

# Passions

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*This is the story of Koizumi, a young ninja who has awoken from a long, long sleep and fallen in love with a dashing (and cute!) young rock star. :3*

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## 1 - Chapter 1 X3

Please be kind to Emi-chan. This story is very rough. This is her first time writing it...

No light filled the sky as the old, cloaked man made his way through the pitch-black forest. In his hand was a small lantern, which could have no purpose but to see three inches in front of his face. Beside him stood a short woman who held a large key with both of her hands as if not to accidentally drop it. Every once in a while the small woman would trip, and the old man would scold her with his walking stick. Near the end of their journey, she felt the need to start up a conversation.

"Who are you waking, Master Yoshida?" she asked quietly.

"That information does not concern you. You will learn whom I have chosen to wake when they leave the temple and not a moment beforehand," the old man said strictly.

"I understand, master."

Eventually, the two of them arrived at a very large temple that looked as if it had been unused for many years.

"Soeki, the key," the old man demanded as he held out his hand.

"Here it is, master." The small woman bowed and held out the key for him.

"Stay here and don't make a sound."

"Yes, master."

The old man hobbled into the temple, still holding the lantern in his hand. Inside was a very large room filled with gravestones, which held no epitaph. Each grave held only one character...a number. The old man stopped his hobbling at the grave labeled #5. That was my grave...The old man was my master, Yoshida. This was the torture that entities like ourselves were subject to. We would live for an eternity in the darkness. We were what humans might call ninja, but we were much more than that. We were damned creatures who awoke only when we were needed.

Master Yoshida fit the key in his hand into a small keyhole, a small part of the stone floor rose, and I opened my eyes. I took a long breath and sat up. My whole body was stiff...it had been a while since I had had a mission. To me, the world above my grave seemed quite bright.

"Welcome back, Miss Koizumi," Master Yoshida said with a small chuckle in his voice.

"Every time I wake you say that, but somehow I never feel welcome," I sighed.

"Regardless I say welcome back."

I sighed again. "Can we just get this over with?"

"Wake the other three."

"Fine." I sighed a third time and called the other three... my teammates to wake up.

Automatically they rose and the four of us stood.

"Come now, we must not waste time," the master insisted.

The four of us followed like good little ninja.

The second we exited the temple, "she" was upon us.

"Welcome, Koizumi-San, Misaki-Chan, Junichiro-kun, Kureno-kun," Soeki squealed, bowing to each one of us.

That woman's name truly suited her. She was not much more than a little pest. The whole way back to Master Yoshida's house, she rambled on about how much she missed us and barraged us with questions. When we reached Master Yoshida's house, we were taken to a small room where we were to have our mission explained to us. As soon as we were all seated, Master Yoshida began.

“Alright you four, you have a tough mission on your hands this time,” he began.

“Good, because you owe us one. We’ve been down there for quite a while. Ten years to be exact,” I complained.

“Well, I believe that this mission will include shinigami enemies, so you’ll be awake for a while.”

“For joy! Everyone loves a good Shinigami fight,” Kureno spat sarcastically.

Ah Kureno, our newest member. Wasn’t he just the biggest ray of sunshine you’d ever met! Yeah, this guy had some anger management problems. His name somewhat suited him. I believe that he was named Kureno for his fiery hair that seemed to have little orange sparkles in it that reminded me of embers. I’m sure his parents had no idea he was going to have such a fiery personality (and I do not make that out to be a compliment). We didn’t know much about this guy though, so maybe I shouldn’t be talking. Back then, he seemed like quite the shady character to me. Moving on...

Master Yoshida ignored him, “This will be a bodyguard mission.”

“And what bodies will we be guarding?” Misaki asked curiously.

“They are an extremely popular Japanese visual kei rock band that goes by the name of Hydrangea.”

I looked up at him with surprise, “Master, if they are a Japanese rock band, wouldn’t they be called Ajisai?”

“You would think that would be the case, but they told me the name was Hydrangea.”

“Wow, they sound so manly.”

Misaki giggled at that. “Master hasn’t even told us weather they are girls or boys yet.”

Master Yoshida chuckled. “I’ll be showing you one of their more popular promotional videos so you can get familiar with them.” He turned on the small television that was sitting next to him.

(the promotional video they watched is show here :3 [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zeppmiXA5To](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zeppmiXA5To) )

As the music played, I couldn’t help but feel something. That boy, .the lead singer I mean...he was quite good, and he did not look too bad either. Then it got to part of the song where he looked straight at the camera and his gaze pierced my heart. I felt like falling, but I couldn’t. As I watched that video, I felt a feeling that I had never felt before. It was very strange to me. At that time, I thought it best that I kept that feeling to myself. At the end of the video, Misaki’s eyes were beaming....I was not looking forward to what she had to say about them.

“Well, there’s that,” Master Yoshida said dismissively.

Misaki jumped up, “Master, that was amazing! Those boys were so beautiful!” I watched her eyes beam even more than they had before.

Misaki was the squealing fan girl type. I didn’t necessarily like her, but I didn’t dislike her either. She stood no taller than five feet, and her short, spiky, blonde hair could probably boost her height another inch. She was a good friend, but we had recently gotten into a fight, and neither of us were ready to put the past behind us.

“What else do we need to know?” Junichiro asked pointing the pen that was in his hand into the air.

Junichiro was the smart type. He was sitting there taking note of every word master said. I kind of liked that about him. He wasn’t very argumentative either, so, most of the time he just went with what everybody else was saying. He was one of my favorites.

“Why are you in such a rush, Junichiro? Don’t you want to know why you are guarding them?” Master Yoshida asked with a small laugh.

“Oh, right, go on,” he stuttered, pushing up his thick glasses beneath his short, black hair that always covered a good part of his face.

“This is how it was told to me...”

\* \* \* \*

The night after Hydrangea received the title of band of the year their bassist, Taiki-san, was relaxing in his hotel suite. He had just been out drinking with his band mates, and he was ready to crash. The window in the bedroom half of the suite had been left slightly open, and a chilling breeze flowed through the room. He ran his hands down his tired face and yawned.

“What a long night,” he sighed as he walked over to close the window.

After a quick shower, he was off to bed, but before he got in bed, he heard what he thought were voices.

“This was his room, I’m sure of it.”

“Then where is he?”

“Oh, I can’t wait to ring his little neck.”

There was a cry of delight from the last voice. Taiki-san peered into the front room of his suite where he saw three frightening creatures. Then he proceeded to blink and pinch himself several times.

“Those drinks must be getting to my head. This can’t be possible,” he whispered silently.

One of the creatures shot its head around right in his direction. Almost simultaneously, he sped silently to the closet and hid under a blanket.

“What is it, Chiba?”

“I thought I heard something in there.”

Taiki-san heard the voices come closer. He had to force his body to stay completely still which was a hard thing to do considering that he was high as a kite. They were right outside of the closet he was hiding in. The creatures were breathing very heavily and Taiki-san thought he heard sniffing as well. He heard what sounded like extremely sharp claws scrape across the closet door as if they were trying to find something.

“I swear I heard a voice.”

“It was just a false alarm. You need to get your ears checked.”

“I’ll make sure I get that done as soon as possible, Mascot.”

Then the voices died off into the distance, and Taiki-san heard his door slam shut. After he was entirely sure his life was no longer threatened, he came out of the closet (no pun intended) and ran for his phone...

\* \* \* \*

“Ah, good, when you said it was a body guarding job, I thought it was going to be a bore,” Kureno said as soon as Master Yoshida was done talking.

“I was thinking the same thing when I got the call, but it seems that this is going to be quite a challenging mission after all,” Master Yoshida added.

“Then let’s get this show on the road, I’m tired of lying around,” I said quickly.

“There is one more thing you have to know. You only have to guard them when they are alone. I’ve been told that they Shinigami won’t go after them when they’re around people.”

“Got it, c’mon guys, let’s go.”

Mao aka Nazo. :D I don't care what everybody says, he's adorable! \*smothers him with hugs\* >w<





## 2 - Hydrangea

Yaaaayyyy Passions! If anybody who is ready this wants to help me design the members of Hydrangea, please let me know. (Yes, I am aware that the members of SID are hot and perfect as the four members of Hydrangea, but they are only people whom I based the characters off of. And the band name comes from their song, Ajisai, which means Hydrangea.)

I was not as enthusiastic about this mission as Misaki was. In fact, because of my reaction to their promotional video, I was actually dreading it. Even worse than the fact that I had a strange reaction to the video was the fact that I was assigned to guard the lead singer, Nazo-san. As we rode into Tokyo in a small car, I looked over the papers Master Yoshida had given me to try and find the mistake that put me with this guy.

Name: Nazo-san

Position: Lead singer

Hair color: strawberry blonde

Eye color: golden brown

Age: 29

Birthday: October 23 (Why I needed to know that, I do not know.)

Photo:

“What are you doing, Koizumi-san?” Misaki asked as I fumbled through my paperwork.

“I’m familiarizing myself with the information,” I answered flatly.

“Oh, I see.”

“May I see your paperwork, Misaki?”

“Ummmm, alright...”

She handed me her paperwork, and I closely examined it the same way I examined my own. To my dismay, both were completely flawless.

Name: Yuusuke-san

Position: Drummer

Hair Color: black with faint blonde highlights

Eye color: brown

Age: 25

Birthday: December 9

Photo:



I was desperate; I had to find a mistake somewhere. Junichiro looked at me from the front passenger seat.

“Koizumi-sempai, is everything alright?” he asked with concern.

“I need Kureno’s paperwork,” I demanded.

“A-a-alright.” He handed me Kureno’s paperwork, and Kureno looked away from the road just long enough to glare at Junichiro.

Back then, I thought that Kureno did not like to talk much, because he was shy. What I read in his paperwork surprised me quite a bit. They said that he was assigned to Taiki-san, because he was the strongest member of our team, and Taiki-san was in the most danger. I was rendered speechless by this. I couldn’t believe that someone as shy as Kureno could be so powerful.

Anyway, the rest of his paperwork was quite unhelpful. It was just as perfect as Misaki’s and mine.

Name: Taiki-san

Position: Bassist

Hair Color: Black with blonde highlights in his bangs or golden blonde (it varies)

Eye Color: brown

Age: 25

Birthday: February 3

Photo:

I was starting to feel discouraged. It seemed that there was no mistaking it. I was stuck with Nazo-san. I seized Junichiro's paperwork. In my hands was my last chance at finding even the slightest imperfection. All at once, my chances were brought down to none. Junichiro's paperwork was indeed flawless.

Name: Yamada-san

Position: Guitarist

Hair Color: black or brown depending on the day

Eye Color: dark brown

Age: 27

Birthday: February 8

Photo:

The four of them were scheduled to play at the Nippon Budokan in central Tokyo in the week that followed our arrival. Master Yoshida told us this would be the night that the Shinigami would most likely choose as their night of attack. The prime suspects in this mystery were the three members of the heavy metal band, Bloody Petals. Those three were about the scariest looking band I'd ever seen.

As our car rolled into the parking lot, my heart sunk. I was thinking of how my heart would soon be broken. Oh well, at least I would look good doing it. I was very happy with the clothes we had been given. I had been given worn out blue jeans with holes in the knees and a dark red, sleeveless zip up shirt with a hood. Misaki and I both wore high-heeled Chuck Taylors as well.

"Where are we meeting them?" Misaki asked excitedly.

Junichiro spoke up, "In Taiki-san's suite...the scene of the crime."

"Would you please stop trying to sound dramatic?" I groaned.

"What's with you, Koizumi-sempai? I thought you were excited about finally having a mission after ten years of being dead."

"Yeah, I was until Misaki saw our clients."

"She'll get over it."

I let out a long, loud sigh, fixed my hair, and opened the car door. I slowly slipped the guitar, which was given to me to complete my ensemble, onto my back, and slowly walked into the hotel with my teammates. Oh, what a mess!

I didn't see any of the hotel lobby...save for the floor. I didn't want my teammates to see the look of fear that showed on my face. Thankfully, I was able to make it disappear before we reached the elevator. By the time we were standing at the door of Taiki-san's suite, any sign of fear or nervousness had disappeared from my façade.

I slowly opened the door and the four of them were sitting right there. They looked exactly the same as they had in the pictures, well, except for Taiki-san. In his picture, the number of piercings he had on his face was not as apparent as it was in person. To tell the truth, I hadn't even noticed any in the picture. Junichiro elbowed my side, "Konichiwa!"

The one who I thought must be Yuusuke-san looked at us with confusion, "Who...?"

Taiki-san elbowed Yuusuke-san much like Junichiro had just done to me, "The bodyguards, Yuusuke." Yuusuke-san laughed. "Konichiwa, bodyguards!" Then he stood, bowed several times, and smiled. He had a very sweet smile.

Yuusuke-san actually seemed like an incredibly sweet and funny person. His hair was black, but there were no faint blonde highlights. Instead, he had one small strand of hair hanging just off his shoulder that was dyed bright red. I also noticed that he was visibly more muscular than the other three.

Misaki's eyes lit up, "Yuusuke-san?"

"Hai!" He bowed again.

"So, you're the body I'll be guarding. I'm Misaki." She held out her hand and he shook it.

The next one to stand up was Taiki-san.

Kureno came forward, "Taiki-san?"

He nodded.

"Kureno..." he didn't hold out his hand or even look at him.

Taiki-san blinked, "I'm sorry if I've offended you, Kureno-san."

Misaki forced Kureno to shake hands with Taiki-san. "Don't let him bother you. Kureno-sempai is just shy."

I spoke up, "Misaki, I don't think shy is the right term."

It was then that I realized that it wasn't "the four of them". Every male eye in the room was fixed on me, and none of them belonged to Nazo-san. The one whom I figured must be Yamada-san was talking quietly to himself and thought I couldn't hear him.

"Hmmm, all that is left is the hot girl and the nerd. I hope I don't get the nerd," he whispered. I rolled my eyes, "Yamada-san, this is Junichiro. He gets nervous sometimes." I pushed Junichiro forward.

He bowed, "Konichiwa."

"I have such bad luck," Yamada-san mumbled to himself.

"Ummm, excuse me. Where is Nazo-san?" I asked, looking around the room once more.

Yuusuke-san let out a small chuckle, "That was quite horrible timing on his part, wasn't it?"

He made his way over to the bathroom, and Misaki walked over to me.

"Koizumi-sempai, you got the cute one," she whispered close to my ear.

I rolled my eyes again. Then I heard Yuusuke-san whisper into the bathroom, "Nazo-kun, your bodyguard is hot."

I heard Nazo-san giggle in the bathroom, and the door opened. At that moment, I looked at Nazo-san for the very first time. He was wearing a cute little hat with sunglasses sitting on the top. His eyes were red, and he looked as if he hadn't slept for days. Moments after he walked into the room I realized that I had a smile on my face, and I quickly hid it before anyone noticed. Nazo-san scratched the back of his head, "Konichiwa....uhhh...."

"It's Koizumi," I said quickly, holding my hand out.

"Nice to meet you." he looked at my hand confusedly for a moment and then shook it.

Yamada-san turned away from the rest of us, "So, now that we're all introduced..."

The four of them exchanged glances, and the three that were standing sat down. I could see that they were trying to figure out which one of us was going to do all the talking. Yuusuke-san offered a seat to Misaki and I. he seemed like quite the gentleman. I hoped the others would be the same.

"We have questions that need answering," Taiki-san said, looking at each of us.

I smiled and looked up at the ceiling, "Ask away and we will try our best to give you the answers you are looking for."

"What were those things?!" He automatically turned serious and started having a panic attack.

"You mean the things that attacked you? Those were death gods or, as you might know them, Shinigami."

"I thought Shinigami didn't exist."

"They do exist, but it took quite a while for people to find out about them."

"If I hadn't seen them myself, I wouldn't believe you."

I laughed. "We get that a lot."

Nazo-san turned to me with a look of confusion on his face, "Do you have missions like this often?"

"It's our specialty."

"Ah, I see."

Junichiro stepped forward away from his spot on the wall.

"I don't mean to interrupt or anything, but it's getting late, and I remember reading that you have a practice tomorrow morning," he said quietly.

"Ah, he's right, we do," Yamada-san, sighed, getting up.

Aki! Aki is Taiki-san. I think he has a really sweet face. (but he has a piercing on his nipple? :0)





### 3 - Day 1 with Nazo-san

Chapter 3 of Passions-Day 1 with Nazo-san. (Emi-chan cannot separate this into days. Day 3 is waaaaay too long. XD)

I rose with the others, and followed Nazo-san to his room. He didn't look at me or even acknowledge my existence as he walked silently through the hall. I was starting to feel nervous again. He appeared to be quite nervous as well. As soon as the door closed completely, he turned to me and started to speak, but I interrupted him.

"I want to get my little speech over with before anything else is said," I said loudly.

A look of embarrassment spread across his face, and his cheeks turned a light shade of pink.

"Oh, a-alright. Go ahead," he stuttered as he stuck his hands in his pockets and looked at the floor.

"Why don't you make yourself comfortable? You look a little tense."

"I'm fine."

"If you say so...Well, the first and probably the most important item of discussion is that of secrets. There can be no secrets. Even something you think is completely trivial could make the biggest impact on your life."

"Got it. Is there anything else?"

"Well, would you rather I stay out in the open or make myself invisible?"

"Considering the circumstances...umm...I think it would be better if you stayed out in the open." He nearly made the last word sound like a question.

I laughed darkly, "I suppose they would attack you either way since we're dealing with Shinigami."

"Uhhh..." he paused.

I looked up at him curiously. "Yes?"

"Back in Taiki-kun's room....did you...have a strange feeling..."

"Not a single one....why do you ask?"

"You just seemed sort of confused."

"I did not." My words were flat and emotionless. They appeared to be turning him off which was what they were intended to do.

"Whatever..."

"Aren't you supposed to be sleeping?"

"What about you?" he questioned.

"The second I fall asleep is the second I'm needed...I don't sleep."

"I'm not tired." He folded his arms across his chest.

"I don't get paid enough for this," I mumbled inaudibly.

"Huh?"

"Nothing..."

"I'm going to take a shower."

"Have fun."

Within seconds, he was in the bathroom. It seemed like he half slammed the door. He was frustrated...I could tell. At the time, I didn't know exactly why, but I had a few guesses.

"Damn..." I said aloud after I heard the shower start.

Somehow, he knew I was lying. He didn't even know me, but he knew I was lying. For a split second, just the thought that he knew I was lying made me question the laws that had been laid down for us

entities. We were never truly free. We were not permitted to love or make friends with mortal humans. It seemed like the best way for us to live.

As I questioned it, I had a vision of my past. I remembered talking with my grandfather while watching a princess movie. I was five years old at the time. "When will I fall in love?" I had asked him. He answered me with a sweet smile, saying, "You will meet a person who, though you don't know him at all, you trust with your soul. You would feel comfortable telling him anything." though his friends often teased him, I believed that my grandfather was a genius. He was absolutely right, but I did not want him to be right this time. I decided that I was going to fight this for as long as I possibly could. There was no way I was going to break out sacred law.

"Koizumi-san!"

I sprang back to life and jumped to my feet. I had fallen asleep. Nazo-san was standing before me in nothing but a towel...I didn't look.

"I thought you didn't sleep," he laughed.

"Put some clothes on!" I commanded quickly.

My command was forceful enough to send him scampering into the bedroom. When he came back in, he was clothed decently. I started to speak before he had a chance to open his mouth.

"I wasn't sleeping," I said in my same, flat voice. Right after I spoke, I wished I hadn't.

"It looked like you were sleeping to me," he stated.

"I was having a vision. Whenever we come upon a situation which requires prior knowledge, we regain memories of the past."

"That's quite interesting." He waited for me to continue.

"I'm not telling you anything more."

"Very well...I'm going to bed."

"That's very nice."

He went back into the bedroom, half slamming the door again. This was the beginning of a very uneventful night. There was no sign of our Shinigami assassins anywhere. To pass the time I thought of my grandfather. I don't think I ever called him Grandfather on time in my life. He had a nickname, but, at the time, I couldn't seem to remember what it was. The thought that I couldn't remember it bothered me all night.

Yuya-kun aka Yuusuke-san. XD XD XD You can't tell it from the picture, but Yuya-san is a big goofball.







## 4 - Day 2 with Nazo-san

Daaaaaay 2! Long, but still not as long as day 3. I don't even have day 3 all typed yet.

By the time the sun had risen, I felt sick. Fighting this thing was a lot harder than I had thought it was going to be, but I wasn't giving up so easily. There was no time to dwell on my upset stomach. I would just have to shake it off.

A phone rang in the bedroom. That was Nazo-san's wakeup call. I heard him rise from his bed and lethargically dress himself. When he came out of the bedroom, a pair of large sunglasses masked his eyes. I stood and looked at him indirectly.

"Ohayo," I said with an expressionless face.

"Ohayo gozaimasu, Koizumi-san," he answered tiredly.

"Try not to sound too enthusiastic."

He waved his hands in the air. "Woo! I get to sing!"

"That's better."

While the four members of Hydrangea practiced, I conversed with my three teammates. They all seemed quite enthusiastic about this mission (well, as enthusiastic as Kureno can be). They all noticed that I was acting strange.

"Koizumi-sempai, do you have something on your mind?" Misaki asked curiously.

"I feel like something's coming...something big," I answered.

"Are we talking future past here or regular, normal future?"

"I'm pretty sure we're talking about both."

Her eyes widened. "This IS going to be something big!"

If you are confused right now, you're not alone. The future past is where we came from. This is probably the most confusing aspect of our existence. Even I am confused by it. I will try to explain it to the best of my abilities. From what I have been told, we are born from mortal humans as mortal humans. I apologize in advance if your brain explodes from this statement, but the way Master Yoshida explained it, time goes on in the same cycle for all of eternity. The age we are when we are recruited for this job is the age we are when we meet ourselves. As a child, we are taken back in time so that we may maintain the passage of events.

"Koizumi-sempai, are you still listening?"

I suddenly realized that I was idle. I quickly sprang back to life.

"Were you thinking about the future past again?" Misaki giggled.

"Yeah... you think maybe I could be close to meeting myself?" I asked quizzically.

"Or maybe you are going to have an encounter with a family member?"

"I did have a vision earlier last night about my grandfather."

Kureno looked up suddenly. A suspicious grin spread across his face.

"How do you know it pertains to your normal future?" he asked strangely.

"I just have a feeling," I answered.

"He can see the future, Koizumi-sempai," Misaki whispered in my ear.

I groaned. "Oh, so Kureno-kun already knows what's going to happen!"

A small snicker escaped his throat. "Hai!"

Junichiro spoke up, "I don't think Yamada-san likes me very much."

I laughed out loud. "Junichiro, you're lucky. I think Nazo-san likes me a bit too much."

“Are you acting just as cross as you normally do?”

“Even more than I normally do.”

Kureno looked at me again. “He’s probably trying to get some emotion out of you.”

Misaki laughed. “You can act quite emotionless sometimes.”

“I do that on purpose. When emotion is not present, friendship has no ground to thrive on.”

“It’s hard not to make friends with our clients though,” she whined.

“That’s not the case with all of them...unless they’ve chosen you. If friendship bore the same punishment as love, you would be burning in hell right now.”

She frowned. “I guess I’m just too personable for my own good.”

I sighed, “How many years did Soeki say we were getting for this mission?”

Junichiro lifted his head, “I heard her say we were getting five years for the mission, and that’s only if we kill the Shinigami.”

“How much of that is for putting up with the band members?”

“I’d say probably about two months of it...you get decent pay when you kill a Shinigami.”

“That isn’t nearly enough years considering how troublesome it is to baby sit these kids.”

“Well, their security didn’t pay Master Yoshida very well...”

Kureno laughed, “Troublesome? Koizumi-chan, something tells me you are going to change your mind about our clients before this job is over.”

I jumped to my feet and pointed an accusing finger right into Kureno’s face. “Don’t you say one more word about the future! The things you are seeing will NEVER come true!”

I turned and angrily stormed out of the room. I didn’t want to hear what Kureno had to say. He was only going to tell me how Nazo-san and I were going to fall helplessly in love. The part where I go to hell was something I couldn’t stand to hear about. My eyes filled with tears. Nazo-san could not become the single black mark on my nearly perfect record, but a promotion was the only hope I had left. I decided that I was going to continue to fight my fate even though I knew it would be fruitless.

As I turned to walk back into the room, I collided with Misaki, who had been standing behind me.

“Woah! Are you alright?!” I exclaimed, steadying myself.

“I’m okay, Koizumi-sempai,” she giggled.

“Why are you out here?”

“I wanted to make sure you were okay...have you been crying?”

“Misaki...I’m damned.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I shouldn’t have listened to Kureno.”

“Oh, c’mon, he was only teasing you. There’s no need to be worried.”

“He’s not one to tease. Most of the time, Kureno-kun tells the truth.”

“But, sempai, how can you be damned? You don’t give mortal humans a chance to LIKE you.”

“You remember me talking about the vision I had about my grandfather?”

“Yeah, what about it?”

“Well, he was telling me what it will feel like when I meet my soul mate.”

“That sounds quite suspicious. Maybe you’ll fall in love with your grandfather.” She began to laugh hysterically and I whacked her upside the head.

“Misaki, I’m serious!”

“So, are you trying to say that this is one of those love at first sight things?”

“I’m saying that it could be, but I’ve decided that I’m going to fight it.”

“But isn’t it sort of a waste of time if you already know your fate?”

“Yes, but I’d rather be stupid than in hell.”

“You know it won’t save you.”

"I know..."

"So, what can you do?"

"I can refuse to let him get through to me until I find some way to get a promotion."

"Good luck with that. They've stuck with the same four ninja for so many years that I've lost count."

"I think there are more than four."

"But, sempai, the number on your grave is five, so there couldn't possibly be more than four."

"Yes, buy Kureno-kun came to us from the fourth grave. I would have been next in line for a promotion."

"That's the part I can't figure out."

I looked past her. "I bet it's one of those "need to know" type things that we usually end up learning about anyway."

"Maybe..."

In order to become a first rate ninja, one must master a single element, and be able to significantly control it in a powerful attack. In other words, we learn to use magic. To be able to control our element, we must immerse ourselves in it. I was at a slight disadvantage, because my element was electricity, also known as lightning. I was at a disadvantage because I was no troubled youth who enjoys pain. The easiest ways to immerse myself in electricity included sitting at the top of a telephone pole, licking light sockets, and standing in the middle of an open field with a metal rod during a thunderstorm. None of these activities sounded like very much fun to me.

Later in the day, Nazo-san had some time off. The two of us sat in his hotel room, doing basically nothing. It was in this time that I began to think things I probably shouldn't have.

"Koizumi-san, do you play shogi#?" he asked in a bored tone.

"Not really. I never had time to learn," I answered flatly.

"I could teach you."

I wanted to try to avoid contact with him as much as possible. "Is this what you usually do when you have time off?"

"I just didn't want to be too much of a burden to you..." he looked down.

I couldn't look at his sad little face without feeling at least a small amount of pity. Sitting there, looking at him, I began to look at this situation from his perspective. I knew that already been too long. I knew that, if I were to go to hell because of him, he would be heartbroken. I decided that it would be wrong for me to break his heart. That was the moment I began to fall in love with him, and, all at once, I was fighting for a very different future.

"Nazo-san, let's go shopping," I said suddenly.

"You want to go shopping?" he questioned doubtfully.

"Yeah, why not?" I almost smiled.

"Are you sure it won't be too troublesome for you?"

"Well, being out and about does make an attack more likely, but I think that just makes things more interesting."

"Really?"

"Of course."

"Okay, let's go shopping."

Nazo-san had cheered up quite a bit. I could tell he liked to shop. We went around to several stores. I was able to make a few purchases. At the end of our little trip, I had bought a cheap lamp, some light bulbs, and a pair of scissors. Nazo-san was quite puzzled# by my odd purchases.

"Koizumi-san, why did you buy all this?" he asked confusedly.

"I'm going to try a little experiment tonight," I answered.

"Oh really?" he sounded curious.

"I'll be starting as soon as you're asleep, so don't try to stay up and watch."

“What kind of experiment?” He pretty much ignored my previous statement.

“All you need to know is that, if it succeeds, you will have a smaller chance of getting killed.”

“Hmm, maybe I should go to bed earlier.”

“It’s way too early now. It’s the middle of the afternoon.”

“Can I teach you how to play Shogi now?”

I almost smiled. “Each of my teammates are going to call me to report in about a minute. Then I have to step out of the room and report to my master. After that, I’ll let you teach me how to play Shogi.”

*\* Shogi- Shogi is like a Japanese version of chess, but we play chess too. Do not ask me, I’m not very good at Shogi.*

*\* Haha! What a funny little pun! “Nazo-san was quite puzzled?!” (Nazo means puzzle or riddle.) Well, I guess that sometimes the puzzle puzzles itself.*

“Yay!” He clapped his hands together cutely.

“I take it you like to play Shogi.”

“Well, I’m pretty good at it. The only person I can’t seem to beat is my grandfather.”

“That is quite impressive.”

He smiled very cutely. At the same moment, my cell phone rang. Each report lasted exactly two minutes, and each began directly after the one before...just like clockwork. Each report was also perfect, aka boring. Not a Shinigami in sight. It’s never fun when the mission had no conflict. I sighed and walked out into the hall to deliver the boring news.

I swear the phone didn’t ring for two seconds. “Konbanwa#, Koizumi-san!” Soeki exclaimed.

“Soeki, can we please just get to my report?” I sighed.

“But Koizumi-san, I want to know how you have been! I heard you were working on mastering your element. How are you doing?!”

“If you really must know, I haven’t even begun to train yet, and I’d like to get this report over with.”

“Oh, I’m sorry! Get right to your report.”

“We’ve had no contact with the Shinigami. So far, all is well.”

“That’s good. Master Yoshida wanted me to let you know that you won’t need to report every day.”

“So, he wants me to report only when I feel it is necessary?”

“That is correct. He also wanted to make sure I told you that he would prefer you had experience with your mind ability before he promotes you.”

“I understand.”

“Good luck, Koizumi-san!”

“Thank you.”

The phone flipped shut, and I waked back into the room.

“I’m sorry, Nazo-san, but there’s been a change of plans,” I said as I walked to my bag and pulled out a small, travel size amp.

“No Shogi?” he questioned disappointedly.

“I’m afraid not. I have training I need to complete.”

“What are you going to do?” he had a look of concern on his face.

“Don’t worry; I’ll make this fun for the both of us.”

I walked back over to the couch and reached for my guitar. All right, I know I said that the guitar was only a prop, but I lied. I love to play the guitar...well, not just any guitar. My guitar was a glossy black Stratocaster with the outline of Santana painted on it. He was my most favorite guitarist. I even named my guitar Carlos.

“You’re going to play the guitar?” he asked curiously.

“Yeah, sort of,” I answered hesitantly.

“Do you like to play guitar?”

"No, I love to play guitar."

"Oh, good. I was beginning to think that guitar was only a prop."

"No, actually I've been playing since I was a little girl."

"So, what kind of training are you doing that involves playing the guitar?"

"Mind training. I'm going to play my guitar without touching it."

His eyes got big. "You can do that?!"

"Well, I can. Each of us had a unique mind power. Mine is the power to move things with my mind."

"Cool!"

I smiled. "Hey, do you know this one?"

I closed my eyes and felt the strings with my mind. Then I played the solo of "Black Magic Woman" without laying a finger on the strings.

Nazo-san shook his head and frowned. "No, I don't think so."

"No? Hmmmm..." I thought for a moment, then smiled again. "You might know this one."

I closed my eyes again and slowly strummed the opening of "Free bird" with my mind.

*\* good evening*

He smiled excitedly. "It's Free bird!"

I nodded. "That's right!"

"Yay!" he clapped his hands together again.

"I'm not sure if you would know any more of the songs I like."

"You might be surprised by the amount of songs I know."

"I might be, but I doubt we'll have time to find out."

"What makes you say that?"

"Look at the time."

He glanced over at the clock and jumped up.

"I guess it's about time for me to be going to bed," he said, scampering into the bedroom.

"Nazo-san..." I called.

"Yeah?" he poked his head into the room.

"Good night."

A smile spread across his face. "Good night, Koizumi-san."

He happily closed the door, and I heard him skip off to bed. A few minutes later, I stood up.

"Alright, time to get this over with," I sighed.

There was one simple goal I hoped to achieve with this experiment, and that was to electrocute the hell out of myself. I had to become the aforementioned troubled youth who finds joy in their own pain.

Because of my abilities, sending a dangerous electric current through my body would never kill me, but, until I got used to it, it would cause much pain through my body. I had to make certain that I did not scream, because I didn't want to wake Nazo-san.

I began by slipping a pocketknife out of my shoe, and cutting the black protective cover on the plug of the lamp. This left the silver wires that attached the lamp to the plug exposed. Next, I carefully broke one of the light bulbs over the trashcan, and screwed it in the lamp. The only thing left to do was plug in my little "torture device".

I hovered above the lamp for several minutes. The low, electric hum of the lamp was causing me to have second thoughts. The thought of how much more painful hell would be drove me to persevere. I shoved my hand into the broken light bulb with such force that I broke the wire, sending an even more powerful shock through my body. I nearly yelped, but stopped myself just in time.

I was in pain for only a minute. Then the pain turned to a feeling of raw power. I felt almost dangerous.

As soon as the feeling was gone, my phone rang. I picked it up and answered it with shaky hands.

"Who is this?" I asked quietly.

"Koizumi, proceed with caution," came the voice of my master from the other end of the receiver.

"What do you mean, master?"

"If you absorb too much power at one time, you will have to release some, and that could be a potential danger to the people around you."

"So, you're saying that I have to do this slowly?"

"Precisely."

"But, I don't have that kind of time."

"Well, you'll have to decide that for yourself. I trust you'll make a wise choice."

"Master Yoshida, I don't mean to sound rude, but I'm pretty sure you don't fully understand the position I am in at this time."

"I do."

"You do?"

"Koizumi, Nazo-san isn't the only one who has noticed your sudden, extreme change in attitude. I noticed yesterday when I woke you."

"Are you going to take me off of this mission?"

"No...I need you on this mission. Here, at this time, I am faced with a very difficult decision. Koizumi, you are one of the very best Kunoichi# I have ever recruited. I don't think I can afford to loose you, but I can't put you above the sacred law."

*\* female ninja*

"Give me a goal, Master. Is it possible to finish this training by the time they play Budokan?"

He was silent for about a minute. "You can...the key is rigor. Make sure you work all night, every night. I'll give you a goal. When you can use your phone without the battery, I'll promote you."

"Easier said than done. I'll have to absorb a lot of electricity to do that."

"Then I suggest you get busy. I'm not making this any easier for you. Tell me, are you doing this for yourself, or for Nazo-san?"

I paused. "Ask me at the end of the week. I'm not sure I know right now."

"I know what you will say. There hasn't been a Kunoichi yet who hasn't faced this challenge at least one time in their life. They all say essentially the same thing."

"Yes, but I didn't have much of a choice."

"You will say it; regardless of weather you had a choice. Now, get to work."

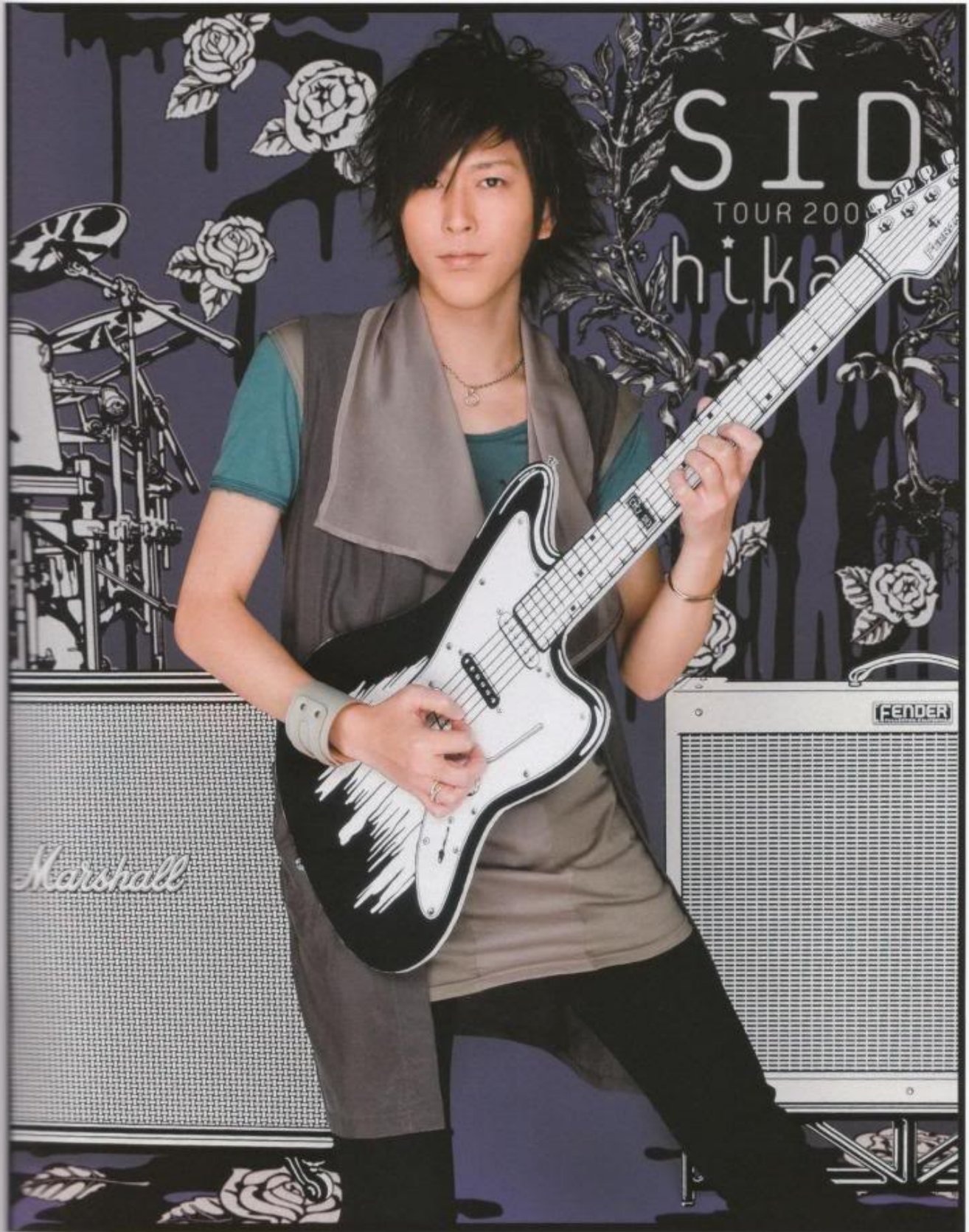
"Yes, Master."

I rushed back over to my torture device. Not knowing where to begin, I placed each finger on the cord, one at a time. I started to notice that the more I touched the cord, the more the strands of electricity began to stick to me like spider webs. It was a strange, but painful sensation. Every time I brushed against the wire, an electric blue explosion tickled my hand. My brain and my voiced whimpered in protest, but my heart pushed me forward.

Ahhhh! That was the longest chapter ever! :O

Shinji-san, aka Yamada-san. Shinji-san is allergic to everything and he has hamsters. ^^ He's very laid back unless he starts drinking. (then he's as bad as Yuya-san. Did Emi-chan mention that beer is Yuya-kun's favorite thing in the world?)







## 5 - The Epiphany and the First Date

Day 3.....part one -0- The epiphany and the first date.

When the sun's first rays shone through the blinds, I was numb, and my hands were covered with scars. A bloodstained piece of a sheet was tied around my left thumb, which was black and bleeding profusely. I quickly wrapped up my hands and put on a pair of fingerless gloves so that Nazo-san wouldn't see. I liked fingerless gloves because they provided another place to hide a weapon. Just as I slid both gloves on, the bedroom door opened.

"Ohayo, Koizumi-san," Nazo-san yawned.

I let out a small giggle, "Just 'ohayo' today?"

"Oh! I'm very sorry!"

"It doesn't really matter to me. You're older than I am, so, really, I would be the rude one."

"Hmm? How old are you?" He rubbed his eyes sleepily.

"I'll be twenty six in about two months."

He looked as if he was meditating on just one thought. "Oh! We don't have practice today!"

"You seem excited. Do you not like singing?"

"Oh no! I love singing! It's just...yesterday I saw you leave our practice. You looked upset."

My cheeks unexpectedly turned a light shade of pink. "You saw that?"

"Yeah..."

"I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings. Actually, I left because I was very frustrated with one of my teammates."

He breathed a sigh of relief. "It's quite alright. It shouldn't really matter to me anyway. You're entitled to your own opinion." He patted my shoulder and looked down at his feet....

I blushed again. "So, what are we going to do today?"

"I would say play Shogi, but that activity seems to be jinxed...."

I looked down at my watch. "Well, I do think I need to talk to Kureno-kun. Why don't you go get dressed and invite Taiki-san to your room?"

"To play Shogi with him?"

"Yes, and so I can talk to Kureno-kun."

"O-okay..." He seemed disappointed. It didn't occur to me that he might only want to play Shogi so he could play Shogi with me.

"I'll be right back." I stood and walked into the bathroom. My hair looked fine (as opposed to looking like I stuck my finger in a light socket), but my left thumb looked a little swollen. It didn't look bad enough that anyone just glancing would notice it though. When I walked out Kureno and Taiki-san walked in the door. Kureno seemed quite annoyed for some reason.

"Kureno-kun?" I looked at him confusedly.

He hurried over to me and glared straight into my eyes, "Do you have any idea what I was put through last night?!"

"Umm..." I blinked and backed away.

He held up his right hand which was covered by a glove. "I stood there at the sink all night, lighting my hand on fire over and over again!"

"Well, I didn't have such a peaceful night either. Why are you blaming me?" I folded my arms across my chest.

“Master Yoshida is making me do it because of you!”

“Haven’t you already learned enough?”

“No, but he thought I had when he promoted me. I chose to stay dead anyway, so it didn’t make a difference to me.”

“So, you found a reason to start working hard again?”

“Yes...” He looked away.

“So, it’s not really my fault. Master Yoshida is just pushing you farther.”

“He wants us to be promoted together though.”

I looked away from Kureno. “What is going on at the temple?”

He sighed. “You better sit down.”

I sat on the couch next to Nazo-san, who looked a bit worried.

“Should we cover our ears?” he asked, poking his ear.

It doesn’t matter as long as you don’t tell anyone,” I answered, patting his head.

“Okay.” He smiled cutely.

I looked back at Kureno who was looking at Nazo-san.

“Just tell me what’s going on,” I sighed.

“Why so cross all of the sudden, Koizumi-chan?” he scoffed.

“Kureno-kun, I know what you’re thinking.”

“You read minds?”

“No, that’s Junichiro.”

“You probably do know what I’m thinking though.”

“Don’t tease me. You may live to regret it.”

He laughed. “Yeah, probably, but you might not want to kill me just yet. I have information you’ll want to know.”

“Do tell.”

His voice got quiet. “In the graves of the four first class ninja, each number represents one hundred ninja.”

“I knew it!” I exclaimed quietly.

He gave me a look of confusion. “You knew it?”

“It was my theory.”

“Ah, I see. Anyway, currently the individuals in grave number one are experiencing a power struggle.”

“A power struggle?!”

“Yes, a power struggle.”

“You mean there’s violence, I’m alive, and I’m not a part of it?!”

“They aren’t fighting each other...”

“What do you mean?”

“Master Yoshida thinks that Tsuyoshi may be involved.”

“Tsuyoshi? Isn’t he the master of the Shinigami?”

“Yes, which means that they are dealing with masters of impersonation.”

“So, the power struggle is really between ninja and Shinigami.... What happened to the ninja they are impersonating?”

“We don’t know yet...they’re probably dead.”

“Is this what we are going to have to deal with after we are promoted?”

“No, but we’ll need to stay vigilant.”

“One more question. Why are we talking so quietly?”

“For dramatic effect.”

My voice returned to its normal volume. “Wow...” I seriously considered slapping him upside the head.

"I'm sorry...so, what kind of self inflicted pain were you put through last night?"

"That's a personal question. If I tell you, I get to ask a personal question too."

"That's not...how is that a personal question?!"

"You can learn a lot about a person from the element they control."

"Alright..."

"If you must know, I sat in the corner electrocuting myself all night."

"Stay away from Nanami."

I paused. "Who's Nanami?"

"The female Shinigami...stay away from her," he sighed, "I'm probably wasting my breath. You're such a stubborn, trigger happy child."

"I am not so ignorant that I can't tell that about myself."

"I know..."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Just ask your question."

"Alright...hmm...what was it that compelled you to work hard on your training again?"

"I can't tell you that. I'll answer any question but that one."

"You're hiding something, aren't you?"

"I'm not hiding anything that would affect any of you...."

"What if we considered you a friend?"

"It still wouldn't affect you."

"How do I know I can trust you?"

He stopped suddenly, grasped my shoulders, and closed his eyes. "Trust me, Koizumi-chan, trust me. You would be better off if you didn't get involved in the madness that comes after you've given your heart to another. If you succeed here, you may never have to."

Every eye in the room was on Kureno. Taiki-san's showed confusion, Nazo-san's, realization, and mine, frustration.

"How long have you known?" I asked like a convicted criminal.

"I've known longer than you have...I'm sorry, Koizumi-chan, have I said too much?"

"Yes, and I think it's high time you left."

"I agree, but that is not my decision, is it?"

Taiki-san stood, "we can finish our game of Shogi later, Nazo-kun."

Nazo-san almost laughed, "We hadn't even started yet."

"Oh, then we can start our game of Shogi. C'mon, Kureno-san." He walked toward the door.

The room remained silent long after Kureno and Taiki-san had left. I felt as if I had been frozen to the couch. I could feel Nazo-san's eyes gazing upon me. My body was beginning to feel numb. The dead silence caused my will to beg him to speak.

He seemed to hear my mind screaming, because he automatically began to speak.

"K-koizumi-san...what was the real purpose of your experiment?" he asked timidly.

I looked at the floor, "Nazo-san, you are much smarter than you appear to be. I was hoping you wouldn't understand what Kureno-kun was saying."

"Well, I may be wrong, but it seems to me that your experiment and what Kureno-san said about giving your heart to another are closely related."

"You're right, they are related."

"Which must mean that...you have fallen in love with one of the people you've come in contact with during this mission."

"The thing you have to understand about this is that, for us, falling in love with a mortal human is considered a very bad thing. Originally, I knew I was going to meet my fated partner, but I was wanted to

resist the strong tug of love and friendship toward disaster.”

“Meaning you don’t want to resist anymore?”

“At this point, I couldn’t resist even if I wanted to....”

“Why did you want to resist?”

“I thought it wasn’t worth the punishment...actually, I still don’t think it’s worth the punishment.”

“Ummm...I don’t mean to sound nosy, but, who’s the lucky guy?”

I grinned. “You’ll have to find out for yourself.”

“I think I already have, but I don’t want to be wrong....”

I looked straight into his eyes...an act that would surely lead to certain death. “I don’t think you’re wrong.”

He glanced down at my hand. “I’m starting to think the same thing...”

My eyes shot down to my hand, and I saw that his hand was touching mine. “Nazo-san...”

“Sorry!” he quickly brought both hands up to his face and blushed with embarrassment.

I could tell very clearly that Nazo-san wasn’t nervous. He was holding back, because he knew I was nervous. All I had to do was make it known that I was completely confident, and Nazo-san would hold back no longer. My hand moved slowly up to hold his, but he beat me to it. He held my hand close to his face. Then he jumped and put my hand back down.

“I’m sorry. I guess being cooped up in here is making me a little crazy,” he squeaked.

“its fine, do you want to go out?” I asked with concern.

“Only if you want to.”

“Well, it was fun yesterday, but I only get a small amount of spending money for each mission.”

“We could go get some lunch.”

“I don’t know, it still costs money.”

“I’ll treat you.”

“Treat me?”

“Yeah.” He nodded.

“Nazo-san, “treat” is a ninja’s favorite word. If you ask a ninja out to eat and say you’ll treat them, they will never say no. thank you so much.”

“It’s nothing really. Hmm, you say “treat” is a ninja’s favorite word? I bet Misaki-san is very happy right now.”

“Does Yuusuke-san like to treat?”

“He does, but he treats too much and never has any money left for himself.” We both laughed.

“Yuusuke-san seems like a very sweet person.”

“That’s one way to put it.”

I stood. “What does that mean?”

He also stood and reached for his bag. “He’s a big goofball.”

“I thought he might be.”

“Are you ready to go?”

“Yeah.”

Nazo-san opened the door, and, weather he was aware of it or not, we walked, hand in hand, out of the hotel. He had put his sunglasses on and (I guess) was (kind of) trying to look cool. I couldn’t help but giggle. He looked cute!

“What are you laughing at?” he asked with a smile.

“You want the truth?” I raised my eyebrows.

“Of course I want the truth.” He giggled.

“That look on your face was so cute!”

He grinned happily. “You think I’m cute?”

“Yes...very cute.”

He hugged me, lifted me off the ground, and spun around in a circle. “You’re cute!”

“Woah! That was sudden!”

His cute grin turned to a mischievous one. “I’m still recovering.”

“I don’t mean to sound rude or anything, but I hope you don’t.”

As I walked with him, I didn’t come to the realization that this was the moment my grandfather had told me about. It seemed natural to me...like I had been with Nazo-san my entire life. We grew closer and closer with each passing moment. Soon his arm was resting on my shoulders, and my head was resting against his neck.

He pointed out two restaurants as we walked. “That one has really good curry, but the one next to it has very good ramen. Hmmmm...What do you think?”

My stomach growled, and I laughed, “I think my stomach wants ramen, but I’ll let you decide since you’re paying.”

“Your stomach has good taste. Let’s get ramen.”

We were almost to the restaurant when I heard a voice that stopped me in my tracks. I grabbed hold of Nazo-san’s shirt and gently pulled him back.

“What’s wrong?” he asked rather loudly.

“Shhh! Misaki and Yuusuke-san are in there!” I exclaimed quietly.

“What’s wrong with that? Are we keeping this a secret?”

“Misaki and your three band mates cannot know about this. If they do find out...bad things will happen.”

“Bad things? What kind of bad things?”

“I’ll tell you while we are eating.”

“So, we’re going to have curry?”

“Yes.”

After we had been seated, and had ordered our food, Nazo-san began his questioning.

“Now you must tell me. What will happen if they find out about us?” he asked frankly.

“I am tempted to lie, but I will tell you the truth,” I sighed, looking down at the table.

“Is it really that bad?”

“Yes...if certain requirements are not met by the end of this mission or people find out about us, then the time I am dead will be spent in hell.”

He lifted my chin gently and looked into my eyes. “If you will meet such an evil fate, please, don’t love me. I couldn’t live with myself if I was the cause for your punishment.”

“It’s too late for that now. We must be optimistic. My master is counting on me to meet the requirements.”

“And if you meet the requirements in time, you’ll get to stay with me, right?”

“Yes, but you’re not the only reason I want to stay alive now.”

He pondered my statement for a moment. “Do you want to stay with Kureno-san?”

“Actually, the reason is something that would be very hard for you to understand. Even if I told you, you would probably think I’m insane.”

“Our bassist was attacked by a Shinigami a couple of nights ago. At this point, I’ll probably believe anything you say.”

“You do have a point there, but this will be very difficult for you to grasp.”

“I think I can handle it.”

“Alright, are you ready?”

“Hai!” He saluted in a very cute way.

“Several years from now, I am going to be born.”

“What?!” The expression on his face was priceless. I had to laugh.

"Don't try to figure it out. I don't want you to get a headache."

"Why are you laughing?"

"Because you're so cute!"

"Oh!" (This is the only way to describe his face.) ^^

"Anyway, I am going to try and simplify this as much as humanly possible. After I am born, I will live normally for five years, but, after that, I will mysteriously disappear."

"Are you from the future?" his eyes as big as dinner plates, he pointed to me with wonder.

"No, not exactly. Just allow me to explain. The five year old me will be sent to the past. That is the me you are looking at right now."

"So, there are two of you?"

"Technically, there is only one of me, but if saying there are two of me makes it less confusing for you, there are two of me. The young me has a different name...my birth name, but it isn't safe for me to tell you that at this time."

"So, Koizumi is not the name of the young you?"

"No, Koizumi isn't the name of the older me either. It's the name I use on missions to keep my identity safe."

"You have three names?"

"Yes, you may never know my birth name, but the name I go by most of the time, I can tell you now."

"Okay, tell me."

"There is a story with it. I have to explain where my name comes from."

"Tell me!"

"The five year old me reappeared about a thousand years earlier in the same spot I had disappeared. At that same moment, a young, five year old girl named Emi died of some sort of disease. I took her name as my own."

"Ah, so Emi is your name?"

"Yes."

"I know why they chose that one."

I paused. "Nazo-san, was that a pick up line?"

He covered his mouth. "Sorry, it just sort of slipped out." \*Emi=blessed with beauty\*

"No harm done."

"So, you must have spent your twenty six years on missions through history?"

'Yeah, that's pretty much right. We only age when we're alive."

"And you're twenty six?!"

"And you're twenty six?! You must have had a lot of missions through the years."

"Not all of my missions are as brief as this one. The amount of time I stay alive ranges from a week to a year."

"Oh, I see."

After our food came, Nazo-san changed the subject.

"So, Koizumi-san, now that we have gotten to know each other better, am I still Nazo-san?" he asked, reaching for his chopsticks..

"Itadakimasu!" I answered in the middle of a laugh.

An annoyed expression appeared on his face as soon as I spoke. It was as if the phrase 'Itadakimasu' had just poked his forehead..

"Itadakimasu," he sighed, "Now answer my question."

A grin spread across my face. "I've been considering Nazo-kun."

"What do you think of just plain Nazo?"

"I want to take this slowly, if that's alright with you."



“Well, I still think of you as Koizumi-san, because I don’t want you to think badly of me.”

“If you really want me to, I will call you Nazo-kun, but only when we are alone.”

“Then I will call you Koizumi-chan.” He paused for a moment. “So, who is your other reason?”

“Hmm?”

“Your other reason for wanting to stay alive.”

“That would be my grandfather. I am getting very close to the time when I am to be born, and I know he is alive somewhere in this world. This is the time period when his band became extremely famous.”

“If he’s that famous, then I should be able to find him for you. What’s his name?”

“I never really learned his real name. I always called him Chibi.”

“Chibi? Oh, that’s cute!” he laughed.

“Hey, he was a chibi. My grandfather was only five feet tall, a little chubby, and he had the cutest face.”

“Five feet? Wow, he is a chibi. Hmmm, who do I know that looks like that? So, he’s a chubby chibi, right?”

I started laughing. “I guess you could say that.”

“I do know one person like that. Is he ridiculously funny and a bit of a spaz?”

“Yeah, but he’s also quite smart.”

“Well, he could be Mitsugashi Hitomi from E.M.O.”

My eyes widened, and I gasped.

“What is it, Koizumi-chan? Did I guess right?” he asked hopefully.

“Mitsugashi is my real last name! That must be him!” I exclaimed in astonishment.

“we should go meet him. Will he recognize you?”

“You would think that, because I have not been born yet, he would not recognize me, but he will. It’s part of the magic of future past.”

“I gotta see this.”

I held up one finger. “One moment please.”

Yomi-kun/Mitsugashi Hitomi/Chibi-kun. Yomi is so adorable! Even when he tries to look and act tough, there's no way I could ever take him seriously! He's just soooooo adorable!

YOMI(Vo)





## 6 - The Vision

Super short chapter! I shall make up for it by putting pictures of people I based some of my characters off of. (all of the ninja and shinigami characters are not based off of anyone in particular.)

Day 3....part 2-The Vision

Hearing my grandfather's name triggered another vision. I ran across the room in a black and white lolita style dress, my strawberry blonde curls bouncing violently behind my ears. As I reached the end of the room, a man with a guitar appeared. That man was Sosuke, a friend of Chibi's, and the guitar was Carlos. Another man (I called him Inu-kun) was standing in the corner, not socializing as usual. I called him Inu-kun because, sometimes, his hair reminded me of dog ears.

I ran over to Sosuke, and he pulled me onto the chair next to him. Inu-kun walked over and sat on the other side of me with a smile on his face. That surprised me quite a bit. I thought of Inu-kun as the type of person who always stands in the corner, doesn't socialize, and observes everything from afar. I had never seen him smile, let alone see him interact with other people. Now he and Sosuke were teaching me how to play the guitar.

Both men had played guitar in Chibi-kun's band. Sosuke played mostly back up. At first sight, one would probably be terrified by his face, which was covered by many, many piercings, and a great deal of eyeliner. He was undoubtedly the definition of Visual Kei. No one should judge Sosuke by the way he looks. He is, most likely, the nicest and cutest acting person I know.

I could remember everything about his memory. Sosuke and Inu-kun taught me the chords to a fairly simple song, and I sat there, playing it over and over again, until my fingers turned red. I loved the way Carlos felt in my hands (even though I could barely keep him on my lap). From that moment on, I developed a strong affinity for him. He became my security blanket, my very best friend, and my fondest childhood memory.

Hitsugi/Sosuke and Sakito/Inu-kun. The two guitarists of Nightmare. Short vs. tall= cuuuuuutttee!





Teruki/Johan. Koizumi meets Johan later on at the after party of the Budokan performance. She recognizes him as the perverted drummer of her other grandfather, Kawaii-kun's, band.

Miku/Shinji/Kawaii-kun. Kawaii-kun also appears at the after party of the Budokan performance. Koizumi recognizes him as her other long lost grandfather.



Kanon Wakeshima/Rairaku-hime. Rairaku-hime is Koizumi's long lost grandmother (the wife of Kawaii-kun). She never actually appears in the story, but she is mentioned by Koizumi.

# 分島花音

はじまりの調べ

Manaプロデュースによる  
噂のチエロ・ヴォーカリスト、ついに登場!!





## 7 - The Kiss

When I regained consciousness, I could feel a hand on my shoulder, shaking me lightly. It was Nazo-san. "Koizumi-chan, I've already paid, it's time to go," he said quietly.

"Okay, okay," I replied sleepily.

He helped me up, and we walked out of the restaurant. "What was your vision about this time?"

I was still a bit disoriented. "Sosuke and Inu-kun were teaching me how to play guitar."

"Sosuke is E.M.O's guitarist, right?"

"Oh! Sorry about that. Yeah, that's right, and Inu-kun is the nickname I gave their other guitarist."

"The really tall one?"

"Yeah, that one."

"Why do you call him Inu-kun?"

"Because sometimes his hair reminded me of dog ears."

He laughed. "You give them such funny names."

"Keep in mind that I was five years old when I made up these nicknames."

"I bet you were very cute as a five year old."

"Yeah, they dressed me up in Lolita outfits all the time."

"How cute! Do I get to see the young you?"

"I don't know. I don't remember ever meeting you."

That worried me a bit. If I had any sort of future with Nazo-san, surely I would have seen him as a child. I hoped sincerely that I had only forgotten my memories of meeting Nazo-san. He sensed that I was worried and squeezed my hand.

"I'm fine. I was just worrying over nothing," I said reassuringly.

"Koizumi-chan? Can we play Shogi today?" he asked hesitantly as we entered the hotel elevator.

"Yes! We are definitely going to play Shogi today! No force on Earth can stop me from playing Shogi with you today."

"Yay!" he waved his arms in the air and clapped.

The cuteness was at such a high level I thought that, if I didn't hug him, I would spontaneously combust. He brought his hands down around me and rocked back and forth in an extremely cute manor.

"Is anyone in the hall?" he asked as the elevator doors opened.

"Nobody we know," I giggled.

"Okay, let's go!"

Nazo-san kept his arms tightly wrapped around me, and we stumbled all the way back to his hotel room.

After about a minute I convinced him that he couldn't play Shogi while I was in his arms, and he let go.

Then I slowly began to realize that I didn't want to play Shogi. The ignition of my relationship with Nazo-san had given me new incentive to train. As we sat, I could feel his loss of interest become apparent.

"Koizumi-chan...I know you're very excited to learn how to play Shogi, but I...", his eyes glanced down to the table.

"Don't worry about it, I don't want to either," I said with a smile.

"You don't?"

"Not right now. I was actually thinking of getting some training done if you don't mind staying in the bedroom."

"Oh..." he sounded quite disappointed.

“Did you have something else in mind?” I looked at him curiously.

“Yeah, but you don’t have to...”

I put a finger to his lips. “I want to do whatever you want to do.”

“It’s no big deal, I just...”

“Shh, just tell me what it is.”

“Well, I just thought it might be nice if we talked for a while. I wanted to get to know you better.”

“I think that sounds like a wonderful idea. We should talk for a while before I train. So, what do you want to know?”

“How about you tell me a story about yourself, then I’ll tell you a story about myself?”

“Sounds good to me. Is there anything in particular you want me to tell?”

“Actually, there is. I want to know about your first kiss.”

“Believe it or not, that is a story that I can actually tell...a true story.”

“I don’t think you needed to clarify. I knew you would tell the truth.”

“I was just making sure.”

“Okay, story time!” He held his feet and started rocking back and forth again.

“Here goes. Before Kureno-kun joined our team, we had another man on our team. Many years before that man left our team, we had five members...the end.”

“That was extremely vague.”

“Oh, did you want to know about the kiss?” I teased.

“You did that on purpose, didn’t you?”

“Well...sort of.”

He gave me a tackle hug, but accidentally lost his balance and fell onto his back. “You little sneak!” I had landed right on top of him, but I made no attempt to move. “I’ll tell you, if you really want to know.”

“Tell me.”

I waited for him to get situated into a more comfortable position. “Ready?”

He nodded. “I’m ready.”

“Alright, to be totally honest, I don’t even remember the guy’s name. He was very forgettable. It was during one of those “danger lurks around every corner” horror movie missions. I had received his confession long before the danger began, but, when he kissed me the danger was all around us.”

“Was that a metaphor?”

“Not one infinitesimal bit. It was meant to be taken completely literally.”

“Did you have to kill Shinigami?”

“No...I’ve never killed a Shinigami before, but I have had Shinigami training. Actually, these were a different type of paranormal criminal.”

“Go on.”

“Why are you so anxious to hear about my first kiss?” I giggled uncontrollably because, taking into consideration the amount of space between our faces was slowly decreasing, I was a bit nervous.

“You’ll see.”

I continued my story to keep myself from exploding. “We were alone together in a cave, and I was constantly complaining about the temperature. He was unusually quiet all of the sudden, and I thought he had disappeared, but, when I turned around he was right there. His face was no farther away from mine as yours is now. I blushed with surprise, and he kissed me.”

“But you didn’t kiss him back, did you?” the grin on his face was growing larger by the second.

“No, I did not. As a matter of fact I remember being infuriated by his actions. I was so infuriated that I broke his nose.”

“So you’ve been kissed, but you’ve never kissed anyone?”

"That's right, and you know what's worse? Misaki was him kiss me, and she told everyone else that we were having an affair! Then it happened again!"

"You've been kissed more than once?"

"No, only once. After that little incident, that man was demoted and sent to a lower grave. The second incident happened with the man who previously occupied the grave where Kureno now resides."

"Another confession?"

"Not at all. The bad guy had begun his long and quite ridiculous monologue. I said I loved him, but I didn't have time to get 'as a friend' out of my mouth before the enemy beheaded him. That memory is fresh in my mind, because it happened on the mission that occurred previous to this one. Misaki was the one who was infuriated this time. I never did find out why."

"So, everyone thought you were having an affair again?"

"Yeah, but that wasn't the reason he got demoted. He got demoted because he died before we had previously predicted. That is considered to be a very bad thing."

"That's strange about Misaki though. She doesn't seem like the kind of person who gets mad easily."

"She's not, and that's what worries me about what happened back there. I've never seen her so mad in my life."

"Don't worry about it. You probably weren't even the reason she was angry."

"You're right...I'm not usually like this. I guess I've just been thinking too much."

"That isn't always a bad thing."

"Oh really? Well, since you must have been doing quite a bit of thinking yourself, let's hear your story."

"Alright, but I don't really want to tell you about my first kiss. Can I tell you about my favorite kiss?"

"Was it your high school sweetheart?"

"No, it wasn't during high school. Actually I was the same age I am now."

"Really? How was it?"

"Give me a second and I'll tell you."

At that moment the space between us disappeared. Then I knew I was out of it. If my mind had been working right, I definitely would have seen that coming. I didn't question it. I just kissed him back as passionately as I possibly could. Then I found that I was having trouble stopping. Eventually I allowed him to break the kiss, gasping for air. I think I may have overdone it just a tiny bit.

"That was more than a second, "I teased, blushing and burying my face in his chest.

"I don't think it's possible to describe how beautiful that kiss was in any spoken language I know if," he said breathlessly.

"Oh, Nazo-kun, don't lie to me."

"I could never lie to you, Koizumi-chan."

"That was the first time I ever kissed a guy before, so I know you're lying."

"You must be a natural then."

"That's it. I have to train right now!" I tried to get up, but he held me there.

"Why now? You don't want to be with me?"

"No, because I love you, silly!" I giggled and kissed his nose.

He frowned. "I don't understand."

"The more I train, the greater the chance I have of being able to stay with you."

"How can I help?"

"Well, this will probably be better for you if you stay in the bedroom. I'll train for about an hour, and then we can order some room service or something."

"Sounds good to me."

"I'll see you in an hour then."

"Okay." He nodded and walked into the bedroom.

As soon as the door had closed I ran straight to my broken lamp, and plugged it in. I tried to stay as calm as I possibly could. My hands shook violently...I was still a bit nervous about getting injured by the electricity. To save my shaky thumb from being cut open again I started with the cord. I noticed that my control over the element was growing. The electricity was forming into shapes that I pictured in my mind. The realization that I was using the power to move things with my mind to master my element made things much simpler.

## 8 - Fear

An hour later my hands were numb once again. They weren't as bad as they had been that morning, so I didn't wrap them up quite as well as I had before.

In the bedroom, smoke was rising away from the bed through the open window. I was a tiny bit confused, because I didn't smell anything. When I opened the door, I heard nervous scurrying, and the line of smoke quickly disappeared.

"You smoke?" I asked, casually walking into the room.

"I do....I mean....I did," he stuttered.

"And you are embarrassed about it?" I slowly sat down next to him on the bed.

"Not exactly. What made you ask that?"

"Well, I assumed you were, because you quickly put it out as soon as I walked into the room, and because you're using an electronic cigarette."

"Actually, it's an empty electronic cigarette."

"You're pretending to smoke?"

"It sounds kind of silly, doesn't it?"

"Just a little."

"I only do that because we are trying to quit."

"Doesn't that raise the stress level quite a bit?"

"Yes, but I'm getting better at it. Taiki-kun is the one who's having trouble."

"Poor Kureno-kun." I almost laughed.

"It's not so much that he's irritable as it is that he cheats."

"I did smell something when he came over earlier today, but I thought it was Kureno-kun."

"Nope, that was definitely Taiki"

I prepared to change the subject. "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure, go ahead." He shifted so he was facing me.

"Does having the window open help you at all?"

"Not as much as some other things, but it does help a little. Why do you ask?"

"I think it might be dangerous for you to be alone in this room with the window open."

"You mean I could be in danger even if you are in the next room?"

"Probably... I may not have killed a Shinigami, but I've seen them on more than one occasion. They are extremely fast and extremely sneaky."

I stood up and walked over to the window. "Hmm... something doesn't feel right."

His eyes widened. "Are you joking?"

"No..." I slammed the window shut.

"Are you mad at me?"

"Of course not. You didn't know you were doing anything wrong. I want to inspect this room. There probably isn't a Shinigami in here, but you know what they say."

"Better safe than sorry?"

"Exactly."

"Shall I order the room service while you inspect?"

"If you want to." I walked back into the front room.

I examined every inch of the room. Not a speck of dust got by unchecked. There was no way I was going to let a Shinigami get to my Nazo-san. I didn't find anything out of the ordinary in the front room,

so I moved on to the bedroom. Nazo-san was there waiting for me.

“Did you find anything?” he asked worriedly.

“Not in the front room, but I’m not so sure I won’t find anything in this room.”

I heard a tiny squeak escape his lips. “I have a favor to ask of you.”

“I am all ears, Nazo-kun.”

“Do you think it would be possible for you to train in here tonight?”

“Well, it will only be my third time, but I think I can control it well enough. If it makes you feel safer, I will train in here.”

“Thank you, Koizumi-chan.”

“No need to thank me. I was going to stay in here anyway.”

I glanced out of the room and, two seconds later there came a knock at the door.

“I still need to check the bedroom,” I said, going to the closet.

“Should I answer the door?” he asked. I could sense his fear.

“I don’t see why it would do any harm, it’s only our food.”

“Oh....oh yeah!” he rushed to get the door.

I let out a small giggle. I didn’t say anything until I heard the door close.

“Please eat in the front room,” I said, closing the bedroom door.

“Did you find something?” he put both hands over his mouth.

“No, but I’m not done inspecting.”

“So, there’s still a chance that a Shinigami could be in the bedroom?” His eyes widened rather cutely.

I gently pressed my lips against his forehead. “You’re so cute.”

“And scared....very scared.”

“Don’t be frightened by this, Nazo-kun. As long as we are in such a small room, I will have quite the advantage.”

“Even against a Shinigami?”

“Yes, even against a powerful Shinigami.”

“What should I do?”

“If a Shinigami does indeed appear, you will have to do everything I tell you to do exactly when I tell you to do it.”

“Hai!” he saluted.

I laughed.

“Let’s eat, Koizumi-chan!”

“Alright.”

I shoved down food so fast that I hardly knew what I was eating. As long as Nazo-san was happy to treat me, I was happy to stuff my face. In the midst of Nazo-san’s laughter and giggling I heard a soft thump and immediately sprung to my feet.

“What is it?” he asked rather loudly.

“Go open the bedroom door,” I commanded.

He did as he was told. “Masoto-kun? How did you get in here?”

I glanced into the bedroom. A man approximately six feet tall was standing there. He wore a black suit that was tattered, but not faded, and on his feet he wore nothing. His hair was a spiky black mess with red streaks going down the sides. Seeing someone who fits this description in Japan is not out of the ordinary. Even the large metal cross that hung around his neck wasn’t odd. To me, the feature that stood out the most was his glowing, red eyes. They were glowing so brightly that you could see beams shooting out of them like lasers.

I quickly slammed the door shut and stood in front of Nazo-san.

“Is that man the lead singer of the band Bloody Petals?” I asked as quickly as I could get the words out

of my mouth.

“He is,” Nazo-san answered frantically.

“Get out of here and run to Yuusuke-san’s room immediately.”

As soon as Nazo-san was out of sight I forced myself into the bedroom and shut the door. The only thing I could see in the pitch black room was that pair of haunting, red eyes. Immediately my hand rushed to the light switch, but an invisible force held it back. It wasn’t until that moment that I noticed that the eyes had become significantly larger...and closer. The feeling of icy breath traveling down my neck sent a chill up my spine.

“You are foolish to underestimate me, servant of Yoshida,” he spoke slowly, pronouncing each word with meticulous intricacy.

“I am not as careful as the others. The only thing I’m looking for is a fight, slave of Tsuyoshi,” I gasped.

“If it’s blood you lust for, I may be able to help.”

All of the sudden the force holding my arm back tightened its grip. I felt as if I was a balloon being squeezed until I eventually popped... The only way I could gain the upper hand was to turn on the light. I took a deep breath and began to feel around the room with my mind. As soon as I found the light switch I forced it up as hard as I possibly could.

We both, in unison, let out a shrill cry of pain. I saw the blood... it was all over me... and a sharp wave of pain shot up my arm. As the pain spread, I began to lose my vision. All I could see was the blurred outline of a massive, horrifying creature escaping through the bedroom window. With each passing moment I saw less of my surroundings until I eventually fell into a deep, deep sleep.

## 9 - Underestimating the Enemy

As I slept fearful nightmares filled my mind. All previous, optimistic thoughts had disappeared. I came to the realization that this was not going to be like our normal, routine missions. It's true that we were a good team, but we were not yet at a high enough level to be called a great team. I knew that if we didn't raise the bar as high as we were able we would all die early deaths. I was truly frightened of this possible fate.

After what seemed like countless days of witnessing horrid possible realities my eyelids forced themselves to open, and I regained consciousness. I had been moved to the couch in the front room... Junichiro stood across the room. As soon as I recalled all of the events that had just taken place, my body began to thrash about and tears fell from my eyes.

Junichiro ran to my side. "What is wrong with you, Koizumi-sempai?!" he exclaimed.

"I don't want to go to hell, Junichiro!" I bawled.

He threw his arms around me and held me close to him to try and calm me down. "You won't go to hell, Sempai..."

"I'm scared..."

"You had an encounter with one of them, didn't you?"

"You know I did."

"I saw what you were dreaming..."

He grew silent after that.

"I'm alright, you can let go now."

He slowly let go and my body relaxed. "I didn't want you to hurt yourself." His eyes moved to my left arm.

I glanced down to look at it and saw that it was covered by a long bandage, but I could see the dried blood.

"What happened to me, Junichiro?" I whispered.

"Do you want me to show you?" he asked, taking hold of my arm.

"I don't see how it would do me any harm."

"Alright, but I'll warn you, this isn't going to look pretty."

"I think I can handle it."

"Okay, here goes."

Junichiro slowly lifted the bandages off of my arm. I let out a loud gasp. Three huge, swollen claw marks covered most of my arm. The more I stared at it, the larger my eyes became. It appeared as if my arm had been squeezed by a very nasty creature. I hadn't seen exactly what he looked like, so I could only imagine.

"What was his name?" Junichiro asked suddenly.

"I think I heard Nazo-san call him Masoto," I answered.

"Did he feel powerful?"

"Quite powerful. I could have sensed his aura from a mile away."

"Kureno-sempai said he could sense him..."

"What do you know about him?"

Masoto is the lead singer of the band Bloody Petals."

"I know that much. I want to know the good stuff. What's the price on his head?"

"Enough Yen for each member of our team to have our own spending money for all of our missions, and



the price rises every time he attacks...that is, unless he attacks the members of Hydrangea.”

My eyes widened once again. “Damn! How powerful is this guy?!”

“He is the most powerful Shinigami we will face on this mission. As every Shinigami does, he moves only in darkness, and his element is raw, unadulterated power.”

“So they sent their most powerful member for the first attack? Either they are baka and have no strategy, or they have some genius strategy that I’m overlooking.”

“Well, I can think of one strategy they could be using, but it doesn’t make sense to use it here. The one they appear to be planning can only be carried out within an elongated span of time. But, Master Yoshida doesn’t have us alive for much more than a week.”

“That could prove to be quite the disadvantage.”

“We could always just ruin their strategy.”

“Sensei, with all due respect, these are Shinigami we’re talking about. That means ‘proceed with caution’ not ‘hit em’ with all we’ve got and hope for the best.’ We have to be smart about this.”

“Junichiro, with all due respect, I don’t care what kind of creatures we’re up against. We need to train and become stronger if we ever want to touch one of these monsters.”

“I’m not sure if we have enough time.”

“You’ll have enough time for what I’m proposing.”

“We voted you as our team leader. Misaki and I will trust your word as long as you remain a member, but I’m not sure if Kureno-sensei feels the same way. His mind is hard to read.”

“Don’t worry about Kureno-kun. He and I both are training independently. I want you and Misaki to practice your taijutsu and Kenjutsu, and if you feel inclined to do so, begin your element training.”

“Taijutsu and kenjutsu?! Are you expecting us to use close combat for Shinigami?! I would have expected you to have us work on our sojutsu and shurikenjutsu!”

“I know it sounds strange, but I don’t think those skills are going to be beneficial. I’m pretty sure the Shinigami would be able to block everything we throw at them.”

“Well, what about you? What are you going to fight them with?”

“That, my friend, is a surprise.”

We both laughed.

“I should probably get you back to Nazo-san before he dies of worry.”

I slowly sat up. “Is he awake?”

“No, but we promised him you’d be there when he wakes up.”

“He’s going to need a new room.”

“He’ll have a new room by morning.”

Junichiro and I gathered up all of my bags and Nazo-san’s bags, and we headed over to Yuusuke-san’s room. His room was quite a mess. I could tell that a small attempt to clean it had been made because there was a massive pile of clothing shoved in the corner of the room. On the couch, Nazo-san slept restlessly.

“Put the bags down and leave,” I commanded.

“Don’t forget to report,” he whispered, doing as he was told.

“Settle down, you’re safe now.” I put my hand on the side of Nazo-san’s face and sighed. I wasn’t sure whether I was talking to him or myself.

I didn’t want to wake him just yet. Time would not wait for me to heal. Injury or no injury, I had to continue my elemental training. I electrocuted myself for approximately two hours until my cell phone rang loudly. Nazo-san shot up, and I rushed to answer it.

“Koizumi-chan!” Nazo-san exclaimed happily.

“Shhh! Don’t let them hear you call me that,” I whispered, pointing at the door.

“Oops!” He covered his mouth with his hands.

“Shh...” I put my finger to my lips and turned away from him. “I apologize, Master, I forgot to report. “Actually, I’m overjoyed to hear that I have a Kunoichi who is so committed to her job that she feels the need to devote every spare second to her training,” Master Yoshida laughed.

“My job isn’t the only thing I’m committed to,” I replied.

“I know your reason for all of the hard work you do, Koizumi.”

“I’d rather not talk about this right now.”

“Alright, give me your report then.”

“Earlier this night I came in contact with a Shinigami.”

“Are you aware that Misaki reported that earlier this night you were brutally killed by a Shinigami?”

“She did?”

“Yes, and she told everyone but Junichiro.”

“Misaki must have been the first one to come to Nazo-s room. I bet she just saw the blood and ran.”

“She told me that she was too afraid to check for a pulse. You should speak to her. Misaki is afraid to live in a world without you. She cares for you quite a bit.”

“I know she does... I know we’re not supposed to make friends, but I almost couldn’t help myself when I met Misaki.”

“I am fully aware of your string bond with Misaki. If this bond should get in the way of your success on a mission, you would have to face your fate without protest.”

“I understand.”

“Well, I’ll leave you to do whatever your heart desires for the rest of the night. If you train any longer tonight, your arm will not heal.”

“Thank you, Master.”

I closed my phone and turned back to Nazo-san. His big, cute eyes were filled with tears. I opened my arms and he embraced me with such force that I could hardly breathe.

“Misaki-san told us you were dead!” he cried into my shoulder, “She said she found you in the middle of a big, bloody mess!”

“No one is dead. I am only badly wounded. It’s no big deal; it’ll be gone in a day,” I whispered reassuringly.

“Promise me you’ll never die on me. I can’t take it!”

“You don’t have to worry about me. I don’t plan to die anytime soon.” I kissed him on the cheek several times.

“You better not, because I need you.” He began to settle down.

“Try to go back to sleep. I need to speak with Misaki.”

“Promise you’ll still be here in the morning?”

“I promise.”

Nazo-san slowly let go of me, and went back to sleep. I knew I had to confront Misaki eventually, but I didn’t know how she would react. Misaki was in the next room. I silently hoped that she would remain silent as I reached for the door knob. When I finally opened the door I saw Misaki sitting against the wall, gazing at the floor. As soon as she sensed my presence her head shot up, and her eyes grew wide. She was frozen in that position for almost a minute. Then she sprinted over to me so quickly that I could barely see her. The only noise she emitted was loud sobbing.

“Misaki, I...”

“How could you leave me like that, you baka?!” she cried, holding onto me so tightly that I could scarcely breathe.

“I’m sorry...” I tried to comfort her.

“Don’t ever do anything like that ever again, or I’ll kill myself!”

“Now why would you do a thing like that?”

“Because I love you, Sempai! You’re like my big sister...or her replacement.”

I didn’t quite understand what Misaki was saying.

“Did you have siblings, Misaki?”

“Yes...and I miss them more than anything else, but it helps to think of you as my sister and Jun-kun as my brother.”

“You should let Kureno-kun into your family as well.”

“I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“He doesn’t like you, and he...he replaced “him”.”

“You can’t keep every friend you make.”

She quickly let go of me and scowled at me.

“You don’t understand! Nobody will EVER be able to replace “him,” NOBODY!”

Misaki turned to Nazo-san, who was sleeping peacefully now, and gave him the nastiest look I’d ever seen on her face. Then she angrily stormed off into the bedroom. I was a bit startled.

“What the hell?” I thought out loud.

I didn’t think Misaki was still so upset about the incident that had happened ten years ago. She had just sent my brain a difficult mystery to solve. Something was definitely wrong with her, but what? Why was “he” so important to Misaki, and what did any of that have in common with Nazo-san? Why did Misaki give Nazo-san that nasty look? I feared my questions might never be answered.

## 10 - Day Four

Day 4

I idled for the remainder of the night. Because of my idling, my arm had fully healed, and the scars on my hands had disappeared. Nazo-san had practice all day, so I decided that I would go get some answers. I knew that asking Misaki was hopeless, so I decided to try and get some answers from Kureno. I found him sitting by himself.

"Kureno-kun, I need to speak with you," I said casually.

He looked up at me. "What do you want?" he asked in an annoyed voice.

I quickly grabbed hold of the collar of his shirt.

"I want some answers! Do you have a problem with me?!"

"I don't know what you're talking about." His expression didn't change.

"You know exactly what I'm talking about! I haven't heard a kind word out of you since you joined our team!"

"Is there a problem with that?"

"Yeah, there's a problem with that! I'd like to know what your problem is, but I think I've already figured out that part."

His annoyed expression changed to one of peaceful submission. "Quiet down."

"You have trouble confiding in people, don't you?"

He sighed. "I try to distance myself from pure spirits, because I'm ashamed of what I've become."

"If you promise to change your attitude, I won't judge you."

He looked up at me with tired eyes. "Just answer this one question, and you will understand... Why is it that I am new to you? Why have you never seen me in heaven?"

"Because you... Then why don't you repent?"

"I can't..."

"Why not?" A truly disturbed expression crossed my face.

"Because of 'her'."

"Her? So, you and I are in the same boat... What is her name?"

"I can't..." he started to turn away, but I stopped him.

"It's unhealthy to hold in all of your emotions. If you keep acting like this, you'll forget why you ever loved her in the first place."

"How do you know that?"

"It's a fact of life, Kureno."

"...Her name was Mary. She was a criminal whom I was on a mission to destroy."

"Love comes from such unexpected places, doesn't it?" I smiled.

"Koizumi, there's something I need to tell you."

"What is it?"

"The rules are written the way they are to make you think it's unlawful to fall in love, but that's not entirely true."

"It isn't?!" my mouth dropped open in disbelief.

"Does it really sound fair to say something like that?"

"Then what does the law really say?"

"I can't tell you, but I can guarantee that you will break it someday."

"I'm not going to hell, Kureno."

“You won’t go to hell, but you will receive some form of punishment.”

“How do you know this?”

“Because it happened to me...and I am just now recovering from it.”

“What year was it when you met her?!”

“I don’t really remember the exact year. All I remember is that the parliament had not yet been established in Brittan.”

“It’s taken you that long to recover?!”

“Yes, but I was alone for most of that time. The answer was rewarded to me because of good behavior. You have me to thank if you come up with it early.”

“But you won’t tell me the answer.”

“No, I won’t tell you the answer, but I will help you find it.”

I folded my arms across my chest. “At least I solved one of the mysteries.”

He looked up at me curiously. “Hmmm?”

“Oh, it’s just Misaki. She’s been acting so strange lately. I don’t think she’s held onto a former member quite this long before.”

“I guess I won’t be welcomed as a member of your little family for quite some time.”

“Don’t be so sure of that. Junichiro and I will talk to her.”

“Then I will try to find out why she’s been acting so strange. Is there anything else I need to know?”

“Yes, there is one thing. She seemed to give Nazo-san a rather scornful look the last time I saw her.”

“Ah, I’ve already got a good idea. I’m going to talk to Junichiro.”

I sighed. “I want to train.”

“Then go train. I’ll take care of Nazo-san.”

“Seriously?!”

“Sure, Taiki-san and I will drop him off when they are finished.”

“Thank you, Kureno-kun.”

I ran back to the hotel as quickly as my legs could carry me. As soon as I walked into Nazo-san’s new room, I received a text message from Soeki. I learned that, if I trained for the rest of the day, all night, and the next night, I would be promoted. My training was quite successful. The electric shock that blistered my hand no longer caused me pain. I was again able to use my thumb that I had injured the first time I trained.

\* \* \* \*

Approximately six hours after I had left the Budokan Nazo-san arrived with food.

“Koizumi-chan, I brought you ramen!” he exclaimed as he burst into the room.

“Aww, you didn’t have to do that. I’m going to become spoiled,” I giggled.

“Only I am allowed to spoil you.”

“Oh really? So now you are trying to spoil me?”

“I’ve got big plans for you.” He laughed and sat on the couch.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You are the granddaughter of Mitsugashi Hitomi, aren’t you?”

“I am, but I don’t see how that is relevant?”

“Can you sing?”

“I can sing in English.”

“Is the reason you can’t sing in Japanese because you sound like Mitsugashi-sama?”

I blushed. “Maybe.”

“You do! I want to hear!”

“Nazo-kun, I am very modest when it comes to singing.”

“C’mon, it’s just me.”

“Which gives me more reason to be modest.”

“will you sing in English?”

“If you desperately want to hear me, I will sing for you.”

“Yay!” He cutely gave me a big hug and went to eat his ramen.

“Can I eat ramen first?”

“I suppose I’ll let you eat first.”

“Itadakimasu!” we shouted in unison.

Nazo-san did nothing but talk the entire time. He was still eating ramen when I finished.

“You’re quite the talkative one,” I laughed.

“I’ve been called that before,” he said with a smile.

“I’ll sing for you now if you’d like.”

“I’d like that very much, but you don’t have to if you don’t want to.”

“But I do want to sing for you. I just don’t want anyone else to hear me.”

“Don’t worry, no one else will hear.”

“Alright, then you eat, and I’ll sing.”

Nazo-san quickly grabbed his chopsticks and ate his ramen. I picked up Carlos and began strumming a simple tune. Then I began to sing the song “I’m yours” by Jason Mraz. I don’t know when exactly it was that this happened, but while I was singing, Nazo-san stopped eating, dropped his chopsticks, and stared at me in disbelief. When I finished singing he clapped, and I blushed.

“Was I good?” I asked doubtfully.

“Koizumi-chan, that was so cute!” he exclaimed excitedly.

“Really?”

“You’re a great singer! Are you sure that Mitsugashi-sama is your only famous relative?”

“I never said Chibi-kun was my only famous relative.”

“There are others?!”

“There just might be,” I teased.

“C’mon, tell me! I wanna make you famous too!”

“My grandmother and my grandfather are the ones. They will be the parents of my mother.”

“Who are they?”

“Hmmm, that’s a hard one. I didn’t see this grandfather quite as often as I saw Chibi-kun.”

“Take your time. I’m in no hurry.”

“I remember that every time I saw him he said the word kawaii. He said it so much that I thought it was his name.”

“So you called him Kawaii-kun?”

“I did call him Kawaii-kun.”

Wow, I would love to have a name like that.”

“It would definitely suit you well.”

“You think so?”

I laughed. “I know so. Nazo-kun, you are the personification of the word, kawaii.”

“So, what else do you know about this “Kawaii-kun?” What did he look like?”

“He looked like me. That was the topic of almost every conversation my family had about him. They said we looked so similar that we could be the same person.”

“But, Koizumi-chan, you are a girl.”

“I think they meant it as a hypothetical.”

“They probably did. I think I might know who he is. He sounds a lot like the lead singer of the band Confectuous Rapture.”

“I’ve loved that band since I was a little girl. I love their style of Visual Kei, and their songs have such a

fun beat! I've never seen the lead singer though. What's his name?"

"His stage name is Shinji, and that's also what most people call him. I don't actually know his real name."

"Do you have a picture or something?"

"I might have one."

He walked over to one of his bags and pulled out the newest issue of the Visual Kei magazine, "Fool's Mate." After flipping a few pages he held it up for me to see.

"Is that him?" he asked hopefully.

"Hold it still, your hands are shaking," I said.

Nazo-san handed the magazine to me, and I held it close to my face. The man I was staring at had the same strawberry blonde hair and brown eyes that I did. We had the same child-like face and slender cheek bones. The only feature of his that was not identical to mine was his smile. When he smiled all of his shiny, white teeth were visible, and every facial feature seemed to intensify. I was told that my smile was much like that of Chibi-kun. My eyes always squinted and my cheeks were chubby.

"Nazo-kun, this is most definitely him," I said happily.

"Yay!" he exclaimed, running in a circle.

"So cute!" I laughed.

He settled down and came back over to sit next to me on the couch. "What about your grandmother?"

"My grandmother's identity is no mystery. She was the only grandparent who didn't have a nickname. She loved to curl my hair and dress me in Lolita dresses, and she was a genius cellist. That was, undoubtedly, where I got my guitar playing skills."

"Did she also sing?"

"Yes, her singing voice was very sweet and mysterious."

"She must be Rairakku-hime."

"She is Rairakku-hime."

"Oh, Koizumi-chan! You are so lucky to have such wonderful grandparents!"

"They were just the average grandparent stereotype. They spoiled me rotten whenever they got the chance," I laughed, "I sure do miss them."

"We'll have time on Saturday."

I sighed. "Nazo-kun, I am still on my mission. I am not permitted to make you do anything on my behalf."

"But I want to do this. It's not like you're "making" me do anything. The only thing you "make" me is happy."

"It doesn't matter. It just can't happen."

"What if I talk to Yoshida?"

"You want to talk to Master Yoshida? I don't know if they will allow that, but you can try."

"Can we do it right now?"

"I don't see why not. He might be busy though."

"Please try. I want to do this very much."

"Alright, I will..." My cell phone interrupted me. "How does he do that?"

Nazo-san giggled.

"Give him the phone," Master Yoshida commanded the second I picked up the phone.

"Yes, Master," I answered quickly and complied without question.

I watched as Nazo-san presented his proposition to Master Yoshida. I could tell he wanted this very much because of the determination on his face and his serious tone. His expression remained constant through the conversation. Each reply was voiced quickly and articulated perfectly. Whether Nazo-san was successful or not, I did not know. As soon as the conversation ended he turned to me.

“Koizumi-chan, he said that we can go if your training tonight is successful,” he said cheerfully.

“What are his other conditions?” I asked suspiciously.

“He said you have to get a paying job...”

“Okay.”

“And you have to stay close to your family and Kurenno-san.”

“What about you?”

“That’s my condition. You have to stay even closer to me.” He grinned.

“I will happily comply with any and every condition you give me.”

“Then you have to promise to never ever, ever leave me!” He got excited and held me tight.

“I promise to never ever, EVER leave you!” I got excited as well and hugged him with enough force to make him fall onto his back.

He started laughing. “I love you, Koizumi-chan.”

His arms tightened around me and my eyes began to close. “I love you too, Nazo-kun.”

For a moment I laid still, listening to the soft beating of Nazo-san’s sweet little heart. Then I moved my head so that I could see his face.

“When the sun rises tomorrow morning, we won’t have to keep this a secret anymore,” I said softly.

“Taiki-kun already knows about us. Kurenno-san had to tell him,” Nazo-san whispered.

“It’s fine as long as he didn’t find out on his own.”

“Koizumi-chan, you know you don’t have to stay with us if you don’t want to.”

I turned onto my stomach so that I could see Nazo-san’s face clearly. “What makes you say that?”

“I’ve noticed that you are very close to Misaki-san and Junichiro-san. Won’t you miss them?”

“I will miss them, but I plan to keep myself very busy.”

“Will you ever see them again?”

“I will see them again if they work hard enough.”

“Good, because I think Yuusuke-kun and Misaki-san have become very good friends. He’d be sad if he never saw her again.”

“Did you know that Misaki knows how to make beer?”

“Oh! Then he would be clinging to her leg like a child, bawling the whole way!” his chest vibrated as he giggled happily.

“He loves beer that much?”

“He does, but he swears he’s not an alcoholic.”

“Too funny. What about you? Do you love beer?”

No, I don’t go crazy like Yuusuke does. You know I used to smoke, but that doesn’t really count anymore. Hmm.... I’m not addicted to video games like Yamada, and I’m not addicted to shopping like Taiki. I guess what replaced smoking was you.”

“Wow, that makes me feel so special.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean that in a bad way.”

“I know what you meant. I’m glad you feel that way about me. I definitely feel that way about you.”

“Are you going to watch our live?”

“I will if you want me to.”

“I am going to sing for you.” He smiled proudly.

“Then I will definitely watch.”

“Oh yeah, I almost forgot! We are having a very unique after party.”

“Is it? What’s so unique about it?”

“It’s a Victorian style ball. You’ll have to wear a dress.”

“that shouldn’t be a problem.”

“Really? We were a bit worried about what you four would wear.”



“You may call us ninja, but we’re more like a giant collection of super secret agents. I consider myself the James Bond of the entity world; I’ve got enough connections to take over the world and then some.”

“That makes things so much easier, but this is still going to be hard on you.”

“How so?”

“This party is to celebrate the ending of our one man tour. The guest list includes several major Visual Kei bands....including Bloody Petals.”

I sat up and began to speak violently. “Ahaha! Now things finally start to get interesting!”

He jumped and scurried over to the corner of the couch. “Oh, look at the time! I thought we still had five hours left!”

I laughed. “You were looking at the clock upside down.”

He laughed too. “I knew that.”

“Alright, Nazo-kun, to bed with you!” I quickly kissed the top of his head and continued. “Tonight I shall complete my training, and I will officially belong to you. In the morning, Soeki will come into the dressing room with new uniforms for Kureno and I. oh, what a beautiful promotion this will be!”

“Who is Soeki?” Nazo-san asked in a small voice.

“Soeki is Master Yoshida’s secretary. As her name implies, she is quite the pest, but she is much kinder than Master Yoshida.”

“Thanks for explaining.” He smiled, stood, and walked to the bedroom door.

“Goodnight, Nazo-kun.”

“Goodnight, Koizumi-chan!”

I watched Nazo-san skip into the bedroom, then got right to work.

\* \* \* \*