

Naoko Takeuchi's

SAILOR MOON™

7

Based on
the hit
TV series!



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CEL MATES

SAILOR MOON™

**Serena
couldn't
believe it. The
Sailor V movie!
That animation studio
was doing the Sailor V
movie!**

**Luna raised her eyebrows. "Good
job, Amy. You finally got Serena
excited about a mission."**

the novel #7 • Cel Mates



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SAILOR MOON™

Sailor Moon the novel #7

ZEL MATES

**Written by
Lianne Sentar**

**Created by
NAOKO TAKEUCHI**



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Chapter 1

Love Letter

Crossroads Theater was dark but for the colorful glow reflected on the faces of the audience. Onscreen a handsome young man knelt before a beautiful starlet and offered her flowers.

"That's so cute!" Serena Tsukino bit her fingertips and blinked teary eyes. If there was one thing she loved more than video games and junk food, it was sappy romance movies. She couldn't get enough of them.

"Amy," she said rather loudly, poking her friend. "Amy, isn't that guy totally sweet? How come I've never met a guy like that?"

Amy Anderson looked tired. "I don't know,"

she said, taking Serena's hand. "But keep it down, Serena. Other people are trying to watch."

"Oh, Ames, I know, but I'm not that lou--" Serena cut herself off as the man in the movie took the woman in his arms. Serena focused all her attention on the screen, holding her breath and crossing her fingers.

"I love you," the young man whispered. "Anna, I've loved you ever since we met on that fateful day on the bridge."

Serena laughed happily. "They're so sweet!" she exclaimed. "This flick sure knows how to..."

"Quiet, down front!"

Serena scowled. Turning, she called back into the faceless audience, "Excuse me for enjoying the movie! This is a romance, so stop trying to bring negative feelings into the theater!"

A barrage of empty popcorn buckets and candy wrappers flew at Serena. She yelped and frantically tried to dodge them.

Amy pulled Serena back into her seat. "Serena," Amy whispered, leaning close to her friend, "just relax, OK? The movie's almost over, and people want to see how it ends."

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Serena snorted and brushed a Raisonette off her shoulder. "The people here certainly don't seem like romantics."

"Come on, Serena. Just sit still for a few minutes."

Serena sighed and leaned back in her chair. She had a personality that was rather, well, loud. She liked to share her opinions and enthusiasm. Only thing was, people didn't seem to appreciate it, and it sometimes really frustrated her. This wasn't the first time she had gotten trash thrown at her in a movie theater.

Oh, well. She couldn't please everybody. Serena opened her last bag of gummy bears and popped a few in her mouth. Onscreen the man and woman were at their wedding, exchanging vows.

"Anna, there's nothing I want more than to be your husband. I want to stand by your side until the world ends!"

Serena giggled. "Wow," she said through a mouthful of gummies. "That guy sure is a charmer."

An empty popcorn bucket fell right on Serena's head. Scowling, she pulled it off.

SAILOR MOON

"Geez," she said, tossing the bucket aside. "I get the point. I'll be quiet already."

Amy frowned and began picking the bits of popcorn from her friend's hair.

Serena grimaced. Maybe she would just be better off waiting until all those movies came out on video. She'd sure stay a lot cleaner that way.

A crumbling abandoned mansion stood alone in Crossroads Woods. The afternoon sunlight flashed off a broken stained-glass window, and the heavy door, although closed, hung broken from one good hinge.

Nephrite stood inside the main room of the mansion. The evil general of the Negaverse clenched his fists.

Sailor Moon and the Sailor Scouts, warriors of justice, had been foiling his plans to suck energy from the citizens of Crossroads. Queen Beryl was growing frustrated. Seeing as how Beryl was master of the Negaverse, it wasn't a good idea to get her frustrated. Nephrite needed a new plan of attack.

"It's time I started focusing more on those

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girls," he said, holding one palm toward the wall opposite him. "I didn't think that Sailor brat and her little pals would require so much of my attention, but I'm growing tired of them."

The man closed his eyes. Slowly, a huge holographic star chart spread along the wall before him. Tiny moving lights represented planets, and glittering dots of silver shone like real stars.

"Great stars," he called, using his ability to ask the stars for guidance, "the Sailor Scouts must have a weakness I can use against them. I need to destroy them before I can continue with my plans. Show me their weak point!"

The stars on the chart slowly began to move. They clustered in the center of the map and formed a glowing circle. The circle flickered several colors, then, after several moments, an image of a man formed within it.

Nephrite opened his eyes. He scowled. "I should have known."

The man on the chart was young and tall, with cat-like grace and a quirky grin. He wore a black tuxedo and top hat, a black cape with red lining, and a thin white mask that covered his eyes.

Long fingers in white gloves deftly held a rose with a razor-sharp tip.

Tuxedo Mask. The mysterious young man who saved Sailor Moon and the Sailor Scouts when they were in grave danger. Nobody, not even the Scouts, knew Tuxedo Mask's true identity.

"These are silly teenage girls I'm dealing with," Nephrite reminded himself. "Of course a pretty boy to the rescue excites them."

Nephrite looked to his own gloved hand. "Well," he said lowly. "This plan should be easy enough to execute. Those foolish girls are mine."

The next day was cloudy, so Serena stayed home instead of taking her usual walk to Crown Arcade. The petite blonde lounged on her bed and stared at her ceiling, her sock-covered feet idly hanging off the bed.

"Whaddya think, Luna?" she asked the small black cat curled up on her desk. "Should I go mall-trotting today, or just kick Sammy off the Playstation and play Final Fantasy 'till my brain rots?"

Luna yawned. She turned half-opened eyes

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to the girl and scowled. "If you want my honest opinion," the cat said, "I would suggest studying so you don't flunk your math quiz tomorrow and end up with a D for this quarter."

"Nah. I'm thinking Final Fantasy. I'm in a heroic mood."

"You simply don't listen to me anymore, do you?"

"Did you say something?"

The talking cat scoffed. As Serena's guardian, and one of the few who knew her secret identity, it was Luna's job to keep the fun-loving, responsibility-hating girl on track. Sometimes this could be quite difficult.

"Listen, Serena," Luna scolded. "If you get another F, your parents are going to ground you from the mall and video games. Either study now and pass so you can have fun the rest of this week, or waste your time and end up getting grounded for a month for flunking."

Serena smiled. "Who says I need to study to pass, Luna? Don't you believe I'm intelligent enough to get at least a C without studying?"

"No."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence."

Luna sighed. "After the 46 on your last quiz, do you really blame me?"

Serena shrugged. She wasn't really good at school. She accepted that long ago. Maybe she should study and do better in her classes, but being a super-hero by night was stressful enough. She figured she deserved a lot of time off.

She fingered one of her long ponytails and thought about the romance movie she had seen the day before. It had been on her mind a lot that day.

"That flick I saw was so cute," she said, stretching her toes. "It was about this guy who had a crush on some girl, but he couldn't get up the nerve to tell her, so he just watched her and left flowers and candy on her doorstep whenever he saw she was sad. When she noticed him on the street and went to thank him, he ran away." She laughed. "I dunno. It kinda reminded me of my own life, but I don't know why."

"Your own life?"

Serena sighed. "Yeah. Though I can't think of any guy who has a crush on me and does things for me to express his feelings."

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Luna raised an eyebrow. "Doesn't Melvin have a crush on you?"

Serena shuddered. OK, Melvin was a nice guy, but he was a little too in love with computers and UFO's. She had the awful feeling that he was infatuated with her the same way he was infatuated with PC games.

"Melvin isn't so subtle about his feelings," Serena said flatly. "He reminds me every day how much he's in love with me." Serena would be more flattered if Melvin understood she wasn't interested and would quit acting like the two of them had a chance.

There was a familiar clicking sound from outside, and Serena brightened. She hopped off her bed and ran for her bedroom door.

Luna looked up. "Where are you going?"

"That was the mailman. I'm gonna go get the mail." Serena always liked to be the first one to check the mail. She had a weird fantasy that she would win one of those ten-million-dollar sweepstakes some day, and if that happened, she wanted to be the first one to know. Hey, she entered about thirty of those contests a year, so she figured she

had to win at some point.

She ran outside and pulled all the mail out of the mailbox. She flipped through the letters until she found one with her name on it.

"Cool!" Serena tossed the other letters aside and practically ripped hers open. Unfolding the piece of crisp white paper, her eyes scanned for the magic words.

But it wasn't a letter from any sweepstakes. In fact, it wasn't even close. As she read the neat handwriting, she felt her eyes widen and the back of her mind go white in shock.

I've kept my feelings to myself long enough, the note read. I have to tell you how I really feel. Meet me at Crossroads Mall tomorrow night at ten.

Tuxedo Mask's signature was at the bottom.



Chapter 2

Mailbox

Mysteries

Serena sat in homeroom the next day, blankly staring her desk. She didn't know what to do. Everything was so, so unexpected. Could Tuxedo Mask really be in love with her? Did he know she was Sailor Moon?

Luna had immediately been suspicious of the letter. Serena had dismissed her until she called Amy and Raye, only to find out they had received the exact same letter. And at school that day she found out that every eighth-grade girl in town had gotten the letter as well. Tuxedo Mask had written a love letter and sent it to over 500 girls. What on Earth was going on?

"I wonder who he is," Serena heard a girl nearby say. "Some tuxedo shop mascot?"

"I dunno. You gonna go to the mall tonight like he asked?"

"Well, since everybody else said they will, I guess so. I'm kinda curious. What kind of guy would write a love letter to so many girls?"

"A desperate guy."

The girls laughed. Serena swallowed the bile rising in her throat.

"Class!" Ms. Patricia Haruna, Serena's homeroom teacher, angrily rapped a stack of papers on her desk. "Settle down! I'm trying to mark down attendance."

Lisa Brownridge sat up. "Ms. H?" she asked. "Do you know some guy who goes by the name 'Tuxedo Mask?'"

Ms. Haruna snorted. "I heard about those letters," she answered flatly. "And the principal is going to make an announcement over the intercom later this afternoon. None of you girls should go to the mall tonight."

All the girls in the class groaned; all the boys laughed.

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Ms. Haruna slapped her palms down on her desk. "Enough about this Tuxedo Mask character! The police are looking into it. Anyone with the intention of getting hundreds of 14-year-old girls in the mall after shopping hours is probably a serious danger."

Serena blinked her blurring eyes. So unexpected. So unexpected.

Serena hardly heard her best friend Molly Baker sigh. "I hope this Tuxedo Mask guy is Maxfield Stanton," the redhead said softly. "I was really hoping to see him again."

Serena's hands, in her lap, were clasped so tightly they were white. What was she going to do? What was Tuxedo Mask planning?

And, even worse, why did she feel like crying?

After school that day, Amy and Luna went to Cherry Hill Temple to visit Raye Hino. The cat was even more nervous about the love letters than she had been about the other Negaverse threats earlier that month.

"Luna?" Amy looked down at the cat as the

two of them walked up the long flight of temple stairs. "Are you going to be OK?"

Luna let out a breath and shook her head. "I don't know, Amy. I've always been a little nervous about Tuxedo Mask, but I simply don't know what to make of this. And I'm worried about Serena."

Amy brushed a strand of dark blue hair behind her ear and sighed. "I know what you mean. Serena's always had a sort of crush on Tuxedo Mask, so it's only natural he's a delicate topic for her. Not only that, but she must feel pretty awful if he sent love letters to all the eighth-grade girls in Crossroads."

"Hmm." Luna remained silent.

Amy frowned. "I know Serena thinks you only nag on her all the time, but I know you really care, Luna." She bent and picked up the cat. "Don't worry, OK? We'll do our best to figure out what's going on and fix it."

Luna sighed and nodded. Raye's grandfather, a short, cheerful man with a shiny bald head, hopped over to Amy and the cat.

"Hello, Amy!" he called, clasping his hands behind his back. "How are you today?"

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Amy smiled and bowed slightly in respect. "Hello, Grandpa. Raye told me she's sick, and I came to see her."

"Ah, that's so much like you, Amy. You're such a dear!" The old man rocked back on his heels. "Raye's in her room, feel free to go right ahead and see her. And remember, if you ever want to work here, just say the word and we'd be glad to have you!"

Amy smiled nervously at him and made her way to Raye's room. Raye's grandfather was always trying to recruit the youths of Crossroads to work at his temple. If all the people he had offered work to had accepted, there would be more teenagers at Cherry Hill Temple than at Crossroads Junior High.

Once inside, Amy took off her shoes and put Luna on the floor. She carefully slid open the paper and wood door to Raye's room.

"Raye?" Amy called softly.

A loud sneeze was her reply.

Luna scampered into the room and went to Raye's bedside. Amy, after sliding shut the door behind her, followed.

"Don't get too close," Raye warned, her normally rich voice raspy. "This cold's awful, and I'm contagious."

Amy went to her knees and smiled gently. "Don't worry about us, Raye. How are you feeling?"

Raye sneezed again. Her thick black hair lay sprawled across the whiteness of her pillow, making her look more fragile than usual. Although her cheeks were flushed and her nose was red, her brilliant dark eyes were still as bright as ever.

"Any new information?" Raye asked, rubbing her nose with a tissue. "Or is everything the same as when you called me during lunch?"

Amy looked sadly to her knees. "Unfortunately, we don't know anything new. The principal announced that no girl was to go to the mall tonight because of the potential danger. There should be police officers staking the place out, too."

"What time are they going to stake it out?"

"Probably at ten tonight, because that's the meeting time according to the letter." Luna curled her tail around her body. "Serena agreed to go half an hour early so she wouldn't run into any police."

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Amy and I will accompany her. We'll see if we can figure out this mystery."

Raye coughed. Rubbing an eye, she asked, "Where's Serena now?"

"She was really tense, so we let her go to the arcade." Amy sighed. "You know how she feels about Tuxedo Mask. We figured she needed a little time to herself to sort out her feelings and relax."

Raye said nothing. After a moment, she murmured, "That was a good idea."

Luna shrugged. "Whatever Serena's doing right now," she said quietly, "I hope she'll be ready for tonight. There's no telling what we'll be going up against."

Serena sat on one of Crown Arcade's stools, her hands gripping the back of the seat. It was already 3:30. Only six more hours before she would have to go to the mall and confront Tuxedo Mask.

What bothered her more than anything was how unlike Tuxedo Mask's style the love letters were. He had always popped in and out of the Sailor Scouts' fights mysteriously. For him to invite hundreds of girls to the mall was very blatant.

Tuxedo Mask had never struck her as a "blatant" sort of guy.

She wondered if he really was in love with Sailor Moon. If so, was he inviting every 14-year-old girl in town because he didn't know her true identity?

Serena pursed her lips. She had always carried a flame for Tuxedo Mask, but she had never seriously thought about what would happen if he liked her, too. She didn't know his true identity, and worse, she didn't know his true intentions--he could be an agent of the Negaverse sent to throw her off guard, and the mall at ten that night was going to be a disastrous trap. And lately, whenever she thought about her feelings for him, something inside of her hurt. She wished she knew what that meant.

"Earth to Serena."

Serena blinked. Andrew Foreman, the arcade's attractive teenage hand, was staring at her curiously. Serena sat up and released the stool.

"Uh, hi, Andrew." She forced a smile. "Sorry, didn't see you there."

Andrew grinned. "You OK, Serena? You

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look so out of it today." He rubbed her head. "I miss your bubbly chatter. Why don't you tell me about your day?"

Serena smiled again, this time much more sincerely. Count on Andrew to cheer her up.

"Nothing special today," she answered, leaning back against the arcade counter. "How about you?"

"Nothing. But there wasn't anything odd at school today?" Andrew raised an eyebrow. "Some girl at Crossroads Junior High told me a guy called Tuxedo Mask sent love letters to all the girls in the eighth grade yesterday. You're in eighth grade, aren't you?"

Serena tried to look calm. She managed a shrug.

"Yeah," she answered. "I got a letter. I'm sure it's just some weird hoax or something."

Andrew laughed. "If not an advertising stunt. How much you wanna bet at ten tonight some tuxedo store in the mall is gonna have its grand opening?"

"You're probably right." Serena hopped from the stool and put her backpack back on. She

wanted to get home and listen to some of her CD's. She was jittery, and she needed to go lock herself away from this whole Tuxedo Mask business for a little while.

"See ya, Andrew." Serena waved as she left through the sliding front doors of the arcade. "I'll talk to you later!"

Andrew waved cheerfully. "Bye!" he called as she turned and vanished down the sidewalk. He smiled and hooked his thumbs in the back of his belt .

"All the eighth-grade girls in town got love letters?"

Andrew turned. Darien, his arms crossed over his chest, leaned against a nearby doll-catcher game.

Andrew smiled at his best friend. "Hey. How long have you been here?"

Darien shrugged. "Long enough to get interested."

Andrew pulled a note from his pocket and handed it to Darien. "This is what some girl gave me earlier," he explained. "It's that love letter thing all those girls got yesterday. What do you make of

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it?"

Darien unfolded the letter and quickly read it. A shadow settled over his face as he read the name at the bottom.

"Tuxedo Mask."

"I know. Corny, huh?" Andrew laughed. "I wonder what kind of an idiot came up with a name like that. It sounds like some crazy super-hero in a romance novel."

Darien stared at the letter for a long moment. Then, slowly, he crumpled it in his hand.



Chapter 3

Trouble Brewing

Molly walked down the sidewalks of Crossroads that evening, her eyes focused on her shoes. The love letter from "Tuxedo Mask" was tucked firmly in her purse.

"I wonder if I should go tonight," she said to herself. "I know it's supposed to be dangerous, but what if this Tuxedo Mask guy isn't really a threat? He could just be somebody trying to find a girl whose name he doesn't know. It could be Maxfield Stanton..."

Molly blushed. She had told only Serena about her crush on the rich young businessman. Too bad neither Molly nor Serena knew that mild-

cel mates

manned Maxfield Stanton was really the Negaverse general Nephrite in disguise.

"I hope it is Maxfield," she whispered, touching her mouth. "I haven't seen him since that first time on the tennis courts. He's a professional, so he must wear tuxedos sometimes."

Molly reread the letter. "Tuxedo Mask is such an odd name. But maybe he just wanted to keep his identity secret."

Molly's thoughts were cut off as she accidentally crashed into someone. She cried out and stumbled, but two strong hands caught her shoulders and helped her regain her footing.

"Are you all right?"

Molly caught her breath at the voice. She looked up, then turned bright red.

"M-Mr. Stanton!" she yelped. Quickly stepping back, she waved her hands frantically. "Oh, gosh, I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to bump into you like that!"

Nephrite, in the handsome guise of Maxfield Stanton, smiled slightly. "It's all right," he assured her. "But you know my name, Miss?"

Molly swallowed. "We met on the tennis

courts last week. My friend Katie was practicing for the tournament, and you helped her with her serve."

Something flickered through Nephrite's eyes. "Oh," he said quietly. "You were there?"

Molly nodded and hesitantly held out her hand. "I'm Molly Baker, sir. I've been wanting to meet you."

Nephrite took her hand and shook it. "Please," he said, a cold smile curling his lips. "Call me Maxfield."

Molly blushed. Averting her gaze, she cleared her throat.

"Um, may I ask you a question?" she asked, reaching into her purse. She pulled out the love letter and unfolded it, then bit her lip. "Um, Maxfield, are you...Tuxedo Mask?"

Nephrite's eyes widened. "Tuxedo Mask?"

Molly took a step back, bowing apologetically. "I-I'm sorry! I just got this letter, and I thought that maybe...I didn't mean to--"

"You're a sharp girl."

Molly's head jerked up. "What?"

Nephrite moved closer, bending down to

cel mates

face her. "I wasn't going to tell you," he whispered, "but now I'm sure you're who I'm looking for. I remember you from the tennis courts, but I didn't know your name. So I sent the letters to all the girls in the hopes that you would come." He reached out and took her hand. "I wanted to see you again, Molly."

Molly gasped. "R-really?" she stammered.

"Really." He leaned closer. "But now's not the time for our reunion. I wanted us to be alone, and I thought the mall after hours would be perfect."

Molly smiled brightly. "Yes!" she exclaimed. "Yes, the mall tonight would be great!"

"Since I've found you, we have to spend our time together before the other girls come." He touched her cheek. "Come at nine instead of ten, dear. I'll be waiting for you."

Molly eagerly grasped his hand. "Great!" she cried happily. "I can't wait!" She blinked back tears. "This is such a dream come true, Maxfield!"

Nephrite let one hand run over her bright red hair. "It is for me, too, sweet Molly." His eyes glimmered with evil. "It is for me, too."

Night came quickly. Serena paced in her room, her hands clasped behind her back as she nervously glanced every few seconds at her bedside clock.

Eight forty-five. Luna and Amy were still at Raye's, although they had assured Serena they would go with her to the mall at 9:30. Serena licked her lips and kept pacing.

Half an hour early wasn't enough. She was worried about the whole situation, and she wanted to get there well before any other girl did. Serena wanted to face Tuxedo Mask and demand some answers, once and for all.

Eight forty-six. Serena stopped, stared at her clock, and made a decision. She took a breath. "That's it. Luna and Amy can join me there. I'm going now."

On the rooftops of Crossroads, a tall figure jumped from building to building. The rising moon bathed the figure in thick silver light, illuminating his sleek black tuxedo and shining white mask.

Tuxedo Mask growled. He jumped off

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another rooftop and landed softly on the next building. He continued running without even stopping to take a breath.

"Whoever this love-letter-sending maniac is, he's in big trouble," he growled. "Not only is that creep endangering all those girls, but he's doing it in my name. Now the whole city thinks I'm a desperate girl-chaser."

He finally stopped and focused on the nearby Crossroads Mall. He pulled his mask from his face.

Darien narrowed his eyes. "You'd better be ready for me, scumbag. I'm not in a forgiving mood."

Molly arrived at Crossroads Mall at 9:00 sharp, a smile on her face. She wore her finest clothes and had tied a new aqua-colored bow in her hair. When she tried the front double-door, she didn't think it would open, but it did.

"Well." The redhead smiled. "The place is closed, but Maxfield must have unlocked it for me." She sighed happily as she pushed the door open. "He must be waiting."

All of the mall's indoor lights were dimmed, so it was quite dark. Molly squinted as she slowly walked forward. Her shoes' clicking on the tiled floor was the only sound in the silence.

"Hello?" Molly's voice echoed in the vast, empty building. "Maxfield? Maxfield, are you here?"

No answer. Molly frowned. "Maxfield? Are you here? It's me, Molly!"

A spotlight suddenly flashed on, illuminating a tall figure in black who stood at the top of an escalator. The figure turned his head to Molly, raising a hand.

"Who is it?" he called.

Molly stopped. The man wore a black tuxedo, black top hat, and white gloves. A thin white mask covered his eyes, and his wavy brown hair reached well beyond his shoulders. A black cape with a red lining fell over his back majestically.

"Maxfield?" Molly's smile was slightly nervous. "That's you, isn't it? Why are you dressed like that? Is that your Tuxedo Mask thing?"

Nephrite didn't answer. He took the escalator down and walked toward her, his gloved fists

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clenched loosely by his sides.

"There's no need to hide anymore," he told her. "See? I've shown you my identity. Now you can transform in front of me without fear."

Molly blinked in surprise. "What? Transform?"

"Right." He placed one gloved hand on her shoulder. "Go ahead. I know who you are."

Molly blushed. "Um, I don't get what you're saying. But that's OK." She smiled and took his hand in both of hers. "We're finally alone. Now we can spend some time together."

Nephrite clenched his teeth. Angrily, he yanked his hand away.

"Don't play games with me," he said harshly. "Transform, brat!"

Molly sucked in a breath. "But Maxfield," she answered shakily. "I don't know--"

"Transform!" He took both her arms roughly and shook her. "I know you're Sailor Moon!"

Molly's mouth opened, but no sound came out. After her trembling lips fumbled for a moment, she stuttered, "Sailor...but I'm not--"

"Stop playing games!" Nephrite shoved one

of his gloved palms against her forehead, and Molly began to glow white.

Nephrite growled. "This energy of yours is stronger than anything I've felt before," he said fiercely. "If you're not Sailor Moon, then what could this energy aimed at me be?"

Tears filled Molly's eyes. "It's my love," she whispered, before passing out in Nephrite's arms.

When Serena reached the mall, she was a bit alarmed to find the door unlocked. Serena, unlike Molly, had learned through her super-hero gig that something unusual could mean something very wrong.

Serena had never thought about how Tuxedo Mask would get into the mall after shopping hours. Only now did she realize he would have had to break in to get the door unlocked for her, and that bothered her. It wasn't his style to do something illegal.

Swallowing, she pushed open the door and stepped into the darkened building. Immediately she noticed the single spotlight on the top of the escalator, and the two people nearby it.

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Serena's heart stopped.

"No way," she whispered, covering her mouth. A man with long brown hair who was obviously not Tuxedo Mask was draining a thick white light out of Molly.



Chapter 4

Unexpected Privacy

It took all of Serena's strength to simply breathe properly. Who was that man with the long hair, and why was he dressed like Tuxedo Mask? And worse, what was he doing to Molly?!

Serena ducked behind a wall and tried to calm her heart. It didn't take her long to realize that the love letters had been sent by a fake, and that poor Molly had been the first to fall into the trap. Serena knew that the white light being drained from her best friend was energy.

And an energy draining meant the Negaverse.

"This has gone too far," Serena said through

cel mates

gritted teeth. "Impersonate Tuxedo Mask, toy with my emotions, and then attack my best friend! This fake is so getting beaten!"

Serena threw her hand into the air. "This ends now!" she exclaimed. "MOON PRISM POWER MAKE-UP!"

Rainbow lights burst out in all directions. Serena closed her eyes as light wrapped around her body and altered her clothes. Her jeans and blouse became a white leotard and blue pleated skirt, and a blue sailor collar tied with a red bow slid onto her shoulders. High red boots reached her knees, silken white gloves reached her elbows, and a red choker, golden tiara, shining hair pieces, and moon earrings all glittered into place. The light surged through her and sent energy throughout her entire body.

The light faded. Serena opened her eyes and spread her feet. She was no longer eighth-grader Serena Tsukino--she was Sailor Moon, Champion of Justice, and she was mad. She ran out from behind the wall and headed straight for Nephrite and Molly.

"Stop it!" she shouted, reaching for her tiara. "Put her down before I blast you to the moon!"

Nephrite raised his gaze. Scowling, he gripped the glowing sphere of white light that had formed from Molly's energy. The redhead immediately stopped glowing, but Serena saw that Molly's face had turned deathly pale.

"You want this brat?" Nephrite asked, holding up the limp Molly. "You can have her. Catch, girlie."

Nephrite threw Molly forward. Serena cried out and threw her arms around her friend, and the two girls went crashing to the floor. Nephrite laughed maliciously.

Serena carefully untangled herself from Molly and checked her best friend's vital signs. Molly seemed OK, but her face was drained of color. Serena snarled and threw her head up.

"What did you do to her?!" she shouted. "I don't know who you think you are, but if you mess with this girl I'll personally send you into orbit!"

Nephrite snorted. "The girl's fine," he answered coldly. "She's very lucky, in fact. I thought she was Sailor Moon. Had I been correct, I

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would have done a lot more than simply stolen her stupid love energy."

"Love energy?" A terrible cold feeling started down Serena's spine. This guy's voice sounded familiar. "What do you mean by love energy? Who are you?"

Nephrite snapped his fingers. His Tuxedo Mask disguise vanished, leaving him in his gray general's uniform.

"Maxfield Stanton?!"

Nephrite raised a gloved hand, and a huge star chart formed in the air behind him. "My name is Nephrite. And now that you know who I am," he said as the stars on the map glowed, "you'll have to be destroyed."

Serena stood in front of Molly. Maxfield Stanton really worked for the Negaverse?! This was even worse than she had feared. Molly's love energy...

Serena hadn't forgotten Molly's first reaction to Maxfield Stanton. The intelligent redhead didn't usually fall for guys on sight, but Serena had seen true love glitter in Molly's eyes. Molly had

really fallen for a Negaverse champion.

This was bad.

"Great stars," Nephrite called, raising a hand. "I ask for a warrior to take care of this brat. Send me Leo the lion!"

The glowing stars on the holographic map arranged themselves into the constellation of Leo the lion, then turned blue. The constellation itself fleshed out and lowered to the ground, and a huge, blue, very hungry-looking lion snarled at Serena and dug his claws into the tile floor.

"No way." Serena frantically thrust her hands out. "Look, kitty, I'm no good to eat. I'm just skin and bones, really! And my earrings are really hard to digest!"

The lion roared and charged at her. Serena quickly took a step back and gripped the red jewel in the center of her tiara. The headband turned into a golden discus that floated just above her hand.

She gripped the tiara and pulled her arm back. "MOON TIARA..." She swung her arm and let the discus fly. "ACTION!"

The tiara went shooting like a golden bullet through the air. Leo raised one massive blue paw

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and swatted the headband aside without even breaking his charge. The tiara clattered to the ground and stopped glowing.

Serena's jaw dropped. Her tiara was her strongest weapon! If it didn't work, then she was done for!

She suddenly realized the lion was still coming straight for her. "Somebody help!" she screamed, dashing in the opposite direction. Leo roared and chased after her.

A flash of red streaked through the air and sliced through Leo's shoulder. The animal roared and fell to the floor, frantically trying to lick the wound.

Serena froze. Cautiously, she turned her head. A red rose, its razor-sharp tip buried in the tiles, stood quivering in front of the lion.

Like a phantom, Tuxedo Mask faded in from behind her. He gripped her arm snarled at Nephrite.

"You're the one behind the fake love letters?" Tuxedo Mask glared daggers. "You'd better explain yourself, punk! Who are you and what are you doing?"

Nephrite only snorted. Leo finished nursing his cut and raised his huge head. He growled as saliva dripped from his jaws and splashed on the tiles.

Serena grabbed Tuxedo Mask's cape. "Wait!" she said, trying to ignore the thundering heart in her chest. "My tiara didn't work on the lion! We can't fight now--I have no way to beat him!"

Tuxedo Mask looked to her quickly. "Your tiara didn't work?"

Leo roared again. Serena and Tuxedo Mask looked up as the animal charged.

"We'll deal with you later," he called to Nephrite, before taking Serena's hand and starting off in a dead run for a nearby elevator.

Nephrite grinned. "Keep running, fools. You're right where I want you."

Serena desperately tried to keep up with Tuxedo Mask's huge strides, but the roaring animal was gaining ground. Tuxedo Mask half threw her into the open elevator, then dashed in behind her and turned to face the lion.

Leo snarled and ran faster. A rose appeared in Tuxedo Mask's fingers, and he threw it tip-first

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at the animal. Leo roared again and tried to bat the rose embedded in his cheek.

Tuxedo Mask smashed his hand into the CLOSE DOOR button. The metal doors slid shut, and the elevator shuddered. Slowly, the compartment made its way up the long elevator shaft.

Tuxedo Mask leaned against the wall to catch his breath. Serena herself panted heavily, but her eyes never left him.

She should have known the letters had been sent by a fake. Tuxedo Mask wouldn't send love notes to hundreds of girls. Remembering her feelings earlier, she felt guilty for doubting him. He had just saved her again. Tuxedo Mask would never toy with her feelings like those letters had.

Just then, she noticed him staring at her. Serena felt herself get light-headed under his gaze. Even with his mask on, he was extremely attractive.

"You OK?" he asked, reaching out and taking her shoulder. "I don't know who that guy is or why he sent all those letters in my name, but if you got one and it upset you, I'm sorry."

Serena felt her cheeks turn red. "It's OK," she

said. "Thanks for, um, saving my life."

Tuxedo Mask opened his mouth to reply, when suddenly the elevator came to a violent stop. Serena stumbled to keep on her feet.

"Well," came Nephrite's voice over the elevator's intercom. "You two are even stupider than I thought."

The elevator shuddered and started going up at an alarming speed. "You fell into my trap perfectly. I have control over this elevator, and once it reaches the top floor, it will plummet to the bottom of the shaft. Enjoy your last moments while you can." The intercom clicked off.

"What?" Serena whipped to Tuxedo Mask. "We'll be crushed if it falls! What are we gonna do?"

Tuxedo Mask quickly looked around. His eyes fell on the escape door at the top of the compartment.

"There." He stepped on a hand railing and punched the escape door open. After climbing through it, he let his hand down to Serena. Serena took his offered help and clambered up with him.

The elevator was shooting up the shaft at a sickening rate, so Serena had to clutch Tuxedo

cel mates

Mask to stay on her feet. He pointed to a ledge near the top of the shaft.

"See that?" he asked. "That's just above the top floor. As soon as we reach it, we have to jump and grab it. The elevator will fall under us."

Serena gulped. The ledge was small, and she had no idea how long she could hang by it. If she lost her handhold, there was no way she would survive the fall to the bottom of the shaft.

Perhaps Tuxedo Mask sensed her worry, because he let one gloved hand brush her cheek. "Relax," he said softly. "I won't let you fall."

Serena's heart hammered.

They came to the ledge quickly. As soon as the elevator compartment hit the last floor, Serena and Tuxedo Mask jumped from the top of it and grabbed onto the ledge. The elevator fell from under their feet and shot down the shaft. Serena heard the explosive crash far below them as the compartment met its doom.

Serena choked back a cry and gripped the ledge as hard as she could. She could hardly do pull-ups in gym class, and here she was, hanging by her arms over a two hundred foot fall. She was

scared to death. Her arms started shaking, and she could feel her grip loosen.

"I'm slipping," she said, her voice high. "Tuxedo Mask, I can't hold on!"

Tuxedo Mask grunted and tried to find a foothold. Sure enough, a metal box of some kind was implanted in the wall near his feet. He stepped onto it and let it hold his weight.

He reached out to Sailor Moon. "Climb on my back," he ordered. "I can hold us both."

Serena held her breath. She reached out to take his hand, but her other hand lost its hold and she fell. She screamed as Tuxedo Mask grabbed her wrist and just barely kept her from plummeting to the bottom of the shaft. With a grunt, he heaved her up, and she grabbed his shoulders and clambered onto his back. She hugged his neck for dear life and heaved fitfully.

"Just relax," Tuxedo Mask said again, grasping at the ledge. "I should be able to climb up to this ledge. I think there's a door to the roof in front of it."

Serena was too busy gasping to hear much of what he said. She had nearly fallen! Tuxedo

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Mask's back was like a wall of comfort. She had never been so glad to feel his body under her arms.

"Thank you," she mumbled, hugging his neck tightly. "Thank you, thank you, thank you. You saved my l-life again."

"Sailor Moon."

Serena looked up. Tuxedo Mask's face was turning blue. He grimaced and tried to free his neck from her grip.

"Need a-air," he said with a choke.

Serena immediately loosened her hold. "Sorry," she said, swallowing hard.

Tuxedo Mask braced his body and tried to pull the two of them up to the ledge. He managed to get an inch or two off his foothold, but had to go back down to it again. The added weight of Serena on his back was too much for his arms to pull.

"OK. This may take a while." He flexed his shoulders and tried to pull himself and Serena up again. They raised a few inches, then had to go back down. Panting, he fixed his grip.

"Why do you always save me?"

She could feel his surprise. "What?" he asked.

Serena tried to calm her thumping heart. "Save me. Why do you always do it?"

The muscles at the base of Tuxedo Mask's neck tightened. He tried to pull himself and Serena up again, but still couldn't get high enough. He fell back onto the foothold. A moment of silence passed between them.

"I don't know," Tuxedo Mask answered at last. He rested the brim of his top hat against the wall of the elevator shaft. "I can always feel when you're in danger, so I transform and follow my inner sense to find you. That knack's never failed--you're always where I feel you." His shoulders slumped slightly under her body. "I save you on instinct. I always assumed that I'd understand someday."

Serena could feel that odd pain start up inside of her again. She let her fingers curl in his velvet cape.

"Sometimes when I think about you, it hurts," she said softly. "I don't know why. It almost feels like some pain I felt a long time ago, or that it's a hurt reminding me of something awful long ago. It scares me sometimes, so I don't always

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know how to react to you. I'm not even sure how I feel about you. I've kinda had a crush on you, but..."

Serena clenched her teeth and closed her eyes. Why was she saying all this? He probably thought she'd gone nuts on him. That was all he needed, a crazy girl on his hands when they were hanging from a tiny ledge above hundreds of feet of empty space. And why on Earth had she told him she had a crush on him? Maybe she really was going crazy.

"I know."

Serena stopped. She opened her eyes slowly, her sight locked on the back of his head in surprise. "Know what?" she asked.

Tuxedo Mask let out a breath. "About that feeling. Like we knew each other long ago or something. I keep thinking that I met you a long time ago, way before we started fighting evil."

Tears filled Serena's vision. The pain inside her got stronger with every word he said. Her heart was beating faster...

Tuxedo Mask shook his head. "Whatever it is, I just hope we find out the truth someday. You

know, who we are and why we're doing all this."

Serena nodded and tried to blink away her tears. "Right," she answered shakily. "Find out who we a-are."

"And I want you to know something." Tuxedo Mask hesitated a moment, staring blankly at the wall. "I...care about you. If you ever wondered about that." His fingers tightened on the ledge. "I don't know how that fake love letter made you feel, but I do care about you. So don't forget. Even if I didn't have that instinct to protect you, I'd want to do it anyway."

Serena's heart stopped in her chest. Something, a combination of warmth and that strange, terrible pain, flowed through her blood as thickly as syrup. Her eyes got blurry. Without realizing it, she rested her cheek against Tuxedo Mask's midnight hair and bit her lip. A single tear rolled down her face and disappeared into the silky blackness.

"Th-thank you," she whispered.

He couldn't reply as the box suddenly broke from the wall and fell from his feet. He and Serena fell one heart-stopping inch before his out-

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stretched arms yanked them to a halt. Serena screamed and clutched him as they dangled over empty space.

Tuxedo Mask gasped and scraped his feet against the shaft wall. There was nowhere to stand, and even Serena could feel his grip slipping. They had no chance. It was only a matter of moments before they fell.

Her heart racing, Serena squeezed shut her eyes and pushed her lips near his ear. "I'm sorry," she whispered, tears breaking from her eyelashes. "For what it's worth, I'm sorry. And, I want to tell you I..."

She couldn't say it. She couldn't. She didn't even know what she was trying to say, but that warmth, that pain, was pushing words into her mouth. What was it? What did she want to say?

"T-Tuxedo Mask, I..."

The door above the ledge was suddenly forced open. Two sets of gloved hands grabbed Tuxedo Mask's arms just as his grip was about to give way. He looked up in surprise.

Serena's eyes popped open. Through her tear-blurred vision, she barely made out two

female figures. Her heart, rather than her mouth, screamed their names.

Mercury! Mars!

Sailor Mercury grunted and pulled at Tuxedo Mask. "Hang on, you two!" she cried. "We've got you!"

Sailor Mars blinked her swollen eyes and sniffed. "Count on something like this to happen," she grumbled as she pulled. "You're certainly not making my cold any better, Sailor Moon."

It was all too much. Serena's emotions could no longer handle everything, and she broke down. She buried her face in Tuxedo Mask's shoulder, gripped his cape, and cried harder than she had in a long, long time.



Chapter 5

Interlude

The afternoon sun shone brightly over Crossroads, sending thick beams of warmth onto the peaceful town. In the Tsukino residence, Serena lay on her bed, her eyes half-closed, and hardly noticed the rays shining through her window and bathing her in bright light.

When she and Tuxedo Mask had been saved from the elevator shaft, she had been emotionally unstable. Tuxedo Mask had told the Scouts to take care of her, brushed a hand over her head, and run off. Amy had brought the unconscious Molly on her back, and Raye and Luna had tried to help Serena walk. Serena had passed out as soon as they

reached street level so that Raye had to carry her home.

Serena rolled over and folded her hands under her cheek. Being Sailor Moon was getting harder and harder. She wondered how long her feelings could take this kind of pressure.

"Serena?"

Serena looked to her door. "Who is it?" "It's Raye." The priestess' voice was muffled through the wood. "Your mother said you've been in here since you came home from school. Can I come in?"

Serena sighed and rubbed her eyes. "Sure," she answered, sitting up in her bed. "Sorry I didn't go with Amy and Luna to see you today."

The door opened, and Raye stepped in. She was fully over her cold, and her dark eyes glittered like two purple-black gems in the afternoon light. The priestess closed the door behind her. "I just wanted to check on you," she said, setting her gaze on Serena. "Are you sick?"

Serena shook her head. "I just don't feel like going out" She rested against her headboard and sighed. "My heart's been on overload a lot lately."

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For a long moment, Raye said nothing. Her long hands pressed against the door behind her as she stared at the sitting Champion of Justice. Finally, Raye walked to Serena's bed, sat down, and motioned to her lap.

"Lie down and put your head here," she ordered. "I want to tell you something."

Serena frowned. She lay as Raye instructed, then was surprised to feel the priestess press long fingers against her temples. Raye began massaging gently, the pads of her fingertips making tiny circles on Serena's skin.

"You've been very good lately." Raye's monotone voice, in tune with her massaging, was oddly soothing. "When I first became a sailor scout, you weren't very responsible. Now you're starting to focus on your missions like a pure-bred warrior."

Serena felt the tightness in her body melt, and she couldn't help but close her eyes. Raye's soft, rhythmic massage made her sleepy.

"A warrior?" Serena asked. "You really think so?"

"I wouldn't say it if I didn't mean it." Raye brushed golden bangs off Serena's forehead. "The

fact that the missions are starting to try you emotionally means you care. And that means you're starting to live up to your duty as a fighter."

Duty as a fighter. It sounded so mature. Serena could feel a slight smile curving her lips. "Thanks, Raye. That means a lot coming from you."

Raye shrugged. "The Negaverse hasn't shown any signs of a new attack," she said. "We're going to schedule a little time away from home. I have a free weekend coming up, so I booked us all a room at a beach house nearby."

Serena's eyes popped open in surprise. "Really?" she asked, sitting up. "We're going to the beach this weekend?"

Raye smiled. "It won't be a fancy outing, because I don't have the money to get reservations at a really classy place, but it should be relaxing. I know how much you love the beach. Amy, Luna, and I figured we all needed some time away from everything."

Serena brightened. Raye was being so nice! She knew it was rare that she and Raye would get along so well, so she decided to live it up. Raye was

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totally cool when you got along with her, after all.

Serena grinned at her friend. "Thanks, Raye," she said, taking the priestess' hands. "That sounds like a great idea!"

Near the entrance of the dark throne room of the Negaverse, Nephrite silently awaited his summoning. The ominous pillars that lined the room were crumbling and laced with cobwebs, and the hot air smelled like rotten meat. From where he stood, the throne of Queen Beryl herself was cloaked in thick shadows.

"Someone's gonna get yelled at."

Nephrite turned. A woman in a gray general's uniform blinked into view, swirls of cherry blossom petals spinning around her long body. The blossoms slowly faded as she grinned wickedly.

"Failed again, did you? Beryl will have your hide." Zoycite cracked a wicked smile. "Ready to hand your position over to me?"

"I'd sooner be destroyed."

Zoycite's teeth glimmered white in the darkness. "Be careful what you wish for."

Nephrite glared at her. "You'd better stay out

of my way, Zoycite," he warned. "I have no patience for you."

"Dear Nephrite, who needs patience?" Zoycite laughed shrilly. "You'd be better off with eyes in the back of your head."

"General Nephrite!" called a booming voice from the front of the throne room. "Approach your queen!"

Zoycite grinned. Taking a step back, she dramatically waved her arm out.

"Have fun," she said, her teasing voice lined with venom. She disappeared.

Nephrite growled before walking up to the high stone chair at the front of the room. He got on one knee, crossed an arm over his chest, and bowed his head respectfully.

"You called, Queen Beryl?"

Beryl focused orange eyes on the kneeling general. The queen of the Negaverse was frighteningly tall, with blazing red hair that dripped like liquid fire from her shoulders. Her long fingers and sharp red nails seemed more like claws than hands, and the slinky blue dress she wore glittered in the shadows.

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"You failed to destroy Sailor Moon and Tuxedo Mask," Beryl said, her voice sharp. She let her long nails trail down the crystal ball in her hand, and an image of the rescue in the elevator shaft appeared inside the sphere.

Nephrite raised his gaze to her. "Forgive me, my queen. I had believed them to be destroyed in the shaft."

"You believed wrong." Beryl's eyes turned a dangerous shade of fire-orange. "You would be best off not making assumptions in the future."

Nephrite lowered his head and went silent.

Beryl lifted one hand. "However," she said, the glowing white ball of Molly's energy appearing in her palm, "you did retrieve me this energy. For that, I will overlook your mistake. Where did you get this powerful energy?"

"The teenagers of Crossroads are foolish, my queen." Nephrite didn't look up. "It seems some young girl has fallen in love with my alias. Her feelings are quite strong."

"Foolish, indeed." Beryl snapped her fingers, and the energy disappeared. "Well done, Nephrite. You are free to go. Although I want to see you

destroy those Sailor Scouts next time."

Nephrite nodded once and rose to his feet. As he turned to go, Beryl called him back.

"And one more thing." The queen rested one hand on her crystal ball. "Who gave you the order to try and destroy Tuxedo Mask?"

Nephrite furrowed his eyebrows. "There was no order, my queen, but since he was aiding the Sailor Scouts, I assumed you would appreciate--"

"What did I just tell you about assumptions, general?"

Nephrite's body went rigid. He bowed. "Forgive me, my queen."

Beryl leaned back in her seat. "From now on, you are not to harm him. Destroy the Sailor Scouts, but leave Tuxedo Mask. Is that clear?"

"It is clear." He looked up at her. "But may I ask why, my queen?"

Queen Beryl's clawing nails flashed in the darkness. "No," she answered, her voice like a lizard's hiss.



Chapter 6

Haunted Holiday

Serena, Amy, Raye, and Luna left for their beach weekend after school on Friday. The bus they took dropped them off a mile from their destination, so they shouldered their backpacks and got to walking. The old dirt road they traveled was bordered on one side by a thick, looming forest.

"So what kinda place is this beach house you booked us at?" Serena took Raye's arm and grinned. "Does it happen to be a popular hangout for attractive young men in bathing suits?"

Luna rolled her eyes.

"I told you, Serena. It's not a five-star place, but it's got a private beach in a little tucked-away

location." Raye pulled a flyer from her pocket and flipped it open. "The place is called 'Pension Adams.'"

"'Pension Adams?'" Serena raised her eyebrows. "What kinda name is that? Doesn't sound very beachy."

Amy glanced at the flyer. "Adams," she murmured. "There was an old show on television called, 'The Addams Family,' wasn't there?"

Serena made a face. Great. That made her feel good. Their beach house was named after an old horror sitcom. She didn't like the sinking sensation she felt in her stomach.

A crash of thunder broke her thoughts. Serena looked up, only to see storm clouds swirling and rain begin to drop from the sky. She moaned and covered her head as the rain quickly became a solid pelting.

"How can there be a storm now?" she complained. "This is supposed to be our weekend in the sun!"

Amy held her map over her head to block some of the rain. "Well, you know how summer storms can be. Don't worry, it shouldn't last

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beyond tonight."

"But we do have to worry about those trees." Raye picked up Luna, sheltered the cat in her arms, and gestured to the forest beside them. "You have to stay away from trees during a thunderstorm. We're in danger here."

Serena scowled and wiped rain water from her eyes. Her hair was already soaked, and her golden ponytails lay limp and heavy from the sides of her head. "Then let's get to that beach house right away and get out of this rain!" she exclaimed. "When I said I wanted to go swimming, I didn't mean in the middle of the road!"

"Are you the guests?"

Serena froze. The voice that came from the trees was young, but there was an odd power behind it. She turned to see a small girl in a cloak standing in the forest. The girl's stormy blue eyes stared at Serena from within a heavy hood.

"Guests?" Amy squinted in the rain. "Are you from Pension Adams?"

The cloaked girl stepped out of the woods, her booted feet leaving small footprints in the wet dirt of the road. "Yes," she answered, focusing her

intent stare on Amy. "I'm from Pension Adams. Follow me and we'll be there in a few minutes."

Serena frowned. There was something powerful, yet sad about the little girl. It made her uneasy. Still, if the kid could get them out of the rain, Serena wasn't about to nit-pick.

"Lead the way," Serena said, hugging her cold arms. "The sooner we all get out of this storm, the better."

The little girl let her gaze sweep once more over her new guests, then nodded and turned to lead them to shelter.

Pension Adams did look strikingly like the Addams's place on the old television show. The beach house was actually an old mansion, complete with cobwebbed windows and creepy statues. The little girl pushed open the huge wooden door and led the others inside.

Serena shivered and took in her surroundings. Her feet stepped on blood-red carpeting, and a massive chandelier lit up the lobby with bright light. A huge staircase spiraled up to a second floor, the walls on both floors covered with antique tap-

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estries and paintings of deceased family members. The place looked like a setting for the haunted house spectacle at her town fair.

"Raye," Serena whispered, leaning over to the priestess. "What kinda place is this? This isn't any beach house."

"It has a private beach, Serena. And it was all I could afford." Raye ran a hand through her wet hair and added, "I think the place is quite beautiful, actually. It looks ancient."

Serena scowled. Count on Raye to find a creepy old mansion cool. Besides, the place did look ancient, and how could an ancient mansion make a good vacation spot? It would've been better off as the location for a black-and-white horror movie.

Two huge, pale hands rested on Serena's shoulders. "May I take your coat?" asked a deep, monotone voice.

Serena turned her head. And screamed.

A man, well over six feet tall and with sickly green skin, stood behind her. His flat head was covered on top with a thin layer of hair, and a long scar ran across his forehead. He had the stony

expression of a robot--or that of a soulless monster.

"FRANKENSTEIN!" Serena shrieked, jumping in Amy's arms. Amy, not prepared for the sudden weight, cried out and toppled over. The two girls went crashing to the floor.

"Serena!" Raye glared at the blonde, her dark eyes flaring purple in a warning. "This man is a doorkeeper. Don't be rude."

"Wh-what?" Serena fought to catch her breath, her gaze hesitantly returning to the "monster." It was true--he couldn't have been Frankenstein, because he didn't have those little knobs sticking out of his neck. But he sure did look like Frankenstein. The resemblance was scary.

Serena swallowed. "R-right," she said, shakily getting to her feet. She bowed apologetically to the doorkeeper. "Sorry. I didn't mean to, um, offend you."

The doorkeeper's lips twitched slightly. "It's all right," he assured in his stony voice. "Happens all the time."

Just then, an older man stepped down the staircase. He was thin, balding, and his face wrinkled like a prune as he smiled at the new guests.

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"Welcome to Pension Adams," he said, resting his hand on the stair railing. "I'm the proprietor, Mr. Youma. Please come to me at any time if you need anything."

"Thank you." Raye handed her wet coat to the doorman, then tried to rub some of the water out of Luna's fur. "I'm Raye Hino. I made the reservations with you over the phone earlier this week. Is our room booked for the weekend?"

"Yes. You are the first guests we've had in some time." He looked to the little girl who had been the guide to Serena and her friends. He frowned.

"Sakiko!" he yelled. "Did you go out to greet the guests? I told you to send someone else."

"I didn't want anyone else to get wet." The little girl bowed her head. "Forgive me, father."

Mr. Youma sighed in frustration. Amy got to her feet, fixing her sopping skirt.

"May we go to our rooms?" she asked. "I'm afraid we're dripping all over your nice carpet."

"Indeed." Mr. Youma gestured to the staircase he stood on. "Follow this up and you'll find your rooms. Hot baths are awaiting all of you."

At the word "hot," Serena brightened a little. "Thanks," she said, giving her coat to the doorman and taking Raye's wrist. "A bath sounds great." The blonde started up the stairs, pulling the priestess close as she did so.

"Raye," she whispered. "This place is weird. I'm feeling bad vibes from every corner."

Raye pursed her lips. "You know, Serena," she replied, "the strange thing is, so am I."

Serena had to admit the bath was really nice. After soaking herself and Luna in the hot water for nearly half an hour, the girl changed clothes and plopped down on her large, soft bed. She began to run a brush through her wet hair, but froze when she heard a knock at her door.

"Fresh towels," a screechy voice called from the hallway. "I have fresh towels for you, Miss."

Serena gulped. Raye and Amy had both assured her the doorman wasn't really Frankenstein and the house couldn't really be haunted, but everything about the place made Serena nervous. And that voice didn't sound very promising.

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"What are you waiting for?" Luna licked down her fur. "Get the door."

Serena slowly stood. "If it's a monster that wants my brains," she said, her voice quivering, "promise me you'll come to my rescue, Luna."

The cat rolled her eyes. "You've been watching too many scary movies, Serena. Open the door or you won't have towels for tomorrow."

Serena walked to the door and held her breath. Slowly, she turned the knob and pushed open the door. She had to bite her tongue to keep from yelping.

The maid was a hunched old woman with scraggly black hair, piercing dark eyes, and a long nose with a wart on it. She looked almost exactly like the witch from Snow White. The old woman smiled, revealing two rows of broken, blackened teeth.

"Here." The maid handed fresh linen to Serena. "If you need help with anything, just ring the bell near your bed. I take it you will join us for dinner in half an hour?"

Serena licked her dry lips and tried to keep from shaking. "Y-yes," she answered, her voice a

squeak.

"Excellent." The old woman held up a basket. "Would you like an appetizer, then? I have fresh apples if you would like..."

Serena slammed the door in the woman's face. Clutching the towels and sheets, she leaned against the door, squeezed shut her eyes, and panted heavily.

Luna sighed. "You're impossible, Serena."

Serena nervously allowed the waiter to set a plate in front of her, her stare never leaving his huge hand. The waiter's long sideburns and hairy arms made him look like a werewolf, and that certainly didn't help Serena's mood. She looked at the dish of chicken and wondered if she should eat it.

"It's delicious, Mr. Youma." Amy swallowed her bite of salad and smiled. Luna munched from a food dish by Amy's feet. "Everything's wonderful. And thank you for the excellent baths."

Mr. Youma nodded and spun the drinking glass in his hand. He sat at the head of the long dinner table.

"Our chef is quite amazing," he said with a

cel mates

smile. "Please eat anything you'd like."

"The chef's probably Dracula," Serena muttered. Raye slapped Serena's knee. Serena sighed and picked up a piece of bread and sniffed it for poison.

"Is your daughter around?" Raye picked up her glass. "There's so much food here, she could really enjoy herself. And I'd like to thank her for guiding us here this afternoon."

"No."

Serena looked up, surprised. Mr. Youma was gripping his glass with white fingers. Anger burned in his face.

"Sakiko will not dine with you," he told Raye sharply. "You won't see her again during your stay."

Amy's eyes widened. "She's not any trouble," she stuttered. "We don't want you to think..."

She was cut off as all the lights went out.

Serena grabbed Raye's arm. Not something else! There was probably a mummy playing with the electricity box in the basement. Serena seriously considered cutting their beach weekend short.

Serena turned around to make sure her

monstrous hosts didn't try to grab her in the dark, but she was startled to see that they were more scared than she was. The wolf-man waiter dropped his serving tray and nibbled his pointy fingernails. The creepy Mr. Youma was sinking in his seat.

"No," he whispered, his voice shaky. "No, he is here!"

Serena gulped. "'He?'"

Serena felt something cold tingle down her spine. The air above the table suddenly twisted and glowed, like something was trying to form. Serena gasped and gripped Raye harder.

The glowing object slowly materialized. Serena felt her heart stop as a large ghost turned to her, narrowed his burning red eyes, and bared his razor teeth.



Chapter 7

Who Ya Gonna Call

"YAAAAAAAAAGGGGGGGGGHHHHHHH!!!"

Serena dove under the table, covering her head with her arms. A ghost! That stupid spooky place had a real live ghost! Frankenstein for a doorman and the wicked witch of the west for a maid were nothing compared to this.

"Get me outta here!" she cried, grabbing Amy's legs. "I knew this place was bad news! Amy, save me!"

The spirit that hovered above the table was white and transparent, and was shaped like a short man in a hooded cloak. The sleeves of his "cloak" were short enough to reveal long, clawed hands.

Luna jumped onto the table just as Raye shot to her feet. The cat growled. "Raye!" Luna ordered, keeping her voice low so only Raye could hear her. "I have no idea what that thing is, but I know he's up to no good!"

The wolf-man waiter had fearfully dashed into the kitchen when the ghost had appeared. Mr. Youma was on his feet, his hands gripping the table.

"Leave my house!" he shouted at the spirit. "I have the power to destroy you! Leave my house or face my wrath!"

The ghost bared his sharp teeth again. He raised one of his clawed hands and aimed for Mr. Youma.

"Begone!" Raye jumped onto the table, ripping an anti-evil parchment from her pocket. She furiously threw the parchment at the ghost. "Begone from this place, evil spirit!"

The parchment stuck to the ghost's transparent body and glowed white. The ghost's back arched and his mouth opened in a silent scream. Slowly, he faded out of view.

Amy yanked her legs from Serena's hold

cel mates

and leapt to her feet. She stared in shock at the empty air. "Is he gone?" she asked, her voice tight. "Did that do it?"

As if to answer her question, the lights flickered back on. Amy fell back into her chair in relief. Raye let out a breath, then carefully got off the table.

"You're a priestess?" Mr. Youma looked at Raye, his face serious. "You didn't destroy the ghost, you know."

Serena tentatively looked up from under the table. Seeing that the ghost was gone, she touched her chest and breathed a sigh of relief. Count on Raye to get you out of a spiritual predicament.

"I know I didn't destroy him, but at least he's gone for now." Raye furrowed her eyebrows. "And you seem to know a lot about that ghost, Mr. Youma."

Amy turned to him. "Do you know what it is?" she asked. "It certainly looked threatening. You need to get rid of it as soon as you can."

Mr. Youma snorted. "Don't you think I know that?" he shot. "That ghost has been the plague of this house for generations!"

Raye narrowed her eyes. "Your place is haunted?"

"I'm taking care of it. He can't escape me much longer." Mr. Youma stared coldly at the girls, then turned for the exit. "Don't worry about the ghost bothering you. I assure you this house is safe. I'll get rid of him soon enough."

The man left the dining room, slamming the door behind him. Serena frowned. She nervously brushed a stray strand of hair from her eye and turned to Raye.

"Can we trust him?" Serena asked. She couldn't help but feel suspicious of Mr. Youma. "If this place is haunted, how do we know this guy isn't a demon or something, too?"

"And worse, how do we know he isn't working for the Negaverse?" Luna looked over at Raye. "I didn't like that ghost one bit. He could be--"

"No." Raye cut her off. "That ghost's not from the Negaverse. His spiritual aura is completely different from all the Negaverse monsters we've gone against."

"Then is he really just a spirit, like Mr. Youma said?"

cel mates

"Probably." Raye stared at the floor. Her fists clenched loosely. "But we still have some serious trouble on our hands."

Serena bit her lip. She didn't like the look on Raye's face. It seemed their beach weekend wasn't going to be completely stress-free, after all.

The next day was wonderfully sunny and warm, so Amy said it was a good time to check out the Pension Adams beach. Raye had assured Luna they could do nothing about the ghost for a little while, so the three girls changed into their bathing suits and went out onto the little private beach behind the house.

Serena was relieved to find that the beach was gorgeous. A long stretch of hot sand glittered under her feet, and the shining ocean lapped the edge of the sand in gentle, yet full, waves. Best of all, the three girls and one cat had the entire place to themselves. Serena laughed and ran down to the water.

Too cool! Pension Adams's fabulous beach almost made up for all the spiritual trouble in the house. Serena hadn't been to a beach in a long time,

so she was ready to live it up.

"Amy!" Serena called, splashing in the warm ocean. "Raye! Luna! C'mon, guys, the water's great!"

Raye smiled. She ran down the beach and dove into the water, her strong strokes shooting her beyond Serena. Amy laughed and dashed in behind, droplets of water splashing up from around her feet and glittering through the air. Luna scoffed and curled up on the beach.

"Water." The cat scowled. "They can enjoy getting themselves wet and dirty if they like. I'm staying here."

A huge splash landed on the cat, soaking her thoroughly. Luna spluttered and shook herself furiously. "Serena!"

Serena giggled. "You are way too stuffy, Luna," the blonde called. "Come in here and let your worries float away!"

"And drown in the process? No thanks." Luna shook herself again, then angrily stomped up the beach.

Amy sighed knowingly and ran her hands over her wet hair. "Leave poor Luna alone, Serena,"

cel mates

she admonished. "You know cats hate water."

"I know." Serena smiled wickedly and prepared to splash the retreating feline once more. "Why do you think I'm doing it?"

Raye pushed a deflated beach ball into Serena's hands. "Leave Luna," the priestess ordered. "She needs some time to relax. The two of us were discussing that ghost this afternoon."

"Oh. That sounds like fun." Serena put the tiny plastic nozzle in her mouth and started to blow into the ball.

Amy turned to Raye. "What did you decide?" the blue-haired girl asked. "He's not a Negaverse creature, right?"

"No," she answered. "He's not from the Negaverse, but we need to get rid of him anyway. He's a major danger to that house." Raye shaded her eyes against the sun and looked up at the mansion. "And I've got a feeling that Mr. Youma and his daughter are more mixed up in this ghost business than he's letting on."

Serena plugged the inflated beach ball and raised her eyebrows. "What do you mean by that?" she asked.

"You saw how Mr. Youma's very touchy when it comes to Sakiko. He won't let her be with us, and he won't give us details on the spirit." Raye brushed a strand of wet hair from her forehead. "And he yelled something about having the power to destroy the ghost. Luna and I think the girl is connected to Mr. Youma's fight against the spirit, but we're not sure how."

Serena tossed the ball at Raye. "I can't believe this!" the blonde screamed. "This is supposed to be our vacation. What are the odds of picking the same weekend getaway as a mean old ghost!?"

Raye threw the ball to Amy. "We have to deal with it, Serena. We can't leave these people. They need our help."

"Those aren't regular people--they're monsters! The fact that they live in a haunted house proves it."

"Don't be ridiculous, Serena. They're normal people. It's just a coincidence they look like that."

Serena frowned. It may have been coincidence, but that didn't make her feel much better. She had asked Luna to sleep in bed with her the

cel mates

night before. Now that she knew a real ghost was in the house, she had the bad feeling she might get desperate enough to sleep in Amy's room. Talk about embarrassing.

She sighed. Well, it looked like she had to defeat evil even when the Negaverse was taking a break. A super-hero's duty. Maybe Superman never got vacations, either.

"Serena, watch out!"

Serena looked up too late. The beach ball bonked her in the face, sending her splashing into the water.

After seeing the frightened state of Pension Adams's workers, Raye decided to ward off the spirit that night. She tacked anti-evil parchments all over the house, and dinner passed without any problems. The staff looked relieved, but Mr. Youma was tense throughout dinner and left abruptly afterwards.

"Hmph." Serena pulled her pajama top over her head and snorted. "There's no pleasing that guy. He just seemed more angry when Raye tried to help."

Amy shrugged. "That ghost makes him very upset. Although you can't blame him--if you had to live in a house that had been haunted for years, it would make you edgy."

Serena crawled into her large bed and yawned. "I'm edgy enough as it is. I'm not used to sleeping in a haunted house." She pulled the covers to her shoulders and beckoned to Luna.

The cat sighed. "Good night, Amy," she said as she hopped into bed with Serena. "Don't worry, I'll keep Serena from crawling in with you tonight."

Serena turned red. "Luna!"

Amy smiled and left Serena's room, closing the door behind her. She quietly walked down the stairs and out onto the moonlit beach to get some air. The sea wind tugged gently that night, and it scattered her hair about her face when she stepped outside the house. She smiled. Happily breathing in the sea air, she let her gaze run over the line of dark water.

Amy suddenly stopped. Little Sakiko, dressed in a simple nightgown, sat near the edge of the beach. The small girl hugged her knees to her chest, her half-closed eyes staring out at the moon-

cel mates

kissed ocean waves.

"Sakiko?" Amy quickly made her way down to the water. "Sakiko, is that you? Why are you out so late?"

Sakiko's head whipped around. She gasped, jumping to her feet.

"I was just...coming out for some air," the girl stuttered, taking a step back. "I'll be going in now."

Amy gripped the girl's arm. "Wait, please." Amy pulled Sakiko back. "My friends and I have wanted to talk to you for some time. Why do we never see you?"

Sakiko lowered her head, her arm trembling slightly in Amy's fingers. "I...can't see you," the little girl mumbled. "I can't. I'm sorry."

"You can't?" Amy frowned. "Why not? We'd like to meet you. There's no reason to be shy."

"No," Sakiko answered quickly, although her voice shook. "Don't worry about me. I don't want your games on the beach to be ruined--you look happy when you play them."

Amy raised an eyebrow. "You watched us today?"

Sakiko turned pale. "I'm sorry," the girl said quietly. "I shouldn't have done that."

Amy's face softened. Carefully, she got to her knees and took the little girl's shoulders. Sakiko swallowed and looked away.

"It's OK, Sakiko." Amy's voice was gentle. "You can watch us if you want. You can play with us, too. We'd love to have you join us. Don't let anything hold you back. Is it that you're shy?"

Sakiko hiccuped and shook her head.

"Is it because you think we don't like you?"

Sakiko hiccuped again, rubbing an eye with her fist. "No," she whispered. "It's not those things. I want to play, but I can't."

"Why not?" Amy's fingers tightened gently on the girl. "Why not?"

Sakiko squeezed shut her eyes. "Papa," she half-sobbed.

Amy sucked in a breath. She was about to say something, but a crash of thunder cut her off. Sakiko shrieked and covered her head. Amy looked up at the storm clouds in surprise.

"Another storm?" The blue-haired girl's eyes widened. "That doesn't seem natural--"

cel mates

"Stay away from her!"

Amy turned around abruptly. Mr. Youma, his fist upraised, charged down the beach like a rampaging animal. He grabbed Sakiko as soon as he reached her and yanked her away from Amy.

"Stay away from Sakiko!" Mr. Youma clutched his crying daughter and glared daggers. "Don't even talk to her, do you hear me? I won't have you taunting her the way people have always taunted our family. Sakiko has the power that will destroy that ghost once and for all!"

Amy gasped. Lightning flashed in the sky, then rain started in a heavy, beating downpour from the dark clouds above.



Chapter 8

Spirit Slaying

"What?!" Amy took a step forward, shocked. "Sakiko has the power to destroy the ghost? What's that supposed to mean?" She furrowed her eyebrows. "Please, Mr. Youma, why are you keeping your daughter away from us like this? She's lonely! Is that what you really want for her?"

Mr. Youma scowled, tucking his daughter into his arms. "I don't have to answer to you," he shot back. "Stay away from Sakiko. She'll destroy that ghost, and our family will no longer be ridiculed!"

The rain suddenly began to pelt fiercely, and Amy cried out and tried to cover her head. Mr.

cel mates

Youma shielded his daughter with his body and looked up at the storm clouds.

"The ghost will be here soon," he said, as much to himself as to Amy. "He always brings a storm with him, and this weather proves his anger. But tonight we will destroy him!"

With that, Mr. Youma picked up his daughter and ran inside. Amy, coughing in the heavy downpour, ran in after them. She watched the man carry his daughter up the stairs to a large room and slam the door behind them. Amy panted, wiping rain water from her face with shaking hands.

"Serena, Raye, Luna," she said breathlessly. "We have to stop this!"

Mr. Youma carefully put his daughter into a chair and wiped some of the tears and rain from her face. He dashed to a nearby bookshelf and pulled down a heavy tome and started flipping through its pages.

"We'll get him this time, Sakiko," he assured her. "I'll pull your power out tonight, and then this whole nightmare will be over."

Sakiko sniffed. She settled her tiny fists in

her lap and trembled slightly.

"Here!" Mr. Youma held open the book at a page and fell to his knees. He tilted up his daughter's chin so she would look directly at him.

"Be strong, Sakiko." He kissed her forehead. "This will be your time to succeed where our ancestors have failed. Do you remember that legend I told you when you were a child?"

Sakiko shakily nodded. "Yes," she murmured. "That one girl in our family would be granted with spiritual powers to destroy the ghost in this house. That she would end the reign of terror on Pension Adams."

Mr. Youma put his free hand on her fists. "Right. And you are that girl, Sakiko. Since the day you were born, I've felt the power inside of you. You're gifted with magic no one else in our family has ever possessed."

Sakiko hiccuped, and nodded.

Mr. Youma's face softened. "Don't cry," he said gently. "People have always taunted our family, Sakiko, for as long as that ghost has been here. People have called us a weak family who held onto a legend simply because we didn't have the skill to

cel mates

get rid of the ghost. But you are living proof that the legend's true, and when you destroy the ghost, you'll save our family's name and end the haunting of this house."

Sakiko bit her lip. Mr. Youma pressed his temple against hers and closed his eyes.

"Be strong for me," he whispered. "Darling, I hate seeing how lonely you are. I want you to be free at last." He brushed his lips across her cheek. "And I'm sorry if I've made you unhappy," he added quietly. "I hated keeping you away from those girls, but I didn't want them to ridicule you the way others ridiculed me as a child. People have been so cruel to our family, and I wanted to protect you from that. I love you, Sakiko, and I'm doing all of this to set you free. Never forget that. If I could take this burden off your shoulders, I would without a thought."

Sakiko blinked back tears and hugged her father tightly. After a moment, they separated, and Mr. Youma took her face in his hand.

"Ready?" he asked.

Sakiko nodded and braced her shoulders.

Mr. Youma began reading from the book,

and a strange, yellow glow started up around Sakiko.

Amy threw open Raye's bedroom door. "Raye!" she called, running in. "Raye, get up! We have trouble!"

But Raye was already sitting up in bed, a scowl on her face. "Tell me about it," she muttered as she lifted up her bedcover. Serena, shivering and clutching Luna to her chest, was curled up beside the priestess.

Serena blushed. "I don't like thunderstorms when I'm trying to sleep," she said in her defense. "Besides, I thought Raye might be scared, so I thought it would be good of me to keep her company and make sure she made it through the night without a problem."

Raye rolled her eyes. "Sure."

"We have to hurry!" Amy exclaimed. "The storm is a sign that the ghost is coming back, and I don't think your anti-evil parchments will keep it away this time." She jerked her thumb behind her. "And what's worse, Sakiko has some sort of power that can destroy the ghost, and Mr. Youma is hav-

cel mates

ing her use that power tonight!"

Serena bolted up. Poor Sakiko! That kind of power sounded like a big responsibility. Serena knew what it was like to be entrusted with power when you didn't want it. She remembered how silent and withdrawn little Sakiko had been. The Champion of Justice was suddenly overwhelmed with sympathy for the tiny girl.

"That's it." Serena stepped out of bed. "We have to save her. We're super-heroines! We must be strong enough to defeat one measly little ghost."

"Good to see you not trembling for once, Serena." Luna jumped from Serena's arms and landed on the bed. "You girls had better transform. There's no telling when that spirit will show up."

Right on cue, the witch-like maid came running to the door. "Hide!" she shrieked, her wrinkled face alight with fear. "Everyone, hide! The ghost is here!"

All the lights in the house suddenly went out. With a frightened cry, the maid ran off down the hallway.

Serena swallowed. She could feel her limbs begin to shake, but she fiercely steadied them. Now

was no time to be scared. She had already been scared plenty. She had to save Sakiko!

"Let's go." In the darkness, Serena still saw Raye's eyes glitter. The priestess thrust a bright red pen with the sign of Mars on it into the air. "MARS POWER MAKE-UP!"

Amy followed suit, holding her own transformation pen up. "MERCURY POWER MAKE-UP!"

Serena clenched her fists. Time for action! A part of her inwardly complained again that she shouldn't have to fight evil during her vacation, but she brushed it off. She was definitely willing to give up lounge time in order to save Sakiko. The poor little girl needed Serena's help.

Serena threw her hand above her. "Time to bust some ghost!" she cried. "MOON PRISM POWER MAKE-UP!"

Rainbow lights flooded through the room, lighting up the darkness.

The ghost appeared above Mr. Youma just as the man finished reading from the book. The ghost raised a transparent clawed hand, aimed for Mr.

cel mates

Youma, and shot a wave of red power at him.

Mr. Youma screamed as the wave crashed into his back and sent him flying. Sakiko, surrounded by her solid yellow aura, jumped up from the chair with wide eyes.

"Papa!" she cried, running to her downed father. "Papa, are you OK?!"

The ghost shot another red wave, this time at Sakiko. Mr. Youma grunted and pulled the little girl into the shelter of his arms. Mr. Youma cried out again as the wave smashed into him. He collapsed to the floor, his daughter underneath him.

Sakiko's face shone with terror. "Papa!" she cried, crawling out from her father's hold. "Papa, speak to me!"

Mr. Youma coughed. He clasped Sakiko's hand as he fought ragged breaths from his chest. "Run," he told her. "Sakiko, dear child, run!"

"What?!" Sakiko clutched his hand with both of hers. "Papa, how do I use the power? I want to use the power, but I don't know how!"

"Neither do I." Mr. Youma coughed again, his body racking painfully with it. "Sakiko, the legend said you can't use your power unless all of

your feelings are into it. But the ghost is angry tonight. He's too strong for you."

"Papa, I won't leave you!"

"I won't let you get hurt, Sakiko. I'll let the ghost destroy me if it means you won't get hurt!" He pushed her away from him. "Now run while you still can!"

Tears rolled down Sakiko's little face. "Papa, no!"

"I love you, Sakiko!" Mr. Youma once again pushed her in the direction of the door. "Now run!"

The ghost smiled evilly. Slowly, he raised one clawed hand and aimed for the old man.

"MERCURY BUBBLES BLAST!"

Bubbles suddenly burst through the room. The ghost covered his face as the bubble foam made a thick, stifling fog that choked the air. Mr. Youma and Sakiko looked to the door in shock. Sailor Mercury, Sailor Mars, and Champion of Justice Sailor Moon tore through the bubble fog with Luna hot on their heels.

Serena quickly reached Sakiko and took the girl in her arms. "Don't worry," Serena declared as Amy dropped to be by Mr. Youma's side. "You're

cel mates

both safe now."

The ghost narrowed his eyes. He raised his palm and prepared to shoot again. Raye growled and clasped her hands together.

"MARS FIRE..." She pointed her index fingers at the ghost, and flames started to blaze around them. Her eyes flashed purple as she let the fire fly. "IGNITE!"

The wave of fire roared through the air, cutting the bubble fog like a knife through butter. The ghost barely managed to fly out of the fire's path.

Serena got to her feet and scowled. That stupid ghost was gonna get blasted, no matter what fancy moves he pulled. He may not have been a Negaverse monster, but he had still terrorized the poor people at Pension Adams, and had ruined her vacation to boot! He was getting her super-hero speech, that was for sure.

Serena pushed Sakiko behind her. "You've overstayed your welcome!" she yelled at the ghost. "You keep these people's lives full of fear and pain, and I won't stand for it." She pointed menacingly at the spirit. "I'm Sailor Moon, Champion of Justice and defender of vacation resorts, and on behalf of

the moon, you're punished!"

The monster gritted his razor teeth and shot a wave of red power at Serena. The blonde grabbed Sakiko and rolled, getting the two of them out of danger just in the nick of time.

Serena got back to her feet and grabbed her tiara. "MOON TIARA..." She flung the golden discus with all her might. "ACTION!"

The glowing headband streaked for its target, but the ghost deflected it with a wave of red power, sending it clattering to the floor.

"Oh, great." Serena punched a fist into her palm. What was it with her tiara not working lately? She hoped Raye had some kind of spell to get rid of that ghost, because now Serena had nothing to attack with.

Mr. Youma struggled in Amy's arms. "Whoever you are," he called to Serena, "please, get my little girl out of here! There's no way the ghost can be defeated!"

Serena turned to him, surprised. No way the ghost could be defeated? But hadn't Amy said something about Sakiko having the power to win?

Serena suddenly noticed that the little girl

cel mates

behind her was glowing yellow. And that tiny Sakiko, with tear streaks on her face, was glaring at the ghost with eyes full of blue fire.

"You hurt my papa," the child said, her voice tight. She stepped out from behind Serena. "You hurt my papa, when he only wanted to save me!"

The ghost must have noticed the yellow power, too, because he flew a few inches back. Gritting his teeth again, he raised a hand to shoot.

Sakiko raised her own hand in response. The yellow power flared up around her. "I love my papa and my ancestors," she cried, "and you hurt them all! I hate you, you evil ghost!"

The spirit shot his red power at Sakiko. Sakiko immediately shot a huge, glittering wave of yellow power back at him, and her attack vaporized his and engulfed him in yellow light.

Serena threw her arms over her face and cried out. The yellow light of Sakiko's power swelled through the room, blinding everyone present and sending beams of yellow shooting out every window and door. There were a few agonizing moments of the painful brightness, and then the power slowly faded away. Serena carefully

removed her arms from her head, her eyes opening a tiny crack in order to see what had happened.

The ghost was gone. The yellow aura that surrounded Sakiko fizzled away.

The child ran to her father. "Papa!" she cried, getting to her knees and taking his head in her lap. "Papa, are you all right?"

Mr. Youma looked up at his daughter, tears in his eyes. "Sakiko," he said breathlessly. "The ghost. You defeated the ghost."

Sakiko blinked back tears. "I couldn't stand him anymore," she answered, her voice high. "He hurt you, and he put our family through pain for years. When I put all my feelings into it, the power worked."

Mr. Youma pulled the little girl's head into his chest. "Sakiko," he said, kissing her head. "Sweet daughter, you did it. You saved us all!"

Serena smiled. That little girl packed quite a punch. The Champion of Justice watched contentedly as Mr. Youma and his daughter hugged tightly and cried in each other's arms.

"That worked out great." Serena grinned down at Luna. "They look so relieved. Guess we

cel mates

can still be quite productive on our vacation, huh?"

Luna nodded. "Indeed," she answered, a smile on her kitty lips.

The next day, a bandaged Mr. Youma sat on the back porch of Pension Adams and looked down at the beach where Sakiko laughed and splashed in the water with Serena, Amy, and Raye.

"Sir?"

Mr. Youma turned. His three helpers--the Frankenstein-like doorman, the witchy maid, and the wolfy waiter--all stood in the doorway.

"Is it all right if Sakiko is outside playing?" the doorman asked. "She may have been hurt last night."

Mr. Youma looked back to the beach. "She's fine," was his simple reply. "Besides, I've kept her from other people for too long. She needs to play."

"She looks so happy." The maid smiled. "I'm glad she can be a normal little girl at last."

The waiter furrowed his wolfish eyebrows. "Will the ghost ever come back?" he asked. "Or do we still need to worry?"

"Don't worry." Mr. Youma smiled as Sakiko

bonked Serena in the head with the beach ball and sent the blonde splashing into the sea. "That ghost is gone for good. And our new dear Sakiko is here to stay."

Down on the beach, little Sakiko laughed, her hair fluffing around her face as sparkling drops of water glittered through the air.



Chapter 9

Sailor V: Coming Soon to a Theater Near You!

The sun was bright and beautiful that day, shining through the windows of the Tsukino household and practically calling for the inhabitants to come out and take a stroll. Serena sat cross-legged on her living room floor, engulfed in the dazzling sunlight that streamed through the window--but she didn't notice. She was glued to the animated images of a spinning, jump-kicking Sailor V that flashed on the TV screen.

"That's right, the movie is almost here!" the announcer in the commercial exclaimed. "For all you Sailor V fans, the action-packed feature-length film will be in theaters later this year. Prepare your-

selves for the movie of a lifetime!"

Serena moaned and covered her head. The commercial changed on the television, and a blaring ad for toothpaste came on.

"No fair," Serena complained, falling back onto her carpeted floor. "That movie's not gonna be out for forever. I'll never last that long!"

Luna, curled up on Serena's bed, scoffed. "Poor baby."

"Leave me alone." Serena pouted and tucked her knees against her chest. The animated Sailor V movie looked so cool. Ever since she had gotten into Sailor V, she had dreamt about that much-anticipated film. Just imagining herself in a theater with booming sound and Sailor V flying across a massive movie screen brought pain. She sighed. She'd never last.

"I love dramatic animation," Serena said, gripping her ankles. "I wish they made an animated movie about me. I mean, Sailor Moon's getting so popular, maybe something like that's right around the corner." She brightened. "Hey, yeah! Now that would be cool. Maybe they'd even do a television series on me...y'know, to have continu-

cel mates

ing adventures. I'd be on TV every day!" She laughed and turned to her cat. "That's a great idea, don't you think?"

"A Sailor Moon animated series?" Luna snorted. "Don't be ridiculous, Serena. Who would ever watch that?"

"What do you think this is, middle school?" Mr. Masterson, the producer for Sailor V's upcoming film, threw a pile of sketches on his desk in frustration. "You two had better shape up! Your latest work isn't what I'm looking for at all."

The two young animators in front of his desk lowered their heads. The shorter one, a pretty petite girl with shoulder-length brown hair and soft facial features, fiddled with the hem of her blouse.

"Could you tell us what we're doing wrong?" she asked timidly. "We want to do the best we can for you, sir."

Mr. Masterson sighed and adjusted the baby carrier on his back. His baby daughter, snuggled happily in the carrier, rattled her toy rattle and gurgled.

"I know it's tough for you two." Mr. Masterson rested his hands on his desk. "You're the youngest members on the animation staff, and the only two still in animation school. The Sailor V movie's a big project for you. But I have to see results or I can't keep you on the film." He stuffed half of the sketches in a folder and handed it to the petite girl. "Cassie, you're not too bad. You're getting Sailor V's face and body consistently, but her action poses are still too rigid. You need to make her look more real."

Mr. Masterson then turned to the other girl who stood before his desk. She was tall and lanky, with boyishly-cut dark hair and dark-rimmed eyeglasses. She kept up his gaze a moment, then swallowed and averted her eyes.

"Lori, I need to see major improvement with you," Mr. Masterson warned. "You consistently make Sailor V's legs too thick and her hair too stiff. And your action poses need lots of work--they don't even look like action poses." He put the remaining sketches in a folder and handed it to her. "I know your assignment is the end of the movie and the end is tricky, but I need to see your stuff get

cel mates

better. I'll check your work in a few more days. Be ready for a lengthy inspection."

Lori sadly accepted the folder. "Yes, Mr. Masterson," she answered in a voice more feminine than her masculine looks suggested. "I'll work harder."

Mr. Masterson dismissed the girls so he could change his daughter's diaper, and Cassie and Lori left his office together. It was a half day, so the animation studio was mostly empty. The girls left the building and traveled in silence down the sidewalk.

"You know, you're gonna be fine." Cassie looked over at Lori and smiled weakly. "Really. I know he's been getting on our cases a lot lately, but I've seen real improvement in your work."

Lori sighed and hugged her folder to her chest. "I dunno, Cassie." She shrugged. "I've been putting in tons of extra hours, but it doesn't seem to do me much good. Maybe I'm just not meant to be an animator."

"What?" Cassie grabbed her friend's arm. "Don't say such things, Lori! We've wanted to be animators since elementary school. And we've

vowed to make it through animation school together, remember?"

Lori pursed her lips. "I know, but--"

"But nothing. Cheer up, Lori. You'll make it." Cassie smiled. "We'll make it together. Those animation pencils we bought back in high school were our pact, and that pact still holds. We're going to finish the Sailor V movie and see it in theaters on opening night!"

Lori looked away. "The pencils are our pact," she mumbled. "R-right."

Cassie patted Lori's shoulder. "Now let's get home. I'm starving, and I feel like ordering in something nice." The young woman started off at a run, calling back with a laugh, "Last one home has to do the dishes!"

Lori's jaw dropped. "Wait!" she called, chasing after her friend. "Cassie, that's not fair! I don't wanna be stuck with the dishes again!"

A stack of sketches flew unnoticed from the folder Lori carried and landed with a plop on the sidewalk. The young animator was too busy dashing after her friend and complaining about her chores to notice.

cel mates

Just then, Amy stepped from one of the stores that lined the sidewalk.

"Ridiculous," the blue-haired girl muttered, glancing angrily at her shopping bag. "One would think the advance of technology would bring the price of computer equipment down. If my laptop needs anything else in the next few months, I'm going to be completely broke."

Her foot nudged against something. Surprised, she looked down to see the stack of Lori's sketches on the ground.

"Someone must have dropped this." Amy bent and picked up the papers. She flipped open the stack to look for a name, then gave a start.

"Sailor V?" She examined the carefully penciled drawings of Sailor V in various poses. Her eyes widened. "I think this girl's an animator," she said to herself. "Serena would kill to own drawings like these."

Amy turned the sketches over and found a stamp on the back of one. "Miss Lori Williams of Studio Dive," she read out loud. She checked her watch. "I have a study session in a few minutes, so I'll have to return it to the studio afterwards. The

bus I take in the evening stops near there, anyway."

Amy slid the sketches into her book bag, snapped the clasp, then started at a brisk walk to her evening class.

In the abandoned mansion in Crossroads Woods, Nephrite stared at his star chart. Anger nipped at his usually stoic features.

"I've had it with these foolish girls." He let out a breath, frustrated. "I need more energy for Queen Beryl, and I'm tired of dealing with these Sailor Scouts. I need a plan that will both get me energy and destroy those children."

He closed his eyes. "Great stars," he called. "Show me the human whose energy is near its peak. I need a new victim!"

The glittering stars on the chart slowly started to move, then formed their glowing circle in the middle of the map. The image of a sad-looking Lori appeared within the circle's center.

"An animation student." Nephrite scowled. "Very well. I'll drain her energy, then get rid of those Sailor Scouts. My new monster is my most powerful."

cel mates

He glared out the window. "Let's see how well those Sailor brats fare when I use their own attacks against them!"



Chapter 10

Pencil Promise

Lori went back to Studio Dive that afternoon to work on her assignment. Long after the sun had set, she still sat, furiously erasing a stray line on her paper.

"This isn't working." Lori dropped her pencil and ran her hands through her hair. She sighed. "I'm still not getting it. I'm never gonna get in shape by the time Mr. Masterson checks on me again."

Lori's fingers inched towards her desk drawer. "I know I said I wouldn't, but..." Biting her lip, Lori opened the drawer. She pulled out a small, brightly-colored pencil case and held it tightly.

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Back in high school, Lori and Cassie had bought a set of expensive professional animation pencils. They had split the set, promising not to use the pencils unless they told each other first. Those pencils were the symbol of their shared promise to make it through animation school together.

Lori opened the pencil case. One pencil, worn down until it was hardly more than a stub, was all that remained of her half of the set.

"I can't believe what I've done." Lori covered her eyes with a hand. Her lip quivered. "That whole promise we made about not using the pencils unless we told each other, and I used my pencils so many times in secret. Some friend I am."

She hiccuped and blinked away tears. "But there were so many times I felt I was falling behind Cassie, I had to use the pencils to keep up. I couldn't tell her I was using them, because then she might have thought I was jealous of her work. I just never wanted to fail and be separated from her."

Her gaze fell on the pencil stub, lonely and sad in the pencil case. She sniffed and rubbed a fist into her eye.

"This is it." Lori's fingers shakily closed over

the remaining pencil. "The last one. I need the best pencil I can get to work through this slump, but I hate breaking my promise to Cassie..."

"I'm sure she'd understand."

Lori gave a start. She turned around abruptly, only to see Nephrite, in the persona of Maxfield Stanton, standing behind her. He smiled slightly.

"What?" Lori nudged her seat away from him. "Who are you? Who let you into the studio at this hour?"

"I found a door open, and I simply had to come in and take a look." He put a hand on her shoulder. "You're Lori Williams, right? I've seen some of your work before. I think you're amazing."

Lori blinked. "Really?" she asked. "But I'm really not...I mean, I'm not doing so well right now...I mean--"

"Nonsense." Nephrite took the tiny pencil from her fingers. "You're a very talented young woman. Although if this stub is all you've got to work with, it's no wonder your quality is slightly lower than usual."

Lori sat up. "Wait," she said, reaching out. "Please, sir, I need that pencil. It's very important to me."

cel mates

Nephrite closed his fist over the stub. Dark energy formed in his palm and sealed an invisible symbol in the bottom of the pencil. He opened his hand, then handed the stub back to her and smiled.

"I'm sure you'll get over your slump," he said, patting her back. "All you need is a little fate. If that's your lucky pencil, you probably should use it."

Lori stared at the stub. Her blue eyes darkened oddly, and she made a strange, lopsided grin.

"I think you're right," she said, carefully fingering the pencil. "I'm feeling some kind of new energy. I think this pencil will lead me to success."

"Of course it will." Nephrite pointed to her sketch. "You should probably get back to work now. Remember to use all of your energy in order to produce the finest work you can."

Lori nodded enthusiastically and pulled out a fresh piece of paper. "I'll create my greatest pieces ever," she said as she frantically began to sketch. "I'll never be behind again!"

"Yes. You do that." Nephrite settled a cold stare on the sketching animator. After a moment, he turned, slipped his hands in his pockets, and

quietly left the studio.

A few minutes later, Amy walked up to the front door of Studio Dive. She checked the window to see if the place was open, but saw only one lamp glowing inside. She frowned.

"Looks like only one person stayed overtime," she said, looking to Lori's packet of dropped sketches. "I don't want to disturb whoever that it. I'll just leave this here."

She bent over and slid the thin packet under the door. Straightening, she turned to leave.

The squealing of tires made her jump. Amy looked over to the parking lot, only to see a hot red Ferrari zooming out onto the road. The car raced past a street light, and the beam of dim yellow flashed off the face and long brown hair of the driver.

Amy threw a hand to her mouth. "Nephrite!" she cried, taking a step back. She looked up at the animation studio.

"Impossible!" She clenched her teeth. "Nephrite was here?"

The next afternoon, Serena sat in Crossroads

cel mates

Park with Amy and Luna. The Champion of Justice and sidekick feline listened as Amy recounted her story.

"Man." Serena gripped her chin. "This is bad. I have the awful feeling Nephrite's gonna be even tougher now that we know he's posing as Maxfield Stanton."

Luna folded her paws in the grass. "You didn't notice anything unusual at the studio?"

Amy shook her head. "I don't know--the place wasn't open. I saw a lamp on, so there may have been someone inside. Maybe Nephrite targeted that person."

"Entirely possible." Luna nodded. "I agree, Amy. Nephrite couldn't have been up to any good at Studio Dive. We'll pick up Raye when she's on her break at the temple and check out the studio."

Serena grinned. This was the first mission in a while that actually sounded cool. Serena was a big animation fan, and she always wondered what went on behind the scenes.

"I've always wanted to visit an animation studio," she said happily, clapping her hands. "Amy, do you have any idea if Studio Dive does

any of my favorite shows?"

Amy looked up. "Hm? I didn't tell you, Serena? Studio Dive is doing the Sailor V movie."

Serena froze. For a long moment, she could only stare, her jaw so slack it nearly hit the ground.

"It's WHAT?!" Serena sprung forward like a wild animal and knocked Amy to the ground. The blue-haired girl choked as the ecstatic blonde sat on her chest, grabbed her shoulders, and shook.

"How could you omit such a fact?" Serena cried. "This is momentous! This is monumental! You should've told me sooner!" Serena couldn't believe it. The Sailor V movie! That animation studio was doing the Sailor V movie!

"What'd I say?" Amy managed with a gasp. She frantically tried to squirm from under her friend. "Serena, I can't breathe!"

Serena jumped off of Amy and spun around happily. "Amy, I'm looking forward to that movie more than anything in the world! Seeing it in production is...is...is even more than a dream come true!" She laughed excitedly. "I never even dreamed about seeing it in the works! This is the most fabulous thing ever! Man, somebody up there

cel mates

likes me!"

Luna raised her eyebrows. "Good job, Amy," she said as the blue-haired girl dizzily sat up. "You finally got Serena excited about a mission."

Amy shook her head. "I don't think so," she said. "I have the feeling Serena's totally forgotten it's a mission by now."

But Serena didn't hear that--she was too busy frolicking through the grass like an older and more frightening version of Heidi of the Swiss Alps. Looked like she wouldn't have to wait for forever to see the Sailor V movie, after all.

"Watch out, Studio Dive!" Serena cried, raising a fist. "Serena Tsukino is on her way!"

Studio Dive was busy that afternoon, as the Sailor V movie deadline was approaching and no animator wanted to be the unlucky one who held up production. Cassie put the finishing touches on a new sketch and smiled.

"Hey, Lori!" she called, leaning back in her chair. She and Lori had low-walled cubicles that were side by side. "How's your stuff going today? What I saw this morning looked great!"

Lori snorted. "Of course it did," she said lowly. "You think I don't have the talent to produce great art?"

Cassie blinked in surprise. Lori's voice was deeper than usual, and carried a cutting edge that had never been there before. "Of course I don't think that," Cassie said. "Lori, are you OK? You haven't said much today."

"I've been working. Which is what I'm trying to do now, actually." Lori turned a dark glare to her friend. "Do you mind?"

Cassie frowned. "S-sorry," she said, turning back to her desk. She stared at her hands in thought for a moment, glanced back at the diligently-working Lori, then sighed and picked up her own pencil. She pulled out a new piece of paper and started a fresh sketch.

Lori, bent over her own desk, smiled. "Just you wait, Cassie," she whispered harshly. "I'll beat you yet. When I finish this new set of drawings, you'll be begging for me to wait up for you."

Lori's haunted pencil had mysteriously become the length of a normal pencil, and wouldn't get shorter when she sharpened it. When the little

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symbol in the bottom of it flickered red, the young animator was too busy drawing to notice.



Chapter 11

Problems at the Studio

A few hours later, Serena, Amy, Raye, and Luna stepped up to the front door of Studio Dive. Serena rapped firmly on the wooden entrance, a huge smile on her face.

"This is gonna be so fab," she said as she punched a fist into her palm. "I wonder if Sailor V herself hangs out here. I could get her autograph!"

"Do you seriously think a secretive superhero would hang out at the Studio where her movie is being made?" Raye asked, rolling her eyes.

Serena shrugged cheerfully. "I can dream, right?"

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A middle-aged man with glasses and a cup of coffee opened the door. "Can I help you?" he asked, taking a sip and checking his watch. "It's a little late, if you're the Chinese food people who never showed up. We ended up getting a pizza instead."

Serena happily took the man's free hand. "We're big fans of Sailor V," she said. "Can we look around for a while?"

Amy gently pulled Serena back. "And I dropped off a packet of sketches I found yesterday," the blue-haired girl added. "I wanted to make sure it was received."

The man shook his head. "Today's not a tour day. We're really quite busy--"

"We'll be good!" Serena laughed and zoomed into the building, not even stopping to get permission. The man was too dumbfounded by her rocket-like speed to argue.

Amy apologized to the guard on Serena's behalf. "It won't take long," she said as she, Raye, and Luna walked through the door.

Once inside the first main workroom of the studio, Serena found herself in Sailor V heaven.

There were more than a dozen people hunched over desks and sketching different pictures of Sailor V, with completed drawings lying in multiple stacks around them. Sailor V movie posters plastered the walls, as did many colored shots that featured Sailor V in standard super-hero poses. Serena had never seen so much amazing Sailor V art in one place.

"This is GREAT!" Serena dashed between the rows of cubicles, her head darting around to take a look at each animator's work. "You guys are incredible! This movie is gonna be so amazing!"

Amy and Luna sighed as they watched Serena zip around the room and startle the artists. More than a few pencils jarred, and one bottle of ink spilled all over a desk.

Raye frowned. "Don't worry," she said, walking out to join the blonde. "I'll tie her down for a while."

"Thank you, Raye." Amy glanced around. Shifting her hold on Luna, the blue-haired girl walked to the nearest cubicle--Cassie's.

"Excuse me." Amy bowed to the petite woman at the desk. "Is Miss Lori Williams

cel mates

around?"

Cassie sat up abruptly. "Lori's my roommate," she answered, her voice alarmed. "Is something wrong?"

"No, no, I just found some of her sketches on the street yesterday. I slid them under the studio's door last night and I wanted to make sure she got them."

"Oh." Cassie settled back down and relaxed. "Well. Thank you. That was really good of you." She hesitantly glanced to the cubicle beside her. "Lori's right there, but she's kinda...busy."

Amy looked over at the boyish animator. Lori's eyebrows were furrowed, and her pencil furiously sketched out a picture of Sailor V getting slashed by a monster. She finished quickly, grabbed another piece of paper, and began drawing rapidly once more.

Suspicion nipped the edges of Amy's features. Luna's muscles tightened.

Cassie stood and smiled weakly. "Lori's been pretty hard at work lately," she explained. "But I'd like to thank you on her behalf. I saw her pick up those sketches this morning, so she got

them fine."

"I threw them away."

Cassie sucked in a breath. Turning, she stared at Lori. "What?" she asked.

"You heard me." Lori didn't look up from her work. Her voice was cold. "Those ridiculous doodles are on their way to the city dump by now. My new work is superior to the old junk I used to do." She turned dark eyes up to Amy. "So thanks for nothing, little girl."

Amy's hands tightened on Luna's fur. "Looks like we found Nephrite's target," she whispered to the cat. Luna growled her agreement.

"Lori!" Cassie glared at her friend. "How rude! This girl went out of her way to make sure you got those sketches back. The least you could do is thank her!"

"Don't be stupid." Lori scraped her chair back and stood. The movement was so loud that most of the animators looked over in surprise, and even the giggling Serena and frustrated Raye stopped and turned their heads.

Cassie clenched trembling fists. "Listen, Lori, I don't know what's been wrong with you

cel mates

today, but you'd better snap out of it. Apologize!"

"Never." Lori hissed and bared her teeth. "I'll never do things you tell me to do. I'm the more talented one now. My new set of drawings will leave your greatest work in the dust!"

Serena gave a start. Raye moved close to the blonde, although the priestess' gaze never left Lori.

"The Negaverse," Raye whispered, voice low. "That girl's psychic aura reeks of it."

"Even I could've figured that out," Serena scoffed. The angry animator looked bad--her darkened eyes and cutting voice didn't fit her at all. She was corrupted by Nephrite, all right.

Lori suddenly snorted and made her way toward a nearby staircase. "I've had it with you," she called, gripping the railing and jumping onto the first step. "Forget we were ever friends, Cassie. I can't believe I ever wasted time on a failure like you in the first place!"

The young woman ran up the stairs without a backward glance. For a long moment, Cassie just stared at where Lori had been, her lips parted. Then she shut her mouth. She hiccuped, and tears rolled down her cheeks.

"She hates me," Cassie whispered. She fell into her chair and covered her face. "Oh, God, my best friend hates me!"

Cassie started to cry. Heart pounding, Serena ran over and took Cassie's shoulder, holding out a hand to keep the other animators back. Serena had to console Cassie. Serena had to console Cassie so the woman wouldn't go after Lori.

"Hey, Cassie. That's your name, right?" Serena forced a smile. "Look, I just think your friend's under some stress. She can't really hate you."

"She does hate me!" Cassie cried through her sobs. "She's never stared at me with such loathing in her eyes! What did I do? We've been best friends for twelve years!"

Serena looked through the corner of her eye and saw Raye and Amy nudging toward the staircase. Serena swallowed. She and the Sailor Scouts had to get to Lori, and fast.

"I'm telling you, it's stress." Serena gently patted Cassie's shoulder. "Look, I don't even know you two, and I could tell she didn't mean it. She looked really tired. She's not really angry."

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Cassie sniffed. Tentatively looking up, she asked, "Really?"

"Sure. But maybe your friend needs someone to help her calm down." Serena pointed to the staircase Lori had run up. "I'm an outside party, so maybe I can help. Where's that stairway lead to?"

"The roof." Cassie rubbed an eye. "But I don't know if--"

"Don't worry, I'll take care of it." Serena quickly jogged to the staircase, all the while glancing back at Cassie. "Stay there. I'll send her down when she's cooled off."

Cassie looked like she was about to say something else, but instead pursed her lips and turned her head. Serena took advantage of the moment and practically flew up the stairs after her companions. As soon as they were far enough up to have some privacy, Serena called her orders.

"We gotta get up there!" she exclaimed as her legs pumped. "Lori had her pencil in her hand when she ran up here. That must be where Nephrite's evil is centered."

Her friends couldn't reply as a muffled scream came from the roof. Amy threw open the

roof's door just as Raye, Luna, and Serena came up behind her.

Too late. Lori was unconscious on the ground, the two demons who had been locked in her pencil standing above her. The demons, a pair of young women, looked up and smiled.

"Look at this," the one with pink hair, pink eyes, and a pink leotard said. "A set of new victims. We can drain their energy for master Nephrite."

"Good plan." The one with blue hair, blue eyes, and a blue leotard chuckled. She let one long-nailed finger beckon the un-transformed Sailor Scouts. "Come on over, little ones. The Gemini Warriors want to play."



Chapter 12

Double Trouble

Serena took a step back, her body tightening. Nephrite had never sent two demons to drain energy before. Did this mean he was tired of losing? She remembered what had happened when Jedite had gotten tired of losing. That final fight still gave her nightmares.

"Girls," Luna ordered, taking a fighter's stance by Amy's feet. "Transform! You need to defeat those warriors to save Lori!"

Amy pulled her transformation pen out of her pocket and thrust it into the air. "We're on it!" she shouted. "MERCURY POWER MAKE-UP!"

Raye held up her own pen. "MARS POWER

MAKE-UP!"

Serena threw up her hand. "MOON PRISM POWER MAKE-UP!"

The Gemini Warriors watched, surprised, as blue, red, and rainbow lights wrapped around the three middle school girls. When the lights dimmed, Sailor Mercury, Sailor Mars, and Sailor Moon stood before the demons.

"You're not getting away with your evil," Raye called, spreading her feet. "We're the Sailor Scouts, defenders of the innocent. Prepare to pay for your crimes!"

The Gemini Warriors exchanged glances. "My, my," the pink Warrior said, raising a pink eyebrow. "So you're those Sailor Scouts we've heard so much about. Master Nephrite told us exactly how to take care of you."

Serena scowled. "Your master Nephrite hasn't exactly had a good track record against us," she said flatly, putting her hands on her hips.

The blue Gemini Warrior smiled and turned slightly. A long blue tail, much like a horse's, flicked out behind her.

"You can't beat us," she taunted, looking to

cel mates

her fellow fighter. "Our plan of attack is unbeatable!"

"Right." The pink Gemini laughed and whipped out her own tail. She entwined her tail with the blue Warrior's, then grinned at the Sailor Scouts. "Come on girls, try and hit us!"

Serena didn't like this. The enemy didn't usually ask to be attacked. Something told her those tails weren't there just to be stylish.

Amy cupped her hands together. "MERCURY BUBBLES..." A small, spinning sphere of blue light appeared in her palms.

"MARS FIRE..." Flames licked the edges of Raye's gloved fingertips.

"BLAST!" Amy let the sphere fly.

"IGNITE!" Raye released the fire, and it roared through the air.

The Gemini Warriors each held up a hand. A pink-blue shield formed around them, deflecting Amy's bubbles and Raye's flames. As soon as the Scouts' attack died, the Gemini let down the force field and smiled.

"You're not the only team that has the power of friendship," the blue Warrior said. She cupped

her hands together. "And not only do we have the teamwork, we have the ability to duplicate anything."

The pink Warrior clasped her hands together. "MARS FIRE..." Fire started around her fingers.

"MERCURY BUBBLES..." A spinning ball of blue light appeared in the blue Warrior's hands.

Serena froze. No way.

"IGNITE!"

"BLAST!"

Serena shrieked. With a dive that would've impressed even a world-class dodgeball champion, the blonde threw herself out of the path of the fire-and-bubble flurry and rolled along the stone roof. She heard Amy and Raye cry out as they desperately tried to dodge their own attacks.

Serena scrambled back to her feet, her wide eyes on the Gemini Warriors. Those two hadn't been kidding when they had said they had an unbeatable attack. Serena suddenly wished she hadn't bragged so much about the Sailor Scouts' flawless victory record. Now their flawless attacks were being used against them!

Luna ran to Serena. "Sailor Moon!" the cat

cel mates

cried. "Whatever you do, don't use your tiara!"

"Like I was really going to, Luna," Serena snapped. She watched the laughing Gemini, her body tight. "Just what are we supposed to do? We can't beat our own weapons!"

"Look." Luna quickly gestured to the Gemini's entwined tails. "They probably share strength that way. As long as they're tied together, they'll have the same team-oriented power that you girls share."

Serena clenched her fists. "Then we'll just have to show more powerful teamwork," she declared. "If the three of us bond closely, we've gotta be able to beat a team of two."

The pink Gemini patted her partner on the shoulder. "How great!" she exclaimed with a laugh. "Did you see how my fire scared them silly? I sure do know how to turn up the heat!"

"Yeah, but my bubbles got them even better." The blue Gemini giggled and twirled a finger in her long blue hair. "I made things majorly slippery for those brats!"

The pink Gemini suddenly stopped laughing. She narrowed her eyes. "What are you saying?"

she asked, voice low. "Are you proposing your bubbles are better than my fire?"

The blue Gemini gave a start. Slowly, she scowled. "And what if I am?" she challenged. "I think we both saw whose attack was more successful."

"Yeah, mine!"

"What? Don't be stupid."

"I'm being stupid?"

The two warriors burst into a frenzied bickering match, their teeth bared and their long-nailed hands ready for clawing. They quickly untied their tails in order to face each other and scream insults.

Serena caught her breath. What a perfect opportunity! She ran over to Amy and Raye, who were both clutching minor injuries and fighting their way to their feet.

"Guys!" Serena grabbed a shoulder of each of them. "Now's our chance! While they're not connected, their power's probably lessened."

Raye looked over at the arguing Gemini. "If we hit them while they're fighting," she proposed, "we can probably get an attack in before they bring up their shield."

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"Right." Serena squeezed Amy and Raye's shoulders gently. "And if we wanna make sure our power's greater than theirs, we need to make this a team effort. All three of us at once. They'll never be able to stand up to that."

Amy glanced over at the Warriors, then nodded. "You're right," she said. "A synchronized attack. They'll never withstand it."

"On my call!" Luna stepped back. "Ready!"

Serena pulled off her tiara. "MOON TIARA..."

Raye clasped her hands. "MARS FIRE..."

Amy cupped her palms. "MERCURY BUBBLES..."

"Shoot!"

Serena flung her headband with all her strength. "ACTION!"

Raye released her flames. "IGNITE!"

Amy let her bubble sphere fly. "BLAST!"

The burst of fire and flurry of bubbles merged with the tiara in mid-air, forming a glowing discus ringed with flames and blue foam. The weapon cut through the air like a homing missile, and the Gemini Warriors stopped fighting just long

enough to see the discus coming straight for them.

"No!" The pink Gemini screamed and covered her face with her arms. "Look what you've done! You should've let me defeat them with my fire!"

"Are you kidding?" The blue Gemini covered her own face. "We never would've beaten them! You should've let me destroy them with my fire!"

The two continued bickering, even as the discus crashed into them and burst them into dust. The dust fluttered down to make two neat little piles on the roof, the echo of the arguing Warriors quickly fading in the evening air.

Serena breathed a sigh of relief. "Man," she said, brushing a damp bang of golden hair from her forehead. "And you guys say Raye and I argue a lot."

Luna smiled. "Good work, Sailor Moon. You got the team to attack in sync. That's quite an accomplishment."

Amy reached over and took Serena's hands. "Yeah," she said, smiling. "You're starting to become a true leader, Sailor Moon."

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Serena beamed. See? She could be responsible when she wanted to be. Being a leader was becoming more and more natural for her. She hoped Luna and Raye would remember that the next time they got on her case for being a slacker.

"Although this doesn't mean we'll stop getting on your case for being a slacker." Raye raised an eyebrow, a mild smirk on her lips. "If that's what you were thinking, Serena."

Some luck. Serena just had to be stuck with a psychic priestess for a buddy.

Just then, footsteps came from the stairway. Luna whipped her head at the girls.

"Hide," she ordered. "We should avoid being seen if we can help it."

Serena, Amy, and Raye ran with Luna to hide behind a skylight. Ever so cautiously, the three Scouts and one cat peeked around the corner.

Cassie stepped in from the stairway, her shoe making a tiny tapping noise on the stone. She looked around the roof in surprise. "Where'd those girls go?" she wondered out loud. Her gaze fell on the fallen Lori, and she gasped. "Lori!"

Lori moaned. Cassie ran to her friend and

dropped to her knees, her hands shaking. "Lori!" she cried as she pulled Lori's head into her lap. "What happened? Are you all right?"

Lori's eyelids slowly fluttered open. Her blue irises were light once more, and no longer held even a trace of Nephrite's darkness.

"Huh?" Lori murmured, looking around the roof. "What happened? Where am I?"

"We got in a fight, and you came up here." Cassie furrowed her eyebrows. "You don't remember?"

Lori reached up to touch her forehead. "I dunno, I just--" The young woman suddenly noticed the pencil stub in her hand, and she turned pale. Once the pencil had been freed of its curse, it had gone back down to its pitiful size.

Cassie carefully took the pencil from Lori's fingers. "Lori?" she asked. "Is this one of those special pencils we bought back in high school?"

Lori swallowed. She took her friend's free hand.

"Cassie," she said slowly, "I-I'm sorry. I used the pencils without telling you. I was afraid I was getting behind." She hiccuped. "I'm so sorry,

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Cassie. That stub's all that's left."

Cassie's mouth opened, but no sound came out. "L-Lori," she stuttered at last, gripping Lori's fingers. "Lori, oh, I'm sorry, too."

"What?" she asked. "What do you have to be sorry for?"

Blinking back tears, Cassie pulled her own pencil case from her pocket. She flipped it open to reveal one tiny stump, exactly the same size as Lori's.

Lori bolted to a sitting position. "Cassie!" she exclaimed. "You used the pencils on your own?"

"You've always been a better artist than I am, Lori." Cassie sniffed as tears rolled down her cheeks. "This slump of yours has been the only time you weren't ahead. I was always afraid you'd get promoted, and we wouldn't be together anymore. I used the pencils to try and keep up with you." She leaned over and hugged her friend tightly. "Oh, Lori, forgive me!"

Lori gripped the fabric of Cassie's shirt. "No," she mumbled, tears starting in her own eyes. "We used the pencils because we wanted to stay together. They were a symbol of our friendship,

after all."

Cassie sobbed and held Lori tighter. "Let's never let anything get in the way of our friendship again," she whispered. "You're the best friend I've ever had, Lori."

Nearby in hiding, the Sailor Scouts exchanged sad smiles. Serena was on the verge of breaking into tears herself.

"This is so emotional," she cried. "Oh, girls, group hug!"

Luna purred as she looked on. "Good job, Sailor Moon. Good job."

Nephrite glared at his star chart. The stars that represented the constellation Gemini, originally bright silver dots on his map, had gone dark. He growled.

"The Gemini were my final warriors," he said through gritted teeth. "I have no more minions to do my bidding."

He waved a hand abruptly through the air, and his star chart vanished. "Fine. If those girls want to get personal, then they'll get it." He looked through the broken stained-glass window and

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stared up at the evening sky. "The next time I come for you Scouts," the general said lowly, "I'm coming to take care of you myself."

Nephrite didn't notice that he was being watched. From a shadowed corner of the large room, Zoycite smiled evilly.

"Do whatever you think will work, Nephrite," she said with a chuckle. "It won't make a difference." Her green eyes glittered. "Better watch your back, loser, because I'm ready to take care of you."



Be sure to follow the Scout's next adventure in the 8th Sailor Moon Novel, "Diamonds Aren't Forever". Find out why Diamonds aren't always a girl's best friend. Sailor Moon is comin' at ya from Crossroads with Love! Being a reincarnated princess, she knows you only live twice, so Sailor Moon and the spy who loved her, Tuxedo Mask, aren't about to have the living daylight's knocked out of them. The world is not enough for these evil Sailor Moonrakers. Visit our website at:

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About the Writer

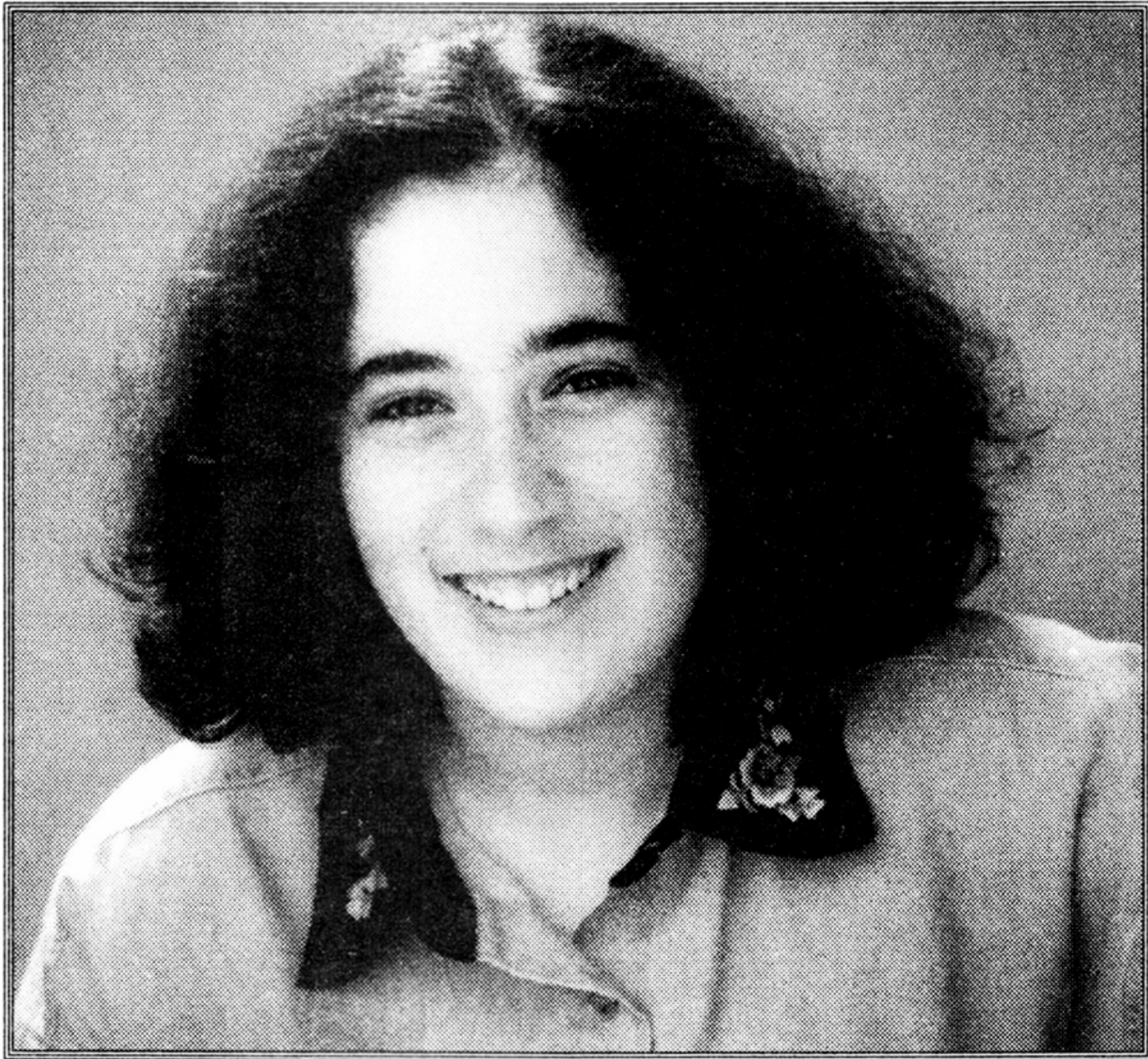
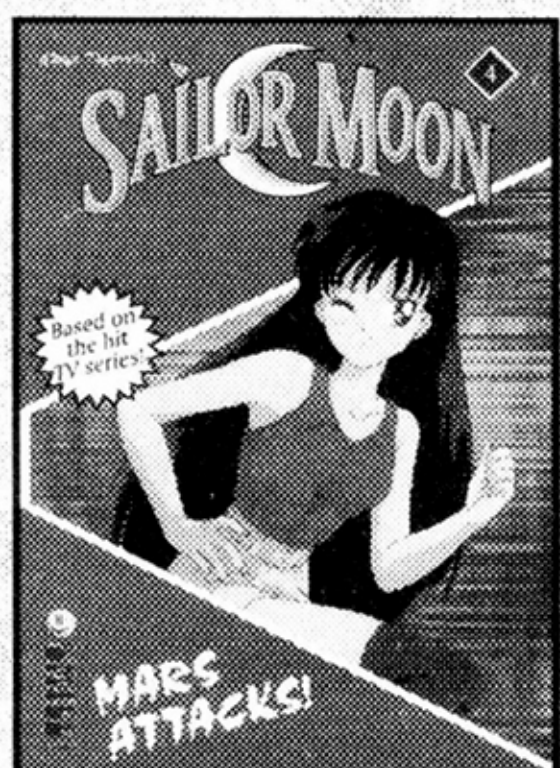
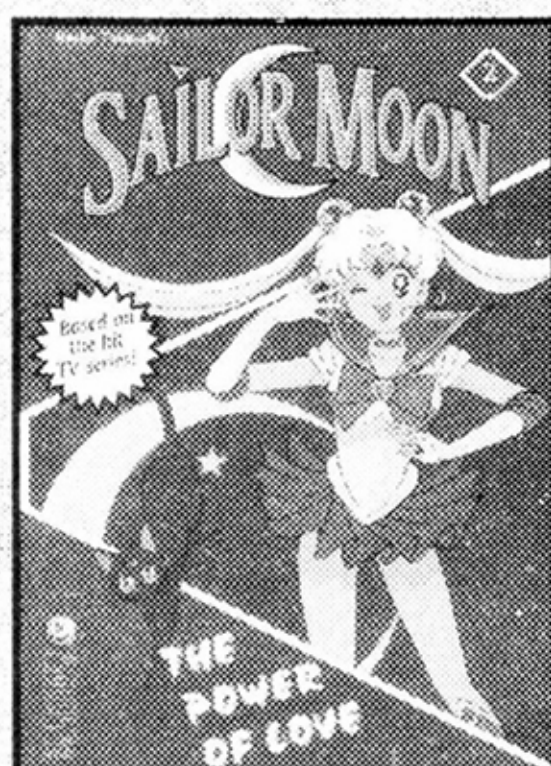


Photo: Bill Burkhart

Lianne Sentar began her career as a writer at just 13 years-old working on an extensive fantasy novel entitled *Thief*. During the next two years, Ms. Sentar wrote hundreds of pages of fan-fiction and published them both on her website (http://members.tripod.com/~Lianne_Sentar/) as well as on other international fan-fic sites. Based on her initial online publishing success, Ms. Sentar self-published her first novella *Rain* in the fall of 1998. Since its initial release, *Rain* has been through four reprints and continues to grow in popularity. In the summer of 1999, 17-year-old Lianne began writing the *Sailor Moon* novel adaptations with the second *Sailor Moon* novel, *The Power of Love*. Ms. Sentar is currently working on her second original novel, the fantasy *Children of the Sky*. Ms. Sentar lives with her family in Connecticut, USA.

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