

Gateway

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Thrown into a strange new world, will a normal girl be able to find her way home with the help of those she meets along her journey?

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1 - Introduction and Summary

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Sei was just the normal, average, everyday teenager, starting her first year of college. But with college taking up most of her time now, she must put aside her passion for drawing. Now, a few months later, she is starting to have strange dreams, involving cries for help, both human and nonhuman, and feelings of parts of her being torn away, causing her to wake in distress. Soon her world would be turned upside down as she is hurled into the adventure of a lifetime and she suddenly finds herself in a strange new world. The thing is, she now, for some reason, has a new look, has few memories of who she is, and no idea where she has ended up. In this new world, Sei soon finds the life forms in this land are mixed with both humans and creatures, both friendly and dangerous, and like none she had ever seen before. Scared and confused, fate leads her to a strange mansion, where she meets a lord who invites her to stay. He seems to know about her, who she is. Curious, as well as exhausted and frightened, Sei decides to accept the strange man's offer, and is given her own room, where she quickly falls asleep. In the middle of the night, she is awoken by a strangely familiar dream of tortured calls for help. Still, vaguely hearing the call when she was conscious, the girl started following it, as it led her to an underground laboratory. There, she rescues a young man, whom she seems connected, even drawn to, and discovers that the lord wasn't what she had first thought. After escaping from him after he tries to kill them, Sei discovers there seems to be something familiar about her new companion, and the young man seems to have lost memories as well. Now as they join up, five more will join them, all mysteriously familiar, and all with lost memories. Just who is the lord? Why is he after Sei's and the others' memories? If they cannot retrieve their memories before the lord does, their fates will be sealed, and the young woman will never be able to return home again.

2 - College: Enter Dreams

Gateway

By: Draco

Chapter I

Sei was the average, run of the mill teenager. She was nineteen years old, had long, waist length golden blonde hair, ice blue eyes, and was in her first year of college. She was somewhat short, being five feet two inches tall, with an average build. She hated being teased about her height, but tolerated the more affectionate teasing. She made up for her height in strength and speed. She was a black belt in karate after all, and was no push over.

Being the friendly, caring person she was, Sei had a lot of friends, and was easy to get along with. She was also known to be sarcastic and feisty at times, and would argue her point with others when it was on a subject she strongly disagreed with. Though, Sei's strongest skill, and passion, was her art. She had been drawing since she was little; developing from scribbles, to detailed, well-structured pieces of art. It was a hobby that always gave her something to do, and work on. From Aardvarks to Zebras, any animal or creature you could think of, she could draw it. Though now that she was in college, she didn't have that much time to herself to engross in her hobby.

A normal day would start with the ringing of the class bell at the college

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Walking along the crowded halls of the college on Monday was pure chaos. The shrieking of the bell barely audible over the loud shuffling, yelling, chatting, and banging of lockers, as students got ready for their first classes of the day. Somehow, once more, managing to get through the first stampede of the day, Sei squeezed past the last few people to her class where her friends were waiting. They looked up as she entered, smiling and waving her over. One of them, Megan, got up give her a brief hug, in which Sei returned of course, smiling. Megan was a good five or six inches higher than her. All of her friends seemed to be taller. It just wasn't fair.

"Don't you just love Mondays?" There's Megan for you, the sarcastic optimist. Sei knew how to play this game, as she snorted a bit, smirking.

"Oh yeah, almost as much as I love Professor Albert's lectures on all the different kinds of fungus. Or maybe the smell of the locker room after the jocks have had their way with it." At that, Lily, another one of Sei's friends, spoke up with a disgusted grunt.

"Seriously, the least they could do was spray aerosol or something in their once their done. They're not the only ones using that room. And don't even get me started on the bathrooms." Everyone shuddered at that comment. It was a fact that the college's men's football, basketball, and soccer teams were dirty, coming in after games all sweaty and smelly, the odor spreading throughout the room and soaking

into everything, even the air. Some girls had even found old shirts or socks left behind.

“Men have to be the most crude, and disgusting creatures. Pigs have better manners.”

“Like that’s even saying anything. They should hand out gasmasks for us when we have to use the place.” Finally taking her place behind her two friends, Sei shrugged.

“I’m just glad I don’t have to go through that everyday. Maybe the girl’s tennis, soccer and basketball teams should write up a petition or something.” That getting a few laughs, it didn’t last very long, before their professor arrived, and class began.

The rest of the day consisted of four other subjects, each about an hour and a half long. Luckily, Sei enjoyed most of her classes, and kept up high B’s in all of them. She would only see Megan and Lily occasionally in the halls after the first class, since they had different classes. But after school they always got back together for a while to go over the day. And it seemed nothing interesting had happened today. Not much of a surprise really. As the three of them walked along the campus grounds, the sun was just beginning to set, and students slowly made their way to their cars. Megan then sparked up a new subject.

“Hey, Sei, get to draw much at all recently? It’s been a few months now hasn’t it?” Giving a sigh, Sei shook her head.

“Haven’t had time, classes have been really tough, and I’ve had a lot of homework. Who knows when I’ll pick up a pencil for that reason. Not anytime soon.” Which really disappointed her, since she loved drawing with a passion.

“That sucks. At least you don’t have a research paper due in three weeks.” Sei had to smirk at that.

“Sucks to be you.” Megan then mocked her, reaching over to poke her in the side, something she hated greatly. Briefly, a miniature mock fight between them, ending with Lily and Megan joining up to gang up on their friend, poking her for a good minute or two. But now, as they reached their cars, they said their goodbyes, the mood changed again, to a duller, routine one. With an exasperated sigh, Sei climbed into her car, started the ignition and headed to her apartment.

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As Sei unlocked the door, and stepped inside, it was almost completely dark out, save for the small lamp that hung outside on the wall of the apartment building that gave a small area of illumination. Her apartment was nothing special; the basic, one bedroom one bathroom, and a small living room that joined with the kitchen. It was enough for a single, college student to deal with on her own, while juggling her classes and work at the local animal clinic, as well as a restaurant down the road near the church. At least she had a free night tonight. A chance to relax a bit and make herself dinner, which normally consisted of easy meals like pasta, eggs and toast, oatmeal, salad, or cereal. Frozen dinners were always an option as well, but Sei tried to avoid those at all costs, ordering Chinese or pizza if she didn’t want to cook. Simple, yet effective, it was cheap, and it kept food plentiful, which always seemed to be a problem for students.

Tonight would be consisting of leftovers from the previous night. Opening the small fridge in the kitchen, Sei pulled out two glad-wrapped pieces of pepperoni pizza. The crinkling of the plastic wrap as she unwrapped her dinner just made the effort worth it as the prize inside was revealed. Not bothering to

even warm it, and grabbing a glass of milk, she sat down at the table and flipped on the little television set up across the table. All it got was standard cable, so Sei usually just ended up watching the news. Dinner was usually a break lasting around a half an hour, to a full hour. Afterwards, it was time for homework. With a groan, the backpack was dragged over and reluctantly opened to reveal her Calculus, Chemistry, Latin, and History books.

“So begins Monday’s after class torture session.”

It must have been past midnight when Sei finally finished all the work for the next morning. She had all but collapsed into bed, having left all her books out on the table. She could get them packed in the morning, when she wasn’t so tired, hopefully. Pulling the covers up over her, it was only minutes before she slipped off into slumber. Though not even in her exhausted state of deep sleep could she ignore the reverie that befell her soon after darkness enveloped her.

It was cold where was she? Was this a dream? Sei thought people didn’t feel in dreams.

So what was going on? A distant, stifled call in the blackness surrounding her made her whirl around, but in the empty darkness, she could see nothing. Glancing around, she tried listening, and watching, to hear if that voice would come back. For a few moments there was absolute silence. No sound whatsoever from anywhere. Perhaps it was gone? No, because seconds later it returned, louder, and a bit more clear, piercing the air around Sei, causing her to jump and whirl around once more. It definitely wasn’t her imagination. The cry was still muffled, but each time it rang out it got more clear. This voice it sounded human, and male, judging by the deep tone. What was he trying to tell her, if that was the case? There it was again, even more clear, almost comprehensible. It was starting to sound more desperate, pleading almost. It sounded like a single word, maybe two once and a while. Was, whoever this was, trying to communicate with her? The second Sei wondered that, she thought it was ridiculous. That would have been impossible; how could something be communicating with her in her sleep? This had to be a dream right? Again, even louder, more shrill and distinct, the call came. It sounded like ‘help’?

Suddenly it came again, and a cold chill, not caused by the feeling of the air around her, ran down Sei’s spine, the hair on the back of her neck rising. It was ‘help’! A cry for help! This so called ‘dream’ was starting to frighten her, take on a creepier atmosphere altogether. But, it was just a dream right? So then why was it affecting her like this? The mysterious call kept coming, but now it was getting muffled, and more distant again. Slightly alarmed at that, Sei tried pinpointing the voice, where it was coming from, but it was from a different direction each time it rang out, making that impossible. Even more frightened now, she started running, glancing around her wildly, unsure to even herself if she was trying to get away or find the voice’s owner. The voice continued to grow softer, more muffled and more distant. It was fading away, and Sei wasn’t sure if that was a good or a bad thing. There was no way she was going to call back, one reason being that she didn’t know what would happen if she did, and she was too scared by now to make any sort of noise. Though, now as the initial voice faded, more voices suddenly exploded around her. Just whispers really, but very loud, as if the ‘volume’ had been turned up. These voices weren’t very clear either, and the direction kept changing, as if they were all around her at once, even as Sei ran. It didn’t even sound like English! It was more along the lines of a chant, or

ancient language.

Just then, Sei lost her footing, and tripped, gasping in surprise as she fell. Once she hit the ground, a pale pair of hands suddenly seemed to just materialize out of nowhere and close around her throat, pushing her down against the ground forcefully. Now the chanting, if that's what it was, got louder. At this instant was when the young college student completely panicked, starting to thrash and claw at the opposing hands around her neck, near hyperventilating. She wasn't screaming until a pair of glowing blood red eyes appeared, seeming just an inch or two from her face. At the sight of them, something within Sei seemed to grow. Terror. Those eyes were the most horrible, horrifying things she'd ever seen, frightening her out of her mind. Screaming, her efforts to break free of the hold the thing had on her increased. As the eyes seemed to be closing in on her, just when she thought she was a goner, the world around her went white

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The loud, insistent buzzing of the alarm clock went ignored, as Sei sat on her bed, pale, and gasping for breath. Her whole body was shaking, the terrifying experience still fresh in her mind. One hand clutched at her chest, in the large white t-shirt she usually wore to bed.

Just a dream

3 - New Places, New Faces

Chapter 2

“A strange dream?” Sitting in the food lounge at noon, at a table in the corner, away from the noise and nosey students, Lily and Megan were trying to make sense of what their friend was trying to tell them as she repeated her dream to them. Sei let out a tired sigh.

“More like a nightmare.” No matter how much she had tried to convince herself that she was lingering too much on it, the strange experience from last night had stuck with her, and she couldn’t stop thinking about it. Both Lily and Megan seemed to frown at her comment.

“You’re really bothered by this aren’t you?” Raising a hand and running it over her face, Sei nodded, prodding some more at her lunch, which had remained untouched since she had taken it out. Breakfast had been much of the same at home, something she would have gotten mad at herself over for wasting food.

“I feel so childish fussing over this like a little kid but there was something about it that didn’t seem like a dream.” Megan, curious, and a bit worried for her friend, spoke up.

“Like what? Did you recognize the voice or something?” Shaking her head, Sei let out another sigh.

“No, nothing about it was familiar at all. It was terrifying! I’ve never, in my life, had a dream like that. Never.” Finally dropping her fork onto her plate, and pushing the unwanted food away, she didn’t know how to explain it.

“Well, you have seemed to be stressed lately, maybe that spurred the dream?” It was a realistic and reasonable theory. She had been stressing a bit lately. But it wasn’t something she was new to. She’d never had such dreams then. Then again, dreams were unexplained and random; it could have just been by chance the nightmare had even occurred. That *had* to be it. There was no other logical explanation for it. Looking up at her two best friends, she also figured she shouldn’t be placing all of her issues onto their shoulders, when they probably had enough troubles of their own to worry about. Smiling a bit, she actually did feel a bit better now.

“Thanks guys, that helps. I’m lucky to have you two around.” That seemed to get her friends to smile as well, which made Sei feel all the better. The day seemed a bit brighter already.

The rest of the day, battling the usual crowds made her feel like she was swimming against the tide.

“Now I know how salmon feel.” Luckily for her, she was only fighting the current to keep from being late to class, and to keep her grades from falling. For salmon, it was a life or death struggle to uphold the species, and keep it going. It made her glad she wasn’t a fish, especially a salmon.

Once the usual routine of each day drew to a close once again, Sei said goodbye to her friends like always.

“No nightmares tonight, I’m sure. You don’t have much homework right? So just get home, eat, and go to bed.” It was amazing that Megan was nineteen. But the concern, mixed with the impossibly simple answer made her grateful for her friend’s advice. Lily just rolled her eyes at the comment.

“Of course, that doesn’t mean slack off on homework either. This isn’t high school anymore remember.” Lily, the scholarly thinker. She was the one who kept them in line when it came to classes and homework. Of course it was sometimes just a facade when they were either fooling around, or when she was just looking out for people’s best interests. This time it was a mixture of both of those, and hidden concern. The hazel eyes didn’t lie.

Now it was Megan’s turn to roll her eyes. She, of course, also knew about Lily’s facades, just loved

drawing it out of her what she really meant. Sei had to chuckle a bit at the two.

"I know Lily, I know. No need to remind me. I'll go home and do the usual. Eat, do homework, then go to bed. Okay? Is that reasonable, sensei?" Megan laughed, poking fun at their friend. Lily seemed to think about it, putting on the part, then nodded.

"Yes that seems like a perfect idea. Carry on then grasshopper" With laughs, hugs, and nice words, the three departed. It may have been a routine, but it never got old between the three best friends. It was the only thing they had to look forward to everyday.

Surviving the trip home, like always, it was almost dark out at the apartments when she arrived. Once inside, the normal home routine started. It took a little over five minutes to make her meal, which was ramen. Opening her backpack, Sei was pleasantly surprised to find out she had even less homework than she'd initially thought. Encouraged, it was about an hour and a half later when she was happy to close her book and folders, put away her bag, throw away the trash, and put the dirty dishes into the dishwasher. Why couldn't there be more days like this? She knew it would never happen much, but she could always hope. Changing out of her clothes and into the huge, and loose fitting t-shirt, one of a couple her father had given to her, she brushed her teeth, even humming a little tune while she did so. Grabbing her iPod off the bedside table, and pulling back the covers, Sei figured the day hadn't been that bad. It had actually ended quite nicely. Now all there was to do, was turn off the lights, and let the ambiance of the night lull her to a peaceful rest, hoping there would be no interruption this time. Or on any other night for that matter.

Unfortunately, not even hope kept away the repetition of the horrible experiences that made up each nightmare that occurred for the next few weeks. Each night the voice returns; and, each night it seemed to have brought along a friend. But some of these voices didn't seem human. The calls always seemed to be the same, for help, though not spoken in English, or human for that matter. The original cry for help, was now accompanied by other male voices, one deeper, one a bit higher pitched. Two sounded like wolf howls, long and mournful. If not for the frightening situation, Sei would have found them heartbreakingly beautiful. Yet another didn't even sound like any creature she'd heard before on earth. It sounded almost prehistoric, like a dinosaur, but Sei could somehow still seem to interpret it as a cry for help.

Also, each night, like the first, the calls came softly, growing louder and clearer. Trying to find them was pointless, she knew, but that didn't stop her from trying. Maybe if she found whatever or whoever was calling out, these dreams would end, or at least not end in such horror. But, despite her effort, each night it ended the same, and each night there was a new, even worse conclusion that scared her out of her wits.

Waking up in a cold sweat, and trembling, sitting up in her bed, was getting stressful. She wasn't getting any sleep; save for the few hours she had before each dream started. There was something else now too. After the first week, she'd begun feeling a strange, almost empty feeling inside of her. Almost as if parts of her were being torn away each night. She tried convincing herself otherwise, but it just kept getting worse. Was she sinking into depression? She barely slept anymore, barely ate even. It was starting to really worry her friends and teachers. It couldn't have just been nothing if they were noticing, right? The illogical consequences of these nightmares just didn't make sense! Maybe she was going crazy? If so, she wasn't about to go to any of the student counselors, or psychiatrists; they'd most likely think she was crazy, and do who knows what about it. Megan and Lily were her only 'counselors' around that she trusted. But the events to come this next night would be different, Sei could feel something about it the second she got home that evening. Things just seemed odd. The young college student felt on edge for some reason, very uneasy, or even paranoid. When she made her way to her room later that night, after homework, and got into bed, she found herself shaking in fear, or something close to that. It was like her conscience and her body almost *knew* something wasn't right, like a bad

omen. That thought certainly didn't help her get to sleep either. Though her thoughts were riddled with the mysterious fear, eventually Sei found herself drifting off.

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As usual now, as Sei dreamed, she found herself back in that inky blackness. Then it changed in the blink of an eye. The atmosphere suddenly altered, and the area began to whirl, like she was in the middle of a tornado. The familiar, ominous feeling was growing stronger within Sei, every second. What was going on now? The air was also starting to get heavy now as well, and her breathing grew slightly labored. Then the feeling of danger struck her, like she had been stabbed or shot. And it was coming from right behind her. Gasping, as though she had run a mile and was out of breath, Sei slowly turned around. There standing before her was a black, smoky figure. It reminded her of a ghost, the way it seemed to float off the ground. This figure must have been, at least, seven feet tall. But what really caught her eye were the glowing beady red eyes on its face, even though everything but the eyes was black on this strange figure. These eyes, unlike those from the previous dreams, weren't narrowed looking, but glowed with the same almost evil aura. That very aura was suffocating the student before it, making it hard to breathe.

Sei couldn't move, she was paralyzed in fear. All she could do was struggle to breathe as the figure moved closer, letting out a soft hissing noise. Slowly, from the 'body' of the figure came a long, bony, smoky, hand that reached out towards the girl wrapping around her throat. The feeling of the black, vaporous hand sent icy chills down her spine. Hissing again, the creature's grip on Sei's throat tightened, causing the teen girl to gasp, though it came out more like a squeak in her fear. Then all of a sudden, noises, like the growls and roars of animals erupted around the two, distracting the ghostly, demon-like creature, as it hissed loudly, glancing around, then back at Sei. And she didn't like the look in its red eyes. Angry evil determination.

*The lack of air made Sei's vision begin to blur and swim. Just as she thought she was going to pass out, the howls and noise around her intensified, and everything seemed to stop around her, until a sudden burst of light erupted below them. The new feeling of falling reached her dimming senses. Like butterflies in her stomach. But how was she falling when there was nothing to fall **from**? This thought went unnoted at the moment; Sei's now half-lidded blue eyes focused on the creature above her, who seemed determined to hang on as they fell.*

Somehow though, miraculously, a thin, white blast of light shot right above the girl's shoulder from below, striking the horrible smoky entity. Giving out an inhuman, high-pitched shriek, it let go flailing as it clawed around the area the light had struck it, where there was a clear hole.

*Sei gasped for breath, color soon returning to her face as well as her senses. That had been too close. Unfortunately, there was little time to thank whatever force had saved her. The light below her was growing as she fell, frightening her. Trying to flail didn't help her, and then before she knew what happened something slammed into her sending her off balance. Shrieking and airy growls in her ear brought her to the conclusion that it was that thing again! **No, you won't take me again!** Struggling, and with a swift kick, she wriggled free and pushed away from the thing, but in the next second it was coming back at her, its glowing red eyes flashing angrily.*

*The light below was getting closer and closer, now at a faster rate, causing Sei to gasp as the dropping feeling increased in her stomach. In that split second of distraction, the creature shot at her again, claw-like hands ready to tear at her apart, when an explosion of light lit up, and strips of light like before curved and flew up. Even as Sei tried to move and avoid them, it they all seemed to avoid her, as if by command from another force, as they whipped around her body towards her attacker. It somehow managed to evade the first few shafts of piercing light, coming at the girl again like a bullet. **I don't***

think so, you bastard Just as it went to grab her, she kicked out as hard as she could, it slamming into the thing's face, it screeching and went flying back and disappeared. Was it gone? Her question was answered with yet another loud screech, and the smoky, ghostly figure flying at her, with even more gusto than before.

Just as the college girl thought it was over, and this thing was going to reach her and kill her, light pulsed from below her, and the light increased to ten times in strength, hundreds of long, bright strips of light shooting out. Against the blackness, the site was amazing to her.

Once more, the creature tried to dodge and evade the multiple attacks coming at it, but with so many it was impossible. It finally pulled back suddenly, retreating, it reminded Sei of a parachuter who had just opened his chute and was jerked back. The black figure was soon gone, some of the lights following it. Then, as if she thought the surprises were over, she could see the light all around her, warm and bright, curling around her body, and the falling feeling faded. It was like she was floating now instead, that is until it came again, worse than before and she plummeted down into the white blankness, consciousness fading away into nothingness.

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From white blankness to the black darkness of unconsciousness, a dreamless emptiness enveloped Sei's mind. Though, now, slowly, her senses began to return as unconsciousness faded away like a mist around her. The first thing the girl noticed was the cold, hard, wet ground she laid upon. Eyelids twitching as she awoke, and groaning, her body moved sluggishly, feeling as though each limb was heavier than normal. When her eyelids finally lifted from over her eyes, blinking a few times as they adjusted to the little light around her. Grass, Sei now noticed, was what she was laying on, face down; though her head was directed to the side, the soft yet wet green pricking her face.

Maneuvering, still sluggish, the young woman got her arms under her and pushed herself up, water dripping from her. Looking up to the dark, cloudy sky, she wondered how long it had been raining. It must have been a while, for she was almost completely soaked, and the ground was muddy, with puddles ranging in size scattered here and there. Shivering in the chill as a gust of wind blew passed, Sei looked around as she got to her knees, one hand raising to brush her wet, muddy bleach blonde hair from sticking from her face. Where was she? Wherever it as, she didn't recognize the area, especially in this dark, rainy weather.

Well, there was one thing she did know, and that was that she couldn't stay out in this weather. Pushing herself to her feet, the girl only stumbled a bit on shaky legs, but soon regained her balance as well as she could on the slippery, muddy ground. Trying to brush the mud and grass bits off her clothes deemed pointless, though Sei tried, her slightly numb hands only seeming to smudge in the mud more. Giving up her task, wrapping her arms around herself, and once more looking around, the girl tried to figure out which way to go. Her mind was still in somewhat of a daze. Eventually, Sei just started off the way she was facing, stumbling at times as she walked along, not having the strength to move much faster. Just past a hill and field, Sei reached some woods, pausing before entering to look into the darkness within. It was spotted with the dim light, but the girl still had no idea what could be hiding or lurking inside. The rain was still coming down on her, reminding her of her limited to no other choices. Getting out of the rain was her first priority, and within the woods, at least there would be some protection by the trees. Commanding her tired limbs to move, she was soon heading into the trees, hoping to find some shelter so she could get out of the weather that was sapping her of her strength.

A rustle in the bushes a few moments later caught her attention, and the girl stopped, shivering a bit and staring in the direction the noise had come from. There was more rustling, along with another strange animal noise. Whatever it was didn't sound friendly, so Sei quickly kept moving, hoping the creature

didn't follow after her. A clearing in the woods an hour or so later revealed a much welcomed sight. A house, and a very large house at that. A mansion most likely. Sei could barely hold back the slight smile that spread across her face. Finally, somewhere to get out of the rain and get dry and warm. Approaching the large mansion, the college girl stared up at the door a moment before reaching out to take hold of the knocker, and smacking it three times before releasing it. She didn't have to wait long before the sound of turning locks could be heard and the big door swung open. With the building being a mansion, the girl thought it would be the butler or something that would be opening the door and greeting her; but standing there in front of her was no butler. It was a man, perhaps middle aged, dressed nicely, with shoulder length dark hair, tied back tightly in a small ponytail. This man looked like he owner, or lord of the manor, why was he greeting her? Lost within her thoughts, Sei didn't see the smile that stretched across the man's face as his soft green eyes watched her before the smile faded. "What are you doing out in such weather? You must be lost, poor girl. Here, come in, get dry and warm" He stepped aside, pulling the door further open, gesturing with a sweep of his arm for her to enter. To tired and exhausted to think much on the situation, Sei nodded and moved to walk inside, and the door was shut and locked behind her. "Such terrible weather lately, good thing your came across this place." An arm made it's way across the girl's shoulders to guide her. Looking up, her eyes met his own. "Come, I have a nice big fire blazing in the study." He smiled, and Sei nodded, grateful, letting the man lead her down the hall and to the right to a big room lined with books, and a large polished wooden desk. Just like the lord had said, there was a huge fire blazing in the fireplace. There were two comfy looking leather chairs in front of it on a soft looking red carpet. Each chair had a little table beside it. "Here, have a seat and treat yourself to the tea, it'll warm you. I'll get you a robe to change into. We can't have you stay in those soaked garments after all." With that the man excused himself, disappearing around the corner and down the hall.

The heat from the fire was already warming her, but Sei went and sat down in one of the chairs, wanting to rest her weary body. Sighing as she found the seat to be quite comfortable indeed, she then looked over to the side table. There was a small kettle and teacup sitting there, along with cream and sugar, making her blink. Had it always been sitting there? She didn't remember seeing it there when they first entered. Strange. Pushing it back as her mind just being too tired not to have registered it earlier, the girl reached over and poured herself a cup, adding her desired amount of cream and sweetener. Picking it up and bringing it to her lips, she took a sip. It was just the right temperature. The beverage indeed warmed her from the inside out as she continued to drink it, letting her eyes close a moment as it's warmth along with the fire calm her. With the soft glow from the fireplace, it made the large room comfortable and cozy. It was very tempting to just give into her exhaustion and drift off to sleep right there, but she made herself wait. The lord was going out of his way to get her something dry to wear, and the girl didn't want to seem rude.

It wasn't long, maybe a few more minutes, before said man returned. Looking up as he came over, Sei put down her teacup to receive the clothes he then offered to her. "Those should do for now, until your own dry. You can change in the room I've had prepared for you upstairs. There's a fireplace in there as well to keep your warm." He smiled, then blinked, seeming to remember something. "Oh, I still have not introduced myself. I am the owner and lord of this mansion, lord Zalaris." He bowed slightly. "Who might you be?" Sei blinked, then bowed back as he did, still not wanting to seem rude.

"My name is" pausing a moment, she looked confused. "Sei. Yes, that's right. My name is Sei." She smiled a bit at having remembered. Lord Zalaris nodded, though now that the girl was more awake and aware, noticed the smile the other now wore was a bit strange. There was a small glint in his green eyes as well, before it passed. Had she imagined it?

"Pleased to meet you, Sei. Now, if you'd like, I could show you to your room for the night. Surely you are tired." Sei nodded, and moved to stand, holding the new clothes enough away from her to keep

them from getting wet. "This way then-" Suddenly there was a loud rumble, and the ground and room shook. Sei gasped, jumping a bit at the experience. Once everything settled down again, the whole thing only lasting a few moments, the girl only then looked to the lord.

"W-What was that?!" But the man didn't seem to hear her at the moment, a thoughtful, hard expression coming over his face. Then, his face softened and Zalaris looked to her.

"I'm afraid I'm not sure myself" Soon, there was the sound of someone approaching from the hall. When it reached the study entrance, they saw it was one of the servants. The new arrival bowed, expression calm, despite what had just happened.

"Excuse me, my lord, something has come up that needs your assistance right away." Sighing, Zalaris frowned, his face hardening again. Sei didn't know what was going on, so just stayed quiet, watching between the two. When he turned to her a moment, he laid a hand on her arm, then his gaze shifted back to the servant.

"Would you please escort Sei to her room upstairs for me?" The servant at the door nodded.

"Regretfully, it seems I am needed elsewhere, Sei." The girl looked up at him. "Please, follow Trine up to your room. If you need anything more, just ask him. With that, I say have a goodnight." With a nod, the man released her, and started towards the door, passing Trine before disappearing.

"Miss, if you would follow me, I'll show you to your room." Sei blinked at that, then after another moment nodded slowly, remembering how tired she was. The warmth from the fire had only increased this feeling. Trine then turned and gestured for her to follow.

It was a pretty long way, up stairs and down halls and corners, to her room, surprising her. Why was her room so far back? They had passed other, nearer rooms as they had walked, why hadn't lord Zalaris prepared one of those rooms? She wasn't sure, but for now let the thoughts fade away. Once the girl got some rest she would wonder over it more. When Trine stopped at the end of the hall and turned.

"This is your room. Hope it is to your liking." Pushing the door open, Sei was soon gazing at one of the most beautiful rooms she'd ever seen. Polished wooden furniture, large bed with curtains around it. Painted vases and art decorated the room, as well as the small comfy looking sofa and chairs scattered perfectly around the large room. All the college girl could do was stare at it all a moment, mouth hanging open a bit. "How do you like it?" The voice snapped her out of her thoughts.

"Oh! Yesthank you." Trine bowed slightly at that, then turned to take his leave. Now, left alone in the room, Sei shivered. A fire was indeed ablaze in the fireplace on the other side of the room, and, remembering her chills, went over, after closing and locking the door, to warm back up. Grabbing the clothes lord Zalaris had given her, she began to change out of the wet clothes she had one then, glad to get them off. Once she was changed, hanging her wet garments on the back of a wooden chair, Sei sat down in one of the big red chairs next to the fireplace. Closing her eyes, she told herself she was only going to sit here a bit while she warmed up. It wasn't long before exhaustion took over though, and the girl fell fast asleep.

At one point in the night, Sei suddenly awoke, by a loud roar in her head. Jumping slightly, her brown and blue eyes opened with a start to a dead silent room. Had she imagined it? Could have been a dream after all. Though, the thing was, she didn't even remember having a dream at all! Glancing around the room a few moments, and seeing and hearing nothing made her a bit nervous. It was almost too quiet. Then, there was a sort of whisper, and a weird feeling washed over the girl. It was like something was calling, awakening something within her. It was silently attracting her, perking her attention and curiosity.

Slowly, Sei got up from the chair, not minding the darkness, since the kindling in the fireplace had burnt itself out. Slowly, the girl started towards the door. The mental call came again softly as the lock turned and the door was opened. Peeking out into the dark halls from the doorway, the girl was unsure. "Um,

hello?" Nothing for a few moments, then the eerie call came again, drawing her out. For some reason, she wasn't scared at all as she began to walk down the hall, following whatever it was that was calling her.

The feeling and call brought her through the halls and down the stairs to the main level. As she passed around one side of the stairs, the voice suddenly faded into nothing. Somewhat distressed by this, Sei looked around. Nothing. Looking back ahead of her, the girl was about give up the search, when something caught her eye. Moving closer, she reached out with a hand to run her hand over the carved wood of the side of the stairs. There was a straight break along the wall. A door? But there was no knob. Looking again though, Sei found it was built into the wall in the form of some sort of dial. Turning the dial half a turn, the door unlocked and swung open to reveal some sort of lift. Glancing down the shaft it hung from, it looked like it went down pretty far, as well as up a good ways. Would it be safe to go into? Obviously that calling voice in the girl's head had brought her here.

Still unsure, yet curious, Sei leaned in again too look up, then down before very cautiously stepping into the lift. It didn't break or fall, for that she was relieved. But suddenly there was a loud shift, causing Sei to stiffen and reflexively grasp onto the bars that made up the life around her. With a slight groan, the lift began to lower, the light from the door fading as she traveled into darkness.

After a minute or two of the black darkness of the shaft, it began to lighten again, and then Sei found herself in a new place. It seemed like some sort of underground cave, but occupied, for there were tables lined with instruments, even some simple furniture. When the lift reached the bottom and stopped, the girl quickly got out, but the lift didn't move again. Why had it suddenly brought her down here? There was no one in sight! Looking to the right of the machine, it looked like it ran on a system of weights and pulleys. Turning from that to around the cave, walking around uncovered that there was more than she had seen from the lift. A sort of tunnel led to a thick wooden and metal door. Taking hold of the iron handle and pulling, with a deep groan the large heavy door opened.

Swallowing and hesitating, finally she started in. Turned out, the door led to another much smaller, less nice room. The cave's rock walls were rough and uneven, making the room seem even more unfriendly and cold, which it was already without the appearance. A fluttering whisper in her head drew Sei's attention forward once more in the dark room. Further ahead, there was a cleared area. In the dim light, the girl could just make out some sort of familiar outline. Squinting her eyes and moving closer, she was shocked to see it was a body. It was hanging from strong iron shackles attached to thick chains that hung from somewhere above, where it was too dark to see. Now quite nervous about the situation, she hesitated in moving closer, but it was like her body moved on it's own.

As the girl neared the hanging body, she found out it was male, and bare chested. Glancing to the side a moment, Sei tried to find maybe a torch or some kind of light. There seemed to be something hanging on the wall. Feeling it, it was indeed a lantern. Its fire was dimmed down, so, taking it off the wall, she turned it up. That seemed to help; now the lantern's light was revealing more of the room. Slowly going back to the hanging body, Sei couldn't help the soft gasp of surprise that escaped her.

The body before her was indeed male. Though, what made her gasp was his appearance. His head, covered in messy red hair, hung down on his chest, while the shackles and chains suspended his arms up above him. He was hanging low enough so that his legs were bent at the knees on the ground, kneeling. Though he seemed either too weak, or unconscious too keep upright, so was hanging forward. This male, also, only seemed about her age judging by his body. Wincing at how said body was covered in cuts, bruises and burns, Sei moved the lantern to get a better look against her better judgment. It was then the body let out a soft groan, and the young woman drew back quickly. He was waking up? Now? All she could do was stand there and watch as the other began to drift back into consciousness. His arms moved slightly then relaxed, as if remembering he was shackled. Then his head moved, and then slowly lifted. Halfway raised, he stopped, seeming to spot that he wasn't alone. Slowly he lifted his head

more up her body to meet her face. Sei swallowed. The brightest amber eyes she had ever seen were gazing straight at her own. Now being able to view his face, she noticed he had two thin orange bangs hanging in his face. His young face, near his eyes, was marked with curved red markings. Either they were that or blood, which there was plenty of all over him. Now revealed in the light, the girl also noticed his shoulders had orange 'V' markings. His bright eyes looked confused a moment, then he spoke up, his voice hoarse and somewhat weak.

"Who're you..? Ya 'ere ta torture me some more in that bastard's place?" But another look up and down her, which made the girl a bit uneasy, he smirked. "Dun look like it, guess I'm lucky this time" his head dropped a bit. "So whatcha doin' down 'ere then?" She certainly wasn't dressed for anything other than bed. The white gown and pants, as well as bare footed.

"I was looking around and accidentally found this place is all" Why was this guy down here being tortured?

"Ya being held captive or something by 'im too?" Looking at the other confusedly.

"Held captive?" The other let out a brief, bitter, chuckle. Why was what she had said so amusing?

"Well if yer not now, ya will be soon enough. Maybe not in the same situation as me, maybe just locked up." Locked up? Why? What had she done to deserve something like that?

"But I haven't done anything." The chains rattled as the young man stood up from his hanging position, staggering a bit.

"Don't matter if ya did or not. That bastard will get ya fer somethin' unless ya escape before then." Sei was so confused now she didn't know what to think.

"Escape? Why? Where would I possibly go? I don't know this place." And how did she know this guy wasn't lying? The other seemed to note her uncertainty.

"I ain't lyin' to ya, I got no reason ta, other than I hate the guy. If ya get me out we both can escape..!" Somewhere inside her, Sei couldn't help the feeling that she could trust this guy, even though they just met. It was strange it was almost as if, deep down, he was familiar to her somehow. She suddenly realized she wanted to help this guy. There was something in his brilliant amber eyes as well that told her.

Turning around, Sei had a quick look around the room. There didn't seem to be any objects to help her release the shackles. Frowning and with a sigh, she turned around back to the other.

"There's nothing here that can get you out..!" The redhead seemed to think a moment.

"Try the other room. They're always bringin' in things from there. Bound ta be somethin' there" Sei nodded, taking the lantern with her as she did so, going through the large wooden door to the room she first arrived in. The tables within the room were scattered with all sort of things. There had to be something in here. After a bit of searching, she found a long thin piece of metal. Maybe it could be used to pick the lock on the shackles! Grabbing it, the girl made her way back into the smaller room where the young man waited, looking up as she entered. Setting the lantern down in front of him, she lifted up the object. "Whatcha gonna do with that?"

"Try and pick the lock worth a try right? It's the only think I could find..." The other sighed.

"Well damn Guess it's worth a try then" Nodding, Sei moved to get closer, when something very strange happened. As her hands got closer to the shackles, they started to reverberate more and more, until, when she touched one, it shattered. Both were taken back by it and jumped. Retracting her hand sharply at the action, Sei stared wide-eyed, not sure what to think about what jus happened. So was the redhead, but soon he lowered his now free arm to look at his wrists where the iron bar had just been not a few seconds before. The, his bright eyes rose to the girl.

"How did ya do that?" his eyes were locked on her seriously. Sei swallowed under the gaze.

"I don't know! I just touched it and it shattered...!" she looked at her hands, a bit frightened by it. The other was still eyeing her strangely, when suddenly his gaze shot up towards the other room.

“shoot, someone’s coming! Hurry and get that other damn shackle!” he whispered quickly, setting his jaw and watching behind her. It took another moment before the girl actually heard what he said and hesitantly moved to do so. When clearly it wasn’t fast enough, the other grabbed her hand and pushed it against his other wrist, shattering it as well. Pausing only a moment to rub his sore wrists, he then grabbed hold of Sei’s arm again and started running towards the previous room. All the girl could do was keep from tripping as they ran, knowing she couldn’t really resist.

Just as they entered the other room, another door on the opposite side burst open, and two men ran in. Seeing the two of them, the men started coming around towards them, clearly to catch them, drawing swords. “shoot.” They stopped as the two started towards them.

“Hey, what are you doing free? Get back here!” The redhead smirked, still hanging onto Sei.

“Like hell I will...We’re outta here, ya bastards! And ya can’t stop us!” Running around one side of the two mean looking men, he easily knocked one aside with a swift kick, and took his weapon, then heading towards the lift. Why, Sei didn’t know, until the redhead leapt up onto it to grasp the ropes attached to it, pulling the girl up after. She didn’t like the smirk that crossed his face now. It looks like one someone wore when they were about to do something risky and unplanned, desperate. The two men stopped, slowly making their way over.

“Now boy, don’t do anything stupid nowwhat do you think you’re going to do now?” Sei was watching the one she was with nervously, asking the same question to herself.

“What am I gonna do? Escape, ya idiots! Weren’t ya listenin’ before?” he lifted the sword. “Now, I got better things ta do then waste my time here, so see ya never frackers!” With that, he wrapped an arm around Sei’s waist firmly, and cut the ropes just below where he was grasping with one stroke. The men lunged for them, but it was too late by then, and the two were sent rocketing up the shaft. Sei grasped hard onto the other, not wanting to fall, too stunned and scared to scream. Then, remembering suddenly about the shaft, she looked up, wide-eyed. Above them, and getting closer to them by the second, was what looked like the end of the shaft? Light from outside shown down. It must have been a sort of skylight, made of glass. At the thought, Sei gasped. They were still speeding towards it with no way to stop. They were going to crash through or into it! The redhead also seemed to notice, but neither showed, nor voiced any fear. “Here we go!” Sei couldn’t believe what was happening!

“What?!” The arm around her tightened, and she could feel the body pressed against hers stiffen.

“Hang on!” He was serious, in a few more seconds they were going to hit the top and crash through the glass. Sei shut her eyes tight, clinging to the redhead. She screamed.

With a burst of shattering glass, they hit the open air, the crystal-like shards sparkling in the moonlight around them. Flying a bit higher before gravity kicked in, and they began to fall. The weightless feeling of their drop made Sei’s stomach do flips within her, and she couldn’t breathe a moment. It didn’t help that she was looking down to a very rocky death down the cliff that was behind the large mansion. She screamed again, shutting her eyes tightly.

“We’re going to be killed!” The redhead didn’t answer, and, looking up to him, if anything he looks like he was enjoying himself. “Are you crazy?!” She was regretting helping him now because in the end he was going to have her be killed! It was then that the wind rushing past them shifted suddenly, alarming the girl, who gasped and her brown and blue eyes shut again as the ground continued to rush at them.

Suddenly though, there was something soft under her slowing her fall. Reflexively, Sei grasped onto it. It was warm, and felt likefur? Slowly, she felt herself curve from going straight down to leveling out a moment before an upward curve. It almost felt as if she was flying, but that wouldn’t have made any sense, right?

Still too afraid to open her eyes, the girl waited until she finally leveled out. Tentatively, she opened her eyes and glanced out. Something white caught her eye before disappearing. It took another few moments more, in her shock, to realize that she was flying! Below her, Sei could feel the warmth she

was riding on moving, causing her to look down. What she saw only seemed to shock her more, if possible. The young redhead she was with before was gone, replaced by a large white flying beast. Along the long muscular, yet slender looking neck, were spikes down the orange striped spine, stopping short of where she was positioned between the shoulder blades. The moving she felt below her were the muscles of the huge powerful, feathered wings that kept them airborne. With each beat, there was a deep rushing sound of air. The top of the creature's head had a brief crest of red fur. Two curved, sharp looking horns extended back from a bit further on the head. From where the girl was, she could not see much more.

She wished she knew what in the world was happening. What had happened to the guy she had been with before? Where were they going now? And-

A deep grunt, and a sudden change in the smoothness of their flight stole her attention away from her thoughts. Now that Sei thought about it, she could also now detect hard breathing. Now they were starting to descend somewhat shakily. Something wasn't right! As the two glided down, the beast positioned himself to land, putting its legs out in front of it, and beating it's wings to slow down. They hit the ground hard, despite the slowing down; jolting Sei some, and she clung fast to its fur to keep from being knocked off. After a few paces, they finally stopped. The college girl slid off it's back and moved a bit away, watching the animal as it suddenly gave off a glow and began to changemorphing into more of a human shape, then a complete one. To her surprise, the figure now standing before her was the same young man that she rescued! How could that be? So what was he?! He certainly wasn't human. So wrapped up in her thoughts, she didn't realize how exhausted the other seemed. The redhead was still injured as well, which didn't help him. Sensing the girl's eyes on him, the male turned his bright eyes to gaze over to her, panting, his body slightly slouched over where he stood.

"What are ya looking at? I ain't gonna get a thank ya or nothin'? Jus' saved yer life!" He seemed to have forgotten it had been after she had rescued him from that room. He coughed, wincing, and put an arm around his middle gingerly. Sei blinked at his statements, then frowned.

"Hey, it's thanks to me you even got out, isn't it?" The redhead smirked at that. "And who says I needed rescuing? You more like kidnapped me. And I don't even know you, or your nameSo-"

"Kaji." The other softly strained out, interrupting her. The girl paused.

"What?" The redhead took a shuddering breath, closing his bright eyes.

"My name is Kaji." With that, his body gave out, and he fell limply to the muddy ground, and into unconsciousness.