

Alphabet Challenge: G is for Grateful

By Kouta Slatefang.

As Kouta lay in the hospital bed, hooked up to oxygen tanks, dialysis machines and the like, Morgan couldn't help but wonder if he, and all his friends should be grateful Kouta was still alive. The fox-tora laid his head on one fist and sighed, too tired to cry as Kouta's heart rate maintained a steady 96bpm. Morgan recalled the events of yesterday, to try and piece together why it was his dearest pet, and not that reckless driver, that was in hospital fighting for his life.

Saturday: 8:42 PM

"No, Calix, get off the steering wheel!" Kouta gasped as his friend Calix the labrawolf clambered behind the wheel of his pride and joy; a dark green Toyota Chaser. He'd wanted one for weeks, and with the help of Crome and Jake, fellow Toyota aficionados, he could finally afford the wondrous sedan. Well, Kouta held the car in high praises, although Crome preferred the Supra Mk.IV and Jake owned a Tacoma X-Runner.

"Awww!" Calix pouted as he got out of the car and ran a finger along the bodywork as he walked up to Kouta to hug him. Kouta returned the hug and nuzzled his pet gently.

"I can't have you messing with the steering, Jake spent ages getting it set up!"

"But I wanna drive someday!"

"How about when you get a license?" The bear chuckled and released his grasp of the labrawolf to finish fitting the large rear wing onto the car.

"Dude, why fit that ugly-ass thing?" Kouta sighed as he made sure the wing, which looked like it came straight out of the JGTC series, was firmly planted on the trunk lid. He patted it, and turned to face Calix.

"Downforce, my friend. Without this, the car will go off the first turn and into the wall." Calix nodded and looked over the car. It wasn't heavily modified, but one could definitely tell it was different from the factory spec. New 20-inch Enkei rims kept the car low to the ground, along with various subtle aerodynamic parts.

"I can tell you love this car..." Calix muttered as he popped open the hood to find the engine had been fitted with a second turbocharger. "But something tells me you made it really unsafe, bro..."

Kouta padded round to the front of the car to see what Calix was referring to. "Oh, that? Nah, it's set to a very low pressure. Overall, it only does 300PS." Calix nodded as he pretended to understand and shut the hood. "You wanna go for a drive?"

"Sorry Kou. Got Spanish homework to do."

"It's okay. I'll use that time to work out some kinks with a test drive." Kouta nodded and clambered into the car, turning the ignition and driving out of the garage, leaving Calix with his thoughts, mostly concerning Kouta's safety. After all, Jake wasn't the worst mechanic, but he wasn't the best.

9:14 PM

Kouta was driving slowly to examine the suspension's response more carefully. Unfortunately, as he did this, a gang of older street racers saw him and couldn't help but chuckle. The tallest of the group, a coyote, threw down the cigarette he had in his maw and called out to the bear.

"You lost, kiddo? Driver's Ed's that way!" He pointed with his middle finger, causing his group of cronies to laugh. It almost seemed forced to the bear's ears, but he wasn't sure. What was certain, was that the bear had a rough week, and he wasn't about to let some ratty old canine disrespect him. He leaned out of the window and growled,

"Sorry pal, was just at your mum's house. She gives a great shag, or so I was told. She fell asleep halfway through!" He returned to his seat and continued typing at the laptop diagnosing his suspension while chuckling to himself, while the coyote seethed with fury.

"Listen, kid. I'd break your nose, but one more offence means the big house for me. How 'bout a race? See who's been screwing who's mom?" Kouta sighed heavily. He remembered what Jake told him; *'Your car's nowhere near finished. You WILL wreck if you take it out for a race.'* He got out of the car and casually walked over, against his better judgement.

"You're on, just don't cry when I win your pink slip." The crowd raised a collective 'Ooooooh!' in response, as the coyote sneered. "I always wanted a car fit for the demo derby. How about a drag down Main Street?"

"Isn't that a bit clichéd? You've been watching too much Grease, pal."

"Glad ya think this is funny. Come on." He got into his car, a grey Ford Mustang, and drove off, the engine bellowing and backfiring as it went.

"Showoff." Kouta growled as he got into the Chaser and followed, struggling to keep up with the Mustang, when they arrived at the start line, already marked out by wannabe drag racers.

He drew level with the coyote, who simply said,

"1/4 mile. When the light turns green." They waited.

Red.

Amber.

Green!

Both cars shot off the line, but the Chaser's wider tires offered less wheelspin, allowing Kouta a headstart. That was soon negated when the Mustang drew level about halfway. "No-one disses Rodney and crosses that line!" The coyote sneered as he slipped behind Kouta's car.

"What's he playing at?" Kouta thought as he examined the rear-view mirror. Suddenly, the Mustang drew out and smashed the Chaser's rear quarter in a textbook P.I.T manoeuvre. "NO!" Kouta panicked as he wrenched the wheel, left, right, it didn't matter. The car kept spinning.

And spinning.

Then darkness. Kouta's Chaser smashed headlong into a bridge support, nearly reducing the car to a half of the length it was originally, crumpled like a paper cup. The bear couldn't remember anything that happened afterwards, just blue lights and panicked voices echoing in his head.

Today, 11:20 PM

Crome and Jake looked at Kouta's unconscious form, deeply moved.

"I can't help but feel partly responsible..." Crome sighed. Jake petted her softly and soothed her.

"He'll pull through, sis. I fitted a rollcage and stuff. He'll be up and about again in no time." He nodded. He seemed cheerful, but he felt anything but. 'Please wake up, lil' bro. I need you...We need you...'

The End