

Endings And Beginnings

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/702322) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/702322>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warnings:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings , No Archive Warnings Apply
Categories:	F/M , M/M
Fandom:	Yu-Gi-Oh!
Relationship:	Jounouchi Katsuya/Kaiba Seto Seto Kaiba/Joey Wheeler
Characters:	Kaiba Seto , Jounouchi Katsuya Joey Wheeler , A little bit of everyone
Additional Tags:	future!fic , Post-Series , Manga-canon , Japanese names , Not what it sounds like , Puppyshipping is my OTP , Some OOCness
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2013-02-27 Words: 4,216 Chapters: 1/1

Endings And Beginnings

by [watanuki_sama](#)

Summary

Kaiba Seto has seven months to live.

Notes

Originally posted 10/29/2008 on ff.net under the penname 'EFAW'.

The news came out of nowhere.

Kaiba Seto blinked, staring in shock as the words slowly sank into his mind. In front of him, his little baby brother (twenty-eight, not so much a baby anymore) stared, grey eyes clouded with a jumble of emotions that Seto couldn't quite untangle. Most predominant in that gaze was worry, and Seto knew it was because of his reaction.

After a few moments, he managed a brittle smile, saying, "I suppose this was going to happen sooner or later, wasn't it?"

That wasn't the reaction Mokuba had been hoping for, because his eyes got downcast and he looked down at his hands. Mentally, Seto cursed, knowing he should have been...*something*. But he wasn't good at this.

After a few moments, Mokuba stood, still staring down. "I suppose...I suppose I should tell the others."

"No. I'll do it."

Those stormy eyes looked up, something like *hope* or *wonder* filling them. "Really, Niisama? You'll tell them?"

The brunette nodded, and Mokuba's face lit up. "Thank you, Niisama! You won't regret this, I swear!" With that, the boy (he would always be a boy in Seto's mind) rushed out the door.

Seto just sighed, closing his eyes, and let the numb sort of horrified feeling sweep over him.

Seven months.

He had seven months to live.

XXXX

The first one he told was Honda.

After all, Tokyo was the closest, just a couple of hours by car. Only a couple of more by train. And if anyone wondered why someone as prestigious and well-off as Kaiba Seto was going to Tokyo on a train, no one said anything. Everyone was either too much in awe or too scared of him to get close, so he suffered the claustrophobic ride in peaceful silence.

(He supposed he could have called everyone over the phone, but he wanted to drag this out. The longer this took, the longer it would feel until the end. Maybe that didn't make sense, but it was better than the alternative.)

Honda had done well for himself since high school. He'd moved to Tokyo and opened a motorcycle repair shop that was relatively prosperous. Rumors were also floating around that he and Otonari were romantically involved, but Seto hadn't heard anything confirmed, and

since Mokuba was a well-connected wellspring of information, he figured Mokuba would have told him by now if there was any substance to those rumors.

Honda was surprised, to say the least, when Seto showed up in his garage. But the brunette took it in stride, wiping his hands of grease and asking if Seto wanted to come inside.

"Just for coffee," he said after a moment, because he couldn't stay long.

Honda just nodded, leading the way. For nearly a half an hour, they sat in silence, broken only by the occasional awkward attempts by one of them to make conversation.

("How have you been doing?"

"Good. You?"

"Good.")

Finally, Honda put his coffee cup down, and asked, point blank, "What are you doing here, Kaiba?"

The businessman set down his own, untouched coffee, and carefully told the news, face blank. If Honda noticed the lack of emotion on the other male's face and voice, then he didn't say anything.

"I'll be there," he said, scooping up the cups. "You can count on it."

And that was that.

XXXX

Next stop was Ootogi. He, too, had done well for himself, opening a Black Crown store in Tokyo and several smaller chains around the outskirts of the city. He wasn't as surprised to see Seto, and, from one businessman to the next, invited the brunette inside, offering not only coffee, but dinner as well. Seto declined, he had a plane to catch, but coffee would be nice, thank you.

For a while, they talked business. Then they talk romance (Neither one of them had anyone special. No, the rumors didn't mean anything, Honda was just a friend. Seto was still as icy-cold to suitors as ever. The usual).

Once those subjects were dried up, they talked about aimless things. The weather. The latest Duel Monsters tournaments going on. What the others were doing. Useless things, because Ootogi could see that Seto had something he wanted to say, and he knew that Seto wasn't going to say it before he was ready.

And when Seto *did* say it...

"*Damn*," the Dice Master growled, setting his coffee cup down and flopping back on the couch. "*Damn*. That *sucks*."

Seto just grinned, another thin, bitter smile. "Yes. It does."

He suspected they had different views on the matter, though.

XXXX

After that, it was a ten hour plane ride to Egypt. Seto hadn't seen Yuugi for years, though he occasionally visited, between digs. He had become a successful archeologist, puttering away in Egypt for months -and sometimes years- on end, working in the tombs and the ruins of old cities and such. Seto didn't understand the appeal, but Mokuba said that Yuugi was always so excited when he found something, even the smallest thing, that Seto supposed it didn't matter what *he* thought. After all, he wasn't the one doing it, so why should he care?

He spent nearly two weeks in Cairo before he got up the nerve to find out where Yuugi was. It wasn't that he was delaying on purpose-he'd just hated how *perceptive* the smaller boy was. He always wore his heart on his sleeve, and Seto supposed that might have been why he was so good at reading other people. Even Seto, sometimes, though Seto always tried his hardest to keep his feelings in check.

No need to let *everyone* in the world know what he was feeling.

It turned out that Yuugi was, conveniently, staying with the Ishtars while in Egypt. Apparently, his current dig was near the Tombkeepers' home, so it was just easier that way.

Great. Not only did he get to see Yuugi, but he also got to see that freak Marik while he was at it.

But this wasn't something he could put off.

If Yuugi was surprised, it didn't show on his face. He just beamed brightly and invited Seto in. Then he apologized, and said he had to go back to the dig for a couple of hours, but Seto could wait here and they'd talk when Yuugi got back.

The years had been good to Yuugi, Seto mused as the other male flurried out of the house. Senior year of high school, he'd shot up, those stolen centimeters finally giving in, so now the dueling king stood at a healthy 5'8". His hair was still the wild, untamed mess it always was, but his eyes had darkened, growing sharper as he grew, and sometimes when he smiled he looked just like the Pharaoh.

He was still the same Yuugi inside, though, and when he returned later that night, he was apologetic and kind and everything that Seto used to hate.

After chatting about old times (the good and the bad), Yuugi asked what was going on.

Unfortunately, just at that moment Marik walked in, started when he saw Seto, and demanded to know what that "lousy priest" was doing in his house.

Seto sighed and told them.

Their reactions were as expected.

Yuugi's eyes widened, and he came around to where Seto sat, hand hovering like he wanted to comfort the CEO but wasn't quite sure if he was allowed. "I'm so sorry, Kaiba-kun!" he exclaimed, finally pulling his hand back to his side. "I hope you know I'll be there. *Of course* I'll be there. I'm so sorry for you."

Marik just laughed. He would be there too. He said, right out, that he wanted to see Seto cry.

That was why he didn't like the blond Egyptian. Even though his alter had been wiped out so many years ago, traces were still imprinted on the blond's heart, and it showed. Oh, how it showed.

Yuugi offered to let Seto stay for a few weeks, at least until he felt somewhat better, and, after a while, Seto accepted. Maybe staying here, and accompanying Yuugi on one of his digs, would let him see what he was missing.

Two weeks and three site visits later, Seto still couldn't see the appeal.

Yuugi was sympathetic at the train station, pressing a small trinket into Seto's hands. "Here," he said. "With my regards."

Marik just laughed again as the train pulled away.

And then, sitting on the train on his way to Europe, Seto looked down at his hand, and saw a small necklace. It was one of those easy-to-find trinkets, but Yuugi had probably bought it with him in mind. Just a simple blue gem with a silver dragon curling around it.

The brunette smirked to himself.

That was just like Yuugi.

XXXX

He spent a month bumming around Europe, finding out how easy it was to go from one side of the continent to the other. Italy was his favorite, though, mostly because of the food. He'd never eaten much, but the food in Italy was *good*. He stayed there nearly three weeks, traveling the country and sampling various things. He hated how much the history pressed down on him, always one to look forward to the future instead of back to the past, but he stayed for the food.

Jounouchi would have liked Italy.

Eventually, he made his way up to England, finding himself in Oxford, standing in front of the college. He'd last heard that Bakura was working here, and, since he didn't have a current address -not even Mokuba had one of those- he decided to ambush Bakura on his way out. It would just be easier that way.

Bakura, ever the gentleman, smiled and invited Seto home, offering tea instead of coffee. Seto had never been much of a tea drinker, preferring his drinks laced with caffeine instead, but he took it if only to be polite.

The small talk was of the 'how's the weather' variety, because they both knew this was slightly awkward. Bakura had been one of the earlier antagonists, and even once he'd rid himself of his second spirit, he'd never quite gotten along with Seto so much. But Mokuba considered him a friend, so that counted.

The albino took the news with a calm dignity that Seto had always seen inside the boy, just nodding quietly and dipping his teabag in the water. After pursing his lips and thinking about it, he quietly said, "I don't know if I can make it, but I'll definitely try. I'm sorry."

Seto shrugged and set his tea down. "If you can't make it, it's alright to just...send a card. That's acceptable too."

Bakura nodded, and Seto left.

XXXX

New York was full of lights and sounds and way too many people for Seto to be comfortable around. He had a panic attack the first time he got on the subway, because he simply couldn't stand being closed in with that many people in such a small space. Not even the Tokyo trains were this bad.

Broadway was a bustling cinema of colors and lights and sounds, and Seto managed to get a ticket. He ended up in a box seat, far enough away from the throngs below that he could breathe, and expensive enough that he felt comfortable with it.

Afterwards, he met Anzu, who was startled, to say the least. Of all the people to come to her show, *he* was probably the last one she expected. But she accepted the flowers and smiled and they went out for coffee, chatting away in Japanese. Hers was a little rusty, having been here for nearly ten years now, but she quickly adapted back.

She was surprised at the news, but at the same time, she seemed to have known it was coming, because there was a '*finally*' sort of look in her eye. "Of course I'll be there, Kaibakun," she said, reaching out and taking his hand.

And even though he hated physical contact from most, he didn't move her hand away. It was comforting and that was what she wanted it to be.

"Of course I'll be there."

Then they talked about their lives -hers, mostly. Her dancing career had taken off, and she was happily married to another dancer, a young man named Kyle. They had no children, and she wanted one, but she wasn't quite ready to give birth. They were thinking about adopting, but they were still considering their options.

She didn't seem too surprised that Seto had nothing to report about his life. Nothing changed for him. Still just the same old, same old.

After a few more minutes of pleasant chatting, and a quiet inquiry as to whether Anzu knew Kujaku Mai's whereabouts, Seto was off.

Next stop: LA.

XXXX

The trip across America took nearly two and a half months. He could have just hopped on an airplane, he supposed, but the sooner he finished delivering the message, the sooner he would have to go back home and face himself-and his brother- and Seto wanted to avoid that as much as possible.

So he took busses, and he took trains, and he bummed rides with people who seemed trustworthy enough. He learned culture -The middle finger is *not* an acceptable finger to point at anyone- and he polished his already impeccable English skills. He also learned quite a bit of slang, the sort that never ever made its way into international business meetings. He met people and forgot them as soon as they were gone, slept in shoddy hotels and fancy hotels and people's guest bedrooms, and he learned what a 'cow pie' was.

All in all, it was quite an adventure.

He was never more glad to see a bustling, smog-filled city. Of all of them, Seto wasn't surprised that Mai had settled down in LA. She was a beauty, even misanthropic Seto could see that. And she had charisma. Not to mention, she had a reputation as a kick-ass duelist in a game that had long swept across the ocean.

She was working on another line of cruise ships, this time teaching people how to play Duel Monsters. Apparently, that was a big thing in the states, and it filtered on the cruises. So Seto booked one, settling back to watch her, and, one of these days, talk to her.

The first couple of days on sea, he avoided her, simply because this was the first time he'd been on an actual cruise and didn't feel the need or pressure to work. He wanted to enjoy himself, in the time he had left.

When Mai caught someone, though, they were caught, and she eventually trapped him on the Pearl deck, as he was studying a game of shuffleboard and trying to figure the charm.

Mai's response to the news was the squeal and hug him. By the time she pulled back, he was too deprived of oxygen to retaliate.

"I'm coming! You bet I'm coming!" she said, standing. "Oh, I have to start planning!"

And she swept out, in a flurry of perfume and skirts.

Seto got off at their first stop, a town he didn't bother to remember in Mexico. From there, he caught a plane up to Seattle (after going through the rigorous and annoying passport battle). And Seattle went right back to Tokyo.

Two more hours on the train, and Seto was standing in front of KaibaCorp once more. For a moment, he debated calling the mutt.

Then he decided against it, and, with two months to live, Kaiba Seto returned to work to make up for all that he'd missed.

Jounouchi didn't need to be told. He already knew.

XXXX

Much too quickly, the days passed, the hours went by, and soon it was here. The Day.

He met Jounouchi outside, and the blond was just as nervous as he was. Seto just didn't let it show. They exchanged the normal greetings, marveled at the fine weather, and stared at the ground, trying to think of something meaningful to say that could in no way be taken the wrong way and lead to a fight.

Finding that neither of them had anything like that to say, Seto just went inside.

The wedding was beautiful. Mokuba was definitely the owner of those Kaiba genes, and half of the bride's side was falling for him as they sat there. If it weren't for the fact that he was getting married, they probably would have been all over him.

Everyone was there. Everyone he'd told, everyone he'd traveled to see was sitting there, all smiles and proud cheer and everything. Even Bakura had managed to make it, though he admitted quietly that it had been a close call.

Shizuka was beautiful too, walking on her brother's arm down the aisle. She'd gone from a gangly, redheaded teen to a charming, stunning-looking woman. (And the fact that this was her and *Mokuba's* wedding made Otogi sort of scowl the whole time, but no one really paid too much attention to him.)

She was beautiful and charming and wonderful and she was taking Mokuba away and killing Seto without even knowing it.

Seto stood behind Mokuba, forcing a smile on his lips as the priest went through the ceremony. Then the rings, and the vows, and—

"—do you, Jounouchi Shizuka, take Kaiba Mokuba to be your lawfully wedded husband?"

The bride beamed, eyes alight, and Seto couldn't find it in his heart to hate her. He could only turn away and stare at the large stained glass window above his head as she whispered reverently, "I do."

The priest cleared his throat. "Then I pronounce you husband and wife. You may now kiss the bride."

Seto kept staring upward as the two sealed their vows, watching a glint of sunlight strike the colored glass at the same moment that everyone cheered for the happy couple.

And something inside him sputtered and died.

XXXX

"Kaiba, what're ya doin'?"

The brunette didn't even look up, fingers still flying over the keyboard. "Working. Go away."

Same Kaiba words. But they lacked the usual bite in them.

And, instead of going away, Jounouchi came closer, sitting up on the edge of the desk. Seto could feel those honeyed eyes watching him, *studying* him, but he paid no mind, still typing away. It didn't matter. He was working. He could ignore distractions while he was working, if it was something important.

Then a hand was pushing his laptop closed, and he looked up to find those honey orbs swimming with worry and concern. "What're ya doin'?" the blond asked again, and this time Seto knew it wasn't about his current activities.

Seto tried to find a part of him that cared, a part of him that felt enough to answer the question, but...there was nothing there. 'Seto', the part that had always felt, had died, and now there was just 'Kaiba', the workaholic drone that was more machine than human.

Of course, Gozaburo would have been horrified to see what his heir had become, because Seto had *also* lost that ruthless edge that had been so appealing to the deceased Kaiba in the first place, but that didn't matter. Gozaburo was dead. 'Seto' was dead. Everyone else was gone (except Jou; Jou hadn't left). So it didn't matter what he felt anymore.

Which was why he felt nothing.

It was just *easier* that way.

Jou must have seen something in Seto's eyes, because he just sighed and shook his head. "C'mon Kaiba, you can't *do* this to yourself. It's been *weeks*, Mokuba and Shizu are gonna be back from their honeymoon any day now, and you look like something from *Night of the Living Dead*. Just...go home, eat...*rest*. Take care a' yourself a little, kay?"

If the concern was uncharacteristic, Seto supposed he deserved it. Here he was, almost thirty-two, and he was on the verge of a mental breakdown because his brother got married. But he couldn't *feel* anything anymore, and he didn't want to go home where the memories assaulted him. He didn't *want* to feel. Why couldn't Jou just let him stay here and work himself into an early grave?

Jou sighed again. "Kaiba, you can't lock yerself away just cuz Mokuba left. He's still your brother."

"He doesn't need me anymore."

There was a pause, as Jou took in this assessment. Then he sighed. "Yeah. That's the thing that sucks about bein' a big brother. The little ones'll leave sooner or later. But that doesn't mean you aren't his big brother anymore. There are things only you can do for him. He's still gonna need you, even when you're both old and wrinkly."

Seto *wanted* to believe him.

But Mokuba was an adult now, and Mokuba could take care of himself. Mokuba *also* had Shizuka, who could take care of whatever Mokuba couldn't Mokuba didn't need *him*.

He *wanted* to believe Jou. Then maybe it wouldn't hurt so much.

He just *couldn't*.

But he didn't say anything, just turned back to his computer, gently removing Jounouchi's hand from the monitor and opening it up.

There was another sigh as Jou sat back, watching him. Then, just as the computer turned on once more, the mutt leaned over and shut it again.

Seto should have been pissed.

He wasn't.

"Kaiba, don't do this to yourself. Don't put yer heart in a box. You deserve better than that."

Seto made a point of not looking at him, just staring down at where Jounouchi's tanned hand met his computer. So different from his own milk-white fingers... "There's nothing to feel for. It's better this way."

Jounouchi had matured over the years, slowly but surely growing out of his idiotic no-thinking ways.

But that didn't mean he was completely free of his old self. On occasion, he still did things without thinking them through and assessing the possible consequences. And the last time he'd done such a thing was when he'd visited Honda a couple months ago and they'd both gotten stinking drunk and thought a ride through the city on one of Honda's bikes was a good idea. So he was long overdue.

Which was why he leaned forward, grabbed the collar of Seto's shirt (Seto had abandoned the gravity-defying trenchcoats about three years ago, but he'd never gotten into the habit of wearing a tie) and kissed the dragon.

Seto just sat, stiff as a board, as Jou's lips roamed over his.

After a moment, Jou pulled back, blinking at Seto's blank face. "Look, you don't have to do this alone. And I'm not gonna just let you freeze up and become another *machine*. I will *make* you feel, if that's what it takes." And he leaned in and kissed Seto again.

This time, Seto didn't *respond*, but he wasn't a stiff piece of cardboard, either.

And this time, when Jou pulled back, he was relieved to see...*something*, something familiar flickering far back in those dark blue depths. It was small and it was weak, but it was *there*. 'Seto' wasn't dead yet.

The brunette shuddered, trying (but not too hard) to pull back. "Why?" he croaked, after a moment. "Why are you...?"

Jou rolled his eyes, tugging the other male forward again. "I gave away my little sister. I know what it feels like too. But that doesn't mean you can just shut yourself off from the world and hope that makes it *better*. You gotta *feel*, and *you* have a problem with needing people to need you. Otherwise you just feel *useless*."

Sadly, Seto couldn't deny that.

Jou continued. "And if you need that, then I'm willing to help. We're the only ones left here, Kaiba. I'm not gonna watch you kill yourself like this. Just because something is ending doesn't mean that's the *end*. It just means it's a new beginning. So let's start over."

The blond leaned in again, breath washing over Seto's cheeks as he whispered, "I can do this as many times as it takes, Kaiba."

This time, Seto kissed him back. Tentatively. Unsurely. Quietly. But just a little bit, he leaned in, not...not totally hating the warmth the fluttered up, melting the cold shell around his heart just a little bit. He didn't hate it, and even though it hurt, even though the useless abandoned feeling he'd felt when Mokuba left was still there, it wasn't his main focus.

This was. This fire, this familiar feeling that Seto remembered from high school. No one else could rile him up quite the way Jounouchi did.

And he supposed, as they aged, the feelings matured, so now those fires were being lit in other ways.

Jou smiled against his lips, feeling it, feeling that fire as Seto leaned into the kiss, and, pulling away, he grinned, eyes dancing. "That's right, Kaiba. I'll bring you back. However long it takes."

And this time, Seto leaned in, whispering, "Help me *remember*, Jounouchi."

Remember what it felt like when it didn't *hurt*, when this fire spread through his body and made him do and say incredible things.

Jou grinned, closing that last few centimeters.

"I intend to."

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!