

KATSUNO'S REVENGE **and Other** **Tales of the Samurai**



ASATARO MIYAMORI

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Preface

The following tales of the samurai, the knights of old Japan, are based largely on real facts. They have been adapted from among traditional stories related by *kōdanshi*, story-tellers, who nightly delight large audiences with romances and historical stories, especially the noble deeds of the samurai. There are also numerous Japanese books and magazines devoted to stories of this description, which are read with keen interest by all classes of our countrymen, in particular by young people.

It is true the samurai class has gone forever along with feudalism; but fortunately or unfortunately the Japanese at large are samurai in a sense. During the last half century European civilization has revolutionized Japanese society, both for better and for worse. In institutions political and social, in manners and customs, in arts and literature, the Japanese have lost many of their characteristics; yet it may safely be said that the sentiments, motives and moral principles of the samurai in some measure remain in the bedrock of their character, in their subconsciousness, so to speak. The Japanese of today are intellectually almost cosmopolitans, but emotionally they are still samurai to no small degree.

Honest Kyūsuké, the hero of the story of the same title, was not a samurai, but his principles were those of a samurai. Let that justify the inclusion of the story in this volume.

The author's hearty thanks are due to Mr. Joen Momokawa, a celebrated *kōdanshi*, who kindly helped him in the choice of these tales, and also to the editor of the *Kōdan Kurabu* for permission to translate *Katsuno's Revenge*, one of his stories.

Tokio, December, 1920. A. Miyamori.

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HONEST KYSUKÉ

UNGO-ZENJI

IT was snowing fast.

Already as far as eye could see the world was covered with a vast silvery sheet. Hill and dale, tree and field, all alike clothed in virgin white.

Caring nothing for the bitter cold, but loving the beautiful, Daté Masamuné determined to go out to enjoy the scene. Accordingly, accompanied by a few attendants, he wended his way to a pavilion set on a low hill in the castle grounds whence an extensive view, embracing the whole of his little fief of Osaki, could be obtained.

In later life Masamuné distinguished himself by signal service rendered to the state, eventually becoming one of the greatest daimios in Japan, under Iyeyasu, the first Shogun, but at this time Osaki was his sole estate, and his income did not exceed 100,000 *koku* of rice a year.

“What an enchanting picture! What can compare with a snow landscape?” he exclaimed, as he stood enraptured, gazing with delight from the balcony of the pavilion at the pure loveliness of the scene before him. “It is said that snow foretells a fruitful year. When the harvest is abundant great is the rejoicing of the people, and peace and prosperity reign over the land!”

While his lordship thus soliloquized, Heishiro, the sandal-bearer—Makabé Heishiro as he was called from his birthplace, Makabé in Hitachi, a surname being a luxury unknown to the third estate—waited without. Having adjusted his master’s footgear there was nothing more to do till he should come out again. But presently Heishiro observed that the snowflakes fell and lay somewhat thick on his valuable charge. He hastened to brush them off with his sleeve, but more flakes fell, and again the *geta* (clogs) were covered with icy particles.

“This will never do,” he said to himself. “His lordship disdains to wear *tabi* (socks) even in the coldest weather, deeming it a mark of effeminacy; should he place his bare feet on these damp *geta* he will assuredly catch cold. I must keep them warm and dry for him.”

So the good fellow in the kindness of his simple heart took up the heavy wooden clogs, and putting them in the bosom of his garment next his skin, continued his patient waiting.

“His lordship comes!”

Heishiro had just time to put the *geta* straight on the large stone step at the entrance before the double doors slid open right and left and Masamuné appeared, young, imperious.

He slipped his feet on to the *geta*. How was this? They felt warm to his touch! How could that be in such freezing weather? There could be but one explanation. That lazy lout of a sandal-bearer had been using them as a seat—sitting on the honourable footgear of his august master! The insufferable insolence of the fellow!

In a passion at the supposed insult he caught the offender by the nape of his neck, and shook him

violently, exclaiming between his set teeth, "You scoundrel! How dared you defile my *geta* by sitting on them! You have grossly insulted me behind my back! Villain, take that. . . ."

Catching up one of the clogs which he had kicked off, he struck the poor servitor a heavy blow between the eyes, which caused him to reel stunned and bleeding to the ground. Then hurling the companion *geta* at his prostrate victim, he strode proudly back to the castle, barefooted, for he was in too great a rage to wait until another pair of *geta* could be brought.

No one stayed to look after Heishiro. None cared what became of him. For some time he lay as he had fallen, but presently the cold brought him back to consciousness, and he rose slowly and with difficulty to his feet.

He picked up the *geta* with which he had been struck, and with tears mingling with the blood on his face gazed at it mournfully for a few moments. Then, as the thought of his master's injustice came over him, he gnashed his teeth in impotent rage.

"Haughty brute, that you are, Masamuné," he muttered, "you shall pay for this! The bond between us as lord and vassal has snapped for ever. I have been one of the most devoted of your humble servants, but now I will never rest till I have had my revenge on you for this cruel treatment!"

Then Heishiro again put the *geta* into his bosom, though with how different an intention from before, and descending the hill on the side furthest from the castle, limped painfully away.

From that time forth the man had but one idea—to wreak condign vengeance on the arrogant noble who had so abused his kindness.

But Masamuné was a daimio, through a poor one, while Heishiro was only a serf. Assassination was impossible, Masamuné being always well guarded even while he slept, besides possessing considerable bodily strength himself. He must have recourse to other and subtler means. He thought long and deeply. There were only two persons of higher rank than the daimio who could affect his position at will—the Emperor and the Shogun. But how could a man of Heishiro's standing gain the ear of either of these two illustrious personages so as to slander Masamuné and influence them against him? The very idea was absurd! True, it was a warlike age and promotion speedily followed the achievement of a deed of valor; with a spear in his hand and a good horse under him one might rise to almost any height. But Heishiro was no soldier and his physical strength was small. With a sigh he admitted to himself that the accomplishment of his purpose did not lie that way.

And then a happy thought struck him. He remembered that any one, high or low, great or small, could become a priest and that the prospects held out in that profession were boundless. There was no distinction to which a man of the lowliest parentage and the weakest body might not aspire. A learned priest with a reputation for sanctity might get access to Court—gain the notice of the Emperor himself!

That was it!

Heishiro resolved to turn priest, and with this in view made all haste to Kyoto, where he entered the Temple of Ungoji in Higashiyama as an acolyte.

But the career of an acolyte is none of the easiest. Before he can be received into the priesthood he must go through all forms of asceticism, self-denial, and penance. Furthermore, he has to serve his superiors as a drudge, doing the most menial tasks at their command. Heishiro had a very hard time of it. A man of ordinary perseverance might have succumbed and given up. Not so Heishiro. Not for a

moment did he dream of abandoning his self-imposed task. He was determined as long as there was life in him to endure every hardship and humiliation, so that eventually he might attain his end. Still he was but human, and there were times when his weary body almost gave way and his spirit flagged. His racked nerves seemed as if they could bear no more. At such times he would look in a mirror at the reflection of the deep scar on his brow, and draw from its place of concealment the odd garden *geta*, saying to himself, "Courage! Remember Masamuné! Your work is not done yet."

Then strength and calmness would return and he once more felt equal to labour and endure.

Little by little Heishiro rose in the favour of his superiors, and his learning showed marked progress. At length, he thought he might get on faster if he went to another monastery, and the Temple of Enryakuji on Mt. Hiei being the largest and most renowned of all places of sacred teaching in Japan, he applied there for admission and was readily admitted.

Twenty years later, Jōben, for that was the name Heishiro took on entering the priesthood, was known far and near for his erudition and strict application to all observances of a life of the most austere piety. But he was not satisfied. He was still very far from being in a position to attract the notice of the Emperor. Yet higher must he climb. To be world-famous was his aim.

So he made up his mind to go over to China, justly regarded as the fountain-head of all knowledge and wisdom. All she could impart of the Buddhistic faith he would acquire. As soon as an opportunity offered Jōben sailed from his native shores and found himself among a strange people. Here he remained ten years. During that time he visited many famous temples and gathered wisdom from many sources. At last the fame of the traveller reached the ear of the Chinese Emperor, who was pleased to grant him an audience, and graciously bestowed on him a new sacerdotal name, that of Issan-Kasho-Daizenji. Thus it came about that Jōben left his country acknowledged, indeed to be a wise and holy man, but he came back to be regarded as the foremost divine in Japan.

After his return Issan-Kasho-Daizenji stayed at Ungo-ji, the temple in Kyoto where he had entered on his noviciate. He had heard nothing of Masamuné for some years and was anxious to learn what had become of him. He was unpleasantly surprised to hear that the object of his hatred had also risen in the world, and that now as lord of the Castle of Sendai he was considered one of the most important men of the day. Not only did he hold a high office at Court, but as the head of the North-Eastern daimios, even the Shogun had to treat him with respect. All this was annoying if nothing worse. The Zenji saw that he would have to bide his time and act warily. A false move now might render futile all his long years of travail.

But after all he did not have to wait very long.

The Emperor was taken ill and his malady was of so serious a nature that the skill of the wisest physicians proved of no avail. The highest officials of the Imperial Household met in solemn conclave to discuss the matter as it was decided that earthly means being vain the only hope lay in an appeal to Heaven.

Who was the priest of character so stainless, of wisdom so profound that he might be entrusted with this high mission?

One name rose to all lips—"Issan-Kasho-Daizenji!"

With all speed, therefore, the holy man was summoned to the Palace and ordered to pray his hardest to the Heavenly Powers for the restoration to health of the Imperial patient.

For seven days and seven nights the Zenji isolated himself from all mankind in the Hall of the Blue Dragon. For seven days and seven nights he fasted, and prayed that the precious life might be spared. And his prayers were heard. At the end of that time the Emperor took a turn for the better, and so rapid was his recovery that in a very short time all cause of anxiety about him was over.

His Majesty's gratitude knew no bounds. The Zenji was honoured with many marks of the Imperial regard, and as a consequence, all the ministers and courtiers vied with each other in obsequiousness to the favourite of the Emperor. He was appointed Head of the Ungoji Temple, and received yet another name, Ungo-Daizenji.

"The attainment of my desire is now within reach!" thought the priest exultantly. "It only remains to find a plausible pretext for accusing Masamuné of high treason."

But more than thirty years had elapsed since Makabé Heishiro, the lowly sandal-bearer, had vowed vengeance on the daimio Daté Masamuné, and not without effect had been his delving into holy scriptures, his long vigils, his life of asceticism and meditation. Heishiro had become Ungo-Daizenji, a great priest. His character had undergone a radical change, though he had not suspected it. His mind had been purified and was now incapable of harbouring so mean and paltry a feeling as a desire for revenge. Now that the power was in his grasp he no longer cared to exercise it.

"To hate, or to try to injure a fellow-creature is below one who has entered the priesthood," he said to himself. "The winds of passion disturb only those who move about the maze of the secular world. When a man's spiritual eyes are opened, neither east nor west, neither north nor south exists—such things are but illusions. I have nursed a grudge against Lord Daté for over thirty years, and with the sole object of revenge before my eyes have raised myself to my present position. But if Lord Daté had not ill-treated me on a certain occasion, what would my life have been? I should, probably, have remained Heishiro, the sandal-bearer, all my days. But my lord had the unkindness to strike me with his garden *geta* without troubling himself to find out whether I deserved such chastisement. I was roused to anger and vowed to be revenged. Because of my resolve to punish him I turned priest, studied hard, endured privations, and so, at length, have become one of the most influential priests in the Empire, before whom even princes and nobles bow with reverence. If I look at the matter in its true light it is to Lord Daté that I owe everything. In olden times Sakya Muni, turning his back upon earthly glory, climbed Mt. Dantoku and there served his noviciate with St. Arara. Prince though he was, he performed all menial offices for his master, who if ever the disciple seemed negligent, would beat him with a cane. 'How mortifying it is,' thought the Royal neophyte, 'that I, born to a throne, should be treated thus by one so far beneath me in rank.' But Sakya Muni was a man of indomitable spirit. The more humiliations he had to suffer the more earnestly did he apply himself to his religious studies, so that, at the early age of thirty he had learnt all his teacher could impart, and himself began to teach, introducing to the world one of the greatest religions it has ever known. It may truthfully be said that Sakya's success was largely, if not wholly, due to that stern and relentless master who allowed no shirking of his work. Far be it from me to institute any comparison between my humble self and the holy Founder of Buddhism, but, nevertheless, I cannot deny the fact that the pavilion in the grounds of Osaki Castle was my Mt. Dantoku, and this old garden *geta* my St. Arara's cane. Therefore, it should be gratitude, not revenge, that I have in my heart for Masamuné, for it was his unconsidered act that laid the foundation of my prosperity."

Thus the good priest relinquished his long cherished idea of vengeance, and a better feeling took its place. He now looked upon the blood-stained *geta* with reverence, offering flowers and burning incense before it, while day and night he prayed fervently for the long life and happiness of his old master, Lord Daté Masamuné.

And Masamuné himself?

As stated above he attained great honours and became a leading man in the councils of his country. But at the age of sixty-three he tired of public life and retired to pass the evening of his days at his Castle of Sendai. Here, to employ his leisure, he set about the restoration of the well-known temple of Zuiganji, at Matsushima, in the vicinity of the castle, which during a long period of civil strife had fallen into decay, being in fact a complete ruin. Masamuné took it upon himself to restore the building to its former rich splendor, and then when all was done looked about for a priest of deep learning and acknowledged virtue who should be worthy to be placed in charge of it.

At a gathering of his chief retainers he addressed them as follows:—

“As you know I have rebuilt and decorated the Zuiganji Temple in this vicinity, but it still remains without a Superior. I desire to entrust it to a holy and learned man who will carry on its ancient traditions as a seat of piety. Tell me, who is the greatest priest of the day?”

“Ungo-Zenji, High Priest of the Ungoji Temple in Kyoto is undoubtedly the greatest priest of the day,” came the unanimous reply.

So Masamuné decided to offer the vacant post to the holy Ungo-Daizenji, but as the priest in question was a favourite at Court, and enjoyed the confidence of the Emperor, it was necessary that His Majesty should first be approached before anything was said to the Zenji. Masamuné tendered his petition in due form and as a personal favour to himself. The Emperor, who retained a warm affection for the retired statesman, readily assented, and thus it came about that Ungo-Zenji was appointed Head of the Zuiganji Temple in the beautiful district of Matsushima.

On the seventh day after his installation, Masamuné paid a formal call at the Zuiganji to welcome the new arrival. He was ushered into the private guest-room of the Zenji which was at the moment unoccupied. On turning to the alcove his attention was at once arrested by the sight of an old garden *geta* placed on a valuable stand of elaborate and costly workmanship.

“What celebrated personage has used that *geta*?” said the astonished Masamuné to himself. “But surely it is a breach of etiquette to decorate a room with such a lowly article when about to receive a daimio of my standing! However, the priest has doubtless some purpose in allowing so strange an infringement of good manners.”

At that moment the sliding door opened noiselessly, and a venerable man in full canonicals and bearing a holy brush of long white hair in his hand, came in. His immobile face was that of an ascetic but marred by a disfiguring scar on his forehead between the eyes.

Ungo-Zenji, for he it was, seated himself opposite his guest and putting both hands, palm downwards, on the mats bowed several times in respectful greeting, Masamuné returning the courtesy with due ceremony.

When the salutations were over, Masamuné could no longer restrain his curiosity.

“Your Reverence,” he began, “in compliance with my earnest request you have condescended to come down to this insignificant place to take charge of our temple. I am profoundly impressed by your goodness and know not how to thank you. I am a plain man and unskilled in words. But, your Reverence, there are two things which puzzle me, and though at this our first interview you may deem it a want of good breeding to be so inquisitive, may I ask you to explain the place of honour given to the garden *geta*, and the scar on your brow that accords so ill with your reputation for saintliness?”

At these words, poured out with the impetuosity he remembered in Masamuné as a young man, the priest smiled a little. Then he withdrew to the lower end of the apartment and with tears glistening in his sunken eyes, said:—

“How rejoiced I am to see your face again. To gaze upon your unchanged features reminds me of the days of my long past youth.”

“What, your words are strange! How can I remind you of your youth, when, to my knowledge, we never met till this day?”

“My lord, have patience, and I will explain all,” replied the Zenji. “In those days, I was but a servant—a sandal-bearer known as Makabé Heishiro—it is not likely so humble an individual would retain a place in your memory. It was when you were residing at the Castle of Osaki. . . .”

He paused, but Masamuné, too amazed to utter a word, only looked intently at his former servant as if trying to recall having ever seen him before.

So Ungo-Zenji went on with his story, and in detail told all that had befallen him since that snowy day more than thirty years before. He did not spare himself, but told how through all those years he had been actuated by a feeling of revenge and revenge only, and how the thought of some day seeing his enemy in the dust had been the spur to goad him on to conquer all difficulties, to surmount every obstacle.

“At length,” concluded the priest, “I came under the notice of the Emperor who so magnified a trifling service that he loaded me with rewards and marks of favour. ‘Now is my time!’ I thought. But to my own astonishment I found that so vile a passion no longer existed in my nature—the desire for revenge had fled. I began to view the affair in a different light, and to look upon you as my benefactor. But for you I should still be a sandal-bearer—but for you the stores of knowledge at my command would never have come within my reach—but for you the intercourse I have had with the illustrious and sage men of two countries would have been an impossibility. Therefore, my hatred is turned to gratitude, my wish for vengeance to a heartfelt desire for your long life and prosperity. I pray daily that some day I may be enabled in some small measure to requite the inestimable benefits I owe to you. Your lordship now understands why I so treasure an old *geta*, and how it is I bear this ugly scar on my brow.”

Masamuné listened to the narrative with growing wonder and the deepest attention. At its conclusion he rose and taking the Zenji by both hands gently, but forcibly drew him to the upper end of the apartment. When both were again seated he spoke.

“Your Reverence,” he said in a voice full of emotion. “What you have just told me quite puts me out of countenance. I can just recall the incident of which you speak and I remember how angry I felt at what in my arrogance I deemed a gross insult. I do not wonder at your desire for revenge, but, that you should renounce the triumph that was yours for the asking—that, indeed, amazes me! Such magnanimity is almost incredible! You prove to me that religion is not the empty abstraction some call it, and I humbly beg your pardon for my past offence, and request you to enrol me as one of your disciples.”

In this way, Masamuné who was of a frank and noble disposition repented of the fault committed in his youth, and the sandal-bearer achieved a greater victory than he could have boasted of had he caused his enemy to die a shameful death.

A hearty friendship sprang up between the two generous minded men, and till death parted them

many years later they saw much of each other and their affection grew. The priest was always a welcome guest at the Castle, while with earnest piety, Masamuné prosecuted his studies in sacred lore under the guidance of Ungo-Zenji.

THE LOYALTY OF A BOY SAMURAI

MATSUDAIRA Nobutsuna was one of the ministers of the Shogun Iyemitsu, next to Iyeyasu, the ablest of all the Tokugawa Shoguns. A man of great sagacity, he contributed not a little to Iyemitsu's wise administration.

When Iyemitsu was a young boy named Takechiyo, Nobutsuna who was called at that time Chōshirō served him as one of his attendants and playmates.

One morning when the young nobleman was passing along a corridor accompanied by Chōshirō and two other boys, on the way to the private apartments of his father, the Shogun Hidetada, his attention was caught by some fledgling sparrows that were hopping about and chirping gaily on the tiles of the roof. Takechiyo, then but ten years of age, was seized with a fancy to have them; and turning to Chōshirō, three years older than himself, he commanded:—

“Catch those little sparrows for me, Chōshirō.”

“With pleasure, your lordship; but should I be found catching sparrows I should be reprimanded by his Highness and the officials. Fortunately I shall be on duty to-night; so to-night I will climb out on to the roof when there is no one to see me, and give you the little birds in the morning. Will you please to wait till then, my master?”

“I suppose I must.” And the small company passed on.

That night when all was quiet, Chōshirō managed somehow or other to get out on to the roof, and crawling carefully on all fours to the spot where the parent birds had built their nest, reached out one hand and seized one of the little sparrows. Poor little things! Surprised in their sleep they were not able to escape. Transferring his captive to the left hand Chōshirō again stretched out his right and caught another. Whether the attainment of his purpose caused him to relax his care or for some other reason, certain it is that at this moment his foot slipped and with a heavy thud he fell down into the courtyard below. As he fell he involuntarily clutched the birds more firmly so that they were instantly squeezed to death. With the dead birds in his hands, he fainted. But the roof was comparatively low, and he also had the good fortune to fall on to some bushes so that he was not killed as might have been the case.

The sound of the fall awoke the Shogun. He started up and followed by his consort and some attendants went out on to the verandah and opening a sliding shutter looked down. By the light of a lantern held by one of the servants he perceived the boy lying on the ground just beneath. Chōshirō had now recovered consciousness and was trying to rise though the pain he felt all over his body rendered the operation one of considerable difficulty. His consternation was great when the light of the lantern revealed his person to those on the verandah.

“Chōshirō, is that you?” called his lord, recognizing the boy at once. “It is strange that you should be on my roof at this time of night! Come up instantly and explain your conduct. This must be

inquired into.”

The boy, still holding the dead sparrows, obeyed. Prostrating himself before the Shogun he waited for him to speak.

“What have you in your hands, Chōshirō?”

“Sparrows, my lord.”

“Sparrows? Do you then climb roofs at midnight to catch sparrows? A strange fancy!”

“Yes, my lord. I will tell you the truth. When Takechiyo Sama and I were passing along the corridor this morning his attention was attracted by some little sparrows on the roof and we stopped to watch them. Takechiyo Sama said ‘What dear little things they are!’ and the desire then arose in my mind to get them for him that he might play with them. So to-night when everyone was asleep I climbed out on to the roof of your apartments in disregard to the respect I should have shown to your august person, and caught two of the young sparrows. But how quickly the punishment of Heaven followed my crime! I fell down as you see and my wickedness was discovered. I am ready for any chastisement your lordship sees fit to inflict.”

“My lord,” here broke in Lady Eyo, the Shogun’s consort. “Excuse my interference, but I think Takechiyo must have ordered Chōshirō to catch these sparrows. There is no doubt about it.”

It should be explained that Lady Eyo had two sons—Takechiyo and Kunimatsu. Takechiyo, the elder, was sharp-witted and active though rather rough in his manners; his brother, on the contrary, was quiet and effeminate. For this and probably some other unknown reason the younger son was his mother’s favourite, and it was her desire that he should be appointed heir to the Shogunate in place of his elder brother. She therefore lost no opportunity to disparage Takechiyo in the estimation of his father, hoping thereby to attain her object in due time.

“What a thoughtless boy Takechiyo is!” agreed the Shogun. “This was undoubtedly done at his instigation. How cruel to command Chōshirō to endanger his life by catching birds on a roof at night! Though he is but a child there is no excuse for him. The proverb says ‘A snake bites even when it is only an inch long.’ One who is so inconsiderate to his attendants when young cannot be expected to govern wisely and well when more power is invested in his hands. Now, Chōshirō,” turning to the boy who still knelt at his feet, “Takechiyo ordered you to get the sparrows; is it not so?”

Chōshirō had heard with surprise the unkind words of the Shogun and his lady about his adored master. What did they mean by the words “A snake bites even when it is only an inch long?” If their feelings towards the boy were already so antagonistic what would they think and do should the real facts of the case be disclosed? Chōshirō firmly resolved to take all the blame even at the risk of his life.

“Oh, no, my lord,” said he earnestly. “Takechiyo Sama never gave me such a command, never! I caught these sparrows quite of my own accord. I meant one for Takechiyo Sama, and one for myself.”

“Nonsense! Whatever you say I know Takechiyo is at the bottom of it. You are a bold fellow to dare to tell me an untruth! . . . Let me see, what shall I do to you? . . . Here, bring me one of those bags.”

The Shogun pointed to some large, strong leather bags, resembling a money-pouch in shape, in which in the event of a fire or of an earthquake his valuables would be incased before putting them into the *dozō* or fire-proof godown.

When the bag was brought the Shogun said:—

“Now, Chōshirō, if you don’t confess the truth, I will have you put into this bag and never allow you to go home again, nor give you any food. Do you still persist in your falsehood?”

“It is no falsehood, my lord. It is the truth that I caught the sparrows of my own wish. No one but myself is responsible for my misdeed. My fall from the roof was the punishment of Heaven. It is right that you should chastise me also. I beg you to do so.”

With these words, Chōshirō, betraying no signs of fear, put himself into the bag.

“What a stubborn boy!” exclaimed the Shogun in anger.

Then with the help of his consort he tightly fastened up the bag with the boy in it, and had it hung from a peg on the wall of the corridor. Leaving the poor child in this state all retired once more to their broken rest.

Late the next morning, having had breakfast and finished her toilet, Lady Eyo, attended by two maids of honour, came out to the corridor where the bag still hung and ordered it to be taken down. On opening it the boy was found still holding the dead sparrows.

“Good morning, your ladyship,” said Chōshirō, rubbing his eyes with his closed fists.

“You were ordered by Takechiyo to take the sparrows, is it not so?” said Lady Eyo kindly, hoping to make the boy confess the truth.

“No, my lady. It was my own idea. Takechiyo Sama had nothing whatever to do with the matter.”

“Come, boy, if you are so obstinate you will have to remain a prisoner always, and never have anything to eat. But if you confess what I am convinced is the truth, you shall be released and have food at once. Now tell the truth.”

“My lady, as you command me to do so I will tell the truth; but I am so hungry that I find it difficult to speak at all. May I ask for some food first? If you will allow me to have even some *musubi*,¹ I will say all you wish.”

“Good boy, you shall have some *musubi* at once.”

The lady gave the order and soon the boy was eagerly devouring the rice-cakes. Three or four large ones made a good meal.

“Thank you, my lady; I am now able to speak.”

“Then confess the truth, good boy, confess quickly; I am tired of waiting.”

“Forgive me, my lady; I caught the sparrows of my own accord. I received no order direct or indirect from Takechiyo Sama. That is the truth.”

The lady for once forgot herself and flew into a passion. Stamping her foot on the floor, she rushed into the Shogun’s room and gave him an exaggerated account of what had happened. He was very angry.

“The young rascal,” cried he, rising, and taking his Yoshimitsu sword in his hand, “I will kill him myself. Tango Hasegawa, bring Chōshirō here.”

Tango found the culprit sitting in the bag his hands on his lap.

“Chōshirō,” he said, “his lordship is terribly angry with you—your stubbornness and insolence are

past endurance. He intends to kill you with his own hands. Prepare yourself for instant death!”

“I am quite prepared, sir.”

“Your father is my old friend,” went on the man pitifully. “If you have any farewell message for him I will undertake to deliver it.”

“Thank you, sir; but I have no words to send to my father. It is the duty of a samurai to sacrifice his life for the sake of loyalty. After my death my motive for refusing to confess what my lord the Shogun desires will become clear. Tell my father only that I met my doom fearlessly by my lord’s own sword. My one sorrow is that my mother is now ill and this news may lead to her death also. That is my only regret.”

“What a truly heroic resolve!” cried Tango, unable to restrain his tears. “Your father may well be proud of you, boy, when I tell him how you met death.”

Taking Chōshirō by the hand Tango conducted him into the presence of the Shogun and his lady. The stern noble stood up on their entrance and laying his hand on the hilt of his sword motioned to them to approach nearer. The brave boy kneeling down pushed the stray locks from his neck, and with clasped hands and closed eyes calmly awaited decapitation. The Shogun’s manly compassion was no proof against this pathetic sight. Throwing his sword away,

“Chōshirō, you are forgiven!” he cried. “I recognize your supreme fidelity to your young master—faithful unto death! Tango, I foretell that when Takechiyo succeeds me as Shogun, no one will be able to assist him in the task of ruling his people so well as this courageous young samurai. Chōshirō, you are pardoned!”

KATSUNO'S REVENGE

AMAN and a woman were whispering to each other by a shaded lamp in a quiet detached room which was partly hedged by *unohana* whose snow-white flowers gleamed in the moonlight. Only the frogs croaking in the neighbouring paddy-field broke the stillness of the night.

The man was Sakuma Shichiroyemon, a councillor of Oda Nobuyuki, the lord of the castle of Iwakura, in the province of Owari. About fifty-two years old, he was a fierce-looking man with powerful muscles and bristling gray whiskers. Haughty, quick-tempered and very jealous he tyrannized over his subordinates and was accordingly an object of hatred throughout the clan. The person with whom he was now talking was a woman close upon his own age—the supervisor of Lord Oda's maids-of-honour, by name O-Tora-no-Kata. Being a cross, cunning, and avaricious hag, she was regarded by the maids with terror and detestation. "Birds of a feather flock together." She had wormed her way into the good graces of Shichiroyemon in order to make her position secure; whilst the latter on his part, had set her to spy on the actions of his lord, as well as of his colleagues and inferiors.

"What's that, Madame Tora?" asked Shichiroyemon, his face reddening with anger. "Do you mean to tell me that our lord is going to set that green boy of a Hachiya over me as Prime Councillor?"

"I repeat what I hear;—all the maids say so. . . ."

"Pshaw! How I do hate that Hachiya—that peasant's son born in obscurity. Who knows where he comes from? A pale, smooth-faced womanish sprig! How glibly he flatters our lord! He has never been in battle; what use is such a bookworm in these warlike days? And yet this inexperienced stripling is going to be appointed Prime Councillor! Humph, what infatuation! Ha, ha, ha!"

"It will not boil yet. The fire is not strong enough."

"Eh! The fire?"

"Ha, ha!" said O-Tora with a disagreeable smile. "Here I have good fuel to make you burn!"

"Don't try to annoy me like that," said he impatiently. "Tell me quickly."

"It is the secret of secrets. I can't readily . . . w-e-l-l . . . sell it." She spoke slowly, with an emphasis on the word "sell."

"How grasping you are! Well, then, I will buy your secret with this." So saying, Shichiroyemon took a packet of money out of his bosom and threw it down on the mat. The crone picked it up in silence, a cunning smile playing about her lips.

"Mr. Sakuma, you must not be off your guard."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, K . . . ; you must give her up."

"What! Give up Katsuno?" he exclaimed, startled. "Why? Tell me quick!"

“Don’t be surprised, sir. It is our lord’s pleasure to give her to Hachiya in marriage.”

Katsuno was a maid-of-honour of Oda Nobuyuki with whom she was a great favourite. A young damsel of nineteen springs, she was the incarnation of beauty, grace and sweetness of disposition, combined with refinement and dignity. In spite of his years Shichiroyemon was madly in love with the fair maiden; but though he had courted her in every way through O-Tora, she had shown no inclination to respond to his advances.

“Has Hachiya formed a liaison with Katsuno?” asked Shichiroyemon anxiously.

“Not that; you know they are both such honest blockheads; they are too stupid for that. Even if they had the inclination, it would be impossible for them to elude my vigilant eye—not even a devil could do it!”

“Is it then our lord’s order?”

“That is it. To-day our lady said to me, ‘It is not good for Hachiya to be alone any longer; Katsuno is a beautiful and excellent-minded maid, I will give her in marriage to Hachiya before long in reward for her faithful service!’ Yes, surely, our lady told me so.”

“Is that indeed so?” said Shichiroyemon, his brow darkening, and his eyes glaring with the intensity of his jealousy. “That green peasant’s son of a Hachiya! It would be infamous to put him over a man of my ability and experience, it would be an additional wrong to give Katsuno to him in marriage. What an insult! What mortification to one of my years! I cannot stand it! I shall never rest till I have taken some steps against this Hachiya—my mortal enemy! I will have my revenge! He does not provoke me with impunity!” He spoke so fiercely and the look on his face was so diabolical that the old woman was frightened.

“Your anger is quite natural, sir; but you know ‘Anger leads to loss.’ You must think more calmly about this matter.”

“Have you anything to propose?”

“Well, . . . of course, in the first place Hachiya must be assassinated, and then we must manage to get Katsuno out of the hands of our lord on some pretext or other;—I will undertake *that*.”

“And I will settle the other business! But, be careful, Madame Tora!”

Here a puff of cool wind swept through the room and blowing out the light of the lamp put an end to their conference for that time.

II.

It was a fine afternoon in autumn; in the gardens of the castle of Iwakura, the glowing maple leaves and vari-coloured chrysanthemums were in the height of their beauty.

To-day being the anniversary of the death of Nobuyuki’s father, all the inmates of the castle had been busy since the early morning with religious services, and a visit to the deceased’s grave; to-night a banquet was to be given to all the samurai.

It was now about four o’clock, and several maids-of-honour who had retired to a private chamber to enjoy an interval of rest were talking volubly.

“What chatterboxes you are, maids! You prattle like sparrows.” This from O-Tora who entering at this moment made the sneering remark that effectually put a stop to the gay talk. As she seated

herself, one of the girls, a saucy young thing, ventured to say with a demure smile. "But, Madame, women are chatterboxes by nature, aren't they? 'Nightingales visit plum-blossoms' and 'Sparrows and tigers visit bamboo grooves'; so we chattered like sparrows hoping Madame Tora (tiger) might be induced to come to us."

At this repartee the rest of the maids burst into peals of laughter and even the cross-grained duenna could not refrain from a sour smile.

"Your mention of sparrows reminds me of Takané (the name of a white-eye)" said she. "It seems the bird has not uttered a note all day. Has it been fed?"

The girls started guiltily, for so busy had they been all day they had quite forgotten to attend to the bird, a great pet with their lord who had received it, together with other gifts, from the Shogun in recognition of his military services. Nobuyuki dearly loved the bird for the sake of its song, in addition to which he prized it on account of its donor.

O-Tora, observing the consternation of the maids, revenged herself on them by saying spitefully:—

"You had better have kept your idle chattering till you had fulfilled all your duties, you good-for-nothing girls."

"It is a shame to have forgotten all about the poor little bird!" said Katsuno, who was with her companions.

"Poor thing, how hungry it must be! I will go at once and give it some food."

Stepping down into the garden, she went to an old plum-tree, and stretching up her arms took the beautifully ornamented cage of the bird off the branch on which it hung. As she did so the hook came off and the cage fell to the ground, with the result that the door came open and the little prisoner with a glad twitter escaped. With a cry of dismay the girl ran after it, but too late; the bird had already made its way through the trees and was now flying far away across the blue sky rejoicing in its freedom.

"What have you done, Katsuno?" cried O-Tora, from the verandah. Inwardly glad of this golden opportunity to carry out her dark scheme of getting Katsuno into disfavour, she yet cunningly concealed her delight under cover of fear and consternation. "Alas! You have let Takané fly away. Dear, dear, what carelessness! How could you do it!"

Katsuno, gazing up at the fast disappearing bird, seemed half stupefied. At O-Tora's words she came to herself, and then overwhelmed with thought of the consequences staggered a little and fell wailing to the ground. Her young companions standing on the verandah uttered exclamations of amazement, but none of them came to her aid, or attempted to console her. "What will you do, Katsuno?" continued the old vixen, who had by this time come down to where the unhappy girl lay, and seized her by the neck of her garment. "You know Takané is not a common bird, but a treasured present from His Highness the Shogun. Do you realize what you have done in letting it escape? Can you atone for your fault simply by a few tears? What can you do to repair the injury you have done to me, for it is I who shall be blamed,—I shall be considered responsible for this misfortune! Come, get up, girl, what have you to say?"

"Katsuno, prepare for death!" A loud and angry voice caused them all to start. Informed of what had occurred the hot-tempered Nobuyuki had rushed to the scene, and now with a drawn sword stood over the prostrate girl in a passion of ungovernable rage.

At this critical moment another voice was heard.

“My lord, my lord, wait!” It was the new Prime Councillor, Tsuda Hachiya, who thus ventured to interpose. “Calm yourself, my lord, I beg you. Do you forget the day? Is it not the holy anniversary of the demise of your revered father? Can you sully this solemn occasion with a bloody deed committed in the heat of anger? Restrain yourself and leave this matter to my discretion.”

Nobuyuki’s rage subsided as quickly as it had risen, and his better reason prevailed. At the remonstrance of his favourite he sheathed his sword and retired to the verandah.

By this time most of the retainers had arrived at the castle for the evening’s banquet, and hearing of the incident hastened to the scene. Shichiroyemon was among them and under cover of the confusion whispered something to his accomplice,—then coming forward, “How about Katsuno’s chastisement, my lord?” he said. “You act wisely in not inflicting death with your own honourable hands, but as an apology to His Highness the Shogun, and as an example to the clan it is necessary—it is imperative that she should receive condign punishment.”

“W-e-l-l—” Nobuyuki hesitated; then turning to Hachiya, “What is your opinion, Hachiya? Shall I do as Shichiroyemon says?”

“No, my lord. History tells that long, long ago, in the reign of the Emperor Takakura, one cold frosty morning, some thoughtless gardeners cut off a few branches of a beautiful maple-tree of which the young Emperor was very fond, and burned them to warm their *saké*. Fujiwara Nobunari, an official in charge of the tree, greatly shocked at this, bound the offenders hand and foot and reported the matter to the Emperor. The benevolent monarch, however, was not enraged at all, but said calmly, “A Chinese poet sings:—

‘In woods we gathered maple-leaves²
And burned them to warm *saké*.’

I wonder how these humble gardeners have learned to have such a refined taste? What a poetic idea!’ Thus the Emperor acquitted the careless gardeners. This is one reason why the Emperor Takakura is revered as a great sovereign even now after the lapse of so many centuries. So I hope and pray that my lord who is as large-hearted as the Emperor, will be lenient with a young girl who through no fault of her own has been so unfortunate as to cause this accident.”

“Enough, Mr. Tsuda!” broke in Shichiroyemon. “You are doubtless a great scholar, and eloquent, but the slack measure you suggest would be a bad precedent. You are always tender and sympathetic with women, but in dealing with a matter such as this we must make no distinction of sex. As well might you pardon the offender who sets fire to the castle and reduces it to ashes, just because she is a woman and it was ‘by mistake’! Is that justice?”

“Your argument is absurd,” replied the younger man contemptuously. “You speak as if severity were a good principle in government. If so, why did Kings Chow and Chieh of ancient China, and the Tairas and the Ashikagas in our own country come to such speedy ruin? Recollect that to-day is the sacred anniversary of the demise of the father of our lord, and therefore it might well have been our lord’s purpose to have set the white-eye free, himself, for the peace of the revered spirit.³ The fault unintentionally committed by Katsuno has thus led to the humane act of setting a poor caged bird at liberty. I have somewhere read these lines:—

‘Though one loves the sweet songs of a caged bird,
Who knows the sadness of its inner heart?’

In my opinion Katsuno has committed no fault in the true sense of the word, but on the contrary, done a good action.”

With the exception of Shichiroyemon and O-Tora, all present listened with admiration to the eloquent pleading of Hachiya on behalf of Katsuno. The black-hearted pair persisted in urging the girl’s expulsion from the castle, but Nobuyuki turned a deaf ear to their arguments, and decided to let the matter rest. Katsuno, all this time on her knees in the garden, now almost worshipped her deliverer in the depth of her gratitude.

III.

Tsuda Hachiya was now thirty-one. He was born the son of a farmer, but being a handsome, well-educated lad, in his sixteenth year he had been appointed to the post of page in the household of Nobuyuki who soon began to treat him with great fondness. The young samurai devoted his leisure hours to a further study of literature, and to the practice of fencing; and as he speedily evinced marked administrative ability, such as was rarely found among the intellectually ill-trained samurai of those days, he rapidly rose in the service, until now, while still a young man, he was both Prime Councillor and Steward, and exercised great authority. But notwithstanding the rank and power that might well have turned the head of one so young, he behaved modestly in public and private, and served his lord with all faithfulness and diligence, gaining thereby the admiration of the whole clan for his character and virtues.

One evening Hachiya presented himself before his lord at the latter’s urgent summons.

“Hachiya,” began Nobuyuki, abruptly, with a pleasant smile, “I think it is high time for you to—, isn’t it?”

“Excuse me, my lord, do I not understand you?” said Hachiya with a puzzled look.

“That important affair of yours.”

“That important affair of mine?” echoed the young man more puzzled than before.

“Ha, ha! how dull-witted you are to-day! The Katsuno affair!”

Hachiya did not speak. It was not the first time that Nobuyuki, who was enthusiastic over the question of Hachiya’s marriage, had offered to act as middleman between him and Katsuno. Far from objecting to the proposed bride, Hachiya’s inclination pointed that way, but his prudence, however, had hitherto prevailed, and he remembered the saying “a full moon is sure to wane.” His appointment as Prime Councillor over the heads of older men was already calculated to give offence; should he marry Katsuno, the acknowledged beauty of the clan, would he not still further give cause for jealousy and ill-feeling? Moreover, he was not ignorant of Shichiroyemon’s mad attachment, and had no desire to provoke his resentment; therefore, on various pretexts, he had month after month evaded his lord’s importunity.

“Do you again say ‘until next month’?” said Nobuyuki, half threateningly, as the young man remained silent. “Think not to deceive me in that way!”

Hachiya did not answer; his head was bent in respectful attention.

“Answer me at once! Still silent? . . . Tell me, do you dislike the girl?”

“Oh, no, my lord, but I fear her refusal!”

“Is that all! Set your mind at rest on that score; I have sounded her. Poor girl! Since the white-eye incident her ‘sickness’ has become worse and she has grown quite thin!”

Observant and sympathetic, Nobuyuki had found out that Katsuno was love-sick for Hachiya.

“Do not tease me, my lord! I will tell you of my real reasons for this hesitation.”

And with this preface Hachiya gave his reasons, at each one of which the older man gave a little nod of comprehension.

“I admire your prudence and forethought,” he said when Hachiya ceased speaking. “But remember you can never do anything if you think so much of the feelings of others. As for that dotting old Shichiroyemon, do not fear him. I have set my heart on your happiness, and I never do things by halves. It is my wish, also, to give Katsuno the desire of her heart. But as it is so near the close of the year we will postpone the marriage till the New Year, and then I will listen to no more denials. Yes, yes, that is what we will do, Hachiya.”

So saying, Nobuyuki summoned a maid and in a low voice gave an order. Presently a bottle of *saké* and some cups were brought in. Then the *fusuma* between this and the next room was gently slid open and there appeared a beautiful young woman clad in a gay *uchikaké* or gown, who knelt with movements full of grace at the threshold. It was none other than Katsuno.

“What is your pleasure, my lord?” said she bowing reverently first to Nobuyuki and then to Hachiya.

“Ah, is it Katsuno? I want you to serve us with *saké*. Sit nearer to me, Hachiya; come, let us have some *saké*.”

“Excuse me, my lord. Something tells me I am needed at home; besides it is getting late. With your kind permission, I will go home at once.”

“No, no; not just yet, Hachiya. Though it is late no loved one is waiting for your return, I imagine. Ha, ha! Come, you cannot refuse. Katsuno, pour him out a cup of *saké*!”

Katsuno hesitated bashfully, but on Nobuyuki’s repeating his command, she took the bottle, and with a hand that trembled filled Hachiya’s cup to the brim. Their eyes met and both blushed consciously.

“If you have drunk, let Katsuno have the cup,” said Nobuyuki.

“I should return the cup to your lordship.”

“No, I will have it after her. Give it to Katsuno.”

Hachiya had no choice but to do as he was told, and accordingly offered the cup, into which he had poured more *saké*, to the maid-of-honour, who, overcome with shyness, took and sipped it with difficulty.

“Give it to me.”

Nobuyuki drank off three cupfuls and then said with a sly laugh:—

“I am mightily glad you have thus exchanged the wine-cups of betrothal! Ha, ha! You have my

hearty congratulations!”

The young lovers prostrated themselves in acknowledgment of his favour, but even as they did so the loud clang, clang of the alarm-bell broke the stillness of the night and caused them all to start up to listen.

“What can it be?” exclaimed Hachiya, opening the *shōji* to look out. No need to ask that question; the lurid sky, the quickly rising flames and showers of falling sparks proclaimed all too surely a house on fire!

“A fire, my lord! And not more than five *chō* beyond the pine-trees on the bank of the moat. I must go at once!”

“No doubt as to its being a fire,” said Nobuyuki looking out also. “Is it not in your direction?”

“Allow me to leave your presence; I fear it is as you say!”

“Then lose no time! I will give the necessary instructions to the Fire-Commissioner myself.”

With a hurried word of thanks and apology to his lord and Katsuno, Hachiya left the apartment and ran home at the top of his speed. A fierce wind had arisen and whistled through the branches of the tall old pine-trees; louder and louder clanged the iron-throated bell.

His fears were all too surely realised: he reached his home only to find it wrapped in flames! A detached room where he had been wont to study was already reduced to ashes and the fire had caught on to the main building. The trees in the garden were also burning and as the wind shook the branches they let fall a shower of sparks. A number of samurai and firemen were doing their utmost with squires and rakes to get the fire under, but against the fierce flames fanned to fury by the strong wind their efforts were of little avail. Hachiya involuntarily heaved a deep sigh of despair, but there was no time to delay. It was imperative that he should venture into the burning building and save, if possible, important documents and ancestral treasures, as well as some highly valued gifts he had received from his lord.

As he rushed through the front gate a dark form sprang from the shade of a great pine-tree and plunged a sword into his side. Before Hachiya could draw his own weapon the assassin gave him another thrust through the heart, and the young Councillor fell lifeless to the ground.

The charred body of the hapless samurai was found in the ashes of his ruined home.

IV.

On hearing of Hachiya's death, Nobuyuki clenched his teeth, and Katsuno was beside herself with grief.

A dagger—an excellent blade by Masamuné—was found near the body. Seeing it, Nobuyuki slapped his thigh in delighted recognition, for it was a well-known weapon which his elder brother Nobunaga, Lord of Owari, had given to the elder brother of Shichiroyemon, Gemba Morimasa, one of Nobunaga's councillors. Except Morimasa nobody could have had it but Shichiroyemon; therefore, Nobuyuki who knew of the terms between his two followers, had no doubt but that his favourite councillor had fallen a victim to the jealous malignancy of the man he had superseded both in the favour of their master, and in the affection of the girl on whom he had set his heart. Added to this, a man who had been arrested on suspicion on Hachiya's premises the night of the fire, confessed after strict examination that it was at the instigation of Shichiroyemon that he had set fire to the house.

Evidence of his guilt being so strong, some sheriffs were despatched to Shichiroyemon's residence to arrest him; but the wily scoundrel scenting danger had fled, and it was not till after a rigorous search that it was found that he had taken refuge in the neighbouring province of Mino in the castle of Inaba, belonging to Saitō Dōzō.

O-Tora-no-Kata also disappeared about this time, and rumour had it that she was now in the mansion of Gemba Morimasa.

It was the seventh of January, and most people were enjoying the New Year festivities. But to Nobuyuki, the season brought no joy; he still brooded over Hachiya's tragic end. Buried in thought as he leant on his arm-rest, he did not notice the entrance of Katsuno, till pale and emaciated she knelt before him.

"Ah, Katsuno, I am glad to see you," he said, "I was thinking of Hachiya, and of your great grief in losing your future husband just after you had exchanged the cups of betrothal. I feel for you with all my heart!"

"Thank you, my lord," she replied sadly. "You are too good to me!"

"It is natural you should grieve," went on Nobuyuki, after a pause. "But mere sorrowing does no good to any one. Far wiser would it be to devise some way to kill the base assassin and avenge Hachiya with all speed."

"You are right, my lord,—I think my husband in Hades would be pleased to know that your lordship is willing to do so much for his honour. May I ask what is the result of your negotiations with His Excellency, the Lord of Owari?"

Nobuyuki's brother, the Lord of Owari, being the son-in-law of Saitō Dōzō, Nobuyuki had requested his brother to arrange for the delivery of Shichiroyemon, but Dōzō had ill-naturedly refused.

"This puts difficulties in our way," concluded the old lord disconsolately.

"I have a favour to ask of your lordship; may I venture to speak?"

"By all means."

"Permit me to go to Inaba, my lord."

"To Inaba! You want to go to the castle of that Saitō Dōzō?"

"Yes, my lord. I wish to enter the castle in disguise, and avenge the death of Hachiya on his murderer!"

"Not to be thought of, Katsuno!" Nobuyuki could not keep back a smile, though he saw the girl was in deadly earnest. "A young woman, and single handed!—absurd!"

"Not so, my lord, believe me!" Katsuno's eyes gleamed, and her breath came quick and fast. "I have thought it all out. I beseech you to let me go!"

Nobuyuki argued with her in vain. Her mind was made up, and nothing could shake her resolution. Therefore, he at length reluctantly gave her the desired permission, at the same time handing her the Masamuné dagger, to which reference has been made before, and saying:—

"This is the dagger with which our Hachiya was stabbed; thrust it up to the hilt in the throat of his

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