

Melody 361

ETERNAL MELODY Chapter 361

Chapter 361: Investigate

If audio player doesn't work, press Stop then Play button again

Asuka sighed. "I knew you would say that. But not even your indestructible Terashima. You've been at this for a good two days straight now. You're at the end of your rope if you ask me."

The person who was lecturing him now wasn't his girlfriend. But instead, it was a girl with long lilac-colored hair and blue eyes. Kiragi Asuka, one of Sumire's close friends.

"Besides, do you want to start the new month in your state?"

Right tomorrow would be September first; in a week, the new semester would start. Only two days have passed since he last saw Sumire, but he not only missed her like crazy, but he knew it would not be easy to bring her back.

He didn't know how large this town was, but he has not even caught a glimpse of her.

Yuhi made his journey to this place, hoping he would receive all the answers. "It's fine, not like I have a performance or anything."

"That is not the point. Rest is important." Asuka emphasized the word rest, and he sighed deeply.

Yuhi sat back up then and accepted the coffee from the girl's hands, and took a sip.

He saw the dark circles that dawned on the girl's face and frowned.

"Aren't you also lacking rest?" He trails off. "If keeping me company here is difficult. You should head back."

Yuhi knew the girl was the only one willingly cooperating with him on investigating what happened. Holy Knights management seems to be odd, and they seem to be more focused on sweeping the incident under the rug.

It was very strange, Sumire aside, their leader Aki also got hurt, but they are not doing anything. For an underworld organization, they are behaving far too well.

"No, I also want to understand why that had to happen and why did she get dragged into it. I know Aki and Jae probably know more than what they have been letting out and that they are both keeping me out of the dark. But I don't mind it, since I know there's a reason they are doing all of this, yet I want to know. I want to understand why did Asahi have to die and get caught up in all of this? Unlike the rest of us, she had nothing to do with this cursed fate at all. That girl didn't have to die."

Kiragi Asuka is one of those people who never lose their calm. People describe her as an ice-cold beauty. There never seems to be any emotions in her eyes, and she talks in a monotone voice.

His eyes went wide at her sudden outburst.

Asuka pauses. "My apologies, I seem to get quite worked up whenever somebody mentions it."

"I understand."

That girl must be a dear friend to both Sumire and Kiragi Asuka. Yuhi understood how they felt despite what it looked like. He also lost somebody important to him before.

After that, there was nothing but silence between the two. Yuhi didn't mind it, though, and he didn't want to end up talking under a strained atmosphere.

When she stood up and left too, he only nodded in acknowledgment and was soon left alone in the private library room as he stared at the girl's retreating back until it was out of sight. He sighs for the umpteenth time.

In the end, they are all carrying such a heavy burden on their shoulders, huh? Those girls are. Though the same could be said for any of the individuals around Sumire. He noticed that the lilac hair girl appeared to be under more pressure, unlike the others.

He stares at the files on the table and recalls the girl's outburst only a few minutes ago. It's the same, huh?

"Those girls are all shouldering such a heavy burden. Yuhi, Yuhi, do you intend to further get yourself in all of their matters? All of them share a connection with Ibuki and cannot escape such a fate, not like the others who have chosen to follow her. Those girls are..."

Even now, he could still clearly recall Akatsuki's words after returning home after rushing out on him. Yuhi remembered Akatsuki's anger and frustration. It was a normal reaction. It was normal for Akatsuki to react that way, yet regardless Yuhi knew that he had already made his mind up.

He shuts his eyes, and it all comes rushing to him.

To measure a person's worth, you must do more than push them. The real way to test their worth is to give them power. When they gain the freedom to act outside the boundaries of law and ethics, you can sometimes see their souls. When the weak become strong

Throughout most of his life, he has followed the rules of the system. He reached out for the things that most people took for granted. Others treated him as this savage beast, all because of his abnormal strength.

Others told him that no matter how hard he tried, no matter what treatment they suggested, there would be no way of changing his psychology.

They told him that he would never be able to change anything about himself, even if he tried to make an effort. That no matter what happened, he would still be the same no matter what he does. That there would still be a wall between him and others, he noticed that upon entering high school and middle school.

He noticed it the second he stepped out of the dojo and set foot into society. But when he met her, all the logic and everything he learned until that point vanished.

Yuhi never thought that he would work so much for another person's sake. Never thought he would end up working hard for anything other than matters for his own gain. Things really have changed quite a bit, huh?

His gaze fell on his phone again when he noticed it was beeping.

Caller ID: Hino

He sighed deeply before he decided to end the call. That guy worries far too much. No sooner did he do that however did he receive a text message.

From: Hino

At least answer my calls

From: Yuhi

I am fine. Nagawa isn't reeking the place?

From: Hino

He briefly went home

At that comment, Yuhi paused. Nagawa went home? Now that he thought about it, that guy acted oddly when he informed him that Sumire went back to her hometown. Should he have pried for more information instead of dismissing it?

Nagawa Sano isn't a third party in Tsuenos's death, that much he managed to scrape from all the reports he read the last two days. So why did he act so surprised?

ETERNAL MELODY Chapter 362

Chapter 362: Encounter

If audio player doesn't work, press Stop then Play button again

Yuhi didn't know what he was doing. But he knew he needed to take a walk somewhere, anywhere than that stuffy library. So when he found himself on the edge of the forest, he expected to be alone. Why would anybody be here in a forest?

It was a familiar voice and familiar presence, but Yuhi couldn't believe it. He hasn't seen her in two days, not once did she appear before him, so why would she be here now of all places?

The trees thinned out, and finally, he came to a stop at the edge of a small clearing, where he saw her.

She turned to face him; her beautiful eyes widened, surprised to see him.

He spoke to her first, or rather he saw how she was about to escape.

"Go."

"...Eh?" She said, puzzled. Had she heard him correctly? "G - Go?" she stuttered.

"I have no interest in harassing you now. However, I can't speak for the others should they find you here out in the open like this."

Yuhi noticed that she did not budge an inch.

"Aren't you leaving?"

Sumire continued to stare at him with her amethyst jewel-colored eyes before she asked him. "Why would you let me go?"

Her question sounded like, why would you let me go again? But Yuhi didn't want to get emotional. He had a bunch of things he wanted to ask her, one of the main ones being why she didn't contact him even once. Or if she has found Ichinose Arashi yet?

"Do I have to have a reason?" he grumbled.

"Everything has a reason."

At that comment, he sighs. "Your Shakespeare-like quotes won't work on me. I'm neither Kou nor Ichinose."

Sumire chuckles. "But, you know it's Shakespeare?"

Crap, he let his guard down there. Of course, he would know it was Shakespeare. After all, she frequently teases him with Shakespeare quotes.

Yuhi looked away then, and for a few minutes, nothing but silence loomed on them. At least that's how it was supposed to be until the Sumire murmured a melody. It wasn't one he had heard before... A new song?

"Will you be composing Emma's solo songs?" Yuhi knew that she accepted the deal to help out with Atsuross band.

"Un. I do plan to. But I probably won't have enough time until next year. There's a lot that's going on next month after all."

When she mentioned that, his eyes widened; of course, that is all that's going on in her mind right now. The burden this girl carries is far heavier than he imagined. After he left and returned to Tokyo, he heard many new rumors regarding her. She became the strongest member in the underworld and became the top.

He extended his hand out and patted her hair. "Yuhi?"

"Don't say anything." He muttered.

He himself doesn't know what to do when he sees her quivering and lonely figure like this.

He could monopolize her and make her his; yeah, he could go ahead and do something like that. However, it would have no meaning, and that's why this was alright for now.

Sumire's gaze softened as she grabbed his free hand. "I am sorry, Yuhi."

It was just four words, and yet it was enough for him. Even though he was the one who casually approached her as nothing happened, Yuhi thought she would continue pretending.

"You should be. I was worried sick." He moved his hand away from her. "I will be honest with you, and I only let you go because I didn't know what to do. When you are like that, what is the best thing to do? How can I help you?"

He tried to lecture her, but that did nothing.

"Mm, I figured that was why even though I knew you were here, I didn't go look for you."

"What about our meeting now?" Yuhi questioned. This was near the library he was using; surely she knew that.

Sumire laughed. "I guess I wanted to get a glimpse. I missed seeing your handsome face Yuhi."

"Just my face, huh?"

"This is what you were supposed to do." She grabbed hold of his arms and wrapped them around her waist. "You wrap your arms like this, and don't let me go."

His eyes widened when he felt the familiar warmth of the girl in his arms. Sumire buried her face in his chest and clung to him tightly.

She is so foolish; what was she doing pretending to be strong?

"Did you find him?" Yuhi asked as he patted her back.

"I did, I arrived on time, but he passed out. He is receiving treatment."

From what she said there, she hasn't spoken to him. It was a relief for him. Right now, dealing with Nagawa was enough, so he didn't want another guy in the picture. Makoto Soujiro has been very quiet lately, and while that one bothered him the most. Yuhi knew the man would respect her situation.

Yuhi lifted her face from his arms, cupping her cheeks. "You look like you have lost a bit of weight. If you come back with me, I can make you a meal?"

He wants to ask her where she has been staying, but a part of him is too afraid.

"Alright."

...

The place he stayed at was a spare building opposite the old library. The two buildings were connected, so he just crossed the bridge whenever he needed to go anywhere. Earlier, he was studying materials he brought over from the library, hoping for a change of mood. But it still felt stuffy, which is why he went on a walk.

Yuhi kicked a few boxes away and tried to re-arrange the papers.

"Sit down here, sorry it is such a mess."

Sumire shook her head. "No, I like this." Her gaze softened. "Is this all to help me?"

Yuhi, who was walking towards the kitchen area, saw her face and called her over. When she was beside him again, Yuhi leaned forward and kissed her lips. Her lips tasted so sweet, and there was a nice scent around her too.

He didn't know when he started to do it, but he isn't just kissing her anymore. She lands on the ground with a thud, and in the next second, Yuhi loosens his shirt buttons. "Sumire, can I?"

The girl extended her hand out and caressed his cheeks. "I want to, but-"

Yuhi recalled her wounds and immediately proceeded to stand up, but Sumire shook her head. "I want you to kiss me like this."

ETERNAL MELODY Chapter 363

Chapter 363: How can I?

If audio player doesn't work, press Stop then Play button again

A few hours later

Yuhi stood with a coffee in his hands as he read a book. Individuals called hanyous are humans with half-demon blood; either this came from their ancestors or infected. The latter has seldom happened, though.

Yuhi felt a pair of arms wrap around him, and his gaze softened. "I like the back hug."

"I know." Sumire trailed off. "I'm sorry for worrying you again, and I won't rush off. So let's work together."

"Mmm, good girl."

"Though her suddenly changing her mind despite her resolve seems odd." Yuhi didn't want her to do things alone anymore.

"Yuhi-san, did you find anything in these books?"

"Nothing, I'm afraid. But there is still more to read."

He can't find any computer records. But he is not the type of person who would rely on technology for his investigations. That is why he is looking through books like this.

"After you eat, want to help?"

"What about you?"

"It's fine, and I will eat later."

"I can't possibly tell her regarding my cravings." Yuhi kissed her forehead softly and squeezed her hands.

..

His thoughts broke off when he felt her lean her back against him. "What is on your mind?"

"Just a few things. Sano is involved?"

"Yeah." Yuhi trailed off. "Did you know—"

"A little. I could tell whenever he kissed me."

Yuhi frowned at those words. He has walked into those kissing episodes far too many times already. He hated the sight of her lip-locking with somebody other than him. The more he thought about it, the more disturbed he became.

"Oi."

Sumire laughed. "I wanted to tease you."

"Hah, please not on this matter." Yuhi sighed. "I understand that you feel nothing for him. But it rubs me the wrong way, knowing you have to get close to him."

Then again, he understood what she was trying to do. Turning Nagawa Sano into her obedient doll, others would see that as twisted. But Yuhi knew if it were him who went through what she did, he would do the same.

"Then does that mean you wish to get closer?"

In the next second, Sumire no longer sat back to back; she was directly in front of him and leaning forward. This time, what caught his attention was not her beautiful amethyst-colored eyes or pretty lips made for kissing but her scent.

Yuhi wondered why he did not notice it before, but it was the scent of blood. It isn't her blood, but this smell is all over her. Surely she didn't get hurt, and he would have se- Yuhi suddenly realized something.

If she isn't injured but smells like blood, then there is only one other option.

I wonder who she drank from. Was it a guy?

Yuhi felt her lips linger on his neck. He felt sick, and he didn't want her to drink from him after she drank from another.

But how could he stop her?

He caressed her hair and back with his hands as she drank. "Sumire," Yuhi mumbled. "How are your urges?"

Since she learned the truth, he thought he would have to deal with more violent outbursts, but she seldom has any. Yuhi found that to be very odd. How is it possible?

"..who have you been drinking from?" Yuhi didn't want to ask her this. But the more he thought about it, the more puzzled he became.

"Sano."

It was a single name, and yet Yuhi felt his emotions go out of control. He wanted to ask her why? Why would she go to him of all people? But he should know better than anybody. When he first got his bad cravings, he also didn't want to hurt her.

"Is his blood sweet?" Yuhi hesitated to ask.

Sumire didn't reply, and he felt his unease grow, but he felt her play with the hem of his clothes.

"Sumire?"

"You want to get closer? It seems you are jealous."

Hah, he wants to laugh. This girl has no idea, does she? What he felt right now was not normal jealousy. It felt like somebody woke up the beast inside him. But at the same time, the beast remained shackled. His gaze fell on the girl who briefly pulled away from him. There was something about the sight of his blood on her lips that made his heartbeat frantically. What on earth is this?

Yuhi traced her lips. "Later."

"Later?"

He can't do this; she is driving him crazy. Yuhi pulled the girl off his lap and fixed his shirt up as he turned to the books again. What was he doing before she started to do this? He felt hot, bothered, and distracted. Yuhi tried to focus, but after a few seconds, he turned back to Sumire. She hadn't moved an inch and was staring at him with her beautiful eyes. Yuhi bent down and hugged her tightly.

"Quit it."

"I'm not doing anything."

"No, you are—" Yuhi sighed deeply. "Nagawa is here in Star town? Hino said he left to go to his parent's place."

"Mm, but here in star town. Did you forget Yuhi? His hometown is here."

He actually did forget. So Nagawa came here, and Sumire met up with him first? Yuhi caressed the girl's cheeks before he stretched them.

"Ouch, ouch Yuhi-san?"

"You have had your fun. Don't drink his blood anymore."

"Then will Yuhi-san be responsible for me?"

"I proposed to you already, so isn't it clear?"

"If you're going to propose, shouldn't it be more romantic?"

What is she complaining about now? The two of them bickered about this for a while until the doors opened and Kiragi Asuka waltz in. She looked at the two of them and shook her head. "If you two want to behave like a stupid couple, do so another time."

Sumire laughed softly. "It is difficult to control him."

Hey, wait a second, she was the one who started this? But the way Sumire covered her mouth with her hands kept her gaze down and laughed. It looked like he was the one who did something. This crazy girl is so good at teasing him.

"I came here to talk about another unusual case. But before that, there is a festival going on tonight. You two should go."

Right, it was the thirty-first. Initially, he was going to take her somewhere, but all of that happened.

Sumire seemed bothered. "But you just said there was an unusual case."

"You can investigate better if you blend in the crowd during the festival." Asuka pointed out. "Besides, Yuhi has been cooped in here for two straight days. The guy needs some fresh air."

"I suppose." Sumire trailed off. "Then Yuhi-san, I will see you later this evening."

Yuhi blinked. "Huh? Why?"

"A girl has to get ready." Sumire winked. "You like yukatas right Yuhi? I will impress you."

Impress? Yuhi already knew she would tease him like crazy. But after the last two days, he wouldn't mind it. It is better to go out and have some fun to lighten the heavy burden in her heart.

ETERNAL MELODY Chapter 364

Chapter 364: The past and present

If audio player doesn't work, press Stop then Play button again

Star Town, 7:00PM

Ichinose Arashi was supposedly unconscious the last time she saw him. When Atushi sent her a message saying they would walk around the festival together, she was speechless. But sure enough, she found him waiting for her.

They didn't say anything as they left the station. Atushi suggested it would be better for them to see the fireworks in a quieter area, so they headed to the riverbank.

Now that she thought about it the last time they saw each other, there was that thing about past memories. It was a strange mission, and Arashi sensed something was weird. Even though he was not a member of the Holy Knights, he still came along with her.

It was then where they learned of their memories of their past life. Rus' condition worsened after that job, so she did not think too deeply about it. But now that they are alone together, surely he will mention something?

"You don't have to be that nervous. I'm not going to attack you, and I just wanted to take a relaxing walk with you."

No, she is sure that this isn't relaxing for both of them. Whenever she is near Arashi, her heart starts beating unconsciously. Perhaps it's due to the feelings from back then. They can't walk side by side like before, but as long as she can follow him from the back, it should be fine.

She wants to tell him that, yet her voice can't come out. Even if the others provide them with this opportunity, she can't help but feel sad around him. Earlier because she thought of Ru, she could face him properly. But the situation differs now.

"When your sad, stupid stories help." Arashi trails off. "Like on the first day of school, you find out all the students in the schools are pandas except yourself, and the world has turned upside down without you changing. Thinking about it that way, though, it might end up as a horror movie. "

What on earth is he doing projecting his fantasies so the whole world can hear them? What a weirdo.

Arashi continues. "Oh, there was another one, a classic summer example. Someone wanting something exciting happening on the beach trip and thus their friend helps them out and asks the guys to swim to the furthest ends, and she secretly takes off all their swimsuits - and then the person who wanted it all to be interesting finds the swimsuits and gives it back to them. But the method she used involved throwing it, and thus the current blew it away."

After he said those words, Sumire remembered something. It was years ago, her second year in light middle school. "That's because they are your stories, Arashi. Your stories for me, I'll never forget them."

Arashi, he always thought of her so very fondly. Earlier even though he's clumsy at it, he tried to comfort her.

From the start, this person has never held a grudge against her. No matter what she does, he always thought fondly of her; and unconsciously, she may have done the same.

Whenever she had a hard time in TOKYO, the one she had been thinking about so very dearly was always Arashi. She came to TOKYO for Yuhi's sake, that's indeed true. She came there so she could confirm it. But that year she spent with Arashi in middle school, that single year in Tsukuhara high school, has always been equally as precious to her.

Sumire reaches over and grabbed hold of his hand.

"Rei?"

She wants to convey it properly again. Even when things get tough, it's better to bring forward the happy memories between them. Because indeed, there have been more happy memories rather than sad ones.

"I won't let my thoughts merge with my past life again. I'm aware that's what we need the most for this upcoming fight. But still, I won't do that. That girl will remain a part of me, and it was because of that I could meet everyone once again. But I will not let her soul mix with mine. Because right now I'm Ibuki Sumire. Right now, I'm the girl you fell in love with, and it was the same back then. But this time it's different. "

She took a deep breath and chose her next words carefully. "I loved you back then, Arashi. Once again, let me say these selfish words. You were so very important and dear to me. Even now, I feel as though

my feelings for you may not have completely gone away. This is selfish of me, but you know me by now. I still want to stay by your side. Can I do that?"

Arashi did not reply right away, and she understood why.

He is silent; of course, he is. Forget being selfish, and this is pure greed now. But strangely, that silence and suffocating atmosphere did not last long.

Her thoughts broke off when he reached over and touched his cheek with his hand.

"I know. I know those feelings of yours quite well. You know Rei I've always pondered about it since we both got our memories back. Won't she hate me? It's only natural for you to dislike me, and yet you still called out my name so cheerfully all the time. Despite remembering, you never treated me differently. And it made me think about a lot of things. I, too, would rather live out my life now as Ichinose Arashi."

Ah, they're the same. Once again, their thoughts line up with each other.

Arashi continues. "Besides, I've never let my past life's memories influence my way of thinking now. The reason I'm in love with you now has nothing to do with the past. The one I'm in love with is the present you."

This person is unbelievable.

When she saw his cheeks go redder and redder by the minute, her gaze softened. "You're embarrassed?"

"O-f course I would be. Dammn, those guys didn't tell me anything. I didn't think I'd be left alone with you so soon."

Ah-! Although she intended to go through this talk calmly. Why is it every time she's around Arashi, it ends up like this? But she's somewhat glad that the tension between them disappeared just like that.

"You're nervous."

"Of course I am!" Sumire exclaimed. Or rather, since when did he get so good at this? He used to be so clumsy. Ah perhaps. "You've been seeing other girls haven't you?" Despite her present embarrassment, she could say those words clearly.

His sweatdropped, "What other girls would want to see me?"

"Clearly quite a few," Sumire said suspiciously.

Arashi sweatdropped. "You and your theories. . . I told you already that the only girl I've ever fallen in love with is you. There hasn't been anyone else."

She half expects this to turn into her usual teasing of him. However, it's bad for her heart if they remain like this. Her thoughts broke off when she heard the exploding sound of fireworks.

Sumire looked up at the sky and saw different-colored fireworks.

"It reminds me of that time." Sumire mumbled.

Arashi smiled at her. "Yeah, that's true."

Ah, come to think of it. "I liked it, the times where we could laugh, cry, get angry together. Although you two often clashed, you both still protected and paid attention to someone like me. You both treated me as a normal girl. When I get back, I want to talk to the two of you properly. About the past, the three of us never really settled it. "

She still needs to settle it properly with that person also. Because she really did treasure those times so very deeply in her heart. To her, that was her starting point.

"Tokyo is a lot of fun. At first, I was worried I wouldn't be able to fit in. I escaped there for several reasons, and I wanted to get away from this place where I have memories of Ru."

But, instead of living an isolated life. She ended up finding the most precious thing to her. The feelings she has for Terashima Yuhi.

ETERNAL MELODY Chapter 365

Chapter 365: Treasure

If audio player doesn't work, press Stop then Play button again

Those feelings were the ones Ru told her to treasure. Even though he asked her out so she could forget, Sumire understood that Ru would never directly interfere if Yuhi returned. She thought she forgot those feelings with the pain of losing Ru, but it turns out that is not the case here.

"Hold on." Arashi stopped her. "I feel like I already know what you're going to say, and that is fine."

"It is?" She raised her eyebrow.

"No it isn't, but--"

Sumire laughed when she saw him panic. "Alright, I understand it I won't immediately say it. Do you think I am that cruel?"

"I think you are the cruelest person I know, but if I say anymore, I fear for my life."

A memory from a long time ago came back to her, and she paused. She said something similar to Yuhi in the past, and he questioned why she said it.

"I won't say it directly, but do you understand? The current me, who is struggling to sing even now, can only do so when I am around Yuhi. I told you before that singing is similar to breathing for me. After Ru passed away, it was painful for me to sing. It was hard to breathe every day since I could no longer sing. But since I came to Tokyo, step by step, I have been gradually singing again."

"I see. Then I guess, for now, I have to stay away."

Her eyes widened when she heard his response. She thought he would say something different.

"Since you left to go to Tokyo, I have watched over you silently. So it is not like I don't understand. Even though things are still painful for you, when you are with him, you can smile, right?"

"Yes."

"Then that is enough."

Nobody said anything else, and they gradually got closer to the top. How odd for him to react reasonably like this. She thought he would say that he would carry on watching over her. But if he has this entire time, then he must know. As each day goes by, she falls even more in love with Yuhi.

When they reached the top, she immediately spotted black hair. For a moment, it felt like her heart stopped when she saw him.

"Yuhi."

Although they agreed to meet up here after she spoke with Arashi, she did not think she would meet up with him so soon.

"You're slow. Or rather," Yuhi waltzed over to her and hit her head. "What the hell were you doing getting embarrassed for."

"Eh? We had to come over from the other side, and I can't help but get embarrassed when Arashi says cheesy things with a smile." A faint tint of red on her cheeks. "Wah, don't make me explain it-" Her sentence fell short when he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her into a hug.

She felt a familiar warmth as he held her tightly. Her gaze softened as she realized something. Was he worried?

"But, if you do that. I'll get jealous."

It took her a moment to digest those words.

"Wait-wait, you're jealous?"

"Stupid, I just said I am."

He is holding on to her. It is comforting being in Yuhi's arms like this.

"Rei." A familiar voice snapped her out of her trance.

Wah, that's right, Arashi still around. Sumire somehow managed to turn around despite Yuhi's hold on her.

"If it's you, the stage you want to perform in the most is already clear, isn't it?"

At that comment, her violet-colored orbs went wide.

"I'd like to see it, your performance on that stage." Arashi smiled tenderly.

"Oh, me too, but make sure you don't make any mistakes as you did during practice." Yuhi interjected before he could say anything."

"H--hey! What do you mean by that?" She exclaimed.

"You want me to repeat your beginner-like mistakes in front of your dear senpai?"

Sumire hits his chest. "Don't you dare reveal my secrets?"

"Terashima." Arashi suddenly called out. "Take care of her."

"I will."

...

After Arashi left, they didn't move from that spot. No, not because they were watching the fireworks but because he wouldn't let her go.

"Yuhi um, will you let me go anytime soon?" Sumire questioned. It's already been over twenty minutes since Arashi left, and yet he is still holding her so very tightly.

"You want me to?"

"T--that's not it. I'm just really embarrassed, and if possible, I'd like to see your face." She stammered. Since he was burying his head on the nape of her neck, she struggled to see his expression.

At that, Yuhi lifted his head up, and she brushed her fingers on his face; seeing the deep red scar, she frowned slightly. "Yuhi?" She didn't notice it earlier but now that she has.

"It's alright. As long as I can help you, then it's fine. Besides, I got what you wanted." Yuhi dove into his pocket, revealing a familiar stone.

"This is?" Sumire said, stunned.

It looks like the one Yumi-senpai has. Yuhi reached over and placed it on one of the slots on the charm bracelet she wore on her left arm.

"Where is my thank you?"

He must have searched long and hard for it. After all, Yumi-senpai said the stones have scattered in different areas, not necessarily in Japan either. The ones that are in Japan, according to her senpai, are hidden and protected carefully. That must be where he got his injury from, the brunette wrapped her arms around his neck, and their lips made contact.

Yuhi, whenever they kiss each other, she becomes dizzy with happiness. More and more, she wants to get closer to this person. Closer than before. It feels too good.

After a while, she lost her balance, and Yuhi caught her immediately. "Whoops, my bad. I got carried away, your cute Sumire. I can't help but lose control when it comes to you."

"Even if I don't do anything, you lose control anyway." She murmurs, causing Yuhi to laugh lightly. Although Arashi's laugh sends her heart pounding, with Yuhi, there is a different sort of feeling. She wants to treasure this smile of his.

"What is it?"

"Nothing." Sumire trailed off. "Yuhi, what do you think I should do?"

Yuhi brushed his fingers on her hand that was touching his face.

"I believe you should go for it."

Eh? His answer was so simple that it stunned her.

"Right now, I know you're still afraid. But Sumire, you said it before, that the place you treasured the most is over there. You picked Iro Road, Tokyo over Tsukuhara, and Moonlight academy over here. If it's that place for you, then you'll be just fine."

But that's even more so the reason why. If she fails in that precious place, the damage would be even worse. She would lose not only her voice but also the last remaining connection she has with him. Sumire is scared, and she doesn't want that to happen.

Yuhi, she doesn't want to lose the connection between the two of them. She felt the tears stream down from her eyes Yuhi bends over and kisses her eyelids.

"Sumire, you'll be fine," He murmurs against the nape of her neck, trailing deep kisses. Before he gently stroked her cheek. "You'll be fine. Because I love you, and that is something that will never change."

She wants to respond to him and to tell him that she believes in his words. But it's difficult. It's so painful, and it feels like she's about to suffocate. She can't get any words out. All she can do is kiss you deeply like this.

"Sumire, you're really beautiful. Hey, doing it in a place like this is dangerous, but. ."

Sumire laughed at his words, and Yuhi awkwardly scratched his face. "On second thoughts, hugging is fine."

"Isn't that too dull?"

"Surely you didn't dress up so I could destroy your outfit?"

When she is with him, it feels like all those dark thoughts and feelings are nothing. It seems like she needs to stop hiding; she has escaped for too long.

ETERNAL MELODY Chapter 366

Chapter 366: Atushi

If audio player doesn't work, press Stop then Play button again

The subtle light that is born

when people's feelings come together.

That light embraces felicity, evil, sin, and happiness

The light blazes forth... illuminating the whole truth.

A woman with long dark violet-colored hair stood on the ledge and glanced over at the beach. She arrived in Tokyo only an hour ago. Instead of waiting for her ride in the airport, she decided to walk. She was still quite a distance from the city, but already she saw many people.

"Did you hear? Ibuki Sumire is performing on the horizon stage."

"Ehh what about Quatro Light?"

"They said they would do it together. But gah, won't she back out again? She canceled her slot in the recent music shows."

"I think it is serious this time, and she did an interview."

Her lips curve to a smile when she hears those words. It seems this was the best time to return, Sumire-chan. She can't wait to hear her sing again.

As she quickly passed by the two gossiping girls, she dropped her hat.

"Excuse me--"

"T-Takahashi Yumi?!"

Yumi winked as she accepted her hat back. She didn't say anything, but she knew the two girls understood.

Before she meets up with her dear pupil, she needs to observe something first.

—

Akagumi bar - 7:00am

Just because it is illogical does not make it wrong, Atushi recalled the very first few words Sumire had told him during the start of their acquaintance with each other. She said that in all earnest under the moonlight skies, and yet Atushi noticed it.

He noticed that lonely look mixed with anguish and pain on her face whenever she looks away. Yet as he thought that, it felt as though there was something else she was trying to say. As if she was trying to understand it, try to make sense of it. As if she is trying to search for the meaning.

"Then are you saying the pain you've gone through isn't wrong?"

That's right, a girl like her. Someone like her should never have had to hold and carry such a heavy burden. It was never supposed to be like that. Why did she have to walk down such a thorny path? It did not make any sense to him. What did she do to deserve something like that?

He recalls his feelings when he ran to her house that time and saw it was already in a sea of flames. How much despair he instantly felt and that feeling of hopelessness that he had been trying to hold back.

Those pathetic feelings he held back on the inside instantly came at that moment. It was a signal that he should have taken action when she was right there beside him.

The others were right about him being a "Coward," after all, never once has he done anything that would truly help her. He hurt her once, and ever since then, Atushi realized that going back to how they were before was futile attempt.

But even then, even when he first extended his hand out to her that day. Perhaps it was already destined and doomed for failure.

Listen to him sounding all depressed, and this is exactly what makes him completely different than Arashi. At least that person has always been able to face everything head-on, even if it's painful. Even now, he is taking action so that the two of them will be together.

He knew the others believed that he knew something about Arashi's whereabouts. But the truth was he didn't know anything at all, unlike last time Arashi didn't tell him anything.

That's right this time around, and he was completely clueless on the matter. However, that didn't stop him from smiling whenever someone brought up Arashi, such a carefree expression on his face all the time. It's no wonder they all think he knows something.

Anyone would question why he can be so carefree.

Either way, his gaze lands on the sheet of paper in his hands and the ones scattered on the table. He has to find a solution to this matter eventually; otherwise, they'll all be in trouble. Sumire and Yuhi returned three days ago, they only spent a short amount of time in Star Town, but it was enough for problems to arise.

The rumors regarding Sumire's connection to the Yankee world vanished, and Nagawa hasn't dropped by recently either. But some of his stuff was still here, so Atushi knew he would return. Still, he most likely did something that made the rumors stop.

His thoughts broke upon when he saw the door open and saw a certain brown hair girl. "Oh, Sumire morning." She nodded and made her way over. "Those guys partied until late last night. So you still gotta be tired."

"I'm fine."

He watches the girl's gaze land on the scattered sheets of paper in the round table.

Atushi briefly closed his eyes before he opened them again. "Ah, these documents are about evolved humans—a souvenir for when I was in Germany. But in the end, it was useless. But during the time I searched for these, I thought it would turn into something. We have to deposit these properly since we don't know what will happen in the future."

That's right, in the end, anything can still happen, and that is why they should prepare for unexpected situations. But before he threw them out, Atushi wanted to make sure that he didn't miss anything.

"Atushi, is it bad that I discovered my powers?"

At that comment, his gaze softens. "I do wonder about that. Indeed, I never wanted to burden you with such a heavy thing. But it is not like I lament the solution you made."

"How was it when Ru discovered his abilities?"

"Well, back then, we didn't understand a thing. So all we could do is be astonished. Since Mamoru-san got his powers, so many things have happened. Even though I left partway, the memories from the beginning are still there. Whenever I remember those times, despite everything I said, being together

with them and forming the akagumi was the best thing that had happened in my life. I thought it was fun."

That's right, it was fun, and he was enjoying himself. However, his family had found out about it and thus moved him to another elementary school. The next time he heard any news regarding Mamoru - in his third year of elementary and first year of middle school. Was that he was dead. At that time, he thought it was over.

ETERNAL MELODY Chapter 367

Chapter 367: Inner Strength

If audio player doesn't work, press Stop then Play button again

He thought it was all over and that any hope of seeing that person again vanished. That was until he saw it. Sumire had gotten into a fight with some people who had been bad-mouthing Mamoru.

"Ru..is...Ru is alive, he won't die over something like this. To the very last second, that person won't die until his cause is gone. Even then, he will search for another purpose."

She said that with determination, and he remembered her standing there with a strong look in her eyes, regardless of the bruises and wounds on her.

Despite being surrounded by so many people, there was something different about her. "That person is interesting." He had such thoughts.

It wasn't until his second year of middle school where he dared to do anything about his interest.

In the end, it turned out that Mamoru was alive, but his injuries were so severe that he might as well have been dead. After he came back then, his illness grew worse, almost like that incident triggered something.

He leans back on the chair, with his arms folded behind him. "That's no good. Even though Jae still causes us trouble now and Mamoru-San too, just now I remembered them to be beautiful people."

Though he said this rather casually, he watches Sumire clench her fist. "Even now, those two are living how they want to live. Going down their path, that's why I will do the same too."

His gaze turned more serious as he watched her.

"Since others considered me as a strange individual, my life ended up this way. From the very moment I was born, I appeared to be comple—someone different than all the others. I was someone with memories of their past life, someone who has not forgotten their scars. My parents had been concerned and thus named me Sumire, hoping that I would become a beautiful flower one day instead of someone living a cursed fate.

I don't know whether or not it was due to that strange factor. However I became able to see many things. I became able to predict so many events and see the nature of individuals. But that was my limit, and without being able to do anything, time passed by."

"Sumire."

"But now it is different; it won't be like that anymore. I will properly walk in the direction I want to go."

His eyes widened when he saw the sudden aura around the brown hair girl. It's her usual fiery and burning presence, yet there was something about it that seemed rather soothing. Something calming, she continues with a smile on her face.

"Having a large power is too scary. But I'll make this power I succeeded from Ru to hold a meaning. I'll make it into a weapon to protect what is important. And to change things with all my might. If someone encounters a sad fate, I'll change it with my own hands, and I won't let them get hurt."

She's...grown a lot stronger than before.

Though she has always had strength, the power to protect others, though she has always had what most people didn't have, to him, it had always seemed rather superficial. As if there was nothing there, an empty existence. But now it is different, and she isn't fighting without a cause now.

Now in his eyes, she is somebody who could lead them all.

Before he could get a word in edgewise, though, she reached over and patted his head. His eyes widened, surprised at the sudden contact; since he followed her to Tokyo, he has maintained a borderline between them. But the truth is he knew his feelings for her have yet to disappear.

"That's why it's alright now. You don't have to keep on worrying about me, Atushi."

She...once again she noticed it.

Once again, she noticed his worries, his fears, and the anxieties he had all mixed and combined into one. She noticed something even the closest to him didn't. "I give up, and I can't win against you."

Sumire smiles." It's also nice to know when to admit defeat."

"But, this time around, I want to get the last word in."

That's right, and things are different now. They aren't the same as before, and that's precisely why he can try to make a change now. He can try to make a change despite how difficult it is.

Atushi pulled out a notebook from the back of the chair, and recognition filled the girl's eyes. She instantly drew her hand back from his head and tried to grab it from him. "Why do you still have that?"

Atushi grins." You dropped it on purpose for me to see, right?"

Sumire sighed deeply. "Alright, I give up. You win this time."

Atushi blinked, surprised that she resigned that quickly. He searched her expression but could not find anything. Before he could say anything, Yuhi leaned across the counter and grabbed a bottle from the shelf.

"Don't listen to her; she will find a way to trick you again later."

"Yuhi-san, you can't drink so early in the morning."

"It is a bribe for Hino."

"Yuhi-san." Sumire reached over and parted a strand of hair from Yuhi's face. "Good morning."

".."

Atushi watched as Yuhi leaned forward and kissed her. He immediately averted his gaze when he realized the kiss wasn't simple. After a few minutes, he hears Sumire's soft laughter and judged it was okay again.

They were still rather close to each other, but it was nothing strange. Yuhi brushed his forehead against Sumire's. "You haven't eaten yet?"

"Mmm, not yet Atushi was gossiping."

Hey, why is this his fault now?

"Unlike you two, I wake up at a productive time and have already finished cooking." He pointed to the kitchen. "Food is in the usual place."

Yuhi grinned. "See, he isn't useless."

"Did something happen with you two?" Atushi asked as Yuhi went to the kitchen to fetch the food. It was a stupid question; of course, the past week must have been stressful for them both.

Sumire ran away twice to go to Star town; the second time, Yuhi went after her, and when they met up, they stayed for a few extra days. Atushi set up Sumire's meeting with Arashi, but he didn't know what happened. But from the looks of things, it went in Yuhi's favor.

"Mm, we got closer."

Yeah, he can see that, but why did they get closer so suddenly?

"Hey Atushi, do you think Yuhi would like handmade things?"

Atushi facepalmed. Why does he have to deal with this silly couple?

ETERNAL MELODY Chapter 368

Chapter 368: Another sin

If audio player doesn't work, press Stop then Play button again

Three hours later, Tokyo Main streets.

On the way to the practice venue, she ran into many troubles. First, the traffic, and so she ended up leaving the taxi second, which is the main issue stopping an assault from happening.

A few minutes later, it was all over because they finally sober enough to see who she was. Sumire thought it would end there, but one of them still managed to use their knife. But afterwards, they rushed off.

Sumire leaned against the wall and placed her hand on her now wounded arm. She felt a stinging pain on her neck and her face too, but her main concern now was her arm. This is bad, and she is supposed to play the piano on stage today.

Before she could close her eyelids, she felt somebody grab her arm.

"Sano?"

Despite her blurred vision, she could make out his face and his voice.

"--okay? Are you okay?"

He showed up again. Whenever anything happens, why is this person the first person to show up? Isn't it obvious that he is involved somehow?

Sumire tried to move his hand away, but unfortunately, she felt very weak.

Sano rummaged through his bag and pulled out a needle. "I will give you a quick shot. You have practice in the stadium today, right?"

"I was on my way."

"You're careless. You should have just ignored them."

So he was in the area long before she came and saw that? Hah, she supposes this part of him hasn't changed. But, there is one thing that is different now. "Yuhi found out that I drank your blood."

"I will explain it."

"He was mad, but it was okay."

Yuhi is not the type of person who would get angry at her for long.

"I see; he is good to you."

"So were you at the start." Even though she can see by now that Yuhi won't abandon her as Sano did, she can't erase the fear in her heart.

"What about now?"

"Eh?"

"I can't erase what my past self did. I was horrible to you just because of my insecurities and fears. You often said in the past that a couple should share everything together, but back then, I didn't do that."

"It was because you didn't trust me-"

"No, the one I didn't trust was myself. I didn't trust in my ability to make you happy or to have a future together. That was why I ignored your suffering. My parents, my family as a whole was putting a lot of pressure on you. They turned you away from the hospital several times when you needed help or when your friends did."

Right, it was difficult then. She didn't care what happened to herself,, but she would bring them to the hospital whenever her friends got hurt. Of course, with her luck, it was one of the Nagawa family hospitals. Everybody knew who she was and didn't hesitate to turn her away.

She remembered how helpless she felt then.

But when she was hurt the most, somebody approached her and said they would bring her to his clinic. It was a smaller place, but the Nagawa family did not own it.

"Was it you?"

It was just a guess, but why else would he bring this up?

"Yes."

"I see."

How many other things will she find out that he did for her? Despite how it ended, it started off well and even towards the end. If he did that much for her sake behind the scenes, then that means he must have had feelings for her.

Still the words he said, his ability to make her happy, huh? If he admitted these things to her back then, she would have most likely forgiven him. If he said such sweet-sounding things genuinely, she wouldn't have had the heart to turn him away.

Sumire flinched when he pulled out another needle. "What are you doing?"

"I don't think a single shot will make it go away, so just in case."

She sighed deeply but nodded, and soon she felt a familiar sharp pain on her arm. It surprised her that no passing by individuals had said anything yet. But then again, Sumire looked towards the direction of the road. It seems the busy traffic is affecting the flow of the people on the streets too.

Her gaze fell on Sano, who wore a formal business suit. "Were you about to go somewhere?"

"I was on my way back from a party when I saw you here."

So he was on the road and went out? Then again, he has a driver, so it is not like he left the car in the middle of the road.

"This isn't the direction of your house."

Sumire paused for a moment. This flow of traffic is most likely because of the concert that would start in a few hours. She knew that fans liked to arrive a few hours early. This huge crowd is gathering for Quatro Light. She knew better than to think they came for her.

"Did you come for my concert?"

"Yeah."

But surely he is too busy for that? "In four days, I will come back to the bar. So I wanted to ask you something."

Sumire blinked, even more surprised. "Oh wait, you're going back?"

"Why did you pack away my things already?"

"No, everything is still there." Sumire said slowly. "But you--"

Indeed, the danger surrounding him hasn't vanished yet. The reason he can move around freely now is because she sent somebody to watch over him. But she didn't think he would think to go back?

"That place is small and uncomfortable for you, right?" She recalled him telling her when they dated how he has never experienced poverty before and can't imagine living somewhere small. Whenever his place ended up renovated, he would stay in a first-class hotel.

Due to the trauma and shock of what happened, Sano was very quiet during his stay, but surely now it has worn off, he would complain.

"It is." Sano admitted.

"Then--"

"But if I am there, I can spend time with you. I can get to know you more and learn the things I didn't know."

Sumire didn't know what to say after he said those words. Maybe Hino is right, and she shouldn't mess with Sano anymore. What good will it do for the two of them going back and forth like this?

"I already told you before, and it is too late to return to the past. But I just wanted to know, did you like me?"

"I wanted to marry you."

Sumire blinked, surprised at his words. She figured he was relatively fond of her based on his stories, but he wanted to marry her? Somehow-- she didn't get a chance to finish that thought since she felt a throbbing pain in her chest and a large ringing sound in her head. It was like a chime.

Her throat and insides felt like it was on fire, so hot. Why is it so hot?

"Sumire? Hey, what--" Sano paused in mid-sentence and removed the buttons from his collar. He pierced his neck with a small pocket knife, and fresh blood trickled down his neck.

"I--"

Sano pulled her towards him. "It's fine. I will take responsibility later; just drink it now."

Sumire wrapped her arms around him and brushed her lips against his neck. "Sorry." Once again, she will add to her sins.

ETERNAL MELODY Chapter 369

Chapter 369: You are loved

If audio player doesn't work, press Stop then Play button again

A few hours later - Horizon Stadium -

Sumire didn't know how she managed to get to practice after that. All she remembered was vaguely seeing Shin, so she supposed he dealt with the situation before he dropped her off here.

Since she came, she has not done much. Her wounds hurt, so after a few songs, she stopped to take a break.

Sumire stared at the magazine for the one-hundredth time. Atushi told her that Yuhi would like anything that comes from her, but she wonders if it is okay to make him something handmade. It is almost winter again, but September just started, so it is still warm out.

Still, the only thing she can find in this magazine that is easy to make is a muffler or a hat. Yuhi doesn't have a hat for winter, does he? She noticed that when she was going through his stuff.

Still, her mind kept wandering to what happened two hours ago. Sano appeared, and she drank his blood, right? But what happened after then? How come it is a blur to her? What happened to him?

"What are you doing?"

Sumire immediately hid the magazine, and Yuhi raised his eyebrow. "Why are you acting suspiciously?"

"N-no reason."

This is embarrassing, and she doesn't want him to see her doing weird things.

Yuhi was curious, but he didn't say anymore and passed her a drink and a small bag. "Here, take a break."

It was ice coffee and doughnuts. Sumire laughed. "No more pastries."

"If you want some, then I will make it when we go home." Yuhi's gaze fell on the guys of Quatro Light. "And so?"

"You guys didn't have much time to practice the song since I only just completed it."

"But you're confident?"

Sumire nodded. "I am."

There is no way she made a mistake. She confirmed these thoughts when she worked on those solo songs.

Her thoughts broke off when she noticed something. Oh, he is getting closer to her again. So when he kisses her deeply, it does not surprise her.

"No more?" Yuhi mumbled against her lips.

"It's okay." Because it is, isn't it? She likes it whenever he kisses her like this.

Yuhi ran his hands across her cheek. "Don't push yourself, even if you do like this."

"I'm not."

"Is that so? But I think we should stop." Yuhi wiped her cheeks with a cloth, and she panicked.

"How did you get this scratch?"

"Uh--"

"Is this from a razor? Did you--"

"N--no I didn't do it. I just stopped a fight on the way here."

"Just your face?"

"My neck, but just a little." Also, her arms, but she can't tell him that part. If he hears about it, then she won't be able to play.

Yuhi brushed his hands across her neck where she placed the bandage. She styled her hair, so it covered that part of her neck. But it seems like Yuhi noticed.

"It must have hurt."

Sumire sensed the pain behind his words and flinched. "Why...does he look so concerned? This isn't the first time I have gotten injured." Or rather, the wounds she had recently were more serious than this—the ones from the accident.

Since that time they came back from Star Town, something has changed. She wonders what it is.

"Go to the hospital later, okay?"

"T--there is no need."

Besides, the Nagawa family own the surrounding hospitals. She doesn't want to see him again so soon. She was having a hard time remembering exactly what she did earlier too. She must have drunk, right? Otherwise, why else would she be able to move around freely like this?

One of the things she learned about this ability of hers is her wounds heal fast after she has had some blood.

"You know Nagawa is working hard for you, right?"

"But he is related to the incident--"

"Sumire, didn't you realize that when he explained the thing about the emblems?"

".."

"So, I know you don't hate him."

"Yuhi that's---"

"You also drank from him."

Her sweatdropped when she saw the gloomy aura around him. "I think he offered since he saw my condition."

But what happened next? Gah, why can't she remember? Sumire felt very frustrated.

Her thoughts broke off again when Yuhi cupped her cheeks and suddenly placed a gentle kiss on her forehead. "Ah-?"

"You worry too much. Sure, I do get jealous, but it is not like I am clueless. I can see that he genuinely cares for you."

"Wait, but at the start, you were all like he should go to jail and stuff."

Or rather, what is this drastic change in reaction? Yuhi was so against Sano before, but recently he is so accepting. Sumire thought it was just her imagination, but now that he has admitted it, she felt bewildered.

"That was before I got to know him. I've seen how he talks and how he looks at you, Sumire. He genuinely likes you. It isn't because you messed with him and led him on either. The look he has on his eyes shows that he has liked you for a very long time."

"How would you know?"

Yuhi kissed her again. "Because you silly girl, it is the same look I give you."

He admitted there that he had liked her for a very long time. What is she supposed to do with such feelings? Yuhi's feelings for her keep growing, and it seems Sano is genuine.

"Yuhi, you know-"

"Hey, it's okay, you don't have to explain anything. I didn't say all that to pressure you for an answer or make you feel anxious. I understand it is hard for you to accept other people's love right now. You don't have to accept it, and I just wanted you to know. It isn't just me who loves you, and you are wanted and loved by others too."

Her eyes widened when she heard him say such things. How? How can he say that to her? Her thoughts broke off when she felt Yuhi pat her back.

"Ssh, it's fine, Sumire."

This isn't fair. If he says things like this, then she can't say anything back.

He must be doing this deliberately.

"Is it okay for others to love me? You are a selfish guy Yuhi so I thought you would want to keep me all to yourself."

Yuhi sighed deeply. "Well, I can't disagree with you there. Truthfully Sumire, I do think that way sometimes."

"Sometimes?"

"All the time."

Sumire laughed when she heard that. "But you never--"

"I never complain. Truthfully after you told me about your relationship with Sano, I have been trying very hard to avoid making the same mistakes."

So it was something like that. No wonder he doesn't overreact when other guys talk to her. "I didn't mean to make you suppress your feelings like that."

"No, you were right. Right now, the one you are seeing is me. I should believe in the feelings you have for me. Even if you have unsettled emotions from your previous relationships, that doesn't matter since we are together."

"Yuhi I--"

"Mimi!" Kou interjected. "Somebody left this for you."

Sumire looked at what was in Kou's hands, a small note with a letter Y and purple colored lilies. Ah?!

ETERNAL MELODY Chapter 370

Chapter 370: Relit the flame

If audio player doesn't work, press Stop then Play button again

She came from a traditional family, so things like the entertainment industry or anything to do with modern music were toxic. That was why when she gradually became interested in music after accidentally watching that person live on TV, her parents became even more strict with her. They said terrible-sounding things to put her off singing and insisted that she had no talent for it.

Her parents instructed everybody to tell her that too so she could not get any opinions. However, when she first met Takashi Yumi, she didn't hold back.

"Yumi-san." Sumire eventually found the woman by the decking.

Yumi smiles. "I am honored that once again you ran here for me." At that, she looks away, causing Yumi to chuckle and make her way over. Yumi took out her handkerchief and wipes her sweat. "Though I do admire your determination and all. You shouldn't overdo it."

"Y-yes."

Yumi chuckles, "The same reaction as always I see. But that's what makes you cute, Sumire-chan." she makes her way over to the railing, "Sorry for calling you out all of a sudden. I didn't think I would return to Tokyo so quickly myself. However, the idol association president was discussing new ways to develop the idol world. When you think of that, what do you think of first?"

"Defeating you?"

"That's right. I came here to Tokyo to prepare for the Queen tournament. It seems there is only one other strong candidate, though."

One strong candidate?

Yumi sighed deeply. "I was looking forward to a direct battle, but apparently, they changed the rules. I will only be a judge."

"Eh, but then your idol rank-?"

"Right, it doesn't make sense. For the rankings, people can see, so the general ones, I will step down quietly since others can alter it manually. But for the universal rankings, they said they would save it for another time."

The Universal rankings, of course, she knew what it was. Rumors say that a stone carving with the names of every legendary idol appears there. Nobody knows how it works or how the names appear, but one thing is guaranteed. The only ones who can make it on that board are the true legends.

"So Sumire-chan, you should become number one in those general rankings and then convince those stubborn geezers for me!"

Sumire sweat fell when she heard those words. "Even if it is the general, it isn't easy..."

"But it is one step away from the universal." Yumi sighed deeply. "Maybe I have been too kind to them. Lately, they keep implementing such odd changes and restricting the new idols from growing."

"Restrictions?"

A complicated look appeared on Yumi's face. "Right restrictions. I thought you would know. Isn't Terashimkun having a hard time at work because of it?"

Her eyes widened when she heard those words. Wait, what is that supposed to mean?

"Yuhi has been struggling?"

"A lot of his new songs ended up rejected because of these new restrictions. He keeps having to rewrite them only to have them rejected again."

Wait-huh? What is this information? But Sumire knew better than to doubt these words. Yumi-senpai is not the type to make things up.

"What the current idol association wants is a standard type of music; they want whatever the masses want. They are afraid to experiment. I hear Terashimkuns new songs keep evolving. But these songs stray away from his current image. The idol association board does not want to take that risk."

So is that why Yuhi always looks so tired? To think she had no idea. Then again, Sano does a great job from shielding her from such news. When she learned about it, she wanted to stop him, but Atushi said it is a good thing.

A good thing to shield her from the nasty things in this world? Sure it sounds nice, and she won't learn about anything bad.

Yumi smiles. "My mind seems clearer now."

At that, she watches the brown hair girl extend her hands out as though she is embracing the sky.

"It feels great." She turned back to her. "That etude of radiance is a wonderful song."

At that, she looks away rather nervously. "Aha...you found out?"

"Well, occasionally, idol scouts loiter around parks and other places, you know? One of them went to one of your lives in the park and picked up a CD. Coincidentally I was in the meeting that day, so I listened." Yumi smiles. "Of course, I could tell it was your voice. It really is a lovely song."

So that's what happened. Come to think of it, one of the people she distributed the CD to seemed odd. But, to think there was an idol scout, her sweatdropped. She needs to be more careful.

"Thank you. But that song-

At that Yumi's gaze softened, and she turned, her hands on her back as she faced her. "Yes, it was for me, wasn't it?"

Sumire looked away, embarrassed. "You know I respect you a lot, Yumi-senpai, and before I knew it, I wrote a song like that."

"But that song wasn't just for me?"

Sumire looked down at the ground and clenched her fist. "...to shamelessly write a song about him, despite what I did. Even though it was because of me."

"Sumire-chan, you still blame yourself?"

"I--" Sumire looked up with tears in her eyes. "I miss him so much. It was because of me, and yet I felt like he was the one who left me. How could he leave me behind in this cruel world?"

All the feelings she suppressed up till this point came out.

"That is good, and you finally said what you were feeling."

Ah-- unconsciously she..?

"You know Sumire-chan, I don't think Mamoru-kun would want you to carry on this way. If it is him, I am sure he would want you to be happy."

At that comment, Sumire recalled Yuhis words and clenched her fist. Of course, she knew that. If others can see that, then naturally, she who knew him the most would understand. But that is exactly why she feels bad.

How can she be happy in a world without him? Why would he ask her to do that?

"That idol scout I mentioned to you recorded your performance."

"Ah."

"Nobody knew who you were, you disguise yourself well, and your stage was small. But you still gathered that many people. To think that my kohai, who admired my voice so much, could pull off a performance like that." Yumi places her hands on her chest as she shuts her eyes. "It puts me at ease."

"Watching you, I feel as though I can keep on moving forward. I feel as though I can reach a better future. As an idol."

Her eyes widened. Is that-?

"So Sumire-chan, please- no reach me. Send your voice to the very end of the galaxy, no even further. I am sure the message you want to convey is something deeper."

"What if I fail again?"

If she fails again, she doesn't know if she will get back on her feet again.