

Chapter 3 – A New Friend

“Ichi, ni, san, shi!” Ben thrust his arms lazily through the air. “Ben Andrews, sit out – you have not shown discipline throughout this karate lesson, now watch the rest of the class, they will teach you how to punch properly!” his Sensei demanded with disgust, glaring at Ben as he shamefully dragged his feet and sat at the edge of the dojo.

Ben stared at the floor with mixed thoughts whirling through his head. “Hiya.” Ben looked up and saw a girl who looked around his age. She had black glossy hair which had been plaited into two long braids which hung down to her waist. “My name is Jamila, I’m new here, what’s your name?”

“B-B-Ben,” blushed Ben. He could feel his face heating up. “Hi B-B-Ben, what’s with the stammering?” laughed Jamila. Ben started to laugh too. “It’s nothing, I am just embarrassed - Sensei’s been mad at me this evening, I’m not normally like this, come on, I’m a brown belt karate champion!”

“Calm down on the boasting! I’m working towards my green belt and I’ve been going to karate for four years now. I had to move because my dad’s got a new job around here. I’m here tonight to see what this class is like.”

“That’s all for today.” The Sensei interrupted Jamila’s conversation. “Good work – better from you next time, Andrews!”

The children got up and collected their coats together and the group cascaded out of the dojo. “Whereabouts do you live?” Ben asked Jamila, slightly embarrassed.

“72 Griffin Road.” she answered.

“Oh, so you’re the new girl who’s moved in opposite my house!” said Ben, a grin spreading across his face. “Maybe we can walk home together?”

“Sure!” The children walked along the road chatting amicably until they reached the row of shops – suddenly Ben stopped in his tracks and became silent and stiff. He remembered the robber’s words – ‘*Kill or be killed.*’ He felt a surge of terror which froze him on the spot. “Ben? Come on let’s go.” Jamila looked anxiously at him, “What’s wrong?” she asked.

“I’ll tell you, but you won’t believe me.” Ben shook his head worriedly.

“Of course I’ll believe you – just tell me!”

Ben explained everything that had occurred since he saw the robbery.

“Are you sure he was a robber?” questioned Jamila.

“I’m *sure* it was a robber – there’s no question about it!”

Ben replied angrily.

Jamila fell silent. “Do you know if Mr Wilson has any fears?” she asked after a while. The children continued to walk slowly home, thinking hard.

“I don’t know – I’m sure I can find out. Why?” Ben glanced at Jamila suspiciously.

“Maybe if we find out what he’s scared of, we can use it against him.”

“Ohh – you’re a smart girl!” Ben paused and thought for a while. “Hang on a minute - it’s pet week this week at school. Mr Wilson strongly warned us not to bring in any reptiles – especially snakes. I was gutted because I wanted to bring in Rattler”

“Eureka! All the pieces are coming together! He’s afraid of snakes!” Jamila grinned at him, elated at what they had just discovered. “Who’s Rattler? *Please* tell me it’s a snake!”

“No problemo! It’s my pet snake! He’s only a small garter snake but I like the name!”

“Great – he’ll come in handy! We’ve got to find out what’s in that briefcase. Oh! I’ve got a fantastic idea!” Jamila cried.

“What?” asked Ben eagerly.

“I’ll tell you tomorrow – meet me here at six o’clock!”
Jamila ran across the road and disappeared into her house.