

Rurouni Hiei

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NOTE: I had to tamper with some power levels and time periods to keep characters in tune with each other.

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1 - Rurouni Hiei

THE harsh pricks of hailstones raged on in the furious blizzard outside. January was usually like this? snow, blizzards, ice storms, and whatnot. There were many tree branches that were constantly snapping and falling, creating a rustling sound throughout the forest. Anyone would be a fool to try and brave this storm?

Kuwabara Kazuma struggled up to the door of the old temple and managed to knock weakly on it. He shivered with the cold and his knees buckled. His orange-red hair had tufts of ice frozen in it, and his largely built figure was weighed down with snow. He really hoped this would work.

No one seemed to answer the door for a long time. ?Typical,? he muttered to himself and took both fists, which he pounded solidly with on the door with all the strength he could muster. He gasped for air, hoping for warm air, when the big brass door opened slowly. A thin, small woman was standing in the door, eying Kuwabara closely. Her wavy hair was hanging loosely at her sides and her jaw was set in a grim smirk.

?Patience, fool,? she warned him. She did not move away from the doorway, like he hoped she would, to welcome him in. ?I would have eventually come. What do you want??

Kuwabara ignored her and peeked around her shoulder into her large living room. The room only consisted of a small kitchen in the corner, an old table with a faded tablecloth, and a Nintendo 64 game console in the middle of the room on pause. His eyes widened in surprise.

?Erm? you know, Genkai,? he began to the old woman, ?well, since you?re a powerful Sensei and all, don?t you, like, have enough money to get a GOOD game console, like an XBOX or Game Cube??

Genkai stared at him for a moment. ?I don?t fight for money, like some selfish idiots do,? she replied coldly. ?I fight anyone who gets in my way, and I always have. Now why on earth did you drag yourself over in a raging blizzard to my temple? I don?t plan on training you.?

??Oh yeah!? Kuwabara suddenly brightened up. ?Is Yukina home??

Genkai looked like she was in deep thought before answering. ?Er? I think she?s in her room, let ME go get her??

?Naw, it?s ok!? Kuwabara pushed past her happily and headed for the far room in the hallway. ?I?ll go see her for myself!?

?No, wait?!? Genkai yelled after him, but he had already disappeared down the hall. She sighed and returned to her game console. ?Don?t say I didn?t warn him.?

Yukina the ice-apparition sat on her daybed, watching the snow pound against the window. She smiled as she fiddled with her long, bluish-green hair. It?s just like home, she thought to herself. But I couldn?t

possibly go outside? Genkai would kill me if I got a cold. That's likely. She sighed and walked over to her door, but looked back at the window quizzically. She felt like someone was out there, but she didn't know who?

She was feeling hungry and decided she was going to make breakfast for everybody. Suddenly the door flew open and she fell back in surprise. Kuwabara was standing in the doorway, smiling broadly.

"Oh? Kazuma!? Yukina gasped, clutching her chest. You scared me! But? what are you doing in my room?? Did you really travel all the way from the city to see me??

Kuwabara smiled foolishly. "Well, I'er ? I decided to get you a present! And I wanted to give it to you while the weather's like this?" He rummaged around in his pocket and pulled out a small, delicate ring with a beautiful snowflake symbol on top. Yukina's eyes widened as she was handed the small item.

"Ooh? Kuwabara? it's so beautiful," she whispered and placed it on her ring finger. He blushed a deep red color. "You didn't have to come here? oh, goodness?" she eyed his frozen tufts of hair and his blue lips. "You look so cold," she concluded to him. "Here, come over here and I'll get you a blanket, ok?"

Outside of Yukina's room, something rustled in the snow-covered trees. Inside the safety of the branches sat a young man with tall, black hair. He was very short, and he wore an oversize cape with a white scarf-like material wrapped around his neck. On his forehead he sported a single strip of white cloth tied in the back. His hand gripped the handle of his sheathed sword tightly as he tried not to shiver with the cold. "Kazuma?" he muttered, and silently zoomed down a few branches to a secluded tree with a good view through the window. His keen, red eyes watched the scene intently.

Yukina walked over to her bed; Kuwabara slowly followed. She pulled off her comforter and placed it about his shoulders. He breathed a sigh of relief and sat down carefully. He looked at her small room and wondered how she even survived it in here.

Yukina sat down beside him. She looked at her hands and gave a small laugh. "Too bad my healing powers can't cure frostbite, huh?" "Yea," Kuwabara said distantly, still looking around the room. Yukina gave a small cough and started twiddling her thumbs together. He turned his gaze to her, who obviously was thinking about something outside the window? she kept glancing over at it nervously. She couldn't, however, see the young man hiding in the trees.

Kuwabara looked around the room once more, as if to see if anyone was looking, and then slowly leaned towards Yukina, aiming for a kiss with his lips puckered. Yukina stopped looking at the window for a moment and turned in Kuwabara's direction only to find a pair of oversized lips headed for her.

SMACK!

"Oh dear?" Yukina sat up quickly, blushing, as Kuwabara held the left side of his face in pain. "Ow! Hey!?" he exclaimed as his face steadily formed the outline of a small hand on his cheek.

"I'm sorry?" Yukina trailed on, looking angry and embarrassed at once. "Um, I'll be right back?" and with that, she ran out of the room. Kuwabara sat alone on the bed and started shivering again.

Dumb @\$\$, the young man thought and narrowly dodged a falling branch from above him. That is pitifully uncoordinated. He jumped through other trees, headed towards the front of the house. Sure enough, Yukina walked out onto the front porch, looking at her new ring, and tears started falling slowly down her cheeks. They clattered to the ground, now transformed into small golden gems. She hastily picked them up and shoved them in her pocket.

The young man watched with despair at the pitiful scene below him. He suddenly had an idea sprout inside his mind. Now is the perfect time to tell her how much you care and watch over her, he thought hurriedly. She needs comfort, she deserves to know you care, but not that you're her brother?

He gently touched the bandana over his forehead and scowled. You didn't become a jaganshi for nothing. Now is the time to confront her! His eye's brightened a bit as he started making his decent down the tree branches. He quietly made it to a closer branch, and was only feet away from Yukina, and he opened his mouth to make it aware he was in her presence?

Everything happened too quickly. At some point before the young man could descend the branch, another man ran from the opposite side of Yukina and quickly covered her mouth to prevent her from screaming. Yukina's face was a look of pure shock as the man swept Yukina off her feet and ran into the opposing forest at such speed that most of the dirty work was done in merely a second.

?No!?! the young man shouted as he tore off his bandana on his forehead and shoved it inside his cape. He revealed his Jagan eye as he closed his own two. His red eyes were open quickly again and he sprinted into the forest ahead of him. His speed was insanely fast as well, so most of the forest was a blur to him. Snow and hail partially blinded him, but he pushed on through the blizzard. I have to catch him, the young man thought urgently, I must! I can see Yukina clearly!

Before he knew what was happening he had stopped at an abrupt halt and was experiencing a severe headache. His alert eyes darted in front of him, and he saw a recognizable redhead, who had obviously run into him, or vice versa? he was trying to get up from the ground. The young man clenched his fists.

?Kurama, you fool, could you not see that man taking Yukina the OTHER way? That man's probably gone by now!!?

But a different, unfamiliar voice came from the redhead. ?I'm sorry, I do not know of this Kurama you speak of, that I don't!?

The young man looked startled as the stranger lifted his head, and sure enough he did not see a familiar face. This man's face was rounder, and he had a cross-shaped scar on his left cheek. His outfit was very old-fashioned, and his eyes were an astounding purple. He had a sword sheath loosely by his side, and he was, oddly enough, smiling at the young man.

The young man's gaze went from the cross-shaped scar to his sword sheath. He observed the hilt with much fascination. ?Pull your sword out,? the young man said immediately to the stranger before he had a chance to talk. The stranger nodded in an understanding motion and slowly pulled the sword out.

It was just as the young man thought? it was a reverse-blade sword. The sword that can't kill. He knew exactly who this stranger was. ?Battousai,? the young man murmured, ?the manslayer.?

"Yes, you're right," the stranger concluded, "or used to be." He put out his hand to the young man. "Kenshin Himura, the man who fights to protect others, no longer the battousai. And you are???"

Kenshin seemed to be politely staring at the young man's Jagan eye. He hastily got the bandana back out of his cape and tied it on with great speed. Suddenly he snapped back to reality. "Yukina!" he gasped and made to take off. "We'll never reach them in time!"

But he suddenly felt a restraining hand on his shoulder. He scowled. "Do not TOUCH me, Battousai, you can't stop me from doing this!"

"You don't understand," Kenshin tried to explain with difficulty as he kept the young man at bay. "I was chasing that man, too? he's Aoshi Shinamori, and he's part of an illegal operation working for someone who creates opium? anyways, he's far too fast and cunning for us to catch up to, even if we hadn't ran into each other. I know where he works, and it's much better to arrive there a day later with backup than arrive there immediately with only a yourself fighting against a powerful man.?"

"Hn," the young man murmured and stopped budging. He knew it wouldn't be wise to go against Battousai, the famous manslayer. It was odd, though? the battousai didn't look threatening at all. He actually looked (the young man shuddered at the thought) pleasant.

Kenshin sheathed his sword again and turned towards the young man. "So, what's your name?? The young man considered this question.

"I can't distribute information like that," he replied coolly. "Sorry to disappoint you." Kenshin nodded approvingly.

"Oh, Hiei, there you are!"

Another longhaired redhead came strolling out of the forest with his hands in his pockets. Hiei sweat-dropped.

"Kurama??

Kenshin laughed shortly, and then noticed the other person in Kurama's wake.

"You all right, Sano?? Kenshin said. The tall, brown-haired thug spat out of the side of his mouth, obviously trying too hard to be tough. "Yea, I'm fine? oh, Kenshin, meet Kurama, we bumped into each other while we were??

"Kurama, why are you here anyways?? Hiei cut Sano short of his topic. Kurama looked at Hiei pitifully before answering.

"Honestly, Hiei, don't you remember? We were supposed to meet Yusuke later today and do some training and??

"Training in this weather??

Indoors, Kurama continued. And I knew you'd probably be watching over Yukina, so I was coming to get you. I saw this Aoshi figure and thought it was sort of suspicious, so I decided to follow, and I met Sanosuke.

Everyone was quiet for a moment. Kenshin then spoke up. I think we should get shelter and talk things over? make a plan, that we should!?

Let's go to Genkai's temple, Kurama proposed? he looked at Sano and Kenshin's confused looks. We have good references there.? All except Hiei nodded their heads in agreement. Then it's settled!?

Kurama clapped his hands together and eyed Hiei carefully. Hiei didn't look at him back.

Oh dear, poor Yukina! She must be dreadfully sick of getting kidnapped so much!?

Kurama, Genaki, Kenshin, and Sano sat on the small sofas, talking to the young girl named Botan. She fiddled with her blue-haired ponytail furiously and looked downfallen. I wish I didn't sleep in so darn late or I could have stopped Kuwabara from going in her room!?

Shut up already!? Kuwabara yelled from a far armchair. I'm just as pissed off about this as you are!?

Hiei stood in the corner of the room, watching Kuwabara with an air of hatred. If it wasn't for him in the first place? he thought to himself and put his view back on the group around the sofa? where Kurama turned around immediately. Hiei raised his eyebrows as Kurama excused himself from the crowd and walked towards him.

Don't have bad feelings towards Kuwabara, Kurama whispered to him. Sure, you're her brother, but if you knew how true love connections are??

And you do?? Hiei spat back at him; Kurama blushed.

All I'm saying is, Kurama continued, is that it's no one's fault this happened? no one knew that Aoshi was going to stroll in and take her!?

Hiei tried to ignore this by looking through the nearest window. He sighed. Perfect??

Yusuke Urameshi burst into the temple, shouldering off his coat, with his girlfriend, Keiko, followed timidly behind. Ok, I am ready for some serious training tips, guys!?

He stopped abruptly when he saw two new guests and seven sullen faces around him. Er?? he stammered. When did the funeral services start being held in Genkai's joint?OW!?

Keiko had kicked him firmly in the leg, causing him to lose his balance and fall flat on his face. Keiko firmly placed her hands on her hips and sneered at him before turning to the group and apologizing.

Oh? by the way?? Yusuke hauled himself up off the floor. Are one of those new guys? names? Sir

Ken???

?Oi!? Kenshin jumped up and ran towards the door. He hastily paused at the doorway, turned around, and said, ?Be right back!? before racing out of the temple. Everybody grew quiet to hear the commotion. Voices could be heard yelling from outside.

?KENSHIN!! How could you leave us wandering around in a blizzard?!??

BAM!

?Very true, Sir Ken, leaving women stranded looking for you and concerned about your safety!?

SMACK!

?That?s right, Kenshin? hey, wait! I?m a guy!?

WHACK!

Kenshin came back in the temple with three large bumps on his head, and a young, pretty girl with her hair in a bun-like ponytail was carrying him. Behind her came another woman with long, waist-length hair and a little boy (who was about ten years old) carrying a wooden sword. The three newcomers looked furious, and Kenshin, on the other hand, looked unconscious. Everyone sweat-dropped.

?Ooh?? Keiko gasped and ran over with Botan to help bring Kenshin in. The younger girl took hold of one of Kenshin?s hands, Keiko took the other, and the slightly older woman and Botan took a leg, while the little boy stood, watching and sneering.

The woman in the back of Kenshin stopped immediately when she noticed Sano. Her lips pursed tightly together as she made her way towards him. Sano smiled toothily.

?Eh? heh heh? hi, Megumi? nice weather, huh??? Megumi marched herself over to Sano and got a firm grip on his ear, causing him to yell very loudly. Botan took in this sight and a wave of happiness came over her.

?That?s exactly what I would do to Yusuke!? she cried and dropped Kenshin?s foot with a thud. Megumi looked pleasantly surprised. ?Oh, really?? she inquired. ?Yes, I think it?s the only way to get men to behave these days, don?t you?? The two started laughing in chorus together.

?I?m thinking? that?s strangely odd,? Yusuke concluded to everybody.

Sano was thinking fox ears and two tails.

?Oh, I almost forgot!? the younger girl smiled cheerfully. ?I should really introduce all of us! My name is Kaoru, and this rude little boy right here is Yahiko!? she pointed at the ten year old, who muttered something under his breath like, ?I?m not little,? Kaoru continued after bopping Yahiko on the head. ?And I think you?ve already guessed that she?s Megumi?? she sounded bored as she said that, and Megumi let go of Sano?s ear for a quick moment to shoot a menacing look her way.

"Please sit down," Genkai told all of them. "I'd be very cold if I figured out the Battousai had left me in the middle of a blizzard. I'll go and make some green tea for everyone."

As Genkai walked towards the kitchen, she passed Kurama, who nodded in the direction that Hiei was walking; he was headed for Yukina's bedroom. "Make that one less cup of tea, please."

Hiei slowly opened the door to Yukina's bedroom. The first thing he noticed was her comforter, which was messily clumped in a pile on top of the bed. He walked over to the bed and started folding her comforter under the mattress and smoothed some of the wrinkles out. When he took his hands away from the bedspread, he noticed a fleck of blood near the corner, and it was fresh.

"Damn it?" Hiei muttered and looked at his right arm, which was covered in bandages. Sure enough, the lower part of his hand had started to bleed again. He tightened the bandages more and tried to take the blood off as carefully as he could. Sometimes he really wished he had never used the Dragon of the Darkness Flame attack; it wasn't quite worth it.

Then something glittering caught his attention over by Yukina's dresser. He slowly walked towards it and he couldn't believe what was in front of him. It was an Ice-Tear Gem, like the one she had shed earlier; but this one was bigger, and it was strung on a necklace. "It's Hina's," Hiei whispered to himself. His left hand extended towards it; he was very close.

Suddenly the door cracked open, and Hiei tore his hand away from the gem. Kurama was standing in the doorway, looking partially concerned.

"They want you out here," he explained. "Himura says that you should know what direction Aoshi went in, and that would help a great deal when we leave tomorrow."

"Yes, I suppose he's got a point." Hiei tried to make his voice sound dull and unconcerned. Kurama looked him up and down once more before commenting, "You okay???"

"Mind your own business, Suuichi," Hiei snapped and shoved past him into the living room. When he walked in he found Botan and Megumi still laughing together, Keiko and Kaoru chatting intently, Kuwabara and Yahiko scowling at each other and arguing, Sano rubbing his ear with Yusuke laughing at him, and Kenshin and Genkai conversing about something. Everyone grew quiet when Hiei entered the room.

"Well then," Kenshin said as Hiei took a place in an empty armchair and Kurama stood behind the couch. "I suppose we should tell you what information we have about Yukina's whereabouts, that we should." He took a sip of green tea before continuing.

"Well, Aoshi is working for an entrepreneur by the name of Kanryu Takeda; he sells items on the black market, and they are usually weapons of death. Everybody that arrived with me knows where their mansion is, so all everyone else has to do is follow our lead. Now, I was informed that Yukina's tears turn into Ice-Tear Gems?" there was a momentary pause and Kenshin looked at Genkai, who nodded,

?right, and if I know Kanryu, he'll start torturing her for tears and wealth, that he will.?

Hiei gritted his teeth, but tried to make it look like he was getting at something between his teeth. It didn't work. Kuwabara was watching him intently until Hiei caught him an icy glance, making him turn away in fright.

?So,? Kenshin went on,? we need to get ready to start for the mansion at sunrise. I'm supposing we should pair up in groups of two, so it'll be easier to scout the area while we're traveling and watch for signs.?

Almost everyone in the room linked hands with the person beside them, (with the exception of Kuwabara and Yahiko bragging about some contest on who was better while they would be paired up) except for Genkai. ?I'm thinking of staying here on this leg of the trip,? she explained to Kenshin before he could protest. ?You don't know how many overly-obsessive fans try to sneak into my temple, like they're going to find a book with all of my special techniques in it. I need to protect this place? so just count me out.?

That left Yusuke, who didn't have a partner. He looked around the room, then at himself, and then grinned broadly.

?Yea, yea, I get it people,? he called aloud. ?I'm just so powerful that I don't even need a partner! I'll just travel alone on this leg of the trip, I can handle myself.? He looked for a willing listener to hear him bragging, but there were none. He scowled darkly.

Kenshin looked from Sano to Kurama, and smiled mysteriously. ?I think you two should be together, that you should,? Kenshin pointed at both of them. ?I have a feeling Kurama can keep a good grip on Sano and keep him under control? that's a good pair.?

Sano cursed under his breath, but Kurama smiled and said, ?It'll be a pleasure working with you, Sanosuke.?

?It's SANO,? he corrected and then went back to nursing his ear.

Kenshin then put his gaze on Hiei. ?I suppose it's us two then, that it is. Do you mind, Hiei??

Hiei looked the other way and shrugged. ?As long as it gets Yukina back safely,? he replied, and kept his gaze on the slowly dying blizzard outside. Dying? it was on this occasion that Hiei wasn't in the mood for thinking about it.

It was unusually cold outside again. There were many voices; most of them were sneering, and one was sobbing and screaming uncontrollably. ?Don't take my baby!? the voice screamed; tears ran down her face steadily. The scene then shifted to another woman, holding a package high above her head. She gazed pitifully at it before whispering to it silently. She then placed something inside the package secretly, and then, her eyes rimming with tears, she reluctantly dropped the package over the edge of a cliff. As the package descended, two small red eyes darted here and there, desperately looking for a

way out. But there wasn't, and the bundle kept falling? falling?

Hiei's eyes snapped open alertly in the dark night. He slowly sat up and looked around. Two other people accompanied the room with him? Kenshin and Kurama. His gaze first went on Kenshin, who was propped up against the far wall, gripping his sword tightly, but sleeping intently as well.

He then looked in Kurama's direction. He watched with fascination as he slept soundly, with a small smile on his face. Hiei felt envy overtake him? he can just lay there, unaware of haunting dreams to keep one up. It wasn't fair at all. He held up his bandaged arm and sighed quietly. There was no way of going back to sleep this night.

Sunrise came earlier than expected. Lots of the travelers were still trying to rub the sleep out of their eyes, and Kuwabara was practically falling asleep standing up. Again, Hiei thought about how insolent one could be, and again, Kurama gave him an I-would-really-appreciate-it-if-you-didn't-bring-that-up look. Hiei pretended that he didn't see it, but he did start focusing more on the task at hand.

?Man,? Kuwabara yawned complainingly. ?Do I really have to be paired up with a toddler? He's smaller than Hiei!?

Yahiko automatically snapped out of sleep and bared his teeth. ?I'm no toddler! You're just a jerk!?

The two made evil gestures to each other until Kaoru came by; then Yahiko grew silent and Kuwabara muttered to himself for a long time.

Hiei was again standing in his secluded corner, thinking about his dream and completely zoning Kurama out as he chatted lively to him.

??And I suppose that when we get there, we should probably use our pairs to take him on, and get him utterly confused before you pounce on him or so??

?Hn.? Hiei was looking at the door anxiously? he just wanted out of this broken-down temple. Did no one else here care about Yukina at all? And the Battousai seemed so calm and unaware of her safety? like her tender skin, which could so easily get burned, like when she was locked up at Tarukane's place.

He was tired of waiting. Dead tired. Before Kurama could say any more, Hiei had swept himself away and was quietly making his way to the door. And this time he wasn't getting stopped, no one was going to get in his way? he would make sure of that.

Kenshin didn't let this sight go unseen. He watched Hiei fling the door open and storm out into the lightly falling snow. Kenshin gave a small grin to himself. He admired Hiei's determination; he obviously cared very much for Yukina. Maybe it was time for all of them to get going after all.

Lucky for Hiei, no one else had noticed him leaving, so Kenshin asked Sano to give everyone directions on how to maneuver around the forest and get to the mansion. Sano agreed, and then looked at Kenshin strangely.

?Why aren't you gonna give them directions? Aren't you the main coordinator on this little

excursion..??

Kenshin walked towards the door and turned back to look at a confused Sano with a mysterious smile upon his features. ?I have some? business to attend to. I shall meet all of you at the mansion, that I will. If anyone happens to ask, I needed to go and keep the premises clean of any enemies. I trust you with this, Sano.?

The thug gave him a thumbs-up in understanding and waved as Kenshin silently slid out the door. As Sano went back to the group, someone small and invisible to everyone else watched from the same corner that Hiei once stood. It was Genkai, and she smiled slightly. So here is where the mission really kicked in.

A small figure zoomed throughout the forest. He landed and departed from branches in a matter of seconds. He was pleased with his speed? it usually served him well. And if there was ever a loose branch in his way, his sword would swiftly cut through it and he continued on. It would only be a matter of time before he reached the mansion.

Hiei slowed his run a bit. He felt someone else?s presence. He stopped for a split second to observe his surroundings quickly. Someone was following him. He quickly regained his speed and kicked in for ultimate speed. This pursuer didn?t stand a chance now.

Then the most extraordinary thing happened. Hiei now had a clear view of his pursuer? it was Kenshin, and he was running along right beside him. Hiei slowed down a bit and raised his eyebrows in amazement. How could the Battousai keep up with him? He wasn?t even a demon!

Hiei reluctantly halted on a large branch and landed on the soft snow. Kenshin did the same. He looked at Hiei and nodded.

?I admire your determination, that I do, but I believe I made it clear that we weren?t going to rush in on this situation,? Kenshin reminded Hiei again. The effect didn?t go as he had planned, however.

?Why must you keep insisting on waiting?? Hiei snarled at him menacingly. ?Do you not care at all for Yukina?s safety? I demand a reason for your doing this!?

?Kazuma.?

Hiei blinked at the sudden response and stared at Kenshin. ?The fool? What good will he do for us? He?s got to be the weakest person here.?

?You may not notice it, but he does really care for Yukina as well. In fact, last night I had to stop him from sneaking out, he was so eager to leave.?

?Hn? he never seemed concerned when I see him.?

?Do you really want to know why?? Kenshin looked at Hiei, waiting for an answer from the jaganshi. He

shrugged his shoulders carelessly and sheathed his drawn sword that he was using before to cut tree limbs.

?It's because he's afraid to disappoint you.?

Hiei's eyes widened slightly, but he just kept his gaze on the snowy ground and didn't look up at the Battousai.

?Yusuke told me he had heard that from Kazuma, and I was wondering the same question you were, that I was, so I had decided to ask his next closest resource. And we're waiting for him because I suspect he very much wants to participate in defeating Aoshi as much as you do. You should give him some credit, that you should.?

Hiei snorted at this comment, and saw Kenshin's brow wrinkle in mild frustration out of the corner of his eye.

?At least she can have someone who isn't afraid to reveal their true identity, like Kuwabara, that she can. I believe that if she knew you were her brother??

Hiei flinched uncomfortably. He had one too many thoughts racing around in his head, too many things to ask.

?Hn? I take you must be quite a nosy person unless everyone came up to you and offered to tell you everything about me.?

?I'm sorry if my way of getting information is offensive towards you,? Kenshin replied coolly, ?but sometimes one must resort to desperate measures, that they must.?

Kenshin suddenly jerked his head towards the slowly rising sun and narrowed his eyebrows in concentration.

?I suspect the others have already started to depart in different directions towards the mansion under Sano's orders. Now I believe it's fine if we start at a slow walk? that way we can arrive at the mansion a little while before the others and do some ?pest control??.? Kenshin winked at Hiei, who was totally oblivious to him and had already started walking in the direction he had started.

?Hey? er? please wait!? Kenshin stumbled after Hiei and was soon behind him. He looked around at the quiet forest and breathed a fresh breath of air. He looked at Hiei out of the corner of his eye? he was walking reluctantly at a slow pace and kept his hand on his sword hilt defensively. Kenshin gave a small grin.

?So, Hiei? where did you get your sword??

?Hn. Can't remember.?

Kenshin made a small face to himself and sighed. Obviously Hiei wasn't one for chitchat.

?Then? who implanted your Jagan??

Hiei froze on the spot, obviously awestruck by Kenshin?s personal question. Then he wheeled angrily on him.

?Damn it, does Kurama just tell you this information from the top of his head?!?

Kenshin smiled at Hiei. ?No, I just like to have my information sorted out, like I told you before. I know that Kurama probably knows you the best, which lead me to asking him questions, that it did. Once again, I apologize??

Hiei ignored him again and kept walking. Kenshin didn?t, however.

?Shigure must have been quite skilled to implant it, that he must have.?

Hiei turned around slowly and gave Kenshin the most confused, annoyed, and incredulous look he could muster.

?Will you shut the hell up??

Kenshin blushed as Hiei once again turned his back to him and continued to keep walking. So much for starting a conversation.

The rest of the trip didn?t consist of much talking between the two swordsmen. Kenshin would sometimes point and say, ?This way,? but either than that there was little to no chitchat whatsoever. After a matter of hours, there was a visible trail in front of them, and the trees seemed to part to let it through. Kenshin?s footsteps ceased slightly. Hiei heard them and stopped as well.

?Now, I believe there should be quite a few guards around, so we might want to get rid of them quickly to prevent the weaker ones in our party from fighting,? Kenshin explained and Hiei withdrew his sword.

?This should be interesting,? Hiei commented and spun his sword in the air, catching it expertly. ?I have never had to defeat mere Ningen guards before.?

Before Kenshin could stop him, Hiei disappeared into the forest, quick as lightning. It only took about two minutes before Hiei returned from the direction he sped off to. He wiped his bloodstained sword on the grass.

?Your kind bleeds a lot.?

Kenshin winced and tried to avoid looking at the sword and nodded slowly. ?I hate to tell you once again, but you must know I do not kill anymore, that I don?t.?

?And??

?And?. Well, never mind,? Kenshin dropped the subject and pointed in the direction Hiei had come from. ?Let?s go,? he said and the two started walking down the trail.

After a great deal of walking, they reached the guard-free mansion. It was very large, built with iron gates that seemed impenetrable to someone who couldn't jump the brick wall. Hiei clenched his fists.

"So this is her prison?"

Kenshin nodded reluctantly and observed the brick wall in front of them. "I presume you can jump that?"

"Yes," Hiei replied matter-of-factly and looked around himself. "The others aren't here yet? and we must wait again?"

"Yes, I'm sorry to tell you that." Kenshin sat down on the ground and planted his sword beside him. He beckoned towards himself. "Aren't you going to take a rest?" he questioned Hiei.

"Hn." Hiei didn't move towards Kenshin, he just kept looking at the mansion behind the protective wall. He looked like he was trying to concentrate very hard, and his eyes widened when it seemed he found what he was looking for.

"What are they doing to her, Hiei?"

"None of your concern," Hiei snarled and his fist upon his sword hilt tightened incredibly as he kept his eyes wide and alert. Suddenly he tore away from his vision as Sano came hurtling through the trees.

"We're here, we're here, don't start without us!" he panted and collapsed on the ground beside Kenshin. Kurama followed him casually, shaking his head at Sano's antics. "He's been like that the whole trip," he said sorrowfully and beckoned towards the woods again.

After some difficulties, Kaoru, Keiko, Megumi, Botan, Kuwabara, Yahiko, and Yusuke had come out of the overgrowth and crowded around Kenshin, who had just stood up. Hiei, however, put his gaze back onto the mansion to try and find Yukina again. Kurama, who nudged him in the ribs, soon interrupted him.

"And I think that Kazuma should weaken Aoshi before Hiei takes him in, does that sound ok?" Kenshin asked the whole group.

"Wait a second," Kuwabara intervened, "how come I just gotta weaken Aoshi? That ain't fair!"

"Er?" Kenshin stammered, "The, uh, sooner you're finished, the sooner you get to see Yukina, er, yea!"

"Good point," Kuwabara thought and brandished his spirit sword menacingly. "Yea, I'll get him all tired, I can do that!"

Kenshin then looked at Hiei quickly for an answer; Hiei smirked quietly and Kenshin smiled before turning back to the group. Although Hiei had looked pretty confident, he had a lot of things to think about like what Yukina wanted.

After Sano burst the doors open and Kenshin, Hiei, Kurama and Kuwabara cleared the inside of the fortress of any enemies, the party of 11 started towards the big doors of the mansion. Kenshin pushed them open and the others quietly followed inside. As they started for a room inside that was fairly large, Kurama noticed Hiei acting strangely. He looked like he kept trying to focus on something? Yukina, no doubt.

?She?s not in there.?

Kenshin turned around to face Hiei. ?How can you tell??

?She is not in there. She?s in the other large room upstairs? and so are the other two.?

Kenshin nodded at Hiei and turned to the other awestruck fighters. ?You heard him? everyone please quietly go up the stairs behind Sano, and Yahiko, follow with him as well??

After descending the large marble staircase, they arrived at another large door like Hiei had described. Kenshin nodded towards Sano and Yahiko, and they both flung the doors open.

The inside of the room was hardly furnished? there was only one piece of furniture, and it was a single chair? and sitting on it was a completely petrified Yukina. She was almost completely shrouded in darkness, but there was a dull light hanging over her head. Kuwabara gasped when he saw her tied up, but Kenshin put a restraining hand on his shoulder. ?Not yet,? he whispered and pointed behind Yukina.

Emerging from the darkness were two people? one was very tall and had short, black hair that hung down in his face, which was long and lean. His mouth was set in a grim smirk, and his jacket blew from the air the ceiling fan created.

The other man was also built tall. He had light brown hair and large spectacles, and he wore a very expensive-looking uniform. He looked at them all and grinned wickedly.

?Come to rescue your precious ice princess, eh?? he grinned broadly and kicked Yukina under the chair she was sitting in. Kuwabara and Hiei both flinched and ground their teeth.

?Well, you just TRY to get past my associate, Aoshi!? he cackled and pointed at the other man, who had just pulled out a small sword. Kurama had seen one of these before. It was small, but incredibly accurate and swift, even if it did not hit with much force.

?Yea? Just try me!? Kuwabara spat and retrieved his spirit sword once more. The man called Aoshi looked at him with a gleam in his eye.

?Spirit energy?? he concurred to himself, ?I shall have pleasure in defeating and/or killing you, whoever you are.?

Yukina gasped as Kuwabara lunged headfirst at Aoshi. It was energy against steel as the two battled on. Kuwabara seemed to have the disadvantage to Aoshi, however. He was repeatedly getting small slashes in unprotected places on his body. Kanryu smiled appreciatively.

After numerous slashing, Kuwabara's strength had decreased steadily until he was struggling to stand on his own two feet. Aoshi kicked him on the ground, and he went rolling along the wooden floor, unable to protect himself. Aoshi smirked as he ascended upon him. Yukina was very close to tears right now.

?Leave the fool alone.?

Aoshi turned around to find Hiei now standing, ready to fight. Aoshi immediately kicked Kuwabara across the floor again and turned to face Hiei again.

?Ah, yes,? he hummed and looked Hiei up and down, ?The famous Hiei. I have heard lots about you? I bet you just can't wait to attack me, can you??

Hiei tried his very best to stop himself from immediately lunging upon Aoshi. Instead, he threw his cloak on the ground and turned to where Yukina was sitting, and the scene was enough to make anyone stop in their tracks.

She was now crying constantly? there were dozens of pearls at the bottom of her tied up feet as she glanced at Kuwabara, and then at Hiei. She still had tears steadily running down her cheeks as Kanryu greedily tried to pick up the gems.

That's when Hiei remembered something. When Yukina was captured at Tarukane's palace, Hiei, Yusuke, and Kuwabara had come to save her. However, when Hiei came up to kill Tarukane, Yukina had begged him not to kill Tarukane. She had said that she had seen enough killing already, and she couldn't bear to see any more.

Unfortunately, this is what was happening now.

Hiei looked at his own sword and then at Yukina's tear-streaked face again. His hand shook as he dropped his sword and it clattered on the floor.

?I?can't,? he stammered and looked at his own fallen sword. Aoshi looked at it too and laughed loudly.

?I understand perfectly now,? he said in a tempting voice, ?when the Great Hiei got the Jagan implanted, it takes you to the lowest class of demons? you obviously never exceeded beyond that after all, did you??

Hiei scowled fiercely and tried to hold himself back from shouting something rude while Yukina was in the room.

?No, wait, maybe it's something else,? Aoshi pondered aloud. ?Maybe he doesn't want to hurt the ice princess' feelings? How incredibly low of him, trying to please a girl that's already taken.?

Hiei literally shook with fury. ?Shut?up!? he yelled at Aoshi, but then he was interrupted by numerous sobs coming from Yukina's direction.

?No? Hiei!? she gasped between tears, ?Go ahead and fight! You? you have to beat him!?

It was as if Hiei could read her mind. "No," she was thinking, "I can't take any more killing! But Hiei has to beat him? oh, I am so confused!?"

Hiei stood, rigid to the spot. A pang of clattered emotions sprang through every inch of his body, and he felt like collapsing on the spot. What was he supposed to do now? He couldn't kill Aoshi? Yukina couldn't take it. His fists wouldn't be enough to surpass his speed and use of swords. He tried to think furiously. What would the Battousai do?

"Well, I'm tired of waiting!" Aoshi announced, "You had better be prepared!"

Wait? the Battousai? Hiei suddenly looked towards the group by the door? he didn't see Kenshin anywhere.

"Hiei, catch!?"

Hiei spun around to find the answer to all his problems? light reflected off all sides of the magnificent reverse-blade sword as it hurtled in midair towards the fire demon. It zipped past the approaching Aoshi, and Hiei, out of instinct, caught it deftly. He then saw Kenshin standing behind Yukina, with Kanryu tied up in Yukina's bonds. He had done it all when no one was looking. He then looked at the sword in a fascinated way. The sword that couldn't kill?

He smirked in a pleased way and took his fighting stance as Aoshi tore upon him. Soon, the two were suddenly engaged in a furious battle. Hardly anyone could see it? the two swordsmen were flying through slash after slash, showing no mercy.

Hiei was finding it hard to fight with this type of sword, considering the blade was turned the wrong way. He was soon finding himself getting more slashes and Aoshi getting less. This sword wasn't working for him?

That's when Aoshi caught Hiei a deafening blow that sent him skidding across the room. Yukina gasped yet again as the wall was crushed under the impact Hiei had given to it. Kurama looked desperately towards the wall when the debris cleared to find Hiei, covered in rubble and plenty of slashes. He struggled to stand up, using the sword as his support.

"You realize I really expected better of Hiei the Great," Aoshi sighed and walked slowly towards his fallen opponent, "I cannot believe he would stoop to fight so pathetically.?"

That's when a sensitive core was struck inside of Hiei. He thought of his self-image, of all the other people he would be letting down, and of Yukina?

"No?? he gritted his teeth and tried to stand up, "I? can?t? loose??"

He gripped the sword tightly and looked at it up and down. If he could turn it the other way at the precise moment?

He had no time to ponder, however. From the other side of the room, Kurama tensed up as Aoshi sent a blow to Hiei's right arm. Hiei gasped in pain as he fell to the floor, trying to stop his almost immobile arm

from constantly bleeding. This was almost an impossible battle to win.

Hiei tried desperately to think. He needed something Aoshi wouldn't expect and something swift and deadly, except without killing?

The jaganshi somehow managed to hoist himself up again. His eyes went immediately to Aoshi's. The tall man noticed instantly that there was no fear in Hiei's eyes; and it partially disturbed Aoshi. He spat the side, close to where he had kicked Kuwabara.

"I can see you are ready to begin seriously fighting," he commented and gripped his sword hilt at his side, "Which is precisely why this battle ends before you begin anything!"

And with that, Aoshi started swerving back and forth, creating a sort of delusion around Hiei. It was as if there were several Aoshi's floating around, and Hiei was having a hard time figuring out which one it was. He had to wait for it?

There! He saw the real Aoshi whiz towards him, with his sword at the ready. It was now or never.

Ignoring his arm, which had not stopped bleeding, Hiei quickly twirled the hilt of the reverse-blade sword and lunged at Aoshi as well.

Everyone gasped, as there was a bright flash of light. When it cleared, Aoshi and Hiei had already made their moves, and they were crouching in their just-attacked positions on opposite sides of the room. Even Kuwabara, who had managed to sit up and watch the fight, held his breath as the two swordsmen kept their stance and didn't move at all.

That's when Hiei doubled over and held his right arm while groaning painfully. Sano and Yahiko started to make a dash towards the fallen demon, when suddenly they were pulled away by none other than Kenshin, who had somehow managed to get across the room towards his band of fighters again. "Look," he whispered and pointed to the two fighters.

Suddenly, Hiei's face turned into a small smirk as Aoshi crippled under the weight of pain bestowed upon him, and he went toppling over onto the wooden floor. Hiei kneeled on the floor, keeping the sword as his balance, and gave a small sigh of relief.

"Wow! He actually won!" Yahiko exclaimed to everyone, and they all cheered happily. Kenshin nodded approvingly towards Kurama, and Kurama smiled back. Everyone suddenly became quiet when they saw Yukina rushing towards Hiei, her arms outstretched.

"Hiei!" she cried and kneeled on the floor beside him, her eyes a bright and beautiful red. He smiled weakly at her, but then held his arm as more blood oozed out from between his fingers.

"Oh?" Yukina saw this and scooted a little closer to Hiei, "Your arm?" Slowly, she outstretched her hands towards his arm, until she was just inches away from it.

She looked up at him, looking for an answer in his facial expressions. Hiei didn't say anything, so Yukina gently picked up his arm and moved it slightly closer to her. Hiei winced slightly, and Yukina

stopped moving the arm for a moment. After a while, she gently got it in the position that she wanted it. Then her hands became aglow with a beautiful green light and she focused her healing energy on the arm.

Moments passed, and soon most of the bleeding had stopped. Hiei even noticed that he could even move his arm around a little more. She removed her hands from his arm and sat back on her heels, panting slightly.

“Arigato,” Hiei said softly and Yukina nodded her head. Hiei suddenly looked up at her. “Yukina, I?”

“Yes?” she asked him quietly. She had started to cry again? but the tears were not tears of sorrow? they were tears of joy. He watched as they slowly trickled down her cheeks and dangled off of her chin. Hiei opened the palm of his right hand under her as the tear fell from her face and landed in his bandaged hand tenderly. He clenched it tightly.

“I? think that Kazuma needs you.” He pointed at Kuwabara, who was gazing with difficulty at the scene in front of him. Yukina gave a small gasp. “I almost forgot?” she said and scurried over to him. As she tended to his wounds, Kuwabara gave a small cough.

“I?m? er? sorry about what happened yesterday,” he apologized to her, and she smiled sweetly to him.

“Please forgive me as well,” she said and touched his face where she had hit him. Her hand started glowing again and the redness around Kuwabara’s cheekbone had vanished. His hand came up around hers and they gazed at each other intimately. Kaoru and Megumi started crying.

Hiei stood up while wincing somewhat and picked up the reverse-blade sword lying at his side. Without looking at Kenshin, he thrust the sword in his hands and muttered, “Here,” under his breath. He then propped himself up against the wall and examined his slightly healed arm. Kurama strolled leisurely over to Hiei and shook his head.

“Your never going to tell her, then?”

Hiei looked over at Kuwabara, who was now fully healed, spinning Yukina around in the air several times, before smirking.

“It would be too hard to do so, she’s just too happy,” he answered as Kurama suddenly held up Hiei’s original sword. Kurama turned it over and examined it before holding it in front of Hiei.

“Well, I suppose you’re a rurouni now,” he thought aloud, “After using the reverse-blade and all.”

“Most unlikely,” Hiei snapped and snatched the sword back from Kurama, hooking it to his belt expertly. Kenshin laughed aloud.

“I suggest you should use that sword for a different purpose now, however, that you should,” Kenshin told the arrogant demon.

“Whatever.” Hiei retrieved the cloak he had thrown off before the battle and closed himself in it. Kurama

then leaned over and whispered out of Hiei's earshot, "You would get used to it."

After Aoshi and the tied up Kanryu were returned to the police by Kenshin (whom was also rewarded a great sum of money for a reward but declined, making Sano turn a deep and angry scarlet), the band of fighters took the path back to Genkai's temple. Most of the travelers conversed happily about the battle that had taken place, and Kuwabara and Yukina teased each other lovingly most of the way.

Occasionally, travelers would stop to congratulate Hiei and Kenshin on their work, but either than that, Hiei was quiet the whole way back. He was never quite enthralled by winning battles; he did it often anyways. But it was today that Hiei felt partially jealous. If he knew Yukina well, she would spend time with both of them evenly? but it was just Kazuma on the mind, apparently.

Genkai smirked as the group of fighters stood upon her doorsteps, grinning broadly. She was immediately grasped into a large hug by Yukina, who apologized for running out of the house without thinking it through first. Genkai took no notice, however, and invited everyone in to celebrate.

After scones and green tea got passed around evenly, the group talked the night away endlessly. It had taken long enough for everyone to try to be the first to tell Genkai about the great battle, anyway. The girls flirted incessantly with the boys and congratulated them thoroughly, and even Sano and Megumi finally made up for their hotheaded attitudes towards each other. It was a great party overall.

Around half past ten, Yahiko started yawning hugely, and Kuwabara was almost fast asleep on Yukina's shoulder. Kenshin laughed softly.

"It seems the children are getting tired," he put emphasis on the word "children", and Yusuke sniggered. Hiei suddenly looked up from his cup of green tea. He had enough of listening to these stupid Ningen's talking all night, he just wanted to retreat to a secluded corner? now was his chance. Hiei slowly stood up and addressed the group none-too-formally.

"It's late, I'm turning in for the night," he simply said and turned towards the door leading to the porch. Kurama made a small face to himself, because he knew Hiei was not one to turn in for the night out of fatigue, while some other people bid Hiei a good night. Hiei ignored them and closed the door softly behind him. Yukina watched him go with a sad look upon her features.

Kenshin suddenly leaned over and whispered something in Yukina's ear. Her face suddenly radiated a brilliant smile as she slowly removed the sleeping Kuwabara from her shoulder, set him on the couch, and ran away into her room. She returned quickly with her hand clutching something small inside and quietly opened the main door as several curious eyes followed her. Unfortunate for them, all sound and visual contact was lost once she stepped outside the door.

Hiei stood against the far wall of the old temple behind the corner, looking up at the black sky. His feelings were all swept up in a jumble, and he couldn't tell what type of emotions he was experiencing, besides confusion. He shoved his hands lower into his pockets and made a low growling noise in the pit

of his throat. Why was he feeling this way?

There was suddenly a tap on the wall, and Hiei lifted his head to find a timid Yukina standing in front of him. He tried to hide the redness in his face, for the bright stars illuminated each of their faces splendidly, and Yukina gave a weak smile. She walked towards him, holding her hands behind her back and shuffling her feet the whole way.

"Hiei?" she whispered, taking a free hand from behind her back and placing it on his cheek, "I am so sorry for my behavior tonight? I should have paid more attention to you?"

Hiei shook his head and took her hand in his bandaged one. "It wasn't your fault, I need to learn to be more appreciative of others; a foremost flaw of mine."

Yukina looked at her hand being held by his. "It's neither of our faults," she concluded and took her closed fist from behind her back. She still kept the fist closed tight as she placed it on his hand. "Close your eyes," she told Hiei, and he reluctantly did so.

He suddenly felt a small clink as the object fell into his hand; he was itching to know what it was. Yukina stepped back a pace and said, "You can open them now."

Hiei blinked his ruby red eyes several times before realizing what actually lay in his hand. It was the tear gem strung on the chain, the exact one that had been in Yukina's dresser; Hina's tear gem?

Hiei stood, aghast, and looked desperately at Yukina, and then back to the tear gem again. She smiled softly.

"That was my mother's," she explained to Hiei, who already knew all of this information but listened to her every word anyways. "She gave it to me before I left Koorime, the Ice World? and I want you to have it."

The jaganshi stared at the tear gem, trying to coordinate his thoughts together. He thrust the gem back at Yukina, his hand outstretched. "I can't accept this? it's too much?" he stammered. Yukina grabbed hold of Hiei's fist and closed it around the tear gem.

"No? I really want you to keep this. As a thank you. You've always been like a brother to me?"

Hiei's mouth dropped open when he heard this, but before he could quickly recover from his shock, Yukina took him in an embracing hug around his neck. Her body was warm and felt good to Hiei's sensitive skin. He slowly extended his arms outward past Yukina and closed them around her small body in return, still clasping the tear gem in his right hand.

"Arigato?" he whispered into her ear, "Arigato zutto?"

Yukina released herself from Hiei after a moment or two, smiling broadly. "At least have one more scone with us," she persuaded as she grabbed his left hand and pointed around the corner towards the front door. Hiei smirked slightly, but turned into more of a small smile.

"Hn. Your cooking is too much to resist," he replied as she her eyes lit up in merriment and she pulled Hiei along with her around the corner. As they made their way towards the door, Hiei noticed a small movement out of the corner of his eye. He turned his head for a split second to see Kenshin the Battousai standing amidst the trees, smiling quietly in Hiei's direction.

"Ja ne, Battousai," Hiei whispered to himself as Kenshin Himura nodded and turned down the path before becoming just the rustling of the trees. "Ja ne."

The End