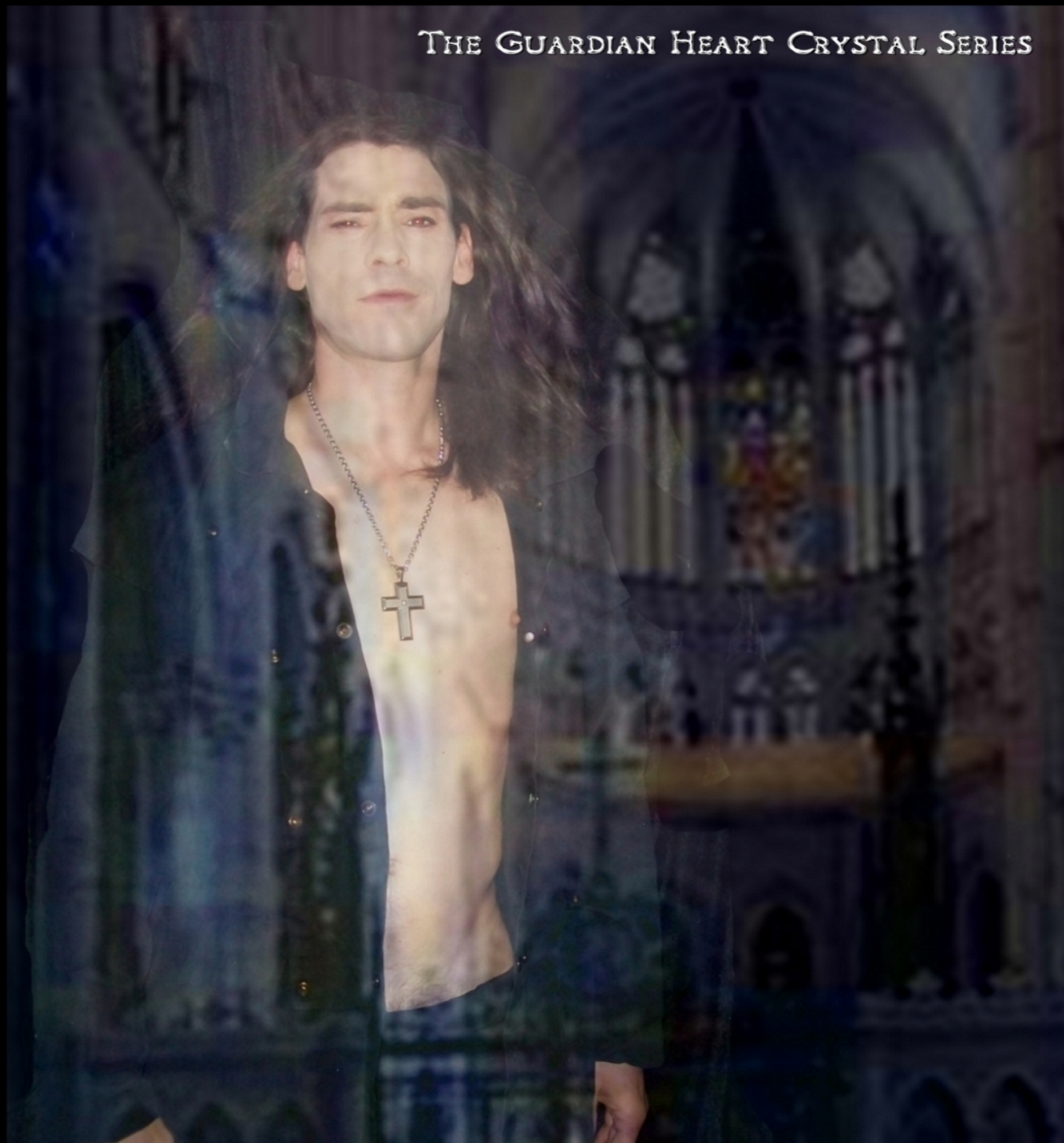


BLACK WINGED ANGEL

THE GUARDIAN HEART CRYSTAL SERIES



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Prologue ### Darius

The monastery bells rang like an alarm, though no one was in the bell tower to pull the ropes. Lightning flashed across the courtyard as the storm appeared out of nowhere. The wind whipped mercilessly, bringing with it the harsh stench of death. A dark ominous cloud appeared on the horizon, racing toward the monastery at breakneck speed.

The monks, who made this monastery home, fell in like soldiers with their weapons of wood, bone, and gold at the ready. They had trained all their lives for this war; this moment in time, as their ancestors had for over a millennium. Sacred scrolls of power and magic were unearthed from the vast library and brought forth to do their work.

Dark blue and amethyst cloaks billowed violently as the monks stood ready to fight a war they each had secretly prayed would not happen in their lifetime.

Trained archers stepped forward first, their arrows strung and glowing with heavenly blue energy. They were silent, standing tall against an enemy none of them were able to truly defeat.

As the cloud came closer, it was apparent that it wasn't a cloud at all, but a whole legion of demons set on destroying mankind. This monastery and the monks within were humanity's last and only hope. A deep, almost calming hum could be heard in the air as the monks cast their spells of protection, determination shining in their eyes.

The sacred scrolls had foretold of the coming darkness that would unleash a plague of demons in their world. It was prophesized that once this battle was over the surviving demons would scatter to the four corners of the earth, following the mystical guardians that had once protected this land as they protected the seal.

Why the guardians and priestess had not yet appeared was a mystery to some, but to the elders it was no surprise. This was something that even the fates could not detour.

An unspoken command was given and the archers released their arrows into the plague that was bent on eradicating the world. Demons fell in the first wave and the first archers fell back, only to have others step forward to take their place. More arrows flew over the once green fields, disintegrating demons in their wake. Their efforts, however, were fruitless. It seemed for each demon they destroyed, ten would take its place.

The archers fell back completely and the sacred scrolls were unraveled. A barrier appeared around the monastery but no one had the ability to call upon the complete power of the scrolls any longer. The ancient ones had written the scrolls and through the centuries their full understanding had been lost. However, it was enough to buy the monks some time.

Orders were given and the gates of the monastery were closed, locked with a seal of protection to give them a few more minutes. Each individual looked from one to the other, knowing this would be the last time they would see each other on this plane of existence.

They all clung to the legend spoken of in the scrolls of the one bound in chains by the demons searching to kill this world. It was written that during the time of the uprising, the demons would mistakenly turn their backs on him.

He, a child of untamed rage and melancholy, with the temperament of the darkest of angels and the power to close the portal, sealing the demons in this world but keeping others from following. It was this child that would hunt down the demons one by one and send them back into the realm

of darkness where they belongedâ€ claiming his vengeance against those that had imprisoned him for so long.

Some legends in the scrolls describe him as a god, while others say he is a devil that seeks to kill the gods to gain his freedom. They had given him a name, if for nothing more than to voice it in their prayersâ€ Darius.

The gates to the monastery groaned under the strain as the demons finally reached them. The thick wood cracked and splintered while the seal holding it closed slowly weakened and finally broke. The gates opened and, like a tidal wave of death and blood, the demons swarmed in, claws and teeth ripping into human flesh.

Oil drums lighting the torches fell over, covering some who were unlucky enough to be battling so close to them. The walls caught fireâ€ creating an inferno that may have rivaled hell itself. The ground cracked open and more demons poured out from beneath the monkâ€™s feet.

The rain had begun to fall, sleeting over the fire-engulfed monastery that refused to bend to the whim of the elements. One by one the monks fell, choking on their own blood as they prayed for their salvationâ€ for the prophecy to be released. Thousands of demons had already come through the portal and the monks had no knowledge of a barrier strong enough to keep them from invading the lands around them.

A great crack of thunder followed by a bright lightening burst across the sky caused a furious shockwave, which sent the monastery crumbling to the ground.

The following silence was deafening as the wind died down to nothing and the rain abruptly stopped. The calm eye of the storm had settled over the remains of the monastery; its walls surged around it, trapping the demons and the monks as well.

Those of the monks who were still alive turned their eyes toward the sky and muttered prayers of penance. The one they had thought was a savior was far more frightening than the demons that had come before him.

He stood in the eye of his own storm, with the chains of his imprisonment dangling from his feet and wristsâ€ the thickest of the chains still wrapped around his neck. They clinked ominously in the silence, covered in the blood of the demons he had slain during his escape.

His long flowing black hair lifted slightly, whether from the storm around him or from his own power, it was impossible to tell. His lethal body was unclothed as all who are suddenly born into this world. Blood glistened from the fresh wounds he had received, telling of the battle heâ€™d fought to make it this far. Two wounds cut across his back where magnificent wings had once been.

Lifting his perfect face to the sky, blood-like tears fell from eyes the color of mercury. The ground beneath his feet quaked once more and rose up, trapping many of the demons and mending the portal, sealing it.

A bright white light shattered and streaked across the landscape, scattering what was left of the multitude of demons to the far reaches of the world.

The prophecy, Darius, lowered his gaze to the center of what had once been a grand monastery. There, encased in a soft angelic glow, was the statue of a maiden kneeling, her hands outstretched as if asking him for something that he could not give her. With the next streak of lightening, the maiden statue vanished.

Chapter 1 â€Evil Laughterâ€

Normally the movie, â€Evil Dead 2â€, scared the hell out of her. But thankfully, Kyoko was so sleepy she could hardly even see the TV screen, and that was saying a lot since it was a 73-inch surround sound theater system. She blinked a couple of times then jerked awake, lifting her head up to glance at the digital clock on the front of the DVD player.

Three in the morning! That last blink had been her downfall. Sheâ€™d been asleep over an hour.

She had a habit of staying awake till she knew everyone had made it home safely, so she quickly started counting heads. She tried to sit up but realized she was sandwiched between the back of the sofa and Toya.

Looking down, her cheeks went up in flames. His face was buried against her lower stomach and one arm was thrown across her hip. How was it that she could fall asleep with him clear across the room, and then wake up in the strangest positions with him? It was completely unnerving. If he weren't sound asleep, she would have shoved him in the floor.

Kyoko rolled her eyes knowing she had thought the same thing many times, and so far he had never hit the floor.

Her expression softened seeing his dark hair and all the silver highlights spread out around him. He always looked so sweet when he was asleep; it really was a shame they couldn't keep him asleep at all times. She smirked at her own mental joke. But what the heck, it was true. Toya, as sweet and loving as he secretly was, would be the first one to start a fight with her.

Pulling herself up and over the back of the sofa so she didn't have to crawl across him, she got her footing and looked around.

Kyoko shook her head, wondering why so many of them had made it a habit to sleep in this huge living room, almost every night, when they all had their own rooms with king sized beds. Quickly glancing around, she noted everyone she had been waiting on was accounted for, except Kyou, which was normal, and Tasuki, whom she knew had the night shift this week.

With Kyou being their boss, she guessed it was too much to ask for him to hang out with the cops, private detectives, and psychics that worked for him.

A very wickedly funny thought slipped into her head and she smiled. Had anyone been awake to see it, they would have run in fright. These guys had been teasing her so much lately that Kyoko believed it was time for payback; ten-fold.

She silently walked over to Shinbe, who was asleep on the loveseat. Carefully, she extracted the TV remote control that had somehow ended up lying across his lap. Kyoko froze when Shinbe shifted and muttered something about rabbit fur and chocolate syrup in his sleep.

Shaking her head, Kyoko got the remote away from him and muted the television.

Adrenaline rushed through her body, giving her a lightheaded feeling. A very tiny part of her started to feel bad, but she viciously jumped up and down on it, until that part of her conscience was beaten into silence. After Kotaro's underwear incident, and Toya's sudden urge to streak the halls and into her bedroom; they so deserved this.

Besides, they thought of her as the baby of the group. She always had to fight with them to get to do any of the hardcore paranormal jobs.

Her only real power was the fact that sometimes when she touched something, or someone, she would get flashes of the past that would help them solve the cases. It didn't always work though. It wasn't like she could just walk up to a demon and touch it to see if it was going around killing people.

Maybe by getting the jump on all of them at once, she would be proving to them that she could hold her own. Plus; revenge was sweet.

With the television still muted, Kyoko cranked the volume all the way up. There was one part in this movie that made her cringe every time she heard it. So, she rewound to that part; the part where everything in the room started laughing at the main character in the most demented of voices.

Sneaking over to the door, she opened it and took a single step out into the hallway before turning and smiling at the peaceful scene. Hitting the mute button one more time, Kyoko tossed the remote in the general direction of the sofa and ran like hell.

The loud noise startled everyone into action, and therefore creating a domino effect that would have everyone not involved laughing for weeks.

Kotaro was the first to react. Heâ##d been sitting in one of the recliners, dreaming about a certain auburn-haired angel, when the loud creepy laughing surrounded him. He bolted to his feet, pulling his Beretta at the same time and shot the television. Being an officer with the local police force, it was instinct that made him react so quickly.

Yohji, Kotaroâ##s partner at the precinct, was sitting in another chair. The noise caused him to jump, which in turn made the recliner flip over backwards. He was up in less than a second, using the fallen recliner for cover and pointing his gun at the remnants of the television.

Shinbe jumped to his feet yelling something about abandoning ship, Kyokoâ##s and perverts first. He blinked, coming out of his dream and into what might be a nightmare. He tilted his head looking at the TV.

Because of Toyaâ##s precarious position on the sofa, heâ##d fallen off the edge, landing on top of a napping Kamui, who had stretched out on the floor with a laptop open in front of him. Kamuiâ##s face went into the keyboard and Toyaâ##s foot went into the screen, effectively destroying the device.

â##What the hell, Kotaro?â## Toya demanded.

â##Get your face out of my ass!â## Kamui screeched and jumped up, dumping Toya on the floor.

Shinbe rubbed the back of his neck, thanking any god listening that no one had heard him.

Yohji slowly stood up and holstered his PPK while frowning at the smoldering television. â##You shot the television again,â## he muttered. â##Isnâ##t that the second one this year?â## He glared at the TV as he added, â##And I think itâ##s laughing at you.â##

Kotaro, for his part, was staring at the broken television that was still blaring the evil laughter, even though the screen was wrecked. The expression on his face was one of utter surprise and he looked down at the Beretta in his hand before very slowly holstering it. He noticed flickering lights and looked behind him to see Suki snapping pictures from her cell phone.

â##Three guesses who just did that,â## Toya exclaimed and made a mad dash for the door.

â##Donâ##t kill her!â## Kamui yelled running out after him. â##I get first dibs.â##

Kotaro didnâ##t move as he was still looking at the television. Shinbe ran out after Toya and Kamui with all intent to â##rescueâ## Kyoko from Toyaâ##s revenge.

â##Fear not Kyoko, I shall protect you!â## Shinbe exclaimed as he ran down the hall.

Yuuhi, a small albino boy, removed the earplugs from his ears. â##Told you,â## he whispered in an emotionless voice that held its own creep factor.

Amni, who was sitting next to the small boy on the same loveseat Shinbe had just vacated, grinned after he removed his earplugs as well. The two of them were the psychics of the group and had foreseen this coming for a few days now. They hadnâ##t bothered warning anyone becauseâ## what would be the fun in that?

â##At least the security cameras Kyou installed will catch everything,â## Amni stated. â##Instant replay is the best thing since sliced bread.â##

â##What did I miss?â## Tasuki asked as he calmly walked through the door, glad to finally be off work for the night.

â##Toya just left to kill Kyoko,â## Amni said in an ominous voice, as if he were seeing a horrible vision. He then busted out laughing when Tasuki ran out of the room so fast he caused a breeze.

Kotaro cocked an eyebrow at Amni, â##Did anyone ever tell you that you had an evil streak?â##

Amni shrugged, â##I didnâ##t want him to feel left out.â##

Darius leaned against the brick wall, getting a feel for the city. The sounds and smells from so many humans were distorted with demonic echoes that no one else noticed. He could even sense shadows that didnâ##t belong within the daylight, but he remained calm to keep his powers concealed for a while.

He had learned a long time ago that his moods had an effect on the weather and so far today, the sky was clear and the temperature was perfection. It was midday and he wanted sunlight more than solitude. He seemed to be getting both.

Darius smirked as he watched the humans. They were staying so close to the other edge of the wide sidewalk that one misstep would land them in heavy traffic.

He was used to people cutting a wide ark around him and he no longer caredâ#i not that he had ever really cared. He could have done them all a favor and just remained invisible, but being the same thing as a ghost 24/7 was getting on his nerves. The only reason he was now in the middle of such dense population was because he had followed the scent of many demons to this area.

He was still trying to figure out why this place had become the center of demonic interest. It was so crowded, noisy, and dirty that he almost understood why the demons would choose this place, but that didnâ#t mean he had to like it. Heâ#d avoided populated areas as much as possible because he had learned a long time ago that it was places like this that bred the worst type of humans. Some of them were almost as evil as the demons he tracked.

Over the millennia, heâ#d killed countless demonsâ#i but the strongest and the fastest demons had scattered and hid while he was busy killing the weaker ones. All those cold trails seem to converge hereâ#i on this city.

His thoughts darkened, knowing the master demons where now conspiring together, mistakenly thinking their army, mixed within so many humans, could defeat him. Hiding among the humans would not help them. Their auras stood out like beacons to him, looking more like distorted shadows rather than actual living beings.

Dariusâ#s eyes darkened at the thought. If he had to destroy this city and all the humans in it, then so be it. He owed the mortals nothing. Besides, they knew about the demons and just chose to ignore that fact. All the horror movies were proof, even though they called them fiction. They had ignorantly forgotten that every human legend was based on a small amount of fact.

Tonight was demon nightâ#i the humans called it Halloween. This was the one night where the people would ignore what was right in front of them. He supposed that was one of the reasons humans dressed up like monsters once a yearâ#i so the real things wouldnâ#t recognize them. How ignorant the human race had become.

With his keen eyesight, Darius looked across the busy road into the glass window of the tall buildings and noticed his own reflection. His eyes narrowed wondering what everyone else saw when they looked at him that made them drag their children to the other side of the street.

Did they see their own lack of knowledge, fear, or perhaps he was a challenge to their known ignorance. They wanted to remain unaware of the true dangers of the world. He was here to save them and yet they treated him like he was a demon. Only the innocent ever caught and held his gazeâ#i children, as their parents pulled them away.

Kyoko stood in the front office, glad Suki was the only one there. She laughed to herself nervously as she made her first cup of coffee. She knew the guys would get her back for what she had done to them last night. She swallowed, remembering the whole floor thumping because it had been so loud, and her running down the hallway trying to make it to her room before they caught up with her.

Sheâ#d heard Toya running after her, yelling every obscenity in the book. They both knew that if heâ#d actually caught up with her, he wouldnâ#t have hurt her.

In her headlong race for sanctuary, sheâ#d turned the corner and seen Kyou standing in his doorway. He had been wearing black silk night pants that were riding dangerously low on his hips, his long silver hair perfect, even in the middle of the night. It was his eyes that had almost made her turn and flee back in the other direction. They were molten gold, smoldering, and fixed directly on her as she ran past him and into her room.

Kyoko turned in the doorway and shrieked when she saw Toya barreling down the hall toward her. Just as she slammed the door shut, she could have sworn she saw Kyou stick his foot out a few inches, causing Toya to trip and fall on his face.

She could smile about it now.

She trusted Kyou with her life and he seemed to take care of everyone who lived and worked within the building. She hardly knew anything about him, but at the same time she felt like she knew him so intimately that it often made her blush.

The only facts she did have were that he seemed to have more money than god and he made sure everyone had more than everything they needed. He also had an uncanny way of knowing just what paranormal cases to send them out on and what weapons they would need. He was the oldest brother of several of the people who worked here although she'd never quite figured out their ages.

Toya was the second oldest, with ebony hair that had silver streaks in it the same color as Kyou's. Just like all the brothers, he had a body that should have been used for underwear ads. You know the kind that makes a girl stop and stare.

Almost every assignment she went out on, it would be Toya who was her partner and she had come to love him dearly for it. How could she not when he had saved her too many times to count, from the monsters normal people had no clue even existed? In many ways, Toya was the closest thing she had to a hero.

The next brother in line was Shinbe, with long midnight blue hair and amethyst eyes. He seemed to be the enigma of the group, always acting like a pervert and his sense of humor often had her rolling on the floor. But there were times when he would become deadly serious. It was those times that no one in the group took him for granted.

The fourth brother, Kotaro, was a detective for the police force and in charge of the cases that baffled the local law enforcement. He had long ebony hair and ice blue eyes that could take your breath away. While the rest of the cops were running around looking for a human suspect, it was Kotaro's small group that would bring it to the attention of the paranormal agency and help track down the demons.

Surprisingly, once the case was solved the city officials never asked too many questions about it. It was almost as though they didn't want to know.

Tasuki and Yohji were two guys that worked under Kotaro at the station. Kyou had invited them to live here, since they worked here more than at the police department. They had also stolen the secretary from the police office and now she worked here. Her name was Suki, and Kyoko loved her like a best friend. Also, Kotaro talked Kyou into inviting two brothers who were psychic Amni and Yuuhi. They were a lot of help.

The youngest of the brothers, although she wasn't quite sure of the age since they all looked to be between the ages of nineteen and twenty-seven, was Kamui. His hair was many colors with the most amazing amethyst highlights. She knew for a fact that his eyes changed colors more than a teenager changed clothes and that was really saying something.

He was the computer wiz of the group, and could break into any databank in the world to get them the info they needed. More than once, he'd broken into high government agencies just to mess with their heads.

Turning with her cup of coffee so she could focus on what Suki had been chatting about for the last couple of minutes; Kyoko almost burnt herself when her gaze landed on Kyou.

He was once again leaning against the door jam, watching her from the doorway of his office with that same look he'd been wearing the night before. When she met his gaze, it sent a raw, sensual shiver through her very core.

One of these days, Kyoko was determined to find out exactly how he did that. She'd actually seen women fall over themselves whenever Kyou would, on rare occasion, leave the sanctuary of the office and walk through the streets of the city.

“I take it you slept well?” Kyou asked stoically, though Kyoko could see just the slightest hint of amusement in his eyes.

“Yes, actually I did,” Kyoko stated with a smile.

“Hmm, I would think it rather difficult, with four males taking it upon themselves to stand outside your room all night arguing over who was, and wasn’t, going to break your door down.”

Quickly turning away from him to hide her blush, Kyoko gazed out the large window that overlooked the busy city street. Sometimes living in this building could be really hard on a girl’s heart, not to mention her hormones.

Feeling chills going up the back of her neck, she knew she couldn’t run away so she tried to just let her mind roam. She looked across the street toward the row of buildings facing this one, wishing she were in one of them instead, at least until last night’s teen-angst blew over.

Her lips parted as she noticed a man directly across the road from her. It seemed like he was looking straight at her, but she knew that couldn’t be because of the tint used on the glass; you could see out but not in. Kyoko stepped closer to the window and placed one hand against the tinted glass just beside her vision of him.

The man embodied stillness, while everything around him moved in a hurried pace. There was a calm serenity to him that was both beguiling and frightening. Somewhere deep inside her mind, she knew it was a lie; he was the one moving and everything else was standing still in his presence.

He was wearing dark sunglasses, with a long black trench coat that was open enough that she could see the sheer tight shirt underneath. He had the body of a Greek God and his face was flawless, even though his long dark hair was shadowing most of it. Something about him screamed danger and sex all at the same time. He looked like he belonged somewhere in the dark ages with the dragons and wizards.

An abrupt vision of him kneeling nude and bloody, with chains around his wrists, ankles, and neck, in some long forgotten underground cavern, burst forward in her mind, making her want to cry out in anguish. Kyoko could feel herself crawling through rivers of blood toward him, wanting to save him. Literally felt it sliding against her skin and weighing down her clothing.

Frowning as the feelings and image faded, Kyoko leaned closer to the glass and had the distinct impression that she was actually trying to get closer to him instead.

Darius felt something invading his space and narrowed his gaze past his own reflection in the mirrored glass, seeing the girl watching him. Usually humans would look away as soon as they noticed him, unless they were innocent children. He had never understood it, but children never feared him. His dark eyes caressed the girl curiously, knowing she was not a child.

She had long, beautiful auburn hair that was neither straight nor curly, but had a life of its own. As he sharpened his vision, he could see glittering emerald eyes surrounded by sinfully dark lashes. The way she was watching him in morbid fascination made his blood heat up and that confused him.

He growled when the sun suddenly disappeared behind dark clouds. Humans had never interested him; just demons, and then only long enough for him to track them down and kill them. The instant she turned from the window, Darius wrapped himself in power, making himself invisible.

“Kyoko, have you heard a word I have been saying?” Suki asked well aware she’d just spent the last few minutes talking to herself.

Kyoko flinched and turned to look at her best friend behind the desk. “Oh! Umm! Huh?” She blinked, “What was the question?” Seeing a shadow to her right, she glanced at Kyou’s office door and relaxed seeing he had once again vanished.

Suki shook her head, “I said we have the morning meeting upstairs in five minutes.” She picked up a stack of papers and came around the desk as Kyoko turned back to the window. “What were you looking at so hard anyway?” she asked.

Kyoko's shoulders slumped seeing the stranger was no longer there. She bit her bottom lip wondering at the disappointment. "I'm looking for a taxi so I can escape the meeting." She winked at Suki.

"Yeah well, if I didn't love you, I would have killed you when the mother of all fuck bombs rattled the windows last night. Besides, it really gave me some good pictures to post on the internet. You should have seen the look on Kotaro's face when he realized he'd shot the TV! I'll show you later."

Seeing Kyoko's attention wander across the street again, she placed her hands on Kyoko's shoulders and turned her toward the elevator. "Come on! it's time to face up to your terrorism."

"Terrorism?" Kyoko defended guiltily. "What do you call what they constantly do to me? civilized?"

Suki giggled and pushed Kyoko into the elevator. "Get up there, and if there's any screaming! make sure it's them doing it."

Darius glanced up at the name printed on the glass above where the girl had been standing! "Paranormal Investigations." He closed his eyes, feeling his way through the building and clenched his teeth as his power came across old souls. He inhaled as he found hers nearing the top floor of the building. She was headed directly into the grouping of souls that were tainted with things not human! nor where they demon.

He opened his ebony eyes just as the rain started, the sidewalk becoming wet, except for where his invisible body was standing.

Was that why she was watching him with such interest, because she was linked to all things paranormal? He let his power ride her soul one more time as he searched for demonic presence within her aura. For several heartbeats, his power surrounded her and he could feel her life force rise up and look directly at him.

That's when he heard it! an echo of soft crying he could barely remember hearing over the sound of his own tortured screams. The only time he had ever heard that sound was the moment the chains of eternity had broken. He had left the sound behind as he'd fought his way out of the pit and it had tugged on his memory many times. The closer he'd come to this city! the more the memory had begun haunting him.

What was it about this cry that made his chest tighten now and not centuries before when it would have mattered? Why did it suddenly matter now? Darius shook his head becoming annoyed. He couldn't change the past, so why dwell on it?

Just as Kyoko opened the door to the room where everyone was waiting, she felt like someone put their arms around her and she drew in a sharp breath. Turning to her right, she looked up into darkness. Within that darkness was the same face she had seen across the street! this time without sunglasses. It was his eyes that held her in fascination! they were the strangest color of swirling silver with a hint of icy blue highlights.

Kyou turned toward the door, feeling Kyoko's approach but the strange look on her face forced him into action. He rushed forward and caught her before she fell. Sensing something uninvited touching her besides him, it was his warning growl that dispersed the supernatural power from around her.

It left her in an angry wave just as thunder rattled the windows from the oncoming storm. Kyou narrowed his golden eyes as he swept her up possessively in his arms and laid her gently on the sofa with everyone looking on. As they all surged forward, he held his hand up, commanding them to stay back.

Darius withdrew and opened his eyes, looking up at the top floor of the building. He could still feel the heat of her soul and it was the first time he had been warm as far back as he could remember. It had also been a long time since he had been shoved by another's power.

He gave a cold and wicked smile as he vanished. The dry spot on the pavement turned darker as the sky opened up in a downpour.

Chapter 2 ###Dangerous Myths###

Kyoko###s hearing came back before she even opened her eyes. When she heard Shinbe###s voice announce that she must be pregnant, her eyes quickly shot open and she pinned him with a death stare.

###I### she was immediately cut off when Toya pulled her into his arms and half crushed her against him.

###Don###t do that! You about gave me a freakin### heart attack.### He held her tight till he remembered everyone was watching. A tick started in his jaw, knowing what was coming.

###Aww, how sweet,### Kamui smirked, ###Toya###s all lovey on Kyoko. I didn###t know you had it in you.###

Toya let go of Kyoko so fast that she fell back against the arm of the sofa. ###You###re gonna have my fist in your face if you don###t shut up, brat.### He growled, but his expression softened again as he stepped back and looked down at Kyoko as she sat up. ###What I meant to say is### what are you trying to do, finish the heart attack you started last night?###

###Keep it up and I just might,### Kyoko said with a smirk directed at Toya. ###Then I###ll go hide in Kyou###s room.###

###Why would you hide in there?### Toya asked, feeling instant jealousy.

Kyoko sighed and blew a strand of hair out of her eyes. Toya was intelligent, but sometimes if it weren###t for his looks### she###d swear he was mentally five.

###Because Kyou has nerd proof wards on his door,### Kamui supplied without looking up from his new laptop, which he was keeping far away from Toya.

Toya growled and spun around to face the youngest of the group. ###Keep it up Kamui, and I###ll bring your whole computer system crashing down on you.###

###This coming from the man that doesn###t even know where the enter key on a keyboard is?### Kamui asked with one eyebrow arched. ###I###m surprised you even know where the power button is on a monitor.###

Toya leaned toward him, ###I wasn###t talking about the hard drive.### His lips hinted at a wicked smile when Kamui gripped the laptop tighter and cringed.

###Enough!### Kyou said, his voice echoing his authority. ###Everyone take a seat. Kyoko, you may stay on the sofa if you wish, and no Toya### she is not sharing it.### He leveled his brother an irritated glare.

Toya started grumbling about certain men with sticks and microchips up their asses before plopping down in Kyou###s chair. Kyou stared at him with the deadpan expression for which he was famous. When the silver-haired man felt a small tug on his hand, he looked down at Kyoko, who moved her feet so Kyou could sit on the other end of the sofa.

Kotaro and Yohji sniggered as Kyou took the invitation and sat down, resting Kyoko###s feet on his lap.

###As you are all aware, tonight is Halloween,### Kyou began.

###Duh!### Toya muttered, trying not to glare at Kyoko###s feet touching his brother.

###Which means,### Kyou continued while glaring at Toya. ###Tonight, there will be increased activity. Pagan rituals will go wrong as usual, and the increased paranormal activity will escalate as well. All of us will be on high alert for the next twenty-four hours. Considering that Halloween parties will last longer into the night, being it###s Saturday### I believe you all get the idea.###

###Yeah, yeah, we got it.### Toya exclaimed. ###Whoa, watch out for naked women running down the street being chased by lesbian gang bangers, ooh!###

“Where?” Shinbe asked loudly, having not paid much attention to anything since Suki had walked in.

Kyou massaged the space above his eyebrows as he felt a slight pressure building. He and his brothers hid their powers well from the world, but sometimes he wondered if they had not regressed a bit too much. They had been sent here to keep Kyoko safe without her knowledge and to rid the world of as many demons as they could. He’d set up the agency as soon as he had realized what her choice career had been.

Kotaro spoke up, “The police department has assigned my squad to the town square tonight because of the overload on the police force. Other cops will be there off and on because last year, the block parties didn’t die down till dawn and several people went missing that night.”

Kamui nodded, flipping his laptop around to show everyone. “Guys, we have a witch in town.”

“Here’s a news flash kid! tonight we have a lot of witches in town,” Yohji smirked. “Some of them sexier than others.”

“Those witches aren’t sucking the life out of little children,” Kamui pointed to a list of names in the children’s ward of the hospital. “All of these kids are in comas, and it has all taken place within the last week. The doctors are stumped, because in every case, the kids were out after dark and all the tests they have run are showing no injuries. They simply won’t wake up.”

Kyoko frowned as she tried to concentrate on the meeting. It was hard because she couldn’t shake the strange feeling that had stayed with her since she had seen the man across the street, then felt what she could have sworn were his arms around her.

Pushing the memory away for a moment, her face grew sad thinking about all those children in the hospital. She had read once that if a witch took part of your soul, you fell into a deep sleep. Then you would have nightmares forever while the witch fed off your fear. Were all those children now stuck within those dreams, crying out for someone to save them?

“I don’t guess a bucket of water dumped on her head will work but I want to be in on the hunt for something that cruel. How will we know the witch if we see it? Has anyone ever seen one? Aren’t they just humans who have tapped into an overload of magic?” She started firing questions as she tried to sit up, but Kyou placed his hand across her ankles to keep her from doing so.

Kyou didn’t look at Kyoko, hoping she would think it wasn’t intentional as he curled his fingers around her ankles like a bracelet. At the moment, he had a protective barrier around her that was only held in place by his touch; plus, he simply wasn’t ready to lose contact with her just yet.

He’d felt the powerful aura surrounding her just before she passed out. And although he had pushed it away from her, he still felt its presence lingering. That alone was enough to anger him. He had placed demon wards all over the building and in every corner of every floor within the drywall so they would not be noticed.

His golden eyes rose to the huge picture window that sat in the middle of the outer wall. The weather for today and tonight was supposed to be clear and cool, so where had this strange storm come from. As he watched the rain closely, he noticed a silhouette where the rain did not pass through.

Not wanting the apparition to know he had located it, Kyou turned his attention to Shinbe’s overly happy description of a witch.

“A real witch was never human. Their souls are demonic and eternal. They keep their lives sustained by taking the life force of children and feeding off their nightmares. That is their food source. As for what one looks like, since so many children have already fallen victim, by now she should be in rare form— young, beautiful, and even angelic in appearance.”

Shinbe cleared his throat and erased the erotic picture lingering in his mind’s eye. “She will not show her true form until she is in the middle of taking another’s life force or in battle. What she looks like during a feeding is truly hideous.”

“You would know,” Toya stated in a dark voice.

Shinbe sent Toya a look that told him to remain silent and for once, Toya had the decency to drop it.

Yuuhi was standing beside the chair his brother Amni was sitting in, but his eyes were on the rain outside the window when he spoke. “She will be in the center of town within the block parties, near the children’s festival, but she is not the only demon there. She is wary of those with powers superior to her own. That’s why she is on a feeding frenzy storing power for the fight she knows is coming. She will add victims to her feeding frenzy tonight.”

Tasuki rubbed the chill bumps on his arms. “I really hate it when you do that,” he muttered as he watched Yuuhi’s eyes. The only difference between the boy and a true albino was the fact that Yuuhi had deep black eyes, and when he got a vision, the blackness would grow and that was just creepy.

As Tasuki watched, Yuuhi turned his eyes on him and the ebony pupils became huge and luminous.

“It will not be a witch that you face tonight,” Yuuhi turned back to stare out at the rain as if he hadn’t just frightened Tasuki to death.

Tasuki clinched his hands into fist, knowing the child wouldn’t tell him just what he was up against. Deciding to ignore the rest of the room, most of which were snorting quietly in amusement, he walked over to the cabinets that held all kinds of demon weapons and pulled out a small bag of sea salt and quickly slipped it into his pocket.

He knew a few things about true magic, and if sea salt didn’t kill the witch or demons accompanying her, then it would at least give him a head start.

Amni smirked as he watched Tasuki grabbing the salt. This was too good to pass up. Silently clearing his throat, he did a very good impersonation of the Wicked Witch of the West.

Tasuki had to have jumped a mile out of his boots, turning around with a hand to his heart, glaring at the blonde psychic.

“Good one Amni!” Toya exclaimed.

“Go to hell!” Tasuki growled.

“Tasuki!” Kyoko admonished. “Do you want me to call Grandpa again?”

Tasuki froze and felt a bone deep chill pass through his body. Yeah, there were things the agency faced that scared the shit out of him but nothing was worse than a visit from the master of all terror Grandpa Hogo.

“Not necessary Kyoko, just keep that weirdo away from me tonight,” Tasuki finally managed, hoping the old man wouldn’t show up in the center of town tonight. He had a way of just popping up out of nowhere when they were out on their demon hunts.

Amni grinned at him again, winking suggestively to make Tasuki blanch before turning back to the group. He pressed his fingertips together and closed his eyes as he called on his power of sight. Behind his eyelids time sped up, day turned to night, and he was flying past the vast skyscrapers of downtown. Amni abruptly found himself in the middle of the city after dark and surrounded by humans dressed up in Halloween garb.

Thrusting his supernatural sight out in all directions, he inhaled slowly, feeling for the things that did not belong there were so many. Distorted shadows writhed all around him, absorbing people from all directions before vanishing from sight. Wraiths that looked like nothing more than filmy spider webs flew around him as if trying to attack, but there was nothing there.

On the very edge of his consciousness, Amni began to hear something sinister, almost like demon claws scraping against metal. Something screamed past him and he was jerked back to the present. He felt a small hand on his shoulder and looked up into Yuuhi’s knowing eyes. That’s when Amni noticed he was on the floor with the chair he’d been sitting in toppled over.

“No one should go out on their own tonight,” was all Amni said as he turned away from his brother and they both looked out toward the rain. The silhouette vanished, leaving the rain to fall within the empty space.

“Everyone will partner up tonight and have their cell phones with them,” Kyou ordered. “Kamui will track everyone from here, so call him if you run into trouble. Whoever is closest to your position will be sent to assist. Yuuhi and Amni will stay with Kamui, so he can relay any warnings if it comes to them.”

Kyou looked at Kotaro, “Kotaro, you and Yohji will patrol the city square for the police department, and wherever they send Tasuki is where Shinbe will follow. Toya and Kyoko will dress up to blend in with the festivities, and possibly keep their identities safe should something unforeseen happen. They will patrol the children’s area, on the lookout for the witch.” He gave a slight nod to Kyoko knowing that was her heart’s intention.

“Amni, you and Yuuhi will also be doubling as the ‘clean up’ crew. Should anything get out of hand with too many spectators, you must be ready.” He silently gave them a look to let them know to do a mind wipe of every living being they sense if need be. “Suki will be waiting with the arsenal van for anyone who needs weapons or a pick-up.”

Toya crossed his arms over his chest, completely satisfied that he would be with Kyoko tonight, even if it meant he would have to dress up for demon night. Suspicion crept in when he realized Kyou had not offered his position for the night.

“What about you?” Toya asked suspiciously.

Kyou narrowed his gaze toward the window knowing they were no longer alone within the room. He had felt the air shift from movement not seen and the hidden power within it was staggering.

“This meeting is over,” Kyou kept his voice calm but demanding so as not to alert the others.

At first no one moved, waiting on Kyou to leave as he normally did after meetings. When it was obvious he wasn’t leaving, one by one they got up and vacated the area. Kyoko also took the hint when Kyou released his hold on her ankle. Within moments, the room was empty and Kyou closed the door behind them, locking it so he wouldn’t be interrupted.

He leaned his back against the door as he looked out at the empty room.

Kyou let his heightened senses scan every square inch of the area before lifting his gaze toward the window. He stared intently at a place directly next to the window frame. He knew this had to be the same entity that had caused Kyoko to pass out a few minutes prior. What he couldn’t figure out is why. It obviously meant no ill will, almost as though it was simply visiting.

However, Kyou couldn’t shake the sensation that he’d felt this entity before. Whatever it was, Kyou knew he needed to find out its secrets and why it was there. In the meantime, he actually humored the idea of staring at its hiding place until it either introduced itself or left.

Darius was sitting on the wide windowsill leaning his back against the frame and had one leg propped up in a relaxed position. He had heard everything and it had left him feeling an odd sense of belonging that he was trying hard to ignore. He had always worked alone against the demons and here he had found a whole room full of humans wasn’t the right word for some of them, even though that was what they were pretending to be.

His proof was the fact that the man knew he was there even if he couldn’t see him. However, the stare the man was giving him was challenging to his nature. The silver-haired male wasn’t human, he wasn’t demon, what the hell was he? Darius frowned a bit until a powerful aura swept through the room toward him. It wasn’t threatening, merely stating the man knew exactly where he was.

Darius narrowed his eyes at the man, Kyou, he’d been called. Where had he heard that name before? He froze in mid-breath and his dark eyes became bottomless pits. It was impossible.

When he had gone back to the monastery only to find it abandoned and the statue gone, he had searched the tunnels beneath the rubble and found the lost scrolls pertaining to the guardians. It was within those ledgers that he had heard of Kyou and his brothers. The monk's writings had indicated that the guardians surrounded their priestess and protected the world from demons.

He had thought the guardians were a myth, nothing more than the hopes of man added to the dire scrolls' foretelling. He searched his mind for what the scrolls had actually said but the memory eluded him because he hadn't paid the fables any attention. He'd left the scrolls where he had found them, only to return years later to find one more scroll added. It had been about the guardians.

One thing he did recall from the new scroll was that he was older than the guardians and they had abandoned this world the same time hell's seal had been broken. Even the monks had not understood why they had abandoned him during his darkest times.

Now they were back and pretending to be human, living among them as if they belonged, while he was left out in the cold to fight the demons as if it was meant to be? What made the humans accept the guardians when they had always turned a frightened eye on him? All the humans had ever offered him was loneliness.

Darius stood to his full height as he drew his longings back behind the hard walls he kept them trapped in. If he allowed himself to feel, then he would only find pain; he had learned that lesson the hard way. He'd never needed anyone and he wasn't about to start now, especially those who were weaker than him. He snarled silently at the man before taking his leave, shattering the window as he went.

Kyou stood there with his hands buried in his pants pockets letting the wind whip through his long hair. He arched an eyebrow wondering what he'd done to anger the entity. He was no closer to finding out what it was, but again, the familiarity of it haunted him. Something told him it would not be the last time they crossed paths.

Turning toward the door, he gave a knowing smile. He quickly pulled it open and stepped back just in time to see everyone fall through the entry.

They had left the room, but as soon as Kyou locked the door behind them, they'd crowded around it, pressing their ears to the polished wood. It took them all by surprise when the door was abruptly pulled open, making them all fall forward and onto the floor.

"I suppose this means I will have to retrain all of you on your eavesdropping skills," Kyou stated before stepping out of the room. "And Suki, call the workers to repair the window."

Toya tugged at the collar of his shirt growling in frustration. Leave it to Kyou to find a way to get him dressed up. The getup was almost similar to the crap he'd seen sappy vampires wear in the movies, complete with some lacy frilly thing around his neck. The pants only went to his knees and he was wearing white stockings. Stockings? What the hell did Kyou think he was, a pansy?

Toya had forgone the wig and settled for just tying his long hair back in a low ponytail at the nape of the neck with several locks falling down on the sides. The only part of the elaborate costume he did like was the long black hooded cloak with red lining. It actually went really well with the rest of the outfit. The other plus was the fact that Kyoko's eyes had lit up when she had seen it on him.

His golden eyes softened when he glanced over at her. She had called him the sexiest vampire she had ever seen. His gaze trailed her body in the same appreciation.

She was dressed in an outfit as elaborate as his, but she took to it a lot better. Kyou had picked out a dress for her that was reminiscent of the Colonial era. It was a nice combination of red and black plaid with the little poof in the back that, to Toya, seemed to sway with each step she took. She was holding a black lace parasol and had a feminine top hat pinned in her auburn hair that served no other purpose except to be stylish.

The only problem with Kyoko's outfit was it was short in the front! it only came up to mid-thigh while the back was long and dragging on the ground. The top of the bodice was also low cut and showing more cleavage than Toya ever wanted anyone else to see! anyone except him.

Seductive was the first word that popped into his mind, but he hadn't shared that compliment with her. He had only teased her back by telling her she would introduce the young boys in the children's area to their first crush.

Despite Kyoko's possible inner pervert surfacing due to the outfit, Toya had to admit his brother had showed impeccable style by choosing it for her. Neither of them had the scary monster look, so it was kind of perfect for hanging out around the kids at the festivities. If Kamui and Amni's facts were right, the witch was going to take another child tonight.

###TESTING!###

Kyoko placed a hand to the side of her head and winced a bit while Toya growled at the listening device in his ear.

###Turn down the god damned volume, you hellish nerd!### Toya exclaimed loudly, hoping Kamui's speakers would burst.

Kamui giggled, ###Sorry couldn't resist. Oh and Toya, if you want to keep undressing Kyoko with your eyes, don't do it here.###

###How the hell!?!### Toya muttered looking around.

Kyoko grinned and placed a hand on Toya's arm to get his attention, then pointed up to the traffic camera mounted on top of the stoplight.

###Son of a bitch,### Toya growled. ###He's tapped into the traffic control center again.### He grinned and looked over at Kyoko. ###Why don't I give him a show?###

Kyoko smacked Toya on the arm and glared at him with a red blush on her cheeks.

###The only one who's going to see Kyoko naked is me,### Kotaro exclaimed good-naturedly from somewhere within the five city blocks that had been roped off for the Halloween parties. ###I'm the one she truly loves.###

###HA!### Kamui exclaimed. ###Kyoko goes more for the quiet types, which puts me in the lead at the moment.###

###You just yelled in her fucking ear with your testing! how the hell does that make you the quiet type?### Toya argued.

###Will all of you stop joking around?### Tasuki demanded. ###We're here looking for demons, not discussing Kyoko's sex life.###

###How about lack of sex life?### Yohji asked, causing another round of chuckles.

###How about all of you shut up?### Kyoko ordered, suddenly angry that she was blushing ten shades of red. ###Just because I don't have a boyfriend, doesn't mean you can make fun of me.###

Toya's expression softened and he pulled Kyoko into a hug. ###I'm sorry,### he whispered.

###OH MY GOD, CALL THE MEDIA QUICK! TOYA JUST APOLOGIZED!### Kamui yelled into the com-link.

###You know,### Toya stated. ###I'm half tempted to go back and kick his ass.###

Kyoko giggled, ###Don't worry about that right now. I'll let you have fun later.###

She smiled shyly, realizing that had sounded a little more X rated than she had meant it to sound. As their eyes locked, she noticed his hair had fallen down around his face, which was soft and tender in the dim light. Tucking a lock of his hair behind his ears, she kissed him on the cheek.

It was all Toya could do to breathe as he blushed at the double-edged comment and the feel of her soft lips against his skin. He smiled wickedly up at the hidden camera and stuck his tongue out at it before taking Kyoko's hand and slowly leading her through the throng of people surrounding them. At least her last few words had shut everyone up.

The block party was in full swing, with music bands performing on every street corner and in every club. The partial moon hung high above, casting twisted shadows around them. They parked on the other side of the square because Kyoko wanted to walk through everything and get a lay of the area before they reached the children's block.

She pulled Toya to a stop as she pointed to a drain near the sidewalk.

Toya nodded as he let go of her hand and stepped closer to it. "Hey Kamui, we got a grate removed from the drain near!" he looked around for the closest landmark which happened to be right in front of the drain.

He arched a dark eyebrow, "House of Screams! damn that's cheesy. You want us to check it out?"

"Yohji and Kotaro can check it out if they will stop pawing Kyoko long enough." Kamui answered in an irritated voice.

Toya growled as he turned and sure enough, Kotaro had his arm around Kyoko's shoulders while Yohji was around her waist, his hand riding dangerously low on her hip. Toya rubbed his hand over his forehead as if he were in pain before he took long, determined strides toward them.

They immediately jumped back, both clasping their hands behind their backs and looking as innocent as possible. Kotaro even had the audacity to start whistling while looking up at the buildings around them like they were the most fascinating things on earth.

"Kotaro," Toya growled, "keep your hands off of Kyoko."

Kotaro pouted and Toya turned his glare on Yohji, who was actually stupid enough to return it.

"Don't even think about it," Toya stated. "Now are you two gonna check out that drain or do I have to throw you down in it?"

Kotaro threw up his hands in surrender, "Fine, fine! we're on it. But I'm sending you my dry cleaning bill." He quickly pulled Yohji out of harm's way when he noticed the idiot was trying to kiss Kyoko on the cheek. "Come on dummy, before demons aren't the only thing you have to worry about fighting tonight."

Kotaro touched his earpiece, "Hey computer nerd, where does this drain lead?"

"Hold on, I'm searching," Kamui said slowly. "I think! yeah, got it! It leads right under the haunted house directly in front of you. Let's see, it's a pretty old place! give me a minute."

"Just tell us if there's a way into the drains from the house," Yohji demanded.

"What the hell do you think I'm looking for?" Kamui yelled back. "I swear, you all seem to think that this stuff is always easy to find. It takes research damn it!"

Yohji gave Kotaro a deadpan expression, "This coming from the guy who can break into the CIA database in his sleep."

"Whatever, we'll leave you three to argue about it," Toya stated. "I'm taking Kyoko over to the children's section of the festival, so we can do our part."

Toya put his arm around Kyoko's shoulders and steered her away from them. They froze however when Kamui's voice came back over the earpieces.

"Um, people! we got a problem."

"What is it pipsqueak?" Toya asked, his voice changing tone at the seriousness Kamui was emitting.

"That drain leads into the house alright! through the basement. It also leads to the local cemetery about five blocks away. Apparently, the tunnels were dug during some kind of revolution. Local legends say it was an underground highway for demon activity."

"Damn, I'm glad I'm not you guys. Totally sucks to be you right now," Toya said with a smirk. "Hey, Shinbe, Tasuki, think you can come over and help these ladies out?"

"I do humbly apologize Toya," Shinbe said over the radio. "But Tasuki and I are on the other end of the square and unfortunately, we are currently preoccupied with our own work."

“Yeah,” Tasuki stated then screamed.

“Tasuki?” Kyoko asked. “Are you okay?”

“He’s fine,” Shinbe said trying not to laugh. “He just got the life scared out of him by an old man and a teenage zombie wanna-be. Hey Tama, love the costume.”

“We changed our minds, we’re coming,” Tasuki growled. “Damn old man, always scares the crap out of me.”

Kyoko giggled along with Suki. It seemed Grandpa Hogo had found Tasuki.

“Tell Grandpa hello for me and I’ll call him tomorrow,” Kyoko said.

“I’m not telling that old geezer shit!” Tasuki exclaimed sullenly.

“Tell him or else,” Kyoko warned, as her emerald eyes grew stormy.

Kotaro, Yohji and Toya took two big steps back from the auburn-haired woman. When Kyoko got that expression on her face, there was only one alternative to run.

“Um, we’re gonna go ahead and check out the inside,” Kotaro said hesitantly. “We’ll keep you posted at what’s going on.”

Yohji didn’t even need prompting. They took a couple more steps back as though Kyoko might attack them once their backs were turned before hastily making their way to the house.

“Kyoko,” Toya said wonderingly. “You’re scary, you know that?”

Kyoko smirked. “It runs in the family.”

“Tell me about it,” Tasuki mumbled in her earpiece.

Suki could be heard laughing again, “And you guys all wonder why I love working with you.”

“Suki dear,” Shinbe said softly. “You can be scary all you want, it only makes me want you more.”

“Shinbe, shut up,” Suki said in frustration.

Chapter 3 Haunted Houses

Darius stood in the shadows, watching as the small group went in separate directions. He hadn’t even bothered with invisibility because, tonight of all nights, he would blend in just fine. His eyes narrowed on the fact that Toya had thrown his arm over the woman’s shoulder. Why was it that they were so accepted within the human circle when he had always been rejected? What made the guardians so damn special?

His brooding gaze caressed Kyoko’s face as she smiled and he knew she did not fear them, but instead, stood among them as if she belonged. What would he give for her to smile at him like that, like a man instead of a monster?

Something tightened in his chest, but Darius shrugged off his melancholy as his attention returned to the two cops that were entering the makeshift haunted house.

He could sense the demon activity inside but he was more interested in the source of the demonic activity. The master controlling the peons is what he needed to find. Destroy the master and you destroy their underlings. It was a simple concept that most found a bit too easy to overlook until you actually faced a master in combat. Only then did it not seem so easy.

First and foremost, he needed to find the master demons and kill them. The Guardians could handle the rest of the vermin loose tonight, the easy targets. He slowly turned his head and gazed in the direction of the graveyard before vanishing from site.

Kamui slurped loudly on his blueberry slushy then chewed for a moment on the straw. He saw the disappearing act of the man that had been stalking Kyoko since she and Toya had arrived and it made him smirk. Turning to another one of the laptops open next to him, he scanned the frozen frame of Darius.

“So, you have finally found us,” Kamui thought to himself, making sure to keep that particular thought locked away from Amni and Yuuhi. He had often wondered if the dark angel was still stalking the lands.

He enlarged the photo and his smile died as he noticed the lonely look that haunted Darious's eyes.

Kotaro and Yohji approached the woman standing at the entrance of the House of Screams and started to make their way in. They immediately noticed a sign outside that indicated no one under the age of eighteen was allowed, which meant IDs were being checked.

«What's the big deal with the age limit? They have naked zombies or something?» Yohji joked, secretly hoping he was right.

«I'm sorry gentlemen,» The woman said. «It's a ten dollar entry fee to go in.»

Yohji choked. «Twenty dollars? That's highway robbery.»

Kotaro showed her his badge and smiled. «You don't want our money and it's time for you to go take a break.»

The badge caught the woman's eye and she followed it with her gaze, unable to look away as it glowed a soft blue.

«I don't want your money,» She repeated in a dazed voice.

Kotaro glanced over at Yohji, his smile gone. «Let's go.»

They walked inside, leaving the woman at the entrance shaking her head in confusion before she glanced down at her watch deciding it was time to go grab a bite to eat.

The front door closed behind them and the two men looked around. The front room was in a hexagon shape, with small round tables set into each corner. In the center was a larger round table with wilted flowers and fake rotten fruit in a bowl, all of which had been covered with sawdust and fake cobwebs.

Both men went on high alert as they noticed the sign that had the word «Enter» scrawled in crooked letters next to a curtain-covered door and no tour guide. Creepy pipe organ music was playing over the speakers, giving the room what they assumed was supposed to be ambiance but it only came off as cheesy.

«Looks like a funeral parlor,» Yohji muttered. «They even have a coffin here.»

Yohji walked over to the coffin and, out of morbid curiosity lifted the lid. It was a decision he instantly regretted and wrinkled his nose at the smell.

«Kotaro! tell me this is fake and I'll be your best friend forever,» Yohji begged softly as he cringed.

Kotaro had already started heading toward the curtain covering the next door. He backtracked to look inside the coffin and instantly turned away. The half-eaten human was laying on the now bloodied satin, twisted grotesquely so that the two halves of his body were facing in two different directions, three if you counted the way his head was angled.

This was an innocent human that had probably volunteered for a night of fun, pretending to rise from the coffin and give the Halloween thrill seekers a scare when they entered the room. But this man would never rise again! at least Kotaro hoped he wouldn't.

Kotaro closed the lid to the coffin knowing there wasn't anything they could do for the man.

«I guess that answers the question of why there isn't a tour guide,» Yohji mused as he backed away from the coffin and glanced longingly toward the door they had entered through.

«This is what you signed up for Yohji,» Kotaro stated. «You knew that when Kyou offered the job to you. The only thing we can do is make sure no more are killed like this poor guy.»

He placed his hand on his earpiece knowing the others were listening, «We have a body count started.»

«And demon night begins,» Kamui said softly.

Kotaro lowered his head, hoping the afterlife was kinder to the mangled guy but something quickly caught his attention on the floor beside the coffin! bloody footprints.

“Hey Yohji,” Kotaro said softly and stepped away from the coffin, walking slowly across the floor. “Check it out,” he finished, pointing at the carpet.

Yohji stared at what appeared to be bloody footprints going across the carpet and disappearing behind the curtain door. They weren’t human. From that he could tell, they were oddly shaped with abnormally long toes and even longer toenails that left pinpoint bloody impressions behind.

Kotaro placed a finger to his lips, indicating quiet and Yohji nodded, removing his PPK from its holster. Taking up the rear, Yohji followed Kotaro into the next room beyond the curtain.

They made it several rooms into the maze of strobe-lights and motion-sensor screams and started to relax thinking the rest of the house was empty. Turning the corner into the next room they froze when they encountered a small group of house visitors jumping and squealing, some laughing at the scene in front of them.

Against the wall behind red velvet rope was a setup from one of the chainsaw movies. One of Kotaro’s favorites. The only problem was the guy driving the chainsaw into the body on the blood-covered table wasn’t human. However, the body on the table was very real and still alive. The woman was tied down and screaming, begging for help, but the visitors thought it was part of the show.

Kotaro felt bile rise up in his throat and glared at the monster that had real human skin stretched across its face. No doubt from another poor human that had fallen victim to the ghoul this night.

“Why didn’t we hear the screaming out front?” Yohji whispered in horror.

Kotaro moved when the chainsaw started to lower toward the woman’s already bloody leg. Just as the flickering lights hit a dark moment, he jumped over the rope and slashed at the ceiling causing a pipe to burst overhead, making cold water rain down on the horror seekers.

“Make sure these people leave out the front door,” Kotaro hissed into the earpiece at Yohji while pulling out his Berretta. “I’ve got this covered.”

Yohji nodded and navigated the people out of the room and back through the parlor. He closed the door behind them and threw the deadbolt so no one could come back in. Yohji had a feeling a lot of people were going to be refunded their money but it was better to be disappointed than dead.

With a loud exhale, he turned back from the door and froze in horror when the body inside the coffin suddenly sat up. It moved stiffly and liquid that Yohji didn’t even want to identify oozed out of it and down the side of the coffin to drip onto the floor. Shock kept his reaction time slow when it rose to its feet and lunged at the detective, burying its teeth in his shoulder.

Yohji was knocked over by the force of the body and panicked as pain exploded in his neck. He had dropped his PPK, so he used his fists to pummel on the thing before he was finally able to dislodge its teeth.

Grabbing his handgun from the floor, Yohji winced when he saw the wire to his earpiece was severed so he couldn’t call Kotaro for help. Something he wouldn’t have been able to do anyway if his partner was in the middle of a fight of his own.

The creature came at him again and this time, Yohji did the only thing he could think of. He screamed and ran like hell.

The ghoul, seeing he was being interrupted, swung the chainsaw clumsily at Kotaro. Kotaro ducked to miss it, dropping his gun in light of a much more effective weapon. The only problem was getting past the chainsaw. When the ghoul regained its balance, it was at the expense of the woman’s life. The chainsaw cut into her midsection and stuck, sending blood everywhere.

Glancing back to make sure Yohji was out of eyesight, Kotaro raised his hand and cast a blue light straight into the ghoul. Becoming confused, the ghoul lifted the chainsaw, and then turned the blaring thing on himself. It laid into his shoulder, adding pressure as it ate its way diagonally down his chest and out the other side. As the demon’s head and one arm hit the floor, Kotaro tapped his earpiece.

“Yohji, I got it,” Kotaro said and waited for a moment before frowning. “Yohji?”

The silence was deafening until he heard a terrified scream that reminded him a lot of the cartoon character Johnny Bravo whom was known to scream louder than a bunch of girls having a screaming contest.

Kotaro abruptly witnessed Yohji running into the room, past him, and out the next door so fast that he caused a breeze. He then heard the sickening footfalls that only a possessed dead body could make. Moving to stand directly in its path, he silently waited on it to come to him.

The thing limped into the room and stopped, coming face to face with the handsome detective. Kotaro's ice-blue eyes glimmered with sadistic glee as he rammed his palm into the face of the ghoul.

Stay down! Kotaro growled at the possessed body that now had a hole in its face big enough to put his fist through. Turning around, he took off through the door Yohji had just retreated through.

Yohji hadn't even slowed down when he ran past Kotaro, believing with everything in him that the dead body was still chasing him and within reaching distance. The last thing he wanted to do was run a gantlet through the whole haunted house, so when he spotted a partially hidden door, he inwardly sang praises to whatever god was listening that he'd found an exit. But as he flung it open, his momentum was too fast and he couldn't stop himself in time.

He had opened the door to a set of stairs leading down; stairs he actually overshot. Yohji screamed again when he started falling down them into the darkness.

Kotaro caught up to Yohji just when his partner flung open the door and took a flying leap; literally.

Using his powers, Kotaro moved faster than the wind itself, catching Yohji right before he impacted with the unforgiving concrete of the basement floor. He held the man back against him, noticing the cop was out cold having fainted from the scare; but that wasn't the problem. The problem was the huge bite the ghoul had taken out of Yohji's shoulder.

Bloody hell, Kotaro exclaimed before tapping his earpiece. Kamui, we have a situation. Yohji is down. I repeat Yohji is--

He didn't get a chance to finish as a bunch of ghouls began coming out of a rather large hole in the wall. Kotaro used his sharp eyesight to see past them into the underground tunnel that he was sure was the one Kamui had mentioned connecting the house to the cemetery.

Kotaro? Kamui answered, and then swore a blue streak that would have made a sailor proud. Suki!

I'm on it! Suki exclaimed and started speed-driving down the back roads toward the haunted house. Do we have any idea what we are up against?

Ghouls, Yuuhi's eerie voice came over the intercom.

Fire! You can kill them with fire, Kamui quickly added.

Suki smiled as she swung around the corner and came to a screeching halt. Jerking the Hummer into park, she got out and opened the rear door. With a huge grin plastered on her face, she grabbed the flamethrower from the arsenal and strapped the fuel tank to her back.

Hefting the unusually heavy weapon, Suki sprinted around to the front of the haunted house.

She was wearing green military fatigues tucked into the top of combat boots. Two belts of bullets crisscrossed over her chest and a standard belt was around her waist with a sword and knife holster on her hip. Around her neck hung a pair of dog tags that had her name on them along with an identification number.

The look was completed by a blood red bandana tied around her forehead and her hair was down and free-flying everywhere. She looked like she'd just walked off a battlefield, which drew more than one man to stare at her.

The bullets, knife and flamethrower looked fake for Halloween but what no one knew was they were one hundred percent real.

“Damn Suki,” Kamui whispered. “Do you need to look any more sadistic?”
Suki grinned up at the camera mounted on top of the traffic light at the corner. “You like it?”

“Damn straight!” Kamui exclaimed. “But Shinbe would like it better.”

“Like what?” Shinbe’s voice rang over the transmitter but Suki ignored him as she walked up to the front door and gave it a hard kick, sending it flying back against the wall with a bang.

“Oh nothing,” Kamui said innocently. “Unless you like Suki looking all bad ass while holding a flamethrower and showing enough cleavage to put a centerfold to shame.”

Suki ignored that comment too as she made her way deeper into the haunted house. She’d get the PC wiz later. Walking through the curtain, she stepped over the dead ghoul lying on the floor and wrinkled her nose at the other one cut in half.

“I swear those two cops are messier than three year olds at dinner time,” she muttered. Her lips thinned when she saw the lady on the table. Passing the room up, she noticed an open door off to the side and a terrible ruckus coming from the darkness below. Hefting up the flamethrower, Suki started to descend the stairs.

“Here goes nothing,” she informed anyone listening.

Kotaro laid Yohji gently against the bottom step and turned to face the deadly crowd in front of him. Wanting to keep them away from his injured partner, he surged forward. It was like wading through thick mud and smelled worse.

Pain exploded along his right cheek when one of the ghouls bit him, making his teeth grind together. He hefted the one that had bitten him and slung him over the others, back toward the tunnel, knocking over more that had been trying to enter the basement.

Reaching behind him, Kotaro pulled a long-bladed knife from the hidden sheath tucked into the back of his pants. He swung his arm in a wide arc as he brought it up, piercing flesh and making black blood spray everywhere.

He cried out when another set of teeth bit into his left arm and plunged his blade into the top of the ghoul’s head. A feral growl erupted from his throat when he felt three more bite into his legs. Removing the blade, Kotaro swung again, this time decapitating the closest ghoul.

A sharp click and loud hiss made the monsters look up toward the top of the steps and he smirked at the ghouls around him.

“Bring the barbeque sauce?” he asked the lady that now had everyone’s attention.

Darius stood in the back yard of the haunted house with his eyes closed, not only witnessing the battle inside but hearing it as well. He had toyed with the idea of going through the house to reach the underground tunnels, but knowing that would slow him down he stayed with his original plan.

The Guardians could take care of themselves! just like they had abandoned him to do so long ago.

Withdrawing his power of sight from the basement, Darius buried the feelings of hatred and forced the worthless emotions aside. He inhaled deeply, smelling the scent of the master demons behind the mayhem! he had smelled them before. Hell Hags! humans called them witches but he knew what they were and that there were three of them within the city tonight. It wasn’t surprising as they usually traveled in packs of three.

He would have to kill them before the ghouls would drop back into hell were they belonged.

Finding the direction easily, Darius started walking almost indifferently through the back alleys of the city. Once he left the main hub, the sounds of the night quickly surrounded him. In the dark corners were demons! hiding, spitting and hissing his name as he passed. He ignored them knowing he had bigger fish to fry this All Hallows Eve.

As he neared the cemetery, Darius felt an all-too-familiar presence and snarled. It annoyed him that only the weakest masters had awakened first, while the real threat slept somewhere beneath the city.

What angered him the most was that he had never wanted to return here after reading the scrolls for the second time. After the monastery had been destroyed, monks had come to rebuild it only to let it fall to ruin once they realized the ground was evil. They had abandoned this land knowing it was useless.

Now the forgetful humans had built a thriving metropolis over the heart of sleeping evil.

Kyou stood in the middle of the cemetery, scanning the area with sharp eyes. He had been listening to the others talk on the com-link and while he had gotten some amusement from it, he knew the problem wasn't within the haunted house. The graveyard was the true center of demonic activity. It wasn't in a ghoul's nature to abandon their feasting ground without a master pulling their strings.

Closing his eyes, Kyou let his senses fan out around and under him, searching for the power he knew was there.

He could feel the dead growing restless within their graves and understood this cemetery had been troubled for a while now. The dead had been disturbed, something that all the guardians agreed was a very big taboo; it just wasn't allowed.

His lips thinned knowing most of the graves under him were empty. Whether they had been devoured, or were now up and walking around was the question. His golden eyes opened and narrowed before turning his head toward the huge mausoleum to his right.

Stepping forward, Kyou opened the heavy door to the crypt, ignoring the creaking and groaning of the hinges. He took in the damage that had been done and understood why this particular crypt had been chosen. The family within had to have been centuries old and with no living relatives to continue its care, it was basically ignored, which worked in the demon's favor.

All the caskets had been unsealed and lay open across the floor. Skeletal remains littered the floor, some of them still hanging from their vaults, ripped open to the elements. In the center lay two larger caskets, obviously the matriarchs of the family. The female's side was virtually undisturbed but the male's side had been desecrated.

A large hole went straight through the male's coffin and what was left of the body inside it. No one had to tell him where the other end of that tunnel led. The demon had probably made the corpses dig it and connect it to the main tunnels.

A noise from further back in the crypt made him look up. Kyou stepped away from the disturbed vaults and followed a narrow path leading back and down a slope. He could immediately tell the moment he was completely underground, as the air became heavy and mold laden.

He heard something that sounded strangely like speech and stepped around a wall, discovering another row of caskets. Several had been pulled from their vaults and thrown open on the floor. A hell hag in her true form was bent over one of the partially decayed bodies, hissing an incantation into the corpse's ear.

She was hideous with long white hair that writhed around her sunken cheeks and eyes much too big for the face. Her skin was dry and cracked, as though she had been mummified alive. Long unkempt nails scraped the ground and the body of the corpse as though she were touching a lover.

Kyou growled when the corpse began to twitch, making the hell hag whip her head up to glare at him with those horrible eyes. A storm of power seemed to descend on him as invisible wind whipped around his clothes and hair. The air around him crackled and translucent golden wings emerged from his back, curling around him almost protectively as he surged forward.

He flew past the coffin, catching the witch around the neck in the crook of his elbow and slammed her through the wall on the other side. Stone and mortar fell as they broke through the other side. He sat straddled across her stomach with a hand around her shriveled throat.

“You would dare to send those filthy things into my city?” Kyou roared in her face as she screeched and clawed at him.

The hell hag couldn’t get in a good hit in because Kyou’s translucent wings were still curled around him, preventing such an attack. She abruptly flickered with power and her form changed from that of a withered old hag into a vision of beauty. Her voice became soft and supple as her grisly hair straitened, turning white as the purest of snow.

“You do not have the power to stop me guardian,” she whispered as she laid her fingers on his cheek. “So much like him yet so different,” she mused just as her claws dug into his face.

Kyou was stunned when a bright flash exploded right in front of him and he was thrown backwards through the hole they had created and into the opposite wall of the crypt. His heartbeat pounded in his ears as he allowed his rage to consume him. This demon was powerful and he needed to finish her off before the underlings that she was controlling killed more of the innocent humans.

He pushed himself from the wall to attack just as bony hands broke through the brick behind him. They wrapped around his chest and pulled him through with such force, Kyou actually found himself breathless.

He was suddenly surrounded by ghouls’ meaty hands pulling him away from the witch, who just laughed as she watched her underlings do her bidding. Just before the ghouls pulled him out of sight, Kyou saw mist rising up out of the floor, surrounding her and swirling eerily. A man appeared within the fog right in front of her. His long black hair fluttered as he turned on the ghouls coming toward him and let loose a string of fire from his palm that set them ablaze.

Darius turned his head to stare straight into the eyes of the hell hag. Seeing the fear leap into her blood red eyes, he let a satisfied smirk pull at his lips. She hissed at him and tried to flee, only to stop dead in her tracks when a black hole appeared below her feet’ ensnaring her within a demon trap.

“Not so fast bitch,” Darius’s voice was so dark it made the already cool temperature within the mausoleum plummet several degrees.

Very slowly, the witch turned around to glare at him with a hideous twist to her lips. “I remember you,” she hissed with false bravado as she morphed back into her true form. “You wore the chains’ we took turns with the whips’ such a pleasure it was to see the masters rip your wings from your back.”

Her words were cut short and she screeched when magma suddenly rose up from the void beneath her feet, forming chains’ snapping into place around her ankles and wrists, burning the flesh where they touched.

His eyes turned crimson at the reminder. “It took more than just you and your sisters to keep me chained, but I’ll give you a gift’ the same gift the demons gave me. These chains have a nickname’ they are called Eternity. You won’t be alone in the dark for long.” He gave her a sinister smile, “Your sisters will be joining you soon.” With that, the bonds tightened and began dragging her down into the pit.

“You will not live!” the hell hag screamed while fighting the pull of the chains. “Our master will see you torn apart and decimated the same way you did to us upon your escape’ you will never be rid of us.”

Darius stood back watching with cold eyes as the witch continued her descent. She spit a number of curses at him, which made Darius feel amusement. Even when he showed them their own defeat, these demons would never be silent.

The witch's screams rose in volume when clawed hands reached up from the void and clutched at her form. She continued to fight until the very last moment even when the void reached up to her ears.

She abruptly tilted her head back and smirked at him, "If He can't reclaim you then He will reclaim the bitch who set you free!"

"He?" Darious whispered as he watched until she sank into the void, her screams finally silenced. There had been no one in the pit except demons so who was the witch calling He?

As the void sealed over the demon, his thoughts darkened remembering the hell hags. They and many other demons had struck him as he'd cried out for someone to save him! but no one ever came. Demons and their lies! no one had set him free.

He still remembered the pain of his wings being removed! pulled! yanked from the flesh of his back. That pain had been nothing compared to the agony of the chains they had wrapped him in. Now they will know how it had felt! physically and mentally. They will scream for someone to free them, but none will answer.

Kyou had remained silent once he shook off the remaining ghouls. No more had come through the tunnels they'd created, which meant Kotaro and Suki had handled the ones on their end. With any luck, the ghouls would merely vanish into nothingness before the flames died out. It would be their job to return the dead to their proper resting places once the proverbial dust settled.

Now Kyou stood still, watching the man's expressions change from rage to pain and then! sadness. Wraiths flew all around him, as if trying to attack, but they could not and would not touch him. Kyou took a step forward! recognizing the power he had felt earlier that day in his office.

The man raised his head but didn't even glance in Kyou's direction before he vanished without a trace. The air rippled and sizzled! sending out purifying energy, washing over everything before the cemetery fell into a peace he was sure it hadn't felt in many years.

Kyou's golden eyes glowed in the darkness as he listened to the voices of the other guardians through the com-link.

Chapter 4 Officially Freaked Out

"Forget barbeque," Suki exclaimed. "I'm going for deep fried."

Kotaro's eyes went humorously wide when Suki lifted the flamethrower in his direction. She pulled the trigger and set the closest three ghouls aflame.

All of the ghouls! even the ones the flames hadn't reached yet, suddenly broke out in a chorus of inhuman screaming before they all burst into flames. Suki and Kotaro could only watch with confusion, as they all seemed to melt, leaving only partially intact skeletons behind. The basement was filled with loud clatter when the bones hit the ground.

Suki giggled unable to control herself, "Tastes just like chicken."

Kotaro gave her a weak smile but he wondered why the ghouls suddenly, for lack of a better phrase, dropped dead.

"I don't know about you, but I'm not going to look a gift horse in the mouth," Kotaro managed before he dropped down on his butt.

Suki turned off the flamethrower and gingerly walked past Yohji to reach Kotaro's side.

"Think you can walk out of here?" she asked sympathetically.

Kotaro nodded and, with Suki's help, regained his footing and the two walked over to Yohji's unconscious form. They got the detective hoisted up between them and very slowly climbed the steep staircase. Once at the top, they maneuvered their way through the rest of the haunted house, thankfully not running into any more animated corpses. They finally found the back door of the old house and stepped out into the fresh air.

"We need to get Yohji back to the agency," Kotaro whispered. "He was bitten by one of those freaks."

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