

Ice and Snow

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Fairytales were never meant to have happy endings, they're warning of the past. Hidden in Cephiro's past is a deadly secret, whatever does happen to those who fail the Test? Where do they go, what becomes of them, what vengeance do they seek?

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1 - Of Death and Ice

*This will be my first story on this site. I hope you enjoy, the idea for this came from book six of DNAngel, a fairy tale called Ice and Snow, and I've wanted to write a Magic Knight Fanfiction for a while now. So I just decided to throw them all into one. Wish me luck; I have a bad habit of starting things and then taking a while to finish them. I welcome constructive criticism not flames, so if you have nothing constructive to say don't say anything at all. And I don't mind the random ``Nice job!" but if you have any ideas they would be most welcomed. Oh yes, I don't own Magic Knight Rayearth or DNAngel... *sighs* wish I did but alas no. And so without further ado we can begin.*

Prologue

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The purest snow has shadows of blue instead of gray. Whether it is night or day, the shadows stay the same pure azure blue. And on nights when no one else is around the blue-tinted fields of snow are just there, blue like her eyes, waiting forever as though time is standing still. Slow and silent the snow keeps falling...

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He felt cold, so cold and yet... warmth was creeping its way into his limbs. Slowly he felt life pour back into him, this warmth of heart, he'd only felt this warmth once before. When he was with her... With effort he opened his amber eyes, eyes like honey in a jar with the sun streaming through. He looked around at the bodies of soldiers all around him. Cephirean, Autozaman, Fahren, Chizetaean, all nations had rallied to the call of war. In the aid of this world. But... the last thing he remembered was... the arrow. He sat up clutching his left shoulder where the shaft of a half embedded arrow should have been and knew he should be lying in a pool of his own blood. And yet... among the snow, where he had been lying dead, there were rose petals, a deeper red than blood. They surrounded him, everywhere and at his feet... a single perfect blue rose. He reached for it, his blond bangs falling into his eyes, and held it gently between his fingers. The rose had no thorns and its stem was long and green. A blue rose, her favorite. Suddenly his eyes widened as the horrid thought came to him.

He was on his feet in an instant running across the bloody battle field, cold with the ice and snow, cold with the death of thousands, cold with the thought of what could have happened to her. Faster, faster to where he'd seen her last, in the thick of the onslaught.

``Please, no, not now. Not after everything, not now."

*Suddenly he saw her, her lithe form covered in a light blanket of snow. Snow... he had once thought it was only the symbol for purity, how wrong she had proven him... She had told him that this was its **other** meaning...*

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``Snow is a symbol for purity..." she said.

``That's what I've always thought" he looked up at her usual calm, serene face with question.

``But... it has a darker meaning" she looked saddened suddenly.

``It does?" he asked perplexed, what could this other meaning be that made her so sad?

``Yes, death..." her voice faded to a whisper in his mind.

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He dropped to his knees next to her and pulled her into his embrace, her head lulling back to the crook of his arm. Her long silky hair tumbled over the snow around them, she looked so peaceful as if she were sleeping, but this was the sleep that people don't wake up from. She had no mortal wound and yet she did not move and did not breath, she was icy to the touch. ``No, please..." his voice came in a strained whisper. Why was she gone from him? She couldn't leave, he'd only just found her!

Then in his memory a soft voice filled his ears, the sound of her prayers. Her voice and what she had done to save him became painfully clear. He pulled her body close to his and called out to anything that could hear, to the one that had taken from him what he held most dear. The one who had granted her wish and taken his away,

``Please, give her all the time that I have left!"

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Ok, there's the first part. What did you think? Chapter one has been started but with all the tests I have coming up it may be awhile. *Sighs* I really do hate not having time to write. Please review. Kiera out.

2 - Water's Shadow

Water's Shadow

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Umi stood patiently in the elevator as its silver doors slid close with a soft hiss; she had a basket in her hand, a cake she'd baked for the others. The elevator rose quietly to the top of Tokyo Tower where she knew her friends would be waiting for her. A loud ding and the doors opened, she stepped out onto the deck her blue hair whisking out behind her with her quick steps.

“Umi! There you are, we were wondering where you were. Come on its time to go” Hikaru chirped happily. The bubbly redhead flittered around her like a hummingbird.

She couldn't help but laugh, “I was baking a cake. See” she held up the small basket with the cake inside. “Oh, its smells so good. Is it still warm?” Fuu asked standing by her side and eyeing the basket, “That's when it's the best to eat” Hikaru added.

“No, no girls. Not until we get there, it's for everyone” she giggled and they clasped hands. Then an all too familiar light surrounded the trio and they were gone.

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Clef spoke with Presea quietly in the throne room, they both looked up at the sudden flash of light and the three girls from earth floated lightly to the floor.

“Hey!” Hikaru bounded forward and hugged the artisan tightly. “Oh, Hikaru,” the blond woman laughed, “You were just here last week, you're hugging me like you haven't seen me in years.” Hikaru finally let go and smiled, “I know. I'm just glad to see you” the fiery redhead hopped up and down. Clef smiled lightly at the three, “Welcome back girls, Presea and I were about to go into my study for some tea. Would you like to join us?”

Hikaru and Fuu exchanged looks and Umi could barely contain herself from laughing, she knew what they were both thinking. She whispered to them, blue eyes blazing with mirth, “Go on you two I know you want to” she looked over their shoulders to Presea and gave a wink. The older woman caught her hint and grinned returning the wink, “You know last I saw Lantis and Ferio were sparring in the room down the hall...”

That was all it took for the fire and wind knight to suddenly find reasons to decline Clef's offer. “Hey, guys we're going to...ah just take a walk. Right Fuu?” Hikaru shot a glance at her friend. “Yes, a nice walk. Why don't we join you later?” the intelligent blond was slightly blushing. Umi restrained herself from snickering, “Sure you can catch up with us later.” The words were barely out of her mouth and the other two knights were off and practically running down the hall.

Moments after the two knights were gone Presea caught Umi's gaze and for a second they both stared, and then dissolved into laughter. Clef on the other hand only smiled once more, shaking his head at the women's antics. “Shall we go then?” The three went down the hall and were sipping tea in his study a few minutes later.

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Hikaru and Fuu were down the hall in a few seconds, stopping outside the door to the sparing room to catch their breath. Hair was smoothed back and clothes were straitened before they both glanced at

one another grinned and Hikaru stepped forward pushing the large doors open.

They had been at least once a week to Cephro (or Formally Cephro as Hikaru had still not decided on a name. So at last just leaving it at Cephro seemed like a good idea to everyone) for over a year now. But Fuu couldn't help feel her heart skip a little when they came; she was always glad to see her friends but it really jumped in her chest because of one person... ``Ferio!" she called his name when she saw the Prince lounging by a window, his sword by his side. He lazily slide open one golden eye and then sat up with a smile. ``Sparing indeed" she huffed at him as he and Lantis were taking naps in the afternoon sun. ``Hey we were just resting. Right Lantis?" the young man looked back over his shoulder at the tall, lanky, dark haired man snoozing to the left of him. Lantis sat up slowly and nodded with a slight smile on his face, getting him to really seem `happy' was harder than making Guru Clef laugh, but seeing the petite redhead always put that soft smile on his face.

It wasn't long before they had split off into pairs, Hikaru and Lantis, presumably, went off into the palace gardens, as a certain fairy was not there to object, and Fuu and Ferio stayed in the sparing room together in the sunlight.

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Darkness, it swirled and flowed around her, like an evil, black tide sweeping everything it can out to sea. Eyes like silver moonlight stare into a mirror upon a cold stone floor, ``They all look so happy, but it shall not last for long...No one in this world deserves to be happy..." the shadow swelled around her and a black gloved hand came up to push a strand of her long auburn hair from her face, ``If he couldn't be happy, if he had to suffer," the black gloved hand clenched tight, ``...then I will make all worlds suffer. ALL of them..." her cold voice echoed in the room. Soon her swift steps echoed down an empty corridor as she waved her hand over the mirror, erasing the image from view.

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Umi had served some of her cake to Clef and Presea, who had become quite accustomed to the earth dessert, and was sitting enjoying her tea. She looked up at Clef as he finished eating, ``Hey, I know Fuu and Hikaru went to see Ferio and Lantis but where are the others?" Clef gazed at her a moment, worry etching itself on his face, ``Lafarga and Caldina went to the southern border. There was a report of something strange, Ascot went with them." ``Oh...something strange? Was it a monster?" ``We're not sure," Presea picked up, ``But according to the messenger it was something they didn't recognize." ``I don't like the sound of that" Umi murmured and closed her eyes thoughtfully. ``You needn't worry. I'm sure its nothing that the three of them can't handle...oh I almost forgot. Presea would you go check on the Autozam commander, it's about that time?" Umi glanced over to the sword smith who was still eating her cake, ``Oh I will Clef" she stood up and the mage looked up at her slightly surprised, ``Its ok. Presea can finish eating and I don't have anything else to do, I don't mind at all" she smiled. ``Alright" he nodded. Umi walked to the door and pushed them open quietly and was gone down the hall. ``Is it just me," Presea asked softly after she left, ``or does she seem a little different today?" The mage said nothing but brooded silently.

Her feet made a soft pattering sound as she walked alone down the hall to the room Eagle was in. Umi sighed a little on the sad side, she was glad that her friends were happy, they always looked forward to coming, but sometimes she felt like a burden to them. For some reason she felt like she was always tagging along with them. She knew that they had found love in this land and she knew Ascot liked her and she hated that she had hurt him but she just didn't feel the same. Even though he'd grown she still just saw the small boy she had first met in the water shrine, a friend yes, but just a friend.

She suddenly pulled from her thoughts as she reached the room. She actually hadn't been in here all that often, Hikaru came to see him more often than her and Fuu did and they always came *with*

Hikaru. She wondered if Eagle would ever wake up, Hikaru had voiced some of her worries to her the other day. She was worried that he wouldn't wake up and the fact that he was talking less and less made the redhead even more worried about the commander's fate. Pushing the door open to let her through she closed it behind her soundlessly. "Eagle?" she said softly, if he was resting she didn't want to disturb him. Even though his body remained asleep always, his mind rested in normal cycles and sometimes he'd be fully asleep and other times not. She felt his mind connect to hers so he must be awake, she got an immediate sense of confusion from him and giggled. "It's Umi. Hikaru's friend?" she sent him a mental picture of herself in her machine armor for that had been the only time he'd seen her before he'd fallen into his coma. "Oh, yes I remember you." his voice was light in her head, barely a whisper. "Guru Clef sent me to check on you, are you doing alright?" she knew the question was kind of redundant but she couldn't think of much else to say to him. "I'm alright. Thank you Umi. It's been a long time since you came with Hikaru." She smiled lightly, "I know. Just didn't...well" she really didn't know what to say. He actually laughed, she could hear it echo lightly in her mind's ear, it was a warm sound and soothing to hear, "It's alright. I understand" There was an awkward silence as neither knew what to say to the other. "How are Hikaru and the others?" she felt the mental question. "There're fine. They both went to the sparing room to find Lantis and Ferio" she smiled lightly and her eyes traveled to the window, which was open, letting the fresh breeze in. Eagle's mental smile was apparent, "I'm glad that Hikaru is slowly getting to Lantis, I think it's good for him." Eagle waited for Umi to respond but she didn't, but he did feel her heavy thoughts and certain sadness, "Umi? Is something wrong?" his kind concern made her smile, yet it was not a happy smile. "Oh, no. I'm fine. I just had a really busy day today. I'm really tired" she glanced back to his unmoving form on the bed, hands folded lightly across his chest, "Oh, did you go to your 'school' today?" after his question their conversation picked up anew, with a thankfully lighter tone.

"Hurry up Lantis." the red knight pulled the cail after her with much impatience at his calm slow walk, so the complete opposite of her quick fidgety steps. Lantis, as cool and collected as ever, gave into her hand in his tugging him forward and quickened his pace slightly. "We're going to stay for a few days but I want to see Eagle before we go out tomorrow...I wish he'd get better soon, so he could go with us" her voice took on a sad tone. "I'm sure he will. There's no one in Cephire with a stronger will than you, I'm sure with your help he'll be fine" the cail had stopped her and was looking down at her sad eyes, the look of them didn't suit her. He lightly ran a hand through her hair and a smile tugged at her lips, a look far more at home on her face. Placing a hand on her back he urged her onward down the hall. Hikaru was quite happy that he was there and happy with the kind words he'd given her. She had slowly matured over the year or so since they had first met, her first year of high school having something to do with it, but all the same she wasn't quite the little girl she had once been. She took his arm and was glad today that it was unarmored, not that she didn't mind it when he wore his armor...but it was like trying to cuddle with a tank. So with much glee and a secret smile she pulled Lantis down the hallway to Eagle's room. They had almost reached the doors when they heard the sound of a faint female laugh drifting to them. They both looked at each other; Hikaru shrugged and pushed the door open.

Both Hikaru and Lantis were slightly surprised to find the owner of the laughter. Umi was now seated on the floor next to Eagle's bed her elbows on the coverlet, her hands holding her head up as she laughed again. Hikaru could now also hear Eagle's mental laughter; it made her smile to hear him happy. "Umi! Eagle!" she bounded over to them and well ...**glomped** would be the best word...poor Umi. Who let out a little squeak as the knight of fire hugged the air out of her.

Though Eagle couldn't see the hyper fire knight enter he could feel her formidable force of will power, Umi's will was strong too, not quite as much as her fellow knight but there was enough difference that he could tell their magical aura's apart easily. He could also feel Lantis's aura hovering just out of

his main field of `sight.' ``*Hikaru?*" he called the redhead's name when he felt Umi vainly trying to breath, and the redhead looked up from her friend but didn't let go, ``What is it Eagle?" she smiled brightly know that he couldn't see it but could still sense it. ``*I think your friend Umi would like to breath*" at this Hikaru looked down to see Umi turning blue, ``OH! Sorry Umi!" she let go and Umi gasped, ``AIR! Finally!" and giggled as she caught her breath. ``Hikaru...Caldina is really starting to rub off way too much on you." The water knight climbed to her feet and sat on the edge of Eagle's bed. ``*Thanks*" she said in a silent mental note to Eagle for distracting Hikaru long enough and then getting her to let go. She felt him smile, ``*Any time*" he gave a light chuckle again as Hikaru leaped over to Lantis and dragged him over to join the little group.

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It was quite. Too quite. Despite the name, the Forest of Silence should have been alive with sounds of night time creatures, and yet...nothing. The absence of sound was almost overwhelming. In the quite a shadow cast by the pale moonlight separated from the shadows of the trees near the river, as if the night had given birth to it and was now spitting it out into the world. A figure stepped out from behind the tree after the shadow. Tall, slender and beautiful, the shadow woman with auburn hair held out her hand, ``There, there, my pet. Come to me" she called in a voice so deceptively bitter and sweet, like poisoned chocolate. The creature slid its way over to her and materialized into a solid shape, slightly resembling a black horse, with deep black eyes that did not reflect the moonlight. Its form was frightening yet beautiful at the same time, as if daring someone to climb on and go for a ride. ``Ebon, you know what to do. Good, my little pet, do me proud" the mysterious shadow woman disappeared into the eaves of the trees once more as if they had reached out and swallowed her. The creature called Ebon shook his head, his form shifting slightly until he appeared to look that of a unicorn. The `unicorn' walked to the river that fed into a small lake and disappeared beneath the water's surface.

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`The wind has picked up' Umi thought as she tucked her blue hair behind her ear. The wind had indeed picked up and blew at everyone's hair and clothes. Lantis and Ferio's capes snapped in the sudden sharp breeze that had sprung up from out of no where. Hikaru and Umi both glanced at Fuu who blushed and shook her head, ``It's not me" she commented. ``The weather has been odd of late" Lantis draped his cape over Hikaru shoulders and she looked up worried, ``It has? Why didn't anyone tell me? I could have done something about it" the smallest knight humped and crossed her arms. ``We didn't want to worry you" Ferio took Fuu's hand, the green knight smiled slightly to herself but did not blush for once, ``And besides its still nice out, a little wind never hurt anyone" he added as they left the wooded trail they had all been on and came to a clearing by the river. ``Tell Caldina that`, Umi snickered as she thought of a certain battle in the Wind Shrine. Fuu shot her a look, ``What?" Umi asked sheepishly and Fuu rolled her eyes. ``Isn't it weird? Coming to the Forest of Silence for a picnic? I think the last time we were here it was to find the Escudo for our swords, right Umi?" Hikaru hopped from one subject to another like a butterfly fluttering from one flower to the next. ``Ya and we had to be tested by that stupid fountain! I hate that place I'm glad there's no use for it anymore!" There was a sudden silence, ``You know I never really thought about it but..." Fuu ran her free hand through her heavy blond curls, ``We'll be the last Magic Knights...ever..." ``Ya...kind of an odd feeling isn't it?" Umi glanced at her friend. ``But isn't that a good thing? That means no one else will ever have to suffer like the Princess did." Hikaru asked, as always finding the silver lining. ``Guess you're right, it is a good thing" Fuu smiled and Umi nodded in agreement and just at that moment they reached the small lake they had been looking for. ``Here it is" Ferio pointed, he'd been leading the way being well versed on the many hidden paths in the forest.

They spread out along the shore of the lake, Hikaru went for a longer walk as Fuu and Ferio set the food out that'd they brought with them; Lantis found a comfortable spot beneath a shade tree and stretched out his lanky form for a nap, being almost as bad as Eagle about loving to take naps. Umi had sat down by the lake and taken off her shoes soaking her feet in the cool water. She pillowed her head on her knees staring at her reflection in the water. Her gaze drifted over it, at her headband, her earrings, and her eyes, her deep blue eyes. She didn't really know why, but lately she just really hadn't felt like herself. Moving her foot she sent ripples across the water's surface, ``What's wrong with me?" she whispered to nothing. She couldn't explain it but she just felt like something was missing, she didn't know what but she had the inexplicable feeling that something just wasn't right with her, on the inside; she had this aching feeling that wouldn't go away.

She heard laughter and looked up to see Hikaru had come back and was holding a small dragon like creature in her arms, ``Aww can't I keep him? Look his wing is hurt. Lets just keep him till his wing is better?" she begged Lantis who was staring at the dragon like animal with slight amusement as Fuu and Ferio were laughing at the sight the two of the made. Umi smiled at them as well, Hikaru, ever the optimist. She felt the cool water lap at her ankles and turned to look across the water to see a unicorn staring at her, its large opaque blue eyes blinked and it pawed the water with its small hoof. ``What are you doing you silly thing?" Umi asked the creature as she stood up and walked into the water, it was only about a foot deep where the unicorn was at. ``Are you hurt or are you just here to drink?" she stopped next to it and reached out to touch it. He was large for a unicorn she thought and reached out to the unicorn, it pressed its nose to her hand. With that touch there was a sudden flare of shadow and the wind suddenly whipped through the trees. Umi watched in horror as the unicorn shifted and morphed into the great black horse like thing. Giving off a screaming cry far too human like for her comfort it reared striking its hoofs into the water. Umi looked down and had just enough time to scream as the knee deep water suddenly opened up and she plunged beneath the water's surface. The others were on their feet in a second, aroused by her scream and the horse creature's cry, ``UMI!" Fuu and Hikaru ran to the water's edge but Umi was no were to be seen beneath the dark surface. ``UMI!!!!"

Beneath the water Umi struggled to break to the surface, she was running out of air and her lungs burned like they were on fire. But no matter how she fought she couldn't reach the surface, she reached down to try and find what was holding her down but she couldn't feel anything. She gagged and swallowed water her vision was swarming, `*I can't breath!!!!*' she screamed mentally and tried with one last effort to break free with no avail. `*I can't give up. I've got to break free. I have to, I REFUSE TO DIE THIS WAY!!!!*' Suddenly there was the roar of water moving with great ferocity...

3 - Is Will Enough?

Note: W00t, next chapter. Sorry its so tiny. >_<; I'm having writer's block, evil isn't it? Don't own Rayearth, wish I did but nope.

3- Is Will Enough?

“UMI!!” Hikaru called out again her voice reaching a fevered pitch as she and Fuu reached the water's edge. She ran to splash forward into the dark water but Lantis's strong arm wrapped around her waist. “No, Hikaru don't go into the water. It'll suck you in like it did her. Without your full powers you don't stand a chance” Hikaru knew this but didn't care, “NO! I have to help her, let me go!” she fought against his strong hold as Ferio held Fuu back in much the same manner. None of them could see beneath the dark surface, there were no air bubbles anymore and the creature that had started it all had disappeared. “We have to do something!” Fuu cried and tried to look for any sign of Umi beneath the water but there was nothing.

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Pale eyes watched the unfolding events.

“Good, very good my pet. So the first shall die by her own element...how...” she gave wicked smile, that hinted at some darker thought, “ Quaint” the evil leer pulled at her soft lips into a full blow grin.

“You know what they say about the fairest of them all...” she waved her hand over the mirror upon the floor and the image closed in and sharpened on the struggling figure beneath the water, flowing blue hair, “it just never ends well for them.”

She watched the writhing young woman with growing anticipation; suddenly the look upon the dark woman's beautiful face changed to confusion and then rage, “What?! NO!”

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Umi's friends looked on in vain as the surface of the water grew darker and darker. Hikaru sank to her knees in a sob and Fuu too was in much distress and she clung to Ferio's tunic.

“No...” she let out a half sobbing gulp.

The entire forest went silent except for the two girl's tears; they all looked up at the sudden lack of movement or noise. It felt...it felt almost like something was building...Hikaru could feel it; something immensely powerful was building, beneath the water. The wind shifted and for just a second time seemed to stand still, as if everyone in the world was holding their breath. Then the breath was released.

The roar of the water was deafening as it rocketed from the riverbed and pulled away as if were being sucked through a giant straw, the ground was left dry as all of the water retreated

back up the river. Everyone, as if being knocked back by the force of the water, tried to gain their bearings and find the source of the onslaught. Fuu was the first to find her voice.

“Umi...”

The blond looked up in amazement along with three other astonished faces at the site that presented itself to them. The water had parted and there was Umi...floating three feet off the ground, her hair seemed tossed by a strange upward breeze. Strangest of all, she was *glowing*; her entire frame gave off a strange ghostly blue light. Staring at them blankly she then turned her head to the side and the water rose up in a threatening manner, making a seemingly impenetrable wall of water. Hikaru gasped and turned looking back down the riverbed to see the creature; it looked at them, mainly Umi, with horrid black eyes and flaring nostrils. It gave an unearthly scream and charged toward Umi, intent on doing something to hurt either her or the others. Lantis and Ferio didn't even have time to draw their weapons before Umi took control. Her hand rose into the air and the forest fell silent once again. Even the creature hesitated in his charge, she spoke only two words.

“To me.”

With equal ferocity of its retreat the river water returned at its mistress's command. Rolling back into its banks the water took the horse creature with it as it screamed in protest and terror. The water became calm and placid again but Umi remained floating just above the water her bare feet dangling below her. Tiny droplets fell from her pale toes sending ripples across the surface; she continued to stare at them listlessly.

“Umi?” Hikaru ventured in a quiet voice, the word fell into the silence like a stone into a pool.

“Hi-ka-ru?” Umi blinked slowly and then collapsed into the water. The fire knight was out of Lantis's hold before the man could protest, running to her friend with Fuu only a breath behind her.

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The cracking of knuckles echoed in the mirror room.

“That little...dog” the owner of the voice was not pleased, not pleased at all.

She flicked her hand and something flashed out at lightning speed, a second later one of her guards at the door fell dead where he stood. A silver knife imbedded in his chest plate a tiny pool of blood already gathering under his body.

“There.” She smiled and stretched her arms over her head, “much better.” She yawned; “It seems I have some thinking to do, I underestimated them, but I shall not make the same mistake twice” her face was emotionless as she stepped over the dead man's body on her way out the door. The other guards were already scrambling to remove the body and another guard had already taken the fallen one's place.

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It was so overwhelming, but comforting at the same time. She'd heard this sound before,

the ocean whispering in her ears. Umi gave an exhausted sigh her eye lids felt so heavy, they refused to open. "Umi?" she heard voices calling her. "Umi?" she forced her eyes open.

"Umi, you're awake!" The blue headed girl felt the arms of her friend wrap around her, Hikaru half buried herself into Umi's shoulder.

"We were so worried about you" Fuu also was sitting next to her and took her hand.

"Where am I?" she asked in a light whisper, blinking slowly as if she were unsure if she was awake or not.

"We're back at the castle. You've been asleep since yesterday" Fuu said as she patted her hand.

"Yesterday...oh" she nodded slowly.

"Umi..." Fuu moved to sit closer to her side, "How did you do it Umi? We haven't had any of our powers to much extent since Mokona and the Mashin left."

Umi shook her head, "I don't know..." Umi glanced at her friends looking at little confused.

"Hum" Fuu nodded and shook her head.

Hikaru just smiled, "Well I'm just glad your ok"

"Me too" Fuu took her hand and squeezed it.

"Eagle was worried too" Hikaru glanced over to other side of the room. Umi turned her head to see Eagle, "Oh I'm in Eagle's room?"

"Glad to see that you are awake Umi, hope you don't mind the company."

"It's ok" Umi said with a small giggle.

"Clef thought it would be a good idea to put you here, that way it would be easier to keep an eye on you, and of course Eagle too." Fuu giggled and Eagle gave a mental note that he approved. Umi sighed; feeling tired again and looked to her friends her eyes dropping closed.

Fuu noticed and shushed Hikaru who was chatting away with Eagle. "Alright you two, quiet down. Come on Hikaru; let's go tell the others how she's doing. They're all worried as much as we were" she shooed Hikaru out of the room after the redhead told Eagle she'd be back to see him and Umi later. Fuu went to the door and started to close it, taking one more last glance at Umi who had drifted off to sleep once again.

"Hey Eagle?" she called softly.

"Yes?" he answered.

She paused for a moment, "Keep watch over her ok?"

"Of course. If something comes up I'll let Hikaru or Lantis know."

"Thank you Eagle" Fuu left the door closing with a click.

After she left Eagle remained awake for quite awhile, he was kind of glad to be helpful for once. Since he'd fallen into his coma he'd felt a little like a burden. But after a while he too became tired; for a moment he debated with himself if he should call one of the others to keep an eye on Umi.

"You worry too much" he heard Umi mummer, "Go to sleep. I'll be fine."

He chuckled surprised at her, *"I though you were asleep."*

"You think too loud for anyone to sleep" she murmured again and rolled over snuggling into her bed. He chuckled again and allowed himself to settle down into a more restful state.

Fuu walked slowly down the castle corridor, it was dark out and most of Cephiro was asleep. There was a storm coming too, ever since the Knights had eradicated the Pillar system the weather had become more like the weather on Earth. The usually calm and level headed young woman was pondering something she's been trying to figure out for two days. 'How did she do it?' she thought.

"How did Umi use her powers?" she actually asked the question out loud.

Mokona had left with the mashin and now the knights' powers were amateur at best. Perhaps her will power had been enough? Clef had offered to re-teach them their magic, but the girls had thought it wasn't necessary to learn it back to the extent they had once been able to produce. 'Maybe we were wrong' Fuu thought and shook her head.

"Peace never truly lasts does it?" she whispered to nothing as she pressed a hand to the glass of the window she was looking out, lightning flashing across the sky. Somehow she felt the monster that attacked Umi wasn't just a single event, she had a bad feeling something else was about to happen, damn bad feelings.

AN: Again, sorry its small. I'll try to get a little bit more into the meat of the story in the next chapter.

In the next chapter: One of the other knights is in danger. Is will power enough to save her? Umi bed ridden and about to hurt someone if she isn't allowed to do something. Next time.

4 - Fairytale

AN: O_o Chapter 3, finally. You can thank the finishing of this chapter to the hellish Texas heat. The high today is somewhere around 99°F, but the heat index is like 106°F!!!! It's too hot to do anything else and I am nowhere near the vicinity of a pool and or watering hole to go swimming, so here you go next chapter is up.

O_O;;; *major sweat drop* and alas I don't own Rayearth, if I did I would be rich and also live in Japan ^_^ . Ok, I'll shush now and let you read. Comments most welcome.

--3. Fairytale

~The loneliness within me~

Takes a heavy toll

'Cause it burns as slow as whiskey through an empty aching soul and

The night is like a dagger

Long and cold and sharp

As I sit here on the front steps

~ Blowing smoke rings in the dark~

The storm had quieted hours before, and the night was calm and smooth like a good whiskey. You could still smell the rain through the open window in the room which Umi was sharing with Eagle while she recovered. It was the perfect weather to sleep in, and yet...Umi's sleep was anything but peaceful. Closed eyes fluttered uneasily as a frown creased her face; suddenly she sat bolt upright in bed as a scream echoed in her dreams. Her delicate hands gripped tightly at the blue coverlet, her knuckles turning white. After a moment she eased herself back into bed not sure if she really wanted to go back to sleep. She tossed and turned trying to find a comfortable position, but it was useless. She sat up slowly and looked to Eagle who, by the feeling of his mind, was sleeping like a baby.

"Lucky..." she mouthed softly and swung her feet over the edge of her bed and stood, and to her surprise fell back onto her bed. "Whoa" she shook her head to try and clear the spots in her vision. She sat still for a moment and then slowly stood on wobbly legs.

Making her way over to the window she stood there gazing out into the darkness. A soft shutter passed through her slender frame as the wind picked up anew. She wrapped her arms around her stomach in what appeared to be a vain attempt to warm herself, but that was not her reason.

She knew the true reason for her discomfort and troubled sleep. That scream, that scream that

was all too familiar kept playing over and over again in her mind. A scream she knew the exact meaning of, she had heard it before. Emeraude had let out a scream like that during the battle, when they had killed Zagoto. She had hoped to never have to hear another human being scream like that again, but as fate would have it she had been faced with having to hear it again this time from a close friend.

Her friend's boyfriend had just been in a car accident. When she heard what happened of course she had rushed to the hospital to comfort her, knowing that her friends parents were out of town. They waited for news for what seemed like eternity and then one of the doctors had come out.

He'd died on the operating table.

She stood there and watched a scene all too familiar as the color drained from her friends face and the poor girl just started screaming. And what had she done during all of this? She had run into the bathroom and into a stall sinking down onto the floor trying to block out the sound, 'that scream not that scream again'.

Her friend had needed her and she had left her with only the doctor to comfort her. It had just been too much for her, reminding her of what had happened to Princess Emeraude. Those two screams were worlds apart but one in the same, both the same pain, the same sorrow. The incident had shaken her considerably. She'd not exactly told the other Knights about it, not wanting to make them have to think of that sorrowful day, but she knew she couldn't hide it for long. Especially from Fuu, that girl, darn smart people have to ruin everything when it comes to hiding something.

A heavy sigh escaped her and she continued to stare out the window at the night sky. Unlike Earth with its one moon, Cephiro had not one but three. Each one a shade of red, blue, and green respectfully, and each had a completely different place in the night sky. 'Is everything color coded here?' she wondered mildly.

At that moment the blue moon was high above her casting an eerie blue light down into the room. The blue glow made her almost look like a ghost, if there had been anyone to see her that is. And although the former Water Knight had no eyes upon her she was most definitely not alone in her thoughts.

Eagle. Yes, the former leader of the invasion of Cephiro was actually wide awake. You will have to humor the poor man because despite the fact Umi had been very quiet her aura alone was enough to wake him. After spending what felt like an eternity to him alone in that room when something moved he knew it, and just having a person in there to begin with changed the room's entire aura. It was like having a light on in the dark, even when you close your eyes you can still see the light. And right now Umi's aura was just as blinding as the light can be, it fact was an absolute mess.

He had felt a little bit of this problem the other day, but she had her guard up then. Now, when she thought she was alone with her thoughts, that shield was gone and all her emotional turmoil was laid bare. It moved and churned with uncertainty, mixed with confusion and even a little pain

and the bitter taste of remorse, to produce an aura that gave him a headache.

“What could be the matter? She seemed fine when I spoke to her the other day, maybe a bit tired, but none the less alright. Well...’ he thought about that again and she had seemed a little sad that day, ’but I had no idea it was this bad. I’ll have to try to cheer her up tomorrow. Perhaps I should ask Hikaru if she knows what’s bothering her.”

The blond man pondered over the blue knight’s mood. He disliked having anyone around him unhappy, but after a moment he closed his mind off to the flow of emotion, not wanting to be completely and totally rude and he didn’t want the headache he had to get any worse. Thankfully Umi apparently decided to go back to sleep and he sensed her movement as she crawled back into bed. After a few moments he felt her aura calm slightly a sign that she had once again fallen to sleep. Giving an internal sigh as his headache eased he made the decision to speak to Hikaru, or even Fuu, if given the chance.

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“What?! Are you serious?” Umi screeched in a voice that could shatter glass and half jumped out of bed, Hikaru and Fuu had to hold her back.

“But Umi it’s for the best” Fuu tried to explain and keep the very agitated water knight from the object of her agitation, namely Clef.

The mage was standing at the foot of the bed along with Presea and Ferio, the later was grinning slightly at her outburst. “Umi, I know you dislike the idea but you really do need to stay in bed for a least another day” the mage spoke in a calm if not slightly amused tone himself.

Umi sat back down her arms crossed with a very unhappy look on her face, “But what am I suppose to do all day?” she complained.

“Don’t worry Umi. We’ll keep you company for a while” Hikaru tried to pacify her friend before the unholy wrath of Selece came down on her head.

“I can bring something for you to read if you’d like Umi?” Clef offered.

“Oh! I know!” Hikaru exclaimed as she leapt up from where she was sitting and darted out of the room at break neck speed almost tripping over Lantis, who had just stepped in the door. “Sorry Lantis, be right back!” she hollered back over her shoulder as she rocketed down the hall to her room.

The cail blinked and watched the redhead disappear, “Where is she going?” he asked perplexed and got shrugs and “I don’t know” from the others in the room. Before he could finish coming in the doorway however, the enthusiastic fire knight rushed back past him, his cape sliding over her head as she whooshed past, causing her hair to frizz.

“I got it!” she huffed and sat back down next to Umi as Lantis moved to the other side of the

room next to Eagle and out of the flow of traffic, he hoped anyways.

“You got what?” Umi asked and Fuu had one perfect blond eyebrow arched in question.

Hikaru plopped her school bag into her lap and started digging through it, “I know it’s in here somewhe...” her voice muffled as her head vanished into the bag.

Clef looked oddly at the girls and then shrugged, “Girls I have some things to take care of, Umi if you need anything or would like a book...” he looked back at Hikaru who was still digging in her bag, “let me or Presea know” he left with Presea right behind. Ferio sat down in a comfy chair by the window and Lantis remained out of screeching girl range by Eagle who he was talking to quietly. Fuu watched Clef’s unusually frank departure but her attention was diverted at the sound of a squeak.

“Found it!” came Hikaru’s voice from within the bag and she held up something small and square.

“Your iPod!!” Umi squealed and jumped over to her and squashed Hikaru in a massive hug. “You’ve saved me. You little devil,” Umi shook her finger at the blushing redhead, “we’re not suppose to take these with us to school”

“What is that?” Ferio asked curiously and stood back up, “an I what?”

“An iPod,” Fuu answered him.

“It plays music” Hikaru added.

“Really?” Ferio asked bewildered on how such a small thing could have music inside it. “So, it’s like a music box?” he looked to Fuu. She giggled, “I guess you can think of it like that”

Eagle was meanwhile explaining the actions of Hikaru and filling Lantis in on what the Guru had spoken of before he’d arrived.

“Well apparently Umi is quite upset because she has to stay in bed. I must say I have to sympathize with her...” he trailed off and Lantis looked down at his friend.

“I know you’re tired of being asleep Eagle, but it shouldn’t be much longer. Hikaru’s giving her best the rest is up to you” he didn’t speak out loud but ‘thought’ it for Eagle’s ears alone.

“I know. Its...just getting really hard to stay hopeful”

Lantis looked sadly at his friend; he knew Eagle was finding it hard to hold on. A person always fights for something stronger when they have their heart in it, and at this point in time Eagle’s heart was anywhere but on his health. During the battle for the Pillar Autozom’s fate and his own had weighted heavily on his mind, but now Autozom was on the road to improvement and here he was, one year later, in his coma still. Hope was getting harder and harder to find in his voice and Lantis knew it.

“Hikaru what’s that?” Fuu pointed to the bag Hikaru had dropped after digging out her iPod. “Oh...that. Well it’s...uh” the small girl flushed and Umi reached down and pulled a small book from the bag. “Hikaru I didn’t know you liked to read”

“Well...” the redhead blushed slightly and ran a booted foot along the floor, “It’s kind of a book I’ve had since I was really little...”

“Oh! It’s a book of fairytales! I didn’t know you were into this stuff” Umi smiled running her hands over the well worn edges of the book.

Hikaru blushed even more; “Well I thought you guys might think it was for kids” she gave a lopsided grin and looked up to the girls plus Ferio.

“What’s a fairytale? It doesn’t have anything to do with Primera, does it?” Eagle suddenly popped into the conversation as Lantis had moved over to where the girls were and Ferio also had a confused look on his face.

“Oh, there’re stories and legends from our world.” Fuu said in matter-of-fact tone of voice.

“Really? I’d like to hear some of them” Eagle seemed quite interested.

“And why are they called fairytales?” Ferio asked. At this Fuu’s face changed to one of confusion, a look rarely seen on her.

“You know,” she said after a moment, “I don’t really know.”

Ferio grinned, “You mean there’s actually something you don’t know?” he teased her.

She gave him a grade A female glare that promised retribution if something further was said and he promptly shut his mouth, but still with a grin plastered there. The others in room just laughed at the joke and Fuu’s cheeks turned slightly pink.

Suddenly Lantis stood from the place where he’d sat next to Hikaru and strode to the door quickly, Hikaru sensing his change of mood looked up to him startled, “Lantis?” she called, “What is it?”

He stood there quiet for a moment, “Lafarga and the others are back...” at the happy look on Hikaru’s face he added, “Something has happened...something bad.” Ferio was on his feet already and following Lantis out the door, Fuu and Hikaru both jumped up to also follow.

“Guys wait up, I’ll come too” Umi threw her legs over the edge of her bed.

“No Umi you need to stay in bed” Fuu ordered her like her own mother would have, “We’ll be back to let you know ok” she rushed out after Hikaru and the door clicked shut.

“But...” was all the protest Umi managed. “What could have happened?” she asked out loud.

“I’m sure their alright Umi” Eagle’s voice lightly called and caught her attention.

Standing slowly, ignoring all the demands for her to stay in bed, she carefully walked over to his side of the room and sat at the foot of his bed pulling her knees up to her chest. “Well at least you didn’t run off and leave me” she huffed and gave a soft pout. She felt him chuckle and glared his way even knowing he couldn’t see it, “What’s so funny?” she demanded.

“You” he felt confusion from her and continued, “You’re so dramatic. What makes me laugh most is the fact you said I didn’t leave you. Like I’m going anywhere Umi...” he couldn’t bite back the bitterness that came at the last words.

“Eagle...” Umi reached out and put her hand on his, “You’ll wake up soon. I know you will.”

“How can you be so sure?” he asked, his mental voice soft and hardly audible.

“Because you are the only person I know that is more stubborn than Hikaru, and like her, once you get something in your head there’s no use trying to get it out.” Giving his hand a squeeze she smiled and then wrapped her arms around her knees, “So what should we do while we wait on the others to come back?”

Eagle mused over the question for a moment, “Well you do still have Hikaru’s book don’t you?”

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“What happened?” Hikaru huffed as she hurried into the throne room with Lantis and the rest of the group.

Clef stood with Lafarga and Caldina as well as poor Ascot who looked completely worn out; in fact they all looked tired.

Caldina smiled as the girls entered and ran over picking up Hikaru in a big hug, “Hey now wait just a darn minute...where’s little miss Umi?” she asked looking around and setting Hikaru back on her feet.

“Clef, you haven’t told them yet?” Fuu asked in her usual polite manner looking around Caldina’s shoulder who’d just grabbed her in a hug as well.

“I was just about to. There have been other things to discuss as well, unfortunately” he taped his staff and several chairs appeared and they all sat down.

“What happened while we were gone?” Ascot asked worried.

“Umi used a rather large amount of her will power to save herself from a monster, rather like Hikaru did when she entered the road Eagle built to invade. She merely drained herself of power and needs to rest before she starts to move about again” the mage explained.

“Really? It must have been on heck of a nasty monster to drain poor Miss Umi of so much power” Caldina commented as she flicked a strand of hair out of her face.

“Well...” and at this all eyes turned to Fuu.

She squared her shoulders and continued, “I’ve been thinking about that...I don’t think it was an ordinary monster created from someone’s fear. Usually those monsters just randomly attack whatever gets in their way, but not this one...It went strait for Umi and only Umi, actually it reminded me of Lantis’s spirit horse” she tapped her chin lightly as she shared her revelations from her quiet brooding over the last few nights. “I don’t think what happened...was random” she finished to a silent room.

After a moment Clef sighed, “I was afraid you might say something like that. Lafarga has just reported about the disturbance in the south...” at this he looked to the swordsman.

“Yes, I must agree with her on the fact the monsters didn’t seem to be random. In fact...they were well timed and placed”

“And my beasts had a harder time than usual,” Ascot added after Lafarga had fallen silent. “With the normal monsters that appear it usually takes little effort to destroy them, but lately they’ve been different...” he bushed his bangs back from his eyes and looked back to the others.

“Lantis,” Hikaru looked up to cail, “Didn’t you say the weather had been strange lately too?”

The cail nodded, “Yes, but why do you ask?”

“Well...” Hikaru thought for a second, “What if the strange weather, what happened to Umi and what Lafarga saw...are all connected?” she ticked each point off on her fingers as she said them.

“But what could cause such a thing?” Presea asked with wide eyes. “That’s what I’m afraid of” and Hikaru’s tone left no room for doubt about her fear for the kingdom.

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“I still don’t understand how she could wear glass slippers. Wouldn’t it be impractical?”

Umi was about to throw the fairytale book at Eagle if he didn’t quit driving her up the wall with forty million questions. “Eagle it’s a story. It just works that way. Now are you going to let me finish?” She huffed slightly amused and agitated at the same time.

“Go ahead” she heard him chuckle and she could be heard muttering something along the lines of “Men...” and rolling her eyes.

She continued with the story of Cinderella and ended with “And they lived happily ever after” closing the book with a soft thump.

Eagle mused for a moment, “So do all stories end happily in your world?” he asked.

“Well...no of course not. Not all of them do, it’s just most of these are meant for children” her face seemed to darken suddenly and she fell silent.

‘There she goes again...’ Eagle felt that sadness from the night before creeping into her aura again. ‘Something must have happened to her...’ “Umi?” he ventured tentatively.

“Oh sorry, I was just thinking. I didn’t mean to go all quiet like that” she laughed it was so convincing that he hesitated to ask her what was wrong. “Well, where were we?” she went on all bubbly almost like Hikaru.

“A story?” he inquired, he still hungered for something new and his curiosity was getting the better of him.

“Oh right...you were asking if all our stories have a happy ending. Well most do fairytales do...but I do know one”

“Really, what’s it called?” he asked, most of the other stories had fluffy, happy titles to go with them, “Ice and Snow” she sat the fairytale book down on the floor and hugged her knees to her chest sitting on the foot of his bed.

“It’s a tragic tale even the title is tragic” she rested her head on her knees.

“What’s so tragic about it?” she had his full attention now, “Snow is a symbol for purity...” she started.

“That’s what I’ve always thought” he ‘looked’ up at her usual calm, serene face with question.

“But... it has a darker meaning” she looked saddened suddenly.

“It does?” he asked perplexed, what could this other meaning be that made her so sad?

“Yes, death...”

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“Lady?”

A young warrior entered her chambers as the shadow woman stood above her mirror.

“What is your command?” the warrior asked, dark green eyes and short black hair framed a pale, strong face. This was a woman of power and those eyes held no mercy.

“Sentra...go to the other side. Find the fire child, her light is the brightest...test it. See if she is really strong enough for us to worry. She was once the Pillar and that should not be overlooked...and the other... who didn’t pass the test. He should have come here but did not, find out

why; we might be able to use him” she waved her hand over the mirror; an image appearing.

“We have much to learn about the knights who did so much for Cephire” she studied the image; the girl she watched moved and flickered like the tongue of a flame, full of life and vitality. “Much to learn...” she smiled and let out a laugh that would send a child running, screaming back to its mother.

A vicious smile crossed Sentra’s face,

“Yes my Lady”

AN: I’m sorry for all the fluffy in the chapter; I was planning on getting into a little more action but alas not yet. You will have to live with me until the next chapter when we get to really kick some ###. Anyhow I hope you’re confused about the ‘enemy’ her true purpose is a Big secret. Author gives great big smile* I should really write the main story thread out for myself...but I’m lazy and I like writing without. It’s all in my head but, oh well. I’ll shush now. Go review please. Begs and pleads shamelessly. (Extra note-I’ve changed my formatting now. I hope its much easier to read now. Thank you for the comments)*

5 - Will is Everything

4. Will is Everything

“No matter how much your heart is aching there is beauty in the breaking”

Hikaru paced back and forth in the sun lit room, her nerves slightly on edge and worry evident on her pale face. ‘Who could it be? Who could want to harm Cephire now, after all this time?’ these thoughts and many others similar to them rattled through her head. She had pulled her braid out and it hung loose down her back, fiddling with the ends of it in a nervous gesture she went out onto the balcony of her room. Cephire was so beautiful now, she looked down at the endless stretch of green and gold, so beautiful, maybe even more beautiful than when Princess Emeraude had been the Pillar. “Who would want to harm us now?” she asked to the empty room.

“Hikaru?”

The sound of Lantis’ voice nearly made her jump out of her skin. “Lantis?” she turned to see the knight make his way in the door where he’d been standing. He strode into her room and onto the balcony with her.

“Hikaru...” there was a scolding tone in his voice as he took a seat on the bench next to her, as if he knew she’d been fretting about their current predicament.

“I’m fine...just a little worried. That’s all” Hikaru forced a smile and knew Lantis saw right through it. She folded her legs beneath her and buried her face in his warm shirt, he didn’t say anything but she felt an arm wrap around her gently. At the moment that was all she needed, the comfort and the silence, but one question still bothered her more than any thing else. ‘Why?’

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Feiro felt the tug on his arm and looked down to see his blond beauty move to make herself more comfortable on his shoulder. Her cheek was pressed against his arm and her bright green eyes gazed off into empty space. She was thinking, he could tell, so he let her and remained silent, but he did reach up and thread a hand through her curls. Her hand tightened in his and she blinked, smiling softly, but she didn’t break the easy silence between them. They were sitting comfortably on the floor in front of a rather large glass window, Fuu had once told him it looked like a terrarium only she was on the inside looking out at all of Cephire. When he had asked her what a terrarium was she had only given him one of her carefree smiles and told him she’d tell him later. Right now he wanted nothing more than to replace that soft frown that tugged at her lips with that smile but at the moment he could only hold her... and wait.

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Meanwhile in another room of the castle the water knight and Eagle were enduring a silence of another kind.

'Death...' Eagle pondered Umi's explanation of the story's title. 'No wonder she's seemed so unhappy. Thinking about that...' he frowned mentally. "Umi, is that what the story's about? It seems hardly a story to tell children" he asked gently not wanting to push her into talking unless she wanted to.

Umi sighed and ran her fingers through her hair in a nervous gesture. 'Should I really get into this now? I don't know...I don't really feel like it but..' she took a deep breath 'but I really want to talk to someone. And he's right here, quiet and listening. What more could I ask for?'

'Umi?' his gentle voice broke her train of thought. She stirred and took a breath, "Well there're two versions of the story. One is less harsh than the other, but they both are fraught with sorrow. 'Ice and Snow' is the only vision I knew for a long time and I only learned of the other recently." She left out the part of how she originally found the tale, right after they'd returned from Cephire the first time, when her sorrow had been greatest. "I was in the library with Fuu actually she'd drug me with her..." she huffed and rolled her eyes.

Eagle chuckled getting the idea that she wasn't much on studying. Umi continued on after he stopped and she gave him a few worlds along the lines of she wasn't going to finish if he didn't start behaving, which provoked another chuckle from the blond man. She pouted and he finally quieted down so she could continue.

"Anyways..." Umi started clearing her throat. "The story starts out simple enough I guess...It's a love story about a young nobleman named Elliot and a peasant girl, Freedert. They fall in love even though they are from completely different backgrounds. They're happy together but in the end they are torn apart...but it wasn't their families or their people that separated them..." she paused for a moment, "It was war." Umi gave a soft knowing smile, 'war does things like that...I should know more than most' she thought and then continued on. "Elliot promised he'd return to Freedert and while she waited she prayed for his safe return."

Umi's voice dropped to a soft whisper and Eagle had to strain to hear. This story was quiet different from the others. "*It matches her mood...*" he thought, "*soft and quiet and so very sad*" pulling back out of his thoughts he listened to her.

He had a feeling that her telling this story was just more than something to keep her occupied. She needed someone and for some unknown reason she hadn't talked to her fellow knights so he was happy to oblige. Perhaps she would feel better soon and talk to her friends about whatever was bothering her.

"But her prayers were in vain" Umi's voice was full of emotion as if she were telling her life story and Eagle wasn't even there. In truth she had almost forgotten he was there except for his gentle encouragements to continue. "Elliot was slain in battle, shot through with an arrow at the last fortress protecting their lands and the village where Freedert waited for him. When she found out about his death

she asked their god to take all her remaining time and give it to Elliot. Her wish was granted..."

Umi stopped again... 'Just like Princess Emeraude's wish was granted...' she shook her head and pushed it from her mind. "Elliot awoke from death and around him, instead of a pool of his own blood, were flower petals from the red flowers Freedert loved. When he returned home and learned what she had done he said, "Please, give her all the time I have left!" The god was moved by their love, so because of their love and the sacrifice of their lives the village was promised eternal time. And to this day the god is suppose to protect them all..." she finished and sighed. Hugging her knees she sat there wondering what his take on the story would be.

"They died for each other...it's beautiful and yet horrid at the same time" the young commander didn't miss the similarity of the tale. He fell silent as a deep sadness fell through him. He didn't know if it was his own sadness from the tale or Umi's saddened aura rubbing off on him, but whatever the reason he fell silent into brooding. *'That story sounds almost too much like what happened to Lantis' brother and the princess...I shouldn't have made her tell me now she'll be even more unhappy. Sigh, where's Hikaru when you need her...?'*

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"Why exactly are we doing this again?" Hikaru asked as she stumbled over a tree root a few hours later, once again in the Forest of Silence. Lantis caught her easily and steadied her back on her feet, she smiled at him gratefully.

"We're going to see if we can find anything that might lead us to where that creature came from that attacked Umi. I don't think it was a normal monster created by fear, that means it had to come from somewhere." Fuu answered with a swat of her hand as she pushed some hanging moss out of her way. The three of them, Hikaru, Lantis and herself, were making their way back to the place where Umi had been attacked.

Clef had given the two knights their old armor but had not given the girls their magic, he wanted to wait until Umi was also strong enough as well. Though Presea had given them their original swords back so they were by no mean unarmed. Fuu glanced down at the softly glowing green jewel on her glove hand, her sword rested comfortably within and brought her comfort. It's magical 'weight' felt good in her hands, 'Lets just hope I don't have to use it' she prayed silently.

A shadow passed following them in the trees, Lantis looked up and a frown found it's way across his handsome face. "Hikaru..." he called in a warning tone and the tiny magic knight already had her hand above her red glove jewel, it flashed in a bright glare of crimson.

There was the harsh sound of metal scraping metal as Hikaru met the blade of her opponent as a woman sprung down from the trees. "Who are you?!" she demanded angrily at the woman.

Short black hair flew wildly as her attacker struck again surprisingly she was able to shove back Hikaru, matching her in strength of sword and will. Hikaru looked at her eyes wide.

"I am Sentra, and I'm here to give you a message" the woman, apparently called Sentra, gave a menacing glare. She lunged forward the blade of her sword glowed with a strange violet light, "My Lady

Impreza told me to ask you something” she swung down and Hikaru was again put on the defensive, deflecting the blow.

“What are you talking about?!” Hikaru looked at her in confusion and took a high guard.

“What is most precious to you? Is it Cephireo or something else?” At this Sentra glanced toward Lantis who had drawn his weapon almost without notice.

“Lightning” he called and a blast of electricity shot forward and the woman did a casual back flip away from Hikaru and towards the third member of their party.

“Fuu look out!” Hikaru called out in panic as the woman sprang away towards Fuu who drew her sword out as quickly as possible.

Green eyes reflected on green eyes as the sudden new enemy reached back and threw her hand forward in a movement that meant only one thing... “Fuu!!!” Hikaru darted forward to intercept it, she had to protect Fuu, no matter what.

“Twilight sphere!” A shadow like ball left Sentra’s hand and flew toward Fuu. The only thing she could think belatedly was how much she wished she could use her magic now. Then suddenly, “Hikaru!” she called out in horror as her friend stepped in front of her.

The roar of the magic attack was in her ears and she couldn’t help but squeeze her eyes shut as a scream escaped her lips. She took the attack full on and she could hear Fuu gasp behind her. “Hikaru!” That was Lantis’ voice...she smiled faintly. She felt the blood begin to flow, warm and fast running down her side and legs. Faint laughter reached her and she opened her eyes to see Sentra bound away into the trees. Lantis was by her side immediately, she knew he’d berate her later for her actions, he and Fuu were safe and that was all that mattered. “Lantis...” she whispered and fell into darkness.

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Umi stood up bolt right from her place on the foot of Eagle’s bed where she’d been sitting listening to Hikaru’s iPod for a while. All the color had drained from her face and she yanked the head phones out of her ears as if to hear something better. “Hikaru!”

“What’s wrong Umi?! What happened?” Eagle asked in a rush, he didn’t need any help to pick up on the anxiety in her voice. *“What happened to Hikaru?!”* Something very bad must have happened for her to react this strongly.

“I don’t know...something’s happened...she’s hurt.” Umi rushed back to her bed and took her uniform jacket and tugged it quickly on. “I’m going to find Clef and Presea, maybe they know”

“Umi don’t be so rash, you really shouldn’t even be out of bed yet” he pressed his concern, though truth be told he was just as worried. *“I’m sure Clef will tell us something as soon as he knows”* he tried to soothe her but it was useless.

“No, I’m tired of just sitting around and waiting on everyone else. I’m going to do something about it, and now” she turned back to him for a brief moment. “I’ll come back as soon as I can.” And she was gone not even bothering to put on her shoes.

Eagle gave a slightly disappointing sigh, *“She’s really just as bad as Hikaru, has to do it herself and wont wait for anything”* Though he did have to admire her will, she wasn’t going to let anything stop her from what she wanted. He paused for a moment in his thoughts. *“And I wouldn’t either, and I shouldn’t... I am going to wake up. If she can have the strength to do what she does even when she’s in pain. Why can’t I do a simple thing as wake up? After all in this world will is everything...”*

AN-Well there’s a little tid-bit for you. I hope you like it and I hope the format is easier to read now.

Next time-Can Eagle give his all and wake up or perhaps he needs a gentle shove to pull him out. And the mysterious Sentra, just exactly what does she mean by “What is most precious to you?”

6 - The Awakening

AN: So sorry for the long wait! Evil writers block had its grip on me plus I had semester finals (of which I exempted out of mostly, thankfully) So here's the next installment of Ice and Snow. Thanks to all my reviewers. Now go read and enjoy.

Alas I don't own Rayearth.

5. The Awakening

**`There are times in life when you gotta crawl,
Lose your grip, trip an' fall
When you can't lean on no-one else:
That's when you find yourself"*

Umi was running, sprinting, faster and faster. She thought her lungs would burst from the exertion. Something was wrong, very wrong. Hikaru, something had happened to Hikaru. She flew down the long corridor at break neck speed, windows and doors flashing by as streaks. Gasping for air she reached the throne room, the large doors gave way beneath her fury, and she came upon a very surprised Clef and Lafarga.

``Umi what are you doing out of bed?" the mage scolded her, his forehead creasing in disapproval. He looked her up and down with worry either for the fact she was out of bed and running about, or the fact she was running and that meant something was wrong, either way Umi waved his concern aside.

``Forget that!" She gasped breathless; she stopped for a moment and leaned over on her knees drawing in ragged gasps. ``Where is Hikaru?" She demanded when she had caught her breath.

Lafarga answered her ``She went with Lantis and Fuu to see if they could find anything in the Forest of Silence where you were attacked. I'm sure there're quite fine Umi"

``No, something is wrong. I have a really bad feeling, something happened to Hikaru." Standing up strait she glared at both men, ``I know what I felt. Something happened to them."

Clef opened his mouth to protest but then closed it quickly and looked away as if he had heard something. His pale eyes closed and his forehead creased in concentration. He felt Lantis reach out with his mind, when they connected Lantis' mental voice was strained.

``Guru Clef its Hikaru..." the cail's voice echoed in his mind. Clef had never heard Lantis sound so afraid; worry was clear in his tone. ``We were attacked in the forest..."

“By another creature?” Not another one, the mage frowned but his frown only became deeper at Lantis' answer.

“No...not a creature. A woman. Guru her strength of will... I haven't met someone with that kind of willpower since I first met the Magic Knights...” Lantis was almost to the castle gates now. **“We will arrive shortly, Fuu is not harmed, only Hikaru.”** The next tone of his voice, despite the circumstances, made the Guru smile just a tiny bit. **“She took the magic attack for Fuu”** He sounded both outraged and expectant of Hikaru's brash act of courage.

“Bring her to me Lantis, I will do my best. Is she still conscious?” Clef looked up to the doors of the throne room as if half expecting Lantis to already be there.

“No, she passed out right after taking the attack.” Lantis cut off his connection with Clef then as the mage could now here the sound of heavy boots clicking down the hall, Lantis' walk was easily distinguishable from the Wind Knight's light footfalls.

“Clef, Clef?!” Umi's frantic calls finally broke through to him. **“What's going on Clef?”** The knight became more and more worried by the look on Clef's face. Her blue eyes were wide and fearful as the mage finally looked to her.

“Hikaru has been injured, you were correct in your assumption...” was all he got out before Umi's **“What?!”** interrupted him and then the large double doors flew open, Lantis stepping through with the tiny Hikaru slumped weakly in his arms, Fuu right behind him.

At that moment all hell broke loose and everyone started talking and moving at once.

“Hikaru!” All the color drained from Umi's face at the sight of her friend. **“Fuu what happened?!”**

It was then that Caldina and Presea made their way into the throne room; Caldina had her fan in hand ready to get whoever was the cause of the uproar.

“Now what's a go'n on here? I ain't ever heard such a ruckus...” the dancer stopped her barrage of words as soon as she saw Hikaru. **“Oh m'gosh what happe'n?!”** she exclaimed in about three octaves higher than Umi had used a moment before.

Lantis had torn his cape in pieces and tied it around the fire knight's wounds in makeshift bandages to try and stop her bleeding. Blood stained the girl's armor and face in streaks of deep red. He quickly went over to Clef ignoring the questions and dropped jaws around the room as Ascot and the tiny Primara came into find out what all the noise was about.

“Umi!” Fuu ran to her fellow knight. **“We were attacked by a woman in the forest”** Fuu tried to explain in a rush as she looked frantically from Umi back to Hikaru in Lantis' arms. He had kneeled down with the girl still in his embrace as Clef said something that the two girls couldn't catch and a soft glow emitted from his staff.

“Who attacked you?” Presea seemed confused, **“I thought a creature had attacked Umi not a person.”** Ascot also came and joined the little group of people clustering around Fuu looking for

answers.

“It was a woman; I've never seen her before. She just suddenly appeared and came after us. She was so powerful...” Fuu paused contemplating, “Her will power...she was able to hold Hikaru back blow for blow...Her sheer power, it reminded me...”

“Reminds ya of what?” Caldina pressed coming close to Fuu.

Fuu paused a moment longer and then added in a soft whisper, “Of Princess Emeraude”

* * *

Sentra returned to her lady quickly. She found her mistress in her throne room her pale slender hands hovering above her mirror. “What did you think of the little fire?” the dark woman asked her warrior.

“She was interesting, but not at full power. Not as much of a challenge as I'd thought but then without the machine that can be expected.” Sentra came and knelt by her lady's side looking up with calm, dark eyes.

“Yes, but you shouldn't underestimate her. She had the will to become the Pillar.” “Yes Lady Impreza” Sentra bowed her head. “Speaking of the will to become the Pillar,” Impreza waved her hand above the mirror and another image appeared. “Have you gone to see this one yet?” a slender finger pointed to the image.

Sentra glanced down, “No lady.”

“Ah, well then we have work to do. Why don't you go pay him a visit.”

Sentra grinned, “Yes milady.”

* * *

Lantis paced back and forth in front of Hikaru's room. The other two knights plus Presea and Caldina had promptly kicked him out after he'd deposited Hikaru in her bed. Clef had finished healing her a few hours before, all of her wounds were closed and all she needed was rest. But this fact did little to calm his nerves. He threaded his slender fingered hand through his raven hair in a nervous gesture, his booted heels making a rhythmic clicking sound as he turned and paced the other way. “I should have reacted quicker. I could have protected her...” he muttered under his breath. His worrying and fretting were interrupted by Lafarga who came to meet him.

“Lantis if you keep at it you'll wear a groove in the floor” Lafarga came and placed a hand on the distraught cail's shoulder. “Go clean up, she'll be fine. The girls won't leave her for a minute, you know that”

Lantis looked down and finally seemed to notice his disheveled appearance. The blood smeared across his shoulder and chest plate had dried, his tattered cloak was in pieces and barely hanging on his shoulders. “Alright” he let a heavy sigh escape his lips and trudged down the

hall toward his room.

Lafarga also sighed and shook his head and watched the retreating black figure. "Worry himself to death..." he mumbled and went back down the hall in the opposite direction.

* * *

"Hikaru..." After Umi's whirlwind departure Eagle was left alone to wonder about what had happened to the fire knight he owed his life to. In his mind he owed his life to all three of the knights and the open hearts of the people of Cephireo.

"I can't even go to see if she's alright..." The commander was understandably frustrated in his inability to do something. "I'm sure she's fine. Lantis would never let anything happen to her." He tried to play his worry down as much as he could, he knew worrying was about as effective as laying there but he couldn't help himself. "First Umi and now Hikaru...something isn't right this can't be random. What's happening to cause all of this? Sigh. I hate being in the dark" He meant this both figuratively and literally; he hated not knowing what was going on and he hated literally being in the dark. "I haven't seen the light in so long. It's getting so much harder to remember what some things are like..."

He gave an inward sigh, if he kept thinking about it he was going to depress himself even further. He knew it was going to be a long while before he found out what had happened, with everything that was going on it would be some time before anyone thought of him again. "Out of sight out of mind..." he thought bitterly. So he decided to bend his will to another matter. "I may be useless right now but not for much longer..."

* * *

"Do you think she'll wake up soon?" Umi asked for the sixth time. She was in Hikaru's room with Fuu, Caldina and Presea. Sitting opposite of Fuu, she held her friend's hand. The fire knight hadn't so much as shifted in her sleep.

Fuu had almost nodded off and shook her head. "I don't know. Guru Clef said she just needed rest." She took her glasses off and rubbed her eyes holding back a yawn. The sun had set long ago and the sky was a rich hue of blacks and blues.

"You girls should go to bed, especially you Umi you probably haven't recovered fully" Presea scolded both knights. "Caldina and I will keep an eye on Hikaru, don't worry." The blond woman shoed Fuu and Umi toward the door.

"I'm fine" Um rolled her eyes and gave an exasperated sigh, "I don't even feel like I was attacked at all" she protested. With the look Presea and Caldina gave her she gave in meekly and both she and Fuu said good night and went out the door. "We'll come see her first thing in the morning" Fuu nodded and they parted going down to their rooms.

Umi made it half way to her room before she remembered all her things were still in the medical wing with Eagle. "Oh Eagle..." she felt a twinge of guilt. She'd forgotten all about him, he was

probably worried sick about Hikaru. Turning around she picked up her pace and hurried down the hallway towards his room.

* * *

“Lantis?” the master mage caught the later coming from his room down the hall. Lantis turned to the mage, his face creased with worry, he looked tired. “Lantis you need to rest yourself, you’ll do no one any good if you push yourself too far” He motioned for Lantis to join him in the throne room.

The cail only nodded and gave a quiet sigh, “Have you learned anything new?” he questioned.

The mage shook his head, “I haven’t sensed anything particular, even at the time when you were attacked but...” Clef leaned upon his staff and looked up to the night sky through the viewing mirror he’d been using. “There has been something growing at the back of my mind of late, something I can’t place that just doesn’t feel right. If I sense anything at all it’s ill intent.”

“Yes” Lantis agreed. “I’ve also had an unsettling feeling of late. Perhaps Hikaru was correct in her assumption that the weather, monsters and what happened to herself and Umi are related...” he trailed off.

“What’s on your mind Lantis?” Clef turned his gaze to his oldest pupil, Lantis may be very good at hiding his true feelings but the mage knew him well enough to at least sense something.

“It was something the woman who attacked Hikaru said...” Lantis crossed his arms, his head lowered slightly in deep thought. “While Hikaru was fighting her she asked her an odd question.”

“Odd?” Clef’s brows furrowed in confusion.

“Yes, she said “What is most precious to you? Is it Cephireo or something else?” ” Lantis had closed his eyes and now opened them to glance at Clef with a troubled sigh.

“What is most precious to you...?” Clef repeated the question, “Tell me everything, from the beginning.” He created seats for them with a wave of his staff; it was going to be a very long night.

* * *

Eagle gave a heavy sigh; he could sense the quietness of the castle around him. Over the uncountable days he’d been in his coma he’d developed quite a strange sense for the things around him, this is Cephireo after all, and since his mind could no longer rely upon his other senses it had developed a kind of sixth sense. Everything gave off ‘waves’ or an aura would be the best way he could put it and it was his best connection to the world around him.

Right after Umi had left the whole castle had been in chaos, he presumed it was because of whatever had happened to Hikaru. “*I do hope she’s alright. Am I ever going to find out what happened?*” At this moment he felt an aura come closer, “*Who...?*” he reached out and examined the aura. He knew that one all too well, passion and power, yet all hidden behind a

calm façade he was beginning to see through. *“Umi...”*

* * *

Umi pushed the doors open quietly to Eagle's room at first she thought he was asleep and tip-toed across to her things as softly as she could. *“Umi?”* His voice echoed in her mind, *“Oh you're awake, I wasn't sure”* she changed direction and went over to his bed and sat on its edge.

“Is Hikaru alright? What happened to her? Was anyone hurt?” The questions came out in a rush and Umi winced she knew he'd be worried.

“She's alright now; she was attacked in the Forest of Silence. Clef said she'd be fine after she's rested, but she hasn't woken up yet...” the tired girl couldn't hide the extreme worry in her voice and her pale hands ran through her hair. Pulling out her headband she set it on the small bedside table and continued to finger her long blue strands in an agitated manor.

“I'm glad she's alright...” Eagle sighed in relief. He felt Umi sit next to him, her aura was that same as it had been the night before. Confusing, chaotic, sad and... *‘Painful...’* he thought with a pang of sadness for her. He paused for a moment, *‘now or never’* he thought. *“Umi...what's been bothering you?”* He waited patiently for her answer, not sure if she'd open up or not.

Her breath caught for a moment. *‘How does he know...? Is it that obvious?’* she hung her head her hair slightly obscuring her face. She then straightened up, *“It's nothing really, I'm just worried about Hikaru. That's all.”* *‘Come on believe it’* she begged silently.

“Umi...” His tone was melancholy holding a bit of her sadness in it. *“You know...”* he paused, *“You shouldn't lie to people like that. It makes them worry.”*

‘Drat, he didn't buy it’ she sighed.

“Umi...” he pressed gently. *“Whatever it is that's bothering you if you don't tell someone it will plague you until you do. You must trust me, I know you don't want anyone to worry and that's why you're hiding your feelings but Umi you should know better than anyone what happens when you hide what you're feeling...”*

Umi looked up to his seemingly emotionless face. He was right; when you hide your pain it makes things much worse. She relented she really did want to tell someone. *“Lately bad things have happened...they've brought back some bad memories for me”* she hardly raised her voice loud enough to hear, as if anything louder than a whisper would shatter her ability to hold herself together.

“Do you mean what happened to Hikaru and yourself?” he asked. *That's not like you Umi. During the battle you kept your spirits up, all of you knights did...but then”* he stopped for a second as if contemplating something, *“that's not the only reason. Is it?”*

She didn't answer at first and her hands squeezed the coverlet, taking fistfuls of the dark green cloth. *“No, not the only reason...”*

“Last night, what were you thinking about that made you so sad?” he asked softly.

“I thought you were asleep” Umi smiled weakly. If he'd been awake she could have seen him grinning sheepishly.

“Well technically I was asleep...”

“That doesn't count” she drew her legs up to her chest and rested her chin on her knees.

“I didn't mean to intrude but you seemed so upset it was hard not to notice. Did something else happen in your world?”

“Yes” She wrapped her arms around her knees tightly. “I have a friend back home and she had someone close to her pass away suddenly...” she stumbled over the words her voice cracking. “And I was with her...when she found out he'd died. She...she just started to scream and scream. I, I couldn't take it and I ran away from her. I ran when she needed me, but her scream...just like the princess'. They were the same. I never wanted to hear someone scream like that again...” her voice was heavy from holding back the lump in her throat and she gripped her arms around her knees even tighter.

“Umi...” Eagle said her name gently, he could tell she wanted to cry but wouldn't allow herself. Holding it in was killing her but she just wouldn't let herself cry. *“She needs someone, she can't do this alone”* he wanted to reach out to her but couldn't. *“Umi it's alright you know, you can cry.”*

She shook her head, “I promised myself after what happened before that I'd be strong and I would try not to cry. I've already cried too much, so I have to be strong so I won't be the one left crying this time” she bit her lip softly.

“But Umi, you know there's another kind of strength that's needed to be able to cry when you should” He wanted to help her in some way, but words could only do so much. He knew she need much more. He felt her aura crack and then her tiny sobs as his words sunk in. Eagle felt a shadow in his mind pass and suddenly there was light...

Umi's shoulders slumped and her cries racked through her frame. His words had been a release and had opened up the gates for her tears which now ran unchecked down her cheeks. He'd been right again; it felt better to just let herself cry. Her worry from the last few days was finally released and fell freely. She bowed her head down and her eyes were squeezed shut, but suddenly she felt something warm against her cheek. The warmth was comforting and she hiccupped lightly, it felt like someone's hand...wait...Her eyes flew open looking for the source and met another pair of eyes staring back warmly.

“Umi.”

AN: A extra note I do tend to draw from what I'm reading at the time into my writing so if you catch something that reminds you of another Clamp title then don't be too surprised. I just started

the Tubasa Chronicles and I borrowed one of Fai-sans lines, it actually pulled me out of my little slump I was in. Clamp sure know's how to inspire. Hope you enjoyed it. Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays to everyone.

*Shame on me last chapter I forgot to tell where the beginning quote came from. This quote is from the song "Mountains" by Lonestar.

7 - Miracles

AN: And finally the next chapter. Thank you to all my reviewers, Keli-chan you rock! I'm sorry for the wait I wish I could update faster, but I'm in the final semester of my senior year and trying to get all my scholarships and financial aide in order for collage. Ehhh...makes me cranky just thinking about it. But anyways on with the story!

I don't own Rayearth; must I really keep repeating this?

6. Miracles

*"The Princess is strong, precisely
because she is strong she is fragile. If someone doesn't
show her that, she'll probably break...soon."
~Kurogane TRC*

"Umi"

It was a whispered, raspy, forced but gentle word, strait from his lips. Not his mental voice, but his *real* voice, hoarse after going long without use. Eyes long closed now looked up to her sadly, squinting slightly from the moonlight for even its soft glow seemed to be too bright for him.

She stared at him; the shock alone stopped her tears for the moment. He'd rolled onto his elbow and reached out to her and now his warm hand rested against her cheek. "Umi?" he repeated softly. Blinking furiously she opened her mouth but nothing came out.

"That much of a surprise?" he chuckled dryly. Grunting he pushed himself into a sitting position next to her. He didn't exactly tower over her but she did have to look up to meet his gaze. He looked down at her with a soft crooked smile. "Are you alright Umi?" he asked once more wondering if he'd get an answerer this time.

She blinked owlshly once again and then in a sudden leap forward threw her arms around his neck and buried her face in the soft fabric of his shirt. Her tears returned though if they were for him or something else was unknown to him. 'Why are women so confusing?' he thought.

He caught himself before he fell backwards a look of surprise crossing his face before a sad smile took its place. He sighed, it seemed like whenever anyone came to him they were in tears. "It's alright" he gingerly wrapped his arms around her shoulders, "It'll all be alright" he soothed. 'She'll feel better after this' he thought as he softly tried to quite her tears. The warm salty liquid was soaking into his shirt as he rubbed her back in soothing circles. He coughed trying to clear his parched throat, he felt like he'd never tasted water before. "Umi" his voice broke and cracked a little, "You need to tell the other knights, they can help you much more than

I can.” He smiled and brushed her hair back, it was so fine it tangled around his fingers slightly.

He studied her face and couldn't help but pause at her beauty. The only knight he'd seen close up before falling into his coma had been Hikaru and to him she'd always be beautiful but not in the same way. Each knight had a strength and beauty all their own that he'd come to cherish each of them for. Their love for Cephire, it's people and foremost for each other was something he truly admired.

Umi pulled away from his hold slightly and shook her head vigorously, “That's not true!” she managed between her sniffles as she finally pulled herself together. “You've helped me...” she whispered quietly.

“I'm glad.” He took her by the shoulders and held her away from him at arms length. He examined her face closely, her blue eyes were a little red and puffy but her tears had stopped. Yet even though she'd stopped crying her eyes still held that glassy look to them that comes from crying. “So are you going to be ok?” he asked again.

Umi looked up and nodded, “Yes, I'll be ok” she said and ventured a small smile. She was rewarded for this as he smiled in return and then he reached over and took her headband from where she'd sat it.

“Even though you do have lovely hair it'd be a shame to hide such pretty eyes behind it.” He handed the band to her and she blushed in a very Fuu like manor as she slid it into place. His smile widened but he didn't say anything about it. “Now that's all in order, you wouldn't happen to know where I could get something to drink would you? I'd settle for anything at this point but water would be nice.”

“Oh! Of course, I'm sorry!” the blue haired girl hopped up and ran into Cephire's version of a bathroom and went to the wash basin where there was a pitcher along with some glasses and a bowl.

Eagle leaned back into the pillows and looked after her curiously as she disappeared into the adjoining room. She returned after a moment with a glass and a pitcher and sat back down on the opposite side of the bed as she poured him a glass. “Thank you” he gratefully accepted the glass and sat up tipping it to his lips and tilting his head back as he unceremoniously gulped down the water, he was that thirsty.

Umi watched him as he drank the water down quickly; she suppressed a giggle as he gulped the water. It was something so boyish she could hardly imagine him doing such a thing. A small drop of water missed his lips and slid down his creamy, white throat and her eyes followed. Almost of their own accord her eyes followed the drop as it disappeared into the collar of his black shirt and soaked into the fabric. She continued to watch him, the way his throat moved as he swallowed how his bangs brushed his cheek bones because they'd gotten so long. She knew it was rude to stare and mentally scolded herself, *‘Umi you're staring. You're still staring...Quit staring!’* she wanted to smack herself as she finally tore her eyes away and looked down to the pitcher she was holding and instead stared at her reflection in the water it held.

* * *

'Mistress will not like this turn of events.' Green eyes flared as Sentra crouched down on the railing of the balcony outside the window to Eagle's room, no never mind that the ground was a good three hundred feet below her. Her short cropped raven hair stirred in the gentle wind from the height. **'I didn't think he'd have the strength to awaken, he shouldn't have had the strength...Unless,'** she paused in her thought. **"Something forced him to play his hand for what it was"** she pondered the notion in a barely audible tone.

"Interesting turn of events is it not?" a male voice carried to her with a slight chuckle.

"Camry..." she hissed the name as if it tasted bad passing over her lips and looked to her right. There in shadows of the balcony, only the pale red light of the third moon outlined his form, was a man. He was tall and lean, his face hidden in the shadows. As he stepped forward he became more illuminated and eyes the color of fine red wine gazed at her from behind bangs the color of ivory.

He glowed red like some devil come to torment her, **"Wouldn't you agree?"** he smiled.

"What are you here for Camry?" she glared. **"If you interfere Lady Impreza will not be pleased."** She glanced back in the room at movement and saw the water knight go into another room. **"We can not be seen here."**

"You mean *you* can not be seen here, I have no such restrictions." He grinned as if this fact pleased him greatly and stepped closer to her.

He would be considered handsome by most, bright eyes, high graceful cheek bones and a sly, mischievous smile. Yet there was something about him, something that nagged the eye and no matter how long one looked upon him you could not discern its source. Despite his good looks and seemingly youthful appearance there was something to him that spoke of age, he gave off the feeling of something ancient. Perhaps it was his eyes, wine-red eyes that spoke softly of eons past.

"You are a traitor" she snarled below her breath at him. She kept one eye on the water knight and her target and the other upon him as he eased closer.

"Traitor?!" he scoffed. **"You and Impreza hold that title far better than I do"** he turned his eyes upon her anger boiling like hot red blood. **"Let's see genocide, high treason, crimes against all of humanity...should I go on?"** he licked the tip of his pointer finger and ticked off the points one by one.

"Why you smug, self-righteous..." her hand clenched and the violet gem on her glove gave off a dangerous light...

* * *

Eagle gave a sigh of relief as the water quenched his dry throat. **"Thank you. Who knew water**

could taste so good” he gently held the cool glass in his fingers relishing the sensation of his fingertips on the smooth surface.

As thirsty as he had been even the water from Autozom, which was metallic tasting and had to be run through purifiers to make it safe to drink, would have been welcome? Thankfully the water in Cephro was much better.

“Would you like another glass?” Umi asked and held out her hand for the glass. She had a new understanding of his situation, he was so thankful for just a glass of water. It made her pause for a moment, ‘Makes my fretting sound silly...’ she thought.

“No, I’m fine for now thank you” his lips curved in a slight smile as he leaned back in the pillows. His head was beginning to ache slightly but he was too happy to care much. His eyes traveled around the room drinking in everything he could see. So many vibrant colors to take in, so many interesting things to study but he found his gaze kept traveling back to the Water knight sitting by his side.

He grimaced as a twinge of pain went through him; he lifted the cold glass and pressed it to his forehead. ‘Something’s not right. There’s something wrong, something is here...’ he flinched as the pain in his head doubled.

“Eagle?!” Umi stood instantly her hands fluttered from his head to shoulder not sure what to do to help him. “What’s wrong?” She placed a hand on his forehead, “You’re not going to go back to sleep are you?!” he voice rose in pitch with her concern.

“No...” he shook his head, the glass in his hand fell, it shattered upon the tile sending deadly tears of glass skittering across the floor. He pressed the palm of his hand to his temple. Reaching out with months of practice he looked for the aura that he was feeling rolling throughout the room, that murderous, malicious intent. His eyes had closed and Umi’s voice was far at the back of his mind, but as soon as he found the pin point his eyes snapped open wide and went to the window across the room. Quickly reaching out to Umi’s mind his words were whispered and harsh even upon her mind’s ear. *“Umi don’t move...”*

* * *

“Don’t be foolish Sentra” Camry warned as the angry warrior advanced. Before the very irate woman could react they both felt the wave of magic. They both stopped in their advance. “Impressive...” Camry mused. “He sensed you’re ill intent” he nodded his head toward Eagle in the room. “Usually only the Pillar can do such a thing...Shouldn’t be too much of a surprise I suppose.” He shrugged, “Well I guess it’d be time to get going then?” he grinned and took a step back off the balcony and dropped, plummeting into the night below.

“Damn you Camry...” Sentra hissed as she followed after. He’d forced her to blow her cover... “Probably planed it too...bastard.” She too dropped away into the darkness and soon there was nothing on the balcony but the wind.

* * *

“What’s wrong?!” Umi asked back. She had frozen at his command and her senses were all on high alert. Eagle had been acting strangely the last few moments, his eyes darted around nervously as if expecting a monster to jump out. ***“What are you sensing?”***

The blond warrior’s eyes didn’t stray from the window for a good long moment. ***“I don’t know...I felt something...evil...”*** His gaze left the window and returned to her, his eyes were dark and solemn none of the light heartedness from earlier remained. ***“Whatever it was...”*** he sighed, ***“I think it’s gone now”*** he spoke aloud now.

“I’ll go find Clef. Just in case something has gotten into the castle and he’ll want to know you’ve awakened if he doesn’t know already.” Umi went to stand and leave but before she could Eagle caught her hand.

“Wait, I’ll come with you.” He slowly shifted his weight and swung his legs over the edge of the bed, the cool tile felt alien to his feet as he stood slowly.

“Eagle be careful!” She went to him quickly as he swayed slightly. ***“Are you sure? I mean you just woke up shouldn’t you stay in bed a little longer? I can bring Clef back with me if you want to talk to him.”***

“I’ll be alright. I’d really like to get up and move around you have no idea how tired I am of being in here.” He smiled his head tilting to the side slightly and his bangs shifted hiding his amber eyes behind the pale strands. ***“I’d like to speak with Clef also but I actually want to talk to Lantis.”*** From what he could sense both the mage and cail were together somewhere down the hall to the left.

“Ok...If you say so” she eyed him wearily. ***“Clef is usually in his study or the throne room this time of night, but I don’t know where Lantis is...He’s probably pacing in front of Hikaru’s room again.”*** At this the water knight rolled her eyes enticing a chuckle from Eagle.

“He’s worried sick isn’t he?” he asked as Umi helped him slip on a lightweight green cloak over his black outfit that he normally wore under his cloak from Autozom. He had to lean some of his weight onto her small shoulders but soon they managed to make it into the hall.

Standing in the hallway Umi looked from the left to the right wondering if she should try the throne room first of Clef’s study. The study was closer so she started to go right when Eagle stopped her.

“They’re that way” he lifted a hand and pointed left. At this the Magic Knight gave him an odd look one perfectly shaped blue eyebrow arching in question. He grinned at her look, ***“Well they are”*** he added.

“How do you know they are?” she had to ask as she turned and went left instead.

“Well...It’s hard to explain” he ran his hand through his hair slowly as he pondered how to explain it. ***“After I’d been in my coma for a while I began to understand that people and things***

give off different auras, and because I didn't have another way to sense things that ability became stronger. So now I can tell different people apart, sometimes even their moods, by this aura they give off. That's how I know where Clef and Lantis are, though Lantis is easier to pick up on I know him better." He smiled down at her slightly surprised face and chuckled once again.

* * *

Lantis and Clef had been in deep conversation for some time when they were interrupted by a soft knocking upon the large wooden doors to the throne room. Both of them glanced at the door in surprise wondering who could still be awake at this hour besides them. When the knock was not answered promptly it came again this time a little harder.

Clef waved his staff and the doors swung open soundlessly to reveal the silhouette of two people one leaning slightly upon the other. The long hair of the water knight gave her away quickly but the other was unknown until they stepped into the light cast from the many magical torches around the room. "Eagle?!" Clef nearly stuttered. The said man grinned in response to the mage's shock.

"Eagle..." Lantis echoed and was quickly on his feet and helping Umi bring the commander into the room. The trip had made Eagle tire far more quickly than he had first thought and almost all his weight was now on Umi and she was having a little trouble. Pulling Eagle's arm across his shoulders Lantis took the man's weight and Umi trotted quickly after him and helped set Eagle down in the chair he'd occupied a moment before. "When did you wake up?"

"Just a little while ago" Eagle gasped slightly out of breath.

"I knew you should have stayed in bed" Umi scolded him like a mother would a child that didn't listen to good advice.

He only smiled wryly at her scolding and took deep slow breaths. "I'm alright."

"Lying is a bad habit" She flicked her hair in a quick light movement as she sat down in a chair Clef had just created for her.

Clef created one more for Lantis as he too sat down. "Well this is a surprise but a good one at least, I was not expecting you to awaken so soon." The mage eyed Eagle slowly, the man seemed a little tired but that would be expected he hadn't used his body in over a year. Though the tiredness was only in his body not his eyes, they were bright and warm and at the moment looking up to the viewing mirror. It had turned back seemingly into a skylight and the Cephiro night sky could now be seen. Eagle seemed to be enjoying the view.

'Beautiful...' was the only word Eagle's stunned mind could come up with as his eyes roamed the sky. The conversation between Lantis, Clef and Umi was soon only a soft mummer at the back of his mind. 'I've never seen a sky so clear' he gazed out the window for quite some time lost in thought.

“Eagle?” Lantis’ deep baritone finally reached the man. The blond jumped slightly startled and looked back at his friend. “Yes?”

“We were discussing that we should contact Autozom and your father should be notified as soon as possible of your awakening” Lantis continued after getting Eagle’s attention. “I’m sure Geo and Zazu will be glad to here it.” Both Zazu and Geo had been to visit several times but they were always eager for updates on Eagle’s progress. In fact if Lantis recalled it was due time for a regular update.

“Yes, I’m sure they will” Eagle smiled and then an idea came to mind he suppressed a grin, he’d have to try and talk to Hikaru later; he knew she’d help him and maybe Umi too. He glanced at the water knight and was surprised to find her asleep in her chair. Her head was tilted slightly to the left and her hair fell around her against the back of the chair. Her breathing was soft and gentle sound asleep. ‘It’s been a long day for her....’ he thought. “If I may, I suggest we finish the rest of this in the morning” he spoke to Clef and Lantis and pointed to the knight.

“Oh...” Clef said surprised. “I knew she wasn’t fully recovered from that creature’s attack. She really never listens to advice...” the mage shook his head wondering about the antics of some of his students.

Eagle stood seemingly much stronger than before, as he did feel himself grow steadier by the minuet, and gathered the blue girl into his arms. “I’ll take her back so she can lie down. I’m sure all she needs is a good night’s sleep” he smiled gently down at her

“Eagle it might be better if I take her” Lantis stood, unsure if his friend could make it all the way back to his room.

“Don’t worry I’m fine, shouldn’t you go see how Hikaru is doing? I do hope she’s doing well.” Eagled nodded his head to the right in the mild direction of where he sensed Hikaru’s aura. “I’m sure Presea and Caldina could use a break.” He added as he left the room and headed down the hall.

“I guess I should go see how she’s doing” Lantis sighed. In truth he really was worried about her still and even being away from her this long was enough to drive him to madness. He spoke to Clef about contacting Autozom in the morning and then left. He went quickly down the hall and reached Hikaru’s room but as his hand reached the door a strange thought reached his mind. ‘How did Eagle know Presea and Caldina were with Hikaru?’ He shrugged it off, Umi had probably told him.

*** * ***

Eagle gently set the slumbering Umi down on her bed in his room and took her jacket off and hung it off the corner of the bed. “Thank you Magic Knight” he took her hand and kissed the back of it and pulled the covers up around her. He walked slowly over to the open window and for the first time looked out upon Cephiro. “It truly is beautiful” he leaned against the door frame and gazed out with the blue moon shining down brightly.

*** * ***

Somewhere deep in the night among the heavy trees of the forest of Silence half in shadows half in light stood a couple. "You should not have angered her so" the woman scolded her lover.

"But then where's the fun in that?" he asked and chuckled as he ran his fingers through her hair gently letting the strands wind around his fingers. "She riles too easily anyways" he teased.

"This is no laughing matter love" she sighed wondering how she ever put up with such nonsense.

"Because you love me, that's why you put up with me" he read her mind and she glared up at him. "That's very annoying...when you do that you know."

"And yet you still come every time to meet me..." His eyes did that unfair smoldering thing that just made her want to give into anything.

"And yet I still come..." she repeated softly right before he covered her mouth with his softly and his hand slid up to gently cradle the back of her head. A moment later she sighed as he pulled away a little. "What becomes of us now? And the others?" she asked her voice filled with sadness.

Her lover looked down at her his red eyes seemed to burn lightly in the darkness of the trees, "Cephiro shall decide..." He looked up to the moon for a moment and then back down to her.

"Camry..." she looked up to him and brushed his pale bangs to the side her fingers moved lightly over his cheek.

"Cephiro always decides" he pulled her close to him with a soft prayer to the creator that everything would turn out alright.

* * *

An: OMG I finished. Author falls over dead...Ahem ok maybe not. This is my longest chapter so far, I'm so glad I got it finished before this week. I hope you enjoyed if I got too cheesy let me know...I tend to let my mind go sometimes...what am I kidding when is my mind ever where's it supposed to be? Also I wrote a poem that goes with the story but since it's not a chapter I posted it separately it's called "Eternity" click on my profile to check it out. I just kept forgetting to tell everyone. Thanks. VKiera

Next time: How will Hikaru fair in the next chapter? Who's the woman with Camry, and what exactly was Eagle grinning about. I bet he's planning something. And Sentra's after a new target, "Tell me little green one, what do you think happens to the ones who fail the test?" Next time.

8 - Dreams and Roses

7. Dreams and Roses

AN: Update finally, I beg your forgiveness for this chapter taking me so long. With the ending of my senior year and getting ready for my classes at the collage I'm about to lose what few marbles I have left. And prom is less than a week and I don't have a date...this is starting to sound like a Myspace entry, anyways. Enjoy the chapter, forward.

Once again I don't own Rayearth otherwise this would be the third season and it wouldn't have ended at just two.

*"The dream reveals the reality which conception lags behind, that is the horror of life, the terror of art."
~Kafka~*

"So...he interfered?" Impreza was sitting in a throne like chair; it was smooth and seemed to be made from some dark stone like volcanic glass. Her silver eyes stared at the cup she held in her hand as she trailed a pale slender finger along its brim. The goblet appeared to be filled with red wine, or one can only hope that's what it was.

Sentra kneeled in front of her mistress, "Yes milady." She had just finished recounting her visit to the palace and her run in with Camry. 'The fool...' she thought. 'Who does he think he's meddling with, some trifling little enchantress?!' She wanted to laugh at the stupidity but she was before her lady and remained silent. Suddenly she heard quiet echoing footsteps and lifted her head to see the newcomer. "Sister?"

Impreza looked up from her brooding at her wine glass, "Ah Solara I was about to call you."

Solara stepped forward with smooth, gliding steps, the exact opposite of her quick tempered sister she had the aura of a calm, leveled headed woman. Though both women were lithe and limber, Solara towered over her tiny, fairy like sibling. She came and stood next to Sentra, her long, strait golden hair tumbled around her. Unlike Sentra's fiery green stare, hers was a calm sharp icy blue.

"Lady" Solara bowed slightly as she came to her sister's side and kneeled, her hair pooling around in her like a waterfall of sunlight. "What are your orders?"

"We make our move soon, but not yet, I have waited too long for this moment to let it pass too quickly to enjoy" Impreza stood from her seat. "The thing we have all been yearning for will soon come to pass and the reckoning for what Cephire has done to the ones we held most dear will be paid for in blood."

She went across the room to a table where glittering silver armor was laid out, a long sword with it.

“Cephiro will soon pay for its crimes, this time it will be its own blood instead of the blood of the Pillar” Her black gloved fists clenched as she leaned upon the table her pale face looking back at her from the polished breast plate. “All shall be done...soon”

She pushed away from the table and headed toward the doors, “Solara go to the other side with Sentra; see what else you kind find out about Cephiro’s favorite little knights. If we are to destroy them we must know what they hold most precious.”

“Milady, what of Camry?” Sentra stepped toward the woman. Her sister, who had been looking across the room, quickly turned her eyes upon the back of her mistress who had stopped in the doorway.

Impreza stood motionless for a moment, “He will be dealt with.” Then she was gone the hem of her long black dress flaring as she quickly turned and went out the door, the sound of her booted heels made an ominous clicking sound on the stone floor.

The two women were left alone in the room and Sentra stared at the door way long after Impreza had left before she finally turned to Solara. She stared long and hard at her sister wondering about her reclusive nature of late. After a moment she sighed, “When...will it begin?” She leaned upon the door frame and Solara’s cold blue gaze flicked to her at the sound of her voice.

“Soon.” Solara brushed past her. “We must go; we have orders to carry out”

The younger woman looked after her as she went down the hall and then hurried to catch up. “I hope mistress deals with that upstart Camry soon; he has become bolder of late. He interfered with my assignment.” Sentra’s anger crept into her voice; she hated nothing more than failing her mistress.

“You should not take him so lightly” Solara pulled her glove jewel from her pocket; the gem looked like it’d been carved from a large chunk of amber the size of a child’s fist. “He is not a fool, you know that.”

“Do you think it’s true? The rumors about him, do you think he really has *that* power?” Sentra asked as they prepared to cross over.

“How should I know, why don’t you ask him next time you meet?” Solara snapped suddenly and that was the end of the conversation.

o o o

Darkness.

That was all she could see. Hikaru was quite confused as she took in her surroundings. She could see nothing; there was nothing beneath her and nothing above her. It was like she was floating in some space less void.

“Where am I?” she asked aloud, her voice reverberated all around her, bouncing off invisible walls.

“*Magic Knight...*”

Another voice echoed around her. 'I know that voice!' Her head snapped around looking for its source. Suddenly a small flame appeared in front her and grew into a roaring blaze, "Rayearth..." she whispered as the mashin's mighty form loomed above her.

"She who became Pillar of Cephiro, do thou know the darkness that grows to meet thee? Can thou feel it as it rises to choke out the light?"

Just as quickly as Rayearth had appeared the darkness evaporated and the Fire Knight stood among glowing pillars and spouts of flame. The Fire Shrine. "I know something is coming. But I do not know who or what it is." The mashin lay before her in its animal like form large scarlet eyes bore their way into her soul.

"Thy enemy is ancient and yet new. They hold a power almost as great as that of the Pillar. Knowing this will thou fight if Cephiro calls, even if I can not come to aid thee in this battle?"

"Yes." Was her simple answer, she knew she'd fight once again for this land she had come to call her second home. The home of so many people she held dear, Lantis' face flashed in her mind, Umi and Fuu, all her friends. "I will fight to protect what is precious to me."

"Then I shall restore all my powers to thee, but I can not be summoned to aide thee in this battle. We are needed by the creator in this new universe. I trust in thine strength of heart, she who became Pillar. Go forth unto battle, Legendary Magic Knight."

Rayearth suddenly stood and charged forward, Hikaru felt the familiar magic surge through her body as the fire engulfed her. *"Trust the one with eyes like thine."* Rayearth's last words echoed in her ears as the shadows descended around her once more. Suddenly she felt gravity take hold and she plummeted downward with a high pitched scream.

o o o

Hikaru sat up with a start and looked around wildly, her heart thudding in her chest. She was in her room. A dream. She let a sigh escape her and looked down at her glove gem that had mysteriously appeared on her hand from where she'd left it on the table; it flared as if it were newly made. Her newly reawakened power surged through her in heavy pulsing beats to match the pulse of her blood. Closing her eyes she looked within herself and calmed her heart slowly.

After a moment she opened her eyes and looked around her room and smiled as she saw Lantis sitting in a chair by her bed. "Lantis" she reached out and placed her small hand on the cail's who slept wearily beside her. It took only the gentle touch to wake him, his dark blue eyes snapped open instantly.

"Hikaru..." The cail couldn't hide the look of relief that crossed his face. He stood in a surprisingly brash act and sat down by her side taking her face in his hands and gently kissed her. After a moment he pulled back with a heavy sigh, his forehead almost touching hers. She looked up at him through half-lidded eyes her face flushed and warm beneath his fingers. "You are the only person in all of Cephiro who can frighten me so" he shook his head and gave her that small rare smile of his.

"Sorry" she smiled back weakly. "Is Fuu alright?" Lantis had still not released her from his tight grip not

that she really minded his hands were warm on her face.

“Yes, she’s fine. She was uninjured in the fight.” Lantis shook his head. “That was foolish of you but...” at this he gave her a very exasperated look as he gently let her go, “I almost come to expect it now.”

Hikaru pouted at this and started to speak but he stopped her.

“Not now, you should rest.” He gently pushed her back into her pillows, “We’ll have much to do in the morning. You’ve missed quite a lot while you were asleep.”

“Really? What happened?!” She sat up again eager to hear.

“Hikaru...”

“Alright, alright...but I’m not even sleepy” In truth she was feeling tired again but she wasn’t going to tell him that.

“Just rest for awhile” he sat back down in the chair by the bed.

“But what about you? Lantis you can’t sleep like that.”

“I’ll be fine. I’ve slept in far worse places.” He settled back into the chair and put his feet up.

The redhead eyed him for a moment and seemingly decided to give into his stubbornness. Giving a heavy sigh she laid back down pulling the covers up. ‘I wonder what happened while I was asleep?’ was her last thought before sleep claimed her again.

o o o

It was early morning when Fuu woke suddenly from a strange dream of her own, the stars were still out and she sat up slowly. Her glove gem, which she had taken off before going to bed, was now upon her had once again glowing softly as Windom’s last words to her seem to echo in her mind.

“Beware the dark warrior, for roses are not all they seem.”

“Roses...?” She asked aloud wondering what the wind mashine could mean. Suddenly the weight next to her shifted and Feiro sat up yawning as he rubbed the sleep out of his eyes.

“Fuu...what is it? Can’t you sleep?” He squinted at the eerie green light emitting from her gem. It flared and flickered casting pale streaks across their faces.

He’d pleaded with her to let him stay the night, she knew he was worried and didn’t want to leave her alone. First Umi and then Hikaru, she could be next on the growing list of injured. “I’m fine. I just had a dream, that’s all.” She ran her finger tips over the gem, “Just a dream...”

“Bad dream?” he asked and sat up more propping himself up on his elbow.

“No...just... unexpected” she let a heavy sigh escape her lips. “I think Windom was trying to warn me about something.”

“Windom? Your mashine...what did he warn you about?” His eyes grew serious quickly all sleep gone from them.

“*“Beware the dark warrior, for roses are not all they seem.”*” She quoted as the glowing of her gem faded and the room was plunged back into darkness.

o o o

He'd always liked the quiet, Camry let out a soft breath from where he stood on the edge of the Forest of Silence. The night air was a little chilled but his breath didn't fog, he gazed into the distance at the red moon that set in the south. The last of the pale light made his eyes flare with an eerie shimmering light.

“I hope there's enough time,” he reached into his pocket and pulled out a small square cloth about the size of a handkerchief, “before it begins.” He gently folded it in half and then folded it in half again. Holding the cloth in one hand he held his other hand above it palm down. *“To seek an item. To seek a person. To seek a location. To seek an item. To seek a person. To seek a location. Guide my search...that which flies...to the location that I seek.”* A tiny light emitted from the square of cloth and it rose, taking the shape of a small bird it fluttered off into forest.

Camry chuckled, “I'm glad she taught me how to do that, otherwise this might have taken too long.” He hurried forward on light, swift feet into the trees after the bird.

o o o

The sound was soft in her ears at first, just a pale whisper of many voices. It was like the soft whistling of the wind on a breezy day but it soon grew louder into the roar of the sea and it throbbed upon Umi's eardrums. And the roar slowly turned to a voice.

“Magic Knight...”

The voice boomed and Umi nearly jumped out of her skin.

“Who's there?!” she called out to the emptiness.

“Magic Knight...” The voice of her mashine entreated her again.

“Selece?” Turning from side to side she peered into the darkness looking for the mighty dragon. At the sound of splashing she looked down and realized she was standing in water up to her knees but she could not feel its gentle touch against her skin.

“Ok...I've cracked...I've lost my mind or maybe I really did drown and I'm dead...but somehow I don't think the after life would be this wet...” She prattled for a moment then something moving upon the edge of her sight made her turn. Something fluttered a short distance away, it was blue. As she watched it

grew closer, a blue butterfly. "A butterfly? Here?" She reached out to it but the tiny thing disappeared like smoke in the wind.

When she looked up to find where it had gone Selece loomed above her, his large nostrils flared with warm breath only a few feet from her.

"Legendary Magic Knight."

"Selece...Why are you here?" Umi stepped forward and reached up placing a hand upon the dragon.

"Magic Knight, I come to in thee in this form for I can not return to aide thee as in the past."

"What?! You mean this new enemy? The person who attacked Hikaru? Why can't you help us?"

"I am needed by the Creator in this new universe, but the Creator knows of the darkness that looms upon this land. I have returned to restore thine powers, if you will have them? Will thou defend Cephiro once again?"

"Yes, I will." Umi stood strait returning the mashin's gaze. "I will fight."

"Thou have become strong magic knight, with every new battle thou shall grow stronger; today more than yesterday, tomorrow more than today."

The water began to swirl around Umi slowly at first and then picking up speed as the mashine spoke.

"In the near future thou will find a new source of strength, more powerful than any thou have had before. Thou are due to be transformed. Go forth with hope Legendary Magic Knight."

The water erupted around her and shot up in a pillar and she lost sight of the mashin as she was swallowed within the water.

o o o

Umi's eyes slowly slid open squinting at the early morning light pouring into the open window. She sat up rubbing her eyes, 'Was that really a dream?' she wondered but then something glowing softly caught her gaze. Her glove gem mysteriously formed on her hand flaring with a bright azure light. "Selece..." she put her hand over the gem and it pulsed with light for a few seconds and then stopped.

After staring at her hand as the light faded she seemed to suddenly recall the previous night's events. "That's right, Eagle!" she looked around the room but she was alone "I wonder where he is...and how did I get back in here?"

Standing she picked up a small bag with some of her things and headed toward the bathroom. "I might as well get cleaned up and then go see how Hikaru's doing."

o o o

After keeping watch over Umi most of the night and into early morning Eagle had made the sensible decision to listen to his empty stomach and go and find something to eat. He left the peacefully sleeping Umi and went down the hall, he really had no idea where he was going and would have probably gotten lost if he hadn't decided to keep track of Umi's aura while he was looking so at least he could find his way back to his room.

An hour of walking later he had not found the kitchen but had stumbled onto one of the many palace gardens; this one in particular was full of fruit trees. Standing beneath one of the rather large trees he eyed the rather strange fruit. It looked like apples but the apples in Autozam were a pale yellow and these were an odd reddish-purple. Debating for a moment he figured that they probably wouldn't grow anything poisonous in the garden; he reached up standing on his toes and grabbed one.

He was one third one by the time he headed back down the hallway to his room, enjoying every bite of the fruit as he went. "I'll have to ask the Guru about sending some of these to Autozam."

He took another bite and pushed open his door and was met with a warm, humid blast of air. A quick glance at the empty bed confirmed Umi was awake; he glanced toward the bathroom in time to see her come out. She had changed clothes and had her hair band between her lips as she brushed her powder blue locks.

Umi blushed heavily when she realized he'd caught her primping, she giggled trying to hide her embarrassment. "There you are. I was wondering where you'd wandered off to."

"Sorry, I got a bit hungry" grinning he held up his hand with the half eaten apple as proof.

The water knight only smiled and shook her head putting her hands on her hips after she'd pushed her hair band into place. "I should have known nothing comes between a man and his stomach."

"Well..." he took another bite of the apple and swallowed it. "Considering I haven't eaten in over a year you will have to forgive my horrendous behavior" he winked and she giggled again.

"Yes, I guess I'll just have to forgive you." She sighed as her laughter subsided, 'He's just as easy going as Feiro...without being so annoying. How can Fuu stand it?' she wondered. One last check in the mirror she was satisfied and tossed her brush with the rest of her things. "Do you want to come with me?" she asked as passed him heading for the door.

"And where might we be going?" He asked as he followed her faithfully back out into the hallway.

"To see Hikaru!" She closed the doors and almost jogged down the hallway towards Hikaru's room.

His eyes lit up immediately and he quickened his pace to match hers.

o o o

Hikaru and Fuu looked up at the sound of gentle knocking on the door. Lantis had left a few minutes before to speak to Clef and Feiro was sitting next to Fuu at the end of Hikaru's bed. "Come in!" The fire knight chirped happily.

Umi poked her head in, "Hikaru how are you feeling?" She smiled, "Hey Fuu, Ferio."

"Umi! I'm great, I feel much better! You guys worry too much." Sitting up more she sat cross-legged next to Fuu.

"Hikaru you were severely injured we had every right to be worried" Fuu patted her hand.

"Sorry Fuu, I didn't mean to make you all worry." she pouted a little.

"Well anyways now that you're all better..." Umi drawled with a mischievous smile.

"Oh no..." Feiro grew wide eyed, "Time to run for cover she's got something planned."

"Quiet you!" Umi hissed and Fuu glared at the golden eyed prince. "I actually have a surprise!"

"A surprise, really?" Hikaru looked overjoyed with the idea. "What is it?"

"It's not a 'what'..." at this Umi opened the door fully and reached for something just out of eyesight, "but a 'who'" and she pulled into view a chuckling Eagle.

Fuu and Feiro gaped in surprise and a grin spread across Hikaru's face from ear to ear.

"Eagle!!!" she squeaked and went from sitting to a strait jump in about two seconds flat, launching herself across the room. Ferio dashed out of the way just in time as she landed in Eagle's arms. The later stumbled back a few steps before wrapping his arms around the now very hyper magic knight. "Eagle!!!" she tied her arms around his neck, her tiny feet hanging about a foot or so off the ground.

Eagle barely reacted fast enough to catch her and let out a slight 'oof' as she knocked a little of the air out of him. He recovered quickly and hugged her tightly, "It's great to see you too Hikaru."

It felt good to have the tiny girl in his arms; he'd really been worried about her. During his coma she and Lantis had been the two who came to see him the most, and being an only child he'd come to feel like she was the little sister he'd never had. "So according to Umi you got yourself into quite a bit of trouble?"

At this Hikaru frowned, "Aw Umi why'd you tell him and make him worry? I was fine!" she glared over Eagle's shoulder at her friend.

"You were not fine. I about dropped dead of fright when Lantis carried you in!" Umi shot back crossing her arms.

"We know you mean well Hikaru but you mustn't be so reckless" Fuu stood up as Ferio offered her a hand.

"I know..." Hikaru said in a guilty toned voice, "but I didn't want you to get hurt Fuu." She looked teary eyed at her friend, "As long as you were safe I was sure I'd be alright, I knew you and Lantis would help

me. Though..." At this her nose wrinkled at the unpleasant memory, "It did hurt quite a bit." During this time she had not unwound her arms from Eagle's neck and he was supporting all of her tiny weight, though quite easily.

"Speaking of Lantis," Eagle interrupted and changed the subject, "He and Clef were talking about contacting Autozom. I really would like to talk with Geo and Zazu, I bet they'll be surprised" He grinned and gently set Hikaru down on her feet and ruffled her hair. "Wont they?" he asked her.

"We should surprise them too!" She hopped up and down, "That'd be great!"

"That's exactly what I was thinking." He winked, "But you know I'm going to need some help."

"I'll so totally help!" Umi jumped in.

"Me too!" Hikaru added and she and Umi had surrounded the blond man quickly. "I'm sure Fuu will...?" at this she turned around to look at Fuu with a questioning stare.

Fuu blinked rapidly and then stuttered out, "Well, I suppose so..."

"Ya, this'll be great! So how are we going to...?" Hikaru and Umi huddled around Eagle and drug Fuu with them. They talked quietly in their little group and Ferio watched with an ever larger sweat drop growing.

"This is going to be interesting..." he grinned and slipped out the door to give fair warning to Clef that a conspiracy was in the works.

o o o

Half an hour later Clef, Lantis, Ferio and Presea had gathered in the throne room, the later on being informed of the Magic Knights' plan had only laughed shaking her head and had agreed to keep the secret.

Clef sighed as the girls chattered with Eagle out of range of the viewing screen. He'd reluctantly agreed to let them carry though with their plan but now he was beginning to regret it, "Girls please do try to keep the antics to a minimum."

"It's just a little fun that's all, don't worry." Umi said as the other two knights followed her over to the viewing screen. She gave Eagle a thumbs up from where he sat out of sight for the moment. He grinned in return as Autozom picked up the connection that'd been sent out.

Geo and Zazu popped up on screen, "Hey it's Hikaru!" Zazu waved. Most often it was Clef and Lantis who regularly updated and a lot of the time the Magic Knights weren't even there much less all three of them at once so something had to be up.

"Is everything all right there? Has something happened?" Geo asked a worried look crossing his face.

"Well do you want the good news first of the bad?" Umi sighed putting on her most serious face.

Zazu and Geo exchanged looks, "The bad first" Geo answered.

Clef stepped in for the more serious side of the exchange, "There have been some occurrences of late that have begun to worry us. You know the weather in Cephiro has become less predictable now that the Pillar system is gone but lately it's been very strange and storms are becoming more prevalent."

"So just the weather is weird?" Zazu asked seemingly relieved by that idea.

"No," Lantis stepped in, "There have always been monsters in Cephiro, even when the Pillar was in power, but there was an attack in the south a few days ago that was just not normal and..." he paused for a moment. "The Magic Knights were attacked."

There was an uneasy silence for a few seconds until Umi cleared her throat.

"I was attacked first." She started, "By a creature in the Forest of Silence, it tried to drown me in the river I was able to escape from it but not without a great deal of exertion on my part. I passed out for quite some time afterwards. A normal monster is created by fear but this one was different it was more like a creature Ascot would summon." She crossed her arms in deep thought, "there was something wrong with that creature, something that screamed 'evil' and I don't ever use that word lightly." She added in a cold, dead serious tone.

"So then someone sent a creature to attack you?" Geo asked and Zazu peered over his shoulder. "And the question is who?" he rested his chin in one of his hands.

"Yes, that was what we were trying to figure out when Hikaru, Lantis and I returned to the forest later." Fuu interjected, "But before we reached the river a woman attacked us."

"What?!" Zazu nearly hopped over Geo's shoulder, "You mean a person actually attacked you and not a creature?"

"Yes, Hikaru fought her mostly. The woman said her name was Sentra she was quite powerful and her swords skills proved quite formidable as well." Lantis added and glanced down at Hikaru who smiled back weakly.

"Hikaru was injured pretty severely by a magic attack she took to protect me, Clef was able to heal her wounds up but she just woke up this morning." Fuu turned her worried green eyes to Hikaru for a second.

"I told you guys I'm fine, really I feel completely normal." Hikaru pouted.

"Then don't scare us like that again." Umi took her by the shoulders and shook her slightly.

"We contacted you to inform you of the situation. If it escalates we may need some assistance from Autozam." Clef added and Geo nodded solemnly.

"This woman," Geo asked, "Did she seem like she was from a particular country?"

“No...” Hikaru had bowed her head down. “The way she fought and how easily the magic came to her...she seemed like...she was from here in Cephireo. Her anger was so blatant, so much hatred, I didn’t understand it. She asked me what was most precious to me, if it was Cephireo or something else...I still don’t quite understand what she meant...” the girl looked a little upset and Lantis placed a hand on her shoulder.

“Man,” on screen Zazu flopped over the armrest of the chair Geo was sitting in, “This is so depressing. What’s the good news?”

On this note most of the faces brightened on the Cephirean side.

“Well...” Umi started but was interrupted.

“Cheer up Zazu it’s not all bad” Eagle slid into view behind the Magic Knights.

There was a stunned silence on the Autozam side for a split second and then...

“Eagle! Whoa, when did you wake up?!” Zazu nearly jumped over Geo, the elder man swatted at him to get off. “How are you feeling? Have you been awake a long time? Is this for real, wow! Eagle!” The stream of questions coming from the mechanic was endless.

There was quite a bit of laughter that had to subside before Eagle could answer.

“I woke last night so I haven’t been up and about too long. I’m feeling much better. How are things there, I do hope there’re doing better than here?” Eagle’s eyes traveled from Zazu to Geo.

“There’re improving, the help from Cephireo is slowly helping to halt the decay of our atmosphere. I don’t think we’ll see a full recovery in our lifetime but maybe by the time this one’s grown it might be green again.” At this Geo crammed Zazu’s hat onto his head with one of his large hands.

“Geo lay off, you’re gonna break my goggles!” the boy complained.

There was more laughter and continued chatter about this and that and as time passed people began to trickle off in ones and twos until only Clef, Lantis and Eagle were left. Hikaru and Umi waved as they headed to leave, saying something about it being way past breakfast

Eagle watched them leave, almost tempted to follow, he was getting hungry again himself and he smiled after Umi as she gave a wink and followed Hikaru.

Geo had known Eagle for a very long time, they’d grown up together and Eagle was very good at hiding what he was feeling and thinking but Geo had know him long enough to at least noticing something. There was something different about his friend but he just couldn’t put his finger on it.

He watched the magic knight’s leave the view screen saying something about breakfast and Eagle turned to watched them go. A slight smile tugged at his lips, almost unnoticeable but it was there just long enough. ‘Humm’ Geo thought as Eagle turned his attention back to the screen the smile now

different, back to the same one he'd often showed during his illness, when he was hiding something, same old Eagle.

o o o

The early afternoon sun beat down upon Fuu as she poured more tea for Ferio. They had left the meeting after the talk had turned to trade and the next import ship to arrive, now that Eagle was awake they were to expect Geo and Zazu on the next one to arrive in a week. Now that a permanent road had been established the time it took to reach Cephiro was considerably shorter.

Hikaru and Umi had met them in the hall and they had decided to eat out on the balcony with the view of the sea far below. The water and fire knight had left a moment before to go down to the kitchen and bring back their meal and Fuu was about to leave and go to pick fresh fruit to add with the breakfast/lunch for it was almost midday now.

"Would you like apples or pears this time?" she asked as she gently set down a full cup of tea in front of the Ferio.

"How about both?" he asked playfully as he took a sip of tea.

Laughingly she set the tea kettle down with a quiet clink, "Alright both then. I'll be right back." She went to leave but a warm hand stopped her she turned back to meet his gaze. He'd stood and grabbed her wrist, "Ferio, what's wrong?" she asked confused.

"Nothing, just...be careful. Ok?" He smiled at her his eyes calm yet worried.

"I will. Don't worry I'm just going to the garden, I'll be back as quick as I can." She smiled to reassure him.

He leaned forward and placed a quick kiss on her forehead. "I know, hurry back."

She blushed in her usual manor provoking a chuckle from him as she hurried out toward the closest garden.

Hurrying through the corridor she reached the garden Eagle had been in early that morning and quickly set to finding ripe pears and apples. Reaching for a pear she snagged her hand on a creeping vine with thorns. "Ouch..." she rubbed the scratch gently.

"I don't remember there being any thorn plants here." Her eyes traced the vine back down the branch searching for its source, there were small flowers blossoming from its base, "Roses..." Windom's warning rang clear in her memory once again. "Roses are not all they seem..." she clutched at her arm full of fruit, a nervous feeling growing in the pit of her stomach.

"Wise words from such a young child."

The Wind knight whirled to face the strangely familiar voice that addressed her, "You're...!"

Sentra sat in the tree opposite the one Fuu had been picking apples from, the tiny woman glared down with angry green eyes. "Wise words from a murderer."

This time the dark sorceress was not alone another woman stood one limb higher her deep golden hair so similar to Emeraude's that Fuu lost her voice for a moment. Her own green eyes widened with fear. She dropped her arm load of fruit and drew her great blade in a quick flash of green. "Who are you, where do you come from?" Her knuckles were white gripping the hilt of the sword.

Sentra dropped down silently to stand only a few meters away from her. The other woman remained in the tree seemingly disconnected from the whole exchange. "As I have already told you, I am Sentra of Cephiro."

"What?!" Fuu took a step back as the woman advanced. "What do you mean?"

"Tell me little green one, what do you think happens to the ones who fail the test?"

A harsh flash of violet blinded Fuu for a moment. When she could see again Sentra held her sword. The blade was somewhere between Umi's light fencing sword and her longer heavy one. "Test...what do you mean test?" Fuu watched the two women carefully but did not see the rose vine starting to wind its way toward her feet.

"What do you think happens to those who fail the test to become the Pillar of Cephiro?"

Fuu had barely enough time to register this thought when the rose vines suddenly snapped tight around her ankles dragging her feet out from under and she hit the ground with a sickening thump. The vines clawed their way up her legs cutting and slicing flesh as they went. The cuts stung at first and then they began to burn, a horrid burning that felt like someone had put liquid fire in her veins. The vines continued to wind tightening their deadly grip upon her squeezing the breath from her chest. Even more sickening was the more she bled the more the roses bloomed, the more blood the more blossoms.

The Knight of Windom dragged in a breath and let out an agonizing scream as the vines tighten around and then cut the scream short.

AN: This is my longest chapter to date. Woot! I hope the Knight's dreams didn't feel too repetative, but I needed each of them to have a dream so I tried to change each one up as much as I could. Thoughts, comments? Let me know that you think. Much love to my reviewers (Keli, I heart you) And you will have to live without a tiny sneek peek, I'm in a hurry to update. So you'll just have to wait. Over and out. VKiera

9 - Stopping Time

AN- I'm alive! Err...well sorta. Senior year is done, I'm enrolled in collage classes and I start in one month...I have summer classes...Why can't I have a full summer before I start? Anyways enough of my complaining next chapter. Thank you too all my reviewers! Keli I luv you! Feel better soon. Now onward! Author is hyper after major pocky consumption.

I don't own Rayearth or anyother Clamp stories, the OC's are mine and that's about it. Go ahead and sue me you can have my markers set, it's the most expensive thing I own.

8. Stopping Time

*“What is true strength of heart?
Is it the willingness to accept your fate,
or the courage to defy destiny?”*

“Just how many of those have you had today Eagle?” Umi asked as she carefully balanced a tray with fresh bread and some other snacks.

“Only five” The blond man smiled as he ate yet another apple happily. He’d met them in the hallway after leaving the throne room and Umi had asked if he’d like to have breakfast with them. Along with a few apples he was carrying he also had an arm full of plates Umi had handed over to him.

“My elder brother said having a big appetite is good, it means your healthy!” Hikaru chirped and nearly dropped the cake she was carrying.

“Hikaru be careful you’ll drop my cake!” Umi sighed as Hikaru righted the dessert again; she’d only brought two of them this time and if Hikaru dropped it that was it.

“So this ‘cake’ is sweet right? I love sweet things.” Eagle asked.

Umi opened her mouth to answer his question but the words froze, stuck in her throat. Somewhere in the back of her mind she realized that she hadn’t answered him but her full attention was now on the strange feeling in the pit of her stomach. That same horrible feeling she’d had when Hikaru had been wounded.

Apparently Hikaru felt it too for she had stopped walking and froze as well. Her red eyes looked dazed as if she were looking at something in the distance.

Eagle stood confused watching both Magic Knights. When the girls had stopped suddenly without word he continued on for a few steps before he realized they were not following. Turning he looked back to see them frozen in place their eyes glazed over and far away. He was closest to Umi and reached gently for her. “Umi? What’s wrong?”

It was then that Fuu's blood curdling scream tore through the air, ending abruptly. There was the shatter of breaking glasses and dishes as both girls dropped whatever they'd been carrying and drew their swords.

"Fuu!" The girls rushed forward to find their fellow knight.

In blurs of red and blue they dashed past Eagle heading for the direction the scream had come from. Eagle quickly threw down his things and was silently cursing himself for not asking Lantis to return his weapons. He was close on their heels as they turned a corner and nearly ran into Feiro.

"Where's Fuu?!" Umi nearly attacked him before she realized it was the prince and then when she did she grabbed his collar roughly.

"She went into the garden!" He pulled away from her and hurried the few more doorways down to the garden, Eagle and the knights not far behind.

Hikaru and Umi overtook him and burst upon the scene ready for whatever lied in wait or so they thought. Both knights stopped dead in their tracks, horror clearly written on their faces.

"Fuu!" Umi cried at the sight of her friend.

The Knight of Windom was on the ground writing in agony, her mouth open in a silent scream that no one could hear, for she had not the breath to voice her pain. A beautiful rose covered vine coiled around her frame squeezing the life out of her. Blood pooled in little puddles all around her as it oozed from her numerous cuts and seeped between the vines. A woman stood above her, with a smug smile tugging at her lips. She was no bigger than Hikaru and turned to meet the newcomers.

"You!" Hikaru growled and shifted her weight to the balls of her feet readying to spring to her fellow knight's aid.

"Oh it's the little fire knight, you recovered quickly...or did you have some help? I'll have to remedy that as soon as I'm done with your friend." Sentra leered as she shot a glance at Fuu who had slowly stopped fighting the vines, you could barely see her through them all.

"Let her go." The voice was low and cold and there was an icy rage underlining it; it was not a request but a demand. And Umi meant to enforce it with cold, hard escudo.

"Or you'll do what, little knight?" Sentra challenged.

Umi shot a look to Hikaru and to Ferio, who had come up behind her, the silent message was understood and all three charged forward. Umi and Hikaru went for Sentra and Ferio for Fuu.

There was a harsh clang as Hikaru met Sentra's blade for the second time, this time more prepared for the attack. The contact of sword on sword had enough force to make Sentra slide back several feet her boots scraping across the floor.

Ferio in the mean time was hacking quickly at the vines that imprisoned Fuu but for every one he cut another grew back. Progress was slow but he did hear Fuu gasp as air filled her lungs when he slashed the vine that was wrapped around her chest. "Don't quit now Fuu!" Some of her cuts that weren't bleeding were turning a flaring red shade as if she'd been burned. 'Poison...' he thought and slashed faster.

"A little angry are we?" the pixie like woman asked Hikaru and placed the palm of her hand against the flat side of the end of her sword and push forward and then swung out sending Hikaru flying backwards. The redhead tumbled and went into a roll hitting the back wall with a solid clunk.

Umi then lunged forward to face Sentra but something caught her ankle and stopped her short. At first she thought it was one of the vines that held Fuu but on the edge of her sight she saw a flash of gold.

Whirling just in time she saw a beautiful golden haired woman snap a whip of light tight, pulling the water knight's feet out from under her in a flash. Despite the soft grass that carpeted the garden grounds her knees and elbows connected solidly with the hard ground, she knew she'd have bruises later.

Umi blinked quickly and staggered to her feet, for a moment she thought she'd gone completely off her rocker and was looking at Princess Emeraude but as she shook off the fall she could see the woman more clearly.

Piercing, icy blue eyes, several shades lighter than her own, watched her coolly as the light whip went snaking back to its mistress. The cord of light solidified into a needle sharp blade, not unlike Umi's rapier. The hilt was silver and had one honey colored jewel embedded in the crossbar of the hilt and another in the pommel.

"Not so fast Lady Water Knight." Her voice was just as icy as her eyes; there wasn't any emotion in her tone at all really. There was no trace of the hatred or anger that filled the other woman's voice; only a monotone, calculative feel that made Umi shutter.

The woman flicked back a few strands of her golden hair, it was longer than Umi's but just as smooth and strait. If the woman had been on Earth Umi would have thought her too be in her late twenties or early thirties, but then again this was Cephire and you can never really tell.

"Who are you? What did you do to Fuu?!" Umi grabbed her sword from where it had fell from her hand and quickly with practiced ease fell into en guard stance.

"I am called Solara" was the woman's only answer before she lunged forward. Umi parried the blow; Solara tried to push though her parry with raw strength but Umi being smaller than her decided to retreat back a bit and then try a feint. Solara didn't buy the fake attack and came down hard in a slicing arc. Umi parried again but the woman came in again with a flick and Umi dogged but not quickly enough. Solara nicked her side slicing neatly below her breastplate biting into her clothes and skin.

Umi stumbled back and smiled grimly, she was good, very good. She straitened and lunged forward with a thrust, it was blocked and she went into a short recovery and then lunged again quickly, the point of her blade embedding into Solara's shoulder. The surprise on her face showed for only a moment but

Umi got the feeling that the woman had not seen her own blood in quite sometime.

Solara pulled back dislodging the point, eyeing Umi with new respect. "I see your reputation precedes you." The blond woman raised her blade in a salute, Umi returned the gesture. Then Solara attacked her once again, with quite a bit more ferocity than before.

With each thrust she pushed Umi back forcing her on the defensive, Umi grit her teeth and dug in for the long haul.

While Umi was occupied with Solara, Hikaru had gone after it again with Sentra. At first she'd tried to refrain from magic so as not to destroy the garden but it was soon clear that sword skill alone wasn't going to be enough.

A quick glance toward Umi to ensure she was holding her own and didn't need help, and then she gathered her magic, "Fire Arrow!" The flames came swirling out of her glove gem catching Sentra off guard and threw her back. She rushed forward to help Ferio save Fuu, he'd been able to free her from about half of the vines but he was tiring and couldn't keep up the pace.

Hikaru eyes darted around quickly looking for the source of the vines, they had been created by magic she could feel that. So that meant they could be destroyed by magic. Her eyes on her target she dashed past Ferio and raised her sword high leaping up to put more force behind the blow and sliced through the vines. The vines squirming and writhing around Fuu stopped, the roses withered and the plant turned brown and fell away. Stepping back she called another attack, "Crimson Lightning!" and destroyed the root of the plant to prevent it from coming back.

Fuu whimpered in relief as she felt herself freed from the horrid restraints, she cried out when Ferio gathered her up into his arms. Every part of her felt like it was on fire, she tried to focus on his face but everything seemed to fade away.

"Fer...io..." she rasped and her head tilted back as she lost her fight to stay conscious.

"Fuu...Hikaru behind you!" He called out to the fire knight; she turned just in time to see one of Sentra's shadow spheres heading straight for them. Fortunately it never made it as Umi's water dragon stopped it a few feet from the three.

"Umi!" Hikaru gasped as Solara came up behind Umi while she had turned to fire the magic attack. She could only watch as Solara clenched her fist, her ovum gem flaring with a white hot light.

"Aurora Flash!"

The blast of magic shot forward at blinding speed there just wasn't any time for Hikaru to reach her.

Umi felt the heat from the blast as she turned belatedly wishing she'd had more time and then suddenly something collided with her and collided hard. The heat was gone and she was tumbling down. She tensed and her eyes squeezed shut preparing to hit the ground but instead of hitting hard ground she hit something kind of soft and... warm?

“Wha...?” Umi braced her weight on her elbows and looked down at what she’d landed on and ended up nose to nose with none other than, “Eagle?!” she stared at him stunned.

“Well, I thought I might as well make myself useful” he smiled.

The commander had hung back for most of the fight, he was unarmed and was not capable of using magic and was feeling quite useless but then he’d seen the attack coming when Umi had her back turned.

He didn’t know if he’d make it in time but he rushed forward and took the chance. Hitting the water knight with quite a bit of momentum they both tumbled down. She landed on top of him with a thud.

He wanted to laugh at the shock written clearly on her pretty face when she realized what had happened, grinning ruefully he was about to say something else but his grin disappeared suddenly and in a quick motion he rolled over taking her with him just in time to miss a shadow sphere that Sentra had thrown their way.

Both of them quickly got to their feet once more and backed up joining Ferio who was protectively clutching Fuu’s unconscious form. Umi winced at the pain that shot up her side from her wound as she stood. Biting her lip she pushed the pain into the back of her mind, there’d be time to deal with that later.

Hikaru also retreated a few steps to join them, all the while she watched carefully as Solar and Sentra join together across from them.

“Why are you attacking us?! What have we done to you?” Umi demanded taking a step forward.

“I was going to go easy on you and end this all quickly but now that you hurt my sister...” Sentra bit off the end of her sentence and left the threat hanging in the air like heavy fog.

She glanced to her sister Solara whom was standing next to her calmly gazing at the water knight. She seemed not to notice or not to care about the steady trickle of blood from her shoulder.

“Sister?” Umi lowered her sword stunned by that little bit of information.

“Yes and you hurt her. Now let’s see how much your friends enjoy watching as you die!” Sentra clenched her fist, her violet glove gem glowing in preparation for a magic attack.

Eagle stepped forward pulling Umi behind him. Damn why didn’t he ask Lantis to return his weapons when he’d spoken to him the night before? Where were the others anyway? His hard amber eyes followed the smaller of the two women as she started to circle their little group.

“A lot of good that’ll do her are you going to protect her. You can’t even use magic.” Sentra raised her hand “Shadow sphere!” The blackish-blue sphere of magic hurdled towards the group fast.

Eagle raised a hand and put up a mental barrier to reflect the attack. Unfortunately he was a little out of practice and the magic shot through in a few places. He heard Umi and Hikaru yelp as they tried to

dodge the magic and protect Fuu and Ferio.

His feet began to slide back a few inches from the force of the magic, he grunted and put up his other hand concentrating to strengthen the field. Sentra threw another sphere on top of her first.

'Damn she's strong, it's like trying to hold back one of Hikaru's attacks in her mashin' he slid back a bit more but his barrier held, although some of the second magic attack punched through. He took a nick above his left eye and a trickle of blood streamed down, blinking furiously he held the barrier until the magic stopped.

He let a sigh escape his lips as he let his hands drop to his side whipping his eye on his shirt, blood smearing across his shoulder.

"No bad..." Sentra stopped in her barrage, "but not good enough, Eagle Vision of Autozam."

At his suspicious glare she smiled, "Yes I know you are not of Cephiro. You shouldn't even be helping them, you shouldn't even be here. You should have crossed over like the rest of us and..."

"Sentra!" Solara snapped cutting her sister off short her blue eyes darkening, she was angry.

"Crossed over...?" Umi asked confused.

"The rest of us...?" Eagle was about to ask more but Solara and Sentra both attacked together.

"Shadow Sphere!"

"Aura Flash!"

The two knights rushed forward to counter.

"Azure Hurricane!"

"Crimson Lightning!"

The four magic attacks roared towards each other rushing to meet between the two groups. But then something very strange happened, everything stopped. The water coming out of the fountain stood still, drops frozen magically in midair. The magic attacks hung in the air as if someone had snapped a photograph. Everything in the room had stopped moving except them.

Time had stopped.

"What the...?" Ferio stared.

"That isn't supposed to happen right?" Eagle glanced at the two knights.

Both girls looked dumbfounded.

“Ah...no...” Hikaru shook her head slowly.

“Now, now, why can’t we all be civil?” A male voice echoed in the strange time-stopped silence.

Solara eyes showed a flash of surprise for quick second and then a slight smile tugged at her lips. “Ah, Camry. I was wondering when you were going to show up.”

“Well I can’t leave you two to your own whims now can I?” Something moved under the trees and Camry materialized from the shadows as if he were one of them. “You just might get into trouble.”

He walked forward stepping into the light and headed towards the no-mans land between the two sides. He was a fairly pale man, this made more prominent by his maroon clothes. His voice was light hearted as if he were teasing but his red eyes were serious, gazing from behind the fringe of white bangs at them as he ducked under the frozen magic attacks.

Hikaru watched him carefully those red eyes so much like her own, so much more behind those eyes than just what appeared to be. Rayearth’s final words came back to her echoing in her mind.

“Trust the one with eyes like thine.”

“Red eyes...” she whispered.

“What?” Umi looked at her confused.

“Nothing...I’ll tell you later, but I think he’s on our side.”

“How can you be sure Hikaru, he seems to know the other two pretty well...?” The water knight was unconvinced.

The rest of their conversation was interrupted by Sentra, “So the rumor is true. You really can control time.” She shot Camry an acid glare.

“Well *control* maybe too strong of a word for what I do, but yes you could say I can *bend* time.” He made a sudden movement with his hands and the magic attacks that were frozen seemed to implode on themselves and a black void appeared under him sucking the magic down into it. There was a rushing of air and a popping sound as it collapsed inward and then closed up.

“What the heck was that?” Umi gaped.

“Negative space, it creates a vacuum.” Eagle answered, “But I’ve only seen one in space between the worlds.”

“You mean like a black hole?” Hikaru sort of got that.

Umi sighed, “This is just too freak’n weird.”

“Why are you helping them Camry?” Sentra demanded. “You of all people understand why we’re

doing this. After what happened, I know in your time you were connected in some way to the Pil..."

Camry's face darkened and he cut her off, "I fight you because of *that*, it should have never been repeated. You know just as well as I do that what they did was for the better of Cephiro." His eyes were hidden behind the shadow of his bangs but there was something in his voice that was...painful...to hear. "You are foolish for blindly following orders."

"Damn you Camry! You have no right to pass judgment! You don't understand our reasons, you could never understand!" She stepped forward but Solara stopped her. "Sister?!" she looked back surprised.

"Now is not the time." Solara's voice had yet to lose its calm, cold note, even when she was angry earlier. She held her sister back, "We should return."

"But?" The angry Sentra protested it was easy to tell she wanted a piece of Camry, and she wanted it now.

Solara shook her head, "Later." She turned and opened a portal under the shadow of a tree and looked back to Sentra.

Sentra grit her teeth and turned back to Camry. She raised her sword up to his chest, "Before this is over... I will kill you." She pressed the point of her sword forward breaking his pale skin just below his collarbone. A small fleck of blood appeared and ran down the edge of the blade.

Camry didn't move and only watched her indifferently as she stepped back her sword disappearing into her glove gem. She stomped off into the portal angrily but her sister didn't follow immediately.

Solara watched Camry for a fleeting instant her blue eyes locking with his red for a moment. Then she moved and broke the spell between them, returning her sword to its resting place she disappeared through the portal and it closed after her.

There was a moment of silence as everyone stared at Camry, trying to decide if he was their side or not. Then Umi broke the silence.

"Who the hell are you?" she asked.

"Umi!" Hikaru gasped.

"What?" she demanded.

Eagle chuckled a little reliving some of the tension from the room, "That was not very lady like of you Umi"

"We were just in a huge fight, with some psycho women who seemed pretty damn determined to kill us for no apparent reason, some weirdo shows up and stops time and you're worried about my manners?!" Umi practically shrieked at the commander who visibly winced and backed away slowly.

"Sorry..." he grinned at her outburst looking pretty sheepish by this point.

“Well you sure are a lively bunch, although I’m not sure I’ll be helping you again if you’re going to call me names.” Camry grinned. “Weirdo? Come on am I really that weird?” He looked down as if to appraise himself.

Hikaru and Umi both sweat dropped but then shook it off; neither of them had put away their swords and stepped forward.

“I’ll ask again, who are you?” Umi repeated her former question.

“I’ll be glad to answer your questions in due time but attend to your friend first.” He pointed to Fuu who had yet to so much as twitch after passing out in Ferio’s arms. “When you speak to the Guru tell him the poison from the rose vines is resistant to healing magic, a natural potion would work best to help her.” He cocked his head to the side as if he heard something, “Hum, here comes your back up...I’ll return when you’ve taken care of your friend.” He turned and headed back for the trees as soon as he was beneath the eaves he disappeared before anyone could get a word in edge wise.

At that very moment Lantis, Presea, Ascot and Lafarga came charging into the garden.

“What happened?” Lafarga returned his sword to its sheath for the danger seemed to have passed.

“We were attacked again” Umi sighed heavily, she had one arm wrapped around her waist pressed to her wound to ease the bleeding.

“It was the same woman as before...” Hikaru said as she shoed Lantis away insisting that she was fine and for him to quit fussing over her. “Only this time there was two of them.”

“Two?” Presea asked.

“Yes two and then that other one...” at this Umi glared off into the shadows where Camry had disappeared to.

“Other one?” Ascot asked confused.

“It’s a long story. We’ll explain later after we get Fuu to Clef.” Umi glanced back worriedly at her friend.

With a bit of help from Ascot, Ferio gathered Fuu up and they quickly headed out the door.

Eagle caught Lantis on the way out, “Lantis could you get my weapons back for me, if this escalates anymore it would be unwise for me to be unarmed.”

The Cail nodded and went out into the castle corridor leaving Eagle standing in the archway alone.

He looked back into the partially destroyed garden and shook his head then quickly headed after the others.

o o o o

Sentra slammed her fist down onto the stone table top, "Why did you stop me Solara?" she demanded. They had returned to the other side by now and Sentra was venting her anger on her sister.

"Because that was not our mission." The blond answered calmly. "We were to test the Magic Knights for any weaknesses they have and we did just that. We were not sent to kill them or Camry. Nor were we to kill the man from Autozam."

"But still! Why did you stop me from at least getting rid of Camry?" Sentra took a step closer to her sister and glared up at her.

"Because your sister follows orders and I said I'd deal with him when the time came." Impreza came into the room silently.

"Milady" both Sentra and Solara bowed.

"So what did you find?" The dark woman sat down on her queenly throne, "I'm waiting for your report."

"The Wind Knight seems have some attachment to the last Pillar's brother, the prince." Solara started.

As does the Fire Knight to the Cail, the last high priest's younger brother. He seemed very concerned about her when I injured her before. They are all loyal to each other I'll give them that at least. During the fight they protected each other instead of just protecting themselves. " Sentra added.

"And what of the Water Knight?" Impreza asked, a frown creasing her perfectly smooth skin. She really didn't like the Water Knight after the little dog had escaped her trap.

"She protected her fellow knights fiercely, she even wounded Solara" She growled at the thought of her sister's injury.

Impreza raised one perfect dark eyebrow, "You Solara? She managed to injure you?"

"Yes milady, her sword skills are exceptional." Thought Solara seemed to be giving Umi quite the complement it really wasn't, just a simple fact to her. "Although she didn't appear to favor anyone, the one from Autozam did protect her. He saved her from my magic attack."

"Ah that one..." Impreza murmured thoughtfully, "What of him?"

"He's very quick and his powers grow daily, though I doubt he knows it. He is unable to use magic yet but he has been in Cephiro long enough for a magic to have chosen him. His strength of will is frightening...he held back one of Sentra's magic attacks with sheer willpower." Solara tapped her fingers upon the table top in a deadly melody.

"He also sensed my presence once before when he first awoke, Camry was there...the bastard...it was his fault I was almost caught and had to leave. She did seem to have at least some feelings for the foreigner." Sentra circled over to her sister and waited for her lady's order.

Impreza seemed to think for a moment, "This one from Autozam, he never did cross over and my sight is limited with the water mirror so I have no idea how he avoided this fate. But..." she paused for a moment and a vicious smile pulled at her lips, "he may prove useful. The next time you cross over...bring him to me"

o o o

Umi would have thought it impossible to fit so many people in one room. She felt like she couldn't take a deep breath or she might bump into someone.

Clef and Presea were on one side of Fuu's bed, Ferio and Hikaru on the other. Fuu herself lay motionless as Presea poured potion onto bandages and wrapped them around her arms and legs.

Umi herself was at the end of the bed with a fidgety Caldina to her right. The dancer was nervously hopping from one foot to the next and Umi was about ready to smack her.

"Well Clef?" Caldina asked anxiously.

Clef let out a sigh and opened his eyes, which had been closed as he used his powers to check on Fuu's healing. "The poison is clearing slowly. I haven't seen a poison of this kind in a long time. Who was it that told you it was resistant to healing magic?" he looked to Hikaru.

"This guy, he showed up in the middle of the fight and stopped our magic attacks. Just froze them in midair and then made them disappear into this freaky black hole. Then he left and said he'd come back after we'd taken care of Fuu." Hikaru made a whole range of hand motions as she described the whole ordeal.

"Hikaru," Umi started, "During the fight when that man first appeared you said you thought he was on our side, why?"

"Well, this is going to sound crazy, but I had a dream last night and Rayearth appeared in it. He said the machine wouldn't be able to help us but that he would restore my powers and right before he disappeared he said, "*Trust the one with eyes like thine.*""

That guy had red eyes just like me; I think he's the person Rayearth was talking about."

"A dream? Well if we're going to go into having dreams with machines in them I got a visit from Selece as well." Umi leaned heavily upon the bedpost the cut on her side was really starting to throb.

"Fuu said something about that last night." Ferio spoke up; he was sitting by his knight's side and had yet to move since he'd laid her down a few hours before. "She had a dream about Windom he gave her a warning."

"Warning?" Presea looked up from wrapping the last of Fuu's bandages.

"*Beware the dark warrior, for roses are not all they seem*" He intoned softly.

"The smaller woman, Sentra wasn't it? Her magic attack had to do with shadows I bet Windom meant

her and the rose vines that she attacked Fuu with.” Hikaru got up from Fuu’s side and went to stand next to Umi.

“The other woman she said her name was Solara, they were sisters.” Umi crossed her other arm around her side to appear more casual. ‘One with power over shadows the other over light. Why doesn’t that surprise me?’ she almost rolled her eyes at the notion.

“Umi did Selece tell you anything?” Hikaru asked.

“Yes, but I still don’t understand it. He pretty much said I’d grow much strong in the coming days and that *‘I was due to be transformed.’* Whatever that means. Why can’t machine be straight forward?” She frowned, her brow creasing slightly.

“I have no idea.” Hikaru also frowned and gave a heavy sigh.

“Alright a girl that’s enough for now, everyone should get some rest. We can sort the rest of this out in the morning. You both should rest after using so much energy today.” Clef ordered them out.

Truth be told Umi felt like she was about to drop dead and she was pretty sure Hikaru was just as tired. It’d been some time since they’d been in such a knock down drag out fight like that.

Caldina went out the door with them leaving Presea, Ferio and Clef to finish taking care of Fuu. There wasn’t a whole lot they could do but take up space at least until Fuu woke up. The dancer squeezed both girls tight, Umi wincing as she did so but managed not to say anything, and then she left to go find Lafarga.

Both Eagle and Lantis had been the sensible two and had stayed out in the hallway; they were leaning against the wall when they came out.

“How is she?” Eagle asked kindly.

“Clef said the poison is passing slowly but she already looked better to me” Umi answered as the girls walked over to them.

“I’m glad I hope she’s well soon.”

“Aw Eagle you’re so nice worrying about Fuu” Hikaru jumped up and hugged his neck.

The commander only smiled and nodded as she let go.

“Well we never did get to eat anything I think I’m going to go get something. Do you want to come?” She looked up to Lantis who nodded. “What about you guys?” she asked Umi and Eagle.

“I’m fine Hikaru, thank you.” He shook his head.

“You should be after all the apples you ate, even before the fight, I’m sure you’ve had more since then.” She shot the blond man a look.

“No actually I haven’t but I’m fine.” He laughed a little and threaded a hand through his hair.

“I’m not really hungry Hikaru you go ahead” Umi encouraged and gave Hikaru a wink.

Hikaru blushed immediately and glanced up at Lantis from the corner of her eye. “Well see you later, night Umi, night Eagle.” She promptly drug Lantis off with her down the hall. The Cail seemed not to mind too terribly much but he didn’t quite understand her reasons for hurrying off so quickly.

After they turned a corner Umi and Eagle were left alone in the dark hallway.

Eagle chuckled as Lantis disappeared with Hikaru, “Umi you should tease her so.”

“Oh she’ll be fine” Umi giggled despite herself though she grimaced at the pain that shot up her side from the laughter.

Eagle noticed, “Umi did you get Presea to look at that?”

‘Darn him why does he have to notice everything?’ Umi sighed internally, “No not yet I was going to take care of it myself. It’s only a little nick, I’ll be fine.”

“Umi...” he scolded.

“What? You sound like my mother...” she grumbled. “You didn’t get anyone to look at your eye” she countered him.

“Yes I suppose you’re right I haven’t, have I?” He shook his head, “Do you know were I could find some bandages?”

“I have a first-aid kit in my room. You’re going to need help with it anyways.” She leaned in closer to him examining the gash with her eyes, “It looks pretty deep” she frowned again. “Come on” she turned and flicked her hair behind her shoulder and headed for her room, Eagle a few paces behind.

Reaching her room Umi pushed the door open leaving it ajar for Eagle. She went over to her dresser and pulled open a bottom drawer retrieving an intricate bowl shaped jar. Setting it down on the dresser top she hurried into her bathroom coming back in with a bowl and pitcher full of water.

Eagle stuck his head in the door and looked about just as she was pouring the water into the bowl. “Over here Eagle” she patted the seat of a blue settee that was next to her dresser.

He came in closing the door and did as she told sitting down on the settee next to her. She dipped a small towel into the water and rung it out. “Here let me see” she placed her hand on the side of his face, gently pushing his bangs back. “Yes, it is pretty deep” she studied it a moment before she began to lightly wash the dried blood away.

“So where did you learn to treat wounds Umi” he asked a question to break the silence between them.

“Last summer I volunteered as a lifeguard and I had to have special training, including some medical training.” She wiped away more caked on dry blood but this caused the gash to starting bleeding anew. “Here hold this” She pressed a new cloth to his skin and after he’d put presser on it she started to wash her hands in the bowl.

“Lifeguard?” Eagle asked his one eye was closed to keep blood from dripping into but his good eye glanced at her sideways as she dried her hand and popped open the small jar.

“It’s somebody that’s trained to keep watch over other people while their swimming and save them if they start to drown.” She reached in the jar and pulled out bandages and ointment.

“Oh, you did that?” He seemed amused by this.

“Yes, why is that funny?” she asked as she pulled the cloth away gently to see if the bleeding had stopped. It had and she started to smear some healing ointment on it.

“Well your magical abilities are rooted in water are they not?” She nodded to his question so he went on, “I just thought it slightly ironic that you did such a job.” He smiled up at her as she began to tread a needle.

“I’m going to have to stitch this up ok?” she asked.

He nodded and fell silent as she quickly and skillfully sewed the wound closed. It was almost like sewing a skirt, though Umi had to remind herself several times this was a person and she took extra care not to pull too hard. He didn’t even so much as flinch as she pulled the needle through, she knew it had to hurt for she had nothing to deaden the pain with. Even so he still didn’t move one twitch but kept his eyes peacefully closed.

“There all done” she tied off the end and cut it. His eyes slid back open again a calm honey colored shade as if he’d been thinking of something peaceful while they were closed. Applying a little bit more ointment she began to wrap a bandage around his forehead. Sighing she pushed some of his bangs out of the way to tuck the bandage behind his ear, “I wish they had some tape or band-aids this would be a lot easier.”

He opened his mouth to ask something but she beat him to it.

“A band-aid is a bandage that’s sticky on one side so it’s easier to put on.”

He chuckled once again, he seemed to laugh easily, and it made her smile to hear it.

“Done” she pinioned the wrap in place and flopped down next to him on the settee.

Smiling he reached out and took her hand, “Thank you very much” he kissed the back of her hand just like any perfect gentleman would do.

Umi blushed slightly she’d never had any guy do that. Though she’d never be the first to admit it she loved all the old tales about knights and chivalry and found it all quite romantic. At this thought she

blushed further and withdrew her hand gently and stood. "Well you should get some rest and..."

Eagle stopped her by gently grabbing her wrist, "No you don't; now somebody needs to take care of you. I can if you don't mind of if you'd like I'll go get Presea but you are not going anywhere until someone does." His voice was still gentle but stern.

She sighed and ran her hand through her hair in an exasperated movement, defeated, "Presea's busy helping Clef so I guess you can" one blush faded quickly into the next she sat back down next to him.

"Alright lift up your arm a bit," he kneeled by her side and peeled the blood stuck cloth away slowly.

"Ouch" her nose wrinkled in discomfort.

"Sorry Umi, could you take off your armor I can't quite get..." before he'd finished there was a soft blue flash and all her armor disappeared into her glove gem. "That is pretty handy isn't it?" he tapped the blue jewel on her left hand.

"Yes they are" Umi cleared her throat and looked around the room trying to find something to distract herself. Suddenly the carving above her door became very interesting. "So where did you learn to do this?" she asked his own question.

"It's standard procedure for all Autozam military to be medically trained, no matter their ranking." He peeled the rest of the side of her shirt up, the slice in her skin was just below her ribcage but it wasn't too deep and wouldn't need to be sewn up like his.

"Oh" she felt pretty silly now asking that, 'Duu! Umi of course he's had medical training he's a soldier!' she sighed but jumped a bit when he touched her side with the wet cloth.

"Oh, sorry did that hurt?" his hands stopped and he glanced up to her.

"No, just cold" she looked down smiling for a second.

He laughed again, "Oh well sorry anyways" he finished cleaning the nick and reached for the same ointment and bandages that she'd used before. "You know I actually wanted to be a doctor before I entered the army when my father became president."

"Really?" Umi was surprised; she'd thought he'd wanted to be in the army.

"Yes, you see my mother passed away from a sickness not too dissimilar from my own when I was quite small. I wanted to be able to help people like her." He'd finished with the ointment and was now wrapping her side up.

"Oh, I'm sorry Eagle" she looked down at him again as he finished up her eyes sad.

"It's alright it was a long time ago, nothing for you to worry about" he stood and poured fresh water into the bowl washing his hands.

“But that still doesn’t change how much you miss someone after they’re gone” she said softly. She heard him sigh and looked up, he’d come back and knelt down in front of her. Taking her hands in his he smiled sadly.

“Yes that’s very true, but you needn’t worry.” He gazed steadily into her eyes for a moment, such a true, true shade of blue and she returned it.

Studying his own amber eyes she wondered what he was thinking and then he stood and leaned forward a bit smiling as he threaded some of her long locks in his fingers. “You’re a very good person Umi.”

He offered her a hand up and she took it looking at him with a slightly puzzled gaze. “Well, I’d say it’s time for you to get some rest.” He headed for her door and she followed him to it standing just inside the doorway as he went into the hall.

“Oh Umi...” he put up one arm to lean on the doorframe. “I know it’s been lost in all this trouble going around but as soon as Fuu is better and it’s quieted down a bit you really should tell them.”

She knew what he meant the second the words left his mouth. The accident with her friend’s boyfriend. She’d still not told them how much it’d shaken her up. “I know” her head dropped a bit. “I’ll tell them soon.”

“You promise?” he asked reaching forward and gently lifting her chin up so she met his eyes.

“Yes” she nodded lightly.

“Good. Remember if you need help Umi all you have to do is ask” on pure instinct he lent down and placed a feather light kiss on her forehead.

A deep red blush flushed her face and she couldn’t find any words to say so he only smiled at her, “Good night Umi.”

Before she had the chance to gather her scattered wits he turned and walked back down the hall towards his room. Slowly Umi closed her door and went back into her room, she stood slightly shell shocked for a moment and then flopped down onto her bed.

She wasn’t sure what to make of anything yet but she couldn’t hold back the small smile that found its way onto her face. She buried her face into her pillow, “Why are men so complicated?” she asked aloud to the empty room. She knew the next day would be a very, very interesting day no matter what happened.

AN: Once again thank you to all my readers and reviewers. Keep with me please I promise to get chapters out as fast as I can!

Next time: Camry friend or foe? What was his connection to the Pillar in his time? When will Fuu wake up and will Camry come clean about his purpose in the coming battle? What's going to happen with Umi and Eagle and just what does Impreza want with Eagle?

10 - A Painful Reality

An: This chapter contains reference to other Clamp characters outside of Rayearth. If you are familiar with other Clamp works you know they like to refer to past works in newer ones, most recently and notably in Tsubasa Chronicles and xxxHolic. While you don't need to be familiar with these stories to understand my story if you are it should make my fanfic a little more enjoyable, lets just call it my little inside joke. If you have any questions just ask I'd be glad to explain. Don't own Rayearth or any other Clamp works, Camry's mine but you can't have him. Enjoy the story.

9. A Painful Reality

*"A person's deepest wish...
may become happy or sad.
Beautiful or evil..."*

DNAngel

The realm of Cephireo slept peacefully, all the country was in the depths of the night. Though it was nighttime, enough pale, muted moonlight made its way through the heavy clouds to illuminate the countryside far and wide.

Camry was alone high up the central tower of the castle, in the docking area that the Magic Knights had once used to enter the castle in their machine. He stood gazing out the vast opening at the fields and forests far below. Red eyes following the downpour of water that dropped away from the castle and flowed away to the sea.

It had been a very long time since he'd last seen Cephireo this beautiful and peaceful. His last memory of the land had been in chaos, the world crumbling away into nothingness as all its people prayed for the birth of yet another Pillar.

'No longer' he smiled softly and took a deep breath as a fresh green wind blew in and tossed his hair and heavy cloak. 'I wonder how the wind knight fairs' he looked back into the darkness of the castle behind him. She was strong, as were the others. "I'm sure they'll be alright" he mused to himself. Though he did feel somewhat guilty for the wind knight's injuries; if he'd perhaps gotten there sooner her wounds would have been less grievous. He'd been afraid of that when he entered the Forest of Silence but it couldn't be helped. It was necessary for him to go. When he'd arrived at the Spring of Eterna he'd allowed himself to be tested. He'd hoped that the time difference wouldn't be too much but it had taken him longer than expected to earn the escudo.

"I hope that escudo will be enough payment in the future as well as the information she gave me" That witch from the other world drove a hard bargain. She had a tremendous amount of power and she'd crossed paths with the Creator. He wondered if the witch was from the same world as the Magic Knights. Most likely not.

With a heavy sigh he reached into his pocket and drew out something small and round. It looked like a glass ball but imbedded in it were intricate magical symbols. Three of them he recognized as the water, wind, and fire symbols for the machine but the fourth one he didn't know. It looked somewhat like a figure eight. 'That witch is such a strange, mysterious woman' he thought as he remembered her instructions.

"It will work only once." The witch's voice came though easily using the spring's extra magical powers as a boost for the communication between worlds. She was lying upon a couch, wearing a floral print kimono and took a breath from her pipe smiling at him. "When the time comes for its use break it and release the seal within."

"The escudo will be enough for this Yuko?" he asked.

"Yes, a very fine example of escudo. I will accept it as payment." She held in her hand the glowing ore which he had sent to her a few moments before.

"Things have already been set in motion and 'his' quest for a wish has already begun to affect worlds. Even if it hasn't begun yet, it has really already begun. As I'm sure you are aware of already?" she asked her long black hair falling to one side.

"Yes, the fact that myself and the others are able to cross over now, when before we could not, is evidence in itself" Camry looked around his surroundings warily.

"Yes, for if the dream does not end..." The witch turned suddenly and put the escudo away and Camry heard girlish sing-song voices somewhere beyond what he could see of her side of the transmission. "Mistress, we have a guest, Mistress we have a guest!" The witch turned her yellow eyes back towards him.

"It seems I have company, until we meet again." Then the connection was shut off and he was once again alone in the Forest of Silence.

While Camry was immersed in his thoughts he did not see a portal open behind him and the tall slender woman step through. Solara flicked a strand of her golden hair back walking silently up behind the man.

"Camry"

"Solara, I was beginning to wonder about you." Camry replaced the glass item in his pocket and turned to face the woman. "You worry me to death sometimes" he gave her that crooked smile that she knew all too well.

"You made Sentra very angry again you know" she walked to his side slowly.

"I told you before she riles too easily" he leaned forward slightly, reaching out and winding a few strands of her long golden hair between his fingers.

"Next time you decide to piss her off I may not be able to stop her from skewering you" she watched him carefully as he replaced the strand of hair tucking it behind her ear.

He merely rolled his eyes and reached out wrapping an arm around her and drawing her to him. "I'll be fine."

"You never take anything seriously do you?" she started to become annoyed with him but she didn't pull away from his embrace. "Although," she ventured, "Sentra made you pretty angry as well. Didn't she?"

Camry was silent for a long moment, "Everyone has scars, things they would rather die than let the people around them know, but that is a scar I will have to share...if we are to end this nightmare."

"You're going to tell them?" she looked up to his face, a mask hiding the pain that was eons old.

"If they are to understand and prepare they'll have to know, know everything." He fell silent afterwards, gazing into the distance but not really seeing.

"Camry..." the usual coldness was gone from her eyes; there was a sad, loving undertone in her voice. She laid her head against his chest her hair falling over his shoulder in a waterfall of gold.

"How's your shoulder?" He asks softly turning and brushing his lips along her cheekbone.

"It's fine" she didn't want to tell him it did hurt.

A deep chuckle escaped him, "You lie." He held out his palm and whispered something so soft even she couldn't hear him clearly. A soft gold orb formed, he cupped it in his palm and then let it fall into her shoulder, healing the wound.

"You shouldn't do that, how am I going to explain it back on the other side?" she asked, but sighed in relief as the pain subsided.

"How are you holding up...?" he looked down at her ignoring the question, tracing her jaw line with a slender finger.

"I'll be fine, I don't think they suspect anything" her hands clenched tightly at his shirt betraying her nervousness.

“Don’t push yourself, if you don’t feel comfortable there. Come back to me or leave them. It’s only going to get worse...” he held her face gently between his hands.

“Camry, I can’t leave my sister...you know that” she softly pulled his hands away.

“Impreza’s hatred has already taken root in her. If this does not end soon...you won’t have a sister to go back to.”

Solara didn’t have an answer for that.

ooo

“How’s she doing?” Umi asked as she and Hikaru checked in on Fuu. The night had been quiet, thankfully, and everyone had gotten some well deserved rest. Except for perhaps Ferio who’d not slept one bit, he’d stayed up all night watching over her.

“She’s not woken up yet, but her color’s returning and the wounds are starting to close” he was sitting in a chair he’d pulled up to Fuu’s bed. He looked up to the girls as they entered smiling weakly; his eyes had dark shadows under them. He looked like he could barely sit himself.

“We’re about to meet in the throne room, Clef’s called everyone” Hikaru looked down at Fuu’s sleeping form, “He put up a magical barrier around the room so no one should be able to harm her.” She reached down and gave her friend’s hand a small squeeze.

“Are you going to come?” Umi asked as she started to head back to the door, Hikaru joining her.

“Yes, I’m coming. I’ll be there in a minuet.” The prince looked back to Fuu as the girls nodded understandingly and left quietly. “I’ll be back soon, I promise,” leaning forward he kissed her forehead and then stood to follow Umi and Hikaru. He was about to close her door when a flash of something red...no maroon, caught his eye. Whipping his head to the left he saw him, the man from before. He was standing in the shadows of the doorway across the hall, looking exactly the same as he’d the day before. His face was hidden in the shadows but his posture didn’t seem to be aggressive, it was almost casual, but still Ferio tensed.

“I mean no harm” Camry stepped forward into the light. “I only wish to ask you something.”

“What do you want to ask?” Ferio still didn’t move and glanced suspiciously at him.

“What is most precious to you? Is it Cephireo or something else?” Camry repeated the very same question Sentra had asked Hikaru.

“What?” Ferio was knocked a little off guard by the sudden, strange question. That had not been a question he was expecting.

“Cephireo...is a very precious thing, it is a county that far too many have given their lives for. But is it more precious to you than she?” Camry nodded toward the door where Fuu rested.

Ferio seemed to waver in his answering, he knew his answer but it was if he felt guilty in saying it aloud.

“You should not feel guilty in saying you value her more, any person who loves someone as you love her would answer the same, even if they were unwilling to admit it. It is not as noble as you might think to deny what you want most in this world.” Camry took a few steps forward down the hallway but then glanced back over his shoulder at the prince, “Stay with her, moments with those we hold dear are small and fleeting and may not come again. Stay with her, she needs you.”

Ferio watched after the strange man as he left in the direction of the throne room. He looked back into the room at Fuu and then back down the hall. He seemed to make a decision and he disappeared back into Fuu’s room taking up his seat once more, holding her hand. Waiting on his princess to awaken.

ooo

Hikaru and Umi had joined with everyone else in the throne room and were waiting on Ferio. The room was full of muted, hushed conversations as everyone seated themselves.

Lafarga stood behind the seated Ascot and Caldina; Lantis stood in a similar fashion behind Hikaru and Umi. Clef was in his usual seat with Presea by his side and Eagle was off to the side a bit behind Lantis leaning against the wall.

Umi tried to watch him covertly from the corner of her eye but failed miserably as he caught her twice and smiled at her both times. A highlight reel of the previous night's events ran through her head, including the impromptu kiss on her forehead he'd given her. She blushed profusely at the mere thought and tried not to make too much of it.

No one seemed to really notice except for perhaps Lantis who silently watched the Water Knight and then shifted his gaze to his friend. Eagle noticed and smiled at him innocently as if he knew nothing at all. It was quick but it appeared that the Cail actually rolled his eyes.

"Where is Ferio at?" Presea asked starting to become impatient.

"He said he'd be right here" Hikaru answered.

It was then the throne room doors opened, swinging wide as a figure stepped through. Everyone turned expecting Ferio but they were surprised to see Camry walk slowly in, once again coming from the shadows into the light. His foot steps were heavy, measured as he strode forward into the center of the room.

Lantis and Lafarga reached for weapons instantly and Eagle pushed off the wall as well.

"Wait!" Hikaru stood and gripped Lantis' sleeve, "This is the man who helped us yesterday!" she pleaded with her eyes and Lantis relaxed slightly as did Lafarga.

"He may have helped us but we still don't know who he is or why he helped us" Umi stood as well her ovum gem swirled uneasily. "So are you going to answer my question now?" she frowned.

"I said I would return and answer your questions as soon as your fellow knight was taken care of. I am a man of my word so here I am. As answer to your question Lady Water Knight my name is Camry" he bowed placing one hand on his chest revealing a pearl colored ovum gem on his glove. His white bangs fell into his eyes and bit and he pushed them back as he stood straight.

"And where are you from, exactly?" Hikaru asked. She was the most at ease for she took Rayearth's words to heart and did not fear the man.

Camry smiled, "Ah my dear Fire Knight I was born right here in Cephiro."

"Then how come we've never met you before? Clef doesn't know you and someone with your abilities in magic should be more well known. I don't recall you being with the refugees in the castle during the previous battle." Presea crossed her arms waiting on the answer to the question.

"That is because, dear lady, I'm quite a bit older than the good Guru. In more years than I care to count actually. I also said I was born here, I did not say I remained here. Though the place I have been is Cephiro and yet not." He seemed to enjoy the reactions to each answer he gave.

There were quite a few shocked faces at that statement.

"What does that mean?" Umi was very irritated by his vague incoherent answers.

"Tell me, what do you think happens to those who fail the test to become the Pillar of Cephiro?" a weak voice spoke up from the back of the room.

All eyes went to the doors as Ferio stepped through carrying a very tired, but very awake Fuu.

"Fuu!" "You're awake!" Umi and Hikaru went to them both instantly.

The blond smiled weakly, "I'm alright" she waved them off and Ferio sat her down gently and then sat beside her.

"She insisted on coming in here the second she woke up" he sighed and fell back into the plush chair he was in, he looked about half alive but relieved that she had woken.

Fuu shifted to make herself more comfortable, not an easy task given it hurt to do just about anything, but she knew this was important. "That was what that woman told me, the smaller one, she asked me that right before the vines took me. "*What do you think happens to those who fail the test?*" she said. At this she turned her eyes to Camry. "Who is he now?" she pointed.

"Camry is my name Lady Wind Knight. I'm glad to see you about."

"He helped us out after you passed out" Umi offered to help her connect the pieces.

They clicked into place quite easily for Fuu and she understood. "So why did he help us?"

"I was just about to explain that" Camry smiled sadly; "If the Guru would be so kind?" he looked to Clef.

Clef nodded understanding and produced another chair, despite its size the room was getting quite full. Camry sat down and took a heavy breath, his playful nature seemed to take a backseat and a more serious man took its place. "Lady Fire Knight..."

"Oh, call me Hikaru please."

"Alright." He smiled a little, "Hikaru may I ask you something?" He folded his hands resting his chin on them.

"Yes..." she was a little confused at his sudden change in temperament.

"When you became the Pillar did the creator tell you what happens to the ones who fail the test?" His posture was solemn and seemed rigid, he was about to talk about something that made him uncomfortable.

"Yes, well...in a way. It was when I was trying to bring Eagle with me..." Hikaru glanced at the commander who smiled at her gently. "I was trying to come back to Cephiro from our world and bring Eagle back, but I couldn't go though and the harder I tried the more injured I became."

She had her eyes on Eagle the whole time; it was something that really the two of them only shared. Neither of them had really shared with the others what had happened between the two of them, it was a special link that was just between them.

She smiled weakly, "He tried to get me to let go and not try to save him, because he was dying anyways. The Creator had said, *"The only one who can travel back to Cephiro is the new Pillar. The one who didn't have what it takes...is banished."* But Umi and Fuu came down the road and we were able to make it back to Cephiro, together." She smiled that same warm smile at her two fellow knights who returned the gesture.

"Yes, banished is the proper word for what happens to the ones who fail" All eyes had been on Hikaru and now quickly darted back when Camry spoke again. "For once one passes down that road there is *no* coming back."

"Where...do they go?" Presea asked the sensible question.

"To a place filled with ice and snow...ice and darkness, where there is no light. It is a part of Cephiro and yet not, a negative of Cephiro you could say. A lifeless place of endless night..." Camry's eyes were dark as he described it. "A place that is an eternal nightmare."

"Why...?" Hikaru's face was filled with horror at the mere thought of someone being sent there, "Why are they sent there, just because they don't have the ability to become the Pillar...they're sent there?"

Camry gave her a humorless smile, "Only the Creator knows some things; that I can not tell you."

"How do you know of such a place? If the ones who pass there don't come back." Clef asked; he'd never heard of such a place.

"Because he's passed down that road...haven't you?" Fuu asked softly. She'd been watching Camry and there was just something in his voice that told her he was speaking from experience.

"You were a candidate to become Pillar?" Hikaru gazed wide eyed at Camry.

"Yes, but that was very long ago" Camry's voice was very quiet and he didn't meet anyone's gaze.

Umi was silent, she'd been thinking over what the women in the fight had said. 'Something about the 'other side', this must have been what they were talking about. That must mean they too...' the idea alone was staggering. 'All of them...were once candidates for the Pillar.'

The cold eyes of Solara flashed past in her memory. 'Her, that cold woman, a Pillar candidate? Her sister Sentra too, both of them. Wait...' her thoughts suddenly stopped on a small point she had not thought about until now. 'Sentra said Camry shouldn't be helping us after what happened...because he knew the Pillar in his time.'

She looked up to the man wanting to ask but not sure if she dared to tread that painful path.

Camry seemed to sense her gaze and looked up to her. They locked eyes for a moment and she saw a flicker of emotion pass through them. Then he chuckled darkly, "So you know now don't you?" he surprised everyone speaking directly to Umi.

"That woman, Sentra...she said something..." Umi was almost sorry she'd figured it out after seeing that flash of pain in his eyes.

"Yes, I knew the previous Pillar in my time, before I became a candidate" He stood slowly, cloak sliding off the chair with a soft hiss of fabric against wood.

Turning he faced the other way for a moment, "That's often how it happens, candidates usually know the previous Pillar. The ability to become the Pillar requires a massive amount of willpower as you know, would it make any sense for an unknown person to come forward and suddenly have the ability? It's almost always a Guru, a Sol, even a Cail or in your case... a Magic Knight." He lifted his eyes to Hikaru for a second.

She was sitting a little closer to Umi; the two friends were clutching each other's hands tightly. Even Fuu was looking away her hand gripped tightly at Ferio's tunic. It would never be an easy subject for any of them to speak about.

"Though there are exceptions" he glanced at Eagle who was looking at Umi and Hikaru with a concerned expression.

Eagle looked up, his eyes were reserved, dark, "But then I too knew in a way..." His voice was soft, "from Lantis." He looked to his friend who nodded lightly.

Camry was looking away once more his eyes distant. It was barely above a whisper when he spoke again, "Her name was Avalon...she was similar to your Emeraude. Just a girl, but she loved this world with everything that she was. She had a heart shaped face and grey eyes...with brown hair that curled..." he seemed to wonder for a moment lost in a memory.

"Did the Magic Knights then..." Fuu asked quietly, "Did they have to fight someone who was trying to protect her, like we did?"

"No, they didn't." Camry had his back to them now. "She had no one to protect her. No one tried to stop the Magic Knights she summoned."

The three Knights seemed surprised.

"Didn't the person she loved try to stop them?" Hikaru asked slowly.

"Magic Knight..." Camry turned back slowly to look at her, "There was no one that loved her in the way you speak of."

There was a solemn silence for a moment.

"But then why did she summon Magic Knights?" Fuu didn't understand why.

"She did not summon Magic Knights because she had fallen in love with someone. She did not love anyone more than Cephireo."

"Then why did she...?" Umi could barely ask.

"Because, she couldn't bare being alone anymore. Yes she had her High Priest, her guard, the cail of her time as captain, the Guru. But she loved none of them in the way you speak of and none of them loved her in such a way." He paused for a moment and then continued.

"No she was alone, day in and day out. No one to talk to, no one to confide her fears in. No one to go to in the bitter night when all her sorrow and loneliness seemed to close in about her. She truly bore the weight of this world upon her shoulders with no one to aide her until eventually she could no longer bare the burden."

"She...summoned... the Knights...because..." Hikaru voice broke, she couldn't even finish her question.

"When her pain became too great Cephireo began to collapse and she knew what she had to do, I think even if Cephireo had not started to crumble she would have summoned them anyways. I'm sure your

Emeraude didn't want to die, but because she knew she had to save this world she did. If there had been another choice I'm sure she would have wished to live. Not Avalon, she longed to die and end it all. She really was just a scared, lonely child..." Camry's voice was monotone and lifeless, perhaps the only way he could recount the tale was to detach himself as much as possible.

Fuu wrung her hands; though Camry had told them about the Pillar of his time he had yet to tell them how he knew her. From how it sounded he appeared to have been very close to her but from what he said she didn't seem to have been close to any of her subjects. "Camry...how did you...know her then?" she ventured not sure if she really wanted to know the answer.

Camry didn't seem to hear her as he continued on, "After summoning the Magic Knights she sent everyone away, her Sol and the Guru, all the palace guards. After she emptied out her palace she then sent for one person..." he stopped again, unable to gather the words.

"Who did she call?" Hikaru whispered.

"She called for the one person all lonely, scared children call for...and I went to her when she called me..." he hung his head obscuring his face and eyes from everyone behind his pale bangs.

'Scared... scared children always...' The pieces fell painfully and horribly into place for Umi. Tears started to fall from her eyes for she couldn't hold them back and her hands flew up covering her mouth in utter disbelief and horror. "No..." she choked out.

"Umi, what is it?" Eagle stepped forward at her outburst; he went to her as she began to tremble.

"Umi?" he sat next to her and Hikaru turned to her as well worriedly gripping her shoulder.

"Umi?!" she asked staring to panic.

"That's too horrible...just horrible..." her tears kept coming as her voice raised a bit in pitch. "She was your..." she shook her head back and forth unable to come to terms with such a horrific thing. "Your daughter!" she finally cried out.

One could have heard a pin drop in that room, Hikaru's hand dropped from Umi's shoulder in stunned realization and tears pricked her eyes as well. "Daughter...?" Lantis was by her side then taking her hand.

Fuu let out a tiny gasp, her hand gripped Ferio's hard enough to pop the joints. He snapped out of his own shock and reached out to her worriedly and took her other hand.

Camry did not answer but his silence alone was answer in its self.

Eagle pulled Umi to him, trying to comfort her as her sobbing continued. She didn't resist, burying her face into his shirt. He put an arm around her shoulders and cradled her against his chest. "Umi..."

Camry suddenly spoke, "I'll...return later" it sounded like he could barely speak. He turned with a rush of air as his cloak spun behind him. As soon as he reached the shadows of the doorway he disappeared, leaving the stunned assembly behind.

No one could blame him.

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An: I nearly cried writing this chapter, I've become quite attached to Camry and writing his past was a painful task in itself. Thanks for reading everyone. Once again any questions I'll be glad to answer. Thanks again.

11 - Angel's Lullaby

10. Angel's Lullaby

An: We meet again! Thank you to all my wonderful reviews, your support and comments are the most wonderful encouragement to keep going with my story. I'd like to thank ShadowScribe for the help on this chapter and also everyone who's posted in my Rayearth forum.

Once again I don't own Rayearth, though the quote is mine. Enjoy the read!

*"Dream of me, I'll come to you.
Singing you an angel's lullaby.
So hush then close your weary eyes
And I'll sing an angel's lullaby."*

The throne room began to clear out soon after Camry left. Ferio had taken Fuu back to her room to rest and Caldina and Lafarga had left with Ascot before them. Presea and Clef spoke together quietly before they too left, heading to the mage's study. Lantis and Hikaru were the last to leave.

Hikaru looked back worriedly over her shoulder, she didn't really want to leave but then she did want to go to Fuu and see how she was feeling. Suddenly she felt a hand on her shoulder and looked up to see Lantis.

"She'll be fine, she's not alone" He reassured her as he draped an arm around her tiny shoulders. His cape was warm and felt heavy on her skin, a comforting feeling. He glanced back into the room as well.

"Yes, I guess you're right" Hikaru nodded slowly and let Lantis lead her out.

With their departure Eagle and Umi were left alone in the room.

A soft sigh escaped the blond man as he held the girl. Her crying wasn't hysterical but soft and quiet, slightly repressed. It wasn't the full fledged crying of the night he'd awoken from his coma but it seemed every time he held this young woman she was in tears.

'I'd much rather hold her smiling' he was stroking the back of her head but his fingers paused for a second as the thought registered with him. It surprised him that he was thinking along such lines, when had he begun to think of her like this?

Umi's tears had slowed yet she didn't pull away from him. Eagle seemed to be lost in his own thoughts for the moment so she remained very still and quiet. Her sobbing gulps for breath stopped and her breathing evened out as his hand passed through her hair. Frayed nerves were soothed for now so she just closed her eyes and concentrated on the sensation of his fingers sliding through her hair.

It surprised her still that he was such a formidable warrior and yet had such soft, gentle hands. There was something about him, a paradox, how he was such a skilled, steadfast, and if need be brutal warrior but at the same time a calm and gentle soul. The soldier that had wanted to be a doctor, to heal wounds instead of cause them.

Hikaru had told her once that she thought Eagle and Lantis were similar and they were. Both were calm, formidable men, yet they were also very different, different as frost is to fire. Lantis was a very cool, hard, calm man and yet every thing about Eagle spoke of warmth, soothing warmth, like morning sunlight.

She took a soft breath unconsciously drinking in his natural scent. It was a relaxing aroma, like old leather and sandalwood maybe even a bit of vanilla and cinnamon. 'Do they even have vanilla and cinnamon here?' her mind wondered off on a tangent for a second.

Turning she pressed her cheek against his chest and listened to the soft passing of air as his breath came and went and the steady sound of his heartbeat drummed in her ears. It was enough to nearly lull her to sleep and she knew it would if she didn't move soon. So with much effort on her part she pulled away from him heaving a light sigh.

The commander had been lost in the realm of his own thoughts when the sudden shock of cool air over his chest where the warmth of her body had been pressed brought him back to the here and now.

"Better?" he asked and lifted up a hand brushing the back of his fingers along her cheek sliding aside a few stray strands of her hair back.

"Yes, I'm sorry. I seem to cry on you a lot...I got your shirt wet...sorry" she just kept gushing words.

"Umi stop apologizing, there's nothing to apologize for." Giving her shoulder a soft squeeze he stood offering her a hand. "I'll walk you to your room."

"Oh, thank you" she graciously took his offer and stood and he lead her out. She caught his gaze for a moment and he smiled, but his eyes looked red, tired. 'Maybe he didn't sleep well'

They made it a few doors down before they came up behind Hikaru and Lantis. They were just a few paces ahead of them. Umi bit her lip and slowly let go of Eagle's hand. "Hey Hikaru...?" she went forward and the redhead turned to look at her.

"Umi? Eagle?" Hikaru took a step back towards Umi; there was something in her friend's face that made her know she was needed.

"I need to talk to you...and Fuu. I need to tell you something." Umi looked back at Eagle for a second.

He nodded in encouragement knowing she was going to tell them finally. He smiled at the determination that flittered through her eyes. She took Hikaru's hand and passed Lantis who came to stand next to him. The both of them headed towards Fuu's room just down the hall.

Umi glanced back once more before they rounded the corner.

There was a comfortable silence between the two men for a moment though Lantis eyed Eagle with an almost accusing gaze.

“Have something on your mind? You’ve been staring at me all day.” Eagle grinned looking up at his friend.

Lantis made a soft nasal sound, almost a snort, “You should tell her.”

“Tell who what?” the blond man’s brow knitted together in confusion.

“The Water Knight, you should tell her how you feel.”

“Hum?” he asked amber eyes blinking innocently.

“Eagle...” Lantis sounded exasperated at his friend’s feigned ignorance.

“I know but..., well I...” Eagle was silent a second trying to formulate a reply but words failed him.

“But what?” Lantis pressed.

“I’m a bit older than she is I don’t want to press...” Eagle chose the words carefully. “I don’t want to press how I feel onto her and now isn’t really the time with all this fighting going on and...” Lantis cut him off.

“Age shouldn’t matter, it doesn’t matter to me or Hikaru; and when will there be a time exactly?” The Cail turned the heavy weight of his sharp blue gaze down onto the commander.

No matter how long he’d know Lantis, Eagle still felt like flinching under that piercing gaze. “I suppose you’re right.” He leaned back against the wall with a thoughtful murmur.

“You convinced her to tell her friends about her feelings, her problem, didn’t you?” Lantis leaned against the wall opposite him. Of course Lantis would know there was something bothering the girl, he always noticed these things, but rarely ever said anything about them.

When Eagle nodded yes he continued, “Don’t you think you owe her the same truth? Don’t be such a hypocrite.”

Eagle glared at him but gave an affirmative nod. “Even so I’m not even completely sure what I feel about her.”

“I don’t know how you fooled Geo and Zazu so long about your illness, you’re a horrible liar.”

Eagle chuckled darkly, “Can’t get anything past you? Can I Lantis?”

“Whatever you decide to do, do it soon. You may lose your chance, if the resent turn of events should

go ill.” There was a heavy weight to those words as they passed the Cail’s lips, almost an omen.

Where ever the conversation would have gone is unknown for Ferio came around the corner from Fuu’s room mumbling a complaint. “What’s with her? I swear the way she acts sometimes you’d think she was royalty! Ha!” he was fuming about something.

“What’s the matter Ferio?” Eagle quickly grinned; he had a sneaking suspicion who had ruffled the prince’s feathers.

“I don’t particularly like being ordered around like a servant that’s what the matter is. Umi and Hikaru just went into to Fuu’s room and Umi ordered me out like she was Queen of Cephiro...” he rolled his copper-gold eyes in annoyance.

“You’ll have to forgive her it’s been a long day for everyone and I think she had something important to tell them” Eagle pushed away from the wall.

“She could have been a little less forceful” the price was still bitter mostly because he’d been separated from his beloved Wind Knight, who had kindly asked him to follow Umi’s orders. He sighed, ‘Man the things I give into for her’ but he smiled anyway.

“You should go get some rest, you look like you’re about to fall over” Eagle looked down at the young man; you could tell he’d not really slept any the night before.

“You’re one to talk you look pretty tired too” the price quipped back but yawned deeply.

“I’ll go rest for awhile...at least until Umi leaves the room” he threw a half-hearted glare back down the hall and then made his way down the corridor to his own room.

“I’m going to go speak to the Guru, do you want to come?” Lantis asked.

“No...I think I’ll follow Ferio’s example and go to my room. Though if something comes up call me would you?” Eagle turned on his heel heading the opposite direction. “Hey Lantis...?” he asked before the Cail was out of hearing range.

Pausing in his step Lantis looked back, “Yes?”

“I know willpower affects these things here but just how old are you anyways...?” Eagle grinned unable to help but ask since Lantis had mentioned in passing the difference between himself and Hikaru.

The older man debated a second then sighing, “Eighty-seven” there was something of a slight grin that tugged at his lip at the subsequent shock that passed through Eagle’s features and he turned back heading for Clef’s study.

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There was a moment of silence after she finished her story. After telling Eagle the retelling was a little easier and Hikaru and Fuu sat and listened nodding their heads in understanding. She bit her lip softly looking from Fuu to Hikaru and then back to Fuu. "That's what I wanted to tell you..."

"Oh Umi so that's why you were so sad last week. We were both so worried about you but you didn't tell us what was wrong." Fuu took her hand.

"Umi," Hikaru scooted over to her friend and linked elbows with her. "I'm glad you told us. It's ok, it happens to me sometimes too. I'll be doing something completely normal and something happens that reminds me of what happened and I'll start to cry again and run into my room. My brothers probably think I'm crazy but it's ok if they do. It's ok to be sad about it."

"Yes, it happens to me as well. But I know that if I need someone you and Hikaru are there and you'll always understand. As long as we're together, we'll all be alright!" Fuu was on her other side and she smiled at her friend.

"Thank guys" Umi smiled brightly. She reached out hugging both their necks, "You're the best."

They all smiled. Even through the wounds, the pain and the heartache no matter what they'd always have each other and that was all that mattered.

"So..." Umi turned to Fuu touching on something she'd thought of earlier. "I just thought it was so cute how Ferio wouldn't leave. You know, I don't think he left the entire time you were asleep. So how long has he been spending nights with you...hum? Curious minds want to know?" she grinned evilly.

"Umi!" Fuu blushed appalled by Umi's little joke. "Not very long..." she blushed even more.

"Really?" Hikaru asked tilting her head to the side, little cat ears popping out curiously. "Gee Fuu I didn't know that, how long have you guys been doing it?" The words were said before it processed though Hikaru's innocent little mind what she was suggesting.

Both Umi and Fuu turned stunned faces to her.

"Hikaru..." Umi clasped both hands over her mouth trying to hold it in but it was just impossible. She started to laugh hysterically, doubling over and falling out of her sitting position next to Fuu, flopping onto the bed. It hurt her side to laugh so hard but she couldn't stop.

Fuu turned red, red, cherry red! "Umi she didn't mean *that!*"

"Sorry Fuu...I didn't mean to say it..." Hikaru also blushed but she too was giggling. With Umi laughing so much it was hard not to. Soon she too had dissolved into a fit of giggles and Umi had a few tears escape her control.

"Ooh! The both of you!" Fuu picked up one of her pillows and whopped them both. This only started pillow warfare in which Hikaru ended up on the floor and Umi got her leg tangled in the sheet and fell dangling off the side of the bed all the blood rushing to her face. The room rang with giggles and tiny

shrieks for a good thirty more minutes.

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“Do you think all the things he said were true?” Presea asked softly. Lantis had entered Clef’s study a few moments before and the three of them were having a quick chat while the Magic Knights were...ahem...*busy*.

“He wasn’t lying” Lantis said softly. “By the way Umi reacted, and Hikaru as well, I’m don’t think he was...that’s something you just can’t lie about.”

“It’s so horrible...I mean I know the tragedy of the Pillar is a part of Cephiro’s history but...such a cruel thing. In a way it’s almost worse than what happened to the Princess.”
Presea looked up to Clef who sighed.

“Cephiro is ancient, there is no way to fathom how many over the many millenniums have been a victim to that horrid fate, the princess was in no way the first...but fortunately she was the last.” Clef added with a sad smile.

“He left before we could get any other information out of him, though I don’t think I’d be in the mood to talk anymore either...” Presea moved to Clef’s side looking at him with a sad expression of her own.

“Perhaps I can be of more help now” Camry came out of the shadows by the door.

Just how in the hell does he do that anyways?

The man looked much the same, the solemn look had not left his face but he seemed to have reined in his emotions. At his entrance all three people in the room jumped, he smiled apologetically, “Beg your pardon. I’m not intruding am I?” He walked further into the room and stood not too far from Lantis.

Lantis eyed the man; he was tall but not quite his height but his eyes were more like Clef’s, old, so very old. Deep pools of age and memory reaching far, far back into Cephiro’s distant past, a past the same bloody shade of red. “You’re not” Lantis said and motioned to a chair.

Camry sat down in one fluid motion, “I’m sorry for upsetting the Knights, but it’s not an easy thing to tell anyone and there’s no way to soften that tale”

“It’s understandable, I’m sure it was not easy for you to recount either” Clef replied. “But we still are unclear on the matter of the reason behind those who attacked the Knights; you know them do you not?”

“Yes, I know them. Many of them are like me, failed Pillar candidates.”

Lantis started to ask something but changed his mind and asked something else, "What of the two who attacked the girls...they said they were sisters?"

"Solara and Sentra, yes they are sisters and failed candidates. Solara is the eldest and Sentra is the youngest...the middle sister was Pillar in their time." Camry's eyes swirled with a strange mix of emotion at the mention of the women.

There was another moment of solemn silence as the understanding of just how many hearts had been shattered by the Pillar system was further enforced.

Lantis wondered what the flicker of emotion he saw pass through Camry's eyes meant but before he could ask Presea spoke up.

"But why are they attacking the Magic Knights?" she seemed unsure still.

"Because they are being ordered to."

"By whom?" Lantis leaned forward a bit resting an elbow on his knee.

"Lady Impreza, one of the strongest willed on the other side. She commands them, though from where she gained such power only she knows..." Camry left the sentence hanging making Lantis wonder that perhaps he did have some idea but was not going to share it.

"This Impreza, what is her reason for this, they are all from Cephire are they not? Why would they want to harm their own county?" Presea asked her hand coming up to comb through her long pony tail.

"She seeks revenge and she can think of none better than destroying the world that destroyed a person precious to her," Camry cracked his knuckles each finger popping one by one and let out a heavy sigh before plowing on.

"Her brother was the Pillar...and she watched as it slowly destroyed him. He fell in love with a sorceress at the time and in the end they both met their end with his Magic Knights. Impreza was strong like her brother; she had the will to become the Pillar but not the heart. So she failed the test and became even bitterer and consumed by hatred. She hates Cephire for what it did to her and her brother. It's a deep-rooted hate, long has it festered and long has she waited, slowly biding her time until she could find her chance." He stopped, pondering for a moment and then continued.

"She was not always as she is now, but her hatred has consumed her, like a bitter poison eating her away, it destroyed her soul until only an embittered angry shell of a woman was left. Her hatred and rage are all she has left and that's all she clings to, she has nothing to lose and it makes her dangerous...But for now she's not the main problem."

"And why is that?" Clef asked.

"Because although there are many failed Pillar candidates on the other side they are not the only ones she can send..."

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Impreza ran her fingers over her water mirror sending soft ripples across its surface. "Such a handsome young man he his, this warrior of Autozam, and so frightfully strong." She gazed into the mirror for a moment and then waved the image away.

"Milady you called me?" Sentra came forward into the room and stood before her mistress.

"Yes...I want you to cross over again to obtain something for me."

"What might that be milady?"

"The Autozaman I want you to bring him to me."

"Yes milady" Sentra bowed.

"Oh Sentra..." Impreza called after her in a strange sing song voice.

"Yes?"

"Take Elantra with you instead of your sister." Impreza smiled sitting down on her throne.

Sentra frowned, her fists clenching tightly. "Would that be wise lady, she is reckless and has no honor." Elantra was know for underhanded tactics and took joy in breaking people, figuratively and quite literally.

"Don't fret my dear Sentra; Elantra has her uses even if she's not one of us. She has exactly what you need for this mission." Impreza ran a finger along the rim of a glass of wine she had just poured.

"What may that be Lady?" Sentra asked as she heard someone come up to the left of her.

"Unadulterated hatred with no mercy for anyone or anything..." Impreza perfect lips pulled softly into a smug smile and took a sip of wine. She'd created that hatred within her and was quite proud of her little monster. "My little darling would you like to go out?" she turned her gaze to the door.

Elantra came forward from the doorway. Her dark hatful eyes, a deep shade of violet, purified hatred at its finest, stared forward. Medium curly brown hair hung wildly, like a Medusa's head of hellish snakes. "So I get to go out and play today?" she asked in a sickly sweet voice.

"Yes, but do be a dear this time and bring him to me alive. I have use for him." Impreza turned one silver eye toward the woman. "Understood?"

"You're no fun Impreza!" Elantra wined. "It's no fun when I can't kill it...or do I get to break it? Can I break it, please, please?!"

“You’ll get your chance my dear, just you wait and see. Just you wait...”

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Umi rolled over in bed with a sigh. Her mind tumbled over the days events and refused to turn off. “I’m never going to get to sleep” she said aloud to the ceiling. Finally she stood, picking up her navy blue robe and shoving her arms into the billowy sleeves.

She walked down the hall silently passing by door after door on her way to the kitchen. Everyone else seemed to be sound asleep she sighed wishing she could join them.

After a moment she had the strange, eerie feeling that you get when something is right behind you. She felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand up and then suddenly someone grabbed her shoulder from behind.

“Umi?”

She let out tiny and very high pitched “Meep!” and whirled to face whatever it was. After a second of stunned silence she let out a heavy breath in relief, “Eagle what are you trying to do, scare me to death?!” she hissed.

“Sorry!” The commander withdrew his hand apologetically, “I didn’t mean to frighten you, but what are you doing out here at this time of night?”

“I was about to ask you the same question. I’m going to the kitchen for a snack, you want to come?” She asked as she tried to swallow her heart back down her throat from where it’d lodged itself. ‘How did he sneak up on me like that?’ she wondered. ‘Freaky solid thing I guess, I thought I was going to die...’ she sighed.

“I’ll come, I’ve been wondering where the kitchen was anyways. I got a bit lost trying to find it the other morning” he smiled slightly embarrassed.

“I know took me forever to remember how to get around here” she motioned him to follow her down the hall. “So what were you doing walking around in the hallway?”

Eagle was silent for a moment, “Just couldn’t sleep is all, you?” he answered quickly.

“Same here, too much going on in my head to go to sleep” She flicked a strand of blue hair and waved the matter aside.

The two of them descended down into the bottom level to the kitchen and Umi told him to wait for a second and she’d be back.

After several long moments she returned carrying a tray with a teakettle of warm milk and something that looked vaguely like a cross between teacakes and cookies. Eagle eyed the little cakes for a moment and then delicately reached over and snagged one. Popping it into his mouth he murmured approval of the sweet.

“Hey! Can’t you at least wait till we sit down somewhere!?” Umi glared up at the commander who was busy trying to swallow.

“Sorry, I’m overly fond of sweet things...” He rubbed the back of his head and grinned sheepishly.

Umi sighed, that grin was just too cute to stay annoyed at, “Come on we can eat in your room” she rolled her eyes trying to pretend to still be annoyed at least. Eagle followed her down the hallway like a faithful puppy being enticed by treats.

In a few moments both of them were sitting comfortably on the window seat in Eagle’s room.

“These are really good” Eagle ate another cake.

“Want some?” Umi offered a glass of milk. ‘I’ve never seen a grown man eat sweets like this. I bet he was bouncing off the walls as a kid’ she smiled at the thought of a young Eagle running around hyped up on sugar. Nearly made her giggle just thinking about it.

“Thank you” He reached forward and took the glass.

“My mother always gave me warm milk when I was little to help me sleep so I thought it might help.” She sighed as she slowly drank the warm liquid. Slumping back into the cushions she yawned, the warmth of the drink spreading through her chest.

“Oh?” He looked at the glass for a moment but then set it down.

“Is something wrong? Do you not like...” she looked up apologetically but stopped. Perhaps because it had been dark in the hallway or perhaps she just wasn’t looking before but she hadn’t realized until now how exhausted he looked.

Tired golden eyes gazed at her quietly; dark circles that looked more like burses rimmed them. He was a little pale too, even his posture spoke of his body’s ache for rest. He’d acted so cheerful, she hadn’t even noticed. “Eagle?”

“Hum?” he raised an eyebrow at her query.

“Are you alright? You look so tired, your head wound hasn’t become infected has it?” she reached forward her hand going to his forehead. “You don’t feel hot; I guess you don’t have wound fever...”

Eagle reached up and took her hands from his forehead and held them gently, “I’m alright you don’t need to worry.” Her blue eyes narrowed a bit, she wasn’t going to buy it. “Really,” he insisted, “I’m fine.”

Umi's glare sharpened and she frowned deeply. "I swear..." she shook her head and moved closer to sit right in front of him folding her legs to her side, "You and Hikaru are the worst!" She snapped at him and her blue eyes swirling like a stormy sea.

"Me and Hikaru?" he asked confused wondering what'd he'd done to earn the unholy wrath of the Knight of Selece.

"Yes, all this "I'm fine" business, there's nothing more meaningless than one of your "I'm fines," both of you are too worried about everyone else to ever worry about yourself!"

She seemed quite livid about the whole thing and even though her anger stemmed from her worry it did no less make it any less furious. "Why can't you ever just say what's bothering you?" she jabbed an accusing pointer finger at him to add emphasis.

Eagle frowned at how accurate her statement was and sighed a bit looking out the window, "I don't want to make any of you worry for my sake." Suddenly he felt her grab his hand and he looked back to her. She had reached forward; her face was only a few inches from his.

"Yes if you're hurt or something is bothering you I'm going to worry, but it makes me worry even more if you don't tell me and let me help you!" her hand squeezed his tightly.

Her face suddenly grew very sad and her features softened a bit, "No one belongs to only themselves, all the hardship you suffer and your pain when you allow yourself to take a burden alone, those who care about you suffer too, because they don't want to see anything happen to you."

The storm in her eyes had quieted and she continued, her voice very soft, "When you're hurt they hurt too because they love you and want you to be happy. They want to help you and share the burden, just like we all now share the burden of upholding Cephro. When you don't tell me what's wrong I feel like you don't trust me." There was a pleading sound to her tone; she wanted him to open up to her as she had to him.

Eagle never ceased to be amazed by the wisdom this young woman. All three knights had wisdom far beyond their years, forced to grow up far too quickly.

He smiled in a humorless manner, 'Lantis was right I am a hypocrite' He reached forward and pulled the blue haired girl into his arms, "I'm sorry Umi, I do trust you. I just wanted you and the others to be happy. I guess when you try to protect the people precious to you and get so caught up in making sure they're safe you forget their worries of you."

Umi was a little caught off guard when he pulled her to his chest, his strong arms holding her tightly, but she returned the gesture. Her arms tied around his neck as her heart throbbed in her chest in double time, it just felt right, to be held by this man.

After a moment he slowly loosened his hold and allowed the girl in his arms to pull back. She did but not completely and gazed down at him blue boring into gold. One delicate hand came up and a slender finger traced the shadow beneath his eyes. He felt them drape closed.

“Will you tell me what’s wrong? You’re so tired that you look ill” she pleaded once more.

“Well, I haven’t slept any really...” Eagle found it a little hard to form a coherent sentence with her so close to him; her fingers were cool under his eyes. He forced them open; she was close enough for him to smell the fresh floral scent from her hair.

“You haven’t slept at all? You mean last night?” she shifted and sat by his side.

Her movements made the air stir with her smell stunning him for a moment; he blinked trying to collect his wits before he looked completely foolish. “No, I haven’t slept any...since I woke from my coma” he smiled weakly.

“You haven’t slept...in three days?!” Shock and worry flittered across her features.

“None at all” he shrugged.

“This is serious Eagle you might be sick again. You’ve been awake for three days and we were in a fight, you need rest.”

“No I’m not sick. The reason I haven’t slept isn’t because I can’t but...” he seemed drawn, worried about something.

“But...?” Umi encouraged gently.

“I want to go to sleep but if I do...” he gazed at her asking with drawn, blood shot eyes to understand.

“You’re worried about going to sleep and not being able to wake up again?” she asked, her eyes softened in understanding.

He nodded lightly. “It’s almost funny, of all the things I’ve face in my life, all the battles I’ve been in and the thing that scares me the most is going to sleep.” Laughing darkly he ran a hand across his face, “I know I need sleep, my whole body aches for it even as I sit here but every time I start to drift off...” shaking his head he leaned back.

“Eagle...” The Water Knight gazed at him a moment and then reached for his hands and gripped them gently in her own. “I...I’ll stay here...if you’d like” she offered shyly her face flushed a little and she looked down at his hands. “That is if you don’t mind...and...” she looked up again this time her eyes strong, almost defiant, “I promise I’ll make sure you wake in the morning.”

“Umi...” his lips tugged into a soft smile, his eyes tender and very light in shade, an almost liquid butterscotch color. He pulled the girl close to him again, “You really are such a good person.”

Umi buried her face into the warm fabric of his shirt and her hands clutched the soft material at the small of his back as his arms found their way around her waist.

She was glad to have repaid the kindness he’d shown her in her time of need but another part of her

knew this was much more than just repaying a debit. She was falling for him and falling hard and in the back of her mind she knew it but for now she didn't need to worry about exactly what she felt for him.

He was holding her and that was all that mattered.

Neither of them made a move to separate or uttered a single word so they just stayed that way. It didn't take long before Umi was asleep; her head rested against his chest and she moved slightly with each rise and fall of his breath.

Eagle stifled a yawn, shifting slightly and tightening his hold on the girl as she slept. He'd almost forgotten what this felt like, the comfort of another warm body next to your own. He'd not slept with someone next to him since he was a very small boy and would sleep next to his mother's side.

Watching her sleep he smiled slightly, 'Always have to be right...don't you Lantis?' he thought. Holding her this close, he sighed; he swore he could feel her in his soul. Her aura was stronger than ever, powerful and yet calming like the sea.

He yawned once more and lowered his head down on hers, sleep was winning the battle. But perhaps he was letting it, how could he worry if he had an angel sleeping in his arms? With that last comforting thought tired golden eyes slid closed.

Sleep at last.

An: Aww, aren't they cute? This chapter was going to be a bit longer but I thought this was a good stopping point. I wanted this chapter to end on a up note because if you read the little preview in the last chapter you know its about to get a bit dark. So that's why I cut this chapter a bit and pushed the dark stuff to the next one. Oh and I have one last present for you, an Omake! So enjoy, it made me giggle to write it and it was originally part of the story and it was cut due to pacing but it was too cute to throw away.

Omake: The Pillow Wars

Eagle had just passed Fui's room to go to his own and heard the start of the uproar. Stopping for a moment he wondered what all the shrieking was about.

Then there was a thud followed by more shrieks and giggling. This was only added to by a loud proclamation of "Ok you're going to get it now!"

With another thud, "You've got room to talk miss ever so innocent, I seem to recall someone got her first kiss from a certain tall, dark, handsome Cail just two wee..."

That sounded like Umi but it was cut off by a loud thump and "oof!"

Staring at the door he wondered if he should save Umi from an untimely death. He considered poking his head in to see just what they were doing but then...Closing his eyes he read their auras much the same way he had when he was asleep.

Hikaru was as hyper as ever, Fuu was still a little weak but the impromptu battle between the three was lifting her spirits and Umi's aura was brighter than he'd seen it yet. All three were, for the moment, very happy.

His shook his head, 'Na, I'll leave them be...hopefully no one will die from whatever it is they're doing.'

Just as he made this assessment there was quite a loud crash.

"Ooh you broke it Hikaru, you're such a klutz sometimes."

"You threw the pillow Umi. Sorry Fuu... we'll get you another lamp"

"Oh its alright, I'm sure its fixable"

Eagle stared at the door a moment longer and then shook his head going to his room,

'Keyword...hopefully...'

Next time- "For the fragile glass like substance that is the soul...is so easily broken. So...lets break you shall we?"

12 - The Mirror Crack'd

An: Here we are chapter eleven (not counting the prologue), and I'm so close to fifty reivevs! Thank you to all my wonderful readers. I'm so sorry I kinda left everyone out of this chapter, its very Umi, Eagle and Camry centric, but no fear Hikaru and Fuu fans, they'll be back soon. And if you're wondering about the odd spelling of the title if comes from a poem called "The Lady of Shalott" by Alfred Tennyson. The lines go, "Out flew the web and floated wide;The mirror crack'd from side to side;"The curse is come upon me," cried The Lady of Shalott." Its a good poem I recomend it. Also fair warning for this chapter, bit of blood and such. So if you're squimish turn back now. So alas enough of my rambeling, I don't own the Rayearth characters, and they're better off that way, trust me.

11. "The Mirror Crack'd"

*"All of the things loved in this world...
...have a soul.
All the things that people have prayed for...
...have life.
But...
Those soul and lives...
...can't all end up in a beautiful place after their struggles...
As in this story..."*

The Cephirean night passed quietly, thankfully so, for many of the castle residences were in sore need of a good nights sleep. It was calm, quiet, hardly anything stirred but the wind. Although it was calm, it was not a peaceful calm.

'Like the calm before a storm and the deep breath before you jump...' with this thought the white haired man looked down to the water that plummeted hundreds of feet before flowing away to the sea.

Camry was brooding, once again high in the docking tower where he'd spent many a night silently contemplating the world away, trying to kill time that seemed to go on eternally. One could perhaps wonder why he does not join the rest of the people of Cephiro in the world of dreams but the answer to that is quiet simple.

For Camry can not sleep, he is incapable of it.

While the answer to the question is simple the reason behind it is not.

He closed his eyes taking in a deep breath and let it out slowly. Despite the slight chill of the predawn darkness his breath didn't fog. The fact brought a humorless smile to his handsome face.

Looking up he gazed at the last of the stars as they began to fade, the few fleeting beams of red and blue moonlight fell down around him casting a slight violet haze. It threw half his face in a relief of shadows and light. If he had been a smoker he probably would have lit up right then. Leaning against the wall he closed his eyes once more, he was only a few feet from the end of the docking bay where the floor stopped and Cephira began.

And that was where Solara found him, looking more like a god than any man has a right to. She stepped through her portal, the icy mask she wore on the other side dropping the moment her eyes fell on him.

She didn't even have to call his name or announce her presence in anyway, he knew she was there. A smile tugged at his lips and his eyes slid open and then slowly shifted their gaze to her. Flaming red met icy blue. She knew that gaze, that gaze had changed her life, how could she not know it?

The first time she'd looked into that fiery stare had been eons ago. Back then her hatred had been no different than her sister's and she had followed Impreza just as blindly.

Then one day in the snow she'd stumbled upon him, there'd always been whispered rumors of a man with blood red eyes and hair like ivory that endlessly wandered the eternal snow. He'd been there long before herself and even Impreza; little to nothing was known about him. Only whispered rumors of untold power and a shadowy past, things so unbelievable that they can't be true.

She'd tensed, ready for a fight, unsure of his thoughts or reasons, but he'd only slowly opened his eyes and turned the full weight of that heavy stare upon her.

In that one instant all her hatred had died right then and there; drowned out by the powerful sorrow and sadness in those eyes. From that day onward she'd belonged only to him.

"Solara" he called holding out his hand to her, long fingers extended in a graceful inviting gesture.

There was an ache to his voice she couldn't ignore, he was lonely and missed her. They had to be careful not to be seen together and often times they would have only a passing moment to exchange information and then separate once again.

She went forward her hand sliding into his and his fingers clasped hers tightly and pulled her into his arms. She'd never understand where she found the courage to risk so much, but she did not regret her choice.

They walked a dangerous line, the two of them, a dangerous line where they were always one step away from losing everything. And yet still they come, still they meet, a forbidden love fit for any fairytale.

Camry reached up with one hand and cradled the side of her face; his thumb stroked her jaw line softly as he pressed his lips lightly to hers. He pulled back a moment later and traced the hollow under her left eye with one pale finger.

“Mmm...” he buried his face into her soft hair, “As much as I hate to...” he pressed his lips to her throat, “ruin the moment...” He pulled away a fleeting second his face became serious, all playfulness put aside. “Have you learned of any new movements on the other side?”

“Aye, the Lady has taken interest in the one from Autozam. I don’t know her intentions or what she has planned to use him for but she did instruct us to take him soon. Though she has not given the order yet as far as I’m aware” she rested her head on his cold chest, but in reality it really didn’t feel cold to her for her flesh was just as icy.

“I believe his name is Eagle. I was afraid she might, he is quite powerful and his will grows by the day. He rivals Hikaru, Rayearth’s knight, for sheer force of will...” he paused for a second, contemplating, then as an afterthought, “I do think he has found a new source to draw strength from.”

Solara looked at him questioningly but he only smiled and didn’t explain any further. He slipped back out of his serious mood and jumped right back into his usual ‘caffeine high eighteen year old’ mentality. With a soft chuckle he nipped at her long strands of gold and caught them between his lips giving them a gentle tug.

“Camry...” she rolled her eyes. Gods forbid he could ever be serious for very long, but she only scolded him halfheartedly, for she was one of the few who understood him on such a level. His playful nature, only a salve for an aching wound that would never really heal. That oh so charming smile, nothing but a nearly perfect mask so similar to her own, that hid the agony beneath.

‘But that’s alright, you go right ahead. Keep on smiling, keep on faking that laugh. For in the end we are the same, aren’t we Camry? Hiding the pain we harbor, as it festers and slowly eats us from the inside out, but we’ll keep going. I’ll keep my frown and you’ll keep that smile for it’s the only thing that keeps us from breaking. But in reality it’s nothing but a lie. We are lies Camry, that’s all we are and eventually it will destroy us. For liars go to hell don’t they?’ her slender fingers dug into his tunic.

As if sensing her troubled thoughts his arms tightened their hold around her, squeezing tight enough that it would have taken the breath of an ordinary person. But she was grateful for the crushing embrace.

Her hands tightened their own grip, latching onto his tunic so hard that her knuckles turned white. She clung to him and he to her, for there was nothing else for them to hold onto. Both their hearts desperately begging each other the exact same plea.

‘Please, just don’t let go... you’re the only thing holding me together.’

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“You can’t save her.”

So much red...everything...so, so very red. Red flowers, red petals...like blood, blooming in the snow.

No more time...

Icy hands, cold lips... 'why wont you wake up?'

"It's too beautiful...that story..."

This sadness... like the snow.

The shadows are blue...like her eyes.

Her wish...

...to sacrifice everything...

Please...

"Give him all the time I have left!"

Eagle woke with a start, amber eyes snapping open sharply. 'A dream...?' he wondered. He stared off into space for a moment trying to remember what it was about but he only had the faintest of impressions. 'It was something sad...and cold...' he closed his eyes again and relaxed into the cushion of the bed like window seat.

'Just a dream anyways...' he sighed, his chest heaving up with the deep breath. Something moved then and he heard a soft mummer, looking down he saw Umi squirm a bit and then preceded to burry her face into his chest. One hand clutched at the fabric of his shirt and the other was curled into a slight fist, tucked gently beneath her chin.

The only thing that managed to make it though Eagle's stunned mind was, 'Oh...'

Sometime during the night they'd both shifted and lain out on the large window seat. One of his arms was tucked underneath her and was now toughly tangled in her fine spun blue hair. The other was casually wrapped around her waist, pulling her close and cradling her to his chest. And somehow during their sleep Umi's robe had slipped off her shoulder revealing the smooth, creamy white skin beneath.

Eagle swallowed hard as said venerable creamy skin was mere inches from his face. It took quiet a bit of his self-control not to reach up with his free hand and find out just how soft that bared skin was. On top of all of this every slender ascending curve of her body was pressed against him. My the Gods have an interesting sense of humor now don't they?

'First things first, I need to move without waking her up...' he thought. Though how he was going to pull it off he wasn't sure of yet. He slowly raised his arm that was around her waist and rolled over onto his back. Thankfully Umi chose this moment to yawn and roll over a bit herself, leaving his other arm free. His arm tingled a bit with the rush of blood returning to it and he flexed a bit as he sat up.

After a moment the sensation died away and he yawned softly, rubbing the back of his head. He looked

out the window and squinted at the very first rays of sunlight. 'Sunrise, I thought I'd sleep longer than that' he mused and looked back down at Umi.

In the absence of his body heat she'd curled up into herself a bit but still slept peacefully, completely unaware that the man whose arms she'd spent the night sleeping in was now awake.

Standing ever so slowly the amber eyed man slid an arm around her shoulders and gathered the girl into his arms, heading for his bed on the other side of the room.

She was hardly any weight at all really, although not as tiny as Hikaru her features were just as delicate, if not more so. She was like a perfectly crafted porcelain doll, from her long, graceful legs to perfectly shaped lips that were now in a soft pout as she slept. Even her hair, which he now ran his fingers, though as he laid her down on the bed, was softer than the finest blue silk from Fahren.

A soft sigh escaped his lips as the last bit of her hair fell through his fingers. He pulled the deep forest green coverlet over her and sat for a moment watching her sleep.

Now Eagle is not a foolish man and was willing to admit he cared quite a bit about this girl. At first he considered her Hikaru's friend and fellow knight who had helped save his life, but now he thought of her as his friend just as much as he did Hikaru, if not perhaps even more than just a friend. Did he want it to be more?

'Do I want more from this girl than just friendship?' he wondered.

He knew he liked her; in fact he was well aware of just how attracted to her he was after waking with the beautiful girl in his arms. Despite being a very polite and kind gentleman, we must all remember he is still a member of the male population and is not immune to such feelings as longing and lust.

He stood, careful not to wake her and headed for his things that Lantis had brought him the day before. There were a few clicking and snapping sounds as he fastened his metal gauntlet onto his right forearm. Reaching for his cream colored cloak he tossed it half-hazardly over his shoulders, not really in the mood to go to the trouble of putting it on properly. He didn't bother with his energy crystal either, he wouldn't need it here.

Standing motionless for awhile, he leaned against the door, gazing at the sleeping water knight. Once more he found himself asking the same question.

'Do I want more from this girl than friendship?'

He studied her face for a long moment and then closed his eyes as he realized his answer. With a slight chuckle he ran his hands over his face and through his hair as he turned and went out the door quietly.

'Damn you Lantis, you always have to be right.'

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Back high in the castle docking platform Camry suddenly loosened one arm from his hold on Solara and held it out into the bay opening.

It was early spring in Cephiro and most of the days had turned warm but there was a cold chill stirring in the wind, winter was trying to sink in her frosty nails one last time. Clouds had gathered and Camry felt the first few icy drops hit the back of his hand.

He released Solara completely for a moment and took a few steps until he was on the very edge of the platform. He looked up as something white caught his eye falling along with the rain. 'Snow...'

"Camry?" Solara asked confused, her blue eyes darted around cautiously as she took a step to close the distance between them.

He glanced back at her and then turned his eyes back to the sky as the rain and snow fell. He reached out and caught some of the snow in his hand; his lips were pressed into a grim line as he finally spoke. "You should hurry back to the other side..."

Solara looked at him worriedly, "Why?"

Camry opened his hand and let the snow he'd caught drop away into the darkness below.

"Snow and rain at once...a bad omen."

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Partly because of how he naturally carried himself and partly because of years of training Eagle's footsteps were nearly silent as he slipped down the empty corridors. For of course soldiers don't live very long if they tromp around with heavy footsteps.

At the moment he was seeking Lantis, somewhat because he was irritated that his friend was so correct about an emotion he himself wasn't sure about yet but also because he wanted a confidant to speak to about said matter.

Lantis was his choice of course because Lantis knew of his apparently new feelings for the water knight and two he didn't know the others well enough to confide in them. Except for perhaps Hikaru but she really was not quite the person to go to for advice on that subject matter.

Not that he was really going to strait up ask for advice from Lantis; more just Lantis was the perfect person to talk to. He sat there, listened, and told you exactly what he thought. He for one never sugar coated anything, if you wanted a blunt answer you went to Lantis.

Doors and mirrors whisked by him as he turned down another long corridor, in fact the entire hall was lined with ceiling high mirrors. They were highly ornate, each corner encrusted with large gems, and wispy silver scroll work descended the sides. He slowed and stopped as he passed one and gazed at his reflection as it stared back at him.

This was the first time he'd taken a good look at himself since before his coma. His hair had grown out a bit, not nearly as much as he would have thought, but he could stand a trim. He pushed his bangs aside to get them out of his eyes, a smile pulled at his lips and his reflection returned the gesture.

It felt good to no longer have to fake the brightness in his eyes to hide his sickness, now that light in them wasn't a lie.

There was a sudden flurry of air, whisking past him gently, stirring the hem of his cloak. He looked away from the mirror wondering where the sudden draft had come from. Rapidly the temperature plummeted, making the empty hallway feel more like a meat locker. Breath fogged in front of his lips as he looked left and then back to his right.

Uneasiness settled over him, the hairs pricking up on the back of his neck. Instincts told him something was wrong, but it was something more than just that.

The cold that filled the room, spreading like an evil mist, was more than just the cold of the world. It was not the cold of the living but the cold of the dead. It sank into his bones and gave him the most unsettling feeling. He did not like it; he did not like it at all.

A press of a button later a light saber like sword was crackling out of his gauntlet.

'I know this presence...one of the sisters...' he felt her but couldn't see her. 'Where are you...?' a swift glance in both directions confirmed she'd yet to appear.

"Why don't you show yourself, I'm quite aware you're here" he smiled wearily.

"Have to have our way now don't we?" A soft voice asked hotly, as if offended by him.

"Hum...well I am an only child I'm a bit use to having my way. I hope I'm not too much bother" Eagle grinned ever so sweetly, eyes a hard shade of amber.

"Ah clever one too?" Sentra materialized several feet down the hall.

"Well I do try" he smiled sweetly once more, but the smile was far too sweet for anyone's comfort.

She seemed annoyed by his odd attitude but didn't falter in her slow, slinking walk as she circled him.

The hallway was far too narrow for a real fight and he didn't like being cornered like this but at least with the wall at his back he didn't have to worry about her getting behind him.

"So what do I owe the honor of your visit?"

As answer Sentra drew her blade, “Oh don’t worry this wont take too long” she added in a haughty tone.

Before Eagle could make his first move he heard a rather odd cracking sound. It sounded vaguely like glass fracturing, but from a great distance away.

Unfortunately he realized too late what Sentra was, as from behind him a pair of fingerless gloved hands reached *through* the mirror grabbing him. ‘A distraction!’ he barely had the time to come to this conclusion before a searing pain shot its way through his body.

The woman that had reached through the mirror had one hand clamped around his throat and the other’s fingers dug into his shoulder. But it was not her strength that was so painful, it was her coldness. It felt like someone had shoved dry ice against his skin; her flesh was so cold it burned.

He struggled to free himself from her grasp but he was at a disadvantage because she had the element of surprise and was behind him cutting off his supply of air. A gag retched its way from his throat as he fought for air.

Spots flittered across his vision and he fought back vainly trying not to black out. In the struggle his loosely secured cloak fell to the floor and he was numbly aware the woman was dragging him backwards.

With his remaining breath he tried to wrench away from her. Taking his free arm he jammed it backwards connecting his elbow with her stomach.

She let out a hiss of pain and snarled her displeasure of being hit, but she only dug her left hand into his shoulder with more force. In doing so she succeeded in earning a distinctive snapping and crunching sound accompanied by a meaty ‘splerch’ as the bone snapped like fire kindling and the jagged shard shoved up through his skin.

Eagle didn’t have time for another attempt as she yanked him backwards. He let out a strangled cry; blood soaked its way through his shirt. He could feel the warm trickle of liquid as it ran down his back.

The searing pain of his shoulder was nothing compared to what came next. Pupils that had been dilated from lack of oxygen now shrank to tiny pinpoints. It felt like someone had shoved needle sharp, icy daggers into him from behind. She took a hold of his wrist and a crack later she had disabled his weapon, smashing the components with her bare hands, the sword flickered and dissipated.

A muted scream was all he managed as he was pulled into the mirror as if it were suddenly a liquid. The last thing he saw before the lack of oxygen and pain became too much were a dark pair of violet eyes, framed by chocolate colored quirk screw curly hair. The girl had a strange gleam in her eyes, as if she’d just gotten a brand new toy to play with. And she just couldn’t wait to break it.

Seconds latter the hallway was empty save for Eagle’s cloak and the faint sound of Elantra’s laughter.

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'Where am I?' Umi wondered as she woke from unsettling dreams. Sitting up she rubbed her eyes softly and groggily glanced around the room, most defiantly not hers. 'Smells nice...' the thought came to her as she buried her face into the soft green blanket that laid over her. 'Actually smells kind of like...'

Full conscious suddenly kicked in, "Eagle!" she said his name aloud and looked around the room again.

'I remember, last night...I stayed in here with him' she blushed heavily hugging the blanket to herself. 'But where is he now?'

"Eagle?" she called out, wondering if he were in the adjoining room.

No answer.

She was suddenly very aware of the sinking feeling that had originally woken her.

'Eagle...' she stood quickly pulling her robe tightly around herself and tied it off. 'Where are you?' she frowned.

She shook her head, 'He's probably just down in the kitchen or eating more apples in the garden' she rolled her eyes as she left the room quietly slipping back to her own to change clothes.

Smoothing her skirt out she left her room gazing down at her glove gem, the power within it swirled to match her reeling emotions.

'Why do I feel so strange, this horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach, telling me something I don't really want to know...' her footsteps began to pick up pace. 'This has happened before, with Hikaru and then Fuu,' she began to jog. "Eagle..." she broke into a run.

She turned down another hall and stopped short. There was something white, no cream colored, in a heap on the floor. Two more quick steps forward and she kneeled down picking up the material. Eagle's cloak... Looking around she examined the floor her eyes landing on small spatters of blood.

'Was there another attack?' Her heart raced at the fear that rushed through her, 'Where is he?' Her eyes followed the bloody trail that lead to the...wall? The blood ended at the wall and a large mirror. Something had happened to him, but what? 'People don't just go through walls, oh wait this is Cephiro...why do I even ask?' she sighed bitterly.

Looking up her eyes narrowed. The mirror was cracked and pieces were missing but there was no glass on the floor. There was something red running down the mirror. The sinking feeling she had suddenly worsened as she realized what it was. More blood. It ran down the glass like bright red silk ribbons.

Reaching up to examine the mirror her fingers were shaking as they pressed to the cool glass. The

surface was smooth, she could see the fractures in the glass but she couldn't feel them. She whipped her hand over a ribbon of blood and pulled it away expecting it to be smeared red, but strangely it wasn't.

A chill went down her spine as she realized why. The blood was on the *other* side of the mirror. The fractures too were on the backside of the mirror.

'Eagle' she clutched his cloak tightly and stood running down the hall to find the others as fast as she could. 'Eagle' she squeezed her eyes shut, 'You have to be alright, you just have to be...'

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Darkness. A heavy, heavy darkness. It pressed in on him, pulling him down, down, down into the depths. Here it was calm; he wanted to stay here, where the cold lulled everything away.

Drip.

Drip.

Drip.

The sound of water trickling from long pillars of ice was what first came to him. The sound called him back from the shadows.

"Uhh..." a moan escaped the blond man's lips. Eagle slowly drifted back to the world of consciousness, though as soon as his wounds began demanding his attention he wished he hadn't. The pain was staggering.

'I think something's broke...' he thought and tried to shift his weight onto his side. He nearly blacked out again at the pulse of pain that shot its way through his body. 'Scratch that, I think a lot of something's broke...' He took a breath, 'Gods it hurts to breath...' he winced.

He lay motionless for a moment trying to take inventory of his wounds. He had several lacerations most of them on his arms but he could feel a pretty deep one under his ribs. Along with his broken shoulder he had the feeling his leg was broken, perhaps a rib or two as well. That would explain why it hurt so damn much to breath.

His eyes slid open, blinking rapidly, trying to focus. 'Where the hell am I? Actually I'd rather like to know why I'm so wounded. He turned his head ever so easily, this didn't cause any pain so he sighed and looked around his surroundings. It was dark, it was damp and it was cold.

Damn cold.

Ice hung from the ceiling and the walls and clung with elongated fingers to the metal bars of his cell. He shivered violently which only made him wince as it aggravated his wounds and did nothing to warm him. "Nuuha" he moaned, he tried to take a deep breath but the air was too cold, it bit at his lungs along with the ache from his broken ribs.

'I have to get up off the floor; if I don't the cold will kill me long before my wounds do.'

He steadied himself and then picked up his right arm, for his left was quite useless, and tried to put some of his weight on it. The sharp spasm of pain let him quickly know that the woman had broken his wrist as well when she'd disarmed his weapon.

The next few words out of Eagle's mouth were not printable.

After a moment he settled for putting the weight on his elbow. He took a deep breath and shoved his weight up and pretty much threw himself to the wall. Breath hissed from between his teeth as his broken ribs protested the sudden lurching movement. His vision grew spots and blacked out for a moment, but he was now against the wall was finally sitting up at least.

His breathing evened out after a bit and he once again took a look at his surroundings. He had no idea where he was or just how long he'd been there. The blood on the floor from before his wounds had clotted was frozen, so he'd been out for some time.

A strange tingling feeling lingered in his fingers and around some of his lesser wounds. The rest of his exposed skin though torn clothing was blanching and red, and burn a bit.

A part of him wished he hadn't regain full conscious the more and more his sense of feeling returned to him. But the thing that worried him the most was his left shoulder, despite it being broken the pain was dull as if diluted. He wearily looked down at his left shoulder, the flesh around the protruding bone was turning a whitish purple.

Frostbite.

Today was just not his day, that is in fact, if it was still the same day he'd been taken.

'How much time has passed? I wonder if anyone knows I'm gone? Too bad I can't heal like Fuu can, or even that annoying fairy that follows Lantis around.' He sighed bitterly but then the sound of quiet footsteps brought his attention to the tall silhouette coming into view.

"So you're awake already? You are a strong one just like he said."

The sudden thought speech directed at him surprised him and he didn't answer, especially after he saw the swish of long blond hair as the figure came closer to stand just on the other side.

Solara, the other sister.

His eyes turn that hard shad of amber again.

"You can hear me can you not? I was told you are capable of thought speech" she asked.

"Yes, I can hear you" he answered cautiously.

His ability to hear her confirmed she stepped forward waving her hands across the icy bars, they disappeared for only a second as she passed into his cell and then rematerialized behind her.

He tensed as she came forward, he was in no shape for a fight but he had little choice.

"Please, don't try the tough guy act with me. You can hardly sit much less anything else." She knelled down right in front of him.

Up close she was indeed quite pretty, her blond hair was smooth and long, but here eyes were not as hard as they had been before, just guarded, much the same his were.

He frowned not sure of her intentions. *"What do you want?"*

"I'm going to close up your wounds." She reached out towards him, the tips of her fingers glowing a soft gold. *"My healing ability is limited and I can only heal others, not myself, but it should be enough. None of your wounds are life threatening on their own."*

Eagle wasn't given a chance to protest before she began to close up his shoulder. He couldn't help but sigh in relief as the bone sunk back down and fused, muscles stitched together and skin turned a healthy flush hue.

"Why are you...?" he started to ask as she moved on to heal his broken ribs, leg and wrist.

"You are of little use to anyone like this and let's just say we have a mutual friend. I don't have time to explain she's coming..." she interrupted him and then finished with the last of his smaller wounds.

"When she comes you have to be at your best, whatever happens don't listen to her, for her words are poison. They are just as dangerous as her weapons if not more so. I'm sure you'll be fine if you're as strong as he said." She stood up towering over him from his place on the floor.

Eagle grunted and stood slowly. "He?" he asked out loud.

She shushed him harshly. The woman's blue eyes sharpened, a bit of emotion flittered there.

"What are you doing Solara?" Another woman's voice echoed in the cold room.

The hair on the back of Eagle's neck stood up as the woman that had pulled him through the mirror came forward. She was such a small thing, how was such a tiny person capable of such strength?

Solara stiffened and Eagle watched an icy mask drop over the woman's face. The face he'd known in their previous battle. "The Lady said to bring him here not drag him in half alive. He is of no use if he's too wounded or died from the wounds you gave him" she snapped sharply at Electra.

The girl frowned, "But he fought back, what was I suppose to do?" her violet eyes narrowed.

“What’d you think he was going to do? He almost became the Pillar, did you think he’d roll over and let you take him?” Solara snapped icily and the smaller girl shrank away from her like a small child that had been scolded.

“Sorry, but the Lady told me to get started ok?” she stuck out her tongue in a very child like manor.

“Just don’t damage him too much, you’ll make the Lady angry with you again” Solara started to leave.

“That’s no fun at all” the girl wined but turn blood thirsty eyes towards Eagle.

He really didn’t like that look, not one bit.

Glancing wearily at Solara’s retreating back, wondering about her earlier words Eagle had the feeling he was really not going to like what was about to happen. “*Solara?*”

She hesitated in her stride for only a second. “*Eagle...I’m sorry.*” Then she was gone.

“You know what I like to do?” The girl, Solar had called her Electra, asked him almost giddy with excitement. “I like to break things, its so much fun!” She hopped up to him standing just a foot or two away. “But you know the thing I like to break the most?” she hovered and took another step forward closing the space between them.

She waited for him to ask what, but as he didn’t she seemed to get annoyed and continued. A leer pulled at her lips, but there was a strange cruelty to it, the cruelty of a child. “People and you know why I like breaking people? For the fragile glass like substance that is the soul...is so easily broken. So...lets break you shall we?”

With a movement so quick he barely had enough time to counter, her arms shot forward. He expected her to strike at him perhaps try to wound him again, so he was totally caught off guard when her hands, swilling with a cloud of black mist, shoved *into* his chest. “Let’s see what makes you tick first, hum? What’s going on inside of that pretty blond head of yours?”

With a sudden shove she pinned him against the wall, shoving her hands deeper into his chest. Picking him up off his feet she smiled, “Time to play.”

Eagle’s eyes widened it felt like something white hot had been shoved into his chest. He drug in a staggered breath...

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Solara walked quickly down the hall. She had to get to the other side and back to Camry as soon as she could. For all their sakes and Eagle’s as well. ‘Forgive me...’ she asked silently of the man she just left behind. Her feet moved faster but unfortunately she wasn’t fast enough.

Eagle's screaming followed her all the way down the corridor, no matter how fast she ran.

An: Once again thank you for reading. I hope I didn't make Eagle seem to weak or anything...but Elantra's like well I'd spoil it if I told you now. oi...that was almost a spoiler. Bad, bad VKiera. Reviews are most welcome, ideas, reactions but not flaming of course. As a good writer I know says "Flames will be used to cook toat and I always burn toat" Over and out. Much love to ya.

13 - The Stranger

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Fuu's intelligent green eyes gazed about the room, taking in the movements of the people around her in the discomforting silence.

Lantis was standing almost motionless beside Hikaru. The only movement that betrayed his worry for his friend was the occasional slide of his hand through his thick black hair.

Hikaru fidgeted incessantly, her red eyes wide and full of worry. She looked from Lantis to Clef and back to Lantis, her inner turmoil easily read on her face.

Clef had his eyes closed and head slightly bowed. His brow creased in concentration as he searched for Eagle throughout Cephiro.

All of their behavior was expected under the circumstances.

It was Umi's behavior that surprised and worried her the most.

Her friend had come running in early that morning and was near hysterics as she tried to explain what she had found in the hallway. Amid her talk of blood and broken mirrors they finally got the idea that something had happened to Eagle.

The blond turned her head slightly to gaze at her fellow knight.

Umi sat staring off into the distance with this unnerving bleak look on her face, eyes distant, frightened. She hadn't moved at all since Clef had begun his search. Eagle's cloak rested in her lap, her hands clutched the soft material tight enough to turn her knuckles white.

Fuu had suspected she was starting to become close to the commander. The wind knight had not been completely oblivious to the side glances they had been giving each other over the past few days. The girl sighed quietly; she would have liked her suspicions to be confirmed in a different manor. Not like this, never like this.

Everyone's attention was brought to the center of the room with the sharp crack of Clef's staff touching the marbled floor. "I can't sense his presence anywhere in Cephiro, it's like he's disappeared all together." The mage's pale brow furrowed in thought, "Though if he has been taken out of the bounds of Cephiro it is likely I won't be able to track him."

"You don't think those people might have...?" Hikaru asked softly, unable to finish the question as if asking it might make it even more true.

"That seems to be the most likely probability." Lantis answered quietly.

Fuu rested her chin in her hands, green eyes sharp and reflective, there had to be some way to find out where Eagle had been taken.

"So what are we going to do?" Umi stood suddenly, "We can't just sit here, I mean what if they, if they...?" She paled at the mere thought and dropped back down in her seat.

"We'll think of something Umi, until then we have to have faith in Eagle. Remember what the Creator said? //If we believe in him he'll be alright." Hikaru came over and sat down beside her.

Fuu nodded her agreement as she stood to join them, "I think our best course of action would be to find

that man Camry. He's the only person from that place we can trust, he has to know something about what's going on."

"Right," the blue headed girl nodded vigorously but her fingers never loosened on the cloak in her lap.

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"Pretty, so pretty." Elantra crooned softly. Her slender fingers slid through soft pale hair. "You're so pretty, yet so tainted, so tainted with red. You know you've killed a lot of people, more than even me. Where you come from you're some kind of soldier right? I guess that's why but still..." A smile played across her lips, "That's an awful lot of blood on your hands. I wonder what your friends would think if they knew you were such an efficient killer?"

She gently stroked the hair of the half conscious man in her arms; Eagle looked up at her with half lidded eyes. "Feeling a bit weak? Ooh, poor baby, it's a bit of a nasty side effect from when I mine a person's memory," she cooed gently. "Don't worry it wears off...eventually..." Giggling rang in the icy cell as she continued.

"You were quite a lot of fun to crack actually, most people break pretty easily, you took awhile. But...I...found...what...I...was...looking...for" she walked her fingers up his chest, emphasizing each syllable with a soft tap.

“You see most people are easy to break because they are afraid of dying. It’s a weakness that almost everyone has, did you know that?” she looked down leaning over him her dark hair tumbling down and obscuring his view.

He tried to make some sort of movement, but only managed to make a slight fist, his fingernails scraping and biting into the rock floor. Despite that the initial shock of her intrusion into his mind was wearing off and he was returning to his senses.

The strange girl with malicious purple eyes continued oblivious to the man’s stirrings for a moment. She leaned over him placing her hands on either side of his head holding her weight, “But you’re not afraid of dying, you don’t want to die, but you’re not afraid of it and that makes all the difference. Perhaps because of something in your past?”

She pried further, merrily picking his memories apart, “You had accepted the fact you were dying because of your illness and you wanted to make sure you did something with the end of your life. Am I right?” She mused knowingly; she had after all pried into his memory and knew full well about his past. Eagle tried again this time managing to bend one of his legs but it gave out and his foot skid along the ice.

Elantra watched laughingly as the awareness crept into his eyes, along with something else, discomfort, a bit of anger perhaps? She seemed only amused and smiled, “Upset with me are you?” she asked giggling again but took little heed of his movements. She didn’t think he was capable of doing anything quite yet.

She was about to find out how terribly wrong she was.

Amber eyes turned hard, sharp, cold; the soldier was pulling himself back together. Eagle didn’t like this, and he really didn’t like her. Being this close to the woman her aura was almost overpowering and there was something extremely wrong about it.

//1Something about this girl just makes my skin crawl, she’s so cold. There’s something about her and the others, even Camry, that isn’t right. She doesn’t even feel alive...’ He thought as he held back a gag, nearly choking on the cold, nasty energy field wafting from her, ‘This is one screwed up aura.’

“You know,” Eagle managed to find his voice, it was soft, barely audible, but threat laced the seemingly sweet tone. “I don’t usually approve of being so rough to a woman...” Mustering his strength Eagle thrust his arms out, moving them in a scissor like motion that opened her arms knocking her off balance. She tumbled to the side giving him just enough time to roll off his side and on to his back.

He smiled grimly, “But for you I’ll make an exception.” As she turned to come at him again he kicked with both feet, heavy boots connected solidly with her chest sending her reeling back and sliding across the floor. She came to a stop striking the back of her head against the cold cell bars.

Yelping in pain and confusion Elantra shook off the blow and staggered to her feet. ‘How dare he!?’ she fumed, ‘How dare he hit me!?’

Hauling himself up into a crouch Eagle reached behind his neck grasping for the knife he kept there. Praying to whoever was out there that Elantra had missed it when she’d relieved him of his other weapons.

Fingers slid down the warm metal of the smooth barreled hilt and with a small press of a button the distinctive and satisfying //1sound of the blade snapping into place reached his ears just as Elantra collided with him.

Eagle landed on his back with a solid, resounding clunk, the blade fell from his fingers and was sent skittering across the ice. She went straight for his throat; having yet to use a weapon he assumed she liked a more hands on approach, quite literally. She’d gotten him before like this and he was not about to have a repeat performance.

“I was being nice before but you’ve made me very angry” Elantra’s tiny hands tightened on his windpipe cutting off precious oxygen. “No one ever beats me, I always win” she took gleeful pride in this statement, almost hissing it as she lent down, her face only a few inches from his.

Struggling beneath the weight of her body Eagle’s hands pried at her fingers trying to loosen her vise like grip. From the edge of his sight he saw the glint of the knife blade, reluctantly freeing one hand he reached for it. It was just out of reach; no more than a hand span away, but try as he might he couldn’t

quiet get it.

A gag retched from him, her extra weight on his chest did not make breathing any easier and he had to use both hands once again to pull at her strong little fingers. Managing a precious gasp he tried for the knife one more time, 'Just a little bit more...' He reached, the tip of his finger brushed the tiny weapon making it spin just a bit. He grit his teeth, 'Come here!' he thought vaguely.

Apparently the knife heard as it seemed to magically dart into this open hand. In one fluid movement he sliced out with the blade, going for the closest thing in range, her face.

With an earsplitting shriek Elantra fell back, hand pressed to her face over her right eye. Blood flowed freely from the gaping wound that started above her right temple and went across her eye, ending just above her lip.

On his feet panting heavily, knife in hand, Eagle watched the girl gape at him a moment as if he'd committed the most horrendous sin possible by scaring her beautiful face and then shrieked bloody murder. Staggering to the bars she phased though and ran off down the hallway nursing the wound.

'Like a child that plays with fire and gets burned' he thought absently, his back sliding against the wall as he sunk to the floor, exhausted and still breathing heavily.

He felt something cold on his face and reached up to wipe it away, assuming it was the water dripping from the icy ceiling. He was surprised when his hand came away smeared with red, absently closing his knife and replacing it, he studied the blood on his fingers, confirming his suspicions from earlier.

Elantra's blood was as ice cold as a corpse's.

'Figures...' he frowned. "How do I get myself into these things?" Musing aloud he leaned his head back, eyes closed, warm breath still coming at a quick pace creating little white clouds.

An ironic smile brushed his features for a second and he chuckled blackly as old memories, long ago buried, surfaced thanks to her words.

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He opened his eyes again and gazed at his blood smeared hands, 'Yes my hands are red, but it's not like I had a choice.' Memories of battles past riffled through his head. He'd put his sword and skills to good use in the civil war that had put his father into power and rebuilt Autozam's government from the bottom up. No one could deny that, but that did not change the fact he'd taken so many lives on that battle field.

He'd long ago washed the blood away and it didn't keep him awake at night because sometimes it's kill or be killed and while your hesitating about if it's 'right or not' someone else is making the decision for you. But still...

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"Damn..." he muttered softly.

Pulling his knees to his chest in a vain attempt to keep warm the pale blond man rested his chin on one knee. In spite of himself he started to drop off, the cold sinking into him, numbing his senses until he unwittingly fell into sleep and with sleep came dreams.

//1Solara paced back and forth along the long deck like floor of the hanger. She'd come back to Camry in flurry. Speaking quickly in hushed tones she relayed what she knew so far, both of them could feel the intense amount of activity and emotional turmoil that had erupted in the palace beneath them.

"Camry..." she stopped her pacing and her lover pulled his eyes from some unspecified place on the wall where he had been staring deep in thought, "Camry, you know I've done some terrible things, unforgivable things, but..." she sighed heavily, "Leaving that man behind...I hear his screaming, even now..."

She covered her eyes with one of her hands, her voice tired, strained, she'd been playing this deadly game for far too long. She was strong, so strong, so strong that she was close to breaking. "If only I had stayed instead of crossing over to see you I might have been able..." she was cut off by the strong pair of arms that wrapped around her from behind.

"Don't." His soft voice filled her ears, "Just don't think about things like that. Those sorts of things are what drove Impreza to become as she is now. You just have to do what you can, that's all you should ever ask of yourself."

Burying his face in her soft hair he felt her chest rise with a deep breath, he tightened his hold on her and felt some of her tension drain away. She sunk into him until he was all but supporting her weight.

"Stay, stay with me. Don't go back there, it's become too dangerous. If they discover that you're..." Camry found himself unable to complete his thought as Solara's pale fingers covered his lips.

//1"Your ability to manipulate time gives you the capability to glimpse the future. Have you foreseen anything new of late to make you doubt?" She asked quietly and turned in his arms.

"No, my 'dreams' have been quiet of late. Only echoes of 'dreams' I've had in the past. The things I see are only shadows of what could be." His fingers absently threaded through her golden strands.

"So the future you saw for those two hasn't changed?" Her blue eyes grew dark with sadness. "You only told me that their future did not bode well..."

"The future is a hard thing to change, if I say something to them now the possible outcomes will increase and the path to the future will become unstable, making it even more difficult to change." His gaze turned downward but the touch of her soft hands pulled his eyes back to hers.

"Knowing from a dream, yet unable to do anything... It must be painful?" she asked as she cradled the side of his face in her hand.

“Yes,” he closed his eyes and reached up pressing her soft hand firmly against his face, “But we can’t wait for the nightmare to become reality without doing anything. So we must do all we can, even if it doesn’t directly affect the results, we must go forward and not look back.”

“Can we stop her Camry and change that fate?” Solara’s voice felt heavy in her throat.

“I don’t know, but against a future seen in a dream that hasn’t come to pass...people’s wishes are always stronger.” He smiled that ever so gentle smile she loved so much; one that actually touched his eyes. Leaning down he gave her a gentle kiss, just barely brushing his lips over hers.

The sound of quick pattering feet echoing in the hallway beyond forced them apart and Solara drew away hurrying to cross back over.

“Solara,” Camry called after her in a hissed whisper, grabbing her hand. He really didn’t want her to go back.

“I will do all I can” She smiled squeezing his hand briefly before releasing it and opening the way to cross back over.

Red eyes followed after her as she disappeared from his sight only seconds before Hikaru came skittering into the room.

A look of relief flooded her face as the redhead spotted and hurried over to him, resting with her hands on her knees for a moment she caught her breath. “I’m so glad I found you!”

Her small face was flushed from running and she took large gasps of air, releasing them as little clouds of white into the chilled air of the docking bay. ‘She’s such a tiny thing really, so delicate looking you’d think she’d break like a china doll. So small and yet so strong. She really is a lot like Avalon was. They looking nothing alike and yet there is a part of her that is similar’ his eyes softened at the thought and he dropped down to one knee so he was more on her level. “What is it little Fire Knight?”

“Told...you...can” she gasped faintly, “call...me Hikaru.”

The older man chuckled lightly, “Hikaru.”

She looked up smiling her breathing finally under her control. She and the other girls had split up each taking a floor. Fuu took the ground floor, Umi the second and she had taken the last; and she had run from one length of the floor to the other, unsure if he was even in the palace.

“We need your help! Someone took Eagle and we think it was one of those people from the other day and they dragged him through a mirror but we can’t figure out where they took him and we can’t find him and...” Her words kept coming until Camry stopped her.

“I know, I know Hikaru.”

She tilted her head to the side her red eyes thoughtful, “You do? How?” she asked perplexed.

Camry smiled knowingly, “A friend of mine told me.”

“A friend? Who?”

“Well, I can’t tell you. Unfortunately.” His gaze seemed apologetic.

“Why not?” the tiny girl ask suspiciously, hands on her hips.

He almost wanted to chuckle at the sight she made, “Because it would put my friend in even more

danger than they already are if someone besides yourself or your friends found out about them.”

“Oh...well at least there’s someone else on our side” she mulled crossing her arms. “But we need to go before Umi freaks out anymore than she is now. I’ve never seen her so upset before...” Hikaru lips pushed into a soft frown. ‘Not that I’m not freaked out too...’ she added as an afterthought to herself.

A flash of sadness flittered through his eyes so quickly that Hikaru almost doubted what she saw but then he stood quickly and turned his gaze to the door. “Let’s hurry, shall we?” he glanced back at her.

“Yes!” Nodding vigorously Hikaru followed after him, eyeing his back as he walked ahead of her. ‘He reminds me of Lantis a little bit, how he’s strong but it’s a quiet strength, but then he’s a lot like Clef too, his eyes seem so old.’ Her eyes took on a sadness of their own, ‘He’s a lot like Eagle too, when he smiles, somehow it’s just like when Eagle smiles. Even though it’s a smile it’s still somehow sad...’

The fire knight continued down the hall her ruby eyes thoughtful as she gazed at the man ahead of her.

Umi hurried quickly down the hall as she heard Clef’s call for them to return to the throne room. Fuu was on the move too, Hikaru had found Camry.

Her eyes strayed to the beautiful mirrors on the wall, ‘Eagle...’ she clasped her hands together in a silent prayer, ‘Eagle we’re coming. I promise,’ her heart thudded faster as the anxiety built within her, ‘we’re coming.’

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Golden eyes slid open slowly, blinking rapidly to dislodge the ice crystals that had gathered upon their lashes. Eagle stared up at the icy ceiling almost unseeing, amber eyes swirling, like molten gold, with the ebb and flow of the deep felt emotion that reeled behind them.

'That dream...the same one as before. Such a powerful feeling, I've never felt anything like it before, this sorrow, so heavy, heavy enough to nearly crush me...but why? Where is this overwhelming sense of grief coming from?' He groaned softly one hand coming up to thread through his pale hair.

"Have a bad dream now did you?"

Eagle felt his blood run cold at the sound of the woman's voice that echoed in the cell, many times icier than the chill of the room around him.

"My Elantra tells me that you have quiet a gift. Her ability to pry into a person's heart and memory is very useful." Sharp silver eyes gazed down at him as a tall slender woman stepped into his cell, auburn hair falling down her back in soft waves.

Lady Impreza herself.

With a rush of adrenalin Eagle forced himself to his feet, reaching for his knife, but then doubled over in pain suddenly.

"Ah, though Elantra's talents are useful. Prying into your heart was not the only thing I had her do to you."

'What?' Eagle's gold eyes widened as his hand clutched at his chest.

“The pain comes from the “ko” she planted deep within your chest. A specialist with certain powers makes them. They were originally designed to gather people’s souls by paralyzing their hearts but I asked //1 to modify this one for me.”

Dropping to his knees Eagle grit his teeth at the strange and horrid feeling that seemed to tug and rip and gnaw away at his soul. The woman came closer leaning down over him. Her dark shadow loomed over his writhing form on the floor, so full of malicious. She was really going to enjoy what she was about to do.

Strong, icy fingers suddenly grabbed his chin forcing him to look up, “Instead taking your soul it will only paralyze your heart. You’ll become a pretty little doll with no voice or will of your own.” Silver met gold for a moment as she studied his gaze, “Such strong eyes, too strong really and wasted on someone such as you...” She brushed her fingers along his cheek leaving in their wake blackened flesh, his veins turned blue, twisting and twining along his face and down his neck. He gasped and tried to jerk away from the painful touch but her fingers held him in their vise like grip.

“Don’t fret it wont hurt for much longer, soon you won’t feel anything at all. Just like the machines your country is so famous for. Once the parasite has full control over your soul you’ll do what ever I say, just like my good little Elantra does and without as much work as she required...”

“Why are you...” he managed to gasp out though the searing pain in his chest, he wasn’t sure if he really wanted to know or not.

“Because no one thwarts me and your little knight friend angered me.” A frown pulled at her soft lips her brows furrowing in anger, “I was just going to have my followers get rid of that aggravating knight but you proved too sweet and opportunity to pass up. You’ll do just perfect for my new plan...”

‘Hikaru...?’ The image of the fiery girl flashed past his eyes, ‘Does she mean Hikaru? What is she going to have me...?’ Apparently she could see the horror in his eyes as she smiled.

“But I’m not that heartless; I’ll show some mercy and tell you exactly what I’m going to have you do.” She leaned forward so when she spoke her voice was barely a whisper, her lips pulling back in a wicked smiled that seemed more like a snarl, “This girl has your heart... and I’m going to break it.”

She trailed her fingers down the side of his face, drawing out the blue of his veins as they descended to his chest where he could now feel the writhing thing within him respond to her power.

“You know I wonder what the look on the Water Knight’s face will be right before you shove a sword through her chest?” Laughing she sank her fingers into his chest and the thing within him twisted and forced its way deeper. His pupils shrank to tiny pinpoints and he screamed as something ripped its way from his back.

‘Umi!’ Was his last conscious thought before he was lost to the inky blackness of its control and horrid demonic feathery wings ripped through his flesh as the creature consumed him.

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14 - Whispers

13. Whispers

*"No, you'll never be alone
When darkness comes I'll light the night with stars
Hear the whispers in the dark"*

"What do you mean?" Umi asked Camry, her blue eyes were a strange swirl of hope and fear as she paced the floor in front of the throne room doors.

"They won't kill your friend for now" Camry was sitting across the room, his voice was calm but there was something about him that seemed apprehensive, fretful even, but it also seemed to not be connected to the current topic of discussion.

"How do you know they're not going to kill him?" Presea turned sharply, her pony tail whipping out around her.

"Because he's more useful alive. They can use him to get to you in a way they couldn't before." He turned his sharp red eyes to the blond woman, almost daring her to disagree. Apparently Camry was not in the best of moods, to his credit no one else really was either.

They had gathered into the throne room and Camry had confirmed their suspicions about who had taken Eagle. Though as he had so pointedly said, Eagle maybe alive but that didn't mean the danger for him was any less.

"So why did they take Eagle?" Clef spoke, "The woman you spoke of, Impreza, what reason would she take him? I mean, if they could have taken anyone why didn't they try to take one of the knights or someone who's actually from Cephiro?"

"Perhaps it was opportunity?" Fuu suggested.

"That's possible but it's more likely they decided to take him for another reason. He is a failed Pillar candidate after all." Camry glanced from Fuu when he answered her to the water knight who'd paused in her pacing.

"Such senseless hatred...Why do they keep attacking us? What does that woman really want? I mean, I know she apparently hates us and wants to kill us and ect," Umi rolled her eyes while waving one hand in a vague upward gesture, "but what does she actually want?"

"She has a wish, a wish that she is willing to go down any road to achieve. Even if it's the road to hell." Camry stood, stretching his long legs.

“What kind of wish?” Hikaru asked as she gently threaded her fingers through the end of her braid.

He was silent for a moment, contemplating something and then spoke, “There is a way”

“What?” Umi stared at the man in front of her.

“Excuse me, could you explain?” Fuu asked softly from her place next to Hikaru.

“There is a way...for you to cross over to where they’ve taken him. Though it’s not something to be done lightly.” He smiled ruefully, knowing they would want to go, no matter how dangerous it was.

Lantis glanced deliberately in his direction; the Cail had noticed his dodging of Hikaru’s question. Camry made a mental note to speak the man when given the chance.

“How?” Hikaru asked the sensible question, bringing Camry’s attention back to her.

“I can take you across, but I feel I must warn you it’s not going to be a pleasant experience. At its best, done properly, it’s painful and at its worst it’s deadly. It’s a miracle your friend didn’t die, as he was forced though.” Camry walked over to the girls, “But that’s not going to stop you is it?”

“Of course not.” Umi said crossing her arms as she forced herself to stand still, her foot tapping the floor in anxiousness.

“Never has before,” Hikaru added smiling weakly.

Shaking his head in defeat Camry sighed, “There is a slight problem though.”

“What now?” Umi glared at him, her forehead wrinkled in aggravation.

The elder man shot her a reproachful look but her sharp blue eyes didn’t flinch under his ruby gaze. “I can only take two of you safely to the other side; three would push me to my limit and put you in unnecessary danger.”

Umi’s gaze turned from aggravation to surprise as she gazed worriedly at her fellow knights.

“We’ll have to leave someone behind...” Hikaru voiced softly.

“I don’t like it” Presea sat down next to Clef who remained silent. “Just two...”

Lantis didn’t seem to like the idea that much either but he remained silent, although he did send a meaningful glance to Hikaru.

“If I tried to take more than my limit it could end badly, it could severely injure you...or kill you and then where would we be?”

“Who should go then?” Ferio asked.

“I’m going” Umi answered sharply, her tone left little room for argument.

“If I maybe so bold as to make a suggestion?” Camry looked for any objections and then continued when he received none. “Though she may not like me after I say so I think it would be best for the Lady Wind Knight to stay behind. If she were to go with you and become seriously injured and unable to use her healing magic we might have a slight problem. I know the Guru has healing abilities but still...and there’s also the fact she’s still not quite herself yet.” He smiled at her apologetically.

Fuu’s face wrinkled a bit in dislike but she sighed and nodded reluctantly, though she didn’t like it. “May I ask something?” she studied the man with her sharp green eyes.

“I bet you’re going to ask anyways no matter what he says...” Ferio joked a little from his place next to her, trying to lighten the somber feeling that hung in the room.

Fuu glared at the Prince, apparently not amused, as Camry chuckled a little, “Of course.”

“If this crossing back and forth is so dangerous and painful, how is it that you seem to do it quiet effortlessly. That is what you do, when you disappear into the shadows when you leave, is it not?” She sat back waiting for his answer.

All the eyes in the room settled on the red eyed man as he shifted a bit uncomfortably, “Perceptive of you. Yes, that is what I do when I leave but it’s a bit more complicated to take someone like...” he rubbed his chin wondering how to explain. “I guess it would be better to just show you.”

He pulled gently at the fingers of his glove, removing the one from his left hand that held his pearly colored glove gem, looking a little closer Lantis noticed that he had a gem on both hands and not just one.

Glancing up Camry looked to Umi who was closets to him at the moment. “Umi if you would,” he held out his hand to her as if to shake.

“What?” she stared at him blankly.

“Just take my hand, nothing will happen to you, you have my word.” He extended his open hand out to her.

“I don’t see what this has to do with...” She reached and took his hand but the second they met her words stopped. She stared down at her hand clasping his for a moment as if she doubted her senses but then yanked her hand away quickly as if she’d been burned.

“Umi?!” Hikaru stood and walked over to her also confused, “What is it?”

The blue haired girl stared at Camry and didn’t look away as she answered, “He’s cold...”

“Umi his hands being a little cold is nothing to worry about, really what is it?” Fuu question also confused.

“No.” Umi stated firmly, studying Camry with seemingly new eyes, “I mean he’s *cold*.”

“Hum? Are you sick Camry?” Hikaru tilted her head to the side quizzically.

“No, I’m not ill.” He raked a hand through his pale white hair, “Truth of the matter is I’m not alive, well not technically, though I’m not dead either. I guess you could say I’m somewhere in-between.” He smiled, but there was nothing happy or playful behind that smile, a humorless, dark smile, more a grimace actually.

Fuu blinked a few times, trying to process the information, she failed miserably. “Could you...repeat that...?”

Very bluntly, “I’m dead, basically.”

“What!? So what are you a ghost? What’s next?! Do you have anything else you’d like to share?!” Umi exclaimed, unceremoniously sinking down into an empty chair. “By Selece....” This was just too much for one day.

“I’m not completely dead, as I said before. More like in-between. I’m cold as you so poetically pointed out, I don’t eat and I can’t sleep. Cold blood flows in these veins.” He grinned a little pointing to his chest as he sat back down resting his head in one hand.

Fuu stared blankly, “You can’t sleep?”

Camry nodded negatively, “Never.”

This fact seemed to boggle Fuu completely.

“Uh...” Hikaru seemed to be trying to formulate a question, “Why...why are you like that?”

“It’s an effect of being on the other side for too long, another reason we should hurry to retrieve your friend as quickly as possible, if he were to remain there for too long...well...” he left the rest of the sentence for them to fill in.

“That explains why the crossing for us will be difficult, being as we’re not...dead...” Fuu seemed to be taking a moment to swallow down that rather difficult pill of information.

“Then what are we waiting for, let’s go now!” Umi demanded.

“Hold on, I’ll cross over first and find a safe place, well...a *safer* place for me to pull you through at.” Standing once more Camry headed for the door, “Be ready when I return and dress warmly, the cold on the other side is not only the cold of the world but also the cold of the dead.” With that final warning he was gone, into the shadows once more.

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“Do you feel that?” Impreza asked, “There’s a stirring in the air. I do believe we are about to have guests.” She absently stroked her white glove gem, “But I do believe we’re ready for them, are we not?”

“Yes milady, he has been given the armor and sword you requested be made for him.” Sentra responded.

“Good, then perhaps we should call him.” She waved her hand and a tall figure came though the doorway instantly. Pale hair stood out in stark relief against the heavy black and green he wore, the man came and kneeled in front of Impreza. “Hum” she murmured her approval.

Solara remained silent, hiding her emotions well. Not even her sister saw the sadness in those icy blue eyes as she stared at the man that kneeled in front of Impreza. ‘Forgive me’ she begged silently of the Magic Knights, for she had done nothing to spare them of the grief to come.

The man stood and stepped to the side to stand by Impreza’s throne; golden eyes stared forward without seeing, like a beautiful, terrible, deadly doll.

“The board is set and the pieces are moving, and with our new knight we’ve only to wait for their next move and then...” Impreza smiled faintly, deeply satisfied with the course of her plan.

“Checkmate.”

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Lantis stirred from where he’d been resting in his room while the two knights prepared for the crossing. He’d been waiting for Camry’s aura to come back within the walls of the castle and had just felt the elder man’s distinctive power suddenly appear. It felt quite close actually. Standing, he exited the room to find said man waiting for him motionlessly just a few paces from his door.

“You have something you wish to ask of me?” He returned Lantis’ sharp gaze.

Really looking at him, Lantis wondered at how much this man looked like Eagle. They were both about the same height and build, the same feathery hair too... only Camry’s was much lighter. And the same eyes, yes. Despite the color difference they had the same eyes, eyes that were quiet and gentle, and silently hid the warrior behind them. Gazing at Camry, one perhaps saw a glimpse of Eagle as an older man, if he made it to middle age that is.

“Why did you not answer Hikaru’s question before?” Lantis’ cool voice remained as neutral as ever.

“Because she is not ready to hear the answer, and the answer would make the task ahead more difficult. It will already be difficult enough for one of them as it is.” The same calm tone came from Camry as he answered.

“So what is the answer?” Lantis wondered which knight he meant, but let it slide in hopes of getting an answer to his previous question.

“Everyone has something precious to them and when they lose that precious thing they will go to great lengths to regain it. Everyone has asked it of themselves, ‘How far would I go to get it back? Would I give my life, or take another’s? Would I save the world, would I destroy it?’” The elder man’s voice was quiet, dark, as if he’d thought about this for many hours alone in the snow and ice of the other side.

Contemplating for a moment, he then continued. “Everyone wishes for the wish Impreza has, even I harbor this wish. But to wish for this thing and to try and attain it are two very different things. Anyone can wish for it, but no one can have it.”

There was a strange yearning in Camry’s voice, but also a steely undertone that sounded like determination to deny himself something. “An un-grantable wish...but not an evil wish, for there is no such thing. There are those with desires and those who are willing to sacrifice great things for those desires, nothing more.” He moved past Lantis down the hallway.

“Camry.” Lantis’ voice hardened, demanding a proper answer.

“She wishes to bring back a dream that has already ended, her brother, she wishes to bring him back.” Camry turned sharply after answering and strode quickly down the hall, his voice drifting back to the Cail as he turned the corner, “Have the others meet me in the hallway where your friend disappeared.”

*“An un-grantable wish, not an evil one.
To bring back one who has already passed...
Do we all not harbor that wish at least once in this life?”*

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The hallway with the shattered mirror Eagle had disappeared into was forbiddingly cold. Silence hovered like a thick fog as they all gathered one by one to where Camry waited for them.

Hikaru came first.

The heavy crimson and fur lined cloak that rested on her shoulders made a soft hissing sound as its hem danced a breath above the floor. Both she and Umi, along with Fuu, had decided to morph into their second to last stage of armor. One level below their Mashine armor, hopefully it would be enough.

Lantis was silently at her side as he always was, her hand clutched his tightly and she took comfort in the warmth of his skin.

Fuu was anxious, wide green eyes reflected her desire to go with her friends, but she held fast to her resolve. She'd wait here for them. She'd be here when they needed her, without fail. Ferio gently held her arm in silent support; his coppery eyes were unusually serious.

Camry nodded in acknowledgement as they silently joined him and the others trickled in one by one until all of them had gathered but one.

Umi was last.

The hood of her heavy Prussian blue cloak, a mirror of Hikaru's, was pulled over her head, hiding her sight. She walked with steady, meaningful steps; her entire posture spoke of her hardened will. Swilling blue eyes looked up to Hikaru, they're gazes met and they both nodded separating from the others and walked to Camry.

"Knights" Camry held out a hand for each of them; stepping forward each girl took a hand. "Whatever happens don't lose your concentration as we pass though. The more will you put forward into the crossing the less likely we are to have something go wrong."

Both girls nodded silently as he led them forward, Umi felt her heart double as they approached the shattered mirror. She glanced at Hikaru who also looked a little nervous but there was no going back. Like either of them would no matter how afraid they were.

Hikaru glanced back at the others once more her eyes meeting Lantis' for a brief second; he nodded in that gentle quiet way of his. Her hand tightened in Camry's as he disappeared first into the shattered mirror and she and Umi followed suit.

It hurt. That was the first thing that went through Umi's mind. It was like being pricked by thousands of sharp icy needles. She gasped to call out in pain but found in this void she could not find her voice, she couldn't feel Camry's hand or the heavy weight of the fabric of her cloak. As suddenly as the pain started it ebbed and disappeared entirely. They were somewhere in the snow, nothing but oceans and oceans of snow as far as she could see. "This place..." she wrapped her cloak tightly to her slender frame, "How horrid..."

"Aye that it is." Camry was suddenly in front of her. "We have to keep moving, can you sense you friend anywhere?" he glanced at Umi pointedly and then Hikaru.

Hikaru's red eyes slid shut for a brief second, "Yes...I get the sense of...down..." she glanced down digging a heel into the snow and pushed it aside, "but he's either very far away or very weak...and something else..." her nose wrinkled in confusion. "I don't know...Umi?"

Umi had followed suit, "I get the same thing you do...I think...somewhere below us..."

"Yes, Impreza's fortress lies beneath the ground, is there anything else?" Camry stepped closer to her.

“Something seems off...I don't understand. I don't like the feel he's giving off...” Umi's hand gripped tightly at the hem of her cloak as if to pull it closer for warmth.

“Do you think he's been wounded?” Hikaru went to Umi.

“I guess that's possible...but I don't think it'd feel like this if he was just weak...”

“I was afraid of something like that...” Camry's lips pulled into a grim line. “Be on your guard, we'll head underground.”

Umi glanced at Hikaru and raised an eyebrow; the redhead shook her head, also at a loss as they followed the ever confusing Camry.

Their trip remained uneventful as the three crossed the fields of snow. The thing that struck Umi most was the silence, so quiet, as if you were to breath too loud the life would be sucked out of you and be drank up by stillness. The absence of sound actually hurt her ears.

They descended from the empty vast fields into the edge of a large crevasse in the ice. The darkness opened up to meet them, seeming to swallow up everything, like the horrid mouth of a demon. ‘A demon guarding the gate into hell...’ Umi thought as they dropped into the shadows and what little light there was faded into nothingness.

For a instant there was a terrifyingly moment of fear that fluttered though both Hikaru and Umi in the pitch black but it passed quickly as they came quiet suddenly into a well lit hallway of smooth grey stone.

Slight motions from Camry and escudo weapons were drawn in silent deadly motions. Exchanging a glance the Knights nodded, Camry fell back behind them slightly and directed them left. Passing under large open door they all froze at the sound of sort of sing song laughter that fell and rose in pitch gently.

“Magic Knights, Magic Knights, why I never thought I'd see the day... oh my it seems we're missing one, too bad I was so looking forward to meeting all three.” A heavy sigh punctuated the string of chanted words, “But I guess two will have to do.” A head full of chocolate colored curls turned toward them, an angry red line of a barely closed face wound stood out starkly on her pale skin.

“Who is that? Another failed candidate?” Umi glanced at Camry.

“No...unfortunately, she fell through when the barrier was thin during a time without a Pillar. Impreza raised her.” Camry shifted suddenly, moving quickly, both his glove gems flared to life at once and he drew identical double edged long blades. They were too short to be swords and far too long to be knives, truly unique weapons.

Elantra snorted, “You're no fun Camry I don't want to fight you...but Lady said that I wasn't supposed to fight the Magic Knights.” Pouting severely she stood from where she'd been seated; “You always have to ruin my fun.” Crossing her arms she stood a quick sprint away from them as if tempting them to try.

“If you’re not going to fight us then what are you doing here and where is Eagle?” Umi held her sword in a defensive manor as she challenged the pint sized woman.

“If you’re spoiling for a fight don’t worry,” Elantra waved her hand in an assuring motion, “I know someone who’s just *dying* to see you!” She clapped her hands, “Kill her.”

There was a sudden blur of dark green and black from a separate entrance way, Umi moved instantly to defend herself but froze part way through the action that should have been as natural to her as breathing. Everything went absolutely numb for a brief horriy second as her mind processed and reeled at the figure that advanced at her. “Eagle...?” she stuttered out in a barely audible voice as a heavy broad sword came down in a swinging arc.

A loud resound clang rung sharply though the air as metal contacted metal.

“Hikaru!” Umi called out as her wits somewhat returned to her. Hikaru had blocked Eagle’s swing that would have most certainly taken the Water Knight’s head off.

“Eagle what’s wrong with you, why did you attack Umi?” Hikaru grunted out from between clenched teeth as she held back his blade. “Eagle?!”

Eagle gave no answer it was as if she hadn’t even spoken. Gazing up into his usually warm gold eyes Hikaru felt her heart sink at the pale sharp stare that glared back down. Not even when they had been enemies in the battle for the Pillar had his eyes lost that warm understanding, somewhere within herself Hikaru knew that wasn’t Eagle looking back at her.

“Not her,” Elantra commanded, “Leave the Fire Knight to me, kill the blue one.”

Suddenly Eagle shifted taking advantage of his height and used brute force to throw the redhead off balance, before she could recover his hand came forward and roughly took hold of her using her momentum along with his he slammed her harshly to the floor with a rattling sound of cracking bone, knocking her unconscious instantly.

“Hikaru!” Umi tried to dash to her friend but was stopped by Eagle who she finally met swords with for the first time. The sheer force behind his blow was staggering; ‘I can barely deflect him’ she pushed back taking advantage of her long stride to leap out of striking distance. She whirled to check on Hikaru and Elantra had moved forward after the unmoving girl. Starting to run to her defense she was stopped by Camry’s firm voice.

“Stay there, you have your own task you must accomplish.” Stepping forward the elder man placed himself between Hikaru and Elantra. The tiny woman drew a wicked weapon that was a monstrous cross between a staff and a scythe.

He was going to protect Hikaru, a small part of Umi felt relieved that her friend would be safe, but another part of her dreaded what was about to begin. ‘My task hu?’ she wondered bitterly as she turned to face her friend. “Eagle, I know you wouldn’t do this, you have to fight whatever it is that’s controlling you,” she begged him but he didn’t heed her plea.

Swords connected once again, and then again, Umi losing ground each time. He was strong, no doubt there, much stronger than herself and Umi had sparred with Lantis enough to learn how to deal with someone who beat you hands down in brute force, speed and agility. It was a simple equation, the stronger you were the more speed and agility you had to give up and the same was true for the opposite.

Unfortunately Umi belatedly realized that Eagle was strong, but he was also nearly as quick as she was. She felt this burning realization as she darted to deflect a blow and he came in above her defenses and the edge of his sword bit deep into the top of her shoulder and broke her collar bone. Blood gushed from the gaping wound and she cried out in pain.

Camry slashed at Elantra's face causing her to flinch away in fear. "Umi, you must call to him. If you do not reach him no one will. He has spent too long on this side if we do not return him soon he will become like me. After that there will be no point in saving him from the control he's under! Call to him!"

"How? Nothing I say reaches him!" Umi was thrown back into a corner, she was losing blood quickly. A charge from Elantra brought Camry's attention back to her and away from Umi. "Eagle wake up, you have to please, Eagle!" she begged once more but it was useless.

Feeling lightheaded from the loss of blood, her mind reeled trying to think of something. She had to stop him, to do something. He wouldn't kill her, she knew him, he would never hurt her or Hikaru, but what was controlling him? Was Eagle even still in there? Her time to think of something was fading fast as the commander approached her, sword leveled in a deadly angle at her chest.

She couldn't die this way, if she just let him kill her. If she died what would happen to Hikaru and Fuu, what about Camry and everyone back in the castle, her parents? She couldn't just die here, she couldn't do that to them...and Eagle...Eagle. She gazed up at those cold gold eyes and hated herself for what she was about to do.

Her fists clenched tightly, cold reality settling in she felt her eyes sting with threatening tears. She closed them and silently begged for forgiveness, "Eagle" she cried his name as she gathered her magic. Forcing herself to her feet, tears fell like rain as the words came trembling from her lips, "Ice Blade!" and she sent the deadly attack roaring forward toward the last person she'd ever wanted to hurt. 'I'm sorry...'

Deadly splinters of ice shards sailed relentlessly through the air tearing into his clothing and flesh, shredding it to ribbons. Her most powerful magic attack sent him sprawling to the floor in a pool of blood.

With a gulping sob she collapsed back into the corner, her sword clattered to her side. Even Camry and Elantra paused in their fight in surprise at the sudden and unexpected magic attack.

Panting heavily she gazed sorrowfully at his unmoving form, 'forgive me.' But then suddenly...movement. Eagle was getting back up.

"Eagle?" she gasped faintly.

"You can't get your friend back, he's lost to us now, and even now the parasite within him grows stronger feeding off his despair and guilt. The demons of his past chain him down with each passing

second. You should just let him kill you and put you both out of your misery.” Elantra sneered gleefully.

‘Eagle...you’re being controlled by that...?’ If he was being controlled by something from within there had to be some way to reach out to him, there had to be! To expel those so called ‘demons.’

Pale blood streaked blond hair fell to the side and the same cold gold eyes greeted her as he struggled to his feet and retrieved his sword. She couldn’t even move as he came forward the point of his blade hovering above her chest.

So tired from blood loss she only gazed up at him as if she’d accepted her fate. In one last desperate attempt she reached out to him the only way she could think of. *“Eagle...”* she projected the thought.

He froze.

“That’s it Umi, call him again.” Camry encouraged her and then deflected another of Elantra’s attacks and threw her back along the floor. “Keep calling him!” Camry kneeled and shook Hikaru trying to rouse the girl.

“Eagle, can you hear me? Eagle!”

Somewhere in the darkness Eagle finally heard a whisper.

“...Um...i?”

“Wake up, wake up now before it’s too late!”

“Wake...up?”

“They’re controlling you, you have to fight back!”

“There’s something...inside of me I can’t get it out.” His mental voice weakened a bit.

“Fight it! Don’t listen to anything they say, we need you. You have to come back to us, what will happen to Geo and Zazu? What about Lantis and Hikaru? What about me?” She begged him.

Eagle collapsed in front of her, falling down to his knees. “Uh...” gasping escaped him.

Umi felt relief wash over her as his golden eyes lost that coldness, but her stomach dropped as pain replaced it.

One of Eagle’s hands came up and latched onto Umi’s arm, fingers gripping tightly in a vice like grip. What would happen to the others if he died, if he didn’t come back? He’d just gotten his chance to live again, he couldn’t give that back! “Ah, ah!” breathing heavy he called out in pain as the black wings of the parasite ripped free from his back once more with a meaty ‘splish.’ “Ah-eh!” gathering his will Eagle put forth all the mental energy he could muster to force the creature out of him.

Suddenly they separated and the pale young commander hacked up a mouth full of blood as he fell

forward into Umi's arms.

"kreee!!" The 'ko' keened in fury as it detached itself from Eagle's back.

Umi flinched away from the disgusting creature; it looked like a mass of root like tubers with wings. It had been sunk down into Eagle like the roots of a plant and had left a lot of damage when Eagle had forced it out of him. After falling forward into her arms he hadn't moved. "Eagle?" she tried to stir him with a rough shake.

Suddenly something sent her senses blaring; she looked up just in time to see Elantra headed right for them. She'd left Camry with Hikaru and come after the two on the floor. Umi dove to retrieve her sword and let Eagle roll to his side next to her. A harsh clang sounded at their weapons met.

"Too bad, I was looking forward to watching him kill you, guess I'll just have to do it myself. After you're gone there will be nothing to stop us, its right back to making him into another pretty doll!" A ruthless smile pulled at Elantra's lips.

Umi glared up at the violet eyes in front of her, anger flickering within her soul. "You will do no such thing; I'll kill you first before I let you touch him or Hikaru again!"

"Kill me? I'd like to see you try; I don't think you have what it takes. You'll end up just like you friend, bleeding to death on the floor."

That was the last straw and Umi saw red. Adrenalin and rage drove her forward as she drove Elantra back with one strike after another. Taking advantage of her weapon's extra reach she wounded and nicked the woman with every chance that presented itself.

Elantra began to seriously doubt her own words as she was drove more and more to the defensive at the harsh wrath of the Water Knight's sword. There was something different about her fighting style from earlier. Before she was protecting, defending, but now a different intent drove the blue knight, the intent to kill.

Umi drove forward harder knocking Elantra down on her back, she didn't know the murderous intent that seethed in her now, and she was not familiar with such a pure desire, a murderous intent like the empty dark. She drew her rapier back for the killing thrust and watched the fear suddenly grow in Elantra's eyes; it was mere seconds before she drove the point home. Suddenly someone grabbed her arm from behind and she whirled to attack them.

"Umi stop it!"

Eagle's words were like a cold slap in the face. Somehow, some way he'd managed to drag himself up to his feet and taken hold of her. He shouldn't have the strength to even move much less stand. "Eagle...? What was I...?" she looked down at her sword in horror as she realized what she would have done. "I..." she felt Eagle waver and she rushed forward to keep him from crumpling to the floor.

Elantra was just as shocked that Eagle had stopped her but took advantage of the distraction to jump away, "Get them!"

"Kreeen!" The parasite that had been squirming on the floor suddenly came after the two. Neither of them had the time react or dodge the creature.

"Crimson Lightning!" A roaring hot torrent of Hikaru's fire magic roared past them and engulfed the creature.

"Kree-eeen! Keeee!" It shrieked as it was consumed by it.

"Hikaru?!" Umi glanced to where Camry was and saw him holding the Fire Knight by the shoulders to help her stand. Hikaru stood panting her fingers crackling with the fire magic she's just thrown across the room.

"Hurry, we have to cross back over!" Camry hurried ahead of them, helping Hikaru along. Umi was trailing behind with a stumbling Eagle who was close to losing consciousness.

"We'll never make it back to where we started!" Umi called to Camry.

"We won't have to, there's another mirror this way! Hurry!" They skidded down a long hallway in a different direction from where'd they came in. Turning a sharp left they were in a large room with a huge oval mirror in the floor.

"A water mirror?" Hikaru asked.

"Yes, Impreza's actually." Camry grinned, "Now go, concentrate on the mirror we went through and you should reappear in the hallway of the castle." He left Hikaru go and went for the doorway.

"What about you?" Umi asked startled that he was going back.

"I'll be fine my dear, I can look after myself. Go I'll keep them back and then catch up with you; I don't have to use a mirror. Now go!"

The girls nodded and Hikaru helped Umi take on Eagle's weight as the commander was now too far gone to support his own weight and taking a deep breath they plunged forward and down into the water mirror.

There was cold and pain and then light and suddenly all three came through the mirror in the castle corridor, collapsing in a bloody mess to the horror of their friends.

Fuu rushed forward quickly along with the other.

Flares of healing magic filled the hallway; Umi fought her own battle to stay awake. She felt someone pick her up and looked up to see Presea's worried face. Lantis was looking over Hikaru's broken arm as Fuu hurriedly tried to stop Eagle's bleeding with Clef's help.

After a moment she went over to Umi, she said something to her but Umi couldn't hear it. Anxiously the Wind Knight cast another healing spell and Umi felt herself slipping, everything became blurry and faces

became streaks of color.

Eyes growing heavier and heavier she glanced over to where Clef worked to save Eagle's quickly fading life. 'Eagle...please...' and darkness opened up to greet her, 'please...don't disappear.'

Then the darkness closed in and there was only silence.

15 - Love Show

14. Love Show[br]

[br]

"The truth is, it's painless, letting your love show."[br]

[br]

She had no idea how long she had been sitting there. [br]

[br]

In truth she should have been in bed, she should have been resting like everyone else was within the castle. Clef would most certainly scold her if he found out she'd gone against his orders to stay in bed. Umi felt a smile pull at her lips, when it came down to it Clef really was a big softy. [br]

[br]

Taking a deep breath to drive off the drowsiness that laced her thoughts she winced from the sore ache in her muscles and bones. It'd been four days since they'd returned with Eagle; she'd awoken after two, most of her wounds well healed. Well all but one. She flinched a little as she touched the tender wound between her neck and shoulder. The most severe wound had been where Eagle's sword had bitten deep into her flesh. [br]

[br]

At least they could feel a little at ease now, after they had returned Clef had placed a magic barrier similar to the one that had surrounded the castle during the invasion. Hopefully it would prevent another similar incident.[br]

[br]

Eagle hadn't so much as turned in his sleep. He looked much the same as he had during his coma. His chest gently rose and fell in a steady rhythm, hands folded and resting across his stomach. Though, of course, the major difference between then and now was the massive amount of bandages that crisscrossed his bare chest. [br]

[br]

It was silly of her to sit here and watch him like this, it wasn't going to help him wake any faster, but she just couldn't bring herself to go to bed. With Fuu and Clef's help they'd managed to stop his bleeding, his wounds from her magic attack were easily healed but the wounds from the creature that had controlled him proved difficult to close, thus the massive amount of bandages. Magic could only go so far, now it was all up to Eagle's natural ability to heal and his own strength. [br]

[br]

Her eyes went from his bandaged chest to his calm face, her hands tightened together in her lap. There was so much she wanted to talk to him about, so much she'd come to understand in the brief moment where she thought either he was going to die or she was, or perhaps even both of them during that fight.

[br]

[br]

A soft yawn punctuated her thoughts, she should really lie back down, she glanced wearily at the other bed in the room. Apparently Eagle's room had become the unofficial medical wing once more and

they'd placed her in his room again, mostly because her room was a good ways down the hall and farther away should she need help. [br]

[br]

Not that she minded.[br]

[br]

Yet no matter how much she wanted to talk to him he slept on, oblivious to her presence. She gently slid from her chair and sat softly down by his side on the bed. She reached for his hand and took it in hers. Its warmth was comforting, helping to disperse the memory of how cold his body had been when he'd collapsed into her arms and the only warm thing about him had been the torrent of hot blood gushing from his wounds. [br]

[br]

Clutching his hand tightly she refused to leave her post, a part of her felt driven to keep the promise she had made to him before. *'I promise I'll make sure you wake...'* she wanted to keep that promise. Her resolve hardened she steadied herself resting her head against the headboard, it was going to be a long night.[br]

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Lantis was deep in thought, as he often was late at night, when a soft rapping at his door brought him back from his brooding. Deep blue eyes traveled to the door and it only took a pausing second for him to know who was there, "Come in, Hikaru." [br]

[br]

The redhead sheepishly poked her head in his door, "I didn't wake you did I?" [br]

[br]

The cail nodded a slight no. "Is something the matter?" she rarely came to him this late at night unless something was bothering her. "Is your arm giving you trouble?" he stood, concern showing behind those seemingly stoic blue eyes. [br]

[br]

The fight with Eagle had left her with a dislocated and broken left arm, as well as a slight concussion. Well patched up by Fuu, but he still worried, in his own quiet way, perhaps in a way only the observant Hikaru could see. [br]

[br]

She nodded no vigorously, her braid swishing with the back and forth motion. "I'm alright, I was just...worried." She looked up at him red eyes whirling with anxiousness. [br]

[br]

"About what, the others?" he closed his door and guided her over to the sofa he'd been sitting on before. "Umi's been awake and up for a few days now, I'm sure Eagle will follow suit." [br]

[br]

"Yes I know I'm sure they'll be alright, but I was actually worried about Camry. We haven't seen him since we left him back in that horrid place." [br]

[br]

Lantis gave a half muttered 'hum,' Hikaru glanced up at him, red eyes scrutinizing his face, understanding his thoughts far better than anyone else could even hope to come close to. Sometimes it made him uncomfortable how easily she was able to see though him, as if he was made of glass, but in some ways it was also a blessing. 'Not today though' he thought as Hikaru seemed to make a

conclusion from her scrutinizing.[br]

[br]

“Something about Camry bothers you, do you not like him?” [br]

[br]

She hit the nail, dead on, he heaved a heavy sigh, “It’s not that, I just don’t think he’s being completely honest with us.” His thoughts flashed back to his brief conversation with the man before they had crossed to the other side, “He’s hiding something.” He absent mindedly twilled his fingers in the soft red hair at the base of her neck.[br]

[br]

Sighing herself she leaned against his chest, one tiny hand clutching onto his shirt, “Aren’t we all?”[br]

[br]

From time to time she really did surprise him, so naive in some ways and yet so very wise, he supposed it would have to take someone so special and complicated in their own right to understand him on such a level. “I suppose,” he relented, “but I think he’s holding back something we really need to know.” [br]

[br]

“Like what?” she glanced up into his blue gaze.[br]

[br]

“...” Before Lantis could answer her a sudden rumble reached their ears.[br]

[br]

“What’s...?” Hikaru could not finish her question before they both felt the floor shift below them as the ground beneath the palace rocked with a powerful earthquake. The Fire Knight called out in surprise and toppled forward and would have fallen if Lantis had not reached forward just in time. The rumbling slowly subsided as soon as it came leaving a bewildered Hikaru, Lantis still grasping her shoulders. [br]

[br]

“What was that?” Hikaru took a breath to steady herself.[br]

[br]

“Cephro is becoming unstable...” Lantis’ heavy blue eyes turned to the window to glance out at the county.[br]

[br]

“I’m going to check on the others!” Hikaru jumped up and burst out the door into the hallway nearly at the same moment Umi, Feiro and Fuu did the same.[br]

[br]

“Hikaru, Fuu?” Umi poked her out of Eagle’s room, “What was that?”[br]

[br]

“An earthquake I believe,” Fuu yawned quietly.[br]

[br]

Umi rolled her eyes, “We’re all aware of that, I meant why there was an earthquake?”[br]

[br]

“Things are becoming unstable.” Lantis came out behind Hikaru.[br]

[br]

“Why? With all of us here there should be more than enough will power to keep the land stable, even with some of the things that have happened.” Feiro frowned. [br]

[br]

“Unless someone is turning their own will towards making things unstable.” Fuu added softly, gaining everyone’s eyes on her.[br]

[br]

“You really think they have that much influence?” Feiro asked.[br]

[br]

“They’ve consecutively attacked each of us, first me at the river, then Hikaru in the forest, Fuu in the garden. Then they took Eagle right from under our noses and nearly killed him. They are all failed Pillar candidates after all; it wouldn’t surprise me if the quake had something to do with them.” Flicking a strand of her pale hair Umi answered for Fuu as she came down the hall and leaned against the wall as they clustered around Lantis’ door.[br]

[br]

“I agree,” Lantis nodded, “but I do not think they are the only factor. Lafarga and Ascot reported another monster attack on a village in the south. The people are frightened, even we are not enough to completely balance that out.”[br]

[br]

Fuu yawned lightly and was about to add further comment when her growling stomach interrupted her. She blushed, “I guess I’m a little hungry...”[br]

[br]

“You still haven’t gotten your energy back from all the healing you had to do. Come on lets go get something.” Feiro took her elbow, “No buts,” he added as she started to protest as he dragged her towards the kitchen. [br]

[br]

“I’ll come too, I’m kind of hungry.” Hikaru started to follow, “Lantis, Umi, do you want to come?”[br]

[br]

Umi glanced back hesitantly to Eagle’s room, “I’ll go make sure the shaking didn’t wake Eagle, and then I’ll come.”[br]

[br]

Lantis reached out and took her shoulder as he passed her, “I’ll go, you go with them.”[br]

[br]

Umi blinked, surprised by his frankness. So surprised that she didn’t protest, “Ok...” she followed after the perky Hikaru, who was talking bubbly about something sweet the cooks had made.[br]

[br]

Lantis turned back down the hallway towards his friend’s room. Glancing into the room Eagle appeared to have not moved and he turned to leave.[br]

[br]

“Lantis?”[br]

[br]

Surprised the raven haired man turned quickly and reentered the room. “Did the shaking wake you?”[br]

[br]

“Yes, is everything alright?” The young commander’s eyes slid open heavily, barely enough for Lantis to see a sliver of their gold coloring. He didn’t move at all, he seemed to lack either the strength or the desire to do so, possibly both.[br]

[br]

Lantis hesitated, “For now yes, everything is alright. How do you feel?” he sat down in the chair he was pretty sure the Water Knight had been in previously. [br]

[br]

“I’m fi...”[br]

[br]

“And don’t lie,” the cail added before Eagle could finish.[br]

[br]

The blond seemed to contemplate and then sighed, “Like hell” he spoke aloud.[br]

[br]

There was a silence between them for a minute, "Do you remember what happened?" Lantis asked after another moment.[br]

[br]

Eagle didn't answer right away, "*Some things...*" he thought spoke again, "*I'm not sure about what was real...and what I dreamed. I've been having such strange dreams of late...*" he paused again. "Umi and Hikaru?"[br]

[br]

"They're both fine." Lantis assured him.[br]

[br]

One hand came up slowly to his face, "*Lantis...what have I done? I...almost killed her...*" he closed his eyes; the mere thought alone revolted him.[br]

[br]

"But you didn't." He answered firmly; he knew that Eagle was speaking of Umi rather than Hikaru.

"You haven't told her yet, have you?"[br]

[br]

Again more silence. [br]

[br]

"No." Eagle finally answered. "*Though not for lack of trying...*" he grinned a little. "*I was coming to speak with you about it when I was attacked.*"[br]

[br]

"Why were you coming to me?" Lantis seemed truly puzzled.[br]

[br]

"*I wanted to ask you something, at the time I was unsure of something, but now the question seems pointless for I already know my answer.*" He smiled a little. [br]

[br]

Lantis shook his head, "You've never made much sense to me."[br]

[br]

"Perhaps that is why we're such good friends." Eagle spoke aloud, sounding a little drowsy. [br]

[br]

"You should go to sleep again, you'll recover faster." Lantis stood.[br]

[br]

The commander yawned, "I know...but...all I seem to do is sleep and..." he started to nod off, "My dreams have troubled me of late..."[br]

[br]

"How so?" Lantis paused for a moment.[br]

[br]

Eagle yawned, "Snow, red snow...so much ice and cold..." he yawned again eyes sliding shut, "And this strange feeling..." he opened his eyes again for a brief second, "A feeling that weights so heavily upon me. I don't understand it, but still so heavy, such a weighty thing..." The last was mumbled as he lost the battle to stay conscious and fell into a fitful sleep.[br]

[br]

Lantis gazed at him quietly for a moment; perhaps he should speak to Clef before joining the others. If what he was thinking was true, then there was much darkness ahead for Eagle and probably Cephire as well.[br]

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“You’re going to eat all that?” Umi raised an eyebrow at the huge sandwich the Cephirean prince had made for himself. [br]

[br]

“Yes and your point?” He shot her a glare as he purposely took a large bite out of it.[br]

[br]

“Feiro, there is no need to have bad manors, she only asked you a question.” Fuu berated him as she delicately ate a small piece of fruit to quiet her own hunger pains.[br]

[br]

“You must be even hungrier than Fuu was.” Hikaru sat across from them eating one of the small cake like treats Umi and Eagle had enjoyed a few nights before.[br]

[br]

“When is he not hungry? He’s a guy.” Umi retorted more to Feiro than Hikaru. She herself wasn’t eating but packing a small basket with cake treats and several apples.[br]

[br]

“What are you packing for Umi?” Fuu nibbled on the slice of bread Feiro had just handed her, she tired to refuse at first but he glared at her and didn’t take no for an answer.[br]

[br]

“I’m going to take it back to the room for Eagle. When he woke from his coma before he was quite hungry, so I’m sure he will be again.” She paused for a second, “Actually I should probably take something for him to drink too...”[br]

[br]

“Oh that’s a great idea, I’ll help!” Hikaru hopped up and disappeared into the storeroom and returned a moment later with a huge wine bottle, more like a jug.[br]

[br]

“Could you find a bigger bottle Hikaru...?” Umi giggled, “We want to get him something to drink, not get him plastered...Though that could prove entertaining...” she dissolved into another fit of giggling.[br]

[br]

“Sorry...It was the only bottle I saw.” The redheaded knight pouted.[br]

[br]

“Plastered?” Feiro asked halfway though swallowing his sandwich.[br]

[br]

“Don’t talk with your mouth full dear.” Fuu scolded him, again. “Plastered is a slang term for being intoxicated in our world.”[br]

[br]

“Hu?” The young man was now even more confused.[br]

[br]

Umi rolled her eyes as she walked over to Hikaru, “She means it’s a word for getting drunk. You have to use little words Fuu.” She made a small pinching movement with her fingers to add emphasis to her point. “Come on I’ll help you look for a more descent sized bottle.”[br]

[br]

Feiro glared at Umi’s back as she and Hikaru disappeared for a moment, he showed masterful self-control as he bit back his words and took another bite of his sandwich. [br]

[br]

Fuu smiled and patted his shoulder; she’d trained him well, as all good women do. “There, there, she

doesn't mean it."[br]

[br]

"You know, now that I think about it, Lantis told me once that while in Autozam he, Eagle, Geo and Zazu went out while on base. Somehow the other soldiers got Eagle and Geo into a drinking game with them." Hikaru was saying as she and Umi emerged with a regular sized bottle.[br]

[br]

"What kind of drinking game?" Umi questioned.[br]

[br]

"I think they were supposed to drink until they couldn't anymore..." Hikaru mused.[br]

[br]

"That's not healthy" Fuu seemed to disapprove greatly, Feiro filed that bit of information away under his list of, 'things to never do around Fuu.'[br]

[br]

"So, what happened?" Umi set the bottle in the basket.[br]

[br]

"He said Eagle drank them all under the table..." Hikaru's red eyebrows scrunched together.[br]

[br]

"No way, you can't be serious..." Umi's hand rested against her cheek as if she were trying to visualize such a scene. [br]

[br]

"Me too..." Hikaru agreed, "Lantis said it didn't seem to affect him at all."[br]

[br]

"Speaking of, I wonder where Lantis is?" Fuu questioned.[br]

[br]

"He was supposed to check on Eagle and then join us." Umi glanced at the doorway.[br]

[br]

"Maybe Clef called him," Hikaru added, "I'll pack something for him too if he's not here soon." [br]

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He was running.[br]

[br]

Faster and faster with those strange soldiers' of Impreza not far behind him, clad in black and red with a sinister bat like symbol on their chests they were very strange indeed.[br]

[br]

'Where the hell did she get such creations? They're not even alive, or human for that matter.' Camry thought as he spun out in the snow as he rounded a corner, beheading one of the soldiers as he did so. A shower of blue sparks followed it as its' head hit the cold ground with a metallic thump. 'From *him* I suppose, the Dimension Witch warned me about that...'[br]

[br]

He threw a magic attack their way, a large black hole opened up and swallowed them all with a loud popping sound and then closed. With a heavy sigh Camry dropped down into a crevasse and back into the underground fortress, "I'm getting too old for this."[br]

[br]

"Aye, you are getting on in years. Perhaps you should take it easy when it comes to running around like

that.” A familiar voice drifted to him over the wind.[br]

[br]

“Ha-ha, what a cruel thing to say Solara!” he turned to her, cocking his head to the side in his usual playful nature. “Were you waiting for me to destroy them? You could have lent a hand you know, since I’m so old and all.”[br]

[br]

“You’re a fool Camry.” She came to him her light blond hair whipping about in the steady wind streaming down from the crevasse. “But then I’ve said all this before.” She reached out and touched the side of his face where dark red stained his pale hair, “You may not always be so fortunate.” [br]

[br]

“That is where you are wrong,” he took her hand and pressed it to his lips, “I’m a very fortunate man.” He drew her close to him, “Very fortunate indeed.”[br]

[br]

“Camr...” he cut her off before she could finish, cold lips pressing to hers. It was a desperate kiss, something terribly raw and painful behind it. As if he were trying frantically to hold onto something as intangible as a soul.[br]

[br]

Solara could do nothing but yield to such an overwhelming emotion, when he let up she gasped softly, “Camry...?” she murmured, looking up, seeking in his red eyes an answer to a question she herself didn’t even know. Long fingers brushed back her blond hair from her neck as he lowered his head and pressed his lips down to sensitive skin. One hand finding its way beneath her tunic, icy fingers leaving a trail of fire. “We can’t...Camry...” she lost her voice for a moment as his fingers slid down her back.

“Not now, if we are found...”[br]

[br]

“If not now,” he said his voice heavy, “then when? There are no guarantees for tomorrow. In reality, for us, there is no tomorrow. We are the frozen past that lingers in the present and have no real future. We, who are in this state, are just an endless existence.” [br]

[br]

“Camry don’t say such things...” even as she said it she didn’t put much heart behind it. “It is enough for me, to be this way.” Her hands gripped tightly at his tunic.[br]

[br]

“Aye, just enough.” Camry said gently as he cradled her face in his hand bringing her in close to him. “Just enough...” he whispered as he drew his cloak up around them and they disappeared into the shadows.[br]

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“Are you sure of it Lantis?” Clef raised concerned eyes from where he sat in his study. [br]

[br]

Lantis nodded, “Almost a certainty.”[br]

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Clef sighed, “I was wondering when he’d start to manifest some magical ability.”[br]

[br]

“He has been here quiet long enough, for even someone outside of Cephire is capable of attaining power, just as it was possible for someone outside of Cephire to become Pillar.” Lantis shifted his

weight from where he stood by the door. [br]

[br]

“Foresight though dreams, that in itself is rare in Cephro, much less for an outsider to obtain such ability. Though without more to go on we can’t be sure of it. Did he have any idea what the dream pertained to?” Clef asked.[br]

[br]

“I don’t think so, though he was drowsy when we were speaking. We may be able to learn more when he’s fully awake. The way he spoke of it though it seemed he’d had the dream more than once.”[br]

[br]

“What was in the dream?”[br]

[br]

“He said something about “Snow, red snow...so much ice and cold...” and a feeling that weighted heavily upon him. He didn’t understand the feeling, other than it was ‘heavy’.” Lantis paused, “Hikaru said that the other side is nothing but an empty void full of snow perhaps that was what he was referring to?”[br]

[br]

“Perhaps...” Clef considered the possibility, “When he’s awake you’ll have to question him more.”[br]

[br]

Lantis nodded with a grunt of agreement and then left, presumably to meet up with Hikaru and the others.[br]

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Snow. Red snow.[br]

[br]

‘Where am I?’ Red snow fell like petals around him.[br]

[br]

“There’s no more time, Eagle.” A male voice drifted to him.[br]

[br]

‘Time...no more...time? Time for what, what do you mean?’[br]

[br]

“Eagle?” A woman spoke this time.[br]

[br]

‘I know that voice...Someone...important to me.’[br]

[br]

“Eagle!?”[br]

[br]

“Eagle!?”[br]

[br]

“Eagle?” [br]

[br]

“Hey, Eagle?”[br]

[br]

Golden eyes blinked furiously, trying to focus in the bright light. “Wha...?”[br]

[br]

“About time you came around, seems like you were having a pretty unpleasant dream.” A rather gruff and familiar voice addressed him.[br]

[br]

Eagle sat up quickly, “Geo?! When did you get here?”[br]

[br]

“Three days ago and you’ve slept like a rock the whole time. Here we were all excited to see you up and about after all this time and you went and got yourself into more trouble.” His junior officer reached forward and grabbed his shoulder, “You best not let it happen again, or you’ll have me to deal with.”[br]

[br]

Eagle could only chuckle, “I should hope I do not receive such a cruel fate from a good friend.”[br]

[br]

Geo laughed and threw a fresh change of clothes at him as he stood heading for the door, “Hurry up, you fan clubs waiting for you.”[br]

[br]

“Fan club?” Eagle’s large golden eyes blinked perplexed. “Geo what are you...?”[br]

[br]

“Uh-oh, too late now...” Geo grinned looking out into the hall. [br]

[br]

Down the hall Eagle heard several voices.[br]

[br]

“Is he awake yet?” [br]

[br]

“He’s awake?”[br]

[br]

‘That sounds like Hik...’ before the thought finished a flash of red came skittering around the doorway and past Geo.[br]

[br]

“Eagle!” One may now exhibit all five feet and four inches of the overly excited fire knight launch herself across the room. “Yay, you’re awake, thank goodness!” She nearly tackled him as she crushed him in a hug.[br]

[br]

“Hikaru...” Eagle nearly fell over backwards and then she seemed to suddenly rein herself in and realize what she’d done.[br]

[br]

“Oh no! I’m sorry, I didn’t hurt you did I? Are you wound’s better, I shouldn’t have jumped like that, I’m sorry!” She leapt away from him and bowed in apology quickly.[br]

[br]

“It’s alright Hikaru, you don’t have to worry.” He patted her head.[br]

[br]

“That’s great, you’re feeling better now?” She asked.[br]

[br]

“Yes, much better.” He nodded to add emphasis.[br]

[br]

“Eagle!” Zazu came in nearly just as quickly as Hikaru had, “You’re finally awake! This is so awesome!” He dashed over to stand next to Hikaru, somewhere he found himself able to restrain where Hikaru could not. “I’ve go so much to tell you, I’ve been helping design a new fighting mecha, you have to check it out!” The boy gushed on and on.[br]

[br]

"I'll have to go tell everyone else, this is great now we can celebrate! Now that everyone's here we should have a party!" Before Eagle could protest Hikaru was gone again and down the hall.[br]

[br]

Geo whistled, "Where does she find all that energy? Well, come on Zazu leave Eagle be so he can clean up."[br]

[br]

"Aww man! But I wanted to talk to him!" The teenager complained.[br]

[br]

"You've got all of this evening to talk to him, come on." The elder man shoved the teenager out the door.[br]

[br]

Eagle chuckled again and stood grabbing his clothes.[br]

[br]

"Hey, you okay?" Geo asked from his place by the door.[br]

[br]

"Hum? Yes, I'm alright, really I fell fine now. Why do you ask?" He gazed at his old friend.[br]

[br]

"Well that dream you were having didn't seem very pleasant." Brown eyes studied the young commander carefully. [br]

[br]

"Oh, it's nothing Geo, just a dream anyway. I'll join you in just a few minuets." Eagle smiled at him and Geo reluctantly let it slide. "Alright." he closed the door.[br]

[br]

Eagle stood motionless for a passing moment, "No more...time..." he mumbled and then pulled his shirt over his head and headed to wash up.[br]

[br]

Walking down the hall Geo shook his head, 'Same old Eagle, same old smile.' He knew that smile, that smile of Eagle's that always meant he was hiding something. 'Some things never change I guess.'[br]

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"Come on Fuu move already." Umi wined impatiently at her blond friend and stared down at the chess pieces in front of her for the hundredth time. [br]

[br]

The two girls were comfortably sitting in the drawing room of the castle having a round of chess while they waited for Hikaru to come back.[br]

[br]

"I'm thinking." Fuu answered as she wrinkled her nose in concentration and then moved her white knight pieces forward, taking a black pawn.[br]

[br]

"Ah man...." Umi frowned and then moved her queen back. "Your turn."[br]

[br]

Fuu gazed at the board once more but soon enough he eyes flicked up to her friend. Umi was looking off to the side, out the window, her blue eyes distant. The girl sighed quietly, resting her chin in one

hand.[br]

[br]

The wind knight smiled, “Are you worried about him, Umi?” she asked casually.[br]

[br]

“He’s been asleep so long...” Umi blinked realizing what’d she just said. “Worried about who?”[br]

[br]

Fuu giggled, “Umi, why don’t you tell him?”[br]

[br]

“Tell who what?” Umi blushed and stared down at the board, “It’s your turn.”[br]

[br]

“Oh come now Umi, do you really need to hide it from me?” Fuu returned her gaze to the board as well, “You like him don’t you; not just as a friend or like a brother the way Hikaru does?” Fuu questioned and then waited quietly. She glanced up after a moment at Umi.[br]

[br]

Umi was staring down at her hands, she rung them together and nodded yes gently, she blushed deep red and continued to stare at her hands. “Is...is it that obvious?”[br]

[br]

“Afraid so.” Fuu smiled and Umi sighed letting her head drop to the table. [br]

[br]

“I don’t know what to do Fuu. I mean...Oh I don’t know what I mean...” Umi mumbled from her arms on the table top.[br]

[br]

“If you’re sincere about how you feel I’m sure he’ll understand.” Fuu reassured her, ‘...and if I’m right about those longing looks I saw from him he’ll do more than understand...’ the blond added silently to herself.[br]

[br]

“You think so?” Umi inquired quietly.[br]

[br]

“Yes I do. I’m sure everything will turn out all right, but I think you shouldn’t wait around too long Umi. You know best of all that there are no guarantees in tomorrow.” Fuu added quietly. “Oh, checkmate.” She smiled as she took Umi’s king.[br]

[br]

“What?!” Umi sat up and glared down at the table, “No way, again?!”[br]

[br]

“So it would seem.” Fuu laughed at Umi’s outraged reaction.[br]

[br]

“Hey guys!” Hikaru poked her head in the door, “Eagle’s awake! I was thinking since everyone’s here we should have a party!”[br]

[br]

“Oh a party sounds wonderful, we all need to have some fun after worrying so much.” Fuu stood along with Umi, not missing the look of relief and joy that crossed her face. As she passed her she gave her friend a gentle pat on the shoulder, “See, this is perfect. You can tell him tonight if you want.”[br]

[br]

Umi smiled nervously, maybe she could tell him. She swallowed hard, ‘maybe’.[br]

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The day passed quickly into evening and the party/strategic meeting was well in way. Along with Geo and Zazu several representatives from Autozam were present as well and information was being relayed via the viewing mirror to Fahren and Chizeta. After much discussion about the current turn of events in Cephio it was decided to send reinforcements to strengthen the country's defenses in preparation of a larger attack. The threat was deemed worthy of attention by the other nations for the sheer fact that the enemy seemed willing to attack anyone, if Eagle could be attacked, what about the other nations' representatives?[br]

[br]

Eagle yawned quietly to himself as things began to wrap up. He'd always understood the importance of meetings like this, but that didn't mean he enjoyed them. They were a necessary evil, in his mind. He vainly wished he'd brought some of the snacks from that basket he'd found in his room.[br]

[br]

Everyone stood from their seats exiting the throne room where the meeting had been held, Eagle excused himself from the Autozam representatives and passed Lantis, looking for the girls. He'd been unable to speak to any of them more than a passing hello since he woke; they'd been thrust into the meeting almost immediately. [br]

[br]

He caught a passing glance of them, giggling about dressing up for the actual party. A swish of blue hair caught his eye and Umi glanced up and back in his direction. A small, tentative smile graced her face and then she was gone.[br]

[br]

The pale blond man sighed with a bit of a frown. [br]

[br]

"Perhaps you should go change as well; I do believe Geo brought your dress uniform for you." Lantis appeared next to him.[br]

[br]

"You really think I should wear that thing?" Eagle chuckled more to relieve his own tension than out of actual amusement as he reached for a drink.[br]

[br]

"Well, you wouldn't want her to out class you, now would you?" Lantis said with the utmost straightest face.[br]

[br]

Eagle nearly did a spit take with this drink. "Lantis?" The commander looked up bewildered at his friend.[br]

[br]

Lantis merely walked away, probably to go change himself from his usual black into his white dress clothes.[br]

[br]

Eagle stared after his friend for a good moment, then scratched his head a bit as he headed for his own room to change...sometimes he really didn't get Lantis, not at all.[br]

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Umi sighed as she took her hair down for the third time and began to comb it once again. She still couldn't decide what to do with it. Up or down nothing seemed to work, well, in her mind anyways.[br]
[br]

Hikaru was sitting across from her, already in her fluffy pink chiffon dress, helping Fuu to lace the back of her bodice styled dress, its heavy forest green folds pooled around her feet. "Umi do you need some help?" she asked as she stepped away from Hikaru.[br]

[br]
"No, its just I don't know what to do with my hair..." Umi pouted as she stared at her reflection. [br]

[br]
"We're going to be late if you don't hurry." Hikaru hopped up looking every bit like a fairy, her red hair loose and wild with a few flowers in it. [br]

[br]
"I know, I think I have an idea." Fuu smiled knowingly and reached for her comb. "You'll be ready in no time." [br]

[br]
It took only a few minuets of Fuu's steady hands to style Umi's long hair. Umi settled for the style, partly pulled back with long slender silver pins and the rest left to hang loose. [br]

[br]
"Come on lets go!" Hikaru tugged the two of them down the hall.[br]

[br]
Umi and Fuu could only smile at one another and follow the bubbly red head.[br]

[br]
Meanwhile in the main room, Eagle in full dress uniform was about to drive Lantis crazy with his fidgeting. The blond kept shifting his weight from one foot to the other while mildly listening to Zazu about the new design for a fighting mecha. [br]

[br]
Lantis wondered vaguely how in the world the commander managed to keep so collected in every other kind of situation. Women nearly fell over him back in Autozam; he would think Eagle could deal with just one. Perhaps it made a difference that this time the feelings were not one sided. [br]

[br]
He'd never understood why other people made such a fuss over these things, he'd not found it difficult to tell Hikaru his intentions. She hadn't quiet understood what he meant at the time, but he'd always been a patient man and she eventually came to understand his feelings. Lantis gave an internal sigh of relief as he saw the bouncing red head appear with the other knights in tow. [br]

[br]
He reached over and lightly tapped Eagle on the shoulder and nodded in the direction of the girls. [br]

[br]
Eagle blinked and then followed the motion and smiled.[br]

[br]
"Lantis, Eagle!" Hikaru let go of the other knights and hopped over to the men. Latching onto Lantis' elbow she looked like a wisp of pink cotton candy.[br]

[br]
"Hikaru you shouldn't hop around like that in a dress." Umi laughed at her.[br]

[br]
"I know but I'm happy, I can't help it." Hikaru shrugged.[br]

[br]
"Well, don't you three look lovely?" Eagle greeted them, his gaze flicked to Umi and he smiled at her.

“You outshine everyone else here I think, wouldn’t you agree Lantis?” The blond glanced up to his friend, who gave a single, ‘hum’ of agreement.[br]

[br]

“Thank you Eagle.” Fuu smiled and waved at Feiro as she glanced at Umi and then Lantis. Lantis caught her eyes and seemed to understand what she was thinking. Looking back on it later Fuu could have sworn she saw him roll his eyes...but she could never be quiet sure about it.[br]

[br]

Feiro joined the group and Fuu gently grabbed his hand. She smiled at him and he turned a few shades of red himself, she did look rather pretty. “Let’s go dance.” [br]

[br]

“What...but...” Feiro protested not sure if he really wanted to make a fool of himself.[br]

[br]

“Come on it’ll be fun.” She coaxed him out onto the floor and placed one of his hands on her waist and placed her own on his shoulder. The Prince turned a few shades deeper with a rather large sweat drop on his forehead before he got a hold of himself.[br]

[br]

Umi giggled at the sight the two of them made and Eagle couldn’t help but join her at the Prince’s expense.[br]

[br]

“Let’s get something to drink Hikaru.” Lantis offered and Hikaru obliged, smiling back as they walked off.[br]

[br]

Once again, by no fault of their own, Uri and Eagle were alone.[br]

[br]

Eagle glanced down at Umi; she was watching Fuu and Feiro, a soft smile on her face. ‘Well,’ he thought, ‘since everyone else has left to their own devices.’ “May I have the honor?” he offered her his arm.[br]

[br]

Umi glanced up and smiled, “Yes” she quickly agreed, linking her arm in his. She glanced back at Fuu and Feiro as Eagle led her towards the garden. Fuu smiled in gentle encouragement and the water knight swallowed nervously. [br]

[br]

“Something the matter Umi?” Eagle asked as he casually snagged two drinks as they passed a table.[br]

[br]

“Oh no, I’m fine” she flashed a smiled up at him.[br]

[br]

“It worked!” Fuu grinned, as she tugged the confused Feiro off the dance floor and watched the retreating couple.[br]

[br]

“What worked?” The prince’s copper eyes narrowed. “What’s going on?”[br]

[br]

“Look.” She pointed after Umi and Eagle.[br]

[br]

“What, those two...? You mean...?” Feiro raised a green eyebrow and pointed in their direction.[br]

[br]

“Not yet, that’s why I wanted them to be alone.” Fuu smiled.[br]

[br]

“Who’s alone?” Hikaru asked as she and Lantis returned.[br]

[br]

“You did a wonderful job Lantis, thank you.” The blond graciously took a drink Feiro handed her.[br]

[br]

Hikaru blinked, “What did Lantis do? And where did Umi and Eagle go?”[br]

[br]

“Ya, where did they go?” Geo suddenly joined them.[br]

[br]

“Into the garden together.” Fuu answered, seeming quiet pleased with the turn of events.[br]

[br]

Feiro rolled his eyes, “Apparently Fuu has decided to play matchmaker...but what I want to know how you got Lantis to help you?”[br]

[br]

“Eagle and Umi...?” Hikaru blinked and looked up to Lantis, “When did they start to like each other?”[br]

[br]

“Whoa, wait. When did that happen?” Geo was just as surprised as Hikaru.[br]

[br]

“Not long after he woke from his coma.” Lantis answered bluntly.[br]

[br]

“I didn’t notice until later.” Fuu added. [br]

[br]

“So you decided to lend them a helping hand?” Feiro laughed.[br]

[br]

“Well I thought it couldn’t hurt to at least give them the chance.” Fuu sipped her drink; ‘I just wanted them to have a chance to be happy as well, they deserve it’ she thought and then sweetly asked Feiro if he’d dance with her again.[br]

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Eagle and Umi wondered into the garden, following the spiraling stone path to wherever it led them. There was a comfortable silence between them until they reached an area with stone benches and he asked if she’d like to sit, she agreed, and gathering the long train of her dress she set her self down delicately on the edge of the cool stone.[br]

[br]

“Here” he offered her one of the drinks he’d snagged and sat beside her.[br]

[br]

“Thank you” her pale fingers wrapped around the cool glass and she took a sip.[br]

[br]

“I should be the one thanking you, I believe, that’s twice now you’ve saved me.” He laughed quietly.[br]

[br]

Umi shook her head, “I think we should call it even, since you saved my neck in the fight with those two women.” She took another sip of her drink, her eyes narrowed, as if she were contemplating something.[br]

[br]

“Well, that still leaves me one short then.” He smiled; leaning forward with his elbows on his knees he rested his chin on his hands.[br]

[br]

“No” she said quietly and paused for a moment, he waited quietly for her to continue. Setting her glass down beside her she gazed downward, some loose strands of hair sliding down to hide her eyes from him. “You stopped me from doing something I would have greatly regretted, if I had killed that woman... I would have never forgiven myself.” [br]

[br]

Slender fingers clutched the fabric of her dress, her knuckles turning white. “I’ve never felt like that before, not in the battles we fought when we first came to Cephrio or in the fight with Zagato or the Princess, not even in our fights with you. I didn’t just want to defeat her, I wanted to kill her...” she stared down at her hands as if they weren’t her own.[br]

[br]

Eagle stopped her words by reaching up to slide the hair out of her face with the back of his fingers. “I understand, but you shouldn’t worry about it so much, regrets are for after something happens, not before. You were scared and worried, your friends were in danger, most people under such circumstances would feel the same.” [br]

[br]

His hand dropped away from her and he sat up straight looking off and away from her, “Killing isn’t always done by evil people. Sometimes, no matter how much we wish it wasn’t true, the taking of a life is necessary. When you’re in such a situation hesitation over whether something is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ will most likely get you killed, because the person you’re fighting isn’t likely to be thinking the same thing. The price of taking a life is heavy, you know that, and you shouldn’t go into battle unless you’re willing and capable of taking on that burden.”[br]

[br]

Umi sat utterly still, her gaze riveted on the young man in front her, only when he spoke with such heavy words did she remember first and foremost he was a soldier and just how many lives had probably ended by his hand.[br]

[br]

“I think, when it comes to it,” he continued quietly, “no matter how much blood you spill the only thing you can do is get up, wash the blood away, and keep going. You and Hikaru made me understand that dying doesn’t change anything, if you want things to change and to protect the people you love, you have to live.” [br]

[br]

He stood and walked a few paces away from her, glancing back at her with an unhappy smile, if such a thing is possible. One closed hand was pressed to her lips, wide blue eyes stared at him unblinking. “Do I scare you now, knowing that I think like that?”[br]

[br]

“No!” she said so sharply that he turned to her. She stood, her blue dress shimmered, catching the early moon light and throwing it back out like millions of tiny stars. Nearing his side she glared up at him, the sea’s wrath visible in her gaze, “I don’t ever want to hear you say such a thing, do you understand?” she demanded.[br]

[br]

Eagle blinked, momentarily stunned by her sudden spit fire tone, but then he smiled, “Yes of course.” *“You should tell her... You may lose your chance, if the resent turn of events should go ill.”* Lantis’ words rang in his ears as he gazed down at her.[br]

[br]

“Good, because I would never be frightened of you. That would be silly, because...” her tone softened, “because I...” she hesitated. ‘Oh why can’t I say it out loud?!’ she silently berated herself. Her hand nervously fidgeted with the pin in her hair. [br]

[br]

She was pulled out of the silent debate with herself when his hand came up and cradled the side of her face and then gently pulled the pin from her hair, the mass of blue locks tumbling into his fingers. The touch instantly made the hairs on the back of her neck stand up, she turned her eyes up to his and her breath stopped in her throat.[br]

[br]

He was gazing down at her, he seemed content for his eyes had turned that deep warm butterscotch color she’d come to understand meant he was happy. Almost of its own accord her hand came up to his, pressing it against her cheek, the warmth from his skin was soothing. “Eagle?” she breathed his name more than spoke it.[br]

[br]

Stepping a bit more forward he closed the distance between them, but he just couldn’t seem to break the silence between them. He smiled, perhaps he didn’t have to. *“Umi, may I ask you something?”*[br]

[br]

For some reason Umi found herself smiling as he switched to thought speech, “Yes.” [br]

[br]

Leaning forward he was close enough for her to smell the distinct aroma she’d noticed when he’d comforted her before, along with another more subtle scent that she couldn’t quiet place, but something about it just said ‘male.’[br]

[br]

“May I kiss you?” He held her gaze steadily.[br]

[br]

If he hadn’t sounded so sincere, if his eyes hadn’t held hers so earnestly she might have laughed at his formality. In answer she reached up and tied her hands around his neck, “Yes.”[br]

[br]

A heartbeat later, his arm slid around her waist pressing her close, her eyes slid shut and his mouth found hers in a strong but gentle kiss. One hand supported the back of her head at the base of her neck, tilting her back to deepen the kiss. [br]

[br]

Umi swore her knees were about to give out on her and her arms tightened around his neck, one hand sifting through the soft hair at the base of his neck.[br]

[br]

In the quiet stillness of the garden, the two of them told each other everything with out ever saying a word and silently wished that time could be frozen if for only a little while, so that such a precious thing could last but a moment longer.