

Just one summer

Von aprileagle

Nehm' Träume für bare Münze
Schwelgen in Phantasien
Hab mich in Dir gefangen,
Weiß nicht, wie mir geschieht.
Ich wärm' mich an Deiner Stimme,
leg' mich zur Ruhe in Deinem Arm.

Halt mich nur ein bißchen
Daß ich schlafen kann.

Halt Mich, Herbert Grönemeyer

(You've made my dreams seem like real life
Every one comes true
Reality's unfocused
I've lost myself in you
Warm me with tender whispers
Now enfold me in your arms

Hold me, these sweet moments
Just until sleep comes)

Author's note:

Again an idea I got during some vacations. Guess then I simply have too much time to think, too much music to listen to and too much nature to look at ^-^.

Disclaimer: La filétté revolutionnaire Utena belongs to Chiho Saito and surely some big firms. The story however is mine.

The song above is "Halt Mich" by Herbert Grönemeyer. It's one of the most touching love songs he ever wrote.
This story won't be a lemon, but a sweet love story. I prefer more to develop things,

not to rush them ^-^. Okay,
to all guys out there who don't like the idea of Utena and Anthy being a couple, don't
read this. To all other
persons, just enjoy ^-^.

To Laura-chan - hai, it's an illness, but a nice one ^-^.
To Adri-chan - This is my next story (Utena) ^-^.
Hehehe

If anyone has curry receipts or seal rings just write to: aprileagle@freenet.de. I don't
take every duel, but answer
every letter. I promise ^-^.

No matter what will follow next, but I guess the best time in my life had been my
school time. Especially the big
summer vacations... sigh... so much free time. So much time to go swimming. So much
time to get sunburned.
And so much time to make total nonsense.
^-^.

Just one summer
(by April Eagle)

Prologue: A special time

"And the little duck said to the big, evil..."
Whatever the evil was, she didn't listen to her teacher's voice any longer. It was hot
outside the school building.
The sun was shining from a cloudless sky and inside the building it was as hot as it
surely was in hell. She
groaned and tried to get some fresh air with her book. An old book that had seen
better days. And surely better
school bags. Hers was always a chaos and that was a real understatement. Mostly she
put all things she needed
and the things she didn't need into the black bag and fought for some minutes to
close it so that she could carry it
around. The book survived several attacks by a broken milk bottle and by a smashed
banana. It even survived the
crash from the opened window when she didn't pay attention. But the summer's heat
seemed to be enough for it.
Or was it her desperate search for fresh air? Some sheets fell out and flew silently to
the ground. But she didn't
care about it. She only rolled her eyes as the girl sitting next to her bowed and picked
them up.
"You lost the ending of the story, Tenjoh-san." Whispered the smaller girl and
concentrated again on the text.
Pink eyes looked confused at the sheets and then at the girl.
"That's not your seriousness, Anthy, is it? This story is stupid!" she sighed and ducked

as the teacher looked
warning over to her. She often disturbed the lessons. Especially during the past
weeks. When the summer got
hotter and the stories they read in Japanese literature more and more boring.
"Do you think so?" answered the smaller girl and stroke some strands of violet hairs
behind her ears. "A little
ducky fighting against an evil fox, Tenjoh-san?"
Tenjoh-san!
The girl groaned again and threw her pink hairs on her back.
"My name is Utena, Anthy!" she whispered a little bit too loud because the teacher
coughed. So she grinned at
the old woman, ducked again and put quickly the lost pages into the book. They were
now at the wrong place,
but Utena didn't care about it.
"Hai, Tenjoh-san." Answered Anthy without looking up and turned carefully another
page. Her book looked
brand-new and the stories they already read had a nice, neat cross in the corner.
She can't mean it!
This story is BORING!
Utena sighed again and opened another button of her special uniform. The boy's
uniform. But because there was
no rule forbidden her to wear it, the teachers - especially the headmistress - had to
accept it. She felt the sweat
running down her back and made a face. This was one of those days she almost
regretted to chose that uniform.
But only almost. Because once she had worn the girl's uniform, too. Only for one day,
but she had looked stupid.
Really, really stupid. And she hated to look stupid. Some teachers would call her
stupid, for example their
Japanese literature teacher right now, but that wasn't a stupid look on her face, it was
a bored one. A very, very,
very bored one.
"The brave duck..."
Where the hell are we? In the kindergarten?
Utena laid her head on her arms and stared over to Anthy whose eyes followed the
lines the teacher was reading
aloud.
We are reading a story about a bloody ducky and a poor fox who will still be hungry at
the end of the story!
Utena knew that it was a fable. Some old men wrote it and they used animals to
describe typical human
behaviours. Nevertheless it was boring and not very useful. Utena's stomach growled
silently and she knew that
she was the fox. But she was not as stupid as the poor animal. She would go to the
cafeteria the next break to get
something to eat. She wouldn't hunt an innocent ducky, but an innocent sandwich.
With a lot of cheese.
"So the little duck ran..."
Utena closed her eyes and opened them again as someone kicked her leg. She raised

one eyebrow but Anthy
stared concentrated down on the text. So Utena let herself sink again into the
pleasant darkness. Then another
kick. She sat upright and glanced over to Anthy. She was the only one who could reach
her without moving.

Shortly she looked into purple eyes that seemed to sparkle. An almost smiling mouth
formed a simple sentence:

>You shouldn't sleep!<

With that Anthy turned away again.

"And then the big fox almost caught the duck and..."

Anthy...

Utena took a deep breath and tried again to get some fresh air with her old book and
looked outside the still

closed window. She tried to open it in the break, but some pupils complaint that they
would catch a cold, because

the door was opened, too. So it stayed closed and Utena felt like an egg boiling in
damn hot water.

Shortly she glanced at her watch and sighed even deeper.

Ten more minutes...

She stared again outside the window and rested her head now on the palm of her
right hand.

In ten minutes I am hard boiled and ready to get served...

The pink haired girl grinned at that thought and watched the tree standing still
outside the building. No wind was

there. Not even the slightest breeze. It was a damn hot summer and it didn't seem to
get any colder during the

next weeks.

Next weeks...

Utena closed her eyes again for some moments and the grin on her face grew wider.
Only this last week. Just one

more day. Friday. Not an important day. She would get her report and the teachers
would say some more words

at least they thought to be important and then she was free.

FREE!!!!

Utena's lips almost touched behind her ears.

Free for eight wonderful weeks. For two beautiful months. For so many days she
didn't want to count, because

that would have given them a limit. And she wanted to be free - unlimited!

Free from this strange school. Free from the crazy school council she would never be
able to understand. Free

from those silly duels she didn't want to fight but had to. Free from the insane
duellists. Utena was very sure that

they had to be insane, because they really thought that there was someone called
"End of the world". They even

received letters from that person! And one look into Saionji's exchange diary
eliminated every doubt.

Poor Anthy, I am sure she doesn't even want to write it!

Anthy...

Utena opened her eyes shortly before the violet haired girl kicked her leg again. There

was now a real smile visible on the bronze face. Purple eyes sparkled and Anthy looked amused. In a happy way Utena hadn't seen a lot before. Especially not during the first time when she... no, she wouldn't say the word "won", she hated that word... when she met Anthy during a duel some months ago. But as the weeks passed and Anthy didn't have to go back to one of those insane persons, she got more and more open. Yet she didn't laugh, but often she smiled and Utena was sure that all the smaller girl needed, was time. Time and a little bit peace. Utena was patient. Well, at least she could be patient when she knew she had to, but the other duellists weren't. They all were blind and didn't see the girl behind Anthy. The girl who wanted so badly to be normal. Saionji Kyochi beat her. For that she would beat him back. One day. Kaoru Micki didn't want the girl, he only wanted her music. Still Utena didn't understand that. Her aunt often told her that genius are complicated and one didn't have to understand them. Micki was a genius with his piano, so that was okay. At least he didn't want to hurt Anthy. But only to see a thing in her... Kiryu Nanami tried to humiliate Anthy. One day the ignorant girl would pay for that. Kiryu Toga... Utena shook her head, still watching Anthy reading the boring story. Toga is an asshole! The only person Utena liked somehow was Arisugawa Juri. The young woman with the hard expression on her face but the sad look in her deep eyes. There was more behind Juri's rough behaviour, Utena was sure. She only couldn't find out what it was. But whatever happened to Juri, it let die her believe in miracles. Utena knew that miracles were important. Almost as important as dreams. As her dream about being a prince and protecting a beautiful princess. Utena didn't know a lot about Juri, but she knew that everyone needed something to believe in. To dream of. A secret wish that might come true. One day... The pink haired girl glanced again at her watch and the grin on her face brightened up. All duellists were forgotten. Just like her doubts how long she would still be able to face and to win all those fights. All that counted now was the clock. Just two more minutes! Utena counted silently the seconds and moved slightly in the rhythm of the clock. Just one more minute and fifty seconds! Then this day would be over. Then the school would be over for this year. Then this term would be over. Because getting the reports didn't count. Just one more minute and forty seconds! Then the best weeks of the years would begin: Summer vacations. Utena already knew what she would do. Of

course she knew it. She would do the same she had done every summer: Relaxing, driving her aunt crazy and eating tons of ice cream.

Just one more minute and thirty seconds!

"Tenjoh-san..." whispered Anthy as the teacher suddenly stopped to read and came slowly over to them.

"Hey, I wasn't very loud."

"No, you didn't snore this time."

"This time? I never snore!" Utena's grin faded and desperation filled her face. "I don't snore, Anthy, do I?"

Frantically she searched in her old book for the right pages, but couldn't find them in all the chaos.

The rabbit and the raven...

The old cow and the little mouse...

Utena hesitated for a moment and her eyes grew wide.

Moment! A cow and a mouse? What's THAT for a story? Ah, right, the cow steps on the mouse by mistake and

the mouse... amazing that the mouse survived it!

The teacher's coughing beside her brought her back into reality. She tried to cover the book with her hands to

hide the bad conditions behind.

"So, can you tell me what will happen to the duck when the fox reaches it?"

He will have a delicious supper?

But somehow Utena had the feeling that her teacher didn't want that to hear that answer.

"The duck will spread its wings and fly away and the fox will be so angry that he dies."

Answered Anthy in her

typical calm voice. The teacher looked confused for a moment, then she nodded.

"Hai, right... but..."

At that moment the bell rang.

Thanks to all gods and goddess!

Utena closed the book and searched for a small place in her overcrowded bag.

Thanks to Anthy...

She turned again towards the smaller girl who already held her bag in her hands. But she didn't rise to leave the

class room as quickly as the other pupils around them. Instead she still sat there, obviously waiting for her.

"Arigato." Mumbled the pink haired girl and earned again one of those soft smiles.

"No problem, Tenjoh-san."

"Anthy..." Utena rose from her chair and almost fell over as she lifted her bag to her back.

"Hai?" Again another soft smile Utena didn't want to lose. Especially not to those insane bakas. Suddenly a

thought hit the pink haired girl and the smile returned on her face. She stroke her strands out of her sweaty face

and looked again at her watch. Two in the afternoon. A simply wonderful time.

"Let's get something to eat and go to the swimming pool." She said and hurried towards the door. In the case that

the teacher wanted to see her messed literature book. "I've got to talk to you."

"As you please, Tenjoh-san."

No Tenjoh-san!

No >as you please<!

You are a normal girl, Anthy! A normal girl.

My best friend!

Since Wakaba moved away with her family just two weeks ago Anthy was indeed Utena's best friend. Okay, the

other girls and even some brave boys wanted to talk to her and to be someone they called friends, but right now

Anthy was the only one Utena could talk to about almost everything. Not only about school, but also about

things that worried her or that kept her thinking. Sometimes there were even moments when they understood

each other without many words. Sometimes a look was enough and they both laughed. Or at least Utena laughed

while Anthy smiled that soft smile. That shy smile that would surely turn into a happy laughter. One day. Surely!

The pink haired girl took a deep breath, then she cheered up and ran outside.

One day she will stop this stupid behaviour as >Rose Bride< and start calling me Utena.

"Don't talk that much, hurry up, Anthy!"

"Right, to eat something and to get into the water."

Utena made a face and raised her arms.

"Is it really so bad? I took a shower in the morning, really."

Anthy's shy giggle told her that it was the best idea she ever had that just formed in her mind.

She simply needs to get out of that crazy atmosphere here.

Utena laid lazy on the grass near the swimming pool and let the sun dry her still wet bikini. Pupils laughed

around her and she heard them jumping into the nice cool water. The last year the school really built a swimming

pool for its pupils and the boys and girls enjoyed the hot days with it. It was not as big as the one in the near city,

but it was cheaper and you didn't have to take care for old grannies and grandpas who were blind and deaf, but

could shout still very loud when someone splashed them with water.

"Chuchu, not!" Anthy's voice was shocked and there was the sound of a little animal eating a biscuit or

something else sweet the smaller girl mostly ate for lunch. Or at least brought to school for lunch. During the last

time it got kind of a tradition that Utena gave her some of the sandwiches she bought in the cafeteria.

"Chuchu!"

"Is he eating your lunch again, Anthy?"

"Hai, and then he'll be sick the whole evening, Tenjoh-san!" Anthy moved on the blanket and something jumped

over Utena's stomach. She raised her sunglasses and gasped hard for breath as someone taller landed on her stomach as well. Chuchu made a face and jumped away. Holding the biscuit still tight in his little paws.

"Chuchu!"

"Anthy..." Utena tried to sit up, but the violet haired girl still laid across her. Only seeing her pet, no, her best friend as she called the evil animal. Without caring for the taller girl she stretched her arms but Chuchu only showed a little, brown tongue, turned around and started noisily to eat the sweet food.

"Anthy... please... breathe..."

"Oh..." Purple eyes grew wide and the next moment Anthy sat back. To watch how Utena's face turned from a dark red to its normal colour again.

"That's much better..." panted the taller girl and finally sat upright. "I knew it, the last sandwich was one too much..."

"Gomen nasai..." Anthy bowed before her and looked suddenly really guilty. Utena took another deep breath and her pink eyes were a shade darker as she watched her best friend.

"No problem, Anthy." Utena laid her right hand under Anthy's chin and forced her to look up. "Hey, I guess I wouldn't have done it better. You know how clumsy I can be. And hunting Chuchu, that's hard. I know that."

They both stared at each other and started to smile at the very same second. Both remembered too well how Chuchu splashed Utena's uniform with chocolate milk and how they both haunted him through the whole room. Over the beds, over the table. Knocking over the chairs of their desks, knocking over the rest of the chocolate milk and doing the worst they could do - opening Utena's wardrobe where she put all things she didn't need right now, but what might be useful later on. Everything seemed to be useful later on for her, so her wardrobe was always full and to open it was like letting a bomb explode.

"Hey, you beauty."

A shadow stepped next to their blanket and covered the sun from their point of view. Beauty?

Not beauties?

Utena looked up and squinted. She didn't have to see that person. She already recognized his voice.

Why does he always ignore Anthy? She's a person! Not a thing one can own!

Nevertheless Utena kept silent. She argued a lot with the other duellists over that topic and especially with him.

She won the duel, but this fight she lost. They simply didn't want to understand. Or weren't they able to? Simply because of those silly letters? Of a silly ring bending them to a stranger? To a crazy prophecy? Even Anthy

believed in that destiny. Maybe she still believed. But Utena was determined to change this. Anthy was a nice person. A really good friend. She didn't deserve the way they treated her. Especially that stupid, arrogant guy called...

"Toga. What's up this time?" Utena didn't make the effort to hide the antipathy in her voice. She didn't want to see him right now. She wanted to talk to Anthy about her fantastic idea and now there stood this guy, grinning at her. Destroying all her good mood!

"I want to duel with you." He explained and knelt down next to them on the blanket. Without asking he took one of Anthy's biscuit and bit into it.

"No." Answered Utena simply and covered her sparkling eyes again with her sunglasses.

"No?" Toga frowned and the half eaten biscuit escaped his hands. It fell unseen in the grass. Not even Chuchu wanted to eat it.

"No! It's summer vacations, now, Toga. No more duelling for the next two months!" Utena rose and looked

down at him. Her damp hairs fitted on her back and she crossed her arms before her chest. Warning she glanced

down at him. Shortly she moved her right hand to silent Anthy who wanted to protest. "I am sure that you and the others want to go on vacations, right? I am sure that you and your sister want to visit

your family or go swimming or whatever you want to do in your FREE time!"

"But it is your duty to duel..."

"Of course it is your duty, Toga. During the school term. School is over now." She interrupted him and her left foot knocked on the blanket in impatience.

"Tomorrow..."

"Tomorrow we will get our reports. That never counted. Besides right after school I won't be here any longer to duel with you. Because I want to have some vacations and to visit my aunt. I haven't seen her since Christmas and I care a lot for her!"

"Then I'll declare this as your giving up as duellist and as my duty I'll take Anthy as my Rose Bride." Said Toga

and grinned evil. Purple eyes grew wide and Anthy looked as if she wanted to say something. As if she really

wanted to contradict. But after some seconds of fight she lowered her head and stared at her fingers in her lap.

Under her bronze skin she was suddenly very pale.

"Do as you please, Tenjoh-san..." she whispered and Utena took a deep breath. She didn't want to shout at her

best friend to ask, no, to BEG her to stop saying such nonsense. Instead she concentrated all her anger on the still

grinning young man who stroke his red strands with an elegant motion out of his face. His blue eyes sparkled

and he seemed to be sure to have her in the typical trap again. The way he had always caught her. Especially during the weeks when she really believed that he was her prince.

A nice prince!

He never cared for me! Only for himself!

An ignorant prince! A arrogant prince! A spoiled prince!

A prince Utena never wanted to be. For her a prince was kind. Understanding. And loving. And, in her case, sometimes a little bit impatient.

"Anthy won't be here, either." She declared with a clear, loud voice. "She'll be on vacations, too. With me!"

Toga's chin dropped.

Anthy's eyes grew even wider.

Chuchu's food fell unseen on the blanket.

She had done the worst thing she could do. She had known it. She had been warned. Hell, she had been the one who created it. The most evil thing on earth. And now she did it. She really did it. Again. She opened it: Her wardrobe.

"I am sure that it is here somewhere." Utena's voice was muffled as she knelt in all the chaos that now covered the whole room. Anthy had put her washing bowl aside half an hour ago and watched her now in silence from the top of the two beds. There was the safest place right now, because whenever Utena found something she needed for her vacations, she threw it through half of the room to the other side of the table. Without looking up.

"Are you sure, Tenjoh-san?" asked Anthy after a long time she watched Chuchu sleeping on her lap. The little pet ate too much this afternoon and couldn't move any longer. So the brown devil decided that the best he could do was to fled into dreamland. To escape Anthy's concerned looks.

"Nani?" Utena looked out of the wardrobe with something that seemed to be a big swimming ball on her head. It was out of air. "I just found the tent!" She pulled something out of the chaos and the whole mountain moved and crashed next to Utena who grinned guilty. "I've never been very good in keeping order." She admitted and pulled the tent completely free. At least it was still in its bag so that there were surely no holes were the rain could drop into and wake her in the middle of the night.

"Why do you want to take me with you? It's your free time, Tenjoh-san? Maybe Toga is right and..." Anthy raised surprised her eyebrows as Utena freed herself from a fishing rod that now caught her this time, not a carp.

"I don't want to hear anything of that silly Toga- or duellist- stuff, is that clear? The

coming two months we'll be away from that stupid school and those damn duels! I want to enjoy it and I am sure that you want to enjoy that time when you don't have to be that silly Rose Bride, too!"

"But I am the Rose Bride!" protested Anthy weakly and stroke over brown fur in her lap. Chuchu purred, but kept sleeping. "And I simply can't go away. What if it happens right now?"

"Don't worry, the end of the world waited for the past millions of years. It is able to wait those two months as well." Utena's voice was sarcastic and Anthy gulped. You never understood...

She lowered her head and stared again at Chuchu. She didn't know how to explain it. It was so hard. Especially for Utena who had an explanation for everything. Mostly a very simple explanations: For her all duellists were bakas. That someone was behind, hidden in the shadows and laughing about their silly behaviours. Surely a pervert who wrote those letters and wanted to know how far he could get with it. No, you would never understand. Because those letters were real. There was no pervert behind. Only a power. And the duellists weren't bakas. At least, not all of them Anthy had to admit after she thought shortly at the exchange diary.

Although I want you to understand it. Then you'd be able to understand me... at least a little bit...

"But if..."

Utena rolled her eyes and Anthy knew that it could be dangerous when the pink haired girl rolled her eyes. And when she took a deep breath. And when she clenched her fists. The way she did right now.

"There's no >if<, Anthy. You'll go with me on vacations, okay?"

"Tenjoh-san..."

"And stop calling me >Tenjoh-san<, Anthy! I am not a teacher! I am your friend! You know what that is, Anthy? F-R-I-E-N-D? Friend!"

"But..."

"You are the Rose Bride, right?" Utena used the voice she always used when she lost patience. Anthy gulped and kept stroking Chuchu. Utena often used that voice towards the other duellist, except Miki and Juri. Or towards the headmistress. Or towards boys who wanted Utena as their girlfriend. With a short answer she declared them that she liked the way her life was right now. Or at least her love life was right now: Being a single.

But she hardly uses that voice when she's talking to me...

"Hai..." answered Anthy very silent and gulped again.

"Fine. And you are always talking that you do whatever I tell you. So, listen now, Anthy, I want you to go on vacations. To relax. To throw that exchange diary away for some weeks. To take away

that sword for a while. To stop those duels for this summer, okay? I want you to be a normal girl!"
"But..."

"No more crazy duels, no more insane duellists who only try to hurt you. Who only see a thing in you, not the person you really are." Utena's voice got quieter and as Anthy raised her head she saw an expression in the other girl's face she hadn't seen there before. "I want you to eat as much ice cream as you can, to watch the stars in the middle of the night and to splash me with water. I want you to get to know how it is to catch a fish and to roast it over an open fire. I want you to have fun, Anthy. This is a special time. It's summer time! I want you to spend it with me! Not with those bakas! Maybe you only listen to me when I order all this to you, but it would be an honour for me if you'd do this voluntarily."

Anthy stopped stroking Chuchu who protested silently and smiled softly at the taller girl still looking up to her.

Wild Utena looked suddenly not that wild at all. She looked understanding and friendly.

"But there's still a problem."

"What problem?" Utena stepped back and of course she stumbled over a volleyball that laid on the carpet. She lost balance and crashed again into the chaos mountain next to her wardrobe. "You still don't want to? Or do you want to visit your parents? Did you have other plans?" Suddenly a very unsure expression appeared on Utena's face surely no one would ever expect there. Someone she normally shout at or ran over.

"I have nothing for camping." Explained Anthy and pointed over to her neat, well ordered wardrobe. It only contained her school uniforms and a huge balloon octopus.

Utena spread her arms and the typical grin returned to her face.

"I have enough for the both of us."

Anthy looked sceptically down at herself. Her school uniform laid now on her desk and what she wore felt strange. It was a dark green sweatshirt with a hood. It was too wide and the sleeves almost covered her whole arms, not only her elbows. It was one of Utena's shirts. Utena was as thin as she, but she was almost one head taller. As Anthy put the hood over her head she almost drown in it. The pink haired girl glanced shortly up and laughed.

"You look cute, Anthy."

Then she concentrated again on the jeans. Blue jeans that covered Anthy's foot completely. First they tried cut

jeans which went over Anthy's knees and decided that they would take them, too.

Cute?

Anthy frowned and watched how Utena simply folded the ends until Anthy could move again. The shoes were

more a problem. Utena searched as long as she found some older boots of her. They looked really like Utena's

boots: Dirty, worn and yellowed. But they were dry and fitted.

"I knew why I kept them!" said Utena with triumph in her voice and stood up.

Sceptically she observed her

victim and smiled finally satisfied.

"My pullovers will fit, I am sure. Yap, that's better now."

"But it feels strange." Anthy raised her arms and the hood slide even deeper into her face. She corrected her

glasses and tried to make some steps without stumbling over Utena's wardrobe chaos.

"We want to go camping. It's very hard to camp with your school uniform. Especially with your red dress."

Suddenly Utena stood right beside her and put the hood back. "Don't worry, Anthy, maybe not even your

grandmother would recognize you right now, but you look cute." Utena smiled tenderly. Then she swirled

around and grabbed some other clothes. "Besides I'll look the same strange." She giggled and held a black T-

shirt up. In pink letters was written on the front: Satan is stupid.

"And I am able to get my things dirty without feeling so guilty!"

Anthy raised her eyebrows asking and pointed at the shirt.

"Oh, it's not mine, but I like it." Grinned Utena and blushed slightly. "It belonged Kei.

Our neighbour's boy. We

went camping a lot when I was younger." The pink haired girl sat down on a basketball and stared for a long

time at the T-shirt. "He always had such dark clothes and listened to strange music. But it was real fun being on

vacations with him. That's why I still have everything for two persons." Utena shrugged her shoulders and put

the T-shirt away. She didn't want to admit that she missed him. The same she missed Wakaba.

"He got a girlfriend last year and got a job after he left school. He has no time any longer for me."

Anthy bowed to fix her shoelace and bit on her lower lip.

"Has he been your boyfriend?"

She saw from the corner of her eyes how Utena shook her head.

He wanted, but I didn't want to.

"Nope, but he was the best kinda big brother you could imagine."

And what am I? Kinda little sister?

No, I am the Rose Bride...

Anthy rose and observed the chaos for a moment. Then she put her hands in her hips and a determined

expression appeared on her face.

"Better we should tidy up the room and pack our bags."

"Packing the bags sounds right." Now Utena grinned again. "The rest can wait." Anthy opened her mouth, but closed it again as Utena pulled out two back bags and started to fill them.

"We need to get some food, the bus tickets and I need to call up my aunt."

Aunt?

"You want to visit your aunt? Your family?" Anthy felt suddenly very unsure and pulled the sleeves of the

sweatshirt over her freezing hands. The cloth had the nice scent of a wild girl with sparkling eyes. Anthy didn't

have any family at all. At least she couldn't remember of ever having parents. She spent all her life in the school

and for her it was the first opportunity to leave it. To spent a summer not alone and in silence, drinking tea while

her Rose Groom waited for the next duel. The longer she thought about that idea, the more she liked it.

"Hai." Utena grabbed another shirt and tried to pull it into the rucksack. Anthy came over to her, still stumbling

because she wasn't used to such heavy boots. Not yet. But for Utena she was willing to learn it quickly. "But

don't worry, my aunt is a really nice person." Utena watched how Anthy took the shirt out of the rucksack and

folded it with a lot of patience and skill. "I am sure that she'll love you, Anthy."

Utena blushed slightly as Anthy gave her one of those soft smiles.

Chapter one: The ghost of the forest

"My bonny is over the ocean

My bonny is over the sea

My bonny is over the ocean

Oh, bring back my bonny to me."

Utena sang with all her heart. Some birds flew terrified away, but she didn't care about them. Tightly she held

the stick she found some hours ago and declared to be her hiking stick. She already told Anthy that she would

carve some symbols into it in the evening. Her voice was happy and a wide grin laid on her sweaty face. She had

bound her pink hairs together to a ponytail and put a dark cap on her head. Proudly she showed all animals of the

forest that satan was stupid and some spots already covered her cut jeans. From the sandwich she ate for lunch

while the bus had to break hard.

Anthy was some steps behind. She always was. Utena had a well trained body and walked very fast. It was hard

for the smaller girl to follow, but she didn't want to be a burden. So she kept silent and tried to keep up. Or at

least not to fall too much behind. The boots Utena gave her were fantastic. Hardly she

stumbled over a stone or a root and when she did it didn't hurt. But even them couldn't make her go faster. The rucksack on her back was heavy, but she knew that it wasn't even nearly as heavy as Utena's. Anthy only carried some more clothes and a little bit food. Especially for Chuchu. Her pet could eat a lot. Right now Chuchu sat on her shoulder and ate noisily a biscuit. Most of the food Utena had in her rucksack. Just like their sleeping bags and some bottles of water. And their tent. And a fishing rod. But the taller girl didn't complaint. She didn't even make a face as she lifted her bag for the first time. She only put it on her back and smiled. And started to hike in an incredible fast speed. During the past four or five hours she didn't slow down. They left the school early in the morning. It was the first time that Anthy saw Utena awake in the morning. Awake at five o'clock when the sun was slowly raising. The pink haired girl took a cold shower and they ate something before they went to the bus station. No one saw them. Especially not the duellists as Anthy feared the whole night. Not even Toga was there to hold them back. It really seemed as if the duellists had to see that they all had their right for summer vacations. Or did Utena confuse them so much? Anthy didn't know. She was simply happy to escape. Even if it was for just one summer. She put the exchange diary down in the most far corner of her desk. The bus left at seven in the morning and took them through half of the country. They saw some big cities passing by. A lot of farm land and finally the beginnings of the forest they hiked through now. Why did she take me with her? Anthy rested for a moment and took a deep breath. She glanced over to Utena who continued to sing while she walked over another root. The way through the forest was very small but Anthy liked it here. Here there could nothing be heard: No cars, no people shouting at each other. No honk. Nothing. Only the wind playing with the leaves of the trees. Only birds singing. Only some other animals hunting through the bushes around them. It was fantastic here. Peaceful. The sun still shown from the cloudless sky, but the trees gave them enough shadow to take her and there a small break. To drink or to eat something. And in Utena's case to dirty her dark shirt a little bit more. In the duels no one could beat her. The pink haired girl was a nature's talent in fighting with the sword. She even beat Juri, no one else could beat. But whenever she had to fight with a sandwich or with a sausage covered with ketchup she lost. At school she had to wash her uniform almost every second day. She was happy

that she had more than just
one uniform. Here in the forest it was alike how many spots were on her jeans. Her
cheeks were reddened and
dirtied, too.

She looks beautiful.

Anthy felt how she blushed and moved again. Her legs started to hurt, but she didn't
say a word. She only stroke

over Chuchu's brown fur and the little pet purred.

She is so wild and independent. She makes no compromises. She always walks her
own way, is never influenced
by anyone else.

I wish I was like her. Just a little bit.

But she knew she wasn't. She was the Rose Bride. A prisoner in a golden cage. A cage
she just escaped. This

morning. Even if this flight was limited.

Anthy sighed slightly and blinked as a ray of sunlight shone directly into her eyes. Of
course Utena gave her

sunglasses, too, but the bronze girl couldn't use them. She had to wear her normal
glasses, otherwise she would

be too blind to follow her friend.

My friend?

Hai, my best friend.

"Oh, bring back, bring back

Oh, bring back my bonny to me, to me

Bring back, bring back

Oh, bring back my bonny to me."

Anthy didn't know why Utena sang one fisher song after another. Because they were
in the forests near the

Fujiyama. When the smaller girl raised her head and blinked through the tree's crowns
she could see a little bit

white sparkling in the blue sky. The sea was away. At least fifty miles in each direction
and Anthy hoped that

Utena didn't want to walk this distance. At least not all today.

It sounds funny.

Utena didn't have the perfect voice. She wouldn't become a star in the show business.
Even when she wanted to.

But she sang with all her heart and changed the character of the old folk music songs
by using a faster rhythm.

Even when she missed a note time by time or sang in a complete different melody, it
was nice to listen to her. To

the giggle in her voice. And to watch how she sometimes jumped over a root in the
rhythm. To see how she

started to dance when she repeated the refrain for another time.

She is so funny. So lively.

Anthy corrected her glasses and glanced shortly at her watch. It was now almost
seven in the evening. The

bronze girl was very tired and her stomach growled. Of course they made some

breaks, but the last one was now
already two hours ago and the chocolate bar was long eaten. Anthy knew that Utena
didn't mean it. She simply
forgot time while she sang one song after another. Surely she didn't remember that
her friend was weaker. But
Anthy didn't want to disturb her. She didn't want to destroy Utena's fantastic mood.
Surely she'll be tired soon, too.
Utena swung the stick through the air and repeated the last refrain. Dancing over the
little path. She turned
around to Anthy and grinned openly at her. The bronze girl smiled shyly back while
Chuchu leaned against her
neck and started to snore.
Well, maybe not that soon.
The pink ponytail hopped through the air as Utena spun around and kept walking.

"What shall we do with the drunken sailor?
What shall we do with the drunken sailor?
What shall we do with the drunken sailor?
Early in the morning?"

Utena reeled as if she was drunken and Anthy couldn't hold back her giggle. She
stroke some violet strands out
of her sweaty forehead and followed her.
I am on vacations!
I am really on vacations! For the first time in my life!
The bronze girl smiled about that thought and her hurting legs kept silent for some
moments. She speeded up not
to lose a sailor Utena on the little path.
I am on vacations with her. My best friend.
The first weeks Anthy had seen her groom in Utena. As she was told by the other
duellists before. But Utena told
her that she didn't want a bride. That this was impossible, because they both were
girls. And that they were too
young to get engaged. Really engaged. For those weeks Anthy didn't quite
understand why Utena fought all
those duels. Why she won, although she had planned to lose on purpose. Until that
special duel she lost. Against
Toga. Anthy couldn't help Utena. Not even when they met at school and Utena wore
the girl's uniform. She
looked strange. Almost weird. In the evening there was another duel. Utena won
again. A fight that seemed to
have been impossible for her to win. But nevertheless she defeated Toga and got the
Rose Bride back. While
they walked home together from the secret place Utena didn't talk a lot and Anthy
didn't want to say a word,
although thousands of questions burned in her soul. Shortly before they arrived their
room, the pink haired girl
turned around and told Anthy that she wanted to be her friend. Not a duellist, not a
master and especially not a

groom. But a friend. A very good one. Since that day they were. For the first time someone listened to Anthy.

Really listened and remembered what she said. Utena protected her as often as he could against Nanami's girls

and against the other duellists. And they both bought a cook book and tried to cook something else than ice

cream and chocolate cake. With a lot of ketchup it was even eatable.

Now she even took me on vacations.

My best friend...

Although Anthy still didn't know why Utena did this. Simply taken her with her in the forest. Carrying so many

more things she wouldn't need to if she was alone. But maybe, maybe that was what good friends did for

another. Simply like that.

Anthy was nervous whenever she thought at Utena's aunt. She didn't know her and was not sure if she was

welcomed. She was a stranger after all! But whatever that aunt would say, before that very day they would spend

two weeks in the forests.

Two weeks Anthy was very keen on. Mostly she had to accept whatever the other duellists told her and didn't

care much if she liked their ideas or not. But right now she knew that she was happy.

As happy as she hadn't

been in a long time before. Maybe as happy as she hadn't been in her whole life before.

Arigato, Tenjoh-san.

Utena...

"Are you coming, Anthy?"

The bronze girl blinked because she didn't realize that she stopped again. She nodded and speeded up. To reach

the pink haired girl who still grinned over her whole face.

"Hai."

"Ohaiup, we're sailing

Ohaiup, we're sailing

Ohaiup, we're sailing

Early in the morning!"

It was a nice place. A river jumped over some stones not far away. Threes surrounded it and here was a little bit

grass growing on the forest's ground. Utena stopped and looked up. Through the green crowns she could see how

the sky changed its colour. Soon the sun would set. In the forest itself it was already a little bit darker. The

shadows grew longer and Utena's stomach protested growling that she shouldn't go any further. That tomorrow

was also a day to hike.

A place to set up the tent, some fresh water and wood for the fire. Hai, that's good.

"What do you think of, Anthy? Shall we stop for today and have supper?"

All that answered her was the sound of a rucksack falling down. Utena spun around and saw the bronze girl

sitting on the ground. Panting hard. Chuchu still slept on her shoulder. Anthy had closed her eyes and held her

right hand on up her chest. She really looked exhausted.

Oh...

Utena raised her eyebrows and felt suddenly guilty. She didn't take much attention about her friend who

followed her the whole day in silence.

The whole day? How late is it?

The pink haired girl glanced at her watch and felt even more guilty. It was now past eight in the evening. What

meant that they walked for the past eight hours without so many pauses.

She's surely not used to so much exercises.

Utena was. Of course she was. She loved it to do sport. All kinds of sport: Basketball, volleyball, running,

swimming. Simply everything. She was very good and played every day in different sport teams. Most of them

were dominated by boys, but Utena never cared about that. Her father once told her that she could achieve

everything, if she only wanted to.

But Anthy did hardly any sport. Mostly she spent her afternoons by taking care for the rose garden. To be the

Rose Bride in the duels. And to tidy up their room. But sport? She liked it to swim. But then she mostly laid on

the surface and enjoyed more the water than swimming some competitions.

"Oh... gomen, Anthy." Utena laid her stick on the ground and came over to her still panting friend. "I didn't

notice that you were tired. Gomen." She went on her knees next to the bronze girl and looked into blurred purple

eyes. "Why didn't you tell me that I am too fast? You know, you have to stop me when I start to run." Utena

smiled and gulped. Still Anthy didn't react.

Shimatta! That was only the first day! Hope she didn't already regret it to go on vacations with such a baka like

me!

Finally, after some more minutes of gasping for breath, the smaller girl smiled one of her shy smiles and

corrected her sun glasses.

"I didn't want to interrupt your singing, Tenjoh-san." Anthy woke Chuchu up who stared interested around. This

was a new territory for him and of course he started to explore it in the very instant.

No Tenjoh-san!

Utena made a face, but she knew that it was too early right now. Maybe in one or in two weeks Anthy would

forget the silly tradition. That she was only the Rose Bride, Utena her groom.

"I didn't know that there were so many fisher songs in the world."

"Ups." Even in the twilight of the trees Anthy could see how Utena blushed deeply. She really forgot that she hadn't been alone in the forest. The way she had been the past year before she came to the strange school and became a duellist. "Hope your ears aren't deaf now."
"My ears are fine, Tenjoh-san." Anthy giggled softly and Utena blushed even deeper. "But my stomach..." she didn't have to finish her sentence, her growling stomach finished it for her.
"You are right! Let's eat!" Utena rose and pushed her heavy rucksack down next to her stick. "I'll make the supper and you set up the tent, okay?" With those words she walked around and searched some old, dry branches to make a little fire. She heard something jingling and knew that Anthy really emptied the bag with the tent. It's not so hard to set, is it?
Utena frowned while she put the branches in a little circle and searched in her pockets for the lighter. Just once Kei tried her to make fire with two sticks. After three hours and a lot of arguing he did it and in the next village he went through, he bought her that lighter. Of course it was black, but Utena kept it. As kind of a talisman. She never had a bigger brother. And somehow he had filled the empty place in her heart very well. No wonder that she missed him now a lot.
"I also know some songs about the mountains. Even a German one. I only know that it's about a special mountain flower or so." Utena giggled while she cared for the fire. The flame was still tiny, but she learned a lot during all the camping vacations in her life, that it wouldn't die away during the next minutes. "My aunt has some crazy CDs and I listened to them all when I was young." Young and often very ill, because I missed my parents so badly.
"So I know them all by heart." Utena laughed and searched in her big rucksack for the pan and the eggs. Surprised she saw that not even one egg was broken. How did I achieve that? Normally half of the eggs are broken by my way of walking. Fresh water was right next to her but she decided to wash herself after the meal. Her stomach protested almost as loud as Anthy's.
"Guess it's all my aunt's fault. She always encouraged me to sing although I really have a terrible voice. If you can't stand it any longer, say it, okay? Before you are deaf or before you faint." She grinned as Chuchu suddenly stood right beside her and looked begging at the toast. She stroke over his brown fur and gave him one. Happily he hopped on top of Anthy's rucksack that laid still untouched on the path and started quickly to eat. He seemed to be as hungry as the two girls.
Again something jingled but Anthy said no word. She didn't even respond Utena's

questions. The pink haired girl put the water bottle down and turned around. And saw how the tent fell down with a loud noise. Partly because a pole hit a stone, partly because Anthy screamed out loud. She had sat inside the tent when the green walls came down. Now she didn't find the exit and fought hard with the cloth.

"Anthy! Wait!" Utena was by her side the next moment and pulled the tent away. A pale Anthy appeared again and looked confused around. Some more hairs escaped her hairdo and hang into sparkling eyes.

"But I read the description..." stammered the smaller girl and let Utena free her completely out of the tent. Then she heard the pink haired girl's bright laughter she loved so much to hear. Utena had a kind that let her know that she was amused. That she was happy. That the scene was funny. But she never laughed over Anthy.

"That's what I did the first time, too, Anthy. After I tried to set the tent we had to repair it." Utena raised her right hand and stroke those wild strands out of Anthy's face. "You got it almost done." For a moment the hand stayed on the smaller girl's cheek and purple eyes grew wide. But before she could say anything more, the moment was gone and Utena stood on her feet again.

"Let's set the tent together, Anthy. And then let's eat something. I am starving." Nani?

Anthy only nodded. Ten minutes later the tent was really set and it seemed as if it would keep standing. First the bronze girl had been unsure if one tent was big enough for them, but after she had seen it from the inside, really set and filled with two sleeping bags, she was convinced that it was okay this way.

"You have never been camping before, have you?" Utena handed Anthy the roasted toast and a plate with two fried eggs. She tried her best, but still one lost it's egg yolk. But the smaller girl didn't complain. She simply started to eat and gave a little bit of her toast to Chuchu who looked still hungry. The little pet sat now on her right knee and nibbled happily at the prey.

"No." Anthy shook her head and drank some gulps out of the water bottle. They didn't have tumblers but they didn't care. Even their plates were made out of plastic so that they wouldn't break.

"But I like it." She smiled that soft smile and Utena felt how her heart beat increased. At least she likes it!

"Tomorrow we won't go that far, Anthy." Utena wolfed down her two eggs and her toast and looked in the rucksack for some sweets. After a short while she found a chocolate bar and rolled her eyes as Chuchu sat now begging on her left shoulder. Of course he got a little bit of the bar, too.

"Only two more hours and we'll be on a lake, well, it's kinda more a pond, but the water is nice fresh and I'd like

to take a bath. Guess I stink like a skunk."

Anthy only giggled and started her second egg. Utena wondered silently how the smaller girl could eat so slowly. She mostly ate with high speed. She knew that no one would take away the meal from her, but her stomach often growled so loud and it didn't have that knowledge.

"Do you know that forest?" Anthy raised her head and looked around. She relaxed her hurting legs and stared for some moments in the dark red sky above them. It was now dark inside the forest, but the fire lightened up their sleeping place. Besides Utena cared for torches so that they would never stumble around in the darkness.

"Hai. It's the same route as every year." Smiled Utena with a brown mouth and took herself another chocolate bar. She knew that they would arrive a small village in three days and that they had new bars there. "When I was very small, my parents went camping this way with me." Her smile deepened and with glassy eyes she stared into the flames. Not noticing Anthy any longer. But seeing someone else. Surely the family she lost ten years ago. Of course Anthy knew about that tragedy. Utena once told her about that. Why she had chosen to become a prince. Where she got the ring with the rose seal from. Why her aunt always had to sign her reports and not her parents. Why no one came to the school when they had a festival.

"Okay, I didn't go that time. Mostly my father carried me on his shoulders." Without noticing Utena brought her legs to her chest and wrapped her arms around her knees. The chocolate bar fell on the ground and disappeared into the shadows. Together with a grinning Chuchu. "We had a lot of fun these days. My parents didn't want to go in expensive restaurants and so we always went camping in the summer. I learned swimming in the pond that was for me as big as a lake when I was little. One year before my parents died they bought me a bike and here on this small path I learned how to drive it. It was great." Utena sighed deeply and took a little branch in her hand.

To stir with it in the flames. Again she saw the beautiful woman before her eyes. Her strong, unafraid father.

Again she felt how they took her in her arms. How she sat on his strong shoulders and laughed happily. How they started to sing funny songs while they hiked. How she helped her father to set the tent. How her mother let her grill her toast all alone over the open fire. How they had so much fun in the evening when the first stars sparkled above. Telling fairy tales in the fire's shine.

Shimatta! It's now ten years and I still miss them so much!

Anthy didn't say a word. She only sat there and ate silently her supper. Looking sadly over to her best friend. She

knew that Utena thought of her parents. That she thought now at her lost family. Anthy herself couldn't remember her own parents. Nor did she ever experienced a vacations in the forest. Any vacations at all.

But now I am on vacations. With her.

Anthy took a deep breath and tried to smile.

I shouldn't be sad about the things that had never been. I should be happy about this time I am allowed to spend - with her.

Utena blinked and it looked as if she did awake from a deep, deep dream. She glanced over to Anthy who just ate the rest of her second egg and finished her toast.

"The following years I could convince my aunt to camp with me. Until I was old enough to go camping with

Kei." Utena grinned now in other, in happier memories. "He was a total baka and a real devil. Just like me. We

did a lot of nonsense. He always told me horror tales and afterwards I couldn't sleep and was afraid." She giggled

and searched for her bar. Disappointed she had to see that it had vanished. Probably forever, because Chuchu's

belly was bigger and his mouth more brown. "He scared me so much that I had to wake him up in the middle of

the night because I was too afraid to go for little girls alone." Her eyes sparkled in the fire's light and she laid her

head on her knees. With half closed eyes she glanced over to Anthy who listened her silently. As she mostly did.

Even at school. At the long evenings when there was no duel to fight. No sport competition to win. No ball to avoid.

"If you want to hear one of his stories, just tell me. He knew a lot good ones." For a moment there was silence.

But it was a pleasant silence. No one searched for words or felt uncomfortable. They simply sat there. Both

looking in the flames. Anthy drank more water while Utena remembered so many things she hadn't thought

about the past months. Maybe even the past years.

"As I told you, he has now a job and a girlfriend. He had to work the last year and I guess his girlfriend wouldn't

let him go camping with me. Not alone." She shrugged her shoulders as if she couldn't understand that girl.

Maybe because she had never seen herself as a girlfriend. Especially not of him.

"Wakaba was in Greek with her parents, so I went alone. It was very nice, but lonely." Anthy turned her head a

little bit and yawned slightly. "I am very happy that you really come with me, Anthy. It's simply more funny go

camping with a friend, not alone." Utena blushed as she earned one of those soft smiles she didn't understand.

But she simply liked to see. With them Anthy looked beautiful. Like a princess. A real princess.

"If I am too fast or if I start to freak out, just say some sharp words or knock on my head, okay? It's hard enough to survive it."
Anthy's smile deepened and she simply nodded.

It was in the middle of the night when she woke up. No, when she was woken up. She needed some moments to orientated. To remember where she was. The ground was harder than her bed and the blanket was completely wrapped around her body. It was dark and as she sat up, she felt cloth on her head. Nani?

The next moment the memory returned. How she went by bus through half of Japan. How she walked the whole day through a deep forest. How she sat down on a fireplace in the evening and ate the most delicious fried eggs in her life. How she washed her face and her arms with the nice fresh water of the near brook and crept tiredly into her sleeping bag. Just like her best friend.

"Anthy?"

The girl pushed the warm blanket away and shivered. She stripped her jeans and now she only wore a white shirt she would misuse as a night gown for the next weeks. Although it had been a very hot summer's day, the night's air was now chilly.

Chuchu laid on her pillow and slept deep and tight. He ate a lot chocolate the evening and not even a bomb exploding would awake him now.

"Tenjoh-san?"

"Don't call me this way, Anthy!"

She saw how the cover was put away and the air was even more chilly. A shadow moved into the tent and the next moment Anthy felt how someone grabbed her hand and pulled her outside. The girl shivered as a slight breeze plaid with her now open hairs.

"What's wrong?" She looked around but could only see shadows until someone put her glasses over her nose.

Now she could make a difference between the high trees and the bushes. But only some inches away there was darkness. Impenetrable darkness.

"What are we doing here?"

"Come." Was all Utena said as she grabbed her hand again. Anthy yawned slightly but didn't protest. The hand was wonderful warm and she knew that she couldn't escape. That was surely one of Utena's crazy ideas and during the past months the smaller girl got to know that it was better to tolerate that or to listen to Utena's complaints for the next days. Sometimes Utena could be like a small child. When her

ideas weren't taken notice of, she could sulk for hours. And even longer. They walked upwards a small hill. Suddenly the trees were gone and they stood on a small meadow. It was like a little island in the sea of the forest. The grass was wet under her naked feet and Anthy winced as she stumbled over a stone. But Utena didn't stop. She only pulled her with her. "Aren't you tired, Tenjoh-san?" But Utena didn't answer. She simply stopped and Anthy who didn't take attention, crashed into her. The taller girl didn't mind. She only pointed to the sky. "Look, Anthy." Her voice was very silent and a little bit shaky. Anthy stepped back and did as she was told. Her chin dropped and her eyes grew wide as she saw the shooting stars. Flying through a cloudless sky. Passing all those other sparkling stars. Falling to earth like an angel. Anthy recognized some constellations. Even the Milky Way. "There..." Utena's voice was almost inaudible. Other shooting stars crossed the firmament. There were ten of them. Or twelve? Or even more? Anthy couldn't count. They were too fast for her eyes. Too fast to catch. Too fast to hold. But the same time so beautiful. Anthy wished to be able to let them stay. To make them rest. Only for her. To watch them a little bit longer than just some seconds. Some tiny seconds that were over too soon. "My father once told me that if you wish something from a shooting star, it will be granted." Whispered Utena after a long time and crossed her arms before her chest. She only wore a T-shirt, too. A yellow one with a dragon on the front. It wasn't crumpled. Just like her hairs weren't messed. Didn't she sleep the last hours? Anthy couldn't remember. She fell down in her sleeping bag and was fast asleep the next second. "You should wish something nice, Anthy." The smaller girl looked shortly at her best friend whose face was covered with shadows before she watched the rain of shooting stars again. They sparkled silver and looked like diamonds. Wish? What shall I wish? Anthy frowned and gulped. She had wished so many things in her life before, but nothing happened. Nothing changed. She was the Rose Bride and whoever won her in a duel was her groom. He could do what he wanted with her. Just like Saionji who beat her. He didn't want her to be his girlfriend as she thought the first time. He wanted to have someone he could control completely. Whenever she was too slow or had to remind him that there were some rules - some bloody rules in a cursed game - he slapped her right into the face. To let her feel

that she nothing. Only the Rose Bride. That her task was it to hold the sword. Nothing more. In those days she stopped wishing anything. But now... one wish was granted. Some months ago... Anthy glanced again over to Utena and sighed slightly. Hai, finally there was someone there who cared for her. As a person, not as a thing. Suddenly there was someone who made her smile. Who made her giggle. Who made her feel so light. So happy. Suddenly there was someone she could talk to. Or at least listen to. To very serious but also to very funny words, to total nonsense. Suddenly there was someone who defended her against the other duellists. Someone who took care for her and didn't let her down like all the others had done. Anthy gulped and felt how her eyes watered. Suddenly there was someone who liked her. Her, the girl inside, not the sword. Again the bronze girl watched a shooting star and closed her eyes. Feeling how the wind got stronger and blew harder through her opened hairs. Some strands flew over her shoulders and touched her burning cheeks. I want this person to stay. It was a silly wish. She knew it. Some day Utena would lose. Or she would get bored and leave. Or she would go insane when she would receive her first letter by the end of the world. One day. Not today. Not tomorrow. But maybe the first day after their vacations. Utena didn't believe in the revolution as she didn't believe in the engagement towards the Rose Bride. She didn't know how much it meant for Anthy. That Utena was the groom and no one else. Stay forever. It wouldn't come true. One day she would lose that friend. But until that day, maybe it was possible for her to believe in that dream. As she opened her eyes the shooting star was gone. It was replaced by other ones. "This is a special night, Anthy. It only happens once a year that you can see so many of them." Utena's voice was still so shaky and the smaller girl wondered if her friend cried. Crying? Wild Utena crying? She had never seen her cry. Not during all those crazy duels. Not when Utena got injured. Not when Toga screamed at her. Not even that strange day when Utena behaved like crazy. When she wore the girl's uniform and looked weak. As weak as Anthy hadn't seen her before. As weak as Anthy didn't want to see her again. Because that picture had almost made her heart break. "Did you wish something, Anthy?" "Hai, Tenjoh-san. And you?"

There was the sound of a shaky laughter. A very sad laughter that made Anthy look again at the taller girl. Still Utena's face was hidden in the shadows, but Anthy saw how the taller girl trembled. "It's alike how hard I will wish, some wishes can't be granted." Utena seemed to tremble even more and she lowered her head. Her long, pink hairs fell over her shoulders. Suddenly she looked like a small child. A lost child. Left by its parents. "They are gone and they will never return again." There was the sound of a silent sob. As if Utena cried but didn't want anyone to let notice it. "Tenjoh-san?" "It's okay, Anthy. It's okay." But as Utena raised her right hand quickly to wipe over her cheeks, Anthy knew that it wasn't okay. That Utena had thought the whole evening, maybe even the whole night of her parents. And that the memory hurt a lot. Maybe even too much to bear it. All alone. No one should be alone. Anthy gulped while five more shooting stars made their ways over the dark sky. Between sparkling stars. She knew too well what loneliness meant. Without thinking too much about it, Anthy stepped over to her best friend and embraced her carefully. To comfort her. To show her that she was there. That Utena wasn't all alone.

"I JUMP!" Utena curled herself up in a ball while she flew through the air. The next moment water splashed around her body as she fell into the water. It was crystal clear and very, very cold. But the pink haired girl didn't care about it. The day was hot and she sweated the past hours. Utena waved her arms and came back to the surface. Her wet hairs hang into her face and happily she smiled over to Anthy who stood at the rim of the pond. Holding her right feet into the water. Her face showed that it was too cold for her. They woke up when it was already light outside. And hot. After a long breakfast Utena needed to wake really up, they put the tent again into the bag and walked on. Anthy didn't complain but Utena knew that the smaller girl had aching muscles. So she didn't want to exaggerate today with their tour. They would stay here for the rest of the day. Relaxing. Maybe reading the book Utena wanted to finish during the past months. But whenever she held it in her hands she had to put it away because of a silly duel. Some hours after they left the little place near the brook, around noon, they arrived at the pond Utena learned to

swim in. A lot of years ago. Without thinking much she stripped her shoes, her jeans and jumped into the water.
She didn't care about her T-shirt. It would dry quickly in the summer's heat.
"Come in, Anthy! It's nice fresh!"
"Fresh? Freezing!" Anthy stood now with both feet in the water and goose flesh covered her arms. Chuchu looked down from his secure place on the smaller girl's shoulder and shook his head. He didn't seem to be keen to froze, too. A biscuit seemed to be better. A lot better.
"Come one! Don't be such a spoilsport!" Utena grinned and waved her hands. Anthy jerked back as the water touched her legs. "You'll like it!"
Anthy sighed deeply before she let Chuchu down. The water looked nice. The smaller girl really sweated and felt dirty after the long walk yesterday. But it was so cold! It was only a pond and it wouldn't be too deep. Anthy could swim, but she wasn't very sure in it. She learned it when she was a child but no one really cared if she could do it well.
Maybe I should listen to her.
She sighed again and stripped her shoes and the jeans.
"Great! I have a small ball in my rucksack. A yellow one. Can you bring it with you? Then we can play."
Shouted Utena from somewhere from the water and splashed a little bit with her feet while she swam on her back. She spread her arms and looked up to the sky. There were only a few clouds. White clouds that blurred in the blue sky. Somewhere there was the Fujiyama, but she couldn't see it right now. Wind played with the threes and the water crimped. Then it moved as someone jumped past her. There was a little scream and then a wave made Utena cough. She stood again and blinked as Anthy came back to the surface next to her and shook her head.
"This is COLD!" she squeaked and the ball escaped her hands. It danced on the surface and she squinted to find him back. She didn't wear her glasses any longer and her purple eyes seemed to be brighter now that they weren't hidden any longer. She kept her hairdo, but water sparkled in her hairs like pearls. Some strands escaped and curled up around her neck. Utena gulped as Anthy stood up and wrapped her arms freezing around her body. She only wore her underwear. White underwear that was wet now and had a strange contrast to her bronze skin.
She is beautiful.
Utena felt how she blushed and frowned. She didn't know why she blushed now. She had seen Anthy often only wrapped in a towel when she came out of the shower. Or when they went home from school and it rained like

hell. So that they were soaked up to their bones. Or when Anthy dressed up in the morning while she tried to get a complaining Utena out of her bed who pulled desperately her blanket over her head and wished that it was still deep in the night and that school wouldn't start in less than an hour. But now Anthy looked different. Completely different. Without that school uniform. Without her sun glasses. With a sweet smile on her face while she said again and again that it was cold. Cold but refreshing. "Ah, there's the ball!" finally Anthy saw the yellow something and grabbed it. "Do you really want to play with such a blind mole like me, Tenjoh-san?" But the taller girl didn't react. Anthy frowned and looked up. But she couldn't see the other one's face. All she saw was a blurred shadow of a pink colour. Surely of Utena's hairs. The taller girl was standing there next to her. Only some inches away. I am really blind! Anthy couldn't see anything without her glasses. Only shadows. Moving shadows. That was why she always wore her glasses. Even when not only one boy told her that she looked stupid with them. That she should put them down. Anthy didn't. She knew that Saionji or Toga would laugh over her when she would stumble over a big chair everyone saw. Everyone except her. She even went to take a shower with her glasses until Utena noticed it. She asked her and looked disbelieving as she heard Anthy's explanation. She promised her not to laugh and the next time as Anthy took a shower, she put her glasses away. Blind as always she had almost overseen her shoes, but Utena was there to hold her when she was about to fall. "Tenjoh-san? Catch!" Anthy is a beautiful girl. Why don't they see it? Why do they have to press her into that Rose Bride nonsense? Don't they know how wonderful she looks when she smiles so softly? When she giggles and even tries to make a little joke? When she argues with her Chuchu and cares for other people? For a total baka like me who falls asleep during the literature lesson and she's busy to wake me up? Don't they know how much fun it can be to cook with her? Even when the rice is burned and the curry inedible? Don't they know how great it is to set a tent with her? To go with her up a hill in the middle of the night to watch shooting stars? To roast grill over the open fire and to talk to her about all different things you just have in mind? To listen to her soft voice when she tries to explain something? To see the sparkle in her purple eyes? Don't they know? Utena sighed deeply and watched how the smaller girl raised the little ball. Water fell

down and it sparkled like diamonds. Valuable diamonds. Diamonds only for her. Anthy threw it and giggled as it fell down shortly before Utena. How it splashed the taller girl. No, they don't. "Tenjoh-san? Everything alright?" Utena blinked and now Anthy looked concerned. She squinted but surely she couldn't see a lot without her glasses. The pink haired girl took the wet ball and held it high into the air. "Can you see it?" "What? Your hairs standing up in all directions or the yellow something in your hand?" It was a joke. Anthy started to giggle, because Utena made a puzzled face. Then she raised her free hand and could feel all the knots and the curls in her hairs. She blushed deeply before she started to laugh. A joke. That was really a joke! Anthy made a joke. She threw the ball gently towards the bronze girl. "You'll regret your cheekiness, Anthy!" she shouted before she dived. Anthy grabbed for the yellow ball and giggled even more. "First you have to catch me, Tenjoh-san." Of course Utena was faster. Of course Anthy was ticklish. Chuchu only watched them while he allowed himself another delicious biscuit.

"Ouch!" Utena tried to brush her hair but it was as wild as always. The whole afternoon she tried to avoid it. She bound her hair more or less to a ponytail and ignored it. They left the water when the sun was already setting and their lips started to turn into blue. They set up the tent, cared for some wood and laid on a blanket to relax. Anthy was fast asleep and Utena got finally a little bit time to read the book she wanted so badly to read during the past weeks. It was indeed as good as she had expected. While the shadows grew longer and longer and the air got pleasant fresher, their stomachs reminded them again that it was time to eat supper. Utena lightened up the fire and now water stood in the flames to boil. Or at least to get warm enough to make some instant soups. At that moment Utena remembered her hairs and searched for a long time for her brush. Finally she found it and now she fought hard with the defiant strands. When she had been younger she wanted to have short hairs, but her aunt didn't let her cut them. Over the years she simply got used to it and in the winter they were a nice warm scarf. For her who often lost her gloves and her scarves during

December. Right in time to get new ones from her aunt for Christmas. But in such moments she wanted to have short hairs. As short as Miki's or even shorter. Right now she wanted badly to have a bald head. No matter how stupid that would have looked.

"Shimatta!"

Again she fought the brush through her hairs but all she earned was pain as she ripped out some strands. Tears burned in her eyes and she blushed in anger.

"This... can't... be... true..." she groaned and threw the brush on the blanket. Insulted she crossed her arms before her chest and stared at the brush as if it would change when she was angry.

"May I help you, Tenjoh-san?"

Utena raised her head and looked at Anthy who put the two instant soups down and came over to her. She had no problems when she corrected her hairdo again after they left the water. But it seems as if her hairs were softer

than Utena's. And that Anthy was more patient than the taller girl. A lot more patient.

"No one can help me. I have straw instead of hairs." Sulked Utena desperately but didn't protest as Anthy took

the hairbrush and knelt down behind her. Carefully she brought the wild strands in order and started gently to

brush them. Utena raised her eyebrow because it didn't hurt. No single strand was ripped out as Anthy brushed

the pink curls. It was as if the smaller girl was stroking them. Stroking, not brushing. Not torturing them as

Utena would have done.

"You have fine hair. You only have to take care for it."

"Oh, yeah. Me and taking care for hairs. You know me, that's not me."

"But it's easy. A nice shampoo and a little bit patience."

"I am the most impatient person on this earth, Anthy."

"I know."

"Nani?"

Utena wanted to raise her head but Anthy held her determined back. She hadn't brushed all hairs yet and there

were some difficult knots she wanted to solve without scalp the taller girl.

"I can remember what you did with the make up your aunt gave you last Christmas."

"Oh..."

Utena's shoulders hang and she blushed deeply by that thought. Anthy only giggled. They both remembered too

well how Utena tried to use it. Only once. Because she had no idea how to handle the pencils and the lip stick

she looked afterwards like a circus clown. Maybe even worse. Anthy had looked really shocked and one look

into the mirror let Utena burst out into laughter. It didn't occur to her to use the mirror while taking all the

different colours up. She hardly used a mirror. She knew how to brush her hairs and often she did that during

dressing her uniform and drinking her milk. It was always too busy in the morning to

take care of her looks. She often said that she liked the natural style and that she was simply too lazy to use anything else than water, soap and shampoo. Just that one day she had time. She got bored and she used it. It took her ages to wash it off again.

Even two hours and three showers later she could still taste the lip stick on her lips. So she threw the whole make up in the dustbin and never talked about it.

"It was one of the worst moments in my life. I am happy that no one else had seen it."

Utena closed her eyes as

Anthy took a special big knot. But it didn't hurt. There was only a gently touch while Anthy stroke some hairs

away from her neck and the taller girl shivered slightly.

"Imagine Toga's face when he would see me like that."

"Hai."

Anthy giggled and finally dissolved the last knot. Again she brushed all hairs and started to curl them up. Utena

let her. She let her eyes closed and enjoyed the gentle touch.

"Guess his face would have been worth it. To come like that to a duel. I would have won without a single move, because he would have died of the laughter."

Anthy giggled again and Utena enjoyed every single touch.

"Maybe I should keep the next make up I get as a last weapon."

"Hai."

Anthy's voice was amused and Utena felt how her hairs were lifted up. She sighed relieved as a light breeze of

evening wind cooled her shoulders. The day had been very hot and even after they took a long bath and haunted

each other and played for hours with the yellow ball, their freezing bodies were quickly heated up again by the burning summer's sun.

Utena relaxed completely and her thoughts drifted away. Away from the little pond. Away from the fire near the

water. Just in the case that they would lose control that they had enough wet to erase it. Away from a brown pet

who sat down on her right knee and nibbled noisily another biscuit.

Her thoughts returned to the other night. A long night she had hardly slept. Her parents were dead now for over

ten years. She had thought that she was over the pain. But somehow one got never really over the pain. Okay,

she could live without them. She learned it. The same she learned to think of them, to talk about them without

crying. But sometimes... sometimes there were moments when the memory hit her. The feeling of being alone.

Of being left behind. Last night had been such a moment. Anthy was fast asleep the moment her head hit her

pillow. Just like Chuchu who rolled up next to her. But Utena couldn't sleep. She looked for a long time in the

dying flames and remembered everything she knew about her parents. Her mother's

smile, her father's laughter.
How they had rested right at that place. How her father woke her up in the middle of the night and showed her shooting stars. Utena didn't know what came over her, but she erased the rest of the fire and climbed up the small hill. This time alone. Her father wasn't there any longer. It had been like a miracle when she saw the stars falling. Just like she had seen them in the night so many years ago. She didn't look into the calendar to see when the special day would return again. It was chance that the rain of shooting stars had been that night. Chance like destiny. For about an hour Utena stood there and watched them fall. Hearing again her father's voice that she should wish herself something. She had wished herself a hamster. She had been very small and such a normal thing had been a big wish for her. A dream. A secret. Just one year later her whole world changed and since then she had only one wish: That her parents would return. A wish that would never come true. She knew it. After so many wishes that weren't granted she knew it. She grew up and hope died away. But she didn't want to waste that night. Her wishes wouldn't be heard by the gods, but maybe Anthy's. So she climbed back to the tent, woke the smaller girl up and showed her the sparkling night sky. The falling diamonds. She had seen how astonished Anthy had been. How shy she had smiled as it was her turn to wish something nice. The smaller girl had closed her eyes and one of those soft smiles laid on her face as she wished something for herself. From the depth of her heart. Utena hoped that it would be granted. Deep sadness came over her when she heard Anthy's innocent voice next to her. She didn't want to cry. She hardly cried because she knew that tears didn't change anything. Besides she wanted to be a prince. A noble prince. Brave princes didn't cry, she knew. Nevertheless the tears simply escaped her burning eyes and ran over her cheeks. She didn't want Anthy to let to know it. She was her prince, well, kinda. She had to win all those duels. She wasn't allowed to show any weakness. So she wanted to push Anthy away as she felt suddenly warm arms being wrapped around her waist. As she felt the warm body being pressed against her trembling one. She didn't want Anthy's comfort. But the same time she couldn't refuse it. She had needed it that moment. Badly. And so she simply kept standing and took it. Anthy didn't say a word for the long time they stood there. No silly words like "Everything's alright" or "It's okay", because at that moment nothing was okay. Nothing. All she did was to hum a sweet melody. Very, very quietly. It calmed Utena more down than all the words her aunt spoke to

her during her parent's funeral.

After a little eternity, Utena couldn't define if it had been one or even two hours, they separated and walked silently back to their tent.

Chuchu jumped off her knee and Utena opened her eyes sleepily. Anthy just put the brush down and glanced over to the water.

"Guess our supper is ready, Tenjoh-san. Shall we eat?"

"Hai." Utena's stomach growled in agreement and she only grinned as she rose and walked over to the fire. To

get some warm water and to heat up the instant soup. It was not as good as real soup, she knew it, but that was

all they could create right now. Just some more days and they would arrive a real lake, not a small pond. There

she would try fishing. Maybe she was lucky and would catch a fish. To roast it and to eat it with great appetite.

That was something she was able to do. To take care that it would taste. Fish was exactly the only thing that

didn't burn under her hands. Fish and water. Okay, mostly fish and water. When she was happy.

"Do you want mushrooms or tomato?" Utena read the package and glanced over to Anthy. "Somewhere we have

a little bit of cheese. To melt it in the soup is simply delicious." She put the packages down and searched in her

big rucksack. "Hope it's still okay. We have no fridge and..." she put some socks out and a pullover and almost

disappeared in the big bag. At that moment she realized that her hairs didn't hang into her face as they normally

did. They didn't even cover her neck or her shoulders.

Nani?

Utena grabbed the cheese and bowed back. Confused she raised her free hand and felt that Anthy had put her

hairs up. To the same hairdo the smaller girl always used.

Nani?

"Do you think that suits me, Anthy?" she asked laughing and turned around. Anthy who gave Chuchu something

to drink frowned and her eyes grew wide. Then she giggled silently.

"Gomen nasai, Tenjoh-san. I didn't take attention." She giggled even more.

"Do I look so strange?" Utena put the cheese to the packages and roamed over to the water. To stare at the

surface and to burst out into loud laughter.

"No, only different." Admitted Anthy. Utena only shrugged her shoulders, wiping away the tears of laughter

from the corner of her eyes.

"It looks better than the make up, anyway. But don't dare to take a photo. And to show it to my aunt. Then I'll

have to punish you."

"To punish?" Anthy looked suddenly very concerned but the sparkle in her purple eyes betrayed her feelings.

During the past months she learned that Utena would never hurt her. Not intentional. "To tickle you until you beg for mercy." The taller girl grinned and turned towards her friend. Anthy was quick enough to raise the two packages and Utena's stomach growled again. "Would your aunt be shocked about such a photo?" Anthy filled her cup with water and stirred in the soup. She thanked Utena as she cut the cheese and let some bits sink in her cup. "Shocked? She would freak out because of luck. I hardly go to the hairdresser and she wasted three years to convince me to get a perm. She said that I would look great with it." Utena shook her head and it was a strange feeling that no hairs fell into the soup. Maybe she was able to eat without dirtying her clothes today? She ate a spoon and knew better when some spots covered her T-shirt. "But I know that I would look even worse." Anthy frowned and reached for the toast. "No, don't say that this would be a good idea, Anthy! One crazy person is enough in my family. I am simply not the type for complicate hairstyles and skirts." ... in my family... Anthy ate silently her toast and decided that a perm would really look silly. Utena's hairs had natural curls and didn't need chemical help. But a skirt... The smaller girl was sure that Utena would look great in a short skirt. Maybe a dark one. Together with the white dragon T-shirt she would be beautiful. With a mini skirt, not with the silly one of the girl's uniform. Anthy drank some gulps out of the bottle and decided to keep quiet. Surely her friend didn't want to hear her advice. And surely she wouldn't believe her. Whenever some other persons talked about clothes, make up or other typical girl's stuffs Utena tried to change the topic. Because she had no interests in it. Anthy on the opposite couldn't afford all those things and so they hardly spoke about it. "If you want to take some photos, the camera is in my rucksack." Utena served herself another toast with a big piece of cheese and bite hungrily in it. "But don't... ah!" The tall girl screamed as the lightening flashed through the shadows. Anthy only smiled innocently and hide the camera behind her back. She just took the cutest picture she could imagine: A hungry Utena with curled up hairs eating half of her toast while the other half went on her jeans. "Photos of me are forbidden!" Utena put the soap away and walked over to Anthy who stepped slowly backwards. "Why?" "It's an old Tenjoh law!" "But it's not written anywhere."

"It doesn't have to."

"Then it's Himemiya law to take photos!"

Utena blinked as Anthy showed her her tongue and held the camera saving over her head.

Just two days and she starts to change. Just two days and she forgets temporary that some people only sees the

Rose Bride in her, not Himemiya Anthy. That's great!

The pink haired girl grinned diabolically as she came nearer and nearer.

"You know that I have to punish you, right?"

Anthy shook her head and giggled again softly.

"I don't think so."

"Why?"

"Because you'll have to starve otherwise."

Utena frowned and turned around. And screamed out loud as she saw how her cheese toast run quickly away. On two brown feet.

The moon shone friendly down at the dark forest. Night fell over the country some hours ago and the only light

shining were the stars. And a little fire next to a small pond. Two girls sat near it. Both being wrapped up in their sleeping bags. Talking quietly to each other.

"Do you know that this forest is enchanted, Anthy?" Utena stirred with a little branch in the flames and her face was looked red in the fire's light.

"Like the castle of the sleeping beauty?"

"Don't tell me that you read fairy tales, Anthy!"

"Only the book you hide under your pillow."

Utena groaned and shook her head. Some strands escaped her hairdo and tickled her in her neck. She stroke them determinedly away.

"I knew it! I should have never begged you to make my bed in the morning!"

"But you begged so nicely, Tenjoh-san."

"Oh..." Utena groaned again and wondered herself when Anthy would stop to call her by that formal name. They

had have a lot of fun during the past two days. They, well, indeed only Utena tickled the smaller girl. They swam

in the pond, ate supper together and stared at stars falling from the sky. They were best friends but nevertheless

Anthy kept to call her so formal.

Hope she forgets it soon and starts to call me Utena.

"I can't let you miss your breakfast in the morning, Tenjoh-san."

Utena groaned again but had to grin. She was sure that Anthy would forget the rules about the revolution and her

being the Rose Bride very soon. She smiled more often and giggled happily. She even started to get very, very cheeky. Behind her still innocent facade.

"But this forest is really special, Anthy." Started Utena again and her low voice was now silent and rough. She looked around as if she feared that someone would listen. Or something. Then she continued to talk.

"There's an old myth about this forest. The old people can still remember when it happened, Anthy."

The smaller girl helped a half asleep Chuchu on her lap and stroke the brown fur. The little pet was fast asleep.

He didn't even start to purr. Only to snore silently.

"What did happen, Tenjoh-san?"

"It is now about sixty years ago or so that a young lumberjack lived here in the woods together with his family.

His beautiful wife and his little son. A sweet boy of just two years." Utena stirred again in the flames and the

branch crackled mysteriously in her hands. "These days the forest around the Fujiyama wasn't explored very

well. But the lumberjack was a brave young man. He only wanted a good life for his family and wood was

needed in the big cities to build new houses. So he built himself a nice hut and lived her. The next village was

these days about three days away and time by time he came to bring his wood with his strong horse. To sell it

and to buy the things they couldn't plant and reap themselves. As the very old people in the village can

remember, he had always been a nice young man. Always friendly. Talking with them about his life and asking

them how they were doing." Utena looked over to Anthy who listened interested. It was very hard for her not to

grin and so she kept her serious face and moved on. "Then there was a long winter. A very long one and the

brave lumberjack didn't come. For about four months he didn't return. And when he finally did, the villagers

didn't recognize him first. He looked old. Very old. As if his whole life passed during those winter months. He

was confused and very pale. His eyes were reddened and he stammered the whole time strange things. About a

monster. That his little son ran into the woods and that his wife and he searched for days. That they couldn't find

him. All they found was his cap. It had been covered with blood."

Utena stopped for a moment and saw how Anthy's eyes grew wide.

She takes it for real!

The tall girl had to smile but forced herself back to look serious. She lowered her voice again and looked again

around. To give her story the touch of reality it needed that Anthy would believe it.

"He told them further that he and his wife didn't give up. That they had to see that an animal probably caught

and killed their son, but at least they wanted to give him a funeral. So they searched and searched and searched,

but didn't find him. When the snowfall increased shortly before Christmas they had to

give up. Until one night,
the snow was almost as high as a small tree and it was bitter cold, they heard
footsteps outside their hut. His
wife, so he told the villagers, believed to hear her son shouting for her. Shouting for
help. He wanted to hold her
back, but she ran outside the hut. Into the deep snow. Into the dense snowstorm. The
brave lumberjack believed
to have seen the shadow of his son standing there. Together with a bigger shadow. An
animal, as he thought. He
took his axe and tried to follow his wife, but suddenly she was gone. The same his
little son was gone and the big
shadow. Simply gone. He searched for them the whole night and almost froze in the
winter's bitter cold. One day
later he decided to go to the village and to get a gun to hunt that animal and to get
back his family."

Utena reached for the water bottle and took a gulp. She glanced over to Anthy who
looked into the fire and
wrapped her sleeping back tighter around her freezing body.

She really believes me!

That's great!

"So the brave lumberjack bought a new axe and a gun and walked away. The villagers
wanted him to stay,
because they believed that a wolf had killed his family and they didn't want him to get
killed. Wolves had been a
real problem during that long, hard winter. They came down from the mountains and
killed a lot of people,
because they were very hungry and very desperate to get food. But they couldn't hold
him. He took his weapons,
said goodbye... and was never seen again. When the snow melted away some months
later and spring let the
cherry trees bloom, some brave villagers went together to the lumberjack's hut. But it
wasn't a hut any longer. It
was a ruin. A hill of smashed boards. There was no trace of the lumberjack nor of his
family. All they found was
the print of a foot. A very large foot. Too large for a human being."

Utena shrugged her shoulders and looked again around as if she awaited someone. Or
something.

"The villagers decided quietly that it must have been a wolf. They destroyed the foot
print and returned to their
houses. They didn't want to think over the tragedy again. It happened and they
couldn't change it. But never
again there had been another lumberjack in these woods. All the other brave men
who followed, chose another
forest to care for fresh wood for the bigger cities."

The tall girl pushed the branch completely into the fire and saw how Anthy winced as
it burned loudly.

"Some of the old villagers say that in a clear moon light, just like that one, Anthy, that
they can still hear the poor
lumberjack call for his family. For his wife and his little son. There had never been

another lumberjack in this forest again, Anthy, but in such a nice night the old villagers say that one can hear an axe cutting trees. The whole night. But in the morning when they looked, no tree was missing. Not a single branch. Only sometimes in very special nights they could see those large foot prints again. The old villagers call it the ghost of the forest who takes innocent people with it who don't take attention. Who are too careless. Just like the poor lumberjack and his family."

Utena rose and stretched her body. Then she yawned.

She really believed me.

Yeah! That will be fun!

The tall girl turned around because she couldn't hide her diabolical grin any longer.

Then she yawned again

provoking.

"I'll go to bed, Anthy." She grabbed her sleeping bag and went over to their tent.

"Have nice dreams, Anthy."

"Arigato. I wish you a nice night, too, Tenjoh-san." Answered Anthy and raised carefully Chuchu who slept deep

and tight on her lap. The bronze girl watched for a while the moon above them. It's light was reflected in the

calm pond's water. The whole scene was so beautiful, so peaceful, Anthy simply had to take that picture in her

mind. To have something to remember when she would be forced to return to her place in the school. To have

something nice to think of during the next duel she would fear to lose Utena.

Anthy smiled while she picked up her own sleeping bag.

I didn't know that Tenjoh-san is such a good narrator.

A regular noise woke her up. It was still dark outside. She couldn't find her watch right now, but as sleepy as she

felt it was maybe two or three in the morning. She hadn't slept very long.

Tuck.

Tuck.

Tuck.

The noise got even louder and Anthy frowned.

Nani?

She sat up in her sleeping back and stroke her open hairs on her bag. It was chilly outside but she didn't freeze.

The sun heated the tent up the whole afternoon and she sweated a little bit in her blankets.

Tuck.

Tuck.

Tuck.

Suddenly someone started to groan outside. It sounded painful and was very, very low. Almost a growling.

Anthy's eyes grew wide and she turned her head quickly. Because she knew that groaning too well. She had heard it often before. During the past months. Whenever something went wrong. Whenever someone special got a bad note or had problems with a stupid or even boring teacher.

Utena!

Anthy was outside the tent the very moment she realized that the sleeping bag next to her was empty.

Tuck.

Tuck.

Tuck.

The groaning even increased and Anthy looked desperately around. Different visions filled her mind. The vision of Utena who wanted to watch the stars again. Who oversaw a root and fell hard. Who broke her leg or her arm or even more. Who was now in great pain and couldn't move. Nor shout for help. Another vision of Utena who had to go for little girls in the middle of the night and didn't see the big stone. Who crashed against it and fell down a deep, deep gorge. And the worst vision of Utena who wanted to take a night bath and oversaw a branch when she got out of the water and fell down. Hit hard with her head on the stone and did bleed now. Maybe she was deeply injured? Maybe she was even dying?

Panic filled Anthy's mind as she stumbled herself, blind without her glasses and totally disorientated in the night's darkness, through the forest. Only hearing the strange sound and the groaning. Utena's groaning. It was everything that still existed in Anthy's world as she ran towards the sound. She ignored her hurting feet as she stumbled through the red fire that still glowed. She ignored how a deep branch wiped into her face. She ignored everything except that groaning.

"Tenjoh-san?" she screamed and her voice was shaking. The groaning even increased and it seemed to move.

Without thinking Anthy changed direction and ran blindly towards it.

"Tenjoh-san? Say a word!" she shouted and felt tears burning in her eyes.

What shall I do when she's really injured? Whom shall I call up? Who will come in the middle of the night? Will the doctor be fast enough to save her? Is she in big pain?

"Tenjoh-san? Are you alright?"

Again no answer. Just another groaning.

Tuck.

Tuck.

Tuck.

At that moment Anthy saw the white shadow dancing only some inches away. Swinging something in its hands.

It looked like a stick, but Anthy couldn't define it. Without her glasses she was really as blind as a mole.

"Tenjoh-san?"

"Buh! I am the ghost of the forest!" groaned the voice and the white shadow jumped around her. Making some

more frightening noises before Utena couldn't hold her giggle back any longer. Anthy's terrified look in her pale

face was too funny. She had to let go off the stick and burst out into laughter.

"Buhu... the ghost..." it wasn't possible any longer for her to be the scaring ghost she talked about in her ghost

story just some hours ago. Planning to scare Anthy. Just the way Kei had scared her some years ago. When she

was little and too naive to believe in such stories. Just like Anthy was right now.

"Be horrified... human..." she held her belly and laughed even louder. "Gomen, Anthy, I wanted to make it more

scary, but I am a bad ghost." She shook her head but there was no response. Anthy only stood there, turning her

back to her. At that moment Utena heard the silent snuffle.

Nani?

Is she crying?

Utena's laughter died away and unbelieving she blinked. She plunked at her white T-shirt as she went over to the

bronze girl. Anthy had lowered her head and clapped her hands before her chin as if she was praying. But she

didn't say words to an invisible god. She really cried. Big tears were running down her cheeks and she trembled.

"Anthy..." Utena gulped and bowed to see directly into blurred eyes. "Hey, I didn't want to scare you that much."

The pink haired girl made a guilty face and laid her hands on shaking shoulders. "Hey, Anthy, little one, it was

only a joke. It wasn't real. The whole story about the ghost and so, I invented it. It was only a story, nothing

more. The ghost right now, that was me."

Anthy only shook her head and cried louder.

"I knew that this groaning was you, you baka!" she sobbed and her sad face looked... angry?

Anthy is angry? About me? But she already knew that I was the ghost. So why...

"I thought that you are deep injured. That you oversaw a stone or a branch or whatever and broke your leg. Or

your arm! That you are bleeding and that I have no idea how to call help here!" Anthy covered her burning face

with her hands and sobbed harder. "I was so afraid that you would be injured or even dying! That you would

leave me..."

Nani?

Utena gulped and suddenly what had been such a great idea just a few hours ago turned out to be the worst one

she had since she destroyed the ugly pullover her aunt knitted for her. And even the pullover story was harmless

against a sobbing girl. Her best friend she wanted to scare with a ghost. Not with her own health.

Shimatta!

"Anthy..." Utena gulped and stepped a little bit closer. Not knowing what to do. Not knowing how to make it up again. She saw the red line on Anthy's cheek, saw that the smaller girl only stood on her right leg. Because the left one seemed to hurt.

Shimatta! You knew that she's blind without her glasses!

"Anthy..." Utena simply opened her arms and brought the sobbing girl to her chest. Held her tight and rocked her

gently. The way Anthy had comforted her only twenty four hours ago. "Gomen nasai, Anthy." She whispered

and ran her hands through opened strands. "I only wanted to fright you, but not to scare you to death." Utena

sighed deeply. "I wanted it to be a funny joke, but I guess it's been a bad one, right?"

"Hai." Sniffed Anthy and calmed slowly down. Her Utena was safe and alive! She was right beside her.

Breathing and sounding really, really guilty. "Never do that again."

"I won't. I promise."

Anthy nodded against Utena's chest and finally raised her head. Still tears ran over her blushed cheeks, but there

was again that soft smile on her face.

"Do you forgive me?" asked Utena silently and wiped those sparkling diamonds away.

As Anthy nodded

slightly, she embraced her again and brought her again nearer to her body. The smaller girl still trembled and

Utena knew that she would let her sleep as long as she wanted to sleep the next morning. That she would take

care for Anthy's injured foot and then silently decide how long they would walk the next day. If they would walk

or of they would stay for another day near the pond.

"Gomen, Anthy. Gomen..."

Again Anthy only nodded. She knew that Utena was a real tomboy. That she often did things she didn't think

much about before. That it was simply normal for her telling ghost stories and then playing the ghost. Surely it

had been a great fun for her to groan and beat with her stick against the trees. Surely she thought that Anthy

would be scared about a dead lumberjack and a ghost with extremely big feet. But she didn't think that the

bronze girl wouldn't believe in the story. That she would recognize her voice the very instant and be scared about

other things than a silly lumberjack searching for his long dead family.

"You know what your behaviour means, Tenjoh-san?" Anthy's voice was still husky from the crying but Utena

believed to hear a silent giggle in it.

"No more chocolate bars?" she asked concerned and the now really desperate expression on her face made Anthy giggle loudly.

"Nope. Punishment!"

One second later the smaller girl attacked.
Utena's laughter could be heard all over the nightly forest.

Chapter two: One single chocolate bar

Normally it would have taken them two more days to arrive the little village between huge trees. A small street led towards it and most people there lived from the tourists looking at the near Fujiyama. But Utena didn't rush things. For another day they stayed at the small pond and instead of two days they needed five. Anthy wasn't as quick as the taller girl but after the first impatient moments Utena slowed down. She relaxed more and more as the days passed and decided silently that this was their vacations and that they didn't have to hurry up. Her aunt awaited them in some days and it wouldn't be tragic if Utena called her up and told her that they needed another week for the normal journey. The small village had only few houses. A supermarket, a hotel with a delicious but expensive restaurant, some various houses that rented private rooms and a doctor. The hospital, maybe the tiniest one of whole Japan, had never serious patients. Mostly some tourists who forgot their sun block and got a bad sunburn. Or in the winter some broken arms or legs when the tourists overestimated their skills on skis. There was a small market place with a fountain in the middle. Utena run towards it and held her head under the ray of crystal clear water. She let out a small scream and grinned at Anthy who moved a little bit slower. "That was refreshing!" Wet pink hairs fell over now wet shoulders and blue eyes sparkled. Anthy smiled shyly back and let Chuchu sat on the fountain's rim. She helped her little pet to drink and splashed a little bit fresh water into her hot face. "Hai, it is, Tenjoh-san." The stick Utena carved in during the last evenings, leaned against the stones. Utena gave it to the smaller girl who couldn't walk so well with her left feet. She burned it that night when she searched for a ghost. A really, really stupid ghost. But the burn hadn't been very dangerous and it healed good with the ointment Utena gave her. "What do we need?" Utena reached into her pocket and produced a crumbled sheet of paper. She frowned as she read the word she wrote down for several times. "Chocolate bars?" she giggled guilty. "Is that all?" "Hm... chocolate bars and toast. New water bottles, cheese, salami and new batteries for the torches." Suddenly

Anthy held herself a sheet in her hands. It was longer than Utena's. "Maybe we are lucky and they have some already boiled eggs." Shortly she glanced at a confused looking Utena and smiled softly at her.

She looks like a little child.

Anthy giggled and her eyes focused again on her writing.

Sometimes she behaves like one.

"Oh, and the tomato soup is out."

"That's all on your little sheet?" asked Utena disbelieving and looked over Anthy's shoulder. Then she stared at

her rucksack which got lighter during the past days. But she didn't notice it. All she noticed was that Chuchu ate

her last chocolate bar. A real tragedy. Utena chased the little pet through the whole forest until he hide behind

Anthy's back. Showing Utena his little tongue because he knew that he was secure with the bronze girl.

"You are a real darling!" The pink haired girl suddenly grabbed Anthy's hands and swirled her around. "What

would I do without you?"

Not duelling the whole school term.

Not being hurt by Saionji or Toga.

Not being screamed at by Juri.

Anthy blinked and her purple eyes darkened.

Not being punished with a burden like me.

"I would starve without you, little one." Utena who didn't see the change in Anthy's face laughed loud. Then she

put her rucksack back on her back and grabbed the smaller girl's hand again. To pull her towards the little

supermarket. Chuchu jumped on Anthy's shoulder and complained that they almost forgot him.

"You ate my last chocolate bar, don't grouse!" growled Utena and they both stared angrily at each other. It was

their private fight and Anthy knew that she couldn't do anything against it. They both were like little children

sometimes and she knew that they would stop it when they got bored. So she looked around in the little shop

they just entered. It had some shelves in the middle and bar for meat and one for cheese. The milk in the bottles

was fresh, maybe even from the villager's cows.

Hope it's not so expensive.

Anthy would like to drink something of that milk. But she had hardly any money. Of course she got pocket

money and while she was Saionji's Rose Bride he gave her sometimes a little bit to buy nice clothes or simply to

be out of the way when he had a date or wanted to practice with his sword. She never knew what to buy and so

she saved it. Nevertheless it was too less to finance a camping trip. The clothes she wore were Utena's, they used

her tent and her equipment and Utena said that her aunt wouldn't let them starve.

She had a small restaurant herself and when they helped a little bit, they would get the best okonomiyaki's she could find in whole Japan.

"I have never seen something as greedy as you!"

"Chu chu!"

"It was MY bar!"

"Chu chu!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Chu!"

Anthy giggled and reached for an iron shopping bag. But an older woman was quicker. She pushed her aside and took the bag first. Then she looked around to see who was in her way and looked arrogant down at the bronze girl. Her eyes glanced over to Utena who still stared with anger at the brown something sitting on the smaller girl's shoulder. For a moment the tourist stared at their hands, still holding each other tight. Her mouth formed to a line, then she turned around without a greeting and went away.

Nani?

Anthy frowned, but had no time to think over the older woman's strange behaviour as Utena decided to go on shopping. Chuchu had turned his back to her and sulked. That was boring and they had not the whole time to waste. She wanted to leave the small village soon. To reach the lake. To use her fishing rod again. And maybe, when she was lucky, to catch the first carp this summer.

I let Anthy decide how far she wants to go today.

Without letting the warm hand go she walked determinedly through the shelves. Pulling a silent Anthy with her.

Just then a real tragedy happened. It was almost as bad as the earthquake two years ago that let her famous apple tree fall over and that destroyed her bike. Almost. This tragedy was worse. Much worse. It was the worst thing that could have happened to her right now.

"No!"

Utena let go of Anthy's hand and went on her knees before the shelf. Raising her hands towards the ceiling as if she blamed the gods.

"No chocolate bar!" she stared in disbelief at the empty shelf and her big blue eyes watered. "That's unfair!"

"That's unbelievable! That's big injustice!"

Anthy looked shortly around but no one seemed to have noticed the big drama. Then she knelt down besides her friend and leaned forward. Out of the nothing she produced one single chocolate bar. The last one. With nuts in it. And caramel. And a little bit nougat.

"It's the last one." Smiled Anthy and blushed deeply as Utena embraced her suddenly and grabbed greedily for that bar.

"You are my saving angel, Anthy!" Utena held the bar tight and watched it, before she put it carefully into the bag. "That's my bar, Chuchu. If you eat it, you have to walk alone back to school! Did you understand me?" she said warning to the brown pet who kept showing her his back.

"Okay, what else?" Utena raised the shopping bag carefully and they continued their shopping. The things they needed went into the iron bag. Only tomato soup was missing. The new one would arrive next week, together with new chocolate bars. Utena and Anthy agreed that they wouldn't wait and went over to the counter to pay.

Anthy was relieved when Utena paid while she declared laughing that she was the one eating the most of all this stuff. While they put the new bought things into the rucksacks - the heavy things in Utena's and the lighter things into Anthy's - the bronze girl discovered a bottle of milk. It was cold and surely very fresh. Surprised she raised her eyebrows.

"Milk? I thought you don't like milk without cocoa. We don't have one." She asked and ignored the older woman who just left the shop. She whispered something Anthy couldn't understand. But it sounded not very nice.

Some people are strange.

"This milk is special. It's fresh from the cows here." Smiled Utena and almost fell over as she lifted her now heavy rucksack again. Chuchu laughed and the pink haired girl made a face. They both showed each other their tongues.

You stood before the shelf and looked so longing at it. Of course I don't like pure milk, but you do, Anthy.

Utena grabbed again for the smaller hand that felt so right in her own one and pulled the smaller girl out of the shop after she greeted the young assistance who only grinned.

"It's this way to go to the lake." Utena opened the map while they walked along the small road bending through the village. Normally Utena didn't need the map who looked old and crumbled. She knew the way. Only Anthy didn't know. To show her which distance she meant, she showed it to her on the map before they started to walk.

That Anthy had the chance to protest. Of course the violet haired girl never did, but the expression on her face couldn't lie. It showed Utena often when her plan for the next day was too exaggerated.

"It doesn't look so far away." Anthy corrected her glasses and felt how Chuchu moved on her shoulder. To look at the coloured paper as well. The idea of taking a refreshing bath in the lake was tempting and Anthy knew that it would be the last effort for the next days. Utena talked a lot about the fishes and that she wanted to stay there

for a while. To be lazy, to catch and roast fishes and to drown Chuchu if he would steal any more of her suppers.

Of course Anthy knew that Utena didn't mean it, but to see the two arguing was simply funny.

"I needed mostly two hours for that way." Utena looked asking over to the smaller girl. "That means about four hours when we slow down a little bit."

"Sounds fine."

"Are you sure? Doesn't your left foot hurt, Anthy?"

Anthy gave her one of those soft smiles and shook her head.

"My feet only wants to see nice water."

"There's still the fountain!"

Utena tried to pull her around but Anthy only giggled and showed the taller girl her stick.

"Don't worry, with that magic stick I can achieve everything."

"Well, if you think so... but say when you want to stop, okay?"

"Okay."

Utena nodded satisfied and put the map away. She forgot the fountain and even her friend as she saw the next shop. The window that showed one of the most delicious food mankind ever invented. Next to chocolate bars, of course.

"There's ice cream!" she shouted excitedly and Anthy almost fell down as Utena started to run. Very, very fast.

Her blue eyes sparkled greedily and the next moment she stood right next to the window. Looking down at all the different sorts. Remembering how delicious they tasted. And how big the portions were. Suddenly she remembered how her father once bought her her very first ice cream. Chocolate ice cream of course.

"What do you want, Anthy?"

Utena smiled friendly at the young man who sold the cold food. He didn't look older than she. Maybe he was still a pupil or a student at a university and tried to get some extra money with that job. Or the restaurant belonged to his family and it was his duty to help during the summer.

"What does taste?" Anthy felt unsure as the young man smiled at her, too, and waited patiently for them to decide. He already held one waffle in his hand.

"Well... everything." Utena pulled her money out and counted some coins. "You can take two portions, Anthy, I still can afford it. Because they had no chocolate bars." Shortly her face darkened but it brightened up as she allowed herself two big portions of chocolate ice cream. There was no better substitute for the bars than this ice cream.

Delicious!

"Hm..." Anthy looked still unsure.

I can't tell her that I never had ice cream before in my life. She would laugh about me.

The bronze girl gulped and finally pointed at two sorts that looked nice. White and yellow, that couldn't be poisonous, could it?

No one went ice eating with her at school. The other duellists simply didn't have time or didn't want her to be around. Especially Toga who wanted to be alone with his dates. With all those girls. Chuchu was Anthy's only friend and she didn't dare to go on her own in the near city. Too often Nanami and her girls waited there for her to shout at her. Besides she had no money to afford it.

"Here you are, young lady." The young man smirked at her and handed her the waffle. Anthy bowed and looked sceptically at the white and yellow mass. Then she took a deep breath and ate a little bit of it bravely. Surprised she stared at it before she continued eating. It was really as delicious as Utena had said.

"Have a nice day, ladies."

"Arigato. Have a nice day, too." Utena winked at the young man who blushed before they went ahead. Towards the end of the village. To go again into the forest and to follow the small path to the big lake.

"Lemon and banana. A good choice, Anthy." The pink haired girl smiled with her brown mouth at the smaller one and sighed relieved as they went from the burning sun into the nice shadows of the trees. "Do you wanna try my chocolate ice? It's damn delicious." Utena giggled as Anthy took her waffle hesitantly and gave her her own one in return. Soon the bronze girl's mouth was brown, too. Just like Chuchu's who begged as long as Anthy gave him a little bit.

"Guess I am addicted to chocolate." Declared Utena to the world in general. "Chocolate ice cream, chocolate bars. Guess if that would be possible, I would beg my aunt to make me chocolate okonomiyaki."

"Does that taste, Tenjoh-san?" Anthy's voice was too innocent to make a joke.

"I have no idea." They exchanged the waffles and suddenly Chuchu sat on Utena's shoulder. It seemed as if he was chocolate addicted, too. "My aunt always threatens to throw a frying pane at me if I don't shut up and eat my mushroom okonomiyaki."

They both giggled and went on. Talking about different things while eating their ice creams. Both girls smiled while a little pet looked more and more desperate because Utena ignored him determinedly. Until the end when the pink haired girl showed mercy and gave him the rest of her waffle.

"Give the water three more minutes to burn." Utena looked into the rucksack, but

decided to save the only chocolate bar she owned right now for a special moment. Or at least for the moment she couldn't live any longer without having eaten it.

The sun was setting when they finally arrived the lake. Now the water sparkled in the moon's shine and it looked mysteriously. A sickle on a cloudless sky. Between sparkling stars. It had taken them even five hours to get here.

In the middle of their journey Utena wanted to stop and to set the tent, but Anthy insisted to go on. She wanted to reach the lake and was very determined. The same determined she was now tired. The bronze girl sat on the rim of the lake and let her feet hanging into the fresh water. She had closed her eyes and her right hand tried to massage her left shoulder.

Surely she has aching muscles.

It had been Utena who sat the tent, made the fire and cared for their supper. Anthy only sat down when they arrived and didn't move again. The rucksack laid untouched next to her and she looked really exhausted.

It was too much for her and her foot.

"The next days no more walking, okay?" whispered the pink haired girl and knelt down behind her friend. Anthy only nodded, slightly moving her feet.

"Is supper ready?"

"Three more minutes for the water, Anthy."

"Good."

The smaller girl's voice was sleepy and Utena knew that Anthy would sleep very well this night. And deep. That not even a bomb exploding right by her side would wake her up during the next ten hours. At least. Utena leaned over to the big rucksack and searched in it until she found the sun block. They had a big bottle that would hold the next weeks. Because the sun was burning without mercy and they would get a bad sunburn if they didn't take it in the morning and refresh it at noon. Once Utena forgot her nose and looked for two days like a circus clown.

Not even Anthy's bronze skin was safe. The first days they didn't think that their ears were necessary to get creamed up, but as Anthy's ears changed from bronze into red bronze they decided that every little bit skin that wasn't covered with clothes had to be covered with sun block.

"Open your shirt, Anthy."

"Hm?"

Anthy's voice was sleepy but she did as she was told. All those years as Rose Bride left her traces. Whatever

Utena wanted Anthy to do, the smaller girl did it without hesitation. Mostly. Only when it was too senseless she asked before she did it. Just like the Sunday when Utena had the crazy idea of making

a pullover for Wakaba. To her birthday. Of course Utena had no idea how to knit. Nor what to use for knitting. Nor how big the different parts should have been. Of course Utena wanted Anthy to be her model. To stand the whole day silently so that she could put the different parts she finished on her until she could stitch them all together. First Anthy agreed but when she saw that Utena needed five hours alone for the neck, she doubted that they would do it in one day. When the evening came she protested to wear the pieces that looked really terrible, because there were big holes in the cloth, the whole night and the whole next week. Utena got impatient and threw all the pieces she got so far away and bought Wakaba a ready pullover. Much to Anthy's relief. Utena pulled the green shirt with the sunflower on the back over Anthy's shoulder and covered the brown skin with sun block. Anthy shivered but still didn't react. The past days she got more open and protested. Silently, but she actually protested when Utena did another nonsense. Just like the big tree she wanted to climb at just three days ago. To get a con. Anthy shook terrified her head and declared with her calm voice that she shouldn't do that. That it was dangerous. That Anthy would show her aunt every single photo she made if she really did that nonsense. Utena placed her hands on the smaller girl's skin and started gently to massage the shoulders. Anthy made a sound that was surprised but the same time agreeing. She lowered her head a little bit and relaxed under Utena's soft touches. Soft, almost tender. Slowly Utena relaxed all the hurting muscles and massaged a little bit longer than necessary. There was again that soft smile on Anthy's lips. The soft smile Utena could watch for hours. So relaxed, so happy she looked suddenly like someone else. Not like the girl who had to be a Rose Bride, who was forbidden to have her own will. Her own thoughts. Not like the girl who did whatever her so called groom wanted her to do. Now she looked free with a sudden. Like a girl who made jokes and giggled whenever Utena made a confused face. Like a girl who was concerned about her and held her tight as she was sad about her parent's death. Like a girl who could tease her around and be really happy. Out of the depths of her heart. She is beautiful. The moon shone on a relaxed face and its reflection of the water covered the place around in a silver shine. The hairdo was messed and some violet strands fell over Anthy's ears. They curled slightly up. Touched a bronze cheek.

Doesn't anyone see how beautiful she is? That she is a real princess?

Utena stopped to massage and swallowed as Anthy leaned trustfully against her chest. Her hands rested in her lap and her feet stopped to move in the lake's water.

No, they don't. But you do.

Utena frowned and ignored the little voice in her head. Instead she raised her right hand and stroked away those strands. Caressed tenderly over the bronze cheek, felt the soft skin under her fingertips. Anthy's breathing became more and more regularly and Utena needed some moments to realize that the smaller girl was fast asleep.

Isn't she hungry?

The pink haired girl caressed again the cheek although there was no strand left to wipe away. She knew that their supper waited for them but somehow she couldn't wake Anthy up. She looked so peaceful she had never seen her before. No desperate expression when Utena argued with one of the duellists and declared loudly that she didn't believe in that strange revolution they were all talking about. No more fear in purple eyes whenever Utena fought in a duel and it wasn't sure if she would win it. If Anthy could stay with her or if she had to go to someone else. Still the smile laid on the bronze face and Anthy looked happy. Really happy. And loved...

"Utena..."

The pink haired girl froze as she heard the calm voice whispering her name. No, not the formal one Anthy chose by the day they got to know each other. But by her real name. Her Christian name. A smaller hand grabbed for her one caressing the bronze skin and held it tight. With the weak power only a sleeping person had. But the power was too strong for Utena to let go. So the pink haired girl knelt there for a long she couldn't define.

Staring into Anthy's relaxed face and at the hand that held her own one. On a thin belly that moved slightly with every regular breath.

Nani?

She just called me Utena, not Tenjoh-san.

Suddenly tears burned in blue eyes. Utena blinked and didn't know where they came from.

Does she accept my friendship now? Does she finally see that she can trust me? That I won't treat her the bad way the others had done? Are we really friends now?

Utena felt how her throat tightened and blinked again.

Does she stay now? Voluntarily? Doesn't she go away like my parents, like Kei and like Wakaba? Just like

Ayani?

Utena took a shaking breath before she embraced Anthy carefully. Softly she brought

the deep sleeping girl
nearer to her body and held her tight. Buried her burning face in violet hairs.
Just stay, Anthy. Please...
Chuchu sat on top of Utena's rucksack and nibbled on a biscuit while the flames of the
fire died slowly away.

The fishing rod swirled through the air before the hook went with an elegant dive into
the water.

"I needed four years to learn that." Explained Utena and pushed the rod into the stony
ground. She wasn't patient
enough to sit the whole time and to wait for a fish to bit into the bait. She simply
would let it that way and look
after it in some hours. The water looked to nice to let it get used. The lake was big
enough to find a place to
swim without scaring away all fishes.

"The first time I tried to use the rod I almost knocked Kei unconscious." She grinned at
Anthy who watched her
interested. First Utena wanted her to throw it but the smaller girl only shook her head
and stepped back. Telling
Utena that this was her business.

"Although Kei was a baka. He stood right behind me!"

Anthy giggled because if anyone would have stood behind Utena this time, she would
still beat that person
down. Chuchu on her shoulder played with his ear ring and looked interested around.
He liked this place very
much. In the morning when Anthy awoke he hadn't been next to her on the pillow and
she searched him in fears.

Until she found him laying on a big leaf of water roses which swam on the surface.
Only some inches away from
the rim. He looked so cute, she simply had to take a photo of him. The same she had
to take a photo when Utena
finally crept out of their tent. Her hairs stood in all directions and she looked very,
very sleepy. She didn't even
make the attempt to take away the camera. Instead she sat down at the water and
needed almost an hour to eat
one single roll. It took her eternity to wake up this morning but now she almost
exploded because of energy.

"Let's take a bath, Anthy!" she shouted excitedly and grabbed the smaller girl's hand
to pull her towards the
water. It looked really nice: Crystal clear and slightly blue. Just like it always was on
the postcards or the books
she saw in the school's library. And it was very deep.

"No..." Anthy stiffed as she felt the water around her feet. Only two more steps and
she would disappear into the
fresh water. There was no big beach and only some inches away from the rim it was so
deep that she couldn't
stand any longer.

"Nani?" Utena stopped and turned around. The water already covered her body up to her chest. She decided this morning only to wear her pink bikini, because it was too hot. Why to waste a shirt when all she would do today was to swim around and take a sun bath? As long as they had enough sun block and as long as there were some more pages to read of her book she saw now reason why to behave civilised.

"The pond wasn't so deep." Stammered Anthy and felt how she blushed. She still wore her glasses and could see the confused expression on Utena's face as she looked up to her.

What's wrong?

"Hai, but it's calm. There aren't any waves and believe me, here are no monsters." Utena grinned and pulled the smaller girl a little bit more so that Anthy stood now in the water up to her waist. Still she fought against Utena, but the taller girl was stronger. She had no chance. "The only monster here is me. So be aware, Anthy." With a final pull they both landed in the water. Anthy screamed but the water took her breath as she dove into the into it. She rowed with her arms as she came back to the surface and gasped hard for breath. Her legs searched automatically for hold but she found none. Panic filled her mind and she forgot how to swim with a sudden. How to move her arms and legs to keep over the surface. She tried to shout for help but instead she dove again. Gulping more and more water. Fearing to drown. The next moment two arms took hers and someone helped her to appear again. She took a deep breath and coughed long and hard.

"Anthy..." Utena held the trembling girl tighter and swam together with her back to the rim. There she sat Anthy on a warm stone and waited until she stopped to cough.

"Hey, Anthy, what's up? Everything alright? Did you get a cramp?" Utena had often heard that even skilled swimmers could drown when they got a cramp in their legs. "Or was the water too cold? Did you get a shock?"

Suddenly Utena felt guilty. They spent the whole morning in the burning sun. Her aunt often told her not to jump into the fresh water when her body was heated up. Of course Utena never heard of her aunt and now she feared that Anthy got such a dangerous shock.

"No..." Anthy wiped her wet hairs out of her pale face and took another deep breath. As if she was afraid that the air would be gone within the next moment. "I am fine." She raised her head and her purple eyes were a shade darker than normal. "I just can't swim."

"Nani?" Utena raised her eyebrows in astonishment. "But the pond... I saw you swimming and..."

"I... I learned it, but not really. I know how to move, but I always touch the ground with

at least one leg and...

and there was suddenly no ground..." admitted Anthy and glanced again over to the lake. "The water is nice and I like it to be at the rim, but I..." she shook her head. "I am afraid of drowning in the middle. When there's no ground under my feet."

Utena took Anthy's now icy hands and without thinking she stroked over soft palms. "I didn't know that, Anthy." Said Utena quietly and followed Anthy's eyes looking outside the lake. Unsure and afraid. And longing. "But don't worry, you'll learn it." Suddenly Utena rose and pulled Anthy again with her. She remembered too well how her father learned her how to swim and that it hadn't been that hard. Her father told her again and again that she could do it, that she was perfect, that everything was possible if she only wanted it. Her father told it to her so often that she believed in his words. That she believed in herself. From that moment on swimming had been easy for her.

Anthy only had to believe in herself. She can swim, I've seen it.

"No..." whimpered the violet haired girl and wanted to go away. But Utena held her determinedly back, looked directly into purple eyes being wide with fear.

"You can swim, Anthy."

"No..."

"Just trust yourself."

"No..."

"It's easy for you. You already learned it."

"No..."

"Trust me, Anthy. I would never let you drown."

"..."

The bronze girl raised her head and gulped. Utena smiled friendly at her and the warm hands held her a little bit lighter. Utena didn't want to rush her, but Anthy knew that the taller girl wouldn't be satisfied until she wasn't in the water again. Utena could be very stubborn. Stubborn and impatient. Angry and childish. But never cruel. In all those months they knew each other now she never hurt Anthy. No, she protected her. She took her with her on vacation and cared for her. She even slowed down in her incredible hiking speed and let Anthy drink the whole bottle of the milk that tasted simply delicious.

No, she would never let me drown.

Anthy gulped and fear made her body shiver as she stepped deeper into the nice fresh water. Utena's smile got softer as they both slipped again into the big lake. Anthy gasped hard for breath as her legs lost the ground. Her mind wanted to panic again but the calming words of the taller girl held her back of splashing around like crazy.

She forced herself to move her arms and legs the way she learned when she was little

and suddenly it worked.

Suddenly she swam. Just once she remembered that there was no ground under her feet and shouted for help.

Right at that moment when Utena let go because she thought that Anthy was sure enough to swim on her own.

"Everything alright, little one." She held the smaller girl again and smiled confident. "I won't let you go again, okay?"

Anthy only nodded and smiled bravely back. Then she took a deep breath and continued to move her arms and

her legs. Continued to swim. To swim freely for the first time in her life.

As she promised, Utena held her the whole time.

"I am sailing, I am sailing
Home again, cross the sea
I am sailing, stormy weather
To be near you, to be free."

Utena sang again with all her heart. A big carp roasted over the open fire. It smelled delicious and Utena's blue

eyes shone greedily. She was more than happy to find the fish on the rod when they returned from their

swimming. She ran around with the big, slippery fish in her hands and Anthy, still weak from the exhausting

swimming, screamed out loud. First Utena didn't see that the smaller girl was afraid of the dead animal. Too

proud about her big catch she placed the fish in Anthy's hands who screamed even more and let it fall. Then she

ordered determined that Utena should take it back. That she would take some pictures of the proud fishing

woman and that she liked to eat something of that big carp, too, but that she wouldn't touch it. So Utena went

over to a stone and let Anthy photograph her in diverse poses. As if the carp was a dangerous shark and she the

brave person who saved the whole world.

"Chuchu!"

Utena finished the song and looked warning at the animal. Big, brown eyes looked innocently up to her and the

pet stepped slowly away from the rucksack.

"Touch my chocolate bar and you'll have to starve for the rest of the journey."

"Chu!"

Chuchu made a disappointed sound and turned around. Quickly he ran over to Anthy and jumped on her

shoulder. To be petted behind his ears.

"I didn't know that you read love stories, Tenjoh-san." Anthy sat with crossed legs in the tent's entrance and held

Utena's book in the air. The pink haired girl blushed as she saw the romantic cover of a

young woman looking

admiring up to a prince on a white horse.

"Well..." She blushed even deeper as Anthy opened the book and started to read.

"Just something to relax. I can't

read Japanese literature the whole time, can I?"

Anthy only nodded but didn't really listen to her any longer. She was already lost in the story of far away times.

When a brave prince rescued the princess in need.

Utena grumbled some indefinable words and sighed deeply. Then she looked critically at the carp she turned

over and over on a stick over the fire and decided that it was ready. That Anthy wouldn't read more of the

romantic story and get a wrong picture of her. Or tease her around the whole evening.

"Anthy? Supper is ready." Utena raised the carp and grinned. "It already laughs, can't you see it? It wants to be

eaten by you."

The bronze girl looked up and winced as she saw the roasted animal unexpectedly so near to her face. She put

the book away and came giggling over to the fire.

"It's really a moving story. Do you mean they will get each other in the end?" she asked and thanked Utena as

she got half of the fish and some toast on her plate. Chuchu begged in the instant and got a little bit of Anthy's

food. Just to burn his little mouth and to beg for water desperately.

"Of course they will. It's a story, they always get each in the end. Otherwise people wouldn't buy such books.

Not when the ending would be sad."

"Probably." Anthy shrugged her shoulders and continued to eat. It was really delicious although she didn't want

to think of the slippery animal the taller girl took care of the whole evening. Carefully she pulled the fishbone

away and had to giggle as Utena coughed. She was as impatient as ever and tried to gulp most of them.

"Take care, Tenjoh-san. Better to eat once slowly than to choke."

Utena spat out a fishbone and nodded. And concentrated again on her fish. Trying desperately to ignore the

growling of her stomach.

Tenjoh-san.

Slightly she sighed while she allowed herself another toast and wolfed it down to at least calm down her raging

stomach a little bit.

She only called me Utena the last night. Because she had been asleep.

Nevertheless the pink haired girl didn't give up hope. Surely Anthy would forget that formal name soon. They

had almost six more weeks left and six weeks were long. Very, very long.

Utena smiled happily by that thought of six more weeks of summer vacation and ate some more of her fish. Just

to cough again. She loved fish. It was her most favourite food besides chocolate. But

she was simply too impatient to eat it. Her aunt often gave up and gave her fish sticks instead. Where they had already removed every fishbone.

"Here, Tenjoh-san." Anthy leaned forward and one moment later Utena held another plate in her hands. A plate

where the fish was hardly eaten. But touched. Every big fishbone was missing.

"Nani?" Utena raised her head and looked over to Anthy who fought now with the other half of the fish.

Removing the fish bones and giving some tiny parts to Chuchu who ate it with passion. Sitting on her right shoulder and purring luckily.

"You didn't have to give me your supper."

"Of course I had to."

Nani?

Utena frowned because it was again the tone of voice Anthy used whenever she was the Rose Bride. Whenever she wore the red dress and had to watch her fighting another duel. Telling her again and again that she would do whatever Utena would tell her to do.

No, please, not again!

"Otherwise you would have killed yourself and then we wouldn't have had fish tomorrow. I can't throw the rod, I can't kill the fish and I can't roast it. Chuchu would be very sad if he wouldn't get fish to eat tomorrow. He seems

to like it." Anthy smiled one of her special, soft smiles and stroke gently over brown fur. Chuchu purred even

more and leaned against her neck. Holding his big belly full with delicious supper.

Oh...

"Arigato." Was all Utena could reply. Silently they ate the rest of their meals. Everyone thinking her personal

thoughts. Anthy looked out of the lake, surely remembering the past afternoon when she learned how to swim

freely, without fear. Utena herself looked over to Anthy and remembered the past night. When she held the

smaller girls in her arms. When she felt strangely calm inside. Safe and secure. Suddenly all memories of her

parents hadn't hurt any longer and all thoughts about the school and the duel disappeared. Her fears were gone.

What would happen if she would lose one duel one day. When a opponent would appear who would be stronger

than her. Or what would happen if she wouldn't lose a single duel. If she kept winning for the next months.

Maybe even the next years. She didn't wonder any longer what would do after they finished school. Would she

really revolutionise anything? Or would she simply leave school and go to university or start to work in her

aunt's restaurant? Would Anthy then still be her friend? Would she still be there or would she be alone again?

All those doubts were suddenly gone. Disappeared into nowhere. When she held the smaller girl softly in her arms she had known that everything would be alright. That there was no reason to be afraid. That there would always be a next day, a next morning. That she would never be alone again. As long as Anthy was by her side. No matter how strange that sounded, Utena suddenly knew that it was right this way. It was very hard to let go finally when the sun was rising. She carried Anthy inside the tent and covered her with her sleeping bag. Watching the bronze girl until she finally felt asleep. Knowing that she would do everything in her might to stay Anthy's friend. No matter what the future held for them.

A deep thunder interrupted her thoughts. She saw how Anthy raised her head and looked over to the horizon. Clouds built up and got darker and darker.

"The last days had been too hot. Surely a thunderstorm is coming." Utena shrugged her shoulders and glanced at the chocolate bar in the depths of her rucksack. Silently she decided to keep it again for later and closed the rucksack. "Better we take our things into the tent this night. It should deter the rain." "Hai."

Anthy's answer was very silent and she winced as a big lightning crossed the dark sky.

She tried hard to sleep, but it was impossible. The thunder rolled above and rough wind ripped at the trees around. The little tent moved slightly and she feared that it would break down. Somewhere was the sound of water splashing against stones. And suddenly there seemed to be thousands of others noises. Noises that made her wince and shiver. Noises she didn't hear the last nights. Had they really been there and did she only ignore them? Because she slept so deep? Or were they new?

Anthy gulped and turned around in her sleeping bag. She sweated but didn't dare to put the blanket away. She knew that she would feel even weaker if she did. It was too dark to see inside the tent but Anthy could feel Utena lying next to her. Breathing regularly. Being obviously deep asleep. The thunderstorm didn't seem to worry her at all. She only complained that they had less place with all their things in the tent and that her shoes didn't smell so nicely.

Somewhere was the steady breath of Chuchu. Somewhere next her feet. Anthy turned her head but couldn't see him. Not even feel him. Suddenly she felt left all alone. Another thunder crashed high above and she winced

again madly. Normally she didn't behave like a small child. Normally she wasn't so afraid by a stupid thunderstorm. But here in the nature she felt weak. It was a complete different thing when she was inside four solid house walls, but the tent moved with every wind blow that went through the trees around them.

What shall I do?

She laid her head back on the pillow and stared with wide opened eyes at the ceiling of the tent she couldn't see.

Because of the impenetrable darkness. Her glasses were next to her, she only had to reach for them. But she knew that wouldn't see more with them.

Help!

But she didn't dare to say it aloud. Another thunder crashed and it seemed as if the lightning smashed somewhere near them. The bang was incredible loud and Anthy winced again. Automatically she kicked with her feet and something fell over. It sounded like one of their water bottles.

I wanna get out of here!

But she knew she couldn't. Outside was a heavy thunderstorm and there she wouldn't see anything more. She wanted to light one of their torches, but on the other hand she didn't want to wake Utena up.

Stop, please, stop!

But the weather didn't stop. Instead it got worse. Another lightning smashed somewhere near. Maybe in a tree.

Then the rain started to fall. Hard drops drummed on the tent and it was incredible loud inside. The cover deformed under the sudden weight and Anthy hoped that it wouldn't break down the next moment. That the rain would remain outside.

What if a tree crashes on us?

What if the lake will be flooded and we will drown?

What if a lightning will hit us?

What...

Anthy rolled up to a ball on her sleeping bag and didn't even care that the blanket fell aside. For a moment the whole tent was illuminated and Anthy could see Utena sleeping next to her. On her back. She had spread her arms and looked peaceful. The bad weather didn't disturb her at all. Then darkness covered the tent again and the thunder that followed was deafening. It was as if the world was going to end. Anthy winced again badly and closed her eyes. Silently she whimpered and hoped that this night would be over soon. This damn, endless night.

"Anthy?" Utena's voice was full sleep and the taller girl yawned noisily. "What's up?"

Anthy gulped and the desire to scream was irresistible as another lightning brightened up the tent for a second and was followed by another loud thunder. Those second was enough for Utena to

see the frightened expression
on the bronze face.

"The thunder is always louder outside the cities." She whispered and yawned again.

"Don't worry, I've seen

many thunderstorms here. Tomorrow it will be over." Slightly she rolled over to her
best friend and searched in

the dark for a smaller hand. Before she could react she felt how Anthy had grabbed
her whole arm and held it
desperately tight.

"Nothing will happen, Anthy." Utena covered the trembling girl with her blanket and
closed her burning eyes. It

was in the middle of the night and she was still very tired. One moment later she was
fast asleep and Anthy could

hear her regular breath near her. Could feel it on her cheeks. She couldn't see Utena
but she could sense her.

Right next to her. Like a rock in the surf. Suddenly the thunderstorm seemed to
quieten and the rain didn't seem

to be so important any longer. Anthy crept a little bit nearer to the warm body next to
her and felt how Utena

wrapped her free arm around her waist. How she held her protectively tight.
Whispered sleepily some words

Anthy couldn't understand. But she didn't have to. She knew that she was safe here.
That nothing could happen

to her. Not even in a thunderstorm like that one. Not even during such a long, long
night.

Not as long as Utena was by her side.

Her prince who would always protect her against the evil world outside.

"This would be the most perfect place for a castle."

Utena swung the fishing rod again and the bait dove into the clear water. The morning
was a little bit fresher

than the past day but the sky cleared quickly up. No traces were left by the heavy
thunderstorm the last night.

Only some puddles that would dry away soon.

"A castle?" Anthy didn't even open her eyes. Lazily she laid on a big towel next to
Utena. They decided this

morning to try another place for their carp trap. It was only ten minutes away from
their tent and it was on a

small cliff. Only some feet higher than their normal place. The cliff was stony and here
they couldn't go into the

water. But with a longer line it was a perfect place to fish. And to overlook the whole
lake. It was really big and

Anthy took several photos. Before she laid down on the towel and took a sun bath.
She was very tired after she

hardly slept the last night and after Utena left the tent early in the morning. To take a
morning bath in the fresh

water and of course to argue with Chuchu who tried again to steal the only chocolate

bar they had. The angry words woke Anthy up and it was impossible for her to return to sleep again. Not inside a breeding warm tent.

Without the soft body next to her.

"Hai, a castle." Utena's blue eyes sparkled as she danced over the stony underground.

She was barefoot and only

wore her bikini. Slight wind played with her pink hairs as she spread her arms. "This would be the kitchen. A big kitchen with a big fridge."

"Full of chocolate bars?" suggested Anthy and giggled yawning.

"Of course! Right here will be the balcony. Overlooking the sea. Maybe it will be a little bit longer so that you

can jump right into the water." Utena laughed and picked Chuchu up who made a protesting sound. "You will

have a little room for your own, you little beast." She sat him on her shoulder and climbed on the big rock. "And

there will be the horse stalls. I want a white horse. One, no, at least ten. They are beautiful creatures, Anthy. Of

course we need a big hall to have big parties. Then I'd invite Wakaba and my aunt. Oh, and of course we need

many servants."

"To tidy up your room?"

"Guess you know me now." Blushed Anthy and looked over to the wide lake with yearning in her eyes. "I want

to have a big tower. Very high so that I can oversee the whole forest when I am on top of it."

So that I am a little bit nearer to heaven.

"A castle would be a nice idea. Right here, Anthy. Where it's so quiet and peaceful. Without the noises of the big

city. Without cars. Without honks and all this industrial dirt. There'll be a big gate. Right there where our tents

are right now, Anthy. I would only let the ones in who are nice. Toga and Saionji can stay outside until they

learned to behave." Utena wrapped her arms around her body and made a face as Chuchu ripped out some

strands of her pink hairs.

"Does that sound stupid, Anthy?"

"No." Anthy yawned again. She didn't have to look up to see everything Utena described. It sounded fantastic.

The perfect castle. Right like the one she imagined when she had been a child. When she read all those fairy

tales. "You always wanted to be a prince, Tenjoh-san. So why shouldn't you have a castle? Every prince in those

books has a castle and this here would really be a nice place."

"Hai."

Utena didn't turn around. Still she stared out of the wide lake and was captured for a moment in her nice dream.

In a dream she had always dreamed alone. Since her parents died and a strange shadow gave her new hope. New

will to live. And a seal ring with a rose sign on it. A dream she wanted to share now.

"Wouldn't you like to live in that castle, too, Anthy?"

"As what? As chamber maid? You know how bad my cooking skills are."

"Not as chamber maid, baka!" Utena laughed and finally helped Chuchu back on the ground. The little pet

showed her his tongue angrily and ran back to Anthy to hide behind her back. "As princess."

Anthy opened her eyes and stared thoughtful at Utena's back. The taller girl didn't move. She only stared outside

the water and wind played with her body. Automatically she crossed her arms before her chest and even in the

pink bikini and without her uniform she looked like a real prince.

Me, a princess?

Her princess?

Anthy gulped and stared down at Chuchu who was fast asleep next to her on the towel.

How did she mean it?

"A carp! A carp! Anthy! Look! A carp!"

The fishing rod started to jump and suddenly Utena was very busy. Anthy's scream could be heard all over the

forest as the proud girl showed her the caught fish without thinking that the bronze girl was afraid of the slippery

animal.

Anthy sat alone on the cliff. Staring out to the wide lake. She had brought her legs to her chest and wrapped her

arms around her knees. Her hairs were opened and covered her back. She only wore her white swimming suite

and her glasses laid in her right hand. She squinted but she didn't have to see anything. She had to think. To think

about the past two weeks. Two weeks when she didn't have to be the Rose Bride. When she didn't have to do

whatever her groom wanted her to do. Two weeks when she had been happy. Really happy. When she giggled

and simply felt free. Utena could be so funny. And clumsy. And with her direct kind sometimes so surprising.

The pink haired girl really saw a friend in her. Another girl. An equal partner. It was a complete new feeling for

Anthy and she liked it a lot.

Six more weeks were still left before they had to return to the school. To start a new term.

What if she will lose a duel?

What if I have to be Saionji's or Toga's bride again?

Anthy gulped and held her knees tighter.

I don't wanna go back again. I wanna stay forever here. Together with Utena who makes me feel so different. So

free. So happy. So being liked.

Being loved.

Anthy took a deep breath and tried to ignore the little voice in her mind.

No, she can't. Surely she doesn't!

And why did she take you on vacations then? Why did she care so nice for you when she saw that you can't walk

as fast as she? Why did she buy you the milk and the ice cream? Why did she massage your shoulders and hold

you tight during the thunderstorm? Why did she help you to swim?

Because she's a friend.

Why did she call you a princess?

Hm, Himemiya? Why?

Because she is a very good friend!

Do you really think so?

"Morning..."

Anthy winced slightly as a shadow appeared next to her and took away the sun. It was early in the morning and

the bronze girl left the tent because she couldn't sleep any longer.

"Good morning, Tenjoh-san." She looked up and had to smile as she saw Utena's sleepy appearance. Her T-shirt

was crumbled, she only wore her sockets and her hairs were a mess. She tried to braid them the last evening, but

almost all hairs escaped the hairdo during the night. Blue eyes were nothing more than small slots. With a long

yawn the taller girl sat down next to her and rubbed her tired eyes.

"How late is it?"

"Around seven."

"Still night. Wonder why the sun is already shining."

Anthy giggled and the desire to stroke through those messed hairs was almost irresistible. She raised her left

hand but before she could reach the soft curls, Utena bowed her head and buried her face with another yawn in

her palms.

"Too early. Too early." She mumbled. Anthy smiled tenderly and placed her hand finally on Utena's shoulder.

The taller girl didn't even notice it. She only yawned again and shook her head.

"Do you want any breakfast, Tenjoh-san?"

"Breakfast?" Utena looked up again and squinted. The next moment she rose quickly and stumbled back to their

tent. "Breakfast!" she screamed and Anthy could see her searching frantically in her big rucksack. She put her

glasses on her nose and was about to follow her friend as Utena returned. Still in sockets. Holding the one and

only chocolate bar tight in the air. "This is a special morning, Anthy!" Utena looked greedy at the bar in her hand

and sighed happily.

"I am really addicted." She giggled as she saw Anthy's confused face. While she tried to open the paper carefully

sat Chuchu suddenly on her arm. His little paws grabbed for the bar, too and soon they both were in a big fight.

"That's MINE!"

"Chu chu!"

"I bought it from my own money!"

"Chu!"

"Give it to me!"

"Chu chu!"

"But it's the last one! I won't share!"

"Chu chu!"

"NO!"

"Chu!"

They both screamed as the bar escaped their fighting hands and fell down. Hobbled over some stones and finally

fell over the cliff. Fell down the abyss and kept laying near the crystal blue water.

Brown and blue eyes grew

wide and they both looked sad at the bar. Then they looked angrily at each other.

"That's all your fault!"

"Chu chu!"

"If you would have let me open it, I would have given you a bit, too."

"Chu?"

"My chocolate bar!"

"Chu..."

Again they looked at the brown paper with the yellow nuts on and sighed deeply.

"That's a real tragedy."

"Chu."

"I'll get my boots to rescue it." Utena took a protesting animal in her hands and sat him on Anthy's shoulder.

"Here are you save, you little demon!" With those words she turned around and ran back to their tent. Jumping

whenever she stumbled over a stone she oversaw in her haste. Or when she slipped in her sockets that were now

dark. Not white as they used to be.

Anthy sighed and stepped a little bit nearer to the cliff. Saw the stones lying there.

Around the only chocolate bar

they owned. Her eyes grew wide as she saw how the water almost reached it. Only two or three more waves and

the bar would sink in the big lake forever. Leaving a sad Chuchu and an angry Utena behind.

"Don't move!" she said friendly at her pet and let the brown animal down. Then she corrected her glasses and

stepped towards the abyss. It was not very deep but very stony. And steep. Anthy didn't care much about it. The

worst that could happen was that she slipped on a stone and landed in the water, right? Besides would Utena be

happy to have back her chocolate bar. Anthy liked it to see her Utena happy.

Just two more inches.

The bronze girl bowed down and felt the chocolate bar in her hands. She grabbed it and smiled. Then she rose

again and held it with triumph over her head. And lost her balance.

"This stupid pet!" growled Utena as she grabbed her shoes and pulled them determinedly over her feet. Not caring that she trapped some tiny stones in her sockets. With anger she ripped at her shoelaces and wiped the sweat from her forehead. Shortly she leaned over to her rucksack and took her sunglasses out. Then she turned around and ran towards the cliff again. Normally it took them ten minutes to reach it, but when she ran she needed only half of the time.

I will kill him!

He will get nothing of that bar!

It's mine!

Her face was red of effort and anger.

This stupid Chuchu!

At that moment she heard the scream. It was short and very high. It belonged to Anthy, Utena was sure. She had heard the bronze girl scream before. For several times. In duels when she thought that she would be hurt. That Utena had no chance against Saionji. That Juri would defeat her easily as skilled fencer. That Nanami would really kill her, because her brother seemed to be interested in Utena.

Nani?

Utena felt how her blood froze in her veins and speeded up. The scream silenced as quickly as she heard it and silence fell over the lake. Silence that felt threatening. There were still some birds singing, still the water of the lake splashing against the stones. But it was different now.

Nani?

Utena's heart fell as she reached the cliff. There was no sign of Anthy. Only Chuchu was there. Standing at the rim and jumping excitedly up and down. Waving his little paws and stammering his >Chu chu< the whole time.

"You are really greedy, don't you know?" snapped Utena who thought that the little pet still mourned for the chocolate bar. "Where is Anthy?" she looked around but there was no trace of the smaller girl.

Did she decide to take a bath?

Utena frowned because Anthy never took a bath alone. She got better in swimming with every day but she was still afraid. She always wanted to have Utena by her side in the case that she would be too scared to move. That she would drown.

"Chu chu!"

"Don't buck me with that damn bar!" Utena rolled her eyes and looked over to the sea. There was no trace of Anthy, too. She didn't go back to the tent, because Utena didn't meet her.

"Where is Anthy, Chuchu?"

The little pet didn't react. He still jumped up and down and at that moment Utena heard the quiet groaning. She frowned and stepped next to Chuchu and looked down. And found Anthy. She laid on the ground of the abyss.

Between the big stones. Her eyes were closed and her forehead was bloody.

"Shimatta! Anthy!"

Utena couldn't remember later how she made it downwards. Maybe she simply jumped, she didn't know. It

occurred as if she knelt next to the injured girl the next second. Ignoring Chuchu who still squeaked with fear.

Fear that Utena felt right now. Deep in her heart.

"Anthy?" She gulped as the smaller girl didn't move.

Shimatta!

She stared helpless at her best friend and gulped again. Not knowing what to do.

What to do best. Her hand

started to tremble and she felt suddenly very, very sick.

Shimatta!

"Anthy! Say a word! Please!" She felt how tears burned in her eyes as she bowed over the bronze girl. Two

purple eyes opened and a thin smile appeared on the pale face. Anthy raised her hand a little bit but had to lay it

down again as the power left her.

"...bar..." was all she whispered. Utena turned her head and stared in disbelief at the crumbled chocolate bar the

smaller girl held weakly in her right hand. It was bruised. Just like Anthy's cheeks. Still blood ran over her

temples and she looked as if she would faint the next moment.

My bar?

My...

Shimatta!

Utena cursed silently and gulped again.

It's all my fault!

"Anthy!" She bowed deeper and helped Anthy to sit up. The bronze girl was too weak and leaned against her

chest. "Anthy! Stay awake! Hey, little one, what does hurt? Tell me, what does hurt?"

Utena took a deep breath

and looked around. A taller stone was bloody. Just like Anthy's left temple. Utena raised her trembling hand and

stroke as carefully as she could violet hairs away. Anthy whimpered but was too weak to push that hurting hand

away.

Shi...

Utena bit on her lips as she saw the wound. She couldn't define if it was deep and if it was dangerous, but it did

bleed and that was serious. Bleeding was always serious.

"I'll take you to the doctor, Anthy, don't worry." She said with a shaking voice and didn't know whom she tried

to calm down with those words. "Are you able to walk, Anthy?"

Anthy tried to nod but her view was too blurred. As if she lost her glasses. But she was

still wearing them, wasn't she? She didn't know. She couldn't even raise her hand to see if they were still there. All she could do was to sit here. Leaning against Utena's warm body. Against a trembling body. Hearing her calming words with a silent voice. Feeling how soft hands flew over her body to check if anything else did hurt. I am fine!

Anthy wanted to say it, but all that left her mouth was a tortured whimpering as Utena touched her right leg. Pain flashed through her body and stars sparkled before her eyes. Darkness waited around her and she wanted so badly to fall into it. To close her eyes and to sleep.

"Anthy! Little one! Stay awake!" Utena stripped her T-shirt and held it into the water near them. She shivered as wind played with her sweaty body. Now she only wore her pink bikini but it wasn't important to her. All that counted for her was the injured girl in her arms. Carefully she wetted pale cheeks and was relieved as Anthy opened her eyes again. Looking asking around and wincing hard as Utena tried to pull her on her feet.

"Can you walk? We need to go back to the village. To a doctor." Utena gulped and felt how Anthy grabbed for her shoulders for hold. "You bleed."

The moment when Anthy's right feet touched the ground she screamed tortured and fell backwards. Utena was there to hold her. Her face was now as pale as Anthy's.

"Shimatta!" she couldn't hold her back her curse and looked down at the foot. She couldn't see anything, but she wasn't a doctor. She didn't have to ask if it hurt, she could see it in Anthy's painful face.

"Don't worry, we will handle that." Utena looked again around and finally made her decision. Carefully she pulled Anthy in her arms. "Hold on me, Anthy. First we have to get back to our tents. Then to the doctor." She whispered and gulped. She knew that it would take them at least four hours to reach the next village. Alone Utena would have only needed two hours, but now she had to carry Anthy.

Shimatta!
It's all my fault! Because of my stupid chocolate bar!
Shimatta!

Anthy groaned put pulled her arms around Utena's neck and buried her face in her shoulder. Silently she sobbed and Utena knew that she was in great pain.

"Don't worry, Anthy, we'll be at the doctor as soon as possible. I'll care for you." Slowly Utena ascended the abyss and walked with a trembling Anthy in her arms towards their tent. Chuchu followed them still jumping excitedly around the pink haired girl. Still the birds were singing, the waves rushing. Crystal clear water reached the stones and splashed them. Rolled

again into the wide lake. Taking a brown piece of paper with it. Brown with yellow nuts on it.

Chapter three: Hold me

Afterwards Utena couldn't remember how they made the way back to the small village. Utena quickly dressed herself in some clothes she found in her rucksack and helped Anthy in her jeans and in a thick pullover. The smaller girl started to tremble and whispered that she froze. Utena tore apart one of her shirts and made a bandage around Anthy's head. Then she took the bronze girl on her back and went back. Ignoring Anthy's weak protests that they couldn't leave their tents and all their rucksacks behind. Utena didn't answer. She had put her purse in her pocket and everything else was replaceable. Everything else wasn't as important as Anthy. Chuchu climbed on her right shoulder and Utena didn't even argue with him. She couldn't blame him, he was only a small animal. A greedy one, but she was the only one to be blamed. She should have known that Anthy would do such a crazy thing as trying to catch their last chocolate bar. A chocolate bar! Only a single chocolate bar! And now Anthy is ill! Utena gulped and clenched her fists until it hurt. They needed almost three hours to get back to the village. Utena wasn't as fast as normal with Anthy on her back who was lighter than she had expected. Anthy looked extremely thin, but she hardly weighed anything. Utena talked the whole time to her to make sure that she wouldn't faint. It was past noon when they finally arrived. The doctor didn't ask much. He only called his nurses and they all disappeared behind a door. Together with Anthy. Leaving a confused and very scared Utena sitting alone on the corridor. It's all my fault! Me and my stupid behaviour! Me and my silly greed of chocolate! That damn bar! Shimatta! Utena gulped and buried her face in her hands. Anthy... If anything happened to the smaller girl, if she was dangerously injured, Utena would never forgive her that. Shimatta! I wanted her to spend some days outside the school. Forgetting that she believes in that stupid Rose Bride stuff for some weeks. Instead I hurt her! Shimatta! The door was opened and Utena raised her head. Her blue eyes were wide with fear as

she watched how the doctor came over to her. He smiled friendly at her but she didn't see it. She tried to see behind him, but the door was closed again.

"What about Anthy?" asked Utena and felt sick. Like throwing up the breakfast she actually missed. Because of her damn greed. Her fists were ice cold and slowly she rose from the chair. "Is she feeling fine?"

"Your sister was lucky, Tenjoh-san." The doctor kept smiling and pointed her to sit down again. As she did he took place next to her. "The wound on her head is not as deep as we feared first and obviously she didn't have a concussion. She doesn't feel sick or fainted. She is only tired." He sighed and looked around. But there was only the girl sitting next to him. Looking expectantly in his old face. No parent, no other adult. Only a girl he wasn't even sure if she was the bronze girl's sister. But he only was allowed to tell medical facts to family members and because they only got the insurance card of a Tenjoh Utena, he decided quietly that the girl inside his patient's room was the sister. Maybe the adopted one. Or the stepsister.

"Is there anyone who could take care for her? Her right foot isn't broken as we feared when we x-rayed it. But she has a real bad pulled muscle and won't be able to walk the next days. Then she'll have to take a crutch to move. Otherwise I'll have to send her to the next big hospital until she's able to take care for herself again."

Anthy?

Alone in a big hospital?

Utena shook her head and gulped.

"I'll call my aunt up. She'll come to take us home." Utena sighed deeply. "Don't worry, doctor. She'll get an excellent nurse."

My aunt always healed me when I hurt myself when I was younger.

The doctor smiled and nodded thoughtfully. Looking at the tall girl with the concerned expression on a pale face.

"Sure she will."

He rose and handled her some moments later a dark telephone.

"Call your aunt up, Tenjoh-san. Your sister needs rest now."

"Hai."

Utena looked at the phone and gulped again.

Auntie will kill me. Surely she will kill me, because this time I have overdone it with my stupidity. With my great talent of always doing the greatest nonsense. Of involving other persons. Of hurting them...

She sighed deeply as she dialled the numbers.

This time I deserve her scolding with me. This time she is right. This time I should have thought better before I reacted. Before I left her alone on the cliff and ran for my shirts. Only thinking of my

chocolate bar. Not of
Anthy who would of course try to save it. She was too long the Rose Bride than
ignoring something that seems
to be important for me being sunken in the lake!
But Anthy is so much more important for me. Shimatta!
"Can I see her, doctor?"
Shortly he looked at her and nodded finally. Normally that was against the rules, but
the doctor was an old man
who learned long before that rules weren't always important. Important was that his
patients would regain
strength again. Mostly they received it by their family or their friends. And the girl
inside his little white room
seemed to need badly a good friend.
"Be quiet. We gave her some painkillers. And let that pet outside. This is a hospital
after all." He bowed forward
and petted Chuchu's fur. The little animal purred but his big eyes were still watery. He
seemed to be as
concerned about the bronze girl as the other one just talking to her aunt.
"Auntie? Hai, it's Utena." Utena gulped and held the telephone a little bit tighter. "I
need your help, auntie."

They bandaged her right foot. Just like they took care for the wound on her head. Still
she was in pain. But it
wasn't as bad as it had been the past hours. Somehow it was trapped deep inside her
head now. All that left was a
knocking inside her head. They gave her some pills, surely painkillers. She gulped
them without asking. She
never asked about medicine. Especially when she felt so sick.
Now she only felt tired. Very tired.
But not tired enough to overhear the nurses silent words. That she would have to go
to a bigger hospital, because
they were only a small doctor's practice and that this village was too small to have a
real hospital. That they
would have to call for an ambulance if no one would take her home to take care for
her there.
Home?
Anthy gulped and tried to move in the soft bed she was lying in. Still wearing the
clothes Utena gave her. Shortly
before they left the lake.
The tent!
Her rucksack!
Our things!
Anthy wanted to sit up but she couldn't. The nurses did a good job with her feet, but
she couldn't move it. Not
even the medicine was strong enough to hold back the pain that now flashed through
her body. The bronze girl
groaned tortured and kept lying. Closed her eyes again. Trying to be as patient as she

had always been. When she waited for another duel that would decide over her destiny. That could change her life forever. The way it did half a year ago. When Utena appeared under the floating castle and defeated Saionji. Anthy tried to be as patient as she always had to be when the pink haired girl duelled with the other pupil. With young men and women who were older than her. Who were more skilled than her. Who were simply stronger than her. Fearing that Utena would lose this time. But the girl who wanted so badly to be a prince, won every time and Anthy could stay for at least another day or week.

Hai, Anthy knew what patience meant, but suddenly she felt restless. She wanted to get out of that bed. To leave that room and the doctor. To go back to the big lake. To see again Utena fighting with herself and the desire to eat the last chocolate bar. To swim again next to her best friend. To feel again her creeping nearer to her in the middle of the night when the thunder rolled loudly above. To be held tight. So protectively.

I don't want to go in a hospital.

She felt how her eyes watered but wasn't willing to cry. It didn't change things, she knew. It only let her cough and snuffle. And look very ugly as Saionji told her when she cried after he slapped her. I don't want to go in a hospital!

The idea of being alone for the rest of the summer scared her more than the thought of waiting again for hours for the next duel to begin, because Toga had another date and forget them. She didn't want to lay awake the whole night. In a strange room. Staring at a strange ceiling. Having too much time to think over her life and over the future. It had been so wonderful with Utena. The pink haired girl was always so funny. So crazy. Making her giggle and sometimes even laugh when she tickled her. With Utena Anthy felt safe and secure. Needed. Loved.

Without her she felt left and alone.

She tried again to move her foot. Maybe it wasn't so bad? Maybe something of Utena's healing ointment she used for her burned skin some days ago would be enough to make her walk again? Maybe they could return to the lake within the next hour? Maybe...

Some tears escaped her eyes as the pain told her that she wouldn't go anywhere. Not alone. That her foot was really injured. Just like her head. That she would stay here or in the bigger hospital the nurses mentioned.

No.

Please...

"Anthy?" she winced as she felt how soft hands wiped away her tears. She opened her eyes and looked into a

pale face. The smile was unsure and blue eyes were full with concern. Utena looked shortly around, but there was no nurse around who would kick her out of the room. She sat carefully down on the soft mattress and caressed again that soft skin. "I called my auntie up." Utena made a tortured face. "She was not very happy, but I guess I deserve her anger. Does it hurt a lot, Anthy?" The smaller girl gulped and without warning more tears ran down her cheeks. Silently she started to sob and searched helplessly for her glasses. The nurses put them somewhere near the bed but she couldn't reach the table or whatever stood there. "Anthy? Shimatta, is it really so bad?" Utena made a depressed face, scolding herself silently that she hurt her best friend so deeply. "I am sorry, Anthy. I am really sorry. It's all my fault. Me and my damn chocolate bar! I should have known that you try to save it! That the cliff is too steep for you to climb it! That I should have let the bar there and go back to the tent - together with you, Anthy. I should..." "I don't want to go to that hospital." "... have taken Chuchu and... uh?" Utena blinked confused as she heard the quiet words hardly interrupting her guilty stammer. "Please, don't let them take me to a hospital, Utena. Please..." sobbed Anthy and tried to sit up. Utena could see the pain on the smaller girl's pale face. Utena. She called me Utena. For the first time when she's awake... "They won't, Anthy." The pink haired girl took Anthy's shoulder and pushed her carefully back into the soft pillow. "I called my aunt up. She comes to take us home." Utena looked even more guilty, if that was possible. "I already told her that I'll bring a friend with me to stay over the summer. But I didn't think that you would be injured... because of me..." Home. Anthy's purple eyes grew wide and the tears dried slowly away. Did she say home? The bronze girl couldn't remember of ever having had a home before. A place she could call home. The school, no, that was no home. That was somewhere to exist, but nowhere to live. "I don't have..." Anthy gulped and closed her eyes again. The painkiller did a good job and she felt more and more tired with every minute. "The nurses said that someone has to take care and..." she yawned and felt again those soft fingertips on her still damp cheeks. Wiping away the last tears. Calming her down. "I'll take care for you, Anthy." She could hear Utena's shaky voice next to her.

Somewhere next to her. The medicine overtook her thoughts and she felt how she drifted slowly but finally into sleep. "Don't worry, Anthy, I won't let you down."

"Utena..."

The tall woman sighed deeply as she saw how the girl winced. She sat on a bed and held a bronze hand in her own tight. The girl inside the bed was very pale under her bronze skin. The first idea she had about her was one single word: Fragile. And the second thought: She is complete different to my niece-chan. But there was something in blue eyes that made the tall woman hesitate. She knew that she should never have prejudices. That she should never judge over a person before she didn't get to know her.

Or I will do the same mistake I did with Ayani.

"Auntie..." Utena looked up and there sparkled tears in her eyes. Tears she had never seen before on her niece's

face. Not after her parents died ten years ago. "Gomen..."

The tall woman wiped some pink strands out of her face and sighed deeply. Then she walked over to her niece and embraced her shortly.

"I talked to the doctor. Give your friend some days of rest and soon she'll be wild again." Although Tenjoh Rinja wasn't sure if the sleeping girl was really as wild as her niece. If anyone on this earth could be as wild as Utena.

Well, maybe besides Kei.

"Let's wake her up and take her home."

Utena nodded and leaned over to the smaller girl. Whispering some words. The girl opened purple eyes and looked confused around. A shy smile appeared on her face as she saw the tall woman and Rinja decided quietly

that this girl wasn't wild at all. Silently she wondered how someone like this girl could be Utena's new best

friend after Kei started to work and Wakaba moved away. But - different from her niece - she was patient. This

girl would live with them for the next six weeks until the summer was over and school term would start again.

Enough time to get to know her closer.

"Hello, I am Tenjoh Rinja, this tomboy's aunt. But everyone calls me auntie." She said and bowed. Purple eyes

grew wide and surely the injured girl saw how much Utena and she resembled each other. Utena earned most of

her appearance by her father and Rinja had been Utena's father's twin sister.

"Himemiya Anthy. I am pleased to meet you."

The smaller girl bowed, too, and almost fainted.

"How should I've known that she would bow in her state of body?"

Rinja went around the car to open the door for the still very pale girl. Her niece followed her. The mouth formed

to a line of anger.

"Anthy is different, auntie. She has manners!"

"How does she survive it then with someone like you?" Her aunt looked directly at her and Utena got even more

angry. Mostly about her head blushing deeply.

"We got a double room at school."

"I am sure she has to tidy up the room when she wants to make her homework, right?"

"Auntie!"

Utena blushed even deeper and Rinja had to grin. She couldn't remember to see her niece as shameful as now.

Then her face got serious again as she opened the door. Together they helped Anthy outside who was still half

asleep.

"My room." Directed Utena as they entered the house. Her room was ground floor, right behind the restaurant.

Anthy wouldn't have to use the staircase and it would be easier for her to reach the bathroom. Rinja nodded

agreeing.

"But you have to tidy it up as soon as she's awake. Not that she dies because of the shock how messy you are."

"Anthy has seen my wardrobe at school."

"And she still wants to be your friend?"

"Auntie!"

Anthy didn't say a word. She didn't even seem to hear them. The doctor told them that she got enough medicine

to sleep for the rest of the day and the following night and that they should leave her that rest. Carefully Utena

and her aunt undressed the smaller girl, trying not to touch her feet and her head.

Utena grabbed into her

wardrobe and pulled one shirt out. Without looking at it she pulled it around Anthy's shoulder and buttoned it.

Then she covered the smaller girl with the blanket and looked for a moment thoughtful at her. Anthy didn't

notice it. She was fast asleep the moment her head touched the pillow.

She gave her her most favourite shirt.

Rinja frowned and watched how a brown animal jumped off Utena's shoulder and rolled himself up in a ball on

the pillow. Next to the smaller girl's head. Chuchu, as Utena had called the little animal. Anthy's pet. A little bit

cheeky and always hungry, but loyal and house-trained. Rinja didn't mind. She had a dog herself, lying in the

living room right now and waiting for her to return. They were very quietly so that her pet didn't hear her come.

The shirt that once belonged her father.

Rinja frowned but didn't say a word as Utena stroke gently some violet hairs away and finally rose. Silently they left the room and went over to the kitchen. There she sat down behind the table and looked tired, but still very angry. Probably angry about herself. Her aunt knew that she didn't have to scold with her niece this time, Utena already looked guilty enough. Silently Rinja decided to talk later to her niece. When her head was a little bit clearer. When she had enough time to think. "Let's make a deal, okay?" she bowed for the broom and leaned it against the wood. "You'll tidy up the restaurant so that I can open it in the evening. I'll drive back and get your things from the lake. You've still been at the lake, right?" Utena looked from her to the broom and nodded finally. "Right."

Utena was on her knees and cleaned the ground. Her hands were dirty but she didn't mind. Slowly her anger disappeared and now, after four hours of taking really good care of the restaurant, she was calmer. Her aunt returned half an hour ago and now took care for their dirty clothes. She knew that they wouldn't fit any longer when her niece would wash them. She always used the wrong washing powder and the water was always too hot for the clothes. "Do you always have to put your friends in your clothes?" Rinja came out in the restaurant and held some used T-shirts in the air. "Anthy only has skirts and her school uniform. You know, you can't go camping with these." Utena didn't look up, only continued to wipe the ground. "Wonder how they fitted. Your friend is smaller than you, right?" "I never threw away my old boots and you can always roll up the jeans." "You still have that one?" Rinja raised the black T-shirt and had to grin as she saw her niece's innocent expression. "Of course, it was a gift of Kei!" protested Utena and rose to grab it back. "I always wear it with pride." "Hopefully not around the church, do you?" "I don't like the priest anyway." "Utena!" "Okay, auntie, I won't wear it here, okay?" Rinja giggled as she returned to the kitchen. "I wonder what your teachers think about you. Did you wear it there?" "No, we have to wear our school uniforms." Rinja raised her eyebrows as she pulled some more clothes away and found a book. A small, brown book in each

rucksack. Curious she had to open them.

"Do you still wear that uniform Hamamodo-san made for you?"

"Hai. You can tell him that he is an excellent tailor."

"I do so when I meet him."

Rinja read the lines under all the points. Of course they described that her niece was wild, impatient but very

intelligent. The bronze girl's lines couldn't have been more different: Calm, shy and very diligent. Utena was in

almost every sport team and helped the school to win some important games. Anthy took care for the rose garden

and all flowers bloomed wonderfully.

"Your mark in Japanese literature increased. How did you do that?" Rinja saw how her niece's head jerked

around and how her eyes grew wide.

"Oh... my report. I didn't think about it any longer." She cleaned her hands on her jeans and came over to her

aunt. "And Anthy's?" in disbelief she stared at the other brown book.

"Her marks are a lot better than yours, Tenjoh-san junior!"

Utena blushed and sulked slightly.

"But my sport mark is better than hers."

"I guess everyone's sport mark on this planet is worse than yours."

"But I improved!"

"Hai." Rinja compared this year's report with the last one and nodded. "This new school seems to be better for

you." She nodded again and frowned. "But your French mark is still very bad."

"But it was enough to get through! Auntie! You know that Japanese is already a hard language for me. To torture

me with French is inhuman!"

Rinja giggled and stroke through pink hairs that looked like her own ones.

"It's okay, junior." Thoughtful she looked at the other girl's report and put it finally down. "Do you like it at your

new school? You know, you could live here as well and visit our school. You don't have to be so far away. It's

just that this other school is very known and better."

Utena smiled and secretly closed her report and put it under Anthy's. So that it was far away. At least out of her

aunt's sight.

"No, it's fine. I have to admit that I changed school, because of Wakaba going there. But I like it there. It's..." she

searched for the right word to express the strange situation with the school council and the duels she fought

almost every day. "... it's different from our school's here. The people are nice there and Anthy is a smart girl."

When she doesn't have to be the Rose Bride instead of Himemiya Anthy.

"Although some teachers could be more interesting. Can you imagine, auntie, in our last literature lesson we read

a story about a damn ducky and a damn fox."

"You shouldn't curse, junior!"

"Okay, about a cute, sweet ducky and a bad, cruel fox." Utena rolled her eyes and her

voice was sarcastic. Her aunt giggled again and shook her head.

"You never liked such stories, right?"

As you didn't like so much other things. Like dresses and perms. Like dolls and to tidy up your room. You got that idea with your prince and stopped being a nice girl the day your parents died. Now you are a wild girl. My wild girl.

"Hm." Utena nodded and shrugged her shoulders. "You know how I am."

Her aunt embraced her shortly and messed pink hairs.

Hai, my little tomboy.

"Hai, I know, junior. I know."

But I like you the way you are. Your father's daughter.

Unsure Anthy sat on a chair. In the middle of the restaurant. It was early in the morning and the restaurant was still closed. Mostly it had opened at noon and around the evening hours. Now Utena's aunt set the table for a good breakfast. The rolls smelled delicious and Anthy had to admit that she was indeed hungry. But it felt strange to sit around so lazily. Not when she normally took care for their meals. Or at least tried to.

Her foot still hurt, but it was bearable when she didn't move it. She sat on diverse pillows and the bandage was removed from her head. The tall woman helped her and now only a plaster remembered that Anthy hit her head on a stone. She wasn't dizzy nor did she feel sick. Obviously she had a lot of luck and didn't get a concussion.

Only headaches that would hopefully go soon.

"Do you want meat for breakfast or jam?" Rinja asked and put the warm milk down.

Her niece was still upstairs

and tried to get dressed. Tried desperately to get awake. She helped her with the guests in the evening and it got late before she could go to bed. Or at least to lay down on the ground. She didn't want to take a guest room, so

she took a blanket and laid on it next to her bed where Anthy slept deep and tight.

"Jam is fine, Tenjoh-san. Arigato." Anthy smiled friendly and reached for the milk. Automatically she filled two cups.

She really has manners. Or is she only so shy because she doesn't know me?

Rinja could remember too well how Kei had behaved when she met him the first time. And how he behaved

now. Not that he was rude or so, he was simply wild. As wild as Utena.

"Call me auntie, okay? Everyone calls me auntie. Tenjoh-san sounds so formal."

Anthy frowned but finally nodded carefully.

"Hai." She replied and took the cocoa. For some moments she stirred in the milk before she put the package

again away. It had been exactly two and a half spoon full. And it wasn't even Anthy's milk.
Utena drinks her milk that way.
Rinja looked for some moments thoughtful at the smaller girl, but before she could ask, the door was opened and a still sleepy Utena entered the room.
"Did someone got the number of the track that ran over me?" she asked and sat down next to Anthy. Taking her warm cocoa milk in her hands and staring with small eyes at it. "Morning, Anthy."
"Good morning."
"How are you feeling? Better?"
"Hai, I am fine, don't worry." Anthy smiled a soft smile. "As long as I don't have to dance it's pretty fine."
"Better not. The last time I stepped on your feet for three times."
"Four."
"Oh..." Utena groaned and drank some gulps of her milk. It seemed to be okay, because she didn't add more of the cocoa nor did she complain that it was too much.
They danced?
Rinja sat down and handled them a roll. Anthy thanked while Utena looked sleepy at it as if she was wondering what it was. Finally she sighed and cut it open. And gave Anthy the upper part of it. Utena never liked the upper part of a roll, because it always fell over when she put a thick layer of jam on it. Just like she did right now.
Anthy didn't seem to be surprised. She took it and put a little bit butter and a little bit jam on it, too. Strawberry jam.
"Did you make that jam, Tenj... auntie?" corrected Anthy herself as she saw how blue eyes looked warning at her. The same eyes like Utena.
"Hai. We have a little garden behind the house. There's my dog right now, Hamlet. I'll introduce you to him when you can walk better with your crutches. He is a really lovely dog, but he is clumsy and wild. He would like you and knock you over by the attempt of showing it to you."
"You see, Anthy, it's simply in the family. I am innocence." Giggled Utena and served herself another roll. She cut it and handled the other half to Anthy who didn't even bit into the first one.
"Does your dog's hut looks the same your wardrobe looks?" Purple eyes sparkled and shortly they glanced at each other. Utena blushed and Anthy giggled silently.
"It's not so bad, Anthy!" Utena pointed over to her aunt. "What shall my auntie think of me when you say such things about me?"
"I think that you didn't change during the past year, junior." Rinja grinned and took sugar in her coffee.
"Do you want to call anyone up, Anthy? Maybe your parents and tell them that you are alright?"

There was a change in Anthy's face. Her eyes stopped to sparkle and the smile froze on her face. For someone who didn't look closer, wouldn't have noticed it. But Rinja did. She had a lot of guests every evening and she learned different kinds of humans to know. Their behaviour and their reactions. Anthy's reaction was hesitant.

Hesitant and sad.

"They died shortly after my birth." Said the bronze girl and put her roll down. "My guardian knows that I am here. I don't have to call him up."

"Oh, I am sorry. I didn't know that, Anthy."

"It's not so bad, Tenj... auntie. I can't remember them anyway and my guardian has to work a lot. But he knows

Utena and knows that I am well here."

Whom is she talking about? What guardian?

Utena stirred in her cocoa milk and wondered how much she didn't know about her best friend. So many things

she didn't dare to ask. So many questions she never got an answer back.

What guardian? The school council? Toga? Saionji?

"Arigato for taking me in your house, Tenjoh... auntie."

"Oh, that's not a problem." Rinja finished another roll and let out a relieved sigh. Her stomach slowly calmed

down. "My niece's friends are always welcomed. Just one advice, Anthy, let her starve the next time she loses

her chocolate bar. She's thick enough to survive it."

"Auntie!"

Rinja grinned and watched how a giggling Anthy put a roll away.

"Oh, and you can take your little pet down the next time. It doesn't have to sit alone and sad in Utena's messed room."

"It isn't messed, auntie. I tried to tidy it up."

"Right, you tried it, junior."

"AH! Auntie!"

"I am sure Hamlet will like your little pet. How is its name?"

"His name is Chuchu."

"A really nice name. Well, Utena named Hamlet. Because of a video game she liked. She didn't even read

Shakespeare and everyone thought that she was intelligent when she chose that name."

"AUNTIE!"

Anthy looked from the tall woman with pink hairs to the girl who was almost as tall as her. Both staring at each

other with the same teasing expression in their blue eyes.

"Once I bought her a bookshelf, Anthy. Do you know what she put in it? Mangas."

"AUNTIE! That's unfair!"

Anthy only giggled.

"Do you want to watch TV? I have a really good anime on video." Utena knelt down before her own TV set and searched in the mess of tapes for the remote control. She didn't find them and so she grinned over to Anthy who

sat on her bed and gave Chuchu the roll. The little pet started greedily to eat.

"Guess music is better. There's a really good CD Kei gave me some years ago." Now she started to search in a big hill of CDs.

"Maybe a book? Or a manga?" suggested Anthy and leaned against the pillow. She only went to the bathroom and to the kitchen, but nevertheless she was exhausted. It was unaccustomed for her to use a crutch and she felt still a little bit tired. She only wanted to lay down and to sleep a little bit more.

"You don't have to stay here. I am sure you have other things to you once you are home."

Utena who finally found a nice CD in the big mess, turned around and looked thoughtful at the bronze girl.

Anthy stroke Chuchu's fur and smiled that soft smile.

Other things to do than being with you? I am on vacations with you, Anthy, can't you remember? You don't have

to be the Rose Bride any longer. Only my friend.

Somehow she couldn't ask her aloud. She simply put the CD in the player and sat down next to the smaller girl.

Soon soft guitar music filled the room.

"Maybe we can play a board game. It's somewhere under my bed." Utena bowed down and her hairs fell into her neck as she looked under her bed. Seeing the dust and the mess there. "I lost some figures over the time, but I am sure that we can play it together. There must be enough figures be left for two players."

At that moment the door was opened and a young man appeared in the frame. First he looked confused at Anthy sitting on the bed, watching Utena who crept under the bed until only her legs were still visible.

"Still the wonderful, shy girl as always." He grinned and leaned against the door's frame. Anthy who didn't see him come, jerked around and looked at him. At his messed blonde hairs that touched slightly his neck. In two sparkling blue eyes. A bride grin laid on his face. He wore dark clothes. Just like Utena's T-shirt she wore with so much pride.

Kei?

Anthy frowned but didn't dare to ask. He seemed as if he felt like being home in Utena's room.

"Still messy, baka?" he raised his right foot and stared at the socket next to it. Lying there next to other dirty clothes. Clothes Anthy could slightly remember that Utena wore them yesterday. When she carried her to the small village, to the doctor.

"Ah!" Anthy hopped a little bit as the bed moved suddenly. There was the sound of knocking and as Utena returned from her journey under her bed, she held her hurting head. Searching she looked around but her face brightened up as she saw the young man.

"Kei!" She jumped on her feet and ran over to him. To hug him extravagantly. Then they clapped their hands and said some strange words. It looked like a dance. A dance of a special tribe only they belonged to. A welcome dance beneath the welcome fire.

"Kei, I thought you have to work!"

"Not on the weekends, baka." He grinned and messed her hairs with a loving gesture. His eyes shone with deep feelings and Anthy turned her head away. To cover Chuchu with the end of the blanket. The little pet already fell asleep after he finally got his breakfast.

"Auntie called me up and I simply had to come. It's such a long time that you were here, baka."

"Your girlfriend simply let you go?"

"She's not my girlfriend any longer." He shrugged his shoulders as Utena looked dismayed. "It simply didn't work and I have to give in that she wasn't my big love. She argued too much and she never liked my music." He grinned and shrugged again his shoulders. "We decided to end our relationship two months ago."

"I am sorry, Kei."

"I am not." He spread his arms and laughed. "I am free again, baka. Enough time to make nonsense this summer.

At least after six in the evening when I don't have anything to do."

Utena smiled and grabbed his right arm. Then she pulled him over to the bed. Shortly wondering why Anthy stared so determinedly on her bandaged foot.

"May I introduce? That's Himemiya Anthy, my best friend."

"Hello, Anthy. I am Kei."

"The one she knocked over when she swung her fishing rod the first time?" Anthy smiled friendly at him but didn't bow this time. She didn't want to scare Utena again who almost freaked out when she bowed before her aunt in the hospital and saw stars afterwards.

"Right, exactly that Kei." He laughed and sat down next to her. Shortly he looked at her foot and frowned.

"And what is that?"

"I slipped on a stone." Answered Anthy honestly. "But it's not so bad. The doctor says a little bit rest and I'll be fine again."

"She tried to save my last chocolate bar." Groaned Utena and looked very guilty.

"Chocolate bar?" Kei looked over to Utena then to Anthy and back. Then he burst out into laughter. "You will never change, don't you know, baka?" he laughed and petted amused Anthy's right

shoulder. "I don't laugh about you, Anthy. It's just that one camping we returned and I had a broken nose." He showed at his nose which was still a little bit curved. "It wasn't her fault anyway. She only wanted to kill a mosquito in the middle of the night and that mosquito decided to sit down on my nose." He laughed even louder as Utena blushed deeply and turned around to take care for the CD.

"The mosquito survived her attack. Only my nose couldn't stand back her boot. So don't worry, Anthy, to be that tomboy's friend means to fall down time by time. She's simply clumsy. And impatient." "Only a little bit." Tried Anthy to defend Utena who searched very intensive for another CD.

"A little bit?" Kei laughed again and held his belly. "That's the biggest understatement I ever heard. You should be happy that she didn't break any bone of you. That you are still alive."

"Kei!"

"What? Isn't it the truth?"

"You chase away my best friend, Kei!"

"Really?" Kei raised his eyebrows and looked at Anthy next to him. Smiling so innocently as if she really didn't

hear the humour in his words. "Are you really afraid of her now? I mean, she is clumsy, but until now she didn't kill anyone. Until now." A pillow hit his head and laughing he threw it back.

"Kei!"

"We shared a room the past school term." Answered Anthy and her smile deepened. "I know her wardrobe, Kei-san."

The young man frowned as he heard the formal salutation but had to laugh even more as he finally understood the bronze girl's words.

"Her wardrobe? You mean the big mess where there's always a bomb exploding whenever she opens the door?"

"She improved."

"Really?"

"She put away her airbed."

"The one she never wanted to let out the air?"

"Hai, but now it's broken."

"Wow, I am impressed."

"AH!" The next moment Utena jumped on the bed and tried to tickle Kei. But the young man was taller and soon he sat on her, tickling her without mercy.

"Kei! WAH!" she laughed helpless and soon they had a big fight. Like in the old days. When they had been teenagers. When Kei fell desperately in love with the pink haired girl but she told him that he was a good friend,

no one more. That he would never be it, no matter how long he would wait.

"You little beast."

"You jerk!"

"Baka!"

"You... wah!"

Anthy brought her hurt foot in security and watched them giggling. She had never seen such a crazy family

before. She knew that they all only teased Utena around. You simply had to tease someone around who reacted

like Utena did. Her aunt was a loving person and this Kei seemed to be nice, too.

I wish I would have such a family, too.

Anthy's purple eyes darkened and she wrapped her arms around her body as she started suddenly to freeze.

I wish I would belong to that family. To her family...

"Your school report?" Kei who still sat on Utena's back who protested loudly, grabbed for the brown book and

opened it. His blue eyes grew wide with surprised. "What did you do? Did you eat an intelligence cake or what?"

You never had such good marks!"

"So you thought I was stupid? Good for you that you work now, uh?" Utena finally turned around and grabbed

the book back. She looked at it and made a face. "That's Anthy's, not mine." She declared and handled it over to

the bronze girl who watched them in silence. "This is mine."

"Hai, that looks more like you."

"Hey, I improved!"

"Right, I can see it at your French mark."

"AH!"

Anthy took her report in her hands and frowned. She couldn't remember to have put it into her rucksack. But

here it was. As always. As every year. No one would sign it. She knew that there was a field on the sheet where

the parents had to sign. Anthy had no parents and so no one signed it. No teacher seemed to care. They took her

book back at the beginning of the school term and gave it back to her when the year was over.

"Your friend maybe doesn't have a good sport mark, but..."

"Kei!"

"Baka!"

They both fought again giggling on the bed and Anthy opened her book again. To look at her bad sport mark.

Even worse than Utena's French mark.

"Jerk!"

"Little demon!"

Anthy's eyes grew wide and watered as she saw that the empty field wasn't empty any longer. Someone had

signed it. Someone who was called Tenjoh Rinja.

Family...

"Are you sure that you can take a shower all by yourself?" Utena looked doubtful at

her best friend. The smaller girl stood on her crutch next to the cabin and looked really determinedly. A plastic bag covered her bandaged feet and right now she wore one of Utena's bathrobes. Of course it was too big. Just like Utena's pyjama Anthy would wear afterwards. It was now evening. Kei stayed the whole afternoon and they played some games. Anthy joined them and won. Because Utena and Kei had to tease each other around the whole time. Of course Chuchu had been on Kei's side in the very instant he awoke and so three voices shouted through the room whenever the other one got a better card. In the end it had been Anthy who held the best cards in her hand without knowing how she got them. Rinja made supper for them before she opened her restaurant. There were less guests today and so she told Utena that she didn't have to help her. That she should take care for her friend instead. Anthy who felt sweaty and dirty after the long day wanted to take a shower and Utena wouldn't leave the bathroom. She feared that the bronze girl would slip on the wet underground or that she would suddenly faint. Still she was ill and still she had headache.

"Of course. I did that all my life." Said Anthy but the concern in Utena's voice warmed her heart. She stripped the bathrobe and opened her hairs. She wanted to wash them, too. They were still dirty with blood on her temple and she felt like a stunk. With unsure steps she entered the cabin and closed the door behind her. Soon nice warm water ran down her body and she closed her eyes to enjoy it. Utena leaned against the door as the waterfall increased. She took a deep breath and looked out of the opened window. Seeing the dark clouds building up on the evening sky. The past days had been incredible hot and she knew that another thunderstorm came. Probably it would rain the whole night so that it would be very hot again in the morning and the following day. As so often during the hot summer months. We need a little bit fresh air.

Utena brushed some hairs out of her sweaty face and blushed even deeper. But it was not because of the summer's heat. She knew that. Hell, what's up with you? You've seen her naked before! Whenever you changed in the sport's cabin for swimming! Whenever she was under the shower in our bathroom at school and you forgot to brush your teeth. Whenever she forgot her night gown and searched it half blind, because she couldn't find her glasses. It's not special! It's not different now! Isn't it?

She took a deep breath and closed her eyes. Nothing changed. She's still the same.

No!

She is different now! Now she is Himemiya Anthy. The Anthy behind the Rose Bride's mask! Finally she shows her real I.

And you like that girl, right?

You like her a lot!

Right?

Right?

Utena sighed deeply and opened her eyes. And jumped over to the cabin as she saw how the shadow of Anthy started to reel behind the glass door.

"Anthy?" she opened the door and caught the smaller girl as she fell. Anthy marbled something and coughed.

Then she tried to stand up.

"Everything alright, Tenjoh-san."

"Forget it, Anthy. Get out before you faint!" Utena tried to pull her out. Trying hard to ignore the soft skin under her fingertips. Trying hard to ignore her own fast heart beat. "I once promised not to let you drown. Not even in our shower!"

"But I am dirty! I didn't wash my hairs right now." Whispered Anthy and Utena felt how she trembled. A

lightening flashed over the dark sky outside the window and thunder followed. They both didn't hear it, because the water falling down was too loud. But in the shine of the lightening Utena could see the pleading in purple eyes. An expression laid on Anthy's face Utena couldn't resist.

It had been hot. I should take a shower, too.

Do you really think that this is such a good idea?

Utena gulped and looked shortly at Anthy's trembling body. She felt how she blushed again and was angry about herself.

Do you really think so?

Shut up!

"Just one moment, Anthy. Don't move, okay?" Utena turned around after she made sure that the bronze girl wouldn't fall down. Then she stripped her jeans and her now dirty T-shirt. They ate ice cream in the afternoon

and of course she had to spread it all over her clothes. Kei laughed out loud - before Anthy showed him that he dirtied his shirt as well. Chuchu begged the whole time and finally Anthy gave him something, too. Happily he had sat on her right shoulder and ate with passion. Being petted time by time by Kei who always wanted to have a pet but simply didn't have the time to keep one.

"Tell me before your foot hurts to much, okay?" Utena stepped behind the smaller girl in the cabin and closed the glass door behind herself. She shivered as she felt the warm water on her body. Anthy took her showers

much hotter than she did, but she wouldn't change the water's temperature. This time she would survive it.

This time?

She didn't think much as she simply took the shampoo and massaged it into Anthy's hairs. Hairs that felt like velvet. Like a violet curtain they fell over small shoulders and covered a fragile looking back.

I will never let anyone hurt you.

Anthy lowered her head and closed her eyes. The world still spun around herself, but she tried to live with the dizziness. The touch was simply too gently to let it go. Utena was so soft, so loving to her no one had ever been before. Carefully her hairs were cleaned from the shampoo and the water was turned off.

No, please, not so soon.

Anthy gulped as she heard the thunder rolling outside the opened window.

Don't let me go now!

"Better you'll go to bed, Anthy. You can hardly stand any more." Utena's voice was low and sounded concerned.

Anthy felt how her hairs were wrapped into a towel around her head.

I don't want to go to bed.

Another thunder rolled and Anthy winced. She didn't slip on the shower's underground, but was frightened about the thunderstorm. The memory of the heavy thunderstorm at the big lake was too fresh to ignore this one. Okay, this time she was in a solid house, but the fear was still in her heart.

"Anthy, keep awake!" yelled Utena suddenly who thought that the taller girl would faint. She embraced her and held her tight as Anthy winced. "Hey, keep awake!"

Anthy opened her eyes as she felt the warm body beside her. As she felt strong arms embracing her. As she felt Utena's warm breath in her neck.

"I am fine." She whispered and wondered why her voice was suddenly so hoarse. She's so soft. So incredible cute. So sweet...

Utena coughed and finally let the smaller girl go. Not knowing why her arms shook with a sudden. She reached for the towel and handled it Anthy who squinted. Her glasses laid in Utena's room on the table and she was almost blind right now.

What's up with me?

Utena grabbed angrily her own towel and dried herself. Then she dressed herself quickly in her clothes and handled Anthy the pyjama. It was really too tall.

"I am a real dwarf, right?"

Utena smiled although she knew that Anthy probably didn't see it. She bowed down to roll up the pyjama's pants.

"No, Anthy, I am a real giant."

They both giggled and Utena asked herself if the shower had really been so hot as she helped Anthy to get over

to her room on the crutch.

"I am a lumberjack and I am okay
I sleep all night and I work all day
I want to be a girlie
Just like my dear papa..."

Utena turned the TV set louder and laughed while she watched the young man being dressed as a lumberjack dancing over the screen. The choir looked very unsure but repeated his words. "Those guys are so funny!" she laughed even louder and wiped away the tears from the corner of her eyes. She sat on the corner of her bed and gasped for breath as a serious looking man went into a cheese office to buy cheese. But the shop didn't have cheese.

"I wish they would have made more movies like this one."

"Hai."

Anthy answered only half hearted. She sat in the middle of the bed, being wrapped in a soft blanket. Her violet hairs were still damp. They had been not very tired after they finished their shower and so Utena decided to watch TV. Her most favourite series. A very funny one with a dark kind of humour. The best humour of them

all: British one. But Anthy couldn't laugh. She didn't even giggle. Not even smile. All she did while Utena almost fell down the bed while that guy did something even funnier was to look to the still opened window.

Seeing all the lightening that crossed the dark sky outside. The thunderstorm started one hour ago and the horizon looked worse with every minute. The wind increased outside and the leaves of the trees around the house rushed threatening. Still it was very hot, but Anthy froze like hell. Her legs she covered completely with the blanket were ice cold and she shivered slightly.

This is only a thunderstorm!

You are in a solid house now!

But it didn't help. Anthy had never felt comfortable with the dangerous forces of nature. Since that night at the lake she disliked thunderstorms even more. Okay, that night, there had been someone right by her side.

Anthy glanced over to Utena who brushed her hairs out of her blushed face and laughed again as a young man declared to climb both peaks of the Kilimanjaro.

Okay, Utena would be there this night, too, but she would sleep again on the ground. Unreachable for Anthy when she would lay half blind in the darkness, listening to the strange noises around her. Wondering how long it

would take to let this night be over. Finally over.

The wind increased and the window frame crashed against the wall. Anthy winced hard while Utena jerked

around. Still laughing over a strange football game between injured patients and doctors she stood up and closed

it. Then she glanced at her watch and yawned slightly.

"What do you think? Shall we go to bed? It's late, Anthy."

The bronze girl only nodded, not knowing what to say, how to reply. Of course they couldn't watch TV the

whole night. But somehow she had hoped so. She had never been afraid of the dark, but when nature raged so

loudly outside she felt very unsure and fragile. Tiny and helpless. A feeling she had often when she was the Rose

Bride. A feeling she hated even more when she was only Himemiya Anthy.

"Let's watch the rest tomorrow, okay? Kei even knows that movie by heart." Utena giggled and switched off the

TV set. "Goodnight, little demon." Utena stroke behind Chuchu's ears. The little pet only turned around on the

pillow next to Anthy and kept sleeping. He was full, warm and simply satisfied. No one argued with him, only

the pink haired girl teased him around. But she liked him, he felt it. She wasn't as mean as Saionji who even

stepped on him one time.

"Good night, Anthy. If you need something, just wake me up. If your foot is hurting or you want something to

drink, just throw a pillow after me. Or a book when I am deep asleep." Utena grinned and raised her hand.

Automatically she caressed bronze cheeks and looked deeply into purple eyes. "If you need anything, just call

me, Anthy, okay?"

The smaller girl gulped and finally nodded again.

"Okay." She whispered and placed her hand over the one on her left cheek. For some moments they froze and

didn't dare to move. Looking at each other. Dreamy. Then Utena let go and turned towards her blankets on the

ground. They were hard, but comfortable enough for Utena who was used to hard underground because of all the

vacations she took part of. It was her fault that Anthy got injured and so she thought it was just fair that the

injured girl would get the bed and she the ground instead.

"Good night, Tenjoh-san."

Utena bit on her lower lip as she switched off the light.

Utena!

My name is Utena!

But she didn't say a word. She knew it was senseless. Anthy hardly called her by her Christian name. Only when

she was in great pain or need or didn't even know that she was talking to her. And when she did, she blushed. As

if it was forbidden for the Rose Bride to say her groom's normal name.

Anthy heard how her best friend laid down and gulped. And gulped again. Another lightning crossed the sky, split the enormous clouds. Thunder followed. It didn't rain. Not yet. It had been too hot this day and still the rain was missing. The clouds had still to built up and sent its harbinger first.

I wanna get out here!

But Anthy was like paralysed. Like she had been in the small tent. This time the walls didn't shake around her.

Nevertheless was the feeling almost as worse as the last time. The trees looked like dark, dangerous shadows outside the window and she felt alone. Suddenly very alone.

Please...

She took a deep breath and crossed her arms before her chest. Her foot start again to hurt. She took her medicine one hour ago but each day she was only allowed to take a little bit less. They went to a doctor here and he told her that her foot was getting better and that there was no need to pump her full with pain killers.

Right now she wished herself a big aspirin.

"Tenjoh-san?" Anthy was surprised that she was still able to talk. Mostly when she wanted to yell, her throat was dry and she wasn't even able to whimper. Right now it was only a silent whisper, but the pink haired girl answered immediately.

"Hai?"

"Are you still awake?"

"What would you do if I'd say no?"

"That you aren't a good liar."

Utena giggled and sat up. Rubbing her eyes and staring through the darkness over to the bed. Anthy still sat there, leaned against her pillows. It seems as if she didn't move during the past minutes at all.

"What's up, Anthy?" Utena yawned deeply and searched for her pillow. Only minutes had passed since she switched off the light. But those minutes had been enough to transform her ground bed to a total mess. Just like her hairs. "Is your foot hurting?"

"A little bit." Replied Anthy in a very calm voice and gulped.

Why did you wake her up again?

What do you want now?

Anthy blinked in the darkness. She knew too well what she wanted. She knew that since the day when the pink haired girl won the duel. But she knew that it was only a dream. Maybe out of the Rose Bride's duty, maybe out of Himemiya Anthy's heart. Utena told her more than once that she didn't believe in all this end of the world nonsense. That she fought all those duels to keep her away from those insane duellists like Saionji who was so brutal that he didn't even deserve a fish or a hamster.

>If you need anything, just call me, Anthy, okay?<

But she offered me her help.

Hai, only her help.

"Shall I get you some more medicine? You don't have to take it forever, so it's not that bad when you take a little bit more today."

You see? Medicine, nothing more.

Shut up!

Again lightening brightened up the room and the thunder that followed was very loud. The window was pushed

open by the storm and Anthy winced hard as the frame crashed again against the wall.

Utena jumped cursing on

her feet and closed it. This time hopefully properly.

"Hope auntie closes all doors and let our doggy in. He's not afraid of thunderstorms, but he tries to attack every lightening as if it were an enemy." Utena chuckled. "He's a little bit stupid, but a lovely dog."

Anthy who already got to know the big, impatient but always begging dog. He growled at her first, but when he

recognized that she held a roll with cheese in her hands, he was suddenly her best friend. Looking the whole time

at her breakfast. Lying his head in her lap and staring with loyal eyes up to her. Or at least up to her hand.

Happily he had barked when she gave him the last part. Since that moment they were deep friends and he even

accepted a still very frightened Chuchu who rescued himself on Anthy's shoulder.

"Do you have fever?" Utena's voice was very concerned as she sat down on the bed.

Anthy didn't react as she felt

the warm hand on her forehead. "Nope."

Now or never!

Just say what you want!

She will tell you if she doesn't want it!

Or do you want to spend the whole night in fear, listening to this dangerous thunder outside?

Do you want?

Do you want?

Do you want?

No...

"Would..." stammered Anthy and lowered her head. "Would you... would you please hold me... Utena? Be...

because I am afraid of thunderstorms..." Anthy gulped and silence filled the room after her words. Only the

storm hammering against the window was heard. And Chuchu's snores.

Nani?

Utena felt how her cheeks burned and cursed herself. Why did she blush again? There was no reason for

blushing! Anthy only asked her to stay. To protect her against the thunderstorm. Just another thunderstorm. Like

in the tent. Nothing special. How often did she ask her aunt to sleep in her bed after

her parents died? When nightmares were hunting her down? Why did she feel so embarrassed right now? This was normal! Anthy was her best friend and she was afraid. Maybe even in pain because of that stupid chocolate bar! Wasn't it normal to help a friend in need? Wasn't it? Wasn't it? Wasn't it? I don't know...

"Of course." Answered Utena and blushed even deeper as her voice died away and she had to cough. She crept under the blanket and took the smaller girl carefully in her arms. She felt how Anthy trembled and brought her a little bit nearer to her body. Feeling that her arms shook a little bit, too.

"Just... just until I sleep, okay? Then you can go back to your bed if you like..."

"And to waste this nice, soft one? To waste an opportunity not to sleep on the ground?" teased Utena and cursed as she saw how Anthy's eyes grew wide.

"When... when it's too hard on the ground, why do you give me your bed then, Tenjoh-san? I could go in one of your aunt's guest rooms as well."

"Because I want it this way!" answered Utena and sighed slightly. "This was only a joke, Anthy. Besides, nothing is more funny than to sleep with someone in one room and to tell that person horror stories."

They both remembered Utena's last attempt of being a ghost and both giggled a little bit.

"Better not this night, Tenjoh-san. Or I would have to search you in your garden... hobbling."

"No, here are my neighbours. Well, they ARE used to my strange behaviour sometimes, but to ran outside a thunderstorm, only wearing a white blanket and moaning like a ghost... they would call the doctors and they would give me nice white jackets. You know, those with the long sleeves."

"Oh... may I get one, too? They always look so soft." Anthy leaned her head against Utena's chest and could hear the regular heartbeat. First it was fast, surely because of the effort of closing the window, but it slowed down quickly. It was the best rhythm Anthy had ever heard. It was calming, comforting. It surrounded her and let her forget the thunderstorm outside the window. It made her sleepy and she yawned slightly. Feeling completely safe here in those soft arms. In Utena's tender embracement.

"You know those jackets?"

"Saionji owns one."

"I am sure he does." Giggled Utena and Anthy could feel her warm breath tickling her neck. Soft hands started to caress her violet curls and smiling she closed her eyes.

I wish I could stay this way forever.

Please, let me be able to stop time.

I never want to go back to that school again. I never want to be their Bride again. I never want to break that gentle touch ever again...

"I am sure that his room has so soft walls and a soft ground." Kept Utena giggling and moved a little bit. So that they both could lay a little bit more comfortable. "Iek! Your legs are pure ice, Anthy." Screamed Utena silently the next moment and Anthy felt warm legs carefully touching her cold ones. "I told you that you shouldn't make vacations in our fridge, no matter how hot the day had been."

"Gomen nasai, Tenjoh-san."

Utena sighed slightly and felt how arms were hesitantly wrapped around her waist. Every touch was electrifying.

Suddenly the pink haired girl asked how they could have been classmates, even roommates for almost the whole past term without.. without having hold each other that way. There had been so many moments when Anthy had been sad. When Utena had been sad, too, but didn't want to show it. There had been some thunderstorms, too. In autumn. Not as heavy as that one, but Anthy never told her that she was afraid of them.

It feels so right, it can't be wrong. Can it?

"It told you to call me Utena. Is that so hard, Anthy?" whispered the tall girl and yawned slightly. It had been a long, exciting day. Especially with Kei around. The crazy Kei who always had his head full with nonsense. He even made Anthy giggle and after some tries he was friend with Chuchu. A chocolate cookie played an important role during those moments.

"No... hai..." admitted Anthy finally and shrugged her shoulders. "I am only the Rose Bride and..."

"You are Himemiya Anthy." Interrupted her Utena and kept caressing those soft hairs. They felt like velvet. The tall girl could remember too well how surprised she had been when she saw Anthy the first time with opened hairs. She hadn't expected them to be so long. Without her glasses and with her long hairs Anthy liked completely different. Like another person. But Utena liked the normal Anthy with her school uniform and her typical hairdo the same. Only the Rose Bride, Utena didn't want to accept that nonsense. The same she didn't want to accept their so called engagement.

I don't want to have someone who hangs around with me because she thinks she has to!

"You are my friend, right? And friends don't call each other -san."

"Hai." Anthy gulped. Then she yawned again. It was amazing how quickly her body calmed down. How

warming and comforting Utena's voice could be. How loving her tender strokes.
"Guess you are right, Tenj...
Utena." It was hard for her. After all those months. To say it and to be aware of it.
"That sounds better, Anthy." Whispered the tall girl and leaned forward. Softly she placed a kiss on Anthy's forehead before she leaned back and closed her eyes. "Good night, Anthy."
"Good night, Tenj... Utena."
The tall girl hugged her for one last time and soon her breath got more regularly as Utena drifted into sleep.
Anthy herself couldn't. Her forehead burned but she didn't dare to move. Deeply blushed she stayed in that tender embrace, burying her burning face on a soft shoulder. Hearing the other one's calming heartbeat while her own heart raced.
Suddenly the thunderstorm outside was unimportant.
She really stayed here. With me. She really cared for me. For me and not for the Rose Bride she's engaged to.
For me, me, Himemiya Anthy...
Not so the thunderstorm in her heart.

"Utena? Anthy? Breakfast is..." Rinja opened the door and rushed into the room. But she quietened as she saw the two girls lying on the bed. Both being fast asleep. Anthy's arms were wrapped around Utena's waist.
Probably in the weak attempt to cover the other girl with the blanket, too. Utena's hairs were messed and she smiled in her sleep. There was no trace any more of the nightmares that haunted the tall girl down so often. Even ten years after her parent's death. She didn't tell anyone, but Rinja noticed it. They didn't live in one house without noticing such things.
She looks happy.
Rinja stepped over to the window and closed the curtains. To cover the room with a nice twilight that would give them some more hours of sleep.
Just like the little one.
Anthy smiled, too. There were traces of tears on her cheeks and Rinja remembered Utena telling her that Anthy was afraid of thunderstorms. The last night there had been a real bad thunderstorm. Surely the bronze girl had been afraid and searched for protection in Utena's embrace. The same Utena searched for comfort in Rinja's arms when she had been just six years old.
Who is that girl, Utena?
Rinja stepped over to the bed and helped them to cover both of their bodies with the soft blanket. Utena's laid of course somewhere on the ground.

"Is it already morning?" whispered the pink haired girl and made a face. She didn't open her eyes, was not really awake yet.

"Keep sleeping, junior. I'll wake you up for lunch, okay?" whispered Rinja and stroke through pink hairs. Utena sighed relieved and buried her face in violet curls. Her right hand caressed slowly a bronze arm. Soon she was back in her dreamland.

Who is Anthy, Utena? Simply a good friend of yours? Like Kei?

But Rinja couldn't remember of ever having seen Kei and Utena in a situation like that one.

Who is that girl, Utena? Your girlfriend?

Rinja sighed and leaned forward and stroke over bronze cheeks. The smile deepened even on a peaceful face.

Whoever she is, Utena, you know that you are always welcome here. Just like your friends. You are my only family, little one.

The tall woman turned around and silently left the room. Knowing that she would wait her niece to come to her.

To talk to her. Maybe about Anthy, maybe about someone else some day. Whoever it would be Utena would

bring home as her partner, Rinja swore herself a long time ago that she would like that person. As long as the

one would make her nice, her little Utena happy. As happy as she hadn't been after her parents died. As happy as

she was whenever she was together with the silent, but very friendly Anthy.

Chapter four: Kimonos and candied apples

I love her.

"Catch that stick, Hamlet!" The big brown dog barked and his tail clapped on the ground as the animal sat down.

Looking impatiently up at the pink haired girl. Utena grinned and winked with the stick. The dog's eyes followed

it. "Catch it, my good boy." She shouted and threw it through the garden. The dog barked again and chased after

the wood.

I love her.

"That's my good boy, Hamlet! And now, give up!" But the dog didn't want to give up the prey. So soon Utena

fought with the brown pet and soon they both laid on the grass. The girl was laughing, the dog growling friendly.

Both not wanting to let go of the stick.

I love her.

Anthy sat on the veranda, her injured foot was wrapped in a soft blanket and laid on another chair. She held a

glass with cold water in her hands and watched Utena playing with her doggy. It was another hot day and the

bronze girl was grateful to sit in the veranda's shadow. So that she didn't sweat too

much. So that she would not have to shower twice a day. Of course she liked to shower. To stand under the nice fresh water and to wash her hairs. The more she liked it when Utena washed her hairs for her. But somehow Anthy didn't dare to ask her best friend again to do her that favour. She asked for so much during the past days. Maybe too much...

"Hamlet! That's MY stick. Give it to me and I'll throw it again. Okay? HAMLET!"

"Chu chu." Commented Chuchu on Anthy's right shoulder and nibbled again on a biscuit. Anthy smiled and stroke his fur. Then she watched again the tall girl.

I love her.

It took her some days to recognize it. To look deep into her heart and to see it there. Her feelings she had for the

tall girl from the first moment on when she saw her. When she fought against Saionji and won. Won her, the

Rose Bride, but didn't want her. Not as an owning, not as thing, but as friend. She talked to her, not pushed her

away when she was in the way. She saw in her a real human being, a girl, not a trophy you won together with a valuable sword in a duel.

Hai, she loved that wild, impatient and so often very loud girl. The crazy girl who was addicted to chocolate and

had to tease Chuchu around. The funny girl who made her giggle and laugh when she tickled her. The tender girl

who made her feel welcome. Who made her feel being home. She loved her with all her heart and feared the

moment she would be forced to leave her.

But she doesn't love me in return.

Anthy sighed slightly and looked into her water glass. Utena didn't believe into the engagement.

And why did she take you on vacations then?

Why did she introduce you to her aunt? To her childhood's friend Kei?

Why did she care so nice for you?

To let you swim again without fear?

To protect you from the thunderstorm?

To wash your hears under the shower?

Why???

Anthy sighed again and watched how the water moved from one rim to the other one as she moved the glass slightly.

Because she thinks that I am her friend. It's simply her kind of caring for a friend.

In that way?

Do you really think so?

Do you really?

Do you?

Shut up!

"Hamlet... please..." Utena laughed and the dog answered growling. Both not willingly of letting go.

"When little children play..." giggled a voice behind her and Anthy turned around. Utena's aunt leaned against the door frame and looked over to her niece. How Utena laid on the grass, fighting with her dog. She saw how a white shirt and brown fur got dirty and sighed. Pink hairs were messed and Utena proved once more what a wild tomboy she indeed was.

"Anthy?"

"Hai? Shall I help you, Tenj... auntie?" Anthy put the glass aside and stood up. Taking her crutch and looking attentive at the tall woman. Rinja gulped. She simply wasn't used to someone who was so quick to help her. Of course Utena did help her, too, but Rinja normally needed hours to convince her niece. "Hai, indeed. There's a favour you could do for me." She said and opened the door. To let Anthy step into the house. They could hear that Utena finally got the stick and held it up to the air. Hamlet jumped barking around her feet. Until she threw the wood again.

"Little children." Said Rinja again and they both giggled. The tall woman showed the girl to sit down and went over to her sleeping room. "Today you want to go to the festivities in our park, right? Today is our town's holiday and I guess you'll have a lot of fun." Rinja laughed as she came back into the living room. She held a bundle over her arms. "Guess Utena will eat too many candied apples like every year and be sick tomorrow. But don't worry, she'll survive it."

"Then she shouldn't eat so much, right?"

Rinja looked at the small girl and smiled friendly. Remembering how sweet they both had looked. In the bed some days before. After a long night with a heavy thunderstorm. Rinja didn't know what it was, but something about Anthy was special.

"That say someone who jumped after a chocolate bar."

Anthy blushed and Rinja laughed again.

"This festival is tradition and a lot of people go there in a kimono." Rinja opened the bundle and held a dark violet kimono in her hands. "Utena doesn't want to wear it. It once belonged to her mother, but she's too wild and doesn't want to wear a skirt as she calls it. But it's a pity to let it fall to dust in the cupboard. It's a little bit too long for you, Anthy, but I can fix that."

Anthy's eyes grew wide and she stretched her hands to touch the incredible soft cloth.

"Are you sure?" she whispered and blinked.

I don't even belong to family and then I should wear such a valuable kimono?

"What if I'll dirty it this evening? What if I stumble over my crutch and destroy it? I would never forgive myself for ruining it."

Rinja looked first at the kimono, than at Anthy. Seeing the concern in purple eyes. Knowing that this kimono had been too long locked up in an old wardrobe.

"Please, Anthy, do me that favour. It would be an honour for me."

Anthy nodded and finally bowed.

"If you want it, I'll wear it, Tenjoh-san."

"Auntie!"

"Gomen..."

"You are a nice girl, Anthy. Don't know how Utena got to such a nice friend like you."

Laughed Rinja and held

the kimono against the bronze girl's body. "Don't know how you can share a room with someone like my niece. I

mean, we all know how her wardrobe looks like."

They both smiled but Anthy's smile faded as Rinja turned around to get her needle to shorten the kimono so that

it would fit.

It's easy to live with her, because she likes me.

Anthy stared at her hands still holding the soft cloth tight.

But she doesn't love me...

Utena brushed her hairs without looking into the mirror. She wore washed, white jeans that would be surely dirty

when they would return in the night. But right now it looked very good. Together with the deep blue shirt she

decided to wear. The same blue as her eyes.

"Anthy? Are you ready?" she knocked impatiently at the bathroom door and put the brush away. Searching for

her purse in the chaos of her room. After five minutes she really found it. Together with the money her aunt gave

her. Telling her that they should buy themselves some sweets and go by the great dipper or the Ferris wheel

which with you could overlook the whole town. And the near forests and lakes.

"Anthy? Common, you never needed such a long time to get ready!" protested Utena and glanced at her watch.

They wanted to meet Kei there who still had to work and she didn't want to be late. At least not later as usually.

"Are you feeling fine, Anthy? Does your foot hurt again? Shall I come in?"

"I am ready." Came the calm voice from inside and the door opened. "You are really impatient... Utena." Anthy

smiled and stepped out of the corridor. She still needed her crutch to lean on but her foot got better with every

day and she hoped soon to be able to take away the bandage and to walk normal again.

"That's good. Then let's..." Utena turned around and simply forgot what she wanted to say. Her blue eyes grew

wide and her jaw simply dropped as she looked at Anthy. The normal Anthy she knew almost a whole school

term now. But somehow that normal Anthy looked different today. She had put her hairs together, like always.
The hairdo was different. It looked more like the traditional hairdos woman had done in Japan centuries ago.
Young women still did on special days. A white rose was braided into violet curls and some strands fell softly over Anthy's shoulders.
The kimono!
Utena stared surprised at the violet kimono. Fitting perfectly to Anthy's colours of the hair.
My mother's kimono...
The tall girl gulped and felt how her heart beat increased again. Just like it had been when they had taken a shower together. To prevent that Anthy would fall down and hurt her already injured foot even more. Just like it had been when they embraced in the bed. To be protected against the wild thunderstorm outside.
She looks so strange.
Anthy felt uncomfortable and gulped.
"Your aunt gave it to me, because you don't want to wear it..." she whispered and lowered her head. "If you don't want me to wear it, I'll change." Anthy bowed slightly, leaning hard on her crutch. "I know it's your mother's one. Gomen nasai if I hurt your feelings." With those words she wanted to turn around and to go again into the bathroom. But Utena held her back. Softly she took her shoulders and turned the smaller girl around. Blue eyes sparkled with tears Anthy knew Utena would never cry.
"It's fine, Anthy. It can't lay the whole time in the wardrobe. I am sure my mother would be happy to see you like that. It simply doesn't fit to me, Anthy, but it fits perfectly to you." Whispered the tall girl and smiled a shaky smile. "You look simply beautiful, Anthy."
The bronze girl felt how she blushed and lowered her gaze. Not knowing what to do, not knowing how to react.
Utena often teased her around with such words, but this time she meant the compliment. Anthy wasn't used to compliments. Especially not so serious ones.
"Didn't you want to leave one hour ago?" called Rinja and looked through the kitchen's door. She would open her restaurant soon and couldn't come with them. She even offered to take care for Chuchu who sat patiently on her shoulder and waited to get something from the nice food she created for her customers. Happily he was right now nibbling on a small roll she made extra for him. Like the dog still chewed on a little piece of meat.
"Surely Kei already searches for you, junior."
Utena coughed, then she giggled.
"He's used to that." She laughed and shrugged her shoulders. "And you really don't

need my help, auntie?"

"Off you go, junior! Have fun you two and don't eat too much candied apples, junior!"

"Auntie!"

Anthy giggled and was happy that she could keep that kimono on for today. That she didn't insult Utena and that

her best friend seemed to like the way she looked right now.

"Let's escape, Anthy, before she gives us more advice." Said Utena, took Anthy's free hand and helped her out of

the house and over the small staircase.

"And don't drive the great dipper two times after another! You know what happened the last time, junior." Utena

groaned as the voice followed them. A laughing voice. Anthy saw the tortured look on her best friend's face and

giggled amused.

The air was nice warm. Even though the sun was setting. Its warm light shone down on the country beneath. A lot

of people were in the park. Laughing. Talking. Chatting. Little children ran around and tried to catch each other.

Couples deeply in love held hands and older couples, being long married, were still happy to have the other one.

They bought candies and wine. Sake and cookies for good luck. Telling them their future on little sheets inside.

"... and then we drove it twice after another." Told Utena while they walked through all the people. Along so

many little shops. Selling mostly food. "Kei was green in the face afterwards. And when I say green, I mean

green. He didn't want to eat anything during the past days." Utena laughed and Anthy giggled.

"And how did you feel afterwards?"

"Not better, Anthy. I didn't turn green, but prayed long to the porcelain god. The worst was that I did eat too

many..." Utena's look got caught by something and her head turned while she walked. Her voice trailed off and

her eyes started to sparkle. "Wait a second, Anthy." She said and disappeared through the mass. Anthy frowned

and walked over to the rim of the small path leading through an alley of trees. Here was a small gap between the

shops and she stood in pleasant nice shadows. Some lights danced around her and she recognized them as glow

worms. She smiled and reached her hand out. One landed on her palm and she watched it thinking. It was

strange. She had never been on such a festival before. She didn't know the town nor its history. She didn't know

the people here nor the owners of the little shops. But she felt comfortable here. As if she would really belong

here. To this small place. As if she was home here.

Home...

She felt how tears watered in her eyes. She wished so much to have a home. A real home. A place she could return to whenever she felt alone and fragile. Whenever she couldn't bear that life at school any longer.

Whenever she needed simply a comforting gesture, a calm word.

Wish I could stay here. Simply here. With auntie Rinja and Hamlet. With Utena...

Anthy raised her head and looked at the coloured sky above. It was still bright and covered with orange and red

shades at the west but turned to get darker, blue until black at the east. The first stars were sparkling and the

whole atmosphere was somehow romantic. Anthy never really believed in love nor in romantic. She wanted to

believe in it after she got to know Utena, but the tall girl told her more than once that she didn't believe in their

engagement. But she believed in their friendship.

Friends...

It was less Anthy wished, but it was more than she had ever had. A good friend she could rely on. She could lean

on. Who would catch her if she would fall.

Somewhere there was music. Japanese folk music. Surely live music. It was played with a lot of love and wasn't

very loud. Someone sang along to the professional singers and Anthy simply liked it here. Once again she

wished to be able to stop time. To rest forever here. To make this summer never end. To stay here forever.

Together with her Utena who was surely buying some sweets. The whole way to the park she had talked about

the past festivals she mostly spent with her aunt or with Kei. Eating one candied apple after another. They took

the bus to get there and Utena cared for Anthy not to stumble over her crutch. Some people looked strange at her,

but some girls, some of Utena's former classmates, recognized her and they talked, too. Laughed over long gone

times. Each of them telling Utena what happened to this teacher and that teacher. They looked curious at Anthy

and declared her their sympathy as they found out that she was now Utena's best friend. Of course Utena

complained and the girls laughed teasing.

A small town. Everyone knows everyone.

Anthy lowered her gaze again and watched the passing people for another long time. They met on the path and

embraced each other. Yelling their names. Waving their arms. Laughing happily. This was a holiday, their

holiday. There was no reason for being upset. Not today, not this single evening.

Everyone seems to like each other.

Anthy wrapped her arms around her body and shivered slightly. Still holding the crutch in one of her hands.

Suddenly she froze.

I wish I would belong here. To all those people. I wish so badly I was one of them...

"White or brown chocolate?" asked Utena and appeared so suddenly before her that Anthy jerked back. But she could hold back her balance and looked with big, surprised eyes at her best friend.

"Nani?"

"I bought candied apples. With white and with brown chocolate. Which one do you want, Anthy?" asked Utena

and crossed her arms behind her back. So that Anthy couldn't see her hands nor the apples. Blue eyes sparkled and Utena was slightly blushed.

"It's alike. Give me what you don't want." Answered the bronze girl and smiled one of those soft smiles Utena liked so much to see.

"But that would be unfair."

"Just gimme one." Anthy tried to peek, but Utena danced around her so that she had no chance to get a look at one of the apples.

"And if that one doesn't taste?"

"I never ate such an apple before, how can I tell which one does taste and which one not?" replied Anthy and blushed because she felt still a little bit ashamed to give in whenever she didn't know things that were completely

normal for other people. For normal people. Not for people like her. The Rose Bride who never had been on such a festival before. But Utena didn't mind. She only giggled, holding the apples tighter on her back.

"Okay, then close your eyes, Anthy. I'll make you taste both and then you decide which one you want to have, okay?"

"If you think so..." Anthy looked doubtful at Utena's grinning face and finally closed her eyes. Gave in her destiny. She knew how stubborn Utena could be and she didn't gave her anything before she didn't decide voluntarily.

"Good. But I only want a small piece, don't try to choke me with the whole apple."

"You already know me, right?"

Anthy raised her eyebrows but kept her eyes closed. Hearing the far away music. Hearing the mumbling of the people chatting and laughing around them. Hearing the children screaming when they tried to catch each other.

"I try not to kill you, I promise."

"That's nice."

Anthy heard Utena giggle and leaned herself a little bit harder on the crutch. Utena saw it.

"Does your foot hurt?"

"Nope. And where's the apple? I am waiting." Anthy smiled again a soft smile and her cheeks blushed slightly.

She stood there, only on one leg. The long kimono almost covered her feet completely. It had the same violet

colour than her eyes and showed how slim she was. Just like it showed her female outlines. Her hips and her breasts under the fine cloth. A light breeze of wind played with the violet curls that escaped her complicated hairdo. Softly they touched her shoulders. Glow worms danced around her and lightened up her face.

She's so beautiful.

"I am waiting. Or do you secretly eat it all by yourself?" Anthy giggled and her lips curved. So soft looking lips.

"Give in, Utena, you are simply too greedy."

She called me Utena. Without hesitation. Simply like that...

The tall girl didn't think any longer. Still holding the apples behind her back she stepped a little bit closer and leaned over Anthy.

She is so beautiful in that kimono. So beautiful...

Utena saw how Anthy frowned but still didn't open her eyes. Then she simply placed her lips on the smaller girl's

ones. Feeling that they were as soft as she had imagined. It was only a light touch, but the most gentlest they

both had ever experienced. As Utena wanted to stop it, Anthy let go of the crutch. It landed somewhere on the

ground but they both didn't care about it. The bronze girl wrapped her arms around Utena's neck and brought her

nearer to her body. Then she repeated the kiss with all her deep feelings. The folk music died away, just like the

chattering people. The whole world seemed to disappear for them. For two girls standing in the shadows of two

trees, being only surrounded by the light of small glow worms.

I love you so much, Utena.

Anthy...

"Mommy? Look!" A small child's voice brought them back into reality. They broke the kiss and turned their

heads. To look at a little girl who stood right beside them. Looking curiously up to them. Eating her ice cream

with passion.

"Yakoo, I told you, not to point with your finger on other people." Her mother hurried and took her daughter by

her hand. "That's impolite."

"But mommy..."

"You don't like it when other people stare at you, do you?"

"Hai..."

They walked away and slowly, very slowly Utena looked again at a deep blushed Anthy.

"White or brown chocolate?" was all she managed to ask and gulped. The desire of kissing the smaller girl was

almost irresistible. It was as strong as the confusion in her mind.

I kissed her!

Why did I do that?

Why?

Why do one kiss other people, uh?

But other girls...

Don't you really know the answer?

Don't you really, smart girl?

Hm?

But...

Anthy searched in blue eyes that sparkled so mysteriously.

"Only chocolate?" she replied and blushed even deeper. Still having her arms being wrapped around Utena's

neck. Holding on her while hobbling on her healthy foot.

"Well..." gulped Utena and held two apples in the air. One was covered with a brown mass, the other one with a white one. Her hands shook slightly.

"Then I'll take the white one. Arigato." Anthy didn't want to let go, but she knew she had to. Here were too many

people around and Utena looked suddenly very confused and unsure. The bronze girl stumbled backwards and

thanked her best friend when she gave her the crutch back.

Best friend? Is she really only my best friend?

What do you want her to be?

What? What? What?

Shut up!

"Anthy! Utena! I searched you all over the place!" A young man came running to them and waved his hands.

They both stepped, still blushed like a tomato, out of the shadow and walked slowly over to him. At least Anthy

walked slowly with her crutch. Enjoying her white candied apple. Utena took a big bite before she ran over to

Kei. Again they made their welcome dance that made the bronze girl giggle each time and soon Utena chased

after Kei who stole her brown candied apple.

"You work, Kei! You have enough money to buy yourself an own apple!" she complained but he only laughed

and tried to be even faster. Anthy only shook her head and watched them amused. The fight stopped about five

minutes later when the apple was eaten and the two crazy teenagers stood right in front of the big dipper. Two

blue eyes sparkled and they both looked a little bit like children.

"We have to take that challenge."

"Sure."

"To prove that we are real men."

"Nani?"

"A brave man and girl."

"Better."

They both giggled.

"I am sure it's great. It's even higher than the one last year."

"Really? Great!"

They both giggled and Utena turned towards Anthy who still ate her apple. She ate much more slowly than her

best friend and her face told the tall girl that she wasn't very keen on using the big machine.

"Do you mind when we ride it?"

"Nope. I'll wait here, Utena." Smiled Anthy and hobbled over to a bank to sit down. From here she had a perfect look over to the big dipper. "But only once, okay, guys?"

"Rinja told her?" asked Kei and looked suddenly guilty.

"Partly. I told her about your green face." Giggled Utena and soon they were chasing each other around again.

Running towards the entrance. Calling the other one a lazy chicken.

They are two tomboys. The both of them.

Anthy wondered slightly why they weren't a couple. They had the same hot temper and knew each other for such a long time. But the bronze girl never found the courage to ask Utena nor Kei. She didn't want to hurt them because of her curiosity.

Anthy finished her apple and threw the remaining in a dustbin next to her bank. Watching how they both stood for ten more minutes at the counter. How they finally got into the big dipper and started their drive. They both winked at Anthy before they got in and the bronze girl smiled. With a wide grin on her face, because Utena was suddenly pale and Kei almost green.

"Hello, may I sit down?"

Anthy looked up and saw a girl standing there. She was some years older. Maybe she was 18 or even 19. Her brown hairs were cut short and she wore a kimono with bright colours. White and yellow dominated.

"Of course, here's still enough space." Anthy took her crutch and slipped a little bit away to make it more comfortable for the girl.

"Arigato." The girl sat down and smiled friendly at her. She had some various bags she put down on the ground.

With a fan she tried to catch fresh air. "It's still amazingly hot."

"Hai." Answered Anthy and winked back as two persons reached the highest point of the big dipper. Soon the wagons crashed down with incredible speed and the bronze girl giggled as she heard two known voices scream.

"I am Toki Ayani." Introduced the girl and bowed slightly.

"I am Himemiya Anthy." Bowed Anthy back and giggled again as the big dipper reached the looping. More screaming increased.

She is really like a baby.

But I love her the way she is...

"Do you know Utena well, Anthy?" asked Ayani suddenly and saw how the smile froze slightly on the still blushed face.

"We are classmates. You know her, too, Toki-san?"

Toki-san? What's that for a nonsense? Does she think I am a fool and fall into her trap

or what?

"We used to be very good friends, Anthy. Very, very good friends."

Anthy didn't like the way the other girl pronounced >very< but she didn't ask. She didn't want to make a friend

of Utena angry, because she didn't want to make the tall girl herself angry.

"Did she never mention me?"

"No." Answered Anthy and looked again over to the big dipper.

Strange? Who is that girl? Utena told me so much about her friends, even about her classmates at her old school,

but she never mentioned her. Does she make it all up? Who is that girl?

Anthy felt more and more uncomfortable.

"She was thirteen when we met. Sweet little thirteen. She grew a lot during the past three years."

Nani?

Sweet?

Little?

My strong Utena sweet and little? Is that girl crazy?

"Hope you don't make too high hopes yourself, Anthy. She won't return your feelings."

Nani?!?

Anthy's eyes grew wide but she didn't know what to reply. So she kept sitting there, hoping that the other two

would return soon. That Utena would explain her who that strange girl was and what she meant with her unclear words.

"Utena waits for her prince. Don't you know, Anthy? She believes that a wonderful prince saved her life after her

parent's sudden death. Now she runs after that prince and won't love anyone except him. Although I think it's a

real pity. To waste her body in that way... because she won't never find that prince. It's only an illusion of her

mind. A confused child's mind. Nothing more. And no matter how hard you try, Anthy, you won't be that prince,

too. No one will be that prince. She'll chase a ghost for the rest of her life and hurt all people around her!"

Ayani almost spat out the last words. Anthy didn't want to hear those words any longer. They hurt inside her

soul. Especially after she experienced that wonderful kiss only half an hour ago.

Prince, no, I am not a prince. Not at all...

She grabbed for her crutch and wanted to leave, as two hands grabbed her arms and pulled her back on the bank.

The other girl leaned over to her and her brown eyes sparkled dangerously.

"Who do you think you are, Anthy? Wearing her dead mother's kimono! You are only a small girl, no one

special. I really have no idea what she wants from you. Maybe some distraction until she finds her so called

prince?" Ayani raised her hands and stroke over Anthy's bronze cheeks, along her neck and finally over her chest

over the soft cloth.

"What does she want from you, you little nigger, hm?"

"Let me go!" whispered Anthy but knew that there was no chance to escape. Not with her now hurting foot. The other girl was taller than her and looked stronger.

Please, Utena, come back!

Rescue me...

"You don't look as if you were good in bed. Too thin." Now those hands circled around Anthy's hips and tears

sparkled in purple eyes. "But one never knows until one tries, right?"

"No... leave me in peace. Please!" Anthy tried to turn away but was hold back once more.

"You are nothing than a little, dirty whore. You don't have any right to possess her!"

"No..."

Utena... please... help me!

"Hai!" Brown eyes sparkled meanly and Ayani's hands hurt now.

"Leave her in peace! Right now!" The low voice was full with anger. Anthy felt how the tall girl next to her was

lifted in the air and pushed against the trunk of the next tree. How brutal hands let her go. She blinked and

looked at a shocked looking Kei. And at a raging Utena who had grabbed the other girl's kimono and looked

directly into an amused face.

"What did you think you were doing, Ayani?" screamed the pink haired girl and bit on her lower lip as the other girl only laughed.

"I wanted to test your girlfriend, little Utena. To find out what she has that seems to bind her to her. To her and not to me!"

"That's not funny, Ayani. You almost hurt her. Didn't you see that she uses a crutch?"

"Oh... I am sooo sorry. What happened? Did she fell out of the bed?" mocked Ayani and pushed Utena away.

They were almost the same tall and the same strong. They both knew that.

"What do you want, Ayani? Why can't you just leave me in peace?"

"Why? You know that answer too well, Utena. You've been the one who didn't want me."

"I wanted you, Ayani."

"Oh... didn't notice that." The brown haired girl shook her head and crossed her arms provoking before her chest.

"Not the way you wanted it." Replied Utena and looked suddenly very exhausted. As exhausted as Anthy had

hardly ever seen her before. Only when the tall girl talked for a long time about her parents. Or when she won

another long and dangerous duel she almost lost. When she got injured and still shook. Fearing of going home -

alone.

"I have enough, Ayani. Three years are enough, don't ya think? Go home and leave us in peace. Go back to your

own friends, okay?" Utena turned around and went over to Kei who already helped Anthy up. She held her

crutch again tight in her hands and they both looked asking over to their friend.

"You are still the honourable Utena, right? The one with the high ideals and the dreams that will never come true. What about that girl? Is she your prince? The prince you waited for so long? So desperate that you oversaw everyone else? Or did you turn into a prince yourself? Is she your princess? Your little slave?"

"Go home, Ayani. Just go home, okay?" Utena smiled at Kei and Anthy and showed them to go on. Over to the small lake where they wanted to catch fishes. With fragile spoons. Another Japanese tradition Anthy didn't know at all, but was very keen about to see finally.

"How is it to be fucked by a nigger?"

It happened as fast that neither Kei nor Anthy could react. With an angry scream Utena swirled around and

Ayani was again pinched against the trunk. Her mean smile broke slightly and she seemed to be surprised that the younger girl was so much stronger. Stronger than she had been just three years ago.

"Don't... you... dare... to... insult...my...Anthy..." spat Utena under her breath and shook the other girl madly.

"Just shut up, okay?!"

"It was only a question. A simply question." Mocked Ayani cruelly, but gasped for breath as the other girl slapped her right into the face.

"It was insulting, you idiot!"

"Insulting? You call that insulting? And what was it what you have done to me?"

"Done to you? I gave you my friendship. I trusted you completely. And all you did was to push me away, Ayani.

Who insulted whom, uh?"

"Friendship, pah! I never wanted your friendship, but your love, Utena."

"Not love, Ayani. You don't know what love is."

"There's more love than your stupid ideal, Utena."

"I couldn't give it to you, you know that too well. And I wouldn't have given it to you!"

"Because of your prince, I know." Ayani rolled her brown eyes and glanced over Utena's shoulder. Seeing Anthy

standing there. Very unsure. Being supported by an angry looking Kei. "Still I don't know why you took her

instead of me. I mean, I am wild and strong. I could play basketball with you, all she's able is to cook or so, right? Why not me, Utena! Why?"

The tall girl took a deep breath and lowered her hands. Let the tall girl let again gasp for breath.

"You can't force feelings, Ayani. But you never understood. Instead you pushed my friendship away. Live with the consequences."

"While she's your whore? I won't accept..." Ayani's voice was cut up as Utena shook her again in rage.

"Shut up! Do you know how much you hurt other people?! How much you have always

hurt them?!" she

shouted and Ayani did the senseless attempt of defending herself. Utena was very angry right now and grew a lot stronger than the brown haired girl had expected.

"Utena..." the voice was soft. Incredibly soft. Suddenly Utena let her go and stepped back. Taking a deep breath and clenching her fists. But not beating her. Ayani lowered her gaze and saw what calmed the wild tomboy down. The bronze girl had placed her free hand on Utena's shoulder and purple eyes looked silently up to blue ones. They seemed to talk to each other without the use of words. Finally Utena sighed.

"You are right, Anthy. Let's catch some fishes for our pond, okay?" she smiled and the smaller girl smiled back.

Without looking back to Ayani the three turned around and walked away. Leaving a speechless girl behind.

"Just another attempt, okay?"

Utena held the five new spoons she bought tight in her hands and she ran past them. To fall on her knees and to

try it again. To catch a little fish for her aunt's pond in the garden. The grass around her was already covered with broken spoons but it didn't look as if the tall girl would give up.

"Okay, but only those spoons, baka. I am hungry and I am sure that Anthy wants something for supper, too."

"Oh... I can wait." Smiled the bronze girl who sat on a bank near the lake. Kei sat next to her. He didn't even

make the attempt of catching a fish. He knew that he was too clumsy to.

"Is that why you are so thin, Anthy? Does Utena let you be hungry? Does she eat everything while you starve?

Wouldn't surprise me." He raised his voice and giggled as Utena growled angrily.

"I am NOT that greedy!" she shouted back and groaned as another spoon broke and the fish escaped back into

the water. The sun was now gone completely, but the park was illuminated by the lights of thousands of Chinese

lanterns. Glow worms danced around them at the rim of the lake and the fear Anthy had felt just half an hour ago

when the strange girl threatened her was gone.

"No." Anthy shook her head and looked over to Utena who looked confused at another broken spoon. "She's the

one who always takes care for me. Without her I would miss more meals. Or all I would eat would be ice cream

or chocolate. I can't cook very well and so she bought a cooking book and we almost let the oven explode."

Anthy giggled in memory while a third spoon broke.

"Utena and cooking? Scary thought."

They both grinned and Utena threw another spoon frustrated away.

"It must be this place!" she mumbled and got on her feet. "I try it over there, okay? I'll be back soon. Take care of Anthy, Kei."

"I'll do, my master."

"Baka!"

They showed each other their tongues before Utena headed towards the other side of the lake. To try her luck there. There were enough fishes in the water to get caught, but as always the pink haired girl was too impatient.

For some moments Kei and Anthy sat there in comfortable silence and watched the Chinese lanterns and the full moon at the slightly cloudy sky. Some stars sparkled and still the air was warm. Even at the water.

"She didn't tell you about Ayani, right?" asked the young man after a long time and brushed some blonde hairs out of his face. Staring at the lake, not at Anthy who raised her head and looked surprised at him.

"No." Said the bronze girl and folded her hands in her lap. "But I am sure she has her reasons."

"Oh, she has them." Kei shrugged his shoulders. It wasn't his task to tell the smaller girl, but he knew that Utena

often had a hard time in explaining things that still made her angry. To talk about her feelings. To show that she

could get hurt, too. Anthy seemed to be a really close friend of the wild tomboy, maybe even more, and so it was

only fair to get to know it. "Utena was thirteen when Ayani moved into our neighbourhood three years ago. A

girl who was as wild as she was. Who liked kendo the same way she did. Who liked it to play with Hamlet, who

never showed fear. They were a lot common. Soon we did a lot together. We three. We went camping,

swimming and to the cinema. I didn't notice it first, but Ayani had kinda crush on her." He laughed lowly and

closed his eyes for a moment. "Utena has a overwhelming character. I have admit that I asked her to become my

girlfriend, too."

Anthy's eyes went wide but she didn't say a word. She knew that it was rude to interrupt him. And she wanted to

know what it was about that strange girl.

"But she denied and I accepted it. To be a real good friend of her is something special, too. I accepted her

feelings and so we stayed the crazy team we had ever been." He giggled as he saw how Utena bought herself

more spoons and knelt down at the other side of the lake. "Ayani didn't. I have no idea if Utena wasn't like her.

Okay, she is wild, but I have no idea if she likes boys or girls. We talked about it and she simply said that she

waited for her prince. Well, everyone has one's own ideas and that was her vision of love. Maybe she didn't want

Ayani, because she was a girl and not her prince, or maybe she simply didn't love her. However instead of understanding and staying her friend, too, she got angry." Kei made a sad face and looked again up to the moon.

"We knew Ayani for a whole summer and Utena trusted her completely. As you may have noticed, Anthy, Utena is very outgoing. She trusts people easily and wants to be friends with them - as long as they don't hurt her. And Ayani did. She tried to humiliate her before the whole school. It didn't work, because Utena was so known and so popular at school. She only got a punishment by the teachers and had to clean the whole classroom, but nothing more happened."

Anthy wanted to know what happened at school, but Kei didn't seem to be so keen to tell her. So she kept silent and listened instead to his now angry sounding voice.

"Nothing of Ayani's silly games worked and so she tried to force Utena. She said to her that she wanted to be her friend again and went swimming with her. She forced herself to Utena and they both had a terrible fight. Utena was strong enough to defend herself, but they almost drowned in the water. After that Utena didn't want to see Ayani ever again. She never said it, but I guess she felt betrayed in her friendship. Soon Ayani's father got another job and she moved away. So we were both surprised to see her here again." He lowered his gaze again and looked into big violet eyes.

"Don't worry, Anthy, Utena is over that false friend." He looked over to the tall girl who looked more and more depressed, because two other spoons broke. "I am only sorry that you had to hear all those bad words, Anthy. They were hurting and inexcusable."

"It's okay." Whispered the smaller girl, still looking at her folded hands. "Sometimes we can't change people's mind." She thought of Toga and Saionji. Especially at Saionji she always had begged to leave her in peace. Not to beat her when she stood in the way or was boring. Not to hit Chuchu because he was annoying in the young man's eyes.

"You like her a lot, don't you, Anthy?" asked Kei finally very silent after another long while they sat there in silence. Each one of them thinking their own thoughts.

Anthy blushed deeply but it was too dark so that Kei didn't notice it. She raised her right hand and touched thoughtful her lips. Still feeling those soft lips on her own. Feeling again those strong arms being wrapped around her shaking body through the stormy night. Feeling again tender hands washing carefully her curly hairs.

Again she saw sparkling eyes. Again she saw the first duel. When Utena was

determined to save her friend's honour and to save the strange girl from the brutal young man's character. Again she saw the grin on Utena's face when she discovered that they would share a room - and started to get it all messed. I love her. No matter what will happen in the future, but I love her.

Anthy's eyes watered.

"Hai, I do." she answered finally very, very quietly and gulped. Looking surprised up as she felt a hand

squeezing her left shoulder. Blue eyes shone understanding and friendly. Hai, Kei was a real friend. Like the

brother Utena never had. Like the brother Anthy always wanted to have.

"Do you know what, Anthy? I guess she likes you a lot, too. She only needs her time to show it." He grinned as

Utena threw another spoon on the ground. "Let's save our hero from starving and forget about all those fishes, okay?"

"Okay." Anthy took her crutch and came slowly on her feet. "Kei?"

"Hai?" he asked and turned around towards the smaller girl.

"Arigato."

"No problem, Anthy. You are a nice girl and you care a lot for her. She's happy when you around. And that makes me happy."

"Aren't you sad?"

"Well, a little bit, I have to admit. But it would have never been right. I mean, we are both crazy and wild. Think

of the poor children." He shrugged his shoulders. "She is a prince and I am looking for a princess. Hey, I am

only 19. I still have enough time to find my soul mate."

They both smiled and walked over to Utena who was already raging, because all the fishes escaped and every, really every spoon broke.

"Incredible. You really tried it for the first time, Anthy?"

Kei looked at the two fishes swimming happily in the little plastic bag filled with lake water. They sat now on a

table outside a small restaurant and waited to get their late suppers. Utena found something else that caught her

attention and ran again away. But her both friends knew that the tall girl would return. As soon as their meals would stand on the table.

"Hai. It wasn't that hard." Anthy blushed and enjoyed it to lay her foot on the empty chair opposite to her.

"Two fishes with the first tries. Utena's face was worth the extra money." Kei grinned diabolic and thanked the

waitress as she bought them their meals. Utena and he ordered okonomiyaki while Anthy decided for a salad.

"Sad that I didn't have my camera to make a photo." Kei giggled and thanked the

waitress. Then he looked around and right at that moment Utena returned. Of course her white jeans were now dirtied and because it was still hot she had opened the first buttons of her blue shirt. Her hairs were slightly messed and her cheeks red from the excitement.

She looks cute.

Anthy watched her come. She didn't even touch her salad yet while Kei already enjoyed his meal. He didn't want

to let it getting cold just because his friend decided to look around instead to eat.

"For you." Said Utena while she sat down and before Anthy could react something hang around her neck. She

looked down and her eyes grew wide in disbelief. There was a gingerbread heart hanging around her neck. It

was total kitsch but nevertheless beautiful. It showed a little teddy who held a big, red heart in his paws. There

were some Japanese signs within the heart. Showing only two words. Two words that let Anthy blush deeply.

>Love you<

"And I?" chuckled Kei as he saw the smaller girl's reaction. Anthy was like hypnotised by the heart. She held it

in her hands and stared with an unbelieving expression on her tomato like face on it.

"Of course I won something for you, too." Grinned Utena and soon Kei held a small, pink reindeer in his hands.

It squinted and looked as if it was dead drunk.

"Great, thank you sooo much! Pink, my most favourite colour! It looks as if it throws up soon."

"Baka!"

They both grinned but showed each other their tongues - just in case.

"Then let's eat!" Utena grinned as Kei mumbled something that sounded like revenge and big, yellow elephant

and wolfed her okonomiyaki into her growling stomach. It took her even less time than Kei who already ate half

of his meal by the time she arrived. The restaurant was well visited and in the middle was a small dance floor.

Some musicians sat down, too, and soon they started to play music. Japanese folk music, but also rock music and

modern songs. Fast and slow songs. And some songs the audience wished to hear. Just like a couple that was

married for over 50 years and wanted to hear >their< song.

"That's great." Whispered Utena while watching the old couple dance. "Wonder if I'll get that old."

"Not when you continue to eat that way, baka."

"Jerk!"

They both grinned and ordered another lemonade.

"Do you want anything more? Maybe an ice cream?" asked Utena and turned around. And froze as she saw that

Anthy didn't touch her meal. She sat there, still staring at the gingerbread heart.

"Earth to Anthy, earth to Anthy,

is anyone at home?"

The smaller girl jerked out of her daydream and smiled guilty.

"Aren't you hungry? Or doesn't it taste?"

"No, no, it's fine." Anthy took her fork shortly and started to eat. Slowly, very slowly. She wasn't very hungry, but she knew that Utena would be very concerned if she wouldn't eat at least the half of it.

"Everything okay, Anthy?"

"Hai."

"Really? And your foot?"

"It's feeling fine." Anthy smiled her soft smile and Kei decided that the smaller girl needed a short time on her own. He had seen her reaction and wasn't sure if Utena meant it that way.

"Do you wanna dance, baka?" he asked as the band started to play a fast rock'n'roll song.

"Even if I jump on your feet?" grinned the tall girl and nodded. "Of course I'll take that challenge." Utena shortly

bowed over to Anthy and caressed a bronze cheek. "Just tell me when you are tired and want to go home, okay? I

mostly know no end and I don't want you to suffer under my crazy behaviour."

"I would never, Utena." Anthy smiled and ate a small tomato. Watching the two going to the dance floor. Soon

swirling each other around in the fast rhythm. They seemed to have learned it very well, because their steps

looked correct and they didn't lose the balance once. Some people watched them and started to applause when

they did some really hard moves. For example the somersault Utena did at the middle of the song. Of course Kei

caught her back and they both grinned as he pretended that the tall girl was very heavy with a sudden. Utena

knocked on his head and soon they rocked even wilder.

They are really perfect friends. I wish I would have had such a friend, too, when I was small.

Anthy watched them and sighed.

Just for a small time.

But now I have Utena.

Is that enough?

Is that really enough?

To be your best friend?

You want her to be someone else, right?

You liked the way she held you tight, right?

You loved the way she kissed you so gently, right?

Right?

Right?

Right?

Shut up!

But Anthy knew that the little voice inside her mind was right. So damn right!

The song ended and the people applauded even more as the two left the dance floor again. After bowing deeply.

"We still can do it." Laughed Utena and took a long gulp out of her lemonade glass.

"But you put on weights, baka."

"You are only getting older and weaker, that's it."

"Older? With 19?"

They both continued to argue a little bit longer with grins on their faces while the band started another song. It

was a very, very slow song. A love song as Utena recognized. She heard little modern music, but this song had

been in the charts the whole summer two years ago. Everyone heard it somewhere so did she. Here no one sang

along, but it sounded even better that way. Instrumental. Utena turned her head and glanced at Anthy who had

finally put her fork away. Some more strands escaped her hairdo and she served herself fresh air with the fan Kei

won for her by throwing a heavy ball at all tins.

"How is your foot feeling, Anthy?"

"Better." Anthy smiled shyly as Utena rose again. Her hairs were messed from the rock'n'roll and still a little bit

sweaty at the ends. Her shirt was crumpled and her blue eyes seemed to shine.

"Do you wanna dance with me, Anthy? Don't worry, it's a slow song, you won't feel sick afterwards."

"Uhm..." Anthy hesitated, but she couldn't say no. Not to the attentive smile and especially not to that look in

deep eyes. She never would be able to say no when Utena looked at her in that pleading way. "But I warn you

that my foot is not the best right now."

"What do you have to jump after chocolate bars, dummy." The dummy sounded so tender that Anthy had to shiver.

"It was YOUR bar."

"I know." Utena took her hand and the touch let them both froze for a small moment. It was over before they

really realized it. "I'll be there to catch you if you stumble."

"As long as you don't stumble, baka." Giggled Kei but Utena simply overheard his teasing words. Carefully she

led the smaller girl through the tables towards the dance floor. Where some other couples already danced.

"I don't know how to dance with my foot." Whispered Anthy and blushed. Utena took her right hand and

wrapped her free arm around her waist. To hold her and to lead her.

"Just move to the rhythm. This is not a competition. This should be fun, Anthy." Utena raised asking her

eyebrows and as Anthy nodded slowly, very slowly they started to move. They had danced before. After Utena

saved Anthy when Nanami tried to humiliate her. But this time it was completely different. Not only because

Anthy could hardly use her injured feet and hobbled more than she danced. Not only because this was a different

place. Not the school hall was around them. Not the pupils. But total strangers who

didn't know them. Who
didn't bother them. Who let them be the way they were. No one wanted to duel, no
one was mean.
And they did change. During the past weeks. Since they had left school to go on
vacations together.
"Is it okay or shall we stop?" Utena held Anthy a little bit tighter as the smaller girl
stumbled.
"No, it's fine." Anthy's voice was the same quiet, the same shaky. She leaned her head
against the warm shoulder
as they continued to move to the slow music. She felt how Utena gave up the
traditional dance style and simply
embraced her with both arms. How she buried her face in her hairs and stroke loving
over her back. Anthy
enjoyed it. It was alike to her how much her foot started to hurt. It was alike to her
that she was dead tired. It was
alike to her if she felt so damn dizzy. To be here, next to her Utena, that was all that
counted.
I love you so much.
But she didn't dare to say it aloud. Maybe Kei was right. But maybe he was wrong.
Maybe...
And the kiss?
And this dance?
Doesn't it mean anything? Something? At least for her?
Anthy didn't know. But she knew that she wouldn't want this dance to stop. To be so
near to her Utena, it was an
incredible feeling. Deeper than every feeling she thought she would feel at school.
Because Utena was her
groom, was engaged to her. Here she was a normal girl, there were no duels and no
stupid student council. Over
the weeks that feeling Anthy had felt deep in her heart when Utena won her,
deepened and grew stronger. With
every day that passed by. With every smile from the tall girl. With every comforting
and so tender gesture. Just
like her now stroking through her strands. Caressing her neck. It was so nice. So
wonderful...
At that moment Anthy stumbled hard and couldn't find back her balance. She felt how
she fell and was caught up
by two strong arms.
"Anthy? Everything okay?" concern was in Utena's voice and all Anthy could do was to
nod. Her foot hurt too
much to stand on it any longer. Her body trembled from the effort and she gulped.
She didn't want to end that
dance, that gentle touch, but she knew that it was over. She felt how she was lifted
into the air and how Utena
carried her over to her chair. How she let her sit down carefully.
"Gomen, I should have seen that it's too exhausting for you, Anthy." Whispered Utena
as she knelt down before
her. To look right into the pale face. Seeing the tired expression there. "Gomen,
Anthy."

Kei raised asking his eyebrows. It was the first time that he heard Utena begging so openly for forgiveness.

Mostly you had to let her fight against an army to let her look as defeated as right now.

When did she become so calm?

"It was a wonderful dance, Utena. Arigato." Anthy smiled one of her soft smiles and brushed some sweaty pink hairs out of a sweaty face.

Kei got his answer as Utena blushed slightly.

"Nani? You don't want to come with us?"

Utena looked puzzled as Kei closed the cabin door. It was past midnight and the firework would start soon. They wanted to look at it from the top of the Ferris wheel.

"No. It's too high for me. Besides I have to take care of those two guys." He held the fishes into the air and winked as they moved. Slowly the ground disappeared and they felt how they were lifted into the air. One turn with the Ferris wheel took almost one hour. Enough time to watch the park illuminated by night. And to watch the firework that would begin soon.

"It's nice here." Said Anthy but couldn't hold back a yawn. She was very tired and trembled a little bit. The idea of going back through the whole city to get to Utena aunt's house wasn't very tempting. Now not only her foot hurt, but also her legs. She was simply exhausted. But she simply couldn't have say no when Utena discovered the Ferris wheel and found out that the firework would start soon.

"Are you tired, Anthy?"

"A little bit." Admitted the bronze girl and yawned again. With tired eyes she stared out of the night through the glass windows, still feeling the cabin move.

"Come over here, Anthy." Invited Utena and clapped on the place next to her. Now they still sat opposite so Anthy hesitated.

"Come on, Anthy. You aren't a chocolate bar. I won't bite."
But you are as sweet as one.

Utena blushed and was happy that it was dark in the cabin. She blushed too often during the past weeks but she couldn't hold it back. No matter how hard she fought against it.

"Okay." Anthy sat down and screamed silently as suddenly two hands grabbed her arms and pulled her backwards. Before she could react, she laid on the bank, her head in Utena's lap. The cabin swung for a moment dangerous but they both didn't notice it at all.

Purple eyes looked asking into blue ones. Then Utena started to open Anthy's hairs and stroke through the violet

curls.

"If you want to sleep a little bit, do so."

"But the firework..."

"It's just a simple firework, Anthy."

The bronze girl gulped. It was simply too nice here. She didn't want to fall asleep.

Because then the ride on the

Ferris wheel would be over too soon. There were only two more weeks left. So short weeks. And then she had to

go back to that school. Being the Rose Bride again. Being afraid with every duel that she would lose Utena.

Anthy smiled tiredly about her strange thought.

No, she would be the one who would have to go to someone else. Utena would lose her, so why did she think

about it the other way around?

Who knew when they would ever have the chance again to go to such a festival?

Anthy raised her hand and

touched the gingerbread heart. When would she ever feel so happy again?

She felt how another warm hand covered her own one and held it over the heart tight.

Neither of them spoke.

They simply looked out of the window and stared at the stars. Anthy still struggling with her sleepy body.

"Sleep, Anthy."

"But...." Anthy's eyes filled with tears and she turned her head a little bit away. "But when I might wake up it

was all a dream and I am still at school." She whispered almost inaudible. Utena's blue eyes grew wide and her

hand rested for a moment in her curls before she kept stroking.

"You won't, Anthy." She answered finally very silent, wiping away two little tears that escaped purple eyes.

"Just sleep a little bit. I'll be there." The tall girl leaned forward and kissed Anthy's forehead. The way she had

done during the bad thunderstorm. This was not a lover's kiss. It was completely different from the one Anthy

got earlier this evening in the tree's shadows. But it was comforting. It warmed her heart and made her feel safe

and secure. She let the sleep take control over her body while Utena's soft stroking hands accompanied her into

the dreamland.

For a long time Utena looked into the relaxed face. Into such a beautiful face.

You like her a lot, right?

Right?

Right?

Right?

More than you have ever liked someone before in your life. More than you have liked Ayani or Kei or Wakaba,

right? She is something special. For you. Right?

Right?

Right?

Right?

Utena sighed and played with one strand. Feeling how the cabin swung slightly. The firework started to explode in the dark night's sky, turning it into a coloured paradise. Utena didn't look up. She wasn't even interested in it any longer. She only glanced down at the girl in her lap and smiled tenderly. Right, she is someone special.
"Don't worry, Anthy, whenever you will wake up, I'll be there."
It sounded like a silent promise.

Two fishes swam happily in their new home. The moon shone down to the water, was reflected on its surface.
Two shadows stood besides the little pond on the now wet grass.
"Anthy?" Utena hesitated. But then she stepped closer and embraced the smaller girl who trembled. Because of the fresh wind playing with her opened hairs and because of her own tiredness. They called a taxi after they left the Ferris wheel and the bronze girl slept the whole time while the driver brought them home.
"Hm?" the voice was husky and full with sleep. Anthy wanted to get into bed quickly, but first she had to free the cute little fishes she won. The evening had been fantastic and soon they forgot Ayani's hurting words.
"You looked beautiful tonight, Anthy." Whispered Utena and blushed deeply. She buried her face in soft hairs on a small shoulder. Smelling Anthy's sweet scent. "I like you very much, Anthy." Her voice was very silent but Anthy understood her very well. Her heart beat increased and she gulped.
Does she mean it the way she says it?
The smaller girl raised her head and looked directly into sparkling blue eyes. She felt how Utena raised her right hand and caressed her cheeks. Wiping away two small tears.
No or never!
This is your chance before you have to return to that school.
To say it as Anthy, not as Rose Bride!
Just do it, she feels the same.
Doesn't she?
Doesn't she?
Utena smiled and took away all of Anthy's doubts.
"I love you, too." Answered the bronze girl and laid her heart in Utena's hands. Whatever she wanted to do with it, she could do it. She could hold it and take care for it. But she could also throw it away.
Utena took a deep breath and suddenly her eyes watered, too.
"Are those the words of my Anthy or of the Rose Bride?" she asked with a shaky voice and took a deep breath.
Squeezing the girl in her arms tighter.
My Anthy...

The smaller girl smiled one of those soft smiles and raised her hands. To mess pink strands. To caress Utena's neck, her cheeks and her temples. Utena closed her eyes and let her do it. Enjoyed it although her stomach hurt.

What was when Anthy answered that it was her duty to love her? Because they were engaged? Because it was simply her destiny as Rose Bride to love whoever was her groom?

"Dummy." Giggled Anthy silently and rested her hands behind Utena's back of the heard. "Of course as Anthy.

The girl you took on vacations with you. The girl you shared one room at school. The only girl you accepted to be your best friend. Anthy, not the Rose Bride."

The Rose Bride is a title, a duty, maybe even my destiny, but my real self, the girl behind the mask is still

Himemiya Anthy.

Anthy knew that she had to thank Utena for that knowledge one day. Even if it took her over sixteen years to see it.

">|< love you, Utena."

Utena.

Not Tenjoh-san.

They both looked deep into each other's eyes and Utena wasn't even ashamed of some tears escaping her eyes.

She felt how Anthy pulled her head down. She didn't fight against it. She only held her tighter against her

trembling body as their lips finally met again. It was a little bit like their first kiss just some hours ago. But the

same time it was completely different. It was more passionate. And surer. Because they knew about each other's feelings.

There were so many questions left: What should they do when they returned to school in only some days. 13

days... too less days... What should they do during the next duel? How should they live with the whole situation

when they were closer to each other. When they were together... a couple... in love...

But those questions didn't matter. At least not right in that moment. Not at that night. It wouldn't play a role

during the following days. They had enough time to think about them... later. A lot later. Until then, everything

that still existed in their suddenly little world was the other one.

Tenderly they held each other tight and kissed. A long kiss that didn't seem to find an end. None of them wanted

to break it. Not after it had take them so long to find each other.

I will never let you go, Anthy. Never again.

Maybe the smaller girl wasn't the prince on a shinning horse Utena had waited for her whole childhood. But now

she grew up and now she was that prince instead. And Anthy the princess.

It was their second kiss. It lasted longer than their first one. It lasted the whole night.

"Chu chu!"

Rinja stepped next to the little pet who sat on the window-seat and stared outside to the nightly garden. The tall woman only had to take one look to recognize the shadows standing there. Near the pond. In a deep embracement.

"Let's go to bed, Chu chu. It's late at night and our two found their way home, okay?" The brown animal chu chu'ed again and followed the young woman who smiled into the darkness while she crept under her soft blanket. Happy that her niece found someone. And that this someone was Anthy. A nice girl who would never let her down. I wish you all the best, you two.

Epilogue: Wishes granted

Anthy felt how her school uniform changed as she walked upstairs. The long staircase that would lead her towards the duelling platform. It was now only two days that school started again. That they returned from Utena's aunt's home. Of course Toga used his chance to challenge her and of course Utena had to agree. She would never lose another duel again, because that would have meant to lose Anthy. She didn't want to ever let her go again. The bronze girl had been really depressed after Toga went away and cried the whole night. Saying again and again that this summer had been too short. That she didn't want to go to Toga. That she loved Utena too much to ever leave her.

I simply have to win.

As ever!

Utena reached the platform and saw her girlfriend's pale face. Knowing that she had to get that sword out of her body now. To face Toga and to fight against him.

I am so damn tired of all those duels. It's not even a week that we returned from vacations and I already feel so damn exhausted!

But Utena knew that she would went through hell - as long as her Anthy was by her side.

"Utena?" Anthy's voice was shaking.

Damn! I want so badly to be a normal girl! To have a relationship with her without that fear and that sorrow!

Without the concern of losing her.

Damn! That summer had been too short. I had been normal. For just one summer... eight weeks, two months.

The time had been too less. Much too less!

Please, let the summer start again. Please!

But she knew that she couldn't turn back time. All she could do was to hope and pray that Utena wouldn't lose the duel. That they could go back to their room and to forget about all this stuff. Even if it was only for some hours. While doing their homework, while preparing and eating supper, while sleeping. In each other's embracement.

"Don't worry, Anthy. I won't let you go." Utena bowed, but instead of pulling the sword out, she kissed her girlfriend. Loving. With so much passion. "Never again, my love."

"I can't believe that Toga really dropped his sword." Giggled Utena as she stepped into the shower. Anthy already washed her hairs and grinned at her. Half blind because her glasses laid on the room's table.

"The look of his face when you kissed me was worth it." Replied the smaller girl and wrapped her arms around Utena's slim waist. Stroking over the soft skin of her back.

"Shall I wash you hairs, Utena?" she offered and Utena lowered her head. Enjoying she started to purr as she felt her girlfriend's hands in her pink strands.

I wish I was a normal girl again. And if it would be for just one summer. One more summer.

But the same time Anthy knew that she was a normal girl. For her girlfriend she would always be Himemiya, her love. Not the Rose Bride. She was incredible happy about that thought.

"Anthy?" asked Utena after her hairs were washed. "What did you wish when you saw all the shooting stars?"

She opened her eyes and saw how the smaller girl smiled that soft smile she only smiled at her. Purple eyes sparkled and Anthy raised her hands once more. But not to clean her hairs this time, but to bring her face nearer

to hers. The smaller girl stepped on her tiptoes and kissed her lightly on her lips.

"It was granted, Utena. Believe me, some wishes are still granted."

Utena smiled tenderly and embraced her girlfriend. To pull her nearer her body. She rested her forehead against the bronze one and smiled loving. Remembering all the tender moments they shared during the past two weeks.

During the whole vacations. Knowing that they had to do such vacations again. Soon. Maybe during the autumn vacations and surely during Christmas. This was not their last term at school, but they both knew that they would

hold on each other until they were able to leave that school. Together. Forever.

"I am happy for you and your wish." Whispered Utena and kissed her again. With much more passion this time.

I love you, Anthy.

I love you, Utena.

As I am happy that my own wish was granted, too.

Finis

One last disclaimer: The funny guys Utena and Anthy are watching at TV at the night of the thunderstorm are of course Monty Phyton's Flying Circus. But I am sure you all recognized them.

So, this was now my own attempt of writing an Utena fanfic. Don't blame me that I left out a lot of characters (guess everyone except Utena and Anthy and... well... Toga, but, does he really count? ^-^) or that I might have changed some storyline. This is a fanFICTION and it is my right to change some details ^-^.

I simply like the idea that Utena and Anthy would be a perfect couple. If you didn't like that... hey, I warned you in the beginning. Maybe I am simply too romantic ^-^. I know some episodes of the anime and finally also the movie (thank you, Link ^-^), but I think that such an all day story could have happened, as well.

Oh... about grammar, the ones who ever had or still have a pet, know how deep the feelings can be towards that pet. It belongs to the family and is a part of it. I know that it's better grammar to write about a pet as >it<, but Chuchu is more than just a pet. He's Anthy's best friend at the beginning, and so I referred him as >him< or >he<. For those who never knew the luck of having pets, just accept it. Okay?

So much to my vacations idea. Hope you liked it. Thank you for reading and, Adri-chan, was it okay that way? ^-^.

April Eagle

29th July - 11th August 2001

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