

Tokyo.

Kamiko Shin watches the rain fall. It fills the street with sparkles as it reflects the neon lights surrounding the busy street. Kamiko always loved rain. The way it fell without a care as to who or what it was affecting, the way it cleansed away the dirt of life and made people run for cover. Kamiko's long black hair was soaked, water dripped down from it threatening to block her vision. Kamiko liked facing rain head on. Nothing made her take cover. Nothing made her run. Like rain, she took no prisoners; everyone gets pounded.

Tonight, there was another who was acting as one with the downpour. He was a gaijin. He had been following Kamiko for several days and nights. She suspected he was some sort of police officer. In the last three days she had to kill several of Kazau's human enforcers. Japan had become too hot for her.

She sees her follower trying to compose himself. He'd lost his mark and just realized that he did not know where she was. Kamiko slowly ducked deeper into the shadows and waited. Soon he would walk past her . . .

Krack!

Her chop to his neck was dead on. He fell to the ground immediately bringing a hand to rub the pain away from his neck. She smiled. It was going to take much more than a rub to make that particular pain go away.

"Who are you?"

The man looks up at her. He was older, perhaps in his late forties, green eyes and graying hair. "My name is Winslow, Mortimer Winslow. - - oww that hurt!"

He is careful to stay on the ground, but moves out of the sidewalk and joins Kamiko in the shadows. "I work for an organization that seeks out special girls, girls who have particular gifts. In the last few days, I'm convinced you are one of them. We offer training . . ."

Kamiko kicks the man in the jaw, a bloodied tooth falls to the ground. "Do I appear to need training?"

"There is much to learn. I . . ." Winslow moves a hand into his jacket. It is the last move that Kamiko allows him to make. She places all her chi into her next kick . . . the sound of thunder above disguises the crack of the man's neck. His body now lies on the ground totally, in his hand, what Kamiko thought was a weapon turned out to be a notebook and pen.

His last words come hard and whispered. They mean nothing to Kamiko.

“ . . . I am a watcher . . . ”

She picks up the notebook, and expertly strips Winslow of his wallet. It contained two airline tickets to the United States and several thousand in American funds. She looks around quickly for witnesses, none seemed to have paid any attention to what went on in the alley. Watcher. What kind of cop is that? Though it caught her attention, it really didn't matter her. She slips into the shadows leaving her pursuer behind, the rain already washing away the blood.

“ I don't like being watched.”

Tales of the New Slayers

The Kabukimono

Raine McEnroe, high school student, bit of an outsider and 100% motorcycle fan. There is of course that little thing about patrolling New England streets at night killing demons and vampires, but otherwise Raine thinks more about motorcycles. From what she has heard, there are other slayers now, so the world can do without her for a weekend. Especially this weekend!

The annual Red Knights Motorcycle convention is on and as is their tradition; Raine and her father Danny are riding to New York together. This is a time that Raine would not trade for the world. The sound of a motorcycle beneath her, her father by her side, and a long straight road ahead. Heaven.

“Look at that sunset! How are things at school? You've been pretty quiet about it these last few months. Usually you're complaining about everyone and everything.” Danny had a way with his daughter. They were friends, but he always had a firm grip on the father part of the relationship. He noted that of late she had taken to becoming quieter at night.

“Made some new friends this year dad, their cool. Well, except for Trim. He's a good guy . . . just not cool.” She thought briefly about Trim's knack for casting spells, an ability that has come in helpful several times no matter how cool or uncool he is. Her

father wouldn't believe her if she tried to tell him. 'Yo, dad, I'm a vampire slayer. My friends cast spells, watch my back, help me kill vamps and demons, and oh yeah, I think one of them is a vamp himself.' . . . somehow she knew that the conversation would not get very far.

The roar of cycles drowned any chance of conversation as a biker zooms past Raine and Danny. Raine catches a glimpse of the rider, an oriental girl about her age, dressed in red leather and apparently riding for her life. Behind her followed several other motorcyclists, all male, dressed in black with black sunglasses. Raine thought they really went out of their way to look all "Matrix" and hoped that they were not heading to the convention.

Danny keeps an eye on the traffic and on his daughter. She is a good rider, but his instinct is to protect her. He looks around and sees that one of the riders is raising a weapon, aiming it at the girl in red leather. "Raine! Ease off!" he wanted her to slow down and let these gangsters get past them. She starts to do as she is told when the gun goes off. The rider in red swerves and the shot misses her, instead hitting a station wagon in front. The wagon goes out of control, slamming into a Toyota civic in the next lane. Danny and Raine maneuver around the accident and both come to a stop just beyond. The motorcyclists who created the chaos fade into the horizon.

"Raine! Call 911!" Danny yells as he runs to the accident scene. Four cars were piled on their side of the road and a fifth was hugging the rail on the opposite side.

Raine looks into the distance at the departing gang. "Whoa."

A lot of folks complain about hotel beds. Perhaps it's folks who spend too much time traveling. For Raine, hotel beds always seemed more comfortable than the slab she had at home over her dad's garage, and she didn't have to make it in the morning.

Danny comes into her room from his adjoining and connected room. "Everything is fine with the front desk. They understood why we were late in checking in. Good thing you called, or we might have been out on the street looking for a place to stay."

"Sleep!"

"I plan on it. Just wanted to check in on you before locking the door for the night; You okay with everything that happened today. Roving gangs are not a usual site during our trips."

"Me. Sleep."

“ You planning on putting on some bed clothes? Sleeping in leather is uncomfortable, and you tend to chafe. “

“Not. Sleep. Ing.”

Danny smiles. “Goodnight hon. See you in the morning. Continental breakfast followed by a tour of the new BMWs!”

“ ’cellent. Sleep now.”

After her father retires, Raine gets up and starts to change into her pajamas . . . or more to the point . . . her dirty little secret guilty pleasure. If the kids at school knew that their leather clad smartmouth biker chick slept in pink Nick and Nora teddy bear pattern pajamas, she would have to disown them all and move to the other side of the world. Or maybe kill them all and claim it was a cult ritual gone wrong. The way things have been going on in her town, that would be a plausible story for the police and she wouldn't have to pack.

Raine opens her backpack and pulls out the pajamas, safely hidden in an opaque carry pack within. She sets them on the bed, takes off her jacket and throws it on top of the hotel TV. Before cutting down to her undies she decides to put down the window shades. Can't be too cautious in a hotel filled with motorcyclists. As she does so she notices the motorcycles from the highway incident in the parking lot and six matrix-wannabees heading into the hotel. “What now?”

Funny thing about being a slayer, Raine thought. You can go out nightly patrolling for trouble, but it seems a waste of time. If you just stay put and mind your business sooner or later trouble comes to you anyway. It must be some mystical force that turns a slayer into a lightning rod for spooks, creeps and mega-trouble. Kinda like the main character of a TV show that somehow manages to become the center of some mystery every episode. At least on TV they only have to deal with it every week for an hour. Raine and her friends seem to have to go 24-7 keeping up with schoolwork and slayage.

Raine steps out into the hotel corridor careful not to disturb her dad. She looks left and right, frustrated that the view was exactly the same. She heads to the right, the direction closest to the side of the building the black suits came in by. As she comes to the stairway door, the door suddenly swings open and Raine is caught by surprise and is slammed against the floor by a figure rushing through. And what a figure. Raine realized that she was pinned by the girl she saw on the highway. The girl was definitely Raine's age, but somehow seemed older. Tattoos of dragons drifted from somewhere down her blouse up around her neck and stretching out onto her left cheek. The oriental girl sat on top of Raine briefly . . . until Raine twisted and changed positions with her. The girl was strong, but Raine was stronger. “Who are you running from?”

The girl slams a hand up against Raine's chin causing Raine to fall back. Quickly, the girl scrambles to her feet as Raine recovers from the chump shot. "Get away from here. You're in danger."

Raine rubs her chin. "Right. If you have to know, my Karma was totaled months ago. Danger and I are kissin' cousins, sometimes we use tongues."

The oriental girl is distracted by the sound of footsteps coming up the stairway. "Stay and you die. Leave now!"

In one move Raine returns to her feet from the floor. The girl is visibly surprised. Raine returns with a swift double kick to the mid section of the first black suit to come through the door. A third kick to the head sends the pursuer back into the stairwell to trip up the others. Raine saw that the man she kicked had tattoos on his hands and neck. However there was something else she noticed immediately. There was a smell, a certain feeling she felt when she made contact. . .

Raine turns to the girl. "Vampires?! You're being chased by vampires!"

She pushes the girl along coercing her to run down the corridor to another stairway. The vampires seem to pour out of the previous stairway running inexplicably across the walls toward them like a brigade of undead spider-men. Raine urges the girl to go up the new stairway.

As she had hoped, they reached the roof of the hotel before the vampires caught up with them. Raine thanked the fates that the girl seemed to be fit and fast as well.

On the roof, Raine prepares to make a stand. She takes a stake out of her boot and hands a second one (from the other boot) to the girl. "Watch me, in case you have to use this."

With only one stake in hand, Raine hoped that she would not have too much trouble with this group of vamps. The first, is easy, they get dusted before they realized she had a stake. The second managed to land a punch to Raine's side which she deflected, returned in kind and followed with a backhanded stake through the heart. Dust bunny number two.

Numbers three and four were better organized, causing her to take a few lumps before she managed to get between them, stake number three . . . kick number four . . . quickly turn and catch the stake she used on number three before it hit the ground and then throw it with marksman like precision into the heart of the now recovering number four.

Number five and six decided to pause before attacking her. Number six was another tattooed matrix clone who looked like he wanted to run and hide. Number six however was a hot lady number looking like an eighties china-town slut who showed no

sign of fear in her face. What caught Raine's eye the most was the fearsome sword she held in her right hand. "Leave the girl to us. This is not your business."

Raine looks at the stake she threw. It sat on the ground yards away from her. If she were Luke Skywalker she'd know what to do. Instead she thought to bluff. "I may be new to this, but really . . . this is my business." Both vampires descended on her. Raine jumped over the sword wielding woman and landed near her stake, but before she could reach it, the other vampire lands in front of her with his foot firmly on the stake. Raine looks up at him, hoping that the touch of fear she felt did not show . . . suddenly she is looking through a dust cloud. The girl she was protecting had gotten into the fray.

The slutty vamp forgets about Raine and yells like a mad woman as she lunges for the girl. Raine quickly places her leg in the way causing the woman to trip. The girl goes at the woman with the stake but misses. The woman flips past both of them and escapes over the side of the building.

Raine and the girl look at each other. The girl hands the stake back to Raine. "I am Kamiko. Thank you."

"Ka-mi-ko . . . that's cool. I'm . . ." Before she finishes, Kamiko has disappeared. Raine looks over the side and sees her slipping down the building using a pipe to climb down and then to briefly look up at her and turn into the night.

“Wake up!”

Raine had ignored the knocking on the door, but it was only getting louder. "One minute dad!". It's a good thing that as a slayer her body seemed to require a lot less sleep. Despite that, Raine liked her sleep. She turned a half open eye over to the end of the bed. There lay, untouched, her Nick and Nora pajamas. "This sucks."

Over breakfast, Raine and Danny review the convention schedule and plan their day. Raine was disturbed by the frequent and poor use of neon in many of the new bike designs and was irritated at the number of panels spent on trying to convince a person that riding down the street like some cheesy pizzeria sign was a good thing. Danny starts in on his breakfast.

"Raine, is there something that you need to tell me?"

"I won't be making it to the Bushtec trailers demo. What's the point. If you're carrying so much crap, just get a Volvo."

Danny puts his hand on hers. "No Raine, I meant in general. You've been sneaking out of the house lately, keeping late hours and being vague about things going on at school. What's going on?"

“Dad, I . . .” behind Danny’s shoulder Raine spots Kamiko walking across the lobby toward them. Kamiko pauses when she notices that Raine sees her, then turns and walks into the womens restrooms.

“Dad, I really need to use the bathroom. We’ll talk. I promise.”

Danny shrugs. “Sure hon. You know where to find me.”

Raine walks into the ladie’s room. Kamiko stands facing her, leaning against a sink still wearing the red leather outfit from the day before. It didn’t look as fresh, and now parts of it were tattered. Raine could see Kamiko’s tattoo better now, a dragon flowing down her long slender neck. Twisting and writhing with Kamiko’s every breath as it seemed to slither down her blouse between her breasts. Raine was a little taken back at how pronounced her sudden attraction to Kamiko was. Raine had been doing a lot of soul searching over the last few weeks due to an incident at school that caused her to question her own sexuality. Kamiko wasn’t making things any easier.

Weeks prior, Raine was trying to get to the bottom of some extreme makeover scam that was turning kids into vampires. Before all the particulars were solved, Raine had the opportunity to question one of the kids, a girl named Jen, alone in a car. As they spoke, Raine had hoped to confuse Jen into doing something stupid. Whatever Jen was into, it was attracting boys like flies to syrup. Raine gave Jen a solid French kiss in the hopes of making her think that the makeover was backfiring somehow. Raine did it to put Jen on the defense, she felt that Jen would be disgusted by the kiss and somehow get off balance. The problem was that Raine had assumed that she would be disgusted by the kiss as well, but that’s not how it happened. She felt no attraction to Jen . . . but the kiss stayed on her mind.

Now here was Kamiko.

“We have to talk.”.

In Raine’s room, Kamiko seemed more at ease. Kamiko wanted a shower and a change of clothes. Raine kept vigil at the window while her mysterious friend showered.

“Why did you come back?”

Kamiko spoke over the sound of the shower. “You handled yourself well last night. In hindsight I thought you might have some answers for me.”

“I don’t do answers very well. I could fix a transmission like no ones business though. By the way, why am I watching out for vampires during the day?”

“The kabukimono are not just the dead who walk. They employ many others.”

The shower stops and Raine turns to look at Kamiko come out of the bathroom. Her straight black hair reaching halfway down her back covered what appeared to be a human canvas of dragons and demons tattooed throughout her back and stretching around to her front. “The Kabukimono?”

Kamiko sits on the bed next to Raine. “The crazy ones. Some members of the Kabukimono go back as early as the year 1612. At least that is when they began to attract the attention of locals. Back then their attire was different, since then they’ve adopted a more modern look. It was then that Kazuo, was turned into a vampire and soon after took on the role of oyabun. He proceeded to sire as many of his officers as possible and turned his particular clan into one of the most powerful families in Japan. They remained underground through many generations, but recent happenings have given them more power, causing Kazuo to come out and try to once again rule Japan as if we were still living hundreds of years ago. He has not accepted that the Kabukimono are history in the eyes of the people and that their ancestors, the Yakuza triads, having losing power daily.”

“Deep. What does it have to do with you?”

“I was in a triad most of my life. They raised me. Last year I got involved with Kazuo thinking it was just another triad. It turned out that he was looking to create some new immortal followers. The moment I saw what was going on I tried to get out. He had his monsters capture me and encouraged them to change me.”

A shock of concern flashed on Raine’s face she put her hand out to Kamiko. “They . . .”

“No. They never had the chance. When they surrounded me, I suddenly felt that I knew what had to be done, and that I had the strength to do it. I fought them off, even destroyed some of them, turning them into dust. Then I escaped and made my way to America. Japan is too small and crowded.”

“You’re a slayer!”

“What?”

Raine was starting to get excited. She didn’t think she’d ever meet another slayer. “A slayer. We fight the forces of evil and all that good stuff. You have to come back with me. I have friend back at school that will be happy to meet you. She could explain everything better than I can. She’s my watcher. ”

Kamiko is startled when Raine mentions the word watcher. “Watcher?”

“Yeah, kinda like a vampire slayer coach. I swear I don’t know what I would have done if she hadn’t been around. All the weird dreams and powers were starting to

seriously freak me out. You have to come back with me Kamiko! Maybe you'll get hooked up with another watcher."

Kamiko's eyes turn to the window. "No, I'm sorry. Kazuo is still out there, and Tam Li wants to prove her love to him by bringing him my head."

Raine raises a hand up to Kamiko's face, brushing away a lock of wet hair. "I told you already, danger and me, we're kissin' cousins. I'll watch your back and I have plenty of friends watching mine."

Kamiko lowers her head into Raine's hand. Then Raine raises Kamiko's lips toward her and they kiss. A longer kiss than the first time Raine had kissed another girl, and definitely a more passionate kiss. A century passed, all worries were gone, and then the kiss ended. "I'll watch your back."

A sound inside the room startled both girls. They turn to see Danny standing at the connecting door, having seen more than he obviously wanted to.

"Dad!?"

An uncomfortable situation turned into an uncomfortable day. Danny had excused himself and quickly apologized for intruding. Kamiko was flustered and grabbed her clothes and made her way out of the room faster and with more purpose than when she was running from vampires.

Suddenly, in the span of seconds, Raine was all alone.

The day progressed according to the Red Knights motorcycle club schedule. Though Raine kept expecting to see her father and the events they shared an interest in, he wasn't around. A knot at the pit of her stomach churned with every anticipated meeting that turned into thoughts of where her father had gone, and what he was thinking.

That evening, Raine took it upon herself to patrol around the hotel and the surrounding community. If she could focus enough she could feel the presence of vampires . . . unfortunately, focus was not an option. Kissing Kamiko, facing her father . . . those were the thoughts of the day. Her lack of focus didn't matter anyway. Practically on cue with the setting sun, a new gang of motorcycling ridge heads showed up. Leading them, a nasty looking vamp that had to be Kazuo, he had that really old vampire feel to his motions, beside him, Raine recognized Tam Li the vamp slut.

The approach of the gang caught Raine by surprise. They didn't seem to care that there were people on the streets and they had added a new wrinkle . . . automatic weapons. The gang roared into the ground of the convention yelling in Japanese and shooting everything in sight, including people. Raine took cover immediately and did her best to

get the panicking crowd out of harms way. There must have been over twenty riders, some human some vamp . . . all armed.

Tam Li charged up to Raine preparing to swing her sword somewhere beneath Raine's chin. Instead, she got a good bite of air as Raine flipped over the attempted beheading and swung about in mid air to kick Tam Li off the motorcycle and replace her on the saddle. Raine had a bike now, a hell of a bad day, and lot's of baddies to take her frustrations out on. She revs the bike and gets her coordinates.

The gang noticed her skills. They stopped their random assault and started circling around her. Raine gave some thought to never seeing her father again and dying in some freak vampire drive by as the gang raised its weapons in her direction. She actually was considering her options when another motorcycle roared up a ramp and landed inside the circle, coming to stop beside her.

“Kamiko!”

“They won't shoot now. It would be an honor less victory. Kazuo wants my head by the rules, however twisted they are.”

Kamiko had not finished her sentence when the automatic weapons fell to the ground and the riders started to brandish swords. Kamiko pulls two swords out from the side of her motorcycle. “Need one of these?”

“You can say that.”

The girls then ride into the battle, covering each others backs and poring through the enemy.

Morning. No one spoke of the events of the night before. By morning the mess made was cleaned up, the injured victims and perps were sharing rooms in hospitals and the police had lots of unanswered questions. Raine overheard one detective declare that the idea of two girls taking on a gang of twenty plus gangsters and winning was preposterous. He urged his people to find out what really happened.

Raine had her things packed and knocked on her father's door. No matter what he did yesterday, he had to be around for their return trip home. He knock opened the door, Raine took a deep breath and walked in. “Dad, I . . .”

The room was empty except for Kamiko sitting on a chair. “He's not here. I saw him leave, he's waiting for you out front.”

“Kamiko?”

“Raine. I need to tell you something . . . about the other night.”

Raine felt a lump the size of Texas in her throat. Kamiko continued.

“I am truly in your debt. Yakuza pay their debts.”

“No problem, Kam . . . don’t worry about it.”

“But I must. No, you must. . . you must understand that I can consider you a sister, a friend, a comrade . . . “

Raine’s heart fell. “I’m sorry, I wasn’t thinking. To tell you the truth I’m pretty confused right now about all of it. It’s freakish I know, maybe there’s a pill I can take. I’ve never done that before . . .”

Kamiko walks up to Raine and takes her hand between her own. “No. No pills. No cure is necessary. I simply have too much to think about right now, too many worries, too many adversaries. Perhaps you’ll meet someone else, perhaps our paths will cross again. Tell your friend, the watcher, that I am very sorry.”

Raine tries to put a tough face on. “Kam, I’m really confused now. Are you saying that perhaps sometime we might . . . cause the chances of me meeting another slayer are slim to none and . . . “

“Hush.”

They hug, and Kamiko initiates a second kiss, Raine allows herself to be the one that is kissed. It feels good, right and too short. By the time Raine realizes that her eyes were closed, Kamiko is gone.

The ride home is quiet. The sound of the road and the cycles spoke tons in contrast to uncomfortable silence. Raine’s efforts to talk to her father fell by the wayside. He was angry, disappointed and depressed. Somehow he felt that her newly discovered sexuality was somehow his fault. Too many motorcycles, shop classes and football games.

Her father now thinks that her big secret was that she was gay. ‘No dad, really, I just figured that one out myself . . . you see, all these months I’ve been in training to fight the supernatural, I haven’t thought about girls, or boys. Actually, I never really thought about boys come to think of it, but that has nothing to do with my real issues.’

Nope, that won’t do. It was going to be a long ride back home.