

Chikamatsu

The Adventures of the Hakata Damsel
(Hakata Kojorō Namimakura)

translated by

Asataro Miyamori

revised by

Robert Nichols

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I

*If you must soon set sail, my love,
O do so in the dead of night!
Even one glimpse of silver sails
Would change to sorrow my delight.*

Shimonoseki in Nagato Province is the largest port on the beautiful Inland Sea. The city is situated where the outer sea enters by the western inlet. Morning and evening thousands of ships call there, laden with rich merchandise from China and Holland. Millions of *ryō* change hands in that city daily. Gold coins without number – we need not speak of silver – roll hither and thither. The harbour might be called a world of gold.

One autumn evening a large cargo ship lay at anchor in the offing far from the bustle of the city. Sunburnt sailors lay at their ease upon her decks. The remainder of her crew, a rough lot, capable, if their appearance did not belie them, of fighting ogres should the need arise, stood on the poop on watch against the outer sea, scanning it for incoming sails. There was about their bearing something at once alert and anxious and the eyes of certain of them were haggard. At length one who happened to be the chief of the group and was named Kezori, his second name Kuémon, a native of Nagasaki, addressed his companions in his peculiar dialect.

“What, my men! Isn’t Ichigorō and Sanzō’s boat in sight yet? I don’t like the look of it. This weighs so on my mind, I can’t get a wink o’ nights. If this affair of ours turns out successful we’ll run to Hakata, ransom some rare lasses out of Yanagi Street and make off to Osaka with them.” He paused. “Did I tell you, by the way, that at the request of one of our sailors

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I have granted a passage to a young travelling merchant who is on his way to Hakata? He's to occupy the front cabin. If our affair doesn't prosper, we shan't of course go to Hakata. I do wish I could get good news so that we could set sail at once. Meanwhile let us invite the merchant up on deck and kill time by a chat with him. Go down, one of you, and fetch him up."

"Ay, ay, gov'nor," came the prompt reply. One of the group descended while the others spread mats upon the poop, sifted Chinese tea into the pot and otherwise busied themselves—all this to serve their leader. It might be remarked what affection and loyalty these rough men had for their chief. Ere long the merchant made his appearance, a young and courteous man, who, kneeling respectfully before Kuémon and placing his hands politely on the mat, informed the captain how delighted he was to see him, how grateful he was for a passage and concluded by asking him to forgive his want of civility in not having appeared on deck even before the summons to make known his gratitude.

"You are too polite," returned Kuémon kindly. "That's right. Don't stand on ceremony. Make yourself at home. We who live in the same ship and take our rice out of the same tub needn't look upon each other as strangers, but may well consider ourselves related. For myself, I come from Nagasaki, my name's Kezori Kuémon and I am a trader in a small way of business. These are my comrades and every man says what he likes without thinking twice about it. You will find them friendly and ready enough, I daresay, for a chat."

He introduced his men one by one to the merchant.

"This is Yaheiji, native of my own town. These are Ogura Denné and Naniwa Niza, both Osaka men. The fellow I sent down to you is the barber. Heizaémon is his name and he comes from Tokushima. If you want a shave, I daresay he will oblige. And now may I ask in my turn where you hail from?"

"Well, I was born in your own city of Nagasaki, but while I was still a child we moved to the Imperial Capital, where I still live. My father's name is Komachiya Sōzaémon and my name is Sōshichi. Every year I pay a business visit to Hakata. It is a great pleasure to me to make your

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acquaintance, sirs. I hope you will forgive any shortcomings I possess as a mere landlubber of a passenger."

Greetings over, tongues wagged more freely; courteous postures relaxed; until at length all lay upon their bellies, resting their faces upon their hands. Nor was it long before hearts thawed, even as morning hoarfrost before the sun. Soon they were as friends of many years' standing.

"Friends," said Kuémon at last, "nothing so beguiles the monotony of a seafaring life as freely telling the tale of our experiences. Let me tell you of a fight I had with a Satsuma man when I was twenty-seven. Listen, now. It's not a made up thing, but a real hard fact. Every year at the festival of the tutelary god of Nagasaki, that is from the seventh to the ninth of September, the local dance and certain Chinese children's dances, among a variety of other amusing performances, are given at the Suma Shrine. During this festival, while I was making my way toward the Shrine, I happened upon a green boy of a Satsuma samurai—stout young fellow all the same—who was rolling about pretty drunk. As we passed each other the tip of his scabbard struck my side. In a trice I seized his scabbard and twisted it with all my might. He turned a somersault and fell to the ground with a thud. The reason why I lay such emphasis on that somersault is because it's a custom among the Satsuma samurai to put to death that one of their number who has been flung down by a man of another clan, directly he gets home. My antagonist, who probably thought he might as well die there on the spot as at home, drew his long sword. 'Wretched foolery!' I cried and, shouldering him, I gave him another fall. He hit his head against a rugged stone and I saw his skull was broken. No, the word 'broken' is taboo on board this ship. Let me see—yes, that'll do—his skull was bruised. Blood and tears gushed out. I saw him carried by a coolie to his inn holding his head together with both hands. Then I was mighty proud of myself, but now I remember the deed with pity. I might well have refrained from such brutality. The people of the capital, I suppose, being gentle, never give way to such violence as that, do they, my young friend?"

The company had listened with no little interest to this story, narrated as it had been in a loud voice and with a wealth of vivid gesture.

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“Come, my young friend from the capital,” continued Kuémon, “tell us some of your reminiscences. I’m going to ask each of you to tell his tale in turn. One always hears great tales of love affairs in the capital. You have a romance or two I’ll be bound. Won’t you oblige?”

“Do, do,” chimed the others.

The good-natured Sōshichi could not but yield to their repeated demands.

“Well, er – my father Sōzaémon is so strict with me in everything that I can’t spend even a copper as I’d like to at Kyoto and Osaka. During my yearly trip to Hakata, however, I do succeed in visiting the gay quarter of Yanagi Street. On my very first meeting with a beautiful girl of that street, named Kojorō, we fell in love with each other and at last we made a vow to the effect that I would spare no pains to ransom her this year and she vowed that she would become my wife.”

“Enough,” broke in Kuémon, not without a touch of derision in his voice, “I don’t care to listen further. We too visit the gay quarter of Yanagi Street. When you ransom your Kojorō we’ll accompany you as your attendants. We hope you’ll favour us, my lord, with such presents as are proper to the occasion.”

Kuémon rose upon his knees and cast a scornful glance at the young merchant. His comrades laughed among themselves.

“Bravo! A handsome gallant!

“Ransomer of Kojorō!”

“Hurrah for a lady-killer!

The exasperated Sōshichi restrained his rising temper with difficulty.

“Well, sirs,” said he clearing his throat, “I caught a chill this morning and it’s turned to a headache. Pray excuse me. We will continue our chat later.”

He made his bow and returned to his cabin, his heart big with wrath and mortification.

“He seems to me to be a fool to pretend to have a cold in his head when his purse is in such a healthy condition that he can afford to ransom a courtesan.”

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Even as Kuémon spoke a swiftly moving boat appeared at a distance. Her rowers pulled with a will and it was not long before she came alongside. In great excitement Kuémon and his comrades cried, “Ahoy! Sanzō and Ichigorō! How did it turn out with you?”

“Never been so lucky in years. We received the goods you were after and paid the price, to the complete satisfaction of both sides. It won’t be long now before we deliver you the goods, in reference to the tally.”

This was welcome news. Kuémon ordered down the sailors to receive the goods.

“Ay! Ay! Sir,” they responded heartily and set about loading the goods. The first articles were one hundred and five tiger skins, no less gay than these men’s hearts. Next appeared five boxes of best quality ginseng, weighing forty pounds. The sailors were as lively as if they had already swallowed this quantity of medicine. Then were taken in forty pods of musk and two hundred pieces of damask in seven chests.

“Did none of the watchers see you?” inquired Kuémon anxiously.

“Not they. Here are fifteen boxes of striped silk gauze, twelve rolls of satin, seven pails of lacquer, one hundred and thirty pounds of tortoise-shell as bright as a full moon. That’s the lot. No, I am wrong. Here are eighty coral beads, big as morning stars. All these goods are entered in the invoice and here is a note of identification for next year. They ask you to send them a ship next summer, sir.”

The chief received the note and held it up to his forehead. He appeared pleased.

“Bravo! Ichigorō and Sanzō! You have done well. Take a rest. Now, men, give them some *saké*.”

“Our best congratulations, gov’nor,” returned the newcomers. “We hope you will see your way to rewarding us handsomely. Now let us have plenty of *saké*.”

They boarded the ship, which slowly moved further out into the offing, one pool of gold under the full moon.

As he who follows this story will by now have guessed, Kuémon and his band were smugglers—unlicensed importers of Chinese and Dutch

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goods, known in a general way as “pirates” and liable to severe punishment on detection.

Kuémon assembled the crew on deck and spoke in a whisper: “Listen! When we took those goods aboard that young fellow below saw fit to thrust his head out of a porthole and from the look he had I fancy he was not without his speculations, in fact I am inclined to think he was suspicious. I don’t know if you others noticed it, but so it appeared to me. If he is allowed to go on sleeping quietly down there, sooner or later he’ll peach on us and that’ll be the end of us. We’d best not cut his throat and spill blood, though; it might bring bad luck just as we’re putting out on this important expedition. You will therefore strangle him and throw his body in the sea. Remember he has a servant, so don’t be off your guard.”

“Certainly, gov’nor. Now then, look sharp about it!”

“Ay! Ay!”

’Twas but a moment’s work for those ruffians to make ready for the brutal deed. They wound their kerchiefs round their heads, tucked up their sleeves and skirts and stealthily descended the hatch. Not one of them but imagined their evil intentions to be quite unsuspected by their would-be victims. The Kyoto merchant and his servant seemed to be endowed, however, with a sixth sense—the sense for danger. The servant made a desperate leap for the deck, only immediately to be overpowered by two of the sailors who closed upon him. They lifted him to arm’s length overhead and with a loud “Yo! Ho!” heaved him headlong overboard and the poor fellow descended to Davy Jones’s locker.

“So much for him! But where’s Sōshichi? Nose him out, boys, nose him out!”

“Here!” Out rushed Sōshichi, a pole in his hand. “Devil-dogs of pirates! I have your secret! Die if die I must, but I will not die alone!”

So saying he laid about him with his weapon. One of the crew seized him from behind only to be flung down, but, falling, the sailor took him by the leg and Sōshichi tripped and fell sprawling on the deck. The pack fell upon him, seized him, lifted him up and hurled him headlong into the deep.

“Now that that’s settled we can take a rest in peace.”

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They laughed heartily and at once busied themselves preparing the gear for the voyage.

Sōshichi, however, was not so easily disposed of as they imagined. He was not drowned yet. In fact, when he awoke from the stupor caused by the fall he found himself lying miraculously unhurt in the dinghy belonging to the ship. He felt his bones: nothing broken. And what joy to learn that he had escaped a danger more terrible than the jaws of a shark or boa-constrictor. Not a moment did he lose in unfastening the painter and in rowing himself some distance away.

"Ahoy! You rascals!" he cried as he plied the oar. "Be so good as to take notice that I, Sōshichi, thank you for your trouble. The day is coming when I'll get my own back – and don't you forget it!" He rowed with all his strength and was soon lost to sight.

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The scene shifts to the front apartment of the Okuda-ya, a famous brothel in Yanagi Street in the city of Hakata. The brilliant lights flooded the new green mats and gorgeous red curtains. Gay enough it was in there as the two young girl attendants on courtesans danced to the music of a *samisen* which Yokuichi, a blind minstrel, was playing. Suddenly the girls ceased dancing.

"Stop, Yokuichi San," they said angrily. "How can we dance to such a rhythm? If you don't know the music of the *zenidaiko* dance you ought to have told us so before we started. Izaémon San of Nagasaki, mind you, knows all about it. We won't dance any more."

"How can you hope to improve if you're so idle? Dance on until I stop playing. Now then, dance."

"No, we won't dance, whatever you may say. And as for you, instead of playing the *samisen* you'd do better to play blind-man's-buff!"

"What! Play blind-man's-buff! Don't you try making a fool of me! Blind as I am I can chastise you for all your eyes."

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The enraged Yokuichi, holding his instrument aloft, pursued the frightened girls up and down the room. At this moment Shirozaémon, the proprietor of the house, appeared.

“What are you up to, Yokuichi? It isn’t worthy of you to torment children. Girls, if you persist in making all this noise I’ll tell the supervisor to scold you. Come, Shigénojō, to-day being the thirteenth anniversary of the death of Kojorō’s mother, she has taken a day off and is praying for the soul of the departed in her room. And you, her attendant, ought to be with her, burning incense to the spirit of the dead. In any event, why all this noise?”

“Well, sir, while we two were practising the *zenidaiko* dance this Yokuichi here came and disturbed us by playing the samisen. And so—”

“Worse and worse,” broke in the proprietor. “There are right hours and wrong hours for practice. Go in and wait on Kojorō. Be off, the pair of you! Now, Yokuichi, Gen Sama of Dazaifu is in the front room upstairs. You had better go and pay your respects to your patron.”

“Excellent! I will go and take a piece of silver off him. If you please, sir!”

Elated at the prospect of receiving a little money, the blind minstrel groped his way upstairs. The girls and Shirozaémon retired.

Out in the street, hard by the door, stood a shabbily dressed man, no other than Sōshichi, but pale and haggard now. Having escaped with his life off Shimonoseki it was not without great difficulty that he had found his way to Hakata, the city of his heart’s desire. Now that he stood without the house he sought, he was in a sorry plight, for his adventures had so reduced him that he now possessed nothing but his own body and was so ashamed of his condition that he dared not visit his acquaintances in the city. His passion for Kojorō had drawn him hither, but in the gay quarter where gold, and gold alone, reigned supreme, the penniless youth felt the meanness of his appearance and suffered a corresponding humiliation. He had meant to knock, but now he hesitated and only continued standing, his heart beating a tattoo within him, and from time to time peered through the gate or shrank back from it in fright lest perchance the servants might espy him.

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“Be off, you beggar there!” cried a harsh voice. “We have given away all the kitchen scraps.”

The passionate lover in Sōshichi felt cowed. “It’s no better than a beggar I appear, is it?” he said to himself. “Alas, what shall I do? If I ask them to let me see my Kojorō they are sure to refuse me and, did I succeed in seeing her, it would only bring disgrace on her I must give up the idea; yes, I’ll leave without seeing her.”

He had but taken a few steps when a voice cried, “Wait a moment!” It was Kojorō’s girl attendant Shigénojō. “To-day being a day observed as sacred by my *tayū*¹ san, I’ll give you a copper as alms.”²

She surveyed Sōshichi not without wonder as she proffered him the money. “A mighty fine beggar indeed! Why, he’s dressed in silk... ah, I know you! Confess, you are Sōshichi San of Kyoto, now aren’t you? *Tayū* San, come quick! Here’s Sōshichi Sama come abegging!”

The girl peered into his face. Her cry of astonishment still more humiliated Sōshichi. He shook his head with vigour and prepared to move off in haste. But the girl, taking him by the belt, detained him, crying, “I won’t let you go! Wait!”

Meanwhile Shirozaémon and his hirelings had rushed out upon the scene. Kojorō came too, and running up to Sōshichi, snatched away his *kasa*³ and gazed into his face.

“It really is Sōshichi San! What fun! You are very welcome, my dear. How on earth did you come to be in such a plight?”

Already, even before he had told his story, she was in tears. She addressed herself to the proprietor.

“May I have a private talk with Sōshichi San?”

“Certainly. You are quite at liberty to do so. Sōshichi Sama is a patron of ours from of old. If you should need anything, sir, please don’t hesitate to mention it.”

¹There were four classes of courtesans. The highest were called *tayû*.

²It is customary on the anniversary of a death to distribute alms to the poor. This is held to bring peace to the departed soul.

³A hat with a hanging brim.

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Kojorō took her sweetheart by the hand and hastened with him into the front room. No sooner was the door shut than she clung to him weeping. “Why didn’t you let me know it was you earlier, my love? What can have brought you to such a condition? Has your father disinherited you? There must be some special reason or other. Do tell me. Do you still think of me as a courtesan? True, I continue in service, but long ago I considered myself your wife. Though both should be reduced to such penury as to have to beg, yet never will I break my plighted word. To-day is the thirteenth anniversary of my mother’s death. Since I have chanced upon you on this day of all days I can hardly doubt that my parents in the spirit have brought about this joyful meeting. Can’t you just say to me, Sōshichi San, ‘How is it with you, my dear wife?’”

Kojorō spoke in tearful tones. It was evident that she was carried away by passionate love. In her voice there was an ecstasy of joy not without a hint of reproach. Her swimming eyes bore witness to the candour of her heart.

“My dear Kojorō,” returned Sōshichi trembling, “it is good of you to say so. I am very glad to find you looking so well. It grieves me very much that, after a year’s separation, instead of presenting myself finely dressed and with good news upon my tongue, I should have to bring you unpleasant news. Pray listen. When I was making my way here carrying, according to my custom, my annual large stock of goods, I had the misfortune to chance to take passage in a smugglers’ vessel. Before my very eyes the villains saw fit to drown my servant in the sea. I all but shared his fate, yet managed to escape the jaws of death and it has not been without considerable suffering that I have managed to make my way hither. Such being the case, not only my goods and my fine clothes, but even my money were left in the ship. Finding myself without a penny I have been reduced to disposing even of some of the clothes off my back—a wretched business indeed! Last year, you remember, I promised that I would ransom you this; but my ill-fortune has been such that I have lost the money intended for this purpose. I am indeed sorry that I cannot keep my word and in my own grief can only too well imagine your anguish and disappointment. It was to look upon your face once more and to assure you

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of my heart sickness that I have dared to come here despite the fact of being well aware of what a shabby-looking creature I am."

Kojorō displayed no sign of great sorrow at this melancholy recital, but rather appeared buoyant, inwardly delighted perhaps at an opportunity to prove her fidelity.

"Thank you for giving me your confidence," she returned calmly. "Money is not of account, but life is everything. It is a joy to me that you are still alive. Once my mind is made up it is no hard matter for me to support you. The question in fact doesn't worry me at all, though I sympathize with your sufferings. I fear you must feel the cold. You seem to have grown very thin."

She laid one sleeve of her flowing overdress upon his shoulder, then tightly embracing him burst into tears.

The voice of a servant without was heard crying briskly. "Hullo there! Here are *daijin*⁴ sama!"

"Guests have arrived. Come this way."

She took him by the hand. The pair entered the inner room.

The guests proved to be none other than the smugglers. Kezori Kuémon was at their head. Yaheiji followed him with five subordinates. They filed into the room with happy shouts. Each was gorgeously attired in rich imported cloths: woollen, satin, damask and velvet. Though their hair was dressed after the Japanese fashion, their costumes were a fantastic medley of the Japanese and Chinese styles. They ascended the front room and seated themselves in a row, Kuémon appropriating to himself the place of honour. He had arrogated to himself the part of lord and paymaster combined, and now addressed himself to the proprietor with an air of importance.

"You remember us, I presume? Hitherto we have frequented the small houses in this city, but, as you may observe, we are now made men and intend accordingly to play the part of *daijin* from this day forth. On

⁴A rich man who spends extravagantly in the gay 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."

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our way hither we have glanced in upon Eguchi of Ichimonji-ya, Katsuyama and Usugumo of Maru-ya, Misao of Abura-ya, Ogura of Izumi-ya and ōiso of Kuruma-ya. If you will be so good as to be go-between we will ransom them for our comrades. Kindly make arrangements to-night, we cannot wait till tomorrow."

"You're in a great hurry, sir."

So saying Shirozaémon made as if to go. Kuémon intercepted him.

"Don't go. If you go there will be no one in charge. You can send someone, can't you?"

"Certainly, sir."

The proprietor hurriedly took brush and paper, wrote a series of notes and dispatched them by a messenger, then he turned to the maids and servants.

"Make haste and bring soup. Open the sliding doors that this room and the next may form a large banqueting hall. Don't let the children cry. Give my wife her medicine. Get a move on you!"

"Is your wife ailing, Shirozaémon? That's too bad. Hand me over that box there. Take care of your health. The only way to keep well is to take ginseng. I have some here in this box if you care for it."

Kuémon opened the box and produced a packet of large ginseng roots of the finest quality. From this packet he extracted about a pound's weight of roots and handed it to the proprietor.

"How many children have you, Shirozaémon?"

"A girl and two boys, sir."

"A proper number. These corals are small but weigh two ounces a pair. Let your sons have them as ornaments. Here are three rolls of damask and five rolls of satin for your daughter. This scarlet silk crêpe here will do as lining. These coins will pay for silk wadding."

These things he threw out one after the other in such quantities and with such expedition that Shirozaémon, receiving them and lifting them to his forehead,⁵ felt his arms grow positively tired.

⁵A polite way of expressing gratitude,

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"Pardon my saying so, sir," exclaimed Shirozaémon, his eyes nearly popping out of his head, "but your opulence and liberality are so astounding that I can hardly find words in which to express my gratitude. May I venture to inquire when and how you acquired such enormous wealth?"

To this leading question Kuémon returned but a random answer.

"Your surprise is natural enough," he replied off-hand. "The truth is, finding my trade at Yedo but a humdrum affair I visited the temple at Sayo-no-Nakayama and rang a successful peal on the famous Bell of Muken at the temple. As a consequence I suddenly became a millionaire, but you mustn't run away with the idea that a mere anybody can ring that bell without trouble. You have to practise some severe austerities or ever you get to ringing it at all. In the temple they keep a book called 'The Millionaire's Bible' with a long list of these austerities in it. Let me recite the contents to you."

"A rare book, I'll be bound," said the proprietor, slapping his thigh. "Since I have no objection to emulating your good fortune, please recite the words."

"Excellent. Now listen."

Kuémon ceremoniously produced a paper of dubious appearance from his bosom and read aloud:

"The Millionaire's Bible.

"He that would learn the history of this Bell of Muken, let him know that there once lived in India a bird with a pot of money whose name was Gwakkai, well known, too, as being a close-fisted sort of fellow. The Lord Buddha, who had it in his mind to snatch this brand from the burning, cultivated the habit of calling round every morning dressed up as a begging friar to give him the 'how d'ye do,' but his luck was out, for every time he got the straight tip to skedaddle, with the door slammed in his face. Then the Lord Buddha got a great idea and the next time he was walking round that way he turned up all tricked out as a whacking great image of shiny gold. No sooner had His Stinginess run his eye over that stunning

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image—and mind you it was just the colour of gold—than he was all of a flutter to rip off the golden leaves. This time he opened the door readily enough to the Lord Buddha and the Lord, having it all his own way, soon succeeded in converting him. In brief, the upshot of the matter was that the old hunk, who had never given a thought to anything but himself before, soon found himself putting up the ready to have this Bell of Muken cast. And if you want the proof of the story, here it is. You ring that bell and the greedy soul of the fellow can't leave it, there's so much money tied up in it, so that when you ring it, it says '*Oshiya! Oshiya!*' or '*Oh, how I hate parting!*' Folks who hear the toll of the bell get rich quick in this world, but in the next are apt to find themselves sitting on the hobs of the Muken hell. You can gather from this that this old bell isn't to be rung for the mere fun of the thing. Here's a list of all the nice little things you have to do before you can get a successful ring. To begin with you mustn't parade about in silk or in pongee. Even cotton is not allowed for your quilt. Straw matting is more '*comme il faut*' As to food, you must swallow tea-skillily twice a day and keep your nose out of the side-dishes, for the idea is that this sort of ration is the sort of thing to give one a helping hand in a life of devotion and assists the purification of mind and body. Then again, you have to work all day and every day throughout the year, and that with all your might. Don't leave even an old boot to lie if on the road you find it and when you fall on your nose, you've got to mind you don't get up without something in your hands, even though it's only a handful of dirt. See that you get up at the crack of dawn. Don't lend money without receiving an I.O.U. It's so much to your credit if you don't buy what you desire. You'll lose by not working by moonlight. The fellow who works as if he meant it will never be hard up. Cut the firewood fine before you use it. Throw nothing away, not even the ashes. Use soot from the pan when you paint your eyebrows. Rice-straw is a sovereign remedy for a leg gone to sleep.⁶ A dried up well's no bad place to keep ladders in. The saving man will use a rat's tail as a gimlet sheath. An umbrella should be dried at once after

⁶There is a superstition among common folk that when a leg goes to sleep an application of rice-straw to the forehead will cure the numbness.

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being used. The wise man never lends any of the following: dried bonito,⁷ a pestle, an earthenware mortar, a whetstone, a quern, a druggist's mortar, for every time you lend any one of these things, it is sure to come back worn, however small the wear may be. We must be frugal and satisfied with our conditions, remembering that there are others not so well off as we are. If you observe these precepts faithfully many a mickle will make a muckle until at last you grow to be a millionaire. Of this there can be no shadow of doubt whatever. If, having assiduously practised every one of these austerities, you then ring the Bell of Muken, depend upon it you will then be a millionaire and your fortune will be that of a millionaire, not only in this world but in the next."

This humorous recitation over, Shirozaémon smiled and said, "That's a real fact and not a fable, but were the whole world to behave as this Bible instructs it, my business would be at an end!"

Kojorō, who had given ear to all this from behind the paper doors in the next room, was lost in amazement and whispered to Sōshichi, "What a mint of money he must have! Did you hear him say he was going to ransom half a dozen courtesans? And he seems to have heaped on the master one valuable thing after another, for all the world as if silver and gold were dirt to him. Isn't it enough to make one envious? Even when my people were living in poverty I never even dreamed of wanting to get money which I couldn't earn in a fair way, but to-day I long to be able to lay my hands on a large sum and how I envy those courtesans who are going to be ransomed. One shouldn't be jealous of a man in good fortune, none the less I should like to see what sort of man he is."

She peered through the chink between the paper doors. A surprise awaited her.

⁷The Japanese dry fillets of this fish. They may be seen in the shops and have the appearance of wooden blocks, the shape of the section of an enormous orange. They can be dropped on the earth without breaking. The Japanese shave off flakes from them against the steel of an especial kind of plane sold for the purpose.

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“Why, he’s a friend of mine! He’s the man who kindly gave me his promise that he would help me if I were ever in need of help. I’ll go in to him and ask him for a loan.”

She was about to enter, but Sōshichi stopped her.

“No, my dear. You know nothing of this man beyond the house, and what is more, those strangers with him would overhear you. How can a courtesan demean herself by requesting a loan⁸ of her patron? Don’t you feel the disgrace of it?”

“That depends upon circumstances. As I told you a little while ago, my Chikugo⁹ patron has all but promised Sadoya that he will ransom me next month. It is therefore with extreme longing that I have awaited your visit, only to be disappointed. Were I handed over to another I would not live. Pray, where is the disgrace in a loan if it be repaid? Do please leave the matter to me.”

So saying she twitched her sleeve from his grasp, great tears glistened in her eyes, nor could Sōshichi refrain from tears. At length she wiped them away, slowly entered the next apartment and gracefully seated herself at the side of Kuémon. At the unexpected vision of so much beauty these rough customers made haste to trim themselves up. Then unanimously they turned upon her sheep’s eyes, so that an unseen beholder would surely have been put in mind of “ogres viewing beautiful flowers.”

“What a pleasure it is to me to see you, Kuémon San,” began Kojorō lightly. “I happen to have a great favour to ask of you. A very heavy misfortune has befallen me and I consequently find it necessary to get myself ransomed at once. As ill luck will have it my lover hasn’t the money required at the present moment. Would you be so kind as to keep the

⁸Strange as it may seem, courtesans of olden days enjoyed considerable respect and avoided mean behaviour, deeming it beneath their dignity to borrow money from their patrons. Their position had perhaps something in common with that of the Greek Hetaerae.

⁹\

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promise you made me some time ago and lend me enough money to effect my ransom until the whole sum comes along? Do be so good, Kuémon!”

“What delicious frankness, Kojorō,” returned Kuémon with joy. “There’s no one but hates to ask another for a loan, yet you have dared to take the bull by the horns. I am glad of it. You won’t have to ask me twice I’ll let you have even a thousand *ryō*, why, ten thousand if you want it! Now, Shirozaémon, I am going to ransom Kojorō. She shall go wherever she chooses. Yes, I’ll pay her ransom money. And I engage her services until the other courtesans arrive. Come, be merry, friends! Sing and drink!”

Kuémon and his companions needed no second invitation, but Kojorō stayed them.

“One moment, sirs. My lover is behind these doors. I’ll bring him in to thank you, Kuémon. Don’t break your word, sir.”

“Upon my honour as a man and a merchant, I never lie. Bring your lover in.”

Overjoyed, Kojorō left the apartment.

“See, *tayū* san have come!”

Scarcely had the announcement been made when Katsuyama, Eguchi and ōiso showed their lovely faces. The room grew gay.

“Good day, sirs,” they cried merrily. “Usugumo San, Misao San and Ogura San will follow us presently.”

“Welcome girls!” Kuémon’s companions grew suddenly uproarious and gazed upon the courtesans with rapture.

“Now, Shirozaémon,” remarked Kuémon, “take these girls into another room a while, for we’ve some business to do here. And don’t let the second lot of girls come in either.”

“Certainly, sir. Come with me, girls.”

The three submissively accompanied the proprietor.

For a while Sōshichi pondered whether to show his face or no, but at length, urged by Kojorō, he opened the doors and entered the apartment. Great was the consternation of both Sōshichi and the roughs when they met face to face.

“Kojorō’s sweetheart! Is it you? I remember you.”

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"So we meet! I have longed for this moment. What, all of you here? These fellows are—"

Kuémon's retainers sought to prevent his further speaking.

"Not a word more!" they cried. "Cut him down!"

They had leapt to their feet. Cups, bottles and pans rolled hither and thither, spilling liquor and soup upon the mats.

"A quarrel about a woman! It's going to be serious."

Panic-stricken maids and servants looked on in terror, their faces white as linen. Kuémon did not budge.

"Not so much fuss," he cried calmly. "I have a plan, comrades. Do you go in to the girls. I'll settle this matter alone."

"No, no! We'll deal with him! Better not leave you alone with him."

"Nonsense!" returned Kuémon with a glare. "Do you think I am the sort of man to take an easy licking? If you remain there'll only be a riot. Get out and be quick about it."

"Very well. We leave it to you."

Kojorō, who had not the slightest idea of what had occurred between them, was astonished at the unexpected turn events had taken, but none the less continued courageously to sit by Sōshichi, glancing first at one face and then at the other.

"Well, young man," Kuémon calmly began, "breathe but one syllable of what passed the other day and you will be undone. Not one word. No need to enlarge upon my trade, you know it; but if your life has any value for you whatever suffer those doings to pass in silence. If you show any signs of objecting you may take it that there will be serious trouble. Therefore suffer things to stand as they are. If I in my own person see fit to ransom Kojorō, your promise will be empty and poor Kojorō's kind intention pass for nothing. She has put herself to the humiliation of asking me for a loan of money for your sake, isn't that so? It would be a shame to disappoint her. Bearing your interests in mind I sincerely advise you to join us in our business. If you see fit to do this I will not only ransom Kojorō for you, but place at your disposal five hundred *ryō*, no, even one thousand *ryō*, in order that you may take your ease with your girl without calling on your father for assistance. Perhaps you will wonder at the offer,

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considering that the more numerous our comrades are the more disadvantageous it is to us. Yet in our trade nothing counts like luck, and since you indeed appear to be a lucky fellow in having escaped the perils of not long ago, I feel sure that your joining us will contribute to the prosperity of our business. I therefore entreat you to join us. Indeed I most humbly insist that you do so, Sōshichi Dono."

Kuémon spoke as one who pleads. Nevertheless his hand was on his sword-hilt and he appeared ready to use the weapon should the young man refuse. Sōshichi found himself in a terrible dilemma. If he joined the smugglers' gang, he would be a violator of the national laws, and run the risk of losing his life. If he refused he would not only have to render his sweetheart to another, but that other would be his murderer. Death awaited him upon either course. Should he heed the law or obey the promptings of love? He was at a loss.

"Well, Sōshichi San," remarked Kojorō in a soothing tone, "what Kuémon's business may be I do not know, but it is obvious that when one man rides in a palanquin and another carries it, both go the same road, though their manner of passing the time is different. I think Kuémon San means well by you since he is making this offer of money and appears to be doing everything else he can for you. Won't you say 'yes' and join him and live with me as husband? But if your joining him means your ruin, return him a definite refusal. Remember that if I cannot be your wife I will live no longer. Whether you make me your wife or cause my death depends upon your 'yes' or 'no.' Since this is not a small question, do not be in a hurry to make your reply."

With that she thrust her hand into his bosom and was surprised to find him wet with perspiration.

At last Sōshichi made his resolve.

"I consent, Kuémon Dono," he said in a determined voice, "I will join you and obey your every order. I have heard that at Nagasaki it is the custom to drink saké mixed with blood when one makes a vow. To testify to my sincerity I will draw blood from my arm."

He made as if to bare his arm. Kuémon intercepted the gesture.

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"No need of that. Your sincerity is sufficiently apparent. Come in now, comrades."

His subordinates instantly returned with their fair companions. Sōshichi exchanged a cup of fraternity with each of them.

"You must feel in fine feather, Kojorō Dono," remarked Kuémon patronizingly. "Now, Shirozaémon, what does the total ransom money amount to?"

"Here is the bill, sir."

Kuémon received the bill and ran his eye over it.

"So the ransom of Kojorō Dono and the other girls amounts to one thousand, four hundred and fifty *ryō*, does it? Well, here's one thousand five hundred, Shirozaémon. The odd sum's a nuisance. I give you the balance of fifty *ryō*." The whole sum of one thousand five hundred *ryō* in silver and gold was accordingly then and there piled up.

"This vow of brotherhood suits me nicely," said Kuémon. "Now, comrades, every one of you treat this young man as more than a brother. Come, a song, a song." Thereupon that rude company broke into chorus:

Where the great green chestnuts spread,
And the cot among the rocks is,
Where the shade is cool o'erhead
And grass pleasant underfoot,
Lie we down, lie we down,
Lie we down, boys, with our doxies,
Head by head on chestnut root.

The song was suddenly interrupted by the cry of a night-watchman.

"Hi! Shirozaémon Dono! A murderer has taken refuge in this quarter and all the visitors are to be examined. Let no one forth. See, the constable is approaching."

Watchman and proprietor left incontinently.

Kuémon and his companions, albeit proud of their self-possession, turned a trifle pale.

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"This looks bad. Is there not, I wonder, some other route to our ship? Never mind the expense."

"The earth appears solid enough, alas! Isn't there some mode of going through the air?"

"Oh, that we had the harness of invisibility!"¹⁰

Sōshichi, taking Kojorō by the hand, sat still, drawing his breath with difficulty, while he fixed an anxious look on the front door. At this moment there arose, uncertain whether in this house or the next, a tumult, the sound of rushing feet and stamping, followed by the loud cry, "We arrest you!"

The sinister exclamation was not without its effect upon the company: all were stiff with terror.

"Have no fear, sirs," remarked Shirozaémon returning. "A wretch who murdered a postman, while playing the highwayman at Tonomachi Street in this city, has been arrested next door and taken to the Bailiff's office: a matter which in no way concerns you, sirs."

The smugglers exchanged glances, not unaccompanied by sighs of relief.

"There's no point in stopping any longer, Sōshichi Dono," said Kuémon, "we'll away to the capital. Come now, comrades, let's be off. Girls, you will follow us to the wharf in palanquins. Farewell, Shirozaémon."

"Farewell, Shirozaémon Dono," echoed Kuémon's companions.

"Farewell, sirs. A thousand thanks for your patronage. Pray visit us again."

¹⁰Tradition asserts that in ancient times there existed straw coats and sedge hats which, like the magic caps in a western fairy tale, conferred upon the wearer the benefit of a temporary disappearance from sight. These were called *kakurè-mino* (hiding straw coats) and *kakurè-gasa* (hiding hats).

II

An auction was in progress at the house of Komachiya Sōshichi in Shinsei Street of the capital. Everything was being put up for sale, from wardrobes, chests, swords and hanging pictures by famous artists to cupboards with their contents, pots and pans, etc., yes, even the mats and the household Buddhist shrine itself. Things were at such a pass that it seemed as if they would sell the very dirt and ashes if they could. The whole neighbourhood had gathered; bidding was brisk among the noisy crowd. The owner of the house, Hishiya Kaémon, rushed forward, crying indignantly to the aged man who was acting as auctioneer.

“What an outrage! This house of mine is rented to Komachiya Sōshichi, a travelling merchant. He and his wife have gone to Osaka on business; this old woman has been left behind as caretaker. They asked me to be responsible for the contents of the house during their absence. They are expected back to-day or to-morrow. Are you pleased to think you are doing your duty as caretaker, old woman? Now, old man, what and who are you? Are you so old that you don’t know the customs of the capital? What madness is this that you should trespass inside another man’s house and sell all its contents without so much as reporting the matter to the Street Meeting Office.¹¹ Do you imagine that I, an alderman of this street and the owner of this house, will suffer such an outrage to pass unchallenged? I intend to have both of you cross-examined. You will be so good as to come with me to the Meeting Office next door. Come now, let

¹¹*Machi Kaisho* or “Street Meeting Office” was an office wherein the public affairs of a particular street were transacted. Every street had such an office.

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there be no delay about it." He endeavoured to hurry them but the woman only wept with bowed head. The old man respectfully replied.

"Honoured sir, as a householder and an alderman, you speak with a good show of reason, I wouldn't think of disobeying you, but pray condescend to listen to what I have to say. I am Sōshichi's father, by name Komachiya Sōzaémon. I am a native of Nagasaki, but I have been living for twenty years in the capital. By trade I am a merchant. My resources are but small and consequently my business is not prosperous. So I live miserably enough in the suburbs. As you are probably aware, my son Sōshichi is in the habit of visiting Hakata as a travelling merchant. Recently his letters have become more and more rare, a thing that has filled me with anxiety, more especially when I have considered the rumours concerning his movements that have lately reached me. Rumour averred that he had earned an immense sum in Kyūshū, had ransomed a Hakata courtesan and was living in a splendid house on Shinsei Street. Outwardly his mode of life was humble, so the rumour ran, but in reality he lived a life of luxury. Astonished at the news, I paid a visit to this place for the first time last night and was amazed to find everything that had been asserted true. Above all the value of the household effects overwhelmed me. I questioned this woman about Sōshichi's affairs, but she could tell me nothing. I daresay you have much experience as a merchant. I have been in business all my life, old as I am, but as far as my experience goes I consider it impossible for a humble merchant to become a millionaire in so short a while. In old days Sōshichi showed such appreciation of his filial duty that he let me know whenever he had earned even so small a sum as ten or fifteen *ryō*, but now it would appear that he is doing his best to hide this great property from me. It's quite impossible for me to think he has earned the money fairly and in his progress from bad to worse, involving as it must you and his other neighbours, he cannot escape a shameful death. I have therefore seen fit to put his things up to auction for a mere song in order to make him realize that ill-gotten goods never prosper and to endeavour to induce him to proceed upon honourable courses. I do this out of sheer affection for my son, sir. Carried away by my desire to dispose of these things I entirely overlooked the fact that the correct procedure was to

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report the matter to you and the Meeting Office. I most humbly beg your forgiveness for such laxity. I beg to return you this house with thanks, on Sōshichi's behalf."

The householder's indignation evaporated before the other's pleading. "Your explanation is sufficient, old man," he returned, nodding his appreciation of the facts of the case, "but since this house is rented under the signature of a surety I want a declaration from you, lest trouble should arise, and I should like this woman's seal affixed to it. Pray come with me to the Meeting Office."

In less than no time Kaémon had ordered every remaining thing to be carried away. The house stood empty. The outer gate was closed and a placard was pasted up reading "House To Let." The three repaired to the office.

The courtesan formerly known far and wide as "Kojorō of Hakata" was now a contented merchant's wife. Her husband, Sōshichi, was a *nouveau riche* after frequent ups and downs on the stormy waters of a dangerous trade. The fortunate pair, accompanied by three servants, returned from their brief visit to Osaka. The sight of their house struck them for a moment completely speechless. The *noren*¹² was wanting and the notice "House To Let," drawn in bold, black letters, stood upon the gate.

"What can have happened?"

They forced the side-door, entered, and were still more astonished to find the house entirely empty: not a kettle to warm water in, not a mat to sit upon. A solitary bird cried disconsolately in the garden. They were too overwhelmed with surprise to cry like the bird, but simply gazed at each other open-mouthed. Something seemed suddenly to strike Sōshichi's mind. He felt as if the soles of his feet were pierced by pointed bamboo stumps and, crestfallen, seated himself upon the bamboo floor.

"My dear," said Kojorō excitedly, "there's no good in sitting down and taking your ease. The householder is a very good friend of ours and

¹²That is, a sign-curtain.

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his wife and I are on such intimate terms that when I last saw her the other day she asked me to present her with a pair of Osaka clogs as a souvenir. It's very unreasonable of them, considering the friendliness of our relations, to have emptied our house in our absence. I'll go at once and ask an explanation of them."

She made as if to go out. Sōshichi stopped her.

"No," said he with gloomy composure, "such negotiations are not for a woman. Remember that this house is a rented house in name only: it was in extremely bad condition when I took it over and accordingly I repaired it entirely at my own expense. And only lately I bought planks to have the floor repaired. As to the rent, I have paid two or three months' rent in advance. I have never been in arrears with it. What is more, we've been liberal in our relations with our neighbours. And now, in spite of all that, this wrong has been done us: our property has been taken from us and our old caretaker is missing. I cannot believe that this is the doing of the householder or of any other neighbour. It seems to be probable that our money and valuables, entrusted to the care of friends, have given rise to official suspicion. In any event we are in imminent danger and accordingly cannot linger here even for one night. Alas! All is over with me! My doom has come at length." He called his servants to him—a man and two maids—and thus addressed them:

"My dear servants, under present circumstances I can no longer retain your services. I am sorry to part from you, but I have no option but to discharge you. I give you this purse which contains some change: share it. Farewell."

With that he threw them a cretonne purse; it was accepted with gratitude. "Many thanks, master. It would be rude to decline your offer. We grieve for you and your fortunes. Farewell, master and mistress."

They felt the purse and were agreeably surprised to discover that it contained eight or nine *ryō* in gold. Then, without exhibiting the least shadow of regret, the cold-hearted servants took themselves off.

The old caretaker, who had perceived the return of her master and mistress, stole out of the Meeting Office.

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“Oh dear, oh dear! Master and mistress,” she said sorrowfully. “Your honourable father came last night and was much surprised and grieved to see the value of your property. He said to me, ‘Greed must have driven Sōshichi to join a gang of pirates. Evidently he considers gain, however unfairly earned, a blessing. Ere long he will be crucified. He has disregarded my precept that money, fairly earned, be it only a penny one has turned by peddling turnips and radishes, is worth more than millions of *ryō* gotten by ill means. I’d very much like to know how he can afford such expensive surroundings. They’re a danger to my son, that’s what they are.’ Then sadly enough he summoned a dealer in second-hand articles and with his assistance sold off your belongings dirt cheap, locked the house up, and took his way to the Meeting Office, where he made his humble apologies to the officers. All this trouble did he take on your behalf. I am very sorry both on your account and on your father’s.”

At these words Sōshichi burst into a torrent of tears. After a brief silence he said gravely, “My good woman, I am wondering what has become of the note of identification I kept in the case of the ink-stone; should that note come to the eye of strangers it would occasion my ruin. Can it, do you think, have passed with the case into the hands of a dealer in second-hand articles?”

“No, sir. The case was indeed sold, but the note is in your father’s pocket-book. Don’t be anxious on that point, but busy yourself in a fashion I consider more useful, namely, in losing not a minute in escaping from this quarter. Since the Meeting Office is likely to send for me at any moment, I had better get back. If we continue to live, chance may bring us together again. Pray take good heed to yourselves, master and mistress. Farewell.”

Reluctantly and sorrowfully she returned. Sōshichi sat with a vacant expression upon his face for a moment, then exclaimed:

“Now that our secret has reached my father’s ears, it must already be known to the public. Nothing can be done. My dear, we had best fly and keep flying as long as may be. I have a friend in the town of Yokkaichi in Isé Province; let us take our way in that direction. It is now close upon four o’clock. Come, get ready for starting, Kojorō.”

At this moment a gruff voice cried, “Is Sōshichi in?”

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And the next moment the side-door admitted a grim giant who proved to be Kezori Kuémon.

"You've closed the doors early!"

"What! Is it Kuémon Dono?" the perplexed Sōshichi stammered. "What brings you to the capital? Well—er—come up—now, Kojorō, bring the tobacco tray. Bring tea."

"Silence, Sōshichi," said Kuémon, casting a suspicious look about him. "It was but four or five days ago that we met at Osaka when we promised to meet in the capital and now you seem to be removing, eh? Why and whither are you going? It makes me anxious."

"You need have no fears. I have just returned from Osaka and haven't had time yet even to wash my feet. The fact is, my father is such an old man that I can no longer live apart from him: accordingly we've agreed to live together and all my belongings have been taken to his residence. That's why everything here is in confusion. Where are you putting up? I'll soon let you know my new address. Well—er—excuse us a moment."

The couple prepared to make off, but Kuémon interposed.

"One moment! You look startled and ill at ease. Strange! Remember, the season of our trade is returning. Since I mean to set out for Nagasaki tomorrow I have come for the note of identification we entrusted to your care. Give me the note before you go out."

"Certainly. But because the note is so precious I put it in a box, sealed the box, and entrusted the same to my father. I will presently send it to you."

At this Kuémon turned colour.

"What!" he burst out angrily. "You have entrusted the note to your father? Remember that in the quest of our fortunes we are in the habit of making voyages over three thousand miles of waves and that note constitutes the only surety in our traffic. Its value is only second to that of our lives. And can you really mean that you have entrusted it to your father? Don't utter such nonsense! I believe it is your intention to secede from our circle and to monopolize the trade. For such a purpose you plan to abandon us without my knowledge. There's no doubt about that. You

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have that note on your person, I'll be bound. I will take it from you by force."

With these words he lost no time in fastening the latches of the main door and of the side door, then he advanced into the middle of the room. Kojorō was frightened.

"Kuémon Sama," she pleaded, "how can there be double-dealing between us who are as close as fish and water? I will not fail to hand you that note in two or three days. Will you please go now."

She tried to push him gently out of doors.

"A beggarly nuisance!" cried Kuémon, and seizing her by the arm he threw her to the floor.

Sōshichi lost his head.

"A fine way to treat a helpless woman, when you could treat me as you will!"

He laid hands upon his sword.

"You can't frighten me, young man. I mean to have that note and have it I will, no matter how!"

He had scarcely spoken when his sword left its sheath. Sōshichi jumped back, drew his, and in a flash steel tingled on steel. Thrust and cut were sure, but the old bamboo floor being rotten in some parts both had considerable difficulty in fighting, for their feet ever and again caught in the decayed bamboos. Squarely matched, neither could injure the other: when Kuémon cut at Sōshichi's right, Sōshichi leapt to the left; when Sōshichi thrust at Kuémon's left, Kuémon dodged to the right. And at each thrust and parry the swords glittered like icicles.

Despite the danger, more terrible than that of treading upon ice that is thawing beneath the spring-tide sun, Kojorō placed herself between the fighters and tried to knock away Kuémon's weapon with a broom. Her feet caught in the bamboo flooring; she stumbled; fell down. Over her the swords continued to flash.

The sound of the fight became audible to the neighbours, but they were too terrified to intervene. Not so Sōzaémon. His affection for his son forbade passivity. He rushed to the doors.

"Sōshichi! Stop fighting! I will give you the note of identification."

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But the fighters were too excited to pay heed. He pushed against the doors, beat against them with both hands, but they would not open. He peeped through the chinks and was horror-struck to behold the struggle at its height. With an exclamation of terror, and twisted up with anguish, he ran round to the rear of the house.

Within doors Kojorō, who had removed a paper door to serve both as a shield and weapon, endeavoured to batter down Kuémon's sword; but, her strength proving insufficient, she fell down with the door upon her back. Kuémon seized his chance to thrust at her. But his feet caught in the frame of the door and he too fell. As he lay he tried to stab her through the door. Sōshichi lifted his weapon.

"Kill Kojorō and I kill you!"

At this juncture a small hole was broken in the wall; a hand was thrust through, waving a roll of paper. The paper arrested the attention of the combatants. To his surprise and joy Sōshichi perceived the paper to be the note of identification.

"Look at that, Kuémon!" cried Sōshichi. "Now that it is restored to you, you can have no further quarrel with me. Let us cease our useless struggle."

Both swords were forthwith sheathed. Touched by his father's affection, Sōshichi lifted the note and the hand that bore it to his forehead in token of gratitude. Then, taking the note from the hand, he offered it to Kuémon saying, "Here is your note, Kuémon."

Kuémon received it and carefully examined it.

"Yes, this is the note. I acknowledge its receipt. Forgive my rashness, Sōshichi, and never harbour ill-feelings toward me again. Remember our trade is one carried on at the risk of our lives and that it is our custom to renew our friendships the very moment we sheathe our swords. You look pale and seem worried. Have courage. Do not lose your self-possession though a mountain crumble to pieces beside you: for otherwise you cannot prosper in our calling. Come to Nagasaki when our trading season opens and meet us there. Farewell, Sōshichi and Kojorō."

So saying, Kuémon took himself off composedly enough.

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Sōshichi helped Kojorō to her feet. Great tears coursed down his face. "Did you understand what passed, my dear? How great is my father's compassion! Thanks to it we are saved from death. Well may you prostrate yourself before the breach in the wall!"

"What compassion! What kindness! I am indeed grateful. It grieves me that this wall prevents me from seeing your father's face. What misery is mine! I am out of breath and cannot speak. How I should love some hot water, nay, even cold water."

She panted; but to her great regret not a tea-cup nor a ladle was to be found in the empty house.

"I am very thirsty; what shall I do?"

Her words reached Sōzaémon's ears. His hand reappeared through the wall and in the hand was a cup containing tepid water. At sight of this kindly hand the couple cried, "Thanks, father, how good of you!" They grasped the hand affectionately. "Not even a cup of *saké* bestowed by a nobleman, not even a sovereign medicine, not even the libation of a tutelary deity can compare with this cup of water! "They received the cup reverently and drank from it by turns.

"Dear father-in-law," said Kojorō, grasping the hand once more, "I am delighted to take your hand, but I am sorry I cannot see your face. Please understand that, though I have not yet your approval, I am your daughter-in-law. Please forgive Sōshichi San's error and condescend to see him and permit me to have a first and last glance at your face."

So saying she pressed the hand to her face again and again and burst into tears. Albeit Sōzaémon's face remained invisible they could easily imagine his deep grief from the agitation of his hand. Presently the hand shook itself free of Kojorō's grasp. A purse was thrown in and the hand vanished in such a manner as to suggest that the pair should retire forthwith. Now that they found it impossible to address their father they again gave way to tears.

"It is true compassion on his part to make a present of money for travelling to an unfilial son," said Sōshichi, holding the purse in his hand, "and it would be all the more unfilial to refuse the favour."

Each held the purse in turn to their foreheads in token of gratitude.

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“It is now so dark that no one can perceive us leaving. Let us set out at once, my dear.”

They tucked up their clothing as a preparation for the journey and left the house, not without tears. Sōshichi could not tear his eyes away from the house next door. He stood at its gate to murmur, “Old woman, can’t you manage to let Kojorō have a glimpse of her father-in-law? I too wish to thank him for the money he has given me to help us on our journey.”

Low as he spoke, the whisper was not lost upon the old woman. She made as if to come out to him, but Sōzaémon called to her from within.

“What are you about, old woman? I deserve no thanks. Why, I did no more than throw into the next house money raised by disposing of the articles in it. Sōzaémon taught his son how to do business. He does not acknowledge the existence of a son who gets his living by unlawful means. Wretched and pitiable Sōshichi’s condition is! Call to mind that Heaven, the sun and moon, the Gods and Buddha do not willingly punish a man, but that man it is who offers himself for punishment by them. Nature has provided food for all. When man comes into the world he finds that which will nurture him—his mother’s breast—those who engage in a lawful occupation find that Heaven does not fail, but provides nurture appropriate to one’s station in life. Often may a man seem to live in luxury and comfort upon ill-gotten gains, but this is only appearance, not reality. Sooner or later the nurture of Heaven will fail him; he will find himself an orphan in the world; drag out a profitless existence and die at length the death of a dog. Such indeed is only too often the case. The dog eats his food from the ground and envies not the cat sleeping quietly by a fireplace inasmuch as he is content with his own status. Alas, that I should find a fool below a dog in this respect. I fancy I can see his final doom. My very anger makes me pity him.”

Despite his harsh words it was evident that he could not control his tears.

“Sōshichi, if once more you wish to be considered Sōzaémon’s son, tread the path of righteousness however poor you be. In this way only can you escape the death of a wretch. Take care of your life, that you die not before Sōzaémon. Fail not to attend his funeral in mourning garments.

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Thus alone shall I be happy in my coffin and acknowledge you as my son. Till then, farewell. Be gone quickly.”

With these words he wept so bitterly that the sound of his crying pierced the hearts of the listeners. It was with sorrow that the pair took their hesitating leave.

IV

Four days after leaving the capital Sōshichi and Kojorō found themselves at Seki, a post-town in the province of Isé. There the foot-worn travellers halted before a stone image of Jizō, a guardian god of children. Fervently were they praying to the deity that he might soften Sōzaémon toward them when palanquin bearers accosted them.

“Cannot we serve you, sir?”

“That may be. We are going to the province of Owari. How much will you charge to carry us to the next stage?”

“It is five miles to Ishiyakushi, the next stage, so we ask you for *korori*.”¹³

Sōshichi was startled.

“I don’t know how much *korori is*.”

“A hundred mon, sir.”

“Too much. Come down to seventy.”

“Very good, sir.”

With the care-worn fugitives within their palanquins the bearers presently began a rapid march, keeping time in their steps to the cries: “*Sokosei!*” – “*Katasei!*” – “*Makkasei!*” Mile succeeded mile, until Oiwaki was reached, where it was customary to change palanquins and bearers. The carriers therefore stopped. Kojorō stepped out promptly, but Sōshichi would not get down, so great was his fear lest the bearers’ sign “*korori*”

¹³Korori, a sign among the bearers, was also used in the following sense. His head, being out off, rolled down korori.”

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should prove a bad omen. His mind might be said to be fettered with apprehension ere his body was tied¹⁴ to the detective's cord.

"Well, Kojorō," said Sōshichi, "you had better change palanquins and go ahead of me."

"I will."

"And wait for me at a place called Yokkaichi."

"I will, my husband."

Kojorō, all unaware of Sōshichi's fears, changed palanquins and let herself be carried ahead. A few minutes later a palanquin arrived from the next stage. The newcomers addressed Sōshichi's bearers.

"Isn't your passenger the companion of the young woman who's just gone on? Let us exchange passengers."

"That'll suit us nicely. Now, sir, we're going to do an exchange. Please descend."

The bearers lifted the blind of the palanquin for Sōshichi. The passenger of the other palanquin had already stepped out. He was lightly dressed in drawers and leggings, carried a packet in his hand and a *hayanawa*¹⁵ in his belt. Sōshichi but glimpsed at him and shuddered. He turned his face away and covered his head with a *tenugui*.¹⁶ Hurriedly he descended and with a brief "Thank you, bearers," stepped into the other palanquin and quickly pulled down the blind.

"I'm in a hurry," he said in a tremulous voice. "I'll give you extra; start quickly."

He had hardly uttered these words when a shrill voice cried, "We arrest Komachiya Sōshichi!"

The next moment a strong hempen cord had been wound round his palanquin. The terror-stricken captive struggled in the palanquin but to no

¹⁴A play on words.

¹⁵A cord for binding criminals.

¹⁶A towel.

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purpose; and he could but cry like a caged¹⁷ bird. Armed detectives, lying in ambush, emerged and surrounded him.

"Prisoner, you know what charge we arrest you on. The official information asserts that there are eight in your gang. We have come to arrest you. Do you permit yourself to be arrested, or shall we have to bind you by force?"

To this the prisoner made no reply, but was heard to address a plaintive prayer to Amida Buddha.

"No," said the first detective, "let us take him as he is to the next stage and bind him when we get there. That's more convenient. Now, bearers, move off."

"Certainly, sir, but inasmuch as he can't escape death, why don't you bind him here?"

So murmuring, the bearers approached the palanquin and lifted it, when, to their amazement, blood dribbled down *gaba-gaba* from it, instantaneously forming a scarlet patch upon the ground. The occupant uttered a groan of pain. The affrighted coolies cried, "The prisoner has killed himself in the palanquin! Come and look!"

The palanquin was hastily set to earth. The bearers drew apart. The detectives unwound the cord from the palanquin and raised its blind. Sōshichi, with fixed eyes, was gasping after a mortal fashion. The long blade plunged in his right side was buried to the hilt. Its point protruded from his left. The detectives were speechless with terror and dismay.

Kojorō, bound, was brought back. Seeing her husband's plight she was struck with unspeakable grief. She trod the tide of blood. She thrust her face into the palanquin.

"I am here, Sōshichi San. Kojorō is here, Sōshichi. I was bound a few minutes ago. Till last night we slept together. We had a vow to die in the same hour. And now, despite our vows, you have died alone, leaving me

¹⁷Japanese words for cage and palanquin have the same sound: *kago*. Here the author makes a clever use of his favourite device, a play upon words, in this case untranslatable into English.

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behind to suffer by myself. That is selfish of you. But never mind that now. You must be in pain; I see you are in great pain."

With these words she wept and, sinking down, placed her face in the dying man's lap. Intelligence returned to the eyes of Sōshichi.

"Ah, Kojorō," he gasped, "are you bound? I am a wicked man who has broken the national laws and disobeyed my father. I have so narrowed the compass of the wide world that my own home could no longer be a home to me and have wandered to this place till at last I am caught in a heavenly net—quite naturally and justly. Were I brought to my home and there executed I should bring disgrace on all my relatives and prove doubly undutiful to my father. With this thought in my mind I have done the deed you see. This is just retribution I now receive for having joined Kezori Kuémon's gang of smugglers and having lived above my station. And since in the eye of the law a wife cannot escape connection with her husband's crime, you are bound, undergo dishonour and are made to suffer—all of which is caused by my own wicked nature. But for Sōshichi you would not have suffered thus. Poor girl! How great must be your grief! You have to sacrifice your life on account of the man with whom you have lived for but a short space of time. Pray forgive me, Kojorō."

Sōshichi breathed with difficulty. Death second by second drew nearer. The stern detectives, taking pity upon the sorrowful pair, spoke gently. "When you reach prison you will not be suffered to see each other. Man must help man. Take your fill of speech now."

The more Kojorō listened to Sōshichi's kind words the more sorrowful she grew.

"Sōshichi San, my dear, you are not to blame. For whose sake is it you have done what you have done? Out of eagerness to prevent Kojorō passing into another's hands you joined Kuémon and forsook even your father. At the risk of your life you became my husband, so dearly have you loved me. So overcome am I at your goodness to me that I cannot find even in Chinese or Hindoo, still less in Japanese, fit words to express my gratitude. Were my hands but unbound I would prostrate myself before you ere I die."

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Anguish took her. She wept so bitterly that she seemed almost to lose consciousness.

“Now,” gasped Sōshichi, “now comes the last moment we behold each other in this life. In the next world, remember, we shall be husband and wife. Namu Amida Buddha.”

The voice that prayed was faint. Then he drew the sword from his side and almost in the same moment ceased to breathe. Piteous was Kojorō’s cry. “Husband, stay for me a moment! I would accompany you! Sooner or later I shall be slain. Officers, have mercy! Slay me here—slay me, I entreat you!”

She wailed and rushed hither and thither in the frenzy of madness. At this moment a police superintendent and his underlings arrived, convoying Kezori Kuémon, his followers and their respective courtesans. All were bound. All had been captured in one place or another. The leader of the party unrolled a scroll and read as follows:

“Prisoners, I read you an Imperial mandate. Listen to it with gratitude. Forasmuch as you have committed the crime of smuggling in connection with great ships in the offing in defiance of the national laws, you richly deserve capital punishment. But in honour of his coronation, His Majesty the Emperor is graciously pleased to pardon you and to release you from such a penalty.”

The gratitude of the prisoners knew no bounds. They cried out for joy. The police superintendent addressed the courtesans.

“Forasmuch as your profession compelled you to become the companions of these men you are guilty of no crime. Henceforward you can go whither you choose. Now, men, set these women free.”

The constables released the women. The courtesans caressed the abrasions the cords had caused. “The power of His Majesty the Emperor,” they exclaimed, “is great indeed! Our hands are freed from the cords. We feel like birds escaped from their cages.”

But Kojorō, albeit set at freedom like her companions, continued to weep. At length she lifted her head.

“Sorrow it is that my husband Sōshichi has forsaken me and his soul winged its way to the other world before the compassion of this edict could

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be made known to him. This life is not now worth while the living for this 'Kojorō of Hakata,' who is just like a bird which has lost its mate by death.' Officers, have mercy! Slay me!"

The bitter tears fell.

"Your grief is natural," said the sympathetic superintendent. "Though your husband was one of a gang of ruffians, he joined them out of youthful folly and infatuation. It follows therefore that his offence was small. We regret that his impetuosity should have led to his suicide. We grieve on your behalf, but nothing is to be done. Your best course will be to serve your father-in-law in Sōshichi's place and busy yourself in prayers for the peace of the departed soul. Now, my men, treat the prisoners as the Imperial edict commands."

Of the smugglers who had escaped death some were branded or tattooed upon the face, others had their ears or noses cut off that they might not repeat their offences. Then they were set free.

The rumour of the adventures of the hapless Hakata damsel did not take long to spread far and wide. It remained a topic of conversation for generations afterwards.