



Final Battle

Final Battle! Friendship of the Sailor Guardians

A Sailor Moon Fanfiction

Written by Sleepycomics

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Sailor Moon created by Naoko Takeuchi

Dedicated to all the sleepy peril fans out there, who once felt alone and different.

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Note: AI was used as a writing assistant for some parts of this story.²

² See the Afterword for more thoughts on this.

Author's Note

When I finished [*Ami's Gift to Mako*](#) last year, I immediately began work on outlining a sequel. I had a blank slate and a flood of ideas. Perhaps...too many ideas. Coming up with a sequel was very hard and I was stuck for months. I had a rough idea of the key scenes I wanted and a basic plot, but there were many gaps. Eventually, I stopped procrastinating and wrote my first paragraphs around June 2023.

The story that I ended up with exceeded my expectations. Within a few chapters, my characters came to life and my outline became useless. This surprised me in ways I find hard to articulate. You just have to read it.

Things begin a few weeks after the events of *Ami's Gift to Mako*. The Dark Kingdom makes moves to awaken their evil ruler. The Sailor Guardians must once again stop them. And our hero Ami Mizuno, must find the courage to confront the greatest evil she's ever faced.

Sleepy peril, of course, is prevalent throughout the story, but it's woven tightly into the plot. This is first, and foremost, a *Sailor Moon* story. Fans of the series may recognize certain callbacks I make, but you don't need to know much to enjoy this. The story is fast-paced, fun, romantic, thrilling, and a delight to read. When you get to the epic finale, you will be cheering triumphantly. So buckle up—this is a long one—and enjoy the ride everyone. Thanks.

—Sleepycomics

Characters

The Sailor Guardians:

Ami Mizuno (Sailor Mercury)

Makoto Kino (Sailor Jupiter)

Rei Hino (Sailor Mars)

Minako Aino (Sailor Venus)

Usagi Tsukino (Sailor Moon)

Luna

The Dark Kingdom:

Zoisite

Kunzite

Queen Beryl

Queen Metalia

The Youma:

Suzuki

Sakura

Hypnosia



A Sailor Guardian's power should be used to keep peace and justice in the galaxy! And to serve our friends and loved ones!

—*Sailor Moon*, Manga Act 59

Chapter 1. Red Eyes

Ami Mizuno clutched her pillow as the sinister red eyes from her dream faded into the abyss. A distant rumble of thunder shook the bedroom windows. Ami flinched. She peered out from under the covers, her tousled blue hair flowing over her matching vibrant eyes. With a relieved smile, Ami reached across the silky sheets and wrapped her arm across Mako's warm chest, comforting her beloved partner.

Mako moaned through soft pink lips. She pulled the blanket over her shoulder, falling back into a light slumber. Mako's dark-brown hair sprawled across her pillow, gently tickling Ami's face. Rose perfume permeated the atmosphere with a flowery, romantic scent.

She's so cute when she sleeps, Ami thought, admiring Mako's lovely face. With her heart racing, Ami stroked Mako's soft cheek. It felt like a dream. Ami wondered if her life *was* a dream—as if she had truly perished inside that Dark Kingdom chamber several weeks earlier. She tilted her head to the side, twirling a strand of Mako's lustrous hair. *No...this is real,* Ami assured herself.

Mako moaned again, blinking her eyes lazily.

“Good morning, Mako,” Ami whispered, rubbing her leg against Mako's thigh.

A smile crept across Mako's face and she closed her groggy eyes. “*Mmmnnn...Ami...wh...what time is it?*”

With a playful giggle, Ami embraced her girlfriend. “Time for a delicious breakfast.”

Mako gazed at an alarm clock that read *5:30 AM* and gave Ami a funny look. “Couldn’t sleep again, *bub*, Ami?”

Ami frowned. “Sorry...I—”

“Was it that dream again?”

Mako...she sees right through me, Ami thought. It was the same dream Ami had been having since their fateful battle with Queen Beryl. She recalled the dark clouds spreading through the sky, with a pair of sinister red triangular eyes staring back at her. Its voice was lifeless and mechanical as it spoke. Ami shook the vivid images out of her head and smiled back at Mako. *I can’t let her worry...we’ve been through so much.*

“Nothing to worry about,” Ami said, grinning mischievously. “Back to sleep, you!” Ami grabbed a piece of the blanket and smothered Mako’s mouth with it.

“Mmmphh! No! Not the *chloroform*...hrmmphh!” Mako said, as Ami crinkled the silky sheet over her nose. Mako took two deep breaths, filling the sheet with a pocket of warm air. She shut her eyelids and released all tension in her body, pretending to fall asleep. “Mmmphhh...”

Ami stifled her laughter as Mako remained limp and motionless under the covers. “Enjoying this a little too much?” Ami asked, pressing the blanket harder into Mako’s nose.

The sleepy peril role-playing sessions had become their secret tradition, born from Ami’s half-serious suggestion in the early days of their relationship. Their games even escalated one night, with Ami getting tied-up and gagged on Mako’s bed. To Mako’s delight, Ami played the role of damsel-in-distress very well.

“BOO!” Mako shouted suddenly, giving Ami a scare. She rolled out of the blanket and cuddled Ami like a stuffed animal. The two girls

caressed each other under the covers, filling the bedroom with their youthful giggles. “Nah, I think you’re currently leading the score, *Miss chloro-queen*,” Mako said. She grabbed a chunk of the blanket and returned the favor, pressing it playfully over Ami’s mouth. “Nap time, *princess!*”

“Mako, nooo...MMMPHH!”

The frisky move brought back memories from just a few weeks ago when Mako had become Dark Jupiter. The chloroform-soaked bow, the battle at the shrine, the thunder dragon—all the memories flooded back. They had come so close to losing each other that day. Ami knew how lucky she was and she cherished every fleeting moment with Mako. *I can’t lose you again*, Ami thought. *I just can’t.*

She pretended to struggle for a bit, then stopped, gazing into Mako’s eyes.

Mako lifted the blanket from Ami’s mouth.

Ami looked away for a moment, blushing, then glanced back. “I’m just...so happy when I’m with you, Mako.”

With an affectionate smile, Mako combed her fingers across Ami’s hair and leaned in for a kiss. Ami closed her eyes and followed, giving Mako a tender, warm kiss over the lips. Her hands glided across Mako’s abdominal muscles, gently touching the frills on a pink brassiere—a gift from a high-end sleepwear store. Mako responded, placing her hands under Ami’s light-blue nightshirt and massaging her back. Ami let out a delicate, steamy gasp, stiffening her shoulders as intimate emotions—and pleasure—flared inside her. The two girls shared a few more sweet kisses, then relaxed and cuddled each other.

Ami's eyes shimmered with tears—something that seemed to happen every time she looked at Mako. The emotions were impossible to control. She blinked and looked away, wiping her eyes.

Mako placed her hand tenderly over Ami's cheek. "What's on your mind, Ami?"

Ami gave Mako a worried look, then hugged her tightly as thunder boomed outside. "It's...the Dark Kingdom...I had that dream again—"

"The one with the dark cloud and evil red eyes?"

Ami nodded. "Yes. I'm worried they are planning something big...and that I..."

Mako gripped Ami's shoulder, feeling her tremble.

"And that I...won't be able to protect you, Mako," Ami said, looking down.

The anxiety Ami felt was an ever-present constant. Their escalating conflict with the Dark Kingdom was still unresolved. While the past few weeks had been quiet, Ami was sure Queen Beryl was plotting her revenge. *I'll never forget that demonic face*, Ami thought, remembering her confrontation with the evil queen.

"Hey, listen," Mako said, her voice filled with gratitude. "I appreciate you looking out for me. But sometimes..." she trailed off, looking out the window longingly. "Sometimes, it's just not possible to save everyone."

Ami clutched the sheets, shrinking further into the bed. "But...I—"

“No, Ami...*listen*.” Mako sat up straight and held Ami, giving her a comforting pat on the shoulder. “Don’t kill yourself to save me. Okay?”

A tear rolled down Ami’s face, as she pondered the implications of Mako’s words. While Ami was endowed with the celestial powers of Sailor Mercury, there would always be limits to what she could accomplish. It was a tough pill to swallow for the bright young girl. The sinister nightmare flashed through Ami’s mind again—those evil red eyes beaming out of the shadows. Then she saw her—Sailor Jupiter, fighting bravely against the colossal dark cloud. *I can’t tell Mako how the dream ends*, Ami thought. It was too tragic.

“Alright,” Ami replied softly, with a single, sad nod. “Just stay out of trouble, okay?”

“*Haha*. I’ll try.”

Ami leaned in for a hug. “I...I love you, Mako.”

Mako chuckled delightfully and gave Ami a kiss on the cheek. “You’re adorable, Ami.”

In an effort to lighten the mood, Mako grabbed a remote off the nightstand and flipped on the television. She rolled off the bed and tended to some flowers next to the TV, a pink camellia standing out among them. Next to the flower vase was a framed photograph of Mako’s late parents. The image of Mako’s mother bore a striking resemblance to Mako herself, emanating a bittersweet warmth through the room.

Ami hopped off the bed and adjusted a cute pair of blue shorts around her hips. She picked up a compact computer from the nightstand, nearly knocking over a photo frame. Inside the frame was Ami's love letter, still decorated with those cute green hearts. Ami shook her head when she recalled the hours she spent writing that silly letter³.

Mako flipped the TV to a news channel, where a weatherman was speaking:

“And back to our top story, the once-in-a-century typhoon is now three thousand kilometers from Tokyo. The trajectory has been updated...”

“Oh, so that must explain the storm,” Mako said.

Ami observed the TV's radar map, following a yellow dotted line as it curved toward Tokyo, her expression growing worried. “Yeah, this looks bad,” she said, flipping open her computer. The computer screen showed a map similar to the one on TV. “They say it'll top the one in 1959...”

“You don't say?” Mako said, staring at the TV.

“Yes. This one's unusually strong,” Ami replied, scanning through her computer's historical data.

Mako walked over, wearing nothing but her pink bra and panties. She picked up a scrunchy with two pink beads and tied her hair into a ponytail, giving Ami a poised smile. “So...end of the world, huh?” Mako said, looking over at the computer screen.

³ [Read the letter here.](#)

Thunder boomed outside the apartment window, perfectly timed with Mako's dramatic sentence. *The end of the world.* Ami was certain the natural disasters around the globe were the work of the Dark Kingdom. And she was certain the Sailor Guardians would need to leap into action soon. Ami opened her book bag and put the computer inside. She then took out her golden Sailor Mercury transformation pen, rubbing its symbol with her thumb. *Am I ready?* she wondered.

"Getting ready to rock those blue boots, Ami?" Mako said, attaching two pink rose-shaped earrings.

Ami dropped the pen back in her bag. "Just making sure we're ready when the Dark Kingdom makes their move."

"Well, we can't be superheroes on an empty stomach," Mako said, slipping on a green shirt and walking over to the kitchen. "Pancakes or waffles?"

Ami couldn't help but steal a glance at Mako's statuesque, athletic figure. It was a lovely sight Ami never grew tired of. *Maybe this really is a dream,* Ami thought, a mesmerizing smile forming on her face.

Mako held up a box of pancake mix, raising a seductive eyebrow at Ami.

"Waffles," Ami said, blushing adorably.



Queen Beryl stirred, awakening on a regal bed covered with velvety purple sheets. Her curtain of ebony red hair flowed onto the rocky floor. The throne room was dead silent, save for the distant eerie sounds

echoing off the chamber's stone walls. Above Queen Beryl, swirled a black, ominous cloud of dark energy. A pair of red eyes emerged, shaped like long oblique triangles.

“Long live...Queen Metalia,” Beryl whispered in a raspy voice.

The black cloud billowed across the sky, twisting and writhing as if dancing to a wicked symphony of malevolence. Gradually, the amorphous cloud coalesced, morphing into a haunting, evil face. It loomed over the chamber, a manifestation of chaos and despair. A red mouth opened in the cloud and began to speak in a cold, mechanical voice:

“The Sailor Guardians...did this to you.”

Beryl nodded, then winced as she looked down at her injuries.

“Yes...help me enact my...my revenge—”

“Patience. The pieces are nearly in place...for my awakening.”

An evil smile formed on Beryl's face as she thought about the natural disasters taking shape on Earth. They were the manifestation of Metalia's power—the seeds of her revival. “Oh, Evil One...what I must do to fulfill your awakening.”

The red eyes disappeared into the black cloud, then emerged with a newfound intensity, its evil power sizzling in the dank air.

“Bring me a source of celestial energy.”

There was no disputing the meaning behind Metalia's profound order. Beryl nodded in understanding. The black cloud expanded in the sky, its ominous, mechanical voice booming before Beryl could respond.

“Bring me...the Sailor Guardians.”

Chapter 2. Delegating

Zoisite paced back and forth in the dim antechamber outside Queen Beryl's throne room. He heard hushed conversations coming from the room, but couldn't quite make out the words. For a moment, he thought he heard a strange, mechanical voice. Zoisite clenched his fist when he thought about the fallout from the Dark Jupiter incident⁴.

When Queen Beryl recovered from her injuries, she had Zoisite demoted. Zoisite's colleague—the devilishly handsome Kunzite—was put in charge of Dark Kingdom operations. Since then, Zoisite had been kept at arm's length, while Kunzite discussed plans in secret with Beryl. It wasn't fair, but it was better than being executed.

CLACK CLACK CLACK.

Footsteps clacked through the chamber, and Zoisite stopped in his tracks. Kunzite's chiseled face emerged from the shadows, framed by his flowing white hair. He flipped his white cape and stepped toward Zoisite. "Just the man I was looking for," Kunzite said in his deep, charismatic voice.

"How's Beryl-sama doing," Zoisite asked, twirling a strand of his own curly blonde hair.

Kunzite clasped his hands behind his back. "She's in good spirits," he said, staring ahead. "The dark energy field is healing her nicely."

⁴ Plot point from *Ami's Gift to Mako*, where Sailor Jupiter was kidnapped and brainwashed by Zoisite.

Zoisite nodded. “What was that...weird voice I heard coming—”

“No need to concern yourself with that,” Kunzite interrupted, placing his hand firmly over Zoisite’s shoulder. “We have a new mission.”

“Let me guess? Energy collection duties?” Zoisite said.

There was sarcasm in Zoisite’s voice. Kunzite hated sarcasm. “No,” he replied, squeezing Zoisite’s shoulder. “Beryl wants the Sailor Guardians.”

“All of them?”

Kunzite gave an affirmative nod. “All of them,” he said, looking into Zoisite’s eyes. “Alive.”

The simple, direct order gave Zoisite pause. Why did Queen Beryl need the Sailor Guardians? Unless they were all corrupted with evil spirit energy, bringing them to the Dark Kingdom was likely to cause problems. He wondered if this was a directive from the Evil One—the sinister black void, visible only by two red triangular eyes.

“That can certainly be arranged,” Zoisite said. “So what’s our plan? When do we—”

“Oh, no. There is no *we* here,” Kunzite replied, smirking. “*You*, Zoisite, are in charge of figuring this out.”

And just like that, the task was delegated to the lowest-ranking general. It was a power move from Kunzite, nothing more, nothing less. Zoisite would do the dirty work, getting blasted by Sailor Guardian fire, water, and electrical attacks. Kunzite would get to sit back and supervise,

taking all the credit when the job was done. Still—it was better than being executed.

“I...I am honored, Kunzite,” Zoisite said, clenching his jaw. “I won’t fail you.”

With a swing of his cape, Kunzite turned around and patted Zoisite’s shoulder. “Good. This is a great opportunity to redeem yourself in Beryl-sama’s eyes. Finish this job and I’ll even put in a good word for you.”

“Thank you,” Zoisite said with a gracious bow.

Kunzite walked toward a dark corridor, entering the shadows again. “Oh, and Zoisite?”

“Yes?”

Kunzite paused for dramatic effect and glared at Zoisite. “*Don’t* fuck this up.”



Dressed in a sleek red leotard, Rei Hino’s gaze fixated on the gymnastics tumbling mat before her. She relaxed her breathing and leaped into the air, executing a smooth forward handspring with agile prowess. Rei struck a pose with her fingertips in the air and her chest pointed forward. She swished her long raven hair back, which had been tied together with two red bows.

“Nice landing, Rei,” a girl wearing a sleeved navy-blue leotard said. The girl’s black hair was tied into a ponytail with a cute white ribbon.

Rei turned around and gave her a friendly smile. “Thanks, Suzuki. What did you think of my form?”

Suzuki walked over and touched Rei’s glossy spandex sleeve. “It was good. Can I see you do a handstand?”

With Suzuki watching, Rei flipped her body forward, raising her toned legs into the air. Her wrists trembled as she held the handstand, trying to sustain it as long as she could. “Uhhh...how’s...how’s this,” Rei asked.

“Excellent,” Suzuki said, placing her hand over Rei’s lower back. “Try to keep your legs straight.” Suzuki glided her hands over Rei’s smooth legs, adjusting their positions. “You can relax now.”

Rei let out an exhausted gasp and flipped upright, shaking her wrists as she landed. “*Phew!* I still need to work on my arm strength.”

“Nah, you picked this up faster than all the girls on my squad,” Suzuki said, patting Rei’s shoulder. “You sure you’re not a superhero, Rei?”

The light-hearted joke reminded Rei of the sensual kiss she shared with Suzuki—when Suzuki had been turned into the evil cheerleader youma a few weeks earlier. Rei’s heart fluttered as she remembered herself transformed into Sailor Mars—and the sensual way evil-Suzuki flirted with Mars’ red miniskirt. The emotions from that passionate moment were still so lucid. Rei wondered if Suzuki had any memory of the incident.

Before Rei could respond, Suzuki stepped onto the edge of the tumbling mat. “Here, let me show you how it’s done,” she said, raising her hands. With utmost grace, she sprung forward like a bird in flight.

Her hands, delicate yet resilient, met the ground with a gentle touch, propelling her body into a beautiful arc. Suzuki landed on the mat like a feather, her feet barely making a sound as they planted onto the surface.

Rei crossed her arms, giving Suzuki an envious look. “Stunning as usual,” she said, with a hint of arrogance in her voice.

Suzuki bent her legs and leaped backward, performing a more difficult back handspring. She landed gracefully again, spinning around on her toes. “Sorry, I was showing off a bit there,” Suzuki said, giving Rei a flirty grin.

“You’ll always be one step ahead of me,” Rei replied, her cheeks turning a shade of red. While it was typical for Rei to be competitive, she tried not to let it ruin the friendship. She was glad Suzuki was back to normal, without too much memory of her brief time as a Dark Kingdom youma. “Anyway, thanks for the help, Suzuki. Got to head out now. Stay safe.”

As Rei packed her bag, Suzuki gently grabbed her hand. “When are you going to introduce me to your friends, Rei?” she asked. “Ami sounds really interesting. Would love to meet her.”

Rei laughed nervously, rubbing her hair. “I...they...they’re going to have a lot of questions...”

Suzuki raised an eyebrow, giving Rei a curious look. “Okay, well...” She trailed off, then smiled again. “Anyway! I’ll show you that move next week. Same time?” Suzuki said, with a glimmer of excitement in her eyes.

Rei clasped Suzuki’s hand and pulled her into a warm, friendly hug. “Sure, if the world doesn’t end!”



“There they are!” Minako yelled across the dining area, as Ami and Mako walked through the Crown Arcade’s doors. The two of them held hands and made their way toward a booth where their Sailor Guardian friends—Minako and Usagi—were sitting.

Usagi waved her hands, calling out to her friends cheerfully.

“Good afternoon, Usagi,” Ami replied with a friendly wave. She exuded an air of elegance, dressed in a charming cerulean blue dress accentuated by a light cardigan. A soft sheen of lip gloss added a hint of allure to her natural beauty—a departure from her usual understated makeup. It was a captivating sight, as if a newfound spirit had blossomed within Ami.

“Mind if we sit down, girls?” Mako asked. Clad in a form-fitting green shirt, white sleeveless blouse, and dark-green shorts, Mako’s attire displayed her confidence and attractiveness. She wore a shiny new pair of rose earrings—another fancy gift from Ami.

“Join the club,” Usagi replied, offering her friends some drinks.

Minako scooted over in the booth. “So! Are you two lovebirds getting ready for the end of the world?”

“We’re going to be fine. It’s not the end of the world, Mina,” Ami said, reassuring her friend with a smile. She flipped open her computer, showing a radar map of the typhoon. Ami hunched her back, her eyes focused on the computer’s tiny numbers.

Mako brushed her shoulder into Ami and squeezed Ami's hand. With a teasing smile, Mako closed the lid on Ami's computer. "Enough screen time, Ami. You'll ruin your back."

Ami gave Mako a playful shove and put the computer in her bag. She linked arms with Mako, snuggling adorably into her shoulder. Once their relationship became known, the two lovers were never shy about showing their affection publicly. Minako was especially obsessed with the pair, frequently asking about juicy details.

"So, have you two gone out for a romantic dinner yet?" Minako asked.

Ami shook her head. "Not really. Mako insists on cooking all the meals. I don't mind it at—"

"What about a romantic movie?" Usagi piped up suddenly, with hearts in her eyes. "You have to see one before the end of the—"

"It's not the end of the world, Usagi," Mako replied, grimacing. She looked at Ami, who fidgeted uncomfortably in her seat.

"You two are sharing a bed now right," Minako said with a perverted grin. "Are you like...ya know...doing it—"

"*Whoa*, Minako!" Usagi yelled, putting her hand over Minako's mouth. "That's *so* rude!"

Mako chuckled, rubbing the back of her head. "Girls, come on—"

"O—Oh...oh my gosh," Ami said, covering her beet-red face with both hands. There seemed to be no limit to Minako's suggestive curiosity.

Minako shrugged her shoulders innocently. “What? Oh, that’s not what I’m saying. I meant—” She picked up a napkin, using it to cover her nose and mouth. “This...mmmph!”

Ami’s eyes shot open and glared in shock at Mako. *That was OUR secret, Mako.* Ami puffed her cheeks and pinched Mako’s arm.

Mako darted her eyes nervously back and forth.

“Ummm...I...have *no* idea what you’re talking about, Mina.”

Usagi clutched her hands, her lips pressed into a tight line.

“Sorry, nevermind,” Minako said, placing the napkin on the table. “But have you two lovebirds danced yet at least?”

The sudden topic change caused Ami to perk up. “Danced?”

“Yeah, danced!” Minako grabbed Usagi’s arms and swung them around, nearly knocking over a glass of juice. “Like this!”

Ami looked down, laughing nervously. “No. I...I’m not very good at dancing, so we haven’t really—”

“Haven’t really had a chance...yet,” Mako replied, grasping Ami’s hands. She glanced over and gave Ami an endearing smile. “But I’m sure you’d be wonderful.”

Minako stood up suddenly, causing the table to bounce.

“Awww, you are too cute! Ami, Mako—get up,” Minako yelled, causing other patrons in the room to look over. “You two are going to dance—right now!”

She cannot be serious, Ami thought. “Mina, now isn’t a great time,” Ami said, as Minako walked over to a jukebox.

The arcade doors opened and Rei entered with a gym bag slung over her shoulder. “Hey, Mina, what are you up to?” she said.

“Ami and Mako are going to dance for us,” Minako shouted while fiddling with the jukebox. She pressed a button to flip through the song selection.

Overwhelmed by all the attention directed at her, Ami’s cheeks flushed with embarrassment. While Ami cherished the idea of sharing a dance with Mako, she wanted it to be a special moment. Engaging in a silly dance amidst the bustling arcade was not the way. With a hint of seriousness replacing her smile, Ami waved to Minako. “Mina, please, cut it out.”

“Oh, come on Ami, have some fun!” Rei said.

Usagi chimed in. “Yeah! We’ll join you guys.”

A giant sweat drop formed on Mako’s head.

Minako pressed the jukebox’s play button. “Found it!” A rock ballad that sounded like it was from the 1980s started playing over the speakers. Minako danced over to the table and grabbed Ami’s hand. “Come on!”

Ami grimaced. “I...I can’t right now—”

“Mako...tell your girlfriend—”

“I don’t think Ami wants to—”

“*Come on*, Ami—”

Ami yanked her hand from Minako’s grip and yelled, “Minako, *STOP!!*”

Minako recoiled, completely flustered by Ami’s sudden, cutting outburst. It was an uncharacteristic flash of anger for the normally sweet Ami.

“Mina, I’m sorry,” Ami said, taking a firm breath. “But our relationship shouldn’t become a point of obsession—like we’re here to entertain you, okay?”

The entire dining room went silent. Minako stood motionless, her mouth agape, her hand dangling. She looked down, then back at Ami apologetically. “Oh my gosh...I...I’m sorry, Ami,” Minako said. Without a big frown, she shuffled her way back to the booth and sat next to Rei.

“So...anyone know where Luna is?” Mako asked, trying to change the subject.

“Luna’s scoping out the Hikawa Shrine, if I remember correctly,” Ami replied.

Rei nodded. “Yep. Are we still going there—”

“Yeah! Tonight,” Usagi said. “First time in weeks.”

“Wonderful. I could use a good night’s rest after today’s practice,” Rei said, rubbing her sore shoulders.

“Oh, that’s right! How was gymnastics practice, Rei,” Mako asked. “You gotta show us your new moves sometime.”

“Yeah, Rei,” Minako said, springing back to her cheery self. “You’ve been practicing a lot with your *girlfriend*, Suzuki.”

Rei’s face turned crimson red. “What!? No...no, Suzuki is *not* my—”

“Do any of you girls...like boys?” Usagi asked, pressing her forehead against the table.

Ami grabbed Mako’s hand, and the two giggled.

“Suzuki is *just* a friend,” Rei shouted, pounding her fist. “It just so happens she’s coaching me, okay?”

“She’s blushing *so* hard right now,” Minako whispered to the other girls.

“*GAHHHHH!!*” Rei yelled in frustration.

Everyone else laughed.

Chapter 3. Suzuki

Suzuki concluded her practice session, devoting a few minutes in the end to stretching her legs. Her athletic figure was still adorned in her sleek navy-blue leotard, its fabric glistening under the fluorescent lighting. The school's cheerleading squad logo was emblazoned across her chest in fancy white lettering.

Suzuki found herself alone in the vast gymnasium. As she wiped her face, Suzuki's mind wandered to her recent interactions with Rei Hino, the dashing girl who had entered her life under mysterious circumstances. Rei had introduced herself a few days after Suzuki's episode of amnesia, a coincidence that gave Suzuki a lingering sense of intrigue.

Huge swaths of Suzuki's memory were missing, with only faint fragments left, akin to the faded echoes of a distant dream. What she did remember felt bizarre, painting a tapestry of inexplicable events and bewildering encounters. In one memory, she woke up in a locker room with her ex-boyfriend, the two of them groggy and confused. In another memory, Suzuki saw a man with curly blonde hair, pressing a soft damp cloth over her mouth. Suzuki's most vivid memory, however, was of the sailor-suited girl in the red miniskirt. The girl with long raven hair floated around in her mind, like a divine guardian angel⁵.

⁵ If you haven't caught on yet, Suzuki was the youma Chiarida, from *Ami's Gift to Mako*.

Suzuki shook her head, chuckling at the strange thoughts. “What a crazy world,” she said. She grabbed her duffel bag and headed for the exit.

SHWOOOOM!

It sounded like a high-pitched wind tunnel, followed by a resounding, ominous hum. The sudden noise caused Suzuki to stop in her tracks. She looked around, her senses on high alert, a chill crawling down her spine. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed movement—a green figure, darting to the side. A thick green vine shot forward suddenly, directly toward Suzuki’s position. She side-jumped out of the way, her instincts kicking in just in time.

SHWWPPP!

The green vine slammed into the floor near Suzuki’s feet. “WHOA!” she shouted. With her heart racing, Suzuki followed the loose vine until she saw her attacker.

Emerging into view was an alluring girl, clad in a vibrant green minidress around her slender figure. The green attire had a skirt crafted from large leaves, while her boots appeared to be made of leaves as well. Silky red hair flowed over one of her eyes. Her red lips curled into a mischievous smile as she retracted the vine. “Damn! You’re fast,” the girl in green said, strolling confidently into the gym.

“Who...who are you?!” Suzuki shouted. She tensed her leg muscles, preparing to dodge the next attack.

The girl in green raised her gloved hand, creating a bunch of vines out of thin air. “Oh, forgive me. I’m Sakura, groundskeeper for the

Dark Kingdom gardens,” she said. “And Zoisite’s given us an important mission today.”

Zoisite? Why is that name so familiar, Suzuki wondered.

Suzuki pivoted towards the exit, determination etched on her face. “Well, you can tell *Zoisite* I have nothing to do with this,” Suzuki said firmly.

“Sorry, can’t let you escape,” Sakura replied. She thrust her hands forward, sending forth a surge of entwining vines. “Zoisite’s orders!”

Suzuki followed the trajectory of the vines and jumped, performing a nimble cartwheel. She missed the vines by several feet, watching as they crashed into a balance beam.

With a playful glimmer in her eyes, Sakura placed a hand on her hip. “You got moves, girl.” She leaped into the air with superhuman strength and landed between Suzuki and the exit doors. “But you’re going to have to get past *me!*”

Suzuki clenched her fists and narrowed her eyes, a mixture of determination and fear flowing within her. The situation was quickly escalating out of her control. “Wh—what do you want with me,” Suzuki asked, her voice shaking.

Sakura wagged her finger, a sly grin on her face. “Oh, you’re quite the curious one, aren’t you?” She summoned another entwinement of vines, adorned with blooming purple flower buds. “I’ll tell you—after you wake up from your little *nap!*”

The vines powered forward, spinning toward Suzuki like a buzzsaw. She backflipped out of the way, evading the dangerous vines

like a skilled acrobat. Tension filled the air, as the two adversaries locked eyes, each strategizing their next move.

“Let’s see you dodge *this*,” Sakura said. With a sinister glare, she snapped her fingers, causing the purple flower buds to explode. *POOOOF!* A cloud of pollen expanded toward Suzuki, filling the air with a green haze.

“What the!” Suzuki shouted in surprise. She instinctively covered her mouth, recognizing the potential danger concealed within the mysterious green cloud. It could have been poison gas for all she knew. In a swift motion, Suzuki leaped towards an apparatus used for practicing the uneven bars, seizing hold of its sturdy steel bar. Using her forward momentum, she swung around the bar once, executing a graceful arc. She then released her grip and landed with finesse on a mat, putting her a safe distance away. Suzuki uncovered her mouth and took in a breath of fresh air.

Sakura swung the vines like a giant fan, wafting the pollen throughout the massive gym. “Get ready to sleep!” she shouted.

Feeling cornered, Suzuki retreated, her back pressing against a wall until her shoulder bumped into a fire extinguisher. Its shiny presence gave Suzuki an idea. She ripped the fire extinguisher off the wall and brandished its nozzle.

A trail of green pollen rocketed into the air suddenly. “You’re mine!” Sakura screamed as she floated through the air, propelled by a bundle of vines. With a thundering crash, she landed in front of Suzuki, pointing a batch of purple flowers directly at her. “Get ready to breathe, girl...”

Using her teeth, Suzuki yanked the safety pin off the extinguisher. “Breathe this,” she said, pointing the nozzle at Sakura’s face. Suzuki pressed down on the trigger, unleashing a powerful combination of pressurized water and carbon dioxide gas. *FSHHHHH!* The forceful stream surged forth into Sakura’s eyes, causing her to retract her flowers and scream in agony. Suzuki swept the nozzle back and forth, covering her adversary’s face with a thick, irritating foam.

“ARGHHHH!!!” Sakura screamed, flailing her arms and rubbing her eyes. “AHHH...YOU...YOU—” Sakura cursed, yelling an offensive epithet that began with the letter *F*.

With the pressurized contents of the extinguisher emptying, Suzuki improvised, hurling the metal cylinder at Sakura’s body and hitting her chest. *SLAM!* Suzuki then shifted her weight, channeling her momentum into a swift roundhouse kick aimed at Sakura’s head. *WWWAPP!* The kick connected with resounding force, sending Sakura tumbling to the ground.

Seizing the opportunity, Suzuki covered her mouth and sprinted through the green cloud, toward the exit doors. Her mind wandered again to the mysterious sailor-suited girl in the red miniskirt. Maybe she was a superhero? Suzuki imagined opening the doors and being rescued by the raven-haired girl. Pushing the doors open, a surge of relief filled Suzuki as the cool outside air greeted her.

BUMP!

“OH!” Suzuki yelled. She had collided with someone standing just beyond the doors, abruptly shattering her sense of relief. The impact sent a shockwave of surprise through her body, jolting her and

nearly causing her to fall backward. She quickly regained her balance and focused her attention on the person she had crashed into.

A sultry, menacing voice spoke up. “Going somewhere, sweetie?”

Suzuki’s heart rate jumped. Standing before her was a tall green-haired woman, with demonic characteristics exuding an aura of power. Her skin had an eerie bluish-gray hue. The woman was adorned in a form-fitting white bodysuit—similar to the leotard Suzuki was wearing. A shiny metal tank was strapped to her back. Her ensemble was completed by striking red boots and gloves, with a red cross spread across her curvy chest. In her hand was a black rubber mask, like something out of a dentist’s office. The mask was aimed—directly at Suzuki’s face.

Suzuki spoke up, her voice quivering with fear.

“W...wait...who—”

POOOOOOOF!

A thick cloud of purple gas exploded out of the mask suddenly, enveloping Suzuki’s entire head. The attack was timed to match Suzuki’s breathing, interrupting her mid-sentence. She inhaled a lungful—*COUGH COUGH!* The gas had a sweet, slightly medical taste to it. It tickled Suzuki’s lungs, causing her to cough and breathe more in. She stumbled backward, a hazy fog consuming her mind.

“Oh, forgive me,” the woman said in her sultry voice. “My name is *Hypnosia*—the Dark Kingdom’s chief medical officer.” She took a step toward Suzuki and raised the black rubber mask.

Suzuki grabbed her knees, straining her neck as she struggled to hold her head up. She grew more and more tired with each heavy breath. It didn't take her long to realize what she was breathing: *sleeping gas!* With her body weakening and growing lethargic, she pleaded again, "Uhhh...wait...please—"

POOOOOF!

Suzuki's head snapped back slightly as another dense plume of sleeping gas puffed into her face. She covered her mouth, a useless endeavor as the fumes seeped through her fingers and into her lungs. *COUGH COUGH!* Suzuki's knees buckled and she collapsed to the floor. "Ohhh...uhnn..." she moaned, turning her head in a desperate attempt to remain awake.

Hypnosia sauntered over to the exhausted girl, looking at the black rubber mask with a smirk. "The gas never fails," she said, chuckling. "Poor thing. Tryin' to stay awake, huh?"

Suzuki never stood a chance—there were two enemies the entire time, cornering her like a rat. She berated herself, wishing she had been faster. The taste of freedom had come so close, slipping away cruelly at the last second. She had been reduced to a helpless, drugged damsel, her once acrobatic body now useless.

CLACK...CLACK...

The ominous clacking of boots echoed from the gymnasium.

Sakura strolled into the hallway, brushing pollen off her green minidress. "Well, well, well. Looks like you hit her with your sleeping gas, *huh*, Hypnosia?"

Hypnosia cocked her head back with a snicker. “*Heh*. You had all that stupid pollen and she *still* bested you.”

“Whatever,” Sakura replied, leaning on her hip. “I prefer to do things the natural way.” She twirled a purple flower between her thumb and index finger. “Besides, she’s still not out yet. Look...”

Sakura and Hypnosia towered over the helpless girl, watching her writhe and moan.

“Uhhnn...p...please...” Suzuki pleaded, her voice soft and weak. She tried pushing herself off the ground, only to collapse as Hypnosia’s boot stepped over her back.

Sakura knelt down and pointed the purple flower at Suzuki’s nose. “I got this. Sweet drea—”

“Hey! She’s *mine*,” Hypnosia spat, pushing Sakura out of the way. “*I’m* the one who gassed her.”

“No fair! I’m the one who drove her into your arms!”

The two female youma bickered over who would get the chance to render Suzuki unconscious. Their dispute boiled down to a matter of pride, a showdown to determine which method—sleep pollen or sleeping gas—reigned superior. Suzuki could only watch helplessly as her fate was being decided by a petty power struggle.

SHWOOOOM!

The bickering was interrupted by a dark energy portal opening inside the gymnasium. “Ladies, ladies, ladies,” Zoisite said, covering his mouth as he marched through the cloud of green pollen. “We’re all one team here. Let’s settle this dispute fairly.”

Suzuki opened one eye, catching a glimpse of the man in his distinct military uniform and polished black boots. His curly blonde hair was tied in a neat ponytail, exuding an air of feminine charm. A flood of memories surged back to Suzuki—images of her somersaulting in the air and throwing pom-poms. And memories of a passionate kiss with the sailor-suited girl.

“Master Zoisite,” Sakura said, bowing.

Hypnosia joined in. “Greetings, master.”

“Save the formalities, ladies. We’re running out of time,” Zoisite said, clasping his hands. He reached into his pocket and revealed a black marble—a *youma seed*, used to transform humans into Dark Kingdom servants. “Let’s complete our team. *Operation Eclipse* cannot fail.”

Operation Eclipse? Suzuki raised her head, bits of her strength returning as she tried to make sense of the phrase. She struggled profusely to stand back up.

Zoisite knelt down next to her face. He gave her a sly grin and placed a brown glass bottle in front of her.

“We’ll let the bottle decide,” Zoisite said, exchanging glances with Sakura and Hypnosia. The two female youma stood facing each other, arms crossed. With a flick of his wrist, Zoisite gave the glass bottle a quick spin.

Suzuki’s heart raced as she watched the spinning bottle come to a gradual halt, its neck pointing slightly towards Hypnosia.

“After you,” Zoisite said, gesturing his arms in Hypnosia’s direction.

“With pleasure,” Hypnosia replied with a satisfied grin.

“Awwwwww,” Sakura groaned, hanging her head in disappointment.

Hypnosia brought out the rubber anesthesia mask and knelt down next to Suzuki. She turned the valve on her metal tank, creating a soft squeak. Stroking Suzuki’s hair bangs, Hypnosia soothed the frightened girl, saying in her sultry voice, “Don’t worry, sweetie. Same stuff as before.”

Suzuki panicked as Hypnosia lowered the anesthesia mask toward her face. With a surge of adrenaline, Suzuki reached out and grabbed Hypnosia’s wrist, slurring her desperate pleas.

“Get...uhnn...away...mmmnn...from...”

But Hypnosia remained unnervingly composed. She calmly disentangled Suzuki’s grip and pinned Suzuki’s arm down with her knee. With a sinister smile, Hypnosia pressed the mask over Suzuki’s face, positioning it carefully, ensuring a secure fit. *FSSSSSSSS*. Purple plumes billowed out of the hissing mask. Hypnosia’s eyes locked onto Suzuki’s, an unsettling terror emanating from her gaze. In a chillingly calm manner, she instructed Suzuki on her breathing technique like a medical professional.

“On my count, take a nice deep breath, sweetie,” Hypnosia instructed. “Three...two...one...”

Suzuki opened her mouth, her resolve weakening against Hypnosia’s spellbinding, seductive voice. She knew the fight was lost. Ceasing all resistance, Suzuki took a deep, soothing breath, feeling the effects of the sleeping gas wash over her senses. “Mmmnnn...”

“That’s it, sweetie,” Hypnosia said, her voice softening to a whisper. “Again.”

Suzuki obeyed, inhaling another lungful of gas. The school logo across her leotard inflated and contracted in slow, regular cycles. She relaxed her muscles, allowing the gas to pull her to sleep. The boundaries of her reality faded as a seductive darkness engulfed her consciousness. In her sleepy mind, Suzuki wondered what fate awaited her, contemplating if she too would awaken as a monster. Perhaps the sailor-suited girl would end up rescuing her?

Hypnosia placed her other hand on Suzuki's cheek, giving it a gentle stroke as purple fumes wafted across her fingers. She looked at Zoisite, saying, "I can feel her fading. Just a few more breaths, master."

Zoisite tossed the black marble in his hand, looking at the ceiling with disinterest. "Just let me know when she's out."

"I would have knocked her out by now," Sakura said, rolling her eyes.

As her adversaries looked on, Suzuki fluttered her groggy eyes shut, her last flicker of awareness fading into the realm of dreams and nightmares.

"Our target has been gassed," Hypnosia said boastfully. She held the mask over Suzuki's sleepy face for a few additional seconds, then slowly removed it.

"Perfect," Zoisite said, releasing the black marble over Suzuki's chest. The marble hovered for a few seconds, then absorbed into her body. Suzuki let out a sudden gasp, her chest convulsing upward as dark energy tendrils wrapped around her.

Zoisite exchanged glances with Hypnosia and Sakura, his face filled with smug satisfaction. "Showtime, ladies," he said.

Chapter 4. Squabbles

“I’m not sure coming here was a good idea,” Ami said, tightening her grip around Mako’s hand. “What if Zoisite comes back?”

They walked past burnt and splintered wooden posts near the Hikawa Shrine entrance gate. Mako sighed, remembering her past battle as Dark Jupiter. She shook the thought away and gave Ami a confident smile. “We’ve been through a lot, Ami,” Mako said. “The Dark Kingdom would be foolish to underestimate all five of us.”

Luna—their talking feline guardian—popped her head out from the shrine’s doorway and jumped into Ami’s arms.

“Hey Luna!” Ami said, greeting the cat with a smile. “Everything okay here?”

Luna rubbed her head against Ami’s cheek. “I think you girls are safe. I arrived at the shrine an hour ago and haven’t noticed anything amiss.” Luna placed a paw on her chin. “But this typhoon has me very worried. I’m sensing extraordinary dark energy coming from it.”

“Yes, it’s very worrying,” Ami replied. “I’m honestly not sure we’ll be able to handle—”

“Don’t be silly!” Luna interrupted. “You girls have the power of love on your side! You’ll be able to stand up to *whatever* the Dark Kingdom has in store. I’m sure of it!”

I’m not so sure about that, Ami thought. *We can’t get overconfident.* While the five Sailor Guardians had grown in experience,

Zoisite knew their weaknesses and could exploit them without mercy. The power of love wouldn't be enough against a ruthless enemy.

With that thought, Ami opened the door to the shrine, where her three friends—Usagi, Rei, and Minako—were already gathered.



Usagi darted her head back and forth. “Did anyone bring snacks?”

“Right here,” Minako said, holding two plastic bags filled with junk food.

“That’s all she thinks about,” Rei said, rolling her eyes.

The five girls sat around a floor-table in the shrine’s living area. They drank tea, munched on cookies, and gossiped.

The shrine itself was spacious and well-furnished, with distinct wooden beams in the ceiling signifying its ancient Japanese heritage. The shelves were lined with a thin layer of dust, given the shrine’s recent lack of occupancy. Adjacent to the living room was a hallway, connecting to Rei’s bedroom and a washroom.

While the rest of the girls chatted, Ami opened her computer. She scrolled through maps and spreadsheets, with a growing expression of worry. “There’s a hurricane taking hold in the Atlantic,” she said. “Record breaking...”

Mako leaned over Ami’s shoulder. “Let me see...”

“Look,” Ami said, pointing to a world map with dotted lines on it. “Same energy signature. Something is awakening inside the Dark

Kingdom. I'm trying to get a read on its energy levels, but I don't have enough—”

“*Ami...can we beat it?*” Mako asked.

“Sorry I...I don't know,” Ami replied, shaking her head with uncertainty. “The data is inconclusive. But maybe I can...” Ami typed furiously on the keyboard suddenly, opening up a new piece of software. “Maybe I can run a simulation. There's a model that uses a special algorithm to fill in the gaps. It'll take a while to run so—”

“Great! Run it and put the computer away, Ami,” Mako said. “You're missing out on all the fun.”

Ami entered some parameters into the algorithm and pressed a key. *BEEP!* “Done,” she said, shutting the lid.

As she turned her focus to the group, Ami couldn't help but feel that she was the only one grasping the gravity of the looming threat. At its current growth rate, the dark forces would be impossible to beat. Not with the Sailor Guardians' current power levels anyway. Despite Ami's newest revelations, the rest of the girls seemed preoccupied with lighter topics.

Usagi picked up a magazine. “Hmm? What's this—*beyyyyy*.” She flipped the magazine around, revealing a photo of a sexy gravure model. “Rei, I had no idea you were into—”

“*GIVE ME THAT!*” Rei yelled at the top of her lungs. She chased Usagi around the room in circles, knocking over a box of cookies on the table.

Ami covered her face with both hands, saying, “Oh dear.”

Mako nudged her elbow into Ami. “I can dress like that if you want.” Everyone erupted into laughter.

Minako inserted a CD into a boombox. “How about some music, girls?” She pressed play and jammed to some pop music. “Ami...Mako...dancing time?”

The gathering quickly evolved into a party. Music and cheerful chatter filled the Hikawa Shrine, the once quiet atmosphere now humming with energy. Ami, however, had a difficult time joining in the celebration. *We need to be vigilant*, she thought. Ami looked at Minako, forcing a fake smile. “I...sorry, I’m just not in the mood to dance right now.”

Minako grabbed Rei’s hands and swung her around in a circle. “Come on, Rei. Show them how it’s done!”

Mako, growing annoyed, noticed Ami’s discomfort and placed an arm around her. “You’re exhausted. Want some fresh air?”

The idea of a quiet serene atmosphere was enticing to the introverted Ami. The music, chatter, and bright lights were giving her a dull headache. Ami mustered a small smile and nodded in agreement. “Sure, Mako. A bit of fresh air sounds nice.”

“We’ll be outside,” Mako yelled. The rest of the girls didn’t seem to notice. They huddled together, flipping through the gravure magazine with cheeky grins.

Taking Ami’s hand, Mako gently led her to the doorway. “Come on.”

As they ventured outside, the shrine’s bustling atmosphere faded into the background, replaced by a gentle breeze and light

raindrops. Ami took an invigorating breath, feeling the cool evening air wash over her. “Thank you,” Ami whispered, leaning into Mako’s shoulder.



“Let’s run through Operation Eclipse again,” Zoisite said, making eye contact with Suzuki. “For our newest member.”

Zoisite’s team of three female youma huddled outside the school gymnasium. Their formidable presence exuded an aura of malevolence, each one chosen by Zoisite to serve his agenda.

Hypnosia was the first one Zoisite captured—formerly Doctor Masui, an expert in anesthesiology. Zoisite had infiltrated Dr. Masui’s office, dispatching her with a chloroform-soaked rag before dropping a youma seed in her. The irony was not lost on him—that very bottle of chloroform had been gifted to Zoisite by Hypnosia herself⁶.

With Hypnosia under his command, Zoisite instructed her to capture Sakura. Hypnosia dutifully carried out the orders, ambushing the dorky girl while she was leaving the serene Hamarikyu Gardens⁷. A single puff of sleeping gas was all it took to render Sakura unconscious. Zoisite transformed her into a youma soon after.

Suzuki was the last one to be captured, having fought valiantly just moments ago. She leaned on her hip, giving Zoisite a seductive

⁶ See the story, *Sailor Guardians vs. Hypnosia*.

⁷ See the story, *When Ami Met Mako*.

smile. Her skin had transformed into a bluish hue and her eyes became sharper, hinting at her newfound dark powers. Her purple hair was fashioned into two pigtails, tied with cute white ribbons. A sleek navy-blue leotard graced her body, accentuating her curvy, alluring figure. The leotard was decorated with tiny white crystals, glimmering across the smooth fabric. A pair of matching ankle-high boots completed her costume, with a set of golden wings attached to each boot.

Among the trio of youma, Suzuki stood the shortest, but her presence radiated potent energy, signaling her capabilities as a formidable member of Zoisite's team.

"It's pretty simple," Suzuki said, in a high-pitched, velvety voice. "We need to locate the five Sailor Guardians and capture them unharmed."

"They must be transformed too," Hypnosia added. "Right master?"

Zoisite nodded. "Correct. We need all five to be in their Sailor form...skirts, bows, and all."

"They'll put up a fight for sure," Sakura said, twirling a purple flower. "What's this for anyway?"

The question gave Zoisite pause. He wasn't sure himself, given he was just following orders. The orders came from Kunzite, which came from Beryl, which came from the Evil One—*Queen Metalia*. Zoisite was now delegating the mission to his three youma ladies—his only method of retaining power in the Dark Kingdom structure. He

couldn't complete the mission alone anyhow—his track record in battle was dismal.

“All I can say is...we're dealing with evil in its purest form,” Zoisite said. He locked eyes with each of his three youma. “Trust me ladies, you don't want to know. Just complete the job and leave the rest to me.”

Suzuki crossed her legs and smiled. “Good enough for me. Are you ladies ready to have some fun?”

Hypnosia took out a leather pouch. “I brought the goods,” she said, dumping its contents on the floor. Needles, bottles, canisters, and handkerchiefs fell to the floor, making sharp clinking noises. “Pick and choose.”

“Ohhhh, shiny,” Suzuki said, picking up one of the hypodermic needles. “What's this?”

“A powerful anesthetic,” Hypnosia replied. “One poke will send them to *lala-land*.”

“Hmm,” Suzuki said. She gently inserted the hypodermic needle inside her boot for safekeeping. “Might be useful.”

Sakura shrugged her shoulders and picked another purple flower from her crown. “*Heb*...don't need any of that *paraphernalia*.”

Hypnosia handed Sakura a white handkerchief. “Take it...you'll need something to soak your...whatever that *green* stuff is...”

Sakura rolled her eyes. “Fine...”

“So when do we start this, *Operation Eclipse*?” Suzuki asked, putting a finger to her lips.

Zoisite crossed his arms, chuckling. “Oh...there's no *we* here. This is as far as I go, ladies.”

“Huh? Who’s in charge then?”

“It’s called *delegating*. Figure it out amongst yourselves,” Zoisite replied, flipping his hand.

“Leave it to me, master,” Hypnosia said. “I’ll lead this—”

“*Ha!* I’m not taking orders from you,” Sakura interrupted.

As tensions escalated, Suzuki swiftly stepped in.

“Ladies, please,” Suzuki said, spreading her arms between the two. “Let’s not fight like this.”

She leaned toward Sakura and picked five flower petals from her crown. “Divide and conquer,” Suzuki said, dropping the petals on the floor. To Sakura’s dismay, Suzuki stomped on all five petals, emphasizing her point. “We split up and target all five simultaneously. They won’t know what hit ‘em.”

Zoisite smiled in agreement, impressed by Suzuki’s leadership skills. Far from being a Dark Kingdom monster, Suzuki was demonstrating clear independence and strategic thinking. Zoisite wondered if Suzuki’s autonomous nature would be a problem.

“Solid plan,” Zoisite said, retrieving a piece of paper from his jacket. He unfolded the paper, showing off a hand drawn map. The map had road names scribbled in pencil and a big black *X* in the corner. “That’s the *Hikawa Shrine*. If you wait there, I’m sure the Sailor Guardians will—”

“Hang on, I can’t read any of this!” Sakura said.

“Yeah, can’t you just teleport us there?” Hypnosia added.

Zoisite shook his head. “No. That’ll alert them. We have to be sneaky.”

Suzuki instantly recognized the Hikawa Shrine as her friend Rei Hino's home. Everything clicked, the realization striking her like lightning. It was obvious. Rei and the sailor-suited girl in the red miniskirt—were one and the same. A rebellious spirit surged within Suzuki and she snatched the paper map from Zoisite's hand, giving the group a defiant grin. "Don't worry, ladies," she said, crumpling the useless map. "I'll lead the way."



"Mako...do you remember the day we first met," Ami asked softly. The two girls sat under a wooden pagoda within a garden, arms embraced around each other. A gentle drizzle fell over the pagoda's curved roof.

Mako stared off into the distance with a sentimental smile. "I'll never forget it. I still laugh when I think about our first lunch. When you—"

"When I called you *Mako* instead of *Makoto*?"

"Haha! Yeah, you totally couldn't stop thinking about me, could you?"

Ami snuggled her face into Mako's warm, curvy chest. "No...I mean, maybe I was just a little obsessed..."

Mako straightened her back. "Yeah, no kidding. I kept wondering when this cute, adorable blue-haired girl was going to work up the courage to say hello."

A warm blush crept across Ami's cheeks as she and Mako reminisced over their cherished experiences. Their words flowed, weaving a tapestry of laughter and tears as they recalled their first lunch, Ami revealing her secret identity, and Mako's thrilling inaugural battle as Sailor Jupiter⁸. Mako shared her dream of owning a flower shop one day, while Ami talked about her aspirations of becoming a doctor. With each shared memory, their bond strengthened, intertwining their destinies as Sailor Guardians and kindred spirits.

After a lively discussion about Mako's skirt-peeking habits, the two girls quieted down, enjoying a moment of silence. Ami exchanged a flirty glance with Mako, giving her *The Look*. It was an expression Mako recognized all too well—a signal that Ami wished for a kiss.

Mako turned away with an adorable blush. Ami released the tension in her body, immersing herself into Mako's chest. Mako responded, parting her lips and gently stroking Ami's blue hair. Their lips touched, a delicate brush at first, followed by a deeper, more passionate kiss. As Ami and Mako kissed, the drizzle evolved into a steady rain, its rhythmic patter serving as an enchanting ambience to the unfolding romance.



“So...Mako and Ami...what do you girls think?” Minako asked, her mouth full of potato chips. The three girls joined in gossipy banter, filling the living area with chatter.

⁸ Read *When Ami Met Mako* to learn more. A great story!

“Those two are like, the *perfect* couple,” Usagi said, pretending to swoon. She blinked her eyelashes at Minako playfully. “Do you see the way they look at each other?”

“*Mmbhmmm*,” Rei said, pouring some tea into a ceramic cup. “You know Ami still cries every time she looks at Mako?”

Minako chimed in, saying, “Forget that. I’ve seen them *kiss!*”

Usagi leaned into the table. “Oh! Give me the scoop, Mina.”

“Well, I don’t have a lot of data points to go off of,” Minako said, pointing her finger like a professor. “But based on my observation, Ami’s actually the more assertive kisser.”

“Wow...”

Minako looked up with hearts in her eyes. “Yeah, you’d *think* it’d be the other way around. But Ami initiates and Mako’s the one blushing. It’s *so* cute.”

Rei calmly sipped some of her tea. “I don’t see how they’re compatible...like, *at all*.”

“*Really?!*”

“Yeah,” Rei said, folding her arms. “Ami’s very shy, reserved, and always buried in her textbooks. Mako’s so athletic and energetic. Does Ami even do a sport?”

Minako pondered for a moment. “She *might* be able to swim...I *think?*”

“My point exactly. Ami and Mako are in their honeymoon phase right now,” Rei said, continuing her romantic analysis. “They’ll hit a wall soon.”

“Oh *please!*” Minako said dismissively. “That’s so silly, Rei. They can work it out.” She gave Rei a flirty wink, saying, “Trust me. I’m the *Guardian of Love* after all!”

“*Ha!* A Guardian of Love who can’t find romance *herself?*”

Minako snapped a potato chip in her hand and glared at Rei. “Hey! At least I’m not in *denial*, like *you* are about Suz—”

“SHE’S *NOT MY GIRLFRIEND!*” Rei yelled, her irises turning to flames.

“Am I...the only one here who likes boys?” Usagi asked timidly.



Suzuki bowed and fluttered her ankle wings. “Ladies, we’re here.”

The Operation Eclipse strike team converged outside the Hikawa Shrine, peering around like secret agents. Gazing past the shrine’s front gate, they noticed a warm glow from its windows.

“Looks like it’s occupied,” Hypnosia said, checking the pressure on her metal tank.

Sakura twirled around, billowing her leafy skirt. “I’m ready. Let’s give them a whiff of my sleepy—”

“Hang on,” Suzuki said, raising her hand. “We have one shot at this. If they notice us, it will be five against three. And trust me, these girls won’t back down. I think we should—”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa! Who put *you* in charge, *Miss cheerleader?*” Hypnosia said, giving Suzuki attitude. “We go in and fill the place with gas. Done.”

“Pollen’s better,” Sakura said, letting out a sigh.

“Oh, shut up.”

The wooden doors of the shrine slid open and two girls emerged holding hands. Suzuki perked up, checking to see if one of them was her friend Rei. She shushed the team. “Quiet down, I see something!” she said. From a distance, Suzuki could only see a blob of short blue hair and a brunette with a ponytail. She observed the shrine’s structure, muttering to herself, “Hmmm...three inside...two outside—”

Suzuki lit up suddenly. “Ladies, I have an idea,” she said, putting her arms around her companions. “Hypnosia...get your sleeping gas ready. Sakura, you’re coming with me.”

Chapter 5. Operation Eclipse

“How’s the operation going,” Kunzite asked, his charismatic voice booming in the Dark Kingdom chamber. He gripped Zoisite’s shoulder, chuckling under his breath. “Operation...*Eclipse*, am I right?”

Zoisite jerked his shoulder away. “My strike team is on their way to the shrine now. I’m due to check in about an hour from now,” he said through gritted teeth. “The Sailor Guardians...*don’t* stand a chance.”

“*Abh*, delegating, I see. Smart man,” Kunzite said, his smirk widening. “Let others do the work for you.”

“Look who’s talking,” Zoisite replied without skipping a beat.

Kunzite recoiled, scoffing in response, “*Ohh*, where’d all this swagger come from?”

Zoisite’s gaze met Kunzite’s mocking expression, as he retorted, “Perhaps you’ve been too preoccupied with your own...*grandeur* to notice, but I’ve been the one doing all the dirty work around here.” His words carried a defiant edge, challenging Kunzite’s authority.

“Is that what you *think*, huh?” Kunzite said, flashing anger.

Without a word, Zoisite turned around, leaving Kunzite’s question hanging. The relentless barrage of Kunzite’s taunts had worn thin on Zoisite’s patience, pushing him closer to his breaking point. He marched down the chamber hall, choosing to distance himself from the brewing tension.

“Queen Beryl’s growing impatient,” Kunzite yelled, his voice ringing across the chamber. “Don’t *test* her, Zoisite...”

Zoisite didn't look back, clenching his fist as he entered the shadows. "She's *your* problem," he said.



Hypnosia snuck to the back of the shrine, using the sound of rain as cover. She slowly pushed a window open, her red gloves dripping with water. The old hinges creaked as Hypnosia invaded the shrine—quietly and with purpose. She found herself in a bedroom, illuminated only by a faint ambient light creeping out from under the door. Picking up a framed photograph, she recognized the faces of the five Sailor Guardians—particularly the one with short blue hair. "*Water girl,*" she whispered derisively. Beyond the door, Hypnosia heard the faint sounds of chatter and pop music. She set the photograph down and unstrapped the metal tank from her back. As she unwound the rubber tubing, her sharp ears caught a sudden creaking noise.

CREAK.

In the corner of her vision—sudden movement. A furry black tail. Hypnosia slowly turned her head and noticed Luna—the talking black cat—observing her with cautious eyes. An unspoken tension hung in the air as they exchanged gazes, each aware of the others' purpose. The hair on Luna's back began rising. Hypnosia placed a finger over her lips, making a quiet shushing sound. As she did so, she slowly pointed the end of the tube toward the black cat.

Luna let out a low growl and opened her mouth to shout.

“USAG—”

POOOOOF!

A thick cloud of sleeping gas shot out of the tube, directly into Luna’s face. The cat hissed in protest before collapsing unconscious with a purr. Hypnosia then stuffed the sleeping cat in a closet.

With the coast clear, Hypnosia cautiously peered into the living room, her eyes gleaming with malevolence.

* * * * *

In the adjacent living area, Usagi, Minako, and Rei continued their banter, unaware of the danger lurking down the hallway.

“Alright,” Minako said, adjusting the red bow in her hair.

“Which villain has been your *least* favorite so far.”

“HmMMM,” Usagi pondered, pointing to her chin.

“Definitely Jadeite...because he tried to kill Ami. What an absolute *jerk*,”⁹

“Hard to top that one,” Rei said. “But for me, it has to be Sakura.” She folded her arms and looked down, the memories triggering a wave of embarrassment. “Ugh...spraying me down with that hose and then...and then *chloroforming* me like that—”

“Oh yeah, that was your first time getting chloroformed, *huh?*” Minako said with a teasing grin.

“Yep. Not fun. You feel totally helpless...you want to fight back, but each breath makes you sleepier and—”

⁹ *When Ami Met Mako* chapter 1.

“And sleeper,” Minako replied, swaying her head and drooping her eyelids. “Reminds me of...what’s her name...*Hypno-gas-lady*.”

Usagi nodded. “Oh yeah. She was the worst.”

“*Hated* her,” Rei said, rubbing her neck. “I still have a bruise where her needle poked me.”

“Her outfit was *so* stupid too,” Minako added. “Like, the green hair and red gloves—*ewww*.”

Usagi sighed and leaned back on a floor pillow. “You know...honestly, if it wasn’t for Ami, we wouldn’t have beaten any of these villains.”

“Yeah...Ami’s been saving our butt a lot lately,” Rei said in agreement.

Usagi jumped up suddenly and brushed some crumbs off her skirt. “Hey! Why don’t we all chip in and buy Ami a nice gift? As a...sort of thank you, for all the trouble she’s been through.”

Their voices animated, the three girls discussed gift ideas, even considering throwing a surprise party for Ami.

Hypnosia placed her ear against the wall, listening with intrigue to the conversation. She snarled, biting her lower lip when she heard Minako’s mockery. “Those insolent Sailor *brats*,” she said, examining her green hair and red boots. “I’ll show them.”

Hypnosia set the metal tank on the floor and checked the pressure gauge. *2000 psi*. Enough to fill the room.

“Pressure’s solid...rubber hose...check,” Hypnosia muttered to herself. With the precision of a surgeon, she attached a long rubber hose

to the tank's valve, twisting it tight to ensure no leakage. "Can't waste any of this precious gas," she said, running her hand along the tube and checking for cracks. With her preparations complete, Hypnosia slid the tube under the living room's door, careful not to alert the girls.

"Enjoy your naps, girls," Hypnosia whispered. She turned the valve on the tank, emitting a tiny squeaking sound. Like music to her ears, the faint hissing sound started—*hsssssss*. Purple gas flowed out from the tube, creating a small cloud in the living room that expanded toward the girls.

Hypnosia tiptoed back to the window, her red boots clacking quietly over the wooden floor. She waved her hand outside—giving her companions a signal that the attack was underway.

Back in the shrine's living area, Minako yawned, stretching both arms as she took a deep breath. "Want to call it a night, girls? I'm beat."

"Sure thing. Want me to grab Ami and Mako," Usagi asked, blinking her eyes a bit slower than usual. She yawned and rubbed her eyes.

Rei shook her head. "Leave 'em alone. You know what they're doing, right?"

"Oh...right..."

"Ummm...Rei, is...is it getting kind of warm in here?" Minako asked, wiping her forehead. "Can we...umm...open one of the windows?"

"Go ahead," Rei replied with a shrug. She took a sip of tea and closed her eyes, nearly nodding off before shaking herself awake. With

her brow furrowed, Rei examined her tea cup. “What’s...in this tea? I’m...I’m dozing off...”

“Special...blend...or something,” Usagi said, slurring her words. She dozed off briefly before jerking herself awake. “Why...why am I so...”

Minako grabbed her knees and stood up. “Let me open that...window...it’s so...warm.” She rubbed her eyes and staggered toward the window, taking about three steps before collapsing to the floor. “Ohhh...” *THUMP!*

“Mina!” Rei said with a gasp, jumping to her feet and spilling her tea. “Usagi, help! Mina fainted!” Rei picked up the gravure magazine and wafted it over Minako’s sleepy face. Minako let out a groggy moan, rolling her head a few times. “Mina, you okay?” Rei asked, with a rising panic in her voice.

Usagi remained seated on the floor, swaying as her exhaustion grew. “Rei...I...I don’t feel so...ohhhhh,” she said, closing her eyes. Usagi fainted, her head landing over her arm on the table with a thump.

Rei shot her eyes open, a chill racing down her spine. “Usagi! Oh no...what’s happening?” Her sixth sense activated suddenly and she felt it—an evil presence lurking in the room. How could she have been so careless? The girls were so preoccupied with gossip and music, that Rei had let her guard down. She sniffed the air, noticing a sweet, almost medical smell. *Sleeping gas!* The same stuff Zoisite so callously used on her a few weeks ago. Rei immediately clamped a hand over her nose and mouth. With her eyes struggling to stay open, she scanned the room. Her heart skipped a beat when she saw it—a thin rubber tube sticking out from under the bedroom door.

Rei bolted for her purse, which was hanging on a wall near that very bedroom door. She held her breath, stumbling like a drunk as her vision blurred. Her lungs burned, desperate for air. Rei took a quick breath, hoping she would last long enough to transform into Sailor Mars. It was a grave mistake. She inhaled a mouthful of gas and felt a wave of sleepiness crash into her. Grabbing her purse, she dumped the contents to the floor and scrambled for her transformation pen. Precious seconds passed, which felt like an eternity. With her pen in hand, Rei opened her mouth and instinctively took another breath. “M...Mars...uhnn,” she stammered, her voice soft and sluggish. “Mars...uhnnn...p...pow—” *THUMP!*

Rei collapsed before she could finish her chant, falling forward with one arm raised and her legs bent. Her golden transformation pen slid across the floor. She groaned, lifting her head up an inch and letting it fall. “*Uhnnn...*” In her sleepy mind, she thought about Ami and Mako. If they walked in, they too would fall under the gas’ spell. With Usagi and Minako knocked out, Rei was the only one left with a fighting chance. *Ami...Mako*—she desperately needed to warn them. The enemy was right here!

“Ami!” Rei yelled, trying her hardest to project her voice. “Mako!”

It was no use. Rei’s voice had no strength left. *I can’t give up*, she thought. Rei summoned every last ounce of her energy for one final attempt. Right as she opened her mouth to shout—the bedroom door swung open. A pair of red boots stepped in, dripping with water. *CLACK CLACK.*

“Well, well, well,” a sultry voice said. “Is that you, *fire girl*?”

Rei recognized the voice immediately. *Hypnosia*—or *Hypno-gas-lady* as Minako referred to her as. It was an ambush. The enemy got the drop on them, gassing the girls before they even had a chance to transform into Sailor Guardians. They were sitting ducks the whole time. Rei cursed herself for failing to sense the attack. She looked her enemy in the eyes. “Hyp...Hypnosia,” she said, straining her now raspy voice. “*Hnn...you...what are you*—”

“No more questions,” Hypnosia said, picking up Rei’s transformation pen. She knelt down and brought an anesthesia mask to Rei’s face, saying, “Time to sleep, sweetie.” Without giving Rei a chance to respond, Hypnosia pressed the rubber mask over Rei’s mouth. She rotated a valve—*SQUEAK!*—unleashing a stream of gas into the mask. *FSSSSSSSSS*.

“Hmmphhh!” Rei shouted through the mask. “HrrrmphAMI!! Mmmmko!”

“My, my...you’re a tough one,” Hypnosia teased, pushing the mask firmly into Rei’s face. *FSSSSSSSSS*. Purple plumes wafted over Rei’s quivering eyelids. Hypnosia counted backward slowly, soothing Rei with her seductive voice. “Three...two...one...breathe.”

“Hmmphhh...mmmphhh...” The cold sleeping gas flowed over Rei’s lips and tongue, into her exhausted lungs. It had a sweet taste, with a slight flowery fragrance to it. Her body relaxed, filled with a warm, soothing sensation.

Struggling to remain awake under the barrage of sweet fumes, Rei mumbled Ami and Mako’s names again. Why haven’t they arrived yet? She had expected to see Sailor Mercury and Jupiter barging in by

now, firing their celestial attacks. But they were nowhere. Instead, a sinister laughter drowned out her senses, echoing in her mind like a nightmare. With her hopes shattered, Rei took a final breath, fluttering her eyes shut and letting the sleeping gas carry her to slumber.

Sorry...everyone...I failed, she thought, before losing all consciousness.

Chapter 6. Closer

10 minutes ago.

“No signal yet?” Suzuki asked, leaning over the shrine’s rooftop and peering at her two targets. She perched next to her companion, like a spy in the night, as rain fell.

Sakura twirled a purple flower playfully. “Not yet. I just saw Hypnosia sneak inside. Give her a few minutes.”

With a short bit of time to kill, Suzuki decided to make small talk. She sat next to Sakura, folding her legs over the roof’s wooden shingles. “So Sakura...you’re a gardener?”

“Yep,” Sakura replied, dropping the purple flower into a glass bottle. “Or...I *was*, until Zoisite kidnapped me.” She held the bottle out, filling it with fresh raindrops and giving it a swirl. “I love all things nature. Humans are the worst...especially those *Sailor Guardians*.”

“Oh? So what’s your story?”

An angry wrinkle formed between Sakura’s eyebrows. “They killed my flowers...my precious *babies*. Incinerating them with fire,” she said, forming a fist. “I’ll make them *pay*.”

“Wow...you really have a grudge...”

“Yeah...Hypnosia too—she hates them. One of those Sailor Guardians blew up her metal tank with a bolt of lightning,” Sakura added, shaking her head in disbelief. “Who do these girls think they are anyway? Destroying our stuff like that. What did we *ever* do to them?”

Suzuki chuckled, unsure if Sakura was being sarcastic or lacked that much self-awareness. “Well...I mean, the Sailor Guardians are just protecting their—”

“What are you, in *love* with them or something?”

“What?! No!” Suzuki replied. An image of Rei Hino flashed quickly in her mind, before a cloud of darkness obscured it. “I’m in the same boat, here to complete Zoisite’s mission,” she said, gently touching Sakura’s arm.

Sakura gave her a teasing look through her flowing red hair. “So what’s your superpower anyway, Suzuki?”

“Well...before Zoisite kidnapped me, I was captain of the school’s cheerleading squad. My powers are kind of related to that.”

“Is that it?” Sakura asked, raising an eyebrow. “Come on. What else?”

A seductive grin formed on Suzuki’s face. “You want to know?”

“Yeah,” Sakura replied, brushing her shoulder into Suzuki.

“What’s your secret?”

“Come closer.”

Sakura pointed her chin forward, parting her lips slightly. Suzuki placed her fingers gently under Sakura’s chin, leaning in slowly and sensually. “Closer,” Suzuki whispered, tilting her head.

With her purple pigtails dripping with rainwater, Suzuki pressed her lips lustfully over Sakura’s mouth, giving her a heated kiss. Suzuki stroked Sakura’s green dress, moving her hand gently from breast to hip. Sakura responded, closing her eyes and touching Suzuki’s slick leotard. Water trickled down her gloves and leafy-skirt as they kissed, their

tongues delicately touching. Suzuki inhaled sharply through her nose, tensing her shoulders and then relaxing before giving Sakura one final warm, wet kiss.

“Mmmmm...” Sakura moaned, brushing away some of Suzuki’s wet hair.

Suzuki released the kiss slowly. “*That...is my superpower,*” she whispered, placing a finger seductively over Sakura’s red lips.

“*Ahem!*”

Suzuki and Sakura looked down at the shrine’s back window. Hypnosia peeked her head out and waved her hand.

“Quit fooling around up there!” Hypnosia said. “It’s go time!”

“That’s our signal,” Sakura said.

Suzuki crept toward the roof’s front side and observed the blue-haired girl kissing the brunette. “Looks like we’re not the only ones enjoying some romance tonight,” Suzuki said, licking her lips. “Is it ready?”

Sakura placed another purple flower in the glass bottle and stuck a cork through the opening. She gave the bottle a shake and tossed it to Suzuki. “Yep. Make it count.”

Armed with a white handkerchief, Suzuki popped open the bottle and soaked the cloth with its contents. Once done, she plugged the cork back in and tossed the bottle to Sakura. “Alright...let’s get this party started,” she said. With a mischievous smirk, Suzuki spread her ankle wings and floated quietly off the roof.



In the shrine's serene garden, Ami gently disengaged from her romantic kiss, pulling away from Mako's lips with a soft, lingering touch. She pulled Mako into a close embrace. "Mako," Ami whispered. "About...what you said this morning..."

Mako sighed, rubbing her hair. "*Gahhh*, sorry! I realize now how stupid it sounded. *Of course*, as Sailor Guardians we should be willing to give our lives for each other."

"Absolutely...and—"

"And I'd give my life for you, Ami. No question," Mako continued. "It's just that..."

Ami straightened up, her eyes twinkling as she listened.

"It's just...I can't handle the thought of losing you, Ami," Mako said, her voice choking up. "If—if that lightning bolt hadn't come down at the right time...you—you'd be..." Mako trailed off, as memories flooded back of Ami being swallowed by the massive dark thunder dragon. Despite Ami's constant assurances, Mako never stopped blaming herself for getting corrupted and unleashing the attack—nearly killing Ami.

Mako shook the intrusive thoughts away and looked down at her hands, saying, "I guess this is just my way of coping. Ami...if you died, saving me...I don't know if I could live with myself..."

Ami tenderly clasped Mako's hand, comforting her beloved partner. "I know it's difficult to shake those feelings. But Mako, stop blaming yourself...you're my hero," Ami replied gently, a tear rolling down her face. "I'm still here because of you. And—" Ami swallowed a lump in her throat. "And I made a vow, a *promise*, since the

very—*very*—first day we met, that I’d give my life for you. Because I love you, okay?”

Ami concluded her heartfelt speech with a firm gaze.

Mako dried her eyes and gave Ami a poignant smile.

“*Haha*...that’s my Ami,” she said. “Just stay out of trouble, alright?”

“Deal,” Ami replied, giving Mako a big hug. “Want to head back in? The girls are probably discussing our love life in *great* detail right now.”

“Sure. I could use a break. That conversation was pretty—”

BEEP BEEP BEEP!

The two girls widened their eyes in surprise. Ami opened her bag and took out the compact computer. “Oh! The simulation is done.”

Mako made a fist. “Awesome. We’re gonna crush the Dark Kingdom, right?”

Without responding, Ami scanned the results, her expression growing more distressed as she flipped through the numbers. “No...no, no, no...”

“What?!” Mako said, hunching over Ami’s shoulder and gazing into the computer screen. “Ami, what’s going on?”

“No...this—this can’t be right,” Ami said, typing furiously on the keypad. Maps and spreadsheets breezed across the tiny screen. A line graph appeared, showing a curve growing exponentially. “Mako, we have to warn the girls. If this is accurate, we don’t stand a—”

SHWWWWPPPP!!

Ami and Mako gasped at the sudden interruption, their mouths agape in shock. With adrenaline and fear trembling through her body,

Ami looked down and saw it—a thick green vine wrapped tightly around Mako’s arms.

“*HNNNN!!* What...what the...” Mako shouted, straining her arms against the strong vines. Her head shot up, eyes wide open in panic. “Ami! Watch out—*HHRRRMMMPHHH!*”

“Mako! NO—*MMMPHHH!!*”

The ambush happened with swiftness and precision—executed so fast, the two girls had no time to react. Ami yelled through a thick damp handkerchief, clamped firmly over her nose and mouth. She reached up and grabbed her attacker’s arms, twisting her torso as a sweet, flowery scent filled her nose. With intense distress, Ami gazed ahead and saw Mako in the same situation. The attacker had a white handkerchief clamped over Mako’s face, likely soaked in the same flowery anesthetic. *Chloroform!* The effects were immediate, filling Ami’s body with a warm, numbing sensation.

Mako struggled furiously, bending her back and tugging her arms, screaming as she tried her hardest to snap the vines. In their moment of shared peril, Ami and Mako made eye contact, gazing at each other with profound stress as white handkerchiefs peeked over their noses. They shook their heads and muffled, communicating their fear through wide eyes—which were slowly beginning to droop. “*MMMPHHH!!*”

Ami’s attacker leaned close to her ear. “Are you Sailor Mercury?” she said in a silky voice. “Remember us? Remember when you froze my little flowers?”

Ami took a deep breath, unable to resist as she sent a rush of flowery, sleepy fumes to her lungs. The scent and the voice triggered a sudden memory. *The Hamarikyū Gardens. Purple flowers. Sakura.* How did she become a youma again? Ami had no time to process the stunning revelation, her mind rapidly fading into a cloud of slumber. She blinked and studied Mako's attacker. *Hair in pigtails. Navy-blue leotard. Ankle wings.*

"Hrmmphh!" Ami inhaled sharply and dropped her exhausted arms, as a recognition dawned on her. *Suzuki!* It was Rei's friend, also once a youma. Ami remembered Suzuki's cheerleader outfit, the pom-poms, and the kisses. It was like a Dark Kingdom family reunion.

Suzuki flapped her ankle wings, floating up and wrapping her arm around Mako's neck. "And *Sailor Jupiter* here is fading fast," she said seductively. "Keep struggling, girl. You'll just fall asleep that much faster."

Mako heaved her chest in anger, stretching her curvy bosom outward and popping one of her shirt buttons. She darted her eyes between Ami and the youma, struggling to stay awake, each breath bringing her closer to the brink. Her hands curled into fists and she flexed her biceps against the vines, which only seemed to make them tighter. After another deep breath, Mako unclenched her fists and closed her groggy eyes. She opened them slowly—halfway this time—and gazed at Ami with a look of exhaustion, huffing and puffing through the drugged handkerchief.

Ami gazed back at Mako, her vision foggy. *Mako's using up her remaining breaths,* Ami thought. *She's fighting with all her might.* In a

fair fight, Mako would have easily thrown the petite Suzuki over her shoulder. But with the thick vines pinning Mako's arms down, the taller, more athletic girl didn't stand a chance. *Mako's going to lose consciousness faster than me*, Ami thought, watching Mako's chest inflate and her eyes flutter shut.

"C...H...C...L...*three*," Sakura whispered in a teasing tone. "Did I get that right, *Miss Mercury*?" She took a step back, dragging the limp, lethargic Ami further away from Mako. "Do you like my special blend," she continued, whispering in Ami's ear. "Purple dream lily...quite exquisite..."

A sudden, painful anguish crushed Ami's heart as Mako's face faded from view. What was the Dark Kingdom planning? Would they ever wake up? As the terrifying thoughts consumed Ami's mind, she suddenly remembered her other three friends still inside the Hikawa Shrine. *Usagi, Minako, and Rei*. Why haven't they arrived yet? Ami fantasized about Sailor Moon bursting through the doors with her friends, shimmering in her red boots and tossing a magical tiara. Instead, a malicious, evil chuckling echoed in Ami's ear.

"*Hebehebe*...wondering where your friends are?" Sakura said, gripping the cloth tightly over Ami's nose. "Hypnosia's taken care of that problem. All of you girls are going to bed early tonight."

No. No, no, no. Ami couldn't believe how foolish she was. *We shouldn't have come back to the shrine*, Ami thought, taking another sleepy breath. She imagined Hypnosia sneaking into the shrine, gassing each of the girls to sleep before they knew what was happening. *I should have warned everyone. I'm sorry...so sorry, girls.*

Ami whimpered helplessly, watching as Mako's statuesque figure fainted in Suzuki's arms. "Hrmp...mmphmmkoo..." *Mako...no!*

The petite youma gently laid Mako on the ground. Disbelief and sorrow filled Ami's heart. Mako—Ami's once proud, courageous protector—had been reduced to a helpless, sleeping damsel-in-distress. Ami wondered about the extreme guilt Mako must have felt as she passed out. *Don't blame yourself, Mako...you fought bravely...this isn't your fault...*

Suzuki floated over, shielding Mako's limp, motionless body from Ami's field of view. "Hey, sorry about the chloroform, *water girl*," Suzuki said, gently touching Ami's forehead. "Zoisite's orders."

She's actually apologizing? The nerve of this youma foot soldier, to think they were somehow absolved of wrongdoing. "Mmmph!" Ami fought back against her sleepiness, a surge of indignant rage bursting inside her. *Must...stay awake...for Mako...*

"Wow, she's a fighter," Sakura said, pushing the handkerchief up Ami's nose. "Maybe I messed up the drug's dosage."

Suzuki grinned and placed a hand around Ami's slender neck. "Nahh...I got this."

Ami squirmed as Suzuki's cold fingers touched the base of her neck.

"Give her to me," Suzuki said, licking her lips and slithering her hand across Ami's skin.

Sakura obeyed and lifted the handkerchief off Ami's mouth, revealing the trembling lips of a frightened, sleepy girl. "All yours."

“Uhhnnn,” Ami whimpered, shaking her head and blinking her sluggish eyes. “Don’t...do this...please...” she begged.

Suzuki leaned forward. “Nighty night, *water girl*,” she said, closing her eyes sensually.

Ami pursed her lips and recoiled. “No! No no no—mmphh!” Her desperate pleas were interrupted by a pair of moist lips pressing over her mouth. They weren’t Mako’s lips, but the kiss was still warm, intimate, and thrilling. Ami blushed as a surge of new passionate emotions rippled through her young brain. Before she had a chance to process the confusing yet sensual feelings—Suzuki activated her powers.

The lips between the two cute girls glowed an erotic shade of purple. A sudden wave of dizziness washed over Ami’s mind, as Suzuki sucked dry the last remnants of her energy. There was no time to think or fight back. Numbness spread from Ami’s lips, neck, and to her fingertips. Without energy, Ami’s once brilliant brain simply shutdown, like a flame burning out. She rolled her eyes and fainted, releasing the kiss and collapsing into Suzuki’s arms with a delicate sigh.

“I’ll carry her,” Suzuki said, playfully touching Ami’s lips. “She’s such a cutie!”

Suzuki swept Ami’s legs up and carried her limp body like a sleeping bride. “*Aww*, poor thing. Think we were too rough on her?”

“*Nabb*, I bet she enjoyed that,” Sakura said as she waved her hands, wrapping Mako’s unconscious body in thick green vines. Nodding her head in satisfaction, Sakura smiled at her youma companion. “Operation Eclipse, phase one—”

“Complete,” Suzuki said.

Chapter 7. Divide...

Ami floated weightlessly through a dark, ethereal void, surrounded by eerie wisps of faint energy. A haunting, mechanical voice echoed around her. Venturing further into the void, she glimpsed a pair of malevolent red, triangular eyes peering back at her. “*Welcome, Sailor Mercury,*” it boomed, vibrating her very core. The disembodied voice evoked a sense of trepidation and intrigue, urging Ami to venture further into its enigmatic bowels. Suddenly, amidst the darkness, she saw a familiar figure launching brilliant bolts of lightning. It was Mako—in her green and pink Sailor Jupiter outfit—fighting valiantly against the evil presence, her bravery illuminating the shadows.

“*Mako...*” Ami called out, her voice echoing endlessly like a dream. She extended her arm. “*You’re okay...*”

Without warning, a surge of clouds exploded in Mako’s direction, enveloping her in an overwhelming ocean of darkness. Mako screamed, her bright green aura vanishing into the shadows.

Ami cried out Mako’s name, shouting it over and over with tears twinkling from her eyes. She gazed helplessly as Mako’s tiny green star grew faint, until it blinked out of existence. *No! No, no, no...*

“*Give up hope, Ami...*” the mechanical voice said.

“Mako! Come back!”

“*She’s gone, Ami...*”

“NO!”

“*Ami...Ami...*”

The dark void repeated Ami's name, the hypnotic chant droning on and on, ensnaring her senses. Ami struggled to ignore it, swimming through the murky clouds in a desperate quest to reach Mako's star.

The dark clouds parted, revealing an angelic figure with long flowing blonde hair. A beautiful red bow flapped in the wind behind the golden hair. The angel called out Ami's name, her voice smooth and comforting at first, then growing more agitated. "Ami...Ami! Ami!!"

SLAP!

Ami felt a sharp stinging sensation across her face and opened one eye in surprise. "Ohhh...uhnnn," she moaned, as the angel's face came into focus.

"Ami! Wake up!" Minako yelled, shaking Ami's shoulder.

"Ohhhh...Mina," Ami murmured, blinking her eyes.

"What...where..." The sudden shift from the dream to reality left Ami disoriented for a moment, but the presence of her friend reassured her.

"You're okay!" Minako said, giving Ami a comforting hug.

"Sorry about the slap. Did they gas you too?"

Holding her forehead, Ami dug into her foggy memories. Images flooded back to her. The damp cloth over her nose. The flowery scent. The purple-haired youma...kissing her. Mako's distressed face flashed suddenly through Ami's mind. She remembered Mako getting chloroformed—right in front of her—and how bravely Mako fought back, to no avail.

Ami grabbed Minako's shoulders urgently. "Did you see Mako?"

Minako lowered her head and frowned. “Sorry. I passed out really fast. When I woke up, I only saw you. I don’t know where Usagi and Rei are either.”

The situation was strange. Ami had expected to wake up chained in some Dark Kingdom dungeon. Instead, she was sitting inside the warm Hikawa Shrine next to her friend, Minako. Where did they take the other girls? What was the Dark Kingdom planning?

“Don’t worry,” a sultry voice spoke up. “They’re in good hands.”

Ami jumped to her feet, the voice triggering a surge of fear. With growing unease, Ami saw her adversary leaning against the wall with her arms folded. She recognized the distinct outfit: the white bodysuit, red gloves, red cross, and the metal tank. *Hypnosia!*

“Did you enjoy your nap, girls?” Hypnosia said with a menacing sneer.

Minako jumped to her feet and stepped in front of Ami. “Hey *gas-lady!* Where did you take our friends,” she yelled, shaking her fist.

Ami reached into her dress pockets, searching frantically for her transformation pen. It wasn’t there. *I must transform*, Ami thought, searching the room for her bag.

“Looking for these?” Hypnosia said, proudly holding up two golden transformation pens. In her clutches were the iconic, gleaming symbols of Mercury and Venus. “You need these to become Sailor Guardians, *don’t* you?”

“What’s the big idea?” Minako yelled. “Those belong to us!”

The taunting, almost carefree manner in which Hypnosia dangled the pens, sent a shiver down Ami's spine. *Give those back*, Ami wanted to yell—a pointless request. Hypnosia was holding all the cards now. Instead, Ami's focus turned to her friends—especially Mako.

“Our friends...are they okay at least?” Ami asked, her voice firm but trembling. She exchanged a quick glance with Minako, who also looked scared. Acting on instinct, Ami reached for Minako's hand and gave her a reassuring squeeze. As if things weren't frightening enough, Ami could feel Minako quivering.

“Your friends are fine,” Hypnosia said, shrugging nonchalantly. She paced around the room, clacking her boots over the wooden floor. “Probably waking up from their naps right now. There shouldn't be any lasting effects from the gas.” She made eye contact with Ami and smirked. “Or the *chloroform*.”

Something about Hypnosia's tone reassured Ami. She could always sense a reluctance from youma—and even Zoisite himself—around acting with too much cruelty. *Mako's going to be fine*, Ami thought. *Mako always pulls through*. Still, the Sailor Guardians were in a precarious situation. The youma were likely acting under direct orders from Queen Beryl and would be punished harshly for disobedience.

Hypnosia sauntered over to the two frightened girls, twirling one of the golden pens. “Here you go,” she said, tossing them to Ami and Minako. “Do your whole...*sparkly*...thing.” She waved her hands in the air sarcastically, mocking the Sailor Guardians' transformation poses.

Minako picked up the transformation pens and handed one to Ami. “Sounds good,” she said. “Ami, you ready? Let’s kick *gas-lady’s* butt!” Minako raised her pen and chanted her transformation phrase. “Venus power! *Maaaaake—*”

“Wait!” Ami shouted suddenly, grabbing Minako’s wrist. “Something’s not right...”

Hypnosia furrowed her eyebrows, giving Ami a threatening look. “Don’t overthink this, *water girl.*”

Ami held firm, refusing to transform under pressure as Hypnosia demanded. Instead, she exchanged a knowing nod with Minako, who understood her friend’s stance and lowered her arm. Ami’s analytical mind worked in overdrive to assess the situation. Never in Ami’s career as a Sailor Guardian has a Dark Kingdom youma explicitly asked them to transform. It was almost certainly a trap, one that they nearly walked into. Ami could only think of one logical goal for the Dark Kingdom’s plan: *Celestial energy*. And the Sailor Guardians were full of it.

Minako turned to her friend, whispering, “Ami...what do we do?”

“*Don’t* transform,” Ami whispered, holding Minako’s hand and gently pulling her back. “It’s what the enemy wants.”

Minako looked at her transformation pen with uncertainty. “But...”

Hypnosia laughed and folded her arms. “Is that what you think, *hub?* Silly me. I forgot...you’re the smart one, *water girl.*”

Three youma involved in the plot, Ami figured. The enemy had split the five Sailor Guardians up. *Divide and conquer*. Ami wondered if Mako would make the same judgment call. As Ami formulated her next move, Hypnosia swiftly launched a surprise attack.

“Hypnotic Mask Bind!” Hypnosia shouted, thrusting her arms forward and releasing a surge of menacing rubber tubes. The tubes snaked their way past Minako, catching Ami off guard. In an instant, the tubes wrapped Ami’s arms, binding them tightly to her torso.

SHWWWPPP! Another set of tubes wrapped Ami’s legs, causing her to lose balance and fall to the ground. *CRASH!*

“Mina! Run!” Ami yelled, squirming her body in a desperate attempt to break free from the restraints. “Run!” Despite her efforts, the harder Ami pulled, the tighter the bindings became.

Minako froze, still clutching her Sailor Venus transformation pen. “Ami, I can’t leave you!” she said, kneeling down and pulling on the tubes.

Minako struggled, however, to loosen the tubes binding Ami. With the strain on her arms growing too much to handle, Minako let go and pouted in frustration.

“I’m not done yet!” Hypnosia shouted. She extended her arm, sending forth a rubber anesthesia mask. The mask flew past Minako and slammed over Ami’s nose and mouth, sealing itself against her cheeks. *FWWAPP!*

“HMMPHH!” Ami screamed, as the mask sunk into her face. “Mmmm! Hrrmmphh!!” She expected to hear a hissing sound, but to her surprise, the sleeping gas never arrived. Instead, it seemed as if all the air in the mask was getting sucked out like a vacuum. She took a

breath—and felt her lungs collapse. Ami shot her eyes open in panic, jerking her head frantically back and forth. “*Hnnn! Hckkkk! Hckkkk!*” *I can’t breathe!* she screamed in her mind, writhing on the ground like a dying insect.

“Oh my god!” Minako shouted, struggling to pull the mask off—to no avail. “Oh god, oh god, Ami!” She clawed at the anesthesia mask, watching helplessly as Ami’s face turned a light shade of blue.

Hypnosia laughed maniacally. “Your friend, *water girl*, is going to asphyxiate.” She glared at Minako, saying, “Unless you transform and help her. Your choice, *gorgeous*.”

“MMMPHHNOO!” Ami shook her head profusely, using up her remaining oxygen. She knew, however, that Minako wouldn’t run away. Minako was Sailor Venus and that meant she had a duty to protect her friend. No matter the cost. *You should run, Minako*, Ami said in her dizzy mind. *But if you stay and fight...I won’t blame you.* Ami’s vision faded, her eyes unable to remain open. Before she shut her eyelids, Ami saw Minako stand up, clutching her golden transformation pen.

Minako gazed bravely into her enemy’s eyes. “Screw it! You want a fight *gas-lady*? You got it!” Minako thrust her transformation pen in the air and shouted, “VENUS POWER! *MAKE! UP!!*”

Golden light beamed down from the sky, illuminating the room with bright, shimmering stars. A beautiful yellow ribbon swirled around Minako’s body and then burst into magical dust. In an instant, Minako stood adorned in her gorgeous Sailor Venus outfit—her leotard, orange miniskirt, heels, and navy-blue bow sparkling with angelic presence. Her brilliant blue eyes gleamed with determination as a surge of power

flowed through her. Minako twirled on her heels, flashing a pair of cute white panties as her golden hair rippled down her back. A colorful red hair bow peaked over her head, like a pair of cat ears.

“I am the Pretty Guardian who fights for love and for beauty. I am *Sailor Venus!*” Minako said, spinning around and flashing a peace sign with her hand. “In the name of Venus, I will punish you with the power of love!” She ended her speech with a dazzling pose and a cute wink, as bright yellow stars exploded behind her.

“*Heh*, about time,” Hypnosia snickered.

Minako pointed her finger at Ami’s bindings. “Crescent beam!” she shouted. A radiant beam of light fired out of her finger like a laser, slicing through the rubber tubes. Minako then ripped the anesthesia mask off Ami’s face. “Stay with me, Ami!”

COUGH COUGH! Ami let out a big gasp, coughing and breathing in huge gulps of air like a fish out of water. *I owe you one, Mina*, Ami thought, as Minako gently cradled her head. “C—could have...shortened the speech...a bit,” Ami said, still gasping for air. She gingerly opened her eyes and gave Minako a weak smile.

“Ami, I can handle this,” Minako said, glancing at their enemy. “Go find Mako and the others. *Gas-lady* doesn’t look so tough.”

Hypnosia bided her time, adjusting her gloves and checking the pressure in her metal tank. “Don’t take too long, *water girl*,” she said with a smirk. “What’s your catchphrase again? Douse and repent?”

Ami grabbed Minako’s hand and wobbled back up. She took out her Mercury transformation pen, rubbing the blue symbol with her thumb. Running away was no longer an option. Hypnosia would have given chase, and there were still two other youma to worry about.

Minako had already transformed and was staking her pride in the coming fight. While Ami had confidence in Minako's abilities, Hypnosia was a tough enemy and one blunder would send Minako to dreamland. They needed to fight. And they needed to win. If they lost, the Dark Kingdom would take their bodies and harvest their celestial energy to feed the Evil One. And if that happened—it really would be the end of the world.

“Mina,” Ami said, holding her friend's hand. “I'm staying right here.”

Minako gazed back, her eyes twinkling with tears as the gravity of the situation settled in. She squeezed Ami's hand and nodded her head in agreement.

“*Awww*, how touching,” Hypnosia said, cocking her head.

Ami glared at Hypnosia and raised her transformation pen into the heavens. “*MERCURY POWER!*” she shouted, her voice echoing with profound determination. “*MAKE! UP!!*”



A soft moan escaped Rei's ruby-red lips. “Mmmnnn...” Opening her eyes, she saw and felt the familiar rubber texture of a blue tumbling mat, typically found in gymnasiums. *THUD. THUMP. THUD. THUMP.* The rhythmic sounds of someone jumping and landing echoed in the room. Rei turned toward the source of the sounds, her vision still coming into focus. It looked like there was a skilled gymnast, gracefully going through a series of leaps and flips on a balance beam. The gymnast executed an impressive handspring off the beam and landed on the mat,

her navy-blue leotard shimmering with crystals. As Rei's foggy mind cleared up, she couldn't help but recognize the gymnast's movements and appearance. "S—Suzuki?" Rei whispered, her voice weak and sluggish.

Suzuki turned around and fluttered her ankle wings, smiling as she floated over to the freshly awakened girl. "Wakey–wakey!" she said in her perky voice, bending over to look at Rei. "Got some practice in while you were napping." She lifted her ankle and pointed at the wings. "Though...the wings do feel like cheating."

Rei held her forehead, shaking off the last bits of grogginess. "Ohhhh...what..." She examined her surroundings and immediately recognized it as her school gymnasium. Just a few hours ago she was in this very space, practicing her moves with Suzuki.

"Looks like Hypnosia's sleeping gas finally wore off. How ya feeling?"

The sight of her friend—now a Dark Kingdom monster—caused Rei to scramble to her feet. She studied Suzuki's appearance, noting the bluish-gray skin, purple pigtails, and pointy ears. Rei touched her lips, a flood of memories returning to her: *The cheerleader youma. The exploding pom-poms. The sensual kiss.*

Suzuki giggled and leaned on her hip. "You remember me, don't you, Rei?" She gazed into Rei's eyes, licking her lips. "Or should I say...*Sailor Mars?*"

She knows my identity! Rei thought, feigning ignorance. It was pointless though. Figuring out Rei's identity likely wasn't difficult, given the rarity of raven-haired Sailor Guardians. It also appeared Suzuki's memories were restored once she became a youma. Rei's shock turned to

concern and she raced toward her friend. “Suzuki!” Rei said, grabbing the youma’s shoulders. “What’s going on? What happened to everyone else?”

Suzuki smacked Rei’s hand away and floated backward. “You mean your Sailor Guardian friends?”

Rei looked down as she remembered Usagi and Minako passing out from the sleep gas attack. Ami and Mako were likely attacked at the same time too. It explained everything. Rei wished she had been more vigilant. Having been unable to foresee the ambush, Rei blamed herself for placing her friends in grave danger. As she gazed into Suzuki’s eyes, Rei reached into her shirt pocket—and found her Sailor Mars transformation pen. *I must atone for my mistake.*

With a look of disinterest, Suzuki floated to a balance beam and strolled across. “Your friends are okay...for now. But I don’t know how long they’ll last.” She bent her legs and performed a backflip, landing elegantly on her heels. “My companions are putting them to the test as we speak.”

Rei lifted her golden transformation pen and flashed a look of anger. “Did you *forget* something?”

“Haha, whoops,” Suzuki said, glancing at the shimmering red Mars symbol on the pen. “I guess I still miss the girl in the red skirt and heels.”

The rage and anxiety inside Rei erupted as she watched the carefree way Suzuki bounced around. Part of Rei’s mind hesitated, however, unsure why the enemy was giving her free reign to transform. Perhaps it was a trap? It didn’t matter. The lives of Rei’s friends were being threatened and that was enough justification for her. Suzuki’s

friendship was irrelevant—Rei needed to defeat her. Still, Rei wanted to give the enemy one more chance to redeem herself.

“Suzuki...” Rei said firmly. “I don’t want to hurt you. And I know you’re under Dark Kingdom control. If you surrender now, we can figure out a way to change you back.”

Suzuki paused her balance beam practice and looked at Rei with intrigue. “Is that so...”

“But if you choose to fight,” Rei continued, gripping her transformation pen with trembling hands. “I’m *not* holding back.”

Rei was bluffing of course. She knew she couldn’t unleash the full force of her celestial powers. No way. If Rei did, she could seriously injure Suzuki—and possibly kill her. It was the Dark Kingdom’s cruel leverage over the Sailor Guardians—turning innocent people into monsters. The risk wasn’t worth taking, especially for a friend.

To her credit, Suzuki seriously considered Rei’s offer. The dark energy coursing through her veins corrupted her soul, but pieces of her humanity remained. It was a strange quirk that had no rational explanation—dark energy wasn’t an exact science after all. For a brief moment, Suzuki thought about joining forces with Rei and fighting against her master. The fleeting thoughts quickly washed away, however, as a wave of darkness consumed Suzuki’s mind.

“No deal,” Suzuki said. She raised her hand and produced a long, purple ribbon, like something a rhythmic gymnast would use. It sizzled with dark electrical energy. “Besides...I got a new toy I wanted to try.” She whipped the ribbon—*SNAP!*—letting it crack near Rei’s feet.

The warning shot caused Rei to recoil in surprise. “Forgive me,” she said. She glared at Suzuki, certain now in her decision. “MARS

POWER!” Rei shouted suddenly, thrusting her transformation pen in the air. “*MAKE! UP!!*”

Suzuki covered her face as a blinding, red beam of light filled the arena. Rings of orange fire encircled Rei’s body, sending sparks and embers flying across her glittering long raven hair. In a burst of flames, Rei transformed into Sailor Mars—clad in her alluring red miniskirt and matching high-heels. She spun around and finished with a confident, stylish pose, showing off a pair of smooth, glamorous legs.

Rei pointed her finger at Suzuki and launched into her signature speech. “I am the Pretty Guardian who fights for love and passion—I am *Sailor Mars*! In the name of Mars, I’ll—”

“Chastise you,” Suzuki interrupted with a smirk. She licked her lips, admiring Rei’s legs and the alluring red miniskirt brushing their upper thighs. “Hope you’ve stretched your legs, Sailor Mars,” she said, taking a bow. “Because practice time—is *over*.”

The tension in the air grew palpable as Rei summoned her fire powers, her intense gaze locked onto Suzuki. The slender youma paced over the balance beam, pulling the purple ribbon taut between her hands.

“Ribbon! *Whirlwind Strike!*” Suzuki shouted suddenly, her voice cutting through the tension filled air.

Rei reacted immediately, swirling two explosive fireballs in her fists. “Mars Fire!” she shouted, as the ribbon approached her with lightning speed. “*IGNITE!*”

Chapter 8. And Conquer

“*Mako...*”

Raindrops landed on Mako’s cheek, causing the slumbering girl to stir slightly in her dreams. The soothing sounds of rain hitting leaves filled the air. A gloved hand grabbed Mako’s shoulder and gently shook her.

“*Mako! Wake up...*”

Mako opened one eye and was greeted by the sight of two yellow odango hair buns, adorned with glimmering crescent moon jewelry.

“Mmmnnn...Usagi?” Mako said weakly, moaning as she lifted her head. As her vision refocused, Mako glimpsed Usagi’s blue miniskirt, golden tiara, and shiny red boots. She gazed at her costumed friend in wonder. “S...Sailor...Sailor Moon...”

Usagi smiled and gave Mako a warm embrace. “Mako! You’re okay. Thank goodness!”

“Uhhnn...” Mako said, rubbing her temple. She sat up straight and clasped Usagi’s hand. “What’s going on?”

“I’m really not sure,” Usagi replied, scratching her forehead. “Everyone else is gone. I fainted in Rei’s shrine and then woke up here. I sensed an evil presence, so I did the only thing I could—I transformed into Sailor Moon.” She held out a transformation pen with a green Jupiter symbol on it. “I found yours, Mako. Take it.”

As Mako grasped her transformation pen, a sudden surge of memories returned to her. *The kiss with Ami. The computer simulation.*

The chloroform ambush. Oh no—*Ami!* Feelings of guilt and shame filled Mako as she remembered her beloved partner getting chloroformed right before her eyes. How could she have allowed Ami to be kidnapped so easily? Mako was supposed to be Ami’s hero—her protector. But the vines and the chloroform-soaked cloth proved too much for Mako to counter on her own. The guilt tormented her relentlessly. *I’m such a failure*, Mako thought. She whispered Ami’s name, her expression marked by a profound sense of dejection.

Usagi gently touched Mako’s hands. “I’m sorry about Ami. We’ll get her back. I promise.”

The two girls examined their surroundings, finding themselves under the canopy of a towering tree, its leaves shielding them from rain. The area was landscaped with lush greenery, and intricate stone pathways. The sun had gone down, and the area was illuminated by path lights. A sign nearby read *Arisugawa-no-miya Memorial Park*.

“I know this place,” Usagi said, touching the wooden sign. “Rei and I come here all the time. We’re not too far from the shrine.”

Mako thought about the green vines binding her during the kidnapping. She recalled the face of the youma chloroforming Ami—and the distinct leafy green dress she wore. It was the garden youma—the one Mako fought during her inaugural battle as Sailor Jupiter.

“I know who did this,” Mako said, narrowing her eyes. “Remember *Sakura?*”

“Ohhh yeah. Plant lady. Had a weird obsession with chloroforming Rei.”

“Yeah...and she had help,” Mako replied, her expression growing distressed. “This was coordinated.”

Mako grabbed Sailor Moon’s hand urgently. “Ami, Minako, and Rei are in danger. We have to go back to the shrine—right now!”

Usagi nodded but then gave Mako another puzzled look. “Okay...but, why the shrine? They could be anywhere. We don’t know—”

“Seriously? Because the shrine is where we’d head if we were in trouble, *Usagi*,” Mako said, raising her voice in annoyance. She clutched Usagi’s shoulders, her eyes filled with urgency and panic. “Ami and I had an emergency plan. If we ever got separated, we agreed to meet at the shrine. If Ami’s awake right now, she’s probably figuring out how to get there. Does that make sense, Usagi?”

Flustered by Mako’s outburst, Usagi stammered in response, “Yeah...okay...I—I get it...”

Mako lowered her head and sighed loudly, her worry palpable. “*Gahhh*...look, I’m sorry, Usagi,” she said, softening her tone. “But...I—I’m just really—*really*—worried about Ami, and our friends right now.”

Mako’s frustration was evident as she clenched a fistful of her hair, glancing at her transformation pen.

Usagi placed a gentle hand over Mako’s shoulder and gave her a friendly smile. “Hey...we’ll figure it out. We have each other right now and that’s the most important thing. All we have to do is—”

RUSTLE RUSTLE.

A sudden rustling sound from above caught their attention and both girls turned their gaze upward.

“Awwww, how touching,” a seductive voice said from the tree’s canopy. “But you two aren’t going anywhere.”

Sakura jumped down from a tree branch and landed in front of Usagi and Mako, causing the two girls to recoil in surprise. The youma spun around on her boots, twirling her leafy green skirt. “I’m Sakura, groundskeeper for the Dark Kingdom,” she said, taking a bow. She extended her arms as if she were a stage magician. “Welcome to my paradise.”

Mako tightened her fists and growled. “You—you’ve been listening this *whole* time?!”

“What did you do to our friends, monster?” Usagi yelled, pointing at the youma.

Sakura closed her eyes nonchalantly and paced around, touching some of the foliage nearby. “Your *friends*?” she said, giving Usagi a taunting look. “You and your friends are going to spend the rest of your lives in the Dark Kingdom.” She smirked and turned her attention to Mako, saying, “Still sleepy, thunder girl? Your blue-haired friend lasted longer than you. All that chloroform and we still had to give her the sleepy-kiss special. Poor thing.”

Upon hearing Ami’s mention, Mako lunged forward in rage only to be pulled back by Usagi, who tried fruitlessly to calm her down. “Don’t you *DARE* talk about Ami, you *disgusting, slimy, WEED!*” Mako screamed, glaring and pointing at Sakura. Mako jerked away from Usagi and lifted her transformation pen. “I’m *done* listening to this nonsense! *JUPITER POWER!!*”

Sakura chuckled as she watched Mako start her transformation. “Right on schedule, *thunder girl*,” she muttered under her breath.

“*MAKE! UP!!*” Mako shouted.

Lightning surged down from the sky, funneling into Mako’s golden transformation pen. The electrical magic enveloped Mako’s body and in a flash, her Sailor Jupiter outfit materialized—a green miniskirt, green collar, and pink bows, all attached to a sleek white leotard. Mako kicked her leg up, a poised smile forming across her face as celestial powers filled her body. She spun around on her green ankle-high boots, finishing the move with a vigorous pose.

Mako pointed her finger at the youma, her fists sizzling with electrical sparks. “I am the Pretty Guardian who fights for love and courage and I’m *so* pissed right now, you’ll *regret* ever messing with *me!*”

“Wow...Mako...” Usagi said softly, staring in awe at Mako’s powerful transformation. She had never seen Mako so angry and determined before. It was as if Mako’s anger was channeling into her Sailor Guardian spirit, increasing her celestial glow.

Sakura jumped back into the air and landed on a tree branch. “*Hahahaha!*” she laughed. “You may look strong, *thunder girl*. But I don’t think you’re very smart. You’re right where I want you.”

Mako thrust her fists upward and summoned her celestial powers. “SUPREME THUNDER!” she shouted, aiming the attack at Sakura.

As Mako’s lightning attack surged toward the trees, Sakura responded with her own plant-based powers. “Arboreal Woodland *Smash!*” she shouted. A sphere of thick vines surrounded Sakura, absorbing Mako’s lightning bolts. The treetops flashed with bright sparks as the two attacks collided. Once the lightning dissipated, Sakura thrust her arms forward and sent the vines down in Mako’s direction.

“Watch out!” Usagi shouted, running out of the way.

Mako ignored Usagi’s warning, choosing instead to hold her ground. “Usagi! It’s just a bunch of stupid plants!” she yelled, watching in disbelief as their so-called leader cowered behind a tree. Mako could have accepted it if this were a typical battle for Sailor Moon—she was still inexperienced and scared easily. But with Ami’s life on the line? And their friends? No—this was the time to be a hero.

Mako fired a blast of lightning at the vines, destroying a good portion of Sakura’s first wave attack. “That all, ya big dandelion?” Mako shouted, ripping dead vines off her body.

Sakura didn’t relent. She laughed and prepared another wave, shouting, “Floraaaaa!...Vine Whirl!”

As the vines made their rapid approach, Mako soon realized the error of her decision. It was too much for her to handle alone. The vines increased in density, forming an impenetrable wall of vegetation that turned the sky dark green. The back to back attacks prevented Mako from recharging her energy. Instead, she relied on her martial arts skills, punching and kicking the vines in desperation. To Mako’s credit—and in a testament to her natural strength—she managed to hold off the attack for a few seconds. But it wasn’t enough and eventually Mako’s exhaustion swamped her. And she slipped.

SHWWWPPPPP!

The vines wrapped Mako’s left wrist. Then her right arm, curling up and squeezing her bicep. “ARGHHH!” Mako yelled, tugging both her arms. She twisted back and forth, but the tenacious vines only strengthened their grip, sending sharp pain through her muscles. Without the use of her arms, Mako could only watch helplessly as

another set of vines wrapped around her legs. *SHWWWPP!* Her knees buckled and she crumpled to the ground, her breath coming in ragged gasps.

“MAKO!!” Usagi shouted, emerging from her hiding spot finally. The fight had progressed too fast for Usagi to react. At first, Usagi thought Mako had the fight in the bag. But Sakura had grown more powerful since their last encounter. Mako had underestimated the enemy and paid the price.

Sakura leaped down from the trees and sauntered over to the defeated Sailor Jupiter. “My, my, my...and I thought you were supposed to be the strong one, *thunder girl*.” She placed a hand in a toying manner under Mako’s chin. “But you didn’t even lay a finger on me!”

Mako sneered and yanked her head away. She had no witty response to Sakura’s taunts. The quick defeat destroyed her pride, leaving her face red with humiliation.

“LET HER GO!” Usagi shouted.

“And why would I do that, *Miss Sailor Moon*?” Sakura said, looking at Usagi with pity. “To the victor go the spoils.” After finishing her taunts, Sakura waved her hands in a circle, causing the buds on the vines to bloom into beautiful purple flowers. One by one the flowers bloomed around Mako, making it look like she was in the middle of a garden bed. “I believe it’s nap time, girls,” Sakura said with a sinister smile.

“NO! RUN, USAGI!!” Mako shouted. “RUN!” She tried putting on a tough face, but deep inside, Mako’s pride was shattered. She was fully aware now that her impulsive decision put both her and

Sailor Moon in danger. Sakura's powers had leveled up and there was no way Usagi could take her on alone.

Mako cried as Usagi bravely stared down the enemy. It was admirable—*really*. But it was also foolish. Once the sleepy pollen blasted out, a couple breaths would seal their fate. And the worst part? Sakura had barely broken a sweat.

“Hold your breath, Mako!” Usagi instructed. She lifted her golden tiara and infused it with celestial Moon energy. Digging her red boots into the dirt, Usagi twisted her body, looking for a target in the vines. The tiara in her hand glowed like a bright yellow disc.

Sakura retreated a safe distance away. She lifted her hand, ready to snap her fingers as she watched the last of the purple flowers—her babies—blossom to maturity.

Mako inhaled a large gulp of fresh air.

Usagi began her celestial chant. “MOON! *TIARAAAAAA—*”

Sakura snapped her fingers. *SNAP!!*

“*BOOMERANG!!*”

POOOOOOOOOF! The purple flowers surrounding Mako exploded suddenly into a cloud of thick green pollen. Usagi's magical tiara breezed through the hazy air, leaving behind a glowing trail of light. As the sleepy pollen cloud expanded, Usagi covered her nose and mouth. She held her breath and peered through the green haze. *SLICE SLICE SLICE!* The tiara did its job, cutting through Sakura's vines like a knife. Darting magically left and right, it was as if Sailor Moon's tiara had a mind of its own.

Wasting no time, Mako ripped the now dead vines from her arms and legs. She pinched her nose and looked around, trying to get a lock on the enemy's position. As Mako regained composure, she heard Sakura's laughter piercing the hazy atmosphere.

"Looking for this *stupid* thing?" Sakura yelled, holding up Sailor Moon's golden tiara. "Come and get it!"

"Mmmmm!" Usagi squealed, still covering her mouth. She gave Mako a panicked look. The tiara was supposed to boomerang back to Usagi's hand, but Sakura had been ready, catching it like a frisbee.

Mako zeroed in on the glowing tiara like a hawk. Sailor Moon's attack was the best leverage they had against Sakura's plant-based abilities. They needed the tiara back. Despite the air in her lungs running out, Mako sprinted through the pollen cloud, taking aim at Sakura. Summoning every ounce of her powers, Mako unleashed a furious battle cry. "SUPREME THUNDER!" she shouted, using up her last breath. An arc of lightning erupted from her outstretched hands, striking Sakura point blank in the face. *ZZZAAPP!* As the electricity coursed through the youma's body, she screamed and spasmed uncontrollably, dropping the tiara. She collapsed to the ground in a heap of dead vines.

The price for Mako's valiant assault would soon be paid, however. Driven by instinct, Mako inhaled a lungful of the sleep-inducing pollen. A sudden wave of sleepiness descended upon her like a suffocating shroud and she stumbled. Yet Mako refused to succumb. She powered forward and grabbed the tiara, every step an agonizing battle against fatigue. Using up her remaining leg strength, Mako sprinted back to Usagi's side.

Upon reaching her friend, Mako collapsed into Usagi's embrace, completely drained. Through her labored breaths, Mako struggled to keep her eyes open. Usagi—still holding her own breath—supported Mako's weight and heroically guided her away from the pollen cloud. During the retreat, Usagi used one hand to cover Mako's nose and mouth, shielding her from the lingering sleep pollen.

Finally, after a frantic escape, the green hazy cloud faded away. Usagi let out a trembling exhale, the accumulated strain leaving her out of breath and exhausted. She unwrapped Mako's arm from her shoulder and gently laid her under a tree. "Mako!" Usagi said, gently slapping Mako's face a few times. "Come on, Mako!"

"*Obbbb...ubnnnnn...*" Mako moaned. She opened her eyes a sliver and gave Usagi a weak, but reassuring smile. "*Ubnnnnn...you...you forgot this,*" she said softly, holding up Sailor Moon's golden tiara.

"Oh my *gosh*, Mako," Usagi replied, hugging Mako tightly with tears in her eyes. "Don't ever do that again!" She backed away, lowering her head in shame. "It's my fault, Mako. I was a coward...*again!* I'm sorry for putting you through this."

Mako shook her head and gave Usagi a supportive pat on the shoulder. Far from being a coward, Usagi was the one who acted courageously, rescuing Mako from the youma's grasp. That was after Mako stupidly attacked the youma without a plan of action. She regretted raising her voice at Usagi earlier. "Don't...apologize," Mako said between exhausted breaths. "You...you saved me, Usagi. I owe you one."

"But I ran away, leaving you alone!"

“And I shouldn’t have run into battle without you by my side. I’m the one who should apologize...”

Usagi took the tiara from Mako’s hand and placed it back on her forehead. “Accepted,” she said with a cute smile. Usagi gripped Mako’s arm in concern. “Mako, can you walk?”

With Usagi’s help, Mako slowly stood up, leaning against the tree for support and taking deep breaths. Following Ami’s past advice, she made sure to fill her lungs with as much fresh oxygen as possible. Mako knew how lucky she was and focused on recovering. “I can try, but...I...I don’t think I can use my powers right now. Sorry...” Mako looked down at her boots, dejected. While it wasn’t obvious to Usagi, Mako was using all her energy to remain standing and awake. She would risk passing out from exhaustion if she tried fighting like before.

“You’ve done enough, Mako,” Usagi said, taking a step forward. “Let me take it from here.” She walked in the direction of the battle, where Sakura was likely recovering from her wounds.

Mako reached out to Usagi. “But—”

“Go find Ami and the others,” Usagi said, glancing back at Mako with a firm smile. “The shrine’s not too far from here. I’ll make sure Sakura doesn’t follow you.”

“But—”

“That’s an order, Mako.”

Mako lowered her arm, trying as hard as possible to hide her tears from Usagi. It was humbling. Mako balked at the idea of leaving Usagi’s side. She never—*ever*—retreated from battle. But Usagi was now the stronger one and that meant she was in charge. And despite the reservations Mako had, Usagi made the right call. It was Usagi’s way of

protecting Mako without hurting her pride. In Mako's weakened state, Sakura could easily capture her and hold her hostage, forcing Usagi to back down. With Mako out of the way, Usagi could fight without worry.

"Usagi, wait," Mako said. She reached behind and unfurled the pink bow from her miniskirt. Walking toward Usagi, she straightened the silky fabric bow between her hands.

Usagi turned around. "Hmm?"

"Here, put this on."

Mako wrapped the pink bow like a scarf around Usagi's mouth. She secured the makeshift mask with a knot behind Usagi's neck and pulled the fabric snug over Usagi's nose. "There. Should have thought of this earlier. I think it should protect you from the sleep pollen," Mako said in a motherly tone, adjusting the mask a bit more. "Better than nothing. But remember to—"

"Mmmph!" Usagi interrupted with a nod, her voice muffled through the cloth mask. "Mmmphthanks!" She gave Mako a quick hug and dashed into the park without looking back.

For a moment, Mako thought she saw a twinkle of melancholy in Usagi's eyes. *Maybe she's putting on a strong face too*, Mako thought. "Remember to hold your breath, Usagi," she said quietly, as her friend raced away, determined and resolute. With the rest of her friends in mind, Mako turned around and jogged through the rain toward the park's exit gate. "I'm coming, Ami," she said, heading off in the direction of the Hikawa Shrine.

Chapter 9. Humiliation

“Kunzite!” Queen Beryl shouted, her regal voice booming inside the Dark Kingdom throne room. “What’s taking so long? *Where* are the Sailor Guardians?”

Sweeping back his dashing white hair, Kunzite replied in a relaxed tone, his expression unfazed. “Not to worry, my queen. The plan is proceeding smoothly. All five Sailor Guardians will be in our clutches soon. Zoisite will be—”

“Zoisite?!” Queen Beryl said, uttering the name in disgust. “You put that sniveling, cowardly, little *rat* in charge of this operation?”

The outburst caught Kunzite off guard. He had momentarily forgotten how far Zoisite had fallen in Queen Beryl’s eyes. Kunzite bowed and stammered a response. “Um...yes, my queen...b—but I am overseeing—”

“So you *delegated* this important mission?” Queen Beryl interrupted, softening her tone in a menacing manner. She stepped off her bed and snatched her wooden staff.

Look who’s talking, Kunzite wanted to reply sarcastically. But he held his tongue. The quip wasn’t worth getting his head blown off.

Beryl rested the wooden staff over Kunzite’s shoulder. A shiny red orb glowed ominously at the top of the staff. “See to it that the plan succeeds. Understand, Kunzite?”

Kunzite bent down on one knee with a fist over his heart. “As you wish, my queen,” he replied. He gently lifted Beryl’s hand and brought his lips to one of her jeweled rings.

Beryl yanked her hand away in revulsion. “Not until the Sailor Guardians are here. You are dismissed!”

As Kunzite marched out of the throne room—humiliated—a cloud of blackness floated behind Queen Beryl. A pair of red, triangular eyes emerged from the sinister void. Its deep, mechanical voice then spoke:

“Fools. All of them.”

Beryl remained still, closing her eyes and surrendering her body to the darkness. “Queen Metalia,” she whispered reverently, as if summoning an ancient being.

From the inky abyss, two long, wispy tendrils extended and caressed Beryl’s neck.

“I perceive them,” Metalia said, a spectral whisper in the void. *“The essence of the Sailor Guardians is within my grasp.”*

“Patience, oh *Evil One*,” Beryl replied. “Patience.”

“Bring them to me,” Metalia said, its sinister whispers and chants casting a spell over Beryl. *“Bring them and ascend to the pinnacle of power.”*

Metalia’s hypnotic words ignited a burning desire within Queen Beryl, an insatiable hunger for the boundless potential of dark energy. No longer resigned to ruling the Dark Kingdom, Beryl desired to rule Earth—and perhaps the very fabric of the universe itself. With Metalia’s awakening, Beryl would be one step closer to that aspiration—her *ultimate* goal.

Beryl took a deep breath and readied a response. But when she opened her eyes, she came face to face with Metalia's malevolent presence—its red, triangular eyes gazing into her very soul.



Kunzite walked into the antechamber and caught a glimpse of Zoisite sitting on a stone surface. He cleared his throat—catching Zoisite's attention—and beckoned his colleague over with a curled finger.

“Question. What if your underlings fail?” Kunzite asked. “What's your contingency, *bmmm?*”

Zoisite shrugged and shoved his hands into his pockets. “You seem worried. What's the rush?”

The flippant response triggered a surge of rage within Kunzite. How *dare* Zoisite—this lowly general—respond to a question with a question. Kunzite sneered and jabbed his finger toward Zoisite's face.

“Don't get TESTY with me!” he yelled, glaring intensely at Zoisite. “*WHERE ARE THEY?*” Kunzite's deep voice echoed endlessly around the cavern walls.

The angry outburst stunned Zoisite. The typically calm, collected Kunzite was growing agitated. There could only be one explanation: Queen Beryl. She had exercised her authority and got under Kunzite's skin, probably humiliating him. It was a power move—no more, no less. *How do you like getting pushed around?* Zoisite wanted to reply. He held his words, however, choosing not to escalate the argument.

“Where. Are. They,” Kunzite said, glaring at Zoisite with daggers in his eyes.

Zoisite debated whether or not to share the Operation Eclipse plans with Kunzite. On one hand, Kunzite was his superior and had the right to know everything that happened under him. On the other hand, Kunzite could respond in an unpredictable and brazen manner, ruining the whole plan. At this particular moment, however, Zoisite felt a slight bit of sympathy for Kunzite. He decided to share.

With Kunzite fuming, Zoisite reached into his jacket pocket and retrieved a wet, crumpled piece of paper. He unfolded the paper, revealing a poorly drawn map. “Here,” Zoisite said, holding the map under Kunzite’s eyes. “This giant X is the Hikawa Shrine—the base of operations for the Sailor Guardians.”

Kunzite nodded and calmed himself down with deep, regular breaths through his nose. He placed his entire focus on Zoisite’s map and listened.

“My youma ladies should have split the Sailor Guardians into three groups by now,” Zoisite continued. He pointed to another section of the map, which had a rectangle drawn with pencil. “One youma is at the school and the other is—”

“Divide and conquer. I get it,” Kunzite replied, the charismatic charm returning to his voice. “Good work.” He yanked the map from Zoisite’s hand and inserted it into his jacket pocket.

“See?” Zoisite said, shrugging off Kunzite’s impudent move. “Nothing to worry about. My team should be done shortly. We just need to—”

SHWWWWOOOM!

Kunzite waved his hands, summoning a dark energy portal.

Zoisite's eyes widened in surprise. "Wh—what are you doing?"

"Come on," Kunzite said, grabbing Zoisite's arm. "We're going on a field trip."

Shaking his head in protest, Zoisite replied, "Not necessary. My team has it under control."

"Want me to involve Queen Beryl?" Kunzite said. "We can have her decide."

Upon Beryl's name being dropped, Zoisite acquiesced. "Fine," he said, sighing loudly.

Kunzite chuckled and led Zoisite toward the portal, gently holding his hand. "Besides. If the operation is going so well, we can just stand by and observe. It will be fun."

Can't argue against that, Zoisite thought, clenching his teeth. He started to regret sharing the plans with Kunzite. Their intervention wasn't necessary and would only serve to complicate matters. It was too late now, however, and the only thing Zoisite could do was act as a mediator in case things got out of hand. Because if Kunzite's temper flared up like it did just now—things really *could* get out of hand. And at that point—all bets would be off.

Zoisite grabbed Kunzite's arm before he could step into the portal. "Kunzite?"

"*Hmmm?*" he replied, glancing back.

Zoisite hesitated before speaking up, his voice carrying a foreboding tone. "*Don't* fuck this up."

Chapter 10. Knockout Gas! Hurricane

“Mercury Bubbles! *Blast!*”

A flurry of icy bubbles shot out of Ami’s finger tips, engulfing Hypnosia’s face in a frosty mist that quickly filled the shrine’s room.

“*Argbbb! What* the?” Hypnosia shouted, rubbing her eyes in aggravating response to Ami’s sudden attack. “*Argb!* I thought you were going to give your *stupid* speech, *water girl!*”

Using the distraction as an opportunity, Ami grabbed Minako’s hand and dashed toward the shrine doors. “Come on!” Ami said, pulling Minako along as the two of them escaped outside. Raindrops splashed their faces as they ran, seeking refuge. They found a hiding spot behind a tree, some distance away from the shrine. Hypnosia’s shouting faded into the background. Taking a moment to catch her breath, Minako glanced at Ami, admiring her quick thinking and bravery.

After finishing her transformation moments ago, Ami had emerged from the magical glow as Sailor Mercury, clad in a costume of vibrant blue hues. The Guardian of Water was now wearing her blue miniskirt, white elbow-length gloves, light-blue bows, and golden tiara. A pair of sleek knee-high blue boots completed the outfit, giving Ami an elegant, distinguished look. Her miniskirt brushed alluringly against Minako’s leg as the two girls stood side by side. Ami shivered, her leotard damp with water from running through the drizzle.

“Are you okay?” Minako asked, warming Ami up with an embrace. “Your knees are shaking!”

“I’ll be fine. Just a little cold,” Ami replied, rubbing her arms rapidly to warm herself up. “The skirt doesn’t help much.”

Minako glanced back at the shrine, where they could still hear Hypnosia shouting in frustration. “We should make a run for it,” Minako said. “Now’s our chance!”

The shrine doors burst open and Hypnosia emerged, shouting, “Get back here you sailor brats!” She scoured the area, looking for her targets.

Ami peered around the tree, catching a glimpse of their enemy before ducking for cover. “I have to stay here,” she said. “Mako and I made an emergency plan in case we ever got separated.”

“*Hub?* You two had a *plan?*” Minako said in amazement. “Wow, Ami, you think of everything.”

“Well...it wasn’t complicated. I suggested we use the shrine as our emergency meet up location. If Mako’s okay right now, she is most likely making her way here.”

“You think so?” Minako asked, sweeping rainwater off her long blonde hair. “Would Rei and Usagi know too?”

Ami shrugged, her expression turning to worry. “That’s the hope, at least. Regardless, the shrine was the last known location of all of us. So they should all be trying to find their way back.” Peering around the tree again, Ami noticed the enemy getting closer. “We need to secure this spot.”

Hypnosia stood primed in the center of the shrine's open square, looking around in annoyance. "Come out, come out, wherever you are!" she taunted.

Minako accepted Ami's decision without argument, but Ami herself still had doubts. What if Mako was trapped and needed help? What if Mako was already taken to the Dark Kingdom? *No, Mako's going to make it, Ami assured herself. She's strong...she'll find a way.* Regardless, Ami couldn't allow Hypnosia's threat go unchecked—she was simply too dangerous.

"Alright, Ami," Minako whispered, glancing at the enemy. "*Hypno gas lady* is getting closer. What do we do?"

"Stay awake," Ami said. "If you breathe any of her sleep gas—even just a whiff—run to safety." Ami demonstrated some breathing exercises, huffing and puffing her chest. "Get as much fresh oxygen into your lungs as possible."

Minako inhaled deeply, expanding her chest and checking how long she could hold her breath. She lasted about five seconds before her face turned blue and she needed to exhale. "*Phew!* Okay, we seriously need to hit the gym after this, Ami."

The lighthearted quip eased the tension somewhat, leaving a smile on Ami's face. She reached for Minako's hand and gave it a reassuring clasp. Despite Minako's recent antics, Ami knew she could always rely on her steadfast friendship, especially when it counted during a battle.

“Enough games, sailor brats,” Hypnosia said, charging up her powers. She grinned menacingly and cranked the valve on her metal tank to the maximum. “Knockout Gas! *Typhoon!*” she shouted. Her declaration was followed by a colossal eruption of purple sleeping gas, enveloping the area like a relentless hurricane. “Time to snuff you bugs out!”

“Oh no!” Minako said in a panic. She instinctively hunched over and covered her mouth as the purple cloud surged toward them. As Minako held her breath, Ami sprang into action, stepping out into the open to launch her defensive attack.

“Shine! Aqua *Shield!*” Ami shouted. She swept her hands in a giant circle, conjuring a protective bubble made of shimmering water energy. The blue sphere surrounded Ami and Minako, covering their bodies in a mystical glow. Channeling her inner strength, Ami focused all her energy into the water shield that safeguarded them. The potent sleeping gas swirled around the bubble, unable to penetrate the barrier, its soporific influence held at bay.

Minako uncovered her mouth. “Wow, you’re a genius, Ami,” she said, gazing in awe at their glistening blue surroundings. She then looked ahead and saw Hypnosia marching over. “But...I think we have company!”

Hypnosia took her time, moseying over to the water bubble with a rubber tube in her hand. “Did somebody order the sleepy special,” she said, her face emerging from the purple clouds. “Comes with a side of tasty sleeping gas.” She stared at the two frightened Sailor Guardians from outside the bubble, dangling the rubber tube in a threatening manner. Hypnosia made eye contact with Ami and

chuckled under her breath. “Poor *water girl*...I really thought you were the *smart* one,” she said, shaking her head in disappointment. The youma then poked the rubber tube through the bubble’s barrier, causing a bit of water to splash back. “But now I think you’re the *stupid* one.”

The taunting words stung Ami’s heart like needles. Ami watched helplessly as the tube snaked inside the protective bubble, creeping closer and closer to Minako’s legs. Minako covered her mouth, backing away from the tube in terror like it was a giant bug. As Ami strained to keep the water shield in place, she berated herself for not thinking of a backup plan. *Maybe I’m really not that smart*, Ami thought, as her self-worth plummeted. *This bubble is about to become a sleepy coffin!*

“Ami! What now?!” Minako shouted.

With her heart racing, Ami frantically considered her options. If she released the water shield, the pressure from the surrounding sleep gas would implode, engulfing her and Minako in a flood of anesthetic fumes. If she kept the shield in place, the bubble would fill to the brim with sleeping gas. In either case, both girls would need to hold their breath and run to safety—or guarantee themselves a trip to slumberland.

“On my signal, run to the shrine,” Ami said. “The enclosed space should—”

“I get it,” Minako replied. “I get it. Listen, Ami...”

Ami looked at her friend without saying a word, her eyes conveying a deep emotion.

Minako wrapped her arm around Ami's shoulder. "Ami...I know we don't hang out all the time...and sometimes I—I give you a bit of grief..."

"Mina..." Ami said, shaking her head as her voice trailed off. She noticed a subtle twinkling in Minako's eyes—probably tears. "Why are you—"

"Sorry, I...I just want to say that...that you've been an incredible friend, Ami—"

FSSSSSSSSSS. An ominous hissing sound interrupted the tender moment. Purple fumes puffed out of the tube, swirling around Minako's orange heels and Ami's blue boots. "*Hebehehe*," Hypnosia laughed from the other side of the bubble. "Sweet dreams, *sailor brats!*"

Minako stepped away from Ami and glared at Hypnosia. "My turn," she said, summoning her celestial powers. A bright glow appeared on her fingertip and she raised it toward Hypnosia. "Hold your breath, Ami!"

Oh no...Mina's going to attack, Ami thought, her eyes watering up. With no time to alter course and her powers draining, Ami took in a deep breath and held it. The purple gas slowly filled the bubble, rising past Ami's skirt, then up to her chest. *Mina!!*

"CRESCENT!" Minako shouted, the energy in her fingertip growing into a large yellow sphere. "BEEEEAM!!!"

BOOOM! A radiant yellow beam of light fired out of Minako's hand, blowing a hole in the water shield and surging point blank into Hypnosia's face. Chaos ensued. Hypnosia screamed in pain as Sailor Venus' attack sent her crashing to the ground. Like Ami predicted, the

surrounding sleeping gas imploded into the bubble, obscuring her vision as the fumes mixed with the blue mist.

Still holding her breath, Ami frantically searched for Minako in the dense purple cloud. Her heart sank when she finally located her friend, ensnared in a fierce struggle with Hypnosia. Despite Minako's valiant attempt to launch another Crescent Beam attack, Hypnosia swiftly regained her footing, grabbing Minako in a vice-like chokehold. Ami reached out to her, only to encounter Minako kicking her away. *Mina, let me help you*, Ami called out desperately in her thoughts. She grabbed Minako's hand, but Minako yanked it away and gave Ami a shove.

Ami's heart filled with anguish and guilt as she recognized the brave sacrifice Minako was making. With her precious air diminishing, Ami sprinted away from the fight, toward the safety of the shrine. *I'm sorry, Mina*, Ami said in her thoughts. *I'm so sorry!* As she ran through the purple gas cloud, Ami heard a loud gasp and coughing from behind her. She turned around and saw Minako locked in Hypnosia's grip, her struggles growing weaker as the sleep gas took its toll.

Minako fought courageously, but her efforts were in vain. Each breath she took filled her lungs with more of the thick, sweet, sleeping gas. She kicked her now feeble legs a few more times, flipping her orange miniskirt over her hips. As her strength waned, Minako's eyes drooped until she collapsed like a ragdoll in Hypnosia's arms.

A sinister laugh escaped Hypnosia's mouth. "No more crescent beams, *gorgeous*," she said, pushing her hand into Minako's stomach, forcing the poor girl to take another breath. "Only sleep now."

Hypnosia watched with malicious glee as Sailor Venus drifted off to slumber, strands of golden hair flowing over her angelic, sleeping face.

Ami sprinted for a few more seconds until her hand touched the wooden post of the shrine's doorway. She jumped inside and slid the door shut—*SLAM!* With the sleeping gas now safely outside, Ami took a deep breath, smelling the familiar scent of Rei's living room. She peered out the shrine's window, searching for any sign of Minako within the purple cloud. *Come on, Mina.* Ami hoped by some miracle that Minako was able to fight back successfully. She imagined Minako emerging from the gas, weakened and sleepy, but giving a cute thumbs up. Ami's heart sank, however, as the harsh reality of the situation tore through her imagination.

Hypnosia's towering shadow appeared, cradling the limp, unconscious body of Sailor Venus. The defeated Sailor Guardian seemed fragile, like a delicate flower caught in an unrelenting storm, her lively celestial energy extinguished. Minako's gloved arms and slim legs dangled as Hypnosia marched forward, dripping with rainwater. Her orange miniskirt flapped in the wind, revealing the cute white panties underneath, her innocence on display. Her long blonde hair flowed downward, like an exquisite sheet of golden silk. Even as a damsel-in-distress, it was hard to ignore Minako's striking, angelic beauty—if anything, the vulnerability seemed to amplify her allure.

“One down, one to go!” Hypnosia declared triumphantly. “Give it up, *water girl!*”

Ami huddled on the floor, tucking her head between her knees, her fingers brushing the tips of her blue boots. *I failed*, she thought, hanging her head in despair. *I failed and now my friends are captured.* “I’m sorry, Mina,” Ami whispered to herself. She second guessed her decisions, agonizing over each scenario. *We should have run away. I should have sacrificed myself, not Mina. I should have tried harder.* Ami wondered if Mako and the others suffered similar fates. *Maybe I’m the only one left*, Ami thought.

Hypnosia’s jeering laughter echoed through the shrine’s sacred grounds. The youma watched the shrine doors patiently, like a cat waiting for a mouse. “You can’t hide forever, *water girl*. Come out, you *coward!*”

As she wallowed in desolation, Ami considered running outside and intentionally breathing in a lungful of Hypnosia’s sleeping gas. She imagined herself lying asleep next to her four, slumbering friends. *Just take me to the Dark Kingdom*, she thought. *Maybe then, I wouldn’t have to worry about being a Sailor Guardian anymore.* Ami normally tried to keep such dark feelings of insecurity bottled up, but seeing Sailor Venus defeated brought them all back. Mako, however, would have savaged Ami for having such thoughts. *Mako...*

Mako would never crouch here like a pathetic coward, Ami thought. *No way!*

An image of Mako’s lovely smile, ponytail, and rose earrings crystalized in Ami’s mind. *Kick her ass, Ami*, Mako’s imaginary voice said. *I believe in you, Ami.* With Ami’s confidence returning, she stood back up and readied herself for another round of battle. Right as she

placed her hand on the door, she heard Hypnosia's boots clacking outside.

CLACK CLACK CLACK.

There was a brief pause, before Hypnosia suddenly shouted, “*KNOCKOUT GAS! CYCLONE!*”

A burst of sleeping gas exploded outside, engulfing the shrine in a swirling purple cloud like a tornado. Ami gasped in shock as the fumes seeped through the door and windows, slowly filling the shrine's interior. She covered her mouth and sprinted down the hall, toward Rei's bedroom. After scrambling into the bedroom, Ami slid the door shut and let out a loud, exasperated sigh.

Hypnosia kicked the wooden shrine doors open—destroying a priceless work of classic Japanese architecture. In one arm, she dragged Sailor Venus' sleeping body, the girl's orange high-heels sliding across the floor. In Hypnosia's other hand, she held a rubber tube, with purple fumes streaming out of it. “I got tired of waiting, *water girl*,” she said, sweeping the fumes around the room like she was exterminating insects. Sailor Venus moaned, possibly muttering Ami's name. Hypnosia responded to the utterance by pointing the tube in Sailor Venus' face, spraying her with another dose of sleeping gas. *FSSSSSS!* “Don't you want to save your friend, *gorgeous*, here?” she shouted.

As Hypnosia wandered inside the shrine, filling it with anesthesia, Ami paced around Rei's bedroom, her mind racing to find a way out. She tried the window, but backed away when she noticed the purple gas outside. *Must seal all the cracks*, Ami thought, ripping the

sheets off Rei's bed. With the silky sheets in her hand, however, another idea popped into her mind.

Ami opened Rei's dresser drawer and rifled through her clothing. She picked up one of Rei's red panties—blushing as she noted its fresh, flowery scent—and pressed it to her nose, breathing through the fabric to check its permeability. *Hmmm...too porous*, Ami thought, tossing the panties aside. She grabbed one of Rei's black leggings and stretched it over her nose and mouth. *A makeshift respirator mask...it might buy me just enough time*. Ami wrapped the leggings around her face, wondering why she didn't think of the idea sooner. *No worries Rei...I'll buy you a new pair*.

Hypnosia stood in front of Rei's bedroom door, grinning like a serial killer. “*Hehehe*,” she laughed, setting Sailor Venus' sleeping body on the floor. “Nowhere left to run, *water girl*.” She stuck the tube under the door, sending a rush of sleeping gas into the bedroom. “Nighty night, water—”

SLAM!

The door slid open suddenly, catching Hypnosia off guard. “*HUH?!*”

“SHINE! AQUA!” Ami shouted, aiming her hands directly at Hypnosia's face. “*ILLUSION!!*” A burst of celestial water energy streamed out of Ami's hands, slamming into Hypnosia like a monsoon storm.

“GAARRGHHH!!” Hypnosia screamed, as the flood of water pushed her down the hall.

Ami emerged triumphantly from the bedroom, the makeshift leggings-mask wrapped snug around her mouth and nose. She took a few small breaths and noticed the distinct, sweet smell of the sleeping gas. It tickled her nose and made her slightly dizzy, but like she predicted, the mask filtered enough of the gas out. It gave her a fighting chance. *I'm going to need more of these black leggings, Rei*, Ami joked to herself.

Minako let out a woozy moan through her strawberry colored lips. “*Uhhnnnn...*”

“Mina,” Ami said, the mask muffling her voice. “Are you okay?” She shook Minako’s shoulder and brushed back her blonde hair. No dice. Minako was sound asleep. The air was simply filled with too much of the gas and Minako was taking in a hefty dose with each breath. Ami grabbed another pair of Rei’s black leggings. She wrapped it around Minako’s face like a gag, pulling it tight over her nose and mouth. “There. That should help.”

Hypnosia wiped water off her face, groaning as she stood back up. “Ughhhh...oh I’ll get you for that, *water girl*,” she said with a scowl. “Come here and face me, you—” Hypnosia paused suddenly, noticing the black fabric wrapped over Ami’s face. “*Hehehe...oh you big cheater*,” she said.

Ami clung to her determination, mustering her strength to maintain a facade of courage in Hypnosia’s formidable presence. “I won’t let you hurt my friend,” she said, wrapping Minako in a protective embrace. Ami had more choice words for her enemy, but chose to preserve her breaths. Even with the leggings-mask around her

nose, there was still a risk of accidentally breathing in too much of the sleeping gas.

“Looks like it’ll be a fight to the sleepy-finish,” Hypnosia said, checking the pressure in her metal tank. “You don’t *snore*, do you?”

Blue swirls of water energy materialized around Ami’s fists, as she summoned her celestial powers. *Come on, Ami...show them what you’re made of*, Mako’s voice said in her mind. *Kick her ass!*

“*KNOCKOUT GAS! HURRICANE!!*” Hypnosia shouted, sending forth a punishing, noxious cloud of purple sleeping gas.

With Mako’s courageous spirit by her side, Ami sprang into action, her response swift and powerful. “*SHINE AQUA ILLUSION!*”

Chapter 11. The Knife's Edge

“Midnight! Ribbon Strike!” Suzuki chanted, jumping into the air and swinging her deadly ribbon in Sailor Mars’ direction.

The air crackled with energy as Suzuki—her gymnastic prowess evident—maneuvered gracefully, her ankle wings providing ample lift. With each agile flip and twist, she sent her ribbon slicing through the air, creating a mesmerizing display of devastating elegance.

“Mars! Fire Ignite!”

On the opposing side stood Sailor Mars, a blazing tempest of fire and fortitude. She unleashed torrents of searing flames that clashed with Suzuki’s ribbon in an explosive symphony of elemental forces. Rei dodged another ribbon strike by performing a back handspring, flipping her legs in the air and landing upright stylishly. The two warriors were locked in a relentless dance of attacks and dodges, each move executed with precision, their powers evenly matched.

Suzuki landed on a high-bar, pausing to catch her breath.

“Wow, I underestimated you, Sailor Mars,” she said, twirling the ribbon in a spiral around her body. “Your form is still a little off though.”

Rei arrogantly brushed some of her hair away. “Want to give me some tips?”

“Sure,” Suzuki replied, bowing on the high-bar with her arms outstretched. She looked at Rei with a playful smile and said, “One kiss and I’ll give you a lesson.” She kissed her hand and blew it down to Rei. “Deal?”

Rei wiped some ashes off her cheek and smirked in response. “*Ha!* You want a kiss?” she said, readying another hot fireball in her fist. “Come and get it!”

Rei remembered vividly how Suzuki’s youma powers worked. When Suzuki first kissed Rei, she activated her energy-draining powers, causing Rei to nearly pass out. Rei knew, however, that Suzuki’s lustful nature was a potential weakness that could be exploited. Perhaps she could lure Suzuki in with a kiss, only to blast her with a fireball at the last second. It was an obvious trap, but it might work. “My lips are waiting,” Rei said, licking them flirtatiously.

Suzuki backflipped off the high-bar and performed another flip in midair. She landed on the floor mat, her ankle wings giving her a soft landing. “You’re hot enough, Sailor Mars,” she said, licking her own lips. “Douse those flames, will ya?”

Rei chuckled at Suzuki’s awful pickup line. “Can’t handle the heat?” she retorted.

“*Heh!* Okay fine, I’ll up the ante,” Suzuki said. “One kiss, and I’ll take you to your *friends*. Deal?”

“Awake or *asleep?*” Rei asked.

Suzuki cocked her head. “Smart girl.”

Rei increased her fireball’s intensity. The wind from the flames billowed her red miniskirt and silky black hair. “Throw down your ribbon, then we’ll talk.”

To Rei’s surprise, Suzuki shrugged and dropped her ribbon. It shattered into a thousand bright purple crystals, its magical essence fading from existence. Suzuki folded her arms and smiled. “Okay. What *now*, Sailor Mars?” she said in a perky, inviting voice.

With Suzuki's defenses lowered, Rei could have easily launched the fireball, blasting the youma to smithereens. She could escape and rescue her friends. But as Rei focused on her enemy, pondering her next move, she could not muster the willpower to attack. Especially since Suzuki had disarmed herself. After learning what her powers were capable of, Rei—and the rest of the Sailor Guardians—vowed to never use them out of cruelty or spite. Besides, Rei and Suzuki were friends in their normal lives. They still had gymnastics practice next week! If there was even a chance Rei could return Suzuki to normal, she had to take it.

Rei allowed her fireball to dissipate harmlessly. “Suzuki, let me help you,” she said, reaching her hand outward in a sincere gesture. “Please!”

Suzuki raised an eyebrow, looking with fascination at the now disarmed and vulnerable Sailor Mars. She focused on the red miniskirt, ravishingly flowing over the peaks of Rei's supple thighs. Just above, Rei's chest heaved gently, covered by a smooth leotard and violet-colored bow. Suzuki could have easily summoned her ribbon and attacked Sailor Mars with it. She would accomplish her mission, much to the satisfaction of her Dark Kingdom master, Zoisite. But the dark energy coursing through Suzuki was held at bay for the moment. Instead, a burst of deep recognition, fondness—and perhaps even romance—swelled inside her.

“Rei...” Suzuki's voice wavered, carrying a hint of emotion. “Rei, I—”

Suzuki darted forward suddenly and grabbed Rei in a passionate embrace.

“What the! Suzuki what are you—mmmmpphhh!!”

Rei’s words were cut off suddenly by a warm pair of lips, pressing seductively over her mouth. Rei gasped in astonishment, the kiss filling her with warm, intense emotions—emotions she hadn’t felt since the last time her lips met Suzuki’s¹⁰. But Rei quickly returned to her senses, thinking about her friends who were in danger. She placed her hand firmly over Suzuki’s chest—feeling her dainty breasts through the sleek leotard—and tried pushing the youma away.

Suzuki held on tight, however, grabbing the back of Rei’s head and planting another sensual kiss over Rei’s ruby-red lips. She rested her hand against Rei’s belly, massaging her thumb around the belly button and pinching some of the soft flesh. Their two tongues waltzed delicately around each other like a pair of shy dancers. The energy between the girls grew with each kiss, the air filled with the sounds of loud, steamy breaths. To Suzuki’s delight, Rei seemed to relax, immersing herself in the moment and giving Suzuki’s breasts soft touches and squeezes.

The emotions returned—passionate, warm, and romantic. Rei waited for the energy-draining process to begin, but it never did. Did Suzuki break free of her dark energy curse? Was this no longer a ruse, but rather the sexy, romantic advances of a lovesick youma? The thoughts vanished under a storm of feelings, as Suzuki’s fingers brushed against Rei’s thigh. Rei felt Suzuki’s hand reach under her red miniskirt and squeeze her fleshy rear. She gasped salaciously at the move and released the kiss briefly, whispering Suzuki’s name.

¹⁰ *Ami’s Gift to Mako* chapter 5.

Suzuki placed a finger tenderly over Rei's lips and said, "No more fighting, Rei. This is *all* I want." She snuggled her face into Rei's hair, savoring its fresh floral fragrance. Suzuki's lips dotted Rei's neck, cheeks and nose with tiny pecks. The two girls paused briefly to gaze lovingly into each other's eyes—and to catch their breath.

To Suzuki's surprise, Rei made the next move, leaning in and kissing her with her round, ruby-red lips. The move created a barrage of warm feelings inside Suzuki, which collided with the dark energy that was corrupting her. The two forces battled for control in Suzuki's mind—unbeknownst to her. As Suzuki returned the kiss, stroking the smooth fabric of Rei's leotard, a dark energy wave spiked in her head. And it triggered her powers.

"Mmph!" Rei moaned, her exclamation muffled by Suzuki's lips. A sudden weakening in her limbs caused Rei to shoot her eyes open. She looked down and saw an ominous glow on Suzuki's lips. The youma's energy-draining powers had activated! Panic surged through Rei as she felt her strength draining, and her mind growing sleepier. Reacting swiftly, she shoved Suzuki away with a mixture of betrayal and grogginess in her eyes. "Y—you tricked me!" Rei said, swaying side to side in a fit of exhaustion. "*Gah!* I'm such an *idiot!*"

Suzuki backed away, a look of apprehension in her own eyes. "Wait...Rei...I—"

Rei stood back up and glared at Suzuki. "No! You kidnapped my friends and tried to hurt me!"

"Rei, please, I—"

"Mars Fire!" Rei shouted, her voice exploding with anger. She summoned two massive fireballs, one in each fist.

The heat from the flames caused Suzuki to jump back in shock. It wasn't a bluff anymore. As feelings of disbelief and shame consumed her, Suzuki responded the only way she could in this situation: she summoned her weapon. The purple ribbon materialized in her hands under a magical aura, crackling with dark energy tendrils. "Rei, wait!"

"IGNITE!"

The first fireball rocketed toward Suzuki like a meteor, leaving an enthralling trail of bright orange embers. Her ankle wings fluttered and she flipped into the air, soaring over the fireball like a bird. She somersaulted and landed delicately on her feet, right as the second fireball made its way toward her. She pulled her ribbon back and swung it like a whip. Powered by dark energy, the ribbon sliced through the fireball, causing it to explode between the two adversaries. *BOOM!*

Rei sprinted through the fiery embers, emerging from the smoke like a phoenix in flight. She charged up her celestial powers and shouted her incantation as she closed the distance. "MARS! FIRE!"

Suzuki planted her boots into the floor and pulled her ribbon taut. She took aim at Rei, watching her trajectory closely. "I'm sorry, Rei," she whispered, her voice trembling with a hint of sorrow.

"IGNI—"

ZZZZAPPP!!

Rei's attack was cut short by a fierce crackle splitting the air, as Suzuki's ribbon shot out like a bolt of darkness. It whipped around Rei's body, binding her arms tightly together with a vengeance. Rei screamed in agony as the ribbon blasted her with a devastating surge of dark energy. It coursed through her body like electricity, wrenching her muscles into uncontrollable spasms. The very air shimmered with the

intensity of dark magic, each pulse of agony marked by vivid flashes of purple light. *ZAP ZAP ZAP!*

Suzuki couldn't bear to hear Rei's tortuous screams for a second longer. She dropped the dark energy ribbon, letting it shatter into magical crystal particles. As the ribbon disappeared, so did the dark energy coursing through Sailor Mars' body. Rei collapsed, falling into Suzuki's arms who had flown over to catch her. "Gotcha," Suzuki said, as Rei moaned helplessly in her grasp. She cradled Rei's head and gently set her weakened body on a floor mat. "Sorry, Rei...I...I didn't mean to—"

"Y—you," Rei groaned, blinking her eyes as she struggled to focus. Light wisps of smoke floated off her bodysuit and skirt. Her once silky smooth hair was frazzled. "You...are...so...dead, *Suzuki*," she uttered in a raspy voice.

The sight of Rei—wincing and squirming in pain—triggered a protective instinct in Suzuki. She gently shushed Rei and stroked her raven hair, providing comfort to the fallen Sailor Guardian. "Still think I can't handle the heat, Sailor Mars?" Suzuki said, smiling and caressing Rei's cheek.

The flirty banter cooled Rei's nerves and she relaxed, returning a cocky smile. "I—I'm not...done yet," she said, weakly grabbing Suzuki's wrist.

"Oh, I think you are, Miss Mars," Suzuki replied. She leaned closer to Rei's face and whispered seductively, "I thought you were going to *chastise* me."

"*Heh*...still thinking about it."

As Rei gazed into Suzuki's eyes, she noticed that they were a beautiful shade of purple. Within their depths, she discerned a glint of recognition—a spark of humanity. Rei quickly realized the error in her overreaction. Suzuki was mentally battling the dark corrupting energy inside her. It explained why her powers activated. Suzuki had fought back not as a means to hurt Rei, but in self-defense. In fact, once Rei was neutralized Suzuki immediately ceased the attack, choosing not to inflict more pain. There appeared to be some unspoken rules of engagement amongst Dark Kingdom youma—a reluctance to inflict excessive cruelty on the Sailor Guardians. It was as if all they wanted to do was play a game. Or steal a kiss.

At the same time, a different kind of storm was brewing in Suzuki's head. While she lusted for Sailor Mars, she was still aware of the mission given to her by her master, Zoisite. Fighting against her dark youma instincts wasn't easy, and only made possible because of Sailor Mars' captivating presence. Another wave of dark energy spiked, causing Suzuki to remember the hypodermic needle she had placed in her boot.

A soft moan from Sailor Mars brought Suzuki back to focus. Suzuki waited for the subdued Guardian of Fire to close her eyes. She then quietly reached into her boot and retrieved the hypodermic needle, palming it in her hand.

Rei placed a hand over Suzuki's cheek and gently brought her closer, unaware of the needle. "Suzuki," she said, her voice tender and calm. "I'd love to share another kiss, but my friends are in danger. Please...let me go help them."

Rei's sincere plea touched Suzuki's heart. She fought against her dark urges, her hand trembling inches from the carotid artery in Rei's neck. She popped the hypodermic needle's safety cap off, but held back, gripping it with sweaty palms. "I...I can't," Suzuki said, shaking her head. "I'm going to be in big, *big* trouble."

"I know you don't want to hurt us," Rei said, her voice cracking in a rare showing of emotion. "You're different." As her gloved hand stroked Suzuki's eyebrow, Rei noticed a slight twinkling in the youma girl's purple eyes. At that moment, Rei—typically stoic and arrogant—decided to pour her heart out, hoping by some miracle that it would break Suzuki's curse. "Suzuki, I...I don't usually say stuff like this, but I—" Rei swallowed hard and blinked, causing a teardrop to roll down her face. "I care about you, okay?"

Suzuki gazed down at her youma outfit, touching her bluish-gray skin and pointy ears. "Even though I'm...I'm a monster," she said, the bottoms of her eyes filling with tears.

"You're not a monster," Rei said, touching Suzuki's hand. "In fact...I think you want to be a hero, Suzuki."

"A...hero?"

Rei smiled and nodded. "A hero."

The simple word ignited a flame of inspiration and hope within Suzuki. She tenderly held Rei's head and smiled, their connection deepening in that moment of shared emotion. As Suzuki's gaze traveled downward, she found herself marveling at Sailor Mars' stunning figure, in all its vulnerable glory. Rei's beautiful legs bent upward, scrunching the red miniskirt up her hips and revealing just a tiny peek of her white panties. Her glossy, raven hair framed her pretty face in an elegant

cascade. Rei was no longer resisting, resigned to her fate, her trust completely in Suzuki's hands. There was a brief moment of tension as Rei gazed curiously at Suzuki, wondering what the youma's next decision would be.

"If being a hero means I get to fight alongside the lovely Sailor Mars..." Suzuki said, her voice seductive and powerful. She leaned close to Rei's ear—causing Rei to flinch slightly—and whispered, "Then count me in." Suzuki's hand—which still gripped the hypodermic needle—slowly moved away from Rei's neck. She brought her lips close to Rei's face and hesitated, as if waiting for Rei's permission before proceeding.

Rei gave Suzuki a slight, almost imperceptible nod.

Suzuki didn't hesitate any longer, her body overflowing with warm, romantic feelings. She leaned over Rei's ruby-red lips and gave her a deep, affectionate kiss. Rei responded fervently, moving her jaw up and down as she swallowed Suzuki's lips with warm kisses. The two girls paused to whisper words of admiration to each other. Then with a loud, sensual breath, they pressed their lips together and kissed again.

Outside the gymnasium, the atmosphere crackled with sparks of ominous dark energy. *SHWOOMMMM!* A portal emerged, illuminating the surroundings with a purple glow and showering the floor with rose petals. A pair of black military boots stepped out, followed by a flowing white cape.

Suzuki's ears perked up at the sudden noise. She released the kiss and darted her eyes to the side. As the gymnasium doors

opened—followed by the clacking of boots—Suzuki’s heartbeat accelerated, her panic shooting through the roof.

Rei shared Suzuki’s startled look and she opened her mouth to say something. “Wha—MMPH!” Before she could get a word out, Suzuki clamped her hand tightly over Rei’s mouth.

“Shh!” Suzuki said, gazing into Rei’s fearful eyes. Suzuki glanced behind her and instantly recognized the blonde curly hair of her master, Zoisite. He was accompanied by a devilishly handsome man that she didn’t recognize. From a distance, Suzuki could see the two generals whisper to each other, pointing in her direction.

A spike of dark energy surged in Suzuki’s mind, clouding her affectionate feelings. Her mission—*Operation Eclipse*—became a priority suddenly. She tried resisting, but the urge was impossible to overcome. It was as if the presence of Zoisite introduced an evil sphere of influence, forcing Suzuki into subservience. She gazed back at Sailor Mars with a look of anguish and flipped the needle in her hand. “Forgive me, Sailor Mars,” she said, her voice trembling. With a deep anguish, Suzuki shut her eyes and thrust the needle into Rei’s neck.

FFFFFF!

“HRMMPH!!” Rei gasped in shock as the hypodermic needle poked her soft neck tissue, sending forth a sharp, stinging pain. She muffled helplessly, her eyes conveying a sense of betrayal and disbelief. “Mmmf...mmph...”

Suzuki pushed down on the needle’s plastic plunger, delivering a potent anesthetic on non-stop flight to Rei’s brain. When the plunger reached the bottom, Suzuki quickly pulled the needle out, sparing Rei any more of the sharp pain. Cradling Rei’s head, Suzuki watched her

eyes quiver as the sedative did its methodical job. She felt Rei's body gradually lose its strength, growing sluggish and weak. Suzuki lifted her hand off Rei's mouth, allowing the now sleepy Sailor Mars a chance to breathe—and perhaps utter a final word.

Rei let out a delicate moan, her breaths labored as she struggled to remain awake. “S—Suzuki...wh...why...” she whimpered, her weak voice drifting off. “Why...” It was the only coherent thing Rei could say before a warm numbness consumed her mind. She tried her absolute hardest to stay awake, forcing her eyelids open—only to have them drift down heavily. Her vision blurred, a torrent of sleepiness hitting her like a typhoon. The last thing Rei saw before fluttering her eyes shut, was the look of torment etched on Suzuki's face. Rei fainted shortly after, her consciousness dwindling into the land of dreams.

Suzuki, overwhelmed by conflicting emotions, wiped a tear off her cheek. Her gaze lingered on the slumbering form of Sailor Mars—once so powerful and dashing—admiring how peaceful the vulnerable girl looked. She set Rei's head down carefully—then turned to face her master.

Zoisite marched over, with Kunzite following close behind. “Suzuki! I see you have a gift for us,” he said in a smug, cheerful voice. “Allow me to introduce you to Kunzite, my colleague.”

Suzuki bowed graciously. “My pleasure,” she said, her voice sullen.

Kunzite glared at Suzuki and smirked, walking right past her without saying a word. He towered over the unconscious Sailor Mars

and folded his arms. “Stunning,” he said, turning to Zoisite. “You know...I’ve always had a soft spot for Sailor Mars.”

Zoisite chuckled. “You a fan of red heels too?”

Kunzite raised his eyebrows and gestured to Sailor Mars’ sleeping body. “Shall we?”

“Oh, of course,” Zoisite replied, scrambling over. He scooped Sailor Mars off the ground, cradling her limp, unconscious body.

Suzuki glared with indignation, watching as Zoisite’s fingers sank into Rei’s thighs, creeping dangerously close to her red miniskirt. Rei’s hair flowed down like an inky paintbrush. Her gloved arms and high-heeled feet dangled lifelessly, lending an eerie stillness to her slumbering state.

As Zoisite carried Sailor Mars to the dark energy portal, Suzuki followed dutifully behind. An imposing hand gripped her shoulder suddenly, stopping Suzuki in her tracks.

“Where do you think you’re going, *hmm?*” Kunzite said, his voice dripping with contempt. “Your job is done.” The Dark Kingdom general towered menacingly over the youma girl, making her look like a small, innocent child.

“But...I thought...” Suzuki looked in Zoisite’s direction, searching for any sign of guidance from her master. All she saw was Zoisite’s unemotional expression and the subtle, disapproving shake of his head.

Suzuki lowered her head, her morale shattered. The thought of defying Kunzite and saving Rei crossed her mind, but the weight of her emotions crushed any semblance of resistance she might have had.

Defeated, she abandoned the idea, her determination crumbling under the influence of her handlers.

Kunzite stepped into the portal and beckoned Zoisite inside. Zoisite carried Sailor Mars through the barrier and turned around, giving Suzuki one final glance. “Meet us at the shrine,” he said, before passing completely through the portal.

The portal snapped shut, leaving behind a burst of rose petals that flowed across Suzuki’s ankle wings. She stood alone in the expansive, silent school gymnasium, accompanied only by the soft patter of raindrops on the roof. With a quiet moment to reminisce in her thoughts, Suzuki performed a backflip and floated elegantly onto a balance beam. She pondered longingly about Sailor Mars, their moment of romantic passion ripped away so cruelly by her Dark Kingdom handlers. *A hero*, Rei’s silky voice echoed in her mind. *A hero*.

Chapter 12. Intervention

“You’re losing steam, Sailor Moon,” Sakura taunted, twirling over her green leafy boots. The youma’s stamina was unwavering, likely given a boost by the park’s abundant foliage. She summoned more vines, their serpentine movements guided by her commands. “Giving up already?”

Sailor Moon’s vivid costume of red, white, and blue, dazzled against the dreary backdrop. Her golden tiara soared through the air, leaving behind a trail of sparkling moondust.

“Not a chance! In the name of the Moon, I’ll punish you!” Usagi responded, catching her magical tiara stylishly. She took a moment to breathe, pulling the pink makeshift mask off her nose. While Usagi was holding her own, she was growing exhausted, her energy levels depleting. *I can’t hold out much longer*, she thought.

“Hahaha! Whatever, moon princess,” Sakura said. She summoned a bouquet of purple lily flowers. Like a bride at a wedding, she threw the bouquet over her head and yelled, “Catch, Sailor Moon!”

Sailor Moon scrambled for cover. In her panic, however, one of her red boots tripped on a loose vine. It was a moment all too familiar for the clumsy girl, as she face-planted into a puddle. *SPLASH!* “Oww!”

Thrown with near perfect aim, the bouquet landed on Sailor Moon’s blue miniskirt and exploded into a green cloud of sleep pollen. *POOOOF!* Sailor Moon yelped and covered her mouth with both hands as she scrambled back to her feet. The mask protected her from most of the pollen, but a few particulates seeped through, tickling her nose.

Sailor Moon shook her head, attempting to stay awake as the noxious pollen triggered a wave of sleepiness.

“*Hahaha!* My, my, what a clumsy fool you are,” Sakura said, sauntering through the green cloud. She watched with glee as Sailor Moon stumbled backward, her legs wobbly. “No more games. Time for your nap,” Sakura said. She took out a glass bottle, still filled with her special chloroform blend from earlier, and popped open the cork. “Not your first time anymore, *hub?*” Sakura produced a white cloth and soaked it with the rest of the bottle’s liquid. She strolled over slowly, taunting her target. “You girls are way too easy.”

Sailor Moon backed away from the green cloud and ripped off her mask, which had been rendered useless by now. She took a couple breaths of fresh air and straightened her back. *I got one more shot at this*, she thought. *Make it count!* She held her golden tiara and summoned all her remaining celestial energy. The tiara glowed bright yellow and expanded into a large ring, like a hula-hoop. “*MOON TIARA! ENCIRCLE!*” she shouted, throwing the tiara into the sky.

“*Hub?!?*” Sakura yelled, watching the magical tiara spin above her. The youma had let her guard down, too focused on preparing the chloroform cloth. With no time to summon her vines, Sakura watched helplessly as the tiara encircled her figure. The tiara contracted in size, binding Sakura’s arms tightly. It was like a golden steel rope had wrapped around her body. “*Argghh!* What!?! I didn’t know you could do that!” she yelled, squirming in frustration against her bondage.

Sailor Moon took a moment to catch her breath, then gave Sakura a cute smile. “Looks like your sleepy-pollen days are over,” she said, pointing her finger. She then brought her hands together, making a

heart shape with her fingers. Between her hands, a pink wand materialized, with a sparkly crescent moon attached to it. With the Crescent Moon Wand in her hand, Sailor Moon struck an elegant pose, spreading her boots apart and raising the wand into the air. “Time to change you back,” she said, her voice brimming with superheroic confidence.

In a nearby section of the park, a dark energy portal opened. A pair of black military boots stepped out, followed by a sweeping white cape and a flurry of rose petals. The two generals—Zoisite and Kunzite—observed Sailor Moon from a distance, careful not to alert her. They quietly approached from behind, using trees and bushes as cover.

The slight movement in the bushes caught Sakura’s attention. She smiled and chuckled. “*Hehehe*...still think you’ve won, Sailor Moon?” she said with a sinister look. “Because you know what I think?”

Sailor Moon stared back with a dumbstruck expression. “What?” she answered, playing right into the youma’s hands, her naivety on full display.

“I think you’re going to be taking a *niice*, loooong, nap, girl.” Sakura closed her eyes and pretended to snore. She opened one eye and saw Zoisite sneaking up behind Sailor Moon. Further back stood a devilishly handsome man with white hair whom Sakura had never seen before.

Sailor Moon shook her finger at the youma, unfazed by the taunts. “In case you haven’t noticed, I’ve captured you, monster,” she

said in a perky voice, gripping the moon wand tightly. Undaunted, she stood confidently, her blue miniskirt fluttering in the wind. “Your reign of putting innocent girls to sleep ends now!”

Sakura kept her focus, laughing in response to Sailor Moon’s cheesy, heroic lines. “Oh, we’ll see about that...”

With no more fun phrases to shout, Sailor Moon pointed the wand in Sakura’s direction. She summoned her celestial healing powers and began her magical incantation. “*MOON!*”

Behind her, Zoisite quickened his pace. He hopped over dead vines, careful not to trip.

“*HEALING!*” Sailor Moon’s wand emitted a bright pink glow. She closed her eyes as the energy inside her surged to its crescendo. With a deep breath, she prepared the final word in her chant.

“*ESCA—MMMMPHHHH!!*”

Sailor Moon’s voice was swiftly silenced by a gloved hand clamping over her mouth. Another hand reached around and yanked the Crescent Moon Wand away, tossing it aside. “Surprise!” Zoisite said, his mouth inches from Sailor Moon’s ear. He pressed his hand over her lower belly, holding the frightened girl with a tight, unyielding grip.

“*HRMMPHH!*” Sailor Moon squealed through Zoisite’s hand. She kicked her legs in desperation, flinging her red boots up and down.

“*ARGHH, HOLD STILL,*” Zoisite yelled, struggling to hold his grip as Sailor Moon twisted and squirmed.

Kunzite joined the scene, grabbing one of Sailor Moon’s blonde pigtails as he walked to her side. “*Abbbbb,* Sailor Moon...the legendary Moon princess,” he said, his deep voice carrying a villainous tone. “We meet at last.”

“Hrrm?! Hmmp?!” Sailor Moon let out a terrifying whimper as Kunzite circled around her, touching various parts of her uniform—her bow, collar, leotard, and miniskirt.

“Exquisite,” Kunzite said, pinching some blue fabric on Sailor Moon’s miniskirt. “Ready to join your friends?”

Sailor Moon tensed up, struggling frantically to break free. “MMMPH!!!” she screamed, as images of her friends flashed in her mind.

Kunzite backed away from the chaotic struggle and gave Zoisite a nod. “Shall we?”

“*Argghh*...can...can you help a bit,” Zoisite said, straining to keep his hold. He looked over at Sakura—still bound by the tiara—and noticed the white cloth in her hand. “Hey...Kunzite...can you get me that cloth?”

“Hmmm?” Kunzite said. “Where?”

“That one!” Zoisite said, pointing his chin toward Sakura. He then moved his head out of the way as Sailor Moon tried to headbutt him. “Hurry!”

Kunzite looked over at Sakura and said, “Ohh, I see.” He casually walked over and yanked the white cloth from Sakura’s hand. While Zoisite was still struggling, Kunzite gently pressed the cloth to his nose, only to recoil away from the pungent scent. “Here,” he said, handing the cloth to Zoisite. “Do your thing.”

Sailor Moon let out a yelp as Zoisite briefly let go of her mouth. He swapped the cloth into his hand and clamped it firmly over Sailor Moon’s mouth. Zoisite adjusted the cloth so that it peaked over the bridge of her nose, forming an airtight seal over her face.

“MMMPHHH! MMMPHHH!”

The damp cloth muffled Sailor Moon’s voice, silencing her high-pitched squeals. She took in a deep breath through her nose and smelled a sweet fragrance—like water lilies, she thought. As the fumes traveled to Sailor Moon’s lungs, its anesthetic properties took hold in her brain, shutting off her neural receptors one by one. The celestial energy that flowed through her—so forcefully, just moments ago—evaporated, leaving the poor girl feeling weak and helpless. “Mmmphhh...hrrmmphh...”

Sakura’s wicked laughter pierce the air.

Feelings of humiliation and shame swelled inside Sailor Moon’s mind. She wished she hadn’t wasted so much time on the stupid speeches. *I’m such an idiot*, she thought, helplessly taking another breath from the cloth. Sailor Moon was supposed to be a leader, a powerful beacon of hope. Instead, she was reduced to a whimpering damsel, chloroformed into meek submission. A sudden desire to sleep consumed her. *Just a short little nap*, she thought, as if she had just finished a big exhausting pile of homework. *I’m so, so tired*. She shut her groggy eyes, the thought of a deep sleep soothing her, washing away the feelings of shame.

Zoisite helped her along, using his hand to gently rub her belly and diaphragm. “There we go,” he whispered, watching as Sailor Moon huffed through the cloth. “Keep breathing, moon girl. Sleeeeeeep.”

Kunzite stood next to Sakura and clasped his hands, watching the scene unfold with intrigue. “So...is this how you normally capture them?” he asked.

Sakura nodded. “Yes sir. Is this your first time?”

“Hmmm?”

“Your first time...watching a Sailor Guardian get chloroformed...”

“Ummm...I suppose. What’s it called again? Ch-chlo—”

“*Chlo. Ro. Formed.*”

“Ahhhh.”

“You like it?”

“It...has a certain charm to it...”

“Mmmm...”

“It’s fascinating. So simple, yet effective. Every breath Sailor Moon takes makes her sleepier—”

“And sleepier...”

“Mmmhmmm. Until she can’t fight it anymore. I’m amazed her powers don’t grant her some sort of...immunity...”

“Nope. Just give these girls a whiff and they’re out like a light.”

“Indeed. Say, what is your name again?”

“Sakura. And yours?”

“Kunzite. Pleasure to meet you.”

“Mmhnnnn...” A dainty whimper escaped Sailor Moon’s lips as she fainted, her limp body collapsing into Zoisite’s arms. *Rei, Mina, Mako...Ami...* The faces of Sailor Moon’s friends flashed one by one through her drugged mind, before her entire world went dark and silent.

Zoisite removed the cloth from her mouth, allowing her pink lips to part slightly. He lifted Sailor Moon’s unconscious body into a

bridal carry and walked over to his colleague. “Here,” Zoisite said, handing the sleeping moon princess to Kunzite. “My back is killing me.”

Kunzite heaved the girl into his arms, wrapping his fingers around her legs and chest. He admired Sailor Moon’s adorable, innocent face as she snuggled into his chest like a sleeping kitten. Her miniskirt scrunched over her hips and her sleek red boots dangled over Kunzite’s forearms.

It amazed him how easily the powerful Sailor Guardian was subdued. He wondered what celestial secrets were locked inside Sailor Moon’s body—untapped power, new forms of energy, or even the keys to the universe itself. All of that potential, and more, was bundled up in his arms, sleeping in a cute, red, white and blue sailor uniform.

As Kunzite reveled in his power, he noticed Zoisite looking around the park with worry. “Something wrong?” Kunzite asked.

Zoisite scratched his head and then mentally counted with his fingers. “Wasn’t there another Sailor Guardian with you,” he asked, looking at Sakura.

Sakura blinked nervously a few times and then responded, “Ohhhh...yeah...Sailor Jupiter...”

“Where is she?” Zoisite asked.

Kunzite gave Sakura an incredulous look. “You let her *escape*?!”

“Hey, I was busy fighting Sailor Moon over here. You’re welcome, *jerk*.”

Kunzite rolled his eyes at Zoisite and Sakura. He dumped Sailor Moon’s unconscious body back into Zoisite’s arms. “Take her back to the Dark Kingdom,” he said, pointing to the energy portal. “Sakura, you’re coming with me.”

Zoisite protested, saying, “Hey, what’s the big deal? I thought we were—”

“Ohhh, there’s no *we* here buddy,” Kunzite interrupted, throwing shade at his underling. “I *told* you not to fuck this up. Now I have to go clean this mess up.” Kunzite retrieved the chloroform-soaked cloth and shoved it in his jacket. “Besides, I learned a new trick. It will be fun.”

Zoisite watched as his colleague led Sakura toward the park’s exit gates. He stood alone, still cradling Sailor Moon in his arms, the girl sleeping soundly. As Zoisite’s thoughts wandered, he couldn’t help but speculate about Kunzite’s upcoming encounter with Sailor Jupiter. Zoisite remembered the ferocity Sailor Jupiter showed when pushed to her limit. Neither adversary liked to lose.

As the evening’s chill deepened, Zoisite pivoted on his heels, carrying Sailor Moon gently toward the portal. He stepped inside, satisfied that the mission was at the very least, making progress. The gateway sealed shut behind him, enveloping the park in a hushed stillness, as if the very atmosphere held its breath.

Chapter 13. Mako's Fight

Mako leaned wearily against a telephone pole, taking a break to recover from the sleepy-pollen attack. The Hikawa Shrine, though not far in reality, seemed like it was hundreds of miles away.

Mako's thoughts drifted toward Ami. Memories of their shared laughter and romance were mixed with images of a terrified Ami being chloroformed. Mako longed to give Ami a big, warm hug—to comfort and protect her. *Don't worry, Ami...I'm coming...*

Mako reached an intersection and pondered over which direction to turn. As Mako waited, her heart ached, triggered by the thought of Usagi fighting alone in the park. Part of Mako desired to race back and check on Usagi. But was it the right call? Being forced to choose between Usagi and Ami tormented Mako. She groaned in frustration.

A street sign with the words *Hikawa Shrine* reminded Mako which way to turn. After jogging for a few minutes, the warm glow of the shrine came into view, like a beacon of hope cutting through her worries. The sight renewed Mako's determination, infusing her weary legs with a burst of energy. Before she could take another step forward, however, a bright purple glow materialized in front of her.

SHWWOOOMM!

“WHOA!”

The dark energy portal blocked Mako's path to the shrine. "Looks like we have trouble," she said, charging up her powers for a fight.

Sakura leaped out of the portal and landed on top of a tree branch. "Well, well, well! We meet again, Sailor Jupiter!" she said in a velvety voice, spinning around in her leafy green dress. "You didn't think you could escape *that* easily, did you? *Hahahaha!*"

Mako's heart sank into the depths as she listened to Sakura's taunting, arrogant laughter. If Sakura had left the park, it could only mean one thing: Sailor Moon had been defeated. Mako glared at the youma, her emotions switching between rage and panic. The enemy didn't seem fazed at all and barely had a scratch on her. *I shouldn't have left Usagi's side*, Mako thought, her mind filled with regret. "What did you do to Sailor Moon?" Mako shouted, hoping the enemy had not been too cruel.

Sakura closed her eyes and made a snoring sound. "Sailor Moon is taking a *niiiiice* long nap." She pointed her finger at Mako and smiled. "Don't bother looking for her. She's on a one way trip to the Dark Kingdom."

I REALLY shouldn't have left Usagi behind, Mako thought, her fists trembling in anger. Sailor Moon was their princess—the one person the Sailor Guardians were sworn to protect. Capturing her was like a checkmate.

Mako knew she had to reach Ami. If there was anyone who could solve this problem, it was the team's brilliant strategist. But was it too late? With her stress-levels skyrocketing, Mako's thoughts stopped

abruptly, her attention snagged by a sudden bright blue glint in the corner of her eye. It was emanating from the shrine and looked like a celestial attack of some kind—akin to Sailor Mercury’s signature move. *Shine Aqua Illusion—Ami!!*

Mako sprinted forward, the thought of rescuing Ami powering her every step.

“Going somewhere?” Sakura said seductively, shooting a vine near Mako’s feet. *SHWWPPP!*

“OUT OF MY WAY!” Mako shouted as she dodged the vine, her fists crackling with electricity. “Or I’ll fry you to a crisp!”

Sakura wagged her finger like a school teacher. “Temper, temper, Sailor Jupiter,” she said, smiling wickedly. “No need to get uptight with me. I just want to—”

“I said *OUT OF MY WAY*,” Mako screamed, stomping her boot. Looking past her enemy, Mako saw another blue water burst at the shrine’s location. She then saw what appeared to be a purple tornado. *Ami needs my help*, Mako thought, the realization igniting a fervent determination. *But this stupid youma is in my way!* The urgency and frustration within Mako intensified, driven by an unyielding resolve to protect Ami—at any cost. Worst case scenarios flashed through Mako’s mind. What if the enemy tortured her? What if—god forbid—Ami lost her life in battle? Mako shook the last horrific thought away. *No...Ami’s going to be fine*. In the distance, the commotion at the shrine quieted down. *She’s going to be fine*, Mako repeated to herself, but with increased worry.

Sakura noticed the distress in Sailor Jupiter’s expression and decided to escalate her provocation. She sauntered back and forth on the

tree branch. “*Obbbbb*...I know what you’re thinking,” she said. “You’re thinking about your cute, blue-haired friend...*Sailor Mercury*, aren’t you?”

Hearing the enemy mention *Sailor Mercury*’s name filled Mako with a blazing surge of anger. She clenched her teeth and glared at the youma, shouting, “I told you to keep her name out of your—”

“Are her lips soft?” Sakura interrupted, punctuating her words with playful kissing noises. “I don’t blame you, *Sailor Jupiter*. She’s a cutie!”

Mako’s eyes went wide as saucers, the mortifying realization settling in. *They saw me kissing Ami!* Her cheeks flushed red with embarrassment. The two had been captured in the midst of their most intimate romantic moment. The helplessness of the situation gnawed at Mako’s sense of security, leaving her feeling exposed to her captors’ cruel whims.

“You...are *so* dead,” Mako grumbled. She positioned herself to unleash a thunderous blast against the enemy, summoning her celestial powers in a fit of rage. Without *Ami*’s calm guidance, Mako’s fury swelled without restraint.

“Uh oh,” Sakura said, pretending to be scared. “Looks like I struck a nerve.”

A fierce battle cry erupted from Mako as she took aim at her adversary. “SUPREME!” she chanted, her voice resonating with righteous fury. Using her thunder strike now risked depleting her energy reserve. But Mako’s anger clouded rationality; she was too incensed to heed her own strategy.

Sakura hardened her stance and summoned her own batch of green, slithering vines. “Show me what you got, *Jupiter!*”

“THUNDER!!” Mako shouted, launching a ball of lightning toward the trees. It hurtled onward like a comet, tearing through the air with divine force. For a moment, it seemed as if the attack would blast Sakura to ashes.

But the youma had been ready the whole time. Sakura quickly raised her arms and commanded her vines to form a shield. They surrounded her body, weaving together into a dense, verdant cocoon. The lightning attack struck the shield, creating a spectacular display of electrical sparks, but otherwise absorbing harmlessly into the vines.

Mako cursed loudly, her precious energy reserve wasted on an attack that didn’t even touch the enemy. Completely exhausted, Mako faltered, bending over and grabbing her knees for support. Her arms trembled with fatigue and her throat was parched from all the shouting. She looked to the shrine, hoping to see a flicker of Ami’s blue water attack. But she saw nothing.

“*Awwwww...poor, weak, little, Sailor Jupiter,*” Sakura taunted, her words oozing with mockery. “I think my sleepy pollen did a number on you back there.” She picked a purple flower from her crown and laughed. “How about you give this flower a sniff and take a nice rest?”

“Never,” Mako said under her breath.

“Hmm?”

Mako clenched her fists and glared at Sakura. “I said *never!* I don’t care how much you laugh at me with your *stupid* vines. I’ve faced tougher bullies in school,” she shouted passionately. “My friends mean everything to me, and *yes*, I care deeply for Mercury. It’s called

love...something you Dark Kingdom scum know *nothing* about!”

Mako’s words filled her with a resolute spirit. She took a step forward, confident that she could muster another thunder attack. “So watch out, monster! Because no matter the odds, I *won’t* back down!!”

Sakura recoiled in surprise, her mocking demeanor momentarily shattered by Mako’s unwavering determination. Before she could utter a response, Sakura noticed movement behind Mako—a white cape, flowing within the bushes. The imposing figure, dressed in a striking military uniform, took a quiet step toward Mako. Sakura’s cunning, malicious demeanor returned, and she retorted, “You’re just a sentimental fool, Sailor Jupiter...clinging to empty ideals.”

Holding a white handkerchief, the figure crept closer to Mako.

Mako remained focused, unaware of the danger lurking behind her. She closed her eyes and summoned another round of thunder energy, hoping the delay had given her enough time to recharge. A green magical aura surrounded her body, creating a light wind that billowed her hair and miniskirt. “We’ll see about that!” Mako said, opening her eyes suddenly and raising her arms. “SUPREME!”

Sakura simply shook her head, watching with sinister glee as the person snuck up behind Sailor Jupiter. “*Obbbbh*...the only thing you’ll be doing is taking a supreme *nap!*”

Mako ignored Sakura’s quip and readied the final word in her incantation. “THUN—*HRMMMMPHHHHH!!!*”

A damp handkerchief clamped over Mako’s mouth, stifling her celestial chant and halting what would have been a powerful thunder attack. “*Mmmphhh!! Mmmphhh!!*” As the flowery, sweet fragrance

hit her nose, Mako realized she was being chloroformed yet again. She grabbed at her assailant's arm, desperately clutching folds of fine gray fabric. *Is it Zoisite?* she wondered. Another arm wrapped tightly around Mako's waist, leaving her no room to wiggle. Mako noticed the arm's distinct, muscular build. *No...this ain't Zoisite...*

"Quite the speech you gave back there, Sailor Jupiter," a deep, charismatic voice said. "Now I know why Zoisite captured you so easily—your emotions make you ripe for manipulation."

Mako's heart raced as the voice slithered into her ear, carrying a tone of condescending amusement. "Mmmphhh!" she protested through the cloth, shaking her head uselessly. "Mmmphhh!!"

Sakura gracefully descended from the tree. "I see you've met my new acquaintance, Kunzite," she said, smirking. "See? I told you. You're going straight back to sleep, Sailor Jupiter!" Sakura's arrogant laughter erupted, echoing in every direction.

Mako squirmed and twisted her body under Kunzite's relentless grip. In her desperate attempt to break free, she drew a deep breath through the cloth, filling her lungs with soporific vapors. "Mmmphhh...mmm...mmm," she whimpered, letting out her feminine moans in short gasps. Mako felt a fatigue growing in her body, but strangely, the effects didn't seem as potent as before.

Taking another whiff through the cloth, Mako realized her nose wasn't fully covered. Kunzite's grip was awkward, demonstrating a lack of care and detail to the art of chloroforming a girl—like it was his first time. *This guy needs a lesson*, Mako joked to herself. Rather than expend her energy in a fierce struggle, Mako chose a different strategy. She intentionally eased her tension and allowed her body to slacken,

pretending to fall asleep. “Hmmpmhhhh...mmpm.” She let out a few moans, increasing the pitch of her voice to give it a sexier, more vulnerable tone.

“Why do we even bother with monsters and dark energy,” Kunzite said. As Sailor Jupiter fell limp in his arms, his sense of superiority swelled. “*Chloroform!* You Sailor Guardians can’t *handle* this stuff!” Gazing skyward, he let out a maniacal laughter that echoed through the surroundings. Amid his unbridled delight, Kunzite’s grip on Mako’s face loosened further, giving her nose more space to breathe.

Sakura sauntered over and fiddled with the pink bow on Mako’s chest. “You’re such a cutie when you’re being chloroformed, you know that,” she said with a giggle. Sakura glanced at Kunzite, asking for his unspoken permission to proceed.

Kunzite grinned and pressed the cloth harder over Sailor Jupiter’s mouth. Subduing the strongest Sailor Guardian made Kunzite feel powerful and he relished the ego boost it gave him. In Kunzite’s twisted mind, power and control were the only things that mattered—it was the fundamental currency of the universe.

With Kunzite’s implicit blessing, Sakura leaned in and gently stroked Mako’s soft, curvy breast. “Might as well...have a little fun while you’re still conscious, Sailor Jupiter.”

That’s right...come closer, Mako thought, watching the youma fondle her chest. While the youma’s lewd behavior hurt Mako’s pride and dignity, she was willing to let it slide—just this once. She fluttered her eyelashes and closed them halfway, pretending to look groggy. “Mmpm.” She whimpered again, increasing the sexy frailty in her voice. *Closer*.

Still gripping Sailor Jupiter tightly, Kunzite leered at the salacious scene unfolding before him. “Front row seats...it’s my lucky day,” he said.

Sakura placed her hand over Sailor Jupiter’s upper thigh, feeling its firm muscles. She moved her fingers upward—slowly and with purpose. Her fingers frisked the hem of Sailor Jupiter’s alluring green miniskirt—then proceeded underneath. Sakura licked her lips and gazed seductively into Sailor Jupiter’s groggy eyes. “Enjoying this?” she said, as her hand massaged the tender skin around Mako’s panties. “I bet *Sailor Mercury* never does this to you.”

Obbbb...you have no idea, Mako thought, a wry smile playing at the corners of her mind. *Ami would run circles around you—any day of the week!* Mako’s patience wore thin, her tolerance for Sakura’s lecherous actions finally reaching its limit. She had been breathing through her nose the whole time, taking advantage of Kunzite’s amateurish mistake. As a renewed vigor surged within her, Mako snapped her eyes open, fixing a piercing glare upon Sakura.

Sakura gaped in shock at Mako’s sudden alertness. For about two seconds, neither adversary made a move. Sakura then piped up, her voice shaking nervously. “Ummmm...K—Kunzite...”

Kunzite looked up. “Hmmmm?”

“The cloth...needs to cover her nose.”

“*Obbbb...that explains why—*”

WHACK! With a sudden burst of strength, Mako whipped her head backward, slamming it hard into Kunzite’s nose.

“*YEEOWWW!*” His agonizing scream rang Mako’s eardrums and he loosened his grip, the pain crippling him.

Seizing the opportunity, Mako kicked both legs into Sakura’s upper chest. The youma flew backward and stumbled to the ground in a jolt. Amidst the chaos, Mako wriggled free from Kunzite’s grip and ripped the handkerchief from her mouth with a determined gasp. “Idiot!” Mako yelled, after greedily inhaling a lungful of fresh air.

Sakura managed to rise to her feet, but before she could recover, Mako fired a bolt of lightning into her abdomen. *ZAP!* “*OWWWW!*” Sakura yelled, crashing into some bushes with a resounding thud.

With both enemies stunned, Mako decided to make a run for the shrine. But before she could steady her legs, Kunzite grabbed Mako’s arm and yanked her brutally to the ground.

“Hey!! Let go!” she yelled.

“*Arghhh!* You...aren’t going *anywhere*,” Kunzite spat. His arm coiled around Mako’s neck in a chokehold. “That really...*really* hurt!” Kunzite said, clenching his jaw. Desperate to regain control, his words carried a mix of fury and pain. With a sneer, he squeezed Mako’s neck.

“*Hrrckkk! Grrrkkk!!*” Mako let out a series of tortured cries and screams as Kunzite’s muscular arm strangled her. She tugged at Kunzite’s arms and latched onto his sleeves with an iron grip. Their struggle shifted to the ground, writhing, bending, and contorting, their battle punctuated by fierce cries as they grappled for dominance.

Mako, summoning every ounce of her natural strength, managed to wrestle herself atop Kunzite’s form. The two adversaries hurled taunts and insults at each other, as Mako pinned Kunzite down with her weight.

“How does it feel to lose to a *girl, asshole!*” Mako said, holding down both of Kunzite’s wrists.

“*Ughhh!*” Kunzite groaned, straining under Mako’s grip. “It doesn’t matter!” he yelled. “Every one of you Sailor brats will fall to the power of the Dark Kingdom!” With a defiant yell, Kunzite tore one hand free from Mako’s grip and summoned his dark powers. The air crackled with purple tendrils of energy as he extended his palm, directing the malevolent power toward Sailor Jupiter.

“Don’t even think about it!” Mako shouted, responding immediately by summoning her own thunder powers. Her fist hovered inches from Kunzite’s nose, showering his face with hundreds of bright, electrical sparks. “Trust me...this will hurt—*bad.*”

Kunzite hesitated, glaring into Mako’s soul. He then closed his eyes and relaxed, allowing the dark energy to evaporate. “*Hebehebe,*” he chuckled, the laughter starting out soft, then growing to an evil, villainous crescendo. “*Hahahaha!*”

“What’s so funny?” Mako said through gritted teeth, still holding her thunder attack above Kunzite’s head.

“*Hebehebe...*you’re such a fool, Sailor Jupiter,” Kunzite said, his sinister laughter subsiding. “Blast me all you want...but we still have Sailor Moon and Sailor Mars.” He shook his head and chuckled under his breath. “You silly girls...with your silly skirts...have already lost.”

Mako’s heart clenched at the mention of Sailor Mars, the first she had heard of her defeat. Rei’s defeat—along with Usagi’s—put the Sailor Guardians at a significant, possibly insurmountable disadvantage.

Mako shook her head in denial. “No...” she whispered, her voice tinged with fear. “No...you...you’re lying!”

“Blast me then,” Kunzite said in a relaxed, arrogant tone. “Do it, *thunder girl*.”

Mako drew her fist back, her chest inflating with a determined breath.

A sinister smile crept across Kunzite’s face. “Do it,” he whispered, his voice deepening to a hypnotic chant. “Do it.”

As Mako prepared to unleash her thunder attack upon Kunzite, a warm presence intruded into her thoughts. Ami’s voice spoke up, offering guidance amidst the escalating standoff. *Never hurt others out of spite*, Ami’s calm voice said. *As Sailor Guardians, we must rise above our enemies*. While Ami was morally correct, Mako badly wanted to blast Kunzite to smithereens anyway. He had hurt her friends and needed to be neutralized. But Ami’s voice persisted, guiding Mako down the proper path.

“No,” Mako said, dissipating her thunder energy.

Kunzite furrowed his eyebrows, his expression conveying confusion and amusement. “Really? *Hehehe...*” he chuckled.

“Well...don’t say I didn’t—”

“Nap time,” Mako interrupted with a mischievous smile. She grabbed the chloroform-soaked cloth—which had been resting on the ground nearby—and shoved it over Kunzite’s mouth. She positioned the cloth so that it covered Kunzite’s large, pointy nose. “So tell me,” Mako said flirtatiously, as she spread her knees, pressing her hips and green miniskirt over Kunzite’s abdomen. “How does it feel to be

chloroformed...by a *girl?*” With her confidence and pride restored, Mako watched Kunzite’s eyes transition rapidly from mild amusement to panic.

Kunzite inhaled deeply through the damp cloth and his power—the power that defined his entire identity—evaporated, replaced with the overwhelming desire to sleep. He shook his head, attempting to wriggle free from Sailor Jupiter’s tight grasp. But it caused him to take another breath, sending him further into the depths of slumber. “HRMMMM!?” he yelled, the disbelief shaking his core. “HHHMMMM!?!?”

As Kunzite struggled fruitlessly to regain his dominance over Sailor Jupiter, another emotion crept into his hazy mind: humiliation. It felt exactly like the humiliation he had experienced at the hands of another woman not too long ago—Queen Beryl. No matter how much Kunzite tried to ignore it, he loathed that feeling, hating it to his bones.

Kunzite wondered what Zoisite would think if he teleported over right now. There’d be laughter. Probably some jokes at Kunzite’s expense. *Beaten...by a girl? Poor Kunzite. Poor...weak, delicate, feeble...little Kunzite.* Zoisite would never follow his orders again. *No! Not like this!* The rage boiled inside him like a hot kettle. *I’m going to **hurt** your friends*, he thought, gazing murderously into Sailor Jupiter’s eyes. *Your friends are going to **pay**...dearly.*

Sakura peeked out of the bushes, rubbing her forehead. “Owwwww,” she groaned. Her entire body throbbed in pain from Sailor Jupiter’s kicks and lightning attack. She looked at the commotion in front of her and saw her master, Kunzite, pinned to the ground by

Sailor Jupiter. To Sakura's surprise, Sailor Jupiter was in the middle of chloroforming him too—and he appeared to be fading fast. “Master...” Sakura said softly. She summoned her vines and aimed one of them at Sailor Jupiter's back.

Mako kept her focus on Kunzite, using both hands to ensure the chloroform-soaked cloth remained clamped over his mouth. Kunzite's hands were now splayed on the ground, too weak to resist. As Mako asserted her dominance, she began fantasizing about her reunion with Ami. She imagined embracing a very sleepy Ami and giving her a passionate kiss. Recognizing that they still had a challenging fight ahead, Mako was confident that with Ami by her side, they would overcome any obstacle. The thought left a warm smile on Mako's face. It also left her distracted—and wide open to a sneak attack.

“Woodland! Vine *Smash!*” Sakura shouted suddenly. A single green vine shot forward with the velocity of a bullet. The vine snaked its way toward the back of Mako's head, aimed at the weakest, most vulnerable part of her skull. Had Mako reacted a split second sooner, she could have moved her head a few inches and dodged the attack. But as fate would have it, the vine impacted, smacking the base of Mako's skull like an iron rod.

WHACK!!!!

“HNN!!”

Mako emitted a loud gasp. Her head snapped backward from the brutal hit. She felt an acute pain at the back of her neck as a constellation of yellow stars filled her vision, intensifying her

disorientation. Looking up at the sky, Mako's eyes rolled upwards, the stars in her vision fading into an inky blackness. The harsh impact rendered Mako unconscious instantly, leaving her brain with zero time to process another thought. "*Ohhhhh...*" she moaned, her voice fading away. Ami's adorable face flickered in Mako's mind, before her entire reality extinguished into nothingness.

Sailor Jupiter's unconscious body collapsed and landed over Kunzite's shoulder. With a loud grunt, Kunzite ripped the chloroform-soaked cloth from his mouth and pushed the incapacitated girl off his body. He staggered back to his feet, rubbing his head as he struggled to overcome a fervent dizziness. Shaking his head while taking deep breaths, Kunzite was able to reorient himself. He gazed down at Sailor Jupiter's sleeping form with a look of twisted rage. Kunzite considered kicking his boot into Sailor Jupiter's stomach, but decided against it as his youma partner strolled over.

"Master Kunzite," Sakura said, taking a bow. "Are you alright, sir?"

Kunzite straightened his jacket and brushed dirt off his shoulder. "I...I'm fine, Sakura," he said, his once booming voice now shaken. "I—I had that under control."

"Of course, master."

There was a hint of sarcasm in Sakura's tone. Kunzite hated sarcasm, especially from underlings. He considered slapping Sakura in the face, but realized he'd need her to carry their prize.

"*Abem...shall we?*" Kunzite said, gesturing to the fallen Sailor Jupiter. With the situation back under his control, a predatory grin

graced Kunzite's lips. The intoxicating rush of power flowed back to him, reasserting his sense of authority.

Sakura dutifully commanded her vines to wrap Sailor Jupiter's body into a tight cocoon. "Our captor is ready for transport, sir," she said seductively. Using her vine powers, Sakura floated the unconscious Sailor Guardian alongside her.

The two Dark Kingdom stewards turned their attention toward the Hikawa Shrine. Before they left however, Kunzite placed a firm hand over Sakura's shoulder.

"Oh, and Sakura?"

"Yes?"

Kunzite bent down to Sakura's level and gave her a cold, serious look. "What happened here...keep it between us...okay?"

Chapter 14. The Power of Love

20 minutes ago.

“SHINE! AQUA ILLUSION!”

In the center of the Hikawa Shrine, a battle of wits and elemental forces ensued. Employing her mastery over water, Ami skillfully conjured protective shields to counteract Hypnosia’s potent sleeping gas. Hypnosia, undeterred, unleashed waves of sleeping gas tornadoes. Yet, Ami’s clever decision to wear a makeshift face mask provided enough filtration to withstand the onslaught. Despite being the weaker opponent, Ami’s resourcefulness and defensive maneuvers allowed her to persevere.

“ARRGHHH!” Hypnosia screamed, as a surge of water smashed into her. She landed hard on the ground, her metal tank making a clunking noise.

“Please,” Ami said, walking over with her hand outstretched. “Hypnosia, try to remember. You were once Doctor Masui...my teacher!”

The youma staggered back to her feet, groaning and snarling as she wiped water off her face. *“Grrrrr...no...idea what you’re talking about, water girl!”*

With Hypnosia right in front of her, Ami observed the metal tank's pressure meter. It was in the red. Hypnosia was running out of gas—literally.

Ami walked forward confidently, a light wind billowing her blue miniskirt. She removed her face mask and gave Hypnosia a warm smile. "I don't want to hurt you," Ami said, her voice calm and tender.

"G—get away from me!" Hypnosia yelled, a sneer on her face. She raised her rubber tube and pointed it at Sailor Mercury. "I'm warning you...you're going to get a big dose of sleeping gas and it *won't* be fun!" She reached for her tank and twisted the valve. *SQUEAK!*

Ami held her breath as she stared into the rubber tube, but she didn't feel any fear. Her blue boots took another step forward.

"Nighty night, *water girl*," Hypnosia said. She grinned and triggered a puff of sleeping gas. *POOF!*

Ami flinched as the puff hit her face. She opened one eye and took a sniff, smelling nothing but fresh air. A tiny wisp of purple smoke floated out of the tube.

"Wh—WHAT?!" Hypnosia yelled in disbelief. She pressed the trigger over and over. *POOF POOF POOF*. Like an empty spray can, the tube only puffed out dry air. "*Obbb...*darn...looks like I've run out," Hypnosia said, a depressed tone in her voice. "I...don't suppose you'll let me chloroform you, huh?"

The two adversaries paused for a few seconds, unsure how to proceed in the awkward stalemate. Had this situation occurred a few months ago, Ami would have run away, too scared to make any sort of bold move. But with Mako in her life now, Ami had changed, able to set

aside her insecurities when it counted. Sensing apprehension in Hypnosia's eyes, Ami made the first move—she pressed forward and gave Hypnosia a big, heartwarming hug.

“Ohhhhh...wh—what are you doing,” Hypnosia said, awkwardly lifting her arms as Sailor Mercury embraced her. “Get...off...me...”

“I don't want to fight anymore,” Ami said, wrapping her arms tightly around Hypnosia's metal tank. “You...Sakura...and Suzuki...you're our friends. You're under Dark Kingdom control and we don't want to hurt you.”

Ami's sincere, loving words triggered a surge of mixed emotions within Hypnosia. She tried shoving Ami away, but the bright young girl kept a firm grip, snuggling her face into Hypnosia's shoulder. She felt Ami's fast heartbeat, throbbing over her own chest. The youma thought about launching a sneak attack, perhaps poking Sailor Mercury with a sedative-laced needle. But she couldn't muster the willpower to move. In that moment, Hypnosia finally understood what the power of love was capable of.

Hypnosia trembled, her voice shaky as she said, “But...but, Zoisite...he...he'll—”

“Don't worry about Zoisite,” Ami said, taking a step back. “If you help us, we can put a stop to him.”

“And...you can change me back to normal?”

Ami nodded. “Yes...we can get Sailor Moon to heal you.”

Hypnosia shuffled her red boots. She appeared uncertain, torn over what choice to make.

Ami sensed the indecision and spoke up, saying, “You’d be a hero, Hypnosia.”

Hypnosia raised her head. “A...hero?” she said.

“A hero.”

“*Haba*,” Hypnosia chuckled, giving Ami a friendly pat on the shoulder. “Okay, Sailor Mercury. I don’t know about this whole ‘hero’ business, but if you can change me back, that’ll be worth it.”

“It’s a deal,” Ami said.

“I hate taking orders from that *idiot*, Zoisite, anyway.”

Ami giggled at the casual insult. She then refocused and said, “Oh! My friend, Sailor Venus...she’s still inside, asleep. We need to—”

“Yeah...I kind of overdid it on the sleeping gas,” Hypnosia replied, rubbing the back of her head. “She just needs some fresh air.”

“Sounds good,” Ami said, turning toward the shrine.

“Oh! And your cat’s in the closet.”

“Oh my gosh...Luna!”

“Yeah...sorry about that,” Hypnosia said in a sheepish tone.

“No worries, I’ll go check on them,” Ami replied, jogging toward the shrine. She glanced back graciously and said, “Thank you!”

For the first time since the ordeal began, Ami felt a sense of hope building up. If she could help Minako and Luna recover, the three of them—plus Hypnosia...maybe—should be able to rescue the other girls. There was even a chance Mako could make an appearance, giving their group a burst of raw strength to fight the Dark Kingdom. Ami fantasized about Mako running over and giving Ami a dramatic

embrace. The romantic fantasy was abruptly ended, however, by the familiar whooshing sound of a dark energy portal.

SHWOOOMM!

“Oh no,” Ami gasped, shaking her head as her heart swelled with fear. “No, please, not now...”

She sprinted toward the shrine doors, frantically shouting Minako’s name.

ZZAAPPP!!

A fierce bolt of dark energy streamed out of the doorway, zapping Ami directly in the chest. *ZZZZTTTT!* Ami screamed as the painful blast sent her crashing to the ground. With smoke floating off her chest, Ami writhed and groaned. She lifted her trembling head and observed a shadow of movement at the shine’s door.

Emerging into view—with utmost dramatic flair—was Kunzite, carrying an unconscious Sailor Venus. Her sleeping form was draped over Kunzite’s arms like a wilted lily plant. Despite his villainous aura, Kunzite treated Sailor Venus with care, making sure her beautiful legs were secure in his grasp. Minako’s angelic face was nestled into Kunzite’s shoulders, like he was carrying a fainted lover. She even had a slight smile on her lips, an indication that perhaps Minako thought she was being rescued.

“What a lovely, sweet little angel we have here,” Kunzite said in his charismatic voice, stepping forward with his prize. “Quiet now...we mustn’t awaken our sleeping princess.”

“Put her down!” Ami shouted.

Ami had never seen the man before. The general commanded an intimidating presence, his entrance dramatically escalating the tension in the air. Had it not been for Ami's preference for girls, she might have even considered the general handsome. But at the moment, Ami did not care for his chiseled looks. She only cared about her friend.

"You don't give orders here," Kunzite said to the frightened young girl. He looked past Sailor Mercury and noticed another figure—a Dark Kingdom youma—walking over gingerly. "You!" Kunzite shouted, pointing at Hypnosia. "Come here."

Hypnosia made nervous eye contact with Ami and shook her head, as if she had doubts about her previous acquiescence. Kunzite's arrival seemed to reset the dark corruption inside the youma's mind, like there was an evil sphere of influence under his control. Hypnosia walked past Ami and stood next to Kunzite, like a good soldier awaiting orders. "Yes, master," she said, with a deadpan voice.

"Please...call me Kunzite," the general said as he handed Sailor Venus' unconscious body to Hypnosia. "Take her back to the Dark Kingdom," Kunzite instructed. "Make sure she's nice and comfy. If any of the girls wake up, give them a dose of your knockout gas. I'll take care of the last one."

SHWOOOOM!

Kunzite summoned a portal and guided Hypnosia through it. She carried the fallen Sailor Venus through the barrier and disappeared in a flurry of rose petals.

"Minako!" Ami yelled.

Ami clasped her mouth in disbelief at how quickly Minako was taken. Her blue boots wobbled uncontrollably as she tried to hold herself together, a flood of hopelessness filling her mind.

While Kunzite had only said it casually, Ami's ear caught the specific, devastating phrase. *The last one*. If Ami heard correctly, it meant Mako and the others had fallen bravely in battle. It meant she was on her own.

Ami closed her eyes and whispered the names of her friends, struggling to find the will to continue. They were the only true friends she had ever known. *Mina...Rei...Usagi...Mako...*

Kunzite strolled over, hands casually clasped behind his back. "I've heard a lot about you, Sailor Mercury," he said, standing poised in front of her. "Intelligent, but naive. Brave, but weak. Friendly, but shy. Clever, but—"

"Are you done?" Ami snapped, her distraught emotions morphing into anger. She sized up her opponent, searching for an opening. Kunzite was taller, stronger, and probably the Dark Kingdom's highest ranking general. In terms of raw strength, Ami was at a colossal disadvantage. She couldn't take him head on and would have to play defense as long as possible. Like a skilled chess player, Ami scrutinized her next move, thinking through the potential outcomes, the fate of the world resting on her actions.

"Hehehehe," Kunzite chuckled, shaking his head with pity. "You really are a fool, Sailor Mercury." He lifted both arms and summoned his dark powers, allowing his hands to sizzle with energy

tendrils. "I'll give you one last chance. Surrender now and I'll spare you an agonizing defeat. Deal?"

Ami glared at her enemy and summoned her celestial water powers, displaying a fierceness she had never shown before. "Never," she replied, holding back tears.

"So be it," Kunzite said, forming a ball of dark energy and pointing his palm at Sailor Mercury. "Such a shame..."

"Shine...Aqua!" Ami chanted, digging her boots into the ground as water energy swirled around her body.

Kunzite smirked and launched the ferocious energy ball directly at Ami. *WOOOOSH!*

"*SHIELD!*" Ami shouted, her powerful voice echoing throughout the shrine grounds.

The deafening sounds of energy blasts reverberated inside Ami's water shield. Kunzite lobbed dark energy spheres in a relentless onslaught, like he was pitching baseballs. Each blast destroyed a piece of the shield and shifted her boots a few inches back, but Ami held firm.

Kunzite laughed maniacally, reveling in his dominance. "You're stronger than I thought, Sailor Mercury. But you'll fall, just like the others." A flash of lightning illuminated the sky. "The power of the Dark Kingdom cannot be stopped!" Thunder boomed immediately after.

"You're wrong," Ami replied. "The forces of hope, friendship, and love...that's what will defeat your evil kingdom!" The cheesy line made her feel like she was channeling Sailor Moon, but Ami didn't care. It invigorated her with a burst of fighting spirit.

ZZZZZAPP! Kunzite responded by shooting a stream of dark energy at Ami's water shield. He sustained the attack with one hand, a bored expression on his face, as if Ami were nothing but an annoying bug. "You know the best part of finally capturing all you girls," Kunzite said with an evil grin. "No more stupid speeches."

Ami let out a tense scream as Kunzite's attack barreled into the water shield, chipping away pieces of Ami's protective barrier. Ami shut her eyes and braced herself for the inevitable impact. But in her moment of intense stress, a warm presence touched her soul.

Usagi? Ami said in her mind, as the ghostly apparition of Sailor Moon appeared next to her. "*We're all here for you,*" Usagi's voice said. The astonished Ami then looked to the other side and saw Sailor Mars, gently supporting her shoulder. *Be strong, Ami,* Rei's ghostly figure said. With her emotions running high, Ami felt another hand reach for her wrist. It was Sailor Venus, gazing back with a cheerful smile and saying, "*You got this, Ami!*" A final pair of strong hands rested over Ami's shoulders, and Mako's strident voice said, "*You're the bravest person I know, Ami. Don't hold back!*"

The uplifting words from her friends filled Ami with powerful, heartwarming courage. *Thank you...everyone,* Ami said to herself, trying her hardest not to cry. Ami took one last look and saw the glowing spirits of her four Sailor Guardian friends, standing beside her with resolute smiles. She stopped trembling, her fear melting away. Turning her focus back to Kunzite, Ami channeled her friends' courageous energy into a single, concentrated attack. "Mercury! Aqua!" Ami chanted, rotating her hands and coalescing the shield into a swirling ball

of water energy. With profound determination, Ami crossed her boots and launched her attack. “*STORM!*”

SWOOOOOOOSH! BOOOOM!

Ami’s celestial attack surged with pure fury, taking on the form of a winged bird, its beak pointed directly at Kunzite.

“Wh—WHAT?!” Kunzite shouted.

Sailor Mercury’s brilliant water attack annihilated his dark energy stream. The powerful avian water formation impacted Kunzite’s body and sent him crashing into the shrine’s wooden post. *CRASH! SPLASH SPLASH SPLASH.*

Ami grabbed her knees and took a moment to catch her breath. She kept her focus on Kunzite’s fallen form, watching for any sudden movements. “You see, Kunzite,” Ami said, her confidence rising. “Even though you’ve captured my friends, they’re still by my side, lending me their power.” She straightened her pose and extended her palm, summoning another round of water energy. “With our combined strength, you can’t defeat us!”

Kunzite wiped water off his face and looked up with a devilish sneer. He picked himself up, brushing debris off his white hair and cape. “Hmhehehehe,” he chuckled, shaking his head in amusement at Sailor Mercury’s pronouncement. “You really believe that, hmmm?”

Ami held firm, maintaining a stiff facade. Kunzite’s sinister laugh, however, chilled Ami’s resolve. *I have a bad feeling*, Ami thought, as her enemy’s twisted laughter grew louder. *A very bad feeling.*

Kunzite cleared his throat and clasped his hands. “I underestimated you, Sailor Mercury,” he said, the charisma returning. “But you’ve had the wrong idea, this entire time.”

He waved his arm, creating a dark energy portal behind him.
SHWOOOOOM!

With a look of extreme worry, Ami clenched her fists, mentally preparing herself for whatever Kunzite was planning. Ami’s heart thumped, its incessant beating causing sharp chest pains.

“You see...my goal tonight wasn’t just to capture you,” Kunzite said, as the portal hummed ominously. “It was to *hurt* you.”

Kunzite raised his arm and snapped his fingers. A youma, wearing a leafy green minidress and boots sauntered out of the portal. Green vines snaked and slithered behind her. As the youma emerged into view, it became clear that there was another figure wrapped within the vines.

“No...” Ami whimpered softly, her lips quivering.

Kunzite watched the scene unfold with a smirk on his face, never losing eye contact with Sailor Mercury.

Throughout Ami’s entire battle with Kunzite, she fought to keep her tears at bay. She refused to cry in front of him, denying the abusive, disgusting man the pleasure of seeing her suffer. But when Ami saw the girl wrapped inside the vines, her heart shattered into a million pieces. All the courage, bravery, and confidence she had fought so hard to build up, collapsed like a house of cards. Teardrops pooled at the bottom of Ami’s vibrant blue eyes like a puddle and flowed down her cheeks. It was an emotion that was impossible to control, no matter how

many times Ami saw the beautiful face, rose earrings, and brown ponytail.

“Mako!!!” Ami cried out in a heartbreaking voice, crumpling to her knees. She sobbed uncontrollably in front of her enemies, tears dripping off her chin and onto her blue miniskirt. Her voice cracked with grief as she cried out Mako’s name, over and over.

Kunzite chuckled at Sailor Mercury’s dramatic downfall, the once confident girl reduced to a pathetic, sobbing mess. He glanced over with satisfaction at Sakura and her sleeping captive. “Let’s put the *power of love* to the test,” he said, directing his booming voice at Sailor Mercury. “Shall we?”

Chapter 15. Doubts

Zoisite placed the sleeping form of Sailor Moon next to Sailor Mars, resting the two girls on a large, circular stone surface. “*Shhhhh*, it’ll all be over soon, princess,” he said, gently stroking Sailor Moon’s blonde odangos. Both Sailor Guardians slept peacefully, encased in a dark energy field, unaware of their fates. Admiring their pure, seraphic bodies, Zoisite wondered what Queen Beryl had in store for them. Would she trap them in an endless nightmare? Or perhaps transform them into evil Dark Kingdom servants?

As he paced around the dreary cavern, Zoisite too wondered about his own fate.

SHWOOOOM!

The sound of a portal opening in the antechamber jolted Zoisite from his trance. He strolled over, noticing the familiar figure of one of his youma ladies. And in her arms, rested a beautiful, sleeping Sailor-damsel with golden hair.

“Master Zoisite,” Hypnosia said, her sultry voice echoing in the rocky chamber. “Where do I put *gorgeous* here?”

Zoisite guided Hypnosia to the large stone surface and motioned toward an empty spot. “Next to *fire girl*.”

Hypnosia lifted Sailor Venus past the energy barrier and placed the limp, unconscious girl on the cold surface. There were now three Sailor Guardians lying in state, their colorful costumes forming a rainbow of blue, red, and orange hues in the dismal cavern.

“Excellent work,” Zoisite said, giving Hypnosia a cordial handshake. “Do you mind keeping watch here? If any of them wake up, can you—”

“I’ll gas them,” Hypnosia interrupted, pointing her thumb at her metal tank. “But...I think I’ll need a refill.”

Zoisite chuckled and looked at his sleeping captives with a sigh. “It never gets old,” he said, gently touching Sailor Venus’ smooth legs. “Such pretty little things...”

“*Mmmhmmm*,” Hypnosia said, admiring the salacious sight before her. “They are so beautiful when they sleep...”

The two of them crossed their arms and paused awkwardly for a few moments. Zoisite spoke up, saying, “Hypnosia...do you remember...the first time we met?”

“I do, master,” Hypnosia replied. “Remember how you walked into my office, asking for my autograph—”

“And in that *stupid* disguise too! *Haha...*”

Hypnosia and Zoisite bantered for several minutes, laughing as they reminisced about their battles with the Sailor Guardians. Their topic then shifted to Sailor Mercury.

“She was such a weakling. Remember how much she cried after we captured her?” Zoisite said.

Hypnosia chuckled under her breath. “*Hehehe*, yeah...what a dork...that *water girl...*”

“Mmmhmmm...yep...*water girl...*”

Zoisite perked up suddenly and looked at Hypnosia with a worried expression. “Wait...*water girl...* where is she?”

Hypnosia looked at the ground nervously. “Ummmmm—”

“Wasn’t she with you?”

“Yes, but Kunzite showed up and—”

“You left her with *Kunzite*?!”

“Ummm...yeah?”

Zoisite paced back and forth, conveying an expression of concern at the revelation. Sailor Mercury was clever and she could easily say something to get under Kunzite’s hot-tempered skin. Kunzite could react badly, perhaps going so far as to seriously injure her—or even kill her. Doing so might even trigger that hidden power he saw in Sailor Mercury—that majestic bird made of powerful water energy. Zoisite regretted bringing Kunzite onboard and letting him overtake the mission.

“I...I need to check in on them,” Zoisite said, anxiously twirling his curly hair.

Hypnosia arched an eyebrow. “Is everything okay, master?”

Ever since the Dark Jupiter incident, Zoisite had found himself harboring a slight sympathy for Sailor Mercury—the bright young girl who always managed to outwit him. Witnessing the genuine affection she shared with Sailor Jupiter had touched a chord in his heart. It planted a noble seed within Zoisite’s soul that had only grown with time. Zoisite kept such reservations a closely guarded secret. So while Zoisite was still acting under Dark Kingdom orders—out of fear of being executed—deep down, his sympathies for Sailor Mercury challenged his allegiances.

“Yeah...everything’s fine,” Zoisite lied. He raised his arm in preparation for summoning a portal. Before he could act, Queen Beryl’s regal voice interrupted him.

“Magnificent,” Queen Beryl said, walking into the chamber. She carried her long wooden staff, pounding it on the ground as she used it to support her weight. “So you’re not a screw up after all, Zoisite.”

Zoisite took the statement as a compliment and stood at attention. “My queen! May I present to you, three Sailor Guardians. Sailor Moon, Mars, and Ven—”

“I know who they are. Where are the other two?” Queen Beryl snapped in response. She locked eyes with her nervous general, giving him a suspicious look. “Don’t hide anything from me, Zoisite.”

Zoisite glanced at Beryl, giving her his signature sly grin. “I...was just about to check in with Kunzite.”

Queen Beryl gazed into Zoisite’s tense eyes for what felt like an eternity. “Good,” she said, breaking the uneasy silence. The Dark Kingdom ruler then turned to Hypnosia and gave her a cordial smile. “I see we have a guest here. And who might you be?”

Hypnosia clumsily shuffled her boots and bowed for the queen. “Um...I’m Hypnosia...chief medical officer for the—”

“Oh don’t be silly,” Beryl said with a chuckle. “We don’t have such a title.”

Hypnosia glared at Zoisite, who was looking up at the ceiling, pretending he didn’t hear.

“I see you’re very good at putting Sailor Guardians to sleep,” Beryl continued, pointing at the energy field where Rei, Minako and

Usagi slept. “I too can put them to sleep. But they’d never wake up. HAHAHA!” Queen Beryl’s maniacal laughter echoed eerily through the deep caverns.

“I call it *eternal sleep*,” Beryl said, her expression suddenly turning serious. “It’s the punishment for failure.” She gave Zoisite a threatening side glance. “Or treason.”

Zoisite swallowed a lump in his throat.

“It was good to meet you, Hypnosia. Please...enjoy your stay,” Queen Beryl said, gesturing to the cold, twisted rock formations in the dreary cavern. “*HAHAHAHA!*”

As Queen Beryl turned to walk back to her throne room, Hypnosia worked up the nerve to ask a question. “Um...queen?”

Beryl glanced back at her underling. “Yes?”

Hypnosia, typically exuding calm and seduction, trembled visibly as she spoke. “What...will happen to us after the mission is over?”

The entire chamber went silent for several seconds. Beryl then responded to the pertinent question, saying in her regal voice, “You will join me in ruling the universe, of course.”

It wasn’t quite the answer Hypnosia was looking for. She had been thinking about her past life as Doctor Masui, a professor who still had students and class to attend to. The whole Dark Kingdom business made her feel insignificant, like she was some pawn that could be sacrificed at a moment’s notice.

Hypnosia stammered, trying to find the right way to phrase her response. “I...wh-what about...will you—”

“We can’t change you back,” Zoisite interrupted. He gazed stoically into Hypnosia’s eyes. “There is no leaving the Dark Kingdom.”

It was a painfully obvious fact in hindsight, but hearing it out loud triggered a sinking feeling in the pit of Hypnosia's stomach. Her entire existence was over, after getting tricked and chloroformed in her school office. Her only hope of escape—Sailor Moon—now lay as a slumbering prisoner under Queen Beryl's watchful eye.

“Understood,” she said, the harsh realization sinking in as Beryl's sinister laughter sounded through the chamber.



Suzuki found solace in the empty gymnasium, channeling her emotions into a flurry of gymnastic maneuvers. She executed flips and somersaults over the balance beam, each movement a manifestation of her unresolved anguish over Sailor Mars' abduction—and her hand in causing it.

A sudden, rebellious spirit swelled inside Suzuki. She flapped her ankle wings and floated toward the gymnasium's exit doors. Zoisite's pertinent instructions resounded within her mind. *Meet us at the shrine.* “As you wish, master,” she said.

Suzuki made her way to the Hikawa Shrine, flying through the treetops like a fairy. Eventually, the pixie-like youma saw the warm glow of the shrine, the place where Operation Eclipse had started.

“What's going on...” Suzuki said, observing the intense confrontation in the center of the shrine's sacred grounds. “Is that...?”

Suzuki immediately recognized Sailor Mercury from her blue boots. Mercury's breath was ragged as she fought and dodged an

onslaught of dark energy attacks. Opposing Mercury was none other than Kunzite.

Suzuki flew to another tree branch to get a better view and saw two more figures. Her colleague Sakura was there and beside her was another Sailor Guardian, ensnared in green vines.

The situation looked dire. Suzuki considered stepping in, but hesitated, unsure if intervening was the best move. She knew the fight was cruel and unfair. But Suzuki worried that getting too close to Kunzite would reignite the dark energy corrupting her body. If Kunzite saw her, he might even take control of her mind. So Suzuki bit her lip and watched the fight unfold, quietly rooting for Sailor Mercury to land a blow.

Chapter 16. Rules of Engagement

Ami wiped away her heartbreaking tears and scrambled toward her beloved partner. Mako was lying motionless on the shrine's wooden patio, like she had been drugged. Her serene, slumbering form was wrapped in thick green vines. A set of vines bound Mako's gloved wrists while another set coiled around her ankle-high boots. Standing next to Mako was Sakura, smiling arrogantly in her leafy minidress like she was a stage girl. *I'll save you, Mako,* Ami thought, her hands trembling. *Even if it costs my life.*

"I have all the celestial energy you need," Ami yelled, glaring at Kunzite. "Let Sailor Jupiter go and take me instead."

"*Heh!* You're in no position to make deals," Kunzite responded, dramatically flipping back his cape. "One more chance, Sailor Mercury. Surrender to the Dark Kingdom!"

Ami used her forearm to wipe more tears away and clenched her fists. Her sorrow transformed into anger, ignited by the sight of Mako—the love of her life—held captive by her evil adversaries. *I must fight,* Ami shouted in her mind, working up the courage to confront the enemy. *Mako, Rei, Usagi, and Minako...they are all counting on me!* Ami took a deep breath and summoned all her power. She even absorbed the surrounding raindrops, allowing them to swirl in a magnificent celestial glow near her hands. Ami shot a furious glare at Kunzite. "Go to hell!" she shouted, raising a massive ball of water energy. She aimed it at Kunzite's ugly face. "*SHINE! AQUA!!*"

Kunzite simply shook his head and motioned to Sakura.

The youma summoned a single dark, purple vine and pointed its tip at Mako's back. Sakura looked dutifully at Kunzite, awaiting his orders.

“In the chest,” Kunzite coldly instructed.

Before Ami could launch her heroic celestial attack, a loud zapping sound interrupted her chant. *ZZZZZZAAAPPPPP!! ZZZZZTTTTT!!* It was followed by a horrific, heart wrenching scream—from Mako.

Ami recoiled in shock as her beloved partner convulsed and screamed in agony, from what looked like a million volts of electricity coursing through her body. The bright stream of dark energy pierced Mako's back, directly into her heart. It jolted Mako awake, wiping away any sedation she might have had, allowing her to feel the full force of pain. *ZZZZZZZZTTT!*

“STOP!!!” Ami screamed, her voice ringing with traumatic emotion. She dropped to her knees, her blue boots sinking into a puddle. “Please! Stop!” she begged.

Kunzite raised his hand and Sakura ceased the attack, moving the purple vine back a little.

Mako coughed and opened her eyes weakly, smoke billowing off her colorful costume. *COUGH COUGH* “*Uhhnnnn...Ami...*” she whispered painfully, her voice dry and raspy. “Ami...” *COUGH.*

Hearing Mako call her name triggered another wave of heartache within Ami. She blinked hard, sending a stream of tears down both sides of her face. Ami squeezed both eyes dry when she saw Kunzite smirking—the evil smirk that followed him everywhere. *Don't*

cry in front of him, she told herself. *Don't cry, don't cry!* With her lips quivering, Ami gazed lovingly at Mako. But before she could formulate a response, Kunzite nodded his head at Sakura.

The purple vine floated forward, like a giant fish hook, its tip aimed point-blank at Mako's body. It then shot out another brutal stream of dark energy. *ZZZZZZZAPPPPPP!! ZZZZZZZTTTT!!*

“ARGHHHHHHHHHHH!!” Mako screamed, louder this time, her painful cries thundering through the skies. Her muscles tensed and her body convulsed violently under the relentless assault of dark energy.

“NOOOO!!!”

Ami's anguished cry filled the air, her hand outstretched in a futile attempt to intervene, the awful scene tormenting her soul. They were torturing her beloved Mako—and smiling as they did so. *She can't take anymore*, Ami thought, watching as Mako struggled bravely against the agonizing pain. *They're going to kill her!*

The dark energy torture stopped abruptly, granting Mako a reprieve. The captive girl dropped her head to the wooden floor, her brown hair sprawled messily over her eyes. Mako took quick, labored breaths, heaving her chest up and down in a desperate bid to recover.

“That was for your first attack, Sailor Mercury,” Kunzite said, pacing around with his chest raised. “Before you hurt your friend anymore...allow me to explain the rules to you.”

“The...rules?” Ami said, her anger rising to a level she had never felt in her life. “This isn't a *game!* She's *suffering!*”

“Yes, the rules,” Kunzite responded, snapping his boots together like a military officer. “You're a smart girl, so I'll explain this once—and only once.”

Ami picked herself off the ground, brushing some dirt off her blue miniskirt, never taking her eyes off Mako. She crossed her arms and listened as Kunzite pontificated.

“If you summon your powers—even a single water droplet—I will instruct my assistant to torture your friend,” Kunzite said. “Do you understand, Sailor Mercury?”

Coward, Ami wanted to yell. *You big, coward*. But she didn’t want to escalate, for fear of Mako getting hurt again. If these were the rules, then so be it. Ami couldn’t bear to see Mako suffer anymore. *My powers aren’t that strong anyway*, she thought. Without her defensive shield, however, it was going to hurt. Badly.

Ami mentally prepared herself for the inevitable beatdown. She took a deep breath and said a prayer to her friends as she lowered her fists to her sides. With her head held high, Ami spread her blue boots into a fighting stance and glared at Kunzite. “Round two,” she said, crying as the words filled her with bravery.

Mako, her body hurt and weakened, looked up at Ami with distress. “No...Ami,” she said weakly. “Please...don’t—“ *FWAPP!* “*Mmmpph!*”

Sakura had shut Mako’s mouth by gagging it with a vine. Mako shook her head in protest, the subjugation further humiliating the once proud girl. “Mmmph! Mmmph!!”

Please don’t...what, Mako? Ami replied in her mind, gazing at her gagged lover in disbelief. *Please don’t what?!* The emotions within Ami were surging to extreme levels. Fear, courage, passion, rage. All mixed to produce a cocktail of feelings that threatened to break the

bright young girl's rationality. *It's because you think I'm weak, don't you Mako? You think you always have to be my protector—my savior. Well, I told you to stay out of trouble, Mako. I told you!*

Ami's inner voice rose to a fever pitch. *I said I would give my life for you, Mako, and I intend to keep my word. Because guess what, Mako? I **love you**. Ami bit her trembling lower lip, as tears welled up in her eyes. I love you with all my heart and I refuse to let them hurt you! So please don't be mad, Mako. I promise I'll figure something out. I always do.*



Kunzite smirked and summoned a dark energy sphere in his hand.

Sakura leaned seductively over her hip, keeping the purple vine inches from Mako's back.

"Mmmphh! Mmmphh!" Mako protested, whimpering and squirming under the tight vines. She gazed helplessly at Ami, as if she had something important to say. "HrrmphAmiii!"

Ami studied Mako's tall, athletic figure, wearing the skimpy pink and green sailor costume. Mako looked more like a helpless, sexy cheerleader than a superheroine. Mako's miniskirt was scrunched up around her hips, revealing a peek of her cute white panties. Her luscious, muscular thighs and ankles were bound tightly with multiple rounds of vines. Parts of her white, skin-tight leotard were smoky and charred. Mako looked at Ami with feeble, puppy eyes and let out a pathetic, feminine moan through her gag. Had the stakes not been so dire, Ami

would have considered the sight of the bound and gagged Sailor Jupiter highly erotic.

“Mmmphhhwatchout!!”

Mako’s urgent cry jolted Ami out of her erotic fantasy. Ami focused on her enemy Kunzite, and saw him lobbing the dark energy sphere. She computed a quick trajectory of the attack, estimating the sphere’s relative velocity. With swift instincts, Ami jumped to the left, dodging the attack. *WHOOSH! BOOM!*

Ami sprinted to a far corner of the shrine grounds. *Keep your distance*, Ami told herself. *He fights dirty!* With barely any time to catch her breath, Ami sprinted again as another energy sphere whizzed past her. *BOOM!*

“Hahahaha!” Kunzite’s villainous laughter echoed in the distance. “Run, little mouse! Run!”

WHOOSH! BOOM!

Mako yelled Ami’s name. “Mmmphhhami!”

Sakura bent down and wrapped her hand under Mako’s chin. “Enjoying the show, Miss Jupiter?” she whispered into Mako’s ear.

Mako snapped back like a rabid dog. “MMMPHH!!”

WHOOSH! BOOM!

The battle continued in this manner for what felt like the longest minute of Ami’s life. Every time Kunzite charged up a dark energy attack, Ami would predict its trajectory. She was five for five now, but she was losing stamina—fast. As Kunzite summoned another dark

energy sphere, Ami—completely exhausted—took a second to catch her breath. And she waited a second too long.

WHOOOOSH!

Ami jumped to dodge the attack like before. *BOOM!* There was an explosion near Ami's left boot, and before she knew it, she was flying through the air. *CRASH!*

“OWWW!” Ami yelped as a crushing pain rippled through her backside. Wincing, she opened one eye and saw pieces of a wooden bench, which had snapped in half. She was lying on the ground, unable to move, every limb sore and hurting. A trickle of blood dripped down her forehead. Ami quickly scanned her body for serious injuries. She lifted her skirt and saw a giant bruise on her upper thigh. *No broken bones, thank goodness*, she thought. *But another blast like that and I'll need to check-in to a hospital!*

“Hahahaha!” More evil laughter. “Where's your power of love now?”

WHOOOOSH!

With a loud groan, Ami looked up and saw another dark energy sphere barreling toward her. *Oh no! No, no, no.* It was going to be a direct hit.

Mako screamed.

Acting on instinct, Ami raised her fists and summoned a water shield. The glistening blue barrier materialized just in time to greet the sinister dark energy attack. *BOOOM! SPLASH SPLASH SPLASH.* Sparkling water droplets sloshed over Ami's body, her ears ringing from the deafening blast.

Ami wiped water off her leotard and scrambled to her feet. *Oh no! The rules!* she remembered suddenly. But Kunzite had already given the order. “NOOOO!” Ami screamed, too late to matter.

ZZZZAPPPPP! ZZZZZZZTTT!

“MMMPHHARGHHHHHH!” An agonizing scream escaped Mako’s gagged mouth. Purple dark energy sparks flew off her body like fireworks. Sakura kept the torture flowing for a few extra, cruel seconds. When the attack stopped, Mako ceased convulsing and fainted, her limp body smoldering.

Kunzite and Sakura laughed. Like it was a big joke to them. Like Mako’s life meant nothing to them.

A burst of adrenaline numbed all the pain in Ami’s body. She sprinted toward Kunzite like a madwoman, her fist clenched so hard her glove ripped. With a fierce battle cry, Ami sent her fist flying into Kunzite’s chest. *SMACK!* It was like punching a boulder.

Kunzite didn’t budge an inch. Ami’s eyes widened in astonishment, her hand throbbing in pain as she flinched back, bewildered by the sheer futility of her punch. Before Ami could muster the strength to punch again, Kunzite lifted his knee—and executed a roundhouse kick aimed squarely at her shoulder. *WHAM!*

The force of the strike sent Ami hurtling through the air. She crashed to the unforgiving ground with a sharp, painful yell. Wincing in distress, Ami rubbed a bruise on her knee and noticed a tear in her blue boot. Her once pristine gloves and miniskirt had rips and scuff marks on them. Her blue hair was disheveled and dirty, sprawling messily over her eyes.

Like a pair of bullies, Kunzite and Sakura crossed their arms, taunting Ami with evil chuckles.

“How pathetic!”

“Has she ever thrown a punch before?”

“Looks like the fight’s over...”

“Hehehe...Sailor Mercury...what a disappointment...”

Long-buried insecurities rushed back into Ami’s mind. *I’m such a weak, pathetic, useless Sailor Guardian*, Ami said to herself. *Mako’s going to die because I can’t do anything! All my friends will die in the Dark Kingdom and it’s all my fault!* Ami dipped her head and pounded her fist. *All those years of studying, staying late, sacrificing time with friends...and for what? Pointless! None of that knowledge matters when it truly counts...when my friends need me most!*

At that moment, Ami no longer needed an external enemy to defeat her. She was drowning in the depths of her own despair. In her mind, she apologized profusely to Mako, almost begging Mako for forgiveness.

“Hehehe...giving up already, Sailor Mercury?” Kunzite taunted. He strolled over and picked her up by the collar with one hand.

Ami turned her head away to avoid his awful breath.

“I win,” Kunzite said, grinning in front of Ami’s nose. “Now be a good girl and come with me to the—”

“No...you...you didn’t win,” Ami said, clenching her teeth. “You. Didn’t. Win.”

Kunzite tightened his grip around Ami’s collar, his grin slowly disappearing.

“You’re just a bully,” Ami continued, glaring into Kunzite’s eyes. “You tortured my friend because you couldn’t beat me in a fair, honorable fight. I bet she kicked your butt back there and you’re still—”

Kunzite snickered. “*Heb!* Is that what you think, *bmm?*”

Ami looked at him with a sly grin, deciding right then and there to give him a piece of her mind. “You want to know what I think?” she said, maintaining firm eye contact. “I think you’re a big, arrogant, *stupid*, vile, cowardly, heartless, *ugly*, *CREEP!*”

Ami spat out her final insult into Kunzite’s face, causing him to recoil slightly. Even Sakura covered her mouth in amazement at Ami’s bold verbal assault. Releasing the string of insults had offered Ami a momentary catharsis, the rush of venting her pent-up emotions filling her with a euphoric sensation. That fleeting satisfaction was cut short, however, for in the next instant, Ami would experience the most excruciating pain she had ever endured in her life.

With a devilish, twisted scowl on his face, Kunzite punched Ami’s stomach—hard—using every ounce of his strength.
WHAAAAMMMMMM!!

Ami’s response was immediate and agonizing. She emitted an awful, wrenching gasp, her body folding in upon itself as if she were a fragile shrimp. “*HHHHNNGGGG!!!!!!*” Her vision filled with bright yellow stars and then went completely black. It was impossible to breathe and Ami thought for sure she would pass out.

Kunzite sunk his fist into Ami’s belly like it was soft dough, near the area where her skirt attached to her leotard, relishing in her suffering. He let go of Ami’s collar, allowing her to collapse to her knees.

Ami crumpled into a ball, grabbing her abdomen with both hands, her face scrunched in pain.

As Ami writhed on the ground, Kunzite lifted his boot and aimed its heel at the center of her back. *WHAMMM!!* It came down like a meteor, impacting Ami's spine and flattening her battered body. She emitted another loud, wrenching groan, followed by subdued whimpering.

Sakura's smile had long since vanished. She watched impassively as Kunzite violated the unspoken rules of engagement, showering Sailor Mercury with unnecessary cruelty.

"DON'T YOU *DARE* SPEAK TO ME LIKE THAT," Kunzite shouted, the pitch in his voice rising with every word. He had become a demon, consumed with petty rage at the insolence shown to him. Showing no remorse, Kunzite summoned a dark energy sphere, its malevolence aimed squarely at Sailor Mercury's fallen figure.

I'm going to die, Ami thought, as the sparks crackled inches from her hair. *I'm going to die and I haven't even said goodbye to Mako!* Ami desperately tried to move, but her entire body screamed in protest from the searing pain. Bending forward sent waves of agony rippling through her back, and any effort to push herself upright was met with sharp stabs of torment in her stomach. *It hurts so much...I can't move!*

The commotion jostled Mako from her dazed state. With a woozy head, she blinked her eyes open and gazed wearily at Ami. "Mmmphh..." Mako's voice, feeble and raspy, whispered Ami's name. She protested louder once she recognized the imminent danger Ami was in. "MMMPHAMI!"

“I’m so sorry, Mako,” Ami said, gazing emotionally into her lover’s eyes as if this were their last moment together. She wished so badly for one more hug and one more kiss to hold onto. As Kunzite prepared to unleash hellfire upon Ami, she opened her mouth to utter her final goodbye. “Mako...I—”

SHWOOOOMMMM!

* * * * *

“Stand down!” Zoisite shouted, interrupting the tense standoff as he stepped out of a dark energy portal.

Kunzite hesitated, his brows furrowing with intrigue. Sakura turned her head and bowed instinctively as she recognized the arrival of her master.

Kunzite lowered his hand, decreasing the size of his energy sphere. “Ahhh, if it isn’t *Mister Operation Eclipse* himself,” he said, the charisma returning to his deep voice. “Are you giving me orders now, *bmmm?*”

Zoisite marched over to Kunzite and beckoned him with a single curled finger. “I said stand down—Queen Beryl’s orders.”

Kunzite looked disdainfully at the cowering, injured Sailor Mercury and scoffed. He dissipated the dark energy sphere with a casual gesture and pivoted toward his Dark Kingdom colleague.

Ami trembled in fear, sharing confused and astonished glances with Mako, their bewilderment echoing the unexpected turn of events.

Mako gently shook her head, as if to tell Ami not to make any brash moves. Together, they listened to the huddled conversation between Zoisite and Kunzite.

Zoisite whispered to Kunzite and gestured his hand subtly at Sailor Mercury. Amidst their whispered exchange, the word “alive” was audible, casting a flicker of hope.

“Oh, *please*,” Kunzite scoffed loudly. “I wasn’t going to kill her!”

Zoisite leaned closer and brought his voice down, whispering into Kunzite’s ear. Kunzite nodded and briefly glanced at Sailor Mercury with a sinister smile. The two generals exchanged stifled laughs. The words “Beryl”, “mission”, and “power” could be heard in between their chuckles. After a few more hushed sentences, Zoisite gave Kunzite a pat on the back and turned to face Sailor Mercury.

“Kunzite has agreed to stop hurting you and your friend,” Zoisite said, looking down at Ami with his hands clasped behind him. “Come with us to the Dark Kingdom...and we promise to spare your precious lives.”

Ami glared at Zoisite in disbelief. It was unconscionable. *No way*, Ami thought. *No way!* She was a Sailor Guardian. It was her duty to fight for the honor of Sailor Moon and her friends. Submitting to the Dark Kingdom was a non-starter. If she surrendered, there would be no one left to stand against their encroaching evil. Queen Beryl, in league with Metalia, would inevitably conquer the Earth—and perhaps the galaxy itself.

Ami coughed out her predictable response. “N—No...I...I refuse to—”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” Kunzite jeered. “*Heb!* I told you she wouldn’t—”

“Sixty seconds,” Zoisite said, bending down and gently touching Ami’s wounded back. “We’ll give you sixty seconds with her.” He gestured toward Sailor Jupiter, his voice carrying a faint hint of compassion.

“Thirty,” Kunzite interjected, folding his arms dismissively.

Zoisite rolled his eyes and pretended he didn’t hear the callous remark. He gave Ami a firm, solemn look, pausing dramatically for her decision.

Sixty seconds? Ami thought incredulously, her heart aching at the cruel brevity of time allowed. It was barely enough time for a hug and goodbye. Mako was also hurt! She needed time to check that Mako’s vitals were stable. Ami wanted to protest, to beg for more time. But a sharp, agonizing pain in her stomach brought Ami back to reality. *I have no leverage here*, she concluded with a wince, her battered body serving as a reminder of her weak, vulnerable position.

Ami looked to Mako, hoping her partner’s body language could reveal an answer—a path forward. But Mako simply muffled through her gag, her cheeks glimmering wet with tears. The once proud and brave girl was left helpless, her gaze conveying the somber truth: Mako too, couldn’t bear to see Ami suffer anymore. There would be no more heroic acts tonight. The fighting needed to end.

The burden of decision weighed heavily on Ami's shoulders. It tormented her. But slowly—and surely—Ami settled on her fateful answer. The thought of sharing one more hug and one more kiss with Mako, was too enticing to ignore. Perhaps, she thought, there would be a way to regroup and defeat the enemy inside the Dark Kingdom. They were Sailor Guardians after all. There *had* to be a way. Because if there wasn't—well—the cruel universe wasn't worth fighting for anyway.

“Okay,” Ami whispered, hanging her head. “Okay.” She exchanged a small nod with Mako and then looked solemnly at Zoisite.

Without a word, Zoisite hooked his arm under Sailor Mercury's shoulder and gently guided her upright.

Ami nearly stumbled back down, but Zoisite swiftly caught her hand and hoisted her up. She leaned wearily against his body, clutching her bruised abdomen as she breathed heavily, fighting to maintain her composure. Ami gazed at Mako, her trembling expression laden with heartbreak and resignation. “I surrender,” she said.

Chapter 17. Compassion

“Mmmphhh...mmmfff...”

Mako squirmed and muffled under her bindings as Ami limped forward. Sharp pains coursed through her injured body. The two girls locked eyes, both filled with anticipation for their tender reunion.

Kunzite and Sakura graciously stepped aside, creating some space as Ami approached. Zoisite supported Ami every step of the way, a rare display of compassion.

When Ami reached a few steps away from her fallen lover, the floodgates of emotion burst open. Ami collapsed over Mako, tears pouring down her face as she enveloped her partner in a tight embrace. Among the many hugs Ami had shared with Mako, this one would forever find a special place in her heart. The intense emotions became a powerful conduit, washing away all the pain that battered Ami’s body.

Ami quickly undid the gag around Mako’s mouth. She summoned an orb of water and fed it to Mako, who slurped the entire thing down. Before Mako could catch her breath, Ami closed her teary eyes and planted a deep, tender kiss over Mako’s lips.

Kunzite shared an astonished glance with Zoisite, like a school boy who had witnessed something naughty.

“See?” Zoisite muttered. “The power of love.”

Ami released the emotional kiss and gazed longingly into Mako’s eyes. “I—I’m sorry, Mako...I—I’m not—” Ami hung her head and cried

into Mako's shoulder, unable to finish her sentence through her sobbing.

Mako, still tied up by the vines, did her best to comfort Ami. She gently rubbed her forehead against Ami's blue hair, whispering softly, "Ami...Ami, you—"

"I'm not a very good superhero," Ami interrupted between her sniffles. "I...I let everyone down—"

"No...Ami, you—you're a hero, okay?" Mako said, her own voice starting to crack with emotion. "You're *my* hero."

The loving words triggered another wave of emotion in Ami, and she buried her head into Mako's ponytail, sobbing loudly. She lost count of how much time passed, but was fairly certain she had exceeded the sixty seconds allotted to her. Ami gripped Mako's shoulder tightly, deciding right then and there she would never let go no matter what. They would have to pry her hands off Mako.

"They kidnapped our friends," Ami said, her voice raw from all the crying. "Mako, I...I don't know what to do..."

Mako gave Ami a confident, heartwarming smile—the very smile that had greeted Ami the first time they met. It was a beautiful reassurance that broke through the clouds of uncertainty. "Ami...you're the bravest, smartest girl I know," Mako said. "You will *absolutely* figure this out..."

Ami lifted her head, smiling in response to Mako's words, then quickly frowning again. "But...Mako, I...I can't—"

"Because you owe me a dance," Mako said firmly. "Promise?"

Ami nodded tearfully, then leaned in for another kiss. As their lips touched, Ami imagined herself dancing with Mako in a ballroom,

the two of them wearing fancy evening gowns. She closed her eyes, savoring each passionate, romantic kiss, wishing the moment would never end.

Kunzite pretended to look at a wristwatch. “*Abem!*”

Zoisite sighed and gave Sakura a small hand signal.

Without saying a word, Sakura pulled out a glass bottle and took the cork out. She plucked a purple flower from her hair and shoved it into the bottle, which already had some water in it. Sakura swirled the bottle, allowing the anesthetic properties of the flower petals to dissolve. Finally, she directed a green vine toward the bottle and sent a zap of dark energy into it. *ZAP!*

Sakura tossed the bottle to Zoisite. He inspected its contents, smiling with satisfaction. Zoisite then pulled out a white handkerchief from his jacket and walked toward Sailor Mercury.

Mako broke the kiss. “Ami...Ami, he’s coming...”

Ami flinched and tightened her grip around Mako’s uniform. “No,” she whimpered, burying her face into Mako’s shoulder. “I’m not letting you go, Mako!”

Mako jostled suddenly, her protective instincts kicking in. “Ami, watch out!”

Lifting her head up, Ami saw the white handkerchief, along with Zoisite’s smug grin. The sight triggered a visceral reaction in Ami, forcing her to relive all the past times she had been chloroformed. Ami immediately responded by wrapping Mako in a protective embrace. “Get that stuff away from us!” she hissed, curling her lips in anger.

In a surprise move, Zoisite set the handkerchief and bottle on the ground next to Sailor Mercury's blue boots. He gave her a firm pat on the back and said, "You'll be gentler than me." Zoisite stood up and walked back. "I trust that you'll know what to do, *water girl*," he said, glancing back one more time.

Kunzite shot Zoisite a confused look as if to say, "*are you sure about this?*"

Folding his arms and adopting a composed stance, Zoisite simply said, "*Thunder girl* would have kicked me in the face. Trust me, this is better."

The two generals observed with keen interest as Sailor Mercury stared at the glass bottle, pondering her next move.

The glass bottle reflected off Ami's wavering eyes, glistening with a captivating sparkle within the shrine's lighting. With trembling hands, Ami examined the bottle. The liquid sloshed inside, carrying a slight purple hue. The vessel beckoned to her, as if it held a hypnotic power over the bright young girl.

It was one final, cruel task, bestowed upon her by her evil captors. *No...I can't*, Ami thought, shaking her head. *I must find a way to fight back...Mako will never forgive me!*

Ami fantasized about tossing the bottle of chloroform at Kunzite's feet. Perhaps it would shatter, releasing a cloud of anesthetic fumes at the two generals. She might even be able to launch a bubble blast, creating the necessary diversion to escape. But there was Sakura and her vine powers to worry about. Ami was also in no condition to

run—her abdomen and back were still in pain from Kunzite’s brutal assault. *But this is what Mako would want*, Ami assured herself. *It’s what Mako would do if she were in my boots.*

But Ami didn’t need to wonder about her lover’s true wishes. For Mako was right there, her calming presence serving as a guiding force. “It’s okay, Ami,” Mako said delicately. “It’s okay. Please, Ami...I don’t want to see you get hurt anymore...”

“But, Mako...if I...they’ll—”

“It’ll be like how we practiced in bed,” Mako said, giving Ami her signature bold smile. “Give ‘em a performance they’ll never forget.”

Ami chuckled softly in response to Mako’s brash suggestion. It was Mako’s style—always proud, optimistic, and funny. Even with the fate of the galaxy at stake, Ami couldn’t help but stifle a smile. Mako’s confidence truly was contagious and it reinvigorated Ami’s spirit. She knew what needed to be done.

Ami picked up the silky white handkerchief, studying its interesting embroidery. She repositioned herself so that Mako’s head rested securely between her laps. Mako’s ponytail tickled the skin near her blue miniskirt. “Ar—are you ready?” Ami said, her hands trembling as she uncorked the bottle.

“Yeah,” Mako replied, tearfully gazing upward. The shrine’s ambient lighting cast a warm glow around Ami, framing her like a beautiful angel. “Love you forever, Ami.”

“I love you, Mako,” Ami replied in her sweetest voice. She took a deep breath and poured the bottle’s sleep-inducing contents over the handkerchief. The cloth quickly grew saturated, the liquid soaking into

Ami's gloves and dripping onto Mako's chin. Ami set the bottle down and adjusted her position slightly, shifting her boots over the wood flooring. "Try to pace your breathing," she said, showing a gentle bedside manner. "It works fast, once it's in your system..."

Mako swallowed, parting her lips slightly as her anxiety leaked through. She calmed her nerves and stiffened her body, accepting the sleepy fate that awaited her. "Ready..."

This can't be real, Ami thought as she lowered the chloroform-soaked cloth carefully over Mako's nose and mouth. *It must be a dream...it has to be!* She cradled Mako's face with her other hand and gently applied pressure over the cloth. Gazing into Mako's beautiful green eyes, a sudden groundswell of emotion burst within Ami. *This could be the last time we ever see each other*, she thought sorrowfully. Her mind became a tumultuous sea of regret and second-guessing, pondering what might have been. But as the pain grew inside her, Ami kept her lips pursed in a sweet smile. She needed to be strong for Mako.

Before Ami could reverse course, she felt Mako's chest expand. And the handkerchief over Mako's mouth—filled with a pocket of warm air.

"Hmmpfh...mmpmhhh...mmm..."

Mako emitted dainty, feminine moans as she paced her breathing like Ami instructed. With each breath she took, Mako blinked and gazed at Ami, trying to savor her lover's precious smile. But as the chloroform sapped Mako's strength, her fighting instincts kicked in. And despite agreeing to this, Mako seemed to have a change of heart. She tensed her muscles suddenly and tried squirming away, blinking her woozy eyes in desperation. "Hrmmmph! Mmpmhhh!!"

The dramatic turn of events riveted Kunzite, Zoisite, and Sakura. The three of them looked at each other in bafflement, uncertain of how to proceed. Kunzite took a step forward, intending to intervene, but Zoisite held him back. He shook his head, advising patience. “Let *water girl* handle it,” Zoisite whispered.

Mako’s panicking, Ami thought, her eyes widening in disbelief. *What am I supposed to do!* The situation presented a stunning dilemma to the bright young girl. As Mako muffled and writhed, Ami wondered if she should lift the cloth and give Mako a breath of fresh air. It pained Ami to see Mako, the love of her life, struggle under the sleepy fumes. Gazing into Mako’s green eyes, Ami sensed fear, betrayal, and heartache. Fresh teardrops were even forming in her eyes. Yet, with her adversaries only footsteps away, Ami was forced to commit to her deed. “I—I’m so sorry, Mako,” Ami whispered. She pushed the cloth harder into Mako’s nose, forcing her to take another deep breath. “Please...try to relax.”

“Hrrmmphh...hrmmami,” Mako whimpered, muffling Ami’s name as her eyelids grew heavier. Mako looked completely exhausted, like she was on the last leg of a cross-country drive. She used her remaining strength to force her eyes open, causing them to flutter in small, rapid movements.

Ami made a gentle shushing sound. She was the one in control now—the weaker girl, asserting complete dominance over the stronger one. With her gloved hand, Ami stroked Mako’s cheek, brushing away strands of brown hair. Using her thumb, she rubbed Mako’s eyebrow in slow circles—a trick she learned when Mako had trouble sleeping. Ami

could feel Mako relax, her once tense body now sinking into Ami's lap. Mako's neck flopped like rubber and slowly fell to the side, its muscles no longer in control.

Mako eventually succumbed, her striking green irises sunsetting behind a pair of fluttering eyelashes. She had fought hard to keep them open, to savor Ami's face for as long as possible. But in the end, despite Mako's valiant efforts, the chloroform prevailed. Her world evaporated into darkness, with Ami's strained smile the last thing she saw before falling into a deep sleep. Yet Mako knew, mere moments before losing consciousness, that Ami would figure something out. The next time they meet, the two of them would share a romantic kiss—and perhaps even a dance. The fantasy brought a tear to Mako's eye and it rolled down her cheek, absorbing into the handkerchief.

Once Ami was certain Mako had lost consciousness, she released all her pent up emotion. "Mako!" she yelled. Still holding the cloth over Mako's mouth, Ami bent forward and sobbed. She wrapped Mako's head in her bosom, rocking back and forth, tormented by what she had just done. Ami's grief-stricken mind had completely lost the will to go on. *I'm such a failure*, she screamed in her thoughts. *I couldn't even protect the person I love most...I'm not fit to be a Sailor Guardian!*

Kunzite nudged his elbow into Zoisite. The two generals, plus Sakura, had watched the entire scene frozen in place. And while Kunzite had granted Sailor Mercury a brief reprieve, his focus quickly returned to the grand mission. "*Ahem!*" he said, nudging Zoisite again. "Go ahead and...do your thing..."

Zoisite sighed, annoyed by his superior's impatience. Seeing Sailor Mercury's desolation triggered a twinge of sympathy within him. He even wondered briefly if he should help the poor girl, throwing another unexpected twist into the mission. But under Kunzite's watchful eyes, Zoisite didn't dare. A betrayal of that sort would mean eternal torture in Queen Beryl's lair. It would also place Sailor Mercury's own life at risk. Zoisite couldn't take the chance.

Thus, Zoisite suppressed his reservations and pulled out his canister of sleeping gas. Holding the tiny white canister in his palm, Zoisite crept closer to Sailor Mercury. He reached her backside, one finger on the trigger. A single puff of the potent gas would be all he needed. It would be sudden and painless, a quick way to put the grief-stricken girl out of her misery. But before Zoisite could spray the sleeping gas in Sailor Mercury's face, he watched in surprise as she picked up the bottle of chloroform—and uncorked it.

Chapter 18. Shifting Loyalties

Suzuki saw it all. The cruel, unfair fight with Kunzite. Zoisite's arrival and his surprising show of compassion. Sailor Mercury's heartbreaking cries.

Seeing the romance between Mercury and Jupiter, reminded Suzuki of her own unresolved feelings for Sailor Mars. Suzuki had watched in shock as Mercury chose to render Jupiter unconscious, a coldly rational way to end the unfair battle's suffering. What was it about love, Suzuki wondered, that drove people to such lengths?

Despite her sympathies however, Suzuki was consumed with fear, unsure if she should stand up against her Dark Kingdom masters. What if she failed and got caught? What if Sailor Mercury was hurt—or worse, killed? For a Dark Kingdom youma, betraying her masters would have put Suzuki in uncharted territory.

Yet slowly, the morality scale in Suzuki's mind tipped decisively, guided by Sailor Mars' parting words: *Be a hero.*

Suzuki decided to save them. It was risky. It was daring. But it was the right thing to do. The only thing left to figure out was logistics. Suzuki looked at each of her Dark Kingdom adversaries, choosing to focus her attention on the girl wearing the leafy green mini-dress. "Time to even the odds," she said quietly, licking her lips.



Ami's body was covered in bruises and scrapes. She still couldn't move without triggering a stabbing pain in her abdomen. This was in addition to the immeasurable responsibility Ami was tasked with: to rescue her friends and save the world. It was too much for the bright young girl to handle. Far too much.

Ami lifted the tear-soaked handkerchief off Mako's mouth, revealing a pair of supple pink lips, slightly parted. *She's so cute when she sleeps*, Ami thought with a sweet smile. *She's like an innocent angel*. Cradling Mako's head, Ami bent forward and kissed her beloved partner's cheek. She whispered some final words into Mako's ear—a promise, a pledge and a declaration of love.

She fantasized about falling asleep and joining Mako in a never-ending dream.

"I'm coming, Mako", Ami said tenderly. "I'm coming..."

With her enemies looking on, Ami poured the remaining contents of the glass bottle over the handkerchief. She sniffed it gingerly, wrinkling her nose in response to the sweet, flowery scent. The cloth contained a bit of Mako's essence—just a hint of her rose perfume. The familiar fragrance drew Ami in, comforting her with its hypnotic grip. Ami closed her eyes and brought the silky handkerchief to her nose, pressing it firmly over her face with two hands. She hesitated for a second—and then relaxed, taking in a deep, soothing breath.

"Looks like she's doing the work for us," Kunzite said, chuckling to Sakura next to him. "What a *pathetic* defeat for the Sailor Guardians."

Before the youma could respond, Kunzite marched forward to get a closer look. With the battle behind them, there was no need for Kunzite to keep his guard up. He wanted to relish in Sailor Mercury's defeat, to have his smug, chiseled face be the last thing she saw before fainting. As Kunzite pressed onward, Sakura obediently followed. "Stay right here," Kunzite said, raising his hand curtly. "Watch our backs, okay?"

Sakura stopped in her tracks. "Yes, master Kunzite," she said, stepping back gingerly. While she respected her master's wishes, Sakura couldn't help but feel cheated. She was the one who synthesized the chloroform after all! And now she would miss out on seeing Sailor Mercury chloroform herself—a perhaps once in a lifetime spectacle, like a solar eclipse. Sakura crossed her arms and pouted. She thought about speaking up, but right as she worked up the courage to do so—*PLUNK!*—a small pebble smacked into her head.

"*Psssss!*" someone whispered.

Sakura turned around, rubbing the back of her head. She noticed movement behind some bushes. A hand extended outward, waving to her. The petite figure had sparkly purple eyes and a pair of pigtails. *Suzuki?* Sakura thought, recognizing her youma friend. *What is Suzuki doing here?*

Without alerting anyone, Sakura snuck off into the dark wooded area.



The instant Ami inhaled the chloroform, all her fears and insecurities vanished into thin air. The sharp pain in her abdomen subsided, filling her with a tranquil warmth. It was soothing, comforting, and dreamy. Ami blinked her eyes, trying to focus her blurry vision on Mako's face. She vowed that Mako would be the last person she ever saw. She blinked again, her eyelids a bit heavier this time, and saw Mako's face dissolve into a sea of tears.

The drowsiness hit her senses within seconds, causing Ami to sway left...then right...then left again, like she had consumed an entire bottle of spirits. A tingling sensation rippled through her hands. She used all remaining strength to take two more deep breaths through the cloth. The tingling reached its peak and Ami could no longer hold the cloth in place. *So sleepy...so tired...so warm*, she thought, as her hands fell. *Just a little longer, Mako...I'm coming.* Ami let out a groggy moan, focusing her last sight on Mako's beautiful face. "Nnnn..." The drugged cloth dangled for a moment over her nose, before slipping off her face. Her eyes fluttered shut and she started falling to the side.

Ami felt a sudden weightlessness as gravity took over. In her daze, she realized she should have guided her fall so her head would land in Mako's curvy chest. Instead, her trajectory would take her head straight to the hard wooden floor. Ami prepared herself for the painful thud—but to her surprise, she collapsed into someone's arms.

"Gotcha," Zoisite said, cradling Ami's head in his elbow.

"Hmm? Wha—" Ami mumbled, opening her woozy eyes a sliver. "Huh?" Through her blurry vision, she could make out Zoisite's distinct blonde curls. Behind him, stood the commanding figure of Kunzite, with his flowing white locks.

“Quite the show you put on, *water girl*,” Zoisite said, grinning. “You look exhausted...want a nap?”

Kunzite folded his arms and laughed. “Poor thing...she didn’t breathe hard enough!”

No...No! I was...I was supposed to be asleep by now, Ami thought, staring in disbelief at Zoisite’s smug face. Even in her last moments of consciousness, her free will was being stolen. The beautiful, romantic memory of Mako’s lovely face was cruelly ripped away, replaced with the evil smiles of her enemies. Feelings of desperation, indignation, and frustration coursed through Ami’s mind. She tried to sit up, but collapsed in a fit of sleepiness. “Please...please, let me...” Ami begged.

Zoisite shook his head in disappointment. “It’s too bad, *water girl*,” he said, stroking Ami’s blue hair. “I know you wanted to share your final waking moments with your girlfriend. But it looks like it’ll be with *me* instead.”

Zoisite picked up the chloroform-soaked cloth and held it over Ami’s nose. “It’s the price of your failure, *water girl*.”

“No!” Ami whimpered, turning her head in a desperate attempt to look at Mako. But Zoisite held firm, holding Ami’s head tight between his elbow and chest. “No...please...no—*brmmmpbbh...*”

Ami’s hopeless pleas were cut short, as Zoisite pressed the cloth back over her nose and mouth. Her hands, heavy with fatigue, tried swatting Zoisite’s fingers away. She shook her head left and right frantically, but it was all useless. Her lungs betrayed her and she inhaled the anesthetic fumes, huffing and puffing nonstop.

“Mmmnfff...hmmphhh...hmmphh...mmphhh...”

“That’s it,” Zoisite said, sealing the cloth tightly over Sailor Mercury’s nose. “Take a nice...big whiff.”

Ami’s entire head was wrapped snugly in Zoisite’s arm, the white handkerchief covering almost her entire face. Only one of her eyes peeked through the top of the cloth, giving Ami a faint hint of light. But like a dim candle in a cavern, the light slowly burned out. Her vibrant blue eye fluttered shut, snuffing the flame entirely. She heard her own relaxed heartbeat and breathing, fading into a dull echo. The strong, sweet smell of chloroform evaporated—the last of Ami’s senses to go. All she wanted to do now was drift off into a deep slumber.

In her sleepy mind, Ami saw Mako in the distance, wearing a beautiful dark-blue evening gown, covered in roses. Ami called out Mako’s name, her voice echoing into the ether. Mako extended her hand, as if she was asking Ami for a dance. Ami smiled and floated over, reaching her fingertips to touch Mako’s hand. But before their hands could touch, Ami’s consciousness crossed into the brink. Mako’s figure disintegrated into darkness, and the entirety of Ami’s awareness—her thoughts, dreams, and feelings—blinked out of existence.



“Suzuki! What are you doing here?” Sakura asked. The two female youma huddled behind a tree, shrouded in darkness. “I thought you were—*MMPHH!*”

Suzuki clamped her hand suddenly over Sakura’s lips. “*Shhh!* Keep your voice down!”

With her senses on high alert, Suzuki peered around the tree. She noticed the two Dark Kingdom generals—Kunzite and Zoisite—looking down at the fallen Sailor Mercury. *Poor Mercury*, Suzuki thought. *She just can't catch a break, can she?*

Sakura slapped Suzuki's hand away. "What's the big idea!" Sakura whispered. "You made me miss the show!"

Suzuki licked her lips seductively. "Oh please! You'll have plenty of chances to chloroform cute girls in the future."

SHWOOOOMMM!

The two female youma turned their heads. At the shrine's entrance, Kunzite had summoned a dark energy portal. The portal's purple light peeked through the tree leaves, illuminating their hiding spot. Suzuki knelt down, concealing herself.

In the distance, Kunzite slung Sailor Jupiter over his shoulder, while Zoisite cradled Sailor Mercury in his arms. Time was running out. If Suzuki wanted to execute her plan, she needed to act fast.

"Looks like our mission is coming to a close..." Sakura said. "Ready to pack it up?"

Suzuki grabbed Sakura's wrist urgently, saying, "Listen...I don't know how else to say this, so I'll make it quick."

"Oh no...what's going—"

"I need your help, Sakura."

"Huh?"

Suzuki tugged Sakura's arm. "Zoisite and Kunzite...they are bad. *Really* bad. Help me—"

Sakura yanked her arm away and laughed. “No *shit*, Suzuki. In case you hadn’t noticed...we’re the bad guys here!”

Suzuki shook her head in frustration. Between the three female youma, Suzuki had made the most progress in breaking through her curse. Sakura, on the other hand, still had dark thoughts corrupting her mind. There was no time for Suzuki to explain the sinking feeling in her stomach or her infatuation with Sailor Mars. *I’m going to need to improvise*, Suzuki thought.

In the distance, Kunzite marched through the dark energy portal, carrying Sailor Jupiter inside. Zoisite took a step toward the portal, looking down at Sailor Mercury, sleeping sweetly in his arms. Mercury’s gloved arms and blue boots dangled listlessly, while her miniskirt flapped in the portal’s breeze. “Time to take you home, *water girl*,” Zoisite said with a sigh. “Let’s just hope Queen Beryl isn’t too cruel...”

Zoisite put one foot into the portal—then stopped suddenly. He looked around. “Hey...where’s Sakura?” he muttered, furrowing his eyebrows. Zoisite stepped back and lowered Mercury to the ground. “Sakura!” he shouted, searching for his missing youma companion. “Sakura!”

In the wooded area, Sakura perked up as she heard her name being called. “I’m being summoned,” she said, taking a step toward the shrine. She grabbed Suzuki’s hand. “Come on, I’m sure Zoisite has a nice reward waiting for us!”

Suzuki jerked her hand away. “You really are the *dumb* one, aren’t you?” she snapped.

“*Excuse me?*” Sakura replied, glaring in astonishment. “If it weren’t for me, the mission would have—”

“They won’t need us once the mission is over, idiot. What do you think they’ll do to us once we follow them back to the Dark Kingdom?”

The compelling question gave Sakura pause and she shuffled her green boots nervously. As Zoisite’s voice grew louder, however, Sakura’s red lips curled into a devilish grin. “And what do you think they’ll do to us if we *don’t* follow them back to the Dark Kingdom? Ever ponder that one, *genius?*”

It was a valid retort that left Suzuki speechless. But perhaps she had been too forceful in her approach. Softening her tone, Suzuki placed a hand gently over Sakura’s shoulder. “Please, just give me a moment to explain. I—”

“Oh, and you know what,” Sakura interrupted, jerking her shoulder away. “I’ll tell Zoisite *all* about our little conversation here. I’m sure he’ll find it absolutely fascinating, wouldn’t you agree?”

Suzuki widened her eyes in horror at the suggestion. If Zoisite found out, it would only be a matter of time before Kunzite knew. She couldn’t begin to imagine the torture he would inflict on her.

“Let’s see who the dumb one is,” Sakura said with a sinister smile. She stepped around the tree and looked in Zoisite’s direction, opening her mouth to shout.

The adrenaline in Suzuki's body surged to insane levels, causing her ankle wings to flap uncontrollably. Acting on pure instinct, she clamped her hand forcefully over Sakura's mouth.

"MMMNNPHH!" Sakura shouted.

The loud squeal caught Zoisite's attention and he looked in the dark wooded area. "Hey...what's going on..."

Suzuki wrapped her arm around Sakura's waist and pulled her behind the tree. "Sorry, but you left me no choice," Suzuki said, licking her lips. She unclamped her hand from Sakura's mouth and quickly twirled her around.

Sakura yelped, "ZOI—*mmph!*" Her cry for help was suddenly stifled—by a pair of warm, moist lips, pressed firmly over her mouth.

Suzuki's fingertips gripped the back of Sakura's head, the cool touch sending a shiver down Sakura's spine. Her lips, delicate and inviting, molded against Sakura's with a gentle urgency. As they kissed, Suzuki pulled Sakura closer into an intimate embrace, squishing the contours of their breasts together. A smattering of raindrops fell from the tree leaves, dripping onto their cheeks. Feminine moans and whimpers escaped their lips, serenading the night with an erotic symphony of voices.

The moment had caught Sakura by surprise, but she quickly found comfort in Suzuki's romantic overtures. With her emotions intensifying, she pressed her red lips forward, kissing Suzuki passionately. Lost in the enchantment of their embrace, Sakura traced a delicate path along Suzuki's spine, gliding her fingers across the smooth,

glistening leotard. Closing her eyes and releasing all tension, she allowed Suzuki to push her backward. Without realizing it, Sakura stepped into full view, illuminated by the energy portal's purple light.

Zoisite froze, his mouth agape, as he witnessed the alluring make-out session before him. While he knew of Suzuki's salacious tendencies, he hadn't considered that it would extend to Sakura too. Letting out a faint chuckle, Zoisite savored the arousing sight, watching as Suzuki's hand caressed the leafy green miniskirt around Sakura's hips. The hand pushed the skirt upward, and for the first time, Zoisite noticed Sakura's pair of dark-green underwear. He silently mouthed the word "wow".

Zoisite turned around, deciding to give the raunchy girls some privacy. "*Hehehe...*do any of the girls in this world...like boys?" he muttered.

With Sakura under her spell and Zoisite distracted, Suzuki decided to strike. She sealed her lips firmly over Sakura's mouth—and activated her energy draining powers. Suzuki's lips glowed purple as she focused all her willpower into sucking her prey dry.

Sakura's eyes snapped open as a sudden wave of drowsiness hit. The betrayal shocked her, the attack mercilessly draining all her vitality and stamina. Her knees buckled and she would have fallen, were it not for Suzuki's steady embrace. Recognizing the peril she was in, Sakura tried pushing herself away, to no effect. Suzuki held on tight, locking her moist lips over Sakura's and making tiny sucking motions. Sakura moaned helplessly, her once vibrant body turning into a limp ragdoll.

Suzuki released the energy-draining kiss after holding it for a few extra seconds, satisfied in her prey's defeat. She gazed seductively into Sakura's woozy eyes, brushing back some of her luscious red hair. "Sweet dreams, my little dandelion," Suzuki said.

Sakura moaned weakly and slurred her response.

"Mmmnnn...you...you and your...dirty tricks...*mmp!*"

Leaning in with a playful smile, Suzuki smooched the sleepy youma once more over the lips. A purple glow enveloped their mouths as Suzuki absorbed the last drop of energy from Sakura's body, rendering her fully unconscious. Sakura swooned, her head and chest bending backward as Suzuki held her by the waist. Suzuki lowered the slumbering girl to the ground and used a mound of leaves as a makeshift pillow.

With one adversary subdued, Suzuki turned her focus to Zoisite.

"Don't get too crazy now," Zoisite said, listening to the rough-housing behind him. He tapped his foot and looked over at the unconscious Sailor Mercury, lying completely still near the dark energy portal. He had been gone too long and needed to wrap things up. "Alright ladies," Zoisite called out. "Enough fun for the night...we need to—"

SHWWWPP!

"HGHNNN!!! WHA—what the..." Zoisite shouted. He looked down and saw his arms wrapped tightly with a purple ribbon. "What's going on," he said, tugging and straining against the bindings.

Suzuki floated out of the wooded area holding the other end of the ribbon, her spry ankle wings guiding her forward. “Good evening...master,” she said deviously. “I’m here, just like you asked.”

“GRRR! Untie me at *once!*” Zoisite shouted, gritting his teeth. “That’s an *order!*”

Suzuki tightened her grip and summoned a surge of dark electrical energy. “Sorry, master,” she said, as sparks crackled around her fists. “But this arrangement...is over.”

Zoisite shook his head as Suzuki charged up her powers. Events were unfolding too quickly for his mind to process. Why was she betraying him? What would Queen Beryl think? “No no no...don’t do this!” Zoisite shouted, trying desperately to squirm out of the ribbons binding him. “DON’T DO THIS!!”

Suzuki ignored his pleas and unleashed her fury, shouting, “RIBBON! WHIRLWIND!”

“STOP IT RIGHT NOW! STOP—”

“STRIKE!”

ZZZZZZZAPPPP!! ZZZZZZZTTTTT!!!!

“ARRGHHHHHHH!!”

Zoisite’s agonizing scream pierced the air, reverberating through the shrine grounds. Violent convulsions wracked him, each spasm a testament to the power of dark energy, now being used against him. The attack eventually subsided, but not before leaving Zoisite a charred, smoking mess. He collapsed to the ground, shattering the ribbon into shards of purple glass particles.

Wasting no time, Suzuki darted into the air, powered by her ankle wings. She flew past Zoisite’s ashen body, toward the unconscious

Sailor Mercury. A surge of panic gripped her as the realization of her reckless actions sank in. “Ohhhh...what have I done,” Suzuki said, her voice shaking with worry. “What have I done...what have I done!”

The gravity of the situation was not lost on the pixie-like youma. Once her betrayal reached the ears of the Dark Kingdom’s queen, Suzuki would become the galaxy’s most-wanted youma. She would be hunted without mercy and tortured for eternity once captured. Her fate was sealed.

Suzuki reached Sailor Mercury and her worries faded away. She had seen how smart the girl in blue boots was, and knew that with Mercury’s help they could figure out a plan. “Hey there, cutie,” Suzuki said, slipping her arms under Mercury’s waist and thighs. “Looks like we meet again.”

Ami, having been thoroughly drugged to sleep, could only let out a gentle whimper. Just half an hour ago, Sailor Mercury was going toe-to-toe with the Dark Kingdom’s most powerful general. Now, she was a tranquil damsel-in-distress, her fate resting in the hands of a lovesick youma.

“Wow, you are light as a feather, Miss Mercury,” Suzuki said, picking up the slumbering girl. “Come on...we need to get you to safety.” Suzuki flapped her ankle wings and levitated into the air, causing Ami’s miniskirt to billow in the breeze. Reaching a height past the treetops, Suzuki could see the city skyline. She squinted and located her destination.

Below, a pair of military boots and a flowing white cape exited the dark energy portal. “Zoisite!” Kunzite yelled. “Quit fooling around and bring back—” Kunzite gasped and marched forward. He reached Zoisite’s injured body, saying, “Zoisite! What the *hell* happened?”

“Uh oh...” Suzuki said, hearing the commotion below her. She quickly propelled herself toward the city skyline, carrying the sleeping Sailor Mercury in her arms. “Time to make our getaway...hang on!”

The cool night-time air whooshed over Sailor Mercury’s face, blowing strands of her blue hair. But the winds did not disturb her heavy slumber. The Guardian of Water remained motionless in Suzuki’s arms, oblivious to her circumstances.

“Ughnnnn...owww,” Zoisite groaned, rolling on to his side and pushing himself off the ground.

“Where’s Sailor Mercury?” Kunzite asked. “What did you do?”

Zoisite scrambled to his feet and looked frantically around him. He grabbed his hair in frustration, then lifted his head upward. In the sky, Zoisite saw the faint twinkle from Suzuki’s wings, making its way toward the city. Zoisite’s expression grew increasingly despondent. Eventually, the sparkle from Suzuki’s wings disappeared into a cloud over the horizon.

Kunzite squeezed Zoisite’s shoulder firmly. “You ready to talk?” he said, his deep voice exuding a menacing calmness.

Zoisite brushed some ashes off his uniform and turned to face his commanding superior. “Kunzite, my friend,” he said, chuckling nervously. “We have a problem.”

Chapter 19. Treason

“WHAT?!!!!”

Queen Beryl’s shrill voice sent tremors down Zoisite’s spine. He scurried to a dark corner of the Dark Kingdom antechamber, like a frightened rat.

“HOW?! HOW DID YOU LET THAT HAPPEN?!!!” Queen Beryl screamed again.

A deep voice tried to calmly explain the situation. Zoisite could hear his name being mentioned multiple times. For the first time ever, Zoisite heard Beryl utter a curse word that began with the letter *F*. Then there was silence, which for Zoisite was even more terrifying. Was his fate being decided? Was he going to be executed for Suzuki’s treason? As the anxious thoughts swirled in his mind, footsteps clacked through the halls.

Kunzite’s chiseled face emerged from the shadows, cool and collected as ever.

“H—how did it go?” Zoisite asked, realizing immediately the stupidity of his question.

With a solemn expression, Kunzite wrapped his arm around Zoisite’s shoulder. “All is good, my friend. All is good.”

Zoisite breathed a sigh of relief. “I’m very sorry about...about—”

“Oh, don’t worry about it,” Kunzite continued. “Queen Beryl isn’t mad. She’s just surprised that a youma could have a mind of their own. Lesson learned. We need to keep a closer eye on them going forward. After all, dark energy is not—”

“Not an exact science,” Zoisite said.

Kunzite smiled. “...precisely.”

The two generals patted each others’ shoulders and laughed inside the antechamber.

“I’ll get my team together,” Zoisite said, his eyes lighting up. “Sakura should have recovered. I’ll have Hypnosia prepare another batch of sleeping gas. We’ll lure them back to the shrine and—”

“Relax,” Kunzite interrupted. “Relax. Look, I’m not worried. This girl...Sailor Mercury...does not pose any realistic threat to our—”

“I wouldn’t underestimate her, Kunzite—”

“...our mission. I’ve seen her fight firsthand. She’s—”

“Smart.”

“...*weak*. Besides, we have all four of her precious friends. If she becomes a problem, all I need to do is torture one of them, and she’ll fold—”

“Careful, Kunzite—”

“...like the *pathetic* crybaby she is. This is but just a tiny, *little* setback that won’t alter the grand outcome,” Kunzite said, turning to face his comrade. “We have *all* the leverage here. Is that clear?”

Zoisite nodded.

“Good. Now get your little band together and find that treasonous little fairy and her friend. The next time I see that

blue-skirted pipsqueak, she better be bound, gagged, and begging for her life at my feet.”

Delegating again, Zoisite thought. “Understood,” Zoisite said with a polite bow. “And can I ask, what should happen to Suzuki when I find her?”

“Hmm? Suzuki?” Kunzite asked. “You mean that double-crossing purple fairy?”

“...yes...”

Kunzite placed a hand under his chin and pondered for a moment before uttering his cold response. “Kill her.”

Chapter 20. Crossroads

The pain in Ami's abdomen started as a small tingle, before growing into an unpleasant, throbbing soreness. Sensation slowly returned to her fingers, hands, and arms. Ambient sounds trickled into her ears—a ticking clock, a humming refrigerator, and pacing footsteps. A thought meandered into her dull, dreamless mind. *I'm...I'm alive...*

As awareness returned to the bright young girl, she couldn't quite pinpoint why she was feeling a persistent sense of peril. Something was wrong, but her memories were fragmented and fleeting. Images flashed through Ami's mind—red triangular eyes, an evil Dark Kingdom general, and Mako's lovely face. Mako's face lingered in Ami's mind—and then a hand clamped a white rag over it.

Strange, Ami thought. *Who is chloroforming Mako?* Ami rewound the memory in her mind, replaying the troublesome scene over and over. She then noticed the blue skirt and boots resting under Mako's head. *Oh my gosh...it was me! I chloroformed her!* The sudden realization jolted Ami out of her slumber. She squirmed her head and opened her mouth to talk.

“Hrrrmnfff!”

Terror flooded Ami's senses as the muffled sound escaped her lips. Then she felt it—a thick cloth gag, stuffed firmly between her lips. Her tongue licked the cloth, tasting its bitter flavor and feeling its smooth, silky texture. “Mmmph!” Ami muffled, louder this time. “Grrmmmph!”

Ami tugged her arms. When they didn't budge, Ami sank further into despair. *Ropes!* Ami wriggled her body, testing the ropes that were binding her wrists and arms. Briefly, she wondered if she was stuck in one of Mako's elaborate bondage pranks. But with more memories coming into focus, Ami was certain this was no stunt. *The Dark Kingdom...they captured me!*

With increasing worry, Ami remembered the last time she woke up bound and gagged like this. Zoisite—with his evil youma partner Hypnosia—had kidnapped her at the school. They had subjected Ami to sleepy-torture and dangled Mako's life in front of her like a big joke. Memories of their wicked laughter sent chills down her spine. *They're going to torture me again...I just know it*, Ami thought. Zoisite and his youma-gang probably had the sleepy chemicals all lined up. She imagined them taking turns, gassing her and making her sleepy with chloroform, laughing along with Queen Beryl. Just for kicks, they would probably force Ami to watch as they tortured her friends one by one. *Please...spare my friends at least!*

Ami worked up the nerve to open her vibrant blue eyes. Mentally, Ami primed herself for the torment her adversaries planned to inflict on her. *I will never give in*, she thought. *Never!* Ami opened one of her eyes, expecting to see Queen Beryl and her evil generals inside the bleak Dark Kingdom caverns. To her surprise however, she saw no one. She blinked her eyes and refocused.

“Hrmmfff?” she said through her gag.

Ami looked down and saw herself lying comfortably on fine, silky bed sheets. She looked to the side, noticing a wooden nightstand with an alarm clock and photo frame. The photograph had a cute girl

smiling in it. Turning her head, Ami saw posters on the wall depicting members of a popular boy band. *It's a bedroom*, Ami thought. *An ordinary girl's bedroom.*

Ami wiggled under her rope bindings and rolled to her side. She took a closer look at the photograph, trying to see if she recognized the girl. *She's a cheerleader...from our school...hang on*, Ami thought, her eyes widening. *Oh my gosh...I...I don't believe it...she's—*

Sudden footsteps outside the bedroom interrupted Ami's concentration. The door opened and Suzuki walked in with a big grin on her face.

“Rise and shine, Sailor Mercury!” Suzuki said in a perky voice. The youma flapped her ankle wings and floated over to the bedside. “I was worried sick! I thought you'd never wake up!”

Ami froze in stunned silence as she absorbed the peculiar sight in front of her. It was Suzuki alright—Rei's gymnast friend, transformed into a Dark Kingdom monster. A navy-blue leotard hugged her petite body, contrasting subtly against her bluish-gray skin. Hundreds of tiny white crystals dotted Suzuki's costume in an elaborate, eerily beautiful pattern. She had a pair of elfish ears and two dark-purple pigtails—tied together, with cute white ribbons.

“Szkimmnff!” Ami said, her voice laden with panic. She remembered with great clarity when Suzuki—along with her youma partner—chloroformed and kidnapped Mako right in front of her. Ami blushed when she remembered Suzuki's sensual energy-draining kiss. *What is she going to do to me?* Ami wondered.

Suzuki reached over to touch Ami. “Sorry about the ropes, but I—”

“HRMMPHHH!!” Ami shrieked, flinching away from Suzuki’s hand. She couldn’t help it. Intense emotions and memories flooded back to her, slamming into Ami’s brain like a freight train. Her heart raced, fueled by a panic attack, as she fretted over her dear friends. “LTMMMGOO!!” she screamed, pulling as hard as she could against her bindings.

Suzuki slammed her hand over Ami’s mouth. “Quiet down!”

The move had the opposite effect on Ami. She overreacted, swinging her head in a desperate attempt to break free. But Suzuki held on tight, suppressing Ami’s screams with her hand. “*Sbhhhh!* People are going to hear us!” Suzuki said.

Ami took several deep breaths through her nose to calm herself. Within a minute, she had lowered her heart rate down to a manageable level. She was still frightened, but rationality slowly returned to her mind. If Suzuki had wanted to hurt her, she would have done so already.

“*Phew!* Like I was saying,” Suzuki said, still clamping Ami’s mouth shut. “Sorry about the ropes and the gag. I...almost got burnt by a similar misunderstanding earlier. But I’m going to remove your gag, okay Miss Mercury? Promise not to scream?”

Ami looked assuredly at Suzuki and nodded her head.

“Mhmm.”

“Okay, here we go.”

Suzuki cautiously released her hand from Ami’s mouth, letting the frightened girl take a deeper breath. She reached behind Ami’s neck and loosened the gag’s knot. With a gentle touch, Suzuki hooked her index fingers under the cloth gag and pulled it out from Ami’s lips, leaving behind a thin trail of drool.

Ami maintained intimate eye contact with Suzuki the entire time. She observed every beautiful detail of Suzuki's face, including the sheen on her lips as Suzuki licked them. An intrusive thought entered Ami's mind—a fantasy of her sharing another kiss with Suzuki. Ami shook the thought away, much to Suzuki's amusement.

“You okay, Sailor Mercury?” Suzuki said.

“Y...yeah,” Ami replied in a raspy voice. She swallowed hard, feeling an itchy dryness in her throat. *Too much shouting*, Ami thought. She had so many pressing questions to ask Suzuki, but her mind prioritized her human needs first. “W...water,” Ami said with a slight cough.

“Oh!” Suzuki said, jumping off the bed. “Be right back!”

Ami heard the sounds of Suzuki rifling through the refrigerator. With a moment to herself, Ami examined her bindings, realizing for the first time that she was still wearing her Sailor Mercury uniform. Her blue miniskirt was torn to shreds, as were her once pristine boots, which were caked in dirt. Rips and scratches covered her white leotard. There was a large bruise on her thigh. *I can't believe I made it out alive*, Ami thought. *Suzuki must have saved me...I'm very lucky!*

Suzuki sprinted back into the room carrying about ten bottles of water. “Here,” she said, throwing the bottles onto the bed. She twisted the cap off a bottle and lifted Ami's chin. “*Water girl* needs her water,” Suzuki said, chuckling. The youma pressed the bottle to Ami's lips.

Ami gulped the water down, tilting her head back until about half the bottle was empty. The tasty, refreshing water poured down her chin, dripping onto her miniskirt. “Thank you,” Ami said, as she swallowed the last gulp. “Do...do you mind—”

“Oh!” Suzuki said. “Where are my manners?” She reached behind Ami and loosened the ropes. “Like I said...it was just a precaution. I didn’t want you to blast me away.”

Ami freed herself from the ropes and rubbed her wrists. “Don’t worry,” she said, sensing Suzuki’s anxiety. “I’m not that strong.”

Suzuki smiled. “Good, because I don’t want a cleaning bill for this apartment.”

The light-hearted quip caused Ami to laugh. The laughter triggered a cough and a sharp pain in Ami’s stomach, resulting in her doubling over in agony. “Owwwww...oohhhhhh,” she groaned, clutching her abdomen.

“Yikes!” Suzuki said, grabbing Ami’s hand. “Come on, let’s get you fixed up. Can you stand?”

Ami nodded, then gingerly stepped off the bed, one leg at a time. With Suzuki’s support, Ami limped into the washroom. Ami sat down on the carpet, and watched as Suzuki grabbed the heel on Ami’s blue boot.

“Here, let’s get these boots off ya,” Suzuki said, as she slipped one of the boots off Ami’s leg. She removed the other boot, and then proceeded to slip off Ami’s white gloves. “Do you need help taking the suit off...or—”

“I can manage,” Ami said. “Give me a moment?”

Suzuki nodded and retrieved a clean towel. She closed the washroom door, giving Ami some privacy.

Taking off the Sailor uniform wasn’t difficult—it was like taking off a swimsuit. Ami pulled her arms through the puffy sleeves and then

slipped the leotard off her legs. She removed the golden tiara from her forehead and set it on the sink counter. Ami glanced at her naked body in the mirror, grimacing at the cuts and bruises. She then stepped into the shower stall and turned the water on.

Warm, steamy water poured over Ami's skin. It was therapeutic, the water not only cleaning her battered body, but also healing her traumatized mind. Ami washed her blue hair and lathered her skin with some of Suzuki's moisturizing body wash. As the situation eased and Ami found solace in the soothing shower, her mind shifted back to the peril of her friends.

Usagi...Rei...Mina...Mako...please be okay, Ami prayed to herself. Ami remembered with great fondness the brave sacrifice Sailor Venus made, which had allowed Ami to escape Hypnosia's sleeping gas attack. She chuckled at memories of how Sailor Moon would bicker with Mars, yet marveled at their unspoken bond—so strong that they would give their lives for each other. Finally, there was her soulmate Sailor Jupiter, the anchor of Ami's heart, for whom she would traverse the universe to save. A sudden deep sadness consumed Ami's heart. *All my friends...the only friends I've ever known...are gone...*

The bright young girl couldn't hold her emotions in check any longer. She swallowed a lump in her throat, letting out a heart-wrenching whimper. With the water still pouring over her, Ami crouched down inside the shower stall and sobbed. Tears flowed down her face, dripping into the shower drain. Ami's sobbing grew more vocal with each passing moment, her cries echoing in the washroom—and almost certainly audible in the rest of Suzuki's apartment.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK! “You okay in there, Miss Mercury?” Suzuki called from outside the washroom door.

Ami let out one more choking sob and then stammered a response. “Y—yeah...I’m almost done.” She shut off the water and stepped out, looking at herself in the mirror again. *Come on...get it together...your friends need you*, she thought, sighing loudly.

“No rush!” Suzuki said from outside. “I hope you like sandwiches!”

Ami wrapped the towel around her body and looked at the sink counter. Her golden tiara had vanished and in its place sat the Sailor Mercury transformation pen. “Interesting,” she said, picking up the magical pen and rubbing its Mercury symbol. “You learn something new everyday.”

She then turned her attention to the dirty Sailor Mercury uniform laying on the floor. “Hey, Suzuki,” Ami said, opening the washroom door a crack. “Do you have something I can wear?”



Ami sat quietly in Suzuki’s mini-kitchen, munching on an egg sandwich and drinking juice. She was wearing black yoga pants, and a light-colored tank top—the only thing from Suzuki’s wardrobe that fit. Ami had declined to wear Suzuki’s cheerleading outfit—she needed a break from running around in miniskirts, afterall. In her mind, she analyzed the circumstances and played out scenarios for how to save her friends.

Suzuki leaned against the wall watching a weather radar map loop on her television. “That typhoon’s getting scary,” she said, breaking the awkward silence. “You don’t think that’s the work of—”

“Yep. The Dark Kingdom,” Ami said, setting down her half-eaten sandwich. She gave Suzuki a look of disappointment and gloom.

Suzuki dipped her head. “Ahhhh...yeah...sorry about...that...that whole kidnapping...thing...”

“If only you had your change of heart a bit sooner,” Ami said coldly. “My friends...they...they’re...”

Suzuki crossed her arms and swayed uncomfortably. “How do I make this right, Sailor Mercury?”

“Please, call me Ami.”

“Ah, sure thing! Look...Ami...let explain why—”

“You’re in love with her, aren’t you?” Ami said, shooting Suzuki a knowing glance.

Suzuki covered her mouth in shock. “Whoa...how...how did you guess—”

Ami took a sip of juice and smiled warmly. “Love makes us do crazy things. Trust me, I know.”

Ami’s radiant smile caused Suzuki to loosen her guard. “Mmmm...she really is lovely,” Suzuki said, closing her eyes as she reminisced. “That silky, raven hair...those glamorous legs...and her ruby-red lips—”

“I need to know how you broke the spell,” Ami interrupted, standing up. She walked toward Suzuki. “How did you overcome their mind control?”

Suzuki placed a hand under her chin. “I don’t know...Zoisite and Kunzite—my masters...they seem to exercise some sort of power over us,” she said, shaking her head. “But once I felt that love grow inside...something must have triggered.”

Ami paced back and forth, her mind deep in thought. “Dark Energy,” she muttered. “It’s a strong force for sure, but it’s not an exact science. It seems like it can be tempered with a strong enough force of good.”

“Good?” Suzuki replied, raising an eyebrow. “Is this scientific at all?”

“Yes...*good*. Love, hope, friendship...these positive forces seem to counteract dark energy. I believe these forces are what power us, the Sailor Guardians,” Ami said. “And no...this isn’t scientific. None of what’s going on makes any scientific sense at all.”

“*Heh*, could have fooled me,” the Dark Kingdom youma said with a chuckle, flapping her ankle wings in amusement. “Okay...so we shower them with the power of love and friendship...and then we win?”

Ami nodded her head. “Basically.”

Suzuki pumped her fists. “Well what are we waiting for then? Let’s go save the world!” She turned toward the apartment balcony. “Zoisite probably has a search party looking for me right now...they are almost certainly going to be at that shrine. I think we should—”

“Hang on,” Ami said, grabbing Suzuki’s wrist. Before Suzuki had a chance to react, Ami pulled her into a warm embrace.

Suzuki held her arms up in surprise, then gingerly returned the hug. “Whoa...Sailor Mer—I mean...Ami...what’s—”

“Thank you, Suzuki,” Ami said, as a tear rolled down her cheek. “Thank you so much.”

The move caught Suzuki off guard, and she was about to crack a joke but held back. The tenderness of the moment melted Suzuki’s soul. There was something very special about Ami and as they hugged, Suzuki could sense the purity and goodness in Ami’s heart. Perhaps it would even be enough to defeat their mutual enemy.

“Y—you’re welcome,” Suzuki said, giving Ami a pat on the back. “But for what?”

Ami dried her eyes and gave Suzuki a kind smile. “For saving me.”



It was mid-morning by the time Ami and Suzuki arrived at the Hikawa Shrine. Gray clouds blanketed the skies and strong winds picked up every minute or so. Ami was wearing a light jacket and carrying a backpack of supplies. After she had finished her meal at Suzuki’s apartment, she insisted on packing snacks for her friends. If Ami managed to rescue them, they certainly couldn’t fight Queen Metalia on an empty stomach.

Suzuki followed Ami, frequently looking around for any signs of a Dark Kingdom ambush. She knew that if Ami got captured it would be a checkmate. And she knew all too well how susceptible the Sailor Guardians were to anesthetic-based attacks. Their celestial powers didn’t make them immune to things like sleeping gas or chloroform, much to the Dark Kingdom’s benefit.

“We’re walking straight into the lion’s den, ya know,” Suzuki said. “I hope you know what you’re doing, Ami.”

Ami clutched the transformation pen in her pocket, looking at the ground with uncertainty. The pressure she faced was enormous. One wrong decision or mistake—and she’d never see Mako or her friends again. Sure, Ami had Suzuki’s help at the moment, but there was no guarantee it would last. There was even the possibility the entire thing was a charade, designed to deliver Ami directly into the hands of the enemy. Ami shook the last thought away and gave Suzuki a friendly smile.

“If this were a game of chess, we’d almost certainly lose,” Ami said, referencing her favorite board game. “We only have two pieces, while the enemy has all of theirs...minus one of course.”

Suzuki stared at Ami blankly. “Okay...so if you’re the king, what piece would I be,” she asked.

Ami chuckled at the silly metaphor, but decided to play along. “Hmmm...I think you’d be a rook.”

“A rook huh?”

“Yes, a very powerful piece,” Ami said. “We need to bend the rules of the game and capture pieces from the enemy, bringing them to our side. If we accomplish that, we can tip the balance and defeat their queen and king.”

Suzuki immediately understood the implications of Ami’s plan. It meant defeating Hypnosia, Sakura, Zoisite, and Kunzite in battle. In their weakened state, the forces of good within Sailor Mercury might be

enough to break their dark spell. It was an insane plan, with no room for error, but it was the best idea they had.

Ami walked up to the shrine doors with Suzuki right behind her. The wooden frame around the doors was shattered, from when Hypnosia had kicked the doors open.

“AMI! THERE YOU ARE!”

The familiar voice brought Ami a surge of relief. “Luna!” she called out, kneeling down to greet the black cat. “I’m so glad to see you!”

Luna raced over, her mouth holding Ami’s compact computer. The cat set the computer on the floor and jumped into Ami’s arms. “I was worried sick,” Luna said, rubbing her furry face into Ami’s cheek. “I thought I’d never see you again.”

Ami closed her teary eyes and held Luna close, cherishing the fond reunion. Throughout their journey as Sailor Guardians, Luna had become a sort of mother figure to them, offering comfort and advice when times got tough. She even leapt into battle sometimes, usually getting a few scratches on the enemy before getting knocked out.

“Oh what a cute kitty,” Suzuki said cheerfully, reaching over to pet Luna.

HSSSSSSSS! Luna hissed at Suzuki and smacked Suzuki’s hand away with a paw. “Youma! Get away from us!”

Suzuki shied away. “Awww...but, I’m not—”

“She’s a friend, Luna,” Ami said, grabbing Suzuki’s hand. “She saved my life. I owe her one.”

Luna looked suspiciously at Suzuki, keeping her guard up. But Ami’s words cooled the tension, and Luna gave Suzuki a cordial smile.

“Apologies...I didn’t know. But if Ami trusts you, then so do I. My name’s Luna, nice to meet you...um...what is your name?”

Suzuki floated a few inches off the ground and bowed graciously. “Greetings Luna,” she said, giving the cat a sly grin. “I’m the rook.”

Chapter 21. Hope

The shadowy mist wafted across Sailor Mars' sleeping face, curving around her cheek before evaporating into the dank atmosphere with ghostly elegance. The mist took on an eerie form, occasionally flashing two sinister, red triangular eyes. A haunting whisper, echoing the galaxy's lost souls, accompanied the spectral fog as it made its way to the next Sailor Guardian.

Sailor Venus sighed, unaware of the evil lurking just above her. She slept peacefully on the stone slab, her angelic golden hair shining under the dark energy field. *"Sleep well, princess,"* the dark mist said in a cold, mechanical voice. *"Sleep well."*

The inky haze then drifted over to Sailor Moon, slithering past her red boots and blue miniskirt. It lingered over her sleeping form, soaking in the celestial power flowing from her body. *"Boundless power and energy,"* it whispered. *"Mine for the taking!"*

After it finished savoring Sailor Moon's celestial essence, the shadowy mist floated over to Sailor Jupiter's unconscious body. It flowed across Jupiter's brown ponytail, enveloping her head with its malevolent aura. Sensing the evil, Jupiter winced and tried waking up. She wiggled her fingers and uttered a few panicked whimpers. But the mist chanted in its hypnotic, mechanical voice, *"Back to sleep, princess...back to sleep."*

Queen Beryl supervised the scene, watching keenly as Metalia hovered over the four captured Sailor Guardians, like a storm cloud

above a rainbow. “I see you’re marveling at our prize, Queen Metalia,” Beryl said. “Your awakening is upon us. Once we have the fifth Sailor Guardian, we shall—”

“*SILENCE*,” Metalia boomed. The dark mist exploded suddenly, filling the void above the caverns. Two narrow triangular eyes manifested, glaring into Queen Beryl’s soul. “My patience wears thin! I have been waiting a thousand years to rise again...*cursed* in this prison by that retched Moon Kingdom. The celestial beings that lay before me provide all the energy needed to unlock my power. We shall *NOT* wait any longer!”

Beryl bowed respectfully. “Forgive me, Metalia-sama, for falling short. My underlings are preparing to capture that pitiful Guardian of Water. With all five, you will reach your greatest level of power. We will—”

“Hope,” Metalia said, interrupting Beryl mid-speech. “Do you know what *hope* is?”

Beryl shook her head. “Please elaborate, Oh Evil One.”

The dark mist contracted back down and hovered over Sailor Moon’s body. “Hope is what gives the Sailor Guardians their powers. It fuels their celestial energy. Without it, they are nothing.”

“I see,” Beryl said. “Is that the key to unlocking their power?”

Metalia coalesced and unfurled, engulfing the sleeping Sailor Guardians in its ominous fog. A long red mouth formed under its triangular eyes. The mouth curled into an evil smile. “Destroy their hopes...and we will become unstoppable.”



“Wake up...Sailor Jupiter...”

Mako moaned softly and opened her eyes, coming face to face with a big yellow flower. She lifted her head and squinted, her vision filled with bright colors. In front of her was a field of beautiful flowers, an assortment of yellow, pinks, and blues. “Where am I?” she said, holding her forehead.

“Welcome...Sailor Jupiter,” a cold, mechanical voice echoed.

Mako jumped to her feet and looked all around her, peering all the way to the horizon. The sky was painted in a late-afternoon hue of orange with a flawless array of white clouds. A gentle breeze swept over the field, swaying the flowers left and right. For Mako, the ambience was perfect for a romantic evening with her beloved Ami. Almost too perfect.

“Is this a dream?” Mako said, kneeling down to pick a pink flower. She twirled the flower in her hand and sniffed it. The scent and texture of the flower felt all too real. If this were a dream, it was unlike any Mako had ever experienced before. As Mako strolled through the breathtaking landscape, her mind increasingly became enraptured in its hypnotic quality. And it distorted her hold on reality. “It’s so beautiful.”

“Enjoying the flowers?” the voice said.

“They’re my favorite,” Mako answered, her eyes glazing over. “I’ve never seen so many perfect pink camellias before. But...”

“Hmmm? Is something the matter?” the voice said.

Mako’s expression turned solemn and she shook her head. “But I...wish my friends were here to see this...”

“Friends?”

“Yes...my friends,” Mako said, looking at the sky. “Where are they?”

There was an unsettling pause. The gentle breeze which had been blowing through the flowers, stopped suddenly. An eerie quiet blanketed the world.

“Mako,” the voice said, its sinister tone rising. *“You have no friends.”*

Before Mako could react, the beautiful field of flowers vanished. For a brief moment, she was floating in a pitch-black void. Then—a new world materialized around her. To Mako’s shock, she found herself standing in the middle of a school hallway. Students crowded the hall, walking past Mako as if she were a ghost. She touched a sign next to a classroom door. “My...my old high school,” Mako said.

“Do you remember?” the voice asked.

The students around Mako huddled into small groups. They whispered to each other and giggled, occasionally shooting Mako brusque glances. Despite their hushed voices, Mako could hear the students clear as day, as if she were standing right next to them.

“Is that Makoto Kino?” one of the students said.

“Ewww! Don’t invite her to lunch...she’s a weird one...”

“Didn’t she get kicked out of her last school for fighting? She won’t last...”

“She’ll never find a boyfriend the way she dresses...”

“She’s such a loser...I don’t think she has a single friend here...”

The words cut deep, bringing back hurtful memories of the bullying Mako dealt with. She remembered the days she sat alone at lunch, the giggling students, and the times she cried in the bathroom. For a few seconds, Mako hung her head, driven to hopelessness by the cruel memories. Yet the feelings were only temporary, and Mako clenched her fist in anger.

“Heh! Wow...good one...whoever you are,” Mako said, looking at the sky with a confident grin. “Almost had me there. I hated that school. I have new friends now, and no...I don’t need a stupid boyfriend. Is that the best you got, you big idiot?”

Sinister laughter echoed all around Mako. *“Hehehehe...you think you have friends? Silly girl. Let me show you the truth!”*

Mako crossed her arms as the school hallway dissolved into glass particles. The particles rearranged themselves into a new reality, and

Mako found herself standing inside the warm, comfy Hikawa Shrine. Sitting in the center were her Sailor Guardian friends: Usagi, Rei, Minako, and Ami. They were gathered around in a circle, discussing something.

“Are these the friends you are talking about?” the voice said.

Mako didn't respond, choosing instead to listen in on the conversation her friends were having. Like the students in the school, none of them noticed Mako at all. The four girls chit-chatted about random topics: school, movies, and boys. Rei then mentioned Mako's name and the tone shifted.

“So what do you girls think about Mako,” Rei asked.

Minako shrugged. “Eh, I think she's really arrogant. She thinks she's so much better than us, but she screws up *all the* time.”

“And I hate how she yells at me,” Usagi said. “She can be so mean! I wish we had someone else as Sailor Jupiter.”

Rei giggled and leaned into the group. “What's funny is, Jupiter's attacks aren't even that strong. She acts like a big leader, but I've never seen her do anything useful.” Rei placed a hand over Ami's shoulder. “What about you Ami? What do you think?”

Mako turned her head, listening with great intrigue at what her girlfriend had to say.

“Well,” Ami said, lifting her face from a textbook. “I don’t think I agree, Rei. Jupiter is certainly not the weakest one on our team. That distinction falls on me.”

Mako chuckled at Ami’s response. *Typical Ami*, she thought. *Always so hard on herself.*

“But,” Ami continued. “Mako could certainly study better. Her grades are an embarrassment.”

Mako stepped away from the girls, her mouth agape in stunned silence. “You have...*got* to be kidding me...”

The mechanical voice spoke up. “*Your so-called friends...think you’re a failure.*”

Shaking her head again, Mako smiled back at the voice in the sky. “Honestly? They’re right. I *could* be a little less arrogant and study harder. This isn’t the failure you think it is, moron. It’s valuable feedback! My friends all have my back...I’m sure of it!”

“...you really think so, huh?”

“Yeah, I’m sure,” Mako said, jabbing her finger at the sky. “If you’re trying to break me, you’ll have to do better than that. You’re *sucking hard* at your job right now!”

There was no response from the sky and the room went quiet. Mako turned around and noticed her four friends had vanished. A moment later, the color tone in the room shifted to a deep, sad blue. The room twisted and morphed until it became a young child’s

bedroom. The bedroom was filled with stuffed animals, flowers, and photographs. Mako squinted, the room triggering a profound familiarity in her. She walked closer to one of the photographs on the wall and gasped. “Oh...oh my gosh...”

“*Recognize them?*” the voice said.

Mako clasped a hand over her mouth and closed her eyes, sending a stream of tears down her face. “Mom,” she said, her voice cracking. “Dad.”

“*Died a tragic death when you were only six,*” the voice said. “*Such a shame.*”

“I...I never got a chance to know them,” Mako said, wiping away more tears. She sank to her knees. “Why...why are you doing this...”

“*I want you to know, Mako, that as a being of infinite omniscience, I can see into alternate futures. I have seen the world where your parents lived.*”

Mako lifted her head up. “What do you mean...”

The sound of footsteps caused Mako to turn around. Standing before her was a man and a woman, bearing striking resemblances to Mako herself. They stood together holding hands, backlit by a heavenly light.

“Mom! Dad!” Mako shouted, sprinting towards the couple. She ran into their arms and hugged them, sobbing her heart out. “I can’t believe it...this...this can’t be real! Mom, Dad...I have so much to share...I—”

“We’re sorry honey,” the man said, pushing Mako’s arm away.

The woman stepped away coldly. “You’re not the kind of daughter we wanted,” she said. “You’ve let us down.”

As her parents walked away, Mako collapsed to the ground in shock, too devastated to even cry. "What...what did I...do wrong," she whimpered.

"Had your parents lived," the voice said. *"They would have found you a big disappointment. That...is the truth."*

Mako sat alone in the cold, dark room, surrounded by her childhood stuffed animals. The weight of the devastating memories took a heavy toll on her psyche, chipping away at the remnants of hope. But right when Mako was at the cusp of her breaking point, a kind voice spoke up.

"Don't lose hope," Ami's voice said.

Ami's spirit reinvigorated Mako. Glaring at the sky, Mako directed her anger at the invisible enemy. "Wow...wow! Using my dead parents against me...that...that's low, even for you Dark Kingdom scum!"

A loud roar boomed in the skies. The bedroom Mako was in shattered into wooden debris, as if a tornado had blown right through. Mako protected her face with her forearm, while the furious winds blew around her. When it stopped, she found herself outside, surrounded on all sides by a demolished house.

Mako chuckled. "Pissed you off, didn't I?"

The voice in the sky laughed. *"Hehebe...it seems as if there has been...an interesting development in the world."*

"What now?" Mako shouted. "Hey, why don't you show your face so I can kick your ass, coward!"

“Hebebebe...”

“What’s so funny?!”

“Hebebebe...”

Mako turned around suddenly and saw Sailor Mercury standing in front of her.

“Ami...that’s her name, right?” the voice said.

With trembling hands, Mako took a cautious step toward her beloved partner. “Y—you better not touch her, you big—”

“Unfortunately, it’s too late. For I do not sense her celestial energy anymore.”

Mako reached out for Sailor Mercury’s hand, but phased right through like she was a ghost. She swallowed a hard lump in her throat. “I...I don’t believe—”

“She’s dead, Mako.”

“No...no...you’re lying,” Mako said in disbelief. “This is a lie...”

“She was brave for sure. But sadly, her death was in vain. A sad waste.”

“Prove it!” Mako yelled. Her frustration was evident and she thought she still had the upper hand. But Mako would soon come to regret those words.

“As you wish,” the voice said.

Dark storm clouds covered the sky and reality shifted again. Mako soon found herself standing in the dreary Dark Kingdom caverns. In the center, Sailor Mercury was alone, facing off against Kunzite and a trio of youma monsters. Mercury skillfully leveraged her water powers, using shields and offensive attacks to ward off her enemies. At the

moment, it seemed that she had the advantage. Water droplets splashed into Mako's face, further intensifying the realism of the scene.

"Keeping watching," the voice said.

The tide shifted and Mercury grew weaker. She continued to fight bravely, but couldn't sustain her attacks any longer. And eventually, one of Kunzite's attacks landed a devastating blow on her.

"Ami...come on, get up," Mako shouted. But like before, no one in the scene could hear Mako.

Kunzite grabbed Mercury's collar, and the two exchanged words. Mercury, defiant to the very end, shouted an insult into Kunzite's face. Enraged, Kunzite materialized a bright purple crystal in his hand, shaped like a long dagger.

"AMI! WATCH OUT HE HAS A—"

SHHHHKK!

Sailor Mercury shot her eyes open and unleashed a horrific yell. She grabbed the handle on the dagger, her trembling gloved hands covered in blood. Kunzite grinned and viciously thrust the dagger further into Mercury's abdomen, causing the sharp tip to penetrate her spine. *SHHHHKK!*

Mako's entire body quaked violently. She entered a state of intense shock, her mind too traumatized to even utter Ami's name. Mako stood paralyzed, watching the life escape Ami's vibrant blue eyes and blood trickle down her blue boots. Finally, as Kunzite stepped away

from Ami's lifeless body, Mako's tortured expression conveyed the depths of her anguish. "O—oh...oh my god...Ami...oh my god..."

The sinister voice in the sky laughed. It watched with delight as Mako stumbled over to Ami's bloody body. Then, in an act of supreme cruelty—it rewound the tape.

Mako looked around in disbelief as the scene played out again, in all its gory detail. "NO!" she screamed. *SHHHHKK!* "NO!!!"

Laughter. Rewind.

SHHHHKK!! "AMI!!!"

When the scene started again for the tenth time, Mako screamed into the sky, "STOP! PLEASE STOP!" She collapsed to the ground a sobbing mess and curled into a fetal position, like a wounded animal.

"Giving up hope already, tough girl?" the voice said gleefully.

Mako whimpered. "I...I can't go on anymore...without Ami...I...I don't know if I can..."

A shadowy mist appeared in the sky, with two red triangular eyes in its core. The mist floated down to Mako, enveloping her with its smoky tendrils. *"You're mine,"* it said.

The mist funneled into the golden tiara on Mako's forehead, causing her to gasp and convulse. The tiara glowed bright green and floated off Mako's head, toward the sky. In a flash of light, the tiara transformed into a beautiful green crystal, shimmering with tiny electrical sparks. The green crystal drifted to a spot between the sinister

red eyes and without saying another word, the shadowy mist vanished into the void.

Chapter 22. The Rook

One by one, Queen Metalia drained the hopes of each Sailor Guardian and sealed their celestial powers in crystals. Metalia invaded the minds of each girl, finding their weaknesses and exploiting them. Each time, the girls fought back against Metalia's visions. But when Metalia showed the vision of Sailor Mercury's brutal murder, each girl eventually broke.

Usagi, Minako, Rei, and Mako—none of them could handle the trauma of Ami's death. They all had different lived experiences and different ways to deal with their issues. But Ami's kindness and friendship had become indispensable in their lives. Whether Ami knew it or not, she had become the glue holding the Sailor Guardians together.

There were four crystals floating above each sleeping Sailor Guardian. A yellow crystal floated above Sailor Venus; red for Sailor Mars; green for Sailor Jupiter; and silvery-white for Sailor Moon. The golden tiaras that once graced their foreheads had disappeared.

Metalia's dark energy cloud hovered nearby, relishing over its coveted prize.

Queen Beryl walked into the chamber and gently touched Sailor Moon's floating crystal. "Incredible," she said, her voice filled with wonder. "So much power at our fingertips."

"Yes", Metalia uttered. *"But we need just a bit more energy to unlock my prison."*

Beryl smiled and poked the tip of Sailor Jupiter's green crystal. "Yes, the last remaining Sailor Guardian. My generals should be on their way as we speak."

There was no response from Metalia. Its sinister red eyes simply narrowed and shifted imperceptibly in Queen Beryl's direction.



Kunzite hurried out of Queen Beryl's throne room into the antechamber. His expression revealed contempt, having experienced yet another humiliating affront from Beryl.

In a dark corner of the chamber, Zoisite, Sakura, and Hypnosia huddled in a circle, whispering to each other.

"*AHEM!*" Kunzite shouted.

Zoisite poked his head out from the huddle. His two female youma then scurried to the side and bowed their heads respectfully.

"What are you waiting for," Kunzite said impatiently. "Why haven't you left yet?"

Zoisite glanced at his two youma and gave Kunzite a polite smile. "They're recharging their energy levels. Can't be too careful, right Kunzite?"

There was hint of mockery in Zoisite's tone. Kunzite hated it.

"Don't get *smart* with me," Kunzite said, sneering. "Are you ready or not?"

Zoisite reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a glass bottle filled with chloroform. "Got all the tools we need right here."

"Good," Kunzite said. "Now get your stinking face—"

SHWOOMMMM!

Zoisite interrupted Kunzite's insult by opening a dark energy portal. "Let's go ladies," he said. "Kunzite...why don't you stay behind and keep guard?"

Kunzite furrowed his eyebrows in disdain. "Excuse me?"

Zoisite guided Sakura and Hypnosia through the portal. He glanced back and smirked. "You heard me. Just stay right where you are. We'll be—"

"You do NOT give orders!" Kunzite shouted. He barged over and grabbed Zoisite's shoulder. "Do I have to remind you who's in charge here? When this is over, Queen Beryl will be getting an earful about your insolence! So do NOT play games with me, Zoisite!"

The energy portal hummed ominously in the background as the two Dark Kingdom generals faced off. Zoisite broke the tense silence and nudged his head. "So...what are you waiting for?"

Kunzite let out an annoyed grunt and released Zoisite's shoulder. He then shoved Zoisite into the portal and followed him. The portal snapped shut in a flash, leaving behind a flurry of rose petals inside the empty antechamber.

* * * * *

Ami, Suzuki, and Luna sat around a wooden table in the Hikawa Shrine's living area. Empty tea cups and snack bags littered the table. Luna sipped milk from a small bowl.

"Do you think our friends are okay?" Ami asked Luna.

Luna licked some milk off her chin and gave Ami a confident look. “Metalia needs the power of the Sailor Guardians to escape its prison. Killing them would not achieve their goal.”

Ami shuddered at the dire thought of her friends dying. “But...if their celestial energy is taken...won’t they...die?”

Luna shook her head. “Without their celestial energy, they will become ordinary girls. Just like they were before they became Sailor Guardians.”

The news gave Ami comfort, but it didn’t fully resolve her worries. After all, a group of four ordinary girls trapped in the Dark Kingdom still presented a dangerous situation. No matter what, Ami needed to find a way into the enemy’s lair and rescue her friends.

Ami turned her attention to Suzuki, who was munching on a cookie. “Suzuki...if...if I don’t make it, can you promise me—”

“Huh?” Suzuki said, looking at Ami in astonishment.

“Promise me...that you’ll save my friends,” Ami said, her voice cracking with emotion. “And please tell Mako that I—”

“Nonsense!” Suzuki yelled, slamming her hands on the table. She pointed the cookie at Ami and took another bite out of it. “We...are going to make it out alive. *All* of us!”

The outburst left Ami and Luna stunned.

“I can’t believe I’m the one who has to give you this speech, Miss Mercury,” Suzuki continued. “But as long as we’re breathing, we do *not* give up!”

Luna joined in. “She’s right, Ami. You are endowed with the unshakeable courage and bravery of Mercury’s spirit. When the time comes, you will shine brighter than any star in the galaxy. I’m sure of it!”

Ami gave Luna a big hug and clasped Suzuki’s hand.

“Thanks...both of you. I...needed that. I know I can be really hard on myself...and I certainly cry a lot...but I think we’ll get through this. Sorry for being such a downer.”

“Don’t apologize,” Luna said.

“Yeah, you’ve had it rough,” Suzuki added. “Seriously, if it were me, I don’t think I could have—”

SHWOOOMMM!

Ami, Suzuki, and Luna shifted their attention toward the sudden ominous noise.

“Oh no,” Ami whispered, grabbing her transformation pen.

“That’s got to be them!”

Suzuki crept toward the window. She poked her head up, then crouched quickly out of sight. “Bad news guys,” she whispered. She beckoned Ami over.

With her anxiety shooting to insane levels, Ami peered out the window. A dark energy portal had opened in the center of the shine grounds. Standing around it was Sakura in her leafy-green minidress, Hypnosia with her metal sleep-gas tank, Zoisite with his blonde curls—and Kunzite, his cape flapping in the wind.

“Four against two,” Ami whispered nervously. In her plans, she had anticipated only Zoisite and his two youma showing up. The

appearance of Kunzite shifted the calculus significantly. She glared at Kunzite's smug, chiseled face, remembering the cruel way he tortured Mako. "Not gonna lie...this is bad."

Suzuki summoned her purple ribbon, showering the floor with dark energy sparks. "Nothing changes," she said, snapping the ribbon taut. "Put your blue boots on Ami...it's go time."

Ami picked up Luna and ran to a closet. "Stay here, Luna!" The cat protested but Ami held firm. "I don't want you getting hurt. Please, stay safe."

Luna nodded reluctantly. "Come back alive, Ami," she said.

Ami hopped to Suzuki's side and took a deep, frightened breath. On instinct, she clasped Suzuki's hand, feeling it tremble. The youma smiled back, suppressing her fear behind a facade of confidence. *She's scared...just like me*, Ami thought.

"For the ones we love," Suzuki said dramatically.

Ami nodded. "For love."

Hand in hand, the two girls marched toward the shrine doorway—and stepped outside.



The mid-afternoon sky had turned noticeably gloomier. A strong breeze kicked up some leaves, sweeping past Ami and Suzuki's legs. They stood side by side outside the shrine's doorway, facing off against their four adversaries.

Zoisite folded his arms and stepped forward. “Suzuki! Been a while. I see you’ve made a new friend!” he said. “Why don’t the two of you come back with us to the Dark Kingdom? Nobody needs to get hurt today.”

Suzuki opened her mouth to respond, but Ami stepped forward first.

“Why are you still taking orders from that wicked queen, Zoisite?” Ami said. “Once she gets what she wants, she’ll kill all of you!”

Zoisite tried to think of a response, but Kunzite stepped forward instead.

“That’s where you’re wrong, Sailor Mercury!” Kunzite said. “In your puny little mind, you have no understanding of the power we hope to attain. We will be joining our queen as rulers of the galaxy. You are nothing but a pathetic little roadblock in our way. So surrender yourself now, or face our wrath!”

Before Ami could react to Kunzite’s delusional speech, the Dark Kingdom general summoned a sizzling sphere of energy in his hand. “Enough talk!” Kunzite shouted, pointing his finger at Ami. *“ATTACK!”*

Ami raised her golden transformation pen into the heavens. *“MERCURY POWER!”* she shouted, her fearless voice echoing across the shrine grounds. *“MAKE! UP!”*

A beam of light surrounded Ami’s body, and in a brilliant blue flash, she transformed into the beautiful Sailor Mercury. Standing proudly next to Suzuki, Ami dazzled in her blue miniskirt, boots, and golden tiara. With synchronized grace, the two superheroines elevated their arms into fighting stances, ready to confront the enemy.

“Wow, nice entrance,” Suzuki said, bumping her shoulder into Ami’s. “No speech this time?”

Ami laughed at the light-hearted quip. “Sorry, not this time.” She summoned a ball of water energy in her fist and directed her focus to Kunzite. “Incoming!” she yelled.

Kunzite had made the first move, launching his dark energy sphere in Ami’s direction. In response, Ami transformed her water energy into a shield, protecting her and Suzuki. *BOOM! SPLASH SPLASH SPLASH!*

Sakura and Hypnosia moved next, targeting Suzuki with vines and rubber tubes.

“Split up!” Suzuki yelled, flapping her ankle wings and flying into the air. “I’ll take care of these two numbskulls!”

Ami nodded and sprinted in the opposite direction, drawing the attention of Kunzite and Zoisite.

With acrobatic prowess, Suzuki somersaulted in the sky, dodging Sakura and Hypnosia’s attacks. From her high-ground, she directed her ribbon at Sakura’s position. “RIBBON STRIKE!” Suzuki shouted.

Sakura blocked the ribbon with vines, generating an explosion of sparks and leaves. *BOOM!*

“She’s too high!” Sakura yelled. “Shoot her down, Hypnosia!”

Hypnosia summoned an energy ball swirling with tiny hypodermic needles. The green-haired youma took aim at the sky and shouted, “Needlestorm! Barrage!”

The needles within the sphere arranged themselves, their sharp tips pointed directly at Suzuki. With a sudden surge of power, the

needles shot upward, its radius expanding, ready to strike like celestial arrows.

“Whoa!” Suzuki shouted, as the shimmering needles whisked towards her. Displaying her nimble skill, Suzuki backflipped to escape one wave of needles, and used her ribbon to sweep away another. The last wave of needles surged toward Suzuki and she flapped her wings in preparation to dodge it. But she mistimed their speed and before she could bolt out of the way—one of the needles hit its target. *FFFTTTT!*

“OW!” Suzuki yelled, grabbing her neck and yanking the needle out. The sharp pain disoriented her and she quickly lowered her altitude for safety. She landed on a tree branch and continued rubbing her neck, hoping she would be able to withstand the needle’s anesthetic effects. “Ow...come on...stay awake,” Suzuki said, smacking her forehead. “Stay awake!”

Sakura and Hypnosia sprinted to the base of the tree. “Looks like you got her,” Sakura shouted.

“Time for bed, sweetie!” Hypnosia said.

Suzuki looked to the other end of the shrine grounds, watching Sailor Mercury face off against the Dark Kingdom generals. Suzuki cursed herself for being so careless and losing so fast. She bit her lower lip, waiting for the anesthetic to pull her under. But strangely, nothing happened. Suzuki glanced at the hypodermic needle in her hand—and noticed that it was empty. “Did...I just get really lucky?” she said to herself.

Before Suzuki could process the situation further, a surge of vines and rubber tubes attacked her tree branch.

“Come and fight us on the ground, coward!” Sakura shouted.

Suzuki tossed the needle away and summoned her ribbon weapon. “As you wish!” she said.

On the opposite end of the shrine, Ami expertly parried Kunzite and Zoisite’s dark energy attacks, displaying profound growth in her fighting experience. She kept her distance from them, using a combination of water shields and attacks to protect herself. Ami had noticed when Suzuki fell into the tree, but felt relieved when Suzuki emerged a few moments later.

“You never give up, *do you*, Sailor Mercury?” Kunzite shouted, lobbing another dark energy sphere. “You won’t outlast us, you know!”

Ami deflected the attack with a water sphere and paused to catch her breath. The constant running and dodging had taken a severe toll on her stamina. Kunzite did indeed have a point however. In a battle of attrition, it was crucial for Ami to maintain her energy reserve. At her current pace, she would run out of steam fast. As a result, Ami decided to shift strategies and stall for time.

“You’re delusional, Kunzite,” Ami yelled, taking hard breaths between words. “There’s no way Queen Beryl would let you join her side.”

Kunzite laughed, shaking his head at Ami’s attempt to delay the outcome. “You know what...fine, maybe you’re right,” he said. He gave Zoisite a cordial pat on the shoulder and said, “Maybe I just want revenge for all the pain you caused poor Zoisite over here. After all, *you’re* the reason he’s been demoted.”

Zoisite rolled his eyes. *Delusions of grandeur*, he thought.

Ami remained focused, never taking her eyes off Kunzite.

“But most of all,” Kunzite continued. “I just really—*really*—want to see the looks on the faces of your friends as I torture you, Sailor Mercury. I will make them watch as I break every...*single*...bone in your body.” Kunzite gritted his teeth into a malicious smile as he fantasized about Ami’s suffering.

“We need her alive,” Zoisite said. “Don’t forget—”

“Oh, shut your mouth,” Kunzite said, turning his attention to Zoisite. “When did you get so soft?”

The distraction was enough for Ami. “MERCURY BUBBLES BLAST!” she shouted. The icy bubbles surged into Kunzite’s face, blinding his eyes with dense cold and fog.

“BLAARGHHHHH!” Kunzite screamed. He clutched his face and ran away, leaving a surprised Zoisite behind.

Seizing the opening, Ami fired a blast of water into Zoisite’s chest, sending him to the ground. *SPLASH SPLASH SPLASH!* Ami then sprinted after Kunzite, catching up to him near the shrine’s gardens.

“SHINE AQUA SHIELD!” Ami shouted.

Kunzite, still recovering from the ice attack, looked up in shock to see a massive water bubble barreling towards him. Before he could react, the bubble rolled into him, sucking him into its watery belly. He opened his mouth to scream, but swallowed a mouthful of water into his lungs instead. “*GRRRAAHHH GLUB GLUB GLUB!*”

Ami held the water bubble intact using her celestial powers, watching as Kunzite started drowning inside. She held firm even as

Kunzite's panicked eyes bulged out of his sockets. "This is for hurting Mako," she said. Then, in a show of mercy, Ami lowered her arms and allowed the water bubble to collapse. *SPLASH SPLASH SPLASH!*

COUGH COUGH COUGH! Kunzite writhed on the ground, coughing up water as he tried to stand up. "Argghhh—*COUGH COUGH!*"

Ami walked over, her blue boots sloshing over the wet dirt near Kunzite's fallen form. She summoned a water energy sphere and pointed it at Kunzite triumphantly. "Unless you want to feel what it's like to drown again, I would stay right where you are," Ami said.

Kunzite glared at Sailor Mercury with contempt, his long white hair dripping water over his face. The once dignified general looked like a miserable wet dog. *Humiliated again*, Kunzite thought, clenching his jaw in anger. *And by the hands of a girl no less!*

He glanced over at the other side of the shrine, where Suzuki was battling the other two youma. The pixie-like youma seemed to have no problem combating the vines and sleeping gas hurricanes. Suzuki's wings and athleticism proved to be a significant advantage. Yet, despite those advantages, Suzuki was still a Dark Kingdom youma. And youma—had weaknesses.

Kunzite raised his fist suddenly and channeled a powerful source of dark energy within him. The energy radiated outward, an invisible sphere of influence under his command. "Checkmate, Sailor Mercury," he said, with a giant smirk on his face.

It had taken Ami a moment to process what had just happened. She felt the malevolent sphere of dark energy pass right through her body, but wondered why it didn't seem to affect her. Realizing that she wasn't the intended target, Ami turned her head and shouted, "Suzuki! Get out of here!"

Suzuki was midflight when she heard Ami's sudden warning. But even with her gift of speed, there was no way Suzuki could outrun the impending energy attack. The invisible sphere passed through Suzuki's body and she screamed as an awful, agonizing pain flooded her brain. Her ankle wings ceased to function and she began a free-fall toward the Earth. Before she could hit the ground, Sakura caught her with a vine and softened Suzuki's fall.

Suzuki gripped her head in torment, the searing pain triggering a tortuous headache. No matter how much she rolled around or screamed, the pain persisted, a relentless force refusing to subside.

"STOP!" Ami shouted. "What did you do to her?!"

Kunzite laughed and twisted his fist, radiating forth another surge of dark energy. Suzuki's awful screams pierced the sky.

Ami stepped away from Kunzite and dissipated her water sphere, unable to bear Suzuki's suffering any longer. In a single stroke, Kunzite gained the upper hand again, exploiting Ami's kind heart without mercy.

"It's a dark energy safety switch," Kunzite said, staggering back to his feet. "A trigger, if you will, that we implant in every youma's brain in case they go rogue."

Zoisite walked over, wiping water off his chest. “Safety switch? I’ve never heard of such a thing!”

“Because we’ve never had to use it before, dimwit,” Kunzite said. He kept his fist raised and glared at Sailor Mercury. “Stay where you are, or I’ll blow that purple fairy’s head off.”

Ami obeyed, watching helplessly as Kunzite and Zoisite regained their composure. She debated whether Suzuki’s life was equal to that of her four friends, but shook the thought away. Suzuki was a friend and her life was worth saving. *I’d give my life for her*, Ami thought.

“Bring her over,” Zoisite said, directing his two youma servants.

Sakura and Hypnosia grabbed Suzuki’s arms and dragged her over. Suzuki’s head flopped to the side, her body weakened severely by the painful onslaught. “*Uhhnnnn...s*—sorry,” she moaned. “I’m...so sorry...Ami...”

They dropped Suzuki to the ground near Zoisite’s feet.

“Please...help me, master,” Suzuki whimpered, twitching and writhing. “It...it hurts so much...”

“Let me check her,” Ami said, running forward. “Please...she’s suffering!”

Zoisite ignored Ami’s pleas and pointed his finger at her.

“Restrain her.”

Sakura launched a vine at Sailor Mercury, wrapping her arms against her sides. *SHHHWWWWPPP!*

“*Uhhnnn!* NO!” Ami shouted, squirming under her bindings.

“What are you doing, Zoisite!?”

Kunzite flipped back his cape. His chiseled face was beaming with malevolence. “Seems like Zoisite here has finally found his spine.”

Zoisite clasped his hands behind his back and stood at attention. He nodded his head at Hypnosia, who responded by picking Suzuki off the ground. Hypnosia lifted Suzuki’s chin, making sure she paid full attention.

“As an officer of the Dark Kingdom,” Zoisite said, his voice booming with authority. “I bring forth charges of treason against the youma, Suzuki, for betraying her allegiance to our queen. Her actions undermined the mission of our kingdom, and jeopardized the lives of our soldiers. The punishment for this willful betrayal...is death.”

Kunzite nodded his head solemnly and clapped his hands. “Wonderful. You’ve truly redeemed yourself here, Zoisite.” He then raised one of his hands and materialized a purple crystal—shaped like a long dagger. Kunzite marched over and handed the dagger to Zoisite. “Finish the job,” he said coldly.

Ami jumped forward, but Sakura’s vines pulled her back. “No! Zoisite! You can’t do this!!” she cried. “I’m begging you! Take me instead. She didn’t do anything wrong!”

Zoisite flipped the dagger in his hand, measuring its weight. He ignored Ami’s cries, aiming the dagger at Suzuki’s abdomen.

“This isn’t right!” Ami shouted, her eyes filling with tears. “She’s innocent, Zoisite! *Please!!*”

Zoisite knelt down to Suzuki’s level and stared into her soul. “Any last words?”

Suzuki lifted her head weakly and blinked her weary eyes, sending down two streams of heavy tears. “Ami...it...it’s been an honor...”

“No!” Ami replied, her voice quivering with sadness. “It can’t end this way!”

“Please...tell Rei,” Suzuki continued. “That...that I—”

“Enough talk, already,” Kunzite interrupted. “Get on with it!”

Zoisite stepped back and nodded at Hypnosia. The youma raised a rubber tube and aimed it at Suzuki’s face.

“Sorry, sweetie,” Hypnosia said in her sultry voice. “This won’t hurt a bit.”

Suzuki opened her eyes weakly. “*Uhnnn...wait...what are you—*”
POOF!

A thick cloud of purple sleeping gas puffed out of the tube into Suzuki’s groggy face. Too weak to resist, Suzuki took a breath and coughed. The gas took effect quickly, numbing the pain in her head and relaxing her muscles. She welcomed the relief, taking another deep breath and fluttering her eyelashes. “*Ohhhhh...gas? I guess it’s...time to...time to sleep,*” she muttered sluggishly. With that, she closed her eyes and fainted, drifting off to the realm of dreams.

Ami continued her futile struggles against her bindings, calling out Suzuki’s name in desperation.

“Quiet!” Kunzite commanded. He then glared at Zoisite. “DO IT!” he shouted.

With utmost flair, Zoisite thrust the dagger into the air, gripping it with both hands. He held it over his head, pointing its sharp tip at Suzuki’s upper stomach.

Ami shut her eyes and collapsed to her knees. Everyone held their breath.

Zoisite glanced over at Kunzite suddenly. “I’m sorry,” he said, his mouth curling into a slight smile. He paused—for dramatic effect of course—and shouted his command. “*NOW!*”

“NEEDLESTORM BARRAGE!” Hypnosia shouted. She launched a wave of hypodermic needles, dropping Suzuki’s sleeping body in the process. The needles—filled with powerful anesthetic this time—rocketed towards Kunzite.

“HUHHH!?” Kunzite yelled, flipping his cape in time to block all the needles—except for one. *FFFFTTT!!* “ARGHHH!” he screamed, grabbing the needle in his neck.

“WOODLAND! VINE SMASH!” Sakura shouted. She released Ami from her bindings and launched a vine attack at Kunzite. The green vines coiled themselves around Kunzite’s arms and legs, causing him to stumble to his knees.

“T—TRAITORS!!” he yelled. Kunzite tried to summon his dark energy again—the same safety switch trick he used against Suzuki—but the anesthetic had already dulled his senses. “WHAT? I...I can’t...I can’t focus...”

Ami, still recovering from the shocking turn of events, scrambled over to Suzuki’s sleeping form. “Suzuki!” she said, shaking the youma’s petite body. “Hey! Wake up, Suzuki!”

Zoisite marched over to Kunzite, with his two youma servants at his side. “Looks like you’re out of commission, Kunzite.”

“ARGHH...wh...what...is the meaning of this,” Kunzite said, his voice slowing down. His breathing deepened and he struggled to keep his eyes open. “You...ALL of you...are *dead*. You hear me? You...will not—”

“Hypnosia?” Zoisite said, turning to his ally. “Gas him.”

“With pleasure,” Hypnosia replied seductively. She pointed a rubber tube in Kunzite’s handsome, chiseled face and turned a metal valve—*SQUEAK! FSSSSSSSSSS*.

“No! No, no no...” *COUGH COUGH*.

Purple sleeping gas streamed out of the tube directly into Kunzite’s nose and mouth. He twisted his head left and right, attempting to avoid the fumes, but it was useless. The gas rendered Kunzite sleepier and sleepier with each passing second. With a deep groan, he dipped his head and shut his eyes. “Damn...you...all to hell...” he muttered. “Damn...you...”

Zoisite shook his head and retrieved the glass bottle from his jacket. “Good lord...Sakura, do the honors will ya?”

Sakura snatched the bottle of chloroform from Zoisite’s hand and poured its contents onto a white handkerchief. “First time?” she said, brushing back some of her sexy red hair.

Kunzite continued droning on, fighting back against the anesthetics with all his energy.

“Damn...you...all...damn...you—*mmmpbh...*”

Sakura pressed the handkerchief over Kunzite’s nose and mouth, suppressing his words into moans. She knelt down, causing her leafy minidress to hike up her hips. “Nighty night, master,” she said seductively, stroking Kunzite’s silky white hair. Kunzite’s breathing

relaxed and his vocalizations dropped in frequency. After a few more sleepy breaths from the cloth, he ceased all movement, entering a deep slumber.

Satisfied with Kunzite's defeat, Sakura removed the handkerchief and summoned additional vines. She wound the vines around his wrists and ankles, finishing things off with a vine gag around his mouth. Sakura glanced back at Zoisite and smiled.

“Operation...Coup d'état...”

“Complete,” Zoisite said.

Ami checked Suzuki's vitals one more time, verifying that her heart rate and breathing were stable. “Thank goodness...you'll be fine,” Ami said, sighing with relief. Suzuki had suffered greatly from Kunzite's attack and Ami decided that a bit of sleep would help her recover. With things quieting down, Ami finally had a chance to process the dramatic change in circumstances. She glared at Zoisite and stood up, brushing some dirt off her miniskirt.

Zoisite waved at Ami. “Water girl! Hey...listen...”

Ami stomped forward, her boot heels clacking loudly. She arrived within an inch of Zoisite's dumbstruck face and—*SLAP!!!*—slapped him hard.

“JEEZ!” Zoisite shouted, holding his crimson red cheek. “You're welcome! WOW!”

Ami jabbed her finger at Zoisite's nose. “You traumatized the *hell* out of that poor girl!” she yelled, her eyes stinging with enraged tears. “When Suzuki wakes up, I want to hear a sincere apology from you!”

Without waiting for a response, Ami turned around and marched back, wiping her eyes.

“Whoa,” Sakura said. “I kinda like her. The kid’s got spunk.”

Hypnosia nodded in agreement. “Yeah...watch out, Zoisite, she’s going places.”

“Whatever,” Zoisite said, still rubbing his throbbing cheek. He pointed at Kunzite’s unconscious body. “Can one of you...shove him in a closet or something?”

Chapter 23. The Plan

Ami tossed some blankets into a big duffel bag, which was filled with water bottles, energy bars, and other supplies. She rifled through Rei's closet, checking to see if there was anything useful. Finally, she grabbed her compact computer and inserted it into the bag's side pocket.

"What are you doing," Zoisite said, leaning on the bedroom doorway.

Ami zipped up the duffel bag and shoved it into Zoisite's chest. "Supplies," she said curtly. "For my friends."

"Why do you need—"

"Because it's *freezing* over there!" Ami yelled, pointing to her blue miniskirt.

Zoisite sighed and shook his head. "Still mad, huh?"

Ami pounded her fist into the wall and pressed her forehead into it. She was frustrated, angry, and exhausted. "You could have...*maybe* given me a heads up," she said. "If you truly felt this way about the Dark Kingdom, why didn't you come to us for help sooner?"

Zoisite groaned and pushed himself off the door frame.

"Look...I told you already. I had to wait for the perfect opportunity. If I had screwed up, they would have blown my head off."

Ami calmed her anger and nodded in understanding. "It's fine. I forgive you, okay? You were scared...just like all of us." She walked over and extended her hand awkwardly, before changing her mind and giving Zoisite a brief hug.

“Thank you,” Ami said, smiling warmly. “You risked your life for us. I can tell that deep down, you’re a good person.”

Zoisite shuffled his feet and blushed. “Awwww...yeah...just to be clear, uh, Sailor Mercury...this doesn’t make us friends, okay? I’ll help get you into the Dark Kingdom, but from there, you’re on your own. Deal?”

Ami walked out of the bedroom, brushing past Zoisite. “We’ll see,” she said.



Suzuki napped soundly on a tatami mat in the Hikawa Shrine’s living area. Her head rested on a comfy pillow with a Japanese silk cover. Nearby, her two youma partners—Sakura and Hypnosia—sipped on sencha tea from fancy ceramic cups.

“So,” Sakura said, twirling a purple flower. “Which Sailor Guardian is your *least* favorite?”

“*Hmmmm*,” Hypnosia said, pondering for a moment before pointing to her metal tank. “Definitely *thunder girl*. Hated her. Especially after she blew up my sleep-gas tank! What about you?”

“*Haha*...Sailor Mars for sure! I tell ya...that girl has a problem with mother nature.”

Ami walked into the living area, causing the two youma to cease their catty conversation. “How’s she doing,” she asked, sitting next to Suzuki.

“Should be waking up soon,” Hypnosia said. “I only gave her a small dose of sleeping gas.”

Ami delicately cradled Suzuki’s cheek. While they had only known each other a short time, a fondness had already taken root in Ami’s heart for Suzuki.

“Mmnnn...”

Suzuki let out a peaceful moan and squeezed her eyes. She opened one eye and smiled slightly. “Uhhnn...good...morning...Ami...”

“It’s evening,” Ami said, greeting Suzuki with a pair of vibrant blue eyes. “How are you feeling?”

Suzuki groaned and rubbed her forehead.

“Owww...damn...what an asshole...”

She sat upright, her voice and demeanor showing signs of vitality. Glancing at her youma partners and Ami, Suzuki asked, “What happened? How am I not dead?”

Ami gave Suzuki a summary of the events, explaining that Zoisite had apparently been plotting a coup for some time. She apologized profusely for the trauma Zoisite caused, but Suzuki waved it off.

“I’m sorry,” Ami said. “I had no idea he was going to—”

“No worries,” Suzuki replied. “He did what he had to do. Let’s figure out how to save your friends.”



Ami opened a closet door and was welcomed by the sight of Luna, curled up next to a sleeping Kunzite. The once powerful Dark Kingdom

general was tied up with a cloth gag covering his mouth. It was a humiliating end for the man who had tormented Ami so much.

“How’s our sleeping, handsome devil doing,” Ami said.

Luna perked up and placed a paw over a metal valve, attached to a nearby metal tank. She turned the valve—*SQUEAK!*—and released a puff of purple sleeping gas into Kunzite’s chiseled face. “He shouldn’t be a problem,” Luna said, wagging her tail. “I’ll make sure he stays out of your way.”

Ami returned to the living area, where Zoisite and his three youma ladies were sitting in a circle, discussing ideas. Zoisite acknowledged Ami and waved her over.

“I think I have an idea,” Zoisite said. “But I need to ask you first if—”

“Quick question,” Ami interrupted. “Does Queen Beryl suspect you’re a turncoat, Zoisite?”

Zoisite shook his head. “Unlikely, but you never know. I did my best to keep this under wraps.”

Ami nodded and left the table without responding. She retrieved something from a drawer and then returned—holding a bundle of ropes and a white handkerchief. She set the items down on the table and placed her hands behind her back. “Make it look convincing,” she said.

The three youma and Zoisite exchanged mischievous, almost playful grins with each other. Suzuki led the way, picking up one length of rope and reaching for Ami’s gloved hands. She wound them around Ami’s wrists, brushing past the top of Ami’s blue miniskirt in the

process. Hypnosia used another set of rope to bind Ami's arms, circling the rope under and above Ami's breasts. She then lowered a set of ropes to Ami's blue boots, but Ami stepped away.

"No ropes on the boots. I'll need to walk," Ami said, blushing politely. She tugged her arms and wrists, testing the strength of her bindings. *Remember to ask these ladies for some tips later*, Ami jokingly thought. "A bit more rope on the wrists, please."

Ami giggled a bit as their hands tickled across her body, gently touching her skin, skirt, and leotard.

"You sure about this, Ami?" Suzuki asked, securing another knot. "Maybe there's another way?"

Ami shook her head. "Queen Beryl is almost certainly guarding my friends, and we need to get as close as possible to her. She can't suspect a thing and the best way to do that is to use me as bait. But before we leave, can we just—"

"My turn!" Sakura said excitedly. She grabbed Ami from behind suddenly and clamped a silky white handkerchief—soaked in chloroform—over her nose and mouth.

"HRMMPHH?!" Ami yelled in surprise. She thought it was a prank at first, but after taking a few panicked breaths and feeling the fatigue set in—she realized it was the real thing. *Chloroform! No...they can't put me to sleep!* "HMMPH! SZKIMMPH! HLPMMPH!"

With delightful glee, Sakura pushed the cloth further into Ami's nose, forcing the poor girl to take another sleepy breath. "Just like you said, Sailor Mercury," Sakura whispered seductively. "We gotta make it look *convincing*."

Ami shook her head in disbelief, her cheeks red with embarrassment. “Hrmmmpfh?!”

“Relax girl,” Sakura said, stroking the fabric around Ami’s belly button. “Just close those baby-blue eyes and sleeeeeeep!”

“Can’t believe you ladies talked me into this,” Zoisite said with a chuckle.

Having been thoroughly tied up, Ami could not muster the strength to fight back. With each breath, the chloroform worked its way to Ami’s brain, methodically relaxing her muscles and limbs. Her mind faded into a warm, soothing numbness. Knowing full well that she only had a few seconds of consciousness left, Ami gazed wearily at Suzuki, her sleepy blue eyes conveying a deep worry. *Please...keep everyone safe*, Ami prayed, letting out a dainty whimper as she reluctantly accepted her fate. “Mmmphhh...mnnn...”

Suzuki gently brushed some of Ami’s blue hair. “I have your back, Ami. I won’t let Queen Beryl lay a finger on your friends,” she said, watching Ami’s eyes flutter shut. “I promise.”

With a final groggy sigh, Ami fainted and collapsed into Sakura’s arms. Suzuki supported Ami’s waist and helped lower the sleeping Sailor Guardian to the floor. Suzuki then pressed a cloth gag between Ami’s lips and tightened it with a knot behind Ami’s neck.

“You were right, she’s such a cutie,” Sakura said, admiring Sailor Mercury’s peaceful face. “Especially when she’s gagged like that.”

Suzuki chuckled. “Believe it or not...this is actually the *second* time she’s been bound and gagged today.”

“Wow, lucky you,” Sakura said with a giggle.

Hypnosia brought over a black rubber anesthesia mask. “Do we need any more, or are we good?”

Suzuki gave a quick thumbs up. “We’re good.”

Chapter 24. Heroes

SHWOOOMMM!

An energy portal opened inside the dreary Dark Kingdom antechamber. Zoisite poked his head out and looked left—then right. It was empty and dead silent. He tiptoed forward, carrying the duffel bag Ami had prepared earlier. He set the bag in a corner of the rocky chamber and waved at the portal.

Hypnosia stepped out, followed by Sakura. Suzuki was the last to exit, cradling the sleeping Sailor Mercury in her arms. Ami was still bound with ropes, a cleave gag between her lips. A cold, eerie breeze from the caverns drifted past Ami's boots, ruffling her blue miniskirt.

Suzuki gently set Ami on a stone surface and stroked her hair. "We're here," she whispered to Ami's ear. "Sorry for putting you through this."

A soft moan escaped Ami's gagged lips. "*Mnnfff...uhhnn...*"

Zoisite paced around the antechamber, clasping his chin nervously. "I got a bad feeling."

"Don't worry. Beryl will have all her attention on Sailor Mercury. Just watch for my signal, okay?" Suzuki said. "Now, where's the throne room?"

Zoisite sighed loudly and pointed his finger toward a dimly lit hallway. "Straight through there, take a left."

Suzuki picked up Ami's limp body and handed her to Zoisite. "Lead the way," she said.

The group walked through the cavernous hallway, with Zoisite in front. Nobody said a word, their footsteps being the only sounds, plus the occasional sleepy moan from Ami's lips.

They soon reached the imposing door to Queen Beryl's throne room. Crafted from obsidian, its surface bore cryptic markings that conveyed secrets from a bygone era. Dimly lit torches held in iron sconces illuminated the massive entranceway, casting shadows on the threshold.

Zoisite flung Ami's rear end over his shoulder, gripping her boots against his chest with one arm. Sakura stifled a giggle when she saw a peek of Ami's cute white panties, just inches from Zoisite's face.

With his free hand, Zoisite made a trembling fist and raised it to the stone door. He hesitated for a moment, glancing behind nervously at Suzuki, who gave him an assured nod. Zoisite then straightened his back—and pounded on the door three times.

POUND POUND POUND.

The sonorous banging noises reverberated endlessly through the chamber. The echoes then faded into ominous silence. Nobody moved an inch. After a few tense seconds, Queen Beryl's regal voice spoke from behind the door.

“Who goes there?” she said.

“I—I have the girl,” Zoisite replied, trying his hardest to suppress his fear. “The—the Guardian of Water, my queen.”

From outside the door, they could hear the sounds of Beryl’s footsteps. “Wait right there,” she said.

Suzuki held up two fingers behind her back and glanced at her two youma partners, signaling for them to hold steady. Suzuki’s heart pounded like a relentless bass drum, its beats resonating through her bones and wrecking her chest. She bit her lower lip, feeling it quiver through her teeth.

CLACK! CLACK! CLACK!

Beryl’s dire footsteps reached the door.

The room held its breath.

The door moved an inch—then opened. Suzuki kept her fingers in position. *Wait.*

The sound of obsidian grinding against stone pierced their ears. Beryl’s wooden staff appeared—then her regal purple dress.

Tiny sparks materialized on Suzuki’s index finger. She silently released a breath. *Wait.*

Queen Beryl’s menacing face appeared, her red lips curled into an evil smile. Floating next to Beryl was a big dark energy sphere—with someone inside it.

The room let out a collective gasp. Suzuki's eyes widened in shock and fear. The sparks disappeared from her index finger. She lowered her hand slowly. *Abort.*

“Greetings, Zoisite,” Queen Beryl said, her regal voice carrying a dark, sinister tone. She focused on her lowly general, paying no heed to his youma servants.

“Do you know what hope is?” Beryl asked.

Nobody in the room uttered a word. All eyes were on the floating energy sphere—and the unconscious form of Sailor Jupiter drifting inside it.

“Uh...umm,” Zoisite muttered, too dumbstruck to respond. He straightened his back and cleared his throat. “*AHEM!* Sorry, my queen, but I...I think I'm missing some context here.”

Queen Beryl aimed her staff at Sailor Mercury, who was still slung over Zoisite's shoulder. “Wake her up.”

Like an obedient dog, Zoisite lowered Sailor Mercury to the cold, stone floor. “Hey! Water girl,” Zoisite said, slapping Ami's face a few times. “Rise and shine.”

“Mnnff...mmm.” Ami blinked her eyes open and looked around, her mind recovering from its drugged stupor. She muffled some words through her gagged lips. “Mnffwhrr...mnfwht...”

Beryl pounded her wooden staff and shouted, “WELCOME, SAILOR MERCURY!!”

It was like the world's loudest alarm clock. Queen Beryl's booming, regal voice jolted Ami awake. Ami scrambled to her knees,

squirming and muffling against her bindings. She then noticed the floating energy sphere. Within moments, tears flowed uncontrollably from Ami's vibrant blue eyes. "MMMPHHMKOOO!!"

Queen Beryl's evil laughter echoed around the chamber. "*Hope!* Hope is what gives you pesky Sailor Guardians your power," Beryl said.

No longer interested in the foolish charade, Ami desperately tugged her wrists, trying her hardest to break free. She glared at Beryl, shouting in anger, "MMNFFF...DNT TCH HRRR!!"

"Ohhhh...you *care* about her, don't you?" Beryl said, glancing at Sailor Jupiter's unconscious form. "You didn't think I'd remember?"

"Mnfff! MMMKOO!!!"

Suzuki regained her composure and held up two fingers behind her back again, out of Queen Beryl's sight. She darted her pupils rapidly between Ami and Beryl.

Sakura and Hypnosia stood at attention, pretending to be loyal youma servants, but quietly charging up their powers.

Zoisite stood in front of the three youma, hands clasped respectfully behind his back. A drop of sweat trickled down his forehead.

"QUIET," Beryl said, pointing her wooden staff under Ami's chin. The red orb on the staff pulsed eerily.

Ami glanced down at the threatening red orb and obeyed. She had many choice words for the evil queen, but it wasn't worth losing Mako's life over—or her own life, for that matter. With no good

options, Ami fought back her tears, trembling incessantly as Beryl pontificated.

“Destroying the hopes of the Sailor Guardians was easy,” Beryl said. “It was all thanks to you, Sailor Mercury.”

“Hmnnff?” Ami said, giving Beryl a genuinely confused look.

Beryl laughed again, keeping the staff pointed at Ami’s slender neck. “Your Sailor Guardian friends couldn’t handle the thought of your sad, pathetic life ending. One by one, they *all* gave up hope!”

You monster, Ami thought, her face burning with rage. *How dare you traumatize my friends like that!*

“But...alas...we still have one more pesky Guardian to defeat,” Beryl said, feigning disappointment. In one swift motion, she swung the staff toward Sailor Jupiter’s unconscious body. “You, Sailor Mercury, are about to lose all your hopes and dreams,” she said, giving Ami a wicked grin. “Say goodbye to your precious friend!”

“MNFFFNOOOO!!” Ami screamed, tears twinkling from her eyes. Without a thought to her own life, she bolted to her feet and sprinted toward Beryl.

Queen Beryl lifted her leg and kicked Ami in the chest, sending her tumbling hard to the ground. *SLAM!* “HAHAHAHAAA!” The red orb on her staff glowed bright and sizzled with dark energy tendrils. “Rest in darkness!” she shouted, aiming the orb at Sailor Jupiter’s heart.

Time slowed to an agonizing crawl. Ami scrambled back to her feet, but with her arms still tied up, she lost balance and stumbled. Profound desperation settled in and Ami cast a frenzied glance towards

her ally, Suzuki. Yet, the youma appeared paralyzed, gripped by an immobilizing terror. *No! She's too scared! This can't be the way it ends...it can't be!*

The red orb glowed brighter, illuminating the stone walls and revealing more ancient carvings. Ami gazed with intense sorrow at Mako's sleeping face, yearning for just one more hug and kiss. A flood of poignant memories surged through Ami's mind—vivid snapshots of their exhilarating and emotional adventures as Sailor Guardians. As the orb's brilliance reached blinding levels, Ami's teary eyes squeezed shut, bracing for the heartbreaking conclusion, convinced this would be the last time she ever saw her beloved Mako. *I love you...I love you forever Mako!*

WOOOOSH!

Something flew past Ami with electrifying speed, leaving behind a gust of wind that blew back her hair.

Ami's eyes snapped open, momentarily blinded by the intense light emanating from Beryl's sinister orb. She squinted against the brilliance, the seconds ticking by like an eternity. As her eyes adjusted, the unfolding scene came into focus—and Ami unleashed a triumphant, cathartic shout that reverberated through the chamber.

Suzuki, flying with her magnificent ankle wings, strained against the malevolent power radiating from Queen Beryl's orb. Her trembling hands tightly clutched the wooden staff, courageously pushing it away from Sailor Jupiter's defenseless form. The air crackled with tension as Suzuki, determined and resolute, faced off against Beryl's evil darkness.

With a defiant smile, Suzuki turned to her colleagues. “ATTACK!” she commanded, the dramatic rallying cry filling her allies with courage.

“WHAAAATTTT?!!!!” Queen Beryl shrieked.

“*NEEDLESTORM! BARRAGE!*”

“*WOODLAND VINE SMASH!*”

Suzuki darted upward as Hypnosia and Sakura’s simultaneous attacks rocketed towards Queen Beryl. *FFFTT FFFTT FFFTT!*
SHHWP SHHWP SHHWP!

“*ARRRGHHH! TRAITORS!!*” Beryl screamed. The needles found their mark, hitting Beryl’s shoulders, neck, and chest like they were a dartboard. Thick green vines smashed into her arms and legs, tearing apart her regal purple dress. In the air above, Suzuki thrashed her dark energy ribbon, showering Beryl with a cacophony of electrical sparks. Beryl tried to blast Suzuki away, but the youma nimbly dodged the attacks, flying around like an annoying mosquito.

The triple youma attack brought chaos to the chamber and rendered Queen Beryl a stumbling, disoriented mess. “KUNZITE!” she screamed, searching fruitlessly for her top general. “ARGHHH!
KUNZITE GET OVER HERE!”

During the attack, Zoisite raced over to Ami’s side and sliced her rope bindings with a crystal dagger. “Go help your friend!” he said urgently.

Ami tore the ropes off her body and ripped out her gag. “That was WAY too close,” she yelled, scrambling to her feet. She sprinted forward and summoned her celestial water powers. “SHINE AQUA ILLUSION!” she chanted, aiming her hands at the dark energy sphere

surrounding Sailor Jupiter. The water attack destroyed the energy sphere, sending Mako falling to the ground. Ami used her body to cushion Mako's fall, and the two girls tumbled over each other.

"Mako! It's me!" Ami said, shaking Mako's shoulder. Mako groaned and squeezed her eyelids, yet remained unconscious. Ami checked Mako's vitals and then beckoned Zoisite over. "Help me get her to safety!"

With Zoisite's help, Ami dragged Mako's unconscious body to the cavern hallway, a safe distance from the chaotic battle. "They're going to need my help," Ami said. "Can you keep her safe?"

Zoisite gave Ami a gentle shove. "Save your friends, *water girl!*"

Ami nodded and sprinted back to the battle.

"And kick that queen's ass!" Zoisite shouted.

The three valiant youma continued their coordinated attacks, their energies blending into a dazzling display of power against Queen Beryl. Yet, the malevolent queen, fueled by dark energy, held her ground with tenacious resilience. Suzuki noticed Ami's entrance and waved her over. "AMI! WE NEED YOUR POWERS!" she shouted.

Ami charged up her water powers. She raised her arms, her fists swirling with bright, elegant water droplets. Taking aim at Queen Beryl, she searched for a potential weak point. *Make it count*, she said to herself. As Ami concentrated all her celestial energy into her fingertips, she noticed Beryl's lips morph from an expression of distress—to one of contemptuous glee. *Why is she smiling*, Ami thought, her anxiety levels soaring. It was then that Ami remembered the cruel trick that Kunzite had used with devastating effect against Suzuki. *Oh no! The safety switch!*

“RETREAT!” Ami screamed. But it was too late.

Queen Beryl unleashed an ear piercing shriek, radiating visible shockwaves from her mouth.

Ami covered her ears, the shrill, deafening sound ringing her ears like a massive toll bell. But Ami had it easy compared to her youma allies.

Suzuki dropped from the sky and crashed to the ground, clutching her ears and letting out a horrific scream. Sakura and Hypnosia fared no better, the two of them gripping their foreheads and squirming on their knees. The sounds of courageous battle had been replaced with agonizing screams, fueled by Beryl’s insatiable cruelty.

“Pathetic worms,” Beryl said with disgust. She regained her composure and picked up her wooden staff. The evil queen aimed the red orb at Suzuki, who was curled up in a ball, her ears bleeding. “DEATH TO TRAITORS!” she screamed, filling the orb with dark energy tendrils. “LONG LIVE—”

SPLASH!

“HEY!” Ami shouted, facing Beryl in a heroic pose. Her vibrant blue Sailor Mercury costume shined like a beacon of hope in the dark chamber. She summoned another ball of water energy and lobbed it toward Beryl’s head. “Pick on someone your own size!”

SPLASH!

Beryl turned her head, enraged, her ebony hair dripping with water. She narrowed her red eyes, glaring at Sailor Mercury with devilish fury, her face contorting into a twisted, demonic expression. With her

mind consumed by ruthless revenge, Beryl aimed her wooden staff at Mercury and unleashed a thunderous roar.

“ROUND TWO!!” Ami shouted, her brave words reaching the ears of the celestial gods themselves. She channeled every ounce of her energy into a brilliant blue water sphere. “MERCURY AQUA!!!”

Beryl mercilessly fired a colossal ball of dark energy toward Ami’s chest. “DIE!!!” she shrieked.

“STORM!!!” Ami shouted, surging forth a powerful, awesome beam of blue celestial light.

BOOOOOOM!!!

The two fundamental forces collided in the middle, illuminating the chamber with a spectacular explosion of water and dark energy. Ami dug her blue boots into the ground, her hair and miniskirt flailing wildly under hurricane force winds. She gritted her teeth, channeling the love of her friends into her energy beam. Teardrops flew off her cheeks, twinkling in the air like tiny stars. “FOR MY FRIENDS!” she shouted, giving her energy beam another burst of water energy.

Beryl on the other hand, consolidated all her evil thoughts and desires into her attack. She prayed to her supreme ruler, Queen Metalia, wishing to be crowned as the rightful ruler of the galaxy. With a ferocious, shrill yell, Beryl sent forth a devastating surge of dark energy, giving her beam an immense boost.

“NOO!!” Ami cried. Her boots shifted backwards, creating a pile of pebbles in its wake. She squeezed her eyes, feeling the stamina in her body drain to dangerously low levels. Beryl’s dark energy stream surged past the halfway point, inching closer and closer to Ami with

every passing moment. Ami's knees buckled and her trembling arms started falling. Hopeless thoughts consumed Ami's mind, filling her with doubts and despair. *No matter what I do...I'm just not strong enough*, Ami thought. *I'm sorry everyone! I gave it my all...*

Right as Ami reached the brink of her breaking point, a pair of hands grabbed her shoulders. "COME ON AMI!" Suzuki shouted, her voice echoing with resolve. "WE HAVE YOUR BACK!"

Sakura, Hypnosia—and even Zoisite—sprinted to Ami's side. Tears welled in all of their eyes, a reflection of the profound emotional moment they shared. Together, they supported Ami with an unyielding alliance, a bond forged from her friendship and good heart.

Emboldened by the unwavering support of her friends, a newfound courage surged through Ami's heart, wiping away all feelings of hopelessness. "Thank you...everyone," Ami said. With renewed conviction, Ami pressed forward, summoning a torrent of water energy, powered by her friends' hopes and dreams. Then, in unison, the group chanted Ami's celestial incantation, throwing every ounce of their determination into each word.

"MERCURY!"

"AQUA!!"

"STORM!!!"

Blinding blue light exploded out of Ami's hands. The energy rocketed forward like a water cannon, blasting past the midway point and obliterating every inch of Beryl's dark energy stream.

KABOOOOOOOM!!!

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!" Beryl screamed. The energy beam slammed into Beryl's chest, sending her body airborne. She

crashed violently into the thick obsidian door, leaving a giant crack zigzagging across it. *CRACK!!!* She then plummeted to the floor and formed a crater in her landing spot. *CRASH!!!*

Ami dropped her arms and collapsed from exhaustion into Suzuki's embrace. "Oh my gosh," Ami said with labored breaths. "Is...is everyone...okay..."

Zoisite ran over to check on Sailor Jupiter and gave a thumbs up.

"Suzuki," Ami said, glancing wearily to her side. "Are...are you hurt?"

Suzuki rubbed her forehead and ears, but gave Ami a confident nod. "My ears are still ringing, but your quick thinking saved us. Thank you..."

"No...thank *you*," Ami said, giving the three youma ladies a big hug. "You were all very brave. Today, all of you...are honorary Sailor Guardians. I mean it."

Hypnosia blushed and wiped her eyes.

"Are you crying?" Sakura said teasingly.

"N—no!"

A loud groan interrupted the tender moment.

Queen Beryl scrambled to her feet, grunting and growling like a rabid beast. "No no no no no!" she screamed, clutching her chest in agony. She took one look at Sailor Mercury and then scurried back inside her throne room, leaving her wooden staff behind.

Ami jumped to her feet and gave chase. "The rest of my friends are in there!"

Suzuki beckoned the others to follow.

Ami sprinted into the throne room, running past a bed with elegant purple sheets. “Over there!” she said, pointing. In the center of the room were Ami’s three friends—Sailor Moon, Mars, and Venus—sleeping on a circular stone slab.

Beryl was crouched in a far corner of the throne room, clutching four bright objects in her hand.

Ami stepped in front of the stone slab, guarding her three sleeping friends from any unexpected attacks from Beryl. “Get them to safety,” Ami instructed. Behind her, Suzuki, Sakura, and Hypnosia grabbed the sleeping girls off the slab. They carried the Sailor Guardians outside, leaving Ami and Queen Beryl alone in the throne room.

“Give those back!” Ami said, pointing to the crystals in Beryl’s hand.

Like a vulture protecting its food, Beryl clutched the crystals to her chest and growled. The once regal and elegant queen had been reduced to a bloody, miserable creature. Her ebony hair was disheveled, covered in needles and twigs. The purple gown was in tatters, revealing deep cuts and bruises on her once fair skin. Yet, despite her horrendous injuries, the queen persisted in her defiance. “Never!” she sneered.

At this juncture, Ami possessed the power to obliterate Queen Beryl, the orchestrator of much suffering in the lives of the Sailor Guardians. Beryl’s schemes and threats to the lives of Ami and her friends had created a maelstrom of emotions within Ami. Despite the magnitude of Beryl’s transgressions however, Ami felt a surprising

amount of pity for the beleaguered queen. In a supreme act of unwarranted mercy, Ami extended her hand.

“Please...don’t do this anymore,” Ami said. “Let us help you!”

Queen Beryl gazed at Ami in stunned silence. A flicker of humanity seemed to rekindle in her eyes. Slowly and cautiously, Beryl reached forward, her fingertips shaking. In that fleeting moment, the possibility of Beryl turning good hung in the air. But the darkness returned with a vengeance—and Beryl snatched Ami’s wrist.

“QUEEN METALIA!” Beryl shouted, pulling Ami into a vice-like chokehold. “I HAVE HER! I HAVE THE LAST SAILOR GUARDIAN!”

“NO!” Ami cried, struggling profusely to escape Beryl’s depraved grasp. “LET ME GO!!”

Suzuki and Zoisite scrambled into the throne room upon hearing Ami’s cries.

“Hey! Put her down!” Suzuki shouted, summoning her ribbon weapon.

Beryl squeezed her forearm into Ami’s windpipe. “Back away or I’ll kill her!” She looked up in the sky and screamed, “METALIA!!”

“D—do...do as she says,” Ami choked out. “Please, it’s not safe here!”

In the ceiling of the throne room, a swirling mass of darkness manifested as a menacing cloud. Metalia, the malevolent force that

lurked inside, peered ominously outward, its blood-red triangular eyes narrowing as it settled on its prey. The air grew chill as Metalia's presence dominated the room, casting a sinister pall to the beings below.

"Greetings, Queen Beryl," Metalia's booming, mechanical voice said.

The terrifying voice sent shivers down Ami's spine and she gazed upward, recognizing instantly the sinister red eyes from her nightmares. The pure evil emanating from Metalia's crimson gaze left her paralyzed with fear. She was confronting a force beyond comprehension. *Oh my god.*

Queen Beryl tossed the four crystals into Metalia's shadowy mist. "Oh Evil One," she said, glorifying her ruler. "With these crystalline vessels, I offer the essence of the Sailor Guardians to unlock your spirit. In exchange, grant me the power to reign supreme over the galaxy!"

Ami watched helplessly as the four crystals—white, yellow, red, and green—swirled in a circle above Metalia's triangular eyes. A sudden power surged within the dark cloud, and it swelled to a colossal size, enveloping the entirety of the throne room ceiling.

Suzuki stood frozen in disbelief as the scene played out. "No! Ami, those crystals! They're—"

"Just protect my friends!" Ami yelled. "Go!"

Beryl clamped her free hand over Ami's mouth. "QUIET!"

"MMMPHHH!"

“Take her power, Metalia!” Beryl shouted. “TAKE IT!”
“HRRMMPHHH!!”

A pair of ghostly shadows, shaped like creepy hands, extended from Metalia’s dark cloud. The cold, misty hands caressed Ami’s cheeks and neck, causing Ami to squirm in absolute terror.

“Hope,” Metalia’s mechanical voice said. *“Hope...”*

“Yes,” Beryl whispered with a sinister smile. “YES.”

Ami shut her eyes, overwhelmed by Metalia’s terrifying aura.

“MMMPPHHHNOO!!”

“The hope in this girl...”

“YES! TAKE IT!”

“...is too strong.”

A deafening silence fell upon the room. Beryl slowly loosened her grip on Ami and gazed up at Metalia’s red eyes. “What!?” she whispered in disbelief.

“You failed, Queen Beryl.”

“No...”

“You are hopeless.”

“No!”

“You are...mine!”

“NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!”

Metalia's shadowy cloud engulfed Queen Beryl, funneling grotesquely into her open mouth. The queen unleashed a bloody scream as the dark mass greedily siphoned every drop of her malevolent power.

Ami squirmed out of Beryl's grasp and sprinted out of the way, joining Suzuki and Zoisite's side. The three of them gazed in wide astonishment as the once formidable queen—began to dissolve.

Beryl's arms and legs disintegrated into black ashes that vaporized into thin air. Her shrill scream faded into a distant echo as her body and head followed suit, reduced to nothing more than a swirling pile of dust. When it was done, the great Dark Kingdom queen—with all her power, lust, wishes and desires—ceased to exist.

Metalia's voice suddenly boomed. *"AT LAST! I'M FREE!"*

The dark cloud emitted a sinister laugh and then rushed toward the sky, taking the four Sailor Guardian crystals with it.

"They're getting away!" Suzuki shouted. The youma flapped her ankle wings and bolted up toward the dark cloud.

"SUZUKI!" Ami cried.

Suzuki ignored the cry and powered forward, reaching for one of the crystals. But as she entered the shadowy cloud, just inches away from grabbing the green crystal, a powerful flash of lightning zapped her hand. *ZAP! ZZZZTTTTT!* "OWW!"

The electrical attack sent Suzuki tumbling toward the ground. Ami quickly summoned a giant water bubble to catch Suzuki. *SPLASH!*

"Owww...that really hurt," Suzuki said, shaking her arm.

Ami pulled Suzuki into an embrace. “Don’t fight it alone! I’m not losing anybody today, okay!”

Metalia’s sinister, almost delightful laughter faded further and further away.

“There it goes...” Zoisite said, watching despondently as Metalia’s dark cloud escaped through a hole in the ceiling. “End of the world.”

Chapter 25. Reunion

Mako awoke slowly, her eyes filled with great sadness and unease as she uttered Ami's name, over and over like a hypnotic chant. She didn't budge an inch, driven to despair by the thought that her best friend had died. But to Mako's surprise, she noticed someone's face buried in the pink bow on her chest. And Mako's eyes widened when she noticed the tuft of beautiful blue hair.

"A—Ami?"

Ami popped her head up, greeting Mako with a pair of teary, relieved, vibrant blue eyes. She sprung forward and gave Mako a big, passionate hug. "Mako!!"

Mako trembled in shock and uncertainty. "Ami? Y—you're alive?"

Ami nodded her head and sobbed into Mako's shoulder.

Mako gingerly stroked Ami's blue hair. "This...this isn't a dream?"

Ami grabbed a piece of Mako's collar and dried her eyes. "No," she said. "Mako, I'm here."

The sincerity and emotion in Ami's voice brought Mako back to reality. Mako could feel the strands in Ami's silky hair and smell her fresh fragrance. She could feel Ami's teardrops falling on her skin. And while Metalia's dark visions carried intense realism—nothing could beat the real thing. With a triumphant yell, Mako pounced and grabbed Ami into a tight bearhug. "*GAAHHH!!* OH MY GOSH, AMI!!"

The two lovers laughed, cried, and held each other close. It was a touching, heartfelt moment for the ages.

“I thought I lost you for good, Ami,” Mako said, holding Ami’s cheeks with both hands. “There was something terrible in my head...something so evil...”

“It’s okay...it’s gone now,” Ami said, clasping Mako’s hands. At that moment, Ami noticed that Mako’s golden tiara had disappeared. Ami frowned, knowing that Sailor Jupiter’s celestial powers were stolen, trapped within Metalia’s crystals.

“What’s the matter?” Mako said.

Not wanting to distress Mako further, Ami shook her head and smiled. She gazed into Mako’s green eyes, giving Mako *The Look*. She then closed her eyes and parted her lips seductively.

Mako tilted her head and followed Ami’s lead. Before the two lovers could share a tender kiss, however—

“AMI!!” Minako yelled, pouncing on top of Ami’s back. “OH MY GOSH! YOU’RE ALIVE!”

Usagi hopped onto the pile, wrapping her arms around everyone. “AMI! I CAN’T BELIEVE IT!” she cried.

Rei joined in front, snuggling her forehead against Ami’s. She tried to keep her emotions in check, but her wet eyes conveyed the truth. “We’re so glad to have you back, Ami,” she said fondly.

All four of Ami’s friends surrounded her, showering her with hugs, laughter, and tears. Ami poured her heart out, commending all her friends for their bravery. It was an affectionate, tender, and

heartwarming moment, one that Ami would cherish for the rest of her life.

Ami grabbed the duffel bag of supplies and handed out blankets, snacks, and water bottles.

“Wow, you think of everything,” Usagi said, munching on an energy bar.

“So what’s the plan,” Rei asked, wrapping herself in a blanket. “How do we get home?”

Ami grabbed her compact computer from the bag. “Well,” she said, hesitating a bit. “There...unfortunately is still a—”

“Hey!” Minako interrupted. “Something’s wrong. I...I can’t use my powers!” She pointed her finger at a wall and tried summoning her Crescent Beam attack. “Nothing!”

Mako looked at her hands with worry. “Yeah...same! I don’t feel anything!”

“Where’s my tiara?” Usagi yelled, grabbing her forehead in a panic. “Ami! What’s going on?!”

Ami leaned impassively against a stone wall. “Girls...I have bad news,” she said, dipping her head in shame. “I’m sorry but—”

“They stole our powers, didn’t they?” Rei said. She walked over and touched the blue gem on Ami’s tiara. “Except for yours, right?”

The mood in the room shifted. All five girls dipped their heads, looking at the floor in dejected silence. Each girl recognized the significance of the problem—the extreme burden and responsibility that rested on Ami’s shoulders.

Ami shuffled her boots and broke the uncomfortable silence. “Look, it’s my fault. I’ll figure something out. I don’t want any of you to—”

“Stop,” Mako said, giving Ami a solemn look. “Just stop. Ami, this *isn’t* your fault.”

“Yeah, Ami,” Usagi said. “Don’t be so upset with yourself.”

“We’re in this together,” Minako said.

Rei joined in. “Honestly, we’re all alive because of you, Ami. If Usagi had been in charge, that definitely wouldn’t be the case.”

“Hey!!”

“Thanks for the encouragement, everyone,” Ami said with a warm smile. She flipped open her compact computer and checked some data points. “But...I think the scope of the problem is bigger than you think. We are dealing with—”

“A big evil cloud,” Zoisite said, interrupting the moment. He walked into the room, followed by his three youma servants—Hypnosia, Sakura, and Suzuki. “Hey! I see everyone’s awake,” he said, giving the room an awkward wave.

Mako sprinted over and pounced on Sakura. “Hey you! Dandelion girl!” she shouted, grabbing Sakura’s green minidress. “You have a lot of explaining to do!”

“Hands off the dress, *thunder girl!*”

The room erupted into a ferocious shouting match, driven by Mako’s rage over the torture Sakura had inflicted on her. A physical altercation ensued, escalating the situation into a near full-on brawl.

Ami struggled to regain control, the shy girl's cries being drowned out by louder, more assertive voices. Frustrated by the chaos, Suzuki decided to fly up and thrash her ribbon.

SNAPP!! "TIME OUT EVERYONE!" Suzuki yelled from above.

Everybody froze in place. Sakura had a purple flower pointed in Mako's face, ready to fire her sleepy pollen at a moment's notice.

Ami stepped in front of the group and cleared her throat. "Everyone...please, listen," she said, projecting a cool, calm demeanor. "I understand many of you are frustrated, but you need to understand. Zoisite and his youma risked their lives for us."

Mako gave Zoisite an incredulous look. "Wow...*really?*"

Zoisite smirked sarcastically. "Yeah, *thunder girl*. I'm a hero, just like you."

Ami glared at Zoisite like an angry school teacher. "We all need to forgive and apologize to each other," she continued. "Because right now, we need to figure out how to stop what is probably the greatest threat our Solar System has ever faced."

The group nodded in collective agreement to Ami's motivating speech. Every friend in the room had begun to appreciate the growth in Ami's leadership skills. Her presence and kindness brought unity to the room, infusing everyone with the courage to confront the looming evil.

Ami pulled Suzuki aside, while the rest of the group chit-chatted and shook hands with each other.

"How bad is it?" Ami asked.

Suzuki frowned and shook her head. “Bad. It’s taken over the whole sky.”

Ami snapped her compact computer shut. “I need to see for myself. Let’s get everyone ready.”



The group walked up a sloping, cavernous hallway, toward a tiny white light in the distance. As they approached the light, a strong chilly breeze blew past their legs. The girls huddled under the blankets Ami provided. Several smaller side conversations broke the monotony of the walk.

“So you just...flew right up to Queen Beryl’s face and attacked her?” Rei asked in astonishment. “Wow...”

“Yep,” Suzuki said, giving Rei a flirty smile. “She was gonna kill Mako. I was so scared that I’d screw up...but, somehow...I found the courage to...to make a difference, I guess.”

“Well you’re certainly a hero in my eyes,” Rei said, blushing. “I don’t think even *Sailor Moon* has done anything that courageous yet!”

“For your information,” Usagi said. “I would have beaten Sakura had I not been chloroformed! So it’s not fair!”

Sakura giggled and gave Usagi a playful shove. “Well...to be honest, that was a ten out of ten chloroforming, Sailor Moon, so...I think it was worth it.”

Minako poked Hypnosia's back. "Wait...so you tied Ami up, and then *chloroformed* her?" she asked. "Did you get a *picture*?"

Hypnosia smacked her forehead. "Darn it. And that was the second time that day too!"

Minako's mind exploded. "She got bound and gagged *twice*?! She must have been *really* cute."

"Very."

Zoisite extended a hand to Mako. "No hard feelings?"

Mako shrugged and gave Zoisite a firm shake. "Nah, I get it. You were under Dark Kingdom control. And Queen Beryl's the ruthless type. Really tough situation all around."

"Yeah, well...looks like I'm out of a job now. You know anywhere hiring Dark Kingdom generals with one year of experience?"

"You need a job?" Mako asked.

"I mean...I guess?" Zoisite responded.

With a cheeky grin, Mako smacked Zoisite's shoulder. "Don't worry. I know a place."

Ami remained silent during the entire walk, occasionally opening her computer to check on some data. Her attention was focused on the looming evil ahead, rendering her unable to partake in conversation. A palpable sense of anxiety and fear for the group's future weighed heavily on her.

Mako jogged to Ami's side. "Hey, you've been really quiet. You okay, Ami?"

Taking a refreshing breath, Ami collected her thoughts and replied, “Sorry for being such a downer. I’ll be honest Mako...I just don’t know how we’re going to beat that thing.”

Mako let out a frustrated sigh. “You’re doing it again! Ami...we’re Sailor Guardians! There’s got to be some...hidden secret power or something we can unlock.”

Ami increased her pace and brushed past Mako. “Only one of us is a Sailor Guardian right now,” she said indifferently.

The tone of the group shifted and everyone ceased their conversations. They all watched as Ami marched alone toward the cavern exit, cognizant of the heavy burden she carried. The fate of the world rested on Ami confronting Queen Metalia—and retrieving the Sailor crystals it was guarding. There was no alternative.

Ami was the first to reach the cavern exit. She wrapped a blanket around her shoulders and shielded her eyes from the blinding light. Cold winds sent a shivering chill down her bare legs. Her pupils finally adjusted to the brightness outside, and Ami gazed toward the horizon, letting out an alarming gasp.

The malevolent essence of Queen Metalia had taken over the sky, a colossal dark cloud that stretched to the edges of the horizon. Ominous tendrils spread across its expanse and they spun around a core like a giant typhoon. The sky itself seemed to recoil from this manifestation of pure evil, as if the fabric of reality was being swallowed by Metalia’s sinister presence. In the center of the dark mass, two red triangular eyes peered out, casting a foreboding, eerie glow on the world below.

The evil presence emitted a deep, haunting hum that reverberated through the sky like a growling beast. Distant rumbles of thunder punctuated the atmosphere with the rhythm of an approaching storm.

The group exited the cavern behind Ami and let out a collective gasp.

“Jeez!”

“Oh gosh...”

“What is that thing?”

“It’s so cold!”

“Not gonna lie...that thing is pretty terrifying.”

“Ami! What do we do?”

“Oh my god, it’s huge!!”

Ami regained her focus and ushered the group back into the caverns. “Stay inside or you’ll freeze to death.”

Ami opened her computer and pointed its sensor at the massive dark cloud. She darted her eyes between her keypad and the horizon, typing furiously as she analyzed the situation with her various softwares.

Mako leaned over Ami’s shoulder, watching her partner work. “Where are we anyway?”

Ami opened up a geolocation app and pointed to a tiny blinking dot. “Hmmm...not surprising...we’re on a landmass in the arctic circle.”

“You mean this *isn’t* a tropical island?” Minako said sarcastically.

Zoisite giggled like a schoolgirl. “This is actually the *niciest* time of the year!”

“The whole betrayal thing makes a lot of sense now,” Suzuki added.

“It’s spreading,” Ami said, pouring cold water on the jokes. “If we don’t contain it, it’s going to block out the sun and destroy all life on—”

BEEP BEEP BEEP!

Ami’s computer beeped and she turned her attention to an imaging app. Her screen displayed four glowing objects, surrounded by dark purple clouds. “The Sailor crystals!” Ami said excitedly. She pressed a key. *BEEP!* “I think I have a location.”

BEEP! “800 meters north,” Ami said. She pressed another key. *BEEP!* “2,000 meters altitude.”

“Behind the eyes,” Mako said. She stared gravely at the dark mass in the sky and glanced back at Ami. “Just a guess.”

The group huddled in a circle and discussed ideas.

“I’m the only one who can fly so...I think it’s obvious,” Suzuki said.

Ami shook her head. “Brave, but too risky.”

“What if we like...combined our powers and—”

“We don’t *have* any powers, Usagi!” Rei said. “Remember?”

“Oh...”

“Vines?”

“Too high.”

“Hey...”

“Knockout gas hurricane! Needles!”

“Are you serious...”

“I’m telling you...send me up there!”

“*Hey!*”

“I am not risking your life!”

“We have to do something!”

“*HEY!!!!*”

The group went silent and stared at Zoisite, who was leaning against the wall, tossing a pebble. “*Ahem*. Ladies, if I may propose something—”

“And what’s your bright idea, smart ass?” Mako said.

Zoisite threw the pebble away and walked towards Ami.

“Majestic wings,” he said, spreading his arms apart. “The power of flight. Big. Mighty. Water...”

Ami crossed her arms and kept her lips sealed. The rest of the group looked at Zoisite like he was crazy.

Zoisite stopped in front of Ami and threw his arms up, giving her his signature cocky grin. “We’re going to need a bird, dummy.”

Chapter 26. Liftoff

Ami snapped her boot heels together and raised her arms in preparation for her celestial chant. Magical water droplets bubbled across her wrists, glowing a brilliant shade of blue. With intense focus, Ami shut her eyes and spun around elegantly, twirling her alluring blue miniskirt.

“MERCURY! AQUA! RHAPSODY!” she chanted.

The water droplets coalesced into a mighty splash in the sky—and fell back to the ground like raindrops.

The group cringed at Ami with embarrassment like she had just bombed a stand-up comedy act. Ami rubbed the back of her head and blushed.

“You don’t remember how you summoned it, huh?” Mako said.

Ami shook her head. “I remember the words, but I don’t think the circumstances are the same. I think it requires a strong, emotional—”

“ARRRGHHH!!” Zoisite growled, grabbing Ami like a zombie. He clamped his hand over her mouth. “I AM EVIL AGAIN! SURRENDER YOURSELF TO ME! ARRGHHHHH!”

“MMMPHHHH!” Ami screamed in surprise, squirming under Zoisite’s grasp.

Mako punched Zoisite in the face. *WHAM!* “OWWWW!”

“What the hell was that for?” Mako yelled, helping Ami regain her composure.

Zoisite rubbed his bruised cheek. “Ow...jeez. I thought you needed...you know...some sort of strong, emotional stress or something...I don’t know...”

Mako smacked her forehead in amazement at Zoisite’s doltish behavior.

Ami hung her head in disappointment. “I’m sorry for wasting everyone’s time,” she said, meandering past her friends. Mako tried to follow, but Ami waved her off. “I need a moment.”

The group watched with gloom as Ami found a lonely stone surface and crouched over it.

“Poor girl,” Suzuki said. “She’s so hard on herself.”

“That’s Ami for ya,” Rei replied. “Give her time, we’ll think of something.”

Everyone else gathered near the cavern entrance, drinking water and discussing ideas. Suzuki raced back inside the caverns to get a torch from Queen Beryl’s throne room. She asked Sakura to produce some dry vines and used them to build a campfire—much to Sakura’s chagrin. As the group gathered around the fire, Mako went to bring Ami back.

“Hey, come hang out by the fire with us,” Mako said, placing another blanket over Ami.

“I’m fine over here,” Ami replied bitterly, clutching her knees.

Mako sighed loudly and sat down on the stone surface, nudging Ami over. The two girls gazed toward the horizon, watching the dark clouds swirl in silence.

“You know next week is my mother’s birthday,” Mako said.

Ami moved her head slightly and reached for Mako’s hand.

“The world is too cruel to you, Mako.”

Mako gazed wondrously into the sky. “Actually...you want to know why it’s my dream to open a flower shop one day?”

“Why?” Ami said.

“Because my mom loved flowers,” Mako replied, adding a fond laugh to her tears. “I remember how she would give flowers to me as a young child, filling my room with vases and bouquets.”

Ami turned her head, her eyes conveying a bittersweet sadness. “Mako...that’s so beautiful...”

“And of course that stopped after she died...but when I got older, I started decorating my place with flowers, to remind myself of her.”

Ami leaned into Mako and gave her a heartfelt hug.

“And I always thought, with a flower shop I’d be able to celebrate her memory by bringing that same joy to others. In a way...it’s how I’d get to keep my mom’s hopes and dreams alive.”

The heartwarming story left tears in Ami’s eyes, and the two girls shared a loving moment.

Ami perked up suddenly. “Wait...that’s it,” she said, her voice rising in excitement. She jumped to her feet and raced toward the campfire. “Thank you so much Mako!”

Mako gave Ami a dumbstruck look. “Um...you’re welcome?”

“Hope!” Ami shouted back. “It’s *hope!*”



Ami clasped Mako's hand on the left, and Rei's hand on the right. Rei was holding Suzuki's hand, who held Sakura's...and so on...until the circle completed with Ami again. In the center of the group circle was a floating water energy ball, which Ami had conjured. Everyone had their eyes closed, deep in thought as they listened to Ami's instructions.

"I want everyone to focus their energy," Ami said. "Fill your mind with all your hopes and dreams. Focus."

Zoisite smirked and opened one eye. "Haha, wow...are we going to sing *Kumbaya* now, *water girl*?" he said sarcastically.

Usagi kicked his shin. "Do as she says, asshole. Don't you have any dreams?"

"Sure," Zoisite said. "I dream of capturing you all and—"

"Nevermind...keep it in your head."

Minako had a beaming smile across her face. "I dream of becoming an idol...the most famous in the world!" she said wondrously.

"To save the lives of my patients," Hypnosia said.

"To grow the biggest, most beautiful garden on Earth," Sakura said.

Usagi gazed at the sky with hearts in her eyes. "To find the love of my life."

"To also find love...and become head priestess of my shrine of course," Rei said.

Suzuki blushed and gave Rei's hand a flirty squeeze. "To share a kiss with the one I love most," she said.

"To open a flower shop," Mako said, giving Ami an ardent smile. "And to get married one day."

Ami let out a surprised laugh and choked back a lump in her throat. “T—to...to...oh my gosh...I’m sorry,” she said, swallowing a sob. Her cheeks flushed deep red and tears pooled in her eyes. “Sorry everyone, I need a moment.”

The entire group joined in a jovial laugh as Ami struggled to regain her composure emotionally.

Within moments, a faint glow materialized above each person’s body. The glowing energy flowed toward the center, merging into the water sphere and increasing its brilliance.

Minako opened her eyes. “Look!” she said. “Something’s happening!”

As the group’s collective energy combined, the sphere shimmered with majestic beauty. The luminous orb, powered by everyone’s hopes and dreams, ascended into the sky. Everyone opened their eyes and gazed in silent wonder.

“I think we’re ready,” Ami said, stepping toward the center and raising her arms. Closing her eyes, Ami entered a state of deep focus and channeled all her power into the beautiful water sphere. *Make it count*, she prayed. With all her friends in mind, Ami summoned her courageous spirit and began her celestial chant.

“MERCURY!”

The sphere ascended further into the air and underwent a stunning transformation.

In unison, the entire group chanted the final two words, their collective voices filling the dark atmosphere with fearless determination.

“AQUA!”

“RHAPSODY!!”

A burst of energy funneled into the water orb, splitting it into two hemispheres. With glorious synchronization, the two halves transformed into majestic wings, which spread open, dazzling the surroundings with shimmering water droplets. Then, in a burst of radiant blue light, the magnificent avian spirit soared into the sky, its head, body, and legs taking the shape of a timeless Japanese crane. The group gazed in awe as the epic bird swept the sky, leaving behind a trail of magical blue sparkles.

“She’s beautiful!” Usagi said, marveling at the crane’s water feathers.

Rei wiped a tear away. “Ami, this is incredible!”

“Puts my wings to shame,” Suzuki added.

Mako pumped her fist. “I knew it! Ami’s secret power!”

“Told you guys!” Zoisite said, giving everyone a cocky smirk. “Giant bird made of water!”

“Can I ride it?” Minako asked.

Everyone laughed.

Using the mental connection Ami had, she swept her arms down and guided the magical crane to a soft landing. The group surrounded the crane, cheering and clapping as they basked in its ethereal glow.

“She’s so warm,” Rei said, gently touching the crane’s watery body.

“Like she’s alive,” Usagi said.

While everyone else celebrated the accomplishment, Ami stood alone near the crane's neck, stroking it fondly. She whispered words of comfort and kindness to the crane's ear. Glancing back at all her friends, an immense sadness filled Ami's heart. She turned away, choking back tears. Without saying a word, Ami climbed up the crane's neck and found a secure spot to sit. Incredibly, the warm water energy molded around Ami's body, forming a protective barrier.

Mako noticed and jogged toward the crane's neck. "Room for one more?" she asked.

Ami pretended she didn't hear, keeping her eyes focused on the looming dark clouds ahead.

Mako climbed up the crane's watery body and found a spot behind Ami.

"Get off, Mako," Ami said firmly.

Mako crossed her arms. "We are not having this argument right now, Ami."

"I said get off!"

The commotion drew the attention of the group, and everyone stopped to listen.

Mako pouted in anger. "We stick together, Ami!!" she yelled. "So unless you want to fight me on this I suggest—"

"You could die, Mako!" Ami cried, spinning around and confronting her partner. Tears of frustration and heartbreak poured down Ami's eyes. "This isn't a game! You don't have your powers! And you're reckless! And you're impulsive! And—"

“And what, Ami?” Mako said, her voice softening to a whisper. A single teardrop glided down her cheek. “And what?”

Ami paused, looking down in shame at her hurtful words. “And...I don’t want to lose you, okay?”

Mako leaned forward and hugged Ami from behind. “And I don’t want to lose you either, Ami. I *love* you.”

Gazing affectionately at each other, the two lovers pressed their foreheads together and cried.

“I’m so sorry, Mako.”

Mako caressed her fingers through Ami’s blue hair. “Accepted. Don’t fight this alone, Ami.”

“Just stay out of trouble, okay Mako?”

“Deal.”

Suzuki flew over to the crane’s neck and handed Ami her compact computer. “You almost forgot this!”

“Oh, thank you so much Suzuki,” Ami replied. She pointed the computer’s sensor at the dark clouds ahead and ran some numbers. “We’re looking at a travel time of about—”

“Time for liftoff!” Suzuki said, jumping to a seat on the crane’s body behind Mako.

Ami turned around, glaring at Suzuki with irritation. “You too?! Suzuki...I...I can’t guarantee that you’ll—”

“I’m here to catch Mako if she falls off,” Suzuki said, giving the pair a thumbs up.

Mako gave Suzuki a high-five. “Awesome! We have a strike team!”

Ami smiled reluctantly and gave her team a firm nod. “Alright. Just one condition—you follow my instructions, no exceptions. If I think the situation is too risky, we’re turning back. No one is dying today. I *mean* it.”

Mako and Suzuki saluted. “Aye-aye, captain!”

“Thank you. Now, if everyone can circle around, I want to review the mission,” Ami said.

The entire group gathered in a circle near the head of the crane. Everyone focused their full attention on Ami.

“We’re going to fly toward the heart of Metalia’s dark cloud,” Ami said, showing a map on her computer. “Our current objective is to retrieve at least one of the crystals—Mako’s. Once Sailor Jupiter’s powers are restored, we’ll work to get the remaining three crystals. It won’t be easy.”

Ami exchanged a glance with Rei. “Rei, you’re in charge back here. Please keep everyone warm and safe. If, god forbid, we don’t make it back...Zoisite, I want you to open a portal and take everyone back to the Hikawa Shrine.”

Zoisite bowed and for the first time in a while, shed a tiny tear which he wiped away with a glove. “You stay safe, Sailor Mercury.”

Sakura and Hypnosia held each other close and waved good-bye to Suzuki.

“Don’t forget! Team Operation Eclipse *forever!*”

“Fly high, Suzuki!”

“You three better come back!” Usagi yelled, holding a fist to her heart. “Or...or I’ll be...really mad with you girls!” She spun around and sobbed into Rei’s shoulder.

“Yeah,” Minako added, crying as well. “You...you don’t want to miss the party!”

Rei ran toward Suzuki and waved. “Suzuki! Listen, before you go, can I just say—”

“Tell me when I’m back,” Suzuki said, giving Rei a flirty wink. She kissed her palm and extended it toward Rei.

Rei clasped her chin and blushed, while everyone else gazed in her direction with astonishment.

“Hang on,” Rei said. She reached behind her back and unfurled the red bow attached to her miniskirt. Tossing the bow to Suzuki, Rei said, “For good luck.”

Suzuki sniffed the red bow, savoring Rei’s fresh floral fragrance. She tied the bow around her neck and smiled. “I love it. Thank you!”

The sad farewells from everyone touched a tender nerve in Ami’s heart. She tried her hardest to put on a strong face for everyone, but the bright young girl knew that there was a chance she wouldn’t return. The thought filled her with unimaginable grief. *Be strong*, Ami prayed, strengthening her resolve. *Everyone...the world...is counting on you.*

“You okay?” Mako asked.

“Yeah,” Ami replied, giving the crane a pat on the neck. “Let’s go.”

Ami channeled her mental energy into the crane and instructed it to raise its wings. The crane obeyed, spreading its wings to twice its body length.

Awe-inspiring gasps and cheers erupted from the group.

“Hang on!” Ami yelled. She placed both hands on the crane’s neck and sent a magical glow through its body. With a surge of power, the crane kicked off the ground and flapped its majestic wings, beginning its ascent to the heavens.

“WHOA!” Suzuki yelled, the sudden acceleration triggering butterflies in her stomach.

Mako pumped both fists in the air. “WOWWW! HERE WE GO!” She turned around and waved to the group. “Don’t worry! We’ll kick its ass!”

The mood on the ground shifted into a spirited celebration. Everyone ran forward, waving their arms, jumping, and cheering. They showered the departing team with love and hope, optimistic in their final victory.

Ami glanced down, watching her friends shrink into the beautiful landscape, her heart tainted with sorrow. Yet as the wind blew through her hair, Ami was unable to resist the exhilarating rush, the miracle of flight filling her with a sense of wonder. For the moment, Ami was able to set aside her gloomy thoughts. “Ladies! We have liftoff” she said, with an excited smile beaming across her face.

The crane pointed its beak upward at an angle and flapped its wings, accelerating toward the clouds. Cold winds rushed past the team, but the crane’s warm body provided ample protection. Eventually, the

crane leveled off and reached a cruising altitude, soaring on a direct path to the dark clouds.

Mako hugged Ami's waist. "Sorry for giving you a hard time back there."

Ami gripped Mako's hand, holding it fondly. "I'm glad you're here, Mako. I...I honestly couldn't do this without you."

Before the two lovers could share another tender moment, Suzuki piped up from the backseat.

"*KSHHHH!* Ladies and gentlemen, this is your flight attendant speaking," Suzuki said, pretending to talk into a speakerphone. "For your safety, please keep your arms and legs inside the crane at all times."

Ami and Mako turned around, stifling their laughter.

Suzuki continued. "Our destination today is that big evil cloud up ahead. Expect some turbulence on your flight today."

Mako couldn't hold it in anymore and laughed out loud. Ami shook her head, a giant grin on her face.

"Piloting today's flight is the lovely Captain Mercury, with her stunning partner, Captain Jupiter."

With a playful smile, Ami leaned forward and caressed Mako's cheek. The two girls closed their eyes and shared a steamy, romantic kiss.

Suzuki paused, savoring the affectionate, tender moment. She then brought the imaginary speakerphone to her mouth mischievously and said, "*KSHHHH!* Please welcome to the mile-high club, our newest members."

All three girls erupted into raucous laughter.

Chapter 27. Enemy

The majestic water crane soared through the ominous skies like a beacon of hope, carrying the team towards the heart of darkness. As they approached the swirling, sinister clouds, their once celebratory mood darkened to an unsettling chill. A palpable sense of malevolence hung in the air, intensifying with every beat of the crane's wings. In the distance, lightning cracked and boomed, foreshadowing the impending clash between good and evil.

Ami scanned the horizon with her computer's sensor. "Altitude 1900 meters. It's going to sense our presence soon. Get ready."

"Can this bird attack?" Mako asked.

Suzuki popped some joints in her neck. "We're about to find out."

A thunderous, haunting boom echoed ahead suddenly, causing the crane to recoil in a defensive maneuver. A pair of sinister blood-red eyes, shaped like oblique triangles, manifested in the dark clouds. The eyes followed the crane as it approached. Metalia's evil presence emitted a terrifying growl, like a beast had awakened.

Mako looked at the sky with a smirk. "Someone's pissed."

"Uh oh...I think it sees us," Suzuki said.

Ami tightened her grip around the crane's neck. "Stay focused team."

Underneath the red eyes, a thin mouth opened and curled into a creepy smile. “*Fools! You are too late,*” a cold mechanical voice said. “*My rebirth cannot be stopped.*”

The deep, chilly voice shook the team’s nerves, inducing a profound sense of dread and unease.

“It’s that voice again! From the nightmares I had when I was asleep!” Mako said, glaring at the dark clouds in anger.

“Hold my hand Mako! Don’t let it draw you in,” Ami said.

Mako grabbed Ami’s hand and held it close. “I want payback for what it did!”

Suzuki glanced down at a particular cloud and noticed it glowing bright purple. “Hey...is that cloud supposed to be—”

SHHHHHHZZAP!!

A dark energy lightning bolt zapped out of the cloud. The crane rolled to the left, maneuvering to safety, the bolt shooting past the crane’s wing by several meters.

“Jeez! It’s REALLY pissed,” Suzuki said, following the bolt as it burst into a cloud.

Ami gritted her teeth and instructed the crane to lower its pitch, accelerating it forward. “Mako! Keep watch above for any attacks. Suzuki! You watch below!”

Metalia’s eyes narrowed. “*The Earth...the galaxy...the universe. Darkness shall consume them all!*”

Three stormy clouds encircled the crane and one by one, each cloud lit up with an eerie, purple glow.

“Above, to the left!” Mako shouted.

Suzuki pointed and said, “Two below!”

Ami increased the pitch of the crane and maneuvered it to the right.

SHHHHHHZZAP!!

The dark energy bolts fired one after another from each cloud, shooting perilously close to the crane’s wings. With sharp skill, the crane maneuvered out of harm’s way, narrowly avoiding the electrical onslaught. The team breathed a collective sigh of relief as the crane stabilized its pitch.

“Damn that was close!” Mako said.

“Nice flying, Ami!” Suzuki added.

Ami gave the crane’s neck a soothing stroke. “It’s all thanks to her!”

Turbulent winds thrashed against the crane’s wings as the team approached Metalia’s ominous core. Ami struggled to keep the crane stable as it careened left and right like an erratic roller coaster. The clouds above and below grew increasingly black, reducing the team’s visibility. Amidst the engulfing darkness, only Metalia’s red eyes provided any source of illumination, casting an unsettling hue on the journey.

Dark energy lightning bolts cracked and thundered around them, along with Metalia’s sinister laughter. Above, below, left, and right—with increasing frequency, the ferocious bolts zapped towards

the crane. Suzuki and Mako frantically warned Ami of any incoming zaps. Ami deftly maneuvered the bird to safety each time, as if she and the crane shared a single mind.

“Watch out, Ami! This one’s really close!” Mako shouted, pointing to a nearby glowing cloud.

Like before, Ami instructed the crane to descend in order to increase its speed. But this time, the evasive maneuver wasn’t enough.

SHHHHHZAPPP! BOOM!

Ami screamed, feeling a surge of pain in her body. On her left, pieces of the crane’s majestic wing had shattered into thousands of bright blue droplets.

“We’ve been hit!” Suzuki yelled, bracing herself as the crane jerked violently.

Mako grabbed Ami’s arm. “Are you okay?!”

Ami winced and gave Mako a confident nod. “Yeah...let me try to fix her!”

With Mako’s help, Ami stood up and summoned a burst of water energy. She directed the energy to the crane’s injured wing and with intense focus, repaired it to its former glory.

Ami let out an exhausted gasp and collapsed into Mako’s arms.

Mako shook Ami’s shoulder. “Ami! Can you keep going?”

Suzuki hopped over. “We can’t keep evading like this! We need to attack its center!”

Ami groaned and rubbed her elbow, the crane’s pain still channeling into her body. “Owww...okay, now I’m angry!”

She returned to the crane's neck and gave it a soothing pat. "Sorry about that," Ami whispered to the crane's ear. "Why don't we show them what you can do?"

Metalia's colossal red eyes glared at Ami, surrounded by swirling black clouds. "*Give up hope, Sailor Mercury,*" the sinister voice boomed. "*Your friends. Your loved ones. Everyone will perish!*"

Undeterred by Metalia's taunts, Ami instructed the crane to increase altitude and aimed the beak defiantly at one of Metalia's eyes. "Nobody threatens my friends!" she shouted. "*Nobody!*"

"*Pathetic Sailor Guardians!*" Metalia shouted. "*You are NOTHING!*"

Ami directed the crane to fly in a holding pattern, circling around Metalia's menacing red eyes. Storm clouds around the crane intensified and glowed bright purple. Ferocious winds whipped around them like a tornado. "Hang on!" Ami shouted. She channeled a burst of energy into the crane's body, causing it to shine with magical water droplets, and chanted, "MERCURY! AQUA!!"

"Here we go!" Suzuki said, brimming with excitement.

"Do it, Ami!" Mako shouted.

Ami closed her eyes and with the final word, unleashed her aquatic fury. "*TYPHOON!*"

With a resounding screech, the crane fired a laser beam of powerful water energy from its beak. The brilliant blue beam gouged Metalia's left eye, exploding in a spectacular display of waterworks.

Metalia unleashed a haunting, furious roar. In a fit of rage, it fired dozens of dark energy lightning bolts, shooting them recklessly in random directions. The majestic crane deftly evaded all of them.

“Bullseye!” Mako shouted, pumping her fist.

Suzuki jumped out of her seat and pointed. “Look! I see them!”

Behind Metalia's wounded eye, emerged the four Sailor crystals, illuminating the darkness like a rainbow. Arranged in a large diamond formation, the crystals emitted the colors red, green, yellow, and silvery-white, casting a mesmerizing radiance.

“This is our chance!” Ami said. On her command, the crane flapped its wings and soared higher into the clouds. Suzuki and Mako cheered as they felt the crane accelerate.

“We need to be fast!” Ami said. “I'm going to swoop down toward the green crystal!”

Mako and Suzuki exchanged a quick thumbs up. Leaning over the edge of the crane's body, the duo readied themselves to grab the crystal at a moment's notice. But before Ami could initiate the swooping maneuver, a giant purple cloud materialized with a distinct zapping sound—directly below them.

“Oh no! Ami it’s going to hit us!” Suzuki shouted, pointing to the cloud.

SHHHHHZAPP!!

The crane reacted swiftly by halting its advance and rolling to the side. The lightning bolt fired upward, right past the crane’s beak, showering the team with dark energy sparks. More and more clouds glowed bright purple, lighting up the sky like a Christmas tree. The clouds crackled with dark energy and coalesced into a large defensive sphere formation around the four crystals.

“Damn it!” Mako yelled, slamming her fist. “We were so close!”

“It’s too dense,” Ami said, scanning the cloud sphere with her computer. “We won’t be able to evade their lightning attacks!”

Metalia’s sinister laughter echoed around them. *“That was close, Sailor Mercury! But I won’t allow that again!”*

“What do we do?” Mako asked, watching helplessly as the crystals disappeared behind the clouds.

Ami shook her head in frustration and scanned the clouds. “I can try another attack. But there’s just too many clouds! If I destroy them, they’ll just come back!”

As Ami and Mako debated strategy, Suzuki stood up quietly and flapped her ankle wings. “Well, like you said Ami...we just need to be fast,” she said. Then, without waiting for permission, Suzuki backflipped off the crane and floated down toward the dense, ominous

sphere of clouds. “Cover me!” she shouted, glancing back at Ami with a mischievous smile.

“Wait!!” Ami yelled, reaching her hand out. “SUZUKI!!”

Leaning over, Mako’s eyes widened as she observed Suzuki flying deeper into the clouds. “Oh my gosh! She’s going for it!”

“Follow her!” Ami commanded, pressing her hands over the crane’s neck. The crane responded, lowering its pitch and initiating a rapid descent. But as they approached the purple clouds, fierce bolts of lightning shot outward. The crane flapped its wings in distress, too frightened to make the daring approach. “It’s too dangerous!” Ami shouted frantically. “We need to get her back!”

Mako grabbed both of Ami’s shoulders. “Ami, listen! Suzuki’s our only shot at making this work!”

Ami lowered her head. “But I can’t lose her, Mako. I made a promise!”

“Then let’s give Suzuki the best chance to succeed!”

Ami nodded reluctantly and pointed her computer sensor at the dense sphere of purple clouds. She turned on the infrared scanner and saw the four glowing crystals, rotating in a diamond formation.

“Look! I think that’s Suzuki!” Mako said, pointing to a figure on the screen.

Coming into view on Ami’s screen was Suzuki’s energy signature. Her figure zipped left, right, up, and down like a nimble sprite. Dark energy bolts fired in all directions, creating tiny zigzagging lines on Ami’s screen. The density of the zigzags increased, causing Suzuki’s figure to slow down.

“She’s in trouble,” Ami said, gazing with worry into the thundery clouds. Flashes of lightning reflected off her irises.

Metalia’s sinister laughter boomed around them suddenly. Both of its red eyes opened up behind the crane, illuminating the clouds with a red glow. “*No more games!*” the cold mechanical voice said.

Ami and Mako looked around as dozens upon dozens of glowing purple clouds descended towards the crystals—where Suzuki was bravely fighting for survival.

“No!” Ami shouted. She guided the crane toward Metalia’s eyes and waved her arms. “Hey!! Over here! I’m the one you want!”

“I don’t think it heard you!” Mako said.

But Ami was already one step ahead. She instructed the crane to point its beak at one of Metalia’s eyes and summoned a fierce round of water energy. “*MERCURY AQUA TYPHOON!*” Ami chanted, her voice echoing through the tension-filled atmosphere.

An awesome blue laser beam rocketed out of the crane’s beak and exploded in Metalia’s right eye this time. Metalia let out a deafening roar, sending violent ripples through the crane’s watery body. With godly rage, Metalia directed the purple storm clouds away from Suzuki, toward Ami.

“Ohhhh, they’re really mad now!” Mako said. She clung to Ami’s waist as the crane swooped down, drawing attention away from the Suzuki and the crystals. Dark energy bolts zipped in all directions, many of them surging dangerously close to the swooping crane.

Relentless booms of thunder and howling winds rushed past Ami and Mako's ears.

BOOM BOOM BOOM!

The crane made a daring escape, leaving behind a trail of exploding storm clouds.

Mako lifted her head from a bracing position. "Ami, that was insane! I don't know if we'll get so lucky next time!"

"Sorry! I'll go back to a defensive posture," Ami replied wearily. "Let's see if we can find Suzuki!"

Ami directed the crane to a holding pattern underneath the sphere of clouds. She took a pause to calm her nerves and recharge her energy levels.

Mako pointed to a break in the clouds suddenly and shouted, "Ami! I see her!"

"Suzuki!!" Ami yelled, vigorously waving her hands. The sight of Suzuki, alive and present, flooded Ami with an overwhelming sense of relief.

However, under the chaotic circumstances, Suzuki didn't respond to Ami's call. From a distance, she appeared exhausted and disoriented. As the clouds began to break away, Suzuki perked up as if she had finally found what she was searching for. Flapping her ankle wings with renewed vigor, Suzuki disappeared behind a cloud, leaving an air of mystery in her wake.

Metalia's haunting voice echoed around them. "*You! You will pay for that, Sailor Mercury!*"

A barrage of lightning bolts blasted out of the clouds, forcing the crane to fly away defensively. The clouds surrounding the Sailor crystals intensified their attacks against Suzuki, lighting up the sky with relentless flashes and booms.

Ami grabbed Mako's hand as a wave of helplessness overtook her mind. With a look of intense worry, Ami scanned the sphere of clouds using her computer. Suzuki's infrared figure was still moving and astonishingly making progress toward one of the crystals. Sensing a disturbance in the crystal formation, the computer emitted a beeping noise. *BEEP BEEP BEEP!*

"She got it!" Ami yelled triumphantly.

Mako leaned over to get a closer look at the screen. Indeed, one of the crystals was moving downward, no longer part of the diamond formation.

"Yes!!" Mako yelled. "Oh my gosh, I could kiss her right now!"

"Come on! We need to rendezvous with her," Ami said. The crane flapped its wings and soared upward until it was hovering near the bottom of the cloud sphere. Ami instructed the crane to increase its glow, making it easier to spot. The deafening sphere of clouds swirled overhead, its thunderous howls dominating the sky.

"Where is she?" Mako asked, gazing through the dense clouds.

Ami checked her infrared scanner. Suzuki's figure was descending rapidly through the sphere of clouds. She then stopped suddenly and pivoted.

"Oh no," Ami said, her heart sinking. "No, Suzuki, don't—"

Mako smacked her forehead. “Jeez! She’s trying to get the other crystals!”

Metalia’s enraged voice boomed. “*YOU DARE!?! You dare disturb my celestial crystals...the very source of my power?!?*”

The clouds darkened to an inky blackness, a reflection of Metalia’s apocalyptic fury. The thunder and winds intensified to hurricane levels.

Ami commanded the crane to fly up toward Suzuki’s position. The crane valiantly fought the tumultuous winds as it ascended, soaring upward against the tempest. As the crane circled the perimeter of the swirling cloud sphere, Mako vigilantly kept an eye out for any breaks in the clouds. “There! Right there!” Mako shouted.

Through a hole in the clouds, Ami spotted her friend. Suzuki battled against the turbulent winds, her ankle wings flapping furiously and her hand outstretched toward one of the Sailor crystals—the red one. Looming behind Suzuki, a giant storm cloud advanced, sizzling with malevolent dark energy.

“Suzuki!! Get out of there!” Ami screamed, her voice drowned out by the storm.

Mako shook her head in disbelief and dread. “Oh no! She doesn’t see it!”

In a heart-stopping moment, Suzuki abruptly turned her head, locking eyes with Ami, her hand mere inches from the red crystal. Ami

and Mako stood frozen, their desperate pleas unheard. A bright flash blinded their eyes and the two girls gasped in absolute horror.

The powerful lightning bolt surged forth, resonating the atmosphere with electrical fury as it pierced Suzuki's chest. The sky around Suzuki erupted, showering the clouds with vivid red and purple sparks. The red crystal gently touched Suzuki's lifeless fingers, before floating away aimlessly. And Suzuki's ankle wings, once fluttering with playful determination, fell completely still.

Chapter 28. Burden

The majestic water crane plummeted from the sky like a ballistic missile. It folded its wings and pointed its beak downward, powering past the limits of air resistance. Storm clouds streamed past in a chaotic blur. As the crane performed its diving maneuver, Ami scanned the sky, trying her hardest to block out a flurry of emotions.

Feelings of shock, anger, sorrow, and disbelief swirled dizzily in Ami's mind. Ami found herself praying fervently for Suzuki's survival, a girl whom she had barely known a day ago. As the winds whipped through Ami's hair, she thought about Rei and how the girls had teased her for liking Suzuki. If the unthinkable were to happen, Rei's sorrow and heartbreak would shatter her very soul. *No one is dying today*, Ami thought. *No one!*

"300 meters!" Ami shouted, looking up from her computer screen. "She's reaching terminal velocity!"

"What does that mean?" Mako replied, clinging to Ami's waist as they accelerated.

"It means you're going to catch her, Mako!!"

Suzuki's lifeless body had already fallen through the bottom of the malevolent cloud sphere, giving Ami a clear line of sight. Like a graceful sleeping angel, Suzuki's face bore an ethereal serenity, her eyes closed in gentle tranquility even amidst the storm. Strands of her purple hair flailed wildly around her face. The red ribbon around her neck

rippled upward. Her ankle wings flapped vigorously, not from her own accord but from the relentless winds that rushed past her limp body.

Ami checked the computer. “200 meters!”

Mako pointed downward and urgently shouted, “I can see the ground! Ami, we need to go faster!”

“I know!!” Ami yelled, flashing a look of annoyance. She blinked her eyes, sending a splash of tears toward the sky above her. Feelings of intense frustration swelled within Ami, her pent up emotions boiling to the surface.

“I *told* her!” Ami yelled, shaking her head and raising her voice in anger. “I told her to follow my instructions! But she just had to be a *big, stupid show-off!*”

“She was trying to help!” Mako yelled back. “Ami, how can you say something like that?!”

“Because! Because I—” Ami struggled to finish her thought and grabbed a chunk of her blue hair in exasperation. “Because I am trying to make sure everyone gets home alive! Is that so hard to *understand!*!”

The fiery outburst left Mako speechless and she recoiled, her expression laden with melancholy.

Recognizing her mistake, Ami turned around and softened her tone. “Sorry, Mako...I’m...I’m doing it again, aren’t I?”

Before Mako had a chance to make amends, Metalia’s sinister laughter thundered around them.

“*You can’t save her!*” the mechanical voice said. “*Her blood is on your hands, Sailor Mercury!!*”

Ami covered her ears, the chilling taunts threatening to drive her mad. “No, no, no! We can save her!”

Mako smacked Ami’s back suddenly. “Ami! Look out!!”

SHHHZZAP!!

A lightning bolt zipped past the diving crane and exploded inside a storm cloud. *BOOM!*

SHHZAP SHHZAP SHHZAP!

Dozens of lightning bolts surged out of the storm clouds, flying toward the crane like they were heat-seeking missiles. The crane flapped its wings and accelerated downward in a nosedive, weaving side to side to evade the bolts. *BOOM BOOM BOOM!* The sky behind the crane lit up with spectacular explosions, like it was blanketed with anti-aircraft fire.

Mako cheered loudly, echoing the thrill of the crane’s exhilarating and daring escape.

“60 meters!” Ami shouted. She instructed the crane to level off slightly and cruise down in a curve. Suzuki’s falling body was right above them, inching closer and closer with each passing moment—along with the hard landscape below. “Mako, get into position!”

With a surge of adrenaline, Mako stood up on the crane’s back and extended her arms, her eyes fixed on the falling Suzuki. “Here we go!” she said, stepping precariously close to the edge. While Mako had been preparing for this moment, she had underestimated the force required to catch a falling body. Suzuki tumbled straight through Mako’s arms and splashed into the crane’s watery body. Before Suzuki could pass through the crane’s underside, Mako dived into the water

and grabbed Suzuki's hand. With her strength and agility on full display, Mako swam back up, pulling Suzuki's body to safety.

"Got her!" Mako shouted, cradling Suzuki's body in her arms.

"We're making an emergency landing!" Ami said, as the crane glided toward the ground. "Mako, keep her warm!"

Ami scanned the sky with her computer, watching as Metalia's sinister clouds swirled far above them. She then turned her attention to the crane and searched for a suitable landing spot.

Mako shook Suzuki's lifeless body. "Ami...Ami I don't think she's—"

"Just keep her warm, Mako!" Ami yelled, looking back frantically with tears in her eyes.

The crane flapped its wings in a steady beat to soften its descent and landed on a flat, rocky surface. Ami patted the crane's neck and commended its bravery. She then jumped to the back where Mako was holding Suzuki's body.

"She's so cold," Mako cried, looking down dejectedly.

Ami touched Suzuki's cheek and felt an icy cold trickle through her glove. The harsh journey through the frigid atmosphere had left its mark—frost dangled delicately over Suzuki's eyelashes, glistening like fresh snow. Her lips, once so warm and passionate, were now tinged with a chilling blue. There was a burn mark across her chest, its searing impact blackening the exquisite patterns on her leotard. Miraculously unscathed amid the chaos, Rei's vibrant red bow remained tied around Suzuki's neck, like a symbol of resilience.

Ami sent a surge of energy through the crane, warming up the watery body like it was a hot tub. She pressed her ear to Suzuki's chest and searched her wrist for a pulse. "Suzuki!" Ami whispered, her voice cracking. Tears trickled down Ami's face and she paused to dry her eyes. "Suzuki, can you hear me?"

Neither girl made a sound as they waited. The air around them hushed into a profound, emotional silence.

Mako embraced Ami and let out a heartbreaking sob. Ami comforted her partner as she struggled to process a rush of intense emotions—anger, sorrow, and helplessness. *Rei will never forgive me*, Ami thought, drifting deeper into sadness. *She never shared her parting words, or a final hug, or a final, tender—*

Ami perked up suddenly and gently cradled Suzuki's face.

"Wh—what are you doing?" Mako asked, sniffing between sobs.

Without saying a word, Ami pressed her warm lips over Suzuki's mouth. Suzuki's icy cold skin stung Ami's lips, but Ami held firm, giving Suzuki an affectionate, fervent kiss. "Come on, Suzuki," Ami whispered, breaking the kiss briefly.

Mako dried her eyes and gave Ami a dumbstruck look.

Before Mako could question her girlfriend's stunning actions, Ami kissed Suzuki again, unleashing a torrent of heated, pleasant emotions. With each delicate kiss, Suzuki's lips thawed little by little until its natural color returned. Then, a miniscule, miraculous glow emerged in a corner of Suzuki's lips, its presence unveiling itself with gradual brilliance.

Ami felt the unmistakable tingle, as a tiny trickle of life-giving energy escaped through her lips. With a surge of excitement, she sealed her lips over Suzuki's mouth, allowing the trickle to swell to a wave.

"Oh my gosh," Mako said, her eyes wide in astonishment. She gasped in awe as the lips between Ami and Suzuki glowed brighter and brighter.

Suzuki's ankle wings fluttered slowly, like a butterfly emerging from its cocoon. Her eyelids moved, shaking off tiny frost crystals. And in an unforgettable moment, Suzuki drew a breath, filling Ami's mouth with a glorious gust of air.

Ami released the kiss and clasped her mouth, choking back tears of joy and relief. Mako laughed and cried with overwhelming relief, the miraculous experience leaving her momentarily speechless.

Suzuki gently curled her lips into a slight smile. She opened one of her fists, filling the crane's watery body with a shimmering, mystical green light. Gazing wondrously at her two friends, Suzuki said in a weak, raspy voice, "Hey...I...I think this belongs to you..."

Ami and Mako's excited faces glowed bright green as they gazed at the sparkling crystal in Suzuki's hand. With a look of reverence, Mako took the crystal and held it up, feeling its celestial powers radiate. She then grabbed Suzuki in a bearhug and gave her an elated kiss on the cheek.

"Oh my gosh, Suzuki!" Mako said, releasing the hug. "I'm never forgetting this. I owe you...big!"

Suzuki coughed and looked mournfully at Ami. "Listen...I...I'm really, *really* sorry about—"

“*Sbbbbbb!*” Ami said, placing a finger over Suzuki’s lips. “You were marvelous, Suzuki. Absolutely marvelous.”

Mako gave Suzuki a jubilant pat on the shoulder. “Seriously. That was legendary! The girls are never going to believe this story!”

Suzuki smiled and chuckled. “Just don’t tell Rei...”

A bright flash of lightning interrupted the tender moment. Seconds later, a deafening crack of thunder sent a jolt through all three girls. In the sky above them, Metalia’s black clouds swirled with the ferocity of a hurricane. Two red eyes, shaped like oblique triangles, glared downward, casting an evil, furious shroud over the scene.

“*THAT BELONGS TO ME!*” Metalia’s voice boomed through the sky. A barrage of dark lightning bolts followed, rocketing mercilessly toward the three girls.

“Get down!” Ami shouted. Reacting swiftly, Ami directed the crane to spread its wings. With a burst of magical energy, the crane’s wings morphed into a protective sphere, surrounding all three girls.

SHHZZZAPP! BOOM BOOM BOOM!

The lightning bolts struck the crane’s water shield, showering the surroundings with thousands of sparks and blue droplets. Inside the sphere, thunderous booms reverberated relentlessly. With each lightning strike, Ami sank further on her knees, until eventually, she released an agonizing, tortured scream.

Mako shouted Ami’s name and raced over to her side.

“Oh no! She feels the pain of every single strike!” Suzuki said, crawling over to join the group.

“Transform now!” Ami yelled, clenching her teeth as another bolt exploded outside the sphere. She gazed at Mako with pained eyes. “Hurry!”

With fierce resolve, Mako lifted the green crystal high above her head, her voice echoing dramatically through the heavens as she chanted, *“JUPITER POWER! MAKE UP!”*

A radiant burst of green energy erupted from the crystal’s core, creating a luminous display inside the water sphere. The ethereal light gracefully funneled into Mako, rejuvenating her body with the very essence of the cosmos itself. In a flash, her worn costume was replaced anew—her green miniskirt, pink bows, and tiara, all returning to their former glory. With a triumphant battle cry, Sailor Jupiter spun around on her heels and raised her fists. Brilliant electrical sparks danced around her in a celestial display, accentuating her vigorous, superheroic pose.

“GIVE IT BACK!!” Metalia roared, its haunting, malevolent eyes fixated on Sailor Jupiter’s brilliant green glow. With a furious wrath, Metalia’s dark core descended from the sky, funneling down in a colossal tornado, converging on the bright blue water sphere. *“You pathetic worms...are not worthy of its power!”*

Electrical sparks discharged from Mako’s fists. “Time to give this thing a piece of my mind,” she said, summoning a round of thunder energy. But before Mako could step outside the sphere and launch her attack, the dark clouds arrived with a vengeance.

A tumultuous vortex of black clouds encircled the water sphere, enshrouding it in a suffocating darkness. Flashes of lightning

illuminated the chaotic scene, revealing glimpses of swirling debris and shadows. Metalia's sinister laughter echoed in all directions.

"We're trapped!" Suzuki said, gazing at the fast-moving clouds outside the sphere.

With great strain, Ami raised both arms and summoned a burst of water energy. The energy flowed into the crane's water shield, stabilizing it against the vicious onslaught.

Mako punched the ground in frustration. "There's got to be a way out!"

Lightning strikes pounded the perimeter of the water shield nonstop, causing Ami to gasp and writhe in pain. The relentless pain eventually grew to a crescendo, bursting past Ami's fragile limits. She gritted her teeth and let out an agonizing scream, crouching over her knees.

Mako and Suzuki raced over to provide comfort. "She's going to pass out from the pain!" Suzuki said, holding Ami's trembling hand.

"Talk to me, Ami!" Mako said. "Let us help you!"

Within Ami's distressed mind, a cold, cruel calculus played out. Despite the valiant battles and daring escapes, Metalia had finally gained the upper hand. There was no good way to escape the vicious dark vortex—not without risk of serious injury or death. The crane's water shield provided their only protection—and it would only last as long as Ami could sustain it. Unless the celestial gods decided to grant them a miracle, the chances of all three girls making it home were slim to none.

Ami raised her head and gazed heavily into Mako's eyes. "I'm not going to make it, Mako. Tell all our friends...that I'll love and cherish them forever..."

Mako shook her head in disbelief at Ami's grave words. "Nonsense! Ami, we'll get out of this...together!"

Suzuki clasped Ami's hand tightly, tears pooling at the bottom of her eyes. "We're going to figure something out..."

"Mako...you and Suzuki get out of here," Ami said, looking down in deep sorrow. "I'll try to create an opening for you. Don't look back...just go as fast as you can..."

Ami had expected to hear an argument from Mako, but she heard nothing except for the incessant thrashing of winds outside. After a few seconds of silence, Mako enveloped her arms around Ami in a warm, comforting embrace.

"I'm not going anywhere," Mako said gently. "You've done enough, Ami."

Suzuki joined, hugging Ami's waist and pressing her forehead fondly to Ami's chest. "Friends don't abandon friends. We're with you till the end."

All three girls huddled inside the water shield, inspired to stick together by Ami's friendship and bravery. The poignant moment brought tears to all their eyes, as they comforted each other and reminisced over shared memories.

Ami—drained and exhausted—felt the weight of fatigue settle within her body. She had poured every fiber of her being into absorbing all the attacks, sparing the crane from suffering. With nothing left to give, Ami longed to relax and release her burdens. Mako's words echoed

hypnotically in Ami's mind: *You've done enough, Ami. You've done enough.*

With her mind at ease and her friends close, Ami shut her eyes and relaxed her arms. She severed her connection with the crane, entrusting its fate to the celestial gods. The energy stream from her hands ceased, causing the water shield to shrink in volume. The turbulent clouds outside smashed into the shield, chipping pieces of it away. Lightning bolts collided violently with the shield, but Ami no longer felt any pain.

A sudden, thunderous commotion erupted around Ami, a cacophony of chaos that assaulted her senses. It was followed by a blinding flash of light that left bright stars in her field of vision. Then, as swiftly as the brilliance had transpired, Ami's entire world—her thoughts, her friends, and her feelings—vanished into a silent, black abyss.

Chapter 29. The Dance

The group at basecamp was dead silent. Minako clasped a hand over her mouth, too shocked for words. Usagi cried into Rei's shoulder, while Rei herself gazed stoically at the dark clouds over the horizon.

Sakura tightly hugged Hypnosia, while Zoisite stood behind them, their faces sunken.

They had witnessed the dramatic battle unfold, the majestic blue crane appearing like a tiny butterfly from their vantage point. They could see the intense bursts of dark energy lightning bolts, thundering in the distance. They saw the close calls and dramatic escapes. They saw the crane make its emergency landing—and the furious black tornado that followed it. And they saw their three friends, filled with hopes and dreams, disappear under a veil of darkness.

“Ami...Mako...Suzuki...”

Usagi whispered each of their names, her voice tainted with heartbreak. She then collapsed to her knees, unable to handle her overwhelming grief. Rei joined her, keeping her arm around Usagi the entire time.

There wasn't a single dry eye amongst the group. Gradually, the air filled with sullen voices, calling out their names in a chorus of despair. *Ami...Mako...Suzuki...*

Zoisite tapped Rei's shoulder and the two of them stepped aside.

"Just say the word, and I'll take you all home," he said.

Rei folded her arms and shuffled her red heels, the arduous decision weighing heavily on her. Without their celestial powers, confronting Metalia head on would be a suicide mission, compounding the tragedy. But leaving behind their fallen comrades also felt wrong. It meant that Metalia's evil would spread unchecked, eventually devouring the world with a thousand years of darkness. Would new Sailor Guardians emerge in the future to confront this evil? Impossible to say. The most important thing in Rei's mind right now was to pick up the pieces and regroup.

Rei placed a hand solemnly over Zoisite's shoulder and gave him a small, almost imperceptible nod. Then, in an uncharacteristic move for the typically stoic girl, she turned around and sobbed, both hands over her eyes. Like Usagi had done, Rei fell to her knees, the grief exploding uncontrollably from her heart.

Zoisite grew despondent as he watched the sorrowful scene. Feelings of intense guilt surfaced within him, as the Dark Kingdom general recognized his unforgivable role in orchestrating the tragic events. His cowardice, his fear, his foolishness—all of it played a vital role in the outcome. He regretted not standing up to Queen Beryl sooner when he had the chance. With a look of gloom and a heavy heart, Zoisite raised his hand in preparation for summoning a portal, his only purpose left in the grand scheme.

“*EVERYONE! LOOK!*” Minako shouted suddenly, jumping up in a burst of excitement. Her orange miniskirt and red hair bow bounced cheerfully as she pointed toward the horizon.

The entire group raced over and joined Minako’s side, gazing at the horizon in eager anticipation. Awe-inspiring gasps and chatter filled the air as the spectacular scene unfolded before them.

Metalia’s ominous black tornado exploded with a burst of cosmic energy, dispersing into thousands of tiny clouds. From the destruction, the majestic water crane emerged, growing to five times its original size. Like a phoenix rising from the ashes, the crane flapped its wings and ascended triumphantly into the sky, leaving a mesmerizing river of magical water in its wake. The crane spun around elegantly, showering the world with shimmering, sparkly raindrops. Then, with its beak aimed upward, the crane rocketed towards Metalia’s core and obliterated one of its red eyes. Metalia’s enraged, agonizing scream echoed to the edges of the Earth.

A euphoric cheer erupted from the group. Tears of sorrow transformed into tears of wonder. Unable to contain their excitement, the group raced forward for a better view of the spectacle. Before they had a chance to settle down, an even more spectacular sight unfolded, a moment that would forever be seared into their collective memories.

With a thunderous roar that shook the very earth, a colossal dragon sculpted from radiant electrical energy emerged from the ground. Lightning bolts with a green hue discharged from its scales, a

manifestation of its spellbinding power and fury. The dragon's serpentine form spiraled upward, joining the majestic crane in a mesmerizing helix of blue and green magic. The two spiritual creatures waltzed around each other with sweeping, elegant weaves, as if dancing for the celestial gods themselves.

Minako covered her mouth in awe as she witnessed the fantastical sight. "Oh my gosh, they're dancing," she said with a beaming smile. "Ami and Mako are dancing!!"

Nobody could take their eyes off the beautiful dance, each person captivated by the magnificent synchronization displayed by the crane and dragon.

Below the spiritual creatures, Metalia's dark cloud swelled in a fit of fury and rage. It went crazy, shooting off dark lightning bolts erratically in all directions. The temper tantrum didn't faze the crane or dragon one bit. Like angry parents, they descended on Metalia's dark cloud, unleashing a godlike torrent of water and thunder energy.

The crane struck first, firing a powerful blue beam of water energy from its beak. The dragon followed, surging forth a barrage of electrical energy from its mouth. In a remarkable show of force, the two energy streams merged and scorched Metalia's core with a devastating explosion. Metalia's angry roar rippled through the sky. From a distance, the roar sounded like a curse word that began with the letter *D*. Without waiting for Metalia to recover, the pair of spiritual creatures charged up their powers—and attacked again.

Usagi was the first to make a move. She wrapped a blanket around her shoulders, brushed some dirt off her boots, and turned to face the group. “They’re alive and need all the help they can get!” she said. Then, without waiting for a response, Usagi sprinted toward the epic battle.

“Hey! Wait for me,” Minako shouted. She joined Usagi’s side and the two of them raced away.

Rei threw her hands up in exasperation. “Well, there goes our plan. Zoisite...please tell me you’re still the voice of reason around here...Zoisite?”

Turning around, Rei noticed that Zoisite too had run off, joining Sakura and Hypnosia in a mad dash. Rei laughed and rubbed her eyebrows, saying, “Ohhhh....don’t make me regret this.” She fastened a blanket around her neck like a cape and without a second thought, chased after the group.

Chapter 30. Final Battle

Ami felt a breeze waft under her blue miniskirt, along with a strong pair of hands gripping her thighs and upper back. Her head was nestled over a cushy, warm, curvy bosom—with just a hint of rose perfume. The disconcerting sounds of booms and blasts assaulted her ears, stirring Ami awake.

“Mako...is that you?” Ami said weakly. Opening her eyes slowly, she was greeted by the sight of a vivid pink bow, tickling her nose.

Mako glanced down at her sleepy girlfriend, cradled in her arms, and shouted, “Hey! Ami’s awake!”

Ami furrowed her eyebrows and looked around in confusion. “Mako...how are we...”

Suzuki hopped over, holding Ami’s compact computer. “You missed the dance!” she said excitedly. “Quick! You need to see this!”

With motherly care, Mako lowered Ami to the ground and provided a steadying hand to help her rise. “We’re not out of the woods yet,” Mako said, pointing to the horizon. “But...well, see for yourself.”

Ami squinted her eyes, her mind still fuzzy. A bright flash and a loud boom jolted her senses back to full alertness. She covered her mouth in amazement at the scene, and even shook her head a few times to ensure it wasn’t a dream.

Directly ahead was Queen Metalia, reduced to a shadow of its former self. No longer dominating the skies, Metalia had collapsed into a muddled pile of dark clouds. It emitted a deep, angry growl as it struggled to regain its supremacy. Two brooding, red eyes emerged from its core and gazed at its adversaries with livid hatred.

In the skies above, the majestic blue water crane swooped down and fired a blast of water energy. Joining the crane's side was a dazzling thunder dragon. The two spirits guarded the skies, destroying Metalia bit by bit with relentless energy attacks.

"You're returning the favor," Ami whispered, gazing in wonder at the crane and dragon. She extended her hand, as if to touch their cosmic souls. "Thank you..."

But as Ami surveyed the impressive battle, she couldn't help but notice the water crane's attacks gradually losing their punch. Growing worried, Ami flipped open her compact computer.

"Do you mind filling me in," Ami said, her voice turning serious as she typed on the keypad.

Mako pretended to make her head explode. "I...listen, after you passed out...the crane...there was a really bright flash...and...I think it talked to me? I suddenly felt a surge of power...Ami...none of this makes any sense..."

Suzuki jumped into the conversation enthusiastically.

"Cranes...dragons...seriously, you girls are amazing!"

Ami chuckled and scanned the scene with the computer sensor. "Well...celestial energy is not an exact science."

BEEP BEEP BEEP!

There was an alert on the computer and Ami tapped a key. She studied the numbers and gave the group a troubled look. “Yeah...we’re definitely not out of the woods yet...”

“What’s going on? Mako asked, trying to make sense of the numbers—without any success.

“Please tell us you have some good news, Ami!” Suzuki said.

Ami snapped the computer shut and gathered the girls into an urgent huddle. Ami’s voice quickened, quivering with increasing panic as she spoke. “The Sailor Crystals...”

“Yeah, what about them, Ami?” Mako said.

“Metalia still has a trick up its sleeve...”

“But...we’re winning, aren’t we?” Suzuki said.

“We need to get them back before—”

“Before *what?*”

“Before it can harness—”

Metalia’s sinister laughter boomed suddenly, sending a haunting chill through the group. “*My, my, my...what a smart girl you are, Sailor Mercury,*” the mechanical voice taunted. “*Did you really think your puny powers could defeat me? Hahahaha!!!!!!*”

The crane and dragon spirits took notice and swooped down, summoning their formidable powers.

In the heart of Metalia’s dark core, a bright red star appeared, casting a vivid glow that eventually spread to all the clouds until it

looked like a blazing inferno. Metalia's laughter continued to echo, until it reached a villainous, depraved crescendo.

Suzuki's eyes widened in sudden realization. "Oh no...the red crystal," she said, her voice trembling with fear.

A torrent of scorching fire erupted from Metalia's core, surging toward the skies with the destructive force of a star. The intense flames roared through the air, homing in on the majestic water crane. With no way to escape the explosive inferno, the flames engulfed the water crane in a cataclysmic collision. The crane's spirit, defiant to the end, attempted courageously to escape the fire. But as it desperately flapped its majestic wings, the crane evaporated into shimmering water droplets. Within seconds, the once beautiful and brave crane ceased to exist, leaving behind only a smattering of blue sparkles.

"BASTARD!" Mako screamed, with tears of rage in her eyes.

Suzuki jumped up and yelled curse words at Metalia.

Ami stood frozen in shock, her mind dazed. "They killed her," she said, shaking with anger. "They *killed* her!"

The thunder dragon in the sky swooped over Metalia and blasted forth a barrage of lightning bolts. In response, Metalia summoned a shield of fire to protect its core. Lightning bolts smashed into the flames, creating a spectacular display of raw, elemental power. Within Metalia's core, another star began to glow—this one with the color yellow.

Circling back around, the thunder dragon courageously summoned another burst of electrical energy. Before it could send the electrical barrage down, a thick yellow laser beam tore through its body.

BOOOOOOOOOM!!

With a tortured howl, the thunder dragon disintegrated into thousands of green electrical sparks. The once mighty spirit, which had dominated the skies, vanished from existence.

Metalia unleashed an exalted roar as it relished in its victory. *“SEE! This is what your powers are TRULY capable of!”*

“MURDERER!” Suzuki screamed. She tried to fly toward Metalia’s core, but Ami held her back.

Mako was apoplectic. She narrowed her eyes, gritted her teeth, and summoned lightning bolts around her enraged fists. “Ami...are you thinking what I’m thinking?”

Ami summoned two swirling balls of water energy and glared at Metalia, her expression livid. “Yeah,” she replied, her voice cold as ice.

“Room for one more?” Suzuki asked, her lips curled into a snarl. She stepped forward and thrashed a sizzling purple ribbon.

Metalia unleashed threatening fireballs and light beams into the sky, daring the girls to attack. *“Come, foolish mortals!”* it taunted. *“Come and meet your DOOM!”*

Ami scanned Metalia’s dark core with her computer. The infrared imaging showed a sphere of flames in the center and three Sailor crystals inside it. Formidable for sure, but not invincible. The computer

readings also confirmed one of Ami's suspicions—Metalia's energy levels simply weren't that strong anymore. The fiery blasts it had unleashed were more akin to the desperate cries of a cornered animal, than the calculated strikes of a powerful dark entity. The crane and dragon, while courageous, had been on their last legs anyway. Metalia's fiery display and bluster were merely a facade, designed to conceal the only thing it felt—fear.

Before Mako had a chance to charge into battle, Ami pulled her aside.

"Keep it distracted," Ami said. "Try not to get too close, okay?"

Mako nodded. "And what's *your* plan?"

Ami conjured a water orb, took a refreshing sip from it, and handed it to Mako. "I'll weaken its fire shield."

Suzuki gawked at the water orb like a hungry puppy. She took a sip and licked her lips. "Mmmmm!"

Ami pulled Suzuki over and whispered in her ear, saying, "You know what to do?"

"Piece of cake," Suzuki replied, giving Ami a flirty wink.

With confident smiles, the three girls placed their hands together and shouted, "Go team!"

They then sprinted toward Metalia's dark core, dispersing in three different directions like warriors.

Metalia's fire shield radiated an intense warmth on Ami's face. There was no fear in Ami's eyes as she approached, only a restless

determination to finish the battle for good. With a swift and courageous charge, Ami launched her magical water attacks, dazzling confidently in her brilliant blue costume. Water and fire clashed in a stunning spectacle, drenching Metalia's core with smoke and embers.

The ominous cloud retaliated, leveraging Mars' celestial powers in a show of force by launching a volley of fireballs. Ami neutralized the fire attack by skillfully conjuring water shields. Unfazed, the Guardian of Water returned the favor, attacking Metalia's core with a torrent of aquatic magic.

In the airspace above Metalia, a petite purple fairy darted around with her ankle wings. Suzuki dodged a barrage of lightning bolts, backflipping and somersaulting her way to safety. With a playful grin, she thrashed her ribbon whip repeatedly in Metalia's red eyes, driving the evil cloud into a frenzy.

Mako unleashed her fury, seizing the opportunity to exact revenge, Metalia's insidious brainwashing still fresh in her mind. With a stormy battle cry, Mako jumped into the air and launched a bombardment of thunder energy. Mako's attack sent violent shockwaves through Metalia's clouds, causing it to emit a harrowing screech. Swishing her brown ponytail back, Mako struck a powerful, superheroic pose, her aura sizzling with lightning bolts like a force of nature.

The intense three-way assault rendered Metalia frustrated, disoriented, and weakened. Driven mad by the taste of freedom, it

vehemently resisted the prospect of being imprisoned once more. It let out an angry roar, shouting, “*Never! Never again!!*”

Metalia’s eyes bore a seething hatred as they focused on Sailor Mercury. “*How?! How did this weak, pathetic Sailor Guardian outwit me?!*” The depth of Metalia’s resentment intensified, the mere sight of Sailor Mercury’s blue bow triggering a raging animosity. Metalia kept its eyes trained on her, waiting for the opportune moment to strike.

Ami retreated and paused to catch her breath. The relentless water attacks had left her drained and exhausted. She watched as Suzuki and Mako kept up the valiant assault against Metalia, wearing it down in a battle of attrition. Yet, Ami couldn’t help but notice Metalia’s sinister eyes staring at her, never looking away amidst the offensive. The creepy stare unsettled her, violating her soul. Sensing a potential attack, Ami lifted her hands and summoned a water shield. But in her state of extreme exhaustion, the shield faltered.

“Oh no!” Ami said, trying to summon another shield in a panic. It faltered again.

Metalia grinned.

Mako noticed Ami’s distress and sprinted over like a cheetah, shouting Ami’s name.

A bright yellow star glowed inside Metalia’s core. Metalia emitted a sinister laugh and fired a powerful beam of light energy, aiming it ruthlessly at Sailor Mercury’s head.

The bright energy beam blinded Ami’s vision and she let out a terrifying scream.

Mako swiftly jumped in front and grabbed Ami in a bearhug, the two girls tumbling to the ground.

BOOOOOOM!

The energy beam exploded in the ground, showering the girls with hundreds of small rocks. Mako enveloped her body over Ami, the rocks smacking into her brawny shoulders.

When the dust settled, Mako winced and looked at Ami, saying, “*Aghhh...sorry about the hard landing...are you okay, Ami?*”

The intense last-second rescue left Ami in shock and she gazed at Mako with stunned relief. Smoke billowed from Mako’s back, who tried to fake a smile, but winced again as a wave of pain hit her.

“Oh no! Mako...you’re hurt!” Ami said. She sat up and examined Mako’s injuries like a concerned doctor.

“It’s nothing,” Mako replied, rubbing her shoulder, grimacing. “May have...mistimed it just a bit.”

Mako stepped in front of Ami and glared at their enemy, conjuring two balls of lightning in her fists. “Stay close,” Mako said, taking on a defensive stance. “This thing likes to play dirty!”

“Hehehehee...I remember you, Sailor Jupiter,” Metalia’s cold, mechanical voice taunted. *“You gave up hope...so easily. But alas, illusions can only go so far. How about I give you a taste...OF THE REAL THING!”*

Metalia’s core expanded and glowed as it charged up an attack. The dark clouds swirled into a menacing tornado, kicking up dust and debris. It let out a high-pitched, haunting yell.

Mako charged up her powers and combined her two lightning balls into a larger one. She dug her heels into the ground, mentally preparing herself to withstand the dark energy onslaught at any cost.

Ami joined Mako's side and summoned a smaller, weaker ball of water energy. "I know it's not much, but I'm not letting you fight this alone!" she said.

With teary smiles, the two girls merged their energy spheres together and held hands. "It's just like we practiced," Mako said. "We got this!"

The tension in the air reached its zenith, both parties charging up their respective attacks in a climactic confrontation. Metalia's powers attained its peak, a malevolent force ready to strike. The dark entity reveled in its apparent invincibility, unleashing a pompous, haunting laugh. Fueled by a delusional level of arrogance, Metalia seized the opportunity to attack first, certain in its ultimate victory. With an ominous roar, Metalia launched its final attack.

POOF!

It choked out a pathetic plume of black smoke and dust.

A heavy, tense silence hung in the air. "*What?!!*" Metalia uttered in disgust. "*WHAT?!!!*"

"Looking for these?" Suzuki yelled, emerging triumphantly from the black clouds. In her hands were three brilliant crystals—red, yellow, and silvery-white. She clutched the crystals close to her chest and darted away from Metalia's core. "Bye-bye, sucker!"

"SUZUKI!!" Ami yelled, hopping up and down in excitement like a bunny.

Mako leapt into the air with her fist held high and shouted, “WE ARE BACK IN BUSINESS!”

The three girls huddled together and marveled at the three crystals, their faces shimmering with a rainbow of colors.

“I’m at a loss for words. Suzuki, how did you—”

“Easy, Ami! You two did all the hard work to weaken it. While it was distracted, I snuck in and got ‘em!”

Mako gave Suzuki a high-five. “Badass! Think you can get these back to our friends?”

Suzuki nodded and grabbed all three crystals.

Ami gave Suzuki a big, heartwarming hug. “Thank you! Get back quick!”

“Sure thing. You two going to be okay here?”

“No worries, we got this,” Mako said.

Suzuki gave Ami a salute and rushed off toward basecamp with the three Sailor crystals.

Ami and Mako turned around to face Metalia, only to find the once formidable entity reduced to a pathetic shadow of its former self.

“*No!*” Metalia shouted, its voice conveying hurt. “*How dare you take what is rightfully mine? How DARE you?*”

“A Sailor Guardian’s power must only be used for good,” Ami said, holding a fist to her heart righteously. “It is for keeping peace in this world, and for protecting those we cherish!”

Metalia’s red eyes widened into a look of astonishment. “*But...I had all that power! It was all mine! How? How did I lose?*”

“Because the forces of hope, friendship, and good will ALWAYS triumph,” Mako shouted, pointing her finger in anger. “Face it, you dumb cloud! Your evil days are numbered!”

Mako grabbed Ami’s hand and summoned another big ball of thunder energy. “You ready, Ami? Let’s send this thing back to the dark ages!”

“*WAIT!*” Metalia shouted, swirling its clouds in a desperate frenzy. “*PLEASE! I...I have an offer to make.*”

Ami raised her eyebrows in disbelief. “An offer? You want to make a deal with us, after how much you tormented us?”

“Pathetic!” Mako said, channeling more energy into her attack. “I’m done listening to this—”

“*Your parents, Sailor Jupiter,*” Metalia said, its sinister voice softening. “*Your parents loved you oh so much.*”

Mako glared, leaning forward with intrigue. “Excuse me?”

“*Spare me...and you’ll be granted any wish you desire. Anything,*” Metalia said. “*My powers will see to it.*”

Ami grabbed Mako’s hand. “It’s a trick. Mako don’t...”

Before Ami could finish her thought, she looked up and saw Mako crying. For Mako, it was her greatest sorrow, a tragic loss that would forever pain her soul. Metalia’s offer had triggered a visceral emotional reaction, and for a moment, Mako genuinely considered it.

“*Anything you want,*” Metalia chanted hypnotically. In a deep section of Metalia’s core, a cloud quietly floated up, glowing with purple dark energy. “*Anything...*” it whispered again.

Mako tightened her grip around Ami's hand and looked down at her girlfriend with a poignant smile. Ami gazed back in silent understanding, tears shimmering in her vibrant blue eyes.

"Nice try, asshole," Mako said, giving Metalia a cocky smirk. "But my friends mean everything to me! I wouldn't trade them for *anything!*"

Metalia emitted a sinister chuckle. "*Hehehe...so be it then, FOOLS!*"

SHHZZZAPP!!!!

"MAKO WATCH OUT!"

A powerful dark energy bolt rocketed out of Metalia's core. Mako swiftly launched her thunder attack, striking the dark bolt just in time. *BOOOOOM!* The ferocious explosion knocked Ami and Mako to the ground, showering them with sparks and debris. They staggered back to their feet, arms around each other, the sneak attack leaving them stunned and disoriented.

"Owwww," Mako groaned, rubbing her knee. Her sailor uniform was scratched and torn.

Ami's miniskirt, gloves, and boots had rips and tears. Her hands trembling, she pointed her computer sensor at Metalia's core. *BEEP BEEP BEEP!*

"Queen Beryl's soul," Ami said, snapping the computer shut. "There was one more crystal we forgot about."

Mako clenched her fist. "Damn it!"

Exhausted, drained, but determined, the two girls held each other close, preparing for another devastating onslaught. They watched

with weary, almost helpless eyes, as Metalia summoned a storm of glowing purple clouds, each sizzling with malicious dark energy. “*Goodnight, ladies,*” the cold mechanical voice said mercilessly.

“Joint attack?” Ami asked, her voice out of breath.

Mako nodded, trying to hide her extreme fatigue.

“Water...electricity...boom.”

Gazing heroically at the mass of storm clouds, the two girls held hands and summoned their powers, auras of blue and green light shining against a backdrop of darkness.

An angelic, golden light beam tore through the tension filled air suddenly.

“*VENUS! CRESCENT BEAM!*”

The glorious energy attack smashed through Metalia’s core, obliterating half of the storm clouds. *BOOOOM!!*

Metalia unleashed a furious roar. Before it could retaliate, two more celestial attacks beamed through its shadowy body.

“*MOON! TIARA BOOMERANG!!*”

“*MARS! FIRE IGNITE!*”

A fiery, magical explosion destroyed the remaining storm clouds, leaving Metalia a smoldering, frazzled mess of smoke.

“*NOOOOOOOOOO!!*” it screamed, its haunting voice shaking the sky.

Sailor Moon, Mars, and Venus sprinted over, their bright colorful costumes radiating an aura of hope, love, and friendship.

“FOR LOVE!” Venus yelled.

“FOR JUSTICE!” Mars added.

Sailor Moon spun around on her red boots and flashed a cute wink. “IN THE NAME OF THE MOON!”

All three Sailor Guardians raised their arms, struck stylish, superheroic poses, and yelled in unison, “WE’LL PUNISH YOU!”

Ami jumped with joy as Usagi raced over. “Oh my gosh! Usagi!” Ami cried, grabbing her friend in a big hug. “I thought I’d never see you again!”

Minako joined in and gave Mako a spirited embrace. “We almost missed the party!”

“Nice entrance!” Mako replied, giving Minako a fist bump.

Rei jogged over with Suzuki by her side. “Ami! Mako! We were worried sick! Are you two okay?”

Suzuki floated up beside the reassembled team of five girls. “I almost flew right past them! You girls really are something else!”

Zoisite joined the group, with Sakura and Hypnosia behind him, the three of them out of breath. “*Awww*, is that fucking thing still not dead yet?” he yelled in exasperation, pointing to Metalia’s dark clouds.

Surrounded by all her dear friends, safe and sound, Ami collapsed to her knees, crying with an overwhelming flood of relief. Everyone lent a helping hand, supporting Ami with love, tears, and kind words. Getting back to her feet, Ami glanced at each of her friends with a warm, precious smile. “Let’s finish this” she said, summoning a bright blue water orb.

The entire group nodded and turned to face Metalia's shadowy, sinister form. Metalia huffed and growled in anger, its evil red eyes glaring back at the group. "*You will never win,*" it said. "**NEVER!!**"

Ami raised her hands and floated the magical water sphere to the center of the group. "We'll see about that. Everyone ready?"

Suzuki led the charge and enthusiastically thrashed her purple ribbon into the sphere. "MIDNIGHT! RIBBON STRIKE!" she chanted, sending forth a surge of energy.

Hypnosia and Sakura grinned, joining their attacks together.

"NEEDLE STORM! BARRAGE!"

"WOODLAND VINE SMASH!"

The energy sphere grew bigger, swirling with new verdant green and purple shades.

Metalia's terrified eyes grew wider. "*No! Any wish! Anything you want!*" It made eye contact with Zoisite and pleaded desperately.

"*Infinite power! Ruler of the galaxy! ANYTHING!!*"

Zoisite shrugged and summoned a ball of energy.

"GIANT...POWER THINGY!" he shouted, shooting the energy into the sphere. The three youma ladies looked at him with cheeky grins.

"**NO!**" Metalia screamed, watching in horror as the sphere grew bigger. "**CURSE YOU!!**"

The group turned their attention to Sailor Moon. "Oh! Right, my turn," she said sheepishly. With an enchanting aura, Sailor Moon pressed the jewel in her tiara and shouted, "MOON! TWILIGHT FLASH!" A magical yellow beam of moonlight shot out of the jewel.

“VENUS! CRESCENT BEAM!” Minako chanted, a beautiful golden light beam shooting out of her fingertips.

Rei stepped forward, her long raven hair flowing elegantly as she chanted, “MARS! FIRE IGNITE!”

An epic fireball blasted into the sphere, giving it a swirling orange ring of flames.

Mako spread her legs apart and raised her fist to the stratosphere. A lightning bolt surged down from the sky. “SUPREME! THUNDERRRRRR!” she shouted, channeling a furious barrage of thunder energy into the sphere.

The colossal energy sphere ascended to the sky, its swirling core dazzling the group with a mesmerizing dance of light, fire, and lightning energy. Everyone looked to Ami, her eyes glistening with tears as she marveled at the raw spectacle. With a kaleidoscope of hues painting her face and a divine voice that shook the heavens, Ami summoned her ethereal water powers.

“SHINE! AQUAAAAAAAAA!!!!”

A beautiful stream of water energy rushed into the sphere, surrounding it with majestic, sparkling blue droplets. The energy sphere swelled and ascended higher, kicking off a fierce windstorm that blew the teardrops off everyone’s faces. Its brightness reached an almighty crescendo, shining brighter than the sun, brighter than any star in the galaxy, and blinding the celestial gods themselves.

Ami shut her eyes, savoring the sphere’s warmth, sensing the love from all her friends, and cherishing the profound, emotional moment. Raising her arms, Ami channeled everyone’s hopes and dreams, their love and friendship, their struggles and heartache, and

their poignant memories, into a harmonious symphony of cosmic energy that transcended the boundaries of time. With all the good, purity and kindness in her heart, and a fierce determination to seal away the evil forces of the world once and for all, Ami sent forth the awe-inspiring energy sphere and shouted the final iconic word of her celestial incantation.

“ILLUSION!!!!”

Everything went white—the clouds, the sky, and the landscape, all disappeared under a curtain of climactic, blinding light.

Metalia unleashed a dreadful, fatal scream—but the sound traveled to no one’s ears. The entire world was silent.

There was nothing Metalia could do. No amount of taunts, threats, or negotiation was going to stop the apocalyptic energy surge from annihilating its very existence. Brilliant tendrils of light, woven with threads of divine power, coiled around Metalia’s dark core. The very essence of Metalia’s evil, down to each fundamental unit of dark energy, unraveled under the destructive celestial energy force. As Metalia’s red eyes disintegrated to stardust, it gazed toward the sky, basking under a beautiful, surreal sunset. In its final moments, a serene calm enveloped its essence, before it faded from existence, merging back into the intricate fabric of the cosmos.

Chapter 31. Goodbye

Suzuki soared through the sky with graceful ease, her ankle wings propelling her to a vantage point where she could marvel at the exquisite, gorgeous sunset. As she gazed in wonder across the horizon, the vibrant hues of the setting sun colored the sky with warm tones—burnished oranges, subdued pinks, and tranquil purples. She savored the magnificent sight for a while longer, then glided back to the group with a beaming smile.

There was an atmosphere of jubilation within the group. Laughter, cheers, smiles, and of course tears, spread through their midst like a wildfire of emotions. Particular tribute was paid to Ami, Mako, and Suzuki—the *Winged Warriors* as they had become known as. Ami shied away from the attention, choosing to remain modest amidst the accolades. She showered praise on her friends, commending everyone personally for their bravery.

“I can’t believe we did it,” Usagi said, her blonde pigtails flowing in the wind. “Is it finally over?”

Ami scanned the sky with her computer, the sun casting a warm glow over her boots and skirt. “It’s gone,” she said, shutting the computer. “Our combined powers sealed Metalia away for good. While we don’t know what the future will hold...what we *do* know, is that together, we are a force for good that knows no limits.”

Mako smacked Ami's back. "What she's *really* trying to say, is we kicked some serious butt back there!"

Ami giggled and shoved Mako away playfully. Mako grabbed Ami's hand and pulled her back, swinging her around in a silly dance. The two lovers gazed at each other fondly and kissed, melting the hearts of the entire group.

Zoisite cordially shook the hands of his youma partners. "Ladies, I want to extend my deepest...my deepest—"

He choked suddenly and turned around, his cheeks red with embarrassment. "I'm sorry," he said, wiping a tear away. "I'm sorry for all the—"

Sakura and Hypnosia grabbed Zoisite and gave him a sincere hug.

"Don't worry, master," Hypnosia said. "I'm glad we got to share in this adventure together."

Sakura nodded and used Zoisite's sleeve to dry her eyes.

"Seconded, master. And remember...team sleepy-pollen forever!"

"Gas," Hypnosia replied with a snuffle.

"Oh, whatever."

"Are you crying," Minako said, giving Rei a teasing smile. "Come here you!"

Rei crossed her arms and turned away. "Nope! I'm just keeping my guard up in case the evil comes back."

Minako stuck her tongue out and grabbed Rei's arm. "Oh please! Loosen up a bit! We won!"

The two girls gazed into each other's eyes, an awkward, seductive tension hanging in the air between them. Minako shook her head and said, "Besides...isn't there a special someone...ya know...that you need to—"

"No! It's...it's not like that," Rei interrupted, her face blushing crimson red.

With a charming smile, Minako pointed to herself and said, "Hello? Guardian of Love here!"

Rei stomped her heel in frustration. "Can you stop already, Mina! I told you, it's not—"

Rei checked her surroundings suddenly, a look of concern on her face. "Wait...where did she go?"

Ami pulled Usagi aside. The two of them engaged in a solemn conversation, occasionally glancing over at Zoisite's youma ladies.

"You ready for this?" Ami said, tenderly holding Usagi's wrists.

Usagi's hands trembled, the moon wand clasped between them. She gave Ami a heartbreaking frown. "I don't know if I can..."

"I know it's not easy...but...it's our duty," Ami replied, her lower lip quivering.

As the voice of reason, Ami struggled to keep a firm face in front of her friend. Yet without fail, the emotional toil swelled past Ami's limits, crushing her heart. She hugged Usagi and choked back an upsetting sob.

Zoisite walked over and placed a gentle hand over Ami's back. "Hey...I think we have a problem."

Suzuki had separated from the group and was sitting alone on a stone surface, gazing somberly at the sunset. She turned around, alerted by the sounds of footsteps.

Ami and Mako walked over and joined her side.

“Thank you again for saving me,” Ami said tenderly. “The Sailor Guardians are forever in your debt, Suzuki.”

Mako leaned forward, blocking Suzuki’s view slightly. “You kicked ass today! Thank you so much for everything.”

Suzuki jerked her head away and hopped off the rock. “Why are you erasing my memories then?” she said, glaring at them with indignation.

The direct question left Ami and Mako dumbstruck and speechless.

Suzuki kicked a stone away and pouted like an angry child. “This is the thanks I get? After risking my life for you girls?”

Ami walked over and tried to put a hand on Suzuki’s shoulder. “Listen...I know this is difficult...but...but we can’t—”

“Can’t what?!” Suzuki yelled, flashing her fangs. “Can’t let me stay like this? Like a *monster*?”

Ami shook her head, her voice rising in agitation. “No! No of course you’re not a monster, Suzuki! But think about your friends. Your family...”

“Your *parents*,” Mako added.

Suzuki gave both girls a look of astonishment and disbelief. “I thought *we* were friends,” she said, her tone softening. She blinked hard, sending a stream of tears down her face. Without waiting for a response, she flapped her ankle wings and floated further away.

Ami and Mako shuffled back to the group, their heads hung low.

“How did it go?” Zoisite asked.

“Awful,” Mako replied.

“She’s very upset,” Ami said. “And she has every right to be.”

Usagi walked over clutching the moon wand. “What do we do?”

Sakura twirled a purple flower in her hand. “I can grab her with my vines...”

“And I can gas her,” Hypnosia added, pulling out a rubber mask.

Minako threw her hands up. “Yeah, see...this is *WHY* we need to change you back!”

Rei folded her arms and listened as the group engaged in a lively debate over the ethics of memory erasure. Growing frustrated, she marched over to Zoisite and pulled him aside. She whispered in his ear and he nodded, giving Rei a firm handshake. Rei then turned around and strolled away from the group.

“Hey...where’s Rei going?” Minako asked.



The sounds of heels clacking over stone caused Suzuki’s heart to skip a beat. She spun around and was greeted by the sight of a dashing, exotic Sailor Mars sauntering over.

Rei’s silky, raven hair flowed elegantly behind her, disappearing behind the golden light of a setting sun. Her red miniskirt brushed across a pair of ravishing bare thighs, while her alluring hips swayed side

to side. Rei's white leotard and gloves heightened her appeal, enhancing her superheroic nature. Her golden tiara and red heels glistened in the warm sunlight, adding a sparkly charm to her natural beauty.

Suzuki floated over, unable to resist basking in the glow of Sailor Mars' aura. She whispered Rei's name, but Rei put a finger over Suzuki's lips.

"*Shhhhh*...I heard all about your bravery," Rei said, gently caressing her cheek. "You're a hero, Suzuki."

Suzuki blushed lovingly. "You inspired me."

"I could chastise you, if you want," Rei replied with a flirty grin.

The two girls shared a giggle and stepped closer together.

"Let me become a Sailor Guardian," Suzuki said, her expression turning serious. "Please! I can fly, I'm acrobatic, I can attack! Let me fight alongside you, Rei!"

Rei shook her head. "It's impossible..."

"Why not? Ask Sailor Moon to...I don't know...use her powers or something!"

"You know we can't, Suzuki..."

"No! Y—You...can't do this to me..."

The youma couldn't finish her thought, trembling as a whirlwind of emotions flooded her mind—anger, frustration, sorrow, and infatuation.

Rei pulled Suzuki into a comforting embrace and stroked her hair, keeping one of her hands closed in a fist.

Suzuki buried her face into Rei's neck and sobbed, pouring her entire heart out. "Please...please Rei, I...I don't want to forget..."

“*Sbbbb*, you won’t forget,” Rei said, her silky voice soothing the frightened youma. “You won’t forget...I promise.”

Clutching Rei’s collar, Suzuki gazed up with tears flooding down her cheeks, her eyes like a sad puppy. “Promise?”

Rei gently held Suzuki’s head, struggling to hold back her own tears. “Promise.”

The two girls held each other close, the warm sun providing a stunning backdrop to the intimate, romantic moment. They exchanged loving gazes, their eyes gleaming with poignant tears, their faces blushing. Their hands, timid at first, began to glide over each other’s smooth bodies in a seductive dance.

Suzuki struck first, kissing Rei’s ruby-red lips with passion, unleashing the full force of her pent up emotions. Rei responded with dainty, almost shy pecks, gradually increasing the strength of her kisses until she let out a salacious gasp.

As their affectionate feelings intensified, Suzuki’s ankle wings fluttered like a lovesick butterfly. She gently reached under Rei’s miniskirt, her fingers brushing past the fabric hem and gripping Rei’s fleshy rear. Suzuki ascended, pulling Rei’s hips closer as the two girls levitated toward the beautiful sky. Their warm lips touched again, the delicate kiss flooding them with a rush of romantic—and pleasurable—feelings. With a seductive feminine moan, Suzuki pressed her mouth forward, tasting the sweetness on Rei’s tongue. A vortex of flaming embers swirled around the two girls, flickering and weaving in a celestial waltz that radiated a boundless warmth.

They floated back to the ground, their heels making soft clacks.

“I never want this to end,” Suzuki whispered, pulling away from the kiss slightly. She clasped Rei’s hand, admiring the striking beauty of her dark eyes. Rei’s fresh floral fragrance wafted over, titillating Suzuki’s senses.

Rei stroked her knuckles up Suzuki’s back, gliding across the leotard’s smooth fabric. She brought her fist to Suzuki’s neck and held it there, trying her hardest not to tremble.

“Closer,” Rei whispered, her voice calm. She closed her eyes and slowly parted her ruby-red lips.

Unable to resist temptation, Suzuki leaned forward, giving Rei a steamy, passionate kiss. She then moved to Rei’s cheeks and neck, leaving behind a trail of moist kisses on her delicate skin. Suzuki opened one eye, a tiny bright glint catching her attention—perhaps just a ray of sunlight shining through Rei’s hand. Ignoring the sparkle, Suzuki turned her attention back to Rei’s lovely red lips, coming back for one final, arousing kiss.

FFFFTTTT!

Suzuki knew it was over the moment she felt the cold, sharp needle slither deep into her neck. She gasped at the acute, stinging pain, widening her eyes with a look of disbelief, heartbreak, and betrayal. A warm numbness spread through Suzuki’s neck as Rei depressed the needle’s plunger—delivering a powerful anesthetic straight to Suzuki’s brain.

“W—Why...” Suzuki whispered, her voice shaking. “Y—you promised...”

“I’m sorry, Suzuki,” Rei said, flinging the needle away. She gazed mournfully at Suzuki, watching the youma struggle to remain awake. “I’m so sorry...”

Suzuki attempted to fly away, but Rei kept a firm grip over her shoulders, preventing her escape. Suzuki’s ankle wings gradually lost their vitality, until they completely ceased all movement.

A crushing wave of sleepiness smashed into Suzuki and she collapsed over her knees. She clutched Rei’s sailor collar, gripping it with trembling hands, almost yanking Rei to the ground. Suzuki slowly slid down Rei’s body, her hands gliding past Rei’s breasts, belly, and waist, her fingers losing strength with each passing moment.

Rei grabbed Suzuki’s upper back before she could tumble to the ground.

Suzuki gazed up helplessly, her eyelashes fluttering and her lips quivering as she struggled against the overwhelming fatigue. “Please...I...I don’t want to forget,” she begged, her voice weakening to a quiet whimper. “Rei...I...I...”

The powerful drug sapped the last flicker of consciousness in Suzuki’s mind, killing the thought before it could escape Suzuki’s lips. With a delicate moan, she fainted, passing out completely in Rei’s arms.

Rei lifted her up, carrying Suzuki’s petite, sleeping form like she was a fairytale princess. “Goodbye, Suzuki. You’ll always be my hero,” Rei whispered with a bittersweet smile. She leaned down and kissed Suzuki’s forehead fondly. Teardrops landed over Suzuki’s cheeks. The red bow around Suzuki’s neck flapped listlessly in the wind, like the echo of a distant memory.

The sun dipped under the horizon, transforming the sky into a rich indigo hue and providing closure to the day's dramatic events. A long shadow stretched across the landscape, slowly advancing back to the group, where everyone waited with breathless anticipation.

Ami jogged over to Rei's side and placed a concerned hand over Suzuki's head.

"She's asleep," Rei said impassively.

Ami nodded solemnly and guided her to where the others were waiting. "This is the hardest thing I've had to do all day."

The five Sailor Guardians were gathered in a circle, their skirts and bows fluttering gently in the breeze. Hypnosia and Sakura stood in the center, holding hands, with sentimental smiles on their faces. A short distance away was Zoisite, standing at attention next to a humming energy portal—a blurry image of the Hikawa Shrine peeking through.

Sakura twirled around in her leafy dress and tossed her flower crown. *POOF!* The crown transformed into a bouquet of beautiful purple flowers. She handed the flowers to Mako, bowing graciously. "No hard feelings?"

Mako accepted the gift and bowed in return. "We're good...you take care!" She brought the flowers to her nose, sniffing them gingerly.

"Don't worry," Sakura said with a playful grin. "They're safe."

Hypnosia stepped forward and handed Ami a brown glass bottle. “It’s not much...but, here...thanks for everything, Sailor Mercury.”

Ami chuckled softly as she examined the bottle, feeling the liquid slosh inside. “Wow...I appreciate it...”

“It’s vintage,” Hypnosia said with a proud grin.

Ami glanced back, a sparkle in her eye. “1847?”

Rei placed the sleeping Suzuki in Hypnosia’s arms. She stroked Suzuki’s hair one last time, before walking away with a sad, lingering touch.

Minako linked arms with Rei, and the two friends leaned into each other, crying quietly.

Sailor Moon stepped forward, her powerful celestial aura capturing everyone’s attention. With a deep breath and a heavy heart, she lifted the Crescent Moon Wand toward the sky. “Your bravery will never be forgotten,” she said, projecting a heroic voice. “May your hearts shine brightly for all eternity.”

She spun around elegantly over her red boots, twirling her blue miniskirt and blonde pigtails. Magical pink sparkles shimmered around her body. Sailor Moon pointed the wand at the three youma, tears twinkling from her eyes and her voice wavering.

“MOOOOON!”

“HEALING!!”

A magical pink light radiated from the wand, enveloping Sakura, Hypnosia, and Suzuki in a luminous, enchanting aura.

Ami, Mako, Minako, and Rei waved a heartfelt goodbye to their friends, not a single dry eye among them, each one cherishing the shared journey that had brought them together.

Sailor Moon struggled profusely, choking back tears and shutting her eyes as she summoned the last word of her noble celestial incantation.

“E—ESCALATION!!!”

A serene, pink light enveloped the entire world. Under the glow’s peaceful warmth, the burdens of pain melted away, leaving everyone’s hearts brimming with only the joyful, thrilling memories of their shared adventures.

Chapter 32. Epilogue

“Careful, Ami...don’t trip!” Mako said.

Ami tiptoed forward, with a nervous smile on her face and a blindfold covering her eyes. Mako held Ami’s hand and guided her to a chair.

“Can I take the blindfold off now?” Ami asked, turning her head around.

“Nope!” Mako replied. “Usagi, can you bring the ropes and the ball-gag?”

Ami nearly bolted out of her seat, but Mako placed a reassuring hand over Ami’s back. “Just kidding! You can take it off now.”

Ami slipped the blindfold off her forehead and was greeted by the sight of her four smiling friends, sitting in the Crown Arcade’s familiar dining room. On the table in front of her, was a delectable square cake, with the words ‘Congratulations, Ami! ♀ ’ written in light-blue frosting.

“*SURPRISE!*” everyone said.

“Wow!” Ami said, clasping her hands together. “Thank you so much, everyone!”

“Hope you like vanilla!” Minako said.

Rei pushed a over a small envelope with Ami’s name on it. “You better! Mako spent all night baking it.”

“I had to hide all my ingredients,” Mako said, rubbing the back of her head. “Ami’s way too smart...she nearly figured out the surprise!”

Usagi looked across the room excitedly and waved at someone.
“Over here!”

Zoisite walked over with Luna perched over his shoulder. He was wearing a dress shirt and a vest, with a name tag that said ‘Crown Arcade Team Member.’ He brought over some plates, silverwares, and drinks. “Can I bring you anything else, ladies?”

Mako gave him a thumbs up. “We’re good!”

Ami couldn’t help but giggle at the ridiculous sight, the once powerful Dark Kingdom general reduced to being a waiter.

Luna hopped on to the table. “Zoisite’s just been promoted to manager too!”

“Wow, nice job!” Usagi said.

Zoisite bowed graciously. “Thank you, thank you.”

Ami patted Luna’s furry head. “So...how’s Kunzite doing?”

“Getting better,” Luna replied. “Anger management therapy is helping a lot.”

“Can you find him another apartment though?” Zoisite said.
“Loudest. Snore. *Ever.*”

Everyone laughed at the funny quip.

Luna pushed over a compact computer and pointed to a map on its screen. “After sealing Metalia away, all the natural disasters vanished. It’s truly miraculous!”

Ami closed the computer lid and moved it away. “Haha...yeah, scientists are going to be scratching their heads at that for a *long* time.”

“Anyway!” Mako said, drawing attention to the cake. “Shall we?”

“Sure! But...I’m confused about something,” Ami said, looking down at the cake. “Why are you all congratulating me?”

The room fell silent and everyone glanced at each other with mischievous grins.

“Usagi...want to do the honors?” Mako said.

Usagi cleared her throat and stood up. She pulled out her Crescent Moon Wand and twirled it in the air. In a puff of magic, the wand’s pink handle extended to the length of her body. She held the wand like a regal queen, her expression turning serious. “Ami...please rise.”

Ami looked around nervously, the sudden attention triggering a mini anxiety attack for the shy girl. Mako touched Ami’s arm and gave her a confident smile.

“What’s...going on?” Ami said timidly, rising from her chair.

Usagi stood in front of Ami and tapped the moon wand over Ami’s shoulder.

“Friends...today is a momentous occasion as we gather here to recognize one of our own,” Usagi said, projecting her voice with regal power. “Sailor Mercury...Guardian of Water and Wisdom, has displayed unparalleled bravery in the face of adversity, guiding us through the darkest of times.”

Ami bowed her head and cried, the dignified, ceremonious words triggering a wave of emotions.

Mako dabbed her eyes with a tissue. Everyone else looked on in revered silence.

Usagi continued her speech, her voice beginning to crack. “In recognition of Sailor Mercury’s unwavering courage, and with the authority granted to me by the Moon Kingdom, I am deeply honored to proclaim her...*leader* of the Sailor Guardians.”

Ami collapsed to her knees and sobbed. “U—Usagi, I...I don’t know what to say...”

With tears streaming down her own face, Usagi lifted the wand and tapped Ami’s other shoulder. “Sailor Mercury...Ami...please know that your humble bravery has served as an inspiration to all of us. We will forever be by your side. May you find the strength to become the greatest champion of justice the world has ever known!”

The entire room erupted into cheers and applause. Ami jumped and gave Usagi a big, endearing hug.

“Usagi...that was beautiful! I am so honored,” Ami said, drying her eyes. “But...but I don’t think I can—”

“It was unanimous,” Rei said.

“Yep...we all voted,” Minako added.

Usagi clasped Ami’s hand and said, “You’ve already proven yourself. You’re going to be an amazing leader, Ami.”

Zoisite pressed a button on the arcade’s jukebox and a romantic rock ballad started playing on the speakers. “Music, anyone?”

The entire group stepped aside, leaving Ami and Mako alone in the center.

“Oh my gosh,” Ami said, blushing adorably.

Mako darted her eyes around awkwardly. “Ummm...this wasn’t part of the rehearsal...”

Ami laughed and gazed lovingly into Mako’s eyes. She extended her hand confidently and said, “Mako...may I have this dance?”

The sweet, wholesome dance melted the hearts of everyone in the room. Both girls were nervous, of course. They clasped each other’s hands, fumbling around for the right position, their inexperience glaring. They stepped on each other’s toes, struggling to find the right rhythm. They laughed and they cried, but within moments, the two lovers found their groove to the music.

While Ami would go on to share countless dances with Mako in the future, she knew for certain that their inaugural dance—their very first—would be the one she cherished most for the rest of her life.



Suzuki executed a graceful forward handspring on the track field, her movements flowing like a bird in flight. She landed on her toes with her hands held high and a beaming smile across her face.

She was wearing a navy-blue miniskirt, a form fitting sleeved shirt, and a matching vest with the school’s cheerleading squad logo. Her hair was tied into a ponytail—with a cute red bow. She jogged over to a group of three other girls, all wearing matching outfits, and gave them high-fives.

“GOOD JOB SUZUKI!!”

A loud cheer from the bleacher stands caught Suzuki's attention. She spun around and noticed a girl with blonde odango hair buns jumping up and down. Next to her was a girl wearing a bright red ribbon in her blonde hair—she too was waving. A girl with short blue hair was reading a book, cuddled next to a brunette in a ponytail. Finally, there was Rei Hino, holding her forehead in embarrassment.

Suzuki waved and called out Rei's name.

Rei perked up and smiled. She grabbed her purse and jogged down the bleacher stands.

"You still have to show me that move," Rei said, blushing as she approached.

Suzuki twirled a strand of her hair and looked away with a shy smile. "*Ohhhh*...you'll get it. I mean, you *are* a superhero after all, right Rei?"

Rei widened her eyes in surprise and didn't respond.

"Just kidding," Suzuki said, giggling.

"Anyway," Rei said, shaking her head awkwardly. "How...how have you been?"

"Ehhh...good, I guess. My therapist can't explain any of the weird dreams. Too many movies, probably."

Rei nodded in understanding. "It's a strange world."

"Yep."

The two girls shuffled their feet aimlessly as charming blushes crept across their cheeks.

"So...are those your friends?" Suzuki asked, pointing to the bleacher stands.

Rei let out a flustered laugh. “Oh! Right! Sorry...I...do you, want to meet up with them after practice?”

“Definitely!”

“4 o’ clock, at my shrine?”

“Done!” Suzuki replied, giving a thumbs up. She then turned around and waved to her other cheerleader friends.

“Oh! Before I forget,” Rei said, opening her purse. “Here, Ami wanted you to have this.”

Suzuki looked down as Rei handed her a small keychain with a chess piece attached to it. “Ohhh...that’s so cute! It’s a...a...”

“A rook,” Rei said.

Suzuki smiled and held the keychain up, admiring the tiny castle shaped trinket. “I love it! Tell Ami I said thanks.”

“Of course,” Rei said, brushing back some of her raven hair. “See you later, okay?”

Before saying goodbye, Suzuki glanced inside Rei’s purse—a shiny glint catching her attention. It looked like a golden wand or a pen of some kind, unlike any Suzuki had ever seen before. She had no idea what it was, but was captivated by its shimmering aura and a beautiful red symbol of Mars, reflecting off her eyes. For the briefest moment, there was a flicker in her mind, a tiny flash of recognition that filled her with intense emotions. In the blink of an eye however, the fleeting moment vanished, and Suzuki waved a farewell to Rei, before sprinting off to join her friends.



Afterword

Congratulations. You made it to the end! How do you feel? Relieved? Excited for more? Still drying your eyes?

Anyway, thank you so much for giving *Final Battle* a read. This was a passion project that spanned the course of almost seven months. Please don't leave me hanging! Send me a note or comment letting me know what you think!

Now that you've read the full story, I want to share some details on how this came about. It's quite interesting.

Let's get some big stuff out of the way first. Zoisite—is supposed to be dead. At least in all my outlines and early drafts of this story. He was going to die a big heroic death, sacrificing his life somehow for Sailor Mercury. It was to be a turning point in the story, that drives Ami to defeat the ultimate evil. Kunzite too, I had expected to kill off. One idea I wanted to do was to have Zoisite kill Kunzite. Another idea was to have Metalia or Queen Beryl kill Kunzite in a fit of rage. But in the end, I spared both—and I'll explain why.

I blame Suzuki. Suzuki's entrance into the story altered the course of events significantly. Once Suzuki became a secondary protagonist, Zoisite and Kunzite diminished as characters. They just weren't that important anymore. And so giving Zoisite a dramatic death would have created an imbalance. Besides—Zoisite is actually a cool character, who I think deserves more story. He's also not a murderer, which is why Kunzite lived.

So let's talk about Suzuki, because she's probably the character on everyone's minds right now. First let's set things straight: Suzuki appeared in *Sailor Guardians vs. Hypnosia*, and *Ami's Gift to Mako*. She started off as an unnamed cheerleader who gets gassed to sleep. Later she's turned into a youma who knocks people out with kisses. Of the three villains I created, Suzuki is my favorite. Her design with the ankle wings is loosely based on the Greek god Hermes (who is...surprise surprise, Mercury!)

For *Final Battle*, I knew from the start that I was going to bring back my three youma villains—Hypnosia, Sakura, and Suzuki (aka, Chiarida.) It was a nice way to round out my series and a chance to give them more development. I loved the idea. Suzuki was going to have a prominent role as the ringleader for the group. But she wasn't intended to go *beyond* that. The three youma were simply tools to capture the five Sailor Guardians, nothing more. In my original plan, I did not have any further use for them after the Sailor Guardians were captured. To understand *why* that is, you need to know what my original story plan was.

This was originally going to be a time travel story. Yes, you heard that right. Time fucking travel. The working title for this story was “Ami and Mako's Timeless Love.” Cheesy, I know.

The plot would have basically followed the same trajectory up until the chapter *Shifting Loyalties*. Ami was going to be the last one standing. She would be forced to chloroform Mako, and then herself. Tragic. Then, out of nowhere, a time portal was going to open up. Ami and Zoisite were going to fall into the time portal, and when they woke

up, they would find themselves in the Silver Millennium. Yes—a thousand years in the past. In a shocking twist, Ami would be forced to work with Zoisite to escape. Lots of sleepy peril shenanigans would ensue. I even planned to have Ami meet her past self, the Silver Millennium Sailor Mercury.

This sounded really cool in my head. It was also a *nightmare* to figure out. It introduced what was basically a second story in my story. And it would have *killed* the narrative momentum up to that point. It had positive attributes. I really liked the idea of Ami teaming up with a villain. I liked the idea of filling in additional backstory on why the Sailor Guardians exist. But in the end, time travel introduced unnecessary complexity to an already long story. So I pivoted, and made the best decision ever:

I swapped Zoisite for Suzuki.

This one change shrunk the scope of the story significantly, and did not require rewriting anything up until *Shifting Loyalties*. It honestly made the story more fun, because Suzuki is just a more interesting character overall. She's spunky, she flies, and she kisses girls. It allowed the narrative momentum to continue all the way to the end. In fact, Suzuki's character introduced a moral conundrum that I exploited with great effect in the chapter *Goodbye*. It's astonishing to me how well this worked.

Mako unfortunately gets short changed *again* as a result. Suzuki supplants Mako in so many ways, becoming central to the plot in basically the last half of the story. I kept telling myself, give Mako

something to do! Poor Mako spends so much of the story getting tortured or knocked out.

The problem with Mako narratively, is that I don't have a good arc for her. She is really there to support our protagonist, Ami Mizuno. The whole arc I had planned for Ami, was to have her start out as that shy insecure Sailor Guardian, only to end up as the team leader. And of course, to win the love of her life. Mako is basically a punching bag I use to help develop Ami's character. If I were a better writer, I'd probably think of a stronger way to handle this.

Apologies to Usagi, Minako, and Rei fans. I didn't have enough time to give them development. They are side characters for the most part, although Rei does have a more prominent role as Suzuki's crush. Their final scene together is my favorite.

In every version of this story that I pondered, two key events always happened: *Rules of Engagement*, and *The Dance*—Ami's fight with Kunzite, and the crane/dragon spirit dance. I knew no matter what path I took, I *needed* to have a scene where the crane and dragon danced. That's because I wanted dancing to be one of the subplots. Their brief dance in episode 147 of the anime is a classic, and is often cited as the beginnings of the Ami/Mako ship.

Mercury versus Kunzite was also a fight I wanted to include. How can anyone forget Mercury's iconic line, "Go bleach your roots creep!" from the DiC dub? While Kunzite is pretty evil in the anime, I dial it up to 11 for my story. I turned him into a power tripping, abusive asshole. He is designed to make Zoisite look sympathetic. Kunzite

basically tortures Jupiter, and beats the crap out of Mercury until Zoisite intervenes. It's supposed to be the low point for Ami in the story.

I didn't think Kunzite was redeemable by that point. Remember, I was originally going to kill him off. And that was still the plan, up until I wrote *chapter 22, The Rook*. When I started this chapter, I needed to make an important decision about how I was going to progress the plot. Namely, how was Ami going to defeat Queen Beryl and Queen Metalia? One of my first ideas was to have Ami and Suzuki get captured and taken to the Dark Kingdom. From there, they would get tortured and need to find a way to escape. From a peril perspective, this is great. But narratively, again this would have killed the momentum. It's like taking two steps back on the game board. By this point in the story, I was strongly motivated to wrap things up. I devised the betrayal plotline as a result.

I had Zoisite execute a coup against Kunzite. This solved the problem of defeating Queen Beryl, because I could just have the youma plus Ami team up against her. This was an important step in unblocking the plot, allowing me to race to the end. At that point, it's everyone versus Metalia, and that wasn't too hard to write. It's mostly just action scenes and shouting attacks. Kunzite also doesn't need to die for this plot to progress.

I wanted to complete Ami's arc with this story. In my headcanon, I've always considered Ami to be the "glue" that holds the Sailor Guardians together. While every girl on the team is important, Ami is the moral, spiritual compass. She's humble, shy, friendly, kind, and everyone just adores her. I believe Ami's loss would affect everyone

the most. The Sailor Moon series does explore this a few times. In one episode, Ami declares she is leaving the team. In PGSM, Ami is turned evil. I really wanted to explore this idea in my story, which is how I came up with the “hope” concept.

I put a ton of obstacles in Ami’s way, to force her to grow as a character. She makes many of the key decisions that drive the plot forward. By the end, there is no question that she’s grown to be the natural leader of the Sailor Guardians. Usagi proclaiming that fact in the epilogue is just a capstone moment, and not just a vanity speech I wanted to throw in.

I also didn’t want Ami to be so pure that she becomes boring. I could have easily just molded her into a classic badass superheroine who always wins. But that just isn’t who she is. She gets scared, she gets frustrated and she gets angry. At the low point of Kunzite’s fight, she berates Mako in her mind (I actually cut out some inner dialogue because it was TOO out of character for Ami.) One of my other favorite moments is when Ami tells Mako to “get off” the crane, because she doesn’t want to put Mako in danger. It shows how far Ami is willing to go to save her friends, even at the cost of her own kindness.

What Ami ends up learning is that you can’t do everything on your own and to succeed, you need the help of others. Ami starts off the story thinking she needs to sacrifice her own self in order to be a great hero. By the end, she’s relying on all her friends to help defeat the enemy.

It’s a cyclical relationship too. Everyone wants to help Ami, *because* she sacrifices so much. That’s the whole point of the chapter *Burden*, when out of nowhere the magical crane decides to go off on its

own and attack Metalia. The crane's spirit recognizes Ami's sacrifice and pays her back (this isn't explicitly told, just shown.)

Ami's kindness is also what drives everyone to abandon the Dark Kingdom and side with her (minus Kunzite, Beryl, and Metalia of course.) Beryl is effectively too corrupted to save by the end, but Ami tries anyway. Having Beryl die at Metalia's hands is more fitting because again, Ami doesn't kill. Beryl's demise mimics the finale of season one, in that she runs and begs Metalia to grant her the ultimate power.

My take on Queen Metalia and the Sailor Crystals is a mash-up of various pieces of Sailor Moon lore. Metalia doesn't have any corporeal form, and is only able to manifest itself as dark energy clouds. It is a pure evil force. It can also invade minds, which is the plot of the chapter *Hope*. It is hinted also, that Ami's nightmares in the beginning are perhaps also Metalia's doing.

The Sailor Crystals are what form the essence of the Sailor Guardians. It's the source of their celestial powers. This is a concept that I borrowed from the manga series. I make some key modifications to serve my story better. First, removing a Sailor Crystal doesn't kill the guardian (like it does in the manga.) In my story, it just removes their powers. Second, the power can be harnessed by someone else. In the chapter *Final Battle*, Metalia leverages Mars' and Venus' powers to destroy the crane and dragon spirits.

Metalia's goal is to collect the Sailor Crystals in order to expand its power. Without them, it's only ever stuck in the Dark Kingdom caves. Because Metalia is just an evil force, it needs human servants to

accomplish its goals. Beryl and her generals are just pawns in Metalia's grand scheme.

I introduced the concept of *hope* to provide a feasible way for Metalia to extract the crystals. Because up until that point, I had no idea how to solve that. In the manga, it's easy—the villains just kill the Sailor Guardians. But I can't do that for my story, because then I'd have to figure out how to bring them back. *Hope* became the lever I could pull to weaken the Sailor Guardians enough, so that Metalia could steal the crystals.

The crane and dragon spirits are original concepts in my universe. They were first introduced in *Ami's Gift to Mako*, when Ami and Dark Jupiter have their dramatic confrontation. It's such a cool concept and I wanted to bring it back. I love the idea of Sailor Guardians being able to summon animal spirits. For sure, I wanted to have a scene where the crane and dragon work together to fight Metalia. But then I'm like...what if we did more.

As I was brainstorming the chapters *Reunion* and *Liftoff*, I started to think about Ami riding the crane into battle like a valkyrie. Why not right? If you're going to have a giant bird, you have to ride it. It's too obvious to leave out. It worked out really well too, because Metalia's a giant cloud expanding in the sky. How exactly was Ami supposed to fight that thing from the ground?

In my original outline, I had Ami riding alone into battle. She defeats Metalia, but also falls from the sky—unconscious. I was planning to have Suzuki swoop in and catch Ami in a dramatic rescue.

This was a really fun idea that was stuck in my head for the longest time. My characters however, wanted to do something else.

Let's be honest, there is no way Mako would let Ami go it alone. It would have been so out of character for her to just stand by and let Ami fly away. So Mako gets on the crane without asking, prompting Ami to have that mini argument with her. Suzuki too, wouldn't have just stood by. She's very invested in the outcome and wants to prove herself as a hero—especially with Rei watching. So Suzuki's part of the strike team too.

The three person strike team ended up working out SO much better (I love Suzuki pretending to be a flight attendant...that was 100% my idea.) I was also able to work in the “falling sky rescue” scene, by using Suzuki instead as the damsel. Apologies for the death fake-out, but I needed to increase the stakes. I left it intentionally vague so I could wiggle my way out of that one. There's no way I'm killing Suzuki.

Metalia's offensive attacks are derived from the crystals it absorbed. I don't explicitly say it, but the lightning attacks are from Beryl's soul, and maybe Jupiter's crystal—up to your own interpretation. Metalia's final defeat echoes how it was defeated in the anime—through the power of friendship. It's cliché, I know, but this is *Sailor Moon*.

I included the typhoon to increase Metalia's malevolence. It's mostly just to increase the stakes a bit—it doesn't affect the plot at all. Without the typhoon, it's very easy to be like, “what exactly does Metalia do?”

The chapter *Goodbye* was a nice surprise. I had thought there would be no more sleepy peril to add by that point, but Suzuki proved otherwise to me. The chapter was supposed to close things out by having Sailor Moon heal all three youma, returning them back to their human forms—without their memories of course. It’s a tearjerker moment because everyone has to say goodbye to their new friends. In another great example of my characters coming to life, Suzuki kept telling me “no”. There was no way she was going to let Sailor Moon erase her memories, especially after forming that bond with Rei.

I even considered having Suzuki whip out her ribbon and have a mini fight with the Sailor Guardians. I scrapped that to keep things short. Instead, I put more emphasis on Suzuki’s final kiss with Rei, and Rei’s decision to render Suzuki unconscious. It was an amazing way to close out my story. Very proud of myself here.

The epilogue is pure fluff. I wanted to give Ami a special moment to close out her arc. Suzuki’s epilogue is designed to keep things open for a potential sequel. I’ve in fact gotten feedback that Suzuki herself should become a Sailor Guardian. Still not sure how that’ll play out, but it’s a very exciting option.

The final story runs about 82,000 words, the length of a typical novel. That’s seriously impressive to me, especially as a novice writer. I actually put in a lot of effort to shorten the story, to keep it a much tighter read. I hope you appreciated that.

From a peril perspective, I’m very happy. Every single character except for Zoisite, Beryl, and Hypnosia, gets put into some kind of peril.

Ami is chloroformed three times and tied up twice. She's arm carried at least four times I think. Everyone gets a chance to shine. Plenty of opportunities for sleepy peril artwork! Definitely tell me what your favorite scene was, and I'll try to illustrate it.

I leveraged AI to help complete this story, but I want to make it clear that the story as it stands is completely from my own head. AI in its current state is not capable of writing a quality story of this length. What AI *does* help with is enhancing certain sentences so they read better. AI is very good at fixing “writer’s block.” Its output is often a good starting point to get the ball rolling, but requires serious editing to make it fit. And AI of course isn’t capable of editing a story, writing dialogue, or coming up with the major twists and turns. I just wanted to make that part clear before people start blasting me.

Thank you all again for giving this a read. This was a labor of love and I learned a ton from writing this. I hope it was able to bring a bit of joy to your life. Take care!