

## PREPARATION

*By BMK*

“A samurai should always be prepared for death, Whether himself or someone else’s.”

That is what Makoto was told by his father his whole life.

“Bastard” Makoto muttered.

The memory of his father infuriated him to no end. Makoto heard through others that his father was an honourable but impressive warrior, Makoto never saw this side of him. His father sat as the head of the Watanabe clan, an infamous clan residing to the east of Japan. Apparently, years ago, the Watanabe clan produced legendary war lords which brought order to Japan’s east coast.

“Bullshit” Makoto muttered.

He only saw them for lazy bastards, only concerned with profit and booze. Despite his reputation, Makoto only ever saw his father as an arrogant bastard who got what came to him. Even as a child Makoto thought this saying as stupid, why would a samurai expect death? And about the someone else, should the samurai care for everyone’s death, the bastards, the beggars? Makoto had always criticized his father sayings, but he would just laugh at him and pat his head like a worthless dog “Nitpicking again, eh?” he would say “You’re a smart kid Makoto, I truly hope you’ll never have to understand these sayings” The old man would then proceed to smile to himself like an idiot.

“Bastard” Makoto muttered.

Makoto found himself kneeling while meditating in the courtyard of his childhood temple. “Why is it now that I can’t stop thinking of him?” Makoto pondered.

“Mako- sir.”

Makoto didn't have to open his eyes to tell who it was. Eiko had followed him since Makoto learned to walk. Despite being siblings, Eiko always treated herself below Makoto, often acting like a mere servant. Makoto opened his eyes to see the cherry blossoms cut through the cold morning air as the sun greeted the red pillars of the temple, his childhood home. He sat on the elevated stone pavement in the middle of the courtyard. The courtyard was covered in pure white sand. He was surrounded on all sides by pillars and support beams holding up the impressive dark roof, visible from the courtyard. The courtyard had no roof allowing the sun to reach the flowers and sakura trees littered around the corners of the courtyard. He took in his environment, and he turned to meet Eiko on his left. “I told you to stop with the formality” Makoto sighed. Right before Eiko could protest Makoto cut over her.

“I don't give a damn if father's death makes me the new head of this clan, this has not changed me! I was given a name, use it”.

Eiko swallowed her protests and started again “Makoto, the messengers have returned, beaten and missing their tongues. One held a letter, from Daichi of the Yamoto clan”. Daichi the destroyer. A fierce warrior from the North. Years ago, Makoto's great grandfather obliterated the Yamoto clan and humiliated them from the east, forcing them to flee North. Makoto admired not only Daichi's strength, but his drive to bring honour to his clan and undo past mistakes. But Daichi was cruel and unforgiving. He was sure he would have given his father a painful death if he didn't fear him like a fool.

“Heh, how prepared for death were you, arrogant fool” Makoto muttered “You needn't read the letter Eiko, we can imagine his next move”.

Eiko swallowed in fear “You mean, they're coming here next?”

Makoto looked around the nostalgic courtyard, where he would play swords with his friends and siblings, play chase or hide until sun went down. He smiled gently, his kamishimo blowing in the wind. He looked at his sister as the wind blew her dark hair

rhythmically. Astoundingly Makoto's hair was still longer, as a child he never let anyone cut it, wanting to look just like Eiko. Makoto started laughing to himself at the thought. "Flee, gather all the clan, its servants, their children, their servants' children and flee. Don't stop till you're at least 3 villages away."

"And what about you?"

Makoto looked solemnly at the ground and feels the warm reassurance of his blades handle. He stares back at Eiko until she sighs and says, "If you die, I'll murder you".

Makoto sat still in silence, thinking about nothing and everything. He thought of the butterfly dancing towards the beaming flowers in fields that have seen history made and destroyed as a never-ending wind blows cherry blossoms from the mighty Sakura tree. Nature had always infatuated Makoto but reminded him of his own mortality, that everything he sees will cease to exist.

"A samurai should always be prepared for death, Whether himself or someone else's"

Makoto sat in thought as the sun fell. If he died, how would Eiko feel, sad, angered? How would he feel if he died, incomplete, worthless? Makoto paused his train of thought.

"What if Eiko died"?

How would Makoto feel? He couldn't begin to imagine it.

"Whether himself or someone else" Makoto repeated. Makoto felt the warmth of his handle as he drew the blade, its elegance reflecting off sunlight. He felt the cold reality of his blade, how could a tool used to kill be so beautiful? He sheathed his blade once more before closing his eyes once more.

Makoto was only awoken by the sound of marching men. Daichi's he was sure. He opened his eyes to the sound of heavy footsteps slamming on wooden flooring. Daichi strolled casually down the red corridor, knocking down ancient statues and slamming desks. Makoto stayed seated in the courtyard and stood before him was the tyrant, Daichi the Destroyer. "Pardon the intrusion, door was open". His voice was low and gravely with a sense of humour in what he was saying, almost mocking Makoto for his foolishness.

"You've had your revenge Daichi, it ends here, whether you fight me or not".

"Arrogant Watanabe, just like your dead 'ol dad."

Makoto stood up. Height wise it made no difference as even from the other side of the courtyard Daichi towered over Makoto, but despite his size this simple action sent fear Daichi's men.

"Do not confuse confidence with arrogance Daichi, arrogance is over valuing your abilities while confidence is being sure of what your capable of. My father let years of rest and flattery get to his head, that was arrogant. I've honed my blade since birth and know it better than myself, that is confidence." Makoto paused to study Daichi "I notice new scars and less men Daichi, maybe father was less arrogant than I thought". Daichi showed visible anger to this. He drew his crimson glaive and slammed the end into the wooden steps he stood on "Your breath is wasted Watanabe, I'll kill you!"

Daichi charged at Makoto who still hadn't drawn his blade. Daichi winds back and swing horizontally with all his might. Barely moving, Makoto ducks and charges at Daichi, delivering sucker punch to his gut causing Daichi to stumble back. The two warriors lock eyes, one pair filled with anger and determination to win, the other pair cold and unmoving with determination to live. Makoto gripped his sheath as he pulled his handle and let his katana dance in the setting sun's rays. He places both hands firmly on the handle and prepares as death stared him down. Daichi swung yet again but was

this time caught by Makoto's katana as he prepares the finishing blow. Daichi holds his glaive overhead casting a shadow over Makoto. "It's a feint" Makoto thought. Makoto rushed toward Daichi's stomach knowing he will make it before Daichi's glaive, but the blade doesn't come down. Daichi throws a kick toward Makoto but anticipating this Makoto swerves right, pivots and sees the opening. Makoto meets Daichi's eyes, terrified, regretful.

"A samurai should always be prepared for death Daichi, I told you to give up your revenge, now prepare".

Makoto's blade met Daichi's neck and swung through in perfect form, crushing whatever bone was in its path. As Daichi's head rolled to the floor the blood splattered over the sand dying it crimson as Makoto lowered his bloody blade. Seeing their hero lifeless head roll across the sands sent chills to the remaining men who ran off. Makoto sheathed his sword and marked a to end Daichi's revenge.