

BITTER JUSTICE

The Samurai Revival Trilogy (Vol. 2)

Chapters 1, 2 & 3

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Hamon Publishing

Author's Note:

Although predominantly accurate geographically, this is a work of fiction. Any resemblance in this story between people or events and real life is unintended and purely coincidental. Furthermore, use of the Japanese, Burmese and Cambodian languages, and historical references, have been simplified to facilitate reading.

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Chapter 1

Friday 13th April 2025...

Calver Cats Threaten Us All

The UNWP has finally been forced to admit that the criminal gang known as the Calver Cats poses a significant threat to world order. Originally UK-based, the gang has expanded rapidly. It now controls much of the world's illegal arms and drugs trade from operations as far-flung as Bogotá, Chicago, Shanghai and Tokyo.

The Calver name is derived from the Japanese technique of gutting fish alive, and many of the gang's victims have suffered a similar fate. British Calver Cats chief, Beauchamp Caille, was detained once, but escaped in a bloody ambush which left twelve dead. A UK-led multinational offensive against the gang has proved inconclusive prompting calls for a different approach...

Global Times

Calver Cats Peacekeeper Slaughter Continues

The Calver Cats have consistently targeted International Peacekeepers in order to hamper Special Forces and dissuade new recruits. Particularly in Japan, Peacekeepers have been ruthlessly hunted down and slaughtered. It is believed only a handful of them remain active, but the secrecy surrounding these anonymous, licensed-to-kill individuals makes verification of this difficult.

Calver Cats boss, Beauchamp Caille, wants to settle some personal scores too. Not only is he hunting the UK Peacekeeper who annihilated the original London gang, but also his own sister whom he holds responsible for his temporary incarceration. However, she has not been seen in public for a long time and rumour has it that she is already dead...

Japan News

Chapter 2

In northern Cambodia...

The ancient Khmer ruins shimmered in the humid haze rising through the jungle. Five men sat around an ornately laid dinner table, having just finished an excessively bibulous feast. Two of them were English; the others Japanese. Nearby, a Japanese woman was tied to a chair. Once proud and striking to look at with long silky black hair, she was almost unrecognisable now. Her clothes were blood-stained, her face badly bruised and misshapen from the ruthless beating to which she had been subjected. She moaned as consciousness returned painfully.

“Damn it, I know business is good!” shouted the blond-haired Englishman at the head of the table. He glowered at his prisoner and stood up angrily. He was an imposing figure, over six feet tall, fit and strong with piercing blue eyes in a heavily suntanned face. Now in his late-forties, the once-respected London lawyer was living as a fugitive; hiding in places he had barely heard of before his dramatic exposure as the boss of a criminal gang. He went behind the woman and with one hand on his sheathed knife, grabbed some of her hair and yanked back her head.

“For the last time, where is that sibling freak of mine?”

“I still don’t know,” hissed the woman defiantly, “and if I did, I wouldn’t say.”

“Really! Brave words, Peacekeeper,” Beauchamp sneered.

“One day, you’ll pay f...”

She didn’t finish speaking. He’d already slit her throat. Her head lolled back unnaturally as the last vestiges of life flooded from the gaping wound. Beauchamp calmly walked back to the table.

“What is it with you guys?” he hissed, wiping his knife clean on the tablecloth. “You’ve had nine months and only unearthed one know-nothing Peacekeeper! I refuse to accept that *anyone* can disappear without trace. Find the abomination! I will not ease up on you until this is resolved; preferably in front of me. I am not going to forget what happened in London, and neither should you, Bill. This blemish on my family’s honour must be expunged. Surely you can manage that?”

Beauchamp always boiled over when he thought of his sister. On this occasion, he finished by slamming his fists down hard on the table, causing all the extravagant porcelain, silver cutlery and crystal glasses to bounce noisily. It could have been far worse. As he walked over to stare moodily into the wide temple moat, his associate, Bill Chalmers, and the three Japanese guests exchanged glances.

“Everything is going so well,” observed Fujiwara Senior. “I don’t understand this obsession of his.”

His sons remained silent, preferring the safer option of finishing their wine.

“Yeah well,” replied Bill, in broad cockney tones, “yer own family ain’t exactly all ’unky dory, is it? They’ve got unfinished business an’ we gotta sort it. Else even Leiko wun’t be able t’ quiet ’im down this time.”

Chapter 3

In northwest Japan...

As night embraced the historic town of Kanazawa, swarms of mosquitoes forced people indoors, compounding the unnatural stillness.

Amongst the hills to the east, around a gravelled clearing, wisps of smoke snaked skywards from stoves set within two ancient wooden houses. Close by, an imposing double-roofed gatehouse guarded an ancient stone wall encircling secret grounds. From the other side of the gatehouse, a path meandered down through the forest, over a narrow Kintai-style footbridge and on across waterlogged paddy fields. Eventually, a massive castle rampart could be seen, silhouetted in the moonlight against the starry sky.

Meticulously constructed from enormous boulders, the rampart sides were surprisingly smooth. They jutted resolutely out from the deep moat, reaching upwards at a dizzyingly steep angle to a summit which seemed curiously bare. Where there should have stood the soaring ancestral home of a once-powerful warlord, there was almost nothing.

A line of well-worn flagstones traced a path towards a towering wooden arch. They passed underneath and on through an avenue of trees, trained to slope inwards to provide shade from the summer sun. The path ended at the entrance to a courtyard fronting a fine, traditionally built Samurai house. Although big for such a dwelling, it still seemed out of proportion with a site clearly intended for a much larger structure. Five stone steps led up to a roofed gateway, the main entrance through the perimeter wall. This extended as far as the edges of the rampart, before circling round to surround both the house and its immaculate garden, the centrepiece of which was a recently watered, newly planted fragrant camellia *lutchuensis*.

Inside the courtyard, the trail of artfully laid stones continued. It passed between six monolithic lanterns and several covered racks containing vicious knives, shuriken and other throwing weapons.

A burgundy-coloured banner hung across the front of the house. It displayed large white logos depicting the coat of arms of the family responsible for building the rampart and house. It was a complex design comprising three Samurai swords pointing upwards with their blades crossing near the centre. Completing the design, on either side of the swords, was a large white-and-gold chrysanthemum, the Imperial flower of Japan. The banner was gathered up in the middle to form an arch over the entrance to the house; wooden latticework doors had been slid aside to reveal the Audience Hall within. The occasional crackling of the dying charcoal fire was all that disturbed the silence. Two people sat cross-legged by the hearth.

Slowly, Tessa's vision began to clear. She sensed the strange tingling of the toxins she had taken to facilitate her training finally being metabolised. As her hearing returned, she noticed the clickety-clack of a beetle scampering across the verandah. She smiled, recognising the sublime artistry with which the Audience Hall had been built.

To her left sat a distinguished-looking Japanese man. His heavily weathered features made him look older than his years. But even so, dressed in his loose-fitting burgundy coloured tunic, he was notably fit, sharp and strong. He focused his gaze on her eyes.

“*Ohayou gozaimasu*, Nariko-san,” said Matsumoto softly. “Don’t move yet. Let your senses and strength return first. It will not take long now.”

He proceeded to make *macha* green tea using a pristine silk cloth to clean all the utensils and a bamboo ladle to measure water into two exquisite hand-made cups. They were unmatched, but both bore his family crest. He whisked froth on to the tea and placed one cup in front of Tessa, positioning the other for himself.

After a brief silence, they bowed to each other, simultaneously lifted their cups, rotated them clockwise a quarter of a turn so that the crests faced each other, and drank the contents in three gulps.

“A *lifetime* in a moment,” he sighed.

“But only a *moment* in a lifetime,” she replied quietly. He smiled at her.

“That was a sad smile, Master Matsumoto.”

“Nariko-san, I smile at you in many ways.” He paused and took a deep breath while he chose his next words. “You have trained for nine months. There is nothing more I can teach you and your departure can be delayed no longer. However, you should know that the world to which you return is even more treacherous than when you left it. The Calver Cats gang has flourished under your brother’s stewardship. Your friends Sinclair and Jones have coordinated an international action against the gang, but with only limited success. Your brother says he will not rest until you are dead. He has spies looking for you everywhere. Your paths will soon converge...”

Tessa had hoped that by the time she returned home, it would all be over. Beauchamp would have faced justice and the Calver Cats would have been exterminated. She wanted only to go back to London and pick up her relationship with her lover, David. But apparently it wasn’t going to be that easy. Her expression betrayed the disappointment she felt.

“Yes, you awaken into darkness. But peace, freedom and tolerance are all worth striving for. Alas, others cannot assume this struggle on your behalf... Before you leave there are two things you should not forget. First, do not be over confident. Your skills are formidable, but no one is invincible. A Samurai rarely appreciates the gravity of a mistake, until it is about to kill them... Secondly, do not undertake to fight continuously for too long. Your body is trained to ignore tiredness. It will continue at the pace you demand, until completely exhausted. Then, with little warning, it will stop. You will recover in a day or two, but if you are in the middle of a battle when this happens, you will be defenceless.”

Tessa bowed in proud acknowledgement. She knew he would only say such things out of concern for her. Surely that was the biggest compliment she could ever hope to receive from him.

The distant sound of birds heralding the dawn and the gentle pull of her two Samurai swords slung in her trademark style over her shoulders, brought her back to reality.

“Three months last time, nine this,” mused Tessa. “And I still don’t remember what I’ve learnt. Must I really face the Calver Cats without a full understanding of my own capabilities?”

“You know that is the way I teach my students. But many of your memories will return this time, some within hours. And if you need any more of your knowledge, it will surface for you.”

He stopped speaking with what Tessa interpreted as a benign, but tired, expression on his face.

“So, what would you have me do now?” she asked.

“Nariko-san,” he replied with a wry smile, “I equip the vessel and launch it. Where it goes and what it does are not for me to decide. I leave that to you and your destiny. However, in accepting an International Peacekeeper Mission against the Calver Cats, you have taken on a great burden. You have been able to evade these responsibilities for a while as your friends fought on alone. But victory has eluded them, so now you must seek it yourself... Before this story is finished, you will have to confront many adversaries, and some perhaps sooner than you think. Who ultimately remains standing will only become clear at the very last moment.”

“Will we meet again, Master Matsumoto?” she asked, battling to take in everything he had said.

He sighed, lost in thought.

“Time will tell. You are as prepared now as you could ever hope to be. Nevertheless, you are going back to a cruel, harsh world where plans do not always work out as we would like. As before, if you find yourself facing what your heart tells you is an unbeatable force, then discretion is the better part of valour; it is always far wiser to live to win another day... Good luck, Nariko-san. Although I doubt it will be down to luck. Hayasaka has made all the necessary arrangements, but from now on you travel alone.”

In one fluid movement, he rose to his feet and looked down at her.

“Conscience, patience, perfection,” she murmured.

A smile fleetingly crossed his face. He bowed respectfully to her, turned and walked away. The fragment of a memory flashed unbidden into her mind.

“Who cleared up all those broken eggs?”

Matsumoto paused. Even though he hadn’t turned back, she knew he smiled.

“You made the mess, who else but you should clean it up?”

“Hmm... and I remember, *two times*,” she added, more seriously. His smile evaporated. She could tell from the set of his head.

“Yes. If you are fortunate enough to cheat death twice, you will remember everything. *Sayonara*, Nariko-san.”

He disappeared along the passageway that led deep into the Samurai house. Back in his room, he looked forlornly at the two mattresses, rolled up side by side.

“Be careful, Nariko-san,” he whispered, shaking his head. “Please be careful.”

In the Audience Hall only the hissing of the embers disturbed the silence. Tessa immersed herself in the civilised tranquillity that pervaded the Samurai house. She didn’t want to leave

this place. She turned round to check the dull glow in the east. Hayasaka would be opening the perimeter gates at dawn. She had to go.

She stood up shakily, tired muscles complaining. She had no idea what she had been doing during the last few days, but it must have been strenuous. She steadied herself, and took a deep breath. She savoured looking round the room for what she suspected would be the last time. A feeling of intense sadness and imminent emptiness engulfed her. She would miss this strange and solitary place. One part of her wanted to go home, but the rest shouted: This is home.

Tessa walked out of the Audience Hall, discarding her indoor sandals and continuing barefoot down the steps and across the courtyard. Invigorated by the freshness of the night, her muscle coordination returned and she quickened her pace. Completely sure-footed, despite the darkness, she started down the rampart. She had made this journey so many times she could have found the way with her eyes closed. There was a chill in the air, but she didn't notice it, and barely paused as she passed the two stone chintses at the bottom of the stairway.

Once over the moat, she ran along the banks between the paddy fields. After her first training session with Matsumoto, she had returned along this path with newfound energy. But then it had been adolescent, unbridled power. Now it was different. Now she felt as though she had matured and her energy reserves were vast by comparison. She could release them in a calm, confident and controlled manner. No longer feeling at one with nature, she felt as though she had *merged* with the environment around her. Running on towards the Kintai-style bridge, she made hardly any noise, only a light breeze indicating she had passed by.

Finally, Tessa started zigzagging up towards the imposing gatehouse in the perimeter wall. She stopped and smiled at the stately camellia trees there, inhaling their almost intoxicating perfume. Deep in her subconscious she knew these trees held a very special meaning for her; though what it was exactly, she had no idea. She hoped that back home in London, her friend Lee's wife had been taking care of the cutting she had brought back with her last time. She entered the gatehouse, with its staggered entrance and exit, just as the first rays of sunlight shone through the trees behind her. She heard the clunk of the massive doors being unlocked and the unenthusiastic creaking as one of them was pushed back. She immediately passed through the narrow opening. The two men by the doors jumped back in surprise. They were expecting her, but had not heard her approach. Hayasaka stood a little further back. He greeted her with a smile and a bow.

"Ohayou gozaimasu, Hayasaka-san," said Tessa. "Have we time for breakfast?"

"It is already prepared," he replied pleasantly, adding. "There is even time for a hot shower, Nariko-san, which I think might be a good idea." He gestured hospitably towards his wooden cottage.

She grinned and walked quietly on, listening to the sound of the gatehouse door being pulled shut behind her. She wondered when and for whom the door would next be opened.

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