

Quarter After Six



Ed sat by the window of his second story apartment. His attention shifted back and forth rapidly between his watch and the street. He kept telling himself that this was in no way contrived. 6:15 p.m. was a perfectly reasonable time to walk the dog, and even if he did not know that Komaruko walked her dog every day at 6:15, he would probably still walk his dog at 6:15 p.m. It was just a good time of day for walking dogs. Ed's small mutt whined and scratched at the door.

"Just nine more minutes, Shiko," he said to the dog. "You can wait nine minutes, can't you?"

Shiko whined again, his tail curled between his legs.

Ed glanced out the window again. As his gaze scanned the street, he suddenly jumped to his feet.

"Hey! My car!"

Ed tried to open the window wider, but it remained stuck halfway open, as it had been ever since Ed first rented the apartment. Ed kicked the glass out of the window, and kicked twice more to splinter away the flimsy frame. He leaped out onto the fire escape, and shouted, "Hey! You! Get away from my car, punk!"

Down on the street, a man with long black hair, wearing a ragged black trench-coat had removed the car door from its hinges, and was now extracting Ed's stereo.

"Hey!" Ed shouted again.

The man ignored Ed.

Ed leaped off of the fire escape, and landed into a crouching position on the sidewalk. "Don't piss me off, man! I know Ninjitsu!"

Dropping the stereo, the man stepped out of the car. He was very tall, and

his face was twisted into an evil grin. The skin around his eyes was tight, as if from a burn.

"Now that I have your attention, Ed," the man said, "We have business to settle."

Ed suddenly realized that there was no traffic whatsoever on the street, and that he and the man were alone on the sidewalk.

"What is going on? How do you know my name?"

"I know everything." said the man, advancing a step.

"Then tell me this. What made you think I would let you touch my car and live?"

The man laughed. "I meant your car no harm. It is you that I came to kill."

"What?" Ed shouted, twisting himself into a fighting stance.

"My name is Ryu Tekishima. You killed me, so now I am going to kill you."

Ryu drew a katana from beneath his trench-coat, and dashed at Ed. Ed dodged to the side, and dove underneath a parked car. Ryu dropped to his knees, and slashed both right tires with a single swing of his katana, but before the car settled to the ground, Ed had already rolled out from underneath it, and was on his feet with the car between him and Ryu.

"I didn't kill you, man." said Ed. "Nobody killed you. You look really alive to me."

"You did kill me, and now you will pay!" hissed Ryu through clenched teeth.

Ryu jumped over the car, and slashed at Ed, who leaped backwards out of range, and leaped forward again, just as the blade passed. Ed punched rapidly with both hands, hitting Ryu twice in the chest, and twice in the face, before ducked again, when Ryu's blade slashed past the other way. Ed dove between Ryu's legs, jumped up and kicked him in the back. Ryu did not fall down, or even appear to flinch.

Ryu slowly turned his head, and stared at Ed. "You have grown in skill since we last fought." he said.

"I haven't even ever seen you before, let alone fought-"

Ed was interrupted by the sound of a dog barking. he looked up at his apartment, to see Shiko peering out the broken window. "Aaaa! What time is it?" He asked himself aloud. He looked at his watch. "6:13! I have less than two minutes!"

"Yes. You have grown in skill." said Ryu. "That will make killing you all the more fun."

"Sorry, mister insane person. Can't fight now." Ed dashed past Ryu, and into the apartment building. He hurried up the stairs, down the hall, and into his apartment. "C'mon, Shiko. we are late!" he said, picking up the dog and clipping the leash to his collar. Ed ran back into the hall, kicking the door closed behind him, and hurried back down the stairs, pausing at the bottom to hide Shiko under

his shirt. He walked calmly past the manager's door, and then pulled Shiko back out of his shirt, and ran out the front door.

Ryu was still standing in the street. The street was still devoid of traffic, and the sidewalks were still empty.

"Are you ready to die, Ed?" asked Ryu, lifting his katana in a samurai stance.

"Yeah, sure," said Ed distractedly, as he stared up and down the sidewalk.

"At last my soul will be at peace!" Ryu launched himself ten feet into the air, and hung motionless in space for an instant as he lashed the katana around violently, before diving blade-first down toward Ed.

Ed quickly dropped Shiko to the ground, caught the oncoming blade between his palms, and flipped Ryu over his back.

"Where did everybody go?" demanded Ed? "Where are the cars? Where are the people? Where is Komaruko?"

Ryu had landed on his feet, and was already swinging the katana again. "I am responsible" he said. "I don't like an audience while I work."

"Well, I do! Bring them back." growled Ed, as he dodged.

"Not until I have my revenge." said Ryu, as he lashed out at Ed again.

Ed jumped back, the blade barely grazing the front of his shirt. "Bring them back now!" Shouted Ed. "I have more important things to do than be killed by you!"

"How dare you mock my vengeance!" said Ryu with another slash. "My blood must be appeased! I have waited so long!"

"Your right." said Ed. "You are absolutely right."

Ryu stopped mid-swing. "Right about what?"

"I can see that this revenge thing really means a lot to you, but I'm kind of busy right now, there is this girl I am trying to meet... So why don't we postpone this until later. Say midnight? I'll bring my own sword, and we can do this right. Midnight, on the roof of the abandoned warehouse on 10th street, to the death."

"I— My revenge—" stammered Ryu.

"Unless you are chicken..." said Ed.

"Never!" shouted Ryu, taking control of the situation. "At midnight, you will die, and I will be avenged!"

Ryu, returned his katana to its hiding place in his trench-coat, stormed out into the middle of the street, and lifted the lid of a manhole with one hand. He cast a hateful glare back at Ed, flipped the lid into the air, and jumped down the hole. The lid landed perfectly in place over the manhole, just as a bus drove over it. The street was suddenly filled with traffic, and people filtered back onto the sidewalks. Ed picked up Shiko, and looked at his watch. "6:15. That guy almost made us late." he said to the dog.

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