

3 days later

The day for the surgery operation has finally come; it will be the time when Amelia's illness gets cured for good. Glacies walked with her mother through the streets of Radiant Garden, supporting the parent as they were on their way to the doctor's office. Amelia's sickness had returned to its state before the Esuna spell over the course of the week. The girl had used another Esuna spell on her mother to weaken the disease just before leaving home, but it was less effective than it was the last time. Perhaps the illness had gotten more resistant to the spell or Esunas weakened over its repeated use on the same sickness. Whatever was the case, Glacies would have to read some more about the spell to get a better idea of it. After all, a keyblade master must know their spells. They reached the doctor's office and went in through the door. A balding man in a white medical outfit standing behind the counter greeted them, "Good morning, ladies! You're just in time for your appointment."

Glacies smiled back, "We are, Dr. Powell. We've been really looking forward to this day."

Amelia let out a cough as Dr. Powell turned his head to look at her. He shifted his glasses and understood, "I see. She looks like she could do with that surgery now. If you'll follow me, I can get her settled onto the operating table and we can get started." The Gallimores went with the surgeon to the operation room. There he patted the operating bed and told, "Mrs. Gallimore, I need you to lay right here." Glacies let go of her mother and Amelia got onto the table to lie down on her back. Dr. Powell took a bottle off the shelf and removed its cork. He poured the contents into a smaller cup and took it to the woman. "Here's some tranquilizing potion to put you to sleep, so that you won't feel pain during the surgery."

"Okay doctor," Amelia replied to him. She raised her torso up and took the cup to drink the anesthetic. It had a very bitter taste to it, worse than any medicine the woman took in her entire life. Her face contorted in repulsion and she held the cup away from her face to temporarily relieve her mouth of the foulness. "Yuck! This tastes horrible."

"I know," Dr. Powell replied understandingly. "But it does get the job done. So you'll just have to stomach it if you want to get that surgery going."

"I understand, doctor." Amelia forced herself to drink the rest of the tranquilizing potion, draining a lot of it fast in her mouth so that she will not have to suffer its taste. Glacies frowned as watched her mother; she hoped she herself will not have to need surgery in the future if this was what she was going to drink. After drinking the last of the contents, the woman gave the surgeon back the cup. "Here you go, I drank it all." As if her sickness was not enough, the woman felt more ill from the presence of the aftertaste in her mouth. It almost felt like she was going to have nausea.

The surgeon replied, "Good, now we just have to wait a few minutes for the potion to settle in and then you'll be sleeping like a baby."

Glacies said, "Then it looks like it's time for me to go now." Looking at her mother, she bid farewell, "Bye mom, I'm going over to Master Leohart now. I hope the surgery goes well."

Amelia smiled back, "Me too, dear. Now have a good day over there." The daughter gave her a kiss on the cheek before she left the office and went on her way to the castle. The girl smiled with hope; Etutu had predicted her mother's death to the disease, but it looks like it will not come true after all. Her mother was going to be around in her life longer. Glacies went up the steps to the castle premise and went inside the building. This time, Zephyr was not here to greet her as he had gotten here earlier than she did when she had to delay herself to get Amelia to Dr. Powell. He along with Hitomi must be with Master Leohart at the courtyard. The bluenette rushed on towards the door to the courtyard. It was inappropriate to run inside buildings, but Glacies did not care right now, she did not want to be any later than she was now. She opened one of the double doors and stepped out into the courtyard.

Leohart noticed her right away when he turned his head to look her straight in the eyes. He commented, "Glacies, you're late." The other students both looked back at her. Zephyr knew she would be tardy; his friend had told him yesterday about her mother's appointment.

The bluenette apologized, "I'm sorry, master. I had to take my mother to the surgeon. She couldn't walk on her own, so I had to take her there."

The man forgave her, "It's quite alright, I understand. I hope your mother gets better."

"Me too, master."

Then Leohart told his students, "Anyway, today, we'll only be doing keyblade and glider practices. I want to see you all practice your swings, your spells and your gliders' fighting moves. No lolly-gagging, do I make myself clear?"

The trio replied, "Yes master."

Leohart told them, "Good, now show me your basic attacks. Let me see your five-hit combos." The students summoned their keyblades and swung them like they were attacking their enemies 1-on-1. Throughout the rest of their time here, they practiced their special moves, spells, team attacks, and glider attacks. Glacies still has not figured out her glider's special ability.

Then the class was over and Zephyr & Glacies were walking together away from the castle. The girl thought of her mother, "I wonder if mom's at home right now. I want to know how the surgery went."

The boy offered, "Then let's go check on her. I wouldn't mind paying her a visit."

Glacies smiled at him, "Sure, it'll be nice having you over. I bet mom will be happy to see you."

"Yeah, she's a pretty sweet person, that's for sure."

They got to Glacies's house and went inside. As expected, her mother was found sitting on a couch and sewing a teddy bear she was working on to sell at her toy store tomorrow. Beside her was a bunch of teddy bears that were finished. The daughter greeted her, "Hi mom, how's the surgery?"

Amelia turned her head and responded delightfully, "It went perfectly well. I'm feeling a lot better already."

The girl beamed, "That's good to hear! It sounds like Dr. Powell did a pretty good job." If anyone was in need of a surgeon, she would be sure to recommend him to them.

"He sure did," the mother nodded. Then she greeted the boy, "And hello Zephyr, how nice of you to come over!"

Zephyr greeted, "Hey Mrs. Gallimore. I'm glad to hear you're alright now. Glacies was pretty worried for you when she told me you got sicker again."

Amelia smiled, "I know, she really cares for me as I do her. Anyway, how's your keyblade training going for you?"

He answered, "Pretty good, all we did today was just practice our attacks." He shrugged with his hands out and continued, "We didn't get to learn anything new."

"Really now, I guess Master Leohart wants you to hone the skills have right now. So anything recently going on in your life?"

"Not much, life's still pretty normal as usual." Now if Zephyr's parents got back, then he would have something to say. But nope, they were always at work as if that was the only thing in their lives.

"Oh," Amelia nodded casually. "Well as long as you're having a good day."

"Yeah." The three continued to hang out as Glacies began to help her mother with the teddy bears and other toys. Even Zephyr gave his try at making the toys, just for the sake of helping the family out. Toy-making was a new thing to him; he had to get Glacies's help with building them the right way before he was good on his own. After all the stocks of toys were finished, Glacies cooked dinner and the three ate their meals while chatting up happy conversations. For Zephyr, hanging out with the Gallimores made him feel like he was part of the family. They were so happy together and there at home for one another like any family should be. If his parents did not have a job that kept them away from home, then they as a family would be just as warm as this one. It has been several years since they were together and he wished they could go back to those days. When would this day come was pretty uncertain for all the boy knew. In fact, it might never come at all. So for now, he may as well have this kind of moment with the

Gallimores.

8 days later

"Yes, that's right, keep it going! Put more swings into your attack... Now unleash that darkness." LimeX watched Juliet fight a grizzly bear she had put her up against. She had taught her apprentice a new move and she was going to make her practice it in real combat. Juliet swung her keyblade at the bear, striking it in the face as it let out pained grunts and growls with each hit. The big brown creature backed up a bit to put some distance away from the keyblade's reach. Then it reared up on its hind legs and raised its heavy paw to swipe with its claws. Juliet proved to be the faster striker as a dark aura appeared around her body from her channeling her darkness as she rapidly spun diagonally towards the bear, hitting it square in the chest. The beast fell over on its back with a thud and hoarse whimper. The blonde stood over it with the tip of her keyblade over its heart before she stabbed it down. The bear let out one final roar before it disintegrated into light particles and released its heart into the air.

Juliet turned to her master and asked, "How did I do?"

LimeX smirked at her apprentice's perfect slaughter, "A good job, killer." Juliet smiled back wickedly, appreciated the praise.

An unknown voice sounded from somewhere, praising, "Yes good job, that was perfect. You'd make a wonderful killer."

Juliet looked around for the speaker, wondering where he was at. She asked, "Who is that?"

LimeX scowled, displeased with the intruder invading their space like he had some business here with them. "No one, now let's get out of here," she told the apprentice. She generally didn't like dealing with strangers; they were worthless unless she got to know them well.

LimeX summoned her keyblade and got ready to create a portal when the speaker told her, "Now let's not be so hasty there, LimeX. You wouldn't want to miss out on some of your lost past now, would you?"

The brunette turned towards the direction of the voice and demanded resentfully, "And what would you know of my past, moron?" Who was this guy thinking he could just come here and act like he knows something about her? Did he take her for a sucker or something? Well LimeX was by no means one and she was not about to fall for any of his ploys. And most importantly, how did he know her name?

The figure stepped out from the cover of the small trees hiding him. LimeX dropped her jaw; she was stunned by who she was looking at. No, it can't be; could it really be him? The young man told her, "Everything. Your childhood, your training days, the people you've killed and everyone you know,

especially the one girl you've forgotten." Forgotten, who could she have forgotten in her life? Was it some worthless broad she only saw for one day? If so, she did not care whatsoever. But this guy sounded like he was hinting about someone important to her life. The man asked her, "LimeX, have you ever felt like there were some blanks between some events in your life? Like how one moment you're new to something and then suddenly, you know it well with no explanation in between." Now that she thought about it, the brunette did recall a few events that were like that or at least similar to it. "Did you ever skip from one big event to the next like it was seemingly rushed? Was there anything you've ever felt missing out of her life that would explain these things?"

Yes, LimeX did indeed feel these cases in regards to her memories. She replied, "I sure did, that's for sure. But what are you getting at, boy? Who are you and how do you know so much about me?" Juliet eyed him suspiciously, if her master did not trust him, then she too should be iffy of him.

The man smirked slyly and replied, "I'll tell you everything you need to know, but in return you and that girl will have to do some certain tasks for me."

"Tch!" The brunette sounded displeased. Figures this guy would want something out of her, or actually them since Juliet was going to be on this, too. She asked sarcastically, "And what exactly do I owe you, girly boy?"

The stranger told her what he needed from them. Juliet froze in shock, horrified by what they must do. Afterwards, he continued, "To help you out with the job, I'll be teaching you how to use the corridors of darkness. But only, if you're really dedicated to the task."

LimeX always wanted to learn how to use them. Sabella could not teach her as even the drow did not know how to create them. That was the one dark technique she never got. She decided to go along with the stranger's game, "Alright, I'm in. Just promise me you'll tell me about who this girl is or else you're going to croak." She pointed her keyblade at his head to show that she meant business.

The silverette man did not show an ounce of fear at the threat towards him. Instead, he just snickered and replied, "Relax honey, I was getting to that first. Now let me tell you everything about her, so you can have some decent motivation. And by the way, this involves Chase, too."

6 days later

"Are they going to be okay, Jack? They don't seem to look well," asked Sakura as she squatted to check on Lock, Shock and Barrel, who were all slumped against the stone brick wall like dolls on the outskirts of town. Their eyes and lids appeared dull, showing none of the friskiness they used to have.

"I don't think so," Jack responded, frowning. "They've been awfully quiet since that no-good girl showed

up, and now they're getting worse." His ghost dog Zero whimpered at the kids, feeling sad and worried for them. They were dying and it looks like they were not long for this world.

Sakura said, "This is bad, and I mean BAD. We have to do something about this, Jack, or else they're goners." If that LimeX girl would just get back, then she would fix her crime. But the demon had no way of getting over to her what with her world being a planet consisting of only itself now for some odd reason.

The skeleton tilted his head to the side and rest chin on his hand, tapping it with his finger. "Yes, but what can we do?" No easy solution was coming to their minds, no matter how hard their brains worked to form one. Sakura knew the removal of the darkness from their hearts was what is causing their slow demise, but how would they bring it back to them? She heard the snap of Jack's fingers as he exclaimed brightly, "I got it! We'll see if Doctor Finklestein can help us fix these youngsters."

The girl asked, "You really think he can do that?"

"Well maybe, but we won't know until we try. So let's say we pay him visit, shall we?"

"Sure I guess." Why not, since this was the only option they have at the moment. Sakura, Jack and Zero went to the doctor's laboratory to see how he could help them save the kids.

As they went far from the trio, No Name came walking from the woods behind him towards Halloween Town. Unlike most outsiders who would be drastically transformed the moment they set foot here, the man retained his normal appearance due to a certain form of darkness within his heart, but he was slightly darkened. The world he came here and checked out had an atmosphere that was quite to his liking. The place was pretty dark as he preferred of his ideal home world; the spookiness here worked as a bonus. This would be a great place to settle here as a hermit, except there were monsters living in the forest and some of them were sentient and quite talkative. That made it similar to a neighborhood, which he wanted to avoid being in. As the nameless man kept on going, he soon saw three children lying against the wall. But apparently, something was off about them; something wrong. No Name looked down at the children, wondering why they looked so dull and lifeless. The answer came to him quickly when he sensed a lack of darkness within their hearts. It seems like something did happen to them that resulted in their state. He thought in pity, *'How unfortunate.'* They could very well die from the loss of darkness as it was essential to the heart just as much as the light is. But fortunately, the empty half of the heart could be filled back in. They just need a new darkness to replace the lost one. No name turned away from them and returned to the forest. "I'll be back," he said to them without looking back.

No Name trekked through the woods searching for 3 non-sentient animals to extract darkness from. Having seen some such creatures earlier, he knew where to go and begin from where he saw them. He went on his way to the nearest monster until he got into its territory. The creature was nowhere in sight; it must have moved somewhere else. The man begins to check the surrounding area for any signs of it. He looked around trees, inside a hollow log, inside holes and by a river. But each time he got nothing

from them. As he continued to search, he felt some kind of presence behind him, more specifically at the bottom closing by his feet. No Name turned around on one foot, just in time evading the snap of the giant snake's long fangs. The orange & black boa raised its head and hissed menacingly at the man, either warning him to get off its turf or perhaps to scare him with its honest intent to eat him. No Name summoned his keyblade and got ready to attack. He stared down the slithering monster, watching and waiting for the right time to strike and/or lunge. Swift like a fly, the snake lunged its head and bite at the man's leg. It ended up hitting the dark metallic surface of the greave, which hurt its face. No Name quickly cast a Blizzard spell at the snake, encasing its head in ice. The monster thrashed its head around, trying to rid itself of the painfully cold cage that refused to budge. Then the man lifted it up with the winds of his Aerora spell. The giant snake flew high above ground like a string spinning wildly and thrashing its ends around. Then he waited for the spell to disappear before the snake started to fall. He saw the exposed underside falling towards the ground and quickly thrust his keyblade upward into right where its heart would be. The heart was released and it was prevented from floating away by No Name using his dark magic to bind it under his control. He held the heart in his small satchel to carry with him as he hunted other monsters to collect their hearts.

A while later, No Name returned to the town with all 3 hearts he needs to save the children. He stopped in front of them and opened up his satchel to take out the hearts. He made them float before the trio, each one paired with a child. With the wave of his hand, he commanded the hearts, "Now send out your darkness into their hearts." The hearts extracted their darkness and infused them into the children's hearts. The monsters' hearts became lighter in color and reshaped into broken halves, now that they lost their darkness. The man let go his control over them now that their use is over. The half-hearts floated away into the sky, but slower than usual now that they were weakened. With his help down, No Name walked away into town, looking for a place to eat and drink at.

A couple of minutes later, Sakura, Jack and Zero returned to the trio, carrying bottles of black potions that the doctor has made for them. The demon girl said, "I sure hope this works. The doctor really worked hard on these."

The Pumpkin King replied confidently, "I'm sure they will, Sakura. After all, he's the best inventor in town."

"Jack, he's the only inventor in town. There's no one else who creates all kinds of contraptions like him."

"Yes; but still, he makes a lot of good stuff. Where would our Halloween celebrations be without him?" Some of the items and machines used in the previous Halloween events were created by the very doctor himself.

Sakura smiled and admitted, "You do have a point there." She pulled the cork out of the bottle as she continued, "Now let's get these kids a nice drink." She looked to Barrel and squat down to him, bringing the dark potion to his mouth.

She was about to pour some of it in when the chubby boy sub-consciously murmured, "I'm...hungry..."

The girl and the skeleton gasped out their surprise as Zero barked agape. Jack asked wide-eyed, "My word! Did the boy just say something?"

"He sure did," answered Sakura without taking her red eyes off the boy. She noticed a change in the children; their hearts had darkness once again. But how did this come to be? "Um Jack, I think their darkness has returned."

"What? When did this happen?"

The demon shook her head, "I don't know, but it doesn't matter now. I think these kids are going to be alright now." She smiled, knowing that they have been saved. Whoever it was that saved them, that is if there was a savior involved at all, she would like to thank them.

After the girl got up, Jack looked at the potion, "Then it looks like we won't be needing these anymore."

As he was about to throw the bottle behind him like trash, Sakura jumped up and grabbed his wrist to stop him, "Whoa Jack, maybe we should keep these, just in case. You know? Maybe someone else will lose their darkness." She grinned, "Or we could use them for next year's Halloween."

Jack appreciated these suggestions and beamed, "That's a great idea, Sakura! I can't wait to see what we'll do with these in the future."

They began to walk back to Dr. Finklestein's lab to tell him the good news regarding Lock, Shock and Barrel as well as to return the dark potions. Sakura replied, imagining her ideas, "We could use them to block out the light and scare people from the shadows." She kept on listing her suggestions to him as Jack spoke his ideas about them with her.

Today, Zephyr and his friends had to train themselves. Leohart could not be there at the courtyard to train them as he had a lot of paperwork to do today, so he told his apprentices to practice their skills for as long as they can. Glacies swung her keyblade, imagining an enemy in front of her and trying to strike him down. She was training vigorously so that she does not die the next time like she almost did with LimeX. She had to get stronger, stronger so that she can protect herself and her friends. At the same time, Zephyr was helping Hitomi practice her keyblade fighting skills. He was making her try to hit him, while he tried to block her attacks. The little girl swung Lurebreaker at him, but the keyblade got caught on the boy's Spring Breeze. He told encouragingly, "Keep it up, Hitomi. You might eventually get me." The swings and blocks continued for a while. Hitomi was overwhelmed by how fast the boy defended himself. She was not able to land a hit on him most of the time; his reflexes were pretty good. But when she did manage to strike him, she would feel a second's happiness for herself. The Lurebreaker swung

fast and hit the boy's thigh. "Ow!" Zephyr cried at the hard hit he took. Hitomi looked at him in worry, wondering if she had hurt him. But the boy just smiled and told her, "Good job, Hitomi. That's how you do it; swing hard so you can hit them."

"Okay," the child replied. If he was okay with this, then this will be the way she spars for now. Her swings stayed hard and fast to the best of her ability. The rate at which she managed to hit her opponent was greater than it was last time.

Zephyr was still able to block some of her attacks, but with the girl being more aggressive in fighting, he needed to be quicker to defending himself. And also, he was hurting from some of the attacks he took. After blocking another hit, he told her, "Stop." Hitomi froze and brought her keyblade away from him. "Let me take a breather for a moment." He wanted to rest his body and recover, until the stings of where he was hit faded away. Once he was feeling fine again, Zephyr pressed the button on his left shoulder and summoned his armor suit around him.

Hitomi looked at his new form in wonder. She had never seen something like this before, but yet it felt so familiar to her. *'Keyblade armor,'* she thought.

Zephyr tells her, "Okay, let's keep going." They went back to what they were doing; this time with his armor protecting him from further pain.

Soon, the child's arm started to ache from exhaustion. She sighed, "Zephyr, I'm tired."

The boy dismissed his keyblade and armor before saying, "Alright, we'll take a break for now. We could sit down and see how Glacies is doing." Suddenly, he felt the wind of something zooming close behind him blowing the back helm of his silver short-sleeved light jacket. "Wha?" he cried startled as he looked to the side to see Glacies's glider stopping.

The bluenette playfully complained, "Hey, no fair leaving me to train by myself, Zephyr!"

The boy smirked and teased, "Sorry, our arms were tired. We did so many swinging around, you know."

Glacies did not believe him, "No, only Hitomi said she was tired. You're just going along with her to get out of this."

"True," Zephyr admitted. "But you can join us if you want. There's nobody to stop you."

Glacies liked the idea, "Fair enough." Since Leohart was not here to watch them, they were free to do whatever they wanted. But still, they should remember to train. The three went to sit together underneath the shadow of the tree. The bluenette asked the child, "So Hitomi, how do you like living here at this place?"

Hitomi answered fondly, "It's nice. Papa buys me toys and reads me bedtime stories."

The bluenette was delighted to hear, "Aww, that's so sweet of him! So, what kinds of stories does he tell you?"

Hitomi answered, "The Tortoise and the Hair, Little Red Riding Hood and the one about the fairies."

"How interesting."

Wanting to entertain her as well, Zephyr raised a finger and offered, "I got a story for you. You all want to hear it?"

Hitomi nodded, "Mm-hmm."

"Sure," Glacies answered. This could be a way to pass the time.

The boy started, "Okay, it goes like this." He began to tell a story about a boy who went into a forest and befriended 3 animals. They all played together before they went on home. The next day, the deer was waiting for his friends to meet him until he got snatched away by a hungry troll who took him to his den. The squirrel saw this and told his friends about it. They all ran to the troll's cave to save the deer before it was too late. They got there and saw the troll preparing his stew to cook the deer in. The boy formulated a plan to save their friend. They set up a trap for the troll outside the cave. Then the squirrel distracted the troll with his mischievous antics, while the boy used his keyblade to free the deer from the cage. The friends then made their escape with the angry troll chasing them. They lead the troll to the trap, where the badger cut the ropes and sent the troll falling down into the hole where the surface-holding net was once held by the ropes. Zephyr finished, "Then everybody cheered and they all lived happily ever after!"

Then they heard a servant shouting down at the apprentices through a window, "What are you doing? You're supposed to be training! It's not even break time yet."

Eyeing the servant, Glacies said to her friends, "Looks like we've been caught."

"Yeah," Zephyr noted. He got up and continued, "Better get back to training now." He asked the child, "So Hitomi, are your arms feeling better now?"

"A little," the child responded. Her arms still ached, but it had lessened since their short break.

The boy suggested, "Then let's train a bit easier this time. Let's try our team attack. Using spells can't hurt the arms." The girls got up and everybody went back to training. Hitomi had enjoyed Zephyr's little tale, but not nearly as much as some of Leohart's other stories. But still she appreciated him trying to entertain her. She was glad to have such friends in her life; they were always doing some fun things for

her. She hoped their friendship would always last forever.

The next day

Zephyr and Glacies were just coming into Leohart's castle to take their keyblade class as usual. Halfway to the courtyard, they saw Hitomi standing before them, waiting to tell them something. The bluenette waved at her, "Good morning, Hitomi. You ready for another day of training?"

The child told her the news, "Actually papa says that you don't have to do training today." The teens were surprised to hear this. No training, why? She continued, "He's still doing paperwork. He has a lot of it to do."

Zephyr smiled brightly with cheer, "Sweet! That means we have a whole day to ourselves! Lots of time to hang, chill and relax."

Glacies was just as enthusiastic about the day off as well. She suggested, "We could take the chance to go visit Nemo and Touketsu." They have not seen them for days, so now is the perfect time to go look for them.

The boy agreed, "Yeah, I wonder how these guys are doing. Let's go see them!" He asked the child, "Hitomi, want to come with?"

Hitomi answered, "Yes." The apprentices went back out the entrance and made their way through the city, going to the place where they saw the young knights. As they half-guessed, the boys were not there yet, so they made their way to the knight HQ to see if they could find the boys on the way or at the base.

A passing woman walked across the street ahead of them. The teens stopped to let her pass, but Hitomi just kept on walking and she bumped into the lady. "Ah!" the startled woman cried out. She stepped back and turned to the child. "Well excuse me," she apologized with a sincere smile.

Zephyr apologized to the woman, "Sorry about that, miss." He told his younger friend, "Hitomi, pay attention next time."

Hitomi said to them both, "Sorry." She did not know that someone else was up ahead of them. If so, she would have stopped. The woman's footsteps must have been too quiet for her to hear. Glacies stared at the little girl, realizing something about her. Hitomi is blind; for a few weeks, the bluenette had seen her bump into a wall, knock over a wooden figurine without knowing, and even fall down a short flight of stairs. Why had not they notice this earlier? Perhaps it was because the child has been good at seeming like she was not blind. She did seem to know her way around most of the time. After the woman walked away, the three resumed on.

After a short while, they found the boys standing at the corner of a block, chatting with each other about their fellow knights and their deeds. Zephyr waved at them and called, "Hey Touketsu! Nemo!"

The boys turned their heads to the approaching apprentices. Nemo greeted back, "Hi guys, what's up?"

Glacies answered, "We're doing fine; we just came by to visit you. And I also want to thank you for saving me the other day."

Touketsu smiled, "You're welcome; that's what heroes do. Gotta keep the streets clean, you know."

Zephyr nodded, "Yep! Keep up the good work, guys."

The brunette replied, "We will. So how are you all's training going?"

"Pretty good," the blonde apprentice answered. "Glacies and I learned how to fight on our keyblade gliders."

"Gliders, huh?" Nemo said with interest. "That's cool! You guys must enjoy getting to fly all over the place."

"Yep!"

Glacies shared her friend's enthusiasm and joy, "It sure is fun being on them!"

Nemo suggested, "Y'all should go racing on these sometime. It'll be like a fun competition."

Zephyr liked the idea, replying, "Maybe we will. It'll be nice to try."

Touketsu said, "How about now? You know? Have some fun for a bit and entertain us."

The younger blonde gave it some thought, "Well..."

Glacies took up the idea, "Let's do it, Zephyr! I always wanted to race you for fun."

Zephyr gave in to them, "Well if you're up for this, then so am I." If it is fun she wanted, then it is fun she will get. They both summoned their keyblades to transform into gliders and got on them.

The bluenette told him, "Alright Zephyr, here's how we'll do it." She told him where they will go as they race before coming back here as the finishing line. "So you ready?"

"As long as you are," the boy replied eagerly. "I'll count for us. 5... 4... 3... 2... 1... Go!" The gliders flew

off and zipped across the air, trying to outpace the other.

Hitomi and the knights watched them go. Nemo decided to make a game out of a game by challenging his friend, "Hey Touketsu, let's make a bet on who the winner will be. Loser has to buy the winner steak for lunch."

The brunette looked at him in surprise, "What you're serious?"

"Yes, I'm serious," the blonde grinned. "We both have enough munny for two meals and I'm turning this into a full-on competition. I'll be betting on Glacies." Her glider, unlike Zephyr's, has the advantage of handles for easy turning and a seat for easy riding. The blonde knight was really certain that she will win.

Touketsu shrugged his hands out, "Guess I'll bet on Zephyr." It was a shame that his friend got the best choice, but maybe the male apprentice was a pro at riding his board-like glider. And being a boy, Zephyr could be more likely to be tactical and aggressiveness in the race, taking risks for the win. But that was just speculation; the brunette will just have to wait and see who will win.

The racers flew towards Leohart's castle, going neck-to-neck with each other. They were to go around the castle as part of the made-up track and not over any part of it. Glacies drove closest as she can to the wall, using that tact to shorten her path and get ahead of her friend. But Zephyr had the same idea, too. He got very close to the edge too, but he flew right above the girl. She looked up at him and let out a complaining cry, "Ah!" The boy giggled, amused with how he coincidentally copied her idea without knowing it. The racers were nearing the window of Leohart's room. Seeing the window open, Zephyr decided to shout out a greeting to their mentor, knowing he would hear him without the glass blocking the noise.

Leohart was busy filling out reports of his students' training and other important things he had to fill out. He was hard at work trying to get all this done. His focus was then cut off by the sounds of roaring engines and a call, "Hi master!" The man looked out the window next to him from his chair. There was no one outside, but he did know that voice belonged to Zephyr. He and Glacies must be riding their gliders outside. He thought, *'Ah youth, so full of energy and thrill.'* It would be to have a day off and enjoy life without the hassles of work. But important tasks needed to be fulfilled first before partaking in any leisure.

The racers made their way back to where their friends are. Along the way, Zephyr noticed a park down below on the side of his flight path. He saw some children playing with each other and going on play structures. The boy thought to bring Hitomi there after this, so that she could have friends her own age to relate to. The racers kept going and then they saw the silhouettes of their friends growing as they got closer. The boy flew down at the side of his opponent so that he would touch the ground faster at the finishing line. The racers willed their gliders to the fastest speed possible, eager to be the first to reach their friends before the other could. They descended down to the street below and kept on zooming. They got closer and closer and then they passed their friends. Nemo swung his arm down like he was

waving a race flag and announced, "And we have a winner! It's..." He paused when he realized that he did not get a clear look at who hit 1st place. Confused, he asked, "Wait, who won?"

Touketsu was also at loss, "I don't know. They were going too fast for me to see." He turned to the little girl, asking, "Hitomi, who do you think?"

Hitomi thought about the second she saw her friends fly by and estimated their positions at the time. She guessed unsurely, "Uh...both of them?" It was not exactly clear to her, but it looked like they finished at the same time.

The racers rode slowly back to their friends before dismissing their gliders. Zephyr asked them, eager to hear his victory, "So who won?"

Nemo answered, "No one did." He turned to the brunette and lightly complained, "Damn it, Glacies. You were supposed to win, so I could get a free steak!" The girl silently giggled a playful 'sorry'.

Touketsu patted his friend's back, "Hey man, look at the bright side, at least you won't have to pay double for our lunch later."

The older blonde smiled in relief, "Yeah you're right about that."

Glacies asked, "So you guys are patrolling today, right?"

The brunette confirmed, "Yeah we are."

The girl asked, "Do you mind if you let us patrol with you? We could hang out together like that."

Touketsu accepted, "Sure why not? Makes our job more fun." Nemo was happy to patrol with them as well.

Zephyr declined to go, "You can spend time with them, Glace. I want to take Hitomi to the park and have her make some friends there." He turned to the child, "What do you say, Hitomi? Want to play with the kids there? They have slides and swings you can play on."

The offer of fun things and play intrigued the child. "Sure," she answered. She wanted to have fun like the other children.

Glacies said, "Okay, you two go on. I'll meet up with you there later. Have fun!" She walked away with the knights as the boy took his youngest friend to the park.

The pair got there and looked at the playing children doing their own activities with their parents joining in on the fun, watching over them and chatting with other adults. Zephyr said, "Doesn't this look like

such a nice place, Hitomi? I bet any one of these kids here would be your friend if you ask them." He pointed to pair of girls her age running around, "Like these two girls over there. Try meeting them and ask if they want to play with you."

Hitomi was not interested, nor uninterested, in meeting the girls. But if Zephyr wants her to, she might as well. She used her ears to listen out for the girls' thrilled screams among the other children's before she walked over to them. The two girls stopped chasing each other and one of them with a soft-pitch greeted, "Oh hi, who are you?"

"Hitomi," the brunette answered. She paused for a bit before asking, "Um, can I play with you?"

The other girl with a higher pitch said, "Sure! We're playing a game called "tag.""

"What's tag?" Hitomi asked curiously.

The high-pitched girl explained, "It's where someone who is "it" has to chase someone and then touch them to make them "it". And since you're the new player, you have to be "it"." She poked Hitomi on the shoulder and beamed, "Tag, you're it!" The brunette sensed the girls running from her and ran after to pursue them. Zephyr smiled as he watched the three girls play, he was glad to see his little friend having fun. He hoped she could have a close friend her age.