

This is a work of fiction based upon the manga/anime characters of **Yu Yu Hakusho**. This story was written for entertainment purposes only and may be freely shared (that means not-for-profit) as long as the disclaimer and the author's name accompany it and none of the contents are altered.

- Based on the anime eps 1-25. Alternate timeline from there. Two years later...
- Loosely structured after the movie "Trick" -- go see it, it's good!!! www.trickmovie.com
"Two guys trying to make it in the Big City."

Treat ☺

by Larissa ^.^ vega8@att.net
complete as of 9/16/99 (update 4/7/00)



By Request:
Happy Birthday, Joey!! ☺



Characters: *Human* - Yusuke Urameshi (our hero), Kazuma Kuwabara (his best friend), Keiko Yukimura (his Girlfriend), Genkai (his teacher), Atsuko Urameshi (his mother)

Spirit/Demon - Hiei (A Fire Demon, half Koorime), Kurama (A kitsune spirit, known in the human world as Shuiichi Minamino), Yukina (Hiei's sister, a Koorime), Botan (Goddess of the River Death), Enma Daiou (God of Hell), Koenma (God of Hell, Junior)

Terms: Reiki (Human Power), Youki (Demon Power), Makai (Demon World), Koorime (Ice Maiden/Demon), kitsune (fox spirit)

Prolog:

He'd done it again.

Hiei and Kurama traded glances as they watched Yusuke walk away from yet another battle that had nearly been his death. They had been forced to watch, standing at the edges of the fight, not allowed by Yusuke's pride to interfere, as he'd been beaten and blasted and finally drained of all rei and nearly life itself. But when Yusuke opened an eye and saw the burnt body of his best friend standing between him and death, then his power flared and he overcame to save himself, his love, and his friends. As he always did. Yukina had taken Kuwabara off to heal him as Hiei said not a word. They had all watched on the monitor as Keiko had recovered and then gone on to school with only a muttered curse at the interruption. Then Yusuke had given one of his little grins... and walked away.

They had watched as he'd been beaten down. Kurama had watched with his heart in eyes. Hiei had watched impassively. They had watched; and done nothing.

Kurama nodded to Hiei and the demon flitted and was gone. Yusuke paused at the edge of the ruins and waited until Kurama joined him and then they walked back home together.

Feature Presentation:

He waited.

He knew *him* better than he knew himself. So much a contradiction, that, but still true. Because of this, he knew that after a day like today, that *he* would come here.

So he waited.

Yusuke walked quietly down the streets, savoring the darkness and the confusion in the streets. In downtown Tokyo, nobody gave him a second glance. There were times that he liked the anonymity, the way the shopkeepers only gave him one glance and no more, the way the ladies would look him over and not run away, the fact that demons rarely attacked him here.

He got to the corner and stood looking at the doorway down the street. It opened and a patron walked out, dim light and faint strains of music following in his wake. Yusuke yearned for it, but even as he stood there, the door closed. He took several hesitant steps towards it, wondering as he did so why he waited.

Before, he'd always gone in unafraid, unhesitating, glad for what the room inside provided. Tonight, for some reason, he wasn't sure if it was really what he wanted. He yearned... for something undefined.

Somebody walked by him, rudely shoving him aside. "Stop blocking the street, kid." Yusuke's fist glowed... and he let it go. With a sigh, he moved to one side, stepping into a recessed doorway and the shadows provided there.

There was a soft curse as he bumped into somebody. "Find your own damn shadow to sulk in!"

That gruff deep tone... Prepared to mumble an apology, Yusuke stopped and stared. Shorter than he... blue eyes, with solid black hair that fell limply down... "I'm sorry," Yusuke muttered, turning around and walking out of the shadows. A contemptuous snort followed him.

Yusuke stood, frozen. Slowly, he turned back, searching the dark shadow. Red eyes glinted at him briefly before shading into blue. Yusuke took the necessary steps back, his heart in his throat

preventing speech. He reached out his hand and brushed the fine black hair, turning the strands and finding the white star hidden there. The hair under his hand wavered and rustled, flowing upright into spiky points before falling down again. With a grin, Yusuke stepped back, “Hiei, what are you doing here?”

“Hn...” Again, the red eyes glinted for a moment. Also a quicksilver flash of purest white as he grinned.

“Hiei?”

“I always follow you here.” The black hair fluffed out to its normal spike, “I just don’t usually get stepped on.”

Yusuke smiled, the darkness that had been around him suddenly lifting. “Hiei, your hair...”

The demon scowled, “Damn.” In fits and starts, his hair flattened.

“If that’s suppose to be a disguise, it’s not working,” Yusuke laughingly stated.

A low growl was his first answer. Then Hiei spoke a bit more, grudgingly, “I don’t normally have to deal with humans for more than a few seconds. It’s good enough for them.”

Yusuke looked down at his friend, “Blue?”

Hiei shrugged, “Light reflects opposite colors – it’s a simple illusion.” His hair started to fluff again.

Yusuke laughed, “I think you’d do better holding a mohawk.”

Blue eyes blinked up at him, not catching the reference.

“Put your hair back up,” Yusuke ordered Hiei, “Now, the edges need to flatten to the center...” Putting his hands out, Yusuke brushed at Hiei’s hair, “Just move your hair where I do, and leave it there.” *Soft...* Yusuke had forgotten how soft Hiei’s hair was. It looked so spiky and wild, yet the feel of it was the softest fur. Rich, luxurious fur, so thick and soft that he almost couldn’t feel it as he patted it into place on Hiei’s head. He was so intent on getting the mohawk just right that the soft growl took him completely by surprise.

“I’m sorry, did I pull...” Yusuke’s words trailed off as he looked down at Hiei’s face. Normally so serious and grim, so unyielding and hard, the small pointed face that he looked down at was not so grim right now. Hiei’s eyes were closed nearly shut, the lids relaxed and limp. His breaths were coming through a partly open mouth, and Yusuke could see Hiei’s tongue at the edge of his lips. A soft flush, barely discernible in the darkness, covered the demon’s cheeks. As Yusuke stood there, unable to move, Hiei growled again and moved his head,

pushing against Yusuke’s hands that were resting on his hair. *Not hair, fur...* Yusuke suddenly realized what he’d been doing as his hands had been petting the demon’s fur, how he must’ve been affecting the demon... Yusuke remembered Kurama’s laughing voice, ‘Hiei’s fur is very sensitive!’ And Yusuke remembered *that* night.

A sudden wave of emotion flared through his body, finally defining what it was that he’d been yearning for. Defining and creating a need that throbbed through his being. Slowly, Yusuke slipped his hands down from Hiei’s fur to gently caress the flushed cheeks. And he brought his mouth down to touch the demon’s open lips... Hiei’s lips, already soft and pliant, touched his, responding almost before they met. Hiei’s tongue slipped into his mouth and left little trails of burning spice along Yusuke’s tongue and mouth. Yusuke flicked his tongue gently over Hiei’s sharp little teeth and wanted those teeth to gently bite and nibble his flesh... Yusuke groaned and swept his arms around Hiei’s body, pulling the shorter demon to him and feeling the strong chest muscles even through both sets of their clothes. And he felt Hiei’s response.

They both heard the door behind them open. Yusuke yelped and wrapped his arms even more firmly around his friend, pushing the demon against the wall as they stumbled together, wrapped together in arms and legs.

“Oh for gawd’s sake,” came a disgusted voice, “take it somewhere else!!” The man closed his door and locked it before side-stepping around the pair and walking off down the street.

Yusuke’s face was burning. He continued to keep his grip very firmly on Hiei’s hand. “Hiei...” Yusuke said in a strangled voice, “Don’t!”

With a snort, Hiei broke the lock Yusuke had on his wrist and slammed his sword back into its sheath. Red eyes glared after the man walking down the street.

Yusuke breathed a short sigh of relief; it had been close there for a moment. Hiei had been taken by surprise, and finely honed battle reflexes left only one reaction for surprise... Yusuke tentatively reached out to Hiei, but the demon moved the barest inch and avoided the touch. Looking at him, Yusuke thought he could make out a faint trace of shame in the demon’s bearing... He let his hand drop, bowing his head.

“Not you, baka,” the same low gruffness that first caught Yusuke’s attention held it again, “Me. For not paying attention.”

Looking up, Yusuke met the soft blue eyes that looked at him with shaded concern. Yusuke managed a smile, his heart still thumping from both sets of excitement. Hiei tilted his head to one side, acknowledging the smile. Then he frowned as he looked out across the street, “Why’d you hesitate?”

Yusuke blinked. As far as he knew he hadn’t...

“The club,” Hiei explained impatiently. “You usually go straight in.”

‘Usually’? Yusuke suddenly remembered what Hiei had first said to him, that “You always follow me here? What do you mean, ‘always’? I’ve only come here a few...” Yusuke’s voice trailed off as he put together his memory of the last visit, this visit, and that look in the demon’s eyes and realized something he had missed, “I’ve gotten rather predictable, haven’t I?”

With a chuckle, Hiei shook his head, “Yusuke? Predictable? Never.” Then he propelled Yusuke forward a few steps with a hand in the small of his back, “Come on.”

Stumbling slightly, Yusuke recovered and glanced down at his shorter friend. Hiei didn’t look at him as he strode towards the doorway. Yusuke followed with a grin, appreciating the powerful bare arms emerging from a blue vest and watching the dark jeans outlining the equally powerful legs. Yusuke spent a particularly long time studying the area where the vest hung over the jeans, or perhaps just a little lower. “You know, Hiei,” Yusuke remarked quietly, catching up with his friend just before they got to the door, “Most people wear a shirt with a vest.”

The demon shot a glare at him before opening the door and walking in. Yusuke followed, still admiring. The spiky hair was still up in a tolerable mohawk, and the upsweep exposed a slim soft neck before the vest covered the back. Looking at that neck, Yusuke licked his lips.

“No,” Hiei’s word was abrupt, jolting Yusuke out of his fantasy. “One of the back ones.”

The lady bowed, acceding to the order and smoothly redirected them away from the tables towards an upper booth along the wall. “Will you have anything to drink?” she asked.

Yusuke grinned as Hiei slid into the booth, settling so that his back was to the wall and he could see everything around him. Absently, he answered as usual, “Coca-cola. Hiei?”

“Fruit punch.”

As the lady bowed again and left, Yusuke stared. Hiei glowered, “I don’t like alcohol or caffeine.”

“Ah,” Yusuke nodded, finally slipping into the booth beside Hiei. He was very aware of the body next to his as he let his gaze wander out to the stage. The musicians here were good, and the company quiet. Here, in this club, you could hear every nuance of the chords, vocal and instrumental both. Here was somewhere where you could listen. Listen to the harmony and intricacy of expression. Listen to the deepness beyond the music. Yusuke sighed and propped his elbows on the table, leaning his chin on his hands as he closed his eyes and let the peaceful music wash over him.

‘Peace’ was not something he needed often – was, in fact, something he regularly despised. But recently... Yusuke shivered, remembering the pain lacing through his body as the lightning had stuck him over and over again. Remembering the look of fear on Keiko’s face as she’d confronted the demons stalking her. Remembering Kuwabara, jumping in front of him yet again to save his life.

Yusuke poured his memories into the music and let the sound wash them out.

After the lady had put down the drinks and left again, Yusuke opened his eyes and looked beside him. Hiei was watching the musicians. With a grin, Yusuke watched Hiei. He finally understood what it was that had made him hesitate, outside the door. *Luck is also a function of rei.*

It had been a long time since Yusuke had been here. It had been a long time since he’d nearly gotten himself and his friends killed so thoroughly. And the music wasn’t enough to soothe his soul for his pain. “It was my fault, wasn’t it?”

Eyes blinked briefly to red before covering in blue again. That was the only indication that Yusuke had that Hiei had even heard him. The demon continued to stare only at the stage, intent on the instruments. Yusuke sighed; he hadn’t really needed Hiei to answer that one – he’d gotten overwhelmed by old habits in the middle of the battle and had declared it to be ‘his fight’ alone, a personal vendetta. And his friends had stepped back... Yusuke could still remember the anguish in Kurama’s eyes. Hiei, as usual, had been impassive. Even after the battle, the demon was not going to admit that he cared that Yusuke had almost gotten himself killed again. Or... Yusuke put his hand up to his lips briefly, remembering the hunger within Hiei’s kiss. Hiei had admitted it in his own unique fashion.

“Hiei...” Yusuke leaned closer to the demon sitting next to him, his hunger deep. He pressed his leg against Hiei’s and he could feel himself tremble.

Hiei finally looked over at him, eyes shuttered and emotions concealed, “Have you thought about it?” His words were near a whisper.

Thought? Yusuke suddenly remembered what Hiei and Kurama had asked of him the last time, the only time. *Keiko...* Keiko wasn't here. She wouldn't be, not yet – not for several more years yet. And though Keiko was his best friend... she wasn't Hiei.

Yusuke lowered his head, closer to Hiei's. He moved his hand from off the table to under the table, resting his fingers lightly upon Hiei's thigh. Hiei tilted his head up as Yusuke lowered his still further...

The room broke into scattered applause as the musicians bowed and left the stage for a brief break. Conversations started filling the air with background noise as chairs scraped and the lights brightened enough for movement.

Hiei sighed and sat back, resting his head against the cushion of the booth. He looked sideways to Yusuke, a faint grin tugging at the corners of his mouth.

Not taking his gaze off Hiei, Yusuke fumbled in his pockets until he found his wallet. He tossed down enough yen for the drinks and then backed out of the booth, his breath coming rapidly as his wide eyes never left Hiei's.

With a chuckle, Hiei also slid out. He muttered, “Eyes front.”

Gulping, Yusuke yanked his gaze from perfection and then quickly led the way back to his apartment.

Yusuke could barely keep his grasp on the keys as he fiddled with the lock. His attention was one-hundred percent on the demon standing next to him. As they had walked back here, Hiei's vest swung with his every move, revealing glimpses of the solid hard body underneath. Every now and again, Yusuke could see the darker flesh of one of Hiei's nipples. He longed to run his hands over the skin and trace the collarbone he could see to the chestbone and then lower down the ribcage... He wanted to follow his hands with his tongue and to hear the demon growl that rough excited sound. He needed...

Finally, he got the door open. Practically pulling Hiei inside, he slammed the door shut with his foot as he tore at Hiei's clothes with his hands. Hiei's hands reached up and pushed hard on his chest, forcing Yusuke to take a step backwards. Yusuke's brown eyes widened as he stared at Hiei in shock...

“Idiot,” Hiei hissed, his cheeks red as his gaze focused behind Yusuke.

Yusuke gulped and turned to meet his mother's astonished and amused look.

“Well, Yusuke-kun...” his mother drawled his name as she took the cigarette out of her mouth and leaned over to tap it on an ashtray. Her mouth twitched as she suppressed laughter, “I guess I should have told you I was coming back early, but then, you weren't suppose to be back this early.”

“Atsuko-chan, where are you?” A high-pitched voice announced the entrance of another person seconds before that person walked in. “I thought you... Ooooooooooooo...” The last was said in a long gasp of appreciation as the person took in the two men standing by the door. “Oh my...” A head with long flowing hair turned to one side, “Katcha-chan! Takiyo! Come see what Atsuko-chan has brought us!”

Yusuke gulped again, slowly edging back towards the door.

“Oooo!!! How kawaii!!!!” First one, then another, then there were at least five people surrounding him and Hiei, their gazes running over them closer than hands. “I want the little one!” “Oh, what beautiful brown eyes!” “What an adorable mohawk!” “What large—”

Hiei was starting to growl, a dark threatening sound rather than the one Yusuke had wanted to hear. Yusuke reached out and pulled Hiei behind him, blocking him from attacking any of his mother's friends.

“Oh, how cute! He's protecting his friend!” “Doesn't the dark one want to play?” “But we don't bite!” “Like hell you don't!” “Well, only once per...”

Yusuke's mother finally intervened, taking the cigarette out of her mouth, “Mina, mina... That's my son, Yusuke. And his... friend.” She smiled at Yusuke as she said the last word. The blush already covering Yusuke's face deepened.

A collective sigh of disappointment went up from the group.

“Atsuko-chan, you never told us how handsome your son has grown up,” the first person spoke in breathless heaves.

Atsuko rolled her eyes, “Believe me, Hirako, he hasn't grown up yet.”

Yusuke shot a glare at his mom.

Stepping closer to Yusuke, Hirako licked dark red lips, “If he wants to play with us, I think we can let him...”

Yusuke squeaked and backpedaled.

“Ow!” Hiei shoved Yusuke off his foot.

The shove propelled Yusuke straight into Hirako’s arms. And he suddenly realized... Yusuke looked up with a frown, “Marma? Is that you?”

A deep laugh changed with a cough into a high chuckle, “Can’t fool you, little Yu-chan, can I? But here I’m Hirako.” The cross-dresser set Yusuke back on his feet and ruffled his hair, “Don’t worry, we were just having a little fun. Now you take your... friend and run along.” Marma tossed back his hair and winked at Yusuke.

Yusuke didn’t need to be told twice. He reached back with his hand to find the doorknob, finally taking a glance over his shoulder to find the door already open and Hiei out in the hall. Yusuke quickly followed, shutting the door behind him with a sigh of relief.

Hiei glared at Yusuke, “Does that happen often?”

“Uhh...” Yusuke glanced at the door to his apartment, “Not so much anymore. Mom calmed down after I came back. She—” Yusuke broke off his words as the door opened and his mom came out.

She looked Yusuke up and down for a moment, “Sorry, Yusuke, I need the apartment tonight. I really didn’t expect you home anytime soon.” She glanced over at Hiei before returning her gaze to Yusuke, “I understand perfectly,” she smiled, “waiting can be hard. And sometimes it’s too much. But Yusuke, remember that Keiko’s been a good friend to us. Be careful.”

Yusuke sighed, “I will, Mom.”

Atsuko nodded and then grinned, “If you need a motel – the one over on Ryo street is pretty cheap...” she tossed Yusuke a wallet, which he automatically caught, his face burning red. Atsuko winked at Hiei and then went back in the apartment, leaving them standing there.

My mom is recommending motels to me... It was a mortifying thought. After a few moments, Yusuke raised an eyebrow at Hiei, “So what about your place?”

Hiei blinked, “My place?” There was a brief pause before Hiei sighed, “Yusuke – when I’m in the human world, I normally stay at Kurama’s.”

Yusuke’s face had just barely returned to a more normal color when Hiei’s statement turned him red again. Then he thought about it...

“Don’t even think it,” Hiei growled, “You’re mine tonight.”

The possessive air the demon wore just served to make Yusuke’s heart pound louder. Hiei stepped close to him and reached up to pull Yusuke’s head down to where he could lock their lips together. As their bodies pressed together, Yusuke could feel the need that was within Hiei as well as his own.

When the kiss finally broke off, Yusuke stared at Hiei for a long moment before looking wildly around, “Damn, where’s that motel?”

Hiei laughed.

Without too much trouble, they found it, one of the “love motels” that Tokyo was famous for – no people to check you in, just rooms with coin slots outside to rent the room by the hour. *Convenient for the need*, Yusuke thought, studying the rates and times – and the single key left in the rack, indicating only one room was left. “If we wait awhile, we can get it for midnight until morning for the same price as a couple hours right now.”

“You want to wait?” Hiei’s voice was disbelieving.

“Uhh,” Yusuke looked down at his friend... and then fed all the money he had into the slot. Even with what his mom had given him, he barely had sufficient money for a two hour slot – but the way he felt now, it would be enough time. There was a click as the panel released the key. “Come on, Hiei...” Yusuke reached for the key, but it was gone... With a grin, Yusuke followed Hiei down the hall to the room. He wasn’t slow, but by the time he got there the demon was already inside, undressed, and waiting for him. Yusuke caught his breath and dashed inside the room, closing the door behind him and locking it.

He started to fumble with his shirt, but a rough voice forestalled him, “Let me.” Yusuke stood, trembling, as Hiei walked to him, red eyes shining. “Yusuke...” Hiei murmured, drawing his hand over the outside of Yusuke’s shirt, flattening his palm over Yusuke’s chest.

Yusuke gasped, “Hiei, don’t wait...”

Hiei grinned up at him, “That’s what I always tell the fox. But sometimes...” He pushed Yusuke’s jacket off his shoulders and followed the move with his hands all the way down Yusuke’s arms. Yusuke moaned and bent his head over the demon. As soon as his jacket was off, he reached to stroke the hard lines of Hiei’s chest. As often as he saw Hiei in battle, he would never stop admiring the bare torso... and now he could also... he stroked his hand lower, hearing the demon growl.

There was a flash of fire surrounding Yusuke and suddenly his shirt turned into ashes and fell off. Closing his eyes, Yusuke lost himself in combination of heat and coolness and soft ashes falling over his skin as breezes tickled his chest... And then the strong hands were undoing the button on his jeans. Yusuke opened his eyes, “You burn my shirt but not my pants?” He loved hearing Hiei’s chuckle.

“You need something to wear out of here,” Hiei knelt and took the zipper in his mouth, drawing it down.

Yusuke dug his hands into Hiei’s shoulders as he fought not to thrust his hips forward. The relief of pressure of having his jeans off was nothing compared to the pressure of expectation and need he was experiencing now. He thought he was going to die as Hiei licked gently at the tip while he brought his burning hands up to cup Yusuke tightly.

“Yusuke! I’ve got great ne—” the perky, happy, excited voice broke off with evident startlement.

Hiei groaned and leaned his head on Yusuke’s hip. Yusuke looked up... “Botan – what are you doing here?”

“Just leaving...” The goddess of the River Death was an ashen white as she tried very very hard to keep her eyes on Yusuke’s head, but they kept wandering down... Her oar trembled as she swung it around and prepared to do a fade out.

Hiei raised his head, “You had news?”

“Uhh...”

It was Yusuke’s turn to groan, “Just let her leave, already!”

Hiei stood up and shrugged, “If she has something she has to tell you, she’ll just be back some other time – who knows if the timing will be any better then!”

That was a definite point. Yusuke motioned for Botan to go ahead.

Botan swallowed, “Uh, well... Are you sure?”

“GET ON WITH IT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

“Right, well, it’s about that demon you got today. Koenma was sifting through its memories—”

“How?” Yusuke had left the demon not much more than an overdone beef patty.

Botan shrugged, “There are ways.”

Thinking about the matter-of-fact way she said that, Yusuke changed his mind, “I don’t want to know.”

“Okay,” Botan was all business now; except when she happened to let her gaze wander lower than Hiei or Yusuke’s waistlines. “The demon was also

the one responsible for the deaths that have been occurring in Florida and Denmark. We can recall our operatives there, and you won’t have to make that overseas trip.”

Actually, Yusuke had been looking forward to that but at the moment he could care less. “That’s nice, Botan. Was there anything else?”

“Uh, Koenma says ‘nice job’ and wants you to take some time for yourself,” Botan was blushing furiously as she stumbled through the last part.

“Thanks Botan. Thank Koenma for me. Now get out.”

“Wait, Yusuke – there’s more,” Hiei said, his gaze focused on Botan.

Yusuke blinked and looked down at his shorter friend in surprise at the tone. Hiei was almost quivering, he was so intent.

Botan fumbled in her long sleeves, looking for something, “Well, the case in Denmark was one that Enma Daiou was personally interested in, so he sent this.” She held out a tiny stone that glimmered a light of its own.

Hiei gave a triumphant shout, grinning like a madman.

Yusuke glanced down at Hiei in puzzlement before moving to take the gem from Botan’s hand. It was very small, only a couple of millimeters in diameter, a round cabochon, and it glowed a steady yellow-golden glow.

Peering into his hand, Hiei grinned again and looked up to meet Yusuke’s gaze, “Tomorrow we go get your ear pierced.”

“Huh?” Yusuke involuntarily lifted his hand to his ears, “Nobody’s touching my ears!”

Botan laughed, “It’s customary for a person so favored with Enma Daiou’s mark to display it.” She sobered slightly, “It’s not given out often.”

“And you approve?” Yusuke frowned at Hiei – the demon was not normally known for his support of authority.

“It also is a source of rei power and protection,” Hiei explained solemnly, though he did give Yusuke a look that said as plain as words that Yusuke was being unnecessarily stubborn and bullheaded.

Yusuke sighed. He didn’t care – he just wanted to be alone with Hiei again, with the feelings they had shared... He clenched his fist around the small stone. “Botan. Go.”

Botan bit her lip, “Yusuke... don’t hurt Keiko. Please.”

“GET OUT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” Yusuke threw the stone at the wall as Botan disappeared with a squeal. Then he collapsed face-down on the bed, his body trembling as he grabbed the pillow and buried his head into it.

He lay there for a long time before he finally felt a hand resting on his back. Yusuke didn’t move, clenching his eyes tightly shut and holding his breath as he tried hard not to cry.

“Yusuke,” Hiei’s soft voice promised safety as his hands gently stroked Yusuke’s back, soothing and healing.

His lungs burning, Yusuke gulped in a mouth of pillow-strained air. It wasn’t quite enough oxygen, but the tightness in his chest receded slightly. His next breath came a bit easier. The bed shifted as Hiei sat down next to Yusuke and continued his quiet ministrations. Yusuke felt the care and concern from his friend but he didn’t yet have the strength to look up and meet those red eyes. He sighed into the pillow and then moved it out of the way as he spoke, “Is it so wrong?”

“Huh?”

“What we’re doing... How can it be wrong?”

Hiei sat back with a snort, “It’s not. Botan was just surprised.”

Yusuke rolled over and looked at his friend. Hiei had abandoned all attempts at disguise and his hair was the spiky point Yusuke was used to seeing, the white star above the head, the blue edging the black. Hiei had also taken off the dark bandanna that had been over his jagan and the third eye stared at him along with the other two. Hiei’s two eyes, small red orbs shining in the white. His third, darker and larger, more pupil than iris, the iris filling the slit. When Hiei used his powers, it gleamed purple; now the jagan was merely a shade between brown and red, darker than his other two but still not quite human. Hiei was not human, he was demon. A demon of power and strength. Hiei’s whole body spoke of that power, with his muscular chest and arms and slim abdomen without a trace of fat. Yet Hiei’s power was more than his body, it was also in himself; in his bearing, his eyes, his presence. The opponent who underestimated Hiei was in for a big surprise. Yusuke had not ever underestimated Hiei; he still got surprised.

Yusuke wanted... “It wasn’t just Botan. It was Mom, and you and Kurama too.”

With a blink, Hiei waited to see what Yusuke meant.

“You all want to know what I’m going to do about Keiko.” Yusuke rolled over again, this time propping himself up on his elbows as he stared at the pillow. “Is it really wrong for me to be here with you?”

Hiei sighed and softly started stroking Yusuke again, fingering the soft hairs at his neck and trying to soothe out the tense muscles in his shoulders. It was a long time before he answered, and in that time Yusuke’s tension got worse, not less. “It would be better if she knew.”

Yusuke shut his eyes and clenched his fists, “Like hell!”

Hiei sighed again and didn’t say anything more.

Damnit. A conversation with Hiei is like pulling teeth and I don’t have the patience for this. “So I should call her up and say, ‘hey Keiko – I’m having sex with Hiei tonight!’?”

Hiei snorted, “That’s not what I meant.” He was silent for so long that Yusuke thought he was going to have to do some more prodding, but Hiei finally spoke, “She told you she doesn’t want sex until she’s out of High School, right?”

“Yeah.” Yusuke still remembered Keiko’s shining brown eyes as she stared at a tree and explained that she didn’t want to drop out to take care of a baby. He still wondered just how Keiko knew that condoms were only eighty percent effective. And his guilt over his mom meant that he was never going to press Keiko on the issue. *I won’t leave her alone like Mom; but I’m not going to put her in that position in the first place.*

“So you’ve already talked to her about your feelings and needs.”

Yusuke wrinkled his nose, “Sortof...” *It really wasn’t something one talked about with a girl!!!*

Hiei sighed and scratched his nose, “In Yusuke terms, that means no.” *How come I always end up being the one to talk to Yusuke about these things???* “Kurama and I are committed to each other, yet I’m here with you.”

Rolling over, Yusuke stared at Hiei with big wide eyes. Hiei smiled at him.

“It’s alright, because Kurama and I have talked about it.”

Yusuke gulped, “You’d planned to have sex with me tonight?”

Hiei chuckled, “Not at all.” He ran his fingers over Yusuke’s side, trailing down to rest on his hip, “But I’m certainly not protesting! Ah, Yusuke...” the demon’s voice turned hot and sultry as he named the object of his desire. Yusuke gasped, his breathing

ragged as he stared at those red eyes... Hiei turned his head to look at the painting on the wall, a mountain scene, "Kurama knew I was following you tonight, that I would watch you through the night until you got safely home again."

Keeping me safe? Yusuke narrowed his eyes in indignation, but Hiei laid a finger over his lips before he could speak.

"I follow so I can watch you. Nothing more." Hiei closed his eyes and his normally impassive features revealed sorrow.

Yusuke stared, realizing again how deeply his friends cared, "If I died, would you come to my funeral?"

"WHAT?????" Hiei jumped off the bed, his sword in his hand, his red eyes searching out danger.

"Where do you keep your sword? It wasn't there a moment ago..."

Hiei's growl was decidedly not erotic.

Yusuke smiled to himself and then asked again, "Not now, but if it ever happened, if I died, would you come to my funeral?"

"That's called a hypothetical situation." Hiei slammed the sword back in its sheath and the sword disappeared, "No."

Brown eyes widened and Yusuke had to fight a sorrow that rose within him and threatened to overwhelm him. And then he wondered why he fought and he didn't.

"Ah for..." Strong arms enfolded him once again, "Damn it Yusuke, you know how I hate explaining. Think about it a minute."

"Hiei!"

The demon sighed, "I wouldn't be at your funeral because I'd be dead too."

Yusuke raised his head and stared at his friend.

Hiei quirked a grin at him, "You don't think I'd let whatever killed you live, do you? And if it was good enough to kill you, it would certainly kill me too."

Oh... Yusuke suddenly felt much better.

"Kurama would go," Hiei said thoughtfully, "Kurama told me once that if I died, he'd keep living so that he could take care of the kids."

"Kids???"

"That was my reaction too." Hiei grinned, "In this case, it would be everybody else in our lives that we care about. Kurama would live to watch Keiko and your mom and his mom and Yukina..." He sighed, "Yusuke, when I go back and tell Kurama

about tonight, he'll just smile at me with those special green eyes of his and ask me how it was..."

"He's going to laugh."

Hiei chuckled, "Probably. Ask him sometime about our first attempt." Yusuke started to ask it right then but Hiei forestalled him, "Back on topic. You have this habit of jumping subjects everywhere, and I really don't want to spend the night talking!"

"Um, no..." Yusuke wrenched his mind back, "So it's okay for you to have sex with me, but not for me to have sex with you?"

Hiei dropped his head in his hands.

"No?" Yusuke watched the silent demon for a moment, and thought about it. Slowly, he said, "You and Kurama are a couple... and he knows you won't betray him, so all this is, for you, is sex. But Keiko... will think I'm betraying her if she finds out. That's why everybody keeps telling me not to hurt her."

"It's not just sex for me," Hiei said softly, "And it's less a matter of Keiko finding out, than your lack of trust in not telling her in the first place."

That wrenched Yusuke's heart, both statements. He knew he loved the demon, and he knew he loved Keiko. He trusted Hiei...

"You trust Keiko, I know you do," Hiei raised his head, "And she trusts you."

Yusuke fidgeted, "I can't tell her, that'd just be too..." Embarrassing was the word, but Yusuke was also afraid of the pain he'd see in her eyes.

Hiei sighed, "Keiko is stronger than you think. Stronger than any of you think. One day, you will come to know her strength. But Yusuke, whatever comes of this must be given by you freely. If you are ashamed and defensive, then she will only see wrong instead of the love that we share."

The love... Yusuke's eyes were wide as he stared... "Hiei..." He reached out to touch Hiei's shoulder gently, carefully, afraid that the demon would vanish under his fingers. He stroked Hiei and stared at his friend.

Hiei smiled a real smile, not one of his little grins, "I love you too, Yusuke."

"But Kurama?"

"Oh, Yusuke," Hiei shook his head, "You are so young... we have room in our hearts for as many people as can make their way truthfully in." He raised Yusuke's hand to his lips and kissed the fingers softly, "I love Kurama and want to spend my life with him." He tilted his head to regard Yusuke steadily, "Just as you want to spend your life with Keiko, not me."

Yusuke swallowed and reclaimed his hand, “I want you there too.” As red eyes blinked at him, Yusuke turned his head to stare at the same picture Hiei had been looking at earlier, yet instead of the picture he saw a vision stretching out before him. “I want you with me through my life, my strong friend, the one I trust with not just my life but my friends’ lives. I want you to be my general, my advisor, my support. I want you to watch over my kids long after I’m gone – if they’re worthy of you. I want Kurama there too. I want his smiles and laughter, his love of life and his cool reason. I want him to help raise my kids and teach them. I want Kuwabara and Yukina to live with us and be with us and to share in the days and nights and summers and winters; to raise our children together and share in the joys.” He paused for a moment, “I want Keiko by my side forever. I want her to be the mother of my children and the one I come back to. I want her strength and her love to be mine and I’ll share mine with her.” Yusuke sighed, “I want it all.”

He’d expected the last statement to draw some sort of sarcastic or amused remark from the demon, but there was only silence. Yusuke turned his gaze off the picture and searched for Hiei. The demon was sitting on the bed, his head bowed into his hands, his body shaking silently. Yusuke’s eyes widened and he scrambled to hold his friend, “Hey, I didn’t mean to upset you... Hiei, I’m sorry...”

“Your hand,” the words were rough and deep, muted as Hiei didn’t raise his head.

“Huh?”

“Give me your hand...”

Yusuke put his hand on Hiei’s thigh, stroking the soft skin.

Hiei snorted briefly as he turned Yusuke’s hand over to expose the palm, and then he dropped two glittering stones in and closed Yusuke’s fingers over them. He stood up off the bed and turned his body away from Yusuke.

Opening his hand, Yusuke stared down at the two gems there. One a small golden stone that shone with its own light, Enma’s favor. The other picked up that light and reflected it back. Twice as large, all shimmery facets that made it round, the tear gem was a beautiful pale blue color like aquamarine.

He’d never seen a tear gem from Hiei, much less ever expected to hold one, nor had he ever thought to be the cause for the creation of one. Yusuke swallowed hard.

“Yusuke,” Hiei turned around and Yusuke could see the glistening of his eyes where other tears were unshed. Hiei walked to him and knelt on the floor

before him, looking up as he reached to hold Yusuke’s hand that held the gems. The red eyes were as large and soft as Yukina’s normally were, and they held the weight of emotions unspoken. “Yusuke,” Hiei’s voice was soft, full of truth, “I admire and respect your scope of vision.” And he leaned over and kissed the hand he was holding.

The tears that Hiei didn’t shed dripped down Yusuke’s face as he leaned over and wrapped his arms around Hiei, ducking his head into Hiei’s soft fur, his fist clenched tight around the stones. “You’re not alone,” he whispered, “You’ll never be alone again if I have anything to say about it. I want you with me, Hiei, forever.” Hiei lifted his head to reach Yusuke’s lips with his own. And they met in gentle warmth, so different than the explosive fire of before. Yusuke leaned over Hiei until he was almost sliding off the bed.

Hiei chuckled as he stood up within the circle of Yusuke’s arms, “Let’s use the bed, not the floor.” He pressed forward on Yusuke, pushing the taller boy back until he was laying flat, staring with velvety brown eyes up at Hiei. Hiei’s breathing stopped for a moment before he reached with lips and fingers to possess that which looked at him so steadily.

“Ooo...” Yusuke moaned under Hiei’s touch. So like the demon, strong, controlled, oddly gentle. He started to return the touches and strokes, and paused, “Hiei – what do I do with these?”

Hiei glanced at the stones, “Personal space.”

Yusuke regarded him in exasperation, “You never finished teaching me that one.”

“Oh...”

“Will you hold them?”

Hiei shook his head. The gems were for Yusuke alone. He slipped off the bed and grabbed Yusuke’s pants, “Put them in the pocket, then you won’t forget them when we leave.”

Yusuke grinned at the reasoning and did so. Then he reached again for the demon, pulling him back into his arms and plastering kisses everywhere on Hiei’s body he could touch. Hiei wrapped himself around Yusuke and also explored hungrily, eagerly, delight evident in his touch, pleasure revealed in his growls and moans. The earlier frantic need had been replaced with a slower, gentler pace as they both acknowledged the emotions responsible for the act.

“Now, Yusuke,” Hiei growled gently as he stared down into the velvet brown eyes, “Let me show you a dance...” He leaned in and lightly kissed Yusuke’s nose.

...

“Hiei,” Yusuke nibbled upon an earlobe as he whispered, “are you sure about this?”

Hiei twisted his head to look over his shoulder at Yusuke, his red eyes half-lidded yet still scornful, “Yusuke...”

Stroking the powerful back muscles, Yusuke gulped, “Kurama’s nectar...”

“I can deal with a little pain – just do it!”

Yusuke kissed Hiei’s shoulder and bit lightly down as he prepared to do something he’d done only once before, and not to Hiei. That Hiei would allow him to... Hiei was not a submissive personality normally and Yusuke trembled in the thought of what he was doing...

The demon vanished from underneath him, sending Yusuke into a nose-dive on the bed.

“What the hell is that!” Hiei snarled, his voice hard and prepared for fight.

Yusuke raised his head and saw the demon standing in the middle of the room, naked sword in his hands, his gaze searching for... “What was what?” Yusuke moaned as he sat up, rubbing his nose, searching for whatever it was that had alarmed the demon.

“That noise...” Hiei paced carefully around the room. Suddenly, there was a shrill electronic whine that buzzed for two seconds and then there was silence again. Hiei jumped and finally located the speaker on the ceiling. “It’s coming from there...”

Yusuke glanced over at the display next to the door. It was blinking ‘0:00’ indicating their time was done. With a groan, Yusuke fell back against the bed, “Damn it... I put in enough money for...” He turned his wrist to look at his watch, “We’ve already been here for two hours??? But...” But they hadn’t even... ! It wasn’t fair! *Too much talking. Start, stop, talk, dither... and then work up to it again. Two hours?* “How can it have taken two hours?”

Hiei coughed. He’d forgotten about the time limit. After the emotional trauma Yusuke had been through, he’d wanted to make sure that Yusuke had a good experience. Instead... “Uh, sorry – Kurama calls it a slow dance... but this probably wasn’t the best time for that.”

“Time...” Yusuke sighed and winced as another buzz sounded. “Hiei, go put more money in the slot. There’s one on the inside of the door.”

After another few moments of silence broken by another buzz, Yusuke sat up and looked at Hiei. Hiei

shifted weight between his feet uncomfortably, “I didn’t bring any,” he muttered.

“What?” Yusuke winced as the electronic shrill came again.

“I didn’t bring any money with me.”

“Oh for...” Yusuke stared at his friend, “I put all of mine in.”

Hiei reached up to put his hands over his ears at the next whine. His sword was gone again. “Is it going to keep doing that?”

“Until we put more money in or leave. In another five minutes, the attendant will be here in a minute to pound on the door and tell us the same thing.” Yusuke sighed, “Can’t you just summon up some yen?”

“Summon?” Hiei blinked.

“Well, where the hell did you get human clothes?”

Hiei shrugged, “I keep an assortment at home. Or I send my imps to get them.” He paused, “I do have a bank account, several of them, but I’d have to go withdraw the money.”

Yusuke stared and then rolled over. A high keening sound accompanied the next buzz and Yusuke got off the bed and snapped at Hiei, “Stop that!”

Hiei glared at him, his hands over his ears still, his keening stopped. But at the next alert, Hiei flitted and vanished, his clothes with him.

“Oh geez...” Yusuke moaned and then reached for his own pants. Hiei was waiting for him outside the building and the two of them just looked at each other for several long moments.

“There’s an alley over there,” Hiei finally said. Yusuke glared.

“So now what do we do?”

The two men walked down the noisy streets of Tokyo. In a city whose nightlife was legendary, it was just starting to come alive at midnight.

Hiei shrugged, “Want to get something to eat?”

“With what money?”

“Pawn shop?”

“If we find one, we’re going back to the hotel. And I’m not trading in the gems!”

Hiei rummaged through his clothes.

Yusuke watched in amusement, “Hiei, you’re not wearing enough for you to be searching that hard for something.”

Red eyes laughed at him, “You know, you’re rather sexy-looking wearing your jacket without your shirt... Makes me want to run my hands inside...”

“Stop it, Hiei...” Yusuke groaned. Walking was already painful with the pressure on his jeans, and Hiei wasn’t making it any easier.

Finally the demon pulled out an assortment of coins from his pocket and started sorting through them. Yusuke looked over and pulled out some hexagonal shaped ones and looked at them curiously. “West Indies,” Hiei said briefly. Yusuke picked up one that was almost black. “Got that one off a ship that sank... back in 1560, I think.”

“What were you doing in a sunken ship?” *For that matter, when were you there?*

“I was looking for something...” Hiei shrugged. Then he brightened, “Ah,” and pulled out a couple of 100 yen pieces.

Yusuke looked at the dates and then looked at Hiei. The demon shrugged again, “You know how sometimes loose change gets into cracks and corners in your backpack? Well, I was just shaking out the edges. Stuff accumulates after awhile.”

“I don’t even want to know what else came out,” Yusuke muttered. *Do I really want to learn that personal space crap?* He tossed the coins back to Hiei, “Well, that’s enough for a cup of coffee if not for five minutes at the hotel.”

“Tea,” Hiei said firmly. “And miso soup.” At the look Yusuke gave him, the demon shrugged again, “I’m hungry.” He gave Yusuke a look back that conveyed another meaning in his words as he added, “I’ll take what I can get at this point, but nothing artificial.”

Yusuke glared at him, his body aching with unsatisfied need, before he laughed at his friend and the situation. Then he led the way to an all-night coffee shop.

“Has this ever happened to you before, Hiei?” Yusuke couldn’t help asking as he stirred his miso and watched the kelp and tofu swirl in the thin soup.

Hiei raised an eyebrow that disappeared under his navy bandanna. His hair was up in the mohawk again and Yusuke privately thought that Hiei looked adorably cute.

Yusuke glared at the eyebrow, “I meant the situation!”

With a chuckle, Hiei relented, “Getting interrupted? More times than I care to remember,” he spoke with heartfelt annoyance. “Not being able to

find a place?” the demon grinned, “Not often.” He picked up his bowl of soup and drank.

“And?”

“Well, the interruptions usually either take care of themselves, or have to be dealt with. As for the place,” Hiei shrugged, “In the human world, a forest is usually secluded enough. In the Makai, I can just go to one of my fortresses.” Done with the soup, he sipped his tea.

“One of...?” Yusuke blinked and then leaned forward, “Take me there!” He suddenly wanted to see one of the places that Hiei would call ‘home’.

Hiei put down his cup with enough violence that the tea sloshed over, “No!” His growl was low and deep, reverberating with menace and darkness and peril.

Yusuke frowned, “Why not?”

Red eyes flared and Hiei’s hair fluttered into two points as his skin started to change color. Then he regained control of himself and faded back to as normal an appearance as he could manage. He pinned Yusuke with a glance and didn’t answer.

Hiei’s threats couldn’t work on Yusuke. Yusuke was secure with his own power and his confidence. He’d beaten Hiei once before, and Hiei followed him as much as he followed anyone. Yusuke narrowed his own gaze, and pushed out with his rei to block the waves that were coming off Hiei, “What aren’t you telling me?”

Abruptly backing down, Hiei picked up his cup again and sipped calmly, before answering, “I can’t take you into the Makai.”

Yusuke blinked, absorbing that; and then he questioned it, “Can’t, or won’t?”

Hiei shrugged, “Won’t.”

Drumming his fingers on the table between them, Yusuke waited.

“Let it go, Yusuke.”

“Not a chance.”

Hiei sighed, “I don’t dare bring you to the attention of my enemies yet. If I brought you into the Makai, with me, to one of my homes... It will be noted. Nothing happens in the Makai that is not public knowledge.”

Damn... Yusuke had heard that reasoning before and had been forced to agree with it then too. That didn’t mean he liked it. He changed topics, “You said earlier that you could get your imps to fetch stuff for you. Why don’t you have them bring you some yen?”

Hiei shrugged, “I don’t want them to know what’s happening.”

?? Yusuke blinked in puzzlement, “I’ve met your imps before, so how is this any different? And if you don’t want them to see me, I could wait around the corner...”

“That... won’t work with my youki in its current state,” Hiei flushed minimally, “Even as discreet as my imps are, they’ll recognize the situation. And... your scent is fairly heavy on me right now.”

Yusuke glared, “Are you ashamed of me?”

Hiei rolled his eyes, “Of course not!”

The human didn’t let up on his powerful glare.

Hiei bit his lip, resisting.

Yusuke relented enough to ask another question, “Do they know about Kurama?”

“Yes...”

“So?”

Hiei sighed, giving in again, “Same problem as before. Everybody in the Makai knows by now that I fight in your team. But... if it’s seen that I’m... in a relationship with you, they’ll try and use that. My fighting with you could be for numerous reasons and not something for them to interfere with. A relationship... is for exploitation.”

Yusuke winced, remembering how the demons that attacked him kept using Keiko as bait, over and over again. Another reason he didn’t want to be that close to her yet... he was afraid of what they would do if she was his lover rather than just his friend. “I’m not Keiko,” Yusuke said softly, “I can take care of myself.”

There was no answer from the demon across from him and Yusuke’s anger started to flare as hot as his passion earlier, “I said I can take care of myself!”

Hiei leaned back in the booth and stared at his friend impassively, “I heard you.”

“And?”

“And I’m not going to call my imps.”

Yusuke growled, his fists clenching tightly, “But you’ll call them around Kurama...”

“Oh for...” Hiei reached a hand up to pinch the bridge of his nose, “Yusuke, do you have the faintest idea what being a kitsune means?”

“He’s less powerful than I am!”

“That’s not what I was talking about.” Hiei sighed, “How do we keep coming back to Kurama anyhow?”

“Maybe because you’ve actually come with him!”

One step too far. Hiei’s eyes widened briefly, then narrowed in a matching anger and he blurred and disappeared.

Yusuke blinked and stared at the empty seat across from him. “Hiei?” he said uncertainly, looking around. “I was just letting off steam... Hiei?” There was no answer. Yusuke stood up and headed for the door, *he’s waiting for me outside...* His heart clenched, wanting to believe the thought.

“Pardon me, but it is customary to pay for food you’ve eaten.”

Yusuke looked at the shopkeeper in confusion for a moment before reaching into his pocket... and remembering that Hiei had the money. “Hiei...!”

He was led to the back room where the dirty dishes were. As Yusuke stared at them, he felt like just walking away and leaving. Two cups of tea and bowls of miso soup weren’t worth it. There was nothing the shopkeeper could do to him... Yusuke turned and started to walk out, but in his mind, a pair of green eyes and a pair of brown ones looked at him in reproach. With a sigh and a muttered curse at Kurama and Keiko, Yusuke grabbed the dishcloth.

Yusuke bit his lip as he stared at the house. *Do I really want to do this?* But he kept seeing the look of anger in Hiei’s eyes as he disappeared. *I can’t leave it like that.* He knocked on the door. After a few minutes he knocked again.

As the door opened, a soft gentle voice accompanied it, “How may I help you?”

“Uh,” Yusuke shifted uneasily, “Is Kurama... I mean Shuiichi... here?”

An equally soft, just a touch deeper, voice replied from somewhere behind the door, “Yes, I’m here. Did you need something, Yusuke?” The voice, while polite, still managed to sound annoyed. Kurama moved up to stand beside his mom.

“Is Hiei here?” Yusuke blurted out, too worried to really think about anything else.

Kurama’s face flushed solid red as he glanced down at his mother.

“Kurama, please! I’ve got to find Hiei!” Then Yusuke realized what was happening, “Uhh... sorry, Shuiichi... I forgot what time it is...” His shoulders drooping, Yusuke turned to leave.

“Yusuke, wait!” Kurama shook his head, “Hiei isn’t here – did you two have a fight?”

His redness almost matched Kurama’s as he looked down at his feet and muttered, “Sortof...”

Kurama sighed and ran a hand over his face, “I’m sorry, Mother – I’ll take care of this.”

The delicate woman who had answered the door glanced up at her tall son and smiled at him. Then she bowed to Yusuke and moved away somewhere inside the house.

“I’m sorry, Kurama,” Yusuke muttered again, “I wasn’t thinking...”

Kurama smothered a yawn, “Next time, just toss a rock at my window or something...” The taller red-head stared down at Yusuke for a moment before stepping back and waving a hand, “Come on in, Yusuke, and tell me about it.”

Kurama doubled over, laughing.

Yusuke flushed, “Kurama...”

“Oh, Yusuke...” the half-human straightened up, wiping his eyes, “Okay, so you left your mom’s...” he smothered further laughter, “Then what?”

His face couldn’t get much redder, “Then we went to a motel...”

Kurama’s howls filled the room. He was down on the floor next to his desk chair, his arms around his stomach. When he’d gotten enough breath, he straightened up, “Oh, poor Botan!!!!”

Yusuke glanced at him sourly, “It wasn’t Botan I was concerned about!”

“No...” Kurama started giggling again, “So what was the next interruption?”

“We ran out of time at the motel,” Yusuke muttered.

Kurama raised very high eyebrows, “You ran out of time?”

“Hiei was... it... well, he called it a slow dance and we just...”

Biting his lip firmly, his green eyes dancing merrily, Kurama waved a hand, halting the rest of Yusuke’s fumbling explanation. “That’s okay, I’ve got a pretty good idea. Oh, poor Yusuke!” Kurama’s voice somehow managed to be sympathetic while still laughing.

Yusuke sat silently, reviewing the next part of the night in his mind and wishing it hadn’t happened.

Sensing something different, Kurama straightened up and poured them some more tea before settling down again. In a gentle, encouraging voice, he asked Yusuke to continue.

Yusuke sighed, “I asked him to take me to the Makai and he wouldn’t.”

Kurama waited.

“And then I asked him to call his imps... and he wouldn’t. I... got mad.”

“Um,” Kurama tapped a long finger on the side of his cup. “And Hiei left?”

Yusuke flushed, “Yeah...” There was a long silence before Yusuke looked up to meet the gentle green eyes that were so caring and patient. “Kurama... why can the imps know that you... uh...” Yusuke cleared his throat, face flaming, “but not me?”

A gorgeous red eyebrow raised, “Oh?” He studied Yusuke for a moment, “Yusuke, how did I get into the conversation anyhow?”

Yusuke blushed and studied the carpet between his toes.

“I see.” Kurama stood up and moved to a drawer, bringing out a small velvet pouch, “Yusuke – what’s in your pocket?”

“Huh?” Yusuke involuntarily reached to check and his fingers encountered two hard stones... He drew them out, remembering. Looking up, he met Kurama’s green gaze and held the gems out to him.

Kurama shook his head, “They’re yours.” He offered instead a tray to put them on. When Yusuke had done so, Kurama studied them carefully. He smiled at the golden one and turned that smile on Yusuke, “Now we have to go pierce your ear.”

Wincing, Yusuke raised his hand, “Why my ear?” Kurama’s laughter was rich and vibrant, full of joy and delight, life sparkling within every note. Yusuke’s heart twisted at the sound of it, so different than Hiei’s soft chuckles, yet both made their way into his soul and stayed there.

“I don’t think you’d want to wear a ring or a necklace, the other two traditional settings for a stone from Enma.” Kurama’s face was alight with the gentle teasing and open sharing, “Actually, I think you’d look good with an earring.” Kurama reached out to touch Yusuke’s left earlobe, “One pierce, a simple setting, and the rich amber tones will highlight your beautiful brown eyes.” He grinned and winked, “You don’t have to worry about your masculine pride... I think a single earring will just make you even more ruggedly handsome and desirable – a pirate king.”

Staring into Kurama’s green eyes, listening to Kurama’s soft voice, feeling Kurama’s touch on his ear, hearing the words of praise... Yusuke groaned and buried his head in his hands, turning his body to collapse against the side of the bed he was sitting next to. *Not again... Oh, Hiei...*

A soft touch drifted over the back of his neck and withdrew. “I’m sorry, Yusuke,” Kurama’s voice was genuine in his concern, “I didn’t mean to tease.” There was a gentle sigh, “Yusuke, do you know what Hiei’s tear gem means?”

Yusuke blinked, opened his eyes and turned his head. He met Kurama’s emerald gaze with only slight trembling before turning his attention back to the tray.

Moving Yusuke’s golden and blue stones to one side, Kurama emptied the pouch he’d retrieved. A dozen or so small stones bounced and rolled on the tray, sparkling and gleaming in the bedroom light. Yusuke gasped at the tear gems spread out before him and reached a wondering hand out but didn’t touch them.

Kurama smiled and pushed a few to one side, separating them. Yusuke had never seen black gems before. They were faceted, sparkling gems, but undeniably black, absorbing light and reflecting darkness. “Black is sorrow.”

Yusuke looked up to see a pain in Kurama’s eyes that he’d seen only a few times before. A pain that made him want to reach out and comfort, to drive that pain away because nobody should have to feel it.

“Hiei’s tear gems differ in color depending on his emotions. The black ones reflect his pain that he will not show otherwise,” Kurama sighed, staring at the five black stones on the tray.

With a gulp, Yusuke turned his attention back to the gems. He reached a hand to hover over the three brightest, most vibrant gems in the lot. He was drawn to the amethyst richness that sparkled and danced, the motes of light pouring out in shades of purples that ranged a small spectrum.

Kurama grinned, “If you two had actually finished your time in the motel, you might have gotten one that looked like that.”

Yusuke looked up in absolute surprise, not knowing the meaning behind... His cheeks flared red and he wondered if it could somehow be detrimental to one’s health to spend so much time blushing. “Uhh, blue?” Yusuke nervously returned his gaze to the rest. The six other stones in Kurama’s lot ranged in colors over the rest of the rainbow, mostly in shades of blue and green but tending to deeper hues. Yusuke’s stone was the palest in the lot.

“Yours is the closest I’ve ever seen to Hiei shedding a true Koorime tear, a crystal gem. With him, the clearness is for the truth and purity of the expression.” Kurama turned over one of his, a blue-green gem that was the color of the ocean, with waves rippling through the stone as they did the

water. “Blue is love.” He picked up Yusuke’s stone and held it to the light, studying the clear-blue color.

Yusuke looked up sharply, his mouth hanging open.

Kurama smiled gently, “Yusuke, you really don’t have to be jealous of me, not with a stone like that.” Reaching out, Kurama took Yusuke’s hand in his and opened it to the palm before dropping the aqua-gem in and closing Yusuke’s fist around it. “If anything,” Kurama laughed, his green eyes still holding Yusuke to him, “I should be jealous of you.”

His heart was pounding so loudly, Yusuke was afraid it would wake up Kurama’s mom again. He gulped as he trembled in Kurama’s grasp... “Hiei said he wants to spend his life with you.”

“Oh, Yusuke,” Kurama’s laughter was music and joy, “I know that.” He grinned at his friend, “I was joking, you silly human.” Slowly, Kurama raised Yusuke’s clenched fist to his mouth and he softly kissed the tight knuckles, brushing his lips over the skin. When he withdrew, he still didn’t let go of Yusuke’s hand, “Hiei and I both love you, and you should know that.”

Yusuke’s body was doing more than just trembling, but he forced himself to hold still. Finally Kurama let go; Yusuke’s hand felt lonely.

Kurama sighed, “Yusuke, Hiei doesn’t hold grudges,” he paused for a moment, “Well, rarely. Never against friends. I’m sure he forgot about his anger five minutes after he left you.”

“But he didn’t come back,” Yusuke’s voice was a tight whisper.

With a shrug, Kurama dismissed that concern, “He wouldn’t think of that.” Kurama sighed, “Yusuke, Hiei is most likely up atop a tree right now, curled up sleeping.” He looked at the tired, stressed, hungry boy in front of him, “You should do the same.”

Yusuke managed a grin, “On a tree branch?”

Kurama laughed, looking fondly at his friend. Carefully, he let his gaze drift to what Yusuke was leaning against, “Actually, I was thinking my bed would do.”

Oh geez... The fire was back. Most definitely back, and quite definitely burning. Yusuke couldn’t breathe, his chest was so tight. *Kurama...* So beautiful; graceful and intense, his body looked like a dancer’s – was a dancer’s. Flexible, yet strong; skin that looked like porcelain yet felt like the sheerest silk. So different than Hiei’s body with his solid power and toughness, skin that felt like the softest fur. Yusuke opened his eyes, “I’ve got to find Hiei,

Kurama. I... can't stand the thought of how I drove him off.”

“Umm...” Kurama gathered up the gems and put his pouch back in the drawer. Standing, looking down at Yusuke still sitting on his bedroom floor, Kurama smiled, “Well, let's go then.”

Yusuke blinked and then his eyes lit up and he smiled back at his friend.

The first place they stopped was in front of a twelve-story office building a few blocks from Kurama's house. Kurama squinted up, “Can you sense any youki?”

Yusuke looked at Kurama curiously before shaking his head. His perception skills were still way under the rest of the group, even though they'd been working on training him somewhat. For power training, Yusuke could be patient. For perception? He usually was bored out of his mind – it was easier to ask Kuwabara.

Kurama sighed, “He usually sleeps on a window ledge up on the tenth floor... I don't want to try and go up there to find him. Since he was last with you, his youki will be tuned to yours, so you might sense him easier than I.” He shrugged, “But if we both can't feel him...” He cupped his hands around his mouth and projected his rei into his voice, “Hiei.” After waiting a couple of minutes, Kurama shrugged again, “Not here, let's keep going.”

Four buildings, six parks, and three power grids later, Yusuke glanced at Kurama, “How many more places does he haunt?” Unspoken was the question of exactly how often did Hiei actually sleep in Kurama's bed.

Kurama blushed, hearing the unspoken. With a sigh, he answered it truthfully, “Hiei rarely spends the whole night. He... hates to cuddle and when we're done, instead of relaxing he starts looking for enemies again. So he goes where he can be by himself and watch.”

Yusuke's heart went out to both of his friends. He knew how expressive a personality Kurama could be around his friends, and Kurama liked cuddling and touching. To constantly love and need... And Hiei, cautious, skillful, powerful – with the enemies his power had gained. He wouldn't take Yusuke to his home, and he wouldn't stay with his love. Yusuke looked up at Kurama, “What does it mean to be a kitsune?”

“Excuse me?” Kurama blinked at the segue.

“Hiei said that it was okay for his enemies to know about you, because you were a kitsune.”

“Oh,” Kurama glanced at the lightening sky. Dawn was fast approaching and they still hadn't found Hiei. Well, there was one more place they could try... It would be enough time to talk with Yusuke. “Kitsune are a very clannish group. In the spirit world, animal spirits are about the equivalent of elemental demons. You remember what Hiei told you about the war between the ice and fire demons?”

“Caused when a fire demon was killed by the ice demons.” Yusuke nodded. The war had nearly torn both groups of elementals apart and in the thousand years since, neither group had recovered even a tenth of the power they had held before.

“Well, if anybody uses a kitsune for hostage purposes, the entire kitsune clan will attack that person or group.”

Yusuke's mouth dropped open. Eventually he closed it again, “So why does anybody attack you then? Are they all stupid?”

Kurama laughed, “No – a fight is something else. Individual actions are individual responsibilities. I was originally killed while performing a theft – that individual was within his rights and my family took no action. But if someone were to use me simply to get at Hiei... Kitsune treasure their family bonds, and for another to exploit love – well, it makes them mad.”

Slowly, Yusuke nodded. He well understood that one. “So you're about the only person Hiei can love.”

“Um...” Taking a minute to think about that one, Kurama tried to figure out not just himself and Hiei, but what Yusuke was really asking. “Not... exactly. Some demons would see kitsune, even all kitsune, as no threat. Hiei will not let the demon world know Yukina is his sister for fear they will use her – and she's an ice maiden. If Hiei had had any say in the matter, he probably wouldn't let them know about me either.” Kurama flashed a grin at Yusuke, “But, you see, I don't let him have the last word.”

“Oh...” Yusuke breathed, his brown eyes sparkling as he realized what Kurama was saying.

Kurama expounded, “If Hiei had his way, I would be smothered in protective layer of silk and satin – a gilded cage. But he knows that I, like he, would die in a cage and so he lets me be free. But he still tries to protect me when he can. Quite frankly – he is more powerful than I; and if I'm in over my head, I'll readily call for help. But on the fights that I choose, he must let me be.” The idea had been planted, now it was time to restrain it from growing too quickly.

“Part of that is because I am six-hundred years old and have my own territory and my own name. I am already a factor in the spirit world. And I have learned caution, and more importantly, restraint in the last seventeen years.”

Yusuke blinked, “As a human?”

Kurama grinned, “Living in the human world.” He rolled his eyes, “Do you know how much patience I had to learn to not reveal myself as this body was growing up? You try and act like a five-year old when you’re really six-hundred-twenty-five! And when I decided to stay for Mother...” Kurama sighed, the longing in his voice plain, “I want to leave. I want to go out and take on the task of obtaining the Serpent of Nine Coils. I want to find the Jewel of Rastiban’s Court. I want to reclaim Yoko’s old territory. I want to establish mine as Kurama. But I have to hold myself back.”

“Because you’re on probation,” Yusuke commented with a grin.

The returning laughter was easy and free, acknowledging their past history and moving beyond. Then the fox-human turned it serious again, “Because I will not hurt Mother. I won’t leave her while she cares for Shuiichi, and while she needs her son. And though I now interact with both worlds more readily than five years ago, I still must be careful. Mother cannot protect herself as we can, and she is vulnerable. There is no clan protecting her, and already I have had seven demons try and manipulate me with threats to her.” He caught Yusuke’s side-glance and smiled coldly, “They paid for their attempt, and a few are still paying. But you see, Yusuke, if I went with Hiei to his home, as his openly proclaimed mate, then it would be much worse, not just for Mother, but for me as well. Hiei’s enemies are as powerful as he – which is much more powerful than I. I would have to go into that gilded cage of his, just so I could live – and I would die there. Until either I grow enough in power to match them, or until Hiei’s enemies disappear, I will only be his lover here in the human world, and though we do not hide our relationship, neither will we broadcast it.”

Yusuke nodded glumly, “And even though I have power, I don’t have the training; and I have Mom, and Keiko, and Masaru, and Takenaka-sensei, and even Kuwabara who would all be targets for demons if I started making enemies.”

Kurama nodded, “You’ve got years and years to go, Yusuke. Be patient. You have powerful friends and allies, and when you have your own territory then you can also protect those you love.”

Unspoken was the thought between them that Hiei had always been alone, trying on his own to protect those he loved, with no one that he trusted enough to share responsibility. Yusuke vowed to himself that his territory would have all of his family and friends to share both the love and the protection. But... it was hard to think of somebody else protecting Keiko instead of him. Yusuke could imagine how much harder it was for a thousand-year-old demon.

They walked along silently for some time after that, watching as the edges of the sky turned pink and light gold while the deep blue of night started to change to the pale blue of day. Eventually Yusuke asked, “Why are we at Genkai’s?”

With a laugh, Kurama pointed up, “Hiei likes that old pine tree.”

Yusuke blinked, then narrowed his eyes. Disbelieving, he said, “He’s there. He’s really there this time.” He could feel Hiei’s youki up in the tree, and if he looked carefully, he could see a vague black shape on one of the higher branches. “He’s here,” *Hiei...*

Kurama smiled at the tone of surprise in Yusuke’s voice, “If I’d been thinking, we probably should have checked here first.” At Yusuke’s puzzled glance, he turned his fond smile upon the human youth and explained, “Because Hiei associates this place with you.”

“Ohhh...” For the hours they’d been walking and looking, Yusuke’s need had been so focused on finding his friend, and worrying about him, that he’d nearly forgotten... He suddenly remembered. And he had to close his eyes for a moment as his body remembered too. *How the hell do I go from zero to sixty like that? Damn, I thought I wanted to talk...*

“He’s asleep,” Kurama grinned and motioned for Yusuke to follow him as they quietly, or as quietly as they could, climbed the tree. Kurama carefully wrapped the area in his youki, masking Yusuke’s ki as well as he could under his own.

Up in the tree, they stood upon branches near to the one Hiei was sleeping on. The demon was curled up in his black cloak with his white scarf around his neck, his spiky hair not affected by gravity as his arm rested over his head, covering his eyes. He was back to his normal utilitarian clothes and looks, no longer masquerading as human in the human world. Though Yusuke had been enchanted by his vest and jeans, and had enjoyed putting Hiei’s hair in the mohawk, this figure laying in front of him was the one he knew best – his fighting partner and friend, the demon who

supported him and admired him for his own strange reasons. Yusuke’s heart was beating so loudly that he was sure Hiei could hear it, especially since his breathing was also ragged and noisy as he gazed on the figure that he’d been searching so long for.

Actually, Yusuke was quite surprised that Hiei didn’t wake up and he started to say something, but Kurama waved him quiet with a mischievous grin. Kurama leaned close to Hiei and breathed softly on his cheek, his long red strands of hair falling over Hiei’s face. Yusuke envied him quietly.

Hiei growled and rolled over, putting the other arm over his face. Yusuke watched, completely amazed that he didn’t fall off the slim branch.

Kurama giggled and picked a pine needle, dragging it lightly through Hiei’s hair, “Wake up, Hiei.” The fox flashed an amused grin at Yusuke that demanded that he share in the fun. Yusuke was not immune to Kurama’s charm and grinned back, joining in the spirit of teasing mischief between friends.

Without moving, Hiei muttered, “Go away, Kurama.”

“Come on, Hiei, the unicorns are dancing...”

“Shut up, fox. I had a long night and I want to sleep.” Hiei curled up in a tighter ball, refusing to look over.

A long night... Yusuke almost cried for the pain he’d given his friend.

Kurama smiled gently down at his partner and stroked his hand through his hair, “I brought you a present, Hiei.”

“THAT’S ENOUGH, Kurama!” Hiei sat up, glaring at the fox... and saw Yusuke beyond him. His eyes went wide and nearly round as he scrambled up to stand on the branch, his attention focused entirely on Yusuke and ignoring the red-haired fox next to him. “Yusuke...” Hiei breathed, wonder and disbelief and guilt mixed in his voice.

“Hiei,” Yusuke cleared his throat. “I’m sorry I snipped at you earlier,” he said as he reached out to Hiei... and then had to windmill his arms and grab for the trunk of the tree as he nearly stepped off the branch he was on. Both ghosts instantly held him tight until he regained his balance. “Damn it, Hiei! Why are we on top of a tree?”

Hiei’s half-smile was back on his face and he flitted to the ground. Kurama leaned over and looked down... and sighed, “You know, that’s one thing I’ve never quite gotten used to either.”

Yusuke glanced sourly at him, then looked down to where Hiei was. It might have been the

mischievous fox’s influence, but... “Hiei,” Yusuke called softly and waited until the demon looked up – and then he stepped off the branch.

Falling through space, air whistling by his ears, a feeling of sensations aborted as his equilibrium tried to catch up with him but was left far behind. Yusuke smiled as he fell.

“Oooffff!!!!”

Strong arms caught him, and red eyes glared.

“What the hell do you think you were doing, you stupid human!! Are you crazy?? You weren’t even paying attention to how you were landing! Baka!”

Yusuke grinned up at Hiei, “I wanted to see if you’d catch me.”

Hiei’s eyes widened and then he opened his arms and turned around, pacing a few steps away before stopping to glower at a nearby tree.

“Ouch!” Yusuke sat up, rubbing his backside. But he was still grinning.

Kurama jumped down, landing next to them and he traded that special grin with Yusuke that shared their love of the short demon and the ways in which his heart was revealed. Then Kurama lifted a hand in farewell and started to leave.

“Kurama, wait!” Yusuke looked over to Hiei, his eyes pleading.

Hiei met his gaze questioningly, and then he seemed to remember what he’d said earlier in the evening. He smiled, “Kurama has brought you to me. I think that deserves a reward...” He walked back to Yusuke and stood on his tiptoes to lightly place a kiss on his cheek. “Yusuke, I didn’t know you’d react that badly to my leaving. It wasn’t against you, truly. Things happen, they’re done, one goes on.”

“You didn’t come back,” Yusuke whispered, “I thought I hurt you. I didn’t mean to.”

“If you were that upset, why didn’t you follow me?” Hiei questioned, genuinely curious and it showed in his voice – which also showed how little he’d thought of the incident.

Yusuke flushed, “I was washing dishes.”

Both ghosts looked at him in total surprise.

“Hiei,” Yusuke sighed, “You had the money.”

Instantly understanding, Kurama laughed, leaning against a tree for support, “You stiffed him with the bill!!!! Hiei! I don’t believe you stiffed Yusuke with the bill! Oh, that’s good!”

“Cha...” Hiei glared at his partner and the air between them grew warm. Then he looked with evident embarrassment to Yusuke. Digging into his

pockets, he pulled out a couple of 100 yen pieces and held them out.

Yusuke took them with a grin and they stood, staring into each others’ eyes for a long moment.

Finally, Hiei made a negligent gesture, ‘that’s over’, and looked to Kurama, “So, is your place available?”

Green eyes dancing, Kurama waved a hand to the temple behind them, “Why not stay here?”

Hiei and Yusuke traded startled glances and then started laughing. “Why didn’t we think of that earlier?” “We weren’t thinking...”

“If you stay here, the dojo needs waxing,” a dry voice commented as they all jumped and turned to look. Genkai stood with her hands on her hips, regarding them with silent amusement. “Your usual rooms are clean, and I expect them to be that way after you leave too. Yukina and Kazuma will be getting up for breakfast shortly... You’re welcome to join us for dinner, later.”

“Um, um, um...” Yusuke stuttered as he tried to figure out how much Genkai had overheard, overseen, and just plain knew...

Hiei winked at Genkai, “Thank you.”

Genkai shrugged, “It’s nice to be young.” She glanced significantly at Yusuke and then turned to leave.

“Sensei!”

Everybody turned to look at Yusuke at his unusual use of the respectful title. He managed to ignore their looks as he defensively and curiously asked his teacher, “Aren’t you going to ask about Keiko?”

Genkai blinked and glanced at Hiei, who shrugged while rolling his eyes. Genkai shook her head, “That’s not my concern, and I don’t really see what it has to do with anything. I heard about the battle yesterday.” She paused and her face took on the expression that said she was remembering her youth, “Danger can generate some intense emotions.” She turned to leave again.

Suddenly struck by a thought, Hiei raised a hand to stop her, “Did you say something about Kazuma and Yukina?”

“Separate rooms, Hiei. Separate rooms. That boy is way too naïve sometimes...” Genkai muttered as she walked away.

Kurama raised an eyebrow at Hiei and the shorter demon glared at him, “I gave him permission to court Yukina, nothing more!”

“Uh huh...” Kurama nodded wisely.

“Knock it off, fox...”

Smothering a yawn, Yusuke headed for the guest rooms. With a shared grin, Kurama and Hiei followed, trading remarks about how nice it would be to get some sleep and how early the morning was, and debating points about human endurance. Somehow, Yusuke managed to ignore them.

“Hey, Urameshi!!! You here? We can really get some training done, now.” Kuwabara looked at him suspiciously, “Unless you’re here for a mission...? No? Great, then!” He closed the door to his room, effectively blocking the hallway while he talked to Yusuke.

“You seem to have recovered well from yesterday,” Yusuke remarked, remembering guiltily the burns that had covered most of Kuwabara’s body at the end of the fight.

Kuwabara thumped his chest and puffed up, “Yukina-san is the greatest healer! There is nothing that Yukina-san can’t do!!”

Hiei snorted and pushed by them, jostling Kuwabara and giving a significant look to Yusuke as he passed.

“Hey!” Kuwabara growled, “Come back here and face me like a man!” The door sliding shut behind Hiei was his only answer. Kuwabara glanced over at Kurama, “You here too?” Suspiciously, he returned his gaze to Yusuke, “Are you sure this isn’t a mission???”

Kurama raised his hand to his mouth, his green eyes dancing, “We could invite him also...”

“KURAMA!” Yusuke yelled, exasperated, “Will you just get out of here?!”

With a wink covering one brilliant emerald eye, Kurama grinned at the baffled Kuwabara and went down the hall to the room Hiei had gone in.

Yusuke shook his head and then sighed. Apologetically, he looked up at Kuwabara, “We were up most of the night... talking about the fight. We’re just here to snag some sleep.”

“Oh...” Kuwabara gave Yusuke a narrow-eyed look and then decided he really didn’t want to know. “Well, I’m off to breakfast – see you when you get up!” Cheerfully, he headed off down the hall.

Yusuke walked to the room that was normally his and went in. After a minute, he poked his nose out and made sure that Kuwabara was really gone. Then he went down the hall to Hiei and Kurama’s room.

“Well, that interruption didn’t take too long,” Kurama remarked cheerfully, teasing Yusuke and Hiei.

The fox’s good humor was contagious, but Yusuke still managed to summon up a frown for the reminder, sourly answering, “When Kuwabara’s hungry, nothing stands in his way.”

“That sounds familiar,” Hiei said, his voice deep in tone and meaning. He had tossed off his cloak and scarf, but still wore his pants. He looked ready for a battle... or action. With quick strides, Hiei walked up to Yusuke and backed him against the wall, slipping his hands inside Yusuke’s jacket and running them over his chest and sides as he pressed his lower body against Yusuke’s.

Blue sparks flew from Yusuke’s skin, demon fire starting to run through his veins. “Ahhh...” Yusuke moaned as he dropped his hands down to Hiei’s bare shoulders and then ran them down his back, pulling the demon into him and feeling the fire concentrate below his waist as he arched his hips. He dipped his head over Hiei’s and breathed in the scent of the demon – scorched earth and velvet, pine and amber – as the soft black fur tickled his nose and eyes. Yusuke closed his eyes and ran his cheek over that softness, hearing the growls and feeling the rumbling through the demon’s body. Hiei tilted his head up until their lips met and hungrily fastened onto each other, seeking, tasting, needing...

And then Hiei broke away and looked over his shoulder.

Yusuke looked up too, “Kurama?”

The fox grinned at them, “You know, I think I’m going to collect my reward later – breakfast sounds good to me right now.” He slipped out the door and shut it behind him.

Hiei and Yusuke traded glances and then shrugged as one – they were rather absorbed in each other at the moment. Yusuke ran his hands through Hiei’s hair, fluffing the spikes, “Hiei – no slow dance this time, okay?” The soft chuckle that he loved was Yusuke’s answer.

They moved over to the mats and knelt down, facing each other. Yusuke couldn’t get enough of just watching Hiei, seeing the soft red eyes watching him, the anticipation almost as much as the feelings themselves. He pulled off his jacket and tossed it to one side, next to Hiei’s cloak. Hiei chuckled again and drew a hand down Yusuke’s abdomen to the waist of his jeans, “Shall I burn them this time?”

Yusuke gasped, feeling the hot warmth spreading... “I think you already are!”

“YUSUUUKKEEE!!!!!!”

They looked up, murder in both brown and red eyes. Simultaneously, they yelled, “BOTAN! GO AWAY!”

The blue-haired deity floated impatiently on her oar, “It’s an emergency, Yusuke! We need the whole Team! A major class Tengu escaped from the prison and is crossing through to the human world to make mischief. He’s broken the Armory and it’s big trouble! You’ve got to come now!”

Hiei sighed, “That would be Dianoa. He never was happy about being in prison...” He met Yusuke’s gaze and shrugged, “Some interruptions have to be dealt with.”

Yusuke stood up, shaking his head, “Botan – Kuwabara and Kurama are in with Genkai. We’ll join you there in a minute.”

“Right,” Botan turned to leave and then looked back over her shoulder, “I’m really sorry about this...”

Yusuke waved his hand at her and she left. He looked down at Hiei, who also stood up.

Hiei looked up, “Well, the timing was a bit better. At least I hadn’t burned your pants yet...”

With a laugh, Yusuke gathered Hiei in his arms and kissed him one last time before letting him go.

Hiei tilted his head and studied the youth thoughtfully, “Yusuke...” He bit his lip and cut off what he was going to say.

But Yusuke had a pretty good idea of what it was, “I promise, Hiei – no heroics this time. We’ll work as a team.” *And I’ll try not to cause any more pain in that secret heart of yours.*

Hiei quirked his mouth in his trademark grin, acknowledging the promise and the thoughts, showing his care in the way he could.

They gazed at each other for one more long moment, then collected jacket and cloak and left to meet the team.

And that’s all she wrote... ;-)