

Chikamatsu

Fair Ladies at a Game
of Poem-Cards
(*Kaoyo Utagaruta*)

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I

During the reign of the Emperor Takakura, eighty-eighth emperor, it was Kiyomori, the Prime Minister, and his clan the Taira who in reality steered the ship of state and achieved the zenith of their prosperity. His son and heir, Shigémori, Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, celebrated throughout Japan for his wisdom and virtue, for literary accomplishments and military proficiency, was an object of love and veneration among the warriors of the two greatest military houses, the Taira and the Minamoto. Among courtiers and court nobles he was also held in esteem, inasmuch as he was elder brother of the merciful and sagacious Empress Kenrei-Mon-in, mother of the Crown Prince shortly destined to become the Emperor Antoku.

On September the ninth, the Feast of the Chrysanthemum, of the first year of Yōwa (A.D. 1181), Lady Tonasé, chief lady-in-waiting, was despatched by the Empress as messenger to Shigémori. The warrior nobleman, having accorded her a hearty welcome, requested her to reveal her message.

“Permit me to congratulate your lordship upon this happy occasion,” began Lady Tonasé. “Since the chrysanthemums are now in full bloom, Her Imperial Majesty graciously deems that the maple leaves upon the mountains must be at their best and accordingly desires to view them. It is therefore her Imperial pleasure that your lordship should order a mushroom picking party to be held upon Mount Kita¹ according to annual custom.”

“Your message delights me, my lady,” replied Shigémori. “I had intended to transmit precisely this suggestion to Her Majesty. Pray tell Her Majesty that the mushroom picking party will take place on the twelfth and the moon viewing party on the thirteenth, and that I beg Her Majesty to

¹ A mountain north of Kyoto or Miyako (the capital), as it was called in ancient times. At this period the Imperial Court was situate in Kyoto.

prolong her visit upon the mountain for two or three days after the parties are over."

"The invitation gives me pleasure," returned the Imperial messenger. "I can well imagine what delight that will cause Her Majesty. The younger ladies-in-waiting, nay, even the more elderly such as myself, always look forward with great pleasure to the two annual Imperial picnics, the flower viewing in spring and the maple-leaf viewing in autumn. Now I must hasten to return and report your lordship's kindly answer to my Imperial mistress. Well can I imagine the scarlet brocade upon the trees and the sweet music of the field insects. Since we have had fine weather for several days now the moon is sure to be bright and beautiful. We should all enjoy ourselves exceedingly. I heartily thank your lordship's samurai in advance for the trouble they will be at in making the appropriate arrangements. I beg to take leave of your lordship."

Her ceremonial speech ended, she returned to the Imperial palace.

Shigémori summoned his retainers, Morihisa, Moritsugu and Takiguchi² and thus addressed them:—"The Imperial mushroom picking party is to be given on the twelfth. You must do your utmost, as is your wont each year, in the matter of escorting Her Imperial Majesty, in sweeping the mountain, and in building the temporary Imperial pavilion. Furthermore, Her Majesty being a great lover of song-birds, you are to place in front of the pavilion for her entertainment a large and beautiful cage containing many song-birds of the four seasons. I hear that the titmouse³ recently presented to me by Lord Kadowaki can perform several feats at suggestions of the hand, such for instance as passing through rings and drawing water. It were a somewhat childish thing in me to make much ado about such a bird; I therefore wish to make a present of it to Her Majesty. Takiguchi, this errand shall be yours. Make ready." With these words Shigémori entered the inner apartment.

Takiguchi was an extremely handsome youth of barely nineteen, a fitting envoy for such a task. He promptly trimmed himself up and set out

² His full name was Saitô Takiguchi Yorikata. Takiguchi is his official title as warrior in the guard of the *Seiryôden*, an Imperial palace. He is however better known by this title than by the name Yorikata.

³ The Japanese name is *yamagara*. It is known to science as *Sittiparus Varius Varius*.

for the Imperial palace accompanied by a henchman who carried the precious bird in a cage.

Now that the date for the mushroom picking party had been announced, the maids-of-honour impatiently awaited the day, not so much for the pleasure of the picnic as for the opportunities afforded of seeing young samurai. For the samurai and men-servants in the palace of the Empress were all men above sixty.

There were to be found among these court ladies two damsels in particular, exceedingly beautiful, named Yokobué and Karumo, both great favourites with the Empress on account of their personal grace, intelligence and sweetness of disposition. Their comrades too felt for them real affection. This day it was Yokobué's turn to serve as usher. She was on duty in the chamber. The other young ladies were gathered in the same chamber and were chattering merrily.

"Yokobué Dono," said one of them, "let us hope that on the occasion of the mushroom picking party we get plenty of chances to see handsome young samurai. I can't help wondering who will accompany Lord Shigémori on that day. What young men of the Taira clan will there be? What fun it will be if there are handsome young men among the attendants! But if it unfortunately turns out that only such warriors as the ferocious, woman-hating Lord of Noto should appear, a very poor time of it we shall get."

"Have no fear on that score," Karumo took up the tale. "Tastes differ. Lord Tsunémasa is commonly held to be the most handsome of the clan of Taira, but he is such a precocious boy that his voice broke at fourteen. Such a trifler too! I don't fancy him. Lord Atsumori is a simpleminded, lovable creature, but I fear he is already engaged to a certain lady. Master Moritsugu's younger brother, Yoshitsugu Dono, is a kind-hearted, lovable man I've no doubt, but that scorpion of a brother of his is so strict about his behaviour that not a girl can get near him. How can a woman choose her comrade for life when this is the case? We can but leave the matter to providence."

"I don't agree with you," said Yakumo and O-Hana simultaneously. "If we leave the matter entirely to providence it is probable that she will provide us with such boorish warriors as Kagékiyo or Gorōbyōé. How could one live a happy life with such a person as that? Master Morihisa certainly played a very pretty tune on the lute at last year's mushroom picnic on Mount Kita, but what an effeminate fellow he is! The gallant who

suits the taste of everybody, high and low alike, the paragon of men, he is surely Master Saitō Takiguchi Yorikata. Don't you agree with me, Yokobué Dono?"

Yokobué met this banter with, "I don't share the opinion of any of you, my friends. You talk as if Master Takiguchi were the only handsome man in existence. He's handsome enough in all faith; nobody can call him ill-favoured; but such a person is always too conceited about his own good looks and usually spoilt and ill-natured into the bargain. I tell you I positively dislike him."

But this assertion only provoked an immediate burst of laughter.

"What a liar!" everyone cried. "The hypocrite! Nobody blames Karumo Dono who frankly states she thinks Master Yoshitsugu is the sort of man one could love. We hate such dishonesty in Yokobué Dono. You are loud in your protestations of dislike for Master Yorikata, but your tenderness of heart did not escape us when you were good enough to mend a burst seam of his *hakama*⁴ and we all know how you kissed its gusset at the football⁵ match at Lord Shigémori's house the other day. What's more you carried to your lips with obvious pleasure a towel with which he had wiped his mouth. And yet you dare to declare that you positively dislike him! What a little liar! Make a clean breast of it, Yokobué Dono! Confess! If you don't we'll untie your *obi* as a punishment and strip you to the skin. Come, girls, let's do it now!

"Please forgive me!"

"Tickle her!" cried the girls, laughing. "Pinch her!"

It was at this moment that Takiguchi arrived before the porch and announced, "Saitō Takiguchi, a messenger from Lord Shigémori, desires to see the lady usher."

At this announcement the girls were overcome with merriment and excitement.

"Speak of angels—" one of them whispered, laughing.

⁴ A ceremonial flowing garment worn over ordinary clothes, extending from the waist almost to the ankle, and covering each leg separately.

⁵ Football was one of the stock court amusements. Needless to say it had little in common with that organized form of refined savagery which we find in the west today. It was a stately game, played in a costume of which the voluminous trousers formed not the least important item. We are informed that this diversion has been revived of late. The pleasure of this pastime is however we believe the prerogative of the elect.

"Your beloved's come, Yokobué Dono!"

"Dear Yokobué," said another, "you're in luck to-day, being usher."

"I can never hope to be a *yokobué*,⁶ but I desire to be a *shakuhachi*⁷ and to be set to the mouth of that *takiguchi*."⁸

"I should like to bring him tea."

They stole toward the paper doors of the porch and peeped through.

"I'd like to bite those lovely cheeks," one whispered.

"I'd like to be held so hard in his arms that I'd die."

The chatterboxes were startled to hear the voice of the chief lady of the court crying, not without asperity, "Girls, Her Majesty summons you! Her Majesty has clapped her hands several times. It's very thoughtless of you that not one of you is in attendance on Her Majesty."

"Gracious me! That old thunderstorm of a hag is blowing up again. Hurry, lest the lightning strike you!"

The girls precipitated themselves into the inner apartments.

Yokobué, who had longed for Takiguchi, opened the doors. Her heart was violently beating. The words she pronounced were tremulous.

"Welcome, sir messenger."

Takiguchi, who had pined for the girl, was transported to see her before him. For a moment he was struck speechless. It was with an effort that he controlled himself sufficiently to say a moment later, "I beg to declare to you my errand. My Lord Shigémori orders me to announce that Her Imperial Majesty be requested to set out early in the morning of the day after to-morrow that she may visit Mount Kita."

His attitude underwent an abrupt change.

"I think and think of you till dawn breaks. All night I am awake thinking of you, so that I never meet you in dreams. By daylight your figure floats continually before me and comes before me and my duties. Passionately I long for you and most of all toward evening. A warrior ought never to shed tears, no, not even once between birth and the grave. Little befits it him to do so. And yet from morn to evening I find tears in

⁶ The girl's name Yokobué means literally 'a bamboo flute', a flute of nearly the same shape as the modern European flute. One end is closed and the player blows with the mouth through a lateral hole.

⁷ A *shakuhachi* resembles the ancient and mediæval European flute. The player blows through a mouth-piece at the upper end.

⁸ Takiguchi means literally "the mouth of a waterfall," i.e. "the crest of the fall."

my eyes. Can you guess who makes me weep? What nonsense I have been talking! Please forgive me! Well, as I was saying, this titmouse performs several tricks at suggestions made by the hand. She can pass through rings and draw water. Her name therefore is 'the Wonder of the Capital.' Lord Shigémori begs respectfully to present this bird to Her Majesty since he knows her to be a great lover of song-birds. Now, my pretty" – he addressed the bird – "do some tricks for the entertainment of the lady usher."

So saying Takiguchi made some passes with his hand, whereupon the little bird threw several somersaults round and round the perch – *hira-hira-hira, kuru-kuru-kuru*. Next the bird nimbly threaded the first, second, third, fourth and fifth rings. Now she hopped to the well and, seizing the rope with her beak, lifted the bucket and drew the water. This operation she repeated again and again – *shiton, shiton, shiton*.

"Oh, Yokobué Dono," said Takiguchi, not without significant glances, "I have improvised an ode on this dear little creature. Please listen:

The very titmouse hops through rings,
Draws water if my will so be;
I would that you would draw my heart
And through great trials come to me.'

If it's not asking you too much, would you be kind enough to make an ode in reply?"

Yokobué, so much entranced that she had noticed neither the bird nor Takiguchi's message, drew close to him, murmuring, "A delightful verse, dear Takiguchi; " – she fell into a brown study, then her face brightened as if with a happy thought – "here is my reply," she said.

"The walnut which the titmouse loves
Lies fallen in the dingle, where
Scarlet the autumn maples burn
And you, my love, may find it there."

"You suggest that we meet secretly in the glen on Mount Kita at the mushroom hunting?"

"Exactly."

"I thank you. I shall not fail."

They drew nearer and embraced so passionately that they tilted the cage, which fell on its side. The bird's food and water rolled out, the rings lost their form. Panic-stricken, Takiguchi hurriedly opened the door of the cage, inserted both his hands and endeavoured to right the damage. But as fast as he pulled one piece straight another would go out of shape. Now he turned the cage upside down, now he laid it on its side, while the frightened bird struggled, flutter-flutter. In his confusion Takiguchi ignored for a moment or two the fact that the cage door was open. With a glad twitter the little prisoner escaped. Frantic with despair, the pair pursued the bird hither and thither around the garden. Takiguchi waved his hand, crying, "Come, my pretty!" – at which the titmouse somersaulted in the air two or three times, then, rejoicing in her freedom, sped away across the sky. Takiguchi and Yokobué stood watching the bird with a vacant stare. They were at their wits' end. They followed the bird with their eyes.

Kaga-no-Gunji Morotaka, police superintendent of the Empress' palace, younger brother to Lady Tonasé and a haughty, heartless old samurai who tyrannized over his subordinates, hearing of the occurrence, rushed out. To Takiguchi he did not vouchsafe a single word of greeting; Yokobué he seized by the arm. "Hussy!" he roared, bending upon her a withering glance. "Do you think this palace is a tea-house or a brothel? Even in the Emperor's palace certain rules of etiquette are observed in the conduct of messenger and usher. How much more then are they and must they be observed here, where almost every office, high and low, is occupied by a woman. Despite the eye I have been keeping on you, you have managed to behave with indecency, nay, the word 'indecent' does not adequately describe your conduct. What is more, you have been so careless as to cause the escape of this precious bird. With these misdeeds to answer for how can you live on shamelessly and dare to show your face before people? Were you a samurai I could apportion you a certain heavy punishment for these serious offences. Since, however, you are a woman, I sentence you to imprisonment. Now, my men, bind Yokobué and be quick about it."

Takiguchi stepped forward and excitedly intervened.

"No, no, Morotaka Dono, Yokobué is not to blame. I am entirely responsible for this mishap. I am resolved to commit *seppuku*⁹ as apology. I cannot however allow what you said just now to pass unchallenged.

⁹ *Seppuku* (*harakiri*) signifies self-dispatch.

What was your meaning when you said, 'Were you a samurai I could assign to you a certain heavy punishment'? I am a samurai; tell me what punishment you propose for me."

"You are overexcited. I never meant such punishment for you. Don't take what I said amiss. If any samurai under my command were guilty of such impropriety I could forthwith order him to be bound, decapitated and his head to be exposed. You, however, are a retainer of Lord Shigémori; therefore, though you should flirt with a maid-of-honour, pluck the titmouse's feathers, roast and eat it, whatever you might do would be of no consequence to me. If you care to commit *seppuku*, however, you are perfectly at liberty to do so. It would make no difference to the fate of Yokobué. Now, my men, why delay? Bind her at once and cast her into prison."

The desperate girl defied him.

"Morotaka Dono, blame yourself before you blame others. There is not one of us to whom you, superintendent as you are, have not written notes. What explanation have you for this foulness?"

Takiguchi laid his hand upon his sword.

"Morotaka," he cried, "I have no option but to believe Yokobué's charge. If it be indeed the law to bind a samurai and behead him for such offences, I, retainer of Lord Shigémori, will begin with you. Prepare yourself, you old fool!"

He rushed upon Morotaka, but the latter leapt back.

"Bind me if you can!" he replied.

None could tell what the outcome might be. Maids and henchmen, struck with terror, could but look at them with anxiety and fear.

At this juncture a voice was heard saying, "See that the quarrel is stopped." It was none other than the Empress, who had been informed of the incident and now stepped out on to the verandah. Upon which the maids cried all together, "It is Her Majesty's pleasure that you stop quarrelling!"

Both samurai instantaneously stopped and bowed their heads in respect.

"I cannot but consider," said the Empress, "that the report is false which accuses Yokobué of impropriety. If any of my maids were guilty of impropriety the blame would be upon Morotaka who is their superintendent. That Takiguchi has let the titmouse escape is no offence at all. Every time he gave the bird food and water he had to open the door of

the cage. Is it to be wondered at that the caged bird longs for the blue sky and hungers for an opportunity to escape? Luckily enough the titmouse alighted in the inner garden and I myself have caught her and put her in the *fusege*.¹⁰ I learn that a large cage containing song-birds is to be ready for my diversion on Mount Kita. Takiguchi, tell Lord Shigémori that I will place the titmouse among the other birds and display her to his lordship. Yokobué and Takiguchi, be of good cheer about that bird. Girls, entertain Takiguchi with *saké* and give him refreshment. Be of good courage, Takiguchi, and present Lord Shigémori with my hearty thanks for his precious gift."

At these kindly words Takiguchi and Yokobué reverentially bowed their heads and gave way to tears of gratitude. Morotaka made a wry face and ground his teeth in mortification.

"And Morotaka," continued the Empress, turning her eyes upon him, "you are most strictly to command all under your authority never to say a word of what has happened to-day. Should they, in spite of your injunctions, mention this matter, it is you who will be held answerable for it."

Having thus spoken to the relief and satisfaction of all present save the old samurai, the Empress withdrew.

The day of the picnic at last arrived. Shigémori, as host, had done all in his power to make the Imperial visit a success. On Mount Kita had been built a temporary pavilion beautifully thatched with scarlet maple leaves. In front of this was set a large cage containing hundreds of pretty birds, such as nightingales, wagtails, robins, parrots, tits and ducks. Their fine plumage shone brilliantly in the gold of the afternoon sun. They flitted hither and thither uttering sweet notes. The Empress and her retinue had that morning been escorted thither by a large number of Shigémori's retainers.

The Empress stepped down, advanced to the cage and contemplated the birds with seeming interest. Need attention be drawn to the fact that the titmouse presented by Shigémori was not to be found among them? The Empress had pretended that she had caught the bird in order to cover the fault of Takiguchi and his sweetheart.

¹⁰ A bamboo frame resembling an inverted basket, upon which ladies' dresses were hung that they might be perfumed with sweet incense burned within the folds.

“My Lord,” said the Empress after a while, “I thank you for your kindness in diverting me with the sight of these beautiful birds. True, I enjoy the sight of them exceedingly, but even more joy will be mine at setting these birds free. It is said that even such little birds as these have the same Buddhist nature as ourselves. Permit me to set them at liberty.”

So saying she opened the doors of the cage and let the birds escape. The little creatures, uttering cries of happiness, flew out and soared far away into the blue sky. Shigémori who, like his sister, was of a compassionate nature, was struck with admiration.

“This is a real *Hōjōé!*”¹¹ he exclaimed. “I cannot but admire Your Majesty’s benevolence. Your Majesty would do well to view the maple leaves and search for mushrooms to-morrow. Let us retire early this evening in order to enjoy the sound of the deer’s cries in the stillness of the night.”

So saying, both retired into the pavilion.

The night was far advanced; all was still. The mountain sides were obscure, for the thickets obstructed the brightness of the moonlight.

Yoshitsugu, a retainer of Shigémori and younger brother of Moritsugu, referred to above, had stolen from his post and was now standing, head and face swathed in a kerchief, by the hedge of the Imperial pavilion, the place of the assignation made between himself and his sweetheart Karumo, maid-of-honour. There was a love of long standing between them. Passionately had they desired to meet in secret; they had sworn to avail themselves of to night’s opportunity. Yokobué, who likewise had promised to meet her lover by stealth this night, arose when all her companions had fallen asleep. Now wearing a *katsugi*¹² she stepped down to the hedge. She beckoned to the man in disguise. He advanced toward her readily enough. They conversed in nods and gestures and were in such a state of joyful excitement that they did not trouble to verify each other’s identity. The young samurai lifted the damsel on to his back. In this manner their faces remained undisclosed to one another. The young samurai set out with a light heart toward the glen.

¹¹ On August 15th (lunar calendar) it is the custom to release many caged birds before the shrine of Hachiman, the God of War, in Kyoto. This is called *Hōjōé*.

¹² The *katsugi* or *kazuki* was a large flowing coat worn over the head and reaching down to the waist, so that it served as a veil. In days of old, ladies of high birth wore it when walking-out.

As for Karumo, intending to keep her word with Yoshitsugu, she stole out, also wearing a *katsugi*, at a moment when the position of the moon in the sky declared that midnight had passed. Now she awaited her lover's arrival. Takiguchi, with a kerchief about his head and face, emerged from the darkness intending to meet Yokobué. The expectant Karumo, as was only natural, mistook him for her sweetheart. She beckoned to him. Nor did Takiguchi harbour any doubts as to her identity. Hurriedly he hoisted her on to his back and hastened toward the glen. Presently the passionate lover found himself on the bank of a rivulet, along which he walked awhile, when, to his surprise, he overtook another man also with a woman on his back, toiling up-stream. Each was equally scared and tried to avoid being seen by the other, but since they were colleagues by daylight it was not long before they recognized each other.

"Is it Takiguchi?"

"Yoshitsugu, is it?"

"You're in for luck, I too am enjoying myself. Ha! Ha!"

"Let us keep our sweet secrets to ourselves."

With that they parted and each hurried on his particular way. But the girls on their backs remarked to each other, "It would seem we have got mixed up. Are you not Yokobué Dono?"

"Is it Karumo Dono?"

"Eh? Have we got the wrong girls?" said one of the samurai. "We are a couple of fools!"

The two samurai lowered their lovely burdens. Each man removed his kerchief and each girl her veil. The four, to their vast surprise, realized the mistake that had been made. All burst out laughing.

"It would appear we have been overhasty! Had we not realized our mistake until a little later there is no knowing what might not have happened. We're lucky! Let each return his charge to the other none the worse."

They wandered no further. Each pair settled down in a chosen spot and enjoyed moments of supreme happiness.

At this moment a considerable body of men carrying sticks and paper lanterns appeared upon the further hillside. These lanterns bore upon them a crest which turned out to be none other than the butterfly of Morotaka, police superintendent of the Empress' court.

"Heaven defend us!" cried the samurai. "If our secret is detected by that fellow it will prove our ruin. Sweet ladies, do you think you could climb up the valley and find your way safely to the pavilion?"

"Of course. For love's sake we would be ready to tread upon sword-blades. As for you, samurai, make haste and save yourselves."

Hastily bidding their lovers farewell the girls summoned up courage and hand in hand made their way up the glen. A happy thought came to Takiguchi in the shape of a plan to detain Morotaka in the wood sufficiently long to give the girls time to make good their return in his absence. He assumed Yokobué's *katsugi* that he might appear like a woman. So disguised, he waited near Yoshitsugu for Morotaka's coming.

Having searched here and there and all to no purpose, Morotaka cried, "No wonder Karumo and Yokobué are missing! I know who their seducers are! See, over there are some figures, down by the rivulet. Don't let them escape."

No sooner had he spoken than Morotaka and his followers swooped upon the erstwhile lovers and surrounded Yoshitsugu.

"Aha!" cried Morotaka in triumph. "So Yoshitsugu is the man, is he? Arrest him."

"An unjust charge!" cried Yoshitsugu, as if in confusion. "I came here but a few minutes ago to view the maple leaves by moonlight. That's the exact truth; I am not guilty of any such crime as seduction."

Hardly had he spoken when the superintendent roared, "No further lies, you rogue! That figure over there is Karumo, I'll be bound. It's two years now since my heart was set on her. Had she yielded to my wishes I intended to ask Her Majesty to bestow her on me as wife. It appears that I have wooed her day and night to no purpose, because of her attachment to you. I have long suspected the cause. You are a criminal who corrupts the morals of court ladies. Why, you're as good as the lover of my would-be wife! That woman standing there is an adulteress."

Morotaka rushed upon the supposed Karumo and snatched away the veil. What was his astonishment and fear to behold himself confronted by Takiguchi who glowered upon him, hand laid upon sword-hilt. But he recovered his presence of mind.

"If you're here," he said brusquely, "Yokobué must be hereabouts. You must have scented the danger and concealed her. Well, I shall inquire into this matter later. Let us return, my men."

Morotaka beat a retreat; but Yoshitsugu and Takiguchi made haste to intercept him in a threatening fashion.

"There's no 'later on' about it, you old fool," they said. "We want justice here and now. Do you think you can make off with impunity, after snatching a veil from one samurai and seeing fit to call the other a seducer of women? You can't behave with us as you behave when you lord it over the Empress's court and thunder at the maids-of-honour. Just you try to return to the pavilion without first explaining those insults and you'll find, if these swords can speak, that you'll have no legs to walk on!"

"Calm yourselves, sirs," replied Morotaka, not without trepidation. "It is Yokobué and Karumo whom I call corrupters of morals. As their superintendent it is my duty to inquire into every particular of these happenings, but with you I have nothing to do. If my words offend you I pray your forgiveness and throw myself upon your generosity."

"Sir Superintendent," returned Takiguchi provocatively, but a few minutes ago you confessed that during the last few years your heart has been set upon Karumo and that you have wooed her day and night. Who then is her seducer if it isn't you? As you yourself were good enough to remark at court the other day, such an offender as yourself richly deserves to be bound and decapitated. Now, Yoshitsugu, bind this fellow! I'll behead him. His retainers too we will chasten. See that they don't escape."

At this threat Morotaka's henchmen threw down their sticks and lanterns and ran for their lives.

"How mercilessly you have argued me down!" cried the deserted Morotaka. "But you wait I'll show you how I'll be revenged on Yokobué and Karumo!"

So saying, he precipitantly took to his heels.

The two samurai burst into uproarious laughter; then they made their way back to the pavilion at their leisure.

II

Takiguchi's father, Katsuyori, was an old samurai with a record of long service under Shigémori and Shigémori's father, Kiyomori. He had abandoned the profession of arms, had shaved his head, hoary with the

snows of seventy winters, and, having assumed the sacerdotal name¹³ of Sairai and having donned a *henzan* (clerical robe), now led a life of abstinence and devotion and made it his daily task to visit the family temple that he might worship Buddha.

One day Sairai, producing an *eboshi*¹⁴ and a beautiful *kariginu*,¹⁵ summoned his son Takiguchi and spoke as follows:

“These articles were the gift of Lord Shigémori to me many years ago on the occasion of a grand banquet to the ministers of state. I wore them and, in company with my colleagues, received the guests. I make them yours. As heir of our house, you are to wear them on public occasions. Up to now I have not heard any reports, favourable or unfavourable, concerning the manner in which you discharge your duties. Tell me how you stand in the graces of your lord?”

“My dear father,” respectfully returned Takiguchi, “albeit my ability is small, I stand, thanks to your influence, higher in his lordship’s favour than any of my comrades. Such pleasure does this give me that I serve his lordship with all the loyalty of which I am capable and attend to my duties with the utmost diligence. Furthermore, Her Imperial Majesty is pleased to regard me with a special favour, so that I am entrusted with all messages to Her Majesty’s court. Thus, upon the occasion of the recent picnic upon Mount Kita, I often had the honour of being summoned to Her Imperial presence for this purpose or that. Also I was made much of by the maids-of-honour and my colleagues. Under these circumstances I am not without hopes that, thanks to his lordship’s authority and your influence, I may shortly receive promotion.”

Hardly had he uttered these words when Sairai glowered upon him and roared, “Silence, silence! Listen to me, you brazen-faced boy! In your foolishness you are bold enough to suppose that I have no knowledge of your behaviour. Forasmuch as I have retired from the world I have no particular business with it, but waking or dreaming I never cease to consider your well-being. Indeed, I give more thought to that than to my future happiness. I am ever all ears to pick up any rumour, good or bad,

¹³ Priests’ names differ from laymen’s names. Samurai in ancient times were generally Buddhists and on retirement were often wont to assume clerical names and lead a life of devotion.

¹⁴ A kind of cap.

¹⁵ A robe affected by early warriors.

concerning you. You need not therefore presume to suppose that your movements escape me. I know very well how infatuated you are with a maid-of-honour named Yokobué. You made such a fool of yourself flirting with her that you let the titmouse, intended for the Empress, escape. For that you were severely reprimanded by the superintendent Morotaka, who sentenced you to a heavy punishment from which Her Majesty's mercy alone released you. That ignominious news came to my ears the very day of the incident itself. As if this mishap were not sufficient warning, you shamelessly misconducted yourself, as I hear, under cover of night with Yokobué on the occasion of the Imperial picnic on Mount Kita. Caught in the act by Morotaka, notwithstanding the multitude of your shortcomings, you yet managed to turn the tables upon your accuser. What behaviour! What audacity! Even I in my retirement have heard the circumstances. That it should have reached my ears is a sure sign that the story is common property, and what the general public knows must of course have reached the ears of the mighty Lord Shigémori. You must know that Lord Shigémori is the wisest man alive and, albeit his lordship does not let his feelings show in his countenance, yet one can hardly doubt but that his lordship has given you up as a good-for-nothing. Without the protection of his lordship our house is bound sooner or later to come to ruin. I grieve for this. You must know how true the story is better than any one else. The report goes abroad that your boon companion, Yoshitsugu, like you was carrying on an affair with a maid-of-honour. Her name is Karumo and she is pregnant by him. It is further asserted that his brother, Moritsugu, keeps him confined to his house on the score of pretended sickness. If I follow his example and confine or disown you, our house, since I have no other son, will become extinct. How can I on your account suffer our house to come to extinction? Our house which, for generation after generation, has served in vassalage the great family of Taira. It had been my hope to continue my life in comfortable seclusion on the pension graciously bestowed upon me by my lord and to have devoted my remaining years to the attainment of spiritual enlightenment and to prayer, that I may live happily in the Pure Land with your dear mother. Alas! Your behaviour has entirely undone my hopes; nay, your sins will bring us to hell. Undutiful wretch!" – he burst into warm tears – "but what good can come of reviling a devil? From to-day on I return to my secular life and once again serve Lord Shigémori as warrior. I am no longer Sairai but Katsuyori! My seven long years of abstinence and devotion are now at an end!"

With these words he slipped from off him the clerical robe and assumed the *eboshi* and the *kariginu*. Takiguchi, overwhelmed by tears, clung to him exclaiming, "Not so, father! I declare to you that I will once for all give up my love. I will start a new life and serve my lord to the best of my ability. Pray forgive my errors, father."

The old man pushed him aside.

"A father may well forgive you, but how can we apologize to my lord and to the world at large? I hardly see how you can remain in your present position." He rose to his feet and took both his swords in his hand.

"Listen, my men," he cried with an air of determination, "make yourselves ready to follow me! Saitō Katsuyori is once again about to serve Lord Shigémori as a warrior!"

With that he entered the inner chamber. Takiguchi was at his wits' end. His sobbing was followed by a melancholy reverie. At length he roused himself, slapped his thigh and thus communed with his spirit: "That's how it stands, is it? My tears are vain. The reproaches of my father are reasonable, but what is done is done. Nothing will be gained by weeping over a past error. I must do something to atone for my fault. Should I attain to spiritual rebirth my wise and compassionate lord would pardon me and my past would be wiped out. But ah, what shame it is to think how I have stood in the way of my father's spiritual enlightenment and of the peace of my mother's soul! That is indeed a greater sin than the Eight Crimes, the Five Crimes and the Ten Evils rolled in one.¹⁶ Well, let me follow the example of Mongaku, who took to the priesthood in consequence of the great love he bore a lady and in time was enabled to lead all his relations to the Pure Land. Life is after all but a dream; reputation and infamy illusions; hatred and compassion but reflections quivering upon the water. Let me hope that my mistake in love will prove but a first step upon the path of spiritual enlightenment. Yokobué will doubtless grieve at my resolution. But she will offer up prayers to meet me and I too will pray for future happiness until such a time as we two are again joined together in the Pure Land. Now is the time for me to make my resolution" —he drew his dirk, cut off his queue and, reverently taking up his father's clerical robe, slipped it over his clothes — "I thank you, father, for your kindly hint. My living father, my dead mother, my sweetheart and I — do we not all aim at

¹⁶ Takiguchi refers to the catalogue of crimes and evils found in Buddhist scriptures.

attaining a new life in the lotus flower!¹⁷ Namu Amida Buddha.” He prepared himself for a journey, then stole out to find his way to some Buddhist temple.

Karumo, having repeatedly met her lover in secret, now found herself, to her great mortification, pregnant. The scandal had spread beyond court circles. Very much ashamed of herself, she again and again begged dismissal, but Morotaka prevented her discharge. She remained in her chamber; her comrades were strictly forbidden to pay her visits of sympathy; two or three maids were permitted to serve her. Under such circumstances the girl’s heart was heavy with shame and grief; her tears fell without ceasing.

One day Morotaka, followed by his retainer Iwamura Gengo and by servants bearing a palanquin, intruded upon her in her room.

“Karumo,” said he, assuming a severe air, “this is indeed licentious conduct of yours, that you, a woman in the Imperial service, should over and over again have stolen out of the strictly guarded palace gate to a clandestine meeting until at last you have become great with child. You presume too much in begging for your mere dismissal after the committal of such grave offences. You will have heard, I am sure, that your lover Yoshitsugu is confined to his room by his brother’s command. As to your own offence, forasmuch as you are in the Imperial service, the laws require that you be heavily punished. But for all that, my heart, which has been set on you all these years, remains the same toward you as before the event. Come, will you not change your mind and, mindful of all my notes to you, tell me in one word that you are mine? Pronounce the word and I will at once take you to my residence. You shall become my wife and be honoured as such, and this palanquin shall be your bridal palanquin. If, however, you answer ‘no’, this palanquin shall be a prisoner’s palanquin. Answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ promptly. Remember that this pressure I put upon you is entirely because I am enamoured of you.”

The old satyr, who had spoken in a coaxing tone, now concluded and cast sheep’s eyes toward the lady.

“It is very kind of you,” answered Karumo with a forced smile, “not only not to hate me, though my offence is heavy, but to offer to take me to yourself as your lady. Many thanks for your attentions; I am minded to

¹⁷ By this he means, of course, a rebirth in paradise, the lotus, the sacred flower of Buddhism, being the symbol of Paradise.

become your wife, but I very much fear me that Yoshitsugu will hardly give his consent. What would you do should he refuse? "

"Have no fears on that score. No difficulty would be experienced in disposing of that fellow on the pretext of an Imperial order. Well then, we may consider the bargain struck. Be happy, my girl."

"Shall I arrange for a discreet abortion or may I give birth to my child, sir?"

"An arrangement of that sort is apt to be dangerous to the mother, so I won't have it. A child is indeed a somewhat unacceptable remembrance of an unfortunate episode; but for my sweet girl's sake I would have it enjoy an easy and natural birth. And if it be a boy I will adopt it as my son and heir."

"There's the rub, sir. This child is Yoshitsugu's son. When he grows up and discovers you are his father's murderer I hardly see how he can fail to plan your death. What would you do then?"

"Oh, kill the young devil. Don't worry about that!"

He had hardly answered when Karumo angrily broke in.

"Do you indeed deem me such a nerveless kind of woman as would be contented to remain the wife of the murderer of her sweetheart and child? The devil take you! Love is everything with a real man or woman. For its sweet sake one takes no care for one's life. It was not because I wished to escape death or preserve my name untarnished that I sought dismissal. My object was, the displeasure of Yoshitsugu's brother being known to me, to visit Yoshitsugu and share his fate. Were I a woman forsaken by all the Gods and by Buddha, were I, I say, such a woman, I might consent to be your wife. Nothing however is further from my present intentions. Most willingly would I forfeit my life for my sweet love's sake. Wreak your vengeance on me, you rascal! Take your fill of it! My only grief is to imagine with what severity you may visit yourself upon Yoshitsugu, doing so under the pretence of an Imperial order. Mean and merciless man that you are! Do you think you can live forever? Everyone is doomed to die once. Do you imagine there is no future world? That divine justice knows no way to retribution? If you think so, you are but a thoughtless shallow-pate."

With such reproaches the luckless girl sought to overwhelm him until at last she sank to the floor, weeping the bitterest tears. These many insults had their effect upon Morotaka, who flew into a tremendous passion.

“Iwamura Gengo!” he cried. “This wench’s reckoning is made up. Away with her to Funaoka-Yama and do with her as I bade you!”

“I will, my lord.”

Gengo gripped the damsel by one arm and by the hair, forced her face down toward the floor and thrust her into the palanquin. Her maids, in tears, did their best to prevent this, but Gengo, either pushing them aside or kicking them down, motioned to the servants to carry the palanquin away to Funaoka-Yama. He himself headed the little procession.

Takiguchi had sought refuge in the _jōin, a Buddhist temple in the farthest corner of the lonely country district of Saga, which lies many miles west of the capital. He entered the priesthood, assumed the sacerdotal name of Saishun, but soon found the temple was too near the capital for him to be able to apply himself wholly to the life of devotion. Tidings of what passed in the capital occasionally reached his ear and disturbed his quiet study of the scriptures. He therefore resolved to go to the great monastery of Kōyasan,¹⁸ one of the holiest spots in Japan, and which is at a great distance from the capital; but though he had resolved upon this change, he still lingered in the _jōin and nightly visited cemeteries in the neighbourhood of the capital. In these cemeteries it was his practice loudly to chant prayers, striking with a stick at the same time upon a small bell that hung about his neck. This he did by way of bidding an eternal farewell to his birthplace and by way of praying for the peace of his dead mother’s spirit and his father’s future bliss.

One evening Takiguchi found himself in such a cemetery at Funaoka-Yama. He prayed at all the new made graves in succession. Here the smoke from one cremation died away; yonder arose the smoke from another – both smokes symbolizing the uncertainty of human life. He who had been left behind by one who had already taken the journey of the spirit, now, in his turn, left behind another fellow traveller who would follow him the next day. Takiguchi found himself pleased in reflecting that he had become a priest praying for the departed. Again he sounded his bell, fervently praying the while, “Namu Amida! Namu Amida! Namu Amida Buddha! Show thy mercy upon all creatures. May all aspire to Buddhahood. Amen.”

¹⁸ This monastery was founded about eleven centuries ago by Kōbō Daishi, the most famous of all Japanese Buddhist saints. It is the headquarters of the Shingon sect of Buddhists.

At that moment a warrior appeared accompanied by some soldiers who bore a palanquin. The warrior glanced hither and thither about the burial-ground, then, selecting a spot overshadowed by a tall pine-tree, ordered the palanquin to be set down.

“Another dead person,” Takiguchi thought to himself. “Poor soul—already hastening on the journey to Hades. But sooner or later one and all are bound to follow him.” And, unnoticed, he murmured a prayer for the supposed deceased.

The soldiers dragged the occupant forth from the palanquin. To Takiguchi’s great astonishment it proved not a corpse but a damsel of noble appearance.

All agog to know what was about to happen, our hero hid himself behind a tombstone. Iwamura Gengo, for it was none but he, cried, “Now, Karumo, face your last moment! Once your head falls all is over. It is my master Lord Morotaka’s pleasure that you be beheaded at once, but it seems to me a distinct pity that this should occur. Come, can’t you see how cruel it is to let the child now in your womb be slain along with you, thus suffering it not to see the light? Neither living nor dead can you expect to meet your sweetheart again, so as far as that matter is concerned there is nothing to choose between them. But if you consent to become Lord Morotaka’s lady there is not one of us who will not regard you with the respect due to you as our mistress. Ponder the question well before you answer.”

“A saucy fellow! You will remember I refused to answer even your master—why should I change my mind? Don’t disturb my preparations for the future life by provoking me at the last moment, but cut off my head and be quick about it.”

“A stiff-necked woman! Die then!

Gengo drew his sword and took station behind her, but, before his blade could flash down, Takiguchi rushed forward and shielded Karumo.

“One moment, sir

“Out, fool of a priest! Do you dare plead for this girl’s life? No, that’s impossible.”

“That is not my meaning, sir. I am a priest who nightly visits these cemeteries to pray for the dead. You are, it would appear, about to kill this woman for some grave offence. ‘Sin reaps its reward’; that is inevitable. But you have said the woman is pregnant. Are you going to slay the guiltless with the guilty? What do you think can be your reward for such a deed?

We do not know the child's age, but as many months as it has lived will it have patron Gods and Buddhas. Queen Maya's¹⁹ Scripture runs, that the wrath of such patrons and Gods descends upon the infanticide, who will presently be seized with an incurable disease or perish by the sword, cut off before a year is out. Nevertheless it is sometimes necessary for a warrior to kill a pregnant woman. In such a case he can divert the divine wrath from his head by the triple repetition of a mystic formula before he commits the deed. There's nothing for it apparently but to slay this poor girl; but, inasmuch as I am acquainted with the formula, it would be wanton cruelty on my part not to try and save you from such punishment. Of a truth I feel very sorry for you and that is the reason why I have momentarily stayed your hand."

"Are these things true?" exclaimed Gengo, overcome by surprise and fear. "I never dreamed of such things. A thousand thanks to you, kind and reverend sir. If it's not asking too much of you, would you please be so good as to teach me the formula?"

"I learned this formula after three weeks' practice of religious austerities and it is one of my greatest secrets; but I can hardly refuse to instruct you in it when it is a case of sudden death for you if I do not. Be sure, however, never to teach it to others."

Having thus cautioned him, Takiguchi whispered in the warrior's ear, "*Riken sokuzé Mida-gō* (The title of Amida is a sharp sword to cut off thy sins with) *Isshō shōnen zaikaijō*²⁰ (If thou once sayest 'Namu Amida' thou shalt be absolved from all thy sins). Repeat this formula thrice before you kill this woman and no evil shall come to you after the deed. Should evil fall on you, however small, I will make atonement for it."

"Dear me! How hard the formula is! I shall never be able to learn it. Isn't there a shorter form? — one easier to learn?"

"Hand me your sword. I'll enchant its blade by repeating the formula over it. And that will be as good as if you repeated the formula itself."

"Excellent! Please be so good as to enchant my sword for me."

So saying, Gengo, without the least misgiving, handed the delighted Takiguchi the drawn sword.

¹⁹ The mother of Sakya Muni, the founder of Buddhism.

²⁰ These Buddhist expressions in the Chinese tongue are as unintelligible to most laymen as are Latin expressions to uncultured Europeans.

“Well, sir,” said Takiguchi sarcastically, “I observe that after all you won’t need the formula or any other thing of that kind; for since the girl is now not going to be killed neither retribution nor curse will fall upon you.”

“Impostor of a priest!” roared Gengo, flying into a great rage. “Was this all a trick to rob me of my sword? How can I suffer you to remain in possession of that sword? What a fool you are to lose your life in the senseless attempt to save the life of a sinner! Prepare to die!”

He sprang at Takiguchi. Takiguchi dodged.

“Come, come,” he cried, “it’s unreasonable of you, a mere layman, to try and recover what has come into a priest’s possession. I will now proceed to take this girl too” – he placed his hand upon Karumo’s – “Taste the sharpness of Amida’s sword!”

With these words he lifted the sword.

“Insolent priest!” cried Gengo and the soldiers and precipitated themselves upon him. Hither and thither Takiguchi whirled the blade. His adversaries, finding themselves no match for him, were not long in taking to their heels. Gengo, however, eager to recover his sword, ambushed himself behind a large tombstone. Presently the soldiers returned and attacked Takiguchi from right and left simultaneously. Again Takiguchi whirled the blade with such dexterity that, as he advanced upon them, they were at last reduced to standing at bay against the tombstone. Takiguchi pressed them and suddenly the tombstone, heavy as it was, toppled over upon the hidden Gengo and crushed him to death. The panic-stricken soldiers sought safety in flight. Takiguchi returned to the girl.

“Can you recognize me, Karumo Dono?”

“Can I believe that you are Master Takiguchi? A thousand thanks to you. But for your assistance I should by now be dead; but I cannot suppress my surprise at finding you a priest.”

“We will speak of such things at leisure. Here we should linger no further.” Takiguchi hoisted the girl on his back and hurried away.

III

Shigémori, Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, who was Leniency and Sympathy incarnate, not only refused to sit in judgment upon the misbehaviour of Yoshitsugu and Takiguchi, but even went so far as to feign perfect ignorance of the scandal. Among his retainers, and among his younger warriors in particular, the affair was a subject of frequent gossip.

“Poor soul!” Takiguchi’s friends whispered, “Takiguchi, led astray by the wanton Yoshitsugu, has come to ruin. Yoshitsugu is the cause of all his troubles.” While those who sympathized with Yoshitsugu murmured, “Yoshitsugu, through keeping company with the lecherous Takiguchi, has earned a bad name for himself. A man is known by the company he keeps, good or bad. Yoshitsugu’s brother, Moritsugu, has also lost in reputation on account of Takiguchi. Moritsugu’s anguish is sure sooner or later to give rise to a quarrel between him and Takiguchi’s father, Katsuyori,”

Subject to this tittle-tattle, which rose whenever and wherever Shigémori’s retainers were gathered together, Katsuyori and Moritsugu became little by little estranged, to such an extent that at last a hidden feud arose between them. One day Moritsugu came to duty in the drawing-room of Shigémori’s palace and was there greeted by those young samurai who sympathized with his brother. They saluted him with enthusiasm.

“Master Moritsugu, we are delighted to see you. It grieves us to hear of your brother’s lot. We young men are apt to be led into youthful follies by bad companions. We wish to say how deeply we sympathize with you and your brother.”

“Many thanks for your sympathy, my friends, but you are misinformed. The truth is, Yoshitsugu is seriously ill.”

Hardly had Moritsugu seated himself when Katsuyori, who, as ill luck would have it, happened to be his appointed comrade on duty for this day, appeared. He wore an *eboshi* (official head-gear) pressed down to the eyes to conceal his shaven head. Takiguchi’s friends gave him a hearty welcome.

“We hear your son, Takiguchi Dono, has forsaken the world. What a pity! But it is always one’s friends who lead one to fame or to ruin and, as the Chinese proverb runs, ‘To such as possesses three good friends, three bad Dame Fortune also sends.’ He’s a lucky man who never meets either a bad friend or a whirlwind. We can well imagine how you feel towards your former friend.”

Katsuyori made his salute to Moritsugu, then, like the haughty old samurai he was, took a seat higher than Moritsugu’s.

“How now! Priest Sairai exclaimed the indignant Moritsugu, “I can’t but think your aged eyes fail to recognize me. Know then that I am Moritsugu. You have taken the wrong seat. Take a lower.”

“Eh?” replied Katsuyori in scorn “Believe me, my aged eyes don’t fail to recognize my colleague’s face. Albeit you are not yet well on in years, your memory seems to fail you with regrettable ease. Kindly recall to

yourself that you are of the Fifth Grade in court rank, while I am of the Fourth. There is therefore nothing incorrect in my sitting above you. A very forgetful person evidently! A few drops of medicine might indeed be efficacious in restoring your health and memory."

"Insolent dotard! Take a lower seat and be quick about it, or I will pull you down to a lower. And if I resort to force your hat may slip off and your shiny pate appear, to your shame and humiliation. Perhaps you would prefer that, eh?

So saying, Moritsugu pressed against the old warrior.

"So you despise me because of my old age? Seize me by the arm if you choose. What new-fangled notion of etiquette is it that requires a samurai of the Fourth Grade to sit below another of the Fifth? Where is the authority enables you to insist upon it? Come, give me a reason, you green boy!"

"You're in your dotage all right," returned Moritsugu, in no whit discomposed. "Fourth Grade, Coarse²¹ Grade! True you are of the Fourth Grade, but aren't you also a lay-brother and consequently out of office and service? In point of fact it's your son Takiguchi's turn to be on duty, but there are those that say that, ashamed of his past bad behaviour and consequent ill reputation, he has seen fit to forsake the ways of the wicked world. It is as well that he has done so. Had he remained in office, any young samurai who might have continued as his friends and colleagues could only have followed his bad example and shared his degradation. Takiguchi's punishment, however, depends upon the pleasure of our lord, and whether he will be ordered to commit suicide or will be beheaded none can tell. I understand that, acting on the supposition that your son's forsaking of the world saved him from punishment, you have returned to secular life and are once more in his lordship's service. To-day I meet you in your second service for the first time. You see there has been no change in our turns of service for some considerable time and to-day Takiguchi and I are to be on duty together. You appear then to-day as Takiguchi's substitute. Now I, Moritsugu, am of the Fifth Grade, while Takiguchi is of

²¹ The pun made in scorn by Moritsugu is scarcely to be rendered in English. I have merely indicated something that implies a similarity in sound; this similarity being associated with an idea that would be offensive. What our ingenious author says is, "*Shii no kashi no*" or "The Pasania (a kind of oak) or the oak." The word "Shii" means either "Fourth Grade" or this variety of oak; and *kashi* means "oak."

the Sixth; and I have never sat below your son. Accordingly you, as his substitute, should sit below me. If I am wrong pray correct me at once."

"So!" sneered Katsuyori. "No more cavilling, please, about the ordering of our seats. You would seem to blame me for having permitted Takiguchi to forsake the world sooner than await our lord's punishment, but, if it be our lord's pleasure to have him recalled for self-slaughter or for decapitation, I can so call him back. Since when has it become impossible to punish one who has forsaken the world? As for your brother, Yoshitsugu, is it not everyone's secret that you have confined him to your house, alleging illness, the better in your cowardice to cover up the ill name his bad behaviour has earned him. It is as well that you have done so. Were such a man as he allowed to remain in office, the young samurai, his friends and colleagues, would be bound to follow his bad example and this would lead to their utter degradation. But were our lord, out of his great mercy, to employ him again without first punishing him, you would, I suppose, have the unblushing impudence to permit him to return to service among the other samurai. No man of honour of course could do such a thing, but we all know that, as the saying goes, the scarlet-faced ape laughs at the golden²² face of the Lord Buddha when he marks the difference in their complexions!"

"Well, well. And another saying goes, the crab who walks sideways laughs at the man who walks forward."

"And the green persimmon, so they say, laughs at the sweet persimmon in the beak of the crow."

"And the man crucified head downward, so I've heard, dies of laughing at an exposed head because it's set forsooth below his feet."²³

"You seem to speak from experience."

"You perhaps have never seen steel? Shall I let you have a taste of it?"

"Do you think you can do that?"

"Why not? I will oblige you this minute if you wish it."

The excited couple prepared to draw their swords and forthwith all the other samurai, taking sides, assumed defiant attitudes. A period of breathless suspense followed. It was broken by the startling announcement that a messenger from the Empress had this moment arrived. A moment

²² That is of course the face of a golden image of Buddha.

²³ In cases of such crucifixion the cross was very tall, while the wooden frame on which the head of a criminal was exposed was much lower.

later Shigémori made his appearance and seated himself on the dais. All kneeled reverently. Morotaka, for it was he, addressed Lord Shigémori.

“I beg to deliver my message to your lordship. Recently two court ladies, named respectively Yokobué and Karumo indulged themselves with Takiguchi and Yoshitsugu. This has occasioned great scandal and disaffection at court. Furthermore, Karumo became pregnant and could no longer remain in service. Her Imperial Majesty, grievously offended with her, ordered me to put a period to her existence. Finding it impossible to disobey the Imperial command, I ordered the damsel to be taken to Funaoka-Yama for execution. Her decapitation was imminent when an unknown stranger, suddenly falling upon my retainer, Iwamura Gengo the executioner, murdered him and carried the prisoner whither none knows. It can hardly be doubted that the rogue in question is Karumo’s lover Yoshitsugu. This heinous crime, by which the law has been set at naught and the Imperial will flouted, has much incensed Her Majesty. She requires that Yoshitsugu be instantly executed. Yokobué is to be beheaded at court. Her Majesty will let your lordship know later on the arrangements made for this ceremony. Allow me to repeat once more that it is Her Majesty’s pleasure that Yoshitsugu be forthwith beheaded.”

“An infamous order!” exclaimed Shigémori after a brief silence. “The like of which has never been heard of before. Izumi Shikibu indulged herself with Hirai-no-Yasumasa and later with Tachibana-no-Michisada, by whom she became the mother of Koshikibu, the poetess. There are the cases too of Akazomé Emon and Nakano Kwampaku; also of Murasaki Shikibu with Nishinomiya-no-Sadaijin. All the above affairs took place while the ladies were in the Imperial service and yet Jōtō-Mon-in, the Empress then reigning, inflicted upon them no punishment whatever. Thus, not only were these ladies spared any disgrace, but have left behind them undying names as authoresses. With these precedents before my eyes, I cannot but deem the present Imperial order of an excessive severity. Surely, Morotaka, you and your sister Lady Tonasé must have joined in remonstrating with Her Majesty?”

“Yes, my lord, my sister and I again and again importuned our Imperial mistress, but with no result. Since Her Majesty is your lordship’s sister and comes of a military family she ordains everything according to the manners and customs of the military classes.”

“There you err. The Imperial order is contrary to the rules of the military class. I would draw your attention to the fact that the executioner

Gengo, in having Karumo carried off, did not act according to the manners that obtain among warriors. Do you suppose that the strict guard kept over a criminal with drawn spears and naked halberds is merely an arrangement made for the safety of the condemned? Is it not also to fend off any violence that may be indulged in by his comrades and relatives? It appears to me to have been an uncommon piece of carelessness on his part that Gengo should not only have permitted his prisoner to be snatched from him, but also to have suffered the loss of his own life. The corpse of so foolish a warrior should undoubtedly be crucified; his relatives should be punished; and you, his lord, required to commit suicide. Such is the rule of the military classes. The Imperial order is against the law inasmuch as it is neither in accordance with the rule of the military class nor with that of the court. To me it appears quite unreasonable; but Her Majesty's pleasure is no less binding than His Majesty's order. Yoshitsugu shall therefore be beheaded during the course of the day. Moritsugu, order your brother to come here! Now, Morotaka, so Yokobué is to be executed at court, eh? Who is to be her executioner? I feel nervous about the matter. Should she be carried off, even as Karumo was, I can well imagine what a scandal would arise at court. You will return therefore to Her Majesty and inform her that I shall send an inspector²⁴ and an executioner. Such is Shigémori's reply to the Imperial order. And by the way, now I'm on the subject of love affairs, I hear there is a samurai—his name escapes me at this moment—who has written notes to a court lady and who now, out of jealousy caused by her rejection of his suit, is attempting to avenge himself upon her and her lover. There is a villain if you like! If he does not submit himself to punishment by you let me know, Morotaka, for I would have you know that it is my intention to have him heavily punished,"

Cowed by these words, Morotaka could but murmur, "Yes, yes, my lord." A cold perspiration bathed his body. He made a bewildered bow, then, stumbling over the skirt of his *hakama* and slipping on the mats, precipitantly withdrew.

Luckless Yoshitsugu! Promptly obeying his brother's urgent summons, never dreaming of the doom in store for him, he dressed himself

²⁴ An officer called *kenshi*, that is a man who acts as sheriff or witness of an execution or a harakiri. (See Redesdale's *Tales of Old Japan*, appendix A, page 285, edition of 1910): Ceremonies observed at the harakiri of a Hatamoto, petty noble of the Shogun's court.

completely albeit his hair remained in an unpresentable condition. He hastened to Shigémori's mansion and presented himself at the hall of reception. Moritsugu said to him, "His lordship's order is that you leave your two swords here and go round to the *shirasu*."²⁵

Instantly the frightful truth flashed upon the mind of the young samurai, but he smiled as he answered, "Certainly, sir." His composed air as he removed his swords showed that he was prepared for the worst.

"A pattern of knighthood," murmured all the samurai present. Their eyes glistened with tears of admiration.

Shigémori bent his gaze upon the young man and said kindly enough, "I am delighted to see you, Yoshitsugu, but I greatly regret that I must tell you that Her Imperial Majesty, in her displeasure at your misbehaviour, has ordered that you be at once beheaded. Know therefore that there is no hope of reprieve. Alas, my poor friend! Since you have served me from your childhood with all possible faithfulness I very much wish that I could at least permit you to commit self-dispatch,²⁶ but I cannot act in a manner contrary to Her Majesty's pleasure. By reason however of the sympathy and love that a lord feels toward his retainer, I will slay you with my own hands.²⁷ Therefore bid farewell to your brother and your colleagues and quickly make your way round to the inner courtyard."

So saying Shigémori rose and went within.

Yoshitsugu looked round the company and thus addressed them: "My brother and my friends, pray listen to me a moment. I wish to record the shame my misbehaviour causes me and for which I richly deserve capital punishment. Yet, shamed though I am, I deem myself fortunate in that I am to be slain by His Excellency Lord Shigémori, who is at once my own liege lord and the wisest personage in all Japan. Moreover his lordship saw fit to address some words of gracious consolation and compassion to me, which are indeed of more comfort to me than the ministrations of a holy priest. Dearly do I wish to live on in this world that, if the need arose, I might fight to the death in defence of his lordship, so to requite his favours toward me. It is the consideration of such an interest that alone worries me

²⁵ Inner courtyard wherein a criminal was condemned and executed.

²⁶ Condemnation to *harakiri* or self-dispatch was looked upon as a privilege in that it was far less humiliating than decapitation by an executioner.

²⁷ It was considered much more honourable for a samurai to be slain by his own lord than by an executioner.

on the eve of my death. Farewell, farewell, my dearest brother and my most honourable friends.”

Having spoken these few words he made his way toward the inner courtyard. Every warrior present, both his friends and those who had aforesaid entertained no feeling for him – and his brother who was already completely resigned to his condemnation – everyone of them was moved to silent tears.

After a brief space Moritsugu exclaimed, casting the while a scornful glance at Katsuyori, “I am a glad man! Had Yoshitsugu forsaken the world, not only would he have missed being favoured with his lordship’s comfort and the privilege of dying at his honourable hands, but he would have suffered the humiliation of having his shaven head cut from his body by a nameless soldier. My brother’s manner of death is truly worthy of a warrior.”

At this moment Morihisa, the chief retainer of Shigémori, emerged from the inner apartments carrying two head boxes in his hand.

“Here, Katsuyori,” he said with an air of authority, “His lordship has slain Yoshitsugu and has placed his head in this box, which has been sealed. Your orders are to take this box to the court, to break the seal, to examine the head and to display it to Her Imperial Majesty. When you have done this, you are to decapitate Yokobué, place her head in this box and bring it back. You, Moritsugu, are ordered to act as inspector at her execution. You are both to proceed at once upon your errand.”

“His lordship shall be promptly obeyed,” answered Katsuyori respectfully.

He took up the two boxes and rose to his feet. Moritsugu also rose.

“Katsuyori,” said he, “dare you accept the order? Can you really be going to examine my brother’s head and decapitate Yokobué?”

“Why not? Dare you not act as inspector?”

“Of course, I certainly intend to. And I would have you know that if your manner of head examination and of decapitation is in any way faulty I shall not fail to report it to his lordship. You understand?”

“I do indeed. And if you are at fault as sheriff, I in my turn will not fail to take notice of it. You understand?”

“Yes. We have given each other our words. Don’t forget that. Come with me.”

“Go before me.”

The two samurai, glaring upon each other, proceeded on their way. They resembled two hardy pine-trees growing on a rugged rock, the one old and the other young, which struggle with one another in the storm.

Under the early winter twilight, rain mixed with hail was falling. From the boughs of the trees in the gardens of the Empress' palace the scarlet embroidery of the leaves had been loosened; already the chrysanthemums had faded; the crickets shrilled sadly. That the tedium caused by the weary atmosphere might be shaken off, the Empress thus addressed her maids-of-honour: "Backgammon does not hold my interest since the die does not fall as I wish. *Hentsugi*²⁸ is so difficult; *kaiawasé*²⁹ chills our hands; what do you say to a game of poem-cards,³⁰ my girls?"

"A merry game, Your Majesty. Quick, let's play it!"

The young girls promptly seated themselves, produced the cards and spread them on the mats. So engaged, they chattered blithely and glanced about in all directions. Not so Yokobué—who, all melancholy, pined for her lover—for she had continued in service despite the fact that her sleeves were forever wet with her tears. The Empress, in her mercy, had extended her sympathy and tenderness to the damsel and had even comforted her with kind words. Observing Yokobué's mood and touched by it, the Empress had a happy idea. "Somehow," she said to the party, "I feel that I would prefer not to take part in the game, but to be merely the reader. I think you will find an increased interest in the game if you practise a sort of divination by the poems you pick up, a divination to inform you whether your wishes are to become facts or no. If I were you I would put up an inward petition to the gods of poetry to grant that you have your

²⁸ A game in which Chinese characters have a prominent place.

²⁹ A game played with a number of clam shells. Roughly speaking, what constitutes this game is the picking up and fitting together of the two respective sides of the shells from those which have been scattered about. The insides of the shells are painted with coloured illustrations of the fifty-four scenes of *The Story of Genji*, the greatest work of classical fiction.

³⁰ The pack contains one hundred poem-cards, each inscribed with the latter half of one of the odes in the famous anthology *Hyakunin Isshu* or "Single Verses by an Hundred Poets". The game is played as follows: the reader reads the first half of the odes and the players endeavour to pick up the corresponding halves. The skill of course consists in knowing the poems by heart and quickly recognizing the characters.

favourite cards in your hand. Well, are you ready? I am going to read the first lines. This is Semi Maru's poem:³¹

The stranger who has travelled far,
The friend with welcome smile,
All sorts of men who come and go'

I would have Yokobué get the last half of this. Don't let the others pick up this card, my dear. Look sharp!"

"I must get it, I must get it," Yokobué thought to herself "It runs:

'Meet at this mountain stile,
They meet and rest awhile.'

And it seems to suggest our happy reunion."

Eagerly she sought the card, her heart beating violently with hope and fear. But Kozakura, another girl, too quick for her, picked it up to the disappointment of both the Empress and Yokobué.

"Come, this is the Minister Fujiwara-no-Sanékata's poem:

'Though love, like blisters made from leaves³²
Grown on Mount Ibuki
Torments me more than I can say,'"

Hardly had the Empress read when Izayoi picked up the card and read:

"My lady shall not see
How she is paining me.'

This poem does not apply to my case. I'm certain nobody pines for me."

"But we are not so sure cried the other girls, laughing.

"Now Lady Isé's poem:

'The double cherry-trees which grew

³¹The translations of these odes are from "A Hundred Verses from Old Japan by Mr. William N. Porter to whom my hearty acknowledgments are due.

³² The artemisia plant (or mugwort) is used in Japan for cauterizing; a conical wad of the leaves is placed on the spot, lit at the top, and allowed to burn down to the skin; this produces a blister, and is extremely painful. Mount Ibuki is famous for its artemisia.

At Nara in past days
Now beautify this palace, and'
The last lines symbolize good fortune and happiness. Now Yokobué!"

"Thank you, Your Majesty," responded Yokobué. But Ukon, flurrying her, picked the card up and read:

'Their blossoms all ablaze
Perfume the royal ways.'

That's lucky!" she exclaimed. "The poem must mean that the clothes I am going to receive at the year-end will be as beautiful as these cherry-blossoms."

"The next is the poem by the Mother of the Minister of State:

'How difficult it is for men
Not to forget the past!'"

"At least I can't fail to pick one up!" cried Yokobué excitedly. She took up the card and read mechanically:

"I fear my husband's love for me
Is disappearing fast;
This day must be my last.'

Oh, I hate this!" she exclaimed regretfully. "What a luckless omen!"

"Here, girls, is the poem by the Mother of Udaishō Michitsuna:

"Throughout the long and dreary night
I lie awake and moan;'"

The bewildered Yokobué again picked up the correct card. It read:

"How desolate my chamber feels,
How weary I have grown
Of being left alone."

The exactness of this description was too much for her she burst into sobs.

The High Priest Gyōson sings:

“In lonely solitude I dwell,
No human face I see;’

I myself will take up this one.”

With this the Empress took up the card and read:

“And so we two must sympathize,
O, mountain cherry-tree;
I have no friend but thee.’

“Don’t say ‘I have no friend but thee’, Yokobué,” continued the Empress, gazing with kindness into the girl’s face, “for you see you have a sympathetic friend in me.”

Yokobué wept in joy and gratitude.

“Come, girls, be quick. Kakinomoto-no-Hitomaru’s poem:

“Long is the mountain pheasant’s tail
That curves down in its flight;’”

Another girl picked up the card which read:

“But longer still it seems to me,
Left in my lonely plight,
Is this unending night.”

“Don’t be despondent, girl,” said the Empress in a soothing tone. “I will not long permit you to be left in solitude. Now, girls, Prince Kentoku’s poem:

‘I dare not hope my lady-love
Will smile on me again;’

It’s Kohagi, I’ll be bound, who has picked up the last half:

‘She knows no pity and my life
I care not to retain

Since all my prayers are vain.'

You are still only fourteen. Never put yourself in such a position as may cause you to exclaim, 'My life I care not to retain.' The Imperial adviser Yakamochi's poem:

'When on the Magpies' Bridge I see
The Hoar-frost King has cast
His sparkling mantle, well I know'''

"Heaven!" said Kojij_, smiling, as she took up the latter lines:
"The night is nearly past,
Daylight approaches fast.'

Even now I feel drowsy enough over my nightly vigil. How much more drowsy I should feel if I had to watch till daylight came!"

"The retired Emperor Sutoku's poem:

'The rock divides the flood in two,
Both streams with might and main
Go tumbling down the waterfall,'

How interesting this poem is! The second half reads:

'But well I know the twain
Will soon unite again.'

Suggestive surely of the successful attainment of every desire. Can't you see it? Look, look, it's there!"

So saying the Empress glanced at Yokobué. The grateful girl, pushing some of her comrades aside, picked up the card.

"I have it!"

Overjoyed at this happy omen, she pressed the card to her breast, and the Empress showed the delight with which she read the girl's feelings.

At this moment an aged lady of the court entered and announced that Superintendent Morotaka would shortly be present, having come on some urgent matter which required a personal interview with the Empress.

“Indeed?” said the Empress, amazed. “Why doesn’t he speak through Lady Tonasé? What can be the matter, I wonder. Now, Yokobué, hide yourself under this awhile” – she bade the girl lie down and concealed her under the *fuségo*—“don’t speak, not a sound.”

Then she spread a silk garment over the *qqfuségo*, drew it close to her back and was sitting at her ease when, a little later, Morotaka presented himself wearing an assumed air of dejection.

“I regret to have to inform Your Majesty that a melancholy message has arrived from His Excellency Lord Shigémori. His Excellency, having heard that Karumo has been discharged on account of her pregnancy caused by a love affair with Yoshitsugu, has seen fit to slay Yoshitsugu with his own hands and has ordered Katsuyori to bring Yoshitsugu’s head hither to display it to Your Majesty. The old messenger is now waiting with it. Furthermore, His Excellency wishes to declare that he is of the opinion that Takiguchi deserves the same fate, yet, inasmuch as he has forsaken the world and his present whereabouts are unknown, His Excellency considers that Yokobué should be decapitated in his stead. ‘If Her Majesty refuses to deliver Yokobué’ – such were the words His Excellency spoke to Katsuyori – ‘it will be your duty to hunt out and behead Takiguchi, but do your utmost to prevail upon Her Majesty to deliver up Yokobué, then decapitate her and bring her head to me.’ Acting on these orders, Katsuyori and Moritsugu are at hand in respective capacities of executioner and sheriff; they await Your Majesty’s pleasure at the middle gate. This is indeed in my opinion a cruel punishment and one unworthy of His Excellency, but against it there is no remedy. I venture to assert that Your Majesty had better yield to His Excellency’s wish and permit them to behead Yokobué. Poor girl! She has served Your Majesty so faithfully; I am saddened at the thought.”

He let fall a few crocodile tears. For a while the Empress was speechless with astonishment. Yokobué, struck with terror and grief, closed her mouth with her sleeve lest she should utter a cry. The tears ran down her face. “It grieves me to have to say such a thing of my brother,” exclaimed the Empress, “but verily I believe Lord Shigémori must be out of his senses. To indulge the passion of love with a married person is extremely wicked and Sakya Muni counsels us against it. Sincere love, however, is the root of faithfulness and in the sacred art of poesy love is considered as the most important of themes. In days of old the court noble Ariwara-no-Narihira carried on an intrigue with a virgin princess who was at that time purifying

herself for the priesthood at the great Isé Shrine; and albeit his conduct was brought to light, yet was he acquitted because of his fame as a poet. This precedent clearly displays to us that the punishment meted out by Lord Shigémori is not in accordance with the rules that regulate the lives of court nobles. The celebrated authoresses Izumi Shikibu, Koshikibu, Murasaki Shikibu and Akazomé Emon again took lovers to themselves while in the Imperial service; yet Generals Yorimitsu and Yorinobu, the actual rulers in those days, did not punish them. The proposed execution of Yokobué therefore cannot be in accordance with the rules regulating the life of the military classes. Whatever her misbehaviour, how is it possible for me to suffer Yokobué to be killed, who has served me with all diligence and loyalty? I and Yokobué, as mistress and maid, are tied with the Karma relations of the three existences.³³ On no account will I consent to her execution, nay, even though I run the risk of losing my rank as Empress and my very life by so doing.” –She put her hand behind her back and took a firm hold of Yokobué’s fingers – “Morotaka, from to-day henceforth you would do well to consider me as Yokobué’s sister or her mother. Never will I permit my daughter to be slain or my sister to be beheaded. Sympathize with me and be so good as to plead with Lord Shigémori on her behalf.”

Overwhelmed with gratitude and writhing with anxiety, Yokobué reverently pressed the Empress’ hand to her forehead. Morotaka, however, remained unmoved.

“I fear, Your Majesty,” he returned, “that the executioner and the sheriff, who have come hither for a definite purpose, will not be readily persuaded to depart. Shall I tell them that, as Yokobué’s death is against the will of Your Majesty, they are to hunt out Takiguchi and decapitate him?”

’Twas with difficulty that Yokobué restrained herself. She made as if to emerge from her hiding-place, but the Empress, covering her face with her flowing sleeve, looked back and signed to the girl to do no such thing. The girl drew herself up on her knees and whispered in the Empress’ ear between her sobs, “I beg Your Majesty’s pardon for seeming to reject your mercy, but Morotaka Dono says that if my life is spared my sweetheart’s will be taken. May I ask Your Majesty to deliver me up and thus save Takiguchi from death?”

³³ That is the past, the present and the future life.

A brief silence ensued; then the Empress said to Morotaka, "I understand that it is Lord Shigémori's will that either Yokobué or Takiguchi shall be slain; very well. You tell me that two warriors have come, one as executioner and one as sheriff. Now, girls, bid the two warriors enter the neighbouring chamber, as I have something to impart to them from behind the lowered blind.³⁴ You, too, Morotaka, are to listen to me."

The Empress wiped away her tears, then took her position on a low seat and in a posture full of dignity behind a bamboo blind. Beauty, awe and majesty emanated from her countenance and bearing. Presently the warriors were announced. The Empress' voice was clearly heard.

"Welcome, both of you. Albeit Lord Shigémori is my elder brother, yet he is now my subject. Despite the fact that he occupies the exalted position of Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, he has with his own hands beheaded Yoshitsugu. I cannot but think he is bereft of his senses. I count it an outrageous thing moreover that he should have dispatched persons of brutal office to the court. Is it nothing to him that he should desecrate the Imperial Palace with bloodshed? How can I suffer that poor girl Yokobué, who has tended me from her youth up, cruelly to perish by the executioner's sword? Albeit a woman, I was born of a 'family of bow and arrow' and am the daughter of Lord Kiyomori, a Prime Minister. I have not learnt how to deal death in battle, but there is no reason why I should not be able to perform the office of beheading another person. I will myself behead Yokobué and display her head to the sheriff. Moritsugu – that is your name, isn't it? – if you are proficient in the duties proper to a sheriff you will carefully examine the head and report on it to Lord Shigémori. When I have performed the deed I, in my turn, will inspect Yoshitsugu's head. Yokobué, I would do everything and anything in my power, but it is evident that my efforts are unavailing. Step forth therefore and prepare for death."

The bright, keen eyes of the Empress glistened with tears. Yokobué revealed herself and prostrated herself before her Imperial mistress.

"Most gracious Majesty," she sobbed, "your benevolence is higher than Mount Shumi and deeper than the ocean, but to pollute your honourable hands with my blood, that is impossible! Divine punishment would visit

³⁴ In ancient days it was the custom for the Emperor and Empress to address people of the inferior ranks from behind a blind.

itself upon me; I should bring disgrace on myself in the next world. I beg one more boon of Your Majesty – let me die by the executioner’s sword. I will not complain of the mode of execution, however severe. It is my hope that I shall be able to meet my sweetheart in the life to come. I grieve to part from Your Majesty, whose benevolence is so overwhelming that, were I to be reborn seven times into this world, I could scarcely hope to find another mistress of a like benevolence. Permit me to die at the hands of the executioner.”

“No, I cannot permit the maid who is dearest to me to be slain by a warrior. Reconcile yourself to dying by the edge of my sword.”

The Empress tucked up her skirts and, taking her sword from the sword-rack, tucked it under her left arm, saying, “Come with me, my girl, you shall meet your death in one of the inner chambers.”

She departed quietly and composedly. Yokobué followed her. All those present, and particularly Katsuyori and Moritsugu, were smitten by awe and pain at what seemed her wrath and at the melancholy they read upon her countenance.

“Katsuyori Dono,” remarked Moritsugu in tones of reconciliation, “have you noticed that the views of Her Majesty upon the subject of Yokobué and my brother would seem entirely contrary to what was asserted to be her first command? Have you observed how Her Majesty and Lord Shigémori seem to find fault with each other? Does not this seem strange? I am certain that some wicked wretch is deceiving both of them. Our mutual hostility is a private matter and the affairs of Takiguchi and Yoshitsugu are matters of but small public importance. An estrangement, nay, a discord between Her Majesty and Lord Shigémori, however, were an affair of grave concern which might lead to public disturbance. Let us therefore make our peace and bend our joint powers to inquiring into the matter.”

“Certainly,” nodded Katsuyori, “that is precisely my thought too. First of all let us consider our friendship restored, then let us take note of everybody and keep a sharp lookout.”

The two warriors exchanged significant glances, then sternly looked about them. Morotaka, who all this while had been ill at ease, could no longer contain himself.

“Ugh! I have a fit of lumbago, my loins ache; I can bear the pain no longer. Pray excuse me, sirs. Be so good as to apologize to Her Majesty for my taking my leave now. Ugh! There again! Good-bye, sirs.”

With a wry face and holding his sides, Morotaka took himself off. The eyes of the two warriors followed his retreating figure not without wonder.

"I consider it very suspicious," both exclaimed, "that this fellow, who is the superintendent of this palace, should remove himself on an occasion like this which is one of greatest importance, merely offering a pretext of sudden illness."

Hardly had they spoken when Lady Tonasé appeared, head-box in hand.

"Good-evening, sirs," said she as she sat herself down. "Her Majesty has beheaded Yokobué and has placed her head in this box which, as you see, she has sealed. Her Majesty orders me to receive Yoshitsugu's head from you and, when I have done so, to deliver Yokobué's head to you."

Katsuyori bowed his head respectfully and, unsealing the box he had brought, removed its lid. With what wonder did not all three behold within, not Yoshitsugu's head, but a queue and a stone as make-weight. Then Lady Tonasé, in her turn, cut the seal from her box with her dagger and so disclosed the contents. Lo and behold! these consisted merely of a bamboo flute cut in two at the mouthpiece and, as make-weight, some earth! All three were dumbfounded. After some rumination Katsuyori exclaimed, "It is above the privilege accorded a man of my rank and station to remark it, but what wise persons Her Majesty and Lord Shigémori are! I am filled with awe and reverence at the boundless benevolence displayed and at the precisely same measure each has taken without pre-arrangement between them. Had his lordship slain Yoshitsugu he could not have spared Karumo's life; it has therefore pleased his lordship graciously to spare Yoshitsugu by cutting off this queue of his and so making a priest of him. By entering the priesthood a man disconnects himself with the secular world, for he who has taken to himself a Buddhist name is, after a manner of speaking, a dead man. This make-weight of a stone is a symbol of the tomb; thus one may say his lordship has slain Yoshitsugu. This is a merciful measure and in accordance with the Buddhist doctrine that 'the bad shall be saved in the same hour as the good.' Her Majesty is apparently of the same mind. Had Her Majesty beheaded Yokobué, how could Takiguchi have survived? The *yokobué* or flute is a wonderful instrument, possessing miraculous notes and a soul of its own. By cutting this flute in twain and covering it with earth Her Majesty signifies that Yokobué, being dismissed, is as it were no more in this world. Thus, two of them being saved from death, it follows that the four of them are saved and how great

will be the joy and gratitude of their parents, brothers, sisters, other relatives and friends. It would appear that a life-granting measure, such as has here been taken by Lord Shigémori and Her Majesty, is a more pious deed than prayers offered by a million priests for æons. Boundless is their benevolence! Oh, Moritsugu, how can we repay this great favour shown us in sparing the lives of your brother and his would-be wife and of my son and his would-be wife? The mercy, the benevolence of it!"

The lion-hearted heroes grasped each other's hands and were speechless, choked by tears of gratitude. Lady Tonasé was also moved to tears.

"I am ashamed, sirs," she said, "for at the bottom of this affair there is a great knave. I need not specify his name. Now that my parents are no more, the love I bear my brother is like the love of a mother for her son. Alas, to know him for the man he is! How can his wickedness fail to attract the notice of Her Majesty and of Lord Shigémori, both being so wise and sagacious? I cannot but think that they will judge me his accomplice. I am prepared for that, though by the Gods and Buddha I have had no hand in the matter. I fear however that their suspicions will not be allayed, even after I am dead. Pray sympathize with me, sirs."

A melancholy silence ensued. At length Katsuyori spoke softly.

"You have our hearty sympathy, lady. Everyone has a mind of his own. A parent cannot know what is in a child's mind and the mind of a brother is unknown to his sister. We can very well understand that you are a perfect stranger to your brother's intentions. A mirror reflects an object exactly as an object appears. Gaze in a mirror with distorted features and a distorted face will look back at you; gaze at it with a placid face and a placid face will greet you. The same is true of Her Majesty: behave innocently and sincerely toward Her Majesty and your reflection will be the same in Her Majesty's mental mirror."

They exchanged head-boxes. The warriors bade her a polite farewell and went their way.

IV

Luckless Yokobué! For a considerable period she had led a sequestered life at Kwazan, nigh the capital, though not a day passed without her pining for Takiguchi. At length her passionate longing induced her to undertake a journey in quest of her sweetheart. Having assumed travelling

garb and veiled her face with a sedge hat, she set out one morning before daybreak. She bade a sad farewell to her hermitage and wearily trudged the narrow roads through the rice fields.

As she plodded on she beheld, far away to the south, the scarlet maple leaves upon Mount Inari, which the poetess Izumi Shikibu immortalized in a love-poem. Her fancy wandered to the village of Fukakusa, situated below the mountain, famous for its connection with the court noble Fukakusa-no-Shōshō, who died a tragic death because of the power of his love for the beautiful poetess Komachi. As, crossing the Kamo River, she came to the street of Gojō, she beheld pass by many flower-sellers' carts on which reposed mountains of flowers sparkling with morning dew. At sight of them the love-sick maiden could not but associate them with the ox-cart in which the hero of *The Story of Genji* visits the daughter of a peasant living in this neighbourhood. Before she reached the village of Saga, the retreat of numerous recluses, she had to pass through many villages and forests and cross certain streams. Their very names were significant to her, either of hope or fear.

At Saga she found so many hermitages in the glens and on the hill-tops that she knew not at which to call in inquiry after her sweetheart. In this quandary she addressed a peasant girl who was going home from the garden where she had been gathering vegetables.

"Somewhere hereabouts lives a young samurai of the capital who has turned priest. Pray tell me which is his hut?"

"Hm! A young samurai is it, who's a priest? Let me see, which can it be? Father Nensai was a huntsman. Father Dōkin³⁵ was a—shall I say a Dorking cock? Father Dōsai it cannot be, for he has removed to Nara. I have it!—some time ago a young samurai of the Taira family shaved his head at the Jōin Temple yonder. Follow this lane and you will find his hermitage easily enough. Listen, you can hear the sound of prayers in his cell."

Having said this the girl made off. The joy of Yokobu^é knew no bounds. Beyond doubt the young priest must be her Takiguchi. She ran along the lane and soon reached the cottage, from within which sounded the bell accompanying prayers. It was with a beating heart that she lifted her hand and knocked upon the garden gate and fence.

³⁵ There is, in the original, a pun which I have reproduced to the best of my ability.

"I want to speak to you, sir! Please unlock the door; please open the gate."

"As you will," replied a gruff voice.

The next moment there appeared within the fence a shabbily attired man with a shaven head, of about forty years of age.

"My mistake," he said, leering, "I thought it was the woman bringing rice for to-morrow. Here comes an excellent meal for the night-time; I'd have you know, my pretty girl, that the priest here is a young man, but he was a samurai once and behaves himself very strictly. However skittishly forward you may be with him, let me warn you he will in nowise do even so much as to uncover your dish. No, not he, never! As for me, I too abstain from flesh to-day and tomorrow, but if it's only a matter of a small consideration, call again the day after to-morrow."

"Nonsense! What do you mean? I know very well he is a man of strong will; but if we meet he will recognize me. Pray be so good as just to tell him, sir."

"You're his friend then? You might have told me so earlier. Wait a moment." So saying he ran into the cell. Yokobué, following him with her eyes, said to herself, "Takiguchi Sama was wont to say that he had a favourite sandal-carrier; this fellow should be he. What a loyal servant to have entered the priesthood with his master! How admirable!"

The shaven henchman ran out crying, "Oh, terrible, terrible! Are you waiting still, girl? What a fright I got! When I told my master of your coming he glared at me with eyes like saucers and roared at me, 'Have I ever invited in a girl or woman since I retired here? In the first place I am short of money. You lecher! Whenever you come across a woman you dilly-dally with her. I am tired of such an idiot! Never come on such an errand again!' And when he had said this he beat me again and again about the head with a bell hammer. Be off, girl!"

"Indeed, he did right in taking amiss what I said. I am sorry to put you to further trouble, but be so kind as to inform him that I come from Her Majesty's court. Your master will then understand."

"No, no," he said sourly, shaking his head with vehemence, "let there be no tattle about Her Majesty's court.³⁶ He never will give ear to any mention of silk coat or petticoat.¹ If I go and speak to him I shall get another knock. Terrible, terrible!"

³⁶ These are more untranslatable puns.

"You seem to have recently shaved your head. I expect you feel cold about the head? I should like to present you with a hood, but I haven't got one, so allow me to offer you this."

Yokobué proffered him a cloth wrapper, then threw it over the fence. The fellow seized it joyfully enough.

"Thank you, girl. This is expensive crêpe I see, and the lining red silk. I can use it as a hood. Wasn't there something wrapped up in it?"

"Yes, it contained money which I gave to beggars on my way here, but next time I come I will bring you anything you want. I suppose you have nose-paper?"

"Yes, I have such things. What would do better – you understand?"

"I understand. I shan't fail to bring it. Will you please grant my request?"

"Very well then."

Once more he rushed into the hermitage.

"None are so frank and simple-minded as people of the lower classes," she said. "He is indeed love's messenger on my behalf. I think I will stay at this hut to-night and talk with my sweetheart all night long."

An ecstasy possessed her. She trembled on tiptoe. But it was a crestfallen messenger of love who returned a moment or two later.

"Well, what did he say? Quick!"

"All for nothing. He refuses to see you. He merely rapped out with an oath, 'A friend, eh! No friend if it's a female. I wouldn't cross the road to speak with a bitch or a hen much less with a woman.' I'm sorry, my girl, I fear you've given me a crêpe wrapper in vain."

He disappeared into the hut again. Yokobué's disappointment was so deep that she was quite confounded. She sank to the ground and wept bitterly. "What change in him! Three years we pined for each other. Three years may seem a short space of time, but when told day by day they amount to more than a thousand days and nights. For so many days and nights did he and I pine for each other. Once we had achieved intimacy, what trouble and difficulty was ours, managing to meet in secret! We vowed to each other that we would become husband and wife through seven existences to come and now he even refuses to see me."

She clung to the gate-post and cried bitterly, but no one came to comfort her.

"It is an idle complaint that I make. Now that I am forsaken by my beloved, to what purpose do I live on? What are the bright moon and the

beautiful flowers to me? I will drown myself in yonder stream and in Hades enjoy gazing at the reflection of my lover as it comes and goes upon the river." Having come to this melancholy resolve, the girl hurried toward the "Plover's pool."³⁷

The serving-man turned priest caught sight of her and was astonished.

"Master! The girl is going to drown herself. See, see! She is running toward the river."

The startled priest rushed out, wrenched open the outer gate and, running to the girl, seized her in his arms.

"Takiguchi Sama, is it?" she exclaimed as she embraced him.

"No, I am not Takiguchi."

"Don't lie to me, dear."

She clung to him but he gently freed himself.

"Is it Yokobué Dono?"

"Are you Yoshitsugu Sama? I feel sad. My life was spared through Her Majesty's mercy; since when I have lived on in hopes of meeting Takiguchi Dono. Alas, my hope is frustrated. Pray kill me, Yoshitsugu Sama."

She seized Yoshitsugu's sleeve and wept bitterly.

"Don't be so cast down," said Yoshitsugu, himself almost in tears. "I too was graciously pardoned by my liege lord, since when I have become a priest. I have not been able, however, to free myself from worldly passions, so that I never cease from remembering my beloved Karumo. Beholding your grief, I can well imagine how passionately she is longing after me. Even in this life we four are separated by fate from one another, so that there seems even less hope that we may be able to 'live together in one lotus blossom in the Pure Land.' But since Takiguchi and Karumo, both of whom are pining for us, cannot have gone to the furthest provinces, let us set out in quest of them. The proverb says, 'Desire finds its way even through a rock'; sooner or later what we wish will be accomplished. Be of good heart, Yokobué Dono. In this world a priest has no fixed place of stay; I can therefore start at any moment. Buddha is one and the same all over the world. Everywhere and anywhere Buddha can be found. I therefore need not take leave of the Buddha in my shrine. Hold yourself ready to depart, Yokobué Dono."

On that Yoshitsugu made over the hermitage to his serving-man turned priest, bade the fellow farewell and departed with the girl.

³⁷ The name of the deepest part of the stream.

Like a mandarin duck separated from its drake and a cock pheasant parted from its hen, the pair wandered hither and thither, weeping inwardly, but comforting each other as week after week went by without the achievement of any special destination.

Late one winter's afternoon they found themselves trudging along a mountain path in the district of Shiga. Snow was falling thick and fast. A freezing wind from Mount Hiei howled through the snow-crueted trees. The sufferings she had endured upon the long journey had told upon Yokobué. Recently she had grown weaker and now the bitter weather tried her so hard that she seemed scarcely able to take another step.

"Take heart of grace, Yokobué. Have no fears on account of your weakness. I am sure you will soon be able to meet Takiguchi."

"Thank you – for – your – kind – words."

So benumbed were her lips that these words proceeded from them but brokenly.

"Naturally you are tired," returned Yoshitsugu. "It was very much my idea to beg two or three nights' lodging for your health's good, but unfortunately it is near the year's end and every house consequently is busy, and in any event nobody would give lodging to a priest and a young woman. We have slept in the open air now no less than a hundred nights – a hard time this must have been for you who have led an easy and comfortable life at court from your childhood up. You have my sympathy. About a mile further on lies the village of Shiga. I will certainly ask them, at the very first house we come on, to give us lodging for the night. Please try to walk on."

Thus urged, Yokobué did her best to obey, but so weak and benumbed were her legs that she tottered and fell down in the snow.

"What a helpless creature I am!" she exclaimed. "Indeed your kindness overwhelms me. You are searching for your love, yet, despite your sufferings, you have fended every care from me for a long while. You have kindly tended a dying woman without any sign of impatience, despite the heavy snow-storm sweeping this strange country-side and without taking thought to your own discomfort at all. Surely you must have been my father or brother in a former existence; in nowise can I consider you a mere friend. I was lucky in coming across you, but I begin to wonder why I have been so long unable to meet Takiguchi with whom I exchanged vows of fidelity. I fear my hapless lot may be a divine counterpoise to the undeserved benevolence Her Majesty showed towards me. By my own

anguish I can well imagine Karumo Dono's pain. Five³⁸ long years have passed since she was with child and yet you have not met each other. A hard lot hers! I heartily sympathize with you in your agony. It grieves me much to have put you to such trouble when you are already weighed down by your own troubles, but there is no help for it. My anguish and this snowstorm seem to rob me of my breath; I feel dizzy; I think I shall scarcely live until the morrow. My hours are numbered. I have not even strength enough to pray to Buddha. Aid me to pray, that I be suffered to be reborn in the lotus flower in the Pure Land with Takiguchi." She found difficulty in breathing and seemed on the point of death. Yoshitsugu, himself grief-stricken and much fatigued, spoke somewhat sternly to encourage his sick companion.

"This is spiritless of you, Yokobué. If your sympathy really extends even to Karumo, why do you not take heart and venture not only through the snow but also through fire to find Takiguchi and then to search for Karumo in his company and mine? You appear a somewhat helpless woman."

He aided her to her feet.

The exhausted Yokobué exclaimed, "I am ashamed of my helplessness and selfishness; I ask pardon of you."

She leaned upon Yoshitsugu's arm. They continued on through the dusk by the light of the snow itself. When they had toiled a little further through the falling snow they were overjoyed to descry, far ahead, a cottage lit by a hearth fire. They stumbled to it and, peeping through the chinks of the paper door, caught sight of a flame drowsily wavering before the images of the "Three Deities of Welcome."³⁹ They saw too an intelligent-looking boy of five to six summers feeding with firewood the hearth, whereon a kettle was boiling. Hope brightened in them. Yoshitsugu slightly opened the door.

"I say, little sir?"

"Who is it?" said the child on tiptoe. "What do you want?"

³⁸ The statement that five years had elapsed since Karumo's pregnancy does not seem to tally with the statement that Yoshitsugu had recently become a priest. Our author displays a singular lack of explicitness as to where Yokobué and Yoshitsugu had spent these years.

³⁹ These deities are Amida, Kwannon and Seishi and they guide the souls of the dead to paradise.

“We are travellers who have lost our way in the snow; there are but two of us. Please allow us to rest in that corner till day breaks.”

“I’m sorry,” replied the boy, with an innocent but firm air, “but the priest of this house has given me orders never to open the door in his absence. I therefore can’t allow you in.”

“You are right to refuse, as ’tis the time of the year when every house must be guarded against thieves, But see – my companion is a woman who is sick. We are neither of us such as steal. I beg your pardon for using such phrases as are used to grown-ups, but it would be a work of great mercy to give us a lodging. We will apologize to your master. Again I say, do be so good as to grant our request.”

“No, I can’t.”

“Then will you permit us a drink of the water that is boiling there?”

“That is not water but medicine. The first infusion⁴⁰ is not yet made.”

“There’s somebody sick here then? Who is it?”

“My mother. She’s long been ill. She lies abed behind that screen day and night. The priest cooks the morning and evening meals.⁴¹ This evening he has gone down to the village hard by, to get mother’s medicine.”

“In that case, though the priest be absent, you will still be able to ask your mother to give us a night’s lodging. Please be so kind, little sir.”

“No, no. The priest takes every care of my mother. He says I am never to let in anybody, whomsoever they may be, in his absence, for fear mother should be carried away. I can’t allow you in.”

“Kaméwaka,” called a woman’s thin voice from behind the screen, “there are travellers asking for lodging, aren’t there? They must be cold in this weather. The priest will soon be back, so call them in quick.”

“No, mother,” said the boy stubbornly, “the priest told me never to open the door, even to our friends. I’ll just go down and fetch him.”

So saying, he took from the wall a large hat of bamboo sheaths, placed it on his head and set out through the heavy snow.

“Well,” Yoshitsugu said to himself, “it’s only natural a priest should hide his wife. I suppose he calls this son of his a pupil. While the boy’s

⁴⁰ In former days internal medicines were decoctions prepared from medicinal herbs and tree-roots that had been subjected to prolonged boiling in water. This process of boiling was often repeated two or three times.

⁴¹ In those days Buddhist priests had two meals a day only, one at morning and one at night.

away let me steal in with Yokobué and let us warm ourselves by the fire. Ah, no. If the priest is offended we shall get no lodging to-night; let us be patient a little longer."

He laid his hat and the girl's on Yokobué where she lay in the snow and, shivering with cold himself, endeavoured to warm her in his arms. Thickly fell the snow upon their hats. Night wore on. When he shook himself the snowflakes fell off him like goose feathers; the icicles hanging from the sleeves of both of them tinkled like tiny bells.

"Hey, travellers!" cried a youthful voice. "The priest is back."

Priest and child appeared out of the darkness.

"Are you the folk asking for lodging?"

"I am, sir. What, you're Takiguchi, aren't you?"

"Yoshitsugu! A strange reunion indeed! Before anything else let me return to you my precious charges. This is your son from whom you parted when he was yet in his mother's womb. Karumo Dono!"

Karumo made her appearance. She was overjoyed.

"My dear Yoshitsugu, this is our son."

"My dear father!"

The three embraced each other, gazing happily from face to face. All were speechless with joy.

After a brief pause Yoshitsugu said to his friend, "As for me, I have brought you a splendid present; here is your Yokobué Dono."

"I thank you for your friendship."

Takiguchi shook his sweetheart, crying, "Yokobué! My dear Yokobué!" But answer came there none.

He shook the snow from the girl. He clasped her in his arms. In vain! To their consternation she showed no sign of life. He forced open her clenched teeth and blew a restorative into her mouth, but to no purpose. Pulse and life had completely fled. Takiguchi, grief-stricken, held her on his knees and warmed her body by pressing her to his naked breast.

"Oh, Yokobué, how unlucky our love is!" he exclaimed with sobs. "These five long years have we pined for each other and suffered hardships indescribable for each other's sake. And now you have died without enjoying a single day of complete wifeness. How sad it is that you came all unwittingly to your own beloved's door and were frozen to death in the snow when all the while a cheerful fire was burning within! Oh, Yokobué, if you really love me, let me hear the single word 'My dear' from your lips!"

Yoshitsugu and Karumo, also in tears, assisted in lifting Yokobué's body up to the hearth, where they warmed it with great care and tenderness. No signs of revival appeared. Karumo, between her sobs, opened her amulet case, saying, "Here I have a precious incense named 'The King of Medicines' and it is said to be possessed of miraculous powers. It is a portion of a present from the Chinese Emperor to the Emperor Goshirakawa, who gave it to Her Majesty. Her Majesty graciously bestowed it on Yokobué Dono and myself as a token of the relationship between mistress and servant extending to the next world. It is my trust that the odour of this incense will restore Yokobué to life, I will therefore burn it."

No sooner did she begin to burn the incense than a sweet odour filled the air and, wonder of wonders, Yokobué's body instantly recovered its warmth and pulse and her face its colour. She gave a sigh and opened her eyes. Then she cried, "Is it Takiguchi Sama? I am overjoyed to see you!" She was again a beautiful woman in sound health. The others were filled with amaze and joy.

"When my spirit had all but fled and I seemed to be half in a dream, I smelled the sweet odour of precious incense and heard Her Majesty's voice crying, 'Yokobué! Yokobué!' The next instant my dream dissolved and I came to my senses. Great is Her Majesty's goodness!"

All of them spent a happy night, merrily talking of what each had experienced during those five weary years.

V

When the full extent of Morotaka's roguery and calumny became known, it was evident that he deserved death; but, for the sake of his sister Lady Tonasé and because the quality of mercy is the foundational principle of government, his punishment was reduced to banishment from the Imperial city. He found it difficult to keep body and soul together and so formed a gang with the villains Genkurō and Muzō, relatives of his retainer Iwamura Gengo, slain at Funaokayama. They roamed the neighbourhood of Karasaki, on Lake Biwa, eking out a living by swindling, highway robbery, burglary, blackmail and the like, as chance and opportunity served.

One day Morotaka whispered to his subordinates, "To-day there should be many visitors to the Shrine of the God Sannō in this place. See,

there is a boat adrift yonder! Genkurō will pretend to be her boatman, will give passage to some of the worshippers and rob them when you have rowed out some distance. In the Hall of Worship in the Myōjin Shrine the priest leaves his hat and robe. Muzō will wear them, pretend to be the priest and appropriate the offertory and the money paid for the 'Twelve Lights'. I, for my part, will prowl the highway and pick the pockets of absent-minded travellers. Come, let us set about our jobs."

They parted on their respective enterprises.

Presently Lady Tonasé, in a palanquin, accompanied by a few attendants, arrived under the Giant Pine-Tree at Karasaki. She had come to the town of Otsu, as proxy for the Empress, for a week's worship at the Shrine of Sannō and of Myōjin. She alighted from her carriage, glanced about and said to her attendants, "See whether the priest Sanday_ is now in the shrine."

Muzō, having donned the priest's robe, made his appearance.

"Honoured lady," said he, "I am Sanday_'s father. I may take orders for the Sacred Dance or the Twelve Lights as well as he."

"Are you Sanday_'s father? Sanday_ must be sixty and you look younger."

Muzō was confused. "No, no. I said Sanday_ was my father. My name is Niday_."

"So you are his son? Come nearer."

The rogue perforce advanced.

"I have the honour," continued the lady, "of doing proxy to Her Imperial Majesty. Sanday_ may have told you that the young court ladies, Yokobué and Karumo, were discharged some years ago on account of their love affairs. Her Majesty has taken pity on them and, a report having come to her ears that they are living a miserable life hereabouts with their lovers, Takiguchi and Yoshitsugu, Her Majesty has commanded me to find them and bring them buck to the capital. With this purpose in my mind I have journeyed hither and am now putting up in Otsu in order to pray here to the Gods Sannō and Myōjin for guidance as to their whereabouts. I intended worship of a week and have already spent five days in prayer. I beg you to pray to the God to let me have news of their whereabouts."

So saying, she worshipped the deity with her whole heart and soul.

Morotaka who, unnoticed, had played the eavesdropper, suddenly rushed upon her, seized her by the nape and drew her down on her back.

"What villainy!" the frightened woman cried. "Who does this deed?"

“Let not the villain escape!

So cried her henchmen; and the palanquin bearers instantly hemmed him in.

“Maggots! Touch me if you dare! Hi! Comrades Knock the old woman down and strip her of her garments.”

Genkurō jumped from the boat and cut at the servants. Muzō, who had also rushed to the scene, drew and flourished his weapon. The terrified, cowardly servants precipitantly took to their heels, crying, “Robbery in broad daylight! Highwaymen! Help! Help!”

“So it is you, wild beast and brother!” exclaimed Lady Tonasé. “You who gave so much trouble to Her Majesty, you who wronged so many, you who, for these crimes, were about to be put to death! To whom do you think you owe it that your head still remains upon your shoulders? Partly it is due to me, but also largely to the benevolence of Her Majesty. You ought immediately to have become a priest, that you might atone for your crime. A cursèd wretch, reduced to such a condition, do you not even yet repent of your crime? What shame this is!”

“Pah! If I had repented I should not have come to this pass. Since we are relations I spare your life. I know your purse is full; you have, I am sure, three or four *ryō* about you. Come, hand it to me at once. If you don’t I will kill you.”

He forced her head to the ground as he spoke.

“A base villain!” said the lady. “You say you mean to kill me if I don’t give you my money! Naturally I would not grudge even thousands of *ryō* as the price of the redemption of my life. What should a chief court lady have money about her for? Kill me if you choose.”

“Aha! I see you have no money on you. Your money must be in your inn at Otsu. You are not to stir till I fetch it.”

He produced a cord, bound her cruelly and thrust her into the palanquin.

“Come along with me and be quick about it, comrades. Since she says she’s to stop here for a week she must have brought plenty of gold and silver coins with her. Think of the special booty there will be—her chests, her fine clothes, her bed-trappings!”

They ran off highly pleased.

They had scarcely taken themselves off when Yoshitsugu with his wife and son appeared. They had spent many days at the temple praying the God Myōjin to restore Yoshitsugu to his former situation as a retainer to

Shigémori. They now proceeded to the shrine and, bowing their heads and clapping their hands, prayed with great fervour. While they were absorbed in their devotions a voice was heard insistently crying, "Karumo Dono! Yoshitsugu Sama!" The surprised couple glanced backward.

"The cry comes from that palanquin, I believe."

"Yes, you're right. It is from the palanquin. Dear Karumo Dono, please come to me!"

Karumo rushed to the palanquin and slid open the door.

"Is it Lady Tonasé? Why, how's this! How did you get into such a state?"

She lifted the old woman out and loosened the cord. Tonasé thanked her and, restraining her tears, said, "Where are Takiguchi and Yokobué? I have come here as Her Majesty's proxy to pray for guidance as to your whereabouts. In point of fact Her Majesty orders me to find you and bring you and your friends back to the capital. A few minutes ago, as I was worshipping the God, that villainous brother of mine, who had been banished and who appears to have turned robber, seized and bound me in the fashion you found me in just now. He will shortly return. Before he returns, let us set out together to the capital."

"Have no fear," laughed Yoshitsugu, "nothing will happen to you now that I am with you. Takiguchi and Yokobué will presently be here to worship. Abide here a while. Karumo, you will hide in this palanquin and when Morotaka returns you will say to him, 'I am forsaken by that heartless monster Yoshitsugu.' Appeal to his sympathy and coax him into going aboard that boat. I will pretend to be the boatman. I have a plan for his chastisement."

"Certainly," returned Karumo, entering the palanquin. "I will do my best, dear husband. But be careful of yourself."

"Have no fears for me."

Yoshitsugu took his child in his arms and embarked with Tonasé. He hid them both in the bottom of the boat and, assuming a straw rain-coat and a sedge hat, sat down and feigned a doze. Morotaka presently returned, exuding perspiration.

"Sister," cried he, striking the palanquin, "they would deliver us nothing at your inn without a note from you. We cannot break into your rooms in broad daylight. You will please write a note demanding the delivery of your money and clothes. Be quick about it!"

No response.

“What next!” he cried, and, tearing the blind from the carriage, was amazed to find Karumo within.

“Oh!” said she, assuming a bashful air. “I am ashamed to meet you in this plight, Morotaka Sama. I regret to have to tell you that I have been unkindly forsaken, as a just punishment for my flat refusal of your kind proposal, by that brute Yoshitsugu. Enraged by my jealousy, he swears that he will drown me in this lake. I have managed with great difficulty to escape and have hidden in this unoccupied palanquin. I trust that, though it be but half of what formerly obtained, your affection for me still exists?”

“Has my sister fled then? But I wouldn’t exchange you for a thousand sisters. How unkind of you to say ‘half my former affection’! Truly my love has grown an hundredfold since then. Make your mind easy; under my protection you are now in no danger. You’re even handsomer than when I last saw you. I am madly in love with you! I would die for you, my dearest girl!”

So saying, he embraced her.

“Don’t! People might see us. What do you say to hiring yonder boat and spending cosy and pleasant hours in the offing, away from the eyes of common folk?”

“Aha! You’ve improved in wits as well as looks. Hello, my man! I thought it was merely a boat adrift, but it’s yours, boatman, is it? Row us over to Ishiyama, will you?”

“With pleasure, sir. I saw in a glance you were lovers. I shan’t be wanting any fare. Come, get aboard.”

“Thank you. This really is, as the saying goes, a boat that arrives just when one wants to cross over.”

The old rascal was making as if to embark with Karumo, when Yoshitsugu exclaimed, “It’s dangerous for two to try and get on board simultaneously; one at a time, please; the girl first.”

He took Karumo in his arms and placed her in the boat, then, seizing the oar, to Morotaka’s vast surprise and anger, rowed out into the lake. A moment later the boat was a hundred yards from the shore.

“Slave-trader! Robber!” roared the villain. Frantic with despair he waded into the shallows. Yoshitsugu, doffing his coat of straw and his sedge hat, disclosed himself to the astonished Morotaka.

“Has divine punishment sealed your eyes, you villain he cried. “Know then that I am Yoshitsugu! It is I have sheltered Lady Tonasé. My advice to

you is that you kill yourself instead of continuing to lead a dishonourable life."

Lady Tonasé and Yoshitsugu's son appeared.

"Ah! That I should have been duped! Were this water a hundred or a thousand fathoms deep, yet would I wade out to your boat and capsize it!"

With these words Morotaka tucked up his skirt and rolled up his sleeves for action; but at this moment Takiguchi and Yokobué came on the scene. Takiguchi rushed at him, knocked him down on to the beach and kneeled upon him, while Yokobué beat his head and pinched his legs. The villain writhed. "A shame it is," he cried, "to have been brought down by a greenhorn of a boy!

"Don't kill him!" Yoshitsugu shouted. "It would be wrong for us to kill one whose life Their Imperial Majesties have graciously seen fit to spare. Let us lie in wait for his comrades and kill them."

He rowed to the beach, jumped ashore, trussed the old knave up hand and foot, thrust a handful of straw into his mouth, wound a kerchief round his face and threw him into the palanquin. The party then hid behind the shrine.

Presently Muzō and Genkurō, both out of breath, returned at a run.

"Can't find our boss anywhere! And a pretty poor time we've been having! We owe it all to this old hag too; let us finish her."

They approached the palanquin on both sides and thrust their swords again and again through the blinds.

"She mayn't have any money, but I daresay we can find something or other hidden in her bosom."

They dragged the corpse out. Great was their consternation to find themselves gazing upon the bloody body of their chief.

"Muzō, beware!" exclaimed Genkurō, alarmed. "Takiguchi or Yoshitsugu must be about."

"A good guess, villains!" cried the two heroes, rushing from hiding. "You see Yoshitsugu *and* Takiguchi before you!"

Mighty strokes fell upon the frightened rascals. The villains were held down, stabbed to death.

At this moment Saitō Katsuyori and Etch_Moritsugu appeared.

"Listen, Takiguchi and Yoshitsugu!" they cried. "We bring you a written order from Lord Shigémori, restoring you to your former situations and fiefs."

The joy and gratitude of both couples knew no bounds and the whole company wept for delight over their happy reunion after five years of weary separation.