

# Fragmented Memories

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Submitted: May 7, 2005

Updated: May 7, 2005

*Tenshi, a young boy suddenly finds himself lost in the Shadow Realm, where the evil King Akuma reigns. In order to save his life, Tenshi's father must take away all of his son's memories and hide him in a village in hopes that Akuma will not find him.*

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# 1 - Letter 1: From Akuma to Tsuyoku

## Letter 1

From Akuma to Tsuyoku

It seems more like a dream than anything... I'm walking alone. Somewhere, I don't know where, but I was alone, I think. It was strange. I was alone and not alone. As if there was always someone right beside me, watching me, protecting me. Someone, who was always there with me... like a guardian. I still feel that way sometimes.

I never knew my father... so I never really missed him. I knew him somewhere deep inside my mind that is only opened in dreams. That was the only place where I was able to see my father, and it was this way for the longest time. Once I woke up, I forgot everything that happened in my dreams. I had someone else with me too, a guardian, I guess. This guardian... you could say took over for my missing father. My father took care of me when I was small ...but I remember someone else protecting me. From what? I don't know. Something terrible, something that can't be stopped. Something... most people call destiny...

A past I never knew... it was kept from me. That potion did it... It hid my scar... But it can't hide it anymore. I now know, I know what happened that day... long, long ago...

My father, he took me away from my mother when I was very small and he left my twin sister, Shinrin, there. He said that it would be safer this way. I didn't understand. How could I? I was just a little kid.

He took me far away. No one lived where we did. There were many animals and plants... but no people. That was the strange thing about it. My father said that he loved to be with people, but we didn't live near any. It never really bothered me because I was always preoccupied with other things. I loved to explore the forests and meadows that we lived by. One day while I was exploring I found something special. A place where all life ceased to exist.

I walked to that lifeless place one day while my father wasn't watching. I was about eight years old, and I didn't understand many things. This dead land that we lived near puzzled me more than anything I had ever seen before. The land... the plants just died there... as if the place was cursed and refused to let anything grow. It seemed to suck the life out of anything that stood near it.

My father saw me standing there. He came running to me, his long fiery-golden ponytail flowing behind him. He stopped as he reached me and said in a stern voice, ``Never come here again because this is the Land of the Dead. Only evil and hatred exists here."

I didn't understand. So I asked him as we walked away, ``What do you mean?"

“Did you feel any fear while standing over there?” he asked me. His soft purple eyes seemed to glow as he stared at me with concern.

“I’m not afraid of anything,” I lied.

He replied simply, “Fear lives there. Whether you felt it or not.” He turned around and glared at the dead land behind us with an unusual look for my father’s kind face. A cold wind blew through our wild fiery hair and sent a shiver down my back. Suddenly I wished that I had told him the truth, but I never did. I had felt something cold while standing there, something I had never felt before. It was like a thousand cold cursed needles, stabbing me all over my body.

However, that only made me more and more curious instead of afraid. I wanted to see more so I tried to sneak off to that land every time I could. After a few weeks, I got my chance... One day while my father was asleep; I crept silently away to the Land of the Dead. I ran and ran then stopped at the border between life and death. Then slowly I continued on into the curse.

The first thing I noticed was the strange smell the Land of the Dead gave off; like dead rotting flesh. The smell burned my nose and added to the cold needle feeling. I ignored the smell and the strange stabbing feeling and continued through the Land of the Dead. I walked and walked and noticed that all the trees, or what was supposed to have been trees, were extremely strange and as dead looking as the crunchy ground that I stood upon. They were so twisted and black... they seemed to be trying to break free of something. As if they were once human. Humans; turned into wretched twigs, snarling in pain, trying to break free of the curse that rooted them here.

I became very tired, and the needle feeling was starting to scare me, so I sat down next to a rock that was covered with strange black ooze. I tried to sit as far away from the gunk as I could. I closed my eyes only for a second. I was so tired from the long walk that I thought I might never wake back up if I fell asleep. But try as I might, I couldn’t stay awake. Sleep quickly took control of me as I leaned against the nasty rock in the Land of the Dead. I awoke to a warm voice calling to me, from inside my mind. It was warning me I think. “Wake up young one. Something is coming,” it called to me.

I tried to answer it, “Who’s there?” But I found no reply.

I suddenly heard a strange noise; it was the crunching sound of the dead earth that covered the Land of the Dead. It startled me and I opened my eyes instantly, but everything was black, as if my eyes were still closed. Another noise flew into my ears; a scream of utter terror. The noise grew closer; it was now standing next to me. It whistled and screamed in my ears. I turned to face the scream, but I saw only darkness. I couldn’t see anything; the sky was pitch black, with no moon. I was in eternal darkness... in the Land of the Dead!

I started to panic. I jumped to my feet and ran. I didn’t know where... I was just running and hoping that somehow, someday, my father would hear me and find me. So I called to him. I yelled as loud as I could. “Daddy! Daddy help me please!” No answer.

I grew frantic. I ran this way and that hoping to find something that looked familiar, so I could somehow find my way back home. Home with my father... and our house... I thought. *Would I ever see it again? Would I be lost here forever? And become like those trees... dark, twisted, nasty, evil trees?* No! I didn’t

want that so I ran as fast as I could. It hurt to continue running, but it was better than staying here. My heart was pounding in my throat. It hurt when I breathed deeply.

*This is it, I thought. I'm dying! I'm turning into a poor lost soul... trapped, behind a horrid cage that smells, tastes, looks and even feels like death. I don't want to stay in this nightmare forever!* Then, suddenly... a branch snapped. I stopped dead in my tracks. *Someone is coming!* The figure stopped a few feet away from me. I could hear the ground crack beneath the feet of the huge figure.

I couldn't see the face so I called to it, "C-Can you help me?" The figure gave no reply... only walked closer to me... getting slower with each step. The crunching of the earth grew louder and louder. The figure then stopped right in front of me.

"A child?" it asked me. I focused hard on the figure... It was a man, a giant man in dark armor. I stared up into his deep dark eyes and he stared back down at me with his emotionless eyes and face. His stiff, pitch-black hair barely moved in the soft breeze

*Maybe, I thought, he could help me escape from the grim land, which we both stood upon. Wait... What was he doing here? Was he lost too? Or... was he supposed to be in this barren wasteland?*

"Sir," I called to him once more, "can you help me... I..."

"Tenshi!" The same voice in my mind made its appearance once again. "Get away from that man! No good can come from one like him! He is covered with invisible blood! And he means to take more! Go! Run!"

But I couldn't run. Fear had taken over my legs and stopped them from moving. I wanted to run, but I couldn't. The dark giant took his sword, that was almost as big as he was, from his side and slowly unsheathed it.

"Now die!" he laughed at me.

I stood there and in slow motion I saw his sword coming down upon me. I screamed and covered my eyes with my hands. I stood there for a while and strangely I felt nothing. Almost as though his sword didn't reach my body, like he tried to miss me. I slowly opened my eyes and saw someone standing in front of me. A human, protecting me. It was "he" who shielded me from that powerful blow.

"Akuma... the evil man... Who rules over a Dark land and owns a black heart. You will not touch this boy... Not so long as I am here." I recognized the voice. That was the body to the voice inside my head. My guardian wore strange clothes... ones I had never seen before. Strange armor that matched his wild, fire-like hair.

"A guardian? How is it possible that this pathetic boy... is an Ancient?" the Dark man asked with surprise and hatred in his voice.

My guardian didn't do anything... he just stood there. *What is he doing? Stalling... waiting for something to happen?*

“What are you doing? Are you afraid of me? Ancient Guardian?” the Dark man laughed arrogantly.

“Afraid... of you? What a laugh! Not a chance! Brace yourself... because here I come!” My Guardian leapt forward and started attacking the Dark man, but he blocked every attack with his enormous sword.

“What is wrong? Are you having a hard time blocking my attacks?” my guardian laughed confidently like an arrogant teenager.

“Not at all. You are very good... but not good enough!” The Dark man started attacking again.

My Guardian simply blocked or dodged each swing of Akuma's Dark sword. The noise was so loud-- the clashing of the Dark man's sword upon my guardian's armor. I couldn't stand it any longer. I covered my ears. “Stop fighting! Please stop!” I cried.

They both stopped immediately and looked at me. My guardian turned his back to Akuma and then came over to me. As he came closer to me, I noticed the Dark man was smiling. The twisted man called Akuma raised his sword and began running towards my guardian and I.

“L-Look out!” I stuttered, but it was too late. My guardian turned at the last second... right when the Dark man was going to cut him in half. It was all too fast. It happened too fast. I didn't see what happened to my faithful protector; all I saw was that he had disappeared.

Akuma, the Dark man stood there laughing as my Guardian's body vanished, as if it were only an illusion. Then I noticed something. The Dark man was bleeding. On his left cheek there was a cut. It must have happened in that moment when my guardian noticed Akuma behind him. He gave that evil man something to remember him by. The cut would become a scar that would never heal.

I guess he hadn't noticed that he had been cut. He didn't do anything about it... he just kept laughing. He suddenly stopped and looked at me with even more hatred than before. I felt my legs returning to me and slowly stood up.

“You thinking about running away boy?” the Dark man cackled.

I gulped down my fear and answered, “No...”

“That's good! You are brave... so then stay right there!” I didn't even see him coming he was so fast, too fast for someone so big.

At first I didn't feel a thing, but then all of a sudden my forehead ached so terribly that I thought I would explode. A warm liquid ran down my cold nose and dripped onto my hands. My left eye began to see red... that was all... no other color except red.

What is happening to me? I thought. I lifted my hands so I could examine the warm, red liquid. “Where did this come from? What is this?” I asked myself. I touched my forehead. It stung. It hurt. It burned. Then I noticed more of that red stuff dripping from my forehead onto my hands.

I started to cry. The red liquid frightened me. My head hurt and I wanted to go home. Was that too much

to ask? I just wanted to be out of that awful place and be home with my father. I would never disobey him again... if I ever saw him again.

“I'd say we are even now! Wouldn't you? But don't worry... you won't have to feel that pain for much longer. I'll make sure of that... I'll make sure I kill you!” The Dark man named Akuma jumped for me.

*This is really it. This is the end of me. I can't stop him,* I thought.

I heard something... but was too scared to look. I gathered up my courage and forced myself to open my eyes. I looked up and I saw my father. He was blocking the Akuma's sword from hitting me with his own sword. My father pushed him back with all the strength that he had. He then knelt down in front of me and examined my forehead.

My father said nothing, as he ripped off a small piece of cloth from his shirt and wrapped it around my throbbing forehead. After he was done my father stood up and glared at the Dark man with a look of hatred, one that I had never seen before on his kind face.

“How dare you do this to my son! You will pay!” my father screamed and started attacking Akuma the Dark man without hesitation. All I could do was sit back and watch.

“Don't get hurt Daddy!” I called to him. Their swords clashed as they threw comments back and forth to each other.

“Heh, heh,” the Dark man laughed evilly.

“Is that all you are going to do? Stand there and laugh? Don't take me so lightly, you fool! Now fight!” my father yelled at him and attacked again.

Clang! Clang! Their swords screamed as they hit one another. I noticed my father was smiling. He saw something, an opening perhaps? He swung his sword quickly in an upward thrust. I looked up at Akuma and now saw two wounds on his face. The one my guardian made and now one that my father had made. A fine slice across his nose bled quickly and he growled at the sight of it.

My father slowly lowered his sword and said, “The fight is over and you lost. So my son and I are now leaving. Never to return.”

“Never... it's not over until I kill him!” Once again, the Dark man raised his sword to kill me and once again, I could not move.

“Tenshi! Get out of the way! Move, move!” my father yelled to me.

“I-I can't... I'm scared!” I cried back to him.

“Tenshi!” I heard my father screamed.

Then my father jumped for me. *He isn't going to reach me in time. I am going to be killed by that awful, horrid man!* I cowered and covered my eyes with my arms hoping that something would save me. That is

when I heard it; a sound that I would remember forever.

I could hear Akuma's gigantic sword pierce through the flesh of someone. At first I thought that it was me that he had split in two. But after a few seconds I realized that I wasn't feeling any pain. I then heard a dripping noise and opened one eye to see what it was. *My father had reached me in time to save me. He had protected me from that man. But where is that dripping noise coming from?* I wondered.

I got my answer when I looked just below my father. A puddle of red liquid lay beneath him and more of it was dripping into the large puddle. I looked at my own hands and noticed that they were dripping red, too.

"Daddy?" I ran to him as he doubled over, screaming in pain. "Daddy... you and I are both covered in red... Why? What does it mean? What is this red stuff, Daddy?" My father attempted to stand up but slipped in his own red stuff. He cursed as he hit the ground.

"That `red stuff`?" Akuma laughed. "It is a magical liquid of life."

"A liquid of life?" I asked as my father coughed some of that life liquid up as he wobbled to his feet. "If it is life then why does it hurt?" My father was suddenly surrounded by a golden aura. Akuma glared at him with annoyance.

"You little fool!" he spat. "That liquid isn't giving life... it's draining it. It's taking life away. As more of it falls, more of your life falls as well. The more that falls the less life you have! Heh... so I will leave you two here. You won't find the way out, nor will you live. See you in the underworld kid."

With that he left, as quickly as he came.

*If it's taking life away, I thought as my father fell onto his back and coughed up some more of his `life`. I have to put it back!*

I began scooping up as much of my father's `life` as I could and poured it onto the cut it was coming out from.

"No!" I cried. "Stop coming out! You're killing Daddy!" I began to cry even harder as I continued to try to pour more of the `life` back into my father.

My tears mixed my father's `life` and slowly it stopped flowing out of him. The wound began to heal and became a huge scar. Then my vision blurred and I could barely hear my father call my name. I could feel my head hit against the stone cold ground. Suddenly, I felt as if I was floating and the pain slowly vanished. My thoughts and feelings vanished into a world of total darkness and complete silence.

It was my father who told me what happened after I passed out, for I have no memory of it. He told me the whole story. That potion can no longer hold my memories from me. I remember what happened that day. I can see and hear it clearly, as if in a waking dream.

"Tenshi!" he screamed over and over but I gave no reply, he said. "There's... there's nothing I can do," he said. "Except... Oh Tenshi!"

My father reached into a little pouch that hung off his belt and pulled out a small jar filled with a light blue-green liquid. He stared at it for a minute then popped off the small cork. My father slowly gave me all of the liquid from the bottle and almost instantly after all the fluid was gone, the life stopped flowing from my forehead. The wound slowly healed and became a scar. Then the scar began to slowly vanish until it was completely gone. My father smiled at the sight, but there was still sadness in his amethyst eyes.

“Oh... my poor son. You cannot stay with me anymore. Now that Akuma knows who you are, it is no longer safe... Good bye, my son Tenshi,” my father whispered quietly. His soft purple eyes became dark as water formed in them. He quickly wiped his tears away and picked up my unconscious body. My father with a sad look turned and then began running out of the dead land we that we were both trapped in. “Tobi Soaru!” he shouted. Suddenly two fiery dragon wings came out of his back and he flew out of the Land of the Dead.

My father, while carrying me, soared over the cursed land, past our house, and farther still. His wings began flashing, as if they were disappearing. He flew lower and lower, then, just as he landed on the ground his wings disappeared. My father then began running once again. Through the forests, and to the grasslands, far, far away, farther than I thought I had ever been, to a small town, near a small forest, in a large clearing.

My kind father, while still cradling me in his warm arms, silently ran to the last house in the town. It was a large two-story house next to the biggest tree in the surrounding area. This house was also next to a familiar two-story house. He jumped over the fence that belonged to the two-story house that was next to the gigantic tree and landed without making a sound.

My father stopped and checked to make sure that no one noticed him. When he decided that it was safe he crept to the door of the house and quietly knocked. He stopped and waited to see if anyone heard him. When nothing happened he started to knock a little louder, but not too loud that he would scares those who were sleeping inside.

“My friend. Can you hear me?” My father whispered to the window above him. “Hear me. Open the door... it is an emergency. Can't you hear me?” he pleaded in loud whispers and lowered his head as if he were about to cry.

My father was about to hit the door once again when it suddenly opened. He raised his head and smiled at the door's opener. It was a young but wise looking man with silver-blond hair that also had a tint of gold. Wisdom had worked its way into the man's hair and caused some of it to turn silvery-white in some spots. He stood there staring at my father in amazement, his golden-lime eyes flashing.

“M-Mukashi? It is you! I thought I heard your voice. I never forgot you. So how have you been these past few years?” he laughed.

My father told me that Tsuyoku, the man who opened the door, was always so friendly. It wasn't until later did I realize how kind Tsuyoku really was.

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Okay I had to take this down for a bit because for some reason I was unable to post anymore chapters and it was really starting to annoy me... But anyway I have all the chapters ready and will be posting them again.

Seifer-sama

## 2 - Letter 2: From Tsuyoku to Shizuka

### Letter 2

#### From Tsuyoku to Shizuka

``Sadly... now is not the time for this," my father said seriously. ``My son... he... Akuma is after him. He needs somewhere to hide... so, I..." My father stopped and looked at his friend, Tsuyoku, for sympathy. The kind man looked back at my father, Mukashi, with complete understanding and nodded.

``I understand. I'll take care of him for you." Tsuyoku smiled kindly. My father handed me over to the kind man and he studied my face for a little while. ``He looks just like you Mukashi. I knew he would. Hmm... What's this?" He carefully studied the spot where my wound had been. ``You erased this, with that potion, didn't you?" My father glanced away for a second his bright purple eyes became dark. ``You sealed away his Guardian and his memories. When he wakes up, he will remember nothing of what has happened before." Tsuyoku looked up and smiled confidently, his golden-lime eyes stared into my father's darkened eyes. ``Will he, Mukashi?"

My father stared at his friend in amazement and almost fell over. His kind purple eyes returned to normal. ``How did you...?" he began.

``Did you forget that I am just as good at potions and spells as you are? If I'm not as good, then better. After all we did have the same teacher. Or did you forget that as well?" Tsuyoku laughed at the confused look on my father's face his silvery-golden hair flicked as he moved.

``No. I never forgot, I just... oh, never mind." The two men looked at each other for a moment then started laughing at my father's idiocy.

``It's just like old times. This town could use a warrior like you again. Why not come and stay with us? We could fix up your old house. It's still here. Katana and I have been taking care of it ever since you and Tenshi left." Both men turned to face the two-story house next door.

``I would like to live here once again," my father said. ``But there are too many memories that still dwell here. And... if I chose to stay here, I know that Akuma would find me easily. If that were to happen, I know that this time I would not be able to defend Tenshi. And that was the reason why I left before. I have to make sure that he never finds this place. I'll make him follow me, that way he'll never find this village and who lives here." My father looked down at me.

``You haven't changed. You always took on the danger by yourself. You never liked seeing someone else face troubles that you could take care of. You were always the first one in line for trouble," Tsuyoku laughed seriously.

``Would you prefer it any other way? This is the only way that I can see to keep your family and mine safe," my father replied his soft eyes grew cold with seriousness.

“I would like it if you would stop getting yourself into danger.” Tsuyoku's bright golden-lime eyes flashed with fear as he stared at my father. He seemed to be searching for the answer inside of my father but he didn't answer Tsuyoku. His dark eyes were fixed on something in the distance. “Where is the other half?” Tsuyoku seemed to pick that question up out of nowhere.

“Hmm?” My father asked in confusion while still staring past the village.

“The boy's twin? I helped you take care of them when they were still just babies. Oh, did you forget that too? I guess it's true what they say about fire people having all muscles and no brains. So, where is his twin sister?” Tsuyoku had a bit of worry mixed in his kind voice.

“She is with my wife. It has been so long since I last saw them. I know them fine. The last time I heard from them, Shinrin had just turned six, as did Tenshi. They were both doing just fine. My wife said that she found a nice cottage in the forest to live in. That is where she is still staying I think. Anyway, how is your son, Shizuku? The last time I saw him was right before he turned fifteen, I think.” My father searched his memory to make sure he was right. His fiery-golden hair glistened in the soft moonlight.

“Shizuku is no longer with us. He became a knight as he... and you always wanted him to be. He fought in the war we had this year, against the Dark creatures. He became a war hero from that battle. He went all the way to general. As the knights were coming home from the war, the Dark creatures attacked them and killed almost all of them. My son, one of the survivors said, was one of the last knights standing. He died protecting his men.” Tsuyoku's kind voice had become empty and lonely. He lowered his golden-lime eyes to the ground. His silvery-golden hair slid into his face and covered a part of his sad eyes.

My father stared at Tsuyoku in disbelief. “I-I'm sorry...” he stuttered. My father slowly lowered his dark eyes to the ground. Sadness hung in the air around the two men and my unconscious self.

“Do not worry about it, Mukashi. I am proud of what Shizuku had accomplished in the short time that he lived. He will not be forgotten. Hmm... and having your son here will bring back my lost memories of what having a son was like. I am so used to having only a daughter. It will be nice to have another man in the house. I was beginning to feel out of place. However, Shizuka acts so much like a boy, you would think that she is one.” Tsuyoku stopped and laughed at his little joke. Then he looked down at me. “He looks so much like you, Mukashi. He may not know it but he gives off a radiant aura that is definitely yours and yours alone. With him here, it seems as though my old friend has returned, and this time, for good.”

“Hmm... I don't remember you having a daughter.”

“She was born a few months after you and Tenshi left.”

“Oh I almost forgot. Would you give this to Tenshi when he leaves, and make sure that he keeps it?” My father pointed to the red ribbon that was wrapped around my waist. “It is my connection to him, so please, make sure he keeps it with him. That way, I will be able to make sure that he is okay. I will be with him wherever he goes.”

“I will, do not worry. I will make sure that he doesn't throw it away or anything like that,” Tsuyoku

smiled weakly.

“Thank you. It means a lot to me, old friend.” My father smiled warmly and Tsuyoku's smile grew bigger. His golden-lime eyes shined brightly against in the dark morning sky while my father's dark purple eyes seemed to mix with the surrounding shadows.

“Hey, I'm not that old,” Tsuyoku laughed trying to brighten up the sadness they both were feeling. My father looked up and met Tsuyoku's eyes. Suddenly both men began laughing uncontrollably. After a few minutes the laughter slowly died. They both knew that the time had come for my father to leave once again.

“It is time for me to go. The dawn will soon be waking,” my father said sadly as he turned to face the soon to be rising sun.

“And so will he,” Tsuyoku hinted.

My father gave one last smile; a sad smile that was attempting to be cheerful. He ran his finger through my golden-silver hair.

“Good-bye, my son,” he whispered quietly. My father gave Tsuyoku a silent gesture, telling him to be careful. He turned, hopped back over the fence, and soon disappeared into the night.

He never told me where he went to after that day. The only thing he said was that everywhere he went, Akuma was always right behind him. My father said that he could never stay in one place for too long, or else Akuma would find him. Akuma seemed to think that my father was the one from the legend, the one who would overpower all evil, and that's why he followed my father everywhere he went.

But all that didn't make any sense to me. For one thing... Why did Akuma let us escape like that? Did he not realize what he actually found that day in The Land of the Dead? Or... did he plan this? Are we all locked within this thing they call `destiny'? Or are these events just coincidences? I wonder if Akuma knew what he was doing or if was he just running? That couldn't be because my father was beaten. He couldn't have won. Could he? Did Akuma know something about my father that I didn't? Did my father have one of those guardians too?

All of that didn't matter to me anymore, for once I awoke the next morning, I didn't remember any of it. I didn't know anything, not even my own name.

I heard voices, so many voices. I heard a kind, familiar male voice, a soft woman's voice, the kind that only belongs to a mother, and a small child's voice. I slowly opened my eyes upon hearing them whispering above me. Warm light from a nearby window soothed my cold cheeks. The rays of sunshine blinded my dark eyes. I squinted and tried to focus on the blurry figures around me.

My eyes slowly adjusted to the light and I was able to recognize furniture. I was in a gigantic bed about four times my size. To my left was a large dresser, which was probably filled with clothes. I glanced to my right and saw a beautiful woman with long golden hair, which had very little silver in it. I guess her wisdom was just starting to turn her hair silver. She smiled, came over to me her kind golden-lime eyes seemed to smile at me too as she dabbed my forehead with a damp cloth.

“I am glad that you are awake little one. You have been asleep for so long that you were beginning to worry me, Tenshi.” The lady smiled at me so warmly. I thought that maybe she might be my mother.

“A-Are...” I wasn't sure if I should ask her if she was my mother. I decided that it wouldn't hurt just to ask. “Are you my mother?”

“Me?” she giggled. “No, no Tenshi, I'm not your mother.”

‘Tenshi’. There was that word again. When she says that, is she talking to me? Am I this ‘Tenshi’?

“Tenshi, are you hungry dear?” she asked me while I was trying to figure out who or what this ‘Tenshi’ was. “Tenshi?”

“Is that me?” I asked her.

“Oh... yes. Tenshi is your name dear. It is who you are,” she answered with a smile.

“So, my name is Tenshi? Then what is your name?” I asked her as she quickly walked around the room.

“My name is Katana, but if you want you may call me mother. I don't mind,” she said kindly. “Now, breakfast is almost ready, so if you feel up to it, why don't you come down and join us? If not, I'll bring you something to eat. Okay?”

I simply nodded. She must have been satisfied with that because soon after, she left the room. I examined the room for a little while but I was interrupted, by a loud growling noise. It was my stomach. I thought about waiting for Katana to bring the food up, but I didn't want to trouble her. So, instead, I decided that I would have breakfast with her and everyone else in this house.

I slowly sat up in the bed I had been laying in and moved the warm covers and blankets aside. I slowly crawled to the edge of the huge bed and let my legs dangle off the side. I gave a small push and shivered as my bare feet touched the freezing floor. I felt a little dizzy and I had a sharp pain above my left eyebrow. But suddenly a strange smell dominated my senses. The smell told me that breakfast was now ready. If I don't hurry, there will be no food left for me, I concluded.

I carefully walked down the steps to the lower part of the house. I hid behind the banister of the stairs so that the other members of the house wouldn't see me. I wanted to see them first.

There was a man with golden hair and jade-lime eyes sitting at the table, talking about something I couldn't understand. His voice was the same voice I heard while I was sleeping. *I've seen him somewhere before*, I thought.

“Oh, Tenshi, you decided to join us I see. I wasn't expecting you to get sick. Are you feeling well enough to eat something?” the man asked with a warm, kind voice. I peered into his bright eyes for a long time. I had seen them somewhere before.

*That's it! I realized. He took care of me this morning. I woke up in his arms just before the sun came up. He smiled at me and I saw another face that was not his. Then my head started to hurt and then I got sick. He took care of me until I fell back asleep.*

``Thank you for taking care of me, this morning." I could feel my face turn red with each second.

``Oh no need to thank me. I'm just glad that you are feeling better. Now, why don't you come and sit right here next to me. I've got a special spot for you right here." He pointed to the chair on the right side of him.

``Okay." I did as he told me and came out from behind the banister. I sat down next to him and Katana. While trying to make myself more comfortable on the chair I was sitting on, I noticed a little boy with a golden ponytail trying to get into his chair between Katana and the nice man.

I didn't realize it until that second, but all three of them had golden hair. They all looked almost exactly the same. I felt a little strange sitting with them. I didn't feel like I matched like they did.

``Shizuka be careful," Katana warned the little boy.

*Hmm... This Shizuka must be that little boy that I heard while I was asleep, I figured silently.*

``Sir?" I turned to the kind man. He turned to face me and smiled. ``Are you my father?" I felt a little embarrassed for asking such a weird question. Or at least I thought it was weird.

``No Tenshi. I am not your father." I lowered my head. ``But that doesn't mean that you are not a part of this family. If it makes you feel better, you can consider me as your father. And Tenshi, you don't have to call me `sir'. My name is Tsuyoku, but if you want to call me `sir' that is fine as well." Tsuyoku seemed to think it was amusing that I called him `sir'. But I didn't know his name, so what else was I supposed to call him?

I could never remember to call him father. For some reason it didn't seem right. I knew I wasn't his son. Even though I knew that, I still cared for him like a father. I guess I could think of him as my father, but something was missing in his eyes.

It always puzzled me how I could see Katana as my mother. She was always just like a mother to me, so I never really missed my own mother. Maybe they once knew each other and that's why I thought of her as my real mother. But there was always something missing from Tsuyoku. He was always so kind to me, he loved me, I knew that, but something inside of me knew that he was different from me.

My father, I wonder if he was like me. I once said to myself, ``My father must have been something like me. If he wasn't, I would have been more like Tsuyoku and I would not have noticed the pieces of him that separates us." I wasn't like Tsuyoku in many ways. However, there were those times when I saw familiar things. Familiar things that I should have known, but I didn't know.

I always noticed little pieces of him that reminded me of myself. Those parts of him stayed with me and nagged at my brain as though I was supposed to know something that I didn't know. But there were always those parts of him that were the exact opposite of me. I can't really explain it. There were parts of

me in Tsuyoku and yet there weren't.

I noticed that he and Shizuka were a lot alike; in the way they laughed and smiled. I wondered if maybe he had known my father and some of him rubbed off onto Tsuyoku. Maybe that was the reason why Tsuyoku sometimes reminded me of myself. If Tsuyoku and Shizuka were a lot alike, then my father and I must have been alike. Isn't it natural for a father and a son to be alike?

I sat and watched Tsuyoku's family prepare for breakfast. Katana was quickly laying out the silverware and dishes, while cooking the rest of the food. Shizuka reached over the table to grab a fork and almost knocked over a large glass of water. Tsuyoku swiftly grabbed the glass before it spilled all over the table. Katana finished the cooking and set the last part of breakfast down before she sat herself down.

Shizuka grabbed at the food first, but Tsuyoku corrected him and let me pick my food first. I felt so weird sitting and eating with this family that was not mine. Though they all tried their very best to help me fit in, it didn't help much. I was thankful for their efforts though.

When I was finished taking my share of the porridge we were having for breakfast, I handed the giant bowl back to Tsuyoku. He dished out his own share of the food and then gave a helping to Shizuka, who was impatiently waiting for his food. Then Tsuyoku handed the bowl over to Katana, who dished herself out only a small scoop of porridge.

While the rest of Tsuyoku's family happily devoured their breakfast, I sat staring at my bowl with a dazed look in my eyes. I was so confused. I felt like I didn't belong and yet I did. They were willing to share their house and food with me. So why didn't I feel like I was a part of their family?

“Tenshi, why aren't you eating? Are you still sick?” Tsuyoku asked when he noticed that I hadn't touched the food in my bowl and on my plate. I couldn't answer him. I couldn't say that I felt like a black sheep standing with one hundred other white sheep. “I know that this must be really strange for you to have to eat breakfast with a bunch of strangers. But let me tell you something young Tenshi, we are not as different as you think.”

I didn't understand what he was talking about, but I decided that I was too hungry to worry about anything else. I started to devour my food as quickly as Tsuyoku and Shizuka. Katana ate slowly and tried not to make a mess, while Tsuyoku and Shizuka sipped and slurped up the remainders of the porridge.

I finished my small serving and asked politely if I could leave the table. Katana gave me permission to leave, so I gathered up my plates and carried them over to the sink.

I walked out the front door and made sure that it closed behind me. I slowly shuffled over to the white fence that surrounded Tsuyoku's two-story house. I reached the fence and leaned into the old wood.

*So, this is my family, I thought. But isn't something missing? Shouldn't someone be here? There are things missing. Who or what are they? Whatever they are, I hope they come soon. Maybe if I wait long enough they will come back. They were here once before, I'm sure of it. I will just wait for them.*

I waited and waited but no one came. I was starting to doze off, but with my eyes open. I stared past the

fence, past the next house, past the road to the entrance of this village, and past the surrounding meadows.

*Someone very important to me lives in the trees beyond the meadows.* I wasn't thinking, I just felt it. I knew something was over there but I didn't know what. I tried to find the answer. I searched my mind to give me at least a small clue. My mind suddenly began to take flight into a place I had never been before. It flew me to a small house in the woods. I drew closer and closer to the tiny cottage. I reached for the doorknob and slowly turned the handle. The door flew open and three shadowed figures stood in the doorway. One was a man, I think, and the other two were definitely girls. All three figures started to slowly walk toward me.

Suddenly a hand on my shoulder instantly flew me backwards, back to where I was standing.

“Tenshi...” Tsuyoku's voice spoke in my ear. “I forgot to give this to you.” Tsuyoku handed me a thin red cloth with gold word printed on it. The sunshine reflected off the shiny letters, I had to squint against the bright light to read the words. My eyes widened at the realization of what was written on the thin ribbon. *Tenshi? That's my name. But why is my name on that piece of cloth?*

“This is yours, your father wanted me to give it to you. He wants you to keep it with you wherever you go. Understand, Tenshi?” Tsuyoku asked kindly as he handed me my ribbon. I cautiously grabbed the red cloth from his gentle hand. I examined the ribbon for a little while trying to decide where I should keep it. *I know... I'll tie it around my waist!* Tsuyoku watched me attempt to tie the long red ribbon around my tiny waist and began to giggle under his breath.

“Would you like me to help you with that?” Tsuyoku laughed. I glanced up from my waist and my ribbon tying and blushed while I slowly nodded. Tsuyoku casually walked over to me his golden and silvery hair flowed softly as he walked. He stopped and knelt down next to me. I could see every aspect of his face, which was somewhere in between young and old. His bright eyes glowed even behind the soft shadow he cast while kneeling against the sun. He grabbed both ends of the thin red cloth and tied them into a loose knot. “There you go.” Tsuyoku chuckled.

“Th-Thank you.” I stuttered bashfully.

“Oh you are welcome Tenshi. It was your father's wish after all for you to keep it with you.” Tsuyoku paused for a moment. Sadness suddenly began to cloud his golden-lime eyes. “I know how you must feel. You miss him. Your father, I mean. Of course... No one could ever forget a person like him. But don't you worry you will find him someday. Don't worry. Why don't you try to just have a good time today? I have an idea, why don't you go play with Shizuka? What do you say about that?” Tsuyoku smiled at me.

I looked up at him and smiled back, just to make him feel better. “Do you really think that I will find who I'm looking for?” I asked him.

“I am certain that you will eventually find everything that is missing. It may take a long time, but I promise you that you will find them. But for now, why don't you take your mind off of this and go have fun? Okay?” I wondered if maybe Tsuyoku knew more than he mentioned.

“Okay,” I answered. I really didn't want to leave my spot on the fence. I wanted to find out who those



people were that I saw in my mind. Tsuyoku was trying to help me, because of that I wanted to be nice and just do as he asked.

“Thank you Tenshi.” Tsuyoku gave me one last smile, then walked past the fence and toward the forest. After I lost sight of Tsuyoku, I decided to find Shizuka. I found him in his room playing with miniature people. I asked if I could join him. He let me play with the miniature people and I spent the rest of the day playing.

When night fell I went back outside to see if I would find what I was looking for or if they would find me. I waited there until Tsuyoku came home. And sadly I didn't get a chance to see the shadowed people.

“Have you been waiting out here all day long Tenshi? I thought you went to go play with Shizuka.” Tsuyoku asked with a tired voice. His golden hair lay flat around his face almost as if it was tired, too.

“I did play with Shizuka, but I came out here to...” I wasn't sure if Tsuyoku should know that I was waiting for the three figures in my mind. Tsuyoku stared back at me with a worried look on his face. He was waiting for me to answer. I quickly came up with an excuse for being outside so late. “I was waiting for you.”

“You... You were waiting for me? Is something wrong?” Tsuyoku lost the sleepiness in his voice and sounded more alert. His golden-lime eyes stared back at me in surprise.

“N-No!” Tsuyoku's question startled me, which made me answer a little too quickly. I hoped that I didn't sound too suspicious.

“Oh well that's good. I'm glad that you are getting used to living with us.” Tsuyoku raised his eyes to the sky and then glanced down back at me. “Do you smell that? I think dinner is ready, come on. Let's go inside and eat.” Tsuyoku lowered his soft but soiled hand to me. I stared at it for a second then put my hand in his. He and I, hand in hand, walked into the kitchen for a wonderful dinner.

Days passed so quickly, like a never-ending blur. Every morning and evening I waited... leaning on the old fence... waiting for the three figures to finally show their faces. Then, at last, they once again came to me in my dazed state.

I was concentrating so hard on the people in my mind that didn't notice that Tsuyoku's little boy, Shizuka, behind me. “Why do you wait here everyday and night? Are you waiting for someone?” He asked in a quiet and confused voice. I was just about to see the faces of the shadow people when Shizuka's voice reached me.

“Huh?” Shizuka's voice startled me so much that I turned around with a quick jolt. “Oh... I uh...” I was speechless. I had no idea that he was behind me.

“Are you waiting for someone?” Shizuka walked closer to me and then leaned on the old fence right next to me. I don't know why but I was always so nervous around him. “What do you see while you wait here everyday?”

“Um...” I didn't want to tell him either about my secret shadow people.

Shizuka gazed back at me with a look of disbelief. ``Hmm... Do you want to play?" Shizuka asked suddenly.

``Play? Play what?" I asked with curiosity. Shizuka smiled innocently.

``I'll show you. Come on follow me," he grabbed my hand and dragged me off to the back of the house. ``Here! Take this!" Shizuka handed me a bent, and twisted twig. ``This is your sword and I will use this sword," Shizuka laughed.

I glanced back down at my shriveled, pathetic excuse of a stick and then looked at Shizuka's stick. It was perfectly straight and very smooth looking, as if someone made it perfect, unlike mine. *This is a little mismatched*, I thought to myself. *Shizuka's stick is a better stick than mine is*. I decided not to say anything. I knew that if I did say something then Shizuka would have gotten angry with me.

``Okay... heh. Now come on... let's fight!" Shizuka positioned himself in this strange stance... one that I know I had seen somewhere before. I did exactly as he did. ``No, no, no. Don't just stand there... attack! Like this..." He lunged at me and would have stabbed my right side with his stick if I hadn't moved out of the way. ``Hey... that was really good. Now come on fight back and we can have our own tournament. ``

I smiled at the compliment that Shizuka gave me and dodged another one of his attacks. As we continued this sword-playing game, I began to notice a pattern in Shizuka's attacks. After I discovered his pattern of his attack, avoiding them became extremely simple. He became annoyed with the fact that he wasn't able to hit me with his stick.

``Why aren't you fighting back? If this was a real fight you would die because you don't attack." Shizuka breathed out heavily from frustration.

``But you haven't hit me yet. You are the one who's tired so why would I be the first one to die?" I asked with confusion. Shizuka's cheeks puffed up like an angry bullfrog and his face became red with fury. He quickly thrust his stick at me, aiming for my heart but I immediately stepped aside. His golden ponytail flapped in the wind and his golden-lime eyes darted in the direction I had moved. He lost his balance as he passed through the spot where I was once standing and almost fell onto the cold ground.

Shizuka turned and glared at me with anger and excitement mixed into one. A small drop of sweat dripped down his milky-white face. He then smiled and held out his hand.

``You are really good. Where did you learn to do that?" he asked as he walked closer to me.

``I don't really know." I laughed as I shook hands with Shizuka.

``You need to learn how to attack though. You can't win a battle if you don't fight back. Don't worry, heh, I'll teach you and in return you can teach me how to avoid attacks." Shizuka smiled innocently.

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In all honesty... I am not sure if these are the fixed chapters or not... I have too many files for this story...

So anyway... hope you are enjoying it.

Seifer-sama

### 3 - Letter 3: From Shizuka to Heishi

#### Letter 3

#### From Shizuka to Heishi

Shizuka and I became really good friends after that. He and I played with our swords from breakfast until dinner. With him as my friend, I felt more comfortable around the rest of his family. There was only one problem with Shizuka though; every once in a while he would puzzle me with his strange talk. He spoke about one day wanting to grow up to be as beautiful as his mother and having children.

“But guys aren't supposed to be beautiful and they can't have kids either.” I said to him one day while we were sitting in his room playing with the miniature people. Shizuka stared at me as if I had offended him by calling him a boy. He puffed up into that usual bullfrog-like face and then threw a miniature person at me. The person just barely missed my left cheek and smacked into the wall behind me. I never understood why Shizuka became so upset with just a simple question.

One clear blue morning, I awoke from my peaceful sleep to a strange noise. I slowly sat up but I wasn't fully awake. Slowly but surely, I climbed from my soft, warm bed onto the cold, hard floor. I slowly tiptoed to the window that remained open from the day before and peered outside it. A small wagon full of old furniture was stopped right outside the house next door. I squinted my eyes until they were almost closed, to try and get a better look at the people who were walking around unloading the wagon.

I was filled with excitement at the thought of someone new living next door. *I hope whoever is going to be living there has a least one child, I thought. That would make three of us. That person, Shizuka, and I; we would have a lot of fun with three people. Two becomes boring after a while.*

With that thought in mind I quickly slipped on my long-sleeve shirt that was at least five sizes too big for me. I grabbed my lace-up shoes and ran out of my room and down the steps.

“Oh, you are up early this morning Tenshi.” Katana didn't even glance up from her cooking but she knew I was there. I noticed almost immediately that Tsuyoku was not in his normal spot at the table. He is always there in the morning no matter how early I woke up, but he was not there today.

“Where is Tsuyoku?” I asked.

“Tsuyoku? Oh he's next door helping out the new people with their things. He said he would be back before breakfast. If you want to go over there and help out too that is fine, just make sure you both make it back in time for breakfast okay?” She stopped chopping carrots for a second, glanced at me then smiled warmly.

I took that as an okay to go next door and rushed outside. Tsuyoku was trying to lift a huge dresser from the wagon as I rounded the corner into the house next door's front yard. I almost crashed into him on account of running too quickly around the corner. He smoothly turned around to face me and smiled with

his usual warm, friendly smile.

“Would you like to help out Tenshi?” he asked me as he set down the heavy dresser onto the dewy morning grass.

“Me?” I asked with sudden excitement, “You want me to help?”

“Well yes. Would you like to?” he seemed a little confused with my reaction to his previous question.

“How? I'm just a little kid, how could I help you out?” I glanced over at the huge oak dresser that Tsuyoku was trying to lift.

“Have you forgotten what I told you Tenshi?” Tsuyoku laughed playfully.

My eyes shifted once again from Tsuyoku to the dresser. “No,” I answered doubtfully.

“Well then, go on. Pick it up.” Tsuyoku stepped away from the gigantic oak dresser and made a gesture with his hand for me to step closer to the huge piece of furniture. I followed his hand and walked up to the enormous clothes cabinet that seemed to become bigger with every step. Slowly, and with a bit of worry on my face, I turned back to face Tsuyoku. “Come on now. Just try. There is no harm in trying something.”

I slowly clasped my hands on the smooth sides of the large dresser. I was expecting it to be tremendously heavy, after-all, Tsuyoku was having trouble lifting it, so I heaved the huge piece of wood up with all my might. The next thing I knew it was in the air. My arms were holding it up into the air and I wasn't having a hard time at all. It was surprisingly easy to lift.

I couldn't believe it. Me? A eight-year-old boy lifting a gigantic dresser with ease? Tsuyoku could barely hold it three inches from the ground.

“How-?” I was cut off by Tsuyoku's quick answer.

“I told you once before about your father and the strength that is present in all Fire people. You are one of them too you know, and even though you only have a fraction of them in you blood, you still inherit the power shared by all people from the Fire village. Your father once told me that most Fire children's strength doesn't start to develop until they are at least nine or ten, but somehow, he knew that you would be different. I was watching you the other day, when you were playing with Shizuka. I noticed something was changing inside you after you broke half of those sticks you were playing with.”

Tsuyoku seemed to be thinking hard about all of this as he stared into the distant morning sun. “Your strength came early and is developing quickly, but don't worry, I will teach you how to control it. Your father prepared me for this.” Suddenly he snapped out of his trance and pulled his eyes away from the sky. Slowly his gaze fell down to me and he smiled kindly. “Enough talking. Now let's get this big thing inside. Follow me.” Tsuyoku seemed to know where he was going, so I quickly moved my tiny legs to keep up with his wide-step walk.

Tsuyoku casually walked up the front porch steps of the neighbor's house and opened the door. He

quickly moved aside, holding the door open for me, which made things much easier. I carefully carried the dresser passed the entryway and into the house.

“Tsuyoku? I thought that you were taking care of the dresser.” An old man's kind voice called from inside one of the rooms. I could hear someone moving around the house but I couldn't see a thing with the huge dresser in my way. Tsuyoku walked over to the room that the voice had come out of.

“Well I tried, but it was just too heavy for me to carry. Tenshi here, my strong little boy, is helping out.” Tsuyoku laughed.

“I see. I have heard of people with great strength such as that. I have never met one though. He is one of them, I take it.” The voice came closer. I think he was standing right next to Tsuyoku but I still couldn't see him or Tsuyoku with the dresser in the way.

“Yes he is and here is your chance to finally meet one of them. Tenshi, boy, why don't you set the dresser down for a second and meet our new neighbor, Mr. Yasashi.” Tsuyoku said kindly.

I did as I was told and set the giant dresser down with care. I moved over to where Tsuyoku was standing and gazed up and the old body that was home to the warm old voice. He smiled at me with such compassion that I think I started blushing.

The old man smoothly raised his worn and tired hand and reached out to me. I lifted my small hand and met his. While I shook hands with him I think I saw a sparkle of a memory locked inside his bright emerald green eyes. They were so wise; I could see his entire life within his eyes. I could see his pain as well as his happiness. I could not help but stare at his fascinatingly green eyes. I had never seen green eyes before. I really liked them.

I finally snapped out of the trance I was in and let his wrinkled but gentle hand go. My face burned hot with embarrassment for staring at Mr. Yasashi's eyes for so long. He must have thought I was acting funny, for he smiled the kind of smile a grown up gives to a child when they are acting silly.

“Such a nice boy, Tenshi was it? Thank you very much. Thank you for helping an old man. My grandson and I are not used to this kindness.” Mr. Yasashi said sadly and I noticed that his bright eyes became a little darker.

“I am very sorry to hear that. Unfortunately though, there are a few people who are unkind in this world but not everyone is cruel. There are plenty of warm-hearted people out there.” Tsuyoku smiled hopefully. “Why take this village for example, it is filled with kind-hearted people.”

I stood there and examined Mr. Yasashi. He was very different from everyone else in the village we lived in. Almost everyone in the village had golden hair, unless they were old and their wisdom turned it white. Mr. Yasashi, however, had a bit of brown in his hair. I think it was because his wisdom had not completely taken over yet.

It wasn't just his hair though; his ears were long and pointed, just like those creatures in Shizuka's storybooks. *He looks like those things... Fairies I think they were called. Yes! That was what they were called,* I thought to myself while completely ignoring what Tsuyoku was talking about.

“Well now, where would you like Tenshi to put this dresser?” I spun back into reality as Tsuyoku's voice interrupted my thoughts of one day seeing a fairy.

“Oh up stairs if you would. In the first room on the left. And thank you again for helping me out. I wouldn't have been able to do this on my own.” Mr. Yasashi glanced down at me and smiled. I heaved the dresser up again with a small sigh and began carefully walking up the creaky steps.

As I continued up the stairway without being able to see anymore than a few inches in front of me, I wobbled a bit then continued on. Then suddenly, I heard and felt something smack into the front of the dresser. I stepped back a few inches to stop myself from falling off of the staircase. My first thought was that I had run into one of the banisters along the way up but that thought was deleted almost immediately when I heard someone yelling at me.

“Why don't you watch where you are going!?” *Banisters don't have voices*, I thought to myself. *It was a boy... I think...* “You could have killed me! You butt-monkey!” I heard a little boy's high-pitched yell from the front of the dresser. The boy blocking my way sounded as if he was about the same age as me, but there was a sense of aggression in his tough voice.

“But I can't see where I'm going and I'm trying not to fall off the steps so you should watch where you are going. You are the one who crashed into me.” I answered back bluntly. The boy didn't answer me. I figured it was because he knew that I was right.

“Oh yeah!? Well I still say it's your fault!” the boy screamed in frustration. I decided to ignore him and continued carefully up the steps, trying to avoid from hitting him. “Don't ignore me! Hey, are you even listening to me?” he called out in anger as I slowly walked past him. I stopped to glance at the face that belonged to the voice.

Right away I noticed his green eyes, just like Mr. Yasashi's emerald green eyes, they were so bright and full of energy and life. The boy was a little bit taller than me and he had pointed ears identical to Mr. Yasashi's long ears. His hair, unlike Mr. Yasashi's, was completely brown with highlights of tan and hazel on the top. *He probably doesn't have a lot of wisdom on him and that's why there's no white in his hair*, I thought to myself. Suddenly something on his right cheek caught my eye. *A scar? I wonder where he got that.*

“What are you staring at!” he barked. I immediately moved my eyes to the floor in embarrassment. My face was grew hot again. I knew that I was getting more and more red with each second; I could feel it, like a sudden burst of flames on my face. Periodically, I glanced up to see if the boy was still looking at me with that superior stare. He was and he looked a little annoyed, with me I think.

The boy opened his mouth as if he was about to say something, but he didn't get the chance to because Mr. Yasashi's voice came through first. “Heishi you had better not be bothering little Tenshi here. He's helping us move in so you be nice to him, you hear?” the kind old man corrected forcefully.

“You are helping us move in?” His questions were so quick that I didn't have enough time to answer before the next one came. “How old are you? Where do live anyway? As a matter of fact, who are you?” He stopped to take a breath, which gave me the time to answer.

“Me? I am Tenshi and I am eight years old. I ... I live right next door.” I counted in my mind to make sure I answered all of his questions. *He asked me four questions right? Yeah I think so.*

“Tenshi huh? Did you say that you were eight years old? I don't believe that! If you are only eight years old how are you lifting that huge dresser? I'm almost eleven and I can't even lift it up for a second so who in the heck are you?!” “Heishi”, I guess that was his name was, was cut off by Mr. Yasashi.

“Young one, leave that boy alone! And don't you use that kind of language in my house!” Mr. Yasashi yelled, this time with a bit of irritation.

“Yes grandfather.” Heishi answered reluctantly but obediently. He glanced over from the floor to me and smiled in a strange but friendly smile. “Hello Tenshi. My name is Heishi. I am nine years old. Would you like me to help you with that heavy dresser?”

I couldn't tell if he was joking or not, so I decided to be polite. “Hello Heishi. Thank you for the offer, but I think I'll be okay.” I smiled innocently and continued my short journey up the rest of the remaining steps.

“Hey wait for me! I have to open the door for you!” I didn't know if he was trying to be nice or if he didn't want to get in trouble for being rude again. He decided to come with me for whatever reason. He practically flew past me to the room that I was about to enter and stopped at the door. He smiled at me and then casually turned the handle to the door. It opened slowly so he gave it a small push to speed it up.

He stepped into the room first and glided across the room to the window. Heishi then opened the window with swift movements and then turned to me. I carefully walked through the doorway making sure the dresser didn't hit the sides of the doorframe.

“Why don't you just set it down over there?” Heishi said pointing to the left back corner of the room. I did as he suggested and set the dresser down with care. I stood up straight and glanced about the empty room. For some strange reason, it was comforting to be in this room, almost as if someone I once knew lived here in this room, someone who was very important to me. It reminded me of the shadow people, whom I had forgotten about since I became friends with Shizuka.

I suddenly was flown, once again to a place very far away, the home of the shadow people. Once again I walked up the steps to the doorway and once again the three figures opened the door to greet me. The man and the woman at the same time took a small step into the light.

“Hey, Tenshi? What's your problem?” Heishi's voice broke the trance and I was no longer standing in the forest with those three shadowed people, whom I cared about so much. “What's wrong with you? Your eyes just went blank there for a minute. You looked like you were being hypnotized or something.” Strangely enough, Heishi sounded like he was worried about me.

“Huh? Me? I- I'm fine.” That was all I could say. Once again I was not able to meet those three people. It seemed as though every time they would come to see me, someone always interrupted my thoughts and scared them away.



A voice called to us from downstairs, "Heishi! Where have you hidden my cane this time?!" Mr. Yasashi sounded angry now, but I could still sense a bit of playfulness within him.

Heishi looked over at me and smiled with an evil playful smile. "I have no idea grandpa. It's where you left it. Have you looked there yet?" I was a little shocked to hear that they were related, Mr. Yasashi was wise and Heishi didn't seem to act a thing like his "grandpa", but they did look a lot alike. It was a little hard expect though, with the way Heishi acted.

Heishi laughed innocently but I could see right through that blameless smile as clearly as I could see through a window on a clear blue morning. He knew where his grandfather's cane was, his smile only added to the proof of that accusation.

"Don't you play games with me boy! You know I can't walk without my cane! Now where is it?!" Mr. Yasashi yelled back to Heishi, coughed a few times, and then waited patiently for an answer. Heishi looked at me for a second and I guess he noticed the look of pity I had for his grandfather because soon after he left the room.

This was great for me because I could now see the shadow people without any interruptions. I waited patiently for them to come while trying to keep my mind clear. I thought only of them and their cozy-looking house in the middle of the forest. I stood silently still for what seemed like hours, waiting for them to float across my imagination, like they always did.

My mind, however, refused to let me see them. There was just no use; it kept wandering off, while my eyes whipped and turned, glancing at the surrounding walls. My attention was wandering away from the shadow people. Unimportant thoughts started swirling through my head. I suddenly noticed that this room, no, the entire house was extremely clean for no one living in it to take care of the dust and cobwebs. *That's strange; I thought to myself, it's almost as if someone has been taking care of this house. Maybe they are waiting for someone to come back to it. But who?*

My mind was stuck on the subject of the clean deserted house. I couldn't figure it out. Who would be taking care of an abandoned house? I suddenly heard Tsuyoku's voice call to me from the bottom of the stairs. "Tenshi!"

"Coming!" I called back while running out the doorway of the room that I had grown so attached to within the few moments that I was there. I was sad at the thought of leaving the comforting room of forgotten memories, but Tsuyoku needed me.

I quickly, but very carefully, ran down the steps of the house that looked and felt so familiar to me. I ran down and down to the spot at the bottom where Tsuyoku waited for me with his kind smile.

"Heishi is in a bit of a fix. He is having a few problems lifting some of the bigger pieces of furniture. He asked me if you would please help him." Tsuyoku smiled playfully.

"He actually said "please"?" I was a little shocked at the fact that Heishi could be polite. He didn't seem like the type of person to remember to say, "please" and "thank you", but then again, I didn't really know him.

``Well no, he didn't say ``please" but he did ask me if I would ask you to help him." Tsuyoku laughed. ``So if you would ..." He didn't have to say anymore because I was already on my way before he could finish what he was saying.

*Where is Heishi's room anyway?* I wondered. As if he could read my mind, Tsuyoku pointed to a large room that was next to the kitchen and the living room. *I think Heishi's grandfather took the biggest room, which was right next to the front door, and Heishi grabbed this room.* I cautiously walked up to Heishi's closed door and tried to knock softly upon the worn wood but I was not able to control my strength and I accidentally made a small dent in the old door.

I could hear rustling behind the closed door, followed by the sound of something crashing into it. Soon after, Heishi opened the door and smiled at me. I noticed that there was a big red mark down the center of his face and suddenly it hit me, that big crash was Heishi smashing face-first into the door. I smiled weakly at the boy in front of me and hoped that he was not angry with me for giving him an awkward look.

``What are you doing here?" he asked in a snide voice.

`` He, um Tsuyoku I mean, told me you wanted help... so I ..." I wasn't able to finish what I was saying before Heishi butted in.

``He sent you huh? I wanted him to come and help me but I guess you will have to do. Here come lift this for me, `` he commanded as he led me over to a gigantic oak bed. I reluctantly did as I was told and picked up the huge bed with ease. He jumped back in amazement. `` What's with you? How are you able to lift such big things so easily? Teach me how!"

``I can't..." I was a little embarrassed at what he was demanding.

``Why not?!" He sounded as if he were a bit frustrated with me as well as my answers. He puffed himself up like a bull and made himself look bigger and bigger with every second.

``Have you ever heard of... of the Fire people? Well Tsuyoku says that they are born with this incredible strength and I am one of them. You see, I can't teach you because you have to be born with it, it can't be taught to someone." While still holding the huge bed, I stared down at the floor. I didn't want to see the expression on his face after what I had just told him.

``Your name is Tenshi right?" he said.

I looked up happily hoping that he wasn't mad at me. ``Yeah, yeah, my name is Tenshi." I laughed awkwardly.

``What does that mean? ``Angel", right? What kind of name is that for a boy and a boy with your strength no less? Maybe you should change your name to ``Devil", it matches your strength and your strange hair." He laughed playfully while pointing at the fiery spikes of my wild hair.

``Well I don't know, what kind of name is ``Heishi"?" I answered back in a monotone. I was a little offended with his question so I suppose my answer came out sounding a little rude. He glanced over at

me and we stared at each other for a little while, but then he suddenly began laughing.

I didn't see what was so funny. I didn't say anything funny so what was he laughing at? I stood there and watched him throw his head back, almost falling over with laughter.

``That was funny. You can be pretty clever sometimes. Anyway, here is where I want you to put the bed." He pointed to the corner that was to the right of the door and across from the window. I did as he said and carefully set the huge single bed down in the corner. I adjusted the piece of furniture so that it was perfectly parallel to the wall.

As soon as it was straight I turned around to face Heishi. ``Is that all you needed me for?" I tried to ask politely but I think I just made myself sound like a servant more than anything.

``Yeah that's all." He stopped and didn't say anything for a while. The silence was almost frightening. It caused a sudden high-pitched ringing to start humming in my left ear. ``Would you mind it if I came over tomorrow?" His mildly tan face began to turn beet-red, as did his pointy ears. For a moment, I think even his dark brown hair was turned a little red. The crimson on his face made his scar turn a dark ruby color too. I couldn't believe it; he was actually embarrassed.

His embarrassment wasn't the only thing that shocked me; I was also surprised that he had asked me a question like that. I was tongue-tied and had no idea of what to say. *You are taking too long. He's going to think that you don't want him to come over. Hurry up and answer him.* I kept saying this to myself, trying to force the words out quickly, but I think that I over did it a little.

``Sure, I would love it if you could come over tomorrow, it would be a lot of fun, I hope to see you out there, and you can meet Shizuka, and we'll have lots of fun!" I spat out in a single breath. Heishi just stared at me like I had giant spiders crawling all over me. I smiled innocently hoping to cover my stupidity with a smile and a halo.

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If this is your first time reading this then you wouldn't even notice... but I made all of my characters older in this version. (Tenshi was originally supposed to be four or five) My manga changed however so I had to make the changes here too. Just a little side note. ^^

Seifer-sama

## 4 - Letter 4: To Tsuyoku and my Family

### Letter 4

To Tsuyoku and my Family

"Tenshi! It's time to go home!" I heard Tsuyoku call from the outside of Heishi's room. "Breakfast is ready!" A wide grin spread across my face. *I am saved from Heishi's weird stares... Thank goodness for Tsuyoku and breakfast!* I chuckled to myself as I made one last attempt at fitting the bed into the spot Heishi had pointed to.

When I was finished I smiled at him awkwardly then ran to the door. I turned around right after I opened it to face Heishi and said, "I would like it if you would come over tomorrow."

I beamed at him and let the door out of Heishi's room close behind me; listening as it softly hit the surrounding frame.

"So the boy's father is gone? I am so sorry to hear that. There is another victim of Akuma's wrath..." I heard Tsuyoku's voice say as I stood motionless outside of Heishi's door.

I wasn't sure what they were talking about and I didn't even think much of it as I walked to where Tsuyoku and Mr. Yasashi were standing by the bottom of the staircase I had to carry the huge dresser up. But as soon as they saw me coming they stopped talking immediately and smiled. I couldn't be sure, but the look in their eyes made me feel as if I had just walked into the middle of a conversation I wasn't supposed to hear.

"Well now, what do you think of my grandson?" Mr. Yasashi asked with a laugh, breaking the awkward silence we had all been standing in. His bright green eyes gave a flash as he chuckled to himself.

I paused for a moment before answering, repeatedly glancing between the floor and at Mr. Yasashi.

"He's nice, but he is a little strange." I answered awkwardly. Mr. Yasashi just looked at me for a second and didn't say anything. His emerald eyes seem to pierce right through me and I could feel it as I started to blush, my face feeling as if it were on fire. It was uncomfortable for his eyes to be focused on me for so long, it almost made me feel incredibly shy. Just looking at them made me want to run and hide, so I would never have to worry about Mr. Yasashi looking right through me. But there was something about him that kept my legs from taking me away. Something mysterious and intriguing, as if there was some form of treasure locked behind his eyes, hypnotizing me and forcing me to do nothing but stare deep into them.

Finally the silence was broken again when Mr. Yasashi and Tsuyoku gave out a laugh.

"Well I would have to agree with you on that one, Tenshi. He definitely is a little strange." Mr. Yasashi chuckled to himself as he glanced over towards Heishi's room. He then fell silent for a moment and as

his laughter slowly died, I saw his eyes grow to a deep jaded shade of green. His eyes reminded me of the forest that lies beyond Tsuyoku's house just after the sun goes down; the deep green forest that can cause a person to lose their way within their trees.

“In fact, that is why we left our home.” Mr. Yasashi sighed in melancholy tone. “The villagers we used to live with do not like people Heishi and I. They are people who are afraid of those who wish to be different and would rather run their own kind out of their home, then allow others to live the life they wish.”

Mr. Yasashi turned to Tsuyoku. His thin gray hair fluttered as he turned, even with the slightest movement. His green eyes then changed to their original state, glistening brightly in the dim light.

“I think that you and your grandson are both very brave for leaving your home and coming all the way out here. It shows great courage for one to leave the area they are most familiar with...” Tsuyoku paused and took a quick glance at me and smiled. “I am glad that you were able to escape those close-minded people back in your old home. I am sure that you will be happy to know that the people who live here don't think like that. They are all very kind and generous people, and very accepting of anyone who may come into our tiny town.” Tsuyoku assured Mr. Yasashi with a smile.

As I stood there and listened to the two older men talk I couldn't help but think of how smart they both were. They knew so much and had experienced more things than I could ever hope to. It was obvious why Mr. Yasashi was so wise because of his hair, but you couldn't tell that by looking at Tsuyoku. Unlike Mr. Yasashi, Tsuyoku's wisdom was hidden within his eyes. Anyone could see that if he or she took the time to gaze into his golden lime eyes. They were filled with countless knowledge and experience. With those eyes; he could always notice the tiniest details, those that most people would overlook. But nothing ever fooled Tsuyoku. He could see anything and everything. Tsuyoku could look through a dark piece of glass as if it were as clear as spring water. I think that was my favorite part about him.

There was a sudden silence in the house. The two men smiled at each other for a while and then Mr. Yasashi broke the stillness. “You had better get on home you two, or your breakfast will get cold. And nothing is worse than a cold breakfast.” His bright green eyes lit up as he chuckled childishly.

“You are right Mr. Yasashi. Cold breakfast is never a pleasure.” Tsuyoku laughed back in the same child-like manner. When he was finished laughing, he paused for a moment in thought and then said; “Please, if you need anything, come right on over.” Tsuyoku smiled happily. Mr. Yasashi nodded, his silver and brown hair swished with every nod.

“Thank you for your help Tsuyoku, I could not have done it without you.” He then took a step forward and knelt down next to me smiling.

“Thank you for all of your help today as well, young Tenshi.” Mr. Yasashi grinned with that same warm smile he gave me when I first met him.

I smiled back and gazed wide-eyed at his mesmerizing face. He was so close to me that I could see every tiny wrinkle in his old and worn face. His eyes were so bright and wise; they reminded me of a pretty jewel that I saw on one of Katana's earrings. 'Jade' I think she called it. Just standing there, staring into his memorable eyes made me want to somehow become as wise and kind as he was.

Tsuyoku carefully opened the door and allowed me to leave first, while he held the door. I noticed that he gave one last smile to Mr. Yasashi and then he let the door slowly close behind him.

Tsuyoku and I walked passed the gate of Mr. Yasashi's front yard and down the dirt pathway to our house. I was just about to open the white painted fence that led into Tsuyoku's yard, when he suddenly stopped me.

“Did you know that your family used to live in that house Tenshi?” My heart skipped a beat the moment Tsuyoku finished his sentence. *My family... lived there?* I took a glance at the two-story house behind Tsuyoku, which now belongs to Mr. Yasashi and his grandson. *So... Tsuyoku knows my family? But... he's never even mentioned them before... So how...?*

I let my gaze fall back down on the wise man with the silvery-golden eyes and hair. My eyes shone with disbelief as I stared at him for what seemed to be hours.

“It surprises you doesn't it? I'm sorry I never really told you anything about them, but it is better for you not to know.” Tsuyoku's normally kind face suddenly turned sad. I let my eyes fall to the ground just below his feet, his features were filled with such sorrow that it pained me to look at him.

Suddenly I was overcome with questions. *Why shouldn't I know? It's my family isn't it? What could be the harm in me knowing about them? It's only natural to want to know about your own family. What does he have to keep things secret?*

I raised my eyes just enough to see the lower half of Tsuyoku's face. “I don't understand. What do you mean, “It's best for me not to know?”” Suddenly without warning, I ran over to Tsuyoku and began tugging on his worn clothes. Crying uncontrollably for the answers I desired more than anything in the world. “Please tell me about my family, please! I don't care what happens, I just want to know about them.”

I begged him to say something about them, anything. It would have been fine if he had just told me their names, it would have satisfied me, but he said nothing. He simply stood there... staring at me with that melancholy expression in his eyes. Sorrow poured out of every part of his face. I reached up towards his face, searching into his golden-lime eyes, hoping to find an answer hidden deep within them, but I only saw sadness. Nothing more than that.

I suddenly felt something drip down my cheeks; it was water. Warm water was coming out of my eyes. I was crying and the tears kept coming. I couldn't stop them. Nothing could stop them.

Tsuyoku knelt down into the dusty road, dirtying his knees. He closed his eyes, wrapped his arms around my shoulders, and squeezed me tight. “I'm sorry Tenshi, I really am, but your father doesn't want you to know until you are ready.” He placed his chin on my shoulder as he held me close. “I made a solemn vow that I would protect you and I must keep that promise. If I told you everything Akuma would surely find you... and kill you.”

*Akuma? Who is Akuma and why does he want to kill me? I'm just a little kid, what could I possibly do to him?*

“You have to trust me on this Tenshi.” Tsuyoku's voice wavered. My small fists still clung tightly to Tsuyoku's worn shirt.

*Is Tsuyoku crying too?*

With tears still pouring down my cheeks, Tsuyoku squeezed me even more for support and comfort. I could barely breathe, but I knew that he was just trying to help, so I had to hold on for a little while longer.

“Your father loves you with all of his heart. He saved your life by making you forget everything.” Tsuyoku paused for a moment and loosed his grip slightly. “Tenshi... Those shadowed people that you see when ever you walk into a familiar area... Those people are forgotten parts of yourself. They won't show their faces until the time is right. You must wait patiently until that day Tenshi. Then, and only then, will you be able to see your father and meet your true self.”

My heart gave a jump. *Tsuyoku knew about the shadow people? But how?* My thoughts were interrupted when I felt two warm drops of water land on my back. *Tsuyoku really is crying, he is crying for me...*

After the moment passed, Tsuyoku slowly released his comforting arms and I was finally able to breathe again. I stared into his eyes, filled with tears and forced a sad smile.

My legs shook and I suddenly felt exhausted. Tsuyoku gestured over at the gate that lead into his yard. He and I sat down next to the paint-worn fence and we both leaned our tired backs against the old wood. I glanced over at Tsuyoku, who was no longer crying; instead he looked relieved. He looked as if he had suddenly dropped a huge boulder that he had been holding for years.

Tsuyoku must have noticed that I was looking at him because he turned to me and smiled warmly. As soon as I saw his smile a voice in my head called to me: “Don't worry, everything will work out in time.” My eyes widened at the sound of the voice in my head; it was a voice that I heard before. He was so familiar; he sounded a lot like Tsuyoku, but he was not Tsuyoku. *Who are you? Warm, familiar voice... who are you?*

“Tenshi, you'll find them soon, don't worry. Let's concentrate on the present for now, okay?” I nodded and smiled at Tsuyoku's kind words. “That's good, because right now we are late for breakfast, and Katana's going to be furious. Today, young Tenshi, you will learn the true horror of an angry woman; there is nothing worse than that!” Tsuyoku said with pretend seriousness, which made me laugh, as the last two tears fell from my eyes. The funny look Tsuyoku gave me while he was explaining how scary women could be, made all my sadness disappear from my mind.

Suddenly Katana poked her head out of the kitchen window, her long golden hair glowed in the early morning sunlight.

“What are you doing out there? Breakfast is ready! Hurry up before it gets cold!” Katana called to us from her window with a smile.

Tsuyoku and I stared at Katana with fear, then we both turned at the same time to each other, and

laughed.

“Quit fooling around, now come inside!” Katana sounded a little annoyed with us for laughing at her. She smiled as she rolled her golden-lime eyes at us and then pulled her face and her lovely sunshine hair back into the house.

Tsuyoku and I continued laughing for a few minutes, until the laughter slowly died. After a few moments we decided that we should do as Katana said and go back inside. Tsuyoku held out his huge gentle hand to me and I put my soft tiny hand in his.

Tsuyoku and I walked hand in hand to our house, just like a father and his son, walking home from a long day. The only difference with us was that our day was just beginning. I will remember that day forever...

Tsuyoku left soon after breakfast was finished and the kitchen was cleaned up. I am not sure exactly where, but with a full stomach and a nice day ahead of me, I didn't have much time to worry about that. Besides that fact, my thoughts were continually racing. I couldn't wait for the next day to come, the day that Heishi would come over. I told Shizuka all about Heishi as we walked outside after just eating our breakfast.

“He sounds okay, but don't you think he was just a little too rude to be nice?” Shizuka asked with confusion as we reached the worn fence that surrounded Tsuyoku's yard. “I mean you just meet him and he starts ordering you around like he was the king of the world and you were born to be his slave or something.”

“Well maybe, but I could sort of feel a kindness about him. I think he's kinder than he acts.” I answered back while I leaned against Tsuyoku's fence; thinking about Heishi's emerald green eyes. Eyes an identical color to Mr. Yasashi's.

“What are you talking about?” Shizuka asked awkwardly as he angrily placed his hand on the rotting wood of the fence. He gave me a strange look that made me feel like I had just turned purple in the face.

“Just wait until you meet him, then maybe you will agree with me.” I stated plainly as I shifted to a more comfortable spot on the old fence I was leaning against.

“Okay, fine. But if he is mean to either one of us, I'm going to beat him up!” Shizuka laughed seriously while raising his fist in triumph.

A red aura surrounded him as he continued laughing like he had just won a very important battle. His obnoxious chortles were making me nervous so I slowly backed away from my strange friend. He instantly stopped his frightening cackles when he noticed the exasperated look on my face.

“What's the matter?” Shizuka asked with sarcasm.

“Heh, nothing...” I smiled and lied to my weird friend. *This is exactly why Shizuka and Heishi should meet; they are both nice, but they can be so weird at times.*



“Well anyway, let's get back to our unfinished tournament!” Shizuka sniggered loudly with excitement.

This was always Shizuka's favorite part of the day, especially when I had to play the bad guy. He always believed that the good guys should win every time. I think his beliefs rubbed off on me because I picked up on the thought that good guys always win too.

“You get to be the bad guy today!” Shizuka snorted.

“But I was the bad guy yesterday, and the day before that and the day before that as well.” I complained loudly, even though I knew that it wouldn't do me any good. I knew that once he made up his stubborn mind, nothing could change it.

“Well you look more like a bad guy than I do.” Shizuka answered quickly. Glancing at my strange hair and dark eyes.

*I guess there's no point in arguing against an answer like that.*

“Okay I'll be the bad guy again...” I answered with a little bit of gloom in my voice.

“Good then let's get started!” Shizuka commanded with enthusiasm. He was always so happy when I didn't argue with his decision.

Shizuka and I continued our sword tournament that had been going on for about a week or so. Each day I had been the bad guy, it must have been because I really did look more like a bad guy than Shizuka did. Sharp fiery hair looks a lot more evil than soft golden hair.

He and I played with our pretend swords until dinnertime, but we did stop once in a while for drink, food, and bathroom breaks.

“It's time for dinner you two, so come in and get ready before Tsuyoku comes home.” Katana called kindly as she poked her head out of the open kitchen window. Her golden hair fluttered in the gentle breeze. She smiled down at us with her bright eyes and then pulled herself back inside gracefully.

“Coming!” Shizuka and I said at the same time. He and I put our pretend swords down below the kitchen window where Katana had been and then ran inside to wash our dirtied faces and hands.

Shizuka turned the water on and then he and I began scrubbing his hands together furiously, trying to get all of the dirt off. The water turned to a murky brown color after our hands were washed and a small ring of mud was left behind when the water left the round sink bowl. I quickly dried my hands on the once white towel that had now been stained with the dirt Shizuka and I brought in. I then walked over to the sink and rubbed away the small circle of mud that lined the sink with my index finger. A small smile crept over my face when I saw the ring slowly beginning to disappear.

*I don't want Katana to have more work to do.* I smiled triumphantly at my attempt to clean the dirtied sink, because it didn't matter how small; help was always help to me. I gave the dirt ring one last scrub and then ran to the table for a wonderful dinner.

Tsuyoku didn't come home until later that night. Shizuka and I were playing with our miniature knights in the living room by the crackling red and yellow fire. Katana had just finished cleaning up the mess that dinner caused, when he came walking in through the front door.

Shizuka and I turned from our toys to the kind man that stood in the doorway. He looked extremely tired and it almost looked as though he had aged ten years in one day. His face was covered with the dried brown soil that inhabited the area we lived in.

“Are you hungry dear? I can fix you something if you want.” Katana asked her weary husband.

“No thank you.” He shook his head slowly. I watched as his hair softly flopped from side to side as he sleepily walked through the doorway and into the kitchen. “I'm not hungry; I am going to go straight to bed. I'm sorry, I'm so tired and I bet it was a wonderful dinner too. I am sorry I missed it.”

Tsuyoku smiled softly as he walked towards Katana. He kissed his kind wife goodnight, smiled at Shizuka and I, and then he began climbing up the stairs that led to his and Katana's room.

I watched him slowly stumble up the steps and shuffle down the hallway to his room. When he was out of sight I turned to Shizuka who was back to playing with his people.

“What does your father do all day long anyway?” I whispered quietly, hoping that Katana couldn't hear me. Being nosey was not what I wanted to be, but I couldn't ignore it anymore. No one ever told me what he did during the day. He always left early in the morning and he usually didn't come back until late at night.

“Actually, I don't really know. I asked mother once and she just said that he was making the village a better place to live.” Shizuka answered quietly as he gazed in to the mesmerizing flames of the fire.

I never asked him about that again. It seemed to bother him when he answered me, so I figured he didn't like talking about it. Maybe it bothered him that he didn't know what his father did during the day... the thought of anything happening to Tsuyoku while he was away must have scared him... That must be why he never liked to speak about his father's work. *I guess I will never know.*

“It's late now, so you two should be going to bed.” Katana said in a soft voice.

I'm getting tired anyway. I did as Katana asked and climbed up the steps and shuffled my feet to my bedroom door. I slowly opened it and let it close behind me.

My room was extremely cold compared to the warm fire. I glanced about the room and noticed that the icy night air was seeping into my room from my open window. My body shivered against the chilly air. *It's going to get really cold tonight if it is already this chilly this early.*

Carefully and ever so quietly I walked to the open window and gazed out onto the dark earth and then up at the night sky. Please let me find my father and the shadow people soon. Oh, and please take care of Tsuyoku and his family, they have been so kind to me and they deserve a lot more than I could ever hope to give them.

I asked the starlit sky these simple wishes to be granted every single night. It always made me feel better to think that the sky and the stars were listening to me. I hoped that they would grant my wishes even if it took forever.

When I finished staring at the silvery dots in the dark blue sky, I slowly closed my window so that none of the night air could chill my already cold room. Silently as ever I crept to the side of my warm bed that the cold could never hope to freeze. I hopped onto the huge bed that was built for an adult three times bigger than me and wiggled my way under the comforting covers.

I wonder if Tsuyoku once had someone else who lived here, like another son maybe? There are enough rooms in this house for everyone and a guest room too. There must have been someone else who lived here. That person had the room that I am in right now. I just know it...

I thought about this for quite some time, which caused my tiredness to vanish. My mind had almost forgotten, but I suddenly remembered the day that would be coming in a few hours; the day that Heishi would come over. I couldn't stop thinking about it, as I lay silent in my bed, allowing my thoughts to wander.

It will be so much fun. He, Shizuka, and I can become really close friends. Maybe we will be lifelong friends. I hope so. Before Shizuka, I never had a friend... Is that true? I don't remember. As my mind raced, I barely noticed that my eyes were growing heavy and before I knew it my thoughts had lulled me to sleep and the night flew by as I soundlessly slept; dreaming of the day to come.

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Hm.... I think we are getting to a part where I have to start editing chapters before I can post more... I think I read and fixed all the chapters up to five... we shall see though.

Seifer-sama

## 5 - Letter 5: To Tsuyoku; My Wise, Second Father

### Letter 5

#### To Tsuyoku; My Wise, Second Father

It was the next day before I knew it. I awoke earlier usual, probably because I was so excited about Heishi coming over to play. The sun wasn't even rising over the distant mountains when I rolled over and opened my eyes to see the purple light of dawn just outside my bedroom window. I stared outside and watched as the sky slowly grew brighter. I thought about going back to sleep, but as soon as I closed my eyes my thoughts began to race; imagining all the fun Shizuka, Heishi, and I were going to have in a few hours.

A small sigh pushed it's way out of my lips as I realized that going back to sleep was nearly impossible now that I was awake. *Well... I guess it wouldn't hurt to get ready... At least it would be something to do and that way i will be ready to go outside and play as soon as Heishi gets here.*

I silently slid out of my covers and onto the hardwood floor. The ground was freezing as usual so I ran to the other side of the room to where my socks were and pulled them on my chilled feet.

Quietly I changed into my usual white shirt that was far too big for my small body. I slipped both legs into my tan baggy pants and pulled them up to my waist. With one hand holding onto the waist of my pants and I then wrapped my red ribbon around my torso and quickly tied the two ends together.

I glanced around the room for a moment and noticed that I had forgotten to fix my bed covers. I tiptoed over to the edge of the mattress and tucked the ruffled covers back into place. Though my bed-making skills were not nearly as good as Katana's, I was still pleased after putting all the pillows and blankets back into their rightful place.

*Well... I guess I am all ready... The only thing left is my shoes... But I better not put my shoes on here, that might make too much noise and I don't want to wake anyone up... I'll just carry them down and set them by the door,* I thought to myself. *Heishi shouldn't be coming until after breakfast, but I want to make sure that I am ready to go outside right when he gets here.*

I grabbed my lace shoes that lay beside the wooden door of my room and heaved a sigh as I prepared to make my way downstairs. Slowly and silently, I turned the knob and opened the door that separated my room from the hallway and quietly tiptoed out of my room. I checked the rooms where Tsuyoku and his family slept to make sure that I hadn't woken them up. After a few moments of silence, I figured that they were still asleep and proceeded down the wooden staircase as quietly as I possibly could.

I was able to walk down the normally squeaky steps without making a sound. Halfway down the steps, I heard a small noise, which startled me. I stopped in my tracks to see if it was only my imagination. The noise was quiet and sounded as if someone was tiptoeing around in the kitchen. My grip tightened on the heels of my pitch-black, lace up shoes and my breathing slowed. I perked up my ears, waiting for

the noise-maker to show themselves. Suddenly Tsuyoku peered out from behind the doorway that separated the living room from the dining room.

“Tenshi?” Tsuyoku's warm eyes widened as he stared at me. “What are you doing up so early? Couldn't sleep?” He asked kindly, his caring smile gleamed brightly at me.

“N-No I just woke up and I wanted to be ready when Heishi comes over... and well... I just wanted to put my shoes by the door.” I stuttered in a surprised voice. I could feel an awkward silence cover the air in the room as I stood motionless on the cold steps of the place I called “home”; waiting for Tsuyoku to answer.

“Oh I see. Young Heishi is coming over today? I am sure you will have a lot of fun playing together.” Tsuyoku smiled brightly. “I just have one bit of advice for you; make sure that no one is left out.” He gazed back at me with both sadness and seriousness locked into his normally kind face. “A word to the wise Tenshi, it is almost impossible for one to have two friends at the same time. One will almost always be left out, so make sure that you spend your time evenly with both Heishi and Shizuka. Understand?” He gave me a quick smile and patiently waited for me to reply.

“I think so.” I answered after a few moments of thought. Tsuyoku's wisdom was displayed once again to me. He always knew what to say and when to say it. I was too young to fully understand everything he had said to me but I knew that advice from a man such as Tsuyoku should never be taken lightly.

Despite the fact that I appreciated Tsuyoku's advice, something else was on my mind; a question nudging at the back of my mind, begging to be asked. *I want to ask him, but isn't it rude to butt into other people's business? I want to know!* I heaved a deep sigh and built up my courage. Suddenly my mouth began to blurt out the question I had been wondering every morning since I came to live here.

“Um... Ts-Tsuyoku? Why do you always leave so early... in the morning and don't come back until dark? Where are you... during the day?” The words stumbled out of my mouth and hung in the silent morning air. My gaze fell to the floor and at my cold stocking feet.

I could feel Tsuyoku's eyes staring. Were they angry? Sad? Annoyed? I wish I had the courage to look, but I was so afraid... so afraid that I might have said something I should not have. I immediately turned red in the face from embarrassment. *I wish I hadn't asked that, now he's going to be angry with me! Why am I always so nosy!?* I scowled at myself as Tsuyoku let out a small sigh.

“Well Tenshi, to tell you the truth... It is my job to keep this village safe for everyone.” He didn't sound angry at all, only sad. *Tsuyoku...* “Me and a few other villagers keep the monsters from roaming into our homes and harming the residents.” I took a quick glance from the floor to Tsuyoku and to see him lean against the wooden wall. He sighed as he pushed his platinum blonde hair away from his eyes.

“Your father... when he lived here, that is, was also one of the village's protectors.” Tsuyoku spoke with such seriousness that it was beginning to scare me. It was rare to hear Tsuyoku speak to someone with a serious tone, but it almost always seemed to happen whenever he spoke about my father. I never did understand why that was.

A silence filled the house once again. I wanted to say something; anything. But all I was able to do was

stare at the floor and hope the moment would pass. I was too afraid to look at Tsuyoku again, I was convinced that I had reminded him of something he wished he could forget. Was it my father? I couldn't tell... but it seemed like everytime I mentioned my father, kind Tsuyoku would get that serious look on his face. I couldn't bare to look at it anymore. I felt so guilty for upsetting him all the time. It seemed to be the only thing I was capable of doing when it came to Tsuyoku.

``Tenshi? Is something bothering you?" Tsuyoku's question broke through my thoughts as if they were thin sheet of glass. Without even thinking I raised my head up and met Tsuyoku's worry-filled eyes.

``Oh, no! Nothing is wrong. I just... I was just thinking. That's all," was all I could manage to stutter out. A thought suddenly came to me as I stared at Tsuyoku. *Maybe I could make Tsuyoku feel better about my dad if I tried to be like him... I could protect the village with Tsuyoku just like my dad used to... My thoughts paused for a moment. But... I don't think I could ever be as good a fighter as my father. He is a legend and I am just a little kid who barely knows how to fight with sticks... I don't think I will ever be able to defend the village as good as he did... But... if it would make a little of Tsuyoku's pain go away... I would do it.*

Then once again Tsuyoku's voice broke my train of thoughts and they were shoved to the back of my mind.

``Last night was really bad. The monsters were only a few days away from the village." Tsuyoku's voice became as cold as ice as he lowered his gaze to eh hard wood floor. ``They keep coming closer, someday, they may even make it inside."

My eyes widened as the words sunk in. *Tsuyoku really does need my father here... That's why he is always so sad when I mention him... Well if Tsuyoku needs help then I want to do all I can!*

``I-I'll help you Tsuyoku!" I blurted out without thinking. The words flew from my throat and out of my mouth as if they had a mind of their own and knew exactly what they were doing. ``I know I'm just a little kid... and I'll never be able to fight as well as my father but please let me help! I know you probably want my father's more than a little kid like me... but Tsuyoku... I would help in anyway I could if it could take away your sadness."

``Tenshi?" Tsuyoku stared at me with his eyes wide open. He looked as though he was at a loss for words. He closed his eyes and smiled. ``Just hearing you say that... It means so much to me." Tsuyoku beamed at me. "But I won't allow you to do such a thing until you are at least twelve. No... older than that maybe." Tsuyoku said sternly with a smile.

``But I can help! I'm strong and I beat Shizuka at swords all the time!" I shouted back; hoping that it would change Tsuyoku's mind.

``Fighting monsters is different then fighting a eight year old child. Shizuka doesn't use black magic, unlike demons and monsters." Tsuyoku answered coolly.

I couldn't say anything in my defense this time. I didn't even know what black magic was let alone know how to defend myself against it. *Black magic... I have to learn about it... so I can be as good as my dad!*

“Wh-What is black magic?” I stuttered.

“Black magic is an evil force of elemental or non-elemental energy that is used to attack an enemy.” Tsuyoku's answer seemed to come without him even giving a thought about it. It was as though he had been schooled on the subject and he knew every aspect there was to know about it.

I thought to myself for a moment, trying to understand what he said, but there were too many words that meant a little less than nothing to me. Without even meaning to I stared back at him with the most bewildered look I had ever given him. He and his wisdom went way beyond my understanding.

“Okay... how about this? Fire can be used in a spell to attack your enemy, or rather, the person or thing that you are fighting. Once you summon the fire with a spell, it is at your command and it will do anything you ask it to.” Tsuyoku paused and checked to make sure that I was listening to what he was saying.

“Do you understand, Tenshi?”

I nodded quickly. This time it made a little more sense. *So you can attack using fire and other things too. Maybe if I learn some magic, then I can help Tsuyoku with the monsters and I will be able to defend the village that was nice enough to accept me. And not only that... but maybe... just maybe I could be as good a fighter as my legendary father. That way Tsuyoku won't need my father here... I can help him defend the village.*

“Tsuyoku? Will you teach me magic so I can help you fight the monsters?” I asked quietly. I began fidgetting with my shoe's laces; afraid of the answer Tsuyoku might give me.

“You want to be like your legendary father, young Tenshi?” Tsuyoku asked with an unexpectedly calm voice.

*He knew! But how? How did he know that?* I stared at Tsuyoku; my eyes widened with surprise and my mouth dropped open a little. There were sometimes when I was almost certain that Tsuyoku could read minds.

“Oh don't look so surprised. It's like I said before, we are more alike than you think Tenshi.” Tsuyoku laughed casually. I smiled back, relieved to hear him laugh.

“Tsuyoku?” I began.

“Yes?” He answered softly in a tired voice as he stood as still as the surrounding walls.

“Is my father really... a legend?” I asked as I tightly grasped one of the banister rails in my tiny hands. My hands were sweaty, making the rail a little difficult to hold onto. I tried to ignore my difficulties with the banister as I concentrated on Tsuyoku's face. My stomach churned with uneasiness as I awaited his reply. Asking questions like this always made me nervous especially whenever I asked Tsuyoku. His everlasting knowledge sometimes made me feel like I was wasting his time by asking him such silly little questions. But despite my childish questions, Tsuyoku never once treated me like an inferior child. He always answered me as if I were an adult of the same age.

“Yes Tenshi, your father really is a legend. Everyone who lives anywhere near here knows your father

as "The Demon Slayer". He became a great knight and saved many people." Tsuyoku stopped for a minute. A small piece of his golden-silver hair fell in front of his weary eyes. They weren't as bright as they used to be. The sadness he was feeling turned his golden-lime eyes to dark hazel. "He is still a hero in many people's hearts." Small rays of sunlight came in through the kitchen window and surrounded Tsuyoku, giving him an almost godly appearance.

I kept my dark amethyst eyes on the kind man who now looked like a sad and hopelessly lost angel, surrounded by the golden glow of morning's first light. He was always so smart, so wise, so aware... but in that very moment he seemed as if he were more lost and alone than I had ever seen him.

I dropped my shoes and ran down the cold wooden steps to that caring man who was left in his own suffocating sadness. I ran into the blinding light that surrounded him and wrapped my tiny arms around his waist. I didn't want him to suffer all by himself, so I held onto him to let him know that he was not alone. I held on tight to the man that I could call "father".

"Tsuyoku, please don't be sad. I don't like it when you are sad. It's not you Tsuyoku." I could feel the tears working their way out. They silently flowed from my eyes and dripped on to the sleeves of my gigantic shirt. "I won't ask you about my dad anymore if it makes you sad. I know talking about him upsets you... I'll never do it again. I promise!"

I couldn't tell if Tsuyoku was crying but as soon as he wrapped his long arms around my head and neck, he held on tightly. This was the second time that Tsuyoku had used me as his support, but this time it was me who brought on Tsuyoku's sadness. He was upset because I had to be nosy and remind him of something that he wanted to forget. I was angered and I even hated myself for making Tsuyoku; the one person I could count on for anything, sad. It was my fault... I made Tsuyoku cry.

"Tenshi," Tsuyoku said quietly in a sad voice. "You are becoming more like your father as the days go on. You will accomplish many things in your life. I can see that now, even though you're young, you hold a soul that is very mature. And you carry yourself with such splendid grace that I know you will become as great a man as your father and don't you ever let yourself think otherwise." Tsuyoku chuckled to himself. "I think that you might even surpass that legendary man." Tsuyoku's voice wavered as he spoke as if he were trying to hold back the tears.

He knew... he knew exactly what was going through my mind... he knew that I felt inferior to my father and how much I wanted to live up to my father's immortal name. Tsuyoku knew that I wanted to be like him for the moment I heard about him. It was Tsuyoku who knew how I felt... It was Tsuyoku who always comforted me... And it was Tsuyoku who was here with me now... It was always Tsuyoku who treated me like his own son... and it was then that I decided to return the favor and do the only thing he ever asked of me...

"Tsuyoku? Can I call you "father" too?" I asked as my flowing tears slowed to a stop.

I raised my head to look up at him when two drops of water softly landed on my already wet face. Tsuyoku was crying too, only this time I don't think he was sad.

"Tenshi, I would love for you to call me your father." Tsuyoku said happily as he continued to cry silently.



Moments passed by quickly as Tsuyoku and I held on to each other for support, surrounded by the bright morning light. He then loosened his strong grip and knelt down next to me.

“I'm a little thirsty, do you want to sit down and have some milk with me?” Tsuyoku sounded so tired; it was as if his tears had drained him of all his remaining energy. His golden-silver hair clung to his wet face where his tears were beginning to dry. The golden rays of the sun still surrounded his soft facial features and created a halo, making him look exactly like an angel sent down from heaven.

“Yes, please.” I answered quietly as I stared at him in awe.

My stomach then growled loudly and interrupted the moment. I turned red with embarrassment. My stomach always made loud noises whenever I would have preferred it to be silent.

I didn't even notice that I was so hungry; the early morning's events kept my mind occupied with other thoughts, but now that they were over, my hunger grew quickly.

Tsuyoku led me into the kitchen and pulled out two glasses that were exactly the same and set them on the table. I had just begun to sit down in my eating spot when he glided across the room to the icebox and pulled out the huge jug that the milk was kept in. The kind and tired man then carefully shuffled back to the table where he had left the glasses.

Tsuyoku smiled as he poured the milk with ease and watched as the white liquid slowly flowed to the top of the first glass. He handed me the full glass of milk and I took it from him, trying to be cautious enough not to spill.

I quickly began gulping down the refreshing drink sipping and slurping every drop. It cooled and soothed my dry throat. Tsuyoku giggled as he watched me enjoy my milk. He poured his cup of the white liquid and smiled at me with a contented look on his face.

As soon as I had finished my glass of milk Tsuyoku sat down to enjoy his drink. I set my cup down with care and watched Tsuyoku quietly sip up the white liquid. *Funny, his eating habits are nothing like his drinking habits.* I remembered back to the very first day I had met Tsuyoku and his family. One of the first things I saw was he and his son, Shizuka slurping up their breakfast. Porridge flew everywhere.

Tsuyoku paused from his drinking and stared back at me. I guess he had noticed that my eyes were on him the entire time. I quickly moved them to the floor and felt my face fluster. I was blushing. I knew I was blushing.

“Is something wrong?” Tsuyoku asked innocently.

“N-No! Not a thing!” *I answered too quickly, he is going to see right through me. He's not going to believe me.*

“Tenshi.” Tsuyoku began sternly.

“Yes?” My voice wavered slightly. *He is going to hear suspicion in my voice.*

“You have milk all over your face.” Tsuyoku laughed.

I almost fell out of my chair. Here I was thinking that he was upset with me and all he wanted to tell me was that I had milk on my face. *Calm down Tenshi*, I said to myself as I wiped the dry white spots away with one of the long sleeves of my gigantic shirt.

“Tenshi, about what you said earlier...” I gulped quickly as Tsuyoku began to speak and then stop periodically to take small sips of his milk. “Would you like me to teach you about magic and the sort?” I let out a small sigh and then sat for a moment in silence to realize what Tsuyoku had just said.

“You are going to teach me?” I asked with excitement as I stood up in my seat and almost knocked over Tsuyoku's drink and mine when I bumped into the table, luckily though, Tsuyoku was able to catch both of them before then fell to the ground. I quickly sat down in my seat as my face turned red with embarrassment. Tsuyoku simply smiled.

“I'll teach you, but only if you want me to. I was going to teach Shizuka too when the time was right. If you want me to I can teach you both at the same time.” Tsuyoku smiled kindly. He finished the last of his milk with one final sip and then set the cup down onto the wooden table.

“I want to learn magic. Please teach me!” I said with enthusiasm. My eyes then fell from Tsuyoku to the two empty glasses on the table. The two cups were now exactly the same again. *First they were empty, then they were full, and now they are empty again.*

“Good, well that is settled. I am sorry to say this, but I have to leave now.” Tsuyoku stood up from his seat and glanced at me for a second. “I am happy to hear that you want to call me your father. I know that I could never be as great as he is but I will certainly try my very best.” He smiled and stared down at the two empty glasses on the dark wooden table below him. “I used to have another...” The rest of Tsuyoku's words were lost in his throat as if they didn't want to come out.

“What Tsuyoku? I couldn't hear you.” I asked as I watched his golden-lime eyes disappear behind his hair. The sunshine came through the window and illuminated his milky white skin, but I could not see his eyes. They were hidden behind the shadows of his golden hair.

Tsuyoku stood still for a moment or two, not making a sound. “I hope you have a good day, playing with Heishi and Shizuka.” He turned from the table and slowly walked to the door. “Please remember not to leave either one out. Spend your time equally with both.” Tsuyoku said as he silently opened the door and walked out without a word.

I wanted to follow him; I wanted to find out what he really said. But I couldn't, something was holding me there in my seat at the dark wooden table with the two empty glasses and the heavenly rays of light coming through the kitchen window.

I stayed in that spot until the soft warm sunrays laid themselves on the dark wood table, reflecting off of all the tiny specks of dust that were practically invisible without the sunlight. I was so upset with myself that I couldn't do anything except sit there, staring at the two empty glasses, and think about what had happened in that moment where Tsuyoku slipped into silent sadness.

I was so out of it that I didn't even hear Katana come down the steps. "Oh, Tenshi? Are these your shoes, dear?" Katana asked as she silently entered the kitchen. She must have noticed the dazed look on my face after she asked me about my shoes because right after, the chipper morning voice she had turned into worry. "Tenshi? Are you feeling okay? Do you want me to call for the doctor? Tenshi?"

I could hear her; but my thoughts were blocking all my senses. I tried to find the voice to speak to her or the strength to shake my head but I couldn't. It was as though I were paralyzed. Katana came over to me and shook me gently. I saw her smile as she noticed that I was reacting to her soft shakes. I blinked my eyes and turned to face the kind woman, with her sweet smile.

"Oh Tenshi, you scared the living daylights out of me. Are you okay?" she sighed with concern. I looked up at her and stared into her bright golden-lime eyes. I tried to stop them, I really tried, but I couldn't stop the tears. "Tenshi what is the matter, dear?" she questioned as she wrapped her slender arms around my small body. Her golden hair, which hadn't turned white from wisdom, fell all around me, like a cage of golden silk.

*She smelled so sweet, just like a rose. She reminds me of someone. Someone with the same sent, same gentle touch, the same warm heart and love. Who is this person that is just like Katana?*

"Katana? I made Tsuyoku sad..." My tears caused my throat to go dry and I began to choke as I tried to speak. "I asked him something that was bad. Do you think he will forgive me?" I cried.

"Oh Tenshi, Tsuyoku would never be angry with you for asking him something. That's just the way children..." I cut into the end of what she was going to say.

"But he was really upset. I don't want him to be sad. That's the last thing he needs." I bawled. She didn't answer me for a while; she was waiting for me to calm down. She ran her slender fingers through my tangled mass of spiky hair and held me close.

Katana gently held on to me and allowed me to cry out all of my troubles, which weren't as many as an adult's. Even though they were few, the problems I had were very important to me.

When I was finished crying she let me go and sat down in the chair next to me, still smiling with concern.

"Tenshi let me tell you something." Her golden-lime eyes stared into my own dark purple eyes.

"Tsuyoku loves you like you were his own son, he would never become angry with you. Never." She smiled kindly. The sun's rays blanketed her in the same way it surrounded Tsuyoku. Their gold hair and perfect skin made them both look like angels.

Katana and Tsuyoku were so much alike. Katana looked just like Tsuyoku when she smiled, they both gave off the same warm and soft aura when they smiled. Their eyes brightened the same way too.

Her comforting words made me feel better and reminded me that Heishi was coming over today. *I shouldn't be upset especially when Heishi and Shizuka will be meeting for the first time.* "Thank you Katana, I feel a lot better now." *I'll wait for Tsuyoku to come home and then I will apologize to him. This I promise.*

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Okay I think this was the last one I fixed and was never able to post.... it's been so long. ^\_^; Sorry for the wait.

Seifer-sama