

Kaede falls in love

By [angel_of_beauty_and_light](#)

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Kaede Mishua live with her grandparents in Domino City. She loves her school and her friends. But there is a certain guy she finds it impossible to like, but maybe he is the one she will love?

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1 - Bad Beginnings

Bad Beginnings

As the sun shone bright in Domino City, three girls sat inside a café on a busy street of shops, chatting and laughing. They sat around the table, sipping milkshakes and showing each other the things they had brought.

One of the girls, who had short brown hair and light blue eyes, held up a new dancing dress that she had brought only that morning. 'It was reduced by 30%!'

'But are you ever going to wear it, Tea?' Laughed the girl next to her. Her long, pale gold blonde hair was down, flowing freely around her shoulders. She brushed it out of her blue eyes as she laughed at her friend.

'Yeah, you'll probably have grown out of it by the time you get out of you job at Burger World and start dancing pro,' said the girl sitting on the blonde's other side. Her brownie red hair was tied in a ponytail to keep it out of her bright green eyes. Her skin was tanned brown by the sun and her long legs were crossed under the table.

'I will wear it, just not for anything but dancing,' Tea said defensively. 'Anyway, how's your life guarding going, Kaede?'

The red head sat up in her chair and smiled. 'Well, I finished the course and have done my shadowing* (*following an experienced lifeguard around for eight hours), got my uniform and now I have done a couple of hours at the pool and been paid.'

'Lucky you, I never have any money,' the blonde sighed.

'Oh come on Yuula!' Kaede cried. 'How much stuff have you bought today? You got loads of new clothes!'

'I know but I never have any money,' Yuula said.

'That's because you always buy new clothes!' Tea shouted across the table.

They finished off their milkshakes and left the café. When outside, Kaede turned her face to the sun and breathed in deeply. What a beautiful day! If only everyday were like this.

The three of them walked in the direction of the main street. As they were walking past the large skyscrapers along the street, Yuula glanced at her watch.

`Hey, my brother Takumi finishes work now. Can we go get him?'

`Sure, why not?' Kaede said and together they walked in the direction of Takumi's work place: Kaiba Corp.

They stopped in front of the building and waited outside. Kaede leaned against a fence and crossed her arms, looking bored. She wasn't really bored; in fact she loved Kaiba Corp. Her grandfather was on the Board of Directors and practically set up the whole of Kaiba Corp. And she did like Takumi; so waiting for him didn't bother her. It was just Kaiba.

Seto Kaiba, the owner of Kaiba Corp, was hated and scorned by many, but especially by Kaede. He was in their class at Domino High, but left to expand his business, and to get there he cheated, stole and some say murdered. In many people's eyes Seto Kaiba was a slime ball, but Kaede hated him beyond words. There was just something about him she didn't like.

The doors to Kaiba Corp opened and Takumi strolled out. When he saw them he jogged over straight away. `Hey guys. What are you doing here?'

`We were waiting for you. You are so ungrateful!' Yuula screamed, bashing him in the stomach. `We come and wait for you and all you can say is "What are you doing here?"'

`OW! I'm sorry, just don't kill me!' Takumi bent in half, mockingly clutching his stomach. He looked up and saw Kaede standing glaring at something. `Hey Kaede, what's the matter?'

Kaede ground her teeth together and lifted one hand up and pointed with her finger. `THAT'S the matter.'

Yuula, Takumi and Tea all looked in the direction she was pointing. Standing by the door was Seto Kaiba, smirking at Kaede. Kaede crossed her arms again before pushing herself away from the fence and walking past the other three. `I'm going home. See you guys at school.'

As she walked past Seto Kaiba he smirked again. `Hey Mishua, been practicing your duelling skills?'

`Keep away from me you scum!' Kaede stopped and turned to face him. She stared him straight in the eye. `How dare you even talk to me about duelling after our last match Kaiba?'

Kaiba smirked again. Visions of their last match flashed in Kaede's mind, her winning, about to finish the match with a glorious victory, when Kaiba somehow produced his blue eyes white dragon and defeated her in one move. The only way he could have done that was by cheating. Kaede glared at him, and then continued walking away.

`Kaede, is that you there?' Where have you been my child?'

Kaede walked in through the front door of her house to find her grandmother standing in the kitchen doorway holding a tray full of freshly baked cookies in her oven gloved hands. Kaede walked over to her, kissed her cheek and took a cookie from the tray.

`You know where I've been. I told you, I went shopping with Tea and Yuula.'

Her grandmother mocked slapping her hand away. `You should wait until these cool down, otherwise you'll burn your mouth. Besides, they are nicer cool. And you didn't say anything about going shopping. You should tell us where you're going next time or we'll get worried.'

Kaede rolled her eyes and left her grandmother in the kitchen, stuffing the cookie in her mouth as she went. She was just about to run upstairs when she heard someone calling her name.

`Yes?' She jogged back to the living room where two men sat watching the television. One was her grandfather and the other was-

`Joey!' Joey stood up when he heard his name called and grinned when he saw Kaede. She ran up to him and glomped him. `When did you get here? Has my grandfather been making you watch the telly with him?'

`Hey! There's no need to be cheeky!' Kaede's grandfather called over his shoulder, still focusing his eyes on the TV screen. `As a matter of fact he wanted to watch this with me.'

Kaede shook her head at her grandfather and her and Joey began to walk upstairs to her room.

`I got here about half an hour ago. Where've ya been?' Joey said climbed the stairs.

`I told you not to come so early today. I said I was going out with Tea and Yuula. Weren't you listening?'

`Ya never said anything `bout going out today.' Joey said haughtily.

Kaede smiled. `You just weren't listening darling.'

Joey put his arm around her waist as they walked down the upstairs corridor to her room. Joey sat down on the bed as Kaede went behind a screen to change. `So, what did you buy?'

`Hold on a sec, I'm just putting it on,' she called from behind the screen. Joey lay back on the bed and put his arm over his eyes, thinking she'd be ages.

Kaede came out and leaned on against the screen, waiting for him to notice. When he eventually looked up, he saw she was wearing a white mini skirt and a yellow halter neck top with white flowers dotted all over it. `Yeah, I like that.' Joey smiled, and then frowned suddenly. `The skirt is a little short though.'

`Oh come on!' Kaede sighed and jumped onto his lap on the bed. `Does it matter? I am only going to

wear this around you anyway.'

'Will you wear it tonight when we go out to the cinema?' Joey put his arms around her waist and held her there.

Kaede thought, frowning slightly. 'Well, alright, but only if you are a good boy and be nice to me for a change.'

'When am I ever not nice to you?' Joey exclaimed.

'You are NEVER nice to me,' Kaede giggled, laughing at the look of horror on his face.

'Whatever!' He muttered and pretended to sulk, refusing to look at her. She put her hand under his chin and turned his head towards her, until he was forced to look at her. Then she brought her head close to his and kissed him.

'Are you angry at me?' She said sweetly, smiling kindly at him.

'Hmmm, I don't know about that one. Better try again and see if I feel better. You know, it isn't nice to be accused like that.'

Kaede laughed and kissed him again. She wrapped her arms around his neck as she kissed him and closed her eyes tightly.

'Better now?' She asked.

'A little better.'

'Well tough coz that's all you're getting from me chump.' Kaede jumped off his lap and ran down the corridor to the top of the stairs. 'Grandma, when do you want me back tonight?'

'Where are you going tonight, love?'

'To the cinema with Joey, when should I come back?'

'But I thought you were going to this dinner with your grandfather?'

'What?'

Her grandmother appeared at the top of the stairs, holding a plateful of cookies. 'Come down here and take these up to that young man of yours.' Kaede went down and took the plate from her grandmother. 'Ooh, my, that is a nice outfit there dear. Yes, I thought you said you would go with grandpa to this posh sit-down tonight.'

Kaede's eyes widened. 'Oh god, I forgot that was tonight. Oh hell. I spose I'll have to go instead of going to the cinema, won't I?'

`Yes dear. You can't let your grandfather go alone to this thing. You know how much he hates it.'

Kaede sighed and took the cookies back up to her room. She put them down on the table and Joey immediately grabbed a handful and stuffed them into his mouth.

`Whatsamatter?' Joey sprayed her with cookie crumbs.

`Oy! Watch it!' Kaede pushed him slightly, laughing with him. Then the laughter died. `I'm sorry; I can't come with you tonight.'

`Why not? Don't you want to come?'

`No, I do, it's just that Grandpa is going to a sit-down dinner and wants me to come along with him. I already promised him I'd go as he hates going to these fancy dinners, and I can't abandon him. I am so sorry, but we can go out tomorrow instead.'

Joey, who had been looking miserable, brightened. `Sure? Okay, but only if you wear that skirt!'

`You can count on it.' Joey got up to leave, then turned around and grabbed Kaede's arm, pulling her up with him. He put his arms around her waist and kissed her. Then left the room. `See you tomorrow then!'

`Bye!' She called after him, then went to her wardrobe to find an outfit for the evening.

After a while she decided to go with her new dark purple dress she had got just the other week. Kaede had so many fancy ball dresses because her grandfather had to go to so many of these stupid sit down dinners, and they insisted that she had to wear a different dress each time.

After tying her hair up in a curled bun so that it seemed to have disappeared, she was ready. She put on her long dark purple gloves that matched the dress and went downstairs.

Her grandfather was standing waiting for her in his tuxedo and monocle. He smiled and offered her his arm. Outside their front door was parked a limousine, sent by Kaiba Corp to pick them up. As Kaede and her grandfather climbed into the back of the limo, her grandmother waved goodbye from the front door.

`I hope Cinderella gets to the ball on time!' Kaede's grandmother called as the limo pulled out of their driveway and onto the road.

Kaede waved at her grandmother out of the window, then sighed as she leaned against the seat of the car. She knew that Cinderella would go to the ball, but the question was, would she enjoy it at all?

2 - Something Unpleasant

Something unpleasant

The limousine stopped outside a huge building, which looked about 6 floors high and was complete with marble columns and stained glass windows.

'I thought it was going to be at Kaiba's mansion, like all the other sit-downs,' Kaede said to her grandfather, as she gazed up at the huge building.

'So did I?' Her grandfather said in a puzzled voice. He picked up the phone connected to the driver's phone in the front. When the driver picked up, he almost yelled into the phone. 'Where are we? I thought we were going to the mansion!'

'No sir, Mr Kaiba has arranged for the dinner to be here tonight. There has been no mistake.' The driver said before putting down the phone so that Kaede's grandfather couldn't argue any more.

As they pulled up at the front of the building, Kaede saw other limousines owned by Kaiba Corp pulling up in front of the marble steps to the front door. More puzzled Kaiba Corp workers were getting out of the limos and climbing the steps.

As Kaede got out of the limo, she heard a screech to her right and was almost knocked to the floor when Yuula glomped her, very hard.

'Get off me!' Kaede laughed, pushing her friend off. As she looked over Yuula's shoulder, she saw Takumi standing behind her, waiting to be noticed. 'Hey Takumi, you okay?'

Takumi shrugged, and they began walking up the steps to the huge oak doors at the top of the steps. 'Kaiba hasn't spared any expenses, has he?' Kaede said, half in awe, half grumpily. She hated how Kaiba just threw his money around and seemed to never run out of it.

They were almost at the top of the steps when they heard a shout behind them. Duke, their friend from school, was running up the steps towards them. 'Hi, sorry about that. Anyway, how are you guys doing?'

'Great thanks, going to see everybody suck up to that rat Kaiba.' Kaede frowned. 'What are you doing here anyway?'

'I sold Kaiba my Dungeon Dice Monsters game and he has made a more digitally advanced version of it. So I was invited to come too.' Duke said, offering Kaede his arm. 'Don't worry about Kaiba, he won't be able to drag up the duel between you two because there will be too many other people there.'

`Thanks Duke.' Kaede said, and the five of them walked through the giant oak doors together.

Inside was the biggest ballroom any of them had ever seen. Huge chandeliers were hanging from the ceiling; dripping with diamonds and down another set of steps in front of them (this time they were carpeted) there was a giant table in the middle of the room. At the other end of the ballroom was another huge carpeted staircase leading to another ballroom on the other side of another oak doorway.

`Hang on; what are we going to do in there?' Yuula pointed through the doors at the other end of the room.

`Knowing Kaiba, something unpleasant.' Kaede grimaced. The memory of their duel was too painful.

From either side of the ballroom, trumpeters appeared and blew their trumpets as a signal of someone important arriving. Through the doors opposite them, Kaede, her grandfather, Yuula, Takumi and Duke watched as Seto Kaiba strutted down the steps with his little brother Mokuba following closely behind him.

`What an annoyingly huge entrance,' Kaede said, and she hurried down the stairs to the table. Seto Kaiba stood at the head of the table on the other side of the ballroom, so Kaede headed to the end of the table furthest away from Seto Kaiba.

`Kaede, don't sit down yet,' her grandfather came up behind her. `We probably have set seats.'

`Fine, just as long as I am nowhere near that rat.' Kaede glared at the said rat, then when he noticed she was glaring, she held his eye for just a second, as if to say to him "Make me sit next to you if you want to die", then she turned her back to him, walking over to where her friends were standing.

`Kaede, don't worry, I think he doesn't want a row this evening, so you won't have to sit next to him.' Takumi said reassuringly.

Kaede crossed her arms in defiance. `Just let him try it. I wouldn't sit anywhere near him even if you paid me.'

The other three laughed at this. `Don't be so dramatic Kaede.' Duke laughed.

`You won't have to go anywhere near him, promise.' Yuula patted her on the shoulder.

`You'd better keep that promise,' Kaede muttered. Another trumpet sounded and everybody (except Kaede) turned around to face Kaiba.

`Your space at the table is reserved with your name by it. Sit where you see your name, and then dinner will be served.' Kaiba said shortly, before sitting at the head of the table. Mokuba sat next to him and they began talking, ignoring everyone around them. Well, almost. Kaiba's eyes followed Kaede as she walked around the table, trying to find her seat. Soon, everyone was sitting down except her, and there was only one more place left. Right next to Seto Kaiba.

Kaede shuddered, and then began walking slowly to her seat with her head held high. Fortunately, Duke

was sitting on her other side and Yuula was sitting next to him, then Takumi next to her, so she could talk to them instead of that rat Kaiba.

As she sat down, Kaiba smirked at her, then turned back to his little brother, who sat opposite Kaede. She ignored them, telling herself not to rise to Kaiba's cheap scheme. Fine, he got her to sit next to him, but there was no way she would talk to him.

`The first course was served then. Hot tomato soup was placed in front of everybody. Kaede looked down at all the different knives, forks and spoons on either side of her bowl. Which one did she use? She didn't want to be made a fool of by Kaiba, so she quickly glanced at him to see which one he was using. He had picked up the spoon to the far right of his bowl of soup, so Kaede did the same, acting like she knew what she was doing.

After the soup came a huge plate of toast and pate. Kaede shuddered; she hated pate. But, as she was determined not to be showed up by Kaiba, she spread the pate on the toast and took a bit. It was not as bad as she thought, so she took another bit and turned to talk to Duke.

`So, do you like the food?' said Kaiba, reaching over and taking hold of Kaede's hand.

Kaede shuddered and turned towards Kaiba. He smirked and caressed her hand. Kaede looked down in disgust at his hand, then pulled her hand away from him and rested it on her lap.

`The food is very nice, thank you,' Kaede sat formally before glaring at him to tell him to leave her alone, then turned back to her friends.

`It was good of you to come along. I trust the limousine ride was comfortable,' Kaiba continues, toying with her.

Kaede spun around in her chair and faced Kaiba. `Look, I didn't make a scene and refuse to sit next to you, even though I would rather drown in burning oil than go anywhere near you. Just give me a break, okay? I don't like you, and you don't like me. Can we just behave like sensible people, and stay away from each other?'

Kaiba smirked again. `As you wish, I won't talk to you.' Then he focused his attention on his plate again.

The meal was 5 courses long. Kaede decided that she shouldn't eat all of every course, so she made it until the end.

Kaiba kept to his word, and did not speak to her throughout. But as soon as the last of the plates were cleared away, he stood up and made an announcement.

`Thank you all very much for coming. Now that you have all finished your meal, can you please make your way up the steps behind me,' he indicated to the carpeted stairs behind him.

Everyone stood up and started walking up the stairs, many of them holding their stomachs because they were so full of food. Kaede waited with her friends for her grandfather to catch up with them, then they followed everyone else up the stairs and through the oak doors into the second ballroom.

3 - Dancing the tango

Dancing the tango

When they had walked through the huge oak doors, they almost couldn't believe their eyes. This ballroom was even bigger than the last and on all four sides were rows of musicians, already tuning their instruments, getting ready to play.

Everybody quickly picked a partner. Kaede's grandfather sat this one out, so Kaede ran over to her friends, hoping not to be the only one without a dancing partner. Duke was asking Yuula if she wanted to dance, for old times sake, he had added (Yuula and Duke used to go out with each other and afterwards Yuula had told Kaede that she never wanted that to happen again). Yuula accepted (hey, it was Duke or her brother) and Takumi asked Kaede if she would to dance with him, as friends. Kaede said yes and together they strode out onto the dance floor.

As they danced, Kaede began to feel more and more uncomfortable. Takumi was her friend but she knew they didn't dance very well together. Kaede was a great dancer and had never needed lessons. Her grandfather said she was probably a dancing girl in a past life, but he was probably only teasing.

Takumi, however, was not that great. Kaede found herself leading most of the time and he kept trying to go the other way when she did try directing him.

In the middle of the dance was a partner switch. Kaede said goodbye to Takumi and turned to face her new partner. She curtsied to him as he took her hand. He pulled her close to her and swept her across the dance floor. Kaede closed her eyes and rested her head on his chest. He was a good enough dancer to lead her, and she was good enough to follow. She felt herself beginning to relax, and started to enjoy the dance.

But then she realized what a horrible mistake she had made to even think of relaxing in this man's arms.

As she looked up into Seto Kaiba's face, Kaede felt disgust and hatred spreading through her entire body. She wanted to stop the dance and walk away but she couldn't, he held her too tight to him. She tried to back away but still he held her, so she gave up, glad that at least he wasn't touching her skin. She felt sick at the idea of herself resting her head on him, and wanted to run away as quickly as possible. But the dance wasn't over yet, so she just followed his steps, longing for it to end.

'Oh Kaede,' Kaiba smirked, clearly enjoying watching her squirm. 'What's the matter? Are you not enjoying the dance?'

She said nothing, determined not to stoop to his level. Eventually the music stopped and she stepped away from him, looking around for her friends. She saw Yuula and Duke laughing together, and tried to

get their attention. She began to walk over to them, when someone grabbed her hand.

`Really, Kaede, giving up so soon?' Kaiba sniggered behind her. `I'd have thought that what you wanted most was to beat me in a duel. Well, I think in some circumstances, dancing could be considered a duel, don't you think so?'

Kaede turned back to face him, unable to believe her ears. Why did he want her to dance with him? Did he really enjoy torturing her?

She looked back to where Yuula and Duke stood to see them staring at her. She smiled at them and they exchanged worried looks. Why not, Kaede thought to herself. A duel is a duel.

`All right, Seto Kaiba. What do you have in mind?' Kaede turned back to him, and pulled her hand out of his grasp. He smirked at her and walked over to the musicians. Kaede watched as he said something to them, then came back to her. A circle of people formed around them as the music began.

Kaiba took her hand for the dance, and whispered in her ear, `I was thinking the Tango?'

Kaede smiled. Of course, when Kaiba went to their school, he had walked in on her dancing the Tango with Joey as entertainment for their friends. Of course, Joey had been terrible, but it had been a laugh. Kaede grinned.

Kaiba put his arm around her waist and they were off, sweeping around the dance floor. As they danced, Kaede emptied her mind of all thought, and let herself go. But as soon as her mind emptied, a memory entered her head. It was a vast hall; full of people, and to one side were some steps up to a platform with a throne standing just at the tops of the steps. The people standing in the hall had separated, to form a circle in the middle of them. In this circle was the figure of a young girl, curled up in a ball, crouching on her toes with her hands stuck out in front of her, and her head resting between her arms. A chain ran from her hands to a guard standing at the front of the crowd and her hands were tied together as if she were a criminal. Suddenly, someone spoke.

`You, slave girl.'

Everybody turned to face the throne at the top of the steps, where a man sat, his head resting on his hand, his elbow on the arm of the chair, as though he were bored.

The girl in the centre of the room lifted her head slowly to look at this man. Her face was streaked with tears, clearly visible lines through her dusty cheeks. The tears showed her real colour, which was a sort of olive gold.

`Stand up, now!' Said the man in the throne. Though he said it normally, there was a tone in his voice that demanded obedience.

The slave girl stood slowly, straightening her legs first, then unbending her body, and when at last she was standing straight, the people around her gasped. Her clothes were simple, slave clothes, but they were dusty and torn, and her arms and legs were cut badly in some places. Her hair was black as ebony and had fallen over her shoulders when she stood. Her face was elegant and her features delicate, her

eyes the most prominent of her features. They were big, green eyes, framed by her long dark eyelashes. She looked straight at the man in the throne with these big dark eyes, unafraid and proud.

The man in the throne looked quite annoyed at this. He seemed quite unused to this sort of behaviour. `Have you no respect girl, bow to your pharaoh!'

The girl's eyes flashed in anger. She took a deep breath and smirked `Why should a bow to a man who has ignored the needs of my people for years and imprisons them for doing the only work they are able to do? Why should a bow to a man who kills innocent people and enslave their loved ones because they are "inferior" to him? Answer me that, my "lord".' She mocked bowing low to him, waving her hand in circles in front of her.

The pharaoh snarled. He was about to motion for the girl to be taken away when a man stepped forward and whispered in his ear. `Halt,' he said to the guard who now stood next to the girl. He listened carefully to what this man was saying to him, and then he grinned.

`Slave girl-' he began.

`Hey, I have a name you know!' The girl yelled at him. Her emotions showed clearly on her face, a mixture of hatred and disgust. She took a step forward, as if to run towards him, but the guard holding her chain gave it a violent tug and she fell backwards to the floor. The crowd laugh at her, as she struggled to get to her feet, her ebony hair falling into her face.

The pharaoh laughed loudly at her. `Oh, and what is your name?'

The girl glared at him from behind her hair. She tried tugging at her chains to get away, but could not.

`My name,' she sighed reluctantly, `is Hebeny.'

`Hebeny? Well, my high priest has told me you were found dancing in the street for money, is this true?' The pharaoh smirked. `I don't think that is honest work, is it?'

`I wasn't dancing for money.' Hebeny snarled at the pharaoh. My old "owner" was selling me at the market and he told the crowds I could dance, so they started throwing stones at me until I danced for them.'

`Then what happened?'

`I was in so much pain that I could hardly dance. I kept falling over in pain, and when I did the chain tied to my hands was pulled, so I fell over again in the dust. A carriage pulled up and I collapsed. The crowds began to disperse as a man walked towards me, picked me up and walked back to the carriage.'

`I see. Well, can you dance now?'

Hebeny stared at him in amazement and disgust. `No, I cannot dance now.'

`Why not?' The pharaoh asked almost angrily.

`Because my legs are cut, I am in too much pain.' Hebeny snarled at him.

`Fine,' the pharaoh waved his hand. `Take her away.'

`My Lord,' his high priest stepped forward again. `This woman does not need a cell; she needs to have her wounds cleaned. If I may sir, I will take care of her while she heals.'

Hebeny looked up at the high priest, a puzzled look on her face. The high priest smiled down at her as the pharaoh rested his head on his hand and thought.

`Please, my lord. Let me look after her.'

`All right, Priest Seto, you look after the slave girl. Bring her before me when she is healed.'

`Thank you my lord.' Priest Seto bowed to the pharaoh and ran down the steps to Hebeny, and took her chain from the guard. He led her out of the hall and away from the pharaoh.

Suddenly Kaede was brought back to the private day when the music stopped and the crowds around began clapping.

Seto stepped back and bowed to her, smirking again. Kaede curtseyed to him and walked to Yuula, Duke and Takumi. The ball was over and together they walked back to the waiting limousines. Kaede said goodbye to them and got into a car, followed by her granddad. She was quiet on the way of, thinking about the daydream, or memory, or whatever it was. She thought maybe it was a coincidence, but the high priest, Priest Seto, had the same name as Kaiba, and also looked exactly like him.

And how much of a coincidence it was that the girl, Hebeny, looked exactly like her.

4 - Painful memories

Painful memories

When they arrived back at the house, Kaede went straight upstairs, avoiding her grandmother's questions. At the top of the stairs she called down 'I'm going to bed now, see you in the morning,' before running to her room and locking the door, not even bothering to turn on the light.

She leaned against the door, listening for her grandmother's footsteps, coming to check if she was all right. Hearing nothing, Kaede slumped on her bed, staring up at the ceiling, thinking.

What the hell was that dream? Why was the girl in it almost an image of herself, and why was Kaiba there? Was it because she had been dancing with him?

Kaede sighed, and sat up. Wearily, she removed her elbow length gloves and removed the pins keeping her hair in place. She put her gloves in her chest of drawers, and then pulled her dress off over her head. She hung the dress up over the screen and climbed into her pyjamas. She looked at herself in the mirror as she passed, her long red hair now with a gentle wave in it from being curled so tightly before. Her tanned skin was even darker than usual in the dark, and her eyes looked dark and mysterious in the gloom. She closed her eyes tight and imagined as hard as she could, and when she opened her eyes, she stood with four other people. Two stood behind her, one a woman, the other a man. The woman had long red hair, just like hers, and the shape of her face and figure was the same. The man had short black hair, and was tall and thin, with beautiful green eyes. They both beamed down at her through the mirror, and had their hands on her shoulders.

On her left was a little boy, with short dark hair, just like the man, but with darker skin and eyes. He took hold of her hand and squeezed it.

And to her right was a girl, identical to her in every way. This girl hopped her arm through Kaede's and smiled at her, a smile that seemed to light up the whole room with radiance and light.

Kaede looked at her family for a few seconds, but was overcome with sadness and closed her eyes. She looked back into the mirror, and saw herself alone. She turned away, and lay down on her bed.

Taking one of the pillows from under her head, she hugged it close to her, and let go of all her emotions. From her eyes came floods of tears, rolling down her cheek as she curled up into a ball, still hugging the pillow for comfort. She reached over to her bedside table where a large scrapbook lay. This she picked up and, turning on the small light on the table, opened.

Every page was dominated by a picture of her family and her, all beaming and making peace signs with their fingers. She stopped on one page where the picture was of her and her twin sister, standing in front

of the great pyramid, with their arms around each other. Written beneath were the words "Lara and I, at the Great Pyramid, where mum and dad were working on an archaeological dig." Beneath this were the words:

*I'm so tired of being here
Suppressed by all my childish fears
And if you have to leave
I wish that you would just leave
'Cause your presence still lingers here
And it won't leave me alone*

*These wounds won't seem to heal
This pain is just too real
There's just too much that time cannot erase*

*When you cried I'd wipe away all of your tears
When you'd scream I'd fight away all of your fears
And I held your hand through all of these years
But you still have
All of me*

Reading these words brought fresh tears to her eyes, and she closed the book quickly, pushing it beneath her pillow, and hugged the pillow even tighter to her chest.

She cried herself to sleep that night. She lay, sound asleep, when her grandmother unlocked the door to her room with the spare key they kept for emergencies, and came in. The old woman sat on the edge of the bed and stroked Kaede's hair, brushing it away from her face. She whipped away her tears and pulled the covers up to her chin.

'Goodnight, my sweet Kaede,' she said, kissing her forehead. She turned and left, shutting the door behind her. She walked along the corridor to her and her husband's bedroom, and climbed into bed beside him. Before she turned off the light she looked at the picture frame on the table next to her, and picked it up. It was a picture of her son and his wife, and their three beautiful children, Kaede, Lara and Hitomi. Kaede sat middle, her arms around her siblings, smiling at the camera, unaware that only a few days after this picture was taken, the people surrounding her would be sent to an early grave.

As Kaede slept, she dreamed of a time long ago, in the land she used to call home. The land of Egypt.

She dreamt of a large room, filled with ornate vases and hangings, with a pillar in the centre covered in hieroglyphics. There was a large bed in the corner of the rooms, an ancient four-poster with long white drapes, hiding the sleeping figure inside.

Next to this bed was a seat, where sat a young man, his chin resting on his hands, staring at the bed in a lazy manor. Bored with this, he got up and walked over to the other side of the room, where there was a table upon which stood a bowl full of water and two goblets, one silver, one gold. The man took the gold goblet and filled it from the bowl, and took a small sip of the clear water inside it.

From the bed came a little moan. The man quickly rushed to the bed and drew back the hangings. There lay the slave girl he had saved only hours before, her wounds cleaned and bandaged, her face washed and her hair brushed. She stirred, her hand that lay resting on the pillow closed around the white sheets.

Her eyes opened and she stared up into his face. Sat down on the bed next to her and held out the goblet of water. She raised her hand to take the goblet but her fingers couldn't grasp it. He lifted her head and brought the goblet to her lips, tilting it so the liquid tipped into her mouth.

After she had drunk enough, she leaned away and raised herself up so she was leaning against the pillow, almost sitting up straight. She looked around her, then down at the white linen wrapped around her wrists.

`When-' she began.

`I took the liberty whilst you were sleeping,' He said gently, placing the golden goblet on the floor beside the bed and looking down at her.

`Where am I?' She asked, staring around the room. She turned back to him and her eyes suddenly filled with fear. `Who are you? Why have you brought me here?'

He just smiled. `Don't you remember?' She shook her head and he laughed a little. `My name is Priest Seto. I am the high priest for Pharaoh Atem. And, if I am not mistaken, your name is Hebeny, is that right?'

`Yes, it is. Well, that's what I was called by my first master, and after that, that is just what people called me.' Hebeny looked down at her hands, saddened by this.

`Don't you know your real name?' Priest Seto asked.

`No, my mother dies in childbirth, and she wasn't married to my father. She was....' Her voice trailed off, and Seto looked away uncomfortably.

`She was a prostitute?' He asked quietly, as if then it wouldn't hurt so much for her to hear.

`Yes, that's what they told me.'

`Who are they?'

`The people who raised me. I don't remember them very well, but I know they aren't really people of importance. Just thieves and criminals,' Hebeny looked at him and smiled. `They stole for themselves and only themselves. They stole for me when I could not, but when I grew up a little bit and refused to steal, they tried to find something for me to do instead. They made me dance in the street for money, but that turned out to be more trouble for them, so they sold me.' Hebeny looked away again.

`How old were you?' Seto asked, taking hold of one of her bandaged hands and holding it in his own, as if to keep it safe from harm.

`Six years old,' Hebeny whispered softly. Seto held her hand tighter, tears forming in his eyes. `I guess they thought that any time before that and I wouldn't be much use to my master, but at six they could get a reasonable price for me and I would be a good servant to whoever bought me.'

`And they sold you to the person who called you Hebeny?'

`Yes, he was a nice man, who owned his own farm and had all these wonderful animals. He told me he would look after me and maybe even adopt me, if I was good and did as I was told. He didn't have any children, his wife died a long time ago and he couldn't bear to remarry and forget her. So he wanted to adopt a little girl who looked just like her. He said I did, because of my long ebony hair. He called me Hebeny because of my hair.' She smiled again, but not to Seto. She smiled to herself, remembering. `He was so nice to me. I stayed with him until I was eleven, and then it all started going wrong.

`One day, I was outside in the field tending to the sheep, when one of his labourers came up to me and started talking. He was only a couple of years older than me, and I had become quite good friends with him, and believed I could trust him. We were just talking and laughing together when suddenly he changed, and stopped laughing. Suddenly, he had pushed me to the ground and forced himself on top of me, and started tearing at my clothes, ripping them and kissing my bear skin. I hit and kicked him, but he was too strong. Then I kicked him right between the legs and he curled up in pain, falling off me. I got up and ran away from him, holding my clothes around me tightly.

`I ran back to my master and he took me in his arms, hugging me, cradling me as I cried onto his shoulder. He patted my hair and said that he would go and sort everything out. He left me alone there, but when he came back he was shaking his head, and looked very sad.

`He asked me why I had lied to him. I said that I hadn't lied, I told him the truth. He said that the other labourers had seen me with that boy, laughing and giggling with him suggestively. He said they told him that they saw us go off together into the wheat field, where the tall plants hid us from view.

`I told him that they had lied, and I never did anything like that. But he wouldn't listen. He got angry with me, and slapped me, calling me a hussy. He threw me to the ground and made one of his other slaves get me into some new clothes. He drove me to the market that very same day, and sold me to somebody else. I begged him to believe me, told him I would never do that ever, because I wasn't like that. But he wouldn't listen. He sold me then got back on his cart and drove away, leaving me crying and calling after him, only to be dragged away to some stranger's house, where my nightmares began.

`Since then, I haven't been owned for over a year, because they made me dance for them, and then

they begun to get lustful, and tried to make me lie with them. Whenever I fight back, they take me to the market and sell me on, to another lonely man, to face even more demons.'

Hebeny looked back at Seto and saw that he has two tear lines down his face. She smiled at him, and place her free hand his hands that held her's. He was trembling, but when she took hold of both her hands in his, he looked up and smiled at her, a sad, sympathetic smile, that said to her that her was truly sorry for what had happened to her.

'I'm sorry,' he said, pulling one of his hands away and whipping his tears away. 'I just can't stand to see or hear or people suffering. That's why I asked Pharaoh if I could take care of you. That's why I saved you from the crowds at the market. That's why-'

'Wait, that was you?' Hebeny stared at him, amazed. 'Why did you do that, for a low insignificant slave girl like me?'

Seto smiled at her through his tears. 'Because I didn't like watching you being tormented by those people. I didn't like to see you in pain.'

Hebeny looked amazed at him, then her confusion turned to delight and she threw her arms around him and hugged him tightly. 'Thank you so much for everything you have done for me. I will never be able to repay you.' She let her arms fall to her sides and beamed at him.

'It wasn't just me,' Seto started explaining hurriedly, embarrassed by this, but then he heard a cough behind him and turned around. There were two girls standing side-by-side near the door. One had long dark hair, and looked like the older of the two. The other was blond and clearly younger. But whereas the dark hears one's face seemed quite unaffected by Hebeny, the blond one smiled and waved at her.

'Hello. My name's Sanura, it means kitten.' She ran up and jumped on the bed, narrowly avoiding crushing Hebeny's already injured legs. 'What's your name? Seto said it was Hebeny, which he said means Ebony. Is that really your name? Is it? It's a very nice name, but I think that Sanura sounds better, don't you? How old are you anyway. You can't be much older than me, and I've fourteen years old. So, how old are you?' She leaned forward, as if expecting an answer. Hebeny stared at this girl, then looked at Seto to ask for help. Seto laughed loudly at this girl.

'Hebeny, this is Sanura. Don't worry, she doesn't always speak that fast, she's just excited. Yes, Sanura, this is Hebeny. I think she's your age. How old are you, Hebeny?'

'I think I am 14, I don't really know. I stopped working it out after my first master sold me. It seemed pointless to me then. But, I guess three years have gone by, so yes, I think that's right.' Hebeny smiled at Sanura, who beamed back, utterly delighted.

'Ha ha ha, oh, and this is Isis,' Seto indicated the girl with the black hair, who now stood right behind him. 'She is one of the priestesses, and helps me, er, take care of Sanura.'

Isis smiled at Hebeny warmly, not as broadly as Sanura did, but still, it was a friendly smile. Hebeny smiled back, and then turned back to Sanura, who was tugging at her bandages, asking her why she had bandages on her wrists.

`Aww, Seto, I want bandages on my wrists. They look so cool, please Seto, please?' Sanura begged.

Hebeny looked at the three of them, all crowded around her, so warm and loving. She smiled and lay back against the pillows. She seemed to have finally found somewhere she belonged.

5 - Love and tears

Love and tears

`Kaede! Hurry up, you'll be late for school!' shouted her grandmother from the bottom of the stairs. `Come on, if you hurry up then your grandfather will drive you on his way to work.'

Kaede was upstairs, throwing on her school uniform as quickly as she could. When she had accomplished this and brushed her teeth, she began a desperate hunt for her shoes. Finding them underneath a pile of clothes, she rushed around madly throwing stuff into her satchel.

Kaede ran downstairs and into the kitchen, grabbing a piece of toast as she passed the table. She took a bottle of water from the fridge and kissed her grandmother on the cheek, then ran out to the car, where her grandfather was waiting. As she climbed into the passenger seat, he laughed loudly.

`It's the same every Monday,' he chortled, and pulled out of the driveway.

They arrived at Domino High with ten minutes to spare, so Kaede got out calmly and said goodbye to her granddad.

`You know, next Monday, I think you should get up earlier, then we won't have the weekly dash,' he laughed at her again, then kissed her cheek and drove away.

As Kaede walked up to her classroom through the corridors, the people she passed all seemed to be turning and looking at her. She was used to this by now, but it always annoyed her a little bit. Mostly people in the corridors avoided her, as if she was cursed. Sometimes, however, the boys would come up to her and start pushing her around, but it always ended up with them getting their butts kicked by Joey and Honda.

Today seemed to be different though. People kept staring at her in bewilderment, and then one girl came up to her and asked `Um, miss Mishua. Pardon me if I am out of place, but I thought you were going out with Joey Wheeler.'

`Yeah, I am. Why, what have you heard?' Kaede said, almost bored. She was fed up with people being amazed that she was going out with Joey. It wasn't that weird, was it?

`It's just, I heard that you were at Kaiba's ball last night, and you kissed him there,' the girl said, suddenly cowering as Kaede went from bored to angry.

`What?! Where did you hear that? I never kissed Kaiba and I never would kiss Kaiba. He is an arrogant, slime ball and I wouldn't touch him with a ten foot barge pole.'

`But you did dance with him,' the girl squeaked.

`I am going to kill that damn Yuula! And Duke.' Kaede pushed the girl out of the way and sprinted to her classroom.

When she arrived she saw Yuula and Duke sitting with their other friends; Yugi, Honda, Tea, Ryou, Sakura and Ana (short for Ana-Gaëlle). They all looked up when she entered the room, and Yuula and Duke both began to look very worried.

`What the hell did you have to go and tell everyone for?' Kaede yelled. `Why did you tell everyone? I'll kill you!'

Joey jumped up and grabbed Kaede to stop her from attacking Yuula.

`Hey, it isn't my fault,' Yuula stood up and pointed at Duke. `He told everybody.'

`It wasn't me!' Duke yelled defensively. `You were the one who told Yugi and Tea, I just told a few other people.'

`Who told the whole school,' Yuula shouted back. `I told Yugi and Tea because I knew they would be able to keep a secret, unlike some people.'

`What? I didn't know they were going to tell everybody,' Duke ran his fingers through his hair angrily. `You see, this is the reason we stopped going out. Because you kept accusing me of things I didn't do.'

`No, the reason we stopped going out was because you couldn't keep secrets. Like the time you asked me if I wanted to "eat cake" with you and I said no, and you told Joey and Honda about it, and asked them what you should do, whether you should keep going out with me or not, and they told EVERYONE! Do you remember that, huh?' (NB Everyone who was in that particular RS lesson will understand the cake thing)

`It's not like I told them to tell everyone, they should have kept their big mouths shut.' Duke glared at Honda and Joey, who hid behind Kaede and Tea.

`No, YOU should have kept your big mouth shut! I can't believe I forgave you enough to let you dance with me last night. Out of everybody who went to that stupid ball, I chose to dance with you because I thought we could be friends, and you go and tell the whole school that Kaede danced with Kaiba. What kind of friend do you think you are?'

`WAIT!' Joey ran between them and held up his hands for them to stop. Duke, who had his mouth open ready to shout at Yuula some more, stopped. Joey looked from one to the other and then to Kaede. `You danced with Kaiba?'

Kaede's mouth dropped open. How could he not have known? Everybody else did.

`You-you didn't know?' Kaede asked quietly, stepping towards him.

`No! Well, I heard something about you dancing and something about Kaiba, but nobody said...! Joey's words trailed into silence. Kaede looked at him in disbelief. Apart from thinking he must have been pretty thick not to understand what had happened, she also felt sorry for him.

Duke glared at Yuula. `See what you've done? He didn't know, and he found out like this. It's all your fault he knows now.'

`Hey, don't blame me for this. If it wasn't for you, no one except you, me, Tea and Yugi would know, but because you had to open your big fat mouth everybody knows.'

`Hey, Joey,' Kaede went up to him and took his hand, ignoring Yuula and Duke, who were now having a full on shouting match, watched by pretty much everyone in the whole school. Kaede heard her name and also Kaiba mentioned several thousand times; so all those in the school who hadn't known she danced with Kaiba were now all in on the "secret".

Kaede led Joey through the crowds of people and they went to get their outdoor shoes on. They went outside and sat on a bench as far from the school building as possible. Joey sat down and looked at his hands, up at the sky, anywhere but at Kaede's face.

`Joey, I am so sorry. I didn't want to. I was kind of forced to,' Kaede said gently, kneeling on the bench beside him, leaning forwards to try and see his face.

`How could you be forced to dance with anyone, especially Seto Kaiba?' Joey clenched his fists as he said Kaiba's name.

`Look, Joey,' Kaede put her hand under his chin and tried to get him to look at her, but he just wouldn't. She gave up and moved closer to him on the bench. `I was dancing with Takumi to begin with, because I didn't want to dance with some stranger, but halfway through the dance there was a partner change, and somehow I ended up dancing with Kaiba. I tried to get away but he held onto my arm and wouldn't let me go. Please, I really didn't want to dance with him.'

Joey stayed silent. Kaede sat back on her heels. `Do you remember when Kaiba used to go to our school, back when Duel Monsters wasn't a very big game? Well, he duelled me then, and I was winning. I was going to win, and you remember what I had bet on me winning?' Joey shook his head. `Well, Kaiba bet his necklace with the picture of Mokuba in it, and made me bet the necklace that I was wearing, which was my mother's.' Kaede stopped, remembering. When she continued it was in a small, quiet voice. `I didn't want to put that necklace on the line. It was an heirloom, passed on to the eldest girl of the family, from generation to generation. It was thousands of years old, found in the remains of an ancient Egyptian tomb. It has been in my family for hundred of years, and my mother gave it to me when I was eleven, just before she died.

`Kaiba forced me to bet it, and I was determined not to lose. I was winning and all I had to do was play my dark magician girl and it would have all been over. I had it in my hand. But, I don't know how he did it, he stopped me from playing my card. And he won. He took my necklace and ran off with it.' She looked down at her hands just as tears began welling up in her eyes. `I demanded a rematch but Kaiba refused. He said, "I don't duel with losers." So he kept my necklace, and as far as I know, still has it.' A tear

formed in Kaede's eye. `And last night, he told me to think of dancing as duelling. I don't know why I agreed in the end, probably for the satisfaction of me being better at dancing than him, but I agreed to dance one dance with him. But instead of everybody joining in, it was just he and me, in front of everyone. And I don't really remember what happened. I cleared my mind and didn't concentrate. And, I saw something-'

Kaede stopped. She didn't want to tell Joey about what she had seen. Not yet. He would just be creeped out. And how would she be able to explain it? She didn't even know what it was herself, just a girl who looked like her and someone called Priest Seto who happened to look like Kaiba. Kaede didn't believe in past life, but she thought that just maybe Hebeny was her in a past life, and Priest Seto was Kaiba's. She couldn't think of any other explanation.

`So you see Joey, it's not like I wanted to dance with him. I just didn't want him to win one over on me. Just like you wouldn't have wanted him to win one over on you. I wish that I had gone with you to see that film, I do, more than anything. But I promised my grandfather that I would go, and I couldn't let him down, by not going and by walking away from a duel. I am so sorry Joey, but you must know I would rather be with you than with Kaiba, you do know that, don't you?' Kaede said quietly through silent tears. She reached out and took Joey's hand.

Joey cleared his throat as if he was trying to hide his emotions. `I'm sorry that I took what people said so seriously. It's just that people kept coming up to me since I got to school, asking me if I was still going out with you. And when I heard that you had danced with Kaiba, I couldn't stand it. Kaiba has done so many horrible things to us, Death-T, trying to take my pride as a duellist at Duellist Kingdom, almost killing Yugi's grandfather, and if he had taken you from me too, I wouldn't know what to do.'

Joey looked up at last, catching and holding Kaede's gaze. She couldn't think of anything to say in reply to this. Stunned, she just sat silently, staring back at him, until he broke that stare by putting his arms around her waist and pulling her onto his lap. She put her arms around his neck and lay her head on his shoulder, and they sat there together, not moving or saying anything for fear of ruining the moment. Kaede closed her eyes and hugged him tightly to her, wanting to never let him go. If only I could, she thought to herself, then maybe it will be okay for us.

Without saying anything, Kaede stood up and took his hand. She led him to the cherry tree, where the pink and white flowers were in full bloom. They sat down and leaned against the tree, Joey with his arm around her neck, Kaede resting her head on his shoulder. They sat there for what felt like a few hours, not saying anything, just enjoying each other's company.

From the school building a loud bell rang to sound the start of recess. Joey stood up and pulled Kaede to her feet. Before they started walking back to school, Joey put his arms around her waist and pulled her close to him. She looked up into his eyes, and kissed him, deeply and lovingly. After they pulled away, Kaede offered him her hand and they walked hand-in-hand back to the school building, their classroom and their friends.

6 - Ice creams with Kaiba

Ice creams with Kaiba

`YOU SCIVED OFF LESSONS FOR AN HOUR BECAUSE YOU WERE HUGGING????' Yuula yelled at them when they came back. `WE HAD TO SAY YOU WERE BOTH ILL BECAUSE YOU WEREN'T BACK IN TIME!'

`Calm down,' Ana said firmly, whilst leaning her chair back on the table behind her and picking the dirt from underneath her nails.

`Don't tell me to calm down; we could have been in serious trouble! And another thing-' she began, turning back to Kaede and Joey to yell at them some more, but Ryou grabbed her arm, pulled her into a chair and told her to shut up or he would get Honda to sit on her. The result: she shut up.

`What lesson do we have next?' Ana said calmly, suddenly taking notice of her surroundings. When she was sitting down, you didn't really notice, but standing up she was very VERY tall. Her mother was French, and it showed in her appearance, the long, dark brown hair, the grey-blue eyes and the olive coloured skin. She got up and went to her locker to get out the correct books.

`Physics,' said Sakura instantly. Everybody looked at her and she turned very red, so red you could fry an egg on her face. Kaede smiled. She knew why. Sakura sat next to Yugi in chemistry, and he always turned into his alter ego, Yami, for her.

Sakura was a slightly tanned blond who always wore her hair in a high ponytail. Her eyes were a beautiful amber colour, and she was happy and smiley most of the time, except when she was embarrassed like now, or when she got upset or her self-esteem ran out.

`Ooookay,' Ana said, and got out her books. Kaede went to her locker and took out her physics books.

When the bell rang to signal the end of break, all ten of them walked to the physics lab together, Tea, Kaede and Ana chatting about the weekend (Tea and Ana subtly avoiding the subject of Kaiba's dinner party), Joey, Honda and Duke were arguing with Sakura and Yugi about duel monsters techniques and strategies, and Yuula and Ryou whispered together about god knows what slightly behind everybody else. When Yuula let out a loud, high pitch laugh at something Ryou said, everybody (including Ryou himself) turned around and stared at her in bewilderment, just like they had done with Sakura. Yuula blushed and everyone laughed except Ryou, who looked quite flattered that someone would laugh at one of his jokes.

They arrived at their classroom and all "eagerly" entered the room. Kaede sat down on a stool in the middle row, in between Honda and Ryou (the class was set in a boy-girl, boy-girl layout). Kaede pulled

her books out of her satchel, took off her shoes and crossed her legs on the stool. She talked to Ryou and Honda about random stuff, whilst watching Sakura and Yugi's alter ego, Yami, who were sitting at the front, out of the corner of her eye. She smiled at their backs thinking about what a cute couple they'd make if it was really possible for them to be together when their teacher walked in. As if on queue, the whole class slumped over their desks and their eyes glazed over. Kaede sighed and tried to concentrate, but she kept remembering her daydream at the ball the evening before, and her dream during the night. She sighed, copied down what their teacher began writing on the board, and pushed these thoughts to the back of her mind. She could deal on them later.

When their lessons were finally over for the day, Kaede and her friends began walking home together. As they walked, Ana took a pack of cigarettes and a lighter out of her bag and lit up one of the fags. She drew in a long breath and then breathed out, slowly.

'Excuse me,' Sakura almost shouted. 'WHAT is that?'

'Um, a cigarette,' Ana said, taking another drag. 'Everybody in Paris smokes, don't you know that?'

'You're not from Paris!' Honda shouted. 'You come from a town near to Toulouse!'

Kaede said nothing, just stared straight ahead. It was only when Tea started coughing that Kaede strode over to Ana, grabbed the cigarette and ripped it in half, stamping it into the ground. Kaede stepped in front of Ana, forcing her to stop.

'I don't know what they taught you in France,' she said quite calmly. 'But here in Japan, they say that smoking kills. Smoke on your own as often as you like, but please never smoke in front of me again. If you do, it won't just be the one cigarette that I tear up, but the whole packet.'

They started walking again, and Kaede chatted and laughed with Ana and everybody else as though nothing had happened. But soon they began to drift away. It started with Honda, Duke and Ana saying goodbye to go to the mall. After that, Duke, Joey, Yugi and Tea left to go to Yugi's game shop. Not long after, Ryou and Sakura waved goodbye (Ryou leaving only after several glomps and whispered conversations with Yuula) and headed off towards home.

'So, where to now?' Yuula stretched her arms above her head and yawned. 'Straight home, or go hang out?'

'Go hang out, definitely.' Kaede said. 'Wait, hang on-'

Something jolted in her memory. She looked at Yuula's face and suddenly it hit her. One of the girls in her dream the previous night looked exactly like Yuula, the one called Sanura. Kaede opened her mouth to say something, but thought better of it. It would probably creep Yuula out if she told her, so Kaede

thought it best not to say anything.

`Hey, why don't we go find Takumi and go get ice creams?' Yuula said, already making her mind up about it. Before Kaede could say anything, she was being dragged off in the direction of Kaiba Corp, despite all her protests.

`But what if we see Kaiba? It would be so embarrassing. Oh God, I hope we don't see him. Okay, let's just wait for Takumi and leave as soon as he leaves the building, okay? Please Yuula, I really don't want to have to see Kaiba today, I just really don't want to. Are you even listening?'

`Of course I am,' Yuula said, tugging her arm. They had arrived on the street Kaiba Corp was on and arrived at the front doors of Kaiba Corp. Instead of waiting by the doors, Yuula went straight inside. Not wanting to be seen by anyone there on her own, Kaede hesitated, but then followed Yuula inside.

Kaede stared around her for Yuula, and saw her at the reception desk. She ran over to her, leaned with her back against the desk just in case the receptionist recognised her, and whispered to Yuula `Just make this quick, okay?'

`No problem!' Yuula beamed, and began explaining to the receptionist that they were friends of Takumi Miharuru, and where was it at the moment.

The receptionist, in true receptionist fashion, explained that Mr Miharuru was very busy at the moment, but if you would like an appointment, please write down your name and telephone number and I'll get back to you. She was in full "I'm afraid I cannot allow you to see Mr Miharuru without an appointment" speech when a voice called their name from at the top of the stairs. `Yuula, Kaede, what are you doing here?'

Both girls turned to look up at the stairs and saw Kaede's grandfather coming down towards them. Kaede ran to her grandfather and hugged him. `Hello grandfather, we were looking for Takumi. Have you seen him anywhere?'

`Why yes, of course. He is in the staff lounge. Come, I'll take you.'

Shooting an angry look back at the receptionist, Kaede and Yuula followed Kaede's grandfather up several flights of stairs, along a few corridors, to a lift which took them up about a million floors, down another hundred corridors (Yuula: `It's like a maze, isn't it?) and finally, up another 10 flights of stairs to a door marked Staff Lounge.

`Well, I suppose the trek gives them something to lounge after,' Kaede said to Yuula as they went through the door.

Indeed, at almost every occupied chair were employees of Kaiba Corp who seemed to be catching their breath. In a chair close to one of the windows was Takumi, with his laptop resting in his lap, typing very quickly. He looked up when they approached, and smile.

`Yuula, Kaede, what are you doing here?' His voice was happy, but then he became serious. `You do know this is an EMPLOYEES lounge, don't you? You really shouldn't be in here.'

`Well, my grandfather said we could come in, so we did.' Kaede folded her arms and looked down at him.

`Yeah. And we came to see if you wanted to go and get an ice cream with us, but it's okay, if you don't want us to treat you, then stay here and do whatever it is you are doing, but just remember, this might be the last time ever that I treat YOU, so if I were you I would make a big deal of it, but it's alright if you don't want to-'

`All right, I'll come!' Takumi snapped his laptop shut and put it in its bag. `But as long as YOU are buying.'

`Oh, you're such a gentleman, Takumi,' Yuula poked him in the chest. You should be offering to buy us ice creams, not demanding that we cough up the cash.'

`Fine, I will buy MY ice cream, you guys can pay for your own,' by this time they were at the nearest lift and Kaede and Yuula got in but blocked the way for Takumi.

`Either you buy us ice creams or you don't come in the lift with us,' Yuula said, barring his way as best as she could.

`But that's not fair, I can't pay for both of you as well as me,' Takumi protested.

`Fine, have a nice long walk,' Kaede said, and pushed him away just as the doors began closing. The girls moved back as Takumi ran to the lift and tried to open it again, but it was not use. The doors closed on him, and the last thing he saw was Yuula and Kaede laughing at him as they did.

They reached the ground floor and stepped out of the lift laughing. `Why didn't we go that way before?' Kaede gasped, out of breath for laughing so much. How many stairs do you reckon there are on the way down?'

`A lot! We should probably sit down somewhere,' Yuula headed to a small lounge area with extremely plush seats. Both girls sat down, and waited.

`About half an hour later, they heard voices at the top of the stairs. When they looked, they saw Takumi walking down the stairs next to Kaiba, chatting about something or another.

As soon as she saw Kaiba, Kaede immediately lay down on the seat, hiding her head from view. She would hate it if he saw her, especially after last night.

As soon as she saw Takumi Yuula jumped up, completely unaware that Kaede was trying her best to hide.

`Takumi!' Yuula ran up to him and punched him (hard) in the stomach. `You took ages! What do you think you were doing?'

`Um, talking,' Takumi pushed her out of the way and they walked towards the exit. But then Takumi turned around. `Hey, Seto, do you want to come?'

Seto looked surprised at being invited alone. 'Oh, no thank you, I have things I need to do.'

'Okay, suit yourself,' Takumi pushed Yuula towards the door, but then stopped and turned around. 'Where is Kaede?'

Yuula pointed towards the seating area, 'She's over there, hiding.'

'You little-' Kaede muttered under her breath but then popped her head up. 'Sorry, I was just resting my eyes. Alright, let's get going.'

Kaede jumped up and ran towards the door, grabbing Yuula and Takumi by the arms and rushed them towards the door.

'Wait,' yelled a voice across the room. Kaede closed her eyes, prayed and turned around. Seto was now walking confidently towards them, a smirk on his lips.

'It appears that the things I needed to do can wait, so I'll come with you. If that's still alright.'

Kaede swore quietly under her breath. She glared at Takumi who raised his hands in defence. As Kaiba approached, Kaede took a deep breath and turned around to face him.

'Hello Kaede,' Kaiba smirked. 'So nice to see you again so soon.'

Kaede said nothing, but looked him straight in the eye and refused to away. Kaiba smirked again, and walked towards the door. 'Come on, I'll buy the ice creams.'

Seto stood out of the doors and Takumi and Yuula followed, dragging Kaede with him.

Kaede was dragged along down the street down to the nearest ice cream shop.

Kaiba leaned against the ice cream stall talking to the man behind the counter. 'I would like four ice creams please,' Kaiba said calmly, ignoring Kaede standing behind him glaring at his back.

'Okay sir and what would you like?' the ice cream guy asked Kaiba.

'I'll have one Pistachio, Takumi, what do you want,' Kaiba said over his shoulder to Takumi.

'What, you're buying us ice creams as well?' Takumi said stupidly, as he had been counting out the loose change he had in his pocket. Kaede closed her eyes and shook her head. He had never been terribly bright.

'Um, yes,' Kaiba said as if he was wondering why on earth he had hired such a thicko.

'Okay,' Takumi put away the coins and thought, which to Kaede looked painful. 'I'll have a honeycomb please.' He decided at last.

`Okay and one honeycomb,' Kaiba said to the ice cream guy.

`I WANT A STRAWBERRY CHOC CHIP!' Yuula yelled at the ice cream guy.

`Um, we don't sell those,' the ice cream guy said, quite afraid of Yuula, backing away to the back of the ice cream stall.

`I'll pay you extra if you put chocolate chips into a strawberry ice cream,' Kaiba said in a business like fashion.

`Um, okay,' the ice cream guy said. `And what about you miss?' he said to Kaede.

`Nothing, thanks,' Kaede said in monotone. Kaiba laughed.

`Mint choc chip for her thank you,' he said as Kaede stared at him shocked and angry. How the hell did he know that was her favorite ice cream?

`Here you go,' the ice cream guys handed Kaiba the ice creams. He paid, then handed them out.

`YAY! Let's sit down and eat them,' Yuula said, furiously licking her ice cream. `Hey Kaede, LET'S DUEL!' She yelled, licking even more furiously.

`No, let's not,' Kaede said, sitting down and taking tiny licks of her ice cream.

`Oh sh-' Takumi swore under his breath, looking at his watch. `Yuula, we have to go.'

`Aww, why?' Yuula whined.

`Because we have to go and get the shopping, or do you not want to eat tonight?'

`I'll come! I'll come!' Yuula jumped up and ran off, stopped, turned around and shouted back, `See you tomorrow Kaede, bye Seto.' She began running again.

`Oh Kaede, don't you have to go to work?' Takumi said as he ran after his sister.

Kaede grabbed Kaiba's arm and looked at his watch. It was already 4.30.

`Oh crap!' Kaede jumped up and began running as fast as she could in the opposite direction to the one Yuula and Takumi took. `Bye Seto, see you soon.' She yelled on impulse, and then nearly hit herself. Why did she just yell that? She turned around to see him smirking at her, as if he had planned this. Kaede shuddered, and then carried on running, dropping her ice cream as she went.

7 - A trip to the Kaiba Mansion

A trip to the Kaiba Mansion

Kaede ran all the way to the swimming pool near her house, where she worked. As she ran through the door, her boss, who was behind the reception desk, gasped in mock shock at her coming in. 'Why, Kaede,' she yelped in fake astonishment. 'We thought something awful had happened to you, where have you been?'

'Sorry, Kyoko,' Kaede said quickly, running behind the desk to get her bag. 'It won't ever happen again.'

'Let's hope not,' Kyoko said, watching her run into the staff changing rooms. She emerged wearing blue shorts and a red polo shirt with the swimming pool logo on it. Quickly, she checked her timetable and saw to her delight she was overseeing the fun swim. She walked quickly to the staff pool entrance and beside the pool up to the lifeguard chair. She climbed into it and sat down, gazing below her.

As she watched the children on the giant inflatable sea serpent and heard the din of laughter and chat, the lights reflection on the water sent her into a sort of haze, and her ears blocked out the world around her. Images flashed through her mind, her friends at school, her grandparents, her family in Egypt, all of them. She was just imagining Ana's face when she had ripped up her cigarette when another face flashed across her eyes. It was Seto Kaiba, but he wasn't smirking or looking at her evilly, he was laughing and smiling at her. Kaede couldn't quite understand it.

Get out of my head, she thought to herself. Get out and stay out. I don't want you in there, Kaiba.

Suddenly she heard three blasts of the whistle. She was awoken from her trance in a second and looked around. At the bottom of the slide of the Monster Island, in the water, was a little boy, who was waving his arms about and had a look of sheer terror on his face. Kaede leaped of her chair, ran across to the edge of the pool and dived in. She surfaced and swam across to the boy. When she reached him, she put her arm around his waist and swam with him over to the side, where another of the lifeguards, a 19 year old guy called Hitomi, pulled him out of the water and laid him on the ground.

When he was out of the water, the boy began coughing up water and the Hitomi patted him on the back as he did so. Kaede climbed out of the water and went to the changing rooms.

She changed out of her sopping when clothes but by the time she got back to the pool her sift had ended. Wondering how much time she had spent daydreaming, Kaede left the pool, saying goodbye to Kyoko as she went.

Walking in the dark had never really bothered Kaede, so instead of ringing her grandfather to tell him to come and pick her up, she set of down the street.

As she went past a dark alleyway, Kaede looked down it and saw a large gang sitting, smoking in the dark. She didn't want to get caught up in anything, so she walked on quickly. But she heard a shout behind her. `Whoa, slow down there girl, come hang with us.'

Kaede looked around and saw they had begun to follow her. She walked slightly faster, but they quickened their pace as well. She started jogging, but so did they.

They began all shouting out to her, and one of them broke into a run and caught up with her and grabbed her arm. She screamed and spun around and slapped him, but the rest of them had caught up with her and were now trying to drag her back to their alleyway whilst one had taken her bag and was opening it. She screamed again, and suddenly the dark street they were on was flooded with light.

Her attackers turned around and saw two car headlights pointed towards them. They let go of her and ran, and the one who had her bag let that go as well. All of them were running as fast as they could away from there, whilst Kaede dropped to her knees and shock from head to toe.

`Oh my god,' she said to herself. `I was just attacked.' She hadn't thought of it that way when it was happening, but now she felt so afraid.

She heard a car door open and close, then there were footsteps heading in her direction. She stood up and picked up her bag, then turned to meet her saviour.

`Thank you so much, I don't know what you have happened if you hadn't-' she stopped, took in the height, the shape and the clothes of her saviour and wished that the ground would open and swallow her up.

Right in front of her stood Seto Kaiba, his arms folded, looking down with a bewildered but amused look on his face. He was sort of half smirking, but the other half was worry, so Kaede didn't know whether to be grateful or to hit him.

`Um, what are you doing her,' Kaede said after an awkward silence.

`Driving,' Seto said quickly. `And it is a good thing I was too, otherwise who knows what would have happened.'

Kaede shook her head, more to herself than to him and hugged her bag close to her chest. There was another awkward pause, and then she said, `I have to get going, bye,' and began walking off.

`Wait,' Kaiba jogged to catch up with her. `Maybe you shouldn't walk home, it is too dangerous. I could give you a lift.'

`Why would you do that?' Kaede asked, amazed.

`Do I need a reason,' as he said this he nearly laughed, and Kaede nearly smiled. `Come on, I'll take you home, I have to give some things to your grandfather anyway.'

Kaede almost smiled again, then got into the passenger seat of the car. As they drove, Kaiba began hunting through a bag by his feet, and then swore. `Damn, I left it at home.'

`Left what at home?' Kaede wondered out loud. She didn't expect him to answer, and was surprised when he did.

`The documents I was meant to be giving to your grandfather,' Kaiba smacked his forehead with his hand. `I have to go back to the house and get them.'

`Dropping me off first though, right?' Kaede asked, but instead of carrying on in the direction of her house, Kaiba swung the car around and headed in to opposite direction.

`Whoa whoa whoa, stop the car! Stop the car right now!' Kaede shouted. Kaiba stopped and she turned around to face him.

`My home is that way,' she gestured behind them. `I have to get home right now otherwise my grandparents will be worried. We have to go there now.'

`No way,' Kaiba shook his head. `My house is closer at the moment, so we go there first. That way, I will only have to go to your house once.'

`But I need to get home now,' Kaede protested, but her protests fell on deaf ears. Kaiba carried on in the direction of his house, completely ignoring Kaede.

Soon they arrived at the wrought iron gates and Kaede stared down the long driveway to see an HUGE house. No, it wasn't a house; it was as big as a castle.

`You live HERE?' Kaede rounded on Kaiba, who had a weird smug look on his face.

`Yeah, like it?' Kaiba said smugly. He pressed a button in the car and the gates opened up automatically. They drove down the driveway, and when they got to the house Kaede almost choked. It looked even bigger close than it had done from the road, stretching far in both directions.

They got out of the car and Kaede stood, stunned, gazing up at the monstrosity in front of her.

Kaiba walked up the front steps of his home and opened the door. Kaede ran up the steps after him, not wanting to be left alone, preferring to be with him than out in his creepy garden at night.

As they walked along the corridor, from either side servants began to appear. They bowed their heads as Kaiba passed and stared at Kaede as she jogged after him.

Kaiba lead her through the labyrinth of corridors to a well furnished room at the end of one of the corridors. Inside were several bookshelves strewn around the edges of the room, and mini bar covered in bottles of this and that (mostly non-alcoholic) and in one corner was a desk on which sat a computer and a large pile of paper.

Kaede went over to the desk and sat down on the swivel chair. Kaiba stared at her. `Fine, just make

yourself right at home.'

'Don't worry Kaiba, I'm never going to get used to this kind of luxury, so let me enjoy it whilst it is there to enjoy,' she said, putting her feet up on his desk and rummaging through the drawers of the desk.

Seto began flicking through a gigantic folder that had been on one of the many bookshelves in the room.

Kaede felt a slight chill of cold air around her and looked around. It was a very well heated room, but one of the doors on the other end was slightly ajar. Kaede went to it and opened it fully, to reveal a young boy with a shock of black hair and around his neck was a locket shaped like a duel monsters card. Kaede had seen him before at the ball. This was Kaiba's little brother Mokuba.

Kaiba turned around and saw Mokuba cowering in the shadows of the doorway. 'Mokuba, what are you doing here? It is late, why aren't you asleep?'

'I was wondering where you were big brother,' Mokuba said. He certainly sounded tired, and was wearing pyjamas; blue with white dragons on (Kaiba's favourite duel monsters card, the blue eyes white dragon). 'I woke up and you hadn't come home yet. I haven't seen you all day.'

Seto strode over and knelt down next to Mokuba, putting his arm around his little brother's shoulders. Looking at them together, Kaede couldn't help but feel touched, however much she hated Kaiba. He obviously cared so much for Mokuba, even if he was a creep.

'Go to bed, Mokuba,' Kaiba said quietly to Mokuba. 'I'll be back as soon as I can; I'm just going to take Miss Mishua home.'

Okay, see you later big brother. Good bye,' he said warily to Kaede. She smiled at him and followed Kaiba out of the room through the door that they had entered by. Kaiba carried the huge folder under his arm, making Kaede wonder just how much of that her grandfather was going to have to examine by the next day. Often her grandfather stayed up late into the night working, not stopping for hours. Sometimes the workload made him sick, but he would never change jobs. Long had he worked for Kaiba Corp, and it was their that his loyalties lay.

She followed Kaiba back to the waiting car, and as they drove to her house she found herself glancing at Kaiba. She seemed to have learnt so much about him in less than a day, but new that to really get to know him, she was going to have to spend more time with him, but that was the last thing she wanted to do.

They arrived at her house and Kaede grabbed her bag and got out of the car. As they walked up to the house together, the lights turned on inside the house and her grandparents came running out to greet them.

'Oh Kaede, we were so worried,' her grandmother grabbed her and hugged her tightly. 'Where have you been? We called the pool an hour ago and they said you have left just after your shift ended. What happened to you?'

Her grandmother held her at arms length and looked at her clothes. Her previously pristine shirt had dirt

covering it, her trousers had a tear on the back of the thigh and her arms were covered in red marks. `What happened to you?' Her grandmother cried, the pitch of her voice rising.

`It's okay Grandma,' Kaede said quickly. `Nothing happened. Kaiba saved me.'

Her grandmother made a little noise as if she was clearing her throat, and looked at Kaede as if she was angry. `What?' Kaede asked, rising her hands to protect herself. `What have I done now?'

`Kaede, it isn't nice to call people by their last name,' her grandmother hissed at her.

`Oh come on, it isn't like-' Kaede began but the look on her grandmother's face stopped her.

`Thank you so much, Mr Kaiba,' her grandfather said, shaking Kaiba's hand. `If you hadn't found her Lord knows what would have happened.'

`That's quite alright,' Kaiba said, as if he were a saint. `I'm just glad nothing bad happened to her.'

Kaede looked at Kaiba astounded. Surely he didn't mean that. But perhaps he was just saying it because he was in front of her grandparents. That would explain a lot of things.

`Well, this is for you,' he handed Kaede's grandfather the folder, which had been under his arm the whole time. `Just look over it, there are quite a few things concerning the new Kaiba Corp project. Bring it to the board meeting in two days time. I hope you will have had enough time to study the contents by then.'

Kaede was dumbfounded. Usually Kaiba gave her grandfather a folder twice that size and told him to read it and know exactly what it contained but the next morning without fail. Her grandfather looked puzzled as well, but relieved.

`Thank you again, Mr Kaiba, for taking care of our granddaughter. I assure you that your kindness won't be forgotten.'

`Please, say nothing of it,' Kaiba said, before turning to walk away. Then he stopped and turned around to face Kaede.

`Maybe, there is one small thing she can do for me,' Kaiba smirked. Kaede gulped. If she knew Kaiba, this wasn't going to be pleasant.

`What is that, Kaiba?' Kaede folded her arms across her chest as he walked back to her. He bent down and whispered in her ear, `Another duel like last night.'

Kaede pushed him away from her and half-ran back to her house. She heard her grandparents asking Kaiba what he had said, but she blocked out his answer. No doubt it would be a lie.

She stuffed her wet life guard's uniform into the washer and ran upstairs. She quickly got changed for bed and jumped under the duvet before her grandparents could grill her about what Kaiba had said. She switched off the light and breathed in the smell of her newly changed sheets. Her grandmother must

have noticed the tear stains on the ones that were on the night before, and Kaede was grateful. She rolled over onto her stomach and closed her eyes.

She couldn't remember the next day, but her last thoughts before she fell asleep, were of Seto Kaiba.

8 - Party at Ana's

Party at Ana's

The rest of the week was fairly uneventful. At school she was being constantly asked whether she was still going out with Joey that, on that Friday, she just exploded.

`Why is it that everybody else can go to these stupid ball things and dance with whoever they like, but when it is me, everybody knows and cares and asked me what happened?' Kaede paced the floor of their classroom, kicking all the chairs nearly along the way. `I mean, Yuula danced with Duke and no one cares.'

`Can you please not use me as an example,' Yuula hissed, glaring over at Duke. She had not been speaking to him since their argument on the Monday, and he was certainly not going to speak to her first.

`Aww, why don't you two just kiss and make up, you did make such a cute couple,' Sakura baited, teasing Yuula. Yuula opened her mouth to argue, but Ana suddenly came running in excited.

`Guess what guys, I'm having a party. It is at my house and you guys are all invited!'

Everybody got excited then too, and began talking about what they were going to wear.

`Hey Kaede, now you can wear that miniskirt and top you brought in town the other day,' Tea, who was sitting on one of the tables nearby with Yugi and Honda, said to her.

`Yeah, it is going to be awesome, that would be cool,' Kaede said, getting up and stretching. `It is going to be awesome.'

That evening their entire group went back to Kaede's house to hang out. Whilst the guys sat around on the floor watching Yugi and Joey duel against Duke and Ryou, the girls sat on the bed and talked about the party.

`It is going to be so cool,' Sakura said. `I can't wait.'

`Me neither,' said Tea, flicking through one of Kaede's magazines. `Hey Kaede, go show us what you are going to wear. Sakura and Ana haven't seen it yet have they.'

`No, they haven't,' Kaede slid off the bed and jogged over to her changing screen. She ducked behind it and changed into her white miniskirt and yellow halter neck top that she had put on the previous Sunday for Joey.

Joey looked up and grinned. 'I hoped you'd wear that.' He laughed.

There was a knock on the door and Kaede's grandmother came in carrying a tray.

'Hello, don't mind me, I just thought you would be a little hungry that's all, so I brought all little dinner for you,' she lay the tray down on the floor and left.

The "little" dinner consisted of many types of pizza and lemonade. Joey and Honda pounced on the food like ravaging wolves, then realised that there were eight other people there (Kaede, Sakura, Yuula, Tea, Ana, Duke, Yugi (who was Yami at that moment) and Ryou), and began handing out pizza to everyone.

Kaede took her slice of pizza and sat down next to Joey, leaning back so that she was resting on him. He put his arm around her shoulders and together they just watched whilst everyone took turns duelling with each other, and they decided to have a small tournament. Of course, Yami won, Duke came second (being the only other person to have above average duelling skills) and so on to Tea who was right at the bottom with Ana (Ana didn't know the rules and Tea had rubbishy cards like Shining Friendship in her deck).

'Hey Joey, Kaede, do you want to duel too?' Yami asked them.

'No, it's cool,' Joey said and Kaede just smiled. She was not in the mood to duel anybody, and she certainly wasn't going to if it meant just losing to Yami.

'But Kaede, didn't you nearly win against Seto Kaiba once?' Ryou asked.

Kaede grimaced and clenched her hands into fists. She remembered Kaiba's face when he won, and when she asked for her necklace back. She had begged for a rematch, and he had ignored her.

'That was ages ago, besides, it's not like it was a fair duel,' Kaede waved her hand, as if it meant nothing to her. But Joey felt her stiffen and knew she wouldn't relax for a while if left alone, so he began asking her about what she was going to do tomorrow night.

'Well, as I am nearly seventeen my granddad has been giving me a few driving lessons, and lets me take out the car for a while sometimes, so I could drive everybody there in our van,' Kaede said, thinking out loud. She relaxed against Joey's shoulder again, her duel with Kaiba out of her mind, and they began talking about party plans.

'Hey, did you say you could drive everybody there?' Honda asked.

'Yeah, who wants to come?' Kaede asked. Everyone said yes apart from Yuula, who would be coming with her brother (her brother was friends with Ana's brother), and Sakura, who was going to drive herself on account of living far away from Kaede's house.

'And I am bringing a surprise, I won't say what though,' Sakura grinned. No amount of questions would get her to tell, so they gave up.

After several more duels, everybody went home, most of them saying they'd come over again the next day to go to the party.

Joey stayed behind for a little while. They went back up to her room and cleared away the mess their friends had left, and then they put on some loud music and talked about the random stuff.

'You want a lift too tomorrow?' Kaede asked him from behind the screen whilst changing into her pyjamas.

'Sure, why not,' Joey called back, lying down on her bed and closing his eyes. 'What kind of party is it anyway?'

'I think it is just a house party,' Kaede emerged from the screen wearing pink snoopy pyjamas. She brushed her hair and then lay down on the bed next to Joey. 'Move up, this is my bed!'

'Now Kaede, you must learn to share,' Joey said as she got under the covers. 'Am I allowed under the duvet too?'

'No way, what if my grandma comes in while you are under there? And even if I lock it she can open it coz they keep a spare key somewhere. And anyway, why ARE you still here? You aren't staying the night are you? Did I say you could stay over?'

'No, but I am anyway,' Joey grinned.

'Get out!' Kaede play-shoved him off her bed. He picked himself up and grabbed his stuff.

'See you tomorrow,' he said, leaning over the bed and kissed her quickly on the lips. He smiled and left quickly, shutting the door behind him as he went. Kaede could hear him going down the stairs and thanking her grandparents as he left.

Kaede smiled and rolled onto her side, and closed her eyes. Then she sat up, she realised she hadn't actually asked her grandfather if she could take the van the next day, but knew that he would probably say yes. She leaned over to her bedside cabinet and switched off the light.

Kaede woke up early the next day, when it was still dark, and got dressed into jogging bottoms and a baggy top. She tied up her hair and took a bottle of water from the fridge. She quickly wrote a note for her grandparents just in case they woke up and she wasn't back, then she ran out of the front door. There was a black limousine with tinted windows on the other side of the street. She looked at it for a second, then decided it was nothing and off she went.

It had been a long time since she had last been for a run. She loved running in the early hours of the morning, when there were no cars around and she could run in the middle of the road.

She found a pace she was comfortable with and ran on, taking little sips of her water as she went. She ran on through the diminishing darkness, across Domino City. As she ran past a park, she noticed a gang of teenagers sleeping on the benches and slides, all of whom would probably wake up with a hangover. Kaede didn't want disturb them; if they could sleep away their hangover then she hoped they would if she left them alone, and she ran on.

By the next park she was out of breath, so she stopped and sat on the nearest bench. Looking to the East, she saw the sky was slowly turning pink. As she looked, the pink faded to gold and slowly the sun rose from the horizon. She watched as the early morning shadows were banished and her skin was warmed by the golden rays.

By this time her breathing was normal, so she ran on, doubling back on herself so she was now headed homeward.

More cars were now roaming around, so she stuck to the pavement. As she past, some cars tooted at her and some rolled down their windows and the drivers called to her, asking if she wanted a lift. She just waved at them, not trusting herself to say anything in case she called them perverts. As she neared home, she noticed the black limousine that had been parked on her street when she had left the house that morning. It was driving in the opposite direction as the one she was running in. She tried to get a glimpse of the driver, but the windscreen was also tinted, so she couldn't see who it was.

She shook her head as it past and carried on running. When she got back to the house her grandmother was already up, and had a pile of toast waiting for her. She grabbed a slice but didn't stop, she ran up to her room and grabbed her swim stuff and headed to the pool.

When she arrived Kyoko looked up from the reception desk and choked on whatever it was she was eating. Kaede went behind the desk and hit her hard on the back.

When Kyoko's breathing was back to normal she stared at Kaede. 'What are you doing here? Don't you have somewhere to go? And why are you here so early?'

'I was just checking whether anybody had a shift they couldn't do, seeing as I am going to need someone to take my shift tonight,' Kaede asked.

'Why?' Kyoko asked suspiciously.

'I'm going to a party.'

'Well, don't do anything stupid. And don't take anything illegal. And never let anybody get you a drink if you can't see it being poured. And-'

'Okay, okay, I know how to be safe at a party. Geez, you sound like my grandmother,' Kaede checked the list of shifts, saw that Hitomi, her friend who had helped her save that kid on Monday, was working one the same shift as her and knew he could take care of things while she wasn't there, so she crossed

off her name for the shift later that night.

`Okay, well, going to go for a quick swim,' Kaede said, and ran to get changed.

After her swim, she went home to find her grandfather was now awake as well and Tea had already arrived with a suitcase full of clothes.

`I just got a call from Ana's brother. It is a house party after all. He said bring whatever you want with you. Anyway, lets choose what to wear,' Tea said happily, skipping up the stairs.

`Tea, what are you doing here?' Kaede said as calmly as she could, putting her swimsuit in the sink to soak out the chlorine and shoving her towel in the washing machine. She went to the kitchen and took her plate of toast off the table and followed Tea up to her room. She found Tea already unpacking her massive suitcase and putting all the clothes flat on the bed. `I thought you said that you weren't coming until before the party.'

`It is before the party,' Tea said absentmindedly, picking up random outfits and holding them against her in front of the mirror.

`I thought you meant about half an hour before hand,' she looked at the clock on her bedside table. It said 7:15. `Tea, it is too early for this. Go home; come back in a couple of hours.'

`Oh come on, you get up before dawn every weekend to go do sports. Clothes is like my sport,' Tea said, now dragging Kaede to the mirror and holding a dress up in front of her. `Hmm, I thought that this would go well on you but it looks a little big around stomach and bum.'

`Maybe if you came for a run with me then it wouldn't need to be,' Kaede grinned at her and jabbed her finger into Tea's stomach.

Tea ignored her and carried on fetching outfits and holding them up against Kaede, occasionally muttering things like: `Well, that is too long' and `Mmm, not the right colour' and, even weirder still `I wonder what she will look like in reddy blue?'

`What is reddy blue?' Kaede asked as she said this.

`A shade of blue.'

`You can't get reddy blue. That is just like purple isn't it?' Kaede laughed at her, but stopped when she saw Tea looking lightly offended and confused.

`Of course you can get reddy blue, it is blue with a red shine in it,' Tea said, and then forgot it, holding up increasingly bizarre outfits.

Kaede was almost happy when Honda and Ryou came at 3 (yes, they had really been doing this stupid holding-up-clothes thing for 7¾ hours). Both boys were already wearing what they were going to wear for the party and seemed quite afraid when Tea pulled out a couple of outfits for them to try on when they arrived.

`No, seriously Tea, I like what I am wearing,' Honda said, backing away.

Tea started moving towards Ryou, who quickly stood behind Kaede and clutched at her arm.

`Tea, I think they like what they are wearing. And the last 7¼ hours were pointless because I am going to wear my own clothes,' Kaede grabbed the clothes out of Tea's hands and threw them onto the bed, then picked up a random dress and threw it at Tea. `Wear that one. Don't argue.'

`Tea looked at it and laughed. `I'm not wearing this.'

`Why not?' Kaede folded her arms in a
There's-no-way-I'm-backing-down-after-you-held-up-your-whole-wardrobe-against-me type of way.

`Because I haven't worn it for over a year' Tea said stupidly. `And it suits you better.'

`Try it on, now!'

Tea slouched round behind Kaede's screen and put on the dress. When she came out she was scowling, but all the others thought she looked amazing. The dress was a short dark blue one, which suited her very well.

`I'm not wearing it!' Tea insisted.

`Yes you are.'

`Why?'

`Because it suits you!' Kaede shouted at her. Tea opened her mouth to say something, but shut up when she saw the look on Kaede's face which said that she would explode if she objected.

`Fine, I'll wear it!' Tea huffed, and sat down on Kaede's bed and shoved her nose into a teen magazine. The others chatted away about stuff, when Kaede's grandfather called them all down.

They came downstairs together (Tea still wearing the dress) and her grandfather beckoned them to follow him.

He lead them through the front door and around to the garage. He told them to wait and went to open the garage door.

Inside was their old van, except Kaede didn't recognise it at all. It wasn't scanky white anymore, but electric blue with lots of different shades all the way along it causing a ripple effect. The roof had a luggage rack tied to it and resting on the luggage rack was a beautiful new surfboard.

Kaede gasped and ran towards the van. She ran her hand along the side, over its new paintwork. She reached up and lifted the surfboard off the rack, taking care not to scratch the paintwork with the fins. She propped it up against the side of the garage and looked at the design. It was blue, strong in some

areas, faded in others, creating a wave effect.

Kaede turned back to her grandfather with tears in her eyes. He smiled, then put his hands to his mouth as if he had forgotten something. He put one of his hands in to his pocket and pulled out a circular disk and threw it at Kaede. She caught it in one hand and looked at it; surfboard wax.

Kaede left the surfboard leaning against the wall and ran at her grandfather and hugged him. He put his hand in his pocket again and pulled out something and pressed it into her hand. She looked down and saw a single car key on a surfboard key ring. She hugged her grandfather again, tears of happiness falling down her cheeks. 'Thank you so much grandfather.' She said into his t-shirt.

After about half an hour of examining the van's new paintjob, Kaede, Tea, Honda and Ryou were called back into the house by Kaede's grandmother, who gave them a plateful of her freshly baked cookies.

This time, instead of going back upstairs, they all went into the living room and pulled out Kaede's ancient games console. They plugged it into the back of the TV and had a tournament on one of the oldest fighting games known to mankind.

They were onto their third tournament (Honda insisted doing best-out-of-five when Kaede beat him in the finals twice) when Joey, Yugi and Duke arrived, all three of them already wearing party clothes.

Kaede ran upstairs and put on her white miniskirt and yellow halter neck top. She left her hair down and put on a couple of golden bangles and some silver hoop earrings. Then she pulled on a pair of knee high boots and grabbed a shoulder bag in which she shoved her mobile phone and a corduroy jacket.

Kaede ran downstairs and kissed her grandparents goodbye. 'Have fun,' they called after her. 'And stay safe!'

Kaede ran outside and into the garage where her van awaited. She climbed into the driver's seat and turned around to look in the cargo area. There sat Tea, Honda, Joey, Yugi, Ryou and Duke all squashed together.

'You all right back there?' Kaede called as she started up the engine.

'Enough talking, more driving,' Duke snarled as he struggled for space from between Joey and Yugi.

Kaede pulled out of the garage and down the driveway. She turned back to her house to wave at her grandparents, who waved back. Then she changed gear and sped away into the night.

Soon enough they reached Ana's house. The lights were on but judging by the fact that barely any noise was coming from the house, the party hadn't started yet.

Kaede drove up the driveway and parked the van next to Ana's brother's car. She turned off the engine and took out the keys, shoving them in her bag. Then she went around the back and opened the back doors of the van.

Out they fell, all six of them, as each of them had been pushing as hard as they could against the door to escape. Kaede looked down on them superiorly, then closed the doors and headed towards the house.

They knocked on the door and Ana opened it. All of them (the others had picked themselves off the floor and followed her to the front door) stared at her. She was wearing an incredibly formal dress, dusty pink with a puffy skirt.

`What are you guys wearing?' Ana asked as if what they were wearing was odd.

`What do you mean what are we wearing? What are YOU wearing?' Joey almost yelled.

`It is a formal party, didn't you know?' Ana said, as if it couldn't possibly have been anything else. `Well, I suppose what you are wearing is fine, come on in.'

`They followed her inside the hall, along a long corridor to what was obviously the lounge, three large sofas, several cupboards and cabinets, a coffee table and a huge sound system in the corner. `Make yourselves at home,' she said, and took their coats and jackets to put them in the laundry room.

All of them stared around them. Ana's house was amazing. It just shouted to anybody who didn't know that she and her brother were part French.

In walked Ana's brother. He waved as he came in, quite cheerfully. He flopped down on one of the sofas and took a beer out of nowhere it seemed to them. He saw the bemused looks on their faces and grinned. `Mini fridge,' he said, pointing to the floor next to the arm of the chair. `Hello, my name is Marc by the way.'

Kaede saw out of the corner of her eye Tea's legs turn to jelly. Ew, Kaede thought, imagine fancying your friend's brother.

Kaede was about to go and whisper some sense into Tea's ear when the doorbell rang. `I'll get it,' they heard Ana shout. There came the sound of the door being opened, a moment's silence, and then the noise hit them like a wall of bricks.

From every doorway into the room there came teenagers, every single type. They jumped on the seats and opened cupboards. One guy had even taken over the sound system and was filling up the house with music.

Everybody was in the party mood, excited, and with the music as the catalyst, the party got started. Ana's brother got up and began chatting to mates, handing around beers and cigarettes. In complete contrast to her brother's calm, Ana was rushing around madly trying to organise everyone, asking them if she knew them or if they had an invitation.

Kaede pushed her way through the crowd to get to her friend. `Ana!' she shouted over the throng. `Ana!'

When she got to her, she saw Ana was about to realise she had lost control over her "guests". `Come on Ana, let's go get you out of that pretty dress, we don't want it to get ruined.'

Ana was looking around, wide-eyed and shocked. She had clearly never been to a house party before. `It's okay Ana,' Kaede had to yell over the music. `Marc has complete control over the situation.'

This was true; Marc was more than capable of taking care of a few rowdy teenagers. Kaede grabbed Ana by the arm and led her upstairs. She guessed which room was Ana's and took her inside.

She had guessed right. All over the walls there were pictures of horses: Ana's favourite animal. When Kaede shut the door behind them, the noise level dropped considerably and they could talk at a normal level. Kaede went to her chest of drawers and pulled out a pair of jeans and a faded blue top. She threw them at Ana and said to her, `Put these on, come downstairs and meet me when you're ready.' And with that she opened and closed the door before Ana could think of arguing.

Kaede pushed her way through the crowd to get downstairs, and when she got there her arm was immediately grabbed by some drunk guy. `Dance with me,' he slurred.

`No thanks,' Kaede said. `Dance with her.' She pushed him over to a girl who was standing on her own and pushed away, hearing him call `Okay' to her as she went.

She entered the lounge again to find that a largish dance floor had been made by the two sofas being pushed back.

As she came in, Joey stood up from where he had been sitting talking to Yugi and Honda on one of the pushed-back sofas, and approached her grinning. She beamed back at him, and when he reached her he took hold of her hand. `Would you care to dance with me?' he asked grinning madly.

`Sure, why not?' Kaede shrugged and allowed him to lead her onto the dance floor.

As they were dancing, Kaede looked out of the window and saw a car pull up. She practically had to yell in his ear about it. `I think it might be Sakura. Let's go check out this surprise!'

Kaede went to the door, followed by Joey, and the rest of their gang after they saw where she was going. As they reached the hall Ana came down the stairs and was waved over by Kaede.

They stood outside the door as the car slowed and parked next to Kaede's van. Out of the driver seat stepped Sakura, grinning from ear to ear. She hadn't seen them yet but she was examining Kaede's van. `Wow, so cool,' she said, loud enough for them to hear.

`I'm glad you like it,' Kaede called over to her. She jumped when she heard her, but when she turned around and saw who it was, she grinned again.

`Hi there, what you doing out here?' she yelled over.

`We were waiting for this surprise,' Honda yelled back.

Grinning again, she went to the boot of her car and flung it open. The whole of the boot and the back seats (the back seat thingy had been pushed down) were covered in crates. And inside those crates

was...

`My God, Sakura,' Joey shouted. `I never knew you were an alkie.'

`I'm not, these are for everyone, come help me,' she said, and began to unload the car. They all rushed forwards, even Ana, who did clearly not like this idea. They grabbed as many as they could carry and rushed back to the house with them.

Kaede just came back from her third trip and was exhausted, ready to have a rest. But as the car was nowhere near empty, she walked over to grab another crate. She bent down to pick on up but was blinded by car headlights.

She looked up and recognised the approaching car. Out of the passenger seat jumped Yuula, out of the drivers seat climbed Takumi. Kaede was about to run and glomp Yuula, but halfway to the car she stopped.

She had just seen who had emerged from one of the back seats.

She glared at Takumi. `Why the hell did you bring him here?' she snarled.

The other passenger smirked at her. `Hello Kaede, nice to see you here too.'

`Shut up, I wasn't talking to you!' she yelled at him. She turned back to Takumi again. `I already asked you, why the hell did you bring Seto Kaiba?'

9 - Spin the bottle

Spin the bottle

`Kaede, hey Kaede!' Sakura yelled at her, because as soon as she had seen Kaiba, she turned on her heel and began to walk back to Ana's house.

As she walked, Kaede felt someone grab her arms. She looked back at Honda and Duke, who had each grabbed one of her arms and wouldn't let go. Kaede looked over at Joey who was glaring at Kaiba as if there was no one else in the world that he hated more.

`Kaiba!' Yugi said after a while, as usual (N.B. Sorry, had to put that in, for Nemya, I just thought she would appreciate that one).

Kaiba ignored him and went to the boot of the car and opened it. Yuula followed him and pulled out a large crate full of orange juice cartons. Kaiba, meanwhile, emerged with about twenty bottles of champagne. Kaede starred. She knew that he had probably brought them for his own personal enjoyment, but it was nice to think that maybe he was going to offer them as drinks.

`Yay, orange juice!' Yuula danced around madly. The others helped her by taking some of the orange juice cartons and carrying them inside for her. Kaiba followed them with all of his champagne.

Almost as soon as they had walked through the door, Marc and all of his friends grabbed the orange juice and the champagne and ran with it to the kitchen. Yuula and Kaiba stood and watched with their arms pathetically hanging by their sides as Marc and co. ripped open the cartons of orange juice and poured it into some glasses, then filled up the glasses with Kaiba's champagne.

They emerged from the kitchen with the glasses on a serving tray, and went around handing them out to all the guests. Kaede took one, in better spirits now that Kaiba looked pathetic as he no longer had his champagne.

She left Kaiba and Yuula looking as though they felt extremely sorry for themselves and went into the living room with the rest of her friends. Almost all the people she passed had drinks in their hands and were all happy and smiling. Kaede felt someone take her hand and pull her to the dance floor. She looked up into Joey's eyes and smiled, and rested her head on his chest, closing her eyes. He wrapped his arms around her and held her closely to him. They danced slowly, in time with the music, and just held each other as if they were the last two people in the world.

Feeling someone's eyes on her, Kaede opened her eyes and looked over Joey's shoulder. Leaning against the doorway, staring right at them, he looked as if his heart was breaking. Kaede felt a large pang of guilt as she looked into his face, realising that maybe he didn't think he was better than her,

maybe he did nice things because he liked her, maybe he felt something a little bit more...

And with that, Seto Kaiba walked away.

And Kaede felt as though her heart had been ripped out of her chest as she watched.

She stopped dancing, and Joey's arms fell to his sides as he realised that something was wrong. Kaede smiled weakly at him, and then looked down at her feet. She felt so terrible, so horrible. Her head was screaming at her that she had done nothing wrong, that he had brought it upon himself; it was his fault for being such an asshole.

But her heart was telling her to run after him.

'I'm going to get another drink,' she said, and turned and walked away from Joey, ignoring him yelling, 'You've already got one in your hand!'

Kaede pushed through the throng, towards the door to the lounge. She made her way down the corridor, to the kitchen door. She was just about to enter when she heard voices from inside.

'Sorry, Seto, but I have to go, something has just come up,' came Takumi's voice. He sounded generally sorry about something, and she heard Kaiba reply.

'Sure, I'll just hang around here with Yuula. It's not as though anyone else wants to be around me.'

Kaede bit her lip. Was it her fault? How didn't he know she was going out with Joey? The rest of the world seemed to know. Where had he been, the moon?

'Aww, come on, Duke's here, and so is Ana, I'm sure they'll talk to you too. And Yugi and Joey might,' Takumi said it what was supposed to be a reassuring voice.

'They won't,' Kaiba said stubbornly. Kaede blinked tears away from her eyes. Since when had Kaiba cared what they thought of him?

She would have listened more if Ana had not grabbed her arm. 'Come on Kaede, we're going to play spin-the-bottle!'

'I'd rather not,' Kaede complained, but Ana pushed open the kitchen door, showing Takumi and Seto sat at the table together. 'We're playing spin the bottle, come play.'

'Sorry, but I have to go,' Takumi said, standing up and walking to the door. 'Really sorry, but I must. Tell Yuula that she can drive the car home.'

He pushed past Ana, and when he got to Kaede he gave her a meaningful look. She looked down at her feet, feeling a bit ashamed. What had Kaiba told him?

'Oh well, Seto, you'll play, won't you?' Ana grabbed Kaiba's arm. He looked as if he was going to wrench it away and back against the wall in fear.

`Um, I'm not sure if-' but he couldn't get any further, because Ana had dragged him out of his seat and towards the door. She got to Kaede and grabbed her in her other hand, and lead them upstairs.

They entered a room on the first floor and Kaede looked around. Their whole friendship group was sat on the floor in a circle, some looking a bit embarrassed, some bored. Kaede sat down in between Honda and Ryou, as it appeared it was meant to be a boy-girl-boy-girl layout.

`Okay, this is a bit unfair as we have one more boy so it is uneven but it is okay,' Ana smiled. `Okay, so I'll spin first and whoever it lands on will start. When you spin, you kiss person of the opposite sex who is closest to the pointy bit of the bottle, so if it lands on someone of the same sex you don't have to kiss them unless you want to.

`Right, so I spin...' she said, and sat down and spun. It landed on Yugi, who blushed and said, `That's not-' but then he turned into Yami, who smiled and said in his deeper voice, `Alright, I'll start.' He put his hand over the bottle and said to himself, `Heart of the bottle, guide me.'

He spun as hard as he could (it managed to not go spinning off in a random direction and just spun on the spot) and he closed his eyes. It slowed down and everyone was staring at it. Kaede crossed her fingers behind her back, and she could see Yuula doing the same, praying for it to not land on or next to her. There were two people in the circle who were glaring at each other, fighting it over in their mind as to who would get Yami; Tea and Sakura. Both kept staring at the bottle, then back at each other. Sakura looked as if she would either burst into tears or jump for joy depending on who it landed on.

It slowed and finally stopped, and everybody looked at whole it was pointing at.

Sakura almost leaped up when she saw that it was pointing at her. Kaede could see the delight in her eyes, and saw her trying to hide it.

Kaede looked away as her and Yami kissed. It was okay to kiss in front of people, but Kaede hated seeing people kiss, and hated being watched when she was the one kissing.

After that, it was Sakura's turn. She spun and it landed on Honda (worst luck). Sakura offered him her cheek (well, it is HONDA) and then leant back as far as possible.

Honda spun, and it landed on Ana, who giggled and leant over so he could kiss her. Kaede shuffled over as far as she could to get away from them, and closed her eyes. Only when she almost fell back on Ryou did she look again, and only after they stopped making horrible kissing noises could she relax.

Ana spun the bottle and it landed on Duke (ha, she got all the bad people!). Duke, who had been looking away from the whole affair as if he was wishing to be anywhere but the place he really was ever since the start, jumped when he saw it pointing on him. He looked almost angry, but hid it quickly and took Ana's hand in his and gently kissed it.

Duke spun the bottle and Kaede thought she saw his eyes flick over to where Yuula was sitting. He spun the bottle, and as it begun to slow down, he begun to stare at it desperately. It slowed down, slower, slower, slower, and then stopped.

Everyone gasped and she shrieked. Yuula put her hands to her mouth in shock and embarrassment.

`What! THAT IS NOT FAIR! I DEMAND A REPEAT SPIN! THAT IS SO UNFAIR! WHY DID IT HAVE TO LAND ON ME? Awwwaaaa!' Yuula sulked, and pouted. Duke suppressed a smile, stood up and walked around the circle to her. She jumped up as he came near and tried to run away, but he grabbed her wrist with one hand and turned her around to face him with the other. He put his hand on her cheek, and at this point Kaede turned away. She heard them kiss and then Duke's footsteps as he walked back to his seat. Yuula remained motionless, until Kaiba, who was sat next to her grabbed her hand and yanked her down.

She sat and slowly took the bottle, and spun it. She looked away as she did so, not really caring who it landed on.

But she looked when it stopped spinning, and beamed at Ryou, who it was pointing to. Ryou seemed shocked at how happy she was, but then smiled back at her and walked around the circle. When he reached her, he seemed quite embarrassed to begin with, and blushed. Kaede turned away as she knew he wouldn't want to be watched. She did not hear anything, but knew when Ryou walked back to his seat beside her that Yuula had kissed him. He was smiling as he reached out for the bottle.

When he spun, it landed on Tea and he just kissed her on the hand as Duke had kisses Ana. Tea's landed on Joey, who looked quite uncomfortable. He kissed her quickly and then grabbed the bottle, spinning as hard as possible. It skidded off out of the circle so he had to grab it and spin again. Slower this time, it somehow managed to land on Kaede.

Kaede had been wondering when it would be her turn, and let Joey get up and come to her. He sat down next to her and put his hands on her waist. His lips touched hers and Kaede felt herself drown in his embrace, allowing herself to be smothered by his kiss. But a face swam into her mind and she put her hand on Joey's shoulder so that he would stop. He smiled at her when they drew apart, and Kaede forced herself to smile back. He got up and went back to her place and Kaede pushed herself to spin the bottle, to finish it. She gripped the bottle. Kaiba was the only one who hadn't been kissed, so surely she would kiss him. Did she want to? She looked around the circle and met his eye. Had he watched her kiss Joey?

Kaede spun the bottle reluctantly, and as it slowed down, she felt as though her eyes were being forced to look into Kaiba's. She almost smiled.

It slowed and everyone gasped, except for Kaede and Kaiba. Sure enough, it had landed at Kaiba, and he was staring at her now, waiting for her to come over to him. Sighing, she got up and walked over to him and crouched beside him.

Kaiba looked up at her from where he sat on the floor, and raised his arms to her face. His hands rested on her cheeks, and gently he stroked her skin, then he wrapped one arm around her waist and pulled her closer to him.

When she was at his head height, they leaned towards each other and brushed lips. He pulled her even closer to him and she almost fell forwards, but he caught her and pulled her onto his lap, kissing her all

the while.

Kaede couldn't think, couldn't reason, couldn't understand probably what was happening. When Kaiba's arms has wrapped around her waist, she had almost collapsed in his arms.

She put her hands on his chest and pushed away from him. She stood up and walked away, not to her place but to the door. `Sorry, I don't feel like playing this game anymore,' she said, opening the door and going downstairs.

She pushed through all the guests and sat down on one of the sofas. She grabbed the nearest glass from someone passing by and down it in one backwards motion. She sat and watched the people dance around her, wishing she could be as carefree.

Someone flopped down onto the sofa next to her. She didn't even need to look around to know it was Joey. He had picked up a glass from somewhere and sipped it quietly, looking at her the whole time.

When he was finished his drink he began fiddling with the glass, turning it over in his hands. Kaede was about to ask him what he was doing when he asked, `So, what was that all about then?'

She turned to face him, indignant. `What do you mean "what was that all about"?' she shouted at him. No one else heard over the volume of the music, but he heard alright.

`That kiss.'

`What about it?'

`Well, why did you do it?'

`We were playing spin the bottle, Joey; it isn't like it meant anything to me,' Kaede looked at him for the first time, and instantly wished she hadn't. He had just seen his girlfriend kissing his worst enemy, and looked as if it had hurt him deep down. His eyes were red and his skin drawn tight across his face.

`It didn't look like just a kiss,' he fought to keep his voice steady. `It didn't look like it meant nothing to you.'

`Well, it did, so just drop it!' Kaede said, standing up. She was about to walk away when Joey grabbed her arm and pulled her onto his lap.

`Kaede, I'm sorry, it's just, I can't stand Kaiba, and after all he has done to us, I couldn't stand it if he took you away from me.' Joey put his arms around her and buried his face in her hair.

`Joey, I am sorry that you think I would do that, because I would never hurt you like that. Please, never think that of me again.' She closed her eyes and hugged his arms to her.

The music changed and on came on of her all time favourite songs. She jumped up and pulled Joey with her. `Come on, this can be your apology for thinking I would cheat on you.'

Slightly happier now, Kaede danced her way through the crowd to find a place for her and Joey to dance among their friends. She soon found Tea dancing with Marc, and danced next to her. Joey joined Kaede and soon it was as if nothing had happened since they had danced together earlier that evening. Kaede closed her eyes and let the rhythm take her.

She felt Joey's hands on her waist and opened her eyes. She smiled at him and he grinned back at her. She leaned forward and kissed him quickly on his lips, then went back to the dancing.

When the song was over, Kaede left Joey to go to request a song to the D.J. But as she neared the sound system, another song flared from the speakers. A girl got up on one of the tables and began dancing in front of everyone. Kaede recognised her immediately as Ana, and smiled, seeing her friend was pissed off her face, and was going to embarrass herself if she doesn't do something to help her.

But Ana raised her arms about her head and moved her hips to the rhythm. Kaede thought it was all going to be okay, until she started singing.

'You think I'm gorgeous, you wanna kiss me, you wanna hug me, you wanna love me,' she sang, her arms raised about her head, dancing raunchily on the table. Kaede noticed she was staring at Honda, who was standing beside the table, staring back at her with an impure look in his eye.

Deciding that she would rather die of embarrassment with Ana than let Ana die of embarrassment alone. She ran through the crowd, pushing people out of her way, all of whom were looking at Ana, some laughing (mostly girls), some drooling over her (MOSTLY guys o.O)

Kaede reached the table where Ana was table dancing and jumped onto it as well, dancing mostly with her hips, and spinning around with her eyes closed, occasionally opening them to make sure that none of the guys were looking up her short skirt.

Joey had followed her to the table, and watched; arms folded, next to Honda, and stared up at her disapprovingly. Soon, Sakura had joined them and all three girls were dancing on the table, surrounded by hordes of boys, being watched in particular by Honda, Joey and Yami.

When the song ended, Joey took Kaede by the arm and helped her down off the table. When she was firmly of the ground, he kissed her quickly and took her by the hand. He leaned her back upstairs into an empty bedroom. It was probably Marc's spare bedroom, because there weren't many personal items in it, but it contained a wardrobe, several very stylist photographs on the walls, an en-suite bathroom and a very large double bed.

Kaede sat on the bed in the room and kicked off her boots, then watched Joey cross the floor from the door to the bed and sit next to her. Smiling, she kissed him gently and moved further onto the bed. She laid her head on the pillows and pulled him closer to her.

He leaned over her and kissed her gently, his hands on her waist. Slowly, she pulled off his shirt wrapped her arms around him, leaning her head on his shoulder, allowing his skin to warm her suddenly cold body.

Kaede pulled back the covers of the bed and wrapped them around her and Joey. Kaede closed her

eyes and breathed in his scent, not wanting to open her eyes just in case it was all a dream. She felt his hands move over her body, and she felt herself drowning in his arms, and in his love.

It was there, lying with in his arms afterwards, his head resting on her shoulder as he slept, that she wished that she would never see Kaiba again, because she knew that if she did, she would end up breaking Joey's heart, and she would lose the love that he had for her. Just before sleep came to her, Kaede made a wish. She wished that when eventually she closed her eyes and fell asleep, she would never wake up.

10 - Strange couples

Strange couples

The next day dawn, sunny and beautiful, and the light streamed in through the window across the bed, when Kaede and Joey lay still, sound asleep. Kaede stirred, and the duvet fell off of her shoulders. She shivered in her sleep and slowly opened her eyes. She lifted her head a little, and looked around her, and at Joey who was sleeping behind her, his arms wrapped around her waist.

Gently pushing his arm off of her, she climbed out of the bed and over to the door to the en-suite bathroom, picking up her clothes along the way as she went. She quickly showered and got dressed into the clothes she had been wearing the night before. She towel dried her hair as best as she could, then emerged from the bathroom to talk to Joey.

But even this small task was foiled at the first hurdle, as Joey lay, sound asleep still, although he had spread out as much as he could, to take up nearly the whole bed. Kaede sat on the bed beside him and kissed him on the cheek to wake him up.

He opened one eye and then the other, and then buried his head in the pillow. Kaede jabbed him in the back with her little finger, then kissed his only just visible cheek, and left the room.

Walking through the upstairs corridors, Kaede found remnants of the previous night's party. Plastic cups, plates, shoes and socks, even a pair of panties. Kaede shook her head at the mess as she went downstairs, telling herself that she would help Ana clean it up as soon as she had had some breakfast.

Going straight to the kitchen, found a bowl, cereal, milk and a spoon, created the masterpiece that is breakfast, and, with her spoon in one hand and her bowl resting on the other, she began to explore the mess.

When she entered the living room, she immediately wished she hadn't. It was ten times worse than the upstairs corridors, with a lot more clothes. She made to sit down on the sofa, but discovered Sakura, Yami and Ryou asleep on the sofas in the living room, all were dressed, but Yami and Sakura were sleeping side by side underneath a woollen blanket, Yami with his arm around Sakura, her resting her head on his shoulder.

Ryou woke up as soon as he heard her come in, and stood up quickly too.

'Oh, thank goodness, we thought you had already gone home,' Ryou said.

'No, I was asleep upstairs,' Kaede looked away and went on exploring the mess in the room.

`Oh, it's just that so many people weren't there, we thought that you had taken them home,' Ryou began straightening the sofas. Kaede put her cereal bowl down and helped him.

`Oh, well, I didn't know anyone was missing, perhaps they went home with Yuula?'

`I don't think so, Takumi's car is still here,' Ryou pointed out of the window into the driveway, where, sure enough was the car that Yuula, Takumi and Kaiba had arrived in last night.

`Hey, where did Kaiba go?' Kaede pushed the sofa into place and sat down on it, brushing away a few of the crumbs that had gathered there the night before.

`No idea, maybe he walked home.'

`I doubt it, he wouldn't have do something that meant a lot of work for himself, he is probably hiding somewhere,' Kaede said, shrugging, leaning back against the sofa.

They heard some thuds on the stairs and looked up at the door as Joey walked in. He was wearing only the trousers he had wore the night before and his head was sticking up on end. Kaede smiled at him when he walked in and made a space for him on the sofa beside her, offering him some of her cereal.

All three talked quietly so as not to wake up Yami and Sakura, but this plan was interrupted by a sudden shouting coming from upstairs. They woke up with a start and looked around blearily eyed.

`TEA! WHAT DO YOU THING YOU ARE DOING! GET OUT OF THERE RIGHT NOW!' There was a crash and even more shouting. "THAT IS SO DISGUSTING! HOW COULD YOU DO THAT TO ME? I THOUGHT YOU WERE MY FRIEND.'

`I am so sorry, Ana, I wasn't thinking, I am so sorry!' Tea begged. `I really am, and I didn't think you would mind?'

`HOW WOULD I NOT MIND? HE IS MY BROTHER, TEA, OF COURSE I MIND.'

Ana ran down the stairs and into the living room, Tea close behind, followed by Honda and Marc. All four of them were half dress and looked as if they too had just woken up, Honda and Marc probably being woken up by Ana's shouting.

`What's going on?' Sakura mumbled, closing her eyes and tugging the blanket so that it covered more of her.

`I woke up, and went to my brother's room to ask him if he could take me to the stables today, but when I walked in I saw Tea asleep with him in his bed,' Ana folded her arms and glared at Tea, who seemed to be caught between fear and amusement. If she hadn't been petrified by Ana shouting, she would have laughed, because her face was priceless.

Kaede opened her mouth to say something, but heard a scream upstairs instead. After the scream there was shouting. And after the screaming, someone came running downstairs, still screaming.

`NO WAY! THAT ISN'T FAR! I REFUSE! NO, THERE IS NOW WAY I WOULD HAVE DONE THAT!'

All of the people in the lounge immediately raced to the foot of the stairs and looked up. Yuula came running down the stairs, with a large blanket wrapped around her, pulling on her clothes as she jumped down the stairs. She was closely followed by Duke, who was only in his boxer.

`Yuula, come back,' Duke jumped down the stairs, almost tripping as he did.

`PUT SOME CLOTHES ON YOU FREAK! YOU CAN'T GO RUNNING AROUND SOMEONE ELSE'S HOUSE NOT WEARING VERY MUCH!' Yuula said, throwing him a pair of trousers. She got to the foot of the stairs and flung on all her clothes. She looked at Ryou, who was watching her with a bewildered look on his face (he does that look a lot!!!). She turned away from him, ashamed. Then she sprinted into the lounge and grabbed her jacket and pulled out a set of car keys. `I'm going home, see you at school.' She ran out of the house, still pulling on her shoes. She ran to her car and jumped in, driving away as fast as she could.

Duke stared out of the window as she drove away, and flopped down on one of the sofas, his face in his hands. Kaede sat down next to him and put her hand on his shoulder.

He looked up and Kaede took in his appearance quickly; hair messed up, his line makeup smudged over his cheek, and his eyes were red as if he were about to start crying.

`I don't know what happened, or why she did that. It was all perfect, I don't know what went wrong,' Duke buried his face in his hands again, and when he looked up again he really was crying.

`What happened?' Ana knelt beside him, totally forgetting her current hatred of Tea.

`Well, last night after playing spin the bottle, Yuula and I hung about in the room after everybody else left. She seemed like she was in a trance. I knelt down next to her and put my arm around her. She jumped up and started yelling at me, which I didn't really mind because she always yells at me, even when we were going out. But she started shivering, so I offered to hug her if she was cold. So she said I could hug her, and we sat on the bed hugging. And then, it just...happened,' fresh tears sprung to Duke's eyes and he buried his head in his hands again.

Kaede put her arm around his shoulders as he sobbed into his hands. She had always known that Duke was in love with Yuula, ever since they had first met each other, but she also knew that after they had split up, Yuula had almost forgotten Duke existed. Kaede was trying to find some words to comfort Duke, but before she thought of something to tell him to heal his broken heart, something moved in the corner of her eye. She looked up at the door, at Kaiba how was leaning against the doorframe, watching them with his arms folded.

`Oh, you're still here, are you?' Kaede said coldly, glaring at him. He smirked back at her and gave Duke the once-over. `I take it Yuula isn't here anymore, and need to get home, so can I please call my chauffeur and ask him to collect me, if that is alright,' he asked Ana.

`Oh, I'm sure Kaede or Sakura could give you a lift home, as they both have their cars with them,' Ana

suggested.

`SHOTGUN NOT ME!' Sakura yelled after hearing those words, turning to smirk at Kaede. Kaede glared at her, and folded her arms when she turned back to Kaiba.

`Well, fine, but my van has only two seats, so you will probably be in the back where there are no seats. Surely you would much prefer to be in Sakura's nice, comfortable, spacious kombi?' she almost winced as she caught herself begging with him.

`But Kaede, Seto lives much closer to you than he does to me,' Sakura lied, still smirking. `Besides, Yami and I aren't going back home for a while anyway, so you may have to take Kaiba home.'

`Mumbling and grumbling, Kaede eventually agreed and everybody collected their stuff. Kaede found her bag from the night before and put on her jacket. She held open the back doors of the van and everyone climbed in, rather reluctantly. Kaede smirked as Kaiba, who was the last person to get in, had nowhere to sit, so he was to squeeze in between the still red-eyed Duke and the much annoyed Tea.

`Everybody comfortable?' Kaede asked, before she slammed the doors. Joey and her got into the front seats and Kaede turned the keys in the exhaust. As they pulled out of the driveway, Kaede saw Ana and Marc waving them off in the mirror, as well as Sakura laughing at them in her practically empty kombi.

She sped around the city, dropping people off as she went. As they began to disappear, more space was created in the back and Kaede heard a duel going on just after leaving Tea's house.

Eventually, it was just Kaiba left, and he had come and sat next to her in the front after Joey had left, much to Joey's annoyance. Kaede wearily turned in the direction of the Kaiba mansion and drove away, ignoring Kaiba as best as she could. This proved harder than it seemed; at one point Kaede thought that Kaiba was staring at her. When he denied it, Kaede put her favourite CD into the newly fitted CD player, and turned the volume up so that she would have something to keep her mind occupied, and listening to music was considerably better than talking to Kaiba.

But about halfway to his house, he turned down the music and turned to her, about to ask her a question.

`What did you do that for?' Kaede yelled at him. `I was listening to that! What do you want anyway?' she pouted, turning back to the steering wheel.

`What happened between Yuula and Duke?'

Kaede almost slammed on the brakes. She turned to Kaiba and, fighting to keep her temper and her volume down, said as calmly as you can, `That is none of your business, and if you really want to know, why don't you ask one of them, instead of talking about them behind their backs.'

`Well, Yuula wasn't there to ask, and Duke seemed pretty upset, so I am asking you,' Kaiba smiled at her.

`It is none of your business to know, and it is none of my business to inform you,' Kaede gripped the

steering wheel tightly, her knuckles turning white.

`They slept together didn't they?'

This time Kaede really did brake. The car lurched forward and stopped suddenly. The car behind them hooted angrily, and then overtook, the driver swearing violently as they passed. But Kaede hardly noticed.

`Why did you bother asking me if you already knew what happened?' She yelled.

`I didn't know for sure and just wanted to check.'

She could have strangled him then, but with forced self-control, turned back to the wheel and forced herself to look ahead and not around at him.

They continued the rest of the journey in silence, and when they finally reached the Kaiba mansion and the automatic gates opened for them to enter, Kaiba broke the silence by saying, `Could you please drive me up to the gate.'

`Wow, a please, your manners are getting better,' Kaede smirked.

They drove all the way up to the door, and were met by Mokuba. Mokuba ran down the steps to Kaiba.

`Bye Kaede, hopefully I'll see you soon,' Kaiba said as he got out of the car. Kaede wasn't listening, and as soon as he closed the door turned around and drove down the driveway as fast as the van would go, not looking back.

11 - "But the baker sells cake."

"But the baker sells cake."

`Oh gawd, I am SO bored!' Sakura complained, leaning back in her chair as they sat in their classroom at lunchtime on the Friday after the party. They had just watched Yugi thrash Joey at Duel Monsters for the fifth time that day, and were all bored out of their skulls.

`Okay, let's play again,' said Yugi, shuffling his duel deck again.

`NO WAY!' yelled Kaede, Sakura, Honda and Joey all at once.

`I would rather burn in hell than have to watch Joey get embarrassed because he can't win a simple duel against you,' Honda said. He was sitting on a chair by the window, waiting for something.

`Where is Tea? I haven't seen her around for ages, she doesn't usually come in here very often,' Yugi said, looking around.

`It's because she and Ana have majorly fallen out over Tea eating cake with Marc.' Sakura explained.

`Wait a second, what is this cake thing? I have not idea what it is, people just started to say it randomly,' Joey complained, getting up from where he had been sitting opposite Yugi and stood behind Kaede, wrapping his arms around her waist.

`Well,' Sakura explained. `We were in R.S. (Religious Studies) and we were talking about whether it is acceptable for people to have sex before they are married. And our teacher used the example of birthday cake.'

`Yeah, like, say you had a birthday cake on your birthday,' Kaede took over explaining. `And you had the same cake everyday of the year, but didn't call it birthday cake. Would the cake that you have on your birthday be as special?'

`And then some people started talking about fairy cakes and cup cakes and in the end, everybody was sickified.' Sakura grinned.

`Okay, I get it, so I could say that Marc and Tea ate cake?' Honda asked.

`Yep, that's it, and if anybody sells cake it means they are a hooker,' Sakura laughed.

`But the baker sells cake,' Joey said in a very innocent voice. Everybody burst out laughing at him, and he went bright red, realising what he had said. `THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT, Y'HEAR!'

Laughing, Kaede kissed him quickly and jumped up to get her books. As she did, Ana suddenly entered the room.

`Hello Ana,' Ryou said, but she took no notice of him, and walked straight over to Honda, sat on his lap and kissed him right in front of everyone.

Kaede turned away, disgusted. Watching people kiss was gross. She walked back to her desk and cleared her throat loudly, stopping their kissing immediately.

`So, what do you guys want to do at the weekend?' Sakura asked suddenly.

`I dunno, but I was planning to go to the beach and try out my new surf board,' Kaede said, sitting on top of the next to her satchel.

`Cool! Can I come too? I could bring my surfboard and we could go catch some waves together,' Sakura said.

`Sure, that would be cool,' Kaede shoved all her books in her satchel and looked around. `Where's Yuula today?'

Duke, who hadn't been paying any attention, suddenly sat up and looked around at the mention of Yuula's name.

`I dunno, she should be around somewhere, she is here today,' said Ana, turning away from Honda for a moment (which was amazing).

`Well, we could stay at her house and then all go to the beach together,' Kaede suggested.

`Okay, I'll ring her after school, and Tea as well, so she can come too,' Sakura suggested.

`Great, can't wait, ring me to and tell me exactly what beach we are going to,' Kaede said just as the bell rang, signalling the start of afternoon lessons. She said goodbye to most of them, and her, Ryou and Sakura set off for their Religious Studies lesson, whilst Honda and Joey shouted at them to try not to think of anymore sick cake related things.

When Kaede got home from work that night, she was completely shattered. She hadn't done very much, put a plaster on this boy's cut, blew her whistle at these kids of fooling around, but afterwards she had gone to the pool's gym and spent about an hour in there.

`Heya Grandma, hi Granddad,' she called to them as she walked through the door. She ran upstairs and

showered, then got changed for bed as quickly as possible.

When she got into bed, she fell asleep almost as soon as possible. She slept soundly, but deep inside her head stirred a long lost memory.

Priest Seto put his hand on Hebeny's shoulder as if to reassure her. It did nothing to stop the queasy feeling in her stomach. She looked at Sanura, who was standing a little way off with Priestess Isis. Sanura beamed at her, but even this didn't cheer her up.

Suddenly there was a knock on the door, and Hebeny's insides plummeted. She suddenly felt faint, and held Priest Seto's arm for support.

'Are you going to be okay?' he asked. Hebeny shrugged her shoulders, not trusting herself to talk in case she hurled. Seto gripped her hand and opened the door.

Behind it stood two of the Pharaoh's guards. They nodded at Seto and entered the room. One of them put their hand on Hebeny's shoulder and steered her out of the room, the other leading the way. Behind the guard pushing her, Hebeny heard Seto, Sanura and Isis follow.

As they began the long walk through the temple to the palace, Hebeny began to feel glad that she was being pushed there; otherwise she would have turned and run away, fuelled by dread and fear. She did not have much left, but she still had her pride, even though there was not much of that left now.

Hebeny walked through the halls of the palace, to the Pharaoh's audience chamber. Two more guards were at the door, waiting for them. They swung open the door to the hall, and the guard behind Hebeny pushed her roughly between them and into the hall.

There was an aisle down the middle of the crowds inside, and on either side of this stood hired dancers, with long pieces of red banner. These were twirled around their head, arms, legs and bodies, and as the dancers waved them, the banners made beautiful patterns in the air, dancing in time with their wielders.

As Hebeny walked through the hall, she kept glancing nervously from side to side, at the guards who were hiding amongst the crowd. Each one was staring at her, along with everybody in the crowd, and she shivered, wanting to vanish so nobody could watch her anymore.

But this was only wishful thinking. She was pushed forward every time she faltered, and the bandages that were still wrapped around her ankles came loose as she stumbled. Each time she nearly fell, she heard the crowd roar with laughter. And each time they laughed, she felt their hate of her sting her like a thousand daggers.

Arriving at the end of the hall, the guard behind her pushed her to her knees and forced her head down against her chest. Her blood boiled as he held her there, not allowing her to move. She wanted to hit him with all the strength that remained in her, but knew she must not, as then she would surely be imprisoned or even put to death. A slave like her would not be missed, so they could do whatever they liked with her.

Which was what terrified her most of all.

She heard everyone around her suddenly go quiet, and knew exactly why. She sensed the Pharaoh Atem enter the hall and heard him sit, and heard the whispers of the crowd. There was silence again as Atem held up his hand, and then fixed his gaze upon her.

The guard let go of Hebeny and pushed her to the ground, spitting at her feet. The crowd laugh maliciously, and then silence again.

She felt a cold breeze pass her as Seto climbed the steps to the Pharaoh's platform and stood behind the throne where Atem was sat. Hebeny looked at Atem, and then at Seto. She wished that she would be told what was happening, what they would do with her. She wanted an order in some shape or form, because not knowing and not doing anything was unbearable.

Atem raised his hand, indicating that he wanted her to stand. She stood and looked at the ground.

'Well, well, well,' Atem said lazily as though she was of no interest to him what-so-ever. 'We have all been waiting your return to my hall.'

Hebeny doubted it, knowing he would rather she was dead than in front of him, a weed among roses.

'Are you ready to dance for me yet?' he asked, again in his lazy tone of voice.

Hebeny's features twisted into a painful smile. She glared at him, and said in what she wished was a steady, strong voice, 'No, and I never will be, because filth like you don't deserve it.' She gave a mocking curtsy and then looked at the floor again.

'You talk very tough for someone who may be killed if they take one wrong step,' he warned, his tone sharpening. Hebeny hoped it was because of her remark, but couldn't be sure.

'Well, my Lord,' she said, mockingly curtseying again. 'I would dearly like to dance for you, but due to the injuries I sustained, I don't think I am fully healed, even after a week. And my injuries are so severe, I may never dance again.'

'Don't play games with me you little witch and do as I say,' he ordered.

'Not in a million years,' Hebeny said, and turned to walk away.

'Never turn your back on me!' Pharaoh yelled after her. She heard his fingers click and saw several of the guards who had been hidden in the crowd suddenly surge forward, with their swords drawn. She began to run, as fast as she could, sprinting down the hall.

But the crowd began to close in around her, and they cut off her exit completely. She looked around for an opening, but there was none.

And then she was surrounded.

Like a cornered animal she curled up, ready to pounce. But she was buried under the mob, and was felt

herself slowly being crushed under their weight. She tried to scream, but her lungs were starved of air. She tried to keep her eyes open, but soon her vision swam and she saw no more.

`STOP!' Someone was yelling. The crowd stopped shouting and turned around. Priest Seto was pushing through the crowd to reach Hebeny, praying she was alright.

From the Pharaoh's platform, Atem stood up, watching as his high priest battled through the crowds. A woman who had been standing far behind him stepped forward and put her hand on his arm, staring after Seto.

Seto fought through the crowd, who were slowly parting to let him pass. A small circle formed and he ran to it, his heart beating, begging, pleading to the gods that he would not see what he thought was there.

He ran into the circle, and stared at the crumpled body on the ground. Her white dress was now dirty from the kicks she had received, and she was bleeding from the side of her head and her arms and legs again. Seto ran forward and kneeled down beside her, lifting her up and cradling her in his arms, his hand on her shoulder, moving down her arm and reaching her wrist. He pressed two of his fingers to her wrist, hoping to feel a pulse.

There it was, weak and slow, but it was a pulse. He lifted her in his arms and cradled his head against his chest. Sanura and Isis ran down the hall to them and helped Seto as he got to his feet and walked back to the Pharaoh.

Atem watched as they brought her to him, and the woman with him sighed in relief when she saw that she was okay. She left Atem's side and began to jog down the steps to Seto.

`Herya, where are you going?' Atem stood up as he saw her go.

`To help her,' Herya said over her shoulder. She reached Seto and looked at Hebeny's crumpled but still alive body lying as though dead in his arms. She checked her head wound and the renewed cuts on her arms and legs. `I can help you treat her wounds, come with me.'

Herya lead Seto out of the hall and through the palace, to a large bedroom. Seto laid Hebeny on the bed whilst Herya found some ointments and rubbed them into the wounds on her arms and legs. She put a bandage around her head to stop the bleeding from her head. She was just putting fresh bandages around her arms and legs when the door banged open and the Pharaoh entered.

He took in Hebeny lying on the bed and said nothing, but came and stood beside his High Priest, and watched Herya tend to her. He closed his eyes in disbelief that a single slave could cause such an uproar, even one such as her. Herya tucked the end of the last bandage away and looked down at her. She pushed Hebeny's black hair back away from her face and stood back.

Atem put his hand on her shoulder and jerked his head to one side, indicating her to follow him. They left Seto with her and left the room.

Atem looked up and down the corridor to check no one was around, and then he spoke at last, looking her right in the eye. `Why did you do that?'

`Because no one else would,' Herya replied, returning his gaze. `Why did you do that to her? You knew she hadn't recovered, and yet you did it. Why do you want to put her in more pain?'

`She is only a slave.'

`She is a living person Atem, like you or me,' Heya snapped at him. `You can't treat her like that, as though she has no feelings or pains. You don't treat any of the slaves in the palace like that, so why her? She deserves better than that.'

Atem said nothing, but looked away from her. She put her arms around him and hugged him tightly, her head resting on her shoulder. Only when he hugged her back did she turn her face to him and kiss him.

`Don't do that again, Atem,' she warned. `Please, promise me that you will never do that again.'

He hugged her to him and buried his face in her hair. `I promise,' he whispered, and he felt her smile slightly as he said this.

Seto sat beside the bed in a chair that he had found in the room. He was still watching Hebeny, though there had been no change. His fingers were running through her hair, undoing the knots that had formed in it. He felt weariness sweep through his body and he kneeled on the floor and leaned on the bed, resting his head on his arms. He closed his eyes and fell asleep in the dim light.

Several hours past without change, but Seto dreamed. He saw Hebeny well again, dancing to the sound of drums, her delicate figure clothed in a red layered dress, and when she spun around to the music her skirts fanned out. He saw her smile at him and felt warm inside, and longed to join her in her dancing. But just as he was going to join her, the drums stopped, and were replaced by screams. Hebeny's scream. Her body twisted and contorted in pain and fear of some invisible creature that was torturing and tormenting her. She sobbed and screamed for help. Blood poured fresh from her head and she had cuts across her cheek and on her shoulders. Her red dress gradually became darker as it got stained by blood.

Seto saw himself watching, straining to reach her, but unable to. Something invisible was holding him back, just as something he could not see was torturing Hebeny. He struggled to get loose and watched aghast as she fell to the ground lifeless. He broke free of his bonds and ran to her, kneeling beside her with her head resting on his lap. Her blood still poured from her head wound and stained her clothes, but he cared not. Tears sprung to his eyes and he wept, clinging to her body, unable to let her go. He lay down beside her broken body and held it to him, burying his face in her soft black hair, running his hand along her arms. Her skin was still warm, but he could feel the warmth of her vanishing into the air.

Then, by the same invisible force who had tortured her to death, she was pulled away from him. He cried as he watched helplessly as her body was beaten and torn apart and then thrown to the crocodiles of the Nile, who were waiting eagerly for blood. They tore up the remains of her body until there was nothing left but the remains of her once beautiful red dress. He picked up one of the pieces and held it tightly as if that too was about to be taken from him, and he wept for her, knowing that she was gone and he had never told her how much he loved her, never asked her how she felt about him, never felt her skin against his.

A sudden waft of cold air jerked him out of his dream, and he found he had been crying in real life as well, for his cheeks were wet with tears. He hastily wiped them on his priest robes and turned around to see who had entered the room. It was Isis and Sanura, who both came quickly to him. Sanura sat down on the floor with Seto, not understanding why he sat there, and Isis leant on the bed to check on Hebeny, who had not moved at all. Seto picked himself off the floor (Sanura stood up too) and sat back in the chair.

None of them said anything, but Sanura jumped onto the bed next to Hebeny and began to shake her shoulders. Isis tried to stop her but Sanura shrugged her off. She continued shaking her shoulders until suddenly Hebeny groaned and, with one swift movement, grabbed Sanura and pushed her off the bed.

They all stared at her. She winced at the pain in her arm that her action had cause and clutched her arm with her hand, and her eyes watered with pain. Sanura, who was unhurt by the fall off the bed, knelt by the bed as she watched Hebeny with a fascinated look in her eye.

Hebeny slowly raised herself up to an almost sitting position and leaned against the wall behind the bed, exhausted by this simple movement. She opened her eyes finally and blinked as her eyes adjusted to the light. She looked around, and smiled at Sanura. 'Thanks for waking me up,' she said weakly. Sanura beamed and lunged herself onto the bed and hugged her. Hebeny pushed her away as she has pressed against her wounds, and laughed at the stunned look on her face. Hebeny hugged her Sanura carefully so she wouldn't cause herself any more pain and then leant back against the pillow.

Isis was smiling half-heartedly. 'You know that Sanura doesn't really understand things after what happened to her before we found her?' Hebeny nodded. 'Well, when you were being attacked, I think she didn't really understand what was happening and tried to join in attacking you. I'm sure she didn't mean to,' she added, seeing the look of horror pass over Hebeny's face. 'It's just that she didn't understand. But she couldn't get anywhere near you for the crowds and I was holding her back as well, so there was no way she would have been able to hurt you in anyway.'

Hebeny smiled weakly again and looked at Sanura. She didn't seem violent at that moment, but Hebeny knew that she had a habit of doing what she saw other people doing, and if that was attacking someone, then she would join in, however wrong it was.

Hebeny looked at Seto, how had said nothing. Isis saw this, and grabbed Sanura by the upper arm and began to drag her away. 'We'd better go and see to the temple, see you later,' she said, and closed the door behind them as they left.

Hebeny looked at Seto, but said nothing. He just stared at her as right though her was staring through space, and Hebeny slowly turned her head to the side to make him laugh. But he didn't. He was devoid of emotion. She knelt on the bed facing him, ignoring the sharp pains his caused her legs, and reached for one of his hands. She pulled it towards him, forcing him to stand up and come closer to her.

She looked up into his eyes, but still no emotion was in his face, no way for her to tell what he was thinking. She ran through every possible thing she could do to make him show emotion in her head, but nothing came to her.

Eventually she couldn't contain the throbbing pain in her legs any longer. She whimpered and her eyes watered as she bit her lip. As soon as this sound was uttered though, Seto immediately became worried. It was as if he had woken from a trance.

`What are you doing? Lay down to take the weight off you legs. Honestly, why are you doing it if it causes you pain, don't do it for my sake,' he fussed over her and she smiled at him. He looked into her face and smiled back. She still held his hand, but she let go now and wrapped her arms around his chest. He put his arms around her neck and rested his head on the top of hers, his hands gently stroking her hair, a smile on his face. Inside his chest, his heart leaped as he held her in his arms, so violently she feared that she would feel it. But her eyes stayed closed, until he lifted his head up again and said, `Come on, let's go back to the temple.'

She nodded and he picked her up in his arms and carried her with him out of the room and through the palace. Servants in the palace stared at them as they went, but Seto didn't care. He didn't care who saw them together, or if they disapproved at him carrying a worthless slave. Because he knew that she wasn't worthless.

All he cared about was that she was still smiling at him.

12 - Invading the Miharu's

Invading the Miharu's

`HANG ON! WHEN WAS THIS DECIDED?' Yuula blocked Kaede and Sakura's way as they attempted to enter her house. `I NEVER SAID THAT YOU COULD STAY AT MY HOUSE!'

`Well, you weren't there, so you had no say in the matter,' Kaede said, trying to jump through a gap between Yuula and the doorframe. This move was intercepted and Yuula pushed her back roughly, so she ended up in a mess on the doorstep.

`Come on Yuula, we've got our stuff and everything,' Sakura begged, attempting to dodge past her to get inside. `Come on, it'll be fun. We can do face masks, paint each others nails, share stories, y'know, all the stuff we use to do when we were 10.'

`I don't know about you, but I NEVER did any of that stuff,' Yuula said, and made to slam the door in their faces but Takumi appeared behind her carrying a tray with a bowl of pop corn and a can of beer.

`Yuula, what sort of behaviour is this?' he tutted, and, balancing the tray in one hand, held Yuula away from the door so that Kaede and Sakura could run in quickly.

`TAKUMI! YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO BE ON MY SIDE, NOT WORKING WITH THEM!' Yuula yelled as Takumi quickly made his way to the living room.

`Sorry Yuula didn't quite catch that. But if you need me I'll be watching the game,' he grinned and slammed the door to the living room shut behind him.

Yuula folded her arms, pouting, then turned around to Sakura and Kaede who had vanished. She looked around and saw them sneaking up the stair case, making as little noise as possible.

`AND WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU ARE DOING?' Yuula shrieked when she saw them. They bolted up the rest of the stairs and down the corridor to Yuula's room. Yuula chased after them, yelling: `COME BACK HERE YOU SCUM!'

She flung open the door to her room to see both of them spreading out their stuff on the floor and finding mattresses and duvets for them to sleep on.

`Get out!' Yuula demanded in a dangerously low voice. Both pretended they hadn't heard her and continued with what they were doing. Kaede stood up and stretched, but then gasped as if she had suddenly remembered something. `Sakura, I think we forgot to-'

`Oh yes, I remember, hold on, I'll go,' Sakura jumped up and ran out of the room and downstairs. They heard her go out of the back door, and Yuula rounded on Kaede.

`What is going on?' she demanded. `What did you two forget?'

`You'll see,' Kaede beamed. They heard the front door open again, and then all the colour drained out of Yuula's face as she heard what sounded like elephants running up the stairs. Both she and Kaede jumped out of the way just in time as Sakura, followed by 7 other people, fell into the room.

Yuula picked herself up from where she had landed on the floor and stared down at Joey, Honda, Yugi, Tea, Ana, Ryou and DUKE.

`NO WAY IS HE STAYING HERE! GET HIM OUT OF THIS HOUSE THIS SECOND!' Yuula yelled, and grabbed Duke by the arm and flung him out of the room, kicking him downstairs. The others watched from the top of the stairs as Yuula pushed him all the way down the stairs and flung open the front door. `GET OUT THIS INSTANT!' she yelled again, and tried to push him out of the door.

Duke held onto the door frame as Yuula tried to push in out. `LET GO!' Yuula yelled at him.

`No!' Duke yelled back. A new idea sprung to Yuula's mind, and she slammed the door on Duke's fingers.

`OW! OW! OW! OW! OW! OW! OW! OW! OW!' They heard Duke howling in pain on the other side of the door. Yuula, triumphant, locked and bolted the door and walked up the stairs to the eager watchers. But Takumi, who had been watching this episode from the other side of the door, ran to the front door, unlocked it and opened it for Duke.

`Come on in mate, I'll make sure that Yuula doesn't bite,' Takumi held his cold beer can against Duke's injured fingers. `If Yuula doesn't want you in her room, then come watch the game with me.'

`What game?' asked Honda suddenly. Takumi looked up and grinned. `Football, of course.'

There was a sudden scrambling and Honda, Joey, Yugi and Ryou ran downstairs to Duke and all five of them ran into the living room. Takumi laughed at the girl's shocked faces and the look of disgust on Kaede's face, before following their example and returning to the living room.

`Football?' Kaede shuddered at the thought. She loved most sports, but was a pet hate of hers. She was good at it, but it was just nowhere near as much fun as sports where you actually had to put some effort into it.

`Oh well, who cares, we don't need them to have fun,' Ana grinned and went back to Yuula's room. The rest of them followed her, although Yuula seemed reluctant to. She still didn't seem to like it, but she wasn't arguing anymore.

When they were back in Yuula's room, Ana and Sakura both produced several tubes of face masks and a fair few magazines from their bags. They put on the face masks and relaxed on Yuula's bed reading the magazine, occasionally swapping them around to show the others what was in them. They were just

laughing about a particular article when in walked the boys, Takumi with them, happily discussing the match. They stopped dead when they saw the girl's faces.

`WHAT HAVE YOU GOT ON YOUR FACE?' Joey shouted when he saw them. `IT LOOKS LIKE MUD!'

`It is mud,' Tea said calmly.

`Here, do you want some on your face?' Kaede offer, squeezing some out of the bottle and approaching Joey slowly.

`No...I...don't,' he began, then turned and ran in fear out of the room, Kaede in hot pursuit. She chased him around the house until she managed to tackle him to the ground. Pinning him down with her thighs, she rubbed the face mask onto his skin, managing to keep it out of his eyes. Forbidding him to remove it, she dragged him back to Yuula's room, to discover the rest of the girls had attacked the boys with face masks and had sat them down with magazines. When they face masks were done, Honda remanded they have a full makeover. Kaede was just painting Duke's toenails pink when Yuula came up with an enormous bar of chocolate.

Eating chocolate and makeovers was so much fun, that they didn't realise the time until Ryou fell asleep whilst filing Yuula's nails. They boys said goodnight to the girls and went to Takumi's room where they were going to sleep.

Still chatting, the girls found more duvets and pillows and changed into their pyjamas. Kaede and Sakura settled down on their mattresses on the floor, Yuula, tea and Ana on Yuula's bed.

Kaede was just nodding off to sleep when something caught her eye. It was just underneath the bedside table, and she grabbed it and held it underneath a patch of moonlight that was shining through the curtains.

It was a photograph of Yuula and Duke when they had been going out, just before they had split up. Kaede recognised the gardens as the place that they had gone to on a double date, her and Joey, and Yuula and Duke. Both looked as though they were having the time of their lives and were making peace signs at the camera. Kaede flipped over the photo instinctively and discovered some writing on the other side. She squinted, as it was hard to read in the dim light. But she managed to figure out what it said. It read:

Dear Yuula,

Well, it has been four months since we started going out, can you believe it? This is us on our last date; you know the one we went on with Kaede and Joey. I think it is an amazing picture of us, because we look so happy to be together. I want you to know that I really care about you Yuula, and want you to be happy, if I can possibly make you happy. I want you to know that I love you before I ask you this, and I want you to think about it seriously, because I am being serious about it.

Well, we're both sixteen now. I have been waiting for you to turn sixteen for a while, because I want us to take the next step in our relationship. Please Yuula, I love you, and hope you love me, so there is no reason that we shouldn't do this. Just think about it, alright. I hope that you will consider it at least,

because I know that you don't really think it is a good idea. But consider it, because if we do this, then we will know that we are right for each other.

With love,

Dookikins

Kaede felt laughter swell up inside her as she read the last word. She had really never heard Duke called by that name before. Smiling, she shoved the photograph underneath the bedside table where she had found it, and sat up so that she had a good view of the bed. She craned her neck to see Yuula, but she was already asleep, and Kaede knew she would just get angry. So, telling herself that she would ask her about it tomorrow, Kaede rested her head on her pillow, and submitted to sleep.

13 - A day at the beach

A day at the beach

`YAY! I LOVE THE BEACH SO MUCH!' Ana shouted as soon as she woke up. The rest of the girls opened one eye each and watched as their friend jumped up and down on the bed. Eventually Yuula reached up and grabbed one of Ana's legs and she came crashing down onto the bed and then rolled onto the floor.

`Shut up otherwise you won't be going,' said Kaede, who hadn't even bothered to open her eyes.

`But we're going to the beach!' Ana jumped up, but had to dodge Kaede's hands trying to grab her ankles as she ran to the door. `I'm going to wake up the boys,' she said as she ran out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

`I pity them,' Tea said, rolling over and pulling her duvet over her head to block out what they all knew was coming. From down the corridor they heard her shout: `WE'RE GOING TO THE BEACH! WAKE UP GUYS!' But they hadn't expected another shout.

`GET OUT NOW! WE'RE NOT WEARING A LOT!' they heard Takumi yell at her.

Kaede sat up with her eyes still closed and started trying to get dressed. Occasionally she would peak open one eye to search for an article of clothing, but shut it again instantly. Sakura was watching her, half fascinated, and said bewildered, `I thought you got up at five every morning to go for a run?'

`Not every morning, sometimes there are mornings when I just cannot get up, I guess this is one of them,' Kaede said, and gave up trying to find her clothes. She stood up, a bit uncertain on her feet and stumbled to the door. `I'll be back in a few minutes, just going to get used to being up.'

She walked along the corridor, her hand brushing along the wall in front of her for support. She reached Takumi's bedroom and knocked on the door.

`If that's Ana again-' Takumi warned through the crack in the door.

`Then come in,' Honda said quickly.

`NO!' shouted Joey, Takumi and Duke together.

`It's me,' she said, pushing open the door. She opened her eyes a bit, lifting her hand up to block the light streaming in through the windows.

What she did manage to see of the room looked like a boom site; littered with rubbish. She noticed that they hadn't bothered to find any mattresses, and most of them were just sleeping on the floor. 'What happened in here? Or does your room normally look like this?' she said, picking her way across the room to where Joey was lying.

'Nope, this is pretty much normal,' Takumi said, and swung his legs off the bed, going back the way Kaede had come. When he had shut the door behind him and his footsteps headed towards the bathroom had faded, Honda and Duke jumped up and ran to the bed. Honda got there first, but Duke pushed him off and spread out his arms wide, so there was no more room. Honda grabbed him by the leg and tried to grab him off but Joey cleared his throat. 'I think that the lady should get the bed.'

Honda and Duke got off the bed and returned to their initial places on the floor. Kaede sat on the bed, and Joey came and lay down beside her. Leaning over so she could whisper in his ear, she said, 'Did you just use me as an accuse to get the bed?'

'Of course not, I wouldn't dream of it,' he said, and grabbed her by the waist, pulling her down to lay next to him.

Kaede lay on the bed and closed her eyes, trying to remember her dream. But nothing came back to her, except...

She sat up and looked at Duke, who was lying on the floor below the window. Smiling, she lay down again and turned to Joey. 'Did you know that Duke has a pet name?' she said quietly, so only Joey could hear.

'No, what is it?' Joey murmured back, on the verge of sleep again.

Kaede fought to keep a straight face. 'Dookikins.'

Joey sat up roaring with laughter. He clutched his sides as tears of laughter rolled down his cheeks. Yugi, Honda, Duke and Ryou all stared at him as he fell onto the floor laughing.

'What's the matter Joey?' Yugi asked, sitting up in bed.

Joey couldn't speak for laughter, but he shook his head at Yugi. Yugi shrugged, and began folding up his duvet.

Kaede knew she was as awake as anyone could expect her to be at this time of the morning. She left Joey on the floor and went back to Yuula's room. She grabbed her clothes and her bag and ran to the bathroom. Takumi was sitting in there making himself look pretty, but Kaede grabbed him by the arm and hurled him into the corridor, locking the bathroom door as she went back in.

Kaede changed into her bikini and then threw on a denim miniskirt and white top which showed off her stomach. She brushed her hair and teeth and then emerged into the hall.

'About time,' Takumi stood up from where he had been sitting in the hall. 'I have been waiting for ten minutes.'

Ignoring him, Kaede went downstairs to the kitchen. She entered and was greeted by the smell of pancakes. Yuula stood by the cooker wearing a pink frilly apron and had a frying pan in one hand. On the kitchen table was a large plate piled high with pancakes. Kaede sat down and grabbed a few of them and began to eat.

One by one the others came down. When Joey and Honda saw the pancakes, they immediately grabbed a fork each and began eating as many as were put in front of them in an attempt to see who could eat the most.

`Slow down guys, otherwise you'll make yourselves sick,' Yugi said when he came in.

`No time to talk; must beat Honda,' Joey sat through a mouthful of pancakes and honey.

`If you eat anymore then you won't float, and I am not going to save you if you do,' Kaede said, calmly cutting up the pancake in front of her.

Yuula watched them all eating and refused to cook anymore because she was starving. Kaede and Sakura finished their mouthfuls and took her place; Kaede mixing, Sakura flipping.

When Takumi came down after making himself pretty, he grabbed a few pancakes, sprinkled them with sugar and left the room. Kaede heard him talking on the phone a minute later.

`Yeah, we're going to the beach. You seriously want to come? Okay, we'll meet you there at 9.30,' he said, and hung up.

`Who was that?' Yuula yelled after swallowing her mouthful.

`Seto Kaiba,' Takumi called back. `He and Mokuba are meeting us at the beach.'

`WHAT?' Kaede and Joey yelled at once.

`He's not coming,' Joey said.

`I'm not coming,' Kaede said firmly.

`What? Kaede, you have to come,' Ana pleaded.

`Not if he's there,' Kaede replied.

`Kaede, come on, we're going to go surfing and they don't have to surf too, so it's not like he's going to be around to annoy you,' Sakura coaxed her.

`No, nothing you can say or do will make me go,' Kaede said firmly and began to wash the dishes.

Ten minutes later she was sitting in the driver's seat of her van, keys in the ignition and Yugi, Tea, Duke and Takumi in the cargo. She looked through her window at Sakura and Joey, who were grinning at her

through the glass.

`Just to let you know, I'm not very fond of either of you, and I'm only going because I have no choice,' Kaede said viciously. `Now please will you put my surfboard back on the rack?'

`It's already there,' Joey said, getting into the passenger seat. He leaned over and kissed Kaede gently on the cheek. `This is for your own good, you know.'

Kaede muttered something under her breath, and reversed out of the Miharu's driveway. She braked and waited until Sakura had put the picnic basket they were taking with them into the back of her kombi and pulled out in front of her and then they set off, heading for the beach.

They arrived at the beach to find a breeze had blown away the clouds and left them with a perfect clear blue sky. Kaede leapt out of the van and untied her surfboard and laid it on the sand. Sakura laid hers down too and they began to wax them so they wouldn't slide off whilst paddling.

The others laid mats and towels down on the sand and covered themselves with sunscreen. Honda asked Joey if he could put some on his back. Joey squirted almost the whole bottle out onto his hands and sloped it all over Honda's back, creating a good snowman effect.

Everyone was laughing and having a good time until a black limousine pulled up next to the vans. Seto Kaiba stepped out of the passenger seat; followed by his little brother Mokuba and a little girl that none of them knew. Seto shut the door as she got out and said something to the driver which sounded suspiciously like: `We'll get a lift home with Kaede,' and the driver nodded and reverse, then drove away.

`Hi everybody,' Mokuba waved at them all, and then he grabbed the little girl's hand. `This is Tenshi.'

The little girl had black hair and dark violet eyes. Although she said she was 12 years, she was very short, even shorter than Mokuba. Tea tried to fuss over her, but by the way that Tenshi glared back at Tea, it was obvious that she could look after herself.

Kaede finished waxing her surfboard and stripped off her skirt and top until she was in just her bikini. Ignoring the stares, she picked up her board and, with Sakura next to her, ran into the sea.

The sea had been warmed by the sun and wasn't cold at all, so she and Sakura saw out until they were submerged to their chests, and then lay on their boards, waiting for a wave.

When one came, both of them began paddling frantically. As it broke, Kaede pushed herself up and stood on the board, her arms out to balance. Turning it sideways, she surfed along the wave until the water ran out, and she dived off it into the water.

Whilst the two of them were surfing, their friends on the beach were stuck for things to do.

`We could have a game of Duel Monsters?' said (surprise, surprise) Yugi.

`How about, NO!' Takumi murmured from where he was lying sunbathing.

I know, let's play a game with a ball,' Ryou suggested, and everybody agreed that that would be better than nothing. Yuula found a rugby ball under the passenger seat in Kaede's van. They sat down to devise the rules. Joey had played a game recently called BUMS. Basically, you stand in a circle and pass the rugby ball around the circle, throwing it to whoever you want. But if you drop it once, you get a B. If you drop it again you get a U and so on until you spell out BUMS. The first person to spell out BUMS stands 10 feet in front of everyone else and bends over, and everyone else gets to dropkick them in the butt. And anybody who cheats goes up to join them.

`But that isn't fair!' Tea moaned. `I can't rugby pass or catch, and I can't dropkick either. Can't we change the rules?'

Joey was furious at this suggestion but then Kaiba interrupted, setting out the new rules. You could pass the ball to anyone in the circle, and throw in however you want. Every time you dropped or missed the ball you had to face a penalty.

`But what's the penalty?' Yugi asked.

`You have to take off one article of clothing,' Tenshi said darkly, with a grin on her face. Everybody stared at her, but couldn't think of any other penalty, so it was agreed.

All of them stood in a circle on the beach, and Seto, who had taken the ball, started the game by making a perfect but difficult rugby pass to Joey, who somehow managed to catch it.

It began peacefully, but then Mokuba complained because Honda missed the ball and it had hit the ground, spraying Mokuba with sand. Irritated, everybody started throwing Mokuba these really hard passes and every time he missed, he would begin to cry.

`SETO!' Mokuba whined the third time this happened, almost in tears. Kaiba shuddered, but stood up for his little brother.

`I'm going to take all of Mokuba's penalties,' he said, and took off one of his shoes. Joey and Honda smirked at each other, at when the ball came to them; they threw it as hard as they could at Mokuba.

Soon everybody was ganging up on Mokuba, and Seto was taking all of Mokuba's penalties. After ten minutes he was down to his shorts and socks, and Joey and Honda still looked as though they wanted to keep going. Even Tenshi was joining in, but not directly. Every time she got the ball, she would throw it to someone who could throw well, or she would just throw it as hard as she could to Seto, trying to hit him on his bare back where the now sand covered ball would bruise the skin easily. Each time she did this she would smile innocently and flutter her eyelashes, and Seto would just glare at her, and take off another piece of clothing.

Sakura and Kaede had long before taken a break from surfing and sat in the sun drying off and watching. She smiled whenever Joey threw the ball hard, trying to catch Seto out. But she also smiled unconsciously whenever Seto caught the ball, for either himself or his brother.

But, to be fair for Seto, they gave up when he only had his swim shorts on so that he could remain modest. They ran back to where Kaede and Sakura sat, and, just to torment Seto, Joey kissed Kaede right in front of everyone. She pushed him away after a while with a little embarrassed laugh, because she hated kissing in public, and began to unpack the picnic.

After their lunch they sat sunbathing and Yugi (it was inevitable) pulled out his Duel Monsters cards and had a small duel against Duke, who ended up losing pitifully.

They just had time for one more surf before they had to go, and Kaede and Sakura grabbed their surfboards and swam out again. Kaede caught a wave and surfed the wave until she fell off. Dragging her board back to the beach, she was met by shouting. She dropped her board and ran over to where Seto was standing next to Joey, shouting his head off.

`WHERE ARE THEY, YOU DOG?' Seto yelled.

`I DON'T KNOW, I WASN'T WATCHING WHERE YOU PUT THEM,' Joey shouted back.

`What's going on?' Kaede asked, forcing herself between them like an umpire at a football match where two players are arguing about a red card.

`This genius has lost his clothes and he is blaming me because of it,' Joey jabbed his finger at Seto.

`Well it's because of this idiot that I had to take them off in the first place,' Seto's voice began to rise a few decibels.

`HEY! DON'T BLAME ME BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T PUT YOUR CLOTHES BACK ON, DUMBASS!' Joey yelled, unable to keep his temper.

`YOUR REPULSIVELY LOW INTELLECT MAKES ME PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY SICK!' Seto shouted at him. `I CANNOT BEGIN TO BELIEVE HOW STUPID YOU ARE, YOU DOG!'

`STOP CALLING ME THAT, YOU SCUM!' Joey pushed Kaede out of the way and squared up to Seto. He raised his fist but was interrupted by Mokuba pointed out to the sea and saying, `Seto, I think those are your clothes.'

Seto looked and saw his clothes floating out to sea. He ran to the edge of the water and was about to wade in to swim after them but Kaede grabbed his arm and held him back.

`They're too far away, you won't be able to swim that far,' Kaede gasped under the strain of holding his back. `You'll either drown or get eaten, just forget it.'

He struggled for a while longer, but then gave up. The force of keeping him back being greater than the force of him trying to pull away, Kaede was thrown backwards when he finally stopped trying. She

landed a few feet back and then scrambled to her feet, her fists raised.

`You could at least have told me when you were going to stop trying to be an idiot,' she said as spitefully as she could, and, grabbing up her surfboard again, headed back to her van. She tied her surfboard to the rack and picked up the rest of the stuff that lay around the area they had been. Seto walked back up to the beach sat on the ground, a strange superior look playing across his face.

`You know, now that I have now clothes, one of you is going to have to lend me some, or go buy me some new ones,' he said calmly.

Hearing this, everyone flung on their clothes and said they had no money, except for Kaede who was folding up her towel.

She noticed everyone looking at her. `What?' she asked, and then what Seto had said finally filtered through her brain. `Oh come on!' she raised her hand in protest, but everyone got into the vans and refused to come out.

`Cheers dudes, you are so selfless,' Kaede yelled at them and then turned back to deal with Seto, who was looking at her expectantly, smirking as he did. `I don't know what you're smiling about buster; wait `til you see what's coming.'

She held up her clothes and the smile vanished from Seto's face. `No, um, I'll go buys some, no, I mean, NOOOOOOOO!'

Faces appeared at the windows of the vans as Seto appeared wearing Kaede's miniskirt and small white top, and they erupted with laughter. He tugged at the miniskirt, wishing it was longer, but this did nothing to change the way he looked and made them laugh louder.

Kaede covered her mouth with her hand and bit her lip so she wouldn't laugh too, because although he looked hilarious, she felt mean laughing at him. So instead she pushed him into the back of her van along with Mokuba, Tenshi and some of the others and jumped into the passenger seat. Joey sat beside her and smiled. `Glad you came now?'

Still laughing, she turned the key in the ignition and drove them all home.

14 - Good (and bad) surprises

Good (and bad) surprises

`KAEDE! I WON'T CALL YOU AGAIN, SO GET OUT OF BED!'

Her grandmother's voice shattered the dream she had been having and she sat up in bed, eyes still closed and shook her head to beat away the sleep. Standing up and stretching, only then did she open her eyes, and the sunlight streaming through the bedroom window blinded her a little. Shielding her eyes, she grabbed her school uniform and threw it on, picked up her satchel and ran downstairs, brushing her hair frantically as she went.

She grabbed her toast from the plate on the kitchen table and jumped into the passenger seat of her grandfather's car, and off she sped.

Jumping out of the car she ran full pelt through the school, pushing past a giggling group of girls in the year below, who all glared after her as she ran. Arriving at her classroom she found to her astonishment that their teacher hadn't arrived yet, and she flopped down in the chair nearest to her and dropped her bag onto the floor.

`Usually morning rush, Kaede?' Ana said, looking at something that wasn't Honda, for once.

Kaede didn't bother replying and began to hunt around for her books. One by one more of their friends entered the classroom, Joey arriving with half his uniform on back to front and the other half in his hands.

`Nice lie-in, Joey?' Kaede asked, standing up to meet him. She helped him sort out his uniform and handed him a hair brush.

`What's this for?' he asked, glaring down at the hair brush in his hand.

Kaede's eyes narrowed and she raised an eyebrow when she looked back at him again. Getting the hint (finally) Joey brushed his hair and sat down next to Kaede.

`Ugh, I really wanted to stay home today,' Sakura groaned after she arrived and threw her bag on the floor. `There are so many things I need to do at home and there's nothing here I have to do.'

`Yeah, totally, I could be working right now. So many people's birthdays are coming up and I don't have enough money to buy them presents,' Kaede said, smiling weakly.

`You don't have to buy people birthday presents you know, it doesn't matter if you don't,' Joey exploded.

Kaede shoved him, laughing, and said, 'Just because you don't buy people things doesn't mean I don't have to.'

The bell rang for their lesson and they trooped off to physics. Kaede crossed her legs as she sat on her science stool and threw her satchel onto the table.

'Aren't you going to remove your books?' Ryou asked politely, trying to ignore Yuula who was sitting on the other side of him and was being strange, talking in a weird soft delicate way.

'No, I figured if I just act as sloppy as possible, I'll get asked to leave the lesson,' Kaede shrugged, untucking her school blouse from her skirt and untying her laces. 'Or I could just wait and see if he bothers turning up before getting my books out.'

Ryou smiled and turned back to Yuula. Kaede looked round to say something to Honda, but, as per usual, whenever Honda was with Ana, it was just impossible to get any sound out of his mouth other than kissing noises. Kaede leaned on the desk, waiting for Honda's mouth to become vacant so she could talk to him.

When this simply did not happen, Kaede got impatient and tapped him on the shoulder. Having no effect, she leaned back in her chair and analysed the situation. If she tried talking to Honda, Ana would simply go ape and shout at her. If she did nothing, she would be bored out of her skull. So she decided to shout at them.

'FOR GOD'S SAKE, WILL YOU TWO JUST CUT IT OUT?' she shouted. They leaped about a foot into the air and stared at Kaede, along with everyone else in their class.

'Okay, I know you two like each other very much, but this has got to stop. We can never talk to either of you anymore and the constant kissing noises are enough to drive me insane. Honda, just take Ana out on a date some time, after school today if necessary, but don't continue this never ending kissing because you'll just become loners because us, your friends, will completely forget about you.'

'Is that really a bad thing?' Ana asked dreamily, turning to Honda as if to kiss him again, but Kaede pulled Honda off his stool and away from Ana. 'Yes it's a bad thing!' Kaede almost yelled again.

Their teacher choose that precise moment to walk through the door, examining a little piece of paper in his hand, and Kaede pushed Honda back to his chair, giving him and Ana a warning look before reaching into her bag for a pen and a book. She tore out a page from the book and scribbled the address of her favourite café and underneath it a note saying 'Take Ana there tonight otherwise we will all kill you,' and then shoved it at Honda beneath the desk.

Their teacher, oblivious to this, began scribbling on the board about sound waves and other physics rubbish, and then remembered the piece of paper and raised it to his face to read it again.

'Um, Kaede Mishua has a phone call down at reception, will she please come to receive it,' he read in a shaky voice, as he was very unaccustomed to receiving such information, even when it was not for himself.

Grabbing her bag off the desk, Kaede hoisted it onto her shoulders and jogged to the door, turning around as she did so to point and laugh at her friends, all of whom obviously wished to be let out early too. Noticing her teacher still looking at her, she smiled sweetly at him and ran out of the door to the reception near the entrance of the school.

When she arrived the secretary thrust the receiver of the phone at Kaede and swivelled her chair around so Kaede couldn't see her and began to give herself a manicure. Kaede tutted and put the phone to her ear.

`Hello, Kaede Mishua speaking?'

`Hello Kaede, its Marik Ishtar.'

`Woah, Marik, how are you? I haven't spoken to you for over a year, how are you?'

`I'm fine, I suppose, how's everything there?'

`It's cool, Japan is so different from Egypt, but it is cool, everything is really nice.'

`That's good, everyone tells me how nice it is, I can't wait to see it all.'

Kaede almost dropped the phone when she heard this. `What? You're coming to Japan?'

`Yeah, with my whole family. Don't you remember? Your parent's inquest is this week.'

Kaede's mouth ran dry, she couldn't think of what to say to this. Her mind went blank and she curled up on the floor, curling up her legs underneath her.

`Kaede? Kaede, are you there? Kaede?'

`Yeah, I'm here,' Kaede licked her dry lips. `Um, okay, when are you arriving here?'

`Well, we're on the plane now, so-'

`You're on the plane?' Kaede almost shouted down the phone at him.

`Yeah, I love planes, they are amazing. D'you know you can watch TV and listen to radio-'

`MARIK! YOU CAN'T TALK ON THE PHONE ON THE PLANE! IT INTERFERS WITH THE EQUIPMENT!'

She waited for a reply, but heard a little squeak on the other end of the line, and Marik said quickly, `I'll call you back when we land,' and hung up quickly.

Kaede smiled as she stood up and hung up the phone. Smiling at the secretary, who was wearing a gold suit and had just painted her nails silver, and said under her breath to her, `Never, ever, wear gold and silver together, just a little bit of advice.' Smirking at the glare she got, she ran out quickly and returned

to her form room.

`Do any of you believe in reincarnation?'

Everybody stared at Ana as she said this. `What? Don't you think it is likely that we were reincarnated and had previous lives in some long forgotten country?'

`Normal people don't usually think about that sort of thing,' Tea said, gazing at her nails. Ana shot her a horrible look, the incident with Marc clearly fresh in her mind. Tea bowed her head and muttered something inaudible underneath her breath (in Maria style).

`Yeah, I do think I have a past life,' Sakura said confidently.

`I KNOW I have a past life,' Kaede added.

`Really?' Everyone gathered around interested. `How do you know?'

`I have these weird visions when I am asleep or dancing or whatever,' Kaede explained. `And I get all these memories of my past life.'

`I bet you were a beautiful princess and I was your handsome prince charming,' Joey said, putting his arm around her.

There was silence and then Duke and Honda both collapsed in a heap of laughter and pointed at Joey, clutching their sides.

`You?' Honda roared with laughter. `A handsome prince?'

`More like a dog,' Duke grinned. Honda and him did a high-five thingy and collapsed once more with laughter.

`Hey, shut up!' Joey yelled at them, his face red.

`Actually I wasn't a princess,' Kaede said calmly. `I was a slave.'

Silence again.

`REALLY?'

`Yes, really,' Kaede sighed. `I was brought up by thieves in ancient Egypt after my mother died, but when I was about five they sold me to this farm owner. This guy was really nice and he was going to

adopt me but one of his farm workers accused me of sleeping with him when I was thirteen, and he believe him. So he sold me as a dancing slave and I got passed on from one owner to another, until one day when my current owners were selling me, the crowd around started throwing stones at me trying to get me to dance for them, but I kept refusing. They kept throwing stones at me until I couldn't stand on my legs anymore because they were cut and bleeding. I collapsed in pain and I was saved by a high priest who was passing by in his chariot. He took me back with him to his temple and looked after me there.'

When she stopped she was met by silence. She looked around at her friends; Honda sitting on a desk with his feet resting on one of the chairs, and Ana sitting on the chair resting her head on his legs; Joey sitting next to Kaede with his arm around her waist; Duke, Yuula and Ryou sitting in a line on the desk (Duke had slowly snuck his arm around Yuula's waist when she was listening to the story); Sakura and Yami (he had taken over Yugi's body, feed up with being left out and wanted to be with his darling Sakura) sitting on chairs next to each other and Tea sitting on a chair on Kaede's left. All of them were looking at her really weirdly.

'What?' Kaede asked worried, looking at them all looking at her with the same weird look on all their faces. 'Is there something really weird about that because it's not as though I dreamt it on purpose-'

'No, that's amazing,' Yuula said.

'Oh, and you're there, too Yuula, and you, Sakura,' Kaede said, remembering suddenly. 'Yuula is this really weird psycho girl who was found wandering in the desert by the high priest and the priestess and they took her in and looked after her and taught her stuff because she forgot everything from her life before and nobody knows what happened to her beforehand. Sakura is the Pharaoh's wife who is really nice to me and looks out for me when the high priest is at the market or wherever,' Kaede said quickly. 'And Yami you are obviously the Pharaoh.'

'Woah, that is so cool,' Tea said in awe. 'Am I there?'

'No, just me, Sakura, Yuula and Yami,' Kaede shook her head.

'Oh,' Tea said, looking disappointed. 'Well, I reckon I was a beautiful dancer in Arabia or something.'

'No, I was the dancer, you'd be something like a servant who waited on rich ladies in England,' Kaede laughed at her.

'I was a French noble,' Ana said excited all of a sudden.

'And I was your Princely consort,' Honda smirked.

'No, you were the random peasant in the street who we threw the contents of our chamber pots at you every morning,' Ana said, pushing him backwards off them desk. Everyone roared with laughter as she ran to help him up. Yuula suddenly shrieked and jumped up from where she was sitting and started shouting at Duke for putting his arm around her, causing everybody to laugh even more.

The bell sounded for the end of the school and they walked out of the school and across the courtyard

together, Ana and Honda skipping off ahead to the café Kaede forced Honda to take her to. Kaede was walking hand in hand with Joey but something further ahead caught her attention. A boy about their age with long blond hair, tanned skin and a purple shirt, purple to match his bright purple eyes. A crowd of girls stood around him staring and posing and flicking their hair from side to side, trying to get him to notice them. But he saw Kaede and waved at her until she noticed who it was. She dropped Joey's hand and ran to him, glomping him in front of all of his new fans.

`Wow! How are you?' she said ecstatically, hugging him so hard it was crushing him.

`I would be much better if you didn't insist on this way of greeting me every single time we meet,' he pulled himself free and looked around to see the rest of their group running to catch up.

`Kaede, who is this?' Duke asked, looking at the boy suspiciously.

`Guys, this is my best friend in the whole wide world. I've known him since I was, like, three. This is Marik,' Kaede beamed at them with her arm around Marik's shoulders (she was a couple of inches taller than Marik and therefore was able to do this quite easily). `Marik, this is Duke, Yuula, Ryou, Tea, Yugi, Sakura, Joey and Honda and Ana have run off ahead so you can meet them some other time.'

`Hi,' Marik raised his hand in a salute type way and dropped it again.

`Dude, why are your eyes purple?' Joey inquired after a while.

`Yeah, are you wearing contact lenses or something?' Sakura asked, leaning closer towards him.

`Um, no,' Marik said slowly, then leaned towards Kaede and whispered in her ear, `Um, Kaede, what are contact lenses?'

Kaede grinned, and whispered back, `They are these little lenses that you put in your eyes that help you to see better as an alternative to glasses or they can be used to make your eyes look different, like a different colour or shape.'

`Ooooooh!' Marik exclaimed.

`Well, we have to go,' Kaede said quickly. `Can't keep your family or my grandparents waiting. Come on Joey, you're staying the night, right?'

Marik, Kaede and Joey waved goodbye to their group and left the school and walked together all the way home.

15 - Ishtars and arguments

Ishtars and arguments

When they arrived back at the house they found the kitchen had been completely taken over by the Ishtars. Ishizu and Odion were sitting at the table, still wearing the clothes that would make them blend in perfectly in Egypt, but here in Domino City they stuck out like a sore thumb, surrounded by electrical kitchen appliances and modern furniture. Kaede smiled at them both and hugged her grandmother, who was bustling around making the Ishtars feel at home. Kaede quickly dragged Joey and Marik away before her grandmother forced them to eat some toast or have a cup of tea.

She and Joey began showing Marik around the house and took him upstairs. He was fascinated by Kaede's various make-up boxes and perfume bottles, and was stunned by the aerosol body spray, and almost blinded himself by putting it close to his face and pressing the top down, but Kaede caught him and grabbed the can away just in time.

‘So how was the flight?’ Kaede asked, pushing Marik into a chair away from her cupboards so that he couldn't cause any more trouble.

‘It was good, and really amazing. How do they make the plane fly?’ Marik asked brightly.

‘Physics,’ Kaede shuddered. ‘It is pretty boring actually.’

‘It was great, we were flying,’ Marik's eyes glazed over as he remembered the flight. When he came back to reality he laughed a little. ‘But Odion said I shouldn't have phoned you in the middle of the flight.’

‘Yeah, well, it was nice that you phoned me to warn me, otherwise I would have had a heart attack when seeing you in the playground,’ Kaede smiled. ‘So, when does the inquest start?’

‘Tomorrow, and they think it will last all week,’ Marik attempted to smile. ‘Are you actually going to go?’

‘Hopefully, but I dunno if I'll be able to get out of school,’ Kaede shrugged.

Noticing Joey felt a bit left out, Kaede took them both downstairs and watched as Joey tried to teach Marik how to play a games console. Marik fumbled several times about which button to press and eventually threw the controller down in a fit. Kaede knelt beside him and whispered a little strategy in his ear. Marik nodded and picked up the controller again. Joey started a new game and they began to hunt each other around a labyrinth, and Marik quietly planted several detonated bombs when Joey wasn't looking and hid somewhere close by. When Joey's character ran past the spot where Marik had dropped the bombs. Marik pushed the detonate button and Joey's side of the screen went red with his character's blood.

`Yes,' Marik punched the air like a little kid. `I won! I beat you!'

Kaede grinned at Marik and at Joey, who was fuming. Marik was saved from certain death by Kaede's grandmother calling them to the kitchen for dinner. It was a squish to fit everybody around the table, as there were twice as many people as there normally was, but they somehow managed.

When they were all sitting down and eating, Kaede struck up the conversation about the inquest. `Am I actually going?' she asked her grandparents, who both stopped eating. Her grandfather whipped his mouth on his napkin and leaned back in his chair.

`What?' Kaede asked, looking from her grandfather to her grandmother and then back again. `What's the matter?'

`Kaede, sweetheart,' her grandmother reached over the table and took hold of her hand, gripping it. `We thought about whether you should go with us or not and we decided that we really can't put you through that.'

`But why can't I go?' Kaede's voice rose steadily higher as she said this, getting louder. Her hand underneath her grandmother's began to tremble with rage and fury.

`Well, darling, because there isn't much use in you being there as you weren't there when they died-'

`Neither were either of you!' Kaede was now shaking with rage. `Why are you going and I'm not?'

`You have to go to school this week, they won't let you out because of an inquest,' her grandmother tried to reason with her, but Kaede was shaking her head now, her eyes closed, clearly not listening to what her grandmother was saying.

`Kaede, please listen, we just don't want you to get upset by it,' her grandmother said, still reasoning.

`GET UPSET BY IT?' Kaede was now shouting at her grandmother. `I'LL GET MORE UPSET BY NOT BEING THERE.'

`DON'T SHOUT AT YOUR GRANDMOTHER, YOUNG LADY,' her grandfather roared above her yelling. He dropped the level of his voice at Kaede's shocked face. `We don't want you to have to hear how it happened that's all.'

Kaede pushed her chair back and stood up. She gripped the table as she stood, making it shake with the force of her templing. Tears filled her eyes as she pushed her chair back under and looked at her grandfather straight in the eye. `It's not like I don't know how it happened,' she said, biting her lip to stop the tears. `I know exactly how it happened, and not letting me go is as bad as not letting me go to their funeral, which I will never forgive you for.'

Unable to stop the tears now, she ran out of the room. Joey and Marik both jumped up and ran after her. They heard the front door slam and opened it, gazing out into the dark street. They saw her running fast down the street, and took off after her. Kaede heard them behind her and pushed herself harder, made

her muscles work harder than ever. She ran further and further away, and deeper into the night, where she knew they would never find her.

Leaving the street lights behind she ran through the trees of one of the parks grouped close to her house. She ran through the park and hid in a group of bushes, wrapping her arms around her knees and hiding her head in between her arms to make herself as small as possible. Her breathing was deep and loud, and she bit her shirt to try and muffle it as she heard them run past, calling her name. She heard Joey curse and shout her name one more time, and then they left the park, continuing on their search.

Kaede breathed a long and deep breath and breathed out slowly. She lifted her head slowly and looked around, but could hear nothing anymore. She sighed and leaned back against a tree, and allowed her grief to overcome her. She wept for everything, her parents, her little brother, her twin sister, for the rest of her family in Egypt who she would probably never see again, for everyone in the world who had lost someone they loved. She let all her sorrow go and when she had no tears left to cry, she slumped back against the tree and closed her eyes, exhaustion overcoming her. She was just about to fall asleep when the tree she was leaning against suddenly hugged her.

Screaming, she jumped up and back away, only to see that she hadn't been leaning on a tree at all, but a person. She squinted, trying to make out who it was in the darkness, but they stood instead and walked towards her into the light.

Kaede almost screamed again, and leaned bent over as she had a sudden rush of blood to the head. She heard him step towards her and almost laughed, because if she hadn't been terrified, it would have been funny. She rubbed her face with her hand, trying to wake herself up a bit more because crying had made her tired, and she stood up straight again and looked up at him, at Seto Kaiba.

16 - Always, and never

Chapter 16

`Um, okay, this is really awkward.'

Kaede and Seto sat together on one of the benches in the park. Kaede leaned back, trying to think of something to say to him.

`It might not have been if you had looked behind you before going to sleep on me,' Seto smirked at her.

`I did not go to sleep on you, I was just resting,' Kaede said haughtily.

`And crying too? Do you normally do that while you rest?' Seto asked with a superior wave of his hand.

`Yeah, all the time,' Kaede snapped sarcastically. `Why, don't you?'

`I have better things to do than cry my eyes out to a tree, which isn't even a tree,' Seto smirked again.

`Shut up, it wasn't even to a tree,' Kaede whirled around so her whole body was facing him, and prepared to pounce at him.

`Whatever.'

Kaede sat back and folded her arms, fuming. He was just sitting there, smirking and taking the piss. She wanted to strangle him right then and there but couldn't somehow. She just turned away from him and looked up to the stars in the sky.

Seto leant over and looked up as well, until she bashed him away with her elbow. `Cut it out, you could at least be discreet with your mockery!'

`Who said I was mocking you?' Seto said, and Kaede looked at him, expecting a smirk, a laugh, an evil grin, anything but what she got, which was a gentle, soft, smile that lit up his face and forced Kaede to smile back.

`Kaede,' Seto murmured, and pulled her closer to him, wrapping his arms around her waist and buried his face in her hair. Kaede closed her eyes, slipping into a dream of him and her together, wishing with all her heart for it to become reality. She felt his hand softly stroking her cheek and his lips brush hers. She hung her arms around his neck as he kissed her and she felt herself melting in his warmth.

But she realised what she was doing and pulled back, breaking their embrace. She almost fell of the

bench but caught herself just in time and stumbled to regain her balance. She looked around quickly, in case Joey and Marik had come back this way looking for her and had seen them together, which was too unbearable for Kaede to even begin to imagine. But luckily, there was no one else in the park, and Kaede glanced back at Seto, who was sitting on the bench staring at her, his eyes hurt and pained. Kaede felt her stomach churn and she felt sick at the horrible feeling in her stomach; guilt.

'I'm sorry, Seto,' she whispered, and not even knowing whether he heard or not, turned and ran home, leaving him calling after her to stop, turn around, come back to him, but she couldn't. She ran back to her street and slowed to a walk as she neared her house.

She was still angry with her grandparents, but she felt like a spoilt brat for running away like that. She entered the house and prepared herself for the arguing that would inevitably meet her.

But it didn't come. Her grandparents were sitting in the kitchen, waiting for her. They didn't shout, or ask angry questions, they didn't say anything. Her grandmother took her in her arms and hugged her so tightly it felt like she would never let her go. Her grandfather did the same, and Kaede hugged them back. As she said goodnight to them, she knew that what they had decided about the inquest was for the best, she wasn't needed there and it would bring back her nightmares, the never ending nightmare of total blackness, the abyss of darkness, and the dust that choked her but was invisible in the dark.

No, she thought to herself, I don't need that again.

She pushed open her door and saw Joey and Marik asleep on the floor, still in the clothes that they had been wearing earlier. Knowing it was her fault, she got two foldable mattresses out from one of her cupboards and laid it out on the floor beside them, and threw two blankets and some pillows onto them. Prodding them awake, Kaede directed their half sleeping bodies to their mattresses and lay them down, pulling the covers over them. Both fell asleep again instantly, and Kaede watched them sleep as she changed for bed.

'I'll tell Joey tomorrow,' she said to herself firmly. 'This has to end.'

And she fell asleep, still watching them.

And far to the back of her memory, something stirred.

Priest Seto, standing on a balcony over a vast garden, with a circular pool in the centre. He was looking down into the garden watching a young girl, dressed in a white dress, her wrists and ankles wrapped in white cloth bandages. She was completely oblivious to his presence and was humming a slow song that seemed familiar to him somehow, but he wasn't able to place it.

He smiled down at her, and rested his head on his hand as he watched. She began to walk in time to the music, slowly, and was turning her body ever so slightly as she stepped. She slowly turning around on the spot, and lift her arms above her head as she turned, ever so slowly, taking a step as she did so.

Then, she was still, not moving at all, barely breathing. Her body was twisted from the turn, one of her feet was off the ground save the very tips of her toes, her arms were still above her head, curled around each other. Silence.

Then her hands came together in a sudden clap. The clap ran around the garden, bouncing off the walls on two sides. She leaped through the air, humming again, this time the beat quicker, harder to follow. Her feet kicked up dust as she spun, her head whipping around as she pirouetted around the pool. She curved and twisted, following the sound of her voice and nothing else, eyes shut for concentration.

She whirled and spun, and leaped through the air once more, landing on her knees, arms spread out of either side, head bowed.

But her head whipped up as she sensed, rather than heard, him watching her. She stood up quickly, rage in her eyes. 'Why were you watching me?' she demanded.

He looked rather taken aback. 'I thought you wouldn't mind, you are used to dancing in front of people.'

Her hands tightened into fists, and her long nails dug hard into her hand so hard, blood started to pour through the gaps in her fist and splattered the dusty ground. When she spoke, her voice was tinged with fury. 'My days as a dancing slave are over, and not even you can make me dance for you.'

She turned and ran out of the garden her white dress riding in the wind as she fled. Priest Seto yelled after her, calling for her to stop. 'HEBENY! HEBENY, PLEASE WAIT!'

But she didn't wait; she didn't even look over her shoulder to look at him.

Seto cursed under his breath and ran back into the building, and down the first flight of stairs he came to. Slaves bringing fruit to the upper rooms were thrown out of the way as he sped.

When outside, he raised his hands to shield his eyes from the blinding sunlight, peering from beneath his hand, searching for any sign of her. He could see nothing but the desert around him. And a sudden flash of white and black. He took off again, sprinting towards her, realising where she had gone.

Hebeny looked over her shoulder when she reached the lake, out of breath and exhausted. She sat down underneath a tree, still looking back; scanning her surroundings to be sure he hadn't followed her here.

Satisfied he was nowhere near, she leaned back against the tree she was underneath and watched the light of the sun dancing on the surface of the water. It hypnotised her, making her eyes feel heavy, and she took a deep breath, and closed her eyes.

Approaching slowing as he knew she would still be angry with him, Seto crept towards the lake, searching for her. He knew she was here, but he couldn't see where exactly. Coming closer still, he saw her beneath one of the trees, sleeping against the trunk. Breathing a sigh of relief, he jogged over and stood beside the tree watching her sleep.

She looked so peaceful and he knelt down beside her, making himself more comfortable. Gently, so she wouldn't wake up, he lifted her hand closer to him, so he could examine the damage she did to herself.

She had deep gauge marks in her palm and her nails were bloody and cracked. He shook his head to

himself, and went to crouch by the side of the lake, cupping some of the water in his hands. He brought it back to her and washed as much of the blood as he could off of one of her hands, and then did the same with them other. The white bandages around her wrists were now damp and stained red with blood, so he unravelled them and wrapped them around her hands to stop the blood flow.

As he did this, his hand brushed hers ever so slightly and she leaped up, roused from sleep and ready to attack.

`Stop,' Seto raised his hands, holding the bandages that he hadn't managed to tie yet. He swallowed and tried reasoning with her. `Look, now I know you're upset with me, but let's just try to sort this out-'

`What do you mean sort it out? You were spying on me,' Hebeny folded her arms, careful not to touch her blood covered hands to her dress.

`Spying? I wasn't spying on you!' Seto jumped up, enraged. `I was watching.'

`That's the same thing!'

`No it isn't. Spying implies it was dishonest.'

`Well it was.'

`No it wasn't, I was just watching you dancing. What's the harm in that?'

`The harm in that is that is all people have done since I was thirteen years old, ever since my first owner sold me. That, and force me to sleep with them and then sell me when I refuse because I want to keep the little pride that I have left.' Hebeny spit out these words like poison.

`I'm not like them, I don't want to hurt you,' Seto jumped up and confronted her.

`Is that so? Then why didn't you say something to let me know you were there, and save me the embarrassment of finally realising when it is so late?' Hebeny leaned forward as she said this, intimidating him. He opened his mouth to reply, but couldn't think of what to say, so he shut it again. Hebeny shook her head, a look of disgust on her face. `You see? You're just the same as every last one of them.'

`I am not the same as them!' Seto roared at her. `I saved you, from the crowds who were stoning you, I saved you from prison when you mocked the Pharaoh, I saved your life again, and helped to heal you, so that one day you would be able to dance again. I brought you into my home, I fed you, clothed you, I bet I'm the only person who was ever kind to you in your life. So now, tell me, how I am like them?'

`You think you're the only one who's been nice to me? They're all nice until they get what they want. Then they tie my hands to a pillar and force me to dance in front of a crowd until one of them decides to buy me to satisfy his pathetic little needs because no self-respecting woman ever would,' Hebeny snarled. `You high class wealthy men are all the same, pathetic, desperate and cruel.'

`That's not true!'

`It is and you know it is. But don't worry, I'm leaving now anyway, to go and find myself a new master who will look after me and treat me with respect. I'll never come back; you won't ever have to see me again.'

Hebeny tried to push past him to go back to the temple, but he blocked her way. She tried to get round him, but he grabbed her arm. She scratched out with her nails, and he held her away so they missed him. Desperate, Hebeny lashed out with her free arm, but he ducked and she stumbled, off-balanced, and fell towards the water, dragging him with her.

They hit the water with a gigantic splash, and coughing and spluttering, she surfaced, and fighting to free herself from his grasp to get back to land. He held her arm tightly, and she dipped her hand in the water, hands open flat, and pushed the water with all her might into his face.

It hit him and water dripped off his face and he gave her the weirdest look, and then did the same to her, smiling as he did so. Laughing, she sprayed him again, and pushed his head under the water. She stood and tried to walk back to land, but he grabbed her by the ankle and she fell forwards, her arms in front of her to break her fall.

`Ow!' she pressed her fingers against the wounds in her hairs, which now had the grit and sand from the lake floor stuck in his. Biting her bottom lip, she washed it repeatedly in the water, trembling in pain.

Seto smiled and took her hand. He washed the cut with water he trickled from his hand, and he wrapped the wound in the bandage that he still had in his hand. After it was all bandaged and the ends tied off tightly, Hebeny looked back at him and smiled. He leaned back in the water, head turned to one side to look at her. She turned her head too, her face dead pan, and he grinned at her. She smiled at him and crawled towards him through the water. He reached out and put his hand on her shoulder, pulling her closer to him. She put her hands on his shoulders and knelt in front of him, leaning closer towards him. He closed his eyes and tilted his head.

And received another faceful of water.

Blinking the water out of his eyes, he smiled at Hebeny's innocent smile and shrug, and pulled her towards him again, his arm around her waist. Her arms slid around his neck and she smiled at him again, their faces just inches apart. She tilted her head one way; he turned his the other way, and closed his eyes. Hebeny hesitated for just a second, and kissed him delicately on the lips. He opened his eyes, surprised, and she blushed. He laughed, and kissed her, soft and long. He held her in his arms, kissing her, holding her, and loving her. Closing his eyes and stroking her wet hair, he mentally promised her and himself that he would protect her from every harm; every fear; every danger. He would make her his for always. Always, and never.

17 - Decision time

Decision time

Kaede woke up the next morning early, deciding to go for a quick run, as it was a Saturday, before Joey and Marik woke up, and maybe talk to Joey about what had happened. As Kaede pulled on her jogging trousers and a t-shirt, she watched Joey sleeping, thinking about what he would say when she told him.

She left the house quietly and ran around the streets nearby a couple of times. She leant against one of the street lamps, taking a rest and drinking some of the water she had brought with her. She whipped her lips and leaned her head back against the lamp post, breathing deeply. She stretched her legs as she stood there, and raised her arms above her head, stretching like a cat. Shaking herself, she looked up and down the street. There was no one else on the pavement, no cars driving on the road. Most sensible people were still asleep, but Kaede knew if she wasn't doing something she would probably kill herself worrying about what she was going to say to Joey. There was a constant war raging in her head about what to do.

Just tell him.

But he'll dump me. Or never speak to me ever again.

And? You deserve it!

It's not my fault!

Or course it's your fault! What, you think Kaiba pinned you down and forced you to kiss him?

No, I just wasn't thinking straight.

Whatever! He'll dump you for sure.

I could just not tell him.

WHAT? HOW CAN YOU NOT TELL HIM?!?! HE HAS A RIGHT TO KNOW THAT YOU HAVE CHEATED ON HIM!

I have not cheated on him!

Yeah? So what do you call kissing the person that he hates more than anybody else in the

world? You don't call that cheating?

Shut up you!

Make me!

shoots

*** kills***

throws atomic bomb

throws hydrogen bomb

burns to nothing

Ha, ha, ha, loser!

`Shut up!' Kaede slapped her forehead with the palm of her hand. `Don't make me come in there!'

Kaede looked up and down the street again, just to check if anyone was watching her, thinking she was mad. Nothing had changed since the last time she looked, no one about, cars in driveways, limousine parked on the kerb-

Kaede stared at the limousine. It was big and black, with the same tinted windows as the one she had seen the last time she had been out jogging, the morning before Ana's party. She recognised the license plate too; it was definitely the same car.

She hesitated, and then walked over to the limo. As she approached, the window rolled down and she saw the driver was some random guy that she didn't actually know.

`Um, excuse me, do you live around here, because I always seem to see you when I go out for a run,' Kaede said shyly, not liking to talk to rich strangers.

`No, I don't,' said the driver not looking her way. `Neither does my boss, but he wishes to speak to you.'

Kaede felt suddenly scared. `Um, who is your boss?'

`You will see.'

`Excuse me?'

`You'll see who he is, now get in the back.'

`How about no jerk off,' Kaede said angrily. `I don't even know who your boss guy is, so I'm not getting into this limo, no matter what you do, until I know who he is, okay asshole?'

When she said this, the door to the back of the limo opened and the driver's boss stepped outside.

'Now Kaede, really, you should be nicer to my employees,' grinned Seto Kaiba, offering his hand to her. Stunned, she took it, and he pulled her into the car and shut the door after he had climbed back inside himself. He reclined on the plush leather seats and poured himself a glass of champagne. 'Please relax,' he said, noticing she was tense. 'Have some champagne.'

'Like I'm as much of an alchie to drink champagne at six o'clock in the morning,' Kaede told him angrily. 'Unlike some people.'

She looked him up and down and saw that he was in the same clothes as he has been yesterday, only now they looked as though he had slept in them. 'Haven't you been home since last night?'

Seto looked away and took a sip of his champagne. Kaede turned her body to face him, arms folded. 'You haven't, have you? Have you been parked here all night? Or,' she said, a thought coming to her head. 'Have you been parked outside my house all night, and when you saw me go for a run you followed me. That's it isn't it!' Kaede laughed when the look on his face told her it was true.

'So how long have you been following me like this?' Kaede asked, fascinated. 'I know it's not the first time, because I can remember the morning before Ana's party I saw this limo following me. And you managed to save me from those guys after work. So, how long?'

'That night was the first time.'

'Really?' Kaede gave him a sideways look. 'Coz I don't think it was.'

'Well, maybe a few times before that, but really, it was only for like a minute or something, it wasn't actually following, just me happening to drive past you and doubling back so that I could follow you and make sure that you didn't get hurt or anything,' Seto tried to explain, but stopped when he saw Kaede was about to laugh and was biting her lip so that she wouldn't. 'WHAT? It's not like I was completely obsessed or anything, I was just watching to make sure you were okay.'

Kaede smiled, shaking her head slowly. She got up and moved over to the seat next to Seto and knelt on it, facing him. She smiled at him and wrapped her arms around his neck. He pulled her onto his lap, his hands on her waist.

'Um, you might not want me being so close to you, as I've just been for a run,' Kaede said seriously.

'I don't mind,' Seto breathed into her hair.

Kaede sniffed the air around him and mocked fanning a bad smell away. 'Yeah, you stink pretty gross yourself. Did you sleep in these clothes?'

'Um, yeah.'

Kaede grinned and leaned back slightly so that she could look into his eyes. He smiled back at her, and then leant forward and kissed her, his hands still on her waist.

Kaede sat in his arms until they arrived at her house a couple of minutes later. He kissed her once more before she climbed out of the car and ran back to her house. She waved goodbye to him, although she couldn't see through the windows, and slipped back inside the house.

After a quick shower, she changed into a loose fitting floaty dress in lots of different shades of blue with a bow made in the same material at the lower of her back. Her tied her hair up in a bun and put on some really nice dangly earrings. She got a pair of white high heels and took them downstairs, putting them by the door for her to put on when she went out.

Kaede went downstairs, leaving Joey and Marik, who were still asleep, and began to set breakfast, placing the plates and bowls on the table, arranging the cutlery, pouring out milk and orange juice into jugs so they could be easily accessed, and switching on the kettle so that she could make tea and coffee.

Ishizu was the first person downstairs, looking immaculate as always. Kaede poured her some tea. She was about to warn Ishizu about it being hot, but thought that she would probably already know as she was the owner of the millennium necklace, enabling her to see into the future.

Kaede's grandparent's came down next and her grandmother made Kaede sit down and eat, even though she complained she wasn't hungry, saying, 'breakfast is the most important meal of the day, you should always eat breakfast'.

Odion, Marik and Joey all trooped down together, Joey still half asleep, and all sat down and ate toast automatically, like robots, as their brains weren't properly functioning yet.

'What are we doing today?' Marik asked when he had woken up properly.

'We could go into town, unless you guys are going to the inquest today,' Kaede suggested.

'Well, we might be needed there today, so I think Marik should come for today, to find out when he'll be needed,' Odion said, biting into a piece of toast.

'Okay, well, Joey and I can go into town, and we'll see you guys later,' Kaede said brightly.

So after breakfast, the Ishtars and Kaede's grandparents piled into her grandfather's car and drove off, while Kaede and Joey waved goodbye and headed towards the mall.

When they arrived, Joey wanted to go into this weird games shop to buy more.

'Okay, I'll just wait outside for you,' Kaede said, sitting down by one of the indoor fountains. 'But hurry up; I want to talk to you about something.'

'Okay, can you just look after my stuff while I go in,' Joey gave her his back pack, took his wallet out and ran into the store.

Kaede sat back and looked around at everyone in the mall. Loads of groups of friends were running

around, totally hyper. Kaede watched them, remembering all her trips with the girls to the mall. She was just thinking about how she wanted to go for another trip with them here when Joey's bag started vibrating. Kaede fumbled around in the front pocket and found his phone. She looked at the screen and didn't recognise the number, so she answered it.

`Hello, Joey's phone?'

`Hi, where's Joey?' the person asked. A girl person judging by her voice.

`He's busy at the moment, can I take a message?'

`Just tell him I called.'

`Right; and who are you?'

`I'm Mai, Mai Valentine.'

`Oh, hi Mai!' Kaede exclaimed, finally realising who she was. They had met during Pegasus's Duellist Kingdom tournament and she had lost to Joey. Somewhere between then and now she had become friends with them. `It's Kaede. Sorry, I didn't recognise you. And what are you doing talking to Joey? I didn't even know you had his phone number!'

`Well, of course I talk to Joey! I am his girlfriend after all.'

Kaede's breath caught in her throat. A sudden rush of blood to the head blinded her temporarily, and she slumped back in her seat, her free hand to her forehead.

`Kaede? Kaede, are you still there?' Mai asked from the other end of the line. `Are you alright?'

`Fine,' Kaede said shakily. `Sure, I'll give him the message.'

She hung up, but didn't put the phone away. She checked Joey's inbox for messages from Mai, and to her horror she saw that it was nearly full of them. Kaede herself didn't have a phone, so she couldn't text him, but began to wonder if she did, would he keep as many from her as he did from Mai. She checked his outbox too, and there were so many messages from him to her, all with "Love you xxx" at the end. Kaede's hands shook as she put his phone away, just as he himself stepped out of the shop. He hurried over to her, smiling, but the look of pure poison she gave him stopped him, and his smile disappeared.

`What's the matter? Are you okay?' Joey asked, stepping forward with his arms out, about to hug her.

`Don't touch me,' she said quietly, so only he could hear. She flicked her hair out of her face and glared at him coldly. She picked up his backpack and took out his phone. `Someone ran you by the way, left me with a message to give to you.'

`Who was it?' Joey asked, still not quite understanding.

`It was Mai, she just said to tell you she called,' Kaede thrust his bag at him and threw his phone hard. He

tried to grab it but wasn't quick enough, and it landed on the flood, shattering the screen and breaking the cover in half.

`What the hell did you do that for?' Joey yelled, bending down to pick up his phone. `Well done, it's completely broken now.'

`Oh, I'm sorry!' Kaede said sarcastically. `Shall I pay for it then? Well, I don't think I need to, coz now we're even. You broke my heart, I broke your phone, let's leave it at that, shall we.'

`What, I don't understand-' Joey began, but Kaede cut through his sentence.

`You don't? Well, I'll explain then, because you're too stupid to get it on your own. Your phone was ringing, so I answered it, not knowing it was Mai. She told me to tell you she rung, and when I realised it was her, I said I didn't know you two talked to each other. And she said, well, of course you talk to each other, seeing as she is your girlfriend!'

Kaede yelled the last word at him and slapped him around the face. She turned on her heel and strode away, her head held high.

She left the mall and began to walk down the street, not really sure about where she was going. She was just waiting by the traffic lights but Joey came hurtling out of the mall, running towards her.

`Kaede, please, just let me explain!' Joey yelled as he ran. Kaede turned to face him, her face dead pan, arms folded.

`Go on then, Explain,' Kaede said, her voice devoid of all emotions. `Hurry up, I don't have all day.'

`Look, okay um, well, Mai, you know, she's just, Mai's just-'

`JUST WAIT JOEY?' Kaede yelled, her patience broken. `WHEN WERE YOU GOING TO TELL ME YOU WERE TWO-TIMING ME? HUH? DID YOU TELL HER THAT YOU ALREADY HAD A GIRLFRIEND, OR WAS SHE ALREADY GOING OUT WITH YOU WHEN WE STARTED SEEING EACH OTHER? WERE YOU EVER GOING TO TELL ME THAT YOU ARE A TWO-TIMING SCUMBAG? OR WERE YOU JUST GOING TO LEAVE ME TO FIGURE IT OUT ON MY OWN?'

Joey said nothing, so Kaede kicked him in the shin. `You know, I was hoping that maybe we could work out our problems today, but obviously, we don't need to, coz you already found a solution Joey; start seeing someone else. Well, that's just what I'll do.'

Kaede hit him with her bag and pushed him over before he could stop her from hitting him again. She was about to hit him again when she heard the sound of a car horn behind her. She looked around at the stretch limo in the middle of the traffic. She immediately recognised it. Turning back to Joey, she smiled as best as she could at him. `Well, looks like my someone else has just arrived. Ciou.'

She left him on the ground and half jogged over to the limousine. The door to the back opened as she arrived and she climbed in, shutting it behind her. She felt Seto take her hand and wrap his arms around her, as she kissed him passionately. He held her to him and kissed her back. When she pulled back she

looked out of the window at Joey, who was picking himself off the ground. She turned back to Seto, tilted her head to on side and asked, `Would you like to take me out to dinner some time?'

Seto laughed, and kissed her again, as the traffic lights turned green and they drove away, leaving Joey standing by the road, watching as they sped away into the distance.

18 - Old dreams fade

Old dreams fade

`YAY! I'M GOING TO KAEDE'S SCHOOL!' Marik shouted the whole car journey the next Tuesday. He had been needed at the inquest the day before, so wasn't allowed to come, but he had begged and pleaded to be allowed the next day.

`YES! I'M GOING TO SCHOOL! YAYAYAYAYAYAYAYAYAYAY!!!!' Marik jumped up and down in the back seat of the car, until Kaede turned around and punched him in the chest.

`Thank you Kaede,' her grandfather said as she settled back in the front seat, her feet up on the dashboard. `So, how is Joey then?'

`I don't know,' Kaede shrugged. `I don't care either.'

`Aren't you still going out?'

`No! I dumped him,' Kaede said, suddenly fascinated by her fingernails.

`But he was such a nice boy,' her grandfather said, frowning.

`Trust me; he wasn't nice, at all!' Kaede said, staring out of the window, laughing at all the kids from their school who had to walk. `Any guy who cheats on you is not nice.'

Her grandfather said no more, and when they got to school he kissed Kaede on the cheek same as always. `Have a nice day.'

`Alright, see you later,' Kaede said, heaving her bag onto her shoulder and getting out of the car. Marik jumped up and down, really excited, and was about to run all the way to the building, but Kaede grabbed his hair before he could run.

`Okay, first rule, NEVER run into school unless you are late. You have to walk as slowly as possible as though you really don't want to be here, like this,' Kaede showed him slow walking looking depressed to be in school.

`But I want to go to school!'

`Tough!'

They made it to their classroom bickering about how to walk to school, and when Kaede walked in it felt

as though she had walked into a freezer. Ana was back (she had fainted the day before and handed come into school) and Honda wasn't talking to her, she still wasn't talking to Tea and it seemed like no one was talking to Joey.

`Dudes, what happened?' Kaede asked. `Oh, yeah, Ana, Honda, this is Marik, I guess you guys didn't see him when he came on Friday.'

Ana nodded, and Kaede noticed something on her face. Kaede walked over and looked at her. Her face was bruised and her lip was split as though she'd been beaten up.

`Ana, what happened to you?' Kaede whispered to her friend. Ana shook her head and looked at Honda. Kaede looked towards him as well, and could feel the tension between them. She turned back to Ana. `Did Honda do this to you?'

Ana shook her head and didn't say anything, so Kaede dropped it.

She, Marik, Yuula and Honda made their way to maths and all sat together. Their teacher looked at Marik a little weirdly, but said nothing and handed out the work. While their teacher was writing up the work they were to do, Yuula leaned over to Kaede and whispered, `So, what actually happened between you and Joey? You were great, and then all of a sudden you weren't talking to each other.'

`You know Mai Valentine?'

`Yeah, what about her?'

`He was going out with her,' Kaede said grimly.

`You're joking?!' Yuula said loudly.

`Shh, keep your voice down,' Kaede hissed. `Yeah, he was, and probably still is, coz I dumped him.'

Yuula decided she was good enough at being sympathetic and started pointing out all the pluses of not going out with Joey anymore.

`I mean, Joey was a bit of an idiot, and anyway, now you can come out with us more, now that you don't have a boyfriend,' Yuula blabbed away happily.

`Who says I don't have a boyfriend?' Kaede asked, not looking up as she was trying to work out a very hard equation. `What?' Yuula demanded. `Who?' `Tell me you scumbag, I demand to know!'

`Okay, but you have to try and guess,' Kaede grinned at Yuula, who was twitching with impatience.

`No,' Yuula said, trying to control breathing. `Tell. Me. NOW!'

`Fine, it's Seto,' Kaede said, looking down at her work so she didn't have to see Yuula's face.

`What, you mean Seto Kaiba? As in, THE Seto Kaiba? As in, the Seto Kaiba that you hate?' Yuula

demanded. 'I thought you hated him?'

'Well, I guess I've changed my mind,' Kaede shrugged. 'He is really different, and so much nicer than everyone expects him to be.'

'You're weird,' Yuula said, and finally started her work, 5 minutes before the end of the lesson.

After the lesson Kaede went to the girl's bathroom, giving Yuula strict instructions to be nice to Marik or else. She entered one of the cubicles, and heard the door open and someone else come in. She heard them enter the cubicle next to her. Kaede stood and flushed and washed her hands.

Perching her bag on the sink she pulled out her make-up bag and touched up her eye shadow. She put it back in her bag when Joey came out of the cubicle next to the one she had been in.

'WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING IN HERE?' Kaede yelled, spinning around to face him. 'THIS IS A GIRL'S BATHROOM, GET THE HELL OUT!'

'Kaede, I am so sorry!' Joey stepped towards her, his eyes red as though he had been crying. 'I am so sorry!'

'YOU FOLLOWED ME IN HERE TO TELL ME THAT?' Kaede yelled. He nodded and Kaede felt strangely superior. 'Well, I'm not going to forgive you until you get down on your hands and knees in front of our whole school, telling them all exactly what you've done and apologising, and after that, you can give me my virginity back. Until then,' Kaede said, pulling open the door. 'Please don't try and win me back or anything, because I'm happy as things are at the moment.'

'Kaede, please come back, I love you,' Joey begged.

Kaede stopped, turned around to say something, but seeing how pathetic he looked, she didn't have the heart to insult him, and just left the bathroom, closing the door behind her.

19 - New Year's ball

New Year's ball

`Seto?'

`Yes?' Seto replied, from where he was sitting at his desk. Kaede was in one of the sofas in his study. Kaede, who was wearing nothing but her panties, bra and one of Seto's shirts, was in the sofas closest to the fireplace, desperately trying to get warmer.

`You know, we have been going out for a month and a half,' Kaede replied, wrapping the big shirt around her to keep warm.

`Wow,' Seto said, pushing his chair back from the desk. He looked over to where Kaede was sitting and smiled, getting up and walking over to her.

`Yeah, I know, pretty long time huh?' Kaede grinned as he sat down next to her. She shivered as the cold of December swept around the room. A cold breeze wafted down the chimney that not even the fire could stop.

`You're shivering, are you alright?' Seto asked, concern showing in his face.

`Yes, it's just a little cold,' Kaede smiled, shivering again.

`Well, we'll have to think of a way to make you warm,' Seto grinned.

`Well, now, let me think,' Kaede said, biting her lip. After a while she smiled, and said innocently, `Nope, you know, nothing springs to mind.'

`Well, I think I might know what will help,' Seto said, and began to kiss her, whilst slowly unbuttoning the shirt she was wearing.

She was just about to start to unbutton his shirt when the door flew open and one of his servants entered.

`I have a letter for you, Master Kaiba, and for-' he saw Seto and Kaede and turned, covering his eyes. `I am so sorry, I thought, well, um a letter, for the both of you, er, well, I'll just leave it here.'

He shuffled over to the desk and lay down the envelope, then almost ran to the door to leave. Kaede

collapsed with laughter, tears running down her cheeks. Seto got up and went to get the letter. He sat back down on the sofa and Kaede knelt behind his, her arms around his waist, reading the letter over his shoulder.

Dear Kaede and Seto,

On the 31st of December, my brother and I are holding a special European New Year party. It is fancy dress so please wear costumes. It is to be held at the Hotel Royale and starts at 8.00

If you wish to stay at the hotel, please R.S.V.P. us to arrange it, and say whether you would like a double, or a single bedroom.

Loads of Love,

Ana and Marc

Seto put down the letter after reading it and turned his head to face Kaede. 'Well, I think a double bedroom would suit us nicely,' he said, and then reached around and grabbed Kaede, pulling her so that she lay on his lap. 'Now, where were we?'

Kaede pulled herself up and knelt on the sofa so that she had one of her leg's either side of Seto. He finished unbuttoning the shirt and gently pushed it off, kissing her bare shoulders. She pulled off his shirt and hugged him to her, his skin warming her. His hands played with her hair, brushing his hands through it. She stood up and pulled him up with her, and after he had removed his trousers, they danced together by the fire, her head resting on his chest, his head on top of hers, hands stroking her shoulders. Making sure there was a rug underneath them, Kaede lay down on the floor by the fire and pulled him down on top of her.

A week before the party, Tea, Sakura, Yuula and Kaede all went out fit shopping. They all went to the mall, after arriving at Ana's house and being told that her outfit was going to be a "surprise".

'It's a shame though,' Sakura said. 'I wish that week could all go out together for once.'

'I doubt Ana would want all of us to go,' Tea said. Ana had never forgiven Tea for sleeping with her brother, and it didn't look like she ever would.

'I mean, if she ever found out that we were actually going out, I seriously don't know what she'd do to me,' Tea continued.

`Well, maybe if you tell her how you actually feel about Marc and that it wasn't just cake, then maybe she'll forgive you and let you see him,' Kaede suggested. `I mean, she invited you to her party, so she can't still be mad at you.'

`Trust me, I don't think she'll ever get over it,' Tea shook her head. `Seriously, if you even mention me and Marc in the same sentence to her, she goes ballistic.'

Kaede shrugged, and changed the topic to what they were going to where. Sakura wanted the whole ancient Egyptian queen style, as she was going to be the Pharaoh's bride, and Yami was going as the Pharaoh (Yugi being thoroughly outcast), so she needed a long white dress and wanted to check out the jewellery store as well. Yuula was going as a cat person, wanting ears and a tail, and a pretty dress the same colour. Tea wanted to be a ballerina so she was trying to drag Kaede to the ballet shop to buy a tutu.

Kaede hadn't really thought about what she was going to buy, everyone was going as something really original, and she had no idea what Seto was going as, though he told her he was going as someone from a film. So Kaede thought that she should go as someone from a film to match him, but she didn't know who.

They brought Sakura and Yuula's dresses, and Tea's tutu, and were going to get some lunch in one of the cafes. Kaede sat at their table, sipping a coca cola, looking around at all the shops. She supposed she could just dress up as any rich lady from a film, as she had so many black-tie dresses, but she wanted to be something original, not some pris little darling hanging off Seto's arm. She wanted to be someone original, and different; someone nobody else would think of.

She spotted the gift shop across the street. She'd been in it a few times, and they sold all kinds of sweet little gifts, figurines, fringe magnets, photos, poster-

POSTERS! Kaede jumped up, dragging her friends with her. She ran into the shop and began flicking through their poster selection, until she found the one she wanted.

Holding it and standing back so that the others could see, she showed them the poster of the comic book, Sin City. She knew that it was being turned into an all-star movie, so she would get away with this if she wanted to (sort of) match with Seto. She studied all the different characters, until she found the one she wanted.

`Okay, any of you got a pen?' she asked, and Tea took out a little notebook and poised a pen over the top. `I need dangly earrings, a kimono, two swords which I am sure we will find at the martial arts shop, boots and maybe I red bra that I wouldn't be afraid to wear in public.'

`Okay, so who are you going as?' Yuula asked, peering at the picture.

Kaede flicked through the Sin City poster section until she found the right on. `Her!' she said, jabbing it with her finger.

`But who is she?' Sakura asked impatiently.

`Miho.'

On the night of the party, Kaede sat in her room at home getting ready for the party. She had washed and blow dried her hair, and was now trying to straighten it with her hair irons. Impatiently, she just considered getting her grandmother's actual iron and trying to do it with that, but then all her friends came bounding into the room.

`Ack!' Kaede said, pulling her dressing towel over her, as she was only in her underwear. The boys took the hint and left the door immediately, although Joey lingered behind until Sakura pushed him out and locked the door.

Tea took control of straightening Kaede's hair whilst she herself put on her make up. She knew she might have to go a little bit over the top with it, seeing as Miho was a prostitute, but she didn't at the moment. As soon as Tea had finished with her hair, Kaede put in her earrings and then her kimono and heeled boots. Finally, she tied her two samurai swords to her back in such a way that they looked as though they were easily accessible should the need arrive.

`I might have to take these off when we get there,' Kaede said as she straightened them, making sure they were perfectly positioned. She turned around to face her friends, and smiled at their pleasantly surprised faces. Together they went downstairs and she said goodbye to her grandparents, who looked shock and slightly embarrassed about their granddaughter dressing like a hooker, but they said goodbye and waved them off as they piled into Sakura's kombi. There were only eight of them there, Sakura and Yami in the front, and Kaede, Tea, Yuula, Duke, Ryou and Joey in the back. Kaede was sitting next to Yuula chatting about random stuff, but sensed eyes on her and whipped her head around to see Joey staring at her. Although she was talking to him again and they were slowly getting friendlier towards each other, she knew their friendship had suffered such a bad knock and it might never be the same. She hadn't told him about kissing Kaiba before their break-up, think what he didn't know wouldn't hurt him, but she thought he had probably guessed. Although occasionally he told her he still loved her (mostly when he was drunk), she knew he was going out with Mai full time now and hoped that they would be happy together.

When they arrived at Hotel Royale, they all got out and let one of the hotel staff park Sakura's kombi. They had a bit of a fiasco because they saw someone yelling and a car driving away, and Sakura ran to stop them, and grabbed the driver out of the car. Thinking it was a car jacker, she began to beat this guy up, but Kaede and Yami ran to hold her back. When she actually looked at the man's face and his clothes, she gasped and apologised profoundly as he was actually one of the hotel car parkers. Blushing, Sakura was lead by Yami into the hotel, and most of them followed, except Kaede who was waiting for Seto to arrive.

After a couple minutes of waiting, his limousine did pull up in front of the hotel. When he stepped out of the car, a wave of people surged forward to shake hands with the famous billionaire. He spotted Kaede

and pushed through the crowd, apologising with the excuse that he had a party to go to.

'Hi,' Kaede greeted him when he reached her. 'You made it in the end, then?'

'It took a while, but I made it,' Seto smiled and kissed her quickly. 'Why have you been standing out here on your own, you must be freezing.'

'No, I'm fine, I just didn't want to go in without my date,' Kaede laughed, and he held her at arms length to look at her costume. While he was examining hers, she looked at what he was wearing. Dressed in a tuxedo, Kaede saw a lump next to his arm that must have been a gun holster. She smiled and slipped her hand into his inside pocket, and found a card inside. She took it out and it read "007".

'How original,' she couldn't help but smile at him. He didn't often wear a suit, but she loved it when he did because he always looked really good in them.

'And you are?' he asked, unable to guess.

'Haven't you read Sin City?' Kaede exclaimed, playfully shoving him. 'Okay, there's this prostitute called Miho in it. She is half Japanese or something and she has samurai swords, a bow and arrows, and these really cool little throwing things which cut people's heads in half. And, yeah, she kills a lot of people.'

'Where do you read these things?' Seto asked. 'Right, inside now, otherwise you'll freeze to death.'

Kaede obliged, it was extremely cold outside and her boots didn't cover much over her legs, her kimono was very thin and short, so her arms and legs were pretty much bare.

They entered the foyer and were greeted by Ana, Marc and Honda, who had all gotten here early. She was pleased to see that they had waited for her before going in, and smiled at their loyalty.

They entered the hall together, and all gasped as one at how beautiful it was; balloons and lots of glitter ready to be let down from the ceiling, white lights lit the whole hall and the ceiling, which was also mirrored, made the light reflect perfectly to every inch of the room.

The music began, and Kaede grabbed Seto's arm and pulled him onto the dance floor. The first song, 'Mambo Italiano' started and Kaede began her famous dancing, her arms raised above her head, spinning around in time to the music. Seto joined in, reluctantly at first, but when he noticed that no one was watching them and was all getting really into it, he joined in too.

Kaede looked over her shoulder at Ana and Honda, who were dancing in the middle of a circle of people. She stopped dancing and watched them, as did Seto, his hands holding Kaede's waist as he watched. When the song ended, Ana and Honda were clapped and cheered for their wonderful dancing.

After that song, Seto went to get drinks for both of them and Kaede joined her friends dancing for the next song. Tea, Sakura, Yuula and Kaede all held hands as they danced, in a big circle, and Kaede led the steps for them. Seto came halfway through with two champagne glasses, and Kaede took one, leaving the circle of her friends. She clinked glasses with Seto and drank her champagne quickly, as all

the dancing had made her thirsty. The next song that came on was quite slow, and Seto took her hand and she rested her head on his chest, just as they had done by the fire at his house (except this time they had slightly more clothes on). As they danced, Seto kept wetting his lips as though he were about to say something, but the words never formed together in his head, so he said nothing.

At 11.45, Ana and Marc began explaining the traditions of New Year in Europe. Everyone stood in a huge circle and counted down when the clock reach 11.59.

`5-4-3-2-1, HAPPY NEW YEAR!' Everyone shouted, as the balloons and glitter began to fall from the circling. Seto took Kaede in his arms and kissed her, swinging her so that he held her just a few inches from the floor. Pulling her up again, she kissed him once more and after they pulled away, she whispered, so that only he could hear her through all the happy shouts, `I love you, Seto Kaiba, I love you so much.'

After dancing a couple more times, and noticing it was only their friends left, Kaede and Seto waved goodbye to them and found the key to their room at reception. Taking the elevator up to their floor, they found their room quickly, and slipped inside, locking the door behind them.

Inside, Kaede stood one side of the door, Seto stood on the other. Kaede carefully removed her swords and placed them down on a chair by the bathroom. She looked at Seto afterwards, smiling at how well that suit looked on him, and what a shame it was for it to just be thrown on the floor. By the look on his face, she knew he was thinking the same about her kimono. Beaming at him, she removed her earrings and her boots, and saw him talking of his shoes, jacket and gun holster. Afterwards, they stood still of either side of the room, then stepped towards each other.

Meeting in the middle of the room, just in front of the bed, Kaede kissed him as passionately as he kissed her, as he hurriedly undid her kimono. After unbuttoning his shirt, Kaede lay down on the bed, and pushed herself up to she was on the pillows. He leaned over her and kissed her, his hands moving through her straightened hair. Pulling off the rest of her clothes, she pulled the duvet around her and Seto and she lay in his arms, loving every inch of him, wishing to be his forever.

20 - For the love of shopping

For the love of shopping

Kaede and Seto were in her room at her house, just sitting on her bed chatting about stuff, when Kaede's grandmother yelled for her from downstairs.

'Kaede, come down here,' her grandmother called. Kaede jumped off the bed and ran down the stairs. Her grandmother was in the kitchen, baking what looked like cookies. She had a tray of freshly baked ones in her oven-gloved hand and some ready to be baked on a tray in her other hand. She tipped the cookies onto a plate and handed them to Kaede. 'These are for you and Mr. Kaiba, and Ana called for you, here's the message.'

'Grandma, please call him Seto,' Kaede said, taking the plate and the piece of paper. 'Calling him Mr. Kaiba makes him sound old.'

Kaede ran upstairs and shut the door to her room with her foot. She set the plate down on the bed beside Seto and quickly read the piece of paper.

'Ana is having another party,' Kaede said to Seto over her shoulder. 'On her birthday. She says she'll pick us up at your mansion.'

'She's having another party?' Seto mumbled through the cookie in his mouth. 'Are her and her brother rich or something?'

'Not as rich as you,' Kaede said, curling up on the bed next to him. 'But I suppose you could call them well off.'

Seto laughed and put his arm around Kaede's shoulders, kissing the top of her head. 'Well, I suppose we should go shopping tomorrow then.'

The next day they went to the mall, and went to the nearest prom shop they could find.

'Well, it's black tie,' Kaede said as she browsed through the rails of dresses. 'But I want a really different dress, because I have so many plain ones, I want something totally different of once.'

Kaede shook her head at all the dresses and dragged Seto out of the shop. They spent the entire morning going from one shop to the other, Kaede occasionally trying on dresses, but putting them back, muttering about them.

At one o'clock Seto complained he was starving, and would not watch her try on any more dresses

unless he had something to eat.

`No way,' Kaede shook her head. `We only have a couple more black tie shops left, and then I can make a decision based on my favourites.'

She was about to walk into the next shop on her list when Seto grabbed her around the middle, hoisted her up over his shoulder in a fireman's lift and carried her to the nearest café.

`Lunch first, before I die of hunger,' Seto said, and ordered some sandwiches before she could argue. Kaede sulked at his negativity and took a pen out of her bag, doodling on the napkin on the table she sat at. She had a picture in her mind about what she wanted her dress to be like. She imagined it two different colours, with a corset top part, and a puffed out skirt, no straps or sleeves.

Seto came back with the sandwiches, placing one in front of her and demanded that she eat it. Kaede stuffed the napkin in her bag so that Seto wouldn't think she was more obsessed about dresses than her already did, and stared down at her sandwiches. Picking it up in between her fingers, she looked at it, and took a bit out of it, chewing half-heartedly.

Kaede looked around the mall at all the shoppers. She was just thinking about how happy they looked, shopping and ignoring their aching stomachs when she heard her name being shouted from across the mall.

`KAEDE! KAEDE!' someone yelled, and Kaede swivelled around in her chair. Sakura was running towards her, dragging with her this guy who looked about 10 years older than her. Kaede was startled, thinking she was cheating on Yami, but she recognised bits of Sakura in him and stood to greet them, realising that this was Sakura's brother.

`Hi Sakura, is this your brother?' Kaede asked, standing up and hugging Sakura.

`Yeah, Kaede, this is Tom, Tom, this is Kaede,' Sakura waved her hand as she introduced them. Her brother, Tom, was tall, with sandy brown coloured hair and a very even tan, Kaede observed. She smiled at Tom, and shook his hand.

`Hi, nice to meet you,' Kaede said. They all sat down together at Kaede and Seto's table and began to chat about the party.

`What are you wearing, Sakura?' Kaede eagerly asked.

`Don't tell her,' Seto warned. `She will start a discussion about it and won't drop the conversation until she goes to yet another dress shop.'

Kaede hit him playfully on the arm. `That was a little uncalled for, I think,' she said, as pompously as she could. Turning back to Sakura, she tilted her head in a questioning manor.

`Well, it is white and strapless, with black flowers along the hem and the bust, and a really cool design up the left side,' Sakura explained, sitting up and looking really excited to be describing her dress. `I spent ages trying to find it, but we've just brought it, and now we have a whole afternoon with nothing to

do.'

'Hey, great plan,' Kaede said, sitting up immediately. 'How about you come with me to go and get my dress, and Seto and Tom can hang around somewhere, because Seto is getting kinda bored of all this dress shopping.'

So, leaving Seto and Tom to try and make conversation, Kaede and Sakura jumped up and went to the nearest posh dress shop. Kaede had been there already but Sakura, who had a keen eye for anything clothes related, began leafing through the rails, looking at the most flamboyant dresses. Picking a few off the rail and handing them to Kaede, she turned her around and pushed her towards the changing room. 'Go and try on, NOW!' She said, and pulled the curtain behind Kaede so she couldn't protest.

After she tried on each dress, she stepped outside to show Sakura, who tutted and made a few comments on the style and the way it looked on. It wasn't until Kaede put on a red one that Sakura actually spoke directly to Kaede.

'Colour.'

'Excuse me?'

'What are your favourite colours?'

Kaede squatted on the floor of the changing room, the skirt of the dress puffed out around her. She looked at herself in the mirror as she squatted there.

'Definitely not red,' she said as she looked at the dress on her. 'It clashes with my hair.'

'What doesn't,' Sakura muttered under her breath.

Kaede pretended she hadn't heard her and turned around, trying to picture what colour it should be. 'Maybe pink,' she mused. 'Or black, that's a great colour.'

Sakura nodded and began to hunt around the shelves. Kaede sat down on the chair inside the changing rooms, thinking that maybe she should just wear one of the ones she already had if it was too much of a hassle, and remembered her doodle on the café napkin. She pulled it out of her bag and gazed at it. Sakura came back with an armful of dresses and Kaede handed it to her, not really thinking that it would help, but it couldn't hurt to have a little bit of a suggestion of what she wanted it to look like.

Sakura glanced at it and immediately ran off, shouting back to Kaede, 'Hold on, stay there, I saw the perfect one.'

Kaede sat bewildered in the chair, and saw Sakura come running back with a dress. She hung it by the hanger from one of the clothes hooks on the wall and pulled Kaede back to look at it.

Kaede gasped in excitement. There, before her, was her perfect dress. With a pink corset top and a skirt that puffed out, not very much, but enough to give it the black tie dress feel, with two pink strips down the middle, getting wider as they went down. The rest of the skirt was completely black, and so was the

tie that wrapped around the waist. Kaede grinned, hugged Sakura, and ran into the changing room to try it on.

She emerged with it on, her perfect dress, and spun in front of the mirror. She twisted her hair up into a bun thing and turned her head from side to side. She was just spinning around again when Seto and Tom walked in, tired of making boring conversation. Kaede smiled and hugged Seto as soon as she saw him, much to his surprise.

`Seto, I want this dress,' Kaede grinned happily, and kissed him lightly on the cheek before running back to the changing rooms to get dressed back in her own clothes. `Oh,' she called, poking her head through the curtain. `You have to dress to match!'

On hearing this, Seto nearly fainted.

On the day of the party, Kaede and Seto spent the whole of the day at the Kaiba mansion getting ready for the party. Seto was going to wear a black tuxedo with a pink rose as his corsage. Within 10 minutes he was ready, and stood around watching as Kaede did her hair and put on make up, waved her hand around to try and get her nail polish dried quicker, and finally put on her dress. She draped a black silk scarf around her arms and was finally ready. They waited in the hallway for Ana to come and pick them up, and Kaede watched through the window, thinking she would see Sakura's kombi along the driveway. She was startled by two white Rolls Royces sweeping along the drive.

`They're here,' she said, grabbing Seto by the arm. She ran down the steps with him and they climbed into the first car with Ana and Honda. Ana looked gorgeous in her strapless red dress and Honda looked like a very smart Honda wearing his tux with a red rose. They were accompanied by a girl with bubblegum coloured hair that Kaede did not know.

`Oh, Kaede, this is Yumiko, Yumiko, Kaede,' Ana introduced them. Kaede smiled at Yumiko as she was introduced, and turned back to Ana, a little confused, so Ana explained. `Yumiko is half Australian, and our parents were friends.'

The cars drove around the city, picking up each of their friends in turn. Their car was full so the other car got packed with everybody else. When finally they arrived to pick up Joey, Yami, Duke and Ryou, Kaede was looking out of the window and was startled to see that with them was a tall blonde girl, with her arms linked in Joey's. Kaede smiled at Mai as soon as she recognised her, and looked at Ana, about to ask if she had invited her too. But Ana seemed to find Mai's appearance just as odd as everybody else did.

When they set off again, the phone rang, and it was Joey apologising for not warning everybody about Mai. Ana was cool with it, just a little annoyed about not being told first, Kaede presumed that she didn't want her birthday ruined by a pathetic argument with Joey, so she didn't really go into it.

They arrived at the hotel and the doors of the car were opened for them, the doormen to the hotel held the doors open as they entered and they were all seated at the best table in the hotel restaurant. Kaede sat down in between Duke and Tea and laughed with them as Ana tried to speak English, her French accent completely masking her English.

After a wonderful meal, they were shown to the hotel's ballroom, and all danced together in their couples, Yumiko dancing with Duke as they were the two singletons. After a couple of dances, Kaede went to sit down in one of the chairs over to the side of the hall. She took off her huge heels as she sat cross-legged in the chair, watching her friends dance together. She was just staring into space when she felt someone sit down beside her.

'Penny for your thoughts,' Mai said, as she sat down beside her.

'I wasn't thinking anything, just sort of daydreaming,' Kaede said, leaning back so her face was on the same level as Mai's.

'So how are things going with you and Joey?' Kaede asked as the conversation between them wasn't going very far.

'It's great actually, he is such a great guy,' Mai smiled as she said this. Kaede turned away, wanting to say that he really wasn't a great guy, but thought better of it. 'So, you and Kaiba, huh?'

'Yeah, we've been going out for just over a month and a half, and so far nothing major has happened,' Kaede said bored, glad the conversation was away from Joey.

'Really, only a month and a half?' Mai exclaimed. 'Joey told me the two of you split up ages ago because you were two-timing him with Kaiba, and he went out with me a while afterwards.'

Kaede immediately stood up, fuming. She pulled on her shoes and made to walk away from Mai, but Mai grabbed her arm, pulling her back. 'What's the matter, Kaede?'

Kaede whipped around to face Mai, her hands shaking with anger. She didn't want Mai to have to find out about this, but she had no choice now, not when Joey was saying things like that about her. 'Okay, you listen to me Mai Valentine. Don't believe anything Joey Wheeler has to say to you, because he is a scumbag liar when it comes to me. I only stopped going out with him a month and a half ago, after I spoke to you on the phone and you told me that you were going out with Joey. That's why we split up, not because I was cheating on Joey with Seto, but because he was two-timing me with you.'

Kaede pulled her arm free and ran back onto the dance floor, and immediately got swept up by Seto in a waltz.

'Where were you, I had to dance two whole dances by myself,' Seto said with obvious fake sadness. Kaede smiled weakly at this and rested her head on his chest, anger still pulsing through her body. Seto realised something was wrong because he stopped dancing and took her hands in his. 'What's the matter?'

'Nothing,' Kaede said as Ana and Honda danced past. Ana looked so happy, she really didn't want Seto

to get angry with Joey, not on her birthday. So she put her arms around his waist and began to dance again, making him follow her. `Just act like nothing's wrong, and I'll tell you later.'

Seto said nothing more about it, and continued dancing as though nothing was wrong. After a couple more dances, and a surprise live singer for Ana, organised by their whole group, and making her get up and sing along with him, they all got dropped off back at their homes in the same Rolls Royces. Seto and Kaede waved goodbye to Ana, shouting happy birthday after her as the cars drove away, and then they ran back into the house to escape the cold. They went back to Seto's room and Kaede got changed into her night things that she left at Seto's house and lay on the bed with her eyes closed.

Seto came and sat on the bed next to her. `Tell me what's wrong, Kaede,' he demanded softly.

Kaede rolled over and leaned up on her elbow to face him. She frowned as she thought about what Mai had said. `Joey never told Mai that he was two timing us, or that I dumped him because of it. He just told her that I was the reason for the break up, because I was cheating on him with you, and he found out and dumped me,' Kaede looked at Seto's face and saw him become angry really fast, so she said quickly, `But it's okay, it really is nothing, I don't know why I got so mad, just please don't beat Joey up, please,' Kaede begged, changing position so she was kneeling on the bed next to him. `Please, he isn't worth it.'

Seto calmed down when she said this and sighed, lying down on the bed. Kaede lay beside him and linked arms with him. He turned his head to look at her and she beamed at him, and once more he found himself fighting to say what he had been wanting to tell her at the New Year's party, but again the words wouldn't form in his mind.

Kaede leaned over and kissed him quickly, and then wrapped the duvet around her and reached out to turn off the light. Seto sighed and turned off his bedside lamp too, and lay next to her, his arms around her, listening as her breathing became more steady and deeper. How hard was it to say those words? Seto shook his head a little and closed his eyes. As he was falling asleep he realised it wasn't that he didn't know how to say the words, because he had never said them before in his life, but it was him worrying about what she would say in reply.

What could she possibly say to, `Kaede, I love you'?

21 - Three month anniversary party

Three month anniversary party

A month had past, and Kaede was successfully still going out with Seto, without any major arguments, except maybe the subject of Mokuba and Tenshi; Seto was completely against the idea of Mokuba having a girlfriend at the age of 12.

`But it is CUTE!' Kaede had explained to him, exasperated.

`Kaede, he is TWELVE!' Seto ran his hand through his hair. `I didn't have a girlfriend when I was his age!'

`Well, you didn't have a girlfriend until me, or there is something you're not telling me!' Kaede said, slipping her arms around his waist. `Anyway, Mokuba isn't exactly going to declare his love for Tenshi and sleep with her is he?'

`No,' Seto looked uncomfortable. Then his expression changed to an indignant frown. `And you are NOT the only girlfriend I have ever had!'

`Yeah, sure,' Kaede said, walking away from him to sit down on his bed. `Well, I have something to ask you about us anyway.'

`Oh no, it's not going to be a "talk", is it?' Seto asked, sitting down next to her cautiously. Kaede had to give him a special "talk" when he went around to her house the first couple of times, explaining about her grandmother's behaviour around new boyfriends, and also that her grandmother would probably make them sleep in separate rooms, because she would never agree to them sharing.

`No, it's nothing like that!' Kaede raised her hands defensively. Seto sat next to her and she put her hands on his chest, trying to phrase what she wanted to say.

`Um, um, um,' Kaede said, hanging her head, phrasing the words in her mind. `It is our three month anniversary this weekend, so do you want to have a party or something?'

Seto looked at her sternly. `Kaede, you aren't seriously telling me that you want to celebrate 3 months of going out?'

`No, no,' Kaede shook her head quickly. `But I just want an excuse to have a party.'

Seto stared at her. `Why the hell do you need an excuse?'

Kaede looked down at her feet. 'I dunno, I just thought that it might be better if I had an excuse.'

'You really don't need an excuse, I mean, it's not like Ana ever has excuses,' Seto said, getting up and going to his desk.

Kaede was about to say that all Ana's parties had reasons for them, but she was just glad she was allowed to do this. 'Okies, I'm gonna go pick out some rooms for everyone,' she said, standing up, kissing Seto on the cheek as she went past.

Seto turned around and yelled at her as she left the room, 'What you mean they're staying the night?'

Kaede smirked as she walked along the corridor. She went to Mokuba's room first, to ask him about Tenshi. She entered and saw Mokuba lying on his bed, reading a comic book.

'Heya Mokie,' Kaede said, shutting the door behind her and sitting on Mokuba's bed.

'Hi Kaede,' he said, putting his comic away. 'What's up?'

'Well, Seto and I were gonna have a random party tomorrow, do you want Tenshi to come?'

Mokie's face brightened. 'Yeah, sure, thanks Kaede.'

Kaede smiled and got up to leave, but sat back down again. 'Um, Mokie, what exactly is going on between you and Tenshi?'

Mokie gave her a sideways look. 'What d'you mean?'

'Well, are you just friends, are you going out or are you seriously together?' Kaede asked, leaning one of her arms on the bed.

'Um, somewhere between going out and seriously together, I think. Why?' Mokuba said suspiciously.

Kaede had gotten up and walked towards the door when he said this. She opened the door and was about to leave when she properly heard him and turned around to answer. 'Well, nothing really, just don't tell Seto thank, okay? I think he is being a little bit protective.'

Kaede shut the door and went back along the corridor. She went to Seto's study and phoned all her friends, asking whether they wanted to share rooms with their other half or whether they wanted separate rooms. And, just for a change, when she phoned Ana, she decided to be the hyper one this time, seeing as usually she can't get a word in edgeways with Ana. She laughed inwardly at how nervous Ana was when she spoke to her. This is payback Ana, she thought to herself.

'Alrighty then,' she said to herself, having written all the details down on some paper. 'Sakura and Yami, sharing; Ana and Honda, sharing, Tea and Marc, sharing; and Yuula, Ryou, Duke and Takumi not sharing.'

Kaede looked at the list and nodded, and then set out on her hunt for bedrooms for their guests.

22 - Past Friendships end

Past Friendships end

When they arrived the next day in Sakura's kombi, Kaede immediately ran down the mansion steps to greet them.

`Hi guys, welcome to my new second home,' she said, hugging Sakura, how was the first out of the kombi. `I am seriously thinking of moving in permanently.'

From most of them she got hugs and smiles, but as soon as Honda saw him glaring at her. Kaede bit her lip, and as she was showing them through the front steps, she whispered to Tea, `Um, why is Honda mad at me?'

`Because you didn't invite Joey,' Tea answered knowingly.

`Of course I didn't invite Joey, do you know how awkward that would be?' Kaede hissed. She still hadn't forgiven Joey for what he said about her to Mai.

`But it wasn't really a lie,' Tea hissed back. Kaede had to look away at this. Although she had not told this to Joey or any of the other guys in their group, she had told Tea, Sakura, Ana and Yuula about what had happened the night and morning before she broke up with Joey.

`That's different.'

`How was it different?' Tea said loudly, but Kaede shushed her so she brought her voice down to a whisper again.

`Joey was actually going out with Mai when we split up, but there was nothing going on between me and Seto,' Kaede whispered.

`Yeah? And what was that about you and Seto in the park together the night the Ishtars and Joey stayed at your house?' Tea demanded.

Kaede ignored her. She couldn't have replied anyway because they had entered the main hall of Seto's house. All of them gazed around his awe at it, the marble columns, the white marble floor, the HUGE chandelier. Kaede grinned as Seto looked at their faces, unsure whether to be pleased that they were admiring his home or disturbed by Yuula dancing around insanely. Kaede ran over and stood next to him and he whispered in her ear, `Um, is there anything wrong with Yuula's mental health?'

Kaede had to bite her lip to stop herself laughing. `No, there's nothing wrong with Yuula that wasn't there

when she was born.'

Seto nodded, trying (and failing) to look reassured about this lunatic running madly around his home. Together they showed everyone to their rooms, and told them that laugh was about to be serve, and if they couldn't find the way to the dinning hall then they could call Seto's personal receptionists and ask them for directions.

Whilst Seto went to the kitchen to check on lunch, Kaede went to see Mokuba and Tenshi. She knocked on Tenshi's door first and when there was no answer, let herself into the room.

It was just the cutest little room Kaede had ever seen. Ever since she had first discovered it the first time she came to Seto's house, she had begged him to furnish it for a little girl. Inside it was pink, blue and extremely fluffy. Kaede looked around, then out of the beautiful bay windows onto the balcony. Tenshi was standing out there, talking to somebody invisible. 'Tenshi?' Kaede called.

Tenshi turned around to see her, smiled, then turned back to the person she was talking to. She smirked and said a fairly unpleasant goodbye to the person she was talking to, before coming back into the room.

'Hello Kaede,' Tenshi said, smiling kindly now. Kaede didn't know if this was genuine affection or something Mokuba had told her to do, so she was always fairly wary when it came to Tenshi.

'Hello Tenshi, lunch is almost ready for us now, do you and Mokie want to eat with us, or do you want the chef to make you something different for you?' Kaede crouched down to Tenshi's level, hating to look down on her.

'We'll eat with you please,' Tenshi beamed. Kaede bit her lip, still unsure about Tenshi. She stood up and gave her one last all over look, and then went to see Mokie.

'Heya Kaede,' Mokie said, jumping up from his bed.

'Hey Mokie,' Kaede smiled at him. 'Why aren't you and Tenshi hanging around together?'

'Oh, we're in separate rooms, so we thought you and Seto didn't want us hanging around together.' Mokuba looked down as if hurt.

'No, we want the two of you to have fun together, just not to sleep in the same room,' Kaede said, sitting down on his bed.

'But you and Seto do!'

'That is very different!' Kaede grinned at Mokie and ruffled his hair. 'Lunch is being served now, and Tenshi asked for the two of you to eat with us, is that okay?'

'Sure, we'll be down in a minute,' Mokie said and went to change. Kaede left him and returned to the dining room. All of her friends were already there, so she sat down in the empty chair nearest to her. As soon as Mokie and Tenshi arrived the servants appeared carrying multiple of trays. They served the first

course of the five course meal. Kaede looks down at her plate and saw to her dismay Seto had managed to forget she hated fish, because there was a chunk of tuna on her plate.

`Seto?' she said from where she sat.

`Yeah, what's the matter?'

`What exactly will we be eating?'

`Well, first tuna, then some smoked salmon, and after that some swordfish stake, than sardines on a plate of lettuce, and the some anchovies to finish it all off. Why?' Seto suddenly looked worried.

`Seto, have you forgotten what I told you earlier this morning?' Kaede's eyes flashed dangerously.

Seto's skin broke into a sweat. His hand began to shake so violently that he had to put his fork down.

`Don't worry, there's nothing you can do now,' Kaede said, turning back to her plate in a manor that suggested that he did have something to worry about. Seto swallowed as Kaede played around with the food on her plate, eating the salad, but not touching anything that was close to the fish in anyway. The next courses came and they were all fish. Kaede looked up and down the table, noticing that none of her friends were eating very much. She shook her head at Seto and vowed to have a word with him later.

After their lunch Tenshi and Mokuba went back to their rooms and Kaede told everybody to go and get their swimming costumes, which she had instructed them to bring. She went to Seto's room and opened the chest of drawers that he had set up in his room for her. She opened the top drawer and pulled out her gorgeous black bikini. She had wanted a pink one, but thought it clashed too much with her hair and skin, so she thought maybe black would suit her physique better, and it did. She slipped it on quickly and tied a light-weight black sarong around her hips. Adding the silver frame, blue lenses Oakleys that her grandparents had given to her at Christmas and grabbing her towel, she strolled out of the room and jogged down to the outdoor pool.

She sat down on one of the sun beds and lay out her towel for when she came out. She took off her sarong and Oakleys and hid them in case some idiot (Honda/Duke/Yuula) found them and broke them, and walked to the side of the pool. She could feel people's eyes on her, which she hated more than anything. She hated the thought of people looking at her body, especially when in a skimpy bikini, but she sighed, putting up with it, and dived spectacularly into the pool.

She surfaced and swam a quick few lengths and then climbed out. The jacuzzi was her preferred hangout at Seto's house, and she put on her Oakleys as she passed by and then climbed into the warm water of the hot tub. Leaning back, she listened to the commotion around her as her friends yelled at each other and dragged each other into the pool.

She had her eyes closed but opened them when someone else climbed into the hot tub next to her. Directly opposite her was Honda, still glaring at her and looking as if he was about to yell at her.

Sighing, Kaede leaned back again. `What the hell do you want?' She said, closing her eyes again.

`Why didn't you invite Joey? I thought it everything was cool between the two of you,' Honda demanded.

Kaede almost laughed. `Not very observant are you? Things haven't been "cool" between me and Joey since I found out he told Mai that I had two timed him, even though he was the one cheating on me.'

`No he wasn't. He said you were the one who was cheating on him. Ever since that ball Kaiba held you have been with him, and Joey went out with Mai to try and get over you,' Honda said viciously.

Kaede stared at him. What happened to him? She knew that the old Honda was completely gone, the one she got on well with and had funny chats with in the lessons they had together. He was the one who had helped her most to get over the death of her family, and persuaded her to enjoy her life. But now he was so different, so cold and strange. Kaede wasn't sure she wanted to have anything to do with him anymore.

Kaede said nothing, but stood up and climbed out of the hot tub. She turned back to Honda as she went and said coldly, `Honda, we used to be friends, but don't make the mistake that anything that existed between us then exists now. You're only here because of Ana, and don't think it is anything else. I don't know what happened to you, but if the old Honda comes back, let me know, because the new one sucks!'

Turning away, she went and lay down on the sun bed with her towel on it, letting the sun slowly dry her skin and forgot about everything except the warm rays of the sun.

23 - Confessions

Confessions

That evening Kaede had organised a smallish black tie dinner for the fourteen of them, remembering all the fun they had at Ana's birthday party. She had already told them all to bring pretty dresses and tuxedos, and she herself had brought along a few dresses. She picked out a few, holding them against her as she turned in front of the mirror. She had several new evening dresses that she had recently brought with her grandparents, and had brought them with her.

She decided to wear black, seeing as it suited her better than any colour. The dress she chose in the end was black and had a cross strap at the back. It was crunched up with glitter at the bust so it didn't draw much attention to your size. There was a folded piece of material draping at the front, and had a high empire waist and high/low asymmetric hemline.

She slipped this on and on her feet she tied some strappy high heeled shoes with lots of pretty gemstones over the toes. She tied these up so they wouldn't fall off and brushed her hair. She had washed it after swimming and blew dried it, and now she just let it hang around her shoulders, not bothering to tie it up or anything. She did spray some leave-in conditioner over it and tuck it behind her ear, but apart from that it was completely undone.

She left the room and ran down the corridor to the drawing room where they were going to eat. She was the last to arrive, so she could admire everyone's dresses as soon as she got there. Seto was wearing a plain black tuxedo (she was going to have words with him later about his fashion sense) as were most of the guys, except Honda (who had apparently forgotten it was SMART black tie) who was wearing a vile gold tuxedo, accompanied by Ana who was wearing an ice blue dress. Tea was in a sickening rose pink dress with a HUGE frilly skirt with what looked like 200 hand made rosebuds.

Others were in less dramatic attires. Sakura was dressed in a long creamy bronze dress with a black lace over dress which was split in the centre. She wore long black gloves up to the elbow with her long blonde hair up in a messy bun with loose bits of hair hanging out at the front.

Yuula was in a short white under dress with a really long lilac over dress which was split all the way from the bust to the ground, and was frilly on either side of the split. Her hair was curled and tied up in a ribbon.

Mokuba and Tenshi were there too, and Mokuba was in a sweet little tuxedo, and Tenshi in a floor length purple dress. They both looked really cute; Kaede wished she had a camera with her.

They sat down to a gorgeous meal and afterwards they moved to the biggest lounge to talk. They were all talking about random school stuff when Tenshi interrupted, suggesting a game of Truth or Dare. She

picked Ana first, making her go and stand outside for 10 minutes in just her underwear. As soon as Ana stepped out of the bay windows it started pouring with rain. Ana disappeared into the darkness and Kaede saw her light as cigarette as she went. Vowing to kill her when she came back, Kaede turned back to the game. Tenshi had tried to dare Yuula to kiss Duke, but Yuula promptly refused. So Duke had to kiss Yuula. Refusing to kiss him, Yuula leaped up and stomped out of the room, Duke in hot pursuit, only to be pushed back into the room with the words 'Get Lost!' yelled at him by Yuula.

After that no body really wanted to play, and when Ana came back in after 10 minutes out in the rain most people had already gone to bed. Kaede and Seto hung around until everybody was going to bed, and said goodnight to all their guests. They walked arm in arm to Seto's room afterwards, Kaede leaning her head on Seto's shoulder. They reached the door to the room and Kaede put her hand on the door knob, but Seto reached out and took her hand off it, entwining his fingers in hers. Kaede looked into his eyes, puzzled, and he leaned forward and kissed her quickly. When he pulled back he looked down at his feet, shuffling them from side to side.

Kaede reached her hand up and laid it against the side of his face. She smiled at him, and asked, 'Is there something you want to tell me?'

Seto was still looking down at his feet, and Kaede pushed his chin up so his eyes met hers. She kissed him and said, 'Go on, tell me.'

Seto took a deep breath and looked straight into her eyes. 'Kaede, I have wanted to tell you this for such a long time, ever since that New Years party. I have known this for so long, but I didn't know how to tell you.'

Kaede swallowed, wondering what it could be. Her mind raced, as she thought of all the possibilities, he was going to dump her, he was going to say they were better of as friends, he was going to say he was gay, he was going to say he had cheated on her, he was going to say he had cheated on her with another man. She braced herself, and said, 'Go on.'

He smiled again and licked his lips, taking a deep breath.

'Kaede...'

'Yes?'

Another deep breath.

'I love you.'

Kaede almost jumped. She stared at him, confused and puzzled. Then she realised this was what he had wanted to tell her. He must have thought she was upset because he said this because he hung his head, but she threw her arms around him and kissed him passionately. When she pulled back, it was his turn to look confused. She hugged him again and said quietly into his jacket, 'Seto, I love you too.'

24 - Together again at last

Together again at last

The Friday after the party, Kaede and her friends were sitting in their classroom, chatting when Kaede's mobile rang.

`Ahhhh!' Kaede yelled, grabbing her bag. She never had a mobile before, and Seto had just gotten it for her, however much she had protested.

`Mobiles are great,' Seto had said as he pushed her towards the counter of the phone shop. `How else will I be able to know exactly where you are?'

Having never needed a phone before, Kaede found it difficult to get used to. She always forgot it, never charged it, and always forgot her ring tone so whenever someone rang her she didn't answer, forgetting she had a phone.

She ripped open the front pocket of her bag before that mobile phone could cut the call into voice mail. She flipped it open and put it to her ear as quickly as possible. `Hello? Who is it?'

`Kaede, it says my name on the screen when it is ringing!' said an impatient voice that sounded a lot like Seto. She looked at the screen and saw that it was indeed him.

`Oh yeah!' Kaede grinned.

`Did you forget that you had a phone again?' he asked annoyingly.

`Shut up,' Kaede snapped back. `I didn't even want a phone, you made me get one.'

`Whatever,' Seto said impatiently. `What are you doing tonight?'

`Working, I'm not as rich as you are, y'know, I do need to work at some point.'

`Oh, okay, so what are you doing tomorrow?'

Honestly, he was like a dog with a bone, never giving up. `Nothing, I'm free tomorrow.'

`Good, I'll pick you up around 7. Please be ready,' and with that he hung up.

Snapping her phone shut, she turned back to her friends.

`He's really brief, isn't he?' Sakura said, not even bothering to look up.

`Yeah,' Kaede said, standing up and going to her locker to collect her maths books. `But that's Seto.'

She heard coughing behind her and turned around to see Joey having a completely fake coughing fit, as he always did whenever she mentioned Seto, which actually wasn't that often.

`Sorry,' Joey said between forced coughs. `I just...have something wrong...with my throat. Terrible cough...terrible.'

Kaede rolled her eyes, hardly able to believe that she was seen going out with such a loser. As she walked back to her desk, Joey got up to go to his locker, and as he past her by she stuck out her leg in front of him and he stripped over, landing on his stomach on the floor.

Ignoring his swearing, Kaede shoved her books in her satchel and lay down on the table. She didn't mind being a dog to Joey, especially at the moment, but it was getting really boring, and she didn't want to lose him as a friend, although she thought that maybe she already had.

But the bell rang, bursting her thoughts, and she, Yami and Tea say goodbye to everyone and go to maths.

Kaede sat in the life guard's chair at the swimming pool, bored as usual. Nothing happened, except she had to tell these girls to leave the pool because they were running around the pool edge. She twirled the string of her whistle around her finger and forced herself to stay awake.

She was actually nearly asleep when she heard a sudden shouting. `JOEY! WHY THE HELL DID YOU BRING MAI ALONG? YOU ALWAYS BRING HER TO EVERYTHING!'

Kaede jumped three feet into the air when she heard this. She stood up on the chair and stared over the pool towards the entrance. There they were, every single one of them, Sakura, Yuula, Tea, Ana, Mai, Joey, Honda, Yami, Ryou, Duke, Seto, Takumi, Marc, Tenshi and Mokuba, all wearing swimsuits and all with little blue bands around their wrists indicating that they have paid to use the monster island that was currently being inflated at one side of the pool. Tea was facing Joey, her face red, and obviously it was her who had been shouting.

She blushed when Mai made a strange noise. `Sorry Mai, I do like you very much, it's just Joey NEVER asks!'

`That's fine,' Mai laughed. `Now where's Kaede?'

They all looked over at where she said and waved. It was at that moment when Kaede wished she

would just have normal friends.

When the monster island was set up, all of them began mucking around and shrieking at the top of their voices. Kaede was unable to keep up with all the rules that they broke. She just let one of her fellow life guards take her place on the chair and grabbed several buckets and her store of ice. She poured some cold water from the tapes into the buckets and added the ice, twenty ice cubes into every bucket. She stood them next to her on the side of the pool closest to the monster island and every time Joey went by she threw the contents of the bucket at him, laughing at how he immediately threw himself into the pool, never making it to the other end of the island.

After ten minutes of this she decided that she should join in their frolicking, and asked her boss if she could make up the extra hours some other time.

`No, you'll still be working, but you'll be like our spy among them,' Kyoko grinned at her. `When one of them put even a toe out of line, blow your whistle and send them out.'

Kaede shrugged her shoulders, unsure whether Kyoko was joking or not. She stripped into her one piece swim suit underneath her red polo top and blue shorts and dived into the pool, swimming up to her friends.

`I thought you were working!' Seto yelled when he saw her.

`I was, but then you guys happened!' She yelled back, hugging Sakura, Tea and Ana when she arrived. She just waved at the others, and ignored Joey, who was once again having a coughing fit. Instead of retaliating, she completely ignored him and had several swimming races with the others, winning them all. Whilst she was ignoring him, Joey, sulking, pulled Mai with him onto the monster island and began running up and down it, yelling, refusing to get off it and jumping up and down. One of the guy life guards got so pissed off with him he jumped on at the start, reached Joey and threw him off. Joey hit the water with a tremendous splash, and as soon as he surfaced every life guard on duty blew their whistles and Joey was forced to sit on the side, dripping wet, next to the open door with no towel, freezing his arse off, whilst the life guards passing him threw Kaede's store of icy water at him.

Nothing happened for about half an hour, until Ana, Yuula, Mokuba and Tenshi began to play a game, seeing how long each of them could hold their breath underwater for. Ana dived down to the bottom of the pool, sat down on the bottom and stayed there. A whole minute passed, and Ana was still on the bottom of the pool, and not even a bubble of air had broken the surface of the water above her head.

Kaede watched from the side of the pool where she sat, talking to Seto, Sakura and Yami, and got increasingly worried. She looked at the clock on the wall, getting worried. She knew that she should do something. She jumped back into the pool and dived down to Ana, grabbing her by the arm and dragging her back to the surface with her.

`Aww!' Ana said when her head broke the surface. `I could have gone on for ages.'

`Out, now,' Kaede said shortly, pointing to where Joey sat by the door. Muttering, Ana climbed out of the pool and sat next to Joey, and had to sit there enduring the icy water and cold breeze.

After an hour more, their two hours were up and they had to get out and get changed. The girls said goodbye to the boys, and went to the showers in the changing rooms to wash the chlorine off their skin. Kaede and Yuula had to share a shower, each fighting over the hot water. They dressed and left the changing rooms, meeting up with the guys in the reception. Kaede waved goodbye to Kyoko and walked out into the night with them, for the first time in the longest time, together again at last.

25 - Date at the Chinese Restaurant

Date at the Chinese Restaurant

The next night after showering, Kaede stood in her room, dressed only in her underwear and a dressing robe, with her wardrobe door open, picking out dress after dress, throwing each discarded one onto the floor.

There was a knock on her door and her grandmother entered, smiling. Kaede beamed at her and turned back to her wardrobe. She picked out her dark purple dress that she had worn to the ball where she had first danced with Seto. She smiled as she touched it, remembering how much she had tried to convince herself that she hated him.

She hung it up on her dressing screen, smiling at it fondly, then she realised her grandmother was still in the room. She apologised quickly, but her grandmother waved away her apology.

‘No, don't worry, I know what you young people are like, so I don't mind.’

Kaede smiled and looked expectantly at her grandmother.

‘Yes, well, I was just coming up here to tell you to enjoy yourself,’ her grandmother smiled back at her. ‘And I thought you might like my advice.’

‘No, it's okay, I'm alright, just trying to find a dress,’ Kaede flapped.

Her grandmother pushed past her to the wardrobe and began pulling out dresses at random.

Kaede sat on her bed and watched, occasionally looking at the clock. It was getting gradually closer to seven o'clock and she hadn't done any make up or chosen what to wear. Seto would be so mad if she was late, and so she started flapping her hands in urgency, and began to pace up and down her room, muttering continuously.

‘Here,’ her grandmother held out a dress. Kaede took it and examined it. It was dark blue, with a slightly floaty skirt and with the straps hanging delicately off the shoulders, held up at the chest by a slight corset inside the dress itself. Kaede quickly kissed her grandmother's cheek and ran behind the screen to put it on. She curled her hair up tightly and pinned it up. She put on a little flower necklace and some dangly earrings and stepped into some delicate little high heeled shoes.

She ran downstairs and grabbed a coat just as a black limousine rolled into the driveway.

‘Bye, see you guys later,’ Kaede waved at her grandparents as she ran out of the house. She climbed

into the back of the limousine where Seto was sitting. Kaede slid over the seats and kissed his on the cheek, then leant against him as the limo began to move out of her driveway and out of her street.

`So, where are we going?' Kaede asked as Seto put his arm around her shoulders.

`You'll see,' Seto grinned. Kaede watched through the window as they drove past familiar streets, people staring and pointing at the limo, keen to see who was inside it. Kaede smiled as she remembered that she used to be like that, wanting to be inside the limo, chatting to the rich people who could afford such luxury. Now she hated the stares, wishing that for once they could just go out in her crappy van or a run down car, because at least then they wouldn't draw so much attention to themselves.

She sat up as the limo slowed down, looking around her. They stopped outside the beautiful Chinese restaurant The Golden Dragon. The outside was a really traditional Chinese building, and as Seto pushed Kaede inside just in front of him and the waitresses took her coat from her and lead her to their table, right next to a large window, overlooking the harbour. She sat down and looked around her, stunned.

Seto sat down opposite her, grinning at the look on her face. She looked up at him and suddenly realised what had happened. `How...what...ahhh!'

`Your grandparents told me that this was your favourite restaurant, so I decided that I should bring you here.'

Kaede stared at him for several moments, letting the fact that he had gone behind her back with her grandparents slowly sink in. She would have strangled him if she hadn't also taken into account that he had done this for her, and was spared the embarrassment of not being able to think of a good reply to him by the waitress bring them a bottle of champagne and the menus. Kaede took a sip of champagne and remembered she hadn't said thank you yet. `Oh, thank you so much, Seto,' she spluttered quickly, not wanting him to think her ungrateful.

`Don't mention it,' Seto shook his head, smiling at her. Kaede smiled back at him and looked down at her menu. She loved this restaurant, and whenever she came, which wasn't very often, she usually had the same thing, but now she wanted something that the two of them could share.

Seto seemed to be thinking the same thing, because when their waitress returned he asked for their two persons meal. The waitress nodded, and then left with the order. Seto leaned forward and looked at Kaede seriously for a second, then looked away.

`Um, what?' Kaede asked, reaching over the table. Seto looked back and took a deep breath.

`I have something that I have been meaning to return to you for a long time. I am so sorry that I took it, but please forgive me, because I had too,' Seto said slowly, letting it all sink in.

Kaede had just taken another sip of champagne, and had to shake her head several times to clear it. She vowed never to drink champagne again when she was with Seto, it just complicated things.

`Well, what it is?' she asked, raking her brain trying to imagine what it could possibly be. She couldn't

think of anything, because there was nothing she didn't have that she had lost recently. She looked at him questionably, and so he sighed, removing a small box from his coat pocket. He handed it to her, and she took it, looking suspiciously at it. She laid it on the table and opened it slowly.

Inside lay her mother's necklace. Kaede choked when she saw it, almost not recognising it. But then the memories of it came flooding back to her, the hospital room, with the machines beeping around her as she entered. She remembered the fear she had felt as she walked over to the bed, where her mother was laid, the white sheets covering her stained with blood, her arms cut and scratched. She remembered sitting down on the edge of the bed and taking hold of her mother's hands, letting the tears roll down her face. Her mother spoke to her, telling her to remove the necklace that she was wearing. Kaede's hands had shaken as she removed it, the silver of the chain glittering underneath the harsh bright lights of the hospital. Her mother's dying words still rang out in her ears. 'Take care of it Hun, look after it just like you look after yourself.'

Kaede's eyes were filling with tears as she remembered it, and she quickly wiped them away with her napkin, and looked back down at the necklace. Its silver chain shone brighter than it had before, and the little silver figure of the ancient Egyptian goddess Isis was no longer dull and dirty, but reflected the lights of the restaurant like it was brand new. But she knew it was the same one, the golden collar around Isis's neck was the same gold, the blue of Isis's pendant was the same blue that the Ancient Egyptians used in their hieroglyphics. Kaede looked up at Seto smiling broadly, and then remembered he was the reason she didn't have it.

'Did you give me this champagne so my head would be too cloudy to slap you when you gave it back to me?' she sighed, leaning her head on her hand.

'Well, that and I know you like champagne,' Seto replied, looking slightly afraid. Kaede shook her head at him, smiling slightly. She got slowly to her feet and walked around the table to him. He looked away as she got closer, as if afraid that she was going to hit him. She knelt down next to him and turned his head to meet hers.

'Thank you so much,' she said, quickly kissing him and then sat back down in her seat. She held the necklace in her hand, turning it over in her fingers. She looked up at Seto, who was looking at it strangely.

'How did you get that necklace in the first place?' he asked.

'It belonged to my mother, and has been our family heirloom for centuries,' Kaede replied, holding it tightly in her hands. She placed it back in the box and shut the lid, wanting to protect it, desperate not to have it taken away from her again.

'Kaede,' Seto leaned forwards to whisper across the table. 'What happened to your parents?'

Kaede's breath caught in her throat as she heard this, and tried to breathe again, her hands shaking. She closed her eyes, trying to phrase it in her mind, but the words didn't seem to click in her mind.

'Well,' she started, opening her eyes and biting her lip, trying to stop herself trembling.

'Just before I came to Japan, my parents were working at the tomb of one of the Pharaohs of Egypt. My

sister Lara and my brother Sho were helping them with their work one day, and I had been sent to the library in the nearest town to take out some books for my parents to use. Whilst I was gone, the tomb they were in collapsed while they and some of their workers were all still in there,' Kaede stopped for a breath, and dried her eyes on her napkin again. She took another breath and then continued. 'The surviving workers tried to dig them out, because they could hear their screaming, but the only one they managed to get to in time was my mother. She had been crushed by a large boulder, and was rushed to the nearest hospital. I meet her there and she gave me this necklace, just before she died.'

Kaede swallowed as the memory of that moment swam into her head. She saw herself taking the necklace from her mother and watching as her mother's eyes clouded over and her whole body went limp, and the hand that she still held loosened its grip on her own hand, and she was gone, walking to a place where Kaede couldn't follow her. She remembered her own helplessness and her loneliness when she attended the funeral, dresses from head to toe in black, face covered by a black veil.

For weeks afterwards black was all she wore, until she meet her friends. With their help she stopped crying herself to sleep every night, stopped hating herself because she wasn't there with them at the time and because she couldn't be with them.

Seto had stood up and walked over to Kaede's side of the table. He knelt down beside Kaede's chair and put his arms around her. Even as she was hugging him back, she still refused to cry anymore. She choked back the tears and let go off him, and sat upright in her chair again. Seto too stood back up to go and sit in his chair, but suddenly behind them was a huge crash. Both of them whipped around in time to see the glass of the front of the restaurant shimmering to the ground like a waterfall, showering the tables next to it.

Two cars from the road had smashed into the front of the restaurant. The noise of the traffic outside flooded the restaurant, and so did the sound of screaming.

Kaede jumped up from her seat and ran to the front of the hotel, where most of the people who had been sitting near the window had jumped up when they saw the car coming. All of them, except a little girl who was stuck beneath one of the cars. Kaede flung herself onto the ground, feeling some of the glass beneath her cutting into her legs and stomach, and as she crawled about on her hands and knees more got suck into her flesh. She bit her lip in pain but slid forward to help the girl.

She reached forward and took hold of the girls arm, trying to pull her to safety. Several of the people from the restaurant ran forward to try and help her. As much as she pulled, Kaede couldn't get this girl free.

'She's stuck underneath the car, you're going to have to lift it up,' Kaede yelled, and the people helping her ran forward to lift up one end of the car. The girl cried in pain as it came free, and when there was space, Kaede tugged on her arm again and she came sliding across the heavily polished wooden floor. Kaede hugged the girl tightly to her and pulled her away from the wreckage.

A woman who was apparently the girl's mother ran forward to retrieve her. She swept the little girl into her arms and kissed her repeatedly, thanking Kaede as she did.

But Kaede didn't hear her, because she had gone back to the cars to help the drivers. She crouched

beside one of the cars that had been turned over on impact and looked inside. There was a man inside, but he was apparently unharmed. Some of the waiters pulled him to safety. Kaede was about to go to the other car and look inside but Seto grabbed her arm.

`What are you doing, these people need our help?' Kaede yelled at him.

`I know, and that car,' he pointed to the car that Kaede had just looked into. `Is my car.'

Kaede's face went white. Seto looked as though he was about to be sick. He jumped over the debris of some of the tables and ran towards the flipped over car, ripping open the door to the passenger door and ducked inside. Kaede heard a shout and swearing, and ran over to help. Seto emerged carrying Tenshi, who was unconscious. Kaede checked her body for any breaks or fractures, but she was okay, except for a little cut on the head. Kaede grabbed one of the table clothes from a table standing nearby and used it to stem the blood seeping through her hair.

She looked up as Seto emerged from the car again. Kaede gasped in horror as she saw it was Mokuba he had in his arms this time, and that Mokie's little body was covered in cuts. His head was bleeding from his ear and he too was out cold, but Kaede feared more for his safety than Tenshi's. Tenshi would probably have mild concussion, but Mokuba needed to get to a hospital, and as fast as they could get him there.

But, drowning out her thoughts of Mokuba, someone who was helping them had checked inside the other car and pulled out the unconscious body of a young girl. Kaede saw that the girl's blonde hair and pink top were stained red with blood. Someone was tapping on Kaede's arm, but she ignored them, and handed Tenshi to them, getting up as if in a daze. She slowly walked over to the other car, and sat down next to the girl, brushing her hair out of her face, covering it with blood from her own cuts. She wiped away as much as she can, tears streaming down her face as she looked at her. She vaguely heard somebody behind her calling her name and the sound of the approaching ambulance. Kaede just sat there with the girl, crying her eyes out for her. It wasn't until Seto came to get her to come in the ambulance with him, Mokuba and Tenshi that she took any notice of the world around her at all. Seto knelt down next to her, trying to recognise the face through the blood. He gasped when he recognised her hair and face.

`Yuula.'

Fresh tears sprung to Kaede's eyes when Seto said her name. This time she couldn't even bring herself to wipe away the tears. She just watched as the lights of the ambulance neared and she stood when Yuula was placed onto a stretcher. She followed the stretcher and climbed into the ambulance. She looked around just as the door to the ambulance shut and saw Joey standing watching her, guilt on every corner of his face.

26 - Tormented dreams

Tormented dreams

Kaede sat in the hospital room, watching Yuula's sleeping form, two days after the crash. In that time there had been no change in Yuula's progress, and although her doctors said they were hopeful for her safe recovery, Kaede seriously doubted that they meant it.

That day a special assembly had been called and they were told that Yuula had been in a car crash and was currently in hospital, breathing through a tube. Although Kaede had already known, it didn't make hearing it any less painful. Seto had called her grandparents and forced her to leave the hospital with them, although she had protested. Her grandfather had to pick her up and drag her away before she gave up attempting to stay.

When she had arrived home she let her grandmother take the glass out of her cuts and clean them without argument or complaint. The dress she had been wearing was ripped off her back by her grandmother, who forced her to shower before she bandaged them. Kaede hoped that her dress wouldn't be thrown away, but she knew as well as anybody that those blood stains wouldn't come out.

Although her dress was gone, the necklace was still with her. Kaede had left it in the hospital beside Yuula's bed, hoping that it would bring her good luck and a speedy recovery. But the necklace's magic wasn't working just yet.

During the assembly, when they were told, Kaede had looked over at Joey, who was the only other person who knew. He hadn't told her why he had been there that night, and really didn't care anymore. She was just glad he had thoughtfulness to ask how Yuula was doing, and feel sad that she was injured.

When they were told about it, almost their whole year started to cry. Sakura, Ana and Tea were huddles together, tears streaking their faces. Kaede forced herself not to cry, and found herself moving between each group of people, comforting and reassuring them. Duke was shaking so much when he heard, and as Kaede past the boy's toilets with Sakura, Tea and Ana, Kaede was sure she heard him crying inside.

After the assembly their group of friends were allowed to leave the school, and the nine of them left and walked to the hospital in silence.

They crowded in Yuula's room, Kaede holding the necklace in her bandaged hands, her grip on it so tight that it drew blood. Each of them took it in turns to sit next to Yuula's bed and "talk" to her, although Kaede passed on this, leaving the silence of the room. She walked down the corridor to the children's ward to see Tenshi.

She was sitting up in her bed reading when Kaede entered. Tenshi's cheeks had tear streaks down them

and her eyes were red and swollen from crying. Kaede sat down next to her, waiting for her to speak.

`Mokie is still unconscious,' Tenshi said after taking a deep breath and still her voice shook as she said it. Kaede couldn't think of anything to say to this, so after asking how Tenshi was feeling, she went to visit Seto.

Inside Mokuba's room, Seto was sitting in one of the armchairs. He too looked as though he had been crying recently, and wiped his eyes when he saw Kaede enter. She looked over to the bed where Mokuba still lay as though he was asleep.

`Still no change?' Kaede asked, kneeling beside his chair.

Seto shook his head and tears began to fill his eyes again. She sat on the edge of the seat and put her arms around him as the tears spilled down his cheeks.

`How's Yuula?' he asked, wiping his eyes after a few minutes of crying into Kaede's shoulder.

`Same as Mokuba,' Kaede muttered, and hugged Seto even tighter.

They sat like that for what felt like hours, until Kaede pulled herself free and wiped the tears away from Seto's face. She kissed him on the cheek and left him, going to check up on the others. But when she arrived back in Yuula's room, they were gone, so she sat alone next to Yuula's seemingly lifeless body.

Kaede pulled the chair in the room next to Yuula's bed, so that she could watch her friend and check on her to see if she showed any signs of life.

But soon Kaede rested her head on her arms that were folded on the bed next to Yuula. Completely exhausted, she fell asleep as soon as she closed her eyes.

Hebeny knelt in the temple, pretending to be deep in prayer. But every so often she heard the door to the temple open, and would glance up at the door to see who it was. But each time she was disappointed.

She went back to her prayer, and whispered under her breath, `Please let him arrive soon, please let him be alright.'

As soon as she said this, the door banged open and heavy footsteps sounded on the marble floor of the temple. Hebeny raised her head and jumped up, seeing that it was Priest Seto. She ran forwards and when she reached him he lifted her into the air and swung her around him. Putting her back on the floor, he kissed her passionately and held her close to him.

Suddenly she pulled away, her eyes searching the temple for anybody else who might be there, watching them. Seeing no one, she sighed and rested her head on Seto's shoulder.

'We have to be more careful,' she said, looking up into his eyes. 'If anybody saw, if anybody knew, the things they can do to us are terrible. You could be banished if you are seen with me, and there is no end to what they can do to me.'

Seto shook his head. 'I don't care anymore; all this lying is killing us.'

'Don't say that, you know what they will do if they find out as well as I do, perhaps even better,' Hebeny scolded him. 'They will do everything they can to hurt us, especially me; I'm only a slave, they can do whatever they want with me.'

'Sssh, don't talk like that,' Seto said, hugging her to him. 'You're not a slave anymore, you hear me.'

He took her and led her out of the temple. She quickly took off the necklace he had given her and put on a pair of old, worn down sandals. Whenever they were around other people she had to pretend to be his slave, because if anybody knew that they were more than that, well, Hebeny hated to think about the consequences.

She walked just behind him, as slaves do, and ignored any stares they attracted. She knew as well as any that any girl slave is usually subjected to rape by her master, and that was clearly what these people were thinking. Little they know, Hebeny thought as she stared right back at them, her head raised in pride and dignity.

As Seto led her through the town, they entered into the market area. Looking around her with caution as she always did when entering here, Hebeny slowly and reluctantly followed Seto into the market, knowing all too well that it was the breeding ground for thieves, spies, prostitutes and dangerous gangs. Seto strode through without any fear, so Hebeny ran to catch up with him, confident that he would help protect her.

Seto stopped at one of the stalls selling jewellery. Hebeny hovered behind him, anxious not to linger for long. Usually when she and Sanura were made to run errands for Seto or Isis, Hebeny would make them sprint through the market, not stopping until they were as far away as possible. Waiting for too long in there could cost you your life.

Hebeny was watching Seto purchase a necklace when they heard a loud screaming. Hebeny looked towards where it was coming from, and then back at Seto, who was also looking for where the sound was coming from.

Hebeny heard the footsteps of someone running towards them and gripped a knife she had concealed beneath her clothes, just in case. She turned around to face whoever it was and to her relief saw it was Isis. She was about to greet her but Isis shook her head.

'No time, come with me quickly, they've got Sanura,' she gasped between breaths, and then she took off again, in the directions of the screams. Hebeny ran after them, determined not to be left alone in that horrible place.

They turned a corner and a horrible sight met their eyes. There was a huge crowd of people circled around the wall of one of these buildings, shouting and jeering at the figure of a small girl strung up on the wall. They were throwing stones at her and calling her names. Hebeny recognised the blonde hair and ran forward, realising that it was Sanura. She pushed through the crowd, shouting.

`STOP IT, LEAVE HER ALONE!' Hebeny shouted at them. They jeered even louder and pushed her to the ground. She snarled and got to her feet, still yelling at them to stop.

Isis and Seto joined her, and seeing them the angry mob began to move away, muttering about protecting "The mad and demon possessed freak". Seto lifted Hebeny onto his shoulders so that she could reach Sanura and cut her down. She took out her knife and sliced the ropes that had been cutting into Sanura's wrists, and lifted her over her shoulder so she could carry her down. Isis helped to lower them both to the ground, and then ran off towards the palace. `I'm going to find Herya, she can help her.'

Seto took off one of his robes and wrapped it around Sanura as Hebeny examined her wounds. She had been stabbed several times in the chest and the neck and blood was covering her white robes. Her wrists had been slashed, and the rope had been caught in these cuts, causing her even more pain. She had bruises and little cuts around her body and face from the stones they had thrown at her, and her face was swollen and caked with blood.

Hebeny put her ear to Sanura's nose and listened. She was still breathing. Hebeny shook her, desperate to wake her. She shook her shoulders and slapped her face, desperate for her to live.

Suddenly Sanura coughed, her whole body lifting with the movement. Hebeny hugged her as she did, hearing her cough loudly in her ear. When she held her at arms length, Hebeny saw that new wet blood had appeared at Sanura's mouth. Touching her robes, she saw that they had been covered in fresh blood, brought up in Sanura's coughing. Hebeny pushed Sanura to the ground, urging her to lie down. Seto began wrapping her wounds in the robe he had covered her with, tearing it into shreds while Hebeny desperately questioned Sanura.

`What happened, why did they do this to you?'

Sanura groaned, and coughed again; bringing even more blood spilling out of her mouth. Hebeny wiped it away hopelessly, asked her again, shaking her hard so she would answer her.

`I was walking through the market,' Sanura groaned, closing her eyes. `And I was talking to you Hebeny and you Seto, and Isis and my mother too, and everything was okay, and then these people grabbed me.'

Her voice was fading, and Hebeny shook her again. `Sanura, talk to me, don't close your eyes,' she shook her even harder, gritting her teeth. `Look at me, Sanura, talk to me.'

Sanura opened her eyes again and continued, her voice slightly stronger. `They took away my necklaces and rings, and forced me into this hut. They ripped my clothes and took my knife, stabbing my neck and chest. Then they tied my hands with ropes and hung me up on the wall, and all of those people started throwing stones at me.'

Hebeny was biting her lip so hard it bled, but she didn't notice. She took Sanura's hand in hers, and hugged Sanura to her. Sanura's blood rubbed against her white robes, staining them red. But Hebeny didn't care anymore, and let the tears spill down her cheeks. She closed her eyes and rocked backwards and forwards, still holding Sanura to her, still holding her hand. But soon she was holding onto nothing more than an empty shell, the hand she was holding had relaxed, gone limp, and she could not longer feel Sanura's warm breath on her shoulder. Already her skin was turning cold, and Hebeny could feel no heartbeat.

Hebeny let go of Sanura, laying her back on the ground, and standing up. She stumbled away and leaned over with her hand against the wall closest to them, the wall that Sanura had been strung to only minutes previously. She arched her back and retched, sobbing. She stood up and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand, leaving her tears that were still rolling down her cheeks. Seto had stood up too, and was standing next to Sanura's body, watching her. Hebeny staggered towards him, and fell over. Seto ran forward and knelt next to her, holding her to him. He brushed away her hair that was stuck to her face by Sanura's drying blood and held her close to him. Seto's face was stained with tears as well, and his eyes filled with fresh tears every time he looked over at Sanura's crumpled body.

When Hebeny had stopped crying enough to speak she asked, 'Why was she saying she spoke to her mother? I thought her mother was dead.'

'She is,' Seto replied sadly. 'But Sanura, well, she wasn't like other people. Before she came to us she lived with her mother in a country not far from here. Her mother was thought to do evil magic and was killed by the villages, who drove Sanura away. She collapsed in the desert and Isis and I found her. We brought her back here, but she didn't remember much of what happened to her. She forgot how to speak or act around people. We tried to teach her, but she never understood things properly, and was considered to be slightly mad.'

Hebeny shook her head, not wanting to hear anymore. Seto took her hand in his and gripped in hard, pulling her even closer to her. She buried her face in his robes, and wept even harder.

Seto stroked her hair, and looked up only when he heard footsteps approaching. Isis had returned with Herya, and was explaining what happened, but she saw Seto and Hebeny sitting slightly away from Sanura's body, and stopped in her tracks. Herya saw to and jogged over to Sanura's body, checking for a heartbeat. She stood up and her shoulders dropped, and a single tear rolled down her cheek, and landed next to Sanura, mingling with the dust.

27 - Sleeping, as though dead

Sleeping, as though dead

Kaede's head jerked up, ripping her out of her dream. She sat, breathing heavily, her entire body shaking.

She looked at Yuula, lying on the hospital bed, breathing through a tube. Kaede held one of Yuula's hands in both of hers. Unnoticed tears spilled down her cheeks as she prayed for Yuula to wake up.

Hearing footsteps behind her, she stood up, turned around, and came face to face with Duke. Noticing her tears, she hastily dried her eyes and spoke in an extremely shaky voice.

'What are you doing here?' she asked. 'I thought you guys had all left?'

'We did, but I went to the shops to bring her these,' he held out the flowers he had been carrying. 'I thought, you know, when she wakes up...'

Kaede smiled at him, and felt tears forming again. She wiped her eyes quickly and was about to leave when she felt Duke pulling her into a hug.

Kaede, startled, did nothing, until she actually noticed what was going on and hugged him back. 'I know you're more her friend than I am,' Duke's voice shook as he said this. 'And you have more right to cry than I do-'

'Don't be thick,' Kaede laughed through her tears. 'You have as much of a right to cry as I do.'

Kaede pulled away from him and saw tears now stained his cheeks. She patted him on the shoulder and they sat down together, waiting, in silence.

Kaede was thinking things over in her head, remembering her dream. Sanura was Yuula's past life, she felt sure of it. And now Sanura was dead. Maybe this was a sign. She hoped it wasn't.

'Um, Duke,' Kaede said, breaking the silence. Duke looked up, his eyes red from crying.

'When I was waiting in here, I fell asleep, and had this dream. Yuula, or someone really like Yuula, was in it.'

Duke leaned forward, suddenly interested.

'And, this girl, she died,' Kaede said, biting her lip to stop the tears she knew would flow if she didn't

control herself.

Duke stared, and shook his head. He buried his face in his hands. `No,' Kaede heard him whisper. `No, she won't, she can't.'

Kaede stood up and jogged over to him. She kneeled beside him and patted him on the arm. `I'm sure it won't happen,' she said half heartedly. `She won't honestly; it was just a dream, Duke. She's not really going to die.'

Duke lifted his face up again. Fresh tears were falling down his face. Kaede patted his shoulder again, and shook her head. `It was just a dream.'

`But you think she might die, don't you?'

Kaede couldn't say anything to him after that, and returned to her seat. He sat in his chair, crying, until the tears had dried, and he had returned to normal, or as normal as he could be. Kaede wished she hadn't said anything, and just returned to that horrible silence while they waited.

Kaede was sitting right next to the hospital bed and held Yuula's hand in hers, and was just about to say she was going to go home when she felt Yuula's hand twitch. Kaede opened her hand and saw Yuula's fingers had curled.

Kaede jumped up and leaned over Yuula. She watched Yuula's face, and saw her eyelids flicker.

`Duke,' Kaede yelled, grinning. `She's awake, she's awake.'

Duke ran over and watched, and slowly, Yuula's eyelids opened. She blinked in the harsh, bright hospital lights. She groaned, covering her face with her hands.

`Kaede? Duke?' Yuula's voice came out croaky and uncertain.

`Yeah, it's us,' Kaede grinned at her friend. `You alright?'

Yuula nodded slowly, grimacing through the pain. `What day is it?'

`Monday, you've been unconscious for two days,' Duke said, smiling down at her.

Kaede looked at Duke's face, full of love, and decided that maybe they should be alone together.

`I'll go get your doctor, and a cup of tea or something. Do you guys want anything?'

`No thanks,' said Yuula, and Duke just shook his head. Kaede left them and ran to the doctor's office. She knocked quickly and let herself in before she was answered.

`My friend, Yuula Miharu, she's awake,' Kaede said.

The doctor jumped up and ran to Yuula's room to go check on her. Kaede followed him half the way, but

stopped at the hospital vending machine. She put in some coins and pushed the button for tea. When it came out, she took one sip, disgusted by how sweet it was, but it was the only source of caffeine, so she put up with it. She wandered back to Mokuba's room to see how Seto was coping.

She entered and saw Seto asleep in his chair. Kaede knelt down beside him, and set her cup on the table. She was gazing up at him, considering waking him, but she heard a voice behind her.

`Hello, who are you?'

Kaede whipped around and saw a girl standing beside Mokuba's bed, holding his hand. Kaede stood up and looked this girl up and down. She was tall, and her hair was bright orange, and underneath her eyes were little pink lines. She wore a long sleeved top with a shorter baggy sleeved short on over the top, and jeans.

`I'm Kaede,' she said quietly, and stood on the other side of Mokuba's bed.

`Hi, I'm Cira!' she said brightly. Kaede stared at her. `You know, Seto's sister.'

`Seto has a sister?' Kaede glanced over to where Seto lay, fast asleep.

`He hasn't told you about me?' Cira demanded, and dropped Mokuba's hand, and strode over to where Seto sat. She kicked him roughly in the shins and he woke up with a grunt.

Rubbing his eyes, he looked up at Cira, and jumped to his feet. He ran over to Mokuba's bed, hardly noticing Kaede was there. He took Mokuba's hand, and his face fell when he saw that Mokuba was still unconscious. He turned back to Cira, suddenly angry.

`I told you not to wake me up until Mokuba came round!' Seto fumed.

Cira stared back at him and crossed her arms. `You didn't tell Kaede that you had a sister!'

`I don't!'

`What am I then?'

`Adopted,' Seto sneered back at her. Kaede hit him on the back, and he turned around, really noticing her for the first time since he had woken up.

`Ouch, what was that for?'

`You should be nice to your sister,' she said, and slipped behind him, picking up her tea from the table and hurried out of the door. She heard him following her, ignored him, and ran as fast as she could back to Yuula's room. She stopped outside, watching through the glass as Yuula talked with Duke.

Seto stood next to her, trying to explain. `It isn't like she is my real sister, otherwise you would have met her ages ago, oh come on Kaede, does it really matter?'

Kaede held up her hand to stop him as she watched Duke move towards Yuula. She shushed Seto and tiptoed to the door.

She almost laughed when Duke hugged Yuula, but to her surprise, Yuula hugged him back. She was even more surprised to see tears in Yuula's eyes. She strained to listen to what they said.

'I love you Yuula,' Duke said, and tears fell down his face as he said these words.

'I love you too,' Yuula replied, and Kaede jumped when she heard this. But then: 'Ryou.'

Duke jumped a foot in the air and stared at Yuula mouth open.

Kaede swallowed, suddenly uncomfortable in this atmosphere. Yuula had noticed she was there, and was looking at her looking at Duke looking at Yuula.

'Oh,' she whispered. 'Oh, my, GOD!'

28 - Yuula, schizophrenic?

Yuula, schizophrenic?

Kaede ran into the room and grabbed the furious Duke by the arm, dragging him out of the room. She slammed the door behind him and leaned against it so he couldn't get back in.

`Right,' she said. `Talk!'

So Duke began to talk, calming down a little as he did so. He and Yuula had been talking properly for the first time since they had been going out; she laughed at all his jokes and smiled at him constantly. He had gotten excited, thinking that she wanted to get back together with him, and asked her back out with him. She had said yes, and then he hugged her, and told her he loved her.

`And you saw the rest,' he said, going red again.

Kaede tried to look as pensive as she could without bursting out laughing. She talked to Duke for a bit, calming him down, until he agreed that maybe he should go home.

`Okay, well, I'll come back tomorrow to check on her,' he said as he left. Kaede wasn't sure that was such a good idea, but she nodded her head anyway.

Seto returned to Mokuba's room while Kaede entered Yuula's room. Yuula was sitting in her bed, looking bored, as though nothing had just happened.

Kaede shut the door and turned to Yuula, crossing her arms. `What the hell just happened?'

Yuula grinned at her. `Ryou and I are going out, isn't it amazing?'

`Yuula, that was Duke!' Kaede said wearily.

`Ew, gross, of course it wasn't Duke, I'm not going to go out with Duke ever again, why would I say I'd go out with Duke again?'

Kaede stared at her. `Are you sure you're not going mad?'

`Absolutely sure,' Yuula nodded her head at Kaede.

`Sure you're not schizophrenic?'

`Yep, pretty sure,' Yuula beamed at her.

Kaede left the room and ran to the doctor's office. She knocked and waited for an answer.

`Come in,' the doctor said, and she entered to see him sitting on a chair, with his legs up on the desk in front of him.

`Hello, Miss Miharu's friend, I presume?' he smiled when he saw her.

`Yes, well, I was just wondering, is anything wrong with Yuula still, because she seems a little bit strange,' Kaede asked.

`I'd say it's just shock, now don't you worry,' he said when Kaede tried to interrupt him. `She'll be out of here in a jiffy, not to worry.'

`I think she's hallucinating,' Kaede said. `She thought that one of our friends was someone else just now.'

The doctor looked slightly concerned at this. `What does this friend look like?'

`Long black hair in a pony tail, green eyes, random bit of make up on his face, dice earring, was wearing red,' Kaede said, listing them on her fingers.

`And what does this other person look like?'

`White hair hanging down over his face, posh English accent, brown eyes, usually wears a cricket jumper,' she ticked off on her fingers again.

The doctor immediately jumped to his feet and ran out of the room to check on Yuula. Kaede wandered around the hospital, not knowing what to do. It was getting dark but she felt as though she couldn't leave now, not when Yuula had just woken up and Mokuba could wake at any minute.

She ran back to Mokuba's room, feeling like an intruder on the family's togetherness (even though one of them was unconscious), and knocked on the door.

Seto opened it, beaming at her as she walked through the doorway. She saw Cira was still sat beside Mokuba, and grinned at her when she looked up.

Seto stood behind her with his arms around her waist. She still held the necklace of Isis in her hand, and Seto took it and tied it around her neck. She shivered as the cold metal touched her skin, and Seto held her even tighter than he had before.

Kaede looked at the clock on the wall. It was nearly 7 o'clock. She hadn't realised that she had spent nearly her whole day in the hospital, and turned around to Seto, preparing to say goodbye.

`Well, I should be going,' she said, and hugged him tightly. He hugged her back, but suddenly his arms loosened and his head lifted up, looking over her shoulder. She turned around as well, and saw Cira now with her arms wrapped around a startled and blurry-eyed Mokuba.

Seto immediately ran over to the bed and hugged Mokuba.

`Are you alright?' Seto asked anxiously. `Do you have a headache or anything? Are you too cold? Too hot?'

`Seto, shut up,' Cira said, beaming at Mokuba. She turned around to Kaede and grinned. `Let's go find the doctor, shall we?'

Together they went in search of the doctor and found him in Yuula's room, doing some mental tests. Yuula grinned when they came in, and so did the doctor, jumping to his feet and preparing to leave the room.

`Um, my little brother has woken up,' Cira grabbed the doctor as he past, forcing him to stay.

He smiled with relief and ran off to Mokuba's room. Cira stared after him, her expression mirrored on Kaede's face.

`What the hell is wrong with him?' Cira asked bewilderedly.

Kaede grinned, and looked over at Yuula, who was humming insanelly, a scary smile plastered across her face. `I think that's why,' Kaede said, pointing towards Yuula.

Cira looked slightly startled and suggested they go back to see Mokuba and Seto, NOW! They left Yuula, who had begun to mutter to one of the teddy bears left as a Get Well Soon present, repeating, `I'm gonna eat your toes!' in a really scary voice.

Kaede and Cira returned to Mokuba's room to find that the doctor had already left, and Seto leaning over the bed, hugging Mokuba. Seto looked up when Kaede and Cira entered and walked over to Kaede, who had stopped at the foot of the bed.

`I'd better get going,' she said when he reached her. `My grandparents are probably freaking out about where I am.'

Seto looked disappointed, but nodded, and kissed her quickly as she left. She waved goodbye to Cira and Mokuba and left the hospital as quickly as she could.

29 - A New Beginning

A New Beginning

After a week, Yuula, Tenshi and Mokuba were all discharged from hospital. Tenshi was so happy to see that Mokuba was alright, she seemed to immediately become a nicer person. Mokuba was fine in everyway, and grinned at every person in the street who he saw.

Yuula's doctor announced she was not schizophrenic at all, but was that way generally, and suggested taking her to the asylum. However, as soon as she was out of hospital she returned to her old self.

Soon after the crash Ana and Honda had gone to France to stay with Ana's father and step mother, leaving Tea in tears for about a week as Marc had gone with them.

The week following Mokuba, Tenshi and Yuula's release from hospital, Seto organised a dinner for just him and Kaede at the most expensive hotel in Domino City. A limousine would arrive at 7.30 and take the two of them to the hotel.

When Seto announced this, Kaede immediately went shopping with Sakura, Tea and Yuula. She searched desperately for the most beautiful dress in the mall, Sakura, Tea and Yuula keeping up with her as best as they could.

'Kaede, you have hundreds of nice dresses,' Tea said as they ran through a shop, Kaede shook her head, and then dragged them back out of it again. 'Why can't you just wear one of the ones you already have?'

'Because I have already worn most of those,' Kaede said impatiently.

Sakura decided that she would take over again, and led Kaede to one of her favourite shops.

'Okay, so how long have you and Seto been going out?' she asked, gazing at the hangers.

'Um, I dunno, since about October,' Kaede shrugged. Sakura pulled a few dresses off the rail and stared around for more.

'And where are you guys going this evening?' Sakura asked, still searching amongst the rows of amazing dresses.

'To a hotel.'

'Which hotel?' Sakura asked impatiently.

'The Hilton,' Kaede smiled as she said it. 'We had our first ever real date there.'

Sakura stiffened, and looked at Tea and Yuula, who both were wearing identical expressions of WTF?!

Sakura looked at all the dresses in her hands and shoved them back on the rail, moving over to some extremely elegant dresses. Kaede followed her, and watched her sort through the dresses, until eventually she pulled just one from the rail.

It was a gorgeous silky silver dress tied with straps of a sort lace material, little diamond gems dotted around it ever so often. The lace for the straps connected at the back, becoming a sort of cape.

Kaede grabbed it from Sakura and ran into the changing rooms, quickly throwing it on herself. She stepped back and looked at her reflection, grinning at the dress. It felt elegantly around her feet and stomach, and the lace cape giving it a beautiful finishing touch.

She quickly bought it and then the four of them ran off around the mall, chatting about all the good times they spent here together. They laughed as Kaede told them about her disastrous break up with Joey in front of everyone in the mall, and then all ran to the make up shop for a free make over.

Kaede returned home after a wonderful day out in town and showered, blow dried and curled the front bits of her hair. She put it a pair of pearl studs and slipped into her dress, then stepped into a pair of silver kitten heels.

She ran downstairs as the limousine arrived, and kissed her grandmother goodbye. Both her grandparents were looking at her with happiness and sadness in their eyes. Kaede noticed, but she couldn't think of why this could be, and thought it rude to ask. So she waved goodbye and ran outside.

Although the silky dress was really thin, the night air was warm with the promise of a hot summer ahead of them. Kaede grinned as she waved at the driver of the limousine and climbed into the back.

Seto sat in the backseat, a glass of champagne in one hand and a red rose in the other. He handed both to Kaede and kissed her as the limousine pulled away, bound for the Hilton hotel.

The limousine stopped at the hotel and Seto climbed out, holding the door open and offering his hand to Kaede. She took it and climbed out, and the two of them entered the hotel.

Whilst Seto was getting their table sorted out, Kaede looked around the hotel reception. There was a fancy party, apparently someone's birthday, who walked through to the restaurant, and there were rich looking families who looked like they dined in places like this every night.

Kaede stared at them all, and found that she and Seto were being stared at as well. Seto was well known and rich, so Kaede found people were often looking at him, but they were looking at her as well, and whispering.

Seto finished talking to the receptionist and offered Kaede his arm. She took it, wondering what the hell was going on. Seto led her into the restaurant and immediately a live band began to play the sort of cheesy classical music that the Hilton often played, the sort that made Kaede really annoyed because it had no real beat or rhythm.

Seto smacked his head and mouthed no at the musicians. Kaede stared as he tried to mouth something else at them. The front man was obviously bad at lip reading, and almost began to play again, until the hotel manager ran onto the stage and whispered in his ear.

Everyone was staring at them, and Kaede pushed Seto a little in the shoulder and hissed, 'Can we sit down please, people are staring at us!'

Seto nodded, his eyes still closed as though pained by the band's performance. He led her to the table and they sat down, and immediately a bottle of champagne was whisked over to them.

As Kaede sipped her champagne, she noticed that the band had begun to play again, but this time it was much better, and more her style; jazzy with a hint of rock.

She immediately relaxed, and Seto must have noticed, because he became more cheerful. Their food was brought over, pre ordered by Seto, and Seto chatted about Kaiba Corp and Kaede about how rubbish school was. The conversation turned to Yuula, Mokuba and Tenshi and how they were doing since the crash.

'Yuula is okay, she is less insane than she was in the hospital, back to her normal self,' Kaede grinned. Yuula's normal self wasn't exactly normal, but it was closer to normal than she had been in the hospital.

'Mokuba is doing well too,' Seto smiled. 'And Tenshi is so much nicer now, even to me,' he added with a grin.

After their meal, another glass of champagne was served and Seto, having pre-paid for their meal, stood up, pulling Kaede up with him.

'Come on, let's go for a walk,' he grinned and they walked hand in hand out of the restaurant. The buzzing of whispers followed them out of the hall and Kaede could swear that some people were craning to look at them, expressions of disappointment on their faces.

'Um, Seto,' Kaede said as they left the hotel and crossed the street. 'What was going on back there? Why was everyone staring at us?'

'They were hoping to see a show,' Seto said quietly. They walked down the street until Seto turned them away off the street into a park. They walked hand in hand, watching as the summer sun slowly dipped behind the horizon and the stars began to come out for the night.

They came to the pond in the park, where the reflection of the newly visible moon danced on the shiny surface, as though the water was a mirror. Star light and moon light lit up Kaede's face as she beamed at Seto.

Seto returned it, and fumbled around with something in his pocket. He seemed to want to say something, but the words wouldn't form in his mouth. Kaede had only seen him like this once, and that was when he had wanted to tell her that he loved her.

She smiled at him reassuringly, just as she had done then, and took his hand. `Just tell me whatever it is, okay?' she asked gently, which seemed to give him some extra strength.

`Um, Kaede,' he said, looking at her straight in the eye. Kaede held his gaze as he took a deep breath.

`Will you, please, do me the honour...' he began, fumbling with whatever it was in his pocket. He shook his head, and knelt in front of her.

Kaede's breath caught in her throat as he pulled a small box out of his pocket, and opened it. Inside was a beautiful silver coloured ring, encrusted with several tiny diamonds,

Kaede almost fainted. She stared at Seto, and he grinned at her. She smiled faintly as he swallowed.

`Kaede, will you marry me?'

She stared, and her head raced, making her wish she was sitting down. Her hands shook as she held out her left hand, and Seto slipped the ring onto her fourth finger. She stared at it, tears filling her eyes. Seto stood up again, and put his hands on her hips, looking into her eyes lovingly. Kaede bit her lip and returned his gaze, and whispered under her breath, so that he barely heard her, `Of course I will.'

When he heard these words, Seto's heart began to race, and he held her close to him, breathing in the smell of her perfume, wanting to hold her forever. He felt her trembling, but it was a warm night. He held her away from him and looked into her eyes; they were full of tears, but she was smiling. Her hands were shaking as she took his hand in hers, and stood on tip toe to kiss him.

`I love you,' she said, the tears spilling down her cheeks. Seto held her again, her soft hair wiping the tears that now fell from his own eyes. He smiled and kissed her cheek, and then whispered into her ear, `I love you too.'

30 - Ruined happiness

Ruined happiness

The whole weekend Kaede could hardly contain her excitement. She ran home as soon as she could and told her grandparents, who immediately congratulated her and pulled out the phone book, ringing up everybody they could think of. She had to wrench the phone away from them when they threatened to ring her friends.

'I'll tell them all on Monday,' Kaede insisted, and pulled the cable out of the phone.

Her grandfather drove her into school and she ran to her classroom, pushing younger students out of the way as she past. She flung herself into their classroom, breathing hard and looking around.

Luckily everyone (except Ana and Honda) was present and she grinned.

'Guess what guys?' she grinned at them all, holding her hand behind her back, hiding her ring.

'What?' they all stared at her, looking slightly worried.

She grinned even more and held out her hand. For a moment there was silence, and then Sakura, Yuula and Tea all exploded with excitement. They ran over and grabbed Kaede's hand and dragged her over to where the others sat.

'Oh my God, how did he do it?'

'What was it like?'

'Tell me everything?'

'Did he get down on his knees and ask?'

'Did he take you out for dinner first?'

'What is this ring made of?'

'Don't ask that! How much did the bloody thing cost?'

Kaede thought her head was going to explode with all these questions. She looked around at the boys for help, but all of them were just looking, quietly interested, but obviously not going to help her; let's face it, what guy in their right mind would want to rescue someone from Sakura, Yuula AND Tea?

`Um, okay, well, we had dinner first,' Kaede began, trying to remember all their questions. `And then we went for a walk in the park. It was twilight and we were standing by the pond in the middle of the park and he asked me. Yeah, he got down onto his knees to ask me, and the ring is platinum, set with a 2 carot diamond.'

Tea beamed so much Kaede thought she was going to burst. Then she gasped suddenly.

`OH MY GOD! YOU HAVE TO HAVE A PARTY TO CELEBRATE!' Tea screamed with excitement.

Kaede just grinned; Seto was already organising one, and the wedding.

`So, when are you getting married?' Yuula asked, pushing past Tea to ask.

`Some time in the summer, probably around my birthday,' Kaede grinned.

The bell rang and reluctantly they all went to their first lessons. Kaede, Joey and Sakura all went to English, and sat at the back, talking excitedly about the wedding. Well, Kaede and Sakura were, Joey sat next to them with a face like thunder.

Kaede noticed and turned to him, trying to keep the grin off her face. `What's the matter?' she asked as kindly as she could without losing her temper.

Joey looked thoroughly pissed off when he looked at Kaede. He looked terrible, as though he hadn't been sleeping, or as though he was sick.

`Oh God, are you okay?' Kaede put her hand on his shoulder, turning around in her chair to face him properly, all traces of a smile gone.

`You know the car crash that Yuula was in?' Joey croaked as though her voice wasn't working properly.

Kaede nodded slowly. Did he think she had forgotten? How could she forget something like that?

`Well, that day I had been told by Sakura that you were seeing Seto,' Joey took a deep breath. He looked so guilty, Kaede looked at him weirdly. What was he hiding?

`Well, Mai and I had just split up, and I was-'

`WHAT?! YOU AND MAI SPLIT UP?!' Sakura shrieked, causing the people in front of them too look around angrily.

`Yeah, ages ago,' Joey said impatiently. `And I was really depressed. I had a little to drink, probably a bit to much, and I called up your grandparents, asking where you were. They told me you were at the Chinese restaurant place that you were always going on about when we were together, and I walked there. I don't know what made me do it,' he said at Kaede's horrified face. `But I needed to talk to you, I really missed you, and missed being with you.'

Joey looked down at his feet. 'I did it because I still love you.'

Kaede stared at him, her hand shaking. 'Did what Joey?'

Joey returned her gaze, and took another deep breath. 'I caused the car crash.'

Kaede's heart stopped for a second. She felt as though she was choking; she coughed roughly, and felt tears of pain and hurt come to her eyes. Pain because of what he had done.

When her coughing stopped, she looked back at him angrily, her eyes shining with the tears. 'Why did you do it Joey?' she said, biting her lip.

Joey looked away, guilt all over his face. She saw rather than heard him mutter 'Because I love you,' and jumped up. She ran out of the room just as their teacher came into the room. She pushed past her teacher and ran out of the school, out into the grounds, collapsing underneath the cheery blossom tree.

As she sat, her tears overcame her. She looked at her hands, the white scars where the glass had cut into her still vivid against her normally evenly tanned skin. She felt the pain as she remembered poor little Tenshi, doubting Mokuba would ever wake up. She thought of Mokuba's body, looking like an empty shell, no life visible. And then the image of Yuula swam into her head, tubes in her arms, and then the crumpled bleeding body of Sanura, lying in a pool of her own blood, Herya and Isis standing over her, knowing she was dead, and Priest Seto holding Hebeny in his arms, cradling her, trying to banish the waking nightmares she was experiencing as she replayed her friend's death over and over in her head.

Kaede curled up in a ball under the cherry blossom tree, letting the tears flow down her cheeks. A whole lifetime's grief poured out of her, and she felt as though the cheery blossom tree was crying with her, a storm of pink petals littering the ground around her. Her hands shook, but suddenly stilled, and her red eyes closed slowly. Her breathing slowed and she slept.

Hebeny knelt by the tomb, marked only by the beautiful flowers scattered around it. The dust around her whirled in the wind, covering her light blue robes, turning them a bluey grey.

A single tear rolled down her cheek and splashed onto the ground. She wiped it away with the back of her hand, and bit her trembling lip.

Placing one hand against the tomb, she muttered a prayer for Sanura's soul, and stood up, trying to leave her grief behind her.

She walked out of the gloomy darkness of the small group of tombs, all holding past Priests. Seto and Isis had agreed that Sanura should be there with them. Hebeny wished they hadn't; the tomb was cold and dark, nothing like Sanura would have wanted. She knew Sanura would have wanted to be outside in the warm sunshine, but Seto had said tradition was best.

The sudden bright sunlight blinded Hebeny, and she raised her arm over her eyes to shield them.

Seto stood next to the entrance to the tombs, and took Hebeny's hand as she left them. He pulled her to

him and held her there, his arms around her waist, hugging her tightly. She struggled for a second, but he held her too tight. She gave up and relaxed as best as she could, although she kept trying to look around to see if anyone was there.

Seto looked at her, and smiled half heartedly. 'I love you, Hebeny.'

Hebeny was shocked, and said as spitefully as she could, 'Do you really think that you should say something like that now?'

Seto nodded. 'Of course, Sanura wouldn't have wanted all this tiptoeing around. You know she wouldn't.'

Hebeny wanted to shut him saying her name, stop him talking about her. But he wouldn't, even if she tried to stop him.

'Hebeny, I love you,' he said again.

'Don't.'

'Why not? It's the truth,' he said, holding her away from him and looking her up and down, and really strange look in his eyes.

Hebeny tried to walk away from him, but she couldn't; he held her too hard.

'Please Seto, let's go back to the temple,' she started to plead with him, but a strange smile spread across his face.

'Why, what is wrong with here?' he said, pulling her to him again. He was terrifying her, and she shook as he touched her.

'Seto, please can we go back?' she begged, trying to pull away again.

Seto said nothing, and let her go. She began to walk back to the temple, but he wasn't following her. She turned around but he stayed where he was, and she ran back to the temple without him.

She arrived and flung open the doors, running to the statue of the goddess Isis and collapsed in front of it, muttering a prayer quickly. She cleansed herself with the sweet incense that filled the halls, suddenly feeling terrible.

She shook, remembering the feeling she had just felt when she stood with Seto. It wasn't love just then, not the love he usually felt for her. It was different, and she had felt it before, too many times before.

The first time she had felt it was at her first owner's house, when she was helping in the fields and one of his field hands tried to take advantage of her. And since that day, the feeling had returned too many times, every single time she was sold again her owner would try to rape her. Sometimes she was lucky, but sometimes, when she could smell the wine on their breath and they were clumsy and more aggressive, she couldn't escape.

She was midway through prayer when she heard footsteps behind her and saw Seto jogging towards her. She was slightly afraid, in case he tried to hurt her, and almost shielded herself, but she saw his face, guilty and sorry.

He pulled her to her feet and hugged her, this time holding her gently in his arms.

`I'm so sorry,' he whispered to her. `I am so sorry.'

Hebeny shook her head slowly, trying to block out her memories.

`It's just, I don't know what made me do it, but, Sanura dying like that, was just so...!' Seto's voice faded, and Hebeny smiled weakly. She forgave him with a quick kiss on the cheek.

`Hebeny,' Seto sat down on the floor of the temple and Hebeny sat beside him. `What are we going to do?'

Hebeny stared at him, confused.

`Are you just going to keep pretending, or are we going to let the whole world know that we love each other?'

Hebeny said nothing, he know what she thought, so why was he asking her?

He took her hand in his, and pulled her closer to him, until she was sitting right next to him.

They sat together for a while with his arms wrapped around her. But after a while he leaned towards her and whispered in her ear.

`Hebeny, come away with me,' he whispered. `Marry me, Hebeny.'

Suddenly, she felt as though the ground had collapsed underneath her and she plunged into darkness.

31 - Poor apology

Poor apology

The sound of footsteps woke Kaede from her sleep. She lifted her head and saw Sakura, Yuula and Tea walking towards her. They sat down next to her, Sakura on her right, Tea on her left, and Yuula kneeling in front of her. Sakura and Tea put their arms around Kaede and hugged her.

With Sakura's help she explained to Yuula and Tea what Joey had told her.

When she had finished, Yuula punched her open palm with her fist. 'I'll kill him,' she muttered. 'I'll kill him.'

She stood up and made to go back to the school, but Sakura grabbed her by the legs and she landed flat on her front, sprawled over the grass.

'Killing Joey won't help, no one was killed or got any permanent damage, so just forget about it,' Sakura said calmly, still holding Yuula so she couldn't jump up and kill Joey.

Yuula muttered something, but resigned her struggle and lay on her back in the grass.

'Hey, aren't we meant to be in lessons?' Tea asked, looking worried.

'Naw,' Sakura waved her hand as though waving away a fly. 'Our teacher said we could go and find Kaede, and then go back to lessons when she's alright again.'

'But she's alright now, isn't she?' Tea asked over Kaede to Sakura.

'Who's she, the cat's mother?' Kaede said irritably. She scowled slightly as she said this, it was something her father and her grandparents always said to her whenever she called someone she, and she had never really thought it was rude to say she, but talking over people was just plain rude.

'Well, you are, aren't you?' Tea asked, sitting up.

'No, I am thoroughly traumatized about what I just found out,' she said trying as best as she could to keep a smile off her face. 'And I think it is best that we don't return to lessons for a while.'

They all laughed, and leant against the tree, playing several word and paper games with paper Kaede ripped out of her books. They were having a great time, laughing and joking in the sunshine, but all too soon the bell for lunch sounded, and they decided maybe they should go back to their classroom after all, and glumly they set off back to the building.

As they turned a corner of the corridor along which their classroom was situated, Kaede suddenly stopped dead in her tracks. Joey was waiting for them outside their classroom, staring straight at Kaede.

Sakura and Tea looked quickly at Kaede, who was looking at Joey with a look which was a mixture of disgust and hatred. Yuula however, was blaring her teeth and her hands had been balled into fists. Sakura and Tea nodded at Kaede, knowing Joey would want to talk to her alone, and pushed Yuula straight past Joey and into their classroom.

Joey and Kaede stood staring at each other for a while, before Kaede walked past him into one of the empty classrooms along that corridor.

Joey followed her, and closed the door behind him as she set her bag down on a desk and sat next to it, waiting expectantly. She knew she would have to listen to this sooner or later, and so she studied her nails and said impatiently, 'Just hurry up, will you?'

Joey swallowed and stood in front of her, fidgeting with his hands, unsure what to say.

'Look, I am so sorry about what I did,' he said after a while. 'I know that it was horrible, and Yuula could have died-'

'Shouldn't you be telling her all this?' Kaede looked up at him, staring him straight in the eye.

Joey fidgeted again, and looked down at his hands. Kaede waited for him to answer, picking at a hole in her skirt.

'I, I saw a little girl,' Joey said shakily. 'In the restaurant, I saw you with her and her mother; was she hurt in the crash?'

'Her legs were crushed by the car,' Kaede said bluntly. 'What do you think? But, yeah, she was okay when they got her into hospital.'

Joey sighed, relieved.

'That doesn't make what you did okay! It doesn't mean you deserve any less punishment than you are going to get,' Kaede almost yelled at him. 'Joey, two people almost died, one of them was Yuula. Seven people went to hospital, the youngest was seven years old. How would you feel if someone had died? How would you be able to live, if either Yuula or Mokuba Kaiba had died?'

Joey hung his head guiltily, but opened his mouth to speak. Kaede guessed what he was about to say and interrupted him.

'Whatever made you do it isn't worth what happened,' she said coldly. 'And hurting all those people for such a stupid reason is pathetic! Just get over it Joey! I am not going to go out with you again, I am engaged! If you hadn't two timed me with Mai then maybe things would be different, but what has happened has happened, so get over it!'

But when Joey looked back at her so pathetically and miserably, Kaede's face softened. She stood up and put her hand on Joey's shoulder, half smiling at him.

`Just tell Yuula what you told me,' she smiled, and turned around to pick her bag off the desk. But when she turned back to Joey, she found him standing dangerously close to her. She tried to lean backwards, but he held her there with an arm on her shoulder.

`I really do, you know,' he said quietly. `I really do love you.'

Before Kaede could even open her mouth, he was kissing her, his arms around her waist, holding her to him. Kaede couldn't think, she didn't know what she did until she saw him lying on the floor in front of her. His cheek was cut and bleeding, and she looked down at her left hand, where the ring on her fourth finger had been twisted inwards, and the diamond had cut him as she had slapped him across the face. He lay on the floor where she had pushed him, looking stunned.

`BASTARD!' she yelled at him. `DID YOU THINK I WOULD GO OUT WITH YOU AGAIN IF YOU APOLOGISED FOR WHAT YOU DID? I DON'T WANT TO BE SEEN WITH YOU AFTER WHAT YOU DID TO THOSE PEOPLE! JUST LEAVE ME ALONE!'

She ran past him to the door which she flung open. A crowd of people had gathered, hearing her shouting, and were looking in at Joey lying on the floor with keen interest.

`WHAT DO YOU WANT?!' she shouted at them, and they scattered as she pushed through them to get to her classroom. She threw her bag on a desk and slumped in a chair.

Everyone had been staring at her since she came in, and she just scowled at them. `Don't talk to me,' she said, and pulled her MP3 player out of her bag. Shoving the earphones into her ears, Kaede turned the music up loud enough to block out all sound and pressed play. The music nearly deafened her, but it also had that strange calming effect that only rock music does. She relaxed in her chair, and closed her eyes, ignoring everything else, Ryou looking at her oddly, Yuula poking her in the side and saying something that sounded to Kaede (hearing it in the space between one song and another) like, `I think she's dead', even ignoring Joey entering the room with his hand trying to still the blood streaming from his cut cheek. Kaede just sat, listening to the music, and felt calmer than she had done for a long time.

32 - Pool Party

Pool party

Seto's reaction to the news about the crash was pretty much the same as Kaede's. He vowed to kill Joey, or die trying, and even Kaede didn't see any point in arguing with him. But she did tell him to wait, because they had other, much more important stuff to think about.

They had decided to have their wedding in the summer, and hold a large reception in the garden of Seto's mansion. But Seto had left it to Kaede to decide what day, and where.

'July is good,' Kaede mused, flicking through wedding catalogue, lying on her stomach on Seto's four poster bed in his mansion the day after finding out the truth about the crash. 'But where...'

'That's up to you,' Seto muttered, whilst writing some stuff on a piece of paper. 'You want an engagement party, don't you?'

'Yeah, and some time soon,' she thought about it. 'What's happening on Friday?'

'Nothing, as far as I'm concerned,' Seto pushed back his chair and rested his feet on the desk. 'Got work then?'

Kaede shook her head. 'I might as well resign, what is the point of being a lifeguard when I'm married? That would just be pointless.'

'No it isn't,' Seto came and sat down next to her. 'If it's what you want to do-'

'It isn't, trust me,' Kaede shook her head. 'I don't want to spend the rest of my life sitting on that lifeguard's throne and moping up the changing rooms.'

Seto sat there, watching her looking at the catalogue. 'Anyway,' he said, changing the subject. 'Where do you want to get married?'

Kaede shrugged. 'My parents all always wanted me to get married in a church, but I never really liked that idea. I thought maybe in a garden or something.'

'What, like our gardens?' Seto laughed.

'No, unless they are SERIOUSLY done up,' Kaede pushed him slightly.

'Well, I'll get it sorted then,' Seto stood up again and went back to his desk, picked up a pen and wrote

quickly on a piece of paper.

`What?! We're getting married in the gardens? You serious?' Kaede sat up and stared at him.

`Yeah,' Seto said absentmindedly as he wrote.

`But, it needs so much doing up,' Kaede struggled to her feet, tripping over the duvet. She straightened up and jogged over to Seto. `And when do we have the time to-'

`WE'RE not going to do it,' Seto looked at her, raising an eyebrow at her. `I'll get a landscape gardener to do it.'

`How much money are you spending on this wedding?' Ebony asked, leaning against the desk.

`It doesn't matter,' Seto smiled at her, and put his arms around her waist. `Just as long as we do get married.'

He kissed her and hugged her to him, and she leaned her head against his chest.

`Do you know what you're wearing?' he asked suddenly, and she jumped.

`No, I have absolutely no idea,' she laughed. `Seto, you asked me to marry you three days ago, I haven't planned that much yet.'

`Well, you should,' Seto said, turning back to his work. `Because it will be July before you know it.'

Kaede sighed and sat back down on the bed.

`Just go shopping with your friends,' Seto called over his shoulder.

Kaede thought about this, and then jumped up. `Cool, I'll go home and organise a shopping trip, you sort out that engagement party.'

Kissing him quickly on the cheek, Kaede grabbed her jacket and left, hurrying down the steps to her van. She jumped inside and sped home.

`I'm home,' she called, and her grandmother came out of the kitchen, a dish and a tea towel in her hand, clearly in the middle of drying up.

`Hello Kaede darling,' she said, and kissed her quickly on the forehead. Kaede grinned at her and ran to the foot of the stairs, but her grandmother called her back.

`Um, Kaede, have you given thought to your dress at all?'

Kaede sighed and retreated her steps. She stood in front of her grandmother and sighed again. `Yeah, Seto said I should start planning, but we have ages until the wedding.'

`Kaede, you want to get married in July, which is just over a month away. Please start thinking about it.'

Kaede nodded and went up to her room, dumping her stuff and grabbing the phone next to her bed. She dialled Yuula's number first.

Takumi answered the phone with a random, `Heeeeeeeeeeeello.'

`Um, hi, Takumi, is Yuula around?' Kaede said, nearly dropping the phone in fright. Takumi was so weird.

`Sure, wait there,' he dropped the phone with a clatter, almost deafening Kaede, but not as much as when he roared at the top of his voice, `YUULA! PHONE!'

To make it worse, Yuula shouted back at him, and the two of them started a full on shouting match.

`WHO IS IT?'

`I DUNNO!'

`WELL FIND OUT DOOFUS!'

`NO, YOU COME DOWN HERE AND FIND OUT!'

`MAKE ME!'

`NO, YOU LAZY GIRL, GET DOWN HERE RIGHT NOW!'

`BRING THE PHONE UP TO ME AND ASK WHO IT IS!'

`WHY DON'T YOU JUST ASK YOURSELF?'

`I'M NOT TALKING TO SOMEONE WHO I PROBABLY DON'T KNOW!'

`TAKUMI!' Kaede yelled down the phone. He must have heard her because he picked the phone up again.

`Yes?'

`It's Kaede.'

`Oh, right okay,' phone drops with clatter. `YUULA, IT'S KAEDE!'

The sound of footsteps running down the stairs sounded so blissfully quiet, even though they were anything but that. Kaede heard Takumi retreat to the living room or somewhere as Yuula picked up the phone.

`Hello,' she said. She sounded loud even as she said that.

`Hi, is it possible you and Takumi could be slightly louder?'

`Why?'

`Because I am sure that there are people the other side of the world who might not have quite heard you!'

Yuula began muttering angrily and then asked irritably, `So why are you ringing me anyway?'

`Do I need an excuse to ring you?'

`YES!'

`Fine, I won't tell you then.'

`WHAT?!'

`Why are you being so impatient?'

`JUST TELL ME ALRIGHT?'

`Only if you calm down!'

`Alright, calming down.'

`Okay, are you free this Saturday?'

`Yeah, sure, why?'

`What to come and help me choose a wedding dress?'

`YES!!!!!!'

`Ooookay then, I'll meet you at the mall at 11.30 on Saturday. See you then, bye,' Kaede hung up and then repeated this call to Sakura and Tea, but the difference was they were slightly quieter.

Kaede grabbed her uniform after sorting out the shopping trip and drove to the swimming pool. She arrived and ran into the reception, preparing to sign in.

But as soon as she walked through the door she was immediately seized by several pairs of hands and dragged into the staff room. It was full of the lifeguards she worked with and over to one side was a huge table of food, and on the other side there was a sound system and a DJ. Overhead were the words, `CONGRATULATIONS KAEDE!' in huge red letters of a banner across the room.

Kyoko grabbed her wrist and pulled her into a circle of space amongst her friends and beamed at them all. `And here she is, the woman of the hour, Kaede Mishua!'

They exploded with cheering and Kaede blushed, wanting to shrink away from the limelight.

`She may be leaving us soon, but we will never forget the times we have shared with her and will always be here for you and,' she leaned closer to Kaede and said in a mock whisper, `if you ever want a party on the Monster Island, you know who to ask for favours!'

Everyone laughed, and a glass of orange juice was pushed into her hands. `No alcohol yet, wait until the reception,' people said, grinning at her, all holding their own drinks of orange juice. She took a sip and immediately smelt the sharp but delicious smell of champagne.

`Well, maybe a little!' they grinned.

Kyoko banged on the table, and there was a hush again.

`Well, we can write a series of books about all the fun times we've had with Kaede; her training when she managed to pass the test by falling into the pool and swimming as fast as she could to the other side; the time that she saved a boy from drowning and it turned out he was only pretending to get her to do CPR on him; and the time she brought all over her friends to the pool!'

Everyone snickered and Kaede blushed even more, her face almost as red as her hair. She tried to hide but Kyoko pulled her arms down.

`So, let's raise a toast, to the new Mrs Kaiba!'

`MRS KAIBA!' everyone toasted and drank, and Kaede felt that, even if Seto didn't manage to organise an engagement party, she wouldn't mind, because this meant more to her, this party that probably cost about 10,000 yen (about £50) at most, than anything that even Seto could have come up with.

33 - The Ultimate Shopping Trip

The Ultimate Shopping Trip

Friday arrived and it was time for the engagement party. Kaede enjoyed it although it wasn't her idea of fun to be dragged around a room and introduced to loads of people she's never met from Kaiba Corp. Then there'd been a speech from her grandfather saying how happy he was that his darling granddaughter had found someone she loved enough to spend the rest of her life with him. And then of course Kaede and forced Seto to have music good enough for herself and her friends to dance to.

Kaede and all of her friends had stayed the night at Seto's mansion and Kaede woke up the next day with a hangover. She made her way down to the kitchen, knocking into things because she was still half asleep, and made herself some extremely strong coffee, before sitting at the table and sipping it.

Her silent recovering was interrupted by Sakura stumbling into the kitchen, apparently feeling as awful as Kaede was feeling and, without saying a word of greeting, ran over to the still hot kettle and made some tea. She sat down opposite Kaede and took a huge sip of the tea and then sighed.

'That's better,' Sakura said, more to herself than to Kaede.

'Well, good morning yourself!' Kaede muttered into her mug. 'Did you sleep well?'

Sakura waved her hand in an offhand sort of way. 'You know, same as it always is.'

Kaede smiled and happily returned to their silence when Yuula, Tea, Yumiko, Joey, Ryou, Yami, Duke and Seto came trooping into the kitchen. Seto sat down next to Kaede and grabbed her mug and took a huge sip before getting a punch and having the mug wrenched from his grasp by an angry Kaede. The others, meanwhile, made their way to the kettle and began to fight over who got the hot water first.

'Don't fight in my kitchen!' Seto yelled at them, which was strangely ironic because it happened to be one of the few rooms in his house that he was hardly ever seen in.

'Since when has it ever been your kitchen?' Kaede said, shoving him slightly. 'Don't yell in my ear. And anyway, if you haven't noticed, there is more than one kettle.'

They looked around and saw about five different kettles situated around the enormous kitchen. Each dived for a kettle, except Yuula, who merely sat down at the table and looked around at the fuss. She was the only one out of all of them who had showered and woken up properly, being the only one who hadn't drunken any alcohol the night before and thus didn't have a hangover.

'Honestly, some people!' she muttered, staring at them all as though they were all insane.

Kaede chose to ignore Yuula and got up from where she sat. She flung open various cupboards and pulled out several boxes of cereal, a dozen loaves of bread, butter and other toppings of bread and then several packets of bacon and boxes of eggs.

`Okay, grab what you want to eat and cook it if it need to be cooked,' she said to the people waiting next to the various kettles as she took a cereal box and poured some cereal into a box. She found some milk and poured that in as well and then located a spoon. She sat down and told Seto to go and make her some more coffee as he had managed to drink all of hers and then proceeded to eat. After ten minutes of noise everyone had located their perfect breakfast option and was chopping in silence.

Kaede stood up before everyone else and ran back to the room she shared with Seto. She had a quick shower in the en-suite bathroom and then quickly dressed into jeans and a black and white stripy top that hung off her shoulders. She pulled her hair back into a messy ponytail and was just looking for shoes when Seto came in.

`Oh,' his face fell when he saw her. `I thought you might not have gotten showered yet!'

Kaede laughed and hit him playfully. `Tough luck, mister. And I had to get dressed quickly because I'm going to the mall Sakura, Yuula, Yumiko and Tea.'

`I think you might have to remind them that,' Seto called from the bathroom. Kaede went back in and put the lid down on the toilet so she could sit in their as she talked to him.

`Why's that?'

`All of them were talking in the kitchen before I left, still in their pyjamas.'

Kaede sighed. `Yeah, I think you're right. Well, I'll go and hurry them up and then we'll be off.'

She stood up and walked towards the door, but then halted. She turned and grinned evilly, and quietly walked back over to the toilet. She flushed it and ran out of the room, Seto yelling curses after her as the water heated up, scalding him.

The grin remained on Kaede's face as she walked through the halls, occasionally bumping into her friends and telling them to hurry up.

`But I don't wanna!' Yumiko groaned when Kaede reminded her to hurry up as she passed her.

`I don't care!' Kaede said, pushing her towards her room. `You're coming and that's that!'

`No way!'

`Do I need to ring Ana?'

After Kaede said this Yumiko ran to her room and jumped into the shower so fast it was a though Kaede had jabbed her with a red hot poker.

Half an hour later all of them were in Sakura's kombi driving to the mall. Yuula was complaining already.

`You said meet at the mall at 11.30!'

`Yeah, but as you were all at Seto's I thought we could go slightly earlier,' Kaede said, pushing Yuula back into her seat. `Sit down and put your seatbelt on for Christ's sake!'

Muttering, Yuula sat and glared at Kaede until they reached the mall, when she jumped out and ran to the nearest dress shop.

`Yay, pretty dresses!' Yuula said as soon as the others entered behind her. `I want that one!'

`Um, Yuula,' Sakura said, jabbing her in the back. `We're in the wrong shop.'

`No we're not!' Yuula said defensively. `This is the shop we usually go into first when Kaede is forcing us to help her look for dresses.'

`Well, this is the wrong shop THIS time,' Tea said, taking her arm and stirring her out of the shop.

`What do you mean?'

`Yuula, it's a wedding. Kaede's not going to go walking down the aisle in a prom dress, is she?' Yumiko laughed at Yuula.

They went into every bridal shop in the mall, taking down notes on the dresses they liked and all the accessories that had caught their eyes. When they went to a café for lunch they poured over their notes and discussed what would be the best dress for the day of Kaede's life that she would always remember.

Yuula suggested something pink with a lot of bows. Kaede flatly refused to wear pink as it would clash with her hair and she didn't want to walk down the aisle looking like a milkshake.

Tea suggested something that would really stand out, like orange, and at this Kaede had to hit her but said nothing, refusing to even discuss this idea, thinking that if she appeared wearing orange Seto would call the whole thing off.

Yumiko suggested green.

`Why green?' Kaede said furiously.

`Because it's a cool colour!' Yumiko said defensively.

`No way! I'm getting married in the Kaiba mansion gardens, I don't want to be lost in the shrubbery.'

After a lot of bickering Sakura finally settled it. `Um, Kaede, did you ever think of white?'

Kaede stopped for a minute. And then looked at her list. 'I do have a couple of white dresses down in here.'

'So let's go check them out then!' Sakura said with an air of someone trying to converse with the very stupid. They paid and ran back to the shops with the white dresses and Kaede tried them all on, commenting on how they looked on (and off *grin*) and then found some accessories to go with them.

Sakura, the fashion expert and Kaede's number one shopper assistant, finally chose the dress for her. They ran back to the shop just before closing time to buy it.

'Wow!' Kaede said as they left the shop. 'Wedding shopping is so much fun!'

'Yeah, and really expensive!' Yuula said, looking at the receipt.'

'You didn't have to BUY the dress,' Yumiko said, also looking at the receipt. 'There was a sign saying that the dresses were also loanable.'

'I'm not just going to spend the happiest day of my life in a dress and then have to give it back!' Kaede said indignantly. 'Of course I wanted to buy the dress!'

'How can you afford it?' Yuula demanded.

Kaede grinned. 'Seto.'

Yuula snarled. 'Trust you to marry the richest man you can find so that you can spend the rest of your life shopping!'

'As if I would marry someone for their money!' Kaede grinned. 'I happen to think Seto is a very kind, caring and loving person who loves to be with me and will love me forever.'

Yuula mimed being sick in the mall fountain as they passed in.

'Well, it was certainly an effective way to waste a whole day,' Sakura said, glancing at her watch. 'Are we going back to your house, Kay?'

'Yep!' Kaede grinned. 'My grandmother would hate to miss an opportunity to complain about how us teenage girls aren't eating enough nowadays, how we're all skin and bone and then force us to eat her newly baked cookies!'

They piled into Sakura's kombi with all the bags of bridal stuff and arrived at Kaede's house. As soon as they walked through the front door Kaede's grandmother grabbed Kaede's hand and demanded to see the dress.

'Come on, it is extremely important that I know what you are going to look like.'

They went up to Kaede's room, partly because Kaede didn't want to take it out downstairs where her grandfather was (not wanting him to see what she was going to wear) and partly because her

grandmother complained that the kitchen was far too dirty.

Once they were inside Kaede took the dress out of the bag and held it against her for her grandmother to see. Her grandmother clapped her hands to her mouth and beamed with happiness as Kaede stood in front of the mirror. Tea and Yumiko were already laying out all of the other things they had brought: the veil, the gloves, the shoes, the tiara, the hair clips, the jewellery, the make up and even the underwear. Her grandmother beamed as all of this was taken out of the bags and hugged Kaede.

'You'll look beautiful, my darling,' she said happily as she hugged Kaede. She took the dress and hung it up carefully in Kaede's wardrobe and lay the other items in an empty draw.

Kaede and her friends sat in her room after her grandmother had tried to explain the whole wedding thing to Kaede and then left to make them lots of nutritional food. The five of them discussed wedding plans and then what each of them would be wearing. They all had their own ideas in their head and were all discussing them when Kaede interrupted.

'Um dudes, you're all gonna be my bridesmaids anyway, so you'll all be wearing the same thing.'

There was another instant uproar at this. Yuula demanded to wear pink and Yumiko flatly refused to wear pink. The two of them began a huge bickering session when Sakura suggested wearing red and Tea said wearing blue and so they began to argue. Kaede just stood up and went to her chest of draws and pulled out dozens of bridal magazines. She threw them down to where her friends sat and then said loudly enough for them to hear. 'There, make up your minds!'

She sat on her bed then and pulled out was about to say something about them not wearing yellow or anything pastel when her mobile rang.

'AH!' she yelled, desperately looking for where the sound of the phone was coming from. 'Where are you, you stupid phone?!'

She turned her room upside down searching for it and eventually found it in one of her going out bags. She flicked it open and put it to her ear.

'Hello?'

'How long did it take you to find your phone THIS time?' said Seto and Kaede could just tell that he was smirking in a knowing way.

'Shut up!' Kaede said huffily. 'What do you want?'

'So I need a reason to call my fiancée now, do I?' said Seto.

'No, I just want to know if you have a reason for calling me,' she said idly whilst flicking through one of the magazines not being read by her friends.

'I wanted to know if you succeeded in finding a dress.'

`Well, I did.'

`What's it like?'

`I'm not telling you that!'

`Why not?'

`Because you're not supposed to know until the day!'

`What? Since when was that a wedding rule?!'

`I don't know, but it just is.'

`Fine, what colour is it?'

Kaede sighed. `White, if you must know.'

`Good good, I was hoping it would be a sensible colour.'

`What do you mean by that?'

`Well,' said Seto and he sounded as though he was choosing his words carefully as he said this. `I know that Tea is rather fond of very bright colours and I was really worried you would take her advice.'

`I thought you might be, that's why I hit her when she suggested that my dress be orange.'

`Hey!' said Tea from behind her magazine. `I sincerely hope you aren't talking about me!'

`Well who else would I be talking about?' Kaede removed the phone from her hear to talk to Tea.

`Everyone else in this room has style.'

`Oy, you'd better watch out or I'll refuse to come to the wedding, let alone be your-'

`Shut it, Tea!' Yumiko and Sakura said together.

`Thanks dudes,' Kaede said, returning to her conversation with Seto. `Well, haven't you brought anything yet?'

`No, I was waiting for the all clear from you. But now you've got something and I know that I still have some money left I'll go out and get something as soon as possible.'

`Hey, I don't spend that much!'

`Was I implying that?'

`Yes, and you know you were!'

`Whatever. I'll see you tomorrow.'

`WHAT? When was that arranged?'

`It wasn't. Bye,' Seto said and hung up.

Kaede stared at the phone for a couple of seconds, her insides boiling.

`Something wrong?' Sakura asked, looking up from her magazine.

`Seriously, sometimes I could kill him!'

`Well, what did you expect?' she said, returning to her magazine. `After all, it is Kaiba we're talking about here.'

Kaede put the phone down and picked up a magazine. She barely looked at the pages as she flicked through it; in fact she was unconsciously turning the pages, her mind a blur, not really thinking about anything. She closed her eyes for a second and fell asleep.

34 - Fade Together

Fade Together

The school year was drawing to an end and Kaede's teachers were talking to them about what the final year would involve and how much they would need to study to pass their exams that year. Kaede tuned out for most of this because she wasn't coming back to school, and was busy doing something else.

Wanting to have something to remember her days at school with her friends, Kaede, with Sakura's help, began to compile a year book. She brought a camera into school and made the whole of her year line up for photographs. Then she brought in a huge notebook and told people to fill out some general details. Then she got people's friends to write a page about them and then she and Sakura spent an entire weekend at Sakura's computer.

`What else can we do?' Sakura said, leaning back in her chair.

`I dunno, we could have a huge collection of photographs, some people can draw stuff and put in little jokes and things they say loads or whatever,' Kaede said, writing stuff down on a piece of paper.

`Oh, we could have some special words by all the teachers for our year!' Sakura grinned.

`Oh yeah! So we need some pictures of the teachers!' Kaede laughed, writing it down.

`Oooh, and we can get the arty people to paint a nice picture and put a photo of that in there, and we could make the music people compose a song or something!'

`Yeah! That's brill,' Kaede said, looking down at her list. `Yumiko will do the first one. And I'm sure that the music people will just be desperate to show off.'

`Totally,' Sakura grinned. `Oh, in the pictures of everyone, we need one of us all at the beach!'

`Oh yeah! Where Seto had to wear my clothes!'

`Yep!' Sakura roared with laughter. `I'm so glad I brought a camera with me that day!'

`Ha ha!' Kaede grinned. `Totally! And the van and the kombi together!'

`Dude! And then we could have a picture of the school.'

`And signatures on everyone's photo.'

`How many pages is everyone going to get?' Sakura leaned over.

`Quite a lot,' Kaede, looking down at her notes. `We need a whole page with the pictures we took on Thursday, that's the place people are gonna write their signatures. We also need a general info page, which could be the next one, and on that can also be their opinions of their time at this school. After that we could have the friend's opinions of them, and what they think they'll be doing in ten years time, what job they'll have etc.'

`Okay, that's three pages, what about any drawings or saying or other random stuff they want to put into it?'

`Okay, that could be the next page,' Kaede said, scribbling all of this in another notebook. `So four pages in all.'

`Sounds awesome!' Sakura grinned, leaning back in her chair. `So how many people are there in our year?'

`I think about seventy five, there's like twenty five people in each class and three classes, so yeah, that's about right.'

`We gonna count Ana and Honda?' Sakura asked suddenly. `We gonna get them one each?'

`Definitely,' Kaede grinned. `I'm gonna call Ana and ask her to send us a photo of her and Honda. I think we'll be able to sort out the rest. And we all know the weird things that they say!'

`What about Seto?' asked Sakura. `Isn't he still a member of the school, even if he never comes.'

`I spose,' Kaede sighed. `I'll get all his stuff when he comes over.'

`This is going to be so cool!'

`I know!' Kaede grinned and jumped up. She ran to the phone and dialled the phone number Ana had left them when she had gone to France. She spoke to Ana quickly and ten minutes later she received all the information she needed from them.

It took them the best part of the next day to sort out all of the information and create the book. They set it out like a proper book, with a contents page, and shoved everyone's information in, putting everyone in alphabetically.

As they were doing this, Kaede suddenly had an idea.

`Hey, how about we have nominations?'

`For what?'

`You know, like, funniest girl and cutest couple and weirdest hair,' Kaede was grinning now. `That would be so cool, and everyone can nominate two people and then the person with the most votes is

announced in the year book. We can have a whole list thing with the award and then we can have a winner, a second and a third place. How cool is that?'

Sakura agreed it was indeed a great idea and together they wrote down a list of possible awards and Kaede, having taken everyone's email address, sent it to everyone, suggesting at the bottom that people can make their own awards.

The next couple of days Sakura and Kaede were running around school trying to sort out the stuff they needed for the year book. They cornered the art and music people who agreed after some persuading and then they lined up all of their teachers and took pictures of them, taking down what they said about the year and how "pleasant" it was to teach them.

They managed to bribe the school office to give them a photograph of the school for them to put on first page and then ran around collecting the drawing and other things that people wanted on their random pages. They got so many they shouted at everyone to put them in envelopes so that they could keep them separate from other peoples. Kaede also began chasing up people to send her their nominations for the awards and by the evening when Kaede and Sakura sat down at Kaede's laptop they had everyone's nominations.

By the end of that week they were finished. Everything had been handed in and they put it all into the book. They put everyone's pages first, alphabetically, and then there were a couple of pages of photographs. After that they had the teacher's section and then the song written by the music students and the picture by the artists. After this they put the awards and then on the very last page was a photograph of their entire year, taken at the start of that school year.

Kaede and Sakura took it to the photocopying shop and ordered copies for everyone in their year and a copy for the school library.

'Alright everyone, cough up!' Kaede announced as she and Sakura gathered their year in the school gym. 'We need 2,200 yen from all of you (about £11) for the year books. And all of you have to pay because you all agreed to have one! It is so expensive because it is so amazing, seriously, it's gonna be good, so come on, give us your money!'

Everyone complained that they didn't have that much money with them and would bring it in the next day. So the next morning Sakura went around with an envelope collecting the money from everyone and glaring at people who didn't bring it.

A few days later, a day before the end of term, the books were finished. Kaede and Sakura collected them and paid the shop who were just too happy to be able to take all that money off their hands.

The next day they took them into school. Their whole year was excused from lessons because they wouldn't have learnt anything even if then had been in them. Once again they gathered in the gym and everyone's year book was pasted around to be signed by everyone. When everyone had signed their page in everyone's book they were returned to the owner.

As soon as the books were opened Kaede heard laughter and she grinned. She saw most people looking at the awards. She flicked to the back as well and grinned when she saw them.

Awards:

Best looking boy

Best looking girl

Fittest boy

Fittest girl

Funniest boy

Funniest girl

Weirdest boy

Weirdest girl

Best hair (boy)

Best hair (girl)

Weirdest hair (boy)

Weirdest hair (girl)

Cutest couple

Weirdest couple

Biggest failure of a couple

`Why,' Yuula demanded, `am I with Duke as the second cutest couple of our entire year?'

`Because you were cute, and it was a majority decision,' Sakura said, jabbing her in the side.

`Ha ha ha, Yugi has the worst hair out of all the boys in the year!' Tea laughed. `And Honda is second!'

`Yeah, but look who the third place was for the girls weirdest hair!' Kaede said, and ducked as something heavy was thrown at her. `What! I didn't nominate you!'

`Why are we the biggest failure of a couple?' Joey asked Kaede, looking up from his book.

`I thought that would be obvious,' Kaede raised her eyebrow at him. `We both cheated on each other, so

that was kind of a failure, wasn't it?'

They were all chatting about the year book when the doors opened and Seto walked into the gym. Everyone was so surprised there was immediate silence, but Kaede grinned and tossed him a year book, that they had got everyone to sign for him. Suddenly everyone surged forwards and demanded he sign their books, and Seto looked as though he was being attacked by thousands of slugs, and grudgingly began signing.

At the end of the day their entire group headed towards the mall, happy and exhausted. Their school shirts had been signed by everyone in their year and so had Kaede's satchel. They reached their favourite café and collapsed into a closely huddled group of sofas. When their teas and coffees and hot chocolates and chocolate cakes and everything else was brought over they sat back and spoke of the fun times they'd had together and everything that would come.

Soon it got too much for Tea and she burst out crying. Everyone leaned towards her and asked her what was wrong and she choked out, 'It just won't be the same without Kaede.'

Kaede was alarmed but then grinned at her. 'It's not like I'm never going to see you again! You guys are coming to the wedding, and you're always welcome to stay with us!'

'They are?' Seto muttered, alarmed.

Kaede ignored him and they carried on talking, and then stood and left the café, and all the girls, even Yumiko, linked arms as the boys walked behind them, as they left the mall together for what seemed was the last time.

Thousands of years before, Hebeny and Seto loaded a cart and set off, disguised as travellers, into the desert, with only Herya and Isis watching them leave.

35 - I am seventeen, going on eighteen...

I am seventeen, going on eighteen...

On sunny morning Kaede woke up at her usual hour and got changed into her jogging clothes. She left her note to say she'd gone jogging and set off on her usual route. She watched the sun rise and felt her spirit rise with it. Today was the start of her new life. Today she would no longer be a child.

She jogged back home and when she arrived she found everybody still asleep. She showers as quickly as she could and changed into some clean clothes, then went downstairs to make breakfast for her family.

She was just setting the plate of toast on the table when her grandmother came in, all set to do the breakfast. She was quite shocked to find it all laid out on the table, including a steaming teapot and some ready made coffee.

'You did this?' her grandmother smiled, looking at Kaede as if to make sure it was all believable.

'Yep, sure did,' Kaede beamed at her grandmother.

'Is it edible?' her grandmother laughed. 'I'm joking, I'm joking. But you didn't have to do this, today of all days. It is your special day, remember.'

Kaede waved her hand to dismiss that remark. 'It doesn't matter.'

'Well, go and wake up your grandfather,' her grandmother smiled. 'He needs to wake up or he'll miss you opening your presents.'

Kaede smiled and ran up to her room to wake up her grandfather. She knocked on the door and entered. He was asleep still, so she quietly crept across the room and sat down on the bed.

'Granddad,' Kaede whispered. 'Granddad, wake up.'

'Is that my little birthday girl?' her grandfather smiled as he opened his eyes. 'Oh my, you're not so little anymore, are you?'

Kaede smiled at him. 'Not particularly. Come on, get up.'

She stood up and left her grandfather to get dressed, going back downstairs. Her grandmother had found the post and had set the post for Kaede in front of her plate. Kaede sat down to open it but the doorbell rang.

`Who could that be, so early in the morning?' Kaede said, half to herself, half to her grandmother, as she got up to open the door. Had she looked at her grandmother, she would have seen a little smile in the corner of the old woman's mouth.

Kaede opened the front door and blinked as the sunlight streamed through the door. Temporarily blinded, she didn't see the three people standing on the doorstep.

`SURPRISE!' they shouted as soon as the door opened. Kaede held her hand over her eyes to shield them and saw Marik and his brother, Odion, and sister, Ishizu.

`HAPPY BIRTHDAY!' they yelled. All three held presents in their hands, but Marik handed his to Ishizu in order to launch himself on Kaede.

`Ouch, Marik, get off me!' Kaede said, pushing him off. `What are you guys doing here?'

`We came to see you on your birthday, and we're staying until your wedding!' Marik said, absolutely ecstatic.

Before Kaede could say anything else, all three had barged past her into the house and then into the kitchen. When Kaede followed, still fairly confused, she saw that her grandmother had lain out three more chairs for the Ishtars and her grandfather had joined them. Not only that, there was a large pile of presents lying on the floor, waiting to be opened.

Kaede sat down in her seat and began unwrapping her presents. From the Ishtars she received a book on deciphering hieroglyphics (from Odion), and Egyptian necklace with an ankh with a ruby set in the centre as the pendant (Ishizu) and a little statue of a sphinx (Marik). Kaede hugged each of them in turn and thanked them all for their gifts, before setting aside their gifts and opening the ones from her grandparents.

Her grandparents gave her a new sound system that she could connect to her MP3 player, a new surfboard to which they had tied a piece of string and made Kaede follow the string around the house until she found the surfboard behind the sofa. It had a blue mosaic background with a white strip down the middle. Where Kaede's feet were supposed to go there was a four petal white hibiscus flower outlined with blue. They also gave her a brown shoulder bag with two handles connected by four gold rings. Inside it was a red scarf to tie to one of the straps.

`Woah, thank you so much!' Kaede hugged both her grandparents. `Thank you, thank you!'

`That's alright,' her grandfather laughed. `It's not everyday your favourite granddaughter turns seventeen.'

Kaede frowned. `I'm your only granddaughter.'

`Well, if I had anymore, you'd still be my favourite!' her grandfather laughed.

They ate breakfast and at ten thirty Marik and Kaede tied Kaede's new surfboard to the top of her van

and put on their swimming stuff underneath their actual clothes. Kaede wore an orange, brown and white bikini with a halter neck top. She wore black board shorts with a white hibiscus flower design up the side of the leg and a yellow top with a single strap over her left shoulder. She tied her hair up in a messy ponytail and grabbed a basket full of a picnic her grandmother made.

She and Marik climbed into the van and Kaede forced Marik to have the picnic basket on his lap and she turned the key and started up the van.

'Have a nice time at the beach!' her grandmother called as she, Kaede's grandfather, Odion and Ishizu waved from the front step.

'See you in a couple of hours!' Marik called back and the two of them pulled out of the driveway and turned towards the main city.

As they drove, Kaede pulled out her cell phone and rang each of her friends to tell them she was coming to put them up. They arrived first at Tea's house and tea came out in a pink floaty sundress with a shocking pink bikini underneath. The next stop was Yami's house and he and Joey came out both in shorts and t-shirts, being typical boys. Sakura, Yumiko and Duke were the next to be picked up. Yumiko was wearing really dark blue surf shorts and a green bikini and Sakura was wearing a white bikini with brown hibiscus flowers over it. She had her surfboard with her which she tied to the surfboard rack along with Kaede's before she climbed into the van.

They arrived at Seto's house and Yuula, Ryou, Takumi, Seto, Mokuba and Tenshi piled into the van, making everyone extremely squashed. They arrived at the beach and when Kaede and Marik leaped out and opened the door for them. They had to grab hold of Yuula's arms and pulled her out and then do the same to Joey and once that was done everyone could get out.

Everyone lay their towels out and then sat in a circle. Then Sakura, Yumiko, Yuula and Tea began laughing and pulled from Yumiko's bag a largish present and passed it to Kaede. She looked at the present and saw there was a tag. She looked at it and read,

Dear Kaede,

HAPPY BIRTHDAY! Just a little something from everyone to remember our time together before you got hitched. Ha ha, well, yeah, happy birthday, and um, whatever.

YUULA! You weren't supposed to write the word um! Heya Kaede, it's Sakura, Yumiko, Tea and Yuula here. We and the others made this for you, hope you enjoy it.

Loads of love,

Sakura,

Yuula,

Yumiko,

Tea,

Joey,

Duke,

Yami

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaand

Ryou

P.S. Ana and Honda have also contributed to the book, and have sent us loads of stuff from Frogland. Anyways, yeah, I hate writing these things ><

IF YOU HATE WRITING THEM THEN DON'T WRITE THEM YUULA!

You asked me too!

No, you said, "I wanna write it".

Humph. Well, sorry, we're arguing on your card. Happy birthday.

Kaede laughed and opened the present. Inside was a fairly large book and Kaede opened it to find written on the first page, *The REAL year book, brought to you by Ms. Sakura, Ms. Yuula, Ms. Yumiko and Ms. Tea.*

The book was an A4 hardback, and as Kaede flicked through it see in her friends' names in a contents page, in alphabetical order, starting with Ana. Kaede flicked to where her section began and found an entire A4 page devoted to the word `Ana' written in huge golden swirly letters. The next ten pages were pictures of Ana and a happy birthday note from Ana to Kaede. Every section for each of her friends was like this and at the end there were pictures of all of them together and then some songs they thought summed up Kaede. Yumiko had painted a picture of all eleven of them and right at the back was a photo that took up a double page of every single one of them lined up on the side of Kaede's van last time they went to the beach. Marik was there as well, as was Marc, Seto, Mokuba and Tenshi, and everyone was in their swimming stuff. Kaede beamed at the book and then looked up at all of her friends.

`Thank you so much!' she beamed at them. `It's great!'

`Isn't it! We got a copy for everyone, although you're the first one to get it, and you get it for free. Everyone else had to pay for theirs!' Tea laughed.

Everyone else pulled out their presents for Kaede. Kaede opened each of them and hugged everyone

before putting all her gifts into the back of the van and then unpacked the picnic with Marik.

Kaede's grandmother had made them a proper birthday lunch. There were little triangle sandwiches full of loads of different fillings, sausages on sticks, pineapple and cheese on sticks, carrots sticks and a large pot of hummus, bread sticks, three different flavours of crisps, salsa, chocolate fingers, party rings, cherry tomatoes, celery sticks and cucumber sticks, sweets in little bowls, jelly, popcorn, a large and very sticky chocolate cake and a couple of large jars of melted chocolate to dip stuff in. There were also bottles of fizzy drinks and fruit juices as well as a bottle of bailey chocolate cocktail that Kaede poured out for everybody.

Everyone dived on the food and, as there was loads (it was a huge basket), everybody got enough of what they wanted to eat. The plates provided were huge enough for a lot of stuff to fit on them at once and they had large glasses for their drink.

After an hour of solid eating everyone was stuffed and lay back on their towels for half an hour to let their food settle. As soon as they were sure they'd be able to go into the sea without getting cramps, everyone got up and ran straight towards the sea, Kaede and Sakura only stopping to pick up their surfboards as they ran. Tenshi and Mokuba, who were staying on the beach to get a suntan (Tenshi was forcing Mokie to do this), had the good sense to grab Kaede's camera out of her bag and take a photo of all of them running into the water.

36 - Glamorous Indie Rock & Roll

Glamorous Indie Rock & Roll

`Okay, so we want a limousine to take us to the restaurant, then go to a club and have a really good band to play for us, maybe even a stripper,' Yumiko said, ticking things off of their list.

`No!' Kaede suddenly lent forward, grabbed the pen off of Yumiko and scratched out the stripper idea. `No strippers! No way!'

`But it'll be fun!' Tea interrupted.

`No it won't! I don't want some oily twenty something year old guy in a sailor suit shaking his @\$\$ in front of my face, thank you very much!'

`Okay, okay, no strippers,' Yumiko sighed. `But what are we going to have as the entertainment?'

`The band!' Kaede laughed. `But I'm sure that it is actually illegal to hire strippers when you're under the age of 18, so we can't do that even if I wanted to.'

`What about what everyone else wants?' Yuula asked.

`Who cares what everyone else wants? It's my hen night,' Kaede shook her head. `When it's your hen night, you can have a stripper. But I personally would rather we didn't.'

`Okay, fine,' Tea shook her head. `But what else are we going to do?'

`How about we go to the club, do a bit of dancing, drink a bit and then go back to my house and sleep?' Kaede suggested.

`That's boring!' Tea and Yumiko whined.

`And? Do you guys want to have huge black bags underneath your eyes when we go down the aisle?' Kaede said, tucking her legs up beneath her.

`But why -'

`We should just do what Kaede wants,' Sakura said irritably. `We can have fun at the reception party anyway.'

`Fine!' Tea slumped back in her chair. Then she brightened. `Who've you chosen for your maid of

honour?'

Kaede groaned. The five of them were sitting around Kaede's kitchen table making plans for the wedding and hen night. So far they hadn't done very much because they kept arguing.

'Can't you guys fight it out between you?' Kaede said wearily. 'I don't want any arguments.'

'Why not me?' Tea suggested. 'I could be a good maid of honour.'

'Definitely not you, Tea,' Kaede shook her head. 'You'll forget the something.'

'Well, if it's all down to responsibility, then I can't be it,' Yuula muttered.

'Sorry Yuula, dude,' Kaede said. 'But I think it should be Sakura.'

'YAY!' Sakura said punching the air as Tea shouted back, 'Why not me?!'

'You two are the only people who really care about it,' Kaede said, getting up to pour herself some more tea. 'I, personally, couldn't care less, but when it comes down to it I'd rather it was Sakura or Yuula than you.'

'Why?'

'Because we're just nicer!' Yuula laughed.

'Sorry Tea,' Kaede shook her head, 'but I'd rather you weren't my maid of honour.'

Tea looked slightly miffed, but then brightened.

'What kind of dresses do we get to wear?'

'Strapless and red,' Kaede picked up a file and flipped through it. She found the photograph of the bridesmaid dresses and passed it across the table. 'Some sort of satiny material, I think. You have to go and get measured as soon as possible. On the day I want you to have your hair slightly curled and the bouquets you're going to carry are red roses.'

'Woah,' Tea said as they looked at the photo. 'When are we having them fitted?'

'Tomorrow, if possible,' Kaede found the card of the dress shop. 'At the same place where I got my dress.'

They just went back to their plans when Marik entered. He looked over Kaede's shoulder at the plans and saw the photo for the bridesmaid dresses.

'Wow,' he said, snatching it up. 'Is this what I'm wearing to the wedding?'

Kaede giggled. 'No, unless you want to be a bridesmaid!'

`Oooh, yes please!' Marik beamed.

`Tough, only women are allowed to be bridesmaids,' Kaede laughed at him posing to an invisible camera.

`Aww,' he sighed, dejected. `But I get to wear a dress, right?'

`Whatever you want,' she said, pushing him out of the kitchen.

`Do I get to come to the hen night?' Marik cried, trying to stop Kaede from forcing him out of the room.

`No!'

`Why not?'

`You're not a girl!'

`I can be a girl!' He said as the door slammed in his face.

When the day of the 19th of July dawned, Kaede and her friends got up as early as they could bring themselves to. They took all of their things that they would need for the wedding in the dining room in Kaede's grandparent's house. Kaede laid her dress and all of her accessories on the table ready for her the following day.

After a quick breakfast the six of them (Marik came as well) piled into a car and drove to the mall.

`Um, why do we spend half our lives here?' Yumiko asked, thoroughly bored.

`Because I always need new clothes,' Kaede answered, leading them into a bag shop. `And because now I need a suitcase.'

`Why?' Yuula asked absentmindedly.

`I'm going on a Honeymoon, dunce,' Kaede laughed at her. `And my own suitcase is really, really old.'

They bought the suitcase and then went on an errand to buy clothes to fill it. When Kaede was satisfied that they had enough things to last them for a lifetime wherever they were going on the Honeymoon, the six of them went to lunch.

`So, am I coming to the hen night?' Marik asked again.

`NO WAY!' Kaede shouted. `It's girl's only, remember?'

`But I wanna,' Marik moaned.

`I'll tell Seto to ask you to his stag night,' Kaede suggested. `You're not coming with us though.'

Marik sulked as the girls discussed their plans for the evening, and after lunch they climbed back into Sakura's kombi and dropped Marik off at Seto's. Kaede jumped out as well and dragged Marik up to Seto's front door.

She knocked with one hand whilst the other was keeping hold of Marik's collar to prevent him from running back to the kombi. `You're not coming alright!'

`But that's so mean!'

`Tough, you can't change tradition!'

The door opened and Mokuba looked out, scared by the shouting. When he saw Kaede he relaxed, but then tensed again when he noticed Marik struggling in her grip.

`Look after this cretin for me, will you?' Kaede said as she shoved Marik through the door. `And ask Seto if he will please allow him to go with him tonight.'

`Um, Seto won't be very happy about this,' Mokuba muttered under his breath.

`Well, he's not coming to mine,' Kaede said, and walked away, leaving Marik staring after her until the door shut, hiding her from view. Marik ran to the nearest window and looked out as the kombi drove away.

`Right,' Kaede said after she'd climbed back into the car, ignoring Yuula's moan of `Awe, I told you to drive away!' and sitting back in her seat next to Sakura. `So, we're going home and then getting ready for going out tonight.'

They sped home and grabbed some food before heading upstairs to get ready for the hen night. Kaede shotgunned the shower first and then went back to her room. She slipped on a beautiful aquamarine spaghetti strap dress that was collected at the bust and had an asymmetric, layered skirt that came down to the floor at the back and up to just below the knee on her left leg. She stepped into two inch heeled strappy shoes and put in some silver earring studded with light blue jewels. When her hair was dry, she coiled it up behind her head so that it was out of the way and applied some extremely natural make-up. Then she sat on her bed and manicured her nails as she waited for everyone else to hurry up and finish.

Just as they were finishing the limousine arrived and they all climbed into the back. Inside the seats were plush and comfortable and there was a bottle of champagne waiting for them inside.

`Great service,' Sakura grinned as she grabbed the bottle and poured out four glasses of champagne

(only four because Yuula had just said `If you dare give me any of that I'll murder you!') and they sat back and relaxed to the gentle music that they discovered was playing.

As they drove through the town they saw people staring after them, pointing as they swept down the street, as only the rich and famous usually drive around in limos. Kaede sighed and leaned back, watching the lights go by, laughing with her friends and enjoying her last night as an independent woman.

They arrived at the restaurant they were to be having their dinner at and were shown to table. They were treated to the most wonderful five course meal and all the girls were clutching their stomachs and were unable to continue eating or drinking anything else after eating as much as they could of the meal.

After paying the bill, they climbed back into the limousine and made for a club that had only opened a couple of weeks previously and had some very good bands playing there. They descended the stairs into the club and the music hit them as though they had run headlong into a brick wall. The five of them opened the door into the club and (if possible) the music volume doubled. They hurried in and closed the door and saw the band on a raised platform, with an enormous crowd gathered around them, completely lost to the music. To their right was a retro style bar and to their left was an area of sofas that were enclosed in a circle.

`Where to first?' Tea had to shout over the volume of the music.

Kaede pointed to the crowd of people and they pushed through until they were as close to the platform as they possible could get. There, they let themselves loose to the music, letting it take control of every fibre of their being. Kaede felt some hands on her waist and turned to see an attractive young man standing behind her, smiling at her. She looked over at Sakura, who was dancing away with some random guy, as was Yumiko, Yuula and Tea. Kaede grinned and turned back to this guy. He smiled at her and Kaede laughed, and she tried to keep her face straight and dance properly.

After what felt like an hour dancing with that guy Kaede motioned that she was going to get a drink and she headed off towards the bar. Yumiko saw her going and tapped the others on the shoulders and they followed her. Kaede perched on one of the bar stools and waited until they had arrived.

`What do you want to drink?' she shouted above the music.

`Vodka cranberry!' Sakura yelled back. Tea and Yumiko nodded and Yuula rolled her eyes.

`You want a coke or something?' Kaede yelled at Yuula, who nodded. Kaede grinned and turned back to the bar and saw the bartender had turned his attention to her now and was waiting for her to order.

`Four vodka cranberry's and a normal coke please?' Kaede asked, as politely as she could although she was shouting.

`I'll get these,' she heard a voice say beside her. She looked up and saw the guy she had been dancing with handing over a yen note to the bartender. She tried to protest but he put his hand up to stop her. `I insist! I couldn't possibly let you pay for your beverages. I'll have a beer, please,' he added to the bartender, who nodded and found a glass for him.

`So,' said the guy as he turned back to face them. `My name's Atsui, and you lovely ladies are?'

`Hi, I'm Kaede,' Kaede said, holding out her hand and shaking his. `And these are my friends, Sakura, Tea, Yumiko and Yuula.'

`Pleased to meet you,' he said, smiling beautifully at Kaede and reaching out to take her drink from the bartender. Kaede took hers and passed them around to her friends and then the six of them made their way across the club to where the sofas were. They all sat down just as the band finished up.

`Okay, we're going to take a 20 minute break now,' said the lead singer of the band. `But we'll be back soon, so don't you go anywhere now!'

As the band walked offstage some other music started playing, but quieter this time. Most of the crowd made their way towards the bar or the seats and the rest were milling around, some still dancing to the music.

Atsui's friends, the guys who had been dancing with the others, made their way towards them from the bar and sat with them. Kaede sat next to Atsui and they were talking as though they'd known each other for years.

`So what are you five doing out tonight?' he asked, taking a sip of his drink.

`Well, it's my hen night,' Kaede said as brightly as she could manage after drinking almost half of her vodka cranberry.

`Oh my God,' Atsui's eyes widened. `You're getting married?'

`Yeah,' Kaede grinned. `Tomorrow.'

`Woah. And, how old are you?' Atsui said, raising an eyebrow.

`Seventeen,' Kaede replied.

`You're getting married?!'

`Yeah, but it's okay,' Kaede said, waving her hand. `I love him and that's all that matters.'

`Who are you getting married to?'

`Seto Kaiba.'

`You're joking!'

Atsui suddenly burst out laughing. Kaede turned to look at the others to see if they were watching but they were too engrossed in their conversation to notice what Kaede was doing. Kaede turned back to him and took her turn to raise her eyebrow at him. `Why is that so funny?'

Atsui grinned. `Isn't he the billionaire who owns Kaiba Corp?'

`Yes,' Kaede said testily.

`Are you only with him for his money?'

`No!' Kaede said angrily. `Of course I'm not! I couldn't stand him when I first met him, and only after I got to know him did I start to like him, and I never once thought about him only because of his money!'

`Okay, okay,' Atsui laughed. `I was just asking.'

He beamed, drained his drink and started to get to his feet. `C'mon, let's dance some more.'

But just that second an extremely tanned man wearing a sailor's costume came walking up to meet them. Kaede saw him and then looked furiously at Tea, who was avoiding Kaede's eye. When the sailor reached them he struck a pose and said, `So, who's the lucky bride?'

Kaede grinned evilly turned to face him. `She is,' she said, nodding at Tea. `The one wearing the pink dress.'

The sailor tipped his hat at Kaede and then strode over to stand in front of Tea. Tea looked absolutely petrified and looked at everyone to save her from him, but everyone was just laughing at her as the sailor began to take off his clothes.

Everyone else got up and left Tea there, being attacked by the stripper, and as the band trooped back onto stage and picked up their instruments, they lost themselves to the music once more.

37 - At the temple

At the temple

Kaede awoke, groggy and tired. She lifted her head and smiled to see that the sun was shiny so bright that it was as though it had never rained. She stretched and prodded Yuula in the back, in order to wake her up.

`Ow!' Yuula said furiously. `Thanks SO much for waking me up!

`Guess what day it is?!' Kaede grinned happily, jumping out of her bed. She ran into the shower and washed as quickly as she could. Then she pulled on her dressing gown and went back to her room. Inside, each of her friends were just getting up.

`Right, shower, now!' Kaede said to Yuula, and pushed her towards the bathroom.

`Aww, why?' Yuula moaned.

`No unclean people at my wedding!' Kaede said, slamming the door behind her. `And I'll know if you haven't had one!

As one by one, her friends had showers, Kaede rushed downstairs. Her grandparents had already laid out breakfast of croissants, pain au chocolat, freshly made bread and lots of different spreads and a good old pot of tea and another of coffee waiting for them. Kaede hugged and kissed both of her grandparents and sat down at the table and pulled a bit of everything towards her.

`Now, the hairdresser and the make-up woman are coming in about half an hour's time,' said her grandmother, sitting down beside her and pouring her a cup of tea. `And when they're done we're leaving for the Kaiba's mansion at about 12 ish.'

Kaede beamed. `Thank you so much. I couldn't have done this without you.'

`We know, darling,' she laughed. `So, did the five of you have a good hen night?'

Kaede laughed and told her about the stripper Tea had hired. Her grandmother laughed and turned to face Tea when she entered with Sakura, both of them in their pyjamas, waiting for the shower to be free.

`So, got a thing for sailors, have you Tea?'

Tea went bright pink but was saved by Marik, Ishizu and Odion entering. Marik immediately went hyper when he saw Kaede and glomped her as soon as he saw her, squealing that she was going to get

married. Ishizu smiled and said congratulations and Odion kissed Kaede on the cheek.

`So, any last wishes as a single woman?' Her grandfather smiled at her.

`Nope, I can't wait to be married!' Kaede grinned.

`Only because you never want to have to work again,' Sakura laughed at her. Eventually everybody managed to have a shower by the time Kaede's hair had nearly dried, and the hairdressers and make-up people arrived. There were at least five of each, so Kaede and her four bridesmaids were always being attended by a hairdresser and a make-up stylist at the same time. Kaede was sat in her room in a chair in front of her mirror having her hair styled and her nails done at the same time. It took them ages, because she had to have a full manicure, pedicure, make-up done perfectly and hair done so perfectly that there wasn't a hair out of place. When at last she was free to inspect herself she saw that her make-up was mostly pinkish coloured and her nails were done in a shiny, light pink varnish. Every single one of her nails had been clipped to perfection and her hair was coiled tightly at the back of her head with smooth curves held tightly with pins, and not a wisp of hair escaping from it.

She went downstairs and stood in the dining room, looking at her dress. It was still in its plastic covering, waiting to be put on. She pulled out one of the chairs that stood around the dining room table and sat on it, looking at the dress, admiring its beauty.

It's much nicer than my other one, Kaede thought. But then she shook her head. What was she talking about, she'd never had another wedding dress. She'd never been married before.

But then suddenly, as though she had fallen asleep, she found herself being transported back through time, to a land where the sun was so bright it burned the yellow sand surrounding the cities. Kaede found herself looking at the land, when suddenly something appeared on the horizon. She watched it, intend on knowing what it was. As it came closer across the burning desert Kaede saw that it was a camel. It was bearing two riders and their luggage, and seemed to have been going for a long time.

Priest Seto put his arm around Hebeny's waist in case she fell asleep and fell off of the camel onto the burning sand below. She turned around and smiled at him, and then turned back to watch ahead. She could see nothing in front of her, just endless desert. Hebeny sighed and pulled a goats skin flask out of the bag that sat on her lap. She opened it and took a sip, quenching the thirst brought on by the heat of the afternoon sun. She passed it over her shoulder to Seto, who also drank from it.

`How far are we now?' Hebeny asked him as he handed her back the flask.

`Not long now,' Seto said. `A couple more hours.'

Hebeny sighed again and leaned back against him. He hugged her tighter as her head fell against his shoulder and she fell asleep. Seto took the reins of the camel from her hands and continued to steer it forwards.

Hours past and all Seto could see was desert. He looked up to the sky and saw the sun beginning its descent behind the sun dunes and urged the camel on. He didn't want to be caught on the desert at night.

As the camel plodded on, Seto began to make out a town through the haze made by the heat. He raised his hand in order to shield his eyes from the sun as he stared towards the city. He could make out the image of a large building in the centre of the town, the temple of Ra, his first home. Seto smiled and brought the camel into a run, and they sped towards the town.

The change in motion joggled Hebeny from her sleep and she opened her eyes to see the town ahead of them. She laughed and sat up in her seat, new found joy dispelling her fatigue. They approached the city quickly, and entered it just as the sun was disappearing behind the dunes.

They slipped through the city, hidden by the crowds making their way back home after a long day at the market. Their camel took them through the crowds into the shadow of the temple. Seto leaped off of the camel, helped Hebeny down, and then stirred the camel into the stables behind the temple. He took all their bags off of the camel and came back for Hebeny, took her hand, and together they slipped between the shadows until they reached the door of the temple. Seto opened it and looked in to make sure that no one was about, and then he entered, pulling Hebeny in after him.

The temple was lit only with candles and was almost entirely empty save for a priest prostrated before the statue of Ra at the back of the temple. Seto took some robes out of them bag and gave them to Hebeny to change into, and then he made his way to where the priest knelt. Seto waited there for him to stand, and when he did, Seto greeted him warmly with a hug.

Hebeny watched them as she changed her clothes into the robes that Seto had given her. Her travelling clothes were dusty and covered in sand, and these new robes were clean and pure white. She put them on and looked into a looking-glass that was hanging up on the wall of the temple. She smiled; no one would know that she was merely a slave if they saw her in these robes.

She turned back to what Seto was doing. He and the priest were holding deep conversation, and the priest was shaking his head sadly. Seto seemed to be slowly winning their argument, and, a couple of minutes later, he lead the priest down the temple to where Hebeny stood.

Hebeny bowed when they reached her, but looked up when he put his hand on her cheek. She stood upright, and Seto moved to stand next to her, slipping his arm around her shoulders.

The priest looked Hebeny up and down, and then sighed, before turning back to Seto.

'You know I am not allowed to perform this wedding?'

Seto nodded grimly, his face set.

'If anybody finds out that I married the two of you, I'd be killed.'

Seto nodded again.

The priest sighed once more, and ran his hand over his face. He looked upwards to the roof of the temple and began muttering something so quietly that Hebeny, who was standing just in front of him, couldn't hear what he was saying. He closed his eyes, and then looked down at Seto and Hebeny again,

and opened them.

`Very well,' he said, finally giving in. `But on your own heads be it.'

He turned and walked back to where he had been knelt in front of the statue and Seto, after grinning at Hebeny, pushed her forwards, and they followed him.

He disappeared and came back wearing the robes of a priest performing a wedding. He stood in front of Seto and Hebeny and sighed again, looked around the temple as though worried that someone might be watching, and then began the ceremony.

He muttered a lot of stuff in the dialect of the priests and Hebeny could hardly understand any of it, only the words that Seto had taught her, such as marriage and love. The only time she was required to do anything was to nod when the priest looked at her, and that was rarely.

The priest finally finished and Hebeny looked up at Seto. He smiled and reached out a hand to touch her cheek. Pulling her closer towards him, he kissed her gently, before pulling back, and smiling at her warmly.

The priest was just about to say something, but the door to the temple flew open. In came a crowd of people, lead by a dangerous looking man who was glaring angrily at Seto and Hebeny. Seto looked around for the priest, but he had fled, not wishing to be caught up in this. Seto swallowed, and turned to face the crowd.

`It is you! I knew it was him!' the man shouted as he came close enough to see them properly.

Hebeny realised who it was just too late. Arms grabbed her and threw her to the floor, and several people began to tie her arms and legs together. They ripped her robes and pulled her hair, laughing as they saw her struggling against her bonds.

`What are you doing? Let go of her!' she heard Seto shouting, and saw him struggling against the people who held him, desperate to get to Hebeny.

`Stop your shouting!' the man who had lead the group cried about Seto's shouts. `Unless you want your precious wife to die!'

Hebeny felt something cold against her neck and knew from the look of horror on Seto's face that a knife was tracing her throat, deadly and poised to kill on demand.

The man left Seto and slowly approached Hebeny. He stood above her, looking down on her, and smirked. Suddenly, his leg struck out and the toe of his boot caught Hebeny on the side of her face. She felt a trickle of blood drip down her chin from the corner of her mouth and looked up to face the man, glaring at him.

Smirking again, he crouched down and slapped her, and her face burned from where his hand had cracked upon her skin. Again, she forced herself to meet his eyes, and he spat at her, and laughed cruelly.

`So, we've finally recovered our stolen merchandise,' he laughed, and he cronies joined in, their cruel laughter filling the temple and Hebeny's head. She closed her eyes to block out the sound of it, but she couldn't stop it from seeping into her head.

`Stop it!' she heard Seto shout. `Leave her alone!'

`Leave her alone!' the man laughed bitterly. `When she is my property! I paid good money for her, and I'm not going to let some thieving priest take her from me.'

He turned back to Hebeny, and smirked again. `Yes, I bought you that day in the market when I saw you dancing. I recognised you immediately, and knew that I had to have you as mine. But as soon as I had paid for you, that priest come and took you away. The trader selling you wouldn't give me back my money, so when I saw the two of you of that camel as I was coming back from trading at the market, I followed you to the temple. When I saw you go inside I ran back to fetch my men. And here we are, reunited at last.'

Hebeny looked up into his eyes, the eyes that had haunted her nightmares since she was a little girl. She had always told the thieves that she knew her father was a kind man, but in her dreams she always saw a horrible man with cruel eyes attacking her mother and forcing her to sleep with him. She had imagined her mother's screams and his awful laughter as he took pleasure in her pain.

Hebeny looked away, unwilling to have to look at him. He laughed again, and knelt beside her.

`What's wrong, Hebeny?' he said, mock kindness drenching his every word. `Don't want to look upon the face of your father?'

He grabbed hold of her and forced her too look at him, and only when her eyes met his did he let go.

`Ha,' he said, triumphantly. `You look exactly like your mother! She was a beautiful woman, your mother was. But she was a whore, and I can see that likeness in you as well.'

He reached out and touched her. She tried to kick him away, but he laughed even more.

`You're not a virgin, are you? You little whore, you are your mother's image,' he laughed. `Well, come on, darling, won't you give your daddy a hug?'

He pulled her towards him and started to remove her clothes. She yelled and kicked him away, but he pinned her legs down. He ripped her robes even more and his hands ran up and down her bare skin.

Seto looked away, unable to watch him ravage her, but the man holding him grabbed a handful of his hair and turned her head to Hebeny. Seto couldn't look away. He was forced to watch as Hebeny's father took her, again and again. Tears of anger and pity for Hebeny streaked Seto's dusty face and he closed his eyes to save himself from having to watch, but Hebeny's screams filled his head and he couldn't stop the image in his mind.

Eventually he straightened up and laughed again, spitting at her in the face. Hebeny flinched and turned

away, trying to cover herself. One of the men threw a cloth at her and she hid beneath it, crying with pain and embarrassment. Her father laughed again.

`What are you doing, whore?' he shouted at her. `I thought you liked that? No? Well, why didn't you say so?'

He ran forwards and grabbed her wrist, dragging her to her feet. She clutched the cloth to her body as her father threw her against the statue of Ra. Two of his men ran forwards with robes and tied her to the feet of Ra. The ones holding Seto pushed him forwards and made him stand next to Hebeny. She saw his tears and struggled to free her hand from her bonds, trying to grip his hand in hers. But she couldn't reach him.

Her father walked forwards again, and stood in front of her. He rolled up his sleeves and then grabbed hold of Hebeny's hair. He pulled her head and moved in to stand right next to her, holding her head in his hands.

`Well then, Priest,' he said to Seto. `How much do you love dear little Hebeny? What would you do to save her?'

Tears fell renewed down Hebeny's face, and she shook her head frantically at Seto. Her father saw her tears and let go of her roughly, throwing her head against the statue top which she was bound to. Her father walked forwards Pain blinded her for a second, but as soon as her sight came back to her she saw a fist flying at her from nowhere. It stuck her on the side of the face and her head smacked against the statue. Before she had time to recover, another punch hit her in the stomach. Had she not been bound, she would have collapsed to the floor in pain.

Her father stood back, looking at her, satisfied with his work. He was just retracting his arm to take another blow at her when the temple doors banged open.

Pharaoh Atem's royal guard entered the temple, their swords unsheathed. Hebeny heard the shouts of her father's men as they ran in fear of the guards. She looked up to see a battle waging between the Pharaoh's guards and her father's men. But soon she saw no more, as she felt Seto untying her bonds and catching her as she slumped to the ground. He picked her up in his arms and carried her through the back entrance of the temple.

It was now night time, and would have been pitch black had their not been burning torches, carried by even more members of the pharaoh's guard, and there were a sea of camel's waiting for them. Leading them were four camels. One was empty, but was set for two riders. The other three were being ridden by Pharaoh Atem, his consort Herya and Isis. Seto grinned to see them, and covered Hebeny's body a little more with the cloth as he climbed into the seat of his camel.

`So you thought you could just run away, did you?' Pharaoh said, shaking his head. `I'm afraid that you were very much mistaken. As soon as I heard you were gone I rode out with my guard to bring you back.'

`What happened to Hebeny?' Isis called from her camel.

`I'll tell you on the way,' Seto answered, gripping Hebeny more tightly to him, fearing for her safety. And then he remembered that now she was his wife. He looked down at her beaten face and whipped away the trickle of blood that ran from the corner of her mouth down her chin.

`I love you,' he whispered into her ear, as their camel stood as Pharaoh's did, and they rode out of the city.

38 - O Sole Mio

O Sole Mio

`KAEDE! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! YOU'D BETTER NOT BE ASLEEP YOUNG LADY!'

Kaede opened her eyes and found herself back in her grandparent's dining room. She looked around and saw Sakura standing at the door, having just had her hair and make-up done.

`No, I wasn't asleep,' Kaede said, looking in the mirror to check on her own hair and make-up.

`Good, otherwise the hair people would not be happy with you,' Sakura said, coming in and getting out her things for the wedding.

`Is anyone else finished?' Kaede asked, standing up and putting her chair away.

`Well, Yumiko spent about half an hour trying to get the make-up lady to give her green make-up instead of natural stuff, Tea was having a deep and touching conversation about clothes with hers and Yuula attacked hers because she didn't want any make-up on,' Sakura said, ticking them off on her fingers.

Kaede looked at the clock on the wall. They had an hour and a half in which to get ready. `So she doesn't have her make-up on yet?'

`No, she does, I hit her with a hairbrush until she sat down and let them get on with it.'

When all four of her bridesmaids had gathered in the dining room, they all got changed into their dresses for the wedding. Sakura and Tea helped Kaede into her dress. After slipping it on, she ran and stood in front of the mirror.

Her dress was pure white, with diamonds studding her torso. The material was slightly gathered at the bust and it was completely strapless with a hidden corset inside the dress. Kaede beamed when she saw herself in it, and even more so when she put on her necklace and earrings. She had single pearl, silver earrings and a silver chain pearl necklace, each pearl held in place by two diamonds on either side of it and ending with a pear shaped pearl at the end. Then the hairdresser came and fitted her tiara that was to hold her veil in place into her hair. The tiara was made of lots of diamonds swirling in different designs and the veil was in a circular shape laid out, so when it was set in her hair it formed an upside down cone shape and the edges of it were studded with diamonds.

Then, finally, she stepped into heeled sandals with diamonds sparkling along the strap across the toes and either side of the two around her ankles. She then grabbed her bouquet of white roses out and held

it to her stomach. She took a deep breath, and looked in the mirror again, and found that she didn't recognise herself at all in the woman that stood looking back at her.

Kaede's grandmother entered the room when Kaede was finished and beamed when she saw her. She rushed over and hugged Kaede, kissing both her cheeks.

`My dear,' she smiled, `you're now a woman!'

Kaede couldn't find anything to say, and was glad when her grandmother lined her up against the wall with her bridesmaids. They were all wearing beautiful red satiny strapless dresses and all had their hair curled and loose. Kaede stood between Yuula and Sakura, in the centre of their group, and didn't have to try to smile when their picture was taken.

They were just about to set off when the doorbell rang. Kaede's grandmother went to open it and she returned followed by Duke, who was wearing jeans, his sleeveless red shirt and old, smelly trainers.

`Woah, you guys are dressed up,' he said when he entered the room. `I thought the wedding was tomorrow.'

There was silence that followed this. Then Kaede stepped forward to attack Duke, but Yuula got there first.

`YOU. ARE. SUCH. AN. IDIOT!' she shouted, bashing him over the head with her handbag. `HOW COULD YOU HAVE FORGOTTEN!'

She continued hitting him with her bag until it became apparent that she was actually hurting him quite a lot, and Yumiko had to come and pull her off of Duke. He sported the most brilliant nosebleed and his hair was a mess.

`Get him cleaned up right now!' Kaede said, stepping forward. `And don't you dare get blood on my dress, otherwise I will never speak to you again.'

Kaede looked so angry that Duke whimpered slightly, got up and ran to the kitchen to be cleaned up, whilst Sakura called Joey and told him to fetch Duke's suit from his house. Half an hour later, they were piling Duke back into his car, cleaned up and dressed in his suit, still telling him what an idiot he was. Then the Rolls Royces arrived.

Kaede shivered as she climbed into the back of hers, followed by Sakura and Yuula. As they drove through the city to get to the Kaiba mansion, Kaede was thinking furiously about whether or not she should actually go through with this. Sakura noticed her shredding a tissue into confetti, and asked her what was wrong.

`Should I do this?' Kaede asked furiously, throwing what remained of the tissue onto the floor. `I mean, am I too young? Should I wait until I've finished school? Should I marry Seto?'

All this came out in such a rush that Sakura took several seconds before answering.

`Yes, no, no, and yes,' Sakura said, beaming once she'd said it. `Well, I mean, the last one is a bit iffy, but I suppose...'

`WHAT?! SO I SHOULDN'T MARRY SETO?!'

`Do whatever makes you happy,' Sakura said quickly.

`I knew you'd say that!' Kaede said, slumping back in her seat. `So I should marry him?'

`If he makes you happy,' Sakura said carefully.

`Oh, that's a rubbish answer. Yuula,' she said, leaning over Sakura to see Yuula, `should I marry Seto?'

`No!'

`Excellent,' Kaede grinned as she leaned back in her chair. `So, using the philosophy that you should always do the opposite to what Yuula says, I have decided to go through with the wedding.'

`Good for you!' Sakura beamed.

They pulled into the Kaiba mansion driveway and swept up the drive. When they stopped, Kaede climbed out and nervously smoothed the creases out of her dress. Sakura and Yuula followed and then they made their way up the front steps. They opened the doors and were shown through to the waiting room for the bride. Then they were called to go outside to where the wedding was taking place.

Firstly Yumiko and Tea walked up the centre aisle, and then Sakura and Yuula followed. And finally, taking a deep breath, Kaede stood between her grandparents, turned the corner, and looked around her.

The congregation were sat in two rows facing forwards, but all of them turned around to see Kaede walking down the centre aisle with her grandparents. Kaede didn't know where to look, so she looked down at her feet, and saw that the aisle was covered in white rose petals. She looked up and saw Seto was standing at the front watching her walk towards him, with his best man, Takumi, on his left and Kaede's bridesmaids on his far right. He caught Kaede's eye and smiled at her, making her smile even more. When she reached the front, she kissed her grandmother, and then her grandfather, on the cheek, and walked right to the front.

As she reached Seto, she saw that they were standing in front of the most perfect maple tree she had ever seen. She beamed at Seto, and then turned to face the marriage official, who would be marrying them.

Kaede looked around the crowd. In the front row were her grandparents and the Ishtars, and in the row behind them were the boys (Joey, Duke, Ryou and Yami) and Mai. In the front row on the other side sat Mokuba and Tenshi, but also Cira. Kaede beamed at her when she saw her and then turned back to face Seto.

`We are here today to join this man, Seto Kaiba, and this woman, Kaede Mishua, in holy matrimony,' the wedding official began. Then he waffled on some more about love and Kaede could barely hear the

words that he was saying, partly because of the fact that her blood was pounding so hard in her ears, and partly because the sound of his dull voice was sending her to sleep. She managed to say yes at the correct times and to repeat what he said when needed.

`If any of you here present today know any reason why this man and this woman cannot be married, speak now or forever hold your peace...' the official said, still bored and dull.

Suddenly there came an eruption from the bridesmaids that sounded very much like a whole load of French swearwords that Kaede recognised as the ones Ana had taught her before she had gone to French. Kaede turned to face the bridesmaids and saw Yuula holding a mobile phone.

`Um, sorry,' Yuula squeaked. `I thought Ana might want to know. Hey, Ana,' she said, holding the phone to her face. `Yeah, I've gotta go now. By-eeeeee,' she hurriedly said down the phone before hanging up. Kaede raised her eyebrow at her and made a silent vow to kill Yuula later. But she had to turn back to Seto to say their vows, so she put it to the back of her mind and continued.

Kaede took a deep breath, and then began. `It is so strange to think that this time last year, Seto and I couldn't stand to be in each other's presence. Neither of us could look each other in the eye nor even have a civilised conversation together. But that all changed one night, when I turned to a friend for comfort, and what followed was the start of the most wonderful relationship I have ever had. You're my friend, my companion and my lover. We've been through ups and downs, good and bad, events that neither of us ever wish to mention again, and we've stuck together. I love you, and I can't wait to begin my life with you today.'

Kaede finished and sighed, and then waited for Seto to start. He looked up at the maple, and then turned back to Kaede, before taking a deep breath.

`Kaede,' he said, smiling broadly, `there was never a time when I didn't want to be with you, when I didn't wish you were mine. Even when I thought you hated me, I would always long for you. I guess our true relationship started about a year ago, when I held the Kaiba Corporation sit down dinner, and forced you to dance with me. After that, it seemed that our relationship improved every time we met, to the point where you would even remain at the same party as me.

`It is funny how your name, Kaede, is so appropriate to you. Kaede means maple, and as you see, we are standing in the shadow of a maple today. Maples flourish red in the autumn, and we first got together as a couple in the middle of October. And the first time I ever met you, I past a maple tree of the way back home, and thought that it was the most beautiful tree I've ever seen. Kaede, my dear maple, I'm so glad that now I can truly call you my own.'

Kaede reached forwards and hugged him, and whispered in his ear, `Yours in way longer than mine!'

`You're obviously just not that passionate,' Seto said as they pulled apart.

`And now, with the exchanging of rings, you shall be bound in matrimony,' said the marriage official, and Takumi and Sakura leaned forward and gave them both their rings. Kaede took Seto's hand and placed a silver ring on his wedding ring finger, and Seto did the same for her, except her ring was studded with diamonds.

`I now pronounce you husband and wife,' said the official. `You may kiss the bride.'

Seto put his hand on Kaede's cheek and Kaede smiled up at him. Then he leant forwards and Kaede felt his lips against hers as she closed her eyes, and then she heard a massive cheer erupt from the crowd. Kaede pulled back from Seto for a second and looked around them, and saw everyone had gotten to their feet and were all beaming at them. Kaede blushed and turned back to Seto.

`Fry an egg!' he laughed, pressing the back of his hand to her cheek.

`Oy, show some respect for your wife!' Kaede laughed, kissing him again. They turned and posed for some photographs, and then walked back down the aisle.

They went back up to just outside the mansion where a veranda had been set up, with a top table for the Kaede, Seto, their family, maid of honour and best man. Kaede sat down next to Sakura and Seto and listened to the speeches, most of which were boring, and then had the wedding food. It was, obviously, superb, having been made by the best chefs Seto could find, and there were loads of Kaede's favourite foods, including Chinese.

Afterwards, the veranda was cleared of table to make a dance floor, and Seto took Kaede's hand and lead her down onto the dance floor for their first dance as husband and wife. Seto took her hand and spun her out as the music began, `(Everything I Do) I Do It For You" by Bryan Adams. Kaede spun back in again and they danced, slowly, as gradually the rest of the dance floor filled. Sakura danced with Yami, Yuula with Ryou, Yumiko with Takumi, Joey with Mai and Mokuba with Tenshi. Tea was standing on the side talking to Cira, who looked as though she would love to talk to anyone else at that precise time, and Duke was watching Yuula dancing with Ryou, scowling.

After the first dance, they all gathered to one side and Yuula phoned Ana again. Kaede grabbed the phone to talk to her.

`I can't believe you didn't tell me!' Ana yelled down the phone at her.

`Well, it's not exactly the thing that is especially easy to say to people down the phone, is it? "Oh hi, how are you doing? By the way, I'm getting married soon! Enjoy the rest of your stay in France; sorry you won't be able to make it.'"

`Hmph. Congratulations.'

`Thank you!' Kaede beamed, and handed the phone around. As soon as Ana had congratulated Seto, Kaede and Seto returned to the dance floor, and left her chatting to Sakura, who was slightly tipsy and happy, as she had been dancing with Yami for a long time.

Gradually, her friends returned to the dance floor, until eventually a Rolls Royce appeared to take Kaede and Seto to the airport.

`But where are we going?' Kaede asked as they were about say goodbye to everyone.

`Well, I had no idea where you wanted to go, so I bought these,' he produced to tickets. Kaede took them and she saw that for destination it was blank.

`Um, so, where are we going?'

`Anywhere,' Seto shrugged.

Kaede beamed and hugged him, and then turned to say goodbye to everyone else. She found Sakura and gave her an especially big hug, and told her good luck with her and Yami. Then she hugged Yuula and Yumiko (against their wishes), then Tea. Then she found the boys and gave them all brief hugs, even Joey, who looked as if he had swallowed something extremely unpleasant. She found Mokuba, Tenshi and Cira standing by the front door of the house and hugged Mokuba and Tenshi, and then turned to Cira.

`Are you going to look after them whilst we're away?' Kaede asked.

`Yeah,' shrugged Cira. `And the house.'

`Make sure there is still a house here when we get back,' Kaede grinned.

Seto heard this as he was coming to say goodbye to Mokuba and grimaced. `And please don't have any parties or break any thing, or let anything be stolen, lock all the doors at night, make sure-'

`Come on,' Kaede said, dragging him away. `The servants will help her look after everything. Bye Cira. Bye everyone!'

And with that, they ran down the steps and into the Rolls Royce, and everyone watched and waved as it swept off down the driveway.

39 - The Final Pages

The Final Pages

Eight cars braked in the driveway of the Kaiba mansion, and each of them matched the people inside them. One was a pink people carrier, the next an old, worn down kombi. Next to that were two brand new, sleek convertibles, one of which was red, the other blue. Then there came a green banger, and next to that pulled up a swish, stylish yellow Lamborghini. Finally came a simple yet stylish navy ford and after that a flash Lotus.

Kaede watched from the front window as all of these cars pulled up, and then smiled as she owners climbed out. Seeing each person made her smile even more, until the little boy whom she was carrying on her hip asked her what was making her so happy.

`Just seeing them all together again, Haru,' Kaede smiled, giving her son an affectionate hug before setting him on the ground.

Kaede smiled at her son, as she always did when she saw him. He was so cute, with soft brown hair and bright green eyes. Kaede would hug him whenever she saw him, and spent half her life playing games with him. He was five years old and extremely inquisitive, but terribly shy at the same time.

He beamed and ran to the front door and opened it. Kaede followed him, and saw him start to run down the steps towards them, but stopped short, and put both his hands to his mouth and started sucking them, a sure sign of embarrassment. Kaede reached him and he hid his face against her legs, and Kaede laughed at him.

`Don't be frightened,' she said, taking hold of his wrists and pulling his hands from his mouth. `They won't hurt you, and if you do they'll have to answer to me.'

Haru looked embarrassed, and hid his face again against his mother's trousers. Kaede took his hand and held it in her own, and they hurried down the rest of the steps towards their guests.

Each of the owners of their cars looked exactly the same, just a little older. Sakura and Yami leaned against the kombi and were chatting to Yuula and Duke, who were stood next to the people carrier, the most unlikely couple you could ever have imagined, but there on Yuula's finger was a wedding ring, and through the open door of the people carrier you could see three little faces peeping out. Takumi also stood with them, without a girl on his arm, and seemingly enjoying it.

The convertibles of course were owned by Ana and Marc, and Marc stood with his arm around his wife, Tea's, shoulder. Ana, who still disapproved slightly of their relationship, was with Honda, her now fiancée, by their convertible, chatting to Yumiko, who leaned against the green banger with her albino

brother, Art. The owner of the Lamborghini was Joey, but the car wasn't as much his as it was Mai's, his wife, but he had decided to turn up alone, which was fine for Kaede, as then she didn't have to put up with Mai's sarcasm. And at the end was Ryou with the Ford and Marik with the Lotus.

As soon as they noticed Kaede coming towards them they all hurried over, and Kaede hugged everyone of them, some more affectionately than others, but it was still a hug. Yuula ran back to the people carrier to find her kids, all of whom Kaede had already met and adored. The eldest was a seven year old boy called Ryou, who was absolutely adorable, but extremely shy. He had black hair that seemed to be all over the place, and the loveliest blue eyes. After that were the twin girls, Ichigo and Kiichigo. They, too, were extremely cute, dressed in pretty dresses all the time. They had green eyes and their hair was shoulder-length and black, but Ichigo wore hers loose, whereas Kiichigo had hers in bunches. Both girls were very outgoing, and tried to make friends wherever possible, but Ichigo's attention span was slightly longer and would always be polite, and Kiichigo would run off and play and would seem to be impolite. Kaede was the godmother all three of the children and hugged them when Yuula came back with them from their car.

Ichigo immediately grabbed Haru's hand and Kiichigo took his other, and they ran off back up the steps to the house. Ryou, however, stayed with his mother, wary of all the new people.

Kaede leaned them back up to the house, which she had completely taken over since moving in ten years before. She showed them through the house to outside, where there was a large table set up by the swimming pool, and where Seto was sat, enjoying the sunshine with a quiet drink.

'Hello,' said Seto as pleasantly as he could manage after seeing Joey walking out of his house. 'How are you all?'

There was a chorus of 'Fine, thanks' from their guests, and then Seto turned to Kaede.

'You'd better go and see Esme, she was crying not that long ago.'

'And you left her to cry?' Kaede nearly shouted.

'No, I left Mokuba and Tenshi with her.'

'Dear God!' Kaede said, turning and running back through the house, Sakura, Ana, Tea, Yuula and Yumiko at her heels. Kaede led them at a pace to the nursery next to Haru's room, in which she heard the giggles of Ichigo, Kiichigo and Haru, and peeped inside and saw them playing with his teddy bears. She smiled, before quickly moving in to the next room and opened the door. She saw Esme in her cot, awake but not crying, and Mokuba and Tenshi in the corner.

'What do you think you're doing?' she demanded, interrupting them. 'If you're going to do that, then don't do it in front of the baby!'

Tenshi scowled, but Mokuba stood and led her out of the room. Kaede shook her head and went to Esme's cot, picked her up, and walked her back to her friends.

'Aww!' Tea immediately squeaked as soon as she saw Esme. Kaede held her in her arms, so proud of

her daughter. Esme was the most perfect little thing Kaede had ever seen, with her tiny little fingernails on her baby fingers and her nearly transparent eyelids. Kaede was always amazed at how tiny she was, being only a month old.

‘Can we hold her?’ Sakura asked, and Kaede beamed, and handed Esme into Sakura's arms. Sakura was one of Esme's godmothers, and had never yet met her goddaughter, but now she beamed down at her with such love Kaede recognised it as the way that she herself looked at her children.

Esme was past around the group of girls, and when Kaede got her back she tucked her safely in her cot. She stood and turned around to leave, when she saw her grandmother standing in the doorway, looking in and smiling at them. She smiled back at the old woman, she and Kaede's grandfather had moved in with the Kaibas and her grandmother had become Haru's and Esme's nanny.

‘How is she?’ the old woman asked.

‘She's good,’ Kaede sighed. ‘She's just gone back to sleep though.’

Kaede's grandmother smiled at the cot. ‘I never thought I'd live to see my great-grandchildren, and now I have two. What more could an old woman want? I'm in the most fantastic house with my darling granddaughter, my husband, a new family and two young ones.’

Kaede beamed and hugged her grandmother, and then, bidding her goodbye, left to go to Kaede's room.

‘Why aren't we going back to the pool?’ Yumiko moaned. ‘There was food there!’

‘Ah, but telling you would ruin the surprise,’ Kaede grinned, and they eventually come to hers and Seto's bedroom. They went inside and Kaede ran to the wardrobe and opened it. As it was a walk-in wardrobe, she walked in and riffled through the various racks of dresses until she found what she was looking for. She pulled out six dresses covered in their plastic protective cover and hung them up on a rail that hung from the ceiling of the wardrobe. This was extremely useful because Kaede could then pull out several dresses when trying to decide what to wear and it made it all the more easier.

As she hung them up, her friends saw for the first time what they were in full. They were six specially made, fitted especially for the one who was going to wear it, early 1900s English tea party dresses. And whilst they were all staring at them in amazement, Kaede pulled out six hat boxes from next to her hat stand and handed five of them out to her friends. She gave each girl the appropriate hat, as each had been made to fit their heads, and then she put on her out. They were the huge old tea party hats, and Kaede had also had special bags, shoes, gloves, parasols and even underwear made for her guests.

‘What do you think?’ she grinned, so happy that they had all been stunned into silence, but desperate for an answer.

It was Yuula who broke the silence. ‘WOW!’

Yuula pulled her hat out of its box and crammed it onto her head, and then ran to look in the mirror. The others warmed to the idea more gradually, and eventually Kaede got each of them to do their hair and

make-up properly and then get into the clothes.

‘So, what's going to happen to these afterwards?’ Sakura asked, after putting on all of the clothes and turning in front of the mirror. She looked exactly as if she'd stepped out of an early 20th century book, and looked elegant and beautiful at the same time.

‘Well, you get to keep them of course,’ said Kaede, standing in front of another mirror as she put on her hat.

‘What?!’ Ana exclaimed, having gotten into a dress that could only have been worn by an olive skinned, tall French girl. ‘But aren't they extremely expensive?’

‘Yes,’ Kaede said, adjusting her dress slightly. ‘But they won't fit anyone else. I got all your measurements especially for these dresses, so they fit you perfectly.’

Kaede's own dress was fantastic. She had a wonderful white under dress and a navy top dress that had lapels just like a jacket, but came down to her ankles. It had a lighter blue flower designs on the front of the over dress and a navy, satin sash around the waist, and a pure white shawl to go around her arms and behind her back. Her hat was also navy blue and had a large ribbon running around it, coming to an enormous bow at the front. Her parasol was white and frilly and her gloves skin tight and white. She stepped into some high heeled shoes that were a sort of navy suede and coiled her hair behind her head.

The six of them made their way back to the garden, but this time they went outside a different door. They came to a very sunny part of the garden where an amazing old fashioned tea table had been set up, and it was set with delicious tea party food, many different varieties of confectionary, several pots of tea and little triangle sandwiches with many different fillings.

From behind them they heard a nervous laugh and all of them turned around. There were their husbands, boyfriends, brothers and friends, standing in early 1900s suits with their hair done in pathetic curls (a lot of them using up a lot of gel), apart from Duke, who had refused to ruin his ponytail. The six of them burst out laughing and then they all sat down together, ready to start the tea party.

‘Hey, where's Marik?’ Yuula suddenly asked, looking around for him. But it was true that Marik wasn't there. Kaede smiled evilly.

‘Marik is ... how shall I say this ... getting ready,’ Kaede grinned, and looked over Tea's shoulder into the house. ‘Oh, here he comes now.’

Everyone turned to look as Marik bounced out of the house, wearing the frilliest dress, carrying the frilliest parasol and sporting the biggest hat any of them had ever seen. He looked absolutely adorable, and Yuula nearly had a fit when she saw how cute he looked. He curtsied and walked over elegantly in his high heels, and sat down next to Kaede, and proceeded to pour himself some tea.

Everyone looked slightly scared by this, except Kaede. ‘Oh, yes, Marik said it wasn't far that he didn't get to be a bridesmaid at my wedding, so he demanded to wear a dress today.’

Everyone laughed as Marik helped himself to some confectionary and the conversation began again.

Their meal stretched from being afternoon tea to dinner as the day wore on, with intervals between their courses. Gradually, their party increased, as the children reappeared, as did Mokuba and Tenshi, and Kaede's grandparents.

They were served their evening meal just as the sun was setting, and everyone was given a glass of champagne. Before Kaede would let them eat, she stood up and made a speech.

`Now, I know that friendship speeches aren't my speciality' - here she looked at Tea and raised an eyebrow - `I have tried my hardest to make a speech that does kind of directly link to our friendship. So, let me begin, and don't you dare laugh.

`I have never been happier than I am when I am with my friends. All of you are extremely dear to me, whether you are friends from way back, or friends that I met when I first came to Japan, and none of you are worth more or less to me than another one of you. I wouldn't trade any of you for the whole world. I'm so happy to have you all here today, you have no idea how much it means to me to see all my friends together again after so many years, and with five wonderful new additions' (she waved her hand towards where her grandmother sat, holding Esme in her arms, and where Haru, Ryou, Ichigo and Kiichigo were sitting) `and I thank you for putting up with my lousy hostessing. You are all truly amazing friends.

`And now to capture this moment in time,' she grinned, and whipped a camera from behind her. She raised her to her eye as quickly as she could, and before any of them could move, or remove the slightly shocked, open-mouthed expression from their faces, took a picture.

She put the camera down, and as soon as she noticed people looking murderously at it, picked up her glass of champagne and raised it into the air.

`To friendship!' she cried, and beamed as they all echoed her.

`To friendship!'