## Kyralih's One Shots

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### Kyralih's One Shots

by [kyralih](http://archiveofourown.org/)

#### Summary

1000-word Writing Challenge Entries, random one-shots, and drabbles from the world of Sailor Moon, spanning from the end of the Silver Millennium to far beyond Crystal Tokyo, to Alternate Universes and different realities.

Note: While categorized as 'multi-chaptered', these stories, for the most part, do *not* have continuations; each chapter is a separate story. ((If I did end up writing more chapters, I'll mention it in the notes at the bottom and make a link! If this is the case, that probably means I haven't finished that story yet, lol))

Thank you for reading!
No Going Back

Chapter Summary

The awakening of Sailor Neptune

There was no going back.

She knew that with a strange certainty, and yet her hand clasped the light blue rod anyway, knowing with just as much conviction that if she didn’t take it her life would be forfeit.

As the piano melody danced through the air, its calming voice spinning a tale of awe and regret, the young violinist closed her eyes, her heart threatening to lose itself in the tender tones. But even with the beautiful music moving through her, she could not shake a feeling of suspense. Nervously she approached the curtain from her place backstage and peered through a small opening. The theater was packed, the audience quiet and absorbed with the performance; nothing out of the ordinary caught her attention, but the feeling of foreboding remained.

“Michiru, are you alright?” her benefactor asked quietly from behind her, placing her hand softly on Michiru’s bare shoulder. “It’s not like you to be nervous, my dear.”

She nodded absently and turned to face the elderly woman, “I’m fine, thank you.”

“You’re on next,” she reminded her gently just as the solo ended to immense applause.

Michiru Kaioh, age fifteen, straightened her white gown and checked her bow, waiting for the previous artist to take his bows and leave the stage. She nodded to him in passing – he was another of the talents from her academy of Fine Arts, home to the young musical geniuses of Japan. This was just a concert, one of many used to attract the attention of the city at large, and any possible benefactors for the young students. Already Michiru had collected four; those four would be enough to supply any tuition she may need to advance her musical studies, but her teachers had instructed them to gather as many as possible – who knew when your instrument could break and you may need a new one? Who would fund sheet music, buy gowns and tuxedos, rent performance areas? To be famous and successful you needed three things: Talent, Determination, and Benefactors.

She strode to center stage and positioned her instrument on her shoulder. Nodding to the audience’s initial applause, she set immediately to a particularly tricky tune. It was a favorite of hers: while it was quick and had a good beat, it also brought forth feelings of deceit. The audience wasn’t expecting this tune; usually she chose more languid pieces, soft and slow and beautiful, but today she wanted to show them that she could do playful just as well.

Just as one brave soul started clapping along, the air of frivolity was shattered with a hair-curling shriek. Michiru played on, hoping to calm the audience and give authorities time to sort things out, but suddenly the doors at the end of the auditorium burst open and arched through the air to land somewhere amongst the seats to a chorus of screams. She saw the silhouette of the creature standing in the threshold for only a moment before it shot off into the audience. It was a monster – there was no other way to describe it. Huge, bulking, like a worm upended without limbs to speak of; while her
knees started to shake, Michiru played on. [i]Like the musicians on the Titanic,[/i] she thought to herself as the room erupted into chaos. What could she do? She was only fifteen, a middle schooler with a knack for music. The police would arrive soon, else those Sailor Senshi the newspapers reported about; someone would come to save these people.

But as the monster approached the stage with a bulging lunge, the teenager wondered if they would come soon enough.

She was knocked aside, her violin and bow sliding across the stage with the force of the blow as someone from backstage pushed her away, saving her from a direct hit. The creature writhed in the backdrop, tangling the heavy red velvet curtain about its freakish mass, momentarily stopping it’s rampage. Michiru turned to see that it had been the pianist that had tackled her, and he now awkwardly struggled to his feet, still unsure of his movements in his white tuxedo. She, too, struggled with coming to her feet, the tight dress not allowing her much movement. He reached down and she accepted his hand, but the pair of them weren’t on their feet for long.

With a strong lurch, the beast pulled the curtain down, its rod and the catwalks above with it. The falling obstacles butchered the stage with sharp metallic pieces, crushing the beautiful piano with a solid blow and littering the wooden floor with fresh shrapnel. She had seen the piece falling seconds before it would have hit them, and this time she dove covering him; miraculously, both of them came out unscathed, but their closest escape to backstage was demolished. To get away, they would either have to jump off stage or directly cross the path of the monster.

They had just managed to get to their feet again when they found that the monster had a ranged attack. Wrapped tightly in the curtain, it had seemingly had enough, and now spat a substance that was similar to fire. The flaming liquid arched out into the audience and immediately found kindling in the seats. The audience screamed anew, but the knot of people at the doorway wasn’t lessening. It was impossible to get out that way, and with the central isles engulfed in flames, the front exits were no option for the captured people. Backstage, artists and their benefactors were evacuating quickly while she spied stagehands hurrying for fire extinguishers. The elderly woman and a middle-aged lady were beckoning for them frantically, intent not to leave them behind, and she shoved the pianist that way.

Thrown off-balanced, he managed to clear the stage at an awkward run, but the monster was free now, and it had her in its sights. With one swipe of its hindquarters, her remaining exit was blocked; with another, she found herself pinned to the ground on her stomach by heavy machinery. The monster loomed before her; the audience screamed in despair beyond her, their desperate attempts to escape futile; the brave stagehands who would have helped were now trapped behind debris. With the theater filling with smoke and flames, there was no hope.

And then an object appeared, floating just within her reach…
Wind danced across the street acting as the master of its cherry-blossom marionettes, which swirled and flowed elegantly from the tree to the verdant green grass below, skittering across the paved sidewalks and taking flight yet again, pressed upward at the side of the other building.

Someone behind her cleared their throat.

The wind was almost like a teacher, then – it knew what it wanted the blossoms to do, and it directed them towards that end. All they needed to do was go with its flow and they would be successful; but where was their spirit? Were they content to mindlessly obey?

“Ahem.”

Maybe she was looking too far into it; they weren’t exactly sentient. …but they were a really great simile – metaphor? Yeah, metaphor – for her current situation. Hers and her guardians’, anyway. If she behaved the way her teachers and tutors and trainers wanted her to, she, too, could be successful, but wouldn’t that just make her a cookie-cutter person? Smiling when it was expected, saying what they needed–

“Princess,” her instructor’s feminine voice growled and Bunny jumped at the nearness of the sound. Quickly, the young girl with silver hair turned, but the length of her pigtails and the quickness of the turn knocked the paper and pencils off the desk of the person behind her. “Sorry!” she exclaimed, whipping back around and attempting to reach over the desk bar to grab the abused articles. Unable to get anywhere near, she hopped up to kneel on the seat to get a better angle. Stretching as much as she could only made it so the very tip of her middle finger glanced the nearest pencil.

“Princess!” the instructor gasped, mortified, and Bunny winced, remembering only now that she was wearing her summer skirt today. Gritting her teeth she prepared to continue as if she still hadn’t realized, but a friendly squeeze of her outstretched hand opened her eyes to see a familiar face wink up at her from a crouched position on the window-side of her seat. Carestia, smiling brightly, gathered the spilled materials and nodded her head towards the teacher, an indication that she had the mess and that Bunny should get back to dealing with the teacher.

Setting her mouth into a forced smile, Bunny turned back around in her seat and looked up at the stern woman, “Yes?”

“It’s alright, Bunny!” Carestia said in soothing tones, placing a hand comfortingly on her shoulder.

“Yeah, it wasn’t that bad,” Biera snorted, turning her purple-haired head away to laugh into Tunis. The two snickered and Bunny pouted.
The road back to the Crystal Palace was alive with the smells of late spring, small shops opening with goods from Earth and from the life-bearing planets of allied systems, their populace meshing almost indiscriminately with the humans they visited, but for small features – cat ears, antlers, and wolf-tails, for example. The street was set up for the Solstice festival, and already street performers were practicing their arts: from fire juggling, street magic and acrobatics to shape-shifting, feats of strength and mermaid-dances in large tanks, her populace was enjoying themselves already. This cheered Bunny up marginally, until she saw two cheeky boys from her class in amongst the crowd, standing facing her with idiotic expressions, acting like they were pulling up their imaginary skirts. She blushed beet-red.

“Jerks!” Zita screamed and dashed into the crowd after them, her long black hair disappearing quickly in the throng of astonished onlookers.

“Zita,” Carestia sighed, her fingers at her temples, “Biera, go bring her back; the Queen wouldn’t be happy if another complaint was raised against her.”

“Sure thing, boss,” Biera quipped and dashed off, to the delight and further confusion of the crowd; it wasn’t every day (well, maybe not for this particular group, Bunny mentally amended) that two senshi broke off of the Princess’s detail to chase middle-school boys. For her it was nearly every day. The other kids in her class just didn’t like her that much – she didn’t pay as much attention to lessons and they thought it was because she had a defined future career and so didn’t need to worry, like she was above them all, while really the teacher was just super boring and she was in various lessons practically all hours of the day and had other things on her mind.

Like her legacy. What would be her mark on the Solar System and the Crystal Millennium?

As they approached the crystalline castle, doors appeared to admit them, sensing the Silver Millennium blood in her veins and the sailor crystals in Carestia and Tunis’s hearts. The long hallway appeared before them, flanked on all sides with hued marble statues of the senshi who had lived their lives for the protection of peace on Earth. First and foremost, in this important entrance hall, were the original eight guardians: Sailors Venus, Mercury, Mars and Jupiter on the left, Sailors Neptune, Uranus, Pluto and Saturn on the right, Pluto’s likeness engraved here even though she lived on at the Gates of Time. Beyond them were the Sailor Quartet, Ceres and Juno on the left, Vesta and Pallas on the right; this covered nearly the first 2000 years of the Crystal Millennium, but the quartet-style of protection continued on after that. Every Queen awakened four senshi from the Asteroid Belt to serve as her daughter’s protectors; it had to be that way, for once a Senshi died and her crystal returned to the Galaxy Cauldron, it took thousands of years for the crystal to regrow and return to its planet, where it would then rest for nearly a millennia as it retuned itself to its guardian star before selecting a shell – a fetus – to serve as the future Sailor Senshi of the planet.

As of yet, the Sailor Quartet’s seeds had not returned to their asteroids, so it took more than 2000 years for the regrowth stage in the Cauldron. Their crystals would be the first to return, as the planetary Sailor Crystals would never be reborn again.

At the far end of the hall stood her ancestors, the first family of the Crystal Millennium: Neo-Queen Serenity the first, King Endymion, and Princess Usagi Small Lady Serenity. She smiled faintly as they turned left towards the elevator that would take them to her quarters; everyone said she bore remarkable resemblance to Neo-Queen Serenity, and she enjoyed the comparison. Neo-Queen Serenity was beautiful, strong, and resilient, and had always been her role-model. She had saved the world multiple times, and had even saved the entire Galaxy once, and it was her crystal that created this Kingdom and brought peace to Earth, unifying the planet. Her crystal allowed her direct female descendants to control it, for better or worse, and on the summer solstice of the Princess’s fourteenth year, it was used to awaken the inner appearance of the Princess and declare them as next Queen.
She wasn’t too nervous about tomorrow’s ceremony itself; the ‘awakening’ part would encase her in light and reveal her ruling regalia – the dress that she would wear as Princess in official ceremonies from that point forward and as Queen when she took the throne, along with her unique crown. From the solstice on she would be able to transform into her Princess regalia whenever she wished; and in that form she could actually control the crystal to grant miracles. Her mother, Queen Serenity the Fifth, told her that it didn’t hurt at all – the crystal’s energy felt more like a warm embrace than anything. No, she wasn’t nervous about tomorrow’s ceremony – she was nervous about her acceptance in the court afterwards. Would her mother’s advisors accept her, clumsy and stray-minded as she was?

They reached her chambers and she only had a few minutes to change from her school uniform to an appropriate dress for further etiquette lessons. As she stood tall for Carestia to lace up the back of her gown, all she could think about was how handy that transformation thing was going to be.

It was time. After a day of festivities, performances and shows, it was finally time to be recognized by the Legendary Silver Crystal as its next bearer. She knelt on the second star of the dais, her four guardians kneeling on either side of her, down another stair. Her mother’s guardians stood watch over the gathered crowd for any sign of discontent, and her mother, the beautiful ruby-haired Queen Serenity the Fifth, stood at the top of the dais, her arms outstretched, palms up, with the Silver Crystal floating and shining inches off of her skin. In her melodious voice she told the story of the Ginzuishou, starting in the Silver Millennium, its use to send the heartbreak of the past into the future for a second chance, its awakening within a young, fourteen year old girl, Usagi, who was Princess Serenity in new form. She told of its use in the many defeats of evil, controlled by Sailor Moon and her pure heart to vanquish the Negaverse, the Black Moon Clan, Pharaoh 90, the Dead Moon Circus, and finally Galaxia. She told of how it was used to bring peace to Earth, and how it created the fair Crystal Tokyo through the love and hope of Usagi, Sailor Moon, Princess Serenity, and how she took the mantle of Neo-Queen Serenity to bring the peaceful era of the Silver Millennium into her time.

She told of the peaceful reign of the Queen, the birth of her daughter, the accomplishments made during her lifetime. She then told of the crystal’s strengthening: when it was time for them to pass on to the Galaxy Cauldron, the planetary senshi of the Solar system and King Endymion pledged their Crystals to further the peace and tranquility of the era and to reinforce the goodness inherent in the Silver Crystal. Their own sailor crystals, the star seeds of the eight planets and the primary dwarf planet, rose from their bodies and, in a rainbow of colors, fused into the Silver Crystal, creating the Rainbow Silver Crystal of today. Then, as one, the heroes of Earth passed on: Neo-Queen Serenity, King Endymion, Sailor Venus, Sailor Mercury, Sailor Mars, Sailor Jupiter, Sailor Saturn, Sailor Uranus, Sailor Neptune, and Sailor Pluto; leaving the planet in the capable hands of Queen Lady Serenity, who, at her death, did the same.

She finished with the triumphs of each of her remaining ancestors, the furthered communication and alliances made by Queen Lady Serenity, the technological leaps and culture sharing by Queen Serenity the Third, the many accomplishments of Queen Serenity the Fourth; she stopped there, not mentioning her own vast achievements. Instead, “Today, I, Queen Serenity the Fifth, present to the Legendary Silver Crystal my daughter, Princess Bunny Serenity, that it might recognize her as the Future Queen of Earth.”

This was her cue. She stood and held out her hands and the crystal floated to just above her grasp. Its light intensified, flowing over her in a wave of reassuring warmth. She felt feelings she herself had yet to experience – intense love, deep longing, hurt, pain, reassurance, the strength of deathless friendship, joy, and, finally, an abiding hope that seemed to overcome her. Tears rolled down her cheeks; each feeling was accompanied by memories, reminiscences that were not hers, and yet were
so familiar that they had to be.

Love – she remembered his face, his deep blue eyes and dark black hair, his smile that brought butterflies to her stomach, his touch that reassured her, calmed her, and gave her strength, his kiss that made the world fall away; he had many appearances, one as a Prince, one as a tuxedoed hero, one as tall man in familiar lavender attire, and one as a normal citizen, yet the love towards him never varied.

Deep longing – she remembered missing him, needing him, she was on the Moon, she knew, looking at a screen with his face; then on Earth, crying into a pillow in her bedroom; in the timestream, staring off at the dark beyond, and finally, staring at an empty mailbox.

Hurt – his death, her suicide; his being captured, her feeling like her soul had been ripped from her; she remembered many people, senshi that Bunny recognized from statues in the hall, being stolen from her, watching them die before her own eyes and being unable to do anything; then having to fight them to save the universe;

Pain – torture, lighting, bleeding, tearing. Her whole body bruised and battered.

Reassurance – a friendly hand on her shoulder, hugs from those familiar strangers, support from that man, a black cat, everyone telling her that they believed in her, that they lived for her, she was their hope.

Deathless friendship – Long golden hair, blue eyes, forever smiling even through tears: Minako. Short blonde hair, hard blue eyes that softened at seeing her, a smile that sung of lessened loneliness: Haruka; holding her hand, medium-length aquamarine hair, steady green eyes and a delicate smile: Michiru. Short blue hair, smiling and reaching out for her, blue eyes shining with unshed tears: Ami. Short pin-straight black hair and strong, yet timid silver-purple eyes: Hotaru. Long brown hair, tied up in a ponytail, green eyes and a true smile: Makoto. Long purple-black hair with matching eyes, a smile struggling through a cascade of tears: Rei. Finally, shorter than the rest and yet just as tall, a girl with pale skin, soft pink hair and bright red eyes: Chibi-Usa.

Joy – Reuniting with the prince, reuniting with four of her friends after a terrible battle, saving a young girl from her death; Awakening in a light and shining place after a terrible burden was lifted from her shoulders as her friends surrounded her.

Abiding Hope – Knowing that universe would be safe so long as there were senshi to protect it.

When the light faded, Bunny opened her eyes and stared up at her mother, wondering why she had lied. This transformation wasn’t painless! She knew those faces; they belonged to the planetary senshi, to her fore-father, King Endymion! How could she have said that this was painless, when she saw their lives, felt their love, only to know now that they were dead? What cruel game was this?!

Did the Rainbow Silver Crystal carry within it the soul of Neo-Queen Serenity that it might share her life, her love and burdens, with all of her descendants that they might remember for the rest of their lives where they came from?

But the look on her mother’s face was not one of shared pain – the regal woman looked confused and awe-struck, taking steps backward. Had something gone wrong? Why was her mother backing away? She turned to Carestia, only to find her kneeling towards her, her hand crossing her heart. Tunis was the same way; she turned around to face the crowd only to find a sea of bowed heads. She was confused – they don’t need to bow or kneel to her! She reached out as if to stop them, only to have a long staff appear in her outstretched hand; it was taller than she, made seemingly out of glass. At the top was a pink-tinted orb, lined with pearls at the bottom that sprouted wings, crowned with another orb that encased a silver six-pointed star. What was this? Her hands – both of them – wore
pearl rings on every finger. She looked down at herself and saw the fuku of a senshi, like none she had seen before. Glass high heels with more pearls and feathers; a short white dress, rather than a leotard and skirt like her guardian senshi wore, and where her guardian’s fuku’s skirt came in at a ‘v’, her fuku was knighted with a circle surrounding a golden six-pointed star, trailing two long white ribbons, pearled and winged and identical to the brooch in the center of her chest. Her collar was white with three golden stripes, her shoulder guards were golden with more pearls and feathers; she felt a choker, a beaded tiara, clips in her hair, but what made her pause was the decoration on her skirt. Under the winged and circled golden star was the front fold of her skirt, decorated with the colors of a rainbow, each color representative of one original senshi. Clockwise, there was the icy blue of Mercury, the royal blue of Uranus, the teal of Neptune, green of Jupiter, yellow of Venus, red of Mars, pink of Earth, purple of Saturn, and garnet of Pluto. This transformation – the Rainbow Silver Crystal?! She looked around hurriedly, but the crystal had disappeared within her, like it had within Usagi… within herself, in another life.

Arms embraced her from behind, folding the long cape of her fuku into her body as familiar hands held her. “It’s alright, Bunny,” her mother said, then stepped around to stand before her. In her mother’s eyes she saw herself – the white collar with golden star, the tiara with a golden star, the pearls and feathers in her silver hair, the pearl decoration surrounded by gold that fronted her playful heart-shaped buns… and her silver eyes, streaming with tears. Her mother’s hands cupped her face as she leaned in to kiss her cheek, “You’re alright.”

Chapter End Notes

This one actually DID go multi-part, and even spawned a side-story told from another character's perspective XD See https://www.fanfiction.net/s/7959975/1/Unexpected-Awakening for what I got posted before Cardinal King ate my life; and if you're -really- interested, the version told from another character's perspective can be found here: http://kyralih.tumblr.com/fanfiction linked midway through the page, between pictures of Sailor Cosmos (I KNOW I NEED TO GET ON POSTING THAT SOMEWHERE XD)

:3 if you like it and would like me to work on it / finish it, I could start working on it again?
Rebirth of the Stars

Chapter Summary

The Starlights vow to save their Princess

The ground shuddered below her feet, knocking one of her partners to the ground violently. She braced herself, digging her stiletto heels into the dirt path and flinging her hands out to counterbalance the sudden turbulence. Cherry blossoms flew fiercely through the air on the back of a strong burst of wind; it was as though Kinmoku itself were shuddering. As soon as the ground quieted she stooped to give her hand to her prone companion and helped her to her feet, her answering expression grateful but unsure, as if frightened.

“What’s going on?!” their third demanded, looking around apprehensively.

Screams tore through the air and the three of them rushed off without hesitation, darting through trees and over decorative streams before bursting out onto the street. With three good hops they were airborne, running atop the low-lying roofs in perfect formation towards the cacophony of sound. Jumping from roof to roof, they finally located the source of the havoc: in the center of town, screaming and laughing, were two foreign senshi. She had never seen them before, nor had she heard of senshi with such different fuku designs working as a team. One had streaming blue hair and powder-blue one-piece outfit overcome with ribbons; the other had gigantic butterfly wings. They threw attacks left and right, each preceded by the words “Galactica!”

“Come out, come out, wherever you are!” the blue-senshi cried, shooting attacks at random citizens. Without needing to discuss tactics, the more aggressive of their trio jumped in its path, deflecting it from the helpless. She landed some feet away, and the final of their trio stood guard over the escape root for the citizens of the capital. She took a fighting pose, readying a defense. “Ah, there you are, senshi!” the attacker hissed, throwing another attack their way.

“Who are you?!” her dark-haired friend demanded, “What are you doing?! We are senshi!”

Her statement was a defense, a demand for a ceasefire; they were on the same team! Why were they doing this? But rather than stand down, the pair of foreigners readied other attacks. “Precisely!” the purple one cried, throwing an attack at her. She sprung out of the way just in time, the attacks searing the building behind her. What was going on?! Senshi attacking senshi – this had never happened before! Kinmoku was not involved with inter-system disputes! They were in a time of peace! She set her mouth in a hard scowl, catching a glimpse of more destruction behind the attacking pair. This was not the role of a senshi; this was not how a senshi’s powers were to be utilized!

The fight was brutal; just when they thought they were on the upside, the pair received reinforcements: two other sailor-fukued ‘heroines’, with no two outfits alike. “She’s nearly there,” she heard a small, mousy one whisper to the tall blue fighter, and her blood ran cold as the possible meaning seeped through her.

“Kakyuu,” she breathed, whipping around to view the palace in the distance. Eerily, a burst of golden yellow light shone up on the exterior walls, and her insides exploded in panic. She caught the green eyes of one partner, desperately trying to convey her message without being overt about the discovery. Their princess was in danger. This was only a decoy!
An energy attack laced with water flew towards her and she barely dodged, but managed to maneuver herself towards the palace. With a glance she spied another explosion, and she could take it no longer, “THE PRINCESS!” she cried to alert their third. Her heart constricting with pain and worry, she turned and started to run, going as fast as her long legs could move. The adrenaline carried her faster and faster, her partners somewhere behind her, along with the team of renegade senshi, but so long as one of them were there, just one… their prince and princess might stand a chance!

A powerful blow knocked her to the ground, “Where do you think you’re going, ponytail?” an attacker jeered sinistfully, but she had no time for this!

She turned over onto her back, still searing with pain, and directed an attack, “Gentle Uterus!” Despite the name, her attack was in no way ‘gentle’, and sent her attacker flying. She pushed herself to her feet and ran on, ignoring the burn, or, rather, taking energy from it. In seconds her allies were beside her, the three of them converging on the gates.

“Serious Laser!” her dear friend turned on her toes and threw the attack behind them to knock the remaining attackers away. They were so close now! They broke through the courtyard and her heart broke at the sight of the palace doors blown open, the guards lying in pieces in the koi ponds and the low-lying trees. “Princess!” the lamenting cry tore from her raven-haired companion’s throat, the sound a verbalization of what they all felt.

A heart-wrenching scream, the voice and pitch unbearably familiar, tore their world to pieces and they launched themselves to the second story using all of their strength… only to see a hallway with a solitary prone figure. She threw herself forward, sliding on her knees over to the body, but it wasn’t whom she expected. She turned the body over, only to have the remains of the Prince turn to dust in her arms. Her breath caught in her throat for his loss, but she had little time to mourn.

“There!” her platinum blonde friend cried, her voice breaking as she pointed straight upward. She looked up to see a rough-hewn hole in the ceiling that extended through the roof, and, far above them, she spied a cloud trail that pushed its way through the thick, rolling clouds that were surrounding them overhead. Their princess had survived, and had escaped. She felt at once glad and guilty, for not having been there to help fight whatever fiend had caused this.

She stood and summoned her wings – they all did, preparing to follow their princess wherever she led them, but before taking off her eyes caught on a small object just beside the prince’s remains: a card. She ducked to take it, hoping it would be a clue, and launched herself skyward after her sisters. A feathery hurricane of wind shot up beside her, nearly knocking her off course, and she glared downward to see the renegade senshi had arrived in the palace.

“Go ahead!” the black-clad woman cried with a malicious smile, “You can run, you can hide, but Galaxia will always find you!”

She had no time to waste with such fools! She spurred her wings faster, harder, the three of them breaking through the thickening clouds, the thick atmosphere, and finally escaping the gravitational hold of Kinmoku, shooting in a straight line hopefully in the direction their Princess had travelled.

But before they had gotten far, their blonde froze and clutched her chest. They doubled back, “What’s wrong?” her blue-eyed companion asked hurriedly, “We cannot wait! We have to find h—“ but then she, too, doubled over in pain, her gloved hands holding onto the winged star at her chest. That both of them were harmed — she turned back to Kinmoku and her fears were realized.

Farther away from them, in points of space where their two planets should have been, was now a field of debris. In panicked fear her eyes shot to her planet only to see it explode violently, shattering
like a fragile glass bulb into the darkness of space. As it blew apart, so, too, did her heart. She screamed and clutched at her chest, her star seed crying out in pain and loneliness as its companion was torn away. It felt like the pain would never end, like she would die right there, a failure in every sense of a senshi could fail. They had failed to protect their Princess, failed to follow their Princess wherever she may lead, and failed to protect their power planets, and, squinting through the pain back at their homeworld of Kinmoku, they had failed to protect their home. Just like that, Kinmoku, too, was gone. Utterly destroyed. And somewhere, out there, their Princess was suffering through this immense pain all alone.

Tears streamed down her face and she hugged herself tight, trying to lessen the pain in her soul, her eyes closed against the weight of their failure, the loss of everything they held dear. Fiercely a hand pulled her close and she came back to herself in an instant. They hadn’t lost everything. Not yet. Not so long as they had each other. Her eyes open, she hugged her two allies tightly, forming a ring of mutual loss and strength. Through the space between their heads, one light, one dark, she saw streaks of light that would indicate the departure of those betrayers, those followers of Galaxia.

“We have to find her first,” she breathed with determination. Green eyes and blue opened to stare back at her with shared resolve.

“We will find her, and we will keep her safe. We will not fail again!” Her black-haired sister declared heatedly.

They broke apart, and she took in the changes to their uniforms. The colors had faded from all but the belts across their waists, the chokers at their necks, and the bands on their arms; everything else had faded to black. “A sign of our failure as senshi,” the blonde, her lips trembling, attempted a smile, “Black; the color we deserve. The color of mourning.” Her soft green eyes threatened tears, but both she and their partner each took one of her hands.

“We will use it to our advantage to find our Princess,” she vowed, squeezing her friend’s hand, “The black will hide us from our enemies as we search for her; we will blend into the background of space, as invisible as the wind.”

“Like shooting stars,” the other said with strength, “We three will be shooting stars, travelling like comets from system to system, just Three Lights, Three StarLights, and we will find her and protect her from this evil that plagues the cosmos! I will forever Fight for her!” She let go of our hands and struck a pose, the pose she took when she finished transforming, “From now on, without a planet to pull power from, I take a new name! I am SAILOR STAR FIGHTER!”

The blonde sniffed once, dropped her hand, and her face hardened. “I will spend my life working to Heal the pain and the wrongs we have caused. I will be SAILOR STAR HEALER!”

They were so strong, so dependable. At that moment, she believed with all her heart that they would find the Princess that they loved so dearly, and they would keep her safe. What would her name be? Her rebirth was in her hands, they took what was given and were making a new life for themselves… “And I will forge the path that we follow,” she vowed, pulling out the last card their princess had left for them, the only clue they had to her whereabouts. “I am SAILOR STAR MAKER.”

Yelling out her name seemed to release some of the pent up feelings of despair and defeat, and so she yelled it again, “SAILOR STAR FIGHTER!”

“SAILOR STAR MAKER!”

“SAILOR STAR HEALER!”
“SAILOR STAR LIGHTS!” she cried, and cried again, and again, until all three of them were yelling in defiance of the fate they had been dealt, defiance of the odds stacked against them, and, perhaps most of all, defiance of the woman who had taken their lives away from them. When finally they were drained of as much of the heavy burden as she believed they could be, they stopped and caught their breath, looking upon each other proudly. “WE WILL FIND OUR PRINCESS!” she cried, “WE WILL TRIUMPH OVER YOU! And this,” she paused, holding out the card for her sisters to see, “Will be our guiding light!”

The card she held before her, like the cards they could create, was no ordinary playing card, but a card of destiny. Blazoned upon its surface was a senshi outlined in silver light, shining with some inner strength and power that filled her with a sense of tranquility. Her eyes were closed in peace, her lips tugged into a quiet smile, and her long blonde hair, pulled up into pigtail buns, swam about her elegantly. In the middle of her forehead shone a golden upward-facing crescent. Below, etched in the elegant script of their beloved princess, were the words ‘Legendary Senshi of Light; Hope of the Cosmos’

“Who is that?” Sailor Star Healer asked.

“I don’t know,” I replied, “but, whoever she is, our Princess believes that she is our only hope. If we find this girl, we might find our princess.”

“We will find our princess,” Sailor Star Fighter amended, snapping her fingers, “I know it. We will search every planet from here to the end of space itself until we find her! The more information we can pick up about these senshi betrayers, the better. And once we find this girl, we will find our Princess, and once we find our Princess, we can find somewhere safe for her, somewhere where no harm will come to her ever again!”

They all agreed. Sailor Star Healer took a breath and summoned a destiny card. The rectangle faded into existence, and on its face was a constellation of stars. They found them, and set off, flying so fast that their passing appeared as nothing more than the path of shooting stars.
“Mama, what was it like when you were a princess?” the pretty young girl turned around in her seat, looking back at her mother with large, curious eyes.

Neo Queen Serenity quirked an eyebrow, offering a small smile, and went back to brushing her daughter’s thick pink hair unconcernedly. “When I was a princess?” she repeated with a doubtful air; she had never hinted before that she had even been a princess – for sure, the time before she assumed the title of Neo-Queen Serenity was anything but something her young daughter could relate to. The sound of the brush traveling through hair was rhythmic and soothing, a slight yet deep *swoosh* as it travelled from root to tip that somehow unwound some of her tension from the day of court sessions and meetings, just as it straightened the pink strands. This was one of her favorite parts of the day; she didn’t get to spend a lot of time with her daughter, so these small moments before bedtime were a treasure.

“Yes, when you were a princess,” the child repeated, her pink eyes focused on her reflection in the mirror. Their eyes met, and she continued with a hint of a shy smile, “in the Silver Millennium, when you and Venus and everyone lived on the Moon.”

The brush froze in her hand as she seemed to lose focus on the world, remembering that last, terrible moment when Endymion died and she turned the tip of the sword upon herself. The thought of Endymion’s death still caused a sharp pain in her chest that she could not ignore, but she had long ago come to terms with her own actions; Endymion had died, and with that, there was no reason for her to live on. She understood her reasons, but she had grown so much now, she had matured, and she could accept them. Her daughter, on the other hand, was only five years old. Theirs wasn’t a story one should share with a five year old; theirs wasn’t exactly an example to be followed. … but someday, someday she would have to tell her precious daughter that she had committed suicide.

“Mama?” her child prompted quietly, waking her from her trance. She started brushing her hair again, smiling.

“Who told you about that?” she asked lightheartedly, wondering if someone had mentioned that time in a slip of the tongue.

“Luna,” the young girl replied with a blush and a fierce, pleased smile, “She said sometimes I am as mischievous a princess as you were.”

Serenity smiled, her heart overfilling with emotion at the pride in Small Lady’s voice at the comparison. “Yes,” she assured, turning her daughter around to tap her on the nose, “You most certainly are!”

Her smile grew to a grin, her Small Lady, and they sat looking at each other and smiling foolishly for a moment. “Um… Mama?” she asked at last, embarrassed, “What does “mischievous” mean?”

Serenity laughed and picked up the little girl, “It means you’re a troublemaker!” she teased, giving
the young girl an Eskimo Kiss as she walked over to the fluffy pink bed. She parted the fine drapes with her shoulder and sat down on the duvet, still cradling her daughter in her arms. “Don’t think I haven’t heard about your escapes from the nanny’s care to go sneaking around the castle!” she admonished with a smile.

“Did you ever escape from your nanny?” she asked shyly, and Serenity sat her down on the comforter beside her, considering an answer, remembering back to times more than a lifetime ago…

“Yes,” she replied at last, “but it wasn’t all that hard; Luna was my nanny back then.”

“Luna?” Small Lady repeated with awe, “Really?”

“Yes,” she returned, “She and Artemis were in charge of keeping all of us in line – all five of us. And when you had five girls your age wanting to escape to run amok, things got easier.”

She smiled excitedly, “You mean you got to grow up with Venus and Mercury and Jupiter and Mars?”

She nodded, “Yep! And we had a lot of adventures… until they started to understand their roles as my guardians. Things got a little less fun then, but we still had a few adventures together.” She smiled, recalling the balls and parties and hiding in the gardens, and shared a few of the funnier (and safer) stories with her daughter, adding in a few embellishments to make her laugh even harder. But even as she told of their escapades on the moon, she couldn’t help but remember her forays on Earth…

“How did you and Daddy meet?” the girl questioned, as if reading her mind.

“Well,” she replied thoughtfully, “I kind of knew him before we actually met.” Small Lady looked at her with confusion, and she continued, “You see, the Moon Kingdom was in charge of keeping the Earth Kingdom safe from evil, and so we had this great big viewing screen to check out little problems on Earth before they became really big problems, and one time there was a little problem in the court of the Earth Kingdom. I saw him on the screen then, and it was love at first sight for me.” She laughed, “He was so handsome I couldn’t resist sneaking down to Earth to see him.”

“You snuck down to Earth?” she repeated in awe.

She paused, considering, “Yes…” she finally admitted, sternly looking at her daughter out of the corner of her eye, “but don’t you ever sneak away from here to visit another planet, okay?”

She giggled, “Okay.”

She turned and pounced on her daughter playfully, pinning her down to the bed and snarling playfully, “Promise?” she prompted.

She laughed, squirming “I promise!”

“Good.” She kissed her forehead and sat up, releasing her and continuing as though nothing had happened. “So, I set up a distraction on the moon and snuck down to Earth to see him in person.” She paused, recalling their first encounter, “I hid in his garden, actually, but he caught me. And then Venus and the girls found me and dragged me back up to the moon, but that wasn’t my last visit to Earth.”

“You went again?” she prompted with enthusiasm.

“Yes,” she nodded, “And again after that, and again – I forget exactly how many times I snuck
away, but it got harder and harder to leave. We fell in love, despite how dangerous it was back then.”

She looked over at her daughter conspiratorially, “It was forbidden, you know.”

But Small Lady didn’t look back teasingly; instead her eyes were serious, if still shy, as if she wanted to ask something but thought she couldn’t. Serenity smiled encouragingly, and eventually she found her voice, “Mama… What’s it like to be in love?”

“IT’s the best feeling in the world,” she replied honestly, leaning back to stare at the pink canopy overhead, “When you find your soul mate and you are in love… nothing can beat that feeling.” She closed her eyes, “You’re on top of the world, confident and invincible so long as you are together. Being with him then, and now, makes me feel complete, and powerful, like energy is welling up within me. It’s like my heart is so light it’s transparent, and always warm, like a star shining brightly.”

They were silent, her in her memories of stolen kisses and flowering gardens, of seas almost as blue as his eyes, and of peaceful moments of the Silver Millennium; her daughter in her hopes of feeling the same way one day. Small Lady took her mother’s hand, and Serenity’s eyes opened to look up at her. “Mama,” she asked with a smile, “How did he propose? Did he go up to the Moon Kingdom and talk to your parents? Or did you two run away together?”

Her euphoria died down a bit, knowing which way this conversation would lead, unsure how to continue. She could lie a bit, and talk about how he proposed to her in this lifetime… but… She sat up, curling her legs beneath her. “He didn’t get to propose to me,” she answered honestly. If she could help it, she would never lie to her daughter, even when there was a way she could trick her way around the truth. Small Lady’s pink eyes were confused, her eyebrows knitting together in puzzlement, a question on her lips that Serenity answered before she could ask, “Not back when he was the Prince of Earth and I the Princess of the Moon. He proposed to me later, when he was Mamoru Chiba, and I, Usagi Tsukino.”

“But why not?” she asked, “You were in love, why didn’t you get married?”

“Well, sweetheart,” she started nervously, glancing at her daughter as she tried to figure out what to say, “something… terrible happened before he could. There was this evil force that took over a woman on Earth, who then led the Earth army to fight the people of the Moon Kingdom.”

Her mouth opened in shock, “But Daddy was from Earth.”

She nodded.

“Did… Did Daddy fight, too?” she asked hesitantly.

“No. You father was the only person on the entire planet that didn’t fall under her evil spell.” She looked relieved, “He actually rushed up to the moon to help us, to defend me.”

“True love wouldn’t let him fall under her evil spell!” she gushed, “But then you had to have won!” she cried out enthusiastically, a smile on her lips, “’Cause you said that you were invincible when you were together!”

She wanted to leave it at that, with stars in her daughter’s eyes and conviction in her voice about the power of people in love, but if she didn’t tell her the truth now, she would be a liar later. So, softly, she smiled, and took her daughter’s hand in hers. “Not that time, sweetheart.”

Confused, her pink-haired child deflated completely, looking sad. “But…”

“Your father jumped in front of a sword that was meant for me, and tried to talk sense into his
people, to tell them that the war wasn’t right or deserved, but they wouldn’t listen to him. Angry, the woman that the evil had possessed struck him down. Your father died, protecting me, and I… oh, honey, I was sad and heartbroken and desperate – I went crazy at the thought of losing him, and I,” she paused, taking a deep, distressed breath to the side, wishing that it hadn’t gotten this far but knowing that there was no other way now. She looked her daughter in the eye, facing the bewilderment and uncertainty there, and held her pink gaze with her eyes, desperate to tell her what happened and, on some crazy level, hoping for her daughter’s forgiveness for her weakness, “I killed myself.”

Small Lady’s eyes became even more confused – she could practically see the thoughts running rampant in her mind, “I’m sorry! I was young and rash and filled with despair,” she explained quickly, searching for reasons that she might understand, “And I was stupid, my darling, I was stupid for—“

Small Lady’s little hand covered her lips and she froze, waiting to see what would happen next, wondering if she had done something too terrible to ever make up for, her heart racing with the possibility that her daughter might hate her now for doing something she had always known to be terrible. “You…” she started, her brows furrowing as if gathering her words, “You loved him, and you said that when you love someone, they make you heart lighter and give you strength. When he died, your heart got heavy, and fell and broke, and you lost your strength.” She stopped, as if the matter were finished, and smiled supportively.

Neo Queen Serenity almost laughed; she was being comforted by her five-year-old daughter, and she was doing an excellent job! She felt better, a little relieved, but still guilty about telling her daughter something so shocking when she was still so young. The matter was still unfinished, however. Small Lady took her hand away and looked at her, a small light glowing fiercely behind her eyes, “But you’re alive now because of the power of love, right?”

She laughed, “Yes; love saved us and gave us a second chance at life, where we found each other again and fell even deeper in love.” Her daughter smiled happily, assured in her belief that love is invincible, and she continued, “Then he proposed to me in an airport before he went to study abroad in America, and we got married in a big church, and I wore a beautiful wedding gown covered in roses, and he wore a tuxedo accented with green leaves. Then we have a beautiful baby girl with pink hair,” she ruffled Small Lady’s hair and she giggled with pleasure, and then pulled her close in a hug, “and we lived happily ever after, the end.”

“Happily ever after?” a familiar voice called from the doorway, and both of them smiled excitedly as the shadow of King Endymion fell across the drapes. The sunrise-cloaked King crossed the room and parted the curtains surrounding the bed. “Sounds like a good story! What one are we telling tonight, the story of Cinderella? Sleeping Beauty?” he asked as he took a seat beside them.

“No!” their daughter corrected, scooting over to his lap and crossing her arms playfully, “Even better!”

“Ooh, hmm… Hansel and Gretel? Snow White? Beauty and the Beast?” Each guess was met with the shake of her head. “No? Then which story?”

“The story about the Moon Princess and the Earth Prince!” she declared, her eyes closed superiorly.

He looked over at Serenity wonderingly, and Serenity nodded, biting her lip. She would tell him in detail what had happened later, after they put her to bed, but for now she waited to see what their amazing daughter would do next.

Small Lady opened one eye, peeking at her father, “Do you know that story?”
He smiled, “I sure do,” he replied, “But do you know the sequel?”

“The sequel?” she replied in surprise, both eyes open and eager.

“It’s about a super hero who fights for love and justice…”
Makoto's Birthday

Chapter Summary

"Spending a Birthday Alone" Writing Contest Winner on the Galaxy Cauldron Forums.

Dawn crept softly across her room, streaming through the thick green leaves to create blotches of shadows on the carpet and hardwood, the rays creeping ever closer to her bed. This was one of her favorite times of day. It used to be right about now that Dad would be turning on the coffee maker in the kitchen, pattering around as he sleepily fumbled for the pre-ground beans. The Mom would pop into the kitchen, tease him quietly for not knowing his way around her kingdom, and playfully push him back towards their room to get ready for work. Then she would measure out the coffee and put it into the machine, the beans sliding into the filter with a quiet shhh and then she’d press the button. The maker would bubble and steam and the smell would seep through the hallway and hit her immediately.

She would already be awake, watching them through the crack in her open door, but when her mother walked down the hallway to wake her up, she’d hide back under the covers and pretend to be asleep. Being woken up by Mom was always nice; she would sneak in quietly, look around the room with a smile when it was clean, and then get really close and kiss her on the forehead. “Wake up, Mako-chan!” she would say, “The day is ready for you!”

And then they would pick out her school clothes and get dressed together, and go back into the kitchen and make breakfast for Dad. She always got to stir and taste-test, but Mom had only recently let her near the pans on the hot stove. She got to walk the plate over to Dad, who would ruffle her hair and say “Good Morning, little girl! You’re so pretty today!” And they’d eat breakfast together. Then she’d help Mom collect the dishes and Dad would get his shoes on and grab his briefcase. She would jump into her shoes and grab her bag and lunch and they would kiss Mom goodbye, then she and Dad would walk to school. His work was in another direction, but he always took the train so they could walk together and talk about sports and classes.

But that was before.

Her alarm went off after the sun had almost filled the entire room, and she shut it off with a sharp tap on the top, glancing at the date again as if by staring at it, it could change. It was 5 December, and she was fourteen today.

She pulled off the sheets and got out of bed, peeling off bedclothes and folding them nicely, putting them under her pillow just as her mother had done. She made her bed and looked around the room until she found their picture on her dresser, allowing herself one more minute of remembering them – their smiles, their warmth, and their happiness – before hardening the sensation of loss and locking it away. She went to the closet, pulled out her school uniform, and stepped first into the long skirt, then slid the long-sleeved shirt on over her head, taking a moment to push the sleeves up over her elbows despite the snowfall on the ground outside. She brushed out her hair, looking at herself in the mirror, and tied it quickly into a high ponytail with the green-bauble hair elastic her father had given her as a going-away present. She ruffled her bangs and offered a smile that, even to her, looked false. A grimace looked more at home, and it was that grimace she was known for now.

Picking up her book bag, she went into the main hall and exchanged the bag for a watering can and
took a few minutes to water her plants and sweep the apartment again. She put her lunch by the door, then turned on the coffee maker, listening to its clicks and pops and breathing deeply its aroma as she stood, waiting for some water to boil for breakfast.

She arrived back at her apartment just after dark, having stayed after school for cleaning and a club meeting. When she got in she put her school bag away and started water for some tea, then changed clothes into something more comfortable. When she finished the water was ready, and she made some rose tea as she washed her lunch container and got out some pots and pans to make tomorrow’s lunch, tonight’s dinner, and a small cake for herself, wanting to try a new icing trick she had learned earlier in the week. She smiled as she cooked, loving the sounds and smells as she multitasked, busily going from pan to pan, tweaking seasonings as she saw fit, stirring sauces and flipping shrimp and little hotdogs to make sure they cooked evenly, even as she preheated the oven and mixed together a quick cake recipe.

As the cake baked and tomorrow’s lunch cooled, she had dinner. Making mental notes on her food as she chewed, she concocted new ways to make the dish better, or in a different style, keeping herself busy with exciting new combinations. Once dinner was finished, she arranged her lunch in her bento box and put it in the refrigerator to cool and keep for tomorrow. She took the cake out to cool, then started washing all of the dishes; her hands never stopped moving, the smile never left her face.

Everything was put away, even the implements used to make the icing she piped onto the cake, making tiny roses on top. The more she made, the better they got, but by the end the entire top of the cake was covered in tiny red flowers and there was no room for a birthday message. She smiled and piped a message in sugar pink anyway, spelling out “Happy Birthday Makoto!” on top of the delicate flowers.

It was then that her smile finally faded. When everything was finished, and she cut into her birthday cake alone.
“Princess! Hurry, come with me!” gloved hands took her by the wrist, pulling her urgently out of the cushioned chair of the vanity. Her brush clattered to the floor, a thousand thoughts racing through her mind as she tried her best to keep up with her blue-haired friend. Something was wrong – Mercury wasn’t usually like this. Her heart racing, they burst into the grand hall and ran, faster than she had run in her entire life. Noises erupted around her, voices raised in concern and determination to her left, from within the courtyard of the palace; and voices raised in fury and terror from without, the foreground to a low rushing sound. She glanced to her right and slowed involuntarily at the sight spied through the columns.

“Princess!” Mercury cried out again, her voice tight and anxious, pulling her along, but Serenity’s shock slowed her still. The gardens were on fire; the flames roared from a distance, creeping ever closer to the pools nearer the front of the palace. Off in the distance, seemingly rising from the thick black smoke, was an enormous crowd of people, shouting in fury as they approached. They were armed with swords, their weapons glinting red. She couldn’t tear her eyes away. From her right erupted a command – “Charge!” – and men and women clad in silver armor rushed through the passageway beneath her, hastening to meet the charge, to defend their kingdom from the encroaching threat. What was going on?!

Mercury stopped and wheeled around, her hands gripping Serenity’s forearms tightly; she pulled Serenity’s confused gaze with the uncharacteristic roughness. Her blue eyes streamed tears, her face red and frightened, “Princess, please!” she begged desperately.

It was then that Serenity became truly frightened.

She nodded and started running, focusing solely on the blue-haired head bobbing before her, the sailor collar that rippled with their speed. They dashed down a circling stair and darted out into another hall, racing quickly away from the chaos behind them. If she could go fast enough, perhaps it would go away. It would go back to the way it was before – no more battle cries and the screams of agony, but the music of a ball, the soft whisper of wind through the flowers, the trickle of water in the fountains.

They burst through a door that would lead them out of the palace, out into the capital city, but before they could run down the short staircase and lose themselves in the chaos of the streets, Mercury’s
hand was torn from hers and she fell hard on the marble stairs. She shrieked in pain, fear, and confusion as she fell, the scream turning into a sharp gasp as a stair jutted into her stomach. Tears coming to her eyes, she pushed herself up onto her hands and looked around for Mercury, only to see her sprawled, unmoving, back at the top of the stairs several feet away from her.

“Mercury!” she called fearfully, struggling to her feet through the pain and telling herself forcefully that the blackened blast across her friend’s chest wasn’t a fatal blow.

“Hello, Princess!” a voice hissed from below. She turned and saw a woman with wild red hair glaring up at her, pointing at her accusatorily, a mad smile on her face, “We will take the Kingdom of the Moon and make it our own! The Legendary Silver Crystal will be mine!” Her eyes were unnatural, her aura black and sinister. She held her hands above her head and an even crueler force manifested, a terrible blade shining though the coalescing darkness.

But suddenly she wasn’t alone. A caped shoulder hid her from view; a tall, raven-haired man took a stance between her and the cruel women before them, his sword raised defensively. Endymion. Despite the situation, the fear, the panic around her, she felt safe behind him.

“Prince!” the woman spat, “will you be a traitor to Earth? This is all for Earth’s prosperity!”

_Earth’s prosperity?! What was she talking about?!_ Her heart hammered in her chest.

“Stop! Lay down your arms!” Endymion commanded, his voice strong and confident in the face of evil. He sounded convinced that his words could stop the battle, and she put her faith in that. “Stop this futile war immediately! War and hatred will never amount to anything!”

She appeared before them in a blurred flash, her sinister eyes glowing angrily, and brought down her blade. It tore through Endymion’s shoulder, continuing sickeningly through his chest, and her world crumbled around her as he cried out in pain. She screamed, as loud as she could; screamed in rage at this woman and her war, screamed in terror for her people, but, most of all, screamed in pain as the person most dear to her was torn from this world. Endymion! “Endymion!” she screamed, her eyes closed and her hands in fists near her face, wishing that none of this were real! None of this could be true! It just couldn’t!

Her mind turned to frenzied despair, watching Endymion’s body collapse, his red blood spilling over the white marble in pools. He was dying – he was dead. What was left for her, now? Her heart crumbled, taking her soul with it, deep into loss and despair. There was only one thing she could do.
With all of her being she called forth the sacred sword, the sword sworn to protect her, and as it materialized in her hands she turned it upon herself, then pulled it close to her as though it were him, her love. The blade bit deep into her chest and she fell down beside him. While blade disappeared her mind lingered for a moment as visions of her life flashed before her eyes: of music and parties with her friends; of the ocean on Earth and his deep blue eyes that she felt she could fall into; of stolen kisses amongst roses…

And she wished she had told him she loved him.


A Different Darkness

Chapter Summary

A favorite of mine XD

Something creepy has found its way into Mamoru and Usagi's hotel room...

He was awake. Suddenly and inexplicably wide awake, without confusion or disorientation… just an overwhelming sensation of dread. The room was deathly silent but for Usako’s deep breathing. They lay curled up together on the bed; his left arm beneath her neck, his bicep a pillow, the other draped over her waist comfortably, one of her hands holding his forearm contentedly. All he saw was a mess of golden hair, but as he raised his head up marginally, trying not to wake her, he clearly saw the luminous red alarm clock on the night stand – 3:00 A.M. – and waited for the feeling of anxious alarm to dissipate… but it only grew.

Something was wrong.

As he looked away from the clock, his eyes were immediately drawn to the dark corner beside the tall windows of the balcony. He could see nothing there, but the shadows were so complete and the contrast between the faint moonlight streaming through the blinds so remarkable, he could not be sure whether he saw the tall silhouette of a person or not.

But there was no mistaking the crushing feel of its presence.

He wondered if he were imagining things, yet he kept his eyes trained on that singular spot, waiting to see what would happen. It had been a long tour, one that might not end for months to come, and there was no denying his exhaustion; surely this was just an extension of the tension he felt or the strain they were under with so many public appearances and purifications – it was an effect of travelling so far in such a short amount of time, a call from his mind that they needed a break. He glanced away, giving the rationalization time to work its way through to his imagination… but the feeling of dread only increased, the presence of whatever it was growing stronger and more potent.

He looked at it again, glaring at the empty space as though his glare alone could keep it at bay. He curled his left arm to hug her even closer to him, farther from the edge of the bed, and gently freed his right arm. He could use other aspects of his psychometry outside of transformation; could he use his energy attack, as well? He raised his arm up, parallel to the surface of the bed, palm facing the corner of the room. It could have been many things – a sign to ‘stop’, for instance, or a warning to stay away – but as a feeling of inexplicable panic washed over him, goosebumps erupting along the length of his body, he knew that the force read it as it was: a threat.

"USAGI!!" footsteps thundered down the hallway as someone screamed in warning. A loud thump sounded at their door, as though someone had crashed into it. “USAGI! MAMORU!” the voice screamed as echoing blows struck the surface of the access.

He remained motionless, drawing strength from within as he stared down whatever sinister terror had found its way into their hotel room. Usagi continued to sleep soundly, and he wondered fleetingly if Helios were guarding her dreams closely.
“Rei-chan?!” Ami’s voice called questioningly in alarm, their voices so loud they were only marginally muffled by the thick door. “Rei-chan, what’s—“

“USAGI! MAMORU!” Rei screamed again, the pounding stopping momentarily.

His arm began to tremble of its own accord. It was moving closer.

There was suddenly a great thud, as if someone was trying to break the door down. “USAGI!! MAMORU—“ Her calling of his name was interrupted at the very end, as if she had been forcibly removed.

“Makoto! Haruka!” Minako’s voice called out in an unmistakable command and a great force collided with the door.

Light spilled into their room from the small hallway, but only momentarily; yet that momentary illumination was enough to outline the torso of threat in their room: it was tall and thin, with long arms and hooked, spiny fingers, and, even with the brief splash of yellow light from the hall, it retained a misty, shadowy form that his eyes could not fully penetrate. But he did not need to see it fully to aim. It had crossed the space and stood now somewhere near the corner of their bed, and that was close enough for him. He focused his energy into the palm of his hand, pulling more and more from himself until he felt his skin grow hot. When he felt he had gathered enough, he threw it forward.

A burst of golden light erupted from him and careened towards the mass of shadows not four feet from them and exploded violently, throwing the presence away from them just as it blew his hair back and away. The explosion was magnified by another striking force at the door, and this time the access flew open and down, masses striking the floor as a woman flew into the room.

Rei dashed forward, stopping just before the dark corner and to brandish a talisman and throw it in a slicing motion into the darkness. “AKURYO TAISEN!” she cried defiantly as the slip of paper seemed to stick to a point away from the wall, and both immediately disappeared in a fiery light. He lowered his arm, forcing himself to breathe evenly. Whatever it was, it was gone. Minako, entering on Rei’s heels, positioned herself in the faint moonlight streaming through the blinds, exactly between the corner and Usako. Makoto and Haruka entered the main room, each holding their shoulder and casting about suspiciously.

Even untransformed, wearing nothing but their pajamas, they were ready and willing to fight.

Usako stirred, but only to mumble something and reach for his arm again. He gave it to her, looking at Minako to see what she intended, but the blonde only smiled fondly at their sleeping Queen and motioned for the girls to leave. Rei made no move, and as Minako passed they shared a quick, quiet word with each other, and the raven-haired girl left. “We’ll talk about this in the morning,” the blonde whispered quietly to him, standing just inside the main room. Craning his neck he could see the shadow of the door being put back on its hinges, or close to it, and in moments Rei had returned with a pillow and blanket from her own room. These she deposited on the small couch, settling herself in for what he knew would be a sleepless night for both of them. Minako nodded at them, whispered “Good night,” and left.
She smiled at him from across their small table, chewing on a piece of mutton. He smiled back, unable to resist her smile for long, even while his heart broke at the thought of what he had to do. As one hand brought the joint to his lips, the other fingered the long-stemmed rose sitting on his thigh, fresh out of the gardens of his Kingdom and still covered in dew from the holy waters of Elysion.

“Is everything alright, Ender?” she asked pleasantly, her blue eyes curious.

As he gazed at her beautiful features, her unblemished skin, clear, bright eyes, high cheekbones and rosy lips, he wondered how he had never seen it before. She was simply too beautiful to be anything but an ethereal being… but perhaps he had been too young when they first met, too naïve to know the true workings of the world. “Perfectly fine, my love,” he returned.

They had met several years ago. He was still a teenager, fresh out of his Kingdom, eager to explore the world he ruled over. Seventeen, and still so young. He, Kunzite, Zoisite, Jadeite and Nephrite were touring the country unaccompanied, finding adventures where they could and enjoying the beauty of Earth as they moved north and westward of the capitol. They had been hunting in the forest that day, chasing some brilliant 14-point white stag, and he was separated from them when he found her.

The sight of her had taken his breath away. Porcelain skin, a long and flowing white dress held to her chest with pearls and silver, her long blonde spilling around her, floating behind her in the clear pool. She had noticed his arrival immediately and turned to meet him, holding the front of her skirt so she could easily step over the rocks of the pond. Her beauty was like an arrow through his heart, and from that moment forward it seemed impossible to take his eyes off of her. “Hello,” she said, her shy words singing like a song in his heart.

They spoke together for a long time in that small meadow, about the beauty of the trees and the feeling of the wind, and when he heard his fellows breaking through the forest, their voices still too distant for her to hear what they called, he yelled back at them to discourage any further search. They promised to meet back the next day so they might talk some more, and as he left she asked his name. “Endymion” was what he had started to say, but he caught himself at the last moment, “End—er,”
“Ender,” she repeated, his fumble a true name on her lips, a name he would swear by for forever if she but wish it so. “I am Lalune.”

After that they met together many times, and eventually, in secret from his family, he married her. They moved in together, into a small cottage in the woods, in the middle of a glade very similar to their meeting place, but closer to the capital city. He had told her he was a Smith, and that he worked long hours in the town as a journeyman to the craft; in that manner, he could spend every night with her, escaping the grounds after he had ‘retired’ and leaving her at dawn; occasionally he spent weeks with her, telling the court that he would be out hunting.

There were days when she was absent, but upon her return her excuses always satisfied him completely.

What a fool he had been, all these long four years.

He had found her true identity earlier that very day. He and the Heavenly Kings were on official business of Elysion, chasing off and defeating pieces of Chaos that had emerged too close to the capitol, but as they stalked the evil creature to its lair, they were surprised to learn that they were not alone in the hunt. With Kunzite on his left and Nephrite on his right, both tensed and ready to jump at his call, he dripped the holy waters onto the single red rose – a fitting piece, he believed, to stand for Earth’s defense – three beautiful figures appeared out of the very sky itself and landed between them and the cave.

They were young women, dressed in outfits coordinated with a specific color, with short skirts, long gloves, and high heels, and yet they fought better than half of his knights. They were fluid with their movements, the orange blonde girl using a chain of copper and firestones as a whip to hold the creature while a tall brunette in green directed lightning towards the foe to weaken it. To deliver the final blow was a girl in a short white dress with long blonde hair in familiar pigtailed buns. Lalune. In a flourish a pink rod topped with a golden crescent appeared in her hands and suddenly a bright clear light shot from the device, enveloping the cruel beast in sparkling silver light.

He had been forced to close his eyes from the intensity, but when he opened them again, the monster had vanished, but the trio remained. They spoke amongst each other for a moment, but two words, more than any others, stuck out like blood on a white kerchief.

The blonde orange warrior clearly addressed Lalune as “Princess Serenity.”
The three of them left, and he and his Heavenly Kings spoke together for a long time about what the occurrence had meant. The Moon Kingdom was interfering with Earth business, that much was undeniable, but to what end? The possibility that they were simply helping was a small one; the Earth Kingdom and the Moon Kingdom had never been close, nor had they opened official assemblies between the two great nations, so why would they come to Earth to defeat an Earth problem? Jadeite, however, had a better explanation, one that hurt his heart to hear, but one that made more sense the longer they spoke of it.

They had never seen the monster destroyed. They had no proof that Princess Serenity and her female warriors had done away with the beast. What if, as Chancellor Beryl had hinted recently in court, the Moon Kingdom was amassing a fighting force to be used against Earth in order to take control of the planet? Princess Serenity could have easily just transported the creature to holding facilities on the Moon, waiting for the right time to unleash it upon the capital or other major cities as the Moon Kingdom deemed fit. How many other monsters did they have locked away? There was only one course of action remaining: they needed information, or, at the very least, a bargaining chip to use against the Moon Kingdom to forestall future attacks.

And he had one hell of a bargaining chip sitting across from him at the table, smiling. Now all he had to do was subdue her.

“So, how was your day today?” he asked, taking another enthusiastic bite out of his meal.

She bit her lip, her blue gaze on the ceiling as she thought aloud, “Well, I refilled the water supply, did some laundry… the berries are coming in! I have some for dessert, actually; they’re raspberries, but I’ve sprinkled some sugar on them for you. Hmm… I tried a new recipe – how do you like the herb crusting?”

“It’s really good,” he replied honestly, watching as her hand shifted from atop the table to underneath it.

“I’m glad you like it!” she smiled wide, then struck a one-handed thinking pose, “Hmm,” she hummed, “I think that’s about it, but it was a productive day, overall.” Her eyes caught his then, and in them he saw something he had never seen in them before. A fierceness, like a cold fire burning behind them, and he gripped his rose tighter. “Oh, and I learned something interesting…”

The table suddenly flipped over in a flurry of utensils, food and cutlery, but as soon as it moved he was ready. He jumped to his feet and readied his rose, but she was quick. She crashed into him and kept moving, and he was forced backwards into the wall behind them, the cruel crescent want
pinning his neck to wood. “You are not who you said you were,” she hissed, her glare intimidating.

“Same to you, Princess Serenity,” he returned, his voice rasping from the pressure of the cold metal against his Adam’s apple. He met her glare with his own, smirking at her and twitching his fingers, drawing her attention to the thorn placed precariously close to the bare skin between her shirt and her skirt. She glanced down and her brows furrowed, not quite understanding the threat, but he was only too happy to lay it out to her. “This rose has been dipped in the waters of Elysion; should it enter the bloodstream of a being that does not belong to Earth or wishes malice upon a being of Earth, their blood will boil beneath their skin and turn them to ash from the inside out.” He reached out quickly with his other hand to hold her still, pressing the thorn ever closer to her, watching the momentary flicker of fear in her eyes, a glimmer that soon changed to one of doubt. “Oh, I assure you, Princess, what I say is the truth. Now, would you care to release me?”

She glared and remained where she was, and for a moment he wondered which was quicker – her command over the magics of the wand, or his reflexes and the powers within the water. Who would die first if they struck at the same time? His heart beating quickly within his chest, adrenaline rushing through his veins, he truly believed that he struck now, he might be able to push her hard enough to break through the double-grip hold she had over her weapon. He could yet escape. But...

… Could he really kill her?

She was Princess Serenity of the Moon Kingdom, an enemy of Earth as declared by Beryl, who had been nothing but loyal to him since her first appearance in court years ago. She had control over magics that he and his people might never have, and so would always be a threat to their way of life. She and her two warriors of earlier today might easily demolish an entire town, if they so pleased, and how many other of her color-coded female fighters did she have under her command? It was his duty as Prince of Earth to kill her. His fingers tightened around her abdomen and his rose –

But as his eyes met hers for what could have been the last time, he knew he could not kill her. Princess Serenity, she might be. An enemy of Earth, she might be. But what she was, was Lalune, his wife. The woman he loved, the woman he adored, whom he could not get enough of. The woman who sang to him, played with him, made him laugh and comforted him. The woman whom he had shared his deepest wishes with, his guarded secrets, who would stay up with him late at night and watch the stars move across the sky, who would talk with him until sunrise. She was the woman that he loved above all others. His grip relaxed. If she wanted him dead…

She growled fiercely and tugged hard at the handle of the wand, yanking its pointed head out of the wall and freeing him. “I can’t kill you, Ender,” she stated as though it was an admission of defeat, “I just –“ her voice caught in her throat, and he dropped the rose to hold her. Her arms wrapped around him welcomingly, and they stood together in silence. He contemplated the repercussions of this move, of what it would mean for Earth and the court, and he had to ask.
He pushed her away from him gently and looked her in the eye, “Does the Moon Kingdom have plans to take over Earth?” he asked in all seriousness, both begging and demanding the truth from her.

“No,” she stated, shaking her blonde head to emphasize her answer. “Is Earth, under Beryl, planning to destroy the Moon Kingdom?”

“What?” the question caught him off-guard. Why would Beryl want to destroy the Moon Kingdom? There was no reason… but, then, from what the chancellor said about the Moon Kingdom it would be an obvious assumption to make if you were from the Moon. “No,” he replied softly. There was no reason…

She exhaled sharply, laughing, “Good!” she exclaimed, then took him by the hand and moved towards the window to glance outside. “I need to call off the hit on you,” she stated matter-of-factly, as though it were an everyday phrase.

While he was taken for a second, he recovered quickly, “I think I might have to do the same for you.” If he were a betting man, he’d put his money on Zoïsite having a group of archers waiting to shoot any Moon Kingdom person out of the sky, if they had the habit of appearing the way she and her soldiers had appeared earlier.

She glanced back at him with a wry smile, “My people might already be here. If I leave you, you’re as good as dead. No offence to your fighting skills.”

“None taken; I’m honestly quite sure you wouldn’t make it through the skies. No offense to your flying skills.”

She smiled, “None taken.”

“So,” he asked, as her blue eyes flickered from place to place amongst the trees around them as though she already had a plan, “What do we do?”

She squeezed his hand and reached for the doorknob, “We run.”
Sitting in the corner of a dimly lit bar, a woman with long red hair sat nursing her drink, her scowl as bitter as her poison. With thinly veiled disdain, she glared at the men on the barstools through blonde lashes, long fingers pressing against the sides of her glass as if trying to keep herself in check...

Worthless, she thought with disgust as two of them laughed uproariously at a pathetic joke. Within her heart something riled, rebelling against the truth in her second-rate position: as a woman, she was ranked below either of those insignificant and ignorant worms and there was nothing she could do about it. She had tried. Years of studying in her free time, teaching herself what teachers had neglected to mention to her gender and others of her class and rank, learning more than half of the people in her district, and yet it had amounted to very little. Her intelligence and intellect had bought her a position barely above the minimum level, and though she knew more than all of her superiors put together, there was no room for advancement, no way for her to gain real respect.

It was below her – this life, these people, this city, this planet – all of it was below her, and yet she was stuck in it as surely as she would be were she shackled to this very bar. She sipped the amber liquid acrimoniously, her eyes on the crowd as a whole as the pair of imbeciles, clapping each other on the back for a belch well done, left into the foul-smelling night of the industry district. She was the first woman from her class to have ever moved districts, she reminisced, putting the glass back on the table with a solid thunk, and even that small accomplishment – that pitifully small accomplishment – was begrudged her. Everywhere she turned within her workplace she was met with sneers, gibes, and dirty comments as men tried to assert their dominance. Their attempts were quieter now, after the more overt attempts were met with her quick physical offense, but they were still there, everywhere she turned. She had been right to teach herself self-defense before sticking her neck out for advancement; her skill with her body had saved her many times over now, here in this piece of shit city on this god forsaken planet. She deserved so much more than this.

She should be running her own business, earning thousands a year and finally weilding power over those insignificant bugs that deemed themselves more worthy than she on the basis of their genitals. She took another drink. Or, even better, she should be captain of her own starship, running between Saffer and the other planets of the system, deciding which cargo would best be served where, deciding the fates of other people by choosing her crew and deigning whom she moved from planet to planet. Or, maybe even a leader. On other planets in the system their government is elected via a majority vote; if she could just enter that political contest… if given a level playing field, she could do well, use her sharpened mind for a useful purpose, her female intelligence and mind to determine how a planet would be run… But she would never have a chance like that. Not her, not here, not ever.
She threw her glass behind the bar, taking no relief from the sound of the glass shattering on the floor as she stood. She exited, tossing coins at the screaming barkeep and fluidly dodging as he threw a mug at her ‘disrespectful wench’ head. Walking home, her coat tight against her to keep off the general street sludge and her mask around her mouth to keep out the smog, the woman marched, pointedly ignoring the catcalls and the verbal advances that were common for a woman to receive when out past starset. Refusing to move to the other side of the building aisle, she ducked, kicked and punched her way out of an attack and kept on going, her anger rising – she deserved so much more; if only she had the power to obtain it!

Sailor Saffer… it had such a nice ring to it. A powerful ring. With her new abilities the skies were the limit, and, really, that ‘limit’ was only semantics. Their system’s first attack by Chaos had awakened her to her true self, her true purpose, and had introduced her to the other women with power from her system, women who answered to her. It was destiny, it had to be – all of her life she had felt like she was meant for more and, all along, her star seed – the very source of her life – was shared with her planet. This connection gave her the powers and energy of Saffer, sufficient enough to fight and destroy as she pleased. And not only that, but her Sailor Crystal was the strongest of her system – she was their leader, their commander; and yet the day-to-day life on her planet had not changed.

Now as she sat in the bar, her long red hair growing out golden since her first transformation, she was met with hateful side-long glances; she was still treated as a woman of the fifth rank, and maybe even worse than before because she had saved them all. They resented her power, hated that her power had fallen to a woman, despised that they owed her their lives; they were ungrateful. Ungrateful, small minded, and she had outgrown them. She was no longer worthless, as they were; she was a Senshi, perhaps the most powerful senshi of them all… and if she wasn’t, she would be.

There was no longer a glass ceiling above her head. The future was open, ready to be taken; she just had to seize the power with her own two hands. “Sailor Saffer” was nice, but “Sailor of the Galaxy”? That was her true destiny.
Usagi’s fingers softly brushed Mamoru’s and he instantly responded, taking her hand in his, intertwining their fingers in comfort and support as they silently stood together. Beside them someone sniffled quietly, the sound almost whisked away by the soft breeze through the budding trees. She could sense Makoto and Rei reaching out to comfort Ami, but she did not see them. Usagi’s eyes focused only on the ground in front of her: on the grass that was just starting to flourish, the tiny blue and yellow spring flowers that poked out of the ground in small patches, the fresh earth piled by the shovel to her right. The rectangular hole in the ground at her feet.

Everything was supposed to have been okay. Everything should have been fixed, and yet now, as once before, she felt as though she were standing on the edge of an enormous precipice, looking down into the black depths and feeling so intensely that she wasn’t okay. It wasn’t supposed to be like this. It was supposed to go back to the way it was before – her friends, her beloved friends, had all come back to her. Her love, her Mamoru, came back, too; she squeezed his hand to reassure herself that he was actually there; he squeezed back, only confirming that this was in fact not a dream. She wished it were.

Three had been left behind at the cauldron.

Her eyes brimmed with tears, but she forced them back. That’s not what Luna would have wanted, was it? Her heart constricted and she focused on the ground again. On the hole. It was so small… so dark and lonely. But it would be okay. Luna wasn’t here anymore. Luna was with Artemis and Diana in the cauldron. She wouldn’t be put into the ground. She wouldn’t be buried. She wouldn’t be left behind in the dark. The tears threatened again and again she fought against them, using her grip on Mamoru to center her. This wasn’t real – she had seen what was real, she had been there. Luna wouldn’t be alone. She would never be alone!

Footsteps through the grass worried her – she knew who was coming, but she couldn’t handle it. Not now, not yet. Maybe not ever, but still the footsteps advanced. Far too soon, Minako was there, a
small wooden box in her arms. Hotaru sobbed quietly. Michiru pulled her back, held her; the young
girl pushed her face into Michiru’s blouse, wrapping her arms about her mother’s waist as she
watched the box in Minako’s arms and cried. Briefly, Usagi wondered if Chibi-Usa was doing
something similar in the future. Was she, too, holding her mother close as she watched the little
wooden box? As she watched her best friend be put to rest? The tears came again and this time,
Usagi didn’t stop them.

Her best friend was in there. Her mentor, her guide, the single person who was there through
everything, from the moment she became Sailor Moon through the hardest period of her life, always
offering support and comfort and asking for nothing in return. Luna had always believed in her, even
at her worst, even when everything was falling apart. And she never doubted, not even once, that
Luna had loved her. Had Luna known how important she was to her?

“Artemis,” Minako shook violently, her hands gripping the box as the whisper seemed to tear from
her throat of its own accord. Tears, fat and heavy, splashed down on the wooden top as she sniffled
greatly, shaking her head to ward the others away as both Rei and Setsuna stepped forward to help
her. Usagi could hear Ami crying again as Minako bent down, her tear-streaked face determined as
she knelt in the grass before the small, gaping hole.

Don’t put her in there! Usagi’s eyes were glued to the box, as though she could see the three cats
through the casket and by sheer force of will make them come alive again. But nothing happened,
nothing except the box lowering, Minako’s hand guiding their loved ones down into their final
resting place. She couldn’t see the box anymore.

They weren’t coming back.

Luna was gone. Forever. Her breath caught in her chest as Minako leaned over to scoop up a
handful of dirt off of the pile. Her hands paused above the hole, hovering in place as though she, too,
were waiting to see if something miraculous might happen. But it didn’t. And it wasn’t going to.
Luna wasn’t here anymore. Neither was Artemis, or Diana. They were gone. They had moved on.

Usagi let go of Mamoru’s hand and bent down across from Minako, cupping Minako’s hands in her
own. Her fingers were cold, and at her touch Minako seemed to melt, to break in some way.
Together they released the dirt, listening to the cascade of earth fall upon the little wooden box in a
steady, peaceful stream until it was quiet again. Holding hands, they knelt there for a few moments
more, quietly mourning their friends, trying to let them go. Finally, they helped each other stand.
Hand-in-hand, they moved away from the rectangular hole in the ground and returned to their
friend’s sides, turning to look once more on the little patch of Earth. Usagi reached again for
Mamoru’s hand; Minako reached for Makoto’s, Makoto for Ami, Ami for Rei, Rei for Setsuna,
Setsuna for Michiru. Hotaru, her face red from crying, stood back and took both Michiru’s and
Haruka’s hands. Haruka and Mamoru completed the circle.
Fate had brought them all together. Power granted them new life. Destinies intertwined to determine their future, but two little cats had started it all.

Usagi felt lighter. She closed her eyes squeezed Minako’s hand, and in a moment felt a squeeze from Mamoru. They were all together. They were as one. She took a deep breath, a sound that echoed all around her, and held it, thinking of Diana, the tiny purple kitten from the future, of Artemis, wise and loyal, and finally her little black cat with the ‘crescent bald spot’. She exhaled, letting them go, knowing they would find happiness. “Luna,” she breathed in farewell.

When they opened their eyes a great crystal spire was before them, rising up within the encircled gravesite to give Luna, Artemis and Diana a strong and beautiful headstone that seemed to touch the sky. It reminded Usagi of the Crystal Tower of the Moon Kingdom, the Pillar of Prayer Luna had prayed to when Usagi struggled to defeat Chaos’s first incarnation on Earth, Metallia. A faint smile tugged at Usagi’s lips with the understood meaning: it was time. With a Crystal Tower of their own, a new kingdom could be built; Crystal Tokyo was still in their future, whether they had lost their important friends or not.

A thousand years later, the Crystal Spire stood enshrined in a new Chamber of Prayer, this one opened to all residents of Earth. Children, women and men of all ages visited the shrine to pray for love and peace, wisdom and clarity, courage and luck; hundreds of people passed within its marble hallways, and everyone knew the names of the three cat statues that stood watch over them all.
Chapter Summary

Writing Contest Entry, "Villains" theme

Alumi opened her eyes and stretched, yawning as she sat up in bed and rubbed her eyes. Another day, another harvest, she thought with little enthusiasm as she hopped up out of bed, swimming past her open window and completely disregarding the bustle of activity in the streets as morning broke over Mermadia. In her room of refreshment she ran a comb through her long blue hair, poked and prodded at her face as she grumbled about not waking up sparkingly beautiful, and retired to her closet to choose the day’s attire. Shimmying into a pair of yellow shells and throwing a light blue netting shift overtop, she returned to the mirror and pulled her hair into a loose seahorse tail, accenting the style with an anemone flower and winking before swimming out to grab her purse, giving a shriek of alarm as she noticed the time shadow.

Her tail flipping fiercely, she whipped through her house and wiggled out the front window rather than waste time opening the door. With a flip of her tail the window closed and she continue past her small front yard and raced through the streets, dodging around the slower traffic much to the chagrin of the Mothers. They clucked and tutted at her as she went around them, their calls of “Slow down!” and “Reckless girl!” falling on deaf ears who had heard the comments too many times before. She turned left, wheeled right, went through an open market stall to shave some precious seconds, her hands before her to cut through the current and streamline her motion; as she whizzed past a slack-jawed merchant, she brought a hand in and waved once cheekily, smiling a toothy smile as she bent backwards and turned down the last side street; this one would be a straight-shot to the fields.

As the long strands of kale grew in size, she stopped swimming and simply glided through the water, putting on the brakes only when hidden safely in the green stalks. Breathing normally, she gently took a stalk and examined it thoughtfully, making a soft and considered humming sound as a shadow passed over her site.

“Alumi?” her superior addressed with masked aggravation. Alumi ignored her at first, holding up a finger and really, really looking at the green, lofty leaf. The woman crossed her arms and tapped her own finger against her bicep, coral-colored eyes glaring under teal brows, lips pinching into a scowl; when finally Alumi thought the woman wouldn’t be able to handle it anymore, she released the kale and smiled up at her, waiting to be addressed, knowing she was just getting herself deeper and deeper into trouble but hoping a look of determination and friendliness might subvert the disciplinary action to come. “Alumi, did you arrive late this morning?”

“Well, let’s see… I think I woke up on time, and then I got dressed, and I remembered I had to hurry to get to work… but I’ve been here looking at this specimen for quite some time now… do you see its spots? They’re odd, aren’t they? Odd, but pretty… I think it’s a good specimen, one we might want to breed, but we should probably taste it first, right? Hmm… tricky… we can’t eat our kale and breed it, too… Oh! But anyway, I can’t be completely sure of when I got here,” she finished with a smile, “but it feels like I might’ve been on time today.”
The supervisor’s eyes were closed at this point, her fingers pressed to her forehead in annoyance, but overall she seemed obliging, and that gave Alumi hope. “Alumi,” the supervisor sighed heavily, looking at her with some gravity, “You’re working on your last scale here. One more mess-up and you’re out of a job, and there aren’t that many places left that will hire you. So just get here on time and turn in some logs, okay? I don’t want to fire my husband’s kid-sister but if you keep up this streak of irresponsibility, I will. Understand?”

Relief spreading like warmth, Alumi smiled and saluted, “Sure thing!” she then turned the salute into a lazy wave as she bid her sister-in-law-turned-supervisor goodbye, “I’ll get straight to work, no problem! Have a good one, I’ll check in with you later,” she said with a sing-song voice.

The woman growled, “Just do some work,” and swam away.

Morning came and went; as soon as noontime came and the whistle sounded, Alumi threw her bag over her shoulder, grabbed a handful of kale to make a third bundle, and rushed to the collection bin. Once there she tied the bunch with a hardened piece of weed and dropped it into the bucket, then swam off as quick as she could, someone yelling after her about an improper knot but it was too late – lunch had started! She raced through the streets again, weaving through the noon crowds on her way to their normal place; by the time she got there everyone else was already seated, but Himil had saved her a spot and she coasted right to it, tearing off her bag and putting it below the coral table in the same motion as she stuck her elbows on the table and cupped her chin in her hands. With a huge smile she greeted her friends from a previous job and the second favorite part of her day started. As much as she hadn’t enjoyed the stress of her former job, she just adored hearing the gossip, especially when the most exciting thing to happen in the fields were her mistakes.

As the hour came to a close and they packed up what was left of their lunch to head back to work, Alumi doddled as much as she could, even swimming part way back to the office with them before grudgingly heading towards the fields. Hearing the faint whistle in the distance she put on some speed, but unlike her earlier trips, this time she was forcefully stopped at a cross-street by a strong-armed man. “Hey!” she exclaimed at first, but after following the hand up the strong arm, across the broad, well-muscled chest and up to the statuesque face, her attitude changed abruptly. Her eyelashes fluttering automatically, a light chuckle catching in her throat, she apologized, her tone lighter and lilting, “Oh! I’m sorry, I must have bumped into you – clumsy me!” The strong, handsome face quirked a brow and Alumi internally celebrated – she’s got him amused, she’s got a chance! “You know, I could make up for it by joining you for dinner sometime,” she invited coyly.

“That won’t be necessary,” he replied with a deep, serious tone.

She pouted at the loss. “Well then, you’ll just have to accept my apology without dinner and let me continue on my way, though, just so you know, I am still accepting offers of lunch, drinks, or tea. Just find me sometime, okay?” She smiled and tried to move around him, but his arm came out and caught her yet again. Scowling, she looked up at him again, “Listen, first time it was almost cute, but this is bordering on harassment.”

“You can’t cross. Royal Party coming through.”

The scowl still on her face, Alumi nevertheless bent her neck to have a look; sure enough the entire street had been emptied as a small group swam leisurely through, laughing and smiling and pretty much enjoying the high life. She sighed enviously as the brightly-colored crew passed her by, watching the Princess’s joyful face as her amber eyes sparkled at some inside-joke before her shell-white hair obscured Alumi’s view. She wished she could be Princess. Or even just part of Princess Meria’s inner group – they never had to get up early or go to work or get yelled at or get fired time
after time; they lived the high life, with parties every night and entertainment every day, and they heard the best jokes and the most amazing stories. As they moved out of sight, the muscle-head moved aside and she swam through, pausing in the middle of the street to watch them go.

In the middle of the afternoon, the vibrations struck. You could almost see the wave rippling before it reached them; as Alumi floated lazily above the field a new bundle in her arms, her eyes doubled in size, watching the mass head towards them. It was the single largest disturbance she had ever witnessed, and she didn’t know what to do. The sirens wailed a warning, the brass tune echoing out from the palace as voices rose in alarm, yelling to go indoors. Beneath her she felt the kale move as other workers dashed through the forest, but she couldn’t move, not yet. It was as beautiful as it was ominous, as magnificent as it was terrifying, and she was frozen, watching as it tore up the sand and crushed rock. Only when her tail was tugged sharply did she look away, dropping the kale and flying away, following on her sister-in-law’s tail as they darted back into the city.

“What is it?!” Alumi cried in fear, already feeling the pressure lessening around them in preparation for the fall.

“Just keep going!” her sister demanded.

“In here!” someone yelled, and with grabbing, helpful hands the pair of them were pulled inside a shop and pushed towards the back room as the pair by the door pulled other stragglers inside. As they swam into the back room she could hardly breathe, the pressure so low her gills had trouble filtering the rarefied oxygen. Fear rising, she looked to the others – there were twelve in there, some holding hands in a circle, their heads bowed. Her sister-in-law joined the circle, but Alumi couldn’t move. She was so scared – this was serious. The sound reached them then, the cacophony of rocks crushing, coral snapping, the thunderous whir of the wave churning the ocean a constant noise that just grew louder in her ears. She pressed her hands to her ears. Her heart raced as the walls seemed to come in on her, pressing around her even as she slowly suffocated.

A hand on her elbow made her jump, her eyes wild as she turned to her coral-eyed sister-in-law – was she the last family member Alumi would ever see?! She was pulling her closer, but Alumi didn’t want to be there anymore! Listen, listen to what the wave was doing to the hardened stone of the ocean floor! Listen to what it did to coral – it would tear through these buildings effortlessly! They were trapping themselves; they were dooming themselves! They had to swim! Swim up and away, over the wave, away from the wave! She jerked her arm free and flipped on her tail, putting her arms before her to swim faster, pumping her fin through the shop and back out the door, evading the hands of the helpers as she turned upwards, out of the city. She couldn’t stay there – she didn’t want to die! Not yet!

Her heart trembled as she climbed higher and higher, until the city streets were just lines in the floor below her, the castle spires even with her height, but still the wave was taller. She couldn’t breathe anymore, she couldn’t push any farther; desperately she reached for the surface far above her, to the sun-disk far above her, but she knew it was useless.

“Mermaid Tsunami!”

Like a clear echo rising above the noise, the voice of Princess Meria – Sailor Mermaid – rang loud and clear to Alumi’s ears and she turned hopefully, watching as the clear blue energy raced outward to defend them from the wave. Sailor Mermaid, of course, Sailor Mermaid would save them! Their senshi could stop anything, could defend them from any threat; she could take care of this wave, she could save them. Her hands clasped tightly before her chest, Alumi watched tensely as the Mermaid Tsunami raced towards the oncoming threat, but as they touched… the wave increased in size. Again
Sailor Mermaid threw out her attack, but Alumi knew what would happen, knew it was useless. There was no hope! She looked up again and forced her tail to move, forced herself upward.

“Do you want to die?” a voice, calm and deep and completely imagined, asked her softly.

“No!” Alumi cried desperately, kicking harder and harder towards the surface. “I don’t want to die! I want to live!” Her whole body ached, weakened, her eyes seeing stars with the exertion and lack of oxygen. “Please,” she whimpered, her fin burning too much to continue, “Please, I want to live.”

“Will you serve me?” the voice asked, her mad mind making a deal as though it could save her from the catastrophe getting ever closer. Looking down she saw it reach the outskirts of town, tearing through the buildings, Sailor Mermaid pressing back as best she could, but her attempts were ineffective. The screams joined the enormous sound of the wave.

So afraid she was shaking, she cried out, “Yes! Yes, I’ll do anything!” and wondered how soon the wave would reach up and claim her, too. Would she have enough energy left to scream?

“Take the crystal,” the voice commanded, “Serve me, and you will never know fear again.” The end of the sentence was punctuated with a grand explosion that nearly deafened her; she closed her eyes tight and covered her ears, but after the worst of it she squinted around her, looking for the crystal the voice spoke of. There it was, blue and glowing eerily, quickly moving towards the surface. With her last reserves she pushed herself towards it, reached out, and took it. The pain that shot up her arms was immeasurable – she almost let go, but she stubbornly refused, holding on for her dear life as a fire burned inside her, a transformation taking her over. Below her the cries had stopped but still the wave moved on, and she didn’t care. She felt powerful, she felt unstoppable, she felt alive, and even as the golden cuffs linked around her wrists and her fin burst in two, giving her two limbs below her waist that moved apart from each other, she felt free. With energy she could now wield with her own will, she followed the silent call and burst upwards, breaking through the surface of the water and up farther still, flying through the air as easily as she swam through the water, climbing ever higher. When finally she burst through the surface of the air and found herself surrounded in a new black medium, she turned and met the golden-clad woman who had saved her. The woman, beautiful and powerful and strong, smiled as Alumi bowed her allegiance, and with a single flick of her wrist Planet Mermaid was destroyed.

“Come, my Aluminum Seiren. There are many other crystals to collect.”

“Yes,” Aluminum Seiren replied, “My Queen.”
Happy Birthday, Mama

Chapter Summary

Queen Small Lady Serenity celebrates her birthday with her Mother

Writing Contest Entry, "Double Moon Birthday" (winner, no banner)

XD another favorite~♥

Queen Lady Serenity smiled and nodded her head, her voice’s echo ringing against the crystalline walls for a moment before it was swept away in exuberant applause. The ballroom was filled with guests dressed in their finest gowns and tuxedos, and the color pink laced around the room elegantly: it peeked out from elaborate fabrics of those gathered, the rose on every man’s breast and tucked into every lady’s hairstyle, and the handkerchiefs tucked into blouses and sleeves; it colored the tabletops, sloshed in silver cups, frosted the cupcakes and stained the berries. She adored the effect, especially in the reflections on the ceiling and in the floor - it was as though they were dancing in a cotton-candy dream.

It had been a long night, and an excellent party. Her cheeks ached from smiling, her feet pulsed from dancing through so many songs, and, with the applause from her farewell speech still thundering and echoing back on itself through the ballroom, it was time to go. Smoothly she turned and walked across the dais through a large door, Pallas, Ceres, Juno and Vesta following behind her. The girls spoke cheerfully about the night as they walked from the ballroom to the elevator and rose the many stories up to the royal apartments, laughing at jokes and reactions, Queen Lady Serenity laughing just as loud as they, snickering every time she glanced over at Juno and saw her in the frilly pink dress Ceres had chosen for her to wear that night, which, of course, made Juno fume.

They said goodnight when they reached the floor of the Royal apartments, the guardian senshi to their quarters, the Queen of the Solar System and Crystal Millennium breaking off to visit the apartment of her young daughter, Princess Little Lovely Serenity. She crept through the night-lit room to her tiny crib and peered over at the darling baby sleeping soundly within. Her silvery lavender locks, already half as long as she was just after a year of life, spread out around her, her tiny fists tangled in the silky length. She smiled and bent into the crib, kissing her softly on the cheek; the baby fidgeted, her little mouth moving noisily for a second before falling back into a deep slumber. It had been a long and exciting day for the little princess, as first birthdays often were; she had presents and plays, and spent the entire day with both mother and her father for as long as she could stay awake, and those light green eyes tired quickly under such stimulation.

“Happy birthday, Little Lovely,” she whispered for the second time that day as the Queen turned and exited the nursery, closing the door softly behind her. When she turned around she jumped and squeaked in a childish manner, surprised to find a figure suddenly before her.

Helios chuckled. “I’m sorry to have startled you, my Queen,” he greeted slyly, wrapping his arms around her waist loosely, pulling her in close.

“Oh, my King, you lie so well,” she teased, kissing him lightly on the lips, her forearms resting on his shoulders with her hands clasped together behind his neck. “You missed the end of a wonderful
party.”

“A regretful occurrence,” he sighed, looking away from her as though in melancholy.

She giggled and kissed him again, “Watch out, or your nose might start growing like the poor puppet in Little Love’s storybook!” Helios had never been one for large celebrations, and so, as usual, found some ‘pressing business’ in Elysion to attend to just a half hour into the celebrations, taking the Princess up to bed before moving to the realm deep within Earth. She didn’t mind, knowing his aversion to large crowds.

“Are you coming to bed?” he asked, resting his forehead on hers.

She smiled, “In a little bit, I wanted to wish my mother a Happy Birthday, first.”

He nodded and let her go, opening the wide doors to their room and disappearing into the elegant interior. She turned and continued down the hall, opening a door at the end of the hall and entering, the story and excitement still on her face. “Mother! Oh mother it was such a great day!” she gushed, sitting on a couch beside the pillow, “You should have seen Little Love! She was nothing but smiles and giggles, reaching and eager to touch everything! Oooh,” she groaned, “but she’s always putting things in her mouth. You wouldn’t believe the things she tries to put in there. Sure, food of any shape and size within reach, but also stuffed toys and ceramic unicorns and buttons and handkerchiefs – sometimes it’s all that we can do to keep her from choking on something! Oh, one day I’m just so afraid that someone’s not watching her and something terrible will happen.” She paused, “but then, with everyone watching over her, I’m sure she’ll be alright.

“There was a festival in every great city, of course, with schools and businesses shut down to celebrate, but we got celebratory messages from all over wishing for our wellbeing and long lives! I loved everything sent our way, but I think, even against the peacocks and other strange gifts, my favorite presents were the crayon drawings and pictures of the girls from around the world trying their own senshi poses. It’s so sweet, Mother, you should see some of them! Each say that they wish they were a senshi so that they could protect us; I’m trying to write a personal reply to each and every one of them, telling them how much the sentiment means to me, but saying that the best thing they can do is to live happily, and to be true to their hearts…

“Oh, but the party! It was so excellent, Mother! The cake was so delicious and simply everyone wore pink, even Juno! There was so much dancing and singing and I really think everyone had a great time! I just...” she paused, staring into the folded hands in her lap, her voice growing quiet, “I just wish you could have been there.”

“I miss you,” the admission squeaked through her throat, tears forming in the corners of her eyes, her voice breaking with the desperate emotion, “And it’s selfish and it’s childish, but I just miss you so much!” she sobbed once, audibly, staring through watery eyes at the silver crystal on its pillowed pedestal. “I wish you could be here with me again. I wish you could come to parties and receive letters and laugh with me again, I wish you could see Love grow up! Mother,” she cried, her hand pressing her chest at her heart, attempting to ease the pain she felt, still as fresh now as the day her mother had moved on. “I miss you!”

She cried then, hard tears and sobs that drained her, thinking back on all their fights, all the trouble she caused her while they grew up, all the problems her mother had helped her through, her constant support and encouragement, easing her nerves and bolstering her spirits… they used to talk, so much and for such a long time, playing and teasing each other even when she grew to adulthood, and now… now her mother was gone.
When her tears had run dry and her throat was raw, she finally stood, feeling lighter and more at peace with herself. The silver crystal gleamed with a friendly light, sparkling in the spotlight above it and reflecting a rainbow of hues across the room, shining even on its golden match on the pedestal next to it. She smiled then as she noticed a strong pink hue in the center of the prismatic beam, and whispered, “Happy birthday, Mother.”

When she left the room she found Helios waiting for her, and, hand in hand, they went to bed.
“Seressen’i” Serenity quoted, her voice a lilting, whispery thing that recalled images of cool, breezy
nights and soft moonlight over grassy plains. Her blue eyes were intent on his, intense and inviting,
drawing out a response as she leaned towards him encouragingly, waiting for him to give the word a
try. It was his first Lunarian lesson, brought on through curiosity and a challenge combined; but
Serenity’s enjoyment of teaching him something for a change might have had something to do with
actually going through with the feat.

Endymion watched her mouth for embouchure, but she had said the word too fast. He stretched his
lips nonetheless into an ‘s’ position and started making a hissing noise, before stopping, “Say it
again, please?”

She giggled, and said the word again, much slower and with exaggerated movements of lips and

“Sereshenniee,” he tried and she chuckled and said it again. Very soon she had him repeating each
syllable for pronunciation, and the lesson was becoming tedious and frustrating until, at last, she
smiled and nodded her head enthusiastically. He repeated again, “Seh-ress-sen-na ee. Seress-sen-
na’ee. Seressen-na’ee. Seressen’a.” She nodded, smiling and leaned back. He smiled back at her
and had to ask, “So, what did I just say?”

“‘The Moonlight belongs to me’,” she replied.

His smile fell as he considered the magnitude of her words – the phrase sounded so personal, what
did she mean by teaching him that, first? Did she… no, there was no way she meant… she wasn’t
‘the moonlight’ in the phrase, right? That wasn’t something akin to an admission of… but it was so
personal and – his faltering, broken thoughts slowed, taking her in, from her silvery hair sprinkled
with springtime cherry blossoms to her blue eyes, sincere and trusting, and the small smile playing at
her lips. He loved her. Was this her way of saying that his unconfessed feelings were mutual?
“Really?” he asked, wondering where this might lead now…

She leaned in again, getting so close… her hand mere millimeters from his, her eyes half-closed…
dare he kiss her? He leaned in, closer and closer… She started giggling, throwing herself backwards
and covering her mouth with her hands, “No,” she admitted as he tried to regain some sort of
composure.

He cleared his throat and hoped she didn’t know what he had been thinking. “Then what does it
mean?” he asked, covering as smoothly as he could.

“‘Let’s get lunch!’”

((Later, Endymion finds that ‘lunch’ wasn’t in that combination of syllables, but the possessive
‘mine’ was. <3))
Writing Contest piece for theme "Reversed Roles"

What if what had happened to the Starlights had happened to the Guardian Senshi during the Silver Millennium...?

Her heels clicked down the hallway, the echoes of her steps slowly swallowed by the cacophony of the crowd’s cheers as she approached the backstage door. A stagehand saw her coming and pulled the heavy black door open, fully releasing the sound of thousands of fans, their cries buffeting her with their eagerness for the show to finally begin. As she passed through the threshold, Venus winked at the boy and blew him a kiss, keeping up her persona as she marched into the fray. The moment her shoes touched the stage she had a smile on her face, her hands waving once before she turned to blow kisses into the crowd, the fans screaming even more. Behind her, Jupiter’s sticks smacked a tempo and then crashed into the drums, throwing out an upbeat to get the concert started. On cue, Mercury chimed in with a riff on her synthesizer that poured like rushing water over the audience, and Mars flung her guitar around her shoulder and leaned into the music. In a fluid movement Venus pulled a microphone from its stand and started the song.

This was nothing. Just the starter – just to get them interested, to get them pumped. To get them in the door. She danced around the stage, winking at proper moments, pointing over the crowd, her voice ringing and playful as it enveloped them in this nothing-song of having fun, eating sweets, and hiding from authority. *Things that she loved,* she thought, pushing through to be louder, to be even more energetic. As the instrumental break came, she went to dance beside Mars, smiling playfully and miming the guitar before she returned to center stage to spin into the last lines of the chorus.

When the song ended the audience screamed and shouted, crying for more, calling their names. She smiled, thinking that she could grow to love this, if only they could *find her.* They just needed to find her! Mercury must have been thinking the same thing, because immediately she transferred to another song, her fingers running hastily along her board to blend the appropriate sounds together, and they were off again. More jumping, more singing, more energy, her voice pulling them in and encouraging them to listen – listen to these songs about nothing, calling back to memories that only *one* of the potential listeners actually shared with the band. Only one.

And so they progressed. Three songs, four, five, and finally one that had something to it; finally one that they could use to find her. As a stagehand came out to take Mars’s guitar, and Mercury stepped away from the synth and towards her computer, the crowd twittered excitedly, but when Mars stood beside her the audience went silent, waiting. Venus turned to her, gazing into amethyst eyes to focus, to concentrate and channel her energy. To recall why they were there, and center her thoughts on the Princess they needed to find. The girl they were struggling to live without.

Serenity.

Venus took Mars’s hand and they concentrated, preparing to throw their planet power out over the audience, peppering their words with energy that they hoped would show her that they were there, searching for her. Mercury’s computers scanned for her, Jupiter’s bass drum turned on and ready to
receive and analyze the data that they would pour through later. The audience twittered expectantly as they prepared, and Venus was just waiting on Mercury’s signal. It came in the form of a technical piano riff, signaling their upbeat Star Single to start. Mars and Venus let go of each other’s hands and hooked elbows for the start, throwing their voices out over the crowd and sang together:

\[
\text{I'm sorry I'm not candid.} \\
\text{I can say it if in my dreams.} \\
\text{My thoughts are about to short circuit.} \\
\text{I want to see you right now!} \\
\text{I'm just about to cry – Moonlight!} \\
\text{I can't call you, either – Midnight!} \\
\text{But I have a simple heart, so what can I do?} \\
\text{My heart is a kaleidoscope.}
\]

Mars took the next stanza by herself, her voice deep and strong as she took hold of her microphone in both hands, her eyes closed. Venus, in the meantime, fit her guitar over her shoulder, ready for the solo.

\[
\text{With the light of the moon to guide us,} \\
\text{we'll be brought together by fate many times over.}
\]

All of their voices jumped back in to sing together.

\[
\text{Counting the twinklings of the constellations} \\
\text{is how I foretell love's whereabouts.} \\
\text{Born on the same star} \\
\text{Miracle romance!}
\]

Her guitar pick powering through several chords, Venus played to Jupiter’s beat as the audience cheered, jumping up and down in their excitement. Was she out there?

\[
\text{To be together once more this weekend...} \\
\text{God, please grant me a happy end.} \\
\text{In the present, past, and future,} \\
\text{I'll be completely devoted to you.} \\
\text{I can't forget that dear look in your eyes} \\
\text{when we first met.} \\
\text{Out of tens of thousands of stars,} \\
\text{I can find you.} \\
\text{Turning even chance into an opportunity...} \\
\text{I love that way of life!}
\]

They can find her, and they will find her! Mars joined her in the next instrumental, all of them playing their hearts out – they could reach her! All they had to do is believe, and keep trying!
A wondrous miracle growing closer.
We'll be brought together by fate many times over.

Counting the twinklings of the constellations
is how I foretell love's whereabouts.
Born on the same star
Miracle romance!

I believe in this
Miracle romance!

At the final note the crowd was pumping, jumping and clapping and singing along, screaming at the top of their lungs. Panting heavily, Venus looked over the crowd of cheering fans, always searching, even after all this time, for a pair of blonde buns; but while she did not see their beloved Princess here, Mars had found something. Or, Venus amended, following purple eyes to a girl with red eyes and hair in the audience who was surrounded by shining stars, someone.
“D’you remember when we got married?” Usagi asked with a dreamy smile, collapsing contentedly onto their bed. With the sound of cufflinks hitting a dresser she pulled a fluffy pink pillow from the top of their mattress and used it to prop herself up comfortably, watching Mamoru’s reflection as he undressed. She smiled, studying the casual concentration of his features as he adroitly worked the tiny buttons on his sleeves, his blue eyes narrowed at the golden adornments before sliding up to meet her gaze in the mirror, and her smile was returned in kind. Of course he remembered, but she wanted more out of him. “Wasn’t it beautiful?” she sighed, rolling onto her back and staring dreamily up at the canopy above her head.

“It was,” he affectionately replied, unbuttoning his lavender jacket as he turned towards her. “And you were the most beautiful part,” he added truthfully, and then, curiously, “Are you thinking of anything in particular?”

Her grin grew delightedly and she giggled, throwing her hands up above her as though she could reach out and grab the memory right from the air. “Just everything! The flowers, the weather, the church, and everyone, everyone was just so happy!”

He appeared between her outstretched arms, a warm smile on his face as he bent down, supporting himself with arms placed on either side of her, and kissed her forehead. She folded her arms around his neck before he could leave. “Of course they were happy,” he mused, staying within her loose embrace, “They love you, and on that day it was nearly impossible to be anything but happy with you around.” He leaned down further, resting his forehead against hers. “The staff were even talking about it,” he teased.

She giggled, “Really?”

“’Have you met the bride?’” he mimicked, “’She’s so happy even I can’t stop smiling!’” He kissed her lips lightly as a sign that he wanted to be let up, and she obliged, her hands moving from his neck to lightly caress his arms as he stood straight, moving out of her sight again. Her arms fell to the comforter lazily.

Thinking back on that day, the morning, the preparation, she shyly admitted, “I was really nervous,
“Nervous?” Mamoru repeated with some degree of astonishment, immediately reappearing beside the bed with his tie untied and a mischievous grin on his face, “Usagi Tsukino, Sailor Moon, was nervous about marrying me?” She grinned, and he was back down with her, supporting himself with one fist as his other hand illustrated his speech, “Monsters? No sweat. Aliens? Not a problem. But that Chiba Mamoru, now he’s scary.”

She giggled and reached up to run her fingers around his collar, flipping up the stiffened neck of the shirt so she could easily pull his tie free. Holding the strip of purple fabric in one hand, she worked to unbutton the top two buttons of his shirt as she replied, “Well, what if you had decided at the last minute that you didn’t want to marry me?”

He scoffed with a smile, “Not a chance.”

Pursing her lips playfully she pushed him away and he bounded back up. She propped herself up on her elbows and threw his wadded-up tie at him. “Yeah,” she mumbled, “I bet you were the picture of total confidence.”

“I was scared stiff,” he replied, and she laughed at his straightforward response.

“No way!”

He smiled self-depreciatingly and expounded, “I was. Standing up there before the ceremony began, just waiting, I couldn’t have been more nervous. Every time that back door twitched I expected someone to come in and say that you had changed your mind. When Minako entered before the flower girl, I swear my heart stopped. The way she looked at me, her expression filled with such pity – did she tell you about this?” he paused his narrative in response to Usagi’s surprised laughter.

“No!” she replied, still giggling, “What did she do?”

He put his hands on his hip as he filled her in, “She opened the door really slowly, eyes downcast, and then slowly looked up and caught my eye and I swear it was the most consolatory look I’ve ever seen on anyone.” He paused for her laughter to subside before continuing, “She then crept down the aisle, biting her lip and looking guilty – I couldn’t even breathe as she passed the first pew and took a step towards me. But then she winked and turned to your brother to get your great-grandmother’s pin from him and waltzed back up the aisle like nothing had happened.”
Usagi laughed until her stomach ached, “When she came back she looked so pleased! I didn’t hear what was going on but I saw her and Haruka bump fists and Ami looked like she was lecturing her for something!”

“Well, now you know,” Mamoru commented dryly, which only caused her to laugh more. “I was still nervous,” he added when she had finished, approaching the bed with his deep blue eyes focused solely on her, “right up until you walked through those doors.” He smiled so fondly at her that she found herself blushing, her heart thumping loudly in her chest. “But then my heart stopped for something else entirely. You were so beautiful, so bright and full of light that I could scarcely believe that I was who you choose to marry.”

“Mamo-chan,” she murmured dreamily, sitting up and leaning forward for a kiss. He obliged.

“And now you’re stuck with me for forever,” he added, sneaking words and smiles around kisses.

“Mamo-chan!” she admonished, and threaded her hands through his hair to keep him close, unwilling to let him escape just yet.

He paused for only a moment more, “Happy Anniversary, Usako. I love you.”
“I ate too much cake.” A body fell backwards onto the bed, her hands over her stomach.

“You ate too much cake?” another body joined the first, this one smaller, but falling just as hard. She grumbled, her eyes closed and her lips in a sick frown, “I ate too much cake.”

The first opened her eyes and side-eyed the second, “I ate more cake than you could ever dream of eating.”

The second glared up at the first, tilting her head so their eyes locked. “I am made of cake.”

“Then maybe I ate your twin because the amount of cake I ate was the size of your entire body!”

“Then, proportionately, I still ate more cake!” the younger declared with a barb in her voice, crossing her arms in victory as the older girl got up on an elbow to glare at her.

“Don’t bring math into this!” she exclaimed fervently, “This is a battle of ---uuuugh,” she fell backwards, her face turning green as the miserably whined, “I ate too much caaaaake.”

The younger whined too, giving up the premise of battle in favor of an upset stomach. “Me, toooooo.”

“Why does she make it taste so good?” Usagi whined further, kicking her feet a bit.

“Because everything Mako-chan makes tastes good,” Chibi-Usa weakly replied, “I don’t think she can help it.”
“But it’s just so cruel!” Usagi wailed, “No one should feel this way on their birthday!”

“Why did I eat so much?” Chibi-Usa muttered pitifully, “I never eat that much. I should be laughing at you right now, not whining with you.”

“Yeah, you usually are, you little fink – now it’s my turn!” Usagi sat up again, making a face, only to plop back down again with a grimace, “I should be immune by now!”

“Maybe it’s an evil plot.” Chibi-Usa whined.

Both pair of eyes, blue and red, slowly opened until they were very wide.

“The eggs! Or the flour!” Chibi-Usa marveled.

“Mako-chan was an unsuspecting accomplice!” Usagi gasped shallowly, unable to get in a deep breath.

“It’s definitely the enemy!” they exclaimed together.

“And on my birthday!” Usagi’s whine turned into an angry accusation.

“It’s my birthday, too!” Chibi-Usa seconded.

“LUNA!” Usagi yelled.

“Shh!” Chibi-Usa hushed quickly, putting a hand on confused Usagi, “We don’t want Ikuko-mama involved!”

“Luna!” Usagi tried again in a loud whisper.

“Diana!” Chibi-Usa joined.
The girls called their cats repeatedly, but even after a good amount of time had passed, neither of the guardians showed. Chibi-Usa flipped over onto her stomach and crawled across the bed to the window, peering outside suspiciously.

“What’s out there?” Usagi asked, grimacing as her future-daughter knelt on one of her pigtails.

“Nothing,” Chibi-Usa replied suspiciously. “But that doesn’t mean that nothing is out there.”

Usagi’s brows furrowed. “What do you mean?” she asked, pulling her hair free before turning over and joining Chibi-Usa at the window. “I don’t see anything!”

“Shhh!” Chibi-Usa hushed again, putting a finger to her lips, “Just because we can’t see them doesn’t mean they’re not watching, just waiting for the right time to strike!”

“You think they’re invisible?” Usagi asked skeptically.

“Or camouflaged!” Chibi-Usa corrected heatedly, “They’re the Dead Moon Circus from the Amazon – camouflage is a big deal there!”

Usagi pulled one of Chibi-Usa’s pink pigtails and said, “I think you’ve had too much cake,” and plopped back down on the bed again.

Sighing in defeat, Chibi-Usa turned around and admitted quietly, “I might have just eaten too much cake. It was so good.”

“See? You’re more like me than you think!” Usagi replied triumphantly from her back, a proud smirk on her face.

“Yeah, yeah,” Chibi-Usa agreed off-handedly, shimmying down until she had enough room to spread out on Usagi’s bed.

They were quiet for a moment, each absorbed in her own thoughts of their party, their friends, the
cake, and that they were a year older. Usagi broke the silence. “Hey, Chibi-Usa?” she asked, her tone that of a girl at a sleepover party, speaking into the darkness really late at night and finally giving voice to the strangest thoughts imaginable and wanting to discuss them. Chibi-Usa hummed a response, indicating that she was listening. “What are our birthdays like in the 30th century?”

“Huge,” the younger girl replied casually, shrugging as she added, “Sometimes they’re accompanied by circuses, but the circuses aren’t evil. There’s always a ball and Sailor Mercury sometimes designs mazes or makes really cool laser shows. And Sailor Jupiter bakes and always makes us little baskets to take up to our room to eat later. I thought mom just got one so I didn’t feel bad, but now I know she probably pigs out just like I do,” the last was a go at Usagi, who laughed weakly.

“Hey Chibi-Usa?” she asked after another stretch of silence. Chibi-Usa sighed and hummed again. “Do you come on time?”

“What?”

Usagi kicked her feet uncomfortably, twiddling her thumbs as she clarified, “Are you an early baby or a late baby or do you come on time?”

Chibi-Usa rolled her eyes and shook her head, “Why?”

Usagi sighed heavily, “Well what if Mamo-chan and I – “ she was blushing and skipped ahead, “And they said that you were due on, I don’t know, July 10th or June 1st or something? Do you know how nerve-wracking that would be? Nine months wondering if something went wrong and –“

Chibi-Usa took Usagi’s hand and looked over at her skeptically, “Listen, I don’t know if I’m early or late or on time, but I’m your kid and you’re stuck with me. My birthday is June 30th, same as yours, so when it’s time just be ready for the absolute best birthday present ever.”

Usagi smiled and squeezed Chibi-Usa’s hand.

“Hey, Usagi? I am the best birthday present ever, right?”

“Hmm, I don’t know… apparently I have a lot of birthdays…”
“Usagi!”

“I’m kidding. You’re the best.”

“…. Good, because I didn’t get you anything this year.”
Celebration

Chapter Summary

Dramble for Writing Contest theme: "Celebration"

A Celebration. The word fell heavily in her mind, the silence of the scene pulling the air from her lungs with more force than space itself. That's what this was supposed to be, right? The edges of the room were splattered with trays of hour ‘devours and shattered glass. Tiny puddles made the shards into tiny, sparkling islands in a sea of shining blue as warm red wines were turned cerulean by the reflected celestial light behind her. Shadows draped across the room, the hanging hemispherical lights having faded hours ago. The middle of the dance floor was startlingly clean, but for the crumpled lovers off to the left… but she could ignore them if she chose. She tilted her head to the side slightly, focusing instead on how her long shadow played on the honey-colored marble. If she concentrated, or, more, let herself go… she could almost imagine attending a party like this. The lighting would be soft and subtle, unobtrusive like the soft glow of lamps, simply there to reveal the world and cast a warm glow. The music would be graceful and upbeat, almost second to the hundreds of excited voices that sung from the guests. Each young woman would be wearing only their very best, with long skirts and beautiful necklaces that set off their natural features; young men would wear striking yet indirect accent pieces in an attempt to impress and delight the girls whose interest they wished to earn. They would laugh and dance together, making silly promises and daring to try something new; winning hearts in the light of Earth.

And she? She shifted slightly, putting her legs together to give her shadow the illusion of a gown. She would be wearing her finest dress of deep purple satin, laughing delicately, blushing charmingly, speaking softly, dancing lightly… but now was time for a different kind of dance. The souls around her were in pain, were angry, were lost and alone. They needed her guidance into the abyss, into the soft and beautiful darkness. She moved to take her scythe in both hands, watching as her shadow shift from a lady to a warrior, and turned her back on the empty ballroom. The scene before her now was much different, as armed men and women lay strewn across a makeshift battlefield, their deaths sudden and painful, their damage extraordinary in the Lunar capitol. In the distance she saw where Queen Serenity lay dead, but where she was was good enough. She would take this present of death and sadness and lead it to its rest. She adjusted her grip on her scythe, and let the blade fall.
“Will you be able to stay home today?” she asked, watching him in the mirror as he stepped into his closet. She picked up her makeup brush, opening her powder to apply a light coating.

“I will – Suko said he would cover that last-minute meeting for me.” He popped out of the closet, his shirt unbuttoned, and asked, “Do you think he’ll be surprised?”

Holding the brush in one hand, she stepped closer and lightly kissed her husband’s smiling face and replied, “He’ll be thrilled.”

Dressed and made-up, she got to work on breakfast in the kitchen, mixing up pancakes and sprinkling in a surprise – chocolate chips. Birthdays came only once a year, and if he were over-energized in the morning, then so be it. It would be worth the excitement of the treat. She made the table for two, setting out glasses of orange juice as the coffee percolated. She was warming the syrup and cutting the fruit into funny shapes when she heard footsteps in the hallway.

“Mom?” he called, even as he was heading straight towards her. She turned and chuckled, seeing him look so confused in his blue pajamas, his hair a mess.

“Well if it isn’t my handsome birthday boy!” she greeted cheerfully, “Good morning, Mamoru! Are you hungry?”

He walked through the kitchen, padding over to his place at the table, and took a seat, “Yeah,” he replied, looking a little confused – perhaps she should have woken him as she usually did. But then his entire face brightened and his little nose twitching. “Are we having pancakes?!” he asked excitedly, and she poured the first batch on the griddle.

They were halfway through their first pancakes – the chocolate chips were a success – when he took a sip of orange juice and asked her, very politely, “Did Dad have an early meeting this morning?”

She pushed her chair back and stood, belaying the answer as she returned to the kitchen to pour a cup of coffee – the cue – and put on a new batch of pancakes. “Well, Mamoru,” she said, careful of her tone. The front door opened and she tried to hide a smile at Mamoru’s surprise as his father strode into the kitchen in his business casual attire and took a knee at their son’s side. She pulled out the extra place setting she had hidden away.

“Today I work for you, son,” he said convincingly, leaning in for emphasis, “Whatever you want to do, I will make it happen. What do you want to do first, Mamoru-sama?”

Their boy laughed, turning back to her and declaring, “more pancakes!”
After breakfast she cleaned up as the “men” went upstairs to get dressed and style their hair – Mamoru wanted to look like a proper ‘boss’, today, so he was taking his new employee to make everything perfect. When they came back downstairs she had to smile – Mamoru’s hair was pushed back out of his face and he looked like an exact smaller version of his father, right down to the black slacks and white button-down shirt. “My, how handsome!” she remarked, putting her hand to her chest and glancing quickly at her husband. The taller man surreptitiously reached up, then put his hand on their son’s head and messed up the hairdo.

“Hey!” Mamoru cried, grabbing hold of his father’s wrist with both hands, his expression annoyed as he glared up at him. He let go and Mamoru looked to her as if to say ‘I cannot believe this utter betrayal’.

She put her finger to her lips and cocked her head to the side a little and then nodded, “I think you look even more handsome, Mamoru!”

Still annoyed, he tried to flatten his hair and turned to his father. “We still have to match!” he declared, and obediently her husband got down on his knees to let their six-year-old mess up his hair. Once he was done they both looked at her and she held back a laugh to nod appreciatively – now they both looked six.

Mamoru had an exciting day of activities planned – first they would go to the children’s science center, where they would play in their new exhibit and watch the IMAX presentation about dinosaurs. They would have lunch there, eating whatever they wanted, but they had to finish with space ice-cream. Next, despite Mamoru’s wish to go to the library for new books (so they could spend the night reading), they drove home and got him changed into shorts and a tee-shirt more befitting of the summer heat. She gave him her present – a new watch, a smaller version of his father’s. He loved it. But next came her husband’s surprise, and they all piled back in the car and headed for the soccer stadium – Mamoru would be attending his first game. When they arrived he looked a little confused, “Where are we?” but when his father pulled out the green jersey and baseball cap blazoned with the team’s logo, there was never a more excited little boy.

His team won, and Mamoru was ecstatic. And starving. They stopped off at a little restaurant for dinner, where he relived the game play-by-play, even standing at one point and acting out an impressive kick, pausing, and then cheering quietly as he pumped a fist in the air. She had to quiet him down every now and again, when the restaurant managers looked their way, but by dessert, after he blew out the candles on the small cake she brought in from the car, the game seemed to be finally out of his system, leaving him one happy and satisfied little man. They paid and left, planning to head home, but before they got to the car Mamoru turned around on them and said, “C’mon, Dad, Mom, I want to go for a drive now!”

How could they resist?

He was quiet in the car as they drove, heading for Mount Fuji – his favorite road for all of its twists and turns and views of the city. She glanced back occasionally to be sure he was awake, but he always was, just smiling and looking out the window. They made it to the mountain, driving up the
curving paths… when suddenly her husband turned to her, his tone quiet despite his terrified eyes. “The brakes and steering aren’t responding.” Ahead of them the road turned sharply to the left; beyond the road was nothing but a several hundred foot drop. They were moving too fast. She turned around, throwing her hand back to press Mamoru into his seat.

“MAMORU!”
Picking up a ceremonial pin from the dresser, Endymion paused, staring at the emblem thoughtfully.

“Endymion, dear, are you almost ready to go?”

“Nearly there,” he replied, turning to the mirror to pin it expertly in place. He straightened his jacket, hooked the collar together, and brushed a stray hair off of his sleeve. He looked regal; tall and well-dressed and stern, just like his father. Reaching down to the dressing table chair, he pulled one edge of his cape into place, locking it in under a shoulder guard, then reached behind his back and fumbled for a moment before he caught hold of the other edge. His mouth turned to a straight scowl for the inconvenience; before he had his valet in to help him dress, or one of his guards, but with his new wife getting dressed in the same room, those times were over. Until the “honeymoon” phase had ended, at least. Breathing out, he clipped the other end to his shirt and adjusted the heavy material to fit his needs. He knew she would be only too happy to help if asked, but while he tried to pretend otherwise in public, he didn’t much care for her attentions. This didn’t bother him too much – it was his duty to wed her; it was what was good for the Kingdom, and so it was what he need do. In time he would grow to care for her, maybe even love her, but… that time had not yet come to pass.

Her frame passed into his mirror and he immediately busied himself with his ornaments, picking other pins and braids that signified his station.

“No, but thank you,” he replied, his eyes on the trinkets.

She moved to her perfume cabinet. He finished adorning himself, mentally keeping track of time until the feast began. When he had finished with absolutely everything, he finally picked up his crown and placed it on his brow, the circlet of bronze and gold pressing his black hair around his head. “Are you ready to go?” he asked.

She smiled and reached for his elbow to be escorted down to the commons; he offered it to her, and
led her down the long hall, nodding at guardsmen as they passed, then down the two flights of stairs to the Great Hall. Nobles of the Golden Kingdom milled about, drinking and visiting with each other. As a lady came forward to speak to his wife he let her go, nodding at her before disappearing towards the courtyard and the large windows that looked into it. There he paused, his gaze moving through the blooming gardens, the couples walking arm and arm, and lingered instead on the quarter moon just above the castle walls. There he stayed, staring, remembering the beautiful girl with the long silver hair who had unknowingly stolen his heart, and wondering what might have been. What would his life be like now if he had pursued her in earnest? What would have changed if he had stood up against Beryl’s claims of the Moon Kingdom’s treachery, and followed his heart rather than stayed true to his duty as the Crowned Prince of Earth? What if…?

“Endymion!” Nephrite clapped him on the back, startling him out of his musings. “Nice to see you out of your bedchambers,” he teased.

“With as pretty a girl as his wife in there it’s no wonder he doesn’t leave!” Zoisite added, both of them getting a laugh. He just sighed, a permissive half-smile on his face as he let them have their fun, though their claims could not have been more wrong, and they both knew it. “C’mon, it’s time for the feast to start,” Zoisite nodded towards the doorway, where his wife stood waiting for him, her smile warm. He nodded and walked with them, stopping to offer his arm to her before they walked through the door. They paused before fully entering as the herald announced their entrance.

“Presenting their esteemed royal highnesses, Crowned Prince Endymion and Princess Beryl!”
It hadn’t seemed any different.

Venus summoned and threw her Love-Me Chain outward, whipping it from left to right as she ran to the left in front of the others, covering them as best she could as Jupiter struggled to stand. Somewhere behind her, Mercury worked on Mars diligently, her fingers flying at her computer as a near-hysterical Sailor Moon begged for Mars to wake up. The enemy jumped backwards out of reach and so she dropped the chain, flipped to use up her momentum, and landed with her Crescent Beam already firing in the being’s direction. Her golden light lit up the darkness and found a mark, hitting the enemy squarely in the shoulder. As it recoiled she stood and created a Shower, calling light beams to fall all around it to distract and blind it, if not completely obliterate it. As she kept up the show, she glanced back to see if they were ready to move – they had to leave, to regroup, to have Amy go over the data and try facing it again when they were more prepared – but while Jupiter had made it to her feet, Mars was still down. Mercury was… Mercury had dropped her computer and was trying to support Moon, holding her back; Usagi was completely hysterical, her hands clutching at Mars as Mercury tried to pull her away. Venus steeled herself and thought up a new plan. Mars was gone. They still needed to get away.

“Jupiter!” she directed, nodding her head towards Moon and Mercury, “Get ‘em out of here!”

Makoto nodded, releasing her hold on her bleeding arm as she lurched towards the pair of them; Mercury working even harder now at pulling Usagi off – it was time to go. As she was redirecting her focus at the enemy, Venus caught a Sailor Chibi-Moon’s eyes, wide with fear and indecision, and sharpened her gaze. Wake up, little senshi! She thought, her eyes sending an unspoken command as she turned back to the enemy, sensing her energy was nearing depletion. She cut off the shower and ran towards it at full speed, hoping to find a pile of dust but preparing to face whatever had survived. As she ran she summoned her chain to her hands yet again, gripping it tightly between her fists, ready to whip it forward at a moment’s notice; movement caught her attention and she jumped, flipping out of the way of an attack, and rolled back onto her feet, sending her chain flying at the darkness ahead of her.

A blast of energy erupted to her right, missing her completely, and while she hoped it was an attack of desperation, that she had actually blinded the enemy, her eyes followed the trail regardless, her stomach dropping as she realized its intended target. Mercury and Moon were sprawled on the ground away from where they had been, both yelling a name together, their cries enough to tear a person’s heart apart. Jupiter was down.

A tug on her hand brought her straight back to where she was. Hoping Mercury would take whatever time she could offer to get Moon and Chibi-Moon away, Venus pulled right back, angling her foot up to kick at whatever was on the end of her chain. She hit something solid at chin-level, something that gave with the heel of her boot, but before she could jump back and away, something indescribably cold encircled her ankle. She held back a groan of pain as the skin beneath the trap burned and blistered with the temperature, and with a forceful jerk she left the Earth’s surface,
spinning in a circle over the creature’s head, her hair flying behind her. She struggled against the stomach-turning acceleration, forcing her arms to move, for her left hand to touch her right arm, her right hand to aim at the area beneath her. One more shot. One more Crescent Beam. Maybe, if she aimed just right… The light exploded from her fingertip, illuminating a dark face with empty eyes, and then she went flying.

The air turned incredibly cold in the second before she landed, the sky hidden from view in a dense fog; Venus smiled – Mercury. Maybe they had gotten away… but as a rush of energy passed beneath her at the speed of light, she knew the wish was too good to be true. A second struck her, flipping her in mid-air; she hit the ground face-first on a rock, and blacked out.

She came-to painfully, her head screaming but her heart forcing her to be alive. Usagi… she gripped weakly at the rock, pulling at it to give her enough leverage to slowly raise her head, her eyes moving across the ground, from the red bow that had come undone from her hair, to the Mercury computer, clutched in Ami’s still hands, to Makoto’s green bauble…

“Get behind me, Chibi-Usa,” Usagi said gently, and Venus’s heart hammered weakly in her chest, her stomach flipping as she pulled harder to sit up. ‘No!’ she wanted to scream, but the breath shuddered in her lungs and her bloody mouth refused to cooperate. ‘No,’ she tried again, but nothing came of it. She couldn’t fight it – it would kill her! They had to escape! ‘Usagi, no!’ she put all she had left into trying to speak, but as she felt the glow of the Silver Crystal strengthen, she knew there was no chance of dissuading her. She changed focus, mustering all the power that had left to command, all the energy that remained to her, to give to Sailor Moon. She had to believe in Sailor Moon, she had to believe that she could win! Pulling from her planet’s core, she sent her Venus Planet Power to aid Usagi in her fight… but the light faded and went out far too quickly. Somewhere in front of her she heard Usagi collapse, and Venus’s heart broke.

Angry, desperate, devastated tears welled up in her eyes as her consciousness began to fade. She felt cheated, she felt betrayed by the future they had been shown, the future that had been taken from them by this unknown enemy, and hated herself for letting them engage it so readily. She wasn’t ready for this life to be over. She wasn’t ready to lose everyone. Not yet.

Ahead of her, an airy, whispery-weak voice Shakily yelled, “Pink Sugar Heart Attack!” and Venus’s eyes shot open, her heart in her throat as her last thought was of Chibi-Usa, fighting this demon alone.
Call me, maybe?

Chapter Summary

Writing Contest Entry for "Valentine's Day" with Songfic challenge

Why did I have to look up? Ceres mentally complained, peering around the corner of a changing shack with a definite pout to her lips, her heart, against her better judgment, pounding with excitement as she picked him out of a small crowd of people surrounding a bonfire. He was gorgeous, her heart cried, and she whirled back out of sight, scowling into the darkness of the surrounding beach, and he’s in my way. Her eye catching one of the Crystal Spires of the palace, she focused on it as she grumpily lowered herself to the ground, sitting with her legs together and folded beneath her as she concentrated all of her annoyance on that spire, and, in particular, one of the inhabitants within.

“Ceres!” Sailor Venus greeted, surprising her out of her latest failed attempt, “I see you’re still having issues.”

A little hurt with the blunt statement, Ceres nonetheless kept her composure and nodded, “Nothing I try is working: at this rate it will never work, let alone be ready in time for the solstice next month.” She sighed, staring at her contraption of crystals and lenses and the stubborn pod across the room that was, as always, refusing to bloom early.

“Hmm,” Venus replied with a wistful hum. “That’s just too bad,” her voice was wistful, “I can tell that Small Lady is taking winter a little harder this year; this surprise you had in store would have been just the ticket.” Cere’s heart sunk, “And not just Small Lady, but Neo Queen Serenity, too, has the Winter Blues.” She trailed off, and Ceres heart sunk further – if she could get this apparatus to work, she could have helped out everyone…

Ceres looked up to the blonde, noticing the wishful look in Venus’s blue eyes as she regarded Ceres’s mess, and all Ceres could think about were the countless failed attempts, the hours spent trying to get it working, and couldn’t help but want a shortcut at this point. “I wish it would work, but –“ she was going to say that she had tried everything, but Venus interrupted her, first.

“Do you?” she cut in, her voice hinting at something. “Do you wish it more than anything?”

Perplexed at the question, Ceres thought for a moment, then answered, “Yes, but I don’t see –“
“Come with me,” Venus beckoned, and nearly an hour later they were in a small cove on the beach, Venus standing across from her on the other side of a peculiar well made of beautiful stones and shells, roofed by driftwood. “This,” she addressed, putting both hands on the well and leaning on it proudly, “Is the Well of Aphrodite, and it is a wishing well.”

Ceres looked at her skeptically, glancing down into the deep well and back up at her, wondering if she was being tricked. “A wishing well? The Well of Aphrodite?”

“Yes,” Venus replied happily, standing straight again and with a smile, “It’s an artifact from Magellan Castle, my birthplace. While we Venusians were renowned for our unbelievable understanding of Love and Beauty,” she winked slyly, “we also granted the occasional wish, and people from all over the system would come to us, tell us their desire, and if it were for love or a loved one, we would take them to this well, give them a special coin,” suddenly Venus had produced a coin and placed it in Ceres’s hand, “and tell them to make a wish.” She kept eye contact for the next part, speaking very seriously, “They had to concentrate on their wish, and only on their wish, as they flipped the coin up into the air and watched it as it fell into the well. If they heard a splash, their wish would be granted.” She smiled, moving around to Ceres’s side of the well, “Want to give it a shot?”

What was there to lose? So Ceres brought the coin to her chest, thought of Small Lady, and of Neo Queen Serenity, and of her contraption working. How with just a touch of her power, it would magnify her strength and abilities and make all the plants in the castle bloom again on the first day of spring, coming up healthy and smelling of everything good in the world… she opened her eyes, concentrating on her wish, and focused on the coin as she placed it atop her thumb and flipped it into the air. It arched up and her eyes followed, it started to fall and – “Ooh, who is that?” Venus whispered, and Ceres’s eyes darted away from the falling coin to land on a handsome boy running down the beach after a volleyball. She realized her folly too late, and when she turned back to the coin it was only a faint shining point beneath the well’s surface. Her heart racing, she listened and heard a distinct splash. Grabbing the edges of the well, Ceres looked in, then back up at Venus, “Venus!” she exclaimed, “I looked up! You – “ she couldn’t blame it on Venus, that’d be rude, “The boy distracted me – what will happen to my wish?!”

“Well,” Venus hummed again, walking away from her, towards the beach and the boy that had caught their attention. He was around her age, with tanned skin and blond hair that caught the rays of the setting sun and reflected them back. “This has happened before…” Venus continued, but Ceres couldn’t help but watch him; he had grabbed the ball and now, with a wonderful smile, was running back to his friends. His jeans were torn; she could see his skin… she tore her eyes away, blushing with embarrassment. “Looks like you’ll have to get him to go on a date with you.” She shot up to find Venus smiling a devilish grin, “Aphrodite Wishing Well rules – a boy caught your attention but you heard the splash. He’s in the way of your wish – once you win him over, your first wish will come true!” She smiled and waved, “Good luuuck!”
Growling with frustration, Ceres pulled a scrap of paper from her pocket, jotted down her communication number, and thinking *well why not?*, stood and marched from her hiding place, putting a smile on her face as she focused just on him. He stood quickly as she approached and, with some confusion, took the slip of paper that she offered. “Hey, I just met you,” she started, her smile becoming a little less bold, “And this is crazy…”
Flowers

Chapter Summary

Writing Contest Challenge "Neptune" and "Springtime"

Sometimes she liked to spoil herself.

A faint smile tugged at her lips as the spot of light before her grew, pushing back the ever-present darkness. She could feel her pupils dilating for the first time in what felt like months, her eyes starting to squint as the deep blue light enveloped her, brighter and brighter as she flew closer and closer to her planet. Still blinking in the light she caught sight of her goal and flipped elegantly, her wings disappearing as she coasted toes-first towards her castle, her arms outstretched behind her, delighting in the feeling of light. Her toes touched down and she paused, accumulating to the artificial gravity, and alighted on the balcony to drink in the sight around her, taking the image into herself, savoring every color of the beautiful dark blue planet that swirled gustily before her. She stepped forward, taking the thin metal railing in hand to steady herself as she let the calm wash over her like a deep and powerful wave. She was home.

Eventually she managed to tear herself away, leaving her perch for the peaceful structure that was Triton Castle, her footsteps echoing grandly in the wide and impressive space, her eyes darting to familiar water features, following tall bronze pillars to metal-worked ceilings to see the small pipes meld themselves into fixtures of light and works of art. Her steps proceeded her down the main hallway, through the open chambers towards the very heart of the castle, Neptune’s glow following her through the wide windows and open platforms surrounding Castle Triton, and soon she had entered her chambers. Here the last bit of stress fell away, her eyes finding the comfortable pillows, her instruments, her soft and inviting bed… she headed there first, turning to selfishly fall flat into its plush embrace, sighing deeply into the soft down comforter, enjoying the touch of the silky covering.

She did not let herself sleep just yet. While she sometimes like to spoil herself, she had a duty, a guiding task she could not, would not, ignore. Thinking of her mission she rolled over to face the canopy of her impressively large bed and, holding her hands before her, called her Mirror to her, and got back to work. She scanned her section of the outer system, her intuition guiding her from quadrant to quadrant, peering into questionable intruding comets, examining the occasional darker darkness, but it seemed quiet. She smiled – what a wonderful present. She turned away from the mirror, was about to send it away, when that selfishness deep inside made her pause, her eyes lingering on her reflection. Should she…? Her heart yearned for it – even while she was sitting in her own personal luxury, reclined on the softest bed, surrounded by brilliant bronze works, bathed in the light of beautiful Neptune, she still craved that sight. She should resist it, reserve it for her weakest moments, the moments when she is alone and afraid, fighting monsters from beyond the system, when she can’t imagine how she will overcome – that is when the mirror sends her that image, not when she is lounging selfishly in her bedroom. … but then, it was her birthday…
She called it forth, her heart singing with the sight of them: Queen Serenity, Princess Serenity, laughing and smiling together in a backdrop of the Lunar Gardens. Her whole world seemed to fall into place, fitting perfectly as soon as she saw their faces, their bright and welcoming glows, their beings the only reason she ever needed to stay vigilant and fight off whatever evil made its way into their system, no matter what the personal cost. She would fight, and she would continue fighting, just for them. Princess Serenity laughed, and Queen Serenity chuckled in response, and then turned her silver gaze towards… Neptune’s mirror. As though she could see through the mirror’s image, she seemed to be looking right at her, Sailor Neptune, and the soft smile she offered nearly made her jump off her bed and go right back to work. She didn’t need to rest, she didn’t need to lounge about today – she had a Kingdom to protect!

But as she did so, as the mirror faded and she stood, she nearly fell back on her bed again as she found herself no longer alone in her room. “Sailor Uranus!” she identified in surprise, wondering both what the other senshi was doing here and what could possibly be going on in her area while she was away.

“But as she did so, as the mirror faded and she stood, she nearly fell back on her bed again as she found herself no longer alone in her room. “Sailor Uranus!” she identified in surprise, wondering both what the other senshi was doing here and what could possibly be going on in her area while she was away.

“Princess Neptune!” a small voice cried as her guardian flew into the room, navigating around the tall and elegant Sailor Uranus to hover beside her. “It’s wonderful to see you home! Sailor Uranus requested entrance; I hope you don’t mind I granted her request?”

“Not at all,” she replied, though the site of one of her partners in protection worried her, as did the presence of her Space Sword; if it started reacting to her Submarine Mirror, if the Garnet Orb were close… would they awaken *her*? She kept her composure as she nodded a greeting, “Princess Uranus, it is wonderful to see you.”

“Princess Neptune,” Uranus replied, a coy smile replacing the usual serious scowl on her lips. Neptune’s heart fluttered at that smile, and, as always was the case around Uranus, she pushed the curious feeling away. “I came to wish you a happy birthday.”

“You’ve traveled quite a long way to do so,” Neptune acknowledged in a grateful, yet reserved manner – when was the last time she had spoken with anyone, face-to-face? And here they were, in her bedroom of all places –

“I brought you a gift,” Uranus continued, closing the distance between them, holding out her hand and summoning a small flowering plant in a golden pot of soil, “They’re Blue Irises,” she paused, Neptune’s eyes on hers, and answered the unspoken question, “from the Moon Gardens.” Neptune took the pot carefully, her palms singing with the pure energy that seemed to emanate from the flowers, her mind naturally traveling back to her earlier vision of the Moon, but as her eyes traveled up the petals and across to the soft smile of Uranus, she felt the flowers might serve as a dual connection to the people in her life. “It’s springtime there;” Uranus went on to explain, “they’ve just
bloomed.”
“Once upon a time—“

An explosion rocked the air, booming solidly in the distance. She held her daughter closer to her chest, covering the girl’s ears and rocking her back and forth, almost yelling over her fearful cries in an attempt to quiet her. “Once upon a time there was a beautiful queen who lived on the moon!” she projected, her voice barely carrying to the walls of their hiding place despite the volume. Her heart beat faster as she glimpsed the red glow of fire through the single soot-covered window; she stroked her daughter’s hair, her story flowing faster from her mouth as the distraction she had started for her daughter slowly became her own source of calm and strength. “She was beautiful, and she was strong, and she was fair, but she was lonely, as lonely as the moon amongst the stars. ‘Oh, I wish,’ the queen would say, ‘Oh, how I wish I had a daughter to share my life with! I would read with her, and laugh with her, and dance with her, and love her more than all the stars in the sky!’”

The cold floor beneath them shook as dust and rock fell from the concrete ceiling; she glanced up fearfully – would the shelter collapse?! – but she continued with her story, her daughter’s cries lessening. Feeling her eyes, she stared down at the tiny child in her lap and hugged her tighter, kissing her forehead tenderly yet fiercely, silently promising herself that they would not give up. “She wished this wish for years and years, praying on every star in the night sky. The moon moved around the earth and the earth around the sun, but still the queen did not have a daughter, and she was very sad, and very lonely.”

Her daughter’s breathing quieted, listening intently; the war beyond the windows momentarily forgotten. “But then one night, as she slept, she was visited by a tiny dream fairy. ‘I’ve heard your wish for a daughter,’” the dream fairy said, ‘Is it true?’ ‘Oh, yes!’ the queen replied, ‘More than anything, I wish I had a daughter to share my life with!’ ‘If I gave you a daughter, would you love her?’ the dream fairy asked, and the queen promised, ‘More than all the stars in the sky.’ ‘Then from your heart I will give you a daughter for you to love and to be loved by you!’ and when the queen woke, she knew she would soon have the daughter she had always wanted, whom she loved with all her heart before she had even met her – “

The door burst open and she recoiled, clutching her daughter to her and turning away, fearing the worst. Instead a familiar voice called urgently to her, “Your Majesty, we must go!” Soft hands urged her up. She gently guided her child from her lap, the toddler’s tiny hand keeping hold of hers as her bright blue eyes followed her movements; once standing, she reached down for her little girl and carried her, keeping her close. Her little arms wrapped themselves around her neck and her little face nestled in the hollow of her throat as they followed her Sailor Senshi out of the bunker and into the violent night, moving quickly and silently through the maze of Crystal Tokyo.

The wagon trundled on, rocking back and forth on the dirt track as the horse carried them forward.
She sat with her legs curled beneath her, her daughter perched before her; their years of exile had changed their attire drastically, but one thing would never change. “And when her daughter was finally born, the queen loved her even more,” she spoke, separating her little girl’s bright red hair into two sections, continuing to tell her favorite story as she brushed the tangled mess and pulled each side into high pigtails. “And they would read together and laugh together and dance together, and surely she loved her more than she loved the stars in the sky!” With a few deft twists and a handful of pins, the buns were complete. “But the night was dark, and sometimes dangerous, and so to keep her daughter safe the queen plucked four of the brightest stars from the night sky and asked for their protection. They became the Sailor Senshi, and loved her daughter nearly as much as she did. They would protect her.”

Finished, her girl turned around and watched her with those bright blue eyes; she reached forward and brushed the bright red hair from her face, making minute adjustments to her daughter’s odangos, and smiled softly. The wagon slowed to a stop, and her senshi poked her head through the canvas covering, telling them it was time to go.

She smiled, pulling her teenage daughter to her feet and keeping her hands as she guided her into the open clearing, her smile nearly coaxing a similar expression from her sullen girl. “And so the six of them lived together in peace and prosperity, and they would read together, and laugh together – “ she pulled her daughter into a spin, their hands keeping them connected as their feet turned in tight circles, their long hair flying out behind them as they leaned back into the spin; in short accord, she had her daughter laughing as she spun and stared up at the trees above their heads and the waxing gibbous moon far above those. “—and dance together, and surely the queen loved her daughter more than the stars in the sky!”

“But not everything can last forever,” she repeated quietly to herself, watching as her young woman strode forward to address the fearful crowd. She wore her power on her sleeve, her Sailor Senshi uniform drawing eyes and demanding respect. Her awakening answered a question that had persisted for centuries; the reemergence of the Silver Crystal both proving their right to rule and condemning them once again to a life of hardship.
The Sea

Chapter Summary

Written for Writing Contest Theme "Other Reincarnations of Endymion and Serenity", but... I didn't get it in on time XD

STILL FAVORITE - MIGHT TOTALLY CONSIDER WRITING A STORY AROUND THIS YAY

She’d always wanted to see the ocean. Something about it – ever since she was little and heard stories about the sea, she had wanted to see it firsthand; to look at a horizon that never ended, to see the sunset’s full reflection, to hear the sounds and play in the foam with her toes in the sand. Pictures were gorgeous, tales were treasured, but still her curiosity would not abate. She even dreamed of the sea… her dreams as real and as vivid as a memory. To see the ocean in person was her very first goal. And now, with the help of her friends, it was finally becoming a reality.

“Well,” Wilhelmina teased, her arm crossing the carriage door to block the exit, “We should be able to see the ocean right about now.” Bunny sat straight up, her daydream ending abruptly as her heart started to pound with excitement. “What do you think, Rachel? Should we let Bunny see?”

“Yes! Yes, you should!” Bunny voiced immediately, raising her hand like they were still in primary school.

“I don’t know…” Rachel trailed, elegant fingers curling to cover her mouth as she made a show of considering the option.

Bunny reached for the window covers on her side of the carriage and drew them aside, only to see wide open fields with no sign of the coast. She whipped her attention back to the others in the carriage and grabbed Rachel’s free hand. “Pleeeeeease?”

“I just don’t know…” Rachel repeated, a smile creeping into her expression.

Bunny turned her blue eyes onto the girl sitting across from her, her heart in her expression as she begged, “Annie! Make them let me see!”

Annie, her gaze leaving her book for the first time in hours, turned to the others and made a small attempt with an exasperated sigh, “Mina, draw back the curtains –“

But it had already taken too long, and Bunny, with an apologetic smile to Marceline, had climbed over her seat partner and wedged herself between the taller girl and the window, her fingers fighting Mina’s strength as she attempted to pull the curtain away from the window; with a laugh, Wilhelmina released her hold and sunlight flew into carriage, the afternoon glow amplified in the reflection off of the water’s surface.

It was like nothing she had ever seen before. Paintings did it no justice, stories paled in comparison. Bunny was finally there – the ocean.
They stopped at a beach and all took off their shoes and picked up their dresses to play in the sand and seafoam, spending the afternoon talking and teasing and taking in the beautiful scenery; they enjoyed each other’s company, and the picnic lunch Marceline had carefully made for them. Annie read poetry aloud as they ate, and she and Mina teamed up to tease Rachel into snapping at them, then dove in for consolatory hugs. Bunny adored every moment of it, of splashing in the shallow water, drawing pictures in the sand with their toes, of stretching back in the scrub grass and enjoying the salty air, and still she wanted to see more. As her friends calmed down and took to relaxing on the shore, she walked off alone, following her feet, her mind on her dreams, wondering if they could stay until nightfall, for in her dreams it was always nighttime. Closing her eyes she could picture it easily, and with the sounds of the real ocean and the smell of the sea aiding her, it was only too easy to fall back into that familiar scene:

Then, as now, she walked barefoot in the sand, though in her dreams it was much cooler, the water almost warm to her toes. The wind blew softly, teasing her dress, pulling at her hair, sending the salty sea air to dance around her. There was no heat from the sun on her skin, just the cool light of the moon, the calming sound of the waves upon the shore, and the reassuring warmth beside her…

She slowed, trying to push the dream further, willing it to move past the stubborn ending point. Who was there? And why did she always wake up so content despite the sharp pain in her chest?

They were walking slowly… she reached for his hand…

*His* hand… she was certain it was a boy, and yet he was so much more…

An interruption of the soft, repeating sound of the crashing waves grew too loud and uneven for her to ignore any longer, and Bunny opened her eyes, blinking in the light, and screamed. She ran forward and fell to her knees in the wet sand, her hands uneasy, hovering above the stranger’s head, not knowing what to do as he coughed and sputtered, his arms shaking and wavering beneath his weight. “ANNIE!” she cried, her voice shrieking – if anyone knew what to do it was Annie, “ANNIE!!”

He fell forward, his face hitting the sand hard, and, her heart fluttering in a panic in her chest, she took him by his shoulder and pulled as hard as she could to flip him over onto his back. She fell back as her strength finally overcame his weight, and she recovered as quickly as she could, her legs struggling in the fabric of her dress. She knelt over him, still unsure of what to do, of where to place her hands; behind her she heard her friends coming, calling her name; in the distance she heard other answering shouts – help would arrive soon; he’d get help. He…

He looked familiar, somehow… his black hair, his strong jaw, straight nose, even his height and build… His wheezing softened and his hand raised, shaking, to take hers. It was wet, his skin cold and clammy, and yet the touch filled her with warmth and a spark of the familiar. Looking to his face, their eyes met, and she fell into their deep blue depths, a rush of warmth flooding the sharp familiar pain in her chest.

Who was he?

Arms wrapped themselves around her middle and pulled her up and away, Marceline quickly removing her from the scene; Rachel took her hand as Marcy went back to help Annie, who was kneeling where Bunny had knelt moments ago, her hands on his wrist, her soft yet forceful voice asking him questions as Mina motioned to the men who were running down the beach towards them.

“Bunny, what happened?” Rachel asked quietly, but the man had tilted his head so his eyes could
find her, and she could not look away.
Weight of Eternity

Chapter Summary

Fic Prompt for Pluto

She had lost all feeling in her arms.

The realization came to her sluggishly, curiously, as though entering her stubbornly empty mind through the same thick haze that roiled around her charge. She examined this thought, her blank face creasing ever-so-slightly at the inconvenience, for now that she had realized it, she could not ignore it. She flexed one hand experimentally; it responded, but still there was no feeling. She released her hold on the Garnet Rod, stretching her hand outwards, dropping it awkwardly to her side. The pain came quickly, her nerves waking, racing up her arm to alert her mind to the lack of blood flow in that arm. She bore the sting easily, moving her other arm about while keeping a tight hold on her Rod, twisting and turning it to shake her blood through her veins, to “wake” her appendages as quickly as possible, that she may return her full attention to her duty.

“What are you doing?” a young voice asked with some amusement.

Pluto stopped twirling her staff, quickly planting the key end on the ground beside her as she regained her composure, pushing the blush from her cheeks and calling up her fiercest face. None should be here – but as she found the young girl standing across from her, saw the wide mischievous smile on her face, Pluto’s scowl softened.

“It looked like you were practicing a baton routine,” the girl giggled, “Your baton is really big, though! Do you like your big baton?”

Pluto’s mouth tugged at the corner, and she quietly whispered her reply through a relaxed countenance. “I do.”

“I wish I had a cute baton like yours!” the little girl continued, “My name is Serenity. What’s yours?”

Pluto’s staff fell to a neutral position, balancing in her hand as she took in the sight of the young girl with her silver pigtails and silk dress. She knelt down to be on the child’s level, her heart beating
slowly as she regarded the round childlike face, the curve of her little cheek, the color of her eyes, their focus somewhere above Pluto’s head. She watched with fascination the girl’s brows tighten and then jump as she continued.

“Sailor Pluto? So you’re a guardian? What do you guard?”

She watched as the girl took her hands behind her back, rocking slowly as she listened, peering sideways at the door behind Pluto curiously. Pluto balanced her staff in her lap, freeing her hands to wrap around her knees. She smiled softly, noting the small creases in the dress, the tiny freckles across the girl’s nose. Her heartbeat slowed painfully.

“The door of time?” the girl repeated, half in awe, half critically.

She was right on the line then, between belief and disbelief, her face tilted to the side, deciding whether she would trust Pluto and everything she said. She moved her hands in front of her, clasping them politely as she listened, her head moving slightly to help her eyes see the doors behind Pluto. And then it was there: the hesitant smile, the look of trust, her eyes lighting up as she stepped forward eagerly, little hands by her side as she bravely moved towards Pluto and the door.

Pluto’s knees hit the floor, the rod clattering dully as the sound was swallowed by the churning fog surrounding them, but the jostling pain was ignored, pushed aside as her hands reached out for the little girl, offering a hug. Tears sprung to her eyes as the image finally started to fade, meters out of reach, the little girl still focused at some point above her. “Please,” she found herself whispering, her voice cracking as her lips struggled between smiling and pursing, but still the image faded. Her heart faltered, pain of a different sort flowing through her.

Serenity faded completely, the visual manifestation of her memory disappearing as quickly as it had appeared. Pluto’s arms fell, her face still focused on where the girl had been for several long moments after she had gone, willing her back. She did not know why the door did this, or even if it were the door. Was it an attempt to lessen her loneliness? An attempt to remind her of those brief times of happiness amidst an eternity of nothing? Was it trying to be helpful?

The image was not returning. Pluto lowered her gaze slightly, her arms moved to hug herself as her heart wept for the girl and her future. For Serenity, beautiful, powerful, and wise, and the fate she did not deserve. And if she were being honest, she would admit some heartbreak was out of self-pity. She was alone, and despite all the lives she knew of, all the stories she could know, she was lonely. Irritation pushed these thoughts away. What kind of self-respecting Guardian was she? To tear up over the loss of an illusion – it wasn’t even flesh and blood. She was stronger than this. She was Sailor Pluto, Solitary Guardian of the Space-Time Door. Her heart still ached, feeling heavy as her arms unfurled, one grasping the Garnet Rod as the other furiously wiped away the tear from each cheek.
She stood, regained her composure with a few deep breaths, and resumed her station.
Minako dropped her bags to the floor and roughly sat down, one elbow on the bar as she stuck the heel of one foot onto the stool’s support and sighed heavily, waving over the barman and pulling out her ID. She was tired, she was airsick, and she was just starting the layover from hell – there was no way she was going to slog through this eight hour stretch without a drink. She flipped through her wallet, looking for some international money as the bartender approached and stood in front of her. Her ID slid across the bar as she finally found and freed some cash, “Yeah, yeah,” she preempted, closing her wallet and putting it back into her travel-purse, “I just turned 21 a few months ago, and ha ha ha,” she flatly fake-laughed, “my birthday did have some bar hopping and I did take advantage of it.” Why did bartenders always ask the same questions, anyway? “I’d like a –” she glanced up and her drink order lodged itself in her throat and was promptly thrust aside without a second thought, taking back seat to a new tone, a new pose, and a new perspective, “Whatever you suggest,” she finished flirtingly.

The bartender was hot. He was hot-hot – beyond hot. Gorgeous tanned skin, long shiny pale hair, piercing eyes, well-trimmed brows, and a beautiful expression that read distinctly ‘I’m done with you and I don’t even know you.’ Minako smiled coyly, putting her other elbow on the bar and crossing her arms, leaning in – she’d change that expression. His quirked brow fell and she sensed an unacted-upon eyeroll as he reached for a glass. “Were you looking for a fruity drink?” he inquired, his voice low and silky and positively sinful.

“Hmm…” she hummed a noncommittal reply, “I’m not sure,” she slid her elbows together, intertwining her fingers and posing her hands lazily beside her face, close enough to rest her chin on occasionally – guys loved that.

He let out a little sigh, “A pina colada?” he guessed.

She crinkled her nose and shook her head negatively.

“Orange Sunrise?”
She shrugged a shoulder coyly, her eyes gliding to the expanse of scotches, bourbons and gins behind him.

“Strawberry Daiquiri?”

Again a nose crinkle, but she returned her gaze to him, butterflies in her stomach waking up, heart pumping a little faster as he put both elbows on the table, leaning closer to her. True, his expression was of slight annoyance, but she had his attention. She mirrored his pose, her forehead inches from his as he continued to name off drink after drink – Pierced Navel, Pearl Diver, Island Breeze, Flamingo – and she continued to nonverbally turn each suggestion down.

“Sex on the Beach?” he offered, his annoyance now clear in his tone.

She smiled annoyingly. “I don’t even know your name yet.”

He walked away.

Which was not supposed to happen! She straightened and raised her hand, “Wait!”

“If you’re not serious about ordering then leave my bar,” he replied, raising his own hand without looking her way, the dish towel in his grasp waving once unceremoniously towards the exit.

Sighing heavily, Minako dropped her arm, her elbow back on the bar and her chin in her palm. “Svedka Clementine with an orange wedge,” she called out, absentmindedly tapping her photo ID with her free index finger. Hot guy, long wait, and he wouldn’t even help her pass the time with some good old-fashioned flirting. …but that didn’t mean she couldn’t admire the view, right? She watched him reach up for her choice of vodka and she scowled at the muscles hinted at beneath his black button-up shirt. Handsome, in great shape, takes care of himself – he was probably already married anyway. Else in a committed relationship. Or maybe into guys. Either way, the pretty ones are usually far out of reach and she, poor Minako, would have to find some other way to pass the time.

Surprisingly, he returned to her to pour her drink. His cold eyes caught hers with a quizzical expression, as though he were reevaluating her. Part of her immediately ordered she straighten up and turn up the flirting to the next level, but really, what was the point? She was tired and this wasn’t going anywhere. “Straight Vodka?” he invited with a question in his tone, pulling out a cutting board
from beneath the bar, and that little voice came back in full force. She kept her cool.

“It’s flavored, so not exactly,” she replied with force disinterest.

He turned, opened a small fridge, and removed an orange, then expertly drew a small knife from a pocket in his waist apron. “Still,” he replied, cutting into the fruit easily, “No juice, no water,” he sliced a neat slit in the rind and stuck it onto the side of her glass before easily sliding it over to her.

She caught it, pulled the orange slice off the side and dropped it neatly into the clear liquid with one hand, and swirled it around a bit to spread the cool ice.

“So, you’re in college?” he asked, motioning to the logo on her shirt.

She hid her smile – he was sticking around and making small talk? Game on! “Yeah,” she replied, a little more cheerfully, “Are you?”

He raised a brow, “Long since graduated.”

“Bartending school?” she prodded, hoping for more information.

He put a hand on his hip, the other leaning on the edge of the bar as he looked away, “Not exactly.”

“Oh?” she continued, “Where did you go? What did you major in?”

“Archaeology,” he replied.

“Like Indiana Jones?!” immediately her imagination had him in a typical Indiana Jones outfit, with the hat and the shirt and the sand and the adventures – how romantic! … but wait a moment… “Then why are you bartending at an airport instead of digging up lost relics and mummies?”

He stood straighter, crossing his arms as he looked at her – his expression had definitely softened a bit – and replied, “Archaeology jobs don’t pay well, and I was hoping to fly home for the holidays.”
She nodded, “How’s that coming along?” She noticed he wasn’t wearing a wedding band.

“I should have enough by the end of the week,” he replied.

“And where’s home?” she continued, coyly, taking a sip of her drink.

He raised a brow, “Tokyo, Japan, if you must know.”

!! She nearly spat out her mouthful, but swallowed the burning liquid instead, practically slamming the glass back on the counter – “No way!” she declared, sitting up straight and putting a hand dramatically on her heart, “I’m from Tokyo! That’s where I’m heading now!” She smiled, manner completely changing again, “We could meet up sometime~”

He rolled his eyes openly. Arms still crossed, he leaned against the back counter. “So, what are you studying?”

And they flirted and whatever and Minako wasn’t alone for the eight hour layover; even when his shift ended he hung around. They got bagels at one of the many coffee shops and their conversation turned to random things. They both enjoyed themselves. Minako learned his name… and slipped him her number before getting in line for boarding.

They’d meet again in Tokyo.
New Years

Chapter Summary

New Years traditions fic prompt

“Is all of this really necessary?” Rei crossed her arms and eyed the table with annoyance.

Minako slammed into her, taking her arm. “Of course it is!” she assured, nearly knocking them both over. “Now, are you wearing them?” she asked, her expression mischievous.

“What?!” Rei recoiled, trying and failing to get out of Minako’s grasp, “No way!”

“You have to!” Minako declared, and fought Rei to put something pink and frilly into the girl’s pocket.

As the two wrestled, pushing and exclaiming in equal amounts of various types of stubbornness – annoyed and enthusiastic – Makoto and Ami looked on with exasperated looks. They had both succumbed to the New Year’s Eve tradition Minako had brought to the party, but they figured Rei would put up a fight for it. Usagi smiled as she watched on, cheering for Minako but not daring to get between them for the moment. As Minako pinned Rei to the wall with lacy pink panties in her face, Rei finally had had enough and released her hold on Minako to snatch the undergarments in angry surrender. “Fine!” she barked, leaving her empty suitcase at the door as she stormed off to the restroom.

Minako flashed a peace sign after her, “In Argentina, new pink panties on New Year’s attracts love!”

Rei shut the door with some force, but her mutter of, “Well, we’re not in Argentina!” could still be heard clearly.

Smiling brightly, Minako wandered over to the table and put an arm around Ami’s shoulder casually, looking at the five strange settings with satisfaction. Usagi grinned down at them, too: five champagne flutes, five pencils, five pieces of paper, five bunches of grapes, and a candle.

Makoto put the last few stray grapes beside a bunch to keep them all at twelve, and straightened.
“Midnight might be a little tricky,” she chuckled.

“What’s good luck without some risk?” Minako teased.

“Exactly!” Usagi seconded. “And we can do it! With one hand,” she mimed, “You eat your grape for the twelve strokes of midnight, and with the other you write your wish on the paper, and then light it on fire with the candle,” she held imaginary paper over the flame, “drop it in your glass of champagne and drink it!”

Then she and Minako raced for the door, “Then,” Minako continued the narration, “in our white dresses and pink panties, we take our empty suitcases and walk around the block. Easy!” Usagi nodded along and mimed the V for Victory with Minako, “Good luck for twelve months, a free wish, chasing away bad spirits, attracting love, and ensuring a year full of travel all in one night!”

Makoto laughed lightly, “Well, we can certainly try!”

Rei stepped out of the bathroom, the look of exasperation still in place, but nevertheless joined them for a night of games, movies and snacks as they whittled away the last hours of the year. As the time wore down, Makoto turned the television to a station that played live from the middle of the city, where thousands of people had gathered to watch the ball drop at Midnight. There was a timer that counted down the seconds, and as everyone joked and prepared, Usagi watched the clock like a hawk.

Inside, she was feeling a little disappointed that Mamoru wouldn’t be there for New Years, but he couldn’t help it. Something was going on at the University that he needed to be there for, so he had to be there. Makoto’s suggestion of Traditions from Around the World was exciting and had taken her mind off of it for a long time, but still, even surrounded by her favorite people, she felt like a little something was missing when he wasn’t around on holidays. She took a deep breath and concentrated on the clock. Three minutes to go.

She moved to her position on the table, glancing down at her grapes, her pencil, and back at the clock. Beside her, Rei had almost finished picking all her grapes off the stem and was lining them up. Minako was tapping her pencil against her chin, deep in thought about her wish; Ami looked calm and cool, seemingly contemplating the bags by the door; Makoto stepped in front of Usagi’s view, blocking the television as she poured the champagne with a huge smile.

As the champagne filled Rei’s glass, she asked, “Where did you come up with this one?”
Makoto laughed again, “I saw it in a magazine; it’s a Russian tradition to burn a wish and drink it so it came true.”

Okay, write a wish, while eating grapes, then burn it, while eating grapes, Usagi concentrated, her eyes moving from object to object, to the television, and back. One minute to go! After it’s mostly burned, drop it in the champagne, while eating grapes? Or should the grapes be done by then? And then grab the suitcase? No, drink the champagne, then grab the suitcase – could I drink it while grabbing the suitcase? And would walking around the building floor be okay? Thirty seconds! “Do we walk around the apartment floor?” she asked Rei in a hurry.

“It’s gotta be the block,” Rei returned, one grape poised in her hand.

Usagi whimpered, looking down at the display. Eat a grape, write a wish, eat a grape, burn the wish, eat a grape? One grape per second – eat a grape, write a wish while watching the clock?!

“Ten!” Mako-chan heralded with the crowd on TV.

“Nine!” Minako, Rei, and Ami joined in.

“Eight!” Usagi joined in, though it was hard to keep track of everything that was just about to happen. She picked up a grape in preparation.

“Seven! Six! Five! Four” The doorknob turned and they all looked over. As Mamoru entered Usagi forgot to keep counting down.

“Good!” Rei stated with stubborn satisfaction upon recognizing him, then she and the others continued counting without missing a number, a sly grin on Minako and Makoto’s faces. “Three! Two!”

Mamoru crossed Makoto’s apartment quickly, carefully stepping around discarded board games. “One!” Usagi stepped back from the table and met him in his approach, putting her arms around his neck.

“New Year’s tradition,” Mamoru explained slyly, and leaned forward for a kiss just as the television erupted in cheers and the girls cried “Happy New Year!” through a mouthful of grape. Usagi forgot all about the grapes for good luck in the upcoming months, and burning and drinking a wish to make
it come true, enjoying the kiss with her true love as Minako laughed out her grapes and Ami squeaked in surprise behind her, and Rei rushed past them downing her champagne to grab her suitcase by the door.

“Keep eating the grapes!” Makoto called, laughing as she followed Rei. She popped another in her mouth and took her own duffle bag in hand as she headed out the door.

“Do I have to drink all of it?” Ami asked in a pitiful voice.

“All of it!” Minako assured, “C’mon, just toss your head back and let’s go! Rei’s leaving us behind on her World Tour!"

A champagne glass was set on the table heavily as Ami finished and followed after Makoto; Minako paused beside Usagi and Mamoru and coyly remarked, “See? Pink panties~ lucky in love~” and winked an unseen wink as she grabbed her bag and shut the door behind her.

“Happy New Year,” Mamoru wished quietly, pulling back.

Usagi smiled up at him, her heart finally beating after the unexpected surprise. “I love you,” she said.

“I love you, too,” he replied.

She smiled, leaned in for another kiss, and froze.

Confused, Mamoru hesitated, “Everything oka—“

Usagi grabbed his hand and pulled him to the door, “C’MON WE HAVE TO RUN AROUND THE BLOCK WITH A SUITCASE OR REI’S GOING TO LEAVE ME BEHIND WHEN SHE TRAVELS AROUND THE WORLD THIS YEAR!!”

Mamoru managed to grab her pink rolling back as the pair of them made it out the door and dashed down the hall towards the stairs.
“Why?! Why do you think this time will be any different?!” Luna choked on her words, her grief intense as they both stared at the blonde in odangos sitting and laughing in the park, surrounded by friends. They had found the Moon Princess once again, and again fate had already reunited her with one of her guardians.

“We have to believe,” Artemis’s voice was low and compelling, his green eyes focusing on reborn Venus; they would awaken her first – maybe if they didn’t awaken the Princess it would be different this time. Maybe if they kept her in the dark they could find the Silver Crystal first, could keep her identity a secret, and she could survive to face the evil that already stirs to combat them.

“It’s pointless!” Luna cried, turning her head aside as tears fell to the dirt beneath their paws. Artemis watched her silently, wishing he knew better how to comfort her; she had always been closer to the girls. While both their places had been at Queen Serenity’s side, he served in official capacities as direct advisor, ambassador, and, occasionally, valet, while Luna’s place had been beside the Princess and her guardians, preparing the next generation for their turn. This chain of events – of finding them, attempting to prepare them, and inevitably losing them was taking its toll on her. If he could spare her this pain… But he needed her, and she him. It was cruel to expect her to face this fate time and time again, but she knew things about these girls’ souls that he did not. She knew how they thought, how they would react, how to gently persuade them; his understanding only scratched the surface. While they found them together, introduced themselves together, returned their memories together, it was she who watched after them as he researched the enemies steps and movements, and when the day came that the girls were overcome, she alone knew all the differences between this reincarnation and the last, and mourned the girls rather than the chance. He had noticed these past few times that she had been pulling back from them, afraid to love them as she had on the Moon; she was losing hope that they would overcome the enemy and live fulfill their destiny. Maybe she was beginning to believe thatthis was their destiny – that Queen Serenity’s final wish had been overruled by Beryl’s curse, and the girls were doomed to find each other and die, over and over, the Moon Kingdom left to weather and crumble with age, never again to know life. But he couldn’t believe that – he wouldn’t believe that. Queen Serenity’s willpower was stronger than Beryl’s, her cause greater, her death nobler – in the end she had to win the day. In the end, her daughter would ascend the throne of the Moon, and set this wrong to right. Their kingdom would be rebuilt and Metallia would be a thing of the past; his Queen would be honored as the heroine she had always been, andremembered. He refused to accept that the only people to remember her were the two of them, when she deserved so much more. Hardening against Luna’s distress, he turned his gaze back to the girls on the bench – the others were leaving; now was their chance. “It’s only pointless if we have given up before it has begun,” he stated with finality, and broke through the cover of the bush to approach the two blondes.

“Oh look!” the princess cried happily, her white-gloved hands grabbing Venus’s frill-covered elbow excitedly, “It’s a white cat! Look at his little crescent mark! How charming! Come here, kitty!” her
smile filled him with familiar warmth – the smile was her mother’s. He continued toward her, but turned his gaze to Venus, who watched her companion fondly.

“Look there, Bunny! A little black kitty’s coming over to see you, too,” Venus commented, her lighter blue eyes focusing behind him.

This time would be different. They’d adopt a different strategy, and this time they would survive.

“As Mars?” Artemis asked as Luna approached, her light gait resounding in his ears.

“She accepts, but does not like the idea of disincluding Serenity,” Luna replied, her tone disapproving, but not of Mars. “None of them do – I don’t. It’s just odd, Artemis! Like we’re all keeping a secret from her. She deserves her memories! She deserves to be part of this!”

Artemis’s mood fouled. “We’ve talked about this, Luna. This time needs to be different – if the Princess does not know who she is, she could survive longer. Especially with everyone else watching over her. Remember last time? She went to face an enemy alone, to spare her guardians - it could have just been that incarnation, that culture of pride that had been nurtured into her from those birth parents, but that cost us! The battle was lost ere it began and the guardians fell soon after. We can’t have that happening again!”

“Then let us train her!” Luna barked back.

They both froze, staring at each other; neither could believe what she had just said. A beat passed. Artemis needed to figure this out – either to convince himself that it could be done, or convince Luna that it could not. “Train her with what? She does not have the powers of a senshi and we have not found the Silver Crystal yet!”

“but... maybe…”

Luna stared at him, her blue eyes vibrant, “There are other ways to fight!”

Artemis scoffed, “Like what? Martial arts? Could you train her to be proficient with a sword within the next few weeks, Luna? Could you train her with a bow and arrow before the enemy engages?” his sarcasm was hurtful, but he had convinced her to follow this plan – there was no other way. "Unless… no. Not in this lifetime. He sighed deeply, “The last guardian has been found – the enemy will not hesitate as it has been doing!” his statement ended in him snapping, “Keep the Guardians on alert, keep Serenity in the dark; she may live longer.”

Luna stayed silent, seeming to bite her tongue. Without another word, she turned and ran off.

Luna stopped directly reporting to him after that, in protest and hurt, no doubt. Every time someone came up on him his heart swelled with hope that it was her, that he could apologize, and then sunk as he placed the footsteps as human rather than feline. She had been sending Venus, who, apparently, was the only guardian not to hate him for his decision. On the contrary, she almost supported it. She agreed with him that, based on their retellings of their previous incarnations, keeping Serenity out of the fight was the way to go unless they somehow met her when she was younger to start her training then. Without the powers of a senshi, putting her anywhere near danger would risk not only her life but the lives of her guardians, who would undoubtedly be distracted by her involvement.
They spoke quietly whenever they met; she would report on their training, on their morale; when Luna and Artemis had awakened them, they had regained all memories of their time on the moon, and while it made them feel complete, Venus reported that memories of their own demise depressed them, made them worry ever-more for Serenity, made them mourn their old lives, and question their new. It cast a shadow over their dealings, and having been told of their previous incarnations and how they had failed to protect her over again, there was a touch of hopelessness among them. Artemis listened closely; the more they met, the more he got to know and respect Venus; while she reported that the others were weighed down by the knowledge of their past, she seemed to be strengthened by it. Their conversations turned to his duties, and the difficulties of monitoring and researching without connection to the Moon’s supercomputer.

As battles became more frequent, their conversations became more candid. In Venus he found an ally who understood him and their goals, who could distance herself from the immediacy of their situation to see the big picture. She saw that, without the Silver Crystal, ultimately they would lose, but the other side would not win, either. It was a stalemate – time after time, when they had died in their previous lives, the Dark Kingdom faded when they could not find the Silver Crystal they needed to resurrect Metallia.

Then it happened; the Princess died, killed in the crossfire, and in the aftermath the senshi followed her into death. Artemis could only watch as the cycle restarted, but already ideas for the next opportunity simmered in his mind, based in conversations between himself and the leader of the guardian senshi. He and Luna traveled the world, her grief palpable; she didn’t have to say it – he knew she did not agree with his choice to leave Serenity in the dark. Next time, though, it might not have to be that way.

All he needed was for humans to develop computer technology; then he could move forward with this plan that he and Venus had cooked up together. This time, Serenity wouldn’t be left in the dark… Luna would. With the Mauan mind connection, he could erase her memories of the past, even make the Silver Millennium foggy. He could use a computer to interface with the Moon’s supercomputers and fabricate a transformation device for the Princess that would give her senshi-like powers, accessing remnants of the Silver Crystal energy that must run in her blood. Luna would train her and the other senshi without knowledge of their past, so their morale would not start out so low, and the Princess would be trained to defend herself so as to be an asset rather than a distraction. And Venus would serve as her decoy, as she suggested. She alone would receive all of her memories from the Silver Millennium; she would work with him in foiling Dark Kingdom plots, giving the others time to mature and grow into powers they, without their memories, would be discovering ‘for the first time.’

Maybe this time…
He was suddenly awake, his eyes opening fully to his dark bed chamber without cause. He stayed quiet and motionless, waiting for whatever had caused him to stir to repeat itself, expecting to hear a noise or cry of alarm to echo throughout the hall, but nothing happened. He blinked, his eyes moving to stare at his door, watching the heavy shadows of the moonlight, waiting for a sign that they could be under attack, but minutes passed and nothing changed. Finally he calmed, reasoning that it might have just been night noises, else maybe the bright moonlight through his open window had caused him to wake. He shut his eyes and attempted to sleep, but could barely do so for the feeling that someone was watching him. Finally he sat up in bed and looked around the room, but found nothing there.

One month later he was awake again in the dead of night, his eyes open and staring, finding nothing amiss but the strong light of the full moon, unable to return to sleep. He did his best to quell his beating heart and sleep, but with the same watched feeling, it was difficult to do so.

Two more months went by, and each night of the full moon was the same; on the fourth such month, Endymion had come to accept that he would wake far too early, and so stayed up late, studying and recording the face of the full moon, finding humour in that he was getting to know the source of his interrupted sleep, but when he awoke that night to the moonlight streaming, the feeling of paranoia was so high that the nerves on his back made his muscles arch. His eyes wide open, his ears straining to hear, he froze in terror as he sensed something behind him, breathing quietly, softly, coolly on his neck. Gathering courage, he flung himself around, whipping his elbow to strike at whatever was behind him, but found nothing but his empty bed. Breathing hard, adrenaline pumping, he tried to figure out if he had imagined it, but he could not prove to himself that the breath was real or dreamt. He did not sleep that night, but he dared not leave his bed til morning.

The fifth full moon had Endymion warring with himself. He stayed up late, sketching the face of the moon, resilient in his attempts not to let it become associated with his monthly night terrors. He fought the urge to sleep, he stayed up all night with his advisors, convinced them nothing was wrong. He was not afraid to sleep alone in his room. What he had not accounted for, however, was that this full moon had reached its completion between two days, and so the following evening, dead tired from a night awake, he was dreadened to find the full moon above the walls as he went to bed. So tired was be, and so stubborn, he went to sleep anyway, facing away from the window, thoughts of the breath on his neck quashed by exhaustion.

This time when he woke, he was more angry than frightened. He was the prince, he needed his
sleep! He threw off his covers and strode around his bed to his window and drew the curtains shut, an act of defiance now, rather than the act of fear he had perceived it before. Now the moon could not bother him. Now he could sleep without its bothersome light! He tugged on the thick curtains to be sure they would not spread when he left, feeling a sense of accomplishment masking the unease that tingled his bare back. He stood, breathing quietly, facing the curtains and calming his heart. Now he could sleep. He turned back to his bed. Now, he could --

A cool arm crossed his chest, gripping his shoulder firmly as it pushed him back and sideways, throwing him easily into his armoire, his head cushioned from the wood by a cool hand. Too shocked to yell or to fight back, his wide blue eyes stared down at the slight creature that had him pinned and his body froze in fear.

"Don't like the moonlight anymore?" The slight pale girl asked playfully, her throaty voice filled with mock dismay, unnaturally glowing blue eyes looking up at him coyly. She was beautiful, but no less terrifying in how easily she had overpowered him, how confidently she toyed with him now. With his full attention she straightened, sobering as she moved herself in front of him, the hand behind his head sliding through his hair to pause to cup his face, her thumb caressing his cheekbone. Her other arm traveled down his torso and back up in a far too familiar manner. "I missed you last night, Endymion," she said quietly, and terror overtook him. She made quieting sounds and led him back to his bed; he was powerless to resist her, his body uncooperative as she tugged his arm and pressed his chest gently to make him turn and sit on the edge of his mattress. She stood over him possessively, her pale blonde pigtailed hair trailing on his knees. She glowed slightly - it was her pale skin, emitting light like the full moon, illuminating his room faintly. She could not be human.

"I like you, Endymion," she said quietly, her voice barely above a whisper, "I think I've fallen in love with you, watching over you while you sleep," she smiled softly; he could have found her irresistible had it not been for his fear, but then her brows furrowed, and her mood shifted. "But I can't trust you anymore, Endymion, not after you kept me waiting last night. I can fix that, though, don't worry." She leaned in and kissed his forehead, her lips soft but ice cold. "Don't worry," she repeated in a whisper, as she lowered her lips to embrace his, kissing him softly. As she pulled away his body began to shut down, sleep overtaking him softly, aggressively. He couldn't keep his eyes open, couldn't fight her magic...

The next morning Prince Endymion was nowhere to be found.

Hundreds of miles away, shepherds reported seeing a shooting star landing in the cave-ridden hillsides, a star that looked like a woman holding the sleeping form of a man, but they were never able to find the cave the goddess had entered, and so never found her sleeping prince.
WINNER
OF THE
GC WRITERS CONTEST
OCTOBER 2015
THEME:
CREATURES OF
THE NIGHT
Letting Go

Chapter Summary

Writing Contest entry for theme "Let it Go"
A familiar scene...

The world cracked and crumbled around her, a booming thunder in the stifling silence. Desperately she searched the sky, putting all of her attention on finding them again; her mistake had cost her, and now her failing heart beat ever faster. She was too weak to move, to reach out, to cry out her pain, but she could still search. She pressed back her panic and honed her focus by humming to herself, her voice nothing but an airy squeak at first, but growing with every hasty swallow – they were gone. She couldn’t find them. She pressed harder, forcing the slow tango melody through her nose until she could hear it in her ears, a hollow mockery of the dances they had hosted, the true memory haunting her relentlessly. She put more and more energy into it, forcing the song into her head, to work past the frantic worries of her heart as her eyes danced from star to star, looking for their particular shine. She forced back regrets, shielded herself against thoughts of their ruined future, built defenses out of her faulty reasoning, refusing to examine it – but she couldn’t find her. Her humming turned into a whine as a sob seized her chest; she swallowed it back and forced the song to continue. She was stronger than this. She knew the magic would work the way she wanted, she believed in it. It wouldn’t fail her now, not on something this important. The whine returned, her doubt breaking through defenses to control her; her bruised chest shook with sobs that she could not hold back. She had lost her.

She fought to breathe around her spasming lungs, her hands weakly gripping the rubble beneath her for support, tears further ruining her attempt at finding them again. Were they too far? Had they already been taken? Had she missed it? She blinked as quickly as she could, fighting the urge to give in and sleep. She had to find her; she had to make sure she was okay.

But she couldn’t even do that, could she? She could only give them a chance; she could not guarantee fate would smile upon it. She couldn’t assure her daughter’s happiness. She couldn’t ensure finding love, or marrying, or having children; she couldn’t even guarantee their safety when they arrived in their new lives, let alone happiness or fulfillment. She could barely breathe from panic accompanying the realization – what had she sent them to?!

A surge of power and energy welled up behind her, and she knew the end was coming. She took a ragged breath, and suddenly found them, just beyond the full moon, the sparkling trail of star-seeds shining in their wake. A calming wave washed over her; her daughter, her guardians, the citizens of Earth… she could not guarantee their futures, but she could give them a chance. She could not foresee what the destruction of the inner planets would bring, or if their guardians would survive the ordeal, but she could give them a chance to survive on their new home, on an Earth-like planet in a younger star system.

Their glow was lost in the sun’s reflection as the expansion closed in. She took a deep breath and let it out slowly with a prayer as planet Earth was destroyed, crumbled and absorbed along with the Moon into the Sun as it became a Red Giant and consumed the inner solar system.
Yuletide

Chapter Summary

Writing Contest entry for theme "Christmas"

The evergreen trees in the studies and entrance halls were decorated in garland and dressed in candles, wreaths were on the walls, holly graced every mantle, fires blazed in every fireplace, ribbons of red and green gave color to rooms, while musicians began carols and hymns that filled the castle with comfort. Endymion stood at the top of the stairs and took it all in, breathing deeply the smell of evergreen and fresh baked goods, enjoying the warmth of the season. Yuletide was here.

He descended the stairs, adjusting the clasps of his cape, knowing exactly how ridiculous it looked even as he knew how important traditions were. When he reached the bottom of the stairs Cassie, one of their maidservants, approached him with a small tray of china, a fond smile on her face as she looked up at him. “Prince Endymion, how handsome you look!” she fawned in much the same way as a mother would. He smiled halfheartedly in an attempt to placate her as she swapped the tray to balance on one hand so she could twitch the heavy red cape material into place and pat down the fluffy white trim. “The children will love you!” He smiled again, nodding slightly, causing the golden circlet to fall farther down to fit snugly across his brow. She stood back, smiling up at him, and then jumped a bit. “Oh! Would you like some hot chocolate?” she asked, pouring the sweet-smelling drink from the metal teapot and into a small teacup. He accepted, taking the teacup from her, and she excused herself to continue with preparations for the evening’s festivities.

Sipping carefully from the hot drink, he walked over to the window and smiled; the moon would be full tonight.

The tour began on the backs of grey horses, their saddles and bridles decked in tiny silver bells and bunches of holly. He led the procession through the crowded parade grounds, Kunzite, Zoisite, Nephrite and Jadeite following behind, each of them decked out as Yuletide Judges, wearing attire nearly as outrageous and opulent as his. The people cheered as they passed, little children hugging their mother’s legs or their father’s necks as their parents reminded them of the importance of the “Yuletide Judges”. Every year they were watched over by the benevolent Kris Kringle, who would deem them as either naughty or nice, but on the eve of Yule the Yuletide Judges would tour the city, making the last calls on the children who lived there. They would hand out treats and talk with the children, deciding once and for all if they would be visited by their dear friend Kris. If they had been naughty, this was their last chance to prove themselves good.

The duty of being a Yuletide Judge was a near-lifetime affair; when a judge retired he trained a younger lad to be Kris Kringle’s eyes and ears in the city, and that lad would continue the tradition for years on end, to keep the myth and spirit alive through continuity. Prince Endymion had turned Yuletide Judge when he was thirteen, taking over for one of his father’s knights just a few short years after learning the truth about Kris Kringle. One by one his friends were turned to Judges as well; Jadeite had been the latest and last to become one – he went through his ‘training’ last year through Sir Denevine, and now the group of five Judges for Elysion were complete, and they would
keep the tradition for most of the rest of their lives.

He enjoyed the tradition, the emotions the children experience when he meets them, the trepidation, nervousness, and anxiety, only to watch the fears disappear when he decides that their nice levels outweigh their naughty and pardon them for the year, he also liked watching his friends’ styles, though he thought some were a little more annoying than others. Kunzite treated it as a true trial, making the kid unbelievably nervous before making his decision. Zoisite actually pulled the kids aside, one by one, and with a small scroll had them repeat everything naughty they had done and subtly hint that they had forgotten a thing or two. Inevitably the kid would start panicking, but he would pardon them; he said that he really wanted the kids to regret their mean streaks, and, typically, the next year the kids he had visited behaved a lot better than the year before. Nephrite was more jovial about the whole thing – he would stare them down, make them turn in circles, ask them a few strange questions, and typically pardon them, though he always acted suspicious and would involve other kids in one kid’s judgment, asking questions like “Has he been a good boy this year?” “Hmm… what do you think, does he deserve a gift from Kris?” or “I don’t know… should I pardon him?”. Jadeite was a little more aloof with the whole business, and would sometimes get flustered with the more outgoing kids, but he’d get used to it.

It was a long day, but slowly they made their way through the city, splitting up to interview the children of different homes, or sticking together to face a large group of them (sometimes they were followed). Zoisite’s scrolls, rather than being filled with the naughty deeds of children, were a census of the children of the town, and as they saw each of them he would strike their name from the list. If the child wasn’t at home they would typically find them with a group of their friends, awaiting the Judge’s arrival nervously; but if they couldn’t find the child at all, he or she usually turned up at the Yuletide ball, their parents in tow, eager to find a Judge and earn his approval before it was too late.

When they arrived for the start of the Yule Ball they were tired but feeling fulfilled; none had given a poor judgment, though the rumors of such a terrible event still roamed the city; grabbing a quick meal in the kitchens they saw the last of the presents being wrapped, preparing for their midnight deliveries, and knew that no child would be disappointed come morning. None ever were.
A Change of Season

Chapter Summary

Writing Contest entry for theme "A Change of Season"

Her booted feet clicked down the sidewalk one step at a time; she loved boots, and with the slight chill in the air the season for them had come at last. She received a few looks, a few smiles and winks as she passed, from the bolder sex for a change, and smiled at the reaction to her short, swishing skirt and tight-fitting vest over the white-button up. She wore glasses to ward off the light of the setting sun, protection against the ‘gentlemen’ who wished for her attention as much as for the UV rays. The cool evening breeze rushed through the trees beside her, freeing leaves from branches and putting a smile on her face.

Autumn.

It had been a hard fight, hard won, but it was time to put those fights behind her, to embrace the peace they had rightfully achieved and move on with their lives. Until such a time that she was needed to protect her Princess or Prince, she was simply Haruka Tenoh, and nothing more. Well… maybe a little something more. As she walked her phone rang a special tune, a tune reserved for only one person. She flipped it open and put it to her ear smoothly, “Ne?” she asked simply, her voice lighter than usual but just as natural for her. “Michiru,” she replied with a sly smile, “How’s it going? … What, again?! …” she listened, then laughed, “No, it’s okay! I was passing there on the way, anyway; I’ll just pop in and grab some. Is there anything else? … Okay, then, I’ll see you later.” She hung up with a smile, popping her tiny cell phone back into her small black purse, still striding down the serene street.

The meeting had gone well with her sponsors; she had the funds in place to move wherever she cared to under the stipulation that she showed up for various events throughout the year and went on a worldwide tour at some point in the near future. It was an easy promise to make; by then, things should be sorted out well enough that she could leave without any prior engagements to hold her back. Good thing, too; the place they had in mind would require quite the funding to live in comfortably and if she had to back out she didn’t know how they would make rent. Eyeing the signs in front of her, she stepped into a store and purchased a few items, primarily diapers and a cute racing-flag pacifier, then came straight back out and kept on walking.

By the time the public garage was in sight, she was ready for it. She exchanged her helmet for her parcels, stuffing the latter beneath the seat before hopping on her motorcycle and revving the engine. Tearing out into the street with the quick maneuvers only her time on the track could afford her, Haruka’s bike sung through the streets, weaving in and out of traffic effortlessly as she laughed, enjoying the tug of the wind on her clothes and skin. While she avoided most lights deftly, it was inevitable that she would hit one. She slowed, came to a stop, and used her booted leg as a kickstand while she waited out the red, her fingers holding the clutch softly, ready to go at any minute; but then something caught her eye, something that gave her pause, made her lean back in her seat and stare.

Across the street, walking happily arm-in-arm with a tall young man, was her Princess, blonde, odangoed, wearing her Juban Middle School uniform and strolling in another direction. Haruka smiled, noticing that the Princess walked elegantly at that moment, as beautiful as any lady; she
wondered if the unusual grace was due to a lack of attention, or if it had something to do with being on the Prince’s arm. Either way, she seemed lighter now, as though she walked without a care in the world; so different from only weeks before when the weight of the planet was on her shoulders. As she watched, an energetic pink-haired girl appeared out of a shop and rushed towards the duo, breaking between them eagerly. Haruka chuckled, watching as Usagi turned on the small girl with frustration, but quieted and cheered when she was presented with something – a small stuffed animal? – Mamoru looked amused, Chibi-Usa, proud, turning to shake her finger at her future-mother and receiving a noogie as a reward.

She heard the click of the light turning and bent back down over her bike, waiting for the person ahead of her to move, but glanced over one more time to see the three of them walking off together, holding hands contentedly.

A new season had begun.
Entropy

Chapter Summary

Quick-fic; done in two parts? A little disjointed, sorry!

ENTROPY: the gradual decline of Cosmos (orderly and harmonic) into Chaos (disorder and confusion).

She knew now – she understood everything. With a calm determination she rushed forward, sure in what she had to do. Would this save everyone? Maybe not, but perhaps this would be enough to satiate the universe. They all belong together – the darkness chases the light and the light brings the darkness, everything wants to be as it was in the beginning, when they were all one within the cauldron. Hers was the brightest star of all, and his, the darkest chasm in the galaxy. Only she could subdue him without destroying everything. She reached the end of the precipice and propelled herself forward, diving down into the mass of churning stellar matter, flying as though to surround Chaos with the love in her heart, the understanding and acceptance she had just gained. This was what she was meant for, because no one deserved to be alone!

When she awoke she found herself in her own bed. Sitting up straight, she surveyed her surroundings, searching for anything amiss, wondering if she were within the confines of the Cauldron. … Was she dead? But everything was as she had left it… as the alarm clock sounded its shrill little “cheep cheep!” beside her, she was sure: this couldn’t possibly be heaven.

“Usagi! Wake up or you’ll be late for school again!” her mother yelled from downstairs, and with a wide smile she got up and dressed in her high school uniform, dashing from the room and down the stairs, for once moving quick enough to have minutes to spare before she had to leave for school. Skidding to a stop beside the table she hastily took a seat, smiling at the batch of pancakes her mother had made for her. Picking up her utensils she cut into the stack with enthusiasm. As she tasted the first delicious mouthful, sighing at the amazing flavor, she glanced around the room for any sign of Luna, and asked aloud after her. “Where’s Luna?”

Her mother stopped mid-pour, the orange juice glass still in her hand as she gave Usagi one of the saddest looks she had ever received, and the beat of her heart faltered. Her fork fell as her mother’s blue eyes glanced away and then back again; she swallowed hard as Ikuko-mama regained her resolution and put the jar and glass on the table. With the resounding thuds, tears sprang to her eyes as she realized that the events at the River Lethe must have actually transpired. Luna, Artemis, and Diana were dead. Ikuko rushed forward and surrounded her in a hug, whispering comfortingly, “Did you forget?”

Usagi nodded, hugging her mother close.

She was told she didn’t have to go to school that day, but what she wanted most was to be with everyone. Did they know? Losing Artemis… Usagi had to be there for Minako. Maybe they’d skip school together, but she didn’t want to stay home alone. On the familiar path to school she would
alternate between walking slowly, taking in the trees, the sky, the morning air, a stark contrast to the
fight she faced only hours before, and running, not wanting to miss Minako at the spot where their
paths usually crossed on the way to school. She kept an eye out for Ami and Makoto; though they
took a different route to school, part of her hoped that they would double back to walk with her. She
hadn’t seen them since… she pushed past the thought. All of that was over now. They won, and
now they could go back to the way things had been.

As she turned a corner her eyes fell across a patch of sidewalk that took her comforting thought and
pulled it out from beneath her. Her breath caught in her throat and she froze, staring at the exact spot
where she had met Luna, all those years ago. Her eyes swam and her breath caught, but she pushed
herself forward, ignoring the tears on her cheeks as she rushed for the intersection ahead where
Minako would nearly run into her as they raced to get to school on time.

Minako never came. Usagi waited until the school bell rang, just in case she had been really late, but
in the end she went the rest of the way alone. Maybe she had been the one who was really late, or
maybe Minako stayed home alone. She decided to get to school and see if her friend was there, and,
if she weren’t, go with Ami and Makoto to her house instead of second period. She raced through
the empty school yard alone, tore through the empty hallways, up the stairs, and slid to a stop in front
of her classroom. She took a hasty breath and slid open the door, her eyes searching first for blonde
hair, then blue, then brown. They were absent.

“Tsukino-san?”

As her heart sunk lower and lower and her chest turned to lead, she searched the room for the long
ponytails of the visiting senshi, Seiya, Taiki, and Yaten, but their desks, too, were empty. Her legs
stopped working as her mind frantically tried to shut itself off; she slid to the floor as their homeroom
teacher rushed forward and her classmates stood in a world far away from where she was.

It couldn’t be this way.

She remembered the teacher feeling her head, remembered the class representative rushing out of the
room, the looks of concern and the whispers, the glances to the empty desks.

But it couldn’t be this way.

She pushed herself to her feet, forgetting her book bag as she ran away, down the hallway, the stairs,
across the ground, down the street. She ran as fast as her legs could take her, her chest heaving as she
finally slid to a stop in front of the Aino residence. She knocked on the door with as much control as
she could, ignoring the desperation the quick knocks betrayed. When a woman answered, she all but
blurted, “Is Minako-chan home?”

“Usagi-chan, no,” the woman shook her head, concerned confusion coloring her features, “I thought – I hoped she was with you. Wait!” she called after her, “Where is Minako?!”

But Usagi had already bowed politely and ran off, her heart hammering from more than the exertion
as she dashed down the street, skidding to a stop to catch a bus. She tossed the proper coinage into
the receptacle and ignored the curious glances as she took a seat, putting her head in her hands and
concentrating on breathing, pushing back the panic as best she could. She counted the stops, waiting
as patiently as she could until her stop arrived. She used the doorway to give her an extra boost as
she threw herself off the bus and towards the steps of the Hikawa Shrine.

She fell once as she climbed but kept going, pushing her legs until she broke the top level. “Rei-
chan!” she yelled as loud as she could manage, breathing heavily. She waited, watching the shrine for movement. “REI-CHAN!!” she called louder, and her heart jumped as a door slid open, her knees giving out on her again. Rei was there, and any minute she’d appear and reprimand her for yelling and startling the birds and scaring off the patrons, and for being stupid for doubting that they had made it, and being even more stupid for going to school instead of going straight there. And then Ami-chan would say something about how they really shouldn’t skip any more school because they could be held back, and Mako-chan would pat her on the shoulder and say how it was useless at this point anyway, and Minako-chan would celebrate because if they had missed too many days this year already, why bother going back to school at all? And then they would all be together again, and laugh and cry and –

But it wasn’t Rei.

She wrapped her arms around her chest and cried, giving in for the moment to the horrible suspicion that everything she had feared was true, that none of them had returned from the cauldron. That she had saved the universe, but she hadn’t saved them. Grandpa Hino didn’t say anything, he just hugged her, patting her on the back in a comforting manner, whispering soft words meant to calm her down, but there was no reason to calm down, right? Because it couldn’t be true. They had to be alive – fate wasn’t so cruel. No one deserved to be alone, she had used that to defeat Chaos. She pushed herself up off the ground, breaking free of Grandpa Hino’s embrace, and practically flew back down the stairs, running as quickly as she could towards the tall apartment building Ami lived in. She was denied entrance to the building, told that Mizuno Ami was still away on holiday. Makoto’s apartment remained quiet, despite how hard she banged on the door, despite how many times she yelled. The super intendant had been called on her for making so much noise, and he informed her that if Kino-san did not pay rent soon, she would be evicted from her apartment.

Their headquarters below Crown Arcade were empty, the computer systems functioning but untouched.

Ikuko and Grandpa Hino found her curled up in a phone booth, dialing and redialing the same number, listening to the away message, “We’re sorry, but we can’t come to the phone right now. If you have a message for Tenoh Haruka, Kaioh Michiru, Meioh Setsuna, or Hotaru-chan, please leave a message and we’ll get back to you as soon as we can.” Before hanging up and dialing again.

“They’ll get back to me as soon as they can,” Usagi repeated brokenly as her mother pulled her close. She told them everything, about how they had died, but she had gone to the Cauldron to save them, and had to fight them and destroy them, but she had won and it wasn’t fair that she came back and they didn’t. The story was interrupted many times as she skipped ahead, then fell back, pausing to hiccup or sob, but her mother listened patiently, holding her close, letting her cry, never interrupting with a question. When she was finally done, or as done as she could be at the moment, Ikuko kept her close until she could breathe normally, only then pushing her back to look her in the eye.

Ikuko’s eyes were wet as well, but she was firm when she said, “Their mothers need to know, Usagi-chan. They can’t be left in the dark anymore.” Usagi nodded. “I can tell them,” Ikuko offered, giving her a way out, but Usagi shook her head. Only she could tell their full story, about how brave they were, how selfless and amazing and how much they done, time and time again. Only she could hope to express how much they meant. Ikuko told her that Minako’s mother had appeared at their house earlier that day asking after her daughter, leaving only a few minutes before Grandpa Hino had found her and they started looking for Usagi. That night, then, she would tell them everything.

As the sun started setting, Hikawa Shrine was closed to visitors. Within one of its great rooms were
gathered Usagi’s family, Ikuko, Kenji, and Shingo; and the surviving families of her friends, or those that she could locate: Ami’s mother; Rei’s grandfather; Minako’s parents; and the two people outside their group that knew their identities and had kept them secret: Naru-chan and Asanuma-kun. The two of them, along with Grandpa Hino and Ikuko, helped give Usagi’s story credibility as she told them the truth, from the beginning. Who their daughters had been, what they stood for, everything they had accomplished, the countless lives they had saved – all of it came to light, including the real explanations behind the ‘strange weather events’ of the past few years. A lot of what she said brought looks of disbelief or anger – why was she saying this? Why was she lying to them? – but with nods of support from the four who had known or suspected, the outbursts were quieted before they were voiced. But still, despite the flashes of recognition that crossed their faces, the simultaneous hope and fear in their eyes, they did not fully accept what they were being told. It wasn’t until Usagi transformed that Ami’s mother started to cry.

Together they buried the bodies of Luna, Artemis, and Diana, the only corporeal representations they had for everyone they had lost, and said their goodbyes.

Later that night, curled up on the couch in an empty apartment, Sailor Cosmos cradled a picture of what should have been her family. Her eyes traced their features, those of her one true love and their future daughter, and regarded the line of pearl rings on the fingers that held the frame close. This was the path she ended on, rather than the path they had forged together. The future they had seen, the millennia they were to spend together, the happiness they were to have had, she had missed it somehow. She would never be Neo Queen Serenity of Crystal Tokyo, surrounded by her dearest friends for all of eternity. In the clarity that came when emotions were exhausted, she considered the repercussions of her final action. She had not destroyed the cauldron; of that she was fairly certain. She had embraced the loneliness of Chaos, gave her light to its darkness, and that she lived now must mean… something. Perhaps she healed the cauldron and dispersed Chaos, putting things in balance yet again. Perhaps she had failed, and the cauldron and chaos were completely destroyed. Maybe that was why her friends hadn’t returned. Maybe that was why she had transformed into Cosmos rather than Moon; she had become the antithesis of Chaos, and threw the universe into unbalance in the other direction.

The battle would continue then, and she had to stay and protect the people from chaos, just as she had always done.

Slowly her transformation faded away, leaving only Usagi, small and very much alone. As she gazed down at the images she had memorized a thousand times over, no more tears came. Even as she tried to say her goodbyes to Chibi-Usa and to Mamoru, she knew there would never truly be a goodbye, not with Mamoru, not with any of them. She would never forget them. She wouldn’t let their memories fade; her heart was now theirs, and until she joined them again in the Cauldron, they would survive in her. She wouldn’t let them go.

Weeks passed and slowly she recovered. She would get up in the morning, would get dressed and have breakfast with her family. She started accepting Naru’s invitations out, she could walk down the street without always being reminded of them. Eventually she could talk about them without crying, but then she would accidentally turn to someone who wasn’t there, or reach out for a hand that couldn’t hold hers, and she would start shaking.

The first attack on Earth surprised her with its familiarity. Lemures attacked the city, a Dead Moon Circus staking its tents in town. She transformed and went to its source, Nehelenia reborn, and
despite the pain in her heart, the nightmares she had been facing, watching and rewatching the many sacrifices her friends had made, she could not see her as a monster to be destroyed. Nehele

Nehelenia was angry and violent, crazed into madness by the rejection she had suffered, the pain of being forgotten, the fear of growing old, and the ever-present loneliness that Usagi had felt in Chaos. As Cosmos, Usagi approached Nehele

Nehele left, taking her servants with her; healed of the malicious feelings within, she set up her own court on the far side of the moon, and lived there in peace.

Isolation and rejection took root in Usagi’s heart, but still she carried on. She spent more and more time alone; through no fault of her own, Naru started to forget about Usagi, and Usagi let her. She understood what she had given up, but still she felt the love of her friends in her heart and she could be happy.

She spent her time waiting at Infinity Park, between the Meioh, Tenoh, and Kaioh buildings, sitting in a bench outside the building that had sprung up in the ruins of Mugen Academy, waiting for Mistress Nine as though she were an old friend. With a great tear in the fabric of time and space, Pharaoh 90 appeared instead, his chaotic need destroying everything in his path. Usagi as Cosmos stood before him, holding her arms out, and gave him the light he craved. As he calmed she felt his true emotions – the desperate panic of danger, the need to survive in a hospitable environment; as she embraced him the only way she could, she considered only for a moment the repercussions her gift would have on her. Her feeling of security and safety was a human need, but she believed she could live without it, so long as she had their love in her heart. As it left her, newfound anxiety wracking her from within, Chaos calmed and retreated, mending the tear it had created. It would find a new area of space to inhabit and live there peacefully.

Usagi’s days and nights were long and tiring; often she found herself transforming without reason, always searching around her, never feeling safe or accepted. A glance down at her engagement ring, a symbol she had broadened to encompass her friends’ love as well as Mamoru’s, would comfort her, bringing her back to herself, rooting her in reality.

The next attack was not by Diamond, but by the Death Phantom himself. He came to her in the middle of the night, appearing in her bedroom suddenly, and immediately started draining her of energy. She transformed into Cosmos, giving him more of what he sought, and in her light she read him truer. He was angry, jealous of the longevity she had been promised, and wanting more than he had, more than he had ever hoped to attain. His greed was the stem of his discord, and so Usagi gave him her contentment along with her light. His malice faded, his thoughts clearing, and the death phantom disappeared, returning to the time stream in peace.

Bitterness, anxiety, and rejection were Usagi’s constant companions. Without the ring to ground her, and the love that it represented, she knew what kind of person she would be. Already she was struggling not to snap at people, not to attack the world around her, not to succumb to the depression her internal isolation threatened upon her; as confusion and second-guessing enveloped her life, she felt she was slowly dissolving into Chaos. Every bit of herself she gave away was another step into darkness, and yet she did not begrudge her once-enemies. She understood them, and in so doing she could not hate them. They were part of her.

The next incarnation she would face gave her the most pause; she knew who was to come, and what she would want. The fear of giving it up nearly drove her insane with worry – her love? She couldn’t give that away, she couldn’t lose it! Not them, not him, none of it – they were hers, they gave her
reason, they kept her grounded, she could not give them away, no matter how lonely and unloved Beryl or Metallia were. Her friends were hers, her love was hers, and she could not have them!

She was driven to such desperation she had the door to the timestream opened before she realized what she was doing. Her plan had come to mind without contemplation, without thinking – she would go into the past and convince herself not to do this. She should have destroyed the cauldron and lived with the consequences… else died with them. Her decision to give Chaos what he needed was the wrong choice; this was not something she could live with. Her friends, her love, her… greed. Her anxiety. Her need for acceptance, her need of safety, her need of contentment. Her need of love. She was no different than they; did Metallia not deserve the peace she had once enjoyed? Was she that selfish?

She closed the doors as her emotions threatened to boil over. She let the transformation melt away and stayed up the rest of the night, staring at the heart-shaped stone resting on her ring finger, thinking of the loop it rested on and the meaning behind a ring; it was never ending, a symbol of eternity, married to the symbol of love. Eternal love; if she gave that to Chaos, would that stop it once and for all?
If she gave that to Chaos, what would become of her?

Jumpy, nervous, and needy, she still somehow found the strength, courage, and bravery to take the first step. She awaited Metallia at D-point, and as an intense wave of hatred washed over her, she felt the arrival of her companion. Again she felt the urge to run away, but the reason she wanted to run was the very same that kept her grounded. No one should feel that alone and unloved. She strode through the snow towards her old foe and the being howled, bunching for a fight. She threw her staff away, her eyes moving from the weak spot on Metallia’s forehead to the being’s eyes, and opened her arms wide. The rage she felt nearly knocked her over, but she held her ground, sending out the comforting light the Chaotic creature sought. She felt tired, but still she pushed through the urgency her newfound greed sent to mind; this was the last of it, the last of her light. Once she gave away her love she would have nothing, but still she pushed through, unable to ignore Metallia’s heart. She gave it what Beryl had craved, the feeling of being openly loved, and as the emotion was sent from her, her heart was instantly claimed by the feelings that love had kept at bay. Anxiety wracked her, bitterness overcame her, rejection threw her, confusion angered her, and as the emotions rolled together to become hatred, her light finally faded and went out.

She fell to her knees in the snow, hugging herself to keep her power in check; she had lost her light, but she could sense the immense power of Cosmos within her. “Go!” she yelled, for Metallia remained. “I forgive you! Please, go, I have nothing left to give! Go, before I can’t hold it back!”

Anger, malice, fear, depression, rage, rejection – these emotions told her to call her staff, to strike out at Metallia before she could leave, to dissipate the shadows that remain with the cruel light of the Cosmos, but she only held herself tighter. Metallia had to escape – she deserved a chance to enjoy peace. When she left Usagi would take to space in exile; she would hide herself away, taking the darkness with her; she felt it taking over her already; her white skirt and bodice turning black. Was this her true destiny? To expend herself as Cosmos only to become Chaos?

Was this how Chaos was born?

“I forgive you.”

The words broke through the tempest of emotions like a shock of ice water. She looked up, still holding herself close, and saw Metallia staring back at her, the shadowy frame shrinking in size and brightening.
A rift opened in the time stream to emit the Death Phantom, though he no longer resembled his name. “I forgive you,” he stated, green eyes on hers.

In an explosion of sound and light, the sky tore open to emit Pharaoh 90, though now he appeared as a nebula of colors and light. “I forgive you,” the voice boomed.

Landing in the snow behind her, Nehelenia stood with her hands held before her, a smile on her lips. “You had nothing, and yet still you helped us become whole. Moon Princess or Earth Queen, I forgive you.”

Each exoneration made her lighter, the turbulent emotions fading as each original owner gave her their forgiveness, the understanding a need she had never quite identified before, but felt relief at now. She had destroyed them before. She had ignored their needs, never seeing past their evil, and had banished them to darkness; she had acted in ignorance, and while she had atoned in her own way, their mutual understanding of her methods calmed the knot in her stomach. Slowly all emotion left her, the black seeped out of her uniform, but as the emotions left she felt more and more tired, lighter than ever before.

“Thank you,” she replied, her voice faint as a breeze, and fell face-forward into the snow, her soul at peace.

When she awoke she was alone and far away from D-point. The air was warm and smelled of familiar flowers, and every sound she made echoed in the emptiness surrounding her. She sat up, noticing that her Cosmos uniform had disappeared, but she was not afraid. She felt peaceful, despite the faint rumbling around her. Her heart thumped loudly in her chest, and with it returned emotions of concern. Where was she? Was this the Galaxy Cauldron? Memories of the past months slowly disappeared, giving way to memories of her time fighting for the Galaxy Cauldron… memories of the past few hours… but while she forgot the exact means, the troubles, the hardships she had faced, the feeling of the forgiveness of her enemies remained engraved in her heart.

Before her a small figure appeared. “I am Guardian Cosmos.” …

And the rest is history. The end.
Mars, 2062

Chapter Summary

Writing Contest Entry for "Reincarnations" Theme

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

2062

Blood pounded against her skull and she took a long, shallow breath, but it was too late - discomfort had set in. Releasing her breath in a gusty, groaning sigh, she flipped over onto her stomach, the picture across from her going right-side-up just as it changed to the next landscape: a beautiful waterfall scene from some unknown lush forest, with beautiful blue skies and puffy white clouds. Wistfully, she scooted back on her bed and put her chin in the palm of her hands, watching dreamily as the water fell over the cliff edge and crashed upon the rocks below. Glimmers of multi-colored light flashed as a bird flitted from tree to leafy tree, and she reached for the remote to turn on the sound, only for her com to blip at her. She frowned, blue eyes on the device and back to the serene image, letting the device sound off for a few moments as she considered just letting it go and pretend she was doing something important, but then she saw the name of the caller flashing at her wrist and extended her arm to grab the earbud and fit it into place, pulling herself onto her knees so she could speak properly.

“Hi Raven!” she greeted cheerfully, lifting her finger over the earbud --

“You forgot, didn’t you?” the deadpan voice accused. She decided not to initiate a video convo. “Forgot? What do you mean?” she laughed nervously, flipping her wrist around to take a look at her watch again, tapping the screen to change functions to calendar and schedule and ‘important notes!’ and finding, in the latter category, pinned with a yellow star, a note that sent her flying off of her bed and towards her closet for her jacket and boots.

“I mean you forgot, rockhead! You’re going to be late – don’t bother coming!”

“Raven!!” she cried, kicking on her last boot as she flung her door open and ran up the stairs to the living pod, past her mother, who looked up from a botany experiment just as the front door slammed shut behind her. “Raven I’m almost there! Hahaha, see I was kidding?” she implored, taking heart that she hadn’t been hung up on yet as she dashed around a corner, past a neighbor with their arms filled with green goods, and down the long corridor, back towards the public spaces.

“Don’t lie to me!” Raven exclaimed, then quieted, her voice a whisper in her ear, “Listen, the doors close in five minutes – I’ve got to go. Don’t be late or I’ll stop covering for you in the morning.” The line went silent just after, so Raven never heard her pitiful whine of a response.

She hated running - she hated the entire experience of running – and yet she was always running! Up a ramp and finally out of the “neighbourhood”, into the wider corridors of the various stores and shopping and a few of the citizen-scientist labs – the performance dome wasn’t that far,
she might actually make it! With a fresh wave of determination, she flew around another corner, her long hair almost sailing out behind her with how sharp she took it, and ran straight into someone. Her nose hit something hard and she and her assailant jolted; hands wrapped around her shoulders in an attempt to stop both of them before they fell over backwards completely, both staggering, fighting for balance. Her wordless exclamation of something-like-“Oh!”-meets-something-like-“Ah!” was drowned by their – er, his – exclamation of “Hey!” but they managed to stop before it was too late.

She disengaged, holding up both hands in a surrendering move as “Sorry!” burst from her lips, but with nose pounding she doubled over, putting her hand to her face to see if it was bleeding, unable to help herself, “What are you doing wearing an EXC indoors anyway?!”

“I – “ he sounded close, and flustered – had he bent over to see if she was okay? That was kinda sweet – “Me?! What are you doing tearing around corners?!” he shot back, much less sweet.

“None of your business!” she snapped at him, pulling back and inspecting her hand. No blood. She straightened, her alarm finally going off on her watch – which meant Raven’s event was starting – and groaned. “I’m late!” she exclaimed, dancing out from in front of him, “Listen, buddy, no blood, no foul!” and kicked off again –

Only to hear heavy footfalls following her. “Listen, Buddy’?!” he called, easily catching her, “’No blood, no foul’?! I didn’t hear an apology in any of that!”

They dashed up a short staircase, heading for the tunnel ahead, “You were the one walking on the wrong side of the hallway!” she returned heatedly, glancing over and immediately regretting it. He was cute. Too cute. Black-hair-and-blue-eyes-perfect-face cute. She immediately looked away, focusing on the path ahead. She would not let her resolve weaken! Her righteous indignation fueled her sprint! The doors were so close!

“You think this is my fault?!” he questioned incredulously, his deep voice lilting up in disbelief towards the end, “You’re running at break-neck speed around corners – what if I had been some poor old lady you knocked over, huh?”

“Then the old lady would’ve been on the wrong side of the hallway!” she insisted, her voice rising. She ignored the port-hole windows in favor of rushing to the entrance, skidding to a stop so she could pull open the large glass doors – to her surprise, he actually helped her – and then squeezed through and ran for the winding staircase. Her lungs burned, her legs ached, all of the weariness coming on at once as she jogged painfully up the stairs, whining as she went; she reached the landing she needed and loped to the door, huffing and puffing painfully towards the closed barrier. She was so close. So close. She leaned up against it and softly pounded, barely able to make her arms move; maybe they’d let her in. Maybe they weren’t as strict as Raven had led her to believe. Maybe –

The door beside her opened slightly and she could have cried with relief. Before they could change their mind she stuck the toe of her boot in the door and offered the girl a tired smile, “Sorry I’m late!” she wheezed. The girl – an usher? – put her finger to her lips and opened the door a little wider to let her in, then pointed to a string of empty seats on the far end near the back. She nodded and dragged herself over, the thought of a chair overpowering any notion of looking for a seat closer to the front or the aisle. With a sigh she settled into the plush audience chair, her eyes closing finally relaxing... until someone took the seat right next to her. She sat up straight, thinking it could be an organizer – or worse, a professor – there to chastise her, but instead it was him. She narrowed her gaze at him, then looked forward, crossing her arms as she slouched in the seat. “You didn’t have to follow me in,” she whispered.
He paid it no attention. “So what is this?” he whispered instead, looking forward curiously, far less winded than she was – which was unfair, but then she had run farther and he looked like he was fresh out of some sort of training program or something that probably had him running for hours. No one else would wear an EXC suit this far in. She looked over again, wondering if it had any dirt still on it, and couldn’t help but notice the strong angle of his jaw, or his straight nose, high cheekbones, long fingers… No! He was definitely annoying and she was not attracted to that!

“Talent show for the summer festival,” she replied anyway, despite herself. He surprised her then by looking over, but while his dark blue eyes looked to her at first, they were continually pulled behind her, through the thick glass between them and the pale-tinted ice-wall that separated them from the Martian landscape. The way his eyes moved, taking it all in, softened the stubborn line of her lips; his actions were so honest, and yet he attempted to cover them, like he wasn’t enthralled by what he saw. It was endearing. Well, almost endearing – she certainly wasn’t falling for it. Putting on her cheekiest expression, she asked, “You’re new, aren’t you?”

He looked guilty, seeming to sink in his seat a little, and she almost regretted the tease. It wasn’t even a tease anyway, right? Just the truth, but he seemed self-conscious about it and it made her feel weird. He took a breath to speak when someone turned around and shh’d them loudly; she blushed, he seemed to bite his tongue, and they both huddled farther into their seats as a younger kid sat down to their cello and began to play. While they didn’t exchange a single word for the remainder of the show, she felt like she had gotten to know him a little, the way his breathing matched the measures of the music, his foot or fingers tapping out the beat to the up-tempo numbers; they both laughed at the same things when a would-be comedian tried out their material – even the less than mature punch-lines that had her in stitches seemed to get him, too.

When Raven came on stage to sing, she was up on her feet cheering her on from the back row, and when she finished and took a bow, she made a point of yelling out, “That’s my friend Raven!! She wrote the lyrics and composed the music!!” loud enough to make Raven bow a second time with the fresh wave of applause (and a bit of laughter at the enthusiasm). The show didn’t have too much longer after that; a few more musical routines, another comedy act – this one wasn’t very good, but she laughed at the jokes to make the performer feel better – a dance routine or two, and finally all performers were brought on the stage to sing an anthem to call it a night. The audience stood and sang along to the old tune; her “friend” stood respectfully, but didn’t sing. As the song ended and everyone applauded again, she made to make her way to find Raven at the front of the auditorium before the rush of people, but found herself almost trapped, the EXC suit guy with those intense blue eyes was staring out the window again, blocking the quicker route down the row to the aisle. She looked over her shoulder and saw what he was staring at – the sunset.

“Different from Earth’s, isn’t it?” she asked quietly as the crowd worked their way out, leaving the two of them isolated, like an island in the sea. She turned to look at it with him, seeing what he saw, but comparing it to the image window back in her room. “The colors are swapped, right? On Earth the sunset is red and orange, instead of blue…” she trailed off; ‘red and orange’ didn’t fit the description at all. Sunsets on Earth were filled with color and light, all pinks and oranges and yellows and reds, with dark purple or light orange clouds, fading out like a rainbow from the light blue sky; what she would give to see one of those in person –

“It’s beautiful,” he said openly, and her reverie broke around those simple, heartfelt words.

She looked at the sunset again, how the butterscotch sky faded to reddish-pink, then then blue around what was left of the sun, almost purple at the horizon today. Utopia Planitia’s red sand looked almost brown, the darker rocks were pockets of darkness spotting the otherwise calm sand-sea; it was pretty, sure, but it was also cold, whereas Earth’s sunset was like the embodiment of
warmth. But then, through the blue glow, she saw two bright stars come shining out of the darkness, and smiled. One was bright yellow, the other deep blue: Earth was out tonight. If they waited for the sun to completely set, they might even be able to see Earth’s Moon. She smiled at the thought, staring at the pale blue dot in space, imagining the planet’s surface, the sights, the sounds, the freedom of being able to walk on ground that didn’t always crunch under your feet, to be surrounded by air that wouldn’t suffocate you, to roam without an environmental suit. While she couldn’t be there, the idea of Earth was sometimes enough. “Yeah, I guess.”

“So I see you made it, Pandora,” a somewhat cocky voice teased. She turned and grinned when she saw Raven standing there, all sophisticated with her long black hair pinned stylishly into place, wearing a red and black performance dress that looked amazing on her – she was about to pose dramatically to accept the veiled praise when Raven’s purple eyes fell on – well, whoever he was – and her brows raised mischievously, “And you brought a date?”

She gasped, her jaw dropping, and immediately stepped away from the EXC-suit guy and exclaimed forcefully, “He is not my date!” barely resisting the urge to point at him when she said it! “He’s far too annoying to be my date!” she continued, feeling a little too uncomfortable with the notion, her heart beating quickly due only to the idea that she could be somehow connected to this guy in a romantic fashion – which would not, could not ever happen!

He snickered, “Your name is Pandora?”

Typical. “See?!” she exclaimed, crossing her arms, “Far too annoying.”

“Whatever you say,” Raven shrugged dismissively, and she knew she wasn’t going to live this down anytime soon. “So, Not-Pandora’s-Date, do you have a name along with that Excursion Suit?” She loved how Raven could be so bold so effortlessly, and come off so cool doing it. Her confidence was practically legendary – she could do anything she put her mind to and make it look easy; she admired her tremendously, even when she was making her life challenging.

“Aurelius Triston,” he replied smoothly, barely ruffling at Raven’s prod. She couldn’t help the eye roll – Aurelius? How pretentious could you --- “Like Pandora is any better?” he stated flatly, calling her on thoughts and making her blush.

She crossed her arms and sniffed, “Conquered any nations recently?”

“Opened any boxes recently?” he quickly rebutted.

“Both of your names are unfortunate, can we move on?” Raven cut in quickly, folding her arms impatiently. Pandora backed down, pouting her lips and looking away from Aurelius – really though? Aurelius? – and nodded. A silent beat passed before Raven asked, “Why are you wearing that, anyway?” motioning, she guessed, to the excursion suit.

“I had just taken my first tour of the colony when I was nearly bowled over by this one; I hadn’t made it back to my quarters yet to change,” he explained, the ‘this one’ designation not lost on her. He apparently didn’t know that the EXC suits were typically stored in lockers near the main airlock.

“He was walking on the wrong side of the—“ she heatedly began in her defense, but Raven waved her off –

“That’s typical of her; listen, have you eaten?” She pouted further at the ‘typical’ part, but the mention of food kept her interest. A quick glance caught him shaking his head no, and Raven
continued on, saying the best sentence: “Want to join us for dinner?” – not that part, the next part – “My name’s Raven and my parents had to go, but they left me their card; I was thinking of going to the Hall of Aries for some Italian.” She loved the Hall of Aries!! It was so much nicer than the cafeteria! They make your food to order instead of going off of the menu schedule – whatever you want, exactly when you wanted it – including desserts! It was usually reserved for birthdays and special occasions but Raven’s father was a bigwig in the colony so of course he could go whenever he wanted! What was she going to order?! Pasta? Oooh, a meatball sub?! Pizza?! Maybe they had breadsticks – oh and dessert! Ice cream or cake?! Ice cream and cake?! There were so many options!! But Aurelius hesitated – newbie mistake – and Raven added, “Think of it as repayment for whatever she just put you through and a welcome to the Colony; I’m sure you’ve got questions that we could answer?”


Raven nodded crisply and led the way, “We’ll stop by your quarters first so you can get out of that suit and freshen up; I know it’s not as comfortable as some would lead you to believe.”

Half a bell later they were being seated at Aries and the menus were delivered and she was pouring over the options as Raven was giving Aurelius a quick history of the base, and if he had heard it before he was being really polite in letting her retell it. Pandora remained quiet, studying her options – not his interested expression – and was trying to decide between a side of rice or a side of macaroni and cheese, but was getting distracted by the little interested noises he was making. Oh-Really-us – just thinking his unusual name gave her a mental mouthful – he needed a nickname if he was going to continue hanging around. Lee, maybe? Lius? Auri? Maybe just his last name – that hadn’t sounded nearly as weird: Triston. Almost normal, really. … but then he was a weirdo and weirdos deserved weird names –

“Can I take your order?” a familiar voice asked, and she jumped but was ready with her answer!

“I’d like the cheesy-fries appetizer with a personal pepperoni pizza and a side of macaroni and cheese!” she declared with a big smile. She ignored Raven’s mixed look of repulsion and embarrassment – the waitress was an upperclassmen of theirs – and EXC-suit-guy’s (he wasn’t wearing his suit anymore, but anything was better than Aurelius until she could pick out a nickname) look of confused curiosity and just waited, sipping on her carbonated beverage – really though, Aries was great! – as they made their much more boring meal choices and the waitress left.

“So, what brings you to Aries Colony?” Raven asked, putting her elbows on the table and lacing her fingers together, resting her chin daintily as she watched him; menus out of hand and the possible mention of Earth coming up, Pandora payed attention, too, though not so obviously: she looked at the murals rather than at him as he responded, but his response did draw her attention back occasionally.

For example, he didn’t answer immediately, which was weird – usually people came right out with ‘I was transferred’ if they were military, or ‘My application was accepted’ if they had actually wanted to come to Mars, like if they were a scientist, but he looked almost uncomfortable with the question… almost like he didn’t know how to answer it, unsure of what to say. “Transfer,” he finally said.

“Military or Scientist?” Raven prompted, poised and cool and confident, but not letting the subject
“Both, I guess,” he replied uneasily.

“What’s your field?” Raven continued; Pandora was getting a little curious at this point, wondering if her wild theories were anything like Raven’s at this point. Maybe he was a spy, or maybe a replacement for somebody who didn’t know they were going to be replaced?

“Physics,” he said easily, “With some astrodynamics and aeronautics thrown in for good measure.”

Both she and Raven nodded absently, “Pilot?”

“Pilot,” he confirmed.

“Here to test the new plane, I presume?” Raven leaned back in her seat, the mystery gone now; one of the colony’s primary experiments was designing a more efficient plane that could transfer not only cargo, but people, between colonies across Mars. They were finishing the first prototype now, and while they had a good number of pilots within the colony, a few more had been periodically trickling in as the project neared completion. He was just one of them – probably the youngest they’ve seen come through yet, but still, just a pilot –

“New plane?” he repeated, and just like that, they were interested again.

“What brought you to Mars, then?” Raven inquired, leaning forward. Pandora often wondered what Raven would choose to do with her future; part of her hoped she either became an investigative journalist or a detective with law enforcement – she’d be so good at it, and then maybe she would be reassigned to Earth and she’d take her best-friend/trusty side-kick with her and let her in on all of the secrets she was finding out while bringing her along on a whirlwind adventure across Earth’s seven continents –

“I was transferred,” he answered, but it… didn’t seem that simple? She couldn’t pinpoint exactly why that struck her as a little off, but maybe how long he took with admitting that earlier versus how easily he admitted it now, or how his shoulders sunk a little, almost like a shrug, or how he wasn’t meeting their eyes but staring down that the complimentary bread – or what was left of it. Sadness tugged at her, looking at him.

“Was it your choice?” she asked quietly; he looked up, like he hadn’t expected her to say anything, and those startling blue eyes caught her for a moment, until he abruptly looked away without a word.

Raven’s voice was low, her body language changed drastically from interested to anything-but, looking at her red nails and brushing the polish absently, “Does it have anything to do with what’s going on on Earth?”

She had no idea what Raven was talking about – what was happening on Earth? Why hadn’t Raven told her something was happening on Earth? Looking from Raven to EXC-Suit so quickly her pigtails hit the back of the plush booth with a thunk, she waited to see what he had to say before demanding answers from Raven, but he kept his mouth shut, looking away uncomfortably.

“It is, isn’t it?” Raven prompted, but he didn’t say anything. She was about to say something when Raven finally got him to talk, asking, “How bad is it?”

At this point Pandora’s head was jumping from one terrible conclusion to the next. Another World
War, maybe, or more of an environmental breakdown that was forcing people who could leave to leave – what if that was what drove the plane project? – more transportation to all the Mars Colonies that were to come because of some catastrophic event on Earth? Could they even support themselves without the fresh supplies from Earth? How long had they been keeping this a secret from everyone? Did Raven know because her dad knew? What other changes were coming? What about planet Earth itself?

“It’s getting bad,” Aurelius replied softly, wrapping his hands around his coffee mug, catching her attention completely. As though he could feel their eyes on him, he eventually continued, “The attacks are becoming more frequent and more hostile all over the globe; their rhetoric is either catching on and spreading, or key people in power have been talked over to their side, or converted, or whatever they call it – either way, one day someone would be standing up against these people and the next they’re all for this change, spewing the same hate-filled stuff as the others. The confirmed monster sightings have increased – there’s a new one every day; sometimes it’s taken down, other times it escapes and pops up elsewhere in another mob of unconscious people. The original reports of the knock-outs being caused by some fast-acting super-virus spread by the creatures is still widely accepted, despite survivors having no such indicator in their blood; it’s saved more people, making them run at the first sight of these things, but still… it’s not enough. It’s like whatever is behind this is growing in power the more damage is caused, the more victims it takes. Local police and military have had some success, but the people doing the most good – the people who were actually responsible for survivors who completely recovered, are in hiding or keeping their identities a secret – it’s a smart move, but it’s hard to contact them because they refuse to take coms on the off-chance their locations could be tracked. I don’t blame them at all for keeping so quiet and off the grid, especially with how often people in power seem to flip-flop on the issues, but if they shared what they were doing, told the right people how they were defeating the enemy so quickly and effectively, this war could be going a very different way.”

As he paused, her mind raced, trying to put together what he said and connect the dots to make a full picture, but what was standing out to her didn’t make sense. Monsters? Crowds of people unconscious without any sort of viral tracer? Was he speaking in some sort of colloquial? Were “Monsters” the new buzz word for terrorists? Were they using a biological weapon, and that was what was knocking people out? The people in power flip-flopping – being ‘converted’ – did that just mean they had been bought? Her heart pounded uncomfortably, squeezing in her chest, her mind processing what he had said even as it remembered that serene scene from her picture window with the birds and the waterfall. Earth was in trouble, but it would survive, right? It had made it through three world wars and an entire era of people not caring about protecting the environment – it could survive this. … but would people be around to admire it afterwards?

She wanted to help – she wanted nothing more than to help, to leave right then, go to Earth, and do something to stop whatever was going on, but what could she do? She was still in secondary school. She wasn’t making the best grades, she wasn’t particularly inclined to science or mathematics – she couldn’t help with figuring out what was going on, except, maybe, in a research assistant position, but there were bound to be thousands of people researching the same thing. What could she do that would actually help?

“I was transferred off planet because some friends in high places learned something and wanted me as far away as possible,” he stated sourly, then took a long drink.

“What did they find?” Raven prompted.

“I don’t know. They were keeping quiet about it, and just as I was catching on that they were hiding something my transfer papers came in.” He put his drink down and sat back in his seat, his hands in
his lap as he looked away, his face in profile to her. His friends must have been trying to look out for him; she liked that he didn’t seem to appreciate it. She glanced to Raven, a frown forming on her lips. She didn’t like it, either.

“What about those other people,” Raven said, ignoring her look if she had even noticed it, “the ones that are actually making a difference – the ones with the survivors that won’t get in contact – who are they? What are they like? Who do they stand for?”

He shrugged again, almost dismissively, like talking about this was disheartening enough for him. “It’s strange – they’re strange. They wear costumes, like super heroes from old comic books, and while they have never been directly filmed doing so, some survivors from incidents they were involved in say they can use magic. My guess is they’ve created some insane technology they should be sharing with others, but then again if it got into the wrong hands it’d be chaos.” He paused, and in a small movement, shook his head. “They call themselves “Sailor Guardians” and claim to fight for “Love and Justice.” In one account they vowed to protect the Earth; so far they’ve been doing that, I guess, but the other side is just wiping the floor with them with the sheer volume of independent attacks.”

“Sailor Guardians,” Raven repeated quietly, rolling the title around in her mouth.

_Sailor Guardians._ Magic, costumes, fighting this uprising without help… maybe that’s what she could do on Earth – maybe she and Raven could go there and figure out who these people are, and try to convince them to share what they knew. EXC-Suit didn’t seem to enjoy his situation – maybe he could pilot them back there covertly. Maybe they could make a difference.

Maybe they could save Earth.

Their waitress returned with their food, breaking the tense atmosphere and forcing conversation back to less-clandestine topics, but she wouldn’t forget.

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My name is Pandora Arcene, your average teenage girl. I was born on the Lunar Station of Mare Serenitatis on Earth’s Moon, but have lived here, in Aries Colony of the Utopia Planitia on Mars, my entire life. I go to school with Raven and other colonist kids, studying science and math, primarily. My father is a geologist and my mother is a botanist, but my dream is to return to Earth and see the world, or what’s left of it.

The day Raven and I met Aurelius was the first day of the rest of our lives; after that, _everything_ changed. We soon came to find that the troubles on Earth had, for some reason, followed him to Mars, and we learned that the only way to stop it was for us to go to Earth and nip the problem in the bud. As it turned out, if we didn’t, no one else could, because we had been granted strange powers and abilities that could transform us into Sailor Guardians and the three other Guardians on Earth needed our help to defeat the Dark Kingdom threat.

It’s going to be hard. Fighting is not something I really look forward to, but it’s something I have to do. We need to work together to protect our Earth.
Chapter End Notes

... I may continue this someday.
Icarus

Chapter Summary

Writing contest entry for "Fun in the Sun" theme!

Mood music: https://youtu.be/FehA9OwZflw Icarus by Bastille ((I may or may not have listened to this song like 30 times when writing this, and then proceeded to listen to their whole album to write chapters 8, 9, and 10 of ck2))

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The battle spread out beneath him, an army as far as the eye could see, writhing and raging, pushing forward through the darkness, lunging closer by leaps and bounds towards the precipice upon which he perched. Twisted faces screamed and groaned their cries of challenge as they scrambled to meet him, to tear him limb from limb, to rip him to shreds for being the forward scout. Heart hammering in his chest, their cries reverberating through him like hundreds of hammers striking hundreds of gongs, he pressed himself to kept control of his breathing, waiting until they reached the exact line in the black, rocky surface - and then stood proud against them. He quickly pressed his horn to his lips and blew, the pure tone cutting through the air above the guttural cries like a laser light cutting through the dark and then, on queue, the first rays of dawn crested the horizon behind him.

Warm light flooded the barren scape behind him - he could see it reflecting off their shining eyes and matte-black bodies as they renewed their screams in rage, climbing up his cliff to seek revenge before the true battle again, but he was prepared for that. Slipping his goggles into place and dropping the trumpet to hang on the string against his shoulders, he took in a deep breath, ran, and jumped from the ledge, spreading his arms wide. As he left the ground beneath his feet and fell towards the writhing horde beneath him, a shiver traveled from his shoulders to the small of his back as the tattoo of wings shimmered in gold and then freed itself from his body, becoming appendages as real as his own arms and legs, twitching once in the sudden freedom from his skin. His mouth a grim line of determination, he locked his wings in place and glided down to gain speed, then angled up, staying just out of reach of their cruel claws. He tilted, turning a tight circle to head back towards the cliff face, soaring above it to bask in the glow of the brilliant sunrise. Peace overtook him and he smiled, relaxing as he coasted back towards the source of that sunlight - the source of all light in his life:

Sol Apollo.

The young ruler rode forth to meet him, his sun-kissed skin glowing in the light of the dawn he brought with him, his Stars riding their own steeds at his side; the sight was enough to bring tears to the eyes of poets, to stop mortals in their steps for sheer awe of the heavenly sight, and yet the guardians themselves never seemed to notice or give it any mind as they raced forward to fight the forces of the Night and bring peace to their budding Star System.
Venus was brightest among them, the long blonde hair whipping out behind her nearly as bright as her eyes and the grin of challenge as she rode into battle, her whip held at the ready, sunlight setting afire her tresses and making the golden laurel wreath upon her brow glow. Mars, beside her, looked on dispassionately as her steed raced forward, her own hair dark as night, the golden laurel the only shining thing about her other than the tip of her arrow, alight with literal fire as she aimed and loosed a shot into the horde of creatures behind him. Mercury rode on his other side, bright blue eyes searching the line with determination, her fingers racing along the strings of her lyre nearly as quickly as the thrumming beat of their horses’ hooves across the carbon rock beneath their pounding feet.

The last of them - Jupiter - urged her horse forward, sparks of electricity arcing along her crown until she pointed a graceful finger and lightning shot away from her to crash into the enemy’s flank.

These were the guardians of this new Solar System, the senshi that would win it for the Light and allow life to flourish within its borders, led by their King, the guardian of the life-giving Star itself, the very man who looked up at him now with those golden eyes and gave him a cocky smile. “Icarus!” he called, and the white-winged scout dove to meet him, as able to resist the call as rocks were able to resist the pull of gravity. Sol Apollo reached up and Icarus reached down, his heart racing for more than just the adrenaline of the upcoming standoff as his hero gripped his forearm and pulled him down to ride behind him on his white steed. As his wings disappeared in another ripple of sensation across his back, he wound one arm around golden-clad torso of the would-be King and raised the horn to his lips with the other and blew once more, the brassy command joined by the whooping call of the Guardian of the Sun as he braced before him, leaning low over the equine creature with his long spear pointed forward. Icarus braced as they crashed into enemy lines with the sun at their backs, tearing through forces as easily as parting waves.

On his left Venus stood upon her steed and whipped her chain around her, the steel slicing through anything it touched, the wound burning with light even as the creatures fell. Mars’s arrows flew into enemies both far and near, the arrows sinking into the ground far into the distance exploding in an inferno as the Guardian of War picked her next target. The music Mercury played emboldened him in a way that his horn could never hope to imagine, and somehow her cold words were heard easily above the din as she pointed out weaknesses in their defensive lines - weaknesses Jupiter immediately sought to take advantage of, grinning madly as lightning sprung from her fingers to turn the creatures back to black dust.

When the first creature survived their leading line Icarus turned back, only for a second, to see the warriors made of golden sunlight quickly engage them, following their creator’s whims as surely as the beings of darkness were driven by their own orders.

How lucky was he to be chosen to be here? To serve any part in this war to claim the territories hitherto left to chaos was an honor, but to be chosen to serve them directly? To be given wings and the ability to call them forth, to ride with them into battle, to witness their acts from a position directly behind him… behind Apollo…
As though able to read his very thoughts, the tall rider turned back, the shining sun-pointed earcuff sparkling in the light of the risen sun behind them, his golden eye-make-up somehow still perfect against his dusky skin despite the battle raging around him. He smiled, at him, and Icarus’s heart seemed to stop. “Isn’t this fun?” he asked, and Icarus could not answer, his tongue somewhere between swallowed and paralyzed. Sol Apollo laughed, and it was like colors came back into the world, his head growing lighter to the point that he wondered if he was breathing. Apollo twisted and ruffled Icarus’s white hair with a golden-cuffed hand, his spear balanced on the back of the horse’s neck as he joyously proclaimed, “Don’t worry, Icarus, we’ll make a Helios of you yet.”

‘If it was for him,’ Icarus thought, his breath and heartbeat returning as the king turned back around and Venus’s blue gaze met with his to deliver a knowing wink that made him blush. He held tighter to the man in front of him - as tight as he dared - and swallowed, knowing, if nothing else, that this was true. ‘If it was for him, I would be Helios for eternity.’

Chapter End Notes

_. am i tempted to continue to write about how Sol Apollo and the original Solar System Senshi fought the primordial darkness in the dust surrounding the proto solar system, pressing it back farther and farther in this first Sailor War to touch our little piece of the galaxy? Am I tempted to continue to the point that Icarus becomes the Helios that we know, binding himself as the first guardian of Earth, a planet otherwise protected by Sol Apollo itself for being the only one that could possibly sustain life and thus the Star of the system's top priority?

Yes. yes I am.

Would there be a huge potentially unrequited hero worshipping crush that would be the focus of all of ittt?

yes. you know it would be. I know it would be. I'd go there. He'd have several millennia to mourn and learn to love again by the time he meets Lady Serenity.

Do i realize that I'd probably do better to consider just another one or two one-shots for the story at different points in the supposed timeline as opposed to writing yet another multi-chapter fic as I know I am not good at finishing them with my limited time scale?

_. yes. i do.

ANYWAY I HOPE YOU LIKE "ICARUS"

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!