

ONE

When did the doorbell ring? It rang
 Earlier today,
 About one, one-thirty in the afternoon, while I
 Sat watching
Yojimbo for the twenty-third time. No—
 No, wait—you see, I've got
 This notebook—
 Here it is—I keep track
 Of all the movies I see, how many times
 I see them....

That's right, I thought so—number 23
 Was early
 This morning—I'd woken up, 4 a.m., couldn't sleep—
 So I watched it
 Straight through—no pauses,
 Trips to the bathroom or phone calls
 To interrupt
 That gust of desolate wind. So.
 This afternoon was number
 24—Let me
 Write this down....

Okay. There I was,
 Advancing
 Frame by frame through the scene—
 You probably know it—the one where Toshiro Mifune
 As the nameless
 Bodyguard, the ronin, the samurai
 Sword-for-hire—the ruthless
 Embodiment
 Of disciplined
 Violence in a world of slovenly
 Backstabbers—he's retired
 To a temple
 In the reeds by the river, not to pray
 But to recover
 From a savage beating. You can tell he's almost
 Back to normal, because he's throwing

His knife, repeatedly spearing
To the rough wood floor
A windblown
Leaf. His eyes follow the fluttering
Unpredictable dance,
Then *WHOMP!* He pulls the knife from the floor,
Frees the leaf
And lets it
Flutter in the wind once more.

When the doorbell rang, then rang again, I froze
The frame
And went downstairs, more than a little
Annoyed. I knew damn well
It wouldn't
Be for me:
It was probably someone randomly
Ringing doorbells—
An illiterate apartment hunter, ignoring
The explicit
Instructions on the For Rent sign, or yet another
Guy
Trying to get hold
Of the woman who lived above me. I guess
These guys think
That since my apartment
Is 315 and hers is 415, I should keep myself
Up to date on her ins and outs
And why she doesn't
Answer her phone, which in fact is a job
I could easily
Manage—given the noise level
Of her lifestyle—if I didn't have a damn
Thing
Better to do! So. As I'm rounding
The last landing,
And heading down the final
Flight of stairs, I see through the glass
Door that divides
The outer lobby from the inner hall, this short,
Smiling,
Black guy with Jheri Curls

Down to his shoulders, a guy I've never
Seen in my life,
And don't really want
To see again. I open the door, ready to slam it
Back in his smiling face, or at least
Slam it
As fast as the hydraulic
Door-closer will allow, but then
I see
This clipboard
With a badge rubber-banded
To the clip, and when he speaks, the syllables
I hear
Are those of my name.

"Yeah," I said, "That's me."

"How you doin' today," he said. "Just got
Some papers
For you to sign. Right down
Here, both copies, the people I work for,
They old fashioned, ain't nobody told 'em 'bout carbon paper—
Ooh, look at that!
That is one fancy mark you make,
My man! Top one for you, and this here
One I keep
For the judge. And now, my man, gotta ask you
For some I.D.—you do
Have I.D. for that fancy name
You signed there? Hey man, no problem! I'll walk upstairs
With you save you
That extra trip."

"You lookin' a little
Winded, you know that man?" he said, one step
Behind me, his patter
Continuing as we climbed
The stairs. "This here a really nice little
Neighborhood,
You know that? I feel for you folks here, I truly do—
All that bad
Publicity—
Man, you all famous round the world! Bet you gone

On TV you self—yeah, I knew it!
No shit—
Connie Chung? Man I knew
I seen you somewhere! Let me ask you, man—
Did you get that one
On tape?"

"No," I said, and
As we reached my floor
I was trying to explain how I wanted
To forget, not preserve,
That time, when suddenly he stopped and stood still,
One step below
The third floor landing. "Hey, this ain't
The building, is it? The one
He stayed at?"

"No," I said, "That's two buildings down, across
The street. Same floor plan, though—
Same builder. I'll be
Right back," I said at the door
To my apartment
And I went inside to get my wallet.

"Actually," I said, to his now
Unsmiling
Face when I returned and handed him
My driver's license, "That apartment was number 315,
Just like this one."

"No shit," said Mr. Jheri Curls softly. "You got
That little alcove?"

"All these apartments do," I said. "So do I
Check out? Do you have
The right man?"

"Well, let me see, sir,"
He said, in a mock-pedantic
Parody of a fussy
White person's voice, and he looked with much skepticism
From my face to my license
To the signature
On the subpoena. "Yes it appears I have indeed

Located
The correct individual." Then his face
Broke back into its smile
As he handed me my license. "Man," he said,
"You the right man."