

Chikamatsu
The Courier For Hades
(*Meido no Hikyaku*)

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I

In Awajimachi, a thriving street in the heart of the city of Osaka, stood a post-distributing office which enjoyed a good reputation and was called Kaméya. Day and night the entire establishment busied itself putting up and untying packets, collecting and distributing letters, and entering up accounts. A brisk interchange was carried on with all parts of Japan. Thousands of ryō passed through the office every day for all the world as if coins of gold and silver had taken to themselves wings. Four years previous to the opening of our story Chūbei, a young man of four and twenty, had been adopted as heir by the elderly widow Myōkan and was now master of the house. The son of a rich farmer in the province of Yamato, he had brought with him a considerable sum of money which had formed as it were a portion. Thanks to the guardianship of Myōkan the young man was now thoroughly versed in all the ramifications of the business, to such an extent in fact that he had several times been to Yedo in connection with the affairs of this business. In the tea ceremony he was an adept. He was no mean composer of *haiku*¹ odes. He could play a good game of chess or backgammon, wrote a graceful style of calligraphy and could down his few glasses of *saké*² with the best. For the rest, Chūbei was an uncommonly handsome young man and one who exhibited a certain

¹The shortest form of Japanese verse, consisting of seventeen syllables.

²Moderate drinking, or perhaps we may say immoderate drinking, was at this period considered, as indeed it was considered in England in the eighteenth century, one of the properest accomplishments of a gentleman.

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grace of deportment but rarely observed in a country-bred youth. It was now some time since he had taken to visiting the pleasure quarter of Shimmachi. Every evening, as soon as it turned dark, he bent his steps thither, having first carefully evaded the eye of his foster-mother.

Late one afternoon, when the couriers had returned from their errands and letters were being franked, an attendant of a *yashiki*³ samurai, a constant customer, made his appearance.

“Is Chūbei at home?”

“So it is Jinnai Sama, is it inquired one of the clerks courteously. “Chūbei himself is out, but should you want something sent down to Yedo be so good as to give me instructions. Now, maids, bring the honoured guest some tea.”

“It’s nothing to be sent down,” returned the henchman, knitting his brows. “We have received a letter from our young master staying at Yedo. I will read it you.” He opened and read as follows: “I will send you three hundred *ryō* by the post of the second of next month. The money will await you at the post-distributing office Kaméya on the ninth or tenth of next month. You are requested to arrange the matter I told you of the other day. I enclose a receipt which you are to hand over to Kaméya when you receive the remittance.’ So runs his letter. But as the money hasn’t reached us yet we can’t carry out his instructions. Why are you so behindhand?”

Your reproaches are well-founded, sir. But prolonged rains have swollen the rivers and the couriers are consequently delayed. Not only has your money not arrived, but we ourselves are suffering pecuniary loss. Suppose robbers make off with some thousands of *ryō* or the couriers yield to a sudden temptation, yet you need not be troubled. The guild of the eighteen post-houses will reimburse you and you will suffer not the least loss.”

No sooner had he spoken these words than the messenger answered haughtily, “That goes without saying. You needn’t stress that aspect. Mind

³Every clan had a granary establishment in Osaka, that the clan might sell the tribute rice collected from farmers. Such establishments were known as *kurayashiki*, or more simply as *yashiki*.

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this, however, should our master suffer loss, Chūbei's head will not remain long on his shoulders. I have come, as I told you just now, because your delay prevents the satisfactory conclusion of our master's affair. Be so good as immediately to send a courier to meet those from Yedo and bring us the money with all possible despatch."

He spoke in a dubious⁴ dialect and with an arrogance guaranteed by the authority of his sword, ornamented with dubious silver, then strutted away. Hardly had he turned his back when a second messenger arrived.

"I come as messenger," he announced haughtily, "from Tambaya Hachiémon at Nakanoshima. My master has received notice of a remittance from the wholesale rice merchant at Kobunachō, Yedo, but has not yet received the money from you. He wrote to you the other day, but as yet you have deigned to make no answer. Then he sent you a special messenger, but on this pretext or that you evaded making a reply. My master is curious as to when you will send him the money. He therefore commands me to spare no pains to obtain the money from you to-day. I will give you this note in exchange for the money. Come, hand it over."

The loyal-hearted chief clerk, Ihei, replied composedly: "Now, sir, you do not mean to say that Hachiémon Sama sends us as peremptory a message as all that! Surely you must know our firm always holds in trust thousands of *ryō* belonging to other people and is at home anywhere on the three hundred mile route between Osaka and Yedo. Your master is not our sole customer. Naturally enough delay in the delivery of remittances occasionally occurs. My master may return at any moment. When he does so we will send you a reply. Pray do not make such an ado about so small a sum as fifty *ryō*."

Subdued by so summary a reply the messenger departed quietly. Myōkan, the widow, had overheard the above colloquy. Now, reluctantly

⁴The original contains a piece of word-play. The "dubious dialect" means the man makes use of a curious provincial dialect; "dubious silver" means that that which had the appearance of silver may in reality have been lead.

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enough, she left the *kotatsu*⁵ and came to the office. Wonderingly she looked at the clerks.

“How can this be?” she said. “It’s ten days and more ago that Hachiémon Sama’s money arrived. Why didn’t Chūbei deliver it, I wonder. I have heard you pressed for remittances two or three times this morning. Now, never since the days of my dead husband has this Kaméya been dunned for a penny. It’s never given trouble to the guild and indeed has got a name for itself as a model among the eighteen post-houses. Chūbei’s manner has been strange of late. Perhaps some of you have noticed it? The newcomers among you may not be aware of it, but he is not my true son. He is the only son of a rich farmer named Katsuki Magoémon of Ninokuchimura, a village in the province of Yamato. His father, who had lost his first wife, very much feared that the ill terms obtaining between Chūbei and his step-mother might drive Chūbei to a vicious life and therefore gave him to me as heir to this house. I have so far no fault to find with his manner of keeping house and his management of the business. I have however noticed that of late he is always restless and cannot attend as seriously as he might to business. I have wished very much to advise him, but have feared that he might regard me, a foster-mother, with much the same feelings he might a step-mother. Hoping that silence on my part may shame him out of his present mode of conduct, I refrain from lecturing him, but none the less I watch his behaviour. Before I could realize it Chūbei has grown so wasteful that he blows his nose with two or three expensive paper handkerchiefs at a time. My dead husband used to say, ‘A fellow who wastes handkerchiefs is a ne’er-do-well.’ When Chūbei goes out he takes three quires of paper handkerchiefs with him and when he gets in he hasn’t a sheet. I wonder how often he blows his nose. Even

⁵The *kotatsu* is a fireplace in the floor. A wooden frame shaped like a box is placed over this, the frame itself being covered with a large, thick quilt which confines the warmth. The body is thrust under the quilt while the user of the fireplace lies or squats upon the mats, which of course are never soiled by shoes or *geta* (wooden clogs resembling the cothurnae of Greek tragedy).

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though he is young and healthy, if he keeps on blowing his nose at that rate he will become sick."

Grumbling after this manner the old woman withdrew, whereon the clerks and shop-boys, taking pity on her, remarked, "We hope our master will soon be back."

The sun was sinking. Soon the office closed.

Chūbei, who had been to the pleasure quarter to enjoy sweet⁶ moments with his sweetheart Umégawa, returned as fast as his legs would carry him, his heart surcharged with sorrow and anxiety concerning the shifts necessitated by the cost of his pleasures and weighed down by the fear of his foster mother. A few steps from the door he halted, overcome with anxiety as to how he might have fared at home should Myōkan have got knowledge of any duns calling in his absence. Still he waited, hoping that one or other of his work-people would come out, from whom he might learn what had chanced. He peeped through the chinks of the closed door and observed the kitchen-maid O-Man about to go on a visit to a wine-shop. She was an unobliging woman; he would not get his information for nothing. He was still cudgelling his brains how to get round her when she stepped out all but on top of him. He took her firmly by the hand that held the wine-keg, whereon she cried, "Why, it's my master!"

"Quiet, my dear. I love you, and, as they say, 'the man in whose heart love finds place will surely show it in his face.' You noticed my manner toward you, didn't you? What a heartless creature you are to trouble me with those love-compelling looks of yours. Why not kill me straight out and have done with it!"

So saying, he made haste to embrace her with warmth, but she shook him off. "You're a pretty liar! Don't I perfectly well know you visit Shimmachi every day and flirt with pretty girls! Why should you cast a single glance at such a woman as myself? What a liar you are I"

"It's the truth," he returned, hastily embracing her again. "What have I to gain by telling you a lie? It's the truth I'm telling you."

⁶This is intended to be a word-play.

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“If you are speaking the truth, will you come to my room to-night?”

“Why not indeed? Thank you very much. By the by, there’s something I want to know.”

“It’ll be cosy listening to your questions in my room. Don’t fail to come. I’ll get ready and wait for you. Goodbye till to-night.”

So saying, she freed herself and ran off in a high good-humour. Baulked in his scheme, he stood blankly staring, when his eye was arrested by a man hurriedly approaching from the north. Alas it was Hachiémon of Nakanoshima. Did they meet, trouble were sure to arise. To avoid him he turned eastward, but the other cried, “Chūbei, don’t you attempt to give me the slip.”

“Hachiémon, I haven’t seen you for a long time. Yesterday, to-day, nay the day before yesterday I intended to send you a messenger, but something or other caused a delay. The weather’s turned very chilly, hasn’t it? How is your father’s lumbago and your mother’s toothache? You smell of *saké*; don’t drink too much. I’ll send you a messenger early to-morrow. I know where there’s a little lady⁷ waiting for you; let’s go on the spree one of these days, my dear chap.”

“Enough,” said Hachiémon gruffly. “I am not the fellow to be taken in by fair speeches. Isn’t conducting a post-house your business? Why don’t you send me the remittance of fifty *ryō* from Yedo? I can stand three or four days’ delay, but I’ll have you know that more than ten days have now passed. Friendship’s friendship and business is business. You charge a high price and your service should be on a par with it. To-day I sent a messenger to your office and some clerk or other of yours took upon himself to make him a sharp reply. Do you deal that way with all your customers? Are you having a little fun at Hachiémon’s expense? You should remember I am known as ‘the Boss’ in Kitahama, Utsubo, Nakanoshima and Temma. If you’re pleased to make fun of me, please do so, but you’re going to pay me that money to-day, or would you like me to

⁷A courtesan in Shimmachi is meant.

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report the matter to your guild? First of all, however, I am going to make a point of seeing your mother."

Hachiémon made as if to step in, but Chūbei intercepted him.

"My dear friend," he whispered, "pray forgive me. I most humbly crave your pardon. Be so good as to listen to one word of pleading, I beseech you."

"Fair words butter no parsnips," said Hachiémon with a stern look. "You may be able to get round Umégawa but you can't get round a man. If you have something real to say, say it at once."

"Should my mother overhear your words, even my death couldn't save my face. Please speak more softly, my dear friend. Do me this favour, if for once only." He burst into tears. "The truth is your money arrived a fortnight ago, but, as you are aware, Umégawa's guest from the country rivalled me owing to his possessing money, All I have is a wretched sum of two or three *ryō* which I lay my hands on when my mother and the clerks are not looking. Driven into a corner by my rival I was in despair on learning, to my great astonishment, that a conference concerning her ransom had already been held and that the bargain was about to be concluded. Umégawa was as much overwhelmed with grief as myself. We resolved upon double suicide. We laid the sword to our throats, but—it seemed our doom was not yet come—circumstances prevented our death. That night we separated in tears and on the following day, the twelfth of the month, your Yedo remittance arrived. Scarcely knowing what I did, I placed it in my bosom and, as in a trance, ran at full speed to Shimmachi. I argued and argued with Umégawa's master until I prevailed upon him to break his contract with the guest from the country and to consent to my ransoming her. I handed him the fifty *ryō* as earnest and succeeded in securing my sweetheart, For all this I am indebted to you, my good friend, and morning and evening I do you homage on this account. Of late, however, I have reflected that our friendship is no excuse for my embezzlement of your money. At the very moment when your demand overtook me I was regretting the deed and have been obliged to tell lie after lie so that even the first excuse I gave you was a lie. Quite naturally you give no credence to anything I now say, but in three or four days at

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latest other remittances are bound to arrive. I will make every effort to pay you the money. You shall not lose a *sen* through me. Were you to think of Chūbei as a man, you could not but be angry; I beg you, however, to tell yourself that you have given a dog its life, and so bring yourself to forgive me. Is it to be wondered that there are capital offenders when you consider circumstances such as mine? Should you press upon me now, no resource would be mine but theft. How does a man come to say the things I am saying now? Harder is it for me to speak this than to swallow a sword! Have pity on me."

Chūbei gave way to tears and Hachiémon, who in the ordinary course of events would have matched himself against an ogre, gave way to tears also.

"You have made a very clean breast of what it must have been hard to confess. Tambaya Hachiémon is a man. I pardon you and grant you grace. Do your best to pay me."

"Thank you," said Chūbei, shedding further tears as he fell on his knees, "I have had five⁸ parents, two fathers and three mothers, but the kindness of Hachiémon exceeds theirs. Never shall I forget your kindness."

"If such be your feelings I am satisfied. Well, we may be observed. We shall meet again."

Hachiémon was about to make off when the old woman's voice was heard within:⁹

"Is that Hachiémon Sama? Ask him in, Chūbei.

The hesitating Chūbei was perforce obliged to step within doors with his friend.

⁸*Hachi* of "Hachiémon" means eight. This is a play upon numerals. When Chūbei says he has had five parents he reckons as follows: by two fathers he means his real father and his foster-father; by three mothers he means his real mother, his step-mother and his foster-mother.

⁹The doors of a Japanese house in elder times were a lattice frame covered with thin paper. The conversation between persons without was thus often audible to persons within.

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“Good evening, sir,” said the old lady. Innocence and uprightness of heart spoke in her voice. “It’s natural enough that you should have sent a messenger and that you should now visit us in person. Come, my son, you know that this gentleman’s money has been here over ten days. Why this delay? Rack your brains honestly. If the package is delayed, the post-house can give no aid. What are you about? Come, hand the money to Hachiémon Sama at once.”

Her words put Chūbei in a quandary. Hachiémon came to his aid.

“Do not put yourself out, madam. Such a sum as fifty or sixty rya makes no difference whatever to Hachiémon’s purse. As I am even now on my way to Nagabori, I will call in again to-morrow or —”

“Certainly not. When we have your precious money in our keeping we cannot sleep at night for anxiety. Come, Chūbei, hand over the money at once.” Thus urged, Chūbei made answer, “As you will, mother,” and entered the closet. He looked round bewildered, but there was no money to lay his hands on. To keep up the deceit he turned the key in the lock of the *todana* or locker, empty as it was. At the squeak of the wards he sweat for very shame. Beside himself with despair he prayed the Gods to disclose to him some device. “Thanks be to the Gods,” he murmured, “here is a *binmizu-iré*¹⁰ in this comb box. My tutelary deity must be helping me.” Thrice he reverentially held the little vessel to his forehead, then, deftly wrapping it in excellent paper, inscribed upon the exterior in bold, black strokes the words “Fifty gold *ryō*.” Returning to the office he addressed Hachiémon.

“Here’s your money, Hachiémon Dono. You see I pay you on the spot, trusting that you will see your way out of your generosity to set my mother at ease. Pray receive it in the spirit in which it is given and reassure my mother. You needn’t open the packet. Content yourself with feeling it and making sure of the amount. I am sure you will consent to this composition, as L”

¹⁰ A small earthen vessel for holding water, the water being used in combing the hair. Its elliptical form somewhat resembles in shape several *koban* or gold coins piled upon one another.

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"Assuredly," returned Hachiémon, receiving the package. "Am I not Tambaya Hachiémon? Of course I make no objection. You see, madam, I am in sure receipt of the Yedo remittance. When you visit the Fudō Temple call at my place."

He made as if to depart. All unsuspecting the old woman returned:

"Now, Chūbei, it's customary to take a receipt in exchange for a remittance. If Hachiémon Dono has brought no receipt, please ask him for caution's sake to write out a line."

"Certainly," answered Chūbei, not without a significant glance towards his friend. "Though mother can't read or write, please pen a line for form's sake."

"As you will," returned Hachiémon, "I'll write one."

He wrote at random as his ready wit dictated:

"I am *not* in receipt of fifty *ryō* in gold. According to your suggestion, which I accept, I agree to have a spree with you some evening in the pleasure quarter at your expense. Whenever you feel like making merry, I shall be yours to command. I swear to the truth of the aforesaid by the *binmizu-iré*. Signed, Tambaya Hachiémon."

He handed the paper to Chūbei and with a brief "Good evening to you both," made off.

The good-natured mother, not entertaining the least suspicion of the deception practised upon her, was well satisfied with the paper. Mother and son sat down anxiously to await the mail from Yedo. The night wore on. At length the tinkle of horse-bells was heard, shortly followed by a loud voice crying, "Ho! there! The packet has arrived! Open the doors!" Alertly the coolies carried in the wicker baskets. Chūbei and the old woman were in high spirits. "Good luck has come back to us," cried the delighted old woman. "Fortune should shine on us next Year as well. Give *saké* and tobacco to the drivers."

Chūbei and the clerks busied themselves counting up the packets and entering them in the books. An air of merriment hung about the house. None the less, the chief clerk Ihei remarked sulkily to the courier in charge, "Jinnai Dono of the *yashiki* at Dōjima was here this afternoon. A remittance of three hundred *ryō* ought to have arrived on the ninth, according to him.

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He had received an early notice to that effect and wanted to know why we made such a delay in the delivery. He made a great noise about it and went off in a huff. Have you that remittance with you? Make haste and tell me."

"I have it about me, I'll be bound. It is an urgent matter and you must deliver it during the course of the night. I have brought several remittances, totalling eight hundred *ryō* altogether."

The man counted out the jingling money. Chūbei's spirits rose.

"Put the silver in the inner go-down and the gold in the *todana*. I'll take the three hundred *ryō* in gold, mother, to the *yashiki* forthwith. Now, my men, as we've got other people's money in our keeping, make haste to close the doors and put yourselves on guard. Keep a careful lookout for fire. I shall be back late, but as I shall go by palanquin you need not be nervous. Take supper and go to bed early."

He pocketed the money and stepped out into the frost-ribbed street. His intention was to walk northward, but his legs according to their wont carried him farther and farther south until he came to Koméya-chō. "What? Am I not to visit the *yashiki* at Dōjima? What ails me? Am I possessed by a fox?" He retraced a few steps, but halted.

"Let me see, I came here by no means of my own accord. Surely it must be because my tutelary deity in person compels me to Umégawa because she must want to see me on some important business. I will pay her a short visit." He turned south again. "No, I must not. I should be tempted to spend the money there. That's dangerous. Shall I give up the idea of the visit? . . . or shall I go? Yes, I must go."

After a few moments' struggle he turned his steps toward Shimmachi with an air of resolution like a missioned spirit, we may say like a very courier for Hades.

II

*When the moon climbs clear and high
"Come, come," the wanton crows do cry
And hark, O hark,
When the night is deep and dark
Still wantonly the hid fowls cry
"Come, come."*

Wanton crows indeed were the visitors to the pleasure quarter of Shimmachi. All the year round the sweet zephyr of love breathed through the streets of this neighbourhood.

Love and compassion are born of one seed. The "plum-blossom"¹¹ and "pine-tree" are fragrant and beautiful, but about them hangs an air of unapproachability and dignity. Their sisters of more lowly estate are more approachable and more readily arouse feelings of compassion and this compassion often transforms itself into sincere love.

The tea-house Echigoya was a sort of club attended by these lower¹² grade courtesans, who would indeed have liked to have bridges built between it and their respective houses. Since the keeper of this tea-house was a woman, the girls called at the house more readily and unbosomed to her their secrets. Thus the streams of love within their hearts found an outlet within the walls of this house.

¹¹Nicknames of the higher grade courtesans.

¹²The licensed courtesans of Osaka, Kyoto and Yedo were divided into four grades.

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Chūbei's sweetheart, Umégawa, was among those who called there, to the neglect, be it added, of her guests at other tea-houses. On this particular night she had deserted her country guest at the Shimaya and was now making a call at the Echigoya.

"Good evening, madam. That brazen-faced bumpkin of mine has been vexing me all day at the Shimaya and so I've found myself a headache. Isn't Chūbei San here yet? I've called just to have a sight of your face, madam."

"You're welcome. Listen, there are several girls amusing themselves in the upstairs room, having a good time before being invited out by their guests. They are playing *ken*¹³ and drinking. Won't you come up and join them? Some of your friends are there."

The two women stole upstairs and peeped into the room. The company was entirely composed of girls and a bottle of *saké* was being heated in a kettle set over the brazier. The players cried gaily, "*Romasé! Tōrai! Sanna! See it's a draw!*"

"*Hama! Sankyū! Gō! Ryū! Sumui!*¹⁴ You're beaten, Narutosé San. You can take a cup of *saké* and I hope you enjoy it."

"Aha, there's Umégawa San. You're just in time. You're a good hand at *ken*. I've been beaten by Chiyotosé San all the evening. I'm quite put out. Please come and revenge me. Have some *saké* first."

"No, thank you. I detest *saké* and I don't care to play *ken*. I'd rather have you weep with me over my present situation. To-day at the Shimaya my guest from the country tormented me about my ransom. He got me into a corner. I lost my temper and hated him. He was, however, the first to make an offer of ransom. He did so before Chūbei San and it was only through the most determined efforts of my master that Chūbei San was enabled to supplant him. Chūbei San paid a certain sum as earnest money,

¹³A game played with the hands—a kind of *mora*. The loser has to drink a cup of *saké* as forfeit.

¹⁴Corrupt Chinese expressions probably indicative of numbers. The game is said to have been introduced from China early in Japanese history.

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the payment of the remainder being allowed to stand over until to-day. But he is, you know, an adopted heir and thus cannot have a free hand in domestic affairs and moreover he carries on an onerous business between Osaka and Yedo. He deals with the samurai of the granary establishments and with prominent merchants. I am therefore all the more afraid some unexpected circumstances may intervene that will give my country guest the chance he desires to ransom me. If such should happen folks would say, 'Umégawa, being a lower grade courtesan, was lured by gold and basely forsook her lover.' How then could I show my face before Kamon San and my other friends? I feel that to save my honour I might, do well to put an end to my life. But what would Chūbei San do without me? Pray, what shall I do? Dear friends, pray sympathize with me."

At these sad words all the girls present bethought them of their own sad lot and gave way to tears.

"How sad we are I" said one of them after a pause.

Let us cheer up and hold a *jōruri*¹⁵ recitation. *Kaburo*,¹⁶ just go and bring Takémoto Tanomo¹⁷ Sama."

"He is out," broke in another. "Just now I went out to buy a cosmetic and happened to hear that he had called at the tea-house Ōgiya on his way back from the theatre, but being his pupil I can recite after his manner. Listen to me, my friends. Now play the samisen." She recited to the accompaniment of the samisen:

"It is said that the courtesan is not faithful, but those who say this do not speak true. This is a saying of the ignorant, of those who know nothing of her life. The truth and the untruth are originally one and the same. For instance, however loyally a girl devotes herself to her lover, yes, even at the risk of her life, should he for some while not visit her and no

¹⁵Properly speaking *jōruri* is a general term for the *gidayū* (puppet drama) and several kinds of popular epic song. But in Chikamatsu's days, as indeed to-day, *jōruri* was often used in the sense of *gidayū*.

¹⁶A little girl attendant on a courtesan.

¹⁷A famous *jōruri* reciter who lived in the immediate vicinity of the pleasure quarter of Shimmachi.

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communication come from him, yet she, in her condition of servitude, cannot call upon him however she may pine after him. Under such circumstances she is at length compelled to suffer herself to be ransomed by some other guest and so her plighted word proves false. On the other hand, if a guest whom a courtesan treated with a false warmth simply for business purposes repeats his visit time and again till she at last consents to wed him, all her first lies turn out to be truths. Thus in the world of love there is neither truth nor untruth, since only the existence of affinities gives rise to truthfulness. How often indeed does it happen that a courtesan pines and pines for her lover for so long that she at last gives him up in despair! In such a case the man cannot but resent her seeming indifference and her inconstancy. Yet to blame her were unreasonable.”¹⁸

The recitation ended, some of the girls exclaimed, “Such resentment cannot be helped. At any rate we cannot help but love. To have lovers is, I daresay, a chronic habit among women of the quarter.” The love-sick girls fell into a melancholy mood.

Tambaya Hachiémon, who had but that moment entered the pleasure quarter, chanced to overhear the recitation and the ensuing chat. “Pretty girls’ voices that I know! Is madam in?”

He entered the lower room and seizing a broom struck the ceiling a loud rat-tat, crying, “What chitter-chatter for a man to overhear! What kind of two-legged creature is it you girls long for? If it’s lonely you’re feeling in the absence of your lovers, I give notice that here is a man perfectly willing to make a little offer of himself, though of course he mayn’t be quite to your exacting tastes.”

“Come,” called Umégawa, ignorant who the newcomer might be, “it’s natural enough that we should want to see our dears, isn’t it? If you feel jealous come and vent your jealousy on us. Whom do you think it is, madam, downstairs?”

“You need have no fears. It’s Hachiémon Sama of Nakanoshima.”

¹⁸A paragraph from a puppet drama entitled *The Yakun Sanzésō* or “A Courtesan’s Three Existences” by the author.

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Umégawa started.

“Ah, madam,” she hastily whispered, “I wouldn’t for the world see that man.” She addressed the others. “Go downstairs all of you. Don’t on any account tell I’m here. Promise you never will.”

“Never,” they answered, and went down to the lower room.

“Chiyotosé Sama! Narutosé Sama!” exclaimed Hachiémon. “What a bevy of beauties! I hear Umégawa Dono left the Shimaya early this evening; and Chūbei it seems isn’t here yet. One moment, madam. Ladies and *kaburo*, one step nearer” – then continuing in an undertone – “I have something secret to tell you about Chūbei.”

“What can be the matter! Pray tell us quick.”

Thus said the women, none the less fearful lest some evil report of her lover be heard by Umégawa. At this precise moment Chūbei, bosom and heart alike icy cold with the weight of three hundred golden *ryō* and the sharpness of the night air, reached the entrance of the Echigoya. He peeped in. Great was his surprise to see Hachiémon sitting cross-legged in gossip concerning his affairs. Chūbei stiffened against the door-post. Overhead Umégawa crouched down perfectly still to listen. The unsuspecting Hachiémon began to speak: “You might imagine from the things that I am going to say about Chūbei that I hate and am jealous of him. But the real truth is that I am very anxious about his future. It’s true, of course, that he always holds in trust one or two thousand *ryō* belonging to other people and that these sums lodge temporarily under his roof. But his property – his house, grounds and furniture – all these are worth no more than two hundred and fifty *rya* at the utmost. His father in Yamato is said to be a man of great wealth, but when we consider that he gave his son to the Kaméya, it seems more reasonable to infer that he must be a petty farmer. I will confess that I myself spend, as young men will, at least fifteen *ryō* a year at tea-houses. But Chūbei’s case is quite a different matter: he spends above his means. Apparently he has lost his head over Umégawa, for it seems he has been paying her continual visits since May last, and this as a rival to that countryman who visits the Shimaya. It is said that not very long ago some kind of an arrangement concerning her ransom was come to; and I understand that Chūbei has already paid fifty *ryō* as earnest

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money of the whole price amounting in all to one hundred and sixty *ryō*. As a consequence he has failed in the payment of several remittances and has been obliged to utter downright falsehoods. He is in great difficulties. If Umégawa, who probably has some debts, is to be ransomed at once, it means that Chūbei must raise at least two hundred and fifty *ryō*. He cannot, however, expect the sum to fall in a shower from the sky or to bubble up from the ground. No course is left open to him but theft. Where do you suppose that earnest money of fifty *ryō* came from? He made use, if you please, of a remittance of mine from Yedo. Ignorant of this fact I called at the post-distributing house for its payment. His foster-mother – poor woman! – who knew the money had arrived, urged Chūbei to deliver it to me. Guess now, girls, in what sort of gold coin he paid me?

Hachiémon produced a small packet.

“What’s the difference between this and fifty *ryō*! Let me show you a scurvy trick.”

So saying, he tore open the paper and displayed the crockery water-holder. Mistress and courtesans recoiled in open-mouthed astonishment. Overhead, Umégawa pressed her face to the mat and wept in silence.

Outside the quick-tempered Chūbei reflected, “The devil! What a malignant backbiter! How mercilessly he betrays me to those snobbish girls. And what for? – all on account of a paltry sum of fifty *ryō*. If Umégawa should hear of this she will die of shame; Enough of this, you scoundrel! Let me draw fifty from the three hundred *ryō* in my bosom, cast it in your teeth and say all I have in me to say to save my face and Umégawa’s. Ah, no, no – I must not – a samurai’s money – a particularly urgent remittance. I can’t be rash now – I can’t, I can’t. I simply must control myself.”

Again and again did he thrust his hand into his bosom and wrench it forth again, anguished and self-divided young man that he was; while Hachiémon, never dreaming that Chūbei listened, held up the water-holder and continued his discourse:

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“Such a vessel cost some eighteen mon. However low the price of gold has sunk, never since the age of the Emperor Jimmu¹⁹ has fifty *ryō* in gold been exchanged for eighteen mon. If so he acts to his friend, you can well imagine how he cheats strangers. The time will come, and that time perhaps is not so very far off, when he will turn cutpurse, then take to burglary and finally do murder! I cannot but feel for him. Sunk as he is, neither his mother’s disowning him nor the remonstrance of Sakya, or the prayers of Dharma could induce him to turn over a new leaf; nay, even the personal admonition of Prince Shōtoku²⁰ could not prevail upon him now. Such being the circumstances I ask you to be so good as to spread this report of mine throughout this neighbourhood and to do your best to prevent him visiting the tea-houses. I would have you tell Umégawa Dono this. Induce her to break with him and get her ransomed forthwith by the countryman. Such a debauchee as Chūbei often brings about double suicide or steals courtesans’ dresses or does something worse, and his punishment is to be exposed with one of his sidelocks shaven²¹ at the great gate of the pleasure quarter, to the dishonour, alas! of his friends and relatives. Chūbei is indeed a fool. If any of you chance to feel any compassion for him don’t permit him to call.”

Umégawa had heard it all. Now she broke anew into sobs of grief, sympathy and despair. “Oh, for a sharp instrument,” she wailed, lying at full length in her agony, “a bare bodkin! Let me bite off my tongue and so die!”

The company below-stairs, guessing her feelings, were overcome with compassion. “Unhappy Umégawa!” Thus did they reflect. “How well we can imagine what she feels. How much is she to be pitied.” The very maids, cooks and little *kaburo* melted into tears of sympathy.

¹⁹The first Japanese Emperor, founder of the Empire.

²⁰A son of the Emperor Yōmei (572-621), the Constantine of Japanese Buddhism.

²¹Such was the punishment meted out by private citizens at pleasure quarters in the feudal period.

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Chūbei, unable longer to restrain himself, rushed in and, crouching down, bent over Hachiémon's lap.

"Here, Hachiémon Dono," he exclaimed with rancour, 46 you call yourself a gentleman and this is your attitude I How well your deeds match your words! Well do they say, 'Three men make a public.'²² Permit me to thank you for cataloguing my property before such a company. You will recall that before I handed you this water-holder I asked you as man to man to accept it that my mother might be set at ease. Yet you babble the matter abroad in the pleasure quarter to the injury of my reputation. And this you do because you are afraid that I will not pay you the fifty *ryō* or—stop!—can it be that you are bribed by the guest at the Shimaya into talking against me to Umégawa, thus winning her over to him? Enough of that! You need not be nervous: Chūbei will not lose a friend either fifty or a hundred *ryō*. Now, Hachiémon Sama, good Hachiémon, see me pay you the money. Return me the bill."

He produced the packet of coins and was about to untie it when Hachiémon interrupted him.

"One moment, Chūbei. Don't be a fool. I know your character well. I know no advice will have any effect on you. It has been my care therefore to request these people to shut the door on you whenever you might appear. For so it has seemed to me and so alone could your nature undergo a change and you become a right-minded man. My intentions, believe me, have been honourable. Had I entertained any apprehensions about my fifty *ryō* I should have declared them in your mother's presence. To reassure your mother, unable as she was to read and write, I wrote a comical paper. Was Hachiémon, even in this, unkind? The money you hold now amounts to three hundred *ryō*, doesn't it? So large a sum can't be your own property. It's somebody else's remittance, I'll be bound Were you to 'inflict a wound on'²³ that sum, you couldn't settle the difference by a water-holder, as you have done with Hachiémon. Or do you mean to make up

²²A proverb.

²³Waste.

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this difference with your head? If you have all this time to excite yourself in, you would do better to spend it paying the money, for at present you are behaving like a feather-pated fool."

This well-intentioned lecture infuriated Chūbei all the more.

"Enough of your hypocritical benevolence! So you think this money belongs to somebody else, do you? I haven't three hundred *ryō*, haven't I, eh? Since you are good enough to put yourself to the trouble of estimating the worth of my property in the presence of this sort of company, it seems that I am the more to pay you your money to save myself in their eyes."

He tore open the packet and counted out ten, twenty . . . thirty . . . fifty *ryō* and wrapped it in paper.

"Here is proof," he cried, "that Kaméya Chūbei is not a robber. Take it And he cast the money into Hachiémon's face.

"That's a polite way to act!" returned Hachiémon, not without asperity. And he handed the money back. "Oblige me by saying 'many thanks' and pay it me politely."

"And why should I thank you, traitor?" Once more he cast the money at his antagonist. Hachiémon cast it back at him and so their quarrel continued.

Umégawa, half blinded by tears, ran down the staircase.

"I have heard all," she said. "Hachiémon Sama was in the right. On my knees I beg you, Hachiémon, to forgive my Chūbei San. For my sake, Hachiémon San!" She turned toward her lover. "My poor Chūbei San," she cried, "Why are you so much excited? Don't you know that those who visit the pleasure quarter, even rich men, often find themselves short of money. That kind of dishonour is here no real dishonour. But if you spend another man's money without the faintest prospect of being able to repay him, you will be arrested and find yourself in prison. Such an eventuality as that, not even you would compare with the present unpleasant predicament, and not only would it be in itself a disgrace to you, but what do you think could be its outcome for Umégawa? Pray calm yourself, apologize to Hachiémon Sama, put the money together again and immediately pay it to its owner. I know you wouldn't have me go into another's hands and I myself do not wish to go. For your sake I am prepared to brave the worst. I have two

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more years of servitude, but to support you I would, if need be, undergo any hardship and undertake anything, howsoever hard. Never will I let you suffer. Pray quiet yourself, you that have grown so reckless and all through my own doing. Know that, since I am the cause of your rashness, I feel both grateful to you and sorry for you. Can't you see that?"

She wept afresh and the tears, falling on to the gold coins, appeared like dewdrops falling upon yellow roses. The bewildered Chūbei resolved upon one last random and desperate fling.

"Silence, my dear. Do you take me for a fool? Have no fears about this money. As Hachiémon will remember, this is the gold I brought from Yamato when I was adopted as heir to the Kaméya. It was taken care of for the time being and I have received it back in order to redeem you. Now, madam" – he addressed the mistress of the house – "up to date I have paid Umégawa's master fifty *ryō* as earnest money. Here are one hundred and ten *ryō*, making in all one hundred and sixty *ryō*, the price of Umégawa's ransom. Please hand this money to her master. This sum of forty is for several things I bought and for which you presented the bill the other day. This five *ryō* is for the *yarité*.²⁴ I should say that the charges for my invitations to Umégawa since September amount to about fifteen *ryō*, but since the exact reckoning may be a trouble to you cross out the account and let us call it twenty *ryō*. This ten *ryō* is your gratuity. Let me thank you in advance for your trouble. Rin, Tama, Gohei, one *ryō* to each of you. Here now, take it."

So saying, Chūbei distributed gold coins with the utmost freedom. A Croesus for the nonce even as Rosei²⁵ in his dream.

"Come, madam," he concluded, "pray lose no time in making such arrangements as are necessary that Umégawa may be able to leave with me to-night. Pray make haste."

²⁴A maid at a tea-house who makes arrangements between courtesans and guests.

²⁵Tradition avers that an ambitious young man named Rosei who lived in China once dreamed that he lived in extravagance and attained to eighty years of age.

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"Very good, sir," returned the delighted mistress. "Poor one day, rich the next. It's queer how it goes with money. Why do folks worry about it, there's no need to despair. Umégawa, my girl, you feel happy I'll be bound. Well, now I shall have to hurry off to call on your master and since I shall be carrying a large sum do you, Rin and Tama, come with me."

And taking the two maids with her she hurried out.

"I don't believe Chūbei speaks true," said Hachiémon doubtfully, "inasmuch as he distributes money even when he doesn't owe it, I can't very well refuse to accept what is due to me. Chūbei, I acknowledge the receipt of fifty *ryō*. I return you the note. Umégawa Dono, you are fortunate to find such a handsome man as husband. I bid you good night, all of you."

And placing the money in his bosom Hachiémon took himself off.

"It is time for us to go home. Accept our congratulations, Umégawa Sama."

The girls made off to their respective houses.

"Why is madam so late?" Chūbei inquired fretfully. Go and hurry them, Gohei."

"I am afraid you'll have to wait a short time longer, sir. In order to get a courtesan redeemed, even when a settlement has been come to with her master, the seals upon the contracts must be cancelled by the director of this quarter and a pass for the gate be signed by the manager for the current month. Until this is done she cannot step beyond the great gate, so pray wait a moment longer, sir."

But won't you hurry them up?" He cast another *ryō* to the man. "Please do your best."

"Very well, sir." Responsive to the golden spur, the servant ran out.

"Now, my girl, make ready at once," Chūbei urged his bride-to-be. "In what disorder you are! Rearrange your *obi*."²⁶

²⁶An *obi* is a broad, stiff sash, tied at the back.

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“Why in such a hurry, Chūbei San? This being the greatest occasion in my life, please allow me to exchange cups of farewell with my friends and to take a leisurely leave of each and all.”

I Her innocent, joyous countenance provoked him to a flood of tears. He clung to her sobbing.

“Innocent creature, those gold coins were an urgent remittance to a samurai connected with a granary establishment at Dōjima. I perfectly well knew that to scatter them as I did was to compass my own ruin. I did my utmost to control myself, but seeing your beloved self the victim of indignities among your friends and guessing the mortification you must feel and experiencing a sudden and overwhelming impulse to relieve you of it, hardly knowing what I was doing, I put my hand to the money. Having once done that it was no longer possible for me, a man, to leave the deed half done. Pray resign yourself to fate. Hachiémon’s expression plainly declared that he intended to proceed to my mother. It can be but a question of a short space ere the eighteen post-houses secure a warrant for my arrest. Let us face the abyss will you fly with me?”

Umégawa trembled like an aspen.

“Have courage,” she returned in a voice choked with tears. “Haven’t I often talked with you of such an emergency? Why do you fear death? I should be more than satisfied to die with you. I can die with you even now and that willingly. Let us prepare for the last act.”

“Of course. Do you imagine I could have done anything so reckless had I not been prepared to die at any moment? But let us try to live as long as may be and thus keep in each other’s company as long as possible. Remember death is the last evil.”

“Yes, let us enjoy each other’s company in this world as long as may be. You had best hide yourself lest your pursuers arrive as well they may at any moment now.” She pushed him behind a screen. “I have left my precious amulet in my chest-of-drawers: indeed I need it now.”

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"No amulet, however powerful, can save us from the consequences of so ill a deed. Since we must die ere long, let us pray for the peace of each other's soul after death." So saying he thrust his face above the screen.

"Ah, horror! Don't, don't! I dare not say what you resemble."²⁷

Clinging against the screen she wept bitterly.

It was at this moment that the mistress and her maids returned.

"You can set yourself at rest, sir. All is now settled. The pass for the gate has been sent round to the western entrance, that being the nearest way to your home."

The young pair trembled. "We thank you. Farewell, farewell."

"You look chilled. Will you have a drink, sir?"

"No, thank you. I can't drink now."

"I am glad you are ransomed, Umégawa Sama, but at the same time I am very much loth to part with you. I feel somehow saddened. I couldn't tire of saying such things even for a *thousand days* (*sennichi*)."

"Oh, do not say *sennichi*."²⁸

At cockcrow the passionate pair, leaving the pleasure quarter, proceeded hand in hand as fast as might be toward Chūbei's native village in the province of Yamato.

²⁷She hints that his face above the screen has for her the appearance, being so thrust up, of the exposed head of an executed criminal.

²⁸The Japanese for "a thousand days," *sennichi*, reminded the pair of the execution ground Sennichi-Mayé in the suburbs of Osaka.

III

The Lovers' Journey in a Double Palanquin

The passionate pair's sweet and peaceful dream, dyed with the green and red of Umégawa's bed-chamber, had been suddenly and mercilessly broken. That courage which they had often displayed in their secret midnight meetings was now of no avail. On leaving the pleasure quarter they took refuge in a double palanquin and hurried on their way. Sitting face to face there was nothing between them but a small *kotatsu*²⁹ or fire-box and the fires of love more served to keep warm their chilly feet than this. Chūbei's hair, which had been left uncombed since yesterday, became dishevelled. Umégawa tidied it with her tear-frozen hand. The snug atmosphere in the palanquin brought to their minds the comfortable nights spent in her small, cosy chamber, but the hot, red fire in the box had now turned white as the morning frost. Since still a little space was wanting to daybreak they lifted the blind. Their attention was caught by a small pine-tree shuddering in the chilly blast and this put them in mind of a *kaburo* tormented by a *yarité*. The sight of it, giving rise to "the remembering of happier things," moved them to tears. After they had given themselves up to grief awhile they consoled each other by observing that their sitting

²⁹A small wooden box of fire is called a *kotatsu* no less than the fireplace in the floor covered by a large quilt.

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together in a palanquin was like "Living together in a lotus-flower,"³⁰ prophesied in Buddhist scriptures.

The morning mists, resembling the thin smoke from the *hiyokugiséru*³¹ which they were smoking, had cleared. A breeze was billowing over the young wheat. A farmer lingered about his field. Fearful lest he might approach and request them for fire to light his pipe with, the couple alighted from the palanquin, paid the bearers liberally and began to walk. Before a small temple by the roadside they worshipped, and, gazing backward beheld, walking along another road, many visitors to the temple of the God Aizen. These were young actors and persons connected with the tea-house business who went up to intercede on behalf of the prosperity of their avocations. Having started before dawn they carried unlighted lanterns. Umégawa looked with longing upon the crests painted on the paper of the lanterns, crests familiar enough to her eye. One lantern in particular arrested her attention. It bore the character "Tsuchiya," the name of the bordel in which she had lived and her own crest paired with the crest of the house. This unlit lantern, flameless though it was, blazed in her heart and illumined for her all her past joys and sorrows.

Umégawa shivered as she realized that their lives were tending downward to extinction, even as the taper gutters. She thought too of the darkness of Hades and, weeping, averred that she was desirous of carrying with them to Hades a lantern figured with her crest to illumine that dim road to darkness.

Forasmuch as they traversed an unfamiliar route, guided only by the answers of wayfarers, they made but little progress. When they found themselves at Hirano the sky was overcast: sleet mingled with hail began to fall. Since they were wearing *setta*³² upon bare feet they were the more

³⁰A Buddhist saying signifying the living together happily-in paradise of husband and wife or of lovers.

³¹A pair of long bamboo tobacco pipes having a single bowl. This pipe was intended for lovers and was formerly to be found in pleasure quarters.

³²Leather-soled sandals.

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chilled. A lass of about seventeen, who was plucking herbs in a field at the back of the farmer's house, made her way back to the house and called in the young man standing by the door, and it seemed to them that she was saying, "Come in, my lad, out of the cold. We shall be warm enough within." The young fugitives smiled wanly upon each other at the discovery that every nook of the country was a little world of love. Chūbei, walking through the thin snowflakes as they fluttered about in the breeze, with pleasure remembered how one snowy morning on his way back from the tea-house at Shimmachi, Umégawa in a gay night gown had accompanied him to the great gate of the quarter. What an innocent, simple-hearted girl she had been in those days! Since then the clear stuff of her heart had been dyed ever deeper with love. Then it had been light blue, now it was utter black, colour of midnight. Unspeakable pity and regret rose in his mind. Calling to mind how often they had taken the names of many Gods and Buddhas in vain when plighting vows of fidelity, he told himself that perhaps their present fate was allotted them in retribution, and with agony asserted that he would shoulder Umégawa's share of the punishment. Continuing their dreary journey in talk with each other upon such things, many a time were they startled by the sudden clatter of birds' wings or by the keening of the wind. The very crows, noisily cawing in Tonda forest, seemed to mock at the foolishness of the way they had taken. Beneath Mount Katsuragi they remembered the legend of Hitokotonushi, God of that mountain, how he hid himself while the light was abroad and worked only at night; and remembering this they grieved that they themselves had become even as bats fearing the light of day. As they traversed a narrow pass, they Ut that no defile was narrower than their way in the world, which way they themselves had gone about to make so narrow.

Thus did the luckless pair pick their way over the stones of passes, plod over plains, creep between mountains, thread townships and hamlets and so drew near their destination.

Meanwhile the police had busied themselves upon the track of the culprit, a particular search being made in the neighbouring provinces. Yamato, Chūbei's native province, was especially singled out for narrow

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search by the authorities and by persons connected with the eighteen post-houses, who, disguised as pilgrims, ragmen, pedlars and strolling singers, spied at every door. Certain of them, tricked out as *amé-vendors*³³ complete with peep-shows, enticed children into the telling of every stranger's movements. So came it that the couple's lot was that of fish in a net, or birds in a trap.

At the end of a wearisome journey of over twenty days and after spending their last penny, the fugitives reached Ninokuchi-Mura, Chūbei's native village.

"Here, O-Umé,"³⁴ whispered Chūbei, "is the place where I was born, in which I lived till I was twenty. Never as far as I can recall have I seen so many traders and travellers in the village at the year-end; no, nor even in spring. I cannot help suspecting that man over there, and surely those two or three men standing at the outskirts of the village are in disguise. Alas! I have a presentiment. My father Magoémon's house stands about half a mile further up; but for a long time past I have not written to him, and besides, the woman is my step-mother." He turned toward a straw-thatched hut by the roadside. "This is my father's tenant, the farmer Chūzaburō's house. Since my boyhood he has been my great friend. He is a reliable man; let us visit him."

The couple opened the door of the house and stepped in.

"Is Chūzaburō Dono in? I haven't seen him for a long time."

The woman within was cooking. "Who may you be? she demanded. "Chūzaburō Dono is away. He has been up at the village headman's since this morning."

"Chūzaburō Dono had no wife. May I ask who you are?"

"Well, I married into this house three years ago and I know none of my husband's old friends. I'll be thinking you are both Osaka folk, aren't you? I have heard tell my husband's master Magoémon's son – Chūbei

³³*Amé* is a viscid, tenacious sweet made of barley.

³⁴Umégawa's name as Chūbei's wife. A courtesan possesses a professional name and this differs from her ordinary name.

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Dono they called him—went to Osaka as an adopted son. I am hearing he bought a curzon³⁵ and Sir Governor has commanded a search. Magoémon Dono long ago ceased to have any truck with him and so he is not answerable, I'll be reckoning, for the lad's misdoings. But still, as they are father and child, the affair worries the old gaffer a deal. My man, being an old friend of Chūbei Dono, is anxious about his safety. He is keeping an eye open for fear the lad should wander in these parts and get caught. The headman has sent to see him. The whole village, spite of it being the end of the year, is all of a pothor over this 'curzon' affair. Every day almost they hold meetings at the headman's. A regular bad lot, that 'curzon'."

Chūbei was disconcerted at the bluntness of her speech, but he answered composedly enough:

"Indeed? Well, the affair's a subject of talk all over Osaka as well. My wife and I are by way of making a pilgrimage to the Great Shrine in Isé Province; and we have come this way round on purpose to see your husband whom I am very anxious to see. Will you be so good as to fetch him from the headman's, as I should like a brief interview with him. Don't tell him, however, that we come from Osaka."

"Are you in such a hurry? I will fetch him. I ought to tell you that a holy priest of the capital has now come to the temple at Kamata-Mura where everyday he preaches. It is quite within the bounds of possibility that my husband has gone on from the headman's to the temple. Please be so good as to keep the fire alight under the soup caldron while I'm away."

She made off with sleeves tucked up. Umégawa promptly shut the door and fastened the latch.

"We are among enemies. Is there any danger, do you think, in this house?"

"Have no fear, my dear. Chūzaburō is a type of chivalrous man rarely to be found among farmers. I will beg a night's lodging of him. What though I perish here—there will at least be some satisfaction to die at home

³⁵She is so illiterate that she doesn't know what *keisei* or "courtesan" is, hence her mispronunciation *keisen*, which the translator and reviser have done their best to render comprehensible.

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among my own people, and did we come to be buried here, the village in which the grave of my real mother is to be found, it would be possible for me to have you and her meet in the next world as daughter-in-law and mother-in-law.”

“How happy I should be! But my mother lives at Rokujō in the capital. I feel sure that the authorities must have recently gone to examine her. I wonder what has become of her, and she poor soul always suffering so from giddiness in the head. How much I should like to have a glimpse of her before I die.”

“Naturally, my dear. And I too wish to meet your mother as son-in-law.” Since no strange eye was upon them, such as might know them for what they were, the couple embraced passionately, the tears showering³⁶ upon their sleeves. At this moment a shower beat against the lattice of bamboo. “Hark! It’s raining!” they exclaimed with one voice, and slightly opening the window’s paper panel, they cast their eyes along the narrow path through the paddy-field. Several persons were hurrying toward the temple. Their umbrellas were held aslant against the rain which came hurrying behind them.

“There’s not one I don’t know,” said Chūbei. “The foremost is Sukésaburō of Taruibata, one of the leading men of this neighbourhood. That old woman is the old mother of Den, the hunchbacked porter; she is a great woman for tea drinking. That other old man used never to be able to make both ends meet. When he found he couldn’t pay his land tax, he sold his girl to Shimabara in the capital; fortunately she was redeemed by a man with any amount of money and became his wife. His son-in-law saw to it that the old fellow was provided for, so now he lives in comfort, the owner of two go-downs and a dozen acres of rice. I, too, have redeemed you, but it grieves me to think what trouble and grief I have brought your mother. The next old man is Tōjibei of Tsurukaké, who ate a quart and a half of boiled rice on his eighty-eighth birthday. He is now ninety-five. The bald

³⁶A play upon words here.

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head following him is the cure-all Dōan.³⁷ He did for my mother with his treatment and so I count him my mortal enemy. Oh, look, look! There is my father!”

“Is that really Magoémon Sama, in a *kataginu*³⁸ of coarse silk? Oh, his eyes are just your eyes

“Ah, that parent and child, so alike in face, cannot meet face to face in public! How he has aged! How unsteady his steps are!” Chūbei clasped his hands together. “This is my last farewell to you, father.”

“Dear father-in-law,” murmured Umégawa, “this is the first and last time I shall set eyes upon you. I am your daughter-in-law. My husband and I may be killed at any moment. When you have attained to your hundredth year, may you and I meet in the next world.”

Through eyes half blinded by tears they watched the aged Magoémon pass by on feeble steps. His feet in their heavy clogs faltered. How slow, how dragging his pace! The old man had all but passed the door of the hut when he slipped upon a frozen puddle at the footpath’s edge; the strap of his clog snapped; and he fell with a thud into the miry field. “Poor father!” Chūbei involuntarily exclaimed and writhed with anguish, but having regard for his present position dared not step out to his aid. Umégawa, however, rushed out; helped him out of the field; wrung the water from his clothing and rubbed his knees and waist with her hands, as she said in kindly tones, “I am sorry, old gentleman. Don’t you have pain anywhere? I shall wash your feet and mend your clog-strap. Tell me anything you want without hesitation.”

Thank you for your attention. Fortunately I am in no way hurt. You’re a very considerate young woman. You show me more sympathy than even a daughter-in-law would. Although a man may visit the temple for worship, if his heart” – the old gentleman pointed at his breast – “is

³⁷In the old days physicians shaved their heads. What Chūbei says is “That bald head who follows him is the acupuncturist Dōan. My mother was killed by his needle.” In old days acupuncture was extensively practised in Japan. See Basil Hall Chamberlain’s “Things Japanese”.

³⁸A form of cape.

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hard, all the worship in the world won't help him. A kindly person like yourself, though, is not far from the Kingdom of Heaven. Please wipe your hands. Luckily there's some straw here and I have some paper. So I'll twist myself a strap with them." So saying he produced a few sheets of paper from his bosom.

"Don't trouble, sir, I have good paper myself. Allow me to make a string of it for you."

Her manner of tearing a paper handkerchief³⁹ struck the old man with amaze. "You are evidently a stranger in these parts," he said, narrowly regarding her. "May I ask who you are and why you put yourself to such trouble about me?"

"I'm a traveller," returned the girl, her heart beginning to beat. "The fact is, my father-in-law is just about your age and has much your appearance. In serving you I don't feel as if I were serving a stranger. It's a daughter-in-law's duty, you know, to tend an old father-in-law when he's in trouble and therefore it's a pleasure for me if I can be of any service to you. I am sure my husband would be pleased that I should do so. Permit me to take your paper in exchange for mine. I'll give it to my husband and make him carry it about as a memento of one who looks so like his father."

She received his paper and slipped it into her sleeve and then, despite her utmost efforts, burst into tears. Her words, her manner, her looks proclaimed the truth to Magoémon. He was overcome with emotion; tears streamed from his eyes. After a pause he said:

"Hum... so you're kind to me because I resemble your father-in-law, eh? Well, that both pleases me and makes me angry. You see, I happen to have disinherited my son—better not ask why—and I sent him away to Osaka as an heir by adoption. Possessed by some devil or other he recently took it into his head to spend a large sum of money belonging to another and then run away. An official search is now being conducted for him in this neighbourhood and I am now, as you may well imagine, in great trouble of spirit about him and all on account of my daughter-in-law to be.

³⁹A courtesan's manner of tearing a handkerchief has something distinctive about it.

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Perhaps it's foolish of me to acknowledge it, but my feelings can be expressed exactly by the proverb which says, 'One doesn't so much hate the son who is a thief as the officer who arrests him.' Since we are no longer father and son it makes no difference to me whether he does right or wrong, but none the less, think of my joy if I should hear folks saying, 'Chūbei's an intelligent, shrewd and diligent young man and what's more he's made a fortune. Magoémon must be an old fool to have disinherited such a son.' And so you can imagine what my feelings will be when presently he is hunted out and arrested and I hear people say, 'Magoémon did well and is lucky to have disinherited his son at the right moment.' I cannot help being very anxious as to his fate. I pray the Lord Buddha, may he let me die as soon as may be, before my boy comes to the place of execution. That is my prayer and I never lie to the Lord Buddha."

He prostrated himself and wept loudly. Thereupon Umégawa could not refrain from further tears and Chūbei, at the window, wrung his hands.

"Blood is thicker than water," continued the old man, brushing away his tears. "I suppose it's human nature that, however close the affection between intimate friends may be, it can never be so great as between father and son, although the son be disowned. Why, before he set about embezzling another's money, didn't he write secretly to me that he was in love with such and such a courtesan and wanted money for her ransom? If he had done so—he is my real son, you know, and a motherless son at that—why, I'd have sold even the field intended for my support when I retired from life, rather than have him bound as a criminal. But now that the report of his crime has caused his foster mother pain and occasioned another person financial loss and trouble, how can I call him my son and give him lodging even for a night? All this is his own doing. I've no doubt but he suffers a great deal himself and certainly he causes his wife to suffer too. He is a fugitive in the wide world. He must conceal himself from his friends and acquaintances, yes, and from his very relatives, and sooner or later is bound to die a miserable death. That sort of disgraceful position is not the life he was born to. I think he is a despicable fellow and yet I cannot help but love him."

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Once more he gave way to bitterest tears. At last, though yet weeping, he took a silver coin from his purse and handing it to the girl, resumed:

"I happened to have this money about me. I intended it as a contribution to the building fund of the Temple of Naniwa. I give it you, not because I take you to be my 'daughter-in-law,' but as a token of my gratitude for the kindness you showed me just now. If you wander hereabouts, you are bound to be arrested, having the likeness you have to the offender, and the same is even truer of your husband. I therefore advise you both to betake yourselves to the Gosé highway, with this money to speed you on your way, and make off as quick as may be. Ah, that I might have but a glimpse of your husband's face, even though I didn't speak with him! No, no! If I should do so I should sin against society, but oh, let me know when he is in hiding, safe and sound. Let me know the glad news of his final safety. Goodbye, girl."

He took a few steps, then returned and softly inquired, "Do you think there is any harm in meeting him?"

"Harm? How can anybody know of it? Do meet him, father."

"No," said Magoémon, breaking into renewed sobs, "I cannot wrong his adopted mother in Osaka. Will you please insist on him making his escape while he can, lest he die before I?"

In tears the old man made off, again and again gazing back over his shoulder. When he was no longer in sight the couple prostrated themselves and took their fill of tears. Chūzaburō's wife returned, drenched with rain.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting so long. My man went on to the temple direct from the headman's and so I couldn't get a sight of him. The rain is clearing; I hope he'll soon be back."

At this moment Chūzaburō appeared, running. He arrived out of breath.

"I am pleased to see you, Chūbei Sama. Your father has just told me all about you. I know, too, that spies have come up from Osaka and an official search is in progress by order of Sir Governor. Found amid swords in the daytime your doom is sealed. I don't know whether they have wind of you, but they have suddenly begun a house-to-house search. They are

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now at your father's. Next they will come to mine. Your poor old father, frantic with despair, bade me tell you to escape quickly. You are now 'in the jaws of the crocodile.' Come, come, lose not a minute, but escape along the back road to the Gosê highway over the mountains."

At these words the pair were panic-stricken. Chūzaburō's wife, who had not a notion of what was in process, exclaimed, "Shall I escape with them?"

"Don't talk nonsense." Chūzaburō pushed her away and rapidly tricked out the fugitives as persons of the farmer class, by placing old sedge hats upon their heads and old straw raincoats upon their shoulders.

"My friend," said Chūbei, "we shall never forget your kindness even in death."

The two stole away in haste. No sooner had Chūzaburō heaved a sigh of relief than constables, guided by the headman and a local magistrate, rushed into the house by both back and front entrances, and, searching everywhere, rolled up the straw mats, broke the hurdles, prised open the coffer and inspected the rice-chest and ash-bag.

"This house is too small for them to find any place of hiding. They cannot be here. Let us search the paths through the fields."

The officials and constables made their way through the tea-garden and vegetable fields. Magoémon appeared, barefoot.

"How is it, Chūzaburō? Tell me quick, are they all right or not?"

"Have no fear, sir. I have so managed that both have made good their escape."

"Thanks be to Heaven! This is the Lord Buddha's favour! Let us at once visit the temple and offer up thanksgiving. How glad I am! How glad!"

They were preparing to depart when a knot of persons, gathered at a short distance, suddenly cried, "Kaméya Chūbei and Umégawa of Tsuchiya have been arrested!" A moment later the constables returned, convoying the young lovers, now bound with cords.

Magoémon swooned at the sight. His spirit all but passed from his body. Umégawa wept bitterly.

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“Listen all of you!” cried Chūbei. “I have done wrong and I am quite prepared for death. I beseech you to pray for me when my soul shall have quitted this body.” He turned to the guard. “Sirs,” he said, “my father’s agony strikes me to the heart and will torture my soul in Hades. For mercy’s sake, cover my face.”

A sympathetic officer blinded him with a scarf, as the devil is blinded in blindman’s buff.

What further fate was theirs tongue need not recite. Suffice to say their names remain upon the roll of those whom passion has made its prey.