

CURSED HEARTS

THE GUARDIAN HEART CRYSTAL SERIES



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The Guardian Heart Crystal Series Book 8

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Chapter 1 ###Sacrifice##

The guardian brothers gathered around the remains of the maiden statue. Even wounded and bloody, they were still a sight to behold. Their translucent wings spanned out behind them like the angels of legend, but the deadly weapons they'd just used to beat back the rain of demons told of their true nature. The guardians were more dangerous and lethal than the demons could ever hope to be.

They are the protectors of The Heart of Time; the time portal that is the link between the demon world and all the human ones. Time and space separate the worlds so no one can cross without the use of the sacred portal. The guardians had never expected to turn their power against what they'd been born to protect.

The winds of change had started three years ago when the maiden statue suddenly began to glow, revealing the fact that the human priestess had been reborn on the other side of The Heart of Time. Hyakuhei, once the most powerful guardian, now lord of the demons, had attacked, sending his demonic minions into

a frenzy as they tried to get to the portalâ#; trying to get to the priestess on the other side.

The guardians knew why Hyakuhei had attacked with such passionate fury, but the dark guardianâ##s reason didnâ##t matterâ#; they couldnâ##t allow it. Their intense war raged for three long years, never stopping, weakening both sides of the conflictâ#; until today. Hyakuhei had released the most cunning of the demons, banding them together with the weaker ones to fight with a vengeance.

Sending the army of evil to overrun the guardians in sheer number, Hyakuhei had spread his dark shadowy wings, calling forth his ultimate power to destabilize the barrier and escape into the human realm. Itâ##d happened so fast that the guardians didnâ##t even know how many demons had slipped through the barrier with him and the only way to stop more from following had been to destroy The Heart of Time.

Now the guardians were at a crossroads. Hyakuhei and the demons would be free to stalk the priestess within the human realm, because with the time portal destroyedâ#; the guardians couldnâ##t reach her.

â##We shouldnâ##t have done that,â## Toya growled, glaring at the pile of rubble from where he knelt on the ground. Loss of blood had sapped his energy but not his anger. Heâ##d sent all the power he could through the time portal an instant behind Hyakuhei. He only hoped he had wounded the demon lord in the process. â##Hyakuhei will hunt her!â##

She's just a baby. Three years old and powerless against them. The sadness in Kamui's voice was thick as his eyes glittered with tears. He tried to wipe the evidence away but only succeeded in leaving a smear of blood across his cheek. What if the demons find her before he does?

She won't stand a chance against them. Kotaro closed his ice blue eyes in denial. She doesn't have anyone there that can protect her from demons or from Hyakuhei.

Shinbe's amethyst wings vanished as he wrapped his arm around the gash across his ribs. He would heal, but it would do no good. We may have stopped the rest of the demons from entering her world but in truth, we have lost it all if he claims her.

Kyou was the only one still standing at his full height, but only because he chose to ignore his own wounds in light of the dilemma that they were now facing. It is not over. His voice was devoid of the anguish that plagued his brothers.

What are you talking about? Toya hissed as he stumbled to his feet. The time portal's destroyed. We can't save her. His silver wings vanished in a flurry of feathers, making way for his anger.

There is a way but the price is high, Kyou informed them.

There is no price too high, Kamui spoke what the others were thinking. His hands were now fisted at his sides and his eyes determined.

Kyou's long silver hair fluttered in the breeze as he turned his golden eyes to lock them with Kamui's. "Would you die for her?"

"If it would save her and her world," was Kamui's instant reply as he took a step forward. "Then it would be but a small sacrifice."

"Just tell us what we have to do," Toya demanded. "Our lives already belong to her! If it takes blood then we will bleed."

Kyou looked from one guardian to the next seeing they were all in agreement. "If we die in this realm, then we will appear in hers! but there is a cost for such an act. Our powers as guardians will be cut in half, and our wings are the price of payment because they will be the power that carries us across time and space."

"Will we be together?" Shinbe had the forethought to ask.

"We are brothers and that will never change. We will not be reborn! but slip through the veil of time as we are. To the mortals, we will appear only around the ages of seventeen to nineteen, but our immortality will keep us from aging. The power of the descent will give us a life as if we have always been there among them! near her. The priestess is innocent in the realm of humans! she will have no power until she comes of age."

Shinbe tightened his grip on his staff as he looked out at the bloody battlefield that surrounded them. "We've been

attacked by powerful demons many times, and yet we live. Just how does a guardian go about getting himself killed?â##

The faintest hint of a smile possessed Kyouâ##s lips as he answered. â##It takes a guardian to kill a guardian.â##

â##If we are going to do this, then we might as well make it a test of strength,â## Kotaro insisted trying to push away the horror of killing one's brother.

Shinbe nodded, understanding what Kotaro was trying to do. â##We have always wondered who among us is the strongest.â##

Kamui's glittering eyes turned black and the ebony color quickly spread out across his wings as if eating the stardust that glittered there in multi-hued flecks. The instant Kamui came into his true power; it became a fight to the death.

Within moments, Toya was the last one standing. He dropped to his knees from the pain of what heâ##d just done, and what he yet had to do. No one had thought about the truest sacrifice that was to be made.

â##To be with you,â## his voice was only a whisper as he kept the rest of his thoughts deep within him. Taking his twin daggers in a tight grip, he plunged them into his own heart. The last of his power activated the sacred daggers as the ice quickly spread out from his heartâ## followed by the flames.

Chapter 2 â##A Voice from the Pastâ##

15 years laterâ##

Kyoko paused in front of the office door not wanting to go in. Sheâ##d been at the all girlsâ## boarding school as far back as

she could remember and being called to Mrs. Crap's office had never been a good thing. It gave the words "Oh Crap" a new meaning.

"Come in Hogo." Even muted from the other room, the female voice seemed harsh and unyielding, the kind that basically grated on people's nerves.

Kyoko flinched wondering how the hell the old lady even knew she was standing there. She took a second to glance around her, looking for the secret spy camera she had never found then shrugged and opened the door.

Seeing that the head mistress was not alone in the office, Kyoko shifted from one foot to the other wondering what she'd done to get in trouble this time. Since the school was in the middle of nowhere and there were no males allowed on the premises, she'd never been in the same room with the opposite sex and instantly looked away from him.

"Take a seat Miss Hogo, we have much to discuss." Mrs. Crap said with all the snootiness she could. Even she seemed to be rattled that her righteous school had been invaded by a man. "This is Mr. Sennin, a lawyer who has been in charge of your family's estate since you were placed here at our school. He has brought to my attention that his job is now finished and all rights of the estate revert back to you as of midnight tonight."

Kyoko blinked several times in confusion. Her family's what? She'd always been told that she was a ward of the school and assumed that meant she was an orphan. Her birthday was

tomorrow butâ#; Kyoko flinched from her thoughts when Mrs. Crap suddenly stood and headed for the door of the office.

The old womanâ##s back was stiff as a board and her heels clicked loudly on the hardwood floors of the office. She looked down her nose past the annoying glasses that hung from the end of it. â##I will leave Mr. Sennin to explain the rest.â## The door closed with a resounding boom, leaving Kyoko and the man alone within the office.

â##May I call you Kyoko?â## Mr. Sennin asked politely. Personally, he was glad the old heifer had left them alone.

His voice was aged and rough but soft and sweet at the same time, making Kyoko finally raise her emerald eyes to meet his. He was dressed in a business suit like a lawyer, but his smile belonged to someoneâ##s grandpa because that smile reached all the way to his twinkling gray eyes. She nodded, needing a moment to find her voice.

â##You know my family?â## Kyoko asked the one question she thought sheâ##d never get an answer to.

â##I knew them very well. Your grandfather was my best friend.â## He sighed as he took Mrs. Crapâ##s chair and pulled it around the desk next to Kyokoâ##s. â##Your grandfather brought you to me when you were only three years old with very explicit instructions and a will. He was killed in a freak accident only a couple hours after leaving my law firm.â##

The old man took a deep breath as if the memory still hurt him deeply, then he started to explain. â##Your grandpa

came to me in confidence. He told me that everyone in your family was in danger. Your parents had just died under strange circumstances and he feared for your life—afraid you would be next I suppose.

He fidgeted as if struggling to explain. "You see your mother and father were found in your family's living room, seemingly mauled to death by some kind of animal. His eyes darkened at the memory. "But there was never any evidence found of animals having been within the house."

Mr. Sennin frowned, "When the police arrived, they searched for your younger brother Tama, but he'd disappeared without a trace. You were with your grandfather at the county fair during the time of your parent's death. But when the investigators had searched the house; it was your room that had the most damage done to it. That's when your grandfather brought you to my office."

"They're all gone?" Kyoko felt like she was caught in the headlights, finding out she did have a family and knowing she'd lost them all within the same breath. "No one has ever told me any of this. They just always said that I was a ward of the school. I've never even been allowed off campus." She blinked wondering if she might've been better off not knowing.

Mr. Sennin nodded, "My instructions were to send you to a secluded boarding school as far away as I could find from your family's home, then not to have any form of contact

with you until your seventeenth birthday. I've always sent the school fees by way of an off shore account so they could not be traced.

He looked around the room feeling regret for her isolation. The only reason I picked this place was because the ground here is sacred, blessed by the monks who live in the monastery right up the mountain. Their ancestry and traditions are the oldest in the world, and the most powerful. I also asked that you never be allowed off school grounds. You see, your grandfather, he was convinced that if you weren't hidden away somewhere that the demons would find you.

Kyoko flinched in surprise. Demons? That was her secret and she'd never told anyone. Her roommates always asked her about her nightmares when she would wake up screaming, but she would simply tell them she didn't remember the dreams. She cast her eyes down not wanting him to see the fear within them.

He cleared his throat wondering if he'd said too much and quickly turned to his paperwork as if he could stack it even neater than it already was. Put it this way, I trusted your grandfather just as much as he trusted me.

Kyoko tried to block out the visions that were trying to form in her mind. The mental family portrait that she had secretly harbored in her heart was now covered in blood. Blinking the vision away until all she could see was the kind man that had spoken to bluntly she asked, What happens at midnight

tonight? Mrs. Crap said

Mrs. Crap, Mr. Sennin laughed then cleared his throat. You have to admit that the name fits her. He shared a grin with her then placed his folder of paperwork on the desk in front of Kyoko. There's a rather large house and an even larger sum of money that reverts back to you tonight at midnight. You may stay here as long as you like, or you can return home to the place you were born and finish out your senior year of high school.

Kyoko's lips parted and her emerald eyes had grown bigger as he spoke. I have a house?

He looked a little sheepish as he answered, Yes. It's on the edge of town and the land behind it is yours as far as the eye can see. It even has a heated in ground swimming pool within the flower gardens behind the house that you can't see from the road. You'll have all the privacy you could ever want.

Seeing her bite her lower lip, he tried to ease her fears. The house is not in the middle of nowhere like this place is. There is a huge house directly across the road and there's always lots of cars coming and going. I've noticed because my wife and I have gone to your house once a month to clean it for the last fifteen years. We even recently stocked it in case you decide to come home.

A slow smile spread across Kyoko's lips as she reached for the one thing she'd always wanted. Inside the folder was a picture of a big house with a well-manicured flower garden and

a long driveway. Home she had a home, a place where her family had once lived and been happy.

Looking back up at Mr. Sennin, she smiled once more and gave him her answer. "When can we leave?"

Kyoko stood on the front lawn looking up at the house where Mr. Sennin said she once lived with her family. The house was two stories, solid white, with huge columns holding up the roof of the front porch that went all the way across the front of the house. She had been standing there for almost ten minutes just taking it all in, but the sun was quickly setting and she focused her attention on the front door.

She had been so nervous leaving the girls' school and taking a plane across the ocean, but now that she was home, a quiet serenity had settled over her. Mr. Sennin had been a lot of help sending her luggage ahead of her and having his wife deliver it to the house. He had even had her school records sent to the high school in town so that tomorrow all she would have to do was show up for class.

Seeing headlights move across the front of the house, Kyoko looked over her shoulder at the residence across the small two-lane road. The house was about the same size as hers, but different. Every light in the other house was on and with so many cars in the driveway it looked full of life. Both were set close to the road with nothing but land around them as far as the eye could see. It was like they were the only ones out here on the

edge of the forest and mountains.

The headlights in question were actually a jeep that came to a screeching halt almost in the front doorway of the other house. She heard grinding gears before seeing the door of the jeep open. Swinging back around, she realized how lonely this house really was.

Hearing the jeep door slam, she took off up the steps with the key and had the door shut protectively behind her before she even got the light on. For some reason, she wasn't ready to meet the neighbors with their happy family and normal life. Flicking the light switch on, Kyoko released the breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding.

Toya jerked the jeep into park and climbed out looking back at the house across the road. He could have sworn he'd just seen someone standing in the front yard. A dark eyebrow rose under his bangs as light appeared in the front room. He leaned against the jeep wondering who was in the Hogo house.

Did you get the pizza?

Toya nearly jumped out of his skin when Kamui spoke from less than a foot behind him. Damn it Kamui! One day I'm gonna take your head off before I realize it's you sneaking up on me like that.

Kamui smirked, Wasn't killing me once enough for you? His stardust colored eyes lit up seeing the pizza boxes scattered across the back seat. Knowing Toya's driving, it

was a wonder theyâ##d even survived the trip. Picking them up, Kamui started back toward the house only to realize Toya hadnâ##t moved.

Following Toyaâ##s line of vision, he looked across the street not seeing any cars in the driveway. He barely acknowledged the fact that a faint light could be seen downstairs. â##The old lady was over there earlier today, probably just cleaning it again. I guess she forgot to turn the light off.â## Kamui shrugged. â##You coming?â##

â##What are you, my babysitter?â## Toya gave the halfhearted insult not even bothering to look at him.

â##Nope, but I am the pizza guru and I say if you donâ##t hurry, you wonâ##t get any.â## Kamui took off laughing when he heard Toyaâ##s growl.

Toya waited until he was alone in the driveway before he started toward the Hogo estate. Heâ##d been in the house many times over the last fifteen years looking for clues as to where the priestess had disappeared. When theyâ##d first come into the human realm and entered the house, the guardians thought they were too late. They quickly realized the priestess had not been among the dead. They could still feel her life force within this realm and the demons were still hunting for her as well.

In the first memory Toya had of this house, thereâ##d been ambulances and cop cars everywhere. The mother and father were dead, and the children and grandfather were missing. Without revealing themselves to the humans, the guardians had

waited and watched. As soon as the house was empty, they entered it, smelling the evil scent the demons had left in their wake.

A couple of days later, the body of the grandfather was found with his neck broken. The coroner's office ruled it an accident but the brothers knew better. The old man was clutching a scroll that Shinbe removed from the scene before calling 911. Shinbe was also the one to decipher the scroll. The old man had snuck back onto the property and been in the middle of trying to make the house and land consecrated ground to ward off demons when he'd been killed.

The demons never strayed far from this area and over time, the humans caught on enough to think that the town was haunted. The feds had even sent their paranormal and extraterrestrial investigators many times thinking maybe it was an alien invasion. But they were usually a little too late to find the evidence. Toya and his brothers would try to get there first, to kill the demons or to at least cover it up.

For fifteen years the guardians had lived in the house across from this one and blended in with the rest of humanity as best they could. Kamui even became quite the computer geek to keep the government from red flagging them. No one ever asked how five young men had an endless supply of money and a huge house on the edge of town.

Toya stayed in the shadows as he stepped around to the back of the house. Glancing over at the pool, he noted it had recently

been reopened. His gaze narrowed on the crystal clear water seeing a red hue slide through the liquid as if reaching for him. Narrowing his golden eyes, he took a step back from it.

The creepy vision disappeared as he watched the steam rising off the heated water and he tried to shake off the feeling that heâ##d just stepped on his own grave.

He shrugged off the possibility that someone couldâ##ve sold the house. If it had ever gone up for sale, the guardians would have been the first to know and they would have bought it. Besides, if some stranger had secretly bought the place, the fact that the house is haunted would quickly get rid of the new ownersâ## or at least it would be haunted if it needed to be. He and his brothers would make sure of that.

Toya held his hand over the lock on the sliding glass door and heard a soft click. Slipping inside, he closed it behind him and stood listening. The house was so silent at first that he thought heâ##d been mistaken, but then he heard a soft voice coming from the living room. Following the sound, he stopped near the shadowed doorway.

There was a girl standing in front of the cold fireplace and she was looking above it at the wall. Toya glanced up seeing the huge family portrait that had always been there. It was of a man with silver hair, almost like Kyouâ##s. But this manâ##s hair was shorter, coming only to his shoulders. His face seemed very young, but there was a look in his eyes that held wisdom beyond that of a mere human.

The muscle in Toya's jaw jumped knowing the man was mortal, very human, and very powerful in his own right. This man had once been called a wizard, just not in this lifetime. Now they just call them scientists and physicists. Torsion fields and worm holes were never meant to be tampered with by humans. His appearance hadn't changed no matter how many times he and his family was reborn into the world.

Toya's gaze moved to the beautiful auburn-haired woman cuddled up next to him. She was holding a toddler in her arms while the father had a small girl with auburn hair sitting in his lap. The children couldn't have been more than a year apart in age. Toya had come here so many times, staring at the picture. He was sure all the guardians had.

The little girl's eyes sparkled like emeralds even in the muted color of the photo. She had her father's eyes. Her lips were pouted as if the photographer had just told her to be still and a pretty blush colored her cheeks.

It's home Momma, Papa, Kyoko reached out and touched the elegant wood that framed the picture. Her sight lingered on her little brother as she tried to put his face to memory. Tama.

Tama's eyes were the same color as hers, even though in the picture some of the baby blue hadn't yet faded, but she could tell their true color. He was smiling like he had just done something wonderful, so full of life. Mr. Sennin said Tama had vanished when her parents were killed. Could he still be out

there somewhere?

“I wish you were here with me Tama. It would be nice to know at least one person at school tomorrow.”

Toya forgot to breathe as he reached out and gripped the door frame to steady his suddenly weak knees. He took a quick step back, deeper into the shadows as the girl turned full circle to look around the room. When her emerald eyes caught the light, the breath he'd been holding rushed out of him as if he had been punched in the stomach.

She had long auburn hair, and at that moment her lips were once again in a state of melancholy. His golden eyes trailed down her school uniform, the likes he had only seen in catholic high school movies. The skirt was short, reminding him of a cheerleader's uniform followed by long shapely legs. She unbuttoned the shirt enough that Toya knew the nuns would not have approved.

He had seen her before, on the other side of the heart of time. The maiden statue that held the time portal in her hands, this girl mimicked the stone, born into flesh and blood. He found the priestess and she was breathtaking. He closed his eyes to the phantom memory of kissing her, it wasn't his memory to keep.

Kyoko bit her bottom lip feeling frightened now that she was out here in the world without Mrs. Crap and all her rules. Maybe it was because this was her first time for everything. “Come on Kyoko,” She said out loud to break the thundering silence

as she picked up her suitcase. "If you want to be ready for school tomorrow, then you'd better go find a bedroom and unpack."

Toya stood there a few moments longer, relearning how to breathe.

In the foothills, miles behind the Hogo house, a tremor could be felt as the scent of the priestess was carried across the land by the October wind. Blood red eyes flashed open and the claws of demons could be heard scraping against stone walls as they reached for her.

Endless caverns and tunnels had long ago been dug out by those same claws. Tunnels that had slowly been shaped into elaborate hallways lit by torchlight from stone sconces. Carvings of demonic victories decorated almost every surface while the natural quartz rock in the ground added a glittering luster to the otherwise dark and dreary surroundings.

The large caverns were transformed into separate rooms containing bedrooms, bathing rooms and even what would have been thought to be a throne room with a chair carved from slick black rock. More quartz stone was inlaid in the walls of the rooms, reflecting the dim light of the torches and amplifying it. Semi-precious stones had also been found to inlay in the walls while long curtains of silk and brocade hung from the ceilings, procured by unknown means.

It was a castle built underground to protect a very precious

thing, even more precious than the stones in the walls.

Within the bowels of the caverns, in one of the bedrooms, emerald green eyes were shadowed by curiosity as they quickly glanced up at the silk-covered ceiling, wondering what had agitated the demons. Feeling the still air stir beside his bed, he looked to find the man who'd raised him from a baby and given him everything he had ever wanted; even the power to control demons.

"Hyakuhei, have the guardians found us?" Tama asked almost looking forward to the fight. Being a teenager was hard enough for a normal boy; and Tama was nowhere near normal.

The corners of Hyakuhei's lips curved ever so slightly into the hint of a smile. Everything within him stilled as he inhaled. It is the scent of the priestess that has rattled the demons tonight; I do believe she has come home.

Tama's eyes lit up with dark excitement. "My sister has finally come back to us?" He threw his senses outward, trying to feel her by using the power Hyakuhei had shared with him. He inhaled deeply, tasting the sweetness in the air but he could also taste the power of the guardians nearby.

If they had just let Hyakuhei go to his sister in peace, then none of this would have happened. They're evil creatures; thinking they're better than the demons. It was the guardian's fault that the demons went after his family when they'd first come into this world.

On their arrival, the demons had run free; killing him and

his parents because Hyakuhei had been injured the second Toya had shattered The Heart of Time. That injury had cost the demon lord control over the demons for a little while.

Hyakuhei had still been inside the time portal when it was shattered, causing his corporeal body to turn into that of a shade in order not to be destroyed. Had the guardians not done that, then Hyakuhei would've remained in control of the demons. Neither Tama nor his mom and dad would have been killed.

Hyakuhei had found him lying in his crib. The demons hadn't damaged his body like they did his parents, but he was dead just the same. Remembering how much the priestess had loved her little brother in the past, Hyakuhei used his remaining strength to become whole enough to breathe some of his life force into him, reviving the soul that had not yet left the body.

All this time, he and his savior remained hidden from the guardians, waiting on Kyoko to return. Over the past years, Hyakuhei slowly regained some of his strength but it still drained him when he used that energy to turn his body from a shade back into flesh and blood. As soon as that store of power was spent, he would return to being a shade. The only advantage of being a shade was that he could spy on the guardians even be in the same room with them and they would never know it.

Many times when Tama was a child, he'd silently asked Hyakuhei why they didn't send the demons to attack the

guardians. He had simply replied, "There is no need for war when there is nothing yet to fight for." Since Hyakuhei had used his life force to bring him back to life, not only could they communicate through a mental link but Tama could also see the shadows of Hyakuhei's memories from his point of view; feel his feelings. He knew Hyakuhei was right to wait.

Tama remembered the stories Hyakuhei had told him about his sister. Tales of the human girl who'd accidentally stepped through the time portal so long ago, bringing an entire village of humans with her into the demon realm. Hyakuhei and his twin brother Tadamichi had stopped the demons from killing Kyoko and the humans who suddenly found themselves within the massive demon realm.

While under their protection, Hyakuhei had fallen in love with her and given her the power to be his priestess, the power to cross between worlds so she could come back to him. In a jealous rage, his twin brother Tadamichi had stolen her from him and thrust her back into her own dimension, sealing the portal between worlds. It had been a malicious act full of jealousy over the priestess.

Hyakuhei's heart had been shattered. He'd then turned from his brother in anger and claimed the demons as his new allies. Becoming their master, his war with the guardians had been for one reason, to find a way through the heart of time so he could reclaim his lost priestess. Because of the power he'd given her, the priestess was now immortal, being reincarnated

over and over as the key to the portal between worlds. But with the passing of time, she had forgotten her true power and her love for Hyakuhei.

Tama's eyes burned with hatred for Tadamichi and the guardians. "What will they do to her?" he envisioned the portrait he'd seen within his family's living room when he would slip in and out of the house without the guardians noticing. She was lovely and he wanted his sister back.

Hyakuhei silenced the demons that awaited his command knowing he would have to be careful for now. He looked down at the young man he'd raised to be the dark prince of the demons, Kyoko's little brother. When he had first broken through the time portal, he had come for Kyoko, had wanted to raise her by his side until she came of age for him to claim her. But the old man had hidden her away from the demons that had attacked the family.

His most lethal demons had already killed the boy and his parents before he could tighten his hold on them. It was those same demons that he now held imprisoned within his body so he could have power over them. Without his ironclad control, the demons would have killed every human they'd come across, spreading death like a plague.

Knowing Kyoko was still alive and would one day return, he'd wanted a gift for her, her little brother. He gave Tama some of his life force along with the power to help him rule over the demons. From the first moment Tama had drawn breath,

they had a telepathic link. And though the boy had never spoken a word to this day, they could hear each other's thoughts. Since then, Tama had stayed by his side willingly, just like his sister once had.

She is of age now, they will desire her. Hyakuhei's anger at the thought could be heard in his voice. They will attempt to gain her trust by telling her they are protecting her from the demons. Once she befriends them, they will try to claim her and her power to control the time portal.

So she's safe for now, Tama mused. But we can't let her stay with them. She doesn't belong there. His emerald iris expanded then darkened to ebony. Do you have a plan?

We will have to be cunning. I was not able to bring many demons with me into this world and my own powers are fleeting. When your sister's powers are awakened by the guardians and we are reunited, my powers will be restored. Hyakuhei could feel the sway of the demons inside him as they rattled their prison walls wanting the power that lay within the priestess. If the demons could get to her, they would force her to open the time portal and let the rest of the demons into this domain.

He growled knowing not only would he have to be smarter than the guardians, he would have to outwit the demons as well. He'd found that the only way to overcome evil was to be that much more.

Once your sister is by my side, I will bring over my

army and the guardians will no longer be such a hindrance. For now, they expect the demons to come for her, and they will,â## Hyakuhei informed him.

â##While the guardians are busy, Kyoko will be contacted by her long lost brother and he will warn her of the guardiansâ## deception. But we must take our time and be careful or we will put her in danger. If they think she is going to betray themâ## then they will not awaken her power. Instead, they will turn on her.â##

Jealousy twisted Tamaâ##s voice as he felt the pull from the minds of the demons around them, â##They cannot keep her.â##

â##No,â## Hyakuhei smiled knowing an even deeper plan, â##But firstâ## we will let them think that they can.â##

When Tama frowned and looked back up at him, Hyakuhei had vanished. Using his telepathy to communicate he asked, â##Are you going to see her?â## his voice was wistful and full of melancholy. He wanted to see his sister but knew he had to wait on Hyakuhei to make sure it was safe.

â##Shhh,â## Hyakuheiâ##s whisper was haunted as he severed the connection between him and Tama. Another benefit to being a shade was teleportation. He materialized within the living room facing the picture that held both her and Tama. His attention slowly turned toward the stairs.

Refusing to teleport, he forced himself to take every ounce of pain the delay was causing him as he walked up the stairs and leaned against the open door frame as she came into sight. He

had known seeing her would hurt and he savored every moment of it. Her suitcase was open on the bed and she was pacing back and forth, hanging clothes up in the walk-in closet.

She was the only one in the world that had the ability to simply take his breath away without even trying. Her auburn hair was in long layers with loose bouncy curls; the body of a goddess; his priestess. He watched as she slowed then stopped next to the bed, seemingly lost in thought. She crawled up on the mattress and curled up into a ball, hugging one of the pillows to her chest.

It's so quiet here Momma; Papa. I wish Tama would come home. Then maybe the silence wouldn't be so deafening, Kyoko sighed as she lay sideways on the bed not even bothering to crawl under the covers. Blinking a couple of times she felt exhaustion claim her.

Hyakuhei sat down on the bed beside her, watching her breathe. It won't be long Kyoko; you will get your wish. You will never be lonely again. Using a moment's energy, his body shimmered into existence as he took the cover from the bottom of the bed. He slowly slid it up and over her body then leaned down and gently kissed her temple before vanishing.

He'll kill us all if there isn't any pizza left! Kamui had a tight grip on one end of the pizza box while Shinbe and Kotaro had a death hold on the other end. Kamui let go as soon as the door opened then laughed when Shinbe and Kotaro slowly set the box down in front of Toya's chair like they had

been protecting it for him.

When Toya didn't go off on them as he normally did, Kyou glanced up from his laptop and watched Toya take a seat at the table, the wrong seat. He cocked a dark eyebrow when Shinbe and Kotaro shrugged and opened Toya's pizza box. They started devouring it. Toya didn't even look at them.

Toya, Kyou prompted, going on high alert when Toya didn't acknowledge him.

Flipping the laptop closed, he grasped Toya's shoulder and started to shake him but Toya flinched, looking at him as if coming out of shock. Kyou silently wondered if Toya had run across another demon that was lurking near the house. He spread his senses out invading his brother's aura but felt no hint of contact with demons; instead he found something more disturbing.

Has something happened? Kyou demanded hearing the rapid thumping of Toya's blood just under his skin.

Toya nodded, then scared the hell out of everyone at the table when his lips lifted in a smile. Toya never smiled. I think we need to go to school tomorrow.

Here, you want your pizza back? Shinbe dropped the piece he'd just taken a bite out of then smacked Kotaro's hand, making him drop his stolen piece back into the box as well. He slowly slid it across the table till it was in front of Toya.

You could've just fought us for it instead of wiggling everyone out with that creepy smile, Kotaro complained.

“I don’t think he was joking,” Shinbe said as he locked his amethyst eyes with Toya’s overly large golden ones. He leaned back in his chair now that everyone was paying attention. Seeing the dazed look trying to creep back into Toya’s eyes he sighed. “And why would we want to suddenly join the freaks down at Hormones Are Us high school?”

“Because, the girl that just moved in across the street is starting there tomorrow.” Toya’s breathing was a little ragged now that he’d finally said it out loud.

When several chairs scooted back from the table, Kyou slammed his palms down on the tabletop with a rattling thump. “Sit! Down!” It was like hitting the pause button on the TV then very slowly rewinding it. Once everyone had obeyed, he turned back to Toya. “Tell us what you are talking about.”

“She’s alone! she’s her.” Toya rubbed his temple even though he knew guardians couldn’t get headaches. “Kyoko! She was talking to the pitcher above the fireplace. That’s how I know she’ll be starting school tomorrow.”

“What’s she like?” Kamui asked getting the same look in his eyes that had haunted Toya’s only a moment before.

“I didn’t talk to her,” Toya admitted then his shoulders dropped an inch. “I couldn’t, but she was dressed like they do at those boarding schools.”

“We can find out where she’s been if her records have

already been transferred to the local school,â## Kotaro added helpfully.

â##On it,â## Kamui fearlessly snatched Kyouâ##s laptop. He knew a backdoor into the school systemâ##s database because he checked all the surrounding schools regularly for signs of anyone who came and went around the age of Kyoko or Tama.

â##Youâ##re sure itâ##s her?â## Kyou asked Toya as he leaned forward in his chair.

â##We would have known her on sight. Kyoko looks like the maiden statueâ##; but alive.â## Toya closed his eyes savoring the fact that so far he was the only one who had seen her. If he tapped into the part of him that was Tadamichiâ##; then he could even remember what she tasted like. If the other guardians knew his secret, they would have been jealous. â##Emerald green eyes, auburn hair but she seemed fragileâ##; like sheâ##s still a little girl.â##

â##Iâ##ll say,â## Kamui agreed as his eyes widened on the screen. â##Her records indicate sheâ##s been living at an all-girls school in the middle of nowhere-land since she was three years old. Kyoko Hogo, age 17. All the information is here and I even have her class schedule for tomorrow.â## He frowned thoughtfully, â##But I donâ##t see anything about her brother starting the school with her.â##

Toya shook his head. â##I know weâ##d hoped they were somewhere safe together but Tama was never with her. Sheâ##s completely alone over there. Remind me again why we canâ##t

just tell her who we are. He already knew the answer, it was just bugging the hell out of him because he wanted to tell her.

Kamui glanced up from the laptop as he answered first. We have taken this vote before. Anyone in their right mind would just call the police on us if we told them who we really are. She's human Toya, with no idea of anything to do with being a priestess. We have to be careful.

Shinbe chimed in, Besides, the last thing we need or want are the feds snooping around because the cops are investigating us for stalking the girl next door. And if the demons find out the priestess is back, they will probably stir up quite a few messes that will have the feds back in the area anyway. It will be dangerous enough with all of us just popping up in school tomorrow.

Plus, if we just up and tell her that demons came after her at the age of three and she believes us, then she would probably blame herself for her family being killed, Kotaro supplied as another justifiable reason.

Toya glared at the other guardians, once again not liking the answers. You've over thought this, haven't you?

What do you expect? We've had fifteen years to turn that question inside out. Kamui gave Toya an apologetic smile.

Shinbe, I think you should go check the demon wards surrounding the house. Kyou nodded to Shinbe and suddenly there were only four of them in the room.

Damn, he left so fast I felt a breeze. Kotaro rubbed his

arms as if the draft had chilled him.

Kamui's fingers flew across the keyboard as he talked, "I've always had it set up as if we've all been home schooled by our adoptive dad and we are all in the 12th grade. As of tomorrow, we're switching to public school so we can graduate like normal teenagers."

"Oh, that won't send up a red flag at all," Kotaro said sarcastically. "Five brothers starting in the same grade, at the same time. Even if the teachers understand what's going on, we'll still be the talk of the school by the students. It's not as if we have a chance in hell of fitting in with real teenagers."

"Try," Kamui gave him a level look. "Anyway, give me some credit. I'll stagger our schedule so that one of us will be in Kyoko's class at all times. I've had our school records updated every year since kindergarten, so our age would match hers if she had ever come back."

"Just curious," Kotaro smirked, "But what if the priestess had come back at the age of ten?"

"Leave me alone," Kamui gave him a glare. "Or I'll make it so your grades suck."

Completely changing the subject, Kyou remarked, "I'm right, the demons could not locate her because of the boarding school being on hallowed ground; for the same reason we could not find her. Up until now, the demons have spread out causing havoc only here and there. But now, they will catch her scent and one by one come back."

His voice became so cold that it sucked the heat right out of the room, and just because we have found no sign of Hyakuhei in this world does not mean he isn't here.

We know he's here, Toya growled feeling his hatred flare then instantly calmed. We came to this world so we could be with her and protect her. She shouldn't be over there by herself even for a minute.

We all agree with you Toya, but you have to remember she is an innocent. That's why we are going to become her new best friends, Kyou informed him.

Just how are we supposed to do that? Toya snapped.
Didn't your mommy ever teach you to make friends?
Kamui smirked, but his eyes widened when Toya quickly stood up.

Toya noticed Kamui flinch and raised a dark brow. I'm just going to see what's taking Shinbe so long.

Shinbe confirmed his demon wards hadn't been disturbed, though he worried about the fact that demons weren't their only problem. The fact that Hyakuhei had broken through the barrier around The Heart of Time spoke volumes of the danger the priestess was really in. Sure, the wards would help hide her and keep the weakest demons from crossing the lines, but it wouldn't be enough to stop Hyakuhei should he come out of hiding.

One thing he knew about Hyakuhei was that the demon lord

was patient enough to pretend to be dead for the last fifteen years. What demons the guardians had caught sniffing around, they'd destroyed. But now that the priestess was here, there was no telling what was going to crawl out of the woodwork. She would need better protection.

When he noticed one of the upstairs lights come on, Shinbe quickly scaled the outer walls unable to help himself. It felt as if his very soul was drawn toward her. His amethyst eyes glowed as he looked in the window seeing her standing within the huge bathroom. Toya had been right; he would have known her on sight.

He watched her graceful movements as she reached into the shower to test the temperature of the water. He tried to turn away, but when she started unbuttoning her shirt it had been his undoing; he was frozen to the spot.

So that's what the maiden statue would look like without clothes, Shinbe breathed then started to climb higher so that he could see more of her than just from the waist up. He suddenly lost his grip on the wall when an arm went around his neck and jerked him backwards.

Toya grunted when he hit the ground flat on his back, but that wasn't as bad as Shinbe landing on top of him. Get the hell off me! Toya growled.

Let go of my neck and I will, Shinbe hissed as he stuck his elbow in Toya's ribs.

Toya pushed Shinbe off and quickly rolled to his feet.

“You’re supposed to be checking the demon wards, not!” He gestured toward the window, “you’re a pervert, you know that?”

“I just wanted to see her.” Shinbe started to glance back up at the window but Toya’s dangerous growl stopped him.

“I think you’ve seen enough.” Toya’s golden eyes swirled with quicksilver.

Shinbe debated reminding Toya there was so much more to see but he knew when not to press his luck. “Fine, there’s always the girls locker room at school tomorrow.” That gained him an agitated slap upside the head but he just chuckled.

“Come on, we have a meeting to attend.” Toya started back toward their house pushing Shinbe in front of him the whole way.

All humor left Shinbe’s face as he told the group his fears about the barrier’s weakness. “I know we have killed a lot of the demons that haunt the area waiting on her, but sometimes I wonder if we have forgotten the real problem.”

“We will take shifts watching over her tonight.” Kyou’s order started the age-old argument about who would go first, but Kyou won.

In his shade form, Hyakuhei leaned against the far wall of the same room where they were having their secret meeting. He was barely paying his nephews any attention as his mind drifted across the road to where the girl in question lay sleeping. He thought it was sad that they still avoided saying his name and

wondered if it was guilt that kept them from doing so.

Chapter 3 Hormones Are Us High School

Kyoko had been frustrated all morning trying to figure out what to wear. It wasn't like she had much of a selection since she had worn the same thing every day at the boarding school. Luckily she found a slice of color to go with her boring outfit.

One of the girls had given her a shirt last year for Christmas. It was emerald green, short, and frilly. She had always loved it but had never had a chance to wear it. Now that she had it on with one of her black school skirts, she felt almost excited about the prospect of going shopping after school and replacing her wardrobe.

Mr. Sennin had given her the bankcard along with her account information yesterday on the plane. Kyoko had almost screamed out loud when he'd told her the balance in the account. She was glad she didn't when he'd added the fact that the card was only from the recreational account. Her true holdings were in a completely different account.

Now she was faced with her first dilemma: how to get to school. They didn't allow the girls to get their driver's license at the boarding school and she had no idea if the bus even came down this street: not that the bus driver would know to pick her up anyway. She was startled from her thinking when a horn blew outside.

Opening the front door, Kyoko smiled and waved at the taxi. "Thank you Mr. Sennin," she whispered as she grabbed her

book bag and headed for the driveway.

Well that answers that question. Shinbe climbed into the passenger seat of Toya's jeep while Kyou and Kamui headed for the sleek black mustang. I just hope the barrier spell I placed on her last night can hide her enough to keep any stray demons from raiding the high school.

Toya clenched his teeth knowing all the guardians had been in her bedroom separately last night, but the thought of how close Shinbe must have been to cast that spell was grating on his nerves.

Kotaro put on his shades and threw his leg over the back of his motorcycle. Last one there has to do everyone's homework.

Wanting to see his sister for himself, Tama sat on the three-foot tall brick wall in front of the high school. He glanced at Hyakuhei, who was leaning against the brick right beside him though Tama knew no one else would be able to see him since he was a shade. So far he'd been silent as they both watched the students entering the school.

With his skater-boy haircut and new clothes, Tama blended in with the other students as he watched and waited. His emerald green eyes were hidden behind the darkness of his thoughts for a moment as he felt the power of the guardians pass close by and enter the school. He didn't look at them for risk that his loathing would show.

Last night, he'd sent one of his demons to watch her house

and alert him if his sister left. Sometime in the early morning hours, one of the guardians had killed it. As the demon's master heard felt its violent death. He knew controlling demons wasn't the same thing as having pets so it didn't bother him when one died. Sometimes, he felt like killing them himself when one of the demons would escape their power and injure a human or worse.

Feeling a spike in the energy around him, he turned his head to see a girl walking away from a taxi that had pulled up to the front of the school. Tama's lips parted knowing without a doubt that it was Kyoko. She had long auburn hair with large, loose waves that bounced as she walked. Part of it was up in a ponytail near the top of her head, while the rest was left hanging almost to her waist. She glanced toward him with bright emerald eyes then quickly looked away as if she were nervous.

Hyakuhei kept his aura hidden as she neared them. Just seeing her again so soon sent a sudden need slamming through him. He could hear Tama's heartbeat speed up as the boy whispered in his mind. "It's here, isn't it?"

"Yes." Hyakuhei's voice was a mixture of emotions as memories resurfaced to haunt him. "It is time to leave our present for the guardians."

Tama gave a wicked smile as he reached up and pulled the black widow off his shoulder, setting it down on the brick beside him. He watched as Hyakuhei passed his hand across the poisonous arachnid, making it look more like a caress than what

it truly was. The shadow that the spider cast in the morning sun opened its blood red eyes.

Kyoko was a nervous wreck as she walked into the building. It felt like someone was watching her and the sensation left cold chills across her arms. This place was nothing like the boarding school. Some of the kids she just passed were doing everything from smoking cigarettes, to making out right there in front of the school. As if that wasn't enough, what they were wearing made her feel almost inferior.

Nearly losing her nerve, Kyoko turned around and put her hand against the door wanting to make a run for it. Looking out at all the students, her eyes returned to the boy sitting alone. She'd noticed him watching her as she'd gotten out of the cab and he was still watching her. He was taller than her, but around the same age, with a lethal body that the alternative fad didn't quite hide.

He reminded her of something that you know is dangerous, but you craved it anyway. Seeing the sun glint off his eyes as he tilted his head, she could have sworn his irises changed from black to bright green. Figuring it was just her imagination, Kyoko turned around and sighed knowing it was time to face the music.

Trying to avoid eye contact with anyone, she headed for the glass doors with the word OFFICE posted beside them. She tilted her head at all the girls that were milling around the doors looking in and whispering. She caught all kinds of remarks from, look at

that ass, to I call dibs.

Once she was inside the room with the door closed behind her, Kyoko glanced around noticing it was even noisier in here than itâ##d been out in the hall. She started toward the long desk but pulled up short seeing several students in front of her.

The secretary clucked her tongue in annoyance. â##I havenâ##t even had time to check the fax machine yet so youâ##ll just have to take a seat until I can get your schedules together.â##

â##Our schedules are already approved and should be with the rest of the paperwork.â## Kyouâ##s voice was icy. If the old woman had known him better, she would have been tripping over herself to do as he asked. With a glare at the fax machine, it clicked on and started printing.

Kyokoâ##s gaze locked on the guy whose voice had given her the shivers, but as soon as she took the sight of him in, her lips parted. No wonder there was a throng of girls peeking in the doors. He had the longest hair sheâ##d ever seen on a guy and it was white-silverâ##; not like the color of an old man's, but soft and vibrant looking. His clothing was that of a rich kid and it seemed he was used to getting his way. The smile he gave the secretary was wicked and cold, but his face was sheer perfection.

He looked like he should have been at a photo shoot somewhere for those Calvin Klein underwear ads. Her cheeks heated up when his expression instantly softened and he glanced toward her as if heâ##d heard her thoughts. Kyoko took a step

back, looking away from him. The carpet was much safer to look at.

“Are you Kyoko Hogo?” The lady practically yelled from behind the desk.

Kyoko’s gaze jerked up and she nodded, not liking the spotlight.

“Here is your schedule.” The lady held the paper out but kept her eyes on the guy in front of her. “Your lawyer had the forethought of sending your information last week instead of last minute. Her voice couldn’t have been sweeter if sugar had been poured on it. Kyoko knew the sarcasm was meant for the guy she had been arguing with and not her.

“You may go on to your first class.” She waved Kyoko toward the door then turned back to the others, “I can believe I have six new enrollments to do in one day.”

Kyoko turned and rushed for the door only to find one of the guys holding it open for her. She had been embarrassed enough, so without even looking directly at him, she quickly murmured, “Thank you,” as she slipped past.

She stepped back out into the hall and put several feet between her and the drooling girls before she finally felt the tension level plummet. Looking down at the piece of paper then back up at the huge hallways, Kyoko noticed them leading off in different directions, even up the steps. “Great! so how am I supposed to find room 101?”

“Up the stairs and the first door on your left,” Tasuki said

as he leaned over her shoulder looking at her schedule. "Hey! We actually have the same classes." Watching her whirl around like he'd scared her, Tasuki gave her his "I'm so innocent" smile. "I've never seen you here, and I know what a screw-up that office can be. So, I thought I would come over and introduce myself in case you needed some help."

He stuck his hand out. "Tasuki, and you are?"

Kyoko couldn't help the smile that tugged at her lips as his warm hand took hers and held it. Curiosity entered her mind feeling like she knew him from somewhere. She blinked when the feeling didn't disappear although she knew there was no way she had ever met him before now.

His hair was so dark that it had strange blue highlights running through it in the light and it hung in haphazard layers past his shoulders. She could see a dangling cross earring peeking out one side and thought he looked like the lead singer of an 80's rock band. One of the girls at her school had constantly been in trouble for smuggling rock posters in and putting them up in various places around campus.

"Kyoko," She gave him her first name since that was all he had offered her.

"And the teachers claim that I'm not good for anything." His smile was brilliant as he waved his hand toward the stairs. "I can now prove them all wrong by keeping you from getting lost today."

Kyoko thankfully followed him up the stairs as he kept talking

about the teachers, who gave homework and who didn't. When they entered the science class, she noticed it was set up with double desks.

"Yeah," Tasuki frowned. "Everyone already has a partner. The school has a thing about putting double desks in every class." He shrugged, "but the desk beside mine is empty."

Kyoko was just happy that the teacher simply smiled at her then looked away instead of introducing her to the class. Finding a science book already on the desk, she quickly got herself organized as the rest of the students slowly filled the chairs. Tasuki was the last one standing since he was flipping through her book pointing out what chapter they were on.

"Tasuki, quit trying to pollinate and take your seat." The deep male voice came from the front of class making Kyoko turn several shades of red when some of the students turned to look at them. "She may be new, but from the look of her previous grades, I don't think her lack of a partner will hurt her."

"If she needs a partner," Shinbe walked into the class like he belonged there, "then I will volunteer." He handed a slip to the teacher and started for the only empty seat in the room.

While the teacher looked over the paper, Kyoko's eyes widened and she moved her stuff out of the chair beside hers. He instantly reminded her of Tasuki because they seemed to have

the same hairstyle. But this guy's eyes weren't soft brown like Tasuki's she could have sworn they were amethyst. Where Tasuki tried to look like a rock star, this guy didn't have to try; he simply did.

"Will you share it with me?" Shinbe locked his gaze with hers as he took his seat.

"Heh?" Kyoko so elegantly replied. Why had her temperature just gone through the roof?

"Your book," Shinbe smirked wondering what she was thinking. "There seems to only be one."

"Oh. Yes." Kyoko nodded sliding the book between them as he slid his chair right up against hers. She silently wondered if it was a rule somewhere that the new girl had to blush all day long.

Looking past him at Tasuki, she noticed her new friend's smile had vanished and he was rapidly tapping his pencil against his desk as he stared a hole in her new partner. He wasn't the only one staring. It seemed every girl in the room decided they needed something out of their book bag so they could turn and look.

Shinbe placed an elbow on the desk and leaned in to block her view of the guy he'd seen lead her up the stairs from the office by the hand. "Looks like you'll have a partner after all. Name's Shinbe." He winked wanting her full attention.

An hour later Kyoko was almost sad to see class come to an end. Shinbe had turned out to be a lot of fun as they did that

day's science experiment. Only their table and Tasuki's table had gotten it right.

Shinbe picked up their shared science book the same time she did. Placing his hand over hers, he pulled her toward him. As she stared up at him with those big emerald eyes, it was all he could do not to wrap his arm around her waist and bring her flush against him. "I'll keep this," his voice was husky then evened out as he added, "Since there's no homework." His thumb caressed the back of her hand as he listened to her heartbeat speed up.

Kyoko nodded, feeling herself go weak in the knees, then pulled her hand away from his reluctantly. There was something about him that made her want to crawl up in his arms and that was just disturbing. She turned around to grab her backpack off the floor but noticed someone else's arm already reaching for it.

Tasuki scooped the book bag up before she could and quickly squeezed in between her and Shinbe. "Ready for calculus?"

Kyoko nodded glad for the distraction. "Never." She laughed at the look on Tasuki's face.

Tasuki caught on to the joke, rolling his eyes and groaning. "Yeah, every time I think I have math figured out, they throw something even stupider up on the chalk board just so they can laugh at me." He grabbed Kyoko's hand, pulling her behind him, "Come on, I'll show you the way to hell."

Shinbe watched them leave with his eyes narrowed on the hand that was holding hers so possessively. "He thinks he

knows what hell is, eh? I can show him the real thing.## Shinbe whispered jealously under his breath. He shrugged off the need to break the boy's fingers.

Closing his eyes for a moment, he let his powers fan throughout the school in a wave as he searched for any signs that demons were on the prowl. When the wave passed Kyoko and her friend, Shinbe frowned. It wasn't that the boy was a demon# the aura was strangely familiar.

In the next classroom, Tasuki started to take her toward the table he knew was open but suddenly stopped in his tracks. Kyoko followed his gaze, and everybody else's in the classroom. Her eyes widened seeing the long silver hair of the guy she'd seen arguing with the secretary. As if sensing he was being watched, his head slowly turned and his liquid gold eyes captured hers and held her immobile.

##How many new people do we have starting today?## Tasuki asked no one in particular.

##Six,## Kyoko answered him remembering what the secretary had said.

##My seat is way up here,## Tasuki said broodingly as she slowly walked past him.

Kyoko felt a sense of $d\tilde{A}\odot j\tilde{A}$ vu when she noticed one math book and that he had already slid it between the two seats as if waiting for her. She pushed the thought aside thinking maybe the teacher had asked him to share it with her before she'd come into the room. The closer she got to him, the more disturbed she

felt. It was as if every hormone in her body had just stood up and taken notice.

When she sat down, he scooted his chair closer and she felt heat creep into her cheeks. Looking out across the room she noticed a couple of the girls were now frowning at her. Knowing this was going to be the longest class in history, Kyoko closed her eyes and rubbed her temple.

As soon as the math class started their assignment, Kyoko struggled to remember how to do the problems even though she'd learnt this the year before at the boarding school. Seeing Kyou's hand nearly flying across the page, Kyoko sighed inwardly having become stuck on the second problem.

The teacher was walking the isles and noticed Kyou was almost finished with the page. "I see you have already learned how to do this Kyou. Would you do me the favor of helping explain it to Kyoko?" The teacher smiled sweetly but didn't wait on an answer as she turned up the next row of students.

Kyoko was mortified. She stayed completely still as she watched him push his own papers away. When he leaned toward her to draw hers closer, a lock of his hair slid across her hand. Feeling the cool silkiness, Kyoko confirmed her worst fears she was so going to fail math this year.

The corners of Kyou's lips tilted in the barest hint of a smile as he heard her thoughts. Leaning down so he could look her directly in the eyes, he placed his hand over hers and whispered, "I won't let you fail."

By the end of class, Kyoko had remembered how to do the calculus problems. Theyâ€”d even finished that nightâ€”s homework assignment before class was over. DÃ©jÃ vu knocked again when he offered to keep the book for them. Seeing Tasuki waiting for her next to the door, she hurried.

â€”Do you really have home economics?â€” Kyoko asked him to keep herself from looking over her shoulder at Kyou.

â€”Sure. As a matter of fact, itâ€”s mostly guys taking the class this year.â€” His eyes sparkled as he winked. â€”We men have to know how to cook for our sweethearts and keep them happy.â€” Tasuki smirked, â€”Besides, we get to cook almost every day so itâ€”s kind of like getting a snack before lunch.â€”

â€”Ha! So the truth is finally out. I knew there was a reason I wanted to take this class.â€” Kyoko gave him a cheeky smile knowing she needed this class probably more than the others. Until last night, sheâ€”d never been allowed in a kitchen and wondered if she would even be able to fake it enough not to become the class clown. Now that she was cooking for herselfâ€”! it was either pass the class or learn to love Cheerios.

This class was set up completely different from all the others. There were tables and chairs like in a lunchroom instead of desks.

â€”No assigned seating.â€” Tasuki wiggled his eyebrows and quickly led them to a table toward the back of the room. The whole right side of the room was made up of everything they needed to cook, including five stoves. Kyoko quickly looked around counting five tables and assumed each table would be

cooking together.

Two other guys joined their table and Tasuki introduced her to Yohji, who looked like an all-around American jock. When he asked the name of the other guy, Kyoko realized he must be one of the new students. Again she felt like she was drawn to him by some invisible magnet that only worked on new students.

“Hi,” she whispered as he smiled and nodded. He was just as striking as the two other new guys she’d met this morning. His hair was awesome! it was dark and light at the same time, with amethyst highlights all over the place. It was shoulder-length but untamed, like he’d been in a windstorm and his eyes! they weren’t a color! they were every color, and she could swear they sparkled with unnatural light.

He seemed to be looking at her just as hard as she was looking at him. When their gaze met, Kamui smiled a smile that would have won the devil himself over.

“Would you two please get a room?” Yohji complained, causing Tasuki to growl and Kamui to laugh.

“Only if we can lock you in it,” Kamui smirked at Yohji when he stiffened. He tried not to laugh out loud when the thought struck him that the jock was claustrophobic. “I was just choosing the person I was cooking for. What’s wrong? Jealous? Do you want me to cook for you instead?”

Yohji shrugged deciding to go with it, “Only if it makes you happy sweetheart.”

Tasuki sat back in his chair watching the new boy watch

Kyoko. They were wrong. It wasn't Yohji that was feeling the needles of jealousy. Maybe it was time to get to know the competition. He glanced over at the happy smile on Kyoko's face and decided he'd best come up with a plan.

Today we will be making Halloween candy from scratch, the teacher announced as she passed out the recipes.

And now we get to eat the heads off of monsters! Kamui added as if he had just won the lottery. When Kyoko started laughing with him, Kamui felt his blood heat up and he found himself fighting the need to reach for her. He silently wondered if his brothers were fighting that same craving.

Each one of them picked a different Halloween-shaped cookie cutter and made ten cookies each, placing them on an oversized pan. When they were done, it was Kamui who was there to take the pan out of the oven. Seeing Kyoko's pumpkin shaped cookies were badly deformed, he whispered a quick word in some forgotten language as he drew the pan out of the oven.

How did that happen? Kyoko asked in awe as he brought the pan to the table. Her cookies were perfection and the guys cookies looked like five-year-olds had done them.

And this is why mostly guys take the class, Kamui smiled as he took a bite out of Kyoko's cookie then blinked when he heard a faint growl come from Tasuki. Taking a better look at the guy that had appointed himself Kyoko's bodyguard for the day, Kamui tilted his head at the sense of foreboding.

Chapter 4 Bad Boys and Romeo

Lunch was next and when Tasuki got in the cafeteria line, Kyoko glanced out the large glass windows and started toward the outside eating area. Seeing tables scattered everywhere on the concrete, she looked past them and notice a of couple picnic tables under beautiful shade trees.

Needing a few minutes of solace to calm down from all the morning's excitement, she picked the biggest tree and sat down at the base of it, facing away from the school.

Hyakuhei leaned against the tree beside Kyoko, though he knew it was a moot point to do so. His eyes were dark, without any emotion at all and his lips held no hint of his mood. He was already tired of being invisible to her but he knew he had to bide his time. How could he comfort someone that didnâ## even know he was there?

Reaching into the backpack, Kyoko pulled out the small soft cooler that sheâ##d stuffed full of grapes and relaxed against the smooth bark of the tree. Hearing a motorcycle close by, she glanced up. A guy wearing dark shades, dressed in black, with long layered hair slowly road by the curb. She couldnâ##t see his eyes, but she could tell he was looking directly at her.

She couldnâ##t decide if it was because she hadnâ##t been around the opposite sex, or if it was simply the fact that this school was full of guys that would graduate only to become super models. She could just picture the guy on the motorcycle on the cover of some movie about sexy bad boys. She ate a couple of her grapes and closed her eyes trying to block out the yummy

site. Her hormones had already taken a licking today and she was starting to feel bent.

It wasn't like any of this really shocked her because at the boarding school she had gotten away with one thing; reading. When the other girls would go to the public library, she would always give the one infatuated with rock stars a list of books to get for her. She would then take the cover of a Shakespeare book and wrap it around the book she was reading so no one would know her guilty pleasure; Romance books of all kinds.

She'd started out with historical romances where the Indian would kidnap the white girl and take her to his teepee, keeping her there until she fell in love with him. Then she had branched out to paranormal romance; vampires were also known to kidnap the girl and keep her until she fell in love with him. Those books leaned closer to erotica and she blamed them for her hormones being out of control now.

For the last year, she'd been reading every kind of paranormal romance she could get her hands on and the darker the better. Kyoko blew her bangs out of her eyes knowing her innocence was gone; if only mentally.

Hearing the school bell, she cringed, realizing she hadn't even eaten more than three grapes. Stuffing the container back into her book bag, she was startled to find a hand reaching down to help her up.

Tasuki knelt down in front of her as he took her hand. "Are you ready?" he slowly smiled when he noticed she got the same

look on her face for him as she did with the new guys. Maybe he hadn't lost after all.

Kyoko returned his smile, "Lead me to Shakespeare."

"How did you know?" Tasuki looked confused.

"Because I couldn't get lucky enough to think the world literature class would allow us to read a vampire series." She laughed when he cocked a dark eyebrow. When they entered the class, Tasuki pointed at the empty desk in the back, then went to see if the teacher had an extra copy of Romeo and Juliet.

Kyoko was already seated and getting out her notebook when the chair beside her scraped across the floor. She glanced up and her breath caught in her throat. The guy she'd seen watching her from the back of the motorcycle during lunch was throwing his leather coat across the back of the chair.

Tasuki turned from the teacher with the copy of Romeo and Juliet in his hand when he noticed Kyoko was no longer alone. "I just can't win, can I?" he asked the air in front of him as his grip tightened on the defenseless book.

"Excuse me?" the teacher asked thinking Tasuki was talking to him.

Tasuki glanced over his shoulder, "I don't guess you would happen to have two copies?" He motioned toward Kyoko's desk.

"We did have extra copies, but it seems someone broke into the supply closet and raided the 12th grade books last night. Strange though, it's hard to believe someone would want a

bunch of math and science books. The teacher shrugged as he turned around and started stacking the papers on his desk.

Tasuki took a step forward before realizing just what the teacher had said! Math, science, and the Romeo books were missing? Now that was odd. He looked at the guy beside Kyoko suspiciously. What do you know about all these new guys that showed up today? He quickly asked.

Not much. Just that there are five of them! adopted into the same family and all in the same grade. They've been home schooled up until now. He laid the papers back down on his desk and shrugged, Just ask them to share.

Tasuki's shoulders slumped and he was suddenly feeling out numbered. As he closed the distance between them, he felt a little taller at the smile Kyoko gave him. Handing her the book he leaned down and whispered next to her ear, There's only one copy! sorry. But if there is homework then we can both use my copy and do it together. He hid his smile when the guy next to her flashed a dark look in his direction.

Thanks, Kyoko mouthed the word then turned to the guy beside her. Her lips parted to tell him that they had to share but the words stuck in her throat. He was looking directly at her while pulling his shades off. His eyes were ice blue! not the normal pretty blue that people lusted over, but really like a deep blue ice. It reminded her of the color of a black light but bluer.

She felt her hair move against her cheek as if a slight wind was blowing even though they were inside and she wondered at

it. "We have to share." Kyoko's voice was breathless.

"I'll be Romeo if you'll be Juliet," Kotaro said in a voice that was meant for seduction.

Kyoko walked beside Tasuki on the way to drama class. She was still tripped out that a guy that looked like the leader of the bad boy biker gang could read Romeo as if he'd practiced it all his life. She snapped out of her daydream when they entered the doors of the school auditorium and she realized it wouldn't be a classroom they were having drama in.

"The class has been getting things together to decorate for the masquerade ball Friday night," Tasuki clued her in. "It's going to be in the old school building just behind this one." He noticed all the boxes lined up on the edge of the stage and the students that were grabbing them up and walking out the back door with them. "I guess it's time to decorate."

Tasuki grabbed two boxes and paused at the end of the stage waiting on Kyoko to join him. When she picked up a box without looking to see what was in it, he watched her stagger from its weight. Before Tasuki could set his boxes down and run to her, someone was already there.

Kyoko cringed knowing she was going to drop everything as she fell. She blinked when the weight of the heavy box suddenly vanished. The box was back on the stage as if she hadn't moved it and two strong arms were around her from behind to keep her from falling.

Warmth she felt so warm. Strong arms, she could feel the hard muscles of his chest and couldn't help it as she leaned back against his strength. She had never felt as safe in her life as she did right at this moment and she wanted to stay.

"Are you alright?" Toya asked as she melted against him. It was all he could do not to bury his face in her hair and kiss the soft skin at the arch of her neck. Everything within him wanted to keep her. "Mine," Toya whispered inwardly when he felt their heartbeat pound at the same time.

Kyoko started to close her eyes but someone grabbed her wrist and pulled her out of the warmth.

"Kyoko?" Tasuki couldn't hide the panic in his voice. "Talk to me. It looked like you almost passed out just now."

"I'm fine." Kyoko blinked and glanced behind her. Her hero was leaning over to pick the box back up when their eyes met. Electric eyes like melted gold just like Kyou's. He had ebony hair with that same color of silver highlighting it, this time in streaks and very long layers. She instantly wondered if he and the guy from calculus class were brothers.

He'd felt so strong, unmovable, even though he wasn't much bigger than Tasuki. But something about the way he moved gave him a sleek, predatory grace that reminded her of a panther when it was on the hunt. The way he was looking at her made her feel like the prey.

Seeing the other guy giving him a hard steady look from over Kyoko's shoulder, Toya picked the box up and started past

them. I'll carry this one. As he moved around them, he swallowed the taste of jealousy when he noticed that the guy still hadn't let go of her wrist.

As soon as he was out of their sight, Toya leaned against the brick beside the door and listened to make sure she really was going to be okay. Satisfied that she was, he closed his eyes savoring the way she'd felt against him. He pushed away from the wall feeling for the first time in a long time that he had a reason for existing.

Kyoko's lips parted realizing she hadn't even told him thank you. Stepping back from Tasuki, she started to grab another box so she could catch up with him, but Tasuki held onto her wrist and swung her back around.

Kyoko stop. Take a moment to breathe and tell me what that was, Tasuki insisted when he noticed the panicked look in her eyes and the way she was suddenly shaking.

Knowing he was right, Kyoko leaned back against the stage and took a deep breath to steady herself. I'm sorry Tasuki. The box was too heavy and I think maybe I did almost pass out. I really haven't eaten much the past couple days because of the move. She wasn't lying so maybe that had been it.

Kyoko glanced again toward the door. I didn't even get to thank him for catching me. The thought saddened her. Do you know him?

Tasuki's eyes darkened as he shrugged, I suppose he's one of the five brothers that started today. It's strange

how every single one of them has found a way to be close to you on their first day. Seeing Kyoko's frown, he tried to turn it into a joke. "I guess they just want to be near the prettiest girl in the school." He winked and checked the weight of the boxes behind them until he found one that was almost empty. "Here, you can carry this one."

When he placed the box in Kyoko's arms, she held it up with one hand. "What am I? Five?" She giggled as they went across the school grounds toward the older rundown building. Her mind backtracked to what he had said about the new guys. "Brothers? Then how come they're all in the same grade?"

Tasuki smiled, secretly thanking the lose-lipped teacher that had answered his questions. "Adopted, and until now, home schooled." He quickly changed the subject not wanting to share her any more than he already had today. "Are you coming Friday?"

"Where?" Kyoko lost her train of thought.

"To the masquerade ball," He nodded toward the box she was carrying, "It's Friday, Halloween night."

"I don't know," Kyoko smiled as she thought about the freedom of finally getting to go somewhere like a normal teenager, but at the same time she hadn't a clue where to buy a costume. "Is there a place that sales costumes this late in the game?"

"The mall has a costume shop that only opens up for a

couple weeks out of the year. Since this masquerade party is a school tradition, they have a very wide selection. He wanted to ask her to go with him but the thought of her saying no actually made his stomach hurt. He had a vision of one of the new guys asking her to go and he stomped the vision into a greasy spot within his jealous mind.

It might be a lot of fun if we go together, Tasuki held his breath mentally kicking his own ass.

Okay, Kyoko smiled a real smile as she said yes to her first date. Oh wow! Her emerald eyes lit up seeing the transformation of what should have been a dark dusty old gym. The students had scrubbed it so clean that it nearly sparkled and now they were adding the darkness of Halloween.

Yeah, Tasuki smiled, suddenly the happiest guy in the world. It will look even better by Friday night.

Toya kept his distance after hearing her tell Tasuki she'd go to the masquerade with him but he didn't have to be close to hear every word that she said. This masquerade party would be a really bad idea for her to come too, but seeing the happiness on her face, he wouldn't have tried to stop her for the world. It looked like he and the other guardians would just have to find a costume and pry her away from her date.

Toya's hands fisted at his sides when Yohji tried to get her to climb a ladder to hang decorations. The pervert pissed him off, but before he could step in, Kyoko put her hands on her hips and looked at Yohji like he was stupid and it made him laugh.

Kyoko's gaze scanned the room looking for the echoing laughter but gave up when Yohji was dim enough to ask her why she wouldn't hang the decorations when everyone else had taken their turn.

"I'll make you a deal Yohji," Kyoko gave him a cold smile that should've warned him. "I'll bring you a short skirt tomorrow and we can take turns hanging the decorations." She turned to go back to the auditorium for another box.

Yohji lowered his gaze to watch her skirt as she walked away. He started after her but pulled up short when Toya stepped directly in his path.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," Toya's voice was low and dangerous and if Yohji had looked, he would've noticed the strange silver color that was starting to bleed in with the gold of Toya's irises.

Sadly, the dumb jock wasn't known for his brains. "Is that a threat?"

Toya's face was dead serious, "You bet."

Living up to his reputation, Yohji started around Toya only to wind up flat on his face when he tripped over something. "Oww, what the hell?" Yohji cried out reaching for his ankle and looking around for whatever he'd tripped over. Not seeing anything, he started to glare up at Toya but couldn't find him anywhere.

Tasuki stepped over Yohji on his way to the door. "It

doesn't look like you'll be doing much dancing Friday night. Concern was absent from his voice.

Kyoko made it back to the auditorium but as soon as the door closed behind her, she knew something was off. For one thing, the whole room was pitch black and totally silent. Hearing something scurry across the floor toward her, she turned and rushed back out the door and right into a brick wall.

Toya's arms instantly went around Kyoko to steady her. He felt the evil mingling within the darkness as the double doors slowly closed behind her, trapping it inside. As he wrapped both arms around her he asked, "Are you okay?"

Kyoko nodded as she laid her cheek against his chest. That was the second time he had asked her that. "I think there's an animal or something in there."

"Tasuki is looking for you," Toya lied as he placed his hands on her shoulders and gently moved her around him. Before she could say anything, Toya was inside the building with the door closed firmly behind him.

Kyoko realized he had done it again. He disappeared before she'd even thought to thank him. Reaching for the doorknob and turning it, she frowned. Locked?

Tasuki had seen her in Toya's arms from a distance and the sight made him grit his teeth. Before he could catch up to them, Toya was already inside and Kyoko seemed to be locked out.

"What happened this time?" Tasuki tried to hide the annoyance that was building at the speed these new guys at the

school seemed to have for coming on to Kyoko.

Kyoko pulled on the door one more time then gave up. I think there's some kind of animal in there, but Toya locked me out so I'm not sure what it was.

Tasuki shook his head, It's probably just a Halloween prank to keep up the tall tales about the town being haunted. Strange things have been going on around here since I was little. I wouldn't worry about it. Come on, class is over in a couple minutes anyway.

Chapter 5 Phantom of the Opera

Toya heard the locks click on the surrounding doors and could feel his brothers closing in at a fast pace. When the room lit up with shimmering light, his gaze searched for Kamui recognizing that it was his magic illuminating the room. Seeing all four of the brothers headed toward him, his senses went on full alert.

Any idea what kind of demon it is? He backed up in line with his brothers when the heavy stage curtains fell from the ropes that held them up, barely missing him.

I'm guessing it wants to be the phantom of the opera when it grows up, Shinbe stated then they heard a clicking noise that sounded like claws tap-dancing across hardwood. It moved so fast all they saw was a streak of darkness.

Come out, come out, where ever you are, Kotaro called making his voice echo softly in the theater.

Nice touch, Kyou complimented him with a raise of his eyebrow. Now can we please be grownups and kill this

thing?â##

Toya nodded toward the darkest area of the stage. As everyoneâ##s attention focused on it, the shadow stretched and rippled, peeling itself from the walls and floor. Blood red eyes flashed open but its form wasnâ##t so much humanoid as a twisting between human and arachnid. Its upper body remained mostly shadow, while its legs filled out with sharp bony spikes at the joints and tips. Its mouth opened like the cheese on melting pizza and it let out a screech as it took off up the wall and across the ceiling.

â##Itâ##s a good thing itâ##s almost Halloween or weâ##d have a hard time explaining that spine-chilling sound carrying through the halls of the school.â## Kamui shivered shaking the creepy sound off. The last period bell sounded causing the demon to screech again as it ripped the speaker off the upper edge of the wall then threw it at the guardians.

â##Goodâ##! no witnesses.â## Kotaro eyed the creature wearily, taking note of the fact it was getting ready to jump.

â##This thing's gonna be a pain in the ass,â## Toya growled right before he was slammed into the row of seats behind him. He quickly pulled his silver dagger from his waist and swung his arm sideways, slicing the deformed demon across what could only be described as its stomach.

Nasty-looking tentacles erupted from its back just as Kotaro tackled it, trying to pull it off Toya. The tentacles wrapped around him, joining with Kotaroâ##s momentum and sling-shot

him across the room and into the edge of the stage.

Toya watched the dark apparition riding the spider demon lean toward him and inhale like some demented vacuum making his hair lift off the ground. The spider's fangs were showing as it slowly opened its jaws to attack.

Damn it! It smells Kyoko on me. Toya's arms were now wedged underneath its heavy body leaving him at a disadvantage.

Kyou raised his hand, forming a glowing ball that became oblong as he moved his hand from side to side. Slinging his hand out, the shape streaked across the room, stretching out to form a whip and lashing itself around the head of the demon. Jerking his hand back, Kyou ripped the demon off Toya, but he had to struggle with it to keep it from returning to Toya as the silver guardian picked himself up off the floor.

Why the hell is it only after Toya? Kamui complained. He quickly raised his hands, whispering words as he added the odd sign language to give the spell strength. The demon skittered sideways and back, trying to avoid the coming strike, but Kamui turned, following its every move. Coming to the end of the chant, his palms turned outward and the last word echoed across the room, slamming the spell into the demon.

The demon screeched, reaching for Toya as the force of the blast sent it plowing through several rows of seats before it smashed into the wall. Its legs instantly turned inward as it braced itself against the wall to use it as a backboard for rebounding.

Before it could jump, Shinbe was in front of it, casting another spell that held it against the shattered sheetrock while the other guardians surged forward and literally tore it limb from limb. Shinbe noticed the shadow demon trying to slither up the wall and escape them.

In the blink of an eye, he leapt up the wall and was like a cage around it. "Hey Nasty, just where do you think you're going?" he growled as a crystal blue barrier appeared over it like a half bubble. Shinbe pushed himself off the wall, landing easily on his feet. The mutilated body of the arachnid that was scattered on the floor twitched several times then caved in on itself as it turned to dust.

"You can't just leave that there," Kamui threw his thumb toward the odd sight of the shadow slithering around inside of what was starting to look like a see-through blue egg sack.

"Ye of little faith," Shinbe smirked watching the sack get smaller and smaller. "By the time it's done shrinking, it'll take a microscope to find it. Now!" he turned and walked straight up to Toya and sniffed.

Toya gave him a look that should have sent him running. When his brother was stupid enough not to take the hint, he reached out and grabbed Shinbe by the throat, lifting his feet several inches off the floor to back him up to arm's length. "Do not ever do that again." Toya dropped him non-to gently.

Shinbe pushed himself off the floor with a knowing smirk.

And you call me a pervert. No wonder Spiderman wanted you so bad. You have Kyoko's scent all over you. His amethyst eyes narrowed as his humor vanished. Why is that?

Speaking of Kyoko, Kyou's voice caused the temperature in the room to drop several degrees. If we are all here, then who is watching her?

When Kyoko asked Tasuki if she could use his cell phone to call a cab, he had quickly offered her a ride anywhere she wanted to go. Kyoko gratefully accepted, not really wanting to venture out for the first time in a strange town all alone.

The mall? Sure. Hey, if you want, I can help you pick out a costume for the masquerade ball. Tasuki started picturing all kinds of things he would pick out for her. Then he quickly backpedaled, realizing he wouldn't want others to see her in half of those costumes. Is that the reason we're going to the mall? A Halloween costume?

Kyoko sighed and looked out the car window debating on whether to tell him the truth or not. As they passed in front of the school in the slow traffic, she noticed that same guy from this morning was once again standing alone on the sidewalk. She wondered what it was about him that kept drawing her attention.

As she gazed at him, she realized that all the other students milled around him, yet he was the stillness in the middle of a raging storm, and he was looking right at her with eyes as black as sin. It saddened her seeing she was wrong about them being

green.

She leaned closer to the glass to get a better look at him as they drove closer and slowly passed. He was watching her with such hunger in his eyes that Kyoko felt it clear down to her soul. It made her want to reach out to him. He turned his head slowly as they passed; keeping his eyes on her and Kyoko saw his lips move.

“What?” Kyoko whispered trying to understand then she felt Tasuki’s hand on her shoulder.

“Do you know him?” Tasuki asked still glaring in the rear view mirror. Something about that guy was just wrong. He knew everyone at the school, but he’d never seen that guy around until today. “He’s not a student.”

Kyoko sat back in her seat but quickly glanced over her shoulder unable to help herself. Luckily, Tasuki turned the corner at the stop sign and the stranger was lost in the distance. “No.” Kyoko shook her head wanting to drop the subject, “I’m just nervous because I’ve never been to a mall or any other kind of store really.”

“What?” Tasuki said a little too loudly. “You’re kidding, right?”

“I wish.” Kyoko smiled at the look on his face. “I’m going to tell you a secret, but you have to promise to keep it to yourself.”

Tasuki nodded gripping the steering wheel a little tighter. “I would never do anything to hurt you Kyoko, so if you want to

trust me with anything! you're safe.

Thanks. Kyoko settled back in her seat looking straight ahead and slowly told him the whole story leaving nothing out. So the first thing I need is a new wardrobe.

Tasuki had been parked at the mall for the last ten minutes listening to her. It was the saddest thing he'd ever heard. You mean you have never even been kissed? When she looked at him strangely, he smiled and closed the distance between them.

Kyoko's eyes widened as his lips caught her bottom one between his and he kissed her. He then moved to do the same to her top lip. She was at a loss for words when he pulled an inch away and inhaled as he watched her reaction to her first kiss. He must have liked what he saw because the corners of his lips hinted in a satisfied smile as he returned to his seat to stare at the mall in front of them.

You know what Kyoko? Tasuki glanced over at her as if he hadn't done anything. We are about to give a new meaning to the words shop till you drop.

Tama stood in the doorway of the abandoned gym watching the guardians leave the auditorium. They had killed the spider demon that had gone in search for them just as they'd planned. It had only been a test and they had failed miserably.

The guardians are easily distracted thinking they are keeping her safe. Hyakuhei was not worried about the demon

theyâ##d lost. Before he entered this world, heâ##d hidden many of his most powerful demons away were no one could find themâ# deep within his own soul. For now, he would use the weakest demons as cannon fodder and lure the guardians into a false sense of victory. â##Let them think that they are protecting her to the best of their ability.â##

â##Can I go to her now?â## Tama glared at the guardian known as Toya. While theyâ##d fought the shadow demon inside the school, Hyakuhei had linked with the demon's mind, letting Tama view the battle through the eyes of the demon. He knew Toya had Kyokoâ##s scent on him more than the other guardians. Hate burned in his eyes as jealousy entered his wounded heart.

â##Only fools rush in dear boy,â## Hyakuhei warned him. It was hard for Tama to share her with the enemy, but what Tama didnâ##t understand was that it would be even harder for the guardians to share her among themselves. The closer bond she has to themâ#, the more possessive they will become until they are at each otherâ##s throats. It would only be a short amount of time before the brothers started to self-destruct. They were no different from him and Tadamichi.

â##Will you let me talk to her soon?â## Tama asked remembering the way she had looked at him from the car window. â##She wants to.â##

â##Her soul is curious about youâ#, it knows you are its sibling, even if she does not remember. It is the tie that binds her to us all.â## Hyakuhei felt the longing Tama was feeling meld

with his own. **Soon Tama!** very soon. You will have your sister.

Hyakuhei stood at the top of the mall escalator watching Kyoko glance around the shopping center in amazement. She had always been an innocent and it seemed in this life she was no different. A small smile tugged at the corner of his lips.

Come to me, he whispered within his mind knowing she would hear the summons without realizing it.

Kyoko glanced up toward the second floor and then eyed the escalator as if it was an amusement ride at the fair. **Can we?** she smiled at Tasuki then back toward the moving staircase.

Sure, Tasuki smirked then laughed when she made him get on first. **Oh sure!** sacrifice me! why not. He shrugged as if it didn't matter then held on to the railing as if he was terrified.

Sticking her tongue out at him, Kyoko gripped the rubber on the handrail and stepped behind him. **Stop watching me like you're expecting me to run back down the steps.** Kyoko warned when he kept glancing over his shoulder at her. She looked up pretending she had done this before, but when her gaze locked on the man coming down the escalator parallel to hers, she forgot to breathe.

Long dark hair framed the most beautiful face she had ever seen. The only people who could even come close where the new guys she'd met today at school. His lips were relaxed but she

could feel them against hers in a heated kiss. His luminous dark eyes were framed by thick dark lashes.

As he grew closer on his downward slope toward her, Kyoko felt her heart skip a beat and everything slowed down. She could feel him reaching for her and she wanted him too. His hand left the rail to move the couple of inches that separated her side from his. The second he laid his warm hand across hers, time caught back up with itself and she was at the top of the escalator.

Kyoko felt disappointment rush through her when she swung around to find him but he was nowhere to be seen.

She's home, Kamui called from the front porch then flinched when his brothers joined him so fast he hadn't even seen them move. And look who's with her.

Tasuki, Toya said in a voice that was way too calm to match the heat in his eyes.

Looks like she went shopping, Kotaro stated.

I would have been fine with the short skirts, Shinbe sighed longingly.

You would. Kyou coldly glanced sideways at him, causing Shinbe to move to the other side of Kamui for safety reasons. One of them being the fact that he was scared.

She can't just run off like that. Toya crossed his arms over his chest wondering what was taking Tasuki so long to get the hell back in his car.

But she doesn't know that, Kamui pointed out,

â##At least she came home at a decent time.â##

â##A decent time would have been before dark,â## Kyou said flatly.

Toya started down the steps but Kyou reached out and placed his hand firmly on his shoulder. â##Tasuki is only carrying her bags in. He is almost finished.â##

â##Iâ##ve told you to stay out of my head.â## Toya glared back at Kyou, â##One day youâ##re not going to like what you find crawling around in there.â## He jerked his shoulder, making Kyou let go of him. The last thing he needed was Kyou listening in on his thoughts. Having part of Tadamichi within him was creepy enough. He made sure his mental defenses were up then glanced back across the street as Tasukiâ##s car pulled away from the house.

â##I wonder if she thought to stop and get something to eat,â## Toya mumbled, thinking out loud.

â##Why would that worry you?â## Kyou asked curiously knowing Toya was not one to say random things.

â##She almost passed out during drama class today. I overheard her tell Tasuki that she hadnâ##t been eating because of the move,â## Toya informed him before adding, â##Tasuki also asked her to go with him to the masquerade party Friday night at the school.â##

Kotaroâ##s lips thinned as he pulled a long-bladed knife from the waist of his pants and started flipping it through his fingers like a baton. â##I think Tasuki has appointed himself her

bodyguard in hopes of being a little bit more.##

##If he's not careful, he will be a little bit dead.##
Knowing how that sounded, Toya quickly added, ##He##ll only find himself a target for the demons if he becomes too close to her.##

##There are five of us! I think we could outnumber his advances if we tried.## Shinbe smirked.

##We failed today.## Kyou's voice held no emotion, but the look in his golden eyes was angry. ##We are her guardians and she is only a human girl that is more fragile than most. If she keeps putting herself in danger by disappearing, then we will have no choice but to reveal ourselves for what we are! her real guardians.##

##And tell her what she is?## Kamui shook his head. ##She isn't ready for that! think about it. Our priestess isn't even eating right because her world has been turned upside down. Give her time to adjust to that first. In the meantime, maybe we should become closer to her so that when we do tell her the truth, she won't think we're crazy! or worse, see us use our powers and think we're some kind of aliens.##

##I still think your wrong about that. She needs to turn to us if anything happens. Right now, the only person she would turn to would be the Shinbe wanna-be that she seems to like so much,## Toya pointed out.

##Hey, I resent that,## Shinbe said trying to hide his grin.

No! you resemble that, Kamui elbowed him good naturedly.

Toya kept his gaze across the road, but in his mind he was remembering how she'd almost melted in his arms. She's our priestess. We're drawn to her and I think she's also drawn to us. I doubt she'll freak out as much as you guys fear she will.

Let us compromise, Kyou said. In case something does go wrong she needs to know we are right across the street.

Agreed, Toya said.

First she needs to eat. Kyou pulled his cell phone from his pocket.

Chapter 6 What Demons Fear

Kyoko had just finished putting away her new clothes when the doorbell echoed making her jump. Rushing downstairs, she looked through the peephole and saw a delivery guy holding five large boxes of pizza. Opening the door, she frowned knowing it was a mistake. Before she could say anything, the guy held a hand up to stop her.

I know you didn't order the pizza because the family across the street ordered it for you. It's a welcome to the neighborhood gift. He smiled and handed her the boxes. And they already paid for the pizzas and left me a huge tip. He nodded and headed back for his car.

Kyoko smiled nervously then looked across the street. Seeing

long silver hair flashing in the porch light she knew that could only be Kyou. All the guys from school were out on the porch looking across the street at her. Kyoko's lips curved into a real smile. She waved at them then motioned for them to come over.

And we have our invite, Shinbe nearly purred as he started down the steps.

Toya reached out and cuffed him on top of the head. If you don't behave over there, then it will be our last invite.

Shinbe narrowed his eyes and turned on Toya. Who died and made you the only one who could touch her? She's just as much ours as she is yours, you prick.

We all died you stupid fuck. Toya backed Shinbe the rest of the way down the stairs as silver started to swirl within his eyes. His voice became dangerously low as he growled, You're so damned horny that I can smell it.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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