

育成計画

魔法少女

遠藤浅蜷

Endou Asari

Illustration

マルイノ

limited

(前)

Magical Girl

K! 宝島社

魔法少女育成計画

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Presented by
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MAGICAL GIRLS



ピティ・フレデリカ

水晶玉に好きな
相手の姿を映し出すよ



トットポップ

魔法のギターで実体のある
音符を作り出すよ

プキン

魔法の剣で刺した
相手の考えを変えさせるよ



ソニア・ビーン

さわったものをすぐ
ポロポロにしちゃうよ





マナ

呪文と儀式でいろんな魔法を使うよ



げこくしようばな
下売上羽菜

感覚をものすごく
鋭くできるよ

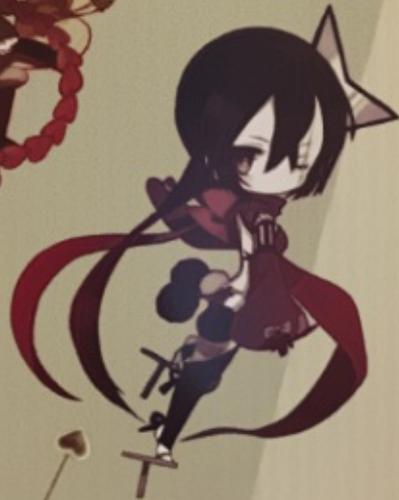
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相手の能力がわかる
魔法のヨーグルを使うよ



魔王パム

四枚の黒くて
大きな羽で戦うよ



リップル

手裏剣を投げれば
百発百中だよ

PROLOGUE

The life of a teacher is oftentimes misunderstood by their students.

Students often think of teachers as instructors and people that give work, assignments, and tests. Some students would even see teachers as resentful things, and would avoid them if possible.

Oftentimes, if you have the right personality, you might be able to bond with some of your students, but there will always be the other ones that think like the rest.

Years of teaching at Namiyama High School has made Nozomi Himeno aware of this fact. She had accepted it. Some students would groan. They are teenagers after all.

The reality of teaching is far from what students thought it was.

As a teacher, Nozomi had to divide her attention between her students, ensuring that they have the best education to survive the real world.

Some kids require special attention because they're falling back. Those kids she would always prioritize. After all, they're the ones that needed the most help.

There are also children who excel at their classwork. Those kids she would challenge more. Not because she despised them, but because she believed in them.

She also had to grade their work and assignments, and if someone is struggling, she'd schedule a session with them to help them, though they often took this as a *bad* thing.

Nozomi cared for her students, but not everyone could see that.

After lunch, Nozomi went to do her usual patrol rounds.

Students would often hide around so they won't have to attend class. The most frequented hiding spot however, is the roof of the school.

Normally, it's a good hangout spot, but the school roof is pretty dangerous. There are no safety railings for the students, which is a safety hazard all by itself.

When Nozomi arrived at the stairs leading up to the rooftop, she found 3 girls sitting down eating their lunch on the stairwell.

“Ah, that reminds me. Time for class, guys!”

“Yeah, we should hurry it up, the *Monster*'s gonna get us if we don't”

“Monster?”

“I'll tell you about it in the hallway”

Nozomi heard the girls talking from a distance. When she turned the corner to climb the stairs, she was face-to-face with them.

One of the girls had a surprised look on her face.

“Ah, Miss Himeno. Excuse us!” she said as she bowed down.

The girls dragged their friends towards class, talking and laughing as they walked away from Nozomi.

Nozomi, however, was climbing up the stairs to make sure there were no other kids on the roof.

A quick sweep, then locking the door towards the roof. Done.

The loud chime of the school bell rang across the building. Time to teach once more. Nozomi walked back towards her classroom.

The lockers and hallways of the school were devoid and empty. Most of the students had already retreated back to class, save for one or two strays that are still running to get there.

Just a corner turn away until Nozomi would reach her class.

“Seriously guys, who’s this *Monster* you’re talking about? School ghost?”

“No, it’s nothing like that. It’s a nickname. You really don’t know?”

Nozomi stopped just before she turned the corner. She heard the three girls from before, talking a bit loudly. They hadn’t seemed to notice Nozomi around the corner.

“Ms. Himeno’s nickname is *Monster*.”

“Huh? Why’s that?”

“I mean, look at her. She thinks she’s so much better than all of us. Looks so innocent and childlike, but still gives us ridiculous amounts of work. Don’t say it in front of her, though.”

“Ah, I see, I see”

Nozomi stood still.

Her heart sank. She never wanted to come off as strict to her students. She just wanted to help them grow into their potential.

It’s true that she had a babyface, and perhaps that contributed to her childlike appearance. Could it be that these kids are so into that appearance that they didn’t expect a serious hard-working teacher?

With a deep breath and a sigh, Nozomi proceeded down the corner into class.

Nozomi Himeno is a language arts teacher.

However, she is also many other things within the school. She helps with extracurricular activities, she often stays late to organize events, and she even takes time out of her day to help the kids who are struggling.

Despite, or perhaps because of it, a lot of the kids have treated Nozomi a little differently than the other teachers.

Mr. Watanabe, a nice guy, has been nicknamed Nabe-San by the kids. He often tells jokes in class, and is a laugh to be around.

Ms. Kobayashi, a sweet teacher, was often very motherly to her students. She was given the nickname of Koba-Sen.

So why is it that Nozomi, who tries so hard to get along with her students, gets the nickname *Monster*?

She disliked it, but she's used to it. After all, it's been a year since she got the nickname.

It won't deter her from her work, however. The most important thing on any teachers mind is the well-being of their students, regardless of how the student feels about the teachers.

And so another day of classes begins and ends.

After the kids all went home, Nozomi locked the classroom door. The day was over, but it wasn't time for Nozomi to head back just yet.

Today, there was something she had to do. A group meeting of sorts in the Science Lab.

No extracurricular activities ever take place in the Science Lab, so it was usually quiet and empty.

Nozomi stood in front of the door. She fumbled in her pockets to find the right key. Then, she inserted it to the door.

Click

That's when she found out it wouldn't turn. Because apparently the door was never locked. Which means the teacher that was teaching here didn't bother to lock the door when they left.

Locking classroom doors is a habit for Nozomi, but forgetting to lock the Science Lab was just a dangerous thing to do.

Still, as long as there were no kids playing around with dangerous equipment, she should be fine.

With a push of her hand, she opened the door, and inside were 5 girls, all doing their own thing, presumably waiting for Nozomi to show up.

This was the meeting she had been assigned to.

However, she wasn't expecting the other kids to be earlier than her. Sometimes they could surprise her.

First, there was the athlete of the school. She was hiding her black eye, must've gotten it from a school fight. Her hair tied behind her in a ponytail.

Umi Shihabara, known for her amazing athletic abilities. She held the district's record for the High School 100-meter dash.

Next to her was a close friend, Kayo Nemura. The two were sitting next to each other, probably talking before Nozomi had arrived.

On the back of the room, staring at the aquarium where the Science Lab's pet turtle lived, was Honor Student Mine Musubiya.

The 3 of those girls were 11th graders.

In the corner of the room were two 10th years, Tatsuko Sakaki, with her glasses, and Kaori Ninotsugi, with her long tied hair.

The two 10th graders were shy and nervous, perhaps because they were outnumbered by their seniors. Nozomi herself doesn't really teach 10th years, but she made it a point to remember their names when they were chosen.

The reason all these girls were here is because of the School Culture Festival. Or rather, the fact of cleaning up for it.

When the Student Council asked for volunteers for cleanup duty, no student even bothered to raise their hand. So the Council decided to do a lottery, and these 5 were chosen.

If you think about it, who would *want* to volunteer for cleanup duty for a big event like this? Maybe a saint, but not anyone that hated the concept of cleaning up after other people.

A lot of the students joked that these 5 were the *sacrificial lambs* because they had to clean up after whatever the other kids in the school were going to do, and the Culture Festival is a *huge* event.

Needless to say, none of them were too pleased when they were chosen.

For Nozomi, this might mean more work and grumpier students. Just the usual, really.

For her though, maybe she could get these kids to get along, and maybe she could form them into a team. She wasn't sure how clean-up duty can be spun into something exciting, but as a teacher, she'll find a way.

Besides, looking at the clock, it's 5 minutes before the scheduled meeting, which means these girls were early. Might not be a sign of excitement, but it's a start.

CHAPTER 1

MAGICAL GIRL ARMY, FORM UP!

☆ Postarie

Tatsuko Sakaki had been a shy girl since she was a young girl, so when she was selected by the Student Council to be a part of the Cleanup committee, her heart skipped a beat.

Fortunately for her, she was relieved when it was announced that a classmate and close friend of hers, Kaori, was also chosen by the lottery. The chances were slim, but at least she got a friend.

Tatsuko was not used to working with other people, due to her shy personality, but with a friend, she might be able to make it through.

Alongside Kaori, they both went towards the Science Lab. The door was unlocked, and when they entered, they only saw one girl, sitting and waiting.

Tatsuko immediately had shivers down her spine. This was a senior. She wasn't in her grade at all. If she had trouble speaking to friends her age, how was she going to handle speaking with her?

"You two part of the clean up crew too?" asked the senior.

"Y-Yes, we are," answered Kaori.

No sooner did those words come out of her friend's mouth that the door slammed open once more.

Strutting down the Science Lab were two more senior girls. This one's a bit more popular than the rest.

Athletic champion Umi Shihabara.

All the kids at school know about her. She was considered the most athletic kid in school, and there were rumors about her strength and rowdiness.

Her sports medals are proof of just how physically fit she was. Even from her face, you could see the determination in her eyes.

The more people that show up, the more Tatsuko was convinced that this lottery was a curse.

Umi took a deep breath, and she looked over to the other girl, her friend perhaps, and exclaimed loudly.

"Ahh, you smell that? *That is the smell of adventure!*"

So confident. Way beyond Tatsuko's league. The gang here are truly randomized, but Tatsuko probably wouldn't fit in, if it weren't for Kaori.

As if on a pattern, the door opened once more. This time, a familiar face. One of the

teachers of the school had entered.

Ms. Himeno.

Most of the others in Tatsuko's class sometimes call her *Monster*. Probably because her looks transcend her age.

Her face looks younger than Tatsuko, but she's in her 20s.

Even though the other kids might make fun of Ms. Himeno, Tatsuko wouldn't do such a thing. Tatsuko wouldn't even be capable of it.

"Ah, Teach is here! So, let's start!" exclaimed Umi loudly.

"Well, we still have 5 more minutes," said Ms. Himeno, pulling out a chair from one of the tables to sit on.

"Whaat? C'mon, the faster we get started, the faster we can actually finish up!" complained Umi once again.

The sky outside was orange. The sunset illuminated the classroom with that hue of the end of the day.

It's going to be Winter soon, and with that, the end of the school year. Most of the students were excited for the holidays, and many of them have gotten lazier as the school year begins to come to a close.

"Aha! You're all finally here! Wonderful! Great! Awesome!"

There was a voice that came from above. A small, childlike voice. In a High School, there wouldn't be any little girls. Most kids were around 16 at the youngest.

So where did that childlike voice come from?

"Hey, hey! Up here!"

A white small figure, dressed in all white, descended downwards from the ceiling of the Science Lab.

This was a miniature girl. A miniature girl was floating down. Tatsuko didn't know just how to react.

"My name is Toko! As you can see, I'm a Fairy! Nice to meetcha all!"

Just what is going on here?

"You all have the best magical potential, so you've all been fated and destined to be chosen at this spot! Guess what? You're all going to become *Magical Girls!*"

Magical Girls?

This fairy thing, Toko, was talking too fast. There was too much information that needed to be processed. Tatsuko wasn't even mentally prepared for this.

By the stunned look on everyone's faces, neither were they.

"I have to ask you all for your help! I'm being chased by a very bad, very evil witch! I need magical girls to protect me! I can make you into one! You'll have awesome powers, *and* you'll fight for justice! So, get ready for all your lives to be changed!"

Toko waved her wand around, and suddenly everyone was covered by a bright white light. Tatsuko wanted to scream in shock, but she couldn't even find the strength or the reaction to do so.

The light engulfed her body, the brightness pierced her eyelids, so much so that Tatsuko closed her eyes in fear. Her heart was thumping, and then... the shining stopped.

When Tatsuko opened her eyes, the first thing she did was to look for her friend.

Kaori, where was she? Was she okay? What was that light.

When she glanced at Kaori's direction, what she saw was not Kaori. Instead, sitting at Kaori's seat was a beautiful girl.

Braided hair, red on the ends of each braid, yet a light brown hair color, the colors seamlessly changing into each other.

Her facial features were perfectly placed, like a manufactured doll designed to look pretty.

She had a small halo above her, floating just a bit above her head. How is that possible? Was there a wire somewhere?

The suit she was wearing was something that came out of a fashion show. Flashy, out-of-this world.

She even had some kind of tail behind her.

But the most striking visual appearance, was the large round circular ring on her back, floating just as well, radiating with the colors of the rainbow.

Who was this girl?

And why did she suddenly grasp Tatsuko's arm in shock.

"T-Ta-Chan?"

The rainbow girl called her Ta-Chan. That's Kaori's nickname for Tatsuko. How did she know.



How did this girl know? Is this girl who Tatsuko thinks she is.

“AAAAAH!”

A scream from the other side of the room.

Looking around, there was a blue shirted pirate and a stage magician screaming and pointing at each other.

Then, there was another girl sitting with a wedding gown.

And then... most peculiarly, floating in the air, was what looked like an Arabian-styled genie, floating upside down.

What is going on?

Tatsuko looked outside the window to see if she was still at school. However, what caught her attention was the reflection on that window.

A beautiful girl, with green hair, dressed like a mail girl. A deliverywoman.

Red suit, and Tatsuko could see small wings coming out from her waist.

Who was this beautiful girl, and why was she in the window reflection.

Tatsuko's mind then finally made the connections. Everything clicked.

Tatsuko touched her cheeks, and the mail girl also touched hers in the reflection. It dawned on her.

This was Tatsuko. Which means... Which means...

“HUH!?”

☆ **Captain Grace**

Umi Shihabara loves adventure.

As a child, she wanted to see the world. She wanted to experience the wonders in story books and adventure novels.

She wanted to become a hero and an explorer.

Unfortunately for Umi, she was born in a small village near a mountainside, so it's not like she could actually go anywhere in her childhood.

Most of the time, she had spent her daily activities playing around in the rivers and forests nearby.

By the time her parents had saved up to move to the city for better education, Umi had developed a knack for adventure and a strong physical body as well.

She had surprised the kids at her school with her amazing athletic abilities, which she honed through her time jumping and climbing through the treetops.

Mastering these skills quickly made Umi soar in popularity. It made it easier for Umi to make friends with the others, but it also made it easier for her to make enemies.

Umi had loyal friends, but would also have bullies that would try to bring her down. Her response to those is to defy them at every turning point, which can sometimes lead to fights that get her in trouble.

But she also had loyal friends as well. One of them being Kayo Nemura, who had always stuck with her till the end. Now, in High School, together with Kayo, she continues her streak of adventures, or as close as she can get to being one.

However, today had been strange, even for Umi.

After what seemed to be a fairy floating down from the sky, Umi had been transformed into a blue-shirted pirate, with a ballerina-style skirt. Not to mention, she seemed to have

the pirate hat *and* the pirate hook as well.

She looked at her reflection in the window. Sure enough, she saw her new self, dressed like a pirate.

From around the room, she could hear the other girls loudly exclaim their disbelief.

“W-W-What!? Fairies? Magical Girls?”

“Am I on *Candid Camera* or something!? Where’s the hidden cameras, huh?”

“Is this some kind of joke!? How’d I get dressed in this outfit so suddenly!?”

She noticed a cutlass sheathed on her hip. Gently, she grabbed on to it, and pulled it out, hearing the distinct noise that the blade makes as it slides across the sheath.

The sight of the cutlass is too real to be true. This is a classic pirate weapon, and Umi was holding it in her hand.

With her other thumb, she lightly pressed the edge of the sword.

“Ouch... Gah”

The sharp pain was enough for her to instinctively jerk her thumb away from the blade.

The cutlass was real, and it was extremely sharp.

Umi had transformed into something powerful. She could feel her energy rising, her strength increased.

This new body...

...She was Umi, but she had also transformed. She was infinitely better than before. This is what true strength and power felt like.

The strength and power of an adventurer.

“Alright! Transformation complete!” yelled the tiny Fairy’s voice once more.

The creature, who looked just like a tiny human, identified herself as Toko. She flew around the Science Lab, fluttering about ecstatically.

“Now you’re *all* Magical Girls! You can definitely defeat the evil witch that’s after me!”

Umi immediately struck a gutsy pose, and turned around to her classmates. With a fist pumped in the air, she smiled, and loudly proclaimed,

“Aha! So what should we do, huh? There’s an evil witch coming to get us, we’re gonna have to stop her right?”

“Correct! To do that, I’ve given you amazing strength and skill! Magical Girls are infinitely more powerful than regular humans! Not only that, each and every one of you possesses a unique power!”

With a flutter of her wand, a bright light formed on each of their palms, and as it settled back, a strange heart-shaped device was held in front of them.

“This is your personal Magical Phone! Each Magical Girl gets one! With this, you can transform into your form anytime you like! Not only that, it also lists important stuff like

your stats, your abilities, and even a small picture of yourself! Oh, and of course, it's also a phone!"

Toko went across each and every one of the girls, darting around the room as she spoke each of her sentences.

Umi turned her phone on. On the first screen was a chibified picture of her, dressed up like a Magical Girl.

In large letters, she could see the name displayed in the center.

Captain Grace

Magical Skill: To Summon an Awesome Pirate Ship

"Captain Grace, huh? Nice name. Hey, Kayo, what'd you get?"

"Huh? U-Um..."

Kayo, who had been transformed into some kind of stage magician, nervously opened her phone. Fumbling through it until she managed to turn it on.

Umi couldn't help but sneak a glance at it,

Funny Trick

Magical Skill: Able to Replace Hidden Objects into Something Else

"Awesome power! This is pretty cool, don't you think?" said Umi with a smile.

"Wha-NO! I don't understand!" screamed Kayo.

"What's not to understand? You've got your name right there, and then that's what you could do. It's pretty straightforward if you ask me"

"Th-That's not the point! All this... What *is* this!?"

"Don't be a sour sport! The fairy told us, we've gotta defeat an evil witch. With our powers combined, we can beat her *easily!*"

"U-Umi-Chan! Don't be so rash like that!"

Kayo was nervously trying to talk Umi out of this, but for Umi, this was the opportunity she was waiting for.

Finally, an adventure she can be a part of!

"H-How are you so calm about this, Umi-Chan?" asked Kayo.

"Cause I had a feeling"

"You had... a feeling?"

"Yeah, earlier this morning, I was like, 'hm, this is gonna be an interesting day.' Turns out, we become Magical Girls! That's so *cool!*"

In the middle of their conversation, Toko swept in in front of the two girls. While floating in the air, the small fairy made a pose that was like someone begging for help.

"Oh, please, save me! I can give you powers, but I can't fight off the witch! I need all of

you guys' help! Not just me! With your powers, you can protect and save the world, too!" said Toko while on her knees, and floating at the same time, hands clasped to each other.

Umi smiled proudly. With a thumbs up, she exclaimed,

"Nooo problem! Kayo and I will be on the case! We'd be happy to help you out!"

"H-Hey! I never agreed to that! Don't drag me into this, Umi-Chan!"

"Someone needs our help and she just gave us the tools to do it, what's not to understand, Kayo?" asked Umi in frustration.

"Sh-Shihabara, perhaps we should wait for a while."

Another voice interrupted them. This time it was older. The voice originated from Ms. Himeno, who now looked like a ballerina dancer, clad with ribbons around her outfit.

So she'd been transformed as well.

"Well, you were chosen too, Teach. What do you expect us to do, say *no* after she gave us these powers? Let's get over the shock and actually answer the call to adventure for once!" exclaimed Umi.

Ms. Himeno shook her head.

"If this witch or whoever is really that dangerous. We can leave it to the police. I'm not going to let high school students, especially not ones under my watch, be subjected to doing something dangerous!"

Hearing Ms. Himeno's words, Toko flew up to her face. The small fairy had a pouty expression.

"What!? Are you kidding me? The police can't do anything about the witch! They'll be killed! As we speak, she's coming here right now! In fact, your kids have a better chance of surviving her than the police ever would!"

"I'm not going to endanger my students"

"If you don't stop her, they're going to be in danger, *anyway!*"

Ms. Himeno continued to shake her head.

"My word is final. My students are not going to fight some dangerous witch."

Hearing those words, Umi's eyes glared at her teacher with a mix of anger and shock. After taking a deep breath, she faced the whole room. She looked at each and every one of the students there, and began her speech.

"Listen. This cute fairy is asking us to help her in her time of need, and we'd just turn her *away*? We've been given powers! It's time we do something *good* with it! I don't care *what* anyone says..."

Umi glared at her teacher with a look of burning defiance.

"...but if you guys ain't gonna help, then it doesn't matter. I'm going in alone, no matter what *anyone* says!"

"Shihabara!" yelled Ms. Himeno.

“I’ll also participate,” said an elegant voice from across the room.

The girl in the wedding dress stood up. A lit candle stuck out of her head, yet she had the elegance of a princess with her.

She looked at a coin that someone must’ve dropped at the table in front of her.

Grabbing the coin, she began playing with it on her fingers as she smiled and looked towards everyone else.

“The fairy tells the truth, and whether or not anyone believes it, that witch will be coming for us, so there’s no stopping the confrontation.”

She flipped the coin, caught it with her hand, and deposited in a pocket.

“Also, I’d just gone through a tiresome exam earlier. I’m not looking forward to going back to normal,” she finished as she smiled.

“Right on!” exclaimed Umi happily.

“I’ll also join!”

Another voice, this time from a rainbow-colored girl, with a halo and a ring on her back.

“I-I may not know any of you, but I want to do some good! I’ll also join up in defeating this witch! Ta-Chan, you’ll come with me too, right?”

The rainbow girl looked at another girl. The other one with a mailman outfit. She simply sheepishly looked up, her answer as vague as it could be. No indication of anything.

“Mei will also join.”

Another voice, this time from the ceiling.

Umi looked up, and saw a girl with an Arabian genie outfit, floating upside down on the ceiling.

“Mei is a Magical Girl. Mei will help other Magical Girls.”

Umi had no idea who she was, but she was on Umi’s side, so that could only mean it’s a good thing.

“Alright, guys! That’s the spirit! Let’s all go and beat down this witch. 5 on 1? Not bad...” said Umi proudly.

“Wait! How are you guys so *casual* about this? We have nothing to go on, here!”

Kaori’s voice was practically begging to be heard. She was trying to appeal to everyone else’s sense of reasoning.

Ms. Himeno also stood up.

“All of you. You have no idea how dangerous this witch could be. I will not let some stranger drag you into this!”

Umi has had enough of Ms. Himeno’s constant complaints.

“We’ll be fine, Teach. Besides, you can’t stop us”

“Yes I can!”

“Why’s that, huh?”

“Because I’m your teacher, and what I say goes”

“That’s a lame reason, and I’m not going to listen to something like that when we’ve got a school to protect!”

“That’s *enough*, Shihabara!”

Slam!

Ms. Himeno had slammed on a desk, clearly angry at Umi’s outburst. However, after she slammed her fist down, Ms. Himeno herself was shocked at what happened as a result.

The table cracked in two, her strength obviously stronger than what she thought before.

Toko flew towards Ms. Himeno. Strangely, maybe because of the sunlight’s shade, Toko’s face looked more mature than before. Serious. Darker.

“You know, if you really wanted to get out, I won’t stop you. In fact, I could help you,” said the Fairy.

“Huh?”

“I can easily wipe your memory. Stop you from being a Magical Girl. After all, just losing 1 won’t be a problem. You’ll forget about all this. Your students, though, will still be Magical Girls, and this is still going to be real. Meaning if you really *really* wanted to protect your students...”

Ms. Himeno realized what Toko was going to say before Toko finished her sentence.

“...You’re going to want to stay a Magical Girl, and agree to let them fight alongside you. Help them. That’s the only way to protect them,” finished Toko with a smile.

The fairy then turned around to the students.

“Besides, it’s not just me that’ll be saved! Defeating an evil witch will save the whole world as well! You’ll all be doing your duty as Magical Girls! After all, Magical Girls before you have done the same, protect humans, and save the world!”

☆ **Tepsekemei**

Mei has become a Magical Girl.

Mei’s eyes were opened. Ever since she was born, nothing exciting has truly happened for her.

Until today.

Mei had forgotten what most days were like, but for the first time in her life, Mei had clarity in her mind. Her memories are as clear as day.

The winged human told her that there is a bad witch coming to the school. Thanks to her, Mei had been freed, and Mei had become a Magical Girl.

Therefore, Mei will repay that debt.

The feeling that freedom gives is amazing. For the first time in her life, if Mei wanted to

go somewhere, she could just go somewhere.

Mei could move her limbs freely, Mei could move her fingers freely, and Mei could fly too.

Mei didn't think that humans could fly, but Magical Girls aren't really normal humans to begin with, so this was a blessing to Mei, floating in the air like this.

Mei folded her arms. Why? Because she can. Her eyes darted across the room. She knew these kids, but didn't remember any of their names. Mei's memories were always a blur to her.

"Hey... Mei, is it? Are you... bored? It's okay if you don't want to join us, you know?"

The rainbow-colored girl had tugged on Mei's shoulders, as she was currently upside-down at the moment.

Mei spun around right-side up.

What was this girl talking about? Mei wasn't bored. Mei couldn't be more excited. This was the most exciting thing that's ever happened to Mei since the day she was born.

So why did the rainbow girl think Mei was bored?

Oh...

It must be because of Mei's facial expressions. Mei had never really expressed any facial expressions before. She never needed to.

Other people seemed to talk by changing their expressions as well as the tone of their voice. It's subtle, but apparently, this is how they convey feelings.

Maybe the rainbow girl will understand that Mei's excited if she did the same.

Mei gave a wide grin, and what she perceived as a happy face.

"MEI ISN'T BORED, MEI IS VERY EXCITED," she said in a loud voice. After all, the tone of your voice matters too when conveying emotions, right?

It looks like the rainbow girl flinched. Her face was a mix of confusion and fear. She slowly backed away. Perhaps she mistook Mei's loudness for anger?

A quick solution is to display the fact that Mei is in fact happy. What better way to do that than by laughter?

"HAHAHAHAHAHAHA"

The rainbow girl smiled, but the smile didn't seem like an actual happy smile. It felt more like an embarrassed smile.

"S-Sorry for asking..." she said as she stepped back.

The nuances of this 'expression' thing is still new to Mei. She will have to understand and learn more about it before she can proceed in communication, it seems.

☆ **Captain Grace**

Umi was never able to do what she wanted to do.

Both her parents always warned her of the dangers of venturing out by yourself. But what's the point of life if you're just going to sit around doing nothing?

Safety is meaningless if it means being bored out of your life. A true adventurer will be safe regardless of what happens. Besides, what's life without a little danger?

Now, Umi is experiencing the same argument with Ms. Himeno.

Umi understood the social hierarchy of the school system. Students obey teachers because they're of a higher position than you, and for the most part, Umi had always done that...

...But now, Ms. Himeno is directly getting in the way of an actual adventure.

When you have to choose between following the social order and following your dreams that you've had since you were young, you'll obviously choose your dreams.

Umi would sacrifice anything to live out her dreams as an adventurer. She won't give in to a teacher, especially not after she's staring at her dream in the face.

Luckily for her, the Fairy, Toko, seems to have solved the solution. Now, Ms. Himeno will have to join them for this adventure, whether she wants to or not. Fine by Umi.

After everyone is in agreement, Toko motioned over towards the window. She pointed towards the parking lot. Normally full of cars, it was now quite empty.

"We're going to fight the evil witch over there!" said Toko.

"Wait, over there? Aren't we supposed to keep our abilities a secret?" asked Umi in a puzzled voice.

"Don't worry about it! As long as we finish up before the police or whoever show up, you guys should be fine!" reassured Toko.

The small fairy flew towards the front of the Science Lab, floating where the teacher would be.

While folding her arms, she spoke loudly,

"Now, the evil witch can track down Magical Girls, so we need a plan of attack! You all will disguise yourselves as normal and hide in several places around the parking lot. That way, you can surprise her!"

One by one, Toko had assigned hiding spots. Each Magical Girl hiding as normal, paired up with each other.

Umi and Kayo were hidden near some bushes, the 1st years were hiding in the shadow of a building, the wedding-dressed girl and Ms. Himeno were hiding behind a car, and the Arabian dressed girl was hiding under the sewers.

Toko positioned herself above the traffic light in the intersection leading up to the school.

All the girls were waiting anxiously.

The month was the end of October. The cold winds of Autumn were slowly transitioning into the Winter breeze, and normally, nobody would be willing to wait this long out in the cold.

Umi's entire body felt the chill of the wind, but Umi didn't care. Her thirst for adventure overcame any chill that she felt in the air.

It's now been over 5 minutes. Anxiously awaiting this evil witch that Toko said would come.

At this point, the nervousness of Umi had caused her to sweat, despite the freezing temperature. She wanted to leap into action. If the witch didn't come, they should come to her.

"She's here."

A voice from Umi's phone, Toko's voice, had sounded. Filtered through the static of the phone.

Umi's heart jumped. Now is the time. She's been waiting for this moment. She snuck a peek outside, and saw what seemed to be a car of some sort, pulling up in front of the traffic light.

Exiting the car was a hooded figure, wearing what seemed to be some sort of slippers. The figure had a coat on her, the hood hiding her facial features, and approached the traffic light.

The hooded girl looked up at the traffic light.

"Toko" she said, with a soft but threatening voice. The evil witch!

"O-hoo, you've come at last. Persistent," answered Toko, full of confidence above the traffic lights.

"Surrender yourself now, or we'll have to do it the hard way."

The coat girl went straight to the point. She's truly an evil witch...

"I don't think so... *Now!*"

The signal.

All the girls rushed the coat girl, transformed into Magical Girls. Umi's transformation was quick. Now, she was once again the pirate captain, Captain Grace!

☆ **Funny Trick**

Kayo was not confident about this at all. Nobody knew just what- or who- they were fighting.

Umi immediately transformed, so Kayo had to do it too. They were all rushing towards this girl, presumably this evil witch.

In Kayo's mind, she could see two problems with this.

The first one is, what if this witch isn't as bad as they thought? They know nothing about Toko or this person.

The second problem, if this witch really is bad, then how are they going to beat her? They still know *nothing* about her.

With over 6 Magical Girls rushing the coated girl from all directions, it seemed like there was no way the coated girl could escape.

However, the coated girl simply gasped from the initial shock, and dodged away.

The coat she used to hide herself flew off when she jumped away, and Kayo could finally get a good look at this mysterious girl.

Wearing what seems to be a white kimono, the girl had light blue hair, and bright red eyes. Long white stockings.

What's most interesting about her appearance, however, is the large bunny ears sticking out of her head, and large earmuffs where her ears would normally be.

The rabbit-eared girl took a moment to look at each of the 6 girls, but before Kayo knew it, the other girls had rushed to attack her once again.

"T-There's too many! It's a trap!" she yelled out towards the car.

From inside the car, a window rolled down, revealing a girl with a witch hat.

"Fall back! Get back in here, now!"

Kayo stood still, trying to process the situation. Obviously their enemies were also Magical Girls of some kind, but her inner doubt still nagged at her mind.

It didn't seem to affect the other girls though, as they still ran towards the rabbit-eared girl. No escape for her.

However...

The rainbow Magical Girl and the wedding dressed girl double-teamed the rabbit-eared girl.

Rainbow girl threw a punch, which was caught by rabbit-eared girl. The momentum was used to push the rainbow girl towards the wedding-dressed girl. They both tumbled to the ground.

Umi and Ms. Himeno then tried to attack. Ms. Himeno, with some flowing ribbons, attempted to tie up the rabbit-eared girl, but again, the rabbit-eared girl caught the ribbon, placed it on the ground, and stepped on it.

The sudden pull yanked Ms. Himeno off-balance. The rabbit girl continued to hold the ribbon. Twirled it around, and used it to tie up the Mailman Magical Girl.

The poor girl was one of the first years. It's obvious from her nervousness that she wasn't used to a fight.

Umi's turn this time.

Umi performed a roundhouse kick with her right leg that was blocked by the rabbit-eared girl. However, Umi smiled, and with her other leg, jumped and kicked her using her left leg this time.

Not expecting the sudden change in fighting ability, the rabbit girl was kicked away by Umi.

The Genie Magical Girl was floating in the sky, rushing to help Umi.

Umi ran as fast as she could towards the rabbit girl. The rabbit girl herself didn't lose any tempo, and rolled when she landed, transitioning smoothly to standing up again.

Now prepared for Umi, the rabbit girl was a different opponent than before.

As soon as Umi went in for the punch, the rabbit girl caught it and tried to use Umi's momentum to throw Umi off-balance.

Umi, used to fighting, managed to strengthen her stance after being pulled.

Umi's elbow was now poised to attack the rabbit girl's stomach. Smiling once more, Umi wanted to curve her elbows to strike at the rabbit girl, but...

...The rabbit girl anticipated it, and used her leg to sweep Umi's legs, tripping her.

Umi reacted fast and rolled away, standing up, trying to rush the rabbit girl again.

The genie Magical Girl was now in full speed in the air, attempting to crash into the rabbit girl from behind her.

Umi ran towards the rabbit girl from the front, genie girl was divebombing her from the back.

Pincer attack.

Rabbit girl's ears twitched.

Rabbit girl reacted fast. She jumped towards Umi. Umi flinched at the sudden charge, and in that split second, the rabbit girl's jump transitioned to a jumping kick, aimed straight at Umi.

The rabbit girl kicked Umi away, and used the momentum to backflip away from Umi, jumping higher than the divebomb trajectory...

...and putting Umi right in the path of genie girl.

Genie girl couldn't stop her rush, and crashed into Umi as rabbit girl landed her backflip.

"Help! Help, please!"

A voice snapped Kayo out of the fight scene she saw. It was the mailman girl, and she was trapped underneath the ribbons.

They were all tied up around her now, and there was no way to get them off of her.

Kayo remembered her own Magical Skill.

Replace things that are hidden with something else.

She saw a trash can nearby, and ran over to it. Opening the can revealed some recycled bottles and soda.

She closed the trash can with a lid, and had an idea.

As if reacting to her thoughts, she noticed a piece of cloth sticking out of her gloves. Like a stage magician, she pulled it out to reveal a large white cloth, enough to hide a person.

She went over to the mailman girl.

“Sorry! Hold still, okay! Moving will make it worse”

She covered the girl in the cloth. Focused. Concentrated.

She then lifted the cloth away, and now, the ribbons that were once tying up the mailman girl were surrounding some bottles and soda cans.

The nearby trash can tripped over, and from inside, the mailman girl fell out.

“Gah! Guh...”

She was covered in whatever was inside that trash can.

Maybe that wasn't the *best* switch in the world.

“S-Sorry!” said Kayo with an embarrassed smile.

Thump, Crash!

From behind her, she heard noises. Umi was getting beaten up and thrown around everytime she tried to attack the rabbit girl, but she *is* actually holding her own.

The rabbit girl screamed at the car.

“Meet me back at the meeting point! I'll run away myself!”

Oh right. There was a car.

The girl in the car gritted her teeth.

“...Damn it. Okay. We'll split up for now. Fall back!”

The car swerved and revved up, and began to drive in the opposite direction.

“Hey! Hey! Get that *car!*” shouted Toko towards the magical girls.

The rainbow girl ran over to the mailman girl.

“Ta-Chan! C'mon!” she said as she dragged the mailman girl up.

“Gah! K-Kaori, wai- WHOAAA”

Too late for mailman girl. Both of them were now running at full speed, trying to chase the car.

Meanwhile, Umi, wedding-dress girl, and genie girl were already prepared for round 2 with rabbit girl.

Ms. Himeno, however, was indecisive.

Kayo didn't want to participate. She never wanted to cooperate with Toko in the first place.

It's not that she didn't want to fight, or that she couldn't fight. However, she just had no idea of the *reasons* she was fighting for, and without that crucial information, she can't make a decision on what to do.

Toko and these two girls that are after her. They are both in conflict.

The question that needs to be answered is why...

The rabbit girl didn't even seem to want to kill the girls, in which case Kayo would happily join in to protect her friends.

Instead, Kayo watched, anticipating what to do next.

☆ **Rain Pou**

The car that drove off was fast. It was faster than any car should be. Could it be enhanced with magic?

Fortunately, since Kaori was a Magical Girl, she could easily keep up with the car. But it took a lot out of her, since she was pushing the limits of her stamina to do so.

Lagging behind her was Tatsuko, gasping for breath as she ran. Unlike Kaori, Tatsuko has always been less outgoing. Even with her inhuman speed, Tatsuko's finding it hard to keep up.

Kaori stopped and ran back to Tatsuko.

"Ta-Chan? Are you okay?"

"Hah... Hah... I'm okay..."

Kaori couldn't bear to see her friend tired like this. She didn't even think Tatsuko wanted to be a part of this.

"Ta-Chan. New plan, okay. We'll trap them. You take that way, I'll go this way. They'll have nowhere to run," said Kaori with a smile.

Tatsuko looked up and nodded.

The two split up, and Kaori jumped. She jumped high enough to reach the taller skyscrapers, and skipped and hopped across the buildings.

She caught wind of the car.

The car was also defying the laws of physics. It didn't slow down when turning, it didn't show any signs of stopping.

That shouldn't be physically possible, but Kaori can't question it. Not now.

She continued to leap across the buildings, tracking down the car as it swerves and moves alongside the busy city streets.

Finally, an intersection she can jump down to.

She dropped down to street level, and... encountered a middle-aged woman and a little boy, staring at awe at Kaori.

Considering her suit and the fact that she just jumped down a skyscraper, Kaori wasn't sure how to react.

"Ehehe... Happy Halloween!" said Kaori with a smile.

The middle-aged woman nodded, "Ah... It's October..."

Kaori immediately ran when they weren't looking. She had to follow the car. She couldn't lose it now.

She turned across an intersection and was face-to-face with the speeding car. Finally, the car was headed towards Kaori. She can stop it. She had the speed, and the strength.

The car's window opened, and a hand threw pebbles and gravel towards her.

Kaori was at her guard, but had no idea what they were.

The pebbles then began to explode into bright light. Flashing bright that Kaori couldn't help but be blinded and stunned.

She braced herself and shielded her eyes, but by the time she opened them again, the car was already gone.

☆ **Captain Grace**

This rabbit-eared girl is tough.

The others, they're not used to fighting. They're not used to school brawls or athletic events. They're not used to putting their well-being at line.

But Umi was. Umi was used to that, and Umi won't lose to any opponent, no matter how strong they think they are.

But this rabbit girl is something else.

Even with 3 Magical Girls attacking from all directions at once, she gracefully danced through them, dodging and blocking every attack made.

Then, with one fell swoop, she easily pushed them away.

Umi wasn't going to let her get away so easily, though.

Now was the time to be serious.

Umi unsheathed her cutlass. A powerful sharp sword. Twirling it for a bit, she then began to pose in a swordsman's stance.

The rabbit-eared girl perked up, and prepared to engage her.

Umi made the first move, striking with a slash, but the rabbit-eared girl simply dodged it. Umi moved fast, slashing and stabbing, but the rabbit-eared girl was too fast. Her guard was up, and Umi couldn't break through.

They were locked in combat, Umi just needed one opening. One opening to strike.

Umi trusted her instincts, thrusting and slashing until she saw her chance. At last, when the rabbit girl is positioned in a more awkward vertical position, Umi immediately slashed horizontally, believing she could not possibly dodged this.

Unfortunately for her, the rabbit girl sensed it, and with her speed, dropped to all fours.

It was then that the rabbit girl quickly turned around and kicked Umi away with her legs.

Umi lost her balance, and saw the rabbit girl run away. But she wasn't running on two legs, she was running away on all 4. Dashing away like an actual rabbit.

Umi gave chase.

The rabbit girl was fast. She used her four-legged running speed to climb and bounce and run across the city, attempting to shake off Umi.

Umi did the best she could to follow her, and was gaining on the rabbit girl.

Just...

...A few...

...More...

Umi stretched her hands, about to grab a cloth of the rabbit girl's Kimono,, when she felt a sharp pain in her thigh.

Umi tripped over, tumbling and rolling as she did. Her thigh was in pain, and when she saw it, it had blood.

The rabbit girl hadn't kicked her. Was there someone hidden? Who?

Either way, the rabbit girl had ran off somewhere, and Umi had missed her chance.

☆ **Wedin (Remaining Time: 23 Hours, 50 Minutes)**

Mine Musubiya had always looked at things from an objective perspective. Her family and her parents had taught her this way of life.

Calculate something from how much you gain vs. how much you lose.

She had lived life this way, and it has served her well.

Favors, kindness, all will be repaid with favors and kindness. Help your friends, and they'll help you. However, if there was a way to get a one-up, don't hesitate to take it.

Using this way of life, she has managed to become Class Representative.

The current situation is unique.

Mine had become a Magical Girl. The gains far outweigh any losses involved.

Even though they had lost the battle, they had learned how to use their powers and abilities. A net gain, not a loss.

The loss, however, was that the enemy now knows about them. They will be prepared next time.

Mine's Magical Skill was not combat-oriented. It is a Promise-based power.

Her Magical Skill:

To enforce any promises kept.

How that works, she's not quite sure just yet. However, it could be useful should the time come to pass.

"Argh, we lost 'em... We gotta try harder, you guys!" cried Toko once all the girls have returned.

"Some of us weren't helping in the fight," said the pirate girl, staring at the stage magician.

"Wha... I was! I just didn't want to fight because I don't know anything about them,

okay?” retaliated the stage magician.

“What’s not to know? They’re bad. We’re good.”

“U-Umi-Chan, what proof do you have?”

“They *tried* to capture Toko, or else they’d beat her up!”

“That *barely* counts!”

“Oh, so now the bullies are the good guys?”

They were arguing. There was tension.

“Okay, guys! Enough! We’ll have to think of a new plan! Next time they come won’t be easy, so let’s prepare ourselves, okay?” exclaimed Toko

The rainbow girl nodded. The mailman girl also nodded, more reluctantly.

“Mei has failed you. Mei will try harder,” said the genie girl in the air.

“Alright, I’m in, what about you, Teach?” asked the pirate girl.

“We... don’t really have a choice, do we?”

Ms. Himeno, in a dress filled with ribbons, also nodded reluctantly.

“Alright, what about you, Ms. Class Rep? You in?”

The pirate girl now faced Mine.

No, not Mine. Her name is Wedin. She had fully embraced her role as a Magical Girl.

“I’m not the Class Representative.”

“Huh? Sure you are. Rep Musubiya, right?”

“No. That is who I was. Now, I am the Magical Girl known as Wedin. If I recall correctly, you are Captain Grace, correct? It’s nice to meet you”

“Aaah, right, we gotta start adopting our codenames, guys! Well then, Captain Grace, ready for duty! What about you, *Funny Trick*?”

The stage magician breathed a deep sigh.

“For now... I don’t have a choice. I’m in... for now,” she said with a face that looked as if she’s conflicted about her choice.

The day had started normally, but now... Now they were Magical Girls.

CHAPTER 2

DROWNING IN LOVE AND HEARTS

☆ 7753

A baseball player takes time after a big game to stop a crime happening just a few blocks away.

A gunfight ends with all the shooters incapacitated, and one hero standing in all the chaos.

A terrorist cell stopped immediately, no casualties, just sightings of someone flying away.

These are all stories of Magical Girls. Magical Girls who pursue the ideals of justice and heroism. Unfortunately, not every Magical Girl is like this.

It's far too easy to find Magical Girls that pursue their own pride or do good things for selfish reasons. After all, they're people too. Most of the truly heroic ones are ones you only find in fiction.

Kotori Nanaya is the Magical Girl 7753, pronounced "Nanako-San".

Clad in a black buttoned-up dress, a hat, and hair that's braided to make a gigantic heart shape. She had heart tattoos in the back of her palms, and a small one underneath her left eye.

She definitely looks the part of a Magical Girl.

She has had 7 years of experience as a Magical Girl, but that didn't exactly mean much, considering she doesn't see much action in the field.

Right now, she's in the middle of her training drills.

A large field, filled with boulders and rocks positioned in different places, some further than others. 7753 made quick work of them, being timed as to see how she reaches each and every boulder, destroying them with precision strikes each time.

7753's Magical Skill is her goggles that she wears.

'The ability to gather information'.

Her goggles can find any information about a target. Just like an RPG status screen.

Their name, age, power, eye color, pinching strength.

It could be as specific or broad as needed. 7753 need only adjust her goggles to do so. They are quantified using a 5-point system.

However, it's also possible to find unquantifiable information.

Hobbies, likes, dislikes, dreams, friends.

Thanks to her skills, 7753 had been assigned as an information gatherer. She's also part of the team that finds possible rogue Magical Girls, as nothing can hide from her goggles.

7753 works in the Human Resources Division of the Land of Magic. She's also in charge of recruitment. At least, narrowing down possible candidates for Magical Girls.

First, she'd try to find their strengths, their beliefs, anything to convince her that they're fit to become a hero of justice.

They could come from anywhere.

A boxing player, a writer, a train conductor, a manga artist, a jobless homeless person.

It also has good pay, which is what 7753 needs right now.

Her parents had passed away a couple of years ago, and she lives by herself, with only some relatives to talk to. Family issues have been turbulent ever since her parents passed.

Work and money is what keeps 7753's human life going at the moment, and being the Land of Magic's information gatherer was pretty much good job security.

But life as a recruiter and an information gatherer is rather... boring. 7 years, and none of it was fieldwork.

7753 wanted to do something for the world. She had trained so hard because the world might be in crisis. However, all of her previous mentors had always said the same thing.

"It's not your time yet"

"The world isn't going to end tomorrow"

"Worry about protecting the city before protecting the planet"

Thanks to her constant attitude, the Land of Magic often had to switch her to different mentors.

Her new mentor right now seems like a dependable person. She feels different than the previous mentors.

The first time 7753 met her, she could feel an air of grace and royalty. However, when she spoke, it was with a calm, down-to-earth voice.

After a few months, her mentor noticed 7753's reluctance in training and writing reports.

"S-Sorry, Master. You can tell huh? Yeah, it's... not gonna lie, boring work," admitted 7753.

Her mentor only nodded slowly, and asked if she could borrow 7753's goggles for a day.

The next day after that, her mentor had returned her goggles. New and improved, somehow.

"Now you can instantly transmit information. They also have tons of more useful features as well," said her mentor calmly.

"Wha-Huh? How!? These things are one of a kind. How'd you-"

"I didn't. A close friend of mine did."

Since then, 7753's bond with her mentor had grown.

But now it's been a year, and she's still doing the same thing over and over. No change.

Nothing.

7753 felt like having the talk again. This is the talk that usually makes or breaks a mentor. Most of them would find her too rebellious, or unable to be handled. Her new mentor is different, though, so maybe it'll turn out differently.

With a deep breath, heart beating, she strode over to her mentor, on her training field, with crumbled and destroyed boulders in the back.

"You've gotten faster. Good job," said her mentor.

"Thanks... Um... Master, I wanted to ask you something," said 7753, with a nervous look in her eyes.

"Hm?"

"I want to work in the field."

"Hm... Interesting request, 7753"

"P-Please, just give me a chance. I've been working here 7 years. I know how to defend myself. I just- Maybe you could pull some strings, y'know, it's- it's just..."

7753 was beginning to lose her words. She'd been through this routine with her other mentors. Finding the right reasons.

She paused. Took a deep breath, and with a determined look on her face, she said,

"I just want to do some good in the world."

"You're not satisfied with your position now?"

"I-I wanna be someone that helps people directly, someone that saves their lives... I wanna be like Snow White!"

"The Magical Girl Hunter? Fairly dangerous job description."

"Okay, maybe not *that* high up, but look. She's stopped terrorists, she's saved people, she's a hero."

"Fieldwork is dangerous work, 7753."

"I know that... I just... Give me a chance."

Her mentor smiled.

It's been a few days after they had the talk. Kotori was having a business trip in B-City. It's a smaller, yet still pretty crowded city. Unlike the large metropolitan N-City.

The business trip had to do with Magical Girl business. A probation period for another Magical Girl.

The hotel that Kotori stayed in was quite spacious, even though she wished it could be a bit bigger.

Waking up, she washed her face. She hadn't been taking good care of her human body mostly. Her hair is constantly messy, and after a morning shower, only then she realized just how her human self looked.

For most of her time, she had stayed as a Magical Girl. It's more practical that way. She only ever needed to change back to human if she needed to.

She drank coffee while watching the news. Several clips of high school students were shown, reminding Kotori of her own youth.

She's an adult now, but as a Magical Girl, she certainly looked young enough to be a high schooler. Sometimes she wished she was still that young.

Kotori decided it was time to take care of her human appearance.

She opened up a map on her phone, found the nearest salon, and called them up, looking to make an appointment. Next, a nice morning walk would get her human muscles up and running again.

She needed to stay fit in both forms after all!

The nearest park would do.

A quick stroll later, and she was interrupted by a phone call. The words on the screen were clear. It was her mentor.

She doesn't usually call. She mostly uses texts.

Regardless, Kotori picked up the phone.

"Hello, this is 7753"

"Good. I've got an announcement, and it's fairly important."

"What is it, Master?"

"You're being assigned to an investigation team"

The words had reached her ears, but she still couldn't process it. Reassignment. Investigation. Team.

"Wait... sorry, slow down, come again?"

"An Investigation Team. There's been an incident in B-City. They're asking for you to help out. In the field"

"I... whoa, wait... huh?"

"You wanted this, right? There is time to decline if you wish. You have until the end of the day. I'll send you an e-mail with further details."

"Whoa, Master, wait, wait... could you... elaborate?"

"I'm not going to lie. This job is dangerous, but that's fieldwork. Recently, a Magical Girl assassin has been sighted in B-City. There's been an assassination."

"What? An assassination? Here? Now?"

"Yes. This job... I can't guarantee your safety. If you accept, you should know that there is a possibility of dying. However, your team is there to help you."

Death? 7753 could die?

"W-Who am I dealing with, here?"

“From what I understand, they’re tracking down a dangerous assassin, expected it to only be one, but they encountered resistance. Lots of resistance. The rest of the details are in the e-mail I’ll send you. Read them over, and make your decision.”

Kotori gulped.

“O-Okay... Thanks, Master.”

“One more thing, 7753. At the end of the day, there will be a barrier erected around the city. It’s invisible to those without Magical Skills, and won’t affect them, but this will essentially be a quarantine.”

“Huh?”

“If you choose to stay... you can’t escape. Good luck, and stay safe.”

Kotori’s heart skipped a beat.

It’s been a few hours since the call. Now at the park, Kotori took a look at the e-mail she was sent.

The target is an assassin. Identity unknown. Last seen within the boundaries of the city. The victim is a high ranking Land of Magic official.

While their identity is currently unknown, it is known that the wounds they inflicted were lacerations and cuts. Possible weapons are bladed. E.G: Swords, Knives, Machetes, etc.

Collaborators include a Fairy named Toko. In possession of the latest model of Magical Phones. Tracking systems have been placed on prototypes in order to best know where she is at all times. Both were last seen in B-City.

Heading the Investigation team is Lead Examiner Mana of the Examination Division, Hana Gekokujo, a specialist in tracking individuals, and Mao Pam, of the Foreign Affairs Division.

So far it looks like things are in order. But bladed weapons, swords. The thought scared Kotori.

But this is what she asked for. She can’t back down, not now. Not after she’d wanted to do this for so long.

It’s either she does this now, or it’s back to 7 years of non-fulfilling work.

Kotori had made her choice.

On her way home, she passed through an intersection in traffic. That’s where she saw it. The barrier surrounding the city.

People were passing through it normally, but Kotori could see it. She wondered...

...Quarantine.

Somewhere within the city, there were dangerous Magical Girls on the loose. She’d passed the point of no return.

Kotori walked slowly towards the barrier. Slowly, she stretched her hand out. With her

finger, she gently placed it towards the barrier, and...

A sudden numbness struck her neck and spine. Like lightning jolting through. Her vision became blurry. Her ears felt like it popped. She heard nothing.

Her legs felt wobbly, and every part of her body felt pain.

She wanted to scream, but there was no voice.

She began coughing blood. Her legs too wobbly to support her. She fell down the street, and tried to stand up. She doesn't have the energy to do so, and began crawling instead.

Every other bystander was shocked. Someone then tried to help her, supporting her on their back.

Weakly, as Kotori's vision began to blur, she pointed to a general direction away from the barrier. The person carrying her nodded, as they rushed to that direction.

Slowly, Kotori began to regain her senses. Supporting herself on a nearby building.

She felt like death. It seems the barrier was effective at its job. Kotori was truly trapped within this city.

No choice. Time to move forward.

The meeting place was in a karaoke bar. A private room for a group.

7753 nervously looked around for the right room. Her palms were sweaty with nervousness. This is her first time on the field.

Here goes nothing.

Knock Knock.

She heard a voice from behind the door.

"Come in, please"

She opened the door, and saw 4 Magical Girls staring straight at her. Bad for her nervousness. Her body felt heavy.

4 Magical Girls.

...Wait, 4?



A Magical Girl with the white coat and glasses. She looks the leader-type certainly.

Sitting next to her was a rabbit-eared girl, smiling happily.

Across them was a Magical Girl clad in a black coat, and silver hair. Horns protruding out of her head.

And the last one.

A ninja Magical Girl. On her left eye was a scar. Some kind of bladed wound. And her left arm was... missing.

One-handed.

Instinctively, 7753 looked away.

The girl with the glasses had an angry look upon seeing 7753.

She spoke out loud,

“This is an investigation mission and we’re getting all these other people”

The rabbit-eared girl patted the glasses girl’s shoulders.

“Mana, calm down. We’ll need all the help we can get! Let’s give them a chance!”

The girl with glasses merely rolled her eyes.

Rabbit ears stood up, walked over towards 7753, and bowed down, smiling.

“My name is Hana Gekokujo. Call me Hana!”

7753 was startled. Her reaction was to also bow, lower than her partner.

“I-I’m 7753! It’s an honor to be working with you!!!”

“Haha, oh don’t worry. We’re all friends here. Over there in the white coat is Mana. The one in the black coat is Mao Pam.”

Mao Pam. In Japanese, Mao translates literally to the Devil. Her horns certainly do match. But her eyes and smile are as gentle as ever.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, 7753,” said Pam with a smile.

It seems 7753 was expecting some sort of demonic style Magical Girl, but perhaps names aren’t everything.

Hana continued, pointing towards the ninja in the back.

“Finally, that’s Ripple. She’s volunteered for the job as well.”

Ripple nodded her head.

Ripple... Ripple?

The name sounds familiar. Certainly 7753 has heard of her before, which means she must’ve filed a report on her once.

With 7 years of work reporting, it’s actually quite hard to remember when she heard of this girl, though. For now, she shouldn’t think hard about that.

Mana stood up.

“Well, now that the introductions are over, time to get to business.”

She pulled out what seemed to be a wand and witch hat, and placed them on the table.

“I’ll give a quick briefing,” she said as she looked at all present.

Hana took a spot next to Mana, and sat down.

7753 awkwardly stood there, with almost nowhere to sit since the seats seemed to be full. It was then that Ripple scooted over, offering 7753 a seat next to her.

Quickly, she shuffled towards the empty seat and sat down, silently thanking Ripple with a nod.

Now she felt bad for looking away earlier.

“Firstly, it seems that the Foreign Affairs department decided to quarantine us here, as I’m sure you’re *all* aware of.”

Mana gave an accusatory look towards Pam.

Pam simply shrugged and replied,

“There is a dangerous, potentially lethal assassin hiding out in the city. A quarantine is necessary.”

Mana sighed, and spoke, “How much time until the quarantine lifts?”

Pam checked her watch.

“We have roughly a day. Then the barrier unlocks. Should be enough time to find them,” she said.

Mana nodded, then began her speech,

“What we have are several Magical Girls protecting an escaped criminal. Illegal use of magic powers, as well as assault on a Land of Magic official. The sentence is to capture them, but if they threaten you, lethal force is granted.”

She folded her arms,

“Any questions?”

The room fell silent for a few moments. The dim light from the TV of the Karaoke room shone on the wall. On the screen was a famous idol group performing a song. The juxtaposition was awkward.

Ripple then raised her hand.

Mana grumbled in a low voice. It seemed like she didn’t want to be asked any more questions, even if she asked for some.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Do you know what she looks like?” said Ripple in a calm voice.

Mana looked over towards Hana.

“For now, the assassin herself is of unknown identity. We know she came here because of her mascot, Toko. We don’t know which one she is, we do know she has allies. They were dressed as a pirate, a stage magician, a genie, some rainbow colored suit, a pink ballerina, and a mailman. Any one of those could be our target.”

That’s a lot. How did whoever they’re chasing manage to get a lot of reinforcements in such a short amount of time.

“Sounds like an improbable amount of reinforcements, in such a short amount of time.”

said Ripple, echoing 7753's thoughts.

"Exactly. All of them will be sentenced the same."

"Why is that?" asked Ripple once more.

"I just explained their crimes."

"You're sure of that?" asked Ripple again. Her voice ever so calm.

Mana glared at Ripple.

"Are you sympathizing with them, Ripple?" accused Mana.

"No. I'm giving the benefit of the doubt. We know nothing about them."

"We know *enough*. They willingly helped the assassin. They certainly weren't forced, and they voluntarily attacked and chased us. That makes them guilty of the crime."

"Hardly. You're being too emotional with this one. Assume they're innocent."

"Assume they're *innocent*? I just told you what they did."

"Think about the situation. The assassin all of a sudden has new Magical Girls pop out of nowhere. Which is more probably, that these girls were under her employment the whole time, or that they have no clue what's going on?"

Mana slammed the table.

"Listen, smartass. This girl is a highly dangerous assassin. Did you forget that she killed a Land of Magic official? In cold blood as well. We are *far* beyond sympathy. Now, you volunteered to lend us your fighting ability, not your hypotheticals. I'm leading this team, so I'd appreciate it if you would shut the hell up and focus on the mission. Do I make myself clear?"

There was a silence. The dim light of the television set illuminated the room. The song of a popular idol group was playing on the TV. Despite the cheerful background music, it was eerily awkward.

Ripple closed her eyes and nodded,

"Understood."

Thank god, that could've turned ugly.

Mana took a deep breath and backed off.

"Good. Well, that's the briefing."

"Whenever possible, stay in your Magical Girl forms. In case we're ambushed. Use coats or thick clothing to hide any non-human looking parts. It's near winter, so it shouldn't look out of place," added Mana.

She walked out of the karaoke room. The rest stood up.

Ripple mumbled in a low voice,

"This is not going to end well..."

Upon closer inspection of Ripple's wounds, it would appear that they're not by design.

Certainly, a Magical Girl could have a scarface looking design. A scarred ninja could be considered cool in some circles.

However, Ripple's scar was way too real to be a part of her outfit. Which means that arm that she lost was from a past incident as well.

What happened to her?

Ripple shrugged and glanced at 7753.

"Wonderful way to start my probation, I guess..." said Ripple.

Oh. That's why she was familiar.

7753's job was to figure out who was fit to become Magical Girls. She also had the job of scouter of the Human Resources Division.

One of the Magical Girls that were scheduled to be on probation period today was Ripple. Before Ripple could enter as an official Land of Magic representative, she had to undergo a probation period.

7753's business trip to B-City was to oversee that probation period as well, at least that was her original plan.

7753 began putting on her goggles. She started seeing all of Ripple's stats.

Age, Height, Weight, Interests. Probation Period, scheduled for today.

7753 had felt bad for Ripple, so she tapped Ripple's shoulder, hoping to start a conversation.

"Hey. Ripple, right? It's nice to meet you. I'm your examination officer. So, this is kind of a weird setup, but I'm sure it'll work out well. Examinations in your home turf often do! Let's just treat this mission as the probation alright? I gotta say, you live pretty far in B-City. Had to take the train to get here."

Ripple raised one of her eyebrows, in a questioning look.

"Wait... you don't live here?" asked Ripple.

"Ah, no, I don't. Don't *you* live here, Ripple?"

"No. I live in N-City, not B-City."

"Eh?"

That's a far off place. Why did Ripple come here? Did she really do it to volunteer? Why would her probation test be held in B-City if it wasn't?

7753 had assumed that Ripple happened to be in the area, but that's unlikely if the cities are as far apart as B-City and N-City.

7753's Magical Phone rang. On the caller ID was simply displayed. 'Boss'. It was her mentor.

"Ah, Ripple. Go on ahead, I'll catch up in a bit! I have to take this call."

Ripple nodded, and left the room. Pam, Hana, and Mana are gone as well.

7753 pressed the Answer button,

“Yes, this is 7753.”

“Seems you’ve linked up with the others. Good job.”

Involuntarily, 7753 looked around. She was confused. How had her mentor known where she was or what happened. Did she have some way of seeing her? Was she here with her?

“Don’t be so surprised, 7753. I’m not nearby. Your goggles transmit any information you have, remember. That’s how I know you’ve grouped up,” explained her mentor calmly.

“Ah, okay, that makes sense...”

“Don’t worry. I won’t be able to monitor you if you remove your goggles. In a way, you control your own privacy. Nice meeting place, by the way. Karaoke place. Never would’ve thought of that.”

Again, 7753 felt a chill every time her mentor mentioned something accurate. It was as if her mentor was here with her, even though she’s not physically here.

“Um, Master... isn’t it a bit... intrusive?”

“You’re one to talk. You haven’t exactly told your allies about your powers. Finding out all their secrets, likes, dislikes. That’s also quite intrusive. I’m merely seeing through your eyes.”

“Well... Um...”

“It’s fine, 7753. I’m not here to talk about ethics. I’m here to discuss something else.”

As 7753 exited towards the parking lot. Her path was blocked by Mana. Not realizing what was going on, she merely stopped.

Then she noticed that behind her, Hana, with a green coat, rabbit ears tucked inside, also flanked her back.

Mana’s eyebrows were furrowed, angry.

“Ripple, Pam. We’re going to have a personal talk with 7753 right now. Leave us be.”

Ripple shook her head,

“This is really not the time or place-”

“You’re right. This isn’t. Which begs the question. Just what exactly were you talking about with your boss, 7753?” asked Mana.

7753 was surprised. It seemed that Mana may have overheard her talking on the phone with her mentor. How?

As a sign of innocence, 7753 raised both her hands up.

Mana walked up in front of 7753. Face to face. Centimeters away. She was actually far more threatening up close.

“Just who the hell are you supposed to be? We were never supposed to get assistance, and now we’re getting offers from every single Division. Now *you* show up and we find out

you're *spying* on us?" said Mana in a low, threatening voice.

7753's forehead began sweating. She had no idea just what she was supposed to say. Her heartrate increased, and she felt hot under the pressure.

"Listen, I'm not spying on you. I don't know why you think that. I was assigned here," explained 7753.

"Bullshit," exclaimed Mana as she grabbed 7753 by the collar, raising her up and pushing her towards a wall.

Then, Mana pointed towards her goggles.

"Don't play dumb. You thought you could disguise your talks with your boss, but you're sending information to her."

"No! No I'm not. That's my Magical Skill! It doesn't work if I don't wear it in my eyes. I- If you heard my conversation, surely you heard that part! B-Besides. With my powers, we can easily find the assassin. It doesn't matter if she's in human form. My goggles will tell me if she's a Magical Girl."

Mana remained silent, still grabbing 7753 by the collar.

"What do you know? Tell me the truth."

Gulp.

"I-I know you're an Investigation Team. You're sent to find an assassin or a killer or someone. I know that your intel says she's hiding here. Anything other than that, I've heard from your briefing."

Silence. Mana still grabbing 7753's collar. Her eyes were hard to read. She was gritting her teeth, and veins were still popping out of her forehead.

7753 then spoke once more,

"I-I know there's a barrier stretched alongside B-City. We're in a quarantine, right?"

"Yes... yes we are. What about it?"

"W-Well. It doesn't just trap the killer. It traps the mascot, it traps us, it traps anyone with magical powers, right? It seems pretty drastic... Also, it probably costs a lot of magic, so... something like that isn't prepared so suddenly."

Mana began to loosen the grip.

"What are you implying?"

"I don't... I don't think you wanted the barrier. I think you and Hana personally wanted to lead the mission alone, but when you requested for help, you got more than you bargained for..."

"The barrier is necessary."

A voice, not Mana's. It was Pam's. Mao Pam spoke, folding her arms.

"My Division received reports of a dangerous and lethal Magical Girl on the loose. We've prepared the barrier for a while now. Once we pinpointed her location, we had the barrier

set up immediately. Believe me when I say that the benefits outweigh the costs. Now the assassin is trapped with *us*.”

7753 tried to speak up,

“But that’s not what I’m doing. I honestly just want to help out. I was assigned here, no questions asked.”

Mana released 7753. She dropped and staggered backwards. Mana shook her head and glared at both 7753 and Pam.

“Enough. You two think you’re so different but you’re the same. Foreign Affairs, Human Resources, all these Divisions... You all and your petty political infighting. You’re both trying to win influence from the higher ups to support your own division. It’s stupid. It’s petty.”

Her glare stung deep in 7753. Although 7753 herself didn’t believe she wanted to do all those things that Mana mentioned, she knew that the Divisions had always had internal fighting.

They had always strived to become the more important ones. Like factions in a war, the more influence they have, the more they can affect the Land of Magic’s decisions.

Mana turned her back on the both of them, Hana walking besides her.

“I don’t care about your politics. I’m here to catch a murderer. I’m trying to save lives.”

7753 breathed a sigh of relief. Oxygen flowed towards her again.

Mana stopped in her tracks, and glared at 7753.

“You still haven’t answered my question. Who are you. Why did you come to B-City in the first place?”

7753 pointed towards Ripple.

“Her. She’s under my watch,” replied 7753.

Mana raised her eyebrows.

“Ripple? Well. I’m not sure if you HR people are told about current events, but... do you know who Ripple really is?” asked Mana.

A silence. 7753 honestly didn’t know, as she didn’t have time to look over Ripple’s full data.

“I’ll tell you. She’s a *Children of Cranberry*. Survived her tests. Last-minute too. Rumor has it that she suffered wounds that should’ve killed her. If there’s one thing you can count on her for, it’s fighting, despite her... handicaps. You trust her?” asked Mana.

7753 glanced over at Ripple.

Ripple was expressionless. Her face devoid of any readable emotion.

7753 nodded.

“Ripple is my responsibility. For now, she’s officially under my watch. I’ll be her probation officer.”

“And what if she snaps? You don’t have combat experience to take her down, do you?” threatened Mana.

7753 backed away. She straightened her back. Took a deep breath, and lowered her tone of voice a few octaves.

“I think that’s a possibility with all the participants here. Mao Pam herself is a powerful Magical Girl too, no?”

7753 didn’t move. Her stare was intense, focusing on Mana’s eyes. She mustn’t lose to this intimidation battle. Can’t show any type of weakness at all. This way, the investigation can continue.

Luckily, Pam responded,

“That’s true. I could be considered a liability. Rest assured, I won’t use my full power until we find our assassin. As for any of our own turning against us. Rest assured that I’m prepared for that as well.”

Mana looked at both of them. Grumbling, she closed her eyes, turned around, and finally continued walking.

7753 sighed. Silently, she thanked her mentor. Her mentor had been providing instructions through her goggles on how to act to escape Mana’s scrutiny.

‘Tell her you’re here for Ripple’

‘Walk backwards a few steps’

‘Lower your tone, then mention Mao Pam. She’s practically more dangerous than Ripple.’

If it weren’t for her mentor, she probably would have no idea what to say. Fortunately, nobody else knew that her goggles did have a communication function.

For now, their problems are far worse than just infighting, and 7753 would do good to keep an eye on her own team as well as the assassin.

But 7753 also wasn’t lying. Ripple was her duty. 7753 was sent here to supervise a probation. This way she can kill two birds with one stone. She just hoped that the actual process will go smoothly.

☆ **Ripple (Remaining Time: 22 Hours, 30 Minutes)**

The Magical Girls surrounding Ripple right now come from the Land of Magic. Unlike normal Magical Girls, these were high ranking officials, assigned the dangerous tasks and assignments that are too much for the regular Magical Girls to handle.

If Ripple wanted to join their ranks, she’d have to fulfill one condition.

A probation period, supervised by the head examiner 7753. In accordance with Ripple’s participation in Cranberry’s tests, the Land of Magic doesn’t trust any Magical Girls that come out of it.

For 2 years, Ripple had been working to root out any rogue Magical Girls, and generally keep the world safe. Unfortunately, she lacks any detailed intel, and to get more, she’d have to join the Land of Magic.

She hated the Land of Magic. Their bureaucracy and internal politics didn't interest her, and in fact made her hate them more.

But she wasn't looking to overthrow them or anything. If she wanted to change the system, she'd have to change it from the inside.

Ripple had a friend, or at least the only one she could call a close friend now. She was already inside the Land of Magic. Now she was protecting the world. She was out there doing some good.

But she also changed. Ripple remembered her when she was a naïve carefree child. Now, she was ruthless and aggressive. The only thing that gave Ripple a peace of mind was that she hasn't crossed any lines, and is still good deep down.

To follow in her footsteps, and maybe even work with her together again. That would be a dream come true.

Ripple also had a legacy to live on. Mana, the group leader, although having a different personality, reminded her of her old partner. It was probably due to her witch-like outfit.

Her old partner...

She had made a promise to herself to continue on in her memory.

All of the fighting, the turmoil, none of that matters. Since her partner's death, Ripple had been trying to expand her boundaries.

She'd be proud of that. Ripple believed so.

She'd scheduled for an application for probation, and it's only after half a year that it was accepted.

Ripple received her probation officer's name, 7753. Then, she received an e-mail to head to B-City for her training period.

For some strange reason, they set the meeting place at a Karaoke place. Ripple's not the one to complain. Their choice, not hers. But then, more weird things happened. Only a few hours after arriving in B-City, Ripple found out she was trapped.

The barrier. It had appeared.

After learning more details, that Ripple had been assigned to an Investigation squad as a volunteer to capture an assassin, Ripple again began to hate the Land of Magic.

Using Magical Girls to fulfill their own goals. That was what most of them were like. Change was necessary within the system.

Trapped in a city with nowhere to run, forced to fight an enemy that could kill her.

Déjà vu.

But if she was going to fight, she damn well will fight. She's had plenty of experience fighting before, and she'll use that to her full potential.

In the karaoke place, she met up with 7753 face-to-face. However, she was quite surprised when she found out how non-assertive 7753 was, and the fact that the leader was someone

from the Examination Department, not Human Resources, as Ripple was led to believe. 7753's confusion struck her as strange as well. What's even stranger is the fact that none of them originated from B-City, and 7753 had assumed Ripple lived in B-City as well. Why bring the officer and trainee to a place none of them lived in?

Questions, questions. Questions that will have to wait. For now, Ripple followed 7753's lead.

And it's not like 7753 was the only anomaly as well. Earlier at the karaoke place, there was a similar discovery made by Ripple.

Before 7753's arrival at the karaoke bar, Ripple had talked to Mao Pam

"Ripple, do you have a minute?" said Pam, who was sitting in the sofa nearby.

"What is it?"

"I want to talk to you about something. Let's head outside for a moment."

"Okay...?"

The two walked out, out of earshot of the others.

"These people. Our team. Do you know them?"

The answer was honestly no. How would Ripple know them? They're high ranking Land of Magic officials. Although, Ripple expected Pam to know them.

Mana seemed to be the type to want her own way. In a way, she was like Ripple herself back in the day, if Ripple had become a leader of something.

Hana was close to Mana, and seemed to act as her voice of reason.

Pam, however... Her silence so far, save for a few choice words, has made her hard to read. From her tone and expression, one word came to Ripple's mind.

Grandma.

Not in the sense that she's old, but she really does seem like someone who would act like your basic grandma-type. Elegant, soft-spoken, probably wise beyond her years too.

But no, Ripple had never met any of them.

"No, I can't say I have. This is my first time seeing them."

"I see..."

Pam closed her eyes and folded her arms.

"Listen. We're both outsiders. I have no idea what's going on either. So I'd like to take this moment to say that we should be equals, okay?"

"Huh?"

"I may be higher in rank and from the Land of Magic, but you are my equal, and I respect you. Don't put me on a pedestal," she said with a smile.

Pam was definitely on the nice side. In a group where many of the others seemed to be

concerned for their own well-being, Pam was different.

Ripple nodded,

“If that’s so, I’ll do that,” said Ripple, while smiling.

Perhaps Pam wasn’t like others from the Land of Magic.

Her manners were just like a grandmother. Caring for others. It’s still too early to judge, but so far, this was the impression that Ripple had gotten.

The group’s mix was certainly going to be interesting.

☆ **Toko (Remaining Time: 22 Hours, 30 Minutes)**

Damn it.

Damn it.

Damn it.

Plans change. Toko knew that. Plans always change. Toko had adapted to that. She and her partner had escaped to B-City, and now was being tracked again.

She thought she could surprise Mana with the group attacking, but it wasn’t the case.

And now this barrier’s here, so she can’t run again. The barrier seemed to be the work of the Foreign Affairs Division.

To make things worse, it looks like Pam was here with the hunt to.

Shit.

Toko was busily typing on her own Magical Phone. Thanks to her diminutive size, she had to physically push the buttons and kick them as well.

Perhaps she could ask for help.

A reply came,

The barrier’s pretty tough, nyan.

Even with a Magical Girl’s durability, it’s impossible to survive touching it for more than a few seconds, nyan.

Also, the barrier is a sphere, so underground or even flight is out of the question, nyan.

Even with my powers, I can’t possibly disintegrate the barrier in time, nyan.

Damn it.

Toko angrily replied again. Was there no escape? No rescue? Is she actually going to be caught here at last?

That can’t happen.

The next reply was quick.

Don’t give up yet, nyan.

I know about this kind of magical barrier, nyan.

There's a limit of 24 hours mostly. So at the most, you should survive one day, nyan.

You can handle that, right? Good luck, nyan!

The urge to slam the Magical Phone was high. What's the point of having someone on the outside if they can't break you out?

But she did make a good point. 24 hours. Toko only needed to last 24 hours. Those 24 hours could be used to hide... or fight.

That's right, Toko's partner. She's powerful. A powerful assassin, and a powerful combatant. If push comes to shove, she can kill the Investigators. Might draw more attention to them though.

Although her partner's strong, it doesn't mean she's invincible.

Mao Pam is a problem.

She's one of the few Magical Girls that could take on her partner, and this was an extreme problem for Toko. If her partner dies...

Toko would feel a tinge of sadness if that's the case as well. Despite all of this, she does care for her partner.

The plan was a simple one. Her partner would bring Toko to her school, and there, Toko can create more Magical Girls. Reinforcements. So long as Toko played the part of the nice fairy.

Since the Land of Magic didn't know what her partner looked like, she could blend in as well.

She could hear the High School kids now, chatting it up below, cheerfully laughing. It's time to get to work.

Toko brandished her cutesy smile, and flew down towards them.

CHAPTER 3

THE PRISONER

Magical Girls.

Their duty was to give the hopes and dreams to everyone. All of that are illusions. Nobody has the same hopes and dreams, so it's futile to try and create a peaceful world like this.

Would you deny someone's dreams if they didn't fit your sense of morality? What makes you different than criminals who do the same to you?

Ah, but the Land of Magic is a land of rules. So, they must have enforcers to these rules.

Magical Girls spread hope, so long as that hope is perfectly within the moral boundaries determined by the Land of Magic... but of course, who else is fit to decide the rules?

What happens to Magical Girls who break these rules?

Well, two things can happen.

The first is that they don't get caught. The Land of Magic likes to make the Magical Girls believe that they are all-powerful and all-seeing. With their administrators and mascots running around, trying to fit them in a nice little order.

The truth is far from that. Due to the internal infighting of the Land of Magic, they are far from omnipresent. Each and every one of their Divisions acts like a power bloc.

The more power they can exert over the entire administration, the more Magical Girls they can recruit to their Division, the more they can have their own agendas advanced.

Now the second thing that can happen to you is if you get caught.

Getting caught itself depends on if the Land of Magic can harness enough manpower to hunt down one Magical Girl, or multiple, depending on the circumstances.

The Division in charge of these manhunts is the Examination Division. It's a vague name, but it roughly means to examine every aspect of your life as a Magical Girl.

The Examination Division's job is to track down any rogue Magical Girls, ensure no powers are being misused, and to operate as a security group within the Land of Magic.

Recently, a Magical Girl known as Snow White has been making a name for herself. Publicly arresting many rogue Magical Girls throughout the last 2 years. She is efficient in her job, and some say she doesn't even rest at all.

Earning the nickname of "Magical Girl Hunter", she is the epitome of an Examination Division agent, and one of the best in the field.

With that explanation out of the way, what happens if you get caught by these Examiners?

Magical Girls that get caught committing crimes are sentenced in two different ways, depending on their severity and mental state.

Magical Girls who commit crimes but are otherwise considered upstanding citizens, perhaps due to an accident with their powers simply get their memory wiped. They would have no memory of becoming a Magical Girl and would return to normal life in human society.

But the ones who are extremely beyond redemption. Those are the ones that aren't even allowed back to human society because, simply put, it doesn't matter if you wipe their memories. They will find ways to terrorize people even as humans.

So they imprison them. A life sentence is most common, since Magical Girls can potentially live for a long time.

A maximum security prison, sealed with magical energy that prevents powers from being used within the prison.

But here's where the hypocritical part comes in. The Land of Magic, once again showing its true colors, denied building the prison within the Land of Magic's own territory.

Housing such dangerous numbers of criminals is dangerous to the Magical Girls of the Land of Magic, so they built it in the human world.

They wish to protect the human world, but they dump all their most dangerous criminals in the human world? What kind of logic is that?

Its location is hidden enough using magic so humans wouldn't stumble upon it, but still...

...You never know what will happen.

☆ **Pythie Frederica**

When you've spent most of your time in a cell, time begins to pass into a dreamlike state.

How many times has she done this routine? She stood up, arched her back, and straightened her body. Her long flowing hair had touched the ground, and then she began to twist her body left and right.

Pythie then started touching her legs with her arms, bending forward while doing so. Then she began doing little hops. Not powerful enough that her head might hit the ceiling.

Time flows like a dream here.

No, that's the wrong description. It's more accurate to say that time doesn't flow at all. How long has she been trapped in this hellhole of a prison?

A specially designed prison, where time is eternal. Trapped long enough, it can drive a person to insanity.

Daily exercise is what keeps Pythie's brain from burning out of the exhaustion and nothingness inside this damn cell.

In the center of the room was a circular glyph, bright neon purple. The very thing that's keeping her sealed shut.

For just a moment, it fizzled and flickered.

"Bored yet?"

“Is it that obvious?”

As Pythie walked to the middle of the room, she looked up to the ceiling. There was a figure sitting, visible from a hole in the ceiling.

Black and white clothing, with what seems like a red cross worn on her chest. Torn jeans. Her look was that of a punk rock member.

She was also wearing a gas mask for some reason.

And her guitar. She had a guitar, but its shape is different. Instead of a regular body of a guitar, it was the same shape as the cross on her necklace. Red as well. She strummed it ever so gently. As she did, physical representations of musical notes seemed to emanate from the guitar.

As they passed near Pythie, she could feel a gust of wind pass by her as well. One of the notes scratched her dress. All of them were converging down to the floor, then disappeared.

“Taking your time?” asked Pythie to the figure.

“Ahihihihi... Hmmm? Don’t be impatient. It’s pretty tough to find you, y’know?”

The figure jumped down. A long fall. Not a problem for a Magical Girl.

She removed her gas mask, revealing rough and tussled blonde hair. Her bangs had a red dyed tip, and she wore what seemed like a punk-style hair bow. Leather, with spikes on them.

Such beautiful hair, paired up with such unseemly decorations. A shame.

But still, she came. How long has it been since Pythie’s talked to anyone? Time didn’t flow here normally. It could be days. It could be ages. It could be centuries.

The blonde rock star bowed her head towards Pythie. Pythie smiled, and placed her finger in between her own hair, twirling it about.

“You haven’t changed, Tot Pop.”

“But why would I, Master? Hmm?” replied Tot Pop.

“A loyal apprentice till the end. I don’t give that praise willingly. Well done.”

“Of course I am! Has any of your others done better?” asked Tot Pop, grinning like a small child.

Pythie had many apprentices. She had trained many Magical Girls in the attempt to find an ideal candidate to reform the Land of Magic.

Their system is misguided and corrupt. Changing them has been tried before, and it has failed. More... direct methods of change are required now.

A complete reformation.

One Magical Girl had the right idea, but not the right ambition. The Forest Musician, Cranberry. Her methods for testing Magical Girls were fitting.

Survival of the fittest.

Natural selection.

The ideal Magical Girl is one that won't be defeated so easily. The ideal Magical Girl is someone who can stand for themselves.

Unfortunately, Cranberry's goals weren't as... ambitious.

But Pythie had replicated these tests herself. Trained more Magical Girls this way. Find the ideal Magical Girl. Reform the Land of Magic.

To do that, they must be both mentally and physically strong. Their convictions must be absolute, and their beliefs can't be staggered so easily.

There is one potential Magical Girl that can fulfill that role. Ironically, it's the same Magical Girl that placed Pythie in jail in the first place.

Snow White.

Uncompromising. Efficient. She fights for what she believes is right, and doesn't let anyone get in her way. Not even Pythie it seems.

Ever since Snow White had survived Cranberry's tests, she had hunted down every single *rogue* or *misguided* Magical Girl. She doesn't keep it a secret either. Her exploits are publicly known throughout the Land of Magic.

She's practically setting herself up as bait for others to come towards her.

Clever. Reckless, but clever.

Snow White was the key for the change in the Land of Magic. Many people looked up to her. She could pave the way for change.

The problem is how?

"Hey, Master Frederica. Did you hear about Keek?"

"Hm?"

While Pythie was busy contemplating, Tot Pop was already in the corner, strumming her little guitar again.

"She croaked. Well, maybe... Last time people heard of her she was in her little cyber world and then she just... blinked out of existence," said Tot Pop as she grinned.

Keek.

Keek was another one of Pythie's apprentices. Her powers were useful. Pythie taught her well. Unfortunately, Keek wasn't the answer.

Pythie hadn't kept up with outside news for now, but knowing the state of the world before she went in prison, it's possible that Keek may have done something to attract the Land of Magic's attention.

Perhaps it hasn't been too long since Pythie had been imprisoned. Pythie wondered where her items were. They confiscated them when she was imprisoned her.

Tot Pop trotted over playfully towards the cell door. Placing her hand on the doorknob. She smiled, glanced at Pythie, and spoke,

“Well, what’re we waiting for?”

Tot Pop turned the knob, and pushed the door wide open. Its creaking noises echoed across the hallways of the prison.

Footsteps could be heard in the distance. A blue haired girl in a gas mask approached Pythie and Tot. She stopped and saluted.

“You ready or not?” asked Tot.

“Barrier is down and will remain down for some time,” replied the gas mask girl.

“Nice! We’re about to head out soon. Keep it down, kay?”

“Roger!” replied the gas mask girl.

Pythie placed her hand on her chin. The accent on that gas mask girl was Japanese. Neither Pythie nor Tot Pop were Japanese-born. As far as Pythie knows, this prison facility was housed somewhere in the United Kingdom.

So Tot’s made connections around the world, huh?

“C’mon. We’re wasting daylight!”

“We’re making a short trip, first. Should be in the seventh cell block. Not far from here,” said Pythie in a calm voice.

“Wha-huh!?! Uh... why?”

“There’s someone I’d like to pick up. You have the barrier down right?”

“I uh... yeah, but... I came here for you, Master Frederica”

“And you will get me. We’re just picking up more guests.”

“Ah, no no no! Out of the question! There’s not enough time!”

“If you have time for me, you have time for them. Now hush, and follow me.”

“I... Gah...”

With a look of disbelief, Tot Pop followed her master towards the cellblocks.

Pythie had once researched the Magical Girls that were imprisoned here. There were some notoriously powerful beings trapped within these walls. If the prison hasn’t been broken into, they should still be present.

Tot Pop is an excellent apprentice. Clever and resourceful. However, what Pythie also needed was someone with strength, power, and ruthlessness that not even Pythie could match.

And she knew just the two to bring.

“Firstly, we’ll unlock the seal of Pukin. Then, we’ll move on to Sonia Bean.”

Tot Pop looked around for a bit. Palmed her hand in her face, and nodded.

“Shit... Alright, you heard her. Bring the seal down!” ordered Tot towards the gas mask girl.

Pythie twirled her hair around her fingers and smiled.

Pythie Frederica is a Magical Girl. As well as being a Magical Girl, she also works as an examiner, and a trainer. Human Resources Division.

Her job description was to find the right individuals to become Magical Girls. Very simple. However, Pythie also had her own plans.

Thanks to her connections within the Division, Pythie has knowledge on every potential Magical Girl from the East to the West. That's not just counting modern day Magical Girls, but ones created a long time ago.

Pukin and Sonia Bean were fairly old themselves.

Over hundreds of years old, perhaps even more. They were there during the golden ages of Great Britain.

Among these two Magical Girls, a path of destruction and blood always followed them. Their legend in the Land of Magic could very well be compared to the human world's legends of killers such as Jack the Ripper.

Rumors had stormed the two, which caused them to be hunted down. This ultimately served to increase their body count, as Pukin and Sonia combined were a force to be reckoned with.

Pythie had been searching for the ideal Magical Girl.

But for there to be idealism and justice, there must also be corruption and evil. After all, one can't exist without the other.

That's where Pukin and Sonia will come in.

A few seconds later, more magical girls in gas masks showed up. They prepared themselves for what is supposedly a difficult and painful ritual.

Breaking the seal on this prison required immense amounts of energy and strength, and based on Tot's rescue, they must've only expected it to only be for Pythie.

But it can't be helped.

"If my research is correct. Pukin should be here," said Pythie.

One of the gas mask girls dug her hands in the concrete. Her strength pushed it through. Others clasped her hands together, like a praying monk. Magical energy flowing from them towards the one with her hands underneath the concrete.

Cracks that emanate light began to form in the floor, reaching up towards the wall.

Bright neon purple lights began intensifying from the cracks. The stone shook as the large magical energy burst out of it in an explosion of concrete.

Crash!!!



Tearing a hole in the wall, the explosion created a dust cloud. In the middle of it, was a figure. Though silhouetted at first, slowly, bright streaks of orange hair were seen.

An aristocratic musketeer outfit. A rapier sheathed on her waist. Her expression has nothing in it. She didn't even react to the explosion.

Though rustled and dirty through the years, she still retained that picture perfect face of a

Magical Girl. Like a hero out of a fairy tale.

“Holy... shit.”

Tot Pop said involuntarily.

Not just her. Her little gas mask army also stood there, dumbfounded.

Standing amidst the rubble was the musketeer with orange hair. Outside the wall, was Tot Pop, in disbelief, and Pythie, smiling.

This musketeer girl was expressionless, but without even looking at her expression, you could tell that she will kill you without a second thought.

Tot moved in front of Pythie, but Pythie stopped her. Instead, Pythie walked over. Closer. Closer. Headed straight towards this musketeer.

Pythie then knelt down on one knee. Bowing down before the musketeer, whose face was still not registering any sign of reaction.

“General Pukin... We have come to escort you home”

Pukin’s pupils glanced over at the kneeling Pythie. 3 seconds of silence, followed by an upward curl at the edge of her lips.

“Hah... Hahah... HAHAHAHA”

A bellowing laugh echoed the chamber, as Pukin turned around to face Pythie head on. While Tot and the gas mask girls were there, standing their ground, preparing for any sudden movements.

Pukin clapped her hands.

“So... Is this a job offer?”

It was just a simple question, yet the way Pukin voiced it sounded like a threat. Her very aura and her legend generates fear.

“A reward can be negotiated, if you so wish,” replied Pythie.

“Heh, rewards... Bribery will not secure my allegiance. I wonder, what would you do if I were to refuse your offer, hm?”

“Then we leave you be. You don’t have to return to this prison.”

“Oh? So you have yet to plan for my disagreement. You’re quite an interesting one.”

Pythie raised her head up towards Pukin.

“All I ask is cooperation. I offer, you may choose to accept.”

Pukin chuckled to herself. She looked around the rubble-filled environment. She took a deep breath, breathing in the first sign of fresh air in a long time.

“You realize what you have done by freeing me, do you not?” said Pukin, eyes displaying interest to Pythie.

“I’ll take my chances,” replied Pythie.

“Ha! Now you *are* interesting... I like you. Well then, where is Sonia? I shall not and will

not leave without her.”

“With your permission, we’ll release her as well”

“My permission is unnecessary. Sonia is a loyal servant, with powers that you will find quite useful for what I feel you will ask us to do.”

With her slightly older way of speaking, it’s clear that Pukin really has lived in the past at some point. It didn’t matter for Pythie.

“Now then. As much as I would like to thank you for your appearance, we must hurry. Sonia can be quite the bother when she’s separated from me. Poor child will probably be crying herself to sleep.”

Pukin walked over towards Tot Pop and her little gas mask comrades, pushed them aside, and stood down the hallway. She observed the area, looking left and right. Then, from the movement of her shoulders, it was clear that she was chuckling.

A scream. No. It was more like a shriek.

Thud, Thud

Pythie, Tot, and the gas mask girls looked around to find the source. But they didn’t need to look far, as it came from nearby.

Two gas mask girls’ necks had been cut. Their heads decapitated, as their bodies slumped down lifelessly on the ground.

Pukin’s arm had extended. Her rapier fresh with blood. A single strike is all it took.

She glanced back at Pythie, Tot, and the remaining gas mask girls.

“So... Still want to hire me?”

Pythie walked over next to Tot Pop, stared directly at Pukin, and without even a single bit of hesitation, replied,

“I told you... I’ll take my chances.”

Sonia Bean was the complete opposite of Pukin.

Where Pukin exhibited an air of aristocracy and authority, Sonia looked like a poor homeless child.

Where Pukin has clothing that would be worn by a member of the higher class, Sonia was wearing what looked to be a tattered dress. Dirty, ripped in several places, and completely messy.

Where Pukin is eating with her fork and a knife, Sonia munched with her hands.

Home base. Tot Pop’s base it seems. From the door, Tot came in, headed straight for Pythie, and stood next to her.

She observed the two other prisoners, Pukin and Sonia, eating at the dining table. They had requested large amounts of chicken and wine, and had been eating constantly for a while now.

“Hey, Master Frederica... They have... quite the appetite don't they?”

“Modern food doesn't suit them. They'll have to adapt. They're like a pair of fish out of water. Oh, by the way, thank you for your hard work, Tot. It can't have been easy breaking us out like that. To have an army of your own is quite the achievement as well.”

“Huh? Oh... yeah, thanks...”

Tot Pop had slumped her back on the wall, her head hung down. The gust of wind on the room made her hair, short as it was, flow ever so softly.

Pythie also relaxed her back onto the wall, intending to comfort her apprentice.

“You seem different, Tot. Why the soft voice?”

“Uh... I'm not the *biggest* fan of our current company,” she said as her head bobbed to the direction of the two other prisoners.

“Tot Pop, are you shy? That's a first for you.”

“I'm not shy, I'm friggin' *scared*. You saw what she did back then. What the hell was *that* supposed to prove?”

Pythie chuckled lightly.

“Oh, but I thought you loved a challenge.”

“No shit. If these two pick a fight with us, you're damn sure I'll fight back. Doesn't change the fact that they're still psycho though”

Tot Pop folded her arms. She took a deep breath and sighed. Her brows were furrowed. She was slightly pouting.

“You really trust those two, Master?”

“Depends on your definition of trust, Tot. Their powers and strength are useful, there's no doubt. As for their personality... you leave that to me.”

“Yeah... psycho killer swordsman and creepy homeless girl. Killer combo we've got right here.”

“You won't have to worry about Sonia. From the way she's acting, she's clearly loyal to Pukin. So, the only one we'll have to keep on our side is Pukin herself. As long as we appeal to her, we should be fine. Let me handle that.”

As nervous as Tot Pop was, she shrugged, fully confident in Pythie's plans.

130 years ago, Pukin was part of the Land of Magic's Examination Division. Her job was simple. Track down any rogue Magical Girls.

She was ruthless and efficient. She had no mercy. Perhaps because of her reputation, she became infamous.

She became known with many titles, *Shogun, General, Hunter*.

However, it's not as if Pukin was an innocent soul. In fact, she was the worst criminals in the history of the Land of Magic.

When Pukin was captured, her trial was done underneath a powerful magical ritual that

forced her to tell the truth.

There it was discovered the true extent of the things she had done while leading the Examination Division.

Oftentimes rogue Magical Girls would be found dead in what seemed to be accidents or suicides. They were neither. Pukin had hunted down the powerful ones herself and killed them, making sure it looked like either an accident, suicide, or some other tragic event.

Not only that, occasionally innocent Magical Girls would be found dead as well. Pukin would accuse them of false charges, and would hunt them down on those false charges without remorse.

When she was eventually arrested, Pukin believed that this was an injustice to her. For her, building a wealthy and powerful influence among a mountain of corpses was perfectly normal.

Pythie knew all of this because Pukin herself had written an autobiography during her high point in life. A book detailing her exploits, stored and archived within the Land of Magic's many libraries.

Pythie had read them, among other books. That's how Pythie knew just how to influence her.

Ego. That sense of self-worth.

Pukin is a warrior. Pukin is a proud warrior. She would've been an ideal Magical Girl if it weren't for her bloodlust. But that ego is something Pythie can use as leverage.

It's why she kneeled down and offered deals that seemed to benefit her.

Pythie understood that the key to influencing others is to appeal to their interests, and use that as leverage. Threats never work, not always, but desire. Desire is a powerful thing.

Pukin desired blood, and she desired respect. Giving her both was key to keeping her on Pythie's side.

Speaking of Pukin...

"So, what is this job you've come to us for, hmm?"

Tot Pop glanced over at Pukin. Her posture looked normal, but Pythie knew she was nervous deep down.

"Examination team's after an assassin. She's trapped in a barrier in B-City. Needs our help."

Pythie twirled her hair between her finger,

"Tot. How exactly did you manage to break me out of prison so easily?"

"There was a hole in the security rotation. I took the chance"

"But how did you *know* about it?" asked Pythie.

"...I had a sponsor give me info."

Pythie chuckled, and petted Tot Pop's head.

So it was a Land of Magic official. It figures. The Land of Magic would do anything for their internal conflicts.

Breaking free a group of criminals to sabotage other Divisions is not something out of character for them. It would place the blame on the criminals, and not whoever hired them in the first place.

This was why Pythie arranged for Pukin and Sonia's escape as well in the process. A spanner in the works. An unexpected equation.

"Want more..."

Sonia spoke.

Pythie tilted her head. As if in response, Sonia spoke again,

"Food... want more..."

Although Sonia's head was pointed downwards, she was addressing it to Pythie and Tot Pop.

In a rush, Tot ran towards the pantry, grabbed up two rice balls, rushed back in, and offered them to Sonia.

Sonia took one, and put the other one on her head as she gobbled the former.

"...Oh, that's nasty..." mumbled Tot silently.

"Now Tot, these are our guests. We should entertain them as much as we can," said Pythie with a smile.

Pythie slowly began walking towards the door,

"That is your specialty, right, Tot? Do try your best. I have some work to do myself."

"Wha- W-Wait! M-Master, I don't-"

Slam.

Pythie closed the door behind her and walked back to her private chambers. Tot Pop does what Tot Pop does, and Pythie needs to do what she does as well.

A Magical Girl Assassin, hm? Could it be Snow White? Has she gone off the deep end? No, not the last time Pythie saw her.

If it's not her, then who was it? If only Pythie could know where Snow White, or really, where any of the other Magical Girls are, things would be a lot simpler.

Sadly, that's not possible.

Her collection of Magical Girl hair was gone, so she was going to have to start over from the very beginning. Frustrating, but exciting at the same time.

It's hard to explain Pythie Frederica's Magical Skill in one word. It's quite elaborate, but also useful.

The key is hair. Using the hair of a person, Pythie is able to use a crystal ball to see her opponent, as if she had a flying camera.

Firstly, you'd need their actual hair. Preferably fresh and not torn beyond belief. Second, the hair must be twirled alongside Pythie's fingers. Thirdly, it *must* be head hair. Hair from any other part of the body won't work.

But if those conditions are fulfilled, then Pythie could use her powers to see its owner. A powerful ability.

Even if they were in another country. Even if they were far in space. Even if they somehow lived in another dimension. It didn't matter. Pythie's powers will allow her to see what they see.

But it's not only limited to spying and monitoring. Pythie's powers also have another effect to them. Should Pythie insert her hand into the crystal ball, it's completely possible for her to influence the environment.

Grabbing.

Pinching.

Gripping.

Hitting.

Anything you can do with your hands. She can even bring things into the environment, or pull things from there towards her.

Even people. Yes, using this power, Pythie effectively has some means of teleportation.

The only limit is that Pythie can't see through what the target sees if the target is dead.

Now the question is the hair. Is it really hard to get a lock of hair from someone? No, not really. Pythie had perfected it.

You can find hair almost everywhere. Most commonly the bedroom. You place your head on your bed when you sleep. How many people realize that bits of their hair may have torn off? It's such a small detail in your life that your brain blocks it off.

Pythie would use that to her advantage.

Thanks to this ability, it shouldn't be hard to cross the barrier and find this Assassin.

While the Investigation team that they sent may have thought of the barrier as a trap. It doesn't affect Pythie in any way.

If anything, they were trapped with her.

With Pukin and Sonia's help, it should throw them in for a loop.

If there's one thing Pythie Frederica is good at, it's getting someone's trust. She knows just what to say to do this. Her powers aren't combat-oriented, so she's always had to gain someone else's trust.

Tot Pop was also good at this, being Pythie's disciple, though of course, not as good as the master.

Tot Pop was way more stubborn than Pythie. She'd try to do what it takes instead of biding her time. Of course, given her personality, it was inevitable.

Still, she has grown. Being able to negotiate and gather up a strong enough group to break Pythie out of prison was an accomplishment.

Now the matter is getting into B-City.

Within Pythie's private chambers, she had found her collection of hair strands. The Land of Magic may have confiscated hair belonging to Magical Girls, but she still had some normal humans' hair she kept.

During her travels in Japan, she had spent some time gathering hair from barber shops, breaking into houses, and other places as well. Extreme? Maybe. But times like this proves it was worth it.

All she needed was a strand of hair from a resident of B-City. Perfect.

Pythie returned to the dining room, where Tot Pop was still staring uneasily as Pukin and Sonia continued to eat.

"Pukin. I've learned many things about you before I broke you out," said Pythie, startling the others with her sudden statement.

"Have you, now? Then you know of the injustice committed against me, do you not?" asked Pukin.

"The *what?*" Tot Pop blurted out.

"They imprisoned me and Sonia for an injustice. That is a fact," said Pukin, bluntly.

Pythie stood face to face with Pukin.

"You forged false crimes on other Magical Girls as justification for hunting them down. That's why you're imprisoned."

"Forgery, yes. False? I don't think so. I've experience you see, as an interrogator. I can tell which of them is just waiting to be a criminal. I'm preventing the disease before it happens."

"Is that how you see it?" asked Pythie. Her tone still calm. She didn't want to anger Pukin, she just wanted to know how she worked.

"That is not how I see it. That is how the world works. If you had the choice to kill a serial killer when it was a child, would you take it if it would save lives? I would not hesitate."

Tot Pop blinked.

"What the hell kind of logic is *that?*"

Self-centered. A morality centered on herself. Justifies her actions simply based on her own beliefs. With just a few words, Pythie began to understand how Pukin's personality is like.

Pukin closed her eyes and shook her head.

"Regardless, it is a shame that Sonia had to be dragged into prison as well, when she was simply a loyal servant."

Sonia's eyes lit up when she heard her name.

“Hoo... My Shogun... You truly are the best, always caring about the future and about me...”

So that's how loyal Sonia is. Either she chose to ignore the fact that Pukin has and would kill her own subordinates for her own gains, or Pukin is also loyal to Sonia. That is to be determined.

Pythie had all the information she needed. Now is the time to move.

“I would like to ride an aeroplane.”

“Excuse me?”

“An aeroplane. I've heard of these. If we're going to Japan, I'd like to ride an aeroplane.”

Pukin was asking Pythie quite an interesting request. Unfortunately, it's one she'll have to turn down.

“I don't think that's possible. According to Tot, there's a barrier in B-City. As soon as the plane crosses it, we'd die,” said Pythie, smiling gently.

“Hmph... A shame.”

One by one, they all lined up, as Pythie twirled the hair of a B-City resident across her left finger. The crystal ball materialized the area.

Using this way, they can bypass the barrier.

First, Pukin and Sonia. Then Tot Pop, and finally, Pythie herself.

As Pythie entered the crystal ball and teleported towards her destination, she saw a living room of a nice, well-mannered home. This must be the owner of the hair.

Lying on the ground is an old man whose gagging in a pool of blood. His throat cut open. Tot Pop shaking her head, Sonia waiting in the corner, and Pukin sheathing her rapier.

“What happened?” asked Pythie.

“I told him not to make a noise,” said Pukin nonchalantly.

“It hasn't even been a few seconds.”

“He tried to make a run for it, I acted. Had he told someone, we would have been exposed.”

Pythie sighed.

“I'm not sure if you understand how my magic works, but the owner of the hair that I used to bring us here must be *alive*. My magic doesn't work on dead people.”

Pukin wiped the blood stains off her gloves.

“Well, what's done is done. We should focus on the mission ahead,” said Pukin once more. Not caring about what she may have caused.

No point in arguing now.

Now is the time to search.

“We’ll have to travel on foot. We can’t attract too much attention to ourselves,” said Pythie to her team.

“On foot? I will not tolerate that. We will take a vehicle,” demanded Pukin.

“You want a *car*?” said Tot Pop in disbelief.

“Yes. I shall not settle for less. If we must take it by force, then we shall.”

“Holy crap, man...”

“No, Tot. This is fine. With a car, they won’t recognize all four of us at once. It allows us to travel faster, since B-City rarely gets traffic jams.”

“Master, seriously?”

“Calm down, Tot. We should focus on our mission.”

Pythie didn’t want any turmoil within her team. That would ruin the whole point of being here in the first place.

The problem was securing a car. At nighttime, there weren’t many cars travelling around B-City. So they had to improvise.

As they exited the house, the streets were empty. The group waited, and waited. The cold Autumn wind blowing a breeze in their face.

Then, they saw a single car. American-made. It seemed wealthy enough for Pukin’s tastes. Pythie could tell by Pukin’s smile. The car was zooming quite fast, as there was no traffic stopping it. So much so that it zipped past them.

“Sonia, if you please.”

Hearing Pukin’s orders. Sonia grinned, and in a blink of an eye, she dashed towards the car.

The white, tattered girl matched the car’s speed, running side to side with the car.

The driver of the car looked towards her, and was shocked to see this pale faced girl running inhumanly fast, just grinning at him.

Sonia pierced through the driver’s window, and grabbed the man’s neck. Without so much of a chance, she snapped it, sending the car swerving and swerving.

Uncontrolled, the car crashed into a telephone pole, and the driver’s head was crushed into a bloody mess.

The rest of the group walked towards them within a few minutes. But what they saw was the crashed car and Sonia sitting next to it, crying and sobbing.

“I... I... I broke it... *sniff*...”

Sonia’s face was red and filled with tears. Looking at the surroundings, there were tire marks where the car lost control, the damage was not too severe, but there was blood in the front of the seat, and the driver was near unrecognizable.

Tot Pop, sensing that this might be trouble, quickly tried to cool down the situation.

“Ehehe, don’t worry Sonia, all you did was kinda mess up the bumper. It’ll still drive,

you're fine!"

"R... Really...?" asked Sonia, still sobbing.

"Yeah, don't worry 'bout it, kay?"

Pukin approached the car. Despite the scratches and the blood, she looked it over and nodded.

"This might work. Quite expensive looking, this model. Befitting for us."

Pukin took the back seat. Tot Pop took the passenger's seat. Pythie took the driver's seat.

Sonia, however, was dragging the corpse of the man to the street. The man wore a business suit, and Sonia was thinking of taking it.

"Sonia! No witnesses, no remains. You know the rules," shouted Pukin from the car.

Sonia was startled. She looked at the suit, and back at Pukin, then back at the suit.

"B... But I like the suit..."

"Nothing that can be traced back to us, Sonia," stressed Pukin.

"Okay..."

With a sad look, Sonia placed her hands on the corpse. Slowly, a black mass of energy covered the corpse as it began to dissolve into ash, and soon the ash and smoke became nothing.

This was Sonia Bean's Magical Skill.

'The power to disintegrate'.

Not only limited to objects, but particles and atoms as well if she wished. There would be no trace of anything if she so much as touches them.

After disposing of the body, Sonia sat at the back, content with being next to Pukin.

The group drove. With the way the barrier works, it's best to go to the center of the city. B-City is a large area, and there's plenty of room for a Magical Girl to hide herself here.

The problem with heading towards the edges of the town is that there is a possibility that they might hit the barrier. The car would be fine, but they won't be.

After about a few minutes' worth of driving, a grumbling sound from Sonia's stomach piqued Tot's interest.

"Wait, did your stomach just rumble?" she asked.

"Sonia is hungry, and frankly, I am as well. Find us a restaurant. I believe that since we are in Japan, sushi would be appropriate," said Pukin.

"We *just* ate, like half an hour ago."

"They come from a time when food is essential, Tot. Besides, when you've been locked up for as long as they have, you'd be hungry too. I'll find us a good restaurant. Sushi sounds great today."

Pythie parked the car in front of a chain Japanese food restaurant. As the group entered the shop, they had gathered strange stares from the customers, but moved on.

After ordering their food, their sushi was delivered to them via a conveyor belt.

“What contraption is this? Is there no respect for labor anymore?” asked Pukin.

“Conveyor belts. People in the modern age prefer efficiency as opposed to hard work. If something can be done quickly, they’d take it. You’ll find many restaurants in Japan, especially those that serve sushi, use this method,” explained Pythie, calmly eating her sushi.

Pukin grabbed her plate and began eating as well. Just as quickly, she spat some of it back out.

“Rubbish! I remembered the sushi that was made years ago were of a higher quality than this. For all your technology, you’ve hardly improved in cuisine.”

While Pukin was not pleased, Sonia was gobbling up all of her sushi. Eating it with her hands, and munching everything whole.

“Sonia! Show some class!” snapped Pukin.

“Mm... Oh... sorry.”

Nearby, the waiters and other customers began to whisper. The group’s outlandish looks were starting to attract attention.

When a man glanced at Sonia’s direction, Sonia simply stared straight at him, and made a peace sign. This startled the man, and he pretended to not know anything once more.

Normally, Pythie would be in human form, but in this case, none of the group would want that. It’s not like they would be in trouble regardless. None of them worked for the Land of Magic anymore.

“A pity. I saw a movie that claimed sushi was the finest Japanese food, yet the modern taste is horrid,” said Pukin out loud. The loudness made some of the waiters scoff and blush in embarrassment.

“You saw a movie? Hundreds of years ago?” asked Tot.

“Of course not. I saw a movie not a few years ago, I believe.”

“Huh? I thought you were in jail.”

“She was, Tot. However, the Land of Magic can often be fickle. Just as how they provided you with a chance to free me, occasionally they’d let... certain prisoners free,” explained Pythie.

They often do this because there really is no other choice than letting a dangerous Magical Girl loose to solve the problem.

Fortunately for those involved, they took great risks before removing the magical seals from their cells.

Extra protective armor, brainwashing magic, taking loved ones hostage, injecting them with a poison that will kill them unless they inject the antidote, only to be given if they

cooperate.

Pythie felt liberated that she didn't have to endure that. Judging from Pukin's actions, she must have felt the same

"Ah, Frederica, was it?" asked Pukin.

"What is it, Shogun Pukin?"

"None of the dishes are coming by. Are they insulting me?"

"Oh, no. If you want more, you should talk to the clerk. If you're rusty in Japanese, I'll help you."

"I have said this once, but you are quite the interesting and talented one, Frederica."

"I'm humbled, truly."

Pythie smiled.

Pukin and Sonia. Pythie needed to collect strands of their hair. This will enhance Pythie's strength.

However, Pythie wouldn't mind collecting their hair just because. Strands of beautiful hair are meant to be preserved.

She'd already gotten a few of her disciple's golden locks of hair. Tot Pop had provided it to her, and always had some to give.

Pythie's love for beautiful hair combined with her powers was a surefire match. It made it that much easier to learn her powers.

Finding Pukin and Sonia's hair isn't hard. Sitting in the backseat, there may be some strands left. Wherever they go, it would be easy to find. No one can fully hide their footsteps, after all.

The sweet smell and aroma of tea calmed Pythie's mind.

As the group ate and ate that night, Pythie calmly sipped her tea.

The game had begun.

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CHAPTER 4

HERO OR IDOL?

☆ 7753 (Remaining Time: 22 Hours, 12 Minutes)

Ripple was wearing a large coat. Combined with her red scarf and the hood, it hid most of her physical features. She kept her head down to hide her wounded eye. Unfortunately, the coat couldn't hide her wooden slippers.

Hana was also wearing a raincoat-style outfit. For her, it's even more important, due to the fact that she has rabbit ears. Her slippers are easier to explain than Ripple's, so she didn't need to hide them as much.

Mao Pam wore a fancier, expensive coat, also with a hood to hide her horns. Despite the fact that this is a stealth mission, it seems like she still has her sense of style to maintain.

Mana wore a trench coat, and kept her witch hat on. She doesn't have many fantastical elements in her outfit to hide.

7753 also wore a simple jacket. Her hat and goggles were perfectly normal in human society, so it's not like she had to hide them as well.

All of the Investigation team wore smoke masks, strapped over to hide their noses and mouths, to make it harder for people to identify them as well.

The four of them walked over to a van. Normally, Magical Girls would be able to travel faster than any van, but since this is a careful search mission, they had to not attract any attention, so a van would be better suited to it.

Parts of the van were a bit scratched up, but 7753, Pam, and Ripple didn't mind.

"Sorry about the mess. We got into a little trouble earlier on," said Hana.

"There's no need to tell them any details, Hana," said Mana.

She looked at the time. Her brows furrowed.

"Shit. We wasted 2 hours. We need to find Toko before the barrier deactivates or we lose her."

Mana looked back towards 7753 and Ripple.

"Before we do anything, I need to ask you two a question."

"Yes?" replied 7753.

"7753, Ripple. Your powers. Do they rely on eyesight?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do they *work* on people who are *invisible*? I don't want any surprises and I need to be prepared for every possibility."

7753 pondered for a moment. She hasn't exactly tested out that possibility herself.

"Well... I don't think it would work if I can't see them," she replied hesitantly.

7753 glanced at Ripple. Ripple nodded softly.

"I don't think I can target someone I can't see, either," said Ripple.

Hana nodded, and approached the two.

"Since we're all sharing. I thought I'd share my ability. I can increase my own senses. Sight, hearing, smell, taste, or touch! Of course, I can do all 5 at once, but then I just get confused by sensory overload..."

Hana began focusing.

"Judging by the way the wind is sounding, I can tell there's a tree about 20 meters to our right by that hill over there," she said as she pointed to her right, without even looking.

Sure enough, far in the distance, was a tree.

"I can do better. I know that it's an apple tree, and I know where each apple is on each branch. If I focus enough, I can spot these tiny details," said Hana happily.

"Wow... That's so *cool!*" shouted 7753 eagerly.

"Ahaha, it's not a big deal. It's useful, though!"

Ripple smiled, bent over to the ground, and picked up two pebbles with her right hand. She threw one high in the air using her strength. The other one, she threw at an angle to the front.

The one she threw second quickly adjusted its trajectory, and within a few seconds.

Crack!

A small shower of grains marked the fact that the two pebbles hit each other head on.

"Whoa... That's cool too, Ripple!" said 7753 again.

Seeing all these powers in action livened up 7753's spirit. She always wanted to see heroes in action do this.

Ripple shook her head, "Probably not as cool as you'd think. It only works in a radius of 3 meters. I tested it myself. Had a lot of practice these past 2 years."

Mana pulled out her wand and began materializing something in her hand. It became a rectangular card. Finally, it materialized. Some kind of driver's license.

Mana tossed over a Driver's License towards Hana. It had the exact image of Hana, minus the rabbit ears.

"Just in case we get pulled over. They can't tell the difference."

Mana used her wand and seemed to scan the air. After a while, she pointed at a direction and spoke,

"There's signs of magic in that general area. We get close, we find out if that's our target. If it is, we go in, we capture her. We'll need eyes above. Pam?"

Mao Pam nodded. Taking off her coat, large dark rectangular looking wings emerged. 7753 heard the voice of her mentor transmitting through the goggles towards her ears..
“I need to know Mao Pam’s combat potential.”

Hearing that, 7753 nervously gulped. She couldn’t just put on her goggles. That would be suspicious. The best course of action then was to...

“Um... Mao Pam. Can I ask you something? If you don’t mind... how powerful exactly... are you?”

Mao Pam glanced over at 7753. She smiled warmly, and answered with a soft tone,
“Very.”

With that, she flew, so fast that a gust of wind blew from where she had launched herself onto the air.

Perhaps it was because 7753 had gotten on Mana’s bad side, but she felt like many of the Investigation Team didn’t seem keen on working together with her, despite what they may say.

Regardless, the mission is clear. 7753 got into the car.

Ripple, a powerful Magical Girl with a powerful ability. Despite her handicaps and wounds, she seems to know how to handle herself. The most shocking thing that 7753 found out about her was that she was considered part of the *Children of Cranberry*.

They were Magical Girls who passed Cranberry’s tests. Since they may have been corrupted by Cranberry’s morals, they were mostly untrusted by the Land of Magic. Ripple, however, seems trustworthy as far as 7753 is concerned.

Hana seems like a nice girl, but she’s also part of the Land of Magic, so 7753 shouldn’t underestimate her. Her powers will give her an edge when finding people.

7753 had set her goggles to find out information on people, based on the category of ‘number of Magical Girls killed’. Thanks to her powers, she could find the assassin easily with this.

The group entered the car. Hana was driving.

Many people passed by her as the car moved across the highway. Her Magical Girl eyesight and reflexes were very helpful here, as she can process and analyze faster than most humans.

But the amount of brainpower required to focus on every human is taxing, even for her. After about a few minutes of driving, Hana pointed forwards.

“Hey, look. A convenience store. You could stop by to get some midnight snack, Mana,” said Hana.

“Not really important, but if you insist. Sure. I’ll need all the energy I need tonight.”

Parking nearby, Hana stopped the car, and Mana got out.

“You want me to come along?” asked Hana.

“No. Stay in the car. I can handle myself,” said Mana as she closed the door.

Finally, 7753 can relax a bit. She took a deep sigh and calmed down at the backseat, along with Ripple.

The few seconds of silence were broken by Hana.

“She’s not a bad person you know.”

“Hm?”

“Mana. She’s not a bad person. She’s just... under a lot of stress right now,” said Hana, looking back at 7753 and Ripple.

“Oh. It’s fine, don’t worry.”

“She can be a little harsh, and sometimes she may say some things that seem rash, but... She’s a good person at heart. 7753, Ripple. Sorry if anything she said was hurtful.”

When Hana was talking about Mana, it didn’t feel like she was talking about a superior. Rather, it felt like talking about your closest friend or your sibling.

Ripple smiled,

“Hey, don’t worry about it. Everyone gets stressed once in a while.”

“Yeah, Hana. We won’t hold it against her.”

Hana smiled. “That’s good,” she said.

Hana relaxed herself, her bunny ears drooped a bit downwards.

“Y’know, she’s not a Magical Girl, so it’s tough for her to be out here amongst all of us...”

7753 perked up at those words.

“Wait, say again... *what!*?”

“Mana’s not a Magical Girl. She’s a Mage.”

“...Wait, *What!*?”

“You didn’t notice? That’s why she needs the midnight snack. That’s why we’re using the car as well.”

7753 had such a busy day that she couldn’t even consider to think that Mana wasn’t a Magical Girl.

“But... she looks like a Magical Girl... I didn’t expect... oh my god. A Mage, out here?”

Mages. Different from Magical Girls. They are normal humans that were taught, or learned, about magic.

Unlike Magical Girls, they are more versatile in that they can do mostly anything if they learn the proper spells. Whereas Magical Girls are given a specific special power.

Unfortunately, they are human. Aside from their knowledge of magic, their bodies are human, their physical abilities are human. Which is why most Mages don’t bother leaving the Land of Magic once they arrive there.

Should a Mage encounter a Magical Girl, it would be no contest. The sheer speed and strength of a Magical Girl will overwhelm Mages without a fight, no matter how skilled their magical knowledge is.

Mana was apparently a Mage, not a Magical Girl. The fact that she was down here, hunting down a Magical Girl, was something to respect. Keeping up with a Magical Girl is near impossible due to their enhanced speed and strength.

“Does she always do this?” asked 7753.

“Yes. Mostly. She is part of the Examination Division. She’s in charge of hunting down rogue Magical Girls.”

“But for a Mage, that’s near suicidal. I thought they never left the Land of Magic.”

“Mana’s different. That’s why... please don’t be rash when judging her,” said Hana.

7753 nodded.

Hana tilted her head, “Hey 7753. Shouldn’t you know that Mana’s not a Magical Girl thanks to your powers? You can tell can’t you?”

7753 smiled nervously.

“Well... Yeah, but... I’m not the kind of person who would look at people’s information without asking for permission.”

Hana genuinely looked surprised at that comment. And then, she burst out laughing. So much so that both Ripple and 7753 were slightly startled by her outburst.

After catching her breath, Hana smiled.

“Ahaha! You really are a good person, 7753. They picked the right person for the job.”

“Ah... Thanks, but... Don’t you think that’s a bit much? I mean, I’m just trying not to be rude.”

“You’d be surprised how few people in the world follow your train of thought. Y’know...

We could use more Magical Girls like you. I’m sure the world will be a better place if that happened. Hey, thanks for that, by the way.”

“For what?”

“Just being a good person!”

“M-Ms. Gekokujo...”

“Whoa, what’s with this ‘Miss’ thing? You don’t have to call me so formally. Just call me Hana”

“B-But you’re my superior”

“Ahaha! There you go again, being all polite! You might not wanna admit it, but you know you’re a good person!”

“Oh gosh, this is really putting a strain on my head Ms. Gekokujo”

“Hana!”

“O-Okay, Hana...”

“Wasn’t so hard, was it?”

“Argh...”

The two heard a chuckle. Not from them. From someone right next to them. The chuckle turned to muffled laughter.

7753 and Hana saw Ripple, cheeks blushing, laughing, suppressing it with her hand.

Hana smiled, “You okay there, Ripple?”

Ripple shook her head and continued her muffled laughter.

“S-Sorry, it’s just... It’s been a while since I’ve had a good laugh. You two are pretty hilarious. thanks for that,” said Ripple with a smile and a blushed cheek.

“Wha- Ripple, you’re not *helping* me!” exclaimed 7753.

Hana and Ripple both chuckled as 7753 covered her face from embarrassment.

☆ **Kuru-Kuru Hime (Remaining Time: 20 Hours, 5 Minutes)**

It’s 8 PM. After the fight from earlier, Nozomi headed back to the assigned meeting location.

The location was an apartment on the outskirts of the city.

Nozomi opened the room to her assigned place. There, she found Toko sitting on the table counter.

“Where is everyone?” asked Nozomi.

“Probably at the roof, or at the ship. I’m just glad we got a place to stay, honestly,” answered Toko, as she flew to the side of the window, looking out.

Toko glanced back at Nozomi, giving a wry smile that seemed cute, but felt off somehow.

“Well. They are kids, so they’ll be rebellious if they want to. Y’know, I can’t believe I was able to turn *you* into a Magical Girl.”

“What do you mean?”

“There’s not a lot of adult Magical Girls. Sure they exist, but they mostly come from people who were transformed as a kid. You think I could just wave my little hand around and *poof!* Magical Girl? Doesn’t work like that.”

Toko looked outside again. Nozomi took a seat.

“Us Mascots, we can turn someone into a Magical Girl, but they need to have the ambition and the potential. That’s why younger kids who’re still naïve and wanna change the world make good candidates, and why it’s harder for adults to be transformed. But you, you had a lot of potential ambition apparently.”

Did Nozomi really have that ambition? She didn’t feel like she had something so grand. She just wanted to teach and help the kids at her school.

“Hey, Toko...”

“What’s up?”

“What exactly... *Who* exactly is this Evil Witch we’re fighting?”

“She tried to catch me. She’s been chasing me everywhere. You ever read any Manga or watch Anime? You should know what having a relentless pursuer feels like, then.”

Toko didn’t even flinch with that answer.

Nozomi sat down in the sofa, sighing at the circumstances she’s in right now.

Earlier today, just moments after their first fight, Nozomi and her students had returned to the Science Lab. Despite being unable to stop the Evil Witch, the kids seemed to be having a lot of fun discovering their powers.

Of course, Toko was as angry as ever on the roof. They could hear her scream out profanities from the lab.

Toko then came down, zipping through the air.

“Okay guys, so I’ve got bad news. There’s a *huge* barrier that’s built around B-City, trapping us inside. It’s that witch’s fault.”

Hearing this, Captain Grace folded her arms,

“We can take ‘em! We outnumber ‘em, right?”

Wedin nodded,

“I shall help organize a plan of attack.”

Rain Pou clapped her hands together,

“Oh, besides! This is good! This means the Evil Witch can’t call for help!”

Postarie, who had been timidly listening in, also chimed in after Rain Pou,

“With my powers, I think we could easily chase them down, too!”

“That’s the spirit Ta-Chan!” said Rain Pou with a smile.

All of these kids had positive remarks. They were all very cheerful children. Nozomi wished they realized just what kind of danger they’re dealing with.

Sitting on the teacher’s desk, listening in but not participating, the only one that felt the same way as Nozomi was Funny Trick, who patted on Nozomi’s shoulder, understanding the nature of the situation they’re in.

“We shouldn’t stay in the school, y’know. They’ll be looking for us here,” said Toko.

“Agreed. We should find someplace else to stay.”

“We should probably change back to human, too! We’ll get spotted easily with these clothes.”

“I’m not changing *back*, let ‘em come for me!”

“U-Umi-Chan, don’t be so rash”

“Hey, we’re gonna end up fighting them anyway, right?”

So many of the children were talking all at once.

“Okay, okay! We need to decide a home base of operations!” said Toko.

“Oh, my grandpa used to live in this apartment on the edge of town. Lucky for us, I have the key to the room. We could crash there for the night,” said Grace.

While the kids were all busy making plans, Nozomi was reminded of a similar circumstance in her life.

At a time when her mother fell ill, her father had to quit his job in order to be able to care for both Nozomi and her sickly mother.

Her father couldn’t usually be home if he kept working, so he decided to spend more time with his family than to let Nozomi carry the burden of caring for her mother.

Eventually, however, despite his best efforts, Nozomi’s mother passed, and her dad had become a shell of his former self ever-since.

He became untalkative, and unfriendly. He was a changed man, for the worse.

Nozomi couldn’t help but feel that she might be playing the role her father had played in this scenario.

The only hope she had is that these kids don’t end up like her mother.

“So it’s settled then. We’ll go back to our human forms until we find the Evil Witch,” said Rain Pou.

“Er, that *might* not be the best idea for one of you here,” said Toko.

“Mei would prefer not to.”

The genie girl raised her hand. She stood up and shook her head.

The girl known as Mei pointed to a location in the Science Lab. The small aquarium, where the Science Lab’s pet turtle used to be.

It was gone.

“...No way,” muttered Grace.

Yet again, it seems that the laws of physics and common sense had been violated by magic.

Everyone else either had faces of realization or faces of shock. For the most part, nobody seemed to question who Mei was, as there were far more important things that were being considered, and Mei was co-operative.

A lot of people assumed that she was just there. The brain oftentimes works like that. Nobody ever thought what her actual form was.

“So, I feel the best way to start strategizing is to know ourselves. Let’s begin.”

The awkward silence was interrupted with Wedin writing on the whiteboard of the Science Lab.

Wedin (Mine Musubiya – Class 2D) – *Promise based powers* – Physical abilities not high

Captain Grace (Umi Shihabara – Class 2C) – *Can summon a pirate ship* – Physical abilities very high

Tepsekemei (Mei – Science Lab Egyptian Tortoise) – *Assimilate with the Wind* – Physical abilities moderate (?) / Can also fly

Funny Trick (Kayo Nemura – Class 2C) – *Switch two hidden things* – Physical abilities very high

Postarie (Tatsuko Sakaki – Class 1B) – *Send objects back to their owner (will fly?)* – Physical abilities not high

Rain Pou (Kaori Ninotsugi – Class 1B) – *Create a rainbow bridge* – Physical abilities moderate

Kuru-Kuru Hime (Nozomi Himeno – Language Teacher) - ???

Oh right. Nozomi hadn't told them about her powers. She hadn't bothered to check the description on her Magical Phone.

"Ms. Himeno, if you would please?" requested Wedin.

Nozomi fumbled around with her phone, and read the description aloud.

"Um... Manipulating magical ribbons?"

A lot of the other girls had confused looks. Wedin simply nodded and added that to the list on the board.

"Then it's time to test it out. If you would please, Ms. Himeno," urged Wedin, standing in front of Nozomi.

The Class Representative of 2D, so matter-of-fact and direct in this extraordinary situation. Nozomi almost had no idea how to react.

"I don't... understand what you want me to do?" asked Nozomi.

"Use your powers. How strong are these ribbons? Can you really manipulate them? How long are they? They're ribbons, so I should be fine as a test subject."

"Er..."

Seeing her serious face, Nozomi knew she wasn't playing around.

Nervously, Nozomi did what seemed instinctively natural to her. She remembered when she did a similar thing earlier during the fight. That was instinct.

She focused, and ribbons materialized in her hands. She threw it towards Wedin, and seamlessly, she managed to tie her up flawlessly.

Wedin tried to struggle, to break the ribbons.

A Magical Girl's strength is extraordinary, but it seemed like it doesn't seem to work on Nozomi's ribbons.

"Hmm... I see, so they can withstand strength. This could be useful," said Wedin calmly.

“I still don’t know how you can be so calm about this,” said Nozomi.

“Ms. Nozomi, your magic of being able to tie up someone in something they can’t break out of would be useful in a battle.”

“I... guess?”

“Yes, Bondage magic.”



“Excuse me!?”

“Ah, perhaps you don’t know. It’s similar to situations you can only find in erotic games

or manga”

“I-I know what it means, it’s just... Musubiya! why is a Class Rep like you talking about stuff like that?”

“It is only natural”

“No it’s not! I’m still your teacher, you know! Even if it’s not school hours, you shouldn’t talk about inappropriate things!”

Nozomi released the ribbons from Wedin, allowing her to be able to move again.

After readjusting, Wedin began nodding. She then proceeded to look at her own hands,

“My power is the power of an absolute promise. I theorize that anyone who makes a promise using my powers must keep it. Though I don’t know if it’s forced upon or if there’s a punishment to breaking it.”

“Pretty scary,” mentioned Captain Grace.

Wedin nodded her head, and continued,

“Indeed. My power symbolizes the horrors of marriage. The bonds of matrimony are sacred till death do them part. It is quite possibly the deadliest deal you can make. Thus my name, Wedin.”

“M-Musubiya! Again! Why is a Class Rep like you talking about stuff like that!?” shouted Nozomi with embarrassment.

“It is only natural.”

“Your idea of what’s natural for a girl your age is quite unique...”

“Hey guys, you notice something weird...” said Captain Grace.

She stood in the middle of the group, looked at everyone in the group one by one, and folded her arms while furrowing her brows.

“I don’t watch too many Magical Girl Anime back then, but... Weren’t they all a unified team?” she asked boldly.

Grace pointed to herself, and continued,

“I mean, look at us! I’m a pirate! Okay, sure... Kayo’s a magician, Teach is a ballerina, we’ve got a genie... Our costumes don’t match. We don’t even have a theme! I don’t know about you, but we look like a mixed batch of random. We didn’t even pick our *names!*”

To be honest, Nozomi’s Magical Girl name is quite embarrassing. Kuru-Kuru is Japanese for being wound up in a string. Hime means Princess. Her name would definitely mean ‘A Princess who’s strung up clumsily’.

If she could pick her name, she definitely wouldn’t have picked that.

“A theme and unifying names would certainly be an important asset to morale... We have nothing in common,” thought Wedin out loud.

Rain Pou clenched her fists, “No, you’re wrong guys! We *do* have something in common!

We don't need unifying costumes, we're here to defend our school! We all go to school here, and that's our unifying trait!" she said, an excited smile on her face.

Wedin nodded, "That seems like a justifiable reason."

"Besides, you all saw *Cutie Healer* right? Every season they change themes! For us it's just like... well, all the seasons united together!" said Rain Pou.

"Ah, yes. Now, on to the more important question. Are we bestowed powers fantastically, or scientifically? Are we *Cutie Healer*, or are we *Star Princess*? These Magical Phones suggest science, yet our powers seem fantastical," stated Wedin in a serious tone.

Funny Trick scratched her head, "I... really don't think it matters where our powers come from."

"Yeah, aren't they the same anyway," echoed Grace.

"False! *Cutie Healer* was blessed with magic, using her staff to fight evil. *Star Princess* is a space queen, and uses scientific gadgets! They're different!" argued Wedin, her face red with fury. The candle in her outfit burning brighter as she spoke.

Truthfully, Kuru-Kuru Hime never saw Wedin like this. Normally the proper Class Representative, she seemed to be a closet Magical Girl fan.

"Furthermore, the concept of a magical girl is very broad. So long as they're warriors granted powers of magic, fighting injustice in the world, you could classify them as a magical girl. Regardless if they're battle-hardened space soldiers, forest elves fighting for justice, or a regular schoolgirl that got lucky."

The whole classroom went silent.

"...Wow. I didn't know you were... Er... such an Otaku for that stuff- Ow!"

Captain Grace talked, and was kicked in the feet by Funny Trick soon after.

This was a nice scene. Kuru-Kuru Hime's students all having fun together like this. It was a good change of pace indeed.

But it's getting late. If what Toko says is true, then whoever that witch is might look for them in the school.

"Well. I think it's time for us to move on, everyone," said Hime, in a voice that she uses as Nozomi when she's teaching classes.

"Wait! Before we go, we should pick a group leader. Every Magical Girl group has a leader! I personally volunteer," said Wedin.

"Oh no, I'm steppin' up!" replied Grace.

Most of the girls nodded, some shyly did so, others just shrugged.

"Alright, we'll do it like a real vote. Anonymously. Write down your choice and pass them over to me, I'll count," said Hime.

After a few minutes of silence, the notes were passed, and Kuru-Kuru Hime read out the results.

“Oh my, a close match. Wedin wins with 3 votes, and Captain Grace came second with 2. We have our leader!.”

“What!? I only got two? Hey, Teach, who’d you vote for?” asked Grace.

“A voter’s secret is their personal right,” said Hime with a smirk.

“Tch! She can’t even *fight!*” complained Grace.

“A sore loser is not fit to become a leader of an army,” retorted Wedin.

“Yeah, and a leader that gets beaten up in 5 seconds isn’t much of a leader, either.”

“We all share the blame for that defeat. Let’s not pretend you succeeded where we failed.”

“Except I did. I actually lasted long enough to get a few hits in!”

“Alright, you two that’s enough. We did a vote, so we’ll stick with the vote, whether you like it or not,” said Hime, eyes focused on Grace.

Grace pouted, but nodded begrudgingly, reluctantly accepting Wedin as the official group leader.

☆ Captain Grace (Remaining Time: 18 Hours, 52 Minutes)

Captain Grace had a secret base. A secret base that only she had access to.

Yes, secret bases do sound like something a pirate might have. What with all their hidden treasures and pirate coves and whatnot.

Although Grace isn’t *really* a pirate, she was dressed as one. Might as well play the part. Even if she didn’t really have her own treasure island, or hidden cave of wonders.

On the outskirts of B-City, there was an old apartment block. It was probably older than Grace’s grandparents, since it was built such a long time ago.

The apartment building is practically abandoned by now. Nobody lives there anymore, save for maybe a few old people.

It was the perfect location for a secret base of an adventurer.

A long time ago, Grace had thought to herself, ‘I want a secret base! Please, please, please, pleaaase!’

And so she begged to her grandfather, since he owned the apartment there. Eventually, he caved in and agreed that once Grace comes of age, around High School, she’ll get the keys to the kingdom, so to speak.

Since then, they’ve slowly began moving Grace’s furniture over towards that apartment complex little by little. They’ve got a nice water system set up. They even gave her the key to the apartment when she finally came of age in High School.

But only for emergencies.

Well, now’s as good as time for an emergency as ever.

Since it hasn’t been taken care of in ages, and really, Grace hasn’t bothered using this apartment for a while, despite begging for it a long time ago, it’s a little bit of a mess.

Not the *best* choice for a Magical Girl secret base, but it'll have to do for now.

Before that, however, Grace wanted to test something. Since everyone else has already done so, why not test her *own* powers for once.

Captain Grace's Magical Skill,

Summons a really cool pirate ship

Time to put it to the test. But first, a location. Since Grace had no idea how the ship would actually show up, she'd prefer to pick somewhere wide and empty.

The school backlot would work.

Of course, before that, she needed someone else to see it with her. Someone like her close friend Funny Trick, who she totally didn't drag along forcefully to the roof.

Feeling the magical energy surge inside of her, Grace was caught by surprise when, sure enough, a large 10 meter length pirate ship miraculously warped into existence on the parking lot.

Captain Grace couldn't help but smile widely at this event. She laughed and screamed out, "Woohoo! Kayo, you see this!? Look at this ship, it's so *cool!* Woohooo!!!"

After the girls had reached the apartment building, it was time for a one hour break.

Captain Grace and Funny Trick were sitting across each other, a mahogany table separating the two.

They were inside a fancy looking wooden room. However, they weren't in the apartment. They were in Captain Grace's ship, which is currently behind the apartment, somewhere in the backlot.

After some experimentation, it seems that anything originating from the pirate ship has had its strength proportionally scaled to match a Magical Girl's. So furniture here wouldn't be destroyed so easily.

On the table were some coffee and hot milk, which Captain Grace and Funny Trick have been enjoying while talking.

Despite the calm atmosphere, the face that Funny Trick was making was rather off-putting to Grace.

"Umi, listen..."

"Hm, what's up, Kayo?"

"Can you not do that again?"

"Do... what?"

"Earlier with Wedin, you got cranky, picked a fight. Please don't,"

Captain Grace's eyes widened with surprise, her cheeks turning red.

Damn it, why does Kayo always have to be like that. Ever since they met, Kayo had always been the one to try to either cool Umi down, or just tell her when something she's

doing is wrong for some reason.

It's frankly rather annoying, but Kayo is also right... Not that Umi would want to admit it out loud.

"Well... sorry, I guess. I was just trying to... y'know, give people a reason to make me leader of the group."

"Yes, but the way you did it..."

"What?"

"Hmm..."

"What!? Spit it out, Kayo!"

"You were being a bully."

"Tch- No!? No... No I *wasn't*"

"Umi, you and I both hate bullies. Don't lie to yourself. If you were her you'd say the same thing."

Umi instinctively tried to draw the conversation away by drinking a glass of milk.

Hot milk.

"Ah, *shit!*"

Umi said as she slammed the glass to the desk. Fortunately, since the glass originated from Captain Grace's ship, it didn't immediately break.

From the other side of the table, Kayo smirked.

"What's so funny, huh?" asked Umi.

"You haven't changed one bit, you know that?"

"Neither have you. Annoying as ever, telling me what to do..."

"Nope. You're stuck with me forever"

Umi sipped her tea, this time checking the heat before she drank it. Afterwards, she wiped her mouth of any of the remains, and smiled.

"Wouldn't want it any other way, though," said Umi with a grin.

Kayo was fairly timid back in the day, and Umi would often stand up against any bullies. At the same time, Kayo would also keep Umi's temper at bay, and is the rational half of the two.

They're opposites, that's why they became so close together.

"Hey, promise me you'll play nice with the others?" asked Kayo warmly.

With a sigh, Umi answered back,

"Alright, alright... I'll play nice. After all, Captain Grace has to defend her crew right? Haha!"

"Always the hero type," chuckled Kayo as the two continued their nightly stay at the ship.

☆ **Postarie (Remaining Time: 18 Hours, 40 Minutes)**

Tatsuko, or Postarie as she was now called, was sitting on the roof of the apartment. Next to her were two others.

Kaori, or Rain Pou, a close friend, and the wedding-dressed girl, Wedin.

The three of them were sitting in a group circle, as the girl known as Wedin passed around some notes that she wrote down.

“So, I’ve gathered some facts, if you will, I had help from Toko in researching this, as well as what I have physically experienced. I assume this will help us all,” she said as she passed it around towards the two.

The notes contained writings, often just a few sentences, written completely on a notebook page.

Magical Girl capabilities

Enhanced Strength

Enhanced Vision (Night Vision included)

Does not need sleep

Does not need food

Does not need to excrete

Physical appearance will tend to be aesthetically beautiful

Identities must be kept secret from humans

The objective is to protect the world from danger

The handwriting on the paper was actually quite neat. With a slight curvature that can only be found on people with proper penmanship.

“You made this all by yourself?” asked Postarie.

Wedin shook her head, “Partly, yes. I also used this chance to test my powers. Toko was willing enough to do it.”

“What’d you do?” asked Rain Pou.

“I said that if I promised to live my life as a Magical Girl, Toko would need to promise to tell me everything he knows about Magical Girls. She agreed, and, well, here we are. It seems that’s how my magic works.”

Contrary to her cheerful excited attitude at the moment, Wedin’s power was actually quite scary if used properly.

The power to seal a promise. Not being able to go behind your word. The only saving grace is that they must make the promise through Wedin.

“This is pretty useful,” said Rain Pou.

“Thank you! I have much to research and so little time to do it. So, I must bid you two

farewell for now!” said Wedin, as she bowed and left elsewhere.

Postarie smiled as she watched Wedin leave, “She’s nice.”

“Yeah. Upperclassmen can be nice sometimes. They’re not all scary, y’know?” said Rain Pou, bumping Postarie’s shoulder.

The two girls saw Tepsekemei flowing and floating in the air just then.

“Mei? Hey, Mei! Down here!” yelled out Rain Pou.

Mei tilted her head in confusion, and floated downwards towards the roof, meeting the two once again.

“Yes? You called Mei?” she said with a blank stare.

“We wanna see your powers! right Postarie?” said Rain Pou excitedly. Winking at Postarie as well.

“Huh? Oh... Well, that would be nice, yes,” she said with a sheepish smile.

“You’d like Mei to show you her powers?” asked Mei.

“Yeah, c’mon!” urged Rain Pou.

Mei nodded, and in an instant, her body looked like it had been swept up by the wind, becoming transparent until it became invisible.

From a nearby box, which for some reason was strewn on the roof, Mei appeared inside of it.

“Mei can become the wind, and can slip in to anything,” she said.

Mei then disappeared and became one with the wind once more, before blowing the box to shreds using air pressure.

“This is also possible,” said Mei as she became visible again.

She then floated above the roof, and began to split apart into 9 different Mei’s.

“As Mei is the wind”

“Mei can be split up”

“Mei can fight separately”

“Mei will confuse the opponents”

“Mei will confuse the Evil Witch”

“Mei has just discovered this recently”

“This power is very exciting to Mei”

“Mei cannot wait to use it”

“But that’s not all...”

9 of them spoke one by one, before clumping together, and forming into a gigantic Tepsekemei.

“Mei can also do this,” she said as her gigantic form floated in the air.

She then placed her finger on her forehead, and once again shrunk to her original size. She folded her arms and floated in the air.

“Oh my gosh... That’s so *cool!*” cried out Rain Pou.

“That’s amazing, Mei!” said Postarie as well.

“Thank you. Mei is... very happy.”

After what Postarie learned about Mei, it makes sense that Mei would have a harder time showing emotion. A tortoise doesn’t do that much emoting.

Mei was cute in a way, there was still that affection that Postarie had when she would see Mei in the aquarium. Only this time, Mei had become part of them, and can communicate with them.

She was still the class pet that everyone loved, though.

“Oh. I have a request. I hope you do not mind, but please hit Mei,” said Mei suddenly, pointing at Rain Pou.

“Huh? Me?” replied Rain Pou.

“Yes. There is something Mei wants to show you.”

“I... don’t think I wanna *hit* you, Mei.”

“It’s okay. Mei will be fine,” reassured Mei.

Mei thrust her right fist into her left palm. “Hit Mei. Like this. Hard.”

Postarie looked a little nervous, and so did Rain Pou, as she slowly stood up and sighed deeply.

“Whew... Okay then, Mei... sorry if this hurts.”

Rain Pou thrust her fist towards Mei’s torso, the speed of a Magical Girl making her fist nearly super fast. However, as soon as Rain Pou’s fist made contact with Mei, it seemed to pass through her, and Mei’s form distorted like a foggy smoke cloud.

Mei then reformed just as quickly behind Rain Pou, and tripped her backwards before catching her.

“If you were Mei’s real opponent, then Tepsekemei has defeated you,” she said as she helped Rain Pou stand up once again.

“Wow!!! That’s so cool! Nothing can hit you! Nice!”

Postarie clapped happily, “That’s amazing, Mei! Good job!”

“Mei has also just learned that this was possible. Thank you.”

Mei looked up at the sky.

“Now that Mei has shown you powers. Mei would like to ask you something.”

“What is it?” asked Postarie.

“Mei wants you to fight hard. When the Evil Witch comes, you will fight with Mei, yes?”

The sudden change in topic caught Postarie off-guard. Rain Pou nodded besides Postarie,

“Of course we will. Together,” she said with a smile.

Postarie didn't want to fight, but everyone else is here, and if she doesn't fight, then she will probably be a liability, or worse, they might end up dead...

So Postarie nodded, since she didn't have any other choice,

“Yeah... Together.”

Tepsekemei nodded,

“Mei has been given something amazing. Mei sees everything clearly now. Mei doesn't want to die. Mei didn't know about death before. Now, Mei knows. Mei is scared of dying. That's why Mei will fight. Mei is happy that Mei's friends will fight, too. Thank you.”

Without another word, Tepsekemei floated once more, cross-legged, cross-armed, floating within the sky.

Perhaps this is what it felt like to a creature of instinct that finally has their minds opened to a bigger world.

☆ **Wedin (Remaining Time: 18 Hours, 22 Minutes)**

Information gathering is a very important task, but information *sharing* is arguably just as important.

For the past few minutes, Wedin had been gathering information about her group's powers and abilities, and teaching them to everyone as well.

She spent 20 full minutes doing this, and with mostly everyone ready and done within the apartment, there was only one more left to teach.

She was on the roof... This is going to be a tough one. Wedin made her way up, and sure enough, she saw Mei floating around.

Deep breaths. Here we go.

“Okay, Mei. So... your magic is...?”

“Consume the air”

“No, no no, not consume, become... *become* one with air, the wind,” said Wedin.

“These words. Why are they hard? Mei understands how to use Mei's magic.”

“Yes, but... okay. Let's move on then. Funny Trick's ability is...”

“Who is Funny Trick?”

Hearing that answer, Wedin sighed and placed her finger on her forehead, massaging it as she tried to hide her disappointment.

“Okay... Let's start over...”

Wedin shouldn't really blame Tepsekemei for this. Considering the fact that she is a tortoise. It's going to be quite hard to properly teach things to her.

During her days before being a Magical Girl, Wedin had always been interested in Mei. She was always there in her little aquarium. Wedin had been curious to know what she was thinking at the time, so she'd often sit next to the aquarium and just watch, interested.

She never thought the day would come where she'd actually have to talk face-to-face to explain something to her.

"Alright, my name is..."

"Wedin"

"Good! I am the..."

"...Leader?"

"Correct!"

"But why?"

"Because it's been decided by a vote"

"But Wedin is a weak fighter. Wedin will lose instantly."

Did Wedin just get insulted by a turtle?

"M-Mei... I think you're being... a little too blunt. Just accept it for now, okay... Ehehe"

"Hmm... Okay. Mei will accept Wedin as the leader"

Mei flashed her teeth in a strange looking face, that felt like she was gritting it really hard and showing it to Wedin.

Instinctively, Wedin backed away.

"Er... Are you okay? If you're dissatisfied, you can tell me you know?"

Mei tilted her head.

"Mei wasn't dissatisfied. Mei was smiling."

"That's... not really what I'd call a smile."

"Why? Isn't smiling just showing your teeth?"

"No, it's... not that simple."

"Teach Mei."

Teach? How do you teach someone how to smile? It's a natural thing for humans to smile when they're happy, but to think someone wouldn't understand how to properly smile...

Wedin rubbed her chin.

"Hmm... You need to, curl your mouth upwards, to your cheek."

"Like this?" Mei said while testing out an awkward smile.

"N-No, you're forcing it. Relax, let it come to you"

“Like this?” said Mei once again, this time a bit more relaxed, though still a little awkward.

“Not quite... Um, here, let me... Sorry about this.”

Wedin grabbed Mei’s cheeks and adjusted them slowly, moving her eyebrows, lips, and even her cheeks, in an attempt to sculpt a natural looking smile.

“This tickles,” said Mei.

“Please be patient! There!”

Wedin finished, and although it still looks slightly awkward, Mei was practically smiling, or at least it’s the closest you can get to a real smile, as she was still stiffing her cheeks.

“If you could remember that position, you’re good for a smile.”

“This is a smile?”

“Yes. A smile”

“Mei likes it. A nice smile. Thank you Wedin. You are a good leader, even if you aren’t strong.”

“Yes, thank you... I think?”

Mei’s face reverted back to her usual monotone expression. However, this time, Mei was tilting her head with curiosity, looking around.

With a soft voice, Mei blurted out,

“They’re here.”

Thump!

A soft landing. A girl. Not just any girl, either. To be able to jump and land like that. This must be another Magical Girl.

But who was she? Someone new. Wedin didn’t remember her from earlier during the fight.

The Magical Girl stood up.

Mei and Wedin also instinctively stood up, standing face to face with this stranger.

Red scarf, one arm, scarred eye? Her hair was tied with a giant shuriken. On her back was what appeared to be a Katana.

With this motif, one word came to Wedin’s mind.

Ninja.

CHAPTER 5

SHOWDOWN

☆ **Mao Pam (Remaining Time: 18 Hours, 14 Minutes)**

From high above the air, Mao Pam had been scouting the situation. Several Magical Girls came and went to the roof. Talking, socializing, conversing. Counting them all up, there may at least be 4 or 5 in the building.

Pam wondered if this will lead into a fight. If it did, she also wondered if it'll be an easy fight. While Pam would prefer a smooth operation, an easy fight is something that's quite boring in its own right.

Soaring in the sky like this was freeing to her. Not being trapped in a small cramped car. She prefers it this way.

The others had already discussed a plan when they pinpointed these girls.

Mana and 7753 would retreat to a safe location, with 7753 guarding Mana just in case. With over 5 Magical Girls here, Mana wouldn't want to be near this place in case a fight breaks out.

Hana would take the front entrance, scanning every room to make sure Toko and her partner weren't hiding off somewhere.

Ripple takes the rooftop entrance, cutting off any airborne escapes.

Pam would watch the skies as well. This is a closed circuit. No entrances, no exits. A successful ambush, a quick smooth job.

Only, the problem with a plan is that your opponents would always have resistance. Now the only question for Pam is...

...How strong is the resistance going to be?

In the distance, Pam saw one of the Magical Girls on the roof spot her. Instantly, she turned invisible and transparent.

That one seems strong.

Pam's heart raced, she felt excited. Will this be a good battle?

Pam must be careful not to go all-out. There were innocent people in the area, and if she's reckless, she could kill them by accident.

Pam had four black wings supporting her flight. They were dark thin rectangular-like sheets, large enough to become wings.

One of those wings deformed and altered its shape, curving and hardening. It then floated around Pam, acting as a portable sheet.

The wind was blowing strangely, Pam felt it blowing harder.

Maybe it was instinct, or maybe it was experience, or an inherent danger sense, but Pam immediately moved her floating black shield just to the side of her, and she heard a large clanging noise hitting the shield.

The wind stirred around her as well.

Now it's no longer subtle, gusts of air began to form and seemed to be aiming towards her.

This is not normal wind either, this wind seemed strong enough to hurt her... clumps of air pressure capable of causing damage...

...If they could even connect their hits.

Pam swiftly controlled her floating shield, rotating and revolving it around her, blocking the gusts of wind that seemed intent on attacking her.

While Pam fought the invisible wind, two of her other wings zoomed down to assist her two allies, Ripple and Hana.

This is Mao Pam's power,

'To fight with 4 black wings'.

Mao Pam's four wings are controllable by her. She can control them personally, and change their size, shape, density, color, and temperature. She can even have organ-like shapes pop out of them in order for the wings to be able to act as mini drones as well. Of course, she only has 4 of them.

Of the two that she sent away, one she sent out to defend 7753 and Mana, while the other popped out an eyeball to act as a scout, informing Pam of any danger.

While Pam is in control of these wings, she can use them in any way they're capable of, but for the wings that she sent away, they must act autonomously, and are not smart at adapting.

One wing only has one goal, 'Defend 7753 and Mana', which it will try to do to its best. The other, 'Scout the skies'.

They cannot react to any sudden changes. Not only that, but Pam is short 2 wings, so she will be less effective. She could always call them back, but for now, this was optimal. 2 wings to defend herself, 1 wing to defend Ripple, and the other to scout the skies.

Speaking of defense,

The winds were constantly attacking without remorse, but where's the actual controller? It has to be the genie.

Keep your shields up, endure the winds.

Clang!

If the genie disappeared before...

Wham!

...And it's connected to these wind clumps violently attacking her...

Slam!

...Then a logical theory must mean...

Whoosh!

Pam had set 2 of her wings spinning rapidly, disorienting the wind attacking her, and threw them in a direction.

From the wind, slowly morphed the appearance of the Genie Magical Girl.

So the Genie can become gaseous?

Her opponent showed no sign of any emotion. Her face a blank expression, despite what happened.

Perhaps she's actually quite strong.

Pam thrust one of her wings towards the Genie, keeping one for herself to remain in flight, and aiming for the Genie's legs. The Genie didn't move, and the thrown wing passed through her leg as if it was gaseous.

The Genie went back to becoming invisible. No good.

If this fight continues to drag on, then Pam will most definitely lose the endurance race, simply because she can't hurt the Genie.

Or can she?

Time for Plan B.

The wing that was thrown, Pam manipulated it, enlarged its size, made it so that it became a large 50 meter diameter ring surrounding the two fighters in the air.

Using her one wing, she blocked the attacks, though some passed through, since she was concentrating on forming the ring around them.

Endure.

Endure.

Endure.

The ring was complete, and now for the final touch. Reducing the density of the ring, and changing the temperature flowing through it...

...Sub-Zero temperature will do.

"Cocytus!" muttered Pam, as the area within her dark ring began to feel colder... and colder...

The Genie, who was invisible just then, began to slowly reappear. She's losing her balance, seems to be wavering. Her eyes expressed surprise.

So it seems her power of flight is tied to her gaseous form.

As the area has gotten colder, she can no longer become gaseous. Cooling the temperature past sub-zero would eventually condense the atoms of that Magical Girl together, keeping her solid, which means...

...Mao Pam had successfully 'turned off' this Genie's powers.

The Genie fell from the air, landed down the ground, and quickly got on her feet, running as fast as she can.

Mao Pam wasn't ready to give up. This could be their assassin.

The hunt is the fun part of battle. And so the chase begins...

☆ **Toko (Remaining Time: 18 Hours, 13 Minutes)**

Oh no.

Toko had gotten too lazy. Sure, there were more Magical Girls around her, but she had underestimated that the Investigation Team couldn't find her.

She heard fighting from the bottom floor, and she heard fighting from the roof. Surrounded on two sides. This is trouble.

Toko heaved and lifted the window up. She had to find a way to escape. She can't exactly fly away either, so she had to get to one of the girls. The roof is a much better option than downstairs.

Using her small wings to carry her upwards, she flew towards the roof, and the scene awaiting her was something she didn't expect.

There was Wedin, backed up by Rain Pou and Postarie, but when she got up there, she had stumbled upon an unfamiliar Magical Girl.

A one-armed ninja.

The ninja reacted fast, reaching out to grab Toko with her right arm, but she was tackled by Wedin.

"Help! Get me out here!" cried out Toko.

Instinctively, Rain Pou ran over, grabbed Toko, and placed her in her chest pocket.

☆ **Rain Pou (Remaining Time: 18 Hours, 12 Minutes)**

It was instinct.

That ninja wanted to grab Toko, but Wedin jumped in and tackled her. Now Toko was asking to escape, so Rain Pou had to act.

She grabbed Toko and made a run for it.

Jumping down the roof, with Toko safely hiding within her pockets, she used her Magical Skill.

Rain Pou's power,

'To create a rainbow bridge'

Like the bridges you'd find in children's books. These weren't actual rainbows. They may look like them, but they're solid beams of light.

Rain Pou is able to create them within her field of vision, and can extend it for however long she wants, so long as it stays in her field of vision.

Her instincts now were to *run*! As far away from the apartment building as possible. She jumped off the roof, and landed on the rainbow bridge, running straight ahead.

It wasn't long until she heard a crash behind her, followed by the rhythmic tapping of wooden shoes. Looking back, she should've known what happened. The ninja had beaten Wedin and was now on her tail.

Time to throw her off.

Rain Pou instantly twisted the rainbow bridge from being straight to moving across to the left. While she herself was prepared, the ninja girl shouldn't be.

However, the ninja girl simply jumped towards the roof, and continued her chase indirectly. She's a persistent one.

"She's *gaining* on us! Rain Pou, go *faster*!" yelled Toko, panicking.

"I'm *trying*!"

Distance between Rain Pou and the ninja, approximately 25 meters and closing.

She could feel something sharp hit her leg. She saw many things flying towards her. Swatting them away, some of them still managed to hit her despite how much she dodged.

These were Kunai...

The ninja would throw them directly in front of her, and they'd change trajectory to hit Rain Pou. These Kunai were homing.

Rain Pou couldn't dodge it, she kept getting hurt in the feet, being stabbed over and over again.

Wait, the feet? Why not the heart?

The ninja didn't want to kill her.

"Kaori!" yelled someone running on her rainbow bridge.

Postarie... Tatsuko?

"Ta-Chan!?! What are you doing?" asked Rain Pou.

"Helping you! Come on!" said Postarie as she helped Rain Pou get up.

The ninja wouldn't stop. They had to find a way to escape her. They had to run.

"Where's Grace!?" asked Rain Pou.

"I don't know!" replied Postarie.

"Stop talking and start *running*!" yelled Toko once more.

"Kaori, when I say go, we *run* as fast as we can, okay?" said Rain Pou.

"O-Okay..." replied Postarie.

The ninja was once again on their tail, jumping toward the rainbow bridge. No choice.

Rain Pou grabbed Postarie's hand and ran at full speed. This is the full power she can muster as a Magical Girl. Something that may be exhausting, but something that's

necessary now.

She twisted and turned in the rainbow bridge, inclines, declines, sudden U-Turns, drops, all to confuse the relentless ninja.

Full speed.

Run.

Distance between the ninja and Rain Pou, approximately 100 meters and potentially closing.

Distance between the ninja and Postarie, approximately 80 meters and definitely closing in.

When they were around 2 blocks away from the apartment block, Postarie, who was barely just lagging behind, began to slow down.

Oh no.

Rain Pou grabbed on to her friend. Slung her over her back, and began looking for options. Scan the area, use that Magical Girl powers. Find a place to hide.

In the distance behind them, a silhouette of a ninja approaches.

Distance between the ninja and Rain Pou, approximately 90 meters.

Find something!

Distance approximately 80 meters.

Rain Pou then noticed an alleyway.

Distance approximately 70 meters.

A van was parked there, not 2 blocks away from their apartment. Didn't the people looking for them have some kind of van?

Distance approximately 60 meters.

Rain Pou was certain that this was the van that was used this morning. Which means...

Distance approximately 50 meters.

"Kaori, you're going to have to trust me, okay? We're gonna be falling, and I need you to use your powers as soon as I say go, okay?"

Distance approximately 40 meters. The ninja is fully visible now.

"H-Huh? R-Roger?"

Distance approximately 30 meters.

Rain Pou built up tension by crouching, and dashed towards the alley, jumping off the rainbow.

Distance approximately 20 meters.

The ninja was still running on the rainbow. Mid-air, Rain Pou turned off the rainbow bridge, and the ninja, unprepared, fell down.

Rain Pou and Postarie crashed above the van. The ninja drop rolled down on the street, unfettered. She continued to run towards them in the alleyway.

“Kaori, *now!*”

Startled, Kaori touched the van, and instantly, it grew large white angel wings on the side. Not only that, it began moving.

Startling both Rain Pou *and* Postarie, the two grabbed on to the roof of the van, as it began flying off as fast as it can.

The ninja, who could not have expected this kind of situation, was dumbfounded at what she’s seeing.

With the van zooming through the air, they were finally safe from the ninja...

...But they’re going to have to face someone else when this van reaches its destination.

Postarie’s power,

‘To return things to their owners’

It allows her to touch any object, and deliver it back to their owner. Growing wings, there would be two methods of delivery.

Normal delivery, which is a slow, but guaranteed process.

Express, which runs very fast, but will definitely take shortcuts.

The type that Postarie decides will govern how fast the objects actually travel through the air. Not only that, but if the object were to hit a wall, or be damaged in mid-air, then the wings would disappear.

Although Rain Pou doubts a flying van would be stopped by anything anytime soon.

The two of them sighed, and held on to the speeding van.

In the quiet fight, Rain Pou took out her Magical Phone, and texted Grace, informing her about the fight happening outside of her ship.

☆ **Kuru-Kuru Hime (Remaining Time: 18 Hours, 10 Minutes)**

Hime threw her ribbon at the bunny-eared girl. Bunny ears simply dodged it, jumped over Hime, landed behind her, and with a swift kick, managed to kick her outside of the apartment building.

Hime wasn’t having a good time fighting this bunny girl. She wasn’t having a good time fighting in general.

“It’s best to give up. I won’t hurt you!” ordered the bunny girl.

It seems sincere, but Hime couldn’t afford to trust anyone. Her students come first.

They were on the roof, right? Okay. It’s time to test her powers.

Hime threw a ribbon upwards, wrapping itself around the roof. Hime jumped as high as she could, while also pulling herself towards the roof using her powers of ribbon control.

When she got up, she saw Wedin sprawled out on the roof. It seems she was hurt.

“Wedin! Are you okay?” asked Hime as she ran over to her student.

Wedin groaned,

“Argh... That *fucking* ninja!”

Instantly, the rabbit eared girl jumped towards the roof.

“Please, don’t run. If you just surrender, we can work this out without anyone getting hurt,” she said.

“...It’s you from earlier,” said Wedin as she stood up.

“Yes, it’s me. Listen, I don’t want to fight. I’m just here to look for someone. If you two just go with me calmly, we can figure out what’s going on. *Nobody* has to get hurt,” insisted the rabbit girl.

Wedin and Hime were side by side, the rabbit girl far in front of them.

“...What’s in it for us?” asked Wedin.

“What?” replied bunny ears.

“We won’t just surrender without an incentive”

“Not getting hurt is a good incentive”

“Will we still be Magical Girls?”

“That’s... to be determined.”

“Call your supervisor, I want to know”

“I don’t think you’re in any position to make demands. Who are you again?”

“I’m the leader”

“Self-proclaimed?”

“No. Voted in”

What was Wedin doing?

She doesn’t usually talk this much. Unless...

She’s stalling.

The rabbit eared girl was focused entirely on their conversation. Hime picked that up.

Quietly, slowly, she began letting a ribbon drop loose. Like a snake, it slithered across the rooftop floor, getting close enough to the rabbit girl.

Closer...

Closer...

Closer...

“Will we get payment compensation? We have no clue why you’re doing this”

“We have our reasons, and I’m not going to ask twice. Will you guys come quietly or no-huh?”

Rabbit ears’ rabbit ears perked up.

Now or never.

Hime launched the ribbons poised to strike. Aimed at the rabbit girl’s feet, to prevent her from doing anything.

They wrapped around her, and she lost her balance.

Hime worked fast, and the ribbons continued wrapping and wrapping until they covered rabbit girl’s entire body.

Rabbit girl struggled and struggled, but she can’t seem to break these ribbons.

The rabbit girl was now trapped in a cocoon of ribbons, unable to move, and no longer a threat.

Hime sighed happily. Wedin is safe. She can’t believe that worked.

But Hime felt something strange.

For some reason, her skin felt the wind tingle sharper than it should.

For some reason, she saw the many cars far away, despite being far, in great detail.

For some reason, she could smell liquid gas of those cars, even though she shouldn’t be able to.

For some reason, she could taste the moisture in the air, and the one in her mouth, despite not having anything in her mouth right now.

For some reason, she could hear the roar of engines and everything around her.

Too many things. Why are her senses overloading? Hime couldn’t focus.

The last thing she heard before blacking out was the rabbit girl, sighing and whispering. Despite the whisper, it was very loud to Hime.

“*Sigh...* you should’ve surrendered. It would’ve been easier that way.”

☆ **Captain Grace (Remaining Time: 18 Hours, 10 Minutes)**

Grace and Funny Trick ran as fast as they can.

When they got down, they found almost nobody. Were they too late?

“Where is everyone?” asked Grace.

“I don’t know. We need to regroup!” replied Funny Trick.

Grace stepped forward and noticed something weird flying in the sky. A black spherical eyeball, seemingly scanning the area.

“What... is that?” said Grace, pointing at the eyeball.

Funny Trick yelped a scream as she saw it.

Grace's response however, was to grab a pebble from the ground and throw it at the eyeball as hard as she could.

The black eyeball's flight path was disturbed by the clash with the pebble, and it fell down to the ground.

"Yeah! Score one for the good guys!" said Grace, pumping her fist.

However, the eyeball began to morph and change shape, and slowly got up as it somehow transformed into a new shape...

...This one's humanoid.

Large black tentacles sprouted out of its back, and there were no facial features to this strange shadowy black humanoid.

Funny Trick's yelp became a full-out scream.

"What the hell *is* that thing?" asked Grace instinctively.

The dark tentacles began to move, as the humanoid continued to shamble its way towards Grace.

Captain Grace pulled out her sword. If it's a fight this thing wants, it's a fight that it'll get.

Captain Grace charged the humanoid, and immediately went for the heart stab.. She plunged her cutlass deep into the humanoid's chest, but the humanoid didn't react.

Worse, it seems her cutlass is stuck there.

Grace's eyes widened with surprise. The humanoid creature, whose face was a dark black mass, somehow opened its 'mouth', revealing rows of monstrous teeth as it roared at Grace's face.

It lunged at her, attempting to bite her, but Grace let go of her cutlass and used her arms to restrain the jaws trying to get a chomp on her head.

With her free leg, she kicked the humanoid as hard as she could, sending it flying towards the apartment building, where it crashed in a side wall.

The creature didn't react, but its tentacles grew longer, and they morphed into blades.

Captain Grace instinctively pulled out stilettos from her waist. However, while Grace usually loves fighting like this. She can't help but feel strange.

What's this feeling?

She hasn't felt this before in a long time.

This feeling...

Fear.

Grace hadn't felt it ever since 10 years ago, when she decided to stand up against the bullies that bullied her.

Since then, whenever Grace fought, she'd always consider her opponent as prey. Prey couldn't fight back. Prey wasn't a match for Grace.

Even the rabbit girl from earlier today was prey, because she ran away. Grace felt no fear then.

But this thing... This thing fought back, and this thing can't be afraid. It was a challenger, not prey.

In fact, if Grace is not careful, she's certain that she could...

...*Die*.

She didn't want to think of that word. Fear made her think of that word.

Parrying the bladed tentacles with her stilettos, while exchanging blows with the monstrous humanoid.

But the creature was only paying attention to Grace. It had made no attempt to attack Funny Trick. Which means she's free to go.

"Get back to the ship! We're gonna need more firepower to beat this thing!" said Grace, focusing on defense for the very first time.

Funny Trick understood where she was going with this, and ran as fast as she can back to Captain Grace's pirate ship.

The tentacles were fast. Grace blocked as much as she could, some of them managed to push through and hurt her. Nothing fatal, but it still stings.

"Funny Trick! Hurry it up!"

Funny Trick finally reached the top deck of the ship, overlooking Grace.

"Ready when you are!"

"Got it, need firepower!" said Grace as she moved backwards to increase her distance against the humanoid abomination.

Grace removed her hat, and covered her stiletto with it, and after a few seconds, she put her hat back on, only for the stiletto to have changed into a flintlock pistol.

Funny Trick's abilities, combined with knowledge of where everything in Grace's ship is, makes for some useful tricks in battle.

Blam!

The shot of the pistol rang so loud, and Grace was not prepared for the recoil it would have. This pistol wasn't a normal one, it was designed to withstand Magical Girls as it came from Grace's ship.

When the pistol bullet hit the black humanoid, it punctured a hole in it. The thing actually took damage!

Blam!

Blam!

Blam!

More shots, more holes. Grace kept her distance and kept shooting. The black humanoid was now a liquid mess on the pavement.

However, it's reforming! Fast, as well! The black creature lunged at Grace again.

"More firepower!"

Grace hid her flintlock with her hat, when she removed it, it became a pirate firebomb. Fuse lit, Grace threw it at the black humanoid. Stunning it as it hit its head.

Boom!

Not working. Still reforming. Still running towards Grace.

Grace picked up another stiletto, Funny Trick prepared another object. They were in-synch.

A harpoon launcher, launched towards the black humanoid, impaling it as Grace used her stilettos to slice it up.

A musket, which Grace used afterwards to blow even more holes in the black humanoid.

Throwing knives, so Grace could keep her distance as she fought it.

Another cutlass, so Grace didn't have to lose her original.

Funny Trick constantly kept giving Grace new weapons whenever she needed it, and Grace danced around the creature. It should've died if not for its regeneration.

"Gonna need something bigger!" yelled Grace loudly to Funny Trick.

"I've got something. Cover your ears!"

Grace was confused. What did she mean. Then she looked back at the ship, and saw what Funny Trick was doing.

Funny Trick was behind one of the ship's weapons. Placed on the side of the ship, were cannons, befitting of a pirate ship. Only this time, these were cannons that were designed to hit Magical Girls.

Grace moved out of the way just in time when she heard the large explosive firing blast of the cannon.

Boom!

The impact of the fire created an explosive crater, and one in which the puddle of black goo had trouble reforming itself.

But it was still reforming.

"Damn it!" yelled Grace.

How was this thing ever going to be put down? Bullets can't kill it, cannonballs can't kill it, swords couldn't kill it.

No matter what, it kept regenerating. You'd need something to stop it from even doing that. Something huge...

...Wait.

"Funny Trick, get out of the ship!"

“What!? Why?”

“Just do it, jump out!”

Hesitantly, Funny Trick jumped from the ship all the way down to the pavement, worried about what Grace was planning to do.

Captain Grace’s power is to summon a pirate ship.

There’s nothing that says it can’t be weaponized.

Grace focused her magic, just like before.

The large pirate ship behind her disappeared. After a few seconds, it reappeared once more.

10 meters long, a true to life pirate ship. Grace made it appear in the sky, in mid-air, and it began falling at an increased rate.

Falling just above the black humanoid creature.

Crash!!!!

The shockwave from the ship crashing to the ground sent large gusts of wind everywhere, and Captain Grace’s hat was blown off from that.

But the black creature was no more. Crushed underneath Grace’s pirate ship, it was finally over. A tough fight, but one that Grace won.

With the fight over, Grace’s heart rate finally calmed down, and she couldn’t help but grin widely.

“Ha ha!!! Yes! We did it! Whoo!” she said, as she patted Funny Trick in the shoulders.

☆ **7753 (Remaining Time: 17 Hours, 50 Minutes)**

“Do you see anything yet?” asked Mana.

“No, not yet. They’re still there I think,” replied 7753.

Together on a rooftop, they were tasked on keeping a close watch on the ground in case someone tries to escape the fighting.

Boom!

A large rumble, like a small earthquake.

“W-What was that?” asked 7753.

“Was that one of us?”

“I don’t think so.”

Ripple’s powers couldn’t exactly make that effect unless she was really lucky somehow.

It can’t be Hana’s either, since she’s focused on senses.

Pam might be a possibility, but 7753 hadn’t seen her anywhere, not even in the sky.

“Shit, we should’ve gone in with them,” said Mana bitterly.

“Not a good idea. You can’t fight these people”

“It’s better than just keeping watch”

7753 continued her lookout. She scanned the streets nearby, and scanned the skies around the apartment. Nothing on the ground, but in the sky...

...A large black bird with white wings.

That’s strange. What kind of bird does that.

The bird seems to be getting bigger and bigger, which means it’s getting closer, fast. What kind of bird was this? Magic?

Only then did 7753 realize that what she’s seeing is in fact, not a bird. She looked at the... *thing*, whatever it is, closely.

Bumpers in front.

Driver’s window.

Four wheels

And... for some strange.

“Is that... our van,” asked Mana with wide eyes.

“Oh my god.”



Their van, which somehow has large wings, was aimed to a crash course trajectory with them. It's coming in fast too. Two girls were on top of it, and at the last moment, they both jumped off the van.

Which means the van is going to meteor dive straight for them.

7753 could survive the blast but...

“*Mana!* Get down”

7753 tackled Mana away from the possible crash site, and in about 5 seconds later,
Crash!!!

☆ **Rain Pou (Remaining Time: 17 Hours, 45 Minutes)**

“Ta-Chan, you okay?”

“I-I’m fine... I’m fine, I think.”

After that van ride, the two of them jumped off to the rooftop nearby. The fall wouldn’t damage a Magical Girl, but she still had to check on her friend, just in case.

“Think you can make that jump?” asked Rain Pou to Postarie.

The jump being the jump from their side of the roof to the roof where the van crash landed, which was now covered in smoke thanks to the van’s impact.

“I think... yeah,” replied Postarie.

Rain Pou helped her up, and together they jumped towards that roof.

The smoke from the crashed van was huge, and they could barely see anyone from it. With their Magical Girl vision, however, they did see silhouettes of two people, one piggybacking the other, rising up and running away.

“Hey, don’t think you can just run from us!” yelled out Rain Pou.

When she was about to give chase, however, a black spherical creature, with an eyeball on it, and what seemed to be dark wings, descended to block Rain Pou’s approach.

Startled, Rain Pou stood her ground, while Postarie yelped and stayed back.

“Toko... is this one of your friends?” asked Rain Pou quietly.

From her pocket, Toko peeked out her head,

“Not any kind of Fairy I recognize. I’ve never seen this one before”

“Doesn’t look like it’s attacking us,” replied Rain Pou.

Toko nodded,

“Could just be a defensive creature. So long as we don’t provoke it, we’re fine. This is probably someone’s ability... maybe.”

Rain Pou thought for a while, and smiled.

“I’ve got an idea. Postarie, could you do your thing on it?”

“Huh!? W-Will that even work?” asked Postarie.

“Maybe. I don’t know. We should still try regardless. I’m sure it’s safe,” said Rain Pou.

“I... Uh... Okay...”

Postarie, with a face that was about to burst in tears, slowly walked over towards the black eyeball creature.

No response from the creature so far.

She continued to walk towards it, and gently, she touched the black creature. Soft carapace.

Just like that, white feathered wings appeared on the creature, and immediately it shot up to the sky, flying away from the two.

Postarie sighed a relieved sigh.

“I think... I’m going to need a long break after this, Kaori.”

“Whew... No complaints about that.”

Not much use for chasing the two that got away now. No complaints from Toko either. Against all odds, they managed to prevent Toko from being kidnapped, after all.

☆ 7753 (Remaining Time: 17 Hours, 15 Minutes)

Mana was pacing in the room. She couldn’t stop pacing, she constantly walked back and forth.

7753 and Mana had retreated to their designated meeting spot, an apartment rented out by the Land of Magic specifically for this operation.

“We should’ve stayed,” said Mana, clearly a tone of desperation in her voice.

‘Calm her down, 7753. This is bad for your team’, said a voice in her ears. 7753’s mentor.

“We would’ve been outmatched, Mana. You would’ve died if these guys wanted to kill you, and I’m not that good of a fighter,” said 7753.

“You left them all back there! They still haven’t called or contacted us, nobody’s here but us!”

“Calm down! I’m sure they’re fine”

“Really? You said so yourself that if they wanted to kill us, they would. One of those people they’re fighting is the assassin, you know that, right?”

Mana’s face was getting redder, and she was clearly holding back tears.

“Mana, why are you crying?” asked 7753 with a somber face.

“Because you *fucking* left them behind!” said Mana, lashing out with a punch to 7753’s cheek. The punch had some impact, but 7753 felt nothing, since Mana was just a human.

With that punch, Mana’s tears came flowing, and she retreated to the corner of the room, sat on a table, and tried to hide her face.

“Hey, that’s enough, Mana,” said 7753 approaching her.

Mana glared at 7753, her face red and wet with tears.

“Enough? You know damn right it’s enough. You know something? This entire operation feels like a setup. Why would all these Divisions start sending people to help me and Hana, huh? Land of Magic’s never done that before,” she said, wiping her tears away.

“Maybe because your target’s a dangerous killer,”

“Doesn’t matter. Examination Division handles them all the time. Our target’s not the most dangerous Magical Girl in the world, and already we’re getting a quarantine? They sent Pam in too”

“What about Pam?”

“Pam is a weapon of mass destruction. You don’t send her in unless you really think it’s necessary. She’s a living nuke.”

“You’re being paranoid.”

“Am I? You don’t think... that *any* of this is out of the ordinary? Sending in Pam? Sending in Ripple, who was part of Cranberry’s tests? Quarantining the *whole* city to find one person? And *you*. Don’t act innocent, 7753. Back at the karaoke shop, you were communicating with someone. I don’t even know if you’re in on *whatever* this is, but don’t you dare for a *second* play innocent with me!”

7753 couldn’t deny that she was talking with her mentor all the way. But a setup? Perhaps... Maybe... It couldn’t be, though.

If it was what Mana had suggested, then how important is this assassin, and what’s her ties with all this?

“It’s been an hour, 7753... It’s been an hour and no one’s contacted us...” said Mana, dumping her head on the table.

“Hey, okay. That’s enough crying for tonight, Mana,” said 7753, grabbing her shoulder.

As soon as 7753 grabbed her shoulder, Mana moved over to slap 7753, but with the reaction speed of a Magical Girl, 7753 caught her hand.

“*Hey!* I said that’s *enough*, alright!? You’re the team leader. *Act* like a team leader! I’m sorry that no one’s back yet, but crying about it isn’t going to change *anything*,” yelled 7753.

“I leave for one hour and come back to this? You two must be fun at parties.”

A voice came from behind them. Looking back, the two saw the person on the doorway, opening it with her right arm.

Ripple.

She also had someone behind her. With a scared looking face, nervously, was a pink ballerina, ribbons all around her outfit.

CHAPTER 6

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

☆ **Wedin (Remaining Time: 17 Hours, 35 Minutes)**

Headaches.

The last thing Wedin remembered before blacking out was an excruciating pain of everything being magnified at once.

She couldn't move. Wait, no. That's not right. She could still move, but something was preventing her limbs and legs from moving.

Rope.

She'd been tied up on the roof. Besides her, just out sight, was Ms. Himeno, in human form. Also tied up.

That was when Wedin realized she was also in human form. Not much strength to break free from this rope.

"Ms. Himeno! Ms. Himeno!" whispered Wedin, trying to get her attention. No luck. She seemed to be out cold.

Wedin then felt her body being picked up. She was casually slung over the right shoulder of the rabbit girl.

"Ngh, so you're kidnapping me, now?" asked Wedin.

"Kidnapping? You're the one who tried to tie me up. If anything, you shouldn't blame me for tying *you* up," replied rabbit ears as she slung Ms. Himeno on her left shoulders.

"You attacked us in our home. Of course we attacked you back!"

"We asked you to surrender. The first shot came from your group, *leader*," replied Rabbit Ears.

Her ears twitched and perked up. Her brows curled. It looks like she was troubled by something, but Wedin couldn't tell what.

"Sirens. The police are coming to investigate. Your little outburst made a mess and you were almost in danger of being caught. What were you all *thinking*?" asked Rabbit ears, sighing.

In an instant, she held on tightly to Wedin and her teacher, and began running and jumping away from the apartment.

The feeling of jumping high up in the air is a lot scarier if you know you won't survive the fall. Luckily for Wedin, Rabbit Ears seems to be holding on tight enough that she won't slip.

Wedin could only hear the sounds of sirens as they blazed underneath the streets.

Eventually, the two stopped, at a rooftop with a peculiar sight on it. Rabbit ears placed them on the rooftop.

Wedin could see a smoking crashed van. Looks to be damaged, but how did a van get on top of a roof?

Rabbit Ears pulled out her Magical Phone, and looked like she was trying to contact someone. Didn't seem to be working, as she frustratingly tried to contact them over and over again.

"Ms. Himeno... Wake up!" whispered Wedin.

She tried to scoot over towards her teacher, and tried to nudge her awake, but it didn't seem to work.

Wedin focused, and could feel her Magical Phone still within her pocket. If she could just reach it, she could transform again.

Rabbit Ears tied the rope tight. It was nearly impossible to remove the knot. She still had to try though.

"Wedin. I found you,"

She heard a familiar voice, and a gust of wind began blowing around her.

That familiar voice...

"Mei? Mei is that you?" whispered Wedin quietly.

"Yes. Mei is the wind. Mei is invisible, but Mei can speak."

A faint transparent figure of Tepsekemei's face could be seen as it faded in and out of sight, being blown by the wind.

"Cut me loose. Cut Ms. Himeno loose, too."

"Okay."

Without so much as an effort. Mei materialized her hand, and ripped apart the rope tying up Wedin, then she moved on and ripped the rope tying apart Ms. Himeno.

Wedin found her Magical Phone, and with a quick press, a bright light shone in her body, and she transformed.

That was when Rabbit Ears noticed.

As quick as she could, Wedin ran and jumped off the roof.

Rabbit Ears was fast. On all fours, she quickly jumped down, leaps and bounds faster than Wedin could ever be.

Although she had a headstart, a quick look back revealed that Rabbit Ears seems to have a speed advantage.

Can't run in a straight line. Wedin will have to cut corners. Turning left immediately when Rabbit Ears would least expect it, Wedin braced herself and crashed through a store's window.

Alarms blared.

Wedin didn't stop, and found a door to the exit, slammed it open, and continued running. Rabbit Ears may have been caught off-guard, but she still kept up by taking shortcuts and jumping across obstacles.

"Stop ruining property, you're only going to make things worse!" yelled Rabbit Ears.

"Then stop *chasing* me!" yelled Wedin back.

Cutting across an alleyway, Wedin continued running, but Rabbit Ears could easily bypass the dumpsters and other trash in the alley.

Wedin saw Rabbit-Ears jump. She was going to pounce her...

...But then a large gust of wind knocked Rabbit Ears back.

Wedin could feel her arms being lifted up by an invisible force. However, Wedin knew who it was immediately.

"Wedin is slow. Mei will help."

"Ngh... Everyone has their own stamina. Thanks for the help, Mei."

Rabbit Ears was still chasing them, however, despite Tepsekemei's apparent speed boost. She tried to reach up to the sky, but could only hover as Wedin hoped Tepsekemei's fast enough.

"Mei, go *higher!*"

"Mei can't do that"

"Why not?"

"Because Wedin is too heavy"

"On second thought, keep your thoughts to yourself."

☆ **Kuru-Kuru Hime (Remaining Time: 17 Hours, 21 Minutes)**

The cold concrete rooftop was all that Hime could feel in her cheeks. When she woke up, there was almost nobody there.

The cold windy air, a smoking crashed van, and a rooftop, all alone.

How did she get here? More importantly, where is everyone?

Then it snapped. Her students. The battle earlier. They were gone, and she had no idea where they went.

She did, however, have her Magical Phone. Transforming into her Magical Girl form, she raced downwards to try and find them.

By now, she had already gotten used to her powers. Swinging from rooftop to rooftop with her magical ribbons, and making pathways that only she could use. It's amazing how fast you could get used to these.

What's more, even if she were to fall, she wouldn't exactly die of falling, thanks to her durability.

As she was zipping through the air, she felt a shock in her body.

Suddenly, her voice couldn't come out, and she felt pain being centered in her face. She found it hard to breath, as if she just hit the vacuum of space.

Coughing blood.

Blurry vision.

Ears popping.

What was this?

Hime used what strength she had to pull herself back towards where she was. Once she was out of the area, she felt like she could actually breathe again.

Her mind began to clear up. Of course, she must've forgotten in the stress.

Toko said that there was a barrier surrounding the city. This must be it. Invisible, but surrounding the city regardless. So touching it can cause that kind of pain, huh?

She really was quarantined here...

Hime tried contacting the students through her Magical Phone. Surely someone must've had it on.

No answer.

There was nothing.

The phone just didn't want to work.

What? Was there a signal issue? Hime didn't think there would be, considering these were supposedly *Magical* Phones, not usual phones. Even so, was the barrier affecting it? That can't be, otherwise she wouldn't be able to use it earlier in the day.

She could still transform, so that was a relief.

How will she contact her students now? Where *are* they? What about her? What if the other Magical Girls find her? How will she defend herself?

So many questions plaguing Hime's mind. So many questions.

Today wasn't even supposed to be like this, but now here she was...

No one to call. No one to contact. All alone. Hunted down by a group she doesn't even know about.

For the first time in her life, Hime felt utterly helpless.

She sat at the edge of the rooftop, quietly wondering how she was going to proceed forward next.

Clank

A small sound from behind her. Distinct wooden noises.



She looked back, and she saw another girl. From her looks, it was another Magical Girl. This one looked threatening. A one-armed, scarfaced ninja.

But the ninja girl simply stared calmly at Hime. Not that Hime would react. She knew well enough that she couldn't possibly match this ninja in a fight, and so fighting would've been useless.

Running would've been useless as well, since Hime thought that she would've just been caught.

Hime had already accepted her fate. But the ninja girl didn't seem to want to attack her. Instead, she went closer, and sat next to her.

Hime didn't know how to react. She just felt anger. Anger at not being able to protect her students. Anger at the situation she's in right now.

She almost cried there. She felt helpless.

"Why are you here?" asked Hime.

"I'm not going to hurt you if that's what you mean."

"That's not what I mean. I'm asking you why you came here."

"I saw you being carried by my friend. Figured I'd follow along just in case."

"I mean, why did you come to this city? Why are you chasing Toko? Why are you causing all this?"

Hearing those words, the ninja girl glanced at her. Despite the scarred left eye, she had a fairly calm expression, and her voice wasn't hostile at all.

"How about this... You tell me about yourself, and I'll answer any questions you want about myself. Deal?" said the ninja girl.

There seemed to be nothing to lose. Hime didn't exactly have much to hide. Maybe she'll learn something by finding out about this ninja girl's team.

With a sigh, Hime nodded.

"Let's start over. My name's Ripple."

"Kuru-Kuru Hime... At least that's what my phone says."

The ninja girl nodded and smiled.

"Alright, start at the beginning. How'd you get in this mess?"

How *did* she get in this mess? The last thing Hime remembered that she wanted to do was to get the cleanup committee set up. Now she was on some life-or-death situation, her students are who knows where, and she's been kidnapped at least once today.

Hime took a deep breath.

"I'm a High School Language teacher. I was supposed to meet with my students to talk about a club... Then this fairy called Toko turned us all into Magical Girls, and she told us about an evil witch chasing her. We got into a fight with her and the girl with rabbit ears, headed out to an apartment, and here I am."

Ripple nodded silently.

"Evil witch, huh? Heh... She can be a hardass, but evil is putting it too much," said Ripple.

Ripple looked at the distant stars, and spoke again,

“So, forced into being a Magical Girl and dragged into a fight you didn’t ask for? I’ve been there”

Hime noticed Ripple’s lost left arm.

“Is that where you lost your...”

Ripple glanced at her.

Hime looked away.

“Sorry, I didn’t...”

“It’s fine. Not like I’m hiding it. Yeah. It’s a long story,” said Ripple.

“So, I told you my story. Now it’s your turn, right? Why *did* you come here?” asked Hime.

“We’re looking for... a criminal, to put it lightly”

“A criminal? Toko?”

“Partly. Toko’s a collaborator. There’s someone in the group that we think is a criminal.”

Hime’s heart skipped a beat. One of her students? It can’t be. The thought hurt her more than she thought it would.

“D-Do you know who it is?” asked Hime nervously.

“Not yet. That’s why we’re trying to gather up everybody.”

“S-So, you’re like... policemen?”

“Me? No. I’m a volunteer. The others in my team, yeah. You can say that.”

“You’re not... one of them?”

“I work with them, just... not officially. Not yet.”

“Why are you volunteering?”

Ripple was silent for a moment. Hime thought she hit something personal. After a while, Ripple answered,

“To help a friend, who really needs someone to be there for her right now.”

Looks like she probably won’t explain further. It makes sense. Something personal isn’t really something you want to openly share with others.

Hime was surprised. She didn’t expect to get into a friendly conversation, especially not after what happened earlier in the day.

Ripple glanced at her,

“Look. I trust you, and I promise you, none of us were ordered to kill you. Your students will be fine. Come with me, I’ll take you someplace safe.”

Hime pondered for a moment.

Alone, she couldn’t really do much. Although she slightly trusts Ripple, she doesn’t know how to feel about her teammates.

But perhaps Hime had no choice in the matter.

Accepting whatever awaits her, she nodded.

☆ **Postarie (Remaining Time: 17 Hours, 26 Minutes)**

Postarie couldn't contact anybody. Her Magical Phone wouldn't work. Neither could Rain Pou it seems.

Both of them tried to contact whoever may be left, but there was no answer at all.

"Toko, what's going on?" asked Rain Pou.

"I honestly have no idea," replied Toko with a shrug.

The small fairy was still tucked inside Rain Pou's chest pocket. It didn't look like she wanted to do much flying, and she was safe there anyways, being able to hide whenever she felt like it.

Today's been an insane day for Postarie. The highlight of it has to be the black creature, that luckily went away as soon as Postarie touched it.

But now there's no way of actually contacting anyone, and Postarie is alone. The only upside is that she's with Rain Pou.

"You alright there, Postarie?" asked Rain Pou.

Startled, Postarie could only nod while trying to pull a smile. She wasn't exactly okay. She was stressed out and scared. She thought she would've died multiple times during that fight. She rode a flying car. She was almost captured by that ninja girl.

Postarie was trying to hold back tears. All she wanted to do now was cry.

Rain Pou didn't seem easily convinced by Postarie's words either, as she approached her and placed a hand on Postarie's shoulder.

"Hey, Ta-Chan. If you wanna talk to me about something, you *can*, y'know?"

Postarie didn't exactly know what to say, or where to start. Perhaps, if she talked about it with Rain Pou, then she'll feel a bit better about it.

She'll never know until she tries.

"Well... I think I'm just not cut out for this whole Magical Girl thing," said Postarie sheepishly.

"WHAT!?! YOU CAN'T JUST *QUIT!*" screamed out Toko as her head popped out of the pocket.

The sudden shouting startled Postarie, and made her even less confident on talking about this kind of stuff.

"Toko, calm *down*. Let me at least talk with her," said Rain Pou, glaring at Toko.

She walked over to Postarie and nodded.

"So, tell me what's up!" said Rain Pou.

“Huh?”

“Why’re you feeling down about it?”

“It’s just... stressful, I guess.”

Rain Pou sat down, and urged Postarie to sit next to her. The both of them sat and watched the night sky.

“I actually thought you’d love it. Having cool powers and being able to do things you couldn’t when you were just human,” said Rain Pou.

“Well, all that’s fun, it’s just... I’m not the outgoing type.”

“You gotta be more confident in yourself, Ta-Chan!” said Rain Pou grinning.

To be fair, Postarie did believe it was quite fun to have these abilities. She was never able to run as fast as she could.

Despite being deathly afraid of what happened earlier, the whole thing was fairly exciting while she was doing it. Still, she couldn’t help but feel like this isn’t the life for her.

It looked like Rain Pou *did* enjoy this kind of life, though. That’s good for her.

“I’m just not meant for this kind of life, I think,” said Postarie. She was nervous. She didn’t want to disappoint her friend, nor did she know the right words to say.

“You can help a lot of people y’know? You don’t necessarily have to fight. I think we were just unlucky, Ta-Chan.”

She’s right. Helping people seemed nice. Postarie’s powers would be useful if she wants to help someone. Besides, helping someone seems less dangerous than actually fighting people.

“I think I’d like to just help people. That’d be nice,” said Postarie.

Rain Pou smiled.

“Alright then! After all this is over, we’ll do that, alright?”

“Okay.”

“For now let’s head back to the apartment. Find out if anyone’s there.”

Postarie nodded, and the two girls jumped off the roof, making their way back.

When they reached just 3 blocks near the apartment complex, the girls heard sirens and bright lights just ahead.

Both of them stopped in their tracks. They understood what happened.

“Change back. We won’t be spotted that way,” said Rain Pou.

Postarie agreed, and both of them transformed back to their human forms. Wearing school uniforms as well.

Toko got out of Rain Pou’s pockets as she transformed, and once she became Kaori, entered her pockets again.

“Do you think the others are okay?” asked Postarie nervously.

“Maybe. We have to take a closer look.”

The two girls approached the crowd of onlookers as police and firemen were responding on scene.

Although there weren't many tenants living in the apartments, which is why they chose this place in the first place, there were still some people living in it. More than that, the surrounding buildings still had people as well.

Reporters were also on the scene, interviewing people.

Rain Pou nudged at Postarie, urging her to get a closer look so they can listen in.

They could just barely hear the interviewers asking questions as they passed by them.

“Could you tell us what you saw, sir?”

“It was a *flying* van.”

“Could you elaborate?”

“I really do mean it was flying. It had wings and everything!”

Hearing the exchange, Postarie nervously gulped. She only realized how reckless they were in letting themselves be seen by others.

She didn't exactly exercise caution, mostly because everything was in the heat of the moment. Now that everything's died down, however, she realized how much she's caused.

Even more people were being questioned, and none of the eyewitness reports gave them any calm.

“Saw a rainbow forming outside my window”

“I- I think there was shooting? I heard gunfire, and I didn't wanna get out”

“Definitely a terrorist bombing. I heard explosions. If it wasn't a bomb, it's some kind of rocket launcher. What? No I don't know *how* they got a bazooka in here”

“There was an earthquake, and I think I saw a ship. Like, one of those pirate ships.”

So many sightings. So many reports. Almost none of them seemed to be good news. The one thing that Postarie did notice though, is that there doesn't seem to be anyone caught.

So their friends are safe? Hopefully.

What about the other Magical Girls that were after them? Postarie didn't think they'd be caught, but she wasn't sure where they are either.

Rain Pou then pulled Postarie's hand and dragged her somewhere.

“Wha... Kaori, where are we going?”

“Somewhere quiet. I don't think anyone's here.”

The two girls walked off quickly away from the scene. Postarie simply followed without question.

A cool breeze washed over the two girls as they sat in a local park, not far from where the apartment is, but far enough that there aren't any onlookers.

Thanks to being late at night, there was virtually no one at the park as of this moment.

The two girls sat at a nearby bench, mulling over recent events.

"Kaori... Where is everyone?"

"I don't know. Phone's not working. They're not answering either. Toko, you know anything about this?"

Toko popped her head out.

"Like I said. No idea. I don't even know why it's not working"

Rain Pou let out a sigh, she looks like she's given up on trying to find the others. That means it was just the two of them for now.

"Did Captain Grace or Wedin or anyone set up a backup meeting location?" asked Postarie.

"No. Nobody did. But actually, if we can get something that belongs to Grace, you can use your powers to track her down, right?"

"Oh... yeah, that's useful but... do we have anything?"

"Nope... We'd have to go back. That place is probably a crime scene now, so we can't do anything about that. Don't suppose you know where any of them live?"

How would Postarie know that. She never really became friends with them before this.

"No... sorry."

"Me neither. It's fine."

Rain Pou stretched her arms. The two of them were clearly tired, and the night is getting later. At this point, Postarie really wanted a break.

That's when she noticed someone approaching them.

It was a woman, with a black coat, and what seemed to be a black, wide-brimmed Gainsborough Hat.

Despite her walking calmly towards them, Postarie felt tense when looking at her. There was something about the woman that screamed danger.

Looking beside her, she noticed that Toko had already hid, and Rain Pou noticed the woman as well.

The two girls acted calmly, not really wanting to make any sudden movements.

The woman stopped in front of their bench, had a soft smile, and calmly asked them,

"I assume you two are Magical Girls, no?"

The question caught Postarie off-guard. Who was this woman and why did she suddenly ask a specific question? She already felt like she knew where this is going, but still...

"Don't worry. I'm also a Magical Girl, as well. Mind if I sit here?" she asked calmly.

Postarie's heartrate increased. Rain Pou silently nodded.

The woman casually took a seat in the middle of both of them. This was getting even more uncomfortable for Postarie.

Suddenly, the woman, in the blink of an eye, caught Rain Pou's hand, reaching for her pocket.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you. I'm not here to kill you. I would've done so if I wanted to. I'm here to talk."

Her hand still gripped Rain Pou's hand. This woman was complete danger.

"Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Mao Pam. May I know yours?"

Postarie didn't know if she should answer. She glanced at Rain Pou. Rain Pou nodded at Postarie, signaling her to do as the woman says for now.

"T-Tatsuko"

"I didn't ask for your real names. Tell me your Magical Girl names."

"Uh... Postarie."

Mao Pam nodded, and glanced at Rain Pou.

"And yours?"

"Rain Pou"

"Postarie and Rain Pou. A pleasure to meet you both. Though, I'd prefer it not be under these unusual circumstances."

The two girls nodded. Postarie did it partly out of fear. For now, it was best to be calm. But how can someone be calm in a situation like this?

She tried as hard as she could to keep her breath steady. This person, Mao Pam, could probably kill them in the blink of an eye.

"From your uniforms, it seems to me like you're High School students, am I correct?"

Again, the two nodded silently.

"You had no prior experience to being Magical Girls before today?"

The two shook their heads.

"You were transformed into a Magical Girl by a small fairy named Toko, is that true?"

The girls nodded.

"But did you know you were tricked by her?"

Silence.

Postarie didn't answer because she didn't know what to say. She hadn't considered the possibility of Toko tricking them. Mostly because what had happened throughout the day only reinforced the fact that Toko was being pursued by someone who'll stop at nothing to get her.

Not only that, but Mao Pam, despite this apparent politeness, had an aura of death surrounding her, like she's someone bloodthirsty. Every instinct in Postarie's body is telling her to run away.

Two possibilities exist,

Toko is lying, in which case Mao Pam isn't evil. However, if Toko is lying, why does it seem like everything she says is true?

If Mao Pam is lying, then everything is as Postarie believed. But then, why would Mao Pam not kill them immediately?

Glancing at Rain Pou, Postarie tried to find Toko, who was still hiding in Rain Pou's chest pocket. Seems like she's not coming out anytime soon, and for a good reason too.

"Hm, speechless. Interesting. Either you know, or you were shocked. I understand your position. A woman comes out to you, tells you she's a Magical Girl, knows about your secrets, and caught you off-guard," said Pam while smiling.

Sweat formed on Postarie's forehead. Despite the cold air of Autumn, this situation has made her tense up.

Pam continued,

"I'd like to offer my protection, in exchange, I'd like some information about you two and Toko."

Postarie didn't know what to say. She's relying on Rain Pou, but even she's speechless right now.

"Repond!"

"Y-Yes!"

"Yes!"

"Excellent, I'm glad you both agree."

The intensity of Pam's orders caused an instinctive reaction in both the girls. Their safest response, to them, was to agree.

They still have no idea what's about to happen, and they have no idea what kind of deal they just agreed on.

☆ **Captain Grace (Remaining Time: 17 Hours, 59 Minutes)**

"We screwed up," said Grace.

"I know that. We shouldn't think too much about it," replied Funny Trick.

The two Magical Girls stood at a rooftop overlooking the sea. Far from the apartment. They had escaped just immediately as soon as they heard the distant noises of sirens coming close.

Since then, Grace hadn't bothered summoning her ship, for fear of getting attention.

"Shouldn't think too much- Kayo, there's *Police!* The damn *police* are coming to *my*

apartment! I heard sirens! The fire department, police sirens, the whole *block* is lookin' at it!"

"Umi, we can worry about that later!"

"Later!? That's my *apartment*!"

"I know, but as much as I don't want to seem like I'm ignoring that fact, we still have to find the others!"

"Good luck with that. My phone doesn't work for some reason"

"Neither is mine"

"Well that's just *fantastic*. What's Plan B?"

Funny Trick closed her eyes and shrugged. "We never had a Plan B."

Captain Grace felt anger. She couldn't believe the situation she was in right now. Isolated, nowhere to go, and no information whatsoever.

She kicked a nearby wall, the strength of her kick creating a small hole in it.

"Umi, calm down!" yelled Funny Trick.

"Wedin shouldn't have been the leader, we could've avoided all this," complained Grace.

"This is *not* the time."

"Then *when*? She was too busy trying to teach everyone how Magical Girls worked, she didn't have a chance to make a backup plan!"

"And *we* were in your ship drinking tea, we're all at fault here!"

Grace couldn't argue with that logic, but she was still furious. Who else was she supposed to be mad to?

The whole situation seemed like there was nothing that Grace could do. She hated being powerless. Being powerless was what she was a long time ago. She worked hard so she could actually have power and control over her life, not the other way around.

Frustrated, Grace screamed and threw her Magical Phone away.

The phone bounced off the pavement and entered an open sewer grate.

Funny Trick rose up, materialized a piece of cloth from her outfit, grabbed some stray pebbles on the roof, covered them up, and uncovered them to reveal Grace's Magical Phone.

"Hey. This is yours," said Funny Trick, handing the phone over to Grace.

"What's the damn point? Crappy thing doesn't work anyway."

"Umi, throwing this away is like giving up. You're not the kind of person to give up, are you?" asked Funny Trick, hand still offering the phone.

Reluctantly, Grace grabbed the Magical Phone from Funny Trick's hand, and she let out a deep sigh.

"Well, what do you think we should do?"

“Make our own Plan B. Set up somewhere. Somewhere they might eventually try to find us.”

Grace thought for a moment. A place that’s not too crowded, big enough to house them, and could probably fit her ship.

“Oh, there’s an abandoned warehouse in town!” said Grace happily.

“An... abandoned warehouse.”

“Yeah! Like those stories where they set up in an abandoned warehouse or building. Nobody’s home, and it can be our little base!” said Grace enthusiastically, the energy coming back to her.

Seeing Grace smile must have triggered something in Funny Trick, as she looked warm and happy once more.

Funny Trick chuckled, and looked over at the horizon.

“Well. Lead the way then, *Captain Grace!*”

☆ **7753 (Remaining Time: 15 Hours, 52 Minutes)**

“Check her,” ordered Mana.

7753 equipped her goggles and scanned over the ribbon ballerina girl. Her name was Kuru-Kuru Hime. Real Name, Nozomi Himeno. Occupation, Language Arts Teacher at Namiyama High School. Magical Girls killed, none.

7753 sighed a breath of relief. “She’s clean.”

“We’ll have questions for you later,” said Mana to Hime, who’s still nervously scared about this whole situation.

After talking with her, Mana approached Ripple with an angry expression.

“Why didn’t you contact us? It’s been an hour.”

“Phone’s not working, not sure why,” replied Ripple.

“Yours too? None of ours is working. Are we being sabotaged?”

“Maybe. You should know that *her* phone’s not working either,” said Ripple, glancing at Kuru-Kuru Hime.

Mana groaned and massaged her head, trying to make sense of what’s going on.

“What the hell is happening. We’re short two people and none of our stuff works. Hana and Pam are still out there.”

Mana was frustrated. She had been for a while now, and 7753 believed she knew the cause.

It was Hana. Mana is very close with Hana, and the fact that she’s not here and Mana couldn’t contact her must’ve put extreme stress in her head.

“U-Um, excuse me,” said a voice in the corner of the room. It was Kuru-Kuru Hime.

All three of them glanced at her.

“Will... Will my students be safe?” asked Hime.

Mana sighed and walked over to her,

“I’m going to tell you straight. They could be facing some serious charges for resisting a Land of Magic official *and* fighting us twice.”

Hime looked distraught. Ripple walked over beside Mana and grabbed her shoulder,

“Mana. Go easy on her, she’s been through a lot.”

“I’d rather tell her the facts than give her false hope, Ripple. Besides, we have more important matters to attend to, like finding out where the rest of our team is.”

“We also need to find the other students,” said Ripple.

“As I said. *A lot* of work ahead of us.”

As the two of them continued talking, 7753 noticed that her goggles are displaying some letters. The letters formed into words, which formed into sentences.

Strange, 7753 didn’t remember writing anything, nor did she know that her goggles could be used to write.

Unless...

Her mentor is typing something to her through her goggles?

Makes sense, since her Magical Phone doesn’t work, her mentor must know, and is trying to relay information some other way.

7753. I need you to relay this information out loud. Urgent news just came to my attention. Your team needs to know this.

7753 gulped.

“Guys. My higher ups are trying to communicate with me. I think you should all listen in to this.”

Mana and Ripple both looked curiously at 7753, wondering what she’d say next.

7753 focused on the message appearing through her goggles, and slowly, she read them out loud to her team.

“A few hours ago, I received a message... There was a breakout in the UK prison facility... Four Magical Girls got out. Led by one named... Pythie Frederica.”

Ripple’s eyes lit up.

7753 continued on,

“Among others, they also broke out several more prisoners... Pukin and Sonia Bean... Highly dangerous. Pythie is also accompanied by a Magical Girl known as Tot Pop.”

Mana closed her eyes and shook her head.

7753 still continued,

“Use caution, because the last I’ve heard of them... They’ve... Entered the barrier?”

7753 read the last line with a look of shock and confusion.

“What!?” asked Mana.

“Frederica’s dangerous. She’s bad news, Mana. We should pay attention to this,” said Ripple.

“You know her?”

“In a way, yes. We’ve had history.”

Mana stepped over to Ripple, face-to-face, with a threatening look on her.

“If you had anything to do with this at all, I swear...”

“Step off, Mana. Frederica’s no friend of mine,” said Ripple, not losing a beat.

“How did you know her then?” demanded Mana.

Ripple sighed, and spoke,

“After Cranberry’s tests. Snow White and I started working together for a time. We trained, we undertook our own missions. Pythie was a rogue Magical Girl. Cranberry supporter. One of the first ones we actually caught. After her, Snow decided to split.”

“So you’ve arrested Pythie? She just *happens* to come to the barrier, and you just *happen* to be sent to our Investigation team? I don’t buy it. How did she even get inside in the first place? The barrier’s not open yet!”

“Her powers can bypass that. Without going into a lot of details, it’s a form of teleportation.”

“Great... She could be anywhere then. Dammit,” said Mana as she rubbed her forehead in frustration.

Then, Mana pointed a finger at 7753,

“And *you!* All of our phones are dead, yet your goggles work and you’re talking to your boss. I don’t know whether you’re a part of this or not, but don’t think for a *second* that I’m not keeping an eye on you.”

“Step *off*, Mana,” said Ripple, standing between Mana and 7753.

“So, I’m the bad guy now? Fine. We’ll formulate a new plan. Our priority is to find the Assassin, then we’ll handle Frederica,” said Mana.

“Bad idea. Frederica’s smarter and more dangerous than you give her credit for,” said Ripple.

“Our job here is to find a killer, not handle others. That takes priority before her.”

“Frederica’s not just going to stand there. She came here for a reason. We’re still short two people. Mana... Hana’s still out there. She doesn’t *know*.”

Hearing Ripple’s words, Mana’s eyes widened. The realization sank in.

Hana doesn’t know about Pythie’s team arriving in the barrier. She’s out there with no one

to look after her. She's in danger.

"Hana... Shit. Okay, new plan. We focus our efforts on finding her and Pam. My wand can detect traces of magic, but it's going to be hard finding one person. You. Ballerina. Stay with us, do *not* try to escape. Ripple and 7753, you'll also need to stay together, since we can't contact each other. Is that clear?"

Ripple, 7753, and Kuru-Kuru Hime all nodded.

7753 noticed more messages transmitting through her goggles. Nervously, she spoke up again,

"Guys... There's more messages. Um... You should all focus on looking for Mao Pam. She'll be useful in defeating Pythie's group, thanks to her past."

"Past, what past?" asked Mana.

7753 continued reading,

"Mao Pam is hiding something from you. Something that can be useful in fighting Pythie's team. Mao Pam is... Cranberry's mentor?"

Ripple's fist involuntarily tightened at the mention of Cranberry. Her eyes looked furious, though she said nothing.

Mana took a deep breath, "Today just keeps getting better and better, huh? Well, Ripple? Still think I'm the bad guy?"

☆ **Mao Pam (Remaining Time: 16 Hours, 30 Minutes)**

Someone managed to destroy one of Pam's wings.

After chasing the genie for a while, eventually she disappeared into the wind and retreated. Pam decided not to give chase, since she knew somewhere in the outskirts, there was a barrier stopping the genie from escaping.

Instead, she ordered her wings to return to her.

One of them returned to her with white feathers, flying towards her at high speed. Someone's magic perhaps?

The other didn't return at all.

The thought that someone managed to defeat Pam's wings made her excited. A worthy opponent to fight.

Pam separated one of her wings, and from that half, increased the length so that she again has 4 black wings.

Her ability allows her to make more, but her upper limit is 4 distinct wings. That's just how this power works, and Pam has to work within its rulesets.

The first thing Pam did was to rush back towards the apartment.

As she was flying across the wide open B-City sky, her sharp eyes picked up two glowing lights. Transformations of Magical Girls, hidden within an alley.

From the alley came two High School girls, running all the way to their apartment. This might be her chance to talk to one of them.

After a few moments, the two girls retreated to the park. Pam landed, and had her wings transform to become her coat, and another to become a hat, hiding her horns.

As much as Pam enjoyed a good fight, these two were amateurs. They were new Magical Girls. Normally Pam didn't deal with them much, but these girls were seriously scared out of their lives.

Newbies. It's been a while since Pam actually felt the need to protect someone. Perhaps she can gain some information as well.

Despite her love for battle, Mao Pam was someone that respected honor. She longed for a good fight, and established herself within the Land of Magic as a powerful individual.

Her reason for finding stronger opponents, a curiosity that wanted to be sated.

Self-improvement, and finding out the ultimate peak of a Magical Girl's ability. Despite the fact that being a Magical Girl involved getting a slightly random unique power, Magical Girls also have to train themselves to adapt to any situation.

It's this kind of adaptation that Mao Pam longed for.

She would challenge stronger Magical Girls, but leave the weaker ones alone.

It turns out she wasn't alone in this pursuit of strength. She established herself as someone who could teach others to become stronger, and so many Magical Girls looking to improve themselves came to her.

One of them was particularly interesting. Partly because she always offered a good fight.

She was approached by an elf girl. Her name was Cranberry.

Sharing her passion for finding the strongest opponents, Pam agreed to train her. Together, the two continued to spar and fight each other, becoming stronger and improving themselves with every match.

As time went on, however, Pam noticed that Cranberry's way of thinking was different from her.

Pam wanted to become strong because she wanted to know the limits of strength itself.

Cranberry wanted to become strong because it seems that it's the only reason for her to live.

After graduating from her mentorship, Pam gave her the title of "Forest Musician." Cranberry's used that title ever since.

However, it's then that Pam began to hear what Cranberry had done after her training.

Cranberry had become a test administrator, and after years of no contact, Cranberry's activities were finally brought to light.

She'd been conducting battle royales. Death games. In an attempt to find the strongest opponents, she's dragged each and every other new Magical Girl into the equation.

Her lust for battle was out of control.

Although Pam felt a tinge of loss, she still couldn't feel full sympathy for the lives lost during Cranberry's tests. Perhaps because she'd become desensitized to fighting and death.

But here, and now... There were two newbies who were troubled. Pam can gain info on her target, Toko, and in return, she may even be able to protect them.

“Sabbath”.

As Pam said those words, two of her wings transformed into fur jackets, and wore themselves around the two girls.

“What is this?” asked Rain Pou.

“Protection. My wings can keep you safe. Now, let's talk,” said Pam, smiling warmly.

☆ **Wedin (Remaining Time: 16 Hours, 11 Minutes)**

“The sea! We should head to the sea!” said Wedin as she was being carried by Tepsekemei, floating through the streets, with Rabbit Ears keeping up behind them.

“Why the sea?” asked Tepsekemei.

“Because she'll have a harder time catching us if we swim! We can lose her there.”

“Cannot reach the sea. Mei has tried. It hurts”

“What? What do you mean it hurts?”

“When Mei was fighting the horned lady. Mei escaped by flying really high. Then Mei hit something invisible. It was painful. Mei doesn't want to do it anymore.”

An invisible wall?

The barrier.

Wedin only just remembered that they were trapped in B-City for the time being. This means they have no choice.

Rabbit Ears won't give up. Magical Girls don't run out of stamina easily, and this could go on forever, but Rabbit Ears will eventually catch up. Her or her friends.

Meaning, they'll have to fight.

“Mei, can you take her?”

“...Maybe.”

“Find somewhere wide and quiet.”

“Mei doesn't know the city.”

“There's an abandoned building nearby. The district's poor and there's nobody there. Follow my instructions!”

“Okay.”

Wedin knew where she was going. An abandoned warehouse, used to be a place where a local factory stored their goods. It was abandoned several years ago, and B-City being B-City, nobody has gotten around to actually demolishing it.

Low witnesses, low noise, a good battlefield if they have to fight.

Wedin led Tepsekemei towards the shortest path, zipping through alleyways and floating through bridges and intersections.

When they finally reached the warehouse, they found the unexpected company of two other people.

“Whoa, what’s the rush?” said a blue-shirted pirate girl.

“Captain Grace!” yelled out Wedin.

Tepsekemei released Wedin, looked at Grace and Funny Trick, and spoke,

“Enemy is coming. Be ready!” said Tepsekemei as she dissipated into the air.

Rabbit Ears arrived at the scene shortly. She stood up, and looked over the 3 Magical Girls in front of her.

Captain Grace smirked and walked in front of the group.

“Oh, hey there, Rabbit Ears! We meet again!”

Rabbit Ears nodded,

“Still going to fight me after what happened last time?”

“Oh, you bet! I’m ready for Round 2! Are you?”

“This will be so much easier for everyone involved if you’d just listen to me and come peacefully.”

“Uhh... That’s a *no*.”

Captain Grace’s voice was loud, boisterous, and boastful. She was a musclehead at its finest. Wedin couldn’t help but feel second-hand embarrassment from seeing this display.

Still, Grace was the best fighter out of all them.

“So you’re going to gang up on me and attack me. Why can’t you guys just listen?” said Rabbit Ears as she got into a fighting stance.

Grace pulled out her cutlass, and pointed it directly at Rabbit Ears, making a distinct *shink* noise as it glinted in the moonlight.

“Oh no, it’s not gonna be 4-on-1 today! It’s just *you* and *me*! Think you can take me on?” she said as she grinned.

“I’ll be sure to make it fast and painless,” said Rabbit Ears.

Wedin noticed something coming from the warehouse. A strange shimmer in the air. Like what you would see when the sun is at its peak.

But it’s nighttime, and the shimmer was there.

What was this?

From the shimmer, walked a woman, clad in an aristocratic dress, an orange sword, and orange hair.

She had a beautiful form, yet she also projected a murderous aura in her eyes.

The woman clapped loudly, and laughed. She laughed like a beast, not caring for a minute what the world thinks.

Then she spoke, but she spoke in a language that Wedin didn't understand.

Some words were familiar, but this was clearly another language... English? And even then, this was a strange accent that Wedin wasn't familiar with.

The other Magical Girls noticed this woman too.

Coming after the shimmer, was another one. With a light brown hoodie, long black hair, horns from the hoodie, and a crystal ball in her hand.

This one spoke in a language Wedin understood,

"My apologies. My friend here, Shogun Pukin, is a foreigner. She doesn't speak Japanese. Allow me to translate for her," she said as she stood beside the other woman, named Pukin.

Pukin began speaking. Again, in an unfamiliar language. The other woman chuckled, and translated.

"Shogun Pukin has said that she found this display entertaining. She was actually rooting for the pirate. She has skill. Fortunately, she's here to make things interesting. She asks that you please not run away, as she is much more capable than the rabbit at catching you, and she will definitely kill you if you run."

Wedin's heart skipped a beat.

Who were these two? Where did they come from? What's going on.

Captain Grace and Rabbit Ears were both shocked and confused as well.

So these two weren't with Rabbit Ears?

A third party?

Wedin and Funny Trick stood side by side, Captain Grace and Rabbit Ears facing off in the distance, with Pukin and this other woman watching them.

Pukin spoke something. Despite it being English, Wedin understood enough to understand what she said.

This will be fun.