Untitled original work -Oni Mempo Ryu

In the dark, under the full moon,

A shadow slides, barely silent.

A stealthy shinobi, with light steps,

He seeks his objective, in warrior fields.

Between bamboo and pine trees, his breath contains,

A whisper of death, that the breeze maintains.

Their hidden, lethal, and precise weapons,

In his skillful hands, destiny is cooked.

The noble samurai, in his honor he trusts,

With his katana in hand, he stood watch at night.

He does not know the danger, lurking in the shadows,

A hidden, silent and wandering enemy.

The shinobi’s eyes, like a deep night,

They observe the warrior, his guard surrounds.

A fleeting flash, a thrown star,

Wound the flesh, the battle is won.

With a swift leap, the ninja pounces,

And the brave samurai, he throws his sword.

But in the gloom, destiny is braided,

The chain of the kusari, entangling the essence of it.

A final whisper, a last breath,

The samurai falls, his spirit to the wind.

The shinobi leaves, his mission was accomplished,

And in the dark night, his life fades away.

Thus in the shadows, the shinobi remains,

The stealthy death, which silently grows.

The honor of the samurai, fades in the night,

And a tale of warriors, who prevails in the wind.

As it will always be (Short story) -Robert Tackett

In the dark of the night, under the full moon,

A shadow slides through the trees, keenly silent.

A stealthy shinobi steps lightly, hardly making a sound.

He seeks his objective, focused on the task at hand.

Between the bamboo and the pine trees,

His breath contains the promise of death that the breeze carries onward.

The night animals hear, they become fearful and quiet.

His hidden weapons, smooth and deadly in his skilled hands,

Will allow no one to escape. Once the target is identified, their fate is sealed.

The target is a noble, young samurai who has always trusted in the Bushido Code.

Honor above all else. This is the way of the warrior. With his trusted katana at his side, and his

Naginata at the ready, he stands watch over his daimyo’s traveling party as they rest for the night.

He is unaware of the danger lurking in the shadows, slowly creeping closer.

The shinobi’s eyes, as deep as the night, observe the warrior and the surrounding area.

A silent flash of the shuriken in the low moonlight startles the young samurai as his shoulder

Suddenly burns with pain. The warrior imagines he is struck by the devilish tengu. Without even

Knowing his true enemy, he has already lost the battle.

With the swiftest of leaps, the shadow warrior silently closes the distance to his prey.

The brave, young samurai brings his spear to bear, directing the razor-sharp tip towards

The shadow moving like the wind. The naginata is kicked aside and in the quiet darkness the

Samurai’s fate is sealed. He tries to draw his trusted katana, and the experienced shinobi warrior

Allows the young gentleman to fall into his battleplan.

The kusari flies through the shadows and entangles the sword arm before the young warrior

Can even finish his well-practiced draw. The rest of the chain finds itself looping tightly around the

Young samurai’s throat. No chance to call for help. No chance to ask for mercy. No chance to gasp

For air. His final whisper, his last breath escapes upon the midnight wind and is lost in the

Moonlight.

The shinobi collects his shuriken and silently slides away. The nocturnal sounds return to normal

As if they have forgotten that a life and death battle had just been played out amongst them. His

Mission is done. His task is over. Now he must quickly return and report to his own clan.

The young warrior never saw his enemy and as his life fades away, he wonders at the beautiful

Moonlight and why it is so cold. So very cold. His spirit is gone with the wind.

Thus, in the shadows, as it is and has always been and as it will always be, the shinobi remains.

Silent death. The honor of the samurai is intact. He died as a warrior should, in battle with the

Enemy. This vicious battle will be spoken about as two great enemies fought the good fight. A tale

Of warriors that will be remembered by the soft sigh of the gentle night breeze.

As it will always be (Full story) -Robert Tackett

The soft, feminine pattering of feet can be heard, as they quickly make their way up the weathered stone steps to this hidden shrine. Small branches and scattered leaved are strewn among the steps showing that this shrine has not seen it’s full glory for many years. The young maiden from Edo has travelled a long way to this particular shrine. She has a folded-up note, gripped tightly in her hand.

She has heard from her lady, Meiko, that a powerful spirit will sometimes grant a humble request. Today, she has her own request to make. Once she arrives at the top of the steps, she makes her way into the small shrine. The room is covered in dust and cobwebs. It is obvious that no one has visited this shrine for many months. More leaves have been strewn around the floor by the wind. She lights an incense stick and a small candle. The beautiful, young bijin could not be more than 15 or 16 winters old. She kneels in front of the small shrine and begins to pray softly.

 An almost invisible figure is roused. Hidden high up in the rafters, covered by dust and leaves, the shinobi is as still as the wooden beams he is hiding among. He cracks his own eyes open just a slit to peek out and to also keep the whites of his own eyes from showing in the darkness. He can barely make out her soft prayer.

 She is asking for a chance to become a wife and mother. If she could just meet a nice, young man to have a future with, she would be indebted. After her prayer, she leaves the folded note on the shrine. She slowly pulls out a small coin purse from the arms of her kimono. She retrieves one small, oblong gold koban. All she has. Earned by keeping a salacious secret for her benefactor, the great lady Meiko.

 The silent warrior is intrigued by the girl’s naivete. As she leaves and begins the arduous trek back to Edo. The curious warrior waits until he is sure she is gone and down the steps. He slinks down the wall and reads the note, carefully folded on the shrine. It is beautifully written on expensive paper. No way the girl wrote this. The calligraphy is too bold, too vibrant for such a young person.

The genko yoshi simply read: I implore you to seek mercy on me and allow me to find the one I can love with all my heart. I will treat him with honor and raise a strong family for him to be proud of. -your humble daughter, Akira

So moved by this young lady, the shinobi decides he must know more about her and her story. Is this note from the girl herself? Or is she just a messenger? He goes out behind the shrine and finds the old water well. He finds what he seeks, an almost invisible filament hidden inside the old well. He hauls up on the filament until a battered bag slowly emerges from the depths. He smiles as he gently opens the bag.

He quickly changes clothes and now looks like a poor rice farmer. He sends the bag back down into the dark abyss and quickly makes his own way down the steps and easily follows the girl towards Edo. What an intriguing story she must have. Why did she chose this particular shrine? He knew why he had chosen it so many years ago. He had chosen this shrine for it’s remote access. Visitors were few and far between. Just the way he liked it.

After quite some time of walking small animal trails, the trails became pathways and soon dirt roadways, where carts and oxen could easily travel. The trail broke out of the heavy forest and was soon meandering along the valley, where more foot traffic was commonplace. He was sure of his disguise and closed the distance to the young maiden. As more and more travelers were using this main road, the closer they were getting to the great city.

The young woman decided to stop at a small dirt town. She chose a small modest izakaya in which to eat. She entered and she sat at a small round table near the doorway. The disguised elderly rice farmer chose to sit outside on the steps and appeared to be occupied by tossing small pebbles into the dirt. The girl was noticed to order some water and a steaming rice ball. The old man was served water in an old, weathered bamboo bowl.

As the rice farmer sits patiently, with a careful eye on the young maiden, he notices a commotion down the dusty street. Villagers are quickly gathering up their children and getting out of the street. A group of regal-looking footmen are walking up through the street. Dressed in emerald green and white they appeared very official and professional. There were a few horses in the middle whose riders were looking formidable with long spears. Each had two swords at their sides. There in the middle sat the newest daimyo. His father had recently passed away and this young gentlemen was determined to maintain his position of power by visiting his lands and reminding the townships who was in charge. The locals were quick to give them their way.

 The poor looking farmer remained in place not wanting to attract attention to himself as he continued to toss small stones at his feet. As poor fortune would have it, the group stopped directly in front of the humble old man. As the riders dismounted and the foot soldiers took up defensive positions in front of the izakaya, one of the riders could be heard barking warnings to anyone close enough to hear.

 “Get back! Get away”! The words were loud and the old man could discern a hint of malice in the words. As he looked up, he was roughly kicked in the chest and he toppled over backwards and off to the side.

 At this moment the young girl was coming through the doorway and witnessed the unprovoked assault on the old man by the young handsome retainer of the new daimyo. She lashed out at the strong, young man and pushed him back a step. Hardly a warrior’s technique, but the young man was embarrassed to be caught unaware by such a small, delicate flower, his embarrassment instantly turned to anger, as his fellow soldiers snickered out loud. He looked over his shoulder to see if his daimyo had witnessed the exchange. His daimyo was on the other side of the horses and had not noticed yet.

 The young girl, noticing her mistake too late, quickly turned to the old man and knelt down to help him regain his feet.

 “Uncle! Are you hurt”? She asked with genuine concern in her voice as she gently touched his shoulder.

 As the old man looked up to gaze into her innocent young eyes, he saw a flash of steel in the air.

 The beautiful face of the maiden was quietly smiling and her eyes were large as the setting sun. Her skin was as fair as the white lilies growing by the lake. And suddenly without warning, her head fell into his lap with a heavy thud and blood sprayed over his face and neck. Her body slumped against his and he struggled to hold on to her body, with one hand, so as to not let her delicate body fall onto the dusty roadway and with the other, he held on tightly to her head so her beautiful face would not touch the same area that so many dirty feet have walked upon.

 And she was gone instantly. Without any word, without any warning, this beautiful young creature with dreams of a family and her whole future ahead of her, stolen! What seemed an eternity, but was merely seconds, her blood had run it’s course and her soul seemed to float away on the dusty breeze. The old man gazed in disbelief at such a murderous crime.

 The daimyo was now making his way to the entrance and noticed his retainer had his katana out and it was dripping blood upon the dirt floor. The young samurai bowed to his master and offered his excuse.

 “These two were in your way”. The arrogant young daimyo turned and entered the modest establishment without another word or a backward glance. The other riders had silenced their snickering and also entered to rest and to fill their bellies. No other thoughts of the beautiful young girl laying dead outside. The owner of the place came outside to help the old man recover the girl.

 “Oh no”! Exclaimed the owner. “What happened”?

 “It was those filthy samurai”! Exclaimed the elderly grandma from across the street. “It was murder! Plain and simple”.

 “Who are these men”? Asked the shinobi still in disguise. The owner’s wife came hurrying up with blankets to wrap the young body in. They needed to move her off the streets or else face the wrath of the daimyo and his men again. The rice farmer carried the girl and her head by himself hastily in his arms. They found themselves behind the grandma’s house with no one around.

 When they had wrapped the poor girl up in the blankets with her head, the store owner began.

 “The new daimyo is trying to make a name for himself. He is the law around here. He gets what he wants, when he wants it. And his samurai are his protectors and his henchmen! They follow his every command”. Explained the store owner.

 “The wife added, “Who can stand against such vileness”? We are doomed to a violent life with him in charge”.

 The shinobi just nodded his head in agreement. No stranger to death, this act was one of the most evil murders he had ever been witness to. It was completely unnecessary and avoidable. But knowing the arrogance samurai tend to harbor, this act only served to remind him of his role in this life.

 The role of the shinobi is to right the wrongs that weaker people cannot . To maintain the ying and yang of light and darkness. To keep their clan safe at any cost. The old man vowed he would make the young samurai pay for this inexcusable act of pure indifference.

 “So, who is this girl”? Asked the store owner. “How do we reach her family”?

 Looking around, the store owner and his wife could not find the crafty old rice farmer. It seems as if he had suddenly vanished into thin air.

 That night a few miles away, the daimyo and his retinue made camp. They would be at the next town in the morning, just in time for breakfast.

 It was getting late. The full moon was high. The overhead umbrella of leaves from the giant oak trees, bamboo and pine made great, dark shadows upon the floor of the woods. Crouched in the dark shadows, the silently shinobi sits patiently waiting for the young samurai to take his turn on guard watch.

 Finally, a lone guard goes to the sleeping area and quietly awakens the samurai. The shinobi recognizes this new night watchman as the impetuous youth who killed the young girl only hours earlier. The new guard picks up his naginata from the ground, adjusts his katana and carefully picks his way from the group to the edge of the woods. Once in place he leans his naginata against the same tree he uses to rest against. Time slowly passes as the silent watcher waits for the samurai to settle in and become complacent, thinking there is no danger near.

 The silent warrior determines that the time is now. He closes his eyes and takes in the wonderous sounds of the natural world. The nocturnal animals can be heard chirping and skittering about their normal business. A quiet prayer for a beneficial night comes silently from the shadow. Then the shadow slowly breathes out and his breath contains the promise of death. As the cool night breeze carries this message forward the night creatures hear and become still, lest they are the target.

 So caught up in his own musings, the young samurai fails to notice the forest going eerily quiet. He has no idea he has become the target of a shinobi. No idea that his actions of killing an innocent young girl has brought death to his doorstep. So ingrained in his samurai righteousness, he cannot even fathom that he did anything wrong. He has followed the samurai code, the code of Bushido. The way of the warrior. His way. He only trusts in his Emperor, his katana and his code.

 The shinobi begins to slide closer, his eyes as dark as the night.

 The young samurai knows that the night shadows can play tricks on the unfocused mind. He imagines a low shadow sliding towards him. Yet the breeze is flowing the other way. The man stands up straighter now and turns his face to change his perspective of the shadow.

 Too late. There is a flash of darkness through the broken moonlight, startling the man. His shoulder suddenly burns in pain. He thinks he has been attacked by the evil and devilish tengu. Nightmarish creature of the dark. He is about to call out for help, when he notices the shadow rise from the forest floor like a ghost. He is mesmerized with fear, thinking the tengu is growing larger. He sees the shadow leap forward. His warrior instinct kicks in. He quickly grabs his naginata and points it towards the threat.

 His spear is kicked to the side. He tries to draw his razor-sharp katana. His fate is sealed.

 The much more experienced shadow warrior allows the young warrior to fall into his fight plan. Drawing his kusari, a short chain with weighted ends, the shadow quickly entangles the sword arm before the katana is free of it’s saya. The rest of the chain finds itself looping around the throat of the young warrior. No chance to call for help, that time is past. No chance to ask for mercy, that time has passed. No chance to grasp for air, that last life-giving breath, that time has passed.

 The young warrior never saw his true enemy. Never even knew he had an enemy. As his life slowly fades away, he is unaware that his time has come. He can only wonder at the cold. This should be a beautiful summer evening. Why is it so cold he wonders? He looks up to the moon in the sky and asks why is it so very cold. Then his soul slips onto the breeze and is carried away towards home.

 Holding the dying young samurai pressed to the tree, he does not allow the body to fall to the ground. The noise may alert the others. Stealth is his weapon now. The body is slowly lowered and the kusari is untangled. The shinobi listens to the last gasp of breath from the samurai. The dead’s final whisper escapes upon the night breeze and is lost in the fading moonlight.

 Methodically, the shinobi scours the darkness for danger. He waits until his heart is calm and the night noises return to normal. He finds his deadly shuriken lodged deep in the shoulder of the dead samurai. Assured that the camp is still sleeping, he cautiously picks his way to the horses. He easily finds the best, the most noble of horses. It can only be the daimyo’s.

 He pulls the waterskin from the horse and quickly produces a small vile of dangerous looking liquid. He empties the vial into the waterskin and replaces it on the horse, just as he had found it. He gently pats the neck of the majestic beast and then quietly fades into the darkness.

 The next day, when the daimyo is thirsty, his first drink will be his last. The poison is quick and very painful. There is no antidote within three days ride. The daimyo may find the samurai dead but there is no reason to suspect more foul play. It is a shame the shinobi will not be close at hand to see. But the old man has a beautiful young girl to bury.

 Thus, in the shadows as it is, always has been and as it will always be, the shinobi remain. Silent in dealing death. No mark of their passing, only whispers of spirits and demons. The samurai died as a warrior should. In battle with an enemy. His honor would remain intact. This vicious battle will never be spoken about as two great enemies fought the good fight. Only the gentle night breeze will remember tonight.