

The Tale Of The Enchanted Sword 妖剣紀聞

Izumi Kyōka Translated and With an Introduction By Nina Cornyetz



Introduction

The Asian Studies Department of Cornell University is proud to announce the recipients of the 2017 Kyoko Selden Memorial Translation Prize competition, concluded on November 1. The prize for a published translator has been awarded to Nina Cornyetz, Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at the Gallatin School of New York University, for her translation of Izumi Kyōka's "Tale of the Enchanted Sword" (妖剣記聞, *Yōken Kibun*, 1920). Writings by Kyōka (1873-1939), renowned for his tales of

the uncanny, the grotesque, and the supernatural, have been known to pose challenges to modern Japanese readers and scholars because of their densely allusive imagery and use of archaic phrases and orthography. Cornyetz's translation, the first into English of this Kyōka text that combines features of both Edo-style and modernist writing, has been particularly successful in capturing the dazzling visual effects of its language.

From his writing debut in Meiji until his death in Shōwa, the prolific Izumi Kyōka (1873-1939) wrote over three hundred narratives. Kyōka was famous as a quirky, anti-mainstream writer, a romantic-idealist, and an impressionistic stylist, whose narrative aesthetics ran counter to the prevailing naturalism of his time. He frequently wrote supernatural "gothic" tales haunted by a dark, perverse eroticism, and many stories made protagonists, or antagonists, of people inhabiting the newly defined domains of the social abject or the uncanny of the era, such as geisha, outcasts, ghosts and demons.

Yōken kibun (*The Tale of the Enchanted Sword*, 1920) is one of my favorites for several reasons. The first is thematic: besides telling a good story, the text centers in part on a member of the outcaste community. As such, the text has historical and cultural significance.

Secondly, the text is stylistically interesting in its rejection of the linguistic *genbunitchi* movement towards literary transparency and realism. Filled with Edo-style linguistic

flourishes, packed with description and kissed by the supernatural, *Yōken kibun* is recounted to us by a narrator who is not the protagonist, nor a direct agent in the tale, although he might be easily conflated with the author himself. This narrator often speaks in conversational rather than literary language, mixing *masu* with *de aru* sentence endings, refusing then-developing literary norms and combining past- and present-tense narration drenched in the “flavors” of Edo fiction. A serious story of impossible love, there are numerous delightfully humorous passages to entertain the reader. Kyōka’s prose borrows and mixes attributes from the Japanese premodern literary canon in a decidedly modernist form. As Donald Keene described it, “The long sentences are broken up into seemingly unconnected fragments, following their own logic rather than that of normal syntax, and the expression can be as indirect as that in the later Henry James.”¹ Ikuta Chōkō claimed that Kyōka’s prose was “styled like a whirlpool, churning confusion to its utmost.”² In Kyōka’s texts events may be linked by association rather than by logical plot progression, leading Noguchi Takehiko to claim that one “frequently follows image, not story.”³ There are often temporary obfuscations of voice, space, and time; some of these may be later clarified while others remain. For these reasons, the translation obviously presented its own set of challenges. I opted for faithfulness to the original as much as possible, hopefully without rendering the English awkward. I have retained much of the idiosyncratic punctuation of the Japanese version.

Third, the tale is important in that it narrates a kind of doubled temporality that Keith Vincent has argued informed many modern Japanese literary texts: an oscillation between a premodern homosocial and homosexual continuum, and a modern compulsory heterosexualism.⁴ Heteronormativity was an integral part of both the process of modernization and the development of the

novel in Japan, which required the leaving behind of a homosocialism that included the possibility of same-sex relations and indeed comprised one model for idealized love in Edo narratives. With the onset of heteronormative modernity, representations of same-sex eroticism were not so much proscribed as circumscribed within an increasingly distant and aestheticized past. Hence it is not uncommon to find texts in which the two historically sequential models actually cohabit single texts. As Eve Sedgwick argued,

issues of modern homo/heterosexual definition are structured, not by the supersession of one model and the consequent withering away of another, but instead by the relations enabled by the unrationalized coexistence of different models during the times they do coexist.... unexpectedly plural, varied, and contradictory.⁵

Although it is a tale of a socially impossible heterosexual love, the narrator of *Yōken kibun* lets us know of samurai Gennoshin’s desire to “keep the youth (Seisaburō) close,” and that it appears that this is a one-sided wish. The sobriquet for Seisaburō, “*kappa*,” as well as the fact that one impetus for the events in the tale – the eradication of a *kappa* – suggest symbolic links to homosexual desire, and an ambivalence towards such a desire. This association is strengthened by the term used to describe Gennoshin’s relationship with the boy, *nengoro* which was in Edo commonly used to describe homosexual relations. As I am mapping out in an in-progress article, I find the tale to represent precisely such an ambivalent co-presence of modernity and convention in the figures of the differing desires of Seisaburō and Gennoshin.

Please note that I have chosen to leave out macrons in the translation.

Synopsis:

The primary, unidentified narrator announces that he will recount to the reader a story he has

heard. In that tale the year is 1793. A samurai, Gennoshin, and his young companion Seisaburō, are visiting the provinces of Koishikawa. They encounter an outcaste woman Omachi (a *torioi*), who gives Seisaburō an iris blossom (*kakitsubata*). Urged by his companions, Seisaburō discards the blossom but he has been irrevocably polluted as well as enchanted by her, and he wanders about in a daze trying to find her again.

A second tale is embedded in the first. During their trip to Koishikawa, Gennoshin and Seisaburō are told of a mystery of two underwater caves by a waterfall bordering a nearby temple, caves which have long been the cause of repeated drownings. Previous attempts to eradicate the river demon - or *kappa* - believed to be the cause of the drownings, have failed. The head priest, Sakuden, dives into the caves to challenge and eradicate the *kappa*, discovering and removing a strange sword. Mysteriously, the sword appears to return repeatedly on its own to the cave where it was found. Eventually the two tales are interwoven, as it is revealed that Omachi has been stealing the sword and returning it to one of the caves to stab herself, thereby purifying her polluted blood. Seisaburō pulls her from the cave and drinks her blood as she dies, receiving both her pollution and a mysterious knowledge of swordsmithing.

The Tale Of The Enchanted Sword

Izumi Kyōka, 1920

Nina Cornyetz, translator

Part One

1.

There are no flowers which I dislike, but I have

loved the iris since childhood.⁶ I am not choosy, and love those which come to life on gilt screens as well as those blooming in garden ponds. Strolling by myself on short excursions to the countryside, along a stream bordering a rice field, by a little brook in the mountain foothills or at the base of a log bridge, suddenly there they are, opening tremblingly, reserved in their fragrance and violet hue. The waters may be shallow or stagnant but I am struck with a deep familiarity and I cannot simply walk on. As I gaze at them I am overcome with a longing, a nostalgia, and feeling like a child again, a lonesome joy, an emotion strong enough to bring tears to my eyes as the sun's warmth soaks into my body.

Recently I heard this story. ——— Irises bloom so vividly in it that I feel I can see them. Picture a narrow stream of water flowing quietly before the gates and behind the back doors of some five or six, shall we say, humble cottages, which stand in a cluster of small dwellings. At the spot where the stream cascades like scattered jewels is a slim, young, attractive minstrel girl standing across from the iris.⁷ ——— Her figure and the scene are poignant. Merely uttering the word flower, can I truly convey their purple hue?⁸ I do not know. ——— Still, I will tell you the story.

——— A ghost will make a brief appearance in my tale, but please, do not say, what, again? ———

The setting: Today there is a waterfall at Koishikawa Sekiguchi.⁹ ——— It became a public park about a year ago. ——— But it was once called Oaraizeki. A by-way crosses over the Komatsuka Bridge, following the upper banks of Inogashira from the cliffs to Mejirodai. That is where the irises bloom and the young minstrel girl stands.

The time: It is the seventh day of the fourth month in the fifth year of Kansei.¹⁰ True to the season, a cascade of falling sunflower blossoms

had just that morning come to a full halt. Visions of damp purple blossoms entice us to begin there, but first we must take a little detour on our path into a tale of doomed love.¹¹

The rain had cleared yet it was a bit humid as the sun came out in flaming radiance. The air was damp and the sun bright enough to induce a light sweat. A simple footpath threaded through the rice fields from Ushigome below Akagi, past the Firearm Corps' grounds, all the way to present-day Nakazato.¹² A thick green ginger field resembles a little thicket, tucked away in a far-off recess of the wide open green paddies full of seedlings. As far as Waseda, Mejiro forest is obscured with a light, smoky haze. It is just past noon and the slanting glimmer of sun rays on Dainichi Slope, where the azaleas were finally about to bloom, turned the earth on the cliff a pale red, a blush wavering in the heat-waves dispelling a quickly declining spring, the color of early summer. One feels faint heat even gazing from afar. The willows of Tsuji were a dash of cool green beneath blue sky, as one looked past Otowa Ninth Street.

There are three people on the Nakazato footpath, which is just as I have described it.

One is a samurai, one is a priest in traveling clothes,¹³ and one is a handsome young male companion. The samurai and youth are wearing high clogs. The priest, an exceedingly humble man, leads the way, scuttling along in leather-soled shoes, and the spot where he stands resembles the one where Benzaiten and Bishamonten performed as amateur jesters, having altered their appearances and concealed their identities during an incognito journey.¹⁴ But this priest is not one of them.

The priest opens his sleeve to motion ahead.

"Look. [six 点] Past the fields, straight ahead. There, see the shimmering mist rising out of the blue? It looks as though it were moving, doesn't it? That's Oarai in Sekiguchi. This sort

of weather turns it into a water-mirage, as it is called in the song of Musashi Plain.¹⁵ A remembrance of times long gone."

"So it does," responded the samurai, raising his eyebrows. To an observer, the conversationalists also appeared immersed in thin fog as they walked along the paddy field border, just like the water-mirage glimmering in the shade.

2.

The priest's eyebrows are stern in contrast to his round cheeks and wide smile,

"See that roof which looks like an overturned boat in the mist? Actually it's a large watermill, engineered by a man named Toshimaya Hanbee. To power it he used that famous box-gutter design to draw water from the upper reaches of Inogashira, quite a feat. Generation after generation of Shogunal family members and lords have come to see it."¹⁶ He furrows his brow and bows his head slightly.

"I see," the samurai responds respectfully.

"That's why the miller, and others, are so grateful, even if they proclaim they don't deserve it or that it's too fine for themselves. So they treat it very specially, bestowing it with a gate of honor, which they usually keep locked-up, tied with sacred cord. You can see it from any road you take around here. There, a little further off, nestled in that little grove of trees, you'll see the roof of a small temple. That's a Fudo Temple of Immobility named Takimotoin, the Temple at the Waterfall Source. Folks call it the Takifudo Temple, Takifudo Temple, the Temple of the Immobile Waterfall.¹⁷ The caretaker, a Shugen Buddhist, is a strapping sort of yokel, but actually quite a talker, being quite educated in his tradition. Why don't we stop for a short visit at his quarters on our way to see the temple?"

He says as they walk along the Nakazato footpath.

The priest now standing by the trail-marker had been the curate of the main temple of the Kobinatasui Docho sect (now belonging to the Jodo sect). He had relinquished the temple to his successor and lived briefly in retirement near Ishikiri Bridge, in a hermitage he built in the garden of a house owned by a grain-merchant. But he tired of his landlord's authoritative and haughty wife, said to be an ex-prostitute of newly acquired status, as well as of the small snakes which crawled in great profusion over the swampy land. So he was now living in retirement in the environs of Akagi Myoshin. He affixed a long name, Bu-joseki-hoku-shin-jin-zen-kaku-nen-jin-jip-po-an-tai-jo-kei-jun-ro-no, to the travel-logs and other sorts of jottings-down that he liked to write, but people called him by the pen name he used for his poems, "Ifu-san" to his face, while behind his back he passed as Issen, Mr. Cup of Tea.¹⁸

Let me explain. ——— He is a master of the Sekishu School of Tea who went on to invent his very own School of Green Tea. Quite an honorable retirement. Being a man who takes pleasure in seasonal countryside excursions, he made his own portable, makeshift stove, which he uses wherever he might be, to enjoy green *sencha* tea on the spot with water drawn from lakes, rivers or wells. By hand he fashioned what he called a field mat as well, oil-paper on one side and cotton on the other, which serves him as a raincoat in foul weather and a mat to sleep on in fine, lying down or sitting up. He sets up his makeshift stove and brews a cup of tea, offering, "A cup of tea?" and so people call him Issen, Mr. Cup of Tea.

Still, he is a priest without fault, aside from his habit of, each time he goes somewhere, pulling out his brush and ink set just as he pleases, announcing himself as "Ifu," to write an absurd line of poetry in swift script on the doors or partitions of taverns or teashops, temple or

shrine railings, pillars, and the like, and his merciless bad-mouthing of the founder of the Nichiren Sect as a religious enemy.¹⁹

One day, unencumbered by companions, he wanders alone near Mukojima Mashirahige. Lowering a kettle on a thin rope into midstream from Ayase Bridge, he fills it with water. Kettle in hand, he chooses a sunny spot on Sekiya no Sato, lays out his mat and step by step sets up his makeshift stove, preparing his usual cup of tea all alone in the dry field. Savoring the perfectly in-season mandarin orange flowers with the tip of his tongue, he is overcome by a sweet feeling of transience and the wish for a companion. Wishing someone would come along to whom he might offer a cup, he looks up and down the path. But the only people who amble by are a horseman perhaps returning from Senju and a young country boy from Kasai. When, out-of-the-blue, waylaid and beckoned, the horseman fixes his gaze on the stomach of the horse he is leading, and the youth stares into his night soil buckets and both keep going in silence with perplexed faces.²⁰

Priest Issen also beckons to the local traveling candy seller. He even rises to give chase when the old candyman, thinking it just too peculiar, tries to escape, yelling, "Oh no, a fox-demon!" trips, and falls splendidly over his own feet in his haste to make a getaway.²¹ Hakuzosu is a tea-ceremony master with a sardonic smile.²²

The samurai is Otsuka Gennoshin, an Echizen clansman, with a fairly generous fief. The handsome youth accompanying him is neither of samurai birth nor is he Gennoshin's page. He is Takamatsu Seisaburo, the only child of a sword craftsman who had lived in the same province as, and been fondly patronized by Gennoshin. The boy was orphaned with no one to turn to, having lost both father and mother. Gennoshin himself assumed responsibility and raised the boy, who was without any other means of support, as his intimate and had the

youth accompany him on required trips to the capital.²³ It is said that in his heart Gennoshin yearned to find Seisaburo a good teacher in the capital city, not to teach him the art of sword-crafting, but because he was so very handsome to have him accepted by a Hosho, or perhaps Kanze school of noh drama. Whichever school, the boy would be well trained as a noh actor. Then, by and by, he would be able to maintain closeness with the boy under the patronage of his lord. As to this ——— let me say in advance that whether or not this same ambition filled Seisaburo's heart will not be fully revealed in the tapestry of circumstances which weave this story. But there are some indications that it is quite possible that it was only Gennoshin who desired it deeply.

Gennoshin was already good friends with Tea Master Priest Jippoan Issen, having practiced the same tea ceremony.²⁴ Every month, on the seventh day, he held a gathering that he called a discussion-group at his Jippoan hut at Akagi. Masters of words and linked-poetry, starting with samurai, attended, as well as monks, doctors, modern-day comic poets, artists, calligraphers and the like. If there were moxibustion healers who wove strange spells, there were also story and ballad chanters, and a sprinkling of actors.²⁵ These gatherings were said to be full days of harmonious tea sipping and conversation. All the guests were persons of extensive social connections. Without doubt he would be able to strike up an acquaintance with a noh school headmaster who might be accommodating. With this desire in his heart, hoping to introduce Seisaburo to all the guests, Gennoshin had been in attendance at the priest's Jippoan hermitage since morning on the scheduled day.

Everything was clean, the kettle clattered as the wind blew through the pine trees and the priest waited impatiently for his guests to arrive. But, on this very day only not one of his regular guests came to call and it was just Gennoshin and Seisaburo.

Noontime came and Jippoan served lunch. Conversation blossomed once more, but as there were still no other visitors and the fine weather turned overcast, the day dulled. Since Gennoshin had never seen the view of Oaraizeki nor distant Mejiro, Priest Issen decided to show them the vistas. He rolled up the aforementioned makeshift stove and his mat, put them in a carry-all and guided his two guests.

Stretching his back, the carry-all in one hand, the priest said,

Ah you can already hear the water."

3.

The visit to Takimotoin Fudo Temple. After viewing the big waterfall at Sekiguchi, the party of three presently crossed the Komadome Bridge and started up the grass embankment.

The water rippled without moving, a single sluggish current like a shimmer of hot air [six 点] it was so still one would never have imagined that in such a short distance from where they had just been this very stream would soon turn with a single thunderous blast into the falls of that big waterfall and eventually become the rushing Edo River. The flint the priest held in his hand was in no danger of being blown out by wind. Gennoshin had joined him in a smoke, and they strolled ——— as the priest habitually put it, "here and there."²⁶

By the by, the topic of discussion as they walk is Priest Sakuden's absence from the Fudo Temple. Whether he were a country monk or a priest, there was nothing peculiar about him being out on some temple business, but the truth was something welcome to their ears: the ascetic had taken it into his head to hold a discussion-group at his temple, in slavish imitation of Jippoan, in the afternoon on the

upcoming thirteenth. He had sent messengers to invite those far away, and had gone himself to invite those nearby. This was why he was not at home, or so they were told by the elderly, long-time temple manservant. Lively despite his advanced years, he wore wrinkled cotton-wadded clothing and spoke using antiquated expressions. That is number one.

[six 点] Having completed that topic, even as they asserted it was not mere curiosity, and actually none of their business, they spoke of how they had passed by no one else at all for almost a mile along the length of the river, from the large watermill by the Toshima Residence, past the big waterfall and the main temple hall, and how it was so forlorn. So forlorn that no one was visiting the temple, where even the grass had grown unexpectedly tall, the water looked dark and the temple alligator-mouth gong seemed to be staring open mouthed into an abyss in the dead-silent absence of any sign of life. So much so that when they went around to the back and encountered the old manservant he looked like a mummy withering in the garden sunlight.

During this season in a typical year there would already have been many devotees taking purification at the mouth of the waterfall. If there would have been men hauling small fish in nets, there would have been even more women washing clothes in the overflow of water from the mill, cottage caretakers joking and water splashing back and forth. When the priest asked the old man why, as one expected to see water plashing in a merry uproar of activity, the old man knit his eyebrows and explained. This was the main topic of discussion as they walked ——— from here to there.

At the top the falls separated into two, which they called Big Falls and Little Falls. One was about six feet, the other over three feet in width, and both some eight or nine feet high ——— of course, they had come precisely

because it was a sight to see, but the rain had just stopped that day and so the muddied water was fiercely turbulent and made a terrific racket. Because the water had swollen to double its usual volume, shaking the ground beneath their feet as they stood there, they could not stay long, so they said ——— just where the waterfall plunged some fifteen feet in the direction of the Fudo Temple are two underwater caves side by side. Under Big Falls was a rock platform called Big Mortar and under Little Falls was Little Mortar. Every year several people were dragged off them into the water and drowned. So, since antiquity, it had been called the Sekiguchi demon dwelling. [six 点] Everyone knew this, and feared and avoided the spot but with summer came swimmers and people chasing fireflies, and not discriminating between men or women, four or five people would undoubtedly lose their lives. However, beginning two years ago and last year as well, there had been a sudden increase in fatalities, up to eight or nine people per year. This year, horridly, six lives just since the water had turned warm. And, because it was said that you did not even have to go into the water, but simply walking along the river bank would make a person weak-kneed and dizzy, they suspected that early summer daylight might be mistaken for some illusory darkness and turn the scattered, churning waves into white mountain roses and sunflowers from the countryside and suddenly, at the outskirts of town, the Koishi tributary of the wide Edo River would resemble a trail through deep mountains.

"I did know some of this already. It's not as if I don't hear what people talk about," the Akagi priest once again unfurls his tongue to claim as the old man speaks.

"I also heard some very faint rumors along these lines, but it is a shock to be standing at the very spot, looking and listening," Gennoshin of Echizen Province, residing in Toki Habashi, said. [six 点] Evidently rumors of the people-

snatching caves were also more distant there than in Akagi, as he had gone out this morning wearing high clogs.

The youth walked silently as he looked at the water. Clad in yellowish-green *hakama* trousers and a crested black *montsuki* jacket, his single sword in a thin wax-sheath, he stood at the water's edge on the grassy bank beneath the Mejiro cliffs. He is beautiful, like some sprite escaped from the waterfall, or rather, the water-caves. His hair is lustrous, his skin white, and his thin face topped with eminent eyebrows.

4.

"The caves may be very large, but if they measured the river width, couldn't they block the caves up with rocks or something?" Gennoshin said. In response,

"No, no. They tried that already."

"Did they? But, well, was it done haphazardly, or by some organized group plan?"

"It is not a simple matter. Begging your pardon, sir, it was by order of the Shogun."

"Well then ——"

"You might have heard about this. Last year the authorities dismantled a Christian stockade at the foot of Kirishitan Slope near Koishi River. Great amounts of discarded stones from it were loaded into several wagons, carted past Dairokuten, then Honbojima where I used to live, all the way here to bury Big Mortar and Little Mortar. The authorities' plans were extensive indeed, it went on for three whole days. The pathways taken by the wagons were enormously lively, strung with tall lanterns erected on poles as though it were a festival. People came to sightsee in huge numbers. The village children waved banners and made quite

a stir, and all on their own wrote "*kappa* river-imp eradication" on their banners.²⁷ In those days I was still living at Ishikiribashi, and was asked by the neighborhood kids to write, just for fun, "*kappa* river-imp eradication" on their banners too. I could have used the characters for river-imp or river-demon or river-creature. None of the three phrasings would have looked strange. I chose to write "water-tiger eradication."²⁸

"I see."

"Anyway, we were talking about the power of the authorities. They buried the demon caves with so many discarded stones from the Christian stockade that they piled up to the water's surface. The water turned into rapids, the stones began to rattle, and the waves grew tall enough to tangle the hair on the heads of fathers, sons and grandsons. I saw it myself. Standing side by side with the ascetic on the veranda of the Fudo Temple, I was choked up with spontaneous tears, thinking that because of the authorities' benevolence, the demon cave would now be the gods' garden, with dances performed on the dance-stage at festival time. The next morning, and a second day, and then, the morning of the third day, the waves dissipated like a dream, and there was no sign of even a single stone. The two caves were exactly as before. The water turned quiet once more, like an indigo pot at dusk. But there was very little gossip about it through the provinces. It was as though the *kappa* had made fools of the authorities, so perhaps it makes sense that people restrained themselves.

I also moved to Akagi.

It seems as if killing people as they have been doing, the year before last and last year and again this year is the demon caves' way of, to put it plainly, venting their spite. What an outrageous thing. It seems awfully odd that everyone is not gossiping about it. I wonder why even the priest hasn't said anything about it when I ran into him now and then. Looking

around, I'm astonished at how desolate it is here."

He looked back at the Komadome Bridge they had quickly crossed, turning his head with an air as if he thought it was a magic horizontal cloud separating off a demon world. Gennoshin, following his gaze, also looked back.

"No, Your Reverence, I think it's like this. One can guess why just from what the old man temple caretaker said. —— People hesitate to speak up about the deaths undoubtedly [six 点] because those who praise the power of the Shogunal authorities, who are after all the ones who once blocked off the caves for them, would seem to correspond to ridiculing them out of the other side of their mouths, surely that is the reason why they refrain. But holding a discussion group in the middle of all this [six 点] the priest is quite the man of taste."

"He must have some reason for it [six 点]" Priest Issen said, looking concerned.

"Things being the way they are, there aren't any more pilgrimages. No one visits the temple. The priest must have had some topic in mind when he invited his close friends to the discussion-meeting. Maybe it is the matter of the demon he wants to discuss. A gathering of folks who are just priests and commoners probably won't help matters much. Would you consider coming too, if only as a diversion?"

"We'll attend, if we won't be intruding. Still, I doubt we can be of any use."

"No, no. Just the presence of someone wearing a sword would be immensely reassuring."

"Isn't that a shrine over there?" Seisaburo spoke for the first time. They were facing a cliff on the top of which one could see two large ginkgo trees standing powerfully side by side soaring up towards the sky, enclosing a flight of stone steps, and tucked inside the forest of trees, the roof of a little shrine littered with the

scattered blossoms of the past full-bloom red camellia.

"Ah, Camellia Shrine."

"The enshrined spirit?"

"Hachimangu."²⁹

"The tutelary deity." Seisaburo looked down, placing his palm to his forehead. Priest Issen's gaze lingered on Seisaburo's graceful figure in a daze which he suddenly shook off,

"Well. This hill goes up to Mejiro. [six 点] It's called Munatsuki Slope, and, as you can see, you might find it difficult wearing high clogs."³⁰

However, the difficulty for those wearing leather soles was not a match for that of those in clogs.

"Oh my!"

Priest Issen slipped, his hips lurching as though he were embracing the slope. "Oh my! It's slippery."

"It is slippery." Gennoshin stood fretfully.

"Umpf."

"Umpf." Seizing the moment, Priest Issen tucked up the hem of his trailing clothes as Gennoshin hitched up his hakama trousers. Thus prepared, they should have been able to go up step by step even if with difficulty, but on this one day when they accompanied Priest Issen,

"It's slippery."

So slippery that his legs twisted and forked, sliding as though he were an acrobat performing the feat of taking off his socks without using his hands, his leather soles unmanageable in the mud.

"It's slippery, very, very slippery. This is quite unusual." He turned bright red with perspiration. Seisaburo stood behind him ready to lend a hand to steady him if need be,

"Your Reverence, let me carry you piggyback."

"Don't joke," he smiled bitterly.

"I may be short, but I'm fat. And you're so slender! How ridiculous. What a joke!" He laughed and slipped again.

Gennoshin clung to a bamboo root on the hillside and looked back.

"It will be okay if he carries you."

"Huh."

"He may not look it, but he's tough and strong. [six 点] Buff from swimming in the Kuzuryu River rapids back home. He's quite a *kappa* river-imp. [six 点] "

"Just hearing you say that makes my back itch.³¹ [six 点] But how will you manage to carry me wearing those clogs?"

"It will be easy if I go barefoot." Seisaburo was unconcerned.

"Well, all right." He lifted his hand to accept Seisaburo's kindness, straightening and planting his two slipping, floundering legs. But,

"Your kindness is truly appreciated, yet, for a priest to be carried piggyback up this slope in broad daylight is extraordinary and it would be quite improper, in this world, for me to arrive in such a fashion at Mejiro's demon caves. No. Lord Gennoshin, I cannot excuse my awkwardness as a guide, but there is a byroad just to the side of this path. If we take that byroad, we will have no trouble and be able to proceed easily. Although it's bothersome, let me entreat you to return to the bottom of the slope once more."

Seisaburo had already slid down effortlessly.

Gennoshin, concerned that he might struggle for balance in vain, had just put his hand on his scabbard, ready to withdraw the blade, cut and fashion a bamboo walking stick or etcetera if asked. There was no need to debate the matter.

"It was slippery, wasn't it?"

"It was." They both exhaled audibly. They walked back about a third of a mile along the cliff by the same embankment to a tiny bridge, just a single step-long bridge spanning a small ditch. Because this is where the by-road is.

They cross over through a narrow entryway into a small quarter that widens. It is a gentle depression shaped like an abalone shell with red earth turned aglow by the strong sun, grassy here and there, sparse at the border, but beyond they can see a cliff thickly wooded with tall trees. Slipping through one would emerge at Mejirodai but there is a cluster of houses encircling the area, four to the left and three to the right.

It looked like a drawing of a seaside scene, the low little houses with thatched roofs were like clams puffing smoke. They were all either shacks of *hinin* or the residences of *eta*.³² One could also call them broken-down hovels. It was pitiful that even in such bright sunlight, the houses were in shadow both north and south, like dim gloomy holes. A little stream circled around by the back doors to beneath the eaves. It was not surplus drinking water, although it could easily have been used as such since it was drawn down little by little through conduits from the pure, gushing stream on Mejirodai. But for no apparent reason, two watermills, about an armspread wide, had been set up like a May banner decoration. Perhaps it was in imitation of the neighborhood watermill, which was said to have generated even Shogunal visits, to amuse the children or maybe for adults to enjoy, but whichever, like a fox or raccoon-dog's crude imitation of a

human being, the watermills exposed the pathetic sentiments of the people of that time. How sad and moving it was to watch them revolving, lonely in their solitude, like slowly grinding teeth.

But, it is here ——

Two or three iris flowers bloomed tremblingly in the pure water.

Purple with leaves of pale green and roots misted with a thick coat of yellow-gold pollen, the blossoms stood tall and beautiful. Suddenly the scene no longer looks like an abalone shell, but resembles the gorgeous array of seashells in the shell-contest games held in palace courtyards and the shacks are pedestals for jewels.³³

The huts were all silent in midday like mountain ascetics' hermitages.

Something stirred. Priest Issen faced the earthen floor of a hut where a tool for repairing cauldron-handles lay in the doorway, and spoke,

"Hello! We are passing through. [six 点] After the rain it is so slippery on Munatsuki Slope that we can't walk there. We are coming through the grounds here, forgive us, please let us pass through."

"Yes."

A voice answered from inside the dim earthen-floored hut, a purple shadow with a faint white face. [six 点] It looked like she had been hiding there shielded by her own house in shame and embarrassment upon seeing a priest and three people all of social standing. But it seemed that once Priest Issen greeted her so very politely, she no longer felt the need to hide.

"Yes, yes," she called out again in a youthful voice, a shamisen dropped like a little puppy with four white teats³⁴ beside the door frame,

and holding her straw hat in one hand as though forgotten, she slipped gracefully out towards the eaves beside the little stream, her fancy, upswept hair so glossy it looked like a shimmer of dewdrops. The minstrel girl was so captivating that she was more eye-opening lovely than the irises, her bare legs snowy against the scarlet silk crepe of her skirt.

"Please go ahead."

"Here we come!"

Gennoshin said reflexively.

"Here we come."

"Quietly, please [six 点] "

Her red lipstick reflected in the water, her pale, blue-spotted belt bending as she courteously bowed slightly as though seeing them off.

"Miss."

For some reason, Seisaburo suddenly went back. No sooner had he retraced his steps than he knelt low on the stream bank.

"Won't you give me that flower?"

Here was the elegance celebrated in the Song of Musashi Plain: here, one stalk with a single purple blossom, the minstrel girl, and there, separated by the narrow single-board bridge, he, conversely like a filler flower or a grounding flower to offset the other, vibrant in the water.³⁵

"Why, whatever [six 点] "

Apparently dazzled by the glare of the sun as he turned to look upwards, his eyelids suddenly painted with its rays, at that moment the youth wiped a single bead of sweat from his forehead.

"You don't have to ask me. Why, even if I said take it [six 点] it's blooming all on its own by

the water. How embarrassed I am that you should act as though it belonged to me —— oh, sir [six 点]

Noticing that the leaves and stem of the flower he is about to pluck are wavering in the stream, bowing and fluttering,

"Please, its better to take it from the roots. [six 点] no, your hand will get dirty. Wait a second please, I'll be right back."

Hurried, little steps take her inside past the shamisen, and back out carrying a thin-bladed kitchen knife.

With faintly trembling fingertips she places the iris stalk into Seisaburo's outstretched hand. That she has not cut short the long leaves shows the gentleness of a woman of compassion. The thin blade swiftly shaving the water's surface is like the shimmer of a young silvery fish, and a vermilion flash, quick as a pinky-finger pledge, is her sleeve lining fluttering like boiling blood.

"Here."

"It's okay."

Politely she held out a fresh hand towel over the stream so he could wipe his hands.

"Here." The offering,

"No."

He refused, his hand was not soiled. He rested it at the band of his *hakama* trousers, the flower in one hand.

The woman looked down, the white cloth to her mouth.

"Thank you." Seisaburo rose quickly and shifted the flower upside down to his other hand. Although the stem was not that long the purple against his patterned garments made it look as if it were rooted in the water.

Priest Issen and Gennoshin gazed blankly at the scene of their two blurry silhouettes as though peering into a far-off place, in a past of more than one hundred years ago, at the borders demarcating the world of humans and a world of enchantment.

Soon thereafter, a short distance from her house in front of the watermill near the exit, the picturesque minstrel girl was standing, shamisen at her side, straw hat pulled down low over her eyes, clad in a tightly belted everyday kimono, staring dreamily deep into the grove of trees.

It is the same girl.

And yet her beauty is to be expected. The beauty of the girl from the humble hut is praised from the Sekiguchi region to town, in manors and to Yamanote; she is a minstrel girl familiar to all, known as the glossy-haired [six 点] Omachi.

She looked at the water in sudden surprise.

What drew her gaze down to the water was her surprise at something that suddenly fell through the air from the top of the trees along the cliffs which led to Mejiro and landed to float in the stream.

She watched an iris blossom float in the steady downstream flow. Omachi stood on tiptoes in surprise as it floated past her feet. On the verge of being turned under in the current, instead, it drifted off to the watermill and made a single circle around it.

Flowers had just begun to bloom. Omachi knew which buds had opened. She had counted them. —— Even Eulalia grass was trimmed on the third day of the new moon. On this seventh day, not even a single ear of grain had fallen to float on the water yet.

She likely knew just who had dropped the floating iris from where he had been standing.

"Lord Seisaburo, she is a highly-polluted *eta*, you have been defiled."

"Yes, polluted and yet to make your debut in society."

As Gennoshin added, Seisaburo spontaneously let it drop from his hand to the water.

The iris circled the watermill again, and as it circled, it scattered water droplets like jewels.

Omachi watched steadily.

Deliberately, she stretched out her soft, supple white hand, but just as she reached out, it circled and escaped beyond her grasp, unreachable [six 点] just as one cannot retrieve small change which has been thrown from hand to ground without first bending down —— the colorfully dressed, tightly-belted minstrel girl, proud of her own slim figure, could not reach the flower from her present position. She repositioned herself, steadying her body with the top of the samisen's neck. At that very moment the watermill stopped and the third string snapped loudly.

With the string she caught up the roots of the iris, its leaves disheveled. She folded the flower in some tissue paper, placed it in her kimono collar deep between her breasts, and buried her chin together with the purple hue hidden at her heart. She slumped against a thin peach tree, despondent, and removing a string-case of the same shade of purple tucked in her *obi* sash, selected and extricated a new string, and wrapped it around the peg with a deft hand. Her eyebrows were dark beneath her straw hat. Beneath them tears fell onto the flower in rapid succession from her bright, expressive eyes, drops of moisture more radiant than scattered jewels.

Just then, was it an echo? The Oaraizeki waterfall boomed an extraordinary sound, a sound which seemed to penetrate deep underwater to the two, two caves. Surely it

must have reverberated through the forest all the way to Mejirodai.

The tops of the tall ginkgo trees at Camellia Hachiman Shrine were astir that day, as if evening crows were scattering sesame seeds as the sun sunk into Waseda Forest at dusk.

On the bank of the cliffside purification spot stood the dim figure of a woman. She pulled her *obi* sash weakly hand-over-hand to remove it, lifted her kimono hem and slipped the top off her sloping shoulders. Her body quite smoldered, quickly obscured in the reflection of the rapids, only her hips still clothed tightly, her pure snow-white skin melting from her knees up into the sprouting reeds, an iris flower hugged to her breasts which first floated buoyantly but then sank into the stream. The seventh day moon's wide-bladed sickle flashed, and as though beheaded, tragically, her neck, then the sidelocks of dark hair and the blossom now against her cheek sunk from sight. The waterfall was soundless, and like two full-length mirrors side by side, the people-stealing Big Mortar and Little Mortar rang repeatedly.

The Tale Of The Enchanted Sword

Part Two

1.

The seventeenth arrived.³⁶

It is said that seven people attended the meeting at the Takimoto Temple of the Takifudo on this day. All together there were eight, if you count the host, the resident temple caretaker, Priest Sakuden. Among the guests were the very same Priest Issen, Gennoshin and, accompanying him, Takamatsu Seisaburo.

After the promised tea presentation and carefully prepared luncheon the caretaker removed the trays and for some reason

disappeared for a while. Obviously this meant the host's seat sat empty, causing some unease which spread like a light mist dampening the varied conversations which had followed, and as though confined by thin curtains, the guests sat and looked at the garden in a studied manner, gazing out at the fields and said things such as, what lovely weather, taking up topics like today's temperature, yesterday's wind and the deepening of autumn, to the occasional sound of tapping ash-pots. Somebody tidily straightened the ash-pot covers. Smoke rose quietly like incense. A frog croaked somewhere, as though it were a signal for a master poet to add his line of poetry.³⁷ Gennoshin shifted his weight, and the sharp pleats in his *hakama* trousers rustled audibly.

Whereupon ——

"Pardon."

The head priest Sakuden spoke first and then opened the single door separating him from his guests, his brawny limbs clad in an outfit as extraordinary as that of an arhat.³⁸

It was what he was wearing that was so extraordinary. It was so outlandish that their eyes widened with astonishment, he was practically naked you could say, scantily clad only in a sleeveless undershirt and loincloth.

He was not at all crazy, as you might wonder. Once you listen and hear the reason you will all respect him. Because it is this resident priest's resolution to confront the people-drowning, life-stealing Little Mortar and Big Mortar which have not even left alone the purification spot which should lie pure and unsullied at Fudo Myoo's feet.³⁹

If you look closely you will understand. [six 点] He appeared to have prepared himself, painting both his undershirt and loincloth black with dark lacquer, doubling and knotting it in a wrestler's style, topped by a tight sash.⁴⁰

All of you have heard about, or seen yourselves, that this Fudo Temple is forlorn as a fox's cry in broad daylight. Some demon or spirit has selfishly and utterly tyrannized Buddha's law. [six 点] As the temple's head priest guardian, I am humiliated. I cannot leave things as they are, in reverence to the wrathful countenance of those who attend Fudo Myoo to the left and right, night and day. Therefore, I have devoted my attention to search for a solution. Today, first, I am resolved to dive into the water and carefully search the suspicious depths.

Let me tell you that I, your humble servant, know how to swim a little, whether you call it training or a skill, the one silly virtue of a fool. Mind you, I am not claiming that I will subjugate the demon or anything like that. What I really want to do is just verify the true character of that demon with my own eyes, and I think once I do so, I may find some solution.

The reason I used the tea ceremony as a pretext to invite you here is precisely because today I am resolved to search for the Big Mortar and Little Mortar demon. At first I did not intend to tell anyone and to rely on my own counsel only, but I thought about how that fearsome monster has not stopped at taking five, or seven lives, just like plucking and eating cucumbers, and it might steal mine too. If I were to lose my life like that, then while my corpse floated futilely on the water because I had botched things, that is, if I drowned, well, even a simpleton's matters must be resolved, but I would have wasted my life and died in vain. I prepared my body this way in the stripped-down style of a wandering samurai. —— I would deeply regret it if I were judged as some jerk only out to make a reputation for himself, putting on a smug face and pretending he had some mystical powers, but who lost his nerve to that fearsome demon. [six 点] But I am earnest, vexed with the contempt this demon shows for Fudo Myoo's virtue and power. As the temple guardian I just cannot leave things as they are. I request that all of you present

bear in mind the circumstances that oblige me to see the demon caves with my own eyes.

I am quite sincere. If you, my friends, think this is a bad, rash and dangerous idea, and advise me to abandon it, I will do so immediately. I am asking for your honest opinions. However, if even for an instant, you back me up and urge me to do my very best as guardian and wish me success, then I will be satisfied. [six 点]

"Actually, even though this is a gathering that I called a discussion-meeting, I purposely did not mention my intention to deal with the demon even as I sat facing Big Mortar and Little Mortar right before my very eyes all morning, because although you see me here in front of you absolutely determined, dressed in this crude outfit ready to plunge into the water, I have been thinking about abandoning my plan. Human weakness is no joke. To be honest, I haven't been able to eat or drink tea and now my heart is pounding.

He folded his bare arms, thick with hair from elbow to shoulder, and rubbed his forehead,

"I am ashamed to be such a coward." He bowed his head, hair bound up in a top-knot.

What a sight he was! This grim-faced, loincloth-clad, strapping man, kneeling bare-legged. A quick glance might mistake him for a bath-house attendant who had wandered in through the wrong door. He looked ridiculous and uncouth, but somehow his shame and sadness lent him an air both solemn and grave.

Everyone held their breath.

Suddenly one side of the tatami mat darkened in shadow, thin clouds stretched out over the forest on Mejiro cliff beyond the window, and Big Mortar echoed as if the sound had fallen from the clouds.

Priest Issen had expected as much in advance, having already debated the situation with

Gennoshin. He spread open his sleeves slowly and deliberately.

"What a great idea. I understand. To do nothing is an affront to Fudo Myoo's authority. Besides, it will honor the officials. They have already shown sincere benevolence towards the people when they tried to bury the caves, in spite of the enormous expense of that endeavor. But the hidden demon has only grown more voracious in the taking of lives. To see that demon with your own eyes is clearly a service which even surpasses being a matter for public record. It is an unequaled act of devotion, I believe. The authorities will surely be pleased too."

No one else present was as devoted to the Tokugawa Shogunate. Each time he said the words, "the authorities," he pressed the brazier edge tightly, fingertips and cheeks trembling.

"As the saying goes, the insects were buzzing, actually, I already expected such a plan at today's meeting,"

Cheeks quivering, he addressed Gennoshin who was seated next to him. Gennoshin nodded and grasped the hem of his *hakama* trousers.

"Indeed your bravery exceeds that of a samurai. I pray with all my heart for the success of this service you wish to provide."

"Now I am truly content."

Priest Sakuden bowed his top knot deeply again, and fairly bursting with bravery, his arms stretched out on their own across the tatami mat.

"Well then [six 点]"

"Your Reverence, please be careful."

This time, someone spoke from the seat farthest to the back in a quiet voice thick with emotion, a man of superior class and character, gracefully attired in a finely-patterned *haori*

jacket and textured weave *hakama*. His cool eyes, straight nose, long face and slightly short, rounded jawline uncannily resemble those of Seisaburo. Could they be brothers? But no, his expressive face looks young, but he is much older, so much that one might think that he and Seisaburo are father and son. But it is a purely coincidental resemblance between strangers. They are of no blood relation whatsoever, one being the orphaned son of a swordsmith in Koshi Province. ——— The other, well, he is the famous, top-ranked Yamato actor from the Eastern capital, Bando Hikosaburo, celebrated widely in books during his lifetime, and even now famous from colorful woodblock prints.⁴¹

——— Unfortunately I, compiler of this story, am ignorant about the theatrical world, and so I do not have detailed information about this generation of actors, but he relished fragrances, flowers and the tea ceremony, serious and playful linked-poetry as well as other elegant pastimes and practices, and lived secluded in a house in Yamanote. His pseudonym was, I am sure I heard, Takuya Takahiko. He was already quite good friends with Priest Issen from previous discussion meetings and this gathering had matched up perfectly with a hiatus from his kabuki performances.

All the distinctive poets and people in the arts of those days, such as Toyama Rankaku, Aoki Hitomu and Fukuo Seio frequented Issen's discussion groups.

If the truth be told, when I first encountered this story, I thought how disappointing! To go to the trouble of introducing this Yamato star and then leave it at that! I thought that if I invented something like a love-story between Hikosaburo and Omachi of the outcaste quarters, to go together with the eeriness of the Oaraizeki Big Mortar and Little Mortar, it would delight and please the ladies [six 点] But that is not how the story goes.

Still [six 点] please take pleasure in this brief

presentation of Hikosaburo.

Because, that day, the famous actor took a paintbrush and respectfully got down on his knees in front of the statue honoring Fudo Myoo, to make up Priest Sakuden's face like Cetaka's.⁴²

Preliminaries concluded, Priest Sakuden said there was one more thing he had prepared that he wanted them to see,

"Please come this way."

He led his guests down a short corridor towards the main temple hall. Although his repeated assertions of how ready he was suggested some exaggeration, Priest Sakuden was truly humble and revealed his deepest feelings, confessing that he felt deeply ashamed of the paucity of his inadequate resolution and bravery. As a result, his guests instead felt deeply supportive and assured him that he was not acting rashly. They could already hear the Oaraizeki water as they neared the end of the corridor. It did not sound like a river in early summer to anyone's ears. Even the green leaves growing along the path not even two feet, or nine, not quite ten steps away from the main temple hall somehow suggested distant depth.

The statue of Fudo Myoo stood some five feet tall, piercing eyes flashing, one hand gentle on his sword ——— flanked by his two disciples, Cetaka and Kimkara, gazing reverently at the incense stick which seemed about to burst into flames and billow black smoke even though it was not lit; the shrine was open.

Here, on the unkindled incense altar, the dust, cold as water, had been swept and a sacred dagger, sword-knot tied, had been laid in place.

"This is it."

As Priest Sakuden picked it up and turned back towards his guests, they all collapsed

backwards in a single wave as though pushed into their seats.

"This is a bit forward of me, in front of a samurai."

"Not at all."

As Gennoshin acknowledged the situation by returning his bow, Priest Sakuden shifted the dagger to his left hand, holding it sideways in readiness, but suddenly, as if he sensed he was being watched from behind, stood upright beholding the shrine.

"Oyakata."⁴³

He addressed Yamatoya,

"I have an earnest request."

"Of me?"

"Yes. This may sound ludicrous, but would you paint Fudo Myoo's face over mine? [six 点] Please forgive me for even asking."

He bowed low on his knees and laid both hands aslant on the shrine.

"I may suffer divine punishment for making such a rude request, but I beg for your protection. This is not something I planned, but it seems to me that suddenly it is clear. It won't matter what manifestation of demon it is so long as you lend me just one glare, then, come what may."

And, with a surge of courage unseen until now, he even slapped his knee.

"This sudden idea must be a sign from Fudo Myoo and not something you thought of on your own. What do you think, Oyakata?"

Priest Issen urged. Everyone looked hard at Hikosaburo. He looked down, silent.

"Mr. Yamatoya."

"Well."

Still he did not raise his face

"I am ashamed," was all he said.

Priest Issen responded,

"Why?"

"Your Reverence, it is a splendid idea but I am not equal to the task. I am just not skillful enough."

"No, no."

"No. Given the situation, please do not be so polite and speak empty praises. It is completely beyond my ability. ———"

Finally he raised his face and unfolded his arms.

"Still, the best plays are created backstage. I am sure I am unworthy of any attempt to draw a likeness right here under Fudo Myoo's gaze. But if you still insist, and if you will not despise my clumsiness as an artist, I will try to draw one of his disciples."

——— Hikosaburo has yet one more role. ———

That is, Yamatoya concentrated completely and using the available ink and cinnabar, shaded Priest Sakuden's face with Cetaka's singular countenance. Priest Sakuden, round-eyed, red-faced with white teeth, pale ears, and willful, billowing hair, rose, drew and held his naked sword firmly, and set off swiftly, practically skimming the coiffured ceiling, somehow, as though endowed with a giant's body, proceeded from the main temple hall's open side door ——— directly to the nearby stone steps ——— descended impatiently, crossed the Oaraizeki purification spot and as though dancing at a village festival, noisily splashed heavily into the water, pausing to glare at the demon-platforms. The guests behind him stood above and below

the stone steps. ——— Some righted and put back on the straw sandals they had taken off before, which were misshapen or twisted, fallen here or tumbled there, growing moldy and wet, in varying disarray and locations, while others stepped out dizzily in socks or bare feet. ——— Priest Sakuden looked back at the shoulders vying for space among the reeds, the chests by the platform and faces peeping from the open door, all eyes fixed on him, and bowed resolutely. No sooner had he put the dagger sideways in his mouth ——— then he stamped his feet at the two Oaraizeki waterfalls. His tangled hair was reflected in the water in the forest on the cliff, upside-down, countering his downturned face, his two eyes of immeasurable depth were a whirlpool in the clouds ——— as he turned to stare right into the eye of the mysterious demon, and made a sound of resolution.

He gesticulated to heaven, fingers high aloft his head, his face like that of a transformed magic bird of prey, wings widespread in attack, and plunged face-first into the whirlpool's center ———

"Where is he?"

Gennoshin asked from behind,

"At Little Mortar."

Priest Issen answered, now down in the reeds.

And then, in no time at all, Priest Sakuden popped back up buoyantly with a splash and turned his still-dripping face to say,

"It's shallow."

And put the dagger back in his mouth. He again voiced his resolution.

He closed his mouth, unable to simply stand by and do nothing. Nearby crows crowed and beat their wings noisily, but not from the waterside, rather from the topmost tree branches on the

cliff face, visible between the reeds.

A pale white light beamed from Big Mortar. Priest Sakuden disappeared from view and the sky clouded. Just then a figure could be seen standing, having threaded out towards the bank behind the little huts, more than a hundred yards away from the jumble of the majestic reverberation of the big watermill and the voices and other noises.

There was the wrinkled face of the elderly temple manservant, looking slightly ill at ease, by the backyard fence.

It was then.

Was Priest Issen's throat dry? Was he having trouble breathing? Or was it because even at a time like this he was so refined that he dipped his fingers into the water by the reeds' roots and wet his lips with a single scoop of water? Simultaneously Gennoshin, who had been staring into the whirlpool, impulsively unsheathed the sword at his side,

"What's that?"

He roared,

"Behave yourself!"

Because his companion, the youth standing at his side, had just then unexpectedly and carelessly stuck both hands inside his shirt sleeves. Given the circumstances, such comportment looked careless, inappropriate, and inexcusably self-indulgent.

"My Lord."

Hikosaburo's eyes were cool as he spoke, close behind Gennoshin on the platform,

"He's preparing to take his shirt off in case Priest Sakuden can't handle the situation. The young master is determined, I'm sure, to leap into the water to help the moment Priest Sakuden runs into trouble."

—— This youth, [six 点] earlier, when Priest Sakuden had left the main temple hall, dagger in hand, Gennoshin had addressed him half-jokingly,

"You're young. How about giving him a hand?"
To which he had responded bluntly,

"I'm terrified."

"What a coward."

Priest Sakuden, almost out the door, had said,

"Oh, you are just being modest. I know you're an excellent swimmer. Even if the water is shallow, in an unfamiliar place no trained swimmer goes in carelessly, but that is a basic rule of swimming."

And had nodded to the youth. ——

There was a battle-cry.

Resembling a wet straw-raincoat, draped with clinging water-grasses, all green, like a trussed poison dragon, or a floating, green, hanging bell, Priest Sakuden emerged —— unscathed from the depths of the demon abyss, glimmering in the evening light.

They looked and saw the dagger in his mouth glittering in all directions while he held high, up by his eyebrows, another blade, a short sword safeguarded by his half-closed eyes as he stood up.

When Priest Sakuden first went underwater, in-between life and death, he found Little Mortar to be shallower than he had expected, and as he looked around through the water nothing special caught his eye.

He surfaced to face Big Mortar and immediately went back in. What a surprise! As he sank down, for the first five or six feet the water was lukewarm. He sank gradually

deeper, to a depth of over three yards, what coldness! It felt like a vertical split of ice, making his arms and legs numb, his tongue shrivel and the dagger in his mouth freeze. Truly, the red lotus level of Hell must be like this, the cold pierced him through to the marrow.⁴⁴ [six 点] Ah, this is the cause, those people must have frozen to death, he surmised, his body was like a large stone-monkey as he sank deeper and deeper from the surface through water as deep as the sky is high.

[six 点] No sooner had he resigned himself to the end then he began to feel as though enveloped by plum blossoms from his toes up over his whole body. The water once again turned warm.

Pleasant, delightful, gentle like a hot spring, is a good description of how it felt. In addition, he felt rapturously rejuvenated, as if caressed softly and gently for about the next six to seven yards.

There at the bottom was a wide, flat rock surface as large as some fifteen tatami mats, crystalline as though spread with silver, and it suddenly brightened. But when he tried to stand on the rock surface he slipped as though he had been shoved. Green moss, algae, water-grasses and katsura trees grew to surprisingly and immeasurably tall heights in a dense green so still and immobile that not even one leaf moved, so extraordinary it is indescribable.⁴⁵ The area he had come to search, just beneath the Oaraizeki waterfall, was shaped like he had run up against a cliff with a hollow, horizontal cave that looked exactly as if someone had placed a carved Chinese chair there. And, on the seat of that chair was a velvet mound of moss of the same green, and nestled in its soft, thick core, there was something shining radiantly.

It is said that Priest Sakuden's descent into the depths, his attempt to plant his feet on the silvery rock-surface, and his tumbling face-down all happened almost simultaneously. It

was as though a baby tortoise with slow, unstable legs turned into a swift catfish. His sharp eyes scanned, then focused on something gleaming. He saw a single, dazzlingly bright, short sword, set in place precisely as though someone had put it there.

It seems as though here and there in the interior of the cave were fissures through which the water gushed in. There were clusters of sparkling, beautiful purple gemstones which functioned to refract the extraordinary brightness, sharpness and fine-tempering of the sword's blade and, it is said, caused strange flowers to bloom at the base and tips of the water grasses.

—— I imagine that later on this also irrevocably altered Seisaburo's future, when he dove down to that spot he must have mistaken the growths of gem-scattering purple in the depths of Big Mortar for iris blossoms. But that came later ——

Priest Sakuden was instantly convinced that the sword was the altered manifestation of the true body of the evil spirit; the manifestation in which the demon had killed. With dragon-capturing vigor he seized the hilt without considering the consequences, struck the rock and surged upwards —— but in his mind what was making the sea grasses suddenly undulate in the stirred-up water was a venomous snake chasing him from behind. When he surfaced he showed none of the fearsomeness he had when he descended. His buttocks and sides were tickled by the water grass stalks that were twined around him. When he realized he was at the surface, he felt as though his body had been severed in half. According to those who saw him, the expression on his face once he reached the Edo River upper reaches had nothing vigorous nor valorous to it, and his body went limp, and his legs actually gave way beneath him in the shallow water, so they say.

—— I imagine you want me to get on with the

story.

Hanbee, owner of the watermill operations hut came running. The locality's well-known long-time resident, Magobe also arrived, having heard the news. That evening —— the one-foot one-inch long, marvelous sword of ice, unadulterated by even a speck of dust —— was laid by the altar in the main temple hall, into which flowed a throng of closely-packed people, including those from the gathering. [six 点] Being that it was a neighborhood event, Hanbee the watermill operator contributed soy-simmered foods, sake, dried cuttlefish and other treats. It was as lively as a festival eve. Women and children gathered too. As the women no doubt confessed in confidence, they came in spite of the eerie jeweled-sword —— because Hikosaburo was there.

Understandably, there were no large paper lanterns or long rows of bright votive lights, but candles and tapers. Fudo Myoo's eyes shone with an uncanny luster in the gloomy dimness as the sword wrested from the demon cave still dripped water. Even finned fish leap back into the water if they are close enough. How much more likely was it that the awful sword might any moment take flight swiftly to cut through the air like a throwing-knife, and so in spite of the bright moon, timid people recoiled, hiding behind trees as shields, keeping their distance in wide circles. Even inside the temple not one person drew close to look at the hilt. Thoughtful people, even if not cowardly, probably sensed that this sword should not be carelessly held.

Only the shriveled shadow of the caretaker's elderly manservant, Heihachi, loomed large as he now and then unhurriedly took care of business at the temple stand. In the silence which persisted in spite of the crowds, the mood was reminiscent of that at the Tamba Province shrine of the monkey god, which encircles a sacrificial altar.⁴⁶

Those assembled discussed the situation. It was

decided that early the following morning Priest Sakuden would safeguard the sword and leave to make a report to the temple headquarters. Everyone went home his separate way through the shadows of the moon and water and forest. The corner lattice-work gate, littered with fallen leaves, closed with a lonely squeak just as soon as the dispersing crowd left. [six 点] The reeds were quiet, the cliffs dark, and the river ran the moon. The lamps went out.

The sword secured in the Fudo shrine, Priest Sakuden lowered the latch-lock with precision and went to sleep in his chambers.

The next morning.

Although Priest Sakuden habitually performed early morning silent sutra readings, he thought he would open the shrine first and take a look at the sword as well. He unlocked the door quietly with the key he himself had safeguarded, looked inside and oh! [six 点] the sword, which had dazzled even the eyes of those who worshiped Fudo Myoo, was nowhere to be seen. There was no trace of it.

"Oh, my!"

He exclaimed. As his head cleared after the initial shock, he could no longer recall clearly whether he had locked the latch the previous night, or unlocked it that morning with his key. But, even though he kept on standing, kneeling, searching, the fact was that the sword was gone.

Taken aback, he turned around and around, and looked some more, and he glanced bashfully at Disciple Cetaka whose face he had borrowed the previous day. Ashamed, he felt as though Cetaka's white teeth were exposed in a wry smile. Priest Sakuden stroked and patted his own face two, three times, in a daze.

"Heihachi! Heihachi!"

[six 点] His voice clamored loudly for the

elderly manservant.

"Yes, yes."

Hearing an answer from the priest's quarter, in his impatience Priest Sakuden ran out into the narrow corridor just as Heihachi came in and they collided, both of them rendered motionless by the impact for a moment.

"Heihachi!"

"Your Reverence."

"The sword is gone, the sword, the treasured sword is missing!"

As they set out to search the entire environs, temple, caretaker's cottage, priest's quarters, Heihachi assessed the situation consummately
——

"Please think about it. The sword was placed under lock in Fudo Myoo's shrine. But now it's gone. It is illogical to suppose that it might be behind a stump, in a corner or on some shelf."

"Well, [six 点] that does make sense."

Priest Sakuden contemplated briefly, and from then until after two o'clock tended to incense at the altar.

Presently it was time [six 点] Priest Sakuden donned the same barely dried undershirt, doubled the loincloth, and tied the sash tightly. This time he did not paint his face, but tied a white cloth towel about his head, knotted in the back.

Resolutely, he leapt into Big Mortar, searched the abyss, and strangely, in the same place there sat the sword, shining brightly like a masterpiece painting sitting on the floor. It was like a dream.

He took it without any trouble and swam to the surface.

"That's it. Oh, how eerie!"

Heihachi had been waiting expectantly, thinking it probably would turn out so. He paled for the first time, retracted his neck which had been craned in waiting, and remained squatting in the reeds at the water's edge by Priest Sakuden's feet as he brushed the water off his body.

That night Priest Sakuden made a strong paper rope, passed it through a hole in the hilt of the underwater sword, wrapped the other end around and through a gap in Fudo Myoo's pedestal, doubled and tied it securely, closed the door resolutely and completely, lowered the lock firmly, and passed an uneasy night, thinking, surely it could not happen again. The next morning ———

"Great Buddha Fudo Myoo," he chanted.

He opened the shrine. There was no sign of it! [six 点] The paper rope had been too weak. It lay, unwound and discarded beneath the dais. "Heihachi, Hei, Hei!"

"Yes,"

Heihachi's wrinkled face already poked out quietly from the staff doorway as he peered, back bent, with an air of trepidation. [six 点]

"Precisely [six 点] Your Reverence."

Ungraced by visitors even during the day, the shrine was more forlorn than an abandoned house. Starting two years ago, spanning last year and especially this year, the riverbank by the Takimoto Temple, avoided by pilgrims because the two Mortars had claimed so many lives, was becoming so fearsome a place that people even hesitated to gossip about it in secret. The cave demon was revealing itself more and more. [six 点] Whether it took its manifestation as a *kawaushi* river-bull or *kawataro* river-creature or a *mizuguma* water-bear, a creature whose very name inspired

terror, once it was removed from the abyss and confined inside the Fudo Temple, in other words, subjugated, people should have been reassured but ——— it was an inanimate blade, moreover a very sharp one, and one that flew freely through midair on its own volition, [six 点] in order to return to the demon cave by itself it must have flown through the air [six 点] and they could not help jumping in fear merely at the sight of a razor dropped by the roadside.

And it happened not only once nor twice.

So, gossip spread through the neighborhood and people avoided the area around the watermill operations hut. Parents went so far as to forbid their children to run outdoors to follow the drum of the candyman.

It was not a strong white-feathered arrow piercing a roof-ridge.⁴⁷ Because this arrow had already left the bowstring and was dancing through midair, having chosen its mark.

Frogs hid and bats did not fly. The day was bright but damp. Someone was on the bank by the Takimoto Temple, next to the hot and hazy, blurry-white watermill operations hut.

Before dusk on this third day, it was the youth in forelocks, attired in a black quilted *kosode* jacket and fine lightweight *hakama* trousers, walking quietly, sleeves linked, head down. He was stunningly handsome.

Each step he took along the path was noiseless, buoyant and light in his leather-soled sandals, eyes riveted on something to one side, clothes fluttering even through still reeds. He walked as if to hide himself, but if he concealed the discreet fragrance of his clothing, their color brightened; if he hid the color, the fragrance was enhanced like, for example, the unnoticed scattering of full-bloom peach or cherry blossoms when there is no wind. How sad and moving! It made one suspect the demon-sword had hit its target, and his was the roving of a manipulated sacrificial victim. [six 点] And yet,

he did not seem to find it unpleasant.

All those mesmerized appear so. Takamatsu Seisaburo seemed to have been enchanted by something and found his way there in a daze.

Stealthily he entered the environs.

A small flower vase stood encased in tile next to the washbasin, apparently potted with cayenne pepper rather than poppy, but what was blooming? Indeed! He saw there was no sign of irises blooming in the holy water basin. A bit regretfully, he stood dreamily, gazing upwards, forelocks loose over his forehead. Still, he went forward serenely, dropped to one knee facing the flower stand, his sword sheath elongated beside him as he elegantly tied up his crested sleeve. He lifted one white hand to the lattice door. It was locked from the inside but a loose joint left a gap of some three inches.

He peeped through it, then drew himself up with a start and retreated. If it had been Goddess Sarasvati in her female manifestation at that shrine, he might have been blinded on the spot.⁴⁸

In the haze from the incense smoke that hung like scented black gauze, her hips partly obscured by the collection box, was the mysterious, white, nude figure of a seated woman, her bare, translucent back turned, sloping shoulders gleaming like reflecting snow, her upswept hair glossy in her Shimada hairdo. At the unexpected noise, she absentmindedly rose, forelocks flouncing. She held both hands to cover her breasts, accentuated by the crimson sash encircling her narrow waist. Caught off guard, she pressed both round arms close to her sides, one cheek turned in silhouette, and glanced indirectly back at him. In the line of her nose and her long eyebrows, touched with a faint blush, was something that recalled a previous world.

Seisaburo retreated, retreated and retreated,

and stood there trembling.

And then, inside the door, there was not even the faintest breath of anything at all.

Surely it could not be. [six 点] Was it a phantom? A dream? Seisaburo felt as though he were suddenly returning to his senses. The woman's figure faded as the day darkened slightly all around him and he saw that dusk was at hand.

Someone else was watching in the twilight. The elderly manservant's wrinkled face peered out from inside the gate by the sparse bamboo hedge bordering the corridor which ran beside the main temple.

The youth's eyes wandered dreamily and suddenly met with the old man's. He saw a hand extended from the shadows like a large snail, repeatedly motioning him to come towards the outer edge of the hedge, like a bewitched loafah.

The one who called, come here, come here, beckoned sharply with his eyes, like so.

Maybe because Seisaburo understood this was Heihachi's way of informing him that he was peering into some dreadful danger as he stood there, he started with fear and as though pulled in by a vortex, suddenly slipped through the haze-shrouded gate.

"Heihachi."

Heihachi opened his sleeves in a protective circle to meet him even as he retreated a step.

"Oh, it's Mr. Otsuka's young companion."

"Unfortunately Priest Sakuden is not here, [six 点] apparently because of the sword."

He spoke energetically, like Iron-staff Li, showing no sign of feebleness or age.⁴⁹ "I spoke with Priest Sakuden and suggested that since the sword had already flown back underwater

twice it was not likely to be subdued by human hands, and asked him to please leave it where it lay. But he ignored me. He said, it is no great feat, as I have swum back safely. In the first place he had spent a month or two deliberating that dive before he came to the determination to go so far as to search Big Mortar [six 点] and subsequently held his tea and discussion gathering to bid farewell in private to his dear friends. In spite of having gone that far, it still returned after he took it. How could I just assent, regarding it as though he had merely announced he were going for a stroll to Mii Temple? Priest Sakuden assured me it was not for selfishness nor his reputation. He said, how could I just leave it there and not go for it again, after I claimed I would sever the root of the evil that has killed so many?

—— That was, sir, this morning. ——

As I told you, two nights ago, and last night again, twice, he took the sword. What do you think happened this morning? Priest Sakuden knows what it's like down there and he dove down again this morning. [six 点] Just think how amazing he is. This was the third time he went after that powerful demon sword, heedless of the danger. Who knows what diabolical repercussions might have followed?

Oddly enough, Priest Sakuden grabbed the sword and swam back safely. Extraordinary as it sounds, this time too, apparently, the sword lay deep below the rock in the very same spot, just as if someone had brought it there and left it. Yet even this third time all went well beginning to end, and Priest Sakuden took it in hand. But he was perplexed as to where to put the damned thing. If he took it that same day to the temple authorities, he would have to leave immediately. Anyway, it being a dreadful blade capable of taking wing and flying, what if, due to some unknown circumstances, something should happen along the way? How terrible if some passerby were injured. His mood

darkened as he worried. Naturally. It appeared more and more likely that Priest Sakuden would leave it locked in the temple again, and go empty-handed to discuss the sword with the temple authorities. They might choose to come inspect the sword, or ask him to bring it to them, saying not to worry about the trip there. [six 点] At any rate, he would seek their opinion [six 点] so Priest Sakuden left. That's why he is not here."

"Well then, where's the sword?"

Seisaburo asked.

"Indeed. [six 点] A sword which can fly even when stored, locked and left inside a shrine, could not be held in the caretaker's cottage, or the priest's quarters, could it? Heihachi, I leave it in your hands until I return. [six 点] No joke, Priest Sakuden said it seriously, quite to my surprise. If I may,"

He scratched his head.

"He was not joking. —— It seemed that we had no choice but to ask for Fudo Myoo's help. Although we tied the sword to the dais the previous night the demon must have spied an opening. [six 点] So, he said, it's sacrilegious, but let's borrow part of Fudo Myoo's body. Maybe we can ward it off if we bind the sword to Fudo Myoo, even just to his feet or hands. Let's use his arm. [six 点] Let's put it vertically, like so, and tie it to Fudo Myoo's sword. One would expect to immobilize it that way —— that's how I understood it. —— Anyway, it's a *kappa* river-demon. [six 点] Demon-transformed foxes, raccoon-dogs, old cats and the like, even though they have special magic powers, are easily subjugated by arrows and bullets, and when they die, their true forms are revealed. But I haven't heard any such ancient stories about *kappa* river-demons or *tengu* mountain-devils dying.⁵⁰ There's no subjugating them. Priests, mountain-ascetics, blind ascetic minstrels and, [six 点] forgive me for saying this in front of you, but, handsome young boys

as well are the specialties of *tengu* mountain-devils. They entice young, hot-blooded boys with carp, catfish, eels, and the like [six 点] reel in women with Nishiri sashes or gold hairpins, and they fish for children by offering them goldfish. Such are the skills of *kappa* river-demons. Since this one's opponent is Priest Sakuden, it contrived a treasure, a sacred sword. Tied to Fudo Myoo's sword, the guardian spirit of the damnable Big Mortar, this time, I wonder whether it will even bat an eye? [six 点] Anyway, because it would touch the statue, Priest Sakuden used new hemp given him as a gift from his home village, the village across the river, purified it at the incense stand, and had me twist it round and round to a thickness approximately twice that of a kite string, and doubled it, trebled it, and tied it to the sword, locked the padlock firmly and told me, guard the temple while I'm gone, Heihachi. He left at about eight o'clock.

But I've been feeling so very alone since he left. Although I said it would be okay, my opponent being what it is, I don't know what might happen or when, and I worry, and then it seems terribly quiet. I've grown accustomed to hearing the ringing of the Big Mortar and Little Mortar morning and night, but every now and then it booms like distant thunder, and I think, ah, that's it. It's really awful."

Seisaburo had been listening, seated on the veranda off the parlor where the discussion-meeting had been held.

"Then at this moment the sword is in the shrine?"

"Yes, it is. [six 点] It should be, [six 点] that is."

He made a face as though he were about to sneeze and rubbed his nose roughly.

"Yes, it should."

For some reason, Seisaburo had been making completely incongruous comments, —— he

had been gazing dreamily at Mejiro Cliff through the open back parlor window the whole time he had been listening. In fact, throughout the tea discussion meeting on the seventeenth he had been staring in that direction so absently and dreamily that it seemed as if something was wrong.

The top of the big ginkgo tree at Camellia Hachiman Shrine was shrouded in the evening haze, the tips of its uppermost branches looked like a ship's mast plowing through clouds.

As though he had just remembered it,

"Heihachi, the truth is, I came to take a look."

"At what? The sword?"

"Which evening was it, at that time, I wanted to take it in my hands and see the tempering, the reflector, the metallic color. But older people were there, and lots of people for whom it would be far more appropriate. It would look like I had shoved my way forward, given that I am just a young fellow, and so in the end I refrained. Today I told Gennoshin about it and asked him to give me some time off. He scowled and his mood darkened. [six 点] This is beside the point, but I am the son of a swordsmith, and even though I would like to learn my father's craft, Gennoshin has said I shall be a noh actor —— he was not happy.

But because it is such a mysterious sword, he also wanted to know about its workmanship, out of curiosity. [six 点] He seemed to think that, even if it was just through mimicry, I had some connection with the art and so might be able to discern what was so special about it, so he was not completely averse to the idea. He gave me permission to come have a look. What a shame it is already twilight."

"You say it was hard to get out but it seems reasonable to me, after all, he must have thought it was already too dark for a visit to the temple."

"No. That is, [six 点] I left the house earlier. But I loitered somewhat on the way."

He said honestly. He looked a bit tired. What Seisaburo was concealing was the fact that he had set out for the Mejiro Cliff outcaste quarter before heading for the shrine. Ashamed to have anyone, even if it were just the Fudo Temple priest, figure out what his intentions were, he had not taken the route that he knew through here, but gone towards the blooming iris flowers and Mejirodai, which he remembered was on the way back from the outcaste quarter. As he wandered from Kobinata, asking repeatedly for directions to the ——— Mejiro byroad, Mejiro byroad ——— he had roved in circles as if blown here and there by the wind. Finally, he tired of asking, gave up, and circled back on his own to the Fudo Temple.

Later, Seisaburo must have thought regretfully that if he had only asked for Camellia Hachiman Shrine he would have soon found it. When the heart is darkened in the throes of passion it is really nothing to be lost on some path.

"Well, since it is locked and Priest Sakuden's gone, I can't see it, can I."

"No, that's not a problem. ——— Here is the key to the shrine,"

From his chest pocket *kimono* fold ———

"Priest Sakuden entrusted me with the key. [six 点] Actually, I'm supposed to open up the shrine and take a look two, three times during his absence, that's my job as caretaker, but it's so creepy that in truth I haven't gone near it. [six 点] But you have made me feel courageous, because even though you know all about the demon, you still want to have a look. I can show you, if I can be of service at long last, so you can go and take a look at it."

"Please [six 点]"

"The corridor is already dark. Wait a minute, I'll get a light."

Heihachi took a lantern and lit it, feeling it too eerie to return alone to the main temple where there were plenty of candles.

Seisaburo coughed two stifled coughs.

Because he glimpsed the white figure of a beautiful woman who should not be passed by unnoticed, or had it been an illusion?

"Oh!"

Heihachi stood on tiptoes in front of Seisaburo in the corridor.

"Oh dear!"

"What is it, Heihachi?"

"I felt a chill. Maybe the floorboards are wet."

"No."

"Oh dear!"

He squatted down as though spear-fishing and the taper fluttered,

"You're wearing socks so you can't tell, but I definitely feel a chill."

Heihachi looked honestly puzzled,

"At my age I shouldn't ask this, but won't you please take the candle and go first?"

He retreated a step.

"I wouldn't be surprised if it's a badger or fox-type. I used to gamble when I was young but." Seisaburo heard him mutter as he took the lead and entered the main temple quietly, shielding the taper with his sleeve. The color of his sleeve was made ever more elegant by the torchlight.

He stood in front of the collection box, then

looked down and suddenly knelt.

In surprise,

"Young Master!"

"It is a little wet here."

"Oh, no, the sword is gone!"

Heihachi cried in consternation. The taper in Seisaburo's hand drops to the floor and spins momentarily like a goldfish swimming.

Suddenly the door to the purification spot is open in a gust of night-wind.

Just as Seisaburo knelt on one knee, shoulder diagonal to the dais, facing the door which resembled a noh stage side-door, there, moving chillingly through the reeds beneath him was a woman, her skin pure white like a white goose.⁵¹

By the time he exclaimed in response, it was already too late, and like the vanishing trace of a barely-glimpsed azalea, her colored, layered skirts seemed to disappear as they scattered hem first to the water and then sank quickly into Big Mortar.

Thrusting both swords forward in their sheaths Seisaburo raced down to Big Mortar, and stripped off his clothing in a flash. He stood tall, the blood pumping through his body making a pattern like a vermillion tattoo on his white skin.

The full moon separates from the forest below.

To his eyes the colorful clothing entangled in the reeds on the opposite side are blooming iris flowers in disarray.

"Oh."

Thinner than her all-but-closed eyes, [six 点] is the voice of the glossy-haired Omachi.

She trembles slightly as she speaks. Omachi is lying face upturned across Heihachi's lap. She is wearing Seisaburo's crested kimono over her chest, wrapped up to her lips with the hem.

By the sleeve, next to her shoulder, the handsome young man is naked.

Heihachi feels like he is dreaming.

"It's alright, it's alright. You are in Fudo Myoo's presence. Don't be afraid, not even a tiny bit. I know you're soaked and it must feel terrible but please be strong. Miss, wait until after your head clears before worrying about taking care of such things. There, there. I will talk to you with my eyes shut, okay?"

"Yes,"

Again she closes her eyes dizzily for a moment.

"Mister, what, what, what will I do?" she addressed Heihachi.

"Don't worry, please, look! Even your hairstyle has survived. Soaked through and through and fallen sideways, but still a Shimada. Cheer up. [six 点] Please be strong."

"Please be strong Miss, be strong."

"Yes, oh,"

She said, trembling frightfully,

"Oh, sir."

"Don't be ashamed, don't be ashamed, you mustn't feel like that. This person, this young man rescued you from Big Mortar. There is nothing to be ashamed about. You are here with the father of life, the gods, Disciple Kimkara, not ordinary human beings!"

As though she could not hear his voice, her mind and body completely enraptured by Seisaburo's eyes, her eyes eluded her control and she feasted her eyelids staring straight at

him.

"Sir, your hand? On this body?"

"Quietly, quietly," Heihachi spoke to restrain her. As if to soothe her anguished heart.

"If you went so far as to touch my body, how awful, I can never apologize enough, because it was I who borrowed the sword taken from underwater. Twice, three times, as many as three times."

Heihachi groaned.

"You, sir, probably know that I am a polluted woman who lives nearby. People of society say that when my people get near water muddies and lights grow dim. ——— I wanted to wash away my pollution, to cleanse the blood in my veins. [six 点] Every day, every night, I could not sleep well, couldn't sleep, couldn't sleep, still awake deep into the middle of the night, so I would cleanse myself with holy water and pray. Then I heard about the sword taken from underwater and enclosed inside Fudo Myoo's shrine, and as if some spirit had spoken to me by my pillow in a dream, I thought of Yuten-sama who hid himself in a Narita temple and received divine favor ———⁵²

Heihachi merely nodded, as though completely captivated.

"His desire to memorize the sutra was so powerful that he put a sword in his mouth and vomited out the bad blood. Thinking that I might also be granted what I yearned for so deeply if I slashed open my own breast to cleanse my filthy blood, I sneaked into the main temple. Please forgive me. I opened the lock just like a thief. My parents are tinkers and so I did it by imitating what I'd seen them do. I held the sword by my sleeve, opened my collar and held the blade motionless, right here. I felt so hot, as if my blood were boiling. I thought it was a signal that I would not again meet the one I love, blood uncontaminated, cooled and

purified. [six 点] I had abstained from salt and tea, but my parents would not let me fast, so, I could at least purify myself in the water. I hugged the sword, and submerged myself, thinking I would now, any moment, here, cut, rend, slash myself, but my heart was racing more than my hand. There was someone I wanted to see one more time, this was my lingering attachment to life. So I could neither stab nor slash. Nor could I give up, and say I couldn't do it, thinking that I would, any moment, slash myself, slice open and cleanse my blood, that I couldn't stand it for even another minute, but if I stabbed myself, I would die, and I couldn't stand that either. So I dropped the sword into the water.

Last night, and two nights ago, twice, I did the same thing with the same intention.

Then I had no expectations [six 点] I thought I would see you, sir, only one time in my life, but the second time. [six 点] It felt like I had been blind and opened my eyes when I looked up to behold your face."

Heihachi stared blankly at Seisaburo's face.

"I have no more regrets. I would be ashamed to wish for more. To long for more would bring divine retribution [six 点]"

"So, you fled out to Big Mortar and flung yourself in. Why would anyone do such a thing? Why? What for?"

Heihachi said as though talking to himself, holding her with one hand over her chest, hugging her shoulder, and supporting her under the nape of her neck with the other. Her wet hair had slid down to pillow itself on Seisaburo's lap.

Heihachi got up and draped Seisaburo's short *hanten* jacket over his white shoulders from behind.

"But there is something else, you have come to

concoct some potion to warm the heart!"

Heihachi, one time dapper gambler, had fully grasped the situation, and understood. He left.

Omachi, soft as wet cotton, went limp. [six 点] She seemed faint, speaking apparently had sapped all her energy.

Did she suddenly realize it? She cringed.

"Oh, sir!"

"Please be calm."

"Your body has been polluted!"

"Nonsense,"

Seisaburo said gallantly with conviction.

"No. You threw away that iris so quickly!" The tears in her staring eyes look, although not quite purple, like scattered red drops of dew.

The youth spontaneously hugged her shoulders firmly.

"That was the biggest mistake in Takamatsu Seisaburo's life ——— please, forgive me," he said resolutely.

"Do you mean that?"

"It is I who cherish you [six 点] you are so dear to me, I have longed for you, ever since then I have not been able to sleep. It is I who love you."

He drew close and Omachi kissed his cheek.

"Let me stay by your side, as your maid!"

"What?"

"Then at least as your mistress."

"No, as a couple, as my wife. My partner."

"How happy I am. [six 点] At the brink of

death!"

As she gazed up, her loosened hair brushed against the youth's chest, and the heaving of her chest through his short *hanten* jacket seemed labored enough to shake the world. But she pulled herself together to smile,

How old are you?"

"Seventeen."

Omachi blushed,

"My,"

"And you?"

Her face was like the petal of a white lotus flower as she turned her cheek and averted her eyes.

"Twenty [six 点] twenty-one [six 点] ah, don't look at me, how embarrassed I am [six 点] Young Master. How adorable you are, looking so much younger than I thought before."

She said. Her pupils slid upwards under open eyelashes.

"Are you in pain?"

"[six 点] No."

Her voice faded away even as she answered.

"What's wrong?"

"Here, it hurts a little, here."

Her ivory white arm trembles as she bends it to show him, pointing from above the sleeve at her breast, her fingernails tipped with red polish, a white fish's salty-blood.

"Before, when I threw myself in the water, I stabbed myself as I had resolved. Things seemed so completely impossible that I had no more regrets. [six 点] That I have been able to

talk, until now, is a divine favor from Fudo Myoo. Considering what I have been so devoted to in purpose, your words are so comforting, I feel so warm and relaxed, as though my body were melting. [six 点] Its gushing [six 点] my blood is flowing [six 点] please step back, you'll be polluted. Polluted, polluted with filthy *eta*, *hinin* blood." The cloth, folded down and back, there, beneath her breast, gem-pure crimson liquid.

She had flung herself into the Big Mortar abyss, where the light of the full moon on the translucent, sparkling water was phantasmagoric, glittering on the silver-white platform, staining her underskirt a coral hue against the deep jade-green of the cave. She had collapsed on the demon-chair, hugging the sword to her chest. When Seisaburo drew close, the thickening, coagulated bluish blood on her gem-like nipple was a single purple iris blossom in Seisaburo's eyes.

"What is polluted? [six 点] As to your blood,"

Seisaburo gathered Omachi tightly in his arms, even as she writhed in agony, hands linked, and while her lips were still rosy with life, drank the blood pouring from her breast in huge gulp after gulp.

When she fell limply to her knees he took the blade of the sword which shone like icy snow vertically into his mouth and sucked the dried blood from its tip.

As he held the sword in his mouth Seisaburo learned with his lips and tongue the smell, [six 点] the shining reflector, the ornamentation, the fine tempering and metallic color, the deep knowledge of the artisanship of the sword. [six 点]

In other words, the deep-water cave was a workshop, the greenhouse a bellows and the chair a workbench, where the condition of the heat of the water which refracted the purple gems, or that of the fire of her gushing blood,

trained the lover, both hue and heart. Was it the teachings of a god or a demon's artistry that made him into the very finest swordsmith of his time.

To his sobriquet pronounced Seiza he added Hinin. The Grand Master Hinin Kiyomitsu was this very youth.⁵³

Mount Arai, Mount Arajina, Mount Soma, No Hill. Mount Kaeru. Onike Peak, Saba Inlet, Sabanami, Su Harbor, Hitsu Field. Yunoo Pass, Kinome Pass. Layers of mountain ridges, peaks on peaks, valleys on valleys, huge trees pillared to the heavens, cliffs of scarred boulders. The mountain path along the border of Omi and Echizen Provinces twisted precipitously. Soma Road, twisted like intestines, ascended up from Omi Province, past Tsubai Pass, and Tochiki Pass, to emerge at Itadori and cross beyond Fuchu (present-day Takyo). Along the path, famous for its beauty in the snow, was a roadside teashop in Naka no Kawachi ———

Mid-afternoon on a sunny day in the fifth month ——— having left Yanagase in early morning [six 点] an Echizen comedian and his partner stopped to rest on their way home.⁵⁴ They had been traveling the Kyoto provinces since spring.

"What a path!"

He sat down heavily on a folding-stool and crossed his legs. Suddenly he realized that an elderly samurai sat resting on the stool facing him, wearing a sagging overcoat and faded clothing. A half lifetime's history was etched on his deeply lined forehead and thin, white hair, a sedge-hat at his side, one hand on a walking stick. The comic seemed to have no scorn for such miserable attire, what an amiable comic. Because the teashop was so tiny his muddied straw sandals were right in front of the old man, and he bowed in close proximity.

"Oh [six 点] that mountain pass is grueling so my sweat must have gotten into my eyes and I

didn't see a samurai was here. I really didn't intend to be rude."

He said as he knelt. The old man bent over as if folding in half.

"Please get up, [six 点] Your salutation is too kind. [six 点] But even a samurai would have no reason to have taken offense, and, first of all, I am no samurai."

He said in a youthful voice.

"Yes, well, I am relieved. But still, let me apologize again. Rudeness is rudeness, after all. You say you are not a samurai?"

"I am a craftsman."

"A craftsman? [six 点] What a strange joke, hahaha."

He laughed. Charm is fitting for such an occupation.

In response to his bombastic laughter, the old man's wrinkled checks also slowly relaxed.

"I am not joking. I am a craftsman, a swordsmith."

"Your craft is swordsmith. [six 点] If so"

He said, exchanging glances with the bald-shaven partner at his side.

"If that is so, the sword [six 点] if that is so, then [six 点] forgive my rudeness, but, you wouldn't be Mr. Kiyomitsu?"

"How did you know?"

He furrowed his white eyebrows.

"Oh my, oh my, oh my, this is, this is the grand master!"

The comic got down on his knees again, and this time, his partner joined him and bowed low

by his side.

"Mostly, there was talk, in the various provinces and even at the inn where we stayed last night, about how you had left the capital and were on your way back home."

"You're making me hot with embarrassment."

He said, in response to the fact that the young teashop waitress was standing, amazed, still holding the tea server, and an old couple, who looked as though they were the proprietors, had come out in front of the shop to bow low, hands on the ground.

"I can't believe we were actually looking at you and did not know it! An honor like this comes but once in a lifetime!"

"To hear you speak is indeed a rare pleasure."

The comic's partner added humbly.

"Your swords are the most treasured in all the provinces. Who would have thought that our sort should have a chance to see one. If you are willing, sir, then please show us a sword you have made, a sword that offers protection of its own accord, with which even itinerants like us could hereafter travel in certain peace. I bet it even clears mist from the foothills."

The old man touched the tip of his cane to his down-turned forehead.

"What resplendent praise [six 点] Ah, human beings succumb so easily to flattery. And when traveling, how much more so. Your words have convinced me. I will show you. "

Without ceremony the old man slid a short, white-sheathed sword out from a dirty saffron-colored cloth wrapper at his hip.

A remarkable comic. He knew how to accept a sword, when he raised it reverently to his head.

"If you like it, it is yours."

"Pardon, what did you say?"

"I made it to take home to give as a souvenir. You are from the same province, so it really amounts to the same thing, whomever I give it to."

"Oh, Master, because I am a comic, please don't think me discourteous - but a sword like this cannot be bought for even one hundred, or two hundred gold coins! It is said that each of us must be content with his station in life. How could I thank you?"

"How formal you are. I have a trade. You too have one. If you feel you must find some way to thank me, then please, won't you perform for me? I'm sure the shopkeepers are lonely, I am lonely too. How about it?"

The comics washed their hands at the water pipe, changed into costumes decorated with large crests of cranes, donned their hats. The comic reverently wore the white-sheathed sword at his hip.

In a voice steeped with tears of gratitude,

"Partner!"

"Yes, Sir?"

[six 点] Ten thousand years of prosperity

In the awesome reign of the Emperor [six 点]

They begin to dance the secret Koshi dance.

"Sake please."

Now sixty-nine, Hinin Kiyomitsu sips unfiltered sake from a teacup.

"A mountain home is best in the spring."

At the base of the mountain pathway was what looked like a shed where the teashop stored items. There were pots and kettles. Late peach-blossoms scatter over the rooftop. To one side is a cliff of scarred boulders, and two or three irises bloom in a swift stream of pure flowing water.

A beautiful minstrel girl with erect posture slipped between elderberry trees, a graceful hand held to her hat. She lifted her lovely, charming face, breathtakingly white against her pale-yellow hat strings, to watch the comics finish their dance, smiling, almond eyes staring straight at Kiyomitsu. The old man smiled too.

Then, as the drumbeat boomed peach flowers scattered and his plain coat fluttered in the mountain-wind. Tears began to flow from Kiyomitsu's eyes and the minstrel girl suddenly vanished. Mingled in the faint echo of the little mountain stream were the strains, not of a koto, nor a biwa, but a shamisen's ongoing melody.

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Notes

¹ Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984), 204.

² Ikuta Chōkō, "Izumi Kyōka shi no shōsetsu o ronzu," in Tanizawa and Watanabe, eds., *Kyōka ronshūsei* (Tokyo: Rippu shobō, 1983), 177.

³ Noguchi Takehiko, "Izumi Kyōka kenkyū annai," in *Izumi Kyōka*, Kanshō Nihon gendai bungaku 3 (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1982), 400.

⁴ J. Keith Vincent, *Two-Timing Modernity: Homosocial Narrative in Modern Japanese Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard East Asian Manuscripts, 2012).

⁵ Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and L.A.: University of California Press, 1990), 47-48.

⁶ Iris: *Kakitsubata*. Rabbit-ear iris, *Iris Laevigata*. Over two feet tall with broad, sword-shaped leaves, it grows in water or swamp-land. It may have purple or white blossoms. *Kakitsubata* is also the title of a noh drama of the Katsura (wig) type; It is also a *makurakotoba* (pillow word) for *niou* (fragrance).

⁷ Minstrel girl (*torioi*), a type of street musician. During the Edo Period (1600 - 1868) on New Year, *torioi* would stand at residential gates, sing, play the samisen and beg for alms.

⁸ *Yukari no iro*. *Yukari* means something like "mystical connection," but *yukari no iro* means "purple."

⁹ Koishikawa is a part of present-day Bunkyo-ku in Tokyo. It was one of the 35 prefectures which comprised old Tokyo.

¹⁰ The fifth year of Kansei: 1793.

¹¹ The word I have translated as a "tale of doomed love" is the Japanese word *michiyuki*. Nakanishi Susumu defines *michiyuki* as follows: "a travel passage. A *michiyuki* is a technique used to depict characters' movements, typically their approach toward imminent death, by stringing together a series of place names. The most widely known examples of this kind are the *michiyuki* in the *yoruri* (puppet play) narratives by the Edo-period writer, Chikamatsu Monzaemon. Nakanishi Susumu, "The Spatial Nature of Japanese Myth," in *Principles of Classical Japanese Literature*, Earl Miner ed. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1985) 117. Donald Keene defines it as: "The journey section of a play or work of fiction, often relating, with references to places passed on the way, the feelings of suicidal lovers on their way to death." Donald Keene, *World Within Walls* (New York: Grove Press, 1976) Glossary 576.

¹² Firearms Corps: One of the Edo-Period army divisions. As is evident from the name, a division which used guns.

¹³ Literally: *michiyuki wo kita*: wearing traveling (clothing is inferred). There is also a repetition of the word *michiyuki*, or the lyrical account of doomed love affair.

¹⁴ Benzaiten is the Japanese name for Sarasvati, Buddhist Goddess of music, speech, wealth, wisdom, longevity, success, and protection against calamity. Bishomonten is the Japanese name for Kubera, one of the four Heavenly Kings, guardian of the north.

¹⁵ Musashi Plain: *Musashino*. The great Kanto Plain. The beauty of Musashi Plain has been celebrated in many modern works, including a collection of stories by Kunikida Doppo, *Musashino*. Yamada Bimyo also wrote a text entitled *Musashino*. It is also the title of an eight-volume work published in 1673 which attempted to make linked poetry (*renga* and *haikai*) linking phrases more accessible to the public by listing famous beauty spots and lines of

renga poetry associated with these spots. A two-volume work of *haikai* also entitled *Musashino* was written in 1676 but only the second of the two volumes exists today.

¹⁶ Shogunal family members: Reference to the Tokugawa family, under whose aegis Japan was united under centralized, yet feudal rule. In other words, the authorities.

¹⁷ *Takimotoin*, a *Fudo* temple. The word *fudo* literally means immobile. It is an abbreviation for *Fudo Myoo* (Sanskrit: Acala) Buddhist God of Fire. Acala is often identified in Japan with the Shinto deity, Ebisu. He is usually depicted with glaring black eyes, and a rageful countenance, teeth clenched. He holds a sword to subdue demons in his right hand, and a rope to truss them in the other, and is seated on a stone dais, enveloped in flames. He has eight disciples, among them the two mentioned later: Kimkara and Cetaka. See note 37.

¹⁸ A translation of each character in his name: Samurai-castle-red-north-true-man-front-enclosure-decree-exhaust-ten-side-hut-big-pure-revere-order-old-pilgrim. Issen means "one cup of tea."

¹⁹ Nichiren (1222-1282) was the founder of the Nichiren Sect of Buddhism. The sect held the Lotus Sutra supreme, and believed that salvation could be achieved through recitation of the sutra's name. Nichiren was a vociferous critic of established sects and patronage of these sects by the authorities, and so suffered greatly at the authorities' hands, and was banished to an island off the mainland.

²⁰ Night soil: Euphemism for human excrement.

²¹ Japanese legends abound in tales of bewitched foxes (and other animals). The candyman is afraid that Issen is not really human but a fox in human manifestation out to trick him.

²² Hakuzosu is the name of the chief priest of a Shorin Temple in the Eitoku Period (1381-1382). Legend has it that he believed in Inari (a fox deity), and made pets of three foxes which were endowed with divinity and prophetic ability. A *kyogen* (comic drama interlude between no plays) play called *Tsuri kitsune* is based on this legend.

²³ A reference to the *sankin kotai* (alternate attendance) system by which samurai were required to travel to and reside in Edo annually or biannually.

²⁴ Jippoan is used both to designate the priest, and to designate his hermitage.

²⁵ Moxibustion is a medical treatment by which herbs are burned on certain body points to cure a variety of ailments.

²⁶ Literally, *furameki*, also meaning "aimlessly."

²⁷ Japanese: *Kappa taiji*.

²⁸ River-imp: *kappa*. *Ka* means river and *pa* means imp. Issen substitutes the character for water, also pronounced *ka*, for river, and the character for tiger, pronounced *pa*, instead of the one for imp. *Kahaku* (river-demon) and *kawataro* (river-creature) are synonyms for river-imp. The priest was asked to write *kappa taiji*, in the characters 河童退治, and he muses over which Chinese characters he should use, listing 河童 *kappa* (river imp), 河伯 *kahaku* (river demon) 河太郎 *kawataro* (river creature) but ends up choosing 水虎 *suiko* (water tiger) synonym for *kappa*. Usually pronounced *suiko*, the *rubi* pronunciation guide reads it as *kappa*. The *kappa* is a mythical creature of Japanese folklore. It is also a term used for an excellent swimmer. Kyoka uses the term both ways: to describe Seisaburo's skill as a swimmer and to denote the mysterious demon of the underwater caves. Although *kappa* legends extend throughout Japan, local traditions have different versions. Usually found in rivers, or other freshwater sources, the *kappa* is generally a skillful swimmer, often depicted with a saucer or

plate (or depression) filled with water at the top of its head – and if that saucer cracks or dries up, the *kappa* dies. The *kappa* sports a beak, and on its back, a shell like a turtle. Although some *kappa* are depicted as more mischievous than evil, others indeed drag people who venture near their watery lairs into the water and drown them, of course drowning swimmers as well. *Kappa* are also known for a particular erotic fondness for young men. This example is well illustrated in the popular and well-known 1763 Edo tale “Rootless Weeds,” (*Nenashigusa*), in which a *kappa* takes the form of a samurai to seduce a famous kabuki *onnagata* (biological male player of female roles). Second, they stink, and apparently, according to some sources, have 3 anuses. Moreover, they are known for stealing people’s *shirikodama* or a ball or jewel that it is imagined people have inside their anuses, and either eating this *shirikodama* or else using it to pay taxes to the turtle king. People whose *shirikodama* have been stolen have weakened sphincters, and become cowardly.

²⁹ Hachiman is the Shinto God of War. *Gu* means shrine.

³⁰ *Munatsuki*: literally “the steepest part” of a mountain pathway.

³¹ *Kappa* have scales on their backs, and also sometimes leap on their victims’ backs. Either of which might make his back itch!

³² *Eta* and *hinin*: heavily polluted and non-human. Early Tokugawa society was rigidly structured into four classes: (in descending order) samurai, peasant, artisan, and merchant. Beneath these four was an underclass consisting of those who worked in certain trades such as tanning, butchery, or burials – any occupations deemed unclean by prevailing Buddhist and/or Shinto beliefs. See Mikiso Hane, *Peasants, Rebels and Outcastes* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 139-143. There was some movement in and out of the *hinin* class, but *eta* were fixed by birth. These words are no longer used today and have been replaced with the term *hisabetsu burakumin*.

³³ Seashell contest evokes the heyday of Japanese aesthetics, the Heian Period, when such contests were held by court aristocracy; many other such contests included poetry, screen painting, etc.

³⁴ Samisen were made from dog or cat skins, and often the skins retained the marks of the position of the teats, so although the text makes it comparative, the comparison is logical.

³⁵ Musashi Plain – see note 10. The grounding flower in a flower arrangement is a flower that offsets, balances and enhances a higher, more centrally placed, or more important blossom.

³⁶ In Part One the date of the discussion meeting is given as the thirteenth. Most likely an oversight by Kyoka.

³⁷ *Ura ni naru* refers to the practice of linking poetry through *kokoro* (conceptual association) rather than *kotoba* (word association). See Earl Miner, *Japanese Linked Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) for a discussion of Japanese linked poetry.

³⁸ Arhat: Sanskrit for realized being. A man who has attained Buddhist enlightenment within his lifetime.

³⁹ A spot for performing water-purification rites. See note 12 for background on Acala.

⁴⁰ His outfit is bellicose. Black lacquer was often used on weapons as well as garments to indicate warring intention.

⁴¹ Eastern Capital is a reference to Edo, present day Tokyo. The capital was moved from Kyoto to Edo by the Tokugawa Shogun to consolidate power. Banto (Bando) Hikosaburo, 1754-1828. Kabuki actor.

⁴² Cetaka is one of Acala's eight disciples. See note 12.

⁴³ Oyakata is a respectful title. He is addressing Bando Hikosaburo.

⁴⁴ Red lotus level of Hell: The seventh of the eight cold levels of Hell. The skin of sinners who fall into this level splits and their blood flows out, said to resemble red lotus flowers.

⁴⁵ The Katsura is a tree indigenous to Japan. Approximately thirty meters in height, with grayish bark, heart-shaped leaves and red blossoms. In Chinese folklore this tree can be found growing on the moon.

⁴⁶ Shrine of the Monkey God at Tamba. Tamba is an old province name for an area included in present-day Kyoto. Statues of various animals, often horses, called *otsukai* (messenger) can be found on the environs of many Shinto shrines. The reason for choosing a particular animal may have been as simple as the animal's presence in the particular area.

⁴⁷ A reference to a Japanese legend. A white-feathered arrow shot to the roof of a household informed people of a god's summons to a woman he desired. It means: Seisaburo is already chosen.

⁴⁸ Goddess Sarasvati: See note 9 on Benzaiten.

⁴⁹ Iron staff Li was one of the eight mythical Chinese Immortals. He supposedly lived during the Sui Dynasty (589-618).

⁵⁰ Mountain demons: *Tengu*. Mythological creatures said to inhabit deep mountains, endowed with mysterious powers and capable of taking on human manifestation. In original form they have long noses, red-faces and wings. See note 23 on the *kappa* river imp or demon.

⁵¹ Noh drama side door entrance (literally: coward-doorway) is the one used by the musicians. Also an entry-exit doorway for performers on the Kabuki stage.

⁵² Yuten is the name of an early Edo Period Jodo sect (Pure Land) Buddhist priest who was awarded the purple robe. The reference here is to an historical novel based on the legend of Priest Yuten, *Yuten shonin goichidai ki* in which Yuten is reported to have thrust Acala's sword down his throat to vomit out bad blood which had been preventing him from learning the sutras. After he cleansed himself in this manner, he was able to learn.

⁵³ Hinin means "non-person," and Kiyomitsu means "pure light."

⁵⁴ Echizen comic-entertainer and his partner: *manzai* comic duo. Heinz Morioka and Miyoko Sasaki define *manzai* as follows: "`Cheering *manzai*' was established as a narrative art when it became the custom for two representatives of a Shinto shrine to go from house to house during the first few days of the year. They performed comical dances and engaged in congratulatory repartee believe to be messages from local deities or prayers for `10,000 years' (*manzai*) of long life and good luck. During mid-Edo, the two performers came to be called *tayu* and *saizo*." Heinz Morioka and Miyoko Sasaki, *Rakugo*, Council on East Asian Studies (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University, 1990), 6. *Tayu* (translated as comic) and *Saizo* (translated as partner) are titles for two distinct roles, wit and straight man.