A Multitude of Possibilities

by spirithorse

Summary

A series of one-shots based on prompts from the Challenge on Infinite Worlds 30 day writing challenge on tumblr.
Lelouch was always amazed when he watched Suzaku perform magic at the shrine, mostly because he was always afraid that Suzaku would get caught.

Back in England, students weren’t allowed to use magic outside of Hogwarts. Lelouch had heard horrible rumors about those students who did, even though he knew that they just got expelled. That still didn't explain the mysterious catches of luggage that Lelouch had found at the end of his second year.

He pulled his knees up, watching as Suzaku carefully circled the area around the tree. Then again, magic was different in Japan. They had often compared spells, Lelouch trading the ones he learned for some of Suzaku's spells, like the one that kept his fire burning no matter what. In the damp rooms of the Slytherin dorms, Lelouch was more than willing to cast the spell, even after he found out that he was invoking a fire demon to do his bidding every time he cast it. The comfort was worth it.

The Japanese spells weren’t all wand waving and precise words, although Lelouch knew of a few that Suzaku was still struggling with. Most of it was through simple objects, pieces of paper with the spells already written down and through careful rituals. Compared to the magic that he was taught at Hogwarts, it looked archaic. Lelouch had learned that wizards in Britain had once used the same lengthy rituals to carry out their spells, but magic had become streamlined since then. If any of his friends from Hogwarts had seen Suzaku working his magic they would have laughed; thinking that Suzaku was a squib who needed the extra help or a muggle who was faking it. That was one of the reasons that Lelouch rarely told his year mates where he went over the summers, because then he would have to explain why he enjoyed watching Suzaku work magic so much.

Lelouch was distracted by his thoughts by a rustle in the tree. By the way that Suzaku had stopped his friend already knew that something was there. Lelouch pulled his legs closer to his body, ready to run if Suzaku shouted at him. He had ignored Suzaku's warning once and had regretted it when the oni had come charging at him. Lelouch still had the scar on his side to prove it.

Suzaku didn't seem to be worried at all. He just took a step back, dragging the stick in front of him to complete the complex design that he had been drawing in the dirt for nearly ten minutes. Lelouch had to marvel at Suzaku's concentration, considering his friend could barely sit still long enough to get through some of his tutor's lectures. Still, when it came to his duty, Suzaku was nothing but attentive. When his apprenticeship was over, he would be in charge of watching the area around the Kururugi house and shrine, just like his mother was doing. In that case, Lelouch wasn't too surprised about Suzaku taking his job completely seriously.

There was a rustle from the tree, Lelouch getting a brief glimpse of a human face before the thing surged out of the top of the tree. Lelouch jumped to his feet when it turned into a fireball, ducking around the rock he had been sitting on for cover. It was the typical maneuver that Suzaku had ordered him to take whenever something appeared. These weren't the carefully secured creatures that he had seen in Defense Against the Dark Arts class, or from afar as the third years had trooped off to Care of Magical Creatures. This was something completely wild, and dangerous if Lelouch remembered the circle that Suzaku had drawn correctly. Wild, dangerous and screaming, far too much to allow a thirteen year old boy to handle.

But that was back in England.

Suzaku stood his ground as the thing came hurtling at him. Lelouch thought he heard the fireball cackle just before it swooped into the circle. The creature probably thought that Suzaku made an
easy target, but it was brought to a stop by the circle. The fireball turned in place as Suzaku clapped his hands together and ducked his head.

The invocation was too fast and too quiet for Lelouch to catch all of it, but he knew the just of it. Apparently, there were different ones that Suzaku had memorized, but they all essentially said the same thing. Each named the creature, bound it to the power in the circle and then either sent it into an object or banished it away. Lelouch had never been too clear on where the creatures went, and Suzaku would never tell him. Apparently it was a trade secret.

The fireball gave a high pitched squeal before being sucked violently into the small jar that Suzaku had placed in the center of the circle. Still chanting, Suzaku followed, stepping into the circle to cram the top of the jar back on. There was a moment of high pressure, like the moment before a thunderstorm, before Suzaku banished the magic back into the earth.

He knelt by the jar, resting a hand on it for a moment before nodding. Suzaku sat back with a sigh, glancing over at Lelouch. After a moment, he grinned. "You can come out now."

"I knew that." Lelouch stormed out from his hiding place, carefully wiping the dirt from his shorts. "I just wanted to wait, to make you feel better."

Suzaku stared at him quizzically for a second before shrugging. Lelouch took that as an invitation to join him, careful not to mar the circle as he stepped in. Sometimes they had to wait a while just to make sure that the creature was well and truly caught or for the magic to dissipate. Lelouch remembered Suzaku being lectured on his carelessness once, and he had never heard his friend lectured again after that.

He pulled out his wand, tempted to poke the jar, but he didn't. Instead, he twirled the wand in his fingers, watching Suzaku's eyes follow it. To his knowledge, Japanese wizards didn't rely on wands. He had seen a few, but they seemed to be something that was given to wizards when they had finished their training. Suzaku was probably a bit jealous of his wand, something that Lelouch thought was silly. Suzaku could work magic without a wand already; Lelouch still had no idea how to do that on his own.

Lelouch let his wand drop to his side, out of Suzaku's sight. Instead, he leaned forward and stared at the jar. "What was that?"

"Tsurube-otoshi. It was bothering the neighborhood for a while." Suzaku shrugged one shoulder and looked up at the sky. "It was actually harder to catch than I thought it would be."

"What can you use it for?"

Suzaku looked startled by his question. "Uh, you could use its power for protection spells, I guess, or bind it to serve you. I don't know, I usually don't think about these things."

"You just hand it to your mother."

Suzaku nodded and pulled his knees toward his chest. "Yes. I'm hoping this will be enough to impress father, because he's promised me something special for my next birthday if I prove myself ready."

Lelouch resisted the urge to snort. He would never understand Suzaku's need to earn his father's attention, especially when the man had never cared for Suzaku before. Genbu was just happy that his son was proving to be powerful, something that Lelouch wanted the hurt the man for. He bet Genbu didn't even know how kind Suzaku could be, his son's moments of great insight that even startled
Lelouch. All he cared about was having a son that wouldn't embarrass him in the wizarding community.

As if Suzaku guessed what Lelouch was thinking, he reached over to poke Lelouch's shoulder. "I'm free after this, what do you want to do?"

"I don't know." Lelouch shrugged. "But I don't want to race you back."

"I'll go easy on you this time."

Lelouch just glared at Suzaku, relieved that his friend laughed. But he wasn't going to back down on the race. Suzaku always won, even when Lelouch tried every trick he knew to slow Suzaku down. He would have suspected Suzaku of using magic, but his friend was too earnest for that.

He leaned back on his hands, fully expecting Suzaku to make another suggestion for their next activity. He was surprised when Suzaku just copied his pose, staring down at the jar in the middle of the circle. "How many days until you go back?"

Lelouch bit his lip, looking anywhere but Suzaku. "Five."

Suzaku took the news with a stoic nod. His friend was silent for a while, Lelouch almost ready to agree to another race when Suzaku looked up at him with a smile. "Just remember to write."

"O-of course I will." Lelouch stumbled through the quick change in his friend's mood, not sure what to think of the sudden levity to Suzaku. "Someone has to make sure you don't kill yourself."

"I know what I'm doing, Lelouch."

Lelouch looked back at the jar in the center of the circle, very willing to admit that to himself. Suzaku was on par with some of the forth years that Lelouch had seen at Hogwarts, at least in this. In other matters, Suzaku was about on the same level as a second year. Lelouch couldn't wait until he was allowed to use magic outside of school, just so he could challenge Suzaku to a wizard's duel. He was sure that he would get a better gauge on his friend then.

He stood up abruptly, wiping the dirt from his legs. "Is that done yet?"

Suzaku reached out and tapped the jar, ignoring the way that Lelouch winced at the sound. He tipped his head to study the pot for a moment before nodding. "Should be?"

He scooped up the jar and began rubbing out the circle, Lelouch helping on his end. When it was nothing more than a patch of disturbed dirt, Suzaku tucked the jar under his arm. Lelouch hurried to his friend's side, not saying a word as Suzaku bumped their shoulders together. If anything, he leaned into the touch, because he had five more days.

Five more days in Japan, pretending it was just like those beautiful summer days when the entire world had been in fear. Of course, he had been too young to remember Lord Voldemort, he had been having too much fun with Suzaku once they had gotten over their differences. Five more days until he went back to school and pushed himself through his third year.

He would be able to write to Suzaku, but it wasn't quite the same. Lelouch wanted all of his friends to be at Hogwarts with him, because it was fun there. At Hogwarts, Suzaku wouldn't have to keep putting himself in danger just to prove himself to his father. Genbu would have to be proud of his son if Suzaku won all of the awards that Lelouch knew he could.

But he didn't say any of that to Suzaku. He just let their shoulders bump against each other as they
trudged down the dusty road.
“Get in!” Suzaku shouted the command as he held the door open, straining against the mechanism that was trying to slam the door shut on him.

He felt the last person slip past him, Suzaku twisting out of the way. There was a slight hiss as the door settled into place, Suzaku staring at it and panting for breath. He let himself have a moment, gathering himself together before he turned to look at the others in the room. He had to be strong for them. After all, they were all probably just as scared. And he was military, a knight if only by rank. That was something that would calm people down, a sense of authority. Suzaku doubted that Lelouch could manage that now; his friend was too busy taking care of Nunnally.

Suzaku glanced over to where Lelouch and Nunnally were huddled further down the hall, clearing his throat before walking towards where the other people were huddled. “Is everyone alright?”

Their replies were slow to follow, the first coming out in a quick bunch. The rest came as people caught their breaths or as others came around to respond for them.

Suzaku sighed and counted their group, wincing as he came up three short. He had hoped that everyone would be able to keep up. He had broken them down into groups especially for that purpose. Everyone had someone associated with the military with them, all with orders to head to the G-1 Base that had never been removed from the Special Administrative Zone. It had been Suzaku’s goal to get to the base and then broadcast their position. Hopefully there would be more survivors that he could save.

He took a step back, slumping against the wall as he caught his breath.

The G-1 was secure, he knew that much. Only he and the few other military personal had the passcode under Princess Euphemia’s orders. She hadn’t wanted the mobile base to stay, but it had been something that Cornelia hadn’t given up. Cornelia had wanted to make sure that her sister would be safe if the Elevens turned on the Britannians.

In the end, Princess Cornelia had been wrong. It was the Britannian Empire that had turned against them.

Suzaku ran a hand through his hair, taking a deep breath. He had no idea who had thought up the plan of creating the virus or releasing infected people into the Special Administrative Zone. All he knew was that Euphemia had woken him up in a panic, demanding that he help her save the residents of the SAZ. Suzaku could only thank every god that he knew of for Prince Schneizel. The prince had been the one to warn Euphemia, with just enough time to spread the word and begin the evacuation. But they had underestimated how quickly the virus would spread.

Those that were infected couldn’t run, but they were relentless, they didn’t tire. Humans did. Suzaku was sure that frantic and exhausted humans were the reason for so many losses. As it was, he doubted that they’d get half of the SAZ out safely, even if he went back in by himself or the Black Knights were called.

His fingers twitched by his side at the thought, Suzaku glancing toward the door. That was a thought. The Lancelot was off site and there hadn’t been any Knightmares left to them because of Euphemia’s orders, but the Black Knights were something different. He was sure that they would help evacuate the rest of the SAZ, since their leader supported it. With Knightmares, they could herd the infected into certain areas and then…
What came after was the problem. So far, the only solutions that Suzaku had come up with were to herd the infected into small areas and lock them in or kill them. The former only worked for a while, because they would fling themselves against the barriers until either their bodies or the barriers broke. After that, they would just start wandering again. The other option was one that Suzaku didn’t want to think about. Infected or not, they had once been human and deserved more dignity than to be gunned down by Knightmares. But, if he was forced to choose between the living and the ones that were stumbling around in the streets, Suzaku knew that he would chose the living. And he would hate himself for it.

He sighed and pushed himself onto his feet, checking the keypad for the door one more time. It was secure, which meant that they were in control of the G-1 Base. He would send the two groups to start looking through the hallways. Even if everyone believed that the base was secure, Suzaku wanted to be sure. In any case, it would be easy to turn the inner defense systems against any intruders.

Suzaku rubbed the back of his neck, trying to chase away an ache there from when he hadn’t ducked low enough to scurry under some debris. When the ache wouldn’t go away, he shook his head, resigning himself to dealing with it later. His first priority was the people that were with him. He glanced around the room, meeting the gazes of the two other military personnel before nodding. They both saluted and got to their feet, starting off. Suzaku was quick to step into everyone’s line of sight, not wanting their survivors to panic.

“They’re just sweeping the base, old habits.” There were a few chuckles from the group, Suzaku glad that he could distract everyone so easily. “But we’ll need to go through the hallways anyway, to figure out what we have here and how we’ll go about the rest of our rescue mission. Stay in groups and be ready to report to command when you’re done. It’s the large room at the top of the base. After that, we’ll assign rooms and try to get you out of here as soon as possible.”

He offered everyone a smile, relieved when they relaxed. A few started to get up, giving people a hand. Suzaku remained behind, watching as the group split up and began to walk down the hallways. Everyone seemed to be calming down now that they were safe. It would be good for them, even if it was just a short interval. He would need those who could shoot guns ready to work when they went back for the rest.

“Suzaku?” Nunnally tugged on his sleeve, Suzaku surprised that Lelouch had managed to push her wheelchair so close to him without him noticing. He must have been more tired than he thought.

He didn’t bother to crouch down beside her chair, looking at Lelouch instead. “Come on, you two can wait in the comm with Euphy and I.”

Lelouch didn’t argue, trudging wearily after Suzaku as he led their small party of four. He had never found out why Lelouch had been in the SAZ, but he had known that Nunnally was visiting. Nunnally had been the first person that Suzaku had run to secure once he had gotten the news, although Lelouch had already been there. Suzaku gave Lelouch a sidelong glance, noting that Lelouch didn’t even bother to look at him. It was probably just a testament to how tired Lelouch was, but Suzaku wasn’t quite sure.

He sighed and ran a hand through his hair. “We might need the Black Knight’s help.” Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Lelouch tense. It was hard to keep his face blank, but Suzaku managed it, plunging onward. “They could keep the infected at bay while we rescue people. And we might need an escort.”

“They won’t like it.”
Suzaku twisted slightly so he could see Lelouch. “I’ll give them my word as a knight that they won’t be harmed, and Euphy can back it up. Right, Euphy?”

He expected her to respond, surprised when she looked up at him in confusion. It was gone a moment later, Euphemia nodding in agreement and giving Lelouch her own assurances. Suzaku bit his lip, but let his suspicion go. Euphemia had been keeping pace with him all night and was bound to be exhausted; everyone was. That was why Suzaku hoped that some of their people could rest. Tired people made more mistakes and he didn’t want any more deaths on his hands.

The door to the comm opened easily to his code, Suzaku stepping in and starting to turn on the lights. He moved to the side as Lelouch shoved past him, leaving Euphemia to push Nunnally towards the throne in the back. It was the safest place for her; close enough that Lelouch could get to her but out of the way of the bustle that Suzaku was sure would overtake the command center when the others reported back. He glanced to the side to see Lelouch booting up the computers, Suzaku smiling at the light that the screens brought. After running around for so long in darkness, it was good to have a bit of light.

He walked over to where Lelouch stood, leaning close to his friend. Lelouch leaned back against him, looking like he was almost tempted to rest his head on Suzaku’s shoulder. In response, Suzaku wrapped his fingers around Lelouch’s wrist, offering that support. “You alright?”

“I’ll be fine once this hell is done with.” Lelouch glanced back at Nunnally, lowering his voice. “Thank you, Suzaku.”

“There’s no need to.”

“Most people would have abandoned Nunnally without a thought.”

Suzaku didn’t react, because he had known that. He had seen it in some of the people’s eyes when things had started to look tough. But he didn’t care. Nunnally was his friend, almost a little sister to him. He was not going to let her die, just like he wasn’t going to let Lelouch die.

He licked his lips and leaned closer to Lelouch, hoping his gamble would pay off. Suzaku hadn’t had time to think over his suspicions, especially after Kamine Island and the rush that had come with setting up the SAZ, but it was worth a shot. “Could you get the Black knights to help us? They’d listen to Zero.”

He felt Lelouch start, Suzaku tightening his hold on Lelouch’s wrist. Lelouch struggled for a moment before slumping, Suzaku carefully letting go of his friend.

“How long have you known?”

“Not long. I just guessed.” He saw Lelouch’s shoulders tense, quickly taking a step back so he wasn’t crowding Lelouch. “But I’m not going to turn you in. You and the Black Knights have been cooperative.”

“And you’d just overlook everything else we’d done?”

Suzaku wanted to say no, but then he wouldn’t be able to continue the operation as he had planned it. And there would be some people who would be overjoyed at the thought of the Black Knights coming to save them. “Yes, because this is bigger than all of that.”

Lelouch relaxed again, Suzaku careful not to pressure him for an answer as they continued to work with the computers. He was in the middle of trying to figure out if he could try and get the computers
to identify the infected when Lelouch bumped gently into him. Suzaku turned to face him, leaning against the table as he listened. “I could, but it would take them some time. And then I’d have to convince them.”

“Do what you can as fast as you can. Tell them that the Japanese are dying if that gets them here faster.”

“Britannians are too.”

“But do they care?”

Lelouch snorted. “They should. We’re knights for justice.”

Suzaku wanted to laugh at that, but he held himself back. He was sure that Lelouch didn’t believe half the stuff that he said as Zero, but that same rhetoric might be enough to save them all. Suzaku was not about to endanger his only way out of the situation. There would always be time to figure out what to do about Lelouch, Zero and the Black Knights; but that would be later, much later.

He leaned back over the table, intending to continue trying to get some kind of system online when he heard Nunnally give a small gasp. Both he and Lelouch turned around, watching as Nunnally reached out to Euphemia. “Euphy, what’s wrong?”

Suzaku looked over at Euphemia, surprised by the way that she was backing away from Nunnally. Then he noticed the blood on her fingers and the stained white rag around her wrist. It took him a moment to process what he was seeing, but then he was shaking his head, leaning as far back as he could.

It was just a scratch. They had been clambering through partially constructed buildings and running through houses to get away from the infected. There were plenty of places that Euphemia could have hurt herself, just like he had. She was probably just as scared as he was, trying to think back to remember if she had been bitten or not. Suzaku took a deep breath, letting it out quickly as he pushed away from the table.

Euphemia was scared, so he had to keep calm. As her knight, it was his duty to protect her, so he would make sure that any cut was cleaned and properly bandaged and then hidden away. He didn’t need panic in the base.

He gave her a smile, holding out a hand to her, only for her to shrink back. “Euphy…”

“Get back. Get back all of you!” Euphemia’s voice wavered, Suzaku taking note of the tears in her eyes and the way that she was shaking. When he took another step forward, she retreated again. “Please, don’t come near me.”

“Euphy it’s okay. It’s just a scratch. We’ll just clean it up and-”

“No, Suzaku.” It was a command, Suzaku coming up short. Euphemia leveled a tear filled glare at him before curling over her injured arm. “It isn’t a scratch. One of them bit me.”

“They couldn’t have.”

“I was saving that little girl when I lagged behind, remember? You were shouting at me to hurry up. I passed the girl to her mother and one of them bit me.” Euphemia paused to wipe her tears with her hand, streaking blood across her face. “I was hoping that it wasn’t, but I can’t lie to myself. Not after you worked so hard to save everyone. And I can’t…I can’t be turned into a monster.”
“Euphy…”

“I can’t allow myself to kill them!”

Silence fell over the room as Euphemia shouted. Lelouch dodged around Suzaku to stand between Euphemia and Nunnally while Suzaku could only stare. This couldn’t be happening, not when he was so close to saving everyone. It was just a scratch and Euphemia was overreacting. It had to be because he had to save her. She was like Lelouch and Nunnally, one of the people that he couldn’t lose.

He didn’t realize that he was trembling until Lelouch’s hand closed over his arm. He looked over at his friend, waiting for Lelouch to say something. Lelouch was the one who always had the plan; Suzaku’s had come stumbling to a halt. He had never expected to have to go on without Euphemia. But in this, Lelouch failed him, his friend shaking his head. Suzaku reached up with his free hand to grab at Lelouch’s arm.

They had to be able to do something. Even then, Lelouch was Zero. Everyone said that Zero could make miracles, and Lelouch owed him one.

Instead, what he got was the cold solidity of a gun pressed against his arm. It was only because he was still in shock that Suzaku took it. He stared at the gun, still not comprehending what Lelouch wanted him to do. He knew what he should do, knew that it was the only way that they had found to stop someone once they had been bitten, but the outbreak was still too new. There had to be other ways, ones that they hadn’t figured out yet.

He swallowed and looked back up at Lelouch, trying to push the gun back on him. “Lelouch, I can’t.”

“Did you hear me, Suzaku? I said to kill me.” He looked helplessly back at Euphemia, watching as she drew herself up. She even dropped her hand away from the bite wound, leaving a swath of red on her skirt as her hand brushed against the fabric. Suzaku met her gaze, his stomach rolling. He knew what she was trying to do, that she was trying to be brave for him, but it wasn’t working. Euphemia might have been brave, but he was the one shaking.

“Euphy.”

She took a step forward, resting her hands against his cheeks. Euphemia held his face steady, forcing him to look at her. When he did, she just smiled and gave him a small nod. “You’re my knight, you’re supposed to follow my orders. And I’m ordering you to keep them all safe. I don’t want them all to die.”

“They won’t.”

“And I don’t want to become a monster. Protect me from that Suzaku, promise me that you can.”

His mouth was dry, Suzaku wanting to shake his head. But Euphemia was just calmly looking at him, waiting for his answer, and he knew exactly what that answer had to be. He couldn’t stand the thought of her dead, but he couldn’t stand the thought of her living like the others were and the chance that she would hate him while she was like that.

Suzaku might have nodded, he wasn’t sure. All he knew was that Euphemia was lowering her hands to his wrists and guiding the gun into place by her temple. Automatically, Suzaku adjusted his grip on the gun, holding it the way that the army had taught him.

Euphemia kept silent through the entire movement, holding him steady even when he started to
shake. Suzaku met her calm gaze, feeling his stomach twist even as he spoke. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. It was my fault.” Euphemia gave him an exhausted smile.

“I love you.” Euphemia just nodded, Suzaku sighing with relief when she closed her eyes.

He raised the gun so it pressed against her temple, watching his hand shake for a moment before closing his eyes. His hand was still shaking, but Suzaku doubted that he could have stopped it. He took a deep breath, letting it out slowly.

Then he pulled the trigger.
Rolo sulked in the gardens, nearly shuffling his way down the path.

The king was out of the country, leaving his queen in charge. Rolo had bristled at the slight to him as Lelouch's heir, but he hadn't been able to voice his objections. He had seen what had happened to the last man that had voiced any objection to the queen. That man had suffered an unfortunate mishap on the battlefield and his fortune had disappeared overnight. Everyone knew what had really happened, but everyone kept silent, which made it all worse.

He knew what Lelouch had been before he had married C.C. His uncle had been a fair king. They had kept within their borders and there had been peace. And then Lelouch had answered a call from one of his cousins to save her kingdom. Rolo had been left in charge of then, back when Lelouch still trusted his heir. But then Lelouch had gone had married the witch and everything had changed. Suddenly he was always at war, taking his army out as soon as the fields were planted to strike against the other kingdoms. Slowly, Lelouch had accrued a bigger kingdom from there.

Everyone said that they were happier, that there was now peace across the whole of England, but Rolo doubted that. He could remember what it had been like before, and that had been better. Lelouch had been better before he had been bewitched.

It was the only conclusion that Rolo could draw. C.C. wasn't even a proper name, but that what she insisted on being called. When he had looked into her, there had been nothing; she wasn't even from a noble family. For all he knew, she had sprung fully formed from the ground. Rolo winced at that. Lelouch was part of the royal line, and it was up to him to keep that royal line going so they could remain in the favor of God. If his line were to fail, it would all be because of that witch.

The other thing that bothered Rolo about her, aside from the way that Lelouch's behavior had immediately changed after he had married her, was the way she acted around Sir Kururugi. Rolo was aware that most women, and quite a few men, worshipped the ground that Suzaku walked on. Rolo was not one of them, and his contempt for the knight sprang from his own jealousy. Suzaku seemed to be constantly hovering around Lelouch, making it a chore for Rolo to get any time with his uncle. What was worse than Suzaku's constant hovering was the way that he and C.C. looked at each other, like they wanted to devour each other on the spot. Such open lust was disgusting, especially when it was in front of the entire court. Surely someone else could see it and worry about it. That C.C. was a witch was not enough, but she was cuckolding Lelouch as well.

It was why he bristled at being passed over for the regency. Not only that, but Sir Kururugi had been asked to look after C.C. while Lelouch went to visit one of his siblings. Lelouch was probably planning another campaign and was going to ask Cornelia and her husband to assist him. Rolo had sat in on the meetings, listening as Lelouch had laid out his plans for the war that was going to free up their borders some more, giving them more breathing room against foreign invaders. But he couldn't understand why Lelouch would leave his best knight behind when he was going off to plan a campaign, nor could he understand why Lelouch would leave his heir. Certainly, Rolo deserved to know what was going on in the kingdom that he was going to rule one day.

The sound of laughter made him slow his steps, Rolo quickly darting off the path to walk on the other side of the hedge. It wouldn't hide him completely, but people rarely looked behind the hedges, pretending to be ignorant of the trysts that were sure to be going on behind them. Rolo was not one of those people, but he preferred to stick to the gravel path. What he did not know, he did not have to report.
Rolo stepped closer to the bushes as the giggling got louder, pausing to peer through a gap. He was not surprised to see a group of the queen's ladies in waiting in the garden. With the fair weather, most of them were taking advantage of the garden while they still could. It was only a matter of time before it started getting cold. Rolo would not begrudge them their outing, but he wondered where the queen was. She should not have been out on her own.

He clenched his hands into fists and stalked off behind the hedge. He would search the entire garden for her if he had to and then drag her back to her ladies. C.C. could use the reminder that she was to act like a highborn lady, no matter where she had come from. Rolo would not stand for her embarrassing his king while Lelouch was gone. He wasn't the regent, but he could look after Lelouch's interests all the same.

Low voices alerted him to the fact that there were more people using the lane behind the hedge, Rolo slowing his steps. They were blocked from view by a curve in the hedge, Rolo sneaking up to the curve and carefully leaning around it.

As he expected it was a tryst behind the hedge, but he hadn't expected it to be C.C. and Sir Kururugi, not so openly.

He watched as they bent their head close together, Suzaku whispering something to her. The whispered conversation was one sided, Suzaku the one speaking with his mouth close to the queen's ear. Rolo frowned at the show of familiarity. If Suzaku had something important to report, then he could have sought out the queen with her ladies in waiting. From there, they could have retreated to a respectable distance and had a private conversation with the proper escort present. Rolo had enough to do looking after his uncle's kingdom, especially since C.C. seemed to have no interest in keeping up with the affairs of state.

Rolo gritted his teeth, quickly coming to the end of his patience. This was something that had to be settled now before things got too out of hand. He would separate the two of them and talk to each. While he wasn't on the same social level as the queen, he hoped that he could make an impression. If not, then he could convince one of her ladies in waiting to help him. Maybe Lady Fenette, she was always so careful about who she talked to. He didn't worry about Sir Kururugi, Rolo outranked him as heir to the throne. Suzaku was just another knight, even if he was favored by the king.

With his mind made up, Rolo intended to walk out from where he was hidden, but he never got the chance. He was brought to a stop when Suzaku pulled back from C.C, just enough so he could turn his head and kiss the queen.

Rolo expected C.C. to rebuff the knight's advance. Even if she was a common woman and a witch, she had to know some kind of decorum or at least have learned in her years of staying in the castle. But she didn't, C.C. just wrapped her arms around Suzaku's neck and kissed him back.

Disgusted with the spectacle, Rolo turned and stormed off. He was not going to watch his uncle's wife shame herself with a knight, it was too much. It would be even worse if the kingdom found out. If Lelouch couldn't keep a woman faithful to him, how could he be expected to keep a kingdom together? C.C's infidelity was something that could bring everything to ruin, something that Rolo would not allow. He loved his uncle, far too much to allow Lelouch's rule to be overruled with doubt. Beyond that, Rolo was not so selfless that he didn't hope for the kingdom as it was when Lelouch finally did die, hopefully many years from now. But he wouldn't get that chance if C.C. ruined it all.

He stormed out from behind the hedge, quickly making up his mind. He wouldn't give anyone the chance to find out; he would bring the matter to the king himself. To do so would temporarily shame Lelouch, but Rolo was sure that there were ways around it. All he knew was that, to allow Lelouch to come out of the affair unscathed, he had to make sure the blame rested on Suzaku instead of C.C.
As much as the idea disgusted him, Rolo would willingly take the chance. It would get rid of one of his enemies, after all. His own distaste in the matter was a small price to pay for the stability of the kingdom.

Rolo stood by his uncle's side, watching as Lelouch's hands tightened on the armrests of his throne. He turned his head and hid a smile, struggling for control. It wouldn't do to be seen gloating over what was happening. The downfall of his enemy deserved more tact than that. As much as he had hated Sir Kururugi, Lelouch had doted on the knight. It was only fair that Rolo stand by his uncle during the weakness that was sure to follow. It was a sacrifice that he was willing to make.

He looked back down at the knight kneeling on the floor, unable to stop the corner of his mouth from twitching up. From the glare that Suzaku shot at him, Rolo knew the knight had seen, but that didn't matter. No one would be able to prove that he had been the one to bring the news to Lelouch. Suzaku could insinuate and rage all he wanted, but Rolo would be safe.

"Tell me if it is true. This is the last chance you get, Suzaku."

Suzaku looked away from Rolo, focusing on Lelouch again. Rolo was sure that he could see Suzaku shaking a bit, but he wasn't sure if it was because of fear or rage. Rolo was hoping for the latter, because then Suzaku might make a mistake. Lelouch was bound to keep any punishment lenient because he and Suzaku had been friends, but being caught in a lie would mean that Suzaku was breaking his oath to his lord. If all went well, there was a chance that Suzaku could be executed.

To his disappointment, Suzaku ducked his head, addressing the floor instead of his king. "It is true, your highness."

"Then you have been with my wife."

"Yes."

"Even though you swore your loyalty to me?" There was a beat of silence before Lelouch stood up from his throne. The chair rocked back, Rolo reaching for it to keep it from falling over. Even then, he was paying attention to his uncle, watching as Lelouch stormed down to where Suzaku was kneeling. "You betrayed me, Suzaku!"

The knight flinched by didn't look up from the floor. "I did."

Lelouch stared down at the knight for a moment more before pointing at the door. "Get out of my sight." The order was a low hiss. "You are not to return to this court. Leave now, before I change my mind."

Suzaku got to his feet and left without a word. Rolo stared after him, struggling to keep the glee off his face. That was one of his problems dealt with. Now there was a chance that the queen would finally settle, and Lelouch would be safe.

He let go of the chair, stepping down to his uncle's side and resting a hand on Lelouch's arm. "You did the right thing. He would have just caused more trouble if you had ignored it."

"Yes." Lelouch sounded like he hadn't heard him, but the words didn't matter as much as the tone of voice and Rolo could see that Lelouch was relaxing already. His uncle took a step to the side, Rolo releasing him. "It's finished."

The lords and ladies in the room muttered to themselves as they left, Rolo hearing the swish of the ladies skirts as they left. But his attention was on his uncle.
Lelouch walked back toward the staircase that led to the upper floors of the castle. Rolo wasn't sure if he was going to seek out his wife or brood in his study. Either way, Rolo was going to leave him to it. He was sure that there were a few other judgments that needed to be passed on, and Lelouch wouldn't begrudge him the chance at practice. His uncle had never cared before. Rolo would give everyone time to settle down before listening to grievances. The court would be in shock but they all needed to move on for the sake of the kingdom.

The gate to the garden opened without a creak, Suzaku careful to close it just as quietly behind him. He kept one hand pressed against the wood while the other adjusted the hood. It wasn't the best disguise, but he hadn't been given much time to work on a better one. The summons from the queen had come too soon and with a sense of urgency that he couldn't ignore.

Suzaku glanced up at the castle and tugged the hood further over his face before walking through the garden, careful to slouch. Everyone in the castle knew him by sight; he had been part of Lelouch's household since before Lelouch had become king. That alone would make sneaking in difficult unless C.C. had done as she had promised. If the hallways were clear and everyone already in bed, then he would have no problem getting up to the queen's chambers. Most of the knights would be housed on the other side of the castle, concentrated around Rolo's room. Lelouch preferred to keep his heir surrounded by knights and safe, especially since it had been Suzaku at his side. Now, that was going to have to change and Suzaku hated it. To see another knight standing in his place beside the king made him want to punch something.

But that was the price he had paid, and the one he had agreed to. He had to take his exile, however long it would be, in good graces.

The door to the castle was just as well cared for as the one in the garden, Suzaku able to slip through without a stray noise. Suzaku eased the door shut, not bothering to linger as he strode towards the staircase.

He took the stairs two at a time, alert for any movement that would mean someone was coming. If he was caught, he would be condemned to death. Rumors would get him exiled until the affair blew over. Proof would get him killed no matter how many years of service he had given Lelouch. The kingdom needed to be strong and Lelouch needed to rule without doubt. Suzaku understood all of that, but he wished it were otherwise. Everything would be simpler.

The door to the queen's chamber was cracked open, Suzaku pausing in the hallway before slipping in. As he suspected, C.C. was sitting by the fire. The queen didn't even look up at him, continuing to warm her hands over the flames. Suzaku was far too used to her quirks to be insulted. Instead, he used the time to strip off his cloak and bow to her. Only then did C.C. move, waving a hand to indicate that he could stand.

Suzaku straightened up, freezing at the sound of a familiar voice coming from the back of the room. "I expect you had no trouble?"

He spun around to face Lelouch, spotting the king leaning against the wall. Suzaku bowed to Lelouch, glad to see a flicker of a smile cross Lelouch's face. When he was signaled to rise, Suzaku crossed the room to stand before him. "None at all."

"Good." Lelouch reached out, brushing his fingers across Suzaku's cheek. Suzaku sighed and leaned into the caress, feeling Lelouch step forward and place his other hand on Suzaku's waist. "You did well, my knight. A perfect performance."

"As you ordered."
"Yes." Lelouch paused, staring at Suzaku for a moment before leaning in. "Sorry."

The apology was a soft whisper against Suzaku's lips, briefly there before Lelouch closed the distance between them. Suzaku groaned and leaned into the kiss, settling his hands on Lelouch's waist. It had been far too long since they had gotten to do this, Lelouch away planning a war while Suzaku was left at the castle, Lelouch's faithful guard and spy.

He crowded Lelouch back against the wall, slipping one hand down Lelouch's leg. It would be so easy to lift Lelouch up, even easier to press him against the wall. His friend was losing weight, something that Suzaku worried about, but it was not something to dwell on, not when it made maneuvering Lelouch so easy.

A soft cough turned his attention away from Lelouch, Suzaku turning his head to watch as C.C. dropped her dress to the floor. He didn't bother to follow the flutter of fabric to the ground, his attention on C.C. as the queen walked to the bed. She flopped onto it, not bothering to get under the covers. Instead, she propped herself up on her elbows and stared at them. When neither of them moved, she flicked her fingers in their direction. "Go on. You two looked like you were in the middle of something."

"And leave a lady on her own?"

C.C. smirked, running a hand over her body. "I can handle myself."

They exchanged a smile, Suzaku aware that Lelouch was tugging on his shirt. Of course Lelouch would demand his attention first, Lelouch had been gone. Suzaku and C.C. had had their time together and now Lelouch was left wanting, something that the king had never handled well.

Suzaku reached up, gently removing Lelouch's hand from his collar. With the king's hand still captured in his own, he began to tug Lelouch towards the bed. "The queen has summoned us."

"She always is."

"Be grateful." C.C. smirked up from where she had fallen back on the pillows. "I can't think of anyone else who would put up with you."

For a moment, Lelouch sputtered. Suzaku laughed at the look of affront on his friend's face. He curbed his laughter when Lelouch glared at him, easily slipping into his role of mediator between the two. He lifted Lelouch's hand to his lips, brushing a kiss across Lelouch's knuckles. "Come to bed, my lord. Your lady and knight await you."

Lelouch sighed but nodded. It was all the permission needed for Suzaku and C.C. to pull him into the bed between them.
Suzaku coughed, lifting his head to stare at the familiar figure in front of him. "I didn't want it to be you."

Lelouch looked down at him from where he stood, still holding the mask between his hands. Suzaku stared at his friend, taking in Zero's familiar outfit before turning his head to the side and spitting blood onto the ground. He saw Lelouch jump at that, ignoring his friend's look of distaste in favor of probing his tongue around his mouth. No teeth were missing, which just meant that the blood had come from his split lip, the wound still throbbing in pain.

He forgot about the pain in his lip when Lelouch grabbed his chin. Even though the touch was gentle, it made the bruises and abrasions on his face hurt. Suzaku wanted to wince or jerk his head away from Lelouch, but he didn't allow himself to. Instead he glared at Lelouch, keeping the glare up as Lelouch tipped his face from side to side before sighing and letting go.

"I told them not to hurt you."

Suzaku snorted. "They went easy on me."

"That's not the point." Lelouch sat down gracefully in the chair that had been left for him before the Black Knights had scurried out of the room. The mask that he had held tucked under his arm was carefully set down on the floor, Lelouch not looking away from Suzaku the entire time. "I ordered them not to hurt you."

"I was a spy in their ranks. They had to see what I knew."

"You knew everything I wanted you to, everything that I wanted passed onto my father." Lelouch's hands clenched in his lap at the mention of Charles. "I knew what you were from the moment you came to the Black Knights. There was no reason that you would have joined otherwise."

"Everyone else believed."

"Everyone else doesn't know you."

Suzaku chuckled, shaking his head. "And you do. You must have enjoyed watching me blunder around here, pulling out information and trying to figure out who Zero was. You were probably laughing in your suite about how stupid I was not to realize it from the start." He jerked forward as much as his restraints would allow, ignoring the small noise of concerned protest that Lelouch gave. "The worst part is that I did suspect you, but I talked myself out of it, because I thought I knew you too."

He sat back, glad to ease the pressure off of his wrists. Suzaku wiggled his hands, trying out the restraints again, but the verdict remained the same. He would have to break a wrist to get out, something he didn't want to do unless it was absolutely necessary. If he was going to escape, he needed to be fighting fit.

The Black Knights wouldn't let him go, not after finding out that he had been planted on behalf of Charles. Lelouch wouldn't let him go, not after Suzaku had figured out who was behind Zero's mask. Unless he could fend them all off, he would be stuck as the Black Knight's prisoner, something that Suzaku was not looking forward to. Even with Lelouch tempering his punishment, the Black Knights would not be so easy to forgive.
"Suzaku," he looked back up at Lelouch, "I offered you this chance once, and I'm offering it to you again. You can drop your ties to Britannia and join us. I'll make sure no harm comes to you, my word is law for them."

Suzaku scoffed, the sound enough to make Lelouch frown. "Do you think I'm joking? I've never offered this more than once to anyone. You are a liability now, one that I have to see secured or gotten rid of. I know about your moral code and how you cling to it, but this is a chance to make everything right again. Even you can see that. The Black Knights are a force for change."

"But is the change wanted?"

"Yes."

He sighed and shook his head slowly. "The price is too high."

Lelouch tensed, finally looking away from him. "Then you will be kept here until we've accomplished what needs to be done. I can't promise your protection then, but I will try."

"It doesn't matter."

"Would you stop being an idiot and listen! I can give them back Japan. I can give you back your home and dignity. You don't need to bow and scrape to Britannia any longer. For once, think about someone other than yourself!"

"It's not that." Suzaku leaned forward again, feeling the chair rock a bit under the shift. "It's too late."

"What?"

"I sent it, everything that I heard, everything that you let me learn. Even my suspicions about who Zero was. Every last bit of it." He licked the split in his lip, the one he had gotten when they had slammed his head against the computer bank when they had learned that everything had already gone out. "They know and they're coming for you."

Lelouch started out of his chair, taking the extra moment to snatch up his mask. He turned to look towards the door, Suzaku watching as his fingers drummed against the sides of the mask. "Why?"

"It was the right thing to do."

"They'll kill you to tie up loose ends. You're just another Eleven to them."

Suzaku shrugged. "I was never buying time."

He watched as Lelouch's face contorted in rage, his friend staring at him for a moment before storming to the door. Suzaku slumped back in his chair, watching Lelouch warily as his friend lingered at the door.

Lelouch raised his mask, pausing just before he slipped it over his face. "I could have saved you."

"I don't need to be saved."

Lelouch frowned and slipped the mask on. In a simple motion Lelouch was gone, the friend that Suzaku had grown up with replaced by Zero. He relaxed at the image. It was better when Suzaku couldn't see Lelouch's face, because he didn't have to face the betrayal directly. It could simmer in the corner of his mind and not distract him from the now.

As soon as the mask was in place, Lelouch looked back at him. "You mean, you don't deserve to be
saved."

When Suzaku didn't answer, Lelouch opened the door and strode out into the hall. The last glimpse Suzaku got of his friend was Zero's cape flaring out behind him just before the door slid shut.
Euphemia snapped the case closed, flicking the two clasps into place. She tucked her music folder under her arm, picking up her flute case in her free hand before looking around.

Most of the marching band had already cleared out, trudging back to their cars or carpools to head home to crash or frantically work on homework for tomorrow's classes. The seniors were the only ones going out but, then again, the seniors didn't care at this point. They were college bound by the end of the year, leaving the rest of them to struggle through a few more years of high school before following.

She idly wondered who the next drum majors would be as she walked toward the front of the school. In the years before, someone from her family had always been a drum major, the tradition starting with Charles and Marianne when they were in high school. All of her siblings, half or full, had been drum majors before her, save for one exception. Euphemia sighed and shook her head. Perhaps she would be chosen, strange as it would be. She would rather the job go to someone else, she enjoyed marching and playing too much to just stand and direct.

Maybe Nunnally would get the job. It would be a rare thing considering that she was only a freshman, but she had been hanging out around the marching band since she had been in elementary school. Nunnally was a key part of the pit already, eagerly taking a position there as her wheelchair didn't allow her to march. Beyond that, Nunnally was the darling of the band, everyone knowing that they would feel the wrath of Schneizel or Cornelia if something happened to Nunnally, even though the two of them were in grad school and the military respectively.

And Nunnally as drum major wouldn't be a bad thing, the band would have a consistent leader for three years, something that hadn't happened since Cornelia had been in the band.

Euphemia smiled to herself and shouldered the door open. It was something to think about and to work towards. She was sure that, if she started putting the word around that Nunnally would make a great drum major, people would be ready to recommend her by the end of the year.

Her planning was brought to a halt when she saw Nunnally sitting by the front of the school, talking to Rolo. Her half sister spotted her and waved, Rolo looking like he was ready to run. Euphemia didn't blame him for it. All of their siblings tended to be protective of Nunnally, to the point of idiocy in her own opinion. Nunnally was allowed to have friends and boyfriends without the rest of their family interfering. It was when the latter started breaking her heart that Euphemia would condone going after them.

She jogged over to where the two were sitting, trying to give Rolo a reassuring smile. "Hello. Thanks for sitting out with Nunnally; my section had a short meeting."

"No problem." Rolo was looking over her shoulder, probably for Lelouch.

Euphemia shook her head, setting her case down on her lap. There wasn't much she could do about Lelouch; she couldn't rein him in like the others. Rolo probably had the better idea of running and hiding when he saw Lelouch. After all, Rolo was in most of Nunnally's classes and Lelouch could only be with his sister on breaks. Even then, Lelouch would be going to college in a year, which meant that Rolo just had to play a waiting game.

She patted his shoulder, Rolo slumping slightly with the motion. "If he isn't out here now, he's gotten distracted by something."
"I sent Suzaku after him," Nunnally piped up, "but that was almost ten minutes ago. He must have gotten side tracked."

The two of them shared a long look before Euphemia got up from the bench. She passed her case and folder to Nunnally, who settled it in her lap. "I'll go find them so we can get home and eat."

Nunnally nodded, her attention going back to Rolo as the boy asked, "Isn't Suzaku usually more reliable than this?"

Euphemia didn't get to hear the answer, she was walking quickly back into the school. From the front it was easy enough to slip into the hallway used for the drama, chorus and all the music programs and even easier to figure out where Lelouch was. All she had to do was follow the sound of someone playing the violin.

Out of all the people in their family, Lelouch was he only one who had ignored the tradition of going into marching band and gotten himself a place in the stings section of the music program. Their father was inclined to rant about the breakdown of family traditions, but Euphemia was proud of her older brother. Besides, if playing the violin made him happy, she wasn't going to argue with him. And it was a bit of a reprieve for the rest of them. If Lelouch had been in the marching band, he would have gone straight for the top, and the band didn't need someone as ruthlessly focused as Lelouch leading them. If that had ever happened, Euphemia was sure that Suzaku would have been the only person left marching by the end of the day.

She tiptoed down the hall, peeking into the small practice room. As she had expected, Lelouch was there, working on a piece. That wasn't strange at all; he usually stayed late when they had practice so he could drive them all home. It gave him the time to practice in a quiet environment without the craziness that went on at their house. The strange thing was the second person that was in the room.

Suzaku was standing right behind Lelouch, pressed against him with his chin on Lelouch's free shoulder. They both swayed a bit a Lelouch played, Euphemia not able to see their faces, but she was sure that they were smiling.

Euphemia shook her head, prudently making her retreat when Suzaku began to kiss Lelouch's neck. She had walked in on them once, and it was not something that she wanted to do ever again.

She walked back to the front of the hall, opening the door and letting it slam shut. That would be enough warning, but she would continue on just in case. "Lelouch?"

The sound of playing abruptly stopped, Euphemia pressing a hand to her mouth as she heard Lelouch curse, followed by her brother ordering Suzaku away. She walked back down the hallway, not surprised to see Lelouch poke his head out of the practice room. "Are you done?"

"Yes. And waiting for you." Euphemia paused as Suzakuducked out of the room, his trumpet case in one hand. She waved at him, amused by the calm wave that he gave back. She didn't bother to watch him leave the hall; he would just be getting a ride back with them. Suzaku had been their neighbor for as long as Euphemia could remember. Instead, she sauntered up to Lelouch, watching as he crammed the sheet music into his backpack, his violin already secure in its case.

She leaned over to try and catch a glimpse of what he was working on, biting her lip to keep from laughing when she saw a fresh bruise on the side of her brother's neck. "I see you got distracted."

Lelouch slapped a hand over the bruise, giving her a startled look before he dropped to his knees and closed the violin case. Both the case and backpack were swept up quickly, Lelouch storming out of the room. "Let's go."
Humming, Euphemia followed in his wake.
"Dragon!" The cave echoed with his shout, Suzaku turning to follow the faint sound of something sliding over rock.

He frowned when his torch illuminated a trail of pebbles. It was not what he was looking for, although it was a sure sign that she had been there. He tightened his hand on his sword, raising it up as he plunged further back into the cave.

He had already passed the spot where Marianne had brought Lelouch in a desperate attempt to keep her son alive. Now he was pushing through winding tunnels, all of them scoured with talon marks along the bottom. Sometimes the tunnels opened up, revealing scattered bits of armor and gold, but Suzaku didn't let himself look too closely at them. He knew that he would just see the bones of the other knights who had dared to enter the dragon's lair. It would be his fate as well, now that he didn't have the protection of Lady Marianne. But he didn't care; he had lost everything that was important to him anyway. As long as he got a chance to wound the dragon he would be satisfied.

Suzaku jogged down another tunnel, picking out a branch at random. "Dragon!"

The sound of his shout echoed again, but this time it was accompanied by a snort. Suzaku ducked his head and ran faster, ignoring the way that his torch guttered. He would need it to see, but that was a dim thought in his mind. He had to find the dragon first, and then he would worry about what to do. "Where are you, dragon?!"

"Right in front of you."

Suzaku slowed down just in time to see something move in front of the end of the tunnel. He smiled and walked forward, keeping his sword up. His shield was strapped to the arm holding the torch, so useless for the moment. But the torch would be the first thing that he would throw away when he fought. The dragon was large enough that it didn't matter if he could see it all. As long as he got a few cuts in, he would be alright. If they weren't mortal, then he would make sure that the dragon bled to death.

He stepped out into another open room, surprised to see the dragon lounging on a flattened portion of rock. She rested her head on what looked like a mass of curtains, a strange sight. The dragon looked like a pampered lady, languishing away the hours until she was called upon. The sight made him sick. It was a perversion of nature, a creature pretending to be human. If he had listened to sense instead of Marianne, they wouldn't have been in this situation. And Lelouch wouldn't have gone mad.

Suzaku strode forward and stuck the base of the torch between two rocks, freeing up his shield arm. He raised the shield, crouching behind it as he looked up at the dragon.

The dragon barely glanced at him, the creature just heaving a sigh and swishing her tail. "Are you going to slay me, little phoenix?"

Suzaku tensed at the title, knowing that she mocked the bird on his shield. He was about to shout at her when the dragon turned to look at him, Suzaku freezing in the face of her golden eyes. "He told me you could."

Suzaku shook his head, quickly averting his eyes. Everyone knew that dragons could control people through their gaze; he would have to make sure not to look at her. That was probably how Marianne
and Lelouch had succumbed to their madness. He stared at the back of his shield instead, taking a deep breath. "I've come to kill you."

He heard the dragon shifting, not risking the glance up that would show him what she was doing. He would be ready, even if she moved towards him. Suzaku shifted his stance, getting his sword ready only to hear the dragon laugh.

"I'm glad someone is willing to." He could hear the click of her claws on the floor, Suzaku standing his ground as they came closer. There was a brief pause, Suzaku tempted to peek over his shield. He didn't get the chance, the dragon hooking one talon on the top of his shield and lowering it. "But you're a little early. I haven't fulfilled my part of the bargain."

Suzaku tried to pull his shield away from her, growling when she easily held it in place with one claw. He pulled his arm free of the shield, taking a defensive stance with his sword, only for the dragon to laugh and sit back on her haunches. "You can try knight, but you will only hurt him."

"Hurt him. I'm saving him."

"Are you now?" the dragon settled down onto her belly, staring at Suzaku again. This time, he didn't bother to look away.

He squared his shoulders, meeting the dragon with his own glare. "You took him from me, changed him into a monster."

"Did I?" The dragon lowered her head to the ground, her muzzle just within reach of his sword. "Or did you ever really know him?"

"I was his friend from the start! I was there for him whenever he called for me. I pledged my sword to him before the emperor."

"His stalwart companion then. And you still didn't see it? Either he was better at hiding it than I thought or you were just an idiot."

He bristled at the word. He only allowed that insult from Lelouch, no one else dared to call him that. Suzaku had proven himself to be more than the young prince's dog or the son of a common peasant. He had earned his title, and he had made sure that everyone in Pendragon had known it.

Suzaku took a step forward, smirking when the dragon suddenly reared back out of his reach. By sitting up, her heart and stomach were out of his reach. So she was going to make it difficult for him. That made Suzaku smile.

His eyes swept up to the scar on the dragon's chest, the strange pitchfork shaped thing that he had noticed when the dragon had reared back before, just before she had pulled out half of her heart for Lelouch. Suzaku shivered at the thought. It wasn't natural, and it wasn't right. He took a deep breath and stepped closer. "I can kill you, since that's what you really want. No more talking."

The dragon laughed again, turning her head to look at another part of the chamber. "He is persistent."

"He always has been."

Suzaku turned around at the sound of Lelouch's voice, staring at the prince as he walked into the ring of light that the torch threw. He lowered his sword, barely aware of the dragon that loomed over them both. He was too busy staring at Lelouch, who looked like he had before the dragon had twisted him, right down to the soft smile. "Lelouch…"
Lelouch shook his head, walking over to Suzaku and pushing the sword so the point was facing the ground. "That's why I can trust him; he'll chase something to the end. And I need you to help me now. I need to bring down my father."

He stared at Lelouch for a moment before shaking his head. "No. You're not thinking straight. The dragon is controlling you. Just let me kill it and everything can go back to the way it was."

Lelouch sighed and shook his head. "It can't, Suzaku. And you can't convince me to stop what I'm doing."

"Then I'll just kill the dragon."

"You can't do that either." Lelouch rested his fingers on the flat of Suzaku's sword, exerting just enough pressure to keep the sword pointed down. "I have half of her heart. If you kill her, then I die."

Suzaku shook his head, looking from Lelouch to the dragon. Lelouch looked just as serious as he always had, but the dragon had stopped mocking him. Her expression was nearly the same as it had been when they had first brought Lelouch in, the prince broken and bleeding. Suzaku could trust that the dragon was taking what Lelouch was saying seriously, and that unsettled him. If Lelouch and the dragon were both telling the truth, then there was nothing he could do.

The sword clattered to the ground, Suzaku barely registering the sound as he backed away from the both of them. "No. No, I came here to save you. I have to save you. Just come back with me and forget all of this, forget about the dragon and your father. We'll figure out a way to make you better."

"C.C."

The dragon moved, Suzaku turning to face the creature only to trip over her tail. He sprawled on his back, staring up at the dragon as she moved away again. The dragon gave him one backwards glance before lowering her head to speak to Lelouch. "You'll have to take care of him."

"Yes."

"But you won't do what you have to."

Lelouch hesitated for a moment before shaking his head. "No. He's a valuable asset."

Suzaku looked between the two of them, about to scramble to his feet when Lelouch knelt at his side. Despite himself, he calmed at the sight of Lelouch, even shifting closer when Lelouch rested a hand on his shoulder. Maybe if he could get Lelouch to explain, there was a chance that he could talk Lelouch out of his mad plan. The emperor was too big, too dangerous to take down. It would be better for Lelouch to wait until Charles had died to challenge the throne. If he could get Lelouch to understand that, then maybe he could talk Lelouch away from the dragon's influence.

He reached up to grab Lelouch's arm, surprised by the sad smile that Lelouch gave him. "Suzaku, look at me."

It was a command, Suzaku following it automatically.

He saw a flash of red in Lelouch's eye, and then nothing.
Schneizel opened his eyes at the soft groan from beside him, watching as the dark shadow that was Kanon shifted on the bed. He tightened his hold on Kanon briefly, not to stop the squirming but to keep him in place. The sun wouldn't be rising for hours yet and Schneizel didn't want Kanon to leave until he had to.

He had gotten too used to the presence of another person in his bed over the years to be able to sleep when Kanon was gone. First, it had been the nursery and then it had been Kanon, crawling into his too big bed and stealing a good portion of the covers. And Schneizel wouldn't have it any other way. Kanon was a loyal friend, an asset in everything that Schneizel needed to do for his father's empire. With Charles beginning to waver on his throne and Odysseus completely useless it would be up to him to manage the empire, at least until his father recovered. What Schneizel would do afterward was something he had not decided yet. There was no use in coming up with a plan when he didn't know all of the factors. It would be better to wait and see how things fell. After all, the physicians said his father would recover from his latest illness soon enough, and then things would go back to their usual pattern. At least until the next time that Charles got sick.

Sometimes it was enough to make him wish that Kanon would stay cursed forever.

He tightened his hold on Kanon at the thought, ignoring the sleepy protest that he got. Schneizel pressed his forehead against the back of Kanon's neck, taking deep breaths as he willed the temptation away, far away where he wouldn't think on it again. It was only when it felt like Kanon would wake up that Schneizel loosened his hold and relaxed back into the bed.

It was a selfish wish, one that he would never indulge. He had promised Kanon that he would break the curse, and Schneizel was not going to go back on his word. He was a prince of Britannia and had to be held to higher standards than his peers, especially since the emperor was sick. If he was strong and didn't allow anything to overwhelm him, the people would believe that it was just a bout of the summer sickness and that they didn't have to fear for magic or curses. He was the rock that the empire rested on now, and he couldn't afford to crack.

But he needed Kanon with him just as much. The man could go anywhere as a swan, the castle staff too used to his presence to say anything about it. Kanon was his spy inside of his palace and his messenger outside of it. Kanon could get anywhere in the empire faster than a horse and rider and speed was something that Schneizel needed. Everyone knew about the Black Knights and how they had risen to harass the Areas. Most people had written them off as a joke until they had started winning. Now the empire looked to him to solve the problem of the Black Knights, which was just another item on his long list of things to do.

Schneizel was sure that he could do it; it was all a matter of managing himself well. What he needed to finish the job was the sure knowledge that his most valuable member of his staff wouldn't run off on him.
There was nothing tying Kanon to Pendragon in the end. Schneizel offered the man a place to stay and some degree of safety, but there was nothing else between them. Kanon had family somewhere in the empire, a family that had abandoned him when he was a child, but Kanon might want to seek them out. There was no telling if breaking the curse on Kanon would free them too. Even if he wasn't attached to his family, Kanon might want to make sure that the curse was broken. Then there was the matter of the Maldini family estates and an entire world that Kanon had never gotten to experience. Why Kanon would stay to watch Schneizel try to wrangle the empire back into some sort of shape was beyond him. Schneizel didn't expect the bounds of loyalty to stretch that far.

On the other hand, he trusted Kanon. Implicitly. Kanon was the one he allowed into his room, into his bed. The one he allowed to know all the secrets of the empire without hesitation. Kanon was the one he talked to about the forces in his life that weren't his father or the never ending pull of politics. Kanon knew too much to just be allowed to wander free, but Schneizel would let him go.

He sighed, shifting so he had one arm draped over Kanon again. It was far too early to be thinking over things that couldn't be prevented. The best thing to do was to gather his resources and make a plan of attack from there. The curse was getting broken, Schneizel wasn't going to even try to find away around that. Everything else would have to fall into place from there.

Even with a vague plan, he still felt uneasy. Schneizel sighed, pressing his forehead a little bit harder against the back of Kanon's neck. For a moment, he felt a prick of pain in his left eye, the sign that his geass had activated. It wouldn't do him much good, but Schneizel couldn't resist the tiny bit of hope that he would be able to do something else than ease a person into believing him. Maybe, if he wanted it badly enough, his geass would do something useful for him just this one time.

"Stay."

The only answer he got was a soft mutter and Kanon continued to sleep on.
Chapter Notes

Takes place after My Mirror, Sword and Shield.

November 12, 2036

Rivalz had known Suzaku since they had been in middle school. He had nearly run the other boy over on his way to school. Thankfully, it hadn't been his motorbike, or else their friendship might have been over far too quickly. Still, it made for a great joke to break out among their peers. The two of them had gotten it down to a routine, a call and response that had impressed everyone in middle school as well as the few people that hadn't heard it in high school.

When they had hit high school, the little duo of Suzaku and Rivalz had expanded outward. Suzaku had taken Shirley under his wing from the first day, and Rivalz had gotten along with her instantly. It was hard not to get along with Shirley.

Rivalz would have liked to say that they had swept Milly into their group as well, but he knew the truth. They had all been swept up by Milly when she had swooped down on them and proclaimed them all members of the student council. Shirley had tried to argue, Suzaku had seemed resigned to his fate and Rivalz was man enough to admit that he had been too busy staring at Milly to do anything. He had felt like one of those girls on the covers romance novels that Shirley read, and was not embarrassed to admit it. Even as a junior, he wouldn't have minded being swept off his feet and carried into the sunset, as long as it was Milly who was doing the sweeping and carrying.

Rivalz couldn't remember where Nina had come from. She had just appeared in the student council room one day. He distinctly remembered having an empty seat next to him the day before and then she was there the next. But it wasn't too bad; he made sure to bring a snack for her because she always seemed to skip lunch to work on some science project of hers. Rivalz couldn't even begin to understand it, but he was amazed by it. And Nina had returned the favor plenty of times, quietly explaining math to him in a way that he really got. In the end, it didn't matter how Nina had ended up with the rest of them because she belonged there. Rivalz would jump to her defense just as quickly as he would the rest of his friends.

They all worked in balance until the day that Lelouch came.

Technically, it had been a week and Rivalz had no idea where Lelouch had stepped into the picture, but it didn't matter. Lelouch had messed up their rhythm by messing with Suzaku.

Rivalz was familiar with love, he had gotten used to carefully tucking it away when he watched Milly. He was used to not reacting with a soft smile or just shouting out that he loved her when she did something amazing. So, when Suzaku had started moping around the school, it had been easy enough to tell. Even Shirley had noticed it. So Milly, bright and beautiful Milly, had come up with a plan to get Suzaku moving, except that it had never happened. Moping had turned to depression and Suzaku staying past even when Milly would hold them.

So they had planned an intervention, wanting to drag the information out of Suzaku and find the person that was making him miserable. Because Suzaku was theirs and no one messed with him.
Except that hadn’t happened either because Suzaku had bounced into school a week later and had been escorted out by a new (college student, Shirley kept reminding him) boyfriend.

Rivalz huffed and glared at the pencil in front of him, flicking it towards the center of the table. The pencil rolled for a ways before slowly coming back to him, Rivalz watching it without paying much attention.

It wasn’t the boyfriend thing that bothered him, that had mostly been a surprise. Then again, Rivalz had thought Suzaku hadn’t been interested in anyone so a significant other of any gender was a surprise. The problem was that Lelouch had come in and messed with their Suzaku, had messed with him for a week. Rivalz just wanted the guy to be happy, and he wasn’t sure Lelouch was right for that.

For all he knew, Lelouch had showed up out of nowhere, seduced Suzaku and then broken his heart for a week. If this was going to be a pattern, Rivalz wanted to stop it before it became a problem. And better him than Milly. He could keep things quiet when he wanted to, but Milly would gather the entire school to Suzaku’s defense, which was something no one wanted to see happen.

It was why he had decided to take matters into his own hands by staying after Milly had dismissed the council early. It was a rare kindness that Rivalz almost regretted not taking advantage of. But Suzaku was also staying late, helping out one of the other clubs with something that he had promised them, which meant that Lelouch was bound to swing by and pick up his boyfriend. It was a grand romantic gesture that had managed to win the girls over, but not him. Rivalz was made of stronger stuff than that. Of course the girls wanted to believe the best of Lelouch, Rivalz desperately wanted it too, but he wouldn't stand for someone toying with his best friend.

He sat up abruptly as he heard the door slide open, spinning around to face Lelouch. Rivalz tried not to sigh in relief at the sight of Lelouch on his own. If any of the others had come with him, Rivalz would have been in trouble. Shirley would have dragged him out of the school and back to the dorms if she had known because she was willing to let the romance work out by itself. But Rivalz was made of sterner stuff.

Lelouch stared at him for a moment before looking around the room, Rivalz noticing how the man frowned. That was good, it was concern for Suzaku was obviously wasn’t in the usual place. That at least was something better. Then the concern vanished, Lelouch sticking his hands in his pockets and tipping his head to the side. "I thought he had council today."

"Milly let us off easily." Rivalz watched him, waiting for Lelouch to ask for clarification. If Lelouch didn't care about Suzaku, he wouldn't bother to remember the names of his friends.

To his disappointment, Lelouch nodded like he understood and dug out his cell phone. Lelouch stared at the screen before tucking it away. "Well, he hasn't gone home, no texts from him. So, where is he? Off rescuing at cat at the price of his own life?"

It wasn't an insult, but it rubbed Rivalz the wrong way. How dare this newcomer barge into their lives, throw off the pattern that they had all developed between each other and send Suzaku into a state that none of them had seen him in? And then he had the nerve to joke about it.

Rivalz stood up, his chair knocking against the table. He noticed that Lelouch reached for his waist, pulling his hand back quickly. Lelouch's hand curled by his side as he stared at Rivalz, raising an eyebrow. The incredulous look was enough to stop Rivalz for a moment, just to pause and try to get his speech to sound somewhat coherent. "Listen about Suzaku-"

"What about him?" For a moment, Rivalz thought he saw Lelouch panicked, but then the
unimpressed mask was back in place and he lost all patience for being polite.

"Everything! Did you think we wouldn't notice what you had done to him, ignoring him for a week?" Rivalz held up his hands when Lelouch looked like he was going to speak. "He told us what you were doing, about how you had some stuff to work out on your own. I get that, man. We all have shit we have to work through. But you straight up ignored him for a week and then expected him to go right back to you? You're lucky that he's loyal. Even Shirley wouldn't put up with that."

Now Lelouch looked insulted, which wasn't what Rivalz had been going for. He took a step back, sheepishly rubbing at the back of his neck. "Look. I think we all got off on the wrong foot. We only heard about you because of what Suzaku was going through and now I'm sure that I'm messing this up. But you've got to understand Suzaku is important to us and we don't want anything to happen to him. That's all I need to get off your back."

"You want me to promise that I won't hurt him?"

"Yeah."

"You know that's impossible, right?"

"Then you know that we'll come after you."

Strangely enough, that brought a smile to Lelouch's face. For a moment, it almost looked like he would laugh. But then it was gone, Lelouch completely serious again. "You have my word that I will try. I can't promise you anything else."

"Nothing like that week."

"No. Nothing like that."

Rivalz stared at Lelouch, trying to see if he was lying. He wasn't as good at is as Milly or Nina. They said he was too honest to be able to tell when other people were lying, but there was something about the way that Lelouch's shoulders slumped. He wasn't carrying himself around like one of the former nobles back in Britannia like he usually did, he almost looked like a normal kid their age. And that was enough for him, that Lelouch would relax his guard and attempt to make a promise. Milly and Shirley wouldn't like it, but they would have to extract the next promise from Lelouch themselves if they wanted. The promise that he had gotten was a good start, enough that Rivalz could step back and watch to see if anything else troubling came up.

"Right." He cleared his throat and jerked his thumb towards the left. "Suzaku is over in the labs. The science club wanted him to take some things back to Lloyd to see if their idea would work. Lloyd sometimes helps with them...when they come up with something that won't explode outright. Just go to the main building, second floor, room 206."

"Thank you." Lelouch turned to leave, Rivalz expecting the door to slide closed. Instead, Lelouch stood in the doorway, one hand out to catch the door as it slid. "Just so you understand, Suzaku is important to me as well; more than you and the others could ever know. Remember that."

He left, the door quickly sliding shut behind him.

Rivalz stared at the closed door, torn between just remaining in place in surprise or storming after Lelouch. Instead, he laughed, reaching back to catch himself on the table. He had hoped to intimidate Lelouch, and he had thought it had worked; until Lelouch had turned it back towards him. And it had worked in the opposite way too. For a moment, Rivalz had wanted to run.
He leaned back completely against the table, staring at the door and shaking his head. He didn't quite like the guy, but he could admire the man's guts. It took a lot to stand up to your boyfriend's friend and tell them off.

Rivalz sunk back into his chair, shaking his head. He would just have to wait and see about Lelouch then; all without letting Suzaku know how iffy he felt about his boyfriend. That would earn him one of Suzaku's patented looks of disapproval, and even Milly couldn't stand those.

He sighed and snatched up his bag, jogging out of the clubhouse. They would all just have to adjust to having Lelouch around and make room in their little group for them. They had done it before. It would just take time. After all, Lelouch hadn't left the best impression with them. Milly would probably continue to defend Suzaku's honor for a little while longer, just until she was sure that Lelouch's intentions were sincere. After that, everything would fall into place.

The sound of laughter brought him up short, Rivalz watching as Suzaku and Lelouch walked out of the main building, their arms brushing against each other. Rivalz had expected them to hold hands or do any of the other cute couple stuff that he had seen the other couples in school doing. But they were just there, existing by each other. Every once and a while, Rivalz could see Suzaku's fingers brush across Lelouch's palm or Lelouch lean closer to Suzaku. They weren't doing the usual couple stuff, but they looked like every other couple on campus. More than that they looked happy. Rivalz could accept that for now. He trusted Suzaku to know what was good for himself.

Rivalz gave them a wave, sure that neither of them would notice. They were too wrapped up in each other to notice anything about the world around them. He shrugged and adjusted his grip on his bag, throwing it over his shoulder as he walked towards his dorm.
C.C. sat down heavily on the bench in the control room, listening to the soft sounds of the TARDIS in flight. They were the only sounds she could hear, strange considering her companions. Then again, she had thoroughly worn them out.

Actually, it was the other way around.

C.C. snorted and looked up at the ceiling, ignoring the bits of crystal that were stuck here and there. As always, it was Suzaku's fault. She had just wanted a peaceful break on a planet known for its food. The delicacies weren't anything when compared to pizza, but they were just as good. And, considering the five other life or death situations that they had gotten themselves into, she had hoped that they would have a peaceful trip. Or that the peace would last long enough for her to stuff herself and retreat back to the TARDIS. They had yet to run into anything that Suzaku and Lelouch couldn't handle by themselves, after all, or maybe that was her being too generous, or too naïve.

What else could she have hoped for when she had brought Suzaku onto the TARDIS on a whim? She remembered thinking that no one would miss an injured soldier, especially one that looked like he was going to bleed out. That had been the year she had been nostalgic, searching for a way to connect to something that wasn't her TARDIS. In retrospect, she should have known better.

Suzaku was an idealist and an optimist in the worst way. He had taken to trying to save people on the planets they landed at, disrupted C.C's careful observation of the cardinal rule of being a Time Lord, not to interfere. She had managed quite well on that rule for centuries now, far longer than humans had been 'civilized' but Suzaku seemed determined to make her break it. After all the trouble she had gone through to save his life, she wasn't about to watch him throw it away on something stupid. Besides, on every planet they went to someone was sure to take a fancy to him. C.C. would happily admit to taken blatant advantage of the fact without remorse, because it got her what she wanted and everyone turned up happy.

In the end, Suzaku was a good investment, even if he did tend to get himself in trouble. Like with the execution of the Demon Emperor of Eslyria. As far as C.C. could tell, it was a perfectly good exercise of the local authority. But she had taken her time to wander through the countryside and amuse herself there. Suzaku had been the one to actually spend time with Lelouch, so she trusted his judgment. From what little she had known about Lelouch then, he had been interesting enough. Although, after knowing him for a few years, he was sometimes annoying. But C.C. had learned to deal with all kinds of people, and there was nothing that a good application of the silent treatment and a few cryptic answers couldn't fix.

It still left her stuck with two humans (or one human and one human descendant) who got into more trouble than they were worth. It was enough to make her regret allowing either of them on board the TARDIS, because she had her mission. She wanted to be left alone, working her way through time and space for whatever end she had decided on in that moment.

C.C. frowned at the thought, annoyed that her usual plan didn't have the same appeal. Years of just drifting had gotten old, she had realized that long before she had met Suzaku, but there had been nothing that she was willing to do about it. Despite the distance from the rest of her race, there were still some values that lingered; like not wanting to leave the TARDIS in a place where it could fall into the wrong hands. C.C. was sure that there was a planet out there where Suzaku wouldn't find trouble, one that both he and Lelouch would be content to live out the rest of their lives on so she could just stop.
It was a tempting thought, but one that was getting easier to push away by the day. As much as it annoyed her to be running for her life on every planet they landed on, it was also fun. There were always new places to see, new food to sample and more ways to goad Lelouch into a sulk. Better yet, everything felt better, felt new. It was an interesting enough feeling that C.C. wanted to see how it panned out, which meant that the nice quiet planet and an eventual end could wait a little while longer, just until she got bored with this life too.
Lelouch laughed at the trainers that called Suzaku weak.

They all knew him from their own village, where he had been under the tutelage of Gym Leader Tohdoh. They had all heard the stories about how Suzaku had come running to Tohdoh with an injured Pidgey, begging for the Pokemon to be saved. They had all heard how he had run away from home on his tenth birthday because of his father. Genbu had demanded that Suzaku follow the usual Pokemon journey that most ten year olds went through. They were to go to the nearest professor's house, if they didn't already have a Pokemon or couldn't take the family Pokemon, get the gear that they would need and set out on their own journey. Genbu Kururugi had made it to the Pokemon League once, and had placed third. It hadn't been enough to gain him entry to the Elite Four, but it had been more than enough for him to win fame in his own town. The stories of his anger at his son's refusal were legendary.

Of course, they all knew Suzaku from their own journeys, everyone had seen him with his Pokemon and challenged him to battles, all of which he had turned down. On the rare occasion he did accept, it was because one of his own Pokemon stepped up to take the challenge. To the rest of the people in their age group, Suzaku was a mystery; either too stupid or too weak to know what he was doing. To the rest of them, it would be better off if Suzaku had stayed home instead of going out on his own.

But none of them knew Suzaku, not really.

Lelouch had known Suzaku for seven years now, the two of them meeting early on into their journey. He remembered goading Suzaku into a battle, confident that his three Pokemon could beat the one Mewoth that Suzaku had tailing him, but he had been proven wrong. Everything that the other trainers had told him about Suzaku was wrong, so terribly wrong and it had embarrassed Lelouch completely.

He had put off his own journey, content to return home and look after his sister. Of course, he still caught Pokemon, on the off chance that he would go out into the field. Lelouch had planned to follow Nunnally, just to be sure that his sister was left alone. But then Suzaku had messed it all up.

Three years after his disastrous battle with Suzaku, the boy had showed up looking panicked. He had dragged Lelouch out to where a group of Pokemon poachers were setting traps, begging for his help in setting the Pokemon free. Lelouch had managed to get attached to a Vulpix that had been stuck in a trap, but that was the only Pokemon they had kept that day. The others were sent free, and the poachers sent packing by Suzaku.

Lelouch had expected that to be the end of their friendship, but he found himself following Suzaku, just to make sure the boy didn't get into trouble. He remembered the many arguments that they had over that time, but they had somehow managed to come to an understanding, a strange friendship. Sometimes, it still baffled Lelouch, but he knew better than to think too hard on it. He trusted Suzaku to have his back no matter what, and he trusted Suzaku with his own life, something that Suzaku had proved time after time. However their friendship came about, it had worked.

Together they could do anything.
Lelouch smirked to himself, leaning forward on his rock as he watched a fierce wind ripple through the field in front of him. On his shoulder, he could feel his Murkrow dig her talons in, getting a better grip as he shifted. On his lap, Espeon didn't seem to notice his move; she was too busy staring at the battle that was happening right in front of them. For a moment, Lelouch was tempted to allow his other Pokemon out, just to see the proceedings, but he didn't want them running into battle. Not when this one was Suzaku's.

There was an explosion in the field, Lelouch starting to his feet. Whatever had happened in the battle had taken a turn for the worse. Lelouch narrowed his eyes before making his decision. He trusted Suzaku to hold out on his own, but there was nothing wrong with tipping the scales to their advantage.

He reached up to lift the Murkrow from his shoulder, looking the bird in the eyes. "Go find the traps, mark them. Espeon," Lelouch glanced down at the Pokemon by his feet, "Follow and free them."

The two nodded and took off, Lelouch ignoring them. He was too busy reaching for three Pokeballs on his belt. Technically, it was an unfair number, considering that Suzaku had probably already worn the poachers down, but Lelouch couldn't be sure if the poachers would play far. And, after all, he was only going to buy Suzaku some time before the main event arrived. And, considering the size of the explosion, it wouldn't be too long.

Lelouch selected Nidoking, Ninetails and Serperior's Pokeballs, releasing the Pokemon quickly. They fell into place beside him as he strode down the hill onto the field. Lelouch reached out to rest his hand on Serperior's head, a gentle reminder to all of them to wait for his signal. He was just there to intimidate, not to barge in immediately. Suzaku would let them know when they were needed.

The smoke over the battlefield cleared, Lelouch getting a glimpse of two crumpled bodies to one side. He clenched his free hand into a fist as he recognized them. It was Suzaku and Lancelot, the Absol curled pathetically on the ground. Suzaku wasn't moving, but he wasn't in any danger, not by the way that Arthur rushed up to jump onto Suzaku's body. The Persian snarled, glaring across the field.

Lelouch pivoted to look at their opponents, not really paying attention to the men. His focus was on the Charizard and Rhydon that were still standing, although it was barely. Suzaku had managed to inflict some damage on them before he had been knocked out. Lelouch narrowed his eyes, resisting the urge to check the sky or on his friend. Arthur would have everything well in hand concerning Suzaku; he just had to stall for a bit more time.

"Ninetails, make a fire and make it big." He heard a soft bark in understanding, feeling the Pokemon brush against him before Ninetails rushed off to the side. Lelouch stepped easily to the side, Serperior and Nidoking moving to stand in front of him.

He could see the looks of surprise on the men's faces, the expression quickly covered over. It was obvious that he was going into battle at a disadvantage considering the two Pokemon already on the field, but he had gone for impressive and threatening over type advantage. Besides, from what he had seen of the men, they were just hired thugs and none too bright.

One of them stepped forward, waving a hand in Suzaku's direction. "You gonna to step in for your friend?"

Lelouch gave the man a banal smile. "For now, if you don't mind."

"Not at all. We get to show some boys how Pokemon battles are really done." The poacher reached over to nudge his companion, Lelouch ignoring them in favor of the heat that he felt as Ninetails sent
up a column of flame.

He had called, now he only had to wait for it to come.

Lelouch sighed, rocking back onto his heels as he looked at the men. "Tell me why you think I need a lesson."

"Because all boys need to know their place."

Lelouch saw his Pokemon twitch, both of them making an effort not to look over their shoulders. That was as much of a hint as the faint sound of something flying their direction. Nidoking and Serperior hunkered down, knowing what was coming their way, both of them a little intimidated. Lelouch couldn't blame them, not when he was also close to shaking. Then again, it was probably for a different reason.

He crossed his arms over his chest, about to deliver a witty retort when he heard a groan from behind him. Lelouch turned slightly, watching as Suzaku rocked onto his hands and knees, pushing at Arthur as the Persian continued to hiss and spit. Their gazes met for a moment, Suzaku blinking blearily at him before he was reaching for the Absol that was still unconscious on the ground. "Lancelot!"

"Suzaku." He looked up at the sound of his name, seeming to really see Lelouch for the first time. Lelouch just tipped his chin up. "Try to exercise some control this time. We're trying to save the Pokemon too."

The sound of something large coming their way was getting louder, Lelouch watching as Suzaku glanced over his shoulder before stumbling to his feet. Suzaku stepped carefully over the Absol, straddling the Pokemon as he looked over towards the poachers. He raised one arm up, like he was about to catch a flying bird. Lelouch smirked at the action, knowing that it was just to mark where he was so that the incoming attack wouldn't harm the people and Pokemon around Suzaku. He waved to his own Pokemon, retreating to the safe zone as Suzaku pointed toward the poachers and shouted at the top of his lungs. "Sacred Fire!"

The ground still smoldered, but the worst of the fire had been put out quickly after the attack had abated. In the ensuing chaos of Ho-Oh's arrival, Espoen and Murkrow had managed to free the trapped Pokemon and had returned to Lelouch's side, resuming their lounging positions. Lelouch had let the rest of his team out as well to let them romp before they were cooped up again. He had no idea where Suzaku would go next, but he was sure that he would follow after.

He made a face as he watched Ninetails roll enthusiastically in the ashes, letting the Pokemon do as it wished. It was a rare holiday for them on their constant tracking of Pokemon poachers. They had gotten enough out of the two that had been defeated to take down an entire ring; something that Lelouch was sure would make Suzaku happy, as soon as his friend was done looking after his Pokemon.

Lelouch looked over to where Suzaku was carefully applying salve to Lancelot's injuries, speaking quietly to the Absol. He smiled fondly at the scene, even with the inclusion of the huge bird that loomed over Suzaku.

He had long since gotten used to Ho-Oh's presence and the legendary Pokemon's affection for Suzaku. Even now Ho-Oh was trying to preen Suzaku, failing in its task to get Suzaku's messy curls
to lay straight. But the Pokemon persevered; even when Suzaku reached up to gently push Ho-Oh's head away. It was only when Ho-Oh draped a wing over Suzaku that he allowed the preening to continue, meeting Lelouch's gaze with a helpless shrug of his own.

All the other trainers might have thought Suzaku was weak, but that was because they had never seen the sixth Pokemon that followed him around, the one that Suzaku never claimed to have captured, even though Lelouch was sure that the fact that Suzaku had never tried to catch the Pokemon meant more than any claim he made. And whether or not Suzaku had officially caught Ho-oh or not didn't matter.

Ho-Oh was as much Suzaku's as Suzaku was Ho-Oh's.

Chapter End Notes

Here are the teams I made up for them for this fic. Please not that I chose Pokemon that I thought would suit them the best, not Pokemon that would make a good team for battling per say.

Lelouch-Nidoking, Ninetails, Espeon, Serperior, Murkrow, Liepard
Suzaku-Persian (Arthur), Breloom, Lairon, Absol (Lancelot), Haxorus, Ho-Oh
## DAILY PLANNER

**DAY/DATE**: February 13, 2019

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**NOTES**

- If you do not go to lunch of your own volition, I will drag you there myself.  
  *Understood.*

- Schwitzel’s birthday in a week. Send out appropriate present.
Deserted Island

It had been a week since they had first woken up on the island, three days since their confrontation over the cave. Kallen looked up from where she was snapping a branch into smaller pieces, checking on the one who had remained behind at their camp.

Euphemia was busy plucking a bird that Suzaku had brought down, a pile of fruit beside her. Kallen was sure that they would go search for more later, but it was enough for now. Besides, Lelouch had told them to always stay in pairs, just in case there was something big on the island. Kallen doubted it, but Lelouch seemed swayed by the scratches that they had found in the cave. He had said that it was an indication of people living on the island, something that Kallen scoffed at. They might have been on the island once, but they weren't there now.

Unfortunately, Lelouch wasn't around for her to argue with, he had gone off with Suzaku to do another sweep of the island, maybe spot a ship. Kallen thought that Lelouch was just trying to stay away from her. She hadn't taken it well when she had realized who was behind Zero's mask.

Out of everyone that it could have been, Zero had to have been Lelouch. He was too apathetic, too distant. He belonged to the world of Ashford. Even worse was the fact that she had suspected him and then ruled him out. She had known but had been tricked, just like the rest of the Black Knights. The branch in her hand made a satisfying snap as she broke it, Kallen tossing the pieces aside with more force than needed. The work was something to keep her from shouting at Lelouch or breaking him as easily as she broke the branches.

How dare he lie to them? How dare he promise them freedom and some kind of camaraderie when he was a Britannian? No, it wasn't because he was Britannian; it was because he was privileged, rich and sheltered from the rest of the world. By now, he knew how they struggled, but that didn't mean that he had the right to push his way into their business; even if he had been bringing them victory.

Kallen groaned and threw the last pieces of wood into the pile, ignoring the confused look that Euphemia shot her. She didn't want to have to talk to the princess, not while she was so angry at Lelouch. But mostly she was angry at herself, that she had allowed herself to be tricked.

In the end, she didn't care if Lelouch was a Britannian. The Black Knights were focused on justice for everyone and it would be hypocritical of her to hate their leader for that. What she resented was that Lelouch had known about her, about everything and had kept silent. It was like he didn't trust her, and she was the leader of the Zero Squad, his body guard. Surely he could have let her know and she wouldn't have told a soul. Kallen was sure that she could trust Zero, Lelouch was another matter entirely. Kallen was sure that she could come to some decision if he would stop avoiding her.

Lelouch was out all the time, with Suzaku or Euphemia, but never with her. When it was her turn to search for food or to see if there were any boats coming, Lelouch would stay back at camp, leaving Suzaku to volunteer. Not that Kallen would complain about having to go around the island with Suzaku, she was sure that Lelouch was gone twice as long because he was so badly out of shape. That he always seemed to take the most time with Suzaku was something that she was not going think too hard about. There were better things to occupy her time, like focusing on getting the fire started and what she had to do tomorrow.

She glanced up as Euphemia hummed, the princess looking inland. Euphemia remained motionless for a while before turning to look back at Kallen. "It's getting late. I thought they would be back by now."
"Yeah." At least Lelouch should have been. Suzaku would work until he ran out of light. Kallen brushed her hands off on her flight suit, her attention going to the pile of sticks. "I guess we start cooking then, it'll take a while."

"And if they don't come back in time?"

"There's always the fruit."

Kallen didn't expect Euphemia to laugh, or look quite so devious. "It serves them right, standing us up. Let's enjoy our dinner and watch for ships. And if one comes, we might not remember to tell them to wait for those two."

To her surprise, Kallen found herself laughing along with Euphemia. It served Lelouch right for lying to her and then refusing to talk. And, even though it was a lesser sin, getting her stuck on this island in the first place. She was Zero's bodyguard and could hardly be expected to just let him get captured. A week long vacation on a deserted island was not her idea of repayment. Lelouch could suffer through a dinner of fruit for all she cared. It was the perfect punishment.
This one takes place in the story Elementary My Dear Kururugi. If you haven't read that story, then it's basically a fusion with BBC's Sherlock, the RDJ Sherlock movies and the actual book series; all set in the Code Geass universe.

Under new management.

That was the phrase that had held all of the information that Suzaku needed, it was the reason that Mao had specifically said that to him that had evaded him for so long. The man had looked at him, smiled at him and said "It was nothing but revenge before, but we moved on from that under new management."

Suzaku had been more than willing to just pass it off as Mao's insane rambling until he had realized what Lelouch must have three years ago, after a certain point, the crimes organized by V.V. did not match up. The most recent murders didn't even make sense when compared to the ones before.

Suzaku stumbled into the sewer entrance, the same one that they had taken when they had gone to find Gino. Something had to be here, Lelouch had gone missing for a few hours before he had been found, and he had looked shaken. Suzaku had just ignored it then, Lelouch had been alone in the dark for a while by that time. He had never even thought that Lelouch had found V.V, the new V.V.

But what if he had. Suzaku stopped to brace himself against the wall, catching his breath so the sound of him panting wouldn't echo in the tunnels. What if Lelouch had met with V.V. and talked to him? That would have explained the sudden drive that Lelouch had gotten for these cases, there had probably been a deal that V.V. would give him the name of the person who had killed his mother, and Lelouch would have promised not to reveal who V.V. was.

Failure was not an option for Lelouch, and V.V. had become an annoyance. That was the reason that Lelouch had pursued him, chased the man who had been taunting him until they had both fallen off the bridge to their deaths.

Suzaku steadied himself against the wall, fumbling in his pocket for a flashlight. He was an idiot not to have seen this sooner. He should have been paying attention to the cases that Lelouch was working on; watching to see what was coming up. It was his job to catch what Lelouch missed. But he had been too busy with…Suzaku couldn't even remember what.

He would make up for it today. If he retraced Lelouch's steps, then he could find out why Lelouch had to be killed too. V.V. was too crafty to allow himself to get caught, so he had probably set Lelouch up, which is why Lelouch had been forced to fight instead of talk. If it had been just the two of them, just V.V. and Lelouch, then Lelouch might have made it out alive.

If he remembered correctly, Lelouch had said that V.V's men used these tunnels to get to him. There were hundreds of them, tunnels created by Elizabeth III as a way out of Pendragon, just in case Napoleon tried to take their country again. The tunnels ran for miles under the city and out into the desert. Suzaku had never heard about where they ended, just that they connected most of the old buildings' cellars together and were the home of most of the criminals in Pendragon. He was sure that
he could find someone that could take him to V.V.

Suzaku pulled the flashlight from his pocket, making his way into the first large chamber. This was where they had found Gino, and this was where Lelouch had left them. He frowned and raised the flashlight so he could see the tunnels that led away from the room. None of them were marked, so he just had to guess. He hadn't been looking when Lelouch had run off.

He swallowed and stepped toward the first one on his right.

He was about to walk into the tunnel when he heard footsteps. Suzaku froze, staring at the darkness ahead of him. Someone was walking into the chamber behind him, he could tell from the echoes of their footsteps. He had two choices then, either to walk into the tunnel or turn around. He swallowed and made up his mind, about to take another step into the tunnel. If the person behind him had a gun, he wanted to get into cover as soon as possible.

"Are you sure you want to do that?" Suzaku froze at the voice, his mouth dropping open. "That one collapsed a year ago. Whatever you are looking for isn't there. To be completely honest, whatever you're looking for probably isn't in any of these tunnels at all."

Suzaku turned around, his hand shaking as he aimed his flashlight at the other person.

Lelouch smiled serenely back at him.

"Lelouch." Suzaku's voice broke over the name.

"Hello."

He found himself shaking his head as he walked toward the man in the chamber. The man looked like Lelouch, dressed like him and carried himself like him. But it couldn't be Lelouch. Lelouch had died three years ago. Suzaku had watched the funeral, he had watched them lower the casket into the ground. Lelouch was dead.

"No. This isn't real."

"It is."

"I…I…"

"I know this is a shock." Lelouch smirked, sticking his hands into his pockets. "But I can assure you that-"

Suzaku punched him.

He didn't even realize that he had done it until he saw Lelouch sprawled on the floor of the chamber. Suzaku swallowed, taking a step closer. "You're dead."

"I'm not." Lelouch glared at him, gently touching his cheek. "You can't punch a ghost."

"No. You're dead."

"How many times do I have to tell you that I'm-"

"I went to your funeral. I watched them bury you. I mourned for you, Lelouch!" He listened to his voice echo in the chamber, panting for breath as he stared down at Lelouch.

Lelouch didn't look at him, instead he was staring at Suzaku's left hand. "So you really did get a
divorce? I was sure that Euphy would have tried to keep you close to her after the political marriage."

"We separated before, Lelouch."

"Before?" Lelouch looked suitably shocked at that, Suzaku slightly gratified. At least Lelouch didn't know everything.

"We just couldn't…not after you died."

Lelouch stood up, brushing off his pants. "Don't blame me for your failed marriage, Suzaku."

"You…" Suzaku swung at him again, Lelouch managing to step out of the way this time, but he looked frightened now. "You arrogant bastard! It has nothing to do with you! Not everything revolves around you!"

"You certainly did."

"Yeah, and what about Nunnally?" That got the desired reaction, Lelouch wincing and looking away. "She was a mess for months, even Rolo couldn't help her. He didn't even get a chance to mourn, he was too busy helping her cope and, by the time that Nunnally was alright, it was too late. Did you even think about what you were doing to them?"

"Of course I did."

"Then why didn't you tell them?!

"Because I couldn't!" Lelouch crossed his arms, standing his ground. "I made a deal to keep them safe. V.V. wouldn't touch them if I disappeared, so I did."

"You…you…" The explanation was so simple and so Lelouch that Suzaku couldn't think of a thing to say. It was just like Lelouch to risk everything for his siblings without really thinking through the consequences or even thinking about how it would affect other people until it was too late. Suzaku had stopped being able to cry over Lelouch a long time ago, so all he could do was laugh.

He swayed on his feet, finally falling to his knees and dropping the flashlight to the floor as he laughed. He thought he heard Lelouch say something, but he couldn't hear anything over the sound of his hysterical laughter.

Suzaku didn't know how long he stayed like that, finally falling forward and bracing himself on his hands as he laughed. He only snapped out of his daze when he felt someone's hand on his back. Suzaku closed his eyes, trying to take a breath, only to cough.

"You idiot. What have you done to yourself?"

Suzaku managed a chuckle at that, suddenly not able to stop trembling. He pushed away from the ground, sitting back on his heels and staring at Lelouch. It only took a moment before Lelouch pulled him into a hug. Suzaku didn't return the hug for a moment, too stunned to do anything, and then he wrapped his arms around Lelouch and clung to him for dear life.
Allegiance-Swap

A transcript of a conversation taken from surveillance footage in the Administrative Building.

Private Rooms of the Viceroy. 8:00 pm. August 26, 2017

[First part of the conversation happens out of the range of the camera. No other cameras managed to pick up the initial contact, indicating that one of the men was familiar with the layout of the building and the security measures. Instead, there is a rustling of fabric heard and then the sound of a harsh snap. A pair of heavy duty metal cutters appears on a table, but nothing else]

Lelouch vi Britannia: They seem to have treated you rather roughly.

Suzaku Kururugi: No thanks to you.

LB: Jeremiah was the one in charge of the operation. I had no say in it. I only arrived this evening, just in time to demand you to be set free. [Now Lelouch walks into view of the cameras, going to sit at his desk] I wouldn't have let them hurt you.

SK: Yeah. But you would have let them kill someone else.

LB: That's not the point.

SK: That's the entire point. It didn't matter if I killed Clovis or another Japanese person did, either of us would have been killed without a fair trial. The only reason you came in to save me was because we knew each other.

LB: Suzaku-

SK: And what are you doing now? Offering me a way out. In what world is that fair?

LB: [Now standing up behind his desk] In no world. Life isn't fair, Suzaku. If it was, I wouldn't be here and you wouldn't be there. Clovis wouldn't have been killed. Japan wouldn't have become Area 11 in a fair world. That's all there is to it and we need to make the best of it.

SK: [laughing] What happened to you obliterating Britannia?

LB: They tried to kill Nunnally! [Suzaku Kururugi steps into view of the camera at this point, looking shocked. Further research has shown that he had known both Lelouch and Nunnally vi Britannia prior to the invasion] We were with the Ashfords for a year before someone tried to kill her. The Ashfords sent us back to a branch of the family in Pendragon. That didn't last long either. We were swept up into the royal family again. Father made it clear what I would have to do keep Nunnally safe. I have to do what he says.

SK: For now.

LB: Yes, for now.

SK: Once you would have jumped at the chance.

LB: Never when Nunnally was on the line. And what about you? You would have never tried to push me like this. What happened to the kind idiot from the shrine?

SK: Britannia killed him.
LB: Suzaku, I-

SK: I won't put you in any more danger Lelouch.

[Suzaku Kururugi turns to leave, but is stopped when Lelouch walks around the desk and grabs his arm]

LB: Wait. I'm conducting an investigation into Clovis' death. I'm going to clear your name, Suzaku. I just need help. What better way to start my time as viceroy than to have the cooperation of the Japanese. Even better, the prime minister's son. Suzaku help me, for Nunnally's sake!

SK: I can't. I would just be incriminating myself.

LB: Then you really...Why?

SK: You know why. You've probably known exactly why anyone would kill the viceroy of Area 11.

LB: Is that a threat?

SK: It's a warning. I'm going to do my best to protect you, Lelouch, but I can't afford to play favorites. Keep up your guard. Watch where you step.

LB: Don't get in your way?

SK: Yes. [Suzaku Kururugi turns to leave again, passing out of camera range. The rest of the conversation is carried on with Suzaku out of sight and Lelouch standing in the middle of the room.] You know, I always hoped that we would meet again. But I never thought that it would be like this.

LB: Neither did I.

SK: Still, I'm glad that we could at least talk. Don't worry too much about Nunnally. I won't do anything that will make you choose between her and me. Just stay safe.

LB: Thank you.

SK: And don't try to find me again. You'll just get yourself killed. Goodbye.

[As Suzaku is off camera it is assumed that he leaves at this point. His path through the rest of the Administrative Building is still unknown, all the guards had been previously ordered away by Lelouch.]

LB: Goodbye, Suzaku.

[End transmission]

Note: This is the first record of conversation between Prince Lelouch vi Britannia and Suzaku Kururugi, who would later become famous as the leader of the Black Knights. While this proves that they knew each other from their childhood, it does not prove that they were collaborating with each other from the start. Further study of the Administrative Building security tapes is needed to pinpoint when they joined forces and prove that it had always been their plan to take over the Britannian throne.
C.C. was woken up as Arthur jumped off the bed, using her side as a springboard. She grunted and sat up, glaring at the two shapes that took up the rest of the bed, as well as the rest of the covers. She huffed and groped around for Cheese-kun, glaring over her shoulder when she couldn't find him. Her gaze settled on where Leloucia was curled up around something. From the way that the lumps in the blanket were, Suzako had rolled away from the two of them during the night, so Leloucia wasn't curled up around her knight.

She kicked the covers off of her, ignoring the initial chill on her naked body. She wouldn't be out from under the covers long, she just had to reclaim what was hers, the proper punishment would come later. There were a few pranks that she had been wanted to pull on the empress for a while now, one of them would be perfect for what Leloucia had done to her. The empress should have known that retribution would swiftly follow if Cheese-kun was taken.

C.C. clambered over Leloucia, ignoring the unhappy grunts that the empress gave. She flopped in the space between the empress and her knight, wiggling a bit to give herself space. Suzako shifted without a protest, probably used to Leloucia coming in at all hours of the night. Then again, Suzako was a soldier, she was probably also used to falling asleep wherever and whenever she could. That and the fact that Suzako had probably exhausted herself running around all day under Leloucia's orders while the empress had busied herself with the diplomatic business of the day.

Out of all of them, C.C. was the one who had done nothing, but she wasn't going to complain. At the start of her life and in between giving people geass she had been on the run and by herself. It was part of the reason she enjoyed sticking close to those that she made a contract with, it was a respite from having to be on the run and an uncertain life. Then again, remaining with the person she had made a contract with didn't guarantee that either. Still, it was a chance that she was willing to take and, as such, she considered the stealing of her things and a chance to stay warm a grievous offense.

A judicious application of elbow got Leloucia to move so that C.C. could squeeze in between them. C.C. kicked up the covers and slid under them again, sighing at the warmth. It was tempting to just fall back asleep, to tuck herself up against Suzako's naked back and content herself with that. She knew that Suzako wouldn't mind in the morning. Of course she would get a glare and a disgruntled dismissal come morning as Suzako still blamed her partially for everything that had happened, but it wouldn't be anger. Suzako was as touch starved as they came, and she would grudgingly allow C.C. to cuddle all she wanted, just as long as they could both pretend that Suzako didn't enjoy the closeness.

Then again, the knight was too different from Cheese-kun. Cheese-kun was soft and stuffed just right, although Leloucia might have messed up the balance when she had stolen him. Suzako was all whipcord strength and muscle, not fluffy enough for her taste. Leloucia was welcome to her knight; C.C. just wanted what was hers.

She rolled away from Suzako and the heat that the woman always seemed to put off. Surely Leloucia would be more comfortable close to her knight, especially when she was always complaining about being cold. That must have been the reason Leloucia insisted in draping herself in that multi-layered dress, no matter how obnoxious she looked. C.C. preferred her own simple dress and then the restraining jacket that Clovis' scientists had stuck her in, both allowed her to move freely. After so many years of running, movement was important.

For a moment, C.C. was tempted to work out a way to take Cheese-kun back and then roll Leloucia
towards her knight again, but she was in a bad mood. She had gotten her Cheese-kun stolen from her, had been forced to move from her place, loose the comfortable spot that she had claimed and was now awake enough to function. C.C. was sure that she would just drop back to sleep as soon as she was done, but it was the principle of the thing.

C.C. reached out, finding the stuffed toy by touch. It was easy enough to get her arms wrapped around it. Actually pulling Cheese-kun from Leloucia's arms was more difficult. The stuffing had already been displaced by how tightly Leloucia was holding it, and it would take C.C. weeks to get it back to the way it was supposed to be. She didn't want to stretch the toy either.

When gentle wiggling failed, C.C. decided to take drastic action. As soon as the sun was up Suzako would wake up and begin her duties. It would take an hour or two before she came back to wake Leloucia. C.C. wouldn't be able to ignore that. When the empress woke up, she expected everyone else to be up as well. C.C. could take naps anywhere in the palace or sneak back into the royal suite, but that would mean missing some of the news of the day, something that she didn't want to do.

C.C. reached back to push the knight down. "She's alright. She just fell off the bed."

Suzako raised an eyebrow, glancing down at the stuffed toy in C.C.'s arms before shrugging and flopping back down. "Then she's alright."

"Suzako!"

C.C. pressed her face into Cheese-kun, smothering her laughter as Leloucia hauled herself back into the bed. The empress didn't get back under the covers, remaining on all fours as she glared at the other two. Leloucia looked between the two of them, before deciding to vent her anger on Suzako. "What do you think you were doing?"

"Sleeping."

"I could have been killed."

"No you couldn't." Suzako rolled over onto her side, pulling the covers with her. C.C. was pulled along with the motion, finding herself tucked up nicely under the covers in Suzako's pocket of warmth. She smiled to herself and settled down, closing her eyes and listening to the two of them. She heard Suzako yawn, the sound nearly smothering the knight's words. "The bed isn't that far from the ground. You landed on all our clothes anyway. Or most of them at least. I think my cape is on the lamp at the moment, I can't be sure."

Suzako trailed off, C.C. listening as her breathing slipped into a slower rhythm, the knight already asleep.

Leloucia remained crouched on the bed before she huffed and turned her back on the both of them,
the mattress shaking as she threw herself back on the mattress. Shortly after the covers were abruptly jerked up as Leloucia settled herself, probably still sulking.

C.C. pressed her face into Cheese-kun, hiding her smile. She shifted into a more comfortable position, deciding not to worry about it. All of Leloucia's dramatics wouldn't bother her in the end, something that Suzako would have to deal with. It wasn't her problem.
"To do what I need to do to win this quickly - - I knew that meant you and I would probably never speak again. Or be friends again. Or partners again. I told myself that I was okay with it because I knew I was right and I - - I knew it was saving lives" – Civil War: The Confession

The door to the basement opened and shut without a sound, plunging the room into darkness. Zero reached over and flipped on the lights, flinching at the sight of so many bodies laid out. All of them were covered in sheets, but it was easy to figure out who was under them. They had lost so many over the past few days, first when they had been busy fighting each other and then fighting the real threat when it had come pouring into Pendragon. With all of the heroes distracted, no one had bothered to pay attention to the villains.

He stopped by one of the tables, starting at the carefully penned tag. He ran a finger over the tear stains on the paper, the ink running slightly where they crossed. This was Lancelot's body, Britannia's White Knight. He had been the death that no one had expected, one in the middle of the week whose body had just been reclaimed from where it had hung on display during the rampage of the city. Zero leaned forward a bit, recognizing the handwriting on the tag.

Euphemia had been down in the basement, probably trying to help by labeling the bodies, even if it was the body of her boyfriend.

He let the tag drop, pulling up a chair to the next table and slumping into it. He didn't bother to pull the sheet from the next body, he knew exactly who it was, even without the tag. After have to deal with Lancelot's body, Euphemia had rushed away, leaving everyone else to retreat to the far corners of the house and mourn in their own way.

The day had been saved, evil had been locked up and Pendragon was recovering again.

"But at what cost?" Even muffled by the mask his words seemed too loud in the room. Zero slumped forward, resting one hand on the edge of the table. It shook there, Zero having to tighten his grip to stop it. He swallowed and looked up, staring at the covered body. "I never thought that it would be this much. The plan wasn't for it to be this much. I didn't think that they would resist the idea of joining together. None of the people that were suggested were villains. They just weren't Knights of the Round."

He swallowed and sat back in his seat, closing his eyes behind the mask. "We did everything we could and it still didn't help. There were too many sacrifices. Bismarck, Naoto, Rolo. No one saw Luciano going insane and switching sides. Monica, Nonette. We almost lost Kallen too, it was touch and go there for a while. There are others, people I didn't even know. And there are people who haven't died but probably wish they had. Euphemia lost everything because…he proposed to her, right before all of this happened. They were going to be happy and everything was ruined. Euphemia and Nunnally, I can't even face Nunnally again. I'm trapped here."

Zero gave the door a quick glance before quickly taking off the mask and setting it down on the floor. He didn't throw it, no matter how much he wanted to. When he was finished, he still had to go outside and walk to his rooms. No one could see him, it would ruin everything.

He stood up and gripped the sheet tightly in his hands, just to keep them from shaking or drumming against his thigh. Braced against the table, Zero sighed and dropped his head, his words still muffled by the second mask that was around his nose and mouth. "Everything went according to the plan once the heroes stopped fighting. They turned on the villains and routed them out. Most of them are
in jail now and the ones that escaped won't be out for long. There are some still chasing after them, some who haven't dropped from exhaustion or grief—or become heroes accidentally.

"Zero was never supposed to be a hero, you and I both know that. Zero started out too close to the villains for comfort. He was only accepted because of Lancelot convinced the others to trust him, and you see where that got him. Lancelot is dead, and so is Suzaku Kururugi. They both died out there in the streets, just like you planned." He tilted his head forward until it was nearly rested on the shrouded body's forehead. "Everyone still remembers what Zero was like before, they keep playing the footage of Zero in the early days and then Zero kill-ending this whole thing and asking if the city can trust him. No one is, not for a long while. We fought a long battle and it still isn't over, not for me. Not for Zero.

"I don't exist anymore."

He stared at the sheet for a long moment before growling and ripping it back. He tossed it to the ground, not bothering to look at where it fell; he was concentrating on the body that was laid on the table. The corpse looked too perfect, too at rest with his eyes closed and a smile on his face. Zero leaned over, ignoring the fall of his cape around him as he took the corpse's shoulders and shook them. "What about everyone who died? What about the innocent civilians and the heroes who didn't have to throw their lot in with us? What about the ones who didn't know how this was supposed to end, who made stupid decisions and got themselves killed? What about the ones who are left behind? What are they going to do now? What am I supposed to do now?

"Was it worth it, Lelouch? Was it?!"

Suzaku stared at the corpse of his friend for a moment before falling to his knees. One of Lelouch's arms flopped off of the table, Suzaku grabbing it and holding Lelouch's hand. "Please, tell me that it was somehow, because I don't feel like it was. I knew what I was getting into from the start because you told me your crazy plan to make sure that all of the villains were put away, to make sure that the heroes would stop squabbling among themselves. You told me how you had convinced them. And it could have worked, but you couldn't stay out of it. You had to get involved and turn the focus on you and your fake attempt to get to the throne. If you had just stayed away none of this would have happened.

"But you couldn't and I said yes like the idiot that you called me, because I just wanted it to end. I let you kill me because it would help the people, it would enrage them and get them to fight back with the wrong side was willing. I said yes to you becoming a villain and me becoming this because I was losing friends. I stayed away like you told me because it had to be done. And I knew that I would be losing everything as well, it wasn't fair to make you lose it all. So I agreed to lose my future, my past, my friend. And now I'm stuck with Zero, because I don't have anything else anymore. Everything that I was or could have been is dead."

Suzaku took a few deep breaths before getting to his feet, pausing in the middle of the motion to reach for the mask. He set it on the chair before setting Lelouch's body to rights. If Euphemia came back it would upset her, and he didn't want to do that. What he felt about it didn't matter anymore, because Suzaku was dead, there was only Zero left.

Even with that, he couldn't cover up Lelouch's face, not immediately. He stared down at his friend, part of him waiting for Lelouch to open his eyes and smile. Maybe even say that there was a part two to this ridiculous scheme of his. But there was nothing, would be nothing. Suzaku sighed and closed his eyes, counting to ten before he opened them to seek out some sort of calm. Lelouch wouldn't be coming back. There was no one to dog his steps while he patrolled the streets, no one to challenge his morals, no one to push against and know that he would be pushed back just as hard. He tightened
his grip on the sheet and answered his own question before flinging the sheet back over Lelouch’s face.

"It wasn't worth it."

Suzaku turned on his heel, scooping up the mask and striding to the door. Halfway through the room, he slipped the mask on, blinking to adjust his vision to the dimmer light. When he reached the door, he flicked off the light, not bothering to glance back at the shrouded bodies lying on the tables. If he did, he was sure that he would turn back and never leave again. All of his anger was gone, all of his will to fight. There was nothing left except deep exhaustion and grief, things that he would never be able to show.

The door slid open and Zero walked out of the room.
Nunnally decided that there were two sounds that she hated above anything else; the sound of someone trying to breathe past the blood that was flooding into their lungs and the sound of a gunshot. She hated those sounds more than anything because they were the sounds that had completely ended her world.

She clutched Rolo close, glaring at anyone who dared to get close. None of the Black Knights were going to touch him; they had already done enough damage. The Geass Order wasn't going to get him back either. It was because of them that he was dead. If V.V. hadn't taken the chance to stab Lelouch, then the Black Knights wouldn't have jostled her out of the safety of their group and into the open where Rolo had caught her. If Lelouch had just been wounded, then no one would have taken offense at Rolo catching her when she had nearly fallen in shock. But V.V. had killed their leader, a knife in the heart would not heal, and they wanted revenge; especially on the person that had dragged them to this point.

Nunnally ducked her head, pressing her forehead against Rolo's shoulder. She felt him weakly try to pet her hair, catching his hand in her own. She didn't want him wasting his energy when he could be holding on. There was still a chance that she could get him out alive if they were allowed to move. Nunnally looked up; assessing the situation like Lelouch had taught her.

The Black Knights were all clustered around where Lelouch was gasping on the ground in Suzaku's arms, but the Geass Order was still lingering, all of them eyeing where she was curled over Rolo. They wouldn't let her leave with him, probably because they thought she was going to drag him away and finishing him off somewhere private. Nunnally muttered a curse through her tears. She felt Rolo stroking her cheek, leaning into the touch even as she glared at V.V.

It was all his fault, everything from start to finish. If V.V. hadn't been busy goading Lelouch then none of this would have happened, no one would have protested that she and Rolo were seeing each other. But, because of the feud, everything had been blown out of proportion. The worst of it was that no one else was suffering but her. The Black Knights would lose a leader, but she was losing a brother and the man she had loved. Nunnally wanted to badly to make someone pay, just to make the other side suffer as she was, but she knew that she wouldn't be able to do it. She wasn't like her brother or V.V, she just wanted the violence to stop, for it to go back to the peace that their gangs had once had.

She ducked her head, holding Rolo close. He flung an arm over her shoulders, the closest thing he could do to hugging her, and it would be the last one that they would get. That thought brought on a new batch of tears, Nunnally shaking her head where it rested against his shoulder. "I'm going to get you out of here."

"No. They'll kill you too."

"So?"

"I want you to live." She lifted her head from his shoulder, watching as Rolo gave a pained smile.

Nunnally glanced down at the torn strip of her skirt that she had pressed over the bullet wound, surprised to see that he wasn't holding it. She fumbled for the arm that was around her shoulders, moving it so he was pressing the bandage against the bleeding wound. "Hold this here for me, please."
"It won't help."

"There's a chance, Rolo. There's still a chance." His hand slipped from her grip again, Nunnally trying to maneuver it back into place only to have Rolo entwine their fingers. She didn't bother to pull them apart, squeezing Rolo's hand gently. Nunnally looked down at their joined hands, slowly accepting what Rolo was doing. They wouldn't be able to get out, so he was saving her. For what reason she couldn't know, because he had to know that the other half of her world was dying just a few steps away from him. She turned their hands over, kissing the back of Rolo's hand. "Please, I don't want to be alone."

"You won't be."

"But you won't be there."

Rolo stared at her, Nunnally not sure that he had even heard her. When he didn't answer immediately, she ducked her head, feeling her whole body shake as she sobbed. She felt him tighten his weak grip on her hand for a moment before his fingers began to slip through hers. Nunnally hurried to hold their hands together, wanting to cling to something to prove that he had been real. After all of this, she would have nothing but violence to remember him by and she didn't want that. She wanted to remember the tenderness too, because that had been important. Tenderness and love.

His other hand reached up to wipe the tears from her cheek. "Don't cry."

"I…there's nothing else for me to do. You'll be gone and I'll have nothing."

"You'll have our time together. And that was real. Don't you forget that, Nunnally. It was real, and I wouldn't have traded it for the world. I want you…to remember that…"

His grip loosened on her, Nunnally scrambling to hold him up. She hauled him against her as he went limp, Nunnally staring down at his face. Rolo's eyes were closed and there was a faint smile on his face, but it looked nothing like sleep. Nunnally choked on a sob, reaching up to brush his hair out of his face. She watched as her fingers trembled against his forehead before she bent over, pressing her face into his chest as she sobbed.

Nunnally cried until no more tears would come, barely aware of the echoing sounds of mourning coming from where her brother lay. She just clung to Rolo, vaguely hoping that something would happen to bring him back.

Lelouch had read her stories where love had brought people back, that love was the greatest miracle that anyone could have. She still desperately wanted to believe those stories, but she had seen the world, had been in it too long. She had seen the members of the Black Knights that they had lost and seen Lelouch at his worst. There was nothing of magic in the world. It had disappeared long ago, before people had started killing each other.

She sniffed and sat back, carefully laying Rolo on the ground. She straightened his clothes before laying his arms at his side, unable to bring herself to cross them over his chest. Nunnally knew that he was dead, but she was not ready to keep reminding herself of it. Instead, she bowed her head and sat in silence, trying to gather the strength to get up and walk away, something she was sure was a long time in coming.

Her quiet moment to herself was interrupted by a pained yell from the Black Knights, Nunnally lifting her head in time to see Suzaku stepping from the protection that the rest of the gang offer. It was easy enough to see what he intended to do, he already had his gun in hand and it was aimed at V.V. Suzaku was doing what Nunnally couldn't bring herself to do, lashing out because there was
nothing else to do with her pain.

Nunnally understood and would have let Suzaku carry on, except that it meant that none of this would end. If Suzaku killed one of the Geass Order, then they would just respond in kind. The same thing would happen if Suzaku was killed. Even more, she would lose her last tenuous tie to her family, now that Lelouch was gone.

Nunnally rose to her feet, not sure how she managed it. She had thought that she would never be able to get up from her place by Rolo's side. But she was also Lelouch's sister, and unable to watch as people she loved threw themselves into danger. "Suzaku."

The command in her voice was enough to stop him, Suzaku looking back at her. Nunnally shook her head and gestured back to where her brother lay. "No."

If he had been anyone else in the Black Knights, he would have argued. But Suzaku just nodded and took a step back, slamming his gun back into his holster with more force than necessary. Nunnally watched him retreat into the Black Knights, finding herself checking over the group. More than anything, she wanted to be left alone, but she couldn't leave the Black Knights like this, not when they would probably get themselves killed trying to avenge Lelouch. She was not going to put more people through the pain that she had suffered, not when she could prevent it.

Nunnally cleared her throat, not bothering to wipe the tears from her eyes as she walked back to the Black Knights. She made sure to do it just as Lelouch had taught her, like a queen because it commanded respect. Without that, they were in danger.

She was glad when Kallen came to stand by her side, the other woman a welcome barrier between her and the rest of the Geass Order. Nunnally did shake her head when Kallen reached for her gun, turning her attention to the Geass Order. "We are leaving to bury our dead, and you will not bother us." There was no laughter from the other gang, she had their full attention. "We will have the proper mourning period and then, your leader and I will have talks. Things will not be continuing as they were before. I will not allow them to. Remember that before you send your leader to me. You thought my brother's wrath was bad, think about mine, especially when everything has been taken from me."

There was nervous shifting among the ranks of the Geass Order and a clear drift from where V.V. stood. If it had been any other day, Nunnally would have been pleased with the rejection of their current leader, but she was too tired for it.

Nunnally was about to turn back to her own gang and issue orders when she saw a familiar face moving among the Geass Order. Nunnally paused, not giving into the urge to stand on her tip toes to see who was moving. She was beyond that childish impulse now. "C.C, where do you stand?"

C.C. pushed her way to the front of the Geass Order, staring at Nunnally for a moment before the corner of her mouth twitched up. "Where I've always stood, with Lelouch."

There was a hiss from V.V, but Nunnally ignored it. "And now?"

"I stand with his reason for living."

Nunnally felt her breath catch at the admission, but she couldn't allow herself to show it. She could break again, could give into the weakness when everyone was safe. Until then, she had to pretend like she didn't care and like she was going to rain fire down onto the Geass Order. She took a deep breath and turned around to face Kallen. "Have someone carry Lelouch and Rolo. We're going home."
To her relief, no one argued about including Rolo in the order. Ohgi even stepped forward to pick up Rolo's body, Yoshitaka following quickly to help him. Suzaku was the one to shove his way through the Black Knights and pick up Lelouch, just like Nunnally had expected.

She averted her gaze when she saw Suzaku lean forward, pressing his forehead against her brother's for a moment. She would give Suzaku what privacy he needed to grieve, but she would need him by her side, him and Kallen if she wanted to get through this.

Nunnally banished those thoughts, wanting to ignore them for now. She was getting them all away safely, and that was all that mattered. Nunnally swallowed and squared her shoulders, walking away from the Geass Order with her head held high. Behind her, the Black Knights made up the rest of the funeral procession, the three bearers of the bodies following right behind her.
Idols

Dear Kallen Kozuki,

Thank you for visiting our school today and talking to us about what it's like to be a Knightmare pilot. When I grow up, I want to be just like you because you're awesome. And I would like to be able to do good things when I grow up. Saving the world is a good thing.

Can you tell me how to convince my brothers that I can be like you? Even when we play Black Knights they say I can't be a pilot unless I'm pretending to be you because I'm a girl. Is it true that girls can't be pilots unless they are special? That's what my brothers say.

If that's true, how can I be special? Because I really want to be a Knightmare pilot. Is there some kind of training that I have to do or eat specific things?

Mother says not to bother you with this because you're very busy, but no one else has been able to give me an answer. My teacher says to always go to the source when I have a question. She says that it's the most direct way to learn anything. So, is there a way to become special enough to be a Knightmare pilot?

Rei Tsukino

Rei Tsukino,

Don't let your brothers push you around. If you do, they'll never let you hear the end of it. My brother used to do that all the time before I made him stop. We were best friends after that.

And don't listen to anyone telling you that you can't be a Knightmare pilot because you're a girl, that's just stupid. It's just as stupid as saying that you need to be special to be a Knightmare pilot. You heard my talk a few days ago. All you need to be a good pilot is good training and good reflexes. If you want to train for it, try out for a sport to keep your mind and body sharp.

Just do what makes you happy. And tell your bothers that if I hear that you're being left out that I will report them to the prime minister. He and I are best friends.

Kallen Kozuki

Kallen Kozuki,

Thank you. They let me play with them now and I don't always have to be you. But I still am, because it's fun to pretend to pilot the Guren. Is it really as hard as everyone makes it sound?

We're doing a project for school now, a report on a hero. I would do a presentation about you, but someone else in my class claimed you and we're not allowed to do the same person. I want to do a famous Knightmare pilot, but not anyone from Britannia. They're all claimed. One boy in my class picked Suzaku Kururugi and he's getting bullied for it. I don't like him, but there's no reason to be mean to him because the thinks that Suzaku Kururugi was a hero. Is there? I tried to be brave like you and tell them off, but I almost got into a fight. It was scary.

Mother says that I'm bothering you with these letters. She says you're busy making sure that the Knightmare Corps train and protecting the prime minister. I'll stop if you want. But I just wanted to
write to say thank you for the advice.

Rei Tsukino

Rei Tsukino,

You're not bothering me. Honestly it gets a little boring in the meetings sometimes. Everyone expects us to be writing notes, but I write you instead. Don't tell on me.

I'm glad to hear that your brothers are leaving you alone. It serves them right for trying to leave you out. And I'm sure you do a fine job of piloting your Guren. It's a bit harder than you think to pilot a Knightmare, but that's because there's so much going on. You have to watch your energy fillers, the enemy, your team. It's just a lot of work, but you get used to it. I'm sure you're the ace pilot in all the missions you fly.

Am I really that popular? Well, you might want to write something about Nagisa Chiba, she is an excellent pilot. Or maybe Commander Tohdoh would be more your style. Any of my recommendations would be from the Black Knight's roster, which you should be able to find in your library. Just write me if you need more help. Honestly, I don't mind. There's not a lot they need me for here.

Good job defending that boy. It doesn't matter if you like someone or not, they have just as much a right to have an opinion as you do. As a Knightmare pilot, you still have to defend them whether you like them or not. It's alright to have Suzaku Kururugi as a hero. I knew him and he was a decent enough guy. I didn't like what he did sometimes, but he was a good guy in the end.

Kallen Kozuki

Kallen,

Thank you for your support over the years and through high school. I don't know where my mind was half the time. I'm surprised you managed to get through high school and fight Britannia when I struggled with school and my part-time job. Still, it was worth it to get here. I can never thank you enough for what you did for me over the years.

It was really silly of me to write in the first place, but you said exactly what a little girl needed to hear. You told her that she didn't need to be like anyone else, but that she just had to keep going forward. That the only thing she had to do was trust in herself, and defend her friends when they needed it. I'm glad that I was smart enough to listen to your advice. Or was it just a little girl obeying her hero? It doesn't matter; all of the advice served me well. Except the one about writing in meetings. I got caught so many times in class replying to you instead of taking notes. I couldn't help it. I always got excited when I got one of your letters.

I know the fact that you and I have been writing each other since I was in elementary school doesn't make me special. It makes me honored to be counted as one of your friends. It's because of you that I met all of the Black Knights, even the prime minister, and spoke with them. Without you, none of that would have ever happened.

Tomorrow I report in to the Knightmare Corps for my first day. I'll try my best not to disappoint you.

Rei Tsukino
Rei,

You have never disappointed me. You have gone far beyond every expectation that I had for you. As much of an honor as it was for you, it was doubly that honor for me.

Now, it's time to show me what you've learned.

I'll see you bright and early private.

Kallen.
Suzaku shifted in his barrel, trying to find a comfortable way to sleep. There were too many bandages, too many stitches, to get comfortable. He snorted and gave up, stretching out so he was partially in the barrel, resting his head on his paws.

The noise in the yard wasn't helping his attempts to sleep either.

Charles was on the porch, spewing out curses as Marianne tended to his hurt foot, Suzaku rolling his eyes at the way the human was carrying on. Charles had just stepped into a trap; Suzaku had fought a bear. The humans barely noticed his complaints, even though he had few. But at least Charles was getting better; it meant that the puppies would soon get a distraction, something that Suzaku sorely wished would happen.

As if thinking about them conjured them, a group of four hound puppies came tearing around the tree. Suzaku lifted his head and pulled his paws out of the way, eyeing them as they raced around. Usually he would be following them, trying to herd them into some kind of order so they wouldn't bother the two retired hunting dogs that got the privilege of living on the porch and inside the house. As it was, Gino was the only one in charge of looking after the puppies. Two days ago, Suzaku had been sure that Gino, in his boundless enthusiasm, would be able to keep up with them. Now, he was surprised to see that Gino was nearing the end of his energy.

The puppies raced around again, this time with Gino panting on their heels. Gino gave him a baleful look before flopping on the ground, his tongue lolling out as he panted for breath. "I give up. They can go and see why we don't bother Bismarck themselves. He wouldn't hurt them but maybe then they'll learn."

"Maybe." Suzaku shifted again, trying to find a new position to lie in that didn't put strain on his side. He stopped when he felt Gino looking at him, purposefully letting himself flop onto his side. "I'm fine."

"You sure?"

"Yeah." It was the only answer that Suzaku would give, one that he was sure Gino wouldn't try to push through. For all he knew, everything had gone off without a hitch, save for the bear. Charles and Suzaku had gone after the fox that had lured Euphemia onto the train tracks and had caused her death. The fact that the fox's hide hadn't been stretched out to dry like the others was probably where the story fell apart, but Gino had been too busy with the puppies to investigate, which suited Suzaku fine.

As long as Charles was laid up and he was injured, Lelouch would be safe. Charles could attempt to take Gino out to track the fox, but Gino didn't know Lelouch like Suzaku did. Lelouch would lead them all on a merry chase, which suited Suzaku just fine. He still wasn't sure what to do about his friend turned enemy, still wasn't even sure about the designation. The time between when Euphemia had died and when he had prevented Charles from shooting Lelouch was a blur of anger and hurt, something that he wouldn't be able to sort out. And it was far too late to. Lelouch was safe in the game reserve, and far too smart to allow either him or Charles to get close again.

He closed his eyes, intending to take a nap when a chorus of howls started up from the puppies. Suzaku heard Gino curse, the other dog getting up and storming over to where the puppies were sitting on the ground. Suzaku just lifted his head, barely listening to the lecture that Gino was about to give, sure that it would be the same one that he and Gino had gotten when they were pups. He
sighed, rolling to his feet. There were other places to nap, like under the porch. Bismarck and Genbu wouldn't bother him, because he was hurt and deserved the peace.

Suzaku walked past the group of chastised puppies, three of them looking properly ashamed. But the forth was just glaring back at Gino. "I'm sure I smelled something."

"I'm sure you did." Gino gave a long suffering sigh. "But it was probably far away and we won't be going after it."

"Not that far. And it's something to chase."

The puppies started barking at the prospect of a chase, falling silent at Gino's clipped command and a shout from the porch. Suzaku shook his head, watching as Gino herded the puppies back to their own barrel before giving into his curiosity. Living by the forest as they were, there were plenty of scents that would drift over the cabin on the breeze. It was probably nothing interesting, maybe some quail or a squirrel. Even then, none of them would go after it. Until Charles had recovered, there would be no hunting.

Suzaku lifted his muzzle into the air, taking a deep breath. He mentally filtered through the scents coming in on the breeze. There was nothing new, nothing good enough to chase. He sneezed, about to turn away when he caught a faint whiff of something familiar. Suzaku froze, sniffing at the air as he tried to place the direction of the smell. It was faint and just in range, but definitely something that the puppies would want to chase. It was one of the scents associated with the fur shed; the one that the puppies learned held the things they were allowed to chase.

He turned in place, stopping at the point that the scent was the strongest. It was towards the game reserve, the edge of the area just on the other side of Marianne's farm. But it was still too far away for Suzaku to see anything, not that it mattered. He knew the scent well. He tipped his head to the side, not aware that he had let out a whine until Gino loped up to his side. "What is it?"

In the distance, Suzaku thought he saw movement. Then again, from so far away, it could have been anything. But the scent was enough proof and, in any case, he just knew, and that was enough for him.

Suzaku smiled and shook his head. "It's nothing."

"Really?"

"Just a breeze from over the preserve. Nothing."

Gino gave him a skeptical look, but didn't get to ask any more questions. The puppies charged over to him, knocking against his legs and demanding hunting lessons. Gino gave a long suffering sigh and escorted them away, leaving Suzaku to stare out at the game preserve.

Suzaku took another deep breath, quickly finding the scent that he was looking for. It was holding steady, which meant that he was probably being watched. Suzaku smiled, glancing back up at the ridge before settling down in the open.

"Lelouch? Lelouch!" He jumped at the sharp nip that was giving to his shoulder, looking over at where the vixen stood by his side. From the look on Kallen's face, she had been calling for him for a while. Lelouch didn't bother to apologize, just acknowledging her with a nod before turning his attention back down to the open space.

From where he was, he could see the two farmhouses, but nothing much beyond that. Anything
moving was a dot on the landscape. The distance annoyed him, but it was prudent, considering everything. Besides, he knew what he was looking for. Suzaku was easy enough to find among the dots that marked where Charles' cabin was. The hound had quickly come into view and, for one frantic moment, Lelouch was sure that Suzaku had spotted him.

It had been his plan all along, but it was hard to forget the night of terror that he had just barely survived over a week ago. When he saw Suzaku, instinct told him to run while rational thought told him that Suzaku would never hurt him, even after everything that happened.

Kallen leaned closer to him, Lelouch watching as her ears flicked. "Are we in danger?"

"No."

She huffed, resting a paw on his back to get the leverage she needed to lick at the v-shaped scab that was forming on his head. Lelouch sat still for her ministrations, rocking a bit when she stepped away. "I don't believe you. That dog-"

"Isn't coming here."

"Good." She lashed her tail before sauntering back into the forest. Kallen paused by the tree line obviously waiting for him, and she would continue to wait until he came with her.

Lelouch sighed and got to his feet, pausing as he turned away from the ridge. In Charles' yard, he could still see the lone dot that had to be Suzaku. He smiled to himself before following Kallen into the forest.
Fantasy

Chapter Notes

Takes place in Demons, Witches and Daemons. Julius’ daemon is a red fox and Suzaku's is a Shikoku dog.

Julius lifted his hand slightly as the train rocked Renatia further into his lap. The red fox didn't seem to be bothered by the motion, resettling herself in her new spot. Julius sighed and rested his hand on his daemon's back, continuing to read.

Both of them had gotten used to the constant rocking of the train. Even though it was the royal train, they were on EU railroads, the same railroads that had suffered from the concentrated efforts of Britannian bombing. It was a sound strategy; one that Julius would have employed himself had he not been traveling on them himself. They had already been stopped three times to transfer engines and tracks to get around blown out sections. A trip that was supposed to have taken two days was now stretching to four. Four days stuck in a train without any time to stretch their legs, at least without their guard dogging their steps.

He sighed and shifted his leg, not wanting his daemon to cut off the blood flow to the limb. Renatia just gave him a disgruntled look before stretching herself out and sprawling over his lap instead of remaining in her curl. Julius chuckled and petted her back, reaching up to scratch at where her neck joined with her shoulders, just where she liked it.

Renatia huffed, closing her eyes and going limp on his lap. Julius watched her squirm, about to suggest they walk the length of the train when there was a hard jerk forward.

Julius felt Renatia slide off his lap, the fox yelping as she hit the floor. There was a flare of pain along his right shoulder and back, Julius ignoring the pain as she reached out to grab onto the bench in front of him. The book tumbled out of his hand, sliding under the seat as he braced his shoulder against the wall, holding his position until the forward momentum of the train stopped.

The train lurched back, Julius allowing the momentum to push him back into his seat. Only then did he reach up and rub his aching shoulder, looking around for any clues about what had caused the sudden stop.

The countryside outside of the window was clear, no sign of approaching Knightmares or aircraft, so they weren't in danger of attack at the moment; which could only mean that the track in front of them was blown out, which would mean another delay. Julius sighed in impatience and sat back fully in his seat, rubbing his forehead. Another delay, which meant that the EU forces would have more time to get into position and he would be in danger of falling into disfavor with the emperor.

Renatia poked her head out from under the seat in front of him, the red fox carefully easing her way out of the small space. She kicked the book out from under the seat as well, hopping back up beside Julius. She nudged as his arm, Julius ignoring her attempts to check him over in favor for reaching for the book.

He missed his initial reach, Julius muttering a curse and leaning back slightly. In the space between his first attempt and when he leaned down again, Renatia had jumped down and retrieved the book.
for him. Julius sighed and took the book when it was offered, knowing better than to shout at his
daemon. She was only trying to help, just trying to look after him now that they had no one.
Shouting at her would just lead to an argument, something that he didn't want to deal with at the
moment. With an imminent delay, he would need every bit of patience that he had.

Julius patted Renatia's head, taking the book from her mouth and settling it on his lap. Renatia didn't
bother to follow, choosing to clamber up the seat and sprawl herself around his shoulders. He
reached up to keep her steady, looking out the window. He ignored the countryside in favor of
staring at his reflection and the eye patch over his left eye. He reached up with his free hand, pressing
against the ornate design on the front.

He couldn't remember what had happened to his eye, but it was a small thing in the grand scheme of
things. He didn't remember anything before waking up in a hospital room with nurses fussing over
him. According to them, he and his family had been involved in a fatal accident. It had been staged
to look like a car accident, but it had actually been a hit but EU sympathizers. It was well known that
the Kingsley family had supported the Britannian forces in the conflict, and that had been enough to
kill for. The assassins had mostly succeeded, killing his mother and father and leaving him without
any memory of what his life had been like before the hospital. The only reason he knew that he had
lost his family, or that he had a family to start with, was because the hospital staff had informed him
of it.

All he had was Renatia, and his new task. With the latter he would begin his new life and learn to
ignore what he didn't know; like he would learn to get along being blind in one eye. Then again, he
had Renatia to help him during his weaker moments.

He lifted his head as Renatia shifted so she could tuck her head under his chin. It was what she did
when she was feeling vulnerable and needed comfort, and Julius was willing to indulge her. It helped
him too in the end, tuning his focus to something else.

Julius didn't have too long to distract himself, Renatia perking up and then bounding from his
shoulders. She bounced on the seat, leaning out to look at the aisle. Her movement was the only
warning that he got before his escort walked towards him.

The Knight of Seven looked as he always did, completely serious. His daemon was the same, acting
like all the guard's daemons that he had seen at the imperial palace. She kept pace beside him, ears
and eyes focused ahead of her. The dog didn't even turn when Renatia leaned out, Julius having to
grab her by the scruff to keep her from reaching out.

He couldn't understand why Renatia kept trying to interact with the daemon, especially when the dog
had snapped at her many times. Julius was afraid that Renatia would push too far one time, and the
dog would lose her patience. He didn't want to watch his daemon get into a fight with a much larger
one, especially not one that had been trained by the military. He couldn't remember what he and
Renatia had done before they had woken up in the hospital, but it certainly wasn't anything that
demanded too much from them.

Julius tightened his hold on her scruff, pulling her back an inch despite her attempts to get free of
him. He hushed her with a look, glancing up to find the Knight of Seven staring at him. When he
stared back he expected the knight to glance away or look guilty for letting himself get caught
staring. Everyone else did their best to avoid his gaze. Whether it was because he was the emperor's
man or because of the eye patch Julius didn't know and he didn't care. But the Knight of Seven just
narrowed his eyes and gave him a perfunctory bow.

"We will be delayed for a while. The track ahead of us has been destroyed."
"So we'll have to wait for a transfer?"

"No. There's a place where we can switch over. There's a train carrying supplies to Britannian troops ahead of us. We're just waiting on your orders."

Julius felt Renatia twist in his grip, his daemon looking up at him. His fingers twitched her fur, Julius considering the information. They would have to keep moving, he didn't want to be the one found responsible for any failure on the Britannia's part. But a lack of supplies would be just as deadly. Julius sighed and glanced over his shoulder at the empty countryside. "We'll wait for the supplies to be offloaded. There's no point in disrupting the delivery schedule, especially since I'll be making use of those supplies. We've been delayed before; just letting the train unload will not delay us as long."

Suzaku nodded, Julius expecting some kind of reaction from him. He had heard Suzaku speaking to the other guards on the train and his daemon, proof that the knight was able to display some kind of emotion, but Julius had yet to see it for himself. Even his answer just got a curt nod, Suzaku's face still frustratingly blank. There was no approval, no denial, just the same expression that Suzaku always had. The knight bowed to him and walked away, his daemon lingering for a moment before following him.

He let go of Renatia, watching as the red fox jumped for the end of the seat. She leaned out into the aisle, Julius seeing her muscles tense as she dug her claws into the seat. For a moment, he was afraid that she would tumble off of the seat or, even worse, call out to the knight and his daemon. It was obvious that Suzaku was just putting up with them until his assignment was done. Julius couldn't imagine what Suzaku would have rather been doing, but it was obvious that it wasn't watching over Julius and Renatia.

He sat down on the bench, picking up the book again. He had plenty of time now, to do what he didn't know, but he had the time. If he had been briefed further on the situation, he would have begun to make plans, but he had been kept in the dark. Julius clenched his teeth, sucking in a breath between them. If the emperor had really trusted him, he would have gotten the initial information that he needed.

Julius looked up as Renatia whimpered, clearing his throat when she went to jump off the bench. The red fox gave him a sheepish look, but didn't move from her perch. "I just wanted to ask how long he thought the delay would take."

"No. You want to try and get close to her." The silence was telling. Julius sighed and set his book down on his lap, looking over at his drooping daemon. "I don't think they want anything to do with us."

Renatia slunk back to his side, clambering up onto his shoulder and settling there. Her head immediately went under his chin. Julius reached up to pet her, tipping his head to the side so his cheek could rest against her fur.

Julius felt her sigh, Renatia speaking in a soft whisper. "I just...sometimes I think that I recognize her from somewhere. Before our accident."

He tensed at her words, carefully turning so he could look over his shoulder. Suzaku was toward the end of the car with his back towards them, and he wasn't looking back, which was a relief. Julius didn't know what he would have done if Suzaku had glanced back. He turned back around, stroking Renatia's coat as he stared down at his lap. "Sometimes, I do too."
"Arthur, should we be doing this?"

"Quiet, Euphy. We need to concentrate."

He ignored the tremor in his sister's hand in favor of walking further down the hallway. It was hard, especially with his sister leaning back and trying to run away from him, but Arthur wouldn't let her. She was the one who had asked about it in the first place and had looked up everything. It was only fair that she come along as well. Besides, he didn't want to admit that he was scared of the dark. He was nine years old, far too old for silly, childish things like that. And, being a year older than his sister, it was his job to keep her safe while they were away from the other parts of the palace.

He glanced at the walls, trying not to shiver himself. He didn't want Euphy running off on him, but it was just too weird in the dark hall. Arthur was used to the brightly lit passages of the main part of the imperial palace, where the hallways always had a guard on them for the two royal children. While it was neat to not have someone following him so closely, it was strange not to have their reassuring presence right behind him.

Arthur swallowed and looked around. Thankfully, they didn't have to go all the way to the end of the hall, just to the third door on the right. After that, the hall didn't have any more doors on either side; the third rooms elaborate suites for the emperor. Except that no one had used them since Emperor Lelouch had died. His mother had moved back to another wing of the palace, taking rooms on the ground floor. Because of the move, everything was closer to her and no one bothered to come to the hallway anymore.

That and there were rumors that a ghost haunted the hallway.

Everyone knew how the evil Emperor Lelouch had died, killed by Zero before he could murder more innocent people. It had taken a bit of convincing by Euphy for a guard to tell them what had happened to the body. The man had sworn that he had seen the emperor burned and the ashes scattered. That should have been enough to stop a ghost from every story that Arthur had read. But Euphy had been the one to turn up with the idea that maybe the ghost was haunting a specific object. After all, they both knew that the rooms hadn't been touched since the day that Lelouch had died. It made sense that the object was still there, and Arthur wanted to find it. What he would do with it would come later, but he wanted to be the one brave enough to go where none of the guards dared to walk. It would show them all that he was a brave prince, brave enough to rule Britannia when his turn came.

He stumbled to a stop when he felt Euphy yank her hand from his. Arthur tuned, ready to yell at his sister when she held a finger to her lips, whispering around it. "What's that?"

"What?"

"Shhh." Euphy tipped her head to the side. Arthur stared at her, listening as hard as he could. But there was nothing. He shook his head, Euphy looking disappointed. "I thought I heard my name."

"You're just hearing things because you're scared."

"I am not!" She stomped her foot, Arthur afraid that she run off and leave him alone like she usually did when she was mad. He didn't want to be alone in the dark hallway even if there were no voices. It was creepy enough on its own.
He swallowed and held out his hand again. "Well, maybe you just thought you heard it because you're expecting to be scared."

That seemed to calm her down, Euphy huffing and taking his hand again. Arthur pulled his sister closer, glad that his attempt at an apology had worked. He wasn't going to apologize all the way, not when he knew that he was right. She had probably just heard the swishing of her dress anyway, the one that he had told her not to wear because ghost hunters didn't wear dresses. Euphy had just glared at him for that and had worn the dress anyway. With all the noise that it was making, they had probably scared the ghost away.

The two of them crept towards the third door, Arthur pulling them up just in front of it and staring at it. It looked just like all the other doors in the palace and not at all creepy. He puffed his cheeks out in annoyance. Maybe the guards had lied to him, laughed at him because they thought it was funny that the prince was scared of a hallway. In any case, he would tell his mother about them and she would do something.

Arthur was distracted by his thoughts of vengeance as Euphy pulled away from him. "We got to the door and nothing happened. Can we go now?"

"No. We have to go in."

"Why?!"

Arthur jumped for her and pressed a hand over her mouth. "You have to be quiet; we don't want anyone finding us here."

Euphy nodded and whispered a quieter, "Why?" when he took his hand away.

"Because they're going to redo this whole wing. I heard Mother talking about it. If they do that, then the thing that the ghost is haunting will go away. That's why we have to find it now and get rid of it. We'll be heroes."

"Like Kallen Kozuki?"

Arthur sighed, but nodded. "Yes, like Kallen."

That got his sister to move faster than anything else he had said to her. She pushed past him, standing up on her tiptoes to slap at the panel by the door. Arthur almost scolded her, because there had to be a code, but the door slid open anyway. Euphy smiled at him before leaning forward to peer into the room, Arthur resting a hand on her shoulder and looking in himself.

There was nothing in the room, no glowing object or red-eyed ghost floating in the middle of the room. It just looked like the sitting room to their living quarters. Arthur bit his lip and took a step back, suddenly very disappointed. He had been so sure that they would find something right away, because all the stories had the guards finding something quickly.

Maybe it was because the ghost didn't know about them; they had both been born after Lelouch had died. Maybe they had to disguise themselves as someone that the ghost would know to draw him out.

He looked back at his sister, who was edging away from the door with a pout on her face. She glanced between him and the empty room, not bothering to keep her voice down. "Now what?"

"We could look through all the rooms."
She didn't look happy about that suggestion. "And what if there's nothing there?"

"I don't know, Euphy."

"Euphy?"

Arthur spun around at the sound of the unfamiliar voice, staring at the man that had stood behind him. His mouth dropped open as he saw that the man was mostly see through, only visible because the walls were so dark. Even partially visible, Arthur recognized the man; he had seen pictures in books and on television.

It was Lelouch.

He sucked in a quick breath to hold back a scream, trying to be as brave as his father was. Besides, there was Euphy to think about, his sister clutching at his arm tightly. Arthur stepped in front of her, puffing out his chest as he tried to ignore the pain in his arm. He would protect his sister from the ghost as long as he needed to. Although how he would do that he wasn't sure. He had thought that it would be easy to defeat the ghost of Lelouch, but they hadn't found the object that the ghost was haunting and Arthur didn't want to go into the rooms with the ghost following him.

His knees started to tremble as Lelouch leaned forward, the ghost frowning at the two of them before it took a step to the side. "Euphy?"

Euphy let out a high pitched scream and let go of his arm. Arthur turned to watch her run down the hallway towards the safety of the rest of the palace. He glanced back towards the ghost, watching it straighten up before making his decision. He turned on his heel and raced after Euphy, screaming at the top of his lungs.

With every step he expected to be grabbed and dragged back into the rooms. He had heard all of the stories about Lelouch, even the ones that the grown ups didn't want him knowing. Lelouch had done evil things when he was the emperor; forcing people to fight for him, torturing people, killing them. Arthur could imagine what would happen to him if he got caught, and then what would happen to his mother and father when they came after him. He started to cry as he ran. He didn't want his mother and father to be hurt by a ghost, but they would be and it would be all his fault.

Someone stepped into the hallway in front of him, Arthur only having a moment to recognize the familiar silhouette, but it was enough. He sped up, hoping to get to safety before the ghost caught him. "Zero!"

Zero glanced at him, Arthur not paying attention to the mask as he darted under the safety of Zero's cape. He reached up for the man's hand, grabbing onto both hand and arm while trying to slow his breathing down. He didn't care about wiping the tears away, he was still too scared. From the other side of Zero, he could hear Euphy sobbing, which meant that she was safe. Arthur risked a glance over, seeing his sister tucked under Zero's cape as well, sobbing into the man's knee. He wanted to reach out and hug her, but that would mean coming out from the safety of Zero, which he didn't want to do.

He was in the safest place in the palace at the moment. Zero had been the one to kill Lelouch when the emperor had been alive. He would be enough to protect them when the emperor was dead.

He tugged at Zero's arm to get the man's attention before turning to point down the hallway.

Arthur froze in the middle of the motion, starting at the empty space in front of him. He gave a sharp gasp and scrambled to get closer to Zero. The ghost had been right there and now it was gone. It was
probably lurking invisibly somewhere. Zero was a great man, but he couldn't fight something that was invisible. It was too much. He sniffed, pressing his forehead against Zero's hand and closing his eyes.

"Hey."

Arthur felt the cape shift as Zero moved, yelping and grabbing it to pull the fabric close. The move stopped Zero, the man gently wiggling his hand until Arthur freed it. He relaxed when the hand was pressed to the top of his head, a firm reminder that they were safe.

"Why were you screaming?"

Arthur tipped his head back to look at the mask, ready to tell his story when Euphy beat him to it.

"Arthur wanted to see the ghost. I told him not to, but he wouldn't let me go back."

"Euphy!"

"You wouldn't! So we went down the hallway and I told him that I heard someone calling me, but he didn't believe me. Then we opened the door and the ghost was right behind us." Arthur heard her break down into sobs again. "It was trying to grab us."

Arthur felt Zero's hand stroke over his head, the pressure gone a moment later as Zero strode forward. He shouted and grabbed onto the cape, seeing Euphy do the same on the other side. "No! He'll get you too!"

"The ghost?" Zero looked back at them, the mask making it impossible to tell what he was thinking. But Arthur was used to it, used to waiting for a slight tip of the head that meant Zero had come to a decision. He sighed the moment Zero relented, the man taking a step back. "Alright. I'll take you back to your mother, but I'm going to come back."

"No!"

"I'll be fine. It's only a story anyw-"

Zero was cut off by Euphy's scream, Arthur feeling a chill run down his spine at the same time. Arthur turned to stare at the space in front of Zero, letting out a shriek of his own when he saw that Lelouch's ghost was right in front of them, Arthur level with the bloodstain that ran down the ghost's front.

He tugged frantically as Zero's cape, trying to get the man to move as Euphy ran out of the hallway, screaming for their mother. He wanted to follow her, but he couldn't leave Zero behind. "We've got to go!"

Zero didn't answer, Arthur looking up to watch in horror as the ghost took a step forward, one hand reaching up to caress the right side of the mask. Arthur felt Zero jerk back, but the man couldn't pull away. The ghost was too strong.

The ghost seemed to realize that, smiling at Zero as its other hand went to rest on the back of the mask before pushing through it. "Suzaku."

Arthur barely had time to recognize the name before the ghost was stepping forward, almost into Zero. The ghost's face disappeared inside of the mask, Lelouch using whatever hold he had on Zero to draw them closer.
Arthur let go of Zero's cape, stumbling back a few steps as Zero crashed to his knees, the ghost bending over him to stay in position. Zero swayed in place before reaching up for where part of the ghost's head could be seen sticking out through the mask. Zero's hand hovered in the air, inches away from touching the ghost's hair when there was a shout from behind them.

"Arthur!"

The familiar voice was enough to send him running back to his mother, Arthur throwing himself against the side of her wheelchair in his haste to get into her lap. It didn't matter that Euphy already occupied it, he needed to get somewhere he felt safe. Zero hadn't been able to defeat the ghost and Arthur didn't know if his mother could. Unable to get up into the chair, he pressed his face into her skirts, sobbing as she stroked the back of his head.

"It's alright, Arthur. I'm here now. You're safe."

"It was the ghost. I saw the ghost."

"Sh, I know you did. And you were very brave to protect your sister." Arthur looked up at the praise, catching his mother's smile before it disappeared. She looked away from him, back towards the hallway. "Zero?"

He turned to look at the hallway, whimpering when he realized that it was empty again. It was only a matter of time before the ghost appeared again, and he wanted to make sure that he was far away when that happened. Arthur pushed against the side of his mother's wheelchair, stopping when Nunnally put a hand on his shoulder.

"Zero, what's wrong?"

It took Zero a moment to answer, the man getting to his feet. "Nothing, your majesty."

"Well, the children don't believe that it was nothing. It would be better if we left here."

Zero nodded, walking out of the hallway and to Nunnally's side.

Arthur whimpered as his mother gently pushed him away, eventually taking Zero's hand under her steady encouragement. He thought he felt Zero squeeze his hand gently, but he was too busy looking back at the hallway and the ghost that stared mournfully after them.
Alright, a few notes here. 1) Using the Code Geass history of events, which can be found on the Code Geass wikia. 2) Even with that I am bending history a little. To my knowledge, there were no Japanese in the Roman Empire, not even as slaves. 3) The way Roman names worked was that they had 3, the first one like our given name, the second was the "clan" name and the third was the family name. Now, freed slaves took on the given and clan name of their master and then kept their original given name as the family name.

Suzaku grunted as he was hauled into the hall of the hillfort, trying not to put too much weight on his left side. The wound from the arrow still hurt, even though it had been bound. He still didn't know why the Celts had bothered to tend to him; he was prisoner who would die soon anyway.

He was tossed to the floor, Suzaku catching himself by his hands. He refused to fall on his face in front of the barbarians that had beaten them. Suzaku shot a baleful glare over his shoulder at the blond man that had hauled him in, surprised by the grin that he got in return. He just pushed himself up to his knees, intending to stagger to his feet. The blond was faster, resting a hand on his shoulder, using the pressure to keep him down. Suzaku tried to twist to move away, but the blond was larger than him, stronger than him. It was only when he slumped that the warrior took a step back.

Suzaku was in the midst of dredging up what little he knew of their language when another man walked into the hall. From the way that the blond warrior snapped to attention and the clothing that the young man wore, he was someone important, someone worth paying attention to. He was under no impression that he would be going back to Rome, or even getting off the damned island.

The battle had been days ago, Suzaku too lost in exhaustion and fever from the arrow wound to his side to remember how many. Even if the army did remain, he didn't know where he was. The last place he remembered clearly was the battlefield, and there had been no hillfort there, they had been close to the coast. All Suzaku had seen on his way over were rolling hills, without the sound of the waves. He was somewhere inland, but he didn't know where. Without knowing anything about the island he wouldn't know which direction to run and Suzaku was sure that there was no way off. It would be better to wait and bide his time for the next attack, if there was another attack.

He gritted his teeth, lifting his eyes to where the young man was settling down on the throne. It would have been better if the man didn't smirk at him, then Suzaku wouldn't have wanted to punch him, but he didn't dare. The light from the fire glinted off the young man's torc, the golden necklace marking him as a man of great standing. Just how great was the question.

The king of the Celts, Eowyn, had been on the battlefield with all of his lesser lords, all with their own troops. Suzaku had been low enough in the ranks to not get the privilege of knowing all of the names of the Celtic lords; he had just known that they were there. The plan had been to put pressure on them to see if they would break, but that hadn't worked. Eowyn was strong enough to hold them all together. Maybe the alliance would break in the years to come, or maybe not. Either way, it didn't matter to Suzaku. He was a prisoner or dead.

The blond warrior spoke to his lord, Suzaku tipping his head as he attempted to catch a few words.
He had learned some of their language fighting for Caesar, but every tribe had their own version of the language and it was different in Britannia as well. Suzaku had never learned a single one of their languages, just enough to get him by when he absolutely needed it, but Latin served him well.

It was the one of the two languages that he was fluent in, but the only one that he routinely spoke. His father had insisted on him becoming a good Roman citizen, to rise further above their status as freemen. Genbu wanted to see his great grandchildren in the Senate, to the point where he had married into an old Roman family and given up his own name. Suzaku had heard his father's arguments and had run off for the military. Genbu might have forgotten what his father had told them about their home, but Suzaku was proud of that heritage, proud of the name that his grandfather had given him, but not too proud to ignore the benefits that being a citizen would bring him.

He looked up from the stone floor as the young man laughed, surprised to see him wave the warrior away. Suzaku was even more surprised when the warrior obeyed, even if it was just to step to the wall. The young lord was placing a lot of trust in him; he was an enemy soldier after all. Suzaku might have lost his gladius and other weapons, but he would still be able to kill an unarmed man.

Suzaku straightened his shoulders, preparing to glare down the young lord when the man continued laughing. He had expected that, Suzaku taking a deep breath to steady himself. Whatever insults would come, or discussion that would be spoken over his head, he would kneel through it. It was just like the inspections that he had been through in the army, or the parties that he had served at when he was still a slave. What he didn't expect was for the young lord to look at him and speak in Latin.

"So this is the soldier that I've heard so much about. He doesn't look like much." The lord looked back towards the blond, Suzaku following his gaze. The warrior just grinned and gestured, Suzaku not sure what it meant. The man had never seemed to understand Latin, even when Suzaku had been shouting at him earlier. He swallowed and looked back at the seated lord, shifting uneasily under the weight of the lord's stare. "But the rest of my warriors have told me that you put up a fight, even half dead."

The lord inclined his head, a clear invitation to speak. Suzaku licked his lips, not bothering to lower his gaze. "You speak Latin?"

"Know your enemy." The man chuckled. "If the Romans had won, it would have been useful. Even with them beaten, it can still be useful. Just because your army has been chased away doesn't mean that the merchants will. And it's helpful for this, speaking to you."

"Why?"

"Because you could be as useful as your language." The lord started at him for a moment before tuning to look at his warrior, this time barking what sounded like an order.

The blond hesitated, muttering something back to his lord only to duck his head when the young man stood up and shouted at him. Suzaku leaned back to watch as the blond walked out of the room, clearly not happy with the order by the way that he was grumbling.

Suzaku frowned, dropping his hand to his side even though he knew that all of his weapons were gone. That the young man would just dismiss his guard so easily was worrying. He was still an enemy soldier despite his injury. The young man was either confident or stupid, and Suzaku wasn't sure which one he would prefer. He turned to look back at the lord, nearly falling over when he realized that the man was standing over him.

He caught himself at the last minute, bent slightly backwards as the young lord stared at him. Then, the man knelt on the floor, grabbing Suzaku's chin and pulling him closer.
Suzaku went with the pressure, allowing the young lord to stare at him. He started when the man traced a finger over the edges of his eyes and nose, relieved when he was let go. But the man didn't back away, he just continued to stare. "I should probably ask why you know Latin, because I have never seen a man like you."

"I am a Roman." Suzaku hesitated for a moment before lowering his gaze. "But I was a slave, as were my father and grandfather. My grandfather came from a place far beyond the Roman boundaries. He said it was an island too."

"Ah." The lord smiled. "Then we have something in common."

"We have nothing in common!"

"Don't we?" The lord reached out for him, gently stroking Suzaku's cheek. "We're both from outside of Rome and have been drawn in by them, and we've both escaped. You must know that you will never return."

"Yes." Suzaku sucked in a quick breath, pulling himself away from the young man. He overbalanced and went down on his injured side, Suzaku muttering a curse and curling in on himself. He heard the lord move; Suzaku remaining curled on the floor until the young man gently coaxed him back to his knees. Then they were far too close, Suzaku trying to lean back only for the lord to tug him closer.

"I don't mean to kill you, not like the others."

"Others?"

"I might be the only one aside from Eowyn that believes that the Romans might come back. We beat them once, but so have many others. They will always come back until they are well and truly beaten. We have seen some of their tactics today, but not everything and every commander is different. Still, we want to learn. And that's where you come in. All of the other captives have been killed or can't be trusted."

"And I can?"

"I dismissed Gino and you did nothing but watch."

"Maybe I'm biding my time."

"Maybe you are, but I am willing to take that chance." Suzaku shivered when the young man's hand slid from his cheek into his hair.

It wasn't fear, because the young man had done nothing to prove that he wanted to hurt him. The lord had gone out of his way to show that he wasn't going to hurt him. It was the exact opposite of fear, and Suzaku was all too aware of it. He had been on campaign for years now, with only a few stops in anything like a town. And he was a mortal, fallible and a sucker for a pretty face. There was no denying that the young man was pretty, it was just a matter of controlling himself long enough to figure out the situation.

He swallowed, forcing himself not to look away. "What would I do for you?"

"Prove that you're loyal to me and then train us. Teach us how to fight like a Roman, how to fight against Romans." The hand in his hair tightened a fraction. "For your loyalty, you will be rewarded handsomely."
"Will I be safe?"

"As long as you remain loyal to me, yes."

Suzaku pulled his head back a bit, trying to get some space to think. To his surprise, the young lord allowed him to. Suzaku rocked back in his heels so he wouldn't stare at the lord, running through the offer. It was a far better one than any other prisoner was going to get. He was sure that they would all be killed within a few days, and it was all too easy to imagine that he would become one of them. After all, he was still an enemy to them and their loose federation. If he refused, he would only be able to hold his head high as he was led away to his death.

But if he didn't, he could live. The idea of that cowardice chafed at him, but there was nothing else for him to do. Escaping was out of the question, even after he figured out where he was. There would always be Celts watching him, ready to kill him. The young lord was his only offer of safety, and to take that would mean agreeing to everything else, which wasn't a bad idea.

Back in Rome, there was nothing left for him but the military and continuing on with it. Going back would mean finally giving into his father's careful planning. He had watched as his step sister had been married off into a good family and then as his father had arranged a marriage for himself after his first wife had died. The same fate was waiting for him if he returned, a proper Roman wife and a career in politics, even if he didn't want it. Genbu had only let him go into the military because all the great Senators had served their time, and was probably eagerly awaiting the time that he came home. It would be far easier for everyone to think that he was dead than to face the fact that Suzaku would just hurt their family.

He raised his head, meeting the lord's gaze. "Yes."

"Good." The hand was back in his hair again, gently petting it down. This time, Suzaku didn't bother to hide the fact that he was leaning into the touch. From the pleased hum that the young man gave, it had been the right move. Suzaku let his eyes close, feeling himself slowly relax now that he knew that he was safe.

"What did they call you?" Suzaku opened one eye at the question. The young man was staring down at him again, this time from a little further distance away. Suzaku gave a soft grunt to show that he was listening, earning a chuckle from the lord. "I can't go around calling you Roman."

Suzaku sighed and sat up, pulling away from the other man completely. "Lucious Julius Suzaku."

The lord made a face and shook his head. "Too long. And too Roman."

"I am."

"And before that you were a slave and had a name that wasn't your master's. Why be free if your name just tells the world that you were another man's property?"

"Suzaku then."

The lord mouthed over the name, Suzaku trying his best not to flinch when the man got it wrong. He was far too used to it anyway. Most Romans didn't know what to do with his name either.

The young man finally shook his head and stood up, walking back to the throne and sitting down. A gesture bought Suzaku to the foot of the throne. He hesitated for a moment, kneeling when Lelouch reached forward and pushed him down. "Now, you swear allegiance to me, Suzaku. Then I can protect you."
"Fine." Suzaku arranged himself so his side wasn't aching as much, unused to kneeling before someone to promise loyalty. Romans didn't have kings; they had Senators that presided over a republic. It was just another change that he was going to have to get used to. He cleared his throat. "I swear my loyalty and my life to...I'm going to have to know your name."

The young lord laughed, leaning back in his chair. "Lelouch."

"I swear my loyalty and life to Lelouch."

"And no one else?"

Suzaku was surprised by the question, but he shook his head. "And no one else."

Before he knew what was happening, Lelouch had slid to his knees and was pulling Suzaku close. "Good. You're far too pretty to be a Roman."

"Japanese." Suzaku spoke in a nearly forgotten language, breathing out the words between kisses. "I'm Japanese."
"Lelouch." He was shaken awake, his hand already reaching for the knife that Suzaku insisted that he keep close.

Suzaku had taught him to use it, carefully explaining while they hitched rides on the back of trucks and carts. What Lelouch remembered most of all were the constant reminders that the knife might save his life one day, it was the only guarantee of safety that Lelouch had.

He grumbled and pushed at Suzaku's hand, sitting up. Lelouch ignored his stiff muscles; they would work themselves out when they started walking again. Movement was the key and the fact of his life now. "I'm up."

He heard more than saw Suzaku walk away, leaving him to finish waking up and to pack up his things. If he was lucky, Suzaku would declare that they were safe enough for him to find a stream and immerse himself in it. He didn't care if it was cold or not, he just wanted to feel clean for the first time in a week. If they had been closer to civilization, it wouldn't have been a problem. But Suzaku had led him out as far as the two of them had been able to go; first with a barely functioning Knightmare and a full energy filler and then on foot. Lelouch didn't even know where they were, but that didn't matter as much as the fact that they were safe.

The whole world might think that he and Suzaku were dead, but that didn't mean that Schneizel would give up. Lelouch knew his older brother, just like he knew that he and Suzaku would be chased from one end of the earth to the other. It didn't matter that Schneizel had something bigger to occupy his time; the usurper and his knight were still the priority.

Lelouch scoffed, rolling his blankets up and tying them tightly to his pack. He wouldn't disagree that he and Suzaku were priority, but there were bigger things to worry about. From their mangled escape from the Damocles, it was clear that neither of them had any power or any plan. For now, they were helpless. What Schneizel should have been doing was dealing with the fallout that the Damocles had made.

They had been too slow in that final battle, Lelouch and Suzaku both caught on the Damocles as it had climbed to its planned height. But Schneizel had been too sure of the support of the rest of the world. Too sure that his contacts in the Toromo Agency were loyal only to him. When the Damocles had reached its final height, the nations of the world had responded with their own weapons and a few F.L.E.I.J.A The ensuing confusion had been enough to allow him and Suzaku to escape, but also enough to destroy a good chunk of the world. Lelouch was dangerously ignorant about the current state of affairs, but he was sure that no country had recovered enough to actual pose a threat. They were probably still trying to catalog the damage and rebuild, if the shattered economy allowed for that.

Lelouch grunted as he hauled himself to his feet, rubbing the back of his neck. He had slept wrong the night before and he ached for it. He shook his head, walking out of the small room that he had slept in. He had tried to convince Suzaku to sleep in the same room, but his knight had insisted on guarding the door and sleeping under the protection of the small porch. Even with that, Suzaku looked much better than he did. If he had the energy, Lelouch would have been jealous.

Instead, he just bumped against Suzaku, leaning against his friend for a moment. It was a testament to how tired Suzaku was that he allowed it. Ever since escaping the Damocles Suzaku had been shaking him off, probably because all the promises that Lelouch had made him were void now. Suzaku wouldn't be able to die, wouldn't get his chance to kill Lelouch for what he had done to
Euphemia. Instead of the few months of cooperation that Lelouch had promised, Suzaku would be protecting Lelouch for an unforeseen amount of time. They both knew that they had to recover Britannia to let any part of their plan continue, that is, if Lelouch could come up with a plan. At the moment, all he could think about was running and hiding. He would come up with something later when they were secure. But that would leave Suzaku sullen and hating him until everything was back on track. Then again, Lelouch had gotten used to it.

He got the expected shrug off, Lelouch taking a step back. He watched as Suzaku walked away from the house, probably heading back to the road that they had been following. Lelouch had no idea where it went, but he knew that it wasn't toward a city. It wasn't the route that Lelouch would have taken, but he would trust Suzaku's instincts for now. Besides, it was better to find themselves a place that they could stay instead of traveling constantly. If they stayed in one place long enough for Lelouch to get a good night's sleep and a few full meals, then he would be able to come up with a plan. A plan just might be the thing to end the silence between him and Suzaku, which was something that Lelouch found himself wanting badly.

It was making him miss C.C. because she would have been complaining about their forced march. Then again, she was probably on one of her own and Lelouch had no idea if it was towards him or as far away from him as possible. It was another thing that he would have to wait and see how it played out.

He ran a hand over his face, trying to ignore the fact that he smeared dust on himself. He would only be getting dustier as the day went on. Stopping at a stream was sounding like a better idea all the time.

Lelouch lurched into motion when Suzaku grabbed his arm and started hauling him down the road. He stumbled the first few steps but then managed to get his feet under him. As soon as he caught his balance, Suzaku let go, his knight already striding ahead to act as the forward guard. Lelouch let his gaze drop to his feet, staring at the road as they trekked further into the quiet countryside.
The squeals were loud enough to be heard from a distance, C.C. flinching at the noise. It was a safe sound, one of a child at play, but it was loud and high pitched. Yet, for that, it gave her some cover to sneak around the guards.

If there was one thing that she had learned after visiting the imperial palace for years, it was that the guards were always more alert when children were around.

She didn't have to sneak around, C.C. had an open invitation to Aries Villa, but she liked to keep up the skill. She was too old to believe that she would be safe just because of her current position. Friend to Marianne would only get her so far, especially if the rumors about Charles were true.

C.C. ducked behind a line of flowering bushes, walking around the guards to the open area of the gardens. As expected, Marianne was seated on a bench, staring out where her son was toddling along the path with a look of extreme concentration.

If C.C. hadn't known Lelouch from his birth, she would have thought that there had been a second child. But there was no one else in the garden, and Lelouch tended to get vocal when he went sprawling on the ground or his needs weren't met by his schedule. For now he looked calm enough, which meant that Marianne would have space to breathe.

She stepped out of her hiding space, making sure to make enough noise that she wouldn't sneak up on Marianne. As expected, Marianne tensed where she sat, grabbing for the knife that she always kept at her side. Motherhood had just honed her fighting skills instead of weakening them, especially since she had to protect Lelouch in the dangerous waters of the Britannian royal court.

C.C. just smiled, ambling over and sitting down on the bench beside Marianne. She didn't expect Marianne to lean into her, but she took the weight without complaint, reaching out so Marianne's head rested firmly on her shoulder. C.C. glanced over at Lelouch, meeting him glare for glare until the kid decided to go back to the complicated task of walking. Once Lelouch was distracted, she wrapped an arm around Marianne's waist to keep her secure. "Is he tiring you out?"

"No. He's a quiet baby."

C.C. snorted, Marianne not seeming to notice. Then again, that was another change from the Marianne she had known. Once she would have jumped up and defended anything said against her son. Now, she was picking her battles carefully. It was a side affect of having to live in the imperial court. If Marianne had lashed out against all insults to her, she would never have a spare moment to herself.

C.C. nudged a bit of Marianne's hair away from her mouth. "Well?"

"You don't want to hear about my problems."

"We're accomplices. Whatever affects you affects our deal. And there's a very high likelihood of it being related to Charles, who we need for this."

Marianne shifted to a more comfortable position, tucking her feet up onto the bench. "It won't affect the plan or the promises I made. It's a very mortal problem." C.C. nudged Marianne a bit, encouraging her onward. "Charles is becoming distant; one of his other wives is pregnant again. It's nothing that I haven't dealt with before. I just got used to having all of his attention."
C.C. wanted to scoff, but thought better of it. For now she could hold her tongue on the subject and her own suspicions. With a son that was barely a year old, C.C. couldn't imagine Charles wanting to spend time with one of his other wives, especially if she had gotten the right palace gossip. Lucille li Britannia was not the easiest woman to get along with and it was no secret that Charles tried to spend the least amount of time with her. C.C. was sure that there was a plot there, maybe one of the nobles trying to drag the emperor away from his favored wife in the hopes that one of the noblewomen that he had married would produce a son. It was nothing more than pat of the complicated schemes that were the usual fare in Pendragon.

That Marianne was worried about it was another thing entirely. C.C. shot a sideways glance at the dark head that rested on her shoulder. Marianne had been a part of Pendragon politics before as Knight of Six and then as Charles' personal knight. She knew how to avoid the traps and sit out the storms. Charles spending time with another woman was just a small storm compared to some of the other things that would roll through the court. The worry was just a sign of something else.

C.C. shrugged off the feeling, the motion encouraging Marianne to sit up. For a moment, C.C. mourned the loss of the steady weight against her. After all, it had been her and Marianne working together long before Charles had come along, but now Charles occupied most of Marianne's time. If C.C. wasn't so old, she would be jealous. But it was just human nature in the end. She didn't begrudge Marianne the closeness with her husband, even if it did produce brats like Lelouch.

She frowned down at the baby that was tugging at Marianne's skirts in a bid for attention. From beside her, Marianne just sighed and scooped Lelouch into her lap. "It's time for his nap. Come inside and we'll talk some more. I can promise we won't be bothered."

C.C. shot a glance over at the two guards that were doing a credible job of pretending they weren't listening before nodding. She would take blatant advantage of Marianne's time now before Charles recovered his senses and came running back. Besides, Lelouch's nap time meant tea. And, aside from the delicacies that she had come to expect from teatime, it meant that Marianne would dismiss everyone and they could talk alone. The servants would retire to the kitchen, the guards would remain on the ground floor and there would be no visitors, the rest of the court busy far away from Aries Villa. The prospect of a private talk suited her just fine.

Considering the length of naps that Lelouch took, she would have time not only to go over business with Marianne but the gossip of the court. C.C. was looking forward to the latter. There was always so much information in the little bits of news, and important things might slip her way. She might get lucking and stumble on something truly entertaining.

C.C. pressed her lips together to keep from laughing. If there was something new and exciting for her in the limited world of court gossip, then that truly would be a miracle.
The Kururugi Affair was a strange occurrence at the beginning of Emperor Richard vi Britannia's reign.

It began with a single letter found in Empress Nunnally's quarters while the rooms were being cleaned. As the letter mentioned Zero, it was brought to him. Zero denied any connection with the letter and proved through a quick handwriting test that it had not been him. The letter was quickly confiscated by Emperor Richard and sent to his grandmother, Nunnally. The former empress acknowledged the letter and said that it had come to her during her reign, from the Zero who had killed the Demon Emperor. More information could not be gotten from the former empress, only that the paper must have fallen off her desk during her move, during those first days of her husband's illness. As the correspondence was a private matter, Nunnally allowed for a copy to be made for study while she kept the original.

The second letter of the Kururugi Affair came a month after the first was released to the public. This one came from a woman whose mother had worked as a nurse in Japan. The woman admitted that her mother had always told stories about the patients that came into her care and seemed to have had a special fondness for one old man, probably because the old man had such a hard passing. The second letter had been left in the mother's care as the man had passed away before he had finished it. By her own admission, the woman stated that the letter wasn't in its entirety, because she remembered it going on for pages and she now only had two. She couldn't say whether the other pages had been lost during a move or just misplaced within either her or her mother's house, which they were cleaning out at the time.

The news of the second letter caught the public imagination by storm, historians using the approval to get into archives that had previously been barred to them. No more letters were found in the papers of the Demon Emperor nor were any found with any of his known associates or their children.

Kallen Kozuki was the last to be interviewed by historians, as her health was fragile. She vehemently denied having received any letter from Suzaku Kururugi, repeating that she had killed him herself many times. After her death weeks later, one of her children admitted that he remembered having seen his mother crying over something before she burned it. Whether or not this was a third letter or just news that her friend, Kaname Ohgi had died in a car accident, has not been proven as both happened on the same day.

After a year of analyzing the letters and checking the dates, historians came to a universal agreement that both were fakes, written by Britannians who were anti-Richard and wanted to stir up trouble for his rule. Historians did appeal to the royal family to examine Suzaku Kururugi's body, but were denied by Nunnally who implored them to let him rest in peace.

The two Kururugi letters are produced here in full with a transcription of their contents as both letters were in poor shape.

**The Empress' Letter**
Nunnally,

You have received my Zero's letter of resignation by now, and I beg you to consider it. The symbol will live forever, but the man behind it won't. To that end, the resignation comes with several people who could take up the mantle of Zero, ones that I have looked over and believe you can trust. In the end, it is up to you to choose my successor and I know you will choose them well.

As for myself, I just want to thank you for making my job easier. You never asked who was behind the mask; although I think you figured it out by the end. You always defended me when the world started to get nervous about having a terrorist symbol in the heart of Britannia and you let me carry on as I wanted...as Lelouch wanted.

You must have figured out his plan already, Nunnally. You were always very smart.

I'm sorry I've had to lie to you for all of these years, but it was for the good of the world. And it was because it was Lelouch's last wish. He wanted to give the world peace, something that you've managed quite neatly on your own as well. That was the truth of why he died, of why he asked me to kill him. And, of all people, you deserve the truth.

Lelouch was never the tyrant that he pretended to be. He nearly fell apart when he learned that you were still alive and that you were going to become his enemy. It was only because I was still so angry at him that I pushed him forward. That is not something that I ask forgiveness for, nor do I ask forgiveness for killing your brother. As I said, it was his plan from the start and my only chance to clear Euphy's name. I regret not acting sooner, but how I could have acted I still don't know. I'm not the strategist that Lelouch was. I've always just been a soldier.

Just know that he loved you until the end, Nunnally. And nothing he did ever changed that.

Lelouch confided to me once that he had wanted to make me your knight before I accepted Euphy's offer, he got his wish this time. It has been an honor to stand by your side and watch you grow. You are strong, Nunnally, and never let anyone tell you otherwise. No one but you could have kept the world like this, even through those tough moments. There were times that I doubted your abilities
and, for that, I apologize as well. You have always been a good friend and a fine empress of Britannia. I am proud and I am sure that Lelouch would be too.

Don’t try to find me after you receive this, I’ve gotten good at hiding over the years. In any case, I’ve been dead for far longer. I sign this letter with the name of a dead man, because you deserve the truth after all of these years. Just let me slip away and remember what I was, a good friend and companion instead of what I became for those two years, death in a white Knightmare and a traitor to the world. In my more selfish moments, I would prefer to be remembered that way.

If you need to know more, ask Lloyd, Jeremiah and Miss. Cecile. They were in on the plan from the start. Kallen has probably figured it out by now as well. Between the four of them, you can get all the answers you need.

It was an honor to serve you, my lady. And it was an even bigger honor to know you, Nunnally. Those years we had together will always be dear to me.

Your friend,
Suzaku Kururugi

The Deathbed Letter

Damn you Lelouch.

Damn you for putting this geass on me and damn you for being dead.

I don’t even know why I’m writing, because you’ll never get this. Unless I find C.C. and she can
somehow pass this to you through C's World or I burn this letter, you will never read it. I guess I'm doing it to ignore the pain.

You put that geass on me so I wouldn't just sacrifice my life, something that I'm still not happy about. I had many things to atone for when you gave me that order, but I am glad that you gave me a chance to do what I had to do. I tried to do what you would have done as Zero, minus the grand plans and daring campaigns. And the hand motions. I could never get those down right. I did everything you needed me to and then left Nunnally in good hands.

I hadn't planned to. I had planned to get the geass removed by Jeremiah until the first war broke out. I was Nunnally's only defender then and I needed it to be extra sure that no harm would come to her. I needed to know that she would be safe above all else. When the war ended, I just forgot. No. There were other important things that caught my attention.

Nunnally was married in the tenth year of her reign to a nice prince from the EU. I know you would have raged at the marriage, but Nunnally was happy so I didn't protest. And yes, I looked into the guy's background and found nothing wrong. You would have yelled at me for that too, but I don't care. They were happy for many years. He died just last spring, and I'm sure that Nunnally was heartbroken. But I couldn't go back. I had already passed the mask to someone else because she needed someone strong and fit. She had her three children there to comfort her, and all of her grandchildren. One of them is on the throne now, Nunnally stepped down when her husband started to get sick.

Richard reminds me a lot of you Lelouch.

I'm sure Nunnally will live a far longer and happier life than I will, especially surrounded by her family like she is. And, I trust the new Zero. She'll keep Nunnally safe. She might even do a far better job than I did.

Oh God, Lelouch. It hurts really bad.

I know you didn't mean to put the geass on me. You would have chosen a better command, on that you could exercise more control over. And I know that you wouldn't have done it like this. You wouldn't have let me die like this.

The geass is making me live, even though everything else is shutting down. The nurses here have no idea how I'm still alive. Anyone else would have been dead a day ago. I'm not going to go quietly or quickly. It's going to take days.

I envy you your death, because it was quick. I made sure it would be. Why couldn't you have returned the favor?

There's not a lot left to say. The world continued in peace after you were dead and it looks like it will go on after I'm dead. It was a good plan.

Thank you for helping me clear Euphy's name.

I miss you.

I love you.

You were my best friend, Lelouch. I never forgot that. I don't know if you knew it all the way through, but that's what made it hard. I hated you for killing Euphy, but I couldn't completely, because you were still that little lost prince in my mind. Even the days we spent at Ashford lying to each other meant something. That's why it took so long to forgive you, because you were as dear to
me as Euphy.

That's the one thing that I need to know now. Did you know that I forgave you everything in the end? Did you understand or did you die thinking that I hated you? You should know that the hardest thing for me to do was walk off of that platform and pretend that nothing was wrong. I guess it should have been a warning to me for this, because it took a while for Suzaku Kururugi to die. It took years.

I really hope that this doesn't take years. I want it to be over. It hurts too much.

Lelouch-

Taken from *Death in a White Knightmare: A Biography of Suzaku Kururugi* by Alysia Cailean
"Aunt Euphy!"

The shout was the only warning she got before the two children barreled into sight. She had just enough time to kneel before the two boys rushed into her arms. Euphemia rocked back a bit under the impact, laughing along with them. She reached up to ruffle Alex's hair, shaking her head at the messy black curls. It was just like his father's, in a constant state of muss. "Hello you two. Have you been behaving?"

"Of course." Julius was the one to pipe up, trying to look serious. But, at three years old, it was hard not to laugh at him. Euphemia bit her lip to keep from laughing, knowing that the boy would just be insulted if she laughed. Julius just puffed out his chest. "I always behave, but Alex gets in a lot of trouble."

"Does he now?"

"He's lying!" Alex stared up at her with wide eyes. "I do everything I'm told. I don't try to argue like Julius."

"Liar!"

It looked like a full blown argument was starting, Euphemia looking between the two boys. There had to be a way to head them off, but it would be difficult to find that point. They were both as stubborn and annoying articulate as their fathers. To manage to get the both of them would take Lelouch, or careful planning on her part.

Fortunately, Suzaku stepped it before it could become a problem. "Boys, behave."

The both looked properly scolded, but Euphemia recognized the expression from when Lelouch was young. Both of them would just wait until the adults were gone before continuing their argument. Euphemia shook her head, giving Alex and Julius both pats on the head before getting to her feet. The move gave Suzaku enough room to slide past her, Euphemia glancing in the direction that Suzaku had headed off into.

Suzaku was probably heading for the kitchen where Lelouch was hard at work, if her nose wasn't letting her down. She followed after Suzaku, Alex and Julius trailing after her, still muttering to each other. Euphemia made sure to stay between them, hopefully postponing the argument until she could leave. This was her one time to visit in the upcoming months, and she didn't want to leave with the two boys arguing. Then again, they probably wouldn't if she told them that. Both Alex and Julius were eager to keep her happy.
She took a deep breath, smiling at the heavenly scent. Euphemia stepped into the kitchen, standing still as the boys ran out from around her, Julius immediately going to cling to Suzaku's leg. Alex was the one to dash over to Lelouch. "Father, look who's here!"

"I heard." Lelouch looked over his shoulder, smiling at Euphemia before looking down at his oldest son. "And I bet Euphy is hungry. Can you and your brother manage to set the table together?"

Alex nodded, reaching over to grab Julius' hand before tugging him over to the cabinets. Whatever argument seemed to have been brewing disappeared, leaving the three of them to themselves.

Lelouch waved Suzaku over to the stove, passing him the spoon as soon as Suzaku took his place. Lelouch wiped his hands on the apron he was wearing before pulling Euphemia into a hug. "It's been a while."

Euphemia leaned into the hug with a happy sigh. "It has. But I've been busy and so have you, it looks like."

"There's never a dull moment with those two." Lelouch took a step back, glancing back at his husband. "With Suzaku too. He's almost as bad as the both of them."

"Hey!"

Lelouch laughed and patted Suzaku's shoulder. "It's the truth."

Euphemia watched as the two of them exchanged jibes, Suzaku eventually leaning on Lelouch despite her brother's sputtering. She pressed her hand against her mouth to keep herself from laughing out loud, leaving them both to finish cooking. Like fathers, like sons it seemed. Euphemia wasn't sure that the world could handle another Lelouch, even two that were tempered by Suzaku. But at least her brother was happy, and that was all that mattered.

She leaned back in her chair, helping Julius up onto her lap when he tugged at her skirt. He settled himself into her lap, Euphemia holding him carefully in place as she watched the rest of her brother's family, relaxing for the first time in months.
"Lelouch. Lelouch, please stay still."

Schneizel didn't hear his brother's response. He was too busy pressing a hand against his leg in an attempt to stem the bleeding. Schneizel gritted his teeth, staring up at where his uncle waited patiently in the center of the room. Of all the people that could have betrayed them, Schneizel had never counted on their uncle. Vincent had always kept himself far apart from Charles' obsession with rare artifacts. That he would turn on all of them now was a surprise, even more so that he had used force. Schneizel could remember many visits when Vincent had looked down at his three nephews and solemnly vowed that they were all his favorites and that he was never going to let anything happen to them.

Apparently, that had all been a ruse because Vincent had not hesitated before shooting Schneizel in the leg, Lelouch in the shoulder and Clovis though the lung. Even now Schneizel could hear Clovis' ragged gasps for air. His younger brother wasn't going to last long, not even if Suzaku ran through the gauntlet that was between them and the Holy Grail. The Grail might have been able to save lives, but Schneizel was sure that it couldn't bring people back from the dead.

He adjusted his grip on his leg and shifted on the ground, dragging himself in a half circle so he could see where Nunnally knelt over Lelouch. His youngest sister looked up at him with tears her eyes but managed a smile, a surprising thing considering that a gun was trained on the back of her had. "Don't worry, Schneizel. Suzaku won't fail us."

"I'm not worried about the Eleven." Pain made him less than politically correct, Schneizel squeezing his leg in a vain attempt to slow the bleeding. "I'm worried about us. How do we know that Uncle won't just shoot us after he gets what he wants?"

Nunnally bit her lip and looked around the chamber, Schneizel trying his best not to follow her gaze. She was just as smart as her brother and would figure something out soon enough. The problem was that there weren't enough able bodied people to help with their escape. Nunnally would be the only one able to walk; and maybe Suzaku if he got out in time. Lelouch would need to lean on someone and Schneizel was sure that he would have to be carried. He didn't want to think about the ride out of the canyon, not sure that he would even be able to stay on a horse.

He eyed the frightened people gathered one the other side of the room. All of them were from the Area and all of them were on Vincent's payroll. Schneizel didn't think that any of them would risk his uncle's ire, especially when the three suffering were all Britannian and children of one of the most outspoken racists in the Senate. If they tried to run for the horses, Vincent's lackeys would stop them if their uncle didn't shoot them first. Their only hope rested on Suzaku, which was a slim one in the first place.

Clovis had been the one with all the information on this artifact; he was the one more likely to go chasing after mythological treasures. Schneizel had confined himself to the EU and Lelouch to the Chinese Federation and Area 11. Suzaku had to read though Clovis' notes, which were partially translated and partially not. Schneizel was sure that Suzaku didn't speak French and Latin in addition to Japanese and Britannian English. It would have been better if Lelouch had gone in, if Lelouch hadn't been bleeding from the shoulder. If Suzaku did manage to avoid the traps, it wouldn't be by reading what clues Clovis had left them.

He leaned back onto his elbows, wincing at the strain on his muscles. He wanted to be able to see what was going on, but it was awkward while holding his leg. Schneizel tipped his head towards the
ceiling of the chamber, taking a deep breath. He was about to let it out slowly when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

Schneizel jumped at the touch, muttering a curse when it made his wound throb. He looked over at the man crouching beside him, already shifting his weight as he realized that one of Vincent's employees was leaning over him. Schneizel gritted his teeth, about to send the man away with a harsh word when the man moved.

He reached out and pulled Schneizel's hand away from the wound, quickly pressing a pad of folded cloth against the wound. Schneizel stared at the pad, not moving even as the man bent the injured limb and began to wrap it. The man glanced over towards where Vincent was still staring into the corridors that Suzaku had disappeared into. "It would be better if you didn't move."

Schneizel snorted. "Better for who?"

"You specifically." The man paused in his hood back from his face. "Although, it would be better for all of us in the end. I don't think I could carry you to the exit."

Schneizel tipped his head to the side, giving the man an ear to whisper into. He felt the man begin wrapping his leg again, speaking quietly in accented Britannian English. "I'll go help the others after this."

"Why? You're Vincent's man."

The heard the man give a soft laugh, Schneizel turning his head to look at the man. His temporary ally was pulling the robe and his shirt underneath away from his chest, revealing a familiar tattoo. Schneizel narrowed his eyes as he recognized the complex cross that marked a member of the Brotherhood of the Cruciform Sword. He glanced up at the man, raising an eyebrow. "And I should trust you because of this? Your brothers attacked us in Venice, and you're from Area 18."

The man waved his hand. "What is all of that in the face of a madman getting far too much power? Besides, there are many men that are stuck in their father's shadow. I think you are one of them." The man glanced up at Schneizel before tying the bandage off. "I am not like the others who charged in without thinking. I did my research and decided that you were the ones worth helping. And then I bided my time."

Schneizel laughed, leaning back on his elbows. "Smart for a Number."

The man gave the knot a harsh tug, Schneizel grunting in pain. The man just smiled. "And gracious for a Britannian."

The two of them exchanged smiles, Schneizel leaning back on his elbows. He tipped his head to the side, checking the wound before giving it a nod. He wouldn't be running anywhere fast, but at least he would be able to limp along without having to bend over to keep pressure on the wound. Schneizel brushed his fingers over the knot of the bandage, reaching out with his other hand to grab the man before he slunk over to Lelouch. "Wait."

"Your brother needs my help."

"Just tell me your name."

The request seemed to throw the man off stride. He stared at Schneizel for a moment before gently prying Schneizel's fingers from his arm. "Kanon."

Schneizel nodded and let him go, watching Kanon as he touched Nunnally's shoulder and knelt next
to Lelouch. Vincent looked over at them once but did nothing to stop Kanon, he just adjusted his aim on Nunnally. Schneizel glared at his uncle, tempted to drag himself between Nunnally and the gun, but he was sure that he move would just get him killed. He clenched his hands into fists and stared at the corridor, joining in the silent vigil as they waited for Suzaku to return.
Shirley held onto Milly's arm tightly as they wound their way through the docks, trying her hardest not to look too long at any of the people in the area.

She was a sheltered young woman, she knew that, but not so sheltered that she didn't know what a whore looked like or how rough sailors could be. All the stories that Sophie had told her were suddenly coming to mind, and it wasn't making the trip to their ship any better. What she wanted to do was close her eyes, but then there would be a chance that she would be plucked from Milly's protective presence or miss the hand that was trying to steal from her. It was better to keep her eyes open and march on. After all, they weren't far from the ship and there would be plenty of guards there to keep watch over two young women making a journey to the colonies.

It had been her mother's idea in the first place, hoping that sending Shirley off with a nobleman's daughter would gain Shirley better matches than could be gotten from being an officer's daughter. Even if those prospects were linked to the colonies, it was better than what could be gotten in England for a girl like her. Besides, with the threat of continued wars with France, the colonies looked much safer. It was far better to get her away before anything bad happened, and it was a way to prepare for the worst. Shirley knew that her father would go off to war and she knew that he might be killed; it was part of being a soldier. And her mother was just trying to protect both of them. Her mother would be able to take care of herself if her father died, but not the two of them, not the way that Shirley's mother wanted her to be cared for. Going with Milly Ashford was the best thing for her.

A new life, a new start. If only they could get past the docks.

She shivered and scooted closer to Milly as they passed another group of sailors, trying to ignore the way the men leered at them. Shirley bit her lip and stared at the ground. "We should have brought an escort."

"Yes." It was unlike Milly to add any qualifying statement, which meant that she was just as scared as Shirley was. Maybe not scared, but wary. Shirley didn't think that anything could scare Milly Ashford.

They hurried on, passing two more ships before Milly began to tug at her arm, pointing at one. "There it is the Black Knight." Milly turned to smile at Shirley, pulling her along faster. "Let's see if we can get there in time to claim a good spot to watch the departure."

Shirley allowed herself to be pulled, having to reach down and lift up her skirts a bit to be able to run. She couldn't help the laugh that escaped her, allowing Milly to tow her along. This at least was fun, running hand in hand with her friend. From what she had heard from her mother, trips across the ocean weren't fun. There was a chance of storms coming up, food shortages and various other mishaps, even on one that was as carefully planned as this. Still, at least she would have Milly. It would be the two of them in a grand adventure, something Shirley sorely needed after so many days of worry.

They stumbled up the gangplank and onto the deck, Shirley quickly shrinking back against the rail that ran along the edge of the ship. She hadn't expected it to be bustling still. All of their things had been loaded the night before and during the early morning, and yet the crew was still rushing about. Shirley swallowed, reaching out as Milly continued to walk forward. They couldn't get in the way, the crew would just get angry and she didn't want that kind of harassment.
To her surprise, the crew just glanced her way, curious glances but nothing more. There was man who leered, but he was promptly slapped on the back of the head by another member of the crew. The two rushed away, Shirley leaning forward to watch them. The smaller of the two didn't walk like any man she knew, and he was too tall to be a young boy. She frowned, tying to right the discrepancy in her mind, but she didn't have the time. Milly moved away from her, Shirley rushing to catch up.

Milly headed right for a man who was standing in the midst of the confusion, alternately shouting orders and talking to a man who was standing right beside him. The strange boy appeared by the man's side for a moment before darting up into the rigging, Shirley blushing when she realized that the strange boy was actually a girl. She had thought that there were no women allowed on ships, at least those of virtue. She dropped her gaze to the boards under her feet, allowing Milly to pull her over to the man's side.

She heard the man speak in an unfamiliar language, looking up as both men tuned to look towards them. The one dressed in black clothes, far fancier than the simple shirt and trousers that the other man wore, gave them a bow. "Welcome ladies."

Milly curtsied back, Shirley surprised by the move until she saw the two of them smiling. Shirley glanced between the two of them, tugging gently at Milly's sleeve. "Do you two know each other?"

Milly nodded. "Lelouch and I are old friends. He and his sister used to come around the family home when they were younger. Our families have been friends for years. That was part of the reason I could arrange this so quickly. That and Lelouch wanted a chance to stretch his legs a bit."

Shirley tipped her head to the side, about to question what Milly meant when the man standing to Lelouch's side shouted and moved away. She was distracted by his departure, enough to miss a good portion of what Milly and Lelouch talked about until Milly nudged her. She glanced up at her friend, blushing when the captain gestured with one hand. "I'll have one of my crew show you to you cabins."

"Not yet. We want to watch as we leave."

Lelouch sighed but didn't look too surprised. He glanced around before pointing to a section of the deck. "Stay there then, you'll be out of the way there."

He walked away from them without saying anything else. Shirley wanted to call him out on his rudeness, but Milly was hurrying over to the spot that Lelouch had indicated, pulling Shirley into place and holding her there. Milly draped an arm around Shirley's waist, giving her a gentle squeeze before letting go. "Stay close, alright?"

"Of course. I don't want to get knocked over by any of this."

Milly laughed, tipping her head back and then keeping it there. Shirley was worried about her friend for a moment, because Milly looked down with almost a melancholy look on her face. When Shirley went to ask, Milly just shook her head. "Don't worry about me; I'm just excited and sad. I've lived my whole life here, only my grandfather has lived in the colonies. But it's a good time to go, for both of us."

"Yes." Shirley nodded in agreement, trying not to linger too long on her own problems. "We're young enough for an adventure."

"And an adventure it will be." Milly laughed again, glancing around this time. Then she leaned closer to Shirley with a barely hidden smile on her face. "Do you want to know why this will be an
“adventure?”

"Because we're going on our own?"

"No. Because there's a chance to see combat."

"What?!

Milly shushed her with an easy wave of her hand, pressing close to Shirley. "As I said, my family has been close to Lelouch's for a long while now. I got the news that he had been given a letter of marque some years ago. He's been quite successful since then."

"Milly!"

"Hush." Milly shook her head. "That's another reason that I asked him to take us to the colonies on his next trip."

"So you could see fighting?"

"No, because there would be fighting." Milly gave her a sad smile. "The war is closer than you think and I promised your mother that I would keep you safe. You're my friend, Shirley and I don't want to see you hurt. To be honest, it might have been safer for you to stay in England, but we'd never know. With Lelouch, the chances even out."

"But he'll go after prizes."

"Lelouch is smart. He won't go after anything that will put any of us in danger." Milly lowered her voice to a whisper. "If you hadn't noticed, he's quite attached to his crew."

Shirley looked up to where Lelouch was standing, surprised to see him laughing with one of the sailors. From what she had heard from her father, most captains tried to stay aloof from their sailors, considering them to be uncouth men. Then again, there was already one woman on board. There was a chance that there could be more. And even that was a show of some weakness, that Lelouch would take a woman in to do a man's job. Shirley shook her head, wanting to say something to Milly but not able to find the words.

What Milly said made sense. And, God help her, Shirley believed it. It would be far better to make a crossing on a ship that could fight and with a crew that was familiar with it. Being in the presence of a privateer was enough to make her want to run, but she could be brave enough to stay. It was an adventure as Milly had said, one that could be quite grand; if they survived it.

Shirley looked out at the ocean, feeling her stomach twist as she saw nothing but a waving field of blue. Blocking out the sounds of the crew around her, she began to pray.
He heard Suzaku's alarm go off, some peppy song that he knew he should recognize. But it was 8:00 in the morning, far too early to be functioning. Lelouch cracked one eye to look at the clock, just to check that he was right, before pulling the covers up to his chin. He would have a ten minute grace period before Suzaku would come to shake him awake, something that Lelouch wanted to avoid at all costs.

If he got up, he was sure that he would sleep through his first class of the day. Usually, he wouldn’t have minded, but he was sure that Suzaku would keep him awake by poking him in the back of his head. That was if he made it out of the dorm and to the dining hall. Lelouch had the sinking feeling that he wouldn’t even make it that far. It was far too easy to imagine him just collapsing on some part of campus and continuing to sleep.

There was a soft curse from the other side of the room as Suzaku stumbled over something, probably the massive pile of books that Lelouch had for his thesis.

He groaned and pressed his face deeper into his pillows. What had possessed him to major in something that required a thesis and then pile on classes that demanded more work was beyond him. Something had seriously impaired his judgment the day he had registered.

The movement in the room stopped the strangeness of it enough to get Lelouch to lift his head, a daunting task so early in the morning. Lelouch had the sinking feeling that he wouldn’t even make it that far. It was far too easy to imagine him just collapsing on some part of campus and continuing to sleep.
Suzaku tugged his shirt all the way on and padded over to the foot of Lelouch's bed. Lelouch felt the mattress sag a bit as Suzaku leaned on the end of the bed. "Lelouch?"

It took him all of ten seconds to decide what he wanted to do. "Take notes for me. I'm sleeping."

He flopped back down onto his pillows, the sound almost overpowering the soft chuckle that Suzaku gave. Lelouch felt fingers brush across his ankle before Suzaku was moving away.

"Alright, Lelouch. Sleep well."

Lelouch was sure that he managed a thank you, but it might have been muffled by the covers that he had tugged over him again. That was the last thing he remembered, aside from the jingle of Suzaku's keys before he drifted off to sleep again.

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