

Making a Connection

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/23133583) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/23133583>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	F/M
Fandom:	Magic Knight Rayearth
Relationship:	Clef/Ryuuzaki Umi
Characters:	Clef (Magic Knight Rayearth) , Ryuuzaki Umi , Ferio (Magic Knight Rayearth)
Additional Tags:	magical university AU continues , background Fuu/Ferio
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of multidisciplinary
Collections:	fan_flashworks
Stats:	Published: 2020-03-13 Words: 1,906 Chapters: 1/1

Making a Connection

by [down](#)

Summary

Ryuuzaki Umi had gone and found the book for him?

That was... the most confusing mixture of aggressively pointed help he'd ever come across.

Notes

Originally for fan-flashworks 'identity'.

Clef de Cephiro, Professor in Historical Magic, blinked at his email and tried to work out if this was a joke perpetrated by one of his students. Or possibly Ferio, because that was definitely a .jp at the end of the email address, and Ferio was the only person he knew who was both in Japan at the moment and liable to try confusing the heck out of him.

But no, despite the email itself being in English, it had, apparently, come from a Japanese academic, who had been so incensed by his latest article that they'd had to *tell* him about it - and if they were correct at how badly the Miyazaki book had been interpreted in the only discussion of it he'd been able to find, well, they were probably within their rights.

Still, he pulled a face, feeling stung, and shot back a response without thinking about it too hard.

He'd wanted to make sure he wasn't just sticking within a European context - there was a lot more world out there and communication and travel had been happening for as long as humanity was around, it only felt right to acknowledge that. But he'd been planning that article for another six months time - after he'd found that book for himself, for one thing. It was a rough first chapter of the book he was trying to pull together. But he was a friend of the journal's editor, and they'd had - a slight problem getting articles to fill out the issue. The problem had since been fixed, but Clef had been leaned on hard to help, as he had this article that his friend *knew* was mostly finished...

None of the reviewers had caught the issue, either. Probably because they were just as trapped in their little spheres of knowledge as he'd realised *he* was.

No. It was his own fault, he shouldn't have left the reference in without finding the original. At least, he could have just footnoted it as 'possibly useful but I haven't a copy yet' rather than repeating someone else's claims. He knew better.

Now someone had caught him out and he was angry about it - but he was angry at himself. This Ryuuzaki who had sent the message didn't deserve Clef snarking back at them for telling the truth.

He sighed, and flopped back in his chair. It was too late for regrets, he'd already hit send, and recalling a message never seemed to work - Ryuuzaki was pissed off with him already, so it wasn't like he could really sink lower in their estimation anyway. Move on. Do better.

Don't let anyone else drag unfinished articles out of you.

oOo

For a week, he almost forgot the whole thing - he had a reminder to chase Ferio about getting a copy of that book, but Ferio was apparently distracted by a woman at the company he was working with, and kept not being around when Clef could call.

Then he got a parcel shoved in his pigeon-hole at work, with a Japanese return address, and though it was odd Ferio sending him stuff here instead of his home address that was

definitely the book Clef had been after, and-

A letter, absolutely not in Ferio's hand.

Ryuuzaki Umi had gone and found it *for* him?

That was... the most confusing mixture of aggressively pointed help he'd ever come across. Clef didn't know what to make of it, so much so that he was late to his seminar group, letter folded and shoved in his wallet when he realised the time and had to dash.

oOo

They were right about the book, too.

oOo

It took a bit of doing, but he managed to get hold of two articles she'd written during her doctorate (one in English which handily came with a short biography, as it seemed she was a new hire and not on her institution's website yet,) which managed to tell him she was a woman and had lived abroad a lot as a child, explaining the perfect English she'd used to judge him and find him wanting. They were both *good articles*, sharp and insightful, though he was sat with a dictionary to get through them just as much as he needed one for the Miyazaki book.

It only seemed appropriate to send her a thank you gift in return. Proving he'd fixed the article was more for his peace of mind than gratitude, so it only made sense to go find something useful for her.

oOo

He didn't mean to start a whole book-exchange.

oOo

Half a year in, he finally realised that Ferio was the reason she'd been able to get his email - when he asked Ferio what Umi was like, he just said 'terrifying and hot', which wasn't particularly nuanced or informative. She did get a page on her University's website in time for the next year of intake, but it gave less detail than her letters and emails over the last months had already told him.

There was one slightly blurred photo of her in an article about a conference she'd attended in Hong Kong, from which he could tell she had long hair and was wearing a blue dress, and that was it.

The curiosity - what would she be like in person? Just as sharp and brilliant as she was in text? Continued in the background of his mind, but she was already his best sounding-board and critic, and he hoped he helped her, too. She didn't mince words when arguing with him, and she challenged him to 'prove it' every time he relied on a well-known assumption in the field.

She made him better at his job, in fact.

Their connection was something he came to... well, cherish. Too much to ruin it by pushing it any further, even if he did wonder sometimes what would happen if they met, if they would stay up all night happily arguing, like he had with friends way back in his undergrad days.

oOo

For three years they continued to correspond without ever being on the same continent, though they both travelled - never the same place, never the same time. Then he got himself invited to talk at a conference in Munich and a week later he got a email which was just a forward of one she'd received - confirming her place speaking on the second day.

At that point, he started to panic.

oOo

Ferio laughed so hard he nearly choked when Clef called him and said "no, really, what's she *like*?" So Clef hung up on him and rang Emeraude, who it turned out could laugh just as hard as her brother.

Clef hung up on her too, dropped his head in his hands, and admitted he was in trouble.

After three years managing to stay mostly in Japan, Ferio was back in England, and turned up on Clef's door the next evening with orders from Emeraude to make Clef get a new suit, apparently.

He also brought photos of Umi, courtesy of his fiancée, who not only knew Umi but was apparently one of her oldest friends.

"You're telling me this *now*?" Clef snapped, not looking at the phone screen when it was held out to him. "At what point in the last three years did you decide you'd pretend you'd only met her a couple of times?"

"I *have* only met her a couple of times," Ferio told him, grinning steadily. "She's a busy woman. Anyway, the two of you seemed to be getting along fine. We were just going to seat you next to each other at the wedding and let you get on with it."

"Does she know- what does she know?" Clef asked, anxiously, not even sure why.

Ferio shrugged. "Just that we're from the same University and know each other, and Fui's mentioned we went to school together. Neither of you have asked since the first couple of months, after we actually started dating, so we decided it was politest not to interfere. But if you're trying to make a good impression, it would probably help if you recognised her when you meet."

Clef's fingers tightened reflexively about the phone as it was pressed into his hands, and he looked down, and then blinked. He'd met Ferio's fiancée a few times, and recognised her in the photo, which meant that the other woman was...

"...Did Emeraude have any recommendations about a new suit?" he said, faintly, taking in the designer dress and trying not to get hung up on how stunning Umi looked in it.

"I think her phrasing went 'at least something from the last decade unlike the rest of Clef's wardrobe' or something along those lines," Ferio told him, patting him on the shoulder.

"She'll argue with you just as happily if you turn up wearing that suit you've taken to every faculty party since the dawn of time when you were hired, but if you'd rather she was arguing historical magic and not your terrible taste in clothes, you'll need to come shopping with me."

"Okay," he said, voice as faint as he felt.

oOo

'Dear Umi,

Ferio showed me a picture of you with Hououji-san so I can recognise you in Munich. He and his sister are making me get new clothes so I'm not a disgrace that you refuse to be seen in public with.

I've known Ferio and his sister since I was in school. He never mentioned you and Hououji-san were best friends.

C'

It was his fifth attempt at an email; he sighed, and hit send.

All he got back was 'Fuu's sneaky. I'll get in the morning you're talking - we can meet after your session. You'll have to buy me dinner, my spoken German is terrible.'

oOo

He didn't sleep the night before his talk, and the nerves had nothing to do with the talk, and everything to do with that dinner promise.

oOo

In the morning, he woke up to a grouchy email about delays, and a flight number - he looked it up, and winced; she might not even make it for his talk. Which actually made him feel a lot calmer, even in his brand-new suit, navy with a thin lavender pin-stripe which Ferio had declared 'dashing' with a laugh, and which was at least more interesting than grey or black.

She hadn't landed by lunchtime, and there were several interesting speakers before his slot; he was trying hard not stay relieved and not disappointed when his turn came with no further messages and no appearance by anyone matching the photo he'd seen. He walked across the small platform to a polite scattering of applause, pulled his slides up on the laptop the organisers had set up, and looked up to start his introduction - straight at Umi as she pushed into the room, still in her travel clothes with her suitcase in one hand and her pass clutched in the other, cheeks flushed from the speed she must have charged through registration with and *absolutely gorgeous*.

He grabbed the microphone with both hands when he felt it slipping from his grip, and looked down, feeling his face light up like the Blackpool illuminations at Christmas, and when he looked up again she was *grinning*, and - stuck her tongue out at him.

Smothering his laugh, he gathered himself, looked around the room, and started to talk.

oOo

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