

I Bought A Block of Diamond

By: Kevin Ren

It has come. To progressive extent of my conscience, the day has come. Perhaps by avenue of inevitability, this day has come. How can I describe myself now, I wonder. Happy? Sad? Indifferent, perhaps? Anyhow, I expect to remember today with every beat of my heart, the day I broke free.

Has it been- 40, already? 40 fucking years since I took up this blade? No. 45, actually. Even after grazing the deepest depths of hell, I've yet to eradicate that picturesque recollection of my eighteenth's celebration.

You see, to batten the planks for bridging his heir from juvenescence to adulthood, my father crafted me a katana unfathomably formidable, more than any other. This little beauty comprises a boundless ocean of sweat and tears. It was made with love, sure, but probably for the instrument, more so, than for its intended host.

Presented with this present so remarkably monumental, I couldn't help but dive into a pool of pride and satisfaction, losing myself to the elation of finally earning the label 'man of the house'. At that moment, I was deprived of the conscience necessary to give my proper 'thanks'. Instead, I immediately drew my unrivaled blade, allowing for the grace of light to dance upon its baleful surface.

Then, as expected as was unexpected, my grandfather made his entrance. That spongy, barky slenderman, crawling towards the gates of hell, too fragile to leave bed for some midnight congee, was dragging along a screaming, struggling girl by her tethered hands. Too soon did I realize what was to come, much too soon. It struck me like lightning, and so I sank to the ocean floor of my freshly minted tears, pertaining to joy no longer, but rather, devastation.

I should explain that my family reveres this austere tradition, a rite of passage they've held in the highest regard for centuries. Every heir to the household is, devoid of personal choice, ordered, upon their eighteenth, to cut down a nameless, voiceless stranger. If one were to surface any hint of regard for remorse or regret, more sacrifices would be made to repeat the process.

Yes, I could never truly deny dawning to a bloodline of assassins and mercenaries, but as well as I am aware of this legacy that, in all likelihood, proceeds me, I will forever despise the manners of my family. Regardless, as a fragile child subservient to my longing for love and

approval, I chose to neither question nor dispute my superiors. Time, as always, proved unrelenting and unforgiving. As it continued treading along its eternal marathon, I eventually arrived at that mid-December night of 1999, when the color of my soul was tainted forever.

With carnage flowing fiercely through my veins, blood boiling to the point of evaporating through skin, all it took was a singular blow, sound and swift. Then, with what little determination was left, I forced my gaze upon the back wall, dripping in crimson red. The ones I'd trusted with my life, the beloved family and friends of past and future, encircled me without batting an eye or giving an inch. Like a flock of birds navigating the sky, they rose to their feet in unison, proudly drumming to the sacrilegious beat of supposed pride, honor, and maturity. This deafened me for many years to come.

It was the very last time I'd see my entire family-tree grouped up together, sharing a drink and a laugh or two. Come the following morning, I jumped out of bed and got right down to work. As rehearsed restlessly for as long as my physique had permitted, I leaped from shadow to shadow, sneaking my way into a foreign residence via windows and vents. Once I'd arrived in the master bedroom, I stood up and stood still, ingesting the shock on my target's face before the reaper would take over.

My ever-so polished rhythm must've hit a roadblock at that very moment. I felt my eyelids converging to the sour taste of hesitation, legs trembling as if I was declaring war upon a nation, and palms submerging dangerously deep into an ocean of sweat.

Ffshing!

Phew... There we go! My first ever job, a job well done. Now, I can sheath my blade and rest easy for the night. See, Haito? It's not so hard after all, is it?

“Da-”

Ffshing!

Perhaps by the will of the man upstairs, I continue recounting that specific strike to this very day. When my sharpest edge crystalized into a most refined chandelier, it began reflecting the iridescence from that little girl's persimmon-like cheeks. In spite of all my training, I was irrevocably shunned by her appearance, that of a being as innocent as a chicken riding amongst its brothers and sisters to the slaughterhouse. Our fates were suddenly sealed by my muscle memory, intertwined forever, in life and in death. Before she would tear her lips apart, yelling and crying for help, my blade spoke first.

Decree 37 of the Yato code: Eliminate all witnesses without exception.

In the decade that followed, I often sat alone, gripping my blade in its opposite direction, but never giving-in to such impulsivity. Instead, I steadily developed a capacity for self-assurance, which soon became a daily ordeal. I began experimenting with medicine for my restlessness, which had amounted to more than any physical pain I could ever bear. I eventually sought permanent change, which illuminated for me a path to lands unknown. I painted my footprints along that path, all the way to a foreign continent, leaving behind whatever it was I struggled to call ‘family’.

My adaptation upon arrival felt like a sort of age regression. I sold off my soundproof shoes and thrifted some used sneakers. I burned my sets of uniform and bought a bundle of white tees and slim jeans. I even trimmed the edges of my eery hair and started using product. Straightening my spine in that worn-down basement as cheap as can be, I could no longer recognize the man in the mirror, but for the first time in a long while, I felt happy.

It was the ‘land of opportunities’, that’s what the TV told me. So I ventured out, in search of resurrection. Then, it hit me. What was there to do? If I wanted, I could’ve asked for directions to the nearest bathroom, but not much more than that! I certainly wasn’t inclined to slouch in a classroom from nine to five as someone who grew up schooled at home and by the stick! The boredom and frustration of mastering a new language would exact no mercy upon me!

I wandered from a cashier’s counter to the back of a diner’s kitchen, then eventually, to the nearest dump, feeling lost and afraid all along the way. Just when I appeared as disposable as my surroundings, I was approached by a devil disguised in wings.

“Oi! C’mere, man. I need me a lil’ help, brotha.”

“What?”

“Here. Use this.”

A knife?

“Stab me! I’ll let ya take whatever’s left in my pocket, aight? I got a buncha cash in there, I swear!”

“But... why?”

“Cause I’m too pussy to do it myself, man! You oughta help me! I just wanna die, goddammit! Please!”

Oh, I see. So this is it, right here. My second chance. Thank you, God. I offer my sincerest regards.

Ffshing!

He wasn't lying. I dug up enough to have decent meals for the rest of that winter. Ergo, my chronic nightmare from youthhood suddenly felt like a dream come true. I would've never expected the chance to grant salvation through the skills I've developed, yet there I was, once again shedding life on a cold, bloody night, just like old times.

The internet has always been my second home. Whereas before I'd find comfort in gazing at the rainbows scattered across its boundless realm, I took a dive down its abyss after that night. Scouring the web's entirety in a timely attempt to quench the devil that thirsts within my subconscious, I eventually arrived at a place called 'The Cotton Road'. I became familiarized with the surroundings of my new settlement, then began advertising a niche service, one of a kind.

For a hefty portion of their savings, I offered people a trip to the afterlife void of pain and fear. I figured that, just like the man who approached me, perhaps my clients were too sensitive to commit, or craved a façade for their self-presumed cowardice. Numerous plausible incentives were floating around my mind, none of which truly concerned me. This was because I'd entirely fortified personal justification by regarding myself as a 'liberator'. The role, the task, the responsibility was my priority, not so much the money, I was convinced.

The sudden reversion in profession and lifestyle showered me in a cornucopia of sentiments, the sharpest of all being nostalgia. The many faces of those bonded to me by blood, the gradients of mahogany on those wooden swords I'd long abandoned, not to mention the dreams I'd frequent atop those rocky hills back home collaboratively engulfed my mind.

I wasn't educated much in ethics growing up. Yet, over time, I became someone who'd confronted both sides of the morality coin. It felt as if I'd truly matured, becoming a 'real man' for a second time.

The innumerable people that openly shared their stories with me felt like aliens from other galaxies. I forever thank them for helping me experience many, many lives brimmed with infinite possibilities. After five years of my novel career, I no longer felt bothered by the constituents of my origins, regarding them as stepping stones on the side of my rocky mountain I was destined to conquer, instead.

In accumulating the immense wealth of opulent, yet unsatisfied clients of young and old, I began indulging in a life of luxury myself. What was necessary became excess, what was unnecessary began generating newfound desire. Looking back, I could've afforded enough planes to operate a commercial airline, land to erect hotels with golf courses, or even back-to-back trips to the moon if I'd wished. I ask myself now, did any of those options feel the least bit fulfilling?

No. Absolutely not.

What I yearned for became an equilibrium foreign to my apprehension of life. Surely, I was capable of balancing work with leisure, if need be. I could slouch a Monday away, then hit the gym hard on Tuesday. Should my body demand so, I would easily curate a perfectly proportioned set of daily meals that equally values flavor and nutrition. I could accomplish all of such in the blink of an eye.

Despite all this, I was never able to achieve enough degrees of symmetry for the shape of morality. Can any amount of rain from the cerulean sky offset an ocean of molten lava? Wouldn't every little drop dissolve in an instant, whether coupled by hundreds, thousands, or millions? Is it my destiny to suppress the fire, but never extinguish the flame? Do my actions of past and future exist in dichotomy, or harmony?

These intricate questions spun the carousel of my mind day after day, relentlessly, but to what point, I had no idea. What I did know was there were many zeros displayed on my bank balance. What should I do with all this money, I asked myself.

Well, as I was scaling the local mountain on a rainy day, the answer descended upon me.

The next morning, I flew across the world to a place where beneath enormous plains of pure white and blue live a substance I deemed more valuable than all else. With the countless millions I had left at my disposal, I bought a block of diamond. Then finally, I unsheathed my katana for the very last time, striking it against my purchase over and over until it broke.