

# Chikamatsu

## The Love Suicide at Amijima (Shinjū Ten-no Amijima)

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## I

So long as it remains true that “the ocean cannot be emptied with a tiny *shijimi*<sup>1</sup> shell”<sup>2</sup> so long may we say love will exert its dominion over the human heart; and well may Sonézaki-Shinchi, the quarter of light-o’-loves in Osaka, be called an ocean of love, and it does not seem mere chance that the river running by the quarter is called Shijimi.

The early winter’s evening at Sonézaki-Shinchi glimmered, softly illumined by the inscribed lanterns of the tea-houses. Through the thronged streets young rakes were strolling, singing folk-songs as they went, reciting fragments of puppet dramas or imitating famous actors at their dialogues. From the upper room of many a tea-house floated the gay plucking of *samisen*, and so witching was the music as to entice certain of the frequenters of the district to visit the courtesans. Others, who had donned disguise, more freely to enjoy the merry atmosphere of the streets, being detected by the teahouse maids, were beguiled into visiting this or that house.

The bridges spanning the Shijimi River are named “Plum-Blossom” and “Cherry-Blossom”; and in this district, among the numerous girls, no less lovely than these flowers, was a damsel of supreme beauty named Koharu of the brothel Kinokuni-ya.

Escorted by Sugi, her maid, she was even now about to pass a lantern hung out as a sign, pondering the while who would be her patron this coming night, when another of the sisterhood, on the way back to her master’s brothel, halted beside her.

“Ah! Koharu Sama,” she said, “I haven’t seen you for a long time nor heard from you. How much thinner you have grown! You are unwell perhaps? A certain little bird told me your master is very particular as to whom you entertain on account of your love for Jihei Sama and that it isn’t

<sup>1</sup>A kind of corbicula.

<sup>2</sup>A proverb.

## *Love Suicide at Amijima*

often you're allowed to be invited out to other tea-houses; while another little bird tells me you have been ransomed by Tahei Sama and are off with him into the country to Itami. Which is true?"

"Sh! My dear friend, don't mention Itami. I hate the name. Poor Jihei Sama! He and I are not particularly close, but that braggart of a Tahei has put about a rumour concerning us, so that all my patrons have forsaken me, and my master, who lays all this at Jihei's door, keeps him away from me and I cannot even write to him. Oddly enough I am being sent to-night on the command of a samurai to the teahouse Kawachi-ya. Making my way thither, as I now am, I am very nervous of encountering that wretch Tahei. It's as if I had a mortal enemy seeking to avenge himself upon me. Hist! Do you make him out over there?"

"Perhaps. You had best hide yourself. See—a strolling singer<sup>3</sup> approaches, reciting something comical, and among the listening crowd there's a young man with his hair dressed in the fashionable style and who seems to be well pleased with himself. It is Tahei Sama, I'll be bound. See—they're coming this way."

In less time than it takes to tell, the singer, garbed in a large fantastic hood and a black robe, came up followed by a crowd, reciting the while after a comic style and to the accompaniment of a tiny bell:—

“The Han-Kwai<sup>4</sup> style of breaking  
The castle gate is commonplace.  
Thus does a Japanese do!  
With this he broke the bar,  
Leaped over the entanglements,  
Uryōko knocked down, and Saryōko,  
And quickly broke into the castle.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>The Japanese name is *namaida-bōzu*. The *namaida-bōzu* was a strolling singer dressed in the style of a Buddhist priest. He recited fragments of puppet drama or folk songs, accompanying himself on a tiny bell which he struck with a little stick. His recitations concluded with the repetition of “*Namaida*” which is a comical modification of the Buddhist invocation “*Namu Amida Buddha*”.

<sup>4</sup>A famous Chinese hero.

*Chikamatsu*

Namaida! Namaida! Namaida!

'He wandered and wandered  
In quest of his dear Matsuyama:  
No shadow of her could he find.  
Then when his grief turned his wits  
All day he laughed and wept,  
Until at length exhausted  
He stretched him on the turf.  
What misery! Oh, what a plight!<sup>6</sup>  
Namaida! Namaida! Namaida!

*'Ei! Ei! Ei! Ei!*

The dyer Tokubei's heart  
Was deeply dyed with love for Fusa.  
So large was his property  
That even dye could not wash it off.<sup>7</sup>  
Namaida! Namaida! Namaida!"

"My good fellow," said Koharu's attendant Sugi, "such doleful ballading of deaths for love is poor hearing. Here at Sonézaki, I am glad to say, such things have ceased to be heard of. Won't you give us the *michiyuki*<sup>8</sup> of Kokusenya?"

She proffered a coin. The singer looked at it and murmured:

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<sup>5</sup>A paragraph of *The Battles of Kokusenya*, a puppet-play by the author, enjoying such popularity with the Osaka people that any paragraph of it was of interest to them.

<sup>6</sup>A paragraph from a puppet-play entitled *The Madness of Wankyū*.

<sup>7</sup>A portion of a comic song based on *The Love Suicide at the Kasané-Izutsu*, a puppet-play by the author. The song is also by the author.

<sup>8</sup>The narrative of the journey of the hero or heroine or both in a puppet-play. It is a description both epic and lyrical and generally forms the most beautiful paragraph of the play.

*Love Suicide at Amijima*

“Pooh! It doesn’t pay to make a long tour  
To China three *sen*<sup>9</sup> (thousand) miles away,  
For the sum of one or two *sen*!  
Oh! It doesn’t pay! Oh! It doesn’t pay!”

The singer made off.

Koharu, parting from her friend, deftly threaded the throng and hastened into the Kawachi-ya.

“You are quickly here, Koharu Sama,” said the mistress of the tea-house gaily. “I haven’t set eyes on you for a long time. I am indeed delighted to see you, my dear Koharu Sama, my dearest Koharu Sama.”

“Hush, madame! Please don’t repeat my name so loud lest it carry without the door, for the hateful Ri Tōten<sup>10</sup> himself is there. Please be quiet, dear madame.”

But it was too late. Tahei and two other young men suddenly entered.

“Koharu Dono,” said Tahei with a sardonic smile, “let me hasten to thank you for bestowing on me the good name of Ri Tōten. Gentlemen, this is the Koharu Dono who, as I told you, is known for her warm-heartedness and generous treatment of her guests. Please hasten to make her acquaintance. It is not beyond dreaming that she may soon enough become my wife or – who knows? – shortly be ransomed by my rival Jihei.”

With these words he approached her haughtily.

“What nonsense!” said she indignantly, drawing away from him. “Jihei Sama is a stranger to me. If it does you credit to give him a bad name be as diligent as you please in this, but don’t let me hear such nonsense.”

“Even though you mayn’t want to hear it,” said Tahei, drawing closer once more, “I’ll put you in the way of hearing it none the less, with the jingling of gold coins. You are indeed a lucky woman, Koharu Dono, to be

<sup>9</sup>*Sen* means either “thousand” or “a small sum of money”. The passage contains a play upon the words. Most of the scenes in *The Battles of Kokusenya* are laid in China, in olden times said to be three thousand miles away from Japan.

<sup>10</sup>A villain in the play *The Battles of Kokusenya*.

*Chikamatsu*

loved by Jihei, of all the numberless men of Osaka, a nice little paper-dealer—the father of two children, whose wife is his cousin and whose father-in-law is his aunt’s husband. Alas! His business is in such a poor way that he can hardly make two ends meet at the end of the quarter. And yet he proposes to pay a ransom of two hundred *ryō* for you. Bah! It’s an impossibility! I, on the other hand, have neither wife nor children, nor father-in-law nor parents and no uncles to lean on me. I am widely known as ‘Bondless Tahei’. True, I am no match at boasting in the pleasure quarter for that fellow Jihei; but you observe I am by no means lacking in riches and in that respect I have the better of him. Indeed, as far as money goes, I am anybody’s master. I am sure Koharu’s guest to-night is Jihei, but madame, I will take his place. ‘Bondless Tahei’ will possess Koharu Dono to-night. Well, a drink, madame.”

“Keep a watch on your tongue,” said the proprietress bluntly. “Tonight’s guest is a samurai and he will be here shortly. Will you please be so good as to take your spree elsewhere.”

“Madame,” replied Tahei with a laugh, “samurai and tradesmen alike are your guests, whether they wear swords or no. No samurai can wear as many as five or six swords; two suffice him. To-night I will invite Koharu Dono and her samurai into the bargain. However much you try to avoid me, Koharu Dono, you cannot help meeting me—for we are closely related by affinity. I owe this meeting with you to the strolling singer. Miraculous is the efficacy of prayer made to Amida Buddha. So let me make my prayer. And do you listen.”

Then, striking with a tobacco pipe on the fire pan of the tobacco tray by way of accompaniment, he cried aloud in imitation of the strolling singer:

*“Ei! Ei! Ei! Ei!*

The paper-dealer Jihei  
Is infatuated with Koharu;  
And his property has become  
As thin as rice-paper  
And thinner than toilet-paper.

*Love Suicide at Amijima*

Jihei is worthless as waste-paper  
Which is not good enough  
Even to blow the nose with.  
Namaida! Namaida! Namaida!"

At that moment someone stealthily peeped in at the entrance, the face being largely concealed by a muffler and the low brim of his *amigasa* or braided hat. Catching sight of this apparition Tahei mocked:

"Aha! Here is Toilet-paper! What a pretty disguise! Pray step in, Waste-paper. Coward, are you afraid of my Namaida prayer to Amida Buddha?" With these words he dragged the man into the room. Profound was his surprise and fear when the newcomer proved to be a two-sworded samurai, who glared upon him with a savage expression. Tahei, speechless, ejaculated "Ah!" But, hurriedly composing himself, resumed:

"Now, Koharu Dono, I am only a tradesman and have never worn a sword, but it's not beyond possibility that the glint of gold coins in my coffer may outshine any sword. Presumptuous is it in a mere toilet-paper seller, with a capital as thin as rice-paper, to attempt to vie with 'Bondless Tahei.' If I take a stroll between Cherry-Blossom Bridge and Nakamachi Street I should be able to put my foot on Waste paper somewhere thereabouts. Let us be off, friends."

Tahei and his companions made off haughtily enough.

To avoid a scene in the pleasure quarter the samurai was compelled to accept this affront. Stung to the quick by these vilifications of her lover, Koharu, lost in thought, did not greet her new guest. Sugi ran in, cast a hurried look about and exclaimed:

"When I escorted Koharu Sama here just now her guest had not arrived, so I went back, but no sooner was I home than I was severely rebuked for not inspecting the guest. Pardon my rudeness, sir."

Forcing up the samurai's hat she narrowly scanned his face.

"Well, it's not he, not he. There's no occasion for nervousness. Have a pleasant time, Koharu Sama, with this gentleman. Good-bye, madame. I will return later."

She departed in haste. The serious samurai was much displeased.

## *Chikamatsu*

“What behaviour,” he grumbled. “Did the maid think me a tea-caddy or a tea-cup that she examined my face as a connoisseur does a curio? Understand, madame, that at our official residence entrance and exit are closely watched, even by day, and notice must be given to the officer in charge if one intends stopping out even one night that he may enter it in his book. Despite such strict regulations I have contrived a pretext to pay this call unaccompanied by my servant this night – that I may meet Koharu Dono, the famous courtesan, whom I have so longed after. Not long ago I was here and arranged with you for this interview, wasn’t I? And, Koharu Dono, how eagerly I have expected that you would deign to let me enjoy myself with you to-night. Deep is my disappointment. You have not favoured me either with a pleasant smile or a word of greeting, but all the while have been gazing downwards as if counting the money in your bosom. I fear your neck must ache. Madame, no gentleman comes to a tea-house to attend a woman in childbirth!”

“Your reproaches are justified,” pleaded the mistress, I do not wonder you consider Koharu’s attitude strange. The fact is she has a particularly intimate guest named Kamiya<sup>11</sup> Jihei Sama. Day and night he paid her visits so that no other patron could have access to her, until at last all have been scattered like autumn leaves overtaken by storm. When relations reach such a pitch things can’t but turn out badly. Koharu Sama’s master has no patience with these passionate lovers and so, according to the usual proceeding in such cases, all her guests have to undergo scrutiny to make sure that Jihei Sama is not one of them. That’s the reason for her low spirits, sir.”

She turned to the girl.

“As mistress of this tea-house, Koharu Sama, I must ask you to do your best to entertain your guest. Come, take a cup and make merry with the gentleman. Now, be good, Koharu Sama.”

The girl made no answer, but, lifting a tearful face, abruptly inquired:

<sup>11</sup>“Kamiya” signifies “paper-dealer,” but in feudal Japan tradesmen, among whom the luxury of surnames was unknown, often used such professional titles as surnames.



## *Love Suicide at Amijima*

“Is it true, Sir Knight, that one who dies in the ‘Ten Nights’<sup>12</sup> shall go to paradise?”

“How should I know such a thing? You had best ask the priest of your family temple.”

“You are right. I have another question to ask you. Which is the more painful method of suicide, by the knife or the rope?”

“How should I know?” replied the samurai disgustedly. “I have never cut my throat. What a question! And what a disagreeable young person!”

“Come, Koharu Sama, what a way to greet a new guest! Come, cheer up, my girl. Well, well, I wonder when my husband will be back. I’ll be off and fetch him to prepare a feast for you. Be good enough to excuse me a while, sir.”

The mistress sought the street.

The crescent moon by this time neared the horizon the clouds were lifting; and the passers-by were few.

Kamiya Jihei, proprietor of a paper shop at Temma, no great distance off the pleasure quarter, becoming infatuated with Koharu, had neglected his business and given way to a life of dissipation. The passionate pair, prevented from meeting each other, falling into a state of desperation, had secretly exchanged letters vowing suicide together upon the first renewal of their meetings. Night after night had Jihei, heavily disguised, wandered the streets of Sonézaki Shinchí. This night he again made his appearance in the quiet streets. Having his face half covered with a kerchief and a short sword at his side, he was now walking stealthily, a far-away expression upon his face. At a chop-house he learned that Koharu was even now at the Kawachi-ya with a samurai guest. It seemed to him his opportunity was come at last. He hastened to the front of the tea-house and peeping through

<sup>12</sup>The period from the 6th to the 15th of October (by the lunar calendar) is known among Buddhists as the Jūya or “Ten Nights” and they have a saying:—Such as in the Ten Nights dies finds the way to paradise. During these days pious Buddhists make special visits to their family temples where they hold prayer meetings.

## *Chikamatsu*

the lattice beheld Koharu sitting in the inner room<sup>13</sup> and opposite her a samurai about whose face was bound a muffler. He observed the samurai's chin move, but the voice was inaudible, and scanning Koharu's profile, illuminated by the lamp-light, Jihei said to himself, "How thin the poor girl has grown! She thinks of nothing but me. How I wish I could whisper to her that I am here and should like to elope with her. How I long to let her know of my coming! How I long to call her by name!" Overcome by his emotion he clung to the lattice and gave way to tears. Within, the samurai gave a prodigious yawn and remarked, "It's poor fun tending a love-sick maiden. Since the street seems to be quiet I'll go to the front room and divert myself looking at the sign-lantern. Come with me, girl."

With these words he entered the front room bringing Koharu with him. Jihei, startled, stooped and hid himself in the shadow of the wall beneath the lattice that he might hear their talk.

"Now, Koharu Dono," said the samurai softly in amiable tones, "I judge from your manner and speech that you are resolved to commit suicide with this lover Jihei of whom madame has spoken. I am right, am I not? Neither kind advice nor reason can gain the ear of one possessed by the God of Death; nothing however could be more foolish than your intention. Your lover's relatives would not resent his rashness, but all their hatred and reproach would be heaped on you. Your dead face moreover would be exposed to the public gaze. That is a great disgrace. I don't know whether your parents are alive or no. If living you may be sure that your undutifulness towards them would bring down upon you Heaven's punishment. Not only would you be unable to fare hand in hand with your lover toward paradise, but even such a journey to hell would be forbidden. Albeit I meet you this evening for the first time it is impossible for me as a samurai to refrain from taking some action to rescue you from such a humiliating death. I am sure it is a matter of money. Well, I can accommodate you with five or ten *ryō* if that will prevent your death. And

<sup>13</sup>Even in winter it often happens that the paper doors of the tea-house are left open, with the result that the interiors of both the front and the inner rooms on the ground floor are visible from outside the lattice.

## *Love Suicide at Amijima*

I will swear to secrecy by Tenshō Daijin and Hachiman and on the honour of a samurai. Pray confide all your secrets to me."

"How kind you are, sir," Koharu responded, clasping her hands, "how grateful I feel! Your kind offer supported by an oath makes me weep for gratitude. You have exactly hit the mark: I have, as you guess, taken a vow to die with Jihei Sama. Owing to my master, we are prevented from seeing each other and Jihei Sama's circumstances do not permit of his ransoming me at present, while his rival, a rich man, is arranging for my ransom. Out of despair, then, he begged of me to die with him and I was forced to say 'Yes, I will die'. I promised him to seize the first opportunity to steal out and to join him in his journey to Hades. I am indeed due to die any day at any moment. My mother, whose only support I am, is living miserably in the slums. At my death she is likely to become a beggar and may eventually die the death of a dog. Thinking of her fate sorrow overcomes me. Moreover I have but one life. You may think me an insincere woman, but to tell the truth I am anxious to escape death if possible. I beseech you, sir, to do something to save me from death."

At this the samurai nodded his head and fell into deep thought. As for Jihei, her unexpected confession amazed him beyond measure. Beside himself with anger, "Was all she said a lie?" he asked himself. "What rage I feel! Two long years have I been bewitched. Fox! Badger! Shall I rush in and strike her? Or shall I revile her to my heart's content?"

He ground his teeth and gave way to tears of mortification.

Within doors Koharu spoke through her tears:

"I have a cowardly request to make you, sir. Will you be so good as to come to see me frequently from now on till about March next, so as to be in Jihei's way whenever he comes with intent to die with me. I hope that while the tragic hour is thus delayed my relations with him will come to a natural end and both be thus saved from death. I wonder now why I was inclined to vow to die with him. I deeply regret it."

Thus speaking she wept, leaning on the samurai's bosom.

"I comply with your request and I have an idea. There is a draught and people may see us."

## Chikamatsu

So saying he shut the paper doors behind the lattice *bata-bata*. Jihei flew into a frenzy of passion. Oh! The woman was a thing for sale! Cheap goods! He had been infatuated with a mere light-fingered wanton. Should it be point or edge? Even now their faces were silhouetted on the paper doors. Oh! To beat her, to trample her down! What were they plotting? They nodded each to each; one worshipped the other; they whispered and made low exclamations. Unavailing was Jihei's effort to control himself. He was now past all holding. He unsheathed his sword – an excellent blade by Seki-no-Magoroku – and, making a pass for Koharu's side, thrust it through the lattice. The couple started, but no injury was done for they were sitting out of reach. The samurai immediately sprang forward, seized the would-be assassin's hands, drew them in and in a trice tied them with the cord of his sword fast to the post of the lattice.

"Koharu," said he, "make no ado. Don't peep out."

At this juncture the proprietor and his wife returned, to halt amazed at the scene.

"What's the matter, sir?"

"Nothing's the matter This fellow barbarously thrust in a drawn sword through the paper doors. So I have tied his hands to the post. I have a plan in my head. Let him alone lest we gather spectators. Come with me, Koharu, let us repose together."

She answered "Yes, sir," but the sword being one familiar to her eyes her spirit received a wound from the blade which had failed to pierce her side.

"You see," she pleaded gently, "drunken folk often misbehave themselves like that when in the pleasure quarter. So I think, Kawachi-ya San, we had best let him go unpunished, hadn't we?"

"No, indeed," said the samurai, "leave the matter to me Let us go in. This way, Koharu."

They entered the inner room. The more Jihei struggled, the more the cord tightened about his wrists. Realizing to the full the bitterness of his plight he gave way to tears of mortification. Tahei, returning from a stroll, caught sight of him.

## *Love Suicide at Amijima*

"If I am not mistaken that's Jihei standing at the lattice of the Kawachi-ya. I'll trip him up."

He seized Jihei by the collar and shook him.

"Do you call out, you coward? So you're tied, are you? Aha! I have it! You're a thief! You're a pickpocket!" –he drubbed him with a closed fist – "burglar! A face for a pike!" –he kicked him – "Hi! Kamiya Jihei has been thieving and someone has tied him up here!"

Upon this a crowd collected. The samurai rushed out.

"Are you the fellow," he cried, "who called this man a thief? Come, tell me what Jihei has stolen?" He seized Tahei and thrust his face to the ground. Whenever Tahei struggled to rise he pressed him down again and holding him thus in a firm grip cried: "Come, Jihei, stamp on this fellow and revenge yourself." So saying he thrust his captive down to Jihei's feet. Tied up as he was Jihei trampled upon the prostrate form. At length, covered with dirt, Tahei rose and glared upon the crowd. "Lookers-on, you have suffered me to be maltreated, but I have taken note of every face and I'll have you know I shall not fail to take revenge upon each one of you."

Thus he spoke and then took to his heels. The crowd burst out laughing. "He gets trampled on and yet he clacks his tongue like that! Let's throw him from the bridge. Drown him! He shan't get off!" The crowd pursued him pell-mell. The samurai advanced on Jihei, untied the cord, removed his own muffler and uncovered his face.

"What!" exclaimed Jihei astonished. "Is it my brother Magoémon Dono? Shame overcomes me."

He sat down on the ground and wept bitterly. Koharu ran out of the house. "Are you really Jihei Sama's elder brother?" she cried.

Abruptly Jihei rose to his feet to seize the girl by the breast of her dress. "Beast! Fox! I'd rather trample on you than Tahei." So saying he raised his leg, but Magoémon stopped him.

"How can you?" he cried reproachfully. "Your foolishness is a source of never-ending trouble. I hope you now see that it is the business of a courtesan to cozen folks. At first sight I saw into the bottom of this girl's heart. Blockhead that you are to have been unable to look into the heart of a woman whom you have visited day and night for more than two years.

## *Chikamatsu*

Why don't you stamp on your own stupid wits instead of on Koharu? The pity of it—you, Jihei, are close on thirty and a father of two children, your son and daughter, Kantarō and O-Sué, six and four years old. And in spite of this you have given yourself up to dissipation night and day, blind to the fast dwindling of your fortune and in despite of my well-intentioned advice. Your wife's father is your aunt's husband, your mother-in-law is your aunt, as good as a real mother to you, and your wife O-San is a cousin of mine, thus all the members of your family are closely related by blood. At the meetings of our relatives they talk of nothing but your everlasting visits to the pleasure quarter. Your poor aunt! Her husband, Gozaémon Dono, an unamiable old-fashioned fellow, got hot about you. 'My beloved daughter,' he said, 'is shamefully treated by my wife's nephew. I'll take O-San back and make him notorious throughout Temma.' But your aunt pleaded for you and has taken such pains to cover up the tale of your misdeeds that she is almost ill. You're an ungrateful cad, bound for ill-luck, if only by reason of punishment for your ingratitude. Under the present circumstances, unless steps be taken, your house will come to ruin. To save your family from such misfortunes and to reassure our aunt I thought I ought first to sound Koharu as to her intentions. I therefore arranged with the proprietor for this night's visit and have thus been able to ascertain the cause of all your anguish. It seems natural enough in you perhaps to desert wife and children for the sake of such a warm-hearted, truthful bit of goods. You have done very well, Jihei. Thanks to a wise brother, Koya<sup>14</sup> Magoémon, a merchant of some reputation, has been compelled to disguise himself as a two-sworded samurai and play the fool like a minor actor. I might well be taken for a person in fancy dress at a carnival or for a madman. I don't know what to do with these swords. My heart is hot both with anger and with a sense of the ridiculous."

He ground his teeth and frowned, with difficulty repressing tears. Meanwhile Koharu continued sobbing and all she could find to say was, "You are quite right, sir, you are quite right."

<sup>14</sup>"Koya" means "flour-merchant," but is here used as a surname.

## *Love Suicide at Amijima*

Jihei patted the ground in sign of indignation. "Pardon me, brother, oh, pardon me! The pity of it! – These long years have I been eaten up with regard for this old badger and have neglected my family and relatives. I grieve that, cozened by this thief of a Koharu, I have wasted my property. This very moment do I give her up once and for all. Never will I set foot again in this neighbourhood. Listen, you badger, you fox, you thief, you! Here's proof that I give you up" – he produced an amulet case from his bosom – "here are the written vows you have made me, one at the beginning of every month these three years: twenty-nine altogether. Once I restore these papers I owe you neither love nor sympathy. Take these back, you harlot!" – he threw the papers toward her – "Take back, brother, in exchange, the written vows I have made her, count them up and burn them yourself. Come now, girl, hand them over to my brother."

"As you will, Jihei Sama."

With tears the girl handed over her amulet case to Magoémon, who took the papers out and counted them. "One, two, three, four... ten... twenty-nine. The number is correct. Ah, here's a letter in a woman's hand. Whose can it be?" He was making as if to open it when Koharu endeavoured to stop him saying, "That's an important letter which I can't let you see." He pushed her aside and scrutinized the superscription by the light of the lamp. To his amazement the address read: "To Koharu Sama from Kamiya O-San." However, he pocketed the missive conclusively enough.

"Koharu, a little while back I swore by the honour of a samurai. Now let me take an oath on the honour of a merchant that I will show this letter to nobody, not even to my wife. I will read it in private and afterward I will burn it with the other papers. Rest assured I will not break this oath."

"Thank you, sir," she returned, sinking to the ground, "my honour is preserved."

"Your honour? Stuff and nonsense! Come, brother, I won't look on her a minute longer. Let us away. Great is my regret and mortification. I can control myself no longer. Let me place my foot upon the hussy's face if but once only." Jihei advanced and stamped upon the ground. "A thousand pities! This very moment with my foot I bid an everlasting

*Chikamatsu*

farewell to all the love and affection I have spent upon you these three years." He kicked her on the forehead. She gave a cry of pain. The brothers sorrowfully departed. Touching was the gaze wherewith Koharu followed them. Was she crafty and false of heart or a truthful, warm-hearted woman? Whatever her true nature was it was bound up in a mysterious letter from O-San, Jihei's wife.



## II

Jiheī's house and paper shop, in a thriving street by the Tenjin<sup>15</sup> Shrine at Temma, was a business of old standing, and despite the master's long neglect of business it yet retained some appearance of prosperity—a prosperity entirely due to the efforts of his wife, O-San, ever busy about deals with customers and the management of household affairs. At present Jihei was dozing at the *kotatsu*<sup>16</sup> in the sitting-room. O-San set a bed screen by him to shut out the draught. Beyond the window visitors, come to the Buddhist temple to celebrate the Ten Nights, were seen passing.

"The evening is drawing in," O-San said to herself, not without concern. "Supper-time is already come. I wonder what Tama, my maid, whom I sent on an errand to Ichinokawa, is doing? Why hasn't that idiot of a Sangorō come back? The wind is chill. My children must be feeling cold. Doesn't he know now is the time O-Sué wants her milk? What an idiot! I shall surely lose patience."

"Mama," said her son running in, "I have come home alone."

"Is that you, Kantarō? I am glad to see you back. What are O-Sué and Sangorō doing, my darling?"

"We played at the shrine. O-Sué cried hard for milk."

"That's natural enough. Your hands and feet are stiff as wood. Warm yourself at the *kotatsu* by which your father is sleeping. What shall I do with that idiot of a Sangorō?"

<sup>15</sup>A famous shrine dedicated to the great minister and scholar, Sugawara-no-Michizané, or Kwan Shōjō, who, a victim of calumny, was in A.D. 901 degraded to the post of Vice-President of Dazaifu or Governor-Generalship of the island of Kyūshū and died in exile two years later. Throughout Japan he is worshipped as the God of Calligraphy. It is almost always the custom to plant a plum-tree near his temple since this was his favourite tree. Tradition avers that the most beautiful plum tree in his garden at Kyoto flew after him to Dazaifu.

<sup>16</sup>A fireplace in the floor covered with a large thick quilt.

*Chikamatsu*

Impatiently she ran out to the shop, only to meet Sangorō lazily returning without his charge.

“Come, you idiot, where have you left baby?”

“Let me see now. I must have let her drop somewhere. Somebody’s probably picked her up. Shall I go back and have a look for her?”

“Alas!” O-San cried angrily. “If my darling is hurt I’ll beat you to death.”

At this moment the maid Tama returned carrying the baby on her back. “Poor baby!” she exclaimed. “I found her crying at the cross-roads, madame. Sangorō, if you are going to take care of the baby you must do so properly.”

“My darling,” said the mother caressing her child, “how much you must have wanted your milk!”

She took the little one to the *kotatsu* where she suckled it, saying: – “Well, Tama, let the idiot have<sup>17</sup> it, so that he will long remember it.”

“No, madame, we have had enough already, thank you,” said Sangorō jocosely. “Just now I let each of the children have a couple of sweet oranges and I myself had five.”

The women smiled grimly.

“Chattering with this idiot I have almost forgotten the more important matter, but I just now saw Magoémon Sama and your mother approaching from the west.”

“Are they indeed coming? If so I ought to wake my husband. Now, my dear, wake up. My mother and your brother are approaching, so Tama says. Should they find you, a merchant, dozing in the daytime – and the days as short as they are now – they would be vexed again for certain.”

“All right.” Jihei rose, hurried to the shop and, seating himself at the desk, pretended to be very busy reckoning on the abacus and in consulting the book beside it. “Ten divided by two is five; nine by three is three, six by three is two; ...er, seven times eight is...”

The fifty-six-year-old<sup>18</sup> aunt and Magoémon stepped in.

<sup>17</sup>This and the following speech contain an untranslatable play on words.

*Love Suicide at Amijima*

“Ah, aunt and brother,” Jihei greeted them, looking up from the abacus, “pray step in. I have just begun making up a pressing account. Pardon me if I finish it. Four times nine is thirty-six; three times six is eighteen, and two over. Now, you two, Kantarō and O-Sué, grandmama and uncle have come. Bring the tobacco tray. Three times one is three (san). Here, O-San, bring tea.”<sup>19</sup>

“By no means!” exclaimed the mother-in-law bluntly.

The object of our call is not to drink tea or to smoke tobacco. Now, O-San, young as you are, you are the mother of two children. It is not enough for you to be merely good-natured. A husband’s evil courses are undoubtedly traceable to a wife’s want of care. When losses compel a man and wife to part, the man is not alone to blame. You must keep wide awake.”

“How mistaken you are!” said Magoémon. “The sly fellow who deceives even his brother wouldn’t take advice from a wife. *Yai*,<sup>20</sup> Jihei, how shamelessly you have deceived me! In my presence the other day you returned the courtesan her written vows and now, before ten days are out, you are proposing to ransom her. Good-for-nothing! This very moment you are totting up Koharu’s debts. Stop it!”

So saying he snatched the abacus from Jihei’s hands and flung it into the yard.

“The charge is unjust,” Jihei pleaded. “Since last we met I haven’t crossed the threshold of my house except to call twice at the wholesale dealer’s at Imabashi and to pay one visit to the Tenjin Shrine. I haven’t even called that old badger to mind, much less thought of ransoming her.”

“Who is going to swallow that?” inquired the mother-in-law excitedly. “At the Ten Nights’ prayer meeting last night the congregation

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<sup>18</sup>The full flavour of this joke is but with difficulty appreciable in English.

<sup>19</sup>This speech is replete with verbal humours such as must produce their effect upon the stage, being dependent rather upon the situation and the motions of Jihei, hesitant between his abacus and his visitors, than upon the written page.

<sup>20</sup>A Japanese exclamation of reproach.

## Chikamatsu

talked of nothing else. The rumour ran that a *daijin*<sup>21</sup> at Temma who has particularly close relations with a courtesan named Koharu of the tea-house Kinokuni-ya at Sonézaki has supplanted all other patrons and proposes to ransom her to-day or to-morrow. So the rumour ran, and they added, 'What a lot of money there must be even in these hard times and what fools there are in the world.' This piece of gossip indeed occupied the whole evening. My husband, Gozaémon Dono, to whose ear the name of the woman sounded only too familiar, was extremely mortified to hear it. When he got home in a high state of excitement, he said 'The silly *daijin* at Temma can be none other than that villain Jihei. Though my wife's nephew, he is no kin to me. My daughter means more to me than he does. A fool bent upon ransoming a tea-house woman is quite capable of selling his wife to a tea-house. So, before he sells O-San's dresses, I must go and bring her and her belongings back. There is not a moment to lose.' With those words he was half-way out of the house. But I stopped him and soothed him down saying, 'Don't be overhasty, my dear. I think we can better manage the matter quietly, after assuring ourselves as to the truth of the rumour.' That is the reason of our call. I rejoiced to hear Magoémon say 'The Jihei of to-day is not the Jihei of yesterday. He has broken with Sonézaki and most certainly turned over a new leaf'; but no sooner did I get the good news than his confidence proved to be ill-founded. What an evil spirit is yours indeed! Your poor father, my elder brother, admonished me on his deathbed saying, 'Sister dear, take care of Jihei, who is both son-in-law and nephew to you.' His words still ring in my ears, but your viciousness is a stumbling-block to my carrying out his dying instructions. It is a thing that grieves me to the core."

She sank her face upon her hands and wept tears of the bitterest resentment.

"Aha!" said Jihei, clapping his hands. "The Koharu talked of is undoubtedly the Koharu in question, but the *daijin* who proposes to

<sup>21</sup>A rich man who spends extravagantly in the pleasure quarter is called a *daijin*. A *daijin* signifies literally "a great spender." Etymologically the word is probably originated from another word of the same pronunciation meaning "a minister of state."

## *Love Suicide at Amijima*

ransom her, that's a different matter. It must be that 'Bondless Tahei,' who, you remember, behaved so outrageously the other night and whom I trampled on. The fellow has neither wife nor family. He can draw money freely from his native place Itami, and, but for my rivalry, he would long ago have ransomed her. Happy to find his opportunity come at last, I'm sure it's he who has arranged for her ransom. At all events I have nothing to do with the matter."

At this O-San recovered her good humour.

"Good-natured woman I may be, mother," she said, "but that's no reason why I should side with my husband ransoming a tea-house woman. It's the real truth he is speaking; of that I feel sure."

These assurances set both aunt and nephew so much at ease that they clapped their hands for joy.

"I am relieved to hear you, Jihei," said the aunt, "but about such matters one cannot be too careful. To dispel any remaining doubts that my husband may retain I should like to have it in the form of a sworn statement. Do you consent?"

"Most certainly. I am ready to write a thousand such."

"I rejoice to hear you say so," said Magoémon, producing a sheet of paper from his bosom. "You see, this is *Kumano-Goō*<sup>22</sup> paper, I bought it on the way here. Please write your statement upon it."

Jihei took the paper and forthwith wrote down a vow to the effect that he had broken with and given up Koharu, and that, should his vow prove false, might he be punished by the Gods Bonten and Taishaku, by the Four Great Elements<sup>23</sup> and by all the other Gods and all the Buddhas.

<sup>22</sup>In early days the Kumano Shrine of Kumano in the province of Kii produced sacred papers for the writing of solemn vows. One side of such a paper was blank, the other side bore the sacred seal. On the seal were represented many sacred crows, messengers of the Kumano God—hence the paper's name *Kumano Goō no Muragarasu*, that is "The Village Crows of Bull-King (another name for Buddha) at Kumano." The papers were on sale throughout Japan.

<sup>23</sup>Earth, water, fire and wind; which, according to a Buddhist scripture, are the elements of all things.

## Chikamatsu

This he signed and sealed with blood drawn from his forefinger and then handed it to his brother.

“Thank you, mother and brother,” cried O-San joyfully, now I am indeed reassured, This is the first time my husband has ever written such a solemn undertaking since we had children. You should both of you be happy.”

“Excellent, my daughter. Thus resolved, Jihei is sure henceforth to behave steadily and his business consequently to prosper. It is solely for Jihei’s good and for the sake of the grandchildren that his relatives put themselves out about him. Let us be off now, Magoémon, for I should like to get home as soon as possible to reassure my husband. Good bye, O-San, take good care of the children. Now the weather is cold you don’t want them to catch a chill. Surely this happy settlement is due to our Ten Nights’ prayers to Buddha. Let me make a prayer of thanksgiving now. Namu Amida Buddha.”

The pair made off, cheerful enough in the bliss of ignorance.

No sooner had he seen them off the premises than Jihei retraced his steps. No sooner recrossed the threshold than, lying down at the *kotatsu*, he dived under the quilt. Alas! Had he not yet forgotten Sonézaki? O-San wonderingly approached him and, putting aside the quilt, found him weeping so bitterly that the tears rained thickly upon the pillow. She raised him to a sitting posture against the frame of the *kotatsu*. “It is too much,” she said gazing intently into his face. “If you are so reluctant to part from her why write a vow? Since the midmost day of the Boar,<sup>24</sup> in October the year before last, when we lay down here together to celebrate the opening of the *kotatsu*, you have left my bed solitary. That is two years ago. Is there an ogre or serpent in my bosom that you should treat me thus? Only through my brother-in-law and mother’s mediation have you been restored to me, and I was looking forward to talking with you to-night in bed. But alas! my expectations have already vanished in a moment. How cruel and cold-hearted you are! If you regret her as much as all that you may weep

<sup>24</sup>There are in a month three days of the Boar. O-San means the second day.

## *Love Suicide at Amijima*

and weep as much as you choose. May your tears flow down the Shijimi River and Koharu drink them, heartless wretch that you are!"

So saying she clung to him with lowered face and commenced to wail.

"Don't cry, O-San dear," said Jihei wiping away his tears.

If the tears of sorrow came out of the eye and the tears of mortification out of the ear you might see into my mind without my pleading; but all tears coming out of the eye and being of the same colour it is only natural that you should not see into my mind. I have no longing after that woman, that beast in human form. You remember my enemy, 'Bondless Tahei,' who had lots of money but neither wife nor family and some time ago was bent upon ransoming Koharu? She rejected his offer and vowed to me, 'Have no fears, my dear; should our relations be severed so that I couldn't wed you, I would none the less refuse to be ransomed by Tahei; and should my master hand me over to him for money I would kill myself.' Over and over again she repeated this vow to me, yet see how it is, ten days have barely passed ere she consents to being ransomed by Tahei. My heart no longer yearns after that beast of a woman, but, for all that, the slanderous Tahei is sure to spread the story all over Osaka, 'Reduced to beggary, Jihei couldn't afford to ransom Koharu,' thus humiliating me and discrediting me with the wholesale dealers. This thought allows me no peace; I am thrown into a passion by it. The tears I shed now are more than mere hot tears or tears of blood, they are as of red-hot iron."

He sank upon his face and burst into bitter tears. O-San was astonished. A thought came to her.

"If this be so, Koharu will kill herself."

"No, ah, no. Though clever you are as a respectable wife, you know nothing of people in her station of life. Why should such a liar kill herself? She would be more likely to cauterize herself with moxa and take medicine for her health."

"You do not know her. I intended to keep the truth from you to my life's end, but now, fearing lest concealment should lead to such a tragedy, I will disclose my secret. Koharu Dono has not an atom of untruthfulness in her. It was through a trick of mine that you and Koharu were induced to

*Chikamatsu*

break with each other. When I saw that you had lost your head about her and were likely to commit suicide with her, I was overcome with grief. In desperation I wrote to her, beseeching her to sympathize with me and break with you, even at the cost of her love, and thus save you from so rash an act. Touched by my prayer she returned me a kind letter saying, that though you were her dearest lover, more precious to her than life, yet her sense of duty toward me and her sympathy compelled her to give you up. See, I carry her letter in the amulet case. Why suppose that such a woman should break her vow and shamelessly wed Tahei? Woman is a constant creature and will not readily change her mind. Koharu will surely kill herself. She will die. How terrible! Come now, save her from death! You must, my husband."

"Then a letter from an unknown woman," returned the astonished Jihei, "which my brother found among the written vows restored me by Koharu, was the note you had written her. That must be so, mustn't it? If so, Koharu must die."

"Die she must. The pity of it! Should she die my duty toward her would be unfulfilled. Please go and stop her."

Bitterly weeping she clung to Jihei.

"So be it... but what shall I do? It will mean that I must pay at least half her ransom as earnest money. In order to ensure that Koharu live on in this world it is necessary forthwith to pay one hundred and fifty *ryō*. Could I raise so much to-day? No, not though I be soundly beaten."

"You exaggerate. If that amount be sufficient nothing can be easier." Opening a small drawer of the *tansu*<sup>25</sup> she produced a bag and shook a packet out of it. Jihei took it up and said wonderingly, "That's money; as much as eighty *ryō*. How have you raised this?"

"I will tell you some other time. This money was intended for the settlement of the paper account, due on the seventeenth. You can, however, use it for this affair. Be at your ease about the account; I will consult with your brother and manage somehow."

<sup>25</sup>A chest of drawers.



## *Love Suicide at Amijima*

She now turned to the large drawers and produced her own and the children's garments – some fifteen sets of beautiful silk clothes containing her best finery – and wrapped them in a *furoshiki*.<sup>26</sup>

"I think you could raise at least seventy *ryō* on these clothes. I and the children can get along without finery; but with a man public esteem is everything. So I ask you to take this money and to raise the rest on these clothes, and thus save Koharu from death and keep up your reputation against Tahei."

Jihei, who all this time had been sobbing face to earth, said, "When I have prevented her death by paying the earnest money and thus ransoming her, shall I keep her outside the house? For if I admit her to this house what will you do?"

Before this unlooked-for interrogation O-San was at her wit's end. "Well, we must see. Perhaps I will turn nurse to our children, kitchen-maid or an *inkyō*."<sup>27</sup> She burst into a sudden wail and sat down.

"Ah, no, that's impossible. Even though I should not be visited by my parents' chastisement, Heaven's chastisement and the Buddha's and the Gods' chastisement, yet the chastisement of the knowledge of what I inflicted on you would suffice to make my future life unhappy. I beg your forgiveness, dear wife."

He stretched his hands toward O-San.

"That is too much. Why should you supplicate me? A wife should do everything in her power for her husband. I have pawned almost all my clothes to meet the bills of the wholesale paper merchants so that my *tansu* is now empty, but I do not regret it. The Koharu affair is urgent. You have no time to lose. Come, make haste and change your clothes and be off with a pleasant smile. Make haste now."

His wife assisting him, Jihei dressed himself in fine silk clothes and assumed a sword of medium length ornamented with gold which none but God could tell would be stained with the blood of Koharu this very night. Accompanied by Sangorō carrying the package of clothes upon his back,

<sup>26</sup>A square piece of cloth used to wrap a parcel in.

<sup>27</sup>A person retired from active life, or a hanger-on.

*Chikamatsu*

and bearing the money in person, Jihei was about to step out of doors when who should appear but his father-in-law Gozaémon, fur hood in hand, asking, "Is Jihei in?"

"Ah! exclaimed Jihei and O-San in bewilderment, "unlucky meet... welcome in."

The old man snatched the package from the boy's back, abruptly sat down and spoke with asperity:

"Sit down, woman. Son-in-law, you cut a fine figure clad in finery and swaggering about with a sword. One would take you for a rakish millionaire, not a paper dealer at all. You are off to Sonézaki, I suppose: very conscientious of you indeed. You evidently have no need of a wife. Divorce O San; I have come to take her back."

Jihei was speechless with confusion.

"Father," said O-San softly, "how brave of you to venture out to-day in spite of the cold weather. Do take a sip of tea!" She proffered her father a cup of tea and continued, "Not long ago mother and Magoémon Sama called and at their earnest entreaties my husband repented of his conduct and, shedding hot tears, wrote a vow to the effect that he was giving up Koharu. That paper he handed to mother. Haven't you seen it yet?"

"Is this what you mean by a vow?" exclaimed Gozaémon producing a paper from his bosom. "A foolish prodigal writes vows everywhere and on every occasion. Remembering this, I regarded the paper with doubt, and my doubt I am sorry to say has been justified. How shamefully, Jihei, you have sworn by Bonten and Taishaku! You would do better to write a letter of divorce than a vow!"

So saying he tore the paper to pieces and scattered the remains on the floor. Stupefied, the pair regarded each other without speech. A short pause followed. Then Jihei bent his forehead to the ground.

"Father-in-law," said he, "your anger is quite reasonable. I can find no word of excuse for myself, but, of your mercy, permit me to continue as O-San's husband. So much am I indebted to O-San that, even if I should become a beggar or an outcast obliged to live on the leavings of food bestowed by others, yet should I be sure to treat O-San with respect and not to let her suffer whatever I might suffer. The reason will become

## *Love Suicide at Amijima*

known to you in course of time if I work diligently to restore my property. Until that day please overlook my past and permit me to continue as O-San's husband. Such is my entreaty."

Jiheï burst into tears and pressed his face against the mat.

"Nonsense!" roared Gozaémon. "How can O-San be an outcast's wife? Come, write a letter of divorce and be quick about it. I will count the tools and clothes O-San brought at her marriage and affix the seal<sup>28</sup> to them."

He made as if to advance to the chest-of-drawers, but O-San hurriedly barred his way, crying, "Don't, father, my clothes are all right. You need not count them."

Gozaémon thrust her away, pulled open a drawer and to his great surprise found it empty. He tried another and another, but the result was the same. Next he examined the wicker basket, the long chest and the clothes box, but not a rag was to be found in them. The old man's eyes grew furious, while the young pair withered in shame and humiliation.

"I am doubtful about this *furoshiki*," said Gozaémon. He untied the wrapper and put the clothes to disorder. "Fool! You intended to pawn these, didn't you? Upon my word, Jihei, you are a beast and not a man thus to strip your wife and children to their skins and go courting a courtesan on the proceeds! Pickpocket! Robber! My wife is aunt to you, but I am no kin of yours. There's no reason why I should suffer loss on your account. I will regain through Magoémon everything belonging to O-San. Come, write a letter of divorce and be quick about it."

Against these imputations Jihei found no word of defence. At last he said: "It isn't with a pen that I will write a letter of divorce. See!" He laid his hand upon his sword-hilt. "Farewell, O-San."

O-San seized his sword and clung to him.

"Father," she pleaded between her sobs, "why don't you heed my husband's words? Selfish you are and hard-hearted. Though Jihei Dono is

<sup>28</sup>To seal clothes means to attach to them a piece of paper with a seal upon it, to prevent possible substitution of other clothes in their place.

*Chikamatsu*

no kin of yours, yet my children are your grandchildren. Have you no feeling for them: I will not accept a letter of divorce."

"So be it!" exclaimed the old man, seizing O-San by the hand. "I require no letter of divorce. Woman, come with me."

"I will not go," said O-San, snatching her hand away. "I don't give him up, nor does he give me up, and would you have your daughter wash her dirty linen in public by daylight?"

"And why not?" inquired Gozaémon, seizing O-San's hand again. "I fully intend to take you back. And, what is more, to publish the fact throughout the entire neighbourhood."

Then she shook him off, but, once more captured, she slipped, and her toes happening to touch the sleeping children they awoke and tearfully reproached their grandfather.

"Grandpapa, why do you take away our dear mummie? Without mummie whom shall we have to sleep with?"

"Ah, my children, not one day since you were born have I failed to sleep between you. Now I must go to grandpapa's. So, from to-night, sleep with your papa, my darlings. Husband dear, never forget to see that the little ones take their Kuwayama pills<sup>29</sup> every morning before breakfast. Ah, how miserable I am!

Dragged away by Gozaémon, O-San departed reluctantly and in tears, leaving the sorrow-stricken children. Upon the face of Jihei came an expression of contrition and great despair as he followed father and daughter with his eyes.

<sup>29</sup>Pills for children: a patent medicine sold at Osaka. Its method of preparation, a Korean secret, was introduced into Japan by Kuwayama, a retainer of Taikō.

### III

The small hours were come at Sonézaki; not a soul was astir; the stillness was unbroken save by the faint, eerie murmur of the Shijimi River. The moon of mid October shone with such brilliancy as to dim the sign-lantern of the tea-house Yamato-ya.

Passed the fire-watchman, beating his clappers and crying in sleepy tones, "Have a care! Have a care!" and the very sound of the clappers seemed to have something sleepy in its monotony. He had hardly passed when a tea-house maid and a palanquin arrived before the Yamato-ya. The maid opened the door and vanished within to be faintly audible, saying, "I have come from the Kinokuni-ya with a palanquin to bring Koharu San home." After a brief colloquy she emerged and addressed the bearers:

"Koharu Sama will rest here the night. You will be wanted no more.... Ah, there's something else I'd forgotten to say. Madame, please take special care of Koharu Sama. Now that the ransom for her has been received from Tahei Sama she is an important charge. Please do not let her drink too much." Having said this she made off, the bearers having preceded her.

The night was so far advanced that even the tea-kettle of the tea-house was now at rest and the dim beam of a solitary lamp set by the kettle, streaming through a chink of the doors, glittered upon the frost that littered the street.

"It's still some time till dawn," the proprietor's voice was heard saying, "I had therefore better let my servant see you to your door. Ho! Jihei Sama is going home. Wake Koharu Sama up. Come, call her!"

"There is no need for that, thank you, Dembei," remarked Jihei, throwing open a side door and stepping out. "Don't let Koharu know. If she knew I should be detained until dawn. I am taking advantage of her present deep sleep to steal away. When the sun is well up wake her and let her go home. When I get home I shall go up to Kyoto to do some buying. Since the transactions will be important, it is not at all certain whether I

*Chikamatsu*

shall be able to get home precisely by the settlement day. So, from the money I handed you just now, please subtract my dues to you; pay eight *ryō* to the Kawachiya, due to them for last month's moon-viewing party; give a silver coin to Saiyetsubō as my contribution to the fund for a family Buddhist altar which he has bought. Let me see, is there anything else? Ah, yes... give five pieces of silver as a tip to Isoichi the buffoon. That's all. Good night, Dembei. I'll call again on my return from Kyoto."

He took two or three steps and then returned.

"One moment, I've forgotten my sword. Well, Dembei, a merchant takes such a piece of forgetfulness easily enough; a samurai would, I suppose, commit *seppuku*."<sup>30</sup>

"It was wrong of me to have forgotten about your sword, sir, since it was I who took it in charge. Pray forgive me. Here it is, all complete with its *kogatana*."<sup>31</sup>

"Thus armed," said Jihei, adjusting the sword in his dress, "I am already beyond the reach of harm. Good night again.

And with this parting Jihei made off.

"A safe journey to you; good night, sir."

The guest departed; the latch descended with a click; and there was universal silence as before.

Jihei, who had only made as if to go away, soon stealthily retraced his steps and, clinging to the door of the Yamato-ya, was breathlessly peeping in when, to his consternation, he descried a figure drawing near. Hurriedly he crossed to the opposite house and hid himself in shadow until the unsuspecting newcomer should have passed by. It was Magoémon, flour merchant, the mill of whose mind was still grinding chaff on account of his brother.<sup>32</sup> Sangorō followed, bearing Kantarō on his back.

<sup>30</sup>The samurai was wont to call his sword his soul. If therefore he forgot his sword he would be like to kill himself for very shame.

<sup>31</sup>The long slender knife worn in the sword-sheath.

<sup>32</sup>A play upon words.

*Love Suicide at Amijima*

At the sight of the sign-lantern he hastened to the door of the Yamato-ya.

"Yamato-ya San," said he knocking on the door, "Kamiya Jihei is within, isn't he? I wish to see him a moment."

Jihei started at the voice, but kept still.

"Jihei Sama's not here," a sleepy male voice answered from within. "He left not long ago, saying that he was going up to Kyoto."

No further exchange ensued. Magoémon burst into tears.

"That's strange," he communed with himself. "If such is indeed the case I ought to have met him on my way hither. Gone to Kyoto has he? I don't see why. I begin to fear. I wonder if he has gone with Koharu."

His head sank upon his breast. Once again he struck upon the door.

"Who's that, at this time of night? We're all abed, I tell you!"

"I'm sorry to disturb you but I must ask you another question. Has Koharu Dono of the Kinokuni-ya, left yet? Hasn't she gone with Jihei?"

"No, Koharu Dono is asleep upstairs."

"Now I feel easy," said Magoémon. "There's no fear of his committing suicide with the woman. I wonder where he's hiding now, giving us such anguish. Surely he cannot realize how all his family and relatives are consumed with fear and pain. Afraid that his father-in-law's reproaches may drive him to rashness I have brought Kantarō with me as an inducement to make him abandon any silly project on which he may be bent. I have searched and searched for him so long and all in vain. I wonder why 'tis so?"

This soliloquy was audible to Jihei in his hiding-place a few steps away. He held his breath and wept in silence.

"Now, Sangorō, don't you know any other place where the fool goes every night?"

"I do indeed," answered the idiot, who took the title for himself, "but I cannot tell you for shame."

"You know? Where? Come, tell me."

"Don't find fault with me when I have told you. The place I visit each night all in a hurry is a flash-house at Ichinokawa."

## *Chikamatsu*

“You fool! What’s that got to do with the matter in hand? Well, let’s search the by-street. Don’t let Kantarō catch cold, poor child. How cold you must be getting, and all because of good-for-nothing papa. The cold is all you suffer now; may it be the worst that happens to you on this adventure.”

Behind Magoémon’s scorn, compassion was to be felt and thus he made his way toward the by-street<sup>33</sup> with the idiot.

When his brother had retreated to some distance Jihei ran out of his hiding-place to stand on tip-toe and cast a longing eye after the receding figure.

“How kind you are, my brother!” he whispered to himself. “You cannot suffer this wretch, guilty of the Ten Sins<sup>34</sup> though he be, to go to death, but follow him to the last. What mercy is yours!”

Again and again, clapping his hands, he made obeisance to the retreating figure.

“I entreat your further mercy. Pray look after my children.”

Overcome by tears, he could speak no more; but, after a short pause, added softly, “Let me give way to no regrets, now that I am resolved to die. Koharu awaits me.”

Advancing to the side-door of the Yamato-ya he peeped through the chink, when a dim figure caught his eye. Surely it must be Koharu. He coughed softly as a signal that he was waiting without, but, to his terror, all the answer he got was the sudden click-clack! click-clack! of a pair of clappers. It was the watchman returning from his round who, plying his clappers, cried out, “Have a care! Have a care!”

The startled Jihei hid himself once more to let the man go by; and then again stood before the door which, at this moment, began stealthily to open from within.

<sup>33</sup>There is a triple play upon words here in the original connected with the use of the word back: “at the back of Magoémon’s scorn... a back-ground of compassion... to the back-street.”

<sup>34</sup>The “Ten Sins” according to Buddhist scriptures are:—Killing, theft, adultery, idle talk, duplicity, abuse, adorned speech, greed, wrath and prejudice.



## *Love Suicide at Amijima*

“Koharu?”

“Is it you waiting there, Jihei Sama? I want to join you quickly.”

The more impatiently she essayed to slide the door open the harder she found the operation. Her purpose was to open it silently, but the door, rolling on its wheels, gave an alarming creak. She shrank back in despair. Jihei aided her, but since his hand shook with fear little progress was made. Little by little the door began to slide away – a quarter of an inch, half an inch, an inch. “Hell an inch ahead” was in store for them, yet they did their best in “the absence of the ogre.”<sup>35</sup> At last to their joy and relief Koharu succeeded in stealing out.

Hand in hand the desperate lovers walked like persons in a trance until they had put the place of her bondage behind them. Then they came to a standstill, wondering which direction to take. Should they proceed north or south, east or west? After considerable hesitation they decided to go opposite<sup>36</sup> the direction of the moon borne upon the current of the Shijimi River. They continued walking east.

Even as the manuscript of the *nō* play is written in the Konoé<sup>37</sup> style and *yarōbōshi*<sup>38</sup> are ever of a light purple, so frequenters of houses of ill-fame are doomed to love suicide.

Such could not but be Jihei’s fate. Dying to-night with his love, tomorrow the news would be spread over the world; illustrated pamphlets containing a detailed account of the tragedy – pamphlets printed on just such paper as he himself was accustomed to deal in – would publish far and wide a posthumous shame and ignominy. True, he expected this; once

<sup>35</sup>These two phrases are popular sayings. “Hell an inch ahead” means any peril may occur at any moment.” Here of course it implies that the pair must suffer the agonies of death in a few minutes. “The absence of the ogre” here implies the absence of any observer.

<sup>36</sup>That is upstream.

<sup>37</sup>The Konoé style: a style of calligraphy originated by Konoé Nobumoto, a Court noble.

<sup>38</sup>Yarōbōshi: the headgear of actors playing female parts.

## Chikamatsu

grasped by the icy hand of death, however, that hand he could not shake off.

“On this fifteenth night of October,” said Jihei to Koharu as they went forward, “the moon shines brightly enough, yet not brightly enough to illumine the darkness of our minds. This frost which now covers the ground and which will vanish with to-morrow’s light, how long-lived is it compared to the brief span of our love? And not less swiftly than the shining water of the Shimizu River flows away, will the sweet odour that is about our bodies dissolve upon the air. This Tenjin Bridge which now we cross takes its name from the God Tenjin who, when a man, Kwan Shōjō, was exiled to Kyūshū. So loth was he to part from a plum-tree in his garden that he composed an ode addressed to it; whereon the tree, affected by his verses, took one night’s wing through the air to the place of his exile. Shame is it that I, born the vassal of so mighty a God, am obliged to kill you and myself. This doom is come on us because I have not sense and judgment enough to fill a *shijimi* shell. Short our lives have been, short as an autumn day, short as Shijimi Bridge itself. Ah, grief! Our vow to live together till grey had come into the hair, how vain it was: before there has been three years’ joy between us, we must die by our own hands. This night, this very night, you who are but nineteen and I but twenty-eight! A cruel end is ours! ... A weary way our walking has been! Here stand we already on Hades’ path.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Koharu tremulously, clinging close to Jihei, “is this already Hades’ path?”

Sadly the pair looked upon each other, yet saw each other but for a moment, their eyes being dimmed with tears. For very agony because of the grief, and what was to come upon his wife and children, Jihei’s heart was heavy; but not a sign betrayed it. By walking northward he might have caught a glimpse of his house, but he had been careful to take the southern road. Now, after crossing another bridge, they found themselves beside the landing-place of the Yodo River, which is called Hachikenya. Fearful of the arrival of the ferry from Fushimi, they pushed on till they came to the spot where the Yamato River flows into the Yodo. Thinking over “the affinity of

## *Love Suicide at Amijima*

water and fish," Jihei found some consolation in the reflection that, to the very last moment, they could enjoy a greater affinity,

"I have been wrong!" Jihei exclaimed. "What have I to regret? Not in this world can we wed each other, but remember, not only in the next world shall we be husband and wife, but also in the world beyond, in the world beyond that, and so further and ever further. By virtue of the holy Fumombon in the *Hokékyō* Scripture, of which I have made one transcription<sup>39</sup> every summer, we shall doubtless be mounted on the jewelled dais in paradise. When we have thus become Buddhas and have attained the power of saving human souls, let us protect those who inhabit the house of 'I die daily,'<sup>40</sup> that never may they commit suicide for love's sake."

Shallow was his brain who sought to console himself by such foolishness. Now faint light began beyond the mountain peaks. In the creek of Noda a mist was rising the bells of temples began to toll. At the sound, Jihei said, "Koharu, we can hesitate no longer. Come, let us on to death." Counting their beads, that were bedewed with tears, the couple reached the sluice-gate of a rivulet running by the bamboo grove of the Daichōji Temple at Amijima, the spot he had selected for their suicide.

"Dear," said Jihei, "wheresoever we may wander we can find no spot appointed as man's place of death, therefore let us make this our place of death." He took Koharu by the hand and kneeled down upon the ground.

"You speak true, Jihei Sama," she said, leaning upon him in tears, "but this thought came to me as we walked. Should it be reported 'Face against face, side by side, Jihei and Koharu were found dead' what would O-San Sama think of me? Surely she would say in anger, 'Is not that the way of a faithless wanton to have broken her vow to leave my husband and to have no share in his death and yet to have enticed him to commit suicide beside her. A liar to the end!' I dread O-San's scorn, jealousy and

<sup>39</sup>In olden times pious priests wrote during the three summer months a copy of the Fumombon, a book of the *Hokékyō* Scripture. This godly act was called *gegaki* or "summer writing." Laymen often followed the priests' example.

<sup>40</sup>Literally, the men and women of the demi-monde quarter.

*Chikamatsu*

resentment more than the reproaches of thousands of others. This alone of all things would trouble my peace in the next world. Therefore kill me here and do you do the deed elsewhere.”

“Not I! O-San was taken from me and divorced by her father’s act. She and I are now strangers. I owe her no duty as a divorced wife. Have I not this moment declared we shall be husband and wife in the several worlds to come? Who then will censure us or who feel jealous of us, if side by side we die?”

“But on whose account was she divorced? Why would you not have us die upon different spots? Do our bodies descend together to Hades? Albeit we die upon different spots and what though our bodies be picked dry by kites and crows, yet let our souls bear each other company and take their flight, wing by wing, to hell or to paradise, or hell or paradise it be.” She sank to the ground and wept bitterly.

“Ah, yes, my dear, yes. Our bodies are compact of earth, water, fire and wind and when we die are rendered back to nothing. Here will I prove to you that never in the Five Existences, nay, in the Seven Existences, shall our souls be separate.”

Suddenly he unsheathed his sword and severed a lock of his jet-black hair. “See, Koharu, while this hair remained uncut I was O-San’s husband, known to men as Kamiya Jihei; now that it is cut I stand up a bonze<sup>41</sup> – a priest who has put the world by and has nor wife nor child nor treasure. I am O-San’s husband no longer, nor does any duty bind you to her.”

“What joy is mine!” said the girl. And, taking up the sword, she shore away her inky locks ordered in the fair style of Shimada.

“A nun you are now and have forsaken the world,” said Jihei. “Neither is any more bound by duty to O-San. We may die together where we please, and it were well perhaps to die on different spots according as you have wished – one may be upon a mountain and the other under a river. Yes, let us take it that this ground above the sluice-gate is a mountain. Your place of death it may be, even as this stream may be mine.

<sup>41</sup>The head of a Buddhist priest is shaven. In former days a layman cut off his hair in order to enter the priesthood.

## *Love Suicide at Amijima*

Thus, though we die upon the same point of time, manner and spot shall be different, that thus we may declare our sympathy with O-San. Give me your waist band."

She handed him her girdle of light purple. He fastened it to the crossbar of the sluice-gate and tying its ends made a loop. Watching what he did she was seized with sudden terror.

"Is that your way? Ah, horror! Since apart we must die but little longer can I enjoy you, come hither" – they grasped each other's hands – "the point of the sword is swift and pains not, what pain must be yours if so you hang! I grieve for you."

"Words! Words! Where lies the difference, since pain must be, between the silk or steel about the throat? Let not such idleness vex your last moments. Do rather what is meet. Cast your eyes in worship toward the light of Buddha,<sup>42</sup> sloping westward. Keep constant your eyes upon it. Never forget the West. If aught remains unsaid, say it before you go."

"Nothing. But are you not troubled at thought of your two children?"

"My children! My children! You make me weep again. I see them sleeping soundly, happy in ignorance that their father is about to die. Fair babes, I cannot forget you!"

He bowed his head. The voices of the crows, risen in a cloud that moment from the tree-tops, cried so mournfully that it seemed they pitied the poor pair.

"Hark to the crows, Koharu. These are they who conduct us to Hades. Is it not spoken that whenever a vow of fidelity is written on the back of a Goō paper three crows of Kumano die upon the mountain. Many copies of our vow have been written – one copy at the beginning of each month – many a crow must we have slain. The crows which used to cry '*Kawai! Kawai!*' (my darlings! my darlings!) to-night seem to cry '*Mukui! Mukui!*' (Retribution! Retribution!) To whom is this retribution for sin due?"

<sup>42</sup>The Pure Land or paradise, *Saihō-Mida-no-Jōdo*, that is "Mida's Pure Land in the West," is held by Buddhists to exist over the western edge of the world and the moon is held to be the halo of Buddha.

*Chikamatsu*

Do I not know it—for me only, me only, are you to suffer the agonies of death. Forgive me now this thing.”

“No. Myself I do it for my own self’s sake.”

She clung to him with sobs. The cold wind froze the tears that Jihei had shed among the locks upon her temples.

Behind them the booming of the bell in the Daichōji Temple proclaimed the break of day. Time was their foe. Jihei arose.

“Let us leave,” said he, “no trace of tears upon our dead faces.”

“I shall not.”

Each forced a smile. Jihei raised the sword, but, frost-benumbed, his hand trembled and suddenly he grew dizzy. He could not do the deed.

“I cannot. Why haste?”

“Be quick. Stay not.”

Courage struck out to him from her and the prayer breathed upon the wind from the temple strengthened him to say “*Namu Amida Buddha*”.

Steel sank in throat. He pressed her down. Leaning backward she writhed in terrible agonies. Jihei perceived the stroke had failed. It smote his sight. He braced himself and thrust till flesh met sword-guard. One moment, and she ceased to breathe—her soul flitting away like the dream at dawn that is suddenly broken. He set the corpse upon its right side with the head to the north and the face turned west, as the rites of the Lord Buddha prescribe, and covered it with his *haori*. Then he brushed away his tears, picked up the girdle, set his head within its loop and, upon the wind-borne sound of that passage in the scripture which runs “*Uen muen naishi hōkai byōdō riyaku*” (those related or unrelated to us—all in the universe shall alike be saved), he said, “May we two come to rebirth together within the lotus.<sup>43</sup> *Namu Amida Buddha*,” and hanged himself in the stream. A few moments’ agonies were his and then his soul dissolved even as the morning dew.

<sup>43</sup>This literal rendering of the Buddhist expression *Ichiren takushō* signifies “May we enjoy perpetual bliss together in paradise.”

### *Love Suicide at Amijima*

Fishermen, going out to their work under the dawn, descrying the corpses, cried in consternation, "Hither! There is death in this place. A double suicide for love!"

The melancholy news was swift in spreading; many an eye there was filled with tears at telling of "The Double Suicide at Amijima".