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SAILOR MOON

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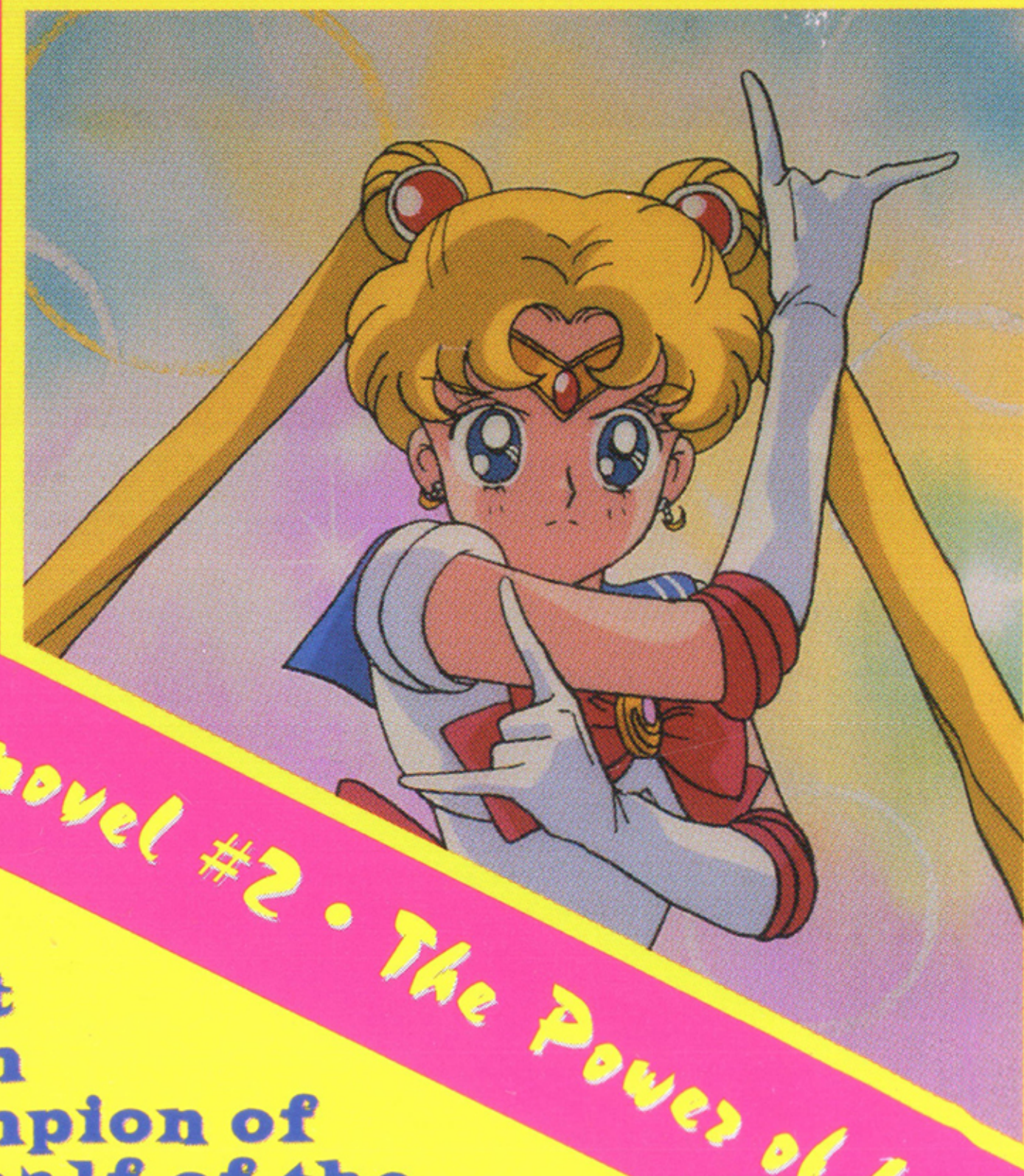


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SAILOR MOON®

Sailor Moon® the novel #2

THE POWER OF LOVE

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Chapter 1

Weight Up

Soft white bubbles floated from left to right, then back again. The warm water lapped up and down the ceramic tile, the bubbles flowing over the edge of the tub.

"Ahhhh," Serena Tsukino sighed, completely relaxed.

There was nothing like a bubble bath after a long, hard Sunday, Serena thought. Of course, her entire day consisted of three naps, three complete meals plus three major snacks, a good hour or two of PlayStation, and a bit of chatting on the Net. Still, oh how good it felt to kick back in a luxurious

SAILOR MOON

bath of eucalyptus, peppermint and Siberian pine bath crystals.

"Luna, you don't know what you're missing," Serena yelled out, teasing.

Like any cat, Luna stayed as far away from water as she could. Serena could see Luna stretching her little black body in the bedroom. Approaching the doorway to the bathroom, Luna sat down and stared at Serena.

"If you keep soaking your body for so long like that, you're going to end up looking like a prune," little Luna scolded.

Serena stuck out her tongue at Luna, although she couldn't cover up a big smile. Sometimes it just cracked her up to see Luna, this little black cat, talking like a person. Sure, Luna wasn't an average cat, and since Serena had first met Luna, her experiences fighting evil as Sailor Moon gave her a new perspective. Even so, it was cute seeing the little furry feline chattering away.

"You're just a big baby, scared of the water and all." Serena flicked a few drops of water towards Luna, who promptly jumped back to dodge getting wet.

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Getting out of the tub, Serena threw a towel over her soaking wet body. As she walked over to the mirror, the sound of water dripping in the tub echoed throughout the bathroom.

“Agggggghhh!” Serena screamed at the top of her lungs.

Luna dashed into the bathroom, and Serena’s entire family ran to her bedroom, worried. Clutching her towel, Serena turned towards Luna, her eyes bloodshot red.

“Luna!” Serena struggled with tears as she caught her breath from the shock. “I’m getting fat!!!”

Luna stopped dead in her tracks. “That’s it?”

“What do you mean, ‘That’s it?’!” Serena cried, desperate in her panic. “This is a major deal!”

Serena’s parents came rushing in the room with her little brother Sammy.

“Serena, you’re going to give Mom and Dad a heart attack!” Sammy yelled, seeing that Serena was perfectly fine.

“What’s wrong, honey?” Kind as always,

Serena's dad looked concerned.

"Daddy—" Serena begged for some sympathy. "Look how fat I'm getting!"

"Honey, being fat isn't a bad thing," her dad responded. That was not quite the sympathy Serena was hoping for.

"Daddy, how can I become popular and," Serena paused, "get boys to like me if I'm fat?"

Serena felt a little guilty about ragging so hard on being fat. After all, some girls were fat, but were still popular, funny and had lots of friends. So, it wasn't being fat that was a bad thing. It was *Serena* being fat that was a bad thing. Being fat just wouldn't look right on her, Serena reasoned.

"That's what you get for pigging out all the time!" Sammy stuck his thumbs in his ears and waved his hands back and forth, teasing Serena.

"Shut up, you jerk!" Serena snapped at him.

"Sammy has a point." This time it was Serena's mother. "After all, you don't exercise and you eat between meals. Not to mention the fact that you never do your homework."

"Mom, what does not doing my homework have to do with getting fat?"

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"See, you don't even realize it, do you?" Serena's mom scolded. "If you were doing your homework like you should every day, you wouldn't be spending so much time in the kitchen raiding the refrigerator."

That was it, Serena decided. She wasn't going to put up with this any longer. It was time she did something about her weight problem so no one could tease her anymore. That meant only one thing, spelled with four little letters.

D...I...E...T...

Serena would show everyone!

At school the following day, Serena barely made it to fourth period. Feeling weak, she put her head on her desk and prayed for class to end. Having skipped breakfast and her usual snack at recess, Serena's stomach was rumbling like thunder.

The bell rang, and everyone stormed out of the classroom for lunch. Only Serena did not budge.

"Come on, Serena!" Molly Brown noticed her blond friend slumped over in her seat. "Are

HALLOWEEN

you feeling sick?"

Serena just stared at Molly's moving lips. Her energy level was too low to even respond.

"Serena, what's wrong with you?!"

"Molly..." Serena struggled to get up, but was somehow able to lift her body from the desk. "I...need...food..."

"Serena, it's lunch time," Molly said, reassuringly. "If it's just food you want, no need to stress. Let's go!"

"Molly, you don't understand." Serena struggled up and made her way outside with Molly at her side. "I can't eat. If I don't starve myself, I'll never lose weight."

"You...on a diet?!" Molly had to hold her side from laughing so hard.

"What's so funny?" Serena protested.

"Serena, you're the grub queen," Molly said, shaking her head. "You on a diet is just wrong."

Serena could hear Molly's words, but nothing was computing in her brain. All she could do was home in on the food being eaten all around her. Joe Pestone was in the corner with his buddies Bill and Zach, all three of them munching on

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Burger King take-out. Jill, Tina, and June were in the middle of the courtyard eating home-made sandwiches. Just then, Serena started to smell the most delicious aroma in the world.

“Hey Serena!”

The voice called out from behind her. Serena spun around to see Melvin holding a plate of sushi up to her face.

“Here, have some.” Melvin offered her the entire plate of succulent California rolls. “I brought way too much for just me.”

Serena felt her jaw drop down to the floor. Her saliva started drooling out of the corner of her mouth. She could not take her eyes off the gleaming white rice and shredded crab. Sushi was her favorite! Sure, it was one of the most expensive meals around, but that only made it more romantic. Her dream date was a fashionable, charming stud taking her to the most intimate sushi bar in town.

“Serena, don’t do it!” Kim Matthews was yelling for Serena to stop while shaking her by the shoulders. “Molly just told me you’re starving yourself to lose weight. You’ve got to stop. I went

through this anorexic period last year, and it almost killed me."

"Kim's right, Serena," Molly agreed. "There are much healthier ways to lose weight."

"Really?" Serena was easily convinced. Snatching the plate of sushi up from Melvin's outstretched arms, Serena started gobbling down the fancy fish treats. With her mouth full of rice, Serena looked over at Molly. "What...other...ways?"

"First of all, they say that exercise is key," Molly explained.

"It's true," Kim chimed in. "A properly balanced diet with regular exercise is the best way to lose weight."

Wishing Serena luck, Kim excused herself since she had to meet another friend in the library. The girls waved goodbye to Kim and carried on their conversation.

"Actually, have you noticed Miss Haruna?" Molly asked, referring to their homeroom teacher, Patricia Haruna. "She's been on a new health kick and lost like 15 pounds in less than a week."

"Really?" Serena asked, surprised. "I didn't

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notice."

"Look here." Melvin pulled out two Polaroid photos of Miss Haruna. "The one on the left here is Miss Haruna when she first joined her new club. This one on the right is what she looked like four days after joining. Amazing, isn't it?"

Serena could not believe it. How could Miss Haruna lose so much weight in less than a week? Was it some special diet that her new club had her on? Or was it just because she was exercising? Either way, Serena had to join this club. If starving herself was not the answer, this club was the key to losing weight.

"Melvin, did you take those photos?" Serena asked, hoping to find out the club's location.

"Yeah, Melvin," Molly joined in. "What are you doing with photos of Miss Haruna in her aerobics outfit?!"

Serena sensed Molly's accusatory tone and knew Molly was ready for a classic nerd-roasting session.

"Don't you know that's a crime—invading privacy?" Molly started to turn up the heat.

CROSSROADS

"And just think," Serena couldn't help it. "She's your teacher! You'd probably get suspended if Donan the Dreaded knew." Everyone at Crossroads called their principal "Donan the Dreaded" because Principal Donan was so mean.

"Come on you guys," Melvin pleaded. "It wasn't like that." The school's biggest geek started to back away from the tormenting girls.

"Let us have those photos," Molly insisted, closing in on him.

"Hand them here, Melvin." Serena moved in on the left, with Molly on the right.

"Please," Melvin begged. "Leave me alone!"

Ducking in between Serena and Molly, Melvin dodged the girls and ran past the courtyard. The girls wasted no time in pursuit.

"Get back here, you little dweeb," Serena called out, while Molly giggled.

Little Melvin proved no match for the girls, and his lack of athletic ability left him collapsed on the ground near the gym. Panting, Melvin looked up in protest.

"OK, you can have the photos," Melvin

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cried. "But please don't hand me over to Donan the Dreaded."

Molly snatched up the photos, and Serena leaned down next to Melvin's face, so close she could easily touch Melvin's nose. Pointing her index finger right in front of Melvin's eyes, Serena played the part of the ruthless private investigator.

"It's time for you to cough up some info, loser," Serena feigned an Italian accent. "Where's this so-called club where you shot your peeping Tom photos?"

Trapped, Melvin had no choice but to spill the beans. Melvin told the girls how he followed Miss Haruna after school, and watched her go into the fitness club named the "Shape Salon." With a contented smile on her face, Serena turned to Molly and continued her Italian undercover routine.

"Molly, baby, forget about this loser." Serena's voice was husky Pacino. "It's time for a rendezvous at the Shape Salon."



Chapter 2

Shape Salon

After school, Kim, Serena, Molly and Lisa Brownridge gathered outside the three-story, round building made with sheer glass windows. From the street, the girls could see rows of fitness equipment. The glass was mainly reflective, so the equipment was barely visible, but it seemed that the club was crowded with people working out.

"Well, let's give it a shot," said Kim, looking over at her friends.

"It can't be any worse than not eating." Serena shuddered at the memory of that morning, and the girls entered the lobby.

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On a huge video screen hanging from the ceiling in the lobby, a beautiful model clutched a towel and smiled.

"Girls, welcome to the Shape Salon!" The model's voice blared out of the video screen, as if someone knew the four girls had just walked in.

"Hey, look, you guys," Molly squealed, excited. "It's Pamela Ooh Sanderson from Bay-swatch. She's talking to us!"

"In just one day," the model explained, "you can lose two pounds. In two days, you can lose eight pounds, and after three days, you can look gorgeous, like me!"

"Guys, I bet this place is totally pricey," Lisa commented, worried.

"Yeah, but no price is too high to become drop-dead gorgeous," Serena reasoned.

"I've spent too much money on clothes lately, though," Lisa explained.

"Good point," the other girls agreed.

"Best of all," the model continued. "This month's special campaign means you can join now for a free trial. There's no excuse not to become drop-dead gorgeous."

"It's like Pamela Ooh is reading our minds," Molly said.

"Yeah, it's a no-brainer now," Serena agreed. "Where do we sign up?"

The girls wandered over to the reception desk and rang the bell. Out came a tall, blond instructor, with tanned skin and very defined muscles. Gaga over the stud-muffin, Serena and her friends tried hard to contain themselves. If this is what losing weight was all about, Serena thought, she'd start shedding pounds like a snake sheds its skin.

"You're here for the free trial, right?" The blond instructor showed teeth so white they sparkled. "My name's Jed. Pleasure to meet you."

"Hi Jed," the girls recited, swooning.

"Come with me, and I'll give you the special VIP tour."

"Wow, he's treating us like VIPs," Molly whispered to Serena, giggling.

"Maybe all the instructors look like him," Kim added hopefully.

Jed, with his totally cut body, showed off brand-new exercise bikes, rowing machines, stair-

the power of love

climbers, and bizarre combo machines only found on late-night infomercials. In the back were pools, lockers, changing rooms, and the full-on steam room and Jacuzzi set. Besides the machines, there were racquetball courts, an aerobics studio, a juice bar, and a relaxation room with yoga and meditation classes.

"This place is amazing," commented Lisa, visibly impressed.

"Girls, I can tell you are some of the elite in Crossroads," Jed cooed. "The Space Salon features the most modern fitness equipment available today. I *know* we will be able to satisfy your discriminating tastes. However, I must warn you about one thing."

The girls looked at Jed's tanned body, wondering what he was about to say.

"Losing weight is something you must be completely committed to," Jed warned. "Not only do I want to see you here everyday, I want you to give yourselves completely to the process. Capiche?"

"Capiche," everyone except Serena yelled out, nodding earnestly. When they noticed Serena

looked puzzled, they turned to face her.

Serena looked around. "Uh," she said, her face reddening. "Isn't Capiche that little Italian restaurant over near the Crossroads Mall?"

Molly, Lisa, and Kim exchanged glances and started busting up.

"Serena, *capiche* means *got it* in Italian," Molly explained, in between laughs. The blond god Jed just shook his head in disgust, while Serena slinked back, embarrassed.

After changing into their workout clothes, the four girls walked out into the main exercise room and looked around at the sophisticated fitness apparatus.

"Good thing I brought my Dolce & Gabbana lycra fitness clothes with me," Molly said, with a sense of relief.

"You're always so prepared." Serena was amazed that Molly always seemed to know what to do.

The girls split up and headed towards different areas of the work-out room. While Kim and Lisa hopped on exercise bikes, Molly gave the row-

the power of love

ing machine a shot.

Serena walked over to the stair-climbing machine and inspected it. She had seen stair-climbing machines on TV before, but how in the world did they work? Serena stepped on one of the stairs carefully and stood up. Suddenly, the stair started dropping down, and Serena completely lost her balance.

"Help!" she yelled, as she fell off of the stair-climber onto the ground. "This thing's *dangerous*." Serena was really worried about messing up her clothes. She didn't have the beautiful Dolce & Gabbana that Molly was wearing, but her CK outfit certainly wasn't worth ruining.

"Do you need some help there, honey?"

Serena looked up and saw Jed offering his hand to help her up. She blushed and took it. "Thanks. I'm not really used to exercising."

"That's okay," Jed said, reassuringly. "I'll help you out. Just step on the bottom stair here, and when you're balanced step up on top and keep repeating the pattern like you're walking up stairs."

Serena followed the blond hunk's instruc-

HALLOWEEN

tions to a T and was soon climbing up stairs like a fireman in a burning office building. What a stupid exercise, Serena thought. After all, if she needed to go up, she would just take the elevator. What was the point of climbing all those stairs and stepping off exactly where she started?

After what seemed like four hours, Serena's body would not budge. She pressed the stop button and carefully exited the nasty machine. Looking at her watch, Serena realized that she had only been stair-climbing for five minutes! Losing weight was *really* a pain.

After all that work (even though it was only five minutes), Serena decided to reward herself with a dip in the Jacuzzi. Throwing her exercise clothes into the locker, Serena headed towards the ladies-only steam room.

In the main exercise room, Molly was taking a break from the rowing machine when the blond instructor Jed strolled by.

"Hey, you!" Jed snarled at Molly. "You can't afford to take a rest. Don't you want to become drop-dead gorgeous? After all, you're

the power of love

pretty cute, so if you try hard enough, I know you can do it."

Molly turned crimson red. "Do you really think so?"

"I know it," Jed reassured her, resting his muscle-laden arm on Molly's shoulder.

"You're right." Molly planted herself on the rowing machine again. "I can't give up until I'm drop-dead gorgeous."

"Good girl." Jed walked away, smiling to himself.

After about a half-hour of intense exercise, Molly's face turned completely pale, and she leaned off the rowing machine and literally dropped on the floor. Kim and Lisa stumbled up to her, both of their faces the same pale shade, and collapsed on the floor next to Molly.

Jed came strolling up to the exhausted girls. "You all worked so hard today, I have a special treat for you."

The three girls looked up at Jed, weak but interested.

"Usually this costs extra, but since this is our special campaign week, and you worked so hard

HALO POD

today, there's no charge." Jed led the three lifeless girls by the hand to the tanning beds. "This is our special Shape Sun Salon. These aren't just regular tanning beds. The UV rays are treated to remove extra lipids from your body, so that you go home even thinner."

Molly looked at Kim and Lisa with an excited expression on her face. "This is what Miss Haruna must have used to lose so much weight in less than a week."

"These little pod-like capsules look kind of freaky to me, but if they help me lose a few extra pounds, I'm in." Lisa headed over to the black tanning beds.

"Wait up, Lisa," called out Kim. "I want to try it, too!"

"Me, too!" Molly ran behind the other two, limping but determined to shed a few more pounds.

The blond instructor watched the three girls enter the capsules and muttered to himself. "That's right, girls. Just let the rays sap up the rest of your energy." Jed chuckled under his breath.

When Molly, Lisa, and Kim finished their

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Shape Sun Salon session, their faces were paler than Casper the Ghost.

"Girls, you look so beautiful," Jed complimented them. "It's amazing!"

"Cool!" The three girls high-fived each other, even though their bodies seemed ready to collapse.

"Remember, if you want to become drop-dead gorgeous, make sure you come here everyday," Jed reminded them.

"Okay." The girls nodded and headed off toward the showers.

Thousands of miles from the Shape Salon, pitch-black columns shaped like bones reflected only the glow of fireflies. Amongst the crawling worms and scrambling rats, Queen Beryl rubbed her black crystal ball. An image of the Shape Salon and its blond, studly instructor came into view.

"Jedite, report in at once!" Queen Beryl's booming voice echoed throughout the dark chambers.

"Queen Beryl, you will be pleased to hear that my strategy is working perfectly."

HALLOWEEN

“Excellent!”

“The stupid girls here want to look beautiful so badly that they’ll do anything to lose weight,” Jedithe explained. “My machines are sapping up all their energy.”

“Perfect,” Queen Beryl hissed. “Continue with your plan.”

“As you wish, Your Majesty.” As Jedithe bowed, his eyes flickered with the same glow as the fireflies.

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Chapter 3

Nuts for Donuts

Finished drying off her body outside the Jacuzzi, Serena changed into her DKNY casual jeans and baby tee. Glancing around, she couldn't find Molly, Lisa or Kim anywhere. Confused, Serena approached the picture-perfect beef-stick instructor.

"Uh, Jed." Serena's innocent, baby-blue eyes were slightly red from the Jacuzzi. "Have you seen my friends?"

"Oh, you mean those three girls? They left about ten minutes ago."

They left without Serena? What were they

HALLO MON

thinking?! Even though they tended to be a bit selfish at times, Serena found them leaving without saying anything to her a bit unusual.

Jed looked over at Serena with a twinkle in his eyes. "How about trying the relaxing Shape Sun Salon bed?"

"No thanks," Serena muttered, shaking her head. "I've really gotta head out."

"Well, make sure you come back tomorrow, sweetie." Jed flashed another pearly-white smile. "You look great in your work-out clothes."

Blushing, Serena ducked out and began walking home. All that sweating, she thought. Really, all the gym ended up doing was just making her hungrier. How could anyone lose weight if they just ate more food after their workout?

Crossing the street, Serena glanced to her right. Coming down the sidewalk was a little boy about four years old. His mother was strolling about fifteen feet behind him, window shopping. The boy's hands were covered with red goo, dripping down between his fingers. His hands grasped a white, creamy donut, with red goo dripping from the bottom. Stuffing the donut in his mouth, the

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boy cackled an excited laugh, as he gobbled the donut up, bite by bite.

Serena's eyes started bulging from her head. Stopped dead in her tracks, Serena stared at the boy walking right towards her. With saliva beginning to dribble down her chin, Serena stood in front of the boy.

"Do...nut..." Serena's voice sounded desperate. "Donut!" The tone raised and the boy looked up, finally noticing her. Serena towered over the boy, staring at his donut with zombie eyes and canine salivation.

"M..." The boy started backing up, eyes full of fright. "Mommy?" The boy's mother was still a few shops back. "Mommy!!" The boy yelled out, spinning around and running off towards his mother.

Serena felt pretty guilty. After all, harassing toddlers was a bit extreme. Still, the pang in her empty gut wouldn't stop. That donut looked so scrumptious! Without food, she might just pass out. Stumbling over to the Crown Arcade, Serena barely made it through the automatic sliding door inside.

Weak from hunger, Serena suddenly felt faint. Dropping her Prada bag, she began falling backwards. Too weak to stop herself from falling, she closed her eyes, braced for the smash onto the floor. Instead, she felt soft arms catch her and hold her up. Opening her eyes, she saw an attractive male face. It was Andrew Foreman, the part-time guy at Crown!

"Serena!" Andrew's face showed worry, on the verge of panic. "What's wrong? Do you feel sick? Do you want me to take you to the hospital?"

"Hospital?" Serena looked up at Andrew. "Can you take me to a nice restaurant?"

"A restaurant?" Andrew looked perplexed. "Why would that help?"

"Because I haven't had anything to eat all day long *and* I worked out," Serena whined. "Thank you, Andrew, for saving me." With that, Serena faded out again.

"Serena, snap out of it!"

She could barely hear Andrew's words as she slipped into dream mode. "Andrew, baby," Serena whispered, deeply content in her day-dream.

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"Serena, I know how to make you feel better." Andrew stroked her hair while talking to her in his deep, husky voice. "If you just feel the power of my love for you, your energy will flow right back into your body."

Serena smiled at the handsome face in front of her. "Oh, Andrew, that's so *romantic*."

Her dream fading away, Serena felt hot chicken broth on her lips. Opening her eyes, she could see Andrew's concerned face, with his hands holding a cup of instant soup up to her mouth.

"Serena, I'm glad to see you conscious again," Andrew said, relieved. "You had me worried. Here drink the rest of this soup."

"Andrew, you're so sweet." Serena smiled, thinking of the dream she had a second before. "I feel much better now."

"So, why haven't you eaten anything today?" Andrew looked at her, curious.

"Well," Serena began, slightly embarrassed. "I just started this diet."

Andrew started cracking up at the mention of diet. Serena just stared at him, shocked.

"What is so funny about that?" Serena's

face had turned bright red.

"It's just..." Andrew tried to contain his laughs. "It's just that you're so skinny, if you start a diet you'll end up skin and bones."

"You're just saying that!"

"No, no," Andrew insisted. "If anything, you need to gain a few pounds. I prefer a girl with some meat on her over those anorexic-looking types."

Serena was definitely pleased to finally hear someone tell her she was *too* skinny. With that kind of encouragement, Serena easily recovered and headed over to the donut shop to pick up a bag of fresh jelly-filled. With a mouth full of raspberry-flavored jelly, humming as she walked down the street, Serena could not have been happier.

"Blondie, is that jelly-covered T-shirt the new junior high look nowadays?"

Serena turned to confront the sarcastic male voice. To her disgust, it was the same tall, dark-haired, Oakley-shaded guy with the sky-high ego problem.

"It's my new look, OK?" Serena pouted. "Anyway, it's none of your business what's on my

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T-shirt!"

"Well, if you keep piggin' out on donuts like that, you really might end up looking like one."

That did it! Who did this guy think he was? After all, Serena didn't even *know* him. Someone needed to stick a pin in that over-inflated ego of his.

Serena reached into her bag of donuts and grabbed one. Hurling it with all her might at the guy, she shouted. "Here's one for you, jerk!"

The guy lifted his Oakleys up a bit with his right hand, and with his left hand he easily grabbed the donut in mid-air. Chomping on the fresh jelly-filled, he looked over at Serena, grinning.

"Blueberry—my favorite kind. This is four hundred calories that won't go straight to your thighs," the guy commented, adding insult to injury. With that, he disappeared around the corner.

What a real jerk, Serena thought, completely frustrated. Luna looked up at Serena, snickering.

"With just one donut, you can gain two pounds." Luna started to tease Serena. "With two

donuts, you can gain eight pounds. After three donuts, you can look just like a donut!”

“Ha, ha, ha.” Serena rolled her eyes. “Luna, to show you how much you know, Andrew actually likes chubby girls. So there.”

“No, Serena,” Luna countered. “He said he likes a girl with *some* meat on her. That’s quite different from *chubby*.”

My god, Serena thought. Luna was right! Maybe she shouldn’t have eaten so many donuts. How many did she eat?

“By the way, Serena, we have a serious situation going on,” Luna said.

“Tell me about it, Luna,” Serena cried. “I ate more than six donuts! This is definitely a serious situation.”

“Look,” Luna interjected. “Miss Haruna looks like a twig, and so do all the girls working out at the Shape Salon. We’ve got to get back there and check it out!”

“Shape Salon, that’s it!” Serena was on a totally different plane. “I’ve got to get back to Shape Salon and lose some weight once and for all.”

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Without even thinking about Luna or her words, Serena dashed off towards Shape Salon. This time she was determined to *really* get in some exercise.



Chapter 4

Killer Workout

Serena ran through the glitzy entrance to Shape Salon, flashing her ID card on the way in. Without slowing down, she headed straight for the lockers and quickly changed into her work-out clothes. Almost knocking down two girls on the way out of the locker room, Serena hurried over to the exercise bikes and hopped on one.

"Hey, there!" A muscle-clad instructor came up to Serena and flashed a smile.

Serena was too busy pumping away on the bike to even notice the instructor. Her arms were locked in front of her, clutching the handlebars,

the power of love

and her head was down, watching her feet push the pedals over and over, faster than the speed of light.

"You know, you really should pace yourself a bit more," the instructor warned. "The most effective workout is a series of repetitions over a long period of time. That way, your endurance is built. If you knock yourself out all at once, you'll just over-exert yourself and run out of energy."

Serena looked over at the instructor, furiously pedaling all along. "I...can't...help...it..." Serena was working so hard she could barely spit out the words. "I've...got...to...work...off...those...donuts..." Serena actually sped up her pedaling to the point where she looked like a crazed Tour de France cyclist.

Everyone in the exercise room momentarily stopped their workouts and stared at Serena's hyper-cycling. Mouth agape, even the instructor backed away from Serena, leaving her on her own.

Serena didn't care. "This time, I've gotta get in a good workout. There's no way I'm going to let that jerk guy and Luna convince me that I'm fat. I'll prove it to them. I'll prove it to everyone!!"

Pedaling as fast as she could, Serena tried to keep herself going without feeling the pain. "I'm going downhill," Serena mumbled to herself. "This is easy. There's no pain at all. No pain. I'm going downhill." Serena kept trying to psyche herself out of feeling the pain that was working its way into her legs.

Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed Luna outside the window. Luna was looking at Serena making a disgusted face. This really annoyed Serena, who kept cycling as fast as she could. Luna was being so uncool. They used to have so much fun hanging out together, but now Luna was acting like every little thing Serena did was wrong. Don't eat this, don't eat that, don't play video games, don't sleep in, don't go shopping. Was her mom paying Luna off, or what?

Serena noticed that Luna was glancing towards another part of the club, distracted. Luna's eyes started to open wide as she jumped up, dashing away from the window at top speed.

Shaking her head, Serena went back to pumping the pedals on the bike. Little by little, she started to run out of power. First, she felt the pain

the power of love

creep in to her side. Her side? Out of all places, why did the pain start there? Pain is a weird thing. Serena did her best to ignore it, but she couldn't keep cycling. Pausing for a moment to catch her breath, Serena stared at the pedals, sitting on the bike, panting.

Just then, Luna darted into the room like a black comet. Heading right for Serena, Luna let out a long and furious meow. Serena couldn't believe her eyes as Luna dove for the exercise bike, hitting Serena like a torpedo and knocking her off the bike.

That did it. Serena had no idea what had gotten into Luna, but there was no excuse for this. Maybe Serena did eat too much. Maybe she did play too many video games. Maybe she didn't complete her homework on time. But Serena was fed up with Luna's rude attitude!

After knocking Serena off the bike, Luna looked right at her and meowed. In front of people, Serena knew Luna wouldn't let them know she could talk. After meowing one more time, Luna stuck her tongue out at Serena and dashed towards the door of the gym.

HAIR MOON

Ooooh, that cat, Serena thought. Wait until she got her hands on the black furball. She'd squeeze Luna until her face turned blue, Serena was so mad! Running outside to chase down Luna, Serena stormed out of the Shape Salon's glitzy entrance. Spotting Luna down the street on the left, Serena ran after her. Luna dashed into a park and stopped on the grass near some trees. When Serena finally caught up, she noticed that no one else was around.

"What are you thinking, knocking me over the bike?!" Serena was livid. "After exercising like that, I was in a state of semi-consciousness. That could have been the end of me!"

"Serena, you don't understand. We have a major problem." Luna spoke calmly yet firmly. "For once, you've got to stop thinking about yourself and listen to me. Miss Haruna is going to die!"

The words went right through Serena. Between not eating almost anything but donuts, exercising like the bionic woman, and being in a state of fury, Serena couldn't think straight.

"You want to know who's going to die?" Serena went on, hands on hip. "You, Luna! Once I

the power of love

get my hands on you, I'm going to kill you!"

Serena dove for Luna, who dodged out of the way at the last minute. Of course, Serena wouldn't really kill Luna, but she *was* fed up, and wanted to teach her a lesson. Before Serena could turn around, Luna jumped onto Serena from behind, knocking her down again. This time, before Serena could even move, Luna pinned her arms down and hissed.

"That's it, Serena," Luna snapped, eyes on fire. Serena started to shake with fear. "I've had it with you! You've got to transform into Sailor Moon and get back to that Shape Salon. The Enemy is running that place! I saw that blond instructor Jed from the window carrying Miss Haruna's body. He just dumped her in the other room, laughing the whole way! Before it's too late, you've *got* to turn into Sailor Moon and go save those poor girls! Don't you understand?"

Serena couldn't believe what she was hearing. How could this be true? She was in the Shape Salon, even talking to Jed and the other instructors. They were perfectly nice. More importantly, they were major hotties. How could *they* be the Enemy?

SAILOR MOON

Well, Serena knew she *had* been acting pretty lame lately. It must have been all those donuts. Or maybe that jerk she bumped into who she threw a donut at. No matter what, she had to believe Luna.

“MOON PRISM POWER MAKE-UP!!”

Serena instinctively lifted her arms in the air and she spun around. With a flash of light, Serena no longer wore her funky CK work-out clothes. Instead, she sported a shiny sailor-styled bodysuit with long white gloves, a red bow, a sparkling tiara and red boots. This was her Sailor Moon uniform. Move over, Batman!

“OK, Luna, let’s go!”

This was only the fourth time Serena had ever had to transform into Sailor Moon to battle evil. Although it was really a pain in the butt, she was starting to get used to it. After all, *someone* had to fight evil, even though it would have been nice if it didn’t have to be her.

Serena didn’t waste any time storming back into Shape Salon and looking for the blond instructor Jed.

“Serena, they’ve got Haruna downstairs!”

the power of love

Luna dashed left and headed down the hidden staircase. Serena quickly followed, and they burst open the closed door.

The blond instructor looked up to see Serena ready to fight.

"You! I knew you'd show up eventually. This time, I, Jedite, won't let you win!"

Serena saw that the good-looking instructor Jed really was the same Enemy, Jedite, whom she had encountered in her last battle. She remembered how she was fooled by his radio DJ disguise, Jay Dight. For some reason, he always looks like such a stud. How could she be attracted to a bad guy? Except, now she was totally unattracted since evil wasn't really what she looked for in a guy.

"So you remember me?" Serena remarked. "Just in case, I'll remind you again. I'm Sailor Moon, Champion of Love and Justice, and on behalf of the Moon, you're punished!"

"That's exactly what you said last time," Jedite scowled. "Can't you be more original?"

"Look who's talking, Mr. Creative," Serena snapped back. "Last time, your disguise name was JAY DIGHT instead of your normal bad-guy name

of JEDITE. This time it's JED instead of JEDITE. What are you going to choose next time, JEDD HEIGHT?"

Jedite's face started to turn flush red. "That's easy for you to say now, but it worked on you!"

He did have a point, Serena thought. "Yeah, but not for too long. See, I figured you out!"

Luna looked up at Serena and stuck her tongue out. OK, so maybe it *was* Luna who had figured it out, but Jedite didn't need to know that.

Jedite called over his three instructor assistants. "Get her!" he barked.

Each of the three assistants looked like they were cover models for *Muscle & Fitness* magazine. With biceps bigger than Luna, the three instructors surrounded Serena.

"Uh-oh." Serena gulped. The three instructors had her cornered and came in to attack. Why did Serena always get herself surrounded like this? Looking up at the three muscle-men, Serena started to snifle.

"Destroy her for good," Jedite ordered. With an evil smile on his face, Jedite disappeared

the power of love

into the darkness.

One instructor picked up a weight and hurled it towards Serena.

"Agghhh!" Serena dodged it at the last minute, and the weight came crashing into the floor, cracking the wood.

"Luna, help!"

"Sailor Moon, see those rings over their heads?" Luna pointed to the instructors. Sure enough, there were glowing rings almost hidden over the three instructors heads. "Those rings control their actions. If you break the rings with your tiara, they'll turn back to regular men."

"You mean regular beefcake, right?" Serena smiled, enjoying the thought.

One of the instructors picked up another weight and hurled it at her again. Serena dodged it, but this time the last instructor grabbed her.

"Luna, they've got me!" Serena cried.

"Fight, Sailor Moon!"

"What can I do?" Serena began to panic.

"This jerk's got me in a lock. I can't move!!"

"Sailor Moon, just fight hard! If you do, you might actually lose some weight," Luna said, sar-

castically.

Lose weight? Just the thought of actually shedding a few pounds gave her inspiration. With a kick into the instructor's groin, Serena broke free of his hold.

"That's it, now use your tiara!" Luna yelled.

"MOON TIARA ACTION!!" Serena wasted no time flinging her Frisbee-like tiara over to the instructors. Like a boomerang, the tiara nailed all three rings and flew back into Serena's hand. Not bad, Serena thought.

The instructors looked around, dazed and confused.

"Luna, do you think I lost a few pounds?" Serena's hopes were high.

Back at home, Serena soaked in her hot bath. This time she really deserved the relaxation of eucalyptus, peppermint and Siberian pine bath crystals.

"Luna, I'm so glad we were able to get Miss Haruna to the hospital in time for her to recover," Serena said.

"It's true," Luna agreed. "Another hour or

the power of love

two and she wouldn't have had enough nutrition left in her to make it. You did well, Serena."

Pleased, Serena got out of the tub and headed over to the sink. Casually stepping on the round, white, digital scale in front of the sink, Serena weighed herself.

"Agghhhh!!" Serena's face turned pale.

From the other room, Luna called out. "Serena, what happened?!"

"Luna, Luna!" Serena started to panic. "After all that exercise, I actually *gained* a pound!!"

Luna couldn't help but burst out laughing while Serena chased the little black furball around the room.



Chapter 5

Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Luna?

Serena was standing in the darkness. As far as the eye could see was a black abyss, and the air felt stale and cold.

"Where am I?" she whispered, then covered her mouth as her voice echoed loudly in the shadows. When finally the noise died down, she looked around.

What was going on? How did she get to this awful place? She took a step forward, and her shoe clicked on an invisible floor. Serena rubbed her arms and shivered as she walked quietly through the nothingness. How creepy, she thought. She felt lost—a stranger in a strange land.

the power of love

Suddenly, Luna's face popped up in front of her. Serena jumped back, wincing. Luna had told her more than once that daydreaming was going to get her hopelessly lost some day.

Yeah, well, Luna was too strict with her anyway. What was a girl without dreams? Bored and lifeless, that's what. Serena sniffed and thrust her chin into the air. Luna just didn't understand what being a truly modern and dynamic female was all about.

Just then, Serena could hear a loud growling from behind her. She whipped her head around, then choked back a scream.

A huge female wolf-creature was crouched in the darkness. She looked like a woman who had grown fur and pointed ears. Her eyes were long and pointed.

Serena began to shake. This time it's personal, she thought. Could Serena really fight her? That wolf-lady looked hungry!

The creature snarled, and charged.

"Aaaghhhh!!!"

Serena ran for her life, her shoes slapping the ground madly as the creature's roars rang in

her ears. As fast as she ran, she still heard the wolf-lady closing in behind her.

“No!” Serena screamed, pumping her legs faster. “Leave me alone! Help!!!”

Light suddenly flashed in front of her, and a white-gloved hand clutched her own.

“Jump, Serena!” a familiar voice cried.

Serena’s heart nearly stopped. Could it be...Tuxedo Mask?!

Serena held her breath and jumped as high as she could. Strong arms caught her, and she was pulled into an embrace. She leaned her cheek on Tuxedo Mask’s chest as the two of them floated into the air, well out of the reach of the wolf-lady. The creature roared in anger.

Serena breathed heavily, looking up into Tuxedo Mask’s face. “You...you can fly?” she whispered, unbelievably.

“There’s much you don’t know about me,” he replied, his voice gentle. One gloved finger gently touched her cheek.

Serena blushed. “Th...thank you for saving me,” she stuttered.

Tuxedo Mask brushed some hair from her

the power of love

flushed face. "I'll always be here for you," he whispered.

Serena stared up at his eyes, blocked by his white mask. So close, she thought. I'm so close to him; I can feel how warm he is. So close, I could just...take off that mask...

Serena swallowed, then gently, carefully, reached her fingers up towards his goggles.

Tuxedo Mask just smiled.

"Agggggghhhhh!!!"

Serena's eyes popped open.

"Agggggghhhhh!!!"

She shot up in bed, grabbing her ears. "Hey! Who's screaming?"

"Get away from me! Get away!!!"

Serena's eyes narrowed angrily. "Sammy? Arrrgh! How dare he wake me up from such a perfect dream," she muttered, realizing that Tuxedo Mask had been a dream. "Aww, it's no *fair*!"

"Get away!!" Sammy's voice shrieked from the other room. "Get away!! Get away!! Serena!!!"

"Geez, Sammy, I'm coming!" Serena mumbled angrily as she pushed aside her covers and slipped her feet in her bunny slippers. She yawned

as she opened her bedroom door and went down the hall to her little brother Sammy's room.

Luna was on the end of his bed, violently awakened by Sammy's screams. Sammy was curled up against his headboard, eyes wide with terror, a pillow hugged against his chest. His huge blue eyes flicked to Serena as soon as she stood in the doorway.

"Serena!" he screamed. "Save me! Get that *thing* off my bed!"

Serena blinked. "Luna? You're screaming because of Luna?" She rolled her eyes. "Sammy, you are such a baby. Luna's a *cat*. She won't hurt you. You ruined my beautiful dream for *that*?" she complained with another yawn.

Luna looked up at Sammy with curious red-orange eyes. Sammy shrieked.

"It keeps looking at me," he cried, throwing his pillow at Luna. Luna dove out of the way of it, and the pillow whacked Serena in the face instead.

"Sammy," Serena roared, her eyes red. "That hurt!"

A frightened Luna jumped into Serena's arms, and Sammy covered his head. "Keep it

the power of love

away, Serena!"

Serena frowned. What was wrong with him, anyway? Who'd be scared of little old Luna? Well, she thought, when Luna got in one of her I'm-mad-and-gonna-yell-at-you-for-a-good-half-hour moods, she could get pretty scary.

Then Serena remembered—Sammy hated cats.

"Here, Sammy," Serena murmured wickedly as she held up Luna. "Wanna kiss?" She waved Luna up near Sammy's face.

Sammy cringed and squeezed his eyes shut.

"No! Serena, stop it!"

"Serves you right." Serena hissed, pushing Luna closer to him. "You have to learn that you can't just throw things at animals."

Just then, their mother's voice drifted in from downstairs.

"Serena, Sammy! Pancakes!"

Serena suddenly froze, her eyes wide.

"Food!" she squealed. "Better yet, pancakes!"

Ditching her taunting of panic-stricken Sammy, Serena dashed from the room, leaving only

a cloud of dust behind her.

At the breakfast table, Serena happily crammed pancakes in her mouth as Luna quietly ate cat food by her feet. Sammy, across the table, crossed his arms angrily.

"Mom," he whined as his mother placed a dish of pancakes before him. "Tell Serena to get rid of that ugly, little cat!"

"I wouldn't tawk abou being ugy," Serena snapped back through a mouthful of pancake. "You have no wight to—"

"Don't talk with your mouth full, dear."

Serena swallowed. "Leave poor Luna alone, Sammy," she said with a glare. "She's my pet, so don't you touch her!"

"Dad," Sammy said, pleading to his father sitting beside him. "Can't you make Serena get rid of it?"

Serena's father shrugged, turning the page of his newspaper. "It's up to you kids, really," he said as he picked up his coffee mug. "Reach an agreement between you, though. Whether the cat

the power of love

stays or goes, I don't want to hear any more arguments."

Serena pushed back her chair and stood up. "Well," she said as she bent and picked up Luna. "I have to go to school. My lovely and *harmless* cat will escort me." With one final glare at Sammy that practically said *you're gonna lose this war*, Serena picked up her lunch and walked out the door.

The sun was bright outside, and Serena stretched her arms above her head as she stepped onto the sidewalk. Brushing her long ponytails over her shoulders, she sighed.

"Luna," Serena said as soon as she and the black cat had started walking. "Why on Earth did you try to sleep at the foot of Sammy's bed last night? Do you have a death wish or something?"

Luna shrugged—at least, made as much of a shrug as a walking cat can. "I've been very tired lately, searching for the Moon Princess all day while you're at school. Despite the many times I've asked for your help," Luna said, throwing a glare towards Serena, "you seem to not be interested in helping my search. So I'm doing it all myself."

"Well, excuse me for dealing with nerve-

wracking school by day and ghouls and ghosts by night. Forgive me for not finding time for your princess-hunt in my wide-open schedule.” Serena let out a breath angrily. It wasn’t like she asked for this added responsibility.

School was bad enough, but trying to find some princess, hidden off who-knows-where? Yeah, right. Fighting monsters as Champion of Justice was bad enough. Although, Serena would gladly trade school in for helping Luna find the princess. Her parents would have a little trouble with that one, though.

“Besides,” Serena added. “If you’re so tired, why don’t you just sleep at the foot of my bed?”

“You kick, Serena. I’d call *that* a death wish.”

Serena scowled. “With Sammy looking to give you the boot, I’d kiss up a bit more to your only ally. Considering I stood up for you today, you aren’t acting very grateful.”

Luna’s face fell. “I guess... I just want Sammy to like me,” she said quietly. “What should I do?”

Serena flipped her backpack over her shoul-

the power of love

der to carry it more comfortably. "Well, considering he's gotta agree for you to stay at our house, I'd suggest becoming his friend." She waved a hand. "Though I don't know what would get him to like you. He's really scared to death of cats."

Luna sighed, her eyes wandering over to a cat on the other side of the street. It was running to a little girl. The cat jumped on the girl and licked her face. The girl, squealing with pleasure, hugged the cat and giggled.

"Maybe," Luna whispered. "Maybe, something like that would work."

"Man," Serena mumbled, completely off-subject. "I could go for a croissant ham and egg sandwich right now. Those pancakes didn't fill me up."

Luna rolled her eyes. "*Pancakes* didn't fill you up? Serena, how did you get to be such a pig?"

"Pig?" Serena slapped a hand to her mouth. "Does that mean I look fat? Oh, tell me I don't look fat!" She quickly turned around, scanning her figure in a store window, with panicked eyes.

Luna moaned. "Not again. We just finished the diet chapter."

Jedite stepped from the shadows, bowing on one knee. Darkness, thick and hot, swirled through the air in the stone kingdom. "You called, my Queen?"

"Yes," Queen Beryl answered, her voice low. Her long finger nails trailed down her floating crystal ball. "Do you have your next plan ready, Jedite? I am tired of waiting."

Jedite's lips curled in a smile. "Yes, Your Majesty. My plan is ready to be put into play at your command."

"Then proceed."

Jedite looked up, and cold blue eyes flashed. His smile was wicked. "With pleasure, my Queen."



Chapter 6

Sinister Scents

"Really?" Molly blinked. "Your brother's so scared of your cat he won't look at her?"

Serena dug into her lunchbag and pulled out a sandwich. Flipping open the top piece of bread, she grinned. "Mmm, tuna."

"Serena, are you paying attention?"

Serena looked up. "Huh? Oh, of course I am." She bit into her sandwich. "So, what were you saying?"

Molly rolled her eyes and leaned back against the tree in the center of the school courtyard. The sun filtered through the leaves and speckled the grass with yellow light.

"I was just saying it's hard to believe Sammy is so scared of your cat. Why does he hate cats so much?"

Serena crammed a few Pringles in her mouth. "I fink it's becawse—"

"Don't talk with your mouth full, Serena."

Serena wiped her mouth with the back of her hand and finished chewing. Everyone was always so concerned with talking and eating at the same time. All she really wanted to do was eat.

"Sammy was bitten on the nose by a cat when he was a baby," Serena explained as she picked up her juice. "So now he's scared of all cats."

"Hi ladies!" Melvin shouted as he suddenly appeared by Molly's side. "Mind if I join in?"

"Eeeek!" Serena screamed and threw her juice, splattering it all over Melvin. She grabbed her chest and glared at him.

"Melvin, you big dork! Don't scare me by popping up like that!"

Melvin looked down at his juice-stained shirt. "Oh, man!" he squeaked. "Now my mom will use that special Tide With Bleach stuff, and

the power of love

that always makes me itch."

"Melvin, gross. Don't you have anybody else to bother?" Molly asked.

Melvin frowned and tried to wipe the juice off him with his handkerchief.

Only a real dork would carry a handkerchief around, Serena thought. Besides, every time Melvin popped up, there was some type of trouble. Not to mention the fact that no cute guys would come over if Melvin was there with them.

"I heard you say your little brother was bitten by a cat as a child, and now he's scared of them," Melvin commented. "Something like that happened to me, too."

"A cat bit you?" Molly shrugged and stretched her arms out. "Can't say I blame it."

Melvin shook his head. "Not cats. I'm just allergic to them. But I have a real fear of alligators."

Serena and Molly exchanged glances.

"We *all* have a fear of alligators, Melvin." Serena wasn't impressed.

"So what happened, an alligator chomped on your face when you were a kid and that's why

you're so ugly?" Molly twisted the knife.

Melvin frowned. "Actually, it was an alligator skin purse, and it didn't bite me—it just sort of bonked me on the head. But it had the same effect."

The girls counted to three and dumped their lunches right on top of Melvin's head. "Melvin, you're such a dweeb!"

Later that day, Serena and Luna stood outside of Crossroads Elementary School waiting for Sammy. Serena wasn't daydreaming as she usually did when she was standing around and the sun was out. Instead, she was holding her stomach and moaning.

"I'm dying of hunger." Serena's stomach rumbled. "Luna, you don't happen to have any food on you, do you?"

Luna sighed. "What do I look like, Meals on Paws?"

Serena shot her a look. "Very funny."

"Serena, your mother packed you a huge lunch today. How could you possibly still be hungry?"

the power of love

"I didn't get to eat that huge lunch FYI," Serena complained. "I dumped it all on Melvin because he was being a dork."

Luna did not show Serena any sympathy. "Then it's your own fault, so don't come whining to me."

"You can at least feel sorry for your starving Champion of Justice, you cruel feline." Serena's face turned red. "Considering I had to give up a normal life once you came to me, you owe me big for not bailing out on you. I could just as easily refuse to fight."

"Serena?" The voice of a boy came from behind her.

Serena froze. She whipped her head up, only to see Sammy looking at her strangely. His hands gripped the straps of his blue backpack.

"Talking to yourself again?" he asked with a shake of his head. "Geez, Serena. You're such a loser."

"Quiet, brat!" Serena snapped. "Mom said you were getting out late today, so I have to walk you home."

"What?" Sammy made a face. "I'm going

shopping with Mika today. Not that I'd wanna walk home with you if I was going home anyway. Man, what was Mom thinking when she sent you? I'm surprised you didn't get lost coming here."

Serena's mouth dropped. She had come all that way for nothing?! All that walking just to be rejected and insulted by her own brother. It would have been much easier just to have headed straight for the Crown Arcade. At least the Sailor V video game wouldn't reject her. And maybe she would have even had a chance to talk to Andrew!

Sammy hadn't yet noticed Luna was there. Before Serena could get back to yelling at her little brother, Luna suddenly jumped in his arms and began to lick his face and purr, just like she had seen another cat do that day.

"Yaagggghhh!!!!" Sammy screamed as he frantically tried to pull Luna off. "Serena, get this nasty thing off me!"

Luna sniffed and jumped back down to the pavement. Sammy breathed heavily, covering his head with his arms. "No!" he shrieked. "Get it away! Get it away!"

Serena couldn't stop laughing. Her annoy-

the power of love

ing little brother, screaming bloody murder because of Luna? It served him right. Serena suddenly wondered if keeping Luna around her would keep him in line. Now that was an idea!

Luna ran off, as Serena watched her go. "Aw, Sammy," Serena said as soon as she could control her laughter. "You hurt Luna's feelings."

Sammy had taken his backpack off and was shielding himself with it. He glared over the top zipper. "You...you keep that thing away from me," he shouted. "I want that creature out of the house, Serena. Get rid of it!"

Serena put her hands on her hips and narrowed her eyes. "When pigs fly," she taunted.

"Fine, I'll be looking for *you* up in the sky," Sammy muttered angrily as he put on his backpack. He ran a shaky hand through his hair. "I'm going with Mika," he said flatly. "Tell Mom I'll be back by dinner."

As he walked away, Serena scowled. Little brat, she thought. Not only does he insult my cat and me, but he leaves me stranded thirty minutes from home.

Serena froze.

HALF MOON

Home. Food.

A half a second later, Serena had disappeared, leaving only a huge cloud of dust behind her.

A small girl stood outside the arcade. Her hair was red-brown, and fell past her shoulders, framing a small, button-nosed face. As soon as she saw Sammy in the distance, she jumped up and waved.

"Hi Sammy," she called cheerfully.

Sammy brightened, and ran the rest of the way.

"Mika!" He panted when he reached her. "Sorry I'm late—my stupid sister held me up."

Mika laughed. "Oh, it's ok." She took his hands; her eyes bright.

"There's the best new place that just opened," she said excitedly. "It's a pet shop with the cutest new pets there—you've gotta see!"

Sammy blinked. "A pet shop?"

"Yeah," Mika said, giggling and pulling him. "C'mon, let's go check it out!"

After a few minutes, Sammy began to sniff

the power of love

the air.

“Something... smells nice,” he commented.
“What is that?”

Mika giggled, pointing to a large store. The words PERFUME PETS were printed over the door in shiny pink letters.

“This is the place.” She tugged on his backpack. “C’mon, let’s go in.”

Sammy opened the door, and a wave of perfume-scented air flew at him. He blinked, then breathed deeply, smiling.

“Wow,” he murmured. “It smells like... strawberries.”

Mika led him in, and over to a long row of cages.

“See, Sammy,” she said, pointing to something small and white in a cage. “This is the kind of pet this place has. They’re called Shaneeras.”

Sammy looked closely through the bars. The creature inside looked like a tiny, fluffy rabbit with small ears and big blue eyes. It shuffled slightly as he sniffed again.

“That’s the smell,” Sammy said, excitedly.
“It’s coming from the Shaneera.”

HALLOWEEN

“The Shaneeras give off perfume scents,” Mika explained. “And each one has a different scent.”

Sammy went from cage to cage, smelling each different Shaneera.

“This one is peppermint, and this one smells like violets.” Sammy grinned as he put his face near another cage. “And what do you smell like, little guy?” he asked with a smile.

The Shaneera looked at him, and its big blue eyes caught his own. Sammy suddenly froze. The Shaneera’s eyes narrowed and began to glow. Sammy’s face fell as he gazed hypnotically at the Shaneera.

“Sammy...” Mika said in a zombie-like tone as she came up behind him. She was holding a Shaneera, staring into its eyes. Her pupils had gone fuzzy, and a big, dreamy smile was on her face. “I’m...getting...this...one...” she said fuzzily.

Sammy slowly opened the cage, then picked up the Shaneera and stared deep into its blue eyes. Sammy’s pupils had also gone cloudy, and the same goofy grin was plastered on his lips. “This one,” he chanted, his voice as hazy as Mika’s.

the power of love

"It...smells...like...spring..."

The clerk walked over to the two of them. She was a tall woman, with red hair and bright green eyes. She grinned and put her hands on Sammy's shoulders.

"So, you kids want those Shaneeras?" she asked, her voice sweet.

Sammy and Mika nodded, not taking their eyes off the creatures.

"You can take them home, then." The woman waved a hand. "Pay for them whenever you can—there's no rush!"

Sammy and Mika nodded again, walking towards the door with their Shaneeras held in front of their faces. "Yes..." they chanted, voices oddly robotic. "We'll...take...them...home..."

The woman smiled wickedly as soon as Sammy and Mika were gone. "Excellent," she purred.

She turned around to the Shaneeras and smiled. White fangs glinted in her mouth. "Good work, my pets," she whispered. "Jedite's plan is working perfectly."



Chapter 7

Furby Imposters

Back at home, Serena sat on her bed with Luna. The talking black furball was very upset.

"I don't get it," Luna said with a sad sigh. "I tried to get him to like me. Normal people like it when cats lick them."

Serena shrugged. "Yeah, but Sammy's my little brother, so he doesn't qualify as 'normal.'"

Luna covered her face with her paws. "I'm a failure," she moaned. "Now I'll never get to stay here!"

"You could stay in the alley behind our house," Serena suggested. Wait a minute, Serena thought. What was wrong with this picture?

the power of love

Here's bossy, commanding, pushy Luna, giving up without a fight?

"Don't throw in the towel yet," Serena insisted. "I don't get you at all. You always tell me to fight until the end. You should take your own advice!"

Luna looked up at her, eyes hopeful. "You think I could really get him to like me?" she whispered.

Serena nodded with confidence. "Sure! Convince him with your cuteness, your charm, your prowess," she explained, waving her arms out. "Convince him with your beauty. Intrigue him with your savvy. Turn on your kitty charm and melt him so he wouldn't dare try to get you out of the house."

Serena put down her arms and shrugged. "Or, if all else fails, do what I always do." She slapped her fist into her palm and grinned wickedly. "Convince him with a knuckle sandwich."

Just then, Sammy walked in. He was still holding his Shaneera, eyes glued to the small, odd-looking creature.

"Serena," he said, his voice sickeningly sug-

ary. "I..."

Before he could finish, Luna jumped from the bed and ran to him, meowing madly. She rubbed against his leg, batting her eyes at him and giving the sweetest little kitty smile she could give.

Serena winced. Geez, Luna. Talk about pouring it on. This was more like drenching it on.

Sammy momentarily moved his eyes from the Shaneera and glared darkly at Luna. He pulled back his leg and kicked at her.

"Myaaw," Luna cried, jumping out of the way just in time. She hopped back on Serena's bed, and Serena shrieked in anger.

"What on Earth do you think you're doing?!" She grabbed Sammy by the arm, her eyes blazing. "You never hit an animal! How dare you try to kick Luna. What has gotten—"

"Get rid of that thing," Sammy spat, breaking from Serena's hold. His eyes, normally an ocean blue, looked a murky, fuzzy brown.

"We don't need that worthless cat," he cried, holding up his Shaneera. "This will be our new pet. It's much better than that dumb feline."

Serena grabbed the Shaneera out of

the power of love

Sammy's hold and looked it over. She made a face.

"This?" Serena shoved it back into his awaiting hands. "It looks like a Furby, only uglier."

Sammy's eyes flashed with anger. "Don't you say that!" he screamed, holding his Shaneera close. "This Shaneera is the most wonderful pet anyone could ever have. No one could ever get bored with it."

Serena snorted. "That's what they said about Furbies."

"Serena, Sammy, snack time!" Mrs. Tsukino called out from downstairs.

Serena's eyes widened, and she started to drool. "Oooh! It's Wednesday, which means lemon pie day." She grabbed Luna and flicked narrowed eyes at Sammy.

"We'll talk about this later," she said sternly, then shot down the stairs like a lightning bolt. Nothing could get in the way of Serena and her lemon pie.

The next morning, Serena ran downstairs, late as usual.

"Aaaaggghhh! Where's my lunch?!" Serena

shoved a piece of toast in her mouth and ran around frantically. "Mom! Dad! Where's my lunch?!"

Serena's mother was washing the dishes. "By the door as always, dear," she called cheerfully. "Oh, before you go, could you run upstairs and make sure Sammy's awake? He's going to be late if he doesn't come down soon."

Serena stopped dead in her tracks. Sammy? Late? Sammy was *never* late.

"I'll check on him, Mom," Serena called as she dashed up the stairs. Luna had just awakened and was walking through the hall with a yawn.

"Serena," she asked as Serena ran to Sammy's door. "Are you ready to go?"

"Hang on a sec, Luna." Serena knocked on Sammy's door. "Sammy, are you awake?"

No answer. Luna sat down and curled her tail around her body. "He's not up yet?"

Serena shook her head, eyes wide with surprise. "This is weird," she muttered. "Sammy likes going to school. How could he sleep in this late?" A better question, Serena thought, is how could he actually like going to school?

the power of love

Serena turned the doorknob and pushed the door open. "Sammy?" she called quietly as she poked her head into his room.

All of the lights were off. The shades on the windows had been pulled down and blocked the sunlight, turning the room frighteningly dark. Sammy was sitting on top of his bed, staring into the eyes of the Shaneera.

Serena gasped. "S...Sammy?" she spluttered. "What are you doing? You're gonna be late for school."

Sammy suddenly realized Serena was watching him. He grabbed the Shaneera and pushed back against his headboard. "Get out of here!" he shouted. "I'm not going to school. I'm...I'm sick!"

Serena sucked in a breath. Sammy looked skeleton-thin, and his cheekbones stood out sharply in his face. His wide eyes, which had looked brown the day before, now looked black. He almost looked malnourished.

"Sick?" Serena bit her lip. "Sammy, you better go see the..."

"Get out!" Sammy cut Serena off in mid-

sentence, throwing a pillow at her. "Just get out and leave me alone!"

Serena swallowed hard and closed the door. Luna looked up at her with wide eyes. "Why is Sammy yelling at you?" the cat asked.

Serena bit on one of her fingernails. "I don't know," Serena mumbled, her voice concerned. "But I think something's wrong with Sammy."

By running faster than the speed of light (well, that's what it felt like to Serena), Serena managed to get to school before the second bell rang. She fell into her seat, exhausted.

"Hey, Serena." Molly hopped up to sit on Serena's desk. She patted Serena's head, lying on the desktop. "Good job. You made it without being late for once."

Serena was panting so hard she could hardly talk. "I think...I'm...going...to die."

Molly rolled her eyes. "You can't run yourself to death at age fourteen, Serena."

"Molly..." Serena weakly took Molly's hand. "Tell...my family...I love them."

Just then, Miss Haruna walked into the

the power of love

room. Molly went back to her desk.

"Good morning, class," Miss Haruna called as she put down her bag. "How is everyone today?"

No answer. Ms. Haruna looked around the classroom, surprised. "Class? Why are you so quiet?"

Serena, surprised, looked around at her classmates. She gasped.

Nearly everyone had a Shaneera. Kim Matthews had hers on her desk and stared into its eyes. Lisa Brownridge did the same with her own Shaneera. Even Rica Kelton, even Tim House—it seemed that everyone except Serena and Molly was staring at a Shaneera.

Well, except for Melvin. He was in the back staring at a nerdy computer book, just like he did every day.

"Molly..." Serena leaned over towards her best friend. "What's with all the Shaneeras?"

Molly shrugged. "They're a big hit now," she whispered back. "I don't get it personally. I think they're ugly."

Serena looked around. "It's like everyone's

been brainwashed with them," she whispered. "Don't you think that's weird?"

Molly yawned. "Not really. Last year, it was Tamagotchis, then it was Furbies. Now it's Shaneeras."

Serena clasped her hands together. She wasn't buying it. Tamagotchis and Furbies were just toys that entertained people until they got annoyed. These Shaneeras were in a totally different league. Everyone who had a Shaneers didn't seem either entertained or annoyed—just hypnotized. Something was suspicious about this Shaneera thing.

Ms. Haruna crossed her arms. "All right, I want everyone to put those weird pets away," she barked. "I've heard about them from the administration at Crossroads Elementary. They're too distracting to have in class."

Nobody moved. Miss Haruna stomped over to Kim's desk and hovered over the girl. "Kim, didn't you hear me say put it away?"

Kim didn't look up from staring at the Shaneera. Miss Haruna's face grew red with anger. She reached for the Shaneera. Kim suddenly

the power of love

jumped up and grabbed the creature away from Miss Haruna's hold. "Don't touch it!" Kim screamed, backing away. "Get your hands *off* my Shaneera."

Serena's jaw dropped. Kim was always such the model student. She would never yell at a teacher like that.

"Wh...wh..." Miss Haruna's face reddened beyond tomato crimson. "Young lady, you better turn that attitude around immediately."

Kim ignored Miss Haruna and walked out the door with her pet. All the other students picked up their own Shaneeras and followed her out the classroom door.

"Wait," Miss Haruna cried, running after them. "Where do you think you're going? You can't just leave class!"

As soon as Miss Haruna and all the students disappeared, Serena looked over at Molly with wide eyes.

"Did you see that?" Serena drew a breath. "Kim screamed at Miss Haruna!"

Melvin finally put down his computer book and frowned. "Those Shaneera things are making

HALL OF MIRRORS

everyone real weird," he agreed. "Tim wouldn't even talk to me this morning."

Serena looked over at Melvin. "Big surprise. No one ever talks to you." Looking back over towards Molly, she mumbled, "I have a bad feeling about this. Where are those things sold?"

"A new store named PERFUME PETS," Molly answered. "It's down the street from the arcade. You're not going to get one, are you?"

"I'm just planning on doing a little window shopping," Serena said, reassuringly.

Luna was waiting for Serena when school got out. The cat looked worried. "Serena," she said quickly. "Your brother hasn't left his room all day. Your parents are concerned about him."

Serena picked up Luna and put her on her shoulder. "We're going to the pet store that sells those Shaneeras," Serena said as she began to walk. "We've gotta check those things out."

"Good thinking, Serena," Luna commented. "This all may be part of the Enemy's plot."

"Enemy or not," Serena said quietly, her face sad, "I've got to find out what's wrong with

the power of love

Sammy. He's a brat and a dork and a pain and all, but he's still my brother and I love him. It's not like him to act like this."

"Yeah," Luna answered gently. "I know what you mean."

When Serena reached the arcade, she stopped.

"Ok," she murmured. "Molly said PERFUME PETS was a little further down the street from here."

"Don't tell me you're getting one of those Furby things, too, blondie." The mocking male voice was annoyingly familiar.

Serena whipped around to see the same dark-haired, fashion-conscious dude she'd been bumping into lately. Today he wore a light yellow polo shirt with one hand in the pocket of his khakis.

Too bad this guy had as much attitude as he did style, Serena thought. She crossed her arms and snickered.

"Well, looks like someone fell into the Gap," Serena said, narrowing her eyes. "Though in your case, too bad it wasn't a ravine."

HALLOWEEN

The pretty-boy gave a sarcastic smile and waved a hand through the air. "I should bump into you more often," he mused. "You amuse me."

"Get lost, jerk," Serena hissed.

"A bit cranky, are we?" As the young man walked past, he leaned near Serena's ear and whispered, "I wouldn't get a Shaneera if I were you. It might mistake you for its sister."

As he disappeared down the sidewalk, Serena's clenched her fists. What a major creep! Every time Serena saw that guy, he offended her. For some reason, though, Serena's heart was beating fast and her palms were sweaty.

"Serena?" Luna cocked her head. "Why are you blushing?"

Serena immediately turned away, biting her lip. "I...I'm not blushing," she spluttered, straightening her skirt. "C'mon, Luna! We've gotta, uh, get moving."

Serena quickly began walking down the sidewalk. Luna sighed, then followed.

PERFUME PETS was empty of customers when Serena walked inside. The cages lined along

the power of love

the back walls were oddly silent.

That's weird, she thought. Pet stores were usually really noisy. She shivered. Something about this store was strange.

"Can I help you?" the female clerk asked as she walked up to Serena. Luna, at Serena's feet, looked up at the woman with narrowed eyes.

"Uh, yeah," Serena said. "I'd like to see a Shaneera."

"Why, of course!" The woman led Serena to the cages. "That little cat near your ankles looks a little on the moody side," the woman drawled. "A Shaneera would make a much better pet."

Luna hissed, but Serena nudged her with her foot to stay silent. The woman opened a cage and pulled a Shaneera out.

"This one seems perfect for you," she beamed as she placed the Shaneera in Serena's arms. "If you'll notice, it smells like bubble gum."

Serena's eyes widened. "Really?" she squealed, forgetting her mission at the mention of food. "I love bubble gum!"

Someone else entered the store, and the clerk went to talk to him. Luna immediately

jumped on Serena's shoulder.

"Serena, be careful," Luna warned. "Remember, it was Sammy staring at the Shaneera's eyes that—"

"Bubble...gum..." Serena's eyes got hazy, and she smiled dreamily. "Did I say these things were stupid? I love bubble gum..."

"No!" Luna's voice was terrified. "Serena, don't look into its eyes!"

But it was too late. Serena was already gazing straight into the Shaneera's big, blue eyes like a smiling zombie.



Chapter 8

Clerk-zilla

"Serena!" Luna ran down the sidewalk after Serena. "Serena, look at me!"

Serena wouldn't take her eyes from the small Shaneera in her hands. She giggled and petted it. "My beautiful little bubble gum baby," she cooed.

Luna yanked Serena's shoes with her teeth. "Serena, stop looking at that thing!"

Serena angrily pulled away from Luna's teeth and growled. "Get away from me, stupid cat," Serena spat. "I don't need you—my Shaneera is all I need now."

Luna winced. "It's like Sammy all over

again," she said, sighing.

Just then, a little girl on a tricycle came riding down the sidewalk. She fell off near the curb and started to cry.

Serena just walked right past the little girl, preening over her Shaneera.

"Oh, Serena," Luna mumbled as she ran to girl and started licking her cuts. When the little girl finally started sniffing and rubbing her tears away, Luna ran back to Serena and jumped on her head.

"This thing is evil!" Luna shouted angrily as she batted the Shaneera out of Serena's hands. The creature jumped to the ground to avoid falling, and angrily glared at Luna. Luna bared her teeth, and the Shaneera's eyes widened with fright. When Luna hissed, the owl-like creature dashed away in terror.

"Serena?" Luna quickly licked Serena's face. "Serena, are you ok?"

Serena blinked. "Huh?" She touched her face. "Where am I? What happened?"

"The Shaneera hypnotized you," Luna said as Serena gently put her cat back on the ground. "You looked into its eyes and couldn't look away."

the power of love

“Really?” Serena’s eyes widened. “It must be the Enemy’s trick. Luna, we’ve gotta get rid of these Shaneeras before they take over everyone!”

“Quickly,” Luna cried as she began to run down the sidewalk. “We’ve got to get to your brother!”

Serena nodded and ran after her. She swallowed. “Hang on, Sammy,” Serena whispered. “Please, hang on...”

When Serena threw open Sammy’s door, the room was still as pitch dark as it had been that morning, and Sammy was still staring at his Shaneera.

“Sammy!” Serena ran in and grabbed the pet from his hands. “Snap out of it!”

Sammy snarled, jumping up. His eyes were deep black vortexes, with yellow swirling within them. “What are you *doing*?” he screamed, grabbing the Shaneera back. “This Shaneera’s mine!”

“Sammy, listen to me!” Serena yelled, grabbing his shoulders. “That thing’s evil. If you don’t get rid of it, you—”

“Get away from me!” Sammy shrieked,

HALLOWEEN

pushing Serena away. "You don't know anything. I'll *never* give up my Shaneera." Clutching his pet close, he ran out of the room and down the stairs.

"He won't listen to me," Serena cried as she ran after him with Luna at her side. This time the Enemy had gone too far, trying to destroy her own brother. Serena was ready for vengeance.

"He's probably going to PERFUME PETS," Luna said quickly as they reached the sidewalk. "Serena, transform!"

"Gotcha." Serena looked around to make sure no one was watching, then reached up towards the heavens.

"MOON PRISM POWER MAKE-UP!!"

Serena closed her eyes as light washed over her, and, after the usual fancy 4th of July celebration style morph sequence, she ran off down the street again as Sailor Moon.

Upon reaching PERFUME PETS, Serena was horrified to see the place packed with children and teenagers, all holding Shaneeras. Their eyes were black and yellow vortexes, focused on the store clerk, who stood upon a countertop with her arms spread. Serena scanned the crowd and found

the power of love

Sammy, Mika, as well as Serena's own classmates.

"Listen up!" the clerk commanded, a crazy smile on her face. "You pitiful humans—you are now my slaves. Spread the Shaneeras to all your friends. The Shaneeras are draining all your energy, but Jedite needs more energy. More! Give Shaneeras to all the moronic humans you know, and darkness will finally rule." The crazed clerk laughed maniacally.

"Yes..." chanted the crowd, their eyes wide but their faces blank like zombies. "We will obey..."

Obey? Oh, boy, Serena thought. Not another group of regular people-turned-zombies. Didn't the Enemy have any other creative tactics?

"Enough of your Shaneerantics," Serena yelled, jumping on top of another counter so she could point directly at the clerk. After all, eye contact was crucial to make a truly threatening superhero speech.

"How dare you brainwash innocent people with Furby wanna-bes! You've corrupted the young people of Crossroads long enough. Prepare to be thwarted!"

"Thwarted," Luna whispered from Serena's feet with an approving nod. "Nice vocab word."

"I looked up a few choice words in the dictionary after the last battle. That was the only one I could remember," Serena whispered in Luna's ear, proud of herself. Looking back at the whacked-out store clerk, Serena clenched her fist. "I am Sailor Moon, Champion of Justice and Defender against Evil, and on behalf of the Moon, you're punished!"

The clerk narrowed her eyes at Serena. "Sailor Moon, huh?" she hissed. "Well then, on behalf of evil, prepare to get eaten!" She roared and a great shadow melted over her, warping her form. When the darkness faded, she had turned into a green lizard with a woman's body.

Serena couldn't help but giggling.

"What's so funny?!" boomed the fire-breathing green lizard-woman.

Serena tried to contain her giggles. "Hee...nothing...hee. It's just that...you look like such a dorky version of Godzilla." Serena kept cracking up.

This only angered the lizard-lady more.

the power of love

“Get her, you young fools!” Clerk-zilla snarled, pointing at Serena. “Take her down, and stop her from laughing!”

All the young zombies turned to Serena with dark eyes. With a cry, they started to grab at her legs.

“Hey,” Serena screamed. “Let go of me!” She jumped and dove over the crowd, rolling along the floor to break her fall. Pushing open the door and running as fast as she could, Serena dashed outside with the mob in hot pursuit.

“What should I do?” Serena cried, her voice panicked. “Oh, Tuxedo Mask, where are you?”

“You can’t depend on Tuxedo Mask or anyone else, for that matter,” Luna yelled as the children approached. “You have to learn to fight on your own, Sailor Moon!”

Someone grabbed Serena’s pigtail, and she screamed and fell. Somehow escaping from all the arms grabbing for her, she yanked her tiara off her head.

“I can’t use the tiara on Sammy and all my friends!” Serena cried.

“You can use the tiara to de-brainwash

SAILOR MOON

them," Luna advised. "Throw the tiara and cry MOON TIARA STARDUST!"

Serena bit her teeth, closed her eyes, and threw the tiara with all her might.

"MOON TIARA STARDUST!!!"

Serena's tiara soared through the air above the young zombies' heads. Glowing a golden light, the discus rained sparkles of gold, which glittered down over the brainwashed mob.

The youths immediately froze. As the gold sparkles fell on their heads and shoulders, their eyes changed from black and yellow vortexes to their normal colors. Slowly, everyone's eyelids drooped, and the mob collapsed to the sidewalk.

Noticing Serena's frightened expression, Luna shook her head and smiled. "They're fine, Sailor Moon, just sleeping. You did it!"

Serena let out a breath and put a hand over her heart. She saw Sammy's sleeping form, and her eyes softened.

Oh, Sammy, she thought with relief. You're finally okay. Now I can go back to teasing you again.

A long tail suddenly wrapped around

the power of love

Serena's throat, choking her. Clerk-zilla snarled and pulled her tail tighter around Serena's neck.

"How dare you!" the lizard-lady screamed. "You think you can foil my plans and get away with it? You're history!"

Serena's face was turning blue. "Uh, Luna..." Serena eyed her black cat while gagging.

"Your tiara!" Luna cried. "Hit her at the base of the tail, Sailor Moon. That's her weak spot!"

Serena shakily reached to her forehead and pulled her tiara off. Fighting to breathe, she threw it.

"MOON...TIARA..." Serena choked trying to get the words out. "ACTION!!"

The tiara hit Clerk-zilla at the base of its tail, and Serena was immediately released. The lizard-lady screamed as gold light traveled up her green body and turned her to dust.

"Noooooooo," she shrieked, fading away. "Someone, help—" Her screams were cut off, and sparkling light engulfed her. When it finally filtered away, her body was vaporized to a pile of moon dust on the concrete floor.

SAILOR MOON

Serena caught her tiara and shakily put it back on. With a sigh she fell to the ground in relief, her arms spread on the sidewalk.

"Another easy day of fighting for justice." Serena stuck out her tongue at Luna, still catching her breath.

Luna smiled and walked over to Serena's face. She licked her fondly.

"Nice job, Sailor Moon."

Just then, the mob began to stir. Serena looked up, only to see Sammy sitting up among the other kids and holding his head.

"What happened?" he muttered vaguely. "I don't remember anything..." Looking up, he saw Sailor Moon, and his eyes widened.

Serena squeaked and dove behind a parked car. As she stumbled to her feet, she thought worriedly, I can't let him see me. He might recognize me!

"Hey!" Sammy ran up to her, eyes bright. "Sailor V! Wow, can I have your autograph? I'm a big fan!"

Serena scowled, and her shoulders slumped. Sailor V? After all that work, no respect.

the power of love

A little bit of self-promotion couldn't hurt, Serena reasoned.

"I'm not Sailor V, I'm Sailor Moon," she corrected from behind the car.

Sammy shrugged. "You're still a superhero, right? That's good enough for me. Can I have an autograph?"

Serena grinned. That was more like it. Serena wanted to tell Sammy who she really was, but Luna would get too upset. Speaking of Luna, Serena had an idea.

"If you're really a fan, listen up carefully," Serena called over the car. "Respect your fellow animals and treat them with kindness. Particularly cats!" she added, with a wink at Luna.

Sammy smiled and nodded. "Whatever you say, Sailor Moon," Sammy said, clutching the signed paper Serena had just given him. "Thanks!"

Serena picked up Luna and snuck away as Sammy went to go help Mika. "Maybe that'll do the trick, huh Luna?" Serena asked with a smile.

Luna scowled and crossed her arms. "I could've gotten him to like me on my own, you know," she grumbled.

Serena rolled her eyes. "Yeah, right, Luna. Sure you could've."

The next morning, Serena ran downstairs, late as usual.

"Aahhh! Where's my lunch?!" Serena shoved a piece of toast in her mouth, running around frantically. She ran to the breakfast table, then froze.

Sammy had Luna in his lap. He fed her some of his oatmeal from a spoon and patted her on the head. "Good kitty," he said with a smile.

"Sammy!" Serena ran to him, eyes wide. "You're actually getting along with Luna?"

Sammy shrugged, scratching Luna behind the ears. "Yeah, people should respect their fellow animals and treat them with kindness."

Sounds familiar, Serena thought.

"And Luna's pretty cool." He looked up at Serena and smirked. "Much cooler than you, Serena. I don't know why she hangs around you so much."

Serena snatched Luna from him. "If I wasn't in such a rush, you'd pay for that, brat," she

the power of love

said, snatching another piece of toast on her way out the door. "See you guys later!"

"You know, Serena," Luna said quietly as Serena dashed down the sidewalk. "Sammy knows how to pay proper attention to the feline race. You could learn a thing or two from him."

Serena jammed Luna on her shoulder and ran faster. "Well, you know who to thank for his change of heart," Serena said, grinning triumphantly. "Not bad, if I do say so myself. I guess even bratty Sammy can change."

Serena shoved the toast in her mouth and smiled. "An you know wha I awways say - wif Sawor Moo awwound, we haf nofin to feaw!"

Luna sighed and shook her head. "Don't talk with your mouth full, Serena."



Chapter 9

All That Jazz

The Crossroads Mall was bustling. Stores lining the many levels were jam-packed with people milling about, and lights glowed a rosy yellow in the high, domed ceiling. Serena, a lollipop in her mouth, skipped along next to Molly.

"Oh, Molly," Serena squealed. "There're so many people here today."

"Isn't it great?" Molly brushed the bright red bangs from her eyes and smiled. "I always love it on Saturdays because everyone shows up for the weekend sales."

"And don't forget all the cute guys," Serena pointed out, her eyes scanning the crowds. "Hmm,

the power of love

let's see...there, and there, and over there..." If only Andrew and Tuxedo Mask were here, Serena thought. Then things would be perfect.

Molly nudged Serena playfully. "C'mon, Serena. If you guy-gaze all day, we won't get any shopping done."

Serena immediately turned back to her friend, taking her arm.

"You're right," Serena agreed. "What was I thinking?"

The air-conditioning of the mall was a nice change from the hot outdoors, and Serena breathed deeply. The weather report had said the heat wave they were in was going to end with a thunderstorm that day. Serena hoped it would be a mild storm. If there was one thing she hated, it was thunder.

The two passed a music store, and Molly stopped and grabbed Serena's sleeve.

"Hey, let's stop by Babel Records. I love this place."

"Babel?" Serena pouted. "Let's come back here later. I'm famished. How about some ice cream?"

Molly turned to her. "Serena, you're *always*

hungry. Just in the first two hours, we've had three slices of pepperoni pizza, a bag of choose-your-own candy, a can of cherry-flavored popcorn, and you're still eating that lollipop."

Serena pulled the white stick from her mouth. It was picked clean.

"Not anymore," she said with a giggle. "Ice cream is a mall must, Molly. Think about the famous Shakespearean poem: Ye scream, thee scream, we the people scream for ice cream."

Molly rolled her eyes. "You're really gonna make 'ye' scream," Molly muttered. "I'll make you a deal. Babel now, scream later. Cool?"

Serena sighed.

"Fine, fine," she said at last. "But as a fee for keeping me wait, Baskin Robbins is on you." She gave a peace sign. "And today I intend to scarf *all* 31 flavors."

Molly gave her a sideways glance as they walked in the store. "Why am I not surprised?"

Serena giggled and hugged her around the neck. "That's why I love you, Molly!" Serena knew she could always count on her best friend to put up with her demands.

the power of love

Babel Music was huge. Tapes and CDs filled miles of display stands and shelves, and posters of bands plastered the walls.

"They have everything here," Molly declared. "There's so much music here. Just look at this selection."

"Here's Jewel's CD." Serena pulled down the CD and started singing. "Who will save your soul..." She glanced over at Molly. "What are you checkin' out, Molly?"

Molly flipped through the CDs she held.

"Bach's English Suites No. 2, 4, and 5, Miles Davis' *Highlights from the Plugged Nickel*, Louis Armstrong's *What a Wonderful World*, Mozart's *Le Nozza Di Figaro*...man, I want them all, but there's no way I could buy everything today."

Serena stood there completely dazed. Wasn't that all parent music Molly had in her hand?

"You listen to music like that, Molly?" she asked.

Molly nodded. "I love it."

Serena took a few of the CDs Molly was holding.

"I just got the new Brandy CD," Serena commented as she skimmed through Molly's choices. "But I've never heard of Duke Smellington."

"That's Duke Ellington," Molly corrected. "And that's because he's not hip-hop or alternative. He's jazz."

"Jazz?" Serena's eyes widened as she stared at the CDs. Molly had always been pretty sophisticated for her age. Even when Serena and Molly went camping together in third grade, Molly brought F. Scott Fitzgerald for reading material. All Serena had were three issues of YM. Even Molly's fashion tended to be more serious. While Serena would gleefully shop for the latest Hard Candy colors, Molly would stick with Dior and Chanel.

"No way, it's out!" Molly cried as she pulled down another CD. "This is the new Amade Yus."

"Who's he?" Serena asked as Molly gazed at the CD with starry eyes.

"He's my favorite jazz artist," Molly explained. "His music is perfect for a romantic, moonlit evening stroll. I think I have a major crush on Amade."

the power of love

Serena glanced over at the CD and made a face. The CD jacket showed an abstract illustration with silver trim around the sides.

“Molly, the dude who makes this music is probably gray-bearded and almost 100 years old.” Serena handed over the CD to her best friend. “How can you have a crush on someone so ancient?”

Molly simply smiled.

Serena shook her head. Geez, she thought. How could Molly even think of dating a guy so antique? With young studs like the Backstreet Boys around, what was Molly thinking? But, Serena remembered that Molly’s dad was more than ten years older than her mom. Serena began to wonder if liking older guys was a genetic thing or something.

Queen Beryl sat upon her throne, thick shadows enveloping her snake-like body. Music was playing, billowing through the hot, musty air of her evil kingdom. She focused her cold orange eyes at the small plant on a table before her. “I do hope you’re not wasting my time, Jeditte,” she

warned, her voice a lizard's hiss.

Jedite smiled. "Please watch, my queen," he said softly as he moved his fingers and the music grew louder.

The plant began to quiver. As the music went on, the plant slowly shriveled until it became a sad, drooping clump of dead stem and leaves. Queen Beryl raised an eyebrow.

"What is this?"

"This is my new plan, Queen Beryl," Jedite answered, his eyes glowing in the darkness. "This music you have heard contains special wavelengths that steal energy from the listener. The energy from this plant was absorbed by the music." He smiled. "The same thing will happen to humans who hear it."

Queen Beryl's face lit up. "Excellent work, Jedite," she commended. "Those foolish humans love music. Set your plan into motion immediately."

Jedite bowed his head. "Of course, my Queen." Jedite straightened and snapped his fingers. "Slave, come to me," he commanded.

The thick air behind him began to tremble.

the power of love

A beautiful woman with fiery red hair slowly appeared, the shadows melting from her form. A dozen bats appeared with her, and they flew off into the darkness, their screeches echoing in the stone kingdom.

"You called, master?" she asked quietly, bending down on one knee.

Jedite held up a small cassette tape. "This music will suck the energy we need from those humans on Earth. Take it, and make sure every human hears it."

The woman smiled. "Understood."

JAM, Crossroads' biggest recording studio, was quiet that night. Rain pattered outside the tall, shining skyscraper that towered in the navy sky. In the darkness of the rainy evening, no one saw Jedite's deathly beautiful servant slip into one of the recording rooms. She pushed the door shut behind her with long, red fingernails.

"Excellent," the woman murmured. "No one's here." She pulled Jedite's tape out of her dress pocket. "If I put this tape in the recording machines, all copies made from them will contain

the evil waves that absorb energy, and soon enough the energy-sucking music will be all over the city!"

She flipped the eject button on the machine and inserted the tape. It clicked as it slid into place.

"Queen Beryl will be so pleased."

Behind her, the doorknob suddenly turned. The woman whipped around, then quickly hid behind a tall plant.

An attractive lady with short brown hair entered the room. She walked over to the recording machine, her high heels clicking on the tile floor.

"Phew," She let out a sigh. "Why does this room have to be on the top floor?"

Jedite's servant narrowed her eyes as the brown-haired woman pushed the eject button on the recorder. The evil tape popped out, and the woman pulled it out curiously.

"There's no label," she murmured. "I wonder why?" She shrugged. "Well, it must be Amade's tape. How silly of him to forget to label it."

"Akiko," someone called from outside the

the power of love

doorway. "Amade just called. He's waiting for you at Cafe Crossroads."

"Coming," Akiko called. She slipped the cassette into a case and quickly left the room.

Jedite's servant growled. "Curses! That's Queen Beryl's special tape. I must get it back."

She whipped her hand forward, and her nails shot out to ten times their length. They glinted in the darkness as her eyes flashed.

"I will get that tape back," she swore. "No matter what I have to do."



Chapter 10

Rain Fall

Akiko quickly stepped into Cafe Crossroads. It was raining hard outside, and her high-heels dragged water onto the tiled floor.

"My," she giggled as she shook out her umbrella. "It's pouring out there." She stomped her shoes to dry them, then looked around. "Amade! Where are you?"

A young man at a nearby table looked up. He saw Akiko, then quickly jumped up.

"Akiko," he called, waving. "Over here!"

the power of love

Akiko spotted him and made her way towards the table. "Amade," she cried, running up to him. "You're soaked! What happened?"

Amade held a bouquet of roses. As Akiko ran up, he blushed and quickly hid the flowers behind his back. "Uh, nothing," he blurted as Akiko pulled napkins from the table. "I just forgot my umbrella."

"Oh, Amade." She began to wipe his drenched jacket. "You're so silly! How could you forget your umbrella on a rainy day like this?"

Amade looked down. "I've had a lot on my mind," he said quietly.

Akiko smiled, pulling off his sunglasses. "And don't wear these indoors, silly," she said with a click of her tongue. "Now why would you want to cover up those pretty blue eyes of yours?"

Amade blushed.

Akiko pulled the tape out of her purse. "Here," she said, pressing it into his hands. "I picked up your demo tape. I listened to it yesterday. It's wonderful!"

Amade smiled shyly. "Um, thanks..." He scratched his head. His fingers were long and

smooth, a musician's fingers.

"Uh, Akiko," he said quietly. "Isn't it your birthday today?"

Akiko laughed. "Oh, Amade," she cried, spreading out her hands. "How'd you find out? I didn't want anyone to know."

Amade blinked. "Why wouldn't you want anyone to know?"

"Because I'm getting old!" Akiko laughed again. "Amade, I'm twenty-six today. I can't believe how fast time passes."

Amade gently touched her shoulder. "That's not old," he insisted. "I'm already twenty-four. You're only two years older than I am."

Akiko smiled, touching Amade's shoulder. "Amade, you are so great," she sighed. "You always make me feel better."

Amade looked down again. His hands trembled over the bouquet behind his back, but he still didn't pull it out.

"Now, onto business." Akiko brushed some hair behind her ear. "The demo's fabulous, Amade. Finish it up and we'll be doing great. And don't forget to come up with a title, too. What do

the power of love

you want on the next album cover?"

Amade shook his head. "I haven't decided yet."

"That's fine," Akiko assured. "Come up with a title first, then think about the cover."

Just then, a man approached their table. "Akiko," he said. "We're having a problem at the recording studio. Could you come help us out?"

Akiko turned her head to him. "No problem." She smiled at Amade. "I guess I gotta go. See you later, ok? Keep my umbrella, or you'll catch a cold the next time you go out."

She pushed her umbrella at him and ran to the door. Just before she left, she blew Amade a kiss and winked.

She didn't notice he had turned bright red.

The door shut behind Akiko with a wet slapping sound, and Amade stood alone. He slowly pulled the bouquet of roses from behind his back and looked at them sadly.

"I'm such an idiot," he murmured. He flipped over the cassette Akiko had handed him.

"She didn't see the title I wrote on the case, *A Waltz for Akiko*." He sighed, and slipped the tape

in his pocket.

Amade took Akiko's umbrella with him and stepped out into the rain, opening the umbrella over his head. He shivered as the cold seeped into his already-wet clothes. Letting out a breath, he began to walk down the sidewalk.

"Don't move!"

Amade froze. Slowly, he turned back his head.

"Who's there?" he called hesitantly.

Jedite's servant stepped from a back alleyway, her eyes dark. Her dagger-like nails glittered in the rain.

"You're not going anywhere," she hissed, clenching a fist.

"Who... who are you?" Amade was shaking.

The woman's body began to change. Her arms and legs got longer, her eyes got smaller, her ears flapped out, and great wings spread out from her back.

Amade choked. "M...M..." He dropped the umbrella, spun around, and ran for his life.

"Monster!!!"

the power of love

"This rain sucks." Serena sighed as she stepped down Molly's front steps. "I can't believe it was sunny and blue-skied this morning."

Luna, on Serena's shoulder, cocked an eyebrow.

"If it wasn't for the rain, no one would appreciate the sun."

"Sure, we would," Serena countered, shaking her head in disagreement. "Also, think about all the added benefits—permanent tans, constant beach weather, endless good moods, and no baseball rain delays."

Luna hopped onto Serena's shoulder. "I don't think any of the farmers would be pleased without rain."

"Or the umbrella makers," Serena added. "By the way, did you realize that you weigh like two hundred pounds?" Serena complained as she nudged Luna. "You're heavier than steel. Maybe I should get you some diet cat food."

"Diet cat food?" Luna muttered. "That stuff tastes terrible."

Just my luck, Serena thought. I'm stuck

with a cat who's not only bossy, but finicky too. She picked up Luna and put her on the ground.

"Then at least try to exercise instead because if you don't lose weight soon you're gonna break my back." Serena side-stepped a mud puddle on the sidewalk.

"Hey!" she shouted. "I know! A rainy day is a great day to play video games." She giggled. "It's a perfect excuse to spend some quality time with Sailor V and Andrew."

"Serena." Luna's voice began to take on its familiar pseudo-parent tone. "Don't you have a math test to study for? It's almost six o'clock, you know."

"Don't be silly, Luna." Serena thrust her chin in the air. "I can't study when it's raining. It's called Serena's Law of Addition. Math homework plus precipitation equals vacation."

Luna rolled her eyes. "Yeah, your whole brain is on vacation, Serena. You can knock on the door all you want, but no one's home."

Suddenly, a screaming Amade ran down the sidewalk and crashed into Serena. The two fell to the wet and filthy concrete with a loud splat.

the power of love

“Aaaagggghhh!” Serena screamed as she saw all the dirt spattered on her clothes. “Look at my Miu Miu blouse! It’s gone from earthy beige to muddy brown.” She jumped to her feet, fuming at the young man who still lay on the ground. “Why don’t you watch where you’re going?! Do you realize that interfering with a hip chick’s style can get you arrested? At least a fashion arrest.”

“There was a...” Amade could barely talk. “It was...a...monster!” He looked up, saw Serena glaring at him with flaring nostrils, and screamed louder.

“Agghh!” he cried, crawling away from her frantically. “Not another one! Don’t hurt me!”

Serena blinked. She quickly shook her head and blushed. “Hey, no, I’m not a monster.” Serena frowned. Great, she thought. Why do I keep scaring people I’ve never met? First the little boy with the donuts a few chapters back and now this dude.

Amade peeked his head out from beneath his arms. “Really?” he squeaked. “I’m...I’m sorry. You just looked so mad a second ago that I got scared.”

Serena sighed and brushed some mud off

her blouse. She looked up at the guy and realized he was pretty cute. Kind of fragile and timid, but good-looking. "No, it's ok. You didn't mean to bump into me like that." She rubbed some water from her cheek. "Why don't you have an umbrella?"

Amade shakily got up, covering his eyes from the rain. "I dropped it somewhere," he answered. "I'm not really sure where it is."

Serena held up her umbrella over the two of them.

"You might as well share mine, then," she offered. "I'll walk you down the street. You'll get drenched otherwise."

Amade blinked, then smiled.

"Thanks," he said. "You're kind."

"No problem."

As the two of them walked down the street, the drops of rain made tapping noises on Serena's satellite-dish-sized Tommy Hilfiger umbrella. The navy fabric seemed to cover Serena and Amade in a faint blue glow.

Serena scratched her head. "So," she asked. "What were you screaming about, anyway?"

the power of love

Serena sensed another potential excuse for skipping her homework.

Amade frowned. "I...I saw a monster," he explained, wringing his hands together. "I was leaving the cafe when a monster jumped from the shadows and tried to attack me!" He looked down. "You...probably don't believe me," he added quietly.

Serena stared at him, mouth open. A monster? An excuse to not do homework is one thing, but another face-off with some Wes Craven movie ghoul was going overboard. Why did Serena always get the gory super-hero action? What about simple crime-fighting. Things like pickpockets or shoplifters. She could deal with them. Even car thieves or bank robbers. But enough of this Twilight Zone stuff!

Amade saw her staring, and he quickly shook his head. "I...I dunno. Maybe I've been working too hard or something. F...forget it." He rubbed a hand across his eyes and looked up. They stopped in front of a small brick building.

"This is where I have to work tonight," Amade said wearily as he pulled a business card

from his jacket. He handed it to Serena. "I'm really sorry about your blouse. Thanks for sharing your umbrella." With that, he stepped into the building and closed the door behind him.

"Great," Serena mumbled as she looked down at the card. "Another monster for me to—" Her eyes shot open when she saw the name *Amade Yus* written in small blue print.

"Amade Yus?" That name sounded familiar. Suddenly, Serena remembered Babel Records. "That guy's the jazz musician Molly's into!"

Luna looked up at the building seriously. "Serena," she said quickly. "I think the Enemy is up to something again."

Serena nodded in agreement, but kept thinking about Amade Yus. When Molly showed her the CD, Serena imagined someone totally different. Amade was so much younger than she had thought. No wonder Molly had such a crush on him, even though he was too wimpy for Serena's tastes.

"Serena, pay attention!" Luna snapped. "You can't sit around daydreaming all day again. We've got to start investigating this monster story."

the power of love

Serena sighed, then nodded. "You're right, Luna." Amade had been really nice. Serena couldn't let the bad guys get him.

"But, why would the Enemy be after that guy, Luna?" Serena asked. "He didn't exactly seem threatening, if you know what I mean."

"I don't know." Luna's eyes narrowed. "But we have to find out."

Serena looked up at the brick building in front of her. The words ALL THAT JAZZ MUSIC CLUB were printed in large letters above the doorway.

"We better get inside this club," Serena said, clutching the brooch on her school uniform as the rain slapped against her umbrella.

Don't worry, Amade, she thought. I'll protect you.



Chapter 11

Gone Batty

Serena stepped under the rain roof of the music club and closed her umbrella. As she reached out to open the door, she suddenly caught sight of the sign on the wall. "Uh-oh," she mumbled, slapping a hand to her head.

"What is it?" Luna asked as she jumped from Serena's shoulder.

"Look," Serena said, pointing to the sign on the building. "*Private Club for Musicians. Members Only. 21 and Over.* Not only am I way too young and not a member, but I couldn't play an instrument to save my life." She looked over at Luna.

the power of love

"What now?"

Luna sighed. "Serena, do I always have to direct you? You're the Champion of Justice. Have you forgotten about the Luna Pen?"

Serena's eyes lit up. That's right, she thought. With the magic pen Luna gave her in the last novel, she could easily transform into whatever or whomever she wanted.

She paused.

"Luna, what do I transform into, a saxophone?"

Luna looked over at Serena and shook her head in disgust.

"Serena, please tell me you're joking. All you need to do is fake being a musician with a membership card."

Serena's face brightened. Cool, she thought. Here was her chance to morph into a glamorous pop star. She began to imagine herself as one of the TLC girls or Jewel or Mariah Carey or—

"Serena!" Luna was losing her patience. "What are you waiting for? Morph into a plain studio musician so we can get in!"

Serena made a face. "A *plain* studio musi-

HALLOWEEN

cian? A Champion of Justice can't settle for plain." She thrust her pen into the sky.

"MOON POWER...TRANSFORM INTO A SLAMMIN' CHICK STAR LIKE JENNIFER LOPEZ!!"

The pen's jewel shot out its light, and when the pink and orange smoke faded away Serena looked down at herself. "Wicked," Serena cried happily. "I am so rockin'!"

Serena's blouse and skirt had turned into black leather pants, a white tee-shirt, a red leather jacket and big silver hoop earrings. Her hair was flashy green like a techno pop star and went well beyond her shoulders.

Luna snickered. "It's you, Serena."

Serena scowled. "Just because you can't keep up with the young generation. Maybe you should try The Box or MTV instead of watching VH-1 all the time." She grabbed Luna and draped her over her shoulder. "Now play dead. No pets are allowed, so you're my accessory."

"What?!"

"No other option, Luna," Serena whispered as she opened the door. "Now play like a mink or

the power of love

we'll blow our cover."

Luna covered her head with her paws.
"How humiliating..."

The music club was brimming as Serena walked inside. The dozens of tables were filled with musicians who stared enthusiastically at the young man on stage. Hardly anyone was talking, their attention completely focused on him.

"Look," Serena whispered to Luna. "It's Amade."

Amade sat behind a huge piano, a single spotlight on him. His eyes were closed, and his fingers gently pressed the black and white keys in beautiful combinations. Music drifted through the air.

"Wow," Serena whispered as she found an empty booth and sat down. "He's really good."

A waiter came up as she rested her head on the back cushion.

"Would you like something to drink, miss?" he asked, bringing up his pad.

Serena grinned.

"Sure. I'll take, let's see, one extra-large

chocolate milkshake."

The waiter blinked, and Luna's jaw dropped. "Serena!" she hissed into her ear. "What are you doing?"

"Shut up, Luna." Serena growled as she covered Luna's face.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," the waiter said slowly. "This is a music club. We don't carry, uh, milkshakes."

"No?" Serena tapped her chin. "Well, how about some cookies, then?"

The waiter's eyes widened.

Serena frowned as Luna slapped a paw to her forehead.

"Fine," Serena said at last, waving a hand. "I don't want anything. Thanks anyway."

The waiter nodded slightly, then walked away. Serena noticed him shaking his head and muttering something as he left.

"Serena!" Luna yelled as soon as the waiter was gone. "What's wrong with you? Ordering a shake at a club? Are you trying to blow our cover?!"

"I wouldn't talk," Serena shot back. "You're

the power of love

supposed to be a fashion accessory. Yelling at me and squirming like that is a recipe for disaster."

Luna shook her head angrily. "Just shape up. You're supposed to be twenty-one, so stop acting like a kid." Luna angrily settled herself back as Serena's shoulders. "I don't even know why I bother with this girl," she muttered.

Serena sighed. How was she supposed to know they don't serve milkshakes or cookies at clubs? Her older friends were into clubbing, but Serena was too young. At any rate, Serena vowed to keep drinking milkshakes until she was silver-haired and wearing dentures.

She flicked blue eyes at Amade as Luna got more comfortable on her shoulder. After a moment, Serena asked, "Luna?"

"Yeah?"

"Look at Amade's closed eyes, his quick, gentle fingers, the slight smile curving his lips. Doesn't he look really happy up there?"

Luna looked up at Amade.

"Yeah," Luna answered. "So?"

Serena smiled. "I dunno," she murmured. "He just looks so content. I wonder if he's thinking

of somebody.” Serena started to imagine Tuxedo Mask next to her, listening to the soothing jazz music.

A few minutes later, Amade finished his piece and took a bow. The audience clapped as he stepped off the stage.

“Come on,” Luna whispered. “Now’s our chance. We’ve got to follow him, Serena.”

But Serena had fallen fast asleep with her head on the table. “Tuxedo Mask,” she mumbled. “Thanks so much for the night of jazz music and chocolate milkshakes...”

“Serena!”

Serena shot up, eyes wide. “Huh? What?” She looked at the stage, and blinked. “Oh no! Where’s Amade?”

“He left through that door,” Luna whispered, pointing to the back. “That must lead to the parking garage in the basement.”

“Let’s hit it!” Serena quickly got up and snuck to the back. As soon as she was through the door, she ran as fast as she could down the stairs. She pointed her Luna Pen into the air.

“MOON POWER...DETRANSFORM!!”

the power of love

Light flashed around her, and as she jumped down the stairs her disguise melted off and her clothes and hair were changed back to normal.

“Finally,” Serena mumbled as her golden hair flew out behind her. “Those earrings were heavy. It must be tough being a famous celeb.”

“Serena!” Luna shouted as she ran beside her. “Look out!”

“Huh?”

Serena screamed and covered her face as something dark flew at her. It screeched and flapped black leathery wings around her face.

“Eww, what is it?!” Serena cried. “That thing stinks!” She swung her arms madly, and her hand smacked into the flying thing full force. The creature fell to the floor, stunned, before flapping back into the air dizzily and flying away.

Serena tentatively peeked from between her fingers. “Is it gone?”

Luna panted, eyes wide. “Yeah. That was a nasty looking bat.”

“A bat?” Serena blinked. “What’s it doing here?”

She was cut off as someone suddenly

screamed.

Luna whipped her head around. "That came from down below!"

"Oh my God!" Serena slapped a hand to her mouth. "That was Amade!"

Serena jumped down the last few stairs with Luna right behind. As soon as they reached the parking lot, Serena gasped.

A beautiful woman stood above an unconscious Amade. She laughed wickedly, clicking her frighteningly long nails together as she clutched a small cassette tape in her other hand.

"Now, to kill this worthless human," she said with a snicker. She raised her claws.

"Don't you *dare* touch him,!" Serena screamed as she ran towards the villain. "You creepy, slimy, disgusting thing—get away from Amade!"

The woman flicked her head at Serena, then snarled. She jumped into the air, spread her leathery wings, and flew out of the parking garage and into the night sky.

Serena gasped. "She's *definitely* with the

the power of love

Enemy.” After all, Serena thought, even the smartest car-jackers don’t know how to sprout wings.

“Serena,” Luna cried as she ran to Amade. “Come over here and make sure he’s all right.”

Serena quickly bent to one knee and checked Amade’s pulse. “He’s fine,” she said after a minute. “She just knocked him out, thank God.”

Something on the ground beside her made her blink. “What’s this?” Serena reached over and picked up the empty tape case that had fallen on the ground.

“*A Waltz for Akiko?*” Serena muttered, reading the case. “Who’s Akiko?” A small picture fell out of the case, and Serena caught it. A pretty woman with short brown hair smiled at her from the glossy photo.

“He’s...got a crush?” Serena mumbled. She giggled, covering her mouth. “This must be Akiko.”

Luna took a step back, surprised. “How can you be so sure?”

Serena snorted. “Obviously, you’ve never had a crush, Luna.” Serena waved the picture at

Luna. "He carries a picture of her around. He named a song after her. Come on, Luna, this guy's diggin' her."

Luna looked at the case. "That bat-witch had a tape in her hand," she observed. "It must've been the one in this case. But why would the Enemy want this tape?"

Just then, Amade began to moan. Serena quickly lifted his head up.

"Are you ok?" she asked. "You got hit pretty hard."

Amade's eyes slowly opened. "My tape..." he groaned. "My tape...where's...my tape?" He suddenly sat up, grabbing the empty case. "That beast took my tape!"

Serena shrugged. "I guess that bat-lady's a big jazz fan."

"You don't understand!" Amade's dark blue eyes were wide as he looked at Serena. "This tape...it's too important. I have to get it back."

How cute, Serena thought. He *really* likes that Akiko girl.

"Ok," Serena answered as she helped him up. "We'll go get it back."

the power of love

Luna hopped on Serena's shoulder as Amade fumbled for his car keys. "Serena," Luna whispered. "How come you're so willing to go fight this time?"

"Because this fight is for love, Luna." Serena clenched her fist and smiled. "And I'm not letting some smelly freak-lady get in the way of a man and his heart!"

Luna rolled her eyes. "I think you've been watching too many soap operas, Serena," she mumbled with a sigh.



Chapter 12

Love Power

Serena squinted through the window and looked to the sky as Amade drove his BMW Z3 full speed. It had finally stopped raining, but it had gotten dark and hard to see.

"Can you see that beast, Serena?" he asked as he turned the car around a sharp turn.

"No, it's too...Wait, there she is!" Serena pointed up. "She's flying east."

"Right!" Amade jerked the steering wheel, and the car flew down an empty road.

"I'm getting that tape back," Amade muttered through clenched teeth. "I won't let anyone take it away from me, not even some bat-lady."

the power of love

Serena looked at him out of the corner of her eye. Amade's eyes were narrowed, and his knuckles were white over the wheel. She tried not to giggle. Man, he must really like Akiko, Serena thought.

"So, Amade." Serena grinned and leaned closer to him. "That song you played in the music club was *A Waltz for Akiko*, wasn't it?"

Amade's eyes widened, and he blushed.

Serena could remember how happy Amade had looked playing the piano. His gentle fingers, his curved lips...

"It was, wasn't it?" Serena repeated.

Amade was quiet for a moment. "Yeah," he answered at last.

Serena smiled. "It's a beautiful song. I saw the picture of her in your tape case. She's really beautiful." She raised an eyebrow. "You really like her, don't you?"

Amade turned away.

Serena laughed. "Why are you so embarrassed? Hey, it's ok—I have a crush, too." She held her chin. "Well, two, actually. Or maybe three or four. Everybody likes somebody. Having crushes is

completely normal."

"I don't like her," Amade muttered bitterly. Serena blinked.

Amade's shoulders slowly relaxed, and his voice went very quiet. "I don't *like* her," he said again, his voice barely above a whisper. "I...I *love* her."

Serena froze. Amade was staring at the road blankly, his eyes half-closed, his lips pressed together weakly on his face—not good since he was driving. But Serena knew he was sincere. This wasn't a crush. This was love.

Serena couldn't move for a moment. Finally, slowly, she shook her head.

She put a hand on his shoulder. "Then, tell her."

"I can't," Amade mumbled. "There's no way."

"Why not?" Serena's eyebrows creased. "She's never going to know how you feel unless you tell her so. Tell her, Amade!"

"You don't understand," Amade moaned as he bit his teeth together. "I've...I've been in love with her for so long."

the power of love

"Then what are you waiting for?" Serena slapped her fist into her palm. "Come on Amade, you can't—"

"Oh my God!" Amade's eyes widened as he pointed to the sky. "Serena, what building is that lady flying to?"

Serena brushed hair from her eyes, squinted, and replied, "The JAM recording studio."

"No," Amade cried, horrified. "Akiko's in there!"

"What?!"

Serena could hardly keep up with Amade as the two of them dashed up the stairs. Geez, Serena thought as she panted and Luna flew beside her. For being such a wimp, this guy certainly doesn't run like one.

Amade reached the top floor first. He threw open the door just as Serena, breathing heavily, caught up.

The red-haired bat-lady stood in the room, holding the cassette tape and laughing. All the workers in the room were unconscious, including the woman with short brown hair Serena had seen

in the photo, Akiko.

“Excellent,” the bat-lady hissed, her red eyes flashing. “Nothing can stop me now.”

“Wanna bet?” Serena yelled, planting her feet apart. She thrust her arms out by her sides. “You’ve done your evil long enough, freak-face! I will not let you proceed with this wickedness, for I am Sailor...OW!!”

Luna released her teeth from Serena’s arm and hissed into her ear, “You haven’t transformed yet, Serena. Make that speech and everyone will know your identity!”

Serena blushed and rubbed the teeth marks now in her flesh. “Um, what I just said...just forget about it.”

“What are you doing?” Amade yelled at the bat-lady. “Why did you take my tape? And what did you do to Akiko?!”

The woman narrowed her eyes. “This isn’t your tape-it’s Jedite’s!” Saliva dripped from her mouth. “Once I put it into these recording machines, all the tapes made from here will spread energy-absorbing music throughout the ranks of you measly humans, and our kingdom shall rule

the power of love

all!”

Serena laughed lightly, waving a hand. “Oh! So it’s not your tape, Amade. See, it was all a misunderstanding. Let’s go, you guys.”

Luna clenched her teeth and hissed at Serena.

“What?” Serena made a pouty pose. “No one uses tapes anymore since everything is going digital. It’s not worth a major nerve-wrecking fight.”

Luna’s glare pierced through Serena.

“OK, OK, Luna.” Serena turned back to the bat-lady. “Ahem. Like I said, you won’t get away with that evil plan!”

“Why won’t I?!” the bat-lady demanded.

Hm, Serena thought. Good point. She had the tape, the recording equipment, and she could fly like a bat.

Without hesitating, Luna jumped up towards the bat-lady and grabbed the tape with her teeth. The woman screamed as Luna landed in Serena’s arms.

“You cursed feline!” she roared. “Give that back!” The bat-lady suddenly threw up her arms,

and a black shadow melted over her. The room rocked with thunder, and the shadows became a flurry of bats. The bat-lady had completely transformed. Her eyes were pink, and her ears had turned long and leathery. Large bat wings protruded from her back.

"Hey," Serena said with a giggle. "You're really Batman's evil twin sister, aren't you?"

"Silence!" the half-bat, half-lady roared. She grabbed Akiko from off the floor and pressed sharp claws against the slender throat.

"Give me my tape," she snarled, "or this woman dies!"

"Akiko!" Amade screamed. "Leave her alone! You can take me instead."

"Uhn..." Akiko's eyelashes fluttered as she woke up. She opened her eyes wide, then gasped at the claws pressing against her neck.

"What...what's going on?!" Her eyes wildly traveled across the room, and she sucked in a breath. "Amade!" she cried. "Help!!"

Serena scowled. "A hostage? That's low, batlady. Prepare to get swatted." Serena threw the tape at the creature. "Get her, Amade!"

the power of love

As the tape flew through the air, Amade dove towards Akiko and grabbed her, rolling to safety. Luna jumped in the air and caught the tape before the demon's outstretched hand could reach it. With all her might, Luna crushed the tape with her teeth and slammed it onto the floor. The pieces scattered all over the floor.

"Nooooo!!" The bat woman fell to her knees, picking up the smashed remnants of the tape. "Jedite's tape!"

She whipped her head at Serena, snarled, and jumped out the window.

Serena cried out. "She's flying away!"

"Akiko!"

Serena blinked and turned around. Amade was holding a shocked Akiko in his arms. She was shaking as he frantically stroked her cheek.

"Akiko!" he cried. "Are you ok? Akiko!"

"A...Amade?" Akiko stared up at him with watery eyes. She grabbed his shirt, and buried her face in his chest. "Oh, Amade!" she sobbed, curling in his arms. "You...you saved me!"

Serena cocked her head. "Aww...how romantic."

HALLOWEEN

"Serena, come on!" Luna jumped onto her shoulder. "You have to transform and go after the Enemy!"

Serena frowned. "Man, just when we were gettin' to the good stuff."

Serena ran out the door and back down the stairs. Once she reached the street and made sure no one was around, she thrust her hand to the sky. "MOON PRISM POWER MAKE-UP!!!"

After the mini laser show her transformation always created, Serena was fully costumed as Sailor Moon. She grinned, taking a deep breath as moonlight washed over her sparkling uniform.

"Ooh, I feel so energized!" She looked down at Luna. "All right, Luna. Let's go get our bat-friend. Holy Moon Power!"

"Enough corny Batman jokes, Sailor Moon. Quick, to the roof of that concert hall down the street!" Luna yelled out as she ran towards the stairs.

After running three blocks, up twelve floors, and through several hallways, Serena was completely pooped. When she finally opened the door to the roof, she was panting.

the power of love

"Evil...witch," Serena wheezed. "Beware... I'm...Sailor Moon..."

The demon, desperately trying to piece Jedite's cassette back together, turned to Serena with a growl.

"Get lost, kid!" she yelled as she threw her arm in Serena's direction. A wave of sound roared through the air and smacked into Serena. The impact threw the Scout backward several yards.

"Aaaiii!!" Serena grabbed her head as she was tossed on the concrete floor of the roof.

"Sailor Moon," Luna cried, running to her. "Are you all right?"

"Uggg..." Serena rubbed her ears. "I guess Mom was right when she said playing my stereo so loud was bad for me. I didn't know sound could hurt so much."

"This isn't ordinary sound," Luna muttered as Serena stood up shakily. "She's turning sound waves into a blast attack!"

"Well, I've had just about enough of this." Serena scowled, putting a hand on her hip for her standard Sailor Moon pose.

"You came between an innocent man and

the woman he loves," Serena yelled, pointing a gloved finger at the witch. "And for that, you must pay! No one loves romance more than me. I'm Sailor Moon, Champion of Love and Justice, and on behalf of the Moon, you're punished!"

Out of the side of her mouth, she whispered. "Luna, come up with a plan quick. She's gonna attack me now that my speech's done!"

Luna sighed. "Sailor Moon, that's your job as a super hero. You've got to be a bit more creative." The cat looked around, then suddenly picked up a microphone in her teeth.

"Here," she cried as she tossed it Serena's way. "Use this!"

"Huh?" Serena stared at the microphone as the demon roared and sent another wave of painful sound.

"Yipe," Serena screeched. "What do I do, what do I wait, that's it!" She flipped the microphone on and threw it at the oncoming sound wave. "Take this, you winged rodent!"

The sound hit the microphone, and the noise suddenly blasted out of the speakers that stood behind the bat woman. She shrieked as the sound

the power of love

knocked her over.

"Now's my chance," Serena told herself as she pulled off her jeweled head piece. She gripped the shining disk in her fingers, then let it fly.

"MOON TIARA ACTION!!"

The tiara sped at the demon, whizzing through the air with a crackling noise. The bat woman shrieked as the glowing disk zapped her and sent electricity through her body. Her scream echoed through the night as she slowly turned into dust and sprinkled to the concrete.

Serena sighed. Her tiara came back to her, and she caught it and put it back on.

"Sailor Moon?" Luna walked up to her. "Are you all right?"

"Fine, Luna." She suddenly blinked. "I hope Amade and Akiko are okay!"

"Let's go check," Luna proposed as she ran back to the stairs.

Serena moaned. "The battle's over, Luna. Do we have to run again?" It just wasn't fair. All the other super heroes got to fly or at least have some fancy car or plane. Couldn't she at least be bionic?

HALLOWEEN

Serena poked her head around the doorway. Akiko was tying a bandage around Amade's leg.

"I can't believe you risked yourself to save me," Akiko muttered as she shook her head. "You could've been hurt, Amade!"

"I don't care," Amade answered quietly.

"You should care! What if you'd hurt your hand? You wouldn't be able to play the piano anymore."

"Akiko!" Amade suddenly took her hands in his, and she stopped. His eyes were glowing. "I...I couldn't play the piano," he whispered, "if anything had happened to you."

Akiko froze. "Wh...what?" she whispered.

"I...I love you, Akiko." Amade's cheeks turned red, and he smiled. "I love you."

Akiko's eyes were wide. A moment passed, and her eyes welled with tears. "A...Amade..."

Watching the whole scene, Serena started balling. "That's so *sweet*!"

Looking up, Amade and Akiko noticed Serena and started giggling, slightly embarrassed.

Two weeks later, Serena and Molly were at

the power of love

Babel Records in Crossroads Mall. Molly picked up the latest issue of Rolling Pebble magazine, and her face turned crimson.

"No way!" she cried. "Serena, look at this article—Amade Yus just got married!"

"Mmm," Serena hummed as she looked at the shelves of CDs.

"How could this happen?" Molly wailed. "Oh, Serena-why he didn't wait for me?!"

Serena sighed. "C'mon, Molly-he's too old for you. Besides, he seems really happy with his new bride." Her finger trailed down the shelf of CDs, and she smiled. "Here's his new CD."

Molly's eyebrows went up. "The brand-new one? I thought it was sold-out everywhere."

"This is the last copy." Serena pulled it down. "It's got amazing music, so everyone's buying it. But it's a little different from how he originally planned. He was going to name it after his wife, but they decided that the two of them would name it after someone they both appreciated."

"And who was that?"

Serena smiled, flipping the CD over and showing Molly the cover. On it was a picture of

SAILOR MOON

Sailor Moon, standing on a crescent of yellow light. The words MOONLIGHT LADY were printed along the side.

“See.” Serena winked. “He’s got good taste, don’t you think?”



Mercury Rising, the 3rd ***Sailor Moon*** novel, will be available in August 1999. Waitamminute..., “***Mercury Rising***”? Say, do you think that means you-know-who shows up? Hmm... Check our website at

www.mixxonline.com

for the latest info on ***Sailor Moon*** novels, ***Sailor Moon Pocket Mixx***, ***Smile Magazine***, ***TokyoPop***, ***Sushi Girl***, and the complete line of Mixx comics, graphic novels, and entertainment products.