

## ONCE UPON OMAKE

### Part One: It Always Starts in a Tavern...

The tavern's common room was quiet and nearly empty. It was that time of day when only people who really didn't have anything to do would go and hang out in a tavern, and of the three occupants, the barkeep actually belonged there, so he didn't really count. Of course, he was sampling his own wares, so it was kind of hard to be sure. The other two people who weren't doing a very good job of filling the place up were both dressed in that mode of dress that suggested 'adventurers', something that was further attested to by the oversized cutlery adorning their seats. At the moment, they were each concentrating on a handful of cards.

The barkeep finished swigging down another mug of ale, and considered the pair. They came through on occasion, stopping for a few days and then moving on to parts unknown. But their coin was good, and they were frequent enough visitors that he kept stocked up on their preferred drinks—*sake*, from the eastern lands, for the older one, and kaffee, served with milk, for the younger.

"Odd ducks," he muttered to himself as he topped off another ale.

At the table, the older one sat back in his chair, frowning at his cards as he stroked his goatee. His black doublet was trimmed with silver, and a longsword hung sheathed from the back of his chair. He sighed. The younger man, also dressed in black, only highlighted with gold, looked impatient. His weapon, a katana, also depended from the back of his own chair.

"Well?" he ventured.

"I'm thinking," replied the other, whose name, incidentally, was Wolfson.

"You've been thinking for fifteen minutes," retorted the first one, who was called Darkling.

"All right, all right," said Wolfson as he leaned forward and fanned his cards out in front of him. Darkling did the same, and faced his partner in anticipation. Wolfson leveled his gaze at Darkling and said, "Got any threes?"

"Go fish!" Darkling smugly replied.

"Damn!" cursed Wolfson as he reached for the pile of cards in the center of the table for yet another time. "I'm just no good at this game." He drew a card and added it to his hand.

"Well, poker's no fun unless we've got girls."

"Well, girls are no fun unless they're cute. And we haven't seen anything cute since... uh..." Wolfson furrowed his brow in attempted recall.

"That video parlor in Port Bostal?" suggested Darkling.

"I'm talking about *real* girls," Wolfson chided, as he once again looked at his cards and started sorting them out. "Although, those bishoujo games *were* interesting..."

"Yeah," agreed Darkling as he glanced again at his own cards. "But it cost us nearly everything we got from raiding Krag's stronghold. Do you have any fives?"

"How do you *do* that?" complained Wolfson as he drew a card from his hand and passed it to Darkling. Darkling gave his older companion an easy smile, and laid a nice row of fives in front of himself.

"It's back to you," he said. "Try not to take so long this time."

"This game sucks," muttered Wolfson. Then he spoke up. "Hey, barkeep! Can we get another round of drinks?"

The barkeep, stirred out of his reverie, moved to go heat up some more *sake* and kaffee, as Wolfson sat back to ponder the strategy of his next move. Darkling sighed and leaned back in his chair, resigned to the fact that this might take a little time. Wolfson could be so impetuous when it came to their adventures, he thought. Why was he so ponderous over a stupid game?

At that moment, a breathless man came bursting into the tavern's door. "Hey, Lardo!" he shouted.

“Who?” asked Wolfson and Darkling in unison as they turned to regard the newcomer, but since he was nondescript, no description was forthcoming.

“Lardo,” he repeated. “That’s the guy that you guys keep calling ‘barkeep’, since you haven’t asked his name.”

“Ah,” the heroes replied.

Lardo came out of the kitchen and asked the breathless man, “What’s up, Dung?”

Wolfson leaned across the table toward Darkling and quietly muttered, “Dung? Lardo? No wonder I haven’t bothered to learn the names of anybody in this town.”

“What do you expect from a place called ‘Compost’?”

“Oh. Is *that* where we are?”

They turned their attention back to Dung, who was saying, “You may want to close your doors, or something. The Shadow Reaver Gang is heading into town.”

Darkling leaned across the table toward Wolfson and quietly asked, “Are we in a bad western, or something?”

“Can’t be,” Wolfson replied.

“Why not?”

“We’re carrying swords.”

“Ah,” Darkling replied.

They turned their attention back to Lardo, who was saying, “Thanks for the warning, Dung. We’ll see what happens. But if I closed my doors at the first sign of trouble all the time, I’d never be open!” He laughed at his own joke.

Dung shrugged and said, “Well, okay. Good luck. I’ve got to be off. Other people to warn, you know.” And he ran back out the door. Lardo went back to swilling his own ale.

Darkling looked at Lardo, and then back at Wolfson. “Well,” he asked, “do we get involved?”

“No,” Wolfson responded as he went back to examining his cards.

“Why not?”

“Nothing in it for us.”

“Ah,” Darkling replied.

**Next: The Best Laid Plans...**

## Part Two: The Best Laid Plans...

Nothing had really changed in the tavern. Lardo, the barkeep, was still amusing himself by making sure that his ale was worth consuming, while Darkling and Wolfson continued their card game at their table in the corner of the common room. But there was still a certain air of tension that was becoming more palpable as the minutes dragged on. Perhaps it was the fact that the sounds of the town outside were rapidly diminishing, to be replaced by silence that was only punctuated by the occasional sound of a door or shutter being slammed shut.

*Perhaps, thought Darkling a little acidly, it's the fact that Wolfson takes so damn long to figure out what card he wants.*

Finally he asked, "Are you sure we shouldn't at least find out what's going on?"

Wolfson reached over and poured himself a fresh shot of *sake* from the flask. "The Shadow Reaver Gang is coming to town," he answered, and downed the shot.

Darkling idly fingered the golden amulet that hung from his neck. It had a curious starburst design on it. "Maybe they're after us," he suggested.

"Have *you* ever heard of the Shadow Reavers?" queried Wolfson, as he resumed examining his cards.

"No."

"Neither have I. Don't go looking for trouble, and it won't come looking for us."

"Uh... that's never been the case with us in the past," Darkling commented with a raised eyebrow.

"Details," said Wolfson. "There's no profit in it for us to become involved."

"So you mentioned," sighed Darkling.

The sound of yelling and laughter slowly began reaching their ears, and they tensed up. They could perhaps be forgiven, because it was not an altogether pleasant sort of laughter. It was the kind of laughter that says, "I've just ripped your ears off, and now I'm going to start with your fingers". Suddenly, the door to the tavern burst open, and several thugs began sauntering into the room. Lardo hastily retreated into the kitchen and slammed the door shut. A moment later, the sound of heavy objects being shoved up against it could be heard.

"Damn," Wolfson muttered.

"I *told* you trouble always finds us!" Darkling lamented.

"No... the *sake* and the kaffee are back there with Lardo," explained Wolfson.

"Ah," Darkling replied.

At that moment, the gang's probable leader loomed in the doorway and entered the tavern. He was a huge, ugly, bald man with an eye patch over his right eye. From his hip hung an oversized broadsword, and he held a pair of chains in his large hand. Entering the room behind him, on the end of each chain, came two girls. Wolfson and Darkling's eyes fell upon the girls with all the lassitude of four rocks plummeting off a cliff.

The pair was terribly cute. They both had long, brown hair and slender bodies, and they both wore leather vests that laced loosely at the front, doing little to conceal their breasts, and short leather skirts, doing little to conceal their legs. The taller one had large, expressive violet eyes and pale skin, and looked somewhat frightened. The other, a few years younger than the first, had large brown eyes, smaller breasts, and a somewhat more indignant demeanor.

"Suddenly," commented Wolfson as he watched the girls, "I see the potential for personal gain."

"Uh-huh," observed Darkling, still caught up in the moment.

"Say... don't they look somewhat familiar?" Wolfson suddenly asked.

Darkling took a moment to make a more critical observation and said, "Now that you mention it, yes."

"But where...?"

“That video parlor in Port Bostal?” suggested Darkling.

“That’s right! They look like the characters in a couple of those bishoujo games. Nah! It couldn’t be. Well, let’s get down to business.” Before Darkling could inquire, protest, or otherwise interfere, Wolfson got up and approached the hulk of a man, who had sat down while his minions proceeded to pillage the bar for potables. Wolfson noted that the man smelled rank. But he plunged on. “Excuse me, Mister... uh...”

“Sardul,” the man replied gruffly.

“Ah. Mister Sardul...”

“Just Sardul. Sardul One-Eye,” the man growled.

“I see. Sorry. Well, Sardul, are these your slaves?” He indicated the two girls who were cowering behind the ogre and looking at Wolfson with some curiosity.

“Aye.”

“Would you be willing to part with them?” Wolfson ventured.

“Aye. For two hundred crowns. Apiece.”

“I see.” He glanced back over his shoulder at Darkling, who was still sitting at the table, looking a little uncomfortable. “Darkling, how much money have we got left?”

Darkling looked at the coins on the table and answered, “Uh... ten shillings, eighteen pence.”

“That makes us short...”

“Three hundred and ninety-nine crowns, one shilling, two pence,” sighed Darkling.

“I see,” said Wolfson. He turned back to Sardul. “I don’t suppose that you’d be willing to—”

“Over my dead body!” Sardul snarled.

“I was afraid it would be something like that.” Wolfson strolled back to his seat and drew his longsword from its scabbard. “Dark, I’ll take Sardul; you handle the rest of the gang.”

Darkling goggled. “What? There are ten of them!”

“And he’s probably as good as all of them put together. Do you want the girls or not?”

**Next: Into Every Life...**

### Part Three: Into Every Life...

The atmosphere in the tavern had suddenly become decidedly tense. When Sardul had barked at Wolfson, the members of the Shadow Reaver Gang had paused in their plundering of the bar in order to see what was going on, only to see Wolfson walk over to his table and draw a sword. Now there were fourteen people in the common room waiting in various states of emotion to see what would happen next. The fifteenth person, Wolfson, knew *exactly* what he planned to do, so he was enjoying a certain sense of prescience.

Actually, Darkling had a sinking feeling that Wolfson planned to go through with his plan in his usual rash manner, so he was feeling a little prescient, too. Only he wasn't enjoying it as much. In fact, if it weren't for the fact that the girl with the violet eyes was so damn cute, he wouldn't even entertain the thought of following Wolfson's lead at all.

*Wait a minute*, he thought, *that sounds dangerously like I'm actually considering it*. Attempting to regain a sense of sanity, he attempted another sally. "You don't seriously think I can dispatch ten opponents at once, do you?"

Wolfson rolled his eyes, and went around to Darkling's seat. Leaning down so that he could quietly confer with his partner, he explained, "All you have to do is hold them off long enough for me to take down Sardul."

"But there are ten of them!" Darkling tried to remind him one more time.

"They're rabble. Rank amateurs." Wolfson gestured with his head over toward the bar, "Look, they don't even know which is the good booze. I'll take care of Sardul, who looks like the only one with any skill, and then I'll back you up."

"But—"

"We are *far* more experienced than *they* are. And we've got a few tricks up our sleeves. You'll be fine."

"But—"

"Just agree with me," Wolfson prompted.

"But—"

"Besides," Wolfson added, "we can loot them for some extra cash when we're finished."

Darkling sighed. "All right. But *next* time, *I* make the plan." He stood up and drew his katana, and Wolfson turned back to face the rest of the room. Ten Shadow Reavers drew their swords, and Sardul One-Eye stood up, drawing his own huge broadsword. Wolfson momentarily wondered why they always made these guys almost seven feet tall. Then the two heroes leapt to the fray, shouting their battle cry.

"*Kawaii!*" Wolfson yelled. Darkling grabbed him by the arm. Wolfson turned to look at him. "What?" he asked.

"*'Kawaii'?*" Darkling inquired a little incredulously.

"Well, it seemed appropriate."

"Why not something more traditional? Like 'banzai'?" suggested Darkling.

"Because we're not fighting for miniature trees," Wolfson grouched.

"That's 'bon-sai'," sighed Darkling. "Then why 'kawaii'?"

"Because it means 'cute'," Wolfson explained, "and the girls are cute. Besides, it's got that firm 'ka' that you can belt out at the beginning, and you can draw out the 'wai' in a good battle cry-like way, okay?"

"Ah," Darkling replied.

"Are you two gonna talk or fight?" grumbled Sardul.

Wolfson and Darkling nodded to each other, readied their swords and turned to face the Shadow Reavers.

“*Kawaii!*” they yelled as they started forward, and then Darkling shouted, “*Zippo!*” The amulet around his neck flared up and a bright flash of light filled the common room, momentarily blinding the gang.

Wolfson, used to fighting alongside of Darkling, was ready for it, however, and closed his eyes just long enough to keep his vision intact. As he opened them, he swung his longsword in the direction of Sardul, shouting, “*Thunder Slash!*” Elemental energy coalesced on his blade and sprang outward at the giant, knocking him back several paces.

Darkling charged into the mass of temporarily blinded Shadow Reavers, dispatching one with a nasty slice from his katana before they could regain their senses.

Meanwhile, Wolfson rushed at Sardul, who seemed to be recovering far too quickly. *Damn big hulks... always a little too tough for my own good.* A sharp thrust of Wolfson’s longsword struck Sardul, but deflected off the ogre’s thick leather armor. Wolfson realized it was enchanted, and good for more than just smelling bad and attracting fleas.

Wolfson’s blow *did* leave Sardul off-balance. Unable to slash with his broadsword, Sardul hammered Wolfson in the head with his other hand instead. The hero went sprawling.

Wolfson shook his head, trying to get the stars to leave him the hell alone. Suddenly, he saw the flash of Sardul’s sword and launched himself to the side, avoiding the blow. Almost. He felt the fire of a nasty gash in his right shoulder. *Damn! I’ll probably need another tetanus shot now...*

Using the momentum of his roll, Wolfson sprang to his feet, and gave his sword a mighty back swing at Sardul. It caught the giant in the gut, and he howled in pain. Wolfson took the opportunity to check on Darkling.

Darkling had leapt onto the bar, minimizing the disadvantage of his short stature. At that moment, he decapitated a Shadow Reaver who foolishly got too close to his katana.

*Good,* thought Wolfson. *At least he’s fine for the—*

A sharp pain shot through Wolfson’s right temple as the pommel of Sardul’s broadsword brought him back to the fight. He staggered back a couple of steps, eyeing the huge man. Two thoughts fought for supremacy just then: *Damn, I’m going to have a headache,* and *Is any girl worth this?* He shook his head again to clear it, and focused his ki.

Time seemed to slow down around him. *Three blows... Two to draw him out, and the third to finish it.*

As Sardul charged in to press his advantage, Wolfson attacked with a quick flurry of blows. Caught by surprise at the sudden speed and precision of Wolfson’s assault, Sardul could only attempt to defend. He lashed out to deflect a cut to the head. Wolfson’s sword bounced around low, toward the open wound in Sardul’s gut. Sardul’s sword lanced down to block it. Wolfson’s sword spun off the giant’s blade again, going high. Sardul found himself in no position to defend against it, and the longsword bit deep into his neck.

The former leader of the Shadow Reaver gang had only a few moments to feel surprised at the fact that he had been beaten by someone who was a whole head shorter than himself before his spirit went on to wherever it was that the spirits of bad little gang leaders went. Then his lifeless corpse collapsed onto the common room floor.

Wolfson slumped down to his knees next to the body and muttered, “Damn, my head hurts!”

“A little help here!” Darkling yelled.

Wolfson looked up and saw that, while Darkling had managed to dispatch four of the Shadow Reavers, the remaining six now had him pretty much surrounded, and he was being forced to fight defensively in order to keep from getting cut down from multiple directions.

“Well, a promise is a promise,” Wolfson said to himself, and he adjusted his grip on his longsword as he returned to his feet. “*Kawaii!*” he yelled, and charged into the throng.

The surviving gang members were so surprised at Wolfson’s sudden appearance that he was able to cut one down before they realized what was happening, and as they tried to adjust to this new situation, it gave Darkling a chance to dispatch a sixth Shadow Reaver. At that point, the remaining four, realizing that Sardul was dead and that they now had to deal with *two* superior opponents, decided that discretion was definitely

the better part of survival, and opted for the Shadow Reavers' retirement plan. They vacated the tavern post-haste.

The two heroes slumped down against the bar. Darkling grinned. "You were right. It worked!"

"How bad are you hurt?" asked Wolfson.

"Not a scratch."

"Figures," Wolfson muttered to himself.

Suddenly, a slender, soft, very feminine body flung itself into each of them.

"Oomph!" the heroes responded.

"You were so brave to fight all of those men by yourself... I was worried," the girl with violet eyes said as she looked up at Darkling with tear-filled eyes.

"Uh..." Darkling cleverly replied as he gazed into her concerned eyes. He could just make out the curve of her breasts beneath her vest, and with the adrenaline of battle still running through him, his body was telling him that something *very* cute and *very* female was pressed up against him.

"It was great how you got rid of that big, stinky man!" the brown-eyed girl excitedly said as she happily looked up at Wolfson.

"Er..." Wolfson replied with equal cleverness as he gazed into her adoring eyes. He could just make out the slight swell of her small breasts beneath her vest, and with the adrenaline of battle still running through him (wounds or no wounds), his body was telling him that something *very* cute and *very* female was pressed up against him.

"I guess we belong to you two now," continued the violet-eyed girl.

Wolfson and Darkling pried their eyes away from the two nymphs long enough to look at each other.

They grinned.

"Yesss!" they agreed with raised fists.

**Next: Haven't I Met You Somewhere Before...**

## Part Four: Haven't I Met You Somewhere Before...

The common room of the tavern had resumed some semblance of quiet. But that probably had something to do with the fact that the majority of its occupants were dead, and were therefore in no particular condition to raise much of a ruckus. The remaining four occupants formed two neat little pairs in front of the tavern's bar, and given the current situation, it was highly likely that if the aforementioned group actually *had* gotten up and started causing a scene, at least two of the four wouldn't have particularly cared or even paid attention.

Wolfson shifted a little, attempting to ignore the pain in his head and right shoulder in favor of the pleasure in his lap. "Uh... what are your names?" he inquired.

The two girls looked downcast, and the girl with violet eyes answered sadly, "Sardul took them away from us. He just called me 'Hey You!'"

"And he called *me* 'Hey You, Too!'" added the brown-eyed girl with a sullen pout.

Darkling rolled his eyes a little bit and said, "Assuming we were to give you *back* your names, what would they be?"

"Oh..." replied the girl in his lap, as she glanced up at him a little shyly. "I'm Kana."

"And I'm Anna," added Wolfson's girl brightly, saying it in the Japanese way so that it rhymed with 'Kana'.

Wolfson and Darkling looked at each other incredulously. "Nah! It couldn't be," they said. But Wolfson ventured, "Have you ever been in any bishoujo games?"

Kana looked a little embarrassed. "Uh... yes, as a matter of fact. That was pretty much the first gig for both of us."

"You don't say." The heroes eyed the girls with renewed interest.

"But how did you end up with Sardul?" asked Darkling, his brow furrowed in confusion.

"Well, Anna and I were both in games with low sequel value," explained Kana. "So the companies that owned us ended up selling us to a traveling restaurant. The restaurant happened to be in the last town that the Shadow Reavers were at, and the gang purchased us from them for some reason."

"Probably because we're cute," interjected Anna.

"More likely they wanted someone to do chores for them," Wolfson corrected. Anna looked a little disgruntled at that, so he added, "But you *are* cute."

Darkling, still trying to piece everything together, said, "Wait a minute. Are you trying to tell us that you were actually slaves for the bishoujo companies?"

"Yes," Kana answered. "It's one way that they can get girls to do what they want. Most companies don't do it as often anymore, though, because the players started to notice that the same girls were showing up in different games, and they wanted fresh faces. So it's becoming a little more economically unviable to keep using slaves."

"So then, how did you end up as slaves?" Wolfson inquired.

"Well," said Kana, a little thoughtfully, "I was actually the Royal Princess of the House of Rune until I wandered too far from the castle one day and was captured by slavers. Now it is the fate to which I am consigned."

Darkling grunted. "Well, you're mine now."

Kana looked up at him with her large eyes. "I know," she responded softly.

"What about you?" Wolfson looked down at Anna.

"Me too!" she exclaimed.

"What?" he asked in disbelief. "You were a princess, too?"



“Well, okay, not really,” Anna confessed. “It just sounded more interesting. My parents were just common merchants and sold me off to get out of debt.”

“Ah,” Wolfson replied.

She smiled up at him and suddenly asked, “What should we call you guys?” Kana looked inquiringly at Darkling.

Wolfson said to Anna, “Well, my name is Wolfson...”

“Hai, Oukami-sama!” she replied brightly.

“Uh... you don’t actually have to call me ‘master’...”

“Hai, Oukami-sama!” she replied brightly.

Wolfson sighed. “Geez, I hate that old gag,” he muttered.

“What old gag, Oukami-sama?” Anna asked, her eyes full of curiosity.

“Uh... never mind.”

“Hai, Oukami-sama!” she replied brightly.

Meanwhile, Kana, still looking at Darkling, asked, “And you? Should I just call you ‘koushujin-sama’?”

Darkling shifted a little uncomfortably under Kana’s violet gaze. “Too impersonal,” he answered. “My name is Darkling.”

“Then ‘Kurai-sama’?” she tried.

Darkling blushed slightly. “Well... uh... yes. For appearance’s sake, in public. But privately, could you... uh...”

“Yes?” she encouraged him.

Darkling found several other places to look other than her eyes. *No, not her cleavage*, he thought. “Well, you see, I kind of have this thing...”

“Yes?” she prompted again.

*I wonder how long it’ll take for those bodies to start smelling bad?* Darkling tried wondering to himself. “Well, in your game, I really thought it was cute... uh...”

“Yes?” she tried again.

“Could you just call me ‘oniichan’ in private?” he finally blurted out.

“‘Oniichan’?” she asked, a little startled.

“Just do it!” Darkling said sharply.

“Yes... oniichan,” Kana replied to him meekly, looking down and just glancing up at him with her violet eyes.

*I’ve died and gone to heaven*, Darkling thought. *One of those Shadow Reaver bastards actually ran me through, and I’ve gone on to Valhalla, or Paradise, or wherever... I’m glad I lived a good life...*

Meanwhile, Anna had cuddled up to a very surprised but happy and contented Wolfson. As he stroked her long soft hair and let his gaze wander over her lithe body, he realized that—in spite of his aches—he was getting aroused.

“Oukami-sama!” Anna suddenly exclaimed as she looked up at him with her big, brown eyes. “Your thing is poking me!” She reached down to stroke the hardness between his legs, and moments later had managed to work it out from his breeches. Slender, delicate fingers softly stroked him. *I’ve died and gone to heaven*, Wolfson thought. *Sardul actually ran me through, and I’ve gone on to Valhalla, or Paradise, or wherever... I’m glad I lived a good life...*

“I know what *you* need,” Anna said with a playful smile.

“Medical attention?” suggested Wolfson.

Anna giggled and explained, "I learned this from the game I was in." She suddenly slipped down between his legs and crouched over his shaft, and he felt the warm wetness of her tongue as he watched her long hair fall around his lap. "You're so thick!" she exclaimed, and then proceeded to really go to work. As the pleasure centers of his brain started firing off, Wolfson leaned his head back and decided that medical attention could go take a long walk for a while.

Darkling and Kana watched as Anna gave pleasure to Wolfson. Darkling definitely felt that something was wrong with this picture. "Um... Kana," he asked, "would you do that for me?"

"Uh..."

"Is there a problem?" he asked, suddenly feeling a little wounded himself.

"Well, it's just that... in *my* game, I never *did* that sort of thing, so... I'm not sure how to do it," she explained, slightly embarrassed.

"Oh, for crying out loud. Just look at what *she's* doing and do the same thing," Darkling said with some exasperation as he indicated Anna's head bobbing up and down on Wolfson's lap.

"Yes, oniichan." Kana worked her way down to Darkling's lap and began her lesson in oral sex. Darkling sighed contentedly.

Lardo, having decided that things out in the common room had been quiet long enough, carefully removed the barricade from the kitchen door and risked a peek out into the tavern proper. Behind the bar, he could see a dead body. *Well*, he thought, *that's better than a live one causing trouble*. He stepped out and saw a few more dead bodies. It looked as if the two travelers had wreaked a little havoc with the Shadow Reavers.

He cautiously continued out into the tavern, and heard a low moan from in front of the bar. *Shit*, he thought, *someone's still alive and hurt*. As he peered around the bar, he saw the two travelers sitting propped up against it, each one with a girl bobbing her head up and down in his lap, making licking and sucking noises. One of the travelers moaned again. Lardo decided he'd probably better stay in the kitchen a little longer.

*I'm in the wrong line of work*, he thought, as he quietly slunk back into seclusion.

**Next: Meanwhile, Back At The Ranch...**

## Part Five: Meanwhile, Back At The Ranch...

Some little ways outside of the town of Compost sat a small castle. It was not a pleasant-looking castle. It was short and squat, with a low keep that sat inside of thick walls, which were assembled from some rough, dark-colored stone. The current owner of the castle thought that it looked sinister. Most passersby thought it looked a lot like a large, fat goblin squatting on a hill to take a crap.

Inside the sparsely furnished keep, a rather young and lanky man with Asian features and short-cropped hair was entertaining himself by pacing back and forth over a small area of the great hall. He wore a gray tunic of a rather severe and conservative cut, and he looked generally irritated as he persistently retraced his steps. A little off to one side, on a small stool, a young woman with a pretty face and a shapely body sat and buffed her nails. Her brown hair hung loosely about her shoulders, and her blue eyes showed absolute indifference to the young man's apparent consternation. She was dressed in a sleek red silk outfit, reminiscent of a Chinese dress. It showed her curves nicely. Not that the irritable man seemed to notice.

"When is that spy going to report in?" he finally blurted.

"When he shows up, I'm sure," the woman answered, without looking up. "What are you so impatient for?"

He paused in his pacing and faced her. "I have plans to set in motion, and vengeance to exact!" he cried. "First, there's that girl..."

"You're just pissed because you didn't get any ero scenes in that stupid game." She paused in her buffing to examine the luster of the nails on the hand that she had been working on.

The young man glowered at her. "At least *I* didn't go around acting like a tramp."

For a moment she looked up at him, and then she went back to buffing the nails on her other hand. "I'd tell you to go fuck yourself," she commented, "but I suspect that's what you do on *most* nights."

The man's jaw worked for a moment, but he couldn't find an appropriate rebuttal, so he just resumed pacing instead. "And then there are those two so-called 'heroes'," he continued.

"What's your beef with *them*, anyway?" the young woman asked.

"Lots of things," he fumed. "Have you heard the kind of crap they say about me? 'Yuta's such a creep.' 'He'd probably sell Kana into slavery.' And then they go off and want a fucking *omake* with a cute little slave girl Kana. And Wolfson goes and writes me in as 'Yuta Conycatcher'."

"Doesn't that mean that you run as fast as a rabbit?" the woman asked innocently.

"Like hell!" Yuta exclaimed. "It's an archaic name that means 'cheat'."

"Oh, my!" expressed the young woman with mock sincerity.

"Bitch," Yuta muttered to himself as he paced.

"What about me?" she suddenly asked. "He's written *me* in as 'Evil Yumi'. I thought he kind of liked me."

"Shit," Yuta replied. "That's just because he needs a beautiful foil in the enemy camp. He'll probably give you some ridiculous shot at redemption, or something, while *I* get the shaft."

Yumi-waru just smiled inscrutably.

"And then they had to go and fuck up my cushy job." Yuta resumed his train of thought.

"Cushy job?" Yumi-waru queried half-heartedly as she examined the nails on her other hand.

"Yeah," groused Yuta. "I got a real cool job as a message runner for Master Krag. All the running around I could possibly want, and I was getting *paid* for it. Plus perks. Then one day I show back up at the fortress to find half the place burning, everybody dead or dying, and Krag's last words were, 'Wolfson... Darkling... took the Amulet of Zarstat.' Then the bastard croaked, and I was on the street again."

"Oh, that's too bad," she commented insincerely, as she resumed buffing her nails.

"Crap," Yuta grunted. "I don't know *why* I'm stuck with you."

“Because *someone* has to be the brains of this operation,” Yumi-waru coolly explained.

Yuta stopped his pacing and considered for a moment whether strangling Yumi-waru might somehow fit into the grand scheme of his plans. Before he could come up with any reasonable—or even unreasonable—justification, however, the door to the hall opened up and a soldier stepped in.

“Yuta-sama!” The soldier bowed.

“Yes?” Yuta inquired impatiently.

“There is a rather smelly thug at the gate who insists that he works for you,” the soldier reported.

“Hot damn!” Yuta exclaimed. “Bring him here,” he commanded.

“Hai!”

Within moments, a nondescript—but rather pungent—man was bowing before Yuta Conycatcher and Yumi-waru. He looked to be one of the former members of the Shadow Reaver gang. “What do you have to report?” Yuta asked, a little annoyed at being referred to as ‘Conycatcher’ in the text.

“As directed,” the man responded, “I influenced the Shadow Reavers to purchase the girl named Kana. As it turns out, they also purchased another girl, named Anna.”

“Anna?” Yuta interrupted. “Who’s Anna?”

“A girl from another bishoujo game,” Yumi-waru explained. “It seems you should know that, since it seems like you’d play those things.”

“Bitch,” Yuta muttered. Then to the thug he said, “Continue.”

“Then I influenced the gang to travel to Compost, where you suspected that we would run into the two adventurers. Uh... I guess we did. They killed Sardul, wiped out the gang, and if I understand the way things work, they now have Kana and Anna.”

“Are they still in Compost?” Yuta asked.

“As far as I know,” the thug replied.

“Good,” chortled Yuta. “Now we can act. Yumi-waru, it’s about time for your entrance...”

**Next: To Market, To Market...**

## Part Six: To Market, To Market...

The room in Old Widow Hatchet's boarding house was not exactly the height of luxury. In fact, in the eyes of Wolfson and Darkling, it looked like it had just barely taken a couple of wheezing steps past squalor, decided that it had gone quite far enough, and collapsed there on the spot to expire. But, since the price was right, Wolfson and Darkling accepted the room for what it was worth. Besides, Compost offered very little in the way of lodgings in the first place.

Wolfson sat on a rickety chair near the shuttered opening that passed for a window and smoked a pipe, as he watched Anna entertain herself with the heroes' deck of cards on the floor. He liked the way her vest let him just catch glimpses of her pert breasts as she leaned over and her short leather skirt allowed him to admire her slim legs.

Darkling perched on one of the cots and examined a sword that had formerly belonged to a Shadow Reaver, while Kana sat at his feet and worked a braid into her hair at each temple—something that Darkling had requested. He was a little more agitated than his older companion, but that was nothing new in their long relationship.

"We really could have used the money," he complained.

"Well, we can still sell a couple of those swords off for a little extra coin," Wolfson easily replied.

"Hmph," Darkling snorted. "We'll be lucky to get much of anything for these pieces of junk. They obviously didn't know how to take care of a weapon. Pity we couldn't have carried more of them with us. And I *still* think it was damn inconvenient of them not to have any money on them."

"I'm sorry, oniichan," Kana said quietly.

"Huh?" Darkling responded in some surprise. "What are you talking about?"

"They spent all of their money buying Anna and myself."

"Then *I'd* say we ended up with a pretty fair deal," Wolfson interjected as he admired Anna one more time. Anna, sensing both his look and his meaning, glanced up at him with a smile and then went back to her game.

"Well, yeah," admitted Darkling, letting his own gaze wander down to the girl at his feet.

"Besides," continued Wolfson, "most of the townsfolk are so gratified at us having disposed of the Shadow Reavers that money isn't an immediate issue for some things. We're getting our lodging for free, after all."

"Woo-hoo," said Darkling half-heartedly as he considered their surroundings. "Their charity isn't going to last forever, you know."

"No, but I wasn't planning on retiring here, either."

"Okay, then," Darkling asked, "what's next?"

"I thought that *you* were going to make the next plan," teased Wolfson.

"I meant the next *battle* plan," Darkling said wryly. "Do you have any long-term ideas?"

"Not off-hand. But in the immediate future, I think we should get to the marketplace before it gets too late."

"What's up?" inquired Darkling.

"Well," Wolfson replied, "we want to get rid of those swords and get a little extra money. And I want to find something other than that heavy collar and chain that Sardul was using for Anna. I prefer something a little lighter and a little subtler. And I suspect that you'll want to do the same."

"Ah," Darkling replied.

"And who knows," added Wolfson. "Even in a town like Compost, we might find something interesting."

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Although the afternoon was growing late, the marketplace was still busy. As they moved through its confines, the four of them drew the same sort of attention as might a pair of well-armed and reasonably dressed warriors leading a couple of lovely and scantily clad slave girls through a crowd of relatively poor and inbred commoners. Which wasn't too far off the mark. As well, rumors of Wolfson and Darkling wiping out the Shadow Reaver gang by themselves had most people treating them much as a traffic accident—something to be gawked at, but only from a safe distance.

The girls, for their part, having never had any real opportunity to visit a marketplace, found it to be terribly exciting (Wolfson and Darkling, on the other hand, giving it about a 'two' on the Thrill-o-Meter), and had the heroes been in a position to indulge their new slaves, they would have found themselves purchasing almost every bauble, trinket and Hello Kitty plush toy in sight.

At a used weapons shop, Darkling traded the swords they had plundered from the fallen Shadow Reavers for a few shillings. As expected, they couldn't get much for the poor quality weapons, but Wolfson and Darkling both suspected that the shopkeeper didn't haggle them down as far as he might have.

Then, at a booth that dealt in such things, Wolfson managed to talk the shopkeeper into trading the iron collars and chains that Kana and Anna were wearing for a pair of leather collars and leashes. Fortunately, Darkling, having been thorough in his attempt to loot the Shadow Reavers, had stumbled across the keys to the locks on the collars. The shopkeeper tried to convince Wolfson and Darkling to buy some other slave girl outfits that he had, but both the heroes were content to save their money and let the girls keep wearing the leather vests and miniskirts that they had on. *Besides*, Wolfson thought as he glanced at Anna, *I'm not sure that I could do much better than that.*

As the sun began riding low in the sky, the four of them made their way back through the twists and turns of the marketplace. The smell of something cooking suddenly tickled their noses.

"I'm hungry, Oukami-sama," Anna suddenly said.

"Hmmm..." pondered Wolfson as his stomach growled. "Come to think of it, it's been a while since *I've* eaten, too. What do you think, Dark?"

Darkling paused to consider for a moment. "Well, we could probably get free food if we went back to the boarding house. But whatever's cooking right now *does* smell good." He glanced at Kana, who was looking at him with big violet eyes, and made up his mind. "Okay, let's go eat."

Anna let out a little cry of delight, and the quartet started out in search of the source of the savory smell.

As they headed down the avenue, Darkling suddenly stopped. "Holy Mother of Lambult!" he exclaimed.

The other three stopped to look at him. Wolfson noted that his gaze seemed to be riveted off to the right somewhere, so he followed it.

Coming down a side road was a pretty young woman riding on a white palfrey, her brown hair hanging loosely around her shoulders. She wore black trousers and a close-fitting, red silk tunic that was cut in a kind of Chinese style, so that it was closed off at the neck but accentuated the shape of her full, round breasts quite nicely. Wolfson decided that must be what had got Darkling's attention. He liked that sort of thing.

"She's hot," Darkling commented. "Look at her breasts!"

"Yeah," Wolfson admitted. "She's pretty. But I *still* prefer small breasts."

"Does Kurai-sama prefer large breasts?" Kana asked, somewhat sullenly.

Darkling and Wolfson looked over at Kana, who was looking downward—although Wolfson wasn't sure if she was simply being downcast, or examining her *own* breasts, which were not very large.

"Uh... yeah. I mean, no... er... well," Darkling stammered. "What I mean is that I like *yours* just fine." But he glanced back up at the mysterious woman who was just riding by. She smiled a charming smile at the two heroes, and then turned and continued up the avenue. "Hoo, boy," Darkling muttered.

"..." Kana said.

"Well, *I'm* glad that Oukami-sama likes *small* breasts," chimed Anna with a smile.

"We'd better get our dinner," suggested Wolfson diplomatically.

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After eating, the four of them headed out of the restaurant and turned up the avenue to make their way home. Evening was starting to set in. Wolfson wasn't sure how long Kana and Darkling were going to be at odds.

Suddenly, a lady's scream split the evening air.

Both Wolfson and Darkling drew their weapons and headed in the scream's direction. Not far away, they found the mysterious woman cornered by a group of six nasty-looking ruffians.

"No!" she cried. "Leave me alone!"

"Heh, heh, heh!" said one of the assaulters in a most unpleasant sort of way.

"I think you should do as she says," suggested Wolfson.

The would-be attackers turned and looked at Darkling and Wolfson standing there with drawn weapons. Then they quickly slunk off, melting away like so many snowmen on a hot summer's afternoon.

"Thank you," the woman sighed, brushing a stray lock of hair out of her eyes.

"Not at all," the heroes replied.

"But I must repay you... I have a castle not far from here. Let me invite you as my guests," she offered, with a disarming smile.

"That's not really necessary..." Wolfson began, only to be interrupted by a sharp elbow in the ribs from Darkling.

"You *want* to stay in that pathetic excuse of a boarding house?" he asked incredulously.

"Well, not really, but..."

"We accept your kind offer," Darkling replied to the woman.

**Next: Come Into My Parlor...**

## Part Seven: Come Into My Parlor...

Night was falling over the land as three horses made their way down the road from Compost. The lead horse sported one rider, while the two following behind carried two riders apiece—one larger and one smaller. One of the larger riders on one of the following horses was Wolfson, and he had some private misgivings about the current situation. Not actually about riding the horses down the road. He'd done that sort of thing plenty of times.

*Something just doesn't feel right*, he thought. Well, it couldn't be Anna. She felt just fine with her small body nestled up against his back. No, it had more to do with how pat the whole thing seemed to be. The woman was just a little too friendly, and a little too accommodating. And something about her seemed really familiar...

"By the way," he ventured, "what did you say your name was?"

"Fuyuko," she answered.

"Ah," Wolfson replied. "It's just that it seems like I should know you. Have I met you before?"

"Ah-ha-ha!" Fuyuko laughed awkwardly. "No... I just have one of those 'familiar' faces. I get that all the time."

"Ah," Wolfson replied again.

Silence descended back onto the party, much like that last guest who just doesn't know when to leave. Wolfson thought some more. Darkling was usually a little more cautious in most of their dealings. He suspected that Darkling had been swayed by a combination of being sick of the situation in Compost, and a full pair of breasts surmounted by a pretty face. For that matter, when they had returned to where they had left the girls with Fuyuko in tow, and Darkling had announced that they were going to her castle as guests, Kana had become even more disgruntled than before—if that were possible. *Oh well*, Wolfson sighed inwardly, *he's a big boy and can handle his personal dealings by himself*.

Before long, the castle came into view. *Cripes, that's an ugly piece of work!* thought Wolfson.

As if reading his mind, Fuyuko commented, "It's not much to look at, but it's home. Actually, I think it's downright ugly."

"It reminds me of something," Darkling observed.

"A large, fat goblin squatting on a hill to take a crap?" suggested Wolfson.

"Yes," agreed Darkling. "I'm pretty sure that's it."

Wolfson could practically hear Darkling's mind wondering if he'd just gotten them into worse accommodations than Old Widow Hatchet's boarding house. Not that much could be done about it right now—it was getting too dark to travel safely.

At the gate, Fuyuko called out, "I'm back... and I've brought some guests!" The old iron portcullis groaned as it slowly rose off the ground, and continued to complain noisily the entire time it opened—apparently unamused at having been disturbed when it was just getting dark enough to get to sleep. Three horses and five riders entered the castle.

After everyone had dismounted and as the horses were being led off by a couple of gray-clad soldiers, Fuyuko said, "Let me show you to your rooms."

She led everyone through a rather spartan great hall, which didn't do much to raise either Wolfson's or Darkling's hopes that their accommodations would prove to be very comfortable. But the rooms that they were led to—although small—proved to be amply furnished, and the beds looked to be far more comfortable than the cots they had been going to be sleeping on at the boarding house. Some misgivings began to disappear.

"If you need anything," Fuyuko smiled, "just ask." And she retreated down the narrow hallway.

Wolfson eyed Anna for a moment and said, "I think I'm going to... uh... unwind a little bit."

Anna felt his gaze, glanced up at him, and smiled a little mischievously. "Hai, Oukami-sama!"



Darkling, for his part, was looking at the still-sullen Kana, and said, “Yeah... live it up. I’m going to a bilateral summit in order to enter into some diplomatic negotiations to try to smooth over some... misunderstandings.”

“I’m sure you’ll do fine,” Wolfson reassured him with a wink.

Both pairs went into their respective chambers.

Inside Wolfson’s room, Anna promptly flopped down onto the bed and squealed in delight. “Oh! It’s so soft and comfortable, Oukami-sama!”

“Good,” Wolfson replied with a smile, as he sat on a chair and started working his boots off. “It’ll make things more fun, I’m sure.”

Anna giggled. Then she asked, “Oukami-sama?”

“Hmmm?”

“Do you *really* like smaller breasts?”

Wolfson looked up at her, and saw that she had unlaced her vest so that it now hung open, exposing her small, ripe mounds and pink nipples. He felt a stirring in his loins and swallowed hard.

“Er... yes,” he answered truthfully. “Very much.” He was trying to remember what it was he had been doing.

At that moment, there came a knock at the door.

“Geez,” muttered Wolfson to himself with some annoyance. “It’s got to be a salesman. Only *they* have such impeccable timing.” He got up, went to the door and cracked it open. A gray-clad soldier was standing there. “Yes?” Wolfson asked.

“The lady requests your company,” the soldier answered.

*Swell*, thought Wolfson. “I’ll be with you in a moment. I’ve got to put my boots back on.” He closed the door, and went back to the chair.

“Oukami-sama?” Anna spoke up.

“Hmmm?”

“Are you going to have sex with her?” she asked.

“What?”

“Are you going to have sex with her?” Anna repeated.

“No!” Wolfson answered firmly.

“Are you sure?” Anna pressed.

Wolfson got up, went over to the bed, and sat down next to her. Then he pulled out a sheaf of notes and thumbed through them. “Here,” he said. ““Wolfson goes to Evil Yumi’s bed chambers. Evil Yumi tries to seduce Wolfson. Wolfson resists’ ... It’s in the notes, okay?”

Anna looked at Wolfson with a confused expression. “But I thought her name was Fuyuko.”

“Yes.”

“But you just said—” she started.

“But we don’t *know* that,” explained Wolfson.

“But you just said—” she started again.

“Aht!” Wolfson interrupted and raised a hand to cut her off.

“But—”

“Aht!” Wolfson cut her off again.

Anna stared up at him with big brown eyes, confusion written all over her face.

“Look,” explained Wolfson gently. “If we *knew* what was going on, it wouldn’t make for much of a story, would it? ‘Heroes ride into town. Heroes avoid villain’s plan. Heroes ride out of town. The end.’”

“I guess not,” Anna admitted, looking down at the floor.

“I’m sure we’ll have some fun later.” Wolfson smiled at her. “Now, be a good girl, and keep the bed warm.”

“Hai, Oukami-sama!” She giggled, and flopped down prone on the bed.

Wolfson got up and left the room.

Moments later, two gray-clad soldiers burst in.

“Wha...!” Anna started in surprise.

They had her gagged and bound before she could even cry out.

*This really sucks!* she thought. *Oukami-sama, help me!*

The soldier led Wolfson to a door and left him there. Wolfson paused a moment and then knocked.

“Come in,” Fuyuko responded.

Wolfson entered the chamber to see the voluptuous Fuyuko clad only in a sheer red silken gown as she reclined on her bed and smiled at him. Her luminous blue eyes gleamed in the soft light from the fireplace.

**Next: Something Smells Rotten In The State Of Denmark...**

## Part Eight: Something Smells Rotten In The State Of Denmark...

Darkling paced. In the small confines of his bedchamber, that was actually no mean feat. Occasionally, he risked a glance at Kana, who was quietly sitting on the one chair that occupied the room and looking at the floor. He paced some more.

*Geez, I hate dealing with women,* he thought to himself. *Why can't she figure out that I actually like her? So what if Fuyuko has larger breasts? I didn't take on ten guys to get a hold of Fuyuko. Damn!*

He tried pacing louder for better effect. All that succeeded in doing was to cause Kana to flinch a little. No other reaction. Other than the fact that it hurt his feet.

*Wait a minute!* he thought. *She's my slave... I could order her to forgive me!*

After a moment's reflection, he decided that maybe that was being just a little *too* unreasonable.

"Oniichan?" Kana suddenly spoke up quietly.

The silence had been so intense that Darkling nearly jumped in surprise at the sound. "Uh... yeah?" he replied as he stopped pacing and turned to look at her. She was still looking at the floor.

"I know her."

The non sequitur caught Darkling completely off guard. "Huh? Who?" he asked in confusion.

"The girl who brought us here," Kana answered.

"Wha?" Darkling blinked. "What do you mean?"

"She was in the same bishoujo game that I was in," Kana explained.

Suddenly, wheels in Darkling's head that had been spinning in neutral ever since he had first seen that pretty face and those gorgeous breasts snapped into gear and began doing some serious work. He suddenly got a bad feeling that something wasn't right, and that they may have just walked into some deep trouble.

"Why didn't you *say* something?" he demanded.

"I... thought that maybe she was what you wanted," Kana confessed.

"Oh, for crying out loud." Darkling sighed in exasperation. "Look, I *told* you that I like you just fine. I mean... Hell! I threw myself in front of ten guys with swords in order to get you. I wouldn't have done that if I hadn't thought you were pretty."

"Really?" Kana asked, finally looking up at him with a hopeful expression.

"Believe me," said Darkling earnestly. He went over and grabbed his katana from the nightstand.

Kana gave him a worried look. "What's wrong, oniichan?" she asked.

"I'm not sure," Darkling admitted. "But that woman obviously wanted to keep her identity from us and lure us back here for some reason. I'd bet my left testicle that those thugs were just a setup." He finished girding on the blade.

Kana had some private thoughts about what Yumi-waru's motives might be, but decided to keep them to herself.

"Look," Darkling continued. "I need to try and find out what's *really* going on. You stay here until I come back, understand?"

"Yes, oniichan." Kana nodded, worry filling her violet eyes.

Darkling quietly slipped out of the room.

Wolfson swallowed hard. Despite his protestations that he preferred smaller breasts, he was only human. So it didn't mean that he *didn't* like a nice pair of larger breasts—especially if they were well-shaped and firm. From what he could see, Fuyuko's breasts were well-shaped and firm, and he could make out the darkness of

her nipples through the sheer material of her gown... as well as another inviting patch of darkness just at the point where her legs began to curl around. He swallowed again.

"You can close the door," Fuyuko suggested.

Wolfson realized that he was still just standing there in the doorway. Common sense told him that he should probably just run away very quickly, but he figured that might offend his hostess, so he told common sense to take a hike for a bit and just stepped inside, closing the door.

"Would you like some wine?" she asked as she got up and went over to a decanter and two goblets. Wolfson could clearly see the silhouette of her body against the firelight through the thin silk, and the sway of her breasts as she walked.

"Uh... I suppose it would be impolite to refuse the offer," he replied.

"Quite." Fuyuko smiled at him, and then turned to pour the wine. A moment later she glided up to Wolfson and handed him one of the goblets. "To first encounters," she said.

"There have been plenty of *those* today," Wolfson admitted as he touched his goblet to hers. He refrained from chugging the contents down as he felt like doing, and took a long sip instead.

Fuyuko took Wolfson's other hand and led him over to the bed, where she had him sit, and sat down next to him.

"You're a *very* intriguing man, Wolfson-san," she commented.

"Oh?" Wolfson replied noncommittally.

"You seem more experienced and less rash than your younger companion," Fuyuko explained.

"Anna or Darkling?" asked Wolfson.

Fuyuko laughed. "I meant Darkling."

Now it was Wolfson's turn to laugh. "That's odd... Usually *I'm* the one who's accused of being the impetuous one."

"Do you *really* favor her?" she suddenly asked.

"Now I assume you're talking about Anna," Wolfson replied. "Yeah... she flips my switches."

"Wouldn't you prefer someone a little more... mature?" Fuyuko inquired.

"Like you." Wolfson filled in the blank.

"Like me," Fuyuko agreed.

"Well, I have to admit that seeing you under these circumstances gets my blood circulating..." confessed Wolfson.

Suddenly, Fuyuko pulled the goblet out of Wolfson's hand and set both goblets on the nightstand. Then she pushed Wolfson down on the bed so that she was on top of him with her hair falling down around her face, and begged, "Then take me... Make love to me!"

At that moment, a scene from a bishoujo game came unbidden to Wolfson's mind... a girl in a towel astride the protagonist in an effort to get him to have sex with her.

"Your name's not really Fuyuko, is it?" he asked her without moving.

"What makes you say that?" She answered his question with a question.

"You're Yumi, aren't you," he calmly told her.

"Evil Yumi," she bitterly replied. "Does this mean you won't have sex with me?"

"I wasn't planning on it..." Wolfson admitted, and started to sit back up.

"Oh, well," Yumi-waru sighed. "Then I guess I won't give you the antidote for the knockout poison."

"What knockout poison?" asked Wolfson.

"The one I put in your drink," Yumi-waru answered.

“Ah,” Wolfson replied. Then he passed out.

As Kana sat quietly in Darkling’s room and waited, she was suddenly disturbed by a knock on the door. With a little hesitation, she went over and opened it up. She found herself confronted by a gray-clad soldier.

“The lady requests Darkling-sama’s company,” he announced.

Kana’s heart skipped a beat. “Uh... he went off in search of a privy,” she lied.

“I see,” the soldier replied. Then he turned and walked away.

Kana closed the door and leaned against it with a sigh. Her heart was making a valiant attempt to escape through her esophagus, and she tried to calm herself down. She hoped that the soldier believed her. She wasn’t very good at passing off lies—it just wasn’t in her nature, and she knew it.

She went over to the bed and lay down, continuing her lone vigil for Darkling. It occurred to her that she wasn’t very happy that Yumi-waru was asking for him, and bad thoughts kept frolicking around her head, asking for an audience.

Some little while later, the door opened, and she sat up, looking over hopefully. Then she let out a gasp.

“Surprised to see me, Kana?” Yuta asked with a sneer.

**Next: And A Room With A View...**

## Part Nine: And A Room With A View...

From a deep, black pit of oblivion, Wolfson slowly began to rise back up to reality. *So this is what it's like to be born, eh?* he vaguely thought. *Hell of a lot of dizziness involved in it, if you ask me.* He forced his eyes open, and then spent a few entertaining minutes uncrossing them so that the double vision would go away. As he realized that he was lying on a rather uncomfortable slab of cold stone, he slowly sat up and took stock of his surroundings.

He was sitting on the floor of a rather small stone cell that was sealed off by a wall of bars on one side. A moldering pile of straw was in one corner, providing the only thing that passed for accommodations in the room. There were no windows, but a lantern some little ways down the corridor provided enough illumination for him to see by—enough to see a similar cell across the corridor from him, and its grinning occupant. Wolfson's imprisoned companion's cheerful demeanor was somewhat lessened, however, by his rather emaciated and decayed overall appearance.

*Swell*, Wolfson thought to himself. *You know, Yumi is actually rather attractive—especially in that flimsy red negligee. Maybe I should have just gone for the 'sex' option... If only Anna weren't so damn cute...* He sighed. *They could have at least given me my pipe.* Then it occurred to him to wonder what might have happened to the others, and he started to worry a bit...

As much as Darkling hated to admit it, he had the feeling that he was lost.

He was definitely sure that there was a problem, though. When he had gone to Wolfson's room and found that it was empty, his suspicions had gelled. Although there had been a brief moment, when Wolfson hadn't answered the door and Darkling was about to burst in, that he was worried that he would just find himself confronted with his older companion's bare ass in the air as he had his way with Anna. That would have explained why no-one answered the door. But instead the room had been empty, and Darkling was lost.

Well, it hadn't started out that way. The upper floors of the keep were easy enough to get around in—Darkling just had to make sure that he avoided the occasional soldier and kept his movements stealthy. But then he had found his way below the keep, and discovered a veritable labyrinth had been dug out beneath it.

"Why does everybody have to construct a maze for a dungeon?" he muttered to himself. Well, at least the current owner hadn't seen fit to populate the place with all sorts of fell and dangerous monsters for whatever reason, so he didn't have to stop and fight something in every other chamber. On the other hand, no monsters meant no treasure—bad luck there—and also, the whole place started looking much the same after a while. Hence the reason that Darkling was feeling a little lost.

Darkling's voice must have carried, because a voice suddenly drifted down the corridor, asking, "Dark, is that you?"

Darkling readied his katana and countered with, "Who's there?"

"Jackie Chan," came the sarcastic reply.

"Wolf, is that you?" Darkling asked in surprise as he started down the corridor. He came to a row of small cells, and found his older companion sitting in one of them. "What are you doing here?" He lowered his blade.

"Oh, well, you know... Just relaxing and soaking up the atmosphere," replied Wolfson with feigned nonchalance. "Did you take out the guards and get the keys?" he inquired.

"Uh... there *weren't* any guards. Or keys," Darkling informed him.

"Aw, geez... Who the hell builds a dungeon like that?" grouched Wolfson.

"I've been asking myself the same question," Darkling commiserated.

"If I had a heavy sword, I could *Thunder Slash* my way out of here," Wolfson said, thoughtfully.

"I didn't think to bring your sword with me," Darkling admitted, "but I *might* be able to find my way back and get it."

“All right. It’s not like I’m going anywhere. By the way, where are Anna and Kana?”

“Kana’s in my room,” said Darkling. “Uh... I’m not sure where Anna is. She wasn’t in your room when I went there.” Seeing Wolfson’s worried expression, he added, “I wouldn’t sweat it, though... she probably just stepped out to go to the ladies’. I’m sure she’s okay.”

“Yeah,” agreed Wolfson, unconvinced. “Get going, and hurry up.”

Darkling nodded and quickly, but quietly, headed back up the corridor. Wolfson leaned back against the wall once more and continued to fret...

Yuta was particularly fond of this room. It filled him with a sense of warmth. Maybe it had to do with the large brazier that was filled with hot coals busily heating various instruments of poking and burning. He was also fond of the whips and chains and manacles. In fact, he was especially fond of the manacles right now, because they were busy holding fast a very naked and very frightened Kana. The fact that they were also busy holding fast another very naked, although somewhat more annoyed, young girl was just an added bonus. Tonight was going to be fun, he told himself.

Yuta walked over to where Kana was shackled against the wall, leering at her pale skin and small, pert breasts. She stared at him with wide, fearful eyes, uncertain of what to expect from him. He reached out and flicked one of her lovely pink nipples, and she let out a gasp of surprise. Tears began to well up in her violet eyes. Then he let his gaze slide down her slim belly and to the soft brown hair that nestled at the top of her slender legs. Yes, she was just as he imagined.

“I don’t know *why* you turned me down,” he finally said.

“It just wasn’t right,” she replied, in a trembling voice.

“Oh.” Yuta let sarcasm drip off of his words. “But it was *right* to make it with your *brother*?”

“He wasn’t really my brother,” Kana protested.

“Well, I *still* don’t see what the skinny jerk had that *I* don’t have.” Yuta glowered at her until she looked down.

“If you two are going to be a while, you could let me down so I could just go and get a soda, or something,” Anna suggested.

Yuta turned to her in annoyance. “Shut up, little girl!”

“I’m *not* a little girl,” Anna said indignantly. “I’m an *adult*.”

Yuta stepped over to her and eyed her lithe body hungrily. “Well, you’ve got the right parts, anyway. Besides, I’ve got *plans* for you.”

Anna glared at him. “You’d better be careful what you do. Oukami-sama will kick your butt.”

“Yes, yes,” Yuta sighed. “I’m familiar with the Sardul thing.” Then he gave Anna an evil sneer. “But I don’t think your precious Wolfson is in any position to interfere. Besides, even if he *did* somehow manage to do so, I’ve got a little secret contingency plan.”

Anna perked up. “A secret? Really? What is it?”

“If I *told* you, it wouldn’t be much of a *secret*, now, would it?” Yuta said in exasperation.

“I don’t think you really *have* a secret,” Anna accused.

“Yes I do,” Yuta rebutted in annoyance.

“No you don’t,” Anna replied with conviction.

“Yes I do!” Yuta snarled at her.

“Don’t.”

“Do!”

Suddenly, a giggle escaped from Kana. Yuta looked in her direction and growled, “What?”

“You’re so immature, Yuta,” she accused, trying to hide a smile.

“I am not!” Yuta protested angrily.

“Are too,” Anna asserted.

“Am *not!*” he shouted at her.

“As many differences as I have with Kana,” Yumi-waru commented from the other side of the chamber, “I’m afraid I have to take her side in this matter. You’re a childish little creep.”

“Waah!” Yuta started in surprise and whirled around to face her. “What are you doing here?” he demanded.

Yumi-waru had pulled a red satin robe on over her silk gown, in order to cover up all the good bits, and was standing at the entrance to Yuta’s pleasure dome, leaning against the door. “I just came to see how the interrogation was proceeding. I can see that you’re progressing with all of your usual focus and flair.”

Yuta glared at her. *Bitch*, he thought, and briefly considered the possibility of adding a third naked and helpless female to his collection on the wall. “I was getting there. I just had to loosen the prisoners up a bit.”

“Of course,” Yumi-waru agreed, airily.

Yuta favored her with a few more moments of icy glare, and then said, “If you’re going to watch, then don’t disturb me.” He turned back to the two naked girls in the manacles. Reaching over to a small table filled with various implements, he picked up a leather riding crop, and since he was in front of Anna, he decided that he’d start with her. He reached out with the tip of the crop and poked her in one of her soft little breasts.

“Hey!” she squealed.

“Now,” Yuta suggested, “tell me about the Amulet of Zarstat.”

**Next: Behind Every Cloud...**



## Part Ten: Behind Every Cloud...

Some time had passed, and it would be fair to say that nobody in Yuta's pleasure dome was very happy.

Kana and Anna were obviously not happy, as could demonstrably be seen by the tears in their eyes and the rather unhappy cries and protestations that they continued to make. Some of their unhappiness stemmed from the fact that they were still chained naked to an uncomfortable stone wall, but most of their unhappiness could be said to come from the fact that Yuta kept poking and prodding them in their most sensitive and tender—and sometimes rather private—areas, while asking them questions to which they simply didn't have the answers. They both wished that he would just stop and let them go.

Yuta Conycatcher was clearly not happy, as could be gathered by the way that he periodically stopped and paced in front of the two girls while scowling and muttering to himself. His unhappiness pretty much stemmed from the fact that he wasn't getting the information that he wanted, and he found that he wasn't having quite as much fun as he thought he would. He was pretty annoyed that something as obviously magical as the Amulet of Zarstat had seemed to go totally unnoticed by both girls—either that, or they were still hiding something. Which only made him more angry, and ergo less happy.

Yumi-waru, who was watching the proceedings fairly impassively, was a little harder to read. But she wasn't happy, either. In fact, she was growing rather more disgusted with Yuta by the minute as she watched him poke, pinch, prod and fondle the two girls in his so-called effort to interrogate them. She half-expected him to stop and choke his monkey at any moment—a thought that she found suddenly turned her stomach. She realized that she felt sorry for the two girls hanging there, and that this certainly wasn't the way to inflict payback on Kana. As she thought about what a perverted little creep Yuta really was, something inside of her snapped, and she quietly left the room.

Wolfson sat on the floor and waited.

He would have liked to have said that he was waiting patiently, but the fact of the matter was that he wished that Darkling would hurry his butt up and get back with Wolfson's sword. He was worried about Anna, and he was worried that maybe Darkling had run into trouble along the way...

Finally, he heard the sound of someone approaching down the corridor.

"Is that you, Dark?" he inquired.

"Sorry to disappoint you," Yumi-waru answered as she appeared in front of the cell. She was still wearing the silk gown with the satin robe pulled over it. She was also carrying Wolfson's sword.

Wolfson sighed. "What do *you* want?"

"You don't have to sound so happy to see me." She pouted. "I've just come to let you out of here." She produced a set of keys and began unlocking the cell.

"What?" Wolfson asked incredulously. "Why?"

"Because, in spite of the fact that you turned me down, I like you better than Yuta."

Wolfson's head reeled for a moment. "Conycatcher's here, too?"

"Yeah," Yumi-waru replied. She finished unlocking the cell and opened it up. As Wolfson stood, she walked in and handed him his sword.

As he girded it on, he told her, "You know, it's not that I don't like you..."

She suddenly threw her arms around him and asked, "Then why did you write Anna into the story? It could have just been Kana and me. Darkling could still have her, and I could have been *your* slave... I'd have given you head, too." As if to prove the point, she reached down with one hand and began gently stroking Wolfson between his legs.

Wolfson's boy reacted, and in spite of himself, he found himself reaching beneath her robe and fondling the fullness of one of her breasts and playing with a large, hard nipple through the sheer silk. She let out a small gasp of pleasure.

"I'm sure you would have," Wolfson agreed. "But you are too strong-willed and independent. You deserve a better position than that of a slave... You'd make a lousy slave girl." He realized that he was in danger of getting lost in the pleasure, and let go of her breast, moving his hand down to gently remove hers from his crotch. "If I'm going to accomplish anything, I'd better get going."

Yumi-waru let out a little groan of disappointment. "Do you think we'll ever meet again?" she asked.

Wolfson considered the question for a moment, and then replied, "I'm pretty sure that we will."

"Does that mean a sequel?" she inquired, looking up at him with a slight smile and a little gleam in her blue eyes.

"Perhaps," Wolfson hedged.

"Will you write us into a sex scene?" Yumi-waru prodded.

Wolfson smiled a secret kind of smile. "We'll see."

She continued looking into his eyes for a moment, searching for something. Then she pulled Wolfson toward her and gave him a long and passionate kiss.

As she released him, she suddenly said, "If you're going to help those girls, you'd better get going."

"Where *am* I going?" Wolfson asked.

Yumi-waru gave him the shortcut directions to Yuta's pleasure dome.

Wolfson stepped out of the cell, and started down the corridor. Then he stopped and looked back at her. "You'd better take the opportunity to change and get out of here, Yumi."

"Evil Yumi," she corrected him.

"No. Just Yumi." And he jogged off down the corridor, leaving Yumi to stand there for a moment with her thoughts and a small, happy smile.

"The *least* they could do is put up signs," Darkling muttered to himself as he found himself in yet another empty, nameless chamber with several exits. "Of course, none of these rooms seem to serve any purpose, so I'm not sure what the sign maker would *call* any of them," he grumbled. He had given up all pretense of stealth, having encountered nothing but corridors and empty chambers for... however long he'd been down here. Of course, it occurred to him, it might be that he was just going in big circles, forever entering the same chambers over and over again.

Suddenly, he heard something. It sounded like the cry of a girl, so he became absolutely still and silent, listening to see if it came again so that he could get some bearing on it. Instead, he heard what sounded like the angry yell of a man. *Good enough*, he thought. *Well, no. Not good at all, but you know what I mean.*

Moving quickly and quietly in the direction of what became the ever-increasing noise of cries and yells, he eventually stumbled into a chamber. On the one hand, it was kind of a relief, since this chamber obviously served some kind of purpose. On the other hand, it looked like something out of pervert's paradise, and... Seeing Kana chained naked to the wall filled Darkling with a searing, hot anger.

"*You!*" Darkling yelled at the man in the severe gray tunic who was currently standing in front of Anna and pinching her nipples.

"*Waah!*" the man replied, spinning around.

"Conycatcher?" Darkling asked in surprise.

An evil smile stretched across Yuta's face. "Ah... it appears that my prayers have been answered."

Darkling was confused. "You've been praying that someone would come here and kick your ass?"

In response, Yuta replied, "*Yale!*", then reached over to a rope and pulled it.

Darkling was quickly becoming convinced that perhaps Yuta had lost his mind somewhere. "Uh... what was *that* all about?"

“I’ve just activated the lockdown sequence on the Amulet of Zarstat and summoned my soldiers,” Yuta explained.

“Huh?”

“I don’t intend to fight you myself, and I don’t intend for you to be able to use that amulet to any effect. So I’ve summoned soldiers to deal with you, and I’ve neutralized the amulet.” Yuta smirked.

“It figures... Even the wuss in that game was able to beat your ass.” But just in case, Darkling tried. “*Zippo!*” Nothing happened. “By the way, have I mentioned what a prick I think you are?”

“I think you mentioned it in one of your emails,” Yuta answered with some annoyance.

“Just making sure.” Darkling readied his katana. “Well, I can *still* deal with you before your soldiers get here.”

“Kick him between the legs once before you kill him,” a teary-eyed Anna suggested from her manacles.

“Oniichan, look out!” Kana cried from her spot on the wall.

““Oniichan’?” Yuta spat out in disgust. “How pathetic.”

“Hey!” rebutted Darkling, a little defensively, as he looked around to see what Kana was trying to warn him about. “*I* happen to like it.” He saw that gray-clad soldiers were already pouring into the room. “Geez! How did they get here so fast?”

“It’s easy if you know the route,” Yuta explained.

“Swell,” Darkling opined as he turned to face the small horde of underlings who now threatened him. He realized that he was badly outnumbered.

**Next: By The Way, Have You Met My Friend...**

## Part Eleven: By The Way, Have You Met My Friend...

The horde of soldiers surged forward.

Darkling did a quick evaluation of the chamber, decided he had room, and then rushed to meet them with drawn katana. “*Chanbara Leap!*” he yelled, and sprang into the air, flying over the heads of the front ranks of soldiers. His katana came down in mid-jump, cleaving two enemy heads, before Darkling landed in the midst of several surprised warriors who hadn’t expected to deal with him so soon.

“Oniichan!” Kana cried.

“Shit,” Yuta snapped back at her. “Would you cut that out? It’s disgusting.”

“Not as much as you.” Anna glared at him.

Yuta tried to ignore her, and turned back to the melee, thinking, *That brat must be related to Yumi somehow.*

Darkling had become a veritable Cuisinart among the horde, whirling about with his katana. He sliced and slashed, while blocking blows, moving with incredible speed. He only hoped that he could keep it up long enough to survive. Several soldiers had gone down, but the mob was pressing in around him, and he worried that it would just be a matter of time.

As Wolfson jogged down the corridor, he became aware of the sounds of fighting up ahead. *That can’t be good*, he thought. He picked up his pace, and came to the opening of a chamber where a group of soldiers was engaged in watching what appeared to be a conflict in their midst. Since their opponent seemed to be so short, Wolfson had to assume that it was Darkling.

Drawing his longsword, Wolfson pushed his way into the throng of rather surprised soldiers. He grabbed the hilt of the sword with both hands, holding it point-downwards, and thrust it at the ground, yelling, “*Thunder Blast!*”

Darkling, hearing Wolfson’s yell, knew what was coming next, and dove to the ground.

A shockwave of elemental energy flashed outward from Wolfson in an expanding circle, throwing soldiers to the ground as it went. It dissipated after several meters, but had taken out a sizable chunk of the gray-clad fighting force in its wake. Wolfson moved over to where Darkling was quickly regaining his feet, sticking his longsword in the guts of an intervening soldier, who happened to still be standing, as he went.

“Oukami-sama’s so *cool!*” Anna chirped.

“Yay, I’m thrilled,” Yuta grumbled, obviously less than thrilled.

Wolfson and Darkling now stood back to back in order to take on the remaining soldiers, a few of whom threw themselves at the pair in a show of futile loyalty. But much of the fight had suddenly been knocked out of them, and within minutes, those who weren’t dead or incapacitated had fled, leaving the heroes alone to deal with Yuta.

“You know,” Darkling mentioned, “it’d be handy if *I* could do that elemental thing.”

“Get spiritual,” suggested Wolfson.

“Uh... no, thanks. I’m content with an agnostic outlook on life.”

“Then be content with your speed and your gimmicks.” Wolfson smiled at his companion.

They turned to face Yuta, who was standing in front of the girls, grinning like a maniac. Wolfson was very unamused to see Anna’s predicament. Darkling was still seething over Kana.

“What are *you* grinning about, asshole?” he growled. “We’re about to kick your ass from here to Cardon Bay!”

“Oh, I don’t think so,” Yuta purred. “You see, I still have one last secret left to deal with you two.”

“No you don’t,” Anna piped up.

“You shut up!” he snapped back at her. Anna fell into a sullen pout.

“I’d be careful how you treat her,” suggested Wolfson, a wicked gleam in his eyes. “You see, I’m rather fond of her.”

“Yeah, yeah... the *siscon* and the *lolicon*. What a pair.” Yuta made a disgusted face. Then he sneered at the heroes. “First you have to deal with my little friend.”

“He has a *friend*?” Darkling asked Wolfson, without taking his eyes off Yuta.

“Well, it takes all sorts,” Wolfson replied.

Yuta turned to the opening into an adjoining chamber and called out. “Kaminski!”

A large, muscular, dark-skinned man wearing a muscle t-shirt and trousers entered the room. He was bald, and his mouth had an odd shape to it... almost canine in its appearance. He gave a slight smile.

Wolfson blanched. “Oh, shit.”

“What?” asked Darkling, completely at a loss.

“Uh... I’m pretty sure that you didn’t play that game, but in most of its contexts, this guy wasn’t human,” Wolfson explained.

“Well, he doesn’t look much like an elf,” commented Darkling.

“No, you don’t understand... He’s a cybernetic or android construct. And he’s virtually unstoppable. The game had twenty-six endings, and in almost all of them you die a messy death.”

“What about the ones where you win? How do you beat him?” Darkling asked.

“Got a cybernetic implant with a built-in missile... or a handy android?” inquired Wolfson. “That’s how the protagonist in the game managed it.”

“Ah,” Darkling replied.

Wolfson readied his sword. “Nothing for it, then.” He stepped forward with a swinging motion and yelled, “*Thunder Slash!*” Elemental energy coalesced on his blade and lashed out at Kaminski, impacting him center mass.

The hulk just stood there, still smiling. “Electrical insulation,” he explained.

“Ah,” Wolfson replied.

**Next: You’ve Gotta Have Faith...**

## Part Twelve: You've Gotta Have Faith...

Kaminski produced a long, wicked-looking knife, and declared, "I'm gonna carve you do-gooder assholes up!"

"We're not all *that* good," Wolfson demurred.

Kaminski leaped forward with superhuman speed. Wolfson and Darkling both jumped in opposite directions as the girls let out small squeals of distress. The cyborg paused a moment, forced to choose which direction to turn.

"Oniichan, be careful," Kana pleaded.

"Ooooh!" Yuta seethed. "That does it! Kaminski, take out the short one first!"

Kaminski whirled on Darkling in a crouch.

"Get him now, Oukami-sama!" cheered Anna.

"Bah! Pest... I'll show you!" Yuta snarled at her. "Kaminski, take out the older one first, instead!"

Kaminski straightened up and yelled, "Hold it!"

Everyone stopped what they were doing for a moment and all eyes went to the dark-skinned giant. He turned to face Yuta with a glare. "If you don't shut up, I'm going to carve *you* up first, and *then* worry about these other punks."

Yuta blanched, and Darkling said, "I kind of like the first part of that idea, anyway." Yuta considered making a comment, but decided that Kaminski just might be serious.

"Put you in *your* place, mister pervert," Anna said smugly. Yuta steamed quietly and considered all the things that he would do to the little snot when this was all over with.

Kaminski turned his attention back to the matter at hand. "Now, where were we?"

"You were about to give up and go take up needlework," Wolfson tried.

"I don't think so," Kaminski responded as he crouched down and readied his blade. Suddenly, he lunged at Darkling with preternatural speed. Darkling rolled using every bit of agility he could muster. Still, he felt a sting along his arm, and heard Kana's gasp.

Wolfson leaped in at the cyborg while his attention was on Darkling, and brought his sword down. But by the time the blow struck, Kaminski was no longer there. Anna let out a little shriek, and intuitively Wolfson spun and stepped back. Kaminski's blade missed him by centimeters.

Darkling, knowing that wolf pack tactics were their only hope, dove in and swung his katana. He was rewarded with a hit, but to his dismay, the thick, metal plating that lay underneath Kaminski's sheath of human skin stopped the sword. "Damn!" he cursed, and spun back out of the way as a grinning Kaminski swung his blade down at him.

Several alternating attacks later, Wolfson and Darkling were sporting a few new gashes, and it was quite apparent that their swords lacked the cutting power to penetrate Kaminski's armored defenses. As they stood back on either side of the cyborg, panting, and waiting for his next attack, Darkling observed, "We're in trouble."

"I think I've got a plan," Wolfson responded.

Darkling dove out of the way of another slash and asked, "Well, what is it?"

Wolfson jumped in and tried another cut at Kaminski, which the cyborg easily evaded. "Pray," he answered.

"*What?*" Darkling yelped. "What kind of plan is that?" He was so flummoxed that he missed his chance to attack while Kaminski was concentrating on Wolfson.

"Uh... stay with me here," Wolfson reminded him as he frantically tried to avoid a series of blows. "Just trust me."

“Right,” Darkling sighed and lunged in for another futile attack. “What do you want me to do?”

As Kaminski turned his attention on Darkling, Wolfson replied, “Keep the big guy busy for a moment.”

“*What?*” Darkling yelled again. “He’ll tear me up!” Just to prove the point, Kaminski gave him another gash to the chest while he wasn’t paying enough attention.

“Just keep moving,” Wolfson encouraged him. “It’ll only take a moment.”

Darkling, as tired as he was, began a purely defensive engagement, using all the speed he could muster in order to weave, dodge and deflect blows while Kaminski kept coming at him with his tremendous strength and agility. Wolfson centered his ki. Then, in a sonorous voice, he cried, “In the name of the Great Matsuzaki, I invoke Ending VIII!”

There was a slight rumble, and Kaminski said, “What the...”

Darkling crouched in mid flinch, waiting for the next blow... which never came.

Wolfson walked over to the stunned Kaminski and neatly lopped off his head, producing quite a bit of blood in the process. Anna cried, “All right, Oukami-sama!”

Darkling straightened up and stared at Wolfson. “Okay... what the heck was *that* all about?”

“Well,” Wolfson explained, “that was the one ending I could think of where Kaminski didn’t do it—he was just an ordinary guy, and someone else was the villain.”

“Ah,” Darkling replied.

They turned their attention to Yuta, only to find that the spot in front of the two girls was unoccupied.

“Where’d he go?” Darkling wondered.

“About the time you guys started doing good, he started running real fast,” Anna explained.

“Well, that’s one thing that he’s actually good at,” Wolfson admitted.

Darkling grabbed a set of keys off a hook and released Kana from her bonds. She grabbed onto him tightly, and he stroked her hair while she softly cried. He tossed the keys over to Wolfson, who unlocked Anna. She also responded affectionately, throwing her arms around Wolfson and holding him tightly. “Oukami-sama,” she chirped, “you’re so cool!”

“Let’s go on upstairs and get some rest,” Wolfson suggested to everyone. “I’m beat.”

“Hopefully not *too* beat.” Anna looked up at him slyly, giving him a mischievous smile.

**Next: And They Lived Happily...**

## Part Thirteen: And They Lived Happily...

The tavern's common room was quiet and nearly empty. It was that time of day when only people who really didn't have anything to do would go and hang out in a tavern, and of the five occupants, the barkeep actually belonged there, so he didn't really count. Of course, he was sampling his own wares, so it was kind of hard to be sure. The other four people who weren't doing a very good job of filling the place up were seated at a table in a corner in two pairs—one male and one female each. At the moment, the men were both concentrating on a handful of cards.

Lardo, the barkeep, finished swigging down another mug of ale, and considered the group. The two adventurers had done the town of Compost the favor of ridding it of the scourge of the Shadow Reaver gang—something for which the barkeep would happily give the pair free drinks for the next few days, anyway. Of course, they had earned themselves the pair of cute girls that they were sitting with in the process, so he vaguely wondered if they hadn't already gotten enough reward.

"Lucky bastards," he muttered to himself as he topped off another ale.

Wolfson sat back in his chair, frowning at his cards as he stroked his goatee. Anna sat next to him and looked up at him with big brown eyes, her long hair hanging loosely down her back. Wolfson sighed. Darkling regarded him over the top of his cards and looked impatient. Kana sat next to Darkling, watching the proceedings with her large, violet eyes, a small braid of her long, brown hair adorning each temple.

"You're not very good at this game, are you, Oukami-sama?" Anna observed.

"I'm just forming a strategy," Wolfson responded, still concentrating on his cards.

"Why not ask him for a queen?" suggested Anna.

Wolfson fixed her with a gimlet stare. "Why not just show him my cards?" he asked.

Kana giggled, and Anna gave an embarrassed smile. "Oh yeah. This is like Old Maid, isn't it?"

As Wolfson let out another sigh, Darkling gave up, deciding that it might be quite some time before the game actually went on. So he asked, "What are we going to do about the amulet?"

"What about it?" Wolfson inquired, looking back at his cards.

"Yuta locked it up. Now it's just a unique piece of jewelry."

"So we'll just have to find a way to unlock it," Wolfson said, matter-of-factly.

"Great," muttered Darkling.

"Excuse me, oniichan," Kana spoke up, "but how did you find the magic word that you know?"

"We paid an enchanter a small fortune to divine us a magic word for the thing," explained Darkling, a little dryly. "Fat lot of good it does us... We don't have enough money to do the same thing, we apparently get a random word anyway, and it's just one word."

"Well," Wolfson commented, "I think the problem was that we asked him to divine us *a* magic word. Letter of the contract, and that sort of thing."

"Damn unions," groused Darkling. "Well, it's not an option this time, so we're stuck with a useless amulet. And it was one of my best tricks, too."

Kana looked at Darkling, who was obviously a little disgruntled. In the pause that followed, Anna stared at the two of them. Finally she asked, "Kana-chan, why don't you comfort him, or something?"

Darkling and Kana both blinked at her. Kana looked down and asked, "Uh... what do you mean?"

Anna looked at her blankly for a moment, and then replied, "You know... snuggle up to him. Make him feel like it's not so bad."

Kana blushed and said, "I don't know if oniichan wants me to do that sort of thing..."

"Well... uh..." Darkling stammered.



Anna blurted out, “Don’t tell me you two haven’t *done* it yet!” Wolfson looked up from his cards. This was getting too interesting to ignore.

“Well, no,” Kana admitted. “But—”

“But what?” Anna exploded, and then demanded, “Why not?”

“Because... I just don’t know if oniichan really—” Kana hesitantly began.

“Oh pooh!” Anna turned on Darkling. “Do you like Kana-chan, Kurai-sama?” she asked.

“Well, uh... yeah... I mean, of course I do...” replied Darkling, a little surprised to be put on the spot like this.

Anna looked back at Kana. “And don’t you like Kurai-sama?” she persisted.

“Well... yes,” Kana answered. “But, I’m not sure he really... I mean, I think he prefers...”

The light came on in Anna’s eyes, and she jumped up, startling everyone but Wolfson, who had already learned not to underestimate her precocious nature. “You’re still hung up about your breasts!” Anna declared with a knowing smile. She went to the other side of the table and reached around Kana, pulling up her vest to expose her pert white breasts and their hard pink nipples. Kana gave an embarrassed squeal. From the bar could be heard the sound of Lardo spraying out his most recent chug of ale. Darkling and Wolfson could only stare.

“Do you like them, Kurai-sama?” Anna asked. Kana was beet-red, and moved to cover herself up with her arms.

“Uh... yes,” Darkling admitted.

Anna looked a little annoyed. “Then don’t just sit there... Touch them!”

“What?” cried Darkling and Kana.

“You heard the girl,” said Wolfson with a little amusement. “Touch them.”

“Here?” cried Darkling and Kana. They stared at each other like a pair of deer caught in some transcendental headlight.

“Oh pooh!” Anna said again. “I guess I have to do everything.” She let go of Kana, who was still blushing and covering herself, and went back around the table, unlacing her own vest. She slid onto Wolfson’s lap and let her vest fall open, revealing her small, soft tits. Her pink nipples were also hard. Looking up at Wolfson coyly, she said, “Would *you* touch *my* breasts, Oukami-sama?”

“You’re a really naughty girl, you know,” he told her.

“Hai, Oukami-sama...” Anna gave him a playful smile.

Wolfson put his cards down on the table and brought his hands up to lightly caress the tempting little mounds that were being offered before him. Anna closed her eyes and let out a soft sigh. Darkling and Kana looked on with a certain amount of fascination.

Wolfson lightly pinched Anna’s nipples and she let out a little gasp. Then they began kissing, and her sighs and gasps became throaty moans. He let his mouth work its way down her slender neck and eventually to her tiny breasts, as he leaned her back against the table.

Darkling realized that one of Wolfson’s hands had worked its way downward and was now under Anna’s leather skirt. He had a feeling that at least one of Anna’s hands was engaging in similar activity with Wolfson. He glanced over at Kana, who was still watching the two of them in embarrassed fascination. *What the hell*, he thought. *No guts, no medal of valor*.

Darkling reached over to a startled Kana, gently moved an arm out of the way, and cupped one of her breasts in his hands. He could feel the hardness of her nipple against the center of his palm contrasting with the softness of the rest of her breast against the rest of his hand.

Kana stared at him with wide, violet eyes. Darkling told her, “Kana-chan... I think you’re very pretty. And I came to know you through your game... I think you’re very special.”

Kana blushed even more, if that were possible. “Oniichan...” she hesitantly said. “I think you are very brave. And I think you have a very noble heart. I think... I like you...”

It was Darkling’s turn to blush. Wolfson and he considered themselves rogues... hardly noble of character. He felt a little embarrassed that she felt that way about him. But he found that he was glad that she did. He let go of her breast and pulled her to him, searching out her lips with his. They were soft and sweet, and she didn’t resist.

When they paused, she looked at him again and suddenly said, “Oniichan?”

“Yes?”

Kana blushed a little again and she looked down slightly. But her eyes strayed up to Darkling as she asked, “Would you touch my breasts?”

Lardo regarded the two pairs of people that were making out in the corner, and decided that it might be best to close the tavern for an hour or so. He was a little worried about what those two might do if they were suddenly and rudely interrupted.

He quietly made his way over to the door, put up the closed sign, and put the “will be back at” sign indicating two hours—just to be safe. Then he quietly made his way back across the common room, gathered up some ale, and went to seclude himself in the kitchen... something that he was getting used to these days.

As he made his way to the back room, he thought about the two adventurers with a little envy. *It must be nice, he thought to himself, to live a life where only good stuff seems to happen to you...*

**The End...?**