

Chikamatsu

The Tethered Steed

(Kwan-Hashshū Tsunagi-Uma)

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I

In February of the second year of the Eien era (A.D. 988), during the reign of the Emperor Ichijō the sixty-sixth monarch, Minamoto-no-Yorimitsu the Shogun, attended by his brave retainers Watanabé-no-Tsuna, and Sakata-no-Kintoki, proceeded to the palace in response to an Imperial summons occasioned by the daily apparition of a goblin horse within the Imperial precincts. Particulars of the creature were supplied by Fujiwara-no-Kanéié, the Regent. The Shogun and his retainers, after fitting preparations for its destruction, awaited the phenomenon.

Noon was come when, on a sudden, precisely at the Hour of the Horse, the sky became overcast, a storm accompanied by thunder and lightning arose, and there appeared in the gardens a black charger of powerful build, having a flowing mane rugged as the ridges of a mountain range, towering ears great as conches, and eyes bright as polished mirrors of copper. Right loudly he snorted; terribly he neighed; hither and thither he raged. Black clouds of dust sprang from beneath his hoofs as he trampled the lawns and dashed between the trees. Into the air he leapt and made as if to wing his way into the palace. Tsuna and Kintoki, hurling themselves upon him from right and left, exerted their superhuman might to stay him. But, in a moment shaking them off, the beast raged to and fro the more furiously. Perceiving the apparition to be beyond the power even of his retainers, Yorimitsu, when he had thrice in a loud voice declared, "I am Minamoto-no-Yorimitsu the Shogun, the Lord of Settsu and a descendant of the august Emperor Seiwa!" — set an arrow to his great bow, bent the bow to its utmost extent, and shot. Pierced through the muzzle, the phantom gave one loud groan and crashed to earth. Next instant the

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beast had vanished and, to the admiration and boundless joy of the Regent and his courtiers, the storm ceased.

When the Regent Kanéié had made an end of praising the exploit of Yorimitsu and his retainers, he summoned to his presence a famous doctor of divination, for he wished to ascertain the whereabouts of the goblin. The doctor consulted an occult volume and presently it became known that the hiding-place of the monster lay south-east of the palace. Yorimitsu, his retainers and the courtiers, assisted by lower officials, made their way to an ancient treasure-house standing upon the spot indicated and subjected it to a prolonged search. Extreme was their surprise to discover therein an ancient coffer in which the Shogun's arrow had buried itself up to half its length. Upon the lid of the coffer no inscription was to be found save the brief words "March of the third year of Tengyō era". Terror seized the entire party, but after some reflection Yorimitsu slapped his thigh and exclaimed, "I have it! That was the date on which the rebel Taira-no-Masakado was overthrown during the reign of the Emperor Shujaku. This was his crime—by pretending to be a Prince Imperial he succeeded in raising an army in the Eastern Provinces, to the end that he might usurp the throne, only at last to suffer death at the hands of the Royal army. One night, so the story goes, a sinister star fell into his stable and transformed itself into a swift steed. The rebel deemed it an omen tokening success to the enterprises of his villainous ambition. He set up the horse as a god of war, worshipped it, and adopted as the crest upon the curtains of his pavilion a tethered steed. This coffer, I feel sure, contains the curtain of his pavilion which Fujiwara-no-Hidésato, commander-in-chief of the Royal troops, brought back as trophy when he returned victorious. I have received a report that Yoshikado, the youngest son of the deceased traitor, now grown to manhood, has gathered a band of malcontents about him and is busy amassing treasure by pillaging villages, a sure sign of a proposed rebellion. We may suppose that the evil spirit of the vindictive Masakado has been transmitted to his son and has breathed a soul into the steed upon his pavilion curtain, with the result that we have seen the cursed goblin." On this the mysterious coffer, tightly locked though it was, was opened in the presence of the Emperor and the Regent. Its contents

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proved to be exactly such as Yorimitsu had indicated. The Emperor, struck with profound admiration at the doughty deed and at the sagacity of the Shogun, graciously bestowed upon him a beautiful wine-cup, together with a mandate entrusting to him the management¹ of all affairs of state, and directed him soon to appoint an heir to the office and possessions. The Emperor also commanded Lord Ebumi, the Prime Minister, to take custody of the pavilion curtain.

Yorimitsu, who had no son of his own, saw nothing for it but to make one of his younger brothers, Yorinobu and Yorihira, his heir. But so nearly equal in character and ability were they, that Yorimitsu found it impossible to choose between them, and therefore determined to solve the problem by an appeal to the divine will of the God Hachiman, patron deity of the Minamoto family. The ceremony was held in the grand hall of his palace upon the evening of a lucky day especially selected for the purpose. The shrine was set upon a dais and before it were laid a variety of offerings. On a desk in the centre of the hall stood a large quiver filled with arrows having white feathers and arrows having black feathers—thirty-three arrows of each kind—which symbolized the office of the Shogun who was guardian of the sixty-six provinces that constituted the Empire of Japan. A great brightness filled the room by reason of those waves of holy light with which the many candles glistened. Lady Yorimitsu, attended by her maid-of-honour Kochō,² a girl of supreme beauty, summoned to her presence the Shogun's trusted retainer Hirai-no-Yasumasa and thus addressed him: "You and other chief retainers of His Highness the Shogun are presently to gather before the altar; the candles will then be put out and each of you will be required to pick in the darkness an arrow from the quiver, the doing of which shall prove an oracle. If the white feathered arrows thus drawn outnumber the black, Yorinobu shall be heir; if not, Yorihira shall

¹In those days the Shogun was the *de facto* ruler, while the Prime Minister was but a figurehead.

²"Little Butterfly."

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succeed. You or one of the 'Greatest Four'³ should by rights be director of the ceremony. But, forasmuch as men are subject to the suspicion of being under the influence of party spirit, my maid Kochō here is to preside over the rite.... Be so good as to tell my brothers-in-law to come here separately and offer their prayers to the deity." She then retired into the inner apartments.

No sooner had Yasumasa departed towards the rooms of the Shogun's brothers than Kochō's heart began to beat like the clapper of an alarm bell and a fire crept in her veins, for it seemed to her that now or never was the night on which to disclose to Yorinobu her ardent and long-established passion. Ere long the handsome warrior appeared, attired in the utmost splendour, and the sight of him sitting in a dignified manner before the altar troubled her eyes. As she listened in a trance to the murmur of his prayer, there emanated from his clothes a delicious odour of incense and this odour seemed to waft her into the air. No sooner had the maid, attracted as by a charm, drawn near to him, than she leaned against him and, utterly losing her head, all but embraced him on the spur of the moment. Despite all his native self-possession, Yorinobu was nevertheless surprised.

"Excuse my rudeness, my lord. I slipped against you by accident."

She drew back and gazed shyly downward a moment, then, controlling her beating heart as best she might, she continued in a whisper, "Many a time have I intended to reveal my secret to your lordship, but whenever I met you face to face my heart failed me and I dared not confess it. Your lordship may well understand how I feel."

"I understand, girl," returned Yorinobu, nodding his head and showing no signs of surprise, "I have heard that you are intimate with the family of the Prime Minister, Lord Ebumi, and you often call at their residence. I believe what you call your secret to be a message from Lady Eika,⁴ eldest daughter of the Premier. As regards this matter we have by

³Kintoki, Tsuna, Suétaké and Sadamitsu, the bravest of the Shogun's retainers, were called his *Shitennō*, or "Big Four."

⁴"Singing."

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frequent correspondence come to a mutual understanding, yet I am sorry my station in life hardly permits me to comply with her eager request that I meet her by stealth. Since I have already acquainted the Shogun and his wife, it cannot be long, should the question of heirship be decided in my favour, before I can openly take her to wife; therefore carry my salutations to Lady Eika and tell her to abide the time in patience. And now, if we talk any longer, I fear we may be overheard. Let us again speak together at some other time." With that Yorinobu hurriedly made his way into the inner rooms. Stupefied with disappointment, the maid found herself bereft of speech and looked as one who dreams that she dreams.

"Alas!" she said, when she had recovered. "All these long years have I yearned for him with such passion that oftentimes I could hardly sleep. With my eyes set upon the prospect of happiness my duties have proved no burden at all to me. Indeed this has enabled me to work harder than my comrades and I have fervently prayed to the gods and to Buddha morning and evening that I might attain my desire. And this—this is the result! Hateful Lady Eika, to be so frank and confidential with me and yet to have kept such a secret as this from me! A vixen! 'All's fair in love and war.' I will not hesitate to use every means to thwart her purposes, though I die in the process. Never will I rest content till I have avenged myself upon her."

She was still a prey to the flames of jealousy when Yorihiro entered the room. She instantly approached him and whispered, "Kindly excuse an inopportune request, my lord, but permit me to deliver an urgent message from... the truth is that Lady Eika, daughter of Lord Ebumi, has long nursed a secret passion for you, a longing so extreme as to cause her to pine away. Each time I see her the lovesick girl begs me to contrive some means whereby she may, while yet there is life in her, meet you in secret. Hapless creature that she is! If you feel any pity for her I will do my best to arrange—"

"One moment," Yorihiro interrupted. "To be frank I fell in love with her at first sight, on the occasion of a New Year Party at Court, but coming to hear of her exchanges with my brother I was greatly disappointed and now believe my love's cause to be hopeless."

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“No, no, my lord,” returned Kochō encouragingly, “that they exchanged notes is true, but they found themselves mistaken in their attachment. Her love toward you, however, is sincere and springs from the very depths of her heart. Why should I deceive you? By the gods, I am speaking the exact truth. Abandon your doubts and believe me.”

“I trust that what you say is true and that I shall not prove a traitor to my brother, and I beg of you to serve as a ferry-boat between our loves.”

The maid secretly sighed her relief and the satisfaction she felt in observing that the young warrior had fallen an easy prey to her wiles.

At that moment the water-clock struck the appointed hour and the Shogun’s consort and Yorinobu, followed by Yasumasa and twenty-seven other chief retainers of the Shogun, all clad in ceremonial costume, appeared.

The company seated themselves. At her lady’s command Kochō declared the ceremony commenced and, lifting a fan of silken gauze, immediately extinguished the candles. In silence and in darkness warrior after warrior proceeded to the quiver and drew each an arrow. When the rustling of clothes and of footsteps had continued a few minutes, Mita-no-Jirō Tomozuna, cousin of Watanabé-no-Tsuna, stepped forward to take his arrow. Hard by the quiver the sweet odour of incense emanating from Kochō’s garments proved irresistible to one already under the influence of the *saké* that had been served in honour of the occasion. Overwhelmed by the spell of a potent and intangible voluptuousness that in the darkness made his senses swim, Tomozuna, hardly cognizant of what he did, drew her tightly to him. Kochō was startled, but, being quick-witted, instantly determined to seize this opportunity of demonstrating her single-hearted devotion to Yorinobu. She seized in her hands the string of Tomozuna’s headgear and, drawing her dirk, cut it off then she pushed him away.

“Ah!” she cried vehemently. “Here is a wretch who catches at me before the very altar, under cover of the darkness. Lights! Lights! The profaner must be known, for I have cut off the string of his headgear in token of his guilt.”

All present were amazed. In a moment Tomozuna had become sober. He turned pale. “Abominable hussy,” he thought, “heartless wench! Shall I

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slay her? Or shall I make reparation by self-slaughter?" – he grasped the hilt of his sword – "but I would not die alone."

At this juncture the voice of Yorihiro was heard crying, "Do not bring the lights yet; I have an idea. Warriors, cut the strings of your headgears, and when you have so done, forthwith give a signal cry. Then let the lights be brought."

The samurai lost not a moment in obeying the command. When the hall was once more brilliantly illumined, the headgear strings of all the warriors had disappeared. Thus was Tomozuna saved from an infamous death by the ready wits of the cunning Yorihiro. The large-hearted lady spoke not a word concerning the affair, but ordered the arrows picked by the warriors to be brought her. When her examination had been concluded she exclaimed, "A miracle! As you can see for yourselves, not a single white feathered arrow can be found among these twenty-eight. See how just and impartial the divine will has been in choosing the elder brother, Lord Yorinobu. The result of this night's ceremony will be duly reported to the throne and then upon some day of luck Lord Yorinobu will be appointed to the heirship. Rejoice, all of you! Remain in this hall and make merry over the *saké*⁵ offered to the deity."

With these words the lady and her brothers-in-law withdrew amidst tumultuous cheering in honour of the long life and prosperity of the Minamoto family.

Late one night when the sinking moon shed a sickly light Sakata-no-Kintoki, one of the Greatest Four of the Shogun, was patrolling the streets. He wore the disguise of a pedlar, for the capital was riddled with Yoshikado's followers, who nightly committed robbery and murder. As he paced close under the earthen wall of the mansion of the Prime Minister, Lord Ebuni, he suddenly felt his face touched by a strange something. He discovered it to be a daffodil dependent from a fine cord hung over the wall.

⁵*Saké* offered to a deity on such occasions is generally afterwards shared by the family as a form of congratulation.

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“What can this be?” exclaimed the warrior in wonder. “A charm against plague or robbery, I suppose. But folks generally use garlic. This tasteful substitute is worthy of Lord Ebumi the poet.”

With these words, scarcely thinking what he was doing, he gently jerked the cord. Whereupon a woman’s voice was heard within making a faint response. His curiosity was aroused. He repeated the pull and found himself offered a tangible answer, for presently a pretty maid emerged from the wicket. She peered at Kintoki as he stood there in the shadow of the wall.

“Welcome, my lord,” she whispered. “For love’s sake, I see, you have this disguise. I pray you come in, my lord. My lady impatiently awaits you.”

So saying, the maid approached him. Her consternation was considerable when she perceived his grim red face and saucer-like eyes. She gave one short cry of dismay, then rushed within and fastened the gate.

Scarcely had she done so when Kintoki’s fellow night-watchman, Watanabé-no-Tsuna, arrived at the spot. Many soldiers, armed with iron rods as well as swords, and bearing bright lanterns upon poles, attended him in processional formation. Kintoki, unaccompanied as he was by henchmen, rallied his comrade upon the ostentation of his march. Tsuna made an unanswerable rejoinder. Kintoki was silenced and they went their respective ways.

They had been but a little while gone and the streets had fallen completely silent again when two figures stole to the wall of the Premier’s mansion. They were Kochō and Yorihiro. Yorihiro was disguised as a woman wearing a *kazuki*.⁶ “Kochō,” whispered Yorihiro, “I owe you my thanks for bringing about this meeting.”

“Why thank me, my lord? To attain my purpose I must use every means at my command to bring their relations to an end. That is the reason

⁶The *kazuki* or *katsugi* was a large and 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.

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that I have arranged this for you. It is I, not your lordship, should say 'Thank you.' I will use only the first half of your name, saying simply 'Yori Sama.' Lady Eika and her maids will then believe that you are Lord Yorinobu. You will have to haste lest you be discovered. When you have both awakened she will have become assuredly yours, however much she may complain of your stratagem. See this flower!—it is her ladyship's signal."

With these words Kochō pulled the cord, when the maid opened the door as before. Guided by her the two went within.

The moon had set. It was pitch-dark. A group of figures clad in black approached the wall. They were Yoshikado's generals, Yasusuké and his son Tokiakira, and their respective followers. Both Yasusuké, a younger brother of Hirai-no-Yasumasa, and his son, had been retainers of the Shogun, but the vileness of their characters had prompted their liege lord to exile them. Their present purpose was to surprise the mansion of Lord Ebumi that they might steal the pavilion curtain decorated with the crest of a tethered steed, which had been confided to the Premier's keeping.

Yasusuké conferred in whispers with his son, then, knocking upon the gate the while, he shouted, "Ho! Within there! An urgent message from His Highness the Shogun!"

But the warders of the gate, rubbing their sleepy eyes, only answered, "Our master's away to-night, being on duty at court," and would not open.

"Your master's absence is of no account to us," returned Yasusuké sternly. "Forasmuch as her ladyship Eika has become betrothed to Lord Yorinobu, who has just been appointed heir to the Shogunate, I am come as the bearer of a present from his lordship. The saying goes:

'Who to the doing of a deed,
Good in itself, adds also speed,
Does verily a good indeed.'

I, Watanabé-no-Tsuna, despite the darkness of midnight, have hastened on this errand. Open the gate and be quick about it!"

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At so peremptory a demand the thoughtless porters immediately flung wide the great gate.

Yorihira started up in bed. He had heard the shouted announcement of an urgent messenger bringing a betrothal present. He confessed all to Lady Eika and poured out prayers that she would forgive the infatuation of his deed. The girl was speechless with amazement, but, after some reflection, returned in tones of unshakable resolve, "It's no use crying over spilt milk, my lord. Once having given herself to a man, even though giving herself under misapprehension or suffering herself to be beguiled, a woman should stick to him all her life. I no longer have any desire to wed your brother. If we escape together before the presents of betrothal have been exchanged no infamy of betrayal will attach to us. I am quite willing to abandon my parents for the sake of the love we have shared this night. Don't forsake me, dear Yorihira Sama."

She clung to him with tenderness. Kochō was at their side before they were aware.

"A brave resolve!" said she. "As for me, I will plead with your parents. Harbour no regrets, but flee at once. I will accompany you till day dawns."

Eika lost no time in making herself ready. The three stole out by the postern gate.

On a sudden all was uproar and confusion within. Shrieks arose and a noise of splintering shutters and the crash of paper doors broken through. Blood-bedaubed samurai and servants rushed out. Lady Hagi, wife of Lord Ebumi, emerged from the great gate bearing the pavilion curtain beneath her arm and crossed swords with Yasusuké. Bravely enough she fought him for a while, but his son rushed forward and knocked her sword from her hand. A moment later he had pinned her to the ground. Yasusuké snatched the curtain, bade his son dispatch her, and rushed within. Tokiakira was about to behead the poor lady, when Tsuna and Kintoki, driving like squalls across a bay, precipitated themselves upon the wretch and bore him to the ground. While Tsuna helped the lady to her feet and tended her, Kintoki prised up the chin of Tokiakira pinned beneath his foot. "That drone, Yasumasa's nephew, eh?" he cried. "Your

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fits of thieving, which not even your uncle's excellent remedy could relieve you of, I will cure by massage. It will mean a little pain for you of course. Summon up your courage."

With these words the hero, with one hand, wrenched off his head. Then he pitched the body inside the gate. Scared out of their wits at this wonderful display of strength, the other wretches, with the exception of Yasusuké who leapt upon the roof⁷ of the great gate, lost not a moment in taking to their heels.

"Infamous fellow!" cried Yasusuké, upright upon the roof. "I call upon you to keep in mind that it is a crime to resist one who will be Regent to Yoshikado, the aspirant to the throne. Observe the courtesy proper toward a man of high station. You rascal!"

"If that is what is troubling you, Your Highness the Regent," Kintoki returned with a laugh, "and you desire high rank, we will translate you to higher spheres and no mistake about it!"

The eyes of the heroes exchanged a sign. Kintoki and Tsuna laid their hands upon the pillars of the gate, braced themselves, and lifted the gate. Right and left the earthen wall rumbled to the ground. Yasusuké, upon the roof, was raised aloft till the gate-posts were all but on the shoulders of the pair. Shaking with fear, the braggart coward clung to the crest tile.

"Good sirs, good sirs," said he, while his tears pattered on the tiles, "it's far too high here and I am feeling dizzy. Please, please! I will give the curtain back. Save my life, good sirs! Oh, please save my life!"

"A baseless Regent indeed!" cried Tsuna and Kintoki. A fine thatch to keep the rain out!"

A while they carried the gate about; then, having tormented the would-be Regent to their satisfaction, they tore off the pillars to right and left. Tiles, timber and earth descended in a mass; dust like black smoke started up; and Yasusuké, flung head over heels on to the pavement, was cruelly crushed out of shape.

⁷Some gates have tiled or thatched roofs over the doors.

II

The magnificent mansion of the Shogun commanded a fine view of Mount Hiéi, "the Fuji of the Imperial Capital." Its gardens boasted a miniature hill adorned with fantastic rocks, trees of lovely shape, and a large pond fed through a bamboo pipe with the clear water of the Kamo river.

Late one afternoon several young maids were busying themselves sweeping and dusting the rooms of this mansion. For, following the elopement of Lady Eika, the Ex-Emperor had graciously arranged to bestow upon Yorinobu the hand of a court lady named Iyo-no-Naishi, a lady no less beautiful than Eika. Their wedding ceremony was to take place this very night.

"What can Kochō be about?" grumbled one of the maids. "It is very lazy of her not to have shown her face yet. Kochō San! Kochō San!" she cried fretfully.

Kochō appeared. Her eyes were flushed with much weeping, her cheeks pale, and the powder upon them streaked by tears. The maid who had called Kochō cast a suspicious glance at her and remarked sarcastically, "What makes you look so glum on this happy occasion? We, as you can see, have finished our tasks, while your part of sweeping the gardens remains undone. You had better be quick about it, and when you've done it you can play hide and seek or anything else you like at your leisure."

Kochō was thrown into such deep disappointment and agony at finding herself confronted with a new and powerful antagonist when she

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had successfully rid herself of Lady Eika, that she was but little affected by her comrade's cynical observations. She remained in a reverie.

"Now, Kochō San," cried another, "look, there's a big blue spider on that *yatsudé*.⁸ An awful beast! Its poison will kill a man. To think of such a creature being in front of the bride's apartment! It's your duty to take it away or it may find its way into her dishes."

These words seemed to bring the love-sick girl to her senses – at any rate some happy idea seemed to cross her mind.

The voice of the chief maid was heard. "A messenger has just announced the arrival of the bridal party. Make haste to the first hall!"

The maids hastened within.

Stealthily Kochō stepped down into the garden and, catching the spider on a bamboo broom, without showing a sign of fear, wrapped it in a silk handkerchief. A horrible imprecation issued from her flower-like lips.

"Blue spider, blue spider! They say that though you are only a mere insect, you possess miraculous powers, inasmuch as you can foretell the good or evil that is to be and can do many other things. They say that when your poison touches the lip, even of a hero possessed of superhuman strength, that man instantly dies a painful death. Receive my soul into your inch-long body and with your poison slay Iyo-no-Naishi between sunset and to-morrow's dawn! Spin from your body a myriad threads that will so tightly bind together my lover Yorinobu Sama and myself that these bonds will not be loosed for all eternity. With all my being I make this prayer to you, the so little and the so mighty." Her invocation ended, she turned about and beheld all the rooms and corridors brilliantly illumined by candles and heard the sounds of merry-making. She had but taken two or three steps as though to return when a sudden signal-like whistle was heard without. Instantly she was all attention, glanced about her, and then, stealing to the water-pipe, applied her mouth to its spout from which the water had now ceased to flow.

"Brother," she spoke into the pipe, "you called me, did you not? I am your sister – Kochō."

⁸The *Fatsia Japonica*.

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She applied her ear to the spout as though expecting a response.

The man she thus addressed was none other than Yoshikado, ringleader of the would-be rebels. He was now standing some way off in the dry river-bed whence the pipe took its course. Kochō was his sister and had entered the service of the Shogun's consort in order that she might play the spy. She was to convey to Yoshikado news of any opportunity for the assassination of Yorimitsu and his brother Yorinobu.

Yoshikado, replied through the pipe. "Is it you, sister? Yes, it is your brother speaking. What fools this Yorimitsu and his followers are; they appear to have no idea that I am in their neighbourhood. Those idiots, the Greatest Four, are far away now searching for me, and the samurai left behind as defenders are all poltroons. They will, I am sure, get dead drunk to-night on the *saké* served at the wedding and so be off their guard. There could not possibly be a better opportunity for assassinating Yorimitsu and his brother, imprisoning the Emperor and usurping the throne, and thus realizing the most cherished aspirations of our dead father. Watch for a chance to aid us and guide me in at the proper moment."

These words struck Kochō to the heart. Long ere this such cruel aspirations had perished as far as she was concerned, since Yorinobu, on the slaying of whom her brother was set, had become the object of her affections. How could she reconcile herself to contriving his death? She became lost in thought.

Under cover of the darkness the Shogun's consort, to whom Kochō's absence from the feast had appeared strange, stole up. Perfectly unaware of her presence, Kochō made answer, "Brother, all is not yet quiet here. I am very much afraid that it will be impossible to find a chance to-night and were we to fail in our attempt it would only prove our sure destruction. In my opinion it is perfectly possible to await some other and more favourable occasion. We had best bide our time in patience. When a good chance comes our way I will not fail to let you know. You had better turn back to-night, brother."

"I can't, I tell you, coward sister," cried Yoshikado angrily. "Let to-night go, and how can we be sure that another opportunity will occur? Take your courage in both hands, sister, and guide me in."

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No sooner had the lady heard these words than she drew her dagger, rushed upon the girl and dealt her a powerful stroke with it upon the shoulder. Kochō gave a shrill cry of pain and leaned backward. The lady made another stroke, seized her by the hair and pinned her to the ground. Hirai-no-Yasumasa, who had heard the cry, rushed out, lantern in hand, and was astonished at what confronted him. At the other end of the pipe Yoshikado, applying his ear to the orifice, impatiently awaited the answer. The lady, no whit discomposed, heaped her reproaches on the girl.

"Hateful woman! Not only have you aimed, or so it would appear, at the death of Iyo-no-Naishi, but it has been your intention to guide a bandit. Vile doings! Confess all! You can no longer escape death."

"Guide to a bandit!" Kochō gasped. "The insult is too great. I had resolved never to confess my secret, however mortal the torments to which I might be subjected; but the ill name of a bandit's accomplice would disgrace the fair reputation of my noble ancestors. That is a prospect I cannot face; I will therefore disclose my secret. I am the daughter of Taira-no-Masakado, a descendant of the Emperor Kwammu, and sister to Yoshikado. I entered your service under a false name, that I might spy out the movements of the Shogun and his brother, and thus assist the realization of my brother's ambitions. But while I watched for an opportunity for their destruction I was unfortunate enough to become the prey of passion. Slave as I am of my love for Lord Yorinobu, I have now quite forsaken my original attitude and these several months I have solely devoted myself to winning him. It was I who beguiled Lord Yorihiro into eloping with my rival, Lady Eika. No sooner had I succeeded in ridding myself of her than I was confronted with another powerful rival, whose appearance here to-night is the cause of my despair. I was determined to poison Iyo-no-Naishi. She, however, has gained her life while I have lost mine. Assuredly this is heaven's punishment for my having disobeyed my dead father and my brother. Now that I can no longer win him I will do my utmost as an evil spirit and as a reborn mortal to prevent Lord Yorinobu and Naishi from dwelling together in happiness. I will not rest content till they are parted." Her eyes had a glare; her hair bristled. She sprang frenziedly to her feet and made as if to rush within; but Yasumasa lost not

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a moment in springing upon her. Her head fell to the ground. Meanwhile the lady applied her mouth to the pipe.

“Brother,” she said in a feigned voice, “I am sorry it has taken me so long to find out how the land lies. The whole batch of them, the Shogun and his retainers alike, are now fallen dead asleep with drinking. You might set a light to them and they wouldn’t wake up. This is our opportunity. Steal in through the south wicket which I will leave open; but be quick, quick!”

Yoshikado leapt for joy at so urgent a summons. “I thank you for your trouble, sister. I go at once.”

The lady ordered Yasumasa to open the wicket and both went within.

Ere long Yoshikado glided in and, groping his way through the darkness of the garden, approached the brilliantly-illuminated inner chambers. Yasumasa, veiled in a *kazuki* that he might have the appearance of Kochō, drew to the villain’s side and suddenly grappled him.

“Bolder than your appearance!” Yoshikado exclaimed. “None the less, the Greatest Four are far away. Yasumasa? Resist me and you die, fool!”

He shook himself free. Yasumasa closed again. A well-matched pair, they wrestled upon the ground; and now one had the advantage and now the other. So struggling, Yasumasa seized a chance to leap backwards and, drawing his sword, cut at his antagonist, who received a slight wound in the side. His adversary flinched. Yasumasa knelt upon him and, obtaining a lock upon his arm, made as if to rise and march him off. At this moment, wonder of wonders – Kochō’s head leapt into the air and fitted itself upon her trunk. The frightful apparition stood upright. It seized Yasumasa by the nape and separated him from his prisoner, who instantly disappeared into the darkness.

“A great chance missed!” Yasumasa cried, freeing himself. “Cursed be the wretch who interfered with me!”

He glared behind him, and lo, Kochō’s head and trunk separated each from each! The body fell to the ground and there was no more apparition.

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Yorihira and Eika, whom Kochō had so cleverly manoeuvred, made their way the morning after leaving her father's house, in a northward direction toward Mount Kurama that they might seek sanctuary in the Buddhist temple upon the mountain, for Yorihira was acquainted with its superior. Not even the chill of the falling snow and the wind's icy blast sufficed to cool the ardour of their passion, which increased as they trudged on through fields and scattered villages. On the plain of Ichiharano, whither at length their weary limbs had borne them, they encountered six or seven giants, whose appearance they could but distrust. Supporting wicker baskets upon their backs, these giants were driving forward an ox heavily laden with a money-chest, a mirror-stand, swords, spears and halberds and, as they passed by, indulged in jeers at the expense of the weary lovers—"A pretty bit of goods! Our hearts are quite captured."

One of them reached out his hand and took Eika by the waistband. With an exclamation of horror she thrust his hand away and drew closer to Yorihira. "A dull-witted wench!" cried the ruffian. "Let her know that we are not the sort of folk who fall a prey to the charms of woman, however lovely she may be. It is your beautiful clothes that fascinate us. Now you know what we are after! We intend, before we let you proceed, to strip you naked. Young man, you are a handsome fellow enough in all conscience, but your handsome sword has more attraction for us than your person. You will both be so good at this instant to remove your clothes and to hand over your sword. Refuse, and we shall be compelled to give you a taste of the steel, and that would be a pity, for soiled clothes do not command so good a price. Life is precious. Doubtless you will be readier to part with your clothes than your lives." He turned to his companions. That is true, comrades, isn't it?"

Yorihira shielded the trembling Eika, then he said, "If you are in such need of my sword, I will give it you. Take this—"

He had hardly spoken when in a flash he drew and cleft the head of the terrible bearded giant. The other ruffians drew and slashed at him. The young warrior, of great strength and a notable swordsman, cut and hewed

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right and left. The ruffians, altogether outmatched, were about to take to their heels, when a giant, seemingly their chief, emerged from a neighbouring bush and seized Eika by the arm, crying, "Young man, fight as you do, and this is what will happen!" He levelled the point of his sword against Eika's breast. Yorihiro halted. "One moment! Be not rash!" he cried, "That lady is my wife whom I have won at the sacrifice of my rank and fief. I offer no further resistance."

He threw down his sword and stood motionless. A cold sweat had gathered upon his body; agony clouded his forehead.

"So?" returned the leader, nodding sagely. "At first sight I knew you for a man beyond the ordinary. I, myself, in point of fact, am not a mere bandit. You see before you no other than a rebel famous throughout Japan, Shōguntarō Yoshikado, son of Hei Shinnō Masakado. These many years have I been troubling my brain to discover such a hero as yourself and win him over to my cause. I cannot but admire your courage and skill in swordsmanship. I entreat you to join me. Refuse, and I will slay your wife. Her life hangs on your answer. Take counsel with yourself before you reply."

Yorihiro, stupefied at this sudden turn of events, stood a moment speechless. "Luckless chance!" Yorihiro returned, grinding his teeth with rage. "Are you indeed Yoshikado the rebel? I am Yorihiro, third son of Minamoto-no-Mitsunaka. This lady is Lady Eika, eldest daughter of the Prime Minister, Lord Ebuni. Formerly she was the about-to-be-betrothed of my brother Yoriobu. But by the caprice of fate she became united to me and we are now flying together. It was my intention to destroy such as you and by so doing to earn the forgiveness of my brother and of the Shogun. Alas! that my hope should prove vain and that I should find myself in such a predicament as this! My doom is sealed. What shall I do? How luckless my chance!"

"Yorihiro Sama," exclaimed Lady Eika, "be of good courage. How will your honour as a knight fare if for woman-sake you should espouse the cause of a traitor? If your love for me is true love, leave me to be slain, and get honour for yourself by slaying this fellow. That is my prayer."

She burst into sobs. Yoshikado laid his hand upon her mouth.

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"Will you join me, Yorihiro," he demanded, "or shall I slay this woman here? Return me a swift answer: yes or no. Answer now, this moment."

"I join you," replied Yorihiro with resolution, "even though I be branded as a rebel and my whole life go down in ruin, for I cannot suffer my love to be put to the sword merely for the sake of my good reputation. I cannot lower myself to condoning such a selfish course of action. I am willing to desert my own people and throw in my lot with you. I am your friend, Yoshikado."

Overjoyed at this reply, the rebel chief released Lady Eika.

"Well spoken, Yorihiro. I thank you for your prompt and hearty consent. With the nobility of your descent I am well acquainted; as to my own, I am a descendant of Prince Kazurawara, son of the Emperor Kwammu, from which circumstance you may perceive that it is only reasonable that I should aspire to the throne. You cannot therefore be said to commit any crime in assisting me toward the realization of my ambition. Let us pledge each other."

So saying, he strode up to the ox, slit its ear with his dagger and caught the blood in a cup, from which each drank in turn. The pledge given and taken, Eika wept bitterly.

Kidōmaru, Yoshikado's scout, suddenly returned.

"My Lord," he panted, "I beg to report that Minamoto-no-Yorinobu, who is now visiting the temple of Mount Kurama, will return by this road."

"Excellent news!" cried Yoshikado, dancing for joy. "An opportunity to avenge the death of my sister Kochō! We will slay him as a blood-offering to the god of war. But Yorihiro, dare you help me slay your brother?"

"Why such a question after such a pledge? Let me, in proof of my sincerity, deal him the first stroke."

"You satisfy me. Kidōmaru, you will slaughter this ox and hide in its belly. You will keep still enough for Yorinobu to mistake it for an ox that has died out at pasture. When he approaches it, you will take him by surprise."

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Kidōmaru proceeded to obey, while Yoshikado, accompanied by Yorihiro, took ambush behind a hill.

Presently Yorinobu appeared, mounted and accompanied by some thirty warriors marching in slow procession, and, as he advanced, now and again shaking the snowflakes from his sleeves, he recited a poem upon the subject of the beauty that snow always possesses. Suddenly he reined in his horse.

“Look, Watanabé-no-Tsuna, yonder is a strange sight. Surely I beheld the belly of that dead ox stir – or was it my fancy?”

“Very strange, my lord. So strange a thing were best not suffered to remain uninvestigated.”

With these words he set arrow to bow, drew the arrow to its head and let fly. The arrow pierced the carcass, but as it whizzed downward Kidōmaru emerged and made as if to challenge Yorinobu to fight. Nevertheless Tsuna seized him, trampled on him and wrenched his head off. A whistle sounded among the hills and the next moment more than three hundred men in armour, commanded by Yoshikado, emerged from ambush. The war-cry was raised and all precipitated themselves upon Yorinobu and his followers. A hot fight ensued, which ended in a crushing defeat of the rebels, the majority of whom fell fighting and with whose blood the snow was soon dyed scarlet. As for Yorinobu, he rode away in search of the rebel chief, who had fled the press. Tsuna was about to follow his liege lord when Yorihiro rushed from under a pine-tree, which the weight of snow had bended, and blocked his path.

“Tsuna, you and I are no strangers. To-day a certain reason has induced me to make Yoshikado’s cause my own. Do not stir.”

He cut at Tsuna. The astonished hero, remarking that this man had been his former lord, contented himself with assuming the defensive. At length, seizing a chance, Tsuna beat down Yorihiro’s defence, pinned him to the ground and tied his hands behind his back. Lady Eika ran up.

“Already bound?” she exclaimed between her sobs. “O! Tsuna Dono, Lord Yorihiro’s treachery is all to be laid to my charge and you would therefore do well to slay me in his stead. Is not a warrior’s honour imperilled if he bind his former lord?”

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It was at this moment that Mita-no-Jirō-Tomozuna, Yorihiro's foster-brother, who, garbed as a traveller, had started in search of the eloping pair, made his appearance and, astonished at what he beheld, intervened.

"Yai, Tsuna," he roared, "are you mad? What monstrous deed is this to bind your lord? Lord Yorinobu did of course love Lady Eika, but she had not become his wife. Lord Yorihiro cannot therefore be said to be guilty of adultery in flying with her. Loose his lordship at once."

Tomozuna pressed upon him.

"Overhasty fellow," replied Tsuna pushing him off, "it is Lord Yorihiro, not I, who has gone mad. Lord Yorihiro, having seen fit to ally himself with Yoshikado, was infamous enough to attack Lord Yorinobu as Lord Yorinobu was returning from Mount Kurama, and the result was the sharp fight just ended. Lord Yorihiro is without doubt the rebel's second-in-command and it is therefore just that he should be bound and by me. Have I not given you sufficient reason for saying that he is mad?"

The astonished Tomozuna clung to Yorihiro.

"Is this true? The pity, the shame of it! What made you act so?"

Yorinobu, who had failed to find his arch-enemy, returned.

"Tomozuna," he said sternly, "you too are a rebel when you condole with Yorihiro, a proven traitor."

"Rebel? cruel title!" returned Tomozuna. "It grieves me to think that I, the foster-brother of this man here, and his guardian, should have known nothing of his flight and of his alliance with the rebels and of his capture. I am ashamed to avow how careless, how ill-advised I have shown myself to be. It is surely my bounden duty now to inquire of him how he found himself in a situation that could lead to such a crime as this. I therefore beg this boon of your lordship — that you will place Lord Yorihiro in my charge until such a time as I have ascertained the motive of his terrible crime"

He prostrated himself. Yorihiro, without a word, motioned him aside and, advancing upon Yorinobu and Tsuna, inclined his head forward as though suggesting execution. Yorinobu paid not the slightest attention.

"Tomozuna," said he, "my brother has proved guilty of so awful a crime that he ought not to be suffered to draw another breath in this world. Swayed, however, by your entreaty, I grant him a reprieve. Moreover, were

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it rumoured that I had slain my brother for ill-will borne him in that he had stolen away my bride, this would ill become me in the face of the world. Your mother, moreover, is Tsuna's aunt, and you are a grave and serious person. I therefore place Yorihiro and Lady Eika in your charge. Guard them with care and await the instructions of the Shogun."

Having so pronounced, Yorihiro with Tsuna and his other followers withdrew. The eyes of Tomozuna, speechless with joy and gratitude, followed the retreating figure of the magnanimous general.

III

Yorihira and Lady Eika, state prisoners in the hands of Tomozuna, spent several days in his house. Meanwhile a conference at the Imperial Court brought its deliberations to a close with the finding that the noble culprit could not escape the due punishment for treason. The Emperor therefore ordered Yorimitsu to carry into effect whichever of the alternate sentences of death or banishment he should deem more suitable. Bowed down with shame and grief at his relation's monstrous crime, the Shogun finally decided upon capital punishment.

The same conference decided that Lord Ebumi was to be considered responsible for his daughter's relations with a traitor and it was concluded that he should forfeit his rank and with his wife be exiled from the capital. The pair had been haled before the Supreme Court, sitting in the hall of the Shogun's mansion; the verdict was pronounced and the officers of the guard were on the point of relieving the ex-Premier of his official headgear, when Lady Ebumi intervened and, clinging to their sleeves, spoke between her tears: "One moment, sirs. I do not consider the sentence pronounced upon us unreasonable; but I must speak out the truth—Lady Eika is not the daughter of the Premier. She is the daughter of my first husband and I brought her to my present husband's house when she was but five years old. Lord Ebumi is an utter stranger to her and I alone am responsible for her misconduct. I therefore entreat you to inflict upon me any condign punishment you think fit. Let this action of mine plead for him and relieve him of punishment."

"An end to idle words!" broke in Lord Ebumi. "Albeit I am not related by blood to Lady Eika, yet for many years have we called each

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other 'Father' and 'Daughter' and I have come to love her as if she were indeed my daughter. Let us suppose she had not behaved as she has, and had become Lord Yorinobu's consort; would I then fail to acknowledge her as my daughter? We three—husband and wife, parents and child—have a right to share our joys and sorrows. Treat me, even for loving-kindness' sake, as a stranger and I shall resent it."

To these reproaches the lady made no reply but continued weeping bitterly. The officers were touched, but none the less were compelled to inform her, albeit as gently as they were able, that there was no disobeying the Imperial command. Then they stripped her lord of his headgear and robe. Armed soldiers conducted the erstwhile Lord Ebumi and his spouse to beyond the gate.

This touching scene had not long been concluded when an ancient warrior, whose hair was snow-white, who wore two swords with red sheaths and was altogether dressed after a very old fashion, halted before the porch.

"Sasamé is my name," he told the porter. I have come to present in person a petition to Lord Yorimitsu."

Without further words he entered and passed up the steps into the hall. The porter and the samurai on duty were taken aback.

"Hey you, you rude old fellow," cried the samurai, "one moment!—whether your business is public or private, you can't enter without our permission. Before you beg an audience of our lord, you must acquaint us with the object of your visit."

"Nonsense!" replied the old man, emitting a loud roar of laughter. "Mine is an affair of vital public importance and I cannot acquaint such as you with it. It is imperative that I speak to Lord Yorimitsu in person. Permit me to enter."

He spoke hoarsely. His great voice reverberated through the halls. The samurai had had enough of him.

"A madman surely! Drive him away."

Scarcely were the words spoken when armed men rushed up and surrounded the ancient. He ran an ironical eye over them.

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“A terrible to do and no mistake!” he remarked sarcastically. “All this fuss over an old man who is no better than a locust! What, I should like to know, would you do if you were to encounter a young and robust enemy? Do you suppose that an old creature like myself, nothing but a pair of perambulating shin-bones, would trouble you with a visit were I scared of staves and pikes? Go on—hit me, stab me, if you think you can gain credit for it.”

“Surely this is the rebel Yoshikado’s spy come to assassinate our lord. Make an end of him.”

They were about to attack him when a loud voice announced the approach of the Shogun. Yorimitsu, attended by pages, appeared.

“So your name is Sasamé, is it?” he mused. “A name with which I am not acquainted, a man whom I do not know... but from your fearless fashion of requiring to be able to see me in person, I conclude that you have a matter of true importance for my ear. Speak without hesitation.”

The old man prostrated himself. His tone was reverent: “I thank your lordship for your great condescension in granting me an audience. Pardon my boldness if I deem it strange that you, who are so lenient as to overlook the rudeness of my behaviour, should not yet bestir yourself to save your own brother, Lord Yorihiro, from death. Youth is prone to error. If you take the sword to your relatives whenever they err, you will soon lose all of them. Lord Yorihiro, her youngest child, was his mother’s greatest darling. If therefore you suffer him to die you will not only cause the spirit of your mother great grief, but will thereby become an unfilial son. And how can an unfilial son expect to govern the Empire with success? I therefore most humbly entreat your lordship to save Lord Yorihiro from capital punishment and to await his repentance. I hope you will remember the promise you once made me to the effect that you would grant any one petition I might make during my lifetime.”

“Yorihiro’s defection,” rejoined Yorimitsu, not without a look of surprise, “is a terrible crime. In such a case as this there is no room for the influence of any personal sentiment of mine. I would have you realize that even the parents of his mistress, Lady Eika, have but just now been exiled by Imperial order. How then can the culprit himself escape punishment?”

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As for the promise, I remember it. But I gave it to Watanabé-no-Tsuna's aunt, who was nurse to Yorihira, in recognition of her distinguished service in raising the hero Tsuna for me. To her I gave it and to none else, and I have no such bond with an old man of your name. Be gone, therefore."

"Surely your lordship remembers the promise? Well then, I will reveal to you my identity: you see before you no other than Tsuna's aunt in disguise. I do not know whether such treatment arose from the fact that your lordship remembered the promise made, but when my son Tomozuna and I of late repeatedly sought an audience, that I might present my petition to your lordship, that audience was invariably refused. The keenness of my disappointment has induced me to resort to this ruse. So much have I changed since last you saw me that to-day you can hardly recognize me and I have taken advantage of this further to disguise myself in the habit of a man in order to gain an audience. I beg you to forgive my deception and my rudeness. Permit me to prove to you that I am Tsuna's aunt."

So saying, the old woman stripped from her the upper portion of her clothes, when, to Yorimitsu's extreme surprise, he was granted an opportunity of verifying the assertion by indubitable ocular evidence.

The Shogun's consort, who had, all this while, been observing the scene through the chinks of the partition, hastened in accompanied by a maid-of-honour and took the old woman by the hand.

"I am delighted to see you, Tsuna's aunt. I fully appreciate your kind efforts on my brother-in-law's behalf, but you must remember that Yorihira is not without justice considered a traitor in that he joined the forces of the rebels; and inasmuch as he is my husband's brother by blood it is become all the more impossible to pardon him. I also have pleaded for him, only to be severely rebuked by my lord, who insisted that if Yorihira were pardoned justice would go out of existence. I have therefore ceased my importunities and I can only hope that, having followed my example, you will return to your home."

With these words, aided by the maid, she rearranged the old woman's garments and gently patted her on the back. Tsuna's aunt,

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however, was not appeased, but, drawing close to Yorimitsu's knees, spoke with vehemence.

"You are stony-hearted, my lord. Will you break your word for the sake of a barren justice? Very well, then, I will plead no more. When I perceive that Lady Eika's very foster-father has been banished by reason of Lord Yorihiro, I can only conclude that this old nurse of his, who may in some sort be said to be his mother, and Tomozuna his foster-brother, that these two, I say, both richly deserve capital punishment. I make you this prayer. Slay me and expose my head that the public may realize to the full the justice and impartiality of your administration."

"Noble words, woman," returned Yorimitsu, overcome with admiration. "Your courage and loyalty are truly worthy of one who is the aunt of Tsuna. For the sake of my promise and in recognition of this courage and loyalty of yours, I will place Yorihiro, who was to have been executed to-morrow, under your charge for a week. If during that interval owing to your admonitions, he displays indubitable signs of repentance, I will petition the throne that he be pardoned. If he does not display such signs, I will send officers duly to carry out the sentence at cockcrow on the fourth of next month, by which time the week will have expired. You understand me?"

At these words the old woman burst into tears of gratitude, and, after assuring the Shogun and his consort of her intention to do her utmost in the matter, she departed in the best of spirits.

Day and night Tsuna's aunt earnestly expostulated with Yorihiro, advising him to repent and obtain forgiveness of the Shogun, but to no purpose. The stubborn hero spoke no word and to all her admonition turned a deaf ear. With grief and anxiety she beheld the fatal week draw to a speedy close. The curtains of night fell upon the last day. Her patience was exhausted. She produced a bow, her valued possession, the very bow which Yorihiro's dead father had carried against rebels, and used it to rain repeated blows upon him.

"This bow, Lord Yorihiro," she said in tears, "is the soul of your dead father Lord Mitsunaka. You do well to consider it his whip of chastisement. Listen, if you have ears; see, if eyes you have. It is only natural that, since

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you are fool enough to have turned traitor in order to keep a petty pledge, you should be callous to the troubles of others. Alas, it is solely on account of you that your father-in-law Lord Ebumi and his wife have been exiled by Imperial order and that their daughter Lady Eika has become an unfilial child. And yet for all this you do not repent. I can only conclude that you bear a grudge against your brothers because you were not appointed heir to the Shogunate. Yours is a crooked spirit. Well, let me, in place of your revered father, beat the wickedness out of you.”

With that she once more raised the bow, but Yorihiro seized her by the arm and, with a melancholy look, exclaimed: “Dear nurse, the chastisement you mete out to me through the instrumentality of my father’s bow grieves me so sorely that I am compelled to open my heart to you. It is not that I cannot distinguish right from wrong, but you must know that neither does the scorched seed bud nor the fallen flower return to its native branch. What though my life were spared?—how could I face public censure and the scorn of my brothers and retainers, I, who stole away Lady Eika who was to be my brother’s bride? There is, too, another affair which is of even greater importance; I would have you know that I, descended from the Emperor Seiwa, drank a draught of ox’s blood with Yoshikado, a descendant of the Emperor Kwammu. Should I break this pledge and desert his cause, how can it be but that people will say: ‘When his sweetheart was taken prisoner by the rebel chieftain, Yorihiro would not fight a duel with him, but treacherously joined him to save her from death. Such a coward is a disgrace to the Minamoto family’? Again, were I shameless enough to live on despite such ill-fame, my brothers’ reputation would thereby be compromised. It would, however, redound to their credit if I caused folk to say ‘Yorihiro kept his pledge even to death. He is worthy of his noble lineage.’ Sometimes it happens that a warrior seems to wander from the path of righteousness, though in reality he does no such thing. Gold is the most precious of treasures, but to a man exhausted with thirst upon a lofty mountain thousands of gold coins are not worth a handful of water. In summer, too, coarse linen is exalted above brocade. Thus comes it that it is my intention to wipe out one disgrace by another and by one guilt

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to clear myself of another. It is my trust that you can enter into my feelings and sympathize with me, dear nurse."

"You have my heartiest sympathies, Lord Yorihiro," the old woman returned, throwing the bow aside. "Why did you not unbosom yourself to me before? How foolish, how thoughtless have I been, who, in my ignorance of my lord's intentions, have beaten and abused him! May my tongue fester! May my arm break! I entreat your forgiveness, my dear lord."

She burst into tears, but after a while resumed, "I have no time to weep. Ere long the officers will be here. I fear that they will compel us to defend ourselves against them here in this very house and that none of us can hope to survive. Let us therefore enjoy a feast of farewell in the inner room. Tomozuna, bar the gate, Come in, all of you."

The company went within. And as the feast, accompanied by the old woman's pathetic singing and dancing, took its course, the night wore on. At length, mixed with the sound of a shower drumming upon the window, there was heard a series of faint raps upon the gate-door. Lady Eika, perceiving the noise, slipped out and advanced to the gate,

"Who knocks at so dead an hour of night?" she demanded in a whisper.

"It is my daughter Eika, is it not?" answered a voice without the gate. "I wish to speak with you. Pray open the door."

The voice of her mother was unmistakable. The girl's heart leapt.

"Is it you, mother? So long separated, much I wish that I might obtain were it but a glimpse only of your sweet face; but I grieve to say that the gate is tightly fastened. What can have brought you here at this hour of the night? Lord Yorihiro's life must end at cockcrow. I also am doomed to the same fate. It is only a matter of a short while ere the troops that will dispatch him arrive. Imagine my surprise and grief at hearing that both my father and mother had been exiled and the noble house of Ebumi ruined—all on my account. My iniquity is too great for me to hope for pardon. The last moments draw near. Delay but a little longer and danger must indubitably overtake you. Haste away, dear mother."

She leaned against the wall and sobbed bitterly.

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“Luckless Lord Ebumi,” said the old woman, “I don’t know how to apologize to him; not even my death could atone for your ill-doing. You can imagine how I feel. But now that Lord Yorihira’s life draws to its close, little it matters at whose hand he dies. I came hither to-night as proxy for Lord Ebumi to ask for his head ere the execution occurs. Should my husband be able to present Yorihira’s head to the throne, I feel sure he will be pardoned and restored to the enjoyment of his rank and office. I am aware that the request I am about to make is cruel, but I entreat you to guide me within that I may accomplish the assassination of Lord Yorihira. I know you love your husband as dearly as I do mine; but if you suffer me to kill your husband you will at least be able to fulfil your duty toward your foster-father. Come, girl, guide me in; or shall I make an unguided assault and so court certain failure? If I find myself unable to do either I will never return, but slay myself here. The hour grows late; render me an answer promptly: yes or no! Make haste, make haste!”

She emphasized the urgency of her demand by rattling her dirk up and down in its scabbard so that the hilt clashed against the mouth of the sheath, but she received no answer from Eika, who found herself at an entire loss.

“Come, daughter, answer promptly! Shall I force my way in without assistance or am I to slay myself where I stand? Not a moment remains for further reflection. Make haste, make haste!”

Eika writhed with anguish. Should she suffer her mother to assassinate her husband, she would be a wicked wife. Should she disobey her mother, she would be doubly undutiful toward her parents. At last she came to such a resolve as she deemed would enable her to extricate herself from this predicament. “You have my willing consent, mother,” she answered with forced laughter. “Fortunately my husband drank himself into a stupor at the farewell feast we have held this night. He is now dead asleep in the front room by the porch. During his long confinement he has allowed his hair to grow so long that it now hangs over his shoulders. When the moment comes I will extinguish the light in his room. When this signal has been given, steal into the room, and when you feel your hand upon his long hair, stab him. In this fashion you cannot fail to kill him.”

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She had hardly concluded when her mother replied, "I am glad, daughter. I shall thank you all my life. I will steal in immediately."

"Not so. Not yet. Should anything occur to Lord Yorihiro before cockcrow, Tomozuna and his mother, who have him in their charge, would incur great blame. Do not be so impatient. Await my signal, I beg you. Fare you well, mother."

She hurried back to her room and, taking a razor from her toilet-case, cut her jet-black hair so short that it barely reached her shoulders. Then she proceeded to the front room and kneeled down in tears.

Outside Lady Ebumi, fixing her eyes upon the eastern sky, awaited the cockcrow with such patience as she could summon. She had not been waiting long ere there was heard the neighing and trampling of a troop of horse yet afar off. Soon great paper lanterns, bright as stars and borne upon poles, came in sight. These were followed by a company of about fifty mounted warriors. Startled, Lady Ebumi instantly removed her hat and mantle and, scaling the wall with great difficulty, groped her way up to the roof of the gateway, whereon she crouched scarcely daring to draw a breath. Ere long the posse arrived before the gate. Their commander, Kintoki, who was in full uniform, alighted, stepped up to the gate and knocked upon its door.

"Ho! Within there!" he cried loudly, but with courtesy. "I, Sakata-no-Kintoki, am come as a messenger of His Highness the Shogun. Since Lord Yorihiro has not yet seen fit to send his apologies to His Highness, I am strictly enjoined to persuade him into self-dispatch and to bring his head back with me. It is however my earnest prayer and my hope that his lordship will at once retract the vow he made with the rebel chieftain and sue forgiveness of his honourable brother. It is with this express purpose that I have arrived ere cockcrow. Tomozuna and Tomozuna's aunt, spare no pains to prevail upon him, that he may return in my company to the palace of His Highness."

At these words the lady upon the gate-roof found herself very ill at ease. Obviously she could not proceed to her bloody act before cockcrow, yet further delay must inevitably frustrate her plans. In desperate straits, she thrust her face into the pine branches overhanging the gate-roof and

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twice gave a loud *kokkekō*. Upon this all the cocks in the neighbourhood clapped their wings and crowed amain. Unobserved in the tumult and excitement that ensued within and without the gate, she leapt down into the courtyard and, finding to her joy the light extinguished, she felt her way within. Hardly had she entered when the paper doors were dyed scarlet.

“Oho, there!” she called. “I, Ebumi Tamenari, have dealt the first blow to Minamoto-no-Yorihira, the greatest ally of the wretched rebel Yoshikado!”

“What brazenness! What an insult!” thundered Kintoki in consternation. “Hateful aunt and cousin—to have permitted a weakling of a court noble secretly to enter and thus to bring disgrace upon the Shogun’s messenger! Wait, I will open the door with a key of my own fashioning.”

He put forth all his strength against the door; under the strain the hinges cracked. Then he kicked the door; at which the bolt broke in two and the door swung open. Kintoki and his troops rushed in. Tomozuna’s mother ran out and hurriedly opened the paper doors of the front room. Behold! between Eika and her astonished mother, who bore a blood-stained dirk in her hand, crouched blood-bespattered Tomozuna, holding together with his hand a terrible wound in the neck. Lady Ebumi was speechless with sorrow and amazement. Tomozuna crept to the verandah and, hard-spent, spoke as follows: “Lady Ebumi, Kintoki and my mother, your surprise is quite natural. If you wish to know the truth I will tell it you—I have suffered myself to be struck by Lady Ebumi. This heroic woman, bent upon slaying Lord Yorihira thus to obtain the Imperial pardon, begged Lady Eika’s assistance. That unhappy creature, Lady Eika, finding herself in such a dilemma, resolved to die at the hand of her mother. She cut her hair short and was awaiting in the darkness the mortal stroke when I, perceiving what was happening, and struck with admiration and pity for the young lady, so contrived as to receive the mortal stab in her place. Lady Ebumi, present but my head to the throne and I am sure your husband will receive his pardon, for I am Lord Yorihira’s chief retainer and guardian. There is however another end for which—”

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“How rash a deed, Tomozuna!” broke in Yorihiro, who had but this moment entered. “That you should act as substitute and die in my stead is not to be thought of. You have died in vain indeed!”

“You are mistaken, my lord,” gasped Tomozuna, “it was not my intention to perish as your substitute. That a warrior who has repeatedly, but all in vain, remonstrated with his lord should slay himself is but the custom. Again and again have I remonstrated with your lordship, but you have ever turned a deaf ear to my advice, For this reason have I resorted to these desperate means. Should my death induce you to forsake the path of error, nothing, I think, could so contribute to the welfare and prosperity of the Minamoto family and to the public good. Then indeed I should not die in vain. My lord, my mother, my cousin and the rest of you, ere I breathe my last, I have a tale for you. You will recall how on a certain night in February last the ceremony of choosing the Shogun’s heir took place. On that night, unable to resist Kochō’s charms, I trifled with her under cover of the darkness, with the result that she not only cut the string of my headgear but loudly called attention to my misbehaviour. Shame and despair ordained that I should slay myself, but Lord Yorihiro in his mercy commanded all the samurai present to cut the strings of their headgears. Thus was I suffered to escape detection and an ignominious death. Gratitude prompted me to await an opportunity to requite his lordship’s benevolence. It was my hope that he would march against the rebels, thus affording me an opportunity to fight for him. Alas! How profound was my sorrow and disappointment when I discovered that he had himself turned rebel! Kintoki, unless his lordship repents of his errors and apologizes to his honourable brother, I shall not be able to die in peace. For it is this thought alone and no other that is a torture to me in my last moments. O my mother, O Kintoki, do your utmost to induce my lord to repent, such is my dying request.”

“Lord Yorihiro,” sobbed the old woman, “yours is a heart of flint! While my son yet draws his breath let him hear those three syllables ‘I repent’ pass your lips: a requiem more potent for good with him than the prayers of a thousand priests.”

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Yorihira, stubborn though he was, could resist no longer. He burst into tears and, taking Tomozuna by the bloodstained hand, spoke with passion: "A thousand pardons, my dear Tomozuna. I regret with all my heart that my obstinacy should have caused the death of so brave and loyal a retainer. Here do I solemnly declare, by Shō-Hachiman, that I entirely and absolutely annul my pact with Yoshikado and humbly beg forgiveness of my brothers. Tomozuna, set your mind at ease. You have not died in vain. I am infinitely grateful to you, dear Tomozuna."

"I thank you, my lord. Now I regret nothing. I can die in peace and joy. Come, Kintoki, I pray you behead me."

"Ah, no!" cried the lion-hearted Kintoki. "I know not how to behead so brave, sympathetic and loyal a samurai as yourself. Do you behead him, aunt."

"Fie upon you! I have no need of your assistance." The dying warrior breathed a "Namu..." and, fixing a smiling eye upon his mother, decapitated himself with his own sword, to the extreme horror and grief of all present. The old woman took up the bleeding head and lavished every mark of affection upon it.

"My dear son, you are at last in my arms again—for the first time since you were weaned at the age of five."

She applied the head to her face and bosom and wept the bitterest tears.

IV

Kintoki's detailed report on the suicide of the loyal Tomozuna, on Lady Ebumi's heroic deed, and, above all, on Lord Yorihiro's heartfelt repentance and apology so profoundly moved the Shogun Yorimitsu that he forthwith obtained Imperial permission to reprieve Yorihiro from capital punishment and to restore Lord Ebumi to his rank and office. Yorimitsu repaired to the Government Office whither he summoned Yorihiro and Ebumi. Great was their joy and gratitude when they learned that the Imperial pardon had been extended to them. The ensuing mutual congratulations were crowned when, in the very midst of the company's rejoicings, news arrived that the arch-rebel Yoshikado had been captured and was now in the courtyard of the Office. The happy Shogun, accompanied by his brother and Lord Ebumi, stepped out on the verandah to view the prisoner, who, with his hands bound, was kneeling, guarded by his captors, Suétaké and Sadamitsu, two of the Shogun's Greatest Four. Yorimitsu highly commended the exploit of his brave retainers and informed all present that from time immemorial every such traitor had eventually encountered the same fate as the prisoner they now beheld. He added in conclusion—"This deep-dyed criminal, having defied the Imperial authority, even as his father did before him, shall in due time be executed. Meanwhile cast him into prison."

Yorihiro interrupted: "Now that I have severed my connection with Yoshikado and am myself so graciously pardoned, it were an easy matter for me to chastise the prisoner here. But, since I have a particular purpose in view, I beseech you to deliver him up to my keeping for a while."

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His petition being immediately granted, Yorihiro descended to the prisoner whom he addressed in kindly fashion: "Having regard for the pact I made with you and for the fact that you did spare Lady Eika's life, I give you quarter and set you free. From now on we are enemies. Your head is in your own keeping until my sword severs it on the battlefield. So be off, Yoshikado." With that he cut the cords that bound the prisoner.

"An honourable warrior in very deed!" exclaimed Yoshikado with a smile. "I am captivated by your faith-keeping and kindness. I am inclined to think it will not be long ere we meet upon the battle-field. Farewell, Yorihiro."

He was about to depart when the Shogun bade him halt one moment.

"You are a deep-dyed villain to have set the royal authority at naught. But that you should pay special homage to your father's spirit is admirable. I will make you a parting present."

He produced the pavilion curtain, upon which was the crest of the tethered steed.

"This, your father's curtain, is quite useless to the Minamoto family. To you, however, it is a god of arms. I return it you!"

With these words he cast the curtain to the ground. Reverently and gratefully Yoshikado took it up.

"I thank you for this precious gift. I shall not fail to requite your favour with my sword. Know that I shall shortly raise an army in Mount Katsuragi and capture Yorihiro. But even though I may return his body to the Minamoto family, yet his head shall remain with me for ever as my ally."

He bade farewell to the Minamoto brothers and strode away.

Day and night the dreams of Iyo-no-Naishi, wife of Yorinobu, were haunted by the spectre of Kochō. Slowly she languished, until the several distractions devised by the wives of the Greatest Four had all in turn proved unavailing and the chief physician felt compelled to declare the case beyond his power. The wives of the Greatest Four, however, did not cease to rack their brains and at length hit upon a happy expedient. It was the custom to light a big bonfire on Mount Higashiyama on the night of the sixteenth of July. The bonfire was always shaped like the Chinese character

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for "Great", in shape somewhat resembling a cross. The object of this peculiar bonfire was that it might afford a guiding light to souls astray in Hades and conduct them back to the right path. It was decided to kindle a similar bonfire in the artificial hill in the garden before the noble sufferer's apartments – thus at once to afford her consolation and to appease Kochō's spirit and so restore the Shogun's consort to health. An excavation in the shape of the particular character was made in the hillside and the cavity filled with much firewood. At nightfall the women, torches in hand, set a light to the wood. So bright was the blaze thus kindled that noonday seemed re-established. The fire illumining rocks, trees and flowers gave to the whole scene an indescribably beautiful appearance. The lady was much intrigued and a sudden rosiness returned to her cheeks. Meanwhile the wives prayed for the peace of Kochō's soul. Then, after several hours' gay converse with their mistress, they retired.

The Milky Way had grown pale, the hour of dawn drew nigh, the bonfire was all but dead, when from the low red embers a ball of bright flame shot upward and as rapidly fell to the ground. From the heart of the ball the ghostly figure of Kochō glided forth and, drifting effortlessly, even as a cloud upon the wind, advanced toward the lady's bed-chamber and violently struck upon the paper doors. The lady awoke.

"Strange!" she murmured. "Who's there?"

"I am a maid in the service of His Majesty, the ex-Emperor. Intelligence of your illness has reached his ears and His Majesty has graciously conferred upon you several supreme Chinese and Japanese remedies. I have brought them hither. Take them quickly, my lady."

Not without misgiving as to why such a messenger should have come at so strange an hour, Naishi opened the doors. Overcome with horror at encountering that very figure which had so often haunted her dreams, she uttered a loud shriek and leapt back. But the apparition advanced remorselessly upon her. "Fool of a Naishi," it exclaimed in terrible tones, "I am the spirit of Kochō, that Kochō who fell a prey to love for your husband and I am no less also the spirit of the Greatest of all the Spiders. Fathomless is my hate of you, of you my rival in love. I, – I am purposed to inflict upon you all the sufferings that are mine in Hades."

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Hardly had the awful voice ended when from the creature's fingertips issued innumerable webs, which instantly twined themselves about the lady. Vain were her struggles – they did but serve to knit the bonds the tighter. She suffered agonies. She stumbled about the room, all but in collapse. Vast gusts whistled through the garden trees; the water in the artificial pond made its incommunicable sound; will-o'-the-wisps gleamed and were gone in the darkness the roll and rattle of thunder added to the pandemonium.

On this the four wives immediately perceived that a calamity must have taken place. Halberds in hand, they rushed into Naishi's chamber and were astonished at the plight in which they found her. With great difficulty they saved her from the webs which threatened to strangle her and carried her to her bed. Once back on the verandah, they were glancing in every direction, when Kochō's figure arose bolt upright behind them.

"Foolish women," quoth the spectre, shaking with anger, "know that I am the spirit of a ground-spider that has dwelt many, many years in Mount Katsuragi. It was my purpose to usurp the possession of the Great Empire of Japan that I might make it one huge abode for my family. To attain this purpose I espoused the cause of the rebel Yoshikado and possessed his sister Kochō, but to my ill-fortune the girl fell a prey to love and so I lost my temporary dwelling. None the less I will display to you my powers."

The spectre had no sooner spoken than the women sprang upon it, brandishing their weapons. When they lunged at its skirts it leapt in the air; when they thrust at its right, it appeared to their left. When they cut at its back, it stood before them. When they surrounded it, it changed its nature and became a blaze of fire. Next it dispersed itself into red and green jack-o'-lanterns which spread throughout the gardens and vanished and flashed hither and thither by turn. Anon these jack-o'-lanterns floated like a mist from branch to blossoming branch. Now the spectre maiden appeared standing before them and laughing, laughing hysterically. A moment later it seemed to vanish, only to appear again, beckoning to them from the distant verandah. So magical were its powers, moving in so many forms, that the heroic women were at last reduced to gaping at it.

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At this moment Yorinobu, accompanied by Hirai-no-Yasumasa, rushed forward to the attack, brandishing a sacred sword, the heirloom of the Minamoto family. He hung it at Naishi's pillow, to ward off evil spirits. Then both heroes leapt from the verandah and, taking up their stand in the garden, glared at the sky. Instantly the storm ceased, only to be followed by millions of cobwebs which poured down from heaven as in an unnatural shower. Hither and thither they spun themselves about the warriors who were soon at a loss to rid themselves of the silvery threads. Then was it that there occurred a miracle of miracles—thunder rolled within the confines of the lady's chamber, the sacred sword sprang from its sheath and, vaulting into the night above the gardens, flickered to and fro in the darkness. Again and again it stabbed at something above that was hidden, a bloody dew descended, the webs, dissolving, were no longer seen, and a shrill voice was heard crying upon the upper air, "Forgive me, I come no more!"

The sword pursued the fleeting voice, but, when the voice became at length inaudible, the sword sprang back into its sheath. No sooner had this miracle been achieved than the illness immediately fell from Naishi and she was as one who has awakened from an endless dream. Thus was the haunted palace changed to a palace of joy and merriment.

V

Two expeditions, each composed of several hundreds of troops, and commanded by Hirai-no-Yasumasa and by Yorinobu and Yorihira respectively, were dispatched against the monster spider with orders to accomplish its destruction. Tracking the monster by the trail of its blood, they marched toward Mount Katsuragi in the province of Yamato. Kintoki led the van. The terrible monster was nothing to him who, clad in ordinary clothes, shouldered a huge bamboo broom as his sole weapon. His appearance excited continuous laughter among the heavily-armoured soldiery. Standing at the foot of the mountain, they descried, fluttering upon its summit, the pavilion curtain crested with the tethered steed. The sight inspired them with redoubled courage, for they hoped to achieve a double prize, the monster and the arch-rebel. They commenced the ascent amid blowing of conches, beating of drums and chorus of war-cries. They discovered to their amazement that the rocks and trees of the slope were thickly twined with silken webs. From the darkest heart of the forest there emerged an immense spider, whose eyes shone with the cold glare of a mirror and whose legs bristled with hairs like iron nails. Emitting with every breath a gust of fire, the angry monster rushed down upon the army. The terror-stricken vanguard were about to take to their heels, but even this the spider prevented, for it flung about them a showering web in which the soldiers found themselves entangled. Then, seizing certain of them with its giant legs it proceeded to suck their blood. Kintoki, in his rage, tore and kicked his way through the threads and sprang upon the monster. Instantaneously it vanished, leaving in its stead an enormous *kobukuro*, or pouch containing its young. This the hero promptly broke in

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pieces, when, from within it, issued myriads of young spiders which sprang upon the troops and threw them into confusion, while all about, among the bushes and in the shadows of the rocks, elf-fires danced and gleamed so brilliantly that the whole mountain seemed afire. While this adventure was going forward and Kintoki was valiantly wielding his big broom against the webs and the young spiders, Tsuna and Sadamitsu and other soldiers attacked the enemy on the other side of the mountain. So well did they acquit themselves and so many of the enemy did they slay that the rebel chief, Yoshikado, was compelled to run for his life. In his flight he came to the front slope where, being intercepted by Kintoki, he was about to be captured. At this moment the dim figure of Kochō was discerned close to Yoshikado, who became suddenly possessed of a miraculous strength, and, felling the Greatest Four to the ground, towered to his full height and stared fiercely about him.

Then it was that Yorinobu shouted: "Beware of Yoshikado, O Greatest Four! I'll be sworn he is dowered with the monster's powers." Forthwith he drew the sacred sword and, invoking divine protection, hurled it at Yoshikado. Instantly Kochō's figure vanished. The monster reappeared in its place. The superhuman strength of Yoshikado left him. In a moment Tsuna and Sadamitsu precipitated themselves upon him and held him down. Kintoki and Suétaké mounted the spider's back. Not a leg could the monster stir. At the sight the whole army raised a shout of triumph and a lusty cheer for the Minamoto family echoed about the mountain.