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**Another Dream**

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Issue  
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**Western Touhou Project Fanbook**

**Literary Works**

*Erroneous Paraisaical Inception Chapter 2*

*Strawberry Crisis*

*Imperishable Memories of the Heart Part 2*

*Alice*

*Twilight of Perpetual Servitude*

*What Winter Consumed*

*Kirisame's Death Rocket*

*Electrified Vengeance! The Palace of Flying Rainbow*

*Outlandish Blooming Rapport*

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*Authors do their best now and are preparing. Please read warmly until it is ready.  
Touhou fanfiction cluster has invaded interwebs! This is unprecedented serious affair.*

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Welcome back! You're reading the second release of Dream [A], the literary half of the Another Dream Western Touhou doujin circle. This issue is released roughly six months after its predecessor, which is still available for download at <http://www.usuallydead.com/ad5a.zip>. Go download and read, if you haven't already!

We have some returning authors from our prior release, and some new authors. All of us, regardless if new or returning, are dedicated to dispelling a misconception. When it comes to doujin-style independent media, too often do people think that fanfiction authors write their stories because they have no drawing talent. They believe that we craft words on the page, rather than shapes and textures, because we couldn't draw a believable stick figure even if commissioned enough money to quit our day jobs and retire.

While is this definitely true of some fanfiction authors, it doesn't hold for all. The written word is a format no less powerful for storytelling than drawn pictures, like those that appear in doujinshi and comic books. Words and pictures have different strengths and weaknesses, but one is no better than the other, and it takes a creator truly talented in either one to tell a story.

To that end, we authors have collaborated in this issue of Another Dream's literary release to bring you our best efforts at Touhou-related storytelling. We begin with the second chapter of my own *Erroneous Paradisaical Inception*, a story written exclusively for Another Dream. We continue with *Strawberry Crisis*, a short by Western Touhou fanfiction veteran Mima.

Storytelling takes a darker turn with Part Two of Nameless Bunny's *Imperishable Memories of the Heart*, and stays in darkness with Kilgamayan's *Twilight of Perpetual Servitude* and two anonymously-written shorts, *Alice* and *What Winter Consumed*.

Finally, we lighten up with *Kirisame's Death Rocket* by KawashiroNitori, *Electrified Vengeance! The Palace of Flying Rainbows* by Odda C., and end with a second story by Kilgamayan, *Outlandish Blooming Rapport*.

We also include a new feature in this issue. The .PDF file you're now reading comes with bookmarks, linking the title page of every story. Use the bookmark function in your .PDF reader, and jump from story to story however you wish. Read one entry, skip the next, come back to it later, read the last story, or the second before it. The choice is yours, as is our powers of authorship. We hope you enjoy the results of our work.

~Usually Dead



*Erroneous Paradisaical Inception*

東方序巫逆

Chapter 2

Story by Usually Dead

Illustration by FantaisieNocturne

Only my god's presence kept me from panic. If not for Kanako holding me, sharing her warmth against the cold mountain air, I would have panicked.

"Gen..." I said, trying to sound out the name. "Gensokuh—"

"Gensokyo," said Kanako. She pointed up to the horizon, along the crystalline wall standing over the mountains spanning the valley. "That must be the Boundary. A magical barrier that contains this land so completely, this valley can't be found from the outside world. It doesn't even take up any space. We're in a sealed pocket of existence."

My arms were wrapped tight around Kanako. I held on to her, rested my head against her shoulder, felt her breasts under her blouse. I hugged her tight, as if the wind would blow me away without an anchor.

"So... how?" I said. "How did we get here?"

Kanako shook her head. "I'm not entirely sure. I know how we can find out." She looked at me. "But you must be freezing out here. Let's go inside and get you some warmer clothes. Quickly, too. We don't have time to talk about this, but we must talk anyway."

She turned me around, pulled me back towards the house. I didn't resist her. I was cold. Above all the shock and confusion, I felt cold.

"My parents," I said as we crossed the courtyard. "Mom and Dad. Where are they?"

"They didn't come with us," said Kanako. "They were left behind when the transition happened. It must have been a rude awakening. Having your bed vanish out from under you in the middle of the night. Waking up and seeing your whole house has disappeared, and taken your daughter and god with it."

"They must be so worried," I said. "We have to go back!"

"Believe me, Sanae. If I knew how, we wouldn't still be here. Come, now. Waste no time."

We stepped up onto the porch. Kanako opened the door and herded me inside. It wasn't as warm as a home should be, but four walls and a roof broke the wind.

"We lost the utilities when we came here," said Kanako, staying on the porch as I went in. "The *kotatsu's* heater is electric, but I can warm it up. Go get in your street clothes." She gave me a soft shove in the back. "Hurry."

"Okay." I happily did as she said, given how little I understood the situation. I went back to my bedroom and looked for a better outfit. My school uniform hung on the closet door, but I rejected that idea. No need to suffer with a skirt and leg-warmers. I wasn't going to school today. A small blessing, but not worth losing my home.

I got dressed in a pair of jeans, the loose-fitting pair that didn't show off my butt. I slipped my feet into athletic socks and sneakers, and put on a long-sleeved blouse. I got a hair-tie and did my newly-green hair into a ponytail.

"Sanae!" Kanako called from the front room. "How long does it take to get dressed?"

"I'm coming!" I called. Though if I still spoke Japanese, it might have been, *Hai, hai!*

I went back to the front room, eager to get under the *kotatsu*. It felt strange wearing my shoes indoors, but my feet were warm. Kanako sat at the table, the quilt pulled up around her legs. Her rope ring and paper streamers were gone. I had expected this room to be cold like the rest of the house, but hot dry air billowed at my face. I blinked, and my eyes watered.

"Whoa!" I said, slapping a hand over my eyes. "Turn it down a bit!"

Kanako smiled. "I haven't had the chance to do this since the power went out, that one winter a few years back. And it's easier than I thought it would be. Usually I'd have to work at it, since I'm so out of practice. But magic is plentiful here."

As she spoke, I sat at the *kotatsu*. I pulled the blanket up around myself, and felt Kanako's heat rise up under my blouse. Sweet warmth.

"Magic?" I said. "I thought only you could do stuff like that."

"In the outside world, yes," said Kanako. "Only a god-level being can gather and work the powers

that appear as magic. But here, things are different.” She glanced down at the tabletop, looking dismayed. Then she looked up, and met my eyes. “Why didn’t you sit next to me?”

“Huh?” I said. “I don’t know. We’ve always sat across from each other.”

Kanako stood. “Scoot over.”

More heat billowed off her, making the room feel like a furnace. She stepped around the table, reducing her heat output so that she didn’t burn me. I slid aside so she had room to sit next to me.

“We need to talk,” she said, her head turned aside to face me. “About serious things. About things you’re not going to believe, but you must believe if we’re to survive. Do you understand? Will you listen to me?”

“Yes,” I said, and I nodded. The situation was grave, I knew. Kanako was my god, and had lived countless years longer than me. I needed her experience and power to cope. I would pay attention.

“Good,” said Kanako. “Not only are we far from home with no known way of return, but time works against us. Every second we spend chatting, the culprit moves farther away.”

“Culprit?” I said. “Who? Someone did this to us?”

She reached forward, took my hand in hers and squeezed.

“First, tell me something. I assume your strongest desire at the moment is to return to outside Japan. Am I right?”

“Of course!” I said. “How can you even ask?”

“How indeed? But we’ll never get back without knowing how we got here. And, like I said, I don’t know what happened. But I know a lead we can follow.”

“Tell me. And don’t squeeze so hard.”

Kanako loosened her hold on my hand. I pulled my hand out of hers. What was that about? Was she giving me some passive-aggressive punishment for something?

“We were attacked last night,” she said. “Just before we transitioned into Gensokyo, a powerful being came to the shrine. I couldn’t tell who or why. It moved too quickly. I barely awoke in time to leverage any power against it. I wasn’t fast enough. I only kept the shrine outbuildings and your parents in outside Japan.”

“Why them?” I said. “Were you defending them above me? Above yourself?”

“No. It was a reaction, not a conscious choice. I felt something hostile come to the shrine. I forced my will out against it, but I pushed outward. It countered the attacker only for the people and matter furthest from me, your parents and the rest of the shrine. By the time I drew my power back in, it was too late.”

“Too late against what?” I said. “What attacked us?”

“I don’t know. Something powerful. Perhaps another god.”

“But how could that matter? This is *your* shrine.”

“You’re right. That worries me. Anything strong enough to match a god at her own place of power...” Her voice faded.

I shivered. I knew now why Kanako insisted on sitting beside me, for comfort. Beyond the mundane world of ordinary people, cars, trains, money and cell phones, mystical forces lurk in the shadows. For me, this is nothing extraordinary. I grew up with a god living in my house. But it scared me to think something *bigger* than Kanako might threaten us.

“So,” I said. “What do we do?”

“We find who did this to us,” said Kanako. “The attacker must have come along when we transitioned to Gensokyo. The spell was too powerful at point-blank range. It’s like stirring up a whirlpool when you’re in the water yourself. You get sucked down along with everyone else.”

“How do you know it got carried with us?”

“I saw it. Early this morning, before the sun came up, while you were still asleep. I was scouting around the house, checking the grounds, making sure we weren’t in any immediate danger. I saw something hiding behind the house. I went for a closer look, but it darted away before I got near. It

moved fast, and was gone from the shrine before I could catch it. But I caught a glimpse before it was out of sight.”

“What did it look like?” I said.

“A human child,” she said.

I felt my brow scrunch up. “Human? Really? Boy or girl?”

“I couldn’t tell. It was dark, and human children look androgynous. Especially with their backs turned to you, running away. Strangely enough, the kid looked like he was running on all fours.”

“Was it an actual human?”

“Probably not. I think he’s like me, a god in mortal form. That explains why he was the only other one here, after the shrine popped into Gensokyo. And why he ran when I found him.”

“Where did he go?”

“Towards the river you saw outside. That tells us where he was headed. There’s no more mountain to climb, and the terrain in either direction is too steep. He must have jumped in the river and let it carry him downstream. Best way to get away from me in a hurry. He couldn’t have known that I can’t leave the shrine.”

“But the river must be freezing,” I said. “It would kill anyone who jumped into it.”

“Any *human*. But if the kid is a god, extreme temperature won’t matter much.”

“Unless you’re wrong, and it wasn’t a god.”

“And why would a human kid be up in the mountains, all alone, before dawn, at just the same time our shrine popped into existence? That’s more than coincidence, Sanae.”

She was right. I made a *hmmph* sound, thinking.

“So you think he’s the god who attacked us last night? The one who kicked us into Gensuh—*Gensohh*—”

“Gensokyo,” said Kanako. “The transition knocked your pronunciation off, didn’t it? I’m surprised you can still say my name. But yes. And if I’m right, that god-kid is our way home.”

“But how do we find him?”

“*We* don’t, mortal girl. I’m stuck here, remember? But you aren’t bound to a location like I am.”

I shook my head. “I don’t want to leave. This place could be dangerous.”

“I’m sure it is. Gensokyo is a sealed land, so there’s magic flying all over. Not to mention all the nasty things you get along with magic. Flesh-eating fairies. *Youkai* and *oni* and *tengu*, oh my.”

I didn’t know the creatures she named, but none of them sounded friendly. I stabbed a finger into her shoulder. I couldn’t hurt her, but I wanted to show some anger.

“And you want to send me *out there*?” I said.

“Don’t worry!” she said. “I’ll protect you. I needn’t be physically there to guard you. Gods have done that for a long time, imparting power to faithful humans. A god can share herself with you by lending you an enchanted item. A *talisman*.”

That word I recognized. Probably because it came from somewhere in Europe, along with the rest of English.

“What kind of talisman?” I said.

“I’ll show you. Hold still.”

She put her hand to my head, stroked my hair. I wanted to shy away, but I didn’t. It’s embarrassing to admit, but it feels nice to be touched.

“I like your new hair,” she said. “The old black was boring. After seeing so many *anime* girls, I’ve wondered how you’d look with green hair.”

“Well, you got your wish,” I said. “Now I’m freak-colored like you.”

Kanako scowled. Her hand paused on the back of my head, just above my ponytail. “Now, now. Don’t be negative. Especially not when a god deigns to bestow her power upon you.” Then she yanked her hand down, clawing one finger into my hair. Her fingernail caught on my hair-tie, snapped it clean free of my hair. The tie broke, but felt ready to tear half my scalp off.

“Ow!” I yelled, clapping a hand on the back of my head. I clamped one eye shut and glared at Kanako with the other. “That hurt!”

She covered her mouth with one hand, chagrined. “Goodness, sorry. That was rougher than I meant. But I needed this.” She held up her other hand, the broken hair-tie hanging off her index finger. “Watch closely. A miracle proceeds.”

I was about to share the miracle of one sneakered foot rammed into a god’s groin at mach-Sanae speeds. What I saw then made me forget the pain. The hair-tie, hanging off Kanako’s outstretched finger, was *changing*.

It grew longer, lengthened like a strand of hair growing on a time-elapsed video. It thickened, became the same girth as a pencil. Its thickness varied down its length. It bulged at one end, tapered thinner, bulged again in the middle, and finally narrowed to a point. It changed color and texture. It became green, dotted through with dark spots, shiny in the thready morning light. It looped on itself, but still hung under its own weight, coiling like a loose spring.

“A *snake*?” I said.

In a few seconds, the transformation finished. My hair-tie had become a small toy snake. It looked to be made of plastic or glossed wood. Its eyes were black oilspots on either side of its head.

“A serpent,” she said. “Look closely.”

She held it out to me. I leaned forward. I extended a finger to it, meant to touch its head and feel its skin. I didn’t quite touch it, but it moved. Its head shifted to the side, fixing one eye on me, and its tongue flicked out. A cold bit of forked flesh flicked on the pad of my finger.

I screeched, the same noise any girl would make upon unexpected contact with a reptile. I scooted away. I wrapped my arms around myself, scraped my finger on my blouse sleeve, trying to get off the icky feeling. I let out another noise, *eeeewww*! But Kanako’s laughter drowned it out.

“Gross!” I shouted.

“Be at ease, mortal girl!” said Kanako, one hand on her belly. Her face was flushed red with mirth. “This serpent is me. Or—” She took a deep breath, getting control of herself. “Or more, a material extension of my persona. If you wear it, you’ll carry part of me with you. I’ll be able to protect you, even if you leave the shrine. And you’ll have use of magic.”

“Magic?” I said, still leaning back from her. “Like you? Like a wizard?”

“Not quite. More a *magi*, technically speaking.” She scooted closer to me. “But who cares what it’s called? Let’s make you a *mahou shoujo*.”

I wanted to escape, get away from that snake-thing. But I had no where to run, unless I wanted to get out from under the warm *kotatsu*.

Kanako took a lock of my hair. Starting with the tail, coiling down to the head, she tied the snake into a braid hanging beside my left cheek. The talisman didn’t move again, didn’t flick its tongue out. But it was only a matter of time, I figured. The stupid thing would startle me for the best possible comic effect.

“I don’t like this,” I said, holding my hand near the snake. I didn’t want to touch it, but I would smack it if any more snakey pranks happened.

Kanako leaned back, folded her arms under her breasts. She sat still and admired her handiwork.

“Don’t turn your nose up at a god’s gift,” she said. “It’s good on you, makes you look edgy. And don’t worry. You’ll come to like it, especially when you see what it does.” She stood, smoothing her hands over her dress. “Come on now. We’ve spent too long talking. It’s time for you to chase a god.”

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Kanako shooed me out the door. I had just enough time to grab my jacket off the hook before she pushed me onto the doorstep.

“I said, I don’t want to go!” I shouted behind me. “You can’t make me chase anybody, gods or

whatever!”

Kanako left me on the doorstep for a moment. She went back into the house.

“Stay there for a second,” she said. “I need to get something.”

I stayed, but under duress. While on the shrine grounds, Kanako’s will is law. I had no strength to oppose her. But her power failed outside the shrine, since she was bound to the place. She could kick me off the lot, but she could force me no farther.

Kanako came back, carrying two things. One was my school bag, and she hefted it with some weight. Another was a long wooden dowel, threaded with a rectangle of rune-covered paper on one end. This was my ceremonial staff, used for a shrine maiden’s purification work.

“Here,” Kanako shoved the bag in my hands. “I stocked some supplies for your trip. A water bottle and some food, change of socks and underwear. I dumped your school books. You won’t need them.”

I took the bag, slung it over my shoulder. Not because I wanted to leave. The bag felt comfortable and familiar over my shoulder. A piece of the real world.

“What are you doing with my...” And the word wouldn’t come to me. I pointed to the wooden stick Kanako carried.

“*Gohei*,” said Kanako.

“*Go-hay?*” I said. “That’s what it’s called?”

“That’s what *you* called it, up to yesterday. You’ve only ever used it for your *miko* duties, but it has more importance here. Symbology is its own type of magic, and has literal power in a place like Gensokyo.” She pushed the *gohei* into my hands, then grabbed my shoulders and turned me around. “Out into the courtyard. There’s something you need to see.”



She pushed me down off the porch, onto the cobblestones. I leaned back into her, making her work to shove me along.

“I don’t want to do this,” I said. “I really don’t want to do any of this.”

“Be quiet, mortal girl. Obey your god. You’ll thank me for it.”

Only obedience to her kept me from protesting more. She pushed me into the center of the courtyard. The sun had risen slightly higher since I'd been out here in my pajamas. Our shadows were shorter.

Kanako pressed her hands down firmly on my shoulders, planting me in the heart of the courtyard.

"Stand here," she said, and took ten steps back from me. There she stood, folded her arms.

"What are we doing?" I said, looking back at her.

"Showing your new power," she said. "The serpent talisman channels my energy, but you'll still need a *foci* to use it, or you'll burn yourself up."

"*Foci*?" I said.

She nodded to the wooden stick in my hands. "Your *gohei*. I've enchanted it with a magical instruction set, so you can cast two basic spells. I don't want you fighting any wars, but it should be enough to protect you against Gensokyo's wild creatures."

"I'm not into magic," I said. "We always thought the fantasy club at school was a bunch of losers."

"Not every soldier is interested in guns, until his life depends on them. And besides, this isn't fantasy. You need the magic to protect yourself. Before firing any spell, you need to *declare*, which will organize the energies around you into the forms needed for spellcasting. Hold your *gohei* in your right hand and point it up."

I sighed. "This is going to make me look stupid."

"Just do it."

I took my *gohei* in my right hand, and held its paper-tipped end up to the sky. I felt like I was holding up a banner printed with *SANAE IS A DORK* in big purple letters.

"Now," said Kanako, "you'll have to say your declaration key. Shout the word *esoterica*."

"Eso-what?" I said. "What does that mean?"

"Just do it, Sanae!"

I pushed out an angry breath. Then I closed my eyes, inhaled through my nose, and shouted the word.

"*Esoterica!*"

My voice echoed around the mountain peaks, resonating through the morning. I expected my voice to die, each echo growing weaker until it faded below hearing. The opposite happened. The echo grew stronger with each bounce, until my own voice roared *TERICA-TERICA-TERICA* in my ears. The noise grew and grew, until the cobblestones beneath me rumbled.

The sunlight seemed less bright, as if someone had tweaked the morning's dimmer switch. New light shot up from my feet, tinting my clothes spearmint green. A circle of emerald and white glowed on the ground around me, about seven feet wide. Loose, fuzzy lines ran from my feet to the circle's edge in the shape of a five-pointed star. As soon as I noticed this shape, the lines lost all definition and became a blur.

More than the light and sound, I *felt* power inside me. Raw energy, standing all my hairs on end and pricking my skin into gooseflesh. My whole body buzzed as if I were a big cell phone someone had left on vibrate.

"Oooh *crap!*" I yelled. "Kanako!"

She still stood away from me. She held both hands around her mouth and shouted.

"Point the *gohei* forward and yell *Yasaka Wind!*"

I did as she said. I leveled the stick out in front of me, parallel to the cobblestones.

"*Yasaka Wind!*"

The energy within me all rushed to a point. The buzzing feeling drained from my head and shoulders, crept up through my legs and belly, accumulated in my right arm. From there, it slammed into the *gohei* and out its tip. A long spear of wild green lightning spat out. It cracked a thunderclap across the courtyard, making my ears ring. The bolt forked out and downward. It hit the cobblestones some twenty feet away. Stones and dirt went flying, as if someone had tripped a landmine. I turned away, covering my face with my arm. Bits of dirt and gravel pelted me.

The energy faded. The sunlight brightened to its normal self. The sound died away, but my ears still rang. I twitched my nose against the scent of ozone.

“That...,” said Kanako. “That was more than I expected.”

I turned my head back around, looking upon the destruction. A long gash had been cut in the ground. Cobblestones were churned up and crushed, exposing the dark earth beneath. The sight of it hit me hard. With the spell’s energy gone, I felt weak and trembly. My legs couldn’t hold me up. My knees buckled, and I fell on my butt. My *gohei* clattered to the ground beside me.

“This isn’t real,” I said, and realized I was trying to catch my breath. “That didn’t just happen.”

Kanako stepped up beside me. She put her hands under my arms, lifted me back up to my feet. I would have fallen again, if not for her to lean on.

“Pull yourself together, mortal girl,” she said. “That’s hardly the most incredible thing you’ll see in Gensokyo.”

“No,” I said. “I didn’t just.... This isn’t an *anime*. This isn’t a movie. I can’t shoot lightning from my fingers like that emperor from—”

“Not yet, you can’t,” said Kanako. “You still need the *gohei*. But don’t resist the truth. It’ll kill you if you do.”

She let me go. I stayed standing, despite my legs feeling far removed from the work of holding me up. Kanako walked over to the hole in the courtyard. She stepped around the rent of earth, appraising the damage I’d done.

“Very good,” I said. “All but the toughest of baddies couldn’t shrug off a strike like that. You’re talented. If we have time to train you later, you could become a highly competent magician.”

“No I couldn’t,” I said. “Because we’re going home.”

Kanako said nothing. She bent down and picked up a cobblestone, knocked loose from the spell. She hefted the stone in one hand.

“Your other spell is defensive,” she said. “Declare again, and I’ll show you.”

“Kanako,” I said. “Please don’t make me do this. I’m just a normal girl. I don’t want to be a wizard in some fantasy world where strange monsters try to eat me.”

“What you *want* and what *is* are two different things,” she said.

“But I don’t—”

“No *buts!*” She cut me off, using her authoritative tone of voice. The tone she had used since I was a young child. The tone that kept me from hurting myself or my family, no matter how badly a kid wants to do stupid things. Eat your vegetables. Don’t stick coins into electrical sockets. Don’t walk out in the street without looking both ways. Always tell your three parents you love them before bed.

That tone was the voice of power from my childhood. It silenced me.

“The longer you stand there complaining, the smaller our chances of ever getting home!” she said. “I don’t like this any better than you. Do you think I want to send you out into the unknown dangers of this land? What choice do I have?” She stabbed her finger up to the house. “Should we stay here and cower until we run out of food and die of hunger? We must act, Sanae! And if you don’t declare another spell,” she lifted up the stone, ready to throw, “I’ll knock the stubbornness right out of you.”

“Y- you won’t hurt me!” I said, but I stammered.

“Not if you use the spell! *Esoterica!*”

I grit my teeth, stabbed my *gohei* back up to the sky. The child in me was angry. Tears burned at my eyes.

“*Esoterica!*” I said, with all the grace of a girl slamming her bedroom door on family fight night.

Kanako heaved the stone back. “*Yasaka Rain!*”

She threw, giving me no further time to argue. It was either cast the spell, hope it protected me, or get hit with a flying hunk of rock. The stone tumbled through the air, arching into a collision course with my abdomen.

“*Yasaka Rain!*” I yelled. The pattern repeated, but more quickly this time. Booming echoes, lighted

circle around my feet, trembling power within me. White-green puffs of clumpy mist formed around me. A fog enclosed me, each droplet particle catching light from the circle on the ground. I had a split second to admire the visual effect, and the stone hit.

Except that it didn't hit. Entering the fog, the cobblestone *slowed*. Its movement, even its flying tumble, came to a standstill. The kinetic energy rippled through each particle in the spell's mist, like waves rippling when a drop of water hits a pond's surface.

"That spell is a diffuser," said Kanako. "It spreads out both physical and magical energies, and so will protect you from most dangers. If you think to use it, that is."

"But what if I don't?" I said. "What if something sneaks up on me?"

"Nothing will. Magic is fairly obvious. Usually, an attacker casting a spell will make himself known."

"Usually?"

"Yes. Like this." She held up her right hand, making a gun shape with her thumb and two fingers.

"Spell declaration: *some spell name!*"

Another *crack* noise split through the courtyard. A forked bolt of red lightning spat from her fingertips and zigged across the distance between us. The spell slammed into the fog around me. It disrupted this energy as well, spreading the lightning all around in hundreds of little red tendrils.

The cobblestone was still suspended in the fog like a berry in dessert gelatin. Some of the lightning touched it, played over its surface. The lightning gripped around the stone and crushed it, splintering bits of rock and dust that slid down the mist in a slow cascade.

I stood there, watching the magical lightning disintegrate the rock. My mouth hung open. It was more than my mundane mind could accept. Stuff like this didn't happen off the TV screen.

"Sanae," said Kanako, stepping up to me. "You can release the spell."

I felt a ache in my right arm. I looked up, and noticed I was still held my *gohei*. I let my arm fall to my side. The spell around me vanished. The green light faded. The cobblestone's remnants crumbled to the ground in a patter of dust and gravel. My arm throbbed as blood flowed back into it.

"Kanako," I said, putting on my best pouting face. Going for the guilt. "Please don't make me go."

"I like it less than you do." She stepped up close, put a hand on my head and stroked my hair. "But have faith in me, mortal girl." She fingered the serpent talisman tied into my braid. "My power will go with you. I'll watch every step of the way, and leverage all my power to bring you back."

I looked up at her, meeting my eyes with hers.

"You promise?"

She pulled me into a hug, resting my head on her bosom. I hugged her back. Half out of genuine affection, half out of a resisted urge to whack her butt with my *gohei*.

"I promise," she said. "You're mine, after all. But you have to go now." She pushed me back, but kept her hands on my shoulders. "Go find the god who forced us here."

"And then what?" I said.

Even as I asked, she turned and pulled me along to the courtyard's edge. Ready to cast me outside the shrine, and outside her place of power.

"Then you call it forth," she said. "Challenge it, in the name of your god, to make itself known. Then it will reveal itself. Gods are bound by honor for such. After that..." She shook her head. "I don't know. I'll do everything I can from a distance, but it will be dangerous. Even that danger is better than sitting here, waiting for death."

We came to the courtyard's edge. Kanako had a hand on my back.

"Take the step," she said. "Don't look back. Walk, and keep walking."

I took a deep breath. I hefted my pack on my shoulder, kept a firm grip on my *gohei*.

"Okay," I said. "I'll go."

I put my foot forward, and stepped off my home.

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I did as Kanako said. I walked, and I didn't look back. I felt her gaze on my back, both urging me along and grudging my departure. Neither of us liked this, but there was nothing else to do. The young-looking god was our only lead. Kanako can't leave the shrine. Either I hunted the god down, or we sat and starved together. I hated it. I hated every bit of it, from leaving my house to appearing in this strange land. We had no choice.

The terrain up here was angled. My sneakers padded along soft ground, layered with sparse grass and the occasional shrub. It was shallow as mountain slopes go, but I still felt like I was hanging above the world. I didn't like it. I'm too much of a low-altitude girl. I didn't look back, but I did spare a glance for the great crystal wall standing up from the slope above me. What had Kanako called it? The Boundary?

I headed towards the river. The sound of running water grew louder as I approached. The river was obscured from view, surrounded by thick thatches of trees that ran up and down its banks. Maybe the child-god hadn't escaped down the river after all. Maybe he'd simply fled from Kanako, and gone to hide near the river while he decided what to do. After all, this situation would also be alien to him. He might be every bit as confused and lost as I felt.

"Yeah," I said. "He'll be waiting for me. The easy way out. Two minutes of craziness, and then happily ever after. Not wishful thinking. Not at all."

I'd find nothing at the river but running water, and I'd have to follow it. I didn't know how far I'd have to go, or what I'd find.

I approached the trees, stepped under their canopy. The foliage here formed a room, shielded from the sun and wind outside. Sunlight filtered in as loose tangles and dots. I missed the sun's warmth when under the shade. I pulled my jacket closer around my neck.

I stepped down a short slope, and saw the river roaring along below me. The water was clear, but for patches of foam on the banks and around the tips of rocks. I could see through to the riverbed, the smooth stones and sediment looking wobbly through the running water. Sunlight danced off the water, scattering in motes of fractal color that flickered around the trees. It reminded me of the sun shining through a fish tank. It was beautiful. Soothing, even. I might have stood still for a long time, looking at the river. Letting its noise and color ease me.

Might have, if not for the young girl sitting on the far bank. Sitting too close to the water, her knees pulled up to her face. She was crying. She wore a school uniform, so that I could see up her skirt while she sat there.

I meant to call out, but my voice caught in my thought. The noise I made sounded something like "*Unghck!*" But I didn't need to speak. It was enough to make myself known. The girl looked up at me. Her face was pretty, though puffy and red, and framed with light brown hair. Her eyes opened wide at the sight of me.

"Sanae?" she said.

"Suwako?" I said. "That— Is it you? Are you really you?"

She stood, wiping the tears from her face. She blinked at me, as if making sure I wasn't a hallucination. Then she stood, waved both hands and jumped in place.

"*Sanae!*" she said. "I'm so—" Her voice cracked. She swallowed. "I'm so happy to see you! I was so scared all alone! Where are we? How did we get here?"

"Hold still!" I said, trying to calm her. If she got too excited, she might slip into the river. I could probably wade through it, but I'm bigger than her. The water might carry her away.

Suwako understood. She slapped a hand over her mouth. She took a big step back from the riverbank.

"Sorry!" she said. "I'm just so relieved!"

"Me too. Stay there. I'll come across." I slung my school bag off my shoulder. "Here. Catch this."

I gave the bag an underarm toss. It sailed over the river, and Suwako caught it. Its weight knocked her back a bit, forcing her further from the riverbank. I didn't want my supplies to get wet, but not only

that. If the river did wash me away, Suwako could make use of the food and water.

I looked down at the river, and dreaded what I had just committed to do.

“Oh boy,” I said. “This’ll be fun.”

I put one sneaker into the water, and nearly screamed from the cold. The water came up just past my knee. My skin tightened all over, but I endured it. I put the other leg in, and stuck my *gohei* down to the riverbed to gain some purchase. The sediment was loose under my shoes. I stepped forward, trying my hardest to keep balance.

Suwako did her best to help. She cheered me on.

“Come on, Sanae! It’s not that far. This river’s a pathetic shame to its family. Show it who’s boss!”

I made it to her side of the river. She took my hand, helped me up onto the riverbank. My feet were already numb from the cold. My pants were dark wet from the thigh down. I meant to complain at how my shoes would feel squishy for hours, but Suwako didn’t give me the chance. She dropped my school bag on the ground, and pressed herself into me with a tight hug.

“Sanae!” she moaned into my shirt. “I was so scared! I’m so glad you showed up.”

I hugged her back, though it felt weird. I had never been this close to Suwako before. Every time we had met before, we had been detached friends. Strange situations bring people together, I guess.

“It’s okay,” I rubbed the back of her head. “How did you get here? And....” Just now I noticed how she spoke. “And how did you learn English?”

“I don’t know!” Suwako pulled back, enough to show me her bewildered expression. “I was gonna ask you the same thing. It’s so strange, what happened. You remember how you told me I should face my problems? Talk to that one girl in school who was making my life hard?”

I nodded. “Yeah. Did you?”

“Oh, I sure did. After I saw you last night, I went to her place and told her off. She got *mad*, too. She started throwing things and threatened to beat me up.”

I winced. I never wanted things to get violent. I felt a bit guilty, giving Suwako the advice that led to it.

“So I ran,” she said. “She chased me. I run faster than her, so I got away. But I didn’t know where to go. I couldn’t go home, since that’d be the first place she’d look. So I came to your place. I knew it was late and everything, and I hoped you weren’t already in bed.”

“You could have gone home,” I said. “Your parents would’ve taken care of you. And the girl probably got bored and went home herself.”

Suwako shook her head, tossing her hair around.

“Oh no. This girl holds a grudge for a *real* long time. And besides, I don’t want my parents knowing why I was out so late. Let them think I was at my boyfriend’s house or something.”

I winced again. Unpleasant thoughts.

“Please don’t tell me you have a boyfriend,” I said.

Suwako smiled. “Of course I don’t! But my parents don’t know that. And if they’re paranoid about boys, it keeps them distracted from other things.”

I smiled back at her, tousled her hair. Suwako. Beautiful, brilliant and manipulative. Beware, gentlemen.

“Clever girl,” I said. “What happened when you came to my place?”

Suwako’s face bunched up, and even that expression was adorable on her.

“I’m not really sure,” she said. “Everything went black, and I felt all floaty. I think I passed out. When I woke up, I was cold and stiff. It was dark, like early morning. I was out behind your house, and I saw *that thing*.” She pointed a finger to the side, off toward the Boundary. “It’s really pretty, so I thought I’d died and gone to heaven. Then came out a big scary lady with blue hair and a rope on her back. She asked me who I was and where I had come from. I got scared and ran. She chased me, but stopped after I got away from your house.”

She had seen Kanako. My shrine’s secret, now exposed. How big of a secret was it supposed to be,

anyway? Was it like action movies, I can tell you but then I'd have to kill you? It had never come up before. Kanako was usually very good at hiding herself.

At least this explained Kanako's god-kid. Suwako wasn't a god, but a terrified schoolgirl in the wrong place at the wrong time. That killed the one lead that might lead us back home. I felt like kicking something.

"Suwako," I said. "Tell me something. Did you see anything else out here?"

"I did!" she said. "After I ran from the scary blue-haired lady, I came to this river. I stopped here to catch my breath, but something else scared me. This slimy *thing* poked its head up out of the river. It looked at me and said, *I am the god of the frog! I have brought you here!*"

My heart picked up.

"Its voice was so *deep*. Everything it said just shook through me." Suwako shook my arms, showing me how it felt. "I stood there, just about ready to pee myself. I thought it might come out of the water and eat me. But then it said, *Be calm, human child. You will be safe. My foolish competitor has brought your friend and protector. She will come soon. Until then, rest.*"

Foolish competitor? Was it talking about Kanako?

"And then I passed out again," she said. "I woke up just a few minutes ago, and I just sat there crying like you saw me."

"Well, I'm glad you're safe," I said. "But I need to find that frog god. Did you see where it went?"

Suwako shook her head. "Nuh-uh. It spoke to me, and then I woke up here. End of story."

"It's probably downstream," I said. "There's nothing much upstream from here. I have to go looking for it."

Suwako hugged me again, clinging tight.

"Take me with you!" she said. "Don't leave me alone!"

"I wasn't planning on it," I said. "But I might be going somewhere dangerous, and I don't know if I can protect you. I should take you back to my house. That blue-haired lady is my friend, kind of like my second mom. She'll take care of you."

"No!" Suwako shook her head against me. "I won't go back there! Either take me with you, or I'll sit here until I die."

I made a frustrated noise. I felt a pain in my forehead. I don't know if we teenagers usually get stress headaches, but this felt like one.

"I'm going to regret this," I said. "Taking you with me will be a huge mistake."

She looked up at me. "But you will anyway?"

"You're not giving me much choice, are you?"

Suwako made a happy squeal, jumped up and down against me. It wasn't hard to talk me into this, I realized. Maybe I wanted Suwako with me. She's a nice girl, and I enjoyed the company of a regular Japanese person in this unfamiliar place.

"Oh! By the way. That hair-tie looks horrible." She pointed up at snake-braid beside my face. "Since when did you start wearing stuff like that? You should take it off."

"No I shouldn't," I said. "The blue-haired lady gave this to me. It gives me magical powers, and it's my best hope of keeping us alive."

Suwako scowled at me. She wasn't impressed with my mention of magic. After switching worlds, instantly learning a new language and meeting two gods, I guessed nothing would impress her for a while.

"Still," she said. "You're not a snakey-kind of girl."

"If it lets me beat off monsters, I'll be whatever kind of girl." I picked my school bag up off the ground. I turned Suwako around, pushed her up the slope and away from the riverbank. "Let's get going. Don't make a nuisance of yourself, and don't fall into the river."

Suwako looked back, grinning at me. "Don't worry! I'm a really good swimmer. I'm like part amphibian."



# Strawberry Crisis

By Mima

"You fail."

"What?!"

"I said, 'you fail!'"

"Why?! How!?"

"Because, in short, this paper you wrote is a piece of crap."

"This is ridiculous!"

The young male adult flailed around, knocking a small tin filled with various stationary items to the floor with a series of rattles and crashes.

"Why do you have the right to say whether I pass or fail?!" The male student began arguing once more.

"Oh... let's see... because I'm your teacher?" The student's nemesis replied, her voice nothing short of sarcastic.

The male slammed his fist down on the table, which failed in its aim of making his opposition flinch, "You're a kid! I'm older than you are!"

His opponent's reply, however, managed to get deep under his skin. "I'm also more qualified than you."

With a grin, his teacher brushed some red hair away that had fallen across her face; his teacher was the well-renowned Yumemi Okazaki, a child prodigy who had aced every test that stood in her way and was now teaching advanced physics at a university but what made the case extra special was the fact she was only 17. Not only did she have this remarkable position, but she also had a hand in the various scientific groups around the country writing groundbreaking papers and similar such works. She was almost like a second Einstein, you could say.

Rising from her chair, her red, shoulder length hair swayed back into her face, with a disgruntled sigh she once again brushed it off. Now standing, Yumemi looked down at the student and gave a sly smile, "What I mean is that the thing you theorised was absolutely absurd."

The student looked back into her brown-red eyes, "Yeah, absurd theories. I'm sure you know all about them."

Yumemi looked at the student through half-closed eyes, "Elaborate."

Confidently, the student grinned as though he had the upper-hand in this apparent battle. "You know what I mean, 'Magic'." The student spat the final word out, "I've read your reports and essays and all that crap, I can't believe that you actually believe in... magic! Are you insane!?"

"Most scientists were considered insane when they theorised but hadn't yet proved something that could change the world." Yumemi calmly commented.

"Yeah, right." The student shrugged the comment away. "What matters is that you can think up magical little theories, and then I create my theory and you don't give a damn!"

"And that's because I have the backing evidence. There's signs that there's a force that's simply missing from

the world, and through research and comparisons to other measures it comes down to something along the lines of magic." Yumemi grinned back slightly before looking down. "The only problem is that I'm missing something from being able to prove it once and for all."

Not as impressed in the theory, the student simply laughed and snapped back with sarcasm. "Yeah, I'm sure you can prove it... in your dreams."

The prodigy had nothing to say after that comment, and simply stood there still looking in the direction of the floor. As the student lost interest and turned around, Yumemi spoke once more. "You know, that might be it."

"Now what are you talking about, you loony?" The student laughed, still cynical.

"In your dreams.... That might just be the answer I'm looking for!" Yumemi placed a hand on her chin, thinking.

The student was taken back. "Are you serious!?"

Yumemi, only half-listening, gave a nod with about as much effort as her listening.

"So, can I have extra credit or something...? You know, since I was so helpful and all?" The student asked with a sheepish grin on his face.

The red-headed scientist merely turned her back to the observer and waved her hand over her shoulder, "Go ask Chiyuri or something."

"Yes! Thanks!" The student cheered as he ran out of the office.

Chiyuri Katashirakawa is Yumemi's assistant, 15 years old and almost as qualified as Yumemi. She's also well known for being almost the complete opposite of Yumemi; whereas her boss is hard-working, determined and strives to discover new things, Chiyuri is completely laid back and doesn't appear to care much for responsibilities and such things. For example, the student's excitement of being referred to her is most likely due to the high possibility that Chiyuri will give a reply along of the lines of "Extra credit for helping the boss? Sure, I'll type that in."

An hour or so passed since the student left her office and since then Yumemi had been frantically jotting notes down and making plans for what could be the major breakthrough in her project. Peace was broken, however, by a visit from her assistant. "Hey boss, what's up? You've been in here a long time now.... Ain't it time we went home?"

Yumemi spared a few seconds to look up from her work to address her assistant. Despite being almost three years younger, Chiyuri was slightly taller than Yumemi, although more notable was her odd taste in fashion; a white sailor uniform complete with a blue scarf around her neck, tied with a yellow band. The other notable appearance about her was her long blonde hair, or rather it would be long was it not tied into two rather hefty pigtails.

"Well, if you must know, I think I've found the answer to magic." Yumemi commented bluntly.

Chiyuri ran forward to the table and turned her head slightly to assist with reading the upside-down papers. "What is it?"

"Go and get me my usual and I'll explain." Yumemi smirked devilishly.

“Fine... Back in a minute.” Her assistant moaned as she left the room.

It didn't take more than a few minutes for her assistant to return with a small bowl full of strawberries, Yumemi's favourite and quite suiting; you just had to look at her to get the idea. She had red hair, and over her formal white shirt she wore a red vest as well as a long red dress.

After her assistant placed the bowl on the table next to her, immediately Yumemi began to eat the red fruits with a content expression. After the opening rush, Yumemi began to slow down and eventually made time to keep her promise to Chiyuri.

“Well...” Another strawberry was eaten. “It's to do with dreaming, I am led to believe.”

“Dreaming? You mean like, it ain't gonna happen 'cept in your dreams?” Chiyuri asked, still puzzled at what she was told.

Yumemi growled, “Don't give me that. That damn student was just here claiming a load of crap like that.”

“That was over an hour ago.” Chiyuri corrected.

“Whatever, it doesn't matter.” Yumemi looked down at her work for a moment, “What matters is that I think our missing element, magic, is related or can be compared to dreaming.”

“As in...?” Chiyuri queried.

Yumemi ate a few more strawberries before answering. “Well, when most people dream 'normally' they experience things generated by the mind, and that's that. Now imagine that's the same for people with no magic capabilities.”

Chiyuri nodded unsurely, “Riiight...”

“But then, there are those who can do more than that, lucid dreamers. They can do much more than those who are 'normal'. They can effectively control their dreams and make anything happen, such as creating things and such.” Yumemi beamed.

The blonde girl paused for a moment before speaking up. “So, you're saying that lucid dreaming is similar to magic?”

“Yes! That's exactly it!” Yumemi slammed the table slightly out of excitement. “I'm sure if we find whatever part of the brain controls lucid dreaming, then we will be able to get closer to this mystery we know as magic.”

“That shouldn't be hard, should be documented somewhere. So then what, you wanna try tapping into that area and try and activate some real world lucid dreaming?” Chiyuri asked while reading a few pages of Yumemi's notes.

The head scientist shook her head. “No. That would be far too difficult. I theorise that we try sending some lucid dreaming brain signals to the PSH and letting it home in on somewhere where the energy is more plentiful.”

The term PSH was a term commonly used by both scientists. After all, it's easier to say the abbreviation PSH

than its full name which is Probably Space Hypervessel.

Chiyuri looked away for a moment, "Wait a sec, you wanna send some signal to the PSH and then let it fly to what could possibly be another dimension or even just wipe us from existence, to see if it takes you to some strange magical land?"

"That's about right, yes." Yumemi nodded, before popping another strawberry into her mouth.

"Alrighty then! Let's do it!" Chiyuri suddenly cheered.

Yumemi sneered. "I wish it was that easy. We've got some things we need to get past first. First, we actually need to create the lucid dreaming signal, so to do that we need to record and digitize one. Another task is we need to get clearance from the government to actually use the PSH, they're not going to want 'their' toy being in any risk of needless loss." The bitterness from Yumemi said the world "their" was quite noticeable.

"Oh, right.... Yeah." Chiyuri mumbled.

There was an awkward moment of silence where the two idly flicked through notes until Yumemi spoke up, "Know any lucid dreamers?"

Chiyuri simply shrugged.

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"Ah! Those complete idiots!" Yumemi growled as she stormed through a set of double doors. On the other side, Chiyuri was stood waiting with a disheartened expression.

"I guess they said no, then?" Chiyuri sighed.

Yumemi slammed the wall next to her, "They just think I'm a damn kid living in some make-believe world. The proof is all there, and yet they just look by it!"

"Come on boss, let's just go, we'll think of something." Chiyuri approached her friend and patted her on the back.

Yumemi smiled weakly, "I... already have an idea."

"What? You don't mean we...." Chiyuri stammered, knowing exactly what Yumemi meant.

Yumemi's smile grew as she nodded, "Yes, we'll just take the PSH without permission."

"But wait, ain't we gonna get into some big trouble for that?" Chiyuri asked a rather obvious question.

"No, we won't. If we trash the PSH, then we'll be unable to actually get back or we'll be dead, no worries. If it does succeed, then we'll have what we wanted and be able to prove the theory right and that will overwrite the punishment of taking what is rightfully mine in the first place." Yumemi nodded her head positively.

"If you say so boss. I'll do whatever you choose to." Chiyuri nodded less sure than her friend, "Oh, that reminds me. I finally finishing converting the LD signal earlier and so all we gotta do now is load it into the PSH and we're in business."

“Really? Excellent work. It shouldn’t be too difficult to get to the PSH. We have the clearance to get to it so if we just say we’re there to fix a few bugs in the OS or something like that then the moronic security should be no problem.” Yumemi pushed up a sleeve and looked at her watch before speaking to herself, “I see... so let’s do it... 4 days from now.”

“Huh?” Chiyuri’s confused expression returned to her face once more, “What’s in four days?”

Yumemi casually hit her friend around the head, “Idiot, it’s my birthday.”

“Oh- oh yeah.... I didn’t forget, totally.” The blonde scientist stammered as Yumemi walked away.

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“You sure that you wanna do this, boss?”

“Yeah... This is it... time to discover the truth.”

There was a nervous mood between the duo as Yumemi and Chiyuri hastily walked down one of many corridors making up the largest science complex in Japan. Their hastiness combined with their unconscious looking around and generally telltale signs that they were doing something wrong made them stand out like a sore thumb.

Yumemi looked at her comrade, “Alright, remember... When we get in, we-“

“Why, hello there Professor Okazaki... and Katashirakawa.” A voice greeted from beside the two.

Startled slightly, Yumemi quickly turned to face whoever it was that was addressing her and her companion to see it was one of the higher-ups in the organization.

“Well, well, what do we have here?” The scientist smirked, “What would two occult-obsessed teenagers like you be doing here?”

Yumemi growled, “If you must know, we’re installing a new OS onto the Hypervessel.” Thankfully, Yumemi had practiced her excuse for entering the base for a few days now, and a small composure loss such as this wasn’t going to affect her.

Scratching his short gray beard, the scientist thought out in thought, “A new operating system? I wasn’t informed of this by anyone.”

“Since when do we inform you of anything?” Yumemi grinned. “It was us two who made the damn PSH of which you had no knowledge or care about until we’d finished it and proved it worked.”

“Now, now, Okazaki, you sound like you’re trying to pin me as a villain of some sort.” The scientist retorted.

Yumemi shook her head. “That’s just your imagination, and maybe your conscience speaking.”

The three manipulators of science remained silent for a brief moment before the older scientist gave up, “Fine, whatever. Install your damn OS... just make sure you log it all correctly this time.”

Yumemi walked by with a smile, trying to not giggle or anything of the sort, “Sure... whatever.”

With the problem out of the way, Yumemi and Chiyuri hastily got by the few remaining doors blocking their way and stood before the final, significantly larger hanger door that lead to the scientists' greatest creation. "So, you reckon they fell for the excuse?" Chiyuri queried.

Yumemi nodded, "I think so. Like I said flat-out to him, they're ignorant; I doubt they've even considered what we're going to do."

Without another word, the pair approached a small console in the wall to which Yumemi produced an ID card and swiped it, causing the wall-mounted device to emit a beep. Following that, the red scientist pressed a series of buttons on the console causing the device to play out another duo of beeps signalling the opening of the laboratory. Slowly the door started to grind open, slowly lifting itself off the ground and presenting what was inside.

Impatiently, Yumemi and Chiyuri ducked down to bypass the ever-slow door and grinned at what was in front of them; taking up almost the entire hanger-sized laboratory, both width and height was the Probability Space Hypervessel, Yumemi and Chiyuri's greatest contribution to the world of science.

Ironically, not even Yumemi herself understood the machine fully. The possibilities that the machine could achieve beyond her logic however she had discovered that if data was entered into the vessel then it could be used to home in on something matching that sample via locating the area that's most probable to have what the data represented. So far, experiments had allowed teleportation to the various places around the world and more notably to the moon. However this time Yumemi was planning to go further than just the moon; she was willing to attempt to travel dimensions for what she wanted.

Chiyuri ran ahead of her boss and began entering another series of characters into a console built into the Hypervessel, which caused yet another door to open, finally giving them access inside.

"Morning, you two." Spoke an unexpected voice.

"Oh, yes. Hello there." Yumemi stuttered, and she mentally hit herself at forgetting about the security guard the facility liked to place around.

"Got much planned today?" The guard asked in a friendly voice.

Just as Yumemi was about to stumble over her own words, her assistant intercepted. "Actually, we have, we're installing some new stuff onto the system including some new safety stuff."

"Safety... stuff?" The guard looked confused.

"Yeah, we're gonna be using you as a test subject." The blonde-haired scientist grinned devilishly.

The guard jumped back. "Me!? What do you want me for!?"

"Ah, nothing bad, we're just gonna set off some sirens sometime in the day and we're gonna watch to see how easily you can get outside the Hypervessel." Chiyuri continued talking without any sign of hesitation. "Once you've been out for a minute or two, the sirens will stop, and then you gotta see if you can reach where we are during emergency conditions, so it'll be dark and stuff. That okay?"

"I... guess.... When's this again?" The guard looked quite petrified at the unknown task ahead.

“Just sometime today, not telling ya when. We gotta catch you off guard.” Chiyuri turned around, “C’mon boss, let’s install that stuff now.”

“Ah, yes. Of course.” Yumemi nodded as she followed Chiyuri, looking at the guard as she walk by she grinned. “Good luck in our little test.”

Leaving the guard to his own fears, the scientists were finally able to get to what they wanted; with no obstacles in the way.

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Silently, the scientists cheered as they reached what could be considered the cockpit of the Hypervessel.

“Finally, we’re here....” Yumemi gave a sigh of relief. “Please say you’ve got the CD.”

Chiyuri felt around the pockets of her clothing before checking again, followed by another check. Suddenly, her face went void of any emotion and she froze to the spot.

Yumemi’s expression suddenly turned to that of a very bitter one, “You... had better... be joking....” She managed to hiss.

“Yeah, I am actually.” Chiyuri burst into laughter, holding up a CD, “See, it’s right he-“ The scientist was unable to finish the sentence due to Yumemi’s fist hitting her around the back of the head.

“Ow!” Chiyuri yelled. “What was that for?! I was only jo-“ Another punch silenced her again.

Yumemi snatched the CD from her companion. “Do that again and I’ll kill you.”

Yumemi turned away from her assistant in the doorway and gave a sigh of relief at the control room in front of her.

The room itself could only be described as a sci-fi fan’s dream. Flashing lights and panels littered the walls and floors, more than enough to prove a danger to someone of a photosensitive nature.

Ascending one of the two matching stairways to the raised section of the room, the amount of technology only increased. With a hatch placed in the centre, it was the only part of the room not dominated by the sheer hordes of monitors and consoles.

The red scientist’s destination was a particularly large computer that faced the lower section she had just arrived room. Closely following her was her assistant, massaging the back of her head.

“Right, you. Get that installed.” Yumemi ordered firmly, before storming off and seemingly controlling another 6 machines by herself. Following the order, Chiyuri cheerfully placed the CD into the central computer and began typing into the computer at a phenomenal, unflinching rate.

A pair of hands clapped down on the blonde scientist’s shoulders, “Oh, and when you’re finished, can you type up some security system to chase that fool out?” Before a response could be given, Yumemi moved to the other side and began playing around with even more consoles.

“Sure, like that’s gonna take any effort.” Chiyuri proclaimed positively.

Moments after moving over to the consoles, Yumemi wore a smirk on her face that would match the greatest evil genius' and opened the storage cupboard located in one of the far corners and from it produced a piece of red fabric. After swinging it over her head a few times to make it appear to expand she left the cloth trailing behind her and pulled it over her shoulders. Adding the final touch of tying it together at the front she was now wearing a rather large cape that somehow suited her; possibly due to the colour matching her usual scientific garb.

With a nod and a sigh of relief, Yumemi let herself go into a trance-like state where she blocked everything in the world except what she was working on.

---

"Hey, boss."

"Boss!"

"You listening?"

"Oi, Boss!"

The irritating little voice trying to make itself known in Yumemi's mind was silenced as she instinctively spun around and punched the source.

"Ow! What was that for?!" Chiyuri complained.

"Oh, er, sorry... I was in a world of my own... what's the matter?" Yumemi asked guiltily.

Chiyuri once again nursed her head, "Jeez, you're gonna give me brain damage if you keeps this up, I mean-" She was cut short by the sharp stare from the scientist in red, "What I wanted to say, is that everything is installed and that I've made a little program to emulate a security alert."

"Ah. Lovely. Brilliant." Yumemi placed a hand on her chin, "So, I think that makes us about ready now, doesn't it?"

With a nod, Chiyuri replied, "I reckon so. Scare the guard away, get the lucid dream data transfer going and... switch things on. I think."

"Excellent, well then... shall we have some fun?" Yumemi grinned as she walked over to the main computer her assistant had been working on. "I wonder where our little test subject is?"

"Hold on a sec. I'll find him." Chiyuri perkily answered as she began typing causing a series of security camera views to appear on a large wall of screens behind them.

Through the twenty or so screens he could easily be seen on three of them, which happened to be the cameras viewing the dining room.

"Ah, there he is and... wait... what the hell is he doing!?" Yumemi shouted in fury.

"My strawberries! How did he find them! I hid them!" Yumemi dramatically swung around. "Chiyuri! Stop him,

quick! He's eating my secret strawberry supply!"

Chiyuri once more began pounding the keyboard in front of her and soon enough all of the rooms that the cameras were watching slammed into almost complete darkness and a computerised voice echoed throughout the vessel, "Warning. The Hypervessel is currently in a state of emergency. Please evacuate immediately."

Yumemi gave a maniacal laugh as the alarmed guard jumped from his seat and picked up his hat as he ran out. "Ah ha! Take that, fool!"

Her glee was short-lived however, as he briefly reappeared in the sight of the cameras to pick up the bowl of strawberries and returned to his escape.

"What! No!" Yumemi fell to her knees.

Chiyuri ran up to her and shook her by the shoulders. "Get a grip boss! We gotta go! Now!"

Yumemi nodded. "You're... right... Let's do this." Chiyuri offered a hand which Yumemi grabbed and was pulled back up to her feet.

"Alright, raise the main computer." Yumemi ordered with a dramatic wave of her arm.

"Roger that, boss!" Her assistant replied enthusiastically as she performed a few keystrokes, causing the floor they were standing on to rumble slightly.

In front of Yumemi a hatch in the centre of the room began to open and from it a piece of machinery rose up. The difference between this and the others was that this computer almost looked alive with various throbbing pipes like veins and arteries as well as the hundreds of lights covering it. On each of its four sides was a large panel, showing the millions of calculations it was working on each millisecond.

The computer that stood dominantly in the control room was, without a doubt, the single most powerful computer mankind had ever created, and unless the two creators- those who were stood in front of it- wanted to create another, it was a confident guess to say that mankind will never create another one of this power in decades.

Yumemi tapped a few commands followed by a password into the central computer before giving a whistle to signal her companion over.

After removing the all-important CD from its case Yumemi examined it for a moment, "The deciding factor in all of this... Just so you know, I took up your suggestion last night and combined the data; it'll be our best shot. Let's just hope it works."

Unable to find a suitable test subject to extract lucid dream data from, the duo were forced to make themselves learn how to do it and through the help of the field of work they're so experienced in, they got the data they needed. Ironically, both of the scientists developed the ability at roughly the same time giving them two rather different samples of data. Hoping for the best, Yumemi combined them for what could be considered the average.

"Sure, boss..." Chiyuri replied with a nod.

Inserting the CD into the computer, Yumemi struck a single key in a dramatic fashion causing the machine to

whirr into life.

“Chiyuri, seal the vessel please.” Yumemi ordered, arms leaning on the main computer and eyes fixated on a console showing the current processes.

“Done.” The white-clad scientist confirmed whilst taking her beret off and placing it on her computer.

Yumemi nodded, “Activating the sensors...” The red-haired scientist burst into broken laughter, “I guess I’ll see you on the other side.... Wherever that may be.”

“Yeah, see you there.” Chiyuri giggled lightly.

“Sorry for dragging you into this...” Yumemi whispered.

Chiyuri stamped the ground, “Dammit boss, we’ve already been through this. We’re a team remember? Anyway, stop being like this. We’ve never faltered at the thought of death in any other experiment and why should this be any different!?”

Solemnly, Yumemi nodded, “Yes... that’s right.” Yumemi looked up and struggled to grin, “Let’s do this!”

Yumemi pulled a level on the machine causing it to buzz like an electrical field before a shudder rocked the Hypervessel.

“Alright! We’re out!” Chiyuri cheered after the vessel settled down.

Yumemi paced around, “It’s a shame our sensors and cameras don’t work now. I’d love to see what the void between realities looks like. Imagine if it was all terrifying like... red... and full of eyes watching you, that’d be... interesting... to say the least.”

“Hah, it sure would.” Chiyuri commented. “So, has the computer managed to find us a destination yet?”

“No, but right now I just want us to end up some place where we won’t die instantly.”

The computer suddenly began beeping erratically, “Oh! 95% complete?!”

“That was quick. With multiple universes to search you’d think it’d take longer...” Chiyuri mused.

“That or the location it’s getting picking up is much closer than we imagined.” Yumemi spun around.

Silence and anticipation filled the raised control room until without warning; the entire Hypervessel began to shake violently, far worse than a moment ago. To accompany the shaking, the entire room felt like it was slowly being turned; a fact made clear when suddenly the two scientists fell onto a “wall” as the craft turned ninety degrees onto its side.

Yumemi scrambled to her feet and looked down at her assistant who was still laid on the floor. “What the... I think... I think it’s automatically entering a destination.... What the hell, did you change it!?”

“I ain’t changed a thing, boss.” The craft violently shook once more, causing Chiyuri to jump up and pull Yumemi to the ground. “Hold on boss, this is gonna be bumpy!”

As the two scientists held onto whatever parts of the control panels had a workable grip, the ship continued to rock out of control. If either of the scientists could have brought themselves to scream it would have been ultimately futile as they wouldn't have heard themselves over the screaming sirens and alarms alerting them of the obvious; that something was wrong.

Another violent attack upon the ship causes the power in the vessel to cut out causing complete darkness and silence to fall upon the room. Still holding on for her life Yumemi spoke up. "I guess... this is it... we failed-"

What sounded like an explosion echoed from one of the corridors that trailed from the control room, "We're doomed... I'm sorry, Chi-"

An immense force against the vessel knocked the scientific duo out instantly.

---

A foggy consciousness entered the mind of the older scientist causing her to slowly become aware of the situation, sirens wailing, the fact she was lying on the floor and, finally, her most recent memories.

"I'm... alive?" Yumemi sat up, "What's going on... the power is back and... the ship isn't on its side any more..." A bout of dizziness hit the scientist to lie down again.

"What the hell happened, Chi...? Chiyuri!?" The scientist jumped up regardless of her condition and looked frantically for her friend.

With no sight of her, Yumemi shouted out, "Chiyuri!? ...Where are you!?"

"Whatcha shouting at?" A familiar voice asked as a familiar face poked her head out from one of the doorways.

"Oh, thank god you're alive." Yumemi fell back down. "Where the hell have you been?"

"I've been checking the ship out. Saw you were still unconscious so I left you alone." Chiyuri grinned.

Yumemi was quick to shout out at her assistant. "I could have been severely injured!"

"Don't worry, don't worry. I made sure you weren't." Chiyuri sighed.

Propping herself up against a wall, Yumemi groaned, "We're not dead.... Where are we?"

An unwanted reply came in the form of a shrug. "Beats me. I only just got the power back in here. And it turns out that the external cameras, sensors and all that stuff are completely dead."

Yumemi groaned as she pushed herself against the wall to get herself to her feet, "Great, so we're going to get out of here to find a crowd unable to mind their own damn business... and then they will start bothering us... and then the media will start bothering us.... Not what I need..."

"Could be worse, it could be hordes of vicious killer aliens... you know... like the ones that jump on yer face and stuff." Chiyuri grinned.

Yumemi rolled her eyes as she stumbled by her friend, "Please, I already proved their existence is impossible after you started having nightmares after seeing that movie."

Yumemi stabilised her movement to a walk and began to travel through the maze of corridors whilst closely being followed by Chiyuri.

“Hey, boss, where you heading?” A voice came from beside the genius, the source being her assistant who was walking backwards for an inexplicable reason.

“Outside.... We’d better check things out and make sure nothing is wrong sooner rather than later.” Yumemi sighed.

As the duo approached a junction, Chiyuri pointed to the left rather than continuing on as Yumemi had planned, “What about taking the emergency exit? If people are outside they might not see us come out this way. Might help us blend in, you know?”

Yumemi hummed in thought, “Yes. That might be better actually. Very well then, let’s do that.”

A few minutes passed as the scientists travelled to the emergency exit, a significantly smaller door located in the side of the craft and began to run a few tests. The aim of the tests was to make sure that whatever was lying on the outside was safe; happily opening an unknown door is no good if it opens to heat of over a thousand degrees or a lack of oxygen so some precautions had to be stuck to.

Thankfully the tests succeeded with pressure and oxygen abundant and so whatever lay outside was given the all-clear for not being immediately hostile.

Standing by the door, one scientist muttered to the other, “Guess we better get this done with then.”

The door hissed and squealed as it came to life and slowly pried itself open allowing a curious Yumemi to peek between the ever-increasing gap between the door and its normal resting place.

“Grass, huh? Oh, and some trees.” The professor grabbed the door and assisted it in opening. “Can’t quite recognise the location by the flora, there’s all sorts here.”

Finally, with enough room to do so, the two scientists disembarked the Hypervessel and the head scientist took the task of closing the door after them, “Least nobody saw us, we’re probably in a park or maybe just some uninhabited field.... That would be nice.”

“Hey... boss....”

“I mean, if that’s the case we can just warp back to the hanger and nothing will have happened.” Yumemi mused whilst tapping various commands into an external panel.

“Boss... look.”

“Then again, the damage to the ship is too obvious and that’s even if it’s in a state to warp back. I hope you packed some repair equipment, Chiyuri.”

“Boss!”

“What!?! I’m trying to talk to you!” Yumemi spun around in anger. “If I’m talking first then... don’t.... ...”

The two scientists had a look of disbelief as they looked at the small creature flying amongst the trees a few metres away; a small humanoid creature with long blonde hair, a neat blue dress and most notably two white wings, almost like that of a butterfly, flapping gently allowing the creature to hover distinctly off the ground.

“Is... that a fairy?” Yumemi whispered.

Chiyuri rubbed her eyes and looked around, “I... think so. I wonder if there’s more of-“

Yumemi caught on to Chiyuri going speechless once more, “What now?”

Following her gaze Yumemi saw the answer, by the back of the Hypervessel was a significant crowd of beings looking at it although even from the 20 or so metres distance they obviously weren’t all human, some were flying effortlessly, some appeared to be part animal and more notably they all stood out from each other whether it was by shape or colour; a quality often lost in ordinary humans.

“What do we do!? What do we do!?” Yumemi panicked slightly.

Chiyuri shrugged, “I dunno.... Try talking to them?”

“The likelihood of them even speaking anything resembling any language from Earth is probably impossibly low. Not to mention they might be a clan-based society and kill us for being outsiders.” Yumemi lamented.

“The odds are probably higher than those of us actually getting here.” Chiyuri grinned before straightening her beret.

Yumemi paused for a moment and then nodded. “I suppose you’re right there.”

The pair cautiously headed in the direction of the crowd and once they were just a few metres away they attempted to move in a way to blend in with the crowd.

“Hey there! Haven’t seen you round here before.” A voice spoke from beside Yumemi causing her to visibly jump.

“Ah! You spoke!” Yumemi panicked as she turned to face the one who was addressing her. There stood a young woman with long orange hair with a single braid hanging in front of her. Her eyes particularly stood out since they shared the same colour as her hair, but her clothing also stood out. It consisted of a bright yellow dress covered with a green vest as well as a strange looking little yellow hat resting on her head.

The stranger gave a confused yet cheerful expression, “Yeah.... Of course I did. What were you expecting?”

Yumemi hesitated to try and think of a suitable answer but was cut short by the orange haired woman, “I get it, you thought us youkai might not speak the same language as you humans or something? What, are you from the village or something?”

“Something like that.... This is our first time... ‘here’” Yumemi replied awkwardly.

“Still, if you’re from the village I’m a bit surprised at your reaction. Youkai are already in the village. Heck, even I go there. You must have been real shut-ins or something.” The woman looked up in thought slightly.

“Oh, yes, quite.” Yumemi stuttered, still in a small amount of shock.

Thankfully, her more confident assistant cut in, "So, what's everyone looking at anyway?"

"Good question! Someone found these ancient ruins earlier today and so everyone is having a look. No-one can find a way into it though so the crowd's just been standing here looking at it and talking."

Chiyuri sounded confused, "How can ancient ruins just 'appear'? Doesn't that make them... new and not ancient?"

"Believe me, in Gensokyo anything can happen at any time. Old buildings can randomly appear in places that were empty the day before. In fact, it's normal for weird things to happen; I wouldn't be surprised if an old mansion suddenly appeared in the middle of a lake." The youkai laughed.

Yumemi jumped back into the conversation. "So, is this all to do with magic?"

"Probably. I know you guys in the village see little of it, but elsewhere magic is everywhere! It's really great."

Yumemi had to stop herself from shouting with joy, "Magic! Can you teach us some magic, or about magic, or show us magic or--"

"Whoa there. Sorry but I can't stick around, I gotta meet another youkai for tea soon." The youkai apologetically claimed.

"Can't you make her wait just a little bit, please?" Yumemi begged.

Yumemi's heart sunk as new friend shook her head. "Sorry, but this is the one person in Gensokyo you do not leave waiting."

"Why's that then?" Chiyuri queried.

"If she's in a good mood, I'll probably get flowers bloom out of my ears. If she's in a bad mood, she'll probably kill me."

Yumemi's mind wondered what a violent flower youkai looked like but ultimately failed.

"Man, I sure wouldn't like to meet her." Chiyuri commented as she lazily scratched her back.

The youkai nodded positively, "That'd would be a good idea, especially for humans like you. Catch her in a wrong mood and you're goners." The girl ended up with a mocking motion of her hand, pretending to fire a laser.

Yumemi cupped her chin with her hand, "I'm not sure what else to ask. I mean, I have so many questions I just don't know what to--"

"Hey look, a fight!" Chiyuri said in a more positive tone than was probably expected as she pointed to a scene above the trees they were facing a moment earlier.

Hastily, Yumemi's head craned in the direction Chiyuri pointed at and was somewhat amused to see two small fairies were firing a small amount of what appeared to be arrowheads made of light at each other, although neither seemed to be anywhere close to hitting the other.

“So, are fights common here? No-one seems particularly bothered by it.” The red scientist questioned the friendly youkai, eyes still fixed on the fight and the blatant use of magic.

“Definitely, people fight in Gensokyo for all sorts of reasons, not just the tradition excuse of territory, but to prove strength, cause problems, solve problems or even just to cure boredom.”

Yumemi took a cynical look after the final example, “They kill each other to cure boredom?”

“Oh! Non-lethal of course, it’s very very rare for someone to kinda... permanently die in a fight in Gensokyo. Fighting humans usually results in non-lethal firepower and most other creatures can simply regenerate from wounds that would be fatal to humans.” Orange chuckled weakly, “A trait I might be thankful for if things don’t go well later.”

Yumemi finally thought of a question to ask when once more the youkai spoke up, “Well, I really must get going now. Sorry I can’t stay around much longer.” Following a nod the girl turned around and began to walk away before turning to face the two scientists again, “Oh, if you see me around, just give a shout, my name’s Orange.”

“Odd name.” Chiyuri said under her breath.

“Maybe to you humans.” Orange laughed lightly.

Chiyuri whispered once more, “She has good hearing.”

Trying to ignore her companion, Yumemi smiled at Orange. “Thank you, my name’s Yumemi, this... idiot is called Chiyuri.”

“Hey! What did I do to be an idiot!?” Chiyuri complained.

“A lot.”

Orange nodded, “Okay, nice to meet you two.” Walking back towards the scientist, Orange leaned forward and whispered, “It’s getting dark soon, youkai get a bit more vicious at that time. I advise you retreat back into your ancient ruins or whatever the structure is while you don’t understand Gensokyo.”

Cheerfully, Orange skipped back and began to jog away. “Okay then? Maybe see you around! Bye!”

“Bye...” Yumemi said weakly while her assistant did quite the opposite, jumping and waving like a child.

Once the youkai was out of sight, Yumemi spun around and punched her apprentice, “Stop acting like a kid, didn’t you hear her? She knew we were from inside the PSH!”

“So? It was kinda obvious since we walked right out of it and she was in direct sight of it. I doubt anyone else saw us.” Chiyuri stretched without a care in the world.

Yumemi nodded solemnly before beginning to plod back over to the side entrance to the Hypervessel. “I hope you’re right. Last thing we need is more trouble and unwanted attention. Well then, let’s go back inside for now, I think I need some time to take this all in.”

---

A few hours later after a few minutes of searching, Chiyuri managed to find where Yumemi had disappeared off to sometime earlier; sitting on top of the Hypervessel.

“Sup, boss?” She greeted as she vaulted onto the roof to join her.

Startled, Yumemi jumped up to her feet and spun to face Chiyuri. “Oh, it’s you.”

“Yeah, it’s me.” Chiyuri waited for the other scientist to sit back down before sitting beside her. “So, whatcha thinking about?”

Yumemi looked at the red sunset dominating the otherwise black sky and sighed. “What aren’t I thinking about? There’s just so much to take in.... All this time I was right.... Magic exists and it’s... even more brilliant than I thought it’d be.”

Chiyuri simply remained silent and continued to listen.

“All these magical creatures too.... Youkai... Fairies... I bet there’s even more than that and they all look so different. I mean... if a kid walked up to you on Earth and said something like, ‘I’m a youkai’ or ‘I can use magic’ you’d pat them on the head and tell them to go and play somewhere yet here you’d probably have to believe them....”

A peaceful moment passed as the two scientists simply watched the sun disappear from view. A few seconds later Yumemi reached into her pocket and pressed a concealed button causing the Hypervessel’s exterior lights to activate.

“Anyway, enough of being surprised and all that. We still have a job to do and it’s not going to be easy.” Yumemi began what sounded to be a lecture.

“I tried to record some data but the results were, again, too varied. Much like our dream data. Not to mention there’s several other problems, such as the fact that our external sensors are trashed and the magic all around us seems to change completely every instance, so we need to get some... how shall I say it... more permanent test subjects.”

“You mean you wanna, like... capture a youkai?” Chiyuri grinned mischievously.

“No, not quite, we’d probably end up getting torn apart by our would-be prisoner if we did that.... No, what we will do is make them want to come into the Hypervessel by their own free will.” Yumemi smirked maliciously.

Chiyuri fiddled with one of her pigtails, freeing it from the band holding it together and letting the hair fall as she spoke. “So, you’re gonna put a sign up... advertising free chocolates or something?”

“No, not quite.” Yumemi stood up and waved her arm to reach out to the side. “I’m going to organise a fighting tournament!”

“A fighting tournament...” Chiyuri replied almost-speechlessly.

Yumemi nodded, smiling confidently. “Like our friend told us, youkai battle to show each other who is strongest, so if we create an official way for them to prove this issue then the strongest will be sure to turn up. We allow them to fight inside the hanger of the Hypervessel, hook up the internal sensors and voila! All the free data we need from... considerably stable sources!”

"If you think it'll work, let's do it I guess!" Chiyuri pledged her continuing allegiance as she undid the other pigtail.

"Of course it will! All we need to do now is create some fliers advertising the event and see if we can discover a bit of magic for ourselves. I'd say a couple of days will be enough time." The red scientist laughed defiantly.

"Not too confident then?" Chiyuri commented.

Yumemi lightly kicked Chiyuri as she walked by on her way to descend from the roof of the Hypervessel.

"Oh, there's one more thing." Yumemi spoke up, out of Chiyuri's sight.

Chiyuri poked her head over the side to look at Yumemi. "Huh, what's that?"

"We still need to get some more strawberries." The head scientist giggled like a child. "Maybe we should go and find some."

"Well, not tonight." Chiyuri sighed.

Yumemi jumped, "Oh, come on! That fool stole all of mine!"

"I said not tonight, we're not going to risk getting eaten just for some strawberries!" The usually careless assistant yelled as the two outsiders entered the Hypervessel for the night. There was a lot to sort in order to get the magical data they'd gambled everything to try and get.

And so begun the Gensokyo Incident that was known as the Phantasmagoria of Dimensional Dream.

## Afterword

So yes, that was my little story about how Yumemi and Chiyuri got to Gensokyo. If you've read the other stories I've done then a lot of the story might click with you since I wrote this with the RiG (Reborn in Gensokyo) series in mind. I gave the two scientists a rather un-Touhou-like backstory in that it was rather serious unlike the nature of Gensokyo where every disaster is usually settled over a cup of tea.

Again referring to the RiG series; the tale ends with Yumemi and Chiyuri being forced back to the human world with incomplete data and the government dismisses them while taking away all their work which was again done to have a contrast between the serious, dark outside world and the 'paradise' that is Gensokyo.

So really I just wanted to add some back-story to two rather great characters which also supplements my other stories while making something that should be fun to read. Well... that and PC-98 just needs more love. PC-98 has great characters and is also rather vague on details, which leaves a lot of room to people to be creative. Use this! We're getting tired of seeing Remilia and the other EoS characters in every piece of fanwork that exists! Make things different and expand the other characters that are there for the choosing but ultimately and unfortunately overlooked by most of the fandom.



***Imperishable Memories of the Heart***

***Part II: History, Disappear...***

***By Nameless Bunny - Translated by Sakura Rurouni***

## *The Orb in the night sky hiding the Princess*

Far-flung clouds stretched over the night sky, momentarily halting the rain and allowing the light of the moon to fall upon Gensokyo. Regardless, there was an area where that light could not reach, a clearing in the bamboo forest where an immortal princess took a midnight stroll now and again... a clearing that was covered by an *impenetrable darkness*.

“Wh-- what's going on?! Why can't I see anything?!” Keine, the half-human half-youkai teacher and defender of the human village, yelled as everything around her simply disappeared. She was blind and deaf, and her legs weighed so much that she thought she would simply faint onto the ground. It couldn't be because she was in youkai form, so...-- “Rumia?”-- She couldn't open her mouth without feeling that something was trying to get inside of her, like the tentacles of a viscous, oozing creature-- “Rumia! Stop what you're doing, now!”

“That light...” she heard from somewhere off to her right, where only moments before she had seen the body of the princess fall. Now she saw it shine with a brilliant silver light, like the moon. In that moment her eyes could see fully again, and she saw it, *a mantle as dark as carbon*, giving off weak, small sparks while it slowly rose up off of the ground until it floated above the head of the small blonde girl standing in front of her... “What a bother...” Keine felt as if a knife had skimmed right past her, on her cheek, and was now roughly shoved into her body, once, twice, and again, again, and a liquid that she couldn't recognize was flung at her face. “Turn it off...”

Lifting the sword again, she nearly cut the teacher in half. But Keine had instinctively jumped backwards, thanks to reflexes that came with dodging danmaku for so long. She landed hard, splattering into the mud. “Rumia! Stop now! What do you think you're doin--” She had to raise a hand to cover her face as a new set of blows and a strong wind blew mud and detritus her way. “Ughhhhhhhhh!  
Rumia!”

But the youkai wasn't responding, so wrapped up was she in her fun. Over and over again, she continued hitting, slashing, and crushing the inert body, making it jump a few centimeters off the ground with each impact. The teacher put a hand to her mouth to prevent an oncoming wave of nausea, and with great effort, she got up

and tried to stop the blonde youkai.

“Stop! Stop it now! *STOP!*” she yelled, pushing her body against Rumia's. Despite her strength and weight, Rumia didn't budge a centimeter-- “The drug is in full effect now! Stop it!”

“Is that so~?” Rumia replied with such a wide, terrifying smile that Keine instantly let go of her and jumped backwards, thinking she would be next.

“Y-you... you wouldn't... r-right?” Keine stammered. “We have a deal, remember?!” But the youkai didn't care, and she kept staring at the princess on the ground, covered in blood and mud. She cleaved her sword into the body again and lifted her leg as high as she could. “Turn it off...” Her foot came down with tremendous force, so strong that the ground beneath her sank, forming a small crater, where the disgusting mix of mud and Kaguya's blood began to pool, until all the light had faded away. “Much better~”

The young girl raised her hand to the sky and the darkness descended again, letting the light of the moon shine once more, but the woman with blue-white hair closed her eyes, not wanting to see what that... monster had done to Kaguya. She could hear Rumia leaving the mantle of darkness again, and begin to walk towards her. “Have you finished, then?!” she demanded, with no reply. The footsteps got closer and closer, until they stopped right in front of her, and Keine could feel Rumia, now standing right in front of her, begin to... lick something, chuckling softly as she did so. She couldn't help opening one of her eyes, to see Rumia standing a short distance in front of her, lapping up the blood that dripped off of her blade's sharp edge.

“Poor, poor Keine~ you look so terrified~” She mocked as she continued to lick up the blood. “... but, I thought you had read my history, my dear teacher. Then you must know that *this is nothing--*”

“W- we don't have time for this!” Keine shot back, not really knowing what to say. In her mind, she was berating herself for having enlisted a partner like Rumia, and all she wanted to do was get as far away from her as fast as she could-- “W-we have to get out of the forest without anyone seeing us and get out before the sun rises!” She whirled around, so she wouldn't have to look at her, and began to walk away, down the same path from which she had come. “Hurry up and bring her along!” the

teacher ordered, trying to stay calm, although the truth was that she didn't want to see how Rumia had left the princess' body. If she saw her mutilated, chopped-up body, her nausea would surely overcome her. "We can't let anyone find out. And if we fly over the bamboo forest, that *tengu* will find us--"

"Don't worry~ --" the youkai interrupted the teacher as she lifted the princess, covered in blood and mud, on the tip of her blade. She lifted her hand to the sky again to materialize her mantle again, that *darkness made solid, material* in the bamboo forest. "I'll make sure no one will see us..."

### *Just like that rabbit. You're all crazy.*

The alarm clock went off at five forty-five in the morning, just as it always did. She was already awake and ready to work. Her skirt, shirt, and blazer jacket, freshly ironed last night, were impeccable and her red tie was tied around her neck in a simple knot. She looked at her watch and smiled. The rabbit was ready; she still had time to clean the mansion up before Master got home. With such a large place full of so many people (mostly rabbits), the mansion got dirty quickly and someone had to be in charge of cleaning up after all of them. That someone was her, Reisen U.

Inaba.

"All ready."

It was eight in the morning now, with all the cleaning of Eientei done, and the bunny-girl checked her schedule. It was the princess' breakfast time-- a time set by Eirin, so Kaguya wouldn't oversleep more than she needed to. "Princess? Your breakfast is ready." She knocked on the princess' bedroom door, but no one answered. "How strange... she hasn't returned yet?" It wasn't uncommon for her to go out into the forest at night (especially when *Eirin wasn't around* to control her) but she usually always returned before breakfast so she could eat in bed and then take a nap in some part of the mansion.

"Tewi? Have you seen the princess?" she asked, knocking on Tewi's room. "Tewi?

Please tell me, have you seen the princess?" There was no answer.

The rabbit sighed as she made her way into Tewi's room, finding it as messy as always. ("Is she a rabbit or a pig?" she found herself asking.) She went closer to Tewi's bed, where she was sleeping. Cautiously making her way around the mess on

the floor, she spoke quietly into one of her ears. “Tewi, have you seen the princess around?” Tewi didn’t respond, preferring to turn around and keep sleeping. The long-haired girl again brought her mouth to Tewi’s ear and whispered into it. “Tiny, tiny rabbit, how long will you stay asleep? The sun will come out soon, and...” she folded her fingers and made the shape of a gun with her right hand, lowering it further down on the other rabbit's body, smiling maliciously. “It's time for lunacy to strike!” A light shone from the tip of her finger as her other hand reached over to pull off the sheets, only to reveal that there was no one sleeping in the bed. There was only a black wig atop some pillows, some false ears, and some strings, moving somewhere-- “What?!”

The alarm clock next to her jumped and a huge mallet fell from the wall on top of her, whacking her soundly in the head before she could do anything more than scream.

“HYAAHHHHHHHHH!”

“Why are you making so much noise outside?” asked a sleepy little rabbit in her pajamas, emerging from the closet where she had been sleeping. “Let the rest of us get some rest...” She yawned and closed the door again.

Reisen, still rubbing her sore head, approached the closet and knocked gently on the door. “Tewi? Come out, Tewi~”

The black-haired rabbit opened the door again, rubbing her sleepy eyes. “What is it, Reise--” but she didn't get to finish what she wanted to say, since Reisen had grabbed her by the ears and forcibly dragged her out of bed.

“Tell me, Tewi, why on earth did you hit me with a hammer?!”

“Oh, that was for the alarm clock, not for you...” she replied.

Reisen slowly moved her hands over to Tewi's neck, and smiled maliciously.

“I see, I see. Tell me, why were you sleeping in the closet?”

“Because I felt like it~” she replied, in such a sweet, innocent, adorable way that Reisen couldn't do much of anything other than give it up and let her go. In the end, she couldn't fight her, an adorable earth rabbit who was, after all, one of the oldest creatures in Gensokyo and the wielder of luck equivalent to forty four-leaf clovers.

She'd get even with her later.

“Well? Do you know anything about the princess? She should have returned by

now..." Tewi shook her head. "I see. All right then, Tewi, gather the guard rabbits so they can tell us where she's gone. She must be taking advantage of the fact that Master isn't here yet, but it's not good for her to stay out all night." Reisen issued her orders. "And don't forget, *Master arrives today*; you should clean up your room.

If you cleaned up, I'd bet you'd find a dead animal or two in all the mess."

"You'd be surprised--" Tewi covered her mouth as she yawned again and put her hands to her ears, cupping them so she could hear better. "That's strange... I can't hear the...--"

"Umm, Tewi?" The black-haired rabbit made a gesture for Reisen to be quiet and turned her intent gaze to the floor. "Tewi?"

"Shhhhh... listen..." The girl with the blazer put her hands around her ears as well and tried to listen. The rabbits of Eientei had an astoundingly good sense of hearing, to the point that they could hear everything their fellows were doing from very far off, and these two, Reisen and Tewi, could hear everything that went on in the bamboo forest and even further if they wished, but at this moment, they didn't hear much more than the sleepy breaths of their fellow rabbits.

"Ummmm..." She closed her eyes, trying to concentrate, but she didn't hear anything out of the ordinary... in fact... she couldn't hear anything.

"The guards... what happened with the guards? What happened to the princess?!" The two girls were in awe at how *silent* the forest was and stupefied by the deathly quiet.

One of the other rabbits approached the door and announced, in a nervous voice for all to hear:

"Lady Eirin has returned!"

### *Shall I consume the devil's history as well?*

The dawn had arrived but the storm had not yet faded, and the worst part of all was that she had returned to her human form, which meant only one thing. "Brrrrrrr..." Her dress was soaked through and she shivered as the cold wind blew, so Keine walked with her arms crossed, hands trying to stay warm. And now, she felt even more vulnerable walking in front of Rumia. She couldn't stop imagining her lifting up that mantle of darkness and forcing it on top of her right before she ran

her through with her sword.

Well, not everything was bad. At least the scent of blood that had been hounding them the entire time had disappeared with the wind and the mud had been washed away by the rain.

“We're here...” she said, parting the last few bamboo shafts in front of her and revealing a small hut, like the sort of hut a hermit would use, in a small clearing. The only other indication that this clearing had been disturbed by humanity was a *small, old well*, which looked like it had been abandoned years ago. “Put her down inside the hut.” It would be good to be beneath a roof, even if it was just for a few minutes.

“Meh...” Rumia replied, approaching the hut and letting the princess down onto the ground, by letting her slide down off of her sword. She then took a seat outside on the edge of the well, without really caring what Keine was going to do or about the rain that was soaking her as well. The girl in the black dress just looked up, with the sky raging against her; she had a serious look on her face, to the point that the teacher couldn't tell if she was feeling melancholy or defiant.

Finally, it was the moment *she had been waiting for*. Kaguya's clothing was shredded, coated in a mix of blood and mud, but at least her body had returned to normal and she still slept, thanks to the drugs Keine had given her earlier. “It's time...” She took out a blank scroll from within her clothing and with it she covered the princess. “Something I can't do in my youkai form...” she murmured, putting her hands on the scroll. “Disappear...”

Five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes later. It hadn't been as easy as she had thought it would be, but the thick scroll lying on her lap lay as testament to her work. The thick scroll-- the complete history of the princess of the moon.

Finally... finally, the Kaguya they all knew would disappear and be gone from her life; she would leave Mokou be, and Keine would finally be happy. “Here--” She tore off a bit of parchment and threw the rest of it over to the blonde girl, who was still outside. “Everything's ready.” Rumia didn't bother to pick it up, letting it lay in the mud.

“Is that so~?” She yawned. And then in the next moment, she disappeared and the enormous black swords fell down in front of Keine.

“Rumia!? What do you think you're doing?!” Keine exclaimed, visibly terrified once she felt someone hugging her from behind, one hand firmly on her waist and the other running down her back.

“Keine, Keine... haven't I done everything you asked me to do?” she asked, while she rested her head on the teacher's shoulder and licked her neck lightly. “You want to get rid of that lunatic princess without anyone finding out, you want *the darkness to cover up all your evil deeds*, no? Sneaky girl~” Keine turned red with embarrassment, but she was also trembling, not knowing if it was because of the cold, and her still-soaked clothing, or out of sheer terror-- “*The drunken oni, the meddling Tengu, and that damned Sukima...* you're afraid of them and so you'd prefer your actions to remain secret, no? Because any one of those girls could interfere with your plans, or worse still, call in that fearsome shrine maiden, who would do anything possible to destroy your plans, without caring if the beloved teacher was trying to do good or evil, isn't that so~?” Keine nodded nervously, agreeing-- “Well then... is there anything more...” Her fingers ran over her trembling cheek and she held her even more tightly than before-- “That you would like me to do for you?”

Keine tried to elbow Rumia in the stomach to try and get her away, but the blonde easily grazed it and before she knew it, Rumia sat on her sword's hilt, straddling it between her legs, smiling up at Keine with a fierce, frightening look on her face. “Remember our deal, Rumia. You would still be just another little girl if I hadn't read your history...”

“Ah, but I know what you really want, my dear teacher. You want the darkness to just swallow up that immortal's history, no? So that the Kaguya we all know and 'love' can disappear forever--” She laughed, evidently enjoying the discomfort she was causing Keine. “Since, y'know, *she's immortal, and so is her history*. That's why you want me, *the youkai of darkness*, to make it disappear forever, never to let the living history of Kaguya Houraisan see the light of this world again...” Some way or another, the scroll that had just been lying in the mud appeared in her hand and Rumia smiled at Keine, showing her teeth. “I know the perfect place for this,” she said. Her tongue snaked out of her mouth and wrapped around the scroll, and in one gulp she had swallowed it whole. “Oh, delicious, delicious!” Rumia licked her

lips with glee. "Really, it was delicious!" The girl jumped and set foot on the pommel of the sword and did a reverence to the white and blue-haired women. "Everything's ready, my dear teacher, so now let us conclude our deal!"

Keine looked at her doubtfully and nodded. For her plan to work, neither she nor her accomplice could be discovered. She would have to take care of the destruction Rumia had sowed later. But for now... she approached the princess, who still lay asleep on the ground and taking a hold of her by what was left of her tattered clothing, she dragged her over to the well.

"This well is much older than it looks; in ancient times it was used to fling corpses down into the next world. I know this because I read its history when I first found this place. It's connected to a great *subterranean river* that runs beneath much of Gensokyo. This way, it'll be that much harder for anyone to find her..." She had made up her mind. She picked up the girl, beneath the faintly interested glances thrown her way by that youkai, and she sat her down on the edge of the well. "You won't die, of course, but without your history, you are no longer Kaguya Houraisan, you are no longer the princess of the moon, you are nothing..."

The girl felt a cold hand on her neck and blinked slowly, once, twice. The effect of the drugs had worn off and her eyes gradually opened. Someone had taken hold of her, but she didn't know what was happening or what the person was saying. She opened her mouth, trying to say something but nothing came out, because she couldn't remember how to speak--

It was only later that she felt herself floating. Her body, devoid of support, had been falling ever since that moment that the cold on her neck had disappeared. And even though she had only just opened her eyes, she soon closed them again, because there was nothing to see in the darkness.

*Only five more days until Tsukimi...*

***To be continued...***

## **Afterword**

Well, here I am again, in this, part II of my fanfic, “Imperishable Memories of the Heart”, the first part of which was released in Another Dream 5A. For those who want to read the first part, you can read it following the following link:

For the ones who want to read it in Spanish you can follow the next link:

Part I in Spanish:

[http://www.4shared.com/file/87242328/6b523ce7/Las\\_memorias\\_del\\_corazn\\_son\\_imperecederas.html](http://www.4shared.com/file/87242328/6b523ce7/Las_memorias_del_corazn_son_imperecederas.html)

Part II (this one) on Spanish:

[http://www.4shared.com/file/112696391/c20a4ed2/Las\\_Memorias\\_del\\_corazn\\_son\\_imperecederas\\_II.html](http://www.4shared.com/file/112696391/c20a4ed2/Las_Memorias_del_corazn_son_imperecederas_II.html)

That's all, I hope you have enjoyed it =3. I will continue in the next Another Dream.

PS: Keine and Rumia are my least favorite characters from their respective games, but their powers... there's no better way to describe them than HAX. They can be pretty powerful in the right hands.

PSS: Ruro, you are the best ever!!!! =3

### **Palabras del autor**

Aquí estoy de nuevo, en este, la segunda parte de mi fanfic “Las memorias del corazón son imperecederas”, que originalmente salió en “Another Dream 5a”. Para aquellos que quieran leer la primera parte, pueden leerlo aquí:

[http://www.4shared.com/file/87242328/6b523ce7/Las\\_memorias\\_del\\_corazn\\_son\\_imperecederas.html](http://www.4shared.com/file/87242328/6b523ce7/Las_memorias_del_corazn_son_imperecederas.html)

Eso es todo, espero que lo disfruten =3. La tercera parte saldrá en el próximo Another Dream.

PD: Keine y Rumia son mis personajes menos queridos en sus respectivos juegos, pero sus poderes, vaya, no sabría como describirlos. HAX. Podrían ser muy poderosos en las manos adecuadas.

PDD: ¡¡¡¡¡ Ruro, eres la mejor!!!! =3

### **Translator's note:**

I totally Babelfished the whole thing. ( ° ▽ ° )つ

... I'm kidding. (Well, maybe I used Google Translate, too. Don't tell Bunny.) (Bunny:

I will not tell him ;D)

- Sakura Rurouni



alice

The human village – a hustle and bustle kind of place, where you can rest assured that youkai are the least of your worries, and you can find whatever it is you may be looking for, from flowers to furniture to friction-reducing gels – thanks to the industrious kappa inventors – or even just fever medicine, which some people buy simply for the opportunity to speak with the beauty behind the counter. Thousands walk its streets every day, and the lucky few in the town center are given quite the show: a puppeteer play, conducted by one Alice Margatroid with such skill and precision that to this day many insist that it's run by magic, or that the dolls have minds of their own. No one has ever spoken with her long enough to come to any concrete conclusion. In all likelihood, no one ever will.

Today's tale is of a great empire with a benevolent ruler, brought burning to the ground by a single tyrant. Of lives, forever changed by the greed of a single man; a melancholy story indeed. As always, when it ends energetic cheers and tears come flying forth from the crowd, everyone having taken from the performance their own interpretation (but such is how these things go). Fans asking for a conversation, or an autograph, or even a single word, and as always her open case's gaping maw remains utterly empty, hungering desperately for nonexistent donations. The next show will be... I don't know, in a while, according to the puppeteer. She pushes through the crowd, dolls tucked away neatly in their places with the exception of her trusty Shanghai, which few ever see more than ten feet from her side. And with a sigh, her left hand finds its way around the throat of a shrouded young man who is now seeing *very* vividly why it was not in fact such a good idea to attempt to steal the enigmatic book that Alice holds so dear to her.

"Would you give that back to me? It's rather important, you see." As mechanical and rehearsed as her puppets, she speaks almost instinctively. Thirteen for fourteen this month, she notes – not a bad way to wrap it up. Still, if she can't improve enough to guess that fourteenth next month, another... *incident* may arise. Few are stupid enough to let that happen, of course, but some clearly are. A hand on her shoulder rouses Alice from her musings, reminding her of the rather pressing matter of a now-blue fellow holding out a hand and the book within it, shaking from a combination of fear and breathlessness. "Oh, yes. My apologies, for a minute there I lost myself." Her left arm once again comfortably full and her back turned, all that she would ever hear from this one would be a thud as he hits the floor, and the heavy tapping of his footsteps echoing above the crowd as he runs in a panic.

Leaving her to think about more... worldly things. Such as her distinct lack of income, her omnipresent repair costs (thanks to that damnable brute who doesn't seem to understand the concept of a locked door), the cost of materials for her craft, and her fear of losing yet another of the things she considers precious. Is money worth knowing that they will never be loved as much by their new owners, or that they almost certainly won't be held to such high standards of maintenance? If performing doesn't bring her money (even if she does keep coming back, over and over, clinging on to the dear hope that just once they'll willingly pay for a skill that doesn't require such an investment of time and money) then it very well may be.

"Yo, Alice!" A voice calls out from a nearby herbal remedy store, and it takes all of Alice's willpower not to cringe at it. Speak of the devil.

"Good day, Marisa. I trust you've been well?"

"Not half as well as you, eh?" Marisa's elbow nudges Alice with such force that she finds it difficult to believe it's unintentional, straining her image of a refined lady even further. "I saw what you did to that guy back there, he nearly shit himself! It was awesome!" Boisterous laughter louder than most would think a girl of her size capable of flows from Marisa, drawing yet more attention to the already rather attention-demanding couple and leaving Alice more and more frustrated and wishing on all her lucky stars for people to just *leave her alone for one day, for Christ's sake*. "I have to say, I'm kind of rethinking my image of you, Alice!"

On the verge of grinding her teeth, she replies, "And I, you. I'm simply making a living here, but you're constantly out partying when you aren't shutting yourself in your study for days at a time or off stealing whatever it is you want at the moment. You're really quite amazing." Marisa's grin spreads

wider and wider as she speaks, completely oblivious to the fact that she's being insulted, but Alice makes no mention of it. Throwing her arm around Alice's shoulder (and knocking Shanghai free of her seat in the process, leaving her to float coldly) Marisa jokes, "Aww, shucks. You're makin' me blush. Really though! What I wouldn't give to be strong like that...Sometimes, you know, I forget you're a youkai at all."

"It's not exactly something I'm proud of. Now if you'll excuse me, I do have business to attend to." With a brush of her arm, Marisa's hand and Shanghai are both back where they belong.

"Right, right. See ya 'round, poopleaker." Before she has time to react, Alice is left staring infuriated at the flow of a crowd, having finally snapped under the pressure of Marisa's constant teasing, and having only just been abandoned by the one once hailed as the fastest in Gensokyo.

Her mood quite swiftly soured by that... *intrusion*, she soon notices a distinct lack of people around her. There are people, of course – but not quite the crowd you'd expect in this kind of city. Perhaps they're being driven away by the fire in her eyes, or the slightly heavier steps she takes. Perhaps it's even the tension in her features which subtly shifts the usually elegant and refined Alice to a frightening figure which demands respect and fear. Or maybe – just maybe – it is in fact the presence of another, far more elegant, far more refined, and far more terrifying individual: Yuuka Kazami, admiring the intricate yet naturally formed patterns of flowers which overflow from hanging pots in an obscured stall on the side of the street.

"And just what has you all in a huff?" Without even turning to face Alice, she speaks. Her voice seems almost perpetually soft, yet carries with it an authority which can freeze blood. Some swear that it actually does.

"Nothing. Just... nothing. I'm fine." Lying to yourself is a bad habit and she knew it, but when you need to calm down and *fast*...well. Some things start to look a little more acceptable – if futile.

"You say that, but I can tell. Your heart is pounding so hard I can feel it through the earth. Your facade of elegance is cracking with every word you speak. You're almost as angry now as—"

"Please stop. I'd rather we not get into another fight today." For all the rage she can feel building in Alice, Yuuka's smile is unwavering. Anyone unlucky enough to pass by them can be seen very visibly attempting to hide their terror at the two, avoiding eye contact and quickening their pace.

"Oh, I bet you would. Just remember who won last time, and who would win again."

Seconds pass in complete silence, as Alice simply stares at her feet. Her face is nearly covered by her luxurious golden hair, yet a hint of red can be seen shining through it as she is put through yet another test of her will – this time to swallow her pride, rather than maintain it. Finally, barely above a whisper, "Yeah. I've got it. I won't be causing any trouble." Not that she would in the first place, of course, but to bow down before her like this is a disgrace.

"Lovely. Carry on then, wherever you were going. The flowers don't much care for people as wound up as you." With a line that would pin anyone else as just a little out of their head, she turns back to the flowers and continues the soft lullaby that she was humming to them, leaving Alice much more eager to retreat to... somewhere. Anywhere, just not here. Home, or to visit the Scarlet Devil Mansion, or off in the forest somewhere, even Marisa's house would be better than the village right now. Pounding the pavement, her head, normally cool and contemplative, is now empty of all but the basest desire, *Just let today end, already.*

"Heeeey. You listening or what?" Another surprise that shouldn't be a surprise. After making a quick mental note to stop letting herself get lost in her own thoughts, Alice turns to face... whoever it is, she doesn't even care any more – until she sees.

"Why hello, Reimu. What a pleasant surprise." At this, Reimu's face tightens quickly and strongly. Whatever traces of relaxation that were in her are gone now, replaced by a sincere worry for her friend.

"Surprise...? I was calling to you for a good minute. You look really down. Are you all right?"

"Oh, I'm fine. I was just thinking about... things." All the smiles and fake cheer she can muster

don't phase Reimu's concern for a second, and knowing that relieves Alice immensely. Very few in this world can speak with Reimu on equal terms, and being friends with her was an even greater honor. Her insight here only went to prove their bonds.

"I think you need some time to relax. I'm about done here. Would you like to join me back at the shrine? Maybe get some tea in you?"

The smile on Alice's face makes any words she could say unnecessary.

---

"Well lookee here! You've gotten so big, I hardly recognized you. C'mere, sport!" For every calm, collected, and pleasant person, it seems there is an equally rowdy, scatterbrained, obnoxious individual that endlessly pesters them. Mima is one such counterpoint, and the current focus of Alice's dissatisfaction – or, rather, Mima's fists, which are currently rubbing her the wrong way, in the most literal sense.

"I'm not a child, *phantom*. You can stop treating me like one."

"Oooh, scaaary. Even though you've only been a youkai for what... ten years, against my thousand? Face it, kid – you're a kid. And for the record, I'm not a *phantom*. I'm a god. Get it right."

"I'd rather you not put me on that scale. I'm old enough to be considered an adult by human standards."

"And just what, may I ask, is human about you? You're a youkai, and you've been one ever since you opened that Grimoire of yours."

"Mima. Stop." Quiet enough to be forgotten until now, Reimu makes her will known sternly, and hers is a will only the most stupid or the most brave would go against. The dead silence of the room is an eerie contrast to the energy present only seconds before, and it lasts entire minutes before anyone dares break it.

"Hey, uh...sorry." Silence. "I didn't really mean all that, you know? Just bustin' your balls, so to speak." Weak, forced laughter, punctuated by silence. Alice's sight doesn't even leave her cup.

"I think you should go, Mima."

"But—"

"*I think you should go, Mima.*" With a dejected sigh, she turns her back to the two now quite sour young women and fades into the ceiling, leaving them to drown in the silence once more.

"Hey...I'm sorry I let that happen."

"It's not your fault. You have to deal with her all the time. I guess you just forgot, or something."

"No, I mean...*that*." It takes a moment for her meaning to sink in, and when it does, Alice's shoulders slump even further.

"...It's okay. Really."

"..."

"She was... causing an incident. Threatening you. Right? I know how these things work; I helped to solve one, once."

"Alice, I—"

"And back then, there weren't spellcard rules or anything like that. It's only natural that there would be a few casualties. You all knew you were risking your lives. It's just how the dice fell." Her hands, having abandoned their place at the table, now grip her dress. Every word out of her mouth is like dancing along the edge of a cliff as she fights off tears, every second that passes her fists tighten all the more until they threaten to draw blood. All the while, Reimu can do nothing but grasp for words that aren't there.

"I... I'm sorry, Alice. I'm so, so sorry."

"It's been ten years, already. We should both just... let it go. If you don't mind, I think I'll head

home. It's getting late."

"... Yeah. Yeah, you get some rest."

In silence, she leaves. The setting sun provides a backdrop for her walk home – too exhausted or perhaps too apathetic to fly, she can't decide herself. Back at the shrine, Reimu is still sitting. She hasn't touched her tea.

---

Alice Margatroid lies in bed, in complete darkness. Her feet ache, her fingers creak with every movement, her hair is disheveled and her nightgown has been given almost no effort into staying on. Even Shanghai is only given a loose grip underneath the weak comfort of her sheets.

Alice Margatroid lies in bed, awake and afraid. Her mind is filled with doubt and with bad memories that she wishes she could abandon, but never will. Sleep would be a welcome escape, if only for the night, but her buzzing thoughts don't permit her to drift away.

Alice Margatroid lies in bed, thinking of tomorrow. Of peddling off her babies, the dolls that she loves so much. Only the best ones ever get bought, and she knows it. The others aren't showy enough for collectors or playwrights, but she can't afford the materials for the good ones unless her performances come through like they used to.

Alice Margatroid lies in bed, and shifts her head to look at the last doll on her shelf. It's a modest one with a simple design. It's old, and it's not as professionally made as the others which have since found new homes, but it's still dear to her. The red cloth, the white hair done up in a ponytail, the tiny, detailed accessories and those beautiful wings that she had spent so long on.

Alice Margatroid lies in bed, crying silently into the night.



# *Twilight of Perpetual Servitude*

*(A Study In Scarlet)*

*By Kilgamayan*

I love having Sakuya as my chief maid.

Every day, when I wake up, there's a delicious cup of tea waiting for me. Just today she prepared this fabulous oolong tea. I hadn't had oolong in decades, and it was just as good as I remember it. She claimed it was the third time around for the leaves; I have no idea when the first two uses took place, because I certainly don't recall anything of the sort. I wondered if she had secretly prepared for this morning several days in advance. I smiled as I entertained the idea. It certainly was a very Sakuya thing to do.

It was no less than a necessity, as well. Patchouli and Koakuma only drink tea with milk in it for some reason. I don't think I'll ever figure them out. Meiling has never produced more than a mediocre green tea, and the last time she was allowed in the kitchen the explosions made Flandre panic. My sister herself knows nothing of the culinary arts, and the fairy maids are useless for anything other than preparing meager food for themselves. I don't know what I would do without Sakuya.

Every day, Sakuya informs me of the daily goings-on in Gensokyo. She is well known in the human village where she does her shopping for the household and is able to learn what vegetables are good this year, or what youkai are acting up, or what the farmers have forecasted for the week's weather.

I heard a familiar light rapping at my study door this afternoon. I knew it would be her, telling me what new things she learned from today's trip.

"Come in, Sakuya."

"Thank you, my Lady. I have finished purchasing our food for the next week."

"Very good. But you wouldn't come up here just to tell me that."

"As sharp as ever, my Lady. It seems Reimu is holding a party this coming Saturday evening. Our house has been invited."

"Really? Reimu's not really the party type. Are you sure about this?"

"Please excuse me. 'Party' was my own word use. Reimu herself called it a 'social gathering' and avoided the use of 'party' altogether. The oni appeared to be partly behind this, however, so I suspect it will indeed be a party."

"Ahaha, that's my Reimu!"

"That is all for now, my Lady."

"Very good. Check in with Patchouli and then set about your daily tasks."

"At once."

Sakuya then disappeared with that odd little time skip of hers. I must learn how to do that some

day. It is no end of useful for her, and it would be a lot of fun for me.

Every day, Sakuya keeps our mansion in pristine condition. I wander the halls of my mansion to find the walls clean, the carpet straight and kempt and the doorknobs and staircase railings sparkling. Her work is fitting for a household of our stature, and she is deservedly proud of it. As am I.

Any time a fairy maid makes a mess, that mess is gone in less than a minute, and the well-being of said fairy maid depends on who cleaned the mess up. We have very few fairy maid messes. Even Flandre's occasional wake of mini-destruction is never around for very long, and my sister will quite often receive a scolding about reckless behavior before receiving a touse, a treat and a suggestion to resume playing while being more careful. Sakuya handles her expertly, and I smile every time I see her in action.

Every day, Sakuya cooks a fabulous meal. She is truly unmatched in her culinary skills. The half-ghost gardener, the pathetic moon rabbit, the shady kitsune, they all pale in comparison to what my Sakuya can do in a kitchen. Her chicken alfredo dish is to die for. She does things with Kobe beef that none of us had ever imagined, let alone seen before. And, of course, her tea preparation is exquisite.

Yes, I love having Sakuya as my chief maid.

And yet...it still hurts.

I cannot stop thinking about her, and I can tell I'm not the only one. Whenever there is just a tad too much pepper in a roast, I feel a pang of sadness. I look over the table, at Patchouli and Meiling, and I can see it in their eyes, ignoring their smiles, that they feel it too. None of us will ever stop.

It's not just at meals, either. Every time I see an underpolished stairway railing, my heart aches just a little bit. Every time a visit to the village takes a half hour when I know it can be done in twenty-eight minutes, my smile becomes forced, less genuine.

Sometimes, when several minor errors have happened over a small period of time, I will even cry myself to sleep. I am ashamed of the rare occasions when Sakuya checks in on me and wishes to know what troubles me. It hurts me deeply. I cannot tell Sakuya why I cry. It is unfair to her. She does everything she can and sometimes more. It is not her fault.

I love having Sakuya...but she's not perfect.

And it kills me to think about.

I miss my old maid.

## *Afterword*

My aim in writing about Touhou is to be different. For example, the Reisen Bad End was one of the very few (if not the only one) that killed the Touhou off instead of the PC. Striving for uniqueness was the catalyst for this story.

When I first got the idea for this story, there had been a recent epidemic amongst the WTCs I frequent regarding Sakuya's mortality and what effect her death would have on the SDM. Of course, this idea has been pondered since Sakuya x Remilia fans first came into being, since Sakuya x Meiling fans first came into being...hell, since Sakuya fans first came into being, but it was at a particular high at this point in time.

The Difference Desire kicked in here. People always think of the rest of the SDM being sad and lonely that, in losing Sakuya, they've lost the best maid and best human friend they've ever had. Remilia's been around for five hundred years. What if Sakuya was merely the latest in a line of maids? What if Sakuya was not only just another maid, but not even the best one the SDM had ever seen? What if *she* was the replacement for the perfect maid that everyone else fantasizes about when they consider Sakuya's death?

Getting back to the origins of this story, I had also recently seen a spike in my own interest of a certain classic black-and-white sci-fi thriller series featuring Rod Serling. (If, at any point, you thought the Twilight in the story title was pulled from that infernal Meyer book, please stab yourself in the face.) The two ideas ran into each other in my head, found my thirst for uniqueness, had a little party and this was the result. It may be short, but I am proud of it nonetheless, and I hope you enjoyed the paradigm shift.



**WHAT  
WINTER  
CONSUMED**

As the night fell, it seemed as though the sky's assault was getting fiercer. The snow seemed to be playing an interesting role, a sugary powder beneath the sun, frigid knives beneath the moon. The winds did its best as a supporting cast member, tossing the snow with great speed, piercing the young man's skin with frozen fire. His torch had died, not that it mattered, as he had been lost for what seemed like centuries. The only thing dimmer than the night sky above him was the hope that waned inside him. He was alone, cold, and very afraid. As he dropped to his knees, he cursed the gods above and his own foolishness. Had he better prepared for his journey, as his mentors had suggested, he would be relaxing before a warm flame. Unfortunately, he could not partake in such luxury, and as the wind grew even stronger, he tried his best to remember the sensation, for he knew deep in his heart that he may never experience it in this life again. He shivered violently and fought back the tears that would surely freeze his eyes closed. He clenched his fists and winced at the searing pain of frostbite. It was then that he could battle no longer. His strength was gone. He could barely gather his thoughts, much less hold his body's weight, and with that, he fell face first into the snow. He almost smiled at the notion of his torture's end. Certainly anything would be better than this hell, an ironic title. He could feel the cold begin to fade as the life slowly seeped from his exhausted frame. He wondered what awaited him on the other side. He felt the reaper himself lift him, ready to carry him into the next world. Little did he realize that this feeling of death incoming was, instead, an unexpected rescue.

His eyes opened slowly. The other side was not quite what he had expected; it seemed more like a traditional house than the heavenly realm he had heard about in teaching all his life. The site of the wooden ceiling above and the feel of the slightly soft mat beneath were more confusing than comforting. It was a more ideal environment than the dire freeze, but is this really what the afterlife held for humanity? *Surely it couldn't be*, he thought to himself. There was no way the teachings were this inaccurate. The great teacher of the village knew much of mortality and the many worlds, and she had described things rather plainly. This was not it. After gathering himself and realizing that he had indeed returned to consciousness, the young man sat up and looked around.

As he rose, the cool, damp cloth that had been resting on his forehead fell into his lap. Had someone placed it there? Obviously, but does that mean someone was caring for him? He gazed at his new place of refuge, taking in his surroundings. It was a small yet cozy home. The bed in which he rested sat in the far left corner of the room. Next to the bed was a tiny desk; the chair that looked to compliment it had been turned in his direction. It seemed that whoever took him in had been watching him from the bedside. On the opposite wall was a table with two chairs, no doubt the usual eating place, and to the far right was a fireplace, a freshly-made fire burning brightly within, comfortably warming the room. Close to the desk was a door that lead to the rest of the house and what sounded like a kitchen; someone was hard at work cooking something there. Familiar sounds of clanging metal, be it pots or dishes, and the scent of something good emanated from beyond. The young man vowed to make sure he apologized for his intrusion, albeit at no fault of his own, and returned the favor as best he could. Still, who could it be?

Before long, a woman holding a tray of food emerged from the entrance. The young man was in awe at her beauty. Her skin was a soft pale, a very delicate complexion, and her hair was a light purple that glittered in the firelight. It shimmered like bright purple diamonds, a mesmerizing sight to behold. She wore a long, white casual robe that, while plain, still managed to look like it belonged to a princess. It was truly exceptional. The young man could not even bring himself to speak in her presence. He could only stare into her eyes, half in fright, eyes on a face that smiled cutely at him. She sat in the chair next to his bed and placed the tray beside him.

"You're awake," she said. "How are you feeling?"

The young man looked down at the contents of the tray: a small bowl of a soup he could not identify and a cup of hot green tea. He looked back at the woman, who continued to smile and nodded. Lifting a weak hand, he picked up the glass of tea and took a sip. He could taste the medicinal herbs the woman had added to the brew; it was a popular remedy in the village that, for whatever reason, seemed to boost the drinker's energy as well as soothe the pains caused by the cold. He set the cup back on the tray and quietly nodded his head at the woman as a friendly gesture. She seemed to understand his non-verbal communication well.

"Don't strain yourself," she said. She leaned in and felt his forehead. "Your fever's starting to go down. That's a relief."

Her hand had a definite chill to it. It wasn't the kind of chill that came from someone whose hands were simply cold from the environment or lack of blood flow. It seemed to be an inherent cold. He shook his hand a bit and took a deep breath, filling his lungs with the warm air of the room. As he exhaled, he looked at the woman, smiling almost ashamedly.

"Thank you for taking me in," he said quietly. "I am sorry for troubling you."

The woman laughed. "It's no trouble at all," she said. "It would have been cruel to leave you like that. You're a lucky man."

"Indeed I am," the young man agreed. "I did not think I would survive to see the sun rise."

His host took the cloth that once sat upon his forehead and stood from her chair.

"You should eat that," she suggested, motioning to the food on the tray. "You'll get better much faster with a full stomach." She bowed and politely excused herself from the room.

Not one to brush away the kindness of others, the young man decided to partake of his gift. Sipping small bits of the soup with the spoon he had been provided, he marveled over the taste. The meal had a combination of flavors, all very familiar but none he could truly pinpoint, and they were all quite delicious. As he ate, his body began to remind him just how hungry he was. He had been craving something like this, and his stomach thanked him. The young man was overcome with relief, heaven on earth. He would have to ask her for the recipe when he finished.

Before long, the woman returned and sat next to his bed once again. She had brought back a bowl of cold water and a new cloth, in case his fever began to return. The young man was truly overwhelmed by the woman's kindness. He turned to her and gazed at her beauty. Then, he looked about the room and noted one particularly interesting detail: there was no evidence that this home had a second dweller. How could such a selfless and dazzling spectacle be living here all alone? He pondered this intensely, as any man would be more than lucky to have such a gift as his bride. While not wanting to pry into her personal life, the young man mustered up the courage to talk with her in order to appease his curiosity.

"I've not seen you around the village before" he said to her. "Have you lived here long?"

"I come and go," she responded. "I like to consider this my winter home."

Her response puzzled him. This particular area was known for harsher winters. If she was not from this side of the land, why would she stay here during this season, only to be greeted by Mother Nature's disastrous fury?

"The winter season is very rough in these parts," he noted. "Why expose yourself to our deadly elements?"

The woman laughed. "Well," she said happily, "if not for my decision to stay out here, I couldn't rescue young fools like you!"

The young man blushed a little in embarrassment but laughed in return. It was true. Had she not been around, he would surely be done for, though he could have prevented his folly from the very beginning had he used his mind a little more effectively.

"You have me there," he said. He turned and looked out the window next to his bed. The storm had not died down much, and what little moonlight did shine between the clouds only revealed the fast-falling snow that slashed through the night air. "You know," he said, "I cannot believe I would let myself get lost out there."

"Oh?" The woman's interests were piqued.

"I have traveled these road many times in my life," he began. "I know these trails like the back of my hand, and yet, somehow, I allowed my mind to grow fuzzy enough to lose sight. But even so, I knew these winters could be treacherous, and I should have brought supplies in case something were to happen."

The woman smiled. "Don't be so hard on yourself," she assured him. "What matters is that you are here now, alive and well. When morning comes and the storms subside, you can leave and be home before you know it."

The young man nodded. "Thank you," he said. "You truly are too kind. If you don't mind my asking, do you live alone?"

"I do," she said. "I travel quite a bit, so I do think it would be unfair to drag someone along on my spontaneous journeys."

"I certainly wouldn't mind."

"Oh?" she giggled. "Are you saying you would like to join me from here on? You're a bold one."

"No no," he said nervously, trying to take it back, "I did not mean it that way!" Her beauty and demeanor were both captivating, and it seems that his mouth was conveying his feelings before his mind had a chance to process and stop them. "I am simply saying that I would find it fun to roam about freely," he continued. "I am something of a traveler myself, and so the prospects of new places intrigues me. Though... it seems I still have a long way to go before I can hope to travel far if I am getting lost in lands I know well."

The young man grew quiet. He was not a genius in any sense of the word, but he was bright

enough to never get lost in his own backyard. How did these events come to pass? The trails are clearly marked, and he had anticipated the coming weather and nightfall. His mind was cloudy. Come to think of it, he could barely remember anything from prior to finding himself nearly dying in the snow. He began to work the events backwards in his head, trying to make sense of things. Blurry memories came forth revealing trivial events. A bird landed on a branch and shook a bit of snow onto the ground below. He sneezed when a slight breeze blew a handful of dead grass past his nose. The sun had been setting over the mountains, but he would make it back before it crept below the horizon. A woman passed him on the path. Wait... a woman?

The woman seemed important. He tried his best to remember why. He couldn't quite make out what she looked like, but he recalled that she was looking for something. Was it something she had lost? Yes, that's right... She had lost a pouch while running from wolves in the woods. The pouch had contained something dear to her, and he had offered to help her find it. Who was the woman? Did he ever find the pouch? Slowly, bits and pieces started coming together in his thoughts. Her garbs seemed familiar, and her hair was different, unlike anything he had seen before. It was a glittery light purple- The young man looked up at the woman taking care of him. She sat quietly smiling at him.

"Is something the matter?" she asked.

"Can I ask your name?"

"That's a secret!" she said, still smiling.

He knew he would not get her name. He truly could have prevented this entire ordeal if he had bothered to remember one of the oldest teachings in the village. He knew who this woman was. The legends had been repeated over and over by the elders and the great teacher. His eyes were filled with fright. This kind woman was not kind at all. He looked at the meal on the tray in his lap. He looked around the room. Nothing here was real. It was all a trick, a result of the trap into which he had fallen. He looked back at the woman. Her face no longer showed a smile as she stared deep and chillingly at him.

"You... You're Le-"

She slowly stood up and reached for him. Frozen with fear, he did not move and ceased to speak. He did not even try to resist her advance. The woman simply placed her hand calmly on his head and ran her fingers through his hair.

"You know," she said quietly, "you're quite cute. I was willing to keep you for a bit longer, but you think too much."

The young man lied motionless in the snow, resting for eternity. The woman stood above him, drops of blood falling from her fingertips. A tiny stream of blood trickled from the side of her mouth, one she quickly licked up. She took one final look at the young man and walked away, leaving no footprints in her wake. He had been her first of the year, and certainly, he would not be her last. With her taste for blood renewed, she disappeared into the night, into the cold, beyond the snowfall.

The winter, and all those who lived within it, were hers to enjoy, to savor, to destroy, to consume. The winter was all hers.



# Kirisame's Death Rocket

By

Kawashiro Nitori

“Are you sure you want to do this, Shanghai?” said Alice. “If my theory is wrong, you might not come out with all your arms and legs.”

The doll bowed.

Alice signaled the other dolls to clear the area, and completed the spell. Electricity streamed out of her hands. It bounced off Shanghai and set fire to a tree. The whole forest shook with the sound of thunder.

Alice made a note of it.

“Damn!” she said. “Damn! Damn! Damn!”

She commanded the dolls to contain the fire and pretended to watch her creations drag water buckets along the ground. At any moment Marisa would rush into the backyard to complain about the noise, or so Alice hoped.

The fire went out and Marisa did not show. The smell of mud and smoke reminded Alice of the time she helped Marisa out of a puddle. She could almost feel the magician’s soft hands on her wrist.

“What am I doing wrong? It was right out her window... Maybe she’s not home. Come on, let’s find out.”

Shanghai folded its arms.

“I am not stalking Marisa. This is different. Mind your own business and go knock on the door.”

Shanghai flew ahead along the path. Alice caught up and pried the doll away from the knocker when Marisa answered. The girl carried a broomstick over her shoulders. She

walked right past Alice and yawned once.

“Marisa, wait!” said Alice. “It’s important!”

“What’s important?” said Marisa.

“Ah... well... it’s the first day of spring, and...” *And you could afford to take some time out for tea, maybe watch your neighbor deflect lightning,* thought Alice.

Marisa groaned. “Oh, wow, I forgot. Lily White!”

“Yeah,” Alice sighed. Truth was she’d also forgotten about Lily White, the vicious herald of spring. Lily’s habit of popping out of clouds to announce the season with hailstorms of bullets made it unsafe for everybody else to fly. Alice had encountered Lily before, years ago, and still it was enough to unnerve her.

“Lemme guess,” said Marisa, “you were gonna watch my back on the way to Kourindou, right?”

Alice agreed. She hadn’t planned to go to Kourindou, let alone put herself in danger, but the chances of encountering Lily were small. Any excuse to spend time with Marisa was good.

They reached Kourindou in a matter of minutes, Alice flying just a few feet behind Marisa. They took low paths whenever possible, skimming the forest canopy where it would be easy to dive in and confound Lily if she gave chase. This upset a few of the minor fairy clans who lived there, but the trip was otherwise uneventful.

When they reached the Kourindou shop, Alice waited for Marisa to ask about the lightning shield test, or at least acknowledge the noise. She was too embarrassed to bring up the subject on her own, so she let Marisa shop in peace.

Not that Marisa did any shopping, Alice observed. The girl loaded Alice with items from nearby shelves and gave her instructions on how to hide it in her dress. She obeyed, and when Marisa wasn't looking, she put the items back.

After unloading a sleeve full of colored bits of metal, she noticed Marisa put an octagonal box on the counter. A skinny clerk inspected it.

"Broken again?" asked the clerk.

"Nah," said Marisa. "Nothin' like that. I wanna make it go hotter."

"You'd melt the reactor. And whatever do you need all that extra heat for?"

"So I can stick it on my broom and make a rocket engine! Voosh!"

The clerk buried his face in his hands. "It'll never work," he said. "And why would you even want to?"

"Yes it will work! And besides, if Reimu can make a three stage rocket go all the way to the moon..."

"You and Reimu have been way too competitive lately. Why can't you relax and stay for tea like you used to?"

"I can't relax! Not with Reimu about to beat me at the race this weekend."

"So what do you have to worry about? You're faster than she is, aren't you? You'll be okay. Knowing Reimu, I'll bet she doesn't practice or anything."

"Yeah, right, Kourin. Have you been living in a cave? She's got some kind of spell, or some stupid lazy trick up her big fat detached sleeve. You should see it. Don't be such a jerk and help me out, okay?"

"I am not being a jerk. You're making impossible demands, so don't be mad if I

can't help you."

"I wasn't mad until you made me mad!"

Alice had to intervene. It seemed the two were on the verge of fighting. "Um... excuse me..." she said, "I think I can help."

The clerk fell out of his seat. "Whoa! Alice, I didn't see you come in."

Alice blushed. "I didn't mean to frighten you. I was only trying to help."

"We're good," said Marisa. "What were you gonna say?"

"Um... let me see the reactor," said Alice.

"You be careful!"

"Eh? That's hihi'irokane in there, looks like. There's no way to break the material without the proper equipment."

"But the outside is made of wood. What if it cracks?"

"Sustained exposure to red metal would have done more than crack it. Whatever protects the wood is the true force holding your device together."

"I don't get it."

"Marisa, do you remember Utsuho? Your reactor is like a personal Utsuho..."

"Alice, I don't know what you have in mind," said the clerk, "but can you please not blow up Gensokyo? I hear rumors you're building some kind of huge bomb, and this Utsuho character sounds like bad company..."

"Oh? You don't want me around?" said Alice.

"Come on," said Marisa. "Get back to the reactor. And, uh, don't blow it up."

The reactor consisted of eight plates covered in characters used in Chinese

divinations. Of course the box derived its power from its geometry and an active hihi'irokane core, not the symbols themselves. A slight disappointment, because Alice had hoped the symbols were a coolant incantation, and altering the script to create propulsion would have been easy.

“This reactor is maxed out,” said Alice. “Maybe unstable. Heat this and... oh, you weren't planning on using a chain reaction of catastrophic energy detonations to push your rocket, were you?”

Marisa blinked. “What? Don't you play with dolls?”

“I *work* with dolls, but what's that got to do with- I mean we'd better take precautions.”

Alice placed the reactor on the floor. With the last of her magic chalk, she drew a seven pointed star around it, surrounding the design with script.

“Chalk ain't cheap. You're overdoing the shield,” said Marisa.

“Because it's a ward, too,” Alice explained. “I'm setting up these alarm triggers as speed markers. If I did it right, we can gauge how fast your reactor can go based on field resistance. You can take the reactor in and out as you please but it can't leave on its own.”

“If you're planning on testing the reactor in here, don't,” said the clerk. “It will start a fire.”

“Not to worry. The flames can't spread beyond my circle.”

“But I do worry. Marisa is enough trouble by herself.”

Alice made a new entry in the book at her side. Then Marisa copied the design in her own pocket sized notebook.

“Marisa, I didn’t know you…” Alice started.

“…take notes on everything?” said Marisa. “Magic is my whole life. Gotta stay ahead, right?”

“I know that feeling. So how were you going to make this reactor fly, anyway?”

“Easy. Put it face down and MASTER SPARK THE GROUND!”

“No!” shouted the clerk, ducking under the counter. Alice tried to join him, but he took up most of the available space.

“Cowards,” said Marisa. “What’s the matter with both ‘a you?”

“Um… Marisa?” said Alice. “I don’t think you should. I’ve seen you use that spell card, and… uh… it’s not quite what you want. Not indoors.”

“It cracks like a lightning bolt, pushes back a little, and it’s done.”

“So you’ve tried it before? And you survived?”

“I did.”

“Cracks like a lightning bolt, huh? Maybe you’re overdoing it.”

“Or maybe… a thunderclap is from air heating up, right?”

“Kind of. What does that have do with…” Alice’s voice trailed off. If the Master Spark heated air into lightning elements, then a lightning spell would push the elements out. The force would send the reactor in the opposite direction.

“I got it!” said Alice.

“Oh. Lightning spell, right?”

Alice studied her notes. “We want half a lightning shield, inside the reactor, shaped like a funnel. Air flows into the shield, you turn it to lightning. The lightning air

bounces around the shield, goes out the end, and you have a Spark Rocket. Kind of like a continuous gun barrel, but without the need for compression.”

“So is this why you put gunpowder in your dolls and sent me straight through the Blazing Hells?”

“No.”

“Huh. Wish I knew how to do a lightning shield.”

Shanghai squirmed in Alice’s hand. The lightning shield’s core and a concave mirror would have been perfect for the job. It would have been easy, too, except the core was linked directly to the spell animating Shanghai. Removing it would destroy Shanghai, so the doll would have to ride the engine to sustain the field.

Alice would sooner throw a baby into a fire than risk losing Shanghai like that. But now, as Marisa walked out the door with the trigram reactor in hand, all the pathetic desires Alice had suppressed with her hobbies slammed into her like a full powered Master Spark right in the gut. If Marisa left now, she might move on to waste her affections on a certain empty headed shrine maiden, then grow old and disintegrate in the usual human fashion. The very thought of missing the opportunity brought her searing pain from the bones outward. If her skin charred from the inside or boiled off she would not have been surprised.

“Wait!” cried Alice. “You can’t leave now! You said you wanted to do this, we have a field set up for testing, and you’re going to give up? Just like that?”

“Guess so. You said...”

“I have something that can work. But... it’s really close to me.”

Marisa stopped in her tracks. “Alice? You crying?”

“Shut up. It’s not like that at all.”

“Ya look like you’re crying.”

“Just shut up, okay?” Alice fought back another rising lump in her throat. “I can make you that rocket. Right now. Shanghai will create the shield and fly it.”

Marisa’s jaw dropped. “Alice, this isn’t like you. Using your favorite doll like a-”

“Like a sacrifice instead of a person?”

“I was gonna say ‘steering wheel...’ But you’re taking way more chances than usual.”

Marisa was right. It was too great a risk. Alice knew from experience the first test always failed, no matter what it was. She didn’t risk Shanghai with the first lightning shield test. Even her first dolls tripped over their own feet. The rocket idea was built on so much more speculation, more than anything Alice had ever done before. She’d never built a rocket before, and the only ones she’d ever seen were the colorful, exploding kind. The reactor could survive, but Shanghai, along with the rest of the insane project, was doomed from the start.

But dammit, there were no second chances with Marisa. She would only live for an instant, and Alice had to make it last.

“I have full confidence in my abilities,” Alice lied. “Shanghai will be okay. Let’s do it.”

Alice drew up minimalistic plans for the spark rocket, requiring as few changes to the reactor as possible. To her surprise, Marisa had a talent for using found objects, items

which Alice would have dismissed as outsider junk. She also drove the clerk mad as he tried to put all the objects on her tab.

While building a safety harness for Shanghai, Alice discovered cluttered script on the bottom of the reactor, full of symbols she had never seen before. She did recognize part of it as a powerful levitation spell, so big that the whole reactor was less than a tenth of the energy needed to cast it. If done properly, it could probably lift Youkai Mountain and drop it on the other side of Gensokyo.

“Marisa! Where did you copy this from? I can’t even read it!”

“Oh, that? Just a shock absorber. Master Spark would knock me over without it. Or, y’know, shoot the reactor through me like a cannonball. Hey, can’t I just do that?”

“No. But look what you wrote over here. If you got it right, we wouldn’t need a rocket. The spell would carry you much more efficiently.”

“So help me fix it, will ya?”

Some of the sections in the script were disturbing, especially a whole verse commanding pure void to explode. Alice suspected the original source was ancient, and poorly copied before Marisa got a hold of it.

“I’d rather not. It’s dangerous to mess around with spells you copied from ancient texts,” said Alice.

“And it’s not dangerous to play with rockets indoors?” countered Marisa.

“At least we know what we’re doing. Ancients had no magical theory. If an ancient magician wrote a spell that blew up his head instead of doing what it was supposed to, he’d take the blame, not the spell. His error would be copied down for

generations.”

“I don’t like the sound of that,” said the clerk. “Can’t you two test this outside, far away from my store?”

“Nope, gotta do it now,” said Marisa. She snatched the reactor from Alice and dropped it in the circle. “MASTER SPARK, FULL POWER!”

“Marisa, no! It’s not ready!” cried Alice.

It was too late. A small jet of flame shot out of the reactor chamber, so bright it hurt. The device fell onto its side. It did not move.

“Shit, damn, fuck!” said Marisa.

“I tried to tell you it wasn’t ready. Hey, are you even listening to me?”

Marisa was already reciting a minor charm. A thin electric arc leapt from her hand into the bright fire. The reactor slid around the magic circle’s edge like a rat in a cage.

“Cool,” she said.

“I don’t think you should be doing that,” said Alice. “How can you see well enough to aim, anyway?”

“Okay, how about this?” Marisa pulled her hat over her eyes and pointed into the circle. A tiny fluorescent star shot out from her index finger into the flame. The reactor jumped.

“No! What if you hit Shanghai?”

“‘No’ means ‘yes’ in Alice language,” sang Marisa, feeding a stream of stars into the bright light. A few missed and evaporated against the inner edge of the circle. “Hey, Kourin, make another trigram reactor and let’s do a race.”

“One is enough, Marisa,” said the clerk. “Why don’t you listen to Alice?”

“Marisa, stop,” said Alice, but she couldn’t help laughing. And then she noticed her highest pressure wards were triggering. “Seriously, you’re going to break the field. Turn it off. It’s not supposed to work like that.”

Marisa stopped firing. The reactor continued to press against the sides, aligning itself straight up. Loud alarm wards sounded in Alice’s head.

“Alice, how do I turn it off?” Marisa sounded worried.

“Oh no. I was afraid something like this would happen. Maybe you can use the spell on the back to push it down for now. But please be careful!”

“All right,” said Marisa. She recited the part commanding void to explode.

“Wrong verse!” screamed Alice.

The ground dropped by an inch. Every shelf in the store collapsed. A blazing column of fire shattered Alice’s magic circle. It burst open the roof and left a haze of dust and splinters in its wake.

Pounded and chewed up like a piece of mochi, Alice picked herself up. She had to pull several finger sized splinters from her wounds, but nothing was broken or twisted. Marisa lay face down in front of her.

“Marisa! Are you hurt? Can you move?” said Alice.

Marisa sat up. She had a black eye and a few scrapes under her chin. “Is something perverted going on, Alice?”

“I don’t follow. Are you feeling okay?”

“I’m okay. You’re a perv.”

“Excuse me?”

“Look!” Marisa rubbed the upper edge of her lip. Alice did the same and found blood on her finger.

“Yuck! A nosebleed!” she said. “It’s not perverted! It must have happened when I fell.”

“Hey, Kourin, lookit Alice,” said Marisa.

The clerk emerged from the corner, choking and covered in dust. “Am I dead? Is this the afterlife?” he said. “Marisa, since when did you become a shinigami?”

“You’re not dead. Check out Alice. She looks like a pervert, don’t you think?”

Alice tilted her head back to stop the bleeding. Looking up, she saw a stack of holes forming a tunnel through the second floor and the attic, all the way through to the sky. A thin trail of white clouds followed a light the size of a pinhead, bright as the sun. Shanghai was up there. Alice wished she knew how to get the doll back.

“I can still see the reactor,” said Alice. “Hurry if you want a look.” She still had trouble grasping the fact that she’d lost Shanghai, though she’d probably scream about it later. She told herself she left Shanghai at home, hoping to stave off panic until she got back.

Three seconds later and her plan failed. She was on her knees thinking about her lost doll, whining about how she should have known better. Tear blinded and nauseated she tried to find her way out of the ruined shop. Then Marisa gripped her hand.

“Then we’d better catch it, huh?” said Marisa.

“How?” sobbed Alice.

Marisa retrieved a handful of silvery foil. “See? It’s from the same roll we used. You said the first rule of magic is the Law of Contagion.”

“Contagion won’t stop Shanghai from burning up, no thanks to you, and it’s useless trying to catch what’s left. I’m leaving before you hurt yourself again.”

Marisa tugged Alice’s sore arm. “Now hold on. Catching this is a two girl operation!”

“Marisa, I can’t hope to match that speed, and neither can your broom. Look how high it is already.”

“We meet it halfway after it burns out and catch it in the air,” said Marisa, mounting her broom. “You fly down faster than you can fall, grab it, and then I’ll scoop you up at an angle. Got it?”

Without even thinking, Alice climbed on and put her arms around Marisa. “No, you’re insane!”

She was going to add something about being needlessly complicated and reckless, but it was too late. Marisa flew her straight up, right through the hole in the ceiling, and the wind ripped the words out of her mouth.

The pinhead of flame was just ahead, and suddenly, it disappeared. Marisa stopped the broom to recite a spell. The foil in her hand turned bright orange. A distant orange dot appeared in the sky, and a thin, shimmering line appeared leading up to it.

“Don’t just do something, sit there!” said Marisa. “Wait, that’s not how it goes…”

Alice jumped off the broom. She soared downward, staying ahead of the falling line. She had less than a minute before hitting the ground, even less time to catch the

reactor. One second it was a distant clump of orange clutter, and in an instant, it was in her hands.

A white blur overtook her as soon as Alice held the reactor. It snatched the device away and slowed enough for Alice to see the outline of a fairy, mocking her. It was Lily White.

The fairy dropped a thick cluster of bullets right over Alice's head and sped away. She was close to the point of no return, where no amount of braking could save her from impacting the ground. She'd have to navigate through a maze of one inch gaps, pushing herself down at one third the speed of the bullets.

Relying on sheer luck, Alice held her arms against her sides and squeezed through the bullet storm. The projectiles caught her arms and legs anyway, and ripped through most of her skirt. One bullet struck her toe. Another nearly cut her ear off. By the time she emerged, she was already too low.

Marisa caught Alice by the arm and pulled up so hard it felt like her shoulder might rip right out of its socket. Alice was heavy enough to flip Marisa upside-down, but the girl was undeterred. Alice's feet came so close to a lake that droplets of muddy water clung to her ankles. Stars overwhelmed her vision until she brought her breathing under control.

Once it was safe, Alice left the broom and caught up with Lily. She dodged wave after wave of white bullets until she was close enough to take the reactor. The fairy swiped at her with a brass horn, screaming for Alice to go away.

"Lily, please," said Alice. "I don't want to hurt you. That's Marisa's reactor, and

she'd really like it back.”

“NO!” said Lily. “Finders keepers!”

“Oh, what could you possibly want a piece of junk like a mini-hakkerō for? Wouldn't you rather have a full sized one?”

“Stupid youkai, I know what it does. It's gonna be springtime forever!”

Alice tried to pry the reactor out from under Lily's arm. The fairy had a good hold of it, and with her other hand, she whacked Alice's knuckles with her instrument.

Alice couldn't keep up with the fairy's erratic flight. Her grip loosened. She caught her hand in Shanghai's harness. She ripped it open and flung the doll at Lily's head.

Shanghai latched onto Lily's face. It kicked her in the mouth and poked her in the eyes as it struggled for footholds. The fairy let go of the reactor and hurled the doll away. Shanghai and the reactor fell. Alice chased after them, catching them both in her arms. She had almost regained maneuverability when Marisa approached, dangling from the broom by one leg.

“Slow down!” cried Alice. Trying to escape, she accidentally moved into the path of the broomstick's drunken spiral. She ran into a wide-eyed screaming Marisa.

The flash of a near concussion and spinning sky. She fell into the thorniest patch of weeds in Gensokyo. Marisa landed on top of her, much heavier than she expected.

When she stopped rolling, Alice opened her eyes. There were so many thorns in her arms and legs she did not want to move, but Marisa's weight crushed her back into more spikes.

“I don’t wanna be in Hell,” grumbled Marisa. “It’s supposed to be closed.”

“Um... actually, I think this is a rose bush.”

Accumulating tangles of prickly rose stems like sand burs, removal caused the stems to stick to her hands. When Marisa broke free, she tore some out of Alice’s palms. There were no flowers in the bushes, making the whole experience as lovely as a face full of dirt flavored needles.

The search for Marisa’s runaway broomstick meant pulling more stems. Shanghai was small enough to move through the most tangled areas uninhibited, so Alice had to keep an eye on the doll in case it wandered out too far. Thanks to Shanghai’s perspective, they discovered a rusty shovel and a broken rake before they found the broom. Since Alice could not persuade Marisa to leave the junk alone, she changed the subject.

“I wonder if that clerky guy will ever forgive us for what we did to Kourindou,” she said.

“We gotta fix his roof. Make it up to him,” said Marisa.

Alice wondered if she’d sacrificed too much. Was anything worth the beating she had taken? A few hours with Marisa and she’d almost lost Shanghai and her life, and now Marisa seemed a lot less cute and interesting. Every step through the field of rose bushes made her sick.

“Alice, I never noticed how great you are. Helping me steal from Kourin, building the rocket... lots of fun, huh?” said Marisa.

“Yeah,” said Alice. “I’m going home. I hope you don’t mind too much.”

“So when we’re done with repairs, you’re gonna be my race partner this weekend, right?”

“No thanks.”

“But I can’t without your doll.”

“You shouldn’t use the rocket anyway. Our results prove it’s too dangerous for a human.”

“Okay, be that way. But you’ll be at Kourindou Shop for repairs until that’s done, right?”

“I’m sending my other dolls. They will supply you with lumber and tools. I am not showing my face in there again.”

“Well what about Tuesday? We can go to the Human Village and, uh, go underpants shopping.”

“I’m busy on Tuesday. I have plans.”

“What plans? Plans for teatime with your dolls?”

Alice had had enough. She headed home, too exhausted to argue any further. Marisa didn’t follow, but she continued to shout at her.

“We don’t have to go shopping, Alice! We can hang out at my place and do all kinds of perverted stuff!”

Enough was enough.

“Alice! Get back here you two-timing tsundere!”

When Alice finally reached her house, Marisa was still begging. Alice felt it was better that way, because Marisa was suddenly a lot easier to ignore. Paying no attention to

the faint whining outside, she lit a small desk lamp and turned to the section on spectral magic in her grimoire.

At least she could rely on something not to screw with her.



In the eastern land of Japan, there exists a world of fantasy. In this fantasy world, things that have been long since rejected in our reality are alive and well. Things such as gods and spirits and other fantastical things are commonplace. Magic is a triviality here. It is a world where the dreams, delusions and imaginary musings come to life unimpeded. This world is Gensokyo.

Welcome.

\* \* \*

The following story is a strange and bright action story. Your eyes are preparing, please wait warmly until they are ready. The soldier of the Dragon Palace along with Heaven have both been disturbed! What awaits inside the enormous palace of rainbows?

# Touhou

~Electrified Vengeance! The Palace of Flying Rainbows~

Authored by Odda C.

\* \* \*

And now, we shall begin.

High above the lands of Gensokyo, stone colored clouds flashed with lightning. Heavy winds and thunder accompanied the lightning, relentlessly assaulting the nearby mountains. It appeared to be a fierce, yet rainless storm... An odd storm... In the distance, waves of orange and yellow shined brightly, as if the sun itself was unwilling to be outdone by the dreary sky. These wild skies sat in between the Earth, Heaven and, of course, the Dragon Palace. The Dragon Palace was the place where the divine Dragon God lived, quietly observing the ever-lively world of humans from his domain.

Of course, the dragon also had messengers. It would be troubling if an enormous dragon suddenly appeared before a group of small, meek humans after all. At this moment, one such messenger swam through the hostile clouds riding effortlessly upon the air. She was a nubile, young looking woman with short, violet-blue hair and red eyes. She was clad in a long sleeved red and white shirt, along with a long black skirt with short pink frills along the bottom. On her head was a black hat adorned with a red bow and two long ribbons of the same color extending outward, waving freely in the air. She had black shoes with pink socks. Finally, she held a freely flowing red and white shawl, holding it between her arms and blouse. You could say that her appearance was that of a humanoid oar fish...

It was not long until she gently set down upon one of the tallest mountains, standing on a cliff's edge. She stood, looking up at the violent skies, her clothes flowing freely in the noisy winds. She looked at the sky intently, seemingly unshaped by the violent winds or bright flashes of lightning, staring sharply into it as if concentrating hard on a long novel. Actually, the sky *was* something of a novel to her. For you see, this woman had the ability to read the atmosphere. She could pick up virtually any disturbance anywhere, whether it be on the ground, in the sky or elsewhere merely by looking up at and silently speaking with the sky. During these moments, things like bright sunlight and strong winds went unnoticed by her, so great was her concentration.

But was she sensing something now...? The narrowing of her eyes signified that she was. It made no hesitation in showing itself... Concealed from view above the clouds, an enormous flash of light appeared right in the atmosphere. A massive object emerged from the light like a butterfly freeing itself from its cocoon. It descended toward the Earth quickly, tearing the dark clouds asunder.

The young woman watched with alarm as the object tore through the dark clouds. First came three massive spikes that had the that appeared to have been torn out from the Earth herself. They were, in fact, the bottom of a large mass of rock. On top of that rock sat a massive European style castle that gleamed like a rainbow as it shone in the well of sunlight it had made for itself. Huge stained glass windows and mirrors adorned the surface. A ring of water surrounded the castle, grass waving about on the large pad of ground the castle sat on.

The purple-haired woman could tell she was in front of the castle. A massive pair of doors was directly in her sight, serving as the entrance to the massive palace before her. Turquoise in color, pearl-like half orbs dotted the surface of the doors, silver ocean wave-like patterns accentuated them. The castle had five towers, four in the corner, and the fifth in the center, standing wider than the other towers and taller than anything else. On the tallest tower was what appeared to be a large, turquoise plaque...

The woman put a hand to her hat as a large wind gust blew her way. So this was what she sensed... Such a powerful presence... But what was the meaning of this arrival? An invasion perhaps? She decided it best that the Dragon King was informed about this as quickly as possible. Then again, with something like this, he perhaps knew already... But that wouldn't matter for now. A smaller presence captured her senses, one no bigger than she was. One also heading straight for this sky bound palace...

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Another young looking woman was speeding straight toward the castle from the distant skies. Her facial expression was rather bitter, as if she had just walked out of a terrible argument, yet, simultaneously, fiery like someone about to face a great challenge. She even bore something of a smirk...

She was clad in a blue dress, and a smallish black hat with fake peaches on the sides. She wore a pink blouse and white apron over the dress, both with black and gold trend. Thin, cloth-like slits decorated the outer edges of the apron, attached to the back of the dress. They were colored the colors of the rainbow. Her eyes were crimson, and her cobalt hair reached down the length of her back. Below her neck was a red ribbon. Covering her lower legs was a pair of sturdy looking brown boots.

She stopped close to the palace, seemingly eager to venture inside.

"So you've arrived, have you? It seems you aren't the cowards the others have made you out to be," She spoke loudly toward the castle with a smile. "I know you can hear me! You were planning on violating Heaven after all. To make a challenge like that and go through the trouble of coming here will be quite silly if no one shows themselves!"

She waited a few moments, receiving no response. She quietly cursed to herself upon realizing that she was not going to be so easily answered. Ignoring her like this, were they trying to irritate her? They were either cowards, or more arrogant than she thought...

"Tch..."

"Eldest daughter!" called out a voice from behind.

It was the fish-like woman who had been observing the skies. She flew up to the 'eldest daughter', stopping at her side. The blue haired one stopped to look at her, mildly surprised at her presence.

"Eldest daughter, why have you come here?" asked the purple haired one.

"Ah, so you're here as well, Iku Nagae? It still hasn't been long since our last meeting at that shrine... Has the Dragon God sent you here?" asked the 'eldest daughter'.

"I came at my own accord upon sensing a great disruption in the atmosphere. It is obvious that it tore through dimensions to get to this place. But what of you? If eldest daughter Tenshi Hinanai has arrived here, then surely she knows of the wonder in front of us?" asked Iku, narrowing her eyes somewhat.

Tenshi chuckled a bit before looking back at the flying palace.

"I know of this place, and the purpose of those dwelling inside. But it was not my doing that brought them here. Their presence here has more to do with the current feud between Heaven and the spirits that live in the rainbows. Surely the dragon god has told you?" asked Tenshi.

"I know nothing of this... ..'feud' as you say. There isn't any way the dragon god couldn't know, so I believe that he sees this affair as not one in which to interfere," replied Iku.

"Well then... These fools wish to buy out a large chunk of Heaven, if you can believe that," said Tenshi, holding up her left fist and tightening it. "And they refuse to say the purpose of this buy-out. Heaven, of course, considers this nothing short of blasphemy, an insult. They have adamantly refused any such deals, despite offers of great wealth and threats of force. Of course, Heaven is plenty wealthy already and has many powerful warriors to defend against any foolish attack... They saw these rainbow spirits as nothing more than worms. They sent a 'negotiator' to 'discuss' this matter..."

"You," commented Iku.

"Perceptive!" complimented Tenshi, briefly turning to Iku while smiling sweetly.

"Hmph. The elders are merely using this as an opportunity to get rid of you. They intend for that palace over there to take you hostage as a 'goodwill' gesture in order to buy time..."

"Yes. If the 'negotiations' were to fail, legions would be sent here without hesitation. They merely want an excuse to attack first without earning the ire of the Yama or the mountain goddess. Of course, if they didn't go through with this plan, they'd be attacked anyway. For me, this is a 'damned if I do, damned if I don't' sort of situation. I wasn't about to put up with being used like a mere toy, so I came here to challenge them personally."

"I see... So a war is practically inevitable..." said Iku disapprovingly. "Though I disapprove of the actions taken by both Heaven and these so-called rainbow spirits, I approve of your lack of calm judgment even less so. Such recklessness is like you, given the recent past. This sort of wild behavior is unbecoming of a celestial, even one with a foul reputation such as yourself. You aren't at all helping your situation, you know."

"Bah, say what you will. But this is far better than hiding around somewhere like a coward... It's a lot more fun this way! If they're willing to entertain me, then I'd be more than happy to become their hostage!" exclaimed Tenshi with a wink.

"How quaint," commented Iku with a nice facepalm. "I guess you really can't let common sense hold you back in Gensokyo."

"Ahahaha, you hear that rainbow spirits?! Kindly do what you will, but only after you answer my challenge!" called out Tenshi, pointing at the palace.

Suddenly, a great gust of wind blew at the two girls, pushing them back some. They held their hats and instinctively put their free arms up to block the heavy winds. The gusts subsided after a few seconds. Now they heard a voice...

"Ah, so someone was brave enough to come after all? Or maybe you're just an innocent fool?"

The voice was female, bellowing out from the castle itself, as if speaking her words through a gigantic megaphone.

"Who are you? Are you going to come out here and face me, or do I have invade your little domain here?" asked Tenshi forcefully, crossing her arms.

"Such spunk and determination... You are either very brave or very foolish indeed. Or it could be that you're simply itching for a fight and oddly unafraid of pain... Either way, we've been looking forward to meeting someone from Heaven. I'm more than willing to welcome you if you still want to come in..." goaded the voice confidently.

"Ufufufu..." chuckled Tenshi.

"Eldest daughter, I must advise against this. Its clear that they are merely leading you into a trap, trying to provoke you," warned Iku.

"Hmph. I do not care. Celestial Tool: Hisou!"

Tenshi held out her right arm. Under her hand formed the brown hilt of her weapon - the Sword of Hisou. It was a weapon with the ability to sense and exploit any opponent's weak point. A four foot length blade made up the business end of the weapon, glowing an orange color, while a red tassel hung freely on the butt of the sword.

"Don't get in my way!" exclaimed Tenshi.

Before Iku could stop her, Tenshi was speeding forth toward the castle, smiling wildly. She was not about to let anything stop her from accepting this challenge.

"Eldest daughter!" called out Iku as she gave chase. "It is much too dangerous!"

"I do not recall inviting you, fish woman," called out the castle's voice. "Begone."

The plaque on the structure's tallest tower suddenly began glowing a sharp gold color, a wave of light almost instantly blinding Iku, drowning Tenshi from her sight! Forced to stop, Iku held up her arms and looked away, wincing in pain as she tried to get another look at Tenshi, to no avail.

"Eldest daughter!" she called out one more time.

"Its time we showed you what happens to those who try to interfere with us."

Without warning, Iku could feel a strange and violent force piercing her... Right down into her very soul. It was a horrifying feeling... In an instant, her entire body felt pain all over, control over her body lost. A white flash blinded her eyes... Her mind felt as if an enormous spike had impaled itself through her head. Overwhelmed by these intense feelings, Iku briefly screamed out before beginning to drop back to the waiting Earth below. As she slipped out of consciousness, the last thing she remembered was a feeling of fear. Fear, not just for her own well-being, but Tenshi's as well.

"Guh...! Eldest... ..daughter..."

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Meanwhile below the skies, the grand Youkai Mountain, home to the Moriya Shrine and Tengu Village, enjoyed a cloudy yet brilliant sunset, the violent storm a great distance away. Even as daytime slowly but surely drew to a close, four small, young looking girls could be seen at the foot of the mountain, playing merrily with one another.

One -a fairy- was clad in a light pink blouse, covered with a blue, one piece skirt. Her eyes and hair were an aqua color with a green bow present in her hair. On her back were large, icicle-like wings. Nearby her, was another fairy with short green hair, tied into a ponytail at the back via yellow ribbon. She was clad in a blue dress with white trend and had golden, very fairy-like wings. For footwear, they both choose black shoes with white socks.

These two weren't ordinary fairies, though the fact that they were as large as humans was indicative of this. They were in fact the great fairies, leaders of Gensokyo's fairy population and far more powerful than the ordinary fairy...

Their playmates were also of note, seeing how these two petite girls were actually autumnal goddesses. The first was short in stature with red eyes and blond hair, clad in a yellow blouse with poofy sleeves. Over the blouse she wore a red dress that went up just a bit over halfway up her chest with black straps that went above her shoulders. The dress had a wheat pattern on the bottom, and on her head sat a red hat with fake, decorative grapes.

Next to her was her older, taller sister. She was also a short haired blond, but with yellow eyes. She was clad in a long red dress that ended with cut-out leaf shapes and a white color along the top. In her hair were autumn leaves, held in place by a rope-like head band. They both also wore white socks with black shoes.

The first of the large fairies threw her right palm forward, conjuring large magical icicles that proceeded to zip downward at the hat-wearing goddess. The goddess smiled while leaping backwards, watching as the icicles smashed into the ground without meeting their target.

"You'll have to do better than that, Cirno!" called out the goddess.

"Pscht. There isn't any reason to be scared... I am the strongest," retorted the great fairy called Cirno. "Here I come, Minoriko!"

"Uhh, Cirno, be careful! I think she's baiting you!" called out the other great fairy.

"Quit worrying so much Daiyousei! I know what I'm doing here!" replied Cirno.

"But what of the other five times my sister has beaten you?" asked the hatless goddess half-consciously.

"I think we need not remind her of that, Shizuha," said Daiyousei with a nervous smile.

Daiyousei and Shizuha waited for their turn to duel under the shade of a large nearby tree as Cirno

and Minoriko dueled a short distance away. They were engaging in what was known in Gensokyo as a spell card duel. Combatants dueled with one another with brilliant patterns of magical bullets until one ran out of spell cards or was subdued. The clear loser would then have to admit defeat, even if she could continue fighting, as per the rules.

"Now it's my turn. The autumnal power of the Harvest Goddess, Minoriko Aki! Plenty Sign..."

Minoriko pulled out a small card - a spell card. It immediately took on an orange glow for a few moments before completely vanishing. The small girl then threw her arms forward as a yellow aura of energy surrounded her.

"...Owotoshi Harvester!"

Minoriko unleashed a massive barrage of yellow lasers at Cirno, but the ice fairy momentarily stood her ground. She then took to the sky, Minoriko immediately correcting her aim as she flew up to follow the dodging fairy.

"Looks like you've gotten faster Cirno. But I'm just getting warmed up!" exclaimed Minoriko.

The little Harvest Goddess threw her arms to the sides for a moment before lowering them, red diamond-like bullets materializing around her before flying at Cirno, augmenting the still-firing yellow lasers. Cirno remained calm, smirking as she bolted toward Minoriko, weaving between the unending lasers and dodging the red bullets with ease. Minoriko backed off, momentarily stopping her attack before moving her arms forward once more, focusing her attack into what could be described as a giant bouquet of lasers. Cirno stopped dead in her tracks, large drops of sweat appearing on the side of her face.

"H-huh, that's new..." she muttered, putting her right arm up.

Minoriko smiled sweetly, apparently proud of her new trick. Cirno darted to the right, avoiding one laser, then to the left, avoiding two more, one of which grazed her torso. Minoriko unleashed more of the tightly packed lasers, forcing Cirno to back away. The ice fairy crossed her arms in front of herself, creating numerous large chunks of ice that she then sent smashing into the lasers to cancel them out. Then, using her superior speed, she darted off to the right, hoping to avoid more of the tightly packed laser barrage.

"Cirno seems to be using a bit of strategy this time," commented Shizuha.

"Heh. She finally started listening when I told her to use her head," replied Daiyousei with a smile.

Minoriko gritted her teeth, her face becoming moist with divine sweat. Trying to turret a large bundle of energy toward a fast fairy was difficult, even for a goddess. Then again, Minoriko and Shizuha were considered sub-par in power and overall battle ability in comparison to the other goddesses of Gensokyo... That, and most people refrained from using such tightly packed attacks due to how much harder it became to move...

Sensing her opportunity, Cirno smiled daringly before placing her right hand on her upper left arm, building energy around her left hand. She looked rather evilly at the nervous looking Minoriko as she circled around until successfully getting behind her. Now in position, Cirno charged forward at

Minoriko's back, unleashing waves of ice blasts at the godly girl. Minoriko dropped her spell but was too slow... By the time she had turned to face Cirno, she could do little more than cross her arms in front of herself as she received a good pelting from Cirno's projectiles. Upon being hit, a loud 'pop' sound could be heard, Minoriko's remaining projectiles suddenly transforming into little blue cards and flying into Cirno's body. The ice fairy seemed unhurt by these cards, as if her body was absorbing them...

"Spell break," said Daiyousei.

"Your training of Cirno is finally paying off," complemented Shizuha.

Cirno now looked quite confident, despite some sweat on her face. Minoriko was panting, slowly returning to the ground.

"Gh...! Oh no you don't...!" cried out Minoriko.

Although fatigue was forcing her back to Earth, Minoriko felt she wasn't quite beaten yet. She reared back her right arm, building energy, preparing to fire it at Cirno who was speeding toward her once more! When she felt the time was right, Minoriko unleashed a large barrage of red, bean shaped bullets at her frosty opponent. At the last moment, Cirno darted away to the left. Minoriko was shocked, yelping as Cirno suddenly appeared to her right. The ice fairy unleashed a blast of her own; a large wave of blue energy. Minoriko briefly glided across the landscape before rolling backwards, soon coming to a stop dead on her stomach with large swirls in her eyes.

"No way..." mumbled the dazed goddess. "My winning streak... It's over..."

"It's bad to get cocky when you have such a powerful foe in front of you!" exclaimed Cirno, striking a pose like that of a body builder flexing the muscles on her right arm.

Daiyousei and Shizuha stood up, smiling and giving Cirno a brief round of applause before walking up to the two combatants.

"Impressive Cirno! At this rate, you'll be powerful enough to take your revenge on those who humiliated you in the past!" complimented Shizuha.

Minoriko suddenly stood up with a large, white, X-shaped bandage inexplicably on her head.

"Hey, whose side are you on?!"

"Now now little sister, sometimes one must encounter defeat in order to know the path of victory," said Shizuha with a finger raised.

Minoriko simply mumbled something to herself before turning her head away with her arms crossed, pouting.

"Words from the wise. Cirno knows them well!" added Daiyousei.

"Are you insinuating somethin'?" asked Cirno, looking in Daiyousei's direction with narrowed eyes.

"I am merely stating that you have taken the words of the wise to heart!"

"Don't make me hurt you..."

"As the old saying goes: *Be not afraid of growing slowly, be afraid only of standing still*," commented Shizuha.

"Oh, was that an old Chinese saying just now?" asked Daiyousei.

"It was! An old, outside world proverb from long ago," replied Shizuha.

"Ooooh..."

Now Daiyousei and Shizuha were talking about things Cirno neither understood nor cared about. She just stared at them, puckering her lips out.

"Geez, you two are perfect for each other. Why don'cha get married or somethin'?" she uttered to herself. "And anyway, isn't it you two's turn to fight?"

"Wah, it is!" said Daiyousei.

"I almost forgot," spoke Shizuha honestly, putting a hand on the back of her head.

But suddenly, the whole area began to grow brighter. Noticing something strange, the four girls looked around a bit before looking toward the sky.

"Hey, what gives? The sun shouldn't be this bright right now..." says Cirno, shielding her eyes with her arm.

"It shouldn't be this bright at any time," added Minoriko, turning around toward the bright light.

"What's going on here? I sense no spellcard du-"

Daiyousei was cut off by the high pitched sound of a large column of golden energy plowing into the Earth some distance away. The light was so bright, the girls could not look on any further. Wild animals began scattering about as the ground began shaking with terrible fury.

"H-hey, what in the world is that?!" shouted Cirno to no one in particular.

"I-I don't know!" answered Shizuha, somehow able to hear Cirno.

"Who cares, lets just get outta here!" yelled Minoriko.

The four flew away, going towards the mountain...

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A little while before hand, deep beneath Gensokyo's surface...

"I-its not like I *wanted* to give you those flowers or anything... S-stupid..."

Standing on a certain bridge was a young youkai woman with blonde hair, pointy ears and green eyes. Her hair was tied into a small ponytail at the back. On her neck she wore a pink sash tied at the front. The top of her dress was brown with purple borders. The bottom was blue, purple and black with criss-crossed, thick pink strings hanging off of the black, medium length skirt. For footwear, poofy pink socks and black shoes. On her arms were poofy pink arm socks.

She spoke strangely with another, red eyed woman, standing on the bridge with her and facing away from her with a hand on her hip.

"I... I just..."

She cursed to herself, pointing harshly at the other woman.

"I-I was tired of carrying them and gave them to you to hold!" she finally finished.

"Come on, ya think I'm gonna buy that?" spoke the other woman teasingly. "Just admit it, you wanted to give me these."

"Huh?!" yelled out the first woman, blushing. "D-d-don't be ridiculous! I-I don't even like you that much! I-I mean I... ..do... ..a little..."

Suddenly, her expression changed to that of one that had been flustered upon being told something most unpleasant.

"This is ridiculous. I can't do this," she spoke.

"Aw, come on now Parsee! Don't sweat it, you're perfect for this," said the other woman with a smile.

"Spare me. I mean, come *on*, the role of 'tsundere' seems like a cheap ploy to attract male viewers. And don't get me started on how embarrassing it is..." said the woman named Parsee.

The other woman sighed.

"C'mon Yuugi, lets switch roles," suggested Parsee.

The other woman merely laughed out loud.

"Not happening! The play is in only two weeks, ya know? Even I'm not crazy enough to try to learn the couple thousand or so lines of tsundere in that time."

Still blushing, Parsee crossed her arms and looked at Yuugi. The large red horn on her forehead (complete with gold star at the top) meant that she was an Oni; a mystical being of Japanese legend. She was clad in a white shirt with dark red stripes for trend. Covering her lower body was an ankle-long, translucent skirt, dark purple in color with red trend and highlights. On her wrists and ankles were manacles, complete with short, broken chains. For footwear, she chose old Japanese-style wooden sandals with white socks. She was quite a bit taller than Parsee as well, her similarly-colored hair longer.

"C'mon, Miss Bridge Princess, one more shot. Just suck it up and it'll be over before ya know it."

Parsee exhaled loudly with her mouth opened wide.

"Eh, I guess you're right, Yuugi. If the princess of the bridge between the surface world and the underworld was to cower out of anything, then, well... What can I say?" she asked before looking away from Yuugi and smiling. "It would be bad form. So, then, shall I give it my best shot?"

That's when Parsee felt breathing down her neck.

"Ugweh?!"

"You're really cute when ya looked resolved," said Yuugi happily.

The moment Parsee had turned away was the moment Yuugi snuck behind her with impeccable stealth. She draped her arms over the bridge princess before playfully biting into her left ear.

*"Nom!"*

"Wah...! S-stop that!" said the blushing Parsee in surprise.

"Nope," said Yuugi, her word barely legible from the ear biting. "You're too cute."

A few moments later, the girls were surprised by the sudden occurrence of what seemed to be an earthquake.

"The heck?" asked Yuugi. "Either the tectonics barrier is going loopy, or someone's just flat out pissed!"

"Th-th-this isn't supposed to happen... ..is it?" asked Parsee as she and Yuugi struggled to keep their footing.

"No, not since me and the rest of the Oni put those barriers up..."

And just as quickly as it started, the rattling was over. Parsee and Yuugi briefly looked around.

"The heck...?" asked Parsee. "At least my bridge is intact..."

"Yeah, but we should probably check on the-"

Yuugi was interrupted as she and Parsee were suddenly hit by a massive blast of light that lit up the entire tunnel. The two yelped as they instinctively slammed their eyes shut, turned their heads away and raised their arms to block out the excessive light. At the same time, the tremors briefly returned. When it all finally stopped, Yuugi and Parsee cautiously opened their eyes.

"...city," said Yuugi, finishing her rudely interrupted sentence.

"That light looked like it originated from the city," said Parsee.

"Best if we go check it out..."

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Taking flight above the feudal-Japanese-styled city, the girls could see a great deal of panic from the inhabitants. They had good reason to do so: a large- no... *absolutely massive* hole had been blown in the crust above the city. The cause then continued down a straight path, plowing through the roof of some buildings; it seemed to be heading straight towards the Earth's core. Yuugi had a bit of a dejected look on her face, scratching the side of her head as she apparently realized what...  
...whatever that was intended to do.

"What in Kanako's green Gensokyo..." uttered Parsee, sweating bullets from the sight.

"Ahh, crap. If that light's headed where I think its headed..." said the Oni.

"W-what? Where's it heading?" asked Parsee nervously.

And that's when the two heard a rather loud and unnerving roar coming from the large hole.

"Ah. Hm. Damn. *YeEEEEep*, it freed him. And after all that trouble we went through putting him there all that time ago..." sighed Yuugi, stretching out her shoulder a bit.

"A-a-a m-monster?!" stuttered Parsee, trembling with fright.

"Heeeeeeey, watch it now... We Oni ain't monsters. We're embodiments of awesome," said Yuugi, looking at Parsee with hostile, narrow eyes while twitching. "And quit shakin' like you're trapped in Antarctica, ya makin' us look bad."

"R-right, sorry," said the still trembling Parsee.

A bolt of energy then flew out of the hole... Following that was a large, violently roaring ball of flaming blue energy.

"Wow. The special effects budget must be through the roof for this one," commented Yuugi.

"Say what?" asked Parsee, raising an eyebrow as she looked at Yuugi, confused.

Suddenly, the flaming orb vanished.

"It's gone!" said Parsee, looking around.

"No, he's movin' really fast. Straight toward the surface through that nice hole in the upper crust there," said Yuugi, pointing.

"Wh- Don't tell me you were able to follow that guy's movements..." said Parsee.

Yuugi grinned widely, winking while pointing at her eyes.

"We Oni have rather good vision when we're sober. Yeah, people are surprised by that a lot."

Parsee drooped a bit, her mouth hanging open and her eyes closing halfway.

*Ugh... She saw that thing go up into the hole with no problem... Meanwhile, I need glasses in order to read properly. I'm so jealous...*

For a moment, Parsee was too busy being jealous to notice that Yuugi had taken her by the right arm.

"Um... What in the world are you doing?" she asks.

"What's it look like?" answered the still widely smiling Yuugi. "I'm hurrying you along!"

"Along wh-"

Parsee stopped herself upon realizing...

"You actually wanna follow it?!" she asked, exasperated.

"Heck yeah! I'm goin' after that guy and draggin' his sorry, cheap beer drinkin' tail back down here. You're coming along as my partner and eyewitness!"

"F-f-forget it! No way Yuugi, no way! I'm not helping you go after than mon-"

Parsee stopped herself from completing the sentence upon Yuugi tightening her grip on her arm.

"I-I mean... ...aura of flaming awesomeness."

The grip was promptly loosened as Yuugi's smile immediately returned.

"Hmmm, too bad. Face it Parsee, ya need to get out more, see some more of the world. Your skin is all pale and flaky. A bit of sun oughtta do ya wonders. Besides, that guy should put up a hella good fight, ya know? And I've been itching for a good brawl of a good while now. C'mon, it'll be fun!" insisted Yuugi rather forcefully.

"No way! Let the surface dwellers take care of it!" protested Parsee.

"Bah, they're gonna be up in arms about that thing since it came from down here and bother us anyway. We gotta go up there. No avoiding it, nope!"

With that, Yuugi shot off upwards to the hole in the crust.

"Uhwawawawa!" cried out Parsee.

"Next stop: the upper world of Gensokyo!"

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The large and bright orb of blue flame streaked out of the ground made by the bright light from

earlier, getting somewhat high above the surface world's ground before letting gravity take its hold. The landing trajectory would take it to the foot of Youkai Mountain...

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Cirno, Daiyousei, Minoriko and Shizuha had fled a bit up the Youkai Mountain, taking cover behind a large, conveniently placed rock. The four girls slowly peeked their heads out from the cover, only to go right back to cowering behind the rock as a great ball of blue fire slammed into the ground in front of them a moderate distance away. Massive blue flames scorched the area around the crash site for a few moments before vanishing, greenish-white smoke replacing them.

The four girls poked their heads out simultaneously, much more quickly this time to see what had landed. They remained silent for a few moments, blinking before looking at each other nervously. As the smoke cleared, they could make out a humanoid shape with two horns. The horns grew straight from diagonal angles from both sides of the head. An extremely well-built and fairly tall body with dark blue-green hair reaching halfway down the back with matching, bushy eyebrows. The creature only had a giant, tiger skin loincloth for clothing wrapped around his waist. His face was ghastly, with stone grey eyes and a wide mouth filled with sharp, dagger-like teeth. Two of the upper teeth curved outward, giving an appearance similar to tusks. Blue and green flames billowed from the mouth with every breath. He stood with a slight slump; his overall presence and aura were decidedly horrific.

"W-wow... He looks just like an outside world depiction of Oni..." commented the nervous Minoriko. "Scary..."

"I-is he waiting for something? He's just standing there hunched over like that," said Shizuha, also unnerved.

"G-g-go talk to him. M-maybe he's not as bad as he looks...?" suggested Minoriko, looking nervously at her older sister.

"No way. You go talk to him!" argued Shizuha.

"You're the older one, you do it!"

"Forget it! I-I think we should all just stay here until he gets bored and goes away," suggested Shizuha.

Minoriko narrowed her eyes and pouted, glaring at her sister.

"C-coward..."

"You're trembling too..." shot back Shizuha.

"Uhh, guys? We have more pressing matters at the moment..." interrupted Daiyousei. "You know that nice plan you just suggested, Shizuha?"

"W-what about it?"

"W-well..."

Daiyousei nervously pointed forward at Cirno, who was walking toward the monstrous Oni. The three other girls stared in utter disbelief.

"That idiot..." said Minoriko, quietly exasperated with a nervous smile. "She's gonna get killed... Heh heh heh..."

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Cirno swallowed hard, slowly but surely approaching the muscular, catatonic Oni. The beast breathed deeply, letting out large waves of hot air as it did so. Even as her skin heated up, and her realization of just how much bigger this beast was than her caught up to her, the ice fairy continued approaching the creature, trying her hardest to hide her fear. Her teeth were gritted and her manner of walking made her look as if she were tip toeing through kitchen like a thief.

Finally Cirno had managed to get within speaking distance of the massive Oni. She swallowed hard again, sweat dotting her face.

"Uhh... Hi," she said with a nervous smile, raising her hand. "I'm Cirno, the strongest in Gensokyo..."

For the first few moments, the fearsome Oni did nothing to respond, apparently ignoring Cirno. She cautiously wandered just a touch closer, bending down to look at the creature's face... ..from the left side... ..then the right... ..then centering herself before straightening up and scratching her head.

*Did he not hear me?* thought Cirno, frowning a small bit. "Hey, you aren't ignoring me, are you?"

\*\*\*

"Cirno, *get away...!*" said the frustrated Daiyousei through gritted teeth, knowing her fellow fairy could not hear her.

"Crap... One of us has to go get her. Shizuha, you're up," said Minoriko.

"Forget it, you go." replied Shizuha.

"You two are *so* not helping..." sighed Daiyousei with a facepalm.

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"Hey, didn't you hear me? I'm the strongest! You can't just ignore someone like that," said an irritated Cirno, pointing at the large Oni.

The large Oni merely growled for a brief moment. Cirno's finger fell limp as a large drop of sweat rolled down her temple.

"Man, what an idiot. He's either ignoring me or..."

Cirno's expression brightened with a smile of enlightenment for a moment before turning to the side

with her right hand finger and thumb cupping her chin and left arm supporting her right.

"Ha, that's it! Maybe he doesn't understand my language! Now how did you say *hi* in that other language again...?"

Cirno faced the large beast once more.

"Der Fisch tacos ist im Ofen!" blurted Cirno excitedly with a finger raised.

Now the large Oni seemed to react... He stood straight, looking downward and locking his eyes solidly on Cirno.

"Faaaaaaaaairyyyyyyyyyyyyyy..." growled the creature in a grotesque voice.

Cirno stopped dead in her tracks, barely preventing herself from soiling her undergarments.

"Uhhhhhhhhhh..." she uttered. "S-s-so you do speak our language..."

The large Oni's eyes began glowing a demonic green color as he opened his maw to let out an incredible roar. Cirno staggered backwards as she covered her ears with one eye open and her teeth gritted. Her three friends took cover behind the rock, also covering their ears. After a full fifteen seconds of roaring, the large Oni finally relented. Cirno hesitated for a moment, uncovering her ears slowly.

Suddenly, the large creature threw back his right arm, emerald flames surrounding it before lunging it forward at Cirno, shooting out a large green fireball.

"Wha?!"

Caught by surprise, the ice fairy barely had time to jump away before the fireball slammed into the ground in front of her with explosive fury. The resulting shock wave threw the fairy backwards, bouncing on her head before tumbling back a bit and landing flat on her stomach.

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Daiyousei and the Aki sisters had looked up from their cover just in time to witness the assault on Cirno. Daiyousei immediately had a look of terror on her face.

"Cirno!" she cried out.

"Hey, that wasn't nice..." said Minoriko, narrowing her eyes at the Oni.

"Hurry you two! We must help her!" said Shizuha.

Cirno was hardly the only one affected by the attack... Now was the time for her friends to forget their initial fear of the imposing Oni. Cirno was in danger. The angered Minoriko was the first to leap out from behind the rock, Daiyousei and Shizuha following her.

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"H-hey... That was a cheap shot..." grumbled Cirno as she sat up, shaking her head. "Coward... If ya wanted to fight, then ya should've just said so! Frost Sign..."

Cirno pulled out a spell card, the object glowing ice blue before vanishing.

"...Frost Columns!"

Large columns of ice began shooting out from behind Cirno as she raised her hands to her sides as if on a crucifix. The large Oni quickly responded, throwing his left arm forward, shooting out powerful green flames. The ice barrage was effortlessly shattered.

"What?!" called out Cirno.

The Oni immediately braced itself, yelling out and seeming to breathe in green and blue fires as it suddenly began expanding exponentially in size. Cirno slowly back away, her eyes slowly widening as she watched the already imposing Oni tower over her and her friends even further until finishing its growth to some 14.7 meters in height. Roaring out again, the now gigantic ancient creature reached out with his left arm. Knowing she was in trouble, Cirno turned to run, but it was already too late. She struggled as hard as she could, locked in the grasp of the beast's enormous left hand.

"Put me down! Let me go you big jerk!" she demanded. "I don't know who you think you are but when I get out of this...!"

Just then, a glint of red light caught the humongous Oni's eye... Minoriko charged in above the Oni, firing off a swarm of red, bean-like bullets, aiming for the head. The Oni blocked with his right arm, only to be assaulted from below by Shizuha, who aimed for the left shoulder with yellow diamond shaped bullets, only to see them explode off the shoulder harmlessly.

"Rats..." said Shizuha.

"Let Cirno go!" demanded Daiyousei.

The green-haired fairy put her arms in front of herself, charging cold energy before spinning around and throwing a massive icicle at the creature's torso. The Oni cried out in pain as the massive icicle plunged into his torso, causing him to drop Cirno. Shizuha caught Cirno just before she hit the ground.

"Cirno, are you okay?" she asked.

"Yeah, but..."

Before Cirno could finish, the angered Oni roared out.

"...I think he's pissed," finished Cirno.

The two joined Minoriko and Daiyousei in the air. The great Oni roared again, swinging his arms at the girls. The four managed to zip out of the way of the fiercely swinging arms for a few seconds before the Oni successfully swatted Daiyousei from the air. The green haired fairy yelped upon being

hit, spiraling towards the ground, but was caught in the nick of time by Minoriko.

"Daiyousei! Are you alright?" asked the little goddess.

"Unh... That really hurt," said Daiyousei weakly, holding her head. "And that was just the tip of his finger... We don't stand a chance against something with so much strength, even together."

"Well, running away doesn't sound like a bad plan right now..." commented Minoriko, checking Daiyousei for any serious injury.

"Wah...!" yelped Shizuha as she stumbled out of the air and fell on the ground.

"...but it might be too late for that," said Minoriko fearfully. "Sis, you okay?"

Shizuha hesitated to answer, looking at the Oni for a brief moment.

"Not for long..." she answered.

Now Cirno was the only one still in the air, panting while gripping her right shoulder, the beast having injured it in his fury.

"H-hey... Y-you think I'm gonna let you get away with hurting my friends like this...? Don't think... I'm gonna run..."

It was a brave front for the little ice fairy, but the truth was that she could no longer run even if she wanted to. She lost a good deal of her stamina in the earlier duel with Minoriko, with her remaining energy devoted to dodging the huge beast's swinging arms. And even then, he managed to damage her right shoulder...

"Cirno, don't...!" cried Daiyousei.

The ice fairy began speeding backwards, increasing her altitude as she did so. From her left hand came many chunks of ice, aimed squarely at the Oni's head. However, in complete defiance of its own size, the great Oni leaped into the sky, right hand outstretched, the useless projectiles likely going unnoticed as they bounced harmlessly away. Cirno's eyes widened, knowing she could not avoid being grabbed...

But that's when something shoved her out of the way.

"Minoriko!"

Cirno heard a shout from Shizuha's panicked voice as she descended toward the ground. As she stopped herself, Cirno quickly realized that Minoriko had shoved her out of the way, taking her place in the great Oni's grasp. The little goddess struggled futilely in the creature's grip.

"Crud! I wasn't fast enough. At least Cirno can get away now..." she spoke.

"Fairyyyyyyyyyy...?" said the Oni, looking at Minoriko as if to inspect her.

"Jeez, this guy is sure interested in fairies... But then... Crap he's after Cirno and Daiyousei! They'd better be escaping..."

Of course, Cirno, Daiyousei and her sister Shizuha all flew up at the beast.

"Huh...? Aw crud...! Run away you idiots! Can't you see I was trying to buy you time to escape?!" shouted Minoriko angrily.

"We're not leaving you behind," responded Daiyousei.

"Unhand my sister at once," demanded Shizuha.

"Eat this!" called out Cirno.

They all charged energy for one final attack...

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"Mmmm... Uh...?"

Laying upon a futon with a cold cloth on her forehead, Iku came to in what appeared to be a very large Japanese-style house. Her vision was blurred for a few moments, but soon cleared, allowing Iku to see a green-haired human girl walking up to her and kneeling down with a smile.

"You're awake. What a relief. I was worried that I had failed to administer the mind retainer spell in time," she spoke.

Iku silently looked at the friendly, yellow eyed human girl for a few moments before weakly asking...

"Where am I?"

"Oh? You rest within the Moriya Shrine, located near the top of the great Youkai Mountain. It was lucky that Tengu reporter caught you. She rushed saying you were falling from the sky and had sensed that some sort of strange spell had been used on your mind," explained the girl.

Iku didn't give a coherent answer, just a mere utterance of her voice to acknowledge the shrine girl. Suddenly, her eyes widened as her memory returned. She shot up into sitting position, in momentary panic.

"Eldest dau-...!"

"H-hey, don't get up so fast!" said the girl frantically, quickly putting her hands up.

Iku then momentarily froze again before putting a hand over her sweat covered face.

"I-I'm fine. Just a little shocked is all," responded Iku with a plain tone. "Sorry about that just now. I will not trouble you any further."

"Hold on!"

Iku then attempted to get up, but was physically stopped by the girl.

"Young miss, why do you stop me?" asked Iku, a hint of irritation in her voice.

"I don't think you've fully recovered yet. Please allow a bit more time for me to see the effects of my repair spell," said the girl, worried.

Iku sighed. She was willing to admit that she still felt a little dizzy. Furthermore, there was no way the Rainbow Spirits were ready to make their move, even with Tenshi... The human girl backed off, sitting on her knees next to Iku.

"Very well," said Iku, calming down, looking directly at the girl with a small smile. "I've been rude and hasty... I have completely forgotten to introduce myself. I am Iku Nagae, servant of the Dragon King."

The girl smiled a room-brightening smile.

"Pleased to meet you. I am Sanae Kotiya, servant of the wind goddess and maiden of this shrine."

Now that Iku was looking more attentively at the girl, she noticed how pretty she was. Wrapped around the left side of her green hair was a sky blue, snake-like accessory. Atop her head was a frog head pin. Her clothing consisted of a dress that looked vaguely like that of a shrine maiden. Though the sleeves were detached from the upper dress. The dress was white with blue trend. The lower part of the dress was held on by a large brown belt with a golden buckle. Also attached to Sanae was a large pouch on the left side of her hip. Under her sleeves, she wore black arm gloves. Finally, she had on tall brown boots with white stockings covering her legs.

"I see... Forgive my earlier rudeness. So you're the maiden of the Moriya Shrine? I can tell that you have adjusted to life in Gensokyo well. Alas, my duties have stopped me from visiting you and the wind goddess on my own. The circumstances of my presence here are... ..unfortunate," said Iku  
"And that is to say nothing of the rebellious Rainbow Spirits hanging over our heads. I have merely had a taste of their power..."

"Don't worry. We can come together if they pose a threat," said Sanae reassuringly. "So it really was them, huh? Anyone who can cast a spell powerful enough to subdue the servant of the Dragon, or any other god for that matter, must truly be powerful."

"That is the strange part. I'm unsure whether it was a person casting the spell through the castle, or the castle itself," replied Iku, putting a finger on her chin.

"A castle... ..casting a spell?" asked Sanae, tilting her head. "Do you suspect the castle itself attacked you without influence from anyone inside?"

"'Tis only a suspicion. I can confirm nothing until I..."

Iku stopped herself. Sanae straightened herself out, raising an eyebrow.

"You intend to make a stand on that strange castle in the sky personally, don't you?" asks Sanae

seriously.

"Sharp. The sense of a Miko indeed," complemented Iku with a small smile. "With its provocative actions, the castle may have already started a war. This will merely be an offensive, an immediate decisive strike. If I can free the eldest daughter from there, they will lose their trump card and thusly be repulsed by Heaven."

Iku sensed worry in Sanae.

"B-but what if that backfires? What if..."

"The Dragon contacted me during my slumber. We agreed that to do nothing at all would be equally as foolish as attacking that castle head on. At least by going on the offensive we have a chance of preventing a terrible disaster, wouldn't you say?" asked Iku.

"Well..."

Sanae hesitated.

"Even now he speaks with the goddess, likely trying to win her support. No matter what they decide, I must be prepared to follow any order I receive," finished Iku.

"Dead if you do, dead if you don't, huh? I guess when you're in this sort of situation in Gensokyo, common sense becomes a deterrent," sighed Sanae with a nod.

"Something I learned the hard way today," comments Iku more to herself. "Now then... You said I had been falling from the sky, correct? Tell me, who is my rescuer?"

"That'd be me!" spoke a black-winged young woman from behind Iku.

Iku and Sanae both looked back at the crimson eyed woman standing behind them with a wide smile for a few moments before jolting away from her, yelping in surprise.

"Hi there!" she said with great enthusiasm.

"For the last time, please don't sneak up on Lady Kanako's guests!" chided Sanae, clearly irritated.

Ignoring Sanae, the smiling woman squatted down in front of the dumbfounded Iku.

"Greetings. I am Aya Shameimaru, reporter for the Bunbunmaru."

"...A Tengu," spoke Iku in a rather dead pan way, seeming to recognize her.

"A Tengu," added Sanae with a twitching eyebrow.

A Tengu. A Tengu with semi-long black hair along with a type of hat known as a Tokin. She was clad in a white blouse with a short black ribbon on the neckline and a rather short black skirt with white trend at the edges and red bead pieces. Walking on the geta common of Tengu with calf-high black socks, she used her natural speed to sneak in on Iku and Sanae's conversation.

"Yes. I was flying up to the palace that had suddenly appeared in the skies high above the mountain, knowing it would, no doubt, be the scoop of the century," spoke Aya with her right finger in the air. "And then there was a really bright flash of light... I took a moment to recover, doing so just in time to see your figure falling from the sky. I managed to catch you just as you were about to crash into the waiting mountain tops."

"Thank you for saving my life, Miss Shameimaru," said Iku sincerely.

"You are quite welcome. Now then..."

Suddenly, Aya had a pen and journal on her person. She grinned widely in an annoying manner.

"Would you care to tell me more of these Rainbow Spirits? What do they want with Heaven? Have they really taken hostages? What do you know of that castle? What is the Dragon Palace's opinion? Do you have..."

Iku and Sanae both groaned at the questions. Sanae marched up to Aya and applied her fingers to the lobe of the Tengu's left ear, giving her a nice yank.

"*Ayayayayaya*, c-cut that out!" protested Aya, flailing her arms.

"Stop causing trouble," said Sanae with ill-disguised irritation.

Iku sighed.

"You did this last time didn't you?" she asked.

"Last time?" thought Sanae out loud.

"This isn't our first meeting. Though this is my first time learning her name."

Iku then briefly put a hand to her head.

"I believe I've recovered. I'm sorry, but I haven't time for interviews," said Iku, getting up from the futon before stretching a bit.

Iku then collected her hat from the floor next to the futon, inspected it for a moment before placing it firmly on her head.

"Of course, I'd be no help to you if I did. My level of knowledge about the Rainbow Spirit castle in the sky is the same as yours," finished Iku.

"Is that so...? This just means I'm gonna have to follow you there then," said Aya, not seeming at all disappointed.

"You are free to do as you please, so long as you don't jeopardize my goal."

Iku proceeded out of the room with the intention of finding the Shrine's exit, followed by Aya.

"Hold on!" said Sanae, dashing in front of them. "Do the two of plan on going by yourselves?"

"I will if I must," replies Iku with a nod.

"I don't think you'll have to," said a new voice.

"Hm?"

Just as she and Aya stepped into the hall, another young-looking girl entered as well. A short blond girl with dull green eyes, her medium-length hair tied in the front into bangs with red ribbons, one on each side. She was clad in a rather simple purple frog print dress with long white sleeves stitched on with red threads and a white collar. The short skirt was attached with a large light brown belt with a golden buckle, quite similar to Sanae's. She had on thigh-high stockings and black shoes. On her head was a large, light brown wide brimmed hat with two large, decorative frog eyes on the top.

Accompanying her were four other people: one bridge princess, one Oni, a lesser goddess and a fairy with icy looking wings.

"O-oh, Lady Suwako. You've come back early. Welcome home," greeted Sanae. "Are these your guests?"

"You could say that... It would seem that we're all having problems with that castle that suddenly showed up," said the new girl with a carefree smile, not seeming to be worried at all.

The expressions of the fairy and small goddess were quite the opposite however. The goddess - Shizuha - was tearing up and seemed frantic while the icy looking fairy - Cirno - looked angry and impatient. The Oni - Yuugi - was casually picking at her ear with her pinky finger and the shorter youkai next to her - Parsee - looked around anxiously.

"W-what happened?" asked the worried Sanae.

The frantic Shizuha spoke first.

"Sanae, it was horrible! A vicious Oni attacked us, nearly killed us before flying off with my friend Daiyousei along with my younger sister Minoriko! Please, you have to he-"

Before she could finish, Cirno stepped in.

"Where the heck is that thing?! I don't know what's going on, but he's gonna pay for taking Daiyousei and Minoriko away!" she said, raising a fist.

"Wait... Did you say... ..an Oni?" asks Iku, raising an eyebrow.

Shizuha went up to Sanae and cried into her chest while Cirno continued ranting angrily at the mere mention of Oni. Iku, Aya and Sanae became irked at the lack of a coherent answer. It was not long before Yuugi stepped in, tugging Cirno by the shoulder.

"Oookay, easy now, one at a time," she spoke, trying to calm the little ice fairy down. "I think I can

provide an explanation... To cut a long story short, there was an Oni sealed away underneath the former Hell by the other Oni. For, ya know, pissin' us off. A huge light fell from the sky and freed him. Parsee and I are going after him! Unfortunately, he's acquired a few new tricks, and judging from the damage outside, he's returned to his normal size."

"The strange power enabled him to go fast. Much too fast for us to catch, thusly we weren't able to prevent the kidnappings of the other two," added Parsee, seeming irritated at her own description for some reason. "Apparently, he took off into the sky, so Yuugi and I decided to grab these two and request an audience with Lady Kanako."

The plot was thickening. Who was this enemy? Why had it appeared in Gensokyo? What would it want with a mere fairy and a harvest goddess? Aya, of course, was making notes in her journal, silently vowing to answer these questions.

"Well, lady Kanako hasn't returned yet unfortunately," said Sanae regretfully.

"Man, that sucks..." sighed Yuugi, putting a hand behind her head and looking down with closed eyes. "Guess we'll just have to find it ourselves. Something as big as that castle can't be hard to miss, right?"

"I see... So now they wish to start a commotion throughout Gensokyo as a whole, rather than just heaven..." spoke Iku, putting a finger to her chin.

"Eh? You know who they are?" asked Shizuha, sniffing.

"The troublesome and greedy spirits from the sky that wish to seize Heaven are now targeting the ground. This is growing even more suspicious..." said Iku, her eyes narrowing.

"They mean to take Heaven?!" asked the shocked Shizuha.

"Man, I thought awakening that guy was suspicious... Sounds to me like these guys need a good lesson," said the smiling Yuugi, putting her left fist into her right palm.

"Well, to take on Gensokyo, one *would* need plenty of good warriors... It makes sense to recruit an Oni," shrugged Suwako.

"What I'd like to know is just how they knew that Oni was there," said Parsee, crossing her arms.

"Spies perhaps?" suggested Aya.

"Perhaps... Furthermore, it seems that they have succeeded in stirring up the Tengu, Kappa and Fairies all at once. The Kappa and Tengu aren't taking well to seeing an ancient Oni from the underground, and the Fairies aren't happy that one of their leaders was kidnapped. They're right outside, protesting in droves," informed Suwako.

"Sounds hectic... I wonder where Lady Kanako..."

Sanae was interrupted by the sudden shaking of the entire shrine. Everyone was visibly startled, looking around frantically. The tremor was over as quickly as it started.

"Wh-what was that?! I-is it the Oni?!" yelled Shizuha.

"I've never known of Earthquakes happening on mountains..." said Iku much more calmly.

"Hey, only Oni here is me, people," said Yuugi with a shrug.

"Ah... Lady Kanako has returned," said Sanae. "We should go out and meet her. It won't be good to continue talking in this cramped shrine."

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"Why are Oni attacking us?!"

"What was that commotion?!"

"The whole foot of the mountain cracked! What's going on?!"

"Are we there yet?"

"Wait, what?"

Outside of the shrine, the panicked youkai denizens of the mountain demanded the presence of the wind goddess, Kanako Yasaka. They were held back by guard fairies. Suddenly, two onbishira fell from the sky, plunging into the ground close to the shrine with a rather loud thud. After that, the noise had quieted. A woman appeared in the sky, slowly descending on the populace.

"Alright, alright, that's enough. Simmer down, will ya?" she asked with a grin.

She was clad in a somewhat bulky and elaborately designed red short-sleeved shirt with black trim, her arms covered by black arm gloves identical in design to Sanae's. A round mirror was below her neck. At her bottom, a black, ankle-length skirt with red prints of flowers and leaves, attached to her person via a large black belt with white buckle. Her purple hair was worn short with a curving bang between her dark red eyes. Atop her head was a small rope, holding down several red leaves.

She crossed her arms, standing between the shrine and the protesters.

"Alright folks, listen up! I have spoken with the Dragon Palace, along with the Yama and the Satori living in the Chireiden. We can assure you that the denizens of the underground are not trying to attack us, nor are they in cahoots with the folks in that big castle floating in our skies. Speaking of that, we have also decided that we will be sending several individuals to investigate the matter. We are confident we can find a solution to this incident in a timely manner. Any questions?"

There were none - from the fairies. Everyone else, however, wanted to know the bloody details, but Kanako wasn't about to try to talk over such a hyperactive crowd.

"Wonderful..." said the woman, smiling with exaggeration.

"Lady Kanako!"

The purple-haired woman perked up, turning around to find her shrine maiden - and several unexpected guests - approaching her.

"Welcome back, milady," greeted Sanae with a bow.

The others, including Shizuha, bowed politely to her. Well, all except the angry and clueless Cirno, who had to be slapped on the head, courtesy Shizuha, before she followed suit.

"Hey there Sanae, Suwako. See you two managed to hold up against the ruckus here. Oh...?"

Kanako smiled an intrigued smile, quite interested in her unusual guests.

"A servant from the Dragon Palace has blessed us with her appearance today," she said.

"Greetings Lady Kanako. I am Iku Nagae. I am under orders to attack the flying castle," greeted Iku.

"I see... So you're the one that the dragon is sending? Excellent. Do these others intend to assist you?"

"I will welcome their help if they are so willing," answered Iku.

"Heh... May I have your names as well?" asked Kanako, addressing the rest of the group.

"Yuugi Hoshiguma. Been meaning to meet ya!" said Yuugi, raising a hand a smiling widely.

"Um... Par... Parsee Mizuhashi," greeted Parsee with minimal emotion, seeming a bit jittery.

"Aya Shameimaru, Tengu reporter extraordinaire!" greeted Aya.

Kanako briefly frowned, not too fond of Aya. Thanks to her articles... She quickly composed herself for...

"Cirno," said the ice fairy, eying Kanako.

"And I already know Shizuha there. I see... So a servant of the Dragon, a great Fairy, and a powerful Oni... I'm quite glad you're making such interesting friends, Sanae," chuckled Kanako.

Sanae blushed, putting a hand on the back of her head.

"Hey! Lady!" spoke up Cirno, much to everyone else's chagrin. "They said you could help us find that castle. I need to know where it is so I can save my friends!"

"Cirno, be polite!" chided Shizuha.

"S'alright Shizuha. Can't blame her for being on edge, ya know? One question though... and this is for Iku here."

"Yes? What do you wish to ask?" replied Iku, perking up a bit.

Kanako cupped her chin.

"While at the Dragon Palace, I learned of what happened during your first encounter with that castle. Tell me, how do you intend on getting past that giant spell dish?" asked the wind goddess.

"I'm not entirely sure if this would work... But I was planning on engaging it from afar before it could hit me with that spell again," answered Iku simply.

"Whoooooa, hold up..." said Kanako, putting a hand up and briefly closing her eyes. "That won't do at all. I'm gonna help you out a bit here. Suwako, we got any of *those* left?"

"We haven't used a single one of those ever since we got to Gensokyo. I see your memory is finally going," said Suwako teasingly with a cat smile.

Kanako's eyebrow twitched a bit.

"You never miss an opportunity, do you...?" she said more to herself. "Alright then! Sanae, retrieve one of the great wind bombs from storage and give it to Ms. Iku here. Hopefully a good bit of *deus ex machina* will take care of that thing."

"Err... Yes Ma'am," responded Sanae as she went away, her and Suwako being the only ones who knew what that was.

The others just looked awkwardly for a moment. Iku quickly snapped out of it, bowing quickly.

"I am grateful for your assistance," she spoke.

"You can thank me after you've taken care of that big thing in the sky. Now then, on to business. Lets give you a nice little flight plan. I can pinpoint that castle's current location merely by reading the winds around Gensokyo."

Kanako began floating upwards into the air, crossing her legs and holding her right hand up, concentrating. Shizuha shushed Cirno when she tried to speak and Sanae snatched away Aya's camera when she tried to take pictures. *Just where was she hiding a camera anyway...?*

Iku and company looked on, watching as winds began blowing all around Kanako. After a few moments, the goddess smiled again, returning to the ground.

"That way," she said simply, pointing off to her right. "To the southeast above the clouds. Go there and you won't miss it."

"Hm? That's different from where it first appeared..." observed Iku.

"It's not a big problem. We'll catch it no matter where it goes," smiled Aya, looking at Iku with a wink.

"Perhaps... Thank you Lady Kanako. I shall now depart," said Iku before taking off, Aya darting ahead of her.

"Yo, wait for us will ya?" called out Yuugi, giving chase with Parsee at her side.

"So our friends are in that direction?" asked Cirno.

"Y-yeah. We'd better go too..." answers Shizuha. "But... how do we know they're alive? And what exactly is in that castle...?"

Shizuha nearly jumped out of her dress as Kanako snuck behind her and gave her a good slap on the butt.

"Eeeeh?!"

Cirno looked over in surprise.

"What's with the long faces? C'mon, goddesses shouldn't look like that, nor should powerful fairies. The Rainbow Spirits aren't dumb enough to kill their hostages just yet. I'm quite sure your friends are fine and are counting on you to come for them. With allies as powerful as them at your side, how can you fail? Now go get 'em!" spoke Kanako with a smile. "I even gave you my trademark slap of divine good luck."

Shizuha turned her head, looking awkwardly at Kanako for a moment before turning back around and taking a deep breath.

"You're right. We can't afford to be afraid now, right, Cirno?" she asked.

"I'm the strongest one of all of them. We'll get our friends back for sure!" said the ice fairy, cracking her knuckles.

Shizuha couldn't help chuckling a bit.

"For sure."

Kanako then perked a bit as if remembering something important.

"Oh right... I think you two will appreciate a nice gift..."

The wind goddess held out her right hand's index and middle fingers, putting them together. A yellow beam of light fired out from the fingers, covering Shizuha and Cirno. The two instinctively put up their arms and looked away with tightly closed eyes. After a few moments, the glow faded.

"It's alright you two. Look," said Kanako, putting her hands on her hips.

Shizuha and Cirno looked up hesitantly.

"What did...?"

Shizuha stopped her sentence when she noticed what had changed. Her dress now had a more elaborate design with leaf-like yellow trend present. But, more importantly, a short sword had been strapped to her side, along with a small, circular shield attached to her left arm. The shield had a large

red leaf painted on it for decoration. Cirno had changed as well; a black shoulder pad was now on her right shoulder, accompanied by a large, loose black sleeve. Strapped to her back was a large sword, painted to look like a watermelon.

"There, beefed the both of you up a bit. Now get moving!"

"A-ah... Thank you so much Lady Kanako," said Shizuha, quickly bowing.

"Hey, this stuff is kinda making me feel stronger..." said Cirno before smiling to Kanako and giving a thumbs up. "Thanks lady!"

Kanako returned the thumbs up as the two finally took flight to leave. Shizuha hesitated.

"Wait... What about you, Lady Kanako?" asked Shizuha.

"Sorry, but if I leave the mountain to help ya more directly, the youkai living here are gonna panic and cause more trouble. Politics and that good stuff," answered Kanako. "Just save your friends and leave things here to me."

"O-oh. I understand. We'll see you later!" said Shizuha before flying with Cirno.

"Lady Kanako!" called Sanae, emerging from the Shrine with a large flute. "Oh, they left already?"

"They haven't gone far. If you go now, you'll be able to catch up," answered Kanako.

"Eh?"

"What do you mean *eh*, you silly girl? I want you to go and assist the servant of the Dragon Palace!" laughed Kanako.

"I will," nodded Sanae, starting to fly off before smile back at Kanako. "I'll have this incident solved in no time. Wait for me, Lady Kanako!"

"I'm countin' on ya!" said Kanako with a wink.

The two waved farewell. Suwako then joined Kanako at her side.

"You don't seem too worried there," spoke the smiling Suwako.

"Same to you," replied Kanako.

"And why should I be? With a servant of the Dragon Palace along with our Sanae, plus all those others, we don't really have anything to worry about now, do we?" said Suwako, stretching out her arms.

"Correct," said Kanako with a nod.

"Oh yeah, dinner is on the way," said Suwako.

"Eh? Ordered out, did you? What did you get?"

"Three Big New Yorkers and a Meat Lovers."

"What?! Why did you order that much?!" asks Kanako, dumbfounded.

"We're both growing girls, Kanako~" answered Suwako playfully.

"Why you little... How much did that come to?" grumbled Kanako, crossing her arms.

"Fifty-nine dollars and ninety five cents." answered Suwako.

"And just how much does that translate to in Yen?"

"Ooooooh..." said Suwako, looking up at the sky for a moment before sweetly smiling at Kanako.

"Five-thousand seven hundred and nine... ..along with fifty two cents, plus tax."

Kanako grabbed Suwako by the neck and began swinging her around. Suwako did not seem to mind too much.

"Geez Louise! I'm not made of money you know!"

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Iku and the others flew toward the giant castle without a hint of fear.

*Finally... I can already see it in the distance. These arrogant Rainbow Spirits will soon know the power of the Dragon God. That, and Tenshi will soon be free once more...*

And thus, the next dream had begun...

-{[Once over the rainbow...]}-

## Afterword

Hey there everyone, this is Odda C. Ya know something that's always bothered me? Well okay, its never *bothered* me per say, but I've always found it funny how the English community speaks Sakuya's name. The Japanese say *Sakuya* in a smooth elegant way, while the English speakers say Sa**K**E**W**ya. There's a lot of emphasis on the 'ku' for some strange reason.

Wait, was this supposed to be about the story you just read? Whoopsie!  
Maybe next time folks! Until then, see you next dream.



# Outlandish Blooming Rapport

By Kilgamayan

Insanity is relative.

It's no great secret that most of Gensokyo thinks I'm a lunatic. You're probably no different. I would expect a lowly human to make such baseless assumptions. Let me set the record straight: the idea that I am insane is laughable. Everything I do, everything I say, everywhere I go; it is all pre-meditated. I know *exactly* what I am doing at all times, and I know *exactly* why I am doing it.

If I am in full control of my mind, how could I possibly be crazy?

*Insane* is such an ugly word. Very little bothers me, but being so falsely labeled does it. If you must label my actions, I prefer the term *unorthodox*. It's not the perfect description - I don't believe my goals are fundamentally different from anyone else's - but I will admit that my means to those ends are unique, possibly because I am the only creature in Gensokyo with enough *cojones* to pull out all the stops in the pursuits of my desires, so it fits, mostly.

*Unorthodox* also does not have the negative connotation to it that *insane* does. I am the most powerful youkai in Gensokyo (despite what the boundary bitch and the ice imbecile may claim), and I have a reputation to uphold. You understand.

Then again, maybe you don't. Fortunately for you, I know of one human who does. She leads me to believe that your race may not be so hopeless after all.

With Mugenkan at my back, far off in the mountains, I took a stroll through the flowered Nameless Hill where I had recently run across that charming doll of poison. Few youkai visit this hill anymore. That is fine by me. Fewer youkai means fewer barbaric animals stomping around the place, smashing flowers and disturbing the peace. On this occasion, however, the hill was not my destination. It was merely a landmark on my travel path, which I destined to stop at the Bamboo Forest.

Fate had decreed differently. I stopped before I reached the summit. I sensed a presence far on the other side of the hill, from the edge of the Bamboo Forest. A creature altered Gensokyo's energy flow in the area simply by being. While magical and very powerful, it did not feel like a youkai. This confused me. I considered the possibility of a human presence, but dismissed it. It did not feel like the shrine maiden, and no other human could possibly have that volume of power.

I suddenly realized I didn't care what species it was. I grinned. Whatever this was, human or youkai or anything, it was power. It was energy. It was a force to be reckoned with.

It was fun waiting to happen.

It was a *challenge*.

Of course, approaching this new presence with a grin wouldn't do at all. Nor would brandishing a large stick. It's no fun if your prey can see their doom promised in your look and moves. I put on my best innocent happy face, held my parasol behind me in both hands and continued my journey toward the Bamboo Forest.

Cresting the hill brought the creature into view, still at a distance. I could discern nothing but a

humanoid shape, though this alone was enough to stimulate my curiosity. The presence was definitely not a youkai. Was it possible for a human *not* the shrine maiden to possess that much magical power? The possibility of another powerful human got my adrenaline flowing. On the inside, I smiled my practiced smile. On the inside, I grinned so hard it hurt. Today was a very good day.

Further travel gave the humanoid detail. It was a girl that looked no more than two human years older than the shrine maiden. She wore a simple light brown shirt, which was a stark contrast to her whitish-blue ankle-length hair. I had only ever seen hair that long once in my very long life span. It was lavender and attached to the head of a delicious-looking rabbit. I was impressed to see a human possessing such long hair. Inwardly I snickered, wondering if Yukari knew of this girl's existence and had discovered that she, the grand boundary youkai, had been outdone aesthetically by a lowly human. Atop the garden of hair sat a red-and-white bow. Did every woman in Gensokyo really need some sort of infernal headgear?

The girl also wore a pair of blood red suspenders, which were home to the strangest aspect of her appearance – handfuls of red-and-white seals were scattered all across her legs, as if to cover up rips and tears in the fabric. Did this girl know the shrine maiden? That might explain why she was such a strong magical force despite being human. She sat on a large rock, resting her chin on her right hand with her elbow propped up by her thigh, staring off into the distance as if waiting for something. She had yet to acknowledge my presence, but I couldn't imagine anything she'd be waiting for if not me.

I strolled toward her, getting close enough that she could hear my footfalls. I walked directly in front of her, staring straight ahead whilst watching her out of the corner of my eye. She finally reacted to my presence, turning her head to watch me walk by. Then she sealed her fate - and initiated contact.

“Are you lost?”

Despite the desirable reaction, my eye twitched. Her voice was deeper than mine.

I twirled and faced her, still with the innocent smile plastered on my face. Every moment injected a little more adrenaline into my system. The game had begun, and I was eager to play.

“No, not at all. I was merely taking a leisurely walk to enjoy the scenery. I don't get this far out very often, you see. What about you?”

It took her a few seconds to realize what I was talking about.

“What, me lost? Nah, I live really close by. Come here every day.”

“Oh, that must be nice, living near the Bamboo Forest of Mystery and knowing your way around. I've heard a lot of horror stories about the place.”

“They're mostly true.”

“And you're not frightened by it? You have a lot of guts.”

She chuckled.

“Nice word choice. But no, I know it like the back of my hand. I've lived here for a long while.”

I found myself impressed by this human a second time. Navigating the Bamboo Forest was no trivial task.

“Wow, that’s quite impressive!”

She acknowledged me with a grunt and a nod before returning her chin to her hand. I took this as my cue and started building energy in the tip of my parasol. Play time had ended. It was time to test this girl.

“So who were you waiting for?”

She turned back to me, her expression blank.

“What makes you think I was waiting for someone?”

“You looked the part before I walked by you.”

“Did I? I didn’t mean to. I was just contemplating things.”

“Like what?”

“Well, there’s this other girl I don’t really like, and she doesn’t really like me. She lives about in the middle of the Bamboo Forest, off that way.”

She turned around to gesture in that direction, putting her back to me. I had gathered enough energy at the tip of my parasol. It was now or never.

Slowly and precisely, so as not to alert her, I pulled my parasol around, pointed the tip of it at her back and released the built-up energy into a giant laser.

“I was thinking about how I could-”

A sharp buzz filled the air as a perfectly rounded beam of pure white light burst from my parasol. The force knocked me back a few centimeters.

Her voice vanished mid-sentence. She was completely engulfed by the stream of energy. The blast lasted about five seconds, long enough to carve holes out from some of the larger bamboo shoots for a good distance. Not wanting to damage more plant life, I cut the laser off and returned what little energy remained to myself.

A blood red shred of fabric lay on the grass beside the rock. A quarter of her ribbon slowly floated down and landed where she had been sitting. There was no other evidence that she had ever been there. The magical presence was gone. The laser had vaporized her.

I *hmp*ed, disappointed. All that build-up and such a pathetic result. This wasn’t nearly as fun as I had hoped it would be. *That’s what I get for believing a human could make a worthy opponent.*

I dropped the smile and frowned at the situation. My day was ruined. Forgetting my goal of traversing

the Bamboo Forest, I turned around and headed home. I needed some food and a nap to get over this bad mood.

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Several uneventful days passed. I quickly forgot about the girl. When you've done the deed as often as I have, you tend not to remember who you do it to.

Forgetting about her was one of my very rare mistakes.

I awoke one morning to a large explosion. Multitudes of fairy servants milled about in a panic, some shouting orders, some carrying buckets of water, and some simply freaking out and being useless. I would have made a mental note to destroy the useless ones but then the smell of smoke hit me. My mansion was burning.

I couldn't believe anyone had the nerve to torch my house. Just when my anger hit its peak, I froze stiff at a voice I hadn't expected to ever hear again.

"Kazamiiiiiii!"

It was her.

I was baffled and confused. For one rare and incredible instant, I panicked. I had *killed* her! She had vaporized in front of my eyes! Her magic presence had dissipated completely! How was she here now?

The moment of panic vanished and was replaced by pure rage. I *had* killed her. I had killed her easily. What was to stop me from doing it again? If something tried to stop me, I would kill it as well. Nothing would get between me and this girl, this...*human*. This human that had the sheer audacity to not only not die when I killed them, but to set fire to my house. I picked up my parasol and bolted out my bedroom door.

"I know you're in there, Kazami!"

*Oh yes, I'm in here. Soon, I'll be out there. We'll have a little chat, and then I will pull your intestines out through your eye sockets and strangle you with them.*

I traversed the hallways of my mansion easily. I must have looked particularly angry, as every fairy nearby scrambled out of my way as if they were on fire themselves. I can't imagine what I would have done to any one that stayed within striking distance.

"Come out here and face me! I guarantee you you're not getting an easy sucker punch in this time!"

A sucker punch, eh? That gave me an idea of how to deal with this insolent human. I prepared a Double Spark spell and flew out the front doors to face the attacker.

I had to duck a fireball as I exited the mansion. I heard it explode on the wall behind me. In front of me, clear in the morning sunlight, stood the girl I had destroyed several days ago. Her outfit remained the same, but now a pair of fiery wings protruded from her back. Her arms were out at length to her sides. Each hand held another fireball, dancing in anticipation of giving the side of my house a hug.

“Well, well, well! Sleeping Beauty awakes! Those’re some nice pajamas you have there.”

With her taunt, I realized this was not the first time a human had attacked my home while I slept, forcing me to fend them off in my nightwear. I added it to the long list of reasons why I hated humans. Do you idiots have no sense of proper timing?

I also realized she had arrived with an air of cocky confidence. This played well into my hand. I needed to keep her distracted, and her arrogance gave me that opportunity. I kept her talking.

“I killed you.”

“You most certainly did! Funny thing about me, though. My body is pretty speedy at natural recovery. I wonder if your little shack here is the same way?”

She chucked another fireball high into the air, shattering a window on the top floor. A new set of fairy shrieks rang out from the room onto my front lawn, barely audible above the flames.

Her moment of distraction was my chance. While she focused on hitting my window, I cast my Double Spark spell, making sure to spawn my double behind her noiselessly. At the same instant, I turned my head to watch the fireball fly into my house so she wouldn’t grow suspicious.

“Pretty good aim, wouldn’t you say? Then again, centuries of practice will help that out.”

She chuckled and spawned another fireball in her hand. This situation could get pretty ugly very quickly. This girl was no match for me, but my mansion was another story. Fixing it up would require a lot of effort I didn’t want to expend. Fun time was over for Miss Pyro. I raised the tip of my parasol to point at her chest and started gathering energy.

“I’ll kill you again. This time I’ll make sure you *stay* dead.”

“Ha! For someone that thinks themselves so much better than a lowly human like myself, you sure aren’t a very fast learner. Listen, Flowertits, you can kill me all you like, but I’m still not going to go away. I just don’t work like that.”

She readied herself into a fighting stance, preparing to dodge whatever my parasol had to throw at her.

“You’re certainly welcome to try, though!”

I spat out my response as my double, having sneaked up behind her (being careful not to roast herself on the flaming wings) cocked her right arm back.

“Thank you. I’ll do my best.”

My double slammed a right cross into the back of the girl’s head. Instantly the fires in her hands and the wings on her back disappeared. She dropped face-first into the dirt and didn’t move. Even with the destruction crackling behind me, I let myself a small smile. I lowered my parasol to the ground and dissipated my clone. Double Spark has such wonderful applications.

I walked over to the unconscious human lying on my front lawn. Staring at her for a moment, I picked up my foot and crushed it into the back of her left knee, shattering it. I did the same to her right knee. No reaction from either. That was a pretty good punch I threw. Stabbing her through the right shoulder with my parasol elicited a reaction; a murmur of pain and a spasm in her torso. Yelling at a pair of fairies to bring two buckets of water outside, I turned her on her left side with my parasol.

The fairies dumped the water on her head, which seemed to bring her around. I punctuated that shock with a kick to her ribs, sending her sprawling onto her back.

“Wake up.”

“Uhhhhnnnn...what...happened...? God damn...I hurt like hell...”

“That would be because of things like this.”

I jammed my parasol tip into her left shoulder, completely paralyzing her. This got my desired reaction, a yelp of pain followed by a string of obscenities I won't reproduce here. I stepped lightly on her chest and stared straight down into her face with a big angry grin.

“Yes, I bet that felt good. It certainly felt good for me. Now I'm going to have some fun at your expense and then grow bored of you and vaporize you again. How about it?”

“Sounds...like...a plan...”

Her indifference rang a small alarm in my head. I silenced it and continued my game, pressing harder into her chest with my foot.

“Good, I'm glad you like the idea. First things first, though. You obviously know who I am, since you've produced my name and know how I feel about our species difference. You must know both what I hold power over and how powerful I am. Why did you, a lowly human, think it would be a good idea to burn my mansion down?”

She grinned.

“Seemed...like...a fun...thing...to do...”

This was cut off by a coughing fit that erupted blood. It splattered all over my shoe. I didn't notice.

Her words floored me. All my rage was gone. My mouth hung open and I stared down at her in disbelief.

I had never expected such a thing from a human. She knew what it was like. She *understood*.

My parasol fell out of my hand, bounced off her shin and fell to the grass. I lifted my foot her chest. My eyes lost focus. She was still grinning despite labored breathing – I must have shattered a few ribs with that kick – but soon her smile disappeared. She looked up at me, confused.

“What's wrong?”

I was too absorbed into my thoughts to respond. Several seconds of silence passed before she spoke up again.

“You know...this hurts like hell...I don’t know...why you seem to have...had a change of heart...but if you don’t mind...can you kill me?”

It took me a second to register what she had said.

“...Huh? Oh...yeah. Sure.”

I picked my parasol back up and raised the tip of it over her head.

“Thanks.”

*Thud.*

The parasol stabbed straight through her brain, killing her. I noticed a smile on her face before she dissolved into a rainbow of sparkles, which the wind picked up and blew everywhere. The parasol stayed upright, stuck into the dirt.

I plopped down on the grass to recover. I won’t bore you with the details, especially since it’s doubtful that you’d understand. Once I noticed the blood on my shoe, I got back up and ordered another couple of fairy maids to bring more buckets of water and some soap to wash it off. The fire had finally been put out, and mansion repairs could wait a little while longer.

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A few days later, I returned to the Bamboo Forest, near the Nameless Hill. I held a small sack in hand alongside my usual parasol. I spotted the girl sitting in the same place. This time I waved to her before I came close. When she saw me, she stood up and stared, though she didn’t make any aggressive moves. As I approached, I saw the look on her face was a cornucopia of emotions – anger, helplessness, uncertainty, curiosity.

Fireballs appeared in her hands when I was about ten feet away. I shot up a hand of my own.

“Please, no, put those away. That’s not why I’m here.”

The flames vanished. Her stare remained.

“What do you want?”

Smiling, I tossed my parasol to the ground and fished through the sack with my free hand, pulling out a lunch box. I held it out to her.

“To eat with you. If you don’t mind, of course.”

She didn’t move. Her gaze flickered back and forth between my eyes and the box in my hand. I giggled.

“Come on. We both know that if I wanted to hurt you I wouldn’t do it this way. Poisons and the like aren’t nearly as fun.”



That did the trick. She took the box from me and sat back down on her rock. She opened the box, sniffing the contents. I conjured up a giant sunflower directly across from her and sat upon it, bringing us to eye level. I pulled a second box from the sack, opened it and began sampling. The fairies had done a good job today.

Watching me eat, the girl tried some herself.

“... You know, this isn’t half bad.”

“Yes. I’m thankful that my fairy wait staff isn’t completely worthless.”

We spent our lunch in silence, save for the occasional gust of wind forcing the bamboo to dance about. I finished my box first and watched her pick at hers. She still didn’t fully trust me. I could hardly blame her, given she barely knew me and I had already killed her twice.

It felt weird to do with genuine intent, but I struck up a conversation.

“How did you know my name? I never told you what it was.”

She put her box down on the rock. I was glad to see it mostly empty.

“A friend of a friend. You’ve met her, apparently. Family name is Hieda.”

“Ah, yes, the Hieda clan. The current one is...Akyu, I think?”

“Yeah.”

“I see. Well, you know so much about me, but I don’t know a thing about you, other than the fact that you refuse to stay dead and can throw fire every which way. What’s your name?”

She picked her box back up and answered while staring at it.

“...Fujiwara no Mokou.”

“You’re of *the* Fujiwara clan? Impressive. It seems that a family the humans consider important has finally produced someone of value and interest.”

She didn’t respond.

“You fascinate me, Mokou. Despite being a human, you not only hold incredibly powerful magic, but you even seem to *understand* my way of thinking about life. Please tell me what else you do that you find *fun*.”

She looked at me and a smile of understanding slowly spread across her face. She put her box back down. She visibly relaxed while exhaling.

“You know that other girl I was telling you about roughly a week ago? The one that I don’t like and doesn’t like me? Well...”

## Afterword

Youkai-human relations have fascinated me since I was first introduced to this series. The more astute among you may have noticed this is my second AD story written from the perspective of a youkai where the only other character is a human. My goal in these stories is to explore the youkai mindset; to see how different – and how similar – they are to humans.

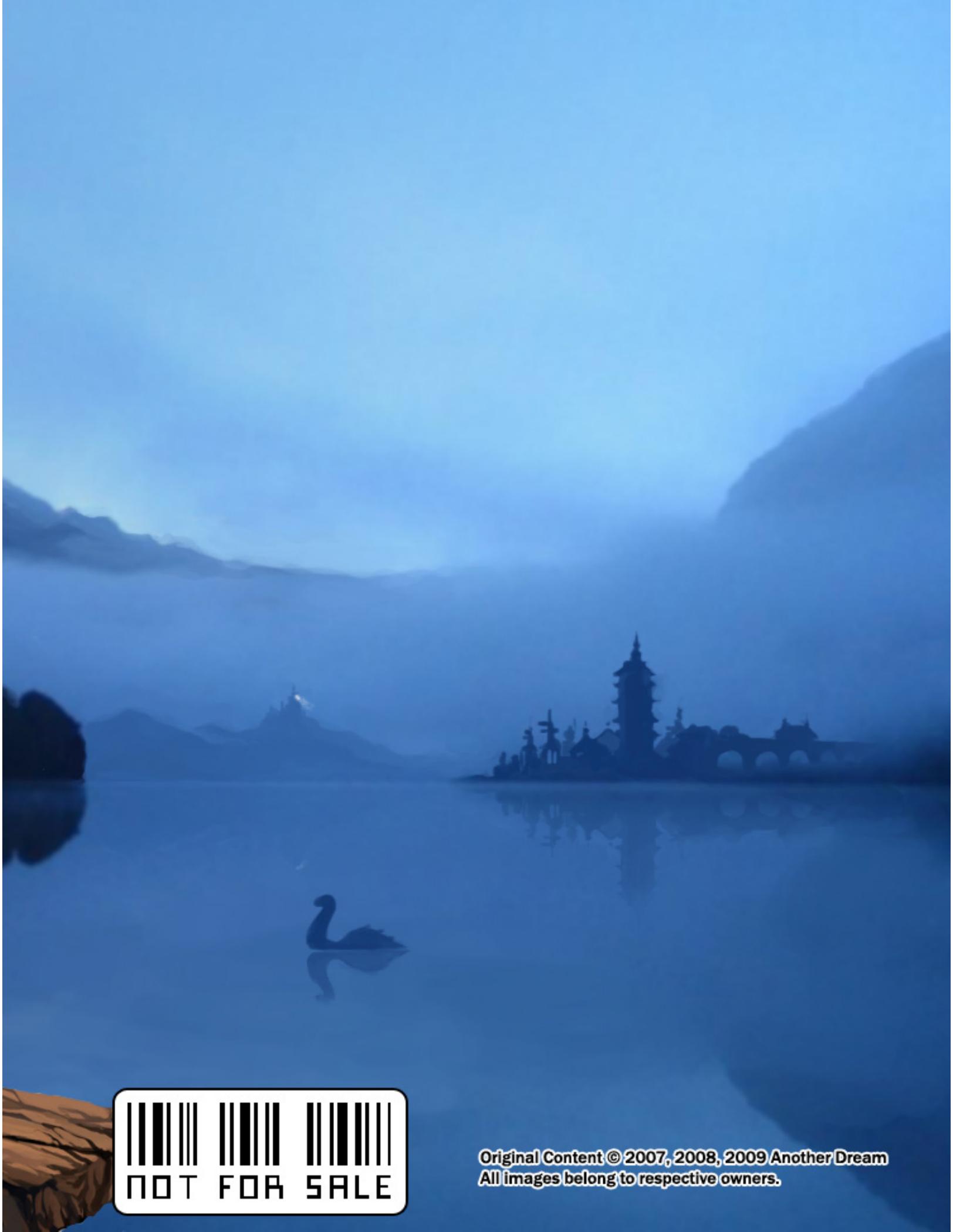
ISR already covered the basics of this for me, however, so I decided my next story needed to have a little more...something. Choosing the youkai was no problem – examining the youkai mindset, particularly as it gears toward humans, with Yuuka was bound to be a challenging adventure. (Plus I like her a lot.) The trick came in choosing the human. Yuuka herself forced criteria on the choice, however; my goal became finding Yuuka a friend. An interesting friend, too – no buddying up with Reimu or Marisa for this one – but a sensible friend as well.

The choice ended up being *not* a choice, as there was only one human that fit the Kazami puzzle. The end result is what you have just finished reading. I hope you enjoyed it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

And, well, apologies to those that wanted an epic fight scene.

Thank you for reading AnotherDream 6A! Be on the watch for the art and doujin release coming this October, and we literarians will see you again in January!





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