

The Ronin's Companion

One day there was a ronin walking along a road at twilight, journeying to the castle of a great damiyo he had served in the wars and hoped to serve again.

Being far from any village or town, he sought a place to camp for the night. He made his fire and began cooking his dinner when, though the darkness, through the smoke he saw a face.

Immediately he drew his katana and called out into the night. There was no answer. There were no sounds beyond the normal sounds of the night. Cautiously, he withdrew to his fire.

He heard the sound of foot steps in the darkness, he again raised his katana. This time he cried out into the night "Who is there?" No sound. No answer.

His dinner done, the ronin began eating but he kept his katana ready in case it happened again.

Then a young man stepped out of the darkness.

The ronin jumped to his feet, katana out. The young man held out his hands in a sign of peace.

"Please, I am sorry to have startled you," said the young man. "I mean you no harm, this road is lonely at night. May I share your fire?"

"Share my meal," offered the ronin, passing the young man some food.

From his fine clothes, his careful speech and manners, the ronin gathered that the young man was of noble birth. A samurai from the swords he carried. The young man asked the ronin of his travels and his plans. The ronin told him that his journey was to the damiyo's castle where he hoped to find service.

"You speak of my father," said the young man, "I too am journeying there. I will tell you that my father is a fair man and if you are a true samurai as I see you to be, you will have no problems. I will speak to him on your behalf."

"I thank you," said the ronin.

The next day the strong winds drew the clouds near and making it difficult to see. The journey took longer than it did so by twilight they could see the lord's castle ahead across the river.

"There it is," said the young man to the ronin. "I will speak with my father and you shall have a hot meal and warm bed in his barracks tonight."

The ronin and the young man crossed a bridge over the river. The fog hung low and thick until the ronin could not see the young man.

When he reached the other side, the young man was no longer there.

He looked around and could not find the young man. He went on to the damiyo's castle, and once he had said his name he was given a hot meal and a bed in the barracks as promised.

Several weeks past and he did not see the young man. He had his duties around the castle, serving the damiyo and kept an eye out but never saw him. In the end he approached the head of the castle guards.

"Sir, the reason that I serve is because of the good word of his son. Please, tell me if I might find him and thank him."

"The damiyo has no son," came the reply, "or rather, he did. He was returning from a journey three years ago when he crossed the bridge in a thick fog and was killed by bandits."