



SUE LEATHER

Death
in the
Dojo

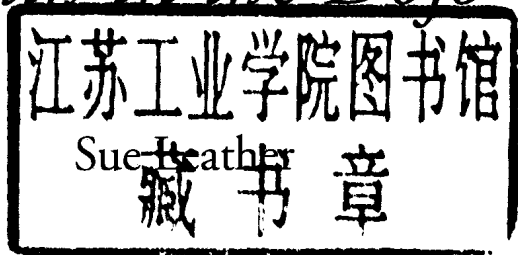
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Death in the Dojo



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Characters

Kate Jensen: a news reporter on The Daily Echo, a national newspaper published in London. She's in her early thirties. She used to train in karate.

Tony Jensen: Kate's eighty-year-old father. He used to be a boxer and also a journalist.

Dave Balzano: Kate's boss. The editor of The Daily Echo.

Rick: Kate's colleague, also a reporter on The Daily Echo.

Jonty Adams: a police contact at Scotland Yard.

Sanjay: An old friend of Kate's from her karate days. He still trains in karate in the Asano dojo in London.

Kawaguchi-sensei: a famous karate teacher and owner of the Zanshin dojo in London.

Jun Kawaguchi: Kawaguchi's son. He lives in London with his wife and children and works for a Japanese bank.

Naoko Kawaguchi: Kawaguchi's daughter. A writer and translator, she now lives in Tokyo, Japan.

Brendan Murphy: Murphy was accused of The London Road murder, over thirty years ago.

Tim: Kate's neighbour.

Glossary

Karate: Karate-do is a Japanese martial art. It means 'the way of the empty hand'. In other words, no weapons are used. There are numerous types of punches and kicks. The training is very hard and is both physical and mental. Students of karate wear a white gi, or karate suit and a belt which shows how long they have been training.

Dojo: means 'the place of the way'. The place where students of karate train.

¹ **Sensei:** teacher, literally 'leader along the way'. Teachers of the martial arts are called 'sensei' by their students.

² **Scotland Yard:** the main office of the London police force.

³ **Black belt:** a high grade in martial arts.

⁴ **Gi:** karate suit. Made of thick white cotton. The full name is do-gi, 'suit of the way'.

⁵ **Dan:** means 'step'. 1st dan is the lowest grade of black belt, 10th dan is the highest.

⁶ **Grade:** level or step.

- ⁷ **Karateka:** karate expert.
- ⁸ **Budo:** means 'the way of war'. Includes all the martial arts – judo, tae-kwondo, ju-jitsu, kendo etc.
- ⁹ **Samurai:** a traditional Japanese soldier.
- ¹⁰ **Kimono:** traditional Japanese dress.
- ¹¹ **Origami:** the Japanese art of paper folding.
- ¹² **Hai:** 'yes'.
- ¹³ **Sushi:** Japanese food. Usually rice and seafood or vegetables.
- ¹⁴ **Moshi moshi:** 'hello' (only used when speaking on the telephone).
- ¹⁵ **Budoka:** martial artist.
- ¹⁶ **Kiai:** the shout or cry used in karate, particularly when attacking.

Chapter 1 *Death of a fighter*

'You kill the guy with a karate punch to the left kidney. Yaku zuki – reverse punch. You step over the body lying on the wooden floor, take one last look at the face, eyes still open in an expression of surprise, and move quickly through the door of the dojo to the lift. Then down and into the cold night air. You almost allow yourself to smile as you walk towards the Underground station, your right hand still aware of the contact with Kawaguchi-sensei's body. Then you get a train to safety.'

'Cut the poetry, Jensen. This is a newspaper for the twenty-first century – we want facts, not fantasy.' This was the sweet voice of my boss, Dave Balzano, editor of *The Daily Echo*, as he looked over my shoulder at my computer screen.

'Yes, sir,' I said under my breath as he moved on towards his office. Balzano was a fat, sweaty man with a bad temper. I had learnt from bitter experience that there was no point in arguing with him. I looked again at what I had written.

'Pity,' I whispered to my colleague, Rick. 'I quite like it.' Rick smiled but carried on looking at his screen.

Rick and I were both news reporters on *The Daily Echo*. I had been working there for about three years and Rick joined about a year after me. Like me, he had started off on a less well-known newspaper outside London, in a small town in Scotland to be exact. All we wrote about

were new babies and marriages. I studied journalism in Manchester and, after finishing my studies, got a job with the Manchester Evening News. That was a bit more exciting, but not much.

We had now finally arrived in the big city and we both enjoyed our work.

We were working in The Daily Echo main office on Malvern Street in central London. Our desks were side by side. The only real problem with the job was Dave Balzano. He was a great editor but he had the worst temper in the world. In the three years I had been at The Daily Echo I'd never heard him talk quietly.

'Jensen!! Get the latest news from Scotland Yard and get down to that damn karate place and get an inside story!' shouted Balzano loudly as he went into his office. I smiled sweetly but under my breath I said 'go to hell'.

* * *

I thought over what I knew about Kawaguchi, or Kawaguchi-sensei¹ as he was known to his pupils. I first knew of him some years ago when I trained with Asano-sensei. They had both trained in Tokyo with the great master, Ohtsuka, and had both left Japan at about the same time, in the early 1960s. They were two of a number of teachers who brought the teachings of karate from Japan to Europe at that time. Some years later they had had a very public disagreement about technique and had started rival karate schools. In London, anybody who wanted to train seriously trained with one of them. Now Kawaguchi was lying dead in the Central Hospital, killed by a single punch.

With Balzano's voice still ringing in my ears, I arranged to meet Jonty Adams, my contact at Scotland Yard,² in a bar in Piccadilly, our usual meeting place. A reporter's relationship to the police is never an easy one. We need them and they need us. Sometimes, though, getting any useful information out of them was nearly impossible. I was lucky that Jonty Adams liked me. He liked me and I needed him. Perfect.

Jonty was a slim, nervous guy in his late thirties with a thin moustache and terrible taste in ties. He was wearing a particularly horrible grey one with little pink pigs all over it. I tried to ignore it. It wasn't easy.

'So what's happening with the Kawaguchi case?' I asked, trying to be casual, not to make it sound that I was desperate.

'Not much progress on motive, Kate,' he said. He always moved his body a lot when he got excited and the pigs on his tie started to dance around in front of my eyes. 'Though I suppose a guy like that might have a few enemies. You know, probably punched a few people in his time. This I will say though, whoever killed him was a real karate expert. The post mortem showed there'd been just one punch, but of such a force that it killed him immediately.'

I groaned to myself. Jonty had a way of spending a long time repeating things you already knew.

'Obviously the place to look is in the karate clubs,' he went on. Christ! How did these guys get to be in the police? Then, just as I was about to go, he said:

'We took a guy called Ito in for questioning, Kawaguchi's number two – he told us that Kawaguchi had been threatened before.'

‘Thank you, God,’ I said to myself. I left Jonty and his tie in the bar.

I went over to the Asano dojo for the last half hour of training and saw a good fight among about six black belts.³ I stood and watched the white gi’s⁴ moving quickly round the wooden floor, black belts flying. There was something beautiful about this, more like a dance rather than a fight. It made me feel sad, not to be there doing it. One of the black belts was my friend, Sanjay. While he was having a shower I went over to the Red Cow pub just behind the training hall on Clapham Common, ordered a couple of beers and waited for him. I was glad to see him; Sanjay and I had been friends for years. We started training together and took our dan⁵ grades⁶ together too. We were more like brother and sister than just friends.

Sanjay was a small delicate Indian man of about twenty-six, with the most beautiful dark eyes and long eyelashes. He came from a southern Indian family who now lived near Birmingham. His father was a surgeon in a big teaching hospital and Sanjay also qualified as a doctor two years ago. He was a gentle, charming man. You couldn’t imagine him hurting a fly, but he fought like a tiger. ‘The Indian tiger’, I called him. We took our beers and sat in the public bar.

‘Nobody can believe that Kawaguchi is dead. It seems incredible,’ said Sanjay, drinking his beer thirstily.

‘How many people do you think would be capable of that – killing someone with one blow to the kidney?’ I asked.

‘Quite a few unfortunately. Any of those guys tonight could have done it if they’d timed the punch right. There

must be a hundred guys in London like that. Even I could have done it – even you, Kate!’ Sanjay smiled. ‘The question is, why didn’t Kawaguchi stop him? He was supposed to be one of the greatest fighters ever.’

Yes, my old friend, I thought. That was exactly the question. How did some guy – if it was a man – manage to catch Kawaguchi before the great man could defend himself? Kawaguchi was known as “the cat” and was said to be so fast that in practice he would hit you as soon as you thought of moving. These old masters got faster as they got older.

‘Yes, it’s a real mystery,’ Sanjay continued, thoughtfully. ‘And what about you Kate, are you doing any training?’ Sanjay asked the same question every time I saw him and he always got the same answer.

‘No, Sanjay, no real training. I just try to keep fit, you know. A bit of swimming.’

I had trained for about ten years in all, but a number of injuries and a doctor’s warning had persuaded me to give up. I missed it a lot, particularly when I was with Sanjay. He reminded me of the companionship I no longer had.

We chatted about our karate friends for a while and drank another couple of beers. At about 10.45 we left the pub and walked towards the Underground together. The night was cold and uninviting after the warmth of the pub. Autumn was beginning to turn into winter.

‘Goodnight Kate,’ said Sanjay. ‘Why don’t you come to practice some time? You’re getting lazy.’

Dear Sanjay, he never gave up. I suppose that’s what made him such a great fighter. He smiled his slow friendly smile as we parted to take different trains home.

*28th September 1960
Brixton Prison*

Dear Mum and Dad

Thank you so much for coming to see me yesterday. It made me feel a lot better, I can tell you. And thank you for having faith in me – it means a lot to me in these difficult times. You don't realise how much you need your family until you're in this kind of mess.

My solicitor, Mr Jeffreys, came today and we had a good chat. I felt much better after that. He's a very intelligent man and he is doing his best for me. I feel that there are people on my side, people like him who know that I am innocent of this terrible crime. I think it can only be a matter of time before they realise what an awful mistake they've made!

I couldn't believe it when that girl picked me out of the identity parade. I've never seen her before in my life!! It's a terrible mistake and sooner or later they'll realise it. In a way I am looking forward to the trial so that we can prove the truth of this once and for all.

Anyway, enough of all that. I hope you are well and that Paddy and Ian are fine. Tell Ian that I'll take him to the football again when I get out of here. I miss you all very much.

God bless

Brendan

Chapter 2 *Death follows death*

Back home in my sixth floor Brixton flat I turned the lights down low and listened to the guy who lived upstairs, Tim, playing the saxophone. He was playing a Ben Webster tune, one of my favourites. The long notes of the sax came through the ceiling. I was in the mood for jazz, as usual. I lay back on my sofa and looked out of the window – London by night, the sweetest sight in the whole world. It was a clear, bright October evening and I took in a view that stretched from the dark streets of Brixton to Docklands.

Brixton was not the best area of London to live in. For me, though, there were some very good reasons for living there. First of all, it was a lot cheaper than some other places in the city. I also had my own private saxophonist living upstairs and this fantastic view over London. What more did I need?

I looked now at that view. The sky was deep blue and the stars looked like tiny jewels all over it. The moon would be full in a few days and it was already big and beautiful. I let the music wash over me. The tune coming from upstairs was sad, full of lost dreams and lost love. I thought about Kawaguchi, dying so far away from his real home and I suddenly felt bad. I took the “Who’s Who in the Martial Arts” off the bookshelf and opened it at Kawaguchi. It read:

Kawaguchi, Takehiko, 8th Dan, born 1925, Osaka, Japan. Student of the great Ohtsuka, 10th Dan, Japan National Team 1950–58. World Champion fighter 1954–56. Started Zanshin School of Karate, London, 1960.

Not much there. Not much for a whole lifetime. I decided to get some sleep. Tomorrow I would have to go to the Zanshin dojo and I was going to need all my strength.

I went to bed and dreamt that I was in the dojo again, with Sanjay. We were fighting but we were both smiling. I was woken by a loud ringing noise next to my left ear. It felt like it was the middle of the night. I came back to life, realised it was the phone and picked it up. It was Jonty.

‘What do you want? What time is it?’ I asked crossly, reaching for my watch on the bedside table.

‘Get down to the Kawaguchi training hall, Kate. We’ve found another body.’

By the time I got to Waterloo Station it was 6.30 am. I had some difficulty keeping my eyes open. I had planned to go to the Zanshin dojo today, but not quite this early. I ran from the station to the dojo, a few minutes away. It was already busy down there. The shape of a man was drawn on the changing-room floor and there were a lot of police. Only a couple of reporters though. Rampton from The Standard newspaper and some new guy from The Observer. Jonty, wearing a purple tie with yellow flowers, was smoking nervously.

‘Same story,’ Jonty said through the smoke. ‘Looks like one punch – to the stomach this time – right on the solar plexus. No sign of a struggle. The guy had just showered and changed after a training session. The cleaner found

him this morning. It was Ito, Kawaguchi's number two. We're telling the rest of the club to stay at home and closing the dojo for the moment.'

The Zanshin dojo had not only lost its sensei, Kawaguchi, but now Ito was also gone. I wondered what effect it would have on the dojo, on the students. I turned my cassette recorder on and did a brief two-minute description of the scene. I kept to the facts. Balzano is keen on facts.

A punch to the solar plexus could be deadly and on this occasion it had been. I had once seen someone hit like that in a competition. He fell to the floor, unable to get up; they had to carry him off. He didn't die, of course, because his opponent wasn't using full force. Hiromitsu Ito hadn't been so lucky. It must have happened about the time I met Sanjay last night. While we were sitting in the pub having a beer, somebody waited until everyone had gone, went into the training hall, then into the changing room and killed yet another top fighter with one punch.

3rd October 1960

Brixton Prison

Dear Paddy

Well, little brother, I hope that you are looking after Mum and Dad properly while I am not around. You're the eldest now – at least until I get home.

Things are all right here. They are treating me pretty well under the circumstances. The prison officers are OK – we manage to have a laugh and joke together. It's not like home though! I just keep hoping that if I carry on telling the truth, telling everyone that I didn't do it, someone will believe me.

The only thing keeping me going at the moment is the fact that I've got my solicitor, Mr Jeffreys and my barrister, Mr Johnston on my side. Mr Johnston's the one that's going to deal with my case at the trial. That starts next week and I don't mind telling you that I'll be happy when it starts. At least I'll have a chance to tell everyone the truth, that I was in Manchester that day.

Look after yourself, Paddy, and look after Mum and Dad and Ian. When I get out of here, we'll go and have a drink or two together like we used to.

Love

Brendan