

**An Affair of the Heart and Soul**  
**By Meriko**

**Chapter 57: Whispers in a Nightmare**

She felt her body shaken, and struggled to rise from the depths in which her mind had been slumbering.

"Wake up, Pretty." That voice again...the voice, his voice. Insistent and always in the same, deceptively mild tone, mocking and light. The voice that chased her through the fogs of her consciousness even when she was able to block out all other noises and sensations.

"Wake, wake, wake," the voice teased, and she shaking, jolting sensation increased. Where? What? The blankness was slowly being replaced by an awareness of her surroundings, although everything was still a misty blur. Reality was something to be glimpsed through the milky, stained glass box she constantly slept in now.

"Wake up, Precious." She sensed a hand fisted in her hair, twisting up a section of her clothing at the back of her neck. Her neck...her body. Her mind reunited with her body once more, although only on a superficial level. Hello, how are you, but no touching, no connection. She inhabited her body, but couldn't move, couldn't talk...only watch and wonder. Wonder why he was shaking her...wonder who he was and who she was...she'd had a name once, she was pretty sure. In a bemused and befuddled drug-induced fog, Marion dragged open her eyelids to find herself staring blearily into a pair of blazing green eyes.

A vague thought flitted across a synapse and was lost...hadn't she had eyes like that once? A glimmer of curiosity that was damped down again, all emotions repressed even further than her thought process by the chemicals injected into her body at regular intervals.

"There you are, Dozy Doll." She blinked, and watched, and processed nothing of what her brain was receiving. Her eyes saw bright green eyes and auburn hair but her mind couldn't even process the fact that there was a man standing in front of her. Her skin sensed discomfort and pulling and choking sensations, but she wasn't aware that the man was holding her by her clothes and hair as if she were a stray kitten. And her ears heard his words but for all her understanding, he might as well have been spouting gibberish.

And then he spoke again.

"Initiate Defense Protocol." The pale face tilted and the green eyes watched her intently, but she didn't notice, this time because of the stark fear that suddenly welled up and obliterated all else. All emotions had been neutralized and swept under some carpet in her mind...all but fear. Awareness sharpened, and she became sentient enough to be considered alive again...to be living again...and that meant to be alive enough to be afraid of being dead.

He took in the wide, flickering eyes and rapid pulse fluttering in her neck. "You remember," he remarked in a complimenting tone. "I guess Hojo's notes weren't so useless after all," he commented softly to himself. "Well then, shall we get started, Puppet?" A flickering green sphere of magic formed around them, and Marion flinched, eyes darting around in panicked reflex. Walls...wooden walls and snow...snow everywhere - piled on rooftops, falling through the air and drifting across the shield, lying all around her on the ground. Everything painted an eerie green from the magical globe she was trapped in...trapped...trapped in here with him and she was so afraid. Frightened, panicked, afraid...heart pounding so fast in her chest and breath coming in shallow gulps...so afraid and not knowing why. No idea why she was so afraid, only that those three words he'd spoken had triggered something in her mind, something primitive and pure, all-encompassing and impossible to ignore.

"See this?" asked a voice in her ear, softly menacing whispers blowing puffs of air against her neck. A glimmering blade eight inches long was lifted up before her terrified eyes and turned slowly in order to catch the light. The limp body under his hand twisted slightly as his prisoner tried desperately to gain control of her body, frantic to escape.

With a chuckle, he asked with mocking surprise, "Why, are you afraid?"

Chuckling her lightly under the chin with the broad side of his dagger, he whispered, "Afraid of this knife? Afraid of the things I could do to you with it? Afraid to die, my little Angel of Death?" He continued his light teasing, constantly moving the blade around her face. "You're going to, you know. You're going to die." The needle point scraped slowly up her neck, leaving behind a thin red line from the hollow in her throat to her jawline. She trembled and twitched, drawing even more blood as her movements dug the dagger into the soft flesh underneath her jawbone.

"Oh, no worries, Angel. I wouldn't be so foolish as to simply slit your throat." The silvery length of steel floated up to wave almost dreamily before her eyes, and then drifted nearer to caress her cheek. "That would be such a waste...one cut and then over. No no, Puppet, we'll take our time, won't we?"

She struggled to breathe in the air that seemed increasingly thin and vainly tried to beat back the fear overwhelming her mind. There'd been means to protect herself, she was sure...some time in the past, somewhere in her mind, there were ways to fight back, to escape situations...she just couldn't concentrate enough to unlock her magic. "Afraid, Puppet? Afraid of pain, afraid of dying a slow, lingering death?"

Yes, yes, she was afraid. She was so afraid. There was nothing now, nothing but the fear. Not even the will to live or the desire to fight back...there was only enough room in her being for the fear of dying. Of all the emotions and thoughts and words that had been stolen from her by the needle, only fear had been given back to her.

No ability to wonder why or how, to question why certain words triggered the fear and why he wanted her to be so frightened...only fear, only fear.

"Be afraid, be afraid little one..."