

Path of the Samurai Part 2

By : Matthew Bissonette

Second Part to the Path of the Samurai.

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Ashikaga was in his office as he tried to decide what was the best course of action. When Kusunoki entered the room, his sword hanging from the scabbard in his belt, Ashikaga seemed dumbfounded.

He asked Kusunoki, "Why are you carrying your sword?"

Kusunoki said, "When they return tonight, I will protect you and the manor."

"I appreciate your gesture, but there are many of them, only one of you. You may have been a great Samurai once, but even you can't win this fight."

Kusunoki didn't flinch. "I failed your father. I will not fail you."

Ashikaga said, "I am not your lord Kusunoki. I do not want you to give your life for me."

Kusunoki turned away. "I am not making a request. I will do this whether you approve or not."

Kusunoki left his office and proceeded through the manor towards the front gates. Suzuka stopped him before he could exit the building, she seemed concerned.

She pleaded, "Kusunoki, don't do this."

Kusunoki pushed her aside. "Suzuka, I don't have a choice. Please, remain within the manor where you will be safe."

He then walked away from her and she began to cry as he left.

Kusunoki waited outside the manor for the rest of the day as night loomed ahead.

Yamato and his men returned to the manor not soon after dusk. They carried torches as they rode through the streets of the city, the people hid inside their homes. The streets of Yoshika were empty, empty except for old Kusunoki who waited outside the manor. Yamato and his men approached the Samurai, no one seemed overly concerned about an old man with a sword.

Yamato, from atop his horse, asked, "And what do you intend to do you decrepit fool?"

Kusunoki said, "I think you know."

Yamato began to laugh. "Men, the great Samurai is going to defeat us."

Yamato's men joined him in laughter, though Kusunoki seemed strangely serene.

"Please, kill him," Yamato ordered his men.

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About six of Yamato's men got off their horse and began to approach Kusunoki. They had their muskets ready but even these criminals were reluctant to kill an old man.

Yamato screamed, " kill him."

Then Kusunoki with speed and agility that was unusual for an old man, charged the approaching men. He had then killed three of them with several swings of his sword when the remaining few fired their muskets and Kusunoki was hit several times. Yet he did not falter and slew the other three before anyone could do anything. Yamato's men seemed afraid, but Kusunoki who was mortally wounded, and fell to his knees. As he struggled to keep his balance, Kusunoki returned his sword to its scabbard.

Yamato dismounted his horse and cautiously approached Kusunoki, a flint lock pistol in his hand. Yamato said, " you fight well for an old man, I am going to relish every second of this."

Kusunoki replied, " no, you won't"

Like he had done so long ago, Kusunoki pulled his sword from his sheath and with a single swing cut Yamato in two. His men watched in shock as Yamato's torso and legs fell away from each other. The criminals rode away and would never return to Yoshika, and Kusunoki would haunt their nightmares for the rest of their lives.

Kusunoki then fell to the ground as he gasped for breath. Suzuka emerged from the manor and went to his side, she knew he was about to die.

She begged, " don't give up Kusunoki."

For the first time in his entire life Kusunoki let out a restrained laugh and he was smiling. He whispered, " Suzuka, don't be sad for me. This is how I would have wished to die, as a Samurai."

" Please, don't."

Before Kusunoki died, he weakly said, " Suzuka, go to my room and look under my bed. There is a letter there for you."

And then he closed his eyes and his breathing stopped. He died in Suzuka's arms as Ashikaga and his people stood around them.

Many years later. Suzuka had been freed of the life of a courtesan thanks to Kusunoki, the letter she found explained that he had amassed a small fortune during the course of his life but his frugal beliefs had left it untouched. He left it to her and with it she traveled throughout Japan. Eventually she had Kusunoki's sword melted down and turned into a sculpture of a Samurai. She kept it with her for the rest of her life but when she was old she decided to thank Kusunoki finally.

The sculpture to this day can be found in a insignificant Buddhist temple near Misato. Some notice it occasionally but no one knows the story behind it, of Kusunoki and his journey. It simply is a relic of a time long gone, much like Kusunoki himself.

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