

A GUARDIAN'S POSSESSION

THE GUARDIAN HEART CRYSTAL SERIES



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The Guardian Heart Crystal Series Book 5

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The Legend of the Heart of Time

The worlds may change, but true legends never fade.

Darkness and light have constantly battled since the beginning of time. Worlds are formed and crushed beneath the feet of their creators, yet the ongoing need for good and evil have never been in question. However, sometimes a new element is thrown into the mix, the one thing that both sides want but only one can have.

Paradoxical in nature, the Guardian Heart Crystal is the one constant that both sides have always striven to attain. The crystalline stone has the power to create and destroy the known universe, yet can end all suffering and strife in the same breath. Some say the crystal has a mind of its own, others say the gods are behind it all.

Each time the crystal has appeared, its guardians have always been ready to defend it from all who would use it selfishly. The identities of these guardians remain unchanged and they love with the same ferocity regardless of the world or time.

One girl stands in the center of these ancient guardians and is

the object of their affections. She holds within her the power of the crystal itself. This is the bearer of the crystal and the source of its power. The lines often blur, and guarding the crystal slowly changes into guarding the priestess from the other guardians.

This is the wine from which the heart of darkness drinks. It is the opportunity to make the guardians of the crystal weak and susceptible to attack. The darkness craves the power of the crystal and also the girl as a man would crave a woman.

Within every one of these dimensions and realities you will find a secret garden known as The Heart of Time. There, a statue of a young human priestess kneels. She is surrounded by an age-old magic that keeps her secret treasure hidden and well preserved. The maiden's hands are outstretched as if waiting for something precious to be placed in them.

Legend says that she is waiting for the powerful stone known as The Guardian Heart Crystal to return to her.

Only the Guardians know of the true secrets behind the statue and how it came into existence. Before the five brothers drew their first breath their ancestors, Tadamichi, and his twin brother, Hyakuhei, protected The Heart of Time during its darkest history. For centuries, the twins protected the seal that kept the human world from overlapping within the demon realm. This task was sacred and the lives of the humans as well as demons had to be kept safe and secret from the other.

Unexpectedly, during their reign, a small band of humans accidentally crossed over into the demon world because of the

sacred crystal. During a time of turmoil, its powers caused a rip in the seal that had separated the dimensions. The leader of the human group and Tadamichi had quickly become allies, making a pact to close the rip in the seal and keep the two worlds locked away from each other forever.

But during that time, Hyakuhei and Tadamichi had both fallen in love with the daughter of the human leader.

Against Hyakuhei's wishes, the rip had been repaired by Tadamichi and the girl's father. The strength of the seal had been increased tenfold, separating the dangerous love triangle forever. Hyakuhei's heart was shattered. Even his own blood brother, Tadamichi had betrayed him by making sure he and the priestess were separated by eternity.

Love can turn into the most wicked of things once it is lost. Hyakuhei's broken heart turned to malicious anger and jealousy causing a battle between the twin brothers, ending Tadamichi's life and splitting their immortal souls. Those slivers of immortality created five new guardians to take guardianship over the seal and protect it from Hyakuhei, who had joined the demons within the evil realm.

Imprisoned within the darkness he had become, Hyakuhei cast out all thought of protecting The Heart of Time; instead, he turned his energy toward banishing the seal completely. His long midnight locks, reaching past his knees and a face belonging only to the most seductive, belied the true evil hidden within his angelic appearance.

As the war begins between the forces of light and dark, a blinding blue light is emitted from the sanctified statue signaling that the young priestess has been reborn and the crystal has resurfaced on the other side.

As the guardians are drawn to her and become her protectors, the battle between good and evil truly begins. Hence the entrance into another world where darkness is dominant within the world of light.

This is one of their many epic adventuresâ#

Chapter 1 â###Feathers of Midnightâ##

Dark feathers left a path in the night sky as Hyakuhei flew within the raging storm he had createdâ#; his anger forming the core of it. Lightning and thunder mimicked his mood as the rain hid the truth of his torment. His ultimate power was to thrive on the authority of the demons he battled then took inside his beingâ#; but he had not expected it to backfire in such a way as this.

His target had been an easy demon to overcome and consume into the void that was his soul. But the sprite had hidden a piece of the shattered guardian heart crystal deep within its mind. That power allowed the dream demon to survive within him and it was now trying to get its revenge.

Hyakuheiâ###s black eyes became a shade darker as he wondered if that had not been the demonâ###s true intent all alongâ#; to break him from the inside. The lowly dream demon thought to give himâ#; nightmares! In his rage, Hyakuhei had

mistakenly taken the dream sprite into his body to silence it forever— only for it to torment him now from within.

The demon had unchecked power Hyakuhei had not expected. It held within it the ability to see the true past that even he had not been aware of. Things that had happened in another time and place— alternate realities. With such a power, Hyakuhei should have known it possessed one of the sacred crystal—s talismans.

Now the demon chose to torment him with visions when he closed his eyes to the world around him— sleep had now become a place of trickery.

The unwanted memories left his blood heated to a painful degree by creating a longing in him that he had forgotten— a craving for the auburn haired priestess that would forever elude him. The hunger he had felt was unbearable now, a reminder of ultimate betrayal from the last place he ever expected it— love becomes something evil once it has been taken away from you.

Ebony hair obscured his angelic face as he screamed out in fury. —How dare you show me the past when there is nothing I can do to change it!— The sound of his voice was lost within the thunder that resounded around him. It thundered deafeningly in response to his anguish, almost taunting him to continue. Lightning flashed, illuminating his face briefly, bringing his beautiful features to stark reality.

He had awakened but an hour ago to the night sweats that accompanied dreams of her. He—d once held her— touched her. His ebony eyes narrowed in anger. She had let him love

her and she didn't even remember. That alone was far more painful than the dreams, yet even now they had their own lives that fate had once again intertwined.

The recurring dreams never finished; the ending always eluding him, making him want to see and feel more of the bittersweet tormenting tale. The most evil vengeful thing the dream sprite could have ever done was make him want her again. He'd supposedly moved beyond it, embracing the creature he'd become in her name. Even now he dared not confront it for fear of losing himself to the suffering of his own soul.

Hyakuhei felt his anger ebbing as he listened to the mischievously whispered voices within him. The countless evil entities contained by him, demons that willingly did his bidding, converged on the dream sprite; fighting an inner battle that did not last long.

The dream demon was forced to bend to its new master's will, if only for as long as the invisible chains could hold it. He knew the demon could still taunt him with voices and seductive images, but he also knew he could now use that borrowed power to share those memories with the priestess.

Hyakuhei's lips curved slightly into a tainted smile knowing he could now use the dream sprites power for his own advantage. He would feed the priestess dreams of what they had once shared on the other side of time; planting himself within her nightly imaginings and mixing memories with the strange bond that held them linked even now within this world.

His hand rose in front of him, holding what would help him. The slivers of the guardian heart crystal he had collected lit up, reflecting the bolt of lightning that passed right above him. As he watched the tiny crystals glitter to life, her image appeared as a reflection in them. His gaze caressed the softness of her face and the ruby redness of her full lips. He would now become a master of illusion.

"I will have you again," He whispered sullenly before evil crept back into his voice. "Priestess, I'll get inside your mind where you cannot escape me or the memories of your own past—our past!"

The shattered pieces of crystal glowed within his palm as their now tainted power crossed worlds and realities to find the priestess within her own world where she slept.

On the other side of The Heart of Time, in her nice warm bed, Kyoko lay sleeping but the silence of sleep became disturbed with flickers of images and sounds as she tossed and turned. The confusion broke as the sounds and movements became one within her mind and she was lost within the strange nightmare.

She broke out in a cold sweat as the dream became almost real—too real as it pulled her in.

Kyoko could hear the enemy's scream of denial just as she passed out. She had done all she could. She'd kept Hyakuhei from acquiring the Guardian Heart Crystal the only way that she had known how. Her last thought was sadness—she had

shattered the Guardian Heart Crystal and now she couldn't go home to her own world.

Hyakuhei gazed down at the girl who'd spoiled all his carefully laid plans. He had made them all think he was dead no longer a threat, then he'd silently waited within the darkness.

He knew as long as the priestess was with her guardians, she was too powerful to approach. So he had hid himself and suppressed his power, playing dead, waiting for her to make the mistake of being alone. She would be weak and vulnerable enabling him to take the Guardian Heart Crystal from her.

It had all worked out perfectly. She'd been alone within The Heart of Time gardens, ready to go back through the time portal now thinking the dangerous game was over, the game they'd played for several years with no winner. He'd been within inches of what he wanted more than anything.

Hyakuhei stood above the beautiful virgin priestess, his raven dark hair flowing like silk down the length of his body, brushing against his calves and still fluttering in the breeze created from the shattering of the Guardian Heart Crystal.

He was every bit as beautiful as a dark angel, but within him beat the many hearts of enraged demons. He wanted to kill the Priestess for what she had done, but he wouldn't; he couldn't as his gaze caressed the face he loved. The starlight streaks that coursed from the shattering of the Guardian Heart Crystal were still lighting the sky like a celestial meteor shower; it was too

late.

Hyakuhei knew her guardians would come for her. His brother's children would once again try to save her from him and history would repeat itself over and over. The heavens had sealed their fate millenniums ago only to offer up the continual chance of changing that same fate.

His angelic face turned into a sneer. The guardian would not find their priestess this time. Swiftly, he cradled her limp body within his arms. No one yet knew he was alive and for now he would leave it that way. He would not harm her; instead Hyakuhei decided this time he would keep her.

Again masking his evil aura, he used his power and opened a small black void and stepped inside, taking Kyoko with him through the gateway. The portal silently closed behind them, erasing all clues of the truth. When the guardians came for her, they would simply believe she had gone home, abandoning them to their land of demons.

Kyoko jerked awake in bed wondering where the nightmare had come from. She searched around the room with wide frightened emerald eyes making sure it had not been real that Hyakuhei was not there. She could still feel him touching her, and strangely enough, she missed that touch. Yet at the same time, she wanted to erase the memory of it. She pulled the covers up around her in confusion.

Hearing the silence of the house, Kyoko knew she would never get back to sleep, so she made the biggest mistake of her young

life she decided to head back into a world of demons in the middle of the night. Being with the guardians would be the only thing that would make her feel safe again.

It was only a couple minutes later that she found herself on the other side of The Heart of Time looking across the clearing that surrounded the maiden statue. She sighed now that she was as far away from the bed she'd just had the nightmare in as she could possibly get. But still, she could feel the dream haunting her as if it were waiting on her to go back to sleep.

It taunted the recesses of her mind, plaguing her imagination with images that were too corporal to let go. Shaking her head, she took a deep breath and drank in the familiarity of her surroundings.

Huge white stones jutted up from the ground in remembrance of the magnificent castle that had once housed the gardens known as The Heart of Time. The wind rushed through the limbs of the surrounding trees, lending a soft sound to the quiet darkness.

Seeing lightning flash way off in the distance, Kyoko turned her emerald eyes to the east. She shivered wondering how something so beautiful could be so dangerous. Even against the dark sky she could see the clouds blocking out the stars. The lightning danced across the clouds like spidery fingers giving the distant storm a sinister appearance.

Kyoko blinked when she saw the lightning converge on one place in the clouds. It formed a tiny ball of light before

blowing out like a tiny starburst. She wasn't surprised by this phenomenon, having seen things more shocking than a lightning cloud. What caught her attention was that it kept happening in the same spot.

"What am I doing here?" she asked the statue of the priestess who looked so much like her, knowing she wouldn't get an answer. The angry clouds from the approaching storm had not made it this far yet and the moonlight shone down as if it were spotlighting the maiden shrine.

Kyoko stepped closer, examining the extraordinary detail of the statue and wondering at it for the hundredth time. They were almost exactly alike, she and the statue, but it had been carved over a thousand years ago in this world, not hers. Once again, she asked herself who could have put it there and why? How could something be carved with a face that no one had known or seen prior to its creation?

Kyoko sighed again wondering what she was doing. It was almost midnight and she had told the guardians she wouldn't be back until morning. But while lying in her soft bed, in her relatively safe world, she couldn't sleep due to some sixth sense telling her that things were about to change. Whether those changes were for the better or for the worse, she couldn't say, and the dreams of the enemy weren't helping.

Her thoughts pivoted between the guardian heart crystal and the shattered talisman it had become. As always, her daydreams and nightmares shifted through the guardian's that she had

never asked for, and the dangerous demons they brought with them.

Her thoughts instantly turned to Hyakuhei, their enemy. She couldn't understand how someone so strikingly beautiful could be so cruel and dangerous. Kyoko saw another flash of lightning streak across the sky in the distance. She cocked an eyebrow reminding herself that looks could be deceiving.

Beautiful or not, just like lightning, Hyakuhei was very dangerous. She knew that as Hyakuhei collected pieces of the scattered talisman, he became that much stronger even though he was extremely powerful to begin with. He already had the ability to take the weaker, lowborn demons within himself and thrive on their dark power. He could also release that power with devastating affects when the time was right, like in battle.

With ability like that, why would he bother with the guardian heart crystal? What would he have to gain by gathering the talisman? Did he truly believe he would gain everything he desired once it was complete and in his possession? Again, those were questions that only led to more questions and secrets that were never meant to be known.

Kyoko looked into the stone eyes of the maiden wondering what secrets it held. Reaching up with her hand, she touched the marble cheek gently and asked, "Hyakuhei seems almost unstoppable even without the help of the talismans, so why is he trying to find them?" Silence was her answer.

Realizing she was once again talking to a stone object,

Kyoko clamped her mouth shut so she would keep her thoughts to herself. "Gee, I really need friends," She mumbled. Lowering her hand, she turned her back to the shrine that transported her between worlds.

Resuming her thoughts, she bit her bottom lip as she pictured the enemy within her mind. As Hyakuhei gained more of the scattered talisman, he became more dangerous to deal with. If he ever gained all the pieces of the talisman, he would then be able to breach the barrier between the demon and human world. This was the true answer to her question.

If that happened, neither world would be able to stop his deadly obsession with the power of darkness. "I won't let that happen, you know." Her shoulders dropped with the weight of keeping that promise.

Her mind shifted back to the dream she'd had less than an hour ago; the same dream that left her in a cold sweat and bolting upright in her bed. The sounds and feelings of the dream had been so real that she could have sworn she'd really been there. It was as if she was watching it all happen and feeling it at the same time.

"But that's impossible, right?" she glanced back toward the statue as the memory of the dream came back to haunt her. Hyakuhei had captured her in her dream and although she had fought him; did she really stand a chance?

Kyoko blinked hoping the remembrance of the dream would soon vanish. She didn't want to feel the fear that she knew

would come with the vision that bordered closer to a nightmare. Seeing the maiden statue staring back at her, it dawned on her. Whether it had really happened in the past or was truly just the memory of a dream it was still a memory in the fullest sense of the word.

She felt the images crashing back toward her, making her feel like a deer caught in the headlights. Her eyes slid closed again as if fate were demanding that she remember it all even remembering the enemy's thoughts. This time it was not the same visions as the last.

In the dream, she'd come through The Heart of Time. But instead of the guardians being there waiting on her, it had been the enemy, Hyakuhei. As she turned to flee back the way she had come, he'd reached out and grasps her wrist in an iron grip to halt her flight. No matter how hard she fought to get away from him it seemed the more she struggled, the closer he got.

He reached his other hand out and gripped her chin to raise her frightened gaze to his and she stopped struggling the moment their eyes locked. Instead of the cold black eyes of the enemy, she was looking into warm brown eyes.

"Welcome back," Hyakuhei whispered softly just as his lips descended on hers.

Kyoko pinched herself so hard that it made her jump and the daydream came to a sudden stop as if she had turned a power switch off. Were the daydreams and nightmares trying to warn her of some unknown fate or had it already happened and was

reminding her of the mistake? Either way she hoped the next time she closed her eyes to sleep it would be dreamless.

Kissing Hyakuhei she put her hands on her hips as if to lecture herself, what in the world is going through your mind girl? she felt like a traitor just for saying it out loud. That's that's almost as bad as kissing Kyou for crying out loud. She smirked at the comparison even though it wasn't that funny.

Lack of sleep will do that to you, She mumbled still fussing at herself. It also causes one to have full-fledged conversations with themselves, She continued before sighing in defeat. I need a vacation.

However, despite her vocal ravings, the mental image of kissing Kyou jumped to the forefront of her mind and wouldn't go away. A rush of warmth traveled from the top of her head to the tips of her toes. She wondered where these thoughts had come from. Again the picture popped up out of nowhere and she made an almost physical effort to push it back down.

With an unsuppressed shiver, Kyoko's mind did a boomerang back to the five brothers whom were predestined to be her guardians in this dangerous world or so they said. Her thoughts became centered for a moment on Kyou, the oldest and most powerful of the five brothers. Kyou presented himself just as dangerous and unnerving as his evil uncle Hyakuhei.

To everyone, even to his brothers, Kyou was an enigma. With

the beauty of an archangel, he hid within himself the power to help destroy or heal this demon-racked world. But she could tell by his cold demeanor that Kyou cared not for either alternative. It was as if he had decided that his evil uncle wasn't his problem.

She was kind of glad Kyou didn't travel with the group but kept to himself. Kyoko had only seen him a couple of times since accidentally becoming their priestess and most of those times she had only seen him from a distance; those encounters had been disturbing enough.

She still didn't know a lot about Kyou but sometimes wondered if he thought he was too good to be around his brothers or was it her that he avoided at all cost?

Kyoko lifted an eyebrow thinking out loud again, "Well, it's probably for the best anyway, because all he and Toya do is fight when they're within seeing distance of each other and Kyou pretty much ignores his other siblings." She heaved a sigh. He seemed to hold a grudge against her for being the priestess he was supposed to protect.

"It's not like I need his help." Her thought flashed back to the past. Upon their first meeting, Kyou had narrowed his golden eyes at her saying that she was nothing but a weak human and not worthy of his protection. Right before that, he'd been even more frightful.

When she first came into their world by mistake, Kyou and Toya had tried to kill her, thinking she was trespassing through The Heart of Time with the help of their uncle. It was the

guardian heart crystal that had shielded her from their attack and that's what started this whole mess.

Somehow, while the guardian heart crystal was protecting her from the brothers, it had shattered into the four winds, sending the demons within their world into a destructive frenzy. If the demons that roamed this world collected enough of the shattered pieces, then they could have the power to cross into her world and plunge it into chaos.

She and the guardians would have to find the talismans before the demons did or all would be lost.

Since then, the five guardian brothers had realized that she was the true priestess of the guardian heart crystal and therefore very much under their protection. Kyou was the only one of the guardians that kept his distance from her. The few times they had crossed paths, she had the sensation that he was more of an enemy than an ally. His golden eyes seemed so hard and cold when he had looked at her, as if destroying her was more to his liking.

Toya had told her once that Kyou thought humans to be beneath him. That was putting it mildly. In Toya's own words Kyou was a self-centered, conceited asshole that couldn't develop a heart if his life depended on it. Kyoko would remember this occasionally and it always brought a smile to her face. For some reason, the aloof demeanor Kyou possessed just seemed right.

He definitely wears it well, She said aloud.

The other four guardian brothers had readily placed her under their protection while they searched for the talisman before the demons of their world gathered them and used their powers to attack.

Toya had appointed himself as her closest watcher and protector. He covered up that closeness with the fact that she had started this mess by bringing the crystal back to their world to begin with. But then again, she could have argued the matter by saying that if he and Kyou hadn't attacked her when they first met, it wouldn't have shattered to begin with. It just wasn't worth saying anything though! Toya's temper always gave her a headache and made her irritated.

He still acted annoyed with her but sometimes she got the feeling maybe he loved her a little too. He just chose to often hide those feelings behind the huge chip he had on his shoulder! a chip she'd really like to knock off every once in a while. Maybe it would actually give him a better attitude about the whole thing.

She smiled softly at the thought of him. To her! Toya was fast becoming her best friend and maybe even a little more. Kyoko could feel the slight blush spreading across her cheeks. Toya had saved her life many times since the day the guardians had tried to kill her.

They had created a very strong bond and even though she and Toya still argued a lot, that bond bordered very close to a deep love. It was as if the crystal knew the feelings they hid for

each other because it had somehow chosen Toya to be the only one who could follow her back into her world when the other guardians couldn't breach the time portal. That had spurred some rather humorous arguments between the brothers. Kyoko was convinced they did it on purpose just to make her smile.

The other three brothers Shinbe, Kamui, and Kotaro all held a place in her heart as well. Kyoko's lips lifted in a fond smile, which left her where she was now. Here she stood, all alone, in the middle of the night, in a land where demons roamed freely. Sometimes she wondered if she didn't need her head examined.

More like needing to be locked up in the loony bin somewhere, in a room with rubber walls, she thought sarcastically. Not wanting to disturb the guardians just yet, Kyoko grabbed hold of a vine and climbed up to sit on one of the surrounding white rocks.

Just because she couldn't sleep didn't mean she needed to wake them up. It was way too late and still way too early. Looking up into the night sky, she just sat there, enjoying the view of the lightning bolts that didn't seem to be getting any closer.

Kyoko's fingers rose to the small pouch she wore around her neck where some of the talismans they had gathered safely rested. She was unaware that as she touched the binding, a soft fluorescent blue light radiated from it and the direction of the cool breeze quickly began to change.

Nearby, Kyou's head tilted as a tainted scent that was caught in the wind of the approaching storm drifted toward him. Hyakuhei was near. He narrowed his golden eyes as the breeze shifted, now coming from the direction of The Heart of Time. That scent, he gritted his teeth at the priestess and the power of the guardian heart crystal.

His hands fisted at his side as anger flashed across his expression causing a small growl to be heard in the stillness of the surrounding forest. She was alone and unguarded. How dare she be at the shrine at this dangerous hour unprotected! Why were his brothers not with her? Kyou inhaled deeply of the woman-child that traveled with his siblings.

Within his mind's eye, he could see the image of the priestess he and his brothers had become guardians of. Auburn hair, startling emerald eyes, it was as if the beauty of the maiden statue had come to life and color. She should have never come to this world with the guardian heart crystal. Neither she, nor it, belonged here.

If he could, he would toss her back through the portal and destroy the statue but to do so would be a bastardization of the barrier his father Tadamichi had protected. Despite his desire, it seemed this point was now very moot.

The dangerous power his uncle continued to gain was her fault. Had she not known what would happen? If she were the true priestess, she should have known to stay away from this

demonic world. His father had died because he had closed the time portal and this small human girl had undone everything he had sacrificed his life for. It had all been for nothing.

Tadamichi wanted him to protect the humanâ##sâ#; all of them. But why? Why would he now protect the very human who had been stupid enough to open the portal between their worlds. Why did Tadamichi care so much that he gave his life for them?

Kyou had tried to frighten her and send her screaming back into her world. But much to his disbeliefâ#; she had to be the only female who seemed to not fear him for more than a few fleeting seconds at a time. When heâ##d first come upon her not so long ago, she had stood there, chin held high, pointing a spirit dart straight at him as if she, a mere human, could fight himâ#; and win.

Heâ##d vowed to protect the guardian heart crystal and the time portal, but never a small human girl. His brothers may have agreed to it, but he had never. Humans were weak, foolish creatures that feared him. Why did she have to be different? Why did she not fear him? Why did she repeatedly stand before him, a symbol of everything defiant?

Kyou leapt from the tree heâ##d been sitting in and stood to his full height. He could feel his heart beat loud and thumping under his skinâ#; his guardian blood demanding that he go to her. It happened every time she was near and that only angered him more. His instinct was a force that was stronger than his will.

Her lack of fear only attracted him to her, and of late, she

had somehow consumed his thoughts along with his dreams. He'd stayed away from the group for that reason alone. How dare that girl plant herself so deep within his thoughts? He would teach her not to enchant him with her insolence and humanity. She was nothing to him except the priestess of the crystal; she had no business here within his reach.

Kyou's body tensed as he felt a shift in the balance of good and evil approaching the unaware priestess. His face was calm the calm before the storm. His silver hair swayed in the constant breeze as his senses picked up what danger was about to come upon her.

Hyakuhei tilted his head back, letting the storm of his own making rage around him. The wind swirled, ruffling his clothing and whipping his midnight hair around his beautiful face. His ruby eyes cracked open when the wind brought a scent to his nose that was not of the rain and sky.

An expression of euphoria crossed his features and he dipped his ebony wings downward in a powerful stroke to gain altitude. His gaze lingered in the direction of The Heart of Time while a sinister smile slowly appeared on his lips. She was here; the priestess that tormented him so.

Ah, priestess, so you are alone and unprotected, He whispered. Wait for my arrival, my beauty; I am coming for you.

Demons began pouring in droves from Hyakuhei's body as

he released them to do his bidding. A maniacal laugh escaped his soft lips and his eyes were wide, shining with the light of borderline insanity. The sky became black with his slaves as they zeroed in on the maiden statue and the object of purity within its gardens.

Lowborn demons were already being drawn to her and the scent of power she held. They were only drones sent to keep her from fleeing and Kyou could feel the presence of his uncle not far behind them. Hyakuhei had discovered her unprotected presence and was coming for her. He would not let Hyakuhei have her.

Kyou glanced up as a shadow passed across the light of the moon announcing their arrival. All night sounds stopped as translucent wings appeared behind Kyou, sending a furious spray of golden feathers across the clearing his silent form stood in. His long silver hair swayed in the wind as he readied himself for the fight to come.

“So be it.” The words left his lips in an answer to his own tormented thoughts.

She had put herself in danger once again and it left him with no choice. He decided if his brothers were going to be lax in their duties, then he would take the priestess from them. If this was the idea they possessed of protection, then they deserved to have her taken away. But first he would destroy the evil stalking her.

Chapter 2 Fearless

Unaware that the storm was now growing closer, Kyoko felt

the breeze cool her heated skin and welcomed it with a soft smile. Closing her emerald eyes, she enjoyed the solitude of the night before heading to Sennin's and joining the guardians that slumbered there.

Sennin's daughter, Suki, had become her closest female friend on this side of the time portal and her hut was where the group stayed when they weren't traveling across the dangerous lands looking for the shattered fragments of the guardian heart crystal. Suki had been with them from the very start, even though she wasn't a guardian.

Kyoko smiled thinking of Suki and the one guardian that never left her friend's side! Shinbe. He was one of the five guardian brothers. He was also a leech and very much had a thing for Suki. With midnight blue hair and eyes of amethyst, it was all Suki could do to continue to fight his advances.

Her smile widened wondering how much longer Suki could hold out. Suki may be stubborn but Kyoko knew just how stubborn a guardian could be once he set his mind to something.

Kyoko and the youngest guardian, Kamui, would often go into laughing fits as Suki tried her best to keep Shinbe in line without admitting she liked him. Kamui had a great sense of humor and she loved him dearly. The color of Kamui's eyes would change with his mood but she didn't think anyone noticed but her.

When Kamui smiled, it was true happiness and very contagious. But deep down, Kyoko sensed something more! something he hid from everyone! even himself. Sometimes

Kamui's eyes would shine with secrets and knowledge she couldn't even come close to comprehending. For one so pure of heart, it was almost as if he held the weight of the entire universe on his shoulders. It made her want to protect him just as much as he protected her, even though he was in no way weak.

Shaking her worries for Kamui from her mind, Kyoko was left with Kotaro, the livelier of the group and Toya's self-proclaimed competition. Almost from the very beginning Kotaro had claimed Kyoko for his own; constantly telling the others that she was his woman. This always got a rise out of Toya regardless of the situation. She knew Kotaro was joking but Toya always took him so seriously.

With dark windblown hair and ice blue eyes, Kotaro was a handful. He was constantly calling her "his woman" no matter how many times she denied it. He was a prince within his own territory and spent much time there, protecting it from the demons within his realm. Most of the time all he would have to do was just flash those bright blue eyes of his at her and she'd melt into a puddle.

He knew what strings to pull with her to get almost anything he wanted. Sometimes she wondered if every one of the guardians didn't have her wrapped around their little fingers in one way or another. The group very seldom saw him though. Her thoughts came full circle back to Kyou.

Kyou, Kyoko shivered as the name left her lips. He didn't like her or anyone else it would seem. He often acted

more like an enemy than a brother to Toya. Those two gave the words "sibling rivalry" a new meaning. Out of the five brothers, Kyou was definitely the strange one and the one to avoid at all costs. He was even more hostile than the demon plagued land he lived in.

Giving up on her scattered thoughts, Kyoko opened her emerald eyes and slid off the stone only to stop dead in her tracks. There not twenty feet from her stood Kyou. He looked almost angelic except for the dangerous expression in his golden eyes.

"Speak of the devil," she thought to herself.

The darkness that surrounded them seemed to illuminate his body giving him a ghostly appearance. Kyou's silence was thunderous. He looked as if he was considering something and Kyoko had a feeling she wouldn't like whatever the result was.

Kyou watched her face become pale because of her alarm and savored her intoxicating scent. For once she should fear him. She should also fear the demons he had just destroyed to protect her. His eyes bore into her as he remembered the dangerous monsters he'd just eliminated. If they had gotten to her!

The muscles in Kyou's jaw flexed angrily at the very thought of a demon's claws touching her. Still she did not run, nor did she scream. Would she scream if she realized Hyakuhei was on his way? Such fearlessness was not in her best interest. As his thoughts darkened, her lack of fear only served to inflame him further stoking the fires of the odd rage and passion he felt for the priestess.

Kyoko stood completely still. She didn't know how to take his hauntingly beautiful image. She was too scared to move and she dared not utter a sound knowing anything she did could put her life in danger. She wasn't so sure he had forgiven her for bringing the guardian heart crystal back into his realm.

She could feel a chill slowly crawling its way up her spine, not stopping until it reached the back of her neck and spread out from there like icy fingers of warning. She took a step backwards before she realized it and stopped herself from taking another retreating step. She knew that would be considered showing fear and she had been taught by her grandfather at a young age to hide such fear.

Her grandfather's words came back to haunt her, "Showing fear only makes you an instant victim."

Trying to fight the creeping sensation, Kyoko closed her eyes for a second. But when she opened them again, Kyou was nowhere to be seen, causing her to be even more terrified. Again the teachings of her grandfather haunted her, "Never let the enemy out of your sight or you will not see the coming attack."

"Kyou?" She whispered his name as fear laced her voice. She then felt his hot breath on her neck and heard him inhale long and slow as if testing her scent.

Slowly, with her eyes wide open, expecting death any second, she tilted her head sideways, stopping only when her cheek touched his silky one. She gasped and tried to throw herself forward only to feel his arm go around her like a steel band,

slamming her back against him and knocking the breath from her.

Kyoko's sudden fear was making it harder for her to regain that breath. She decided that she now knew what a panic attack really was and wondered if she was going to hyperventilate. This was the one person she feared more than Hyakuhei, though she had kept that little fact to herself. She had never been within touching distance of him; she definitely liked it better that way.

Her scent now surrounded him, intoxicating him. Kyou could smell her untainted scent mixed with fear, getting stronger and heavier the longer he held her imprisoned against him. Finally she was showing the fear he demanded but still she did not scream. Her first mistake had been that small step she had taken away from him. Just that simple gesture had heated his guardian blood in ways he hadn't felt in a very long time.

The lids of his golden eyes momentarily closed while images flashed before him too fast to decipher as he imagined the ghostly sound of her voice screaming; whether in fear or something else was hard to tell. All he did know is he did not want to hear it.

Or maybe he needed to hear that sound to rid himself of the spell she had put him under. Something told him that it wouldn't matter one way or the other. Deep inside his guardian's heart, Kyou knew he wanted her and he was not one to be denied. A slow dangerous smile graced his lips as she started to struggle against him. He quickly caught one of her wrist in a light grip as she jerked.

Kyou nuzzled her neck and then took in a sharp breath when she rubbed up against him trying to free herself. "You are encouraging me," He growled low in his throat and brushed his lips against the delicate flesh of her neck. His heated blood challenged him to claim her as his own.

Kyoko couldn't help the chills the sensation of his lips gave her. Was he trying to seduce her or was he going to kill her after all? She stopped struggling and went perfectly still not sure if she liked the sound of what he had just said and she didn't want to piss him off. Something told her that he was only trying to scare her.

'Smart girl,' Kyou contemplated to himself, but still she was not screaming and he was touching her— how odd. His arms loosened into a softer hold as she looked up over her shoulder at him curiously, her fear starting to subside.

Kyou got his first up close glance at her emerald eyes and the reaction startled him. She was looking at him as if he were a man— not a guardian lord. Her inability to show proper fear of him was confusing and that alone angered him. Her lack of fear had been what put her in danger tonight in the first place.

It was also why Hyakuhei was on his way to her right now thinking he could steal her away in the middle of the night. Even at this great a distance— he could feel the malicious intent of his uncle. With his hearing as sensitive as it was, he could almost hear the caress of the wind against ebony feathers. This was something for her to fear— among other things.

Fearâ€¦ he could teach her that.

He would teach her the reality of his world and show her why she should never have entered it. The Guardianâ€™s, his brothersâ€™ her protectorsâ€™ they were not here to save her now. He would instruct her in various ways the true meaning of fear. His golden eyes shone wickedly in the waning moonlight as an idea came to him.

Kyou reached around her body, sliding the palm of his hand slowly downward in a caressing motion until it rested against her thigh at the bottom of her skirt. He then slid it up and under the loose cloth. He could feel the heat coming from her soft skin scalding the palm of his hand.

Her whole body shivered at the light touch as she tried to twist out of his hold. The motion caused him to form a tighter grip on her. He slid his other hand across her rib cage meaning to only teach her the lesson of being caught alone and without protection so she would be wise enough not to do so again.

Once again his instinct was stronger than his will as something within her called to himâ€¦ making him want. Kyou could feel the heat radiating from her and his highborn blood stirred dangerously out of his control. Becoming confused, he suddenly did not want to let her go.

He would never know if the warning was for him or her. Dipping his lips closer to her ear, Kyou breathed one word. "Run."

In Kyoko's mind, fear gave way to panic when his arms

loosened. She could be very obedient when the time was right and now was that time. She shot forward with no thought except to escape. Her mind screamed Toya's name repeatedly but not a sound came from her lips. Every sound she would have made seemed to be lodged in her throat, leaving it echoing only in her own ears.

If she could just get closer to the village and Toya, she would then have a chance of him hearing her and saving her from his deranged brother. She mentally pleaded with herself to wake up even though she knew this was too real to be a dream.

She nearly groaned out loud when a raindrop hit her proving she had been right; this was no dream she could wake up from, the storm had finally reached her. Glancing quickly over her shoulder she slammed into what felt like a wall and stumbled backwards with the impact.

Seeing the white billowing silk shirt only a step from her, she sprinted in another direction; now running away from the village where the guardians slept and the only hope she had of someone saving her. She knew Hyakuhei used to be a guardian but somehow had lost himself to the demons he once fought; becoming the enemy. Kyoko wondered if the same thing hadn't happened to Kyou without anyone realizing it.

Kyoko caught a glimpse of white to her right and shifted back toward the village hoping to now have a chance to get to Toya. Her heartbeat was so loud in her ears it was deafening. Somewhere she knew the gods were laughing at her as the sky

opened up and let loose its rain with a ground shaking crash of thunder.

Why? Why was he doing this? Why didn't he just kill her instead of torturing her first? She knew she didn't have a chance of out running him. She was also aware of the fact that he was going to stop her before she got to safety, but that didn't stop her headlong rush for it.

Kyou watched her get closer to the village and decided to let her think she had half a chance of escaping for a minute. It would only make it better when he caught her. Then another scent hit him. His brothers. No! He would not allow it! They had failed in protecting her and because of that, she would now stay with him no matter what. His highborn blood demanded it.

Kyoko could feel the sudden change in him. She felt Kyou's aura closing in on her and she screamed, this time unable to hold it back. The sound rang like a death bell throughout the forest as a hand clamped over her mouth and an arm went around her waist tightening, cutting off her air supply as she was once again slammed back against his chest. Her feet were now dangling a couple of inches from the ground.

Toya glanced up at the darkening night sky just as the first raindrops came. Tonight was a bad night; he could feel it clear down into his soul. His eyes matched the color of the lightning that danced across the darkness as the storm closed in.

Unable to sleep while Kyoko wasn't with him, Toya had

climbed onto a high branch of a tree on the outskirts of the village to keep watch. All he could do was wait until dawn and then go meet her in the gardens of The Heart of Time. If he had his way she never would have gone home to start with.

The ground shook with a rumble of thunder but Toya's eyes widened; his hearing picking up a terrified scream within the storm. That scream had taken his breath away. Kyoko? What was she doing back here at this time of night without telling him first?

His eyes instantly turned to molten silver as his protective instincts went into overdrive. He'd never heard her that scared, even during battle. His heartbeat flew as his silver wings sprang to life and he took off almost too fast for the human eye to detect.

"Kyoko!" The worried cry ripped from his throat.

Shinbe stood outside Suki's hut no longer able to sleep. His nightmares would not allow it. His amethyst gaze locked on the forest that held The Heart of Time portal. Something was wrong, he could feel it; it had nothing to do with the oncoming storm that now raged over the forest.

Kyou? What was Kyou doing so close? For a very long moment, Shinbe's throat refused to work and his breath halted in his chest as he stared into the distance. He could feel her; Kyoko was back. His midnight blue hair swayed in the stormy winds that brought the scent of his brother's anger with it and his fist clenched. She was not alone; Kyou was with her!

He grabbed his staff that was leaning against the doorframe. Shinbe knew he didn't have to call for the others, he could already feel them standing behind him. Translucent amethyst wings spread out around him as his feet left the ground.

Kamui quickly followed suit, leaving a trail of multi-colored dust in his wake. Kaen roared to life lifting Suki up to join in the chase.

"No!" Kyou's voice was stern as if scolding her for something he didn't approve of. Not this time. He would not be denied this time. He'd wanted to touch her before, during the heat of battle, but he never had. Something had warned him the contact would be dangerous to them both so he had refrained.

This time he would appease his true nature. Her soul had plagued him long enough. She was the only human to ever face him in battle or anywhere else and not run in fear. He tightened his arms to still her struggles.

He knew his brothers loved her; but Toya was in love with the priestess. It made him angry for his brother to be close to something he desired for himself. He still could not understand why Toya hadn't mated with her but instead left her free and defenseless. Did he not realize the enemy could take her away? The mere thought of Toya taking her as his own sent a wave of possessiveness through his arms as he held her.

Kyou knew Toya had heard her scream for help. He could feel the silver guardian getting closer at an alarmingly fast rate. Not

only would he teach her not to wander out alone at night; he would also teach his naive brother a lesson for letting her do so.

With a quick thought, he created a shield he knew his brother could not break through. He gazed down at the girl whose emerald eyes were wide with the fear he had caused. Kyou removed his hand from her lips only to replace it with his lips, cutting off her cry. He claimed her mouth in a hard, hungry kiss, relentless in his quest. The moment he tasted her it was too late to give her back.

Kyoko instantly began struggling against him, gasping for breath. What was he doing? She had never been kissed before and this was not what she had dreamed of as her first kiss. She cried out against his lips only to be invaded.

Kyou thrust his tongue into her as he held her face still, his fingers entwined in her silky auburn hair. His other hand slipped back under her skirt caressing the smooth skin there before he encountered the soft cotton between her thighs.

He watched in fascination as her wide eyes instantly closed and she whimpered into the kiss. Kyou could feel her confusion of desperately wanting him to stop but also wanting more as he brought her body to life with sensations she'd never felt before. There were many things he would teach her this night.

His golden eyes glowed when a white-hot surge of desire shot through him and into his loins as he pressed himself against the soft roundness of her hip. He had not meant to take it this far; what had he done.

Toya's adrenaline rush provided him speed until his vision caught a faint blue glow coming from within the darkness of the forest. He quickly landed, skidding to a halt when he found them. A fluorescent blue barrier surrounded Kyou and his hostage, crackling with dangerous energy. What met his eyes shattered him and filled him up with fury at the same time.

Kyou! Toya roared in anger. Slinging his hands downward by his sides his daggers slid into existence. Grabbing the sacred weapons in a firm grip, he crossed the glowing blades. The power within the twin daggers pulsed to life causing a shockwave out around him, sending his hair blowing back and revealing the rage that showed on his face.

Toya roared as he lunged at the barrier and slammed his blades against it, only to be repelled backwards when energy bolts shot from the surface of the shield. His body slammed into the trunk of a huge tree, stopping his flight. He growled as he slid down the rough bark.

Picking himself up off the hard packed dirt, Toya watched angrily as his brother continued kissing Kyoko. He then noticed the muscles of Kyou's arm bunching slightly and followed the motion downward to his hand. Seeing his brother's hand beneath her skirt, rage hit him square in the chest! The muscle movements of his arm could only mean one thing. That rage amplified while his brother continued, knowing he was watching.

Kyoko! Toya could feel his guardian blood boiled as he screamed her name. Kyoko was his and he would not let Kyou

touch her this way. "Damn you bastard!" Again a wave of energy swept out around him, sending dirt and debris into the trees from the shock wave.

Kyoko's mind was tormented as her body began to betray her. She pounded on Kyou everywhere her small fist could land until she had to grasp the front of his shirt to hold on because her knees were weakening. She pushed against his chest as hard as she could but only succeeded in making him deepen the intoxicating kiss and giving his stroking hand more access.

She heard Toya scream her name and knew he was close enough to see her but Kyou wouldn't loosen his grip on her. The kiss became more demanding as her whimpers and frantic movements became more intense. She kicked out at him only to have her leg now trapped between his. Becoming frustrated she tried to bite him but that didn't work very well either.

He wasn't hurting her. Instead, what he was doing felt so good. He was now cupping her between her legs in a rhythmic grip that made her feel like she was riding his hand; it was unfair torture. Never once had she ever considered Kyou capable of a kiss; much less such a bold touch. For it to be so alluring was the very thought caused her mind and body to wage war as she still tried to gain her freedom.

Kyou was enjoying her determination to fight him but he could sense that she was growing confused with her reaction to the kiss and the pleasure he was giving her. Her young untouched body craved it even as she fought him with all her meager strength. It

gave him even more satisfaction knowing Toya was now watching from outside the shield he had created around them.

He could feel her responding to his touch and nearly groaned as her body betrayed her further. Her whimpers becoming more pronounced as her priestess side blazed to life the side of her soul that belonged only to the guardians. She had not given in. She still fought him but it did not matter for the choice was made. He had taken it too far to turn back now.

Kyou's gaze turned to lock with Toya's, wanting him to see, to watch him awaken her untamed passion. The expression on Toya's face the look in his eyes at that moment. Yes, now his brother knew the price he paid when he took his eyes off the one he was supposed to be protecting. In Kyou's mind it served Toya right to lose her this way.

Her gasps were enough for him to almost lose the control he was hanging on to by a thread. It was intoxicating to say the least. Toya would know what it felt like to want something his brother had and knowing it was out of his reach.

Kyou could feel her struggles becoming weaker and knew why as he felt her try to keep from pushing herself tighter against his hand where moist heat now radiated from her. Her back was arched and her eyes were closed, her long lashes draping over flushed cheeks.

Just as she reached the summit of the mountain he had forced her to climb, he removed his mouth from hers letting her seductive cry echo around them. Kyou's face held no

expression but his eyes glowed as he watched, feeling the heated flesh of her body tight against his. He had only touched her—such passion hid deep within the priestess.

Kyoko's confusion broke as she felt herself throb against his hand and she jerked her head up to glare at Kyou. His angelic appearance belied his evil deed. He was no better than his uncle Hyakuhei. She felt the full force of her mortified anger override any fear she still had. She raised her hand and struck him hard across his cheek then stilled when she realized she had probably just signed her death warrant.

When the sound of the smack faded, Kyoko raised her chin in defiance as the rain hummed against the outer shield of the barrier. "I hate you," She hissed as humiliated tears sprang to her eyes.

Kyou was unaffected and made no move to let her free as his gaze locked with her now angry frightened one. Whether they liked it or not, his guardian blood had chosen her and because of that they were both doomed. Kyou liked the smell of her anger. It was like an aphrodisiac to him but he felt the hot knife of jealousy as she turned her attention to his brother.

Toya's eyes were now hid behind the bangs of his silver streaked midnight hair as he watched them. He knew he could not break the barrier Kyou had created but he had heard her words. She hated Kyou and it was up to him to release her from her bondage.

"Kyou!" Toya's face lifted to show silver eyes of rage. "We

are her protectors—her guardians. Give her back to me! Now!" his voice was harsh and grating within the sound of the pounding rain.

Kyou still watched Kyoko. He slid his palm against her cheek caressingly as his golden eyes bored into hers. "So possessive," He whispered as if talking to himself, still watching the fire shoot from her eyes. The fact that she now feared him even less because of her anger made him smile inwardly.

Shifting his gaze back to his brother's, Kyou's eyes narrowed dangerously but his voice remained cold and void of feeling. "It's too late. You were lax in your protection of our priestess for her to be alone in the shrine this late at night."

Kyoko tried to shove away from him but his hold tightened. "Let me go you, you jerk!" She looked back over her shoulder at Toya wanting to scream his name, needing his help. But her lips stayed sealed, not wanting the brothers to fight.

She knew Kyou was strong but she also knew if angered—Toya's strength was limitless. A battle between them would be far too dangerous. Still, she couldn't help the pleading look that shimmered within her emerald eyes—that look alone was a silent scream for him to help her.

As if reading her thoughts, Kyou grabbed her chin and brought her attention back to him where it belonged. "Never," he growled out watching her eyes widen in alarm. Then, taking his fingers to the pulse of her neck, he pressed, catching her as her body went limp and she silently slid against him. He almost regretted

putting her to sleep almost.

Toya knew his brother was stronger but still he had no right to take her. He could read the odd desire in Kyou's eyes as he looked at Kyoko. "What do you think you are doing? Damn it! Just give her back to me! I have always protected her." He waited as his brother just stared at him.

Kyou could feel what his brother could not. The evil was closing in on them in the form of Hyakuhei and his minions. This would be another lesson for his dear brother to learn the hard way.

Toya released his pent up breath as his hands tightened into fist at his sides. "What are you thinking Kyou? She is our priestess!" Still not getting a response Toya whispered, "I thought you said humans were beneath you! why did you do that?"

Kyou's face remained calm and his voice softened for a fleeting moment as if talking to a wayward child, "If you take your eyes from her then she will be taken away from you. You brother, do not know the meaning of true protection."

Kyou had already turned his attention back to the limp girl in his arms. His brother loved her but had never told her, how ironic. She loved his brother but he intended to steal that love. He wanted it! craved it and would not be denied it.

His golden orbs turned back to Toya as his voice hardened. "Hyakuhei's near! can you not feel him? She would have been in danger. You left her untouched, unmarked, unprotected,

and alone! waiting for him. I will not make the same mistake."

Toya watched as the shadow of Kyou's golden wings shimmered to life, destroying the barrier that had surrounded them the second the powerful feathers touched its surface. He screamed in denial as Kyou disappeared with Kyoko in his tight embrace. The sound ricocheted, leaving nothing behind but the roar of the storm that still raged across the forest.

He knew he had failed her for now, but he would find a way to free her from his brother. Kyou was right for scolding him for his lack of surveillance over Kyoko, but to kiss her! touch her like that! then take her from his protection. Why?

Toya's blood boiled as the echo of Kyou's threat resounded within his mind. Unmarked? He prayed Kyou didn't mean that he would take Kyoko as his mate just to protect her. Toya growled at the very thought.

No way! He shouted at the now empty space. He was the one always by her side, not Kyou. Kyou hated humans and had never showed any interest in Kyoko. Why would he suddenly do something so rash? The very air surrounding Toya became alive with suppressed fury as his guardian powers rose dangerously with his anger.

Kyou damn it! I won't allow it!" Toya's voice could be heard throughout the forest.

Chapter 3 Descending Darkness

Shinbe landed behind Toya having arrived just as Kyou and Kyoko vanished. The others descended behind him as

they watched Toya's powerful aura expand around him in florescent blue waves.

Kamui's face showed the shock from what he had just witnessed as the purple highlights within his untamed hair rustled from the winds of Toya's outburst. His eyes seemed to change color with every confused heartbeat that followed. "Kyoko?" his voice sounded breathless as his bottom lip quivered in rebellion. Glittering multihued dust fell from his translucent wings as he lifted them in one mighty stroke intending to give chase to the one who had taken Kyoko from them.

A flash of lightning silhouetted the dark wings of the enemy as he shimmered to life right in Kamui's path. Hyakuhei's long midnight hair lifted in the current caused by his sudden descent. His ebony eyes locked with Kamui's causing the guardian to jerk back in his headlong rush to rescue Kyoko.

"Poor child, have you lost something?" Hyakuhei's voice held a note of concern but his ebony eyes gave his true intentions away. Drifting forward, he reached out to touch Kamui's pale cheek, only to laugh when the guardian shot back several feet to avoid the contact.

"Always so skittish." Ignoring the other guardian still on the ground, Hyakuhei stalked the sparkling eyed boy as he retreated, "Come now Kamui, how will you ever truly beat me if you do not have your priestess with you?" He knew the boy's fears better than anyone. His lips hinted at a sadistic smile. After all, he was the one who had taught Kamui all those

fears.

Kamui nearly choked on the panic that was rising higher by the moment. Seeing the monster in front of him was almost as bad as sensing the hidden monster inside the dream demon. He could feel it there in front of him behind the face of his enemy, memories of nightmares he had long since buried came back to haunt him as he fought the urge to flee the man before him.

Feeling Kamui's terror flood the area Shinbe shouted, "Leave him alone, traitor!" Raising his staff, he used his telekinesis to send an onslaught of rocks and earth at their uncle to distract him long enough for Kamui to escape.

With a wave of his hand, Hyakuhei created a barrier for the projectiles to harmlessly bounce off, his black eyes turned to the amethyst guardian in anger. "Do not interfere with something you have no knowledge of dear nephew."

Kamui dropped to the ground, landing on his feet as he pushed the dark memories back hoping they would stay hidden for a while longer. They were his secrets to keep and keep them he must. Kamui blinked, his eyes turning back to their normal glittering state. He would never remember what Hyakuhei dared him to remember, he glanced back at the other guardians wishing the lie were true.

Toya had seen enough and he snapped. With speed faster than the human eye could detect, Toya seemed to disappear and reappear behind Hyakuhei. Wrapping his arm around the enemy's neck in a death hold he growled, "And what the

hell do you think you can do about itâ##; dear uncle?â##

Hyakuheiâ##s eyes became slits as he realized Toyaâ##s anger had released the power that equaled his own. Seeing that Kamui had escaped his reach for now, he smiled deceptively. â##How do you intend to stop me when you canâ##t even protect one small girl? You have already lost.â##

He knew he could still torture the priestess with the seductive memories hidden deep within the dreams. The dream sprite would see that they stayed linked. Sooner or laterâ##; she would come to him willingly. Kyou would not have her for long. Even now he could feel her sleepingâ##; waiting for him to join her in her dreams.

With a wicked laugh, Hyakuheiâ##s body vanished leaving Toya to once again scream in rage.

Darkness surrounded Kyoko in its murkiness and somehow she knew she was once again asleep. Reality faded into the background and she cringed inwardly, knowing the dream had found a way to continue. She tried to fight itâ##; to wake up so it couldnâ##t reach her but the lull of the dream world was too strong.

Time and space had no meaning as the dream became real to her. Kyoko felt warm, almost too warm and the sensation was making it hard for her to wake up. She struggled to try to shake the darkness that left her so weak and lost. Moving her fingers beside her, she felt the softness of fur. She became aware enough

to realize that she was lying on some kind of pelt.

Opening her eyes, she looked at a stone ceiling and let her vision trail across it to the stone walls that surrounded her. She was in a cave of some kind. Light flickered in all colors around her from a small fire that was only about ten feet away. It was truly breathtaking as only the dream could be.

She tried to sit up but instantly regretted the movement, lying back as slowly as she could. Her head hurt and she was weak as if all the strength had just been zapped from her. What had happened?

Her lips parted as the memories started coming back to her. This time she sat up quickly not caring about the pain, still she held her head in her hands hoping to steady her vision.

It looked like she was deep within the earth because of the crystal formations along the ceiling and walls. There was only one entrance that she could see and it was small so the fire was doing a good job of heating the room. No doubt without it, the cave would have been very cold.

Closing her eyes again and rubbing her temples she tried to think rationally. The Guardian Heart Crystal. She had shattered it to keep Hyakuhei from obtaining it. That was the last thing she remembered. Opening her eyes again, she could see clearer.

Glancing down, she realized she was laying on fur the color of midnight. Kyoko groaned. Hyakuhei had her. She knew it. Why else would she be lying on what appeared to be a black fur

robe deep within a hole in the earth... only Hyakuhei could be that demented.

She wanted to cry but knew better, because if she did give in to the fear she might never stop crying. Checking her body for injury to keep her mind off her fears, she realized she was unharmed and instantly felt better. If Hyakuhei were going to kill her, he would have already done so, right? She shivered at the lingering question.

Looking all around, Kyoko felt better seeing that she was alone. If she were going to try to escape, now would be the time. She just hoped she had the energy it would take to flee the cave without Hyakuhei knowing.

Crawling up on her hands and knees she steadied herself. It took all of her strength just to push herself into a standing position. She fought the wave of dizziness that swept over her. What had he done to her? Or was it the shattering of the crystal that had stolen her stamina. She felt like she was lost in a dream and only hoped it was true.

She didn't mean to be a baby but she would give anything right now for one of the guardians to come and save her. After being in a world full of demons as long as she had been, nothing much scared her, but right now she was silently terrified.

Kyoko turned her attention to the opening of the cave. While it was light within the cave, it looked awfully dark on the other side of the opening. She made her way closer to the exit almost scared of what she would find on the other side.

She could feel the temperature difference as she reached the opening. She could even feel the cold trying to enter the warm room and it almost made her want the warmth of the black pelt she had been lying on. Glancing back over her shoulder, she contemplated returning to the warmth but quickly banished the thought.

“No,” Kyoko thought stubbornly as she rubbed her arms to keep them warm. She had made it this far, she wasn’t about to turn around and go back for it. Besides, it was Hyakuhei and needing it seemed wrong. He was the enemy.

She took another step, which brought her within the shadowy doorway, and she had been right. It was so dark. Kyoko raised her eyes to find a small stream of light coming from way above. From what she could tell, she was quite a ways from the surface. Staring at the light to avoid looking back at the darkness, she noted the fact that it must be morning now.

With a quiet sigh, she wondered how long she had been out of it. She bit her bottom lip hoping that she hadn’t slept for days or something like that. The thought of being alone a mile under the earth was creeping her out and the thought of Hyakuhei being with her down here was more than just creepy.

She nodded to herself thinking, “It’s definitely time to scram before the devil shows up to throw me in the fire.” Inhaling deeply, she steadied her fright knowing she didn’t have an alternative, but how was she supposed to get back to the top?

Kyoko took another step into the darkness, hoping to get a better view but what happened next took her breath away. She couldn't even scream. There was no floor for her foot to touch. She instantly lost her balance and was falling. She wordlessly watched the small shaft of light above her getting farther away.

Closing her eyes, Kyoko reached for the light as she waited on the impact. Out of the darkness warm arms came around her to slow her fall. She didn't care who it was as long as she wasn't falling any more. Her muffled cry echoed off the stone walls as she clung tightly to the muscular shoulders, her fear set in realizing she could have died.

She could feel the warmth coming off the person whose strong arms held her safely against a broad chest. She could hear something that sounded like soft wings as they rose upward toward the entrance to the room she had just fallen from. Fighting the urge to press closer to the body that had saved her, she started concentrating on how much lighter the walls appeared.

As the light came closer, Kyoko was almost too scared to look up, knowing already who had her, but morbid curiosity brought her emerald eyes to the face attached to her lifeline. Her fears were renewed. His perfect face turned toward her as his long dark hair hovered around them in waves. If evil had a name that name would be seduction.

"Hyakuhei," her voice was laced with alarm and gratitude at the same time. It was his fault she was here but also she didn't have to save her when she fell. Why had he done that?

How could she fight such an enigma? A small breeze hit her back and she realized they were close to the small cave she had originally awoken in. Had she really fallen that far?

She didn't say a word as his feet landed on the floor without a sound and he carried her bridal style back to the fur pelt and sat her down. He then lowered his body to sit in front of her. Kyoko's nerves were in a knot by the time he was settled. It wasn't helping that he just stared at her as if he were deep in thought. She bit her bottom lip knowing it would be useless to run.

She gazed right back at him as if sizing him up. If she didn't already know how evil he was, she would have thought of him just as strikingly beautiful as Kyou, except where Kyou had light coloring, Hyakuhei had dark coloring. Both men were powerful and very dangerous with looks that could kill but she knew better than to get taken in by seductive beauty.

She also knew not to show this traitorous guardian fear. So steadying her nerves, Kyoko raised her chin a notch and looked at him defiantly. "I don't have the crystal so why did you bring me here?" She was glad her voice sounded stronger than she felt and drew courage from it.

Hyakuhei ignored the priestess's question while he stared at her for a moment. This girl intrigued him on many levels. He knew she had great power but he also knew she had no idea how powerful she really was. She didn't even realize her fall had slowed down before he had caught her in his arms. If he had let

her fall, no doubt she would have landed softly on her feet.

His power had grown since the last time they had come face to face. This time finding the Guardian Heart Crystal would be easier because she would help him locate the shattered fragments. His mistake before had been his obsession with only the crystal. This time he wanted both her and the crystal.

“Why do you fear me so?” Hyakuhei whispered softly as he brought his hand up to touch her cheek and was surprised when she barely flinched. She was showing him that she was not scared of him, not realizing he could smell her fear rise when he reached out to touch her. She was right to be frightened but he would make her forget such fears.

With the skin contact and her wide eyes staring into his, he entered her mind, giving her the feeling of comfort and safety. He had put spells on her before but she had always broken them. This time it would be a spell that left her feeling no danger and she would have no cause to break free of it even though she probably could if she tried hard enough. This was the thrall of a vampire demon he had recently taken into his soul.

The corners of his sensual lips turned up in a hint of a smile as she curiously watched him and her scent of fear receded.

Kyoko should have known better than to let him touch her but she was trying her best to show no fear. As her heart pounded in her ears she began to feel strange. He had yet to try to hurt her and for some reason she understood that was not his intentions at all. She felt safe with him and she also felt sleepy. She turned

her cheek into the palm of his hand and lowered her lashes.

Hyakuhei She whispered, glad she was no longer alone within the cave.

He felt her tire and crawled closer to gently lay her back on the soft midnight fur. Hovering above her he straddled her body and stared down at the vision he now had caged under him.

It is I whom you will love Kyoko my touch, my voice my kiss. He lowered his lips to hers as she fell asleep. Tonight he would let her body and mind sleep and he would keep contact with her to strengthen the bond of the thrall. He would make her want him to the point of physical pain so she would have no choice but to seek him out and feed the craving.

He lay down beside her, drawing her body within his arms, inhaling her scent. He smiled to himself knowing she was such an innocent just a woman-child really. He had no desire to change that tonight. His body tightened around her possessively. She was pure and oblivious to the fact that she was now under his control while asleep within a dream. She was his!

Several miles away Hyakuhei tossed and turned as he dreamed the same dream as Kyoko the dream demon now had them both within its clutches and they didn't even know it. The demon laughed silently at the chaos it had created. Oh, it was undoubtedly under Hyakuhei's control but its mind remained untouched. For how long was still an unknown and it sought to strike back at its jailer while it could.

The sliver of crystal within the dream masters spirit gave him

the power to look deep within Hyakuhei; so deep he could see through The Heart of Time and into another reality. Past or future world; it didn't matter for it was the truth and he would use it against the dark one that had chained him.

He would feed the memories into both Hyakuhei and the priestess so they would know defeat not once; but twice. This was the land of demons and the demons should always win.

Kyou carefully held Kyoko in his arms even though she was asleep. He had put some distance between Hyakuhei and the priestess but somehow; it was as if Hyakuhei was still within touching distance of her. His guardian blood roared in response to these thoughts while he held her a bit tighter to himself.

Lifting a hand to cup her cheek, he felt foreign warmth start to spread through him when she turned her face slightly into his palm. His golden eyes hardened when she whispered a name in her sleep. She had said the enemy's name so tenderly.

With an angry growl, Kyou tried to peer into her mind to see what she was dreaming about but found a barrier keeping him from the dream. His gaze narrowed; a dream demon's barrier? How dare Hyakuhei construct a bond with Kyoko using a lowly sleep demon? His lips thinned with the knowledge of how much power the dream demon had within its enchantment.

Stopping in midair, Kyou sent a banishing wave of psychic power directly into the barrier and smiled icily when he heard the faint scream of the dream master as it left her mind. He could

sense the taint of Hyakuhei leave her as her dream came to an abrupt end. He could only hope Hyakuhei was now wide-awake, in a cold sweat and in pain.

Kyou shifted her up closer to his face so he could watch her as he flew to the veiled barrier that hid his castle from all. Others would only see a dreary forest covered in mangled strangling vines and the rain, but he knew the illusion.

Closing his eyes, he whispered secret words and the morbid landscape shifted as a hole in the hidden barrier opened, allowing him to enter. The illusion closed behind him. The enchantment had once again sealed his home from the restless world of demons.

The barrier itself was a stroke of genius created by his father Tadamichi to keep unwanted enemies from attacking. In the end however, Kyou discovered the true purpose of the barrier to prevent Hyakuhei from returning home. It was a fitting punishment so long ago, Kyou had witnessed his uncle standing just outside, staring in and wanting, needing to reach past it and grasp the power Tadamichi had left behind.

He flew over the lush grounds that surrounded his palace, entering an open window on one of the upper floors his feet silently landed on the marble floor inside. With grace, his steps made no sound as he walked to the side of the room that held a pillow large enough for a dozen people to sleep on.

Bending down, Kyou laid her gently on the soft pillow only to stare hard at her. Why had he taken her? He knew why

'because he wanted her'. That had been enough.

He knew when Kyoko awoke that she would hate him. Kyou did not want her to hate him. Again he wondered why he cared so much about what she thought of him. Since when had he wanted something that did not already belong to him?

He growled softly, getting annoyed with his own tangled thoughts. How could he get her to agree to stay here, with him, without having to fight her every step of the way? This was a new obstacle to the lord of the demon realm.

If it had been someone else causing these thoughts to haunt him, he would just destroy them and go on with his existence. But she was their priestess; he was her guardian. He didn't want to kill her. He didn't want to hurt her at all. He wanted only to keep her. This notion surprised him.

He would make a deal with her. Yes, she would show him what he wanted to know. Only then would he let her go. If she still wanted to go and he would make sure she did not. The fact that Hyakuhei had slipped into her dreams only a few moments ago heightened his need to keep her close.

His only concern at this point was the power of the dream master; was it strong enough to breach the barrier that surrounded his home? Would the ancient magic be enough to protect her? She had no idea how much danger she was really in. Kyou's golden eyes shifted to her face as he sensed her pulse speed up. She was waking up.

He sat down on the pillow beside her and waited. First, he

would try to calm her fears. Then and only then would he be able to move on to the next step, keeping her beside him regardless of the cost.

Kyoko felt like she was on a cloud and it confused her. Her hand moved across something very soft and she wondered if she was dreaming again. Hyakuhei had kissed her so softly. Why had he kissed her? Her eyes fluttered open only to widen when the first thing she saw was Kyou sitting beside her, looking like a frozen angel that had lost its wings.

Emotionless golden eyes were pinning her to the spot where she was lying. The similarities between her dream and her reality were disheartening to say the least.

She quickly looked around her noticing the black marble floor and stone walls. Her first thought was that this was just like the cave only nicer. It looked like what she always imagined the inside of a castle would look like. Large tapestries covered parts of the walls giving it a warmer touch along with the gold and black pillow she was laying on.

Her attention returned to Kyou noticing he had not moved a muscle. Again the remembrance of her earlier thought came back to haunt her. He's just as dangerous as Hyakuhei. How could someone so beautiful be so evil? The darkness of the room made his aura seem to glow disturbingly brighter as if mocking her thoughts.

Again, the same feeling of knots in her stomach returned just like in the dream. Closing her eyes tightly, she fisted her hands

on the pillow and prayed this was just another dream that she would wake up back at the maiden statue and Toya would be standing over her yelling about her stupidity for coming back in the middle of the night. When her eyes slid open she swallowed fearfully, comprehending that this was very real.

When he actually spoke, it startled her so much that she flinched at the melancholy voice. Her emerald eyes widened at the reaction knowing she'd just messed up again by showing him fear; this was not good.

"I will not hurt you if you behave." Kyou stared blankly into her eyes waiting for her reaction to his words. He then smirked inwardly when she glared at him. 'Good.' He thought to himself. She was not going to scream in fear of him; not at least while she was still so angry.

Kyoko glared daggers at him as she remembered what he had done and right there in front of Toya of all people. How could he have done such a thing? Lifting her chin Kyoko hissed, "And what makes you think I would ever behave myself?"

Kyou nearly lost himself when the demand flew from her pink lips. By the gods, she was determined to defy him to the very end. Despite his initial dislike of her, she had to know it was not his desire to end her existence. If that were the case, she would have died at his hands upon their first meeting. Her defiance was heating his blood again; forcing him to make a physical effort to concentrate on the task at hand.

Kyoko's eyes suddenly dropped from his. She couldn't

compete with the intensity of his gaze. Not at that moment. Not with her heart beating so hard. The strange look in his golden orbs scared her more than fighting Hyakuhei himself.

"You will behave if you want to go back to Toya and the other guardians," He said confidently as if stating a fact. He narrowed his gaze as her eyes snapped back up to his. So she thought she was going to argue did she? He certainly hoped so. If he had anything to do with it she would never set eyes on Toya again.

"Who do you think you are?" she demanded rising to her knees in front of him. "You put your hands on me, touched me in ways that I didn't want. I don't care what you want or have to say, take me back to Toya you perverted leech!"

Kyou suddenly leaned forward making Kyoko fall back into her original position and he savored the mixed scent of her fear and excitement.

"You will stay here with me until I deem otherwise. If your so called Guardians cannot be there to protect you, then they do not deserve the responsibility." Kyou's temper blazed as he remembered how close she had come to death from the demons he had destroyed before taking her. This was for her own good. If he had not found her in time, she would be with Hyakuhei right now instead of under his protection.

Kyoko's lips parted in confusion, "Why do you want me to stay here with you?" It was then she realized just how close he was while leaning over her. She watched the way he was breathing and she blinked for a moment, it looked like his shirt went

nearly transparent in the light. Mentally shaking her head, she met his gaze waiting for an answer to her question.

Before Kyou could answer, the door to the room opened and two small children ran in smiling and giggling. They looked to be around six years old. The boys had untamed blonde hair that stopped just past their shoulders. They were identical twins.

Kyou abruptly sat upright, momentarily, wearing an expression of someone with his hand caught in the cookie jar. Kyoko didn't even know that look was even in his repertoire. She knew she'd never forget it! where was a camera when you really WANTED it?

She cocked her head to the side knowing they were human children and twins at that. Why were they here with him?

"Kyou, you are back." They called out his name while running closer. Noticing Kyoko they stopped, their eyes widening with shy curiosity.

"Kyou, is she staying?" they turned wide clear blue eyes up to stare at Kyou.

Kyoko watched Kyou. He didn't even look at the small twins as he answered them.

"Hiroki, Hiraru," He said in a deadpan voice.

"Yes?" Came the sweet replies.

"She is staying. Now leave us for the time being." Kyou's cold calm voice didn't faze the twins as they smiled at Kyoko then suddenly ran forward, closing the distance between them.

Kyoko expected to be pounced on. Her eyes widened in

surprise when they stopped short of reaching her and climbed into Kyou's lap, hugging him for all they were worth. Again the expression on Kyou's face was priceless making her wonder just how much she really knew about him. The twins jumped back laughing when Kyou abruptly growled deep in his chest before they turned around and skipped out of the room.

Kyoko looked back up at Kyou. "Why are they with you?" He simply stood before her, elegant and infuriatingly beautiful. She figured he wouldn't answer and was surprised when he did.

"They want to stay and I let them," he replied with the same blank stare he had given her earlier. Towering over her, Kyou noted the look of surprise that crossed her face. His gaze trailed down her cheeks to pause on her lips, full, almost pouty lips.

Kyoko didn't know what to think about his answer. "Why do you let them when you hate humans?"

He loved to watch her lips move. Kyou leaned closer to Kyoko, coming within inches of her face. "They are not smart enough to fear me." His voice was low and smooth. His eyes rose from her lips becoming deadlocked on hers.

Kyoko swallowed, leaning back just a little but the pillow didn't allow too much room to do so. What did he mean that she was not smart enough to be scared of him? She could tell he wouldn't hurt her so she didn't flinch from him. "Then why am I here?" she cocked an eyebrow at him.

"Because you are also not smart enough to be scared of me," His voice got softer as he watched her face so close to his. It

amazed him how much her emotions showed on her face.

Kyoko wanted to lean back a couple more inches trying to create space between them. "Do you want me to be scared of you?" she asked cocking an annoyed eyebrow. She inhaled when his eyes seemed to unnaturally glow even more within the shadowy room. She suddenly forgot what had led to this conversation.

"As long as you behave, you have no reason to fear me. For now," He reached his hand out to touch her cheek only to slowly lower it when she suddenly drew back out of range. The light from the window behind him reflected within her eyes. Did she realize how seductive she looked with her childlike innocence and her melancholy lips? He sat back away from her, his gaze narrowing once again.

Kyoko watched him curiously. "Kyou, why am I really here? I need to go back to the other guardians and continue hunting the missing talismans." She couldn't tell what was up with him and it was starting to officially freak her out. He still didn't answer her and the butterflies in her stomach were breeding as she waited.

After a minute of watching him just stare at her, Kyoko finally put her hand down on the pillow and pressed herself up to a standing position.

Kyou was oh so tempted to let her lean up into him but after treating her body so seductively earlier, he knew to do so would break any sort of trust he'd gained. He leaned back and let her rise to her feet.

Feeling a little off balance trying to stand on the oversized pillow, Kyoko put her hands out to balance herself as she glared defiantly down at him. "Okay! If there is no reason for me to be here then I want to go back." She went to take a step but before she knew what happened, she was on her back staring up at a very angry looking Kyou. "Well! at least I know his face isn't made of stone," she thought to herself.

Kyou had grabbed Kyoko's ankles and as she landed he pulled her toward him. He was instantly on top of her, staring down into her face. Her hands were pressed against his chest and he could feel the crystal's power building within her palms but she didn't release it. "Good," he thought to himself.

"Do you think I took you for nothing? You were in danger and didn't even know it!" he informed her darkly.

"Danger," Kyoko nearly growled at him. "I was fine until you showed up!"

He breathed hard trying to calm his temper and his rapidly beating heart. He did not want to hurt her but she would not leave yet. Someone had to keep her safe and he did not trust his brothers to do that after their negligence. "You will not leave until I learn what I need to know from you."

"What do you want to learn from me?" Kyoko pressed her hands against his hard chest and pushed, trying to get him to back up so she could sit up again. When she figured out he wasn't going to budge, she glared at him in frustration.

She was starting to lose her own temper with the `prince of

ice' she thought to herself, causing a slight hysterical grin to cross her features. Her fingertips tingled with her power and she reined it in since he had made no real threat to herâ#; yet.

Kyou again watched the emotions cross her face in amazement, though he showed no evidence of being amazed. He put his hands on her shoulders and gave her a slight shake. "Thatâ#; I want to learn that."

Kyoko frowned at him. Now what the hell was he talking about?

He shook her again, "And that, I want to know that."

"What?" She yelled at him, getting angry. Kyoko gave him a strange look wondering silently if he had seriously lost his mind.

"Yes that, all of that and this too." He pulled her to him and slashed his lips across hers in a searing kiss.

Kyoko gasped when he took her by surprise and slipped his tongue past her lips bringing his body closer to hers, tasting her. In her panicâ#; the crystalâ##s power faded and she pushed against him but her strength had no real will.

Kyou chose this time to release her when her struggles ceased. He had made his point even if he was the only one that understood it. His gaze never left her face as she fell back against the pillow, her cheeks flushed. The picture would forever be imprinted in his mind. Her breasts rising and falling with each deep breath. Her lips slightly parted. Her long auburn hair fanned around her in waves.

It was the look of innocent seductionâ#; making his loins

tighten and swell. She was already his; only she didn't know it.

Kyoko put the back of her hand to her lips in an attempt to bar him from doing such a thing again. Now she was angry. She didn't understand. He wanted to learn what from her? "WHAT are you talking about? WHAT do you want me to teach you?" she asked the questions with a shaky voice feeling like he was trying to drag her into his insanity.

When she didn't get an answer quick enough, she cocked an annoyed eyebrow at him and hissed, "Go take a flying leap." She then wiped the back of her hand across her mouth as if to rub away the sensation of his kiss.

Losing his patience with her, he turned to leave the room. Why didn't she understand? Why didn't she see that he wanted to know her? He couldn't release her now; unprotected from Hyakuhei. The enemy had gotten so close to her that he was now haunting her dreams; he would not allow it.

Kyoko screamed at him. "I want to leave! Let me go! If I don't know what you want from me, then I can't help you!" She watched as he stopped, his back stiffened but he didn't turn to face her.

Kyoko knew what he wanted from her but for now, this would have to do. "I want you to teach me your human emotions." He walked toward the door. "Maybe then I will understand why I am bothered with protecting one."

He left, firmly closing the door behind him. Once in the

hallway outside the room, he leaned back against the wood of the door. That was strange, he thought with a raised eyebrow. He quickly straightened up and looked around him to make sure no one had witnessed his moment of weakness.

You stood there for a moment, thinking. If he could get her to stay even if it was only for a while, he would have time to try to get her to love him. It was time to admit what he was up to at least admitting it to himself. He wanted to keep her. For once in his long life, he wanted something his brother Toya possessed.

He wanted the priestess for his own wanted to be the one to protect her. Was this what they call love? His eyes darkened attractively. Deep down inside he knew emotions, but only he was aware of that fact. He just hadn't had a reason to tap into them in so long that they had become dormant. He smiled secretly. If she wanted to leave him then first, she would have to get to know the real him.

First, he wanted to know what human love was and she would be the one to show him. In order to do that she would have to fall in love with him. His highborn blood had already chosen her as his mate and he could not change that. No matter how hard she fought him he would only fight harder.

Your eyes grew brighter with the thought of her coming to him willingly. He wanted to feel all those emotions. He knew why his father and brothers thought humans were so interesting worth protecting. They thought each and every one of them were different and in some way intriguing. He found it

easy to ignore most humans but not the priestess. She was the enigma among the humans.

It had been a long time since the lord of the guardian realm looked forward to anything. But this was a battle he did not intend on losing.

Chapter 4 Double Trouble

Kyoko sat up on the pillows staring at the door that had slammed only a few seconds before. Her thoughts were frozen on the reason he said she was there. Kyou wanted her to teach him human emotions? Why would the prince of ice want to know human emotions? And why would he want to learn them from her?

She raised her hand to her lips still feeling the tingling sensation his kiss had caused. Kyoko's eyes narrowed as she lowered her hand thinking. 'One thing is for sure! Kyou knows two emotions already! anger and conceit.'

Hiroki and Hiraru opened the door peeking in, looking for the pretty girl. There had never been a girl in the castle or at least one that they had ever seen. It had been a long time since they had even seen another human among them. They were so used to only seeing Kyou that it had never dawned on them that they were missing out on anything till now. Now they couldn't keep their curiosity at bay.

Looking at each other when they didn't see anything straight away, they leaned forward a bit more to fully see the

pillow the girl had been lying on. Seeing that she was still there, they scrambled in almost falling over each other in the process.

Kyoko's eyes brightened considerably when she saw the twin boys. They were so adorable and again she wondered how someone like Kyou could have these two beautiful children in his company. It just didn't fit his cold personality.

In their rush to her side, one of them tripped but luckily landed on the edge of the pillow instead of the unforgiving marble floor. Kyoko couldn't help it and laughed, taking him up in her arms and placing him back on his feet. She watched the other twin run up and hug his brother. Their cheeks were pressed together looking at her with identical smiles. They were so adorable and reminded her of her little brother when he was small.

"Be careful," Kyoko admonished. "You shouldn't run across such slick floors. My name is Kyoko."

"Hiya Kyoko. He is my brother Hiroki" "And he is my brother Hiraru." They finished each other's sentences.

"It's very nice to meet you," Kyoko nodded.

"You're very pretty," Hiraru said quietly.

Kyoko mentally squealed at their cuteness but held it in. "Thank you Hiraru, I must say you two are very handsome too."

They both blushed sweetly and Kyoko was finding it harder to keep from hugging the life out of them. She glanced toward the door then back at them. "Do you know where Kyou is?"

Hiroki and Hiraru gave each other a knowing look. "I think

she likes him," Hiroki whispered.

Kyoko's lips parted but nothing came out and she blushed.

"Her cheeks are red," Hiraru said. "Mommy's cheeks always turned red when Daddy would hug her. Do you think Kyou hugged Kyoko?"

Kyoko resisted the urge to fall over and bury her face in the pillow. "He's done more than hug me," the thought steamrolled through her head. Trying to distract herself she noted the smudges of dirt on the boy's hands and grinned. Boys would be boys and it looked like these two had been playing outside.

Kyoko reached out and lifted Hiroki's hand turning it palm side up. "Been playing in the dirt have we?" she winked.

"We need to take a bath now," Hiraru informed her knowing Kyou never had dirty hands. The twins looked up to him and wanted to be just like their hero. "Will you come take a bath with us?"

Kyoko shook her head, "I don't think that would be a very good idea." She faltered when the twins each took a hand and attempted to pull her to her feet.

"Kyou won't mind," Hiroki said. "Once he sees how pretty you are when you're clean maybe he'll hug you."

Kyoko's eyes widened again and she groaned mentally. She didn't want Kyou to hug her! she wanted Kyou to let her go. That's when it truly dawned on her! the children didn't

know she was being kept against her will.

The little twins smiled innocently at her, pulling her toward the door. Her resolve to stay right where she was shattered when she saw their dirty bare feet. She wondered who bathed and took care of them. All the little things her mother used to do for her, that she took for granted, had not been given to these beautiful boys.

Kyoko didn't know what to do so she just nodded and followed the children out the door and down the hall. At the moment it was a plus just to get out of that room. There were large tapestries and paintings lining the walls; more than a few Kyoko wouldn't have minded taking a closer look at but she wasn't about to make an appointment. She had an ulterior motive; find a way out of the castle and back to Toya.

The tiny hands holding hers continued to pull her down the hall to a set of white marble spiral steps. The stairway was so steep Kyoko tightened her grip on the children's hands not wanting to see them trip and fall in their haste. At the bottom they led her through a set of double doors. Kyoko felt the change in temperature and humidity; she blinked in surprise and looked around with her lips parted in awe.

The room was enormous with a tantalizing hot spring bubbling comfortably in the center of the stone floor. The stone stretched all the way to the walls where it was lined with soft fluffy cushions creating a very comfortable setting. Under the right circumstances; it could have been considered romantic.

Following the wall, she craned her neck noticing it went all the way up through the center of the castle, leading to different wings and letting in the breeze and sunshine. If it were raining, she'd be wet right about now.

Well, at least this is closer to being outside than I was, she glanced down and smiled when both the boys looked up at her curiously. It's beautiful, She nodded not wanting to worry them with her own ramblings.

Kyoko remembered Toya once telling her that Kyou lived in a luxurious setting; this alone confirmed it. She couldn't tell just how big the castle was, and she wasn't really sure she wanted to find out. It was bad enough she was having trouble remembering how she got to this room.

Following her line of vision back down to the spring, she noticed there where soft materials for drying and steam rising off the heated water. She had come to absolutely love the small hot springs they often ran into in this world but this was the best thing since sliced bread. In ways, it was even better than what she had in her modern world.

It seemed almost too good for just general use and she wondered if this were someone's personal bathing area. She shivered when the idea that this could be Kyou's private bath entered her mind. Taking a quick look around to be sure, she breathed a sigh of relief upon determining he was nowhere around.

Kyoko looked down at Hiroki and Hiraru nervously. "Are we

supposed to be here?"

They smiled, jumping up and down with excitement. "We wanted Kyoko to come with us like Mommy used to do!" With that the twins preceded in stripping and running into the water, giggling in delight.

Kyoko's jaw dropped. Like mommy used to do? She blinked several times wondering how two children so sweet and innocent had survived without their mommy and how it was that they had wound up living with the prince of ice.

Kyou paced back and forth within the walls of his room wondering what he was going to do with Kyoko. He wasn't worried about Toya and the others, but the fact that Hyakuhei had gotten so close to her didn't make him happy. If he hadn't gotten to her first, what would have happened?

Shaking his head he growled at the question. He knew exactly what would have happened. Hyakuhei would have seduced her and then used her to gather the talisman and open a portal into her world. He could still remember the softness within her voice as she said Hyakuhei's name in her sleep. That thought alone was enough to make him want to fly into a rage. His uncle did not deserve to touch her. He would NEVER touch what was his.

He stopped pacing and stared into space. He very much liked the sound of that. The only problem he faced at the moment was gaining more of her trust and making her see that he was the only one that would ever have the ability to protect her

the way she was meant to be protected. In order for him to accomplish this, he needed to keep her beside him and make sure she remained so.

He knew he could force her to stay but he also realized that would only make her hate him. He had worked most of his life at keeping humans at a distance, but Kyoko he didn't want her distant at all. If she never left the castle, then evil could never reach her. He wanted her to want to stay willingly, like the twins.

A very brief smile graced his lips thinking of the human children he had accommodated within his home. The expression vanished when his mind flashed back to the past keeping the twins had been an accident.

The humans that had been stranded in this world, millenniums ago, had had to fight the demons of this world in order to survive. But often they were killed off at early ages because of their weakness, so the population had not grown by much. Those that did survive to adulthood often spend their entire lives fighting the demons that plagued this world.

The guardians and stronger humans within this world tried to keep them protected but they couldn't always be there at the right time.

Such was the situation with the twins. Not long after the guardian heart crystal had been shattered, Kyou had heard of a village near his castle being attacked by the underlings of his uncle and he knew there must have been a talisman there for Hyakuhei to show such interest. On top of that, the village

was within his territory and therefore under his protection. Unfortunately, for reasons he still had not discovered, he had not sensed the demons closing in until it was too late.

By the time Kyou had arrived, the village was under attack by several airborne fire demons. The twins had been the only ones left and that was only because their parents had hid them in a cavern under their hut. Had he not heard their cries under the burning shelter? Kyou found it difficult to think about that part of it which constantly led him to a confused state.

Having pulled them from the wreckage, he had noticed the twins both had been adorned with a necklace made from the shattered pieces of the guardian heart crystal. The twin's crystalline blue eyes had matched the color of the jewel that hung around their neck as they cried for the family that had been taken from them.

He had stood there looking around the destroyed village as the twins clutched at his legs, hiding their faces against him.

Kyou had thought it strange that both fragments had been in the shape of a teardrop; how ironic as he looked around the village that had been slaughtered leaving behind the very reason it had been demolished. Had the guardian heart crystal somehow hid the children from the monsters that had come for them? Considering the unknown nature of the crystal and the many secrets it contained; it wouldn't have surprised him.

Knowing others would come for the tainted necklaces, Kyou quickly removed the fragments from their necks. He tried

convincing himself repeatedly that it was part of his duty as a guardian to protect the talisman but, again, emotion constantly swayed his decisions. Later, looking back on the event, he had to stop from associating himself and his brothers with the twins. Like the children, they had no family except each other.

Already hiding feelings for Kyoko, it had made him curious about humans, so when the twins had tried to toddle behind him, wanting to follow him, he realized they too would die without his help.

Something about the tearstained faces and the way they looked up at him made his chest feel tight and heavy; he would not leave them. The decision made, he had turned and swept them up in his arms and brought them home behind the walls where demons could not find them. He would watch after the human siblings and learn the secret of why the guardian heart crystal protected such a race.

Shaking the memories from his mind, he pulled the chain out from his shirt and glanced at the sphere that rested there. The fragments of the crystal he had taken from the children.

He raised it up to eye level to watch the small teardrops float within the barrier he had given them. Such beautiful slivers of blue crystal that seemed to swim in a sea of tears they had caused. Tears he knew the twins still shed for their lost family, though they were coming less often than before. Occasionally, while resting, one or both would attempt crawling into bed with him to sleep. He did not understand this aspect of comfort but he

allowed it, curious.

Slipping the necklace back into its hiding place, Kyou retreated back to the room he had placed Kyoko in and opened the door. Without stepping a foot inside, he could feel the room was empty and his anger grew. He had not told her she was free to leave. His expression hardened. She would have to learn her place if he was to protect her.

He inhaled slowly, detecting the scent of the twins mingling with hers. He walked on silent feet to one of the two balconies that lined the hallway just outside her room. This one led to the center of the castle and he looked down toward the hot springs that lay within.

Seeing her again, Kyou felt his anger cool. She had not fled as he had first thought. He silently watched her from the shadows as she spoke with the siblings.

Kyoko walked to the edge of the enclosed hot spring, still undecided on whether or not she should be here watching the twins bathe or trying to find a way out of the castle completely. Seeing the children's carefree happiness eased her worries for a few minutes. As long as they were with her nothing would happen, right?

Letting her mind relax, she sat down on the stone lining that surrounded the heated water, sticking her feet in while watching the set of human twins. She was still curious as to how the little children came to be here, with Kyou. "Hiroki, Hiraru, where is

your mommy and daddy?"

The twins stopped splashing and turned to Kyoko with a tilt to their little heads. "The village was attacked and everyone disappeared in the flames. Hiroki took a piece of cloth from the side, dipped it in a bowl on the side of the spring, and started rubbing his little body.

Kyoko was surprised to see that it made lather as he rubbed his skin. So, the twin's parents were dead? "How did you come here to be with Kyou?" She watched Hiraru wade to her smiling.

His little face tilted up to Kyoko's and she could see warmth in his eyes. "The demons would have taken us too but Kyou stopped them and now we get to stay with him." he turned and splashed water on Hiroki, getting rid of the soap while he continued to answer her question. "The demons can't find us now. They can't even see this place, Kyou said so. Kyoko watched Hiroki struggle to wet Hiraru's hair and lather it.

So! Kyou had saved them and now he watched after them much like a father would? Kyoko's eyebrows forwarded in confusion. That did not sound like the Kyou she had come to fear. Her gaze softened for a second wondering if she really knew him at all. An ice prince with a heart? she giggled at her own joke.

Noticing the stream of soap making its way toward Hiraru's eyes, Kyoko decided to offer her assistance. "Would you like for me to help you wash your hair?"

When the children nodded and laughed, Kyoko got up her

nerve and removed her clothes then slid into the water to help them, completely ignoring the fact that at the moment she was supposed to be trying to find a way back to the other guardians and far away from the guardian who had become her jailor.

How was I supposed to know Kyoko was coming back through the time portal in the middle of the damn night? Toya yelled up at the sky as if Kyou could still hear him. It had taken Shinbe a while just to get him this calm.

They had all panicked at first when light traces of red started filtering into Toya's irises. When Toya started to destroy select trees around him, they had decided to step back a moment and let him work off some of his anger instead of letting it build up to such a dangerous level.

And Hyakuhei showing up like that! she could have been kidnapped! Toya continued to rage in confusion as his eyes turned silver in anger then reflected back to gold as worry reentered his mind. He looked back at the spot where Kyou had held her within the barrier against her will.

What am I saying? She WAS kidnapped. Damn it! he growled broodingly.

Shinbe was Toya's opposite! he remained calm in the face of their missing priestess. Kidnapped or saved? He questioned as his hand tightened on his staff in uncertainty. What was Kyou thinking? He was sure there was more to this story than Toya was telling them.

His amethyst gaze watched Toya's every move in hopes that his cursed demonic side would stay dormant. The last thing they needed was Toya's demon blood taking over and making the situation worse. Kyou has never been known to be nice even when he was actually helping. Maybe he took her just to keep her safe till Hyakuhei left.

Toya clinched his fist knowing the others hadn't seen what he had seen. He didn't want to tell them. Somehow saying it out loud made it that much truer but they had a right to know what their older sibling was up to. Kyou isn't bringing her back.

Why not? Kamui spoke for the first time since Hyakuhei had disappeared. He is a guardian, one of us. Why wouldn't he bring her back to us?

Suki listened quietly while the brothers tried to sort it all out. She was still in shock with the fact that Kyou had shown up at all. Up till now, he had pretty much stayed out of this war as if it wasn't his problem. Her hopes rose at the thought that maybe now he had decided to help but Toya's next words made her cringe with dread.

Because he wants her all to himself, the selfish bastard wants her for his own. He's never touched another woman that I've ever seen like that, which means he's probably chosen her for his mate. Toya stopped pacing realizing what he had just said.

His eyes changed back to pure gold as he lifted them to look

at the others. Shinbei's jaw was dropped and Suki's eyes were the size of saucers but it was Kamui he was most worried about. Kamui's eyes were hidden behind untamed purple hair as the boy stared at the ground but Toya could see his fingers clinched into fists.

Toya started to take a step forward but stilled when Kamui took a step backward. "Don't touch me!" Kamui's voice had changed and the sound gave everyone a very uneasy feeling.

Kamui? Toya gritted his teeth hoping Kamui would be able to hold it in for now. The boy was the most innocent of them all but only because he had chosen to forget the truth about his own past.

Don't fall asleep Kyoko, Kamui whispered warningly knowing the danger she was in if Hyakuhei and the dream demon could reach that far.

The puddles left behind from the rain seemed to shimmer with liquid speckled hues all around Kamui. "Hyakuhei wants her! Kyou wants her! what makes them any better than all the demons that want her?" Kamui's voice quivered as his untamed hair swayed in the wind that seemed to be blowing only around him.

Suddenly the shadow behind Kamui took a different form causing the others to take a step back.

With a burst of energy that rippled the air and water around him, Kamui screamed, "They can't just take her from

me!â## A shower of glitter fell from translucent wings that rebelliously appeared across his back.

Finally raising his tear filled eyes, Kamui glared at the others as the tips of his wings took on an ominous dark tinge. He shook his head as his voice became dangerously soft. â##Fathersâ## brothersâ## it doesnâ##t matter. They canâ##t have her.â##

The guardians shielded their eyes from the flash of light that swept out from where Kamui stood. When they lowered their armsâ## Kamui was nowhere in sight.

â##Why do I have a feeling he didnâ##t go after Kyoko?â## Shinbe stated still wondering at the strange darkness that had appeared at the tips of Kamui's wings. That wasnâ##t a good sign.

The words Kamui had spoken, â##fathers and brothersâ## chilled Toyaâ##s soul and confirmed his destination. â##Because heâ##s gone after Hyakuhei!â##

Shinbeâ##s shoulders slumped in defeat. â##I will go after Kamui, you go find Kyoko. Right now, Kamui needs the voice of reason and Iâ##m the best one for the job at the moment.â##

Suki watched as they both took off in different directions as if forgetting all about her. She then noticed Kaen still beside her. â##I guess we should head back to the hut and wait on them to return.â## She shrugged knowing she would only slow Shinbe down if she tried to follow him.

She turned to walk away but noticed Kaen hadnâ##t moved. Stepping back around in front of him her lips parted in awe.

Kaen had tears in his eyes as he stared off in the direction Kamui and Shinbe had gone.

Hyakuhei entered the chambers of the cave he had been staying in. This was the perfect hiding place— deep within the ground while they searched for him above. His translucent black wings shook away the tension of the flight then retreated as if they had never been there.

He looked around the majestic beauty of the cave— this is where he would bring her. He was right under their noses and they didn't even know it. Hyakuhei sat down on the black fur robe he had spread out near the low burning fire to rethink his strategy.

Kyou had ruined his plans of capturing the priestess while she was alone in the gardens of The Heart of Time— but plans changed. Now that she was only with one of the guardians instead of all of them, it would not be so hard to steal her away. His eyes darkened with intent as he reached for the very thing that had let him know she had been alone near the maiden shrine.

Just like in the dream— the plan could have been the same. He could feel the dream demon inside him even when the other demons were silent. It was waiting for him to fall asleep. Hyakuhei closed his eyes remembering the nightmare demons he had overtook in the past. He had used their nightmares to torture others and make them experience their worst fears— now the deception was turned back on him tenfold.

Being able to share this torture with the priestess had turned this weakness into a weapon.

Hyakuhei held the mirror of souls within his angry fist. Seeing only his reflection peering back at him, he demanded to know the whereabouts of the missing priestess. The mirror only showed him the image of twisted branches and stormy weather. Why would Kyou take the priestess to a place that seemed covered in despair? He knew the possessed mirror could only tell the truth but at the same time— Hyakuhei knew it lied unknowingly.

He mentally called to several of his demonic servants to do his bidding— sending them in search of her true hiding place since they were expendable. He knew Kyou's fortress lie somewhere within the northern lands. The castle had disappeared from existence during the war between him and his brother Tadamichi. The demons he sent into that area would wreak havoc on villages and draw out the guardian lord.

He would allow Kyou to unknowingly lead him to the priestess he was shielding. As he peered into the tainted glass the reflection changed— but not by his control. Hyakuhei's eyes hardened as a vision of multihued dust covered the looking glass in warning.

—So— Kamui, what will you do?— he asked just as Kamui came into focus within the mirror. The boy's eyes turned to look directly at him as if he knew he was being watched. —Are you looking for me? Be careful what you wish for— son.— Hyakuhei warned.

“No father!” It is you that should be careful,” Kamui hissed in retaliation.

“So you have given into the memories?” Hyakuhei held the glass closer to his face as the corners of his lips turned up in a dangerous hint of a smile. “Kamui! if you really want to keep your priestess, then you should join me. Take your rightful place beside me and we will make her forget the other guardians together.”

Kamui stopped in midair knowing exactly what his father had meant. “I am nothing like you or your monsters. One day the demons you thrive on will turn on you father! you think it is you in control of them. You lie to yourself even when you are losing.”

They both could hear the echo of laughter as the dream master fought its restraints. Kamui knew its powers bordered on mystical and that was something that could not be controlled! even by Hyakuhei.

“You belong to me! not them,” Hyakuhei hissed at the image. “That is a truth even you cannot bury forever.”

“I will never betray my friends!” Kamui screamed as he broke the link between him and his father.

Hyakuhei tossed the mirror into the fire when it exploded from Kamui’s anger. The fragments became like liquid silver and slithered over the burning wood. They gathered into a puddle and slowly formed back into the familiar shape, hardening into the enchanted mirror! as if it had never broken.

Hyakuhei lay back on the dark fur as traces of colorful glitter shimmered within the cave. So, your powers have grown. We shall see Kamui; we shall see.

Kyou leaned against the balcony, staring down into the hot springs that he had enclosed within the center of his castle. His eyes were still locked on his lost and found priestess. She looked happy for the moment and it dawned on him; she belonged here. He felt his blood begin to heat when Kyoko started disrobing. He watched her firm breast rise as she pulled her shirt over her head; his eyes began to glow liquid gold.

His knuckles turned white as his grip tightened on the banisters. He closed his eyes for a brief moment trying to press down the urge to go to her. When he opened them again, he nearly growled. What was she thinking? She was completely naked.

Kyou watched as she stepped into the warm water. She intrigued him with her innocence. Why did she have this effect on him when no other human did? None had ever turned his head but here he stood; craving a human and only Kyoko would do. How could one be so pure and unconsciously seductive at the same time?

She was beauty incarnate all wrapped into one tiny human package. He growled low in his throat. What if one of the servants that lived within his castle walked in on her? She had unknowingly exposed herself to any of the men servants who

happened by. Kyou sent a silent message to all within his castle to avoid the hot springs or they would suffer his anger as a result from disobeying. If he learned that any had spied on her prior there would be no escape from his wrath.

She should not have come to the bathing room without his permission. Sure, it was true that the servants within his castle stayed hidden, for he did not like to see them unless he called for them. Still, he would have Kyoko's body seen by no one but him. He would have to teach her to behave. A ghost of a smile chilled his lips as he watched.

Once Hiroki was finished with his bathing, the little boy wanted to help Kyoko wash her hair. So, Kyoko let him. She had to lower herself in the water up to her neck so he could reach the long auburn strands. The sensation of his small fingers rubbing her hair and scalp sent her into a very relaxed state. Hiraru soon joined them and Kyoko tried not to laugh as they argued over who was going to rinse.

Finally, Kyoko solved their argument by dunking under the water. When she came back up she was greeted with adorable whining noises. She giggled again and they smiled brightly before starting a splash war with one another. Kyoko moved to the other end of the spring and sat down on a rocky outcropping under the water to watch them.

Her mind was at ease for a short time as she listened to the echo of the children's voices while they played within the water. Realizing what she was doing instead of staying focused

on what was really going on, she quickly washed herself. When she turned around and started rinsing off Kyoko noted the twins getting out of the water.

The little boys had strange looks on their faces as if they were concentrating on something. Little did she know they were listening to Kyou's silent command. She bit her lip when they nodded as if answering someone.

"We have to go get dressed now." Grabbing some oversized cloths from a pile, they quickly wrapped the soft material around themselves.

"It's time to eat." Hiraru yelled over his shoulder as he grabbed Hiroki's hand and the small twins skipped from the room.

Kyoko stood in the water in shock as she felt little needles of fear start to climb her back and she squeezed her eyes shut, a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach. Somewhere she knew the gods were laughing at her.

She should have known better than to just follow the children here without asking questions. Kyoko started for the side of the spring hoping to make it back to her room before Mr. Double personality noticed her gone. She needed to hurry, her fragile security blankets were gone and she was unprotected.

As she stepped from the water and started for the huge towels, she heard a low growl directly behind her. The next thing she knew hands from nowhere wrapped around her naked ribs and she was pulled back against a silk covered chest as her feet left

the floor.

Kyoko instantly looked up to see Kyou's face. Instead of the anger she had expected to see, his face was calm almost too calm. She looked down at the floor watching it get further away from them. Yep, the gods were having an all-out laugh fest over this one.

Her lips parted as she glanced back up seeing he was taking her to a balcony. He didn't even land but glided in through the opened doors and back to the room she had started out in. He finally stopped once they were over the huge pillow she had woken up on.

Kyoko waited to be dropped but he did not release her, nor was he hurting her by holding her too tight. She noticed his hands were soft as they touched her bare skin. Kyoko's eyes widened. Her bare skin! Oh! how could she have forgotten so quickly? She was still naked from bathing.

Her arms instantly crossed over her chest self protectively and she felt all her muscles tense up, waiting as he held her as if undecided on what to do with her. She could give him a big fat hint if he wanted and that would be to PUT HER THE HELL DOWN!

Kyou's eyes almost slid shut as he felt her softly rounded curves pressed against him creating havoc on his senses. He noticed when she tensed up and it brought his mind back for a moment... But still he did not release her. He had always prided himself on control and here would be a good chance to test his

control of her and teach her another lesson at the same time.

"Did I give you permission to leave this room?" His voice was cold and unyielding.

Kyoko's eyes widened as her heartbeat thumped in her chest, kicking against her ribs so hard she knew he could feel it. Thinking quickly, what would be the best answer? she said in a small voice, "I don't know the rules." She cringed knowing that playing dumb would be the best option at the moment.

She knew for a fact that right now was not the time to fight for her rights because of her lack of clothing. It wasn't that she would win if she tried. She just wanted down and him gone so she added in a soft frightened voice, "I'm sorry."

When he heard her soft sweet voice, it engulfed him, making him inhale as sensations pooled in his nether regions. This would be dangerous if he pushed the test too far. He felt the rage of her disobedience leave him but the rage of his want remained tenfold.

"The first rule is you never go anywhere without my permission unless you want to be punished," His voice softened to take the sting from his words, but still he felt her flinch.

Kyoko's throat went dry. "Punished?" She didn't mean to whisper the word. It just slipped out and she felt her heart start to flutter in fear. She instantly deleted the picture of Kyou spanking her from her deranged mind not wanting to even know where the insane flash had come from.

"Yes, I will punish you." The palm of Kyoko's hand caressed her flat stomach and slowly made its way down as his knee came up on the inside of her thigh to spread her legs. In a movement too fast for her to try and deflect, the palm of his hand cupped her womanhood as his powerful blood tried to take over.

"Like this," His fingers massaged her bundle of nerves right above her entrance and the shock of it had her instantly arching away from him, with a soft cry she bucked against him trying to evade his hand.

The sensual movement was almost his undoing and he hissed in her ear. "If you do not stay still, I will have to punish you more." He could feel himself growing hard and was relieved when she strained away from him but stayed still, her fear of what he would do keeping her from fighting him.

Kyoko's eyes closed. She thought he had meant to hurt her when he said punished but this was almost as bad. Did he not realize he was more disturbed than Hyakuhei? This made her lose control of her body and took her will from her as all her heat pooled to where his fingers were working their magic. She didn't want this regardless of how her body reacted but couldn't help her reactions to it.

He was still holding her in midair with her back pressed against him and his fingers were working back and forth, stimulating her so much that she almost wished he would have spanked her instead because this was creating a different kind of pain, delicious pain that gnawed hungrily at her. She gasped

and a moan slipped out as his fingers slid between her lips to push one up inside her.

She groaned when he slid it in only to take it back out again. She felt the liquid heat pool around his finger as he thrust it back inside her tightness making her cry out. Her eyes started burning with the familiar sting of tears but she held them back. In the back of her mind she was screaming at herself to stop acting like she was enjoying Kyou's punishment even though she was.

The scream became louder and finally she couldn't ignore it anymore. "Please, please stop, I can't take it anymore."

Kyou listened to her cry and he knew she was in pain with need of release. Her virgin body, so new to this pleasure, it wouldn't take much more to bring her over the peak. He watched her head arch back against him as he pumped his finger into her hot tightness in rhythm.

He leaned his head forward and licked the arc of her neck, tasting her. He felt the rush of the instinct to bite her and make her his forever. He satisfied that feeling for a moment by sucking some of her soft skin into his mouth to leave a slight red mark on her. She tasted so good. He could smell her scent all around him as he pressed his swollen hardness against her soft thigh.

Kyou growled in defeat. He knew he was the one losing this battle.

Kyoko felt his hand leave her and she slid down his body to the pillow below. She was still whimpering and squeezed her thighs together trying not to rock. Her senses were so alive that it

was almost painful. She grabbed one of the smaller pillows and hugged it close, trying to hide her body from him. She was afraid to look up at him. Afraid he would be able to see the need her body was crying for.

Burying her face in her arms, she rolled so she was lying half on her stomach as though to hide from him further.

He watched her try to hide from him and the loss of her in his arms was cooling his raging blood. He realized he had no control over this and remembered what had been written within his father's scrolls.

Tadamichi had warned that guardians were different from humans when it came to choosing a mate; that the guardian's highborn blood would do the choosing and there would be no stopping it. His father, Tadamichi, had been talking about his and Hyakuhei's rivalry over the same mate at the time but Kyou had understood the underlying meaning. The warning pertained to every guardian; not just the twins.

That had been the last scroll written by his father but the humans trapped within this realm had continued the story.

His uncle had turned to the dark side because he had been separated from the one whom heaven had fated to be his soul mate. The young Priestess the maiden statue had been made in the likeness of; the same maiden statue that mimicked the priestess lying below him at this very moment. They could have very well been the same woman; but time proved they were not.

They were identical in looks proclaiming Kyoko as a direct descendant of the priestess his uncle had chosen for his life mate. Were he and his uncle so different? Had Hyakuhei's powerful blood been his downfall in the end? Was Hyakuhei now mistakenly placing Kyoko in the place of his lost love? He wouldn't allow that.

Kyou floated closer to her, dipping his lips to her ear. He didn't want her to fear this. He wanted her to want it. What he used as punishment now was only kindling the fire that would keep her with him forever.

He reached out stroking her hair lovingly. "In order to keep you safe from the demons from Hyakuhei, you have to obey me Kyoko. I do not want to hurt you so I will punish you like this and more if you do not behave."

"Then let me go," She whispered. "You say you don't want to hurt me but you treat me no better than he has. I'd rather have him touch me knowing that he would kill me after, than you touch me not knowing."

"My dear Kyoko, I have no desire to kill you. As your guardian I could not; it would go against all I stand for. You are meant to be protected by the guardians and I am a guardian. To let you go would only send you away without a guardian's protection. That I cannot allow. The punishment stands." He gripped her head between his hands to keep her still and pressed his lips against the top of her head before turning to leave her to think about her punishment.

Hyakuhei is also a guardian, Kyoko whispered defiantly knowing he could hear her even if he didn't acknowledge it.

Part of him knew she was right but he wasn't about to admit that to her. He wanted to fly into a rage at the mere thought of Hyakuhei touching her as he just had, but refrained. He needed to put space between them in order to keep his own passion under control. He turned his attention to the window.

He could feel demons closing in on his lands from all sides. Had Hyakuhei found out where he was keeping the priestess? No, he had only sent them in search of her. He gazed back at Kyoko not wanting anything to interfere. He would stop them before they came any closer to his possessions.

Kyou moved almost too fast for the human eye and when Kyoko peeked up at him, he was gone.

Chapter 5 Black Wings

Toya looked to the north as he flew. His translucent silver wings danced in the light of the moon, the seemingly delicate feathers fluttering slightly. He needed to find Kyoko as quick as he could. He scanned the area wondering where to search first when the rising smoke in the distance caught his attention.

A village? Toya turned in that direction wondering why Kyou had allowed humans to even live on his lands.

Kyou hates all humans, Toya's thoughts skidded to a stop. Kyoko is human. His lips thinned with the debatable point.

As he neared the village, he noticed there was too much smoke to just be coming from cooking stoves. The village was in trouble. He quickly scanned the area sensing demons in the midst of the flames he was now seeing.

“What were demons doing in Kyou’s territory?” Spreading his senses out beyond just the village, Toya realized demons were crossing the borders of the northern lands in several places, not just here. The color of his eyes shattered into molten silver.

“Hyakuhei, he knows Kyoko is here somewhere,” Toya spat the words angrily as he heard the human’s scream below him. “Damn it! I don’t have time for this,” He growled even as he drew his daggers intending to rid the small village of the beasts before they could do any more damage.

Toya flew over the village and abruptly pulled his wings in close, the feathered appendages vanishing as he landed on one knee in the center of what appeared to be the village square. Lifting his head, he snarled at the demons closing in around him.

“Looks like most of the human population hightailed it,” He growled and stood up, twirling the daggers between his fingers. “Come on you bitches. Let’s see how you stand up to me!”

Toya smirked when two demons came at him from opposite sides. He waited until the last moment before ducking out of the way forcing the two of them to run into one another, bashing their foreheads in their excitement to catch him. Placing his hands on

the ground, Toya kicked his legs straight up, nailing each in the chin to send them sprawling.

“Just as stupid as always,” he murmured already bored. A hideous looking demon swooped in from above and Toya rolled away, barely missing its sharp talons in his back. Rising to his feet, he leaned back just in time to miss the claws of another demon, losing several strands of hair and getting his shirt ripped in the process.

He plunged his ice dagger into the demon's chest and felt a surge of satisfaction when the monster turned to ice with the weapon's power. A hot burning sensation inflamed his left side making him cry out in pain and anger. The flying demon had returned and dug its claws in just below his ribs. Pulling the dagger out of the frozen one's body, he tapped the fire dagger against his lips and turned to the demons that didn't realize it had just signed its death warrant.

His lips parted slightly reminiscent of a kiss and fire burst from his mouth torching the winged demon. Spinning gracefully on one foot, Toya's right foot came around striking the frozen demon, shattering it.

“That's gonna be messy when it thaws out,” Toya said with a touch of pride.

Turning toward the rest of the demons gathered, he brought the daggers up swiftly and dropped into a fighting stance. His senses were alive with the thrill of battle and he was getting some of his frustrations out. Each demon around him started to change

and he was suddenly seeing Kyou standing in their place.

“Oh you are just LOOKING to royally piss me off!” he exclaimed.

The remaining demons attacked simultaneously as Toya crouched, readying himself for the onslaught. Claws and steel met resulting in a bloodbath that left Toya soaked within a few moments. His clothing was ripped as the enemy dug their claws into his flesh but Toya didn't slow down.

Had anyone been watching, they would have witnessed Toya in his battling glory. Despite the wounds on his body and the blood spilled, he was beautiful to behold when his silver wings shattered into existence, he became the essence of a lethal angel.

The attacks suddenly paused and Toya came to a stop. He was now kneeling on one knee with his arms extended out to the side; the daggers clutched tightly in his grip. His breathing was heavy and his ebony and silver hair fluttered in the breeze. Long bangs hung down over his intense silver eyes nearly hiding their intent.

After a few moments of silence, the remaining demons surged forward and Toya growled in frustration. It was time to end this; this was Kyou's job to take care of his lands for crying out loud. Bringing the daggers forward, he crossed them in front of him. The combined power of the weapons swirled and writhed forming a glowing orb. The sphere began to grow and soon encompassed him completely.

The following explosion wiped out everything including what

was left of the village. Toya lowered the daggers and slowly but gracefully rose to his feet. Tilting his head back, he stared up at the sky that was mostly obscured with dust and debris. Ignoring the stench of burning flesh around him, he walked across the now barren ground thanking whatever gods were up there that no humans had been alive upon his arrival.

“This is what we’re reduced to,” he thought sadly. “Destroying villages just to stop Hyakuhei’s sick and demented schemes.”

Toya sighed and his wings once more burst from his back, lifting him above the polluted ground and high into the night sky. Kyoko was waiting for him to rescue her and he was determined to find her. As he vanished into the night, a single silver feather floated to the ground and landed in the hand of a small child who had hidden and witnessed it all.

As the small fingers closed around the shimmering feather it vanished.

Hyakuhei stepped from a void not far from the cave. It would not do to give his secret location away unless it was Kyoko who joined him. He could feel Kamui coming and wondered if the boy would make it this far before realizing the effects of confronting his nightmares would have on him. If the boy noticed his innocence dissolving, would he still come?

His long midnight hair swayed in the cool breeze as the muscles within his body flexed. Knowing if Kamui did make it

to him! he would have to fight his own.

##So be it,## Hyakuhei whispered darkly.

Kamui felt the icy chill of the wind cooling the fire that boiled within him. He could also see the black tips of his wings out of the corner of his eyes and it scared him. This was why he had buried those memories. The longer he held onto the dangerous memories! all the rage of the past! the harder it was to breathe.

The wind changed direction and a feather floated past him as he slowed his flight. Kamui's eyes widened in terror. Black! the feather was solid black.

He turned in panic, looking for the black winged man that haunted him so. No one was there. His glittering eyes slowly turned to glance at his own wings and the breath left his lungs as if someone had kicked him in the chest. He had his father's wings.

##No! I will not become you!## Kamui wrapped his arms around himself in denial. ##I will not become you!## he screamed out just as he spotted Shinbe in the distance. ##Make it go away, please! just make it go away,## he whispered not wanting Shinbe to see him with ebony feathers. Letting his body fall, he quickly became enveloped within the trees.

Landing hard on the forest floor, Kamui kneeled there for a moment before opening his eyes. The first thing his bright eyes fell on was his black wings. With an anguished cry, Kamui

grasped one of them in a painful grip. He cried out in agony as he tried to rip the midnight wing from his very flesh.

Letting the feathery appendage go, he let his body fall exhausted on the ground. Tears fell from his eyes when he saw the grass around him hiss with the evil power he held deep within his very soul. It was leaking out of him like a plague that would kill everything it touched—hate, rage, jealousy, and untamed raw power. The one gift his father had given him was pure evil!

Curling up into a tight ball, his body started to glow and shimmer with every heartbeat as that power formed a tight cocoon around him. If he broke free of the bondage, would he be evil incarnate?

“Don’t let this happen to me?” he begged quietly as he fought with every breath. “Don’t let me become the nightmare my father wants me to be.”

Shinbe’s lips thinned feeling Kamui dead ahead. He could sense Kamui’s power becoming unstable and it didn’t bode well. “Come on Kamui, pull it together! Kyoko will need us.” Something black floated by him and he quickly snatched it from the wind.

A midnight feather! but it wasn’t Hyakuhei’s. Shinbe’s troubled gaze darted around the vicinity in search for the true owner! for Kamui. “You don’t want to do this Kamui.” His voice held a hint of fear. “If you open the door to such destruction! we may never get it closed again! please.”

The forest below him was shimmering with a strange life force and Shinbe quickly headed straight for it. A large blue sphere rested in a small clearing lighting up everything around it in a vibrant blue hue. Landing beside it, Shinbe felt the dangerous conflict raging within the sphere. His amethyst eyes showed his sadness as he took in the ebony feathers that still littered the ground.

“Kamui?” Shinbe whispered as he reached out and gently touched the swirling color on the surface of the orb.

The second his hand touched the sphere, the conflict inside stabilized for a moment, turning pure. Shinbe’s eyes slid closed as he took Kamui’s essence inside him, letting it build. All of Kamui’s pure love and innocence, all his concealed malice, also the untamed power he drew from those feelings.

Kamui opened his eyes feeling someone there, but all he could see was the cage he had built around himself. Through the thick walls, he could see an amethyst aura and knew Shinbe was there. “Don’t look!” He whispered as he lowered his head, “I don’t want you to see the truth.”

He could hear Kamui’s heartbreaking request. While the link between him and Kamui was so strong, Shinbe used his telepathic power to reach out to him through the barrier. He laid his forehead against the shield and pressed his palms on each side, making his muscles push and pull at the same time.

Sending his voice inside Kamui’s barrier, Shinbe tried to reason with him. “Kamui, let it go, you do not need to fight

Hyakuhei on your own. Not like this. We will do it as brothersâ€” together. But right now there is someone who needs us more. Kyoko needs you Kamui.â€”

â€”Kyoko? Butâ€” I am not a true brother,â€” Kamui cried from inside his cell. He could see his own reflection and it was disturbing as black eyes stared back at him. â€”Iâ€”ll never be thatâ€” regardless of how much I want itâ€” need it. You donâ€”t know whatâ€”s inside me trying to come out. What if I hurt her?â€”

Shinbeâ€”s amethyst eyes watered in understanding. â€”Let it go Kamui. That knowledge has been buried and forgotten for a reason. You had a choice and you chose us. You are my brotherâ€” a guardian to Kyoko. We protect her with everything we areâ€” even if we have to forget where we come from.â€”

â€”Butâ€” itâ€”s a lie!â€” Kamui cried out then became shock still as he heard Hyakuheiâ€”s voice taunt him from afar. â€”You belong to meâ€” child. So does your priestess.â€”

Shinbe could hear Hyakuheiâ€”s voice within the barrier and it angered him. â€”Do you want him to put those same chains on Kyoko that you once wore!?â€” Shinbe yelled, trying to make Kamui listen to reason. â€”Fight the memories for her sake. Bury them deep inside and never look back. You can choose your own destiny! You do not have to become him! Think of Kyoko damn it.â€”

â€”Kyoko?â€” A tear fell from Kamuiâ€”s cheek as he looked down and watched it shatter with its glittering color. If

he was truly his father's; his tears would be black as night or crimson even, not the shattering array of light he saw now. He envisioned Kyoko struggling against Hyakuhei and knew what had to be done. The only way he could ever win against such an evil was to become evil; but he would never betray his priestess that way. He loved her too much.

Shinbe took a step back from the sphere as it started to rise several feet off the ground. The blue aura surrounding it glittered like diamonds as the light within became so bright it overpowered it.

"You cannot have me or her. Once again Hyakuhei, I deny you," Kamui whispered just as the sphere shattered.

Several miles away, Hyakuhei's eyes flashed red in anger as he heard Kamui's words and he answered, "You cannot conceal the truth for long boy; you and I are the same."

Shinbe ran forward to catch Kamui as he fell. The boy was passed out cold. His amethyst eyes widened with his smile seeing the colorful glitter that fell from his translucent wings. He hugged Kamui to him knowing everything would be all right; least for now. He had somehow forgotten the darkness once again.

"Welcome back Kamui," He grinned as the boy's eyes, too many colors to count, opened to stare up at him in confusion.

"I just don't get it; why would Kyoko all of a sudden decide he wants Kyoko?" Suki paced back and forth annoyed because she wasn't out there helping to bring her friend back.

Sennin rubbed his temple as he looked at his daughter, "Suki please sit down. You are making me dizzy." He grabbed up a stick and poked at the fire as he continued. "Kyou is a guardian; therefore Kyoko is safe with him. As for him wanting her, well if he does then it is already out of his hands."

Suki turned to glare at Sennin. "What do you mean by that? He isn't a child. He can control what he does!"

Sennin stared into the fire and stated, "If it is his guardian blood that has chosen her, then even Kyou has no choice."

"What do you mean he has no choice?" Suki demanded. "It's against everything the Guardians stand for to take that privilege from anyone, much less their priestess. Besides, if Kyou did like Kyoko all along, then why didn't he say something before instead of stealing her away like a thief?"

Sennin smiled, "For the same reasons our friend Shinbe has kept his silence."

Suki felt her face heat up and turned away from her father. "Why would Shinbe want to keep quiet about liking someone? He'd never had a problem speaking his mind before or keeping his hands to himself for that matter." She cringed.

"Perhaps the reason Shinbe has kept his silence is due to the one thing that keeps any man quiet for the one they secretly adore; fear of rejection." He cocked an eyebrow knowing he spoke the truth.

Suki stared at her father like he'd grown a second head.

“You mean Shinbe loves Kyoko, and never got up the guts to tell her?” The thought made Suki’s chest hurt and eyesight go all watery.

Suki suddenly grabbed her head, rubbing the spot where Sennin had just brained her with her own bayonet.

“Stop being daft girl,” Sennin muttered, placing the bayonet back on the floor of the hut. “Young people and their obliviousness.” He paused in thought for a moment, secretly reminiscing about his own “oblivious” moments with Suki’s mother. “Ah, the memories.”

The talisman within the dream master blazed to life as it felt Hyakuhei and Kyoko both slip within the walls of sleep. This was when he gained enough freedom to gaze into both their souls and find things they had both forgotten or never had the power to remember, the other side of their souls.

The dream demon’s black eyes opened wide as he looked into that world and brought his victims into it. Even the protective barrier around the girl was not strong enough to keep him out.

Dreams were a strange enigma indeed but when you awaken within a dream, you no longer know you are still lost within your own mind, that’s just beyond strange. Kyoko came into that same haze, feeling like she was wrapped in a blanket of warmth. Resisting the urge to open her eyes, she snuggled closer.

Everything was so quiet except for the heartbeat that sounded

so strong and calm pressed against her ear.

Her eyes shot open knowing she was not supposed to be sleeping with anyone. Kyoko's startled gaze came in contact with a bare chest. She noticed the lean muscles underneath flawless skin and tendrils of long dark silky hair that lay in waves across his ribs. Her gaze curiously followed the ebony locks upward to the flawless face of Hyakuhei.

She bit her lower lip feeling a blush spread across her cheeks. What was she doing lying with him? Seeing his eyes were still closed, she quickly looked back down between them to make sure he was wearing pants. Thank god, other than his missing shirt they were both still dressed.

It's just Hyakuhei, he is my guardian, right? She reminded herself stubbornly. Trying to remember how they got there, she drew a blank. As a matter of fact, she couldn't remember the last thing she had done and frowned softly as she glanced back up at him.

That's right, I was falling and he saved me. Her lips parted when her eyes locked with his, he was awake and staring quietly at her. Her hand was still pressed against his chest. She could feel the same heartbeat strong and steady that she had heard only moments before. Her attention lowered to his lips before reluctantly pulling her gaze away.

She slowly sat up, feeling his gaze follow her as she did so. Now that they were no longer touching, she wondered at the cold emptiness that rushed in to steal her warmth.

Hyakuhei watched her awaken and sensing no fear, he waited for her to rise. He craved this. He liked her conflicting scent—her purity clashing with his own evil aura. His dark eyes were drawn to the pink that now tinted her cheeks. It made him wonder what she was thinking. As he watched her take in the solitude of the cave, he could tell she did not like the confinement of its walls.

“Where are we?” Kyoko turned away from him to look at the small opening of the cave and felt a slight fear seeing the cold darkness that lay beyond it. She took a hesitant step back wishing she could still hear his heartbeat and feel the security she had woken with.

Hyakuhei rose up behind her and wrapped his arms securely around her when he felt her fear spike. “Do not worry my pet. I brought you here to keep you safe from the demons who want the guardian heart crystal.” He nuzzled her hair with his cheek. “I will always protect you and keep you safe.” his lips hinted in a secret smile that she couldn’t see.

Kyoko closed her eyes and tilted her head to give into his soft caress as she nodded. That sounded like it was the right answer though she didn’t remember the demons that had given chase. “Oh, okay.” she whispered as she sank into his warmth.

“Kyoko, would you like to go outside? I would like to show you something.” He slid his palm slowly down her arm until her small hand was within his.

Kyoko wondered why she felt so weak. “Yes, sunshine”

That's what she needed to clear her head. For some reason, she felt out of place but couldn't put her finger on the dilemma. She only nodded to Hyakuhei, trusting him to take her out of this dark beautiful dungeon.

Hyakuhei tightened his strong arm around Kyoko pressing her to his side and rose above the stone floor. In turn, he felt her wrap her arms around him, clinging to him so she wouldn't fall.

"I will not ever let you go Kyoko," He whispered in her ear as he touched her chin gently knowing she would not hear the double meaning within his words. Her face turned up to his and she loosened her hold. He glided out of the cave and then straight up but not too fast so he wouldn't frighten her. He landed on the soft ground in the sunlight.

Kyoko looked around at the leaves. The forest offered speckled shade to them and everything was so bright as her emerald eyes adjusted to the light. She let go and took a step out of the circle of his arms. What was she doing here? What was she missing? She glanced at Hyakuhei still feeling a little confused. Wasn't she looking for something she had lost?

"Kyoko, will you still help me find the fragments of the guardian heart crystal before the demons can use them to break through the portal?" He watched as her eyes lit up in understanding. He was glad she didn't yet remember her true guardians. The spell he had on her was strong and as long as nothing prompted the memory, the enchantment wouldn't confuse her.

Kyoko smiled. Yes, that's what she was here for. Looking for the talisman.

"Yes Hyakuhei. The shards. I almost forgot." She closed her eyes and tried to detect any of the crystals untainted energy nearby. After a moment, her eyes opened and she pointed. "About half a mile that way Hyakuhei and its alone." She smiled glad it wasn't inside a demon; well, not that she could tell.

She let him take her back into his strong arms as he lifted them off the ground and took them in the direction she indicated.

They found the fragment quickly and when he asked to hold it for her, she didn't think twice about giving it to him, although something gnawed at her memory. She sighed, closing her eyes again and instantly detected another fragment; but this time it wasn't alone. This time it was contaminated with darkness.

She reached behind her for her crossbow but her hand came up empty. She frowned wondering where she had left it as she felt a hand on her shoulder.

"Kyoko, do not worry. I will keep you safe. Just tell me where it is." He knew she was looking for her weapon but that was a memory he also wanted her to forget. He knew the power behind the spirit darts and it was a power he did not want near him.

He let her show him the direction of the shard and that led him to a shadow demon that was feeding off the power of the sliver of crystal. Pushing Kyoko behind him, Hyakuhei cast a barrier around her so she would be safe while he pretended to fight the demon. It was such a splendid creature and its power

was enormous now that it had the talisman within it.

It may have been a simple shadow demon once upon a time, but now it resembled a black dragon. It would be a shame to just kill the beast but he could not take it into his own body and savor its powers in front of Kyoko. She wouldn't understand and it may trigger the memory that he was indeed the enemy.

Using his powers over demons, Hyakuhei made quick work of ending its life. Seeing the splinter of crystal fall, he picked it up feeling the small slice of power Kyoko had just unknowingly given to him.

The corners of his lips turned up as he looked back at Kyoko. Releasing her from the protection barrier, he once again took her in his arms. He knew he was deceiving her into being with him but suddenly he didn't want it to be a lie. Leaning down toward her to block out the rest of the world, he lowered his lips to hers.

Hyakuhei's growl echoed as he reached out toward the darkness just as the dream ended. The haunting laugh of the dream master was the only thing that greeted him within the cave as he watched the flames from the fire turn several shades of color before the licking flames twisted into a dark shade of black to match his mood.

How dare the dream tempt him so, making him notice the loneliness.

Chapter 6 - Deadly Escape

Kyoko awoke with a start just as the memories of what

had happened came rushing back to her like a confused tidal wave. She could almost swear that she could hear the echo of Hyakuhei's angry roar as she slipped away from the dream and it gave her cold chills. It was his scream still ringing in her ears leaving her eyes wide with shock.

The dream had found her again and somehow she knew it was waiting for her to close her eyes once more. Her fingers trailed up to softly touch her lips and something within her wondered if she fell asleep again; if the dream would start out with that same kiss. She wrapped her arms around herself, strangely missing the heat.

Wondering how long she had been sleeping, she glanced toward the window. From the height of the moon and all the stars she could see it was still the middle of the night but getting closer to dawn with every heartbeat. It was no wonder her mind was trying to make Hyakuhei her savior when her real savior was becoming so dangerous. This was all Kyou's fault.

So much had happened in such a short amount of time that she wasn't surprised she'd cried herself to sleep. Her mind and body wouldn't let her sleep but only a few minutes at a time till she found a way out of this mess. It was already getting hard to decipher what was reality and what lay only within her own mind.

Just who the hell did Kyou think he was? Kyoko mentally lashed out as she rose up on her elbows. She needed to get away from this place and him as soon as possible.

Looking around for something to wear, Kyoko spotted a white silk robe lying on a low table by the large pillow. Her gaze roamed the rest of the room hoping to find something more to wear. She knew the silk of the robe wouldn't provide her much covering and this was the north for heaven's sake! She would freeze.

Blowing her bangs upward in disappointment, she climbed across the pillow and stood reaching for the robe. Slipping it on, she marveled at the silky softness of it against her skin. It was so light it felt as if she hadn't put anything on. If she hadn't been a captive here! she might have actually liked this place.

Tying the silk around her, Kyoko snuck to the window and looked out already planning her escape. The moonlight provided enough light to see by but enough darkness to maybe try to get away.

Leaning out the window, she looked down the three-story drop in denial. Seeing the deep crevices in the outer rock wall, her lips quirked in a childish smile. She knew after being with Toya for so long that she would be able to climb down. Hopefully without falling, she contradicted herself in a whisper.

She had to run as far away from Kyou as possible before he took something from her that she was not offering.

Kyoko sighed inwardly as she made a silent wish. Toya! I need you. The words seemed to echo within her and somehow she felt maybe! just maybe Toya had heard her. Memories untold seeped through her mind! Toya would never let her fall. Her lips parted in wonder for a moment before she shook the

feeling off as imagination.

She gripped the windowsill to steady her nerves. Straightening her shoulders and finding her courage, she decided she wasn't holding out for a savior because even she knew Kyou was a force to reckon with. She really didn't want Toya putting himself in that kind of danger. She also knew the longer she waited, the more of a chance Toya would try to rescue her.

Kyoko climbed up on the ledge and threw her legs over. Turning around, she slowly felt for footing in the wall. She grimaced when the stone felt like it was cutting into her bare feet, but she would go through anything just to escape.

As carefully as she could, she made her way down the side of the castle. What took only a few fleeting moments felt like hours. She spent the whole climb fearing being caught, but when her feet finally touched the ground all other thoughts fled except getting as far away as possible.

Looking up at the window, she backed away from the wall half expecting to see Kyou appear and snatch her up again. She couldn't go through another one of his "punishments" as he called it.

That thought spurred her into action. Kyoko turned and ran like Hyakuhei's demons were after her through the surrounding maze of gardens and statues. Without stopping her headlong rush for freedom, her eyes took everything in, marveling at the surreal beauty of it even within the darkness.

Only the fear of being found by Kyou kept her going when

her lungs started burning and her legs cramped. She was startled when she made it to the end of the grounds only to find a very potent barrier shimmering with a luminous blue hue. She knew it would take all her priestess powers to break through something Kyou himself had made.

Once more she looked over her shoulder at the imposing structure Kyou called home. There was no doubt in her mind he would know what she was doing if the barrier was brought down. She only needed to make an opening just big enough to let her through.

Biting her bottom lip, she reached out one shaky hand and touched the surface of the barrier to test its strength and was rewarded with a slight shock wave that passed warningly through her body. It didn't hurt her; instead; it felt like the barrier was trying to tell her that there was unknown danger on the other side and for her to stay inside where it was safe.

She smiled in surprise realizing the shield was more for protection than to cause bodily harm; at least from the inside of the barrier. She had no doubt that if someone or something tried to get in from the outside without permission that's where the pain would be.

She gave pause as the dream came back to her; the barrier Hyakuhei had placed around her for protection from the dragon he had fought; it also was only to keep her safe and she had felt safe; strange that she would think so softly toward the enemy. "I mean no harm; please," Kyoko whispered as she

again touched the barrier. To her amazement, an opening appeared and she quickly stepped through the milky-blue mist just as the shield closed behind her. It had given her exactly what she needed.

Turning around to see if the barrier had really closed behind her to erase the fact that she had escaped, Kyoko was startled to only find a desolate overgrown forest and no lush grounds or castle anywhere in site. It looked as if gloom and sadness had descended to silence all living within its tangled web of limbs.

Would Kyou know if someone breached the barrier he had placed around his home? Would some kind of alarm go off to alert him? She felt fear slither across her at the very thought of what he would do when he found her missing after warning her not to leave. Kyoko cocked a shaky eyebrow knowing she wasn't going to be stupid enough to wait around to find out if the ice prince had a sense of humor or not.

From there, she ran as fast as she could over the unstable ground and toward the unknown. Kyoko could feel the undergrowth of the forest tearing at her robe and skin. She ignored the branches as one scraped her cheek and others caught her hair and legs as her headlong flight continued.

Her feet were screaming at her to stop as she continuously stepped on small pebbles and thorns. She could feel trickles of liquid running down her arms and legs but didn't look to see if it was sweat or blood. If she stopped he would catch her!

Looking back over her shoulder to make sure she wasn't

being pursued, Kyoko realized in the darkness of the forest that he could have been right behind her and she would never have seen him. The thought was chilling and made her move faster.

She didn't really know where she was, but on instinct, she stayed straight and prayed she was getting farther from the castle and from the possessive guardian that Kyou had become. Her foot caught on something stiff and the ground came up hard and fast. The impact made her disoriented for a few seconds, her breathing fast and shallow.

Staying on hands and knees, Kyoko tried to catch her breath and slow her pounding heartbeat. Her body ached and she knew there were more wounds on her knees; they stung as only skinned knees can. She listened to the sounds around her and noticed the sounds had stopped; that frightened her.

Kyoko looked down at herself and saw that the white robe she had on was glowing in the moonlight. She gritted her teeth realizing that from a distance she would look like a light in the heart of darkness.

Swiftly, with shaking hands, she discarded the shimmering white material knowing she would have no covering but also that she would have a better chance at not being detected and recaptured. Kyoko tossed the silky robe away and took off again through the darkness of the forest, praying that the reason the forest was quiet wasn't because Kyou had followed her.

More limbs cut into her bare skin as she ran but she paid no heed. Turning her head while she was running, Kyoko looked

over her shoulder feeling like something was closing in on her. She didn't see the ledge where the ground disappeared coming back into view several hundred feet below.

Turning her head back just in time to see herself take the fatal step, the next thing Kyoko knew, she was falling. She didn't even scream as she fell; it would do her no good. The same feeling she had during the dream came back; she had fallen inside the dark cave but Hyakuhei had saved her.

Hyakuhei, she closed her eyes wishing he was there.

Then she felt it, the arm coming around her from behind. She could tell by the touch that it wasn't Hyakuhei and she screamed in panic. Thinking it was Kyou; she clawed at the arm not noticing the shirtsleeve was the wrong color.

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