

# Flickering Flames

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Submitted: February 19, 2009

Updated: February 19, 2009

*Ronin Warriors (Yoroiden Samurai Troopers) fan fic written many years ago. I hope to finish it this year.*

*A bit Mary-Suish - BUT the OC doesn't end up with anyone.*

*>\_\_\_> Mia and Kento are married XD*

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A red jeep rushed to a grand white house.

“Man, am I HUNGRY!” grunted Kento.

“You always say that when we come home!” Mia replied, chuckling softly. “So, is it meatloaf night or macaroni and cheese night?”

“Ugh, Mia, don’t tease me like that, you know I’ve been looking forward to lasagna for this past week!!!!”

“Alright, dear, just kidding!”

Kento carried all the groceries (at once) into the house as Mia set up for dinner. Kento told Mia that there was an awful lot of food, and Mia replied that it was unusual for Kento to say such a thing. They laughed and continued on. During the clanging and banging of cooking, the phone rang.

“Yeh-loh?”

“Hi, ah, Kento?” a British accent asked.

“Cye, buddy! Is that you?” Kento had a huge smile.

“Well, who else would it be? How ya doin’ ole chap?”

“Wow, it’s been 2 months since we talked. Where have you’ve been? I’ve been trying to get a hold of you! Dude, watsup?”

“Well, sorry. You know how things are with my mom and the shop. So, what have you been up to?”

Kento pouted in thought. “No, nothing. It’s not like there are any bad guys to fight anymore, ain’t that right!”

“Ha, ha, you said it!”

“Man, let me tell ya, it’s been boring around here...”

“I know exactly what you mean. Oh, and Kento, go answer your door...” And the phone went dead.

“What? The door--“

DING DONG

Mia shouted, "Hey, Kento, get the door!"

"No kidding, this is weird," he muttered to his baffled self. Kento finally hung up the phone and approached the door. This is like those horror flicks, should I open it? Ah, he opened it anyway. It's probably just Cye playing his pranks!

"SURPRISE!!!!"

The whole gang was there!! The Ronin warriors were all there and Yulie also.

"Cye! Ryo, everybody, what...what are you guys doing here? Hey, it's not my birthday...is it?"

Mia's head poked out the kitchen door, "Come on in, guys!"

"Hey Kento!"

"Hi."

"Kento, how are ya?"

They walked by and sat in the living room, with frustrated Kento following.

"MIA, YOU KNEW ALL ALONG THEY WERE..." Kento started for the kitchen

"Well, isn't this a great surprise, Kento? Aren't you glad to see us?" Yulie asked with his head tilted. The little boy we once knew was now a young teen. He had been staying with Ryo, but kept in touch with all of the Ronins, especially Kento and Mia. However, Yulie had quite a resemblance with Kento. His face carried the attributes of strength...okay, so he looks like a jock, much like Kento...

"Yeah, I thought that you would want to see us?" Sage smiled nonchalantly.

Kento put his hand behind his head, "Of course, this is great! So tell me, what have you guys been up to?"

"Dinner's ready!" Mia exclaimed.

The herd of starving men stampeded into the kitchen, except for Ryo who seemed to lag behind for some reason.

So dinner and conversation took a good portion of the night. Ryo talked about his school and all the girls that he was dating, meanwhile secretly looking for a reaction from Mia. To his disappointment, there were none. Sage continued with his father's dojo after his father passed away. Rowen continued to work for the Mishima Co. Yulie, he's just going to school and doing normal teen guy things. He took up a class at Sage's dojo; I guess the heroism hasn't died away. None of the guys really mentioned about having a steady girlfriend, though.

Summer vacation was coming along. Then Yulie suggested they all stay at Mia's, like the old days.

“That’s a great idea! We can wrestle like we used to, but I’ve gotten better, you know!” Kento didn’t hesitate.

“I don’t know...” Mia whispered to herself. But why not, I do miss it; I guess there would be no problem...

“Yeah, that does sound like a great idea, but,” Rowen stopped and looked at Mai with those puppy eyes, “is it alright with Mia?”

Mia rolled her eyes...and smiled, “Sure, you boys can stay. It’ll be fun.” Shouts of excitement and “alright” and “yeah” filled the room.

When the vacation started, they all came back with their things. Sage and Rowen shared rooms. Cye, Yulie, and Ryo took the other. Of course, Mai and Kento... well, we won’t go any further.

One gloomy breakfast, Cye cooked a grand meal. Ryo woke up early and went down to chow.

“Hey, Ryo, why the glum face?” Cye noticed a big frown on Ryo.

“White Blaze disappeared on me. I just don’t understand why? I kinda miss him. But I’m more worried than anything else. A few days before I came here, he was gone, no trace, nothing. Yulie said that White Blaze has a mind of his own and can take care of himself, but I don’t know...”

“Well, White Blaze is a mystical creature, maybe he has some other business to take care of.”

“Maybe you and Yulie are right...”

“I hate to tell you this, chap, but you worry too much!”

“Ha, you don’t say!” Ryo felt a little better. I suppose I do worry a lot! (No kidding, Ryo!) But there was something that he didn’t tell Cye...that he wasn’t sure he was ready to confess...

“Whoa, Ryo, I didn’t know it was that bad,” Rowen said softly as his head hung low. He walked beside Ryo in the forest by Mia’s (and Kento’s) house.

“But why would White Blaze take my yoroi (the little glowing marble thingies)? It doesn’t make any sense. Is something going on that we don’t know about?”

“Maybe, but you know ‘psychic’ Sage would feel something. Or that Kayura and her guys would show up, something. You should have told us; maybe someone else is missing his yoroi. Hey! You don’t think Talpa is back, do you?”

“No Talpa is gone for good. I don’t know, maybe I just worry too much.”

“Well, stop worrying so much. It’s only been a few days, maybe White Blaze had to take care of

something, and it's not like he could tell you or leave a note. Are you sure that you didn't just lose it?"

"If I would have misplaced it, well, somehow, I would be able to feel it out, ya know? No, it's definitely gone...with White Blaze...."

Together, they sorted through the possibilities. Rowen convinced his friend that he should inform everyone once they returned to the house. Meanwhile, they enjoyed the walk through the lonely forest. Conversation told of recent experiences and hardships as well joys. Rowen talked about his ladder of success in the Mishima Co. Ryo only touched upon school, but he supposed life has been kind of dull. The gloom went away later in the morning. The sun was noon high and shined through the canopy of the trees. But there was one ray that particularly caught Rowen's eyes. Something reflected brightly. Rowen didn't intentionally walked towards it, but somehow the path led to it ever so slightly.

A young woman was sprawled out across the grass face down. Her clothes were torn, and blood stained the fabrics. What reflected was a bracelet on her right hand. Her dark hair hid her face.

"Oh, damn, what..." Rowen horror stricken face stared, "Is she dead?"

Ryo was already at her side, feeling for a pulse. "She's alive, but we need to get her some help! You go and get Sage and call for the ambulance, and I'll stay here!"

"Right." Rowen was out of sight in a heartbeat. Ryo turned back to the girl, seeing if there were any open wounds or broken bones. Her clothes and skin appeared to have been clawed or something. The Ronin tried to find her wallet or anything for identification, but there was nothing to be found. But next to her...

"Oh, no, that looks bad," Sage showed up with a first aid kit. He examined her and dressed her wounds a bit. He opened an emergency blanket and laid it over her. He transformed into his sub-armor and called upon Halo. (Obviously, he still had his yoroi.) Little by little, he healed her, but her spirit that he felt was very weak. When enough healing enabled to stabilize her, Sage returned to his normal clothing. Then the paramedics showed up with Rowen leading the way. They took her away on the stretcher. Sage rode with the ambulance meanwhile Ryo and Rowen drove to the hospital. Before Ryo got into the car, he pulled out his missing yoroi that he found next to the girl, and his head continued to spin.

The three Ronins sat in the waiting room, each wondering what happened to the poor girl. Usually, Sage would get the info from his mother who worked in the ER department; however, she was off that day. The nurses were too busy to really tell the guys what was going. Besides, any of the girls LOVED chatting with Sage whenever possible. A couple a girls even got into trouble for forgetting to get back to work and being drawn in by Dr. Date's handsome son. Meanwhile, Ryo confessed to Sage about White Blaze and his missing yoroi.

"But I found this next to the girl today..." Ryo told them as he reached for the yoroi and showed it to the wide-eyed guys. "And why does she look like she was clawed?"

Rowen asked, "Do you think White Blaze-!"

"NO WAY! White Blaze would never do such a thing!" Ryo defended his feline friend. "He would never

attack an innocent person!"

"Well, maybe she stole the yoroi and White Blaze went to hunt her down. Maybe she's working for someone that's out to get us," Sage suggested.

Ryo looked down, "I don't know, Sage. But we'll find out what's going on."

A pink-haired nurse stepped up to them and asked, "Excuse me, are you the guys that came with the girl from the forest today?" (She's obviously new for not recognizing Sage.)

Sage, quick to stand for a pretty lady, "Yes, we are."

The nurse blushed. "Oh, good. The doctor would like to speak to you." She began walking to a hallway. The guys followed her to an office. "Wait here, please," and the nurse left the room. Ryo sat in front of the desk with Rowen as Sage stood against the wall.

They feared the worst that the girl didn't survive.

The doctor appeared and her soft voice broke the silence, "Hello, gentlemen. I'm Dr. Goth. I would like to ask you a few questions about the lady that you helped. Oh, hello Mr. Date. I didn't see you there in that dark corner."

Rowen asked for everyone, "Is she dead?"

The doctor replied, "No, actually, she gained consciousness in the recovery room."

"Can we see her?" Ryo asked, anxious to inquire the mystery girl.

"Not yet, not until I explained what has happened and ask you a few things. Alright?" They all nodded their heads as she took a seat behind her desk.

"Okay, so what are your relations to her? Are you relatives, friends, or just strangers?"

"We don't know her," Rowen answered. "We just found her injured and called for help."

The doctor eyes changed, "Well, that's nice that you came to the hospital with her. You see, the problem is, the girl has no memory of anything. She has amnesia and no identification on her. Did you guys find anything around her?"

Ryo slouched in the chair a little, "I looked around for something, but I found nothing..."

"Well, that's too bad. I guess I should go get the paper work started, probably another runaway...you may speak with her now." Dr. Goth took them to the room that she was resting in. They stepped into the room.

The girl was sitting up in bed staring out the window. She turned her head to them. Her brown eyes were lost, confused, and scared. "Ma'am, these are the nice men that rescued you and would like to speak to you. Is that alright with you?" She nodded slowly. "Okay, I'll be in my office, just push that button if you need anything." The doctor smiled and left.

The mystery girl looked down at her hands. One was bandaged up. She was in a hospital gown and hooked up to tubes and monitors like she was some sort of experiment or something.

“Hi, how are you doing?” Ryo asked with uncertainty. He sat next to her bed. Her voice was a little raspy and low; “I don’t think things are going so swell for me.” She didn’t look at Ryo or anyone else.

“Sorry,” he flinched.

“I don’t remember anything. The doctor said that I have amnesia. Do you know who I am?” Her face turned to Ryo, hoping for the right answer.

“No, I don’t. None of us do…” he was at a loss of words.

“Oh,” hopelessness filled her eyes. They could feel the heavy energy in the room.

“Would you excuse us for a moment,” Ryo got up and headed towards the door. He motioned with his head for the rest of the Ronins to follow him outside.

Rowen asked, “So, Ryo, what should we do? Do you think it’s a trick?”

“I don’t think so, she seems completely lost.”

Sage took a step closer and spoke softly, “I think Ryo is right. But… I can’t sense anything from her.”

Ryo crossed his arms and closed his eyes. “Well, I think we should take her with us to Mia’s house. Maybe she can regain her memory, and we could find something out,” he suggested.

Rowen, ready to question everything, “Hold on, Ryo, we don’t know her, and what if we find out if that she is out to get us. This whole thing can be a trap.”

Sage interrupted, “Yeah, but at least we can keep an eye on her and see what happens.”

“Besides, Rowen, where would she go?” Ryo stated rather than asked.

“I’m telling you, that’s probably exactly what they want us to do…”

“We don’t really have a choice, Rowen. If we want to find anything out, we should just bring her along.”

“Well, then, maybe you should ask Kento and Mia before we make any decisions,” Rowen gave up arguing.

“Alright, maybe they’re home, I’ll try calling them.” Ryo turned and searched for the payphones.

“Hello?”

“Hey, Cye, it’s me. Could you put Kento or Mia on the phone?”

“Sure, hold on...>in the background, Cye shouts< MIA, IT’S RYO!!”

Mia picked up the phone, “What’s up?” Ryo explained what had happened earlier that day. Mia listened attentively. “Sure, bring her over, we will think of something when we all get together.”

Ryo smiled, “Thanks Mia, you are always so helpful...” He paused. An emotion overwhelmed his heavy heart.

“Hey no problem, oh, I need to help Cye make dinner. I’ll see you later.”

“Later.” He stood there for a while, thinking.

The girl didn’t watch them leave the room. She struggled in her mind to remember something. Especially remembering who she was. But nothing came to mind. It felt like a dark cloud hung over her. Or more like a huge void inside of her. She was so frightened, frightened of this unknown.

The three strangers returned to the room.

The black haired man approached her; “Maybe it would be best if you stayed with us.”

“No, I don’t want to impose-...”

“You won’t be imposing on us. Besides, uh, err, we can help you.”

“Maybe if you beat my head, and my memories come back.”

Ryo chuckled, “I don’t think I could hit a girl-!”

“Thank you. You... you all are very nice, but I just don’t feel right doing this. But, no matter who I stay with, they’ll all be strangers...” her voice trailed off

“Come on, we insist.” He sat next to her and leveled his head with her. He stared into those big brown, despaired eyes. “We have plenty of room at the house and food...” Ryo tried to convince her. After much persuasion though...

“Okay, okay, I’ll go,” she gave in rather than just complying. “I don’t understand why you insist, but thank you.” Faintly, she smiled. And...a little light shined from her eyes.

The following day, after much hassle, the hospital released her. Mia had bought some clothes for the girl, especially since the girl was smaller than Mia. The shreds of her old clothes were taken to a lab to be examined. The police said that they would get in touch with her as soon as they find something.

The whole time, the girl was silent and sad. But everyone sympathized with her. Rowen was suspicious of her. Ryo was just worried about everything. When they arrived at the house, Cye was already



cooking.

Ryo opened the door, "Well, this is the place you'll be staying at."

"Come upstairs with me," Mia walked ahead, "I'll show you where you'll be sleeping." The girl followed Mia to the attic. "It's a bit dusty >cough< but once we clean it >coughchomping on food< but we don't know her. She >chomp< could be working >chomp< for the bad guys."

"Look, guys, we can't be too obvious that we are suspicious, unlike Rowen here," Sage said. "We just have to be on our guards."

"Great, wasn't this supposed to be a vacation? Now we have to watch our backs," Rowen muttered.

"Well, she may not be having such a great time either," Ryo stopped Rowen.

Cye suggested, "Maybe it won't be too bad, I mean if each of us just take turns to spend a day with her, we could observe her and find out what's going on."

"Hey, Cye, >chomp< if you just needed to get a date-!" Kento started.

"That's not what I'm trying to do! I'm just-!"

"I think that is a good idea," Ryo interrupted. "We all would only sacrifice about one day a week, it shouldn't hurt. Besides, if she is a victim, we'll be giving her a lot of help."

"Like helping the enemy, you mean," Rowen blurted out.

Yulie put his fist down with a smile, "Yeah, maybe she'll turn out to be this billionaire and we'll be rewarded! We'll be rich!"

"Atta boy, Yulie, >chomp< that's positive thinking!"

Rowen stood up, "I THINK YOU'RE ALL BEING FOOLISH, I'M OUTTA HERE!!" The Ronin of Life stomped out of the silent dining room.

"Rowen..." Ryo was about to chase him down. He began to doubt himself. Maybe this wasn't a good choice after all...

Mia called to Ryo, "Let him go, you know how he is. It's kinda like when you two first ran into Kayura, remember?"

"Yeah, but..."

"Let it go; he'll get over it."

Cye changed the subject, "Speaking of which, how do you think the war-, err, those...guys are doing?"

The night passed uneventfully. At breakfast, the mysterious girl decided to eat. She showed up at the table in her new clothes that Mia bought her. Her clothes consisted of jeans and plain dark green shirt. On her face was nervousness. Mia, Cy, and Rowen were in the kitchen

“Uh,” the girl looked down and back up, “Good morning, everybody.”

Mia turned from the stove, “Morning, glad to you are doing better. Have a seat.”

She sat down next to Rowen, who was already edgy. He tried his best to conceal his negative feelings. Fortunately, she seemed too out of it to notice anything.

Cy sipped on some coffee and asked, “Hi. Are you feeling any better?”

“Well, yes. I think I’ll feel much better once I remember who I am,” her voice was still low.

“So, uh,” Rowen tried to hide his discomfort, “What do we call you in the meantime?”

She looked down, “Forgetful is all I could think of.”

Cy chuckled, “Now, I think we could do better.” The girl shrugged. “How about Sheryl?” She made a face obviously not liking that name.

Rowen, almost forgetting his suspicion, “What about Tina?” The girl shook her head.

Sage appeared in the kitchen. He said his “good mornings” and sat next to Cy. He, too, joined in the naming of the girl. After many names were poured out...

“I had a cat named Kiahle,” Sage said.

“Kiahle...” the girl repeated. “Kiahle, I like that...”

“Well, it’s settled then!” Cy said.

The rest of the gang showed up. It was known that the girl would be called Kiahle. Mia agreed to take the girl out that day. It was Wednesday, that means grocery shopping and laundry! (Yuck, for me, ?) Mia already started the drying, so they went to the supermarket to get some food. Nothing much happened except that Kiahle grabbed a box of candy, and a flood of boxes fell by her feet. Ugh, how embarrassing! Mia noticed that the new girl didn’t know much about anything, not even money. It was odd, because amnesia shouldn’t include a person forgetting simple things... Well, at home, Mia told Kento of the funny incident, and Kento said something about Mia’s missing twin. Mia hushed Kento REAL quick. The ladies put the groceries up and began folding laundry.

“Hey, Mia, what kind of...uh...shorts...are these?” Kiahle held up some boxers.

“Oh, well, those are someone’s underwear.”

“Are they yours?”

“No, of course not, only boys are supposed to wear those kind of boxers!”

“Boxers? But I thought that you said it was underwear?”

“There are different kinds of underwear; those are called boxers.”

“Oh,” Kiahle looked at them as if she was in awe. Then she asked, “Hey, are these...boxers supposed to have these holes. They look like weird pockets or something...” Her hand was through the ‘hole.’

Mia didn’t know how to react! “Oh no, get your hand out of there!! Don’t you know why that’s there, for real?” Kiahle shook her head. Mia bowed her head anxiously (this is where the sweat bead comes in.)

“Okay, let me explain something...”

Needless to say about what Mia had to explain. Kiahle felt pretty embarrassed and asked that Mia didn’t tell anyone. That evening, before dinner, Mia gave Kiahle a complete tour of the house and showed her how to live a little more comfortable. At dinner, Kiahle joined the Ronins and gang. (Ugh, I’m drooling, I could only dream!!) They all talked about their day. Rowen started to interrogate the girl, but Cy kicked Rowen’s leg. Kiahle frowned and became quiet. But Mia told them about the supermarket incident. Kiahle was embarrassed and told them about Mia running into someone’s cart and the guy got real angry at her!! Everyone laughed, well, almost everyone. The rest of dinner was pleasant, though, Rowen was silently angry. In the middle of it though...

“Hey, did you hear that?” Sage suddenly stopped eating.

“Yeah,” Rowen stopped, too. “It sounds like someone’s at the back door.”

Kento got up, “Don’t worry, guys, I got this!” He stood up and disappeared from the dining room.

Everyone stopped eating and listened. “WHITE BLAZE!!” The whole group immediately ran to see the tiger, except Kiahle who looked around all confused.

Ryo wrapped his arms around White Blaze, “White Blaze, I was so worried about you, pal! Why’d you run off like that?” Everyone gathered around the large cat and made a big commotion.

Rowen asked, “Hey, Ryo, let’s see if White Blaze recognizes this girl or not.” Ryo nodded. A big ‘thud’ sounded in the room. They all turned to see Kiahle fainted on the floor. White Blaze jumped from the bunch towards the girl.

“No!!” Ryo yelled, worried that he may attack the girl. “White Blaze!”

To everyone’s amazement, White Blaze looked over the girl, licked her hand, and nudged her body. He looked towards Ryo with the expression ‘are you going to do something or what?’ (If tigers could do that.) Kento picked Kiahle up and put her on the couch.

“Well,” Ryo said, “It seems that White Blaze has ran into this girl before, and she is not the enemy. White Blaze does have good innate judgment, you know.” They attended to the fainted girl. Sage noticed that Rowen stood by the backdoor, frozen, with a guilty look on his face. He walked over there and smiled.

“Don’t feel so bad,” Sage put his hand on Rowen’s shoulder, “I’m sure it’ll be alright. Besides, one of us had to keep our guard up.”

“Yeah, but I didn’t have to be a jerk about it,” Rowen frowned. “She was innocent, and I prob-...”

“Just let it go. Hey, you could make it up to her tomorrow; it’ll be your day to take her out.”

Rowen smiled, “Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

When she woke up that night, Kiahle had no idea what had happened. White Blaze sat next to her.

“Who is this; is this White Blaze?” she asked. Ryo nodded. “What, how did I get to the couch? All I remember is seeing White Blaze and...and that was it...”

Sage sat next to her on the couch, “Do you know why you fainted?”

“I fainted?”

“I guess that answered my question.” Sage noticed that she was petting the tiger and stated, “You are not afraid of him.”

“No,” she shook her head. “Why should I be?”

Cye answered, “Well, most people are when they first meet him. He seems to like you, though.”

The room remained quiet for a while. People slowly migrated back to the dining room to finish their supper. Chattering went on about White Blaze returning. The last to go back was Rowen.

“Hey, look, uh, I’m sorry that I treated you kinda badly. Maybe I can make it up to you somehow...”

Rowen didn’t really know what to say.

She only stared for a little before a grin painted her face, and that light shined in her eyes, “That’s okay, Rowen, I know that you must have had good reason to. But I’m glad that we can be friends now!”

Rowen smiled back, “Yeah, me too.”

The building towered over them. The sign read ‘The Hall of Astronomy And Aerospace Science.’ They came to Rowen’s choice of pastime.

“What do they have here?”

“You’ll see.”

They stepped in the lobby area. On Thursday s, there’s not as much hustling and bustling, and not many young adults go there to pass the time. There were quiet booths around, some unattended. Many

booths were set up, but that didn't really interest the girl. Rowen knew what she would think was fun, though...

"Here, step up onto this. Now grab here and don't let go. No, no, don't worry, these straps will hold you in, but it's better if you hold on," Rowen helped Kiahle into this funny sphere shaped thing. "Okay are you ready?"

"I'm ready, but WWWHHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

Off she went, spinning round and round, in the gyro. It only lasted a good 2 minutes when the gyro slowed and stopped. As they released her from the thing, Rowen caught the dizzy girl.

"The...room...is...spinning...round...uggghhh...Rowen...you..." she slowly told him as her head twirled like the gyro.

Rowen couldn't help but laugh, "I'm sorry, everyone that I brought here knew what this thing was. I guess I assumed that with you, ha ha hah! My mistake!" He'd forgot that she did not know what was going on, but he still had a kick out of it. That jerk! "Well, do you want anything to eat or drink?"

She made a face of disgust and only uttered, "No...thanks."

Next stop, they ventured over to the dome. They lied back to watch the walls turn dark and into the night sky.

"WOW, they brought the sky into this room! How..."

"This is a simulation. It's not real, but it's still very educational."

"It's still so beautiful," she awed. "Rowen?"

"Yeah?"

"I feel like this sky, that I'm only sim-u-lated, and I'm not real..."

"Don't say that. You are very real. You just have amnesia. I'm sure that your memories will return to you, and your life will be normal again." Of course, there were some doubts about what Rowen said...but he brushed them aside.

"Life," she repeated to herself. "What is life about?"

"Most of us live our whole lives trying to find that out."

"What do you think life is about?"

The Ronin thought to himself, you know, I really can't say in a sentence, and here I am, the Ronin of Life.

Rowen looked at the girl to give some insights about spirituality and creation but found her deep in thought. He chose to let her float along in her sky of questions.

"I really enjoyed that place! I learned so much!" Kiahle smiled as she stared at the twilight sky. She turned to Rowen who was driving them back to Kento's and Mia's. He's really a nice person. He was patient with all of my questions today. I thought he would never...I dunno, be my friend. "Thank you, Rowen."

He looked at her, "Hey, it was the least I could do."

She smiled and turned back to watch the sun fall behind the mountains.

It's dinnertime again. Kiahle talked about her fun day, and everybody else spoke of his or her day also. The girl finished her plate, excused herself from the table, and headed towards the balcony. Meanwhile...

"So," Rowen began, "Ryo, what are you and White Blaze going to do?"

"Well, White Blaze and I are going on a little journey soon. I think I need to try to trace where my yoroi has been or why it disappeared, and I'm not going to figure anything out by staying here...I think there is something up..."

"Oh that's right," Mia burst out, "the police called about the lab results." There was a restless silence

that waited for the rest of the info. "A large animal clawed her. They got some blood that was unidentifiable. Also, they found fur," she turned to Ryo, "not just white and black, but purple and blue." Ryo placed his fork down, "Well, whatever is going on, we'll get to the bottom of it. My hunches so far tell me that this girl is involved with something, and I think White Blaze was trying to protect her, I can't be certain. But why did she carry my yoroi? If White Blaze didn't take it, did she, or who did?" Sage closed his eyes in thought and opened them, "Well, I suggest that we keep a close eye on our yorois. Whatever took Ryo's may try to take any of ours." They all nodded in agreement. "So, >chomp< who's going to spend the day with the girl >chomp< tomorrow?" Kento asked aimlessly. "Mia and I >chomp< have reservations at a nice restaurant and a show tomorrow, >chomp< so it can't be us. Ryo said, "White Blaze and I have important plans." Rowen added, "I already took her out today." Yulie said, "I already have plans with her on Sunday." Sage protested, "But I've got a date for Friday!" Cyé said, "And I got a date, too! Ryo chuckled, "Looks like you two will have to duke it out! Come on, who's it going to be?" Sage and Cyé stood up. "I'm going to win, Sage, just give it up." "Not a chance, give me your best shot, Fishy!" "Alright, here goes nothing!" They raised their fists up... "Ha! Scissors beat paper!" Cyé exclaimed. "Ah man, it's always the scissors that get me!" Sage moaned as he slumped in his chair. Kento remarked, "I dunno, by the look of you hair, you could use a pair of-" "Quiet, Hardrock, if you value you're life," Sage began. But the whole table laughed. "This is great, now I have to find some other time for my date." The victor tried to cheer his friend up, "Come now, Sage. It's not you can't get another date ever again." Ryo smiled, "Yeah, from what I understand, you have plenty to spare."

Just outside the door, Kiahle eavesdropped on the conversation. All she wanted was some water, but she didn't want to hear this. I am just trouble. She turned around and slowly climbed the stairs. Sage was walking out the door to call in the cancellation when he saw the girl go around the corner to the attic. He gasped and wondered. Did she hear me?

Sage came to breakfast only to find Cyé cooking.

"Cyé, don't you ever sleep in?"

"Who else is going to feed this household? I figure since Mia is being such a generous hostess, I could help with breakfast...it is the most important meal of the day. Anyway, are you ready for today?"

"I don't think so. I saw Kiahle walking up the stairs last night after I said those things about not wanting to go. I think I might have hurt her feelings." Sage sulked as he sat down. "I shouldn't have said what I did."

"Hey, you were only frustrated 'cause you lost. Maybe she'll understand."

"I hope so."

Only Kento joined them for breakfast; the aromas of food could never escape the bottomless pit.

Everyone else slept in an hour or so and had to microwave their breakfast. Mia went up to the attic to

wake the new girl up.

“Rise and shine, sleepyhead! It’s a nice day!” Mia threw the covers off.

“Ugghhh, it’s too early,” Kiahle moaned as her body curled to the fetal position.

“Well, Sage is going to take you to the city today, so you need to get ready.”

She sat up in bed and rubbed her eyes, “City?”

“Yeah, they have so much to do there. I’m sure that you’ll have lots of fun there.”

The girl was excited, “Like what?”

Mia sighed, “Oh, like lots of shopping. Great food to eat---!”

“Better than Cye’s food?”

“Uh, different, I don’t know if anyone could outdo Cye, though. Anyway, there are dancing and games, just all kinds of stuff.”

“Wow, that does sound like fun,” she said with a forced enthusiasm. But I don’t think Sage will get to enjoy himself very much.

Downstairs, they both met feeling uneasy. Both know how the other party felt, or must be feeling, but without certainty. Sage painted a smile on his face and decided to make the best of it. Besides, maybe she didn’t hear him.

Sage pulled around with his red sports car. The features stood out like those of a racecar. Hey, he used to race when he went through that phase of rebellion. The ride was pretty quiet and short.

“Whooooah, look at how tall these buildings are! And so many of them!” Kiahle stared with wide eyes.

“This place is so full of energy!”

“I know a place that many young people like to go,” Sage smiled.

“What’s that?”

“The mall.” (Joy! I LOVE malls!)

“What do they have in here,” Kiahle asked.

“Well, let’s look around and find out.”

“Hey look at all those clothes in there. Oooh, and they have such pretty dresses. Oh, no, but Mia said that I needed money to buy them, and I need to use my money wisely.” She paused and snapped her fingers, “I know I’ll just look at everything and pick what I want the most.” The girl turned to Sage and grabbed his arm, “Come on, don’t just stand there, we got some shopping to do!”

Before Sage could answer, he was pulled along the girl’s journey. They stopped in all the stores. There was an electronic department where she turned a knob on the radio and the music blasted in her face. The shock rippled through her body, and she turned the knob the other way. The Ronin chuckled at the naïve woman, and she smiled at the people that glared in her direction. He shook his head; this girl is definitely not normal...

“Hey, let’s go in here. It smells good,” Kiahle continued to tug on him.

“The chocolate shop?”

“Yeah, Cye gave me some before, and they are ssooooo good.”

“They’re alright.”

“Alright?” Then she began to sweetly describe her thoughts, “They are the greatest things to eat. They are so sweet, so soft. Oh, I could lose my mind thinking about it! (I sure do) How could you say that they are just alright?” She walked through the door, determined to buy a bag of chocolate.

Moments later, the girl came back out with one hand behind her back. “Here, try this one. Do you like it?”

“Hmmm, this is really delicious! I’ve never been in this store before, but I guess I’ve been missing

out.”

She brought the other hand around and held a small bag. “Here! A present for you!”

Sage accepted the gift and smiled. How cute. “Thank you,” he said softly.

A muffled voice replied, “Yurm wlcmh.” She was already stuffing her face with chocolate, lots of chocolate.

“Oh, how adorable!” The girl ran into the pet store. “Oh, Sage, these animals are so cute! Can I hold one?” Sage called to a worker to look at the puppy. The worker gave the puppy to Kiahle. She laughed as the puppy licked her, “Yuck! But you sure are cute! Here, Sage, do you wanna hold him?”

“Uh, no that’s okay, you go ahead.” He didn’t quite want the fur all over him.

“Oh,” she smiled and put the puppy down. The little thing wagged its tail as she petted its head. “I wanna take them all home!” She held it again and gave it a kiss on the forehead.

Sage doesn’t usually enjoy the pet store, getting fur on himself and smelling animals. He watched the girl in wonderment at how she was enthralled by such a simple thing as a puppy. It was like she was a child at heart. What was she like before she lost her memory? Was she this nice, or a completely different person? Is she even a real person? How could she know so little about life? But I can’t sense anything from her. I can’t feel a strong energy from her, but there’s something... I dunno, familiar about her...

After circling the mall, Kiahle bought a couple of clothes and one thing that she didn’t show Sage. She refused to tell him what it was, so his curiosity ran wild. It was only late afternoon, so they had a quick meal at the mall.

“So where are we going now?” she inquired.

“I’m not going to tell you,” he grinned, “you’ll have to wait and see.”

“Oh, I see,” she hung her head at hearing those familiar words. After a while, though, “OH, TELL ME, I CAN’T WAIT!! Tell me, tell me!”

“How about you tell me what’s in that bag then?”

“No! I can’t tell you. I won’t tell you.”

“Well, then I won’t tell you where we’re going.”

“Fine, I’ll wait,” she stuck her tongue out. Sage stuck his out also. They both laughed. Well, after much harassment, they pulled to another building. They parked the car and got out. “Bo-tan-ni-cal garden?”

“It’s a very beautiful place, come on.”

They walked through the nursery and reached the back area. What spread out before them was a lovely field of flowers with fountains and benches decorating the way.

“Oh, Sage, this is the best place that I’ve ever been to!” She ran through the flowers and knelt down at a random spot to smell them. Then she rolled on her back to stare at the stars. Sage followed and sat next to her. She spoke softly, “I don’t know exactly why, but I feel like I belong here. It’s so peaceful and carefree... Sage?” Kiahle sat up with a sad look on her face.

“What’s wrong?”

“I know that you didn’t wanna bring me here today because you had to give up your date.”

Sage frowned and felt his heavy heart beating. He didn’t want to confront her with this. “Kiahle, I-...” She smiled and put a finger on his soft lips. “But I’m glad that you did. I had the most wonderful time today! Besides, I’ve seen those dates.”

“How, you couldn’t have-...”

“But they all look so ugly-”

“What? They’re not-”

“-And they don’t look so tasty either. I saw many of them at the market. But Mia said that they’re good

for people to eat, so maybe that's why I understand..."

Sage stopped when he realized she had the wrong 'date.' He laughed, "No, no, not those dates! I meant dates with other women. A date is also when a man and a woman go out together."

She thought about what he said and asked, "So are we a date?"

"Well, not quite..." he didn't know how to explain it, "It's when two people try to get to know one another..."

"So you just don't want to know me."

"No, no. It's just...a date is a little more...intimate. The people dress up a bit and go to the movies or the club or something..."

"But I am dressed!"

"Yeah, but casually."

"Oh," she let out a sigh, "Maybe I'm not ready to understand what is so special about a date."

"Well, it's when a man and a woman get together because they are attracted to each other. They go on a date to see how the other person is, you know, how they behave around other people, what kind of fun they like, what's on their minds. They both put most of their focus on the other person. See, when you were with Rowen, or me, instead of learning about us, you were concerned with learning other things or just having fun."

"Is that wrong?"

"No, not at all, it's just that what you and Rowen did, or what you and I did was not a date, because you were keeping yourself occupied with other things. It's okay...I know that it must be hard not being able to remember your past, so you're trying to get caught up to things. We all understand, you know."

She wrapped her arms around her knees and mumbled, "Yeah, who would go on a date with me, especially since I don't know anything. What fun would I be?"

Ugh, now you've done it, now you've made her feel bad... Sage looked down and couldn't believe what he was about to do. He coughed a little and smiled, "Nonsense. Why don't I take you on a date next Friday?"

Kiahle's eyes lit up, "What? You mean, you want to take ME on a date?" She swung her arms around him, almost throwing him down, "Oh, that sounds great! You're so wonderful!"

The girl was excited all the way back home. Sage explained some of the 'rules of dating' and suggested that she talk to Mia about it. He wondered if he did the right thing and worried about what the guys would think he was up to. But it's too late now, he figured.

Throughout the week, everyone spent his or her time with Kiahle except Ryo. On Saturday, Cye took her to (where else) the Aquarium. Yulie took her to the temple on a remote hill. Kento invited her to a movie, with Mia of course. Then Mia spent time with Kiahle on Tuesday and Wednesday, working around the house with an extra hand. Rowen took her to the library on Thursday, so she could learn more about, well, anything. Then Friday came along...

Ryo took his car and followed the great big cat to the seashore of a remote island. White Blaze chose his route carefully. It took about a week for him to get there. The ferry took the longest time. White Blaze stopped at a random spot and waited for Ryo to get out of the car.

"So is this the place that you wanted to show me? But there's nothing here." White Blaze lied on the sand by the foot of a cliff that overlooked the sea. "Oh, I get it, you just want to rest. Ok, well, I'll just go back to my car..."



But the tiger growled. He stood up and walked over to the Ronin of Wildfire. By the edge of his jacket, White Blaze bit onto Ryo and pulled him down. "You want me to sit down here, I guess." So Ryo complied with his feline friend. Throughout the night, he turned to the mystical animal and questioned why they were doing nothing; however, the creature didn't respond. Finally, Ryo fell asleep by his friend's side.

"Is this a dream?" Ryo stood by the sea and looked at his own body. "I can see myself sleeping. I feel as if that is my body over there, but..." White Blaze appeared next to the shocked guy. "White Blaze, is that really you?" Ryo doubted his eyes. "Hey, where are you going?" The cat walked to the cliff. Ryo looked hard. "Is that an...entrance?" He followed his friend into the cliff. "Whoa, this is wicked? Where is White Blaze taking me?" Further they went into the cliff until they stumbled upon a room.

"Wildfire," a familiar voice called.

Ryo braced himself, "Who's there?" A figure appeared before Ryo. "Anubis? What the heck are you doing here?"

"You've finally come." Anubis's body, covered with a kimono colored in brown, red and yellow, leaned by a wall. His eagle eyes stared kindly at the surprised Ronin. "I have been waiting."

"What's this about?" Ryo relaxed a little, but not too much. "Why was I brought here?"

"Wildfire, you must follow me quickly, I cannot wait here that long." Before Ryo could react, Anubis already walked the dimly lit stairs. The Ronin of Virtue pursued him. White Blaze, meanwhile, faded away unnoticed.

"Hey, Anubis, what's going on, where are you taking me to?"

"I'm taking you to the sacred land of the Ancient Clan's spirits. Someone is there to speak to you."

"Why does he want to speak to me? Wait, the Ancient Clan? That means..."

"Something is going on..."

"But the Dynasty is under control now..."

"No, Ryo, this is something different."

"Is it Talpa?"

The ex-warlord shuddered at the name, "No, it's something much older than the battle between the world and Talpa. It is the very darkness itself."

In minutes, they somehow reached the top of the stairs that suddenly became a new land. It was bright as if the sun was up, but there was no sun. Flowers, mountains and rivers brought exquisite beauty to the land. Upon a rock, stood the long lost Ancient.

"Ancient?" Ryo shouted in disbelief.

He turned to face them. The pan hat (oh, I'm so uncultured, I don't know what else to call it!) left the upper half of his face unseen. "Thank you, Anubis, you may go now." The ex-Samurai of Spring (or Cruelty) bowed in respect and disappeared like steam into air. "So, Ryo of the Wildfire, we meet again."

"Wow, Ancient, does this mean that you are alive again?"

"No, my body is no longer. I brought your spirit here through your dream. It disturbs our spirits' ki and the Balance, but it is urgent that I must speak to you. All the possessors of the Nine Samurai Armors are in grave danger."

"Don't tell me, someone wants our armors, right?"

"Actually, they're after the heart of your yorois."

"What, you mean...hey, my yoroi was stolen, but I found it with that girl!"

"Yes, she escaped them with your yoroi. I asked White Blaze >Ryo realized now that the tiger is gone< to rescue her and to retrieve your yoroi. I will explain about her in a while. Now, listen carefully, Ryo, for you have a quest that is dire..."

During Ryo's dream, White Blaze woke up next to his human friend. A shadow caught his eye, and the feline began to growl. The shadow jumped again. White Blaze turned his head, trying to locate this creature. Suddenly, the thing jumped high above them and fell swiftly down to attack Ryo's unconscious body. It was a hideous skeletal being, with dark fur covering its body. Hands consisted of two long, slender claws and a matching thumbs. The legs and feet resembled that of a bird. Horns protruded from his forehead and arc out like a jester's hat. Glowing underneath them were two red slits for eyes. Two slanted holes replaced a nose. No mouth was visible.

White Blaze intercepted the assault. The night creature hissed, through what, White Blaze couldn't tell. The thing failed many attempts at Ryo's body, but managed to claw Ryo's arm...

"Aaagghhh!" Ryo's astral body collapsed. Through his teeth, he groaned, "What...is...going...on?"

"Someone's attacking your body. You must go defend yourself, hurry!"

"Can't I just wake up?"

"No, not here. Or you'll be trapped in limbo. You must run back. Hurry!"

Ryo picked himself up and ran, even with the excruciating pain. (How could an astral body have pain?)

As he exited the cliff, he witnessed White Blaze and some sort of creature fighting. "WHITE BLAZE!"

Suddenly, Ryo woke up, and his body shot up. Blood dripped from his gashed left arm. He grabbed his yoroi and leapt into the air. The Ronin landed with one knee on the sand in his sub-armor. Ryo stood

and asked, "Who are you?" The creature dashed for Ryo's neck. Ryo dodged the attack. "I guess you won't answer." The battle continued with Ryo, White Blaze and the dark creature. The thing ran up the slope that leads to the top of the cliff. There, it turned around and clawed Ryo through his sub-armor. In the place where the claws made the contact, bright red flashes illuminated in front of Ryo. In pain, the warrior knelt. White Blaze cornered the creature to the edge. Against the huge full moon behind him, the fur appeared to be...blue and purple. That fur, could it be the thing that attacked Kiahle? Well, looks like I'll have to transform...boy, it's been a while!

"ARMOR OF THE WILDFIRE, TAO GI!!!!!"

But nothing happened. His armor didn't appear.

"What the...?" Ryo looked down at his sub-armor in disbelief.

Hissing before him was that creature of the night. It squinted its red glowing eyes and jumped into the deadly waves below. Ryo and White Blaze ran towards the edge to find the lonely sea and great moon in the crispy night.

The Ronin climbed slowly into his car. He searched his glove department for the first aid kit and tended to his wounds. White Blaze sat outside the vehicle, staring with concern at his friend.

"Ugh, White Blaze, don't worry, pal, I'm okay." He slumped into his seat and sighed. "Yeah, I just need to rest. Just for tonight before our quest."

But the stars provided no comfort that night. Sleep came so lightly, especially since Ryo's slumber was disturbed by nightmares of that creature and his worries of the future. In the morning, red eyes greeted the rising sun. The same ferry picked up Ryo and his huge companion. He leaned on the rails and wondered about many things. The Ancient sent White Blaze to rescue the girl from the Dark Realm? Where did this Dark Realm come from? Then I got to find the Orb of Divinity, in a cave somewhere northeast of here? They tampered with my yoroi. I must find the Orb of Divinity and give it to Kayura. How am I going to find Kayura? Why can I go into my sub-armor and not my armor? If only the ancient had more time...And that girl...

They finally reached the mainland. "Let's see," Ryo whispered to himself as he shielded his eyes from

the sun. "There are three caves that I know about in that direction, but I better get a map. Most likely it'll be in an unknown cave; these things usually are." He looked around once more. The next city wasn't too far away.

"Hey, stop it!"

"Nnyyaahh."

"C'm on!"

Children ran around the café without a care. The parents scolded their kids to behave. Ryo sat with a cup of coffee and a map. White Blaze stayed beyond the city limits, not wanting to draw a crowd tonight. Alone, the Ronin's mind wandered away. He watched the kids. They had so much energy. He remembered when he was a child and how much energy he had. The battles with the Dynasty and Talpa took a lot of energy, too. But...I'm not as young and fired up as I used to be. Now, I'm twenty-four, and I feel drained. Sure he had his health and all; however, Ryo was just...tired. Using the power of the magical armors takes its toll on the wearer; it uses the wearer's very life energy. That is why Ryo felt so tired. Just the mere thought of having to fight again wore him out. Well, whether I've had it or not, I guess it's just fate. I feel more like a flame than a wildfire.

There, he sipped his coffee and stared into his thoughts. For the first time, he was mentally preparing for the hard times ahead, trying to push away his doubts.

Mia kidnapped Kiahle to get her ready for her big date. It's funny that no one really made a big deal about it. In fact, they just all agreed "any girl that meets Sage will eventually go on a date with him." It was inevitable. (That is, just recently, because he did have trouble just holding a conversation with a girl, let alone able to date one. Anywho-) "That's just what they're doing; she's one among many."

Sage sat on the small sofa, occasionally looking at the clock. Rowen and Cye sat on the couch, reading their books. We don't take as long as Sage to get ready. Besides, he goes all out. Writing of such, Sage was so suavely dressed with a light beige suit and a dark green shirt underneath. His hair kept the same flow as always. He wore a cologne, one that he had Rowen concocted to perfectly compliment his natural scent. The doorbell rang. Sage looked at his watch and answered the door.

Mia stood in the doorway, smiling, "Are you ready?" She stepped away to reveal the new and improved Kiahle.

The girl stepped into the room and smiled. "Hi, Sage, I'm ready for our date!" Her short dress had the pattern like White Blaze. It hung on her body with two black straps. On her neck was a black choker that matched the ribbons in her hair and on her ankles.

She...actually looks...kinda...cute, they all thought to themselves.

"Wow, Kiahle, you look splendid tonight," Cye commented. Rowen just whistled.

"Thank you," Kiahle replied with enthusiasm. She spun around slowly like a dance and asked, "Do you like the dress?" She stopped and winked at Sage, "I've been wanting to wear this for a week!"

"So that's what you-"

"Yup! You guessed it!" The girl threw her arms behind her back and rocked up and down on her black high heels. "But, hey, you finally got to see my secret!"

He held out his arm, "Are you ready to go now?"

"Yes, I'm ready!" she giggled as she grasped his arm. As they disappeared into the night, she turned around and waved.

Cye and Rowen looked at Mia, then at each other. Cye broke the silence, "I hope they have fun. She seems pretty excited."

Rowen furrowed his brows. He knows Sage better than anyone. Sage enjoyed the company of women

and the attention that he gets from them. He recalled one time that they talked:

The two Ronins walked down the strip.

“So, Sage, are you ever going to get tired of dating so many women?”

“Are you crazy? What man in his right mind would get tired of that? Besides, you know that I’ve just got over my problem. I couldn’t even think about a girl without being nervous.”

“I dunno, maybe you’d like to find the right girl or something?”

“Well, hopefully she doesn’t come my way anytime soon!”

“And what if she does? You’re just going to break her heart?”

“Of course not, she’ll just have to wait.”

“C’mon, Sage, get real, who’d wait for you?”

“Oh, I can think of plenty.”

“Yeah, that is until they realize that you have all the women around your fingers. Then they get jealous and leave your sorry behind.”

“Like I don’t have any girls to spare!”

“Yeah, that’s true! So, you would never be in love with a girl?”

“Well, of course I will! I did have one steady girlfriend in high school, it’s not like it’s impossible.”

“And since the last girl broke your heart, you chose to remain a bachelor, admit it!”

“I admit it, but there’s nothing wrong with my choice, it’s just my choice. Besides, with this face, it’d be a shame that I’d be tied down!”

“Conceited!”

“Oh, you should talk, Mr. ‘I got an IQ of two-hundred.’”

“Two hundred and fifty.”

“See.”

The image faded away, but the words echoed in his mind. He remembers all the heartbroken girls that would cry over him. Those girls didn’t really matter to Rowen; he didn’t even know them. But now, he’s a friend with one of Sage’s many girls. I’d hate to see her cry! She won’t understand why Sage will do the things that he’ll do. But it’s not my place to get involved. Is it? Rowen muttered under his breath, “I hope he doesn’t break her heart.”

In the line, Sage and Kiahle stood among many other people, waiting to be let into the nightclub. “This is the best club around here. I know the bouncer, my mom treats his daughter.”

“Tonight has been so fun. The dinner was delicious and I enjoyed the movie; it was so funny! I can’t wait to learn how to dance!” Stars were bouncing in her eyes.

“The club can be fun, but you need to watch out. Some people in there are trouble. But,” he stroked his left hand through his hair, “If you stick with me the whole night, you should do fine.” A hand touched his shoulder. “Hey!!”

“Hey, man!” a huge muscular man shouted. Standing six feet and seven inches tall was a man that must have weighed around two hundred seventy pounds of pure muscles. However, his eyes were so kind and bright, almost as if it didn’t belong to the body it came with. “So, Sage, I see you got a new date for this, uhh, week, no, no, I guess it would just be for tonight, I know-“

Sage interrupted nervously, “HEY, Jokku, how are you doing?” Sage motioned his hand across his neck.

Jokku winked and whispered, “Oh, I get it, this is a new girl in town! Fresh meat.”

“So,” Sage spoke loudly, “Jokku, are you going to let us in or what?”

“Yeah, yeah, but aren’t you going to introduce me to your cute new friend?” He smiled at the confused, intimidated girl.

"This is Kiahle. Hey! Back off, she's, ugh, not your type."

"Well, she might be tomorrow, you'll have a new date--"

"OH, MY FAVORITE SONG; SEE YOU LATER!" Sage pulled Kiahle into the club as his bouncer friend laughed his head off.

As they entered the noisy room crowded with people, the new face asked, "What was that all about?"

"Oh, Jokku, don't mind him. He's such a joker. Heh, heh!" He chuckled nervously, "So, would you like something to drink?" The girl nodded her head in response. She grabbed his arm and followed Sage to the bar through the thick hoard of people. They found two empty seats and sat down. He bought her a couple of drinks, but the rest were virgin strawberry daiquiris so she wouldn't get drunk. Meanwhile, she watched the people moving to the beat of the techno music that filled the room loudly.

"Sage, let's go dance."

"Sure," he stood up and grasped her hand, "C'mon."

Eager to dance, Kiahle followed him to the dance floor. Different colors beamed spontaneously around. It was pretty dim in the room. Shadows moved everywhere, clouded in mystery.

"Hey, you're a natural! Did any of the other guys take you dancing?" Sage shouted over the thunderous music.

"No, this is my first time!"

For a good while, they danced together. Many women tried to dance with Sage, but he didn't allow it. He didn't want to let Kiahle out of his sight, not in this kind of place. Sage was tempted, though. After all, these were beautiful women that were after him.

"So, handsome, how about grooving with me," a blonde chick asked as she stepped between Sage and Kiahle. She must've been the hottest woman in the club.

"Uh, thanks, but I al-!"

"Uh-ungh, I think you should dance with a real woman now."

"Look, I already am." Sage's dance slowed a bit.

"C'mon, hot-stuff."

"Look, I'm sure there are plenty of others guys willing to dance with you-!"

"But I want to dance with YOU."

"Hey! Where is she? Kiahle? Kiahle?" Sage stopped his dance completely and frantically looked around. He couldn't see her. Suddenly, it was harder to get through the pack of people.

What Sage failed to see was how the blonde slightly kicked Kiahle out of the way. The girl was thrust away from Sage. Others were bumping into her, forcing her to move away from them. "Sage?" she called out. "Sage!" She walked around the huge dance floor, slowly. "Sage!"

"Hey there, cutie, looking for your boyfriend? Forget about him, why don't you come with me." A big man like Jokku grabbed Kiahle's arm, tightly. His breathe reeked of alcohol.

"Please, let me go. You're hurting me. I have to go find Sage."

"I don't think so. You found what you need right here."

"LET ME GO!" she yelled. Fear built inside of her. Something in her eyes began to glitter...maybe it was more than fear that was stirring inside of her.

A familiar voice shouted, "Hey, do we have a problem here?"

"Rowen?" Kiahle smiled.

"You heard the girl. Let her go," Rowen demanded. Cye stood behind him. (Oh, those two could come to my rescue ANYTIME!)

"Oh, yeah? What are you going to do to me?"

"I'm warning you."

“Ha, ha! Yeah, whatever!” The brute began to drag Kiahle away. In seconds, Rowen grabbed his arm in which released the girl (you know, like that whole pressure point stuff.) The blue-haired hero kicked the big guy down, knocking a few people down with him. By the time the big guy got up, a group of observers were already beginning to form. “You’re going to be sorry for that.”

“Hey,” Cye interrupted, “Why don’t you just admit defeat and go cause trouble else where?”

The big guy seized Cye’s shirt. “Do you mind, runt? I’ll take care of you, your friend, and that little cutie of yours!”

Oh no, he said ‘runt.’ Nobody, but nobody, calls Cye a runt. A brawl began with Cye, Rowen, and the brute. Bouncers broke the fight up and kicked all three out of the club. Kiahle followed them outside into the alley.

Sage was in the middle of concentrating. He tried to feel Kiahle out, to locate the direction she was in. He could feel her vibes were growing stronger throughout the week, but they still weren’t strong enough for him to lock onto. A big commotion caught his attention. Kiahle! He rushed to the scene and saw some people being escorted out. Kiahle was right behind them. He trailed after them. Is that Rowen and Cye? He felt a hand on his shoulder.

“Don’t go,” the blonde insisted.

“Leave me alone, you’ve cause enough trouble for me!” He shook her hand off and rushed away.

“Oh well,” she shrugged and continued her trouble elsewhere.

“Okay, let’s finish this!” Cye shouted.

“C’mon, two against one? That’s no fair! Fight me one on one, like a man, you runt!”

“Rowen step aside.”

Rowen stepped closer instead. “But Cye-.”

“Just do it!”

The fight continued without Rowen. He knew that Cye could take this guy out. And he did. Of course, Cye ended up with a bloody nose, but that was better than being knocked out like the brute. Kiahle watched in horror, almost repulsed at the sight of violence.

“Hey, what’s going on? Kiahle-!” Sage ran out of the door. But Rowen cut him short and grabbed Sage’s shirt with both of his hands.

“Where were you, Sage? Aren’t you supposed to watch her?” Rowen hollered with anger.

“I was, but she...what happened was out of my control!”

“Yeah, somehow, I don’t believe that! I saw you with that blonde girl!”

Kiahle stepped between them, but Rowen still had one hand on Sage, “Please, Rowen, stop! Please!”

Rowen let go and stormed off. “C’mon, Cye. We won’t be getting into this club for a while.”

“Rowen,” Sage began, “That girl was a nuisance...I didn’t-!”

“I got nothing to say to you! Let’s go, Cye!” Rowen held Kiahle’s wrist, “I think you should come with us. >glaring at Sage< You’d be safer.”

Sage pushed Rowen arm away, “Now, look, Rowen, you are getting way out of line here. We are on a date-!”

“Then why don’t you act like it?”

“Hey, I don’t think it was Sage’s fault,” Cye began, but Rowen stormed off. Cye shouted after Rowen,

“Rowen, shouldn’t we at least...oh...” He turned to Sage and Kiahle, “I better try to cool him down.” The Ronin of Trust ran after his friend.

Sage watched in anger as Rowen stormed away. He let out a huge sigh and faced her, “Kiahle, I’m so

sorry that our date had to turn out like this. I'm sorry that you had to see all of this. I don't...understand why Rowen..." He paused to recollect his thoughts. "We shouldn't go home right away. Let's go to the lake. I just need to clear my head."

\*\*\*Ok, the end of the beginning is here, and the beginning of the middle is next... Huh?\*\*\*

## 2 - 2

Fan-fic based off of Ronin Warriors/Samurai Troopers.

### The Beginning

A red jeep rushed to a grand white house.

“Man, am I HUNGRY!” grunted Kento.

“You always say that when we come home!” Mia replied, chuckling softly. “So, is it meatloaf night or macaroni and cheese night?”

“Ugh, Mia, don’t tease me like that, you know I’ve been looking forward to lasagna for this past week!!!!”

“Alright, dear, just kidding!”

Kento carried all the groceries (at once) into the house as Mia set up for dinner. Kento told Mia that there was an awful lot of food, and Mia replied that it was unusual for Kento to say such a thing. They laughed and continued on. During the clanging and banging of cooking, the phone rang.

“Yeh-loh?”

“Hi, ah, Kento?” a British accent asked.

“Cye, buddy! Is that you?” Kento had a huge smile.

“Well, who else would it be? How ya doin’ ole chap?”

“Wow, it’s been 2 months since we talked. Where have you’ve been? I’ve been trying to get a hold of you! Dude, watsup?”

“Well, sorry. You know how things are with my mom and the shop. So, what have you been up to?”

Kento pouted in thought. “No, nothing. It’s not like there are any bad guys to fight anymore, ain’t that right!”

“Ha, ha, you said it!”

“Man, let me tell ya, it’s been boring around here...”

“I know exactly what you mean. Oh, and Kento, go answer your door...” And the phone went dead.

“What? The door--“

DING DONG

Mia shouted, “Hey, Kento, get the door!”

“No kidding, this is weird,” he muttered to his baffled self. Kento finally hung up the phone and approached the door. This is like those horror flicks, should I open it? Ah, he opened it anyway. It’s probably just Cye playing his pranks!

“SURPRISE!!!!”

The whole gang was there!! The Ronin warriors were all there and Yulie also.

“Cye! Ryo, everybody, what...what are you guys doing here? Hey, it’s not my birthday...is it?”

Mia’s head poked out the kitchen door, “Come on in, guys!”

“Hey Kento!”

“Hi.”

“Kento, how are ya?”

They walked by and sat in the living room, with frustrated Kento following.

“MIA, YOU KNEW ALL ALONG THEY WERE...” Kento started for the kitchen

“Well, isn’t this a great surprise, Kento? Aren’t you glad to see us?” Yulie asked with his head tilted.



The little boy we once knew was now a young teen. He had been staying with Ryo, but kept in touch with all of the Ronins, especially Kento and Mia. However, Yulie had quite a resemblance with Kento. His face carried the attributes of strength...okay, so he looks like a jock, much like Kento...

"Yeah, I thought that you would want to see us?" Sage smiled nonchalantly.

Kento put his hand behind his head, "Of course, this is great! So tell me, what have you guys been up to?"

"Dinner's ready!" Mia exclaimed.

The herd of starving men stampeded into the kitchen, except for Ryo who seemed to lag behind for some reason.

So dinner and conversation took a good portion of the night. Ryo talked about his school and all the girls that he was dating, meanwhile secretly looking for a reaction from Mia. To his disappointment, there were none. Sage continued with his father's dojo after his father passed away. Rowen continued to work for the Mishima Co. Yulie, he's just going to school and doing normal teen guy things. He took up a class at Sage's dojo; I guess the heroism hasn't died away. None of the guys really mentioned about having a steady girlfriend, though.

Summer vacation was coming along. Then Yulie suggested they all stay at Mia's, like the old days.

"That's a great idea! We can wrestle like we used to, but I've gotten better, you know!" Kento didn't hesitate.

"I don't know..." Mia whispered to herself. But why not, I do miss it; I guess there would be no problem...

"Yeah, that does sound like a great idea, but," Rowen stopped and looked at Mai with those puppy eyes, "is it alright with Mia?"

Mia rolled her eyes...and smiled, "Sure, you boys can stay. It'll be fun."

Shouts of excitement and "alright" and "yeah" filled the room.

When the vacation started, they all came back with their things. Sage and Rowen shared rooms. Cye, Yulie, and Ryo took the other. Of course, Mai and Kento... well, we won't go any further.

One gloomy breakfast, Cye cooked a grand meal. Ryo woke up early and went down to chow.

"Hey, Ryo, why the glum face?" Cye noticed a big frown on Ryo.

"White Blaze disappeared on me. I just don't understand why? I kinda miss him. But I'm more worried than anything else. A few days before I came here, he was gone, no trace, nothing. Yulie said that White Blaze has a mind of his own and can take care of himself, but I don't know..."

"Well, White Blaze is a mystical creature, maybe he has some other business to take care of."

"Maybe you and Yulie are right..."

"I hate to tell you this, chap, but you worry too much!"

"Ha, you don't say!" Ryo felt a little better. I suppose I do worry a lot! (No kidding, Ryo!) But there was something that he didn't tell Cye...that he wasn't sure he was ready to confess...

"Whoa, Ryo, I didn't know it was that bad," Rowen said softly as his head hung low. He walked beside Ryo in the forest by Mia's (and Kento's) house.

"But why would White Blaze take my yoroi (the little glowing marble thingies)? It doesn't make any sense. Is something going on that we don't know about?"

"Maybe, but you know 'psychic' Sage would feel something. Or that Kayura and her guys would show up, something. You should have told us; maybe someone else is missing his yoroi. Hey! You don't think

Talpa is back, do you?"

"No Talpa is gone for good. I don't know, maybe I just worry too much."

"Well, stop worrying so much. It's only been a few days, maybe White Blaze had to take care of something, and it's not like he could tell you or leave a note. Are you sure that you didn't just lose it?"

"If I would have misplaced it, well, somehow, I would be able to feel it out, ya know? No, it's definitely gone...with White Blaze...."

Together, they sorted through the possibilities. Rowen convinced his friend that he should inform everyone once they returned to the house. Meanwhile, they enjoyed the walk through the lonely forest. Conversation told of recent experiences and hardships as well joys. Rowen talked about his ladder of success in the Mishima Co. Ryo only touched upon school, but he supposed life has been kind of dull. The gloom went away later in the morning. The sun was noon high and shined through the canopy of the trees. But there was one ray that particularly caught Rowen's eyes. Something reflected brightly.

Rowen didn't intentionally walked towards it, but somehow the path led to it ever so slightly.

A young woman was sprawled out across the grass face down. Her clothes were torn, and blood stained the fabrics. What reflected was a bracelet on her right hand. Her dark hair hid her face.

"Oh, damn, what..." Rowen horror stricken face stared, "Is she dead?"

Ryo was already at her side, feeling for a pulse. "She's alive, but we need to get her some help! You go and get Sage and call for the ambulance, and I'll stay here!"

"Right." Rowen was out of sight in a heartbeat. Ryo turned back to the girl, seeing if there were any open wounds or broken bones. Her clothes and skin appeared to have been clawed or something. The Ronin tried to find her wallet or anything for identification, but there was nothing to be found. But next to her...

"Oh, no, that looks bad," Sage showed up with a first aid kit. He examined her and dressed her wounds a bit. He opened an emergency blanket and laid it over her. He transformed into his sub-armor and called upon Halo. (Obviously, he still had his yoroi.) Little by little, he healed her, but her spirit that he felt was very weak. When enough healing enabled to stabilize her, Sage returned to his normal clothing.

Then the paramedics showed up with Rowen leading the way. They took her away on the stretcher.

Sage rode with the ambulance meanwhile Ryo and Rowen drove to the hospital. Before Ryo got into the car, he pulled out his missing yoroi that he found next to the girl, and his head continued to spin.

The three Ronins sat in the waiting room, each wondering what happened to the poor girl. Usually, Sage would get the info from his mother who worked in the ER department; however, she was off that day.

The nurses were too busy to really tell the guys what was going. Besides, any of the girls LOVED chatting with Sage whenever possible. A couple a girls even got into trouble for forgetting to get back to work and being drawn in by Dr. Date's handsome son.

Meanwhile, Ryo confessed to Sage about White Blaze and his missing yoroi.

"But I found this next to the girl today..." Ryo told them as he reached for the yoroi and showed it to the wide-eyed guys. "And why does she look like she was clawed?"

Rowen asked, "Do you think White Blaze-!"

"NO WAY! White Blaze would never do such a thing!" Ryo defended his feline friend. "He would never attack an innocent person!"

"Well, maybe she stole the yoroi and White Blaze went to hunt her down. Maybe she's working for someone that's out to get us," Sage suggested.

Ryo looked down, "I don't know, Sage. But we'll find out what's going on."

A pink-haired nurse stepped up to them and asked, "Excuse me, are you the guys that came with the girl from the forest today?" (She's obviously new for not recognizing Sage.)

Sage, quick to stand for a pretty lady, “Yes, we are.”

The nurse blushed. “Oh, good. The doctor would like to speak to you.” She began walking to a hallway. The guys followed her to an office. “Wait here, please,” and the nurse left the room. Ryo sat in front of the desk with Rowen as Sage stood against the wall.

They feared the worst that the girl didn’t survive.

The doctor appeared and her soft voice broke the silence, “Hello, gentlemen. I’m Dr. Goth. I would like to ask you a few questions about the lady that you helped. Oh, hello Mr. Date. I didn’t see you there in that dark corner.”

Rowen asked for everyone, “Is she dead?”

The doctor replied, “No, actually, she gained consciousness in the recovery room.”

“Can we see her?” Ryo asked, anxious to inquire the mystery girl.

“Not yet, not until I explained what has happened and ask you a few things. Alright?” They all nodded their heads as she took a seat behind her desk. “Okay, so what are your relations to her? Are you relatives, friends, or just strangers?”

“We don’t know her,” Rowen answered. “We just found her injured and called for help.”

The doctor eyes changed, “Well, that’s nice that you came to the hospital with her. You see, the problem is, the girl has no memory of anything. She has amnesia and no identification on her. Did you guys find anything around her?”

Ryo slouched in the chair a little, “I looked around for something, but I found nothing...”

“Well, that’s too bad. I guess I should go get the paper work started, probably another runaway...you may speak with her now.” Dr. Goth took them to the room that she was resting in. They stepped into the room.

The girl was sitting up in bed staring out the window. She turned her head to them. Her brown eyes were lost, confused, and scared. “Ma’am, these are the nice men that rescued you and would like to speak to you. Is that alright with you?” She nodded slowly. “Okay, I’ll be in my office, just push that button if you need anything.” The doctor smiled and left.

The mystery girl looked down at her hands. One was bandaged up. She was in a hospital gown and hooked up to tubes and monitors like she was some sort of experiment or something.

“Hi, how are you doing?” Ryo asked with uncertainty. He sat next to her bed.

Her voice was a little raspy and low; “I don’t think things are going so swell for me.” She didn’t look at Ryo or anyone else.

“Sorry,” he flinched.

“I don’t remember anything. The doctor said that I have amnesia. Do you know who I am?” Her face turned to Ryo, hoping for the right answer.

“No, I don’t. None of us do...” he was at a loss of words.

“Oh,” hopelessness filled her eyes. They could feel the heavy energy in the room.

“Would you excuse us for a moment,” Ryo got up and headed towards the door. He motioned with his head for the rest of the Ronins to follow him outside.

Rowen asked, “So, Ryo, what should we do? Do you think it’s a trick?”

“I don’t think so, she seems completely lost.”

Sage took a step closer and spoke softly, “I think Ryo is right. But...I can’t sense anything from her.”

Ryo crossed his arms and closed his eyes. “Well, I think we should take her with us to Mia’s house. Maybe she can regain her memory, and we could find something out,” he suggested.

Rowen, ready to question everything, “Hold on, Ryo, we don’t know her, and what if we find out if that she is out to get us. This whole thing can be a trap.”

Sage interrupted, “Yeah, but at least we can keep an eye on her and see what happens.”

“Besides, Rowen, where would she go?” Ryo stated rather than asked.

"I'm telling you, that's probably exactly what they want us to do..."

"We don't really have a choice, Rowen. If we want to find anything out, we should just bring her along."

"Well, then, maybe you should ask Kento and Mia before we make any decisions," Rowen gave up arguing.

"Alright, maybe they're home, I'll try calling them." Ryo turned and searched for the payphones.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Cye, it's me. Could you put Kento or Mia on the phone?"

"Sure, hold on...>in the background, Cye shouts< MIA, IT'S RYO!!"

Mia picked up the phone, "What's up?" Ryo explained what had happened earlier that day. Mia listened attentively. "Sure, bring her over, we will think of something when we all get together."

Ryo smiled, "Thanks Mia, you are always so helpful..." He paused. An emotion overwhelmed his heavy heart.

"Hey no problem, oh, I need to help Cye make dinner. I'll see you later."

"Later." He stood there for a while, thinking.

The girl didn't watch them leave the room. She struggled in her mind to remember something.

Especially remembering who she was. But nothing came to mind. It felt like a dark cloud hung over her.

Or more like a huge void inside of her. She was so frightened, frightened of this unknown.

The three strangers returned to the room.

The black haired man approached her; "Maybe it would be best if you stayed with us."

"No, I don't want to impose..."

"You won't be imposing on us. Besides, uh, err, we can help you."

"Maybe if you beat my head, and my memories come back."

Ryo chuckled, "I don't think I could hit a girl-!"

"Thank you. You... you all are very nice, but I just don't feel right doing this. But, no matter who I stay with, they'll all be strangers..." her voice trailed off

"Come on, we insist." He sat next to her and leveled his head with her. He stared into those big brown, despaired eyes. "We have plenty of room at the house and food..." Ryo tried to convince her. After much persuasion though...

"Okay, okay, I'll go," she gave in rather than just complying. "I don't understand why you insist, but thank you." Faintly, she smiled. And...a little light shined from her eyes.

The following day, after much hassle, the hospital released her. Mia had bought some clothes for the girl, especially since the girl was smaller than Mia. The shreds of her old clothes were taken to a lab to be examined. The police said that they would get in touch with her as soon as they find something.

The whole time, the girl was silent and sad. But everyone sympathized with her. Rowen was suspicious of her. Ryo was just worried about everything. When they arrived at the house, Cye was already cooking.

Ryo opened the door, "Well, this is the place you'll be staying at."

"Come upstairs with me," Mia walked ahead, "I'll show you where you'll be sleeping." The girl followed Mia to the attic. "It's a bit dusty >cough< but once we clean it >coughchomping on food< but we don't know her. She >chomp< could be working >chomp< for the bad guys."

"Look, guys, we can't be too obvious that we are suspicious, unlike Rowen here," Sage said. "We just have to be on our guards."

"Great, wasn't this supposed to be a vacation? Now we have to watch our backs," Rowen muttered.

"Well, she may not be having such a great time either," Ryo stopped Rowen.

Cye suggested, "Maybe it won't be too bad, I mean if each of us just take turns to spend a day with her, we could observe her and find out what's going on."

"Hey, Cye, >chomp< if you just needed to get a date-!" Kento started.

"That's not what I'm trying to do! I'm just-!"

"I think that is a good idea," Ryo interrupted. "We all would only sacrifice about one day a week, it shouldn't hurt. Besides, if she is a victim, we'll be giving her a lot of help."

"Like helping the enemy, you mean," Rowen blurted out.

Yulie put his fist down with a smile, "Yeah, maybe she'll turn out to be this billionaire and we'll be rewarded! We'll be rich!"

"Atta boy, Yulie, >chomp< that's positive thinking!"

Rowen stood up, "I THINK YOU'RE ALL BEING FOOLISH, I'M OUTTA HERE!!" The Ronin of Life stomped out of the silent dining room.

"Rowen..." Ryo was about to chase him down. He began to doubt himself. Maybe this wasn't a good choice after all...

Mia called to Ryo, "Let him go, you know how he is. It's kinda like when you two first ran into Kayura, remember?"

"Yeah, but..."

"Let it go; he'll get over it."

Cye changed the subject, "Speaking of which, how do you think the war-, err, those...guys are doing?"

The night passed uneventfully. At breakfast, the mysterious girl decided to eat. She showed up at the table in her new clothes that Mia bought her. Her clothes consisted of jeans and plain dark green shirt. On her face was nervousness. Mia, Cye, and Rowen were in the kitchen

"Uh," the girl looked down and back up, "Good morning, everybody."

Mia turned from the stove, "Morning, glad to you are doing better. Have a seat."

She sat down next to Rowen, who was already edgy. He tried his best to conceal his negative feelings. Fortunately, she seemed too out of it to notice anything.

Cye sipped on some coffee and asked, "Hi. Are you feeling any better?"

"Well, yes. I think I'll feel much better once I remember who I am," her voice was still low.

"So, uh," Rowen tried to hide his discomfort, "What do we call you in the meantime?"

She looked down, "Forgetful is all I could think of."

Cye chuckled, "Now, I think we could do better." The girl shrugged. "How about Sheryl?" She made a face obviously not liking that name.

Rowen, almost forgetting his suspicion, "What about Tina?" The girl shook her head.

Sage appeared in the kitchen. He said his "good mornings" and sat next to Cye. He, too, joined in the naming of the girl. After many names were poured out...

"I had a cat named Kiahle," Sage said.

"Kiahle..." the girl repeated. "Kiahle, I like that..."

"Well, it's settled then!" Cye said.

The rest of the gang showed up. It was known that the girl would be called Kiahle. Mia agreed to take the girl out that day. It was Wednesday, that means grocery shopping and laundry! (Yuck, for me, ?) Mia already started the drying, so they went to the supermarket to get some food. Nothing much happened except that Kiahle grabbed a box of candy, and a flood of boxes fell by her feet. Ugh, how embarrassing! Mia noticed that the new girl didn't know much about anything, not even money. It was odd, because amnesia shouldn't include a person forgetting simple things... Well, at home, Mia told Kento of the funny

incident, and Kento said something about Mia's missing twin. Mia hushed Kento REAL quick. The ladies put the groceries up and began folding laundry.

"Hey, Mia, what kind of...uh...shorts...are these?" Kiahle held up some boxers.

"Oh, well, those are someone's underwear."

"Are they yours?"

"No, of course not, only boys are supposed to wear those kind of boxers!"

"Boxers? But I thought that you said it was underwear?"

"There are different kinds of underwear; those are called boxers."

"Oh," Kiahle looked at them as if she was in awe. Then she asked, "Hey, are these...boxers supposed to have these holes. They look like weird pockets or something..." Her hand was through the 'hole.' Mia didn't know how to react! "Oh no, get your hand out of there!! Don't you know why that's there, for real?" Kiahle shook her head. Mia bowed her head anxiously (this is where the sweat bead comes in.)

"Okay, let me explain something..."

Needless to say about what Mia had to explain. Kiahle felt pretty embarrassed and asked that Mia didn't tell anyone. That evening, before dinner, Mia gave Kiahle a complete tour of the house and showed her how to live a little more comfortable. At dinner, Kiahle joined the Ronins and gang. (Ugh, I'm drooling, I could only dream!!) They all talked about their day. Rowen started to interrogate the girl, but Cye kicked Rowen's leg. Kiahle frowned and became quiet. But Mia told them about the supermarket incident. Kiahle was embarrassed and told them about Mia running into someone's cart and the guy got real angry at her!! Everyone laughed, well, almost everyone. The rest of dinner was pleasant, though, Rowen was silently angry. In the middle of it though...

"Hey, did you hear that?" Sage suddenly stopped eating.

"Yeah," Rowen stopped, too. "It sounds like someone's at the back door."

Kento got up, "Don't worry, guys, I got this!" He stood up and disappeared from the dining room.

Everyone stopped eating and listened. "WHITE BLAZE!!" The whole group immediately ran to see the tiger, except Kiahle who looked around all confused.

Ryo wrapped his arms around White Blaze, "White Blaze, I was so worried about you, pal! Why'd you run off like that?" Everyone gather around the large cat and made a big commotion.

Rowen asked, "Hey, Ryo, let's see if White Blaze recognize this girl or not." Ryo nodded. A big 'thud' sounded in the room. They all turned to see Kiahle fainted on the floor. White Blaze jumped from the bunch towards the girl.

"No!!" Ryo yelled, worried that he may attack the girl. "White Blaze!"

To everyone's amazement, White Blaze looked over the girl, licked her hand, and nudged her body. He looked towards Ryo with the expression 'are you going to do something or what?' (If tigers could do that.) Kento picked Kiahle up and put her on the couch.

"Well," Ryo said, "It seems that White Blaze have ran into this girl before, and she is not the enemy. White Blaze does have good innate judgment, you know." They attended to the fainted girl. Sage noticed that Rowen stood by the backdoor, frozen, with a guilty look on his face. He walked over there and smiled.

"Don't feel so bad," Sage put his hand on Rowen's shoulder, "I'm sure it'll be alright. Besides, one of us had to keep our guard up."

"Yeah, but I didn't have to be a jerk about it," Rowen frowned. "She was innocent, and I prob-..."

"Just let it go. Hey, you could it make it up to her tomorrow; it'll be your day to take her out."

Rowen smiled, "Yeah, I guess you're right."

When she woke up that night, Kiahle had no idea what had happened. White Blaze sat next to her.

"Who is this; is this White Blaze?" she asked. Ryo nodded. "What, how did I get to the couch? All I

remember is seeing White Blaze and...and that was it..."

Sage sat next to her on the couch, "Do you know why you fainted?"

"I fainted?"

"I guess that answered my question." Sage noticed that she was petting the tiger and stated, "You are not afraid of him."

"No," she shook her head. "Why should I be?"

Cye answered, "Well, most people are when they first meet him. He seems to like you, though."

The room remained quiet for a while. People slowly migrated back to the dining room to finish their supper. Chattering went on about White Blaze returning. The last to go back was Rowen.

"Hey, look, uh, I'm sorry that I treated you kinda badly. Maybe I can make it up to you somehow..."

Rowen didn't really know what to say.

She only stared for a little before a grin painted her face, and that light shined in her eyes, "That's okay, Rowen, I know that you must have had good reason to. But I'm glad that we can be friends now!"

Rowen smiled back, "Yeah, me too."

The building towered over them. The sign read 'The Hall of Astronomy And Aerospace Science.' They came to Rowen's choice of pastime.

"What do they have here?"

"You'll see."

They stepped in the lobby area. On Thursday s, there's not as much hustling and bustling, and not many young adults go there to pass the time. There were quiet booths around, some unattended. Many booths were set up, but that didn't really interest the girl. Rowen knew what she would think was fun, though...

"Here, step up onto this. Now grab here and don't let go. No, no, don't worry, these straps will hold you in, but it's better if you hold on," Rowen helped Kiahle into this funny sphere shaped thing. "Okay are you ready?"

"I'm ready, but WWWHHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

Off she went, spinning round and round, in the gyro. It only lasted a good 2 minutes when the gyro slowed and stopped. As they released her from the thing, Rowen caught the dizzy girl.

"The...room...is...spinning...round...uuggghh...Rowen...you..." she slowly told him as her head twirled like the gyro.

Rowen couldn't help but laugh, "I'm sorry, everyone that I brought here knew what this thing was. I guess I assumed that with you, ha ha hah! My mistake!" He'd forgot that she did not know what was going on, but he still had a kick out of it. That jerk! "Well, do you want anything to eat or drink?"

She made a face of disgust and only uttered, "No...thanks."

Next stop, they ventured over to the dome. They lied back to watch the walls turn dark and into the night sky.

"WOW, they brought the sky into this room! How..."

"This is a simulation. It's not real, but it's still very educational."

"It's still so beautiful," she awed. "Rowen?"

"Yeah?"

"I feel like this sky, that I'm only sim-u-lated, and I'm not real..."

"Don't say that. You are very real. You just have amnesia. I'm sure that your memories will return to you, and your life will be normal again." Of course, there were some doubts about what Rowen said...but he brushed them aside.

"Life," she repeated to herself. "What is life about?"

"Most of us live our whole lives trying to find that out."

“What do you think life is about?”

The Ronin thought to himself, you know, I really can't say in a sentence, and here I am, the Ronin of Life.

Rowen looked at the girl to give some insights about spirituality and creation but found her deep in thought. He chose to let her float along in her sky of questions.

“I really enjoyed that place! I learned so much!” Kiahle smiled as she stared at the twilight sky. She turned to Rowen who was driving them back to Kento's and Mia's. He's really a nice person. He was patient with all of my questions today. I thought he would never...I dunno, be my friend. “Thank you, Rowen.”

He looked at her, “Hey, it was the least I could do.”

She smiled and turned back to watch the sun fall behind the mountains.

It's dinnertime again. Kiahle talked about her fun day, and everybody else spoke of his or her day also. The girl finished her plate, excused herself from the table, and headed towards the balcony. Meanwhile...

“So,” Rowen began, “Ryo, what are you and White Blaze going to do?”

“Well, White Blaze and I are going on a little journey soon. I think I need to try to trace where my yoroi has been or why it disappeared, and I'm not going to figure anything out by staying here...I think there is something up...”

“Oh that's right,” Mia burst out, “the police called about the lab results.” There was a restless silence that waited for the rest of the info. “A large animal clawed her. They got some blood that was unidentifiable. Also, they found fur,” she turned to Ryo, “not just white and black, but purple and blue.” Ryo placed his fork down, “Well, whatever is going on, we'll get to the bottom of it. My hunches so far tell me that this girl is involved with something, and I think White Blaze was trying to protect her, I can't be certain. But why did she carry my yoroi? If White Blaze didn't take it, did she, or who did?”

Sage closed his eyes in thought and opened them, “Well, I suggest that we keep a close eye on our yorois. Whatever took Ryo's may try to take any of ours.” They all nodded in agreement.

“So, >chomp< who's going to spend the day with the girl >chomp< tomorrow?” Kento asked aimlessly.

“Mia and I >chomp< have reservations at a nice restaurant and a show tomorrow, >chomp< so it can't be us.

Ryo said, “White Blaze and I have important plans.”

Rowen added, “I already took her out today.”

Yulie said, “I already have plans with her on Sunday.”

Sage protested, “But I've got a date for Friday!”

Cye said, “And I got a date, too!”

Ryo chuckled, “Looks like you two will have to duke it out! Come on, who's it going to be?”

Sage and Cye stood up.

“I'm going to win, Sage, just give it up.”

“Not a chance, give me your best shot, Fishy!”

“Alright, here goes nothing!”

They raised their fists up...

“Ha! Scissors beat paper!” Cye exclaimed.

“Ah man, it's always the scissors that get me!” Sage moaned as he slumped in his chair.

Kento remarked, “I dunno, by the look of you hair, you could use a pair of-“

“Quiet, Hardrock, if you value your life,” Sage began. But the whole table laughed. “This is great, now I have to find some other time for my date.”



The victor tried to cheer his friend up, "Come now, Sage. It's not you can't get another date ever again."

Ryo smiled, "Yeah, from what I understand, you have plenty to spare."

Just outside the door, Kiahle eavesdropped on the conversation. All she wanted was some water, but she didn't want to hear this. I am just trouble. She turned around and slowly climbed the stairs. Sage was walking out the door to call in the cancellation when he saw the girl go around the corner to the attic. He gasped and wondered. Did she hear me?

Sage came to breakfast only to find Cyé cooking.

"Cyé, don't you ever sleep in?"

"Who else is going to feed this household? I figure since Mia is being such a generous hostess, I could help with breakfast...it is the most important meal of the day. Anyway, are you ready for today?"

"I don't think so. I saw Kiahle walking up the stairs last night after I said those things about not wanting to go. I think I might have hurt her feelings." Sage sulked as he sat down. "I shouldn't have said what I did."

"Hey, you were only frustrated 'cause you lost. Maybe she'll understand."

"I hope so."

Only Kento joined them for breakfast; the aromas of food could never escape the bottomless pit. Everyone else slept in an hour or so and had to microwave their breakfast. Mia went up to the attic to wake the new girl up.

"Rise and shine, sleepyhead! It's a nice day!" Mia threw the covers off.

"Ugghhh, it's too early," Kiahle moaned as her body curled to the fetal position.

"Well, Sage is going to take you to the city today, so you need to get ready."

She sat up in bed and rubbed her eyes, "City?"

"Yeah, they have so much to do there. I'm sure that you'll have lots of fun there."

The girl was excited, "Like what?"

Mia sighed, "Oh, like lots of shopping. Great food to eat---!"

"Better than Cyé's food?"

"Uh, different, I don't know if anyone could outdo Cyé, though. Anyway, there are dancing and games, just all kinds of stuff."

"Wow, that does sound like fun," she said with a forced enthusiasm. But I don't think Sage will get to enjoy himself very much.

Downstairs, they both met feeling uneasy. Both know how the other party felt, or must be feeling, but without certainty. Sage painted a smile on his face and decided to make the best of it. Besides, maybe she didn't hear him.

Sage pulled around with his red sports car. The features stood out like those of a racecar. Hey, he used to race when he went through that phase of rebellion. The ride was pretty quiet and short.

"Whooooah, look at how tall these buildings are! And so many of them!" Kiahle stared with wide eyes.

"This place is so full of energy!"

"I know a place that many young people like to go," Sage smiled.

"What's that?"

"The mall." (Joy! I LOVE malls!)

"What do they have in here," Kiahle asked.

“Well, let’s look around and find out.”

“Hey look at all those clothes in there. Oooh, and they have such pretty dresses. Oh, no, but Mia said that I needed money to buy them, and I need to use my money wisely.” She paused and snapped her fingers, “I know I’ll just look at everything and pick what I want the most.” The girl turned to Sage and grabbed his arm, “Come on, don’t just stand there, we got some shopping to do!”

Before Sage could answer, he was pulled along the girl’s journey. They stopped in all the stores. There was an electronic department where she turned a knob on the radio and the music blasted in her face. The shock rippled through her body, and she turned the knob the other way. The Ronin chuckled at the naïve woman, and she smiled at the people that glared in her direction. He shook his head; this girl is definitely not normal...

“Hey, let’s go in here. It smells good,” Kiahle continued to tug on him.

“The chocolate shop?”

“Yeah, Cye gave me some before, and they are ssooooo good.”

“They’re alright.”

“Alright?” Then she began to sweetly describe her thoughts, “They are the greatest things to eat. They are so sweet, so soft. Oh, I could lose my mind thinking about it! (I sure do) How could you say that they are just alright?” She walked through the door, determined to buy a bag of chocolate.

Moments later, the girl came back out with one hand behind her back. “Here, try this one. Do you like it?”

“Hhmmm, this is really delicious! I’ve never been in this store before, but I guess I’ve been missing out.”

She brought the other hand around and held a small bag. “Here! A present for you!”

Sage accepted the gift and smiled. How cute. “Thank you,” he said softly.

A muffled voiced replied, “Yurm wlcmh.” She was already stuffing her face with chocolate, lots of chocolate.

“Oh, how adorable!” The girl ran into the pet store. “Oh, Sage, these animal are so cute! Can I hold one?” Sage called to a worker to look at puppy. The worker gave the puppy to Kiahle. She laughed as the puppy licked her, “Yuck! But you sure are cute! Here, Sage, do you wanna hold him?”

“Uh, no that’s okay, you go ahead.” He didn’t quite want the fur all over him.

“Oh,” she smiled and put the puppy down. The little thing wagged its tail as she petted its head. “I wanna take them all home!” She held it again and gave it a kiss on the forehead.

Sage doesn’t usually enjoy the pet store, getting fur on himself and smelling animals. He watched the girl in wonderment at how she was enthralled by such a simple thing as a puppy. It was like she was a child at heart. What was she like before she lost her memory? Was she this nice, or a completely different person? Is she even a real person? How could she know so little about life? But I can’t sense anything from her. I can’t feel a strong energy from her, but there’s something...I dunno, familiar about her...

After circling the mall, Kiahle bought a couple of clothes and one thing that she didn’t show Sage. She refused to tell him what it was, so his curiosity ran wild. It was only late afternoon, so they had a quick meal at the mall.

“So where are we going now?” she inquired.

“I’m not going to tell you,” he grinned, “you’ll have to wait and see.”

“Oh, I see,” she hung her head at hearing those familiar words. After a while, though, “OH, TELL ME, I CAN’T WAIT!! Tell me, tell me!”

“How about you tell me what’s in that bag then?”

“No! I can’t tell you. I won’t tell you.”

“Well, then I won’t tell you where we’re going.”

“Fine, I’ll wait,” she stuck her tongue out. Sage stuck his out also. They both laughed. Well, after much harassment, they pulled to another building. They parked the car and got out. “Bo-tan-ni-cal garden?”

“It’s a very beautiful place, come on.”

They walked through the nursery and reached the back area. What spread out before them was a lovely field of flowers with fountains and benches decorating the way.

“Oh, Sage, this is the best place that I’ve ever been to!” She ran through the flowers and kneeled down at a random spot to smell them. Then she rolled on her back to stare at the stars. Sage followed and sat next to her. She spoke softly, “I don’t know exactly why, but I feel like I belong here. It’s so peaceful and carefree...Sage?” Kiahle sat up with a sad look on her face.

“What’s wrong?”

“I know that you didn’t wanna bring me here today because you had to give up your date.”

Sage frowned and felt his heavy heart beating. He didn’t want to confront her with this. “Kiahle, I-...”

She smiled and put a finger on his soft lips. “But I’m glad that you did. I had the most wonderful time today! Besides, I’ve seen those dates.”

“How, you couldn’t have-...”

“But they all look so ugly-“

“What? They’re not-“

“-And they don’t look so tasty either. I saw many of them at the market. But Mia said that they’re good for people to eat, so maybe that’s why I understand...”

Sage stopped when he realized she had the wrong ‘date.’ He laughed, “No, no, not those dates! I meant dates with other women. A date is also when a man and a woman go out together.”

She thought about what he said and asked, “So are we a date?”

“Well, not quite...” he didn’t know how to explain it, “It’s when two people try to get to know one another...”

“So you just don’t want to know me.”

“No, no. It’s just...a date is a little more...intimate. The people dress up a bit and go to the movies or the club or something...”

“But I am dressed!”

“Yeah, but casually.”

“Oh,” she let out a sigh, “Maybe I’m not ready to understand what is so special about a date.”

“Well, it’s when a man and a woman get together because they are attracted to each other. They go on a date to see how the other person is, you know, how they behave around other people, what kind of fun they like, what’s on their minds. They both put most of their focus on the other person. See, when you were with Rowen, or me, instead of learning about us, you were concerned with learning other things or just having fun.”

“Is that wrong?”

“No, not at all, it’s just that what you and Rowen did, or what you and I did was not a date, because you were keeping yourself occupied with other things. It’s okay...I know that it must be hard not being able to remember your past, so you’re trying to get caught up to things. We all understand, you know.”

She wrapped her arms around her knees and mumbled, “Yeah, who would go on a date with me, especially since I don’t know anything. What fun would I be?”

Ugh, now you’ve done it, now you’ve made her feel bad... Sage looked down and couldn’t believe what he was about to do. He coughed a little and smiled, “Nonsense. Why don’t I take you on a date next Friday?”

Kiahle's eyes lit up, "What? You mean, you want to take ME on a date?" She swung her arms around him, almost throwing him down, "Oh, that sounds great! You're so wonderful!"

The girl was excited all the way back home. Sage explained some of the 'rules of dating' and suggested that she talk to Mia about it. He wondered if he did the right thing and worried about what the guys would think he was up to. But it's too late now, he figured.

Throughout the week, everyone spent his or her time with Kiahle except Ryo. On Saturday, Cye took her to (where else) the Aquarium. Yulie took her to the temple on a remote hill. Kento invited her to a movie, with Mia of course. Then Mia spent time with Kiahle on Tuesday and Wednesday, working around the house with an extra hand. Rowen took her to the library on Thursday, so she could learn more about, well, anything. Then Friday came along...

Ryo took his car and followed the great big cat to the seashore of a remote island. White Blaze chose his route carefully. It took about a week for him to get there. The ferry took the longest time. White Blaze stopped at a random spot and waited for Ryo to get out of the car.

"So is this the place that you wanted to show me? But there's nothing here." White Blaze lied on the sand by the foot of a cliff that overlooked the sea. "Oh, I get it, you just want to rest. Ok, well, I'll just go back to my car..."

But the tiger growled. He stood up and walked over to the Ronin of Wildfire. By the edge of his jacket, White Blaze bit onto Ryo and pulled him down. "You want me to sit down here, I guess." So Ryo complied with his feline friend. Throughout the night, he turned to the mystical animal and questioned why they were doing nothing; however, the creature didn't respond. Finally, Ryo fell asleep by his friend's side.

"Is this a dream?" Ryo stood by the sea and looked at his own body. "I can see myself sleeping. I feel as if that is my body over there, but..." White Blaze appeared next to the shocked guy. "White Blaze, is that really you?" Ryo doubted his eyes. "Hey, where are you going?" The cat walked to the cliff. Ryo looked hard. "Is that an...entrance?" He followed his friend into the cliff. "Whoa, this is wicked? Where is White Blaze taking me?" Further they went into the cliff until they stumbled upon a room.

"Wildfire," a familiar voice called.

Ryo braced himself, "Who's there?" A figure appeared before Ryo. "Anubis? What the heck are you doing here?"

"You've finally come." Anubis's body, covered with a kimono colored in brown, red and yellow, leaned by a wall. His eagle eyes stared kindly at the surprised Ronin. "I have been waiting."

"What's this about?" Ryo relaxed a little, but not too much. "Why was I brought here?"

"Wildfire, you must follow me quickly, I cannot wait here that long." Before Ryo could react, Anubis already walked the dimly lit stairs. The Ronin of Virtue pursued him. White Blaze, meanwhile, faded away unnoticed.

"Hey, Anubis, what's going on, where are you taking me to?"

"I'm taking you to the sacred land of the Ancient Clan's spirits. Someone is there to speak to you."

"Why does he want to speak to me? Wait, the Ancient Clan? That means..."

"Something is going on..."

"But the Dynasty is under control now..."

"No, Ryo, this is something different."

“Is it Talpa?”

The ex-warlord shuddered at the name, “No, it’s something much older than the battle between the world and Talpa. It is the very darkness itself.”

In minutes, they somehow reached the top of the stairs that suddenly became a new land. It was bright as if the sun was up, but there was no sun. Flowers, mountains and rivers brought exquisite beauty to the land. Upon a rock, stood the long lost Ancient.

“Ancient?” Ryo shouted in disbelief.

He turned to face them. The pan hat (oh, I’m so uncultured, I don’t know what else to call it!) left the upper half of his face unseen. “Thank you, Anubis, you may go now.” The ex-Samurai of Spring (or Cruelty) bowed in respect and disappeared like steam into air. “So, Ryo of the Wildfire, we meet again.”

“Wow, Ancient, does this mean that you are alive again?”

“No, my body is no longer. I brought your spirit here through your dream. It disturbs our spirits’ ki and the Balance, but it is urgent that I must speak to you. All the possessors of the Nine Samurai Armors are in grave danger.”

“Don’t tell me, someone wants our armors, right?”

“Actually, they’re after the heart of your yorois.”

“What, you mean...hey, my yoroi was stolen, but I found it with that girl!”

“Yes, she escaped them with your yoroi. I asked White Blaze >Ryo realized now that the tiger is gone< to rescue her and to retrieve your yoroi. I will explain about her in a while. Now, listen carefully, Ryo, for you have a quest that is dire...”

During Ryo’s dream, White Blaze woke up next to his human friend. A shadow caught his eye, and the feline began to growl. The shadow jumped again. White Blaze turned his head, trying to locate this creature. Suddenly, the thing jumped high above them and fell swiftly down to attack Ryo’s unconscious body. It was a hideous skeletal being, with dark fur covering its body. Hands consisted of two long, slender claws and a matching thumbs. The legs and feet resembled that of a bird. Horns protruded from his forehead and arc out like a jester’s hat. Glowing underneath them were two red slits for eyes. Two slanted holes replaced a nose. No mouth was visible.

White Blaze intercepted the assault. The night creature hissed, through what, White Blaze couldn’t tell. The thing failed many attempts at Ryo’s body, but managed to claw Ryo’s arm...

“Aaagghhh!” Ryo’s astral body collapsed. Through his teeth, he groaned, “What...is...going...on?”

“Someone’s attacking your body. You must go defend yourself, hurry!”

“Can’t I just wake up?”

“No, not here. Or you’ll be trapped in limbo. You must run back. Hurry!”

Ryo picked himself up and ran, even with the excruciating pain. (How could an astral body have pain?)

As he exited the cliff, he witnessed White Blaze and some sort of creature fighting. “WHITE BLAZE!”

Suddenly, Ryo woke up, and his body shot up. Blood dripped from his gashed left arm. He grabbed his yoroi and leapt into the air. The Ronin landed with one knee on the sand in his sub-armor. Ryo stood and asked, “Who are you?” The creature dashed for Ryo’s neck. Ryo dodged the attack. “I guess you won’t answer.” The battle continued with Ryo, White Blaze and the dark creature. The thing ran up the slope that leads to the top of the cliff. There, it turned around and clawed Ryo through his sub-armor. In the place where the claws made the contact, bright red flashes illuminated in front of Ryo. In pain, the warrior knelt. White Blaze cornered the creature to the edge. Against the huge full moon behind him, the fur appeared to be...blue and purple. That fur, could it be the thing that attacked Kiahle? Well, looks like I’ll have to transform...boy, it’s been a while!

“ARMOR OF THE WILDFIRE, TAO GI!!!!”

But nothing happened. His armor didn't appear.

“What the...?” Ryo looked down at his sub-armor in disbelief.

Hissing before him was that creature of the night. It squinted its red glowing eyes and jumped into the deadly waves below. Ryo and White Blaze ran towards the edge to find the lonely sea and great moon in the crispy night.

The Ronin climbed slowly into his car. He searched his glove department for the first aid kit and tended to his wounds. White Blaze sat outside the vehicle, staring with concern at his friend.

“Ugh, White Blaze, don't worry, pal, I'm okay.” He slumped into his seat and sighed. “Yeah, I just need to rest. Just for tonight before our quest.”

But the stars provided no comfort that night. Sleep came so lightly, especially since Ryo's slumber was disturbed by nightmares of that creature and his worries of the future. In the morning, red eyes greeted the rising sun. The same ferry picked up Ryo and his huge companion. He leaned on the rails and wondered about many things. The Ancient sent White Blaze to rescue the girl from the Dark Realm? Where did this Dark Realm come from? Then I got to find the Orb of Divinity, in a cave somewhere northeast of here? They tampered with my yoroi. I must find the Orb of Divinity and give it to Kayura. How am I going to find Kayura? Why can I go into my sub-armor and not my armor? If only the ancient had more time...And that girl...

They finally reached the mainland. “Let's see,” Ryo whispered to himself as he shielded his eyes from the sun. “There are three caves that I know about in that direction, but I better get a map. Most likely it'll be in an unknown cave; these things usually are.” He looked around once more. The next city wasn't too far away.

“Hey, stop it!”

“Nnyyaahh.”

“C'm on!”

Children ran around the café without a care. The parents scolded their kids to behave. Ryo sat with a cup of coffee and a map. White Blaze stayed beyond the city limits, not wanting to draw a crowd tonight. Alone, the Ronin's mind wandered away. He watched the kids. They had so much energy. He remembered when he was a child and how much energy he had. The battles with the Dynasty and Talpa took a lot of energy, too. But...I'm not as young and fired up as I used to be. Now, I'm twenty-four, and I feel drained. Sure he had his health and all; however, Ryo was just...tired. Using the power of the magical armors takes its toll on the wearer; it uses the wearer's very life energy. That is why Ryo felt so tired. Just the mere thought of having to fight again wore him out. Well, whether I've had it or not, I guess it's just fate. I feel more like a flame than a wildfire.

There, he sipped his coffee and stared into his thoughts. For the first time, he was mentally preparing for the hard times ahead, trying to push away his doubts.

Mia kidnapped Kiahle to get her ready for her big date. It's funny that no one really made a big deal about it. In fact, they just all agreed “any girl that meets Sage will eventually go on a date with him.” It was inevitable. (That is, just recently, because he did have trouble just holding a conversation with a girl, let alone able to date one. Anywho-) “That's just what they're doing; she's one among many.”

Sage sat on the small sofa, occasionally looking at the clock. Rowen and Cye sat on the couch, reading their books. We don't take as long as Sage to get ready. Besides, he goes all out. Writing of such, Sage

was so suavely dressed with a light beige suit and a dark green shirt underneath. His hair kept the same flow as always. He wore a cologne, one that he had Rowen concocted to perfectly compliment his natural scent. The doorbell rang. Sage looked at his watch and answered the door.

Mia stood in the doorway, smiling, "Are you ready?" She stepped away to reveal the new and improved Kiahle.

The girl stepped into the room and smiled. "Hi, Sage, I'm ready for our date!" Her short dress had the pattern like White Blaze. It hung on her body with two black straps. On her neck was a black choker that matched the ribbons in her hair and on her ankles.

She...actually looks...kinda...cute, they all thought to themselves.

"Wow, Kiahle, you look splendid tonight," Cye commented. Rowen just whistled.

"Thank you," Kiahle replied with enthusiasm. She spun around slowly like a dance and asked, "Do you like the dress?" She stopped and winked at Sage, "I've been wanting to wear this for a week!"

"So that's what you-"

"Yup! You guessed it!" The girl threw her arms behind her back and rocked up and down on her black high heels. "But, hey, you finally got to see my secret!"

He held out his arm, "Are you ready to go now?"

"Yes, I'm ready!" she giggled as she grasped his arm. As they disappeared into the night, she turned around and waved.

Cye and Rowen looked at Mia, then at each other. Cye broke the silence, "I hope they have fun. She seems pretty excited."

Rowen furrowed his brows. He knows Sage better than anyone. Sage enjoyed the company of women and the attention that he gets from them. He recalled one time that they talked:

The two Ronins walked down the strip.

"So, Sage, are you ever going to get tired of dating so many women?"

"Are you crazy? What man in his right mind would get tired of that? Besides, you know that I've just got over my problem. I couldn't even think about a girl without being nervous."

"I dunno, maybe you'd like to find the right girl or something?"

"Well, hopefully she doesn't come my way anytime soon!"

"And what if she does? You're just going to break her heart?"

"Of course not, she'll just have to wait."

"C'mon, Sage, get real, who'd wait for you?"

"Oh, I can think of plenty."

"Yeah, that is until they realize that you have all the women around your fingers. Then they get jealous and leave your sorry behind."

"Like I don't have any girls to spare!"

"Yeah, that's true! So, you would never be in love with a girl?"

"Well, of course I will! I did have one steady girlfriend in high school, it's not like it's impossible."

"And since the last girl broke your heart, you chose to remain a bachelor, admit it!"

"I admit it, but there's nothing wrong with my choice, it's just my choice. Besides, with this face, it'd be a shame that I'd be tied down!"

"Conceited!"

"Oh, you should talk, Mr. 'I got an IQ of two-hundred.'"

"Two hundred and fifty."

"See."

The image faded away, but the words echoed in his mind. He remembers all the heartbroken girls that would cry over him. Those girls didn't really matter to Rowen; he didn't even know them. But now, he's a friend with one of Sage's many girls. I'd hate to see her cry! She won't understand why Sage will do

the things that he'll do. But it's not my place to get involved. Is it? Rowen muttered under his breath, "I hope he doesn't break her heart."

In the line, Sage and Kiahle stood among many other people, waiting to be let into the nightclub. "This is the best club around here. I know the bouncer, my mom treats his daughter."

"Tonight has been so fun. The dinner was delicious and I enjoyed the movie; it was so funny! I can't wait to learn how to dance!" Stars were bouncing in her eyes.

"The club can be fun, but you need to watch out. Some people in there are trouble. But," he stroked his left hand through his hair, "If you stick with me the whole night, you should do fine." A hand touched his shoulder. "Hey!!"

"Hey, man!" a huge muscular man shouted. Standing six feet and seven inches tall was a man that must have weighed around two hundred seventy pounds of pure muscles. However, his eyes were so kind and bright, almost as if it didn't belong to the body it came with. "So, Sage, I see you got a new date for this, uhh, week, no, no, I guess it would just be for tonight, I know--"

Sage interrupted nervously, "HEY, Jokku, how are you doing?" Sage motioned his hand across his neck.

Jokku winked and whispered, "Oh, I get it, this is a new girl in town! Fresh meat."

"So," Sage spoke loudly, "Jokku, are you going to let us in or what?"

"Yeah, yeah, but aren't you going to introduce me to your cute new friend?" He smiled at the confused, intimidated girl.

"This is Kiahle. Hey! Back off, she's, ugh, not your type."

"Well, she might be tomorrow, you'll have a new date--"

"OH, MY FAVORITE SONG; SEE YOU LATER!" Sage pulled Kiahle into the club as his bouncer friend laughed his head off.

As they entered the noisy room crowded with people, the new face asked, "What was that all about?"

"Oh, Jokku, don't mind him. He's such a joker. Heh, heh!" He chuckled nervously, "So, would you like something to drink?" The girl nodded her head in response. She grabbed his arm and followed Sage to the bar through the thick hoard of people. They found two empty seats and sat down. He bought her a couple of drinks, but the rest were virgin strawberry daiquiris so she wouldn't get drunk. Meanwhile, she watched the people moving to the beat of the techno music that filled the room loudly.

"Sage, let's go dance."

"Sure," he stood up and grasped her hand, "C'mon."

Eager to dance, Kiahle followed him to the dance floor. Different colors beamed spontaneously around. It was pretty dim in the room. Shadows moved everywhere, clouded in mystery.

"Hey, you're a natural! Did any of the other guys take you dancing?" Sage shouted over the thunderous music.

"No, this is my first time!"

For a good while, they danced together. Many women tried to dance with Sage, but he didn't allow it. He didn't want to let Kiahle out of his sight, not in this kind of place. Sage was tempted, though. After all, these were beautiful women that were after him.

"So, handsome, how about grooving with me," a blonde chick asked as she stepped between Sage and Kiahle. She must've been the hottest woman in the club.

"Uh, thanks, but I al--!"

"Uh-ungh, I think you should dance with a real woman now."

"Look, I already am." Sage's dance slowed a bit.

"C'mon, hot-stuff."



“Look, I’m sure there are plenty of others guys willing to dance with you-!”

“But I want to dance with YOU.”

“Hey! Where is she? Kiahle? Kiahle?” Sage stopped his dance completely and frantically looked around. He couldn’t see her. Suddenly, it was harder to get through the pack of people.

What Sage failed to see was how the blonde slightly kicked Kiahle out of the way. The girl was thrust away from Sage. Others were bumping into her, forcing her to move away from them. “Sage?” she called out. “Sage!” She walked around the huge dance floor, slowly. “Sage!”

“Hey there, cutie, looking for your boyfriend? Forget about him, why don’t you come with me.” A big man like Jokku grabbed Kiahle’s arm, tightly. His breathe reeked of alcohol.

“Please, let me go. You’re hurting me. I have to go find Sage.”

“I don’t think so. You found what you need right here.”

“LET ME GO!” she yelled. Fear built inside of her. Something in her eyes began to glitter...maybe it was more than fear that was stirring inside of her.

A familiar voice shouted, “Hey, do we have a problem here?”

“Rowen?” Kiahle smiled.

“You heard the girl. Let her go,” Rowen demanded. Cye stood behind him. (Oh, those two could come to my rescue ANYTIME!)

“Oh, yeah? What are you going to do to me?”

“I’m warning you.”

“Ha, ha! Yeah, whatever!” The brute began to drag Kiahle away. In seconds, Rowen grabbed his arm in which released the girl (you know, like that whole pressure point stuff.) The blue-haired hero kicked the big guy down, knocking a few people down with him. By the time the big guy got up, a group of observers were already beginning to form. “You’re going to be sorry for that.”

“Hey,” Cye interrupted, “Why don’t you just admit defeat and go cause trouble else where?”

The big guy seized Cye’s shirt. “Do you mind, runt? I’ll take care of you, your friend, and that little cutie of yours!”

Oh no, he said ‘runt.’ Nobody, but nobody, calls Cye a runt. A brawl began with Cye, Rowen, and the brute. Bouncers broke the fight up and kicked all three out of the club. Kiahle followed them outside into the alley.

Sage was in the middle of concentrating. He tried to feel Kiahle out, to locate the direction she was in. He could feel her vibes were growing stronger throughout the week, but they still weren’t strong enough for him to lock onto. A big commotion caught his attention. Kiahle! He rushed to the scene and saw some people being escorted out. Kiahle was right behind them. He trailed after them. Is that Rowen and Cye? He felt a hand on his shoulder.

“Don’t go,” the blonde insisted.

“Leave me alone, you’ve cause enough trouble for me!” He shook her hand off and rushed away.

“Oh well,” she shrugged and continued her trouble elsewhere.

“Okay, let’s finish this!” Cye shouted.

“C’mon, two against one? That’s no fair! Fight me one on one, like a man, you runt!”

“Rowen step aside.”

Rowen stepped closer instead. “But Cye-.”

“Just do it!”

The fight continued without Rowen. He knew that Cye could take this guy out. And he did. Of course, Cye ended up with a bloody nose, but that was better than being knocked out like the brute. Kiahle watched in horror, almost repulsed at the sight of violence.

“Hey, what’s going on? Kiahle-!” Sage ran out of the door. But Rowen cut him short and grabbed Sage’s shirt with both of his hands.

“Where were you, Sage? Aren’t you supposed to watch her?” Rowen hollered with anger.

“I was, but she...what happened was out of my control!”

“Yeah, somehow, I don’t believe that! I saw you with that blonde girl!”

Kiahle stepped between them, but Rowen still had one hand on Sage, “Please, Rowen, stop! Please!” Rowen let go and stormed off. “C’mon, Cye. We won’t be getting into this club for a while.”

“Rowen,” Sage began, “That girl was a nuisance...I didn’t-!”

“I got nothing to say to you! Let’s go, Cye!” Rowen held Kiahle’s wrist, “I think you should come with us. >glaring at Sage< You’d be safer.”

Sage pushed Rowen arm away, “Now, look, Rowen, you are getting way out of line here. We are on a date-!”

“Then why don’t you act like it?”

“ Hey, I don’t think it was Sage’s fault,” Cye began, but Rowen stormed off. Cye shouted after Rowen, “Rowen, shouldn’t we at least...oh...” He turned to Sage and Kiahle, “I better try to cool him down.” The Ronin of Trust ran after his friend.

Sage watched in anger as Rowen stormed away. He let out a huge sigh and faced her, “Kiahle, I’m so sorry that our date had to turn out like this. I’m sorry that you had to see all of this. I don’t...understand why Rowen...” He paused to recollect his thoughts. “We shouldn’t go home right away. Let’s go to the lake. I just need to clear my head.”

\*\*\*Ok, the end of the beginning is here, and the beginning of the middle is next... Huh?\*\*\*