

Untitled

She almost didn't see them, it was rainy, and she was walking home from afternoon classes, eager to get inside and out of the rain. But something or other had caused her to take that route, and she *did* see them.

A small group of men, looking to be older than her, but not by much, were kicking something on the ground. That something, however, didn't seem to be enjoying it much, from the groans and shouts that she heard. Narrowing her eyes, she began to jog towards them.

"Hey! What the hell do you think you're doing?!"

The men turned to the angered voice in surprise and annoyance. Blue-green eyes glared hard at them as the young woman came to a stop from her jog, and she peered around them.

"Who do you people think you are?" she demanded angrily. Trying to push by one of them, she received a cold look, but got a glance at what they were terrorizing. A young man lay on the ground, a wild mane of black, gold, and crimson dancing around in the faint wind, but dampened from the rain. She couldn't see his eyes- they were squeezed shut in pain, but she had a feeling that they were every bit as unnatural as his hair. He was wearing all black, and his skin was a deep bronze color that was unusual for this time of year when it always rained.

One of the thugs, looking to be the leader, took a step forward and crossed his arms.

"Hey girlie, I don't know who *you* think you are, but you had better not butt in. This fledgling is just getting what was coming to him." At he said this, the one on the ground thrashed and growled angrily, trying to get the better hand of his possessors.

The young woman glared hard at the repressors, pausing only for an instant. "Look, I don't care what he did. It still doesn't give you the right to gang up on him!" She snapped angrily. The lead man glared back, taking a step towards her warningly.

"I'd watch your mouth if I were you, missy," he growled. "People like us don't have to answer to you."

Narrowed blue-green eyes watched him carefully. "People like us-"

"Now now," a cool voice interrupted her, and she whirled around to see a young man standing behind her calmly, even though she was sure he hadn't been there a second ago. His appearance was anything but normal- with white bangs and dark ebony hair cascading to his shoulders. One red eye stared at her calculatingly, the other swollen closed from a scar that ran from his brow to his bottom eye-lid, where it split into three, claw-like scratches. The woman's posture faltered at the look he was giving her, but didn't back off.

"Don't you think we've made our point by now?" He finished, finally taking his gaze off of her to the leader. The latter, although much larger, flinched under his gaze and immediately took on a recessive demeanor.

"Sir-" The man didn't have time to finish as the young man flicked his pinning glare to the form on the ground. With a glare, the largest thug growled and stalked off, his buddies following him with furtive glances at the man on the ground and the slender one who had just appeared, grateful to get out of the latter's view.

"Sooo sorry about that, luv." Spinning from watching the others leave, Sarah narrowed her eyes at the slim man that had remained. His clipped tone held a fragment of an Australian accent and something else she couldn't name. His posture was relaxed, and he watched the moaning form on the ground with a look of pity.

Somehow that bothered the young woman. For someone whose cronies had just beaten up someone, he seemed awfully casual. She moved to stand between him and the man on the ground. Better to be safe than sorry.

The accented man raised an eyebrow and smirked, revealing teeth that were way too sharp to be human. Sarah felt her skin crawl, but she didn't move.

"Luv, do you really think that you can protect that fool from *me*?" He asked with a laugh.

"What do you want from him anyway!?" she demanded. "He is in now shape to give you anything!" The man behind her grew quiet; his labored breathing the only sound from him. In front of her, the red-eyed man laughed lowly, his eyes narrowing to slits that flickered from her to the one she was protecting.

"Do you know this...man?" He sneered at her. Sarah's eyes widened a little, but she said nothing, just frowned. "I see." Crossing his arms, he leaned against the wall and watched her carefully. He looked a little contemplative, if not amused. "Well luv, I won't spoil it for you." He grinned ferally. "You'll just have to find out on your own."

And then shadows danced about him, wrapping around his arms and pulling him into a black patch of darkness. Sarah watched in horror as he let out a bone-chilling laugh, and then disappeared. A cold air swept over her, and she shivered, pulling her wet windbreaker around her even tighter. When the shadows dispersed, there was nothing left but the brick of the wall that he had been leaning against. She hesitantly reached out and pressed gently against it, just to see whether or not she would be sucked in. She wasn't.

A groan to her right reminded her that the injured man was still there. Turning wildly, she saw that he was trying to get up. Bruises dotted his arms, and she didn't doubt that he had any on his torso and legs as well. His clothes seemed a little worse for wear- his shirt was torn from what looked like a knife, and his pants had rips in them all over. His arm slipped on the wet pavement, and he fell down once more.

"H-Hey!" Jogging over to him, Sarah leaned down and tried to help him up, but received a hard fist in her gut. She let out a small grunt, and fell back, stumbling over the pavement and falling. Holding one arm to her stomach and grimacing, she turned her head sharply at the man struggling to get up.

"What was that for?" She demanded coldly. Her blue-green eyes were set in a sharp glare, and her brow was furrowed. The man grunted in response. "I was just trying to help!" She could feel the rainwater soaking through the thin material of her jacket, and her jeans were probably already dripping wet. Good thing she had left

her bag on a crate to keep her books dry.

Her breath was momentarily knocked out of her as she glanced at the said crate that she was *positive* she had put her bag on. It was gone. Looking around the alley frantically, she scrambled up. Still gone.

No doubt one of those bastards took it when they...left. Her brain stumbled over the last word, still unsure about the 'exit' of the red-eyed man. Sarah groaned, rubbing her cold, wet hand over her equally cold and wet face in exasperation.

"I hope you're happy," she snapped, turning back to the man who had punched her. "Not only am I soaked, but I also lost my books- which cost me a fortune by the way- and all I get for thanks is a sore-" She was cut off when her eyes finally landed back on the male that had managed to stand up.

She was right. His eyes *were* as exotic as his hair. They shone a bright red, but not like the man's with the scar- these were a deep red-wine color that had starbursts of gold flecking them. She stared into them, entranced, and they swirled as the gold flecks became more and more prominent. Around her, the world slowed down, and all she saw were the gorgeous colors of his eyes. As the red and gold swirled, little spots of lavender appeared, the most beautiful purple she had ever seen.

And then the man blinked, and she snapped out of the trance like she had been startled out of a deep sleep. Her eyelids drooped, but as the cold rain continued to pour down on her, she shook herself and focused on his face instead of just his foreign eyes. He was staring at her, his face no longer twisted into a grimace, but instead a look of incredulity and curiosity. With his features as smooth as they were, she couldn't help but notice how handsome he was. His build was slender, but it was obvious that he was in good shape. His hair, wild as it was, fascinated her, and she wondered vaguely if it was as silky as it looked.

He took a step towards her, looking as entranced as she had felt a moment ago, but stopped himself. Sarah's eyes widened a little, and she took a few steps towards him.

"Hey, you should probably to a hospital," she paused when his eyes flickered to hers uncertainly, but she moved her own gaze away, not wanting to get caught in them again. "I mean, you did just get beat up pretty badly." Searching his face while avoiding his captivating crimson orbs, she caught a look of anger cross his features. That surprised her.

"No." His voice was rich and smooth and deep, even though it sounded cold with his obvious fury. Sarah looked up quickly. His brow was furrowed in displeasure. Suddenly, his features smoothed over again as his eyelids drooped. Lurching forward on instinct, Sarah grunted as he swayed towards her and fell into her.

"...no...hospital..." he murmured before going limp in her arms. She grunted again, re-adjusting her hold on him to keep him from hitting the cold, wet pavement.

She thought about just calling for an ambulance anyway, but his reaction to her suggestion of hospital rang through her thoughts. She shook her head. She didn't even know where he lived.

"My house it is," she ground out through clenched teeth. Sighing, she wished she had a car. It was going to be a long six blocks home.

xXx

Thank god for elevators. Dropping her burden on the couch unceremoniously, she glared at the sleeping man, but it held no bite. He looked so calm, and she found herself unable to stay mad at him. As she placed a hand on his forehead, she found that he wasn't burning with a fever, but chillingly cold. Walking to the closet, she pulled out an old comforter, then shook it out and walked back over to the couch. Still asleep. She laid the blanket over him gently, without disturbing him.

Shivering, she shed her coat and shoes, tossing them into the bathroom as she looked around the apartment for her roommates. They weren't there. Heading to the bedroom, she pulled out a fresh shirt, a worn pair of comfy jeans, underwear and socks, and a hoodie. Walking back to the bathroom, she peeked at the sleeping male on her couch- he was still out.

Shaking her head, she padded into the bathroom, setting her fresh clothes on the counter and locking the door behind her. Discarding her sopping clothes, she jumped into the shower and sighed as hot water rushed over her chilled body. She took her time, washing her hair thoroughly and letting the warm water soak into her. Dragging a man six blocks had made her tired and sweaty, but she was numbingly cold from the rain. By the time she got out, she felt warm again and her fingertips were wrinkled from being in the water for so long.

Getting dressed quickly, she brushed her hair out and braided it to dry. She threw her wet clothes into the laundry basket along with her towel and walked back out into her apartment.

Her house guest was still asleep.

But she noticed something peculiar.

The bruises that had littered his bronze-colored skin were no longer a fresh purple, but a sickly-brown color. They looked days-old. She frowned, scratching her head thoughtfully before heading into the kitchen for something to eat while she thought.

She almost jumped out of her skin when Kelsey leapt on her around the corner.

"There is a man on our couch," her friend hissed quietly, so as not to wake the said man. Sarah placed a hand over her racing heart, pinning the other with a glare, before nodding. Kelsey frowned.

"Well? Who is he?" She whispered. Now Sarah frowned, and then looked sheepish.

"I...don't know?" the blue-eyed one said quietly. Her roommate's mouth opened and closed, her expression shocked. Finally, she got her words out.

"You don't know?!" She said, too loudly. The man on the couch groaned, and both girls froze. Nothing else was heard, but the brown-haired girl lowered her voice. "What do you mean, you don't know?" she hissed, glaring. Sarah ran a hand through her hair.

"Well, he was kinda in a fight with some people, and I found him. He passed out before I got anything out of him." She edited the whole, 'shadow's sucking him into the wall' thing, not knowing what to make of it. Her friend frowned.

"Why didn't you call an ambulance?"

Sarah's lips puckered in thought. "When I suggested it, he refused. Then he just passed out," she explained. Her friend raised an eyebrow.

"So you took him here? To our apartment, on our couch?"

"Um...yes?"

Kelsey sighed, running a hand through her hair. Turning on her roommate, she fixed the younger with a stern look. "I have classes. As soon as that guy wakes up, I want you to call me, do you hear me?" She snuck a glance at the slumbering man. "I don't want him to pull anything."

Sarah grinned, saluting. "Yes'm."

Her friend rolled her eyes, but snatched her jacket and waved as she opened the door, and then pulled it shut behind her. Sarah sighed, running a hand through her hair before turning back to the kitchen.

There, in front of the counter, stood the man that had been asleep on her couch five seconds ago. She jumped, back hitting the wall, and she let out a small squeak of surprise. He continued to stare at her, but the corner of his mouth quirked. The blue-eyed girl noted that he had located a hair tie, and the wildest of his black and magenta locks had been pulled back into a pony-tail.

Casting a glance back into the living room revealed that the couch was empty, and the blanket had been folded neatly over the back of it. Her gaze flicked back to the man before her and folded her arms over her chest as she pinned him with a hard look. His mouth quirked again.

"I'm sorry if I startled you." Once again, his voice struck her as beautiful, and it was no longer cold with anger. However, she raised an eyebrow at him wryly.

"My, haven't your manners improved," she snapped as her eyes narrowed. "Was it just earlier that you *punched* me?"

The man's gaze faltered and he averted his exotic eyes away quickly. "I apologize for that," he said quietly. "I lost my temper with the wrong person." Sarah's features relaxed, and her eyes softened. She held out her hand and smiled slightly.

"I'm sorry, my name is Sarah," she said gently. He glanced from her outstretched hand to her face, then smiled crookedly. Sarah decided that the only thing she liked better than his voice was that crooked smile.

"Yami," the other replied, taking her hand in his own. She gasped as his hand slipped over hers and squeezed it tightly.

"Oh my god!" She cried out, placing both her hands over his now. Her shocked gaze flicked from his hand to his own alarmed expression. "Your hands are freezing!"

Suddenly he chuckled, and his alarm softened into amusement. He placed his hand over hers and gently pried them off, but didn't release them. "They've always been like that," he informed her lightly. Sarah continued to stare.

"How- How can they get that cold though?" She shivered, but didn't pull her hands away. "I mean, mine get cold, but not like that!" Yami laughed, and Sarah's features eased into a smile. She laughed lightly in return.

They stood there for a moment, awkwardly staring at each other, and she realized that he was only a little taller than she was. The smaller of the two found herself gazing into his eyes one more. They swirled, this time without the starbursts of gold, but she found them beautiful all the same. Somewhere between a shade of lavender and ruby, they locked onto her own sea-blue ones.

The dark-blondé leaned forward, entranced, and the eyes seemed to beckon with praise. And then Yami blinked again, and she snapped her irises away from his quickly. The man blinked again, confused, and absently ran a thumb over the back of her hand softly. Sarah blushed deeply, and he smirked, squeezing her hand lightly.

Clearing her throat, she pulled her hands out of his, shoving one into her jeans pocket while the other went to the back of her neck. She smiled at him. "Um...if you want something to eat...?" She trailed off awkwardly, not meeting his gaze. He chuckled lightly.

"No thanks. But if I could use your shower, that would be great," he replied. Sarah nodded and gestured for him to follow as she walked out of the kitchen. His footsteps were silent, and it irked her that she couldn't hear him move. Stopping at the hallway closet, she opened it and pulled out a fluffy blue towel. She tossed it over to him, and he caught it easily. Rifting through linen and bathroom supplies, she finally found fresh shampoo and conditioner, along with a new bar of soap. She handed these to him and ushered for him to follow again.

Reaching the bathroom, she turned to look at him and smiled. "Sometimes the showerhead sputters, but if it does just hit it, and it works again," she explained, scratching the back of her neck sheepishly. Yami laughed and nodded his thanks, and she left him to shower, closing the door behind her.

As she headed back into the kitchen, she reached for the phone while debating what to eat. Dialing her roommate's cell, she rolled her eyes when she got the voice mail. She left a quick message, then hung up, turning to the fridge. In the bathroom, a curse was heard before a hard thud vibrated through the wall. Sarah laughed.

xXx

"Hey Kelsey, it's Sarah. The mystery guy woke up. His name is Yami, and he seems nice. I don't think he'll pull anything, but he's using the shower right now..." Her friend paused. "He has gorgeous eyes..."

Click.

Kelsey sighed and deleted the message with a small smile. "What a weird girl..." she muttered. Across from her and seated in front of a laptop that purred quietly, cobalt eyes flicked towards her.

"Something the matter?" He asked. Kelsey smiled at him and shook her head.

"Nah, Sarah's just being...Sarah again. I swear, she'd bring a rabid dog into our house if she thought it was cute..." She smiled, shaking her head again. Seto Kaiba snorted, turning back to his work.

"So you have a rabid dog in your apartment now?" her boyfriend asked mockingly while tapping away at the keys of his notebook. Kelsey laughed, and the CEO's lips quirked at the corners- a haunting of a smile.

"Nope, some guy she found passed out from a fight," she explained while sipping her coffee. Seto stopped typing and frowned over the screen at her.

"That's not safe," he said disapprovingly. Kelsey set her coffee down with an eye roll.

"That's what I told her, but she said he seemed alright to her..." she trailed off, thinking of her friend. "She said his name was Yami... or something like that."

Seto, who had gone back to typing, froze, his hands poised over the keys. His eyes widened slightly, before narrowing into a scowl. His lithe fingers came back down on the keys with a little more force than necessary. Kelsey noticed.

"Something wrong?" She asked, leaning over the table to look at him. Seto looked up at her and smirked.

"No, I just thought I knew him for a minute." The brunette across from him smiled, relaxing back into her seat and looking out the window of the café. Blue eyes watched her carefully.

"It's lovely when it rains," she said very quietly. Seto's lips quirked again, and Kelsey smiled.

Drop That Chao!!

The Sonic cast gets a little possessive when it comes to what belongs to them...

Shadow continued to glare at the perpetrator standing before him, hackles on end. His crimson eyes were narrowed to slits, and the poor fox that stood in front of him was ready to faint. Finally moving, he crossed his arms.

"What are you doing here, Prower?" He questioned coldly, gesturing to the barren landscape around him with a slight shrug of his shoulders. A crow cawed in the distance, and Tails shivered. The place that they were standing in could only be described as a graveyard, and he didn't like it one bit.

Tails looked Shadow in the eye, raising his chin in defiance.

"Nothing... I, err, lost something and I thought it might be down here."

"In my Graveyard."

"Um...yes?"

The dark-looking one raised an eyebrow. "And what, pray tell, have you lost?"

Tails gulped under the scrutiny of those dark-red eyes. It was hard to lie when you were scared out of your wits. Shadow was a very intimidating being.

"A fusion bar for the Cyclone," he finally said with a shrug of his shoulders. The one facing him didn't look very convinced. Attempting to regain himself, he shrugged again. "I usually carry a spare one with me, to work on, but I must have misplaced it." Turning, he began walking away. "But, I guess it isn't down here...so I must be going..."

"Drop it, Prower."

Tails froze, and then let out a nervous laugh. Turning his head, he glanced at Shadow, noting the look of anger in his eyes. He was sure that the other would not hesitate to take what he wanted by force.

But he wasn't about to give all he had done up so easily.

"Heheheh...I'm not holding anything Shadow..." he lied through his teeth.

"Bull," he said, gritting his teeth. He could only take so much of the annoying fox. "Give. It. Back," he growled.

Then Tails did something totally unexpected. Shadow's eyes widened as the fuzz ball broke out into a full sprint towards the exit. It took him a moment to register what was going on, but when he did, he was furious.

"FOX!" He roared. "DROP THAT CHAO!!"

...

'Run like hell, run like hell, run like hell, RUN LIKE HELL!!' Tails chanted to himself, knowing that the black and red hedgehog behind him was bound to catch up soon. The little Chao in his arms cooed in excitement, and the fox glanced down with a smile.

His search and rescue mission would have been a success, had Shadow not shown up. Pipsqueak, his Chao, had gone missing from the Garden a few days ago, and Tails had an idea of who was responsible for it. With Rouge confirming his suspicions when she said a little blue Chao had shown up in the Graveyard, Tails knew he had to take action.

So he had. However, he hadn't planned on Shadow wanting his little Pipsqueak so badly.

And now he was running for what was probably his life. Twisting around the stairway, he finally made it to the Garden lobby. He heard another roar of rage behind him, considerably closer. Racking his brain, he remembered that Sonic was in the Shrine.

Racing around the transporter pad in the middle of the room and past the Garden, he got to the second stairway, only this one led up. Looking out the corner of his eye, he saw that Shadow had made it up the stairs in record time and was now sprinting across the room. With a yelp, Tails ran even faster, his two tails beginning to propel him forward.

All the while, the little blue thing in his arms cooed away, clapping its little hands together in glee.

Finally Tails reached the doorway to the shrine, twitching one of his tails away as Shadow made a grab for it. He leapt through, and bright sunshine spilled over him and his burden. A few meters ahead he saw his best friend leaning over a Chao that was reaching for a Chaos Drive.

"Sonic!!" He cried, racing towards his friend. The blue hedgehog looked up in surprise, then his eyes widened as Shadow leapt through the door after Tails.

"Tails, what the-?"

"HELP ME!! HE'S GONNA KILL ME!!" cried Tails as he flung himself at Sonic's feet. The little thing in his arms was sent flying forwards, and landed with a little thud next to the one that Sonic had just been attending to. With a little snuffle, it began crying.

Shadow growled as he stalked up to the pair. Tails scrambled behind his best friend and peeked around him while Sonic crossed his arms unhappily.

"What in Chaos' name is going on here?" he demanded, looking from Shadow to Tails, then back to Shadow. The darker hedgehog pointed accusingly at Tails.

"Your damn fox stole my Chao, that's what! I demand that you return it AT ONCE," he said, shouting even louder at the end. Sonic winced. Looking at Tails, he raised an eyebrow.

"Is that true?" Inwardly, he shook his head. He felt like a mother scolding her children. Her very *pissed* children. Tails bristled.

"NO! He stole Pipsqueak first!"

"Pipsqueak?! WHAT THE HELL OF A KIND OF NAME IS **PIPSQUEAK**?! It's Emmet, you inane little weasel!"

"I'm a fox, damn it! NOT A WEASEL!"

"ENOUGH!" Sonic finally cried, hands over his sensitive ears. "Both of you, pick one quality that you know your Chao has, then we'll see who's it really is." He cursed, feeling the need for an aspirin. Tails pouted and Shadow smirked.

"Fine," the darker one said. "Emmet has a scar on the back of his head from when he fell."

"And Pipsqueak has a purple mark on his left foot," Tails said, frowning at the red and black hedgehog. Sonic nodded, then went over and proceeded to check over the Chao in question.

"Well that's odd," he said more to himself than the other two. They lurched forward to see what was going on. Sonic turned to them and held up the now smiling Chao. "It doesn't have either of those marks on it..."

“What the hell do you three think you’re doing?” A new voice demanded from the door. All of them turned to see Knuckles standing there, cracking his huge fists in anger. His almond eyes were narrowed, and he stalked towards them. Sonic and Tails gulped while Shadow continued his blank stare.

“Well, well, well. It seems we have quite a predicament, wouldn’t you say?” Asked a fifth voice. Everyone looked up to see Rouge perched on one of the Shrine’s columns. Sonic narrowed his eyes, running a hand over his forehead in an attempt to drive away the onslaught of the headache.

“Can someone PLEASE tell me what’s going on here?” he asked. Rouge laughed, her feminine voice slicing through the air.

“I suppose I should say something, since I’m the only one that knows how this all happened,” she sighed as thought the idea of telling a story pained her a great deal.

“It started out a few days ago. *Someone* took Tail’s Chao- Pipsqueak was it?- and put it in the day care so it looked like he had gone missing. Then they put Knuckles’ little Chao, Echie, in the Graveyard, so it looked like someone had stolen Pipsqueak, since the two look alike.”

“So where’s Emmet?” Shadow demanded quickly, interrupting the story. Rouge sighed.

“Oh, Emmet’s safe and sound in the Garden, but back to the story. With the knowledge that the three of you would break into a fight about who belonged to whom, that *someone* is now clearly taking advantage of the situation.” Rouge finally finished, looking content.

“And just who is this ‘someone’?” Sonic questioned.

“Eggman,” the bat answered calmly. Shadow’s eyes narrowed.

“And just what is he doing when you say ‘Taking advantage of the situation’?” he demanded. Rouge stifled a laugh behind her gloved hand.

“Oh, he’s off raiding all of your Chaos Emerald stashes.” She tossed a bag in the air as everyone’s eyes widened. “Luckily I got mine before he could...take it. Well, there they go.” She sighed to herself as everyone raced out of the Shrine. Shaking her head, she plopped down and proceeded to pick up Echie. Might as well put everyone back where they belonged.

She suddenly laughed aloud, making Echie gurgle in her arms.

“Some people around here are just too easy to stir up,” she said to it. It cooed something back, making her smile. Then, with the little blue thing in her arms, she strolled out of the Shrine, wondering how long it would be until she found something this entertaining ever again.

{-Owari-}

Plunk...Plunk...Plunk...

She was *bored*.

Plunk...

People could pretty much tell by know. Her arms were spread eagle over her desk, and she looked like she was going to ooze off any minute now. Not to mention her beating her head against her desk for the past ten minutes was getting on more than a few people's nerves.

Plunk...Plunk...THWAK!

"Ow!" Rearing back, Jodi glowered up at her teacher and rubbed the back of her head tenderly. Ignoring the twitching vein in the instructor's forehead, she squeezed her eyes shut as her hand passed over a little bump.

"Jeez teach, what was that for?" She whined. The elder's eye twitched, but she held onto her weapon steadfast as her student continued to rub the back of her head.

"As much as your self-inflicted abuse is amusing us," she paused and glared at the few students who were trying not to laugh. "I would like to continue my lesson." Snapping the yardstick on the desk warningly, she turned back to the overhead and began talking again. Jodi rolled her eyes, but sat back in her chair.

Glancing at the clock, she was horrified to see the hand tick backwards. The teen groaned, throwing an arm over her eyes dramatically and leaning forward on the desk. Once again the other occupants of the classroom turned to look at her.

"Oh, c'mon!" Removing her arm, blue eyes sought out her overly annoyed instructor's beseechingly. "It's Friday, eighth period, and there's fifteen...Ah!" Scrambling to sit up straight in her chair, Jodi pointed radically at the clock. "It just moved backwards!"

Rolling her eyes, the teacher allowed herself some small amusement, and cracked her student on the head again. The teen hissed, clutching her throbbing skull, and glared at the smirking teacher. Stupid yardstick of doom was going to go missing soon if this kept up...

"I think I'm bleeding," Jodi announced loudly, bringing her hand up to examine for any signs of red. "Does anyone see blood?" Around her, students snickered, and her friend tried to hide her laugh by sticking her nose in a book.

Clearing her throat, the teacher turned back once more to the overhead. In her seat, Jodi muttered about evil teachers and stupid clocks that didn't work. *Man* was she bored. Passing notes was out- the teacher's overly elaborate hairstyle would intercept it again most likely. Doodling was out- her pencil was halfway across the room after an attempt at getting her giggling friend to be quiet. Hmmm...Origami? No, she couldn't fold a paper in half.

Sighing, her head drooped down to the flat surface of the desk dejectedly. Her arms hung off either side of the small table limply, and for a moment, Jodi imagined herself oozing off the desk and out the door. Smiling a little at that, her daydream was killed when the teacher scooped her up in a jar and replaced her on the desk. Rats.

The Shivers

The snowy city of Flanoir lay sparkling in the mid-afternoon sun. Snow fell gently around the icy city, making it very beautiful.

And to Genis, very, very cold.

The half-elf walked along, teeth chattering, as they neared about a half a mile of the radiant gates with the rest of his comrades. Even though he was decked out in a heavy coat and heavy breeches, he was still freezing. Grumbling, he pulled his hat down further over his head and wrapped his arms around himself. Everyone else looked at him skeptically, wearing only light jackets and gloves. Genis glared at them and curled around himself further.

Presea sidled up to him as they walked, making Genis blush at her company. He prayed she couldn't tell. Presea was the only one that wasn't wearing a jacket, and she looked at him curiously as he shivered.

"Why are you shaking, Genis?" She asked him. The albino blinked, surprised.

"Why are you not? Aren't you cold?" He questioned, genuinely curious. Presea shrugged, her pigtailed bobbing slightly from the movement.

"No, not really. Why? Is that why you're shaking?" She looked at him, making him blush again.

"Yeah. When you get really cold, you...shiver," he tried explaining. Presea took this in, pondering it for a moment.

"Genis has The Shivers..." she said to herself, making the albino laugh. She turned to him, looking slightly offended. "What?" Genis chuckled once before answering.

"Nothing, just the way you said it," he let out a little giggle before smiling at Presea. "Yes, I suppose I do have The Shivers," he assured her.

Looking proud of herself, Presea turned around, and walked in silence next to him for a moment. Finally, she turned back and spoke.

"How does one cure these 'Shivers'?" She asked him. Genis shrugged.

"Well..." he searched for an explanation. "I would have to get warmer," he finally said. "I would have to get out of the cold." Presea nodded, going over it in her head. They walked in silence for a few more moments until Genis was suddenly tackled.

"Wha- AHHH!!" He gasped as he fell face-first in the snow. Something landed on top of him, and he heard a giggle. Pink hair entered his vision as Presea nuzzled him. Genis's face went scarlet and he rolled over, causing Presea to sit on his stomach. She smiled at him. "Presea, what are you doing?!" He demanded, still red in the face. Presea hugged him.

"I'm making you warmer, silly!" She giggled again, finding this very funny. The others laughed, stopping to watch the scene. Genis's face went an even darker shade, and he struggled to get up.

"Well I didn't mean to get warmer like THAT!" He told her. It was her turn to shrug.

"But it worked, didn't it?" She asked, watching him struggle under her.

"Well, yes but-" Presea smiled again, pleased.

"Then shouldn't you be happy that you aren't cold anymore?" Genis sighed.

“I guess...” Presea smiled and leaned down, kissing his cheek and making him blush to his roots.

“So you shouldn’t complain anymore, about being shivery. Otherwise I might have to warm you up again.” She told him. Poking his *very* warm face with an icy finger. Giggling, she got up. Genis groaned as he picked himself up.

“That was a mean trick,” he stated. Presea giggled again.

“Yes, but there’s a 99.9% chance that you enjoyed it.” She said smugly. Genis growled, blushing for the millionth time in five minutes. Raine cleared her throat.

“Okay you two! Stop flirting so we can get to Flanoir!” Genis gaped as Lloyd laughed. The red-clad boy stopped abruptly when he felt a snowball smack into the back of his head. Growling, he whirled to find Genis whistling innocently.

Thus, the snowball war had begun.

oOo

Regal sneezed, curling up further under the blanket. Across from him, Sheena was pulling more of her blanket to her, causing Zelos to cry out in protest. Lloyd was still laughing, cuddled next to Colette, who was blushing from the contact. Genis and Presea sat closest to the fire, the albino shaking uncontrollably. Raine sneezed, then sniffed.

“Let this be a lesson! We should-“ she sneezed again. “-Learn to stay on task!” Lloyd chuckled.

“Oh come on, Professor! Let us have some fun once and a while!” He ducked a swing from the half-elf, laughing.

Across the room, close to the fire, Presea cuddled next to a quaking Genis.

“Oh Genis! You have The Shivers again!” Genis groaned in frustration as he was tackled once again by a determined axe-wielder.

Tollbooth Romance

“That’ll be a dollar seventy-five!”

Aoshi looked up from where he was counting the amount of change at the chipper voice. The normally bland-sounding woman who had been there was gone, replaced by a younger-looking woman with big green eyes and a black braid going past her waist.

The stony man blinked.

‘What-‘

“Um...sir?” the girl asked. Aoshi blinked again before reaching over to hand her the money. Their hands brushed for a moment as she accepted it, and she blushed, pulling back fast.

“You’re new.” It was more of a statement than a question. The girl blinked as she put the money in the register, hand poised over the release button for the gate. She raised an eyebrow and pulled her hand back, instead scratching the top of her head curiously.

“Oh, you mean...ah, yeah Sam was transferred,” she explained wryly. “I’m just taking over for her since I just started working.” She suddenly grinned. “You must be a man of habit,” the green-eyed girl teased. The man in the car held from rolling his eyes.

“And you must love your job to be so energetic.” The longhaired girl pouted and rested her hands on her hips indignantly. Aoshi frowned at the numbers displayed in neon green on the car’s dashboard before looking back at the girl exasperatedly. “Look, lady-“

“Misao.” The black-haired man blinked dumbly as she spoke. The weasel-girl smiled, taking her hands off her hips and resting them on the window, her whole demeanor changing in the blink of an eye. “The name’s Misao Makimachi, not ‘Lady’!” She informed him, bright eyes twinkling despite the setting sun. Aoshi smirked, leaning his head back to look at her more closely.

“Misao,” he corrected, noticing that the name fit her quite well. “Do you think you could let me go now?” Aoshi nodded to the yellow gate that blared **CAUTION** in big black letters. Misao looked at the barricade quizzically for a moment before it clicked. Her eyes widened, becoming even larger.

“Ah! Oh, yes...” she trailed off, pressing the button down firmly and watching the gate rise while glancing at the car’s occupant. “Here.”

Aoshi smirked. “Thanks,” was all he said as the petite Misao nodded silently. Then, he was gone, driving down the ramp. The young girl sighed, following his car with her eyes, and leaned heavily against the glass window, giving a cold glance at the clock next to her register.

“Great, two more hours of nothing but sappy smiles and thinking of some hot stranger I’ll never see again,” she snarled to herself. The next car pulled up to reveal an older woman wearing too much make-up.

Slapping on another cheesy smile, Misao sighed wearily.

Black hair. Ice blue eyes.

”That’ll be a dollar seventy-five!”

Aoshi sighed as he ran a hand through his still-wet, black hair tiredly. Somehow he couldn’t get the image of bright-green eyes out of his head. Chewing absently on his salad, he looked out the window of his shared apartment in thought.

“What’s got you, Shinomori?” His roommate, Kenshin Himura, inquired, flicking a strand of flaming red hair away from gold-flecked violet eyes. The other man turned from the window to look at his food blandly, frowning a little.

“Nothing Battousai,” he replied shortly, closing his eyes. Kenshin rolled his eyes, but waited for Aoshi to continue as he always did. The black haired man didn’t break his habit, instead continuing after a long silence while he sipped his tea.

“Some girl today,” he supplied. His red-haired roommate raised an eyebrow, smirking.

“A girl, huh?” He teased the taller man lightly. Aoshi just rolled his eyes at the other before taking another sip of his tea. The silence ensued a bit longer, and Kenshin slurped the last of his instant ramen, waiting once more.

Aoshi looked back out the window as he chewed his food thoughtfully. “Her eyes…” he began, but stopped himself. “She’s different than the rest,” he mused out loud. Kenshin raised an eyebrow, but the black-haired man shook his head, stabbing at his green salad and frowning a little more. The green only reminded him of her.

The name’s Misao Makimachi, not ‘Lady’!

If she worked the nightshift every weekend then...

“Hey,” Kenshin interrupted his musings, pointing with his spork at Aoshi’s now-neglected plate. “You gonna finish that?” He asked, raising an eyebrow.

Aoshi just shoved the plate over to him distastefully. Suddenly he was no longer in the mood for salad. Grabbing his teacup, he headed into the living room to watch the news and get some work done.

“Kaoru-chan!!”

The blue-eyed woman turned from walking into the employee lounge at the sound of her name being called.

“Misao-chan!! How are you?” She asked as her friend and employee dashed after her into the building and out of the rain. Kaoru took her usual seat at the table, munching on a packet of crackers hungrily.

The shorter girl plopped down soon after, first hanging up her dripping jacket and leaning her umbrella against the wall. She panted, wringing out her braid, having ran from her car.

“Sick and tired of the rain, that’s how,” Misao ground out, shaking her head a little to get the excess moisture out of her hair. Her friend smiled amiably.

“Yeah, but it’s April in the Big Apple, so what did you expect?” Kaoru shrugged. The green-eyed girl frowned, glowering at a coffee stain on the table.

“This is coming from someone who **never** tires of the rain, too,” she grouched. Setting down her purse and keys, she looked a little more serious as she looked at her boss professionally. “Hey, Kaoru, I have a favor to ask of you,” she started.

Kaoru nodded, folding her hands in front of her and taking on a business-like manner. “Sure, what do you need?” the blue-eyed girl replied. Misao sighed, rubbing her arm a little and looking a bit pleading.

“My cousin’s coming in from Japan on Tuesday,” she explained, motioning with her hands in front of her to prove the seriousness. “I promised Jiya I’d be there when they went to pick her up, but I’ll need to take off for a few hours.” Kaoru nodded, listening and telling her friend to go on.

“It’ll only be about two hours,” Misao amended finally, her braid twitching as she flicked some hair out of her face. “I figured you could have someone take over for me since it’s closer to the end of my shift anyway,” she told her friend. Kaoru smiled, leaning back as she folded her hands behind her head.

“Yeah, that’s fine. I’ll have Tsubame take over for you,” she assured her friend. Misao sighed gratefully.

“Thanks a lot, Kaoru-chan,” she breathed, relieved. The braided girl sipped her coffee a little, spacing out. Kaoru looked at her friend closely.

“What’s on your mind Misao-chan?” She questioned the other curiously. Misao sighed a little, pulling herself out of her daze wearily.

“Some guy at my booth yesterday,” she told her friend/boss in an explaining tone. “He had black hair, and blue eyes, and he was soooo hot!” The green-eyed girl whined while Kaoru smiled wryly.

“Aw, Misao-chan’s found a boyfriend!!” She squealed a little, making the other snort indignantly, then laughed. “Too bad you’ll probably never see him again,” the blue-eyed girl warned. Misao sighed and slumped against the table.

“I know, I know!!” the younger girl griped sadly, smacking Kaoru gently on the arm. “You don’t need to remind me!” The black-haired girl across from the pouting weasel smiled a little.

Silence stretched comfortably between the two as they listened to the sound of the rain pattering against the roof. Misao leaned her head on the table, picking at a slight chip in the cheap paint, and looked out the window at the water running in rivulets down the glass.

She wished more than anything that she would get to see that man again. He was...different. Like a refreshing drink of cold water compared to the desert of the usual men that caught her interest.

“Misao-chan?” Kaoru’s lilting voice carried over into her random musings and Misao looked at her friend, snapping out of the daze that she seemed to slip into so often now.

“Ah, yea, Kaoru-chan?” She replied, glancing at her friend who was motioning to the clock.

“Your shift started fifteen minutes ago.”

Misao’s emerald eyes widened, and she looked at the clock in confirmation. Cursing at the time, she grabbed her jacket and slipped it on hurriedly as she took one last sip of her coffee. Throwing the cup away, she gave her friend a smile as she yanked open the door.

Cold air and a little rain poured in as the genki girl waved over her shoulder. “Thanks again Kaoru-chan!!” Then she dashed out, slamming the metal door shut behind her. Kaoru smiled and looked at the time again. Fifteen minutes and thirty seconds late.

“Boy, that weasel can get around,” she said to no one in particular as she reached into the box that rested on the table. Grasping at air, she clawed the box over to her almost frantically and peered into its empty contents.

“MISAO!!” the blue-eyed girl shrieked in anger and dismay. She could just picture the little weasel now, all cocky and grinning as she sank her sneaky teeth into the last chocolate Danish.

“Hey! It’s you!”

Aoshi looked up once again from counting a dollar seventy-five, (he’d really have to start counting it out beforehand to save time,) to see vibrant green eyes looking at him curiously. The woman was leaning out the window and looking at him closely, searching for some reason he’d be here.

‘Huh,’ the older man thought to himself as he returned her stare with icy-blue eyes. ‘So she **does** work here every night...’

“Hey, what are you doing here again?” The girl- Misao, he corrected- had gone from silent questioning to ask him straight out. He watched her carefully, gauging her reaction as he raised an eyebrow at her curiously. She smelled like a chocolate Danish.

He smirked. She frowned.

“What?” The shorter girl snapped at him, looking offended. Aoshi chuckled a little at her.

“If I had known that you were new, don’t you think I would come through here on a regular basis?” The blue-eyed man countered skillfully. Misao frowned a little more, opening her mouth to reply, then closing it again in agitation of him outsmarting her.

Finally, she smiled at him, revealing white teeth.

“Touché.”

Aoshi’s lips quirked in the hint of a smile, but not a full one. He leaned against the rolled-down window of his door leisurely as he put the car in neutral. “I go through the same tollbooth at the same time everyday on my way home from work,” he informed her, chuckling when she muttered something under her breath.

“Habitual man...”

Aoshi smirked at her, continuing. “So, you must work weeknights?” he questioned, gauging her reaction again and reaching out to hand the girl the amount of money he owed. Misao rolled her eyes and nodded, accepting the change.

A few drivers behind the tall man honked impatiently, but both people ignored them grandly, instead focusing on each other.

“Every. Night.” The braided girl ground out between clenched teeth. Aoshi nodded and put the car back in gear, and Misao grudgingly pressed the ‘Release’ button for the gate, missing the refreshment that was her un-named man. It was nice to see him again, but...

“Have a nice night, then,” she said with a little sigh, closing her eyes. Aoshi raised an eyebrow again and replied quietly.

“Goodnight, Misao.”

Then he was gone again, driving down the ramp once more and leaving her with only the hint of a smile on his lips and the sound of his deep voice echoing around in her mind.

Rain. Rain was a glorious thing, but to Misao Makimachi, it seemed that the rain was always coming at the worst moment. Why did it have to be so rainy and cold here all the time?

The normally-genki girl sighed dejectedly and leaned her head against the glass windowpane, her breath misting the glass.

Today, of all days, when her cousin was coming in from Japan for the first time in three years, her car just **had** to break down. Yep, see that junky little piece of crap sitting in the parking lot, still smoking? Well, that was her car. Although it hadn't been smoking earlier. She **might** have had something to do with that...

“Misao! Kicking the car wont make it any better!!” Kaoru had scolded, but Misao paid her no mind, running towards the car again instead.

“Makes me feel better!” the green-eyed girl had replied, dealing the car another Kecho Giri Kick. Finally Kaoru had just rolled her eyes and left to go get some coffee.

“Life bites,” the braided girl grouched, glumly opening the register to deposit the woman's- who again was wearing too much make-up- seven quarters. With another tired sigh, she opened the gate and watched as she drove away.

Mentally groaning, the green-eyed girl slapped on a fake smile and repeated the mantra she was forced to learn when she accepted the part-time job.

“Hi, that'll be...Hey!” She perked up instantly at the sight of the tall, blue-eyed stranger. Smiling widely, she leaned out the window to look at him as she always did. Aoshi gave her his usual smirk, and she wondered vaguely what his smile would look like.

“Hey,” he replied, handing her the money already. She accepted it and put it in the register, but didn't open the gate. Aoshi raised an eyebrow at her. “Planning on keeping me trapped here?” He asked, making Misao blink then blush.

“Ah...not quite.” Leaning out the window more, she gave him a big smile. “Where 'ya headed?” The shorter girl asked, eyes twinkling. It was Aoshi's turn to blink, and he looked at her blankly.

“Err...Manhattan?” He supplied, a little warily. Misao grinned cheekily.

“Sounds great!” She paused, having the decency to look a bit sheepish as another girl with big, brown eyes appeared behind her. “You think you could give me a ride?” The green-eyed girl asked a bit pleadingly.

When Aoshi kept staring at her blankly, she quickly defended herself. “Ya’ see, not many cabs come through here, and my car broke down...” Misao grinned a little as she motioned to the smoking mass in the parking lot sheepishly. Aoshi’s brow rose halfway up his forehead, but he nodded slowly, putting the car in neutral so she could get it.

The girl all but leapt out of the small booth with a squeal of thanks and bounced over to the passenger door while Tsubame blushed a little as she took a seat at the stool, replacing her friend. Putting the car in drive, the blue-eyed man drove away from the booth to get out of the way.

With a request to get her belongings, Aoshi pulled into the employee parking lot and waited for Misao to come back. When she opened the door to get back in, drenched in rainwater, the black-haired man stopped her.

“Are you sure you want me to drive you?” He asked curiously. When Misao just raised an eyebrow, he explained. “I mean, wouldn’t you like one of your friends to drive you home? You don’t even know my name.” The tall man continued, interested as to what her answer would be about him.

She just smiled again, however, and planted her hands on her hips, shaking some rainwater off of her head as she plopped down in the seat and closed the door.

“Course I am!” she chirped, despite the fact that she was practically dripping water like a dog out of a pond. “Besides, none of my friends that get off around this time live in Manhattan,” she explained. “And you...well, I figure you’re a nice enough guy.” She grinned, shrugging her shoulders as Aoshi held his blank look.

Misao tried to blow some hair out of her face, only to have it swoop down and slap her in the nose again. Growling, she ran a hand through her hair, getting excess water out, and brushing the limp hair behind her ear. Smiling in success, she grinned at the driver, who couldn’t help but think she was a bit...cute.

Aoshi started the car again and put it in drive, reaching behind him to buckle his seatbelt. As Misao reached to do the same, she spoke up.

“So, you, where-“ she started then stopped, pausing in buckling her seatbelt as Aoshi interrupted her.

“Aoshi.” He said, turning to smirk at her again and gaining back his cocky attitude. “The name’s Aoshi Shinomori, not ‘You’,” he teased, throwing her words back at her. Misao

grinned good-naturedly, buckling her seatbelt then reaching over to shake the taller man's hand.

"Well, Mr. Shinomori, it's very nice to meet you," the black-haired girl laughed, and Aoshi quickly came to like the sound. Sitting back, she released a relieved sigh and glanced at him from the corners of half-lidded eyes as he pulled out of the parking lot and onto the ramp.

"By the way, thanks for this. I was worried I would be too late to pick up my cousin," she told him quietly, relaxing against the plush seats. Aoshi glanced at her before returning his attention to the road.

"It's not a problem," the blue-eyed man started, but paused in thought. Looking at her again, he narrowed his eyes in seriousness. "Unless you live deep into the city," he warned her. Misao laughed again, eyes twinkling in the headlights of other cars.

"Why? Gonna leave me stranded in the middle of the city, Aoshi?" She asked teasingly. Aoshi just gave her another look, and she laughed again, raising her hands in defense and shaking her head animatedly. "No, no, I don't. I stay at the Aoi-ya," she told him.

When the black-haired man just looked blankly at the road, she blinked.

"What, you haven't heard of the Aoi-ya?!" the raven-haired weasel blinked incredulously. Aoshi just shook his head, and Misao mock-gasped, going into 'advertising mode' as Shiro liked to call it.

"Well, it's only the best Japanese restaurant in Manhattan!!" She elaborated; leaving out that it was probably the **only** Japanese restaurant in Manhattan. "It's right on the edge of town, a few blocks away from the university, and it has the best food ever!" She smiled a little, thinking about nice, warm miso soup on a day like today.

"And you stay there?" The man's voice started her out of her hungry musings before she nodded.

"It also has boarding, and I stay there for free as long as I work weekends." The genki-girl smiled cheekily again, and Aoshi's lips quirked into that almost-smile. "It gives me a place to stay, free of rent might I add, and extra jobs help pay for college!"

The other had to admit, it was a clever plan. Sighing, he asked, "Do they serve tea there?" Tea was something no Aoshi could live without- it was his life stream. Turning to pull onto the bridge, the blue-eyed man watched as Misao grinned, putting on her best advertising façade.

"The best tea in all of America! And some parts of Japan," she added, looking smug. Aoshi looked stony as ever, but he smirked a little.

“Hm.”

“So where do **you** live? It’s only fair you tell me, since I told you,” the shorter girl questioned, fidgeting in her seat so she could look at him and pointing an accusing finger at him. She prodded his shoulder a little when he didn’t answer right away.

The man smirked a little more, and Misao wondered once more what his smile would look like.

“The apartment complex near the university,” he finally spoke. “I room there with my friend, Batto- er, Kenshin Himura,” the blue-eyed man explained in his quiet yet commanding voice. They were approaching the city limits, and Misao just nodded.

They sat together in a comfortable silence after that, neither one of them wanting to break the quiet that had settled. Both simply sat, enjoying the presence of the other, only interrupted when Aoshi asked the shorter for a quick direction.

Too soon, they saw the lit-up Kanji of the Aoi-ya flashing into the semi-darkness. Misao started gathering her things, a smile forming on her face as she unbuckled and turned to thank the other once more.

She never got the chance though, because as soon as she met his ice-blue eyes with her bright-emerald ones, he was leaning forward and pressing his mouth against hers in a gentle kiss.

Surprised, she started to pull away, but as soon as she felt his large hand on the small of her back she relaxed and melted into the kiss. It was a clean, closed lips kiss, but both Aoshi and Misao found they were enjoying it immensely.

And then, once again too soon, it was over, and Misao had stepped out onto the curb with a little urging from the blue-eyed man. She clutched her umbrella nervously, waiting for a reaction from the other.

“So...I’ll see you tomorrow?” The braided girl asked, hopefully, desperately. Anxiousness and happiness from the kiss laced her voice, making it foggy, but her green eyes sparked like an emerald fire. It was clear and burning.

Aoshi smiled, and Misao found herself smiling back.

“Yeah.” He replied, watching as his little weasel smiled wider and jumped up. “See you tomorrow.”

~Owari

Untitled

Sheena takes the betrayal of Zelos Wilder the hardest of them all.

I stood stock-still, eyes open side in shock as that single man walked across the space between our two sides. Yggdrasill grinned, showing white teeth, as that idiot came to a stop before him, then turned.

That red hair that I had come to love swayed with motion in the turn, and blue eyes came to rest on our side with a glitter or betrayal. Other members of our small band were gaping such as I, but I didn't register them. All that mattered to me was the man standing before us on the destroyed platform.

Zelos Wilder.

He was saying something, but I wasn't listening. All I could think of was *why*? Why would he betray us for those...those...My mind didn't come up with an insult, still numbed by the situation. Then, suddenly, I heard what he was saying perfectly- crystal clear.

"You should all know by now that I would only side with the strongest. What benefits are there to being on the disadvantaged side?" He smirked, his expression cold. He swept his gaze over us, finally landing on me. For a moment, I swore that he faltered and that his eyes softened, but it lasted only for a second. He looked away and spoke again.

"Fools. You should have payed more attention to me, but no. No one ever listened to that 'Idiot Chosen'." He sneered. My mouth went dry, and I looked down.

"It's true...we should have listened to what he was saying..." I whispered. My eyes brimmed with tears, and I suddenly found my voice. "You... You bastard!!" I yelled. Everyone looked at me in confusion, but I went on. "How could you?! You got everyone of us to trust you," I paused, taking a breath. I faintly felt something warm running down my cheeks. "Including me!!" Zelos continued to avoid my eye.

Professor Raine looked at me sadly. "Oh Sheena..." She whispered. I submitted to the tears now, letting them fall freely. Lloyd was apparently inspired, and began yelling as well. Presea gave me a sad look, her usually vacant eyes filled with sadness.

Just like mine.

Yggdrasill said something, and then Colette, Zelos, and himself were gone, teleported out of the room, I thought vaguely. Pronyma was there now, talking about something or other. My blood began to boil, and I was thankful that there was a fight nearing.

Just as I assumed, our group rushed into an attack. Lloyd, Presea, and I fell into step, charging forward. Raine and Genis were already casting behind us, and Regal fell back and began a short protection spell for himself.

The rest of us ran blindly on, and I felt myself pull ahead. Heated rage fueled my blood as I swept in, swiping blindly with spells. My mind was a haze of rage and sorrow, and before I knew it, the battle was over.

Walking away from the scene, I followed the hurried group onto the teleport rune, and we were transported to Derris Kharlan. The place made me shudder, giving off vibes of soul-less people and death. I allowed my thoughts to wander to take my mind off of the horrible surroundings.

However, there was only one place that my mind wandered to. And that was the man that had so easily deceived us, tricking us into letting him into our group.

Zelos...how could you?

:Flashback:

I smiled as we flew over Tethe'alla, taking in the scenery, but my eyes were sad and longing. As I piloted my Rheaird, I let my mind wander. Zelos pulled forward from his position, stopping when he neared me.

I looked over at him.

"What do you want?" I asked a bit tartly. He waved his hands and grins at me, then hastily resumed piloting his machine.

"I was wondering...what are you so down about?" he asked me. A little surprised, I turned from him to look back at the land.

"My tribe...and Tethe'alla..." looking at him again, I saw confusion.

"You mean, whether or not you're going to remain here after we save the worlds?" I nodded. He gave me a small smile. "Sheena, you don't have to worry about where you have to stay." I glared lightly.

"What do you know? All your life, you've been pampered and taken care of because you are The Chosen!" I said this a littler harsher than I meant, but it was too late to take it back. Zelos's eyes cloud over a little.

"I know..." Looking back at me, he smiles again though, and something inside me tears as I realize he took it so well.

"Zelos, I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way..." He shrugs.

"It's the ugly truth. No need in hiding it." I take this in quietly, and try to maintain steering. He speaks again.

"What I meant before was, you don't have to worry about where you're staying. I know that you're worried about the king, but I'll settle things with him. Don't worry. I'll take care of you."

I smiled at him genuinely, feeling my eyes mist over.

"Zelos...Thank you..."

:End Flashback:

Something warm and wet slid down my cheek, and I vaguely registered the fact that I was crying. Thankfully, no one had seen.

We continued down a long, twisting ramp. It seemed to go on forever. Now that I looked around, gigantic roots covered everything. One particularly enormous root hung down in the middle. I looked at it for a moment before finally seeing the bottom.

As Presea took her last step from the ramp onto the ground, the room rumbled. I saw the huge root trembling, before it lashed out a Lloyd, who had taken the first step onto the bridge crossing a large chasm.

Letting out a cry, the red-clad man jumped back just in time. The root continued to tremble, waving other roots around like long tentacles. As I watched it, a sudden idea filled my head. Transfixed, I went over it, and despite the gruesome ending, liked it.

"Lloyd," I yelled in his direction. He looked up from where he had been attempting to cut a root. Everyone looked at me as though I had sprouted another head, probably because this was the first time I had spoken since *his* betrayal. I ignored them.

“When I give the signal, run. Okay?” He opened his mouth, no doubt to protest, but I had already begun chanting.

“Mother Earth, Creature of the Dark Abyss, Spirit of Ice, and King of Godly Thunder! Grant me your strength, so that I may disperse the shadows of evil!” The summon spirits I called upon appeared before me, giving me their powerful mana.

Everyone was staring at me. Raine looked livid.

“What are you doing?!!” She roared at me. I smiled bitterly.

“My version of the mana cannon. Now quick, go—” that was all I got out when the huge amount of mana erupted from me, too powerful from me to contain. It shot out of my body, into the huge root.

“RUN!” I screamed at them. They did, scrambling underneath it until they got across. The root fell then, crumbling from the roots that held it up. It smashed through the bridge, shattering it, and I was left gazing across the chasm. Once the flow cut off, I slumped, and slid to the ground.

“Sheena!!” Lloyd called from the other side. I could see everyone watching me worriedly. I grinned in spite of my current condition.

“Don’t worry about me!” I called across. “I’ll be fine, I just used a lot of mana.” The first was a complete lie, and I knew it. “I’ll catch up to you. Just let me rest a moment—”

A root shot up from the pit just then, seizing me around the ankle. I let out a cry as it pulled me, but managed to get a good grasp on the rim of the chasm. Panting, I gave Lloyd a thumbs up sign.

“Just go! I’ll catch up! You need to save Colette!” His eyebrows furrowed, but he gave a curt nod, rushing off. Everyone followed, casting worried glances in my direction. Genis was crying a little. Poor kid.

Sighing, I winced as the root tugged harder. “Damn. I really should let myself be rescued once and a while...” Smiling a little, I felt tears slide out of my eyes.

“Guys...thanks so much for everything you’ve done. I hope,” I closed my eyes. “I hope that you guys will save the world. I only wish...I would be there to witness it...”

I let go of the ledge...

And fell.

‘Zelos...You were wrong. You lied. You wouldn’t always take care of me...

But I still love you.’

Waking up in someone’s arms is an odd feeling. I opened my eyes groggily, blinking away the fuzzy corners of my vision. It took me a minute to actually find out that someone was holding me, but when I did, I struggled and fell to the ground. Landing on my back with a thud, I looked up.

Blue eyes and red hair met my eyes, and I saw that gorgeous face once again. Pretty.

If this was heaven, it sure was nice.

“Am I dead?” I asked the pretty red-head before me. My voice came out as a croak, but I think he understood it. He chuckled.

“No.”

If that didn't wake me up, I don't know what would. I shot up, narrowly missing the man's chin. My memory surged, and I clutched my head to register what was happening.

I shot the mana...falling...there was a lot of falling...

Looking up and seeing the man again, I noticed his garments and figured out who he was. I gasped, shoving him back and standing in anger.

"What the hell-!" My yell was cut when his eyes widened and he put a hand over my mouth. I sputtered, but he leaned down and whispered in my ear.

"Don't yell kitten. Someone might hear you." Zelos said lowly. My eyes widened in anger. I bit down on his hand, and he yelped, pulling back.

"How dare you! You...red-haired, law-breaking, carrot-topped, girlish, TRAITOR!!!" I screamed at him. His eyes widened further, and he tackled me to the ground as an angelic guard passed by. "What the hell do you want?" I hissed, pulling away.

Zelos looked at me, his eyes changing. They grew sadder. He reached towards me, but I jerked away.

"You have absolutely no right. You betrayed us..." My eyes misted over lightly, but I willed myself not to cry. It didn't help. I buried my face in my hands to hide the tears, but Zelos wrapped his arms around me.

"Sheena...I'm so sorry. I-I didn't know that everyone would take what I did so hard. I seriously thought I was just holding you all back- no one ever listened to me anyway." He smiled. "So I thought it would be easy to get out for a little bit."

"What-hic-What are you talking about you big dope?...Hic." I choked out. I didn't pull away from him. Not yet. Maybe I could just stay here and enjoy this until he got sick of me. Zelos rested his chin on my head, pulling me all the way against him. I blushed, but didn't say anything.

"How else could I have gotten the secrets of Derris-Kharlan if you all knew? I had to take you all by surprise as well so on one would give me away." I looked up at him.

"So...so it was all just a... lie? You aren't really...on their side?" He smiled at me, pecking me on the lips. I blushed scarlet and squirmed.

"No kitten. I'm not." I sighed and leaned against him then, like those words had somehow deflated all the tension in me.

He stood suddenly, pulling me up against him. I yelped, but he kissed me hard on the lips. My eyes shot upwards to look at him, but gently slid closed as I felt his hand on my back. I wrapped my arms around his neck, angling his head for a better kiss.

The big idiot just smiled into the kiss before pulling away, making me cry out.

"Don't cry, kitten. We gotta go spring the others." I looked at him quizzically, ignoring the annoying kitten comment.

"Huh?" I licked my bruised lips, and he eyed them for a moment before starting towards the door of the room we were in.

"The others, you know? Lloyd, Teach, The Brat, Presea, and so on? Yeah, they were caught in 'traps' much like yourself," he said, ignoring me gape at him. Pulling out a card, he activated the door and it opened, letting us walk through. I nodded then, catching up.

"Are they alright?" I asked, worried for them. Zelos smiled.

“Yes, they’re fine, for now.” My eyes widened more at this, but he just shook his head. “That’s why we gotta go spring ‘em. Now, *let’s go*.” He said. I nodded, inching closer to him as we walked. He smiled and pulled me into his side.

“Sheena?” He asked after a little while of walking. I looked up at him.

“Yeah?”

“Remember when I told you I would always take care of you?” He asked again. I smiled, diverting my eyes back to the hallway.

“Yes.”

“I meant it. I love you Sheena, and if anything ever happened to you...well, I don’t know what I would do...” he trailed off. My eyes stung for what seemed to be the thousandth time today.

“Oh Zelos...I love you too you big idiot!” I hugged him tightly and he wrapped his arms around me. It was a delightful feeling.

I realized then that no matter what kind of hell someone was going through, that love was always there too. And not the fake love. Real love. This love.

And even though the worlds were on the brink of destruction, and the time was at its bleakest, I still felt lighter than air being in that man’s arms.

Zelos. My love. Thank you.