Sekirei: Guardian of the North

by shadowsofvanity

Summary

If you had the chance to fight, to put others at risk to gain yourself power, would you do it? Or would you destroy the world, if that is what it took to protect those you love?

Follow Minato Sahashi and his Sekirei as he answers that. Minato/Harem
Prolouge

A/N: Hey guys, shadowsofvanity here again, with another Harem story. Duh, can't have Sekirei without a Harem story. Well, you can, but it's not as much fun. This story has some AU stuff in it, so I'm sorry if you are a die-hard canonist, but I hope you aren't because you wouldn't be on if you were. Nothing major, just little writer's prerogative type stuff.

I have a Facebook page and a Twitter, so feel free to join those and post on my wall. Links are below.

This story will feature kind!Minato, but also has-a-spine! Minato. All other character changes in personal history and such from canon will be explained as part of the plot

edited and re-posted 8/3/13

BEGIN!

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Sekirei: The Guardian of the North

Prologue

"Minato-sama." Matsu said quietly from here doorway as the young man in question walked down the hallway, a pile of clean laundry in his arms. "I have something you need to see."

"Eh?" he said absently, turning to face her. He immediately noticed the solemn look on her face and put the laundry on the floor. "What is it, Matsu-chan?" She led him into her room and gestured to one of the several computer screens she had running. It showed a cluster of three Sekirei and a single Ashikabi chasing a single Ashikabi and Sekirei pair.

"So, is someone poaching again?" Minato said, voice suddenly cold and hard, his eyes flinty as he glared at the larger group.

"Yes, one of Higa's subordinate Ashikabi, Takizaki. They're likely trying to force that pair to join them." Matsu replied quietly, turning to face her Master. He nodded and turned to leave the room, but her voice stopped him at the edge of her curtain. "Minato-sama…it's your sister Yukari, and her Sekirei Shiina who are at risk."

He froze, turning to look at her, eyes wide in shock, and she nodded to him in reply. Turning back, Minato quickly left the room. If Matsu was certain, than it was the truth. She didn't make mistakes about surveillance, and she wouldn't tell him on a whim. Their chances of escape had to be very slim indeed, which meant he would have to intercede. Reaching the living room, he sat down slowly in a large and comfortable armchair and leaned back, closing his eyes tiredly.

"Uzume, Yume, Tsukiumi, Miya, Homura." He spoke the five names softly, but his girls heard them none the less and appeared in the room with him, ready for battle. They knew it was serious business of a non-romantic nature when he didn't use any affectionate suffixes with their names.

Opening his eyes, he looked at them with a commanding air. "It appears that Higa has decided to go poaching again. His minion, Takezaki, and several Sekirei are chasing an Ashikabi and her Sekirei."

"Bastard! He hunts in your territory again?" Uzume hissed, her intense hatred for the man flaring violently, her anger causing the Veils that were her power to flutter as though in a breeze. Higa had almost had Takizaki succeed in forcing her to become one of his Sekirei, and she had had no choice but to severely injure several of her fellow Sekirei in her escape attempt. That night, when Takizaki had caught up to her again, Minato and the Sekirei he had had at the time had come to her rescue. After they had returned home to Maison Izumo, she had kissed him and become winged. According to what she told the group later, Chiho (her first Ashikabi of choice) had died of a disease before they had bonded, and she had found herself drawn to a similar soul, Minato's. Chiho had died because the man Takizaki had refused to give her aid in the hospital owned by Higa so that she would die, and Uzume would be broken and vulnerable to capture.

"Yes. He appears to have forgotten that the North is a refuge for Ashikabi and Sekirei, and that all those present are under my protection." Minato confirmed, feeling sorrow in his heart for the pain that she had had to go through. He loved her dearly, and couldn't stand the thought of ever losing her, but it was those feelings that told him how she must have felt when her first chosen Ashikabi had died.
“Shall we go and correct his error, Minato-sama?” Homura asked, her soft voice filled with equal anger. As the ex-Guardian of the Un-Winged, she hated Higa, a man who forced himself on Sekirei, as much as Uzume.

“Yes, I need you five to go. His minion has three Sekirei with him.” He said quietly. “Ku-chan and Kazehana.”

The two Sekirei in question appeared with the others, Kazehana with her ever-present sake bottle and Kusano with her small potted plant.

“You two will need to head to the Ashikabi’s home and retrieve her belongings. It will not be safe for her to be there for the time being. Can they stay here, Miya?” he turned to the pale violet-haired Sekirei. Their bonding had been a bit of a shock to everyone, themselves included. It had happened entirely by accident. Miya had found a letter from her dead husband, which had detailed his last wishes to her, including his desire for her to find another love. Walking down one of the hallways of the inn, she had been so deep in thought over the letter that she didn’t see Minato in front of her till she ran into him, sending them both to the floor with her on top of him. Like Uzume, her body had reacted and she had kissed him on impulse. When he had expressed his regret for winging her against her will, she had merely hugged him close and thanked him.

“Of course, Minato-sama. Ku-chan, Kazehana, put her things in the empty room, ‘kay?” she answered with a smile, and the other pair nodded.

“Minato-sama, you never told us who it is, or where they can find her things.” Yume pointed out quietly. After they had run into each other and she had become his first Sekirei, she had been his constant companion and it had been her encouragement that lead Minato to not only bind other Sekirei to himself in addition to herself, but also to take command of the area and become Ashikabi of the North, creating a safe haven for anyone who needed shelter.

“Girls…” he said, looking each of them in the eye, one after the other. "This mission is of the utmost importance. The persons you are going to guard and return with are none other than my sister Yukari, and her Sekirei, Shiina.”

All of his girls gasped and Tsukiumi cried out: “That worthless scum! He dares to hunt thine own sister and her companion? Truly, he must desire death!”

“Please remember, don’t kill unless you have to. Disable, knockout, whatever, but don’t kill them unless it’s avoidable.” Minato said calmly. If the girls didn’t know him so well, they likely would have been surprised that he was not demanding blood to be spilt over the threat to his sister. They smiled lovingly as they glanced at each other. With a universal shrug that said “Of course”, they nodded to him and he smiled. His kind and gentle nature kept his implacable will to protect restrained, and that was why they loved him. “Go then, and please return to me safe and sound.”

Each girl gave him as kiss before leaving, the five on the rescue group racing towards his sister while Kazehana and Kusano left for Yukari’s house, the younger and slower Ku holding onto Kazehana’s back.

Minato watched them leave with love and concern and pride warring in his heart, before turning and heading upstairs to monitor the situation with Matsu.

“Come on, Shiina! Keep running!” Yukari yelled, dragging the silvery-white haired girl after her as they continued to try and outrun their pursuers.

“Yukari…we…aren’t….going…to….make…it.” Shiina gasped out. They had been running for felt like hours now, and still hadn’t managed to lose the people after them.

“We can’t give up now!” she yelled at her in determination, turning down another alley. “We can do this!”

“No, you can’t.” a purple haired Sekirei with spinning disc-blades around her landed in front of them while she heard two more appear behind them. “This is the end of the line for you.”

Yukari growled in response, eyes darting as she tried to find an escape route, but it was futile, and she knew it. The sound of slow, almost sarcastic applause echoed from behind the Sekirei in front of them, and a tall man with dark brown hair and glasses walked up behind her.

“Bravo, bravo!” he said mockingly, a smirk on his face. “You led us on a merry chase, Yukari and Shiina, but now it is time to swear allegiance to Higa-sama.”

“I refuse to work for that bastard!” Yukari hissed, and the man sighed theatrically.

“Then I suppose that I will have to kill you.” He said, his smirk turning into a deadly stare.
"Girls…"

Yukari braced herself as the Sekirei prepared to attack, but a voice echoed from above them, causing them all to look up.

"Not so fast, asshole. By order of our master, the Ashikabi of the North, you are to leave immediately, minion of that bastard Higa. Otherwise, it is you who will die."

Yukari gasped in surprise and a little fear. Standing on the rooftops surrounding the alley she, Shina, and their attackers were in stood five Sekirei, all of whom were ready for combat. One had balls of flame hovering around her, another had a dragon of water beside her, yet another was dressed in silks that seemed to move at her bidding, while the fourth held a deadly looking katana, but it was the last that really caught her attention.

"Yume-chan!" she cried happily, pleased to see a friendly face.

"Hello Yukari-dono. So glad to see you again. My sister's and I are here to save you and Shiina-san." Yume smiled at her before returning her deadly gaze to the enemy. "Will you withdraw or must we fight?"

"Why you little bitch, I'll show you!" one of the Sekirei behind Yukari screeched, leaping towards Yukari, legs ready for a kick that would shatter her skull. "I'll kill your little friend first!"

In an instant, it was all over. Yukari didn't see it begin, or see it end. One moment she was flinching away in fear, the next her would-be killer was on the ground with a sword at her throat while water bound her companion's hands and feet. Yume and the fire-user landed lightly next to Yukari and Shina and Yume held out her hand.

"Come on, Yukari-dono. Minato-sama is waiting for you." She said with a smile.

"Big brother sent you?" Yukari asked, startled, and then gasped as something occurred to her. "Then, that would mean Minato is the Ashikabi of the North!"

"Yes, the Master is the Guardian of the North." The fire user said with a nod as she held a hand out to Shina. "He sent us to rescue you. Uzume, explain the situation to that Ashikabi over there, would you? I think he knows you."

"Of course, Homura. I'll enjoy it." The girl with the silks-Uzume, Yukari assumed-snarled as she walked up to the enemy Ashikabi before smashing her fist into his face. Putting a foot on his chest and pushing, she leant down and growled loud enough for everyone to hear. "Go back and tell that pathetic bastard Higa that if he tries to hunt in my Master's territory again, his next little group won't get off so easily. You're lucky he decided to spare you this time, going after his sister like you did."

"I'm…sorry!" the man wheezed, clearly in a great deal of pain. "I…didn't realize…who she…was."

"It doesn't matter, fool." The sword-wielder said, dropping the two Sekirei she and the water-user had subdued next to him. "The fact is, you and your master knew that the North is a sanctuary and any hunting in the North is forbidden. Do so again at your own peril."

"Higa-sama will show your worthless master his place soon enough!" shouted the purple-haired Sekirei defiantly. All Minato's girls and his sister glared at her, and Yukari started to retort angrily when Yume started laughing, the other four joining her after a moment.

"What are you laughing at, you bitches?" the loudmouth yelled at them, and Yume smirked at her. "What's your name and number, little one?" she asked, her gentle tone at odds with the cold glare in her eyes. Yukari blinked at the odd question, but remained silent.

"Sekirei #101, Oriha." Was the angry answer, and Yume's smirk grew.

"Tell me, little one, what chance does your master have against mine?" she asked pleasantly. "His highest number is Sekirei #16, right? Toyotama?"

"What of it?" Oriha snarled at her, and Yume's smirk became a full-blown grin.

"My master, with all of his Sekirei gathered, has Miya, #01. Matsu, #02. Kazehana, #03. Homura, #06. Myself, Yume, #08. Tsukiumi, #09. Uzume, #10. Hikari and Hibiki, #'s 11 and 12. Finally, little Kusano, #108. So, as you can see, my Master could destroy you in an instant if he so desired."

All throughout Yume's listing of the Sekirei of the legendary Ashikabi of the North, Oriha had been growing paler and paler, until she was nearly as white as one of Uzume's veils. Not only did he have more Sekirei than Higa-sama, six of them were single digits! Even of those that were not
were not to be trifled with. The Veil Sekirei, known for her speed and ability to attack and defend powerfully and in equal measure. The Thunder and Lightning sisters, a truly deadly duo when working in concert. Even Kusano, despite being the last numbered Sekirei, and still a child, had power over any plant life, which made her dangerous enough. Yume looked as though she was about to continue, when a cell phone rang in the stillness. Reaching into her pocket, Yume drew it out and flipped it open.

"Hai, Minato-sama? Yes, we handled it. What? Must you?" she spoke into the mouth piece, listening to Minato before sighing gustily and holding the phone out to Higa's minion. "Minato-sama wishes to speak with you, scum."

Reaching out with a shaky hand, the man took the phone from her grasp and held it to his ear.

"Kakizaki-san?" Minato's voice came over the phone, and Kakizaki whetted suddenly dry lips.

"H-Hai, Minato-sama?" he stammered, sweating slightly with fear. He knew that one word from this man would destroy not only him, but Higa-sama as well.

"I understand that Higa has you poaching in the North again. I'm not very happy about that, Kakizaki. Not very happy at all. Not only that, but you're going after my sister?" Minato was silent for a moment, and Kakizaki could almost imagine him shaking his head at such follies. "You know I'm going to have to do something about that, don't you Kakizaki?"

"Pl-Please, Minato-sama, I won't do it again! You have to believe me!" Takizaki cried, panicked. This was not sounding good for him, not at all.

"You're right, you won't be. Yume!"

"Hai, Minato-sama?" the girl in question replied, evidently able to hear him from a foot or so away.

"Is there any love in the bonds they all share?"

"No, I sense only sorrow and…regret? They do not wish to serve, but they must." Yume answered, closing her eyes and letting her power wash over the three Sekirei.

"Very well then. You know what to do. Eliminate them from the competition and return them here. They will be re-released to find their love once this is all over."

"NOOO! Minato-sama, Higa-sama will kill me if I lose both of my Sekirei and one of his!" Kakizaki screamed, eyes wide and sweat dripping down his face.

"I should kill you for killing Chiho!" Uzume snarled, grabbing him by the front of his shirt as Yume calmly took the phone from his hand. "Fortunately for you, Minato-sama's love is strong enough, and his example good enough, that I will spare you. Leave the city, and don't return!"

With that, the Veiled Sekirei tossed the terrified man to the ground. Scrambling to his feet, the coward fled screaming into the night.

"Come, Uzume. MBI is approaching, we need to go if we are going to get these girls out of here safely." Miya said quietly, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder.

"Did I do the right thing, Miya-chan?" Uzume asked quietly, following her "sister" Sekirei across the roofs towards the Izumo Inn.

"Yes, and Minato will be very happy that you did. He loves you so much, Uzume, and he wants you to be happy." The First Sekirei replied, grabbing her hand and squeezing gently.

"I know." Uzume whispered, tears in her eyes as they landed softly in the yard of the Inn, where Minato was waiting for them with love in his eyes and a smile on his face. "I know."

"So, tell me how you of all people became the legendary Ashikabi of the North, someone so powerful that even MBI is hesitant to interfere in your affairs?" Yukari asked her older brother later that night as she sat across from him on the living room floor. On her right and slightly behind her sat Shinna, who had her right arm around Kusano. Minato, for his part, had pulled an obviously distraught Uzume into his lap after he had leaned his back against the couch that Miya, Yume, and Tsukiumi were sitting on. Even now, the Veil Sekirei—once more dressed in her favorite t-shirt and pants—had her face buried in his neck, her arms tight around him, and one of his hands was supporting her while the other calmly and lovingly stroked her long chestnut hair. Hikari and Hibiki, recently returned from work, were sitting beside him. Matsu had once again managed to find a way to move aside one of the ceiling tiles and was watching from above, one ear trained on the room below while the other was focused on her computers, alert for any
warning signals. Kazehana was lounging lazily next to Hibiki while Homura was sitting with perfect posture on Hikari's free side.

"It's a very long story, you know." Her brother warned her, not in a "I don't want to tell you" kind of way, but in more of a "I hope you're comfortable, cause this won't be a short one" way.

"It would have to be, given how many Sekirei you have, big brother." Yukari pointed out dryly, and Minato cracked a smile while some of his girls giggled. Yukari hid a small smile behind her hand. During dinner her brother had introduced her to all of his girls, and she had had a chance to speak with them some. At first, she had thought he was an incredible hentai***, but the way all the girls talked about him quickly put that to rest, and now she wanted to know how he had changed, and what he had done for them to earn such love and loyalty.

"It's true, I have many Sekirei, and they are all precious to me. I love them all very much." He replied, smiling around at his girls and pulling Uzume even closer while he did. She tilted her head to smile at him through tear-stained cheeks and tugged him down into a passionate kiss that made Yukari blush just from watching. Uzume's wings flared and faded at the contact, and she ducked her head with a light blush, nuzzling his neck affectionately as she went burrowed back into her little 'nest' in his arms with a murmured "Daisuki**".

"I guess that the story begins on an afternoon nearly three months ago, just after I had failed my second Entrance Exam for the University…"

The gathered humans and Sekirei settled themselves comfortably as they began to listen to the person that they all loved and respected begin his tale. The tale of how they had all come together.

A/N: Well, that's the prologue as a wrap. I don't have a beta yet for this, since I am pretty sure my Harry Potter beta, Dragon Raptor, doesn't know what Sekirei is. I don't even know if you can watch it in England, which is where he lives. Anyway, I am looking for a beta who is knowledgeable in the English language and the ins and outs of the Sekirei series (plural of series?). I know some of you might be waiting for me to do a new Hand of Judgment Chapter, or a new Lightening Effect chapter, and I am working on those, but I have too many ideas to be able to dedicate myself to one story only. I love writing to much to do that. Besides, I tend to think things over for a while, examine an idea from all directions before I publish it!

** as far as I can tell, this is one way of saying "I love you".

*** this means "pervert"
Game On!

Chapter Summary

In Which Yume Lands On Minato

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Sekirei: The Guardian of the North

Chapter One

Game On!

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Sekirei Number 08, Yume, also called the Sekirei of Fate, leapt from rooftop to rooftop as she dodged the whip and ice shards from the Sekirei who had been pursuing her almost since she had left MBI Tower.

This is absolutely ridiculous. If I had an Ashikabi, those two would be absolutely nothing to me, but as it is, all I can do is run and hope I either lose them or somehow find my Ashikabi. She snorted at her train of thought. Really, what were the odds of her finding her Ashikabi just like that? Sure, she bet he was just walking down the sidewalk, as casual as…

Her train of thought broke and she stumbled, almost taking a hit from the whip that hissed past her head once again. Her chest…so warm…she held her left hand over her right breast, feeling the pounding of her furious heartbeat even through the not-insignificant amount of flesh. The feeling grew more intense as she continued in the same direction, and her mind flew even faster than her body had been.

Amazing! I am reacting. This warm feeling in my chest, the beating of my heart! There is no doubt, the one that I shall love now and forever is near! I must get to him!

Stretching out with her senses, Yume easily identified the human that her soul had chosen to be her love and her Ashikabi. Leaping from the edge of the building, she arrowed towards him only to be knocked off course as her pursuer's whip caught her at last. Instead of landing agilely before her Ashikabi, like she had planned, she instead went plowing into a fruit seller's stall. Grunting in pain at the impact, she rolled out of the wreckage and staggered to her feet, holding her left shoulder.

"Hey, are you alright, miss?" she heard a soft yet strong voice, filled with concern, come from behind her, and she turned towards it. Time seemed to stop as she met the gaze of the young man who had spoken. Mid-length black hair framed a strong yet gentle face while dark blue eyes met her own amber ones in concern. He was dressed in blue jeans and a fur-lined jacket, with a schoolbag slung over one shoulder. It was him, the one she had sensed! She moved towards him but stopped when an angry voice called out from behind her.

"Hold it right there, number 08! You're not getting away!"

Minato Sahashi was confused. He had been plodding along in a self-depreciatory mood that had been birthed from his second failure to get into the University when a flying body had smashed into the fruit stall a little ways ahead of him. Concerned, he had moved towards it only to see a beautiful girl with chestnut brown hair roll out of the wreckage and stagger to her feet, clutching her right shoulder in obvious pain. His concern growing, he quickly moved towards her.

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"Hey, are you alright, miss?" he asked, his concern filling his tone. He hated to see women in pain. She turned towards him, and his breath caught in his chest as the world seemed to freeze around him. Chestnut brown locks framed a sweet and gentle looking visage, delicate eyebrows furrowed in discomfort over amber eyes that seemed to draw him into their depths. She started to move towards him, their eyes seeing only each other, when an angry and not-so-pleasant sounding voice came from her far side.

"Hold it right there, number 08! You're not getting away!"

Minato looked over her shoulder and saw two other girls standing there, one wearing some sort of dress and a vacant expression while the most noticeable aspect of the other were the whip in her hand and the look of rage on her face.
"You're coming with us, back to Mikogami-sama. So be a good girl and stop running!" the angry one yelled, and Minato frowned. He didn't know what was going on, but it looked like these two were chasing the injured one.

"I won't go with you! He isn't the one for me! I won't serve him!" the girl with the amber eyes replied, staring at her attackers with defiance, despite the pain she had to be in.

"Then Akitsu and I will make you come with us!" the angry one yelled, uncoiling her whip in preparation for use. "What Mikogami-sama wants, Mikogami-sama gets!" Her whip lashed out, and Yume braced herself as she raised her one good arm in an attempted block, but gasped in shock as a body moved in the way, a piece of wood in its hand as it moved to block the strike.

Minato grunted as the board from the wrecked stall that he was using as a shield snapped from the force of the blow, and he was driven to one knee by the impact. He hissed in pain as he stood. His hands had not fared well from the force of the blow hitting the board, nor from the destruction of the board itself, but he set himself into a martial arts stance in front of the girl with the amber eyes regardless.

"WHO THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?" Shrieked the angry one, stamping her foot in anger at being foiled.

"I should be asking you the same. I don't know who you are, or who this Mikogami guy is, but I know that you're attempting assault and kidnapping, and you'd best leave before law enforcement arrives." Minato shot back, weight balanced as he watched the strange duo. "Leave now, and I won't mention any names when the cops arrive for a report. Not even this "Mikogami-sama", or whatever the hell the bastards name is." He was bluffing, he hadn't actually called the police, but it was even money someone else had.

The angry one shrieked in outrage and prepared to use her whip again when the emotionless one-Akitsu, she had been called-placed a hand on her shoulder.

"Mitsuha, it's too soon to risk open confrontation with the city forces. Continuing will cause problems for Mikogami-sama." Her voice was completely devoid of any and all emotion. It would have sounded terrifying, but for some reason unknown to him, Minato felt a great well of sympathy and concern for her well up in his chest. Yume sensed it as well, with her affinity towards emotions, and stared at him in shock.

"Amazing! Can he actually feel Akitsu's sadness at being the discarded number? He feels pain and sympathy for her! Just from hearing her speak, he can feel her pain! Part of her swelled with pride and happiness. This young man would be perfect for her. She could feel love for him burning within her heart even now, and knew that not only would he give her love, but help all the other Sekirei seek it as well. She frowned to herself as a sudden though struck her. From what she could tell, he was strong, both in his Ashikabi potential and his willingness to love. While she had always know intellectually that any Ashikabi she ended up with was likely to have other Sekirei, part of her was sad at the idea that she would not be his only love.

"Whoa, slow down there, Yume! He isn't even YOUR Ashikabi yet and you're worrying about how much competition you will have. One thing at a time, girl!"

"Hey, they've left. You should be okay, for now." The young man's voice brought her out of her thoughts, and she met his caring eyes with a faint blush.

"Ano…thank you very much, ummm…?" Yume said, trailing of, and he smiled at her.

"Sahashi, Minato Sahashi." He replied, and she blushed. His smile…it makes me feel so warm and tingly inside! "Anyway, take care! Avoid whip wielding maniacs in the future, yeah?" He started to walk away, and she panicked.

"Oh, no! He's leaving! He can't leave! She thought frantically. "Wait, please, Sahashi-sama!" she called, running after him and tugging lightly at his jacket with her good hand.

"What is it?" He asked her, curiosity and concern mixing in his voice.

"Please, don't leave me! I don't feel safe alone, and I have no money to go to the hospital!" Yume said, thinking quickly. She had to get him to take her home so that she could kiss him in private. She wasn't about to get winged in the middle of the street! He was silent for a very long moment, and she looked down, fearing he would brush her off, but instead he smiled and nodded.

"Come with me then. I'll look at that shoulder and you can hide out at my place for a few nights."

"Thank you so much, Sahashi-sama."

"It's Minato, and no -sama please, I'm just a 2nd year ronin." He scolded lightly, and her smile grew. "Handsome, caring, noble, and humble! He IS the perfect one to be my Ashikabi!"
"My name is Yume, thank you so much for saving me!" she bowed low, forgoing using his name. If she couldn't use the suffix he deserved, she would wait to use his name until he understood what was going on.

15 minutes later, Yume was gazing around the interior over her Ashikabi-to-be's apartment, impressed. It was well-kept, everything in its proper place, every surface clean and shiny.

"Yume-san, I got some clothes for you to change into. They aren't for a girl, especially not one like you, but they're clean, and the shirt will make it easier to work on your shoulder." Minato said, coming in with a pile of folded laundry in his arms. "I'll be in the other room until you're done changing, alright?" Just like that, he was gone, leaving Yume frowning a little. She wouldn't have minded revealing herself to him.

One step at a time, Yume. Become his Sekirei, and then become his lover. This is good; this is proof that he is a gentleman. One step at a time. She kept repeating that mantra in her head as she slowly and carefully pulled on the new clothing. Her arm smarted when she moved it, but she knew it would heal once she was winged.

"I'm dressed." She called towards the room Minato had vanished into, and he reappeared with a box that had a large red cross on it.

"Good, now I can get to work on your shoulder." He said, gesturing for her to sit before kneeling beside her. He gently rolled the right sleeve of the t-shirt up, baring her shoulder to him, and he eyed it with a professional air. "Well, it's not too bad." He murmured as his hands gently prodded and moved over the injury, as he assessed the damage. "Just looks like you lost some skin, probably sprained it and have a deep bone bruise. It doesn't feel broken, so you don't have to worry about that."

"You're very knowledgeable, Minato-sama." Yume said quietly, watching his face as he focused on tending to her arm. He looks so…strong, and cute, with his focus so intense on taking care of me. Like it's the only things in the world that matters. And his hands…strong and firm, but gentle as a dove.

She thought to herself with a small smile.

"My maternal grandfather was a master of martial arts, and he taught my sister and me how to fight and how to do First Aid." He replied, his eyes flicking up to meet hers with a warm smile that made her stomach flutter like it was filled with butterflies.

"Was?" she asked, fighting the desire to jump on him and claim him as her Ashikabi right then and there.

"Yes, he died a long time ago." Minato answered quietly, and Yume drooped. She hadn't meant to bring up something sad! She hoped he wasn't mad at her, she didn't know if she could handle being turned away or rejected by her Minato-sama. Her heart ached at the mere thought of it. Her internal pain must have shown, because Minato smiled reassuringly at her.

"Don't worry, I'm not mad at you for bringing it up." She smiled at him a little, but he could still see fear and sadness behind her eyes, and he leaned forward. "What's wrong, Yume-san?"

Yume flinched slightly at the rather impersonal form of address, and looked at the floor. This is ridiculous! She scolded herself mentally. You're acting like an addled high school child, not a Sekirei! Pull yourself together! Despite her internal pep talk of sorts, her gloom was still palpable. So absorbed was she inside herself that she didn't notice Minato's hand until it cupped her chin and tilted her face up towards him.

"Tell me what's wrong, Yume-san." He said softly, intensely. Hesitantly, she began to speak.

She told him everything. About the Sekirei, Ashikabi, M.B.I, the Plan. Not once did he interrupt, or express anger or disgust. He simply sat there in silence and listened to her story, and when it was finished, he nodded slowly.

"So, you're a member of an alien race called Sekirei, each of whom has a destined soul-mate of sorts called an Ashikabi. M.B.I found you all and now they're going to make you and your siblings fight to the death in some sort of game?" he said slowly, and Yume nodded fearfully. They way he had summed it up had had a very negative tone, and that didn't bode well for her.

"And you were being chased because another Ashikabi wants to claim you against your will because you're one of these "single digits"?" he continued, and she nodded once more. The righteous anger bubbling in that sentence made her feel more confident in her chances.

"And, whatever it is in Sekirei that tells you who your Ashikabi is, it is pointing you towards me, yes?" Yume nodded for a third time. His tone had been completely neutral. She had no idea what to expect from him.
"I believe you." He said finally and simply.

"You do?" she asked, surprised. Most humans would have called the police or an ambulance by now, but Minato actually believed her!

"Al l the facts line up, and there is something about you…" his voice trailed off, his eyes getting a dreamy look in them that looked entirely to endearing for Yume's self-control. Apparently coming back to earth, Minato blinked and smiled at her, one hand coming up to caress her cheek. "Yume-chan, Sekirei #08, the Sekirei of Fate, will you accept me as you're Ashikabi?"

"Yes." Yume whispered, tears of happiness welling up in her eyes. "Yes, yes, a thousand times yes!"

"Good. I'm glad." Minato smiled gently at her before leaning forwards and capturing her mouth in a kiss. Yume moaned in happiness as she felt the warmth in her chest grow and grow until it consumed. Completely missed or ignored by Minato and herself, busy as they were exchanging DNA, her wings flared into existence and seemed to bend forwards, moving to encircle her love.

Minato felt his back thump against the carpet as Yume's next kiss pushed him backwards and out of his seated position, but he didn't mind. Part of him felt as though something had fallen into place, deep in his soul, and he wrapped his arms around her as he deepened the kiss, his tongue dancing along the edge of her bottom lip.

Yume moaned into her love's mouth again as her lips parted, her own tongue moving as though with a mind of its own to tangle with his. She had known that having an Ashikabi would be an amazing thing, she reflected to herself as he rolled her over under him and began kissing her neck, her hands clasped tightly in his on the floor above her head. Still, that he was able to make her feel this amazing after only a few minutes was beyond anything that she expected. She moaned a third time as his teeth nipped lightly at her throat, his strong body covering her own in a way that set her on fire inside. He pulled back some, causing her to unconsciously mewl in disappointment, but he only smiled down at her and said three words that made her cry from joy.

"I love you."

"I love you too, Minato-sama." She whispered back, leaning her head up to initiate another breath-stealing kiss, her wings flaring back into sight after fading for a moment when their lips had parted. After several long moments, when they next came up for air, Minato rolled off of her and pulled her to her feet. Just then, the T.V. flared to life, and a man that Minato recognized well came onto the screen. Hiroto Minaka, Director and Chairman of MBI.

"Well done, Minato Sahashi! You have winged your first Sekirei! And it's number 08, Yume! Impressive!" Minaka said loudly, before continuing on in a long spiel about the rules of the game and a whole bunch of nonsense that Minato only half paid attention to. It's not like he planned on getting involved any more than necessary anyway. When the psychotic bastard was done and the T.V. off, he turned to Yume.

"Want to go for a walk around town, Yume-chan?" he smiled at her, and she leaned against his chest with a bright smile in return.

"I would love to, Minato-sama. You have to tell me all about your family." She replied, and he nodded his acquiescence.

"It's a deal." He agreed, and she smiled against his chest. She would learn everything she could about him. His likes, his dislikes, and she would make sure to provide the former and eliminate the latter.

Minato, for his part, could hardly believe what was happening. He had a beautiful girl tucked under his right arm, a girl who loved him more than anything in the world, and the amazing things was...he really did love her back. It felt right, holding her in his arms, feeling her mouth against his. As though it was the only thing in the world that was right. Yume still held securely against him, he made his way to the door and opened it...only to find himself face to face with his landlord. A squat, heavyset man whose hairline has receding as he advanced in years, his landlord was not known for his sunny disposition, but for his very low prices.

"Well, well, well. Sahashi-kun, I come up here because I thought I heard voices, and I see you leaving with a woman tucked under your arm." He growled, eyes narrowing as he looked at the young couple before him. "Don't even try to give me some cock-and-bull story about her just being a friend who is visiting, I see that fresh hickey on her neck. That's a violation of your lease, be out of here by the end of the week!" he stomped away down the stairs, and Minato shook his head before heading down as well.

"Minato-sama, I lost you you're home…I'm so sorry!" Yume said, tears in her eyes. Would he cast her aside now? "I'll make it up to you, I promise I'll do anything, just please don't send me away!"
“Shh, Yume, it's okay.” Minato murmured, holding her to his chest as she cried some. "I would rather live in a trash bin with you then in a palace without you. We will just find a new place, you and I.” He shook his head in dismay and kissed her passionately. "And I will never, ever send you away.”

"Minato-sama…” Yume whispered, feeling the love he held for her fill the air around him. "Okay then. I will follow you anywhere."

A/N: Damn, my Muse were going crazy when I wrote these first few chapters. I did them all back-to-back, man! WHEW! For those of you who may think that Yume is a little OOC from being miss "Head of Discipline Squad, Second Generation”, I would like to point out that we don't know much about Yume, and what we do know is that love is paramount in her mind. For some of you who think things in their relationship may be going too fast, I would point out the absolute love and trust that the Sekirei bond engenders, and since my Minato actually has a spinal column for something more than keeping his body from being a pile of primordial ooze, he is going to act on those feelings more than canon Minato ever would.
In Which Minato Is A Badass

This is insane. Thirty apartment retailers, at least, and not a single one willing to give us a place to stay!" Minato groused as he tugged Yume down onto the park bench beside him and pulled her into his side.

"I know, it does seem a little crazy, but if you would let me…" Yume started, but her Ashikabi and love was already shaking his head in denial.

"No, I won't have those psychotic bastards at M.B.I. paying for us to live. I don't want them to have any leverage on us. I won't let anyone force you to fight to protect me or our right to be together." He said firmly, and Yume bit her bottom lip. She didn't know what to say to that. "I am your Ashikabi, it is my duty to watch over you, to provide for you. I will find a job, and a way to pay for us to live somewhere."

"Minato-sama…" Yume murmured, laying her head against his chest and listening to his heart beat as his hand stroked her long brown hair.

The peaceful and romantic moment was killed in it's infancy as someone yelled nearby. Moments later, two bodies came hurtling past the bench they were seated on and ducked behind it.

"What the hell?" Minato furrowed his brow as he looked over the back of the aforementioned bench at the ravens-wing black haired twins that were hiding there.

"Please, don't draw attention to us!" one of them gasped, a bleeding cut across her cheekbone, dangerously close to her eye. "We need to hide or else…"

"Aha! Look at this. It's our lucky day, Akitsu. Not only are #s 11 and 12 here, but little #08 is as well, despite escaping us! And the little toe-rag that insulted Mikogami-sama!" a very familiar voice shouted from the behind Minato, and he slowly turned forwards again, eyes widening at a sight he was really not happy about seeing. There stood the same pair that had tried to steal his Yume, and now they were after these two girls. He could only assume that they were Sekirei as well.

"Well, if it isn't the two wenches that tried to take my Yume from me yesterday." He said with calm that he didn't totally feel. Sure, his Yume was #08, so if it came to a fight she would be fine, but there were two of them and only one of her. "What do you want?"

"We want to bring our master those Sekirei that you have with you. All three of them will serve the master!" the one called Mitsuha seemed to be doing all the talking, like she had yesterday.

"Well, you sure as hell aren't getting my Yume." Minato growled threateningly, despite the fact that the two aliens could tear him limb from limb without their powers or weapons. "Something tells me that these two girls aren't really interested in serving your master either."

"We've met, he isn't our destined one." The twin who hadn't spoken earlier said quickly, when Minato looked at them for confirmation. He turned back to their two attackers and shrugged nonchalantly. "That's that. Why don't you two run along now."

"So, you managed to wing #08. No matter." Mitsuha hissed, uncoiling her whip. "I kill you and take them all back to my master!" Her whip lashed out, only to impact against a wall of light that emanated from Yume's outstretched hand.

"I will not let you and your master harm Minato-sama or force these girls to serve him." She growled, furious over the death threat to her beloved.
"Akitsu!" Mitsuha snapped, and the one named Akitsu flashed with speed as she raced past Yume straight towards Minato.

"Damn you!" Yume yelled, turning to face her only to have her attention forcefully directed into erecting another shield as the whip snapped again.

"Uh uh, you aren't going to be helping your little master! I keep you busy while Akistu freezes him from the inside out!"

"Stay behind me, you two." Minato snapped, shifting into a fighting pose as he braced himself before the pair.

"Stop, you don't stand a chance against..." one of the twins started to say, but then Akitsu was on them, one hand lashing out in a chop that likely would have snapped Minato's neck if he hadn't dodged it at the last moment.

Hikari and her twin sister Hibiki watched in fear and awe as this average-looking human managed to avoid blow after blow from a Sekirei. Sure, he was avoiding them by barely a hairsbreadth each time, but such a feat should have been impossible for any human. What's more, they both noticed that their bodies were feeling abnormally warm and...fuzzey, almost, at the sight of this boy.

"Too slow!" he shouted suddenly. "An opening!" He lashed out with a kick that connected with Akitsu's ribs and sent her stumbling to the side. It was unlikely that she was injured in anyway, but that was far from the point. The point was that he had landed a blow.

"You are an interesting human. What are you, to be able to evade a Sekirei's blows and land one in return." Akitsu asked in a dispassionate and dead-sounding voice.

"My grandfather was almost as fast as you when he was training me in martial arts." The boy replied, breathing heavily from exertion.

"Impressive, but I'm afraid Mikogami-sama is waiting. Frost Arrows."

"Look out!" Hibiki screamed, but it was too late. Arrow-like blades of ice appeared all around Akitsu and sped towards the boy. Eyes wide, he shifted his body in an attempt to evade the attack. He wasn't fast enough.

Ice shard after ice shard sank into his body. He stood there for a moment, staring down at his t-shirt in shock as crimson began to spread across it. He staggered, his face turning towards Yume.

"Yume...chan..." he murmured, collapsing to his knees as his face turned horribly pale. "Take...them...run..." He fell forwards and to the left, his left shoulder impacting the ground and he rolled limply onto his back.

"MINATO!" the girl he had called Yume screamed. "NO!" she rushed to his side, cradling his head in her lap as he gazed up at her, his breathing labored.

"Help them...Yume." He managed to gasp out, before his eyes rolled back in his head and he lost consciousness as his body started to shut down from the pain.

"Hey, number 08." Hikari and Hibiki crouched beside him, their own faces pale as they looked at the boy who was dying for their sake. "Your affinity is light, right?"

"What of it?" Yume snapped, angry at the pair. If they hadn't shown up, her Minato wouldn't be bleeding to death in her arms after only a day of being together.

"Light has healing properties, doesn't it?" Hibiki continued, and Yume nodded choppily.

"Hai, I could stabilize him, but I can't do that and shield at the same time." She replied, and the twins exchanged looks.

"Yume-san...my sister and I are reacting to your master." Hikari said quietly, and Yume's head snapped up and met her eyes. "Allow us to bond with him, and this trash will be swept away while you save Minato-sama."

"Are you truly reacting to him? Minato would rather die than bind two non-reacting Sekirei." She said quietly, so that the two enemies-who seemed to be gloating, under the impression that their will would soon be broken by the imminent death of the boy- couldn't hear.

"Hai, my sister and I felt ourselves drawn to this place unconsciously while we fled." Hibiki answered for them both. "There is not much time left, you must decide quickly."

"Do it, fast." Yume ordered without a moment's hesitation. She could feel their sincerity, and that
was good enough for her. Together, the twin sisters leaned forward and kissed the semi-conscious boy one the lips. Together, their wings flared and in unison they moaned as the warmth flowed through them. Standing as one being, they turned to face the no-longer confident pair that had caused all of this.

“You almost killed Minato-sama!” Hikari yelled.

"Now, we will return the favor!” Hibiki added as they joined hands and thrust them into the sky, shouting out their Norito to the heavens: "The thunderslap of our oath, destroy the disasters that befall our Ashikabi! GOD SONG!” They thrust their free hands at their two opponents, and lightning arced across the sky while thunder boomed. With a resounding CRACK! twin bolts of lightning blazed a path through the heavens, headed directly for the enemy. Akitsu had to focus all of her power into creating a barrier of ice to save herself and her companion from an instantaneous and searing death. The effort robbing her of the last of her energy, she collapsed to the ground, from which her companion retrieved her before beating a hasty retreat.

Letting the last of their power dissipate, Hibiki and Hibiki dashed to their Ashikabi's side, where he lay under a dome of light that seemed to come from Yume's hands. Overhead, thunder continued to boom and with a slight pitter-patter, rain began to fall.

“Will Minato-sama recover?” Hibiki asked, an icy fist of fear griping her heart and squeezing.

"Not if we don't get him out of the rain. Come on, we have to get him back to his apartment.” Yume said, gathering him in her arms and dashing away, leaping from rooftop to rooftop with the Twins hot on her heels.

Not 5 minutes later, they skidded to a halt in front of their Ashikabi's apartment complex. Quickly retrieving the key from Minato's belt, Hikari opened the door and held it as her sister helped Yume bring their Master inside.

"Hibiki, first room down the hall and to the left is the bathroom. Bring me all the towels there. Hikari, first room on the right is his bedroom. Bring me some clothes, any clothes.” Yume ordered swiftly, and the Twins vanished in their haste to obey. They were back only seconds later, and Yume sucked in a deep breath.

"Girls, hold his arms and legs down, I'm going to have to pull these ice shards out to finish healing him, and the pain will bring him around. You can't let him move or he could hurt himself further. Do you understand?"

"Hai, Yume-chan.” They replied together, gently but firmly holding their Ashikabi's limbs to the floor. One by one, Yume pulled the shards out, her hand muffling his screams of pain until the last one was removed, and she kissed him ferociously, her wings blazing like the sun in high summer as she laid both hands on his chest.

"By the light of my contract, the darkness of my Ashikabi shall be taken away!” she murmured her Norito. "Fukugen!" (Restoration) Again the white light spilled from her palms and washed over his wounds. With agonizing slowness, the wounds vanished as muscles and flesh knit themselves back together. Finally, her job finished, she sat back wearily.

"Help me get these wet things off of him.” Yume said quietly to the other two as she started to undo his shirt. When they didn't immediately move, she looked up at them with a scowl.

"Well?” she demanded, and they blushed heavily.

"Well…is it proper for us to look upon him? What if he gets angry, and casts us out?" Hibiki asked quietly, her fear at such a possibility flooding her tone.

"That won't happen. Minato-sama would never ever do something like that, and especially not to Sekirei that bound themselves to him out of love. Now, come on.” Yume said reassuringly, and they smiled small smiles back at her as they helped her strip of his wet clothes and dried him.

"Look at all of these scars on his torso.” Hibiki murmured, tracing one that was almost as long as her middle finger with her own index finger.

"There are so many.” Hibiki agreed, tracing another.

"He told me that his grandfather was a master of martial arts and trained both himself and his sisters.” Yume said quietly, stroking his hair with his head in her lap. "It might be from that.”

"That explains the two kodachi that I found on a stand in his room.” Hikari muttered. "Also explains why he managed to dodge and actually land a blow on a Sekirei.”
Yume nodded silently as she helped Hibiki pull a shirt on over their master's head.

"Come on girls, let's take him to bed." She said softly as she picked him up and carried him bridal style down the hall, the Twins trailing after.

Indicating for the twin to roll back the covers, Yume slowly and carefully slid their beloved Ashikabi into his bed, careful to not wake him or jostle him too much. The Twins expected her to then tuck him in and lay down on the floor, and they themselves were looking for any spots that looked even slightly comfortable. They were shocked, however, when she seemed to have a short internal debate before sliding into bed next to him. Shrugging, they assumed that as his First she had the right and started to lay down on the floor for some much needed sleep, but her quiet yet sharp voice stopped them.

"What are you two doing? Get up here." She whispered, and they exchanged glances.

"It's not right...we only bonded with him today, and you're his First Sekirei. It's your right, not ours." Hikari mumbled while Hibiki nodded, but Yume only rolled her eyes in exasperation.

"I only bonded with him yesterday, and he won't mind. He has very sharp emotional senses for a human; he will know your reaction was legitimate. Besides, don't you want to join me here with him?"

The Twins exchanged another loaded glance. Yume was right; they did very much want to be in bed with their Minato-sama, and if Yume-chan said it was alright...

"Okay." They whispered in unison. Hikari slid into bed on Minato's free side while Hibiki slid in next to Yume, each sister pulling their half of the blanket up to cover them all.

"Good night Hikari-chan, Hibiki-chan." Yume yawned, resting her head on their Minato's chest as she draped an arm and a leg over him.

"Goodnight, Yume-chan. Sleep well." they murmured in reply, cuddling in as close as they could to their master.

Goodnight, Minato-sama. Daisuki. All three girls thought together, each holding tight to whatever bit of their love that they could reach as they drifted off into a peaceful sleep.

Minato Sahashi woke slowly as sunlight and birdcalls drifted in through the window. Blinking, he looked up at the ceiling as he tried to remember what had happened. The fight, saving the two girls, Yume and the two girls saving him...he must have passed out after that. It was after his train of thought ended that he noticed several things. First, he was in bed. Second, he wasn't in bed alone. Third, he was apparently in bed with three people. Looking down at the weight on his chest, he smiled at Yume, whose face was turned towards him in such a way that he could see the contented smile on her face even in sleep. Looking to his sides one after the other, he saw that the twin girls he and Yume had tried to help yesterday were snuggled up against him with smiles of equal contentment. Debating internally over the morality of such an arrangement, Minato laid his head back and relaxed, closing his eyes and meditating like his grandfather had taught him.

Visualizing the core of his being, his soul for all intents and purposes, he looked upon the shining orb and saw that there were three ropes leading out from it, and at the other end of each rope was a shining beacon of love and trust directed towards him. One of them was Yume, that much was obvious to him, but the other two confused him. Subconsciously, he knew that they were the twin girls, but he was only Yume's Ashikabi, not theirs. Unless they had bonded to him somehow.

He felt a slight shifting at his sides and opened his eyes to see the twins waking up. Blinking sleepily, they noticed him watching them and smiled at him.

"Good morning master." The one on the left said, kissing him, her wings flaring and fading at the contact. As soon, as she moved away, her twin moved in.

"Did you sleep well, master?" she murmured, taking his mouth with her own, her wings flaring and fading like her sister's.

"Of course he did." Yume mumbled against his chest, likely awoken by the shining wings. "He had three beautiful women who are in love with him in his bed. How can he not sleep well with that kind of warmth?" She crawled up his body and kissed him hard, her tongue demanding entrance to his mouth and receiving it as her wings shone. Hibiki and Hikari blushed and felt warmth inside them as their bond-sister and beloved engaged in a heated kiss. Both unconsciously licked their own lips, looking forward to kissing him the same way. From the sounds Yume was making, it was very enjoyable. Very enjoyable indeed.

"Yume, I'm sorry!" he said when the contact broke, panicking. "These girls kissed me, and I didn't stop them! I'm so sorry!"
At his words, Hikari and Hibiki both bit their bottom lips and slid off the bed, tears welling up in their eyes as they started to leave. It was just as they feared. They had tried to be close to their Ashikabi, and now he was rejecting them out of hand.

“Sit back down, you two!” Yume’s voice was implacable and had a definite air of command. She turned her attention back to their lover and smiled down at him. “Minato-sama, I appreciate your loyalty to me, but these girls bound themselves to you out of love. They reacted to you the same as I did, and through their emerging, both our lives were saved from Akitsu and Mitsuha.”

Minato blinked up at her for a moment, his now more awake mind processing what he had been told, and he nodded, giving her another searing kiss before moving her off of him. Sliding out of bed, he moved over to the twins, both of whom were resolutely looking anywhere but at him. Seeing the tears in their eyes and on their cheeks, he kicked himself mentally. Yume had told him what it was like for a Sekirei to feel rejected by their Destined One, and he had just given them that feeling.

Placing his hand on the first twin’s shoulder, he turned her towards him while the other tilted her chin up. Before she could try and move away, his mouth came down on hers. Her eyes widened in shock before half-closing with a moan of pleasure as her love’s tongue stroked her bottom lip, begging to be allowed into her mouth. Happily allowing it, she opened her mouth and sent her own tongue snaking out to dance with his as pleasure flooded her body. Her wings burned brightly, small bits of electricity arcing randomly around them before he pulled away, much to her displeasure, a displeasure that she vocalized. He smiled at her tenderly and kissed away her tears before nuzzling her neck and nibbling on it.

“What is your name?” he asked against her throat, and she had to scramble to form a coherent reply.

“H-Hikari, master. Sekirei #11.” She managed to moan out, and she felt him smile against her neck before she moaned again, louder, as he bit down and sucked slightly.

“Thank you, Hikari, for loving me and for saving my lovely Yume.” He said, pulling away from her neck and stroking her cheek lovingly for a moment. Then he turned to her sister, who had been watching with a flush of pleasure and a lustful gaze as he ravished her twin’s mouth and throat. He smirked at her and raised one hand with a twitching finger in a ‘come here’ gesture that she immediately obeyed. She promptly found herself being treated to the same attention that her sister had, and she moaned with pleasure several times and, like her sister and Yume before her, voiced her displeasure at having such wonderful attention cease.

“And what is your name, lovely twin to Hikari.” He murmured against her throat, teeth scraping the skin slightly, causing her eyelids to shutter slightly from arousal.

“H-Hibiki, my master, Sekirei #12.” She moaned in anticipation of the bite that would give her the same love-mark he had gifted to her sister and Yume. Her answer was rewarded with exactly that, and she sighed in pleasure as he marked her as his.

Yume for her part was rather pleased. She had more competition for her Minato-sama’s time and attention, but she knew in her heart of hearts that he would never abandon her or anyone else, for any reason.

“What is your command, master?” Hikari asked submissively after a moment, and he smiled at her.

“I’m your Ashikabi and your lover, not your master. If you wish to call me that, you may do so, but you are not my slaves.” He replied, only to fall back with a started yelp as Hikari and Hibiki glomped him onto the bed together, tears of happiness in their eyes.

“Thank you, master.” Hikari murmured into his ear.

“Yes, thank you master. Thank you for loving us, and valuing us as more than weapons for this game.” Hibiki echoed in his opposite ear.

“Personally, I am totally against this so-called Sekirei plan.” Minato grumbled, sitting up and leaving the bedroom, leaving two somewhat hurt Sekirei staring after him.

“What did we do wrong? Yume-chan?” Hibiki asked the Sekirei who had been with him longer, even if only by a day.

“Nothing at all. Minato is, like he said, totally against the Sekirei plan. He hates the fact that Sekirei are being winged by people they don’t love.” Yume answered her quietly, also watching him go. “He hates that we Sekirei, all of whom are siblings to one another, must try and kill each other at the whim of a madman.”

“Oh…I see.” Hibiki murmured, while her sister sat quietly. They hadn’t really thought about it like
that, but when it was worded that way, all of a sudden the Sekirei Plan didn't sound like such a
great thing after all. After letting them think about it for a moment, Yume started out of the room.

"Come on, girls. It's time for us to go try and find a new place to stay." She said over her shoulder,
and the Twins hurried after her.

Do any of you have any idea where in the city we could find a place to stay?" Minato sighed
after they left the 5th retailer of the day.

"No, Minato-sama." Yume answered verbally while the twin shook their heads.

"Master, if you would just let us use our M.B.I cards..." Hikari started to try and persuade him,
but he shook his head firmly.

"No, as I have already told Yume, I will be damned if I let those bastards pay to provide for my
family. No, it's my job and my duty." He said firmly, and all three of his girls blushed and smiled
at how he had referred to them as his family.

"Excuse me?" a young woman's voice came from behind them, and all four turned to see a
beautiful young women with long brown hair in a ponytail on her left side
(I'm not a girl, so I
don't know the names of the hair style Uzume has. Sue me. _) standing there with a smile and
blush on her face.

"Yes, what can I do for you, miss?" Minato said politely, and the girl's smile widened.

"Well, I stay at a boarding house a few blocks from here, and we are looking for new tenants."

"I thank you for your kind offer, but I don't have the money to rent three rooms at a boarding
house, and I doubt the owner will accept an IOU." Minato replied with a slight bow, regret in his
tone.

"Oh, that's no problem! I'm sure you can work something out with her!" the girl said cheerfully.
"C'mon, give it a shot! I would love it if you would all stay there with m-us!" Minato accepted the
chance gratefully, and started walking beside the girl as they chatted about various mundane
subjects.

"Yume-chan, did you catch what she almost said there?" Hikari murmured to her as the three of
them followed after the pair, their eyes locked on the brown-haired women.

"Yes, she almost said "Stay there with me" but changed it at the last moment. Did you see her
blush?" Yume replied, just as softly, and Hibiki answered her.

"Yes. Do you think that she is another Sekirei reacting to him?"

"Yes, she must be, but things are happening so fast! How does he keep running into Sekirei he
has an affinity with?" Yume murmured, wincing as she caught the suddenly gloomy looks on her
bond-sister's faces. "That isn't a slight against you two, Minato, or even that girl."

"What do you mean, then?" Hikari asked, relieved. Yume hating her and Hibiki could have made
life very hard for everyone.

"Doesn't it seem like he is running into Sekirei that are compatible with him a little fast? I mean,
what is he, a Sekirei magnet?" Yume pointed out, and the Twins nodded slowly.

"Well, you said it yourself. He has an unusually strong soul for a human, and he is bonded to us,
numbers 08, 11, and 12. You know better than I that the more powerful an Ashikabi grows due to
his bonds, the more he attracts Sekirei." Hibiki said slowly, and her sister and Yume nodded in
agreement.

"Yes, his soul is almost Sekirei-like, isn't it?" Yume murmured. "And you are right about the
power levels attracting Sekirei."

"Sp, wait and see what happens?" Hikari asked, and the other two agreed. "Then I suppose we
should catch up, shouldn't we?" Three Sekirei quickly ran to catch up with their Ashikabi and
potentially future bond-sister.

A/N: I am trying to lengthen the chapter to my normal level as I progress into the story, so they
won't be short forever! Anyway, hope that you all still like it, and see you in the next chapter!
DON'T FORGET TO REVIEW!
Maisson Izumo

Chapter Summary

In Which Our Heroes Find Somewhere To Live

Sekirei: Guardian of the North
Chapter 3
Maisson Izumo

Atop the tall structure that was MBI headquarters, Takami Sahashi glared spitefully at the back of the man she had used to love, and the father of her children. Hirato Minaka, Director and Chairmen of MBI, Creator of the Sekirei Plan, and raving psychotic.

"You bastard, you swore to me that my children would not be involved!" she hissed, but Minaka just laughed in that maniacal way of his, completely uncaring.

"Ah, be glad that our child has been chosen to take place in this glorious game of mine!" he shouted, fists on his hips as the wind made that ridiculous cloak of his billow. "He will destroy those who challenge him and prove himself, or he will fall upon the wayside!"

"That kind sentence is the reason he is MY son and not yours." Takami growled, turning and stalking back inside. Prowling down the halls, she cursed furiously inside her mind. Her son had been trained to fight, that may be true, but he was still kind-hearted, and her father had instilled a sense of honor and duty in him that would have made those of the ancient Samurai seem pale and insignificant in comparison. The Sekirei Plan, she knew, would offend him and anger him beyond anything else she could imagine. She could only hope that he would forgive her for her part in it.

Minato, Yume, Hikari, and Hibiki followed the girl, who had since introduced herself as Uzume, down the front walk of the small Inn that she had spent the last half an hour describing. It was beautiful, a building using an amazing blend of traditional and modern architecture. It was surrounded by a high, simple wooden fence, and there was a garden off to one side.

"Miya!" Uzume called as she opened the door. "I found some potential boarders for you!"

"Oh? How did you manage that, Uzume?" said a quiet but strong voice from what appeared to be the kitchen, and a slightly older women with pale violet hair in a traditional miko's outfit: a purple hakama, a white haori with a sash-like belt wooden sandals and a white ribbon to partially hold her hair in place, came into the hallway. Minato and his girls bowed deeply, and she smiled. "Who are your friends, Uzume?"

"My name is Minato Sahashi, Landlady-sama." Minato said, bowing low. "My companions are Yume, Hikari, and Hibiki. We are looking for a place to stay."

"A pleasure to meet you all, please come in." Miya said, standing back as they filed in. In truth, she had known who they were as soon as Matsu had 'seen' Uzume meet them near the realtor's office with her satellites. As soon as the boy had bonded with Number 08, her successor as leader of the Discipline Squad, Matsu had kept an eye on him, even more so when she figured out he was the son of Takami Sahashi. When he had then winged Hikari and Hibiki soon after, he had become even more interesting. She knew everything about him, and Matsu, who had watched the fight yesterday, where the Twins were winged, with her computers had shown her a recording of Minato willingly taking on Akitsu, the former number 07, for the sake of two Sekirei that were not even his. "So, Minato-san, please explain to me what you are looking for accommodation wise, and how you can pay."

"Landlady-sama, I got thrown out of my home because Yume here was in trouble and I let her hide out at my place for a while. Uzume told us this place was very safe, and I want to make sure that these three stay safe above all else." The boy said nervously, but with iron resolve in his tone. "I have no way to pay for room and board at this time, but I am searching for a job, and am willing to take care of this building, clean it, anything."
Miya raised her eyebrows concealed surprise, and a great deal of curiosity. What a strange human this was. He had three Sekirei, each with their own, unlimited value MBI Platinum card, yet he apparently refused to allow them to pay for him to live. He wanted to care for them on his own merits and with his own work. He valued their safety above all, something that certainly earned him more respect in her eyes than was already gained by almost dying to protect un-winged Sekirei. He reminded her a great deal of Takehito, now that she thought of it.

"I'm sure that we can work something out, Minato-kun." She said quietly. "Why don't you and I go discuss it, while Uzume helps your friends choose rooms?"


As soon as they were alone, all three of Minato's Sekirei turned their heads and locked their eyes on Uzume, who shied away from them and fiddled nervously.

"So, Uzume, what number Sekirei are you, and are you a threat to our Minato-sama?" Yume asked calmly, and while the Twins didn't make any outrageously aggressive moves, Hikari casually brushed her hair, and it just so happened lightning was arcing between her fingers at the same time.

"Easy now, girls." Uzume said, holding her hands up to show she wasn't a threat. "I'm Sekirei #10, Uzume, and I'm not in any way a threat to Minato-sama. In fact, I'm reacting to him."

The trio visibly relaxed, and Yume smiled at her. A new sister would be nice, especially since this one was responsible for them having a home again.

"I am number 08, Yume. These girls with me are numbers 11 and 12, Hikari and Hibiki. So, do you want me to tell him that you are reacting to him?" she said, but was dismayed when Uzume shook her head violently, tears filling her eyes. She crawled next to the now sobbing Sekirei and wrapped her arms around her. "Hey now, what's wrong? Minato-sama is a kind and compassionate Ashikabi."

"Yes, he almost died for my sister and I. You do not need to fear!" Hibiki said encouragingly, trying to cheer her up.

"Oh, I know all that, it's just…" Uzume blubbered, hands over her face. After a little more coaxing, she spilled the entire story, a story that had the three Sekirei of Minato Sahashi raging and feeling rather vengeful.

Uzume explained that Minato wasn't the first person she had reacted to. She had, in fact, first reacted to a young girl named Chiho. Unfortunately, Chiho was very sick, and from a poor family. So, when she was admitted to one of the hospitals owned by a man called Higa, he had had his man Takizaki, who was apparently his right hand man and ran the hospital, refuse Chiho aid. The girl had died that night, before Uzume could bond with her and pay for her care with her MBI card. According to Takizaki, who had found her later that night, Higa had known that Uzume was reacting to Chiho, but desired Uzume's power for his own faction. Takizaki had, evidently, guessed that the death of Chiho would break her spirit and allow him to subdue her and return her to Higa. She had fled from his Sekirei and himself and sought refuge in Maisson Izumo, and been there ever since.

"It's a good thing Minato-sama didn't hear this story." Hibiki muttered while the other two nodded slowly. "He would blow his top over something like this. So, what drew you to Minato then, if he isn't your true Ashikabi?"

"His soul…it burns like the sun, and I can feel it drawing me in. I would bond with him, oh how I want to bond with him, but…" Uzume trailed off sadly, and Yume hugged her again.

"You need time to recover emotionally. I understand completely." She said warmly, before having a thought. "You have a cell phone, right?"

Uzume nodded, confused by the apparent non sequitur. Yume smiled and gave her Minato's cell phone number. In response to her questions, the Sekirei of Fate simply replied with "Call and we will find you." It was obvious what she was saying. If anyone came after her to try and wing her forcefully, call Minato and they will come and help her, no matter what. This reduced her to happy tears, and the girls hugged and comforted her a little more before she had cheered up enough to be pert.

"So, how good of a kisser is Minato-sama? I see those hickeys, and if I'm going to be one of Minato-sama's girls I want to know everything so that I'm ready for the fun." She said slyly, and the other girls giggled and blushed before launching into a rather detailed description of their Ashikabi's skill as a paramour. Super-powerful aliens they may be, but they were also young women in love, and some things span every race.
Minato shivered slightly and sneezed. He rubbed his nose and sniffed. It felt like somebody was talking about him, somewhere.

"Tissue, Minato-kun?" the landlady, who had introduced herself as Miya Asama, said in her quiet way, offering him one and he accepted gratefully, blowing his nose quietly.

"Thank you, Landlady-sama. I appreciate that you are willing to help us out like this. I was running out of viable options." Minato bowed low from his seated position, resting his forehead on the floor, and Miya frowned slightly where he couldn't see it. Why was this boy so violently against using the MBI cards as payment? Perhaps Uzume would find something out from his Sekirei.

"I'm glad to help, Minato-kun." She said calmly. "Now please stop bowing to me, it makes me feel uncomfortable. I am your landlady, not your sensei."

"Actually, Miya-sama, I heard from Uzume that you are skilled with a sword. I myself use two kodachi, and I was wondering if we could spar sometime. I know I could learn much from you." Minato said respectfully, still bowing.

"Hmmm…very well. Once you move all of your things here, I suppose that we could have a quick match, at which time I'll decide if I wish to teach you more." Miya agreed slowly. The recording she had seen of him had involved hand to hand combat, not Satsujin-ken. This boy was an enigma, and a part of Miya relished that.

"Thank you Miya-sama."

"Humph, I see that you found two more sluts to entertain you as well as the first." Minato's ex-landlord snorted in disgust as he saw Minato, Yume, Hikari and Hibiki leaving his apartment with his belongings. Minato's hand twitched slightly, and his eyes hardened and narrowed.

"Watch your mouth. I won't tolerate any insults to them." He said coldly, so coldly that the man stepped back automatically. Minato never could tolerate insults to any woman. His grandfather had taught him that. He still remembered the old man's words.

"Minato, a woman is like a jewel. Treat her well, and take care of her, and she will shine and gleam. Ignore her or abuse her, and her shine will fade, cracks will appear, and eventually she will break to pieces. Never let those you care for lose their shine, nor suffer others to darken it."

"Minato-sama, don't waste your anger on the likes him. Let's go home." Yume said quietly, taking his free hand in her own. Minato visibly calmed, and smiled at her. She was right, after all. The man was an ignorant pig, a self-centered and lonely fool. There was no need for him to lose his temper. That would make him just as bad.

"You're right, Yume-chan." He agreed, and they left the spluttering man behind as they walked away, chatting cheerfully amongst themselves.

"So, Uzume, what did you pick up from his Sekirei?" Miya asked quietly, looking out the window of the second floor at the setting sun.

"Other than the fact that he is an amazing kisser?" Uzume giggled, and Miya turned her head slightly, raising one eyebrow slightly as an oni mask appeared behind her. "Oh relax, I need the laughs. Anyway, he was apparently taught martial arts and a Bushido-like code of honor by his grandfather, who was evidently a master of many styles. He has a very strong sense of justice and honor, and iron-clad opinions on the line between right and wrong."

"That is good to hear." Miya murmured. She had been able to discern much of that simply from watching and talking to the boy, but hearing her opinion reinforced was always nice as well. "Did they say why he refuses to use the MBI cards to cover their expenses?"

To her surprise, Uzume grinned widely and somewhat viciously. Her tenant and friend was not one prone to anger or hate, so such an expression was surprising to say the least.

"Minato-sama is totally against the Sekirei Plan. He entertains the idea of trying to put a stop to it." She grinned broadly as Miya gasped, and the false doors hiding Matsu's room swung open.

"Are you sure about that, Uzume-chan?" the red-haired Sekirei of Wisdom asked, shock and awe in her tone as she pushed her glasses up her nose.

"Yes, very sure." Uzume nodded confidently. "He is violently against the idea of we Sekirei being winged against our will, and even more violently against the idea of we Sekirei, who are siblings, being forced to fight and kill our brothers and sisters because some 'psychotic cape wearing bastard of a lunatic found a crashed ship and thought that that he had the right to own the living,
free thinking creatures on board.” Uzume quoted gleefully. Higa had better pray that he never crossed paths with Minato-sama, because she knew which one would walk away. Higa was the exact opposite of Minato-sama, better than him in every single way. “He says he doesn't want to be in debt to people who would commit such atrocities.”

“I must admit, I find myself rather impressed by his character.” Miya murmured, surprising both the other women. Miya was not one to show emotion easily, nor was she one to share her opinion on others. For her to compliment someone aloud, especially someone she had just met, said a lot about what kind of person he was, and just how much of a good impression he had made.

“I have to agree. Everything I’ve found on him says he is an upstanding person of morality and character.” Matsu chimed in after a moment. “He has a record with the police for subduing muggers and the like. He has brought in something like two dozen abusers and muggers because he caught them committing their preferred crimes and stepped in.”

“So, you think it wise to have him stay here then?” Miya asked quietly, and both nodded. They knew if they had had any problems with him, Ashikabi or not he would have found himself on his ass outside the door. The violet haired number 01 Sekirei quietly descended to the lower floor to begin making dinner, leaving Uzume and Matsu alone.

“So, Uzume…Minato-sama, huh?” Matsu said quietly, the question implied very clear in her tone.

“Yes, Matsu, I am reacting to him, but I can't have him wing me yet. I'm not ready.” Uzume said, her grin fading as she thought about Chiho. She had cared so much for that girl, yet here she was caring for another, not even a month after her death. What kind of horrible person was she?

“Hey…You're not betraying Chiho's memory, Uzume. She would want you to be happy.” Matsu said, correctly discerning what had caused her friend to feel gloomy. "She would want you to be happy.”

Uzume just nodded quietly and went to her room to get ready for supper. Closing her secret door, Matsu sat back in front of her Command Center, as she liked to call it, and watched Minato and his Sekirei walking towards Maisson Izumo, laughing and talking happily. She felt a stirring inside her as she gazed upon his laughing face, and she softly reached out with one hand to touch the screen.

“You aren't the only one reacting to him, Uzume.” She said quietly to herself.

Several hours later, Minato lay on his futon, staring up at the ceiling as he considered everything that had happened in the last three days. He had failed his entrance exams again, and his future had seemed rather bleak, when Yume had quite literally crashed into his life. He had taken the beautiful young woman home, and his reality had been shattered. So, she had told him about how he was now involved in a barbaric battle royal where he either had to split up people who loved each other or allow them to take his loves away from him. Then he had met Hikari and Hibiki, and almost died to save two girls he didn't even know, just because it was the right thing to do. Now here he was, with three girls to care for, and the strong possibility of more, according to Yume, and he had no job, or even an idea of where he could start looking. He sighed and threw his arm over his eyes.

What the hell do I do now? Sleep well, my lovely Sekirei. I swear I'll do right by you! were his last thoughts, as he drifted away into the arms of Morpheus.

Unbeknownst to their Ashikabi, Yume, Hikari and Hibiki were all still wide awake, and talking quietly to one another.

"How many more Sekirei will the Master attract, Yume-chan?" Hibiki asked curiously. "Do you have any guesses?"

"None, only that it will be many." Yume shook her head negatively. "His soul is overwhelmingly powerful. I've never seen anything like it, except among we Sekirei."

"It is strange though." Hikari murmured slowly. "That his soul is so strong, and so bright. It's like Uzume said. It draws you in, until you are consumed by its heat and light."

"Like a star." Yume agreed, the metaphor seemed very appropriate to her. "He has his own gravitational field and it's impossible to escape from once you enter it. You can only do what Uzume is doing, and resist for as long as you can."

"I wish that we knew more about him. I mean, we know he is trained in martial arts, and had two kodachi but we don't know what arts, or what his code of honor is, or who his family is. We know nothing, and that disturbs me." Hibiki sighed, flopping down on her futon. "He's an enigma. I mean, did you see how angry he got with his old landlord when he called us whores?"
"Yes, that is strange." Yume frowned in thought. She remembered well the anger that had clouded his eyes, and the dark scowl that had marred his face, and the frigid tone he had spoken in. "That didn't seem like the Minato-sama we see usually. I wonder if what the landlord man said hit a nerve with Minato-sama. After all, as you said, Hibiki, we know next to nothing about him, only the barest details."

"SO we ask him." Higari said bluntly, getting under her covers. "We ask him to tell us more about himself, and start to piece together his past. But," she yawned widely, making the other two Sekirei yawn as well. "We can ask him in the morning."

All three Sekirei curled up in their futons, and all three fell asleep and dreamt of their beloved Ashikabi, and the puzzle that he represented.

Sekirei #108, Kusano, the Green Sekirei, sat sniffing on the gnarled roots of a massive tree in the Arboretum. She was cold, and scared, and worst of all…she was all alone. Her big brother Shiina wasn't anywhere to be found. She had searched for him and searched for him, but when the mean girls, the angry one and the cold one, had tried to hurt her she had hidden here. When they had followed, she had cried out in fear, and now her beloved plant friends were protecting her from the mean people.

"Big brother…." She snuffled. "Come and find me big brother! HELP ME!"

##################################

A/N: another chapter done, still with no beta, so if you see anything that needs correcting, tell me in a review and I will edit the chapter and re-post it later! Catch you next time!
“HELP ME BIG BROTHER!” the voice of the young blonde girl screamed in Minato's head as he awoke the same way he had for the past three nights, with a sudden start and soaked in sweat. Sighing softly to himself, he rubbed one hand over his face and tugged slightly on the bridge of his nose before pushing himself to his feet and walking groggily into the bathroom. After splashing cold water on his face he stood there for a moment staring at his reflection in the mirror. Ever since Minato and his girls had started staying at the Maisson Izumo, he had had the same nightmare each night.

It was dark, the dark you found only in the middle of the night. The rain was falling in thick sheets, soaking him to the bone and running down his face in thin streams. Minato stood before the gate of the Arboretum in the center of the city, staring into the dark and forboding treeline. He felt a sense of worry rise from the pit of his stomach, like there was someone inside he had to find, but he didn't know where to start looking.

The whispers would always start at that point. “Help me big brother. I'm scared, and lonely, and cold. Where are you big brother?”

He would run into the Arboretum and race between the trees, looking everywhere for the scared little girl who was crying for help. Eventually he would reach a small clearing deep inside, and there against the roots of a massive tree he would find the little girl. She was wearing a small soaking wet white dress, blond hair unkempt and tangled around her face, small blue eyes gazing up at him with fear and sadness.

"Why won't you come find me, big brother? Why won't you help me?"

"Hey, I'm right here, I can help you. Come on, let's go," He would always reply, but she would never seem to hear him.

"I'm so scared big brother. The bad people are coming! I don't want them to find me. Where are you, big brother? HELP ME BIG BROTHER!"

The desperation in her voice would always wake him up.

"Minato-kun, breakfast!" he heard Miya call from outside the bathroom. He took a deep breath in an attempt to calm himself.

"Thank you, Landlady-dono. I will be down in just a moment," he replied, drying his face off. He heard her move away down the hall to wake his girls and Uzume. Opening the door, he trudged back to his room and threw his work clothes on. Miya had been a great help in finding him a job, talking to an old friend of her husband's to get him a job with a construction company. The pay was decent and the hours were neither good nor bad. He was also learning a lot and getting stronger physically, so all in all it was a good deal.

"Good morning Minato-sama." Yume's voice said softly from behind him as a pair of arms circled his waist and a feminine body press up against his back. "What's wrong? I can feel your sadness."

Minato grimaced slightly and quickly ran through a mental technique his grandfather had taught him for purging emotion before turning to face her with a smile.

"Nothing is wrong Yume. Just a little tired, that's all," he replied, kissing her softly for a moment and smirking internally at her barely heard moan. Pulling back, he hugged her and continued.

"How are you this morning, love?"

"I would be a great deal better if you would quit that ridiculous job and let us pay your way. It is..."
our duty as Sekirei to service your every need,” she replied. He sighed loudly, then pulled back and looked her in the eye.

“Like I’ve told you every time you’ve said that, as an Ashikabi and as a man it’s my duty to care for the three of you. The only reason you and your fellow Sekirei think that you have to serve your Ashikabi’s every whim is because of all the “improvements” that bastard Minaka did to you when he found your ship. I swear to God, I will end up killing him. The more I find out about him, the more I think he has to die,” he replied firmly, a deep frown of distaste crossing his features as he thought about the CEO of MBI.

“Master…” Hikari and Hibiki entered his line of sight, apparently having stood back to allow Yume to greet him first. Each gave him a hug and a kiss before Hikari continued. “I understand your anger, but we want to help you in any way we can. You won’t let us participate in the Sekirei Plan unless you’re forced to because you don’t want to cause anyone pain. I thank you for that, I have no wish to leave you or force others to leave their own beloved Ashikabi. Can’t you at least let us do something besides stay here and do nothing all day? You even do all of the chores around the house!”

“I’m sorry ladies, but I can’t,” Minato said firmly, stepping around them and heading downstairs. Moments later, they heard him shouting farewell as he left for work. Walking over to the large bay windows, the trio of Sekirei watched him trudge off down the street to work, shoulders sagging and body full of weariness.

“Minato-sama, why won’t you let us help you?” Yume mumbled sadly, feeling rejected for some reason. It wasn’t as though their Ashikabi didn’t love them. In fact, everything he did was overwhelming evidence to the contrary. However, Minato still refused to let them show him how much they loved him in return. The Twins each laid a comforting hand on her shoulders, and she wiped away the few tears that had started to fall before heading down for breakfast.

Miya watched covertly as three of her new boarders entered the room for breakfast. All three looked slightly put out, and from what she had heard of their conversation with Minato she wasn’t surprised. Frowning lightly to herself as she stirred some rice, Miya reflected back on the conversation. She still found Minato-kun’s somewhat fanatical drive to care for his Sekirei by his own means strange but admirable. He was correct in that it was the duty of the man of any family to care for the women, but he was harming himself in the act, which was never a good thing. It was as though he had something to prove, but Miya wasn’t sure if it was to himself or to the world. Miya’s frown deepened as she considered his words on Minaka. His voice had held such hatred when he spoke of the man, and she could tell he was at least half-serious about wanting to kill him. This, she knew, could get very painful very quickly for all involved. Miya knew that Minaka was actually Minato’s, and his younger sister Yukari’s, father. His mother Takami works for MBI, and from the way Minato spoke, Miya sincerely doubted Minato would ever forgive his mother if he ever discovered that she was involved in the Sekirei Plan. That went double if he ever found out that she was one of the people who “adjusted” Sekirei to make them subservient to their Ashikabi. Miya doubted that his sense of honor and justice would be able to accept such a transgression.

“Good morning, Landlady-dono,” Yume said quietly. Her greeting was echoed by the twins, and Miya turned with a bright smile as though she had just noticed them enter.

“Good morning, ladies. I have some more rice coming right up in a few minutes, and there are biscuits on the table,” she said with her normal, chipper tone. The trio murmured their thanks before they each settled down at the table and grabbed a biscuit. A few moments later, Miya bustled around the table, serving each of the girls a portion of rice and placing the rest of the bowl on the table.

“Thank you, Landlady-dono,” the trio said together, eating heartily, and Miya smiled softly at them. She had not known any of them for very long, but they were already growing on her. A loud knock at the door interrupted her thoughts, and she swept out of the room. Opening the front door, Miya felt her smile drop off of her face in favor of a cold glare.

“What do you want, Higa? I warned you not to come here again,” she hissed, incensed that this scum would return to her home after she had sent him and his Sekirei packing the last time.

“Ah, but Miya, you too are a Sekirei, which means you must participate in the game. Why not let me wing you so you can wield your true power?” the insufferably arrogant Higa replied, pushing his glasses further up his nose with a smirk.

“I have no wish to serve any Ashikabi for the foreseeable future, and certainly not one such as you, Higa,” Miya replied, nearly snarling. She hated Higa and Mikogami with a passion, and any Ashikabi like them. How dare they force her younger siblings to unwillingly give themselves to them! Years ago, she had killed many humans for less offensive violations.
"Now, Miya, I think it would be in the best interest of everyone here…” Higa began but a voice from above interrupted him.

"If you left right away?” Yume said, and both Miya and Higa looked up to see Yume, Hikari, and Hibiki standing on the porch overhang, red-tinged white energy gathering around Yume’s hands while the twins had violet-blue electricity arcing along their arms. "I would have to agree with you. In fact, you should go with that plan. Now.”

"Oh my! Numbers 8, 11 and 12, you will make fine additions to my collection,” Higa smirked. Yume glared at him hatefully, fingers twitching as if she was debating de-atomizing him on the spot. Which, of course, she was.

"We three are already claimed by someone stronger, and better, than you!” she snarled, and the twins voiced their agreement.

"Oh? What is the name of this Ashikabi that has winged such beautiful manifestations of power as yourselves?” Higa asked casually, and Miya's eyes narrowed in suspicion. He was being too polite, and that worried her. "I wish to congratulate him on the enormity of his success.”

"Minato Sahashi,” Yume replied before flicking one finger at him, creating a small bolt of photonic energy to flit across the space between them and past his face, creating a small crater just behind him. "Now leave, before I decide to correct my aim.”

Bowing with a polite smile, Higa retreated hastily through the gate and back into his waiting limo, which promptly roared off down the road. The four Sekirei stared after it, an uncomfortable gnawing of worry building in their stomachs, before they went back inside.

In his limo, Higa Izumi pulled out his cellphone and hit speed dial, putting it to his ear as he waited for the person on the other end to pick up. He stared out the window as the streets flew by, his driver taking him back to the safety of the East side of town. His territory. There was a click and his attention was back on the phone.

"Yes?” a cold voice said from the other end, causing Higa to smile to himself.

"It's Higa. There's something I need you to do for me.”

"It will cost you, but what do you need done?”

"Cost is no concern. I want you to find someone and make him disappear.”

"Give me a name and it's done. My people will handle the rest.”

"Minato Sahashi. Find him, make him gone, and make it look casual. I don't want anything leading back to me.”

"Done. It will be handled within the hour.” There was a soft click as the person on the other end hung up. Higa flipped his phone shut and leaned back in his seat, a cruel smirk playing across his lips.

Minato swung his pickaxe again, the sharp "thunk” of its blade biting into the hard ground having quickly become familiar to him. He paused for a moment to wipe the sweat from his eyes, and looked around the construction site that was the only work he had been able to find inside city limits. All around him men at least twice his age were slaving away. Jackhammers pounded away, power equipment whined and boomed around him, and every once in a while three sharp whistles would be followed by an echoing blast as another shaped charge was detonated. Taking a sip of water, Minato returned to work, his mind drifting to his Sekirei.

He just wasn't sure what to do. When the Sekirei Plan really picked up, he and his girls were going to be constant targeted due to their high numbers and the fact that he had three of them. More than anything, he wanted to protect his girls. However to do so he would have to separate other Ashikabi from their own Sekirei, something he was loathe to do. He thought back to when his life had been a whole lot simpler. He woke up in the mornings, ate breakfast, went to school, came home, trained with Grandfather, did his homework, ate dinner, and went to bed. Rinse and repeat, day after day. Nothing major ever happened, his life had been like a repeating broken record.

Then his mom had gotten a job working for some big pharmaceutical company here in the capital and he had come along to prepare for University. He had failed to get in the first time, something that had shocked everyone considering his almost perfect grades in high school, and he had let pessimism get the best of him. Taking his kodachi and wearing a disguise of sorts, he had started to roam the streets at night, looking for any trouble that he could involve himself in, embroiling
himself in the violent world of the back alleys. Gaining a reputation as the ruthless vigilante "Justicar" to the criminals, and as an aggressively helpful citizen to the authorities, he had started to go out more often and stay out later. Picking more and bigger fights, he did anything he could to feel strong and useful. It had eventually taken nearly dying at the hands of some yakuza to straighten him out. He had left the hospital after that event determined to leave "the Justicar" behind him forever.

Minato sighed deeply to himself. He was such a shallow person. He couldn't handle failure, so he had to try and make himself strong by using an alias and a pair of swords. True, he didn't regret helping all those people, but he had nearly become the very people he fought, a realization that had scared him. What scared him even more was that he knew "the Justicar" had never really disappeared. Back in high school, he could barely talk to a girl without stammering and blushing like a tomato, but now he was kissing three girls one after the other and giving them hickeys. Reckless confidence was a trait his time as "the Justicar" had given him and had never faded. Now he was taking liberties with girls who trusted him with their safety.

"Hey, Minato-kun!" his shift manager, a nice if eccentric guy named Seo said, walking over to him. "Good work today! Keep this up, and you'll be on the fast track for an extended period hire!" Minato pulled his yellow hard hat off and shook the sweat out of his hair before smiling at Seo, whose own spiky black locks seemed a little limp and damp.

"Thanks, boss! Work over for today?" Minato replied. Seeing Seo nod in reply, Minato got ready to leave for home. "Okay then, I'll see you in the morning, bright and early!"

"Alright kid, say hi to Miya-chan for me," Seo replied, waving to him as he placed the pickaxe with its fellows and left. Minato had found out by accident that Seo and Miya knew each other through Miya's now deceased husband, who had been Seo's long time best friend. The two still talked, but from what Minato had gathered, Seo annoyed Miya to no end.

Walking down the street as the sky began to darken, Minato's mind returned to his previous introspective musing. What should he do? He trusted the girls and cared about them very much, but he had never been in love before. Did he truly love them, or was it just a surface level side effect of being his Sekirei? He had so many questions, and there was no one he could turn to for help. He couldn't ask his girls, the only other Ashikabi he knew of was this "Mikogami" person who had tried to kidnap his girls, and he couldn't tell anyone else about the Plan unless he wanted an MBI hit team after him. What the hell was he supposed to do now?

So absorbed was Minato in his difficult thoughts that he did not immediately notice that he was traveling through a dark alleyway. Alone at night and without any way to defend himself, it took Minato a few moments to realize that he was being followed by four men dressed in dark clothing. When he did, however, he swore softly to himself. He had gotten lazy! That was how those yakuza had come so close to killing him back then. They had caught him while he was arrogantly daydreaming, secure in his own self-assured power and reputation. Now he was in the same spot because he couldn't wait to get home to have a serious evaluation of his life! Quickening his pace, he started to lengthen his strides as he approached the far end of the alleyway, hoping he looked casual enough to get away with it.

The two gunshots that echoed down the alleyway were a testament to his spectacular failure. Pain exploded in his right shoulder and chest as the two slugs tore through flesh and bone. Collapsing to his knees, he landed face first on the ground, breath coming in heavy gasps as pain wracked his body. He heard footsteps coming closer and closer, and the sound of a gun being cocked near his head. He closed his eyes, a lone tear running down his cheek. So this was how it all ended. Dead in an alley because he got lazy again.

"Goodbye, Yume. Goodbye Hikari and Hibiki. I hope your next Ashikabi isn't as stupid as I was."

Sai Sekirei number 10, Uzume, raced from rooftop to rooftop faster than she could ever remember moving in her life, the body of a dying Minato was cradled against her chest. Looking down at him while she ran, Uzume felt more tears well up in her eyes at what she saw. He was so pale and he looked so broken, his white T-shirt turning a deep burgundy as his blood soaked into it. His breath was coming in shallow pants, and his skin was getting clammy and cold. Looking back up frantically, she poured on more speed, almost crying in relief as she finally saw the MBI sanctioned Ashikabi hospital. Jumping from the last roof onto the roof of a car and to the ground, she charged straight towards the front doors, which slid open as she neared them. Skidding into the lobby, she looked around wildly. There was no one here! How was she supposed to get him
help if there was no one here? Quickly glancing back down at Minato, her face paled as she noticed that he was just barely breathing. He was rapidly running out of time, and there was NO ONE HERE! She watched in horror as his chest stilled, and her ears strained to hear his breath, a groan of pain, something, ANYTHING, to let her know that he was still alive, but there was NOTHING! He was gone, stolen from her! Shrieking in rage at the horrible fact that another Ashikabi had been taken from her, she lashed out with her power. Her veils smashed blindly through windows and doors. Alarms began to blare and shouting could be heard, but she ignored the commotion in her rage. Tears ran freely down her face and her teeth were bared in a snarl of pure hatred and sorrow as she destroyed everything within reach of her veils. Glass, walls, doors, humans...it didn't matter; it all fell before her fury…and her sadness.

Back at the Maisson Izumo, three Sekirei were in the middle of a discussion with Miya when they felt an overwhelming wave of dread wash over them. Shivering, the trio got to their feet and looked around nervously. Something was very, very wrong, but what was it? An empty feeling. Yume touched her fingers to her cheeks, feeling wetness there. When had she started crying? A few uncomfortable minutes later the phone rang, and Miya answered it. Seconds after she hung up, the four Sekirei were racing for MBI's Ashikabi hospital as fast as they could, hoping that they could get there in time.

Takami Sahasi was working on compiling her most recent notes on number six, Homura, and her seemingly accelerating self-immolation when the alarms that indicated a security breach began to blare throughout the hospital. Moving to the door, she poked her head out and saw a doctor from the lower levels rushing past.

"Hey! What the hell is going on?" she shouted, and the doctor halted to look at her with fearful eyes.

"Some Sekirei has gone insane! We think her Ashikabi got shot and killed! She's holding some teenaged kid's body in her arms while some sort of white veils destroy everything in sight. The lower levels are evacuating." The doctor reported, and Takami felt a distinct feeling of dread. That was number 10, Uzume, and Uzume just happened to stay at Maisson Izumo…the same place as her son and his Sekirei.

"What does the Ashikabi look like?" she asked, fearing the answer with all her heart. "Please God, don't let it be him. Anyone but him!" she pleaded, but her prayer was a little late to make a difference, it seemed.

"Teenaged kid, dressed in construction clothes. Spiky black hair." The doctor replied before resuming his hasty retreat further down the hallway, leaving a horrified and shell-shocked Takami standing there. An instant later, she was racing as fast as she could towards the stairs with only one location in mind: the first floor lobby. Her hand dove in to her pocket and pulled out a phone. She flipped it open and she dialed the one number she never thought she would need to dial again.

Uzume snarled, sending one of her veils flashing through the air to hammer another security guard into a wall hard enough for him to leave a human-shaped imprint behind. None of them would ever touch her beloved Minato! She would kill them all!

"Uzume! Stop!" a voice shouted from behind her. Her head whipped around to see a white haired female coming into the room from the stairwell. Uzume snapped her fingers, twisting a veil into a razor-sharp spear that she pointed at the human. If she came any closer, she would find herself with a stomach full of veil! The human took a fateful step forward and Uzume flicked her wrist, sending her spear blurring towards its target.

"Uzume, I can still save him!"

The spear faultered and redirected itself, hissing past the woman's head before punching a hole straight through the reinforced steel door of the stairwell. The woman let out an audible sigh of relief and slowly began walking towards her. Uzume backed away in response, clutching Minato closer to herself. No one would touch him!

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"Uzume, it's me, Takami Sahashi. That's my son, Minato, and I can help him. I can save him Uzume, you just have to trust me," the woman said, and Uzume blinked at her. Takami-sensei? Minato's mother? Trust her? She was human, and humans had killed Minato!

"Stay away, human!" Uzume snarled, forming a barrier between them with her veils. "You're just going to make sure your friends killed him!"

"Uzume." A soft voice said from behind her. She whirled, veils ready to defend or destroy, but she faltered when she saw Miya standing there. Minato's other Sekirei stood beside her.
"Miya! They killed Minato-sama! Kill them, kill them all!" Uzume raged, and Miya shook her head slowly, speaking in calm and measured tones.

"Evil humans hurt Minato, Uzume. Not all humans are evil. Takami is a good sort, and she wants to help Minato. You punished the people who did this, Uzume. It's over now. Everything is going to be okay."

"But...humans killed him, just like Chiho. My beloved Ashikabis, stolen from me by humans," Uzume said brokenly, hugging Minato close and rocking slightly from side to side as she stroked his hair.

"The twins and I would be in bad shape if he had really died, Uzume. It will be okay, just let the doctors take him, and he will come back to us. We can trust them," Yume said quietly, and Uzume looked at her before nodding slowly. Her veils drooped to drag on the ground as she turned to Takami and carefully held out Minato. Takami rushed forwards and shouted for a gurney, which arrived in seconds. Within moments, Minato was on his way to the operating room.

A team of doctors and nurses trailed after his gurney, which was being pushed by two burly security guards.

Uzume, for her part, was busy sobbing into the combined embrace of Miya and Minato's Sekirei while Takami looked on, a sad smile on her lips. It was obvious Uzume cared for her son very much. She would guess that Uzume had killed maybe five security guards and wounded another seven or so when they had tried to approach her and Minato. Looking around the absolutely destroyed lobby with the gaping holes in the walls and ceilings and the wreckage and glass all over the floor, Takami could only thank God that Uzume hadn't been winged yet, or that Yume hadn't been the one to find him. Otherwise, the hospital and everyone in it would be either a pile of rubble, or naught but ashes drifting in the wind. Takami wasn't positive she knew everything about what had happened, but from the few coherent words Uzume had managed to scream in her rage, she gathered that a group of humans had tried to murder her son and Uzume had tried to save him. She could guess that Uzume had arrived at the hospital and hadn't found anyone in the lobby to help her. Then she had watched Minato seemingly die in her arms, causing her to completely lose her composure. Uzume had then proceeded to destroy everything in sight and in her pain concluded that any and all humans were evil and trying to hurt her Ashikabi. After having her first Ashikabi die based off of the indirect actions of another human, Takami couldn't find it in herself to feel angry with the distraught and sobbing young woman.

Turning on her heel, Takami Sahashi left the room and walked towards the O.R. with purposeful strides. She wasn't going to let anyone do surgery on HER son without her there to watch over their every move! If they messed up and he truly did die, Takami would happily turn his Sekirei, Uzume included, loose on MBI and let them do as they wished. Heaven knew, she would be right there beside them with a gun and some plastique explosives.

Behind her, three Sekirei clung together in the midst of the wreckage to comfort another they considered a sister, and pray for the young man they all cared for.

A/N: BAM! Hope everyone liked this chapter, I poured my heart and soul into it! The end may be a little flaky since it was typed at like 1 A.M. on a school night, but I think it was worth it. Didn't want to get too heavy with Uzume's feelings, but I wanted to portray the all-consuming rage that I think would come over a Sekirei if their Ashikabi died, never mind if he died in their arms. Of course, Uzume isn't winged yet, but it doesn't matter too much. Like Takami Sahashi thought, if Uzume had been winged, things would have been much worse for MBI. Now, in this story, if an Ashikabi dies, their Sekirei are operational for a time before becoming inert. Think of it like a chicken with its head cut off. It can keep running around for a little bit afterwards. Naturally, all inert Sekirei can be "reactivated" at some point by the ship, but that's for much later on!
Minato Sahashi floated in utter darkness. He looked around, but saw nothing. Calling out, he waited-hoped for a response, but there was nothing but utter silence. Not the silence of night, which still has the sound of the wind blowing past the ear or through nearby plants. No, it was utter silence, a complete lack of any and all sound. The silence of vacuum. The silence of utter nothingness.

Frowning, he looked down at himself and was shocked to see that he was wearing the same all-black clothes that he had worn back during his time as "the Justicar". The familiar weight of Justice and Truth, his twin kodachi, in their harness on his back reassured him slightly. If he was trapped in an unknown place, at least he would be able to protect himself. Suddenly, a blaze of light assaulted his eyes. He cried out, covering his eyes with one hand while his other drew Justice and held it ready, ears straining for any sound that would indicate the direction of a threat. His eyes began to slowly adjust to the light, and he listened still harder. All he could hear was something like flames and a strange rumbling sound, rather like the sound of the ocean. His eyes no longer screaming in pain, he slowly dropped his hand to his side and gazed upon the strange scene before him.

It looked rather like the solar system models he had seen at various times in his life. A large sun was surrounded by orbiting planets. The planets, however, were not recognizable from any of his Astrology classes. Each planet was in a seemingly strange orbit, and each was unique. The closest planet to the sun was nearly on top of it. It shone with light, red-tinged white energy that pulsed slowly, small tendrils coming off odd intervals. Not much further out, and seeming to draw closer to the sun, were a pair of planets that orbited each other as they did the sun. He could see that the surfaces of both planets were covered with thunderstorms with small arcs of lightning racing across, and even between, them at times. Somewhat further out, but quickly drawing closer, were another pair of planets, separate from each other but the same distance from the sun. One was pure green, covered with all manners of plant life. Massive and ancient plant life that was everywhere on the planet's surface. The other a pattern of red and blue lights, crisscrossing each other. In fact, it vaguely reminded Minato of that old American movie, Tron. Slightly further out was white, the color of linen, and as he studied it he realized that it was cloth, but it was white silk, like veils. There were other planets, further away from his position, but he could barely discern any details from them. Only from one could he catch even the slightest detail, and that was that the planet looked rather like an enormous ocean, but he wasn't sure.

A sputtering sound drew his attention back to the sun, and he frowned at it. The sun was sputtering and hissing like a fire in the rain, its light dimming and brightening sporadically as darkness seemed to begin to enclose it, and he felt himself growing oddly tired. Something began to whisper in his mind, speaking to him, telling him things. They told him to hold on, to keep fighting. He wasn't sure what the voice meant, but for some reason he felt as though he couldn't allow that sun to go out. It had to stay lit, no matter what! Focusing his attention on the sun, he poured all of his willpower into making it shine brighter than ever. The planets orbiting it seemed to falter and wobble, almost stopping as the light continued to dim, and he snarled. The planets needed the sun! They would die without it, and THEY MUST NOT DIE! The sun must keep burning, keep shining for the sake of its planets, this he knew without a doubt. His will redoubled, his concentration more intense than he could believe possible, and the failing sun roared back to life, growing brighter than it had been, it's gravitational pull growing stronger. Minato smiled grimly to himself. The sun would live, and through the sun, the planets would thrive!
Five young women sat around the hospital bed, the incessant beeping of the machines reassuring them that their young friend/Ashikabi/love-interest was still alive, albeit in very bad condition. The door opened quietly, and all five looked over to see Takami Sahashi slip into the room and shut the door just as silently behind her.

"I should have known that you would all be here," she commented quietly with a slight smile. "I take it that you decided to let yourselves back inside after nightfall?"

"Yes, of course. We couldn't just leave him. He would be furious if he found out he was at an MBI hospital," Yume replied just as quietly, looking her in the eye. Takami's eyes widened in indignation at the response.

"Why is that? This hospital saved his life!" she pointed out, trying to keep her voice down. Much to her surprise, Yume nodded in agreement.

"That is most likely true, and we, here she indicated to her fellow Sekirei, "are eternally grateful. However, the fact of the matter is, Minato-sama hates MBI with a burning passion, and sometimes seriously considers having us destroy it entirely, with he himself taking the head of Hirato Minaka."

Takami dropped into a chair that was, fortunately for her, nearby. Her shock was clearly written across her face. She couldn't imagine her sweet little Minato even feeling the motion of hate, much less wishing to personally kill someone! And his own father, at that! Of course, Minato didn't know that Minaka was his father, but still! Sure, Takami felt like she was half ready to kill Minaka sometimes out of sheer exasperation, but she never seriously considered it. From the way Yume said what she had, her son was serious.

"Why?" Takami breathed after a moment, looking at them with sorrowful confusion. "Why would he do that? The Minato I remember isn't like that!"

"No offense, Takami-sensei, but from what little we've gotten out of Minato-sama, you haven't really been around all that much," Yume stated a trifle coldly, and Takami flinched as if struck.

"I've been working here on the S-plan," she mumbled, sounding slightly petulant. Miya sighed and decided to step in when she saw Minato-kun's Sekirei (Uzume included) swell slightly in anger.

"Takami, your son wants to dance on the ashes of MBI and Minaka because of the S-plan," Miya said as gently as she could. The now distraught mother whipped her head around to meet Miya's eyes. Miya nodded slowly at the question there and continued. "He hates-no, abhors- MBI and anyone affiliated with it because of what you have done to myself and my siblings. Claiming us while we sleep, making adjustments to my younger brothers and sisters, making us fight and kill each other. "Miya's voice began to get a definite bitter note to it as she continued. "You thought that finding a crashed ship of intelligent, free thinking sentient creatures gave you the right to own them as property. To alter them genetically until they are but a shadow of their former selves. To force them to give themselves, body and soul, to the first human they kiss. Unable to resist their demands. Unable to truly be free. That is why Minato-kun wants to destroy you all. That is why finding forgiveness from him when he finds out you were a Head Adjuster and one of the two humans who started it might be nigh impossible."

With that, the clearly angry and agitated violet haired Sekirei #00, Miya, stalked to the window and vanished through it, intending to go for a run and clear her head, then return when Takami had left. She could understand Minato's anger with MBI. In fact, she had more cause to hate them than did, as one of their almost-victims, and a second-degree victim as she was forced to watch her siblings give themselves to scum and prepare to kill one another. She didn't really have anything against Takami personally. In fact, she knew that the women had lost her left eye trying to protect little Kusano, #108, from Mikogami. But the fact of the matter was, she was MBI first and foremost to Miya, not Minato's mother.

Miya landed gently on a roof with a clear line of sight to the hospital and settled down to think. Minato had been shot, and from Uzume had told her it wasn't from some simple mugging gone wrong. Four men with covered faces, easily-concealable handguns, wearing gloves and all-black clothing arriving in a black van with tinted windows and no license plates precisely as Minato entered a secluded alleyway was no coincidence. That screamed assassination, and the only people she could think of who would try to assassinate Minato were...other Ashikabi. Her
immediate assumption was Higa, but Miya had been around for a very long time and she knew better than to make drastic assumptions and claims without proof. Pulling out a cell phone she rarely used, she called Matsu.

"Hai, big sister Miya?" the red-headed Sekirei of Wisdom's voice came over the phone. Miya smiled a little to herself. Many of the Sekirei no longer knew that she was their older sister, the one adult from their transport, but those that did insisted on calling her "big sister" in private.

"Matsu, I need you to do some real digging, anywhere you need to and however much you need to. I want to know more about Minato Sahashi. I want to know who would had the motive to try and have him assassinated, I want to know where those people are, and I want to know everything about them," she replied with a tone of command. Matsu, back in Maison Izumo's hidden room, almost clicked her heels and saluted the phone in response. Almost. What she actually did was file away the orders and then latch onto the, in her mind, far more important detail.

"MINATO-SAMA IS IN THE HOSPITAL?" Matsu shrieked, hands flying across her keyboards as she hacked MBI looking for anything on her Ashikabi-to-be. "Why did I not hear anything about this?"

"Because Uzume was trying to destroy the Ashikabi hospital because no one was in the lobby and Minato-kun went into shock. Uzume thought he was dead, and…well…" Miya's voice trailed off as she searched for the word or phrase that she wanted.

"Went on a rampage?" Matsu asked bluntly, and Miya sighed gustily. Her younger sister was right, that was exactly what Uzume had done, and she murmured her agreement. "Well then, big sister, let's be glad that it wasn't Yume-chan, because with her power over positronic energy, any true loss of control on her part would have reduced the hospital and likely the city to a pile of drifting ashes."

"I know, I know. I just hope that Minato-kun will be okay." Miya sighed, tilted her head back, and looked at the stars, trying to see the light of their home, but she couldn't. How she longed to leave this dying planet and return home to Sekirei. To the open fields, soaring mountains, and endless seas. To a place not choked by pollution, rife with crime, hatred, and pointless violence. Worst of all, in her opinion, was the thing humans called divorce. She shuddered to herself. How anyone could-or would- voluntarily leave their life-partner was beyond comprehension. Back home, a Sekirei found their destined love, or Ashikabi, in the Old Tongue, and never left them. They remained together until the day they returned to dust. That was the mandate of the Maker.

"Minato-kun is strong. Some of the stuff that I am finding out is pretty brutal though, Miya. Remember how I told you that Minato-kun was well known by the cops as someone who made citizen arrests?" Matsu replied absent-mindedly, and Miya blinked at the apparent non sequitur.

"I do, it's one of the reasons that he was allowed to stay at the Inn," she replied, curious as to what Matsu was getting at. She was not surprised that Matsu had found information out so fast, but she wasn't sure how good it would be.

"Well, there's more to it than that. I hacked some old, old police files, referencing a skilled and well-trained vigilante known only as "The Justicar" or just "Justicar". He destroyed Yakuza gangs all over the Tokyo underground, put dozens into the hospitals, and every time there was a mark carved nearby, sometimes into particularly bad criminals' biceps. A set of scales with a feather on one side, and a heart on the other. I looked up the reference, and its…"

"The Judgment Scales of Anubis, the Feather of Truth, and the heart of whoever is being judged," Miya finished for her with a sigh. Miya could see what Matsu was getting at, and that concerned her. It sounded as if Minato had started to become the very people he tried to protect others from. "You think it's Minato-kun?"

"I do, based off of multiple other sources," Matsu confirmed, and Miya could hear computer keys clicking slightly as Matsu continued. "It seems that after he got rejected from Tokyo U, he was at a loss as to what to do. He possibly got depressed, and then turned to fighting crime in order to boost his self-confidence by "proving" to himself that he is strong and has skills. He continued these activities while remaining relatively unharmed until an incident in an alley, where he got ambushed by several Yakuza and took several bullets."

"From what Uzume told me about this most recent incident, almost the same exact circumstances occurred here. Do the Yakuza know he made it?" Miya asked, concerned that the Yakuza could be dropping by the Inn at any moment.

"Oh, they know he made it, but they have no idea that Minato Sahashi is "Justicar". Apparently, he is "The Damn Vigilante That Won't Die". Got that one from an old Yakuza blogging site. They tried to take him out several times, and failed each time. My guess is that he got complacent, and they got him, but couldn't finish the job for some reason," Matsu replied, using the tone of voice that meant she was absolutely positive of her facts. "I…Oh, my…by the Maker!"
"What is it Matsu?" Miya snapped, her gaze no longer on the stars but directly in front of her as her body tensed. If Matsu was in danger, she needed to move quickly.

"My piggybacked satellites just filtered through the day's take from our immediate area, and I have something you need to hear. Stand by," Matsu replied. She sound very angry, her tone as clipped as it had been when the First 5, the original Discipline Squad, had defended their unborn siblings by slaughtering the humans that had tried to attack their spaceship's island crash site. Moments later, Miya heard a familiar voice coming loud and clear through her phone speaker, and she gasped before her eyes narrowed dangerously as she listened.

"Yes?"

"It's Higa. There's something I need you to do for me."

"It will cost you, but what do you need done?"

"Cost is no concern. I want you to find someone and make him disappear."

"Give me a name and it's done. My people will handle the rest."

"Minato Sahashi. Find him, make him gone, and make it look casual. I don't want anything leading back to me."

"Done. It will be handled within the hour."

"This is all of it, Matsu?" Miya asked, eyes and tone cold. Higa had dared to try and have one of her friends, one of her boarders, murdered inside her territory so he could forcefully take their Sekirei.

"Yes, big sister. I'm working on getting the identity of the other man now, but I have a lot of data to sort through," Matsu replied, her own tone promising pain for a certain bastard of an Ashikabi. It brightened quickly when she spoke next, excitedly, "Miya! Minato-sama just woke up! It looks like he's trying to leave, and boy does he look mad! Best get in there!"

Miya sighed and shook her head. Why was she not surprised that the young human was trying to get up and leave after being shot twice? No doubt it was either his insane self-torture of a work ethic, or he had found out he was in an MBI hospital. She was guessing the latter, and she knew how to get him to stay in bed with only minor complaints if that was indeed the case. Getting to her feet, she bid Matsu goodbye, flipped the phone shut, and flitted from rooftop to rooftop as she approached Minato Sahashi's hospital room window.

"NO! YOU ARE NOT LEAVING THIS HOSPITAL ROOM!" Takami Sahashi shouted at the top of her lungs. She couldn't believe her idiot son was trying to get out of bed despite being held down by the Twins while Yume begged him to stay in place. Uzume just looked on, eyes filled with tears of mixed happiness and fear. Happiness since Minato was alive and awake, but fear because he was going to hurt himself again and she didn't know if she could take that at the moment.

"Damnit, Mom, I have to get back to the Inn! I have work to do! Besides, this is an MBI hospital!" Minato shouted back, trying in vain to get himself free. "Girls, can you explain it to her? And let me go!"

"Gomen, Minato-sama, but we can't. Takami-dono said that you will hurt yourself again, maybe even die, if you don't rest," Yume said firmly, while the Twins didn't even seem to consider letting him loose. "We love you Minato-sama, and we can't just let you do that. We girls will take care of anything back home."

"I…swore…an…oath." Minato wheezed out as he began to cough loudly, his struggles becoming much weaker. He slumped back against the pillows, and Uzume moved forward to his side. Hikari, who had been restraining his right side, stepped away as Uzume moved forward, summoning a tendril of her power to make a silken handkerchief, which she used to wipe some of the sweat off of his forehead. "U-Uzume?"

"Please, Minato-sama, stay safe and heal. I-I can't bear the thought of you dying!" Uzume mumbled quietly, teary eyes begging him to listen to her words. "Just please, don't leave me!"

Now sobbing once more, the Veil Sekirei buried her head into the blankets near his hip. A confused but ever-compassionate Minato reached out slowly with his uninjured right arm and stroked her hair in what he hoped was a soothing gesture.

"I'm not going anywhere, Uzume. Everything will be okay," he said reassuringly. A clatter at the
"Landlady-dono?" Minato asked, confused at the sight of Miya Asama climbing in through his hospital room window. For some reason (maybe it was the drugs, or the pain) the sight of his violet-haired landlady climbing through his window did not shock him whatsoever, though he had no idea why she was here.

"Minato-kun," Miya nodded in reply with a slight smile. "I hope you are going to listen to these young ladies and stay in bed to heal?" An oni mask appeared in a purple haze behind her head as she kept smiling, and everyone in the room recoiled in fear at the fearsome presence.

"Hai, Hai! I'll be good, I promise, Landlady-dono!" Minato yelped hurriedly, and the oni mask faded away, making everyone in the room sigh in relief. Looking around at the people he considered his family, he asked a question that most would expect from these circumstances.

"Why are you all here? What happened?"

"Baka!" Yume snorted, rapping him on the top of his head with her knuckles, making him yelp again and rub the spot with his good arm.

"You shouldn't abuse a helpless patient, Yume!" he scolded lightly. Yume rolled her eyes at him with a slight smile in response.

"Baka," she repeated, before answering his previous questions. "We are all here because you almost died after someone tried to kill you. Your attackers were going to finish you off, but Uzume was apparently watching over you and killed them before bringing you to the hospital. Your mom and her medical team kept you alive and performed emergency surgery."

"Uzume?" Minato blinked, looking down at the no-longer crying but apparently unconscious Uzume. "How did she stop them? They were all armed, and the person who saved me was dressed in white veils."

"The veils are Uzume's power," Takami explained bluntly, and Minato gaped at her before staring down at the sleeping young woman.

"Uzume is a Sek-," he started, then coughed slightly. He had almost mentioned the Sekirei project! That could have been very bad.

"A Sekirei? Yes, I know. Uzume, Sekirei #10, the Veil Sekirei," his mother's words had him staring at her wide eyed and open mouthed, almost totally speechless. His mother knew about the Sekirei plan? How? Seeing the question in his eyes, Takami sighed lightly and decided to confess. "I have worked for MBI all these years, Minato. Now that you're involved in the plan, I'm considering leaving. I stayed with that bastard Minaka because he swore you wouldn't get involved in the plan. He broke his promise, so I'm not feeling particularly inspired to sticking around."

"Well," Minato said finally after staring at her for a little while. "I guess that's some good news. I suppose you know the rest of my girls then?"

"Of course I do. Yume, Sekirei of Fate, #08. Hikari and Hibiki, the Thunder and Lightning Twins, #s 11 and 12," Takami replied with a shrug. She checked her watch and shook her head slightly. "I have to go soon, but do you know anyone who might have wanted you dead? This attack wasn't random, according to the MBI unit I sent to the scene of the crime. Everyone who attacked you has been positively I.D.'d as well-known Yakuza hit men."

Minato blanched noticeably, his face getting nearly as white as his sheet. Uzume stirred, apparently awoken by the violent motion of his flinching. She sat up, rubbing her eyes slightly and looked around with a confused expression marring her features. She had no idea what was going on, but everyone was looking at Minato-sama, so she figured she might as well do the same.

"I…may know why they were after me, but it's a very long story, and I don't think anyone here will be particularly pleased with me," He muttered in response, looking at his hands. His mother and Sekirei looked at each other in confusion. Miya, however, eyed him appraisingly. Would he confess, or lie?

Minato impressed her once again as he told them everything Matsu had told her about his time as "The Justicar", and even gave a few details she wasn't sure that Matsu had uncovered yet. When his story was done, Miya watched in quiet amusement as he cowered before the wrath of four irate Sekirei and one volcanic mother. The women let him have it for several minutes before each and every one of them began crying, making Minato feel even worse about what had happened.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell all of you before now, but that is a past I would rather forget. Everything I told you girls about my grandfather training me is true, but the majority of my scars are from my time as "The Justicar". I nearly died that night the Yakuza finally caught up with me, and I left the hospital with an oath to myself not to forget myself like that again," Minato said quietly, looking at
his hands. "I had started to become my enemies, and that scared me more than anything else I could imagine."

"So they know that you're this vigilante and you survived?" Yume said, fire in her eyes as her hands began to shimmer with power, her anger made it flare unconsciously. "If they try to touch you again, they won't be getting a burial! They'll be ash on the wind!"

"No! You mustn't interfere! This is my fight!" Minato's head snapped up as a horrified look crossed his face. "I created this problem, and I will solve it!"

"Minato-kun, you didn't cause this problem, I did," Miya had finally decided to contribute, stepping in before the noble fool could charge off after the Yakuza and reveal himself. "The Yakuza don't know who you are. Someone else ordered the hit."

"Miya, are you telling me that someone paid the Yakuza to murder my son?" Takami gasped.

Sure, it was a big shock that her son was an ex-vigilante, but a part of her was unsurprised. He had always taken his Code very seriously. Someone wanting to assassinate him for totally unrelated reasons was not, however, expected.

"Yes. Another Ashikabi, one named Higa. Your Sekirei and I had an altercation with him this morning, Minato-kun, and refused to join him. My guess is that this was his revenge." Miya replied, pulling out her phone and playing the sound file Matsu had sent her. When it was over, she slid the phone back into a pocket and observed the reactions of the other people in the room. The Twins' arms and hair were covered with lightning that arced and writhed between them in an impressive display of electricity. Yume's hands were completely hidden by the red-edged cobalt blue of her positronic light. Takami looked like she was going to find some of that plastique she had been thinking about earlier, find Higa, and shove it where the sun didn't shine before personally pushing a little red button. NO ONE tried to have her son assassinated!

"WHERE IS HE!" Uzume roared, her veils appearing in a flash of light and writhing angrily as she got to her feet. "I'll kill him! I'll hang him by his balls over a slow-roast fire!"

Though as angry as her, everyone else in the room blinked at her rather…terrifyingly graphic promises of pain as she continued to rant and rage for another minute. Minato frowned to himself. Uzume wasn't one of his Sekirei, although he was proud to call her a friend. Why was she so angry?

"What's wrong, Uzume? I'm still alive, and Higa won't be able to touch me here. It's a hospital, run and guarded by MBI. We just have to be more careful next time," Minato said reassuringly, feeling at a loss. He wasn't used to people acting like this, all deeply concerned about him and such, other than Yukari. She was the only one who had ever noticed all those times he disappeared at night for hours at a time and come back bruised and sometimes bloody.

"That's not the point!" Uzume choked, her rage vanishing as her eyes teared up again and her lip trembled slightly. "I've already lost one Ashikabi to Higa, I won't lose another!"

"What do you mean, Uzume?" Minato asked quietly, laying a comforting hand on her shoulder, ignoring the twinge of pain at the movement. His body hurt, yes, but that was unimportant in the face of Uzume's own pain of a different sort.

"Higa found out that a young girl named Chiho was supposed to be my Ashikabi, but she was very, very sick. Dying, to be honest," Uzume replied, sitting next to him on the bed and holding the hand on her shoulder tightly in one of her own. "I was going to have her wing me, which would give her a vitality boost, than use my MBI platinum card to transfer her here and get her cured. Before I could, Higa, who owned the hospital she was in, arranged for her to be denied further care. She died that night, before I could have her wing me. Now he's trying to get rid of you, and I won't lose another Ashikabi! Never again!"

Minato blinked at her explanation, before his expression grew thunderous, eyes glinting dangerously as he held Uzume's hand tightly.

"I won't be going anywhere Uzume. When you are ready to be winged, you can come to me. If Higa comes after you, call me or my girls and we will be there. Meanwhile, I'll think about a way to show Higa how angry I am at what he did to you."

"I can make MBI's displeasure clear to him as well. Targeting Ashikabi isn't forbidden, but it is strongly discouraged. I can make sure he knows that," Takami offered. Minato cocked his head as he released Uzume's hand and leaned back against his pillows.

"I would appreciate that. I would prefer to keep my girls out of this damn fight. I won't be losing them nor will I force apart other Ashikabi and their Sekirei," Minato said firmly, although wearily, as he slumped further back on his pillows. He had used too much energy arguing with his Sekirei and his mother, and fell asleep before anyone could reply.
"Well, I seem to have misjudged Minato," Yume said finally, looking first at him, then at Takami. "I thought he would be more difficult than that."

"Being reminded of his grey past had a deep effect, I think," Miya commented, brushing some hair out of the young man's eyes lightly, eyes soft as she looked down at him. "He is a good man, and his heart and kindness seem unlimited. He will not forgive MBI's overall crimes, but I think he can forgive a few individuals for having been dragged along."

"I hope so," Takami murmured as she left the room, leaving the five Sekirei to watch the sleeping young man. MBI hospital or not, until Minato was healed there would be a constant watch over his room. Higa could send a Sekirei to finished the job. They would make sure that nothing ever got close enough to hurt him again.

Miya returned to the Inn, her mind confused for the first time in a long time. She felt herself wanting to become closer to young Minato-kun, but why? Was she becoming interested in him? "Takehito, what should I do now?" she thought to herself as she drifted off to sleep.

Matsu sat surrounded by computer screens, eyes roaming them as her satellite piggy-back programs kept up an unceasing watch over the MBI Ashikabi hospital. If anything hostile got too close, she would get to see if she could hit a small moving target with the MBI attack satellites. No one would harm her Ashikabi, not while she was watching! She had failed once, but never again!

Minato Sahashi slept without dreams. While he slept, his body healed and his mind absorbed all it had been told that night. He was on the mend, and God help his enemies when he was back on his feet.

Another chapter done! Not sure how well I did on this one, might need to edit it after you review, but I think it is up to you to tell me that! The review button is hard to miss, just scroll down!
“What I don’t understand is why you just can’t get him back on his feet with your powers, Yume,” Hikari commented as Minato’s three Sekirei and Uzume stood at the drink machine down the hall from Minato’s room. “Then we could just go kick Higa’s ass now instead of whenever Minato-sama says so.”

“Because, while my power can heal almost any injury, over time his body will build up a resistance to it, and it will become drastically less effective. He is already stable, and healing, and perfectly safe in an MBI hospital with several trigger-happy Sekirei sitting in his room or on the roof at any given time. I would prefer to save my power for a time when the hospital or any other form of medical aid is either unavailable or insufficient to save his life,” Yume replied while taking a sip of her drink. The other Sekirei nodded in understanding.

“Not to mention that you’re using this as a way to make him rest, and perhaps wheedle a concession on the MBI Platinum cards, right?” Uzume added slyly, and Yume blushed slightly before shrugging guiltily.

“I won’t deny that if such a random and happy occurrence presented itself that I wouldn’t take advantage of it, although I doubt I would find myself overly successful,” she replied noncommittally. Her companions giggled at her “innocent” tone of voice, making her grin a little.

“So, you think that Minato-sama was so forgiving of his mother because of his past?” Hibiki asked quietly, and the mood quickly grew serious.

“I do. It makes sense, because he wasn’t always a paragon of virtue either, whatever his intentions,” Yume replied solemnly. “That reminder was enough to make him consider what reasons his mother might have had for doing what she did. Hopefully, the pair of them can sit down, have a good long heart-to-heart, and the issue will be over with.”

“Why was Minato-sama so afraid of ‘becoming what he had fought’?” Uzume asked, looking at Minato’s trio of winged Sekirei. She had been curious about that ever since she had heard the intense self-loathing in his voice as he recounted his story.

“War, especially guerilla warfare, can do terrible things to a person’s soul, and what Minato was doing was basically a guerilla war against the criminals of Tokyo,” Takami replied, shaking her head sadly. “He is a much colder person than I remember, and I ask myself how I missed it. How
The quartet of Sekirei shifted uncomfortably, shooting covert looks at one another as they entered Minato's hospital room. None of them were sure quite what to say to that. In truth, they all wanted an answer to that question as well, so none of them felt comfortable soothing her with empty platitudes. However, neither did they want to chastise her when she was obviously mentally berating herself already.

"Good evening, Minato-sama," Yume said cheerfully as she walked through the door, but instead of seeing her rapidly recovering Ashikabi, all she saw was a note on the bedside table with his open cell phone on top of it. She froze, and the other three Sekirei spread out into the room as well, squeezing past her to see what the hold-up was.

Takami seemed to regain herself and strode over to the bedside table. Snatching up the phone and the note, she read the note, looked at the screen of the phone, and went into a string of the most vile and imaginative curses that the quartet of Sekirei had ever heard. The distinct lack of Minato had already given them a bad feeling in the pits of their stomachs, and that bad feeling got worse as Takami continued, now muttering things like "Damn hero complex". "Stupid fool, too noble for his own damn good" and, of course, the clichéd "When I get my hands on him…"

"Takami-sensei, what exactly has Minato-sama done this time?" Yume asked, dreading the answer. Her only reply was to have the piece of paper and the phone shoved in her face. Blinking, she took them and read aloud to the other three Sekirei present.

"I'm sorry to disappear like this, but it needs to be done. She needs my help. I've seen her in my dreams, crying and calling for me. I have to go to her. It's the right thing to do, and I know you wouldn't let me go if I had stuck around to ask. Please, don't be too angry.

Minato

P.S. Look at the phone.

Looking at the phone, Yume read the message on its screen aloud as well.

"There's a Sekirei inside the Arboretum. First one there, wins. You could make the Green Girl emerge." Yume looked at Takami, who was glowering darkly out the window. "What does this mean, Takami-sensei?"

"It means that bastard Minaka has put every Ashikabi on the trail of number 108, Kusano, who is nothing more than a little girl!" the white haired woman snarled in reply, fists clenched tightly to her sides. "In human terms, she would be barely eight or nine years old!"

"He's been seeing her in his dreams. That would indicate that he is far more powerful an Ashikabi than I had thought, to be seeing Sekirei he is destined to wing in his dreams. His soul is subconsciously telling him who are destined to be with him. This is incredible!" Yume breathed, shaking her head both in awe and a not insignificant amount of exasperation. "Regardless, he went to save her alone, and now we have to go save him. The loveable fool is probably wearing Maker-knows what and bleeding all over the place. Hikari, Hibiki, let's go."

"Hey, what about me?" Uzume asked sharply as the trio headed for the window. They paused and looked back at her, eyebrows raised, and she frowned at them. "Just because I am not ready to be winged by Minato-sama yet doesn't mean that I don't consider myself his! I will not sit around here and let you all rush off into danger without me!"

Exchanging looks with each other, the trio smiled softly at her, and Yume indicated to the window with her head. Smiling, Uzume called her power and, waving goodbye to Takami, left with the others. Takami stood at the window and watched them race away, far faster than any human she had ever met could move, and hoped that they would get there in time. Still, just to be safe…

Pulling out her cell phone, she called the first person in her rolodex, and put the phone to her ear. After three rings, the person on the other end picked up.

"Homura here, Takami. What can I do for you?"

"The crazy bastard sent out a message. Every Ashikabi is trying to hunt down Kusano, but Minato is trying to rescue her before the others get there."

"What the hell? Shouldn't Minato-sama still be healing from getting shot twice?" Homura shouted loudly enough to make Takami pull the phone away from her ear with a wince. Despite having a fiery temper to go along with her power, the grey haired young women that was Sekirei #6 did not often yell, but when she did, she really yelled! Still, it appeared some good natured ribbing was in order.

"Oh ho? Minato-sama, is it? Well, if I didn't know better, I would say that you were reacting to my son, Homura!" she teased, but instead of the spluttered denials and threats she expected to
"Because I am, Takami-sensei. Not just me, either. Matsu is for sure, you already know Uzume is, and I swear to the Maker that Miya is acting different since he arrived. Last time I ran into Tsukiumi, she ranted about "some black haired monkey that was sullyng her dreams of late" or some such. Based on the rest of what she said, I have to assume that it is Minato-sama of whom she speaks," Homura replied, her soft alto sounding drawn and weary. "Anyways, I'll head over to the Arboretum and see what I can do. Maker knows, Kusano will be better in Minato-sama's hands than with Higa or Mikogami."

"Thank you, Homura, I owe you," Takami breathed a sigh of relief as she hung up and sat down on her son's hospital bed. Leaning back against the wall, she lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply, eyes staring listlessly in front of her, her mind elsewhere. "So, Yume, Hikari, and Hibiki are already winged. Kusano will be winged soon, God willing. Homura, Uzume, Matsu, and Tsukiumi are all reacting to him for sure, and even Miya is acting strange when he is around? Hmm, looks like momma's little boy is well on his way to becoming a powerful individual in Tokyo. Here's to hoping his girls reach him before anyone unpleasant does."

"Oh this was such a bad idea. A really, really bad idea. Like, the worst idea in the long and terrible history of bad ideas."

Minato groaned to himself as he peeked around the corner of the building he was hiding behind to glance over the MBI roadblock that stood at the entrance to the Arboretum. He had managed to sneak out of his room and pilfer a pair of jeans, a t-shirt, and some socks and shoes from one of the staff lockers in the hospital during one of his Sekireis' drink and food runs, and hidden them under his bed before they returned. The next time they had left, he had quickly dressed and left the room through the window, dropped a foot or so onto a section of overhang for one of the outdoor walking paths, and from there found a suitable tree to descend. After that, he had simply had to act casually and walk away from the building. Now that he was here, however, he had no idea how he was supposed to get past two armored vehicles and a dozen armed soldiers from MBI's private army. "Yeah, I could have asked my powerful, beautiful, and perfectly willing to help Sekirei to do this damn rescue mission while I stayed in the hospital and healed. But nooo, I had to prove that I can be a hero again. What's next, trying to fight some nutcase pinnette Sekirei with a penchant for punching and an inferiority complex while on a bridge?"

In the center of the city, high up in MBI Tower, Sekirei number 105, Benitsubasa, sneezed violently as she slid into the hot tub. Rubbing her nose, she looked around suspiciously, but saw only her fellow Discipline Squad members, #104 Haihane and #04, Karasuba.

"Ne, are you catching a cold, Benitsubasa?" Karasuba asked absently, looking up from where she was carefully and meticulously polishing her nodachi, checking its gleaming length with a critical eye for any dings, scrapes, or other blemishes.

"No, I think that someone is talking about me somewhere, and not saying anything nice either!" Benitsubasa replied with a frown. Karasuba just nodded absently and went back to her sword.

"Pfft, as if anyone would even bother to talk about you, Washboard! Why should they when they can talk about me or Karasuba?" Haihane laughed, stretching her arms over her head languidly, intentionally making her full and perky breasts bounce and sway where Benitsubasa could see them.

"Tch, you're just jealous that Natsuo-sama didn't wing you two as well, Granny!" she shot back, her temper flaring predictably at the insult to her lack of breasts.

"Hey! Watch it!" Haihane growled, flicking her silvery-white hair out of her eyes as she pointed a finger menacingly at the pinnette. "Besides, why would I want to be winged by a pouf that can't do anything for me? I would rather wait for a real man to show up so I can react to him, get winged, and get laid as much as I want!"

"I will wait until I meet this man who has winged Yu-chan, I think. If he is to my liking, I shall have him wing me. If not…well, if not I will see where to go from there," Karasuba said softly to herself, looking out the big bay windows over the sprawling lights of the capital, as though searching for one of the few people whom she actually trusted, respected, and cared for on this dying planet.
Minato gathered himself with a deep breath and started to edge around the corner of the building, staying in the shadows and moving slowly to make sure anyone who saw him would think it a trick of their eyes. Before he got very far, however, he found himself cocooned from foot to mouth in white silk, everything save his nose and eyes tightly wrapped and covered as he was pulled off his feet and back around the corner. The veils moved of their own accord, turning him so that his eyes could see the quartet of incensed Sekirei that had just arrived.

"Why hello there, Minato-sama! Whatever could you be doing here, at night, all alone, without your SEKIREI!" Yume seethed angrily, and he attempted to paste an innocent look on what there was of his uncovered face, but Yume only gave him a dark look in response. "Oh, no, don't give me that! Want to explain why you are trying to get yourself killed!"

"Mghf, mmmghfff!" Minato tried to reply, but his mouth was still covered. Casting a pleading look at Uzume, he flicked his eyes down to his mouth and back up to her eyes. She seemed to get the message, because the cloth covering his mouth unraveled to drape down his still-bound torso.

"We agree Minato-sama, but you honestly didn't expect to rescue her all by yourself, did you?" Uzume asked softly with a scolding look, although her eyes were soft as she looked at him with hidden approval. Clearly, she approved of his intent but not his attempted methods. "The four of us came to help you rescue Kusano."

"Kusano? Who is that?" Minato asked, curious, and his Sekirei rolled their eyes. Honestly, sometimes he missed the most obvious things!

"Sekirei #108, Kusano, the Sekirei of Life," a soft feminine voice replied from above them. Minato's Sekirei blurred into motion. Yume threw up a shield of light while Uzume pulled Minato up against her body, and the Twins took up defensive stances on either side of Yume while electricity began arcing up and down their arms. "Calm down. I'm not going to hurt your beloved Ashikabi. I'm actually here to help."

The person speaking jumped down from the roof and landed lightly before them, hands spread wide to show that she was carrying no weapons. Stepping into the light, she revealed herself to be a young woman around the same height as Minato himself with steel grey hair and black eyes. The majority of the lower part of her face was covered by a mask, and she wore a long black coat with billowing sleeves and black bell-bottom pants.

"Homura! Why are you here?" Uzume blinked and straightened up, causing Yume to look back at her.

"Do you know, her, Uzume?" Yume asked carefully, and the Veil Sekirei nodded. "Is she trustworthy?" Again Uzume nodded, and Yume eyed Homura tersely before allowing her shield to drop, although she remained alert for any signs of treachery.

"Stand down, girls. I don't think she has any malicious intent," Minato said after a tense moment. He stepped forward, having been released from Uzume's veils. "If my assumption is correct, my mother sent you after me, correct Homura?"

"Indeed, Minato-sama," Homura replied with a slight bow, and Minato's Sekirei glanced between themselves with knowing looks at the light blush on the young woman's face. "She asked me, as the Sekirei Guardian, to help you with your intervention into that bastard Minaka's little open season on Kusano."

"Oh, someone who hates Minaka as much as me, how excellent!" Minato commented with a smirk, making Homura blink at him in surprise. Like Miya, Homura knew the truth about Minato's parentage, and was surprised to hear him say as much. Still, it made sense to her, given what Takami thought of Minaka. "Regardless, this is not your fight. Nor, in fact, is it Uzume's. My girls and I can handle this. You two have no need to get involved."

"Baka!" Uzume growled, swatting him over the head. Rubbing it, he looked at her to see her staring at him with watery eyes. "I told you, you're going to be my Ashikabi someday! I may not be ready yet, but your fight is mine, Minato-sama."

"Indeed, Minato-sama, and this is a just cause. Rescuing young Kusano is the right thing to do, and so I will help you," Homura added, while mentally continuing and because you are MY Ashikabi as well, Minato-sama. I am glad to be by your side."

"Hmm, alright then. I trust that you can make your own judgments, and I'll not argue against more help." Minato nodded firmly, his countenance shifting slightly, becoming firmer and more
commanding. "Now, I need to eliminate those MBI troopers and armored vehicles to get inside. Can any of you do anything about that?"

"Hikari and I can destroy them easily, Minato-sama, but are you sure you are okay with that? There won't be any survivors if we attack." Hibiki asked quietly, and Minato gained a pensive look.

"I will give them a chance to stand aside. If they accept, we proceed without harming them. If they interfere," his voice grew cold and hard, giving the gathered Sekirei their first glimpse of the vigilante that lay inside him. "Then they are accessories to what is, in my mind, slavery and pedophilia. They will be executed as such." With that, he spun on his heel and strode towards the street. After a moment's hesitation, the Sekirei followed, bringing their powers online and ready to be used in an instant. Homura had balls of flame hovering over her, the twins were awash in surging electrical energy, and Yume's hands had vanished into the shine of her power. Uzume's veils hovered about them, ready to attack or shield in equal measure.

Ken Namarai cradled his assault rifle in his arms and yawned, bored out of his mind as he stood with a slight slump in front of the wooden barricades blocking entrance to the Arboretum. He thought that this was the stupidest thing ever, standing here guarding an overgrown park all night, but the boss had said that was where he had to be. The boss paid the bills, so here he was.

"Hey, Ken! See that, over there?" his squad-mate, Satoshi, asked aloud, and Ken looked in the direction indicated to see an attractive yet disconcerting sight striding towards him out of the darkness.

Before the two soldiers strode a tall, black haired young man, wearing a black t-shirt and pants, surrounded by beautiful young women. Normally, that would be a source of envy for any single male. What was disconcerting, maybe even frightening, was that one girl was surrounded by hovering balls of flame, two more had what looked like lightning playing over them, another's hands were hidden by the burning red-blue energy around them, and the final seemed to be manipulating cloth of some kind.

"Hold it right there, kid! This is a restricted area!" their squad leader barked, leveling his own carbine at them while the two Armored Personnel Carriers that had brought the soldiers here swiveled their .50 caliber machine guns to point at the incoming group.

"I don't particularly care. It is quite simple. There is a little nine year old girl inside that forest that needs rescuing, so I am giving you one chance to stand down and let me pass before my friends and I get unpleasant. By unpleasant, I mean that they will kill you, if need be," the young man in the lead replied with strength and confidence. It was obvious to Ken-who was a veteran recruited from the Japanese Defense Force a year or two ago- that he knew, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that he and his friends could, and would, kill them all if they had to. That observation made, he very carefully flicked the safety onto his weapon and lowered it.

"Well, you see, I happen to know what you are, kid, and another Ashikabi payed me a lot of money to make sure that nobody makes it to the "Green Girl". That means you aren't going anywhere," the squad leader shot back. The young man sighed heavily, before raising his voice so that everyone could hear him.

"My name is Minato Sahashi, an Ashikabi. I swear upon my Honor and the souls of my ancestors that you will not be harmed if you do not resist. If you wish to live, relinquish your weapons and stand clear."

Taking the young man's words to heart, Ken placed his rifle on the ground and backed away from his squad, gesturing for his fellows to join him. Another three, including Satoshi, did so as well, but the rest stayed. The young man sighed again, sadly.

"Hold it right there, kid! This is a restricted area!" their squad leader barked, leveling his own carbine at them while the two Armored Personnel Carriers that had brought the soldiers here swiveled their .50 caliber machine guns to point at the incoming group.

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"Very well, you give me no choice but to remove you from my path. Ancestors watch over you, but this must be done, for the sake of an innocent. Hikari, Hibiki."

"Hai, Minato-sama?" the twin girls with the lightning said in unison, stepping forwards to stand on either side of him.

"Prosecute," was all the young man said. The twins bowed to him before striding towards the roadblock.

"Open fire!" the squad leader yelled, and the remaining eight soldiers and both APCs opened fire, unleashing a hail of bullets. Ken's heart leapt into his throat, as he expected to see the young man and his companions shredded, but the torrent of death impacted on a wall of light that seemed to emanate from the hands of another girl. The twin girls pointed their right index fingers at the two
APCs, and honest to Kami lightning blazed forth and pierced the vehicles, causing them to vanish
in a fiery explosion that sent the soldiers to the ground dazed. The young man and the rest of his
companions advanced, the young man pausing only to retrieve an assault rifle from the ground,
which he checked over expertly before gazing around at the devastation. Catching sight of the
four soldiers that had heeded his warning, he gave them a solemn nod with sorrow-filled eyes.

"I am sorry it had to happen like this, gentleman. I am glad you heeded my warning, and ask only
that you leave MBI's service before you end up on the wrong side of myself and my companions
again," he said sadly, and Ken nodded sharply before the four men hurried away, eager to get
home to their families and determined to quit MBI first thing in the morning.

Minato watched them, still with the sad smile on his face, before he turned back to his girls and
Homura, and opened his mouth to speak. Before he could say anything though, the sound of a
bolt cycling behind him drew his attention and he spun leveling his acquired weapon in the
direction of the sound and firing off a short burst. The squad leader, whom had been about to
shoot him in the back, shuddered as the rounds punched into his body, and he collapsed to the
ground, dead. Groaning to himself, Minato just looked at the body.

"Why couldn't you just stay out of the way? Why did you have to choose this path?" he
murmured, regret filling his voice, before turning once more to the Sekirei. "I am sorry, girls,
especially you two, Hikari and Hibiki. I did not wish to end their lives."

"We know, Minato-sama. It was what had to happen. They had their chance, and the leader even
admitted to taking money to help another capture Kusano. You did what you had to do to protect
her, just like you did what you had to do to protect innocents as the Justicar," Hikari answered for
both of them. Minato nodded sharply, before sighing again and looking into the woods.

"Well, now all we have to do is find Kusano in there somewhere," he mused, feeling rather taken
aback by the immense size and depth of the forest before him.

"Sorry, but my Ashikabi wants that little girl, and she is going to get him," a familiar voice said
from a rooftop, and Minato growled. He knew that voice, and it was getting
way to familiar for his
taste. Looking up, he saw that, sure enough, there stood Mitsuh and Akitsu, along with some
scythe-wielding chick and another Sekirei that looked just like Mitsuh. "Yomi, go get the kid, me
and Akitsu and Mitsuki will keep the Good Samaritan here busy."

"Hmph, if you fail, don't bother returning to Mikogami-sama, I'll just kill you." Yomi snorted in
reply, leaping over Minato and his Sekirei to race into the forest, rapidly disappearing into the
overgrown foliage.

"Damn it! Homura, Uzume, Hikari and Hibiki! You four handle these three! Yume and I will go
after Yomi!" Minato commanded, a harsh look on his face. "Try to avoid killing them, it is
obvious this Mikogami is as bad as Higa, but no one should die for having a bastard as an
Ashikabi."

"Hai, Minato-sama!" came four separate replies, and he nodded before he and Yume bolted for
the forest.

"Hold it!" Mitsuha shouted, making to follow, but she was intercepted by twin bolts of lightning.
She was forced her to use her whip to jerk herself away to avoid getting electrocuted.

"Not going to happen, girly. You see…" Hikari started with a glare that literally crackled with
electricity, as her eyes were currently throwing off sparks.

"Our Minato-sama said to keep you here, and that's what we're going to do. Besides, we owe
you…" Hibiki continued, in the same state as her sister.

"For trying to capture us, and for almost killing Minato-sama." Hikari finished. Mitsuha simply
sneered in reply, and their battle began.

"You know, now would be good time to give up," Uzume said calmly, circling her opponent with
her veils at the ready. "You cannot possibly fight me and win."

"We will see about that, but first, we should introduce ourselves, as is courtesy," her opponent
said coolly. "I am Mitsuki, Sekirei #39, and Mikogami-sama is my Ashikabi."

"Uzume, Sekirei #10, and I have no Ashikabi," Uzume replied honestly, and her opponent
actually stumbled slightly in shock.

"If you have no Ashikabi, why do you serve that human? Why do you fight alongside his Sekirei
if you are not his?" she asked, genuinely curious, and Uzume shrugged slightly in response.

"Because it is what I wish to do," she answered simply, before attacking.

Meanwhile, Homura was having a more difficult time than any of her comrades. Mostly because she was too busy being horrified by the fact that her opponent, Akitsu appeared to be panty-less and totally unaware of it.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING WALKING AROUND IN PUBLIC LIKE THAT!" Homura shouted, her normally unflappable personality at a loss. "I mean, honestly, does your Ashikabi have no honor or shame as a man, making you walk around like that?"

"Hmm?" Akitsu asked absenty, pulling up her long white robes to stare at her bare crotch. "Oh, it seems I forgot underwear this morning…"

Homura sighed heavily and facepalmed. How was she supposed to fight Akitsu like this?

"Look, Akitsu, can you please cover yourself up?" she sighed, and the Ice Sekirei stared at her blandly for a moment beforeshrugging and dropping her clothes to over herself again. "Thank you. Now, I really don't want to fight you, Akitsu. Mikogami is making you fight your siblings, and you really shouldn't be. Come with me, with us. Join Minato-sama. Be free."

The Ice Sekirei just stared at her, and Homura saw a flicker of hope in the depths of her eyes.

"Now, little girl, you're coming with me!" Yomi snarled, grabbing Kusano around the arm and trying to yank her to her feet.

"Nooooo!" Kusano cried, eyes welling up with tears. "You're the mean lady that hurt Auntie Takami!"

"I'll hurt you if you don't..." Yomi started, but dropped Kusano and dodged as a quick burst of bullets hissed through the space she had just occupied before slamming into a tree. She spun to look in the direction they came from to see a heavily breathing and sweaty Minato pointing his assault rifle at her. Despite his injuries—and his wounds had clearly reopened by his running, and parts of his black t-shirt were even darker than the rest his aim appeared to be steady.

"Leave her alone, she's just a little girl!" he commanded firmly, and Yomi just sneered at him before blurring to the side and charging him. Cursing, Minato twisted and tried to get a bead on her, but her scythe slashed through his weapon, cutting it in two. The broken halves fell to the forest floor as she reached out with one hand and grabbed him around the throat, slamming him into a tree with enough force that he coughed up blood.

"Well, look at that, the Good Samaritan. Looks like none of your little sluts are with you now human, which means I can just kill you and take the girl!" she sneered, dropping him and readying her scythe to remove his head from his shoulders. "Any last words?"

"Yeah," Minato coughed, smiling up at her with bloody lips. "What girl?"

"That girl, over..." Yomi snapped, glancing at where she had left Kusano and jabbing a finger in that direction. Her head snapped around and her jaw dropped in disbelief when she saw that Kusano was gone. She stared at the spot, before glaring savagely at the still grinning Minato.

"What did you do?"

"I had Yume take her out of the danger zone while you were busy gloating over me." He chuckled a little wetly, spitting some more blood onto the ground beside him. "And you know what the best part of it is?"

"Oh, what's that? That I'm going to kill you anyway?" she hissed, digging the point of her scythe into his neck.

"No, that she's right behind you and that you've already lost." Yomi's eyes widened as his words registered, but before she could turn she felt the back of her clothes torn away and a single finger touch her Sekirei crest.

"By the light of my contract, the darkness of my Ashikabi will be taken away," were the last words she heard before darkness claimed her, her body shutting down as her mark was removed.
"Good timing, Yume," Minato said, as said Sekirei helped him stagger to his feet. He looked at the body of the beautiful young woman who had only moments ago been trying to kill him. "Is she dead?"

"No, Minato-sama. When our marks are removed, or our Ashikabi killed, we revert into a sort of stasis, a coma where we await a kind of reactivation that only our own technology can give us," Yume replied, knowing how much better Minato-sama would feel with that tidbit of information.

"We give our defeated opponents to MBI, who care for them until then."

"Very well. Take her, and I'll get Kusano. While I don't like it, my mother will make sure such things are handled with care and respect, I'm sure," Minato sighed. Yume bowed before bending and picking up Yomi, while Minato headed off into the woods, returning a minute later with Kusano clinging to his back, half asleep.

"She's nearly asleep, the poor thing," Yume crooned, smiling happily at how carefully and gently Minato-sama was holding her youngest sibling.

"She's been through a lot. C'mon, let's go home."

"Hai, Minato-sama." And with that, the pair (and their charges) headed off through the trees towards the entrance.

Miya looked up at the soft knocking on the door, and glanced at the clock. She could only assume that it was Minato-kun and his Sekirei back from rescuing Kusano. Homura had called her as soon as she had been called by Takami, and Miya had watched events unfold along with Matsu via the Sekirei of Wisdoms hacked satellites. Everything she had seen and heard had made her more impressed with Minato-kun's character. He truly seemed to be a good man. Rising to her feet, she padded over to the door and opened it, allowing the group outside to file in.

"Oh, Minato-kun? Who is this?" she asked, acting surprised to see young Kusano clinging to his back drowsily, when in fact she wasn't surprised in the least. Although she did have to admit it was rather cute, and the obvious care Minato-kun moved with to avoid upsetting her was endearing and obvious.

"Erm, she's a relative that has been suddenly placed under my care, yes that's who she is," he said hurriedly, apparently still unaware that she was a Sekirei herself. Miya glanced quickly at Yume and the others, who subtly shook their heads. So, they hadn't mentioned it to him yet. Well, that was not something to bring up after the day they had had. Any further storytelling was halted when Kusano stirred slightly and peered around blearily. Minato looked over his shoulder at her with a gentle smile. "Oh, hey there, Kuu."

"Where are we? I'm hungry," Kusano mumbled quietly, and Miya's heart nearly melted. Her youngest sibling was adorable as it was, and a half asleep comment like that made her even more so.

"Oh, you poor thing," Miya cooed gently, smiling at the little blond. "I'll fix you something right away!"

A quarter of an hour later, Minato and Yume were sitting together on the side stoop, talking quietly. Hikari and Hibiki were already in bed, tired from their battle with Mitsuha, while Uzume was equally unconscious, as her opponent had proven a difficult fight, especially for an un-winged Sekirei like herself. Homura and Akitsu had been missing when Yume and Minato, with their charges, had exited the forest. After Mikogami's remaining Sekirei retreated and Takami had arrived to retrieve Yomi, the group had headed home.

"So, do you think I did the right thing today, Yume?" Minato asked his first Sekirei quietly.

"Having you all fight and kill on my orders? Putting you at risk to save someone we don't know?"

"Without a doubt, Minato-sama. Kusano was meant to join us, and even if she wasn't, saving her would have been the right choice. We fight and kill when we must, Minato-sama," she replied gently, her head on his shoulder as they looked at the stars high above. "Never doubt that, Minato-sama." With that, she turned her head and tugged him down into a soft kiss, her wings flaring at the contact, and fading as she pulled away and cuddled into his side happily.
"Big brother?" a soft voice asked, and the pair looked up to see Kusano standing there with pink cheeks. Before either of them could react, she rapidly move forwards and kissed Minato square on the mouth, making her own bright green wings flare and fade as she pulled away with a happy smile as fresh flowers and sprouts in the garden seemed to grow before their very eyes.

"Kuu-chan, what…?" Minato spluttered, and Yume stared at her youngest sibling with an odd look on her face, before smiling slightly.

"There, now you're my real big brother!" Kusano chirped happily before scampering inside, leaving a gobsmacked Minato and a giggling Yume behind her.

Like, holy shit, way longer than I had thought it would be, but it just kept on going, you know? What happened with Akitsu and Homura will be revealed shortly, while the situation with Uzume will start being resolved soon as well. I can't leave her hanging forever, right? Remember to review, and catch you next time!
In Which Matsu Is A Very Bad Girl

"Today is the day that I will get winged by Minato-sama." Matsu giggled a little perversely inside her hidden room, watching her computer screens as they showed Minato-sama's three other Sekirei and Uzume leave to go shopping. They had gotten Miya to scare the young Ashikabi into remaining home and healing properly, even though he still insisted that he was perfectly fine. Kusano was busy with the garden, helping Miya plant new seeds that would grow into fruits and vegetables that were larger and better tasting than could be found anywhere else, thanks to the ambient power Kusano constantly emitted. Matsu knew that right at this moment, her Ashikabi-to-be was in the herbal bath his Sekirei had prepared for him to both help his wounds heal and to reduce the aches and pains he had accumulated while rescuing Kusano. Now was the perfect opportunity to go down there and make her move. Again. The last three times she had tried, Miya had shown up from nowhere and interfered. Matsu was pretty sure that Miya was just in denial about reacting to Minato-sama as much as she was. To be honest, Matsu had no idea how or why Miya was reacting to Minato-sama, since she was "pure Sekirei", which apparently made her different from those adjusted by MBI. Matsu wasn't sure what a "pure Sekirei" was, since Miya was oddly tight-lipped about what life was like back home. "Home," Matsu thought, lying back on her futon and looking at the roof as though she could see through it, to the stars above. She had never seen their home world. Only Miya, as the commander of the ship that had crashed here on Earth, had walked on the surface of that distant planet. Miya didn't like to talk about it, her eyes would always turn into whirling pools of infinite sadness when it was mentioned. "I guess it just hurts too much to remember a home that she might never be able to return to. I know she hates being stuck on this planet, with its crime, and wars, and pollution. That doesn't even include the distinct lack of individuals worthy of being an Ashikabi. Even Takehito-sama wasn't..' Matsu shot upright as the ever proverbial light bulb went off over her head. "This is a two part problem for her. She is reacting to someone when she didn't react to the man she loved enough to marry, AND she doesn't think she could handle the heartache of letting herself love another and then have them die as well, as Minato-sama almost has a few times." Matsu grinned to herself once more, but this time it was not the perverted grin she always had when she plotted to ensnare Minato. No, this time it was a cheerful grin of understanding and that of a friend who has realized how they can help someone they care for very much. Turning to her computers, Matsu activated the satellites to keep Minato's Sekirei busy and left her secret room for the bath, already plotting to ensure Miya's eventual winging by Minato.

"Did anybody else just get a really, really bad feeling?" Uzume asked tentatively, looking over her shoulder. "Like somebody was watching us and plotting?"

"Yeah..." Hikari muttered, glancing around nervously as the quartet of Sekirei walked down the street, arms laden with groceries. "I feel like I've got some sort of target painted on my back."

Yume and Hibiki nodded in agreement, and Yume looked around at the rooftops, trying to spot anyone who might be watching them, when she saw a strange twinkling in the sky behind them. Her eyes widened, and she shouted at the top of her lungs.

"EVERYBODY MOVE!" The four Sekirei leapt away from the spot they had been standing on instantly, just barely avoiding the laser beam that smashed into the ground.

"Perfect! Just perfect!" Hibiki shouted as the quartet raced down the street just ahead of the beam. "We go out shopping and frickin' laser beams start falling from the sky! What's next, lame movie actors dressed like knock-off Mexican gunman from an American Wild West film?"
"Yes, EL Guapo!" Jefe agreed, hauling Ned Nederlander to his feet while sticking the barrel of his six-shooter under the Amigo's chin.

"This is a deliberate attack! Someone is either trying to eliminate us, or keep us REAL busy!" Uzume snarled, using her veils as a lasso to swing out of the way as the beam tried to flank her.

"The only thing I could think of in that case would be someone is trying to get to Minato-sama while we're busy running around town being chased by this thing!" Yume shouted back, using her own energy-based powers to forcefully divert the beam from destroying a small food stand. "I would blast it out of the sky, but from what I can tell the damn thing is in orbit!"

"What, can't you hit things in orbit?" Hikari asked a few minutes later as they continued to run. The beam was blocking every attempt they made to get past it and towards Maisson Izumo. The Sekirei, astonished at the level of destruction the beam was causing, were trying to pull it out of the denser populated areas of the city in an attempt to limit the damage and prevent innocents from being injured or killed.

"Sure I can, but the amount of power I would have to generate to go that far is immense. The backlash and energy leakage from firing such an attack would devastate the area around me. Somehow, I didn't see that as an option," Yume replied, her tone dry and amused despite their situation. Her sisters smiled a little wryly in response.

"Oh, c'mon Yume, don't you want to accidently destroy or irradiate half of the city our Ashikabi lives in?" Uzume teased cheerfully. "Where is your sense of adventure?"

"In the bedroom, with Minato-sama," Yume deadpanned in return. The other three Sekirei actually stumbled in response, not expecting an answer quite like that, and certainly not in such a bored tone.

"Okay, was not expecting that kind of reply from you, Yume," Uzume replied, shaking her head.

"Why not? I know you all want him too. I would do anything Minato-sama asks of me, because he is my Ashikabi, and I love him," Yume replied, genuinely curious. Certainly, her reply had been slightly teasing and delivered to be more so, but there was a kernel of truth underneath the layer of humor. She was very much the young woman in love, and a part of her wanted Minato-sama. She knew, however, that he was not even remotely ready for such things to happen so quickly. No, it would be best if she and her sisters eased him into it.

"So would we, but I never imagined you of all people would make a sex joke," Uzume replied with a faint blush, as she thought about what she would like to do with Minato-sama once she was winged.

"This isn't the time for playful banter! Someone is trying to get past us to Minato-sama! Stop discussing frivolous things and focus on rescuing him," Hibiki shouted at them, and Yume rolled her eyes slightly.

"My guess is it is another Sekirei that wants to be winged by him, so she is trying to keep us away while she gets to him. Besides, if he was truly in danger, Miya could easily handle anything. She is our oldest sister, Sekirei #01. Anything that tried to harm Minato-sama while Miya was nearby..." Yume smirked slightly, using one energy-clad fist to bat the beam away from herself. "It wouldn't get very far before she dealt with it."

"OWWWWW!" Matsu cried, clutching the top of her head as a large lump began to form. "Big Sister Miya, no need to hit so hard! I was only trying to get to my Ashikabi!"

"Of all my sisters, you are by far the most perverted!" Miya growled, fist still in the air from the blow she had landed on the red-head. She couldn't believe that Matsu had tried sneaking into the bath while Minato-kun was in it. "Trying to sneak into the bath while Minato-kun is still in there! For shame!"

"Well, the last three times I've tried to get winged by him, no matter where I am, you interfere!" Matsu retorted, getting to her feet and glaring at Miya, fists clenched tightly by her sides. She was starting to get angry, understanding Miya's position or not. "Minato-sama is my Ashikabi! I don't know why you hate him enough to try and keep me away, but I won't let you!"

"Hate him? I don't hate Minato-kun!" Miya blinked at her, shocked by her younger sister's accusation. Matsu was clearly not thinking with her head right now, she was too emotional. "Matsu, I just don't think that it is a good idea for you to be winged by Minato-kun right now."

"WHY?" Matsu cried, swiping one hand sideways in an imperative gesture. "Why would being
winged by Minato-kun be so bad? I know you want it too!"

"Because you don't know what it's like to lose someone!" Miya snapped back harshly, and Matsu blinked at her, speechless. Her big sister did not shout and did not even raise her voice often. "I watched the building Takehito was in burn to the ground, with him and all of his friends, and number 88 inside! I feel the heat of that fire on my face even now, I still hear the screams of the dying in my dreams! I can't let anyone else suffer that pain! Minato-kun has almost died many times, twice just in the time we've known him! What will happen when his luck finally runs out? He will die, and I will lose not only him but all of you bound to him as well! I…I can't lose anyone again!"

"Miya-chan…I understand. You're afraid of the pain, afraid of letting anyone get close, but you can't hide from your feelings forever," Matsu said softly. It looks like her suspicions were correct, damn it all. "We need him, and he needs us. Takehito-sama's death at Karasuba's hand was a tragedy, but you cannot stop me just because of your past. If you want to ignore the call of his soul, ignore the fact that you are reacting to him, and remain alone, that is your choice, and I shall weep for you. But loneliness cannot be chosen for another!"

With that, the red-haired number 02, pushed past a frozen Miya, and stormed into the bathroom.

Miya was speechless. What could she say in response to that? Was she really reacting to him, but ignoring it? "Takehito, what do I do now? I'm so lost, adrift. So confused, and so alone…"

Minato lay back in the bath, head half submerged as he blissfully enjoyed both the warm water and the soothing herbal mixture Yume and the others had concocted to help soothe his wounds. Shifting slightly, he grimaced as the movement pulled on one of those wounds, the still-healing skin protesting being stretched. "Maybe I should have gone back to the hospital after all, but I wasn't going to take Kusano there, not with a bounty of sorts on her head. As it is, I will heal fast enough, and be back on my feet and to work within the week," he thought to himself, grinning wryly. He felt the air in the room shift across his bare skin, which was enough to tell him that someone had opened the door. Sitting up, he looked over at the door only to see a red-head he didn't recognize with brown eyes and glasses storming towards him with a scowl set on her face and determination in her eyes.

"EH? Who are you, where did you come from, what do you want, and most of all…WHY ARE YOU IN HERE WHILE I BATHE!" he shrieked, sounding rather feminine as he made a dive for his towel, only to slip and fall, plummeting head first into the red-head's rather ample bosom. Instead of shrieking or reacting badly in any manner, the young woman promptly wrapped her arms around his head and pulled him even closer. Minato reacted much as any other man would when confronted with a truly magnificent pair of breasts.

His face turned completely red, his nose released a somewhat worrying amount of blood, and the watching Miya swore that she saw steam pouring out of her young friend's ears. Frowning, she strode forward and hauled Matsu off of Minato.

"Matsu, while he is your Ashikabi, you could at least let him have a little modesty. Moreover, you know my rules. No 'adult content' inside of Maisson Izumo. Also, he is now bleeding, which is a bad idea in his weakened state. So please, let us wait outside for him to be composed and decent before you have him wing you," she chided gently, mindful of what her younger sister had said not minutes before.

"Fine, fine. I'll be waiting for you outside, Minato-sama." The red-head pouted and released his head before smirking at him and bat ting her eyelashes in a sultry fashion. Turning, she sashayed from the room, her hips swaying in a fashion that nigh on guaranteed his complete attention. Miya, seeing his dumbfounded stare at her sister's rear-end, sighed and smacked him on the back of his head.

"She isn't one of yours yet Minato-kun, and she is one of my sisters, so I would appreciate it if you could keep your eyes to yourself," she said dryly. The young Ashikabi shook himself, hurriedly wrapped a towel around his waist, and frowned at her.

"Sister? One of mine? Wait a minute!" His eyes widened and he stared deeply into her eyes. "You're a Sekirei, aren't you? I guess that's why you were able to climb through my window in the hospital, and why Higa showed up at Maisson Izumo. I'm guessing you're exceptionally powerful."

"Correct. I am Miya, Sekirei #01. The redhead is Matsu, Sekirei #02. She and I will explain everything once you have dressed. We shall wait in the living room. " With that, the lavender haired Sekirei swept from the room, closing the door behind her. Minato waited for a minute or so, to give the two women time to get to the living room, before heading upstairs and into his room. Quickly toweling off and drying his hair a bit, he dressed and rushed back downstairs.
“So, let me get this straight. Matsu-chan is also reacting to me, but she has been hiding from MBI for a long time because she stole something from them, something important. Takehito-dono built the hidden room when he built Maisson Izumo. Miya-dono, you're the oldest of the Sekirei, were the Commanding Officer of the ship that brought you all here, and are therefore the only one not "adjusted" as a fetus by MBI?” Minato said some time later, rubbing his temples slowly.

"Hai, Minato-sama/-kun,” the two women replied in unison, and he nodded slowly before sighing gustily and leaning back in his seat.

“Very well, if Matsu-chan is sure that I am her Ashikabi, then I will wing her,” he said definitively. At the pair's somewhat surprised looks, he smiled crookedly and shrugged a little self-consciously. "From what Yume and Uzume have told me, not being winged by your chosen Ashikabi, or being forcefully winged by some random person, is the worst possible thing that can happen to a Sekirei. So if Matsu-chan is sure, then I will not cause her that pain.”

With that, Minato got to his feet and slowly walked across the room to stand before Matsu, who was gazing up at him with damp eyes. Holding out his hand, Minato waited for her to hesitantly place her hand in his before closing his hand around her own and tugging, pulling the red-head to her feet. Wrapping her in his arms, he gently leaned down and softly took her mouth with his own. Matsu's mouth was soft and had a unique taste, as different from his other Sekireis' as theirs were from each other.

Matsu, for her part, felt a moment of surprise at Minato-sama's boldness, before the feeling of his mouth on her own wiped any and all higher brain functions from her mind. Leaning into him, she deepened the kiss and felt a wave of warmth wash through her body and soul, and she was instinctively aware of her wings flaring to life in all their pale orange glory. After a long moment of continued kissing, she felt her Minato-sama pull back, and she smiled at him dreamily.

"Hmm, my beloved Ashikabi, Minato-sama,” she murmured happily, before snuggling into his chest blissfully. Miya, who had found herself entranced by watching Minato wing yet another willing Sekirei, blushed brightly when the aforementioned Ashikabi looked her in the eyes and smiled gently.

"I thank you for taking care of Matsu, Landlady-dono.” he said softly, and Miya smiled at him slightly before nodding in reply. After a moment's reflection, she frowned at him.

"Did you call me by my given name earlier, Minato-kun?” she asked sharply, and his eyes widened, a look of horror crossing his features, before he stepped away from Matsu and bowed a very deep bow indeed.

"I apologize, Landlady-dono!” he gasped, not noticing Miya's slightly confused look. "I became informal with you from shock at the situation! I assure you it will not happen again.”

"Yes it will,” she said firmly, and his head snapped up as he blinked at her owlishly in confusion, making her giggle lightly.

"I can promise you that I will be vigilant and avoid being so rudely informal at all costs....” he stared to assure her, but her laugh-a bright, warm, and relaxing laugh that he found he quite enjoyed hearing-stopped him from continuing.

"You misunderstand, Minato-kun. I have decided I quite like hearing you call me by my given name, and I must ask that you address me as such from now on,” she said firmly, resisting the temptation to use her dreaded oni mask aura. She wasn't convinced that Matsu was right about her and Minato, but...there was something there, and she intended to find out what.

"Ah...um, are you...ah, sure about that, Landlady-dono.” Miya locked eyes with him and abruptly changed what he was saying mid-sentence. “Ahem...Miya-dono.”

"Never, ever ask a woman if she is sure about something she has told you to do, Minato-sama,” a familiar voice said from the doorway. The trio turned to see a truly disheveled quartet of Uzume, Yume, Hibiki, and Hikari standing in the entryway. "Big Sister Miya told you to call her by her name, so you smile, nod, and do it.”

"Okay, I guess I will cede to your wisdom. It is Miya-dono's wish that I call her by her given name, an so I shall,” Minato said with a sigh, conceding defeat. He then frowned at his 3 ½ Sekirei. "What in the name of the Nine Circles of Hell did you four run into? A volcano? Are you alright?"

"Oh, we're fine, but a certain red-haired hacker isn't going to be. She had an MBI military satellite attacking us so she could get to you,” Yume replied pleasantly, smiling at the frozen Matsu, who gave a shaky grin in reply. "What have you to say for yourself, sister?"

Matsu thought hard for a moment. She had two choices here: beg for forgiveness on her knees and hope that they were feeling charitable, or hide behind Minato-sama. Her mouth, regrettably, chose
a third option that was probably decidedly unwise.

"Everything went precisely as I had forseen! I regret absolutely nothing!" she said aloud, before bolting from the room, four Sekirei hot on her heels while Miya giggled quietly and Minato stared after them, scratching his head in confusion.

As the sun set over Tokyo, the only sounds to be heard from Maisson Izumo were crashes, shouts and laughter, along with running feet and intermittent shrieks. All was well in the world for the group of friends that were quickly becoming family, unaware that life was soon going to be getting interesting, and conflict would soon arrive.

BAM! There you are, chapter seven. Yes, I know we didn't see much of Kusano in this chapter, but honestly I don't know how much she could have figured into its events. Regardless, READ AND REVIEW PEOPLE!
Minato groaned in annoyance at the bright light streaming in through the windows of his bedroom. Attempting to raise his arms to shield his eyes so he could go back to sleep, he frowned blearily in confusion when his arms didn't move due to a warm weight lying on either side of him. Recognizing the feeling, he guessed that two of his Sekirei had crawled into bed with him again, even though they hadn't been there when he went to bed. Every night he went to bed alone, and every morning he woke up surrounded by his family. Not that he minded in the least.

It had been a week since he had winged Matsu and found out that Miya was not just a Sekirei, but the most powerful one of all. The following days had been interesting. Minato had conceded partial defeat, allowing his girls to pay for groceries and such with their MBI unlimited cards while he continued to work around the Inn and with Seo to pay for their room and board. Uzume still didn't feel ready to be winged, while Matsu had tried to catch him every night since he had winged her by hiding in various places in his room (the ceiling seemed to be a popular place for some reason), then jumping out at him when he was getting into bed. Somehow, Miya had always known what she was up to and opened the door in time to see Matsu, pajama shirt half off of her body and revealing a rather tantalizing amount of cleavage, trying to pull Minato's own shirt off. The redhead would be hauled off and whacked over the top of the head. This would end with both Minato and Matsu being treated to a lecture on how "adult" actions were not allowed at Maisson Izumo, especially not when Ku could come in at any moment. "Still," he thought with a wry grin, "it was fun as hell to watch Matsu try and escape both Miya's wrath, and the wrath of Yume and the others. Not that they really did anything more than give her a lump or two on the top of her head, but still..."
enjoying the feeling immensely. Something about it felt so very right.

Miya, for her part, was lost in the feeling of running her hands through her young friend's hair. She had no idea why she had started to do it, but she knew she didn't want to stop. She had looked over at him, annoyed for some reason by his persistent formality with her, when she had seen his damp and mussed hair. She swore that she could feel her heart throb at the sight of him looking so casual and…handsome. Before she realized it, her hands were running through his hair, fixing it in such a way that she felt would maximize his features to make him even better looking than he already was. She looked at his face and their eyes met, and both unconsciously began moving their heads towards the other. Their lips were only a few inches apart when a voice interrupted them.

"Onee-chan, what are you doing to onii-chan? Were you going to suck his face?" Ku asked in confusion, and the pair leapt apart like startled rabbits, both blushing so heavily one might think that they were teens caught by their parents instead of two adults caught by their little sister figure.

"What makes you say that, Ku?" Miya asked, feeling her heart beating wildly as she tried to fight down her blush.

"When I went shopping with Yume-onee-chan and Uzume-onee-chan, they saw a boy and a girl winging each other, and said that they were sucking face! Onii-chan, what is sucking face?" Ku replied innocently, an expression of adorable confusion on her face. Miya struggled to not project her oni mask aura, which would have scared her youngest sibling, and storm off to punish the two that Ku had mentioned. How dare they corrupt poor little Ku by talking about such things in front of her!

"It's something that two adults do when they love each other. It's like winging each other," Minato explained awkwardly, distracting Miya from her anger, and Ku gained an awed expression.

"Ohh, does that mean you're going to wing onee-chan, onii-chan?" she asked, and both Ashikabi and Sekirei blushed again. Miya glanced at Minato out of the corner of her eye and saw him doing the same at her. Making a hurried, half-coherent excuse, she quickly left the room, but stopped just out of sight, wanting to hear his answer for some reason.

"Maybe someday, Ku-chan. It depends on if your Onee-chan wants me too," came the unexpected reply, and Miya hurried on her way. Moving with inhuman haste, she practically fled to her room, shutting the door and flopping face down on her bed. She lay there for a long moment before rolling over and sighing.

"I can't believe I almost winged myself with Minato. I've never acted like this before, not even with Takehito! Why am I so drawn to him? Is Matsu right? Is he really my destined love? I mean, I've only known him for less than a month, but already he is as precious to me as Takehito was. Should I follow Matsu's advice? Cast aside my fear of losing someone else that I love and take the chance?"

Miya considered her own questions carefully. Minato definitely didn't seem averse to loving her, and didn't seem angry over her actions. If anything, he seemed to enjoy it, and his words to Kusano were a relief somehow. Besides, if there was any being on this world that Miya would desire to be with for the rest of time, it would be Minato. His kindness, his gentleness, his good nature and humor, his willingness to own up to his past mistakes…she gave her some modicum of hope for humanity. Perhaps, once she and her siblings regained control of their ship, and took their Ashikabis home, she would recommend to the Elders that they revisit this planet in a century or two. Maybe by then, more of humanity would be like Minato. Of course, she would have to figure out what went wrong with their arrival to this place before she could get them home. Matsur would no doubt be able to help with that. Her sister was brilliant, and Miya still believed to this day that the reason she was so publicly perverted was because her mind connected directly to computers, and therefore to the human's "World Wide Web", which EVERYONE knew was overrun with "pornography". The images had corrupted her, Miya knew it.

"Miya-onee-chan?" Uzume's soft voice filtered through her door. Miya sat up, rubbing one hand over her face before sighing again.

"Come in, Uzume-chan," she called softly, and Uzume opened the door enough to slip inside before shutting it again.

"I heard about what happened in the kitchen, onee-chan. Want to talk about it? It might help you work it out to talk," the brunette said quietly, and Miya sighed again, looking at her younger sister.

"I don't know, Uzume-chan. I care for Minato-kun so very much, I really do. I might even be reacting to him, but I don't know. I mean, I've never reacted to anyone before. I didn't even think
that I could react to any human if I didn't react to Takehito?" Miya sighed, before quickly
becoming more emotional than Uzume had ever seen her oldest sister. "What kind of woman am I, Miya? I was MARRIED, Maker help me! Married and happy with a wonderful man named
Takehito Asama, yet here I am, not even half a year later, lusting after another man barely out of
his boyhood!"

"Onee-chan…” Uzume whispered softly, watching the legendary #00 Sekirei break down in tears,
arms wrapped around her torso as if to hold herself together. Quickly walking over, Uzume pulled
Miya to herself and let the confused and distraught lavender haired woman cry into her shoulder
while she rubbed her back, murmuring soothing and comforting words in her ear.

It was some time later that Miya finally calmed down enough to be rational, and Uzume reassured
her that she was neither defiling Takehito's memory nor was she some kind of whore. What she
was, was a Sekirei who had found her Ashikabi and was falling for him, hard. After talking for a
little while more, Miya felt much better about herself thanks to Uzume's intervention, before Miya
asked a question that had been at the back of her mind for a quite a while.

"Uzume-chan, why haven't you had Minato-kun wing you yet? I know that you care for him very
much, and that he thinks the world of you, so why the continued hesitation?" she asked softly, and
Uzume froze for a moment before groaning slightly.

"I don't really know myself, onee-chan. Maker knows I love him to death as it is, but something
inside me is telling me to wait, telling me that something else needs to happen before he can wing
me. I don't know why, but it's like the Maker Himself is whispering in my ear,” she mumbled,
eyes slowly losing focus as if trying to look into the future, and Miya nodded slowly.

"Like a proper wife and Sekirei, ne onee-chan?" Uzume asked slyly, taking the offered hand and
allowing herself to be pulled to her feet. Miya blushed, but nodded slowly after a long moment.

"Yes. Exactly like that Uzume-chan, ne onee-chan?" Uzume asked shyly, taking the offered hand and
allowing herself to be pulled to her feet. Miya blushed, but nodded slowly after a long moment.

Minato sang softly to himself as he recognized the loud song blaring from Seo's large boombox.
Ever so carefully he wrapped the detonator cord around the blasting charges, placed it on its soon-
to-be victim, and scuttled away, passing the spool of cord to a waiting Seo, who grinned slightly
as he clipped it and wrapped the loose end around the detonator. Minato grinned back at his
fellow raven-hair passed him the detonator and winked. Gathering himself, Minato placed one
hand on the activator.

"FIRE IN THE HOLE" he roared, before twisting and depressing the plunger. For a moment
nothing happened, causing both Seo and Minato to frown at each other. Sighing, Seo took the
detonator back and fiddled with it.

"Honestly, you rookies! You can't even blow crap up correctly! What is the world coming to,
when a kid can't even blow stuff up properly?" the foreman grumbled as he prodded the wires.

"Hey!" I'm not too bad at blowing stuff up! I mean, I'm not as good as Hikari or Hibiki, but that's
not the point!" the younger of the two shot back in annoyance. "And don't call me kid! I'm only
four years younger than you!"

"Don't matter kid. Until you can blow stuff up properly, I'm gonna call you kid," Seo snarked in
reply. Apparently satisfied with whatever he had done with the detonator, he repeated his earlier
warning. "FIRE IN THE HOLE!"

Once again the detonator failed to go off, this time causing several of the pairs' fellow workers to
chuckle or make teasing remarks as they watched the pair squabble over how to best solve their
issue. Finally Minato growled, grabbed the detonator, and pulled the casing off before tweaking
the insides slightly. Slapping the casing back on, Minato warned his fellow workers of the
pending explosion once more. This time the charges did go off, and the so-called rookie smirked
broadly at an open-mouthed and silent Seo before getting to his feet and walking away, casually
dropping the jury-rigged detonator into another worker's hands.
Minato checked his watch and realized that it was still a good three hours to sundown. Sighing to himself, he rolled his shoulders and cracked his joints before heading to his next task. No rest for the weary or the wicked, after all, and he was sure that was twice as true for him. He was weary as hell, and if having an ever-expanding harem of (literally) inhumanly beautiful women waiting for him at home didn’t count as being wicked, he didn’t know what did.

A tall blonde woman dressed in a long, Victorian-style black dress with white lace trim stood atop a small water tower, gazing out over the city that the monkeys called "Tokyo" with bright blue eyes that were half-narrowed with either concentration or irritation.

“How dare he defile me in mine own dreams!” she grumbled angrily, arms crossed tightly over her generous chest. "For sooth, when at last I lay mine eyes upon the wretch he will experience the true terror of a Sekirei. I, Tsukiumi, Sekirei #9, will show that black-haired monkey that a Sekirei has no need of an Ashikabi to be truly strong!”

Tight in the grips of her fervor, the blonde now identified as Tsukiumi pumped her fist in the air and charged off of the water tower, neatly landing on the roof of the next building before she continued on her way, hunting for the raven-haired menace that haunted her dreams. She would end him for making her dream like that…even if those dreams were more pleasurable than any she could have possibly imagined…

In a nondescript and utterly uninteresting building, one that just so happened to be one of several safe houses Homura had set up around the capital to hide unwinged Sekirei in until they could find their Ashikabi, a grey haired young woman watched her silver-haired guardian/roommate pulling on her combat outfit.

"Akitsu, will you be all right here alone for a little while? I need to go out on patrol.” Homura asked her binary quietly, and the dispassionate woman blinked at her slowly before nodding her head in acquiescence. "Good. Please, stay here. I don't want Mikogami or Higa to find you before we can tell Minato-sama about you.”

"Why haven't you joined him yet, sister?” Akitsu asked in her dead tone, though Homura swore she heard a slight note of genuine curiosity beneath it, and she grinned happily. Maybe her sister was finally starting to thaw a little! Still, it was a valid question, and she paused in the midst of settling her long coat on her shoulders.

"Because there are others at Maisson Izumo who need to be winged before me. Besides, I need to help you right now don’t I?” the silver-haired fire-user replied cheerfully, before disappearing out the window into the city. Akitsu gazed after her, watching her black-cloaked form framed against the rays of a setting sun before she vanished into the distance. Akitsu turned away and padded into the living room to watch TV. She had never been allowed to watch it before, and she found it to be engrossing. Watching it gave her a strange feeling, one she was unused to. Dare we say it? Yes indeed…she was having fun.

"I…I may ask Minato-sama to wing me soon, Chiho-sama. I care for him as much as I cared for you, as much as I still care for you. But is it the right thing to do? Is it right for me to let someone else kiss me, hold me, love me? Am I betraying you by being with him? By loving him?” Uzume whispered, sitting with her knees drawn up to her chest as she stared at the headstone for her deceased almost-Ashikabi. As she did every time she visited, she read the words carved into the stone through tear-filled eyes.

Here Lies Chihó Hidaka
Who Left This Plane
Far Before Her Time
March 13th , 1992-August 8th, 2008

Sniffling, Uzume got to her feet and wiped her eyes before turning to leave. She froze however, when she saw who was standing there. Chihó's parents, both of whom were staring at her in
surprise. They had never met her, so they were no doubt wondering who she was.

"Ah..." Uzume bowed to the couple. "Good evening. Please, forgive my current state."

"No, please forgive our intrusion." Chiho's father replied, surprised, as he and his wife returned the bow with one of their own. He hesitated for a long moment, before continuing. "Were you one of Chiho's friends? Most stopped visiting after a little while, and I am ashamed to confess neither of us remember you."

"I never met you before, that is why you don't remember me. My name is Uzume. I never even met Chiho. Not properly. She was someone I always gazed upon from afar, someone I cared for very much despite not knowing her personally," Uzume replied, keeping her eyes on the ground. "I had hoped to get her out of the hospital thanks to some friends of mine, to a better one that could help her more, but before my plan could come to fruition..." Uzume stopped, unable to say more, before bowing again deeply. "I failed! It's my fault she died!"

"Uzume-san, please don't blame yourself." Chiho's mother said softly, stepping forward and pulling Uzume into a tight hug, shocking the poor brunette. "You tried to save her life, and you cared about her. The fact that you tried is enough. I thank you for that."

"B-but she didn't..." Uzume started, confused at the lack of anger she was encountering. She had expected anger and rejection, not compassion and understanding!

"She may have died, but you tried to find away to save her. Trying is what matters most, unlike many others who did nothing more than visit once or twice," Mr. Hidaka said gently, placing a hand on her shoulder. "You, who had never even met her face to face, did more to try and help her than those she had called "friend" for years. That says much about who you are, and much about who they are."

"What should I do then, Hidaka-dono?" Uzume asked tearfully after a moment. "I don't know if I can let myself love anyone again! It would be a betrayal of Chiho-sama, but I..."

"Oh, Uzume-chan, it is no betrayal. Think about what you know about my daughter. Do you really think she would be so petty, so spiteful as to feel anger or bitterness if you fell in love, despite her death?" Mrs. Hidaka asked, and Uzume naturally shook her head. Chiho would never be that kind of person. "Of course she wouldn't. Move on with your life, fall in love, have a family, just as long as you never forget her. She would want you to."

"Thank you, both of you," Uzume said softly, stepping back and bowing to both of them with a small smile. "Your words mean a great deal to me. I feel at peace with myself now."

"Good. Then I bid you goodnight and Godspeed. Perhaps we will meet again," Mr. Hidaka smiled back at her, while Mrs. Hidaka waved farewell. Uzume returned the wave with one of her own as she headed out of the cemetery, leaving the couple to grieve in private.

The inhabitants of Maisson Izumo were chattering back and forth cheerfully as they ate dinner. Miya had, to everyone's surprise, claimed the seat at Minato's right hand side, while Yume took the left. Miya had ignored the odd looks she received and simply began to eat, leaving the others to shake their surprise off and join her. Hikari and Hibiki were busy talking with Matsu about some movie or another that was coming out soon, and deciding on what day they were going to have Minato take all of them. Yume and Ku were talking about Ku's latest work in the garden,
and how nice it looked now.

"Something's wrong. I can feel it." Minato mused to himself, looking around. He noticed that Uzume was missing, and the feeling of wrongness grew stronger. Uzume…

His phone rang, breaking him out of his thoughts, and he flipped it open.

"Minato Sahashi, what can I do…Uzume? Uzume, slow down and talk to me!" he said, his urgent and worried tone getting everyone's attention. The gathered Sekirei watched as his expression and a scowl formed. "I understand. How many of them are there? I see, hold tight. We're on our way."

"Minato-kun?" Miya asked softly, laying a gentle hand on the young man's shoulder as he slid the now shut phone into his pocket. Minato surprised them all when he slammed a closed fist onto the table top, making the tableware rattle loudly.

"Damn them! Hikari, Hibiki, Yume!" he growled, and his Sekirei resisted the urge to snap to attention at his tone.

"Hai, Minato-sama?" they replied in unison. Minato got to his feet in a swift movement and headed towards the door.

"Higa's servant, Takizaki, and three of his Sekirei are hunting Uzume right now. They ambushed her on her way home from Chiho's grave, and she needs help. You three are with me. Matsu, I need you to provide over-watch with the satellites and guide us over the phone. We don't have time to waste. Move!" he rumbled, and all of the gathered Sekirei shivered at the change that had come over their young friend. His aura was commanding and stern, but also held a frightening amount of anger, and Miya felt herself blushing slightly despite herself. His aura felt incredible to her, she could almost see it around him.

"Hai, Minato-sama!" his Sekirei acknowledged. Matsu flitted quickly out of sight as she raced for her computers while Yume and the Twins headed for the door. Miya looked into Minato's eyes as he turned to her.

"Miya, I don't know what kind of shape Uzume will be in. Would you please get Ku into bed and be ready to help us if she is hurt?" he asked softly. Miya was silent for a long moment before smiling at him happily.

"Of course, Minato. I wouldn't dream of doing anything else," she replied, and he smiled at her in response. Unbidden, one of his hands came up to cup her cheek, stroking it his thumb, and Miya's eyes half-shut as she unconsciously leaned into it.

"Thank you." He said in a heartfelt whisper, and then he was gone, racing away into the night with his three Sekirei following him, leaving Miya looking after him from the doorway, one hand held to her chest, not realizing how much she looked-or felt-like a wife watching her love march off to war.

Uzume was gasping heavily as she clutched her side. Despite having wrapped some veils tightly around herself to slow the bleeding, the gash she had suffered from one of her hunters' weapons was painful, and its location made running much harder for her. Ducking around a corner and crouching behind a large truck, she paused for a moment and prayed that she had lost her pursuers.

Alas, it was not so.

"Just stop running, damn it! Give up already!" an angry voice growled, and Uzume's veils tightened into spears and blurred towards the Sekirei that had just spoken, catching them in the shoulder and throwing them back. Recalling her veils, Uzume started running again as the chase resumed.

"Where now, Matsu?" Minato demanded into his phone as he raced down the street, his Sekirei leaping across the rooftops after him.

"Turn left at the next intersection, and you should intercept them within five minutes, based on their current path. I would call Uzume and tell her, but I don't want to distract her," Matsuri's voice replied, and Minato grunted his approval before flipping his phone shut and pouring on more speed. Thank Kami for his grandfathers' training and his former vigilante lifestyle!
"Doesn't it seem odd that Minato-sama can run like this?" Hibiki asked her fellow Sekirei as they followed their Ashikabi, alert for any threats he might not see in time. "I mean, he's a human but he's moving as fast as many Sekirei, and his endurance is incredible. And look at some of the moves he's pulling off!" she pointed down at the subject of their discussion as he vaulted a guardrail to shave a few precious seconds off of his transit time to Uzume's location.

"I will admit, I am becoming to wonder about Minato-sama. His soul is like that of a Sekirei, he could keep up with Akitsu in a fight, he blocked an attack from Mitsuha when he saved me, and then all this," Yume agreed, eyes sharp as she stared down at her beloved.

"Not to mention his aura from earlier. It felt like onee-chan's almost," Hikari agreed, vaulting off of one building's roof and onto the next.

"It bears investigation. He's not a normal human. Look, he's calling us down. Come on," Yume said finally, before all three arrowed down to land before their Ashikabi.

"Looks like we got here first. I want us to set up an ambush. Drive off the enemy Sekirei, I don't want to get into a fight tonight. If Uzume is wounded, she will need help sooner rather than later. Understood?" Minato's voice was clipped and stern, and his Sekirei again almost felt like they were undertaking some sort of military operation.

"Hai, Minato-sama." They replied in unison once more, and he smiled around at them briefly.

"Good. Take your positions. I'll wait here for Uzume to spot me," he ordered, and his Sekirei flashed away, taking up positions to cover Uzume's retreat.

"Minato-sama, where are you? Uzume thought desperately as she dodged another flying blade from her pursuers. "Have you abandoned me? Are you even coming?"

"Uzume! Come on!" she heard her beloved Ashikabi's voice split the air, and her face broke into a happy grin at the sight of him waving to her from a side street. She headed straight for him.

Time seemed to slow for Minato Sahashi as he watched Uzume run towards him, bloodstained veils wrapped around what was clearly a moderately serious wound to her right side. He watched her face break into a large smile, watched her change her angle of approach to head towards him…and ran straight into the path of another flying bladed weapon. He watched in horror as it thudded into her back, just behind her shoulder blade. Seemingly in slow motion, Uzume collapsed to the ground, blood pooling around her body.

"UZUME!" Minato howled in shock and anger, racing towards her body. Knowing his Sekirei could hear him, he roared out his order. "COVERING FIRE!"

Twin jagged arcs of lighting roared through the sky, striking trees and light posts in front of the enemy Sekirei, who were forced to dodge repeatedly to avoid the vengeful strikes of the Thunder and Lightning Twins, who seemed to have forgotten Minato's earlier orders to simply drive the enemy off. No, they were aiming to kill. This was personal now.

"Minato-sama!" Yume shouted, leaping off of her building and joining her Ashikabi, jumping behind him as he threw Uzume's arms around his shoulders and hauled her onto his back. Red-white light blazed from her hands, forming a wall that several thrown blades bounced off of. It appeared that the enemy was desperate not to fail, and decided to take out the Sekirei attacking them at their source, their Ashikabi, Minato. "Minato-sama, I can stabilize her, but I need someone to cover you! They're targeting you now!"

"Damnit! What about the Twins?" he shouted back, staggering away from the fighting as fast as he could with Uzume slung over his back.

"Their power can't create a shield like mine, and these kunai are too small for them to be able to blast from the sky accurately!" the Sekirei of Fate replied, as another barrage of weapons smashed into her shield.

"Damnit!" Matsu hissed, checking her feeds. Four more of Higa's Sekirei were on their way to join the attack on Minato and his Sekirei. It appeared that Higa wanted her Ashikabi out of the way for sure this time. She couldn't go to their aid, she was not a melee fighter, and if she used the military satellites she might hit her own side. Pulling out her phone, she called the number of someone she knew could help.
"Are you still hungry, Akitsu?" Homura asked her housemate. The Ice Sekirei shook her head in response. Anything else that might have been said went unheard as the silver-haired fire user's phone rang loudly. Glancing at the Caller I.D., her eyes widened in surprise and she flipped it open, putting it to her ear. "What is it Mat…"

She was cut off by the loud and frantic voice of her sibling yelling for her to shut up and listen. Her eyes widened in surprise before narrowing in anger. Akitsu felt her own eyebrows rise fractionally as her binary sibling clenched a fist and it became enveloped in flame.

"Yes, I understand. I'll go, and Akitsu might help as well. Keep me updated." Sliding her phone into her pocket, the Sekirei of Fire turned to the Sekirei of Ice. "Akitsu, I need your help. Three Sekirei that serve Higa are trying to kill Minato-sama, Uzume-chan, Yume-chan, and the Twins. Uzume-chan is already wounded badly, and four more enemy Sekirei are on their way to overwhelm Minato-sama and his Sekirei. I must go help my future Ashikabi, but I am asking you to come along. You don't have to, but I would appreciate it."

"Minato-sama was kind to me, and did not want me to get hurt even when he fought me or had his Sekirei fight me. I will fight for him. I will serve him now," Akitsu said after a moment, her voice having a slight undertone of conviction, and Homura smiled as she pulled on her mask. Looks like Minato-sama was helping to break that icy shell around Akitsu's heart and soul. The pair took off out the window, racing to reinforce their future Ashikabi and lover.

"Where is that damnable monkey..? When I catch him I will…!" Tsukiumi ranted as she jumped onto yet another rooftop. She was cut off however when Homura and another Sekirei, one she didn't recognize, blew right past her. "Hey!"

Her angry shout was either ignored or missed completely by the two rushing Sekirei, and Tsukiumi growled in anger before pursuing them. No one got away with bumping into her and then not apologizing! Nobody!

"Minato-sama, reinforcements are on their way. Akitsu and Homura are 40 seconds away, and closing. Just hold on a little longer." Matsu's words were a blessed relief, a gift from the Kami Himself, and Minato breathed a sigh of relief.

"Good work Matsu," he replied before pocketing his phone. Raising his voice so his girls could hear him over the fighting, he called out. "FIRE 6 AND ICE 7 WILL BE HERE IN THIRTY SECONDS! HOLD THEM A LITTLE LONGER!"

"HAI, MINATO-SAMA!" his Sekirei cried back, and Minato went back to placing pressure on Uzume's wound. He had removed the kunai from her back and wadded up her veils before using them to staunch the bleeding. It was crude, but it would keep her alive for now.

"Minato-sama!" a familiar voice drew his attention skyward as Homura and Akitsu dropped into the small alley he had pulled Uzume into. Homura stared down at the body of her friend in horror. "Oh, Maker! Uzume!"

"She's alive for now, but I need Yume to be able to heal her for her to stay that way. Akitsu, take over defense from Yume and send her to me. Homura, help the Twins drive of the enemy. Move it!"

"Hai, Minato-sama!" the pair vanished once more, and an instant later Yume was at his side.

"Yume, I need you to heal her," Minato said tightly, and she let light spill from her hand to wash over the wound. Pulling away the veil bandages, she shook her head slightly and grimaced.

"The damage is extensive. I need my Norito for this, Minato-sama." She replied, and immediately found herself in a heated kiss with her beloved. Pulling away with a small (very small, given the circumstances) twinge of regret, Yume murmured her Norito. "By the light of my contract, the dream of my Ashikabi shall come to pass!"

Pure white light spilled from her hands and sank into Uzume's body, making her body shine and
forcing Minato to look away. The light carried on for perhaps a minute before fading, and he looked back to see the wounds were gone. Uzume's skin was flawless and smooth again, and he smiled happily before his eyes widened in alarm, and he half-dove to catch Yume as she slumped backwards.

"Yume, are you alright?" he asked worriedly, but the only reply he received was the sound of light snoring. The gentle snoring reassured Minato, as he realized that Yume had just passed out from exhaustion. She had overused her powers in the earlier fighting and in saving Uzume's life. Gently settling her beside Uzume, Minato turned to look at how the battle was progressing, only to find himself face to face with a heavily blushing, but very angry looking blond.

"Why dost thou risk thine own safety for thy Sekirei? Are thee not a foul and perverse monkey that cares not for them beyond the sexual favours they provide thee with?" she asked, blue eyes staring into his own black ones, and he blinked at her before his eyes narrowed in anger.

"I love all of my girls, even those that I haven't winged yet. I risk my life for them because it is my duty and honor as their Ashikabi and as a man. I won't let you hurt them!" he snarled back, settling himself into a fighting stance. What he didn't expect was for the blond to eye him suspiciously, still with that heavy blush, before stepping forward faster than he could react, tired as he was, and pulling his mouth onto hers. Immediately, bright blue wings burst from her back, before fading as she stepped back.

"Let us be the tides of everlasting change, my beloved Ashikabi. Now and forever," she mumbled, staring at him with a blush. He stared back at her, blushing just as heavily, before blinking suddenly.

"What…?" he started to ask, but she only huffed and turned away, crossing her arms.

"Art thou a simpleton? It is clear that thee has become mine husband, mine Ashikabi. Dost thou need me to explain further, or shall I go and assist thine concubines?" she asked, trying and failing miserably to sound aloof, and Minato blinked again. Concubines? Well, whatever, he wasn't going to waste time talking.

"Please, help the others. The enemy Ashikabi has a personal desire to see me dead. It's the only reason the enemy Sekirei haven't retreated yet. Think you can handle helping drive them off?" he replied, and she scooped before leaping into the literal and proverbial fray. Minato smiled faintly before returning his focus to his two unconscious Sekirei. He would watch over them while their sisters watched over him.

"Hikari, Hibiki!" Homura shouted, landing beside the pair as the fighting continued. "Why the hell haven't they withdrawn yet?"

"Homura?" Hikari blinked at the fire user, before shrugging. If Homura was here to help, that was all the mattered. "They want Minato-sama dead. Higa probably thinks he is getting too powerful, and he keeps interfering with Higa's plans. First with Miya, then with Uzume. You here to help?"

"Of course! Not going to leave my sisters or Minato-sama in danger if I can do anything about it!" Homura replied, her fists igniting before she smashed them together and pulled them apart, creating a long and thin spear of flame. After a second, several more appeared, floating around the silver-haired Sekirei, and she smirked behind her mask. "Fire Lances!" She snapped her fingers and the lances blazed across the intersection, impacting on the street and blowing holes into it. One detonated just to the side of an enemy Sekirei, who went flying backwards with a cry of shocked pain.

"Incoming!" Hikari cried as several of their enemies unleashed various ranged attacks. Before they could strike Minato's Sekirei, though, they were stopped cold by a wall of ice, which hovered for a moment before shattering and turning into lethal looking shards that hammered the enemy positions.

"Nice timing Akitsu!" Homura called to her sister, who gave her a faint smile.

"Hmph. I see mine husband's concubines are not unskilled. Forsooth, he appears to have many capable females to serve him," another voice grumbled as Tsukiumi joined the group. Seeing everyone staring at her, she huffed angrily. "Art thou simply going to stare at me like a fool, or shall thou help me protect our Ashikabi?"

"Uh…right! Come on girls, let's finish this up!" Homura said after a moment, clenching both fists and snarling as she gathered her power. "Dragon of the Inferno!" A large dragon made of flame
coalesced behind her, and her sisters smirked.

"Not bad!" Hikari and Hibiki said together. "Here is ours! Dragon of the Thunder Gods!" Twin dragons made out of pure, arcing electricity crackled behind the pair, forcing their sisters to step away slightly.

"Humm. Dragon of a Frozen End!" Akitsu murmured in her quiet way and a large ice beast rose behind her, dropping the local temperature by about 30 degrees Fahrenheit.

"I'll not be up-staged by concubines!" Tsukiumi cried, making her sisters roll their eyes in amusement. "Dragon of the Endless Sea!"

"GO!" they cried in unison, pointing at their enemies, and the five dragons roared and charged as one.

The impact was most impressive. The very air seemed to shake as they struck the ground, creating a not-insignificant crater in the middle of an important Tokyo intersection. The enemy Sekirei retreated hastily, the lightly wounded hauling the more seriously. Minato sighed in relief at the lack of corpses on either side. It appeared that, despite their anger, his girls had headed his request to not kill their siblings. Either that, or they had tried but hadn't managed to pull it off. That last attack made him wonder, to be totally honest. Grimacing, he pulled out his phone. He was not going to enjoy this discussion at all.

"Hi, mom, it's Minato. Hmm? Yeah, I winged Tsukiumi just now, but that's not why I'm calling. See, what happened was…"

"…POSSESSED YOU LOT TO DESTROY AN ENTIRE INTERSECTION?! DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW HARD THE COVERUP IS GOING TO BE? NEVER MIND THE TIME AND RESOURCES IT WILL TAKE TO REPAIR IT!" A very red-faced Takami Sahashi howled, standing before a cowed group of seven Sekirei and one human Ashikabi. She smiled at Uzume, who flinched slightly at being the focus of her attention. "I don't blame you of course, Uzume, you were badly injured and unconscious, and so I know it's not your fault. I'm glad to see you're alright."

"We didn't have a choice, Takami-sensei! They were trying to kidnap Uzume, and they tried to kill Minato-sama!" Homura protested for the group, her fiery personality giving her the courage to risk the wrath of the white-haired Director. "It wasn't like any of us could ask them nicely to go home and play another day!"

"I know, it's just…" Takami sighed in exasperation, running a hand through her hair and looking around at them all. "I can't believe that Higa would try to take you out again, after MBI warned him explicitly that the killing of Ashikabi is forbidden. I can't believe he would think he could get away with this."

"Getting away with it would be easy," Minato said suddenly, breaking the silence he had held since they had all finally returned home. "All he had to say was that I got caught in the crossfire during the fight between Sekirei. My Sekirei would be in stasis due to my death, and his would say whatever he told them to. All too easy, and he would eliminate his most powerful opponent in the game."

"What do you mean, Minato-sama?" Homura asked, curious about his logic, and Minato looked and noticed that he now had everyone's attention, including his mother's and Miya's.

"It's simple tactics. The Sekirei game, despite being called a game by that cape-wearing bastard, is a war. A war between Ashikabi, with the Sekirei as their armies. Combat tactics would dictate removing the more powerful threats whenever possible. I have 02, 08, 11, 12, 108, and now 09 on my side, while Maisson Izumo is defended by 00/01. I have more single digits than anyone, including MBI, which makes me the greatest threat," he explained at length, and his companions blinked at him. His evaluation made sense, but they were all wondering how he had gotten this good at tactics, even if he was an ex-vigilante.

"So, you think he may try this again?" Takami asked finally, and Minato shrugged slightly.

"Who can tell. As far as he knows, I also have #10, #6, and #7 with me as well, so a direct confrontation would quickly lead to his destruction, which means I am probably more likely looking at assassination attempts on my person a frontal assault. Nothing to be concerned about, I just need to be more careful," he replied calmly, and both Miya and Takami frowned at him.

"He says that this bastard is going to try and have him assassinated again but he tells us not to worry. What is wrong with him? I mean, honestly, most people would be a little bit more
"concerned, especially since they almost took him out once!" Miya grumbled mentally, eyeing the raven-haired young man with something akin to impressed disbelief.

"Now, who's hungry? I think there are some leftovers from dinner!" Minato continued cheerfully, making half the room face-fault.

"Thank you for coming for me, Minato-sama," Uzume whispered, as the pair sat on the overhang outside her bedroom window. She leaned into his side, resting her head on his shoulder and sighed gustily. "You saved me from a fate worse than death."

"You needed my help Uzume. You might not be ready for me to wing you yet, but I'll be damned if that bastard Higa, or any other, forces you to serve them by taking you against your will," Minato replied just as quietly, putting an arm around her shoulder and pulling her into his side.

"Minato-sama..." Uzume murmured, pulling her head back and staring at him. Surprised, he turned to look at her and she reached up to stroke his face with her hand before leaning forward. Their lips were inches away and Uzume whispered a single phrase that she meant with all her heart, finally able to be spoken. "Please, Minato-sama. Wing me. Make me your Sekirei. Become my Ashikabi."

"Are you sure, Uzume? Are you ready? I can wait as long as you need to, I can have your sisters watch over you when you go out, Higa won't get you I promise," Minato said softly, searching her eyes.

"I'm sure. Please, Minato-sama. I need you. I need you to wing me," Uzume replied firmly, even though her voice was still soft. Minato nodded lowly and their lips met. Uzume gave a happy sigh as her bright white wings flared into being and arced forward as if to envelope her new master.

"Let us fill the world with joy together, my beloved Ashikabi. Now and forever," she murmured into his lips as she leaned in.

"He's mine too! I met him before you did!" Uzume barked, lunging to her feet and glaring. "Why the hell did you wing yourself to him anyway! I remember you always talking about how men are 'foul monkeys' and that 'Sekirei have no need of an Ashikabi' yet here you are!"

"I saw his kindness to his first concubine, Yume, and to you during the fight. It seems that not all men are foul cretins," Tsukiumi admitted with a slight blush, before scowling again. "That's not what's important here! You did not ask mine permission, as Minato-sama's wife, to lay your lips upon his! Water Celebration!"

"Why you...!" Uzume growled, flaring her powers and blocking the barrage of water with her veils. "Let's go!"

The two Sekirei charged at each other despite Minato's protests, only for a flash of white and lavender to appear, followed by the sound of twin thwacks. Minato saw that the flash had been Miya, who had appeared with speed faster than he could follow and smacked both Sekirei over the head with a wooden ladle.

"Now girls, no fighting in Maisson Izumo, especially not amongst each other!" Miya said with a cheerful smile even as her oni mask aura made its first appearance in days. "I'm sure Minato would be horrified if any of you hurt each other! Besides," she turned and started back through the window into the house. "If anyone here is going to be Minato-kun's wife, it will be me."

Uzume grinned triumphantly while Tsukiumi gaped at the not-so-subtle almost-confession. Minato for his part simply scratched his head in confusion and shivered before sneezing.

"Damnit, now I probably have cold," he grumbled to himself, completely missing that Miya had just announced her interest in him, even if not in so many words. Sighing, he went inside for a hot shower and bed after kissing his two present Sekirei good night. He had work tomorrow, after all.
"So, it seems that my son is growing even more powerful and influential than I had imagined!" Minaka cackled from his dramatic pose on the top of MBI Tower, Takami and the Discipline Squad behind him as he raved about his plan, and his genius, et cetera, et cetera, and so forth. "Now he has not only #08, but 11, 12, 108, 09, 10, and it seems 06 and the former 07 answer his summons as well! GAHAHAHAHAAHAA!

"C'mon girls, ignore the idiot," Takami sighed, turning around and walking away, the Squad followed her.

"Takami-sensei, is it true that your son is Yume's Ashikabi?" Karasuba asked quietly, glancing at one of the few women she actually respected these days.

"Yes, it's true. Karasuba, feel free to investigate him, see if he is your Ashikabi, but be careful. Miya is reacting to him as well, and she might kill you before you can explain to her that Takehito's death was not your fault. Just know that Minato-kun will probably protect you from her wrath long enough for you to do so, but only if he is there when you meet."

"Thank you, Takami-sensei. Maybe now I'll have a reason not to burn this world to ash for its darkness," Karasuba said softly, gesturing to Haihane, who followed her as they disappeared into the depths of the Tower.

"I hope so too, Karasuba. Who knows, maybe they can cure you of your pain and hatred," Takami whispered after she was gone, eyes sad.

BAM! Let it not be said that I cannot provide! 9,000 words of story. In other words (lol!) 9,000 words NOT INCLUDING AUTHOR's NOTES! Anyway, review please! It really gives me a reason to right and tells me what you think!
In Which Minato Subverts Two Scary People

The two days following the large battle that had resulted in Uzume and Tsukiumi being winged had been filled with sleeping and eating on the part of Minato's Sekirei, as they either recuperated from taxing their powers or, in Uzume's case, allowed the healing Yume had conveyed upon her to truly sink in, as the healing had been hindered slightly by Uzume's exhausted state. By the afternoon of the third day after the trying events, Minato and Yume were in the living room of Maisson Izumo in what appeared to be a rather compromising position, but was actually nothing of the sort.

"Please, Minato-sama!" Yume was on her knees and between Minato's legs, begging before her Ashikabi, who looked both embarrassed and annoyed at the situation. "Higa has to be eliminated! He has to be shown that he cannot be allowed to get away with trying to take your life so many times!"

"No, Yume! We aren't going to go in guns blazing, and risk not only yourselves and your sisters getting hurt or killed, but also any innocents that may get drawn into the fight. We've been lucky so far that none of our fights have caused injuries to anyone not involved in this war, but that luck won't hold out forever. Eventually these fights are going to get to the point where all of you, and the enemy, will be using Noritos. That kind of power is best left unused until it won't destroy the lives of those who've done nothing more than get caught in the crossfire." Minato said firmly, his tone making it clear that this was not one of the times that he was willing to negotiate with his Sekirei. Yume hissed like an angry cat before getting to her feet and stalking away.

All Minato could do in response was sigh, rub one hand over his face, and lean back in the chair. He glanced over at Miya, who had appeared next to him moments after Yume left.

"I understand what you're saying, Minato-kun, but in this case Yume is right. Higa has gone too far not just once, but several times. He is a risk to us and everyone else around him," she said softly, laying a gentle hand on his arm. Minato sighed again.

"I know that Miya, but..," he let his voice trail off, and Miya could see how conflicted he was. Miya knew that Minato's distress was not simply over Higa and the current situation.

"What is the real issue, Minato? Is it just that you don't want people getting caught in the crossfire?" she asked quietly, her eyes steadily meeting his. He gave a short choppy nod of the head in response, but Miya could see that he was lying and that he was unsure. Her look immediately changed from gentle to cold and hard, her eyes snapping angrily as they bored into his. "Do you think me a fool, Minato Shahashi? Do you think that I will believe you when you are so obviously holding something back?!"

"Well, what do you expect me to say, damn it?!" he snapped back, his own temper surging to meet hers. He began to feel hounded and cornered by her questions, a feeling he always hated with a passion. It was one reason why he had trained to be so nimble and fast during his vigilante days.

"I expect you to tell me the truth! I am your friend, Minato, and more than that I am...!" Miya suddenly stopped speaking, and Minato's anger was doused instantly as he swore he saw tears shimmering in her eyes. Turning her head aside angrily, she huffed at him. "I don't know what you fear so much, Minato, but if you do not tell the people who love you, all that will happen is that they will get hurt trying to help you after you get yourself into a deeper hole than you can escape from."
With that, the violet-haired woman swept from the room and up the stairs. Moments later, he heard
the sound of her bedroom door slamming shut. Minato sighed heavily in dejection and self-
loathing. This wasn't at all what he had wanted to happen, but it was happening anyway. Didn't
they understand that there were some things he couldn't risk exposing, some demons he couldn't
risk waking? No, it was best that they played it safe for now, and didn't take any aggressive
actions.

Minato tried to ignore the voice in his head that told him he didn't believe that any more than his
family did. He wasn't entirely successful.

Miya entered her room, frustration and confusion clouding her emotions, although she knew there
was a large dose of hurt added for good measure. Did Minato-kun not trust her and the rest of the
family with his true motives, the truth in his heart? Shutting the door with more force than she
normally did in her anger, she turned to the bed to see all of Minato's Sekirei sitting there looking
at her. Yume had clearly been crying, and it looked like Ku-chan and Matsu had been trying to
find out what had happened, judging from the concern on their faces. The Twins were standing
in the back of the room, arms crossed under their ample chests and. Despite their stoic
expressions, Miya could easily see that they, too, were concerned. Uzume was leaning against the
wall near the door, her own concern and even anger clear to everyone.

"What happened, Onee-chan?" Matsu asked softly, and Miya sighed before sitting in her desk
chair. Looking around at her younger sisters, and hopefully her future fellow wives, she remained
silent for a long moment before speaking slowly.

"Minato...still refuses to let us do anything to Higa, even after everything that has happened
because of that man. He says that it is because he doesn't want innocents getting caught in the
cross-fire," she answered, stressing the word 'says' in such a way that it was clear that she did not
believe him. Hikari was the next to speak up.

"You don't believe him though, do you, Miya-onee-chan?" she asked softly. Miya shook her head
slowly in response. "I think he is afraid of something else? I mean, we all know he would die
before letting one of us get hurt, but with Yume, Tsukiumi, Uzume, Hibiki, and I as attack units
with Matsu covering us with her eyes in the sky, it would be fairly simple for us to eliminate Higa
and his operations if we attacked now while he is licking his wounds from our last fight."

"No, I don't believe him, not entirely. While I think he is telling the partial truth, I think he is afraid
of something totally unrelated, something that has less to do with the S-plan and more with him as
a person," Miya replied, shaking her head slowly from side to side. She looked each of them in the
eyes before continuing. "I think that he is afraid of...regressing. Of losing himself to the darkness
that nearly consumed him during his time as a vigilante."

"That...makes some sense, onee-chan. I mean, he knows we would do anything he asked of us,
and that we have to do what he orders even if we didn't. He's afraid of abusing that power," Matsu
said immediately, reminding everyone that while she was a massive pervert, she was known as the
Sekirei of Wisdom for a reason. "With all of us and our power at his beck and call, he could do a
lot of damage to a lot of people if he were to revert to his old mindset."

The other Sekirei in the room nodded in agreement save for Kusano, who was busy playing with
Yume's hair in an adorable attempt to cheer her up. Most of the conversation went right over her
head, but she didn't mind. She and her sisters were there for onii-chan, so there was no sense
worrying. Everything would be okay.

After all, he was Onii-chan.

"I'm leaving to visit my mom and sister! I'll be back in a few hours!" the gathered Sekirei heard
Minato shout from downstairs after nearly an hour of talking quietly about how to best protect
Minato and their sisters while at the same time ensuring Minaka didn't decide to shut all Sekirei
down AND how to convince Minato that he was not going to turn into some bloodthirsty, demon
vigilante of the night bent on the merciless destruction of all things misdemeanor. They glanced
around at each other, wide eyed, before Yume hurriedly handed Ku to Tsukiumi and rushed from
the room, followed closely by Uzume. Ku blinked up at the blonde, Olde English-speaking
Sekirei of Water, and smiled brightly before snuggling up against her and yawning hugely.

Tsukiumi stared down at her, before looking over at Miya with a look of such bewilderment and
confusion that the lavender-haired maiden couldn't help but giggle, though she tried to stifle it with
one hand.

"I think that Ku-chan senses the closeness of your elements, as she does with Yume," Matsu
answered the unspoken question. She pushed her glasses up her nose slightly when everyone focused on her. Adopting a slightly lecturing tone, she continued. "You see, Ku-chan is the Sekirei of Nature, the Green Girl. Water," here she pointed at Tsukiumi. "And Light, which is Yume's element, are both necessary for plants to survive. Therefore, it seems to me that she is most fond of you two because you both are what feel right to her."

"And her fondness for the would-be wife?" Tsukiumi asked, nodding at Miya, whose eyebrow twitched as she resisted the overwhelming urge to 'spar' with her younger sister. Call her a 'would-be wife', would she? She would show this child what it meant to truly be a wife to a good man, a strong man. A man like Minato...

Before Miya's mind could completely get taken off track by thoughts of her future Ashikabi and how wonderful a man he was proving himself to be, Matsu answered the blonde's question.

"Miya-onee-chan is the big sister to all of us, and she's the most motherly in her affections," she said, before freezing in fear, sweat beading on her face, as she turned to look at her big sister. Miya hated it when people said she acted like a mother (not because she didn't like children, she always reminded them, but because she wasn't THAT old) but instead of an Oni mask, Miya had a faint blush and her eyes had a dreamy quality to them as she hummed to herself, staring off into space. Matsu, genius that she was, quickly made the connection and a sly (and very perverted) grin appeared on her face.

"Oh~? Is big sister Miya thinking about having Minato-sama's babies~?" she teased in a sing-song voice. Tsukiumi gasped in outrage while The Twins' heads snapped away from their own private conversation to stare at Miya, who was now blushing heavily with a faint trickle of blood coming from one nostril. "Oh, she is~! Big sister Miya wants to do all sorts of ecchi things with our Master, and have lots of lavender-haired~...YEOW!"

Miya had finally snapped out of the, admittedly perverted, thoughts she had been thinking and whacked Matsu hard on the head with a ladle she pulled seemingly out of nowhere. Three times, in fact. Miya rose to her feet gracefully and departed with a chastisement for speaking of ecchi things around Ku-chan, leaving Matsu rolling around on the ground in pain with three large lumps rising from her head wounds. Shaking her head at the weirdness of her older siblings, the small blonde child hopped off of Tsukiumi and skipped out of the room, heading downstairs to help her onee-chan begin preparing dinner for when onii-chan got home.

"Minato-sama, wait for us!" Uzume and Yume cried in unison as they rushed out the door after their Ashikabi, who was already halfway down the street. He half-turned to look at them, mild surprise evident in his expression and mild resignation in his eyes.

"I take it that you two are my bodyguards for today?" he asked mildly, and the pair exchanged concerned glances with each other at his tone of voice before nodding.

"Yes, Minato-sama. Even if Higa doesn't try anything as you've predicted, one of his Sekirei or another Ashikabi might. Besides," Uzume replied for the duo, a smirk spreading across her lips. "You have an astonishing propensity for attracting trouble, Minato-sama. Besides, is it so bad that Yume and I want to spend time with you, our Master and Husband?"

Minato glanced over at her for a moment, even as he continued down the street, before smiling slightly and shaking his head. Turning forward again, he replied.

"Not a bad thing in the least, Uzume." Uzume and Yume exchanged happy smiles before skipping up to stand beside him, each latching onto an arm tightly as they continued towards the large house that Takami and, at the moment, Yukari lived in. Over the course of their trip, the trio had to put up with a variety of looks from passers-by. Men of all ages were either leering at the two brunettes hanging off of Minato or glaring at the coal-haired youth for being in the company of such attractive women. The young girls alternated between glaring spitefully at the two girls, glaring angrily at their boyfriends' perverted looks towards the girls, and drooling at Minato, who's athletic physique was easily seen through his tight T-shirt and well-fitted jeans. The older woman were either glaring at their husbands for staring at the girls, the girls for acting so "sluttish", or at Minato for being what they obviously thought was the worst kind of player.
The trio, however, for the most part ignored the looks, instead spending the trip laughing, teasing, and flirting with each other, acting like the young man and women that they looked like for once, instead of the General and two of his soldiers that they had felt like the last few days, or even like a Master and his Pets, like some Ashikabi treated their Sekirei. Of course, this relaxed state didn’t prevent the girls from glaring coldly at any girl they thought might try to make a move on their man, nor did it stop Minato from sending warning looks at any boy foolish enough to begin to approach the girls. Interestingly, neither Yume nor Uzume treated the few watching Unwinged with cold looks, but rather slight smiles and a welcoming warmth in their eyes, while Minato was apparently oblivious to them.

SGOTN SGOTN SGOTN SGOTN SGOTN SGOTN SGOTN SGOTN SGOTN SGOTN

Yukari Sahashi lay comfortably sprawled across the couch of her mother's-and now her- large home in Tokyo, watching TV while petting one of the several cats her mother had kept for companionship before Yukari had arrived. Sure it wasn’t her grandparents' house, with its quiet street and rustic feel, but it was nice to see her mom all the time instead of once every month or so. Now all that had to happen was for her brother to visit every once in a while and her life would be just about perfect. Yukari frowned at the thought, her good mood killed. She hadn’t seen her brother in months, and she knew for a fact that he was living in Tokyo now while working on getting into school! However, whenever she asked her mother his address so that she could visit him, Takami either changed the subject or said that it would be better if she didn’t know. No matter how much Yukari shouted, pouted, begged, or wheedled, she couldn't get another detail out of her mother, which was a rarity in and of itself. Still, she would find him if she had to camp out in front of his school with a tent and a sign!

A knock on the door disrupted her plotting, causing her to sigh in exasperation before picking up the cat and sitting up with a pout. Putting the cat back down on the couch (the greedy thing immediately took her spot and reveled in the warmth from her body having been there for so long) she padded out of the living room and down the hall to the front door.

"Sahashi residence, what can I..." Yukari said politely, only to have her words grind to a halt as she saw the person standing there with a smile.

"Heya, Yukari-chan, how’ve you been?" Minato asked happily, pleased to see his younger sister.

"Minato-onii-chan?" Yukari said slowly, causing him to nod in slight confusion. He didn’t look that different did he? His inevitable question of what was wrong was stifled before its inception as Yukari laid him out with a right hook to the jaw. Laying on the ground, blinking up at the sky, Minato saw Uzume giggling on the overhang above the porch while Yume crouched down next to his head and poked him in amusement. Yume’s head, however, vanished after a moment to be replaced by an angry Yukari, who stood over him with her hands clenched in to fists and resting on her hips as she glared down at him.

“What was that for, sis?” Minato asked. Groaned, really, as he sat up and rubbed his now throbbing cheek.

“THAT was for not leaving me an address to reach you at and not coming to visit sooner!” Yukari yelled as he clambered to her feet. She glared at him for a moment before huffing and turning away. Minato slowly came up behind her, wary of further retribution, and wrapped his arms around his younger sister gently. Despite her anger, she snuggled into her precious older brother’s protective arms, a small sigh of happiness escaping her. This, right here, is what mattered to her. Her family.

“I’m so, so sorry Yukari-chan. I honestly didn’t think. I didn’t think about leaving an address or a phone number, I didn’t think about whether you could find me and visit or not,” he said softly, and she huffed again, but this time she did so with a small smile.

“Honestly, onii-chan, when do you ever think these things through?” she said teasingly, and Minato sighed a silent sigh of relief. If she was teasing him, then he was forgiven.

“I’ll have you know I think lots of things through!” he said primly, and both his sister and Yume snorted in amusement. He was sure Uzume had as well, but as the Veil Sekirei was trying to be inconspicuous, he may have been imagining things. Yume’s giggle, however, brought the brunette’s presence to Yukari’s attention. Somehow, she had totally missed the gorgeous young woman with her brother, but now that she knew the woman was there, “protective sister mode” went into overdrive as she pulled out of her brother’s arms, posted her hands on her hips again, and stared hard at Yume. To Yume’s credit, she returned the stare evenly and without hostility, and after a few long moments Yukari hummed to herself and nodded. Stepping forward, she offered her hand to Yume.

“My name is Yukari Sahashi, Minato-kun’s younger sister.” she said politely, and Yume looked at her for a second before smiling and shaking her hand.
"Yume, a friend of his. It's a pleasure to meet you, Yukari. Minato-sama talks about you often," Yume replied rather happily, and Yukari raised an eyebrow both at the suffix attached to her brother's name and the woman's happy tone. Still, her brother had always had a good judgment of character, and she shrugged slightly before beckoning for the pair to come inside, which they did. Removing their shoes, Minato and Yume followed the raven haired girl back into the living room. The cat, spotting new people, walked over to the two new arrivals, inspecting these new creatures that dared enter HIS domain. Sniffing at their offered hands, he sensed that the tom before him was related to his pet human, and that the female belonged to the tom. Purring in satisfaction, he twined himself around in the tom's legs before looking up at the female and meowing at her. The purring intensified as the female obeyed his command and bent down to pick him up, petting him gently and cooing at him. Nothing less than he deserved, of course.

"So, what's been happening with you, big brother?" Yukari asked, sitting in an armchair with her legs folded up underneath her as Yume and Minato settled down together on the couch, Yume leaning against Minato's side unconsciously, still petting the cat gently.

"Oh, this and that. After I failed to get into Tokyo U this year, I got a job with a friend of my landlady Miya's doing construction work. That's what I've been doing until recently. Since the project is on hold for the time being, I'm helping around Maisson Izumo." Minato replied, and catching his sister's curious look elaborated. "Maisson Izumo is the inn that I am living at, along with others, and Miya is the owner and landlady. She is a very kind and wise woman, even though she is only in her early 30s," Minato guessed at Miya's apparent age, but it seemed like a reasonable estimate.

"Who else stays there?" Yukari asked, curious about her brother's housemates. The answer, however, was not at all what she was expecting.

"Well, there is Miya-chan, of course. She runs the inn and is, as I said, a very kind woman, and very generous as well. Kusano is a little seven year old blond orphan that Miya adopted and takes care of. She loves to garden and take care of plants. Uzume, she's the one over on my other side, is a cheerful brunette with a sense of humor and a love of veils. Matsu is our resident tech genius, though she is as perverted as her hair is red. Hikari and Hibiki, a pair of raven-haired twins with attitude and punch to back it up. They're a little bit too fond of electricity, however. Tsukiumi, another blonde, tends to stay on a high horse and speak like she lives in Shakespearean times, but is an all-around good person once you get through her shell," her brother answered, and she blinked slowly before her eyebrow started to twitch slightly. Her onii-chan was living with a house full of beautiful and single women? "Sometimes Akitsu visits. She's a little cold to most people, but I think it's because she's had such a hard life. If Akitsu is there, then Homura comes as well. The two are sisters and best friends, but Homura is as fiery as Akitsu is cold."

Yume smiled a small smile as her Ashikabi told his sister nothing but the truth, even if it wasn't the whole truth. After all, it's not like he could say "Yeah, actually, I'm in a secret battle royale with my harem of sexy aliens, who I live with, and there will probably be many more on the way." Somehow Yume doubted that would go over well with Yukari. Frankly, she liked the girl. She had the same fire and determination in her that Minato had, and her nature as a Sekirei whispered that this girl had the potential to be a powerful Ashikabi. Still, Minato would no doubt want her as far away from this situation as humanly (and Sekirei-ly) possible. Again, a sentiment Yukari would no doubt appreciate on some level, but still punch him in the face for. She continued to listen to the siblings as they chatted with each other, until Minato's phone buzzed in his pocket. He held up a finger to ask Yukari to hold her thought as he dug it out of his pocket. Flipping the phone open, he checked the screen before flipping it shut again. Yukari and Yume instantly noted the difference in his demeanor as he got to his feet.

"Yume, perhaps you would like to take a turn about the yard with me for a moment? Yukari, please wait here, we will be back shortly," he said calmly before walking towards the front door, Yume padding after him in utter confusion.

"Minato-sama, what is it?" Yume asked, concerned by his expression and his silence as Uzume dropped down to the ground beside them.

"My mother is bringing two members of the Discipline Squad here. I don't know why, but I want Yukari inside and away from any potential conflict of any kind," he replied shortly, looking towards the street. "I don't want her involved in this war, either as a victim or as an Ashikabi."

"What do you want us to do, Minato-sama?" Uzume asked calmly, and he sighed slightly before looking at them.

"We will talk to them, find out what they want, and go from there," he replied firmly. The two women nodded in response before the sound of an approaching car pulled their attention to the road. Low and behold, a limo with MBI markings pulled up in front of the house. The rear door
opened and Takami exited first, followed by a woman with grey hair and carrying a nodachi, and another with hair bordering on silver and a cloth bag on her back, which Minato presumed contained her weapons.

"The grey-haired Sekirei is number four, Karasuba, Minato-sama. The second is Haihane, number 104. Both are third generation members of the squad, but Karasuba was also in the first, under Miya, and the Second, under me. She is fast and powerful with that sword, but is also extremely brutal in battle. Haihane is rebellious, and tends to disregard Minaka's orders if she doesn't like them," Yume said quickly and softly as she recognized them, and Minato grunted in acknowledgment before moving forward to intercept the trio.

Haihane and Karasuba both felt their hearts stop at the sight of Him. Their Ashikabi. Shaggy raven hair drifted slightly in the light breeze, hints of powerful muscles showed through his movements and his well-fitting clothes. Graceful movements, much like some jungle predator, but not threatening at the moment. In a single word, he was magnificent. Everything they had ever hoped for.

"Ah, Minato! I've missed you," Takami said broadly with a smile, walking over to her son with arms held open for a hug. Minato smiled faintly as he hugged her back.

"Missed you too, mom," he said gently with love in his voice as he held her close, and Haihane and Karasuba exchanged what someone who knew them would recognize as a blissful smile. He was obviously as kind and loving as they-especially Karasuba- had prayed he would be. Pulling back, he looked them over as Yume and Uzume joined him, making Karasuba and Haihane tense slightly as the other two Sekirei watched them carefully, ready to attack at the first sign of aggression on the part of the two Disciplinary Squad members. Offering his hand, their future Ashikabi continued. "Karasuba, Haihane. A pleasure to meet you. Minato Sahashi, at your service."

The pair stared at him for a moment before shaking his hand one after the other, secretly reveling in the feeling of his warm and strong hands gently took their own, even if only for a brief moment. Both were blushing lightly after he released them, and nodded mutely.

"These two asked me introduce them to you, Minato-kun," Takami continued, and Minato raised an eyebrow at her. Elaborating, she continued. "Neither of them are reacting to Natsuo, who is technically the Ashikabi of the Discipline Squad, and reacted rather...violently when he tried to wing them. They heard that you had winged Yume, and thought that you might be the one for them."

"And what do they have to say about their natures? From what I've heard, Karasuba revels in spilling blood and Haihane does what she pleases, even if it means breaking laws or orders," Minato asked coldly, and both Sekirei flinched while Takami drew herself up, fire filling her eyes.

"Now, listen here, Minato! You don't understand...," she started to say angrily, but Karasuba's hand on her shoulder stopped her building rant in its tracks.

"Karasuba," he replied with a short nod, but Karasuba felt a small measure of hope as he hadn't left or told her to leave yet. She glanced over at Yume, who nodded at her slightly. Hope began to shine in Karasuba's eyes again. Their relationship had suffered heavily as Karasuba fell deeper into her madness, but their affection for each other had never been completely eliminated.

"You know how we Sekirei came to be here, that we were found in the ship, and only Miya-onee-chan was fully grown?" she asked, sounding depressed as she said her oldest sister's name, and Minato nodded slowly in response. "Then you know that we were adjusted in the womb, as it were. Well, for me, it didn't stop at loyalty to Ashikabi and the ability to be deactivated. MBI wanted the perfect soldier, a shock trooper that could obliterate anyone and anything in their path, and it was just my luck that they chose me. They twisted me, using psychotropic drugs and brainwashing techniques to change me, make me want to hunt. Imagine it, Minato-sama. A voice in your mind, whispering dark things to you every moment of every day to spill blood, to hunt and kill your sisters or innocent human beings like they are nothing but prey. Takami-sensei has tried to reverse the conditioning, but according to her it is impossible unless an Ashikabi that truly loves and wants to help me takes me as his own. That will keep me from descending into further madness, until I can be returned to the ship, which has the facilities needed to restore me."
"Minato-sama, it is said that I am rebellious, and this is true. It is said that I do not follow orders. This is true. It is said that I do not care about anyone or anything. This is a lie," Haihane now spoke, stepping up beside Karasuba and inclining her head to her Destined respectfully. She didn't normally act respectfully or formally, but this was her chance to be with him. She wasn't going to risk anything ruining it. "I will not follow the orders of a man I do not love unless I must. I do Minaka's bidding because he can kill me with the push of a button, but I am not a dog, to hunt on command. If you wing me, I will obey your every wish, because you are my Ashikabi. Neither Karasuba nor I would ever betray you to your enemies."

Minato looked at them for a long, long moment before pulling out his phone and dialing Matsu. The phone rang for a few seconds, and the waiting Sekirei and human held their breaths, unsure of what to do. Finally, his red-haired Sekirei picked up.

"What can I do for you, Minato-koi?" she said sultrily, and Karasuba resisted the urge to roll her eyes in amusement. It seemed some things never changed.

"I need to know if you can block MBIs winging notification program long enough for me too wing two Sekirei," he said calmly, and everyone present gasped at what he was asking. Surely it wasn't possible?

"...I can, but I can't do it for long. I can give you a minute, maybe. Any longer and they will track me down, and I can guarantee you that this is one breach that they will not let slide," she replied just as calmly. Minato looked away, seemingly lost in thought for a long moment, then nodded to himself.

"Do it."

"Okay. I'm accessing the network now, give me thirty seconds...bypassing the firewalls...I'm inside. Some worms, and couple of viruses, and they'll be unable to tell for one minute starting now!" Matsu said, and Minato kissed both Haihane and Karasuba hard for about 15 seconds each. Their wings flared and faded, silver for Haihane and black for Karasuba. In her computer room, Matsu gasped as she saw the notification an instant before her programs ripped it into pieces and banished the remains into a cyber dumping ground, never to see the light of day again. Miya-onee-chan wasn't going to be happy about this, but she knew that their koi would never wing an evil person, which meant there had to be more to this situation than Miya, and consequently she, knew.

"Thank you, Matsu. Remind me to give you a reward when I get home," Minato said thankfully before hanging up and looking at his two newest Sekirei, who were beaming at him happily.

"Girls, I have to ask you to do something rather difficult and even somewhat cruel. I need you not to let anyone know I winged you, not yet."

"Why, Master?" Haihane said sorrowfully as both her own and Karasuba's faces dropped in sadness. Did he wing them out of necessity rather than desire? Out of duty, rather than affection?

"Do you not...love us?"

"That's not it at all, Haihane-chan," Minato said firmly, and her heart warmed at the affectionate suffix. "But I don't trust that bastard, and I need eyes in MBI, which you are perfectly placed to be. If he knew you were winged, by me especially..."

"He would cut us out of the loop. I understand, Master," Karasuba finished for him as she nodded slowly. "We need to appear loyal to MBI so you can counter their moves against our sisters."

"Exactly. I plan on destroying MBI before this war is done, and returning all of you to your ship should you wish it. To do that, I need to know what they're up to," Minato confirmed, looking at them sadly. "I wish I didn't have to ask this of you..."

"It's okay, Master. We will serve you from the shadows, and when the time comes step back into the light and serve you openly," Haihane cut him off, sounding like a kunoichi reporting to her lord than a lover talking to her mate. "May...may we come visit you, Master?"

"Not at Maisson Izumo, that's too obvious. If you accompany my mother often, I can meet you here. All I ask is that you try to keep my little sister out of this war. I don't want her involved," he replied, and they nodded in acceptance, making him smile. "Thank you both very much. Come, let's go inside and talk. You can meet Yukari as well."

With that, the four Sekirei and his mother followed him into the house, unaware of the buxom raven-haired woman in a violet kimono standing a few rooftops away, sake bottle in hand as she watched the goings-on.

"Well, well, well. Aren't you interesting, Minato Sahashi-kun," she mused, feeling the pull towards him, a pull that she ignored, for now. "I want to see more..."
"Hold on a second!" Yukari said loudly, holding up her hands and waving them frantically. The room looked at her, pausing in their collective story telling. Once she had their undivided attention, she continued. "You mean to tell me you have more Sekirei than the ones here? How many Sekirei do you have?"

"Well, the ones you see here, which makes ten, and then Karasuba and Haihane, which makes twelve. I know of a few that are currently in hiding that want me as their Ashikabi, but aren't ready to be winged yet...," Minato said with shrug, as if it was no big deal, and Yukari gaped at him. No wonder the other Ashikabi and, indeed, MBI was hesitant to piss him off! He could probably take over the country if her wanted to!

"Now, let us continue telling you our story. Not long after I winged Karasuba and Haihane, I met Kazehana-chan, who had been watching me for some time, and..."

The family shifted comfortably in their seats, preparing to continue the story of how they came to be together. Meanwhile, outside forces prepared for the next phase of the war, and a white-haired man plotted his own son's destruction.

There ya go, about six thousand, six hundred and fifteen words! Make sure to review with questions or comments, and check out my other stories if you haven't already!
"Mou~! I can't go on, Shigi-kun! I'm too tired..." a fair-skinned girl with messy blond hair and wearing a pale blue dress moaned, ceasing her running to sink down to the ground, sniffling. Her companion, a young man with equally messy brown hair, bright green eyes, and dressed in jeans and a t-shirt, huffed in annoyance as he, too, stopped running and turned back to haul her to her feet and throw her arm around his shoulder as he got her moving again.

"Just keep moving, Kuno-chan! You heard what they said, if we make it to the territory of the Ashikabi of the North, we will be safe! Not even the Discipline Squad will come after us there!" he said encouragingly, and the girl looked at him with worry.

"But, Shigi-kun, what if they knew that we were overhearing them? What if it's a trap?" she asked him, and his eyes betrayed his own concern before he forced a grin at her and rolled his eyes in an over the top manner.

"Kuno-chan, I doubt that the dreaded Black and Blue Sekireis would bother with an elaborate plan when there is no way we could stop them. They would just kill us and have done with it," he said reassuringly. Or, at least, it was meant to be reassuring.

On the rooftop above them, framed against the setting sun, a pair of smirking silhouettes watched the pair that they were herding towards their master's protection. They may not be able to help the pair directly, since their orders were to actually eliminate them, but it was was enough to "chase" them in the right direction and let slip the right information while in earshot of the pair.

"Do you think Minato-sama can help them, Karasuba-chan?" the shorter of the two asked softly. White teeth gleamed as the taller of the duo's smirk broadened into a grin.

"Our Ashikabi can get them out of the fight on way or another, have no doubt about that, Haihane-chan. Minato-sama has a good heart, and he's smart. C'mon, they look a little bit too comfortable for my tastes."

"Aren't you enjoying this a little too much, Karasuba-chan?" Haihane asked with a sweat-drop, and her immediate superior answered with an evil cackle.

"Just because my bond with our Ashikabi is helping with my psychosis doesn't mean watching people scurry is any less fun, Haihane-chan. Let's go!" the elder Sekirei replied before vanishing from the rooftop. Moments later, the sound of her cackling was promptly followed by a scream, a geyser of water, and more cackling as Haihane face-palmed as best she could with her claws.

"Yet another fire hydrant destroyed. That makes the twelfth today..." she bemoaned, shaking her head in distress at her superior and fellow harem sister's destructive tendencies. Dashing after said sister, she pulled out her phone and called her Ashikabi. "Minato-sama? Haihane here, got a situation for you..."
"drive you off" shortly. Take care," Minato said into his phone as Miya came up behind him. Her eyes widened before quickly narrowing at the name. She knew that something had happened while Minato-kun, Uzume-chan, and Yume-chan had been visiting the Sahashi residence just from the way they acted, but she hadn't been told what. Now that she heard the name of a member of the current Discipline Squad, her suspicions were going in a direction she didn't like.

"Hello, Miya-san." Minato said absently, noticing her standing there as he pocketed his phone and turned around, heading towards the living room where the majority of his girls were watching a movie.

"Minato-kun, who was that on the phone just now? The girls are wondering why you left in the middle of the movie," Miya smiled, playing dumb. Minato shrugged in answer and offered a fake smile while trying to hide the sudden uneasiness in his eyes.

"Nothing you need to worry about, Miya-san. Just getting some information from a pair of acquaintances. Seems they know of a Sekirei-Ashikabi pair that need help getting out of it, and sent the two here for protection," he responded. Miya felt like crying. Minato didn't seem to trust her enough to provide her with all the details. How could she protect him and care for him if she didn't know what was going on?

As the pair re-entered the living room, all of Minato's Sekirei looked up and, seeing the serious look on his face, placed their full attention on him, with little Kusano pausing the movie.

"Alright ladies. As loathe as I am to break up our post-dinner movie watching and family time, we've got an Ashikabi and his Sekirei coming right towards us." He held up a hand to forestall any comments. "I do not believe that they're any threat, in fact I think they are planning to ask for protection and, perhaps, an evacuation from the city. From what my sources tell me, the Sekirei is not a combat-type, and wouldn't stand a chance. Her Ashikabi loves her too much to risk her in a hopeless fight, so he wants out. We're going to help."

"Who are they, Minato-sama?" Hikari asked, standing and stretching, her cracking back causing her to sigh in satisfaction.

"Sekirei #95, Kuno, and her Ashikabi, Shigi Haruka." Matsu's voice came from the ceiling before he could open his mouth. The family looked up to see her poking her head down through an opening in the floor boards. Smirking slightly, she adjusted her glasses. "I detected them entering your territory, Minato-koi, since I have satellites dedicated to watching it for any threats. It found them and ID'd them seconds after they crossed in. #4 and #104 stopped pursuing them immediately."

Miya's hands tightened so much at the mention of her most hated sibling that, had she been holding anything, it would have shattered instantly under the pressure. As it was, her nails cut into her skin and drew blood.

"Excellent, excellent. Hikari, Hibiki, Yume, Tsukiumi. You four come with me to pick them up. We will return them here for the moment. After they're safe, we can devise a plan for evacuating them," Minato said with a small smile and a nod of thanks to his red-haired Sekirei. The four named girls nodded and hastened from the room to change into their preferred combat outfits.

Glancing over at Uzume and Kusano, he smiled and shook his head at their questioning looks. "You two and Matsu stay here. I don't want to have all of us gone at once. Granted, Miya can keep the Inn safe, but I'm sure she wants to stay as uninvolved as possible. Speaking of..." here he trailed off and turned to said lavender-haired woman. "I'm already looking around for a suitable building or complex to buy and refurbish for me and the girls to move into. We ought to be out of your hair soon enough."

Miya blinked at him in shock, unable to immediately form any kind of reply at his unexpected declaration. Not waiting for a reply, Minato left the room, grabbing his jacket off of the hook on his way out, and opened the front door. Hearing the sound of the door opening snapped Miya out of her daze, and with unusual haste flitted after her love-interest, grabbing him by the sleeve before he could leave.

"Minato-kun, you don't need to look for other lodgings. You can continue staying here! Please, don't leave!" she said, her voice taking on a slightly panicked tone. Minato looked over his shoulder at her, eyes unfathomable.

"Miya-san, you're not one of us. You are neither one of my Sekirei, nor are you really a friend. I am your tenant, even if we have an amicable relationship. You wanted to stay uninvolved in everything, and I'm respecting that. The girls and I will be gone soon enough, and you can return to your normal life without fear of an attack on your home," he replied almost coldly before slipping out of her grasp and into the darkness, ignoring Miya's cry for him to wait.

Miya stared after him, holding one hand over her heart, which felt like it was breaking. First, Minato-kun was hiding things from her, then he said they were nothing more than landlord and tenant, and he was planning on leaving her! All because she hesitated to tell him how she felt.
about him.

"Does he truly believe that I don't want them here, that he is nothing more than a tenant to me? Does he not trust me? Does he see me as a threat? Is that why he is keeping secrets from me? Have I not made my affection for him clear enough? Does he...not want to be around me anymore?" Miya thought to herself, tears brimming in her eyes at her mental and emotional agony. She couldn't deny it any longer, she was in love with her raven-haired young friend, but she couldn't bear the thought of letting herself love and lose another like she had Takehito.

"You're losing him anyway, fool," her mind whispered to her. Sadly, she realized she had no rebuttal to that.

Sitting down on the stoop, Miya cried for the first time in a long time. Her heart was breaking, and she had no idea what to do.

Was she to ignore the love she felt for Minato, and remain loyal to Takehito's memory?

Or was she to forget Takehito and move on with Minato?

What was the right path to take?

In her self-absorbed state of grief, she didn't see the two shadows, each unseen by the other, watching her in the night. One vanished in a swirl of flower petals after a moment of self-reflection, while a single tear tracked down the cheek of the other as its owner longed to comfort her sister, but knew she couldn't. With the swirl of a cloak and a flash of grey hair, the second shadow vanished to return to her duties.

"A little harsh, Minato-sama..." Yume said slowly, not wanting to anger her Ashikabi, but also worried about her big sister.

"I regret it, but it was necessary. Miya wanted to stay uninvolved, and that is precisely what we're going to give her," the raven haired young man replied with a decent semblance of calm, not wanting to add that he wanted to leave before he couldn't. He knew he was highly attracted to Miya, with her long and sweet-smelling lavender locks along with her kind and gentle nature. He wasn't willing to risk anything by staying much longer. Besides, it just wasn't fair to her that they stayed in her home, bringing the war literally to her doorstep, when she wanted to stay out of it all.

The four Sekirei accompanying him exchanged concerned glances, not particularly pleased with their Ashikabi's plans, but not willing to discuss it in the open. Better to complete the mission and return home where they could sit both he and Miya down and set the pair of them straight. All the romantic tension was causing a whole heap of emotional pain for everybody involved, and enough was enough. It was high time the pair of them were honest with one another and figured out what they were going to do about their painfully obvious mutual attraction.

"There they are," Minato said suddenly, pointing to a pair of teens leaning up against the wall of a small store, sweating and breathing heavily from all the running they had been performing recently. Leading his group over to them, Minato waited for the pair to notice them. After a minute, he cleared his throat pointedly, startling them. Glancing up, the pair shrunk back against the wall in fear, the Sekirei ducking behind her Ashikabi's shoulder as she recognized several of her far more powerful siblings arrayed around them.

"What do you want?" the boy's attempt at a demand was ruined entirely by his nervous stuttering, and Minato regarded him silently for a long moment before smiling warmly and offering his hand.

"Minato Sahashi, Ashikabi of the North. With me are #8 Yume, #9 Tsukiumi, #12 Hibiki, and #13 Hikari, four of my Sekirei. I'm told that you are looking for protection and a way out of town?" he said kindly, and the intense looks of relief that swept over the pair was almost hilarious.

"Hai, Minato-sama," the boy said, accepting the hand and bowing deeply at the same time. "Kuno isn't strong enough to win this thing, and I am not willing to risk both her health and our life together for a forlorn hope. Please, will you help us?"

"No need for formalities, Shigi Haruka," Minato chuckled lightly, releasing the boy's hand and stepping back. Glancing at the still-hiding Kuno, he beckoned with two fingers and a reassuring smile. "Come on, Kuno, my girls and I aren't going to hurt you or your Ashikabi."

"Thank you for helping Shigi-kun and myself, Minato-sama," she said nervously after rising,
before glancing at her older sisters and bowing again. "And thank you as well, Yume-onee-sama, Tsukiumi-onee-sama, Hikari-onee-sama, Hibiki-onee-sama."

"Don't worry about it, Kuno-chan. You're in my territory now, which means you're as safe as you can be, for the moment. Getting you out of the city, however, will be a damn bit harder," Minato told her gently, shaking Shigi's hand. Stepping back and making a sweeping gesture with one hand, he continued. "Come on, let's head back to my current base of operations and get a meal into you two. Hikari-chan, Hibiki-chan, please see to some groceries in order to accommodate our guests. We'll meet you back at the Izumo."

"Hai, Minato-sama," the twins bowed in unison before vanishing as they moved away to perform their task.

"You don't have to go to any trouble for us, Minato-sama...," Shigi started to protest, but Minato waved his protest off casually.

"You're my guests, which means I provide for you. And stop calling me Minato-sama. I'm just a normal person like the rest of you. I've long since given up convincing my Sekirei not to do it, but you I can keep from forming the habit," he said with a smile as he headed back towards Maisson Izumo, Shigi and Kuno on his heels with Tsukiumi and Yume following and watching for threats.

"So, why don't you two tell me about yourselves? How you met, stuff like that," Minato asked curiously, and the pair exchanged faint blushing peeks at each other before Shigi cleared his throat and started talking.

"Well, Minato-san, I met Kuno a few months ago. She was wearing the same clothes that she is now, and it was really cold out, even snowing a little. I passed her in the street, and she just looked so cold, and lost, and sad, I had to do something. So, I bought a couple a hot buns and gave her one. After we ate, I went to get up and go home, but she grabbed my hand and kissed me. Things...just went from there, I guess...," he explained, holding Kuno a little more snugly, causing Minato to smile slightly at their obvious affection for each other. If he had had any reason to believe he had winged her by force, he would have turned them over to MBI himself, but it seemed that such measures wouldn't be necessary.

"I'm glad, Shigi-kun. You did a good thing without any thought of reward," Minato said aloud as they arrived at Maisson Izumo just in time to see Hikari and Hibiki landing in the yard after scampering across the rooftops with the groceries. Telling his Sekirei to take the pair into the living room and relax, he went in search of Miya, intent on apologizing for his harsh words. He had meant what he said, but the way he had said it was both cruel and rude. So absorbed was he in planning what to say and how to say it, he didn't notice an equally absorbed Miya coming towards him until they collided. Tumbling to the ground, Minato instinctively cradled the lavender-haired beauty against his chest protectively. Wincing slightly from the pain of striking the floor, he looked down at Miya as her eyes raised to meet his, filled with tears. Panicking and thinking he had hurt her, he started to babble.

"Ah! Miya-dono, I'm sorry for running into you! Are you okay? Do you need help? Should I call a doc..." that was as he got before she cut him off.

"I love you, Minato. I tried so hard to ignore it, and prayed to the Maker that it wasn't true, but it is. I love you so much, my destined one. My heart of hearts. My Ashikabi," she whispered, before leaning up and capturing his lips with her own in a fierce kiss. Immediately, her shimmering silver wings flared to life, expanding to unprecedented size as they blazed forth at her shoulders, transcending the walls to wrap Maisson Izumo itself in their blinding silver embrace. The very air hummed with power, and downstairs Shigi and Minato's Sekirei were having trouble breathing beneath the pressure of her incredible power.

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Nor was this effect limited to just the building proper. A few rooftops away, a sake bottle smashed to the ground as an extremely busty young woman with long dark violet, almost black, hair pulled into a pony tail and wearing a very short and revealing purple Chinese-style dress fell to her knees, shivering as the power washed over her. It wasn't, however, due to fear. No, it was due to mingled joy, disbelief, and arousal.

"So, Miya-onee-chan, Minato-kun has winged you as well? Perhaps he really is my Ashikabi. Perhaps he can make me forget him," she mumbled to herself. Squaring her shoulders, she got to her feet and let her hair down, allowing it to flow loosely. "But I need to measure his worth. Let's see how he handles my interference in his little Good Samaritan mission. Will he fight to keep his promise, or flee like a coward?"

Glancing down at the ground, she poked the sake bottle a little sadly with her right foot.
"Mou~! My sake is all wasted now! That bottle was expensive too!" she grumbled in annoyance, totally ignoring the fact that she had flirted the shop owner into a stupor and gotten it for free. "All the shops are closed, so now I can't get any more 'til tomorrow!"

She was still grumbling as she vanished to her little hideout for some sleep and planning.

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Across the city, to a lesser or greater degree depending on distance, the eyes of every Sekirei turned North and they shuddered together, eyes wide.

"Ah, hell. Miya-onee-sama just got winged. This game is over and it only just began." was the general line of thought amongst them.

Many went on to try and convince their Ashikabi to stay out of the fights to extend their own existence, unaware that the Ashikabi of Miya had no intention of killing anyone.

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"GYAHAAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!

"My son is truly the greatest of the Ashikabi! Even the legendary Demon of the North has joined him! My son will use her power to elevate me to godhood!"

His insane laughter was cut off as Takami, tired of his egomaniacal insaneness, executed a truly beautiful jumping side kick to send him plummeting towards the ground. She landed with the poise, precision, and grace of an experienced gymnast or martial artist, and leaned over the edge carefully to observe her handy work. Grumbling in annoyance, she turned on her heel and stalked back inside. Karasuba and Haihane exchanged glances before looking themselves. Far below them, drifting slowly and safely to the ground under a large parachute that came from God-only-knows-where was Minaka, still cackling.

"Girls, come!" an irate Takami barked from inside, and the pair of Sekirei hurried to follow her back inside. Karasuba spent the rest of the night agonizing about where to go from here. Her Master had just winged a woman who wanted nothing more than her head on a platter, preferably by the lavender-haired maiden's own hand.

How could she face the woman who had once been her closest sister, and explain to her why she had had to murder said sister's husband and his entire staff, at the orders of their mutual Ashikabi's father? How could she inflict that knowledge on her Ashikabi, for that matter?

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Later That Night

"Miya-chan, why did you have me wing you?" Minato asked his lavender-haired Sekirei as they lay beside each other in Miya's room, Miya half-way draped across Minato as she used his chest for a pillow. The young woman hummed in sleepy confusion before explaining what had happened earlier that day..

Flashback Starts!

Moments After Minato Left

Rubbing her tear-stained eyes furiously, Miya struggled to compose herself long enough to get inside and to her bedroom. It wouldn't do to frighten or worry little Kusano. Seemingly calmly, the shrine maiden look-a-like ascended the stairs to the second floor and entered her room, quietly shutting the door and locking it as the tattered remains of her composure left her.

Moments after that secure click resounded in her room, she was face down on her bed, crying her heart out as all of her confusion, love, regret, and sadness turned to tears. Her doubts and conflicting emotions tormented her, hounded her, ravaged her, body and soul alike in agony.

"Looks like I've hit my limit." She moaned softly in pain, curling up in her bed. "I can't resist the Pull towards Minato-kun anymore. I need him, even if I will feel guilty about Takehito at first. I
can't do this anymore..."

Crawling across her bed to her bedside table, she reached inside and pulled out a rather large photo album and spent the next hour slowly flipping through it. It was filled with pictures from a happier time, from before Karasuba went insane, before Takehito died, before Minaka became consumed by his lust for power. Sighing when she reached the end of the album, she moved to place it back in the table when she frowned heavily, hand running over the binding of the album. There was something off about it. Some thing was hidden in the binding...

Drawing a knife from the folds of her clothes, Miya carefully and swiftly made a single cut, and the outer skin of the binding parted like a hot knife through butter, revealing a thick envelope.

An envelope with her name on it.

Frowning, Miya slit the envelope open and withdrew several sheets of paper, all covered with the precise and elegant script Takehito had used when he had been alive.

My Dearest Miya, it read.

If you are reading this, then I am indeed dead. I want you to know that I shall always love you, and that I wish we had had more time. You made the days and the nights of research under Minaka bearable. There is so much I wish I could tell you, but not nearly enough time. What I can tell you, however, is the truth behind it all. My death, the Sekirei plan, your presence here, everything.

My love, I know that you will harbor great hatred for Karasuba, believing her to have slaughtered me in cold blood.

This is not the case.

Karasuba was tricked into killing me on the orders of one man. The same man that turned her into a mindless killing machine. The same man that meddled with your entire group of sisters in their womb. The same man that seeks to use his son as a weapon to take over the world and elevate himself to godhood.

Hiroto Minaka.

Long ago, he was a brilliant and kind man. However, finding your ship changed him. He became obsessed with the power and immortality your people and their True Ashikabi possess. He wanted to rule this planet with you as his weapons, and eventually other planets.

I planned to tell you so that you could confront him, but he found out. I don't know how, but he did. He told Karasuba that she had to kill me, because I was going to kill you in your sleep. She just wanted to protect her precious older sister.

Now, young Minato and Yukari know nothing of Minaka's plan. They don't even know precisely who and what he is. THEY MUST NOT FIND OUT! It would destroy them both emotionally to learn what a horrible person he is, and Minato would...well, he would fall back into an old habit best left alone.

Do not blame Takami either, she can do nothing to Minaka without risking her child. Yes, I said child, because in truth there is very little of Takami or Minaka left in Minato. Minaka had his doctors, under the guise of a special checkup, remove young Minato's fetus from her womb. Using the technology he gathered from your ship, he grew the young man in an artificial womb, adjusting him through DNA splicing techniques until he was more Sekirei than human. Minaka seeks to use him as the general of his Sekirei army by making him Ashikabi of all Sekirei, and then having someone loyal to him Wing Minato. Only one person can, and that person if the greatest of threats, but I was unable to discover who it was. Protect him, Miya.

Above and beyond all of this, Miya, I want you to find happiness. I know I wasn't your True Ashikabi, just as I know you loved me all the same. Just as I loved you. Do not mourn me. Take what I have learned, find the one man who can bring you absolute happiness, and save your people.

Sayonara and I Love You,

Takehito

Miya was crying again, the teardrops falling onto the paper as she felt the weight of worlds lifted from her shoulders. She felt so...free, now. Free to love her Ashikabi without guilt. Then the rest of the letter registered with her, and she had to put the letter down to avoid crumpling it in her sudden, white-hot blaze of anger. So, Minaka was the root of all of this, then? He had destroyed her family, twisted them and turned them against each other! He had killed Takehito, experimented on his own child, and planned on using her people as soldiers, disposable weapons to take over entire worlds!
Hearing the door open and shut, and Minato's voice, she placed the letter and the other sheets of paper (which she had never even glanced at, come to think of it) back in their envelope before placing the album back on its shelf and the envelope on the tabletop. Exiting her room, she headed at a brisk pace for the stairs, head down as she thought deeply over how to tell Minato everything she had just discovered. So distracted was she that she never saw Minato until she had run into him, knocking him to the ground as his arms came up to cradle her against his chest. She gazed up at him, the love she felt for him and the sorrow for what his father had done to him turning into shimmering tears, and her beloved immediately began to babble in concern.

"Ah! Miya-dono, I'm sorry for running into you! Are you okay? Do you need help? Should I call a doc..." resisting the urge to roll her eyes and giggle, Miya interrupted his rambling.

"I love you, Minato. I tried so hard to ignore it, prayed to the Maker that it wasn't true, but it is. I love you so much, my destined one. My heart of hearts. My Ashikabi," she whispered, and finally, finally, leaned up and claimed his mouth with her own. Pleasure, sweet and strong, swept through her body in an instant, setting her heart on fire and making her blood sing with joy. She was finally his, finally whole. This world no longer had meaning beyond her Ashikabi. Minutes that felt like years dragged on, but it didn't matter, here in his arms. His mouth, soft and gentle yet firm and commanding on hers as he responded to the kiss, free hand coming up to cup the side of her neck while he bent her backwards over the arm she was braced against. Her own arms looped delicately around his neck as she surrendered herself to him. After an eternity that could never be long enough in their minds, Minato pulled back for some much-needed oxygen and Miya gazed up at his strong but sweet demeanor, feeling whole for the first time in her long existence.

A few moments later, the rest of their family had burst into the hallway and the teasing, babbling, and jocular threats had begun, and lasted well into the night. Shigi had been even more impressed with Minato then before, and Kuno had passed out in a fit of hero-worship upon seeing her most legendary big sister. Tsukiumi had grudgingly accepted that Miya could-and would-have the position of "official wife", knowing that she could never best #00 to claim that position, leaving Minato confused and embarrassed as Miya had not released her hold on him for the rest of the night, and had invited him to her room to "lay beside her as husband and wife." Which is where they were now.

"SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT SONT ANGST BEGINS

"Damn him!" Minato hissed, fists clenched tightly as he glared with hatred towards MBI tower from his place at Miya's window. "How could he do that? How could he claim to be my father and pull shit like that? I'm not even human anymore thanks to him!"

"Humanity is more than blood, Minato-kun. Family is more than blood. He may have been the one to impregnate your mother, but he is nothing more than that now," Miya said lovingly, coming up behind him and wrapping her arms around him as she laid her head on his back and held him as tears began to stream down his face. Guiding her shattered love back to her-their-bed, she pushed him down and straddled him, lavender hair falling down around them to shade his face. "No matter what he has done to you, Minato, I will always love you. All of us who join your family will always love you. Minaka may have changed your body, but your heart, your soul, will always belong to you."

"I love you Miya," the confused and broken-hearted young man murmured, raising a hand to brush her cheek with the back of his knuckles gently, tentatively. Then, just as suddenly as he had calmed, he grew angry again. "I just don't understand how you can love me! I'm not even a natural Ashikabi! I'm a fake, created to be an Ashikabi but not born to be one! I'm not even a real person, just an experiment! You only feel anything for me because of his experimentation!"

Growling in agitation as he spoke, Minato pushed Miya off of him and leapt to his feet, pacing back and forth as his aura began to grow wilder and flux more and more as his emotions began to grow out of control.

"No, Minato! Please, that's not true!" Miya pleaded, eyes wide with horror as she felt her bond with him shudder as if being struck by a massive hammer. The male turned his head to glare at her, and she gasped as she saw his face. Eyes, normally a soft and kind grey were an angry red-gold, and objects around the room began to rattle and shake.

"Don't lie to me! I felt your disgust when you talked to me, just like I feel your fear now!" he growled darkly, and Miya's eyes shot from side to side as the rattling objects began to crumble in on themselves, and her fear increased before she stamped it down and focused on pouring her love through her bond with him, realizing that he was sensing her emotions on a higher level than even Yume could achieve.
"Listen to me, Minato! This is what he wants! He wants for you to feel alone and betrayed, so that you will go crawling to him and be easily controlled! Feel the love I hold for you!” Miya cried, aware of the fact that every other Sekirei in the building was by now flooding into the room. She gestured sharply for them to stay back as she continued to try and talk her lover down. Unfortunately, little Kusano didn't understand what was going on and ran forward, grabbing Minato's arm, only to go flying backwards and into a wall, hitting it with a crack before thudding to the floor. Instantly, everything on the room stopped as Minato's eyes flickered and changed back to their normal grey. Horror-filled, they flickered over to where the unconscious young blond lay before everyone of his Sekirei felt a massive surge of grief and self-loathing before their Bonds to him closed completely. Before they could collect themselves enough to stop him, he was gone, the downstairs door slamming open and shut. By the time they snapped out of it and got out onto the porch, it was too late.

He was gone.

A/N: Now, I hated having to write the whole Angsty part, but it was necessary. My characters lives can't be all sunshine and daises, especially not a former vigilante who is participating in a secret battle royal. Minato reacted precisely the way he had to. I hope you guys don't abandon me over this. If so, I will probably just throw in the towel here and now...
Justicar and Princess

Chapter Summary

In Which Minato Meets Up With An Old Friend, Karasuba And Haihane Invade The Inn, And Kazehana Stalks Minato

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Sekirei: Guardian of the North

Chapter Twelve

Justicar and Princess

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A tall, male figure wearing black jeans and a black hoodie, carrying a long, thin black bag over one shoulder, meandered down the dimly lit and sparsely street in a somewhat seedier part of Tokyo. The other people in the area paid him little mind, sparing him a passing glance devoid of anything other than acknowledgment of his existence before continuing on their way. Soon enough, the sound of throbbing base and chattering voices, muted slightly by walls of stone. The figure stopped outside of the utterly nondescript building that the music and voices were echoing from. Exchanging a few sparse words with the bouncers at the door, he was quickly granted entrance. Slipping with ease and grace through the writhing bodies that filled the main floor of the room, he made his way to the well-furnished bar that ran along one wall and slid onto one of the stools.

"What will you have, buddy?" the barkeep asked, putting down the glass he had been wiping down, and coming over to the male.

"A pint of ale and a pint of blood..." the male said, sotto voce, and the barkeep's eyes widened and narrowed so slightly the average human would have missed it, but the speaker didn't, and inclined his head slightly at the inquisitive disbelief in the older man's eyes.

"Buy men without a name." the barkeep finished just as quietly, looking the stranger over before pouring an ale and plunking it down on the counter for him. "I'll send word up to Hime-sama*

"Thank you kindly." the stranger said cheerfully, taking a sip of his ale as the barkeep walked down the bar slightly to pick up the small phone hanging on the wall. After speaking into it for a moment, and listening a moment more, he hung back up and returned to his previous place, no longer looking nor speaking to the stranger. A few moments later, the stranger stiffened slightly mid-sip before continuing as though he hadn't. A hand landed on his shoulder, griping it tightly, and in a flash the stranger's free hand had said wrist in a painfully-tight grip, one tight enough that he could hear bones creaking in his victim's arm.

"Hime-sama asked us to take you directly to her, sir. Please, release my companion and follow me." one of the two bouncers standing there said calmly, seemingly ignoring the discomfort said companion was in. The stranger finished his ale before getting to his feet and dropping a couple of bills into the tip jar for the bartender, who thanked him as he turned around, releasing his victim's wrist and following the un-aggressive bouncer away from the bar.

After moving through the writhing crowd, he was directed to step into a small lift, and to remember to show the proper respect to Hime-sama, otherwise he might find himself waking up naked and bloody in an alleyway...if he was lucky.

Stepping out of the lift, the stranger made his way into the dramatically dim balcony that overlooked the entire club, and found himself facing a beautiful young woman with coal-black hair, bright green eyes, and a scar over her left eye as she reclined languidly across a large and plush armchair, a trio of younger but equally gorgeous girls sitting on small cushions around her feet, eyes bright as they looked at the strange young man who had been deemed worthy of Hime-sama's personal attention.

"You know, it's been quite a while since I've heard that code phrase." Hime mused to herself, eyeing the stranger with a small smile and a twinkle of mischief in her eyes. Glancing around the guards around the edge of the booth, she snapped her fingers, and pointed at the lift, resulting in a simultaneous bow and withdrawal of each of them, leaving the stranger alone with Hime and her three girls. The smile became a full blown grin as they looked at the strange young man who had been deemed worthy of Hime-sama's personal attention.

"Take that damn hood off, Minato, you look like the kind of person we used to beat up together."
The stranger pulled his hood back to reveal the smiling face of one Mintao Sahashi.

Miya stared blankly at the ceiling of her bedroom, her thoughts chaotic and pained. Three days had passed since Minato had vanished into the night, and despite the considerable resources of his Sekirei, allies, friends, and family, he was still nowhere to be found. No hints, sightings, not even the faintest whisper of where he could be or had been during that time, and they were all being forcefully reminded of the skills he seemed to have gained during his time as a vigilante.

Miya sighed and rolled onto her side, staring at a picture of Minato that had taken up residence there before he had left, one that had been taken by Seo. Minato stood in the center, eyes bright with laughter, a broad smile on his face. Kusano was sitting on his shoulders, Uzume, Akitsu, and the Twins on his left, with Yume, Tsukiumi, and an embarrassed-looking Homura on his right. Leaning against his chest, smiling peacefully, was herself, with a squirming Matsu under her foot after an attempt to grope Minato. Her eyes traced over his happy visage and down to her own, and from thence to the powerful arms wrapped around her waist, and her heart ached to feel that warmth and strength behind and around her again.

Another thought came to her, and she grimaced heavily as she considered the Sekirei that weren't in the picture. Karasuba and Haihane had been absolutely furious when they found out what had happened from Takami…

Flashback Start

Their arrival was quite sudden and surprising, befitting two of the members of the Discipline Squad. In fact, the only ones who sensed their approach were Yume, for her familiarity with Karasuba, and Miya, due to her power and familiarity with the auras of all her younger sisters. The front door exploded off of its hinges in a shower of splinters, and Karasuba stormed through the wreckage, murder in her eyes and unquantifiable rage in her body. Right behind her came Haihane, whose normally relaxed expression was marred by a slight frown which, for those who knew her, was as worrisome as Karasuba's own demeanor.

"What are you doing in my Home, Karasuba?" Miya demanded coldly as she rose lithely and (given the aura of calmness around her that screamed DANGER to anyone in the room) menacingly to her feet. The threat in her tone and stance, however, was immediately and totally ignored and discarded by the two angry Sekirei.

"Shut up, you stupid bitch!" Karasuba hissed back, hand clenched tightly on the grip of her still-sheathed nodachi. "Because of you and these other fools, my Ashikabi is gone! I can no longer feel him, and I've combed the city for hours and found no trace of him!"

A flash-step later and Karasuba was holding Miya in the air by her throat, something that shocked everyone, Miya included. It seemed the anger and fear that the disappearance of her Ashikabi had induced in Karasuba had given her a boost in strength and speed.

"WHERE! IS! MY! MINATO!" Karasuba roared, her grip painfully tight on her eldest sister's throat.

"Miya-onee-sama!" the other Sekirei shouted, leaping to their feet and moving to help their sibling, only for Haihane to intercept them, razor-sharp gauntlets gleaming with deadly intent. The group came to a halt, unwilling to risk Miya's safety by attempting to defeat the two Sekirei with force.

"Karasuba, let Miya go! This isn't her fault! It's NO ONE'S fault but Minaka's!" Yume cried, stepping forward to just out of Haihane's reach, and Karasuba turned her head slightly to glare at her, eyes red from anger and from crying. "Kara-chan, please, let us tell you what happened. Please…trust me?"

The grey-haired Sekirei looked conflicted for a moment, before giving a soft growl of anger and frustration, and tossed Miya to their siblings before stalking into the living room and dropping into one of the armchairs, nodachi laid across her legs.

"Talk." Was all she said, and they did.

For the next several hours, Miya and the others explained to the pair of Squad members about the fight with Higa, where Minato displayed stamina and agility that no human should possess. They outlined the other oddities surrounding their mutual Ashikabi, and then finally spoke of the discovery that Minato was hardly human any longer, and who had done such a thing to him. Haihane had been horrified and deeply worried about her beloved Master, but Karasuba's concern melted before the incredible furnace of her rage.

"Minaka! Damn that wretch to the depths of Hell, Breaker take him! I'll cleave him in two and send him there myself!" the incensed swordswoman roared, getting to her feet with lethal grace,
only to be stopped by the iron grip of Miya, who met the resulting glare and killing intent with steely calm. “Miya, let me go NOW! Minaka must suffer for this!”

“And he will, Karasuba, but not until we find and bring our beloved back to us. He is not safe in the city alone at night, especially not as distracted and emotionally conflicted as he is right now.” The lavender haired Sekirei responded calmly, and Karasuba hissed in rejection, causing her to continue. “Protecting our Ashikabi is far more important than vengeance, Kara-chan. Minaka’s time will come.”

“It had better.” Karasuba snarled, before closing her eyes and taking a deep breath, trying to calm herself. After a minute or so, they opened again, and she nodded shortly to Miya, who removed her hand. Turning on her heel, cloak swirling around her, Karasuba stalked towards the door, yelling over her shoulder. “What are you bimbos waiting for? Get your asses in gear, we’ve an Ashikabi to find!”

Flashback Ends

They had searched for hours each day, working in rotating shifts so that some of them were always on the hunt, but it seemed that the skills Minato had gathered in his misspent youth had not faded, as they had come up with nothing. The thought of searching the other territories never crossed their minds.

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Minato smiled happily from his own comfortable chair, nursing a drink as he chatted amiably with one of his oldest and closest friends: twenty-three year-old Yuri Suzuki, also known as “Hime”, head of the only all-female yakuza group in existence. Originally formed by Yuri's grandmother during the second World War, it was primarily a form of "underground railroad", to use the American phrase, whose purpose was to smuggle, hide, or rescue “comfort women” from the militarist ultra-radicalist loyalists that had taken over the country during that time. Over time, it grew into the second most powerful group in the country, bested only by the Yamaguchi, with whom they had an alliance of sorts.

Now, the family kept to much the same purpose, using such means as nightclubs, bars, and gambling parlors to acquire funds, which were used to create shelters and new identities for abused women across the country. Of course, it wasn't to say that they were paragons of virtue. Blood had been spilt many a time by Yuri and her people, for one reason or another, and all were actively hunted by law enforcement.

All of this made their friendship all the stranger, of course. Yuri and her family were the kind of people that were usually on Minato's hit list, but he and Yuri had...something of a history, and the coal-haired girl had been like a big sister to Yukari for a number of years whenever Yuri would visit her family holdings near the Sahashi grandparent's home.

"Not that me and the girls (referring to her three girlfriends: Hadi, Ryui, and Shala, members of a family that had served the Suzuki for many years) are unhappy to see you, Minato-kun, but why are you here? Last I heard you were living large with some very beautiful women in Northern Tokyo and working in construction?” Yuri inquired curiously, and Minato shook his head slightly, unsurprised that his friend had been keeping tabs on him.

"I can’t tell you everything, Yuri, just that I’m in a pretty tough situation, and the stress got to me. I hurt someone I care about pretty badly, and I just...” he gritted his teeth and shook his head angrily, harshly chastising himself for his actions again. "I just ran. I just wanted to get away from it all, so I disappeared and started making my way here.”

Yuri stared at his bowed head and depressed form for a moment, before glancing at the eldest of the three sisters that sat in their preferred place around his feet. With a flick of her finger and an utterance of the girl's name, she communicated her orders, and Hadi rose to her feet. Striding over to Minato, she looked at him for a moment before smacking him sharply across the top of his head. Ignoring his yelp, she turned on her heel and returned to fold herself back onto her cushion at her Mistress/lover's feet.

"Damnit, what was that for?” Minato hissed, rubbing his head gingerly as he glared at Hadi and Yuri equally. Hadi, despite being tall and slim, was quite capable physically, and thus that smack had hurt a fair amount.

"For being a damn fool, Minato.” Yuri responded frostily. She glared at him for a long moment before scoffing and continuing with a sneer. “You’re a lot of things, Minato, but I never took you for a coward!”

"Don't you dare call me a coward, Yuri!” Mintao growled lowly, his proverbial hackles raising at one of the few insults that had ever managed to get under his skin, despite his and his grandfather's best efforts. "You cannot even begin to comprehend the pressure I am under right now, the risks being taken! I have the lives of a dozen, if not more, relying on every action I make, on every
Yuri watched with raised eyebrows as her normally unflappable friend stood up and paced over to the railing overlooking the club, knuckles white as he gripped it tightly enough that it gave a soft groan of protest. She had assumed that he had had a bad fight with a girlfriend or something, but it appeared that the situation was far more serious than she had foreseen. Not that her chastisement was any less warranted, of course, but perhaps she would have to try a gentler and lengthier approach.

"Tell me everything, Minato. Leave nothing out." she commanded, and he scoffed lightly, shaking his head as he turned his head to smile at her sadly.

"You might end up wishing you had never said that." he sighed, moving back to his chair and sitting down slowly. He stared deeply, searchingly, into her eyes and gave one final warning. "This will change everything, Yuri. How you look at me, my family, this city...everything. And you can never speak of it to anyone other than those who already know, because if you do everyone you even thought about talking to will vanish without explanation, just before they come for you."

With that cryptic yet menacing warning, Minato leaned back in his chair and, after a moment of gathering his thoughts, began to speak.

"You might have noticed that there have been odd happenings around the city, especially since MBI took the place over lock, stock, and barrel?" he inquired, and Yuri nodded with a frown. The fact that he was asking meant it was more than a business venture taken to the extreme, which she supposed didn't surprise her. One doesn't buy the capital city of a nation out from under said nation for fun. Actually, now that she thought about it, Minaka might. The man was reputed to be certifiably insane, but even insanity had its purpose... She was drawn from her musing as he continued. "That's because there is a tournament, a Battle Royal going on inside the city, one where the participants have to fight or die. That's why he took over the city and has checkpoints going in and out, so that his troops can keep 'his' fighters trapped here. All the strange things happening around the city? Battles between participants."

"Minato-sama," Hadi started respectfully, only to stop and flush slightly as he raised an eyebrow and gave her a chastising look. Correcting herself, she started over. "Minato-kun, some of the things you're attributing to these fights are ludicrous. Water mains bursting, streets filled with craters, collapsing buildings..."

"All from battles between Sekirei." Minato told her, before making the obvious progression into just what a Sekirei was. He explained that they were aliens, despite looking perfectly human, of inhuman strength and powers. He used the examples of his own, starting with Miya, who could cut battleships in half with a swing of her sword. Tsukiumi, Homura, Akitsu, and the Twins, who bent the elements themselves to their will. Of Kuu, who literally controlled life itself. Yes, she could only grow plants right now, but would power expand as she grew older. Finally, he told them of Yume, his first Sekirei, who controlled Light itself.

"You're insane, Minato, this whole story is utterly insane." Yuri declared flatly, eyeing him with something akin to worried speculation. "Have you been hurt, ate or drank anything strange recently?"

"Were it so simple." Minato scoffed lightly, shaking his head in amused chagrin. "No, I am deadly serious. Unfortunately, due to the problem I mentioned earlier, I fear I may be on the outs with my Sekirei, so I have little to offer you in the way of proof..."

"Not needed, I'll believe you, albeit with skepticism, for the time being. Least I can do for an old friend." Yuri replied a trifle dismissively, her brow furrowed as she considered him intensely. "I'm going to assume that you had a fight of some sort with some of your Sekirei, and since you felt responsible and guilty, you tried to run from the situation."

"More or less. I hurt little Kusano. I didn't mean to, didn't want to. One minute I find out a...horrible truth, and in the next she is slumped against the wall unconscious because I threw her into it." Minato told her, voice harsh with guilt and self-condemnation. "They trust me to care for and watch over them, and instead I hurt one of them just because I was feeling sad and angry. It's unacceptable."

"Perhaps it is." Yuri agreed thoughtfully, watching his shoulders slump slightly before she continued. "However, it is also very human, and I am sure that they don't condemn you for it."

"But I condemn myself!" he retorted sharply before sighing and shaking his head with an upheld hand to ward of her rebuttal before she could make it. "At any rate, the big issue I have right now is that many Sekirei and their Ashikabi truly love each other, and are unwilling to risk what they have and each other's safety over this stupid game. I need a way to smuggle them out of the city, or at least hide them until I finish this."
"Finish this?" Yuri asked, raising an eyebrow at his wording, and his mouth twisted into a sardonic smile.

"I'm the most powerful Ashikabi involved. The entire northern district of the city is under my direct control, and everyone knows it. I've tangled with both the East and South a couple of time, and both times they were forced to retreat worse off then they started." he explained to her, getting slightly startled looks in response. "The Ashikabi of the West has a temperament similar to mine. He only wings willing Sekirei, and doesn't seem to care about anything other than keeping his safely close to himself."

"I presume that you four are the most powerful, as you said, but that there are many more that have only a single Sekirei, maybe two? These are the ones you want to help, since they are too weak to fight any of the major players."

"Exactly. For example, at our current base at Maisson Izumo, I have a Ashikabi and his Sekirei. The Sekirei is too weak to beat any of her brother's and sister's, so her Ashikabi wants to run before she can be taken from him through death or defeat."

"I see...well, I can have my people keep an eye out throughout the city, maybe start a few subtle rumors about the North being a safe haven. Meanwhile..." Yuri hummed, pulling out a small tablet computer and tapping commands into it rapidly. Looking satisfied, she tossed the tablet to Minato, who caught it and looked at in interest.

"This is...!" he gasped, looking startled as he glanced up to meet her eyes, and Yuri smiled at him warmly.

"The deed and layout to an auxiliary compound in your territory, yes. It has everything you need to have a proper base of operations, as well as access to the old tunnels out of the city, in addition to the underground complex my family used to hide our "packages" in during the war. Perfect for your used, I should think," she said, rather pleased to be able to help her friend with this problem. She couldn't do much against the apparently godlike-beings he and his had to fight, but this she could do. She was about to say something else, when a small phone built into her chair buzzed softly. Picking it up, she answered it. Minato could hear a muffled male voice on the other end, and Yuri frowned deeply before speaking. "Send her in, but I want perimeter three blocks out. Report if anyone else approaches and asks the same."

"Yuri? What is wrong?" Minato asked, a little concerned. His friend looked at him silently for a long moment, before answering.

"A young woman named Kazehana is here to speak with you," she explained slowly, head cocked slightly. "Did you tell anyone you were coming here?"

"No, most certainly not, I am technically in enemy territory just by being in the Southern area of the city." Minato frowned. Something about the name Kazehana tickled at his mind. It was important, he knew it was, but he couldn't remember why...

Minutes later, he had his answer as he shot to his feet, hands diving into his black bag to withdraw his twin kodachi, which he raised into a ready position. He knew what she was, what she had to be. Inhumanly beautiful, with a powerful aura that swirled around her like a hurricane. The very air seemed to sing at her presence.

"Oh my." she chuckled gaily, sloshing her sake bottle around a bit in her hand. "Such a reaction for little old me! Not to worry, Minato-kun, I'm not here to start trouble."

"You'll forgive me if I don't simply take a former member of the Discipline Squad at her word." he returned, and she raised sighed, raising a hand to her face, covering her eyes for a moment as she went to brush her bangs slightly. An instant later, her eyes were visible again, and everyone present shivered in instinctive fear as her cold, hard, gaze bore into them. Her aura expanded almost visibly, wind swirling around her feet as she lowered her hand back to her side.

"Wh-what are you." Yuri breathed, eyes wide in fear and shock. Everything about this woman screamed "danger", "not human", and "run!" to her very soul.

"I am Sekirei number three, Kazehana. Mistress of the Winds, Lady of the Sky. And I have come for you, Minato Sahashi, Ashikabi of the North."

There we go. Sorry I've been on hiatus for so long with this story, I just wasn't feeling it. This chapter is a bit rough and could be better, but this is the best draft I have done so far, and I'm as pleased as I think I can be at the moment.

You know the drill, review this so I know where I am at with you guys.

*Meaning "Princess"
Well, another resurrection chapter for the lot of you, after yet another computer disaster. Mind you, it was hard to do this, but for you lovely people I buckled down and did it all over again.

This chapter will have a significant break from the flashback-storytelling we are used to, because I doubt the world stops moving whenever someone is telling a story. :P

Sekirei: Guardian of the North
Chapter Thirteen
Transition

At the purple-haired woman’s declaration, there was a series of metallic clicking sounds as Yuri and her companions pulled handguns from God only knows where and aimed at her. Despite their shaking hands and fearful faces, Kazehana could see the determination to protect their friend from her in their every action. That in and of itself earned him a point in her book. They knew just how powerful, how dangerous, she was, yet they were still willing to fight her.

“Now, now, the weapons aren’t necessary. I don’t mean anyone any harm, at the moment anyway. My measure of your character will decide your fate, Minato Sahashi.” Kazehana said with hollow sounding placation, and the weapons didn’t waver, though Minato did reply.

“Meaning?” his voice was clipped, though polite enough given the circumstances, and she smiled at him. It was not a warm and kind smile, but cold and calculating, making him shudder slightly and flex his fingers on his sword hilts in response to the malice that the women seemed to be exuding.

“Meaning that I’ll not harm you until I decide if you’re worthy of my sisters’ affections. At which point in time the condition you find yourself may take an abrupt and regrettable turn for the worse. After all, even if your untimely demise were to come about, I could gather my sisters safely and return them to health with the technology of our ship.” She promised him, and he noted the information about the ship with interest and catalogued it before moving on to more immediate concerns.

“...you might as well kill me now then. I do not deserve people like your sisters, or their affections.” He said finally, lowering his hands back to his sides, blade-tips to the floor and waited for her response, as the trio of young women behind him gasped together.

WHAM! Minato rolled around on the ground, clutching the top of his brutalized head in agony as the newly-arrived Karasuba spun her sheathed blade back around and to her side from the outstretched position it had been in from its collision with her Ashikabi’s head.

“What the hell, Karasuba?” Minato grumbled, getting to his feet, essentially unharmed besides a rapidly disappearing lump at the point of impact and slouching back towards his seat, flopping down in it with a scowl directed towards the Fourth Sekirei.

Electing to not answer right away, and totally ignoring the annoyed and strange looks that she was getting from her sisters and Yukari, the ash-haired swords-mistress strode through the room and sat down on a spare bit of carpet, legs crossed and sword resting across her lap. Haihane, on the other hand, elected to fold her legs under her and lean against the side of the couch, eyes closing blissfully as she hummed in pleasure when her Lord’s free hand, the one not occupied with Uzume, came down to stroke her hair softly and affectionately.

“That was a well deserved blow to the head for your idiocy, Minato.” Karasuba said bluntly, not looking in the least as if she were disturbed by bludgeoning her Ashikabi across the top of his head. To Minato's chagrin, the rest of the women in the room could be seen nodding or heard humming in agreement, as the unhappy looks shifted from Karasuba to himself.

“That was a well deserved blow to the head for your idiocy, Minato.” Karasuba said bluntly, not looking in the least as if she were disturbed by bludgeoning her Ashikabi across the top of his head. To Minato's chagrin, the rest of the women in the room could be seen nodding or heard humming in agreement, as the unhappy looks shifted from Karasuba to himself.

“I have to agree with Kara-chan. It was stupid of you to say something so ridiculous, Minato. We wouldn’t have chosen you as our Ashikabi if you had been unworthy of that honor.” Miya said with a frown at her lover, whilst Yukari and Shiina were casting surprised looks in her direction at the affectionate name and lack of anger they would have expected from Miya due to the story thus far. Clearly, something had occurred that they were not yet privy too at this point of the story.
"So it is said now, I clearly didn't feel the same then." Minato said airily, waving a hand in a dismissive gesture, as though to shoo the issue away, and every other pair of eyes in the room narrowed at his wording, which indicated that he still didn't believe it to some degree. "At the time, remember, I had run off because I had hurt Ku-chan, remember? Not exactly great evidence for being worthy of you all, was that?"

There was a long, fairly awkward silence as the women considered how best to respond to that without lying. Obviously, what he did to Ku was wrong, even if they didn't blame him in the least due to how emotionally compromised he was at the time. Still, telling him that it was fine would likely come across simply as obligatory reassurance, but saying nothing would indicate that they agreed with his evaluation of himself, something that they wanted to avoid.

Fortunately, they were saved from responding when Minato's phone rang. Checking the caller ID, he flipped the phone open with a grin, inspiring curiosity from the now-observing women, especially Yukari. This was yet another revelation on top of all of the others she had gotten tonight: her brother had people who would call his cellphone. Friends, in other words.

While most people would be surprised and likely offended on Minato's behalf (he was a nice guy after all, and pretty smart too), the fact of the matter was that Minato was never the most...sociable of individuals. He had spent most of his younger years studying or training with their grandfather, and once he had moved into Tokyo, he had been studying to get into Tokyo U. Constant studying and/or training were not usually conducive to forming lasting or meaningful friendships, being involved in a secret war involving super-powered aliens even less so.

"Hey, Yuri-hime. What is it?" he asked, sounding fairly cheerful, and the room leaned forward unconsciously, their focus now on the phone call as Minato's eyes widened in surprise and he leaned forward himself. Simultaneously, Matsu's computer chirped insistently, and she directed her attention to the Sekirei Winging Announcement the MBI servers had just logged. "Well, now that is interesting. You say she introduced herself as Ikki, Sekirei #19? And her companions were Oosumi Orikiho and kaho, Sekirei #87?"

".....!.....?!"

"Of course I understand, at least you know about the situation beforehand. Unfortunately, this means that you are involved, which means we need to go to ground quickly. You are easy pickings for any of the other Ashikabi in the vicinity right now. Blindfold Oosumi and Kaho, and take them to the new base."

".....!.....!.....?!"

"I understand that they seem like decent people to you, and I am inclined to trust your judgment, but the fact remains that they might be pressured into revealing the hideout's location if captured by an enemy Ashikabi, and they can't tell anyone what they don't know." Minato's voice had a fair bit of calm and patience, but also a note of urgency, as he continued to pass instructions to the person on the other end of the phone. "I'm sending a group of my heavy-hitters to help you get there safely. Send some of your people here to get my groups things, as well."

"....."

"Good, see you shortly." He finished the conversation and hung up, putting his head back against the seat with a sigh.

"Who was that, Minato-sama?" Haihane asked, curious, but it was Matsu who answered as her head re-appeared in the ceiling.

"An old yakuza friend of Minato's who just ended up Winging Sekirei #19, Ikki. Looks like things got a whole lot more interesting." The resident pervert said seriously, and Minao nodded in agreement.

"Indeed, and she has another Skirei and Ashikabi who were in her club at the time of the Winging and are seeking an Alliance with her. Unfortunately, that club is in enemy territory, so we have a lot to do in very little time." He began passing out instructions to each person in the room. "I understand you all may be reluctant to leave, especially mid-story, but time is of the essence. Haihane, Karasuba, Homura, Kazehana, Tsukiumi, and Yume. I want you to escort Shiina and Yukari to an address I will provide and escort Yuri and her friends to the new base. You're the only person I have who can convince her that the girls aren't the very attackers we mean to protect her from."

"Don't worry about her, Minato-sama, or your friend. It would take a great deal more power than any of your enemies can bring to bear to fight us." Haihane said reassuringly, stating what really was the obvious, given that two members of the Discipline Squad and five Single Digits were in the group. Smiling at her and getting a faint blush in return, Minato turned to the
“Digits were in the group. Smiling at her and getting a faint blush in return, Minato turned to the
rest.

“Matsu, pack up your gear for transport. Hikari, Hibiki, gather up the deactivated
Sekirei we've been holding on to, they're coming with us. Uzume, Miya, make sure to pack
everything of particular value, whether monetary or sentimental, and get it ready for pickup, then
get the house ready to be closed down. We will be back, but I don't want to risk anything
important getting taken by looters or rivals. Yuri's people will be here shortly to take delivery of it,
and then we head directly for the new base. Everyone understand their jobs?” a round of
confirmations and nods answered him, and he clapped his hands with an air of finality. “Excellent.
Keep your eyes open and return to me safely.”

“Hai, Minato-sama!” the room, sans Yukari, chorused together, bowing respectfully
before scattering to their assigned tasks. Shaking his head in slight irritation (really, he did not
need the complication of his oldest and best-some would say only-friend getting involved in this
shit-show) before ascending the stairs and padding down the hallway to the room Kuno and Shigi
had been living in since their own little "rescue". Knocking on the door, he addressed the
occupants.

“Shigi-san? Kuno-san? I need to talk to you about something important…”

“I told you, I'm not angry with you Ikki-chan, nor are the Three Sisters.” Yuri said
reassuringly to her very newly acquired Sekirei, who looked close to tears as she watched her
agitated Ashikabi pace. The ravenette had joined Kaho and her Ashikabi some days prior, having
helped them fight off another, rival Ashikabi when she saw the genuine affection the pair had for
each other. After the fight, she had asked if they could stick together until she found her own
Ashikabi, hoping for some manner of safety in numbers. Tonight, they had come to this club both
to further that search, and to get some relaxation after weeks jumping at shadows. Surrounded by
civilians as they were, enemy Ashikabi couldn’t attack them without making a scene, something
MBI had expressly forbidden. “Was I surprised to find myself an Ashikabi, yes. Did I ever expect
to have my own harem, not really. Am I blaming you? Of course not!”

What I don’t understand is how you knew all of this already. Is this friend you called an
Ashikabi?” Oosumi asked curiously in his soft voice, and Yuri made a noise of confirmation.

“Yes, Minato Sahashi, he…” she started, but gasps from all three of them cut her off,
and she stopped in her pacing to raise an eyebrow at them.

“You’re friends with the Guardian of the North?” Ikki breathed, in utter awe of her
Ashikabi at that knowledge, and Yuri nodded slowly, not sure what was so significant about that.

“I wouldn’t know about this ‘Guardian of the North’ business, but Minato and his sister
Yukari have been close friends of mine for many years. He is the one who told me about this
Sekirei Plan nonsense and asked for my organization’s help in protecting people like you two,”
this was addressed to Kaho and her Ashikabi. “And helping you hide out until the dust settles. Is it
really such a big deal that I know him?”

“Hai, Minato-sama is a good person, he wouldn’t do something like that.” Hadi
commented.

“And besides, a second-year ronin ruling the world?” Ryui grinned, and Shala
snickered as she too spoke.

“Kami help us all, it would collapse within the week.” The pair then yelped as their
older sister laid twin swats on their twin heads, leaving them pouting at her whilst nursing their
abused heads. “Sister, what was that for?!”
“You should show more respect for Minato-sama.” Hadi huffed, posting her hands on her hips as she frowned down at her younger twin siblings, who stuck their tongues out at her in unison.

“We have plenty of respect for Minato-sama!” Shala snapped back with a frown as she rubbed the small lump on her head.

“Yeah, you know we do, big sis!” Ryui agreed, doing the same as she continued. “But Minato-sama would agree with us, you know he would!”

Hadi opened her mouth to retort, no doubt to tell them in no uncertain terms that Minato could agree all he liked, but they shouldn’t say it regardless, thank you very much. The lecture was killed in its infancy however when the dance floor suddenly went dead silent. While the three sisters had recommended clearing the building, Ikki had pointed out that the patrons should stay for the very same reason that her group of three had originally entered the club. Exchanging concerned looks, Yuri saw that a group of women that screamed ‘danger’ much like Kazehana had all those nights ago had entered the club and were standing in a staggered cluster, blocking the exit as they looked around the club intently.

“Oh my Maker, that’s the Discipline Squad at the front.” Ikki squeaked, sounding terrified as she pointed to the ash-haired woman at the front of the group, whose left hand was drumming idly on the hilt of her nodachi, and the silver-haired girl standing next to her with a cloth bag slung over her back. “Karasuba of the Black and Haihane of the Blue.”

“...I’m going down there.” Yuri said finally, ignoring the immediate protests of her companions. She had a niggling that these were the “heavy-hitters” Minato had said he was sending her way, but if they weren’t she could play dumb about the Sekirei plan better alone, without anyone else’s expressions to worry about. Her poker face was impeccable. The others’, not so much.

Making her way to the lower level, she weaved her way through the mostly still and silent clubgoers to stand in front, she stood before the group of Sekirei and folded her arms across her chest, the very image of a somewhat irritated club owner who was trying to be polite.

“Can I help you ladies with anything?” she asked coolly, and the one Ikki had called Karasuba looked at her with a small scowl, one that Yuri had a feeling never really left her face.

“We’re looking for some Yuri, kid. Think you can help us out?” the Black Sekirei said, and though Yuri was sure they meant her, she couldn’t help herself. Raising an eyebrow and looking them over with a critical eye, she responded.

“Sorry, but this ain’t that kind of club. You looking for that kind of thing, you want to go towards the red-light district. We’re just a regular dance club, here.”

Karasuba’s eyebrow twitched in irritation at the flippant response, and her hand tightened around the hilt of her sword as she clearly was contemplating using it on her, and Yuri tensed instinctively in response, only for a familiar voice to sarcastically interject itself into the conversation.

“I think there is plenty of Yuri of all kinds to be found here, my old friend.” Yukari Sahashi was revealed as Karasuba released her sword and stepped to the side slightly, allowing the ravenette to pass and approached Yuri, who pulled her in to a tight hug.

“It’s good to see you again, Yukari!” Yuri said happily, pulling back and glancing at the balcony, waving for the others to join her. “I didn’t expect Minato to send you out like this, if what I have heard about this so-called “Game” is true.”

“Minato knew only he or I could convince you that the group with me were allies as opposed to the very enemies we want to protect you from. Minato is busy coordinating his forces, so that left the pick-up to me.” The younger Sahashi sibling responded with a faint smile and a shrug, clearly still unused to the situation she found herself in.

“Well, from what Ikki and her friends say, we’re not likely to have any trouble. Not with the amount of firepower you have with you.” Yuri commented, looking the group over again as the three sisters, Kaho, Oosumi, and Ikki arrived to join them.

“It’s good to see you all again, Onee-samas.” Ikki said in a soft and nervous tone, and Karasuba frowned at her. Her blade flashed and, before anyone could react, Ikki was crouched on the floor clutching the lump on her head from where Karasuba had wallop her with her scabbard. "W-What was that for?"

“Stop acting so timid, for Maker’s sake! You’re a Sekirei, damnit, so straighten up and grow a pair! You can’t protect your Ashikabi by getting nervous the moment someone who looks strong comes along!” the Black Sekirei huffed, returning her sheathed weapon to her side again. Noticing everyone staring at her, she huffed and frowned again. "What?"
"I dunno if I should be impressed with how deep and advising you've been tonight, or if I should lecture you for bludgeoning one of our siblings." Homura said finally, and Karasuba huffed again as her cheeks pinkened slightly at the praise in the Sekirei Guardian's eyes and tone.

"Hmph, whatever. Let's just get a move on, damnit." She said gruffly, turning her head away with a swish of her hair and a slightly elevated nose. Exchanging grins, her sisters turned back to Yukari and Yuri, who were now discussing the finer details of the move.

Minutes later, the group was on the move through the city. Yuri, Yukari, Oosumi, and their Sekirei were walking in plain view, though with some caution, whilst the Northern group followed silently from the shadows and the rooftops, watching for any potential threat. Yukari had questioned why not display their full force and prevent any attack through intimidation, but Yuri had shaken her head and pointed out that having nothing in reserve had more cons then it did benefits.

"So, how did you get mixed up in all of this, Yukari-chan? If I know Minato-kun (which I do), he will have done his damndest to keep you as far away as humanely possible from this little situation we have found ourselves in." Yuri commented after a few minutes of silence as they weaved their way through the streets, which were populated few and far by those who burned the midnight oil at clubs or pubs.

"Eh? Oh, I met Shiina-chan when she was out looking for her sister Kuusano, #108, one of my brother's Sekirei. Whereas Kuu-chan is the Sekirei of Life, she is the Sekirei of Death. Many Sekirei have a polar opposite amongst their sisters, and that polar opposite is their closest sibling." Yukari explained, and Yuri nodded in understanding, though she was curious and somewhat concerned by the fact that Shiina was apparently the Sekirei of Death. "Anyway, I helped her look for a while before taking her home for dinner when she told me she had nowhere to eat or sleep that night. I was carrying a spare blanket over to her as she lay on the spare bed at home, tripped, and lip-planted myself right onto her mouth."

The younger Sahashi shrugged with a wry smile, and Shiina took up the narration for the amused audience. Yuri in particular was noticing parallels between how Yukari and Minato had both met and winged their first Sekirei. Though, Minato had done so deliberately, as opposed to doing so via the kind of accident one would expect from an anime.

"Anyway, after Yukari-sama winged me, I started living with her and we kept looking for Kuu-chan. One night we stayed out too late and Higa's subordinates found us. We ran for it, but they finally cornered us. They were going to kill us, or at least beat us bloody, when Minato-sama's Sekirei arrived and took them all down."

"Speaking of Minato, why did you all call him 'The Guardian of the North'?' Yuri asked, remembering the dramatic-sounding title with a flair of amusement. She doubted Minato had come up with it, given his usual distaste for being overly dramatic. A distaste that he had apparently misplaced when he had decided on his Vigilante name, "Justicar". For all his points about it being an ancient title for someone who dispensed justice wherever and whenever it needed to be done, it was still a pretentious sounding, dramatic, and romanticized name for a teenage boy to give himself. Which is exactly why she had been unsurprised, given that teenage boys had a flair for making pretentious, dramatic, and romanticized nicknames for themselves in games and the like.

"It's a title he was given when he started helping other decent Ashikabi and their Sekirei out of tight situations, whether by protecting them, helping them find someplace to live, or other things along the same vein." Ikki explained softly, her voice carrying a strong hint of reverence within it. "We were planning on heading into his territory the next time we felt we could do so safely, in order to seek protection."

Yuri was about to respond to that when Yukari's phone rang, and she glanced at it before frowning and answering.

"Hai, Onii-chan?" she inquired, and the occupants of the vehicle could hear the muffled voice of Minato coming from the speaker, though they could not discern much of his response. She listened for several long moments, making noises of understanding every so often, before bidding her brother goodbye and hanging up. Seeing the questioning gazes of her companions, she addressed the vehicle at large. "Oni-chan says that everything has been moved from Maison Izumo over to the new base, and that the northern sector seems clear for now. We should be able to get there without any trouble or disruptions."

"This is feeling entirely too much like a Shounen manga, complete with harems for the protagonists." Yuri grunted in amusement. Seeing the odd looks she was getting from the Sekirei, she expounded on her comment. "Shounen manga are stories written primarily for men, especially teen boys, which involve a lot of fighting, cloak and dagger, and often involves the main character being surrounded by unnaturally sexy women that want him."
The Sekirei blinked, exchanging glances, before shrugging more or less as one. It was, the decided, another one of those human things that they did not quite understand. Then again, they did not quite understand human beings period. Multi-person relationships were hardly rare amongst their race, after all, so the idea of it being some sort of niche fantasy story market was...odd to them.

The car settled into comfortable silence as they traversed the remainder of the city towards their destination.

"You really have a thing for clubs, don't you?" Yukari commented dryly as the group got out of the car in front of a large, well-lit complex. Pulsing music could be heard from inside, and the brightly lit sign over the door read *The Fallen Angel*. "Aren't clubs the most stereotypical front in history?"

"Yes, they are. Which is precisely why it is the best cover. Everyone unpleasant will assume it is a red herring. Too obvious, too cliche to actually be our new hideout. Besides which, this club is nothing new, been running for months. The complex which it provides the entrance for, however, is only recently activated. Come with me." Yuri responded, walking into an alcove, subtly hidden from easy view, and pressed an small indent on the base of the angel statue that resided there. A faint sound, one so innocuous a passerby would dismiss it out of hand, echoed as the statue smoothly slid back, revealing a platform large enough for all of them to stand on. A moment later, the platform sank into the ground, taking them with it. The faint sounded resounded once again as the statue slid back into place, looking for all the world as though it had never moved.

"Okay, do you really have any basis for making snide remarks about shounen manga, Yuri? Because this is stereotypically worse than any shounen manga I have ever read." Yukari snorted in amusement as the elevator platform they were standing on settled onto the floor, powerful lights coming to life to reveal a long, black metal hallway with a large, bulkhead like door at the end."Seriously, is your family with the CIA or something?"

"No, CIA is even more prone to cliches. This is just part of the family business, that's all." Yuri said, mostly honest. Her family business wasn't entirely what her old friends thought it was, but only by the scope of the matter. "Regardless, Minato-kun will be up ahead in the operations room."

Minato walked into what Yuri's schematics had labeled the operations room, stopping at the raised platform in the center of the room. Feeling very like Director Fury from *The Avengers*, he folded his hands behind his back and looked at the massive curved Sony 4k HDTVs set up all along the railing of the platform, each showing a truly baffling array of information and images he couldn't even begin to grasp.

"Fill me in, Matsu?" he asked somewhat plaintively. The Sekirei of Wisdom smirked over her shoulder at her Ashikabi before cracking her knuckles and 'plugging' herself into the massive network of screens that filled the room using her unique powers.

"Yukari-sama and her group just entered the building, they're on their way." Her voice echoed from every speaker in the room, though her physical mouth didn't move an inch, as one of the platform's screens flashed over to an image of the group of humans and Sekirei walking down a hallway. "I've brought all of my systems back online, it's just a matter of time before I can start searching again. What do you ask of me, Minato-sama?"

"Direct everyone into a good sized room. We need to finish story time and finish this damn war." Minato said, eyes cold as he turned on his heel and departed.

And that is a wrap! This chapter had a mind of its own, totally deviated from my original plan. There will be one, maybe to chapters of 'storytime' left before all the flashbacks are over and we will be in 'real time'. Plan to finish the story soon and start on the sequel not long after that!

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