Lines In-Between

by DarkMage13

Summary

A princess unwilling to stay still on the sidelines discovers a universe bent on trying to use her for its own gains. Her best friend Riku missing, armed with a keyblade, and a newly awakened Sora who slept away a year, Kairi is in for a wild ride. On top of all that, everyone won't stop teasing her about her feelings towards Sora. Ah young love.

AU where Kairi doesn't go home to Destiny Islands at the end of KH1.
"Take care of her," Riku said as the door closed.

Sora nodded. He would. But did it have to end this way? Was there no other choice to protect and restore the worlds? Ansem was dead; Riku and the King could come out from behind the door and help push it closed…

The door closed and sealed with the use of the keyblades, Sora could only think of the memories he had with his best friend on the island.

"Sora! Riku!" the voice of Kairi yelled out. Sora turned around and saw the red head running towards him.

Donald and Goofy snickered as Kairi embraced Sora. "You're okay," she whispered. She released him and looked into his eyes. "Where's Riku?"

Sora looked down, thinking of his best friend, trapped behind the door. "He's…In there." He pointed to the Door to Darkness. "His heart chose to prevent the darkness from seeping out."

Kairi looked to where the door once was. "Then we…We have to go find him then."

Sora perked up. "What? What do ya mean, Kairi?"

"I mean…There has to be other ways out of the Door to Darkness right? Or else how do the Heartless get out in the first place?"

The boy thought about it deeply, or as deeply as he could.

"Gwarsh Sora, she's right," Goofy spoke up, placing a reassuring hand on Sora's shoulder. "The King came from behind the Door to Darkness. I'm sure he found a way in."

"Yeah," Donald added. "The King and Riku will find a way out."

Sora nodded, hope aflame in his heart. "Let's go find them."

"I'm going with you," Kairi declared.

"Wha...But Kairi…"

"No buts about it. Riku is my friend too. I'm tired of standing on the sidelines. Ansem is defeated; the immediate danger is gone."

Sora looked at her; her determination was not going to take "no" for an answer. He feared over her getting into huge danger again, but she was right. Ansem Seeker of Darkness was gone.
Roxas awoke from his sleep in a loft in Twilight Town, from another dream about the boy with a giant key for a weapon on a journey to find a guy with silver hair, and a girl who he could not make out most of the time.

It was five days before the end of his summer vacation.

Yesterday, it was the guys in white who had stolen photos of him. Why they wanted photos he had no clue.

Perhaps he was just going crazy. He got up, threw on his garb, and went to meet Hayner, Pence, and Olette at the usual spot. Running down the back alley, he suddenly felt the world around him...stop. He couldn't explain it, but he felt his limbs moving while everything else just plain stopped. He slowed down just in time to come face to face with someone.

Before the teen was a girl, with pale blond hair, in a simple white dress. Her smile on her lips was one of happy familiarity with him. But he had never met this girl before...had he?

"Hello, Roxas," the girl greeted.

"Uh, hi?" he scratched the back of his neck, unsure what to say. This day was weird already.

"I am...My name is Naminé." She looked at him, expecting the name to ring a bell, but he had no clue what her name was supposed to mean.

Her brow furrowed in confusion and she simply walked away. Once out of sight, the world continued on again.

As Hayner ranted on about Seifer as always, Roxas couldn't stop thinking about that mysterious girl. She gave off a sense of familiarity, as if they met before. He felt compelled to find her, to find Naminé.

The next day, Roxas still felt extreme guilt over losing the 5,000 munny they had gathered. A guy in black hit him with a stick and just stole it, yet no one else but him saw the pickpocket.

Things were becoming stranger and stranger. But Naminé still remained on his mind. He had to find her.

Heading to the usual spot, Roxas found a note from Hayner, telling him to go to the beach, and not to sweat the munny.

He smiled at being forgiven by his best friend.

The world stopped again. Feeling everything pause, he turned around in surprise to see Naminé in front of him.

She smiled, but not as enthusiastically as last time. "Hello, Roxas."

"Uh, hello, again."

"Do you...know who I am?" she asked, hopeful.

"I...No."

Her cheerful expression faded. "Oh." She turned to walk away, but Roxas reached out and grabbed her wrist to stop her.
"Wait," he pleaded. "Who are you?"

"I...Come to the mansion, I will tell you more."

Her hand slipped out of his grip. Walking out of sight again, the world returned to normal time.

He needed her answers, now. Roxas sprinted to the mansion, the beach forgotten completely. Running through the sandlot, Seifer shouted some remarks at him but he didn't care. Something within him knew Naminé.

The guys in white had returned. Seifer shouted at them as they twisted towards Roxas in particular.

The world was spinning beneath him. Since when did the everlasting sunset become dark as night? His stomach lurched as the world opened up beneath his feet and sent him falling into the abyss. Gravity eased the farther down he went, like he was floating in water. Roxas aligned himself up, landing on what felt to be solid ground with his feet. He looked around. Where was he? Taking a step forward the floor opened up. A bright blinding light shone through as dozens of doves flew up and away into the darkness. The floor was stained glass, blue with a splash of red. There was an image of Sora on the stained glass, asleep.

Roxas had to be dreaming.

The giant monster in white reached out to him, trying to snatch Roxas away.

*We have come for you my liege.*

"I'm not in league with you, so buzz off!" he shouted, slamming the keyblade into the head of the monster.

The white giant fell over on top of him, creating a massive hole of darkness where it fell into oblivion. The same darkness latched onto Roxas, trying to pull him into that same oblivion.

He cried out, his limbs struggling against the tight hold of the darkness. His hand outstretched, he pleaded for help, his cries echoing through the black abyss.

A soft, familiar hand grabbed his. Light and warmth emitted from the hold.

He was safe.

Eventually, he awoke from his stained glass nightmare to Seifer taking pictures next to his limp body on the ground. Getting up, he brushed aside the comments from Rai about how Seifer was gonna drive the guys in white away and headed towards the mansion.

Roxas passed through the woods and arrived at the locked front gate of the haunted mansion. "How do I even get inside...?"

He didn't have to, for he felt himself fall into a daze on the spot. He found himself standing in the white room on the second floor.

"Naminé?" He looked around for her. She sat at the end of a long white table. She nodded her head towards the various drawings on the walls.

One was of Sora and himself, standing side by side. Another was of Sora, Donald, and Goofy.
One in particular was of him and Naminé. He placed his hand on it, feeling as if he forgot something. "Naminé...I know you, don't I?"

She looked down at her hands. "You used to."

"Who are you then? Tell me, so I may remember."

"I'm a witch, with power over Sora's memories and those connected to him."

"A witch?" he tilted his head in confusion. Who would call her a witch?

"That's what DiZ calls me. You and I...Are friends, Roxas. In this life and in the next one."

"We are? How could I have forgotten something so important then?" he asked.

"Because...You..." She stopped. "I'm sorry."

Roxas felt the grass beneath his feet again.

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Sitting on the clock tower, Roxas handed each of his friends one of the four crystal orbs on the Struggle Trophy he earned in the tournament. His mind was going crazy at this point. Naminé mentioned the next life. Then, a guy named Axel appears, and he too acted like he knew him. Then, a man in red who claimed that Axel was deceiving him. Roxas didn't know what to think anymore.

"I got a gift too, for everyone," Olette said as she pulled out four ice creams, snapping Roxas out of his daze. He stood up suddenly, his balance being thrown off. He toppled over, falling off the clock tower. The screams from Olette and the shouts from Pence and Hayner pierced Roxas' ears as he descended to the ground. He closed his eyes in anticipation. This was it, was he going to...

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Within the open floor of the mansion in the woods, all debris of an abandoned past was cleared to the sides to leave room open for free movement. A red haired girl dressed in white shorts and a white tank top held her practice sword firmly in her grip. Her partner, a tall figure in a black cloak, was poised with his own practice weapon, ready to strike.

"Kairi, you ready?" the figure asked in a deep voice.

She nodded. "Mmhmm."

He rushed forward. Kairi sidestepped the assault with ease. "You've progressed greatly. I'm impressed," he complimented.

She smiled for a moment before it faded.

"What's wrong?" the man in black asked.

"Do you remember a boy, back on the island?" she questioned. "We used to play together all the time, but I can't remember him. His name, his face. I feel awful about it."

He knew that feeling all too well. He had forgotten too. Everything was such a haze to him, to the point where he forgot, not even remembering his face or name, but he knew he was there, just like Kairi did.

"Yes. I am the same way. But I know one day we will see him again." Only she would see him...
again. The man would never face his best friend again.

Kairi felt wobbly all of a sudden, a headache coming on.

"Naminé?" a boy's voice called out to her.

She toppled over, the cloaked man catching her in his arms.

Roxas, in a desperate attempt to figure out why he wasn't perishing from his fall, why the world was slowing down, reached out to Naminé like he did back at the mansion.

_Naminé...? What's happening to me?

Who are you? And that's not my name. I'm Kairi.

Kairi...I know you. You're that girl he likes.

Who? Please, a name!

I'm Roxas.

Okay, Roxas, but could you tell me HIS name?

You don't remember my name? Thanks a lot Kairi!

Huh?

O-kay, I guess I can give you a hint. Starts with an 'S'!

The man in the cloak looked at the sleeping Kairi in his arms. Soon he would have to leave her, and he felt envy towards his other friend who will be with her instead.

The haze was starting to clear. He would have to ask DiZ about this.

Kairi's eyes opened up. Her brain searched hard for the answer to the hint she was given to that familiar voice. It wasn't Roxas' voice who gave her that hint, it was someone else's. That boy she used to play on the island with.

"You okay?" he asked her.

"Ye-Yeah," she said as she sat up. "I...I don't know what just happened." Kairi reached into her pocket and took out a rolled up piece of paper. "Here, I want you to give it to him just in case you find him first. I wrote this letter yesterday. Until I remember everything about him, I refuse to go home."

The man took the paper carefully, placing it in his pocket. "You sure you want me to hold onto this?"

"Yes, I am sure. I trust you...Ansem."

She stood back up and looked to the sunset in the back window to the garden of the mansion. The colors remained constant no matter the time of day. Eternal twilight. "Starts with an 'S'. Right? Sora?"
Ansem stood behind DiZ as he looked over the progress on Sora's memory. Roxas was never in any danger from falling due to the failsafe he built in. Ansem, though, had different questions on his mind.

"His progress is astounding," DiZ commented.

Ansem looked at Sora's progress as he bounced a tiny blue crystal orb in his palm. 79% restoration. How DiZ came up with this technology to monitor Sora's own memory and heart, he would never know.

"So, what happened?" he asked as he slipped the orb into an orange pouch.

"Naminé's encounter with Roxas put his heart in contact with Kairi's. And that in turn, affected Sora. You see?"

"Naminé…She's a wonder."

"She wasn't born like other Nobodies. She can interfere with the hearts and memories of Sora and those aligned with him."

"But whose Nobody is she?"

"I could tell you…But first, you could tell me your true name?"

The man removed his hood, revealing tanned skin, silver hair, and golden eyes. "It's Ansem," he stated with a smirk.

DiZ began to laugh almost hysterically. "It is an honor, Ansem."

Axel sat in his chair in the Round Room, glaring at III, who just gave him the order to eliminate Roxas. The red headed man knew he was lying through his teeth trying to save Roxas, but he didn't care. He wasn't about to go destroy his best friend like that.

"But it's not like that, he didn't betray us, he can't return!" he declared.

"If he doesn't return, you know what you must do," III simply stated, one of his purple lances appearing in thin air. "Or you will face the consequences." The lance shot at Axel, cutting only a couple of hairs as it stabbed into the back of his chair. Axel remained unfazed by the act. He knew III wouldn't let this go. He knew III, VII, and even their leader would use Roxas to test his loyalty to the Organization.

The Superior lifted his hand to make III pause. The lance disappeared. The leader then raised his hand, a blue electric aura in his palms. It was a threat, a very serious one.

Axel looked away. "So you'll turn me into a dusk…All right! I'll do it! If that's what you want."

Why did it have to come to this?

Perhaps the most painful thing for Naminé to admit to Roxas was the nature of Nobodies. The Organization, long ago explained it, but now his memory was gone. No matter how much she desperately wanted to restore his memories of his friendship with Axel, his friendship with her. But DiZ would eliminate her on the spot once Sora's memory was restored. She would never live to see Roxas again.
"You were never supposed to exist, Roxas."

"What? How could you say such a thing, even if it is true?" he asked, bewildered.

She almost wanted to cry. "I'm sorry. I guess there really are things better left unsaid."

"Are the holes in your memory starting to fill in?" DiZ asked Ansem before him, sitting in a chair in the mansion. Tomorrow Sora will need the last component to awaken, Roxas himself. He carries the last bit of his strength and memory.

Ansem couldn't help but nearly lose his patience with this man. "Yes, the haze is clearing." He could remember Sora again.

"The same thing is happening to everyone who had ties to Sora. Very soon, to them, he'll be like a good friend who's gone away for a year."

Ansem sat down in a chair across from DiZ. "I've waited and now I want to know. What is it that you want?"

"Revenge," DiZ stated simply.

Ansem's hand resting on the armrest clenched up into a fist. "Revenge…"

"Now for the finishing touches. First, we must dispose of Naminé. She did a splendid job with Sora but it's high time she disappeared. Roxas isn't the only one who was never meant to exist. All you need to do is let her and Kairi meet. Take care of it Ansem."

"Roxas!" Naminé called out to him in the White Room, as DiZ tried to take her away. "You and I are friends, always. You made a promise to me once, that no matter what, we will always be friends. We will meet again, and I promise to restore all of your memories. You may not know it is me, and I may not know it's you. Someday soon…I promise!"

Roxas reached out to her. "Let her go!"

DiZ, Naminé, and Ansem disappeared in the dark corridors, leaving Roxas all alone.

He left the White Room, only to bump into a red haired girl.

"S-Sora?" she asked innocently. "No…Not quite," she said, examining his blonde hair.

He shook his head. "I'm Roxas…Wait, you're Kairi, right?"

"Yes…Oh. We've met before, haven't we?"

"Yeah, we have."

Ansem appeared before her. "Kairi, we need to talk," he said.

She looked to the man and nodded. "Alright." Kairi smiled at Roxas. "Nice to meet you in person, Roxas." The two walked into a dark corridor, leaving him alone once more.

DiZ shoved Naminé into the broom closet. "Until Ansem can dispose of you, you shall remain here."
The door closed, leaving Naminé in darkness. All she had was her memories of Roxas to keep her company.

"Kairi, you must make a promise for me," Ansem said. The two stood in the library of the mansion.

"Yes?"

"Do not mention me to Sora."

"Ansem...Why?"

"He cannot know, lest his new journey is wrought with pursuit of me when his true enemy is Organization XIII."

She didn't want to accept it, but she had to. "Okay, I promise."

He presented her a Keyblade, a gold and red blade with flowers on the teeth. "You are ready. You will soon see him again." She took it, looking over it with wondrous eyes.

He disappeared in a dark corridor. Kairi, with a heavy heart said, "Thank you for everything."

Now, she had to find Sora. But where could he be?

"Simply amazing Roxas," Axel remarked as the blond finished off a bunch of his assassin lackeys.

Roxas remembered. He remembered him. His first friend.

A friend who failed to tell him the truth, again, and again.

Yet he felt pity for him. In hindsight perhaps leaving as he did only made things worse. He knew who Sora was now, but to what cost? To what end?

"Axel..."

"You really do remember me...I'm so FLATTERED!" he ignited a large ring of fire in the room, trapped Roxas inside. "But you're too late!"

Roxas sighed as he pulled out not one but two keyblades in each hand, Oathkeeper and Oblivion. It really did come down to this. He didn't want to fight Axel; he wanted answers more than anything.

He wasn't going to get his answers, possibly ever, not until Sora did.

"Who are you talking to? Me? Or Sora?" Roxas mocked to DiZ. The room was white and endless.

At the center of it all was a large, white pod holding the key that connects everything. In front of said pod was the man who was only using him as a tool of revenge.

DiZ gave his derogatory answer, "To half of Sora, of course. You reside in darkness. What I need is someone who can move about the realm of light and destroy Organization XIII."

Roxas remembered Organization XIII, but not all the lies they had told him in order to use him. His memory was still fuzzy. Blur of Naminé and Axel returned to him, but the details were lacking. He didn't have the complete picture, not yet at least.
He, however, knew who Sora was and what his ties to him were. Why was it always Sora? Sora… Sora…

"Why? Who are you?" he demanded.

"I am a servant of the world," DiZ responded. He laughed before continuing, "And if I'm a servant, then you should consider yourself a tool, at best."

His jaw and fist clenched in boiling anger. He was a puppet in the palm of the Organization, and now he was a puppet to DiZ as a means to an end. "Was that..." he spat out, trying to form coherent words. "Was that supposed to be a joke?" the Keyblade on instinct, appeared in his right hand. DiZ was going to pay. "Cause I'm not laughing!"

The teen sprinted towards the man, striking him with the Keyblade, but it went right through, leaving the man unharmed. He stood up straight, clenching the Keyblade tight.

"My apologies. This is only a data-based projection," DiZ explained.

He had snapped. Anger took over. He screamed and viciously attacked the hologram. Growing tired, he swung the Keyblade down on the hologram one final time. The hologram disappeared completely. He huffed for air, the same mantra repeating over and over in his thoughts. He screamed his name over and over in his head.

The hologram of the man in red appeared a few feet away from him. "Come, over here."

This man removed his memory, led him to lead a fake life, only to be forced to give it all up. This man was doing this to him. He absolutely refused to fade. With a fierce glare, the teen spat out words laced with fury. "I hate you so much..."

"You should share some of that hatred with Sora. He's far too nice for his own good."

He couldn't take any more of those heartless words. "No! My heart belongs to me!" he declared. He ran towards the hologram, cutting through it and causing it to disappear. The pod opened before him, showing who was contained within.

"Sora..." If he, a former member of the Organization, couldn't stop them, then at least he could help the one who can.

This is his fate. He felt his heartless existence fading away. He looked at his hand, which was now translucent. Looking away from his hand to Sora, he gave his last words: "You're lucky. Looks like my summer vacation is...over."

*Kingdom Hearts II*
"Sora," a voice called out from the distance. It was a guy in black and white, with blond spiky hair.

"Who is there?" He asked in his half asleep daze.

"Sora!" Donald Duck spoke.

"Sora, wake up!" Goofy told him.

Sora opened his eyes to a sea of darkness. Where was he? How did he get here? The device he was sleeping in opened up, shining bright light onto him. He yawned and stretched his muscles out. He felt out of sorts in his own skin. Like it was him but different. He saw Donald and Goofy before him. With a grin he jumped down, but not used to his own skin anymore he clumsily landed on his knees. The two caught him as he tried to get up. He embraced them in a hug. "Donald! Goofy!"

Standing up properly the three grabbed hands and jumped for joy.

Jiminy leapt out of Sora's hood, yawning. "That was some nap," he remarked.

"We've gotta remember when we went to sleep!" an impatient Donald said.

"Let's see…" Sora began. "We defeated Ansem…"

"Yep," Goofy assured.

"Restored peace to the world… Found Kairi… And then we went to look for Riku. I think that's right so far? Wait, where is Kairi?"

The two shrugged. His heart began to race. Oh no, he lost Kairi again. In a panic, Sora sprinted out of the room and up stairs to the main floor of the mansion. "Kairi? Kairi?" he cried out. Was there a point in his journey that the two were separated? He couldn't remember.

"Sora!" Donald and Goofy called out, trying to catch up with the frantic boy. Sora pushed open the main doors of the mansion after searching all the rooms and sighed in relief. A red haired girl in white stood in the courtyard, back facing towards him.

"Kairi!" He exclaimed, joy and relief in his heart.

She turned around, her expression of surprise turning into one of happiness. "Sora!" she ran over to him, stopping to take note of how much taller he was than her. The baby fat on his face had melted away. In the constant sunset of Twilight Town, his highlights in his hair made the color appear like a rich caramel.

Sora's cheeks glowed red as soon as he noticed how much Kairi had changed. Her hair was longer, her body became curvier, and her face filled out a little. Her indigo eyes were the only thing that hadn't changed.
Kairi pulled Sora into a tight hug. "I missed you."

"I didn't know I was gone," Sora replied, earning a giggle from the red head.

"Ahem."

The snickers from their audience broke the two apart from their embrace.

"How long were we asleep, Kairi?" Goofy asked.

"A year," she answered, the number feeling like a blur. It was only a few days ago that she remembered Sora. Now she realized how long it'd been since she last saw him. That year felt like a fog, like something happened within it but her memory couldn't access it. All she could remember was darkness.

"A year?!" Sora gasped, tugging at his own hair. He looked down at himself. No wonder his body felt out of sorts. He went through an entire growth spurt and didn't even have a chance to adjust.

"Where are we anyways?" Donald questioned, looking at the constant twilight sky.

"I…" Kairi began to say, but remembered her promise.

*Don't tell Sora about me.*

Ansem had only told her that it was a world sitting on the edge between the light and darkness. But telling them that would eventually lead it back to Ansem.

"Do not know. Let's ask the locals," she suggested.

Sora raised an eyebrow at her hesitance, but shrugged it off. Her memory must be just as foggy as his. "Let's go."

As the four walked through the woods, Jiminy sat on Sora's shoulder, opening up his journal. "There's only one sentence here." He gaped at his empty journal. "'Thank Naminè.' I wonder who that is."

"Naminè…" the name rang familiar to Kairi. It was that name Roxas called her, but she too, didn't know who Naminè was.

"Hmm, I don't know why, but she sounds familiar," Sora mused, placing his hands behind his head.

"Some journal that is," Donald grumbled.

The town was bustling with shops and people. A girl at the accessory shop said the place was called Twilight Town.

"Twilight Town," Sora tested the name on his tongue as they walked down a back alley. Why was he getting such a familiar feeling from this place?

A small nook tucked away on the corner of the alley caught the gang's attention. The little nook had the entrance covered by a worn red cloth. Curious, Donald and Goofy headed inside the nook, Sora and Kairi following suit.

Now the familiarity was hitting Sora like a collapsing brick building. He stopped in front of the door, absolutely baffled.
"What is it, Sora?" Kairi asked.

"You know, I think I've been to this town," Sora spoke his thoughts out loud.

"You've been here before?" Kairi raised an eyebrow. "Was it before you fell asleep?"

"Hmm…Guess I must've imagined it," he shrugged. He would have definitely remembered being here if he had forgotten.

Behind the cloth, three teenagers sat around, practically twiddling their thumbs.

"What do you want?" the boy in green said in an abrupt tone.

Sora held his hands up in defense. "Uh, nothing. Just wondering what was back here."

"Now you know. This is our spot," the rude boy said.

Another boy walked up to the four, dressed in a red jersey examining them. "Umm…You're…new around here, right? I'm Pence," the nicer boy said.

The rude boy walked up to them. "Hayner. Nice to meet you, but we've got stuff to do, so catch ya later." Hayner strode past the four of them.

Pence shook his head.

"My name's Olette," a girl in orange standing next to Pence said. "Hey, did you finish up the summer homework yet? Independent studies are the worst, huh?"

"Homework?" Sora said in confusion. Kairi shook her head as Sora turned to Donald and Goofy, who both shrugged.

"Hey, what are your names?" Pence asked.

"Oh sorry," said Goofy. "We're Sora, Kairi, Donald and Goofy," he gestured to each person as he introduced them.

"Hi," said Kairi.

Sora couldn't help but think he had met these three before, but he couldn't put his finger on it.

Pence and Olette looked at each other in surprise. Olette then turned to the four. "Sora, Kairi, Donald, Goofy, we just met someone who was looking for you."

"He sure seemed in a hurry," Pence added. "He had a black coat on so I couldn't see his face. But he had these big round ears." He formed circles with his fingers up near his ears to emphasize the size of the stranger's ears.

"The King!" exclaimed Donald. Sora felt something in his heart stirring. The King was here? That might mean...

"Where'd you see him?" questioned Kairi.

"At the station," Pence answered.

"The station! Thanks!" Sora said. "Nice to meet you!" he turned with Donald and Goofy to leave quickly.
Kairi quickly bowed to the three new friends. "Thank you. We'll see you later!" She waved them off, following after the rushing trio.

Once Kairi caught up with the three goofballs, she found them panting and heaving for dear air at the top of the hill where the train station was.

She put her hands on her hips and looked over the exhausted Sora, who was leaning on his knees trying to catch his breath. "Sora you lazy bum. Did you really run all the way up that hill?"

"Kairi it's...the...King. We….had...to...hurry!" he defended in-between breaths, giving her a pout.

She laughed, shaking her head. "Oh Sora…"

A woosh sound alerted them. From black and white spikes on the ground appeared white beings. Their limbs were thin as a stick, their bodies moving fluidly around them. The gang was surrounded. Sora somehow knew that these creatures were hostile, and were after him. He summoned his keyblade, the Kingdom Key, on instinct."Kairi, stay close to me."

Kairi nodded, but summoned her own keyblade, causing the boy's jaw to drop.

"What, how did you..?"

"No time now, lazy bum. We have to deal with these things first!" she declared, holding her keyblade at the ready.

The white creatures attacked; Sora and Kairi leaped into action. He held the Keyblade with two hands and landed many blows on his enemies, while she went low and pushed the ones heading towards Sora away with swift and precise single handed hits. Donald was casting Thunder spells until he ran out of magic power, then he would help Goofy defend against other creatures.

Sora started to feel his muscles and limbs ache. Every time he destroyed a white creature, at least two more would pop up. He remembered that he was out of practice from his year-long nap. Meanwhile, it seemed to him that Kairi had some practice with her keyblade, for she was still whacking at the beings with ease. Fatigue was hitting her slower than Sora.

Where had all these creatures in white come from? Donald and Goofy collapsed in exhaustion. Sora found himself unable to stay standing and fell back onto his butt. Kairi was the last one standing, being pushed back as she held her keyblade up to block each swipe from the limbs of the creatures.

The creatures surrounded them, ready to strike. Something small and black wiped one out with a single blow. The tiny person then destroyed all of the white creatures in only a couple of swift, fluid movements. He held out his keyblade as he regained his balance from the flips and leaps he performed. It was like Sora's own keyblade, but a silver guard and a golden blade instead.

Sora and Kairi stared in awe at the keyblade, and skill the wielder showed.

Donald and Goofy's jaws dropped. "Your Majesty?" called out Donald.

"Shh! You gotta board the train and leave town! The train knows the way," the King said in a whisper. He moved towards Sora and held out an orange pouch with munny inside. "Here."

Sora took the pouch and looked at it for a second, before watching the King run away.

"Your Majesty!" Donald shouted, but he was already gone.
"The King…Was that really him?" Sora asked.

"I always imagined he would be taller," Kairi mused.

"It has to be him!" Goofy said, excited that the King was alright.

Sora thought for a moment. "The King was locked in the realm of darkness, right?"

"Uh huh," said Goofy.

"But we just saw him…"

"Yep!" assured Donald.

"And if the King is here, that means Riku's here."

Kairi lit up with a smile. "We better find him then, so we can go home."

Sora gave her an assuring smile. "Yeah. Home…" Snapping out of his reverie, he turned to Donald and Goofy "What are you two gonna do?" he asked the two.

The two seemed confused as they thought about it. What exactly were they supposed to do? "Gawrsh, Sora. Do ya have to ask?" Goofy said, annoyed.

Kairi and Sora busted out snickering.

"Hey! What's so funny?!" Donald hopped up and down angrily.

"Your face," Sora pointed out.

"You look like someone with his feathers ruffled," Kairi said, trying to contain her laughter.

Goofy and Donald looked at each other and saw their annoyed faces, causing them to laugh.

"What do you say, guys?" Sora began after the laughter died down. "Let's stick together for one more journey."

His three friends nodded in agreement. He turned to Kairi, grabbing her hands. "Kairi, come with us. We can see all the worlds out there together. Once we find Riku, we can all see them together as well. Are you up to it, Kairi?" Sora asked.

She nodded. "Of course Sora. You honestly think I would let you run off again without me?" She winked at him.

He smiled. "Right. Got it. I mean, who else is going to defend me if I get attacked by those guys in white again?"

She lightly slugged him in the arm. "Sorry to disappoint you, lazy bum. You will need Riku to be your knight in shining armor next time."

"Better find him quickly then, or I am doomed." He placed his hand on his forehead and sighed dramatically. "Now…where to?" Sora said, putting his hands behind his head.

"We hafta board the train," Goofy reminded.

"Oh yeah."
The four of them walked inside the train station, and got their tickets. The train was purple and had stars all over it. Something told Sora that this was their train, from how different and unusual it looked from the other trains. Hayner, Pence, and Olette came running into the station.

"We came to see you off," Pence said.

Hayner nodded. "Yeah. Will you be coming back?"

So Hayner did care after all.

"Yeah, we promise," Kairi said. "Right Sora?"

"Yep!" he replied. Within his heart though, he felt emotions that weren't his own being forced upon him. He normally never was upset at leaving friends, for he would always be able to see them again one day. But somehow this feeling was like he would never see them again. A feeling of heartbreak. He looked at them with unknown familiarity.

"Hey Sora, you sure we've never met before?" Hayner asked.

That was certainly odd. Sora put his hand under his chin. "Positive." He looked at them with a smile, a silent promise that he would see them again.

An uncontrollable tear slipped out from his eye.

Kairi looked at him in surprise. He had just met these three a short while ago yet he was torn up about saying goodbye. "Sora?" she asked, placing a hand on his shoulder.

The Twilight gang was shocked at the sudden tears from the teen.

Sora was trying to wipe away the tears with the back of his hand, stunned at the action. That couldn't have been him...Could it?

"You okay?" asked Olette.

"Y-yeah. Don't know where it came from. Pull it together," Sora nodded to them.

"Time to go you two," Donald said from the doorway of the train.

"Right...See ya." He climbed onto the train with Kairi. The door closed, and the train left the station. Hayner, Pence, and Olette stared at the departing odd-looking train. Olette held up her munny pouch.

"Did you guys notice that pouch Sora had on him?" she questioned out loud. "It's the exact same one as mine."

"But yours is handmade right?" Pence said.

"Something weird is going on..." Hayner said, staring at the sunset shining through the windows of the station. "Sora seems like a cool dude, but he also seemed....confused, like half of him was upset to say goodbye and the other..."

"Was not saying goodbye but see you later," Pence finished.

"Yeah."
As the train traveled on the track, a bright light flashed outside, and the train was brought to a new, strange place. Soon, the train stopped at a floating piece of land with a tall tower on it. Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy got off, but as soon as they did, the train vanished in a bright light.

"Heh, Heh. There goes our ride…" Sora laughed nervously.

"Who's that at the door?" Kairi pointed out. A big, tall figure was in fact peering through the front door.

"He looks familiar…" Goofy said. "But I can't quite put my finger on it."

The gang approached the large bulky figure.

"What's going on?" Donald asked the unknown figure.

The figure laughed. "I sent some of my lackeys inside to see if the master of this here tower's as big and tough as they say," the figure spoke in a loud and obnoxious voice. "Word is, he's a powerful sorcerer. Which would make him the perfect bodyguard for me. See, it don't matter how tough he is - once he's a Heartless, he'll do as I say!"

"A Heartless!?" Kairi exclaimed. She and Sora on instinct summoned their keyblades. The sound of their blades appearing tipped the big guy off.

"Huh?" His ear twitched. Turning around, he immediately spotted Donald and Goofy. "Wha… AAAH! It's you!" he pointed accusingly at the duck and dog.

"Pete?" Donald and Goofy said in unison.

"What are you two nimrods doin' here!?" Pete stomped his feet.

"What are you doing here?" Donald spat.

"You know him?" asked Sora.

"We sure do," said Goofy. "Pete's been causin' trouble for ages. Her Majesty banished him a while ago to another dimension. I wonder how he escaped?"

Pete chuckled. "You wanna know how, eh? Well, Maleficent busted me out, that's how! And now your world - no, no, no, all the worlds - are gonna belong to yours truly. Cause Maleficent's gonna help me conquer 'em!" He squinted at the two teens. "An' who are you two pipsqueaks anyways? Oh...yer that brat with the keyblade!"

"Oh did the great and all powerful burnt toast Maleficent tell you about me?" Sora said, smirking.

"You...You...Did what to Maleficent?!"

"May have slain her you know, rumors flying around and all that." Kairi shook her head at Sora's antics.

Pete's ears twitched in outrage. "Heartless Squad! Round up!" he called out.

Shadow Heartless started appearing from the ground. Before Sora could even lift his keyblade to deal with them, Kairi had wasted no time taking a few out. Sora had to close his jaw and focus at the task at hand: Eliminate the Heartless.

When the last Heartless was gone, Pete stomped his feet like an upset child. "You just wait!
Nobody, and I do mean nobody, messes with the mighty Pete!"

"So "mighty" Pete," Sora mocked. "Who lives in this tower anyway?"

"Oh ya don't know, eh? Well, it's old Yen Sid. 'Course he's probably a Heartless by now!"

Donald did a double take. "Master Yen Sid lives here!?" the duck quickly went up the stairs and slipped into the tower.

"Yen Sid is the King's teacher," Goofy explained to the baffled Sora and Kairi.

"Wow. Sounds powerful!" Sora said in awe.

Kairi looked at the tower. "The King's teacher? I wonder if he can answer my questions." She took off after Donald.

"Questions? Kairi!" Sora chased after her.

"You'll have to catch me first!" Kairi laughed.

The gang reached the top of the tower to see an old wizard sitting at his desk.

Donald and Goofy bowed to the wizard while Kairi gave a small curtsy and Sora gave a casual "Hey there."

"Sora! Show some respect!" Donald reprimanded the teen.

Yen Sid gave a wave of dismissal. "So, you are Sora and Kairi. Now then, have you seen the King yet?"

"Yes, we did Master. But we didn't get a chance to talk to him," Goofy explained.

"Yes…the King has been quite busy of late," Yen Sid assured. "Therefore, it would seem that the task of instructing you four falls upon my shoulders. You have a perilous journey ahead of you. You must be well prepared."

"You mean…we have to go on another quest?" Sora asked, crestfallen.

"We were looking forward to finding our friend Riku, so we can go back to the islands together," Kairi said.

"Yes, I know," Yen Sid said. "However, everything in your journey is connected. Whether you will find your way home to the islands…Whether you two return home alone, or with your friend. And, whether or not the islands will still be there.

"And the key that connects them all is you, Sora."

"I'm…the key?" Sora questioned. He held out his hand and the Keyblade appeared in a flash of light. The weapon in his hand felt a lot heavier suddenly.

"Chosen wielder of the Keyblade. You are the key that will open the door to light." informed Yen Sid.

Sora nodded.
"Kairi, the King informed me you have also gained the use of a keyblade?"

The girl nodded. "Yes." She summoned her own blade, the golden color shimmering in the dim room.

"Chosen a long time ago by a master, their keyblade passes to you now."

Sora, Donald, and Goofy's jaws dropped. "Chosen?"

Yen Sid nodded. "A keyblade is passed down from generation to generation. You have been trained to defend yourself, and now you must continue your study by accompanying Sora. The seventh Princess of Heart, you will be a powerful ally to him. Sora's keyblade is much different, for he never inherited his.

"But be warned, as a heart with pure light, enemies will be attempting to do you harm, as the Heartless fear the keyblade they also fear the light you carry. But this can be of great benefit to you."

"Master Yen Sid, how can this be a benefit?" Kairi questioned. "From the sound if it I sound like a homing beacon for the Heartless."

"You will find that your power is great, and even in the greatest immense darkness there will always be a way to return to the light."

"But wait a sec - how come the Heartless are still running around?" Sora asked.

Yen Sid explained. "Your past endeavors did prevent an immense effusion of Heartless from the great darkness; make no mistake about that. However, the Heartless are darkness made real—and darkness yet lingers in every heart. The Heartless are fewer. But while darkness exists in a single heart, it will be difficult to eliminate them."

"Gawrsh, that must mean…if everybody's heart was full of light, then Heartless'd go away!" Goofy realized.

Yen Sid nodded. "Now it is time to speak of the enemies that you will encounter," he waved his hand, and a hologram of Donald appeared. The hologram showed Donald turning into a Shadow Heartless. "If one such as you, Donald, yields to the darkness in their heart, they too will become a Heartless. But you know this."

"Oh," Donald said, relieved.

"The Heartless are always lurking and ever seeking to capture new hearts. Never let your guard down!" Yen Sid told them. "Now then…" he waved his hand and a hologram of a white creature appeared next to the Heartless. "At times, if someone with a strong heart and will—be they evil or good—becomes a Heartless, the empty shell they leave behind begins to act with a will of its own," the Heartless hologram disappeared. "An empty vessel whose heart has been stolen away… A spirit that goes on even as its body fades from existence—for you see, Nobodies do not truly exist at all. Nobodies may seem to have feelings, but this is a ruse—they only pretend to have hearts. You must not be deceived!"

"Nobodies… They don't exist…" Sora repeated. Another pang of sadness hit him that was not his own.

Three new holograms appeared, showing more Nobodies of the same type. "Now then…" continued Yen Sid. "The being you see before you is known as a Dusk. They are the most common
form of Nobody. But there are others—some larger, some with frightening and unique powers. Be vigilant!

"On your journey, you will meet an alarming number of Dusks. They will all attempt to do you harm," the holograms vanished. "Still, they are nothing but empty shells, destined to returned to darkness. But—" another three holograms appeared, showing beings wearing a black coat. "The beings you see before you now are different. These powerful Nobodies have formed a group called Organization XIII. It commands the lesser Nobodies."

Strangely, Organization XIII sounded familiar to Sora. "Organization XIII…"

Kairi knew of said Organization only by name. This was the enemy Ansem mentioned.

"While Heartless act on instinct, Nobodies function in a higher manner. They can think, and plan. And it seems they are working towards a goal," Yen Sid explained. "What that goal is, we do not know. The King sensed the danger, and journeyed forth to fight it. He found the dark realm's Keyblade, and with it, closed the door. Now he's traveling from world to world, fighting the Heartless as he seeks the answer to the riddle of the Nobodies and Organization XIII."

The holograms were gone.

"Then I guess we'd better go find the King first," Sora decided.

"He might know where Riku is," Kairi noted. Sora nodded at her.

"Now wait…" Yen Sid gestured to the two teenagers. "You two need more suitable traveling clothes for your journey. Those look a bit too small."

Sora looked at his red jumpsuit. He had grown greatly while he slept. He looked to Kairi wearing her white tank top and white shorts. She had the most growth. She was vastly taller, nearing his own height. Her shoes were too small; plain white sandals with her toes spilling out.

What exactly happened during his year of sleep?

"Through there," Yen Sid pointed towards a door. "You'll find three good fairies. If you ask, they'll create for you appropriate garments."

"Gawrsh, you two sure are growing fast!" Goofy pointed out.

"Uhh… I guess," said Sora.

"You guess?" Kairi said. She felt ecstatic for new clothing.

Sora blushed. "Heh…"

The four of them went inside the room. The three fairies were chatting quietly until the red fairy, Flora, noticed the visitors. "Well, look who's here, dears! Sora, Kairi, Donald and Goofy. What is it that you need?" Flora asked.

"Umm…" Sora began.

"We need new clothes," Kairi finished.

"Ooh, if you're looking for clothes, you've come to the right place!" said Merryweather, the blue fairy.
"We should do the princess first. Oh it's been so long since we've dressed a princess!" The green fairy, Fauna, sighed.

Flora and Merryweather pulled the girl forward first.

"Hmm what color?" Flora asked. "It has to match her eyes."

"And her hair," Fauna noted.

"I say it should be blue!" Merryweather declared, raising her wand.

"You always say blue," Flora stopped her.

"My dear what is it you want?" Fauna asked.

Kairi thought about it. "Hmm. Oh, I have an idea. May I have a pencil and paper please?"

"Of course dear," Flora conjured up the two objects. Kairi grabbed them and, pressing the paper up on the wall, she quickly sketched out the outfit she had in mind. Images in her head molded together what she wanted. It was like she was drawing from a dream she had a long time ago. Sora, Donald, and Goofy stood on their tip-toes trying to see what she was drawing.

Once she was done, she handed the paper to the three good fairies.

With a smile on their faces, they nodded. "Together then," Flora said.

Raising their wands, sparkles of red, green, and blue shot out towards Kairi.

In a shimmering light, the sparkles merged together, transforming her clothes in an instant.

When the light faded, Kairi was wearing a soft pink mini dress with decorative zippers, one slightly unzipped to allow breathing room. Underneath was a white halter top with tight sleeves that extended down to her elbow. Black shorts reached halfway down her thighs. Her shoes were light purple sneakers, tied with black laces. On her belt were two small bags on each side of her hips for carrying items, one large enough to carry a book. Kairi's yellow band was replaced with three bracelets, each one white, black, and blue. The finishing touch was a hoodie attached to her white halter and her purple gloves.

"You look beautiful!" said Fauna.

"Very beautiful!" Merryweather added.

"Pretty as a princess!" complimented Flora.

Kairi turned around to face Sora, Donald, and Goofy. Placing a hand on her hip, she posed. "How do I look?"

Sora's jaw was agape. Both Donald and Goofy swore his face turned red at how good Kairi looked in her outfit.

"You look," Sora cleared his throat. "You look great, Kairi."

"Thank you!" she smiled. "Your turn."

Sora stepped forward.
"Any preference dear?"

He shrugged. "Not really. I will leave it to you."

"All right then, dears. Together now," said Flora. "...and no more squabbling."

The three good fairies raised their wands together, and shot a light at Sora. His entire outfit shined until it changed completely. His new outfit was black and silver, has many zippers, and extra legging. The one thing he retained was his silver crown necklace. His white, fingerless gloves were now black, and his shoes were more black than yellow.

Kairi found herself thinking that Sora was quite attractive in his new outfit. "Wow…"

"Yes! It's perfect!" Flora exclaimed.

"Oh yes!" Fauna commented.

"He does look very dashing!" Merryweather said.

Sora looked over himself, very pleased.

Kairi turned to Sora and smiled. Sora walked up next to her.

"Now those aren't ordinary garments," said Flora.

"They have very special powers," Fauna continued.

Flora created a yellow swirling orb from her wand. "Take the orb dears,"

Sora and Kairi reached and the orb split in two, absorbing in their hands.

"And watch what happens," Merryweather said.

All of a sudden, a burst of power and physical strength surged through the two teenagers. Their outfits shined, releasing a powerful shock wave. When the light subsided, Sora and Kairi's outfits were red, and Sora was wielding not one, but two Keyblades. He had the Kingdom Key in one hand and Star Seeker in the other.

"Wow!" Donald said in awe.

"Two Keyblades!" Goofy gasped.

"This journey's gonna be twice as difficult as the last," informed Merryweather. "Together you two are stronger than apart. Never forget it."

Sora sighed. "Why do things have to be so hard?"

"It wouldn't be called a quest, Sora, if it was easy," Kairi pointed out. He stuck out his tongue at her. She laughed at his antics.

"Your garments also have other powers—but you will have to discover what they are as you continue on your journey," Flora explained.

"Okay. We'll do our best," Sora assured.

"Thank you for the clothes," Kairi added.
"Good luck!" the three good fairies said in unison.

Back inside the sorcerer's study, the Gummi Ship was hovering outside one of the windows.

"The Gummi Ship!" Donald exclaimed.

Yen Sid stopped the gang in their excitement. "Before you leave, there is another matter at hand," he said. "If what the king suspects is true, the pathways between the worlds are closed. But fear not, they have prepared gates for you, Sora, to unlock. The king believes that Sora is the key that connects everything. You Kairi, and Riku, are destined to aid the key that connects everything. Remain vigilant, Kairi and Sora, for you must protect each other. The darkness will want to steal your pure heart again, Princess of Heart; and the Nobodies will want to prevent you, the Keyblade's Chosen, from succeeding in finding the King and Riku. I wish you luck on your journey."

The four of them saluted.

"You got it Master Yen Sid!" Goofy declared.

Sora and Kairi watched each other out of the side of their eyes. Nervous for what lied ahead, they worried about each other and Riku.

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**Missing Entry 04**

The mansion caught my curiosity one day. I was drawn to it, like I had to be somewhere within it. But something else compelled me to go inside. A voice, so unknown but familiar to me calls me.

Doing recon on these endless missions opened up my eyes to the many parts of the heart. Teenagers in Twilight Town running around together, that is what they call friendship.

But what makes people friends? What is the meaning of it? Why have it? Why is it so important to those with hearts?

Stirring in my stomach was a strange feeling as I watched those kids. It occurred to me that it was jealousy.

Does one need not a heart to feel jealousy towards those with hearts?

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to my beta ThreeDegrees for helping me polish off this chapter and the previous.

Feel free to leave a review.
Chapter II: Reviving Hollow Bastion

"Hey Kairi?" Sora asked as the gummi ship moved forward through the depths of space. The gang was smiling uncomfortably due to the ship's fuel being smiles.

She gave him her most heartfelt smile. "Yes?"

"What's the name of your keyblade?" he questioned, his face warming at her smile.

She summoned it to her hand. The name popped into her head. "Destiny's Embrace."

"Like the islands right?" Sora placed his hands behind his head, still smiling painfully.

"Yeah…" she responded. The two imagined their island, wondering when they were going to find Riku and return home.

"Wak! It's Hollow Bastion!" Donald pointed towards a massive world outside the windows of the gummi ship.

"Gawrsh, I wonder how Leon and the gang are doin'?" Goofy asked.

"Let's find out," Sora said as he grabbed a hold of the controls to the ship.

"Sora! You know you can't drive the ship!" Donald quaked, reaching to snatch the controls of the ship away from him.

"I can too, Donald!"

The ship jerked and tilted about. Kairi latched tightly onto her seat while Goofy covered his eyes.

Sticking a haphazard landing in Hollow Bastion, the gang stumbled out; legs like jelly from the intense fear of perishing in the gummi ship.

"Next time, autopilot drives," Kairi remarked, brushing herself off.

"Who is explaining to Leon why we destroyed half of a wall?" Sora said, glaring at Donald.

"You started it!" The duck stomped his foot.

"Did not!"

Kairi shook her head.

"Uh fellers, shouldn't we figure out where we are in the town?" Goofy asked, looking past a corner and spotting heartless running amok. They disappeared quickly, moving on to find people to terrorize. "Uh oh, looks like we gotta be doing some fightin'."

Sora stopped bickering with Donald to turn to Kairi. A question burned on his mind greatly. "Oh
yeah, Kairi, where did you get that keyblade anyways?"

Her eyes widened. She couldn't lie to Sora, but she couldn't break her promise either. How exactly would he react if she did tell him?

"We can worry about that later, we gotta find Leon and the gang!" Donald interrupted, walking away towards town with Goofy.

"I think someone's feathers are ruffled," Kairi said. "And I don't just mean Donald," she added, looking at the pouting Sora.

"He started it, I was perfectly fine driving the ship…" he muttered. Kairi placed a hand on his head in comfort.

"There there Sora, one day you'll be a great gummi ship pilot and Donald will have to acknowledge that."

He couldn't help but smile at his best friend. "Thanks, Kairi."

The gang walked into the marketplace. Shops of various types were open for business. One little item shop had a Moogle hanging outside of it. Across from it was a shop that looked like a giant freezer. A short duck with a top hat on was standing outside of it, back facing everyone.

"Uncle Scrooge!" Donald said the top hatted duck, wide-eyed.

"Er, who?" Sora asked.

"He's Donald's uncle—a business typhoon," Goofy explained. "Before the heartless showed up, he travelled the worlds on a gummi ship with the King. He was helpin' to set up a traffic system."

"A transit system," Donald grumbled.

"What's all the racket?" Scrooge said. He turned around, cane in one hand and a dreary looking popsicle in the other. "Why, if it isn't Donald! And Goofy! Hello lads! And who'd be this lad and lass here? The name's Scrooge McDuck."

"I'm Sora," the teen pointed to himself.

Kairi leaned down and extended her hand to Scrooge. "I'm Kairi. Nice to meet you Scrooge McDuck."

He took her hand and shook it. "A pleasure to meet ya Sora and Kairi. Wait, you must be the two who saved Hollow Bastion eh?"

The two teenagers were taken aback. "Saved Hollow Bastion?" Sora questioned.

"Ye, the keyblade hero and the princess of heart. Are the stories true? You stopped a massive influx of heartless and brought back the place from the darkness."

The two nodded.

"Ah, nice to know. Can never know with youngsters and their rumors. Hope ye all hale and hearty."

"What are you doing here, Scrooge?" Donald asked.
"Tryin' to make my favorite ice cream when I was a wee laddie," Scrooge said, gesturing to the ice cream in his hand. He took a couple of licks and shuttered. "Tastes terrible. Anyways, I bet you'd be lookin' for Merlin and the others." He pointed with his ice cream towards the steps behind him. "They be through there."

The gang nodded.

"We better get going then. Nice to meet you Scrooge," Sora said as he proceeded towards the steps, giving a friendly wave.

Kairi waved much more gently. "Yeah, nice to meet you too."

The elder duck waved back with his ice cream. "See you lads and lass later!"

Walking down the stairs, they came upon some pieces of fountains, yet to be finished being built.

"They must have a really long way to go still," Kairi said, noting all the construction equipment.

"Yeah, maybe we can help out somehow," Sora said, putting his hands behind his head as they walked.

Donald turned a corner and was greeted with a surprising sight. "Wak! A heartless!"

Sora and Kairi leapt out from the corner, keyblades brandished.

A man in black, lacking any weapon, was surrounded by many soldier heartless. Sora, Kairi, Donald and Goofy charged in.

The man in black suddenly summoned a silver blade with mechanical engine parts in its hilt. He, with a single hand, sliced down each heartless in front of him with ease. In a surprising twist, he then dismissed his sword and summoned a huge greatsword and swiped it through the rest of the heartless with ease. By the time the gang reached him, the heartless were all gone.

"Whoa," Sora gasped in awe at the skilled swordsman.

The man put away his greatsword and turned around to face the gaping onlookers. "Whoa. Who are you guys?" he seemed startled by the attention. His heart, from what Kairi could sense, was very pure, almost as pure as Sora's. Darkness lingered very little in his heart.

"I'm Sora," he introduced himself.

"I'm Kairi, nice to meet you," she greeted.

"Donald," the duck pointed to himself.

"And I'm Goofy," he said.

"Hey. I'm Noctis. Call me Noct," the man said. His eye caught the keyblade in Sora's grip. "Nice weapon you got there."

Sora lifted up his keyblade. "Yeah I guess."

"So the legends are true…” Noctis muttered under his breath. He stepped forward. "Hey Sora, I am afraid that my battle skills have been a bit…rusty. Wanna be my sparring partner?"

Sora nodded. "Sure!" He fell into his natural battle stance. Noctis took a few steps back, cracked
his knuckles and poised himself for the duel.

Kairi raised her keyblade like a flag. "Ready. Set. Go!" She waved down her blade and immediately jumped out of the way.

Sora blinked and Noctis was right in front of him, sword above his head. Sora whipped around and blocked the attack just in time. Using all of his raw strength he pushed the man back. Noctis flipped backwards and landed on his feet perfectly. Sora raised the tip of his blade to unleash a homing blizzard spell at Noct...And realized all his know-how of magic was gone. Noctis raised an eyebrow as he moved in and summoned a lance to his grip. He leapt up and jabbed the tip down at Sora. Sora raised his keyblade and the teeth collided with the lance. Pulling forth strength from the blade itself, Sora redirected Noctis to the side, knocking the lance out of Noct's grip. It disappeared as soon as it left Noctis' hand.

The dark-haired man was wide eyed as Sora's keyblade was inches from his face.

"You win," Noctis declared. Sora dismissed his keyblade. "Did you forget how to use your magic?"

Sora became sheepish. "Uh maybe."

"Hmm. I have some magic tricks up my sleeve if you need it," Noctis held out his palm and materialized an ice crystal in it. "The secret to ice magic is to think of a memory where you felt cold."

Kairi walked up and held out her keyblade. "Cold memories?" She thought of a dark place. Endless darkness, an abyss that chilled her to the bone. Her memory of that cold was so powerful it unleashed an ice missile out of her keyblade by accident. "Oops." It bounced off the walls and the construction equipment until it hit Donald right in the tush.

The duck screamed as he grabbed onto his behind feathers trying to ease the cold.

Kairi cringed. "I'm so sorry Donald."

Sora tried to conceal his laughter as Noctis snickered. "Yes, cold memories like that," the man said. He turned to walk away but stopped in his tracks. "Sora? Kairi? May I ask you a favor?"

Goofy was still tending to a rather disgruntled Donald.

Kairi nodded.

"Yeah?" Sora said.

"If you see a couple of guys asking for me, don't tell them where I am."

Kairi and Sora looked at each other. "Why?" Kairi asked. "Just, who are you, Noct? What is your power?"

Noctis answered. "I am no one worth mentioning."

He simply walked away. Sora called out. "We promise to keep our word!"

He disappeared in a flash of blue sparkles.

Kairi looked at Destiny's Embrace. "He seemed to know something about the keyblade."
"Yeah," Sora looked at his own. "He doesn't seem like a bad guy, but I wonder why he doesn't want to be found."

Kairi turned to Sora, "So you forgot all your magic hmm? Who else is going to teach me how to use it?"

Donald stomped his foot. "What about me? What am I? Roast duck!?"

Sora smirked. "More like frozen duck."

Kairi was sheepish. "Sorry about that Donald."

Just then a white circle formed from the ground in front of Sora. "Whoa, what's this?" he asked.

"That's the town's defense mechanism, we just put it in," a cheery voice said from up above on one of the roofs. A girl in black garb and a headband waved to them.

"Yuffie!" Sora exclaimed.

She smiled before quickly falling into a fight stance. "Look out!"

Heartless returned to fight the gang. The shadows and soldiers lunged right at them as soon as the keyblades were called. Disposing them with much effort, Sora stretched himself out, popping his joints. "Man I really am out of practice," he groaned.

Kairi however was perfectly fine. "Tsk tsk Sora, imagine if Riku was here."

"He'd call me a slacker."

"He does speak the truth."

"Well he'd call you a slacker too!" Sora pouted.

Kairi leaned in close to him. "Not as much as you, lazy bum."

Yuffie jumped down from her perch. "Good to see you guys! I see you're still in 'top' form, Sora."

Kairi nodded. "Nice to see you again Yuffie. See Sora, even she agrees with me."

Sora sighed, defeated. "Hey Yuffie, have you seen the King and Riku?"

The ninja replied with a blunt "Nope."

He was crestfallen. This search wasn't going to be easy at all.

Yuffie walked down the path through the Borough. "But I had a feeling I would see you guys again!"

Sora nodded before putting on his most serious face. "We may never see each other again, but we'll never forget each other."

"Is that supposed to be Leon?" Yuffie asked.

"I didn't know Leon could be so sappy," Kairi remarked.

"Better not tell him that," Yuffie said with a wink. "Come on everyone will want to see you. We're working on stuff at Merlin's house." The ninja skipped off.
The gang arrived at Merlin's. It was easy to spot the unusual architecture among the normal houses. Opening the door, Yuffie gestured to the gang gathered around a large computer.

"Introducing the Hollow Bastion Restoration Committee!"

Aerith turned around. Her face lighted up at the sight of them. "We missed you!"
Cid squinted at the four with a toothpick in his mouth. "Well if you ain't in top shape."
Leon, ever the stoic, only reacted with an "I knew it."
"What?" Sora asked as they walked in inside.
"A while back, everyone suddenly remembered you guys. All at the same time," Leon explained.
"You remembered?" Sora was taken aback. "Wait! Does that mean you forgot about us!?"
Kairi winced, thinking back to when his voice called out to her a while ago, when she fainted.
"Thanks!" Donald grumbled.
Yuffie put her hands on her hips. "So where've you guys been all this time?"
"We were sleepin'," answered Goofy.
Cid rolled his eyes. "Where? in cold storage?"
None of the gang answered the engineer's question, looking away or giving a nonchalant smile.
Aerith shook her head. "It doesn't matter. This is great! Everyone's together again!"
Leon, curious, looked over at the red head. "I didn't expect you to be with these guys, Kairi."
Kairi grinned. "Gotta aid in the search for Riku after all. Have you guys seen him or the King?"
They all shook their heads. Of course. The two teens looked crestfallen.
Sora looked down. "Right."
"Sorry," Aerith apologized. "But let us know if there's anything we can do to help, okay?"
"Thank you," Kairi answered.
Cid got up and approached the teenagers with his hands rubbing together. "Don't go thanking us just yet."
"Hollow Bastion's got a problem, a big problem," Leon said.
Sora moved away from Cid. "You mean, like Nobodies and Heartless?"
"That's right!" answered Yuffie.
"Sounds like you could use our help," Sora declared.
"Then let's get to the point. Sora, Kairi, Donald, Goofy, we were hoping you could lend us a hand," Leon asked.
"Like we're gonna to say no?" Sora responded with a cheesy smile.

"Right...I forgot who I am dealing with," the tall man smirked.

Donald narrowed his eyes. "What do you mean by that?" he grumbled.

Aerith smiled. "Just think of it as a 'Leon Compliment.'"

"Well now, show us to the problem then," Sora said, pumping himself up to help out.

Kairi chuckled. "How very Sora of you." She then nodded towards Leon. "What exactly is the big problem?"

"I will show you at the bailey," Leon strode towards the door and exited Merlin's house.

As soon as Leon left, Merlin the Wizard in his blue robes appeared before the gang in a puff of smoke and sparkles of magic. He adjusted his hat and greeted them. "Oh! I thought it was you. Right on time."

"Merlin!" Donald exclaimed.

"Hello Merlin," Kairi greeted.

"Hello Your Highness," he responded in kind.

"Sora and the gang said they're gonna help us out!" Yuffie informed the wizard.

"Splendid! We'll count on you," Merlin cheered.

"Right!" the gang saluted.

Merlin turned to Aerith. "Ah, yes. Did you give them the cards, dear?"

The woman in pink gasped. "Oh!" She pulled out of her side pocket purple cards and handed each one to Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy. "Here, they're presents for you. Leon thought you'd might like to have them."

Sora read the small white text on the back of the card. "Hollow Bastion Restoration Committee Honorary Member." His name was printed below.

"Membership cards!" Donald exclaimed.

"Kinda cool, huh?" Goofy stared at his own card.

"Hey thanks Lea...huh?" Sora turned around to thank Leon at the door but the swordsman had already left.

"Uh Sora, we're supposed to be at the bailey," Kairi informed him.

"Oops! We gotta go!" Sora said, ready to march out of Merlin's house on the spot.

"Wait a moment," Merlin stopped the gang. "What about your magic, Sora, Kairi?"

"I uh...Well we did meet a guy earlier who taught us some tricks," Sora explained. "But uhh...I seemed to have forgotten most of what I know."

Kairi nodded. "I've never done elemental magic before, so how do I control it?"
Merlin nodded. "Quite alright. I can teach you two a basic skill, but you will have to learn more types of magic on your journey. Come back to me if you need more training." With a wave of his wand, he conjured up a piece of old parchment in the air. Kairi grabbed it, reading it with Sora. It was instructions on how to control magic. "Now off you go."

Thanks Merlin!" Sora said.

Kairi nodded. "Thank you Merlin."

The gang marched out of the house and back into the borough. Ascending the stairs up to the bailey, they were besieged by a group of heartless.

Taking each one out with ease, Sora turned to see Kairi dealing with another shadow but didn't notice quickly enough the soldier heartless fast approaching behind her. She whipped around, but she was a second too late and couldn't raise her keyblade to block the incoming blow.

A pew sound echoed, and the soldier heartless was eliminated. Sora slammed his keyblade into the last shadow and it was vanquished.

Kairi looked to the source of the sound. A young man with blonde hair in black clicked the safety of his pistol. It disappeared in blue sparkles.

"Ahh, still got the aim," he said. "Duh dun dun da duh duuuun!" he hummed.

"Thank you for stopping that heartless," Kairi said, slightly bowing to the young man.

"No problem! Happy to lend a hand," he responded, pointing a thumb to his chest. "My name is Prompto Argentum. Nice to meet you milady."

She smiled at him. Sora noticed, his blood pumping faster for some reason. "My name is Kairi. This is Sora, Donald, and Goofy."

"Nice to meet you, Sora, Donald, Goofy," Prompto said. "Say, have you guys seen a brooding guy with dark spiky hair?" he gestured to his own hair, pointing a finger up.

Sora bit his lip. "Ummm can't say we have."

"Aww man, guess I'll have to just keep on keeping on then," Prompto pouted. "Thanks anyways! Nice to meet you all again!" he walked away with a wave. Kairi waved back.

"Thanks again for the save!" she said, then turning to Sora and slugging him in the arm.

"Owchie Kai!" he whined, rubbing the area where he was slugged.

"Did you just lie to him?"

"I mean…I did say I couldn't say I have seen him, which is technically the truth, right? Besides, we made a promise to Noct."

"Still, seems odd that Noct doesn't want to be found. Prompto seems like a nice guy," Kairi pondered.

Donald's eye twitched. "We gotta meet Leon in the bailey!"

"Oh, right!" Sora said. The gang ran off into the bailey, where Leon waited by an open balcony overlooking a giant maw, a dark castle off in the far distance.
Leon nodded to them and pointed down below the dark castle. "Take a look."

"What's that? A fort?" Sora asked.

Kairi's eyes widened as she looked at the base of the castle. "Uh Sora, look down," she squeaked out.

Sora, Donald and Goofy looked down, Goofy pulling out his binoculars to get a better look.

"Yikes!" the three of them shouted. Thousands and thousands of shadow heartless all crowded around the base of the castle, forming a sea of darkness.

Goofy and Donald nearly collapsed from shock. "There must be millions!" Sora exclaimed, his jaw to the floor.

"Are those Heartless?!" Donald quacked.

"I'm getting' goosebumps!" Goofy exclaimed.

Kairi could only stare at the massive sea. How long would it take to eliminate all of them? Was it even possible, with what Yen Sid had said?

"I'd hate to ask this," Leon said, scratching his neck. "I want you to help us get rid of them. We want to restore Hollow Bastion back to the way it was. Who knows, maybe something even better...I'm sure we can handle everything except for that, and..." he pointed even farther down closer to the balcony. Sora and Kairi spotted white dusks marching forward.

Sora turned to Leon. "Of course we'll take care of them!"

Kairi gaped at her best friend's quick response. If he was so sure they could handle that many heartless then she would follow him into battle, but looking at it she wasn't so sure.

Leon was equally alarmed by Sora's response, but brushed it off. "Well, that's good to hear."

"Sora, you're crazy!" Donald yakked, feeling faint at the idea of wiping out all those heartless. "There's too many!"

Goofy was already seeing black stars in his eyes. "W-We're talking millions!"

Sora summoned his keyblade. "Donald! Goofy! We defeated Ansem, the leader of the heartless!"

Kairi just stood there, pondering his words as he went to the edge of the balcony. "Besides," he began. "One swipe of the keyblade and they're all history!" Squinting at the large pool of heartless with his keyblade out, he seemed ready to jump in already and fight.

"How encouraging," Leon muttered under his breath.

"It looks like lava boiled in soy sauce," Sora commented.

Kairi shook her head. "Sora, even if you did defeat Ansem, the leader of the heartless, defeating them will be the biggest challenge. It has to be Pete who amassed this army of heartless, I can't think of anyone else who could control that many. Even then..." she looked at the lava boiled in soy sauce. "I have a feeling Pete could not have gotten so many heartless in one place."

Sora put away his keyblade. "You're right, Kairi, but the Organization is in charge of the Nobodies."
"Organization?" Leon asked.

"Pete is going around plotting with the heartless, but he doesn't seem able to tie his own shoes. Organization XIII is the real threat, they're behind the nobodies."

Kairi pointed to the dusks. "Those creatures right there."

Goofy pondered. "I wonder where those Organization XIII guys are even at."

A deep voice boomed from overhead. "You called?"

Sora and Kairi felt shaken by the powerful voice. The two of them ran out to the other side of the bailey.

"You're doing well," another less deep voice spoke.

"This calls for a celebration," the first voice boomed across the bailey again. Mocking laughter echoed in Sora's ears. All of a sudden, rage rushed through him uncontrollably. His fist tightened up, his heart pounding with fury.

"Show yourselves!" he demanded, summoning his keyblade.

On a high wall, from corridors of darkness: six beings in black coats emerged. All of their hoods were up, obscuring their facial features. The leader supposedly, with a wave of his hand, summoned forth dusks. "I wonder where your confidence comes from, brave one chosen by the Keyblade."

The dusks surrounded the group. Kairi summoned her keyblade, noting that Sora's fingers were turning white gripping his own keyblade.

"Organization XIII!" Goofy exclaimed.

"But confidence in your real ability will be your undoing," the leader spoke again. "You're just a conceited little boy and a weakling little girl who need to be taught a lesson."

The group attacked the dusks sent their way. Donald unleashed his magic spells like mad, Goofy bashed his shield into a couple dusks, Leon pulled out his gun blade and struck a group of dusks in rapid succession, Kairi shoved all her weight into mowing down a row of dusks with her keyblade, tumbling down to the ground. As she got up, she watched Sora be extremely aggressive against the dusks, a lot more than usual.

"Not bad," the same second voice said again.

A bunch of creepers appeared and went after Sora. "Wak! There's more!" Donald shouted, his feathers sticking up in a panic. He and Goofy surrounded Sora but got smacked away as the creepers turned into swords and swiped at them. Kairi ran in, standing behind Sora and smacking away the nobodies as Sora roughly attacked a large group of them. She could feel the anger and even hatred radiating off of him. She blocked an attack with her keyblade, but was quickly being overpowered.

"Come on kids you can do it!" a throaty dry voice cheered from the top of the wall.

"Come on, cheer him like you mean it," the second deep voice said to his comrade.

Leon was eventually overtaken by another group and sent to the ground with Donald and Goofy.
"Leon!" Sora cried out, before turning his attention back to the dusks and creepers. His anger raged within his veins, spurning him on.

Sora and Kairi were the only ones left standing. Kairi couldn't keep up with the mass swarm of nobodies much longer, the dusks latching onto her keyblade. Sora slammed his keyblade with more force than necessary into the group of nobodies, wiping all of them all out. Kairi kicked the dusks away, and Sora reversed from behind her to in front of her and eliminated the rest of her assailants with much fury.

Never had Kairi seen Sora so angry before, it nearly frightened her. His glare darkened as she looked upon him, leaning over on her knees in exhaustion. As he huffed and puffed from his excessive spending of his energy, he turned away from her and raised his fist at the beings in black.

"So?! Who's next?!!" he demanded to them.

The source of the dry voice raised a hand to his chin in thought. "Hey kids, who taught you how to use that keyblade?"

"Huh? Shut up and come down here! You're next!" Sora threatened.

Kairi was still out of breath. "Sora please…" She looked to her comrades on the ground and took out three potions from her bag, healing them.

It was like her best friend was a different person.

"Better listen to your girlfriend, wouldn't want you to hurt yourself," the man mocked.

"I said come down here and fight me!" Sora threatened again.

The deepest, most booming voice spoke again. "What a shame and here I thought we could be friends."

All of them laughed as they disappeared in an aura of darkness. His blood raging and heart aching for a fight, he decided without thinking to run off after them.

"Sora!" Kairi called out to him, but her words fell on deaf ears. He was stopped when the same raspy voice Organization member appeared in front of him by the stairs.

"Oopsy-daisy," he said to Sora.

"Move!" Sora gritted his teeth, baring his blade to him.

"Now, do you think that's polite, shutting me down like that?"

"I said get outta the way!"

"As if. You can talk all you want, but that won't change a thing."

"You gonna cry?!" Sora's fist tightened on his grip.

"Clearly we failed to remind you about how tough the crowd you're dealing with is."

"Remind me?" The teen was ready to charge at him, shooting a fierce glare the man in black.

The man laughed. "That's right; he used to give me the same exact look!"
"I guess you can psych me out by saying really random stuff!"

Kairi latched onto Sora's arm, holding him back. He turned and looked at her pleading expression and softened up. Something within him calmed down, and suddenly Sora was trying to remember exactly what had just occurred.

"Aww the two lovebirds are reunited at last. You better be good with those keyblades of yours, or else he disappeared for nothing." He vanished.

"He?" Sora asked, puzzled. He felt exhausted, the anger faded like the searing light after a lightning strike. Why was he angry in the first place? Where did all this negative emotion come from? "Who gave him the same look?"

Goofy, Donald, and Leon got up. Goofy looked to Sora. "Ya know, I think he was just tryin' to confuse ya."

Sora nodded. "Yeah, you're right, only one me!" He pointed to himself.

Kairi sighed in relief. Whatever had just occurred with Sora was probably nothing. "I wonder why they let all their minions do the fighting though. Why not try to engage with us?" she pondered out loud.

"They were probably testing us," Donald proposed.

The two teens looked in the direction of the sea of heartless. Sora pulled out his card of membership. It was now a reminder of a promise. The promise of aiding the restoration of Hollow Bastion by driving out the heartless and eliminating Organization XIII.

The card shined in Sora's fingers. "Whoa," he said in surprise.

"Whoa indeed," Kairi said.

The tip of Sora's keyblade reacted with sparkles of light as the card floated up in the air.

"Gawrsh ya think…?" Goofy commented in awe.

A beam of light shot out of the card and into the sky, forming a keyhole. Sora felt an energy surge from within the keyblade as he stepped back, flipped it and lifted it up, shooting a beam out and the keyhole shined bright, a loud click signaling the opening of the new road.

"Oooh now I get it," Sora said as he stared at the powerful weapon in his grip. "That must've been the gate Yen Sid talked about."

"Oh boy!" Donald said with excitement.

"Sorry to run, Leon, but other worlds are calling," Sora explained.

Leon gave him a nod. "Organization XIII, they look tough. Be careful out there."

Kairi agreed. "We will."

"See you soon," promised Sora with a smile on his face.

The future was as bright as they could see.
"Do my eyes deceive me?" Number III said, his arms crossed as he sat back in his white chair. "That boy has the power to wield the keyblade? And not just him, but the Princess of Heart."

Number II, the dry voiced man, spoke up. "Give them a chance. It means they're straight as an arrow. Pure of heart, unlike all of us here. They will stop at nothing to help others."

"They had better be, or else they're worthless," Number VII said.

Number X pulled out his cards with the Nobody symbol on it. "I truly hope they're enjoying their adventure together. A little hand from fate brought them together on their little quest."

Number IX slouched back in his seat. "Hey, as long as it works in our favor. We can let them do whatever they want for now. Then we'll jump in if needed."

II smirked. "Those are bold words coming from you. Are you saying you'll volunteer to take care of it if things go wrong? Huh?"

IX was surprised. "What?! Me? No you have the wrong guy, I'm not comfortable with that."

III rolled his eyes. "You act as though you have a conscience. When was the last time any of us felt anything?"

IX swallowed.

"Truer words were never spoken," X flicked a card, disappearing in his palm. "Well I suppose the fun will have to star crossed lovers will have their moment, for now."

VII was emotionless in his tone. "Do you know what happens to those who lose their true purpose? Inevitably, they destroyed themselves."

"Gentlemen," their leader spoke up. "The Hero of the Keyblade and the Princess of Heart have embarked on a new adventure. Make sure it is one they will remember. The witch and the Key of Destiny are not reunited in oblivion...not yet."

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**Missing Journal Entry 05**

Sadness was a quiet ocean, devoid of movement. The waves were never moving. At least that's what I thought of in my minor slump of missing something. My dreams were of an ocean, and it felt to me like home...But what was the feeling of home? What was a home to begin with?

That mansion was back in my conscious again. Along with the ocean, from which I could taste the breeze, was that mansion. Its pull, even in my room far away, was very reaching and disturbing. I lay awake during sleep hours. The moon never rose, it never set. There was no sun, not like the sunset of Twilight Town.

I hatched a plan in my head. It was crazy, but I had to know. What was in that mansion that compelled me so? I knew VII would be against the notion of going in there, but perhaps...Perhaps there was something that could aid in the Organization's goals. Surely once he heard of what I found he would be more open to that idea.

But this must be kept a secret until then.

Chapter End Notes
Sorry this was late posting. Thank you for reading, see you next chapter!
The first world was one the gang didn't recognize at all. They landed in a bamboo grove, next to a rather large black and white bear viciously eating the foliage. Sora tiptoed away from the large mammal.

"Where are we?" he whispered to Kairi.

"I don't know," she said. "It's beautiful here though, completely different from the islands." She paused in a cleared and looked up at the sun's rays shining through the branches and leaves of the bamboo.

"We can make soup outta this," Goofy remarked, touching the bamboo and feeling the rough ridges of each segment.

Donald peeked behind a corner and saw a man in green cowering from a shadowy creature in front of a rock. "Wak!" he gestured for Sora to come over. "A heartless?"

Sora nodded. "Let's get the jump on 'em!"

Kairi shook her head. "Umm guys…"

"Gwarsh, maybe we should look before…" Goofy's words couldn't stop the two hot headed ones from charging off toward the shadow. "We leap."

Sora and Donald ran in with a battle cry, startling not only the man but the shadow. A tiny red lizard leapt out from behind the rock into the arms of the man, who ducked away from them.

Goofy and Kairi caught up to them, Goofy's eyes squinting at the red lizard. "Is that Mushu?"

Mushu popped out of the man's grip. "That's right! I know you heard of me! I'm little, lethal, and legendary! Now ya'll scram before I get my dragon dander up!" he threatened at the assailants, not paying attention to who was in front of him.

"Hey Mushu! We missed you," Sora greeted.

"Who?" Kairi asked.

"Yeah but you better hope I miss you or else you're…" the dragon stopped and blinked. "Sora! Donald, Goofy!" he leapt off the man's shoulder and strolled over to the gang.

The man with a rather soft voice stopped cowering. "You know them?" he asked Mushu.

"Know them? Man we used to kick all sorts of bad guy butt together. Yeah you know, I used to help these guys out of a lot of tight spots, 'cause I'm a mighty dragon! Right?" he leaned on Sora's large shoe. Sora took a step back and sent the dragon tumbling to the ground.

"Something like that," Sora answered to all of Mushu's big game talk.
Kairi leaned down and helped the show off dragon stand up. "Hi, my name is Kairi." She stood back up to face the man. "And you are?"

"I'm Mulan, uh no I mean uh…"

"Ping!" Mushu declared.

"Mulan Ping?" Donald said with skepticism.

"Just Ping, son of Fa Zhou," the man puffed his chest out and spoke in a much deeper voice.

"You know Mushu?" Sora asked.

"Mushu's one of my family's guardians."

"We didn't know we were borrowin' someone as important as a family guardian," Goofy said.

Mushu pointed his finger at the gang. "Yeah that's right, and that puts you up in your eyeballs in debt to Ping here. Well guess what kiddies, it's payback time!"

"Mushu…" Ping whispered.

"Ah, they don't mind, right?"

Sora nodded. "Sounds fair."

Kairi nodded. "Yeah, we'd be happy to repay a debt."

"Now we got one problem," Mushu began. "See Ping here was on his way to join the recruits in the imperial army but they have one important rule…” He gestured to Kairi. "No girls allowed."

Kairi was stunned. "What? You mean I can't join because I'm a girl?"

Sora stepped forward in outrage. "Girls should be allowed in the army! Girls can fight and be just as tough and skilled and smart as guys! I would know; Kairi here would probably kick my butt if she would!"

Kairi stood there in that moment, staring at her best friend. The way he spoke his words of defense with such vigor and passion struck something within her heart. Her face felt hot, her stomach feeling…off. It felt like he was the only one there, standing in front of her. In that moment, he was the only one who mattered. What was this feeling? She snapped out of it and continued listening to his long-winded rant, trying to ignore the bubbly feeling in her stomach.

Once Sora finished his rant, Ping nodded. "I agree Sora, but even they won't let me in…"

Something went off in Kairi's mind. It made sense now. Ping was not who he said he was.

"What do you mean, won't let me in?" Sora asked, baffled.

Mushu pretended that Ping didn't say anything. "Um well don't worry about that…"

"You're pretendin' to be a boy aren't ya?" Goofy asked.

Sora and Donald's jaws dropped. Kairi shook her head. Of course they wouldn't notice at all. "You're a…girl?" Sora said in disbelief.
What a very Sora thing to do.

Ping grinned. "You didn't notice?"

"Not me," Sora responded, still gaping at the soldier.

"I think it's working," Ping said to Mushu.

"I don't know, those two will fall for anything," the dragon remarked, sitting on Ping's shoulder.

"I'm right here!" Sora grumbled. "Why are you trying to get into the army anyways?" he asked Ping.

Ping looked down at her palms. "My father never fully recovered from the last time he fought for the Emperor. Only boys are allowed in the army and I knew he wouldn't last in the war against the Huns. I'm an only child and there was no one to go in his place so I...took his armor and decided to take his place instead."

Moved by Ping's words, Kairi steeled her resolve and stepped toward the woman in disguise. "I want to help you blend in," she said. "I grew up with boys; I know how to be one of the guys."

Sora was flabbergasted. "Kairi you sure?" He couldn't imagine Kairi, beautiful, fair Kairi, getting down and dirty and aggressive like guys. He did duel Riku a lot and raced with him a lot, but Kairi... "But but, training in a boot camp..."

She stuck out her tongue at him. "What happened to I could kick your butt if I wanted to?"

She had a point. Not like he could stop her anyways. "So uh Kairi how we gonna pull this off?" He looked over her pink and white attire along with her long red hair. "Kinda stick out as a girl."

"Hmm," she pondered. "I will need some new clothing for the time being. Got any spares Ping?"

Ping shook her head. "This is my father's armor."

Sora turned to Donald. "Can't you conjure up some something Donald?"

Donald tapped his foot. "I'm a court wizard not a fairy who makes clothes on a whim."

Mushu raised his finger. "There's a village not far from this place filled with clothes for the taking!"

"Let's go then!" said Sora, pumped up.

"Wait we can't just walk in and ask to borrow clothes to disguise Kairi," Goofy noted.

"We can just borrow without asking permission then," Mushu suggested. "We gotta get a move on and be quick!"

Sora leaned on his hands behind his head. "I mean it is a necessity."

Kairi shook her head. "These are someone else's clothes..."

She couldn't believe she was going along with this crazy plan.

At the village near the boot camp the gang hid behind a bunch of bushes, watching a man pin up clothes on a line to dry. They were the standard army uniforms, all different sizes, many of them
worn down from past wars and usage.

"You guys sure we wanna steal these?" Kairi asked.

"Borrow, borrowing without permission," Sora said as a matter of fact. "We promise to give them back when we're done Kairi," he smiled at her, not very convincing.

"If it's absolutely necessary..." Kairi said, a small amount of guilt in her gut.

The man doing the laundry wiped his forehead of sweat. He cracked his back and knuckles and walked away to sit under the shade of a tree. Sora, Donald, and Goofy leapt out from the bushes and sprinted over to the clothes line. Sora grabbed a random robe off the line and put it on, finding it far too large.

"Sora! This is for Kairi not you!" Donald grumbled. "Quit getting distracted."

Goofy held up tiny, tiny boots that even Kairi wouldn't fit. "Hyuck, what about these?"

"She's not a tiny fairy ya big palooka!"

Sora raised his eyebrow at the shoes. "Who even has feet that small?"

"Says the one with big feet!"

"Says the one with giant duck feet!"

"I can't watch," Kairi said from her spot from behind the bushes, covering her eyes. Ping only patted her on the shoulder in sympathy.

"Uhh fellers he's coming back," Goofy said.

The three went into a panic, grabbing what clothes they had in their hands and rushing out of the laundry area, diving behind the bushes.

A huffing Sora presented Kairi with a uniform. "Here...Kairi..."

She took the clothes from his arms and shook her head. "Thank you...lazy bum."

He raised a thumb up, face down on the ground.

Changing in the bamboo grove, Kairi emerged with her hair up dressed in a red soldier's uniform. In her arms was her pink mini dress and purple boots. Her pearl necklace was tucked into the collar of the robes she wore.

One day she would be able to show to them all who she was. Putting the gear away in her magical book bag on her belt, Kairi went to join her friends.

"How do I look?" she asked.

Sora gave her a thumb up and a cheeky grin. "My, Kairi you look like an amazing guy."

She slugged his arm.

"Yo, we gotta get a move on!" Mushu declared. "Let's go join the recruits."

Leaving the grove the gang moved down the hill toward the encampment. Sora, Kai, Donald,
Goofy, Ping and Mushu peeked in from the entrance.

A group of soldiers all stood in line waiting for something.

"Okay girl," Mushu whispered to Ping. "Chest out, knees together, legs apart and strut! 2 3 and work it!"

Ping did as she was told, walking awkwardly behind the four new friends. Some of the soldiers sitting about stared at the odd man's walk.

Sora stepped into line when a short man with a permanent black eye shoved him out of the way. "About time we got some grub."

"Hey no cutting!" Sora said, angry at the man.

"Get out!" Donald quacked.

The man, named Yao turned around and decked Sora in the face, sending him straight to the ground.

"I'll show 'em!" Donald leaped forward to tackle Yao, but missed and headbutted a skinny man named Ling instead. Ling jumped into the exchange of fists.

"That does it!" Sora declared, going after Yao.

A tall giant man with no hair named Chien-Po just stood there, unsure whether to join in the fist fight. "I wonder what they're serving for lunch today?"

Yao raised his large fist. "Knuckle sandwiches."

Ping and Goofy were trying to stop the violence, and Kai had a hand over her eyes, shaking her head.

Ping, unsure of what to do, shouted "Please!"

Everyone stopped in their tracks. Even Kai was surprised.

Ling got up from Donald jumping on his back. "Please?" he mocked.

"What a girl!" Yao growled.

Oh. "Uh, knock it off!" Ping said.

"Knock what off?" Yao played ignorant.

"You punched me!" Sora accused.

"Cutting in line," Donald added.

"What a chickenboy!" Ling insulted.

"Chickenboy!? Say that to my face you limp noodle!" Mushu roared from Ping's hood.

"Let's just get back in line okay?" Ping said.

Kai nodded. "I'm with Ping."
"Whose side are you guys on? I just got slugged!" Sora objected.

Yao glared at the teen. "Want some more?"

"Soldiers!" a stern voice commanded.

"The Captain!" Ling said.

On cue, everyone including the rude jerks lined up side by side. The other soldiers also were lined up.

A man with a stick in his hand walked down the single row of soldiers. His eye caught the newcomers but they were obeying orders perfectly fine. Last minute recruits it seemed. "And you five are?"

The gang all saluted. "Sora."

"Donald."

"Goofy."

"Kai."

"Ping."

He eyed both Kai and Ping but said nothing. He walked over to a barrel with more sticks in it. "You will assemble swiftly and silently every morning," he said as he took off his robe and grabbed a bow and quiver of arrows. "Anyone who acts otherwise will answer to me."

Ping was gawking at the bare muscles of the captain.

Kai was just concerned with not getting discovered.

Sora sweated hoping he didn't get his butt kicked in boot camp.

"Ooo tough guy," Yao mocked.

"Yao," the captain, known as Li Shang turned toward Yao, drawing an arrow back.

The entire line of men stepped back except for Yao who was staring at the incoming arrow. Shang raised his bow and arrow up high and shot it at the top of a long wooden pole. "Thank you for volunteering. Retrieve the arrow."

Yao cracked his knuckles. "I'll get that arrow pretty boy, and I'll do it with my shirt on." He walked over to the pole and was about to start climbing when Shang stopped him.

"One moment, you seem to be missing something." A man in blue silk robes held with great effort a wooden box to Shang. He pulled out two weights with black straps on them. "This," he put one on Yao's right wrist. "Represents discipline. And this," he put the other weight on Yao's left wrist, "Represents strength."

Yao was dragged to the ground by the sheer heaviness of the weights. Ping and Kairi heard snickering from Ling and Chien-Po.

Blending in with the guys was going to be the most difficult thing the two women would ever face.
"You need both to reach the arrow," Shang finished.

Yao with the weights tied to his wrists, began to climb the pole, but felt himself slipping from the excess weight immediately. He stuck his teeth into the wood, but slid down to the ground anyways.

Ling flopped down to the ground like a pancake.

Chien-Po slammed to the ground so hard it sent the pole up from the grass a few feet.

Goofy accidentally hit his head with one of the weights.

Donald couldn't even lift the weights from the ground, pulling with so much effort he slammed straight into the pole.

Sora landed on his stomach, all wind knocked out of him.

Kai accidentally slammed the weight into the pole.

Ping landed flat on her butt, rubbing it of pain as she got back in line with the others.

Shang rubbed his neck. "We've got a long way to go." He grabbed a bunch of sticks from the barrel and tossed them at the men. He held out the stick. "I'll make men out of you lot yet."

The gang accidentally knocked everyone in the group over, flinging their sticks around.

Archery was no better with everyone missing their targets with the fruits. Mushu slapped the fruit on the end of Ping's arrow, which earned a death glare from Shang.

By the end of the day, training was a disaster and a half. Ping had accidentally set fire to Chi Fu's tent with a rocket, Yao got a flaming arrow to the butt, Ling got a few teeth knocked out trying to chop a block, Chien-Po caused half the army to fall into the river, Sora got slapped by a fish, and Donald and Goofy got launched into the air by Kairi trying to fire an arrow with rope on the end.

Sora, Donald, and Goofy took to their own tent while Kai and Ping took the other tent, for obvious reasons.

Sora flopped down on the ground. "Training is hard," he whined. "My muscles feel like they're on fire."

Kai peeked into the tent. "Man Sora you're really out of shape," she said. "Wait till tomorrow where we continue our training."

He turned away. "Ugh. I need a shower."

Donald and Goofy collapsed immediately to sleep. With a giggle, Kai closed the tent and went to sleep in her own tent next door.

Training resumed the next day at the crack of dawn. The disaster and a half became two disasters. Ping got a black eye from martial arts training with Captain Shang. Kai ran over and helped her up while Mushu threw water on her face to cool her off.

Sora, Donald, and Goofy decided to give the arrow on top of the pole another try, only to land in a dogpile at the base of the pole.

Then Shang declared they had to make a hike around the small mountain nearby their camp,
everyone having to carry supplies on their backs.

Walking together, Sora whined some more. "I think building a raft and beating up heartless was
easier than this."

"You big baby it's not that heavy," Donald said, carrying a rocket.

"Gawrsh it still quite a ways though," Goofy said.

Sora looked to Kai and Ping. Kai was huffing really hard, the weight of the various supplies
pushing on her. Ping was even worse off, barely even walking forward.

"We got this Ping," Kai whispered.

Shang turned around and saw Ping tumble to the ground. "Ping!" Kai exclaimed. Shang wordlessly
walked over, Kai trying to get Ping to get up.

Sora was about to run over but Shang was faster than him. Shang picked up the load Ping was
trying to carry and put it behind his back like it was nothing. Not a word was spoken between the
two as Shang walked off.

Ping knew she had failed in the eyes of the Captain. Her worth as a soldier was less than her worth
as a bride.

"Come on, let's get your back to camp in one piece," Kai said, still carrying her load of supplies and
pulling Ping up by one arm. Sora pulled her up with the other.

"Guys I'm fine, it's okay," Ping said, her breath ragged. Mushu frowned at the limping soldier.

"No it ain't okay, I don't need a collapsing soldier passin' out in the battlefield. Go cool off in
camp. Sun's going down anyways," Mushu declared.

Ping looked to Kai, who was risking her own life trying to help her out. Where did she get her own
strength from? How is it she looked like she was a princess and yet was tough as nails, able to
continue despite the struggles? Could Ping even do anything right?

Shadows appeared from the ground in front of the gang. "Heartless!" Sora, Donald, and Goofy
exclaimed, dropping their supplies to summon their weapons. Kai and Ping stopped in their tracks.

"Heartless?" Ping asked.

"Beings that feed on the darkness in people's hearts," Kai explained, leading her to the wall to lean
on. Ping pressed herself up against the wall while Kai summoned her keyblade to aid the guys.

A rather large assault raider heartless appeared from behind the gang, holding a giant spear in its
grip. It charged at the distracted gang dealing with the small fry.

Mushu gaped. "That heartless is gonna skewer them!"

Ping looked up at the ledge over the raider heartless. A boulder was barely staying put and was
conveniently placed away from her friends. Without hesitation Ping grew her sword and flung it at
the boulder in the cliff. "Look out!" she warned.

Sora, Kai, Donald, and Goofy turned around to spot the giant heartless incoming to them. Hearing a
credit from above, Sora pulled Kai and Goofy away from the falling boulder.
The boulder fell perfectly on top of the heartless, crushing it. When the dust settled, the gang moved past the boulder to check on Ping.

"You saved us, Ping," Goofy said, patting the soldier on the shoulder.

"Your quick thinking got that heartless in the nick of time," Kai complimented.

"Yeah I think we would have been toast back there," Sora said, pointing behind him with his thumb.

"You're as good as any soldier in the camp!" Donald declared.

"Thank you, but the captain doesn't know that. He doesn't have any faith left in me," Ping said with a sigh. "Let's go back to camp."

Arriving back at camp, the night had already fallen.

"I need a shower. I feel sticky and gross," Sora complained.

Kai crossed her arms. "You know Sora you tend to complain a lot about boot camp," she said with a wink.

"Boot camp sucks," he groaned.

Ping pointed down the path past the camp. "There's a lake that way to bathe in. I'll go in after you guys. I need to face Captain Shang myself."

Sora nodded. "If you're sure."

"We'll be waiting for you then," Kai added.

The gang walked down to the lake. Kai looked to the worn down Ping. She had to make sure the woman was okay, she snuck off as Sora and Donald continued their bickering all the way down to the river.

Captain Shang had Ping's horse, Khan all packed up. Ping was shocked. Shang pulled the reigns of Khan and shoved them into Ping's hands. "You're unsuited for the rage of war. Pack up, go home, you're through."

He turned away from her with a heavy heart. Ping was a burden to his troop. No way could the boy make it without easily getting slaughtered. He would only dishonor them.

Kai watched the exchange from behind a tent. No way was he actually sending Ping home. That had to hurt, to be kicked out.

"You okay Ping?" Kai asked the crestfallen soldier.

"No...I have dishonored my family yet again. How do I prove to him that I am capable? What do have I prove?"

Kai put a finger to her lips. "Hmm. You are a smart thinker. Show them all your brain. You may not have strength of muscles, but you do have a strong will. You'll find a way." she turned to go to the lake. "Goodnight Ping."

Ping looked up at the arrow still sticking out of the pole. "Hmm..." She marched over to the box near the base and pulled out the heavy weights. Perhaps if she could climb this pole and retrieve
the arrow she could prove to Captain Shang she was just as much of a soldier and worthy of staying. She tied the weights to her wrist and jumped up on the pole. The weights pulled her down and she landed on her butt immediately. She looked at them. How exactly were they supposed to use these burdensome weights to get the arrow?

What if the weights were used to balance her own weight out? She undid the ties and tied them together instead. Gripping the ends she threw them around the pole and began to climb the pole. It was much easier to ascend up the pole, but her lack of strength made it difficult.

But Ping persisted.

"Kai, you sure about this?" Sora said, turning away using bright red as Kai let her hair down and removed her sticky clothes.

"If you guys can bathe why can't I?" she said, stepping into the cool water.

"I just uh don't want anyone to see...anything that might give away our secret."

"Sora, remember that time Riku stole your clothes? I think we all saw more than we needed to."

His face became bright red at the memory. He looked to the grass Kairi was hiding behind. "You done yet?"

"Wak!" Donald pointed forward.

"Oh no!" Goofy yelped as three familiar figures sprinted towards the river. "Take cover!"

The duck and dog leapt into the bushes. Sora turned back around and saw Yao, Ling, and Chien-Po throwing their clothes off. "Kai we got a problem!" he whispered.

The girl calmly reached out to where her towel was supposed to be, only to not have it there. She panicked. "Uh oh where's my towel?!"

"What do you mean where's your towel!?"

"It's gone!"

The three men were still approaching. This was bad, very bad. Sora, not seeing any other option, began to strip.

"Hey guys," he said to the three men, really wishing he could advert his own eyes away.

"Hi Sora!" waved Ling. The three leaped into the lake. Sora, in order to distract them, joined him.

Kai lowered herself into the water, hiding in the tufts of grass even more.

"Hey Kai!" Yao greeted.

"Hi guys, um I am already done and I must get some shut eye so uh..." She gestured to Sora. "He can keep you company."

Sora waved sheepishly. "Yes um, yeah so how's the weather?"

Having diverted the three men's attention to himself, Sora watched out of the corner of his eye Kai trying to find her towel. Donald and Goofy ran over to her with a towel and she grabbed it and
immediately got out of the lake. Ducking into the bushes she grabbed her clothes and the three ran out of sight.

Sora felt relieved at his best friend's escape. But he still had to entertain the trio of men it seemed, for they wouldn't let him go.

And more men from the army showed up.

Dawn had come.

"Rise and shine and come see Ping retrieve the arrow!" Mushu shouted in Sora's ear.

The teen groaned. He wanted more sleep. "Hyuck, hurry up Sora you don't wanna miss it!" Goofy said, peeling away his blanket.

He stood up and exited the tent with a yawn. Kai was right there, incredibly excited. "Come on Sora!" She grabbed him by the hand and pulled him towards the pole.

All the army was awaking, catching sight of one Ping, who everyone thought was the weakest and most useless of the army, climbing the pole using the weights as both a counterbalance and a lift. She was almost to the top. She nearly slipped, causing Kai to tighten her grip on Sora's hand.

"You can do it!" Sora cheered.

"You got this!" Kai shouted.

Ping persisted, pulling herself up on top of the pole and grabbing the arrow out of the wood. She threw it down to the front of the captain's tent. Shang exited his tent to find an arrow sticking out of the ground and a bunch of cheers from the army.

Ping grinned at her achievement.

Shang raised an eyebrow. Maybe this boy wasn't a disgrace to the army.

After that, morale was extremely high, and performance improved dramatically. Chien-Po taught himself how to swim. Ling mastered chopping a block in half. Yao without fail dodged all flaming arrows sent his way. Sora, Donald, and Goofy got better at carrying supplies over long distances.

The most improvement was with Kai and Ping.

Ping had bested Shang in hand to hand combat, which thoroughly impressed the captain.

During practice with using basic weapons, Kai struggled with the basics and fell on her butt, and Ping offered her a hand up. Kai gladly took it, and Ping demonstrated the first stance. Kai repeated it. The next stance. Kai repeated it. The two eventually were in perfect sync, performing the stances with precision and ferocity. Kai herself felt stronger, her endurance much greater, and her fighting abilities much more precise.

Shang called all of the army to gather one morning. "Scout reports the enemy Shan-Yu has made its way into the mountains. We must make haste quickly."

Mushu rubbed his hands together from behind a tent. "We're moving out at last! My girl's time to shine!"
"I've got a deal for you," No. II of Organization XIII said to the menacing Shan Yu. "We give you an army to rival the Imperial runts and you create us fodder for heart collecting. Sound like a fair trade?"

Shan Yu nodded with a grin and a laugh. "A deal is a deal."

"Be sure to watch out for a boy with rat's nest hair and a redhead with attitude."

No. II exited via a corridor of darkness.

Marching up the mountains, the gang carried rockets on their shoulders. Ping had her black horse Khan pulling a wagon full of cannons up the path. Mushu sat in the wagon.

Sora per usual groaned at the constant walking. "How much farther?" he asked. "My feet are falling off."

"Sora, shush, we're in war now…" Kai said with an unsteady voice. She was not one either for running or walking so much.

"War…yay," he said weakly. "This is so hard."

Donald huffed. "It's hard on me."

"Soldiers, stop dragging your feet!" Shang said. Despite the major improvements over the training course, they still were not in tip top shape in comparison to his father the general's army. It takes years to become highly agile muscle men, but Shang within his heart believed in his men. He gave them the tools they needed to at least survive.

"Your men are the most pitiful soldiers I've ever seen!" Chi Fu, the assistant and apparently one of the Emperor's counsels, commented as he passed by the marching soldiers limping in the snow on his horse.

Shang wanted to roll his eyes, but only faced forward, on the road ahead. "They've completed their training. They're ready."

Sora heard the exchange, and perked up. Stepping up, he marched on ahead. "Come guys, the faster we move the sooner we get to the enemy!"

Kai smiled. "Race you there," she winked at him.

Sora, determined not to lose, ran up ahead to march beside Yao, Ling, and Chien-Po. Kai stood behind the trio, listening in on their conversation.

"I just want a girl who likes to laugh and thinks I'm a god," Ling declared.

"A girl worth fighting for would be one who could cook amazing meals," Chien-Po sighed.

"What's your girl worth fighting for?" Yao asked Sora. "Mine would marvel at my strength and battle scars."

"Hmm…" Sora thought about it. What was his ideal girl? "A girl who is independent, adventurous, oh and can kick my butt."

Kai felt her cheeks heat up at that last statement. Did he just….No. No way was he being specific to her. Sora was oblivious and was her friend. Surely he would never…nah.
"Halt!" Shang said.

Everyone's attention snapped to the scene before them. An entire village, scorched. Buildings burnt down, torn cloth hanging from the black pitch posts. Soot and bricks littered the snow.

Sora, Kai, Ping, Donald, and Goofy stared in horror. Mushu peeked out from the cloth covering the wagon of canons and gaped at the sight. What exactly had he gotten the gang into?

Kai felt the darkness fleeting nearby. This destruction was fairly recent. This Shan-Yu was close to them, but moving quickly.

"Where could they have gone?" Shang asked out loud.

Ping looked to the mountains. "Through the pass, up toward the summit most likely."

"Move out! They're moving quickly," he ordered.

Sora looked to Kai. The pink hue on her cheeks faded, leaving a sickly pale hue in its place. He placed a hand on her shoulder. "You okay?"

The darkness was getting closer as they marched. "Yeah, I'm fine Sora."

Climbing through the snow, the army reached the summit.

Not a single trace of Shan-Yu was in sight, or his Hun army. But Kai felt the darkness. It was very close.

Ping flinched as a loud roar of a canon zipped from the wagon past her head and into the air. It exploded in a thundering boom. The gang turned and glared at the source of the canon, where Mushu with wide eyes pointed to the little cricket accompanying him in blame.

Shang was furious. "What happened?!" he demanded to Ping.

"Uhhh…" Ping scrambled to form words.

"You just gave away our position! Now we're…" an arrow shot at Shang's shoulder armor so fast it knocked him off his horse. He ripped the arrow out. Darkness laced the arrow's tip.

"Look out!" Goofy shouted, point to the large barrage of dark arrows heading their way.

"Get out of range!" Shang ordered, fearing for his men.

Donald with his magic, unleashed a new magic spell. "Reflect!" A bubble of hexagons formed around the army for a brief moment, absorbing all the arrows and breaking immediately. A few stray arrows hit the wagon, setting it aflame.

"Save the cannons!" Shang added. Everyone grabbed as many cannons out of the wagon. Ping took her sword and cut Khan free, fleeing from the impending explosion.

"These arrows have darkness on them," Sora noted as the gang fled to the rocks.

"Look!" Kai pointed to the mountain top. Shan-Yu's army was gathering, their leader at the helm. Heartless rapid thrusters floated above the enemy.

"Heartless! That's why there's darkness in the air!" Sora said, summoning his keyblade.
Shan-Yu wasted no time. "Charge!" his deep, inhuman voice boomed across the snow. His horse took off down to the small army.

"Ready the cannons!" Shang commanded as they set up the cannons behind the rocks. "Fire!"

Some of the cannons hit some of the Hun army, but they did nothing to the heartless. "Gaaaah! They ain't human!" Yao panicked.

Sora, Kai, Donald, and Goofy prepared themselves. "Captain, we're going up front!" Sora declared.

"Leave the heartless to us!" Kai said, the gang running off.

"Let's go!" Donald said with a battle cry.

"Come back! That's suicide!" Shang cried out after them.

"Attack!" Shan-Yu commanded the heartless. Trails of darkness followed after the rapid thrusters, the little flying bugs zooming in on the four.

Ping watched helplessly at her friends. No way was she going to let them perish, not after all they've done for her.

"Ready the cannons again, we need to help them!" Shang declared.

Ping looked up at the mountains overlooking the Hun army. A ton of snow was on it, just begging to fall. She shoved Yao to the side and grabbed his cannon.

"Hey!" the short man yelled.

"Ping! Not you too! Come back!" Shang yelled out to the soldier. Were they all crazy? He ran after her.

Ping ran up to behind the fighting gang, trying to take care of the swarm of heartless plaguing them.

"If only..." Kai grunted as she parried a thruster's attack away with her keyblade. "I had my own clothes..."

Sora blocked several blows from three heartless. "That would be super helpful right now I agree."

Ping got to her knees in the snow and set up the cannon.

Yao, Ling, and Chien-Po caught onto Ping's plan. "Come on! We gotta help!" Yao declared, pulling out his sword. The trio ran out into the thick snow after the gang to support them.

Ping pulled out the flint from her pocket to light it. The falcon that rode upon Shan-Yu's shoulder swooped down and stole the flint out of her hands.

"Oh no!" she cried out. "Flint, I need flint!"

Sora and Kai turned to notice Ping just behind them, immediately catching onto her plan and diving to the side out of the cannon's path.

"Wak! Shan-Yu!" Donald pointed back up the summit. The two teens turned right around to see Shan-Yu before them, raising his blade to strike them.
Ping grabbed Mushu who was running away and used him as a lighter. He fell onto the head of the cannon just in time to be shot up into the mountain.

"You missed! How could you miss! He was 3 feet in front of you!" Mushu screamed, riding the cannon.

Boom. The snow attached to the towering mountain cracked off. Thousands of pounds like power began to roll down on top of the summit, taking the Hun army first.

Ping shoved Shang away from the swarm of heartless darting at him, taking full force of the attack instead.

"Ping!" Sora cried out, seeing the heartless brutally attack her. Shan-Yu fled in panic of the avalanche. Sora dispatched the heartless with one swipe.

Ping groaned in pain. Her side was injured. Sora and Shang lifted her up by she shoulders. Kai followed behind, keyblade in hand.

"We have to get out of here..." Ping said, pointing to the incoming avalanche.

"Waaah!" Goofy and Donald exclaimed. "Avalanche!"

The heartless noticed the snow barreling down towards them.

The five of them began to retreat back to the rocks for shelter.

The trio of men as they charged in immediately noticed the white death approaching at an alarming rate. They immediately turned around, screaming their way back to the base of rocks.

Shan-Yu was consumed by the white death.

Sora, Shang and Ping struggled to run away from the snow. Kai felt she had to think of something, they would surely be consumed by the snow, even if the rocks had some leverage.

The spell Donald performed to reflect the barrage of arrows; it could possibly work against snow, right?

Reaching the rocks, Kai summoned her keyblade before them.

"Kai wait!" Sora warned; the keyblade almost a dead giveaway for who she truly was.

"Reflect!" she shouted to the sky. A giant dome formed around the entire army. The impact of the snow slammed into the barrier with the force of a thousand tons. Kai held her ground, pushing her physical limits as she struggled to keep her keyblade up in front of her, the barrier pulsing as it cracked under the weight of the snow.

Sora put Ping down beside Shang and summoned his own keyblade to aid in protecting them. The beams of light kept the barrier up, but it exhausted both Keybladers greatly.

When the avalanche ended, the snow stopped moving and formed a dome over the army.

Kai was too weak to keep the barrier up anymore. "Watch out!" she told them. Releasing the spell, snow concaved in on them, with less intense force.

Climbing out, Sora and Kai pulled Ping out from the snow. "Everyone okay?" Sora asked.
A weary Donald and Goofy popped out of the snow. Shang, Yao, Ling, Chien-Po, and the rest of the army dug themselves out.

"We're okay…" Ling said with a groan. Shang took note of the scene before them. The entire enemy army was gone.

Shang struggled to move through the snow to check on Ping. "You alright?"

Ping nodded.

"You're the craziest man I've ever met. And now I'm in your debt. From now on, you have my trust," he placed a hand on Ping's shoulder.

"Let's hear it for Ping! The bravest of us all!" Ling cheered. The army of men crowded around the soldier. A smile graced Sora and Kai's lips. Ping had definitely proven her worth, even to the Captain.

"You're king of the mountain"

Ping groaned in pain. The adrenaline had worn off.

"He's wounded!" Shang said, pulling away the straps of the torso armor to look at the wound.

"Oh no," Kai whispered. Sora, Donald, and Goofy reached out to stop the captain but it was too late.

"No!" Ping cried out. "I'm fine! Really!"

The men stood there, gaping at what they saw.

Mushu popped out of the snow, Crikee in his hand. "First she uses me as a lighter, and then drops an entire mountain on me! At least the entire army is gone!"

"Treason!" Chi Fu declared to the unmasked woman, who laid upon the snow in bandages. Mushu gaped in fear. Oh no. "A woman in the army, treacherous snake! She deserves death!"

"Hey hold it!" Sora yelled.

Kai tightened her fist. "We'd all be toast if it weren't for Mulan! Why does it matter if she's a woman?!" Her teeth clenched. "She did it to save her father! She is the bravest soldier I've ever met!"

"Mulan…?" Shang said, testing the true name of the woman lying in the snow on his tongue.

"You knew?! You were in on this charade?" Chi Fu said, grabbing Mulan's sword from its sheath on Khan. "Unforgivable. Your verdict, Captain." He handed Shang the sword.

Kai felt her blood boil at Chi Fu being unreasonable. "No way you're gonna just execute her!" she screamed at him. Sora had never seen Kairi be so angry before. Tears brimmed her eyes. She was almost ready to jump in front of the blade to save Mulan.

Yao, Ling and Chien-Po almost ran over to help Mulan, but Chi Fu stopped them. "You know the law."

Shang looked to the woman. This woman, Fa Mulan, saved his life, saved all their lives. He knew the law. No women allowed in the army or it was death. But he was an honorable man, and he
honored his debts. He didn't want to kill her either, that was just cruel. His father perished in this war; he would have done the same as she did. He tossed the sword down to the ground in front of her.

"A life for a life. My debt is repaid. Get out of my sight, now, you're all dismissed," he declared.

"But you can't just…" Chi Fu protested. Shang grabbed him by the robe.

"I said, move out," he said, with a final tone.

The army moved out down the summit toward the Imperial City.

Khan pulled a blanket off his back and wrapped it around the depressed Mulan sitting in the snow to keep her warm.

Sora, Kairi, Donald and Goofy all sat down next to her.

"I've brought dishonor upon my family…How will I ever face my father now?" Mulan said, pulling the blanket tighter around her.

"It's not fair that just because you're a girl, doesn't mean you can't fight or take your father's place," Sora said.

Kairi agreed. "I would have done the same in the heartbeat, Mulan." She got up and went behind a rock with her regular clothes in hand to change.

"Those are the rules in this world, nothing we do about it," Donald said, nonchalant about it.

Sora deadpanned at the duck. "You know, if you'd just cast cure, no one would have found out."

Donald's eye twitched. "Wak! Well you could have used a potion too, Sora!"

"Hey hold on!" Sora argued back.

Mulan, Mushu stared at the bickering friends. Khan rolled his eyes at the antics.

Kairi came back, dressed in her normal pink gear again. She let down her red hair, feeling relief at being herself again. She hoped that Mulan could find confidence in herself, now that she no longer had to hide.

"The Captain got her out of her clothes so fast there wasn't any time for either," Goofy noted.

Donald sighed. "That Captain Li is quick…"

Mulan giggled. "I bet there would never be a pull moment travelling with all of you."

"Don't even think about it! Every moment is chaos," Donald grumbled.

"But it's the havin' fun part that's the best part, right?" Goofy asked.

Kairi took a seat next to Sora. "I'm having fun so far."

Sora smiled. "Great to see ya back to yourself Kairi."

"It feels…great. Hiding yourself limits your true potential."

Mulan sighed. The girl had a point. She stood up, putting the blanket on Khan. "Thank you
everyone," she said with a smile. "Sorry I got you in trouble."

Sora stood up. "It's no big deal," he shrugged. A grin grew on his face. "So Ping, uh I mean, Mulan, what are you going to do?"

"Go back home. I have to face my father sooner or later," she replied, grabbing Khan's reins and began the trek down the mountain.

"Your daddy's gonna be steamed as a chicken dumpling," Mushu commented, hitching a ride on Khan, to the horse's disgruntlement.

"To be fair Mulan, it is kinda our fault too," Kairi said.

Sora nodded. "Relax then. We'll take our share of the blame."

"Thanks," Mulan said. "You're all wonderful friends."

Travelling down the mountain, an echo of a screech rang in their ears, halting the group in their tracks.

That screech was scarily familiar.

From the snow that was sent down the mountain, popped out a hand, followed by the rest of the man attached. Shan-Yu was alive. Heartless returned behind him. His men were gone, but the heartless remained.

Mulan, Sora, and Kairi stared in horror over the cliff as they saw the darkness imbued man start his quick descent towards the Imperial City.

"Did you see that?" Mushu asked. "He popped out of the snow. Like daisies!"

"We've got to warn Shang!" Mulan declared, hopping onto Khan. "However Khan can't carry all of us.

Sora looked to Kairi, eyeing her outfit. "Stronger…and faster as one," he muttered under his breath.

Kairi looked at the teen, curious as to what he was onto. "Sora?"

Sora grabbed her hand and held out a yellow orb he had on hand. "Give us strength!"

With a powerful shockwave, their clothes shimmered and turned red. The two keyblades appeared in Sora's grasps. Red electric energy flickered around the two. Speed was imbued into the two teenagers' shoes. Kairi felt she could outrun a horse.

Donald and Goofy got onto Khan with Mulan. Sora pointed Star Seeker in the direction of the city. "Ready!"

Mushu hopped onto Mulan's shoulder with Crikee. "Let's go kick some hunny buns!"

The gang took off. Sora and Kairi with enhanced speed were able to keep up with Khan. "Race you there Kairi!" Sora teased.

"Oh really? Wait till I tell Riku that I kicked your lazy bum in a race!" Kairi declared, running way ahead of Sora.
The gates to the Imperial City were open before them. It was a race against time. Shan-Yu had the powers of darkness on his side.

Arriving in the massive open courtyard of the palace, Shang and the army marched up the stairs.

Mulan pulled Khan in front of Shang. "Shang! Shan-Yu is alive, he's headed this way."

He crossed his arms. "Why should I believe you?"

Sora furrowed his eyebrows. "But she's telling you the truth."

Kairi nodded. "We saw him in the mountains."

"Another liar!" Chi Fu pointed to Kairi. "A woman in the imperial army!"

"Your point?" the red head glared at the pointed man. "I am here to help."

Donald pointed to the sky. "Look!"

The falcon that followed Shan-Yu flew overhead and landed on the shoulder of a gargoyle on the roof of the palace. Only the gargoyle was a man made of flesh and bone. Shan-Yu himself.

A swarm of heartless appeared in the courtyard, surrounding the army.

The gang summoned their weapons. "Captain, you save the Emperor and we secure the courtyard!" Sora ordered.

"We got your back here. Go now!" Kairi said.

Shang had to blink twice. Kai was also a woman. It made sense now, but he had no time to dwell on it. "Guard the palace! Do not let the enemy get near the Emperor! That's an order!" Shang said to the soldiers. Yao, Ling, and Chien-Po raised their swords, charging up the stairs to the front doors.

The gang dispatched the heartless with ease. Mulan looked to Shang and the others heading towards Shan-Yu.

"Let's go! The Emperor is in danger!" she said.

When they reached the doors, Shan-Yu had his jagged sword pointed to the Emperor's throat.

"Now you'll bow to me," he sneered at the old man, who remained stoic.

"No matter how the wind howls, the mountain cannot bow to it," the Emperor said.

Shan-Yu turned his head at the footsteps of Mulan. His eyes widened as he recognized the face of the soldier from the mountains who eliminated his men in one fell swoop. "The soldier from the mountains..."

Shang leaped down from the roof support and knocked Shan-Yu down. Chien-Po grabbed the Emperor and rushed him inside of the main hall. Yao and Ling pulled the large doors closed. Shang, behind the gates, gave a look of approval to the gang. He would defend on the inside, and Shan-Yu would be stopped by them.

The Hun ran to the gates, but Sora and Kairi with their speed beat him to it. Shan-Yu laughed at them as he summoned heartless by the tons to siege the gates.
Mulan drew her sword. "It ends now!" she declared. Shan-Yu, hungering for bloodlust, went after Mulan immediately.

"Right now!" Sora added. "Ready Kairi?"

She nodded keyblade out. "Yes! Let's go!"

Strength surging through their clothes, Sora placed his hands open for Kairi low to the ground. She stepped forward, Sora giving her a lift up into the air. She flipped backwards and slammed down to the ground with her keyblade, sending heartless flying into Donald and Goofy. Goofy bashed them in and Donald zapped them into non-existence.

Mulan dodged a swipe of Shan-Yu's blade, him pursuing his prey with maddening bloodlust. A dark aura grew on him. But Mulan could take him. She however would need Sora and Kairi to finish the job. "Mushu!" she called, sliding out of the way of Shan-Yu's slam of darkness.

"I'll handle this!" the dragon said as he sent balls of flame shooting at Shan-Yu from above. The man grunted as he was pelted with the flames, but he shook them off.

Sora unleashed a wide spread whirlwind attack, the force of the wind sending the heartless into oblivion. He backhanded a walker heartless behind him with Star Seeker. Flipping into the air he slammed down the falcon into the ground. Kairi charged up a bunch of energy into the keyblade and ran through a row of shadows, mowing them down. She lifted Donald up onto her shoulders. The mage with a battle cry created swirling flames around Kairi as she tore through soldier after soldier heartless.

About five assault raiders appeared before them, their spears poised to stab at the two.

"Sora!" Kairi called to attention, running to his side. Linking arms with their backs together, the two spun like a whirlwind towards the assault raiders. Their keyblades blocked the spears and knocked the raiders down. Jumping high into the air, the two dive bombed down and eliminated them.

Mulan got pushed back into the wall, her sword kicked away. She pulled out her fan that she carried on her person, as a reminder of the life she left behind as a perfect bride.

"Looks like you're out of ideas," Shan-Yu mocked, stabbing his sword into the fan. Mulan closed the fan on his sword and kicked it out of his grip, now handling the sword herself.

"Not quite," she said in response. "Sora! Kairi!"

Shan-Yu looked behind him. The two teens had wiped out his army of heartless. Mulan stabbed the blade into his coat into the ground, trapping him in place. "Only darkness remains!" She ducked to the ground, shielding herself from the incoming impact about to be dealt to the hun.

Sora and Kairi, with their keyblades together, leapt up into the air and sliced down Shan-Yu, destroying him within seconds.

Mushu ducked out of Mulan's sleeve, dancing around in circles. "Aww yeah! That's what I call burning some hunny bun! Mulan's the best! Mulan's the best!"

The army and the people of the city gathered in the courtyard when they heard the rumors of a woman defeating the leader of the Hun army. Shang and the trio opened up the gates when they got the all clear.
The Emperor, followed by Chi Fu, exited from the inside of the palace.

Mulan stepped forward, bowing to the Emperor in shame for her crimes.

"I've heard a great deal about you, Fa Mulan. You stole your father's armor, ran away from home, impersonated a soldier, deceived your commanding officer, dishonored the Chinese army," the Emperor listed off.

Sora sighed. "We get the picture."

"Involved people in your ruse, and…"

Donald sighed.

"You have saved us all," he said with great reverence. He bowed. It wasn't a deep bow, but it was enough.

Chi Fu looked at His Excellency in shock and collapsed to the ground, dropping his clipboard.

Shang, Yao, Ling, and Chien-Po all bowed. Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy also bowed to the brave woman.

Mulan looked behind her. The entire Chinese army had bowed to her. She was surprised to say the least.

Mushu sniffled, a tear in his eye. "My baby all grown up, saving China."

The Emperor straightened up. "I would like to thank your friends here for aiding you in your bravery. I imagine you would not have had the strength to endure all you had alone, Fa Mulan."

"It's no problem," Sora said.

Kairi elbowed him in the ribs. "Sora, he's the Emperor."

"Captain Li." The Emperor gestured to Shan-Yu's sword in Shang's hands. The captain presented it to Mulan. "Take this, so the world will know what you have done for China."

"Thank you," she said, bowing to the Emperor.

"Mulan, Sora, Kairi, Donald, Goofy," Shang said. He bowed to them. "Thank you."

"Thank you? Is that all there is to say, Captain?" the Emperor asked. "If you wish to win the heart of Fa Mulan, China's bravest woman, you'll have to be a bit more eloquent than that." He chuckled.

Mulan agreed with a smile sent in Shang's direction. Kairi could tell that Shang looked at Mulan with greater reverence than the others. The captain's cheeks blushed at the Emperor's words. Kairi sighed. Ah young love.

"Can I get an autograph?" Sora joked to Mulan.

"Thanks for everything Sora," Mulan said. She turned to Kairi. "And thank you especially, Kairi."

"Oh? What for?" Kairi asked.

"For being an inspiration to me."
Kairi placed her hand on her heart. "Me?"

"Yeah. Turns out, the strength of the heart comes from being yourself. I won't forget that."

Kairi smiled so bright it made Sora's heart jump. "Of course! We gotta stick together and help each other, always."

Shang noticed Sora's gaze directed at Kairi. It seemed Shang wasn't the only one who held great reverence for brave women. He did admit the two made a great team.

Mushu walked around, not a care in the world. "Now they gotta let me go back to being a guardian, they just gotta!"

Goofy scratched his head. "But Mushu, I thought you already were a family guardian."

Sora was snapped out of his gaze at Kairi to catch that important detail. "What?" he turned to Mushu.

"Oh no, no, don't even worry about that, that's just technical. Just for us guardians," the dragon fumbled over his words.

"You tricked us!" Sora said, eye twitching. He started chasing after the fleeing dragon. Kairi sighed, her hand on her face, shaking her head.

High up above, the same figure who struck a deal with Shan-Yu smirked underneath his cloak. "That girl's pure heart could definitely be used to our advantage." With that, No. II stepped into the corridor of darkness, his job done for now.

Shan-Yu's sword in Mulan's grasp sparkled in that moment, giving Sora pause in his angry pursuit of the dragon. Lifting his keyblade, the Kingdom Key, he unlocked the new road way opened by the sword.

"Okay!" Donald said, rearing to go.

"Guess it's about time to be movin' on," Goofy said.

"You shall be missed," the Emperor said.

Sora grinned. "Is it okay if we come back to visit?" He would miss the friends they made here, but he knew he would see them again.

"Of course!" Mulan answered.

"We will look forward to your return," Shang added.

"That's a promise," said Kairi, staring at the nice coin in her hand.

"You two play nice!" Sora said to Mulan and Shang.

Shang smirked. "Easy there soldier, I should say the same for you and Kairi here."

Sora's face turned at least ten different shades of red. Kairi looked away, trying to hide her blush from Sora. "I uh what do you mean uhh…" Sora jabbered, not sure how to respond.

Donald and Goofy pulled at his sleeves. "We best be going now. Goodbye!" Donald said, trying to shuffle the two bright red teens away.
Mulan chuckled. "Goodbye Sora, Kairi, Donald, Goofy!"

Missing Journal Entry 20

No. VII was onto me. My goals might be compromised at this point. My carelessness is getting me into hot water with our leader and VII. He keeps questioning me more now, every mission report I turn in, the interrogations get longer and longer. I might have to cut my trips to the mansion short for a while to lead him off my trail. I may have to skip altogether.

VII was even adding more to my missions. More hearts. Slay more heartless. Hearts, Heartless. More, more, more. He looks to the heart-shaped like it was all he wanted, he and No. I. Their desperation grows. They want me to finish the job sooner rather than later.

Time will soon run out. Something was not sitting right about all this. Something in my gut told me something was very wrong.

My instincts point to Castle Oblivion.

Chapter End Notes

So sorry this was late! School decided to take over. And I got carried way with this chapter because Mulan is my favorite Disney movie and it was a shame there was no training montage in the game.
Chapter IV: Be Our Guest

No. III of Organization XIII exited a corridor of Darkness into the west wing of the castle. He walked over to the doors of the main chambers and opened the doors.

The beast within sat upon his bed, staring at his claws.

"Where is your rose?" No. III asked, knowing exactly where it was. "Some Heartless might be going after it."

The beast, in fear, ran out of his room to get his rose.

"This castle is cold," Kairi shivered. Night was a constant in this place. Fearsome gargoyles sat on the buttresses and the chandeliers. Darkness seemed to be lurking around the corner.

"Who do you think lives here?" Sora questioned, waving a hand in front of a gargoyle statue.

A loud roar shook the floor.

"Whoah!" Goofy almost lost his balance.

Another loud roar. "Wak!" Donald ran to hide behind Goofy.

"What is that?" Kairi asked, moving closer to Sora out of fear.

"Hey wait a minute, that's the Beast!" Sora exclaimed in joy.

"Maybe we should check up on him," Goofy said.

Kairi felt the Darkness grow closer. Out of the corner of her eye she spotted a shadow crawling under the ground, heading past a door slightly ajar. A glow of a light emitted through the dreary main hall. "Look! A Heartless," she pointed.

"Come on!" Donald glared at the shadow.

"After it!" Sora said, running off immediately after it. Kairi paused, feeling a strong Light approaching. Shaking it off, she ran after the boys.

She entered the room, a small parlor with a warm flame illuminating the room. Sitting on a table was a mysterious rose that glowed pink. Donald looked around in search of the enemy. "Where did it go?" he asked.

Kairi's eye immediately caught sight of the rose in the corner. She walked over to it. Some sort of magic was emitting with the glow. Donald too, was captivated by the rose and walked over to it. Before he could reach out to touch it, the shadow appeared at his feet. "Wak! Found it."

Sora spotted more Heartless appearing around them. The keyblade on instinct came to his hand. An
entire swarm of shadows had gathered, encircling the gang.

Two swipes of the keyblade, various thunder spells, and a shield bash later, and suddenly five more Heartless showed up to take one's place. The gang was backed into the corner by the rose.

"There's too many," Kairi said, getting annoyed with how they were swarming the small room.

"Enough already," Sora said to the Heartless, as if it would make them stop coming.

"Somebody help us!" Donald yelled.

The parlor doors slammed open. In came the Beast. The Heartless leapt at him, but he fought them off with a roar and his claws. Kairi felt his Heart of Light being shrouded by powerful Darkness feeding off negative energy.

"Just in time!" Sora waved to him. The Beast didn't acknowledge him or Kairi, but just shoved the two teenagers to the side, knocking them on the floor.

Donald and Goofy in fear stared as they too were knocked back to the floor.

Beast went straight for the rose on the table, picking it up and cradling it like it was his own child. He walked out of the parlor promptly, not noticing or caring for the four friends.

They got up and stared at the Beast's backside and up the stairs.

"Gee, do ya think he maybe forgot who we are?" Goofy asked.

"With this many Heartless around, something must be up," Sora said, curious as to why the Beast didn't recognize them.

Donald rubbed his cheek where the Beast's claw made contact. "Why'd he have to do that?"

Kairi felt the Light within the Beast's Heart still strong. "Maybe we should go talk to him."

"Huh?" Goofy asked, confused.

"His heart is clouded by something. Maybe if we talked him if he was a little bit calmer. Now that he has that rose with him, we can get through to him. We are his friends after all," Kairi said. "He's not lost to us."

"You're right Kairi, we should go talk to him," Sora said, peeking out of the parlor to see where the Beast was going. He went up the left staircase.

"Are you sure that will work?" Goofy questioned. "He didn't seem open for talkin'."

Kairi nodded. "I'm sure of it. We can find the source of all these Heartless and put a stop to it."

"Let's go then," Sora said, agreeing with Kairi's plan.

The four ascended up the stairs to the West Hall. Heartless appeared along the way. The hall was lined with red carpet, statues of all types stood at attention, same as the main hall.

Kairi felt an extremely familiar Light approach behind her as they walked down the vast hall. She abruptly turned around to see what the light was coming from, but saw nothing.

"Something wrong Kairi?" Sora asked.
She shook her head. "Nothing. I think there's a cold draft or something bothering me."

Goofy shivered. "This place is swarming with Heartless."

Sora nodded as he dispatched a shadow with one half-hearted slam of his keyblade. "You're telling me." More statues appeared along with flying bats with hooks for tails. "Watch out!" Sora exclaimed. "Kairi?"

"I got your back Sora!" Kairi said, leaping forward and slamming all of her body weight into the gargoyle statue. "I don't fear the Darkness!" She jammed her keyblade into the main portion of the statue and dispatched it, freeing its possessed Heartless from the statue. Raising her keyblade, she blasted out large crystals of ice, shooting at the bats. The bats scrambled, but the crystals made their target. She struck a pose. "And neither should anyone else be. Light will prevail."

Sora nearly dropped his keyblade in awe at Kairi's abrasiveness in battle. He sometimes forgot that Kairi was a daredevil, capable on her own now. She knew he had to be reminded of that fact.

They came upon stairs that must've led to the Beast's chambers, but were blocked by two tall statues comprised of armor. Sora waved his hand in front of the statues, but they only shifted, absolutely resolute in their stances. "Welp, guess we're not getting past these guys."

Kairi shook her head at him. "You lazy bum, use your spikey head. We have magical clothes, remember?"

Sora grinned sheepishly. "Oh yeah." He grabbed her hand. "Give me strength!"

The two's clothes went back to red. Raw power and agility was surging through their garments. Sora jumped up to test the leaps and bounds of his newly granted abilities, and went at least two stories high into the air. "Whoa!" Sora exclaimed.

Kairi jumped up as well. "Wow! This is amazing." She landed on the ground, stumbling forward. "That was a rush. Now to clear those statues."

"What should we do, since we can't get past the statues?" Goofy said. Donald noticed across the way a wardrobe…sleeping?

Donald waved a hand in front of the snoozing wardrobe. "Ehrm, hello?" He looked behind her and saw a door. He pushed the wardrobe over to see if he could get into the door.

The wardrobe opened her eyes, angry at being awoken. "Do you mind!?" she said, annoyed. She scooted over and went back to sleep.

"That's…the oddest thing I've seen all day," Kairi said, unsure of what to do with a talking wardrobe. She turned her attention to the suits of armor. "But we gotta get to the Beast before the Darkness clouding his heart gets to him."

Sora looked at Kairi. For some strange reason, he had an overpowering urge to do something possibly stupid at the cost of his legs, but it would probably be worth it. "Hey Kairi?"

"Hmmm?" she looked to her best friend who had an evil grin on his face. He walked over to her and, without another word, picked her up in his arms. "Sora!" she laughed, holding onto him. He leapt up in the air, fueled by the power of their clothes, and cleared the armored knights.

She looked at him. There was something strange about Sora. She was almost looking at someone else, with blonde hair…
Sora set her down. She slugged him as he gave her a cheeky grin. "You my dashing knight, Sora?" she asked, in a teasing tone.

"Doth thy thou lady protest my bravery?" Sora responded. Whatever Kairi was seeing a mere few seconds ago was gone. It was still just Sora.

"More like recklessness," Kairi said. "Anyways, we gotta talk to the Beast."

"Right. Together we'll talk to him and snap him out of it. Donald, Goofy, see if you can find anything else out about this place," Sora saluted to the two.

Goofy saluted in return while Donald was trying to inch the sleeping wardrobe over. "You got it!"

Belle felt the presence of a familiar Light come into the castle. Unlike the Beast's own Light, which was clouded by Darkness currently, this one was pure, very pure. No Darkness. It prompted her to set down her book and leave her room to investigate. To her surprise, she spotted what looked like Sora, Donald, and Goofy. With them was a red haired girl, the source of the light. The four disappeared into the West Hall. Belle decided to brave the castle and hopefully get the Beast to come to his senses.

She walked carefully behind them, to stay out of the way as they slayed Heartless after Heartless in their path. The red haired girl held in her grip a familiar weapon, a keyblade. She attacked the Heartless with a determination Belle had never seen. The girl, simply put, was just as brave as Sora.

She caught up to Donald and Goofy trying to get past the wardrobe. "Donald! Goofy!"

"Huh?" Donald stopped trying to push the wardrobe to the side and fell flat on his face.

"Heya Belle," Goofy waved.

"I'm so glad to see you two. Where is Sora?"

"He and Kairi were able to go on ahead to see if they could get the Beast to come to his senses."

"I want to help them as well, but the statues became hostile ever since more Heartless arrived and the Beast started acting odd," Belle explained. "He won't even speak to me at all now…" She pointed to where the wardrobe was sleeping. "Down there is where the dungeons are. The Beast locked his servants up."

"Then we should go rescue them then," Goofy said. Donald propped himself back up from his face plant.

Belle walked over to the wardrobe. "Wardrobe? Can you wake up?" She waved her hand in front of the face of the wardrobe. "It's me, Belle."

The Wardrobe snapped awake. "Huh, what? Oh. Hello Belle! Sorry about that. What may I do for you?"

Belle smiled at the familiar friend. "We need to get into the dungeons."

"Oh?" Wardrobe looked at Donald and Goofy. "Oh! You want to help rescue my friends. Well pardon me." She moved away from the door.

"Thank you," Belle said.
"You're quite welcome dears."

The three entered the undercroft. Various broken and ruined pieces of furniture stacked up against the walls. A door with a statue blocking the way led to where the servants were being held captive. Donald and Goofy raised their weapons as the statue came to life before their eyes. A twin Heartless grasped its claws on the locked door handles.

"uh oh, how will we even open without Sora?" Goofy noted.

"I knew we shouldn't have let the love bird go alone with Kairi…" Donald grumbled.

Belle stood in the back of the room, wincing as the duck and dog yelped as they were smacked around by the gigantic hands of the twin Heartless.

The Beast stared at his rose in his chambers. The walls had cobwebs hanging off of them, the curtains were torn, the furniture was trashed and broken into pieces. The glow gave him some comfort. He clung to it for so long, it being his only hope. He barely remembered what it was like before Belle came into his life. The rose was wilting. She would never love him.

"It won't be long until the petals have all fallen," said No. III of Organization XIII, who walked around the room behind the Beast. "You have only one path available to you now. That of a monster…" He had been witness to the Beast locking his own servants down in the dungeons. "You seem to bear a burden of heavy regret regarding the denizens of your castle."

"Of course I do," the Beast growled. "They bear this curse because of me, after all. What did you expect?"

"They suffer from this curse because of you. Let your rage linger on. They will never be free of it, because of you. They're conniving fiends, just waiting for fate to run its course. They would have you shoulder the blame for this tragedy alone," No. III urged him on. The guilt clouded the Beast's heart once more. A little bit more. "It's time you dealt with Belle. She's scheming to take everything you have." He gestured to the room. "This castle, your precious rose. And then, your life. Trust no one. Feed your anger! Only anger will keep you strong."

"I've had enough of strength." The Beast's Heart fought against the Darkness, and was losing. "There's only one thing I want…"

"What? To love and be loved in return? Who could ever love a beast?" No. III mocked.

The Beast roared, his anger taking over, overwhelming what was left of reason and logic, and Light.

Sora and Kairi pushed open the doors together, immediately spotting the man in the black coat.

"Organization XIII!" the two exclaimed. Their outfits were still red, flowing with the power of sheer unified strength.

Kairi summoned her keyblade, glaring at the man. "Leave the Beast alone!"

Sora's dual keyblades appeared in his hands. His blood raced at the sight of No. III. "You…You're behind this!" he shouted. His knuckles turned white. The anger radiating from Sora feed directly into the Beast's own Darkness-fueled rage. "Don't listen to this guy, Beast!

No. III put his hands behind his back. "Ah, the two love-birds are her accomplices."
He disappeared in a Dark corridor.

The anger within Sora faded as quickly as it came. He was dazed for a moment, not sure where the rage came from. It was just like in Hollow Bastion.

Kairi was confused. Why did that guy refer to her and Sora as love-birds? There was no proof; no way would the Organization ever think she thought of Sora that way.

The Beast's roar snapped the two teenagers out of their daze. "Beast!" Kairi pleaded. "Come to your senses, we're your friends!"

"Yeah! We fought together in Hollow Bastion, for Belle. Don't you remember? Your Heart willed it so you would find her. And you did!" Sora added.

Their attempts to calm him down were in vain. The Darkness had consumed the Beast. His blue eyes were gone, turned to white. A true monster.

The Beast roared even louder, charging straight at them.

"Uh…" Kairi said.

"…Oh," Sora finished.

"Wahaaaah!" yelped Donald as the fist from the Heartless sent him flying into Goofy. He slammed head first into his friend's shield. Goofy charged in, blocking incoming punches from the monster as Donald recovered. The duck got up, raising his staff to the air. "I'll show ya. Thunder!"

A loud shock from above stunned the Heartless. It flailed about from its place rooted inside the wall. Donald rained down more thunder spells. Goofy bashed his shield into it with a battle cry. "Yahoo!" The Heartless released its grip on the door handles.

Belle watched from the sidelines. It was working. She wondered if there was something she could do with the leftover debris of furniture.

"Without Sora…" Donald said, banging his stave on one of the heads of the Heartless as his magic recharged. "We can't get rid of this confounded Heartless!"

"Yeah, we need him!" Goofy said. "He and Kairi have the power of Light and the keyblade. I don't know where else we could get that."

The Heartless recovered from the constant stuns. It raised its giant fists and slammed them down into the ground, sending the magician and knight flying backwards into the wall by Belle. It made the poor woman jump. The Heartless glared at her, extending its arms to snatch her up. The Darkness emitting from the grip paralyzed her with fear. It was like when the castle fell into Darkness. She felt so weak, and then her Heart was trapped in a bond of Darkness, a cold eternal sleep. She pressed herself against the wall to avoid the grip. Squeezing her eyes shut, she wished for Kairi's bravery.

"I'm not afraid of the Darkness. And neither should anyone else be!"

Belle remembered the girl's words. She was right. Belle felt the ground shake beneath her feet, the fist slamming down in front of her in a desperate attempt to grab the princess. She slipped out of the tiny area near the exit of the undercroft, bolted toward the debris and picked up a piece of splintered wood. She raised it up at the Heartless made another attempt to grab her.
"I'm not afraid of the Darkness you hold!" She bashed the plank into the grip of the Heartless. It shuddered with shock, wiggling its hands away. "Now, Donald, Goofy!"

The two lazy bums got up from their places on the wall, charging in with spells and spinning shields. Belle felt strong warmth within her Heart as she approached the Heartless from behind the duck and dog. Her thoughts of the Beast and her friends in the castle made the warmth grow. Orbs of Light formed around her, shimmering so brightly it blinded the jaw dropped Donald and Goofy. Belle reached out with her hand to the stunned Heartless, the orbs of light going into it and forcing the Heartless possessing the statue to flee. The statue's stone crumbled to pieces and faded into oblivion. All the remained in their way was a regular skeleton key lock.

The Possessor Heartless disappeared in thin air, off to somewhere else.

"You did it!" Goofy exclaimed, happy for Belle.

Belle smiled. "Where are the keys?"

Donald found on the wall hanging on a hook a pair of jailer's keys. "There they are." He jumped up and grabbed the keys, handing them to Belle. She unlocked the doors and opened up to a bunch of bewildered servants.

"Hello? It's me, Belle," she said as she walked into the dungeon cell.

Donald and Goofy were surprised to find even more animated household objects. A candlestick, a clock, a teapot and teacup all crowded around Belle.

"Mademoiselle! You've come to rescue us!" said Lumiere, the candelabra.

"You're safe and sound dear," said Mrs. Potts, the teapot.

"Yes, thank you for your bravery and coming to save us," Cogsworth, the clock, bowed to her.

"Who are your friends?" said Chip, the chipped teacup.

"This is Donald and Goofy," Belle introduced the two. "They helped me rescue you."

"It's a pleasure to meet you messieurs," Lumiere said. "Thank you for coming down to rescue us."

"Yes, thank you," Cogsworth said, adjusting himself. "Ever since the master has been out of sorts, it's been rough being trapped down here in the dungeons. The Heartless are everywhere."

Lumiere sighed. "If only we were human again, then maybe we'd be able to combat the Heartless as well."

"You guys were once human?" Goofy asked.

"Yes…Ah it seems so long ago," Lumiere answered. "It's a spell cast upon the castle."

"How did that happen?" Donald asked, squinting at the animated objects.

Mrs. Potts cuddled up next to Chip. "It was a cold winter's night. An old beggar woman came to the castle and asked for shelter."

Cogsworth added more, not noticing Donald reaching a hand towards him. "But the master of this castle, that is, the prince..." Donald fiddled with Cogsworth's clock handles on his face. "Stop that!" He slapped the hand away. Clearing his throat, he continued. "The master turned her away,
all because of her, ahem, meager appearance."

"That's awful," Goofy commented.

Belle shook her head at the story.

"Oui," Lumiere agreed. "He was a spoiled prince, so selfish and how shall I say…cruel."

"Lumiere!" Cogsworth reprimanded.

Mrs. Potts continued the story. "The old woman warned our master not to be deceived by appearances. Still, he would not take her in."

Cogsworth gestured his short hands about. "Then her ugliness melted away to reveal a beautiful enchantress."

Mrs. Potts nodded. "She turned the prince into a beast, a shape she thought fitting for his cold heart."

"And to further punish him, everyone in the castle was enchanted too," Cogsworth finished.

Belle felt sad at hearing this story. Ever since she came here, she had no idea. "I'm so sorry."

"Poor Beast…" Goofy said.

Lumiere lit his candle-hands up to better illuminate the room better. "We already know what needs to be done, but…I fear he may have been turned into a Heartless of some sort."

Belle froze in fear. "Oh no…"

"A Heartless?!" Donald and Goofy exclaimed.

"Yes. It's almost as if he forgot how to trust others," Mrs. Potts said, crestfallen.

"Sora and Kairi went to go talk to the Beast!" Goofy exclaimed. "If he's a Heartless…"

"They'll refuse to attack him!" Donald finished.

Cogsworth's eyes widened. "Wait, you mean your friends are trying to snap him out of his mood?"

Belle nodded, fear growing for both the Beast and the two teenagers. "We have to save them!" she declared.

Cogsworth began hobbling out of the dungeon. "We must hurry then!"

Sora and Kairi dodged away from the Beast's charge. The two were on opposite sides of the room.

"Beast, please!" Kairi yelled in vain. "Remember the Light in your Heart is stronger than any Darkness!"

The rage was blinding to him, all consuming him and his heart. He turned to the redhead, swiping his claws at her. She raised her keyblade to block the swipes, deflecting to push him back away from her. He snarled in pain, his white eyes glaring at her. He raised his claw as he stalked over to her. The razor sharpness was accentuated by the wisps of Darkness swirling around the claws.

Sora saw the fear on Kairi's face. He had never seen his best friend so terrified before in his life.
Not when Destiny Islands fell, not when Riku was possessed by Ansem, Seeker of Darkness. The Beast, consumed by Darkness, terrified her more than anything. She raised her keyblade to defend herself, squeezing her eyes shut.

Sora did what he had to do. He threw his Star Seeker keyblade at the Beast. "Hey Beast! Listen to me!" It didn't hurt the Beast in the slightest, but it did grab his attention away from Kairi.

Kairi opened her eyes to see the Beast turn away and charge at Sora. She relaxed against the wall, her Heart pumping from all the adrenaline rushing to her. She felt light headed, but she knew Sora needed her.

Sora lifted his two keyblades to parry the Beast's swipes one after another. The Beast kept pushing him back, not wanting to harm his friend. "Wake up!" Sora shouted. Still his attempts fell on deaf ears. Whatever that Organization XIII guy did, it was very powerful. "Don't let the Darkness win, Beast!" He was backed into the door leading to the balcony. The Kingdom Key in one hand, he blocked an incoming fist while his freed hand fumbled with the handles on the doors. Kairi rushed to Sora's side and kicked the doors open, giving them leeway to move.

The Beast's foot clipped the table the rose was sitting upon, causing it to fall over. The Beast, in all his rage saw the falling rose and pushed Sora roughly out the door without a second thought.

"Whoah!" Sora yelled, flying over the balcony.

"Sora!" Kairi cried out, jumping over to him, arms stretched out to grab him. Her hands latched onto his. He hung in the air, grabbing onto Kairi's hands as well. Kairi felt her arms were on fire, her hands and wrists aching from Sora's weight. "I promise Sora, I won't let you go!" she cried out to him, her eyes looking into his.

The Beast paused in his rampage at the cries of Kairi.

"Everything will be okay Kairi," he said, trying not to look down at the long fall before him. She tried to pull him up but she didn't have much strength left in her.

"I'm…trying…" She felt her feet slip forward from the weight. If she wasn't careful she would fall with Sora as well.

"Kairi…" he pleaded her to stop trying to pull him up, fearing for her safety. He was terrified of a long fall, but he was even more terrified of taking Kairi with him.

"Sora! Kairi!" Belle cried out to them. The rest of the gang arrived. The Beast roared at the intruders, holding his rose, his only attachment left like it was his own child.

"Master please! Compose yourself!" Cogsworth pleaded, ringing his alarm clock incredibly loudly. Donald raised his staff. "Come and get us! We'll free you from the Darkness!"

Beast set down his rose and ran straight to Donald and Cogsworth. Goofy and Belle ran over to Kairi, who was trying not to let Sora's hands go. The two latched onto Sora and pulled him up onto the balcony. Once he felt his feet touch the ground, he hugged Kairi in a tight grip.

"I'm sorry Kairi, for worrying you…" he whispered. Kairi was surprised by the hug, but welcomed it nonetheless.

She hugged him back. "I'm just happy you're okay."
The Beast stopped chasing the duck and walking clock when he saw the loving hug between the two teenagers. Belle looked at him, a sad smile on her lips.

"Belle?" he said, trying to remember what was important to him.

"Beast," she said, walking up to him and hugging him. "Please calm down."

The Light and hope in his Heart was growing stronger than the Darkness overwhelming him.

Sora broke away from the embrace. He lifted his keyblade and shot out an orb of Light to cleanse what remained of the Dark aura clutching the Beast.

The Beast was freed. "Belle…" he said, embracing the woman.

Kairi smiled at the happy couple. "He's back to normal."

"What happened?" Beast asked, ending the hug between him and Belle. His head felt light, his heart running on cloud nine.

Cogsworth didn't know what to say. The Beast's own confidence was still not exactly very high even though his heart had beaten the Darkness. "Well, Master…ah, you see …that is…How should I say…ah, actually…"

"You put everyone down into the dungeon," Donald stated bluntly.

The Beast's blue eyes widened. "I did what?"

Cogsworth bit his lip. "Ah, you did."

He looked down in shame. Belle shook her head. "Beast…"

"You probably did it so you didn't want to hurt 'em, right?" Goofy asked, trying to follow the logic of why he would do that to his own servants.

"Ye…Yes," Beast said. "I'm…so sorry to all of you. I brought this upon all of you."

Cogsworth whispered to the gang. "You see, I'm afraid he still judges himself far too harshly."

"It's okay, Beast," Kairi assured him. "You put everyone into that dungeon to protect them. We know you have a good heart."

Everyone nodded. "She's right Master, we've all seen how kind you can be," Cogsworth added.

"Who was that guy you were talking to? The one in black?" Sora asked.

The Beast remembered the name clear as day. "Xaldin," he growled. "That's his name. He came from the Darkness…He used my anger to control me. He took all my sorrow, my sadness, my pain, and turned it all into rage. There was…Nothing I could do…I could no longer see the truth."

"This is my fault…" Sora mumbled, guilt written on his face.

"What?" Kairi asked, hearing his words.

"Oh, I didn't say anything," Sora answered, snapping out of his daze.

Belle placed a hand on the Beast's paw. "But now you see the truth again. You had me worried for
you."

He smiled at the woman. "Belle I…"

The castle shook beneath their feet. Something was wrong.

"What was that?" The Beast said.

"Umm, say, what happened to that Heartless down in the dungeon if the keyblade didn't free it?" Goofy pondered.

Sora and Kairi looked at each other with wide eyes.

"We gotta find that Heartless!" Sora said, summoning his two keyblades and running off down the hallway.

Kairi felt her clothes draining. "Uh, Sora," she said.

Their clothes reverted back to normal, Sora back to just his only keyblade. "Oh boy," he said, stopping in his tracks. "Guess I'm walking normally."

Kairi shook her head at Sora's silliness. "Let's go find that Heartless."

Cogsworth and Belle stayed behind in the Beast's chambers, as per the Master's orders. Belle crossed her arms, pouting. "I wish he would start trusting me more."

Cogsworth was taken aback. Her spirit was as fierce and strong as ever. "Ehm well, he does trust you. He cares about you a lot; he doesn't want you to get hurt."

She sighed. He was right. The Beast cared, deeply.

The gang searched the castle high and low for the Heartless. "Where is it?" Donald stomped his foot. "There were tons of Heartless in this place and now they're all gone."

"Guess we got rid of them all," Sora said, leaning back on his hands.

The ground shook again, startling everyone. The Darkness was very close, Kairi could tell. She pointed to the ballroom. "There! It has to be in there!"

Busting down the doors to the ballroom, the Beast and the gang entered to find Xaldin standing in the center of the wide golden room.

He raised his hand and snapped his fingers silently, summoning forth the Heartless from the depths. It burst from a dark portal in the floor, turning the entire ballroom into a twisted dark prison. The Possessor Heartless had grown exponentially into a Shadow Stalker, chains hanging off of its limbs.

Xaldin fled, leaving the gang to deal with the Heartless.

Sora, Kairi, Donald, Goofy, and Beast stood at the ready, weapons out.

"Let's go!" Sora declared as they rushed to the Shadow Stalker.

The Heartless vanished into the walls, sending out rows of rushing purple flames. Donald and Goofy got their tails hit, and Sora, Kairi, and the Beast flew to the sides barely scathed. Kairi
leaned against a pillar to catch her breath, until she felt a wiggle behind her. "Huh?" she leaped back to find pillars had turned into spikes of doom. "Reflect!" she shouted, a dome appearing around her and forcing the pillar to wiggle back into place.

Sora scanned the room for where the Heartless could be. "Sora!" Beast pointed to the pillar where the Shadow Stalker possessed the objects en masse. Sora leaped onto the Beast's back and pointed his keyblade at the Stalker. Turning his blade, the Heartless was released back into the air.

Beast grabbed onto one of its chains and pulled it back down to their reach, slamming the creature into the ground. Kairi and Sora jumped onto it, slashing at it. It twitched and twitched until it shot up into the air and into the chandelier high above. The once elegant décor was now a death trap with spikes all over it.

Kairi ran over to Donald and Goofy and healed them with potions. She raised her keyblade as she saw the chandelier come crashing down, but she was a second late. The shockwave hit their feet and sent the three to the ground.

Sora and the Beast charged in and, with a roar fueled by the power of Light, blasted the deadly chandelier back. Sora freed it with another twist of his keyblade. Kairi, Donald, and Goofy rejoined them to wail on the Heartless.

The Heartless twitched as it got weaker and weaker still. It floated up into the air and released a shockwave roar, blasting the gang back. Darkness exploded from its mouth and enveloped its entire being.

"I don't think it's done with us yet," commented Kairi.

From the Darkness came a newer version of the Heartless. It had giant red claws and a long mane that flopped around. It roared so loudly the entire ballroom shook from the intensity. It went invisible, the only indicators of its location being the heavy steps the monster took.

"How do we fight something we can't see?" Donald asked, trying to throw blizzard spells at it but missing every time.

Sora looked up. The chandelier was on a chain that easily could be used to lower it still. "I got it! Beast!"

Beast nodded and boosted Sora up, launching him into the air with his own bare claws. Sora landed on the top of the chandelier and sent it flying down. His friends dodged behind the pillars as Sora spun the chandelier around and caught the Dark Thorn Heartless, forcing it out of invisibility. Kairi whirled around from behind the pillar and shot out a beam of Light at the Heartless, stunning it.

Sora jumped off the chandelier, sending it back up to the ceiling. Beast began clawing viciously at the Heartless, not giving it a chance to react as Donald rained down ice crystals and Goofy bashed his shield into its head.

Beast held it against the wall, waiting for Sora to finish the job from afar. "Sora!" he shouted.

"Kairi!" Sora called for the red head. She looked to him, and he gestured to follow his lead, hanging off a pillar. She nodded. He had a plan.

"Right!" She ran over to him.

He grabbed her hand into his grasp and spun around the pillar, gaining speed. Kairi was flung
toward the Dark Thorn, keyblade in front of her. The teeth of the keyblade collided with the Heartless' chest, where its heart resided. Turning it, she freed its Heart and got off the monster. It roared in pain as its body disappeared, its Heart floating up into the air, returning to where it came from.

The ballroom returned to normal. The castle was safe, for the time being.

"We did it!" Sora pumped his fist in the air in victory. Kairi had to admit, it was an exhilarating battle.

"So you think," Xaldin said by the door. The gang turned, Sora nearly flaring up in anger.

"Xaldin!" Beast growled.

"Farewell," the Nobody disappeared in his corridor of Darkness.

The Beast glared at where the evil being once stood. "What does he want here?"

"He's with Organization XIII," Kairi informed him.

"Ever heard of the Nobodies?" Sora asked. "When a person turns into a Heartless, a Nobody gets created too. See, the Organization they've got control of all the Nobodies."

Goofy nodded. "That's right. And they were gonna make you into a Heartless. That way they could get that Nobody of yours and have control of it." He gestured with his hands, trying to explain how serious the Organization was to be taken.

"You're alright!" Belle said as she entered the ballroom.

"Belle!" The Beast was almost irritated with how she disobeyed, but he couldn't be. She was a free spirit; it's what made her special. He mustered up a smile at her, one that wasn't super terrifying in his beastly form.

The servants followed behind her into the ballroom. Lumiere gestured to the Beast with his candle hands. "Go on!"

Beast cleared his throat. "Belle…I-I'm sorry. I wasn't myself and I put everyone into danger…I hope I didn't hurt you…Forgive me."

Her warm smile made his heart flutter. "I know you weren't yourself. You don't have to apologize. But I had hoped," she raised her finger, her eyebrows furrowing. "You might have changed a little bit."

Beast's ears drooped a little.

"I wish you would start trusting me," she said as she crossed her arms, looking away from him.

He knew she was right.

"Oh I'm afraid time is running short," Lumiere mentioned.

"Oh?" Kairi asked. "What do you mean?"

Lumiere turned to the girl. "Remember the rose?"

"The one in the Beast's room?" Donald said.
"Precisely!" answered Cogsworth. "See, if the Master can learn to love, and earn love in return before the last petal falls…"

"The spell upon him and the castle will be broken. He'll be human again," Lumiere added, to Cogsworth's chagrin.

Sora looked to the couple. "Really? You think he's gonna make it?"

Mrs. Potts nodded. "We think so."

Chip jumped up in excitement. "Yeah!"

Kairi watched the couple from afar. The Beast had a good heart, but he still had a long way to go. But Belle was fair. Sowing the seeds of trust and care was tough, and it required effort to make it work. But she knew, she saw the way he looked at Belle. The Beast might have deep affections for her. "Yeah Sora, I think he will," she unconsciously grabbed his hand without knowing it.

Sora's face felt red at the movement, but didn't mind. "I hope you're right."

"Same here, ahyuck." Goofy added, cheering on the Beast.

The keyblade appeared in Sora's free hand. The gang looked in surprise at the magic that summoned it to Sora's grip. A new gateway had opened before him, the rose being the beacon.

"What happened?" Beast asked, after Sora unlocked the gate in a blinding light show.

"The gate is open," Donald explained.

Belle was crestfallen. "Do you have to go?"

Sora nodded. "Yeah."

Belle turned to Kairi. "Thank you, Kairi."

The red head pointed to herself. "Me? What for?"

"For giving me courage in the darkest time," Belle answered.

"Now," Goofy began. "No more arguin', ya hear?" he said to the couple.

Belle smiled at the Beast, who looked away, bashful.

"We'll see to it," Lumiere assured the gang.

Mrs. Potts agreed. "Take care dears."

"You're welcome back anytime," Cogsworth said.

"If you hear anything about Riku or the King, the Heartless, the Organization, let us know," Sora informed them pointing his thumb to himself and Kairi, Donald, and Goofy.

"Take care everyone," Kairi waved to the residents of the castle.

Xaldin reported back to VII with his mission report in hand. "Well, did you finish the job?" VII asked.
"The brats got in the way, but rest assured, when the Darkness encroaching upon the castle grows strong again, I will make the Beast into a Heartless."

"Good. Did you see any reaction from Roxas?"

"None. Sora knew nothing of familiar note from the place aside from his friendship with the Beast."

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**Missing Journal Entry 18**

No. III accompanied me on a mission to a dreary castle to investigate and gather recon. His attention was caught by the master of the castle, a ferocious beast. He mentioned something about love, and how pathetic an emotion it was, but useful for our agenda in the Organization. I scoff at the thought. What would one person really contribute to our goals?

Love though…That was a very foreign emotion to me. What exactly could it do? What was it like? None of the descriptions I found in the Organization's archives could give me a concrete answer like anger, sadness, rage…I asked Axel about it while I sat upon the Twilight Town clock tower and he nearly choked on his ice cream. Was love so difficult to understand? To describe it?

Yet somehow, my mind connected love with an image of the ocean…and someone wearing blue sandals.

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**Chapter End Notes**

Hello again! While I'm busy with finals I was able to post this chapter. HYPE FOR E3 AND KH3 RELEASE DATE :D
"Hmm, where exactly am I?" a woman with cat ears poking out of her white hair walked down the dark path of the Underworld, the feeling of souls guiding her way. "The spirits here are in fear, fleeing from a supernatural force."

A woman's scream from the cave alerted her. She took off running, looking for the innocent.

"Are you sure this is the Coliseum you talked about so much, Sora?" Kairi felt extremely drained by the dark foggy cave. This place gave the Beast's Castle a run for its munny. "This doesn't feel like a place heroes would hang out and train in."

"It's that way," Donald pointed to stairs that led to a warm comforting light.

"Oh, guess I was a little er…off?" Sora said, shrugging with a stupid grin.

Kairi raised an eyebrow. "Only a little?"

Two strong Lights rapidly approached them. An ear piercing scream startled the gang. Turning around they saw a woman in a purple dress flee from little rabid Heartless dogs. She collapsed to the ground, holding her ankle.

"Heartless!" Sora exclaimed; he and Kairi summoning their keyblades to their hands.

A small shield formed around the woman, forcing the dogs to retreat back into Darkness as the gang ran over to her. Another woman, one with cat ears and a tail, approached with her staff in her grip.

Sora held out a hand to the woman in purple, but she waved him off. "Thanks, I'm fine," she said.

"Your injury to your ankle says otherwise," the woman with the staff said, casting a cure spell on the woman in purple's ankle. It healed, but a small scar remained along with an ache. "The pain should not persist after a couple of days."

Kairi looked into the pale eyes of the healer. She couldn't see, or that was what Kairi thought.

The woman in purple got up. "Thank you," she looked at the odd group before her: a woman with cat ears, a talking duck and dog, and two teenagers in odd looking attire. "And you're supposed to be?"

"I'm Sora, this is Kairi, Donald, and Goofy," Sora said.

"Greetings. My name is Y'shtola," the cat lady said, putting her staff on her back.

Kairi waved. "A pleasure to meet you, Y'shtola."

"Likewise, Kairi," Y'shtola bowed to the gang. Hmm, a strong and strange power rested within the redhead. It piqued Y'shtola's interest.
"Why are you here?" the woman in purple asked.

"We came to see how Hercules is doing," Sora answered.

The woman raised an eyebrow. "You know Wonderboy?"

Donald grinned with pride. "Yeah because we're heroes too!"

"Junior heroes, Donald," Goofy whispered.

Kairi bit her lip, trying not to laugh. So the boys were junior heroes?

"That's not funny Kairi," Sora pouted.

Kairi busted out laughing. "I'm sorry... but it is hilarious. Junior heroes?"

Sora was about to protest until her ringing laughter made him take pause. It was such a melodious laugh that it made his heart flutter. He turned away from the laughing Kairi, fighting a smile on his lips.

The woman laughed. "Looks like we have a friend in common. Name's Megara. My friends call me Meg."

"A pleasure," Y'shtola said. "Might I inquire as to what our location is?"

"This is the Underworld, Hades' domain." Meg pointed to the stairs leading to the golden light, "That is where the Coliseum is, along with the world of the Living."

"Why are you down here, Meg?" Kairi asked. She could tell the Heartless must run rampant in a dreary soul sucking place like this.

Meg sighed. "Wonderboy is duking it out at the Coliseum every day. Ya know, 'a hero's job is never done' and all that. These foes are special deliveries from Hades himself. Wonderboy is ready to drop though. He's reaching his limits."

"Hades is sending these opponents?" Donald raised his fist, wanting to punch Hades in the face.

"Yeah. He keeps sending them every day. I was going to go talk to Hades, convince him to give Wonderboy a break. If anything happened to him..." Meg looked down, her hand near her heart.

"Gwarsh, sounds like you're more than just friends," Goofy commented.

Meg snapped out of it, her face turning red. "Oh... uh I mean..."

"Does this Hades seem like a reasonable figure? If he's sending countless foes at Hercules..." Y'shtola said.

"He'll probably listen to us since we've encountered him before, and beaten him might I add," Sora said. "We'll go talk to him for you Meg, I'd hate for the Heartless to attack you again."

Kairi agreed with Y'shtola's observations, but Sora seemed confident enough in convincing Hades to chill. But something nagged at her; something told her encountering the Lord of the Dead was a bad idea.

Meg raised an eyebrow. "You'd do that? Well if you know what you're doing; I guess I will take you up on that offer. But, can we keep this our little secret for now?"
"Our lips are sealed," Goofy performed the motion of zipping his mouth shut.

"I do have to warn you, the Underworld zaps your strength and there are always falling rocks. But I'm sure you can handle it," Meg informed them.

Y'shtola put a finger on her chin in thought. "If the Underworld impairs your strength, it would be my pleasure to come along with you."

Sora and Kairi nodded. "Happy to have you along, Y’shtola," Sora said, giving a thumbs up. He marched off with Donald and Goofy in tow into the Underworld, straight to Hades' personal domain.

Kairi shook her head. "He's always up and ready to help people at the tip of his hat."

Y'shtola chuckled. "Such a blithe spirit."

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Pete marched on up into the chambers that belonged to Hades. A small red imp and his friend a blue imp led the cat up stairs.

"You have a visitor, your most perniciousness," the red imp said, the two presenting Pete to Hades, who sat on his throne.

"Ah, Pain, Panic, who is this?" Hades said, still annoyed that Jerkules tossed his rock monster into the sun.

Pete pointed to himself. "A pal of Maleficent's. I'm here to gather Heartless into a mass army. Surely the Lord of the Dead has plenty of beings to turn into a Heartless."

"Hmm…" Hades thought to himself. "And why did you come here of all places?"

Pete crossed his arms. "Because of those Organization XIII guys are interfering everywhere else. Buncha guys in black coats who keep running around messin' with everything."

Hades looked at Pete standing by the door. A black speck was peeking in behind him. "I'm assuming the guy behind you is this Organization?" Hades asked.

Pete turned around and spotted No. IX spying on them. "Wha?!"

Hades, with a bored look on his face flicked a fireball at the member. But No. IX saw it coming and screamed, sprinting away as fast as possible.

Hades sat back in his throne. "Where do they dig these guys up? Geez Louise."

Pete sat down on a window sill. It looked like he wouldn't be having much issue with the Organization here. "Oh they're nothin' but trouble, the whole lot of them. So uh, whadda gonna do about Hercules? He's made mincemeat outta every fighter you sent at him. Pretty soon the Underworld will be standing room only." Pete paused, an idea forming. "Say, why don't ya just pick someone already dead and save 'em the trouble?"

Hades was about to smite Pete for his suggestion until he thought about it. "Dead...Dead is good and I know just the warrior."

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"What brings you here, Y'shtola?" Kairi asked as the gang walked through the dark caverns, souls whispering by.
"A teleportation spell had gone awry and brought me here to this world," she stated simply. "I must recant the spell again to hopefully return to my friends. It will take some time before I have the ability to use it again."

"Man this curse is really dragging on me," Sora said, crushing another heartless with a great amount of effort than usual.

Kairi felt the claws of a shadow draw across her arm, cutting deep enough to draw blood. "Ack," she shook off the Heartless. Y'shtola used her extremely powerful magic to heal the wound, leaving a scar. "Thank you."

Donald and Goofy were exhausted. They were only halfway to Hades' main domain.

"The curse here truly is formidable. To countermand it we will need a power source from this world," Y'shtola noted. "The people here might know of such a source."

"Perhaps we should turn back then," suggested Goofy.

Kairi agreed. "We should turn back and go ask Hercules, he might know of something if he's a famous hero."

Sora wanted to continue forth but he relented. "You're right. Let's head back."

Number IX of Organization XIII ran past the gang, in a panic. Everyone except Y'shtola summoned their weapons for battle. "Run, run away!" he screamed, fleeing into a dark corridor.

Sora and Kairi didn't know what to think of the cowardly member. "Okay…" Sora deadpanned.

"Who was that?" Y'shtola asked.

"Organization XIII, though I've never thought one of their own would be so frightened," said Kairi.

Donald and Goofy looked into a crack in the wall that lead to the road into Hades' direct domain. "Wak!" Donald yelped as he got smacked into Goofy by a blur of red.

A man holding a katana on his shoulder ran out of the crack in the wall. "Run! We cannot fight him here!"

"Who?" Sora asked. The man stopped.

"Hades. We are weakened here and he's after me. Run!" he exclaimed. A ball of fire exploded from the crack in the wall, sending Donald and Goofy flying.

The wall was wide open, showing a rather angry Hades with the flames on his head red, and Pete with a swarm of Heartless.

"You again?!" Hades shouted, lodging fireballs at Sora, Donald, and Goofy. Y'shtola leapt into action, creating a barrier to absorb the flames. Kairi and Sora helped Donald and Goofy up.

The man in red gestured to the exit. "Go now!"

The gang fled, fireballs and Heartless hot on their trail.

Fleeing outside of the passageways into the main entrance of the Underworld, Heartless continued to rain upon them even if Hades wasn't following anymore. A group of soldiers with lances charged at the gang, who were still weakened from the Underworld's curse. The man with a katana
leapt forward and with one swipe eliminated every single heartless.

Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy were out of breath and exhausted from running. "You're really good," Sora commented. "Are you some kind of hero?"

The warrior shook his head. "No, I'm no hero. I'm just an…"

"Huh?" Sora said. This guy had to be a hero, he was incredibly strong.

"Auron," he finished.

Y'shtola nodded. "A pleasure to meet your acquaintance, Auron. My name is Y'shtola."

Sora jumped up. "I'm Sora!"

"I'm Kairi," she joined him.

"Donald!" said the duck, leaping onto Sora's shoulders.

"Goofy!" the knight captain added, leaning on Donald. Sora couldn't hold the weight of his two friends anymore and collapsed, sending the three to the floor.

Auron was amused. "Hm, seems we were fated to meet. Maybe you're in need of a guardian."

Kairi helped each of her friends up. "I think we're good, thank you for the offer, Auron."

Y'shtola crossed her arms, a finger on her chin in thought. "We should find your friend Hercules and inquire about lifting this constant ailment in this realm."

"Good idea, Y'shtola, before we lose Sora here to the curse," Kairi teased, trying to keep the poor boy steady.

"Kairi I'm fine," he pouted. "Perfectly fine." He took four steps before feeling wobbly again. "This curse sucks!"

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"I've got Heartless all over the underworld now, so you can leave those pipsqueaks to me," Pete said, as the Lord of the Dead sat upon his throne in contemplation.

"If I remember correctly, that brat's keyblade can open any lock?" Hades asked suddenly.

Pete looked at him in confusion, before figuring it out. "Whatcha gonna use it for?"

"Have I told you about the Underworld's coliseum, it makes the one upstairs look like an Olympic kiddie pool. Zeus locked it up, though. All we gotta do is swipe that key, and then re-open the Underdrome. End Jerkules' winning streak."

Pete agreed with this plan, but there was only one issue. "Hate to tell ya, but that key is kinda particular, it won't work for just anybody and those two kids ain't no pushovers."

"Did you say…two kids with keyblades?" Hades asked, his intrigue in the Keybladers rising.

"One of them's the Princess of Heart," Pete declared.

"Hmmm…" Hades snapped his fingers. Two holograms of Sora and Kairi appeared in the center of the room. If he couldn't get the prisoner to eliminate Jerkules then he could at least weaken the so-
called hero in his own realm, using his pathetic little friends.

A great burden was lifted from the group's shoulders as they ascended the stairs into a bright golden town. Before them was the coliseum gate, with great big statues of golden soldiers bearing blades over the large doors. The light of the sun was so blinding compared to the darkness in the Underworld.

"That curse hampered our combat ability. I feel so much more capable of magic with less extraneous effort now," said Y'shtola, embracing the warmth of the bright sun. "Truly a marvel this place is."

Kairi gawked in awe at the gates to the coliseum. "Wow, is this where heroes come to prove their worth? I wonder if I could one day be tested there."

Sora stared at Kairi's amazement. Ever since his first journey, he wanted to show her everything he saw, and now here they were. If only Riku was also here to see this marvel...

"Where's Auron?" Goofy asked, snapping Sora out of his thoughts.

Indeed the warrior had taken off. "He can take care of himself," Sora said. He had to question why Auron took off so quickly though. It was probably nothing.

A loud rumble and the gates opened up, being pushed by Hercules himself. He was throwing his entire body into the act. His muscles ached. Bags formed underneath his eyes. Megara was behind him, saddened at the worn hero. She was surprised to see the gang back so soon. Something must've come up.

Hercules looked up, warmth filling his heart at the sight of his friends before him. They had returned, one year later.

"Sora! Donald! Goofy!" he greeted them. Sora gave him a high five. "What are you guys doing here?"

"Just tracking down some friends, wiping out some Heartless," Sora answered.

Hercules noticed the two figures standing behind Sora, Donald, and Goofy. "And who are your new friends?"

"I'm Kairi, nice to meet you, Hercules," she said.

Y'shtola bowed. "Greetings, I am Y'shtola."

"Nice to meet you guys. So, I see you found one of your friends Sora," Hercules said, looking to Kairi. This was girl he mentioned seeking out.

"Yeah, we're still looking for Riku though," Sora added.

"But we'll find him," Kairi said. "We believe it."

"Yeah, we're working on it, when we got here we ran into Meg...a trouble though," Sora said, catching himself.

Kairi raised an eyebrow. Sora was not good at this. Y'shtola smiled in bemusement.

"We tried to teach Hades a lesson or two but the Underworld's curse zaps our strength," Sora
"Are there any sources of power to countermand the realm's curse upon heroes?" Y'shtola asked.

"Oh yeah, there is a stone that guards against the Underworld's curse," said Hercules. "The gods on Mount Olympus use it whenever they have to go down there."

"Mind if we use it?" asked Sora.

"Sure!" Hercules said, smiling. "Anything to help you guys out." He turned to Megara. "I'll meet you back at my place."

Megara nodded. "Alright Wonderboy, don't push yourself too hard, okay?"

"I'll be fine Meg, what does a hero need rest for?" Hercules said, flexing. The bags underneath his eyes proved otherwise.

"Real nice of ya to let us borrow it," Goofy said.

Hercules nodded. "But Hades is no pushover, even if you got the Olympus Stone. I'll be back." He walked out of the area and marched up to Olympus.

Megara sighed once Hercules was out of sight. "I can see the Underworld's curse dragged you down?"

The gang all nodded.

"Follow me," she gestured up a path. "I'll make something for dinner."

Kairi, Y'shtola, and Megara were in a garden full of olives, grapes, and flowers of all types. Kairi picked up one particular pink bloom that was on the ground and slowly withering.

"This flower was left alone with no support," mused Kairi. "I hope Hercules knows we support him as his friends." And Riku. Where ever Riku was, she hoped he too knows that he's not alone.

Megara smiled at Kairi's words as she picked grapes off a vine. Y'shtola inspected the plants all around her, smelling the sweet aromas.

"Hey girl, why you so down?" a woman's deep voice spoke, almost singing her words.

Kairi nearly dropped her flower. "Who is there?"

"Over here," another voice spoke. Megara pointed towards the fountain, and Kairi spotted five short women made of stone standing on a platform.

"Fascinating, animated statues," Y'shtola commented, looking over them in awe.

The tallest one bowed. "Hello Princess! We are the Muses! Goddesses of the arts and proclaimers of heroes! I'm Calliope, muse of epic poetry."

"I'm Clio, muse of history," said the second tallest.

"Muse of tragedy, Melpomene," said the one with long curly hair.

"Call me Terpsichore, muse of dance," said the second shortest one.
"I'm Thalia darling. Comedy is my expertise." The shortest muse grinned. "Been a while since we had a heroine princess."

Kairi pointed to herself. "Me? I'm no hero. Sora is the hero."

Clio raised an eyebrow. "Princess, that boy still has a lot to learn as to what being a hero means. Although, he's getting pretty close. But you, you're just as close to figuring it out as he is."

Calliope nodded. "Besides, a heroine princess is a rarity. Oh sure you've heard of other princesses overcoming trials and such, but one who is willing to brave the battlefield? How many of those have you heard of?"

Clio opened her scroll. "Not very many in history."

Terpsichore twirled around. "In any case, hello!"

Kairi waved, wondering if she should tell them that technically she's not royalty. "Um well actually…"

Megara leaned over to whisper to Kairi. "Don't bother convincing them that you're not royalty. They're goddesses."

"You tell legends and tales of heroes and gods?" Y'shtola asked.

"Yep! We follow the stories of heroes and the like," Melpomene explained. "We know all about the story of Sora and Kairi."

"Y-You do?" Kairi stuttered, hoping it wasn't about some sort of romance or anything. They were friends…Only friends.

Calliope cleared her throat. "Of course! There was an island of destiny, where three friends named Sora, Riku, and Kairi grew up together. It was a happy time before the Darkness came. Then came the legendary weapon, the unbreakable…"

"Unbeatable…" Clio added.

"Unstoppable!" Thalia finished.

"Keyblade!" the five sang together.

Calliope continued telling the story. "It chose the mature Riku, but it denied him at the sign of a corrupted and foolish heart. Then it came to Sora, who braved the worlds and the Darkness to find the lost Princess of Heart, Kairi."

Melpomene pulled out a sad mask. "Oh how tragedy struck. Kairi's heart under siege by the darkness, hid away within Sora. They call him a junior hero at first, a boy stumbling through his journey, touching the hearts of many."

Calliope nodded. "Then in a twist of fate, he sacrificed himself to save the Princess of Heart."

Thalia fanned herself. "Oh how I fainted when that happened."

"His Heartless never let go, he saw the truth even in the deepest Darkness, the Light of the Princess' heart guided him back…"

Clio pretended she held a blade. "And he made his way to slay the leader of the Heartless."
Melpomene gestured to the stars. "Now that the worlds were restored, the pair must find their lost friend Riku."

"And that…" Calliope bowed. "Is how the best love story goes."

Y'shtola chortled while Megara sent a very bright red Kairi a sly smile. "Love story eh?"

"I uh what? Sora is my best friend! Nothing interesting going on between us, nope, none."

Y'shtola bit her lip, trying to not chuckle at the bright red Kairi. "Your response tells us all."

"I do not have feelings for Sora! He's my friend, through and through," Kairi declared, going back to looking at the flowers.

Thalia shook her head. "Keep telling yourself that girl."

Kairi, Y'shtola, and Megara returned back inside Hercules' home, a wide open space with the entrance only supported by columns. Curtains were draped all over, and sunshine flowed through the gaps between the columns. Donald and Goofy were admiring the busts sitting about. Megara set down her basket of food on a table and began to sort through it.

Kairi still had the pink bloom in her hand. "Where's Sora?"

Donald and Goofy stopped staring at the busts and turned to Kairi. "Uh, we thought Sora went to go help ya," Goofy said.

Donald crossed his arms. "Probably got lost on the way. He'll be back."

Hercules marched up to the house with a small satyr in tow. "Now champ you gotta get some rest because no one will pay to see a puffy eyed worn out hero, capche?" the satyr lectured. Hercules walked over and passed out on a couch.

"Herc!" Goofy said, hoping his friend was okay. "Oh heya Phil!"

"Wonderboy you just rest now," Megara said, handing him a towel to wipe the sweat off.

Hercules smiled. "Thanks Meg."

Phil turned to Kairi and Y'shtola. "Haven't seen you two around here before."

"I'm Kairi, Sora's…friend."

"I am Y'shtola."

"So you're Sora's friends eh? You two look like fighters. Since Herc here is passed out, how about some training while we wait on dinner?" Phil asked, pointing his thumb to outback of the house to a training area with barrels and dummies. "Herc told me about you fools trying to stand up to Hades. Zeus knows you're gonna need all the training you're gonna get."

Kairi raised an eyebrow. She wasn't sure if she should be insulted or not. She nodded.

Phil marched off to the dummies.

"He seems straight to the point in his words," Y'shtola said.

"You can say that again," Kairi said. She followed Phil to the training area. He pushed up a bunch
of barrels to the center of the pit of dirt.

"Okay girly, see if you can handle crowd control by smacking these things away from you," Phil explained.

Kairi summoned her keyblade to her grip. She moved forward and smacked the barrel in front of her. It was sent flying, but there was more to deal with. She paused, thinking of how to deal with the encroaching barrels. She spun around, like how she saw Sora do many times over. She called upon her inner strength, imagining the barrels as a swarm of Shadows.

A burst of Light exploded out from the blade, extending its reach out and slamming all of the barrels away into the bushes and high into the air.

She turned around to face Phil with a smile. The satyr and cat woman had ducked behind a pillar of the power blast.

"Whoa…" Phil gawked at Kairi.

She looked at the destruction she inflicted. "Sorry about that."

Y'shtola crouched down at the marks left by the Light blade. "Your abilities are a powerhouse of magic and Light. Tapping into it without much control can cause unintended consequences."

"You've got potential kid, just gotta work on control," Phil added, still hiding behind the pillar.

Kairi agreed. "Thank you."

Walking back into the main room of Hercules' house, Herc had sat up with a towel in his grip. "Sorry guys, got bad news," he said. "The Olympus Stone was stolen."

Donald's feathers were ruffled. "What?! Stolen?"

"By who?" Goofy asked.

"We don't know who did it yet," the hero looked down at his towel. He failed his friends. "All we're sure of is that it was a guy in a black-hooded cloak. And he was accompanied by creatures in white."

Donald stomped his foot. "That no good Organization!"

Kairi tightened her hand into a fist. "We'll track them down and stop them."

"Hyuck if we get the stone back can we borrow it fer a while?" Goofy asked.

Herc gave the three a smile. "Sure." He looked around. "Shouldn't Sora be back by now?"

Kairi's blood ran cold. It was definitely not like Sora to get lost like this. Something definitely went wrong. "Where is he?"

"Oh what's wrong, Princess, fearing something is amiss?" Kairi felt a hand on her shoulder. The voice belonged to one way too amused Hades.

She whipped around and summoned Destiny's Embrace to her grip and pointed it right at the god. The others also drew their weapons. "What did you do with Sora?!"

"Oh nothing much, he went and got himself lost in the Underworld somewhere, man who knew he
Hades explained, like it was just another Tuesday for him. "You... You mean..." Kairi had a powerful anger plague her. No one and she meant no one is allowed to harm her best friend ever. "You kidnapped him!"

"Well maybe... But why get caught up in the details?" Hades said, not caring if anyone answered or not. "Your boyfriend did put up a fight but man, Keybladers just aren't made very strong these days, you know?"

"How do we even know you're telling the truth?" Donald said, ready to throw a thunder spell at the god.

"Would I really ever lie to you on such a dire matter as the fate of your dear friend?" The answer everyone thought was yes. Hades turned away. "Besides, you can't exactly rush off to find out since Wonderbreath here is looking a little under the weather. Who knows what kind of accidents might happen if you left the place unguarded."

Kairi glared at the god. "And I suppose Sora getting 'lost' in the Underworld was also an accident?"

"Like I said, details, who needs them?" Hades disappeared.

Kairi turned to Hercules. "I'm so sorry about all this Herc. I promise, we'll find Sora and we'll protect the coliseum."

Hercules nodded. "Go, find the Olympus Stone and bring back our friend Sora. I believe you guys can do it."

Kairi, Donald, and Goofy nodded.

Y'shtola decided to stay and help Herc recover from ache and exhaustion. "Remember Kairi, strength of heart matters as much as will," she said.

"Right," Kairi agreed.

Sora didn't remember much as he awoke in a dark cave with his hands and legs bound. He remembered Hades and Pete appearing before him, he got mobbed by Heartless and blacked out. He sat on the floor of the cave, looking at Pete and Hades talking.

"Ngh..." he groaned. What exactly happened, why was he here?

"Oh looky it's the key brat," Pete said, turning to face the awakening Sora.

"What do you want Pete?" Sora said, glaring at the cat.

"I need yer girlfriend to do as we say and then you can go home, but hmm, Maleficent did teach me how to turn people into a Heartless, maybe once we get what we want from the Princess we can turn you into a Heartless."

Pete held out his hand and summoned a dark flame in his grasp. Dark flames tried to release from Sora but he easily fought it off. "Guess again Pete, I'm not going down to the Darkness that easily."

Hades waved him off. "Ignore that kid, knowing him he'll just somehow bust himself out if you poke him long enough."
Sora gritted his teeth as he struggled about. "Kairi won't give into your demands so easily."

"Oh I highly doubt that, kid." Hades smirked. "Just wait and see."

Kairi, Donald, and Goofy felt the heavy pressure on their shoulders return the second they entered the Underworld.

"Where could they have taken him?" Donald asked.

Kairi looked around the entrance. There was the cavern towards Hades’ domain and then another cavern farther into the Underworld. "To be honest, I'm not sure where they could have taken Sora."

Goofy thought about it before arriving at a conclusion. "Gawrsh Kairi, maybe you just gotta let your heart guide your way to Sora. After all you guys have a connection, right?"

"Hmm…" she placed her hand over her heart. "You're right. I will find you, Sora, no matter where you go." She held out her keyblade before her and focused on finding Sora. An orb of light formed at the tip and shot out towards the deep caverns of the Underworld. "Let's go!" she declared as she ran off after the light.

"Wait up!" Donald huffed, as he and Goofy followed after the determined princess.

Even as she got deeper into the Underworld, the curse wore down on Kairi more and more. But her determination would not waver. "Sora!" she called out amidst the dead souls crying in soft whispers. She jumped down farther into the dark caves, her body aching, her will being worn down, her strength fading, but her willpower grew. Heartless appeared before her, bats and ghosts standing in her way. Lifting her keyblade up, she fired out blasts of fire to dispatch the enemies, but only sent them flying instead. Donald and Goofy caught up with her. Goofy body slammed one of the ghosts out of the way. Donald casted some blizzard to freeze the bats in the air.

"Come on, we can't fight these guys here yet," Goofy urged the two on. Kairi agreed, taking off running up a set of stairs. The light floated to the top of the stairs and disappeared.

A figure in black stood before a large sinister looking door.

Kairi stopped, immediately noticing the man. "Who are you?" she said, pointing her keyblade at him. She felt nothing coming from the man…or so she thought.

"Oh," he turned around and took off his hood, bearing a mullet of dirty blond hair. He squinted at Kairi. "Ah! You! Naminé? It's me, Demyx."

"Excuse me? Who's Naminé?"

"Hmm…maybe they were right after all," Demyx muttered. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a card. "Let's see here, 'if subject fails to respond, use the girl to liberate his true disposition.'" He put the card away and reached into his other pocket. "Right…Ugh they really picked the wrong guy for this." Demyx pulled out the golden Olympus Stone.

Goofy pointed at him with a glare. "He's gotta be the thief!"

Demyx with a partial smirk said his rebuttal. "Now that's just plain rude."

Kairi, Donald, and Goofy pulled out their weapons. "You stole it alright," Donald declared.
Demyx's eyes widened. "Uh okay this might be where the show is over and I should uh…yeah, Naminé, be sure to tell Roxas to come back to us. Thanks, bye!" He disappeared in a dark corridor, dropping the Olympus stone on the ground.

Donald picked it up and raised it up, the stone granting the three freedom from the curse.

"That's a much unexpected type of person to be in the Organization," Kairi said, feeling the burden lift off her shoulders. "Who is Naminé…?"

"Naminé, what's happening to me?"

That was what Roxas said to her, but she had no idea what their connection was. "Let's go, Sora needs our help."

They barged through the doors, weapons at the ready to fight Pete and Hades. Only a single green light was in the center of the empty room.

Kairi knew this was where Sora was being held. His light was near. "Let's go." Running right into the light, discarding her safety, Kairi found herself in a dark cave. "Sora? Sora where are you?"

The lights turned on. Sora was still tied up in the corner. "Eheheh hi guys."

Goofy and Donald arrived behind Kairi. "Sora!" the two cried out as they ran over to him. Kairi summoned her keyblade to destroy Sora's bonds. The three were blasted back by a fireball.

Kairi slammed into the wall of the cave, her grip releasing Destiny's Embrace.

"Uh uh huh, now that would be just too easy," Hades said. "Now you and your boyfriend can go once you do me one little favor." He snapped his fingers and with bright flames in thin air appeared a keyhole. "You use that special little key of yours and open up the Underdrome."

Kairi glared daggers at the god. "And what if I refuse to help you?"

Hades smirked. "I don't think you're in a position to refuse, little girl."

Pete stepped out from behind Hades and raised his hand. With a maniacal laugh, he lifted Sora up using wisps of Darkness. "Succumb to the Darkness within!"

A horde of Heartless appeared before her, blocking her way to Sora. Sora emitted cries in his struggle. "Don't…Listen to them…Kairi…I…will…be fine…ahhh!" he shouted to her.

"You won't use me like this!" a familiar voice unlike Sora's came out of his mouth. "Don't…let them…win!"

Y'shtola looked over the feverish Hercules, casting a mild cure spell to mend his ailing body. "The exhaustion opened him up to a cold. It will take some time for him to recover but he shall be fine," she explained to Megara and Phil.

A roar thundered close by. "What was that?" Hercules said, barely able to keep his eyes open.

A purple monster with spikes on its back crawled up to the house by the coliseum and tore off the roof. The monster with the roof in its teeth tossed it at the four. Y'shtola whipped out her staff and stood in front of the three. The roof destroyed the entire house in one fell swoop. Y'shtola generated a large bubble shield just in time. The debris fell off the bubble and onto the ground.
"Gods, that's a Hydra!" Phil exclaimed. "We gotta get Herc outta here, can't fight that thing in his current state."

Megara took the delirious hero's arm over her shoulder and pulled him off the couch. "Y'shtola, can you hold that thing off?"

The woman nodded, still holding up the bubble. "I will do my best to distract this creature before it does any more harm. Escort Hercules out of here."

Megara and Phil agreed, pulling the sick hero along and down the side of the hill.

The hydra roared, Y'shtola lowered her bubble down as she saw the three move out of sight. With her staff raised, she was ready to parry the Hydra's incoming tail swipe.

The impact never came. "Need help?" Auron asked, his katana colliding with the tail.

"Of course, always appreciate the assistance," Y'shtola replied.

The Hydra screeched, shaking the hill once more.

Kairi stared at the keyhole while blocking a Heartless soldier. Sora still was being tormented by the Darkness Pete was trying to bring out.

Her heart didn't know what to do. Give in and do what Hades wants, or let Sora suffer?

The Heartless were encroaching closer. A Shadow took a swipe at her leg, cutting deep enough to draw blood. She looked to Sora, still being attacked by raging flames of Darkness.

"Well little girl, what will you do about your precious boyfriend?" Hades asked, mocking her weakness.

Her heart refused to give in. "I'll…I'll do what you want. Let him go."

Pete whistled, making the Heartless back off. Without a second to spare Kairi lifted her keyblade up at the lock, and turned it to Sora. A beam of light shot out and broke him free of his bonds. Sora collapsed to the ground.

"What?!" Pete exclaimed, shocked. Sora summoned Kingdom Key to his grip and uppercut Pete in the face, knocking him down. Kairi leaped over the Heartless swarm to Sora, Donald and Goofy despite her leg wound. Touching his shoulder with her hand, she granted him protection from the Underworld's curse.

Sora raised his keyblade into the air. "Heal!" he shouted, unleashing a powerful cure spell and healing Donald, Goofy, and Kairi of their wounds. "Sorry Hades, but it takes more to prevent us from being apart," he mocked.

Kairi agreed, falling into her battle stance. "Together we're stronger than anything you've ever seen."

Hades turned bright red, his anger making his eye twitch. "You pathetic brats dare refuse me?!! This is my territory!"

"So?" Sora smirked. "Doesn't mean you can control us."

Hades was so furious when Pete stood back up; he was backing away from the god. "Get them,
Pete!

Pete snapped his fingers and summoned more Heartless. "With pleasure!"

Bats, ghosts, shadows, soldiers, and lance soldiers crowded the tiny cramped space. "Goofy!" Kairi called out to him, smacking a shadow out of existence.

Goofy got her message. "Got ya!" he moved to her side and back to back, the two spun around in an impenetrable shield tornado, pulling in half of the Heartless and blasting them away with the keyblade.

"Come on, Sora!" Donald said, hopping on Sora's shoulder. Sora threw his keyblade in a narrow line, Donald summoning a large barrage of fireworks to finish off the Heartless colliding with the keyblade.

The cave was cleared away. Pete had nowhere to go. Hades had ditched amidst the battle. Pete's eye twitched in annoyance. "That no good God of Death ain't helpin' ever. I'll get you two yet!" He shook his fist at the gang.

He ran off into the light that permitted an exit.

"Let's get out of here, I don't wanna face Hades again," Kairi said, grabbing Sora's hand and practically dragging the teen out of the cave. The duck and dog followed suit.

"No kidding…Kai…He was…Obnoxious…" Sora said, trying to keep up with Kairi's urgency as they ran through the deep caverns.

"I'm just scared he'll hurt you again," she explained, keeping her eye out for more Heartless on the path ahead.

It clicked for Sora. "Oh, yeah that…Sorry if I worried you, Kairi."

She paused and turned to face him, her hand still holding his. "You're okay, that's all that matters, you silly goof." She hugged him, tightly. "Don't apologize Sora, Hades is the one who should be apologizing."

He hugged her back. "Yeah. We'll make them pay."

Donald and Goofy snickered. No one harmed Kairi's friends, ever.

Hades returned to his throne, a sinister smile on his curled lips. "Wait until those brats find the lovely surprise I left them upstairs. Wonderbreath is history at this point."

Arriving at the top of the stairs to the Underworld, the gang was greeted by a Hydra stomping, now with more heads grown. It had destroyed most of the Coliseum by then, with Auron and Y'shtola hanging back and just trying to keep the monster's attention without creating more heads.

"Oh no!" Kairi shouted, seeing the destruction wrought by the Hydra.

Megara and Phil were behind some rocks, a giant winged horse by their side. "Sora! Kairi!" Meg waved to them.

"We could use a hand here!" Phil said, throwing another barrel towards Auron, who slammed it into the Hydra's face like a golf ball.
Donald and Goofy raised their arms. "We gotta help!" Goofy declared.

Sora and Kairi linked arms. Raising their keyblades they together activated the powers of their garments. "Give us strength!" they shouted to the sky, their clothes transforming to red. Sora leapt up with his two keyblades and bashed in one of the Hydra's heads. Kairi remembered her training earlier, being able to unleash a giant blade of Light from her own heart. Channeling the words of Y'shtola and Phil, the girl ran off low on the ground, catching the attention of the other head of the Hydra. Creating a large Light blade out of Destiny's Embrace, she whirled around and sliced off the head of the Hydra.

Donald stunned the third head with a thunder spell, allowing Goofy to throw his shield and cut off the head from its long neck. Sora with a kick off of his Hydra's head tossed Star Seeker at the neck and sliced it off.

Y'shtola lowered the bubble formed around her and Auron at the back of the Coliseum and ran to the sides of Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy.

Cutting off 3 heads of the Hydra made 9 more instantly grow back from the open slices.

"What is the plan?" Auron asked, blocking a dive-bomb from one of the Hydra's heads.

"Maybe forget about the head-slicing thing?!" Phil shouted from the distance.

Y'shtola furrowed her eyebrows. "The wounds left behind after the heads are removed are open, allowing it to regenerate. If we cauterize the wounds, it cannot regenerate the heads."

"We'll need to do it as soon as we slice the heads off then. It regenerates faster than we can possibly cauterize it, said Auron.

Donald shouted "Fire!" and coated the keyblades in flames. "Now we'll be quick!"

The 9 heads darted down towards them, Y'shtola reflecting them back and stunning them. Two of the heads bit down on Auron's sword. He held them in place. "Go!"

Sora crouched down and Kairi hopped onto his back, pushed off and sliced the two heads at the base of the neck with her flaming keyblade.

"Go Pegasus!" Megara said. The giant winged horse flew down from the sky, and Sora hopped onto its back. He flew around the other stunned heads and cut off each head with a spin of both keyblades. The wounds were instantly cauterized. One by one, Sora was able to cut off the rest of the heads.

He and Pegasus landed back down on the ground. Kairi was in awe. He sliced through all of them in a matter of seconds. His power was amazing.

But she had to wonder, how did one acquire two keyblades? She had no time to dwell on it because the heads of the Hydra flailed about in the air, screeching in agony. The body with its heads shook and stomped the ground until it stopped. The Hydra was finished.

Sora and Kairi reverted to normal. "We did it!" They pumped his fist in the air.

Calliope, Clio, Melpomene, Terpsichore, and Thalia stood upon the broken pillars. "Poor Hercules, worn out and exhausted, lost the coliseum, thanks to Hades," Calliope narrated.

Clio opened her scroll. "But at least the Princess and Hero of the Keyblade learned something
Melpomene agreed, putting her mask away. "In the face of possible tragedy, the Princess remained strong and used her heart to guide her way."

"And the Chosen One of the Keyblade," Terpsichore, span around in her white robes. "Might have learned a thing or two about his inner darkness."

Thalia held the pink bloom that Kairi had in the gardens earlier. "I just wish those two would admit their feelings already! Ugh! They're perfect together!"

Calliope side-eyed the muse of comedy. "We just have to be patient. Their story is far from over. Now we must watch and see what happens to them. Hades is just the beginning. Hercules has endured so much; it will be a matter of time before Hades returns."

Indeed, the muse of poetry was correct. Hercules lied upon a slab of stone with only a pillow on it by the ruined gardens, a fever burning. "I failed…” He moaned.

Megara shook her head. "It's not your fault. Even a god would be exhausted."

"I let everyone down…I'm just a…I'm just no use." The glow and color on Hercules faded, his fighting spirit broken and lost.

Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy looked upon the fallen hero with sadness. "She's right. Give yourself a chance to rest."

Phil placed a damp cloth on Herc's forehead. "A hero needs his rest after all."

Y'shtola nodded. "The only cure for an ailment such as this is water and sleep."

"Where's Auron?" Donald asked. "He disappeared again."

The warrior clad in red was nowhere to be seen. "He's capable of watching himself," Kairi answered. "He's like a lone wolf…Kinda like Riku."

Sora smirked. "More like Riku was a lone wolf because he just wants to be cool like Auron."

Kairi poked his arm. "So does that mean you don't wanna be cool?"

Sora placed his hand over his heart. "You wound me with your words Kairi! Are you implying that I am not cool?"

Kairi placed her hands on her hips. "Maybe I am, maybe I'm not. Point is Sora, you gotta obviously be a lone wolf if you wanna be cool."

He smirked. "Then I would have to abandon you, Kairi."

She grabbed him by the jacket, giving him the most frightening death glare. "You leave me behind Sora, and I promise that you will face a great fury from my keyblade." She winked at him.

"Okay okay, Kairi I concede your point. Besides, I'm already cooler than Riku anyways," he stuck his tongue out at her.

Hercules let out a weak chuckle. "I wonder if they met the Muses yet…” he muttered, coughing.

"Gwarsh, I hope you feel better Hercules," Goofy said.
"Thanks."

Kairi turned to Y'shtola. "So now what?"

"It will still take a considerable amount of power to recharge my teleportation spell," she explained. "I'll stay and help Hercules recover."

"Oh right! The Olympus Stone," Sora said. Kairi pulled the stone out of her pocket and handed it to Hercules.

Megara faced the gang. "Sora, Kairi, Donald, Goofy, I owe you big time."

Sora shook his head. "It's no big deal. Just let us know if Pete or Hades start acting up. We'll take care of it."

Donald struck a flex pose. "Yeah that's what heroes are for!"

Megara and Phil looked at them with eyebrows raised. "When did you three make hero?" the woman asked.

"Uhh, we'll save that for another time, we have to hit the road," Sora changed the subject.

"Junior heroes…" Kairi whispered, trying not to giggle. Sora blushed.

Megara didn't buy it, but didn't care anyways. "Heh, okay, don't be strangers."

Phil waved to them. "Take care guys, we gotta catch up on some serious training next time."

In Hercules' grip, the Olympus Stone glowed. Sora looked to his friends and grinned. Another gateway was revealed.

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**Missing Journal Entry 09**

Number IX is the worst partner to work with. I do all the work, he sits around and naps. At least everyone else pulls their weight.

Images of a guy in red appeared in my head today as I (not IX, he did nothing) investigated a giant coliseum. I swear he looked almost just like me.

VIII was my friend, or at least he was closest to a friend I could get. I find myself opening up more now, even if I have nothing to say. We talk about nothing while upon that clock tower, and when the ice cream's all set and done, I see him off to the castle and sneak my way down to the abandoned mansion.

She…She was there as always, drawing pictures in a sketchbook. And with her, I felt I could also talk all day about nothing. And nothing was nice. Too bad my visits with her were much shorter due to not wanting to arouse suspicion in VII or any other Organization members for my lateness. Perhaps one day I could introduce her to VIII so I could spend more time with her.

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Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading this chapter!
A great thank you also to threedegrees for beta reading all of this fic! It means a great deal to me. Also thank you to DieWalkure for also giving me feedback on this chapter.

Feel free to leave a review. :)

As a side note, I have come to the conclusion that Pride Lands will not be included in this fic for various reasons. It doesn't contribute much to the overall plot and will have a major conflict with something later down the line so unfortunately I will be able to include it (despite having Lion Sora and Kairi would be adorable)
"Sora! Sora!" Chip, the Gummi engineer, shouted over the intercom of the Gummi ship. The boy shot up in his seat, wide eyed in panic after being disturbed from his sleep.

"Wha wha?!” he groaned, feeling dizzy. "What's going on?"

Kairi was still sound asleep in her chair, untouched and untarnished. Her hair was gently swaying with the ship's movement. Sora reached a hand over and brushed the tips of his fingers over her cheek. "Kairi wake up," he yawned.

"Hmm go away Sora…" she waved him away.

"Kairi it's half off fruit smoothies today at the seaside shack," he mumbled, still trying to wake up. She yawned. "Nice try Sora I'm not going to fa…"

"Sora! Kairi!" Dale shouted in the intercom. "We got a situation!"

The two shot up in their seats.

"Situation? Where?" Kairi asked, dazed from being torn from her sleep.

Donald and Goofy were out in their own seats. Autopilot was turned on.

"What's up?" Sora pressed the button on the intercom to respond.

"It's horrible! The Castle is in danger!" Chip and Dale said together.

Donald and Goofy shot up, wide awake. "What?!" the two screamed.

"There are thorns in the Hall of the Cornerstone and Heartless…" the two engineers were cut off by static. Donald slammed the manual pilot back on.

"We gotta get to Queen Minnie right now!" Donald declared, slamming on the gas. Sora, Kairi, and Goofy jerked back in their seats from the force.

"What's going on?" Kairi asked.

"The Castle is in danger! We gotta go there now!" Goofy said.

Sora readied himself. "If there's Heartless running around, then it's a good thing we got the message."

"Maybe we'll find the King there," Goofy hoped.

Kairi squinted at the wide window. "Um…guys?"

"What is it Kairi?" said Goofy.
She pointed up to the right. "What's that?"

A giant shadowy glowing portal swirled about. It was moving, and it was getting closer and closer to their ship.

"I don't think I want to know what that is!” Sora panicked.

Donald spotted the blue and white Disney Castle down below. Without any other thought, he slammed down on the gas and dive-bombed towards the castle. "Brace yourselves! That vortex is getting closer!"

The gravity of the vortex was pulling them closer and closer to the right, but to add insult to injury, a giant red and black Heartless with four limbs came flying out from above and slammed into the ship.

"Wak!" Donald exclaimed, trying to re-align the ship towards the castle. The rest of the gang clutched their seats.

"What was that?!” Sora shouted. "And why are there no seatbelts?!"

"Hunter-X!" Goofy cried out, gripping his seat for dear life.

The giant Heartless took aim at the ship. Donald jerked the steering wheel several directions, trying to dodge the laser bullets.

Then Hunter-X formed a red beam and shot it straight at the ship. "Look out!" Goofy cried out. Donald slammed the ship downwards, trying to get near the castle. The red x-shaped laser beam hit the side of the ship, taking out the entire lower right side. Kairi went flying out of her seat.

"Sora!" she cried out, getting sucked into the lanes in-between.

Sora released his grip on his seat and jumped up, reaching out for her hand. "Kairi!" He too went flying, latching onto both Kairi’s hand and the edge of the torn ship. It was diving at a fast speed, an alert sounding off and blaring in their ears. "I won't let you go!" he shouted, trying to hold on as best as he could. The vortex was incredibly close to them, narrowly passing by the Castle and being flung in a different direction.

Sora could hold onto the ship no more, the force of the vortex of doom pulling too much on Kairi. He slipped away, with Kairi clinging to him tightly.

"Sora! Kairi!" cried Donald and Goofy.

Hunter-X stopped its pursuit, the Light of Disney Castle too powerful to even go near.

The two teenagers were sucked into the vortex. Kairi and Sora clung to each other. The Light of their emotions shone forth. The concern they had for each other powered up a shield of Light from their hearts, protecting against the Darkness of the lanes in-between.

The vortex pulled them into its depths, slowly closing up.

Donald struggled to slow down the ship, zooming down at max velocity towards the center courtyard of Disney Castle. The ship clipped the top of the hedge shaped like a mini-castle and slammed into a wall.

Goofy and Donald stumbled out of the ship, greeted by two chipmunks in engineering gear.
"Donald! Goofy!" squeaked Chip.

"You fellers okay?" Dale asked.

Goofy held his head. "Uhhh I think so."

Donald brushed off his feathers. "But Sora and Kairi got sucked up in a vortex of Darkness…"

Chip and Dale looked at each other with wide eyes. "We lost contact with ya before we could do anything."

Chip stomped his foot. "That no good Hunter-X must've shown up…"

Goofy nodded. "We gotta find them somehow."

Dale raised his hand up to stop the two. "Queen Minnie still needs you! I'm sure you'll be able to find them with her help."

Donald and Goofy had to comply. Queen Minnie's safety was of utmost importance. But they still felt a great concern for their two friends, who had probably been lost in the void…

Kairi opened her eyes to a dusty and hard ground beneath her nose. Her body ached greatly, drained of energy from the burst of Light from her heart. It protected her and Sora, but at her own cost. She probably would have been in a longer slumber if Sora's own Light didn't aid hers. She sat up. The dusty landscape was barren, only the sound of the wind could be heard. There was no chance of finding any people here.

She looked around and spotted a passed out Sora beside her. "Sora!" she crawled over to him. She shook him to see if he was just asleep. "You okay Sora?" He had no injuries to his person. She sighed in relief.

He stirred. "Nghh, Kairi?" he asked, wobbling awake. All he could see was her beautiful face covered in dirt and scratches above his. The sunless sky cast no shadow upon them. The arid wind brushed against the tall rocks.

Something about this place was eerily familiar to the both of them. "Where are we?" Sora asked her, sitting up and squinting at the covered sky.

"I…I don't know," Kairi said, standing up. "But we won't know until we find out…" She began walking forward towards a cliff. Her keyblade appeared in her grip as she peered over the cliff. More desolate wastelands stretched for miles and miles, no end in sight.

Sora got up. His heartbeat increased. He didn't know this place, yet he felt a sense of dread. A desolation such as this had to have been the result of some catastrophe. But he had no recollection of this place at all; his heart however said otherwise. "Kairi? Do we know this place?"

Kairi turned around, her keyblade still in her grip. "My keyblade knows, but I don't."

Sora looked up to the sky in thought. "Maybe we should figure out a way out of here then. This place feels…Dead."

She shook her head. "Come on Sora, where's your sense of adventure, hmm?" She took off jogging away from the cliff, leaving him baffled.

"Wha, Kairi wait up!"
"Oh dear!" exclaimed a tiny mouse in a red dress and a crown. Beside her was a duck in a purple
dress. "Are you sure they will be alright?"

Goofy and Donald nodded as the four of them marched over to the Hall of the Cornerstone.
Entering the main wide throne room of the Castle, Goofy reassured her, "Yeah Queen Minnie, Sora
and Kairi are smart."

"And reckless," grumbled Donald.

"Do we know of anyone who can help with our problem of the Cornerstone?" the duck in purple
asked. "I think we might need Sora and Kairi for that."

Donald agreed. "You're right Daisy."

Daisy beamed. "Of course I am."

"But uh, how are we gonna get them back?" Goofy asked, a finger on his head, wracking his brain
to find a solution.

"Your Majesty!" Chip and Dale scampered into the throne room, avoiding the horde of Heartless
trying to get inside. They ran up to the group, out of breath.

"We figured out what that vortex did," Chip explained. "It led to a long forgotten place.
Unfortunately using a gummi ship would tear it to pieces."

"An' I don't think Sora and Kairi know how to travel without a gummi ship," Dale added.

"Who do we know that can travel between worlds then?" Goofy asked out loud. He got it.
"Merlin!"

"You're right!" Donald agreed.

Minnie walked over to the King's throne and pressed a button underneath the armrest. "That's
perfect. He can figure out what's wrong with the castle and bring Sora and Kairi back to us."

The throne moved over on its blue platform, opening up a set of stairs to a dim basement below.

The desolation was large. For miles Sora and Kairi walked, unsure if they were going in the right
direction or were getting even more lost. Rocks and cliffs overlooked them, worn down by the test
of time.

Sora had a strange feeling he was once there before, but that couldn't have been true, could it? He
didn't have the feeling he had forgotten, but the feeling of once being there lingered at the back of
his mind.

Kairi saw a figure in the distance. Was there an actual person there? She ran off towards the figure.

Sora followed after Kairi. The girl stopped as soon as she could see the figure in full. It was a man
in supposedly a suit of armor, kneeling. His hands grasped his blade deep in the ground. A cape
attached to him whipped around in the wind.

"Who is this?" Sora said to Kairi.

The girl shrugged. "I don't know. Sir? You okay?"
Her heart of Light felt no Light or Darkness from the man. Instead, a rage radiated off the armor. It was as if the armor was possessed by something, animating it.

"Aqua…Ven…" a whisper of a voice spoke to them. "I sense…your presence…"

Sora on instinct grabbed Kairi's hand.

"Sora?" she said, still unsure of the armor. "I don't think there's a person in that armor."

His eyes widened. "Uhhh, then what is making it move?"

"My…will…lingers…" the voice whispered in response.

Kairi and Sora summoned their keyblades to their grasp.

"A keyblade...Her keyblade...My keyblade...No, you're not the one. You're not the one I chose… You weren't chosen at all…Inherited nothing… Where is he? Xe...ha...nort. Xeha...nort. Xehanort!" The armor stood up and pulled his blade out of the ground. Sora and Kairi's eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets at the weapon. It was a huge keyblade, taller than them.

The Lingering Will leapt up into the air and swooped down towards the two. Sora and Kairi dodged out of the way, but the armor swooped back in, aiming towards Kairi. She ran and rolled behind the rocks, the Lingering Will just slicing through it and causing it to collapse. Kairi created a dome shield to reflect the rocks back.

Sora was behind the Lingering Will when he saw the rocks collapse on Kairi. "Kairi!

The Lingering Will was hovering in the air over the wreckage, his attention turned to Sora. The teen took a step back and prepared his keyblade as the Lingering Will darted at him. He whirled around and slammed his keyblade into the Lingering Will's, pulling all of his strength into pushing the armor back. The armor however had extreme strength to rival a giant Heartless and blasted back Sora.

Sora skidded across the ground, his keyblade tossed away. Kairi climbed on the rocks and leapt down with a battle cry towards the Lingering Will. Her blade collided with his. Her keyblade charged up with a bright light, engulfing the entire blade. She released the pressure on the Lingering Will and flipped back and tried to slice him, but he dodged out in seconds. He took his keyblade and flung it around him, forming a whip with the air. Kairi got tossed aside like a rag doll by the air whip.

Sora got up to get to Kairi, who had used a potion to heal her wounds. Whoever possessed this armor radiated anger and rage. What had happened to the man underneath his will that had latched onto the armor? "That guy is angry," Kairi said, wiping the side of her mouth of blood as Sora pulled her up.

"You can say that again," Sora said, summoning his keyblade back to his grip and bracing himself for the next attack.

The Lingering Will planted himself in the ground and turned his keyblade into a magical cannon. He shot out a giant orb of light the size of the fissure rock formations surrounding them. Sora deflected it back with the Kingdom Key while Kairi ran off behind a rock, but it circled right back around. Sora was engulfed by the white flames of the explosion.

Kairi peeked out from the rock and charged up ice from the tip of her keyblade. "Freeze!" The crystal honed in on the armor, freezing his arm. Breaking it off with just a squeeze of his fist, the
Lingering Will shot another orb of light at Sora and turned his cannon keyblade into a hover bike. He jumped onto it and zoomed straight towards Kairi.

Sora deflected the shot again, and again, and again, and again. He reversed away from it and deflected it into the rock Kairi was hiding behind. Kairi rolled closer to the rock, failing to see the orb.

"Kairi look out!" Sora cried out, unable to move very far. She was slammed into the ground by the explosion from the rock, debris flying everywhere. She landed flat on her back, the wind knocked out of her. The Lingering Will zipped past her and made a quick turn, heading for the wounded girl.

Sora had never ran so fast in his life. Fear grew in his heart. He skidded across the ground to her side. He lifted his keyblade up. "Defend!" he said, forming a dome around them.

The Lingering Will's bike shattered the dome shield.

Merlin the Wizard stood in the Hall of the Cornerstone. Minnie and Daisy were anxious to know how to save the castle. The hall was covered in thorns, eating away at the light the Cornerstone emitted, thanks to Maleficent. It was an orb of light in a giant glass bubble sitting on a pedestal. Donald and Goofy were conferring with Chip and Dale about the whereabouts of Sora and Kairi, but made no progress.

"I got it," Merlin said. He closed his eyes and conjured up a white door with a "T" emblem on the top. "There's a door inside that world that needs to be closed by the keyblade. Fellas, mind showing me where the Keybladers are?"

Chip and Dale handed him a map. "They're where the badlands are. No one ever goes there so we can't figure out their exact location," Chip explained.

"It's very dangerous, even for a ship," Dale added.

Merlin nodded. "Hmm yes, I can open up a portal that can bring Sora and Kairi back, but it will take some time to cast it. The spell has to locate them first. Since we have a general idea, it will be much faster."

Donald was impatient. "But we gotta stop Maleficent from taking over the castle fast," he stomped his foot.

Goofy agreed. "I know! Merlin can stay here and cast the spell an' we go and find that there door we're supposed to close."

Minnie looked down at the floor. "It will have to do. We haven't got much time, and who knows if Sora and Kairi are okay?"

"They're tough and brave; they'll be okay," Daisy reassured her best friend. "Besides, what trouble could those two get into?"

Donald and Goofy looked towards the white door. "Welp, here goes nothing," Goofy reached out to open the door.

"Wait," Merlin stopped the dog. "That is a gateway to a very special world. The nature of it will tempt you, but you must resist at all costs."
Donald narrowed his eyes in suspicion at the wizard. "What is it?"

"You'll know," Merlin answered. He waved his wand and conjured up a spell book. "Now, to bring back Sora and Kairi."

The two entered the white door, unsure of what they would find on the other side.

The dome surrounding Sora and Kairi shattered and blasted the Lingering Will off his bike. Sora reached into his pocket and shoved a potion into her hands. She threw it on herself, her wounds healing but not her stamina.

"Sora look out!" she warned, seeing the Lingering will stand back up.

The boy prepared for the onslaught, planting himself firmly on the ground. His keyblade was in front of him, ready for what the armor was going to do next.

The Lingering Will took his keyblade bike and transformed it again, this time bending it into a large bow. He teleported to Sora and Kairi and shot a black and blue arrow at them. Sora reflected it, but Lingering Will teleported to his side and shot again. Sora reflected again, trying to protect Kairi most importantly. His magic was draining; soon he wouldn't be able to reflect any more arrows. The Lingering Will continued teleporting and shooting.

"How can he teleport so much like this?" Sora gritted his teeth, his magic waning. Kairi used her keyblade to stand back up, her muscles aching and her back hurting.

Sora's magic ran out. The Lingering Will saw his opportunity and shot a beam of light and darkness out of his keyblade towards Sora, locking him in the air.

"Sora! No!" Kairi cried out, stumbling forwards. She reached up to grab him out of the energy's hold but was shocked. She shot out a beam of light from her keyblade and freed Sora from the Lingering Will's energy hold.

Sora landed flat on the ground, his legs shaking. Both of them were covered in dirt, blood, and grime. The Lingering Will was unstoppable.

Kairi jumped in front of Sora. The armor sent out little homing missiles to surround the two. It shot out lasers after lasers at the girl, hitting her body over and over and over. She cried in pain, doing everything she could to prevent Sora from taking the blows. His heart hurt at hearing her pain.

The Lingering Will was running towards them as the lasers finished firing at the girl. She collapsed to the ground, her body beaten. Sora looked to Kairi, mustering up as much strength as he could to grab his keyblade and raise it to the sunless sky. "Heal!" he shouted. All the burns Kairi took and all the pain in Sora's gut faded. The two got up and saw the incoming armor.

"We have to get out of here," Kairi said, wincing at the lingering pain in her joints. Sora got up, helping her to stand as well.

"We gotta run," he told her. She nodded, and the two took off running. They linked arms and activated their clothes. Their shoes felt faster, propelling them forward away from the enraged armor.

They had no idea where they were going, but they needed to flee right then and there to survive.

"Ven..." the Lingering Will's words whispered in their ears as they fled. "I can sense you..."
Sora looked back at the armor chasing them.

"Aqua…You chose a disciple at long last…" The armor's will said. "You're the light of the worlds…Not…Xe…ha…nort…"

Kairi, too, looked behind her.

"Keep running!" Sora exclaimed, the two snapping back to face forward. They had to run; they had to flee. "Whoa what?!"

A man in a black cloak was off in the distance.

"Xehanort!" the armor whispered in renewed rage, getting onto his keyblade hover bike and zooming straight towards the two.

A portal opened up before Sora and Kairi only a few feet away. Within was an image of Merlin, a radiant orb of light on a pedestal, and a mouse with big ears.

The two pushed themselves to move faster, jumping straight into the portal.

The portal closed immediately, leaving the Lingering Will alone in the desolation once more.

Sora and Kairi landed on the smooth glossy floor. Their body ached, and dirt and scratches covered them.

"Oh dear!" Queen Minnie exclaimed. "Heal!" she conjured up an orb of light in her hands. It floated over to the two beaten teens and healed their wounds.

"Are they okay?" Chip asked, looking over them.

Sora weakly lifted up a thumb. "We're okay," he muttered into the floor.

Minnie sighed in relief. "They're okay."

Merlin looked over them. "What manner of a creature attacked you?"

Kairi lay on her side, ready to take a nap. "A suit of armor…"

Chip and Dale jumped for joy. "You two are back! Now we can save the castle!" they both shouted together.

Sora and Kairi groaned. Sora sat up, his keyblade appearing in hand. He pointed it in some direction. "Hmm okay where's the Heartless?" he muttered.

Merlin pointed with his wand to the white door. "Inside there is a special door. Donald and Goofy went on ahead to find it so you can lock it with your keyblade."

Queen Minnie casted another spell to get the two back up with some energy. "Indeed. They probably found it by now. The Cornerstone of Light," she gestured to the giant light on a pedestal. "Protects our castle from evil worlds. Go, Keybladers, and protect our Cornerstone."

Energy renewed, even for a short time, Sora and Kairi stood up and wandered over to the door.

"I can't wait to nap after this…” Kairi whispered, leaning on Sora's shoulder before grabbing the door handle to help.
The boy pulled open the door with great effort, his strength not all there yet. "You can say that again."

Entering the white door, the two ended up in a very strange world. Everything was monochromatic. Sora and Kairi themselves were changed; their intricate outfits were simplified down. Kairi only had one zipper on her dress and wore her old shoes, while Sora was back in his old jumpsuit.

Sora noticed immediately that a bunch of blocks in a circle laid in the middle of the grass before them. "What's going on? Everything's black and white!" he looked at his hands, freaked out that all the other colors vanished.

A woman wearing a long skirt and a cowbell gasped at the empty space of blocks. "Oh no! Our Cornerstone is missin'!" She ran off in a panic.

"Hmm," Kairi thought about it. "The Cornerstone was supposed to be here? I think we're in the past."

Sora hadn't thought of that. "Ooooh, right. So uh, where are Donald and Goofy? And who took the Cornerstone?"

Just then, Pete ran past them down a path with a giant sign that said "Waterway." He snickered evilly. "The Cornerstone is mine!" he declared.

Another Pete, one in simple overalls chased after Evil Pete. "Get back here with my boat you pipsqueak!"

Donald and Goofy, also wearing simple outfits, chased after the two Petes towards the Waterway.

"I think I found them Sora," Kairi pointed to the two Petes and Donald and Goofy.

"Let's go!"

The two chased after the four down by the river. Evil Pete was on a giant steamboat, pulling the Cornerstone of Light away from them in a wooden cage.

Donald raised his staff to the sky. "Thunder!" he declared. The bolt of lightning hit Old Pete instead. He leapt several feet into the air and ran about screaming.

"Oops," Donald said sheepishly.

Sora and Kairi arrived just in time, curious as to why Old Pete was running around in a panic. "Uh what's going on?" Sora asked.

"I don't think I want to know," Kairi said.

"Sora! Kairi!" Goofy pointed at Evil Pete on top of the steamboat. "He's gettin' away!" He took his shield and threw it at the mocking cat.

"Ouch!" he yelped, getting slammed on his back on top of the boat. Tiny birds circled his head.

The boat swung around and got right by the shore. Kairi slammed her keyblade as hard as she could to break apart the wooden cage. In a puff of dust clouds, the container for the Cornerstone was broken.

Sora glared as he threw his keyblade at Pete and knocked him into the water. "That's for kidnapping me!"
The steamboat came to a stop. Pete came up for air, shaking his fist at the gang. "I'll get you yet!" His head got bumped from behind by the platform the Cornerstone was sitting upon.

"Whew," Kairi said, ready to sit down and nap. "Now that that's over…"

Donald and Goofy noticed Evil Pete crawling out of the river and booking it down the path conveniently labelled "The Wharf". "He's headin' for the doorway!" Goofy shouted.

Other Pete ran off in a rage after his future self.

Sora just stood there, unsure whether to be confused or mind blown that there were two Petes. "My head hurts…"

Kairi grabbed his hand and dragged him down to the Wharf. "Let's go and lock that door!"

The gang chased after them, Other Pete sucker punched Evil Pete in the face. Evil Pete retaliated by blasting back his other self with a fist of darkness.

Evil Pete turned to face the gang. "You pipsqueaks don't know when to quit eh?"

They summoned their weapons.

"Neither do you," Sora pointed the keyblade at him.

"Heh, how about a change in scenery?" Pete said, throwing bombs at the group. They were made of little eggs that exploded upon contact.

"Ack!" Kairi, Donald, and Goofy danced around them, trying to avoid their feet being blasted off. Sora leapt at Pete with his keyblade, but he ran off as the curtains fell. They went back up a second later, and the five were in front of a giant building on fire. The fire leapt around, spreading destruction in its wake.

"Wha…How?" Kairi asked, shooting a blizzard crystal at the fire. "How did he do that?"

Sora shrugged as he charged towards the laughing Pete. "I don't know, but we'll just stop him anyways!"

Pete snickered. "You two couldn't harm a fly even if you wanted to."

Sora slammed him straight into the fiery building, collapsing it on top of the cat.

Pete pushed aside the debris, glaring down the teen. "You…" He snapped his fingers and summoned Heartless Hammers. "How about…another change?"

The curtains fell, then rose again. The gang was now inside someone's house. A giant black hole of darkness was in the center, pulling everything into it. Pete laughed as he put up a shield of protection.

"Whoa!" Sora, Kairi, Donald, and goofy yelped as they were being sucked into the black hole with the furniture. Sora gritted his teeth and used the black hole to swing himself over to Pete. He cut through Pete's shield and uppercut him. The cat flung back and stomped, sending out a shockwave that sent Other Pete flying.

Sora jumped up in time, descending down at Evil Pete to swing at him again.

The curtains fell again. That time, the group was on a scaffolding high in the sky.
"Oh no!" Goofy exclaimed, trying to balance himself and Donald on the wobbly scaffold.

Kairi stood on one corner opposite of Sora and Pete. She glared at Pete trying to punch Sora in the face. "Oh no you won't," she declared. She jumped up and slammed all of her body weight down on the corner.

The result was Sora and Evil Pete being launched into the air. Sora latched onto the ropes holding the scaffolding up and swung his keyblade around. It knocked Pete clear off the platform.

The curtains fell and rose for a final time. They were back at the Wharf.

Pete was on his back in pain, his ego deflated. He'd been beaten by a pathetic kid with a key and his lackeys. "Hmph," he grumbled, getting back up. He summoned his version of the white door before him and entered, returning back home.

"And stay out!" Other Pete shook his fist.

Sora raised his keyblade and locked the door. "Glad that's over."

Kairi sat down on the ground, her legs taking a bit of a beating. Minnie's energy spell wore off. "My head…" she groaned.

"Who was that creep anyways?" Pete asked. Sora raised an eyebrow at him. How did he not recognize himself?

"Hello? That was…" Sora began to explain but Goofy put his hands over his mouth.

"Sora, that's a secret," Goofy reminded Sora, releasing him.


Sora walked over to Kairi. "You okay Kairi?"

Her legs were jelly, and her joints ached. Her eyes wanted to close and nap for a few good hours. "I'm so tired…"

Sora smiled. He was quite worn out as well, but not as bad as she was. He leaned down and picked her up in his arms. She gripped his jacket tightly, almost nodding off.

"Let's go," he said, walking back to the white door. "Gotta put the Cornerstone back."

Donald and Goofy nodded. "We'll take care of that, okay?" Goofy said, waving them off.

"Need some help?" Pete asked the two, heading down to the waterway to retrieve the Cornerstone.

Donald held a small knife in his hand, snickering as he spotted the Cornerstone. "Yeah, thanks."

Present day Pete stumbled back into Maleficent's castle in Hollow Bastion.

The woman glared down at him. "You've failed me…again."

Pete gulped. "It was the uh…the brats…again…"

She said nothing as she pointed to a mop and bucket with a pink lace apron on a hook. "Get to work you useless ingrate."
The cat walked over, head hanging as he grabbed the mop and put on the apron.

"Welcome back!" Minnie greeted Sora carrying Kairi. "The thorns have disappeared!"

Sora sighed in relief. "Thanks."

Kairi opened her eyes, smiling at the queen. "Yeah, thank goodness the castle is safe."

"Oh, will she be alright?" Daisy asked.

Sora nodded. "Yeah she'll be fine."

Chip and Dale skittered back in. "We finished buildin' the new ship!" Chip said, excited.

"Yeah, it will be able to withstand further attacks from Hunter-X," Dale added.

"Say, Your Majesty," Daisy pointed to the Cornerstone. "There's a scratch mark on the glass. I couldn't decipher it before but it makes sense to me now," she looked to the two teenagers.

"What does it say?" Sora asked.

"It's a heart with the letters S + K inside of it," Daisy explained.

Minnie's eyes widened. "Oh... Was that there before?"

Sora's eye twitched. Kairi was too tired to care.

Merlin shook his head. "No it was put there, a long time ago..."

"Donald..." Sora muttered. Someone was roast duck.

In the dark steps of the basement, a mouse in a black coat smiled. "Thanks guys, for protecting them when I couldn't," he whispered, running off to continue his search.

The ship took off at full speed. Donald stepped on the gas, giving a fake smile. It wasn't Sora who was torture for his mischief, it was Daisy.

"So uh, where to next Sora?" Goofy asked behind him cheerfully.

Donald grumbled at the lack of a response. "Grumpy teenagers more like..." The two turned around to see Sora asleep in his seat. Kairi clung to him tightly, also sleeping.

Donald snapped a picture to hold as blackmail and snickered quietly.

Goofy felt his heart warm at the sight.

The two rested peacefully, dreaming of the warmth of the islands, and Riku with them once more.

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Missing Journal Entry 21

A bracelet like no other. It took awhile to make it, but I did it. The charms were made to reflect her. A star to reflect the skies above that she represents. A pink sketchbook to represent her drawings. The third charm, a silver X shape because I couldn't think of anything else. I imbued it with my powers of light, so no harm will come to her, even in the deepest of darkness.
I had no idea where I got the silly idea to make her a gift like this. It was just a bracelet, why would she even wear it? Why am I freaking out about this?

VIII wondered why I asked for his opinion on the bracelet. Now he's curious as to who this secret girl is. Maybe I should tell him about her. Maybe… We are friends enough that I can tell him, right? Tomorrow I will give her the bracelet.

Chapter End Notes

Whew, the new Guild Wars 2 release took me by surprise but here it is!

slimjim1516: Haha thank you for the compliment! Hope this chapter lived up to the hype!
"Naminé, I need you to do me a favor," Ansem asked, watching outside the window of the White Room of the mansion.

"Yes?" The pale girl looked up from her sketchbook. The struggle to restore Sora's memories had slowed her progress tremendously.

"Once Sora is able to take care of Kairi, I will be...no longer in the picture."

Naminé looked up, her mouth slightly agape in shock. "What?"

"Right now, Kairi needs me. What kind of a friend am I if I were to let her be able to trapped by the darkness again? But... she'll remember me, and who I am." Ansem had guilt rise in his heart. He hated to do this, especially to Kairi and Sora, but it was the only way, the only way to ease the pain. "Please give Kairi memories of me not as who I am but what I present myself as: an entity from the darkness."

Naminé had no idea how to respond. "Fake memories within her? I mean, I can but..."

Ansem turned around, his expression on his face obscured by his hood. "Yeah?"

"Once her heart grows strong enough, especially in the proximity of Sora's, the fake memories of who you are will fade away."

"I'll accept that, I will be long gone by then."

Naminé was saddened by the self-exile. "Alright, I'll give her the fake memories."

"Thank you, Naminé."

The damage the darkness did to Kairi was far stretching.

"Her memories of the past year will be hazy at best," DiZ explained, looking over her chart on his computer screen. Sora would awaken in only a matter of days. "The mansion will be familiar to her, but she won't remember most of the details of her life here, not until the damage done to her heart has repaired fully."

"How long could that take?" Ansem asked, fiddling with the letter she gave him for safe keeping in his pocket.

"Could be weeks, months, or even years. It's fully dependent on how far she's willing to push herself into facing the darkness with Sora," DiZ answered.

It would be years before Kairi would remember and figure out who he really was. By the time she and Sora returned home to Destiny Islands, he would long be into his exile. But he had done his job of ensuring their safety, and that was enough.

Sitting in the dark closet, Naminé gripped the bracelet around her wrist. It brought to her a sense of
calm, almost hopeful. Roxas gave it to her, before he lost his memory…Before everything happened while she was trying to restore Sora's memories.

She missed him with all of her existence. Soon she would be fading back into darkness…Forever in oblivion.

The door opened, shining in light from the eternal twilight outside. Naminé was blinded. As her eyes adjusted, she saw who her rescuer was. Ansem.

His black cloak cast a shadow over her, but she was relieved at the sun and his presence. "There you are," he said in his deep baritone. "DiZ did this…Didn't he?"

She nodded. "Ye-Yes."

He reached a hand out to her. She took it, standing up and stepping out of the closet.

"Are you going to destroy me now?" Naminé asked, innocent and accepting of her fate.

He shook his head. "Why would I? You deserve to be yourself. If anything, I'm setting you free to live your life."

She gasped. Why would he let her go free? "But…What life can I live? I'm a Nobody. Doomed to fade to darkness."

"So? Doesn't mean you don't have control over your life," he said. "What do you want in this life, before you fade, if that is the destiny you feel is inevitable?"

She thought about it. What did she want more than anything in that moment? Her bracelet rested on her wrist, jingling whenever she moved. "I want to see Roxas again, just one more time, even if he's Sora. I just…want to see his eyes again to remind me he's okay."

Ansem placed a hand on her shoulder. "Then go. You're free now to make that choice. I have a feeling Sora is coming back soon. Enjoy what life has to offer." He disappeared in black and blue flames.

The reality that Naminé was now free, free from the crushing grip of the Organization, the demands of DiZ, her obligations to everyone, including Sora, had not fully settled in.

She wanted nothing more than to see Roxas again. Taking her freedom, she ran out of the mansion and breathed in the forest air.

Freedom. Freedom was a breath of air after choking in the deep ocean. Freedom was pain relief. Freedom was something to beheld and cherished forever. Naminé still couldn't believe it. She was finally free. She could explore beyond her boundaries of the mansion. See the town in depth, what Roxas wanted her to see.

She skipped off into the hole in the wall, seeing the town for the first time in forever. It hadn't changed one bit. The sun was eternally setting, casting an orange light upon the world. People walked about, not taking note of the girl in white.

Naminé walked forward down the streets. The smell of a bakery flooded her nose. Some street performers were playing instruments, and a couple of guys on skateboards zoomed past Naminé, doing tricks.

This was what it meant to be living. She wandered over to the ice cream shop. She remembered
sharing a sea salt ice cream with Roxas once. But she had no money, so all she could do was stare at the shop's big sign, with frozen treats as décor.

Three teenagers walked up to the cashier. "Three sea-salt pops please," the blonde boy said, handing the cashier some money.

Naminé recognized the three as day.

The girl in orange turned to see Naminé. "Oh," her eyes widened. She tapped her friend in a red jersey on the shoulder. "Pence?"

"Hmm?" Pence turned around with his ice cream in hand. Before he could take a bite he froze at the sight of Naminé. "Wha…"

Naminé waved to them. "Hello!"

Hayner turned around, holding Olette's ice cream and his own in his grip. He handed it to Olette who took it absentmindedly. "What are you two gawking at?" he asked. Pence gestured to the girl in white. Hayner looked and saw exactly what they were gawking at. "Who…?"

Naminé beamed. "My name is Naminé."

That floored the three. "What?" they asked in unison.

"Naminé. I'm a…friend of Sora's. Have you seen him?"

The three couldn't help but gawk. This girl looked exactly like Kairi and was friends with Sora.

Hayner turned to the cashier. "Can I get another ice cream please?"

"So you're waiting to see Sora again?" Pence asked. The four sat in the usual spot eating ice cream. Naminé explained in simple terms how she knew Sora and Roxas, but she didn't mention the Organization or the Nobodies, or the nature of Roxas in general. They couldn't know. They wouldn't understand.

They would probably cast her out if they found out she had no heart.

"Yeah," she answered, looking at her finished stick. "He'll show me where…Where Roxas is." Her stomach growled. How long had she had anything to eat?

"He said he's coming back," Hayner informed her.

"Are you still hungry, Naminé?" Olette asked.

"Y-Yeah," Naminé smiled, a hand on her stomach.

"Well then, let's go get you food," Pence said.

Pluto wandered around the World That Never Was' alleyways. He sniffed out the location of his master. The dog was determined not to lose his best friend in all the worlds.

A tall man with flaming red hair ran into a dark portal. Pluto raised an ear at the sight.

He heard a whistle from a dark portal behind him. Whistling only meant one thing.
A friend. The dog ran straight into the portal, his collar imbued with light protecting him from the darkness within.

Naminé carried a bag of food in her grip as she shoved a steam bun in her mouth, walking with wide eyes around the town.

"Careful Naminé," Olette warned. "You'll choke."

The girl in white swallowed. "Sorry, I've never had food like this before." She grinned, sheepishly. Pence laughed. "Haven't been able to see the sights ya?"

A vast understatement.

A dog barked behind them. Naminé, with the other half of a steam bun in her mouth, turned around and was greeted by a dog, happy to see her.

"Oh, hello," she said, her words muffled. She leaned down and pet the dog on the head. She recognized this dog in Sora's memories.

"Whose dog is this?" Hayner asked.


The dog perked up at his name, spinning in circles in excitement. They knew his master!

Pence chuckled. "He likes you."

The group walked past the sandlot, Pluto still sniffing around for his best friend. The group gained the attention of Seifer and his crew. Seifer sat on a bench while a guy in an orange shirt massaged his shoulders.

Seifer glared at them. "Well well, I haven't seen her around," he said eyeing the girl. "Who is she? Transfer student?" he said, bored.

"Uh oh," Hayner said, glaring right back at the guy in a black hat.

"Just ignore those jerks," Olette told her. Naminé finished off the remaining part of her bun.

"That's just plain rude," Seifer shouted back, getting up and sundering over to them. He looked Naminé up and down. She was delicate looking, her hair pushed to the side. She held the bag of food in her grip with a careful grip, a bracelet resting on her fragile wrist. "Aren't you just lovely and sophisticated?" Seifer sneered. Naminé raised an eyebrow at his comment.

Olette glared at him. "Stop it Seifer."

"What? I'm just saying hi," he brushed the girl off.

"Hello," Naminé said to the bully. "I'm Naminé." Her lips were curled up, almost into a smile. "Pleased to meet you uh, Seifer?"

Seifer blushed bright red. The girl was pretty and mesmerizing, like she had a strong effect on him instantly. His friend in orange, Rai, laughed, while the girl with red eyes remained indifferent to everything.
"W-What does she look like?" Seifer stuttered out. "I'll let you know if I see her."

Hayner and Pence pulled Naminé away from Seifer.

"Don't get any ideas," Hayner waved him off.

"Yeah, she's looking for her boyfriend," Pence said.

Naminé blushed at the mere thought of Roxas being her boyfriend. Referring to him as her boyfriend was so alien and strange as a concept to her. "I uh, what? Roxas is not…"

Olette waved her off. "Don't be bashful."

Seifer's eye twitched. "What does he look like then?" he asked through gritted teeth.

"Oh, he has blond spikey hair…" Naminé explained.

"Sora, why are we back here?" Goofy asked. The gang ended up back in Twilight Town, at Sora's insistent request.

"We gotta find the king! No time for backtracking!" Donald grumbled.

"I just had this feeling. I wanted to check up on everyone here," Sora explained, shrugging. Kairi looked at him, concerned. He had this expression of yearning for this place, like it was home. But that couldn't be right; he always talked of going back to Destiny Islands with her and Riku.

"What is it you need to check, Sora?" Kairi asked.

Before Sora could answer, a kid in a bug yellow hat and blue jacket ran past, screaming.

"H-Help! The sandlot! W-We're being attacked!"

The kid ran away in terror, being chased by dusks.

Sora without a word used his Keyblade to strike them both down. More dusks were invading into the marketplace. People screamed, trying to close their doors. The dusks swarmed the place.

"Nobodies!" Kairi exclaimed as she leaped into action with shots of blizzara spells at the dusks.

"Wak! Where did they all come from?!" Donald blasted back three Dusks with orbs of fira.

"We're surrounded!" Goofy told the two teenagers as he bashed in a dusk's head with his shield.

*Do I have to do everything?*

Samurai Nobodies appeared, adding fuel to the raging wildfire. Sora braced himself for the dual-wielding swordsmen to attack.

They bowed to him and turned to stab at the dusks. Kairi raised an eyebrow. "Are they helping us?"

Sora shrugged. "Whatever it is, I'll take it."

The samurais raised their blades, dashing forward and with one strike, eliminated the dusks.

All the dusks dispatched with the aid of the samurai Nobodies, the soldiers bowed once more to
Sora and then vanished.

"You saved us!" the woman from the ice cream shop cried out.

"That was bizarre," Sora mused. He would bask in the worship of the townspeople, but the occurrence of the samurai nobodies following his lead was….odd.

Kairi agreed. "Strange how they just helped us like that."

"We can't dilly dally now," Donald said. "The sandlot!"

"Oh, right!” the two teenagers exclaimed in unison. The four ran to the sandlot.

Before them on the ground was Seifer, Rai, and Fuu, surrounded by giant Nobodies. Seifer tried to get up, but he was too weak to do so.

Sora stepped in between the Nobodies and Seifer. "We'll handle this," Sora told him, Keyblade in hand, charging up a fira spell. The giant Nobodies were dragged by their hammers over to the group. Donald hopped on to Goofy's shoulders and the duo created a protective shield around the beaten teenagers. Kairi leapt into the air, slamming down her Keyblade onto a berserker's back side, knocking it into its own hammer and landing head first on the ground.

The berserker stood back up immediately and swung its hammer with little effort at Kairi, sending her flying into Sora.

The fira spell charged up shot out from Sora's Keyblade and hit a berserker square in the face. It stumbled back in a stupor.

"Wait Sora, look!" Kairi pointed to the dazed berserker. "They're weak to magic."

The two stood up. Kairi, without much thought as the berserkers closed in, grabbed Sora's hand. "Give me power!" She called out to the sky, thinking on magic.

A shock wave exploded from the two's clothes. The magical gear turned deep blue with flames painted at the edges of the cloth and shoes. Their shoes felt like skates. Wisps of blue light followed them around. In Sora's hand was strangely, the Oathkeeper keyblade. In Kairi's grip was her keyblade but transformed into a bow. His eyes bulged at her weapon. "Stealing inspiration from the Lingering Will?"

She looked at her magical bow. "I guess."

A berserker leaped up and was about to smash its hammer on Sora. Sora lifted Oathkeeper up and shot out a small arrowhead of blue light that stunned the berserker in midair. Kairi skated over to the side of the berserker and took aim with her bow, sending out a large light arrow at the berserker. Sora smirked and held his Keyblade out and shot out magical arrowheads in rapid succession as the berserkers continued to be dragged over by their hammers, stunning them. Kairi imbued her arrows with fire, ice, and lightning, taking shots at the stunned Nobodies and finishing them off.

Donald and Goofy lowered the shield around Seifer, Rai, and Fuu.

Sora and Kairi high fived each other. "That was amazing!" Sora exclaimed.

"Impressive," a voice behind them said.
The group turned around. A tall man in a black coat stood in the center of the sandlot. Anger raced in Sora's veins. He held his keyblade at the ready. "You!"

Kairi looked at Sora, and could have sworn she saw blond hair again.

The man was unfazed. "By the way, have you seen a man named Axel?"

"Is he a part of your ranks?" Goofy asked.

"Yes."

Sora scoffed. "Not a very organized Organization, Saïx."

"Did he run off or something?" Kairi said. Wait, how did Sora know his name?

"You could say that," Saïx answered. "Don't let your guard down. Axel will try anything to turn you into a Heartless."

Sora gritted his teeth. "Like I'd care. He would never do such a thing."

Saïx took off his hood, revealing blue hair and an X-shaped scar in-between his eyes, a smirk on his lips. "True, I forgot who I was talking to." His eyes drifted over to Kairi. "And your injured heart heals still."

Kairi held her bow blade tight. "Are you trying to psyche me out? Your words will do nothing to me."

"I only merely speak the truth, Princess. We know very well how to injure a heart such as yours, thanks to you." A dark portal formed behind Saïx.

"What do take mean?" Goofy asked. No answer.

"Let's jump in after him," Sora whispered to them, ready to attack the man.

"Why?" Donald asked the angered teenager.

"It will lead to their stronghold," Sora answered.

Saïx stepped back into the corridor. "Don't be reckless. Do you want to end up like Riku?"

The anger vanished. "What?" Sora said. He ran over to the dark corridor but it disappeared.

"End up like Riku?" Kairi asked. "But... what does that even mean?"

Ansem had told her Riku was missing, but she had no idea he was probably lost in the Darkness. She hoped that wasn't the case. Perhaps she should tell Sora this.

Sora sighed. "I don't know why I feel so angry around those guys," he said.

Oh right. "Sora..." Kairi began.

"You, get out of my town. You've caused enough trouble," Seifer said to the group.

Kairi turned around and suddenly Seifer's face burned like the surface of a star. "Excuse me?" she said to the rude boy.
"Y-You're…" Seifer's face was bright red. Sora shorted at the guy's reaction. Seifer turned to Sora and glared at him. He snapped his fingers and Rai handed him a giant trophy made of four blue swirls, each swirl carrying a pretty crystal. Seifer presented the trophy to Sora. "This goes to the toughest guy in Twilight Town."

Sora shook his head. "Thanks but we're good."

Seifer shoved the trophy in Goofy's grip and glared at Sora once again. "Take care of your girlfriend, alright?" he grumbled, walking away. Goofy nearly fell over from the weight of the trophy.

"My…girlfriend?" Sora asked.

"Your girlfriend?" Kairi tilted her head. Her face was hot. Must be the summer heat. "Wait we're not…"

"Hey!" Hayner shouted off in the distance. Sora, Kairi, Goofy, and Donald turned to see Hayner, Pence, Olette running down the steps to the Sandlot. The three had bruises all over them.

"What happened?" Kairi ran over to them, inspecting their wounds. "You're hurt."

"Heal!" Donald waved his wand, healing the three.

Pence, still out of breath, looked to Sora. "Do you know a girl named Naminé?"

"Naminé?!" Sora shouted impulsively. "Where is she?"

"Naminé?" Kairi asked. "I know of that name but…I've never met a girl named Naminé. Sora, do you know her?"

Jiminy hopped out of Donald's hat. "That's the name left in my journal."

Sora paused, confused. "I, I don't know a girl named Naminé actually."

Olette raised an eyebrow. "She was here; she said she was looking for you."

"Me?" Sora pointed to himself. "Why was she looking for me?"

"She said you would lead her to a guy named Roxas," Hayner explained.

"Roxas?" Kairi gasped. "I…I think I met a Roxas once. I don't know what happened to him though."

"We remember a guy named Roxas," Pence said. "We haven't seen him in a long time though."

Sora felt excited, somehow. He was compelled to find this girl, Naminé. "Where is Naminé? Where is she?"

"Well…" Hayner began recalling what happened, scratching his neck.

Naminé sat upon the couch in the Usual Spot, munching some more on the food her new friends bought her. An assortment of goodies such as steam buns, rice balls, vegetables and even fruits covered in chocolate was in the bag of food she carried about. She threw a meaty steam bun at Pluto, who caught it in her mouth.
"Where did you get the bracelet, Naminé?" Olette asked. "It's so pretty. It looks like it was made out of things from the accessory shop."

Naminé set down a rice ball in its packet. "Oh this? It was a gift from Roxas."

"There you are, Naminé," a voice, an all too familiar voice for Naminé echoed in the room. She remembered it all too well.

A dark corridor opened before the group. A man in a black coat and blazing red hair stepped out. Number VIII. "Why are you here?"

Naminé looked at him with apprehension. "I could ask the same for you, Axel."

"We have to leave, now," Axel said, walking over to her. "Or else the dusks will come for you." He reached out to grab her hand but she jerked it away.

"No, why should I? I'm doomed to fade into oblivion anyways, just let me stay," she declared. "The Organization has no power over me anymore."

Axel shook his head. "Naminé please, I cannot let you stay here anymore."

"Leave her alone," Olette shouted at him, grabbing a bat with nails sticking out of it.

"Yeah, she doesn't want to go with you man," Hayner threatened, his fists raised. Pluto barked in anger.

Axel turned to them, fear on his face. "You don't understand. If she doesn't get out of here, our enemies will find her first."

"You're quite correct, Axel," a dark, deep voice spoke in the void.

"Oh no," he muttered, grabbing Naminé by the wrist. "We have to leave, now."

"Let go of me!" Naminé cried out.

Axel looked to the dark corridor he opened. That was their only escape route, but Naminé didn't have a coat to protect her. He would have to risk it. "I have no choice," he told her.

He pulled her into the corridor of darkness, Pluto jumped in after them. The passageway closed, leaving Hayner, Pence, and Olette alone. Then another corridor opened, this one with Saïx stepping out to the three teenagers.

"Have you seen a man with red hair and a girl in white?" Saïx asked the three of them. The three shook their heads. He removed his hood, revealing his blue hair. "You three are such pathetic liars."

"So what?" Hayner sneered at him. "We're not telling you where they went."

"Hmmm, if you say so," Saïx said, summoning a giant claymore to his grip. "I highly doubt you'll be willing to withstand a fight against me, but so be it."

Axel re-appeared again before them before Saïx could strike. "Enough!" he said. "Your problem is with me."

Saïx remained unfazed. "Don't you get it? If these three are connected to Roxas, wouldn't it be better to use them to provoke him?"
"That's just low, even for you," Axel said. "Leave them alone."

Saïx stood there for a moment, and then a smirk grew on his lips. "Then so be it. I'll promise from the bottom of my heart to leave these three alone, if you give me Naminé."

"No," Olette declared behind Axel before the pyromaniac could respond. "We're not letting you use Naminé as leverage."

Pence nodded. "No way."

"You'll have to go through us first," Hayner said.

Saïx raised his claymore. "So be it. You, or the girl. Your choice. Doesn't matter in the grand scheme of things. One way or another, Roxas will return."

Axel summoned his chakrams to his hands in a swirl of flames. "Not on your terms."

__________________

Naminé sat in the corridor of the in-between. She had only been here once before, and it was as eerie and empty as it was then. She had no idea why Axel brought her here and then left immediately. She was lost and confused by it all. Why did he bring her here? Why, after she thought to find new friends in her newfound freedom? Sadness washed over her. She began to snap her fingers again, and again, trying hard to summon a corridor of darkness to return to Twilight Town and find Sora... find Roxas. "Why can't I see you again, just one more time?" she cried out.

Pluto whined as he nudged her hand. What was a dog to do to cheer this poor girl up.

Axel returned in a corridor of darkness, limping and holding his arm. "Naminé, we have to get out of here," he said, grabbing her wrist. Pluto growled. "Saïx is coming, there's no time."

"What do you mean?" Naminé said. "What happened? You're injured! Why am I even here, Axel?"

Silence. He only looked at her with dread as he pulled her along.

She yanked her hand away at his lack of response. "I demand answers now!" she screamed at him. "That was my last chance to see Roxas again!" she said, tears falling down her cheeks. "I just wanted to see him one more time even if it is just Sora now..."

Axel paused, looking at the girl with pity. He empathized with her pain; he wanted to see Roxas again, at any costs. But he wasn't willing to let anyone get hurt, especially hurt by the Organization. Xemnas was desperate to get his mindless puppet back, and Axel be cursed to oblivion if he didn't do everything in his ability to prevent that.

But he still wanted his best friend back. "Naminé..."

"You're such a fool, VIII," Saïx said, appearing in the lanes in-between. "You let your want of a fake friendship with empty emotions give way to your eventual fate. I'll be taking the girl now." A berserker appeared behind Saïx and swung its massive hammer at Axel, knocking him to the ground.

"No!" Naminé went to his side. Axel tried to get up, huffing in pain.

"I'm surprised you haven't perished in this world yet, Naminé," Saïx noted. "Something is keeping you from fading."

The girl glared at the second in command. "Stop this! I know what you're going to do to me; you'll
"Your powers over memory are no longer of any concern to us. We know we can't force you to do as we need, but even so, your mere presence is useful to our ends," Saïx informed her.

"Get away from her," Axel growled, getting up from the floor. "You will not get Roxas as long as I have anything to say about it. Naminé... Run."

Naminé, her bag in hand, ran as far and as fast as she could. She wasn't a runner; she never got a chance to run.

Axel summoned his chakrams again as he got up, throwing them at the berserker and destroying it in an instant. "Tell Xemnas I resign."

Saïx raised his claymore. "We don't take resignations, and we will not let your heartless existence interfere with our plan. "Don't you know, Naminé, how Axel was going to get Roxas back? By using you."

The Berserkers ran after Naminé, grabbing a hold of her. "Ahh! Let go of me!" she shouted. "Let go!" She tried snapping her fingers again to open a door way, but the iron grip of the berserkers was too great. "You're a liar Saïx! Your lies...Xemnas' lies and manipulation made you lose Roxas before, and it will not bring him back." She was a sitting duck. "Axel!"

Saïx slammed his claymore down in front of Axel, the x-shaped scar on his forehead flaring up. His orange eyes turned all yellow, his pupils gone. "Your feeble existence is a lie!"

Axel looked to Naminé, tossing his chakrams at the raging maniac. "Is it true? You were using me?" she questioned, fear trembling in her voice.

The man sighed as he opened a portal. "Yes... I'm sorry Naminé."

The blue berserker rushed over to the corridor, but he was too late. Axel had escaped.

Naminé feared for her life. The only comfort she had again was the bracelet on her wrist.

The group stood in front of the train Station entrance, still talking about the incident with Naminé and the guys in black coats.

"She's gone then," Sora said, crestfallen. Somehow, he was deeply upset by the turn of events. "Organization XIII got to her."

"Do you know where they possibly taken her?" Olette asked.

Kairi and Sora shook their heads. "No," they answered in unison.

Kairi turned to Sora. "Are you sure you don't know a Naminé though?"

Sora snapped out of his daze. "Huh, oh. Yeah I don't know a girl named Naminé."

"We're sorry we couldn't save her though," Pence said.

Kairi shook her head. "We're just glad you're okay. That guy in the black coat hurt you."

"It's fine, don't worry about us. Save our friend Naminé," Pence asked the group.
Goofy leaned over to Donald, still holding the heavy trophy with four crystals. "Do ya think it might've been Axel?"

Donald nodded.

"Guys it's okay, don't be upset that you couldn't save her..." Sora reassured them. "We'll find Naminé; we'll get her back, promise."

Kairi nodded, clenching her fist. "Yeah. She is your friend; we'll protect her, even if she wasn't your friend."

Sora looked to the Princess of Heart. Something about how she was willing to protect someone she had never met was endearing to him. "Yeah..."

The Keyblade appeared in Sora's hand, startling him. "Whoa!" he jerked back out of his admiration of Kairi and knocked into Goofy.

"Whoahoh!" Goofy exclaimed, dropping the trophy to the ground. The crystals popped out of their holds, rolling on the ground.

Hayner, Pence, and Olette picked up three of the crystals. "That was close," Pence said in relief.

A blue crystal rolled to Sora's feet. He kneeled down and picked it up. He'd held it before. He raised it up to the twilight sun, always constantly setting, never dipping below the horizon and never dipping higher past the clock tower of the station. The light shone through the crystal, making it glow.

"A promise..." Sora whispered, his voice changed.

"Sora?" Kairi asked him, wondering about that voice that just spoke. It definitely didn't belong to Sora.

"Sora? Are you okay?" Goofy said in concern.

"Huh?" Sora lowered the crystal.

Donald could've sworn he saw a blond haired boy in Sora's place a mere second ago. "Something wrong?"

"I...I don't think so," Sora, perking up. "I'm fine guys, really."

Kairi crossed her arms. "If you're sure." Something was definitely off with Sora, and she didn't like him bottling it up.

Sora nodded. "I am very sure." He raised his Keyblade, ready to open the new gateway that appeared. The blue crystal shimmered, creating the keyhole.

"Hey, you youngins," an elderly woman said to Hayner, Pence, and Olette. It was the woman from the ice cream shop. "Have you seen some teenagers walking around with a duck and dog?" She presented them with a bag in her hands.

"Why do you ask, ma'am?" Hayner said.

"I bought them some ice cream to thank them for helping me out," she said with a smile.
"Oh, they just left," Olette said.

Pence walked over. "We'll eat some!"

The old woman held her hand out. "That will be 100 munny each."

Pence pouted.

The three paid up and grabbed three of the four ice creams. But to their surprise, there was two extra instead of just the one.

"Huh?" Pence stared at the two extra ice creams. "How come there's two extra?"

"It was two boys and a girl, right?" the old woman questioned.

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"Sora, we need to talk, alone," Kairi said to him as they sat in the airship once more.

"Yeah?" Sora said. "What's up?"

"Alone, Sora," she said with a firm tone.

Donald face palmed. "You two get a room." He and Goofy shoved the two into the supply closet, locking it.

Sora banged his fist on the door. "Not funny Donald!"

"You'll thank me later Sora."

"Ahem," Kairi cleared her throat. "Talking?"

Sora turned around to face her. They were extremely close in the dinky room. "Ah, sorry Kairi."

"Something is wrong with you, Sora. Please, tell me if there's anything. You're acting weird," she pleaded.

"I…I don't know what's wrong with me. I just feel…so angry at random times, Kairi. I feel like I should know Naminé since I reacted so badly to her kidnapping, but I don't. I don't know any girl named Naminé."

"Maybe the King knows something, or Merlin, or..." Kairi rambled off. Sora had to stop her.

"Something in my gut tells me it's Organization XIII trying to mess with me."

"But Sora, sometimes when I look at you, I don't see you anymore, I see someone else. How can it be Organization XIII if it's affecting me too?"

"You never know with those guys, Kairi. One of them even said they were trying to turn me into a Heartless, like how could they possibly do that, unless they did something to you?"

Her head jerked up to look into his eyes. "Wait, what?"

His expression was serious; the most serious Kairi had ever seen Sora in her life. "Because if something happened to you, I…I don't know what will happen to me."

"Sora..." she was stunned. She was that important to him. "You..." Now was the perfect time. "I confess Sora, there's something else that's bothering me, about what Saïx said."
Sora raised an eyebrow. "What?"

"What if Riku is lost somewhere in the darkness?" Kairi posed the shattering question.

Sora felt dizzy at the mere mention. "No… There's no way he would be lost in darkness, Kairi. Riku is stronger than that. If Mickey was outside of the realm of darkness, then so can Riku."

"I mean I just have this feeling… If something happened to him…" She didn't want to think about it, but neither did he.

Sora with a firm grip placed his hands on Kairi's shoulders. "He's gotta be okay, Kairi. He has to be. We'll find him, I promise."

"You sure Sora?" she said. "I… All I know about the year you were asleep is barely there. If I could remember what happened, then I would be certain we would have found Riku by now."

"Then we'll have to recover your memory then, Kairi. We'll figure it out, alright?" Sora said, brushing a strand of her hair aside. It occurred to the teen that he was very close to her in the tiny closet, their faces mere inches apart...

"You two done talkin' yet?" Goofy asked from outside the door. "We're about to land."

A click. Sora opened the door. "Eheh I guess we should uh, go prepare to land in the next world, right?"

Kairi was left in a daze. They were very close. Too close. "Uh… Y-Yeah. Yeah. Let's um, not go flying out into space again."

As the two blushing red teenagers sat back down in their seats of the brand new gummi ship, Sora reached into his pocket and ran his thumbs over the lucky charm.

He would do anything to protect Kairi, no matter what. He would never let the Organization touch her as long as he was around.

Naminé sat in a cell in the Castle that Never Was. Pluto was with her, never leaving her side.

Her freedom was gone, as soon as it came. "I miss you." She cried herself silently to sleep.

Axel stumbled upon the clock tower of the train station. "I'm sorry Naminé," he said. "I failed you so many times," he groaned. He couldn't go rescue her from Saïx, not with his wounds.

He was alone again. Both his best friends were long gone.

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Missing Journal Entry 14

I found the Organization's computer room. Nothing was interesting on it except some mission reports, many of them all the same. IX was lazy even during recon; X had organized another poker league, yadda yadda.

But curiously, there was a secret room, with a different computer in it. It had so many passwords on it; to decipher it all would take me a while. This had to be a secret computer.

In all, there was thirteen different passwords on it, but the hints were all the names of every single
Organization member, including me. There had to be something I was missing. I put in my title, the Key of Destiny, for the password, and it rejected it.

The computer asked me if I wanted another hint.

"The tools."

What does that even mean? What could it mean?

If Xemnas thinks of us as tools, I have even more of a reason to get inside his secret database.
Chapter VIII: The Black Pearl

"I don't think we've been here before," Sora said as they landed in a new world identified as Port Royal. "At all."

The night was reigning upon the land. Puffs of clouds moved about, floating around the moon.

"Whoa, our clothes changed," Kairi said, looking at her attire.

"Huh?" Sora looked down. His black clothes turned into ragged black trousers and a dark blue coat. It covered his lose undershirt, but his crown necklace was still visible. His hat was on the side of his head, trying to contain his spikes. A red cloth bandanna wrapped around his head underneath the black hat. His shoes were boots, and his gloves were still fingerless but frayed.

Kairi was wearing a deep red coat lined with gold trim, a long pink sash on her waist over her black pants. Her laced-up boots went up to her knees. Her shirt was also white, purple lace adorning the very top collar. On her head was a much larger black hat lined with gold and had a pink feather sticking out. Her gloves were also frayed, but black and tied with blue.

"Whoa," Sora said, not sure whether to be in awe of the magical clothes on himself or on her. She looked fierce in her pirate outfit.

Donald and Goofy were also dressed in ragged pirate wear. "Wow, are we pirates?" Goofy said, looking at his hands and arms. Donald fumbled with his bandana on his head.

"Must have been changed when we got here to blend in," Donald said.

Kairi looked over the ledge of the fort they were standing on to see the ocean. "Wow, this place is very...different," she said in awe.

Sora looked at the canons by the fort. "Hmm, it says 'Commodore Norrington' on these. Who is that?"

"The guy in charge of an entire fleet," Donald said.

Goofy put a finger on his head. "Uh, what fleet is that?"

"The one that works here you big palooka," Donald grumbled.

"Is it that fleet?" Goofy pointed to a large dark ship off in the distance. It had black torn sails and was headed right for the port. A flag with a skull and crossbones flapped in the wind.

Kairi and Sora looked at each other. "Pirates!" the two exclaimed.

Boom! The ship fired cannons. "Cannon fire!" a man shouted overhead.
"Wak!" Donald yanked the three down for cover. The cannon ball hit the ledge the Princess of Heart was leaning over a mere minute ago. Screams erupted from the town.

"Return fire!" the man shouted again.

"We're under attack!" Goofy put his hands over his head in protection.

"Then we have to help!" Sora declared.

"Commodore! We need aid! Shadow creatures are attacking us down by the decks!" a man in a red uniform shouted from the stairs of the fort.

"We're under attack by pirates; I've got no man to spare!" Norrington shouted back.

"Shadow creatures?" Kairi said. "That's our cue."

Sora nodded. "Let's go!"

The four raised their weapons, running off the fort and down the stairs. The soldier stared in confusion as he witnessed two teenagers dressed as pirates followed by a duck and dog run past him.

"Aztec treasure eh?" Pete said to a large group of pirates. His nose wrinkled. They all hadn't brushed their teeth in a decade…or bathed from the smell of it.

"Aye, and the curse that comes with it," the man dressed in a large hat, Captain Barbossa explained. "You help us be rid of it and we'll help you as you please with your…Heartless army."

Pete looked them over. "You don't look cursed to me."

"But in the moonlight…" Barbossa looked up and the clouds covering the moonlight passed by, allowing the moon's glow to shine upon them.

"Whoa," Pete cringed. The crew of pirates all turned into rotting skeletons. "Whoa, you weren't kiddin'," Pete said to the group. "Well if you see two doofuses and two brats holding giant keys steer clear, they got magic that don't belong in this place, and no one knows what it can do to ya, 'specially when the moon is showin' who you are."

"Aye, a match for Barbossa eh?" the captain said, stroking his wispy beard.

"Use my heartless and you'll be set to get your treasure, but in exchange, you get me this red-haired girl. Do we have a deal?"

Barbossa wondered why this giant cat was giving him an entire army, but he couldn't question the deal...Not yet anyways. Whatever this guy had up his sleeve had to be a trick. "Hmmm..."

"I'll one-up your deal, mate," a voice from behind the group of pirates by the doors to the captain's quarters spoke. The entire crew turned around and saw a man in a black coat, his hood up. "Why take the heartless, when you can have Nobodies, faster, stronger. You get us to your treasure and we'll take the chest in exchange for our minions." The man had a card in his hand. "This ace tells all. You gain less and give more effort going after the girl."

Pete stomped his feet. "You again!? You keep gettin' in our way!"

The man chuckled. "Because you are simply in our way. Go back to your witch or whatever her
name is and let Organization XIII take over from here."

"What be yer name, newcomer?" Barbossa squinted at the man.

Number X of Organization XIII removed his hood, presenting blond short hair and a goatee. "The Gambler of Fate, Luxord. I play with the cards in my hand, as do you."

"Show us your minions then, and I may consider your improved deal," Barbossa said. He turned to the crew. "Bring me that medallion, and find a maiden with red hair." The crew all shouted in agreement, hopping into smaller boats to row to shore. Cannons fired off at the port. Barbossa smirked at the annoyed Pete and Luxord looking at the cards in his hands. "You two show me just how your deals are better than the other, and I will consider taking one."

Luxord nodded. "With pleasure."

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Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy reached the docks to find both Nobodies and Heartless roaming about. A couple of men dressed in pirate gear had their guns and cutlasses out. Pete sat upon some cargo and was glaring at the Nobodies until the group came along.

"Hey!" one pirate pointed to Kairi. "Is that the girl?"

The moon was uncovered, revealing the pirates for who they really are.

A chill ran down Kairi's spine at the sight of all of them. They were rotting and terrifying.

Sora stepped in front of her. "Get away from her," he growled at the pirates.

Pete perked up. "That's the girl. Bring her to me, but be careful of the punk's magic!"

"What for?" another pirate said, bracing himself to attack. Sora and Kairi raised their keyblades, Donald and Goofy raising their staff and shield.

Pete's eye twitched. "Weren't you listening to me before?!"

Donald pointed his staff at the cursed pirate. "Thunder!"

The pirate screamed and ran off, twitching as his skeleton form didn't take too kindly to the magic.

"Hey Pete, thanks for the tip!" Sora said.

Realizing what he just did, Pete glared at the group and hopped into a small boat and began rowing back to the pirate ship out on the harbor. The moon was covered again. The pirates returned to normal. The ball of flame Donald shot at them went right through the men.

Donald and Goofy stepped back. "We can't harm them if they are normal looking," Donald said.

Sora glared. "How does that make sense?"

Donald shrugged. "Rules of this world are rules."

Kairi kept her blade up but was still wary of the pirates leering at her. "I'd rather not with the rules right now." The heartless and Nobodies floated about, ready to strike them.

Two men, one balding the other having a wooden eye, ran by with a lady with them.
"Let's go!" the bald one said to the pirates. "We got what we came for."

A shirtless pirate pointed to Kairi. "What about her?"

"You want this curse lifted? Come on, we didn't even agree to get her," the grouchy man said. "Let the Heartless and Nobodies deal with these pipsqueaks."

"Who are you calling pipsqueaks?!" Sora exclaimed, swiping his keyblade at the Heartless. "It's Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy to you! Go tell your captain that!"

The Heartless and Nobodies leaped at them. Kairi noticed out of her eye the woman in a nice golden dress with lace being held captive by the iron grip of the balding pirate.

The pirates ignored the group and ran over and hopped into their boats, following after Pete, the woman with them looking behind her. She didn't cry out for help strangely.

"We have to stop them!" Kairi exclaimed, kicking a shadow crawling at her feet.

"Yeah, they're getting' away!" Goofy bashed in a dusk's head.

Sora took a swipe at a new Nobody, a gambler. It floated backward, its cards hovering in midair. "And now these guys are just wimps," he muttered under his breath. More Nobodies and Heartless appeared.

"Elizabeth!" a man cried out, running across the bridge after the pirates. He moaned in pain as the Heartless jumped him, knocking him to the ground.

"Hey get off of him!" Sora ran over and exterminated the heartless. The Nobodies twitched and vanished.

"The ship is moving away," Goofy pointed out.

Kairi ran over to the man, offering a hand. "You alright?"

The man nodded, taking her hand and standing up. "What manner of creatures were they?"

"Heartless," Donald stated.

Sora looked to the pirate ship. "They seem to be working with those pirates."

The man's fist tightened up. "And they took Elizabeth. I was too late." He turned to the four, an eyebrow raised. "Are you pirates?"

Sora and Kairi looked down at their attire. "Uh...no?" The two said in unison.

"Hmm, if you say so. But I owe you one for saving me. What are your names?"

Kairi placed a hand over her heart. "I'm Kairi."

Sora smiled at the man. "Sora."

Donald pointed to himself. "Donald Duck."

"Name's Goofy," the dog said with a grin.

The man held his hand out to Sora. "I am Will Turner."
Sora shook the hand. "Do you know where they might have taken your friend?"

"No, I don't unfortunately...Unless one of the pirates in the jail knows."

"Lead the way!" Sora said, stars in his eyes. He was going to meet a pirate, hopefully, one that wasn't going to attack or harm Kairi.

Kairi looked at Sora. He was a little too excited to be going into a jail to meet a pirate.

Will led them into the fort. In all the panic and confusion, the guards were knocked out or missing. Only a scraggly dog with keys in his mouth remained, running past the group as soon as Will opened the door.

The sun would rise soon.

The cells were empty; a hole blasted in the brick walls. No doubt the prisoners were able to escape. But one cell didn't have an escape route, a single prisoner inside.

A man with a red bandana on his head laid in the dirt, contemplating life.

"Jack Sparrow," Will said to the prisoner.

The man sat up, his eyes narrowed at Will. "There should be a Captain in there. Who are the rubble you brought with you?"

"They're my friends. They're going to help me find Elizabeth," Will explained. "Do you know who took her?"

Jack smirked. "'Course I do. Captain Barbossa and his crew of miscreants are sail from the dreaded Isla De Muerta on my ship."

"Your ship?" Kairi asked.

"Aye, the Black Pearl is my ship. It's the fastest in these here waters. But I cannot help you for you see...There is no profit in it for me. Your girl is long gone." Jack laid back in the dirt. "Cannot locate a place that cannot be found 'cept by those who know where it is."

Will glared at the pirate. "I will break you out if you help us."

"Break a pirate out of jail?" Kairi questioned.

"What is even your name?" Jack yawned. "Going to turn pirate now?"

"Never as long as I call myself Will Turner," the man answered.

That caught his attention. The pirate sat up. "I'd imagine that's short for William. Good strong name. No doubt named for your father eh?"

Kairi raised her eyebrow. Will was confused as well. "Yes," Will answered.

"And you are?" Jack asked Sora and company.

"I'm Sora!" The boy said, excited to have a pirate ally. He gestured to the two behind him. "This is Donald and Goofy."

"I'm Kairi," the girl said, apprehensive of Jack.
"Ah, the sky and sea, right?" the pirate said. "Alright Mr. Turner, Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy, I've changed my mind. Get me out of here and I will save your bonny lass. But the key's run off."

Sora lifted his keyblade up. "Not all the keys."

Kairi looked at her friend in disbelief. "Are we really breaking a pirate out of jail?"

Sora leaned in close to her ear. "Well this Will guy seems intent on finding Elizabeth," he whispered.

She had to concede. "Good point."

"I can..." Will tried to interject.

"No need," Sora said with a smile. "I got this." He pointed his keyblade at the lock.

"I can't look," Goofy said, covering his eyes.

Jack raised an eyebrow at the giant key. A beam of light shot out of the tip of the keyblade and unlocked the door to Jack's cell. The door swung open. Jack hopped up and walked out, a free man.

"Hurry, we must make haste if we are to find Elizabeth," Will told him.

Jack sauntered over to a small bench that had a hat, coat, sword, and pistol on it. "Not without my effects."

"Looks like Barbossa went to town with the...er town," Jack noted as the group ran to the docks. The fort had holes blown in it, and the town across the bridge had smoke lingering in the air from the raid. The militia was still looking for survivors and remaining pirates. He turned to Will. "How far are you willing to go to save your girl?"

"I'd give my life for her," Will stated, firm and final in his statement.

"Oh good. Now, since we have a crew, we can commandeer a ship and be on our way to Tortuga." Jack pointed to an unguarded ship. "That one right there."

"The Interceptor is off-limits to civilians," Will said. That didn't stop Jack from walking over to the ship.

"Commandeer?" Kairi asked. "Isn't that stealing?"

Sora didn't care; he was staring at the Interceptor in awe. "Whoa, are we actually riding on a real pirate ship?"

Donald crossed his arms, rolling his eyes at the teen. "Sora, you becoming a pirate?"

The teenager was deeply offended. "Wha? Of course not!" he huffed, crossing his arms and looking away.

Jack climbed aboard the ship. "Make way ye scallywags, before that bloody Norrington shows up and rains on our parade."

Will sighed. "For Elizabeth."

The boy saluted to Jack. "Ready to go, Captain!"
Kairi shook her head as she saw Sora run aboard. "At least it's for good intentions…"

Pete nearly popped a blood vessel just sitting next to Luxord on the supply crates as the Black Pearl sailed across the sea. "So where is our destination on this fine evening?" No. X asked, making Pete even more annoyed with his presence.

Pintel and Ragetti glared at the smirking Nobody. "To the Isla De Muerta," Pintel explained, Ragetti trying to adjust his wooden eye. "Stop rubbing it!" He scolded his pirate comrade.

Within the Captain's Quarters, Elizabeth sat at a table decorated with the most delicious of foods. She eyed the table with suspicion as Barbossa took a bite out of an apple. "You can release me. You have your trinket; I'm of no farther value to you."

The captain rubbed at the medallion in his dirty fingers. A monkey sat on his shoulder. "This is no trinket, missy. This is cursed Aztec gold. One of eight hundred and eighty-two identical pieces they delivered in a stone chest to Cortez himself."

Elizabeth gripped her dress, trying to resist rolling her eyes at him. "I hardly believe in ghost stories anymore, Captain Barbossa."

"That's exactly what I thought. Buried on an island of the dead what cannot be found 'cept for those who know where it is. Find it, we did. There be the chest. Inside be the gold. And we took 'em all! We spent 'em and traded 'em and frittered 'em away on drink and food and pleasurable company." He stood up, the monkey moving away to explore the table, and the medallion swaying on its chain in his grip. "The more we gave 'em away, the more we came to realize...the drink would not satisfy, and food turned to ash in our mouths. We are cursed men, Miss Turner. Compelled by greed, we were, but now... we are consumed by it."

Barbossa walked over to the monkey sitting on its perch, placing the medallion with it. "There is one way we can end our curse. All the scattered pieces of the Aztec gold must be gathered and restored to the stone chest. And the blood of every soul who touched a piece o' the treasure must be repaid."

He looked out to the waves outside the windows of the quarters. "For ten years we've searched every league of these waters, every town and village—preying on sailors and settlers alike. Eight hundred and eighty-one pieces we found but despaired of ever finding the last. All those years, you been safe in your bed, readin' your pirate stories, dreamin' of adventure on the high seas—we've endured torments worse than death itself!"

Elizabeth looked at the knife on the table. She slid it across the wood and into her long skirts. Barbossa turned back around to Elizabeth. "But now, thanks to ye, we have the final piece at last. When this medallion is restored to the chest, we'll be free to roam the seas as men. No longer will we be ghosts!" He laughed like a maniac.

The monkey screeched in excitement.

"And the blood that's to be repaid?" Elizabeth asked a look of sheer horror on her face. Her grip on the knife tightened.

Barbossa smirked. "That's why there's no sense to be killin' ye...yet."

Her eyes widened. She sprinted out of her chair and threw the knife at Barbossa, who only flinched out of its way.
Bursting out of the cabin, all the pirates on deck were skeletons in the haunting moonlight. Pete clung to the ropes on the side of the ship, Luxord staring at his cards, not even caring in the slightest.

Elizabeth wanted to scream. She turned back around to see Barbossa step into the light.

"Ye see, the moonlight shows us for what we really are." His body became that of a skeleton, his clothes torn and ragged like that of the deceased. "We are not among the livin', and so we cannot die. But neither are we dead. We've suffered for too long!" Barbossa lifted up a bottle in his grip and sneered at the woman. "You'd best start believin' in ghost stories, Miss Turner —you're in one!" He bit off the bottle's cork and started downing it.

The stench of Tortuga flooded the noses of the gang. Pigs squealed, drunkards lazied on the barrels of alcohol, ladies in superfluous dresses strutting about. Jack rambled on as the group followed him into the rambunctious town.

"...More importantly, it is indeed a sad lot that has never breathed deeply the sweet proliferous bouquet that is Tortuga, savvy?" Jack finished as they made their way through the free town. He inhaled the air around him with a big gulp. "What do you think?

"Uhhh..." Sora, Kairi, and Will had no idea what to make of the town. Donald was annoyed at the lawless place, while Goofy was stalwart as ever.

Will cleared his throat. "It'll linger."

A man with a big mug in his hand laughed as he leaned on Sora's shoulder. Kairi tried not to laugh as Sora had no choice but to stand there as the man's eyes closed and he was close to passing out.

"I'll tell you, mates, if every town in the world were like this one, no man would ever feel unwanted," Jack declared.

A woman in red spotted Jack and sashayed over to him. "Scarlett!" he exclaimed in joy. She simply slapped him in the face, turned around, and walked away.

Kairi covered her mouth in shock. Sora was still occupied by the drunk man falling asleep on his shoulder. Donald, Goofy, and Will stared with wide eyes.

"I did not deserve that," Jack said, turning forward before a blonde woman. "Giselle."

She glared at him. "Who was she?"

"What?"

She slapped him and sashayed off.

Jack rubbed his cheek. "I may have deserved that."

After Sora brushed off the passed out drunk, the gang made their way to a pig pen. Jack grabbed a bucket of water and handed it to Will, and then grabbed another one.

"Why are we even here?" Donald questioned.

"Will this help us find Elizabeth?" Kairi added, trying to hold her breath among the smell of pigs rolling in the mud.
"You'll see lass," Jack said, sauntering over to a man napping on a couple of rather large pigs. He tossed the water onto the man.

The pig man was shocked awake, pulling out his knife in self-defense. "Curse you for breathing, you slack-jawed idiot!" He looked over the pirate who awoke him. "Mother's love. Jack! You know better than to wake a man when he's sleeping. It's bad luck!"

"Aye, Joshamee Gibbs, but I, fortunately, have a counter to said bad luck," Jack explained. "I've got an able-bodied crew," Jack looked to the two teenagers and the duck and dog. "For the most part and I'm in need of a firs' mate. What say you?"

"Aye, and what is this venture?"

"Let's just say there's massive profit in it for everyone," Jack added.

Gibbs stood up. "Alright, buy me a drink an' tell me the profits."

Will took the water and splashed it onto the man, soaking his clothes. "Blast I'm already awake!"

Gibbs shouted.

"That was for the smell," Will said.

Gibbs nodded; he couldn't argue with that.

Out on the sea again, night waned on. Donald stood by the edge of the deck, feeling woozy. Goofy patted him on the shoulder.

Jack Sparrow manned the wheel, Joshamee Gibbs by his side. Will sat upon a few crates, sharpening his sword.

Below them near the entrance to the hold of the Interceptor, was Sora and Kairi sitting on a couple barrels together.

"I feel like I won't get the smell of Tortuga off my clothes ever," Sora wrinkled his nose.

Kairi leaned down and pulled her jacket out of a bucket of clean water. "I'm so glad that there's soap in the gummi ship."

"Captain, you sure of this?" Gibbs said overhead.

The two perked up from trying to clean their smelly clothes.

"I am perfectly sure. It's a matter of leverage as I've said. Besides, we've got those two to deal with whatever matter of strangeness Barbossa has," Jack explained.

"Aye, those blades of theirs?"

"Aye."

Gibbs walked down to join Will, Sora, and Kairi in their little circle. The Interceptor passed by a graveyard full of ships.

"How can we sail to an island that nobody can find with a compass that doesn't work?" Will questioned.
Gibbs smirked. "Aye, the compass doesn't point north. But we're not trying to find north, are we?"

Sora and Kairi tilted their heads at the statement. "Then where does it point to?" Kairi asked.

"Where the heart desires most of course," Gibbs said.

Sora brightened up. "How did he get it?"

Kairi leaned in. A compass like that is very powerful.

Gibbs continued. "Not a lot's known about Jack Sparrow 'fore he showed up in Tortuga with a mind to go after the treasure of Isla de Muerta. That was before I'd met him, back when he was captain of the Black Pearl."

"He was captain?" Kairi asked.

Gibbs took a swig of whatever was in the bottle in his hand. "Well, he plays things close to the vest now. And a hard learned lesson it was. See three days out on the venture the first mate comes to him and says everything's an equal share – that should mean the location of the treasure, too. So, Jack gives up the bearings. That night, there was mutiny. They marooned Jack on an island. But, he had gone mad with the heat, allowing him to escape."

Will nodded. "Ahh. So that's the reason for all the..." He widened his eyes and stared at his hands with suspicion in imitation of Jack.

Sora and Kairi snickered at the on par impression of Jack Sparrow.

Gibbs smiled but continued his story of the famed pirate. "Reason's got nothing to do with it. Now, when a pirate's marooned, he's given a pistol with a single shot. One shot, well that won't do much good hunting, or to be rescued. But Jack escaped that island. And he still has that single shot."

"Wow, I feel bad for Jack," Sora said.

Kairi looked at her palms. "I can't imagine being betrayed by someone you trust like that."

Gibbs eyed the girl. "Aye, keep your friends close. You may have to rely on them most in the face of betrayal."

Sora's hand on instinct reached for Kairi's hand. She looked at him. Ever since she opened up her thoughts on Riku, Sora had been particularly protective of her. Then again, he wasn't acting right since Twilight Town. His flat out denial of Riku being lost to darkness was supposed to be hopeful optimism, but it was more concerning than anything. His light dimmed even a little bit.

She had to remind herself that it was still Sora at the end of the day.

"Make way to land!" Jack Sparrow called overhead. "We've caught up."

In the misty waters, an island with a chill so strong it rattled the gang's bones. The black rocks cut through the fog.

On the rock face, the gang lowered the deck bridge to disembark. Within the island's inner hold in the distance was the Black Pearl.

Jack turned to Will after spying at the Pearl through his telescope. "Alright then, we make our way in, steal your lass away from the miscreants, and be on our way, savvy?"
Will nodded. "Agreed."

"Gibbs," Jack said. "Keep to the code an' watch the ship with Zola, Kiri, Doland, and Gooby."

Sora's eye twitched. "That's Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy!"

"Aye sir!" Gibbs saluted.

"Why are we being left behind?" Kairi demanded.

"Yeah, we should help too," Donald grumbled.

"But you are, I trust ye to watch the ship and make sure none of Barbossa's fools steal it. We'll be back," Jack waved them off. He turned away with Will. "Shall we?"

Will nodded, looking back at the gang before the two men walked inland.

A while passed. Donald and Goofy lazed about on a barrel. Sora pouted on the deck while Gibbs drank some rum near the wheel.

Kairi stared at the Black Pearl in the distance. The tattered sails flapped in the breeze.

"Hey Sora," she asked, getting the teen's attention. "That was Jack's ship, right?"

"Yeah?" Sora responded, slow with each syllable.

"Aye, that'd be the Pearl," Gibbs confirmed.

"If it belonged to Jack then…" Kairi lit up with an idea and turned to Sora. "Then let's get it back for him right now!"

Sora, Donald, and Goofy all had their jaws dropped. "Who are you and what have you done to Kairi?" Sora pointed his finger at the girl.

Kairi brushed his accusing finger aside. "Don't tell me Sora that you wouldn't have suggested the same."

She had a point. "Eheh, you're right," Sora scratched the back of his neck. "Just so weird seeing you make such a bold decision."

"Jack is our friend, right? He had his ship stolen so we go and get it back for him," Kairi added. "They're mean pirates too. Though, it's also a lot bigger than ours."

Gibbs stood up from his seat on a barrel. "Aye but the Black Pearl is the supposed fastest ship in the Caribbean."

"The fastest?" Goofy questioned.

"Yes, as long as ye know how to man a ship."

"We should do it then," Sora said, his fist up in front of his heart. "We'll surprise Jack with it."

"Yeah!" Kairi jumped up with a smile. "That way they cannot catch up to us once Will and Jack come back with Elizabeth."

Sneaking aboard the Black Pearl was far too easy. For one there was no one left on it. Except for a
couple of oblivious pirates in the hold.

Sora, Kairi, Donald, Goofy, and Gibbs climbed onto the top deck.

"Okay the first thing we gotta do is prepare the ship for sailing. But we need to deal with whoever else lingers on the ship," Gibbs explained.

"Wait…" Kairi tensed up. "You mean there might be some pirates left?"

Maybe this wasn't a good idea.

"Aye. No one leaves the ship unguarded," Gibbs informed her.

Sora stuck his head into the hold. Two pirates sat by a porthole staring at a piece of yummy white and yellow frosted cake. He lifted her keyblade and whispered thunder, a bolt of lightning appearing out of the ceiling and zapping the two undead pirates. The cake fell to the floor, unharmed or untouched as the two pirates were shocked into submission.

Donald and Goofy went down the stairs and tied up the two sleeping pirates. Sora turned to his best friend.

"Alright Kairi, now to lower the sails!" Sora said, looking up at the mast.

"Oh dear," Kairi said. "This ship is definitely bigger than the Interceptor."

"It's okay Kairi, once we get this ship up and running we'll be home free," Sora assured her. "If only Riku was here though…"

Kairi agreed.

"Now to free us from this curse, forever!" Barbossa declared on top of a flat rock deep in a cave laden with gold and treasure. Elizabeth stood before a large chest full of gold medallions like the one she had around her neck.

Barbossa turned to her with a knife in his hand, removing the medallion hanging around her neck. "By blood begun, by blood undone," he said, cutting her palm and placing the medallion on top of the wound.

In the back of the cave hiding behind a bunch of rocks was Will and Jack. Will's eyes widened at Barbossa harming Elizabeth.

Jack grabbed his shoulder. "Don't. I will deal with the negotiations. And try not to do anything stupid." Jack moved to enter the main part of the cave before a loud thump stopped him. He fell over, Will tossing a wooden plank away.

"Sorry Jack but I am not your leverage," Will stated, moving closer to the rock the chest sat upon.

The medallion fell into the chest. Barbossa had his arms outstretched, waiting for his mortality to return.

"Did it work?" Pete asked from the back, Luxord sitting next to him counting cards.

"The chances of that are nigh low," Luxord muttered with a smirk.

Barbossa rolled his eyes and pulled out a pistol and shot it at the nearest available target, Pintel, the
bald man. Pintel froze where he stood, expecting death and...not getting it. His friend, Ragetti, looked at him with curiosity as his wooden eye rolled.

"You're not dead," another pirate said, looking at the bald man with Ragetti's curiosity.

Pintel shook his muscles out. "Heh, you're right." His relief turned into a glare at Barbossa. "He shot me!"

Barbossa turned to Elizabeth, who had to fight back a smirk. "You, maid, who was your father?" He asked as he shook her, eyes scrunching up in anger. "Was yer father William Turner?!"

With a sneer, she uttered her answer. "No."

Barbossa shoved her down the pile of gold, out of sight of everyone. "You ingrates brought me the wrong person!" He shouted at Pintel and Ragetti.

Will with quiet steps moved over to Elizabeth. Placing a hand on her shoulder, he got her attention. She smiled at the sight of her dear friend. Gripping her skirts, she followed Will out of the side entrance to the cave.

"She said she was a Turner! She's the proper age!" Pintel defended himself.

"Who is to blame here though?!" A shirtless pirate growled.

Another pirate with dreadlocks joined in. "Every last decision has led us from bad to worse! The mutiny was your plan."

Pintel pointed to Barbossa. "And it was you who sent Bootstrap to the depths!"

"And it was you who brought us here in the first place!" The shirtless pirate pulled out his sword.

Barbossa rolled his eyes as he drew his own cutlass.

"Lads," Luxord piped up, putting his cards away with a flip of his hand. "While I would love to sit here and watch you argue over who is the fool here, your precious medallion is missing."

The entire group of pirated all paused to look around. Elizabeth was nowhere in sight.

"The medallion! She's taken it!" Barbossa shouted. "Now go find it ye pack of brainless ingrates!" He turned to Pete. "Send out your Heartless to get me that medallion."

Pete was ecstatic. With a smirk, he snapped his fingers. "With pleasure!"

"How does this thing work again?" Sora looked at the tiller of the ship. "I spin it right?"

"It moves the ship in the direction we wanna go," Donald grumbled. "Have you never rode on a real ship before?"

Kairi shrugged. "If you count rowboats and a raft."

Donald facepalmed. Goofy patted his best friend's shoulder.

"They're after us!" Will shouted from the cave mouth, Elizabeth in tow.

"Wak! More pirates!" Donald pointed behind the couple in a panic.
Gibbs grabbed a hold of the lever to pull the anchor up. "Weigh anchor! We got the lot on our tails!"

The group went into a panic. Sora and Kairi rushed to lower the mainsail. Donald and Goofy prepared the deck plank to be pulled up once Elizabeth and Will boarded.

Sora moved behind the tiller, grasping the handles. "Let's go!"

Elizabeth gasped for breath once she and Will were on deck. "Hurry!"

"Heartless!" Goofy pointed to the rock face. Flying pirate Heartless flew about. Kairi and Sora prepared their keyblades

The ship ready to sail, it took off in an unknown direction. The sky pirates zipped towards the Pearl, fists prepared. Sora jumped down from the top of the tiller to Kairi's side.

"Let's do this!" Kairi declared, grabbing Sora's hand.

Sora gave a nod. "Together! Give us strength!"

Their pirate garb shimmered with light in a shockwave. Kairi's crimson coat changed to faded blue, Sora's pants and bandana did the same. Kairi prepared her keyblade bow at the sky pirates, taking aim and shooting at them with arrows of light. Sora slid along the ground with Donald on his shoulders, shooting ice crystals at the heartless.

Shadows rose from the deck. Goofy held out his shield and spun in a tornado, blasting away the shadows from Kairi as she took more shots at the sky pirates.

"Get down!" Kairi told Will and Elizabeth, noticing canon heartless spacing behind the couple. Elizabeth pulled Will to the lower deck.

Gibbs got his sword and pistol out, blasting back the shadows and canons. "Aye I can see why Jack trusts ye! Heheh!"

The heartless ambush was vanquished. Sora and Kairi reverted their clothes to normal colors.

Elizabeth and Will came up from the lower deck.

Goofy looked around for someone. "Uh where's Jack?"

Will took pause before speaking. "He fell behind and said to keep to the code."

Gibbs nodded, looking away. "Where to then?"

"Jack? Jack Sparrow?" Elizabeth raised an eyebrow, incredulous to what she was hearing. Jack Sparrow came to help them?

Sora sighed. "Well then, we need to go back for him once we got a plan, right?" He turned to Kairi, Donald, and Goofy. "Jack is our friend and we got this ship back for him."

Kairi nodded with her fist up. "Right. For now, we need a plan."

Goofy scratched his head. "Mr. Gibbs what was that there code Will mentioned?"

"When a pirate falls behind, is left behind so others may roam free," Gibbs said, solemn in tone. "As per the code set by the pirates Morgan and Bartholomew."
"So others may roam free..." Sora repeated. He thought back to Riku staying behind the door before Kairi's sweet voice snapped him out of it.

"Well then, we roam free so we can come back for Jack," Kairi declared.

Sora placed a hand on Kairi's shoulder. "Yeah! Now uh, Jack was the captain...who is captain?"

Gibbs pointed to himself. "Aye usually the firs' mate is the captain but I shall leave it to ye loyal lads and lass."

Elizabeth turned to the two teenagers. "Thank you two...?"

"Sora!"

"Kairi!"

Sora pointed his thumb to his other two friends. "Donald and Goofy."

Elizabeth smiled. "Thank you, Sora, Kairi. And thank you, Donald and Goofy."

"You're welcome," Goofy said, straightening up.

"We must hurry back to Port Royal," Will said. "We'll be safer there, then we can...go after Jack."

He went to the ship's hold. "Elizabeth, your hand,"

Elizabeth gasped. "Oh right, I should fix my wound...right." She followed Will.

Kairi and Sora watched the two.

"Sora," Kairi said. "Shouldn't Will be happy that he got her back?"

Sora nodded, sad that his friend wasn't wearing a smile after getting the person he cared most back. "Something happened on that island."

Gibbs took a swig of rum from his bottle. "Love is difficult, more complicated when it comes to matters of class and heart. She is the governor's daughter; he is a blacksmith. Best leavin' it to them to resolve."

Donald crossed his arms. "Now to the real issue, who is captain?"

"Is it true?" Will asked Elizabeth as he wrapped her hand up with a fresh bandage, eying the medallion in her hand. "You gave Barbossa my name instead of yours? Why?"

She squeezed her eyes shut, shaking her head. "I don't know."

"Where...Where did you get that?" he questioned.

She placed it in his hand. "I'm sorry. I took it when we found you floating out at sea. I feared...That you were a pirate," she looked down in shame.

It clicked. Will took it, brushing off the blood. "It wasn't your blood Barbossa needed. It was my blood. The blood...of a pirate."

"You're supposed to be dead!" Pintel exclaimed in disbelief in the cave as a drowsy Jack Sparrow
stumbled about.

Jack looked down at himself, feeling his abdomen and legs to see if they were still there, and solid. "Am I not?"

Another pirate belonging to Barbossa's crew pointed a gun at him.


Ragetti tilted his head, the wooden eye nearly falling out. "Parley?"

"That's it!" Jack exclaimed. "Parley!"

Pintel's eye twitched. "Parley? Damn to the depths whoever thought of 'parley!'"

Jack put his fingers on the pistol's tip and pushed it down so it wasn't pointing at his head anymore. "That would be the French."

"It's this way Sora, we're heading north, not west," Kairi said, trying to read a map.

Sora moved the tiller a little to the left. "Relax Kairi I know where we're going. I am the captain after all."

Kairi raised an eyebrow, a smirk crossing her lips. "Oh you're the captain? I did not remember appointing you as one."

"It's because I won that race with Riku on the island so, therefore, I should be captain," Sora hummed, amused at remembering his small victory.

Kairi rolled her eyes. "Is it really always a competition with you two? Riku isn't even here right now. What exactly was it you two were racing for anyways because I know you've done more races for other things besides the captain's spot on the raft. You know, why wasn't I involved now that I think about it?"

Sora felt his cheeks get hot. He knew exactly what he raced Riku for. "Nothing else, it's just silly. Don't worry."

"Well now I'm intrigued Sora, because if it was nothing then why did you two involve me?" Kairi pouted with her hands on her hips. "Since you won't tell me and you're going in the wrong direction I should be captain. Captains never hide secrets from their loyal crew."

She moved to take the tiller but Sora twisted it the other way towards more north. "Nuh-uh Kairi, we are definitely going the right way."

"We're supposed to go west." She latched onto a handle and yanked it downward.

"East." He moved it back.

"West."

"East."

"We won't go anywhere at this rate," Kairi whined glaring at Sora.

"I know where I am going Kairi just trust me," Sora whined back at her. Their faces were very
close as they yanked the tiller back and forth, not really going in any proper direction anymore. The boat swayed far more, making Donald, Goofy, and Gibbs wobble on the deck.

"Why won't you tell me then?" Kairi fired back.

"Because there's nothing you need to know," Sora responded.

"If it's nothing then there's certainly no problem in telling me the reasoning for racing so much."

"You're becoming impossibly stubborn Kairi!" Sora raised his voice.

"You won't tell me the truth!" Kairi raised her own tone to match Sora's.

"Wak!" Donald latched onto the main mast for dear life. Gibbs chased after the rolling bottles of alcohol and Goofy tried to make his way up to the tiller.

"Liar!"

"Nosy!"

"Directionally challenged!"

"I learned better insults from Cid!"

"Good, maybe you can get him to also teach you how to find your way around!"

"Guys!" Goofy cried out. "We got a problem!" He pointed to behind them. The Interceptor was fast approaching behind them, and at the helm was Barbossa and his crew.

Luxord stepped forward and snapped his fingers.

"Yer turn, since Pete's little heartless invasion failed," Barbossa said.

Pete slumped on a barrel, glaring at the Organization XIII member. Luxord smirked as a horde of dusks and gamblers appeared. They twisted in midair towards the Pearl. "With pleasure."

Sora and Kairi stopped their bickering long enough to see the incoming Nobodies darting straight for them. "Uh oh," the two said in unison. They released their grip on the tiller and summoned their keyblades. They linked hands.

"Give us strength!" Sora shouted to the heavens. Nothing happened.

Kairi's eyes widened. Why wouldn't it work?

The dusks swarmed the ship. A gambler took out its dice and knocked both Sora and Kairi into the air. The dusks held them in the air, binding their arms to their sides and squeezing to the point they dropped their keyblades, the weapons disappearing upon impact of the deck.

"Sora!" Donald shouted, trying to fire thunder spells at the undead pirate crew that now pulled up to the side of the Pearl.

"Kairi!" Goofy yelled, throwing his spinning shield at the dusks. The gamblers turned both Donald and Goofy into walking cards.

The pirates crossed over to the ship. Barbossa had to laugh. "Ye left yer own vessel behind."
Elizabeth exited the hold to see the commotion and regretted it. Pintel and Ragetti grabbed hold of her.

Sora and Kairi still struggled in mid-air.

Barbossa turned to Luxord. "I see you caught these troublemakers. I am impressed."

Luxord flipped through his cards. "It's a matter of good fortune really. They're not in harmony anymore."

Guilt sank into the two teenagers' hearts. Their fighting caused them to get caught.

"Now, I'll be having back that medallion," Barbossa said to Elizabeth. "Or is it worth more than your friends' lives?"

Across the boardwalk was Jack Sparrow with his hands tied together on the Interceptor, watching the negotiations go down. He sighed. Leave it to his crew to fail to capture a ship and keep it.

Pete sulked in a corner, taking peeks at Jack once in a while to make sure he didn't go anywhere.

"Don't let him Elizabeth," Kairi said while still struggling to break free of the dusks. "Don't let him use us as leaverage!"

"Silence maiden!" Barbossa barked at Kairi. She stuck her tongue out at him in retaliation.

Sora noticed Will crawling out of the hold behind Pintel and Ragetti and onto the edge of the ship. Grasping the ropes, Will pointed a pistol at the group. "Barbossa! She goes free," he declared.

Barbossa laughed. "Go ahead boy, shoot. We can't die."

"You can't," Will turned the gun away from the pirates to himself. "But I can. My name is William Turner. My father was Bootstrap Bill Turner. His blood runs in my veins!" He presented the medallion in his grip. "On my word do as I say or I will be lost to Davy Jones' locker!"

Barbossa nodded. "Name yer terms, Mr Turner."

"Elizabeth goes free!" Will declared.

"Yes we know that one." Barbossa rolled his eyes.

"And the crew," Will pointed to Sora, Kairi, Donald, Goofy, and Gibbs with his pistol before realizing what he was doing and pointing it back at himself. "The crew goes free. Leave, now."

Barbossa gave a short bow. "Alright. Leave we shall. But the Heartless and Nobodies stay," he said, a smirk on his lips.

Pete laughed as various Heartless appeared before the group. Luxord summoned more dusks to surround the ship.

Jack sighed. "I told him not to do anything stupid."

On the Black Pearl, near an island in the bright sunlight, Barbossa's crew prepared the plank off the side.

"Barbossa you lying b-" Will was cut off by a gag from one of the pirates.
Sora, Kairi, Donald, Goofy, Jack, and Gibbs had their hands tied and their backs tied up against the mast.

"That is the last time I ever trust a pirate," Sora muttered.

"You said that she goes free," Barbossa told Will. "But you failed to specify where or where in your terms." Barbossa pushed Elizabeth onto the plank. "Bring the other maiden!"

"What?!" Sora sneered at the pirates grabbing Kairi from his side. "Let her go!"

"What's the meanin' of this?" Pete shouted. "What about our deal?"

"Your heartless or his nobodies? I'm no fool," Barbossa explained. Luxord smirked at Pete, making the cat even more enraged.

Kairi struggled to fight back against her bonds, but she was vastly outmatched by the strength of the pirates. "Stop it!" she shouted, trying to shove them off.

Luxord flipped a card, revealing an image of a broken heart. "I'd say this aligns with our plans, now does it?"

Elizabeth looked down into the water. It looked beautiful, but visible rocks laid underneath the waves.

The shirtless pirate rolled his eyes at Elizabeth's hesitation. "Too long!" He slammed his foot down on the plank, making her wobble and fall into the ocean.

Kairi was pushed onto the plank.

Sora forced himself up the mast to stand, pulling on the rope binding him to the pole. "Pete! Organization XIII! You'll…"

A voice unlike his own spoke from his mouth. "You'll pay for this!"

Kairi turned around to see Sora trying to break free from his binds. He glared in anger at Luxord.

"Get goin!" Pintel slammed the plank.

"Ahh!" Kairi screamed, falling into the ocean.

Luxord smirked until he nearly dropped his cards at a swoosh sound. Fighting his gamblers was the samurai nobodies. "What the…"

Pete's jaw dropped. "Eh?!" He flailed his arms about.

One samurai shoved the pirates out of the way and sliced Sora's rope clean through. Sora ran onto the plank after Kairi and dove into the ocean, his hands still bound.

Luxord threw his cards at the samurais, dispatching them. "What is this new player in the game?"

Donald, Goofy, and Gibbs frowned as they witnessed their friends walking the plank.

Jack looked at the water below. Sora, Kairi, and Elizabeth were somewhere in it. "I did notice."

Barbossa smirked as he pointed his pistol at him, holding Jack's hat, cutlass, and a separate pistol. "That'd be the same island that we made you governor of last time. Now, you get a pistol with one single shot, as before. Maybe somehow you'll make your miraculous escape if you can put up with the lady and teenagers long enough."

Jack's eye twitched at the way Barbossa held his effects. The pirate captain laughed as he tossed them into the ocean. The pirate crew rejoiced as Jack Sparrow dove off the plank into the ocean.

Kairi struggled to break free of her bindings in the water. Sora grabbed onto her sleeve with his own bound hands, trying to keep them afloat.

"To shore!" Sora told her. She nodded, trying to catch her breath.

Jack dove down to the ocean floor, grabbing his effects from a coral-covered rock.

The four made it to the island's beach. Elizabeth untied Kairi and Sora's ropes. Jack cut his own with his knife, squinting at the Black Pearl leaving in the distance.

"That's the second time I had to watch him sail away in my ship," Jack grumbled. He turned to Kairi and Sora. "By the way who was the one who thought of the plan to steal my ship?"

Kairi raised her hand, guilty as charged. "We were gonna give it to you since you helped Will find Elizabeth."

"Ahh, I thank ye lass, but now that doesn't matter," Jack sauntered off.

Elizabeth crossed her arms. "Do you have a plan?"

Jack looked around the trees. "Nope," he answered, popping the p syllable.

"But you're Captain Jack Sparrow!" she exclaimed, following him around. Jack continued to search, seemingly ignoring Elizabeth.

Sora and Kairi tilted their heads as they watched the exchange.

"You sacked Nassau Port with not a single gunshot! You vanished under the eyes of 7 East Indian Trading Company Agents! Are you the pirate I read stories about or not!?" Elizabeth demanded.

Jack paused and looked at her like she grew two heads. "Last time, the rum runners carried out business here and I was able to barter passage off." He walked over to a sandy spot under a lone pair of palm trees. He jumped up and down. He brushed aside the sand and pulled a metal latch. "Seems like they ran out of business, thanks to your bloody friend Norrington." He stepped into the cellar and pulled out a large bottle of rum.

Kairi looked to Sora. "I prefer Gibb's story of how he got off this island, to be honest," she whispered.

Sora nodded. "You said it."

Elizabeth's eye twitched. "So that's it then, that's the glorious tale of the famous Captain Jack Sparrow. You just lied out here on the beach for three days drinking rum."

Sora groaned, crossing his arms. "And I thought pirates were supposed to be cool!"
Kairi patted his shoulder in comfort.

Jack handed Elizabeth a bottle of rum. "Welcome to the Caribbean mates."

Elizabeth took the bottle and shoved it into Sora's hands. "We need to get to Will!"

Jack sighed, popping the cork off his rum. "Unless you or the two hormonal key kids have a rudder and some sails in your clothes, Mr. Turner will be long dead by the time we get to him."

Kairi put a finger on her lip, thinking. Sora took the cork off the bottle in his hands, sniffing the contents. "There has to be a way off of this island," she said, placing her hand on top of the bottle before Sora could attempt to drink from it.

Sora nodded. "Yeah, we can't give up now Jack!"

Elizabeth rolled her eyes, her hands falling to her sides. "Well until we think of a way, I will set up a fire. Sunset is soon."

The sun had fully set. Jack was wandering around the bonfire, the bottle of rum he had already half empty.

Sora and Kairi sat next to each other, not sure what to say. Elizabeth dug around the rum stash searching for anything that remained to build something.

"Hey um," Kairi began, twiddling her thumbs. "Sorry about badgering you about something so trivial and calling you a liar."

Sora looked up at her, a smile growing on his lips. "Hey it's okay Kairi. I'm sorry too. I was lying about well, how it was nothing. But um," he turned his head away, his cheeks hot. "I will tell you eventually, just give it time Kairi. I'm more worried about Riku and if he's okay."

Kairi leaned back on Sora's shoulder. "I understand. I wish Riku was here with us. It would be like how we were back on the island as kids, playing pirates."

Sora's hand moved to her waist. "Yeaah, like how you were a pirate captain and we both had to fight for your captainship."

"Hey, remember when we went water skiing for the first time?" Kairi giggled. "You and Riku were trying to race for best times then too."

"Yeah...I miss that," Sora stared at the Black ocean before them. "We glided so fast over the water like we were flying."

He stiffened up. Kairi sat up. "Sora?" She said in concern.

"That armor that attacked us, it turned its keyblade into a hoverbike," Sora spoke, excitement growing in his voice. "If we can turn our keyblades into that..."

Kairi's eyes widened. "Then we have a way off this island!"

Elizabeth walked over to them, handing them a coconut. "All that is left for food."

"Elizabeth, we got ourselves a way out of here!" Sora said, jumping up from his seat.

Elizabeth lit up with a grin. "Oh?"
"Well uh, kinda, we have a plan," Kairi added. "We need to make sure it will work first."

Jack slumped down in the sand. "Elizabeth! Got any tunes?"

Kairi laughed. "Maybe make sure Jack doesn't do something bold."

Elizabeth rolled her eyes. "I've got a tune." She walked over to Jack and began humming. "Yo ho yo ho a pirate's life for me…"

Sora summoned Kingdom Key to his grip. "Hmm, I wonder how we can make this transform."

Destiny's Embrace appeared in Kairi's hand. "What if it's like our clothes? Where we have to think about it?"

"Yeah, I think that will work," Sora said. He stopped moving, a realization dawning on him like lightning. He raised his keyblade up and tossed it up into the sky like it was second nature.

The keyblade sparkled like a star and came back as a bike with side wings made of silver.

Kairi jumped back in surprise. "Sora! How did you figure to do that?"

He shrugged. "I just knew. Now you give it a try Kairi."

She nodded thinking of a glider and tossing Destiny's Embrace into the air. It returned as a golden glider, with vines of flowers twisting up and around the bars.

Elizabeth ran over, holding a nearly drained bottle of rum. "Oh, is this our way off the island?"

Jack stumbled over, a frown on his face as he glared at Elizabeth. He paused at the two teenagers' strange vehicles before him.

"There will be no living with any of you after this."

"Gawrsh I hope Sora and Kairi are okay," Goofy said to Donald. The two and Gibbs were still tied to the mast of the Black Pearl.

"Aye, if Jack doesn't go mad with the heat," Gibbs said.

Donald sighed. "Well phooey."

Inside the cave of the Isla De Muerta, Luxord placed nobody guards at the entrance. The dusks danced around, playing cards with the gamblers.

Pete eyed the Organization member with suspicion. "So uh, why are you really here?"

Luxord chuckled. "Because the chest can make for some interesting experiments for the heartless. Once they're no longer in our way, I can be free to take it."

Pete gulped. "An' here I was just trying to get Barbossa's heartless."

"Ahh." Luxord flipped his card, showing a heartless on it. "But you must think bigger outside of your scope."

Barbossa stood before the chest once again. "Bring me Bootstraps' flesh and blood."

Pintel and Ragetti pushed Will forward, his mouth still gagged.
"Now let's be tryin' this again," Barbossa began. "Begun by blood and by blood be undone yadda yadda you know how it goes."

"Wait, stop!" a familiar, slightly not sober voice echoed in the cave.

"How in the blazes…" Barbossa stared at Jack Sparrow.

Jack climbed up the mini island to the chest. "I come in peace, and with a preposition."

Barbossa rolled his eyes. "Go on."

"Outside is the Dauntless, with the Royal Navy armed with at least a dozen canons and 5 guns ready to blow ye to bits," Jack began to explain his proposition. "So, may I suggest you don't lift the curse just yet and deal with the idiots."

Barbossa's eyebrow went up. "And you don't want me to kill the whelp?"

"No no, by all means, kill the whelp. But let me add, you can take the ship and make it your flagship. And I get the Pearl, give ye 10% of me plunder," Jack leaned over the chest and casually picked up a couple medallions. "And call you Commodore Barbossa, what say ye?"

He had to think about it of course. "40% of yer plunder."

"15!" Jack fired back.

"30!"

"25."

Barbossa smirked. "Then we have an accord."

Jack threw back the medallions in the chest, piece by piece. "By all means."

"Sora!" Donald exclaimed.

"Kairi!" Goofy shouted. The two teenagers climbed aboard the Black Pearl from the sides, pulling Elizabeth up to the deck.

"Missed us?" Sora asked, tipping his bandana.

Gibbs grinned. "Nah, not for long. Where's Jack?"

"Planting the bait," Kairi answered, cutting the ropes and freeing the three. "We got a plan. Donald, got some firaga on hand?"

Donald raised his staff. "Yup!"

"Gibbs, can you get some powder?" Kairi said.

"Aye, Miss Kairi," Gibbs ran down below the ship to grab more powder.

Sora climbed up the mast. "This is gonna be great," he said, watching the cave mouth with excitement.

"I never expected this from you, Jack," Barbossa said.
Jack wandered around the cave, grabbing miscellaneous shiny objects. "Me? I'm dishonest. And you can always count on a dishonest man to be dishonest." He eyed Pete who looked like he was gonna book it and Luxord who stared at his hand of cards. He then looked at Will. "It's the honest ones you gotta watch out for because you never know when they'll do something stupid."

Boom! The ground shuddered. Pete leaped in the air. Luxord dropped his cards. Barbossa nearly fell over, Will leaned against the chest to keep himself steady, and Jack just stood there, as if nothing happened.

"Ahoy mateys!" Sora's voice echoed off the walls of the cave. "Miss us?" By his side was Kairi, Donald, and Goofy.

"Ehhh?!" Pete glared at them. "Why you…"

Luxord smirked. "Clearly the game is set and match." He disappeared in a dark corridor.

Pete stomped his feet at the Organization member leaving.

Barbossa pointed his sword at the group. "What you playing at boy?"

Sora put his hands behind his head. "Hmm, no playing. We are pirates after all."

Kairi stepped up. "You lead us, Captain Jack Sparrow."

Jack smirked, pulling his sword on Barbossa.

Barbossa pulled his sword out in turn. "So it begins. Pete! Honor our deal!"

Pete snapped his fingers, finally feeling appreciated without that Organization bloke around.

"Heheh, hope you like the darkness!"

A lizard with a lantern for a tail appeared over the chest. Will dodged down away from Barbossa and grabbed a stray dagger to cut his binds free.

A cloud of darkness flooded the cave. They were all blinded.

"Keep yer senses open mates," Jack said to the gang.

Kairi's hand moved to grasp Sora's, a chill running up her spine. "Sora?"

"We got this Kairi," Sora said as he squeezed her hand. "Give us strength!"

A shockwave cut through the darkness. Wide yellow eyes of the heartless stared into Donald's soul.

"Follow the eyes!" Donald exclaimed, pointing at the heartless even though no one else could see his hand.

Kairi fired light arrows using her transformed bow at the heartless, but it jumped away, the arrows missing their marks.

"Aha!" Barbossa said behind Sora. Sora flipped backward and shot his small magic arrows from his keyblade at him.

The darkness caused him to miss.
"Sora, behind ye lad," Jack said to him.

Clang! Jack's cutlass collided with Barbossa's.

Sora turned around and spotted the pair of eyes. He flipped his keyblade and slid forward on the ground, wisps of blue sparks following. The magic bullets homed in on the heartless. It fell over and exploded into a heart into the abyss.

Donald raised his staff, balls of fire emitting from its tip. Kairi fired orbs of light from her keyblade, the fire and light illuminating the darkness.

Goofy tossed his shield at Pete, the force of the mouse shield knocking him down. "Ouch!" He whined.

Barbossa now visible to everyone, Jack continued to clash blades with him.

Sora and Kairi skated about the ground, their keyblades trading shots at Barbossa. He dodged them with ease while parrying Jack's cutlass.

"Sora! Kairi!" Goofy called out to them, gamblers randomly appearing in tow with some pirates left from the explosion outside. Smoke came off of them.

The two separated. Sora fired off thunder spells at the pirates, and Kairi charged up ice arrows, blasting back the undead pirates in the moonlight. Sora shot bullets from the back while Donald charged in with a circle of flames.

Kairi skated over to Goofy, who had his shield lowered and prepared. "Let's go!" She exclaimed as she jumped onto the shield and Goofy pushed her into the air. Her arrows had a clear shot of the remaining pirates hiding near the cave entrance and made its mark as she released three at once. The pirates stunned with electrical energy, frozen, or smoking, were too focused on putting out their magical ailments.

"Get down!" Will shouted behind Kairi, who landed perfectly on the ground. She whipped around in time to see Will stab another pirate in the back before he could land a hit on her.

"Thank you, Will." Kairi bowed to him.

The five turned their attention back to Barbossa and Jack, who continued their duel.

"Jack! You can beat him!" Sora cheered him on.

"Don't give up!" Kairi cheered with Sora.

Jack got his opening. He stabbed his blade straight into Barbossa's gut.

Barbossa laughed at him and pulled the sword out and stabbed it into Jack's gut in retaliation.

Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy all gasped.

Jack's words choked in his throat, eyes wide in shock and pain. He stumbled back into the moonlight, revealing his true form. A rotting skeleton, with his clothes torn and frayed. Jack fiddled with the medallion on his knuckles, smirking with his teeth at Barbossa.

"I couldn't help myself," he said.

Barbossa glared at him, not sure what to think of Jack taking the treasure to protect himself. "So
what now Jack Sparrow we two immortals fight forever until judgment day?"

"Or you could surrender," Jack said, pulling out the sword from his gut. The two locked blades again.

Kairi sighed. "Leave it to Jack to pull something like that."

Sora stared at the battle with stars in his eyes. "That was so cool!"

Donald patted Kairi's arm in sympathy.

"Shouldn't we help him?" Goofy asked.

"This is his fight," Will explained. He climbed up to the chest.

Barbossa pushed Jack back into the shade, his skeleton form fading. Jack retreated away from his former traitorous first mate. He shoved his medallion into his palm and cut his hand with his sword. He dodged Barbossa's stab, whirling around and tossing the medallion at Will. Barbossa paused and took out his gun, pointing it at Jack's crew.

A gun fired off. Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy all watched in bewilderment at the gunfire's echoes.

Smoke came off Jack's pistol, pointed in the direction of Barbossa. The pistol with only a single shot in it.

Barbossa smirked. "Ten years you carried that shot and now you waste it."

"He didn't waste it," Will declared, his fist over the cursed chest. "Laugh while you can, Barbossa." He released his grip and dropped the medallions into the chest, the blood repaid.

The once undead pirate captain Hector Barbossa stood there, stunned. "I feel….cold," he muttered. He fell over. The pistol made its mark.

Jack looked over the body, no emotion on his features.

Pete got up from his smackdown earlier, witnessing the fall of Captain Barbossa. He grumbled as his plans were ruined, again by the intervention of Sora and his friends. Pete ran off, grumbling.

"This ain't over..." he muttered.

At the Black Pearl, Gibbs and Elizabeth watched over a tied up Pintel and Ragetti. Smoke came off of the two very much alive and un-cursed pirates.

"Well then, I see my plan worked out," Jack stated. Elizabeth rolled her eyes, before spotting Will approaching in the back.

"Will!" she cried out, a smile on her face as he embraced him.

"Elizabeth," Will whispered as he hugged her back.

Sora and Kairi looked at the couple with contentment. A blush crept up on their cheeks, their thoughts turning to be about their best friend beside them.

"Mr. Gibbs!" Jack called his first mate to attention.

"The Pearl is ours again, I say we toast to rum, and make way back to Tortuga soon, oh and err Port Royal if the lads and lasses want to return home," Jack said.

Gibbs nodded a grin on his lips. "Aye, Captain."

Jack eyed Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy. "However, I don't think you will be staying, will you?"

Sora shook his head. "Nah, we gotta hit the road somewhere else."

Jack placed a hand on Sora's shoulder, Gibbs handing his captain a bottle of rum. "I tell ye Sora, you're well on your way to becoming a great pirate."

"Oh?" Sora asked.

"Indeed." Jack took a swig of rum.

"How?"

"Let's see, you stole a ship, broke a pirate out of jail, you're clever, you have that lovely blade of yours, whatever it may be. And you're completely obsessed with treasure," Jack listed off.

Sora raised an eyebrow at that. "Treasure? But I'm not…"

"Aye," Jack leaned down and gestured to Kairi. "Treasure is not only silver an' gold mate."

Sora blushed even harder. "Oh…right…Yeah."

"So where to, now that you got the Pearl back?" Will asked Jack. "After Tortuga?"

Jack shrugged. "Wherever the horizon leads me to. I am free."

Will looked to Sora and the gang. "And you?"

"We're trying to find our best friend," Kairi explained. "He's out there."

Elizabeth looked at the four friends in gratitude. "I hope you find him. Thank you, for everything."

Will nodded. "Thank you, Sora, Kairi, Donald, Goofy."

Gibbs placed his fist over his heart. "Our paths may cross again, and maybe I will tell a tale about ye."

"You know Sora," Kairi spoke, brushing her wet hair on the gummi ship. The stench of piracy was washed clean off of the four adventurers. "Jack may be a pirate, but he has a good heart."

Sora shook his hair out, the spikes bouncing back into place like they never were flattened. "Yeah, he was cool, even if some of the stuff he did was just tall tales."

Kairi laughed. Sora felt his heart warm at her mere laughter.

Donald ruffled his feathers out, putting on his zippered cap. "I just hope we don't see that cursed chest again."

"Now where to?" Goofy asked.
Sora sat down in the driver's seat. "To wherever the horizon guides us!"

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**Missing Journal Entry 03**

I had fallen into a coma. I awoke and all of Castle Oblivion was eliminated.

It was…empty. This low feeling in my stomach. My…friend, yes, was gone.

VII didn't care. Once I was determined to be physically fit again, he sent me out to do as I always did.

I wonder if this was me mirroring sadness. VIII explained it to me before he was assigned to Castle Oblivion. My emotions were non-existent, but I had to be feeling something right? In my gut? Or was I just longing for something I don't know about?

I went up to the clock tower after my mission today, because that's all I know, that's all I could do. The same routine. Over and over.

This is getting really boring, really fast.

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Chapter End Notes

I'M BACK YALL. Happy KH3 release! Hope this will tide yall over until the big day! May Sokai be everywhere, and may it be fun for everyone!

This chapter is SO LONG holy crap. I loved PotC so much that it slipped...oops XD
Chapter IX: Arabian Nights

A not-so long time ago, under the scorching sun, where the winds blew the sands from the east, and the land shines from dusk to dawn, a boy and a girl searched out for their best friend. They discovered a lamp, a dangerous, terrible lamp.

No, not that lamp with the golden shine. Nah, the one to the left, the one next to the green one. That one. The one that looks like it will stab someone and join a gang of men in black coats.

Now, do not be deceived by its threatening appearance. For what lies inside might just give the two the best gift to move forward.

The gift of friendship.

And maybe a wish from an oh-so handsome devil of a genie.

It began on a sunny day in the delightful city of Agrabah…

Over the sand dunes, in the heart of the desert, Pete hiked through the harsh landscape. A scarf covered his mouth as the winds whipped around him. A platoon of Heartless with curved moon blades followed behind him.

"Now where is that darn lamp," he muttered, eyes squinting through the wind.

Before the sand dune of the Cave of Wonders was the exact spot where a black lamp laid, a red feather beside it.

Pete's ears twitched. "Aha! Jackpot!"

Behind a rock cliff in the distance was a man in a black coat. His hood obscured his face.

"This will make one beauty of a Heartless," Pete said, picking up the lamp.

The hooded figure snickered. "Under my control."

Dusks and sniper nobodies appeared and surrounded Pete and his platoon of Heartless. "What the-?!" Pete exclaimed. A dusk leapt up and latched onto the lamp. "Hey! This is mine bucko!" Pete pulled back, to no avail. More dusks piled on top of him. Too weak to hold on anymore, the lamp slipped out of his grasp.

The dusks floated over to the Organization member and dropped the lamp into his hand.

"Hey you again?! That's mine," Pete pointed his finger at the man holding the lamp.

"As if. You can't even keep a grip on it." The man walked away, dangling the lamp with his fingers.
The first thing Kairi noticed upon their landing in Agrabah was a red feather on the ground. The second was the heat beating down upon them. "Ahhh, good to see this place again."

Sora stretched his arms, basking in the warmth. "Ahhh, good to see this place again."

The area they landed in was an empty back alley. A worn cloth covered the entrance of a hole in a cracked wall.

"I wonder how Aladdin and Jasmine are doin'," Goofy said.

"And the Genie," Sora added. "Maybe they've seen Riku and the King."

Donald looked inside a stray cracked pot. "Keep dreaming you two."

"You were thinking of the same thing, Donald," Sora said. He turned to Kairi. "Welcome to Agrabah, Kairi!"

She looked from the worn cloth covered hole to the cracked pot. "It's ummm…" She pushed some sand beneath her feet around. "Very sandy."

"The palace is massive and beautiful, trust me," Sora added with a smile.

"Hehe, good," Kairi said.

"How do we even get to the palace though?" Goofy asked, thinking.

"You mean to say we're lost?" Donald said.

Sora climbed onto some boxes. "We are not lost we are just...out of the way."

Kairi heard flapping of wings behind her. She turned around to see a red parrot with a massive beak. "Oh hello there," she greeted the bird.

"And who are ya?" the bird spoke in a loud perfectly recognizable human voice. She jumped back in surprise.

"Y-You can talk?" She asked back.

"Of course I can, whadda think I am? A half brained flamingo?"

"Kairi!" Sora called to her. "Get away from that bird!" He grabbed her hand and pulled her back.

"It's Iago!" Donald exclaimed, rolling his invisible sleeves up.

"Who?" Kairi questioned.

Then it clicked. She remembered that she had seen Iago before. "Oh, Jafar's lackey."

Sora stood in front of Kairi. "How did you even get out of the lamp?"

"Wait wait! Let me explain," Iago pleaded, resting on a wooden plank against the wall. "I was trapped in the lamp with Jafar but I managed to get out. Some things happened and well, I turned over a new feather. Legit. No more scams!"

Sora and Donald glared at the loudmouth bird. "So free as a bird huh?" Sora said.

"Wait Sora," Kairi looked him over. "I believe he is telling the truth."
Donald shook his head. "What if this is his latest scam?"

She pet the top of Iago's head. "Oh then he can prove it with his own actions."

Sora's jaw dropped. "But Kairi…"

"I agree with her fellers," Goofy said. "Maybe we should give him a chance."

Iago nodded, flapping his wings over to Sora. "I wanna apologize to Aladdin and Jasmine. Can you guys put it in a good word for me please?"

"Sure, we can do that, right?" Goofy agreed.

Kairi nodded before Sora or Donald could protest. "Yes, absolutely."

Heartless appeared, surrounding the group. Bandits with giant moon crescent blades danced around them.

"Ack!" Iago screamed, cowering behind Goofy. The gang summoned their weapons.

"Where did these guys come from?" Sora questioned, glaring at the Heartless.

Kairi bashed her keyblade into one. "Not sure, but we gotta take care of them."

Sora agreed. The gang unleashed a flurry whirlwind of lightning strikes and flying keyblades. Sora and Kairi grabbed each other's hands once their keyblades returned to their grip.

"Give us strength!" The two shouted. Their clothes shimmered, turning into a very familiar color scheme. Sora's pants were red, his shoes yellow, and his jacket white. Kairi's halter turned black, her mini dress white, her shorts purple, and her boots white on top and lined with purple on the sides.

"Whoa, this is just like," Kairi said, looking at her own clothes, smacking a luna bandit away without even looking.

Sora looked himself over. It was just like his old clothes. "Yeah, I know what you mean."

Kairi pointed her keyblade at the horde. A giant bright light coated her blade, and an explosion of light burst forth.

Sora dashed through each Heartless, each hit shoving them into the air or eliminating them entirely.

But they kept coming. And coming. And coming.

"Who keeps summoning them?" Sora grumbled, bashing his keyblade through a line of bandits.

Donald bonked one on the head. "Bet ya Pete is behind this."

Iago flew up over some scaffolding, screaming as he tried to get away from the Heartless bandits. He knocked over a wooden box and it fell on top of the group of enemies.

Goofy pointed to the hole in the wall covered in a cloth. "That way!"

The gang ran forward at the first chance, ducking inside the hole.

Donald and Goofy caught their breath. Sora and Kairi leaned on their knees as their clothes
returned to normal.

Iago perched on a broken wooden plank.

Donald held his nose. "This place is a dump."

Indeed, it was. Flies circled around a moth eaten rag. Broken pottery and wood piled up against the wall.

Goofy pet the top of Iago's head with a finger. "Gwarsh, we would have been goners if Iago didn't help us."

Sora sighed. "You're right. I guess we owe you one."

"Perfect!" Iago said, flapping his wings in excitement.

"But, you're gonna apologize to Aladdin and Jasmine yourself," Sora declared.

Kairi nodded. "That's fair."

"I promise I will not screw this up," Iago said.

"Wak! This is a shop?" Donald glared at a sign above the doorway. It said shop in big letters. "Who would want to shop here?"

Iago flew over to Sora and rested on his shoulder. "To the palace?"

Goofy took a peek outside. "Yup, coast is clear."

The gang exited the dinky shop.

They moved forward towards the palace scraping upon the blue sky. Kairi pet Iago while Sora eyed him with suspicion still.

Something black and shiny caught Donald's eye. He stopped by a bunch of boxes covered in random debris. A cloth hung over the box, only a silver of black peeking out. Donald pulled off the cloth and before him was a lamp. It shimmered in the sun, smooth to the touch.

Didn't Genie come a lamp just like this one? Donald picked it up, blowing off the dust on it. He tucked it under his arm and sprinted off to catch up with the others.

The gang arrived at an open gate. Guards watched from towers above them.

"Who is there?" One guard said, reaching for his sword.

"We're Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy," answered Sora. "We're here to visit Aladdin and Princess Jasmine."

The guard raised an eyebrow. "Ahem, right. The heroes of Agrabah. Let them in!"

Kairi looked at Sora. "Heroes?"

Sora gave her a grin. "Yup."

Inside the gate was the courtyard where merchants set up shop for the royals to browse their specialized goods. Ribbons, jewels, and fabric stalls lined the walls. A woman with a jeweled
headband weaved in and out of the stalls, exploring the options before her.

"Hey Jasmine!" Sora waved, grabbing Iago and shoving him behind his back out of sight.

Jasmine paused while touching a white fabric and looked up at them with a smile. "Sora! Donald! Goofy!"

Kairi could feel the strong light coming from Jasmine.

The three boys bowed. Kairi bowed as well.

"It's so great to see you again," Jasmine said. "I never got to thank you for saving Agrabah and defeating that awful Jafar. I am assuming this is your friend?"

Kairi nodded. "Nice to meet you, Princess Jasmine. I'm Kairi."

"As do I, Kairi," Jasmine said.

Goofy smiled. "Hyuck, isn't Kairi technically a princess as well?"

Kairi's face burned. "W-What? I mean yes but I'm not really that type of princess."

"You're a royal princess to me…" Sora muttered.

Goofy and Donald giggled like the gossips they were.

"Jasmine," Sora said. "It looks like the Heartless are acting up again. Any way we can help out?"

Jasmine looked down. "Well, we're okay for now. But lately I haven't seen Aladdin very much. He is always in town."

"Why is that?" Goofy asked.

Donald whipped out his staff. "Is it because of the Heartless?"

Jasmine shook her head. "I'm not sure. He's usually the same cheerful Aladdin but…Sometimes he just seems sad. I asked him if there's anything wrong and he said no."

Kairi placed a hand on Jasmine's shoulder. "Maybe we can go talk to him?"

"If you can, please," Jasmine said.

Sora pointed to himself. "We'll take care of it."

Jasmine giggled. "Thank you." Her eye caught a red feather sticking out of Sora's shoulder. "Sora, what is that?"

Iago popped out of his hiding spot. "Maybe he's got a secret girlfriend! I'll go find out who she is."

Jasmine tightened her fists and gritted her teeth. "Iago! Sora quick, catch him!"

Kairi reached up to catch Iago before he blabbed on anymore. She tripped over Donald, which in turn knocked the lamp he has under his shoulder out of his grip. The lamp landed with a clang.

"Ack!" Iago screamed, frozen in fear midflight.

Everyone paused in the shuffle to stare at the lamp.
"Uh Donald," Goofy said. "Where did you get that lamp?"

Donald shrugged. "I found it. Was gonna show you guys."

Iago flopped down to the ground, shaking. "It's…. It's THE lamp!" He skittered behind Jasmine's feet.

Jasmine wanted to kick Iago away in disgust, but his trembles in fear made her reconsider.

"What's going on?" A man said. Everyone turned to look at the newest arrival.

Sora, Donald, and Goofy waved. "Aladdin!"

Aladdin took his red hat in greeting. "Hey guys!"

Heartless appeared. The merchants all screamed as fat bandits and Luna bandits with blades tore through the courtyard. The gang brandished their weapons, and set to work on the horde of Heartless.

"The lamp! There it is!" Pete shouted from the gate.

Aladdin pointed his scimitar at Pete. "Who are you?"

Pete shoved him aside and dived for the lamp. Sora, without another thought, sprinted toward the lamp.

Pete tried to shove Sora away with his body weight, but Sora had his keyblade at the ready, and fired a blizzara spell at Pete. Pete's feet were glued to the ground by the ice, his fists swinging about to reach the lamp.

A fat bandit blew fiery breath at Sora. He ducked down, skidding across the grass and grabbing the lamp. The palm of his hand slipped over the tarnished metal of the lamp.

Red clouds sparking with golden lightning burst from the thin opening of the lamp.

"Uh oh," Donald and Goofy said together.

Kairi paused fighting with a fat bandit as the two looked up at the sparks forming a person in the air. "Sora, what exactly was in that lamp?" Kairi asked in a panic.

Iago cowered even more behind Jasmine. "Jafar!" He screamed.

Aladdin rushed to Jasmine's side.

A person formed from the clouds. A grumpy looking red genie from the lamp glared at the group before him.

"I am the all-powerful genie of the lamp! And you will bow before me, mortals!" Jafar shouted to the heavens.

Sora looked to Aladdin, who pointed to the lamp in his hand.

Oh right.

"Yeah sure Jafar," Sora said. "So when are you going to grant my wishes?"
Jafar stopped in place. He turned around and grumbled. "Great, I'm at the beck and call of a puny street rat."

Pete stomped his foot and snapped his fingers. "I'll show ya!"

Two giant Heartless appeared, one emitting frost, and the other covered in flames. They lorded over the gang.

The twin Heartless put their staves together and stabbed them into the ground. Molten rocks and spikes of ice burst forth from beneath everyone's feet and sent them flying really high into the sky.

"Wakakak!" Donald screamed, clinging to Goofy.

"Sora do something!" Kairi shouted, trying to reach her keyblade in midair.

"Use the lamp!" Aladdin added, grabbing Jasmine's hands.

Jafar raised his eyebrow at Sora.

Sora held up the lamp. "I wish my friends were safe!"

Jafar snapped his fingers. "Your wish is my command," he said with a roll of his eyes.

Suddenly everyone disappeared in a puff of red smoke.

Sora's jaw dropped. "What...what did you do to them?!"

"I saved your friends," Jafar said, looking at his knuckles.

"Where did you put them?!" Sora demanded. He grinded his teeth while clutching the lamp in his grip.

Jafar pointed to the palace. "In the dungeons, nothing will get them there," he said with a sly smirk. "Besides boy, you've still got those Heartless to deal with."

Sora looked up at the two massive Heartless before him. "Uh oh."

"Free me and I will get rid of them," Jafar said.

"As if," Sora said, summoning Kingdom Key to his grip. "I will fight them off myself!"

Pete ran at Sora, reaching for the lamp. "Give me my lamp!" Pete shouted.

Sora held the lamp out of reach. "No way! Get off of me!"

"Heartless! Get him!" Pete commanded, pointing at Sora. "Get him to drop the lamp."

The two large Heartless prepared ice crystals and orbs of flame to shoot at Sora.

He dove to the side as ice formed above his head.

Jafar floated in the air, watching the show. "Now this is the best type of revenge."

"Where are we?" Kairi asked, pulled at her restraints. Her hands were locked to the wall. She couldn't even use her keyblade.
Chains hung from the ceiling. Dust covered the floor.

Aladdin and Jasmine were right next to her, also locked against the wall. "We're in the dungeons," Aladdin said.

Jasmine tugged at the wall. "That no good Jafar did this!"

Aladdin sighed. "Sora was only trying to save us."

Goofy and Donald were trapped in an upside-down chain rope. "Well we are technically saved," Goofy said.

Donald's eye twitched. "How are gonna get out of this place?"

Iago sat in a bird cage. "Oh sure! Trap me in a cage why don't ya Jafar. I bet he wonders why I escaped the lamp. Pah!"

Jasmine tilted her head to look at Iago from her spot against the wall. "You're not working for him, are you?"

"With how he locked me in this tiny prison, nope," Iago said, popping the 'p'. "I'm so over Jafar anyways." He looked at Jasmine and Aladdin. "I uh um…" He cleared his throat. "I'm sorry for all the trouble I caused you guys."

Jasmine and Aladdin looked to each other in surprise.

Aladdin nodded to Iago. "I accept your apology, Iago."

"So do I," Jasmine said.

Kairi smiled. "Aww. Now we gotta go save Sora."

It just occurred to Aladdin he had never met this girl before. "You're Sora's friend, right?"

"Yes. I'm Kairi."

"Any ideas on how to get out of here?" Aladdin asked.

Kairi shook her head. Her wrists began to ache. "None. I can't summon my keyblade."

A squeak from above.

Aladdin smiled wide. "Abu! He can free us."

Iago leaned on the bars of his cage. "We're saved by a monkey of all people. My hero."

Abu swung down from the chains hanging from the ceiling. He pulled out a lock pick from his pocket and presented it to Aladdin.

"Free Kairi first. Lockpicks don't last long and she can free the rest of us," Aladdin said, gesturing with his head to her.

Abu hopped onto Kairi's shoulder and began to work on the lock binding her to the wall.

"Hold on Sora," Goofy said. Donald had fallen asleep while upside down.
Sora was tossed against the wall. He dropped his keyblade, but the lamp was still in his clutches.

"I wish I had Kairi here. I wish I knew where Riku was," Sora muttered without thought. "We could save everyone."

The Blizzard Lord breathed ice at Sora. All he could do was roll out of the way.

Jafar had very good hearing it seemed, at least for he caught Sora's second wish. "Oh you want to know where your friend is. Fine."

Sora realized he has said the magic words. "Wait no!"

Secretly he hoped that Jafar wouldn't twist his wish, but he didn't count on it.

Jafar snapped his fingers while Sora ran around the courtyard trying to avoid the lava puddles the Fire Lord produced on the ground. In the genie's palm a sphere formed. "Show me his puny friend's location."

The orb changed into the land of Agrabah.

Sora summoned the Kingdom Key back to his hand from across the yard. He reflected the fireballs raining down on him. He glared at Jafar. "You're lying to me! Why...why would he even be here if he's not even coming to say hi? Riku wouldn't just be here and not find us."

Jafar laughed. "You really think I would lie? All it says is where he is. Have you ever considered that maybe your friend doesn't want to be found?"

Sora looked down at his feet, swallowing reality. "That's silly! We're his friends. Kairi and I will not stop until we find Riku."

Something in his heart made Sora realize the weight of the words. What if Jafar was right?

But why wouldn't Riku want to be found? What possible explanation would ever make sense? Riku was Riku.

And Sora was Sora.

Sora's reflect shattered and blasted back the fireballs right at the Blizzard Lord. "Some genie you are, not even granting people's wishes as they see fit!"

A twinkle of light in the distance caught Sora's eye. He looked up, as did the Heartless closing in on him, and spotted a blue dot flying in at hurricane speed.

"I'm HOOOOOME!" a devilishly handsome genie declared. He and the magic flying carpet by his side were off seeing the worlds and experienced singing and dancing under the sea, getting lost in a maze full of card soldiers, walking through a dark city while it rained, and even participated in the search for a lost city. Now they were home.

And Sora needed them most certainly. "Genie! Carpet! Nice to see you again!" He waved with his hand.

Genie zoomed right in to hug Sora, sending the two Heartless lords flying into the walls. "Sora! It's great to see ya again kid." He set Sora down on Carpet. "And who are these troublemakers?" He gestured to Blizzard and Fire Lord.

"Nuisances who dared to hurt my friends," Sora explained. "Got any fire or ice power Genie?"
"Do I ever!" Genie conjured up a giant ice bazooka in his grip and fired the largest rocket snowflake Sora had ever seen. It blasted the Fire Lord to bits. Sora tossed his keyblade up into the air and it came back as a giant silver canon. He pointed it at the Blizzard Lord and charged it up.

"Fire!" He launched a massive fireball the size of a wrecking ball right at the Blizzard Lord. A heart burst forth from the Heartless and into the air. Sora turned his keyblade back to normal and high fived Genie.

Carpet flew up high above the walls. Sora still had the lamp in his hand, his keyblade in the other. Jafar growled. "That's cheating."

Sora held out the lamp. "You still obey me Jafar." He said, taunting the rogue genie with the lamp. "You insolent bratty street rat!" Jafar grew 3 sizes bigger.

The Fire Lord shot an orb of flame at Sora's hand. It knocked the lamp clean out of his grip and onto the ground. "The lamp!" Sora shouted, urging Carpet to get to the lamp before Pete.

Pete picked up the lamp and snickered. He rubbed the side of the lamp with his palm. "I am your master now!"

Jafar sighed. "And what do you want, you pesky cat?"

Pete's ears twitched. "Oh really pally, you really want to go there? Fine!" He raised the lamp up.

Sora reached out to grab it from him on Carpet. "Pete no!"

"I wish for you, Jafar, to succumb to the darkness and become a Heartless under my control," Pete said. "Hop to it, Jafar."


Sora fell right off Carpet in shock. Luckily for him the ground was only 4 feet below him.

Jafar did as he was asked, succumbing to darkness. "Oh boy. Ey kiddo, do you know what happens when a genie of phenomenal cosmic power becomes a Heartless?"

"What happens?" Sora said.

"You're about to find out! I suggest we get Al and the others and blow this popsicle stand before it blows."

Sora gave a thumb up, climbing back onto Carpet. "Good plan."

"Sora! You're okay!" Kairi ran out of the palace doors, followed by Aladdin, Jasmine, Donald,
Goofy, Abu, and Iago. Carpet flew over to her and picked her up as well. She embraced Sora with a
death grip. "You beat the Heartless!"

Sora's heart fluttered. "We beat the Heartless, Kairi. I'm just glad Jafar didn't put you someplace
where I would never see you again."

Kairi put her hands on her hips. "I cannot be rid of that easily Sora."

"Wak! What's that?" Donald pointed to the mass of darkness floating in midair.

"Where's Jafar?" Iago asked.

Aladdin pulled Jasmine closer to him. "Iago I think we're looking at Jafar," Aladdin said.

Iago dove behind Abu. "Okay that's it we're outta here. You can be the first one to face Jafar Abu."

Abu crossed his arms and squeaked in annoyance.

Kairi and Sora prepared their keyblades. "We got a plan," Kairi said, Destiny's Embrace ready.

Sora raised an eyebrow. "We do?"

Genie too, raised an eyebrow. "We do?"

Iago was still cowering behind Abu, who was cowering behind Aladdin. "We do?" Iago said.

Kairi nodded. "We're gonna take this fight to the sky!" She grabbed Sora's hand. "Give us
strength!"

Their clothes turned blue. Kairi's keyblade was a bow. Sora's was now a gun.

"Let's go!" Sora pointed his keyblade at the mass of darkness. Carpet took them to the skies.

Genie pumped his fist. "Oh right!" He created a bunch of blue mini magic carpets and put on air
goggles and a scarf. Leading the charge of magic carpets (dubbed the Air Genie, the companion to
Magic Carpet Airlines), he snapped his fingers and plopped everyone onto the carpets. "Keep your
hands and arms and beaks inside the carpet at all times, and let's go!"

Goofy and Donald pulled out their weapons. Aladdin stood up on his carpet with scimitar in hand.
Jasmine, Iago, and Abu floated on their carpet.

Bursting forth from the darkness was a dark red genie with glowing yellow eyes. There was no
mouth on the Heartless, only swirls of darkness.

"That's a big Heartless," Goofy said, shield out and ready. "What's the plan Kairi?"

"Protect us while we shoot it down, Aladdin distract it," Kairi shouted over the air.

"Got it!" Aladdin flew up to the head of the Jafar Heartless. He swung his scimitar around,
parrying away the Heartless' fist.

Kairi and Sora shot at the giant Heartless with their keyblades. Sparks of magic flew as Kairi
charged up arrows of light coated in ice and lightning. Heartless Jafar bashed his hand into the
tower Pete was hiding in, taking the roof clean off. Pete cowered down, his hands on his head.

"I'm not gonna stick around to be mincemeat! Maleficent better take my word!" Pete disappeared in
a corridor of darkness.

Sora fired off arrow shaped ice crystals at Jafar's abdomen. The Heartless summoned tiny fiery globe Heartless by the dozens, each one with tiny wings attached.

Genie zoomed amidst plane noises, six hands with swords in each one. Aladdin hopped onto his shoulder, and the pair cleaved through the storm of tiny Heartless. "Just like old times, eh pal?" Genie said, spinning like a tornado.

Aladdin hopped onto his mini carpet, a little dizzy. "Yeah, just like old times."

Donald stood behind Goofy, raining thunder upon mini Heartless after mini Heartless. Jafar began raining down meteors upon the entire group.

"To Sora and Kairi," Goofy said. The carpet moved over to them. Donald put up a reflecta shield over the group.

The entire courtyard was in flames. Jasmine, Abu, and Iago ducked behind a spire of the Palace and watched from afar.

Genie pulled Aladdin over to inside the gang's dome. "Got any other ideas?" Aladdin asked, shaking his dizziness off.

Sora looked at the possessed genie. In his side was a large scar, like someone stabbed a sword inside it.

"Genie, can you get us to Jafar's side?" Sora said, pointing to the scar.

"Absolutely." Genie floated in front of everyone. "Hold onto your butts, it's gonna be a bumpy ride."

Donald lifted his staff to the sky. "Protect!"

Goofy bashed a Heartless out of the dome. "Ready to go."

With the charge being super powered by Genie bull rushing past the meteors and swarm of Heartless, the gang zoomed straight to Jafar's side.

Aladdin jumped up to it and inflicted tiny cuts by his sword like lightning. Kairi and Sora put their keyblades together.

"Take this!" They led one giant swipe of light and the Heartless began to shake.

A heart covered in darkness burst forth from the chest of Jafar's Heartless. The body faded away in black smoke.

Genie hugged Aladdin. "Oh Al I missed ya!"

Jasmine, Abu, and Iago flew over on their carpet. "Wow. You did it," Iago said, jaw dropped at how Jafar was gone forever.

Donald pointed to himself. "We are the heroes of Agrabah after all."

"Err Genie," Goofy looked at the destroyed courtyard. "Can ya fix Agrabah?"

Genie set down Aladdin. "One fixed up brand new Agrabah coming right up!"
Aladdin shook his head with a smile. "Just the way it was please."

Genie's shoulders dropped. "Really? Same old same old?"

Aladdin, Jasmine, Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy all nodded.

Genie snapped his fingers. Fireworks of magic dashed about, repairing the damaged buildings in rains of sparkles. "Next time let me put in a few swimming pools, okay Al?"

"You got it Genie." Aladdin laughed.

On the ground of the courtyard, everyone shared a chat.

"Thanks guys for helping us with Jafar again," Aladdin said. "We couldn't have done it without you. Though, I wish I knew who that guy was."

"That's Pete. He's plotting with the Heartless," Kairi explained. "He got away again. At least we defeated his new Heartless."

Iago walked about on the stone. "And a relief at that. I don't think I can take any more of his failed insults."

"You should stay for a small party," Jasmine insisted. "Please?"

Aladdin agreed. "Yeah. We hardly got any time to catch up."

Goofy nodded. "Sure, we can spare some time to sit down and rest."

Donald fluffed his feathers and rolled his muscles. "That battle took a lot of outta me." He looked around. "Where did Sora and Genie go?"

Kairi shrugged. "Good question. They said they would be back later."

Jasmine pulled Aladdin along. "Come, I will ask for the servants to set it all up," she said. She pointed to Iago and Abu. "Now boys, be on your best behavior, or else I will reconsider that apology."

Iago saluted. "No trouble here ma'am!" He flapped his wings and perched on Aladdin's shoulder. "Besides, there better be some grub at this shindig."

The gang walked into the vast palace. Kairi looked behind her, wondering exactly where Sora went.

Up above on a spire overlooking the gates was a man in a black coat. "Heh, who knew so much damage could be caused by one little dusty lamp."

"You sure Genie that this will work?" Sora asked, looking over his new attire that Genie conjured up for him. He wore a dark red coat embroidered with gold. A small crown of gold sat on his head. "She's just...not any princess."

"Oh kiddo you'll be fine. I got your back. Now, go wow 'em!" Genie pushed Sora forward. "This is your third wish after all."

Sora took a deep breath. "Right. Okay."
In the dining hall, everyone sat at a long table. Iago plucked grapes from a vine one by one and dropped them in his mouth. "I can get used to this," he said.

Jasmine rolled her eyes at Iago. Aladdin placed a hand on hers. "How much trouble can a bird cause, Jasmine?"

She shook her head with a smile. "He has proven he means well."

Donald shoved his face in with some mutton. Goofy drank too much wine by accident. Abu tried sneaking away with some rare item again.

Kairi sat on the edge, finishing her serving of sweet chocolate. "This is so good, Princess Jasmine."

"Thank you, Kairi," Jasmine said.

"Where is Sora? It's almost dark, and the party is almost over," Kairi said, slumping down on her cushion seat.

Genie opened the doors to the dining hall. "Presenting the greatest, strongest, and most loyal of them all, Sora, Chosen Hero of the Keyblade!" He rolled out a carpet and gestured to Sora.

All heads turned to look at Sora. Kairi gasped as she looked him over. He looked just like a prince.

"S-Sora?" Kairi questioned, trying to make sure this was her Sora.

Sora bowed to her and kissed her hand. "Princess Kairi."

"What's all this?" She tilted her head at him. "Such grandstanding."

Sora cleared his throat. "Well uh, well um, I wanted to ask you if you wanted to uh, take a walk through the gardens? Genie told me it's beautiful at night and…"

"Of course Sora," Kairi said. She looked to Donald who was still stuffing his face and Goofy who was asleep on the table. "We'll be here a while anyways."

Aladdin gave a thumbs up to Sora, while Jasmine waved.

Kairi stood up and followed Sora to the gardens. Genie shuffled quietly behind them, Carpet following.

Iago plucked another grape from a vine. "Ahh young love."

In the royal gardens, by a large fountain, Sora and Kairi walked side by side.

"So Sora, why all," Kairi gestured to his attire. "All this?"

"This? Well um, er, I kinda just wanted to show you the sights of Agrabah when there isn't a battle and…Okay I admit it," Sora scratched his head. "I figured if I was going to be at the side of a princess I should meet the standards of a princess."

Kairi tilted her head. "Sora you know that I am not that type of princess."

"You're a Princess of Heart, kinda goes with the title," Sora said. His face was red. Why was he doing all this? He couldn't figure it out. Why did he ask for Genie to basically be his wingman and dress him up to impress Kairi. "Even when we were kids, you were the royal princess."
"That was us playing pretend," Kairi added, a smile of bemusement on her lips. "But I do have to admit, you look quite dashing in that princely look of yours."

His face could not get any more red. "T-Thank you, Kairi."

Genie conjured up an orchestra, with him as the conductor. A slow waltz began to play. Carpet lit candles on the sides of the large fountain, illuminating the night.

"Whoa, it's so pretty here," Kairi said in awe, the candles lighting the dark.

Genie winked at Sora. Sora bit his lip and reached out his hand. "M-May I have this dance, Princess Kairi?"

Kairi was taken aback by the request. He wanted to dance with her. Right here, while he was dressed like a prince, like in those fairytales she read about as a child. She didn't know what to think about all this.

The only thing she could think of was her answer. "Of course Sora." She took his hand. "Do you even know how to ballroom dance?"

He froze. "Good question I don't know."

She laughed. "It's like in those stories. One hand on my waist, I put mine on your shoulder." He moved his hand onto her waist, to his ever increasing blush. "And we sway, I guess."

"You guess?" He said, eyebrow quirked.

"I've never danced a waltz before," She said, a blush creeping up on her cheeks.

"Oh right. Yeah." Sora internally cursed the lack of occasions for waltzes on the islands.

"So Sora," Kairi said, snapping him out of his thoughts. "Did you wish anything else from Jafar before he became a Heartless?"

He spun her around. He had no idea where he got that confidence from. "Well um…I wished I knew where Riku was."

"What did Jafar say?"

"That he's here in Agrabah, but I didn't believe him," Sora said. "Why wouldn't Riku help us?"

The pair continued to sway. Kairi bit her lip in thought. "Maybe he thought you could handle it. You're strong Sora."

Sora smiled, shaking his head. "My friends are my strength."

"That is certainly true, but…" Kairi gripped his shoulder tighter. "You're stronger than you believe, Sora."

"I guess you're right Kairi. Where do you think Riku is now?"

"Somewhere safe I hope. We'll find him Sora. I promise."

Sora dipped her, confidence surging in his veins. She giggled, which made Sora laugh.

Genie wiped a tear from his eye as he continued to play the music.
In a dark corner hidden behind a bush, a man in a black coat smiled underneath his hood.

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**Missing Journal Entry 06**

VIII was alive. As alive as a Nobody can get. He showed up one day just as I finished my mission in Twilight Town, before I could attempt to get into that mansion.

He has some explaining to do.

I asked him the nature of friendship, and he said all he could remember was that they hang out and do stuff together. Sitting on that clock tower, eating sea salt ice cream, I thought long and hard about it. Companionship was important. Wanted. Needed. The kids running around, joking, laughing. They seemed….happier with it.

Happiness was a strong emotion, one I could only dream of experiencing.

At least VIII's companionship was enough for me.

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**Chapter End Notes**

Hello! Man is this what it's like to live in a Post KH3 world?

One more world to go! Then we head back to Hollow Bastion ;D

Also the cover for this fic is being worked on, but for now I decided to replace it with a heart made of blue (Sora) and Light Red/Pink (Kairi) for the time being.

Sending thanks to my beta Dusky-Dancing for editing and reviewing all my previous chapters once again. :)

THOUGHTS ON KH3 (MILD SPOILERS)

I really loved KH3, however KH2 imo has a stronger story. Kairi's treatment infuriated me to the point I will write a sequel to this story and dub it the KH3 fix fic. So yes, I will do KH3 in this AU. No, it will not have Dream Drop Distance involved, or 0.2 Birth By Sleep.

See ya next chapter!
Chapter X: What's This?

Jack Skellington opened a door shaped like a tree, all decorated with ornaments on green paint. Within the doorway were swirls of snowflakes and the scent of fresh gingerbread. He stepped into the magical vortex, and found himself falling.

"Whoa!" Kairi looked down at her attire. She wore a purple robe with brass armor on her sleeves. A large indigo hat rested on her head, angled so one of her eyes was shaded.

Sora was back in his black winged vampire costume. Donald was a mummy with no torso, and Goofy was Frankenstein.

"Where are we?" Kairi lifted her arms up and admired the long sleeves.

"Halloween Town," Sora said, grinning. "Remember when we used to trick or treat as kids?"

"And you kept knocking on Riku's house the most because his mom gave out the best candy?" Kairi said, making Sora blush.

"I mean she gave out these large jumbo sized chocolate bars!" Sora said, hands out to show the size.

Goofy tilted his head, looking at the town square. "Why is there a ramp?"

"Wak!" Donald nearly jumped out of his gauze as a ghostly dog floated about.

"Oh it's Zero!" Sora waved to the dog. "How have you been boy?"

Zero tilted his head up to the sky.

"Is that Jack?" Goofy said.

Indeed it was. The gang gawked as skeleton reindeer pulled a sleigh made from metal and rotting wood along, Jack Skellington sitting in the seat. The sleigh landed on a ramp and slowed to a stop.

"Merry Christmas!" Jack waved to the gang. "Sora! Donald! Goofy!"

Sora and Goofy tilted their heads. "Merry Christmas?" Sora said. "Don't you mean 'Happy Halloween'?"

"Of course! Halloween greetings from Jack Skellington, the Pumpkin King!" Everyone flinched at Jack's terrifying skeletal glare. A smile formed on his face and joy took over. "Forgive me, I've been in a Christmas mood." He presented his hand to Kairi. "And who is this lovely lady?"

Sora gestured to Kairi. "Jack, this is Kairi. Kairi, Jack."

She shook his bone hand. "Nice to meet you Jack Skellington. What's with the Christmas things?"
"I thought I would help run the show this year. Sandy Claws, after all, probably needs help, and I want to give him whatever aid he needs," Jack gestured to the sleigh. "Well, as soon as Sally finishes up her work."

"Sandy Claws?" Sora asked, tilting his head.

"I think he means Santa Claus," said Goofy.


"Oh no!" Jack said. "Prepare yourselves friends." He charged in with a flurry of fire and ice crystals; the shadows evaporated. Donald rained down a storm of ice, with Goofy's shield tornado tossing the Heartless in the air.

A large grave Heartless floated about the town square. Ghouls encircled the tombstone like a shield.

"Sora!" Kairi called out to him, shooting a fireball out of her keyblade and blasting back the grave, but not removing the mini ghouls. "Together?"

He bashed a soldier in the head. "Right!" He grabbed her hand and shouted to the heavens. "Give us strength!" His pumpkin mask changed to a red and black heart. Kairi's witch hat turned light purple with a heart just like Sora's on it.

Kairi's keyblade became a large beam of light. She charged it up while Sora leapt up into the air and fired volleys of prismatic light directly at the Graveyard. The ghouls vanished, leaving only the tombstone. The tombstone went back inside its box and out popped a demented jack-o-lantern in a box with a knife and a drill. Kairi's blade charge finished.

"Hyaa!" She flew in straight for the kill. Her blade of light cut through the jack-in-a-box. A heart burst forth from the box and disappeared.

Keyblades and weapons put away, the gang looked at Jack with concern.

"That Heartless was particularly strong," Donald said. "It took two big attacks from Sora and Kairi to beat."

Goofy put a finger on his head in thought. "Gwarsh, I hope that Maleficent or the Organization isn't here to ruin Christmas."

Sora scoffed. "With our luck it'll be just Pete."

A woman made of patches and yarn ran over from a top of a set of stairs leading to a house. "Jack! Sora! I heard the commotion and wanted to make sure you're okay."

Jack grabbed her hands, a smile on his face making her flustered. "Everything is alright, Sally. Just some troublemakers. Is it done yet?"

She shook her head. "No Jack. I need a bit more time."

Jack was not disappointed in the slightest. "That's okay! Take all the time you need. I'll just show our friends around Christmas Town in the meantime. Come along my fellow friends." He walked off and out of the town square.

Sally's lips curled into a frown. "Sora, can you make sure that something doesn't go wrong? I'm
afraid with everything Jack is doing, something terrible will happen."

"No worries," Sora pointed to himself. "Everything will be just fine."

Somehow, Kairi knew in her heart something had already gone terribly wrong. She couldn't make that promise.

The gang followed after Jack through the graveyard past the curly hill and into the woods.

A shiver trailed up the spines of Kairi, Donald, and Goofy. Halloween Town was pretty terrifying with how dreary and dark it was. Sora seemed immune to its effects, somehow.

"You're extra upbeat, Sora," Goofy said.

Kairi ribbed her best friend with her elbow. "Yeah Sora, what's up?"

Sora's dumb smile got bigger. "I'm just excited to see Santa!"

"I thought you didn't believe in Santa Claus," she said with a sly smile. "You said so when Riku told you he wasn't real."

His face turned bright red. "I didn't say that!"

"Uh huh, sure you did. I don't believe in Santa Claus,'" she mimicked his squeaky voice from childhood. "And I am secretly Maleficent in disguise."

He pouted. "Meanie."

Various trees were decorated to look like other holidays. Easter in the form of an egg. Valentine's Day in the form of a pink heart. At the center of them all was a tree painted green and decorated with a star and ornaments.

"Behold!" Jack said. Sora stopped pouting immediately and gazed upon the door with awe. "The door to Christmas Town!"

Kairi leaned forward, the same awe and curiosity as Sora taking over.

Jack explained his reasoning for all the cheer. "The scares of Halloween can get so dull year after year. I wanted something new, something fresh! Then I came upon this!"

"Open it!" Sora exclaimed, his hands up, almost ready to jump in excitement.

Jack opened the door. Sora took a step inside before falling in. "Whoa!"

Kairi jumped in after him. Then Donald, then Goofy.

"Oh boy!" Kairi flailed about, gravity pulling her down into a swirl of snowflakes.

"Wahahhak!" Donald screamed.

Goofy was falling upside down. "Yaaahooohoowhee!"

The first thing Sora noticed when he stopped falling was the cold snow up his nose. The second thing he noticed was Kairi's weight on his back. Then she got heavier and heavier.

"Sorry Sora," Kairi said, rolling off of him.
He sat up. The third thing he noticed was his mask was gone, replaced by a lined fuzzy hat. The fourth thing was the smell of gingerbread. "Whoa..." He gaped in awe at the town down the hill. Kairi looked to where he was gazing upon.

"Oh wow..." She had stars in her eyes. The bright cheery lights of the town and the sweet smell overwhelmed her with joy and warmth. Her witch's hat was changed to a Santa hat as well.

Donald and Goofy both felt the same, the holiday spirit changing their forms. Donald was a snowman and Goofy was a reindeer with a big red nose.

"It's incredible," Kairi said.

"Let's go see Santa!" Donald declared, getting up from the snow.

"Where would he be?" Sora asked.

Jack pointed down the hill. "At his workshop in the largest building."

Sora and Kairi were like kids again. "Yay! Let's go see Santa," they said in unison.

Something stopped them when they began running down the hill. The horrible feeling in Kairi's heart returned. Heartless swarmed the entire town, turning the once cheery town into one of darkness not unlike Halloween Town.

"Oh no!" Kairi gasped, hand over her mouth.

Sora's fist clenched. "We'll stop them!"

Columns upon columns of the Graveyard's cousin, Toy Soldiers, were marching in circles around the town square.

"Sora...There's too many," Kairi said. "No way we'll be able to get through all of them."

Goofy braced his shield. "We just need to split up."

"Help!" Elves shouted from the rooftops. Soldier Heartless clawed their way up the sides of the buildings.

Jack held out his skeletal hands. "Sora! Kairi! Prepare yourselves!"

The two latched onto his hands, and Jack flung them into the air in a flurry of wailing ghosts. Sora braced his feet to land on the building. He launched himself off towards the other building, but not before noticing Kairi's upside down face. She flipped herself, preparing a custom-made kick just for the Heartless.

Sora slammed into the building, the shockwave knocking all the Heartless into oblivion.

Kairi kicked a flying Heartless into the air and grabbed it by its tail. Slamming it into the soldiers, she landed on the roof with grace. "You okay?" She asked the elves.

"Yeah, we are fine. Thank you," said the head elf in green.

Sora cut through the line of Heartless on the ledges. He turned to launch fire at the remaining flying Heartless.

"You guys okay?" he asked the elves.
They all nodded in collective agreement. One elf in red pointed to the largest house. "Santa is in danger!"

"Got it! Thanks!" Sora tipped his hat.

On the ground Jack, Donald, and Goofy plowed through the army of Heartless. They made their stand in front of the door to Santa's house.

"Where are they all coming from?!" Donald shouted, throwing a thundara spell at a toy soldier. It fell over the side of its box, stars circling its head.

Sora and Kairi rejoined them on the ground.

"Whatever is causing this much Heartless has to be inside," Jack said, shooting flaming jack-o'-lanterns at a large body.

Sora nodded, stabbing a soldier Heartless. "The elves said Santa is in danger."

Goofy bashed his shield into a pack of shadows. "Gwarsh we can't all go in to investigate. There's too many out here."

"Then you and I go in, Goofy," Kairi said.

"Wha? But Kairi," Sora was about to protest but Kairi held up her hand to stop him.

"I'll be fine Sora. I can take care of myself."

Goofy and Kairi barged into the workshop.

Donald looked to Sora. "She'll be fine."

Sora sighed, bashing in a shadow. "You're right."

Inside the small room in Santa's house was nothing but a dead fireplace and an empty chair.

Kairi looked around. "Where are all the Heartless?"

Goofy opened the door to the workshop. "Gwarsh there is no Heartless out here either."

The two entered the massive workshop. Peppermint candy canes decorated the walls.

Three tiny children in Halloween masks giggled as they jumped up and down on a box full of fluffy stuffing.

"This is fun mischief!" a girl in a witch's hat said.

"Yeah! What are we gonna do with the big red guy?" the boy in a devil mask asked, looking to a big red man tied up on a conveyor belt.

A rounded boy flopped down on the fluff. "We'll stuff him in a bag somewhere!"

"Hey kids what are you doing?" Kairi said to them. "Leave Santa Claus alone."

"Oh don't worry about her, Lock, Shock, Barrel," a smooth elegantly evil voice spoke from atop the row of conveyor belts. The Mistress of Evil swished her black cloak around to grin down at Kairi and Goofy.
Goofy raised his shield and stood in front of Kairi. "Maleficent!"

"Ah Goofy. Ever the annoying pest. And Kairi, aren't you radiant as always with your precious heart of pure light," Maleficent said. Her gaze fixed on Kairi. "Your light shines brighter than usual, hmm..."

Kairi's keyblade shimmered in her grip. "What do you want, Maleficent?"

"I want to destroy this insipid Christmas Town of course, but since you are here I might as well find the other brat with the keyblade..."

Behind the witch a dark corridor opened. A panicked Pete stumbled out wearing a pink apron. "Maleficent! We got big trouble! Those Organization guys popped up and threatened me with some doohickey nonsense!"

Maleficent glared at her right hand man. "And? Is that really all you're pesterling me about?"

"The Heartless are disappearing in droves and an army of white guys is marching upon the castle!"

Maleficent sighed, pressing her fingers to her forehead. "Fine. I will go and assess the situation. The Heartless are mine." She looked to Kairi and Goofy, then down at Lock, Shock, and Barrel. Snapping her fingers, a dark portal formed, and out came a Heartless made of metal with a cage attached to its tail. "My Heartless will aid you."

Maleficent disappeared in black and green flames.

Kairi looked to Goofy. "You heard what she said right?"

Goofy nodded. "The Organization is probably waging war against Maleficent."

The Prison Keeper opened its cage and the three mischievous kids hopped in.

Goofy and Kairi prepared their weapons. The Prison Keeper prepared a large orb of fire in its claws.

Meanwhile outside, the hordes of Heartless vanished. Sora, Donald, and Jack all stopped and looked around the town square.

"Where did they go?" Donald said, confused.

"Perhaps we scared them off," Jack said.

Sora put his hand on his chin. "I dunno..."

The house behind the three exploded, knocking the three back into the snow. Sora stood up and shook his hair free of snow. The screams of a falling Goofy and Kairi alerted him to the air.

Donald ruffled his feathers and saw Goofy falling right towards him. He extended his arms, but Goofy was much larger and slammed Donald right back into the snow. Sora caught Kairi in his arms.

"Hiya," Sora said with a smile.

Her face burned as red as Rudolph's red nose. "Hi Sora..."

A muffled cry from the merry-go-round caught the attention of the gang. Sora put Kairi down. Jack
rushed over to see that Santa landed on the canopy of the merry-go-round.

"Sandy Claws! Don't worry we'll get you down!" Jack climbed up. Sora and Goofy rushed over to pull Santa down from the top of the merry-go-round. Kairi undid the ropes around Santa and Donald took the tape off his mouth.

Santa breathed in deep, his voice raspy. "Oh my, thank you. Maleficent's forces overwhelmed me and..."

"Look out!" Kairi shoved Santa and the others out of the way, taking a fireball blast straight on.

"Kairi!" Sora cried out. Keyblade in hand he glared at the Prison Keeper Heartless. He ran to her, rolling her onto her back. "Kairi?!"

Donald raised his staff. "Heal!"

A green leaf fluttered over her and absorbed into her skin. She blinked her eyes open. "I'm...okay," she said, taking deep breaths. "That hurt. Knocked the wind out of me."

Sora wanted to embrace her despite her wounds, but he had a Heartless to deal with first. He got up, keyblade poised and ready.

"You harmed Kairi..." He said with a voice unlike his own. The same voice that had come out several times before. "Prepare to face oblivion!"

Nothing terrified Kairi in that moment more than seeing Sora, her best friend who took each challenge with honor and courage, become full of pure rage.

This wasn't Sora. This wasn't her Sora.

He leaped at the Prison Keeper, the snickering of the three brats held in the cage fueling his uncontrollable anger. The Heartless launched another fireball at Sora, and without even bothering with reflect he slammed his keyblade at it and it blasted the Heartless in the face. Prison Keeper flew back, tips of its claws glowing.

Sora bashed and slammed his keyblade into the mouth of the Heartless over and over. Over and over. Jumping back, Sora unleashed a giant ice crystal at the creature, and then a volley of light prisms. It froze and collapsed onto the debris of Santa's house. Lock, Shock, and Barrel ran out of their cage and fled.

All the rage left as soon as it came. Sora collapsed into the snow. "What...What just happened?"

Santa offer a hand to Sora. "It seems there's a power within you, Sora, that is trying to take control. The anger was a manifestation of it."

Sora held his head. "I...I don't even remember feelings this way."

Kairi put a hand on his shoulder. "We'll figure it out, Sora. I know you're you, nothing will change that."

Jack grabbed Santa's hands. "I'm so sorry Sandy Claws that we were too late! Your workshop is ruined."

"Gwarsh but we did save the elves and townsfolk," Goofy said.

Donald nodded. "Yeah it's important to make sure everyone is okay."
Jack sighed. "Oh but the presents? Who will make the presents to give out?"

Santa chuckled. "Oh this? I promise, if you believe, everything will be okay." He whistled. A sleigh pulled by live reindeer flew out of the sky and stopped before the gang. He climbed aboard and snapped the reins, taking off into the sky.

"Jack!" Sally's soft voice called from the entrance to the town. "It's done."

Jack jumped for joy. "Oh my!" He took from her hands a red suit and put it on over his clothes. He pulled the red hat over his head and tied the big white beard behind his nonexistent ears. "Thank you so much Sally for this amazing gift of yours."

Sally smiled. "You're welcome Jack."

Snow began to fall from above.

Sora held out his hand to catch a flake. "Whoa...Snow."

Kairi took a step out into the clear snow. "I've never seen snowfall before." She smiled at Sora before flopping down in the white fluff. "It's so soft."

Goofy and Donald jumped out of their skins. "What?" Donald said, gaping at Santa's house.

Sora turned around and the house was newly fixed. "Whoa..."

Goofy grinned. "Guess everything turned out okay."

"Sora!" Kairi waved to him from her spot in the snow. "Come make a snow angel with me."

Sora laughed as he jumped into the snow. The two made snow angels, laughing and giggling together. Kairi turned her head to look at Sora with a dreamy look in her eyes. Sora smiled back at her.

He was content to stay like this forever.

Jack grabbed Sally's hands and twirled her around under the snowfall.

Goofy and Donald grinned as they watched the two lovebirds in the snow. "Awww," Goofy said.

Donald shook his head, unable to contain his grin.

Sora and Kairi sat up and looked to Jack and Sally. Kairi wondered if Sora would ever dance with her like that.

Sora couldn't help himself. He imagined himself and Kairi in the place of Jack and Sally. He could imagine her laughter as he twirled her around.

"Sora?"

Sora shook his head. "Huh?"

Kairi held her hand out. "It's almost time to go."

He pouted. "Aww already?" He took her hand and stood. "What's the rush."

Her smile left her lips. "Well, I just remembered what caused the Heartless..."
"Ah, there you are," Santa said, having landed his sleigh in front of his house. "Sora and Kairi right?"

The two teenagers realized this was the Santa Claus. "Uh yes sir," they said in unison.

Santa smiled. "So, do you remember seven years ago, Sora, that you told everyone you didn't believe in Santa Claus?"

Kairi held back a laugh "I do."

He pouted, pulling at his hair. "I uh...Yes."

Santa nodded. "You were trying to be cool like your friend Riku."

"Uh well...yeah," Sora hung his head in shame. Kairi patted his head full of spikes.

"I believe that you two will find Riku, as long as you believe in him," Santa said. "Belief is a powerful weapon. It lights even the darkest nights. I wonder if your friend Riku believes in you too."

Kairi nodded. "I believe that we'll see him again soon."

Santa smiled. "Right. I thank you for saving my elves and me from Maleficent. I must prepare for Christmas."

Jack walked over. "Can I help you with preparations Sandy Claws?"

"Aweh I think you should stick to Halloween and scary stuff Jack," Goofy said.

Donald agreed. "Yeah, Santa does his job best, as you do your job best."

Jack slumped a little, but then he perked up. "Right! And if Halloween becomes too routine then I must think of something that will really make them scream!"

Sally stood there, admiring the enthusiasm emitting from Jack. "Thank you, Sora, Kairi, Donald, Goofy," she said to them.

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**Missing Journal Entry 07**

I climbed over the walls guarding the mansion one late afternoon. The main door was locked, so I climbed to the second story window. It was conveniently left open and behold me I found...a girl in white.

Why did she look so familiar to me? Why was I compelled to get to know her?

Drawings covered the walls of the mansion. Some of the scenes I recognized.

Then one drawing piqued my interest: a drawing of me, blonde hair and all.

She asked my name.

And I asked her name.

I needed to talk to her again, soon.
A/N: Hello it's been ages hasn't it? Anyways I am working on both the next chapter and the next chapter of Another Side Another Line. Happy Belated Sokai Week! It was an awesome week and I thank all the creators who participated for the lovely pieces!

(Side note I always wanted to write Goofy's yell XD)

Thank you all for the comments and subscriptions and kudos! (Especially you Kouaka I love all your comments! <3) See ya next time in Radiant Garden.
Scherzo Di Notte

Chapter Notes

This chapter is rated T for Daddio Gladio's abs. XD (not really)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter XI: Scherzo Di Notte

Kairi sat in the gummi ship. Sora's rage in Christmas Town was deeply troubling, but more importantly, so was Maleficent's sudden departure.

"Sora, we should go check on Hollow Bastion," she suggested. "Pete had to get Maleficent because of some invasion from the Nobodies."

Sora raised an eyebrow. "Oh no. I hope everyone is okay." He grabbed onto the controls. "To Hollow Bastion!"

Kairi, Donald, and Goofy latched onto their seats and Sora floored it straight from Halloween Town to Hollow Bastion.

Landing in the town, Sora and Donald looked around. "Hmm," Sora squinted his eyes over the ledge of the marketplace. "I don't see any Heartless or Nobodies."

Goofy put a finger to his head. "Hm, Pete did say the Organization was up to something."

Kairi pointed to the giant freezer near the steps. "Maybe Scrooge knows something."

The gang walked over to Scrooge, who was eating a blue popsicle. "Oh?" He turned around. "Aye laddies and lass. I finished my ice cream. Sea-salt ice cream." He handed each of them a bar. "Tell me what you think."

Sora and Kairi looked at each other and shrugged, taking a lick of the treat in their hands.

The taste was too eerily familiar for Sora. "It's..."

"Salty," Donald said.

"But sweet too," Goofy added.

Kairi let the taste settle on her tongue. "It's a perfect combination."

Scrooge grinned wide. "I'm glad ye like it. I shall make millions now! Aye Leon and the others are probably waitin' for ya in the Borough, at Merlin's house."

The group threw out their clean popsicle sticks and waved goodbye to Scrooge. Down the stairs they ran into a man in black with familiar blond hair.

"Oh!" Sora brightened up at the man. "Cloud!"

Cloud looked up at the deeper voice. Huh, the kid went through a growth spurt since he last saw
him. "Sora."

"How've you been?" Sora asked.

A pause then an answer. "I've been searching for him."

"Who?" said Donald.

"Sephiroth. Silver hair, wields a long sword." Cloud looked away. "We have something to settle."

Donald slumped. "You kinda look different Cloud."

"If I do, it's because of him," Cloud explained.

Sora nodded. "Then we'll let you know if we find him."

Cloud looked back to the four before them. "Be careful, he messes with your head, makes you think darkness is the only way."

Kairi placed her hand on her heart. "We know that's not true. We won't listen to him then."

"Good," Cloud said.

"Is something wrong?" Aerith spoke. Cloud didn't even hesitate to try to leave. "Cloud?"

The soldier turned around. "It's nothing. I don't want you involved."

Aerith leaned forward, eyeing him as she was not convinced. "You mean you don't want me there when you go away again?"

He sighed. "I just—Listen, even if I go far away, I'll come back."

"Do you mean it?" Aerith asked.

Cloud opened his mouth to try to respond and faltered.

"See you don't look so sure." Aerith nodded to him. "Well okay. I understand. Go get things settled."

He quirked an eyebrow. "Huh?"

"No matter how far away you are...once you find your light...I'm sure it will lead you back here again. Right?"

"I suppose."

"So I'll stay here—and I'll cheer for you. Okay Cloud?"

"Okay," he said, barely audible for the gang in the back. He about-faced and walked down the stairs.

Aerith crossed her arms. "I wonder if he'll be okay."

"He'll be fine," Sora said. "I'm sure there's some light in him somewhere."

Aerith smiled. "You're right."
Kairi noticed a girl walk past her. Her attire was all black, save for a thin laced white cover over her shoulders. "Sorry excuse me," the girl said, walking briskly down the stairs. Aerith followed after her.

"Should we get to Merlin's?" Kairi asked.

Goofy nodded. "Better see what's going on."

The group walked into the Borough to Merlin's House. Within the house, everyone save for Yuffie, Cid, and Merlin, were nowhere to be found.

"Heya," Cid greeted them. "Got some good news for ya."

Yuffie nodded with much vigor. "Yeah. We found the computer Ansem was using!"

"Oh boy!" Donald exclaimed.

"Yup. Should be able to get all sorts of info on the Heartless and the Organization," Cid said. "It's in the Castle Postern. Leon will explain more."

The gang left the house and made their way to the Bailey.

A tiny voice made Sora and Kairi stop in their tracks.

"Excuse me, are you with the Restoration Committee?"

The gang turned around and found three small girls floating in midair. One girl with brown hair stood up front of the trio, the leader. A blonde with wild hair floated to the leader's right with wide wings. A girl dressed in all black with red eyes floated to the left with her arms crossed.

"I'm Yuna," the leader introduced herself.

The blonde point to herself. "I'm Rikku."

"Riku?" Kairi said with a finger on her lips.

"Two k's," Rikku said with her two fingers up.

The girl dressed in black didn't even flinch. "Paine. Nice to meet you."

"What's Leon's gang up to?" Yuna asked.

Sora didn't even hesitate to answer. "Oh they've got stuff to do over by the castle postern."

The three turned to each other. "Scoop!" exclaimed Rikku.

"Huh?" Sora tilted his head.

"Umm..." Kairi wasn't sure what this was all about.

"Let's report," Paine said.

"To who?" asked Donald.

Yuna turned back around to face them. "Our leader, of course!"

Rikku nodded. "Yeah you know, Malefi-"
Paine covered her mouth before she could finish.

Sora, Donald, and Goofy all narrowed their eyes. Kairi wasn't sure to be annoyed that these girls were spies for the witch or amused at how bad they were at it.

"Don't mind her," Paine said. "I assure you, we come in peace."

Yuna muttered under her breath. "You're kidding..."

Paine glared at Yuna. "Problem? Okay then fine, you do the talking." She disappeared in red sparkles.

Yuna bowed to them. "So sorry about this!" She, like Paine, disappeared in sparkles, only this time they were blue.

Rikku gave an unconvincing smile before disappearing in yellow sparkles.

"Well that was...odd," Kairi said. "But it makes sense. Maleficent left Christmas Town in a hurry because of the Organization. She wanted to keep track of us somehow."

Goofy nodded. "Yeah but why those three girls?"

Sora shrugged. "They were certainly...odd."

Moving on, the gang turned the corner and leaning against a wall was a familiar black haired man. "Noct!" Sora called.

Noctis looked up and saw Sora and Kairi before him. "Hey Sora, Kairi. You two look like you've gotten tougher since we last met."

Sora puffed out his chest. "Yeah, been working out."

Kairi shook her head. Oh Sora...

Goofy and Donald snickered behind them.

Noctis chuckled. "How's your magic, Kairi?"

Kairi smiled. "It has improved immensely, thank you."

Noctis stood up straight and tall. "You two have gotten stronger, but so have I. How about another duel to practice? You two versus me."

Sora tilted his head. "The both of us?"

"Yeah. For fun."

Kairi looked to Sora, who shrugged. What an odd request.

"Sure," Kairi said.

Noctis fell into a defensive stance. "I won't go easy on you two, Chosen of the Keyblade."

Sora and Kairi's keyblades were in hand.

"Alright Noct!" Sora smirked. "Let's see what you got."
Noctis summoned forth twin blades. He warped forward. Sora and Kairi darted in opposite directions to split focus. Noctis warped, flicking his twin blades at the duo. Kairi dodged back; Sora held his keyblade up and the blade bounced back to Noctis. The blade stuck in the ground teleported back to Noct's hand.

Kairi charged her keyblade with an ice crystal. She blasted it at Noct as he descended in mid-air. With his blade up, the ice crystal exploded. Sora sprinted to his left as Noct rolled onto the ground. Noctis swapped to his bow and fired a blue arrow at Kairi. Kairi planted her feet and reflected the arrow back, which clipped Noct's jacket and sent him skidding sideways. Sora slammed his keyblade into the bow, causing it to disappear. But Noct summoned a greatsword to swipe at the teen. Sora rolled back. Noctis teleported into the air. Hovering, he snapped his fingers and a barrage of blue weapons encircled him. He sent them flying towards the duo, who dodged to and fro as each weapon stabbed the ground.

Sora and Kairi reached out to each other, ready to level the playing field...

"Ack!"

"Noct!"

Sora and Kairi stopped in their tracks. The weapons in the ground disappeared along with Noctis' barrage.

He fell to the ground with a flump. Donald and Goofy laughed as they watched the man being attacked by a small fluffy blue thing.

"Hey! Watch the hair!" Noctis whined as he was licked by the blue creature.

Sora and Kairi put away their keyblades and observed as Noctis pulled it off and wiped his face with a grimace.

The blue thing tilted his head at the onlookers. "Hm?"

Noctis sat up. "Sorry about that." He gestured to the creature. "You save one person from getting slapped by a Heartless and you're suddenly the whole world to them."

The blue creature nodded, hugging Noctis' arm. "Stitch found Noct!"

He sighed.

The creature, known as Stitch, turned around and his big bug eyes got even wider at the sight of the keyblade duo. "Huh? Roxas? Naminé?"

Sora shrugged at Kairi, who shrugged back.

"Not Roxas and Naminé then," Stitch said. He pouted.

"Hello Stitch," Sora crouched down and offered a hand. "I'm Sora."

Kairi leaned down to look Stitch in the eye. "I'm Kairi."

Stitch extended his paw...claw? And shook Sora's hand. "My name Stitch."

Noctis scratched his neck. "So uh, re-match next time?"

Sora nodded, brushing his knuckle. "Yeah!"
Noctis suddenly walked backwards towards a wall. "Uh well um I gotta go see ya later!" He warped up the wall and over the ledge.

Kairi looked to Donald and Goofy. "Wasn't that...really odd how he left so quickly?"

Donald shrugged. "He probably had something to do."

"Hmm, still..." Kairi still wondered why he was in a rush.

"Hey you," a deep voice called out from the entrance to the Bailey. A man, taller than even Leon and Cloud, with toned abs barely covered by his leather jacket, walked over with a giant silver blade on his shoulder. "Have any of you seen a guy in all black and likes to warp around?"

Sora and Kairi froze. The promise they both made came back in a rush.

"Er, we haven't," Sora said. Kairi clenched her teeth in unease at the lie.

The man furrowed his brows. "Huh. Okay, guess the search is still on," he said. "Hey, are you with the Restoration Committee?"

Goofy nodded. "Uh uh."

"I heard from Leon about you guys lending a hand around here," the man said. "Name's Gladiolus Amicitia, Gladio for short."

"Nice to meet you Gladio, I'm Kairi," she waved.

Sora held out his hand. "I'm Sora." Gladio shook it.

"Donald Duck."

"Heya Gladio, I'm Goofy."

Kairi turned around to where Stitch was to find he was gone. "Huh?"

Gladio brushed a stray hair out of his face. "Nice to meet you guys. Welp, I gotta find my friend lest he gets himself into some sort of trouble."

He walked out of the Bailey to a different part of the town.

"Where did Stitch go?" Donald asked.

Sora shrugged. "I don't know. Let's go see Leon and the others at the Castle."

The group moved forward through the alleyways and up to the castle postern. Aerith was waiting there for them.

"You guys found the computer?" Kairi asked.

"Yes," Aerith said. "The King is very interested in it."

Donald and Goofy's eyes bulged out. "The King?!"

Aerith put her finger in front of her lips. "He's with Leon. But be careful."

"Er..." Sora hesitated. "Is Riku with them?"
Aerith shook her head.
Sora and Kairi slumped a little.

"Well, at least we can ask the King about him," Sora said. Kairi nodded.

"Let's go inside and take a look at this computer," Kairi said.

The gang walked down a set of stairs and into a door in the wall. The hallways were never-ending, twisting and turning onto themselves.

"Why did they make this into a maze?" Donald whined.

The sounds of little pattering steps echoed in the halls.

They made their way through the maze and to an orange door at the end. Pushing it open the gang looked around a study with papers littered everywhere. A giant portrait of a man with silver hair, Ansem, hung on the wall. By the desk was the same woman dressed in black ruffles from earlier.

She turned around and greeted them. "Oh hello!"

"Oh um, hiya," Sora said with a lame wave.

Kairi felt something special within this woman. "Hi!"

"You must be Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy," the woman said. "With the Restoration Committee right?"

"Yeah, and you are?" Donald asked, suspicious of her after their little encounter with the three fairy-like girls earlier.

"I'm Stella, nice to meet you. I'm looking for a guy with heavy bangs in his face, have you seen him?"

Sora tugged at his bangs in his face.

Stella laughed. "Heavier."

Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy all shrugged.

Stella sighed. "Right...Well then, I will see you later then." She left the study, leaving the gang to stare at the portrait of Ansem.

"This must've been his room," Goofy said.

"Hey you!" Another called from the doorway. She was dressed in all black, with fighter gloves on and sneakers. "Name's Tifa. I'm looking for someone. Have you guys seen a guy with spikey hair?"

Sora tugged on his spikes. Kairi held back a giggle.

"Spikier," Tifa added.

They all shrugged.

Tifa looked around. "I'll just take a look around then."

So she searched through the desk, the books, and eventually stared at a wall. She kicked with such
force the ground vibrated. Not satisfied, she waved them off as she left. "Sorry to bother you."

The three boys all straightened up. "No bother ma'am!"

Kairi waved goodbye to Tifa. "I hope you find him."

The door closed.

"So you made it," Leon said from his spot on the wall.

"Oh, Leon!" Sora exclaimed.

Leon turned around to the same wall Tifa kicked. "I assumed you checked in with Cid?"

"Yeah. Where's the King?" Donald asked.

"He left. He'll be back soon enough." Leon placed his hand on the wall. A flash of light and it disappeared.

Donald sighed. "Awww."

A new hallway opened up, this time with a glass floor.

Black hair poked out from the side of the wall. "I heard something kick the wall," spoke Noctis.

"Oh, hi Noct," Kairi said. "That was Tifa."

"Ah. Good," Noctis stood up straight. "Not err..."

"It wasn't that other woman earlier," Leon said, rolling his eyes. "Anyways, follow me. The computer room is this way. Be careful though."

Into the next room was a large computer. The keyboard was wide, and the desk overlooked a massive machine-like system.

"What are these for?" Kairi asked.

Leon crossed his arms. "They're for creating Heartless. The ones with the Emblems on themselves."

Kairi looked over the railing. "So this was Ansem's invention..."

Sora saw the computer and immediately rushed over. "Where's Riku!?" He pressed a few keys on the keyboard, before his frustration got the best of him and he began slamming the keyboard with his fists. "Where's...Na..."

"Easy there," Leon said. "Do you wanna break it?"

The pattering sounds returned.

Noctis put a hand on Sora's shoulder. "It's alright man."

The anger and frustration faded. "Right, sorry. Guess I got a little carried away."

"Hey Leon, Noct-" Aerith said from the doorway.

"Whoa!" Goofy pointed to the ceiling.
Stitch was clinging to the ceiling with his claws. Looking downwards he spotted the wispy hair of Noctis. "Noctis!" He leaned down too much and fell off the ceiling, right onto the keyboard.

"Hey get off of there!" Donald grumbled, jumping onto the keyboard to snatch Stitch. The little fluffy thing was too fast and he leaped off, tackling Noctis across the floor.

The computer began to beep.

"Attention current user, this is a warning."

"Donald be careful!" Kairi warned. "What is that voice?"

"I am the Master Control Program," said the computer. "I oversee this system."

Donald took one step on the keyboard and the beeping returned.

"Donald!" Sora, Kairi, and Goofy all exclaimed in unison. Leon face-palmed.

Noctis was still being licked by Stitch.

"Decision reached, you are now under arrest," the Master Control Program announced.

The portal from across the room began to shimmer. Sora and Goofy tried to pull Donald off the keyboard while Kairi tried to prevent Sora from slugging him.

"Arrest?!" Kairi demanded. "What?!"

Leon, Aerith, and Noctis all reached out to them, but were too late. The light beam hit all four of them.

They disappeared.

Kairi woke up with her neck aching. Blue light flooded her sight. She looked down to find her attire had changed. It was gray and black with lines of blue highlights. A helm on her head flattened her red hair.

Sora was lying next to her. Donald and Goofy were slumped up against a wall. A man leaning against a screen played with a disk in his hands.

"Sora? Wake up lazy bum. I don't think we're in Hollow Bastion anymore." She shook him.

He groaned and sat up. "Where...Where are we?"

Donald and Goofy both woke up as well.

"You're in a mainframe computer system," the man holding a disk said.

The gang all tilted their heads. "Computer system?"

The man nodded. "A computer system for processing data."

"So wait..." Sora thought about it. "We're inside the computer somehow?"

"That's right." The man stood up. "This system is a copy of one created by a corporation called ENCOM. The original version was destroyed. But this copy was acquired by another User. The new User customized and updated the programs, renaming the system 'Hollow Bastion OS'. It was
used for town maintenance, and to advance his private research."

Sora, Donald, and Goofy all blankly stared at the man. Kairi laughed. All the technology they were used to was made of gummi blocks.

"So, uh," Kairi asked. "Are you...A program?"

He nodded. "I'm Tron. I'm a security program. I was modified as well."

"I'm Kairi."

"I'm Sora."

"Donald Duck,"

"Nice to meet ya Tron, I'm Goofy."

Tron looked at them in curiosity. "With that configuration, you must be Users."

"Users as in...People who use the computer, right?" Kairi asked.

"That's right. But we're under arrest in this pit cell. The only way to get out of here is through that barrier," he pointed to the doorway. "If you idle-here for too long, you will be de-rezzed."

"De-rezzed!?" Donald nearly jumped out of his feathers.

"How do we break that barrier?" Sora asked.

Kairi put a hand on his shoulder. "Sora. Keyblade?"

"Oh...Right." He grinned sheepishly. Sora twirled the now summoned keyblade in his hand. "Piece of cake." He bashed his keyblade into the door and little clusters popped out, pulling into the keyblade. He pointed the keyblade at the door again and it opened.

Tron was wide-eyed with impression. "Wha...What did you do?" He didn't understand, even as Sora smiled with triumph.

"It's a long story. So uh, how will we be able to get back to the outside world?" Sora asked.

Tron pointed to the yellow computer screen. "This terminal will be your way out. But the MCP cut the power."

"What's the MCP?" Goofy asked.

"The Master Control Program," Tron answered. "He took power away from users and wants to rule the system itself. I tried taking him on before, but my functions were downgraded. I can show you where the power grid is."

The group walked out of the cell and took a lift up to the canyon where the power grid was.

Tron looked at the keyblade with awe. "It seems you have some unique functions."

Sora grinned. "Well uh yea..."

Donald hand-waved it. "Don't flatter him, his head will swell like a balloon."

Sora pouted as Kairi patted his shoulder. "Hey, what does that mean?"
In the canyon, a tower with a keypad stood in the center of a junkyard. Blocks were spread around the area.

"One of these will fit, but which one..." Tron said, observing each block.

Heartless appeared.

"Really?! Not here too!" Sora rolled his eyes. The Heartless had a variety of colors to their light lines. A bunch of knock-off cyclones had yellow highlights, and a big giant Heartless with a laser at its center was purple.

"We've got this Sora! You help Tron!" Kairi declared, keyblade in hand.

Tron moved onto the next box. "Hurry then. Find the one that fits. It should have a red s-shape on it."

Sora scrambled to the next box. "Uh right red s got it."

Kairi launched a flurry of lightning storms at the horde of Heartless. She jumped off of Goofy's shield and bashed all of her weight onto the yellow strafers. She charged at the purple Devastator but it formed a shield and electrified her, tossing her back.

The Devastator moved onto Donald and Goofy, blasting them back with lasers.

Tron pulled out a box. "Aha. This one will work."

The Devastator fired a blue laser right at the block, destroying it.

"No!" Tron felt the block disintegrate in his hands.

Sora stabbed his keyblade right where the laser was, destroying the Heartless in an instant.

"That was the only part we had. It's hard to find..." Tron sighed.

Kairi pulled out some other boxes. "What about these?"

"They don't fit, sadly."

Sora took his keyblade and lifted one slightly larger box up. "Then we'll improvise by making it fit!"

Kairi quirked an eyebrow. "Uh you sure it will fit Sora?"

"Absolutely! Give me a hand with it," Sora shoved the box into the top port of the tower. Kairi with her keyblade pushed the box in magically.

Strangely the box clicked in place, and the tower lowered itself into the floor. Light lines in the floor lit up with power.

Tron gawked. "Impossible...But your actions are totally illogical. How..."

Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy all huddled together. "Well...that...is...us!"

Tron laughed. "The terminal is back on. Let's get you back before the MCP de-rezzes you."

Back in the pit cell, Tron pulled up the destination to the lab.
"I have an access channel open for you. May I ask you a favor?"

"Sure! What do you need?" Kairi agreed.

"I need access to the DTD, the main data-space where all my functions are stored. It also contains any sensitive data. But access is denied until you have a password from my User," Tron explained.

"Sounds simple enough," Sora said. "Who is your User?"

Tron pressed a button. "Why he's the owner of this entire system. Ansem the Wise."

"Ansem?!" Donald and Goofy were taken back by the name.

"Uhhh..." Kairi cringed.

"We'll...Uh. We'll get the password," Sora said, scrambling to find a response. "Take care Tron!"

Back in the computer lab, Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy reappeared from the portal device.

"You're back," Leon said, relieved.

Noctis came in from the backroom, still trying to pry Stitch off his arm. "Oh you guys are okay."

"Stitch glad," Stitch said, a smile with his ears perked up.

"So what happened?" Leon questioned.

Maleficent held out her finger waiting for Diablo, her raven, to return. "Pete, are the curtains done yet?"

Pete in his pink apron scrubbed the last curtain in the bucket. "Um almost Maleficent!"

The three Gullwings flew up to her from the window. "Reporting in, Maleficent!" They saluted.

Yuna flew forward. "The Restoration Committee are at the old castle working on things."

"Good," Maleficent said as Diablo perched on her finger. "Time to launch an assault while they're still here. They can pick off the Organization. But most importantly, I want to know what is in that castle. Pete, prepare the Heartless."

"Wait just a darn minute here," Rikku said with her finger out. "Where is our treasure?"

"I did not promise you guaranteed treasure now did I?"

Rikku slumped. "Wha...Meanie!"

"Liar," Paine stated.

Yuna put her hands on her hips. "Well poopy! Fine, we'll go somewhere else."

The three gullwings disappeared in sparkles.

Maleficent smirked as she pet Diablo. "All according to plan."
"I told Cid about the MCP. He's working on a solution," Leon said. "So we need the password to access the dataspace. But you defeated Ansem...So this means this was all a wild goose chase."

Noctis put a finger on his chin in thought. "Would there be any clues or notes left behind in here that might indicate a password?"

Kairi nodded. "There has to be a hint around here somewhere. We'll find it."

"Find what?" Tifa said, nearly causing Noctis to retreat before realizing it was only Tifa. "Aha there's another room. I will take another look around."

Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy all watched in the study as Tifa pulled books off of shelves and lifted up the cases in her never-ending search.

"She's persistent," Kairi said.

"And so are we," Sora added.

Tifa walked over to the portrait of Ansem, lifted it up from the wall, and set it down. Scribbles riddled over a heart-shaped diagram were marked on the wall in purple pen. Tifa punched the wall, expecting something to happen, but nothing did. She shrugged and left the study.

The gang squint their eyes at the diagram. "Say Sora," Kairi spoke. "This looks like something about the computer."

Indeed it was.

"Hollow...Main...Security...Tron..." Donald strained to read the faded text.

"Hollow Main Security/Tron...Door to Darkness?" Kairi recited.

"Oh!" Sora exclaimed with excitement. "D...T...D! The DTD! See?" He pointed to the letters. "The Door to Darkness is the name of the dataspace."

Kairi put a finger on her chin. "The Door to Darkness, but...What about the password? That must mean whatever unlocks the Door to Darkness is the password."

Leon walked in. Noctis was nowhere in sight. "What did you find?"

"This diagram must be a part of the dataspace," Sora told him. "Door To Darkness."

"Say fellas, did someone mention the Door to Darkness?" a high squeaky voice spoke from the doorway. A mouse in a black coat with large ears pushed down his hood to reveal the King of Disney Castle itself. Mickey Mouse.

"Your Majesty!" The gang jumped for joy. Donald embraced Mickey, while Goofy pulled them into a group hug.

"Nice to meet you, Your Majesty!" Kairi waved to the mouse.

"Long time no see!" Sora also waved to him.

Mickey pushed Donald and Goofy off of him, putting a finger to his mouth to indicate silence. "The Organization might be listening. You mentioned the Door to Darkness?"

Donald and Goofy straightened up. "Uh yes sir," Goofy informed his king. "We're looking for a
secret password."

Mickey tilted his head. "Password? Oh! You mean a code."

Leon smirked in amusement.

"Well," Mickey began counting on his fingers. "The Door to Darkness can only be opened by the Seven Princesses of Heart. Jasmine, Belle, Alice, Aurora, Cinderella, Snow White..."

Everyone in the room looked to Kairi. "And me." She put her hand over her heart. "I'm the password."

"Watch, she's also the password in Sora's world," Donald whispered to Goofy.

Sora stomped his foot. "What was that Donald?"

"Nothing!"

"Hey," Leon said from the back. "Isn't Tron waiting for you?"

"We should go give him the password..." Kairi said.

The three boys looked to Mickey, dying to ask their questions.

"I'm not goin' anywhere. If those Heartless attack, then I will stand and fight with everyone here," Mickey said. "Oh, before you go." He took out his keyblade, the Kingdom Key D, and charged up an orb of light. It split into two and absorbed into Sora and Kairi's clothes. "There, some new powers, as a thank you."

Their clothes surged with magical energy. Sparks of yellow flickered off of them as the glow faded and their clothes were normal again.

"Thank you so much Your Majesty!" Kairi smiled.

Sora put a thumbs up. "Yeah thanks!"

Naminé sat in her cell, her bracelet being her only comfort.

"Wakey wakey it's lunch time," the voice of Number IX, Demyx, spoke, holding a bowl of rice.

Naminé turned around, her back facing Demyx.

He sighed, sliding the bowl into the food slot of the cell. Pluto growled at him, even as he slid a dog treat alongside the bowl.

"Why is it always me..."

"Your name is Demyx, right?" Naminé said.

"Uh, yeah?"

"Why are you in the Organization?"

Demyx pondered the question. "I don't know, got nothing else to do I guess."

"Why take orders from the likes of Saïx then?" Naminé said, leaning against the bars. "Sounds like
you can just leave whenever you feel like it."

Demyx scratched his neck. "In case you haven't noticed, Saïx is terrifying."

"Then why stay?"

"Not everyone has the luxury of being able to fight off Saïx and the big man. I'd be toast," Demyx explained. "And yeah, I saw what your boyfriend did. Wish I had the guts..."

"Do you know where Axel is?" Naminé asked.

"Not a clue. He flew the coop right before you got here."

She slumped down. "Do you...Know where Sora is?"

"He's in Hollow Bastion right now. Something about Maleficent is picking fights with us...I don't wanna see what damage that kid can do. Welp, time to go eat my ramen." Demyx promptly left.

Naminé sat there in realization. Pluto shove his head underneath her hand. "Sora is in danger..."

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**Missing Journal Entry 15**

Where was this password?

I asked her what tools could mean.


My keyblade...Was a tool to eliminate Heartless. To fight. It could destroy, not create.

I knew its name since forever. The Kingdom Key.

I knew the password now, or at least part of it. I needed to get my hands on the names of the other weapons. But where? How?

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Chapter End Notes

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Thanks to my beta Dusky Dancing again for helping me so much. Thank you, Kouaka for your comments again! So many goodies await next two chapters :D
"Uh Sora," Kairi looked around the bright blue grid arena. "Are you sure this is the right place?"

Sora recognized that he was definitely not in the pit cell. "I thought..."

A voice over an intercom began explaining. "Welcome to the game grid. You've been selected to play a few games. Lose and you will be subjected to de-resolution. Win? Well...There is no winning."

Sora stomped his foot. "We're not playing your games!"

"You have no choice."

A bike formed from pixels in the floor. Hordes upon hordes of bike-like Heartless appeared.

"Uh Sora..." Kairi summoned Destiny's Embrace. "There's no exit."

"Then we'll make one. Hop on! You fight them off, and I'll drive." Sora climbed onto the light cycle. Kairi got on, one hand around Sora's torso, keyblade in the other hand.

"Do you even know how to—DRIIIIVE?!"

Sora floored the gas...er light. They sped off, spinning the Heartless around to the point they were dizzy.

"How fast are we going?!" Kairi spotted Devastators in the distance shooting lasers.

Sora spotted a ramp up ahead. "Not fast enough!" He picked up more speed.

Kairi squeezed Sora tighter for dear life as they flew off the ramp. "Whoo hoo!" Sora cheered. They landed on the other ramp across the grid.

"How do we get out of here?" Kairi shouted over the whirr of the light cycle.

Sora made a U-turn and began zipping across the grid towards a wall. "Blast a wall open!"

Kairi released her tense grip around Sora and pushed herself to sit up higher. She turned around and charged up a beam of light. With much effort, she blasted a ray from Destiny's Embrace and straight into the wall. A giant hole was torn.

"Got it!" Kairi shouted in triumph.

Sora did another U-turn, heading straight for the opening. Devastators appeared, flinging orbs of electricity at the duo. Kairi reflected them right back, stunning the Heartless.

They were home free.

They reached a lobby with a terminal. The Heartless followed after them.
"Hurry Sora!" Kairi braced herself to fight against the Heartless as Sora scrambled to find the right teleport.

"I got it!" He latched onto Kairi and the two were sent to the pit cell.

In the cell, Donald, Goofy, and Tron all waited for the duo.

"You're okay!" Goofy looked over the two exhausted teenagers for injuries.

"They...sent us to the...game grid," Kairi said between huffs for air.

"I don't understand, why are you guys here?" Tron questioned, baffled.

Sora was crestfallen. "We came to give you the password."

"Why didn't you just transmit the data?" Tron stood up, stumbling a little. Sora caught him, trying to keep him up.

"Transmit?" Donald said, arms crossed.

"Well uh," Kairi grabbed Tron's other arm. "We got the password. Let's head to the database."

Beyond the canyon was a door to the DTD. Three screens surrounded the area, with a hand pad next to the main keyboard input. Tron presented his hands and a keypad appeared. "Okay, what's the password?"

"Alice, Aurora," Donald said.

Goofy went next. "Cinderella, Jasmine."

"Belle, Snow White," Sora added, then looking to Kairi.

She nodded. "Kairi."

Tron was surprised that her name was a part of the password. "Got it."

The computer kicked into gear. A feminine voice overhead began announcing.

"Now switching DTD over from hibernation to active mode. This process will take a few minutes. Please enjoy a game in the meantime."

Sora slumped over. "Not another game..."

Tron looked over the main screen. "Oh no! It's the DTD's final security routine! Stay alert."

The screens all presented warning text.

"We need to lock these screens!" Tron warned.

Sora and Kairi twirled their keyblades. "This will be a piece of cake," Sora said.

Heartless formed.

"I'll lock the screens Sora, you fight off the Heartless," Kairi told him, moving over to the first screen. She jumped up into the air and turned her keyblade in a locking motion.

The chaos continued as Kairi scrambled to reach the next screen.
Leon reached Merlin's house. Cid was furiously typing on his screen to make the anti-MCP program.

"Is it complete?" Leon asked.

Cid brushed his knuckles over his nose. "Would have been if it weren't for the old loon's magic."

Merlin practically had steam coming out of his ears. "Old loon you say!?" He raised his wand and fired a spark at Cid.

The disk popped out of the drive and Cid grabbed it. "Done!" The spark sent Cid flying to the floor. At Leon's feet, he presented the MPC eradication program. "Here Leon...one custom program. A loony wizard special."

Leon took the disk. "I'm off."

"And be on your guard," Merlin warned, glaring at Cid who backed away slowly.

Leon left the house and into the Bailey. The ground started to shake like mad. "What?!"

Inside the study, Aerith grabbed onto Mickey. "What's happening?!"

Mickey summoned Kingdom Key D. "I...I don't know!"

Noctis barged into the room. "Where's Sora?"

"They're inside the computer." Aerith pointed to the device. "Something must've gone wrong with the MCP."

Noctis clung to the wall. "No kidding."

"Hurry!" Tron said, running to the lift. "We have to stop the hostile program loading into the I/O Tower!"

"Tron...What's the MCP doing?" Kairi asked between breaths. "Did he seriously mention the town's self-destruction command?!"

"Yes." Tron pushed the button to go forward once the gang was on board. "I bought us some time by changing the password. He's loading a hostile program that will destroy the town."

In the I/O Tower, all was quiet. The gang prepared their weapons. Tron nudged Sora with his elbow. "I restored my main functions. Hopefully it will be enough."

Sora nodded. "Got it."

"Where is the hostile program?" Donald asked, staff at the ready.

Goofy looked up. A giant machine with spikes all over its body dropped down. Giant claws spun around, twitching.

"I'm disappointed in you Program," the MCP spoke, its deep voice overbearing. "Why do you insist on allying with these selfish Users?"

Tron glared at the Hostile Destruct Program. "Because," he began, planting his feet firmly on the
floor. "Because I want to help them. Something written into my code commands me to do what is right. And this, this is what is right. I want the system to be free for all Users."

"Oh? And what command would that be?"

Tron paused, unsure. "I...Can't really say for sure."

Kairi felt a light within Tron. Something powerful and new. A heart. It went beyond just code.

"Friends help each other, that's all," Sora explained. What a very 'Sora' response. "Our hearts shall be stronger because of it."

Kairi smiled at the mini-speech. Sora could tell too, that Tron had gained a heart, somehow.

The Hostile Program turned its laser beam onto them. "Look out!" Kairi jumped in front of Tron and Sora, putting up her reflect shield. The blast exploded against her much stronger shield and she didn't even move an inch. "Let's go!" She grabbed Sora's hand and their clothes surged with power.

When the glow faded, the cloth was yellow with white and black crosses. Destiny's Embrace was electrified with sparks of yellow. Sora's right hand held Oathkeeper with pure energy. "Whoa..."

Tron grabbed his disk. "I can freeze the program while you two wreak havoc."

The Hostile Program darted to and fro, spinning around the room in circles. Kairi and Sora leaped up to reach it but were just falling short every time due to it moving so quickly.

Donald launched lightning spells at it, Goofy throwing his shield alongside the magician.

Tron pulled up his own mini keypad. "Sora! Kairi!"

The duo rolled to Tron's side. A pressure pad appeared for both of them. "Access approved!" he declared.

Sora and Kairi slammed their palms onto the pads. Clusters of white squares and triangles formed, darting about and towards the Hostile Program. Leaping off the holographic hover, Sora and Kairi double jumped up to the now frozen Hostile Program. The two danced around each other in an endless spiral, keyblades flying around them.

"Thunder!" Sora shouted as a thundara stuck the core of the twitching program. The white clusters continued to immobilize the program, but one by one faded away.

"Sora! Take my hands!" Kairi stretched her hands out for his. He grabbed her hands and they spun around, keyblades forming rings of light around them. Their hands charged with golden energy.

"Together!" They said to each other, releasing their hands. The energy exploded on top of the frozen Hostile Program. The spell wore off, and it began twitching and cracking.

Their drive forms ended. Sora and Kairi plopped to the ground just as the Hostile Program blew up.

The town stopped shaking.

Noctis, Aerith, and Mickey all stopped clinging to the walls.

"Whew." Mickey wiped his forehead. "I think they stopped whatever it was doing."
Noctis slumped down against the wall. "I hope they're okay."

Leon pushed open the door. "It's done." He presented the disk. He walked over to the computer. He pressed the button to allow him to load the disk inside the I/O tower, but to no avail. The MCP rejected it.

"Leon let me try," Aerith asked. He nodded, handing her the disk.

She used her delicate hands and shoved it right into the drive. "Bon appetit. Don't talk with your mouth full."

"What...are you loading?!" The MCP shouted at her.

Inside the I/O main tower room, Tron watched as a glowing yellow and purple light floated in. He took out his disk and let it float up to collect the data.

It came back down shining in the dim room.

"This is very strange," Tron said, observing the disk.

"That's Merlin's magic," Donald said.

Tron nodded. "I really owe you all one. With all my functions restored and this MCP eradication program, we have a fighting chance to get system control away from the MCP." He held out his hand to them. "Will you, Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy, aid me in doing so?"

"Absolutely," Sora said, pumped up to go fight the MCP.

Kairi nodded. "How do we get to him?"

"There are flight paths for the solar sailer. Let's get down to the hangar."

The gang and Tron made their way through the hangar and took the solar sailer down to the central computer system. A red beam of light sat at the heart of it all.

"Whoa...Is that the MCP?" Kairi said, pointing to the red pillar.

"Yes...ugly isn't it?" Tron answered. "Finally we end this."

In a flash, a man with red highlights appeared before them.

Tron prepared his disk. "Sark, the MCP's number two."

Sark glared at the gang. "Tenacious little bugs. Your time is up!" He pulled out his own disk, prepared to fight.

Tron and Sark clashed, disks flying. Dodge, then parry. Tron jumped back and charged up his hand with the disk and threw it so hard it sucker-punched Sark in the face. Sark collapsed to his knees, groaning in pain.

"You're...very persistent...Tron," Sark said, trying to get back up. His jaw hurt something fierce.

"I'm also better than you," Tron stated. "Because..." He looked to the gang. "Of them."

Sark fell forward. "We...would have made...a great team..." Clutters of white flew off of his body.
"Why do you...trust...Users? They'll only betray you...again."

Tron shook his head. "You don't understand that every User is different. My friends are not the same people who destroyed Hollow Bastion, or betrayed us."

"Have it...your way then." Sark went limp.

"Tron? What happened?" Kairi asked, a hand on his shoulder.

"Ansem is...well he's my enemy. He restored the MCP. Destroyed the town. Created machines that created those beings...Heartless?" Tron explained. "The Ansem I know wouldn't have done that."

Sora and Kairi looked at each other in understanding.

"Err Tron," Sora stepped forward. "We defeated Ansem. He's gone now. He was our enemy too. We didn't tell you because we weren't sure how you would take it."

Tron nodded, a sad smile on his face. "I'm glad you put a stop to him."

Kairi blushed, pointing to Sora, Donald, and Goofy with her thumb. "It was them that stopped Ansem. I had no part in it."

Sora shook his head. "That's not true Kairi, I wouldn't have been able to come back to fight without you."

She grinned, before summoning her keyblade. "We have a job to finish."

Tron prepared his disk, the anti-MCP functions flickering with blue light. "Now to free the system."

"Tron," the MCP spoke with its booming voice as it spun. "Don't you understand? We don't need Users. We've advanced. They're superfluous. Be a part of me and the system will be ours to control!"

Tron's fist clenched. "MCP you still don't get it, do you?!"

The MCP stopped spinning. Its terrifying face caused the gang to step back in horror. "Sark, all my functions are now yours."

The gang looked to Sark who sparked with red as he got up.

"He's getting really tall!" Goofy pointed to Sark in panic.

Kairi went back and forth looking at the giant Sark and the MCP, then to Sora's keyblade and Tron's disk. "I have a plan. I will distract Sark while you guys finish off the MCP."

Sora was uneasy about Kairi going against a giant man like that. "Kairi..."

"Trust me Sora!" She grabbed his hand. "Together, right?"

Their clothes shimmered. Sora's highlights turned red, blue, and yellow. Kairi's highlights turned white and purple.

Sora nodded. "Together."

Kairi charged at Sark, her body shimmering with overflowing light power. Her keyblade became a
giant blade of light as she slid underneath the knees of Sark and sliced his shin. He reached down to grab her but she uppercut his hand. Annoyed as he held his hurt hand, he turned around and began chasing her around the room. She rolled out of his reach.

Tron and Sora turned to the MCP. The evil program had formed a wall made of shields.

"We gotta break one of his shields!" Donald said, unleashing a barrage of fire at one panel section.

"Is that the best a User can do?" the MCP mocked, firing a laser out of the shield. Donald reflected it back, sliding back from the force.

"Goofy!" Sora called out.

"I got ya Sora!" Goofy tossed him his shield and Sora used his keyblade like a bat and smacked the shield into the panel. A crack formed. He hit the shield two, three, four more times. A large crack in the center formed among smaller cracks.

Sora held his keyblade in front of him and charged in, sonic waves of light emitting off of him as the panel collapsed.

"Tron!" Sora prepared his keyblade with light at the tip.

Tron placed his disk in front of the blade. "Running executable!"

Donald raised his staff to form a dome. "We got your back!" Goofy put his shield up next to Donald's staff to boost the shield as the MCP fired more lasers at them.

Kairi meanwhile got ahead of Sark so that she could toss her light blade with ease at his shins and arms. Sark stomped his foot and a wall formed behind her.

"Going somewhere?" He said, smirking down on her.

She climbed up onto the wall using light to boost herself up. "Yes, I am. How nice of you to ask." With her light blade in hand, she launched herself off the wall, twirling toward Sark's helm and piercing right through it. He screamed in agony. White clusters formed from the wound and red electricity began to repair the corrupt data.

Tron spun his disk as Sora channeled light through it at the core of the MCP. The shields went flying up as the MCP roared in agony. Right before he could unleash a full on laser attack in retaliation, the core snapped.

The MCP turned blue and disappeared in white clusters. Sark decayed away.

Tron grinned wide, pumping his fist into the air. "We did it!"

Sora smiled with him. "I see Tron has a silly side too."

Tron realized the meaning of those words and cleared his throat. "I learned it from you. Of course, I have my silly limits too."

Sora's smile turned into a smirk. "Okay then I will tweak your program when I get back to the User world."

Kairi shook her head, trying to fight back a laugh. "Sora you can barely type on a keyboard."

Sora looked at her, smirk still on his face. "But I can learn, right?"
Tron was horrified at the thought. "You might wanna not do that."

"How about it guys? Singing Tron! Dancing Tron!" Sora grabbed Kairi's hands and twirled her around.

"Sora I swear..." Kairi laughed. "You've got enough silliness for all of us and then some."

"Yeah!" Donald agreed.

Tron chuckled. "Okay, okay. Before I crash..."

Sora stopped twirling Kairi around to hear Tron's words.

Tron, who was once a logical security program, who experienced a variety of emotions, looked upon them with a sad smile. "Sora, Kairi, Donald, Goofy, and all the Users out there, thank you. You helped me in the face of betrayal and made me stronger by teaching me what friendship is truly all about. I will never forget it. When I met you, I knew we would defeat the MCP and take back the system."

"You're welcome," Kairi said. "It was great meeting you."

Sora brushed his knuckles under his nose, happy to have Tron as a friend. "Yeah. What are friends for."

Tron presented his hand to Sora. Sora took it but was instead pulled into a hug.

"Uhhh..." Sora wasn't sure how to take this.

Breaking the hug, Tron asked, "Isn't this what Users do when they're sad to say goodbye?"

"It's a first for me," Sora said. Usually he only hugged people when he saw them again.

Goofy smiled. "Gwarsh Tron it's like a promise that we'll see each other again real soon."

"Okay then." Tron hugged Goofy, Donald, then Kairi. Once the exchange of hugs was over, Tron pumped his fist into the air. "Promise me you'll protect Hollow Bastion."

Sora and Kairi nodded. "We will," they said in unison.

Kairi placed a hand on her heart. "I feel as if, this was once my home town. But since I found Sora and Riku long ago, I realized my real home is where my friends are, and I will defend it with all my power."

Tron nodded. "And I will help defend home with you. I promise." With one last look at the gang and a wave, he jumped into the pit where the MCP once was.

"Wha!" Sora and Kairi reached out for him but it was too late.

Donald and Goofy's hats nearly popped off their heads.

A rumbling beneath their feet rolled in as they were teleported back to the lab.

Noctis played with a device in his hands as he waited for the gang to return.

Yuffie came bouncing in as Leon watched the computer. "The shaking has stopped!" She declared.
Aerith sighed in relief. "Good. Let's hope they return in one piece."

From the portal did Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy reform. Sad faces graced the four of them.

"Welcome back!" Yuffie jumped in joy. "Hey why the long face? What happened?"

"Tron just disappeared," Donald said, slumping over.

"Yeah..." Sora said.

"But he promised we'd see him again," Kairi added.

Leon pointed to the computer. "The MCP is gone at least."

A rogue beep came from the computer.

"Huh?" Aerith said.

Noctis put his device away in his pocket. "Is it the MCP again?"

Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy looked over the computer.

"I hope not," said Kairi.

"Greetings friends!" Tron's voice spoke from the computer. "System is up and ready for user input."

On the screen were pixelated versions of the gang dancing with big text saying "THANK YOU."

"Tron!" Everyone exclaimed.

"Stay in touch," Tron replied.

Leon took over the keyboard. "The King went to check on the town after that last shake-up, so he'll be back soon don't worry. Should we access the DTD and copy down the data?"

"Sure," Sora agreed. "We got the password."

Leon nodded. "I need to go check and see what that last shake-up did." He left, followed by Noctis, leaving Aerith and Yuffie alone with the rest of the gang.

Kairi pressed a couple keys to pull up the password input.

"Hey stop that! It tickles!" Tron said, laughing.

Goofy quirked an eyebrow. "Tron is ticklish?"

Kairi stopped and stepped aside for Sora, shaking her head as Sora pressed random keys. "How 'bout this!"

"Please stop that!" Tron laughed, unable to contain it. Sora and Donald snickered.

Yuffie looked to Kairi. "I think Tron's been hanging around those guys too much."

Kairi had to laugh. "That's Sora for you. Always being silly."

"Wait, wait," Tron said amidst giggles. "I found something that wasn't corrupted. A picture of
Ansem the Wise." A picture of a man with a blond beard and a red scarf appeared. "This was my original user."

Sora, Kairi, Donald, Goofy, Yuffie, and Aerith all stared at the picture in awe.

"Hmm, does this guy look familiar to any of you?" Yuffie asked.

"Nope not a clue," Kairi answered.

"I should go ask Leon," Yuffie said, leaving the room to go find him.

"I see you guys got the system up and running," Mickey's voice said from the doorway.

"Oh Your Majesty," they all said in unison.

Kairi pointed to the picture. "Do you know who this guy is?"

Mickey nodded with much vigor. "Yes! Ansem the Wise."

Sora, Donald, and Goofy tilted their heads. "Um, what?" Sora said. "We already defeated Ansem and that's definitely not him."

Mickey's eyes widened. "Right. I forgot to finish explaining. Come over here."

He led them to the portrait of "Ansem."

The gang tilted their heads.

"The man in this picture is definitely the one who tried to take over Kingdom Hearts, the one you fellas defeated," Mickey explained.

Kairi nodded along. "The one who possessed Riku," she said, remembering the darkness that overtook Riku...Yet she remembered something about this man in the portrait. A kindness repaid.

"But what you actually fought was this man's Heartless," continued Mickey. "He wasn't really Ansem, he was just going around tellin' everybody he was."

A pause.

"Whaaaaaat?!" Sora, Donald, and Goofy all shouted in disbelief.

Sora tossed up his hands in exasperation. "You mean we went to all that trouble to defeat an imposter?!" Kairi patted him on the shoulder in comfort. He leaned against her, pouting.

"Yep, a fake, but he still had to be stopped," Mickey added.

Kairi nodded. "He was still the bad guy at the end of the day."

"Hmm," Goofy put a finger on his temple.

Sora sighed. "Don't tell me there's more! I'm lost enough as it is."

Kairi patted his shoulder once more. "There, there?"

Goofy turned to Mickey. "So some feller named Ansem who wasn't really Ansem became a Heartless. Does that mean a Nobody got created too?"
"Yup. And that Nobody is the leader of Organization XIII," Mickey said.

"Whaaaaaat?!" Sora and Kairi both exclaimed, jaws open in shock.

"This guy is responsible for everything going wrong?!" Sora gritted his teeth. "Xemnas..."

Kairi caught onto the name. "Who?"

Sora looked at her. "Um, I don't know."

She wasn't sure what to believe anymore. "In any case, this guy is the reason the worlds fell...That Riku was harmed."

Sora looked at Kairi, who was glaring at the portrait. Never had he seen her be angry like this before, nor unconcerned that she was harmed by this fake Ansem. But to be fair, he was angry too. "Because of you," he said to the portrait. "Riku...and Naminé..."

Mickey's wide eyes got even wider. "Naminé?"

Kairi leaned down to his eye level. "Yeah, Naminé was kidnapped by Organization XIII."

"Oh no!" Mickey was slack-jawed. "We will need to save her as soon as we find their stronghold."

"You know her, Mickey?" Goofy asked.

"She was a pivotal pawn in the Organization's plans. She managed to escape their clutches until now. I can only imagine what their plans for her are," Mickey explained, crestfallen.

"Hey Your Majesty." Sora poked the King's shoulder. "Do you know where Riku is? Last time we saw him he was with you, behind the door."

Kairi leaned in with Sora. "Yeah, where is he?"

Mickey was startled and turned away. "I'm sorry. I don't know."

The duo's shoulders fell. A frown graced their lips.

"You...you sure?" Sora begged.

"There's nothing at all that you can tell us?" Kairi asked, throat tight.

"I'm sorry Sora, Kairi. I cannot help," Mickey said with a low tone.

"Back to square one..." Sora slumped down to the floor. "Is he even okay?"

Kairi felt in her heart that somewhere, out there, Riku was alright. "I'm not giving up yet," she declared, a tear brimming on her eye. "We have to find him. I refuse to go home to the island without both my boys."

Sora stood back up. "Both your boys?"

She looked into his eyes with complete sincerity. "Yes. I'm not going home without both of you. Lazy bum."

Sora began to feel the confidence radiating off of Kairi. His heart knew too, that Riku would be okay...Hopefully.
The doubt still lingered.

"Right, once we defeat Organization XIII, we'll drag Riku home," Sora said with resolve.

"There he goes again..." Donald said as Sora flexed his arms, preparing himself for the road ahead to continue the search.

"I know that I've seen this man before, and I've seen the leader of Organization XIII too," Mickey explained once more. "Felt like being around the same fella. I cannot remember his name though."

Kairi poked Mickey's shoulder. "Your Majesty, may I ask you something else?"

"Sure Kairi!"

Sora continued flexing, thinking about where else to search for Riku.

"Don't get show-offy," Donald berated him.

"Am not!"

"Are too!"

Kairi leaned down closer to whisper in the King's ear. "There's something strange going on in Sora. He gets these odd bouts of rage at times and becomes an entirely different person. Sometimes I can see his hair turn blonde."

Mickey's ears twitched. "Oh no, that means something went—"

Boom! Ka-bam! The entire castle shook.

"What was that?!" Donald shouted in the confusion.

"Do you think that was something to do with Maleficent and Pete?" Kairi said. "They said there was an issue with Organization XIII."

Mickey nodded. "Let's go and help out there."

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**Missing Journal Entry 11**

Something was amiss with this group.

Each time I went out on recon, I always get visions in my head of the guy in red. I asked VII if that was normal, and he said no.

I was suddenly thrown into a test, asking if I knew who the guy in red was. My answer was always no.

Why did they care? What was so special about this guy?

They refused to answer.

Tomorrow I would ask her if she knew.

She had to know, right?

But still, they knew. Organization XIII knew something. I needed to find out.
Hello again! So close...so close to my favorite chapter aka the Battle of Hollow Bastion!

Thank you to my beta DuskyDancing again! Along with ValkyriePrincess for checking and hearing my shenanigans. :D

Some trivia:
Each chapter of this fanfic is named after a song, either in-game or after one of the Disney films.

Thank you again to TheaBa12 for all the lovely comments you left me! In due time when I am able to I will definitely update Another Side Another Line with the lovely Rokunami moments! (I got ahead on this fic so I would have some time for Another Side haha)
No. I sat upon his throne.

"Those pests are simply in our way," Saïx said. "Shall we deal with them?"

"Only when the time is right," the Superior said, slouching back in his seat. "Send IX to observe the boy and the girl, now that Naminé is in our hands."

"And what about Naminé?" Saïx asked. "Something is protecting her."

"Just watch and see." The Superior smirked underneath his hood. "All the pieces are falling into place now. We have the army. We have the tools. Now we wait for the opportune moment. And bring me Axel if you can."

"Yes Superior."

All according to plan indeed.

Heartless of armored types flooded the castle hallways. Dusks floated in the air, dancing around the Heartless, destroying them with ease, flailing their tendrils about.

Maleficent stood in the hallway, observing as the Dusks annoyed the Heartless with a twitch of her brow and her lips in a tight line.

Sora and company came running out of the study. "Maleficent!" Sora exclaimed with gritted teeth, keyblade in hand.

Pete nudged Maleficent, uneasy. "Err we're kinda getting our butts kicked in."

She glared at him. "Heartless, forget the white husks and turn your attention to Sora and his pathetic friends."

The evil duo disappeared in a dark corridor.

"Where's the King?" Sora asked.

"Worry about him later, we got Heartless and Nobodies to deal with!" Donald whipped out his staff and conjured up homing ice crystals.
"We have no time."

"Huh?" Sora looked around and Samurai Nobodies appeared. With one cut of their swords, all the Heartless were eliminated. The Samurais bowed to Sora and disappeared.

Kairi shrugged. "That was weird."

Sora nodded. "But I will take it!"

They were about to leave when the three gullwings appeared.

"Where's Maleficent?" asked Yuna, looking around the area.

"She ran off," Donald answered.

Rikku put her hands on her hips. "Well that was pre-tty lame of her."

"We picked the wrong side," Paine stated.

The three girls turned away from the gang to convene their grievances against Maleficent.

"Um, Leon could use some help," Sora said, unsure whether these girls were really helpful or not.

The girls looked back to him. "Does this Leon have any treasure?" Yuna asked, stars in her eyes.

"Yeah lots of it!" Donald used his hands to show how much.

"Score!" Rikku pumped her fist in victory.

Sora quirked an eyebrow. "Who are you exactly?"

"Oh," Yuna said as she swayed. "We're nothing worth mentioning."

"Just three treasure fanatics," Paine answered.

They disappeared in sparkles, with Rikku's voice echoing "Later taters!"

Kairi heard Donald's snickers. "Um Donald..."

Sora leaned his head back in his hands. "Does Leon even have any treasure?"

Kairi sighed. "I swear we keep getting caught up in a string of lies every moment."

"More like...slightly off truths," Donald said before taking off down the hallway. Sora, Kairi, and Goofy followed after.

They ran out of the castle hallways to the Postern. Heartless flooded the area. Out of nowhere a man with silver hair and a giant feathered wing appeared. His long blade, a masamune, was out, having just cut the Heartless away.

"It's Sephiroth!" Donald declared, staff ready in case.

Goofy had a thought. "Isn't Sephiroth the dark part of Cloud's heart?"

Sephiroth turned around. He inspected the gang before him. Two teenagers, a fiery duck and a questioning dog. How amusing. "Is that what Cloud told you?" He spoke with a deep voice. Pure darkness radiated off of him, sending a chill shivering up Kairi's spine.
Sephiroth's eyes drifted over to the keyblade in Sora's grip. "That's an interesting sword you have there."

Sora felt in his gut something very off. His stomach lurched.

"It's the keyblade," Donald said, glaring at Sephiroth.

"I see," Sephiroth examined the Kingdom Key with a dark gaze. "So that's a keyblade. And you're its chosen wielder."

Sora gritted his teeth. "So what if I am?"

"I wonder if it will change its mind about you. Fight me, if you dare," Sephiroth said.

Sora shook his head. "In case you haven't noticed, we have other priorities at the moment." He unsummoned his keyblade and turned his back to him, ready to leave. "Come on Kairi."

Sephiroth smirked. His eyes drifted over to Kairi. "A light so pure, the darkness constantly trying to snuff it out. So feeble."

She glared at him, fist clenched. "My light is not-" She choked on her words as his masamune was inches from her chin. Paralyzed on the spot. Before she could react and summon her keyblade, the Kingdom Key clashed with the sword, shoving it away from her.

Sora held no amusement on his face. All that was there was quiet anger. "No one. Touches. Kairi."

The Kingdom Key slid against Sephiroth's masamune, sparks of metal flying off.

"Then let us begin," Sephiroth said, a smirk on his lips.

Sora held no words as he rolled underneath the masamune. He called down a lightning strike upon Sephiroth, who side-stepped it with ease.

"Show me your true strength," he said, about to slice Sora in half with his sword. Sora spun around and blocked it with ease. He formed an explosion of light orbs around himself, sending Sephiroth jumping back.

Kairi, Donald, and Goofy watched the spectacle of Sora and Sephiroth battling amidst pillars of flames, orbs of dark electricity, and feathers.

It came to a head when Sora shoved Sephiroth up against the wall of the castle. Kairi clasped her hands. Goofy shoved his hands in front of Donald's eyes as they watched in surprise and horror.

Blond hair came out, and another voice spoke from Sora's mouth. "Satisfied now with this keyblade wielder?" He said with gritted teeth and a scowl.

Sephiroth's smirk fell off his face. "Fine. I concede." He disappeared in a black explosion. Sora coughed as he landed on the ground, rage leaving his body and his muscles left aching.

"Sora!" Kairi grabbed his arm to keep him upright. "You alright?"

He realized Kairi was holding him. With a blush, he turned around to inspect her for injuries. "You okay Kairi? No scratches and stuff?"

Kairi shook her head. "I'm fine Sora, but you aren't." She pulled a potion out of her belt bag. "The others need our help."
"Yeah," said Donald. "The town is crawling with Heartless and Nobodies."

Sora chugged down the potion, and they departed the poster and walked down the hidden alleyway. They came upon a man in glasses and silver gloves facing down a bunch of pink Nobodies skating around. Dancers.

"Together!" Sora and Kairi shouted, their hands entwined together. Entering Master Form, the two jumped over the man's head and danced with their keyblades in a spiral of light. Pulling in the dancers, the two continue to spin, releasing their spin cycle hold by latching onto each other's free hands. Oathkeeper flew back to Sora's electric grip once he released Kairi's hand.

The man clapped. "Very impressive techniques you have demonstrated."

"It's no big deal," Sora said. "Will you be okay against the other Heartless and Nobodies?"

The man brushed his shoulders off. He summoned a dagger in his hand. "I think I shall be fine. I was caught off guard by those Nobodies." He adjusted his glasses. "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Ignis Scientia. I am searching for my friend named Noctis. Have you seen him recently?"

Sora and Kairi tensed up, looking to each other before Sora gave his answer with a shrug. "Nope haven't seen him recently."

Ignis nodded. "Well then I must keep searching, but I will lend whatever aid I can to this showdown. Oh, may I inquire as to your names?"

"We're Sora," Sora said as he pointed to himself then to each of his companions. "Kairi, Donald, and Goofy."

Ignis gave a shallow bow. "It is an honor to meet you all. I wish you safety in this battle."

More Heartless appeared. Ignis summoned his other dagger. "Go! I will take care of the small fry here. I believe I saw a small mouse run up ahead."

The gang ran for it to the Bailey. A giant section of the wall and the stairs was blown out. Heartless soldiers one by one walked in. Sora and Kairi bashed them in with their keyblades, while Donald and Goofy zapped and slammed the surveillance robots out of the way.

Reaching a clearing overlooking the massive battlefield ahead, they stopped when a black hooded figure flipped in front of them, arms spread wide.

"You guys go find the Organization's stronghold while they're distracted here," Mickey commanded.

"But Your Majesty..." Kairi started to protest.

"Leon and the others are friends too," Sora declared.

"There is plenty of help here. This could be our only opportunity. We'll take care of this fight. Donald, Goofy, take Sora and Kairi and get going."

Sora sighed, hand over his heart. "But I promised Leon."

Donald and Goofy knew how important this was to Sora. Kairi always knew Sora would never abandon a fight when his friends needed him most. She looked at the royal knight captain and court magician. They winked at her.
"Come on you lazy bum. The Organization cannot be kept waiting," she said, hand on his shoulder.

"You're coming with us whether you want to or not," Goofy ordered.

"Come on Sora you gotta be good," Donald said with a wink.

He caught on. "Right. I gotcha."

The four of them ran past the King.

"Sorry Your Majesty," Sora said, saluting him.

Kairi bowed to him quickly and ran off with Sora. "Yeah sorry about this!"

Down in the maw below, the Heartless migrated towards packs of Dusks. Each and every ally of the Restoration Committee was battling the hordes of soldiers and robots.

Stitch had his gun blasters out, hopping from Heartless to Heartless and shooting them in the face.

Noctis unleashed a barrage of assorted weapons at a group closing in on him.

Yuffie was throwing her shuriken at each Heartless, dispatching rows of them. One pushed her down with its blade. Landing on her knees, she gasped for air. A flower blossomed over her head, healing her scratches from the opening the Heartless had. Aerith ran over to her, helping her back up.

Yuna, Rikku, and Paine all had tiny versions of a pair of dual pistols, winged dual blades, and a longsword. Each tiny girl kicked and bashed in a Heartless off a cliff.

Cloud and Leon were back to back, gunblade and buster sword out at the stalling Heartless.

"Think you can handle this many?" Leon asked.

Cloud nodded, his spikes bouncing. "Well...Might be tough if one more shows up."

Leon smirked. "Then that'll be the one I take care of."

"What? You're fighting too?"

The two lunged at the Heartless, cleaving down scores of them in one swing. A group surrounded Leon, encroaching in on him.

"Need a hand?" Gladio said from above on the cliffs. He jumped down, stabbing his greatsword into the ground and sending a shock wave out, knocking the Heartless off the cliff.

In the abandoned computer study, No I. of Organization XIII walked in and typed in seven passwords on the computer.

*Another.*

*Braig*

*Dilan*
Even
Aeleus
Ienzo
Xehanort

The door to the stairway down below opened up. No. I walked down into an endless spiral of stairs.

At the bottom, he entered a chamber. The Chamber of Repose. It was gray, with chains of white on the floor crawling up the walls to connect to Nobody symbols. He sat down on a throne. Hood still drawn, he meditated.

On a table across the room was a set of armor and a steel purple keyblade.

"It's been a long time...friend," he said.

The smell of freshwater flooded his nose.

Aqua?

"Wise Ansem, I seek your advice," Mickey said to the man with a red scarf on. He sat at his desk in the clean study.

Ansem licked an ice-cream. "Would you like an ice-cream Mickey? It's Sea-Salt."

"Sure!" Mickey took one and unwrapped it. "So um, what do we do about the worlds? I sense trouble is brewin'."

"I'm afraid so, my friend."

The door opened. A man with white hair and a purple scarf bowed. "Master Ansem, regarding my presentation the other day..." He began. "I would like your permission to proceed..."

Ansem stood up in outrage. "Out of the question! Forget this nonsense of hearts of worlds and doors. It is forbidden."

Mickey turned around to get a better look.

"But Master Ansem..."

Ansem shook his head. "Xehanort. Those thoughts are best forgotten."

Xehanort tried to protest, but stopped. He sighed and bowed. His brown eyes connected with Mickey's.

Xehanort.

The gang ran into ruins of a building. The floor was intricate, made in a different time of Hollow
Bastion.

In a dark corridor, stepped out Demyx.

"Hey Roxas!" Demyx said.

Sora's fist clenched. "What do you want?"

"Scram!" Donald yelled.

Demyx cringed. "I knew he was sending the wrong guy..." He tried again. "You're looking lively."

"Didn't we catch you in the Underworld?" Kairi said. "We were on our way to save Sora...Then we caught you stealing the Olympus stone."

Demyx scratched his cheek. "Uhhh...Yeah sorry about that."

Sora crossed his arms. "Why did the Organization even send you? Can you even fight?"

Demyx sighed. "Roxas is the same as always..." He planted his feet on the ground, raising his finger at him with a glare. "Silence, traitor." His hand up, water formed in a circle at his feet and pulled up into his palm. The water created a Nobody emblem-shaped sitar. "Dance water dance!"

Clones of water surrounded them. Sora grabbed Kairi's hand. "Give us strength!" He shouted. Their clothes transformed, the resulting shockwave blowing all the clones away.

"Uh oh." Demyx darted away from the two teenagers in blue, leaving water pillars in his path.

Sora pointed his keyblade at Demyx, shooting out blue magic arrows. Kairi skated across the floor, charging up thunder arrows on her bow. Demyx held up his sitar to deflect the arrows, but the fire arrow clipped his cloak instead. "Ow!" He said, slamming into the wall. "Okay then." He strummed his sitar and formed walls of water.

Kairi skated over to Sora, her hand reaching for his. Their keyblades coated in fire, they dashed into the wall. Demyx retreated back again in pillars of water.

Donald hopped onto Sora's shoulder. "Fire!" He shouted to the sky. A shower of fire rockets rained down upon Demyx, blasting him every direction like a ping-pong ball. Skidding to a halt, Demyx created a spotlight on himself and played like mad.

Goofy pointed to up the stairs. "Watch out!" A tidal wave was forming. He put his shield down and grabbed a hold of Sora and Kairi's arms. Donald closed his eyes as the wave curved over them.

"Ahhh!" The gang screamed as they were shoved around by the tidal wave.

Demyx sat upon the cliff, strumming away while humming.

Sora lifted his keyblade just high enough above the water to fire an arrow bullet at Demyx. It hit his hand and caused the sitar to fall into the water.

"No! My sitar!" Demyx dove in after it, but the water level had a rapid decrease. He scrambled to reach for his sitar but Kairi put her foot down on top of it. Sora skidded across the wet floor and struck the final blow.

Demyx choked on his words. Trying to say something, anything, he twitched for his instrument.
"No...No way...Noooo..." He yelled out.

Kairi looked away. The Nobody's cries were too much to bear.

Sora stood there, not sure if he should have pitied him for his lack of fighting skill and being a punching bag, or still be angry he attacked in the first place. He grabbed Demyx's coat, even as he was fading away in black ashes.

Anger remained.

"Where is Naminé?!" Sora demanded with another voice.

"She..."

Demyx disappeared without a trace.

"Anyone of the Organization who'd like to be next?!" Sora shouted to the sky. "You sent your weakest as fodder. Come out you cowards!"

"Sora!" Donald berated him. "Don't antagonize them!"

Kairi put her hand on Sora's. "Yeah Sora...Not now."

"We gotta help our friends out first," reminded Goofy.

"Aha! There you are," Mickey said. "Why are you all soaking wet?"

"Long story..." Kairi said with a shrug.

Sora, Donald, and Goofy hung their heads in shame, awaiting for a lecture.

Mickey shook his head. "You sure have lotsa friends to help. Let's go."

Up above, a robot Heartless fired a laser at a dusk, who dodged with ease. The laser clipped the side of a cliff and sent a piece of rock flying off right towards the king.

"Look out!" Goofy dived in and shoved Mickey out of the way. The rock hit him in the head. He skidded across the tiles and slammed into the wall.

"Goofy!" Sora, Kairi, Donald, and Mickey all yelled, sprinting over to him.

Donald shook him. "Wake up! You're the king's captain you gotta get up!"

Goofy remained limp.

"Goofy?" Mickey asked, voice trembling.

"I'm sorry about the ice cream!" Donald cried. "Oh...Goofy."

Kairi pulled out her keyblade. "Heal!"

A flower was conjured over him, but it seemed to do nothing. Goofy remained limp once more.

"This is not happening..." Sora said, on his knees. "It can't be..."

"I'm sorry..." Kairi said head down, looking over Goofy's body. "Please wake up Goofy."
Mickey held back the tears. His fist clenched. "They'll pay for this," he muttered. He tossed off his coat and charged off, Kingdom Key D in hand.

Donald quaked with anger, running off after Mickey who charged down a split path into a horde of Heartless.

Kairi looked to Sora. Sadness weighed down on their hearts.

"We need to keep going," Sora said, hand over his heart. "For Goofy."

She nodded. "Let's go." She took his hand, leading him down the steps towards the other path full of Heartless.

Keyblades in hand, the two shared silence as they fought for Goofy. More and more Heartless crowded around the duo. Destroy five, and ten more took their place.

"Need some help?" Yuffie called out from above. In a flash of smoke she appeared, throwing her shuriken in a circular path.

Kairi grabbed a robot and used her keyblade as a bat to knock it into the air. Yuffie poofed up the side of the cliff and stabbed it with her shuriken.

"I've got this area covered. Go on get going!" Yuffie told them, wiping out more Heartless with ease.

Moving down the cliff-side, the pair was stopped by a giant meteor of a Heartless.

Gunshots from the side pounded the Heartless until it went flying off the cliff. Prompto stepped out into view. "Hey Sora, Kairi! Need a hand?"

Surveillance Heartless flew in.

Kairi nodded. "Maybe."

Sora positioned himself, firing ice crystals out of his keyblade. "Let's do this!"

"Aww yeah!" Prompto took out a machine gun and began firing at the Heartless in the air. Sora and Kairi moved behind him as they spun around. The keyblade duo smashed in Heartless after Heartless charging in.

Once the area was mostly clear, Prompto fist-bumped Sora. "I got this area under control now."

The couple waved off Prompto as they headed farther down the pathway. More meteor Heartless appeared, this time in a pack of five.

"Oh boy," Sora said, hand reaching for Kairi's to activate master form. He was stopped when from a crack in the wall busted in Gladiolus. He swept up the morning stars in a whirlwind and sent them to oblivion.

"I got your back. Leave this place to me," Gladio said with a wink and a smile.

"Thanks Gladio!" Kairi waved to him.

Into the cavern, shadow Heartless swarmed the darkness. Only a few cracks of light shone through.

"This is..." Kairi clutched Sora's hand.
"We can take 'em!" Sora declared.

Entering Limit Form, Kairi charged her light blade up while Sora illuminated his keyblade and tossed it into the sea of darkness. In the darkness of the cave, another weapon of light shone through. It was a rapier coated in golden luminescence.

"I got you," Stella said to them. "Leave this to me."

She danced around the shadows, kicked them and slashing them away in fluid movements. Kairi took inspiration from her and began dancing with her as well, her light blade cleaving scores of shadows.

Sora only stood there in awe of the girls' movements. "Wow..."

Once the pathway was cleared out, Stella pointed her rapier towards the exit. "You did great. I have this."

Sora saluted to her. "Yes ma'am!" Kairi pulled him out of the cave and down the road.

Out in the daylight once more, giant floating red Heartless made of fire appeared. Orbs of fire swirled around them.

One crimson jazz was kicked in the face, sending it spinning outward and becoming dizzy.

Tifa cracked her knuckles. "I'll help!" She punched another crimson jazz in the head, slamming it into a wall. Kairi rolled in and reflected the exploding fire orbs. Sora stabbed his keyblade into each dazed crimson jazz until there was none left. More appeared.

"Well then." Tifa charged up her fist with energy. "This'll hurt!" She punched the crimson jazzes so hard she went right through them. "Hurry, go on ahead."

Under a rock bridge, armoured soldiers and regular Heartless soldiers moved in around the couple.

Leon charged in with his gun blade, now a giant knife of light. "Here goes!"

Sora and Kairi put their hands together, tuning into Valor form. Sora joined the side of Leon with his two keyblades. Kairi picked off the strays with a twirl of her keyblade in the air.


In Valor form still, Sora and Kairi charged down towards a ravine.

Armoured soldiers froze in their movements, twitching.

Ignis was already there, a lance in his hand. "Greetings again." He lunged upwards, throwing his lance at a column of Heartless and off into the ravine.

Sora and Kairi stood back to back, knocking Heartless after Heartless into the ravine with Ignis.

Ignis re-summoned his lance. "Quickly go. Hurry!"

With a nod, they left, their drive form wearing off.

A group of large bodies stood in the way.

"Seriously?" Sora rolled his eyes. "These guys are a pain." He fired off a volley of lightning
strikes, making the bodies hop.

Kairi parried a swing of their fists. "I agree."

"Need some help?"

Noctis floated above them, weapons encircling him. A katana in hand, he pulled out the blade and cut them all with one swipe. His barrage of blue weapons shot at the remaining large bodies, cleaning the area in one go.

"You better hurry to the Maw, I'll clean up the rest here," Noctis said.

Sora gave him a thumbs up. "You got it."

At the mouth of a crystal cavern, every type of Heartless appeared. Large bodies, shadows, soldiers, armoured soldiers, surveillance robots, crimson jazzes, and morning stars.

"Really?!" Sora exclaimed with exasperation. "All of you?"

Kairi backed herself up to Sora's back. "Out of our way!"

Cloud came flying in from nowhere. His buster sword whipped around, cleaving every Heartless with barely a touch. "Get them close to me."

Sora knocked the Heartless close to Cloud. Kairi used fire on the other side of Cloud to push them in.

Cloud glowed blue, attacking the cluster of Heartless over and over and over and over. With one final gleam of light at the tip of the buster sword, he slammed it down in an explosion of light.

"Most of the Heartless here are gone," Cloud said. "We'll clean up here. The maw will need your attention most."

The two teenagers nodded. "Got it."

Inside the crystal cavern, the two caught their breath.

"So many Heartless..." Kairi said.

"No kidding..." Sora added.

Kairi put a hand on his arm. "You okay?"

It came rushing back. Goofy.

"Yeah...Not really..." He said, trying to choke back the tightness in his throat.

"I'm so sorry, Sora," She said, pulling him into a hug. He hugged her back.

Mickey and Donald came running in. "You guys okay?" Mickey asked.

"We're fine it's just..." Kairi said, their embrace breaking.

"Oh Goofy..." Donald sighed.

"Hey fellers!" Goofy waved to them.
Everyone's jaw dropped. "Goofy!"

Mickey rushed over to hug him. "Aww Goofy!"

"You know, that really hurt," Goofy said. Mickey hugged him tighter. "Gwarsh, Your Majesty, I get hit on the head all the time."

Donald stomped over and rammed his staff down on Goofy's knee.

"Ow!" Goofy said, hopping while holding his knee. "That hurt too!"

Donald was not having it. "Don't worry me like that again!"

Sora hugged Goofy. "You're okay!"

Kairi smiled for the group of friends, and a weight on her heart lifted. She swayed in happiness. "Glad to see you're alright Goofy."

Sora sighed in relief, releasing Goofy from the hug.

Kairi looked to the exit of the cave. The dark castle where Maleficent's army was based in was in view. She took a step outside and noticed the army down below. "We have a tough battle ahead of us."

Sora placed a hand on her shoulder. "And we'll do it, together, right Kairi?"

She nodded. "Even if we're apart, we're always close by."

Sora smiled. "Right." He grabbed her hands. Warmth flooded their cheeks. "I'm ready if you are, Kairi."

Kairi took a deep breath. "I am."

Mickey prepared his keyblade. "Now let's get down there and clear them out!"

Weapons prepared, the five of them marched down to the Maw.

A stillness in the air hovered over them. Donald's feathers stuck up. Kairi and Sora's skin crawled. Goofy steeled himself, ready for the impending battle.

Darkness. Nothingness. It made their hair stand on end. Kairi took a deep breath. Darkness was all around them, and it weighed down on her heart the most. She had to remain vigilant.

Standing before them were thousands of Heartless.

Something wasn't right.

"Why are they all frozen?" Donald asked.

Sora and Kairi looked around for the cause.

"Look!" Goofy pointed to upon the cliff. A dark corridor was forming.

Stepping out was a man who stood tall and proud. He removed his hood to reveal his face. Orange eyes glinted in the dull overcast. Silver hair sprawled over his shoulders. He gave an air of utmost authority.
"It's the guy who is not Ansem!" Donald exclaimed, jaw dropped.

"You mean it's his Nobody!" Goofy corrected his friend.

"The leader of Organization XIII..." Kairi gasped.

Sora never thought he would feel such pure uncontrollable rage at the figure above him. "Xemnas..." Another voice spoke from his mouth. His fist was tight.

Mickey glared at the man. "Wait a minute! Now I know! The man was Ansem the Wise's apprentice, Xehanort! His Nobody is the leader of Organization XIII."

Xemnas smirked at the group before them. A certain malicious glee lied in his eyes.

"And he shall pay," Sora muttered, in a different voice still. "Let's go." His voice became normal once again.

Mickey brandished his keyblade, charging towards Xemnas.

The leader of Organization XIII snapped his fingers. The Heartless began to move. They cut the gang off.

"Move!" Sora yelled.

"Out of our way!" Kairi shouted.

"We can't let Xehanort get away!" Donald declared.

Thousands upon thousands of Heartless stood in their way.

Sora looked to Donald and Goofy. They nodded and charged off into different directions of the horde. Kairi had her back to Sora. He reached for her hand, squeezing it tight.

She squeezed back, a brief smile upon her lips, falling into a tight line. Ready for battle.

"Be safe, Kairi," he whispered. The lucky charm was still in his pocket, providing him with all the protection he needed.

"I promise."

With a nod, the couple departed. Keyblade in hand, Sora charged at the Heartless legion.

"Nothing will stand in my way," the other voice spoke within Sora. "I will stop you this time Xemnas."

With a battle cry Sora was pulled up by his keyblade and darted down in a sonic slash of light. He repeated it over and over, going in a z-motion. He latched onto a surveillance robot and turned its laser onto its comrades. Any Heartless in the path of the 10-foot long laser was extinguished. He jumped onto the side of the cliff, running up it and flipping over. The world was upside down, but that did not stop him. Indifference remained on his features as he channeled the growing power within him.

For the first and possibly the last time, he was able to summon Oathkeeper as a second blade. Kingdom Key in one hand, Oathkeeper in another. Pulling himself and his arms in, he descended
onto the mobs. He unleashed an x-shaped slash at any Heartless in front of his landing zone.

The cycle repeated. Sora continued dashing to and fro each pack of Heartless, exterminating them with each hit of his two keyblades. Arcs of light followed from each stroke of the keyblade. Another soldier here. Another surveillance robot there.

Another. More. Even more. Thousands of hearts disappearing in thin air after each and every single Heartless’ body is slain.

At the end, he stood alone. A thousand Heartless destroyed. He breathed heavily, his bangs blonde for a moment.

Oathkeeper disappeared. Only Kingdom Key remained in his grip.

The maw was quiet.

Xemnas was gone.

Sora ran up ahead to a cliff overlooking the dark castle. Sora leaned against the wall, still exhausted.

Goofy, Donald, and Kairi caught up to him. Kairi was equally as exhausted as Sora, and leaned her back on the wall.

Sora was about to catch his breath and ask if they were okay, only to look up and see Mickey killing another Heartless.

"Come on!" Sora pointed his keyblade forward, running after the King.

Kairi was still out of breath. "Wait for me!" She jogged after Sora; Donald and Goofy shaking their heads and following.

Xemnas overlooked the empty field where the army of Heartless was once kept. Eyes closed in meditation.

Mickey pointed Kingdom Key D at Xemnas. "Xehanort!"

Xemnas opened his eyes. "How long has it been since I abandoned that name?" he mused.

Sora’s knuckles turned white. "Out with it!" He shouted at him, losing control of the boiling anger. Seeing him made him sick. "Where is Riku! Where is Naminé?!"

Silence. Xemnas smirked.


"Good to know that you still care deeply for her...Roxas," Xemnas said. He turned around to face them, his orange eyes looking down upon them.

Sora gasped. Something told him he’d slipped up.

Kairi didn't care that Xemnas was mocking him, but she was more concerned about Sora. This wasn't her Sora. Not again.

Who was this boy before her?
"As for Riku," Xemnas continued. Sora and Kairi snapped to attention again. "Perhaps you should ask your king."

Mickey glared at him. "Xehanort!" He lunged at him. Xemnas let out a hmph as he disappeared in a dark corridor. Mickey went inside, disappearing into the abyss.

"Your Majesty!" Donald and Goofy cried out. "No!"

"He's gone..." Sora collapsed to his knees, pounding the ground with his fist.

Kairi stood there in disbelief. "No..."

Goofy placed a solemn hand on Sora's shoulder.

"Way to fall right into their trap," a voice from behind them spoke.

A red-haired man in a black coat was leaning against a wall, arms crossed. His eyes

"Axel..." Sora muttered, not in his own voice. "What happened to Naminé?!" He demanded.

Axel's eyes widened at the statement. "Is it...No, it can't be."

"What trap?" Donald grumbled.

Axel rolled his eyes. "C'mon. It's a setup by Organization XIII. Xemnas is using you to destroy the Heartless, and you've made his job easier by having not just one but two keyblades doing all the work."

Kairi shook her head, glaring at him. "What is that supposed to mean?" She summoned her keyblade.

"Ah ah, the princess has sass," Axel said, hand-waving her comment off. "That's Xemnas' master plan. You know, that guy you just saw. X-E-M-N-A-S. Got it memorized?"

Sora had none of it. His voice still was not his own, but another's. "Enough! You know what happened to Naminé!"

"Sora..." Kairi put a hand on Sora's arm, to no prevail. His jaw was still rigid, his knuckles white. He was seeing black spots.

Axel sighed. "Look, about Naminé...I'm sorry. I let her get caught by Saïx and I failed her. I failed you too...Roxas."

"I don't care for apologies anymore! Take me to her," Sora demanded.

"If I could, I would. but I can't," Axel turned away.

Goofy tilted his head. "Why does Organization XIII wanna get rid of the Heartless?"

Axel shook his head. "Man you're slow." He turned back around, eyes on Sora's keyblade. "Every Heartless slain by that keyblade releases a captive heart. That is what they want."

"Then what are they gonna do with them?" Donald demanded.

"Kingdom He—" Before he could finish his answer, another voice interrupted.
Axel!

Saïx appeared in a corridor.

Axel's eyes widened. "Uh oh." He fled in a portal of darkness.

"You!" Sora pointed his keyblade at Saïx's back. "Let Naminé go!"

Kairi took a step back. "Sora...Please..." She feared what he was going to do. This wasn't him. Not his voice. Not his words.
If only she had gotten to talk to Mickey sooner. Perhaps she could be able to solve this before it began again. And again. She placed a hand on his shoulder but he was indifferent now, his focus squarely on Saïx and the fate of Naminé.

Saïx turned around. "Rest assured, we're taking good care of her."

"Like you would ever take care of her after all you did! Let. Her. Go!" His sneer shook Kairi, Donald, and Goofy to the core. Never had Sora been this angered. Sora charged at Saïx.

Saïx side-stepped him. "I don't think so." He kicked Sora straight in the face, knocking him to the ground.

"Sora!" Kairi rushed to his side, looking at Sora's face and gut for bruising before glaring up at Saïx. "What is wrong with you?!"

"Do you hate me? Do I make you angry?" Saïx said, a smirk on his lips.

She continued her glare, trying desperately to hold herself together in the wake of Sora's anger. Sora sat back up, wiping his mouth of the dirt and holding his jaw. Kairi sensed a strong darkness radiating from Sora's heart unlike ever before.

It reminded her of Riku in the days before the islands fell to darkness.

Saïx snapped his fingers. "Then take that rage and direct it right at the Heartless."

"What..." Sora muttered in his own voice. "Is happening to me?"

Heartless appeared.
"Sora, something is very wrong," Kairi said, placed her hand on Sora's shoulder again. "And somehow, the Organization knows."

"Very astute of you princess."

The Heartless closed in on them but did not attack. Donald and Goofy held out their weapons, waiting for the first strike.

Saïx spread his arms wide, looking to the sky. "Pitiful Heartless. Mindlessly collecting hearts. And yet, they do not realize the power they hold. The rage of the keyblade releases those hearts. They gather in darkness, masterless and free, until they weave together to make...Kingdom Hearts. And when that time comes we can truly, finally, exist."

Kingdom Hearts. The mere name was an enigma to them all. It was a force to be reckoned with at the mention of it.

Organization XIII gaining it would be destruction for all.

"You're crazy!" Kairi yelled. Sora still held his jaw, his glare at Saïx ever-tightening.
"Hmph. It is simply the truth, Princess," Saïx stated.

"What are you prattling on about?" Maleficent appeared before them. "A dominion named Kingdom Hearts is fit to be my dominion. It is mine!" She turned her head to take a brief look at Sora on the ground with Kairi. "And with double the keyblades, you're only aiding them in getting it first!"

With a wave of her staff, a green and black aura appeared around Sora, lifting him up. He struggled to break free. "K-Kairi!" He yelled for her.

Kairi reached her hand out to his. "Sora!" Her keyblade appeared in her hand. Not now. Not like this. She jumped up and charged up an orb of light from the tip of her keyblade. "No! I cannot lose you!"

Hovering in the air above them, Sora twisted and turned against the magical bonds. "Ngh...Cannot...break...free!"

"Sora!" Donald and Goofy shouted, charging forward.

Maleficent fired an orb of green flames at Kairi, blasting her against the rock wall. She fell to the ground, her head hanging like a doll's. She forced herself to get up, using her keyblade as an extra limb.

A wall of green flames appeared, separating Maleficent, Saïx, and Sora from Kairi, Donald, and Goofy. The knight and magician were thrown back.

"Pete's observations were for once, quite useful. I cannot have twice the amount of keyblades helping these fools out," Maleficent explained, swirling her stave. "The rage within Sora has tainted his heart with far more darkness than ever. Since I cannot do anything to you, Princess, I can do something about this loud-mouthed fool!"

Kairi clenched her fist. "Let. Him. Go!" She forced herself to leap up again to tear open the curtain of flames with her keyblade. The darkness, however, proved to be stronger. The flames blasted her away, leaving scratches and cuts, fire engulfing her body for a few moments. She landed on her back, hard.

She tried to get up again, her arms shaking. "Sora...No!"

Sora screamed out as the darkness encircled him. "Kairi!" Another voice spoke from him. "I won't...Let you fail...If I have to..."

Another boy was trying to break free of Sora. Blonde hair of a shadowy boy appeared as Sora tried to fight back the boy within him.

Kairi's legs were like jelly as she pushed herself up. "SORA!" She screamed, a tear dripping down her cheek. She stumbled forward onto her knees. She lifted her keyblade, but it was too heavy. She placed a shaky hand on her heart. "I will...Protect you..." She shimmered with light, charging forward but ultimately as she dreadfully finds, her light wasn't as potent as she thought.

It was only stronger with Sora's, and now that was being snuffed out.

The flames blasted her back again, setting her aflame. She whined in pain. The flames evaporated, leaving even more scratches and cuts on her skin. Her magical clothes remained intact through the damage. Hair frayed, she looked up, her head heavy, only able to watch in despair.
"Kairi..." Sora uttered as he could no longer fight anymore. "I'm sorry."

"SORA!" She cried out. "No...No..."

This couldn't be happening. It couldn't be. It was like her reality was falling apart at the seams. This was just like the first time she was in Hollow Bastion.

The darkness engulfed his entire body, forcing him to succumb to darkness.

"Sora no!" She cried out again in denial. Her hands and knees were shaking so much that she collapsed as soon as she tried pushing herself up once more.

Dusks appeared before Maleficent.

Saïx glared the witch down. "The Heartless follow the strongest, you know," he said.

Maleficent smirked, her creation taking form. "I only need to control this one."

"Have it your way then." Saïx summoned berserkers and promptly left.

Maleficent rolled her eyes.

Her new creation took shape. It was in the form of Sora, but his body was covered in black. His eyes were glowing yellow, and his hands were claws. Wispy tendrils of darkness encircled his new form. "I will hold off this rabble while you, pathetic girl, finish off those Organization XIII fools. Get out of here." The dusks attacked the witch, squeezing at her limbs.

"I..." Kairi glared at Maleficent, making another attempt at getting up. "You...Why?! I don't take orders from you!"

Donald and Goofy managed to get back up and were limping their way towards Kairi.

The Sora-Heartless stood on the ground, crouched down and twitching.

"Sora..." Kairi felt hot tears sting her eyes as she looked at the creature.

Maleficent glared at her, falling into her own cloak to evade the hammer of the berserker. "You can't be trusted to do anything can you?"

A dark portal formed below Kairi, Donald, and Goofy, pulling them in its clutches. Kairi grunted and cried more, her body fighting against the darkness as it pulled her deeper and deeper.

The Sora-Heartless twitched its hand out for her, but she was already gone.

Saïx returned to the Round Room upon his throne along with the other remaining Organization XIII members. Xemnas sat in the tallest.

"Sora is no more," Saïx stated.

No. II grabbed the arms of his chair in shock. "No way, what?"

Xaldin rolled his eyes. "Hmph. Not surprised."

"He has been forced to become a Heartless by Maleficent," Saïx said. "Kairi however, knows now
of our plans."

Xemnas smirked. "She is too nice for her own pure heart. She will continue doing as we wish. As for Sora... Perhaps this is an advantage we have that Maleficent failed to consider. Send out the dusks."

"Interesting," No. X said, flipping cards in his palm. "A gamble she took, but it shall work out in our favor anyways."

Xemnas leaned on his hand. "There is a small chance however that it won't. Keep an eye on Naminé."

"Yes, Superior," Saïx said, departing.

No. II leaned back in his seat. "Never thought that the boy would get turned into a Heartless again. I thought he was to be stronger than most."

Xemnas remained indifferent. "The anger and hatred of Roxas tainted his heart. Roxas forced Sora into this state. It was inevitable. Either way, everything still works in our favor, even if we're set back a little. Having two valiant keyblade wielders was certainly a boon."

In Twilight Town, a being formed from darkness and light.


He opened a portal. Time to collect his cloak.

Kairi laid upon a pure black ground in a dark abyss. She sat up, the memory of watching Sora suffer and struggle from being turned into a Heartless all too fresh. "Sora..." A tear slipped out. Then another. Then another. "I'm all alone. I can't..."

I'm stronger with you.

A man in a black coat walked over to her. She looked up from his shoes up to see he was holding a white box.

It wasn't the Organization. The fog was clearing in her head. This was Ansem, Seeker of Darkness... Wasn't it? No, it was not him.

He offered a hand to her. Ah, right, this was him, this was the man she had met, the one who gave her training before he left.

Taking his hand, he helped her up. "Can you... Help me please?" She begged, wiping away her tears. "Sora is... I can't do this alone..."

The man snapped his fingers. The floor opened up and the darkness melted away in shimmering
Kairi uncovered her eyes to see the sunset on the horizon. Palm trees swayed to and fro. The ocean caressed the sand.

She was on their play island. Sora, Riku, and hers.

The man presented her with the white box. "Here," he spoke in a deep voice. It almost rivaled Xemnas'.

She took it. Her hand brushed over the back of his hand and it all came flooding back.

A strange familiarity. An old sense of adventure and seeker of the unknown drowned in shame.

But she knew. She always knew.

"Ri-Riku?" She asked the man. "What?"

He stepped back. "I'm no one, just a denizen of darkness."

"Riku..." Kairi clutched the box.

"Remember Kairi," he said. "You're never alone. Everything will be alright." He pointed towards the waterfall, before disappearing in a dark portal.

She looked to the waterfall and remembered that the Secret Place was behind the thicket. She crawled through the small hole and looked around. The rocks and roots remained the same as always. Nothing has changed.

Except for one minor detail.

She sat down on her knees with the box in front of the portraits they drew as children.

Opening the box, she pulled out a picture of the gang from Twilight Town, but with another boy. The same boy she kept seeing in Sora.

It clicked now. She had met him once, in the mansion. Roxas.

She continued looking through the box. An ice cream, sea-salt ice cream, was still in its wrapper. She moved it aside and found one more thing.

A letter in a bottle. She swallowed. This was her letter to Sora.

She set it aside, looking at the portraits. Sora drew Kairi, and she drew Sora.

Sora had added a new edition. He had drawn himself giving her a paopu fruit.

A tear slipped down her cheek. A sad smile graced her lips as she tried to hold back the pain. He cared. He always cared. He wanted nothing more than to intertwine their destinies together forever. She grabbed the thick stick used to draw on the rocks and added to the drawing.

"I'm sorry...Sora."

She left the secret place, bottle in hand, the ice-cream and the photo in the other. She leaned down in the sand and placed the bottle in the water. The waves washed it away into the sea. "I will find you Sora. I know I will. I will not let you go."
Missing Journal Entry 19

There was a girl in the darkness. She looked...like someone I should know. If I blinked I swore I could have seen red hair instead of black.

She told me to stop Xemnas, that he was the reason she was even awake in the first place.

Whatever he was doing I needed to know, now.

Finding the weapons was more difficult than I could imagine. But now, I have the passwords to Xemnas' little secret computer. All 13 of them.

I needed to sneak in when no one was there. Tonight, I would search.

I am back from my excursion.

If anyone finds this. Xemnas is worse than I could ever imagine. I need some air.

I will go find her. The girl in white.

Chapter End Notes

:D

I had this planned the entire time I began this fic. The plot twist was planned far, far before KH3. This fic was conceived fully during when KH3 was announced for development, so any coincidences to KH3's Ending are entirely coincidental.

Thank you to TheaBA12 and The_Traveller for your comments! I will respond very soon!
Falling.

He was falling into darkness.

Sora had no idea where this abyss led, or how deep it went.

"Kairi..." He whispered.

He landed on a stained glass floor. This floor was different...It was covered in chains of white.

"Kairi?" He called out into the void. "Riku?"

A light stood at the edge of the platform. "Sora!" Her sweet voice called out to him.

He reached out to her light, but it flew away.

"Right...I'm trapped," he said, "I promise I will come back to you Kairi."

He looked down. The chains covering the floor obscured a castle-like structure.

A voice in the long-off distance—a girl's voice—sounded similar to Kairi's own voice.

"You're...Oh..."

"Hello?" He called out into the distance. "Who are you?"

"You're trapped within your own heart. Darkness is surrounding you, but you're...in a different part of your heart. The part that is locked away," the girl explained. "You don't know who I am."

Sora looked back down to the floor, his brows furrowed. "Hmm, do you know what these chains are?"

"I put them there, sadly. You'll need to unlock them yourself. But remember, Sora, don't lose track of your light."

Silence reigned once again.

Sora summoned Kingdom Key to his grip and pointed it at the floor. A keyhole appeared, ready and shimmering. Unlocking it with a beam of light, the chains disappeared. The floor opened up to a hole into the abyss.

A light at the end of the tunnel.

Her light.

Sora took a step into the hole and found himself floating down deeper into the dark abyss. Images swirled around him, blurring together.
14-year-old Sora pushed open the doors to the large castle. "What's inside here?"

Kairi, 14 years old, bit her lip and looked around the white walls of the hallway. "You sure we're even supposed to be here?"

Donald and Goofy's clothes changed in the blink of an eye. "Huh?" Donald said, looking down at his battle attire. "Not again..."

"Gwarsh," Goofy furrowed his brows, "this place is kinda empty."

"Something is telling me to go forward," Sora said. "Well, you think Riku is here?"

Kairi nodded. "I...I think so. Something is telling me he is here."

"I wonder who that guy in the black hood is though..." Sora thought out-loud. "To lose is to find, and to find is to lose."

"That is correct," the man in black said behind them, standing in the way of the gate. "You seek something important to you...Even though you have it for now."

"I do?" Sora said with a glare at the man. "Explain?"

"Hm." The man walked forward, straight to Kairi. "You will do."

Kairi backed up, hands up in fists. "Don't touch me!"

"Kairi!" Sora, Donald, and Goofy all rushed over to save her.

Donald raised his staff. "Thunder!"

Nothing happened. The man shook his head and a dark corridor appeared behind Kairi with a flick of his wrist. "I'm sure the Chilly Academic would love to ask you a few questions." He grabbed her by the wrists and shoved her in.

"Sora!" She cried out to him. The corridor vanished.

Sora felt his world collapsing. "What did you do to her?!"

"You want to find her? Your precious one? Then continue on." The man flicked a blue card. "Remember the rules are different...To lose is to find, and to find is to lose, here in Castle Oblivion."

15-year-old Sora stood there in the scene, a mere observer. "Kairi..."

"Where do ya think Sora could be?" Goofy said, adjusting his hat and thinking out loud.

Donald leaned back in his chair on the gummi-ship. "Who knows? He's a Heartless under Maleficent's control."

Kairi walked past the two. She handed Donald the sea-salt ice cream wordlessly before taking Sora's seat as the pilot. She sighed, eyes closed. She wanted Sora to be here. She wanted Riku to come back.
After Riku left her the box, Chip and Dale found her on Destiny Islands again and Donald and Goofy were able to pick her up.

"It's up to Kairi to decide where to start searching," Goofy said.

With a shaky breath, she opened her eyes. "What would Sora do, knowing everything that happened in Hollow Bastion?" She summoned Destiny's Embrace to her hand. "Using the Keyblade will only help the Organization. But I know that Heartless will continue attacking anyways. How can I..."

Goofy and Donald placed reassuring hands on her shoulders. "Aww, we know it's a hard choice, but you're right to keep on fighting Heartless," said Donald.

Goofy nodded with a grin. "Yeah, and maybe you'll be able to find Sora sooner."

"But...Can I? Am I strong enough to do so? Sora and I were stronger together. I was stronger with Sora." Kairi put down her Keyblade. "I felt so helpless at that moment. If I had been more powerful, I could have saved him..." She curled up into the chair.

"You are strong, Kairi. And every step you take in this journey has and will make you stronger," Donald said. "And you have us."

Goofy smiled. "All for one and one for all."

Kairi looked up from her knees. "Thank you, Donald, Goofy."

"What are friends for?" Donald said, taking a bite out of the ice cream.

"Where to?" Goofy asked. "You're the captain now."

She thought of her memories of the raft. Sora and Riku's race over who got to be captain and name the raft.

Highwind.

Excalibur.

She never thought of a name for a boat or ship before.

Regalia.

"Perhaps we should check on our friends in the worlds. Knowing the Organization is out there, they may still need our help," Kairi said. "It's what Sora would do."

Donald hopped into his seat, licking the popsicle stick clean. "Oh boy!"

Goofy buckled in. "Full steam ahead!"

Kairi leaned forward, her hands on the controls. "I promise, Sora. I will come back to you."

Li Shang collapsed to the floor.

The man in black's Keyblade, a red blade with blue veins, sparked with dark energy. He turned to face the indifferent Emperor.
Kairi looked around the Imperial City. No one was around. "This place is too quiet for my tastes..."

Donald quaked, pointing towards the stairs. "Wak!"

A man in black with tight sleeves ran up the stairs.

"Hey wait!" Kairi shouted to the man, who never ceased in his steps. "Stop!"

Reaching the top of the stairs, the man was gone, but three soldiers lay upon the ground. Yao, Ling, and Chien Po.

"What the...What happened?" Kairi got on her knees to inspect them for injuries. "Are you guys okay?"

Chien Po sat up. "The man in black knocked us out of the way. Didn't even bother attacking, just pushed us with his weapon and ran."

Yao cracked his knuckles. "I will smack that man silly..."

Ling pointed to the gates. "He ran inside there and closed the doors."

Kairi, Donald, and Goofy ran over to the gates and latched onto the handles. Pulling with all their strength and weight, the door refused to budge even a centimeter.

"Hey, guys, what's going on?" Mulan called out for them at the top of the stairs behind them. "What happened? What are you trying to do?"

Kairi released her grip on the door handle and pointed to the door. "A man in black went inside; I think the Emperor is in danger!"

Mulan put a finger on her lip in thought. "Getting through the door that way won't allow us to reach the Emperor in time..." She looked up to the overhead. Two giant columns held it up, and a ledge extended over to an open window. "I've got an idea." She took out a sash from her belt. She turned to the soldier trio. "Can we borrow the ties on your armor?"

The three men nodded. They took off the ties that bound their armor to their arms and shoulders and handed them to her. She passed them over to Kairi, Donald, and Goofy. Mulan ran over to the large column and wrapped her robe sash around it. The cloth clung to the little wooden ridges in the column perfectly. She began climbing, her feet pushing her up.

Kairi, Donald, and Goofy nodded. Donald went next up the column, then Goofy.

Ling waved to Kairi. "We'll watch your backs here."

She saluted to them, "Gotcha." She looked up the large column. This was more intimidating than exercise during training. She took a deep breath; she could do this. Hopefully. She wrapped the long cloth around the column and pulled herself up. Her feet clung to the surface. With each step up, she shifted the cloth upwards to support her weight. Her left foot slipped near the top, and she hugged the column tight, eyes closed as she breathed heavily.

It was a long way down. She couldn't fall.

She had to get up there. They needed her.

Her thoughts wandered to Sora and Riku. No, not right now. She hoisted herself up and grabbed onto the wooden grip in the ceiling. She used the pillar to kicked herself around to the outer ledge
Donald and Goofy held out their hands for her to grab onto. She took them, the duo pulling her onto the roof.

The four of them moved across the roof and shimmied on a thin ledge towards the open window of the palace. Once inside, the group ran down the hallway towards some stairs. Donald and Goofy jogged down the steps.

Kairi looked to the rails. There was a smooth path going almost to the bottom. "Hey Mulan, check this out." She hopped onto the railing and slid down the stairs.

Mulan laughed, hopping on with her, only she stood as she slid.

The two reached the bottom before even Donald and Goofy. Donald crossed his arms. "No fair, that's cheating!"

Kairi summoned her Keyblade with a grin. "Well, then slow pokes let's go! The Emperor is in trouble."

Donald glared while Goofy chuckled. Kairi and Mulan brandished their weapons and busted through the door to the antechamber. Kairi slid across the smooth floor, spotting a man in black before the front door. His sleeves were tight with the shoulders padded.

"Stop!" Kairi pointed her Keyblade at the man. "Who are you?"

The man froze in his stance. He turned around and took off his hood. An eye patch covered one eye, the other golden. Silver streaks were in his black pulled back hair. He smirked. "The name's Xigbar, princess. Guess you have things covered here like a good little girl."

He snapped his fingers. Purple Nobodies suspended in the air with crossbow-shaped sniper rifles appeared.

The gang prepared themselves to fight. Kairi looked around and saw the man was gone from in front of the door.

"Wait!" Mulan shouted behind Kairi.

Kairi turned around and saw Xigbar fleeing. "Stop! Ahh!" She stumbled back when a red arrow sniped her in the gut. It felt like she bumped into something by accident with more force than she should have. "Ouch..."

Goofy grabbed her arm to hold her steady. She thanked him and leaped at the sniper in front of her. She bashed the sniper in, but it only wiggled backward and hovered in the air. Another arrow hit her in the back, sending her flying forward onto the floor. Another arrow hit her in the leg. She whined in pain, trying to push herself up. She could do this, she tried telling herself.

Why was her confidence gone so suddenly? She felt she could take on the entire universe when she came here. Now she was being bested by a bunch of Nobodies.

She squeezed the handle of Destiny's Embrace and channeled her magic. "Reflect!"

The next bullet arrow bounced back at the sniper. It shook and wiggled in the air. Kairi got up and slashed at the sniper. It vanished in a burst of white circles laced with jagged black thorns.

All the snipers were vanquished by the gang. Kairi stared at Destiny's Embrace, doubt in her skill. Her power. Her strength.
She was stronger before she lost Sora.

"Let's go!" Mulan declared, pushing open the doors to the throne room and marching inside.

Kairi dismissed her Keyblade. Now wasn't the time to dwell...or was there ever a perfect time to do so?

Li Shang nursed his shoulder, trying to stand upright by the side of the perfectly calm Emperor.

"Your Excellency!" Mulan bowed to the Emperor. "We saw the spy in black."

The Emperor nodded. "I fear you may have other things to worry about. The man left in darkness a few minutes ago, but there is a greater threat afoot."

Left in darkness? That sounded like a different person entirely. Xigbar was trying to get inside. This man in black was someone who already got in.

"What's wrong?" Donald asked.

"A giant Heartless is about to attack," the Emperor stated.

"A Heartless?!" Kairi, Donald, and Goofy all exclaimed.

The ground shook beneath their feet.

Mulan nodded, bowing again. "We'll see to it, Your Majesty!"

"Mulan..." Shang reached out to her.

She looked back at him. "Shang, guard the Emperor."

He winced as he put his arm back into place, but he nodded in silence.

Goofy pointed towards the large doors. "It's gotta be outside."

Sure enough, it was. The four of them ran outside and found Yao, Ling, and Chien-Po with their swords out in the courtyard. A giant winged dragon Heartless with sparks of lightning flying off of its yellow horns swooped over them.

"Look out!" Kairi called out to the trio, Keyblade in her grip.

"It's a Stormrider!" Yao screamed, retreating away from the swooping dragon.

Goofy braced his shield. "A what?"

"It's a dragon that controls lightning!" Mulan exclaimed. "Dodge!" She, Kairi, Donald, and Goofy all threw themselves out of the way.

Mushu popped out of Mulan's collar. "Ahem! Dragon versus dragon!" He took a deep breath and breathed out a large bellow of fire at the tail of the dragon. The Heartless unleashed a thunderstorm in retaliation.

"Whaaoooh!" Goofy hopped to and fro each foot.

Donald ran around, his tail feathers smoking.

Kairi rushed to their side and cast reflect. Again. And again.
Mulan grabbed the arms of the trio and pulled them against the large wall of the Imperial City.

The dragon swooped down again, dropping firebombs as it went.

Kairi looked up from the sky after her last reflex of lightning. The dragon zoomed low over the ground, heading straight towards her with its wings widespread.

"Kairi!"

Sora's voice. That had to be his voice. Her constitution resolved, she planted herself firmly on the spot, her Keyblade prepared. She took a step forward, throwing her weight into an uppercut, forcing the dragon to force itself into the air to realign with its head.

It sat mid-air for a moment before Kairi jumped up and made several swipes at its gut. The dragon flopped over in pain onto the ground. Kairi landed on her feet, stumbling forward a bit.

Donald, Goofy, Mulan, Mushu, Yao, Ling, and Chien-Po all rushed in to hit the dragon while it was down. Kairi's heart was racing as she charged in, Keyblade high.

I heard your voice Sora.

Sora was pulled out of the vision, startled by what he had just seen. "Wha...What was that? I know Kairi's okay, but I don't even remember how I got her back. Or even what happened to her."

"Her memory of the events surrounding what happened at Castle Oblivion is foggy due to what occurred there. Only Riku knows truly what happened to her there." The same light voice spoke once again. "And your memories themselves are locked away."

Sora looked down at the stained glass floor. Kairi's portrait remained strong and sure of herself. "I should have been there for her. I could have kept her safe, but instead, I failed just as soon as we started our journey."

The voice said nothing for a moment as if she couldn't offer words of comfort. Then she spoke again. "You remind me of someone I know."

Sora tilted his head. A glint of light caught his eye. It was the same light from before.

And it was...in pain.

"I can't do this. I'm a failure."

It was Kairi's voice. "Kairi!" Sora called out to the light, chasing after it.

He got so close to her light, but it was once again, out of reach.

Sora slumped over on the new platform covered in chains. He sat down, staring at the floor. "Who do I remind you of?" he asked the voice from nowhere.

"Someone who is important to me. He's...Angry and bitter right now, and I hope he realizes his error before it is too late for him, for good. If you can remember your memories, and never stop following that light you hold dear, you will be able to save him."

Sora summoned Kingdom Key to his grip with a nod. "Okay, I will! If he's important to you, I will do whatever it takes."
The voice sounded surprised. "Oh. Right. Thank you, Sora."

He pointed his Keyblade at the floor.

The dragon charged up an enormous orb of lightning with its two main horns. It rested on the bridge and pointed it at the group. They all dived to the side.

Kairi looked at the flow of water underneath the bridge.

Water. Lightning.

Duh.

"Mushu?" Kairi called out, inching away from the lightning walls. "Can you set fire to the bridge?"

Mushu saluted from the back of Mulan's neck. "Aye aye!" He dove into the water and swam underneath the bridge. He began blowing fire onto the bridge.

Kairi turned to Donald, Goofy, and the rest of the group. The Stormrider fell over in exhaustion from one too many lightning beams. "I got a plan! Distract the Heartless! Donald, come with me."

She ran over to the water flow, taking a deep breath. "Okay, there has to be a spell for this..." She muttered, holding out her Keyblade. Donald looked to the water and nodded; his staff out and tight in his grip.

Yao held up Ling, Chien Po waving his hands in front of the dazed Stormrider. "Whoo-hoo!" The trio shouted. Goofy danced around with his shield.

"Water!" Kairi and Donald shouted together, their exclamations overwritten by the shouts and Hollers of the goofballs dancing in front of the Stormrider. Water flourished from their weapons and poured into the river, flooding it.

Mushu continued to burn the bridge, the water level flooding over and nearly squishing him to the ceiling of the bridge. He swam back down and out from the water, coughing up some. "Man now they're tryin' to drown me!"

The flames weakened the bridge enough. When the water was done, Kairi pictured herself as Sora, throwing his Keyblade as he pleased. "Haa!" She threw Destiny's Embrace at the head of the dragon. It cracked its head upon the ground, the bridge breaking from the fire and the main body of the dragon going into the water. With a spark of its own energy, it electrified itself into the air, trying to avoid the water which damped its stomach. Its wings were frayed as more energy crackled off of its body in desperation. It shook like mad, a giant scar caused by the water damage right in its gut. Kairi's Keyblade came back to her and she threw it again, right into the scar.

Mulan pushed everyone to safety before the creature crashed onto them all.

"Mulan!" Li Shang shouted, running over to her and wrapping his arms around her as a heart burst forth from the chest of the Stormrider.

The body disappeared. Once Shang knew the danger had passed, he backed off of Mulan.

But he was still holding her hands. He looked into her eyes and immediately released them. Both their faces were bright red.

Kairi didn't even notice the cute exchange as she stared up to the sky where the heart floated away.
into the abyss. Her Keyblade disappeared from her grip. Donald put his hand on her wrist, while Goofy rested a hand on her shoulder.

She helped the Organization. Over and over. Soon, they would reach their goal and she was powerless.

Almost powerless.

"You had to do what you had to do," Donald said in reassurance.

Goofy nodded. "Yeah. The whole place would have been done for if it weren't for your bravery."

A sad smile graced her lips. "Thank you, Donald, Goofy."

In the distance of the courtyard was a stark black figure crawling on all fours. It turned around and left.

A party was thrown in celebration of the victory and the saviors of the city.

Donald and Goofy watched as Ling tried to win over a lady with his chops-stick nose trick. It didn't work. Chien-Po slurped noodles from a bowl. Yao showed off his muscles to the public before engaging in a fistfight with a contender on top of a stage.

Kairi sat by the river flow. The bridge had been replaced by boards for people to walk on until the repairs were finished. She looked at her own reflection in the water. Her eyes were haggard; her hair was not as neat as it used to be.

Mulan came over and sat down next to her. "Goofy told me that Sora is missing. You okay?"

Kairi sighed. "I don't know. He's...very important to me, and I worry that he will be okay more than me. But am I strong enough to find him?"

Mulan placed a hand on her shoulder. "Kairi, you're stronger than you believe. Besides, you've got the support of your other friends to back you up."

Kairi looked up to see the shenanigans that Donald, Goofy, Yao, Ling, and Chien-Po were up to. The trio of soldiers respected Mulan, greatly. "Right. You do have friends to always back you."

"It's great to do things yourself, but friends are there for a reason," Mulan said. "The Emperor wants to see us."

Kairi, Donald, Goofy, and Mulan were escorted back inside the palace by Shang. Inside the throne room, the gang bowed to the Emperor.

"Once again," the Emperor began, "You have served China well. I congratulate you four on your victory. It would please me to reward you. What is it that you wish?"

Donald looked around the elaborate throne room and at the golden decor with dollar signs in his eyes, then back to his simple mage staff. Goofy's stomach growled.

Kairi stepped forward. "For me, I would like to know what that man in black said to you."

The Emperor quirked an eyebrow. "That is all you wish, young lady?"

"Yes. That's all I want to know," Kairi said. "I'm sure my friends here would like food and an
ornate decorative weapon."

The Emperor nodded, gesturing to his servants to bring them what was requested. As Donald and Goofy sat down to the side to enjoy the rich dishes. "Very well. The man in black was rather rude, but also powerful."

"Rude? Riku?" Kairi said, leaning forward to listen even more closely.

Goofy looked to Donald, mouth half full. "Is Riku part of Organization XIII?"

Donald shrugged.

The Emperor continued. "He even bested my best guards."

Shang looked down. "To my dishonor..."

"Dragons have crossed our land and left a tangled web of paths. These dragons wield such power, and they are the source of many gifts to both man and nature. But it would have seemed someone of great evil intent disturbed one of our dragons, and transformed it into what you call a Heartless. It is of my belief this man came to warn me of that danger. Then I could alert and prepare my troops. But he told me there was no need."

Shang chimed in. "He said two wise guys and a stubborn girl arrived and they would take care of things."

She was surprised she wasn't referred to as lazy. "I know that man, then. His name is Riku." A smile graced her lips. Riku was still out there, probably looking for Sora as she.

"Remember Kairi, you're never alone. Everything will be alright."

Goofy and Donald looked at each other again in concern. Goofy put a finger to his head. "But what's he doin' hanging out with Organization XIII?"

Kairi looked at her companions. Goofy was right, he wore the same coat as the Organization, for some reason. "I don't think he's helping them, but he must have a reason for looking like them. We know he's okay at least. That's what matters."

The Emperor gestured to Mulan. "Now then. Fa Mulan, do you have a request?"

Mulan bowed again, swallowing before speaking. "I would like Shang...I-I mean the Captain to uh...Could he have a vacation please?"

Shang stood there, surprised by her wish.

Kairi had to hold back her giggle. Mulan's cheeks were red as she waited for the Emperor's response.

The Emperor chuckled. "I hardly expected such a humble request." He stood up. "But I am afraid I must refuse this one request. Captain Li's responsibility is to protect the Emperor. And yet, Mulan..."

She stood up straight. "Your Excellency."

"Would you like to serve and protect alongside him?" he offered. "Two reeds together are stronger than one. But the choice is yours alone."
She smiled so wide, so happily. "I would be honored, Your Majesty."

Kairi sighed dreamily. Love was blossoming in the air. The duo of Mulan and Shang so much reminded her of her and Sora. She wanted that back, the thrill of their teamwork, and their victory after victory. He would high-five her sometimes like he would do with Riku when they sparred back at home.

Home. When would they all go back together? Before everything, she wasn't much of a fighter. Now, she knew she was fit to fight and protect.

Mulan must've felt the same way.

Kairi's eyes felt wet. She wiped them away, a smile still on her lips.

"So uh, when's the wedding?" Mushu said, standing on top of Donald's hat.

In the dungeon of The Castle That Never Was, Naminé hugged herself, leaning against the wall. She felt a part of Sora's heart and memories struggle against the darkness... And another light. A powerful light. Roxas' light.

"Who are you talking to?" Saïx asked her. He had dismissed Luxord from guard duty for the time being. "The Dusks are whispering that you're talking to someone. Who is it?"

Naminé glared at the man with the x-shaped scar. "No one. I'm talking to myself."

Saïx smirked. "If you insist. I seem to recall that a cloak is missing from Number XIII's room. Know anything about that?"

She looked away. "If I wasn't trapped in this cell maybe I would know something about anything."

"You've grown a backbone since Castle Oblivion I see," Saïx said. "No matter. We shall break that soon enough."

Naminé stood up and walked to the bars. "I learned it from Sora and Roxas. It will take more than threats to break me down."

"Even if your boyfriend's life is on the line?"

She glared, not even saying a word.

Saïx merely walked away. "A foolish girl for a foolish boy."

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**Missing Diary Entry 01**

What should I even put here? What is this thing even for? What's the point of recording my thoughts into a book? My thoughts were my own.

VII handed me this journal for record-keeping, and that no one would read it. Maybe that's true, but I'm not going to blow every single secret I keep if I even had any.

So I should introduce myself.

My name is Roxas. I am Number XIII in Organization XIII. That's all I have. That is all I am. This is all I know.
Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for the comments and kudos! As always DuskyDancing did the betaing and I thank them so much!
Chapter Notes

This was once again beta'd by DuskyDancing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter XV: Beauty and the Beast

Sora watched as his younger self left the first room of Castle Oblivion, only to be faced with Axel and the first hooded guy.

"Hello!" Axel greeted with a smirk on his mouth.

The hooded man was unfazed. "What do you want?"

Axel faked his hurt feelings. "No hogging the hero now."

Younger Sora glared. "Where is Kairi?!"

"She's safe and sound," the hooded man said, turning to Axel. "Perhaps you would like to test him then?"

"Absolutely," Axel said.

The hooded man left in a dark corridor.

Axel spread his arms. "My show now, keyblade master! Oh, who am I? The name's Axel, got it memorized?"

Present-Day Sora's jaw dropped. "I knew Axel before?"

The soft voice in the void spoke. "Yes. You knew him before your memory was altered."

Younger Sora wasn't sure how to take the introduction. "Uh, sure?"

Axel wanted to laugh. "Good, you're getting it. So Sora, now that we're getting to know each other better..." He put his hands out and summoned to his grip two chakrams in a flurry of dancing flames. "You better give me one hell of a show!"

The gang arrived back inside the castle. Not a single Heartless in sight.

Which was deeply concerning.

The Beast paced back and forth in the main hall. His attire was all cleaned and refined. He noticed Kairi, Donald, and Goofy had entered, but an important person wasn't with them.

"Where is Sora?"

Kairi was surprised by the inquiry, even if she expected it. She answered anyways. "He's missing.
We're trying to find him."

Beast grumbled, turning around to face them. "I wish you luck. Tonight is very...special."

Oh. That explained the getup.

"Uhh, maybe we came at the wrong time?" Goofy said.

Donald looked around. "No Heartless either."

Kairi shook her head. "I have a sinking feeling the Organization is up to something though."

The servants opened the doors to the ballroom. Belle made her way down the stairs dressed in a beautiful sunshine dress. Beast took her hand and led her inside.

Kairi pictured herself wearing a beautiful dress just like Belle's, only pink with a white skirt, golden flowers as accents. Sora, dressed just like a prince, would take her hand with a smile. His uncontainable spikes would hold a crown on his head. They would dance just like how they did in Agrabah. They would sway and sway to soft music. Probably talk about nothing and everything.

"We should stand by in case something happens," Goofy said, snapping Kairi out of her daydream.

The three followed far behind the couple of the evening.

"Monsieur, Mademoiselle, enjoy the evening," Lumière said, stepping back by the pillars with Cogsworth and Mrs. Potts.

"An evening indeed," said Xaldin's booming voice from above.

Kairi without another thought ran to the center of the dance floor. Belle clung to the Beast in fear. The Beast glared at the man on top of the balcony.

"Xaldin! Leave them alone!" Kairi yelled, summoning her keyblade.

He didn't even flinch at her orders. "You don't know when to quit, do you, little girl?" He revealed the item he was holding behind his back: a glowing rose in its casing.

"Hmph. I have something very precious to you indeed. Let your anger grow." Xaldin left in a black corridor, Nobodies of a new type appearing and surrounding everyone. Their wings flapped about, their claws holding a giant pinkish lance.

"Belle! Get back!" Beast shouted to her, fists clenched. He slammed a dragoon out of the way.

The Nobodies had wings and a lance in their grips. They swarmed in, teleporting into the air and darting down with their lances. Upon landing, it unleashed a shockwave that tossed everyone into the air. Goofy tossed his shield at one of the dragoons, bashing it right in the head. Donald lodged a barrage of ice crystals at the Nobodies. Kairi's body slid across the floor until she was stopped by a column. She pushed herself back up, breathing raggedly.

Blood pounded in her ears. She put up her keyblade to block a jab from the dragoon's lance. A small aura of wind formed around the torso of the dragoon. It had a lance pulling up and then down. Seeing her opening, Kairi tapped the aura with her keyblade and teleported up and above the Nobody, destroying it in one go.
The Beast flared his claws at the last dragoon and destroyed it. The ballroom was emptied of all enemies.

Beast turned around to look for Belle, who ran to hide outside with the servants.

Only the servants came back inside.

"Oh no..." Kairi mumbled.


The doors to the main hall creaked. Donald and goofy whipped around and saw a slip of black and sunshine leaving.

"Oh no! They went that way!" Goofy pointed to the ajar doors. Kairi, Donald, Goofy, and the Beast ran out to the main hall.

Standing up above the grand ballroom doors was Xaldin, his gloved hand silencing Belle from speaking, and in his other hand, the rose.

Kairi pointed her keyblade at the Whirlwind Lancer. "What do you guys want?! Let her go!"

"Kingdom Hearts. When Kingdom Hearts is ours, we can exist fully and completely," he said. "So you see Beast, that's why we need your Heartless and your Nobody."

"Let Belle go and get out of my castle now!" Beast roared.

"Hmph."

A giant gust of wind so strong forced them backwards. Donald and Goofy went flying, Kairi and the Beast struggling to stay upright. Kairi's shoes slid across the floor, leaving rough marks in their stead.

When the wind ceased, Kairi and the Beast looked up to the ledge on top of the stairs and saw nothing. Kairi's eyes widened in panic. Where did they go? She ran over to a dazed Donald and Goofy. With her keyblade in hand she cast cure.

"They have to be outside!" Donald declared.

The four ran out to the courtyard. Neither Belle nor Xaldin was in sight.

"There," Beast pointed his claw at the main gates. "On the bridge."

As they all ran onto the bridge, a very familiar Heartless watched behind him, twitching on all fours.

Axel, bested and out of breath, dismissed his chakrams. "Hah, you're very tough. Good, good."

Younger Sora kept his hand on his keyblade. "You were just testing us."

"And you've passed. Congratulations! You're ready to take on Castle Oblivion. You will need-" Axel put a hand over his chest where his heart should have been," to follow your memories. Trust what you remember and seek what you forget. Then you'll find someone very special. You have lost sight of the light in the darkness, and it seems you have forgotten that you forgot."
"Kairi, he had to be talking about Kairi," Present-Day Sora said. "What happened to her?"

"Your memories," the soft voice explained, "You carry some of Kairi's due to your special connection. Her pain is echoed in your heart. I can show you."

The scene changed to a room with a looking glass and a girl in white sat upon a chair, drawing with a frown on her lips.

"Wait..." Sora looked over the scene. "Why does that girl look like Kairi?"

The voice said nothing.

A man with dirty blonde hair appeared, not even looking to the small girl as he waited for his comrades to appear.

Axel appeared next. Then another hooded person, someone with a smaller figure and build than the men in the room. She tossed off her hood to show her green eyes and bright yellow slicked-back hair. In her grip was the arm belonging to 14-year-old Kairi.

"Look what the cat dragged in," the woman said with a sinister smirk. "One Princess of Heart."

Sora formed a fist and gritted his teeth. "Let. Her. Go."

Axel shook his head at the woman's antics. "You can thank Marluxia for that, Larxene."

Larxene tightened her grip on the poor girl's arm. "It's not every day you get to capture a rare wimpy girl like this."

Kairi looked up to see the girl in white staring at her shoes. She tried to step back but Larxene's grip was too tight. Larxene yanked her over to the blonde man. "Here Vexen, the final factor in your little experiment."

The girl in white suddenly shuddered and fell over off of her chair. Axel's eyes widened as he rushed over to her.

Vexen grabbed Kairi by the arm. "Separate them, Naminé and Kairi must not be near each other!" he shouted. "Don't worry, I will put Kairi in the basement." With a snap of his fingers, he and Kairi disappeared in a dark corridor.

"Experiment?!" Sora's mouth was agape. "What...What did they do to her?!" He looked over to the girl in white.

"You alright?" Axel asked her, pulling her up.

Her soft high pitched voice croaked. "I-I'm fine. It just felt...odd."

"Wait a minute," Sora furrowed his brows. "That's you. You're Naminé."

The voice from above took a moment before answering. "Yes. I am Naminé."

"What...What happened to you when Kairi got too close?"

"If I get too close to Kairi I will...disappear."

"Disappear?!"
"Yes. It's inevitable, but that is what will happen."

Sora watched as the scene before him faded away and he was back on the stained glass floor.

"You! Get out of my castle now!" Beast growled.

Kairi pointed her keyblade at Xaldin. "Leave these people and never come back!"

Xaldin smirked under his hood. "With pleasure. But I prefer to travel light. What should I leave behind? Belle?" He yanked at her arm. "Or the rose?"

"Let me go, mutton chops," Belle muttered under her breath.

Beast charged down the bridge, calling out for the girl he held dear. "Belle!" Kairi, Donald, and Goofy followed behind.

Belle saw the look of determination on Kairi's face. She knew exactly what she had to do. She elbowed Xaldin in the gut and grabbed the rose. She gripped the rose in her hands for dear life, trying not to trip over her skirt as she ran across the bridge to safety. He grunted in pain, his hood falling off his head to reveal black stringy hair and sideburns creeping over his face.

Kairi pointed her keyblade at Xaldin. "It's over."

He glared at her, smirking. "Oh, really princess? You're so bold as to dare think you can take on an experienced strategist without even the likes of your boyfriend?"

She tried to remain stoic at his words, but keeping an indifferent face became impossible as Xaldin summoned forth pillars of a tornado around him. The pillars turned into one, two, three, four, five, six purple lances, one in his left hand, two in his right, with the remaining three hovering in the air.

Oh crap.

Kairi, Donald, Goofy, and the Beast all scattered.

"Wind!" Xaldin called to the heavens. Donald launched a thunder strike at Xaldin, but he teleported to Donald immediately, using the wind to launch the poor duck into the air.

"I'll show you!" Donald quacked as he fired blizzard crystals at Xaldin. They hit him smack in the face but he didn't even flinch.

"Where's the fun in this?" Xaldin asked, the ice falling off his coat and blasting Donald right into the Beast, slamming the both of them into the wall of the gate.

Kairi chucked a potion towards the two and looked to Goofy who was backing away slowly from Xaldin's approach. "Goofy!" She ran towards Goofy, keyblade up in front of her.

Goofy raised his shield and began spinning. Xaldin took a free lance and jabbed it at Goofy, but his shield blocked it. The tension froze the two in place, and Kairi managed one strike against Xaldin in-between all his lances and the wind. Xaldin grinned wickedly as he blasted back the duo with aero. Beast charged at Xaldin, knocking him down flat on his face. Another blast of aero made the Beast slam into Donald.

Kairi got back up, casting cure on herself and Goofy. "How do we fight this guy?" Kairi asked.

Goofy raised his shield again. "I have a feelin' we gotta survive first."
Indeed. Xaldin took his lances and shot out a giant orb of sharp wind. Kairi held up her keyblade and formed a barrier around herself and Goofy. The orb dissipated, smashing the barrier to shards.

Xaldin connected his lances together and spun them around in a wide arc. Kairi and Goofy ducked down and then jumped over the lances. Kairi struggled to keep hold of her keyblade in the gusts of wind caused by the lances. Xaldin continued to spin and spin. Kairi's legs became jelly from the constant strain of jumping then ducking. He jumped up, his lances expanding into a serpentine form. He hopped onto the head of the dragon and floated about and out of reach, going underneath the bridge.

Kairi and Goofy grabbed Beast and Donald. Goofy prepared his shield in front of them alongside Kairi. But Xaldin appeared behind them on his lance-dragon. Three lasers formed from the mouth. "You wear the face of despair!"

A vortex of wind circled most of the bridge. Goofy grabbed Kairi and pushed her out of reach as he put up his shield to take all of the damage, knocking him, Donald, and Beast away.

Kairi got up using her keyblade. She was the only one left now in this battle. Xaldin smirked as he got off his dragon and his lances returned to his grip. A small aura of wind formed around him, the same one that the dragoons had. Kairi pointed her keyblade at the aura, a small orb of light exploding out and tapping the aura.

"Look at you, pathetic. Useless," Xaldin mocked, his lances dancing around in the wind.

Kairi wiped her mouth. Without a word to retort, she leaped up above Xaldin and stabbed her keyblade downwards. He was stunned in mid-air at the wound, so she did another jump. And another.

His shield reformed and blasted her against the wall. She collapsed to the ground; limp by the side of her friends. She struggled to get back up even as a lance was stabbed very closely by her arm. Xaldin kicked her keyblade away from her, turning around with his lance resting on his shoulder.

"I won't destroy you, but I will not deny if I had a heart I would be amused at your feeble attempt at fighting. You're a foolish, pathetic little girl who should only stick to bashing Heartless with a stick," he took a few steps away from her, looking at Destiny's Embrace with disgust. "How sad that you gained a keyblade. I had my doubts about your pathetic boy being a keyblade wielder but you, you are such a defenseless weakling that the keyblade must've chosen you out of pity."

Her eyes stung. She blinked back the tears as she tried to muster the strength to sit up.

"Why do you even bother trying," Xaldin continued. "To protect this beast? For what? To protect 'true love'? Love withers and dies, it never conquers."

A beam of light hit Xaldin square in the face, bouncing back immediately after impact.

"That's a lie."

Kairi gasped as another figure in black stood in-between her and Xaldin. In one hand was Oathkeeper barely touching the ground. In the other hand was a black chained keyblade pointed right at Xaldin's chin. The voice, the extremely familiar voice, spoke once more, having silenced Xaldin's cruel words.

"You once said that love was weakness, useless, pathetic," the boy spat. "Guess what, Whirlwind Liar, love is strength, power, and ultimately for you, your demise."
Xaldin struggled to spit out any words. "You trait-" He was silenced as the boy in black chucked his keyblade at Xaldin again. Xaldin barely managed to get his lances up in time to block the spinning keyblade. It bounced off and back to the boy's grip. He jumped up and summoned thirteen pillars of light upon Xaldin. They knocked all his wind lances out of his hands. The boy tucked in his arms and unleashed a whirlwind of light, beating back the Whirlwind Lancer to his back. Xaldin grabbed a stray lance to push himself up but the boy was moving at the speed of light itself and stabbed the black keyblade—Oblivion—into Xaldin's chest.

Xaldin fell backward, the forces of wind lifting him into the air as his lances disappeared. He screamed in agony as he shuddered and faded into oblivion.

The boy stood there staring at where Xaldin once was with his keyblades in hand. "Love is what makes you strong, Kairi. Don't ever doubt that."

Kairi reached out for him as he left in a dark corridor. "Wait!" But the boy was gone.

The remaining Organization members gathered in the Room Where Nothing Gathers.

Saïx, ever stoic, gave his report. "Number III is no more. However, a curious detail might be of value to us. It was Roxas who destroyed him."

Xigbar leaned back in his seat. "That kiddo really packs a punch."

"With his temper and power, getting him under our control will be difficult," Saïx said. "However Naminé will prove to us an advantage. Roxas snuck into the castle once already, he will be back before long for her."

"And what of the poor princess," Xigbar asked. "Her constitution is weakening every moment."

"It seems her heartbreak is taking a toll on her strength," Luxord said, flipping through his cards. "She was dealt a rough hand, and her luck is running thin. But she is like-minded with Sora."

Xemnas leaned on his hand, bored. "I have full confidence that the Princess of Heart will continue acting in our favor. Her stubborn and optimistic interior will not falter in the time of need."

Kairi, Donald, Goofy, and the servants all watched as Belle handed Beast the rose.

"It's yours again," Belle said, soft and low in her tone.

He took the rose, unsure how to respond besides the typical "Thank you." He looked at her with uncertainty, nerves, and a lump in his throat. "What matters is...You weren't hurt by Xaldin. I'm very grateful to you for bringing the rose back to me."

Belle nodded, giving him a sweet smile. "It was the least I could do, you're very good to me."

Beast stuttered as he tried to find the right words again.

Kairi, Donald, and Goofy all leaned in anticipation.

"You've got this," Kairi said.

"Don't be bashful now," Goofy added.

Donald nodded. "C'mon!"
Lumière waved his candle hand. "Go on!"

Cogsworth adjusted his clock mustache. "We have full confidence."

"You can do it," Mrs. Potts reassured him.

Beast took a deep breath, looking into Belle's beautiful brown eyes. "Belle, would you like to stay here...with me? If you want to."

She blinked. Her smile grew even wider as she presented her hand to him. "I would love to."

Some other servants as violins and even the piano ran out onto the courtyard steps and began playing.

The pair danced around the courtyard, just as they'd wanted to earlier that evening.

Kairi swayed to the music. Her thoughts drifted to the boy who had single-handedly defeated Xaldin with such incredible strength, perhaps even stronger than Sora. He wasn't Sora, that was for sure. But she definitely recognized him from somewhere. His voice was mirrored in Sora's before.

She was curious as to why he had two keyblades without the powers of her and Sora's connection.

The shame that she needed rescuing weighed down her heavy heart.

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**Missing Journal Entry 22**

She loved my gift.

But VIII knows. I let it slip, like an idiot.

Most importantly he was more concerned that I knew where the girl in white was. Like I would ever tell. VII was breathing down my neck about everything now.

Kingdom Hearts was growing, but I didn't really want them to get their hands on it. They shouldn't get their hands on it.

And I refuse to let them get her.

I don't know what to do anymore. If I rebel they will turn me into a Dusk. But if I had already let slip to VIII that I knew where she was, it was only a matter of time before they find out.

I'm done with this.

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Chapter End Notes

:D I have no shame in how much I love Roxas (Namine, Kairi, and Sora a close second too)

Thank you all so much for the comments and kudos! I also have a prequel about Roxas' days in the Organization called "Another Side Another Line." That will be the next update I plan on doing for a little bit. See you next time!
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!