



Once upon a time...

Blaze sat on the back of a big figure horse, he felt a fiery pain in his chest where the rib had broke. Vengestone shackles meant the Elemental Master of Fire couldn't melt through them. The four-armed big figure, Diyi, was in front of him driving the horse. Blaze thought back to when Sensei Sage first recruited him. He had just finished a marble frieze carving in his studio. He had been assigned by Shogun Honourous to make a frieze of a great battle between the Central Shoguntu and the Ronin Indians to display in the Forbidden City. Blaze stood with pride on the stage as he pulled the cover off the long narrow sculpture that would hang along the outside of the army headquarters. Bananas, apples, lemons, banana bread, apple pies, and lemon cakes bombarded him from the crowd. He became covered in all sorts of doughs and juices. The crowd of Indian War Veterans were so upset that the battle portrayed the Indians as the soldiers of the Overlord, the frieze was put on the outskirts of the Forbidden City.

They jumped over a small stream and Blaze was wracked with pain. They were traveling a long way across Nihon. He was evil, that was what Diyi was. Diyi did this to me, and wanted it to be done to all his enemies. HE, not the Indians, was the one that served the Overlord. There was no good in him. I am glad I am a warrior, that way I can lodge a katana in Diyi's heart when I get the chance. Blaze felt his blood boil. I hate him, Blaze thought. There is no good in him. But wait, they didn't like my story of pure evil? Will nobody believe me that Diyi is bad? I must find good in him, so I can die with peace.

Ahimsa, Blaze's sister, bellowed, "We need to split up or we will never find him. Flowious, don't you think we should be looking for him alone?"

The usually calm Flowious snarled, "No, not at all. Did anyone tell you that you are way too overprotective?"

Zoro, the smart, calculating one, added, "That would be unwise. We know we can push him back with the right five of us. If we split up, whoever finds them will become the next victim. We have to find them as a group."

Isabelle, Princess of the Maa Shoguntu, commented, "It was a mistake to go after the sword. We should have known it would be rusted by now. If we had done nothing no one would be injured. We shouldn't have gone and we shouldn't try to correct it by making another mistake."

Bamf, the Viking Master of Earth, bluntly said, "We need to find him before he dies."

Isabelle was angered Bamf disagreed with her, he was usually so agreeing with her. Bamf looked away in shame. Sarcea argued, "We have to find him, the Golden Rule says we should. He shouldn't be treated that way."

Krispal, the bad-boy elf, blurted out, "Nonsense, to heck with Blaze. If we split up more of us will just get hurt and I will never be in the mightiest ninja clan."

Sensei Sage finally spoke. "I agree with Krispal," he said.

Everyone gasped. Sensei Sage explained, "People with greatness on their mind always do a better job than people with goodness on their mind who aren't great. Professionals always have a basic idea of what is good. Trust people who seek greatness over goodness. Krispal is correct."

Sarcea made sure to look shocked Sensei Sage would agree with Krispal. Sensei Sage continued, "...light will always beat ice."

Sarcea corrected him, "But, you shouldn't say always."

Sensei Sage added, "New clan rule: never say always."

Krispal said, "Oh well- then I will never do what is right, and not always."

Sensei Sage added, "New clan rule: Never say never."

Falco asked, "That is obviously wrong. Then how does it make sense to never say always, if you should never say never?"

Sensei Sage complimented, "Falco, you are very good for thinking of contradictions to what people say."

Ahimsa asked Sensei Sage, "What are you going to tell our mother? Blaze died the first day with your clan?"

Sensei Sage said, "I lost my son in the expansions wars of the Central Shoguntu, I know it can be difficult. We should be doing the most good, not helping a lost cause."

Ahimsa felt sorry for Sensei Sage. He had been through a terrible pain, but it didn't show. All that showed was a man who thinks hard and is dedicated to his duty- a pure man, that is being forced into this terrible pain. Sensei Sage continued, "We learned a valuable lesson today. That magical swords rusting causes their magic to go away. Nobody could have predicted that without it happening to them or being told by another. Now we must warn other Ninja Clans- so they don't repeat our mistake."

Bamf argued, "So what, we look for him as a group and don't find him in time."

Falco loudly commented, "Finding him is what Shogun Honourous would want."

Zoro said, "Falco, you have beliefs with your sound. I have knowledge with my light. We both ultimately believe in saving Ninjago. My methods are rational, reason based; yours are not based on reality. We have until Friday night to find Blaze before his injury becomes lethal. If we find him alone who ever does will be hurt him or her self."

Falco screamed, "No, it is the Ninja against the way of the world. 'Some mini-figures can rise to the occasion with enough fire.' said the great Pithious. I am the last son of the Serpentes house, the right hand of the Golden Rule."

Zoro gave in, she wasn't going to argue with a fanatic. Sensei Sage said, "Zoro is right. All great lessons are built off the natural world. The greatest Sensei is the natural world. When experimenting with nature the results will not lie to you, if conducted properly. Senseis, who are less than nature, jobs are to teach what the Great Sensei shows. If a sensei decides to teach something other than what nature teaches- that sensei is doomed to be wrong. Minor senseis' job in minimal: carry the message from the great sensei to the pupil. Figurine is a result of nature. Don't play natural sciences with figurine. We challenge nature, we are uprooting the ground upon which we stand. Nature is above figurine, figurine must not forget that, or it is doomed to fall."

Falco argued, "So what, figurines can just believe anything they want if it is based on reality?"

Sensei Sage agreed, "You are right too, actions must follow the Golden Rule as well."

Fremt, the alien, who was steering the Destinys' Bounty said, "Come on. They are probably long gone by now. We need to rest for the night so we can search when we can see better."

The night of his showcasing of the frieze Blaze went home. Ahimsa comforted him. She said, "It's OK they didn't like your work. The extent of my artistic ability is gluing twigs around a stamped outline of the Mona Lisa, and even that gets everyone at school impressed."

Blaze said, "It is OK. At least now I get to see it, instead of it being locked away in the Forbidden City."

Their mother advised, "You can still be a great artist. If it means something to you, it is good art."

Their maternal uncle, who acted as their step-father, replied, "Artwork has no point, you should just be a farmer, that way you never go hungry."

Krispal, their younger brother, said, "I like artwork because it means the world has less farmers and more people have to fight over food."

Blaze met Sensei Sage on a visit to his frieze. That is no surprise because Blaze went there often. When he looked at his work he was filled with joy. Countless figures saw and all sorts of people thought about it. He was consumed by his pride.

Diyi lifted Blaze off the horse and brought him into a house in the countryside by a barn. It was on a rocky, mossy meadow, by the ocean. Across the sea, he could see a tint of orange where the rising sun was beginning. A mini-figure woman was there in a night gown and served Diyi

gumbo in a chipped porcelain bowl. She was very pregnant. Blaze lay silent and unfed on the dirt kitchen floor. Diyi mumbled in a deep, threatening voice, "Huh, where's your husband?"

The lady replied, "He is going after X with other clan members."

Blaze couldn't see them as his view was obstructed by the table top. Diyi mumbled, "Did he get the travelers tea?"

The woman replied, "He did, it is on the stove top in the kettle."

"So they are going after Undead X? Why?"

"That greedy soul. He wants to throw a wrench in all of our plans. You know, he wants to marry into the Fun Dashaus house so we can't stop him. Then replace you as the patriarch. He has no concern for brotherhood or devotion."

"Foolish master-less samurai. We hold the strings over this Shoguntu. Once we kill Honourous, Ajna will be Shogun. Undead X doesn't work with other people, he only wants himself to be the Daimyo of Daimyo. His ambition will be his death. But he has quite the following, you really think they can stop him tonight?"

The women whispered, "He took S.L. with him."

"Thank you for the map to the Sword of Invincibility. It was correct, despite the sword being rusted away."

"The library has some books on the Dashaus House."

"What library?"

"Domu, where Kahn got the map. Will you use the tea to get inside and burn it?"

"The whole library?"

"Yeah."

"No, we don't want the Shogun after us. I'm not sure if he knows Ajna is a Fun Dashaus member. I already had a run-in with a Malgarson Ninja clan, that is where I got the Master of Fire. We don't need to be like Undead X and create enemies with everyone. They had my creator's son with him, I could tell they were related because of the face. You know the Dashaus House is not the first house?"

"I somewhat knew."

"The First Spinjitzu Master started the first house. Wu and Garmadon, and their mother, are the only three members. They have to be killed. I just hope Ajna doesn't find out we are the second house, as he actually believes in finder's keeper's. He doesn't believe in the brotherly devotion."

"You just said that in front of our prisoner."

The floor felt cold and stiff. Blaze's vision began to fill with a cool tint that surrounded his sideways view of the small country kitchen and consumed every corner of it. It was unrelenting, but also beautiful. A cool blue filled the room from the window overlooking the sunrise. Diyi replied, "Relax, he will be dead in a few days."

"Then why don't you kill him?"

"I was hoping those Ninja would split up and I could pick them off one by one."

The next morning Wu woke up on the deck of the Destiny's Bounty. He was a happy mini-figure but today he felt a deep woe, like a gash had been cut in his spirit. Becoming a ninja the other day changed his life for the worse. Nothing was perfect enough to sustain a smile. He was a ninja, protector of Ninjago. Like a blacksmith plunging away, life seemed to be making more and more arms to point at them and Ninjago. He felt he could grab the anvil and stop the blacksmith. He smiled at the warm sunrise of winter morning. But alas, the mallet plunged again forcing him to flee. His happiness felt marred, within reach only to find it indescribable. He tried to stand up but doing so made him feel dizzy. He fainted. Isabelle and Fremt ran over to him and helped walk him to a chair in the cabin. Isabelle said, "You look pale."

Duh, Wu realized he was sick. Zoro said, "We have to keep looking for them. Wu will just be a liability sick. Wu, you should walk to the herbalist I read about in The Valley of The Martial Children, while the rest of us look for the others with the Destinys' Bounty."

Wu asked, "The others?"

Sacea said, "Yes, Ahimsa, Bamf, and Falco snuck away in the dark looking for Blaze on their own. Sage just left to meet with other senseis to discuss Diyi's return."

Wu used all his effort to climb off the Destiny's Bounty. He was in terrible pain, but the others had to leave as soon as possible to save Blaze, Ahimsa, Falco, and Bamf.

The ship shot into the sky and Wu walked down the trail to The Valley of The Martial Children.

When Blaze woke up he was glad to have another day. His story was nearing its end but it still had a few pages left to conclude. His long shadow in the shape of a mini-figure with shackles

filled spaces of deep orange over the country kitchen. He could still find peace and forgive Diyi. Death seemed miniscule to hatred. To hate another figure was worse than any death. To want to see blood and gore was worse than wanting to feel a calm death. Fire- that was his element. It was warm and loving, it didn't have hatred, it had pride and happiness. Blaze brought himself to his feet. His head pounded and his chest throbbed. He stumbled into the well-decorated Departed Room and saw a statue of Diyi. He bowed to his slayer and said, "Enemy, I am ready to die. But I want my sister and brother to be alright."

He looked in a polished gilded mirror on a table and saw his face. The sun was higher in the sky and the ruby and golden room danced with intense light. He smiled at seeing himself. He was so handsome. Ever since his father ran away Blaze felt it was his fault. His father was so disappointed he didn't want to see his son. But now he was at peace. He was ready to die, or was he? He thought, just because I am ready to die doesn't mean I have to. I can still escape. He went into the kitchen and found a fork. He wiggled it into his cuff's keyhole and they popped open. He looked at the back door to the house. He jiggled the handle and saw it was unlocked. But, he could not leave his feelings with Diyi unresolved. He walked back into the Departed Room and laid down on the silk carpet.

The front door slammed open and Blaze heard what seemed like a hundred feet rush into the living room. Diyi's heavy footsteps came running down the stairs. Diyi yelled, "Kahn, you're back."

Kahn yelled, "Undead X, he has his entire army and they have followed us here. You have the Traveler's Tea?"

Diyi said, "Yes, but only two mini-figures can fit. Get your wife, the next generation must be protected. Use the tea with her to escape. It's in your room."

Kahn argued, "No. You are our leader. You escape."

Diyi insisted, "Nonsense, it is better to save two going on three than one. You and Zincy escape. I will escape through the back door and lead your cousins through the mountain pass."

Kahn said, "But sir, the ten of you will stand no chance if they catch up."

Diyi said, "Then we must go. Now!"

Another voice, Blaze assumed it was the one with the initials S.L., announced, "They're here."

Blaze rolled over and looked out the paper window and saw the house was surrounded by fifty men on horseback, with deer skin clothing, feathered hats, bows and arrows, and katana's.

They were a Ronin Indian tribe? But how? Honourous had chased down the last of the barbarians.

Diyi and nine men dressed in kimonos with katanas ran through the kitchen and out the back door. Diyi punched through the Indians and the ten ran as fast as they could. The leader of the Indians led the charge after Diyi. He had the largest headdress, a single katana, and a comedy theater mask on his face. Undead X turned his face at Blaze, glanced at Blaze with the smirk of the comedy mask and charged at Diyi. Blaze was left all alone now in the house. He realized Diyi may not consider all figurines to apply to the benefits of the Golden Rule, or even believed in finder's keeper's, but he loved his clan members. Diyi wasn't the horrible person who served the Overlord. The story Blaze made months ago wasn't a great story, some figures were pure

evil. Figures like stories where the villains have heroic qualities, and the heroes have flaws. A story with complications and fluid morality. Figures have to continue to fight for these stories. Blaze found some healing tea upstairs and drank it. He wanted to get back to his studio so he could make his next sculpture. It would be about his time in captivity and Diyi would be like the real Diyi. Blaze felt proud knowing he had a great story to tell and he would be the main character.

Wu walked alone in the forest that led to The Valley of The Martial Children. Death of winter hung on all the barren trees. Wu smiled, but alas, the cold wind called his name, the mallet had plunged again. Wu lay down on a rock and went to sleep as snow began to fall over the Haunted Forest.