



Forever Young  
Eternity 1: New to this world

Kim Houtzager

*Falling, catching, take me in your arms.  
Swirling, dancing, show me where the High Ones are.  
Promise me, that you will never let go.  
And promise me, that you will honestly show,  
the true meaning of my life.*



Forever Young Eternity 1: New to this world  
Second edition, February 2021  
First edition, ©2007 Kim Houtzager  
ISBN 9789464351125

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## Chapter 1: New to this world



## Episode 1: New to this world

Seken. The leaves rustled the planet's name. The forest seemed to sing the name of the world where people appeared to live forever. And yet, in this magical world... there was no such thing as true peace, as no one had died of old age yet...

The wind played with the leaves. Aside from forest life, the green place seemed empty. It seemed empty... yet it was not.

A purple-haired girl opened her eyes. The first thing she saw, were the clouds in the sky. She didn't move. Her eyes remained on the sky above. The clouds fascinated her. What was she looking at?

Suddenly a bird flew over. She followed it as far as she could with her head and discovered that she could move. The young girl raised a hand and studied it like she had never seen it before. She raised her other hand, studying it as well.

The girl raised her body into the sun; moving up from where she had been laying. Her long hair fell down over her pale skin. Slowly she stood up. Weird... she could keep balance on these strange two long sticks.

She took a step forward. Another one. Within seconds she walked like she had done it many times before, but the way she looked around herself could best be described as new to this world. New, as if she had never been here before. As if she belonged... somewhere else.

The girl's long hair danced in the wind. The girl suddenly put her arms around her: a reflex. She saw her arms. Little bumps had appeared and quickly vanished again. She ignored it. She went on with her journey into this strange new world.

Silently she walked through the forest. Not a single word; just observing. She touched a tree; it felt rough. She then touched a leaf. It was much softer than the tree.

Then the girl noticed something. Curiously, she walked towards it, her eyes showing no emotion at all.

If she had a word for it, she would have called it a house.

She walked towards the opening where there used to be a door. She touched the wall. It was cold and rough, just like the trees outside. However, this wood was much colder and dryer.

The girl observed the room. It looked as if a herd of bulls had raged through it, but it didn't give her any emotions at all. She walked inside and looked around, with wonder written all over her face.

She walked through the place, observing and learning from it all. She touched all things she could touch, until her eyes spotted something.

The girl walked towards it. She had no idea what it was, until she saw something. Something that moved. Her eyes came closer and her hand touched something cold. The moving thing seemed to do the same.

It didn't take long for her to find out that it was her own reflection that had been moving. She looked down from the mirror. Her reflection... had so much resemblance with the creatures at her feet. Yet... they didn't move.

There was something else that was different. One had short hair and even hair on his face. The other seemed to have long hair, just like hers. Not only that, both creatures wore something over their skins.

She knelt down and touched the fabric. Then she looked at her own skin. She didn't wear such things. Should she wear it too? They looked so similar.

She bent over to the woman's face and she looked into the woman's eyes. Why was she staring? What was she staring at? And why didn't she move?

The girl touched the woman's face with her hand. Cold. Just like the walls, just like the trees. Cold.

The girl then observed the rest of the body. In the middle there seemed to be something else that the girl didn't have. A hole. The hole was reddish-brown and the girl touched it. It was cold, like the woman... like the walls... like the trees.

All of a sudden her fingers had turned into the same colour as the hole before her. She looked closely at it and then placed her hand back onto the woman's body. When she raised her hands again, most of the colour had left her fingers again, staining the fabrics even more.

The girl stood up again. She looked around until she saw a small door. She walked towards it and opened it.

There were a lot of shelves in the closet. The girl took some fabric and pulled it out. It was just as soft as the woman's.

She noticed the clothes looked exactly like what the woman was wearing. She looked back and forth at the fabric and then at the woman...

When her bare feet touched the grass outside again, there was something different about her. The emotionless eyes remained, but her body was now wrapped in a long orange dress.

Not caring which way she went, she started moving once more.

"Good morning!"

"Good morning, Matsuru!" The man greeted back.

"So, what have you got today?" Matsuru looked at all the fruit and vegetables.

"Hey, isn't this yesterday's fruit?"

The man shrugged. "Ah lad, it's still good enough to eat."

Matsuru looked at him with a questionable look and wanted to say something really witty, until he looked into the mirror that was for sale behind the grocer. He immediately turned around and looked at the square in the middle of the village.

The entire town was completely silent. All gazed at the young girl that steadily walked through town. She didn't seem to pay attention to anyone around her.

Nothing seemed to stop her; neither the playing children, nor the running dogs.

Eventually she was forced to stop anyway. She stood before the grocer and simply stared at him. "Eh... good morning, lass..." He said uneasily. He had never seen her before; someone with such piercing eyes would be hard to forget.

The girl didn't reply. She just looked at the man. It didn't seem to affect her that he talked to her, as if her mind had wandered off to another world. As if she hadn't heard him at all.

"Is there... something we can help you with?" The grocer asked once again. Matsuuru stared at the girl who didn't move or reply. Suddenly she tipped her head. She looked at the grocer with a 'hmm' face and then turned away.

Confusing everyone in town, the girl simply... left.

At that moment, sound filled the air again. At first the people were still following the movements of the strange girl, until they heard the sounds. The sound of running hooves came closer within seconds, making the townspeople nervous. Seconds later, their fear was confirmed by a young man running into town. "They are coming! Hide! The Black Knights have returned!"

A moment later four men on horses entered the village. The men wore strong plate armour; the same metal that protected their horses. With their swords raised high, they enjoyed seeing the people flee in fear and panic.

With piercing laughter, their bodies got filled with ecstasy, feeling their power when plunging a sword into a poor man's side.

Matsuuru clenched his fists. "When will we stand up against them?" He whispered from his hiding place. With his hand he touched his sword, but even he knew that one person would never be strong enough. Not to mention he was not much of a fighter; why did he carry his sword today anyway?

Suddenly, it was as if the air around him vanished, letting him gasp for air. The girl! She stood in the middle of the road, not moving. Had fear captured her as well?

However, he noticed her face. There was no emotion but wonder, just like she had shown before. Had she no clue who was standing before her?

A Black Knight noticed her as well. "Well, girly, are you being brave?" He laughed and guided his horse towards her, his sword raised high. When he reached her, he stopped. There was something... in those eyes.

It frightened him! He, one of the mighty Black Knights, was afraid of a young girl who just stood there. But when he saw her eyes, he saw more. She didn't know who he was. She didn't know who *she* was! But he saw it... in her eyes...

"Get away from me!" He screamed with fear in his voice, lowering his sword with an almighty speed. However, the girl still didn't move.

"No!" With strength unknown to himself, Matsuuru dove forward and pushed his sword in the stomach of the Black Soldier. The Black Soldier stared at it and then fell off his horse, landing onto the soil with the sound of clattering metal.

With his last breath, he saw the girl fade away. "Get away... from me..."

Matsuuru stared at his sword. It was now covered in blood. He realised it all too well. He had killed a man.

"K'charan!" Another Black Knight yelled when he saw what had happened. "You punk, you'll pay for that!" He quickly turned his horse and rode at Matsuuru and the girl.



Matsuru didn't think any more. All he did was based on pure instinct. He jumped onto the fallen knight's horse, grabbed the girl and drove faster than he had ever driven before. He drove; away from his village, away from his home, away from the Black Knights... away from the body...

"Mardok," A Black Knight calmly said to the man who wanted to pursue them.

"don't be so foolish. K'charan's horse is the fastest one."

"But Amordus!" The Black Knight was furious. "They killed..."

"We can't get them," Amordus replied. "but this town will fulfil our taste for vengeance..."

Matsuru didn't look back. He didn't know where he was going, but he knew one thing for sure. Behind him, the sky was slowly glowing red.

Tears welled up in his eyes. He knew what he had done. He knew what the consequences would be... and he knew it was his fault.

Matsuru had to stop. Feeling sick in his whole body he jumped off and threw it all out. Then he cried. "What have I done...?" He whispered between his tears. He wiped his mouth clean.

He then turned around. He was startled; behind him stood the same girl. He expected pity in her eyes, but once again he saw no emotion at all.

As before, she tipped her head. She then suddenly turned around and started walking once again.

Anger suddenly grabbed Matsuru's heart. He jumped up and grabbed her arm.

"Hey, wait a moment!" He yelled. "Where the hell do you think you're going?"

He looked at the girl's eyes. Empty. What was in them that had scared the Black Knight so much? Not only that, the girl didn't move at all. She didn't try to pull herself loose or made the slightest effort to get away. She just looked and observed him.

He was startled, but recovered quickly. "I just saved your life!" He yelled. "And by doing that I doomed my village! At least you can say thank you!"

There was no reply whatsoever. Nothing changed in her eyes, nor in her movements.

"Can't you talk?!" Matsuru screamed.

Again, no change. Matsuru let go of her arm. Her eyes blinked once, but she remained standing.

"Fine, whatever!" Matsuru raised his hands and turned around. Tears came in his eyes once again and his hands went through his hair. He sniffed and mumbled.

"Oh High Ones, I can't believe this is happening!" His eyes were filled with fear.

"Please, help me, High Ones!"

"High Ones?"

## Episode 2: Unspoken words

"You can speak?" Matsuuro stared at the strange girl. Had she just talked?

"High Ones?" She repeated herself.

Matsuuro shook his head. "They've got nothing to do with this!" He yelled. "What is wrong with you?"

"You..." She said.

"Me?!" Matsuuro screamed. "The hell? How can I be the reason what is wrong with you?!"

"You?" The girl tipped her head.

Matsuuro looked into her eyes. Empty, emotionless as ever. Like an infant's stare. He walked towards her. "You aren't talking to me, are you?"

"You." She now said firmly. Saying a word brought a spark into her eyes, a very small one.

Matsuuro sat down on a rock and observed her as she observed him. "You can't talk." He concluded. "And you don't have a clue about the way things go in this world, do you?" He stood up again and shook his head softly. "It's as if you just woke up from a long sleep."

"Sleep."

"There you go again." He mumbled. "Mimicking. That's all you can do, can't you? Who are you?"

"You." The girl said again, but the word was still empty without a meaning.

Matsuuro pointed at her. "You." He said.

The girl pointed at herself. "You." She repeated.

Matsuuro shook his head. "You." He pointed at her. Then he took her arm so that she pointed at him. "You."

The girl looked at her finger. She pointed at him. "You!" She said firmly. Then she pointed at herself. She remained silent.

"I." Matsuuro filled in. He pointed at himself. "I." He pointed at her. "You."

The girl repeated him. "I." Her finger pointed at herself. "You." She pointed at him.

Matsuuro nodded. "Indeed!" He smiled. "I think you understand it!" Suddenly, both heard a sound. The girl looked around to see where it had come from. Matsuuro laughed when he noticed she couldn't locate the sound. Then Matsuuro took her hand and placed it onto her belly. "You're hungry, aren't you?"

Confused the girl looked at him. She just found out she could communicate with others by the use of words and all of a sudden he was talking to her so difficultly.

Matsuuro was surprised. He saw it in her eyes. There was an emotion.

"Let's see if there is something to eat." Matsuuro walked towards the horse that was grazing some grass. He opened a bag. "Mm, not much." He noticed. "Some apples, a few pears... I wonder how long this bread has been inside this bag."

Matsuuro took all the food out of the bag, put it on the ground and then sat down. The girl just stood there. With his hand he motioned her to sit down as well. It went quite clumsy. Matsuuro took an apple. "Look." He said and took a bite from it.

Matsuru chewed and then swallowed it. "It's food. You must eat it otherwise you'll die."

"Die?" The girl pointed at an apple.

Matsuru shook his head. "No, apple."

"Apple." The girl took an apple. "I."

"No, apple." Matsuru corrected her. "You and I." And he pointed at them both again.

"Apple, I." The girl insisted and took a bite.

Matsuru sighed. "This is no use." He mumbled. "She doesn't understand it. How on Seken will I ever teach her to speak?"

"You."

Matsuru looked at the girl. She had a pear in her hand, stretching it towards him.

"Pear." He tried.

"Pear, you." She said. She pointed at herself. "I, apple. You, pear."

Matsuru was astounded. "You do get it!" He smiled and took the pear. He took the bread. "Bread." He said.

"Bread." The girl repeated.

"Horse." Matsuru pointed at the black horse.

"Horse." The girl repeated with her mouth full of apple.

Matsuru looked around. "Rock!" He was getting enthusiastic. She was learning at an amazing speed and the girl repeated him once more. "Bread, horse, rock." He said once again.

The girl followed his example. "Bread, horse, rock." She pointed. Then her stomach interrupted her once again.

Matsuru laughed. He had completely forgotten that she'd caused the demise of his village. She was so innocent, yet so smart! 'She doesn't know a thing about this world, but I'll teach her that.' He thought. 'I wonder if she has a name...' Matsuru straightened himself. He pointed at himself. "I, Matsuru." He said, telling her his name.

"Matsuru?" The girl asked.

"Matsuru." Matsuru nodded. "I, Matsuru."

The girl hesitated for a moment. "You, Matsuru?" She asked. When he nodded she became confident once more. "You Matsuru!" She yelled.

"That's right!" Matsuru smiled. "How about you?"

"You, Matsuru!" The girl kept on saying. "Matsuru!"

"Yes!" Matsuru nodded and noticed she didn't understand the question. "You?" He asked.

"I..." The girl just said. She looked doubtful. "I..." it was the only word she could think of.

Matsuru's enthusiasm died down. "You don't have a name, do you?" There was no reply. "Maybe I can give you one?" While she ate more apple, he thought of a name. What would suit her? "How about... Eve...?" He suggested, but the girl didn't react. "Guess you don't like that name then." He shrugged. "Maybe... Dyara?" He shook his head right after. "No, that's not right either." The girl looked at him.

Her eyes were empty once more, but they seemed to suck him in. What had the Black Knight seen in her eyes that frightened him so much? His surroundings slowly blackened out, but Matsuuro didn't notice it. Slowly he got dragged into the world of her eyes...

Stars appeared and Matsuuro noticed he was in the galaxy, a place unknown to him... but that was impossible! "Who are you?" He asked. "What are you?"

A blinding light shook him awake from his dream. Matsuuro jolted and noticed that he was back into reality again. Confused, he looked around, but the girl only ate her apple, like nothing had happened. Did something happen? Or was it only a dream?

Matsuuro smiled, putting his hand to his head. "Well, I don't know what just happened, but I do know that you need a name way more mystical." He thought once more. "How about... Naraku?"

The girl stopped eating. "Naraku?" She repeated.

"Well, you seem to like it." Matsuuro answered. "It's the first name you react to."

He sat close to her. "You, Naraku?" He asked.

The girl looked doubting. "I... Naraku." She repeated.

"Like it?"

The girl pointed at herself. "I Naraku, you Matsuuro." She said firmly. "Naraku." Pride filled Matsuuro. He already managed to teach her so much in only a few minutes. He saw Naraku standing and walking towards the rock. "I, Naraku." She said at it. Then she walked towards the horse. "I Naraku." She said.

Matsuuro smiled. 'Well, it's too early to explain her why she shouldn't introduce herself to a horse or a rock.'

Naraku sat down before him. "I, Naraku!"

"Yes, you Naraku." Matsuuro laughed. He observed her closely. She was so much like a baby. So innocent, so unaware of the world around her... He then noticed her dress. It didn't really seem to fit her; it was one or two sizes too big. Matsuuro wondered where she had found that dress.

Strings hadn't been tied to each other and the only reason it hadn't slipped from her shoulders was pure luck. She couldn't speak, she didn't know what would talk back or not, didn't have a name... did she also not know how to dress?

Naraku said her name a few more times, like she wanted to convince herself that this was going to be her name from now on. Matsuuro smiled. He couldn't be angry with her. All he felt was an urge to take care of her. So beautiful, so mysterious...

His thoughts were interrupted when an arrow shot through the air. It sliced his arm, leaving a deep cut. Blood poured out of it and with a scream Matsuuro grabbed his arm.

"Matsuuro!" The girl yelled his name, but he didn't hear any concern in her voice.

Naraku slowly came closer. She wanted to touch the arm, but Matsuuro pushed her away.

"Look out!"

An arrow hit the ground where Naraku had been standing mere seconds ago. Matsuuro jumped up and took his sword, trying to stop the blood with his other hand. With fear he looked at the shadows that closed in: The Black Knights.

"They found us!" Matsuuro cursed.

"Us?" Naraku asked.

"Not now, get behind me!" He stepped before her, holding his sword high. "This is useless..." Matsuuro bit on his lip. "They are with three and I'm all alone. I will never survive this!"

Arrows flew through the sky and Matsuuro tried to block them all with his sword. If there weren't any arrows, they could have fled on the horse, but now... "Please, High Ones..." Matsuuro begged. "I need a miracle!"

## Episode 3: Curiosity

"You punk, you'll die for what you did to K'charan!" A Black Knight took his sword and jumped off his horse. With raging speed he ran towards Matsuru, who tried to protect Naraku. Screams of rage filled the air as the other two Black Knights came closer as well.

Matsuru did his best to take the blow, as he had no other choice than to fight with his injured arm. Trying to remember everything he had ever learned, Matsuru fought the best he could.

Naraku just stood there, looking at him. Arms alongside her body, like always, she stared at the fighting men without any emotions.

A second Black Knight stopped his horse between Matsuru and Naraku. It startled her a bit, but fear was not present in her eyes when she looked up. The Black Knight jumped down and grabbed her shoulders. "Well, missy, end of the road!" He laughed. "You and I will have some fu-" But then he stopped. He took her chin and forced her to look at him. "Your eyes..." He mumbled. "I can see..." He suddenly pushed her back. "In the name of the demons!" He yelled.

Naraku just stood there. "Naraku!" Matsuru yelled, but his opponent was not giving up.

The third Black Knight joined his friend. "What's wrong?" He asked. What could be so terrifying about a little girl? He wanted to grab her.

"Don't touch her!" His comrade ordered. "In the name of our Lord, don't touch her!" Then he drew his sword once more and stormed towards her. "Go back to where you belong!"

Matsuru saw what happened. "No!" He yelled, but at that time the Black Knight hit his side with the sword. Deeply in pain Matsuru fell down and could only stare at the storming Black Knight. "Naraku..."

"RAAAAH!" The Black Knight screamed while he ran towards the girl.

Naraku didn't move. No emotion appeared in her eyes. However, all of a sudden she started glowing red. With an innocent face, she looked at the Black Knight.

"Vardak!" A Black Knight yelled. He gasped, seeing his comrade suddenly burst into flames! Screaming in pain, Vardak fell to the ground and burned until there was nothing left of him...

Naraku looked down at the ashes. She tipped her head. Then Naraku looked at the other two Black Knights, who gazed at her. "My Lord..." A Black Knight drew his sword.

"No, Mardok!" The other commanded. "Don't look into her eyes! It will drive you insane!"

"But she killed..."

"No!" The order remained unchanged. "We must tell our Lord about this!"

Gritting his teeth, Mardok nodded reluctantly and jumped back onto his horse. Leaving Vardak's horse behind, the last two Black Knights vanished behind the horizon.

Naraku followed them with her eyes. "Naraku..." She heard. Naraku walked on her bare feet towards Matsu. "Heh, heh... that was... amazing..." He coughed smiling. "And I... thought I needed... to take care of you..." Naraku knelt at him and looked at Matsu's wounds. When she laid her hand on it, Matsu screamed in pain.

"Always curious, right?" Matsu tried to smile.

Naraku laid her hand on the wounds again. She did it gently, but her eyes remained emotionless. Matsu swallowed, he knew he was going to die. His wounds were so painful, so... warm. He never expected them to be warm.

Matsu opened his eyes once more and saw a light. "The High Ones... are calling me..." However, through the light he saw Naraku's face. The light came from her! And to be exact, from her hand!

As if she noticed it too, Naraku pulled her hand back. Curiously she looked at it. The glowing had stopped.

Matsu raised himself. His wounds... they were not gone, but healed so much! Barely worth being called a scratch. "How... how..." He pointed at her, not understanding it. When he saw her eyes, he realised she didn't know the answer either.

For a while Naraku and Matsu just stared at each other. The sun slowly started to set. "I wonder..." Matsu finally said. "If the legends are true..." He knew Naraku wouldn't understand him, but he wanted to say this to her. One day he would explain it, but he couldn't keep it inside any longer. "I was always told that the Black Knights were knights, loyal to a dark sorcerer. If you stay near a Magic User for a long time, you tend to get some magic feelings yourself... Maybe... what they saw in your eyes... was something caused by magic."

Naraku just looked at him, blankly staring and taking up the words. "They fear you, Naraku..." Matsu added. "They know what you are... before they are driven insane." He chuckled. "Good thing I don't have any magic then!" Then he looked seriously at her. "But you do. You do have magic."

"Magic?" Naraku asked.

"You wouldn't understand it, even if I tried to explain it now." Matsu shook his head. "I wonder... if you actually know what you were doing..."

"Magic?"

Matsu pointed at the ashes that were being blown away by the wind. "Magic did that." He said. Then he pointed at his wounds and took Naraku's hand. "Your magic." However, Naraku looked more confused than ever. "I knew you wouldn't understand this. But at least they fear you and that means we'll be safe for a while." Then Naraku started to yawn. It startled her! Matsu couldn't help but laugh about her. "Sleep." He said. He helped her down and put her down onto the grassy ground. Curiously Naraku looked at Matsu, who had done the same. "I can't explain this, but it'll happen on its own." He put his hands behind his head and closed his eyes. "Good night." He said.

"Good...night." It took Naraku several tries to repeat that. Then she looked at the sky that slowly went darker and darker... until her eyes suddenly closed.

The next day, Naraku was the first to wake up. She stared at the sky, which was a soft pink with yellow colour. She raised herself and looked around. Matsu was still snoring beside her. "Matsu." She said. There was no reply. "Matsu." She said once again. Still, no reply. Naraku placed her hand on his body. "Matsu!" Matsu mumbled a bit until Naraku yelled: "MATSU!"

"Waah!" Matsu jumped up. He looked around him. "Naraku! What's wrong? Did the Black Knights come back?!"

"Matsu!" Naraku pointed at him.

"Awe, man..." Matsu sighed. "You woke me up when there was nothing wrong?" He started to yawn.

"Sleep?" Naraku asked innocently.

Matsu nodded. "Yes, sleep." He grumbled. "Oh, well, better get something to drink. You stay here." He pointed at the rock. "You, here!" He commanded. Matsu hoped she would understand him. Then he turned around in search for water, taking an empty water bag along.

Naraku sat on the ground, looking around. When Matsu had gone out of sight, she waited a while longer but then stood up. She walked towards the two horses. "Horse." She said to one. The horse didn't reply. "I, Naraku." She said again. But besides a drowsy glaze in her eyes, the horse didn't do anything more than eat grass.

Naraku then noticed the other horse. Unlike the black one, this one was dark brown. "Horse." Naraku said. "I, Naraku." She introduced herself, but the horse didn't reply.

Naraku looked confused. She pointed at the black horse. "Horse." She said and moved her finger to the other horse. "Horse." She looked back from one to another. "Horse?" Then she got an idea. "Name?" She asked. She remembered that Matsu had asked her that. Maybe now the horses would respond. Still, the horses didn't reply.

Naraku put her fingers to her face, thinking deeply. "I, Naraku." She said. "You, horse. You, horse..." Then her stomach growled and her face lightened up.

Matsu came back with a full water sack. "I'm sorry it took me so long, Naraku!" He apologised when he saw her with the horses.

"Matsu!" Naraku greeted him with a smile.

Matsu was surprised, Naraku was smiling? "What are you doing?" He asked, but immediately knew she wouldn't understand that.

However, Naraku ran towards him. "Apple, Pear!" She smiled pointing at the horses.

"No, horse." Matsu corrected her, when he put the water sack down.

Naraku shook her head hard. "Apple, Pear!" She pointed at one another.

"Are you hungry?" Matsu wondered and wanted to take some food.

Instead of letting him get that, Naraku pulled Matsu to the horses. "You, Matsu." She said.

Matsu nodded. "Yes, I'm Matsu."



Naraku pointed at herself. "Naraku." Again Matsuuro nodded. Then Naraku pointed at the black horse. "Apple." She said. "Pear." She pointed at the brown one.

Matsuuro was silent. "By the High Ones..., you gave them names?!"

Naraku pointed at the black horse. "Apple." She pointed at the brown horse. "Pear.

Matsuuro, Naraku, Apple, Pear." Naraku looked so proud it amazed Matsuuro.

Matsuuro couldn't help but smile. "All right, Apple and Pear it will be." He gave her the water sack. "Okay, let's drink and eat a bit and then hit the road again." He opened the water bag and made an example. "This is how you drink."

"Drink." Naraku took the water sack. She raised the bag high and tipped it over.

Water poured out of it and splashed right into her face.

Matsuuro had been too late to stop her. He was now looking at a wet girl and a half-empty water sack. He sighed when he took the bag from her. "Let's go one step back..." He suggested and formed a small bowl with her hands. He poured the water in. "Drink."

"Drink." Naraku repeated and brought her face to the water. With a lot of noise she drank the water.

"Next time I'll teach you about manners." Matsuuro smiled and put her on Apple, the black horse. Then he mounted the brown horse, Pear. He took the bridles and guided his new horse and Naraku's horse into the new day.

While Naraku kept looking straight ahead, Matsuuro caught himself staring at her once in a while. "One day..." He whispered to the girl with long hair. "One day I'll find out your secret..."

## Episode 4: How do you explain?

It had been a few days since Matsuru and Naraku fled from the remaining Black Knights. They were hiding in a forest now, where they had everything they needed. Matsuru used that time to give Naraku more lessons in speaking and to think about what their future would be like.

However, he had a much bigger problem at this very moment.

"Naraku..." He started. "I... you...ARGH!" He put his hands through his hair.

"Okay, one more time. Naraku, I really hate to tell you this but... No way she'll understand that!"

"Matsuru?"

Matsuru looked around and saw Naraku's ever-innocent face. She stared at him, with emotionless eyes. "You... not good?" It took her a lot of strength to say what she was thinking. She knew so few words...

Matsuru shook his head. "No, I'm fine." He knew that if he wanted Naraku to learn his language well, he should use easy language, but grammatically correct sentences. He sighed deeply, gathered all his courage and took her shoulders.

"Naraku, listen." As a reflex Naraku pointed at her ears. "Yes, that is correct, listen. How should I tell you this...?" He thought again. "Naraku, once in a while... people need to take a bath..." Naraku looked confused. "Water. They need to become clean."

"Clean?" Naraku asked. Then she pointed at his clothes. "Dirty?"

Matsuru nodded. "Yes, my clothes were dirty yesterday, when I fell into the mud." He replied. "I washed them with water. People, humans, need to clean themselves too." He guided her to a small spring in the forest. "And well... you smell." He added.

Naraku thought deeply. "Smell..." And she pointed at her nose. She smelled herself. Then she immediately dove on Matsuru and smelled him. "You smell flowers! I smell mud!" It surprised her.

She wanted to step into the water, but Matsuru stopped her. "Eh... people usually take a bath without clothes..."

"Clothes clean?"

Matsuru shook his head. "No, but you clean them...separately. First humans," He pointed at himself and Naraku. "then clothes."

Naraku thought for a moment, letting the words go through her system. Then she nodded. "First I, then clothes." She agreed and started to take off her dress.

"No!" Matsuru yelled, becoming as red as a tomato.

"Not good?" Naraku asked, confused.

Matsuru blushed more than ever. "Eh, wait till I'm gone. I need to... do something." He said and hurried away.

Matsuru sat down on a rock. He sighed deeper than ever. "Okay, that went pretty well." He mumbled. He knew that Naraku still had to learn many things, but just standing there would make him feel as if he was taking advantage of her. "I just

hope she won't drown." He mumbled, but then he started to worry. What if she would drown? He didn't know if she could swim. She was so helpless, so young... so beautiful..

Lost in thoughts, he never heard her coming, until she said his name. "Matsuru?" Matsuru instinctively turned around, but immediately jumped away. "Whoa!" He yelled. He put a hand before his eyes. "Naraku, your clothes!"

Naraku looked at her now very heavy dress in her arms. "Clothes wet. Not good." Matsuru hurried to Pear and handed her a blanket while he tried not to look. Naraku took the blanket and wrapped it around her. "Warm." She said. "Not cold."

"Of course you would be cold without clothes." Matsuru hung the dress in the trees to dry.

"You not look." Naraku asked. "See not good?"

Matsuru knew that this was one of those really, really hard questions. How could he explain to her that it was indecent to be undressed in front of other people? "Well... eh," Matsuru started. "I eh, it's not good for me to see you without clothes."

"Not good?" Matsuru had a feeling she wanted to ask 'why', but she didn't understand that word yet.

"It's just not good." He ended the discussion. He would explain it later, when she knew more words. Sure, she already learned a lot, but not enough to explain things like this.

Yet when he turned around, seeing her innocent wondering face again, he felt something inside. There was a reason for their meeting. "High Ones, guide my path..." He prayed.

After a few hours Naraku's dress was dry again and she tried to put it back on. Matsuru saw her wrestling with the evil thing and when she was (according to his morals) decent enough to come closer he helped her tie the strings. It reminded him of the days where he helped his little niece when she had visited him.

However, this girl was *not* a little girl. This girl was a young woman.

For the first time in days he had come this close to her again, close enough to hear her breathe. "There," Matsuru said and couldn't help smiling. "just one more thing." He guided her to a rock. "Sit."

Naraku obeyed and sat down. Matsuru dug into Apple's bag and took out a heavily decorated brush, something the Black Knights must have stolen somewhere.

Naraku looked confused. "That?" She asked.

"Brush." Matsuru told and walked behind her. He put the brush in her long, long hair and brushed it. "Brushing your hair." He said.

"Hair..." Naraku repeated. "Brush...ing hair."

"You are so smart."

"Smart?"

"Never mind." Matsuru continued brushing her hair. It made him feel really good taking care of her. He felt like being a mother and father at the same time. This girl

needed him. If he hadn't rescued her, she would have died. And if she hadn't saved him, *he* would have died.

Her innocence and faces just made him melt. He couldn't resist it! Her face when she proudly told him she named the horses Apple and Pear. Her face when she introduced herself to each flower and tree in this forest. And her face when she found out they didn't reply...

"Good." Naraku broke the silence, letting Matsuuro know she liked this. Matsuuro stopped brushing. "Done." He whispered in a sad voice.

Matsuuro walked through the woods. "Pear?" He yelled. "Pear, where are you?" Matsuuro stopped and he slapped his forehead. "I'm beginning to sound like her." He sighed. "Like that horse will respond." Matsuuro looked around for his horse that had wandered off.

He heard a snort from his horse and he knew he was close. "There you are." He said. "Wasn't satisfied with the grass back at our place?" He wanted to take the bridles, but the horse took a step back. "What? You hate the name Pear? Well, so do I, but then you can tell her and break her heart."

Matsuuro took the bridles and guided the reluctant horse back. At that moment he heard Apple's neigh in the forest and as a reflex, Pear started to run towards the noise.

"Pear, not so fast!" Matsuuro dangled behind, but the horse was going too fast for him to keep up.

Soon they reached their camp again. Matsuuro tried to calm Pear down, but then he spotted something else. "Naraku!" He yelled.

Six men turned back, seeing Matsuuro and the horse. "So, the girl wasn't alone." One said.

"A shame." Another said. "Would have been a lot more fun if she was."

"Leave her alone!" Matsuuro jumped forward and grabbed his sword.

Naraku pointed at Matsuuro. "Sword." She said.

"This chick is nuts!" A guy said. "She only points or repeats words!"

The six men drew their swords. "Your own fault, guy." One said. "This is *our* forest and everything in it is *ours*!"

"Nonsense!" Matsuuro yelled. "The forests belong to no-one!"

"So you're willing to fight?"

"You bet!"

Four men jumped on Matsuuro with their swords, while two others turned to Naraku. "We're always last... let's be first for a change!"

Naraku remained still. As always she observed the men coming closer. Suddenly, she raised her finger. "You... smell." She said.

The two men fell silent, but then they became furious. "That's it missy, you are history!" They raised their swords.

"Naraku, run!" Matsuuro yelled while trying to win this battle against these four men.

Luckily they weren't very good fighters, but they were four and he was all alone.

However, Naraku didn't move. There was no connection in her brain yet, telling her she should run.

There was no hope for Naraku. The men and their swords came closer and closer... until one man simply flew through the air!  
With their large bodies, Apple and Pear stood before Naraku. Their eyes were filled with one message: "Touch her... and feel our hooves!"  
Curiously, Naraku stared at the horses and the man that was hit by their hooves. While Apple remained with Naraku, the brown horse Pear went off to help Matsu.

Seeing this angry horse coming, the robbers quickly turned around and ran away. "Cowards." Matsu said under his breath and turned towards Pear. "A horse saved me? Should I thank him or not?" Pear then lowered his head and stared directly into Matsu's eyes. Matsu felt uncomfortable but knew the answer. "Thank you, Pear..."

Matsu then went to Apple and Naraku. "Thank you, Apple." He thanked the horse and went to see if Naraku was all right.

Thanks to Apple and Pear, nothing had happened to him or Naraku. He wondered why they had helped them. Horses were just stupid animals; that's what everybody else had always told him. Could they all have been wrong?

Not only that, Apple and Pear seemed to hate their names. They never listened to them. Why would they help the girl that gave them such stupid names?

"Apple good." Naraku said and caressed the black horse. "Pear good." She said and did the same.

And then he noticed it. Even though the horses hated their names, they cared for Naraku. They *knew* she was special. They knew she needed help. They knew she needed protection.

People always said horses were stupid animals, but they were not. They were far from stupid!

## Episode 5: Decision

Matsuru sat on a rock. He looked at Naraku, who was brushing Apple. On the ground before him lay two swords. One was his own, the other one was left behind by the robbers. He took the thief's sword and let his fingers play with it, thinking.

The young man looked at Naraku once more. "Brushing hair." She said. "Good." He smiled. After she found out how much she liked being brushed, she kept on wanting to brush other things, animals and people. Suddenly Apple stepped away. Naraku stepped forward. "Brushing good." She said and wanted to brush again. Apple stepped away again.

Naraku didn't understand it and followed the horse who kept on walking away. Matsuru stood up and walked towards her. "Naraku," He smiled. "Apple has had enough brushing. She doesn't like it anymore."

"Like?" Naraku asked.

Matsuru thought for a moment. "Like... is good." He tried to explain. "Not like... not good."

"Apple not like brushing?" Naraku put the words together. Matsuru nodded. "Pear like brushing!" She stated and dashed off to the brown horse. However, it seemed that Pear didn't like to be brushed any more either and walked away as well. "Pear not like?" She wondered and thought for a moment. She turned around and looked at Matsuru. "Matsuru like?"

Matsuru didn't know how to reply. His hair was short, she would be done within moments. Actually, he didn't even like brushing that much. He always hated it when his mother wanted to brush his hair. However, her innocent eyes were hard to refuse. "I like brushing..." He sighed and Naraku walked towards him. While he sat down he continued thinking, letting both the swords play in his hands. Naraku carefully brushed his short hair. 'It almost went wrong,' Matsuru thought. 'If it hadn't been for Apple and Pear, Naraku would have been killed.' He noticed that he did like it when Naraku brushed his hair. It calmed him down. 'But it's wrong...' He continued. 'She can't even talk correctly yet.'

"Matsuru?" Naraku asked. "You not talk." She tried to make him clear that she wanted to learn more.

Matsuru stepped up. "Sorry, Naraku, I was thinking." He pointed at his head.

"Talking inside my head." Naraku looked at him. In her eyes he saw she understood him. "Listen, what happened yesterday..." He stopped. It was no use explaining. She wouldn't understand.

Matsuru took a sword. "Fighting is not good." He said. "People get hurt then."

"Hurt?" Naraku asked. "Wound?" She connected those two words.

"That's not good." Matsuru answered. "But a lot of people are not good either. They want to fight." Before she could ask why, he continued. "I might not always be with you."

"Matsuru go away?" She asked.

Matsuru shook his head. "No, I will not go away. But just in case," He looked at his sword. "I need to teach you how to fight. So you can defend yourself." Then he remembered her powers. She was very capable of defending herself. However, ever since they had met the Black Knights, Naraku hadn't shown magic powers anymore.

'Maybe she doesn't know she has them,' Matsuru thought. 'or she doesn't know how to use them. I can't just watch and hope she'll use them again by accident. She needs to learn something she can rely on.'

Matsuru took the sword that was left behind by the thieves. "Sword." Naraku said and took it.

"A sword is dangerous." Matsuru said.

Naraku looked at it. She touched the edge of the sword with her finger and pulled her hand back in a reflex. She stared at her finger, where a small cut had appeared.

"Wound." She said confused.

"See?" Matsuru said. This was the best way for her to learn. "Swords hurt people, give them wounds. That's why they are dangerous."

"Dangerous." Naraku looked at the sword. "You not good!" She said to it.

Matsuru cleaned her small wound and then went on explaining. "This is how you hold a sword." He said.

Naraku copied him. She placed her hands on the sword just like Matsuru. Then Matsuru slowly swung the sword back. Naraku copied him again. He lowered his sword and 'attacked' a tree stump.

Naraku followed his example once again. "Tree hurt!" She said and pointed at the carve.

Matsuru shook his head. "The tree is not hurt." Matsuru said. "This tree is dead."

Matsuru continued his lessons on how to move the sword as well as going faster each time. "And if someone else has a sword," Matsuru continued. "You need to block him."

"Block him?" Naraku asked.

"Attack me." Matsuru commanded.

Naraku looked at her sword. "I hurt you!" She said. She seemed to be a bit worried.

"No, you won't." Matsuru assured her.

Naraku looked at her sword and then swung it at him with a massive speed.

Surprised by this blow, Matsuru barely managed to block it. Shocked he looked at her. Such strength! "You not hurt." Naraku saw. "Block."

Matsuru huffed a bit. "Yes, block." He said.

"You attack I." Naraku pointed at him and then at her.

Matsuru shook his head. "No, that's too soon." He said.

"You attack I!" Naraku demanded.

Matsuru sighed and obeyed her, by giving her a soft blow. Naraku easily blocked it.

"Good." He smiled.

Naraku shook her head. "No, not good." She said. "You not attack!"

"But you just started!" Matsuru tried to make clear he thought she still wasn't ready for it.

"You attack!" Naraku demanded.

"All right, you want an attack?" Matsu said. "Then you'll have one! That will teach you!" He thought about a way how to really attack her without her getting hurt. The sword swung down.

Naraku raised her sword and blocked the blow. Then she suddenly pushed her sword up and Matsu was so surprised he fell backwards. When he looked up, he saw Naraku aiming her sword at him. "Attack good." She said.

'She didn't just block it,' He thought astounded. 'she also gave a counter attack!' Matsu looked at her. 'Where did she learn to do that? A normal human being doesn't learn this fast.'

Matsu slowly pushed away the sword and stood up. "You blocked well." He complimented her. "The lessons are over."

Matsu walked away. How was it possible she blocked him so well? How did she learn so fast?

"Bath time?" Naraku asked.

Matsu turned around. "Huh?" He asked.

"You wet." Naraku pointed at his sweat. "You smell."

Matsu smiled. "Yes, bath time." He nodded. "But just me. Not you." He left her behind with a confused glaze.

Matsu sat in the water thinking deeply. "I'm so pathetic." He concluded. "I'm jealous of her." He splashed some water into his face. "I should be proud of her, but all I feel is jealousy."

All of a sudden someone started brushing his hair. He really enjoyed it and calmed down, when suddenly he realised something. "Naraku!" He yelled and turned around.

"Brushing hair." Naraku said with an innocent face.

"Not now, I'm having a bath!"

"But you like." Naraku had used the word 'but' for the very first time.

Matsu sighed. "I do, but remember what I said?" She tipped her head. "Seeing people without clothes is not good."

Naraku looked aside and spotted his clothes. Then she looked at him. "You... no clothes." She said.

"Yes, and that's why you shouldn't see me."

Naraku thought for a moment and then sat down again. She closed her eyes. "I not see. I stay?"

Actually, Matsu liked her being there. He was silent for a moment. "Okay..." He mumbled. Matsu turned around and Naraku started brushing his hair again.

After a while Matsu helped Naraku with her fighting lessons again. "Good."

Matsu complimented. "But you shouldn't use your arms like this." He made an example. "Just do like this." He swung the sword aside.

Naraku copied him, but her arms remained stretched and she almost turned around because of the speed.



Matsuru put his sword down. "No, like this." He made an example once more. Naraku copied him, but her arms remained stretched. Matsuru walked towards her and stood behind her. He took her arms. "Like this."  
He swung her arms to the side and bent them at the right time. They did it a few times and then Matsuru realised something. He liked being this close to her. And actually, even though he realised she understood it... he didn't want to let go... Was this taking advantage of her? He could easily do anything to her... but he couldn't. He liked her so much. He just couldn't take advantage of her. Just when he wanted to let go, a voice filled the air. "High Ones, you are *pathetic!*"

## Episode 6: Blade

Matsuru and Naraku turned around. They saw a young man, standing on a rock. Matsuru's face got filled with joy. "Blade!" He yelled. "Praise the High Ones, you are all right!" He ran towards him. "I thought the Black Knights had killed the entire village."

Naraku stared at Matsuru. "High Ones?" She asked, but no-one replied to her question.

Blade walked down from his rock, walking steadily towards Matsuru. "I was so afraid they killed you too." But when Matsuru reached Blade, Blade answered his greeting with a mighty punch. "What the...?" Matsuru asked.

The young man noticed Blade's eyes. "Bastard!" He yelled. "Jerk!"

"Blade, what is wrong?" Matsuru asked.

Before Matsuru could stand up, Blade dove on top of him. "Arrogant twerp!" He yelled more insulting names.

Matsuru pushed him away. "Blade, what the hell is wrong with you?"

Blade pointed with his finger. All Matsuru saw, was pure hatred in his eyes.

"Because of you the entire village is gone now!" He yelled. "Because of you my parents are now dead!"

"What? Blade, come on..." However, Matsuru knew Blade was right. "I... I didn't mean to."

"Sure!" Blade yelled. "Of course you didn't mean to!" The tone was obviously sarcastic. "Of course you didn't mean to kill my sister. Of course you didn't mean to kill everyone!" Blade's eyes were filled with small tears. "The fact that you don't have parents any more doesn't mean you can do whatever you want! You only think of yourself! If you just considered for one second what would happen if you'd kill K'charan!"

"He would have killed..." Matsuru tried.

Blade threw his argument away. "That would have been one life for many."

"That's low, Blade!" Anger filled Matsuru now as well. "I don't know you like this. You were my best friend. Each life the Black Knights destroyed was one too many."

"One life for a complete village is *nothing*!" Blade snapped back.

"And then you call *me* selfish?" Matsuru asked.

Blade fumed with anger. He drew his sword. "Bastard!" He screamed. He wanted to run towards him, when suddenly a new sword appeared between them.

Naraku stared at Blade with a firm glaze. "Sword not good." She said. "Sword hurt. Hurt not good."

"What the?" Blade stopped. "Who is she?"

The girl walked towards Blade. "I Naraku." She said.

Blade ignored her. "Who is she?" He demanded to know.

"I Naraku." Naraku said.

"That is Naraku." Matsuru answered.

"Where the hell did she come from?" Blade still ignored Naraku. He saw Matsuuro trying to evade the answer. "So, this is the girl you had to save, huh? And by that you doomed our village? *For a girl?*"

"Girl?" Naraku asked.

"And what is wrong with her?" Blade screamed. "Why on Seken can't she talk normally?" Blade dropped his sword and grabbed his head in frustration. "This can't be happening!"

Matsuuro didn't dare to come close to his best friend anymore. Suddenly a hand touched Blade's head. "Head hurt?"

Blade looked up. He saw Naraku's eyes. The innocence in her gaze was incredible. For a moment it seemed they sucked Blade in. Just looking at her calmed him down. "Who are you...?" He whispered.

Naraku tipped her head. "I Naraku." She only said.

A while later, Blade sat on a rock eating an apple, cutting parts with his knife.

Matsuuro sat far away from him, though Naraku came closer and closer to Blade.

"Apple." She pointed. Blade nodded. From the corner of his eyes he saw Matsuuro and just seeing him made him angry again. However, when Naraku touched him, he calmed down.

Naraku pointed at the black horse. "Apple." She said.

Blade looked confused at the black horse. "She named the horses Apple and Pear." Matsuuro carefully mentioned.

Everything became silent. Naraku was the only one who broke the silence.

"Blade." She said.

"That's me." Blade replied, eating another slice from his apple.

Naraku tipped her head. "Blade thatsme?" She asked.

"No, just Blade." Blade answered.

"Just Blade?" Naraku asked. Blade nodded. "I Naraku, you Just Blade."

"Huh?" Blade looked confused at her. "Why doesn't she get it?"

Matsuuro stood up. "Because she can't speak that well yet, in case you didn't notice." He knelt before Naraku. "Naraku." He started to get her attention.

"Blade." He pointed at Blade. Then he pointed at himself. "Matsuuro." He pointed at her. "Naraku."

Naraku pointed at the horses. "Apple, Pear." She said. "Blade." She pointed at Blade.

"High Ones, where did you dig her up?" Blade snarled.

"High Ones?" Naraku asked, but once again she was ignored.

Matsuuro shrugged. "I guess she kind of dug me up." He mentioned. "She just came walking into the village a few days ago. I saved her from K'charan." He saw Blade's face getting angry again. "She couldn't speak and doesn't have a clue about how things go in this world."

"So she's nuts?" Blade snapped.

Matsuuro looked up, feeling insulted. "No, far from it!" He snapped back. "As a matter of fact, she's really smart. She knows words after hearing them once and learns really fast. She's just..."

"Well, she doesn't sound human to me." Blade finished his apple. He threw it to Pear. "So, you're saying this girl doesn't know anything?"

"From eating to talking." Matsu said. "But she learns really fast. She's like an infant."

Blade's face lit up. "So, you became a mommy, eh?" He grinned. "If what you say is true, you can teach her anything you want. And she would never disagree!"

Matsu jumped up. "I will *not* turn her into my personal slave, if that is what you mean!" He yelled with a red face.

Blade sighed. "Jeez, that is just so typically you. Always being a gentleman to the ladies." At that moment, Pear appeared behind him and dropped the remains of the apple on Blade's head. "Hey!" He yelled at the horse. Pear just replied by staring back at him. Blade felt like he was shrinking to the size of an ant.

Matsu grinned. "I forgot to warn you." He said. "Pear and Apple decided to protect Naraku, no matter what. So you'd better not insult her again."

"Just like you?" Matsu looked up. "You vowed to protect this nutcase no matter what too, didn't you? Why?"

Matsu shrugged and sat down. "I have a feeling that she needs to be protected." He replied honestly. "Someone has to teach her how things are in this world and it might as well be me."

"Well, I have a feeling she doesn't care who teaches her things." Blade sighed as Naraku started to brush his hair. "She likes anyone."

"That's why it might as well be me." Matsu added. "I might not be the best mother or father around, but at least I won't abuse her."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Blade jumped up. "You think I would abuse her?" Pear came closer towards him and Blade sweated. "I was only kidding!"

Matsu gave an apple to Apple. "I know you, Blade."

"Then you don't know me well enough." Blade sat down again and took a small branch. With his knife he started cutting it.

Silence filled the woods once more. Naraku looked from Matsu to Blade, as if she had trouble choosing who she should brush.

"So, eh..." Matsu started. "How did you survive anyway?"

"Hunting." Blade only replied, telling him why he wasn't in the village.

"Oh..." Matsu replied. Silence once more. "I'm sorry." He apologised.

Blade looked away. "Whatever."

Naraku put the brush down and took her sword. She walked towards Blade.

"Fight?" She asked.

Blade looked at her. "What does she want?"

"Ask her." Matsu smiled. He knew what she wanted.

Blade looked a bit helpless. "WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?" Blade asked, shouting.

Naraku rubbed over her ear. "Ear hurt." She mumbled. Behind her, Matsu softly grinned. "You, I, fight." She said and pointed at Blade's sword.

Blade stood up. "You want to fight with me?" Blade looked at Matsu. "So that was what you were trying to do." He stated. "You were trying to teach her how to fight?"

"I was trying to teach her how to defend herself."

Blade raised his sword. "I'd better teach her that." He smiled. "After all, you learned it from me!" He turned to Naraku. "Well, let's see what you've learned thus far." Naraku looked confused at him. "Okay, attack me." He rephrased.

Naraku raised her sword and Blade was ready to block it. She lowered her sword, but when the metal clashed against each other, Naraku's blow was so strong that it surprised the skilled Blade.

"Good?" She asked innocently.

Blade nodded. "Yes, very good!" He said. "Your strength is amazing, but strength isn't always what you need."

"I remember you saying that to me." Matsu said. "But don't worry, she learns really fast. Before you know it she'll beat you."

"Not a chance." Blade smiled. "Not in these clothes at least." He observed her.

"She needs more comfortable clothes."

"More comfortable for you or for her?"

## Episode 7: Naraku's makeover

"You never bought her shoes?!"

Blade, Matsu and Naraku left the forest to find a town. Matsu wanted to teach Naraku how to defend herself with a sword, but Blade thought she couldn't learn that in a dress.

"Well, excuse me that it never came to my mind!" Matsu snapped back.

Naraku sat behind Matsu. "Shoes?" She asked.

"You'll see." Matsu replied and looked forward. "There, I can see a town."

Blade stretched himself on the back of Apple. "Finally," He sighed. "I'm getting hungry."

Matsu stopped. "Hey... do you actually have any money?"

Blade looked at him. "You don't have any money?" He gasped.

Matsu sweated. "Well, not enough to buy clothes anyway." He replied, embarrassed.

Blade sighed. "Fine, whatever." He stopped Apple. "Then I'll catch some animal so we can trade it." He jumped off.

Naraku wanted to follow Blade, but Matsu stopped her. "You'd better stay here." He said. "You might chase the animals away."

"Why?" Naraku asked.

Matsu was a bit surprised. This was the first time she used 'why'. Could it be she understood what it meant? "Because you'll make too much noise."

"I quiet." Naraku thought. "I look?"

He smiled at her. "Not yet. We'll teach you how to hunt later, but not now."

'What a remarkable girl,' he thought, 'she keeps on learning, curious about everything.' Then Matsu saw her eyes. Each day they seemed to be less empty. They weren't as empty as when he saw her for the first time, those few days ago. But true emotions? No, not yet.

After a while Blade returned with his catch of the day. "Bunnies." Naraku pointed. "Why not move?" She had only seen bunnies that kept on hopping away when she tried to touch them.

"Because they are dead." Blade answered and tied them to Apple's saddle.

"Dead?" Naraku asked. She saw the wounds on the animals. Naraku jumped off.

"Wounds... not moving." She mumbled. "Like human-things in house!" She then exclaimed.

Blade and Matsu stared at her. "What did she just say?" Blade asked.

"I think she has seen dead people..." Matsu thought. "But when?" He walked at her. "Naraku?" He asked. "Do you remember when we met?"

"Met?" Naraku asked. "See Matsu?" She asked. Matsu nodded. "I see Matsu." She replied.

Matsu sighed. "Yes, I know that, but do you remember the village? With the Black Knights?"

Naraku closed her eyes and thought deeply. "Thinking..." She mumbled. "Talking in head. See village, see Matsu... see Apple and Pear. See not good people..." "Next time when you explain thinking," Blade started. "tell her that she shouldn't talk then either."

Matsu ignored him. "Good. Those dead people, have you seen them before or after that?" Naraku looked confused. "It's no use." He sighed. "She doesn't understand that yet."

"Dead good?" Naraku asked.

Blade shook his head. "No, being dead is not good. But if we don't hunt, we'll starve. We'll be very hungry." He mounted Apple. "Let's go. If we can't manage to trade this then at least we'll have dinner."

Matsu helped Naraku onto Pear and climbed in front of her. 'How long have you been wandering in this world, Naraku?' He thought, 'How long before we met? Where did you come from?'

In the village Blade and Matsu tied their horses to a pole. They wanted to walk away, until they noticed something. "Naraku, you can come off now." Matsu held out his hand. Naraku took it and let herself slide down.

"Human-things." She said and looked around. "Much human-things."

The people in the village stared at her. Her fragile figure, her long, long hair... In every way she looked perfect! While she followed Matsu and Blade, the people in the village stared at her with amazed eyes.

Blade opened the door to a clothes store. While he greeted the store clerk, Naraku looked into a mirror. "Is I?" She asked Matsu.

Matsu hushed. "Yes, that's you, but I want to hear what Blade is trying to arrange." He left Naraku at the mirror, being fascinated by herself.

"So, are you interested?" Blade asked the man.

The man observed the rabbits closely. They were quite big and there was quite some meat on the bones, not a bad catch at all. "They are not of good quality." He shook his head. "If you would add something..."

Blade became furious, but remained nice. "I can assure you that this is not low quality." He bit on his teeth, feeling insulted.

Matsu bumped in. "Well, it's okay Blade, if he doesn't want them." Matsu took the rabbits. "We'll find another clothes shop." He turned around. "Come, Naraku, this guy doesn't want the rabbits." Then he said to Blade, a little bit too loud:

"Gosh Blade, I'm surprised you kept your calm. You're the best hunter of our village. I would be really insulted."

"Wait," Blade and Matsu smiled and turned around with 'not interested' faces. "I was just testing you."

"Really?" Blade retorted. "Gosh, I never knew!"

The man smiled nicely. "Of course I saw the quality of the rabbits. I just wanted to see if you knew that as well."

"In other words, you were trying to scam us?" Matsu folded his arms.

The man started to sweat and couldn't do anything but agree. "You can't blame a guy for trying." He walked behind his counter. "Tell me, what can I do for you?"

Matsuru motioned Naraku, who obeyed and walked towards him. "She needs new clothes."

"Ah, a dress for the lady?" The man didn't dare to look into her eyes; something in those eyes had frightened him.

Blade shook his head. "No." He disagreed. "She needs something more comfortable for travelling. She needs pants, shoes - that kind of stuff."

The clerk was surprised. "But she's a girl!"

"And?" Blade asked. "We will pay you for it, so don't ask questions."

It took the clerk a while to take all the measurements and then he looked into the back of the store for what he had in stock. He came back with a white shirt, a brown vest, brown pants and darker brown boots. "Maybe she should try this on." He suggested.

Blade and Matsuru first observed the quality and then nodded. "Naraku, try this on." Matsuru said to her.

Naraku looked a short while and then said. "Okay." She started to untie the strings of her dress.

"NOOOOO!" Both Blade and Matsuru yelled.

Innocently and confused, Naraku looked up. "Not here." Matsuru quickly said.

"There." He pointed. "Behind the curtain."

Naraku turned around and walked away. "And you honestly never thought about...?" Blade whispered.

"And you won't think about it either." Matsuru growled.

It took Naraku a while, but finally she managed to get everything on. However, Matsuru had to help her with getting her vest on. The strings were tied together, but in such an unusual way it couldn't be described.

Blade and Matsuru looked at her. Somehow they felt this didn't suit her, but it was the best they could do. Blade put two of the three rabbits on the counter. "There you go." He said.

"Two?" The man asked, disappointed.

Blade looked up. "I know the value of quality fabric. And this... this isn't quality. The stitching is poor and the leather is thin and weak." Blade stared into his eyes. "You tried to scam us twice. Be happy you actually get something and that we won't involve the law into this."

Naraku looked at herself in the mirror. "I no dress." She said.

Matsuru folded the dress. "I'll keep it with us, in case we can use it again." He said. All three walked out and again the people stared; especially the women. "I'm not sure if this was such a wise decision." Matsuru mumbled.

"Why?" Blade asked. "Because the whole village is practically staring at us? If you want her to fight, she shouldn't be hindered by a heavy dress."

Matsuru helped Naraku onto the horse once more and they continued on their way. "I guess so." Matsuru said. "You were the village's best hunter and fighter..."

"That wasn't so hard." Blade shrugged. "Most of the people were farmers." He looked at the single rabbit that was tied to the saddle. "Well, at least we'll have dinner tonight."

"I suggest we save the skin." Matsuru said. "Maybe we can use it."



"As what? A table rug?" Blade laughed while guiding Apple out of the village. However, Matsu was serious. "A true hunter uses everything he can use." Blade said, showing he was only joking. "From flesh to teeth." He looked around. "Which way shall we go?" Matsu looked back, seeing Naraku just staring aimlessly. As if she was... bored. "Some place where we can teach her a lot." Matsu decided. "As well as a safe place." Blade sighed, annoyed. "Awe man, back to the forests you mean?"

At night, Blade, Matsu and Naraku still hadn't reached a forest. They stopped and Matsu made a fire. Blade had skinned the rabbit and placed the meat close to the fire to roast it. Naraku looked carefully at the skin. "Bunny." She said. Matsu nodded. "Yes, that's the skin of the bunny." He tried to explain her. Naraku brought the skin close to her nose and sniffed. "Bunny." She said once more. "Soft."

Blade checked the meat. "So, what are your plans?" Blade asked his former best friend. "What will you do after you taught her everything you can teach her?" Matsu shrugged. "I don't know. Depends on what she wants."

"So you're letting your life be guided by some idiot with no brains?" Blade sat down, but screamed when Pear almost stood on his fingers. "Jeez, will you leave me alone for a change?!"

Naraku sniffed the air. She stood up and walked around. "Well, it's not like there is someone waiting for me." Matsu sat down as well. "For now I only have Naraku and..." He stopped himself. Each time he saw Blade's eyes, he saw hate in it. "You can't expect me to forgive you." Blade said as if he knew what he thought. "Ever."

"I know."

"Bunny." Both boys turned around, seeing Naraku lying on the ground. Blade and Matsu stood up and walked to her side. "Bunny?" Naraku asked.

Matsu looked at where she was lying. In the dark night he could vaguely see a hole. "What did you find, Naraku?" He asked.

Naraku pointed down. "Bunny. There." She said.

Blade looked closer. "It's a rabbit's lair indeed." He mumbled. "There could be a rabbit inside there. But how does she know that? Have you ever showed her something like this?"

Matsu shook his head. "Never." But how would she know it then? "Naraku, how do you know that?" He asked. A hard question, he knew that.

Naraku thought for a moment, analysing the question in her head. Then she pointed at her nose. "Bunny." She said. "I smell bunny."

Matsu's eyes grew larger. Blade dropped the knife he had in his hand. Silence filled the air. Naraku looked at both boys. "She... smelled it?" Blade gasped. "H... how can she...?" He turned to Matsu. "No *human* being can smell animals from a distance!"

Matsuru looked at Naraku. The longer he looked at her, the more he began to doubt. His head told him she was not human, his heart told him she was. "I wonder if we'll ever find out..."

Back at the fire, Naraku tasted the meat; it was her first time. "Smells like fire." She said. "But I like!" She ate every single piece that was left and then yawned. "I sleep." She said.

Matsuru smiled. "Yes, I am sleepy too."

"I am sleepy too." Naraku repeated.

Blade looked at them. Matsuru laid himself back against a rock and closed his eyes. Suddenly he felt something and he looked up. Naraku crawled against him and sighed happily. Matsuru had never felt this much peace and put his arm around her. Blade watched them sleep. On the other side of the fire, he wondered why he actually stayed here. He wanted to leave so much, leave the guy behind he now hated so much... but there was a stronger feeling, begging him to stay. They needed him. And the more he looked at Naraku and Matsuru sleeping next to each other, the more jealous he became...