

BOOK II.

DAI-BOSATSU TÖGE

OR

Great Bodhisattva Pass

AND

BOOK II.

Suzuka-yama Mountain

AND

Chapter I.

“HAMA, is much snow on the ground?” asked Ryunosuke in a dull sleepy voice as he awoke from a nap over a warmer.

“Yes, about six inches or so, it has been falling without ceasing, you know.”

“Um, bigger flakes, now.”

“Folks say that big flakes mean the snow will stop pretty soon.”

“But it looks as if more’s to come. I think it’ll keep on falling all day.”

"It is beautiful to look at while it is falling, but so dirty after—the road."

"Bad after....." said Ryunosuke looking at Hama who was lying on the floor with her feet in the warmer and giving her breast to Ikutaro, their son.

"It's not only snow that is bad after, all the affairs of this human world are that way."

Ryunosuke spoke unusually sentimentally that day.

"Ho, ho, you are becoming sentimental?" Hama laughed softly.

"Well, sobering now I suppose....." Ryunosuke closed his eyes.

"Hama, much snow in Kai Province I suppose, because it's so mountainous."

"Yes, indeed. When it blows down from Kimbozan peaks, the snow will be two feet deep at Yawatamura, my native village."

They thus went on, man and wife, in sweet nothings. There was snow withal, but soft spring-like atmosphere was in the room.

The life of a couple whose marriage was contracted evilly is something like keeping on drinking heady wine. While drunk they both steep themselves in the same atmosphere and enjoy, but when the effect of the liquor begins to fall off, an irresistibly and wretchedly unhappy feeling comes on. Therefore Hama and Ryunosuke would at one time quarrel so emphatically that they talked of suicide and murder; at another as sweet as any couple could be.

"Is our darling asleep?"

"Yes, sweetly."

"Any of the wine left?"

"Yes, I think so."

"It's tedious to be snowed in, let's enjoy talking the past over the wine cups."

"That'll be safe."

Hama pulled a seat-cushion that was by her and put down Ikutaro, who was now deep in sleep, on it. And putting the lap of the warmer-quit over the child, she was about to rise, then from withal came the soothing notes of some one playing on the pipe.

"The piper!"

Both man and wife sat to listen to the piper, whose soothing and weird notes, blending with the quiet of the snow day, captivated their souls. The piper seemed now standing under their windows, his notes soft and clear moved their minds.

"He plays handsomely. Let him have our mite."

Hama wrapped some coins in paper and handed it to the piper through the lattice of the window. The playing on the pipe now sounded all the more sonorously.

While Hama was gone to the kitchen, Ryunosuke lay himself down and listened to the pipe.

"*Thousand years, yet another,*

Nay, let his reign be ever more,

Warble the plovers on the rocky Sashide Shore

Of the rapids by Shio-no-gama." piper played.

Presently the piper had gone, but the song seemed to be still in the air. Ryunosuke sung the Song of the Plovers to himself:—

“Thousand years, yet another,

Nay, let his reign be ever more.”

Then Hama carrying in the bottle:—

“Warble the plovers on the rocky Sashide Shore

Of the rapids by Shio-no-yama.” Sung she and smiled.

“You know the song, very well,” said Ryunosuke.

“Of course I do, because it is all about my native place.”

“How?”

“The Shio-no-yama means Enzan, the Sashide Shore is along the Fuefukigawa between my native village Yawata-mura to Kusakabe.”

“Is that it?”

“.....on the rocky Sashide Shore

Of the rapids by Shio-no-yama,” sang Ryunosuke again abstractedly.

“It's all very well to sit here and listen to the piper and call it good taste, but it must be hard for a man who must stroll playing in this cold weather,” Hama said putting her hands, which had become cold, in the warmer:—

“A young person may make light of the hardship, but that piper-friar was an old man, you know?”

“Well, to be poetical one must put up with a lot,” said Ryunosuke and he sat up to take a sip at the cup that was given by Hama, his wife, who filled it tastefully.

“My father was fond of playing on the pipe, too.”

“Was he?”

“Yes, so he was. He was a man rough and gruff, strict and strong, but at the same time quite refined. He used to compose Chinese ‘classical’ poems as well as Japanese odes.”

Perhaps this was the first occasion for Ryunosuke to speak at length of his father.

“This cold weather must be pretty telling on him.”

“Um.”

It seemed that Ryunosuke had begun to think of his sick father Danjō of late. The praise for Toranosuke Shimada which Danjō was never tired of uttering was found to be quite reasonable by Ryunosuke the previous night for the first time in life. The discovery revealed to Ryunosuke that his father was a man of insight. So naturally his father became a subject for his observation.

“I wonder how he is getting on? I would have called to ask after him but for the eye of the people.”

This might have spurred the mind of Ryunosuke to long all the more for homeland and father:—

“Hama!”

“Yes.”

“Shall we visit home once?”

“You back to Sawai?”

“Yes. First to your home Yawata taking the Kai Road, and then how about our travelling over Great Bud-dhisattva Pass?”

“I'd like it indeed, but I fear something untoward might

happen to us," Hama answered with a cloud on her face.

"I think it'll be all right so long as we go quietly."

"Won't he reinstate you?"

"No chance."

"How happy and proud we should be if we lived in the grand old residence of the Tsukues at Sawai!"

"The fact that you regard the matter too lightly vexes me. You must know that we shall never be able to return to live there—never in this life."

"I think folks have forgotten the matter already."

"Oh no! All those who live round there and are the fencers of the Kogen Ito Ryu School must still be harbouring a deep rooted grudge against me, I'm sure of it."

"But the matter was due to an accident that happened while a bout was going on. So I don't think the folks could be so revengeful that they still have not forgotten it."

Ryunosuke did not answer to this. He seemed to be musing for a while:—

"Hama, I understand that Bunnojo had a younger brother?"

"Yes, he had one; his name is Hyoma."

"Well, where is that Hyoma now?"

"He was living at a relation's at Bancho, Yedo when I left."

"How old is he?"

"Well, about sixteen."

"He can't be thinking kindly of me."

"But he's only a child."

"I am not scared of him, but he is on my mind to some extent. Is he still with that relation at Bancho? You had better find it out one of these days."

"Suppose Hyoma was after you bent on revenging, what would you do, sir?"

"Well, if Hyoma is out for revenging I may respond to his challenge and get killed by him—I may; or I may kill him."

"I should be sad if I must see Hyoma killed, he is guiltless."

If Hama were to open her mind she would say that there was nothing wrong with Hyoma. She was his kind sister-in-law, he was her darling little brother-in-law. The sweet memory could not be relegated to oblivion. So, should Hyoma be after Ryunosuke for revenge, it was certain that it would be Hyoma who would be killed, and not Ryunosuke. The thought brought honest tears into Hama's eyes pitying Hyoma.

"If there's any one at all who is after me for revenge it must be Hyoma, and Hyoma alone. The fencers of the Kogen Ito Ryu School detest me surely, but none of them is courageous enough to challenge me. If Bunnojo had a real brother called Hyoma, child he may be, I shall have to be on guard" Ryunosuke opened his mind to Hama—the troubled mind of a guilty man who must expect a revenge.

"If only there were no Hyoma, it wouldn't be impossible to ask father to reinstate me," Ryunosuke added.

'If only there were no Hyoma' implied that if Hyoma was found Ryunosuke would put him out of the way. Hama began to feel irresistibly uneasy.

Who caused the death of Bunnojo? Was Hyoma to be put to death by the same man?.....the thought made Hama shudder.

"Is Mr. Yoshida in?" some one called from outside.

"Yes. I take it that it is Mr. Serizawa," Ryunosuke said and he rose. The caller was Kamo Serizawa, Captain of the Band of New Levies.



Chapter 2.

Kamo Serizawa and Ryunosuke Tsukue were chatting. The house did not have many rooms. From the next room came the sound of Hama preparing to entertain the guest. Hama could hear plainly what passed between her husband and the caller.

"And Mr. Yoshida," Serizawa began anew in a lower tone:—

"What was your plight last night?"

"Well, I'm really ashamed of myself."

"Hijikata came back dejected, too. He told the matter

to that man Kondo. He got roused and went to Shimada's school to-day at dawn, but came back thoroughly ousted."

"Shimada is more than his reputation."

Serizawa was much exercised finding Ryunosuke Tsukue, now known as Ryutaro Yoshida, also much dreading Shimada.

"Now I can find nobody but you, sir, to kill Shimada. Fair or foul Shimada must be killed, otherwise the honour of the New Levies is at stake."

"But don't you think we have had nothing to do with Shimada? The event of last night was through our own blunder, we've got only ourselves to thank for that."

"No, it isn't. The blood of our comrades is now upon him, and besides, to the government that man Toranosuke Shimada needs watching. We must kill him."

Through excitement Serizawa spoke louder than he intended.

Their conversation filled Hama with misgivings. Having had the necessary preparation for a little repast ended, she lay herself by Ikuhiko, the child, and was listening. But then they continued in much lower voices all of a sudden, and Hama could hear little.

There were several things that had given Hama cause for anxiety of late. Often Ryunosuke came home late and at times drunk. Especially Ryunosuke's association with vicious-looking roving samurai gave her misgivings. The guest now talking was a leader among such samurai, she was told, or some such a person among the 'rovers.' If

Ryunosuke could return to his native hearth, as he and Hama talked a while ago, he would become settled in mind, and would become gentle leaving off drinking, and of course less association with the 'rovers.'

While Ryunosuke and Serizawa were carrying on almost in a whisper, such names as Kondo and Hijikata struck the ear of Hama. Toshizo Hijikata was a man well up in fencing, and was a friend of Bunnojo, Hama's former husband. Occasionally the name of Hijikata fell from the lips of Ryunosuke. Isami Kondo must be that rough and ready man who was taken into the family of the founder of the Tennen Rishin Ryu School fencers at Hachiôji. Ryunosuke seems to be friendly with him of late, too. Overhearing such, the anxiety in the mind of Hama increased.

"Mr. Yoshida, do you know a person called Hyoma Utsuki?"

Hama started to hear Hyoma mentioned by Serizawa.

"Who? Utsuki?!" Ryunosuke uttered, showing signs of excitement.

"Utsuki, Hyoma Utsuki, and I hear that he is seeking you to revenge some one."

"Well, that's not impossible," said Ryunosuke rather coolly.

"And that Hyoma talks of coming to behead you assisted by Kondo and Hijikata."

Hama heard it clearly, and forgetting herself tried to get nearer to the slide to hear better. In so doing, her

teat brushed the face of the sleeping child. It stirred. Hama in a hurry attended it to make it sleep again.

Then the conversation in the next room became a whisper, and Hama could not hear it. Presently:—

"Well, I think I'll take your leave. Think over it well, will you?"

Hama tried to rise, for it seemed that Serizawa was going.

"And where lives that Hyoma Utsuki?" came from Ryunosuke.

"I mustn't tell. If I do, a fine young man must see his end without fulfilling his sacred mission of avenging his brother. Well, be on guard!"

"Um....."

It seemed that Ryunosuke did not press his question.

Chapter 3.

"Mr. Yohachi, I have now no other way but kill myself or run from this place," said Matsu at last coming one night to Yohachi, who was still doing some odd work. She was crying. He stopped his hand, "Well, run!" he said and continuing:—

"I have encouraged you to stay, but I now see that this house is not a good place for any one. I think you had better run not hesitating any more."

"Very well, Mr. Yohachi, then I'll depart at once, so please don't tell it anybody."

"If it is that you go, I go; so let's go together."

"Mr. Yohachi, are you coming, too?"

It was like finding an army of help coming to her to find Yohachi willing to come with her. And thus the two persons agreed upon to leave secretly the service of this immoral Kamio, a retainer to the Shogun.

Yohachi and Midori (Matsu) succeeded in slipping out of Kamio Mansion that night.

"Mr. Yohachi, where shall we go?"

"Let's go to Sawai. At Sawai I can find many of my old acquaintances."

They intended to take the Yedo-Kofu Highway going Temma-cho Street straight. But neither of them knew about the way much, so travelling in the opposite direction, they came out before the mansion of the Lord of Mito at Koishikawa.

"We may have made a mistake, I thought there was not a slope like this on the way," Yohachi remarked, noticing the mistake when they came near Ochano-mizu:—

"Never mind, let's go on as far as we can."

But when they came upon the open and lonely track of Kagayppara that lay between Shoheibashi Bridge and Sujikai Gate, a number of people and lanterns were seen coming from the opposite direction. They seemed to

be officials. So Yohachi felt a little uneasy and looked around. In one corner of the riding-ground he found an eating stall on wheels. He ducked under the curtains of that shop leading Matsu by the hand. As they entered "Good-night, sir, very cold, it looks snow," said a woman who had passed middle age but looked fresh and attractive—not a woman from the slum.

"Miss Midori, what do you say to some fried fish?"

"Yes, if you take it, Mr. Yohachi."

"Fried fish for two, then."

"Very well, thank you," said the woman and a little later with a 'thank you for waiting' she brought forth the dishes. The shop was sufficiently light, though the lamp that burnt in the paper-shade was a dim one. The eyes of Matsu and the woman met.

"Oh my, isn't it Auntie?" cried Matsu, now called Midori, with joy.

"Matsu, my word!" the mistress of the stall exclaimed in surprise.

"Aunt Taki indeed! But why must I find you here?"

"I am loath to be found by you here."

She may well be ashamed of herself to meet Matsu, for she was no other than Mrs. Yamaokaya of Hongō in her better days.

"Auntie, it is a long time since, are you all well?"

"No, not at all well, my dear, but I am glad that you are looking well."

"I have seen life since I called on you at Hongō."

"Oh, that time, you know I was not in, so....."

The woman could not help feeling qualmish to think of her very cold and heartless ways in treating Matsu when she called on her for help. So trying to pass the matter over:—

"Anyway, this is a pleasant surprise; if you are not in a hurry won't you come with me? I live at Sakumacho, a short way from here."

Thus softly spoken, whatever was the motive of the woman, it was a godsend to Matsu.

"Auntie, I have a little matter I'd like to seek your advice, so if you don't mind I'd like to come with you. I say Mr. Yohachi, this is my aunt."

"Is she? Good-night, ma'am," abruptly stammered Yohachi, who had been gazing at Matsu and the woman in wonder, not eating at all.

Matsu and Yohachi came to a lane at Sakumacho. Her house was the third one of a tenement partitioned off into eight compartments.

The aunt did not like to tell her story in detail, but what she said was that Yamaokaya, the drapery, was first burgled extensively, and then some of the employees were guilty of embezzlement so much so that the store had to wind up. Kynemon, the master, then died leaving debts. Whereupon, Mrs. Kynemon came to accept help of a kind artisan who had been a regular hand at Yamaokaya and she now lived with him. Moved by the woman, who related this in tears, Matsu could not withhold anything from

her and told all her stories, including the absconding from Kamio's.

"Don't worry, Matsu, I will see that you'll be well looked after."

She spoke kindly this time but she could not impress upon Matsu much. However, there was no other way for Matsu that time but lean upon this woman. And then as luck would have it, the second compartment from that woman's was not occupied, so they decided during that night to rent that.

The next morning Matsu found herself feverish, and dull and heavy in the head. She tried to be up as long as she could, but she could not bear it any longer and had to take to bed. Taki, her aunt, came in looking at least anxious, but Yohachi's anxiety was something indeed pathetic. Matsu asked not to send for the doctor, because she said that might lead to detection of their being run-aways.

"All right, then I will get some cold-cure at the druggist. Pull the quilt well over your head, you mustn't catch the cold draught," Yohachi said, and went to buy some cold-cure after having seen her snug and comfortable in the bed. As he went out Aunt Taki came in:—

"Matsu, better?" Did you try the egg-flip I sent to you?"

"Yes, thank you, I did."

"Where is Mr. Yohachi?"

"He is gone out to buy things for me."

"Is he?"

Taki getting nearer the bed put her hand on the brow of the sick girl:—

“Your temperature is pretty high, you must be careful—by the way, Matsu, have you got money?” added Taki hesitatingly.

“Yes—”

“If you have, I’m loath to ask, but I am short of cash for my shop, so won’t you kindly let me borrow some out of your fund? Just a small sum will do.”

“Yes, Auntie, with pleasure,” Matsu said very willingly:—

“Sorry to trouble you, but will you find it in that casket? Not much is there, but break the seal of the packet and take what you will.”

“Yes! May I break the seal. It is very good of you indeed; then I open the box, may I?”

Taki opened the casket which Matsu carried with her as she run away from Kamio’s:—

“Oh my, you possess a fine article! What’s this in a brocade bag? Dagger, eh? This is the packet. My word! Gold coins! Well then, I borrow just two ryo out of this. I really thank you, you’re very kind. Now, Matsu you mustn’t hesitate to let me know if you want anything. Aunt and niece should keep nothing from each other, I say; otherwise, there can be no real affection towards each other you must know.”

Taki went out talking volubly highly pleased. Then Yohachi came back.

Matsu did not get any better the next day. Yohachi was alarmed. He never left the bed-side. As he was nursing Matsu, Taki came in:—

“Any better, Matsu? No! You had better send for the doctor, send for Dr. Dōan of Chojamachi Street. He is all right, he isn’t that sort as given to gossiping, so there’s no danger in engaging him. Mr. Yohachi, sorry to trouble you, but won’t you go and get Dr. Dōan? Go the main street, you’ll come to that big oil merchant, it is Aioicho street. Now go straight on from the corner of Aioicho, you will find yourself before the mansion of Lord Ogasawara. Along the side of the mansion runs Chojamachi Street. If you mention Dr. Dōan to anybody, even children, in that street, you’ll soon be informed. But there’s a little knack that is necessary in inducing the doctor to come. If you don’t know how to ask he will never come.” Taki explained with appropriate gestures. Then continuing:—

“The little knack that is necessary to induce him to come is to say, ‘Sir, a poor folk is suddenly ill, I’ve come to ask the doctor to favour us with a visit.’ You must say ‘poor man is ill,’ if you happen to make him think you have come from a rich man, he’ll never come. Don’t forget to say ‘a poor folk is ill.’”

“Is the doctor fond of poverty?”

“No, not fond of poverty, but he is an eccentric man, you see. Besides, he is always tipsy, so keep that in mind,

too," Taki added, talking away in high spirits. Yohachi soon went out to call on Dr. Dōan. Taki then came nearer Matsui's bed once again and softly she began:—

"Matsui, my dear niece, I'm again short of money to pay in my share for this month to the 'fund raffle.' I don't like to ask you again, but....."

Matsui's money had now been marked down by this loathsome auntie.



Chapter 4.

Where was he bound for, Ryunosuke Tsukue was seen going on Onarikaido Thorougfare at Kanda towards Ujeno Hill with the setting sun upon his back. As he came to the corner of the mansion of Lord Ogasawara, "Wha!" came a shout and some one darted out from the side of the mansion wall and fell thud before Ryunosuke. Ryunosuke was surprised and saw that it was a physician, dead drunk, the hair done up in such a way that he looked like an arrowroot.

"Sorry, very sorry," he said trying to rise, but he could not steady himself, and his effort to rise was very funny. Rising at last he looked up—Ryunosuke could not help bursting out in laughter. Because an elderly and respectable doctor wore a mask of 'pouty-goggly' and turned its protruding mouth towards Ryunosuke.

"Rise, sir, rise!" Ryunosuke said smiling grimly and assisting the doctor by the hand.

"Very sorry, very sorry," the doctor said with rickety bows, swaying his body to and fro, and the mask of 'pouty-goggly' on the face. The sight was indeed comical. A number of children of the locality now caught sight of him. They flocked round the doctor calling out:—

"Hurrah, Dr. Dōan's in a 'pouty-goggly' mask; look at him, look at him! Hurrah, hurrah!"

"Give me that mask, doctor!" said one, "Won't you give me that?" shouted another, and the doctor was soon surrounded by the children.

"I've got only one mask, I can't give it to you all," said he.

"Let us toss," the children called out.

"Toss, all right, go ahead—w-h-a-a!" ejaculated the doctor and he nearly fell over Ryunosuke who stopped him from falling.

"Sorry, very sorry," said the tottering man.

Passers-by now began to gather round the scene. Ryunosuke was highly annoyed to find himself thus detained:—

"Say, sonny, who is this man?"

"He is Dr. Dōan of Chojamachi Street."

"He is dead drunk, some of you had better let his people know."

"Never mind, mister, he is always like that, leave him alone, he'll find his way home all right."

"Hey, children, dance, dance in this manner. One who

can dance best will get this mask," said Dōan and he began to dance like an octopus on land, still wearing that mask. All those who had been watching the scene burst out in laughter. Taking advantage of that Ryunosuke left the man and proceeded towards Shinkurumon.

As Ryunosuke was going to take the turn for Hirokōji Street a man passed him hard by. Ryunosuke did not take any notice of the man, but he turned round and stood grazing upon the back of Ryunosuke. It was Hyōma Utsuki.

"I think I saw him somewhere" thought Hyōma. He tried to recall who the man was but in vain and remained thinking. When Ryunosuke was gone about a hundred yards, Hyōma succeeded in recalling.

"Oh yes, he is the man I had a bout with at Mr. Shimada's school," thought he.

"He said he was in the service of Tarozemon Egawa if I remember rightly. His style of using the sword was very peculiar," he went on recalling the bout of the other day and the peculiarity of Ryunosuke's guard of 'at the moment of.'

"He scored over me first with a cut on the wrist, it came almost irresistibly. I like to try with him once more," he thought, and "Since he fences so well he must be a well-known fencer. What name did he give? Oh yes, he said something Yoshida, I have not heard of any fencer of fame called Yoshida—Yoshida may be an assumed

name." Hyōma turned over the matter thus in his mind walking absent-mindedly.

Then some uneasiness, something like a presentiment, passed in his mind:—

"Wait a minute, Ryunosuke Tsukue is reputed for his favourite peculiar guard called 'at the moment of,' wasn't that peculiar style of Yoshida that thing? Possibly it is. Besides, that Yoshida looked to be about thirty-two or three, that's Ryunosuke's age; is he not Ryunosuke, the murderer of my brother?"

Intuitively Hyōma felt that the man he passed a moment ago was Ryunosuke though there was nothing definite to go by. Then he turned to follow the man in the direction of Kurumon feeling all the more certain that he must be Ryunosuke.

"Wh-a-a-a!" staggered out Dr. Dōan from a side of the street and fell before Hyōma.

"Sorry, very sorry!" said the doctor.

The children who followed him called out:—

"Say, doctor, give us the mask."

A man of respectable age in a mask of 'pouty-goggy!' Hyōma burst out in laughter, too. It was that Hyōma tried to dodge the funny tottering man, and the latter fell before him.

"He is down again, make him get up, make him get up," shouted the boys trying to set Dōan on foot again:—

"Let's carry him to his home; heave ho, heave ho!" Disturbed by this incident Hyōma Utsuki lost trace of

Ryunosuke Tsukue, and he returned home leaving the matter at that.

Chapter 5.

Matsu got much better, but as she had been in bed over a fortnight, Yohachi indeed had a very troubled and uneasy time of it.

Aunt Taki came every day to offer empty compliments to Matsu and borrow money from her. She spent it all in furnishing her husband with pocket money and in treating herself to dainty food. So by the time Matsu was better, nearly all the money she had was gone.

Matsu was sitting in the bed and was combing up her dishevelled hair, Taki came in again:—

"I am glad that you are better now."

"Thank you, Auntie."

"I think my prayer to the Tenjin at Yushima had a great deal to do with your recovery as well as the skill of Dr. Dōan, whom I recommended to you."

"Yes, Auntie!"

"It is Tenjin's 'prayer day,' so you must visit his shrine for thanksgiving."

"Very well, Auntie."

"It's not far, but I fear it may be too much for you to go on foot, so I'll get you a palanquin."

"No, I don't think I need a palanquin, thanks all the same, Auntie. I think if I don't go on foot, it won't do for thanksgiving."

"Oh yes, just the same whether you ride or walk, so long as you have faith. By the way, Matsu....."

Whenever Taki turned upon her word it was to borrow money. So Matsu felt a thrill of abhorrence and fear go through her body on hearing Taki change her subject.

"How about the fee for Dōan?"

"To tell you the truth, Auntie....."

"No more money, eh?"

"No," Matsu blushed. Her aunt with a face trying to look very anxious:—

"I owe you some sum, but you know I can't repay all at once; I don't know what to do. Dr. Dōan is such a generous person, so he will not mind delay, but just because he is not exacting we must al the more be punctual in paying him. Besides, you'll need much money to fix yourself up, don't you? So we must find some means to raise money."

"Yes, indeed, Auntie."

"I may be prying too much into your own affairs, but haven't you got any valuables that may be sold or pawned to raise some definite sum of money?"

"No, I don't think I....."

"What was that thing in your casket—that thing in a brocade bag that seems to be a dagger? I think that thing will fetch money."

The thing that Taki had marked down was the dagger forged by Toshiro, that was given to Matsu by Shichibei, her rescuer. Matsu did not know what answer to give. She was sad to find her aunt had become so greedy and unscrupulous.

After Taki had left the house, advising Matsu to show the dagger to a curio dealer, Matsu opened the casket to look for the dagger, and taking it out of the bag, she unsheathed the cold short blade and looked at it.

For some time she had neglected to do the necessary wiping and dusting for it, but the dagger by the well-known smith was shining as ever. While gazing at the dagger she called to mind vividly the tragedy she witnessed at Great Buddhisattva Pass several years ago. Thus she remained buried in thoughts looking at the blade.

"No, no, no; no rash act," tumbled in Yohachi embracing Matsu from behind, arresting her arms. He had just come back from getting her medicine.

"Ridiculous, Matsu, ridiculous! Why must you stab yourself?"

"Mr. Yohachi, you make a mistake. I was only looking at the ware."

Matsu wanted to laugh to find Yohachi so much surprised. Yohachi thought Matsu was going to kill herself out of despair for being ill so long.

"No, no, I'll keep it for you," Yohachi said taking the dagger from the hand of Matsu. Finding the sheath he

put the dagger back into the brocade bag. Matsu smiled and said:—

"All right, I'll ask you to keep it for me—oh, no, better still, sell it and get rid of it, for that is the safest way. Sorry to trouble you so many times Mr. Yohachi, but won't you go and show it to a sword dealer?" for then it flashed in the mind of Matsu that she had better sell it.

"Sell this!?"

"Yes, I had better."

"But isn't this a treasure?"

"Yes, a treasure, but I think I must sell it to pay the doctor, and to obtain the necessary money for our future move."

"All right."

Yohachi, commissioned by Matsu, took the dagger to Odawara at Onarikaido Thoroughfare, that dealt in arms and armour, and showed the dagger. Thirty gold ryo was the price offered without any bargaining for it. Yohachi had thought it wouldn't fetch more than two or three ryo of gold. So he was dumbfounded at the offer of thirty gold ryo. The clerk, seeing Yohachi held his peace, added three ryo to his bid, and before Yohachi could speak put down the money there and carried the dagger to the inner part of the store.

Yohachi returned to the tenement at Sakumachō, putting the money carefully in his bosom.

"Miss Midori, I'm home."

"Thank you, every time."

Matsu had her hair done up into a maiden knot called *shimada*, and sitting in the light of the lamp, looked at Yohachi, she looked quite different from what she did when ill in bed. The beauty made even Yohachi feel a thrill.

"It sold far better than I had thought it would. See! thirty-three *ryo*."

"So much for that dagger!?"

"Thirty-three *ryo* even for being so short. It must be a superb ware."

"Won't you then kindly trouble yourself once more to go and pay Dr. Dōan his fee?"

"With pleasure."

"Tea is ready, let's have it together."

"Yes! Did you prepare?"

They sat together to eat.

"Mr. Yohachi, let me fill your bowl."

"Thank you, indeed."

They ate together. They had now the necessary money. Their conversation was chiefly about how happy they were now to return to Sawai. There Yohachi would keep the mill, and Matsu would work, her sleeves tucked, for Yohachi. When the meal was over, Yohachi said, "Well, I'll go and thank the doctor."

Chapter 6.

"What, brought the fee? All right, put it down there," said Dr. Dōan to Yohachi.

He was lying upon his back, dead drunk, in a eight mat room and talked like one in a dream.

"Doctor, how much is it?"

"How much, do you say? Well, eighteen *mon* copper will do."

"Eighteen *mon* copper!" ejaculated Yohachi much puzzled.

"It's too cheap, sir, for troubling you over a fortnight."

"Shut up! My price has got nothing to do with you.

Give your cheek to somebody else."

"Don't talk like that, doctor, please tell me how much I owe you."

"Eighteen copper coins, haven't I told you?"

"You are drunk, doctor, that's why you talk like that."

"Drunk? Yes. But I never forget myself that business is business. Put down eighteen *mon*, and go back."

"That won't do, it's too small a sum."

"You must be a fool. I, the man who is to be paid, say eighteen *mon*; why don't you put down eighteen *mon* and go?"

"Doctor, I must call you a fool. You looked after the patient over a fortnight, and you supplied her with medicine, and you restored her to health. Do you think I can go back with only eighteen *mon* behind?"

"Shut up, you fool! Your business is to pay me eighteen *mon* and go."

"But, doctor, please hear me keeping your temper.

Do you think I can go back and tell the girl that I paid you, Dr. Doan, only eighteen *mon* for his fee?"

"You are a nuisance. Pay me eighteen *mon* and go."

"Then I'll pay a *ryo*."

"What, a *ryo*! ? Whom did you rob to get such a big sum of money?"

"What? Robbed some one to get the money? You good for nothing leech!" Yohachi got furious with

rage:—

"I have never, in my whole life, taken anything belonging to somebody else but me—even a bit of dust! I can not forgive you for that.

"Surely you must have robbed some one of the money,"

said Dr. Doan shaking his head. Yohachi was incensed:—

"I can't permit myself to be called a thief, my honour is at stake."

"Shut up, you must have robbed some one to obtain that money."

"What? You still say that," so saying Yohachi pounced upon the doctor and caught him by the breast of the coat.

"What? Are you looking for trouble? Come on, I'm ready!" said the doctor and hugged Yohachi's head, but of course, in the matter of strength Dr. Doan was no match to Yohachi. Yohachi on his part, however, hesitated to do anything to the doctor, for he was not his enemy.

Taking advantage of the hesitation, the doctor, bit, scratched and slapped Yohachi on the head as much as he liked. Yohachi was much annoyed, but then the doctor fell on his back again and went to sleep once more after having played with Yohachi's head for some time.

Yohachi thereupon left a *ryo* wrapped in paper, put it by the head of the doctor and returned home, for there was no other way but that.



Chapter 7.

Upon returning to the tenement at Sakumacho, Yohachi found his own door as well as that of Taki closed.

"Miss Matsu, I say Miss Matsu," he called but no answer. He came round to Taki's and called but no answer came, not a sound.

"Have you turned in already, Auntie? I say, Auntie!"

Yohachi called again but no answer.

"I say, neighbour."

"Who is it?"

"Yohachi, your neighbour."

"Oh, is it Mr. Yohachi? Have you forgotten anything?"

"My compartment is empty. Did she tell you anything?"

"You don't know then, Mr. Yohachi."

"What of?"

"What of ?!" Your Aunt took leave of her neighbours to remove, and is gone. Don't you know that?"

"Removed!"

"Yes, and before she left, that young lovely girl who came with you went out in a palanquin."

"What?! I never knew!" Colour mounted in the face of Yohachi, his lips quivered.

"No? Didn't you know? We thought you were sent ahead to prepare the new home."

"And where did she say she was removing to?"

"Yotsuya, I think she said, and said that she would call on us one of these days to look us up."

"Just think, to go removing not letting me know....."

Yohachi said, big tears running down his cheeks. He then exclaimed what part of Yotsuya, and seemed to cry aloud. But something passed in his mind, and he ran next towards the main street.

"Isn't it Mr. Yohachi, I say Mr. Yohachi" called out some one to Yohachi as he ran on Onarikaïdo Thorougthfare.

"Who is it?" Yohachi turned. The man who accosted Yohachi was Hyoma Utsuki, who was returning home after having called on Toshizo Hijikata, at the house of Kaneko at Yanagiwara—the house that was the rendezvous of the Levy-men when they planned to waylay Takahashi and Kiyokawa.

"Oh, Mr. Hyoma," said Yohachi and stopped though he was in a desparate hurry.

Chapter 8.

When the night grows quiet so does human mind. As it grows quieter by degrees things that never entered into the mind in the day time are called up. And when one cannot sleep, one becomes all but nerves and things which had better been left alone begin to occupy the mind. The sage alone exempted, among the rest of humanity, there must be no one who can say 'I have not erred' recalling the past. Conscience sleeps while passions and other mental elements are active. But when they are tired and fall to inaction, conscience wakes up to chide the man.

Ryunosuke had nightmares every night. One night the groans disturbed the sleep of Hama. She had a peep at the face of her husband. It looked unearthlily fiendish. Weird groans mingled with the sound of grinding teeth. They sounded as if a fiend were giggling. A chilly sensation crept over Hama. She hugged Ikutaro, the son, and trying to pull the counterpane over her head she looked at the shrine for the dead.

Ryunosuke and Hama possessed no shrine yet. So, the shrine that was in their house was what the previous tenant had left. Inside, possibly there was a picture of Amidaha Tathagata or some such deity—there could have been nothing in the shrine that could stir Hama's mind. The shrine however was clattering. But that was nothing uncanny, for some rats were running riot inside.

But the noise now became too loud to tolerate, so Hama shooed to frighten away the rats. The noise stopped all of a sudden. A little while later a huge rat emerged pattering from the shrine and dropped close to Hama's head. Hama was frightened and tried to hit the animal with her wooden pillow. The rat, losing head, jumped right between the feet of Hama and the face of the child.

"Ah-h-h" Hama cried and tried to drive it out. But the rat all the more losing wits ran further into Hama's clothes.

"Oh, oh" she cried and leaped out of bed. The rat thereupon fell on the face of the child. It began to cry all of a sudden like one startled with a pain.

"Oh, oh, baby dear" Hama took up Ikutaro in her arms. Meanwhile the rat ran up the slide and disappeared into a hole that was formed by fallen plaster from the wall near the ceiling.

Ikutaro cried. His cry sounded as if it were wrung from his whole self.

"The rat is gone now, don't cry baby, don't cry," Hama said to the child and tried to suckle, then she found a drop of blood on her breast.

"I say, my good man, wake up, please, wake up! A serious thing has happened," said she, and stretching one arm she shook Ryunosuke carrying in the other Ikutaro who kept on crying.

"What's the matter?" Ryunosuke woke. He was startled

by the unusual nature of Ikutaro's cry, and by the fact that every part of his own body that his hand could feel was so wet with perspiration that it were as if wetted with water.

"A rat bit our baby. See to him, will you?"

"Yes? What part?"

Ryunosuke got up. Mending the wick, he examined the body of the child. He found that Ikutaro had a horizontal scar on the throat. It was not deep, but blood was oozing out of the wound that was like a tiny earthworm.

"Oh, the darling is bit at the throat," Hama screamed like a lunatic.

"Not much. Wipe the blood, and bind the throat with this," Ryunosuke said handing Hama a piece of cotton cloth that had been lying about.

"There's some ointment in the drawer of the work-box; get it quick—quick I tell you."

"Don't hurry me so."

"Can't you find it? That right hand small drawer."

"Oh, I see."

"I think I'll give the scar a good wash. Get us some water, dear."

Hama was agitated and excited. After much ado she finally had it done to wipe off the blood with wet cloth. The child all the while writhed in agony crying pathetically.

"Oh, that's all right darling, it's not hurting, is it? It shan't take long now," she said to the child, bandaging the throat at long last applying ointment.

"You mustn't cry, darling, you're a brave little chap, aren't you?" said she, settling the still crying child on her lap; Hama herself was half crying. Ryunosuke was also looking into the face of the child anxiously despite his wont of martial ways of looking at things. Meanwhile, whether the pain decreased, or the child had no more voice left for crying, it became quieter its hands catching his mother at her breast.

"I think I'll take him to the doctor."

"It's too late, wait till morning."

"Can't wait, sir. I fear it may become too late for treatment. I wouldn't mind so much if his wound were caused by something else, but you know, a rat bite is at times fatal they say," Hama answered and insisted upon taking the child to the doctor at once.

"All right, I'll go and fetch him," Ryunosuke said and went out.

"Dirty wretch!" Hama gnashed her teeth staring at the shrine and cursing the rat, wishing that she could catch it and tear it to bits.

It was midnight. The hush peculiar to the dead of night, however, was disturbed by the agony of the child. In the garret the rats ran about again. Their footfalls sounded as if they were saying 'serve you right, serve you right.'

Hama looked up at the ceiling with angry eyes. Looking down her eyes met the pitiful white bandage which

looked as if it were trying to choke the slender throat of the helpless child that was exhausted from crying. Hama became irresistibly sad, and sorry for the child.

"Darling dear, you must not neglect that, you know; the throat is an important part" Hama said in tears looking in the face of her child; "Should you die, your mother shan't live another day."

To relate a little about the child here, Ikutaro was a plump, healthy little thing. It overcame measles without suffering. It had lovely eyes, the charms of which even a stranger could not resist. So to Hama, its mother, it was her life.

"I can't leave off that beast," Hama muttered, her thought turning again to hate the rat from the love of her child.

Hama wanted to change her bed-clothes to her daily wear to meet the physician. So she tried to put the child down to bed gently. But it started again to cry most pitifully in a hoarse voice. Hama took it up again to nurse, but it kept on crying. The child had now no voice left in him; he opened his big eyes and staring the mother in the face shed big tears, its body trembling.

"Darling dear, it still hurts, does it? Oh you mustn't stare at me in such a dreadful face," Hama said and wept being now utterly dejected. The child shook its whole little self and seemed trying to get at the mother, its eyes still staring her in the face, not even winking.

"Why do you tease me so, my child? Oh what fate!"

She said in tears looking in the face of her child:—

"Oh retribution! Surely retribution! It's come, it's come, it's come!"

She put down the child in the bed rather abruptly; her eyes shone like those of a lunatic.

It was too late for Hama to cry *peccavi*, but she had to though so late it was. Such is human. It was mother's love that drove Hama to the verge of lunacy over such a trifling wound of her child.

"O-h-h-h!" Hama uttered shuddering from fear. She now thought of Bunnojo, her first husband. How much tear did Hama shed for the man who was killed by the murderous blow dealt out with a dummy sword? How much did she resent the man who dealt out that blow? Hama never had had inward peace since his murder. Now she found the last looks of her butchered husband in the face of Ikutaro. The noise of that rat in the garret sounded like the mutterings of Bunnojo; behind the screen lurked ghosts. In the shrine for the dead, Bunnojo was looking this way in his wan and emaciated face. The arabesque patterns of the bedding began to lengthen to coil round her throat; from behind the toilette stand a long thin arm stretched forth to pat Hama on her breast as well as on her abdomen. Out of the drawers of her work-box rose a vapour, and it forced its way into Hama's eyes and mouth. Out of the broken pane of the paper sliding door, demons lurked to carry away the child.

In all directions Hama saw dreadful things. She felt giddy, and could not support herself unless some relief was sought. So she opened a window and looked out.

The chilly night air that patted her face revived Hama. She carried Ikutaro in arms to the window, and remaining there said:—

"Oh how slow the doctor is in coming."

The child sobbed and moved its body in spasm. It still stared the mother in the face with its eyes wide open.

The crescent shone in the sky though at the window the moon was hidden from view. It shone upon the tiles of the fire-proof store-rooms of the Egawa Mansion. In the reflected light the face of Ikutaro looked ghostly.

"Darling dear, all is my fault," Hama said, her tears in big drops wetting the face of the child.

Hama kept standing by the window with the child firmly in her arms, there being no likelihood of the doctor's coming nor Ryunosuke's speedy return.

Chapter 9.

Ryunosuke was still in bed tired from the incident that occurred at midnight.

"I say dear, I say," it was Hama who was calling and shaking Ryunosuke at the same time.

He raised his head from the pillow. The sun was high

already in the heavens and the old knarled plum-tree in the yard cast its fantastic shadows upon the paper sliding doors.

"Such a letter, my man."

"What, a letter?"

Ryunosuke received it from the hand of Hama. The wrapper was sealed on the wrong side which meant bad news.

"Oh!" he uttered. On the face of the wrapper was inscribed 'To Ryunosuke Tsukue Esq.' and on the back 'Hyoma Utsuki.'

Ryunosuke half rose in bed, and broke the seal, it read:—

You are my enemy. I desire to fight you according to our samurai custom. If you accept my challenge, I expect you to be at Akabanebashi Cross to-morrow morning by four o'clock.

"Hum, despicable little letter!" Ryunosuke threw the letter lightly down and sat up in bed abruptly.

"How's baby?"

"He is soundly asleep."

"The physician said that it was only a fright, and there was nothing the matter with the baby except that," Ryunosuke said looking into the face of Ikutarō, who slumbered in the arms of his mother, Hama.

After wash and breakfast:—

"Hama, bring baby to me."

"But he is fast asleep."

"Never mind, I want to have him in my arms."

"Why, very unusual of you?"

"Never mind, let me have him."

"He will cry if we disturb him."

"That doesn't matter, I want him."

Seeing Ryunosuke was determined, Hama put Ikutarō, who was fast asleep, gently in the arms of Ryunosuke. Ryunosuke, embracing the child closely to him, gazed upon the face of it fondly, and directing his eye to the bandage that was applied the previous night over the scar on the throat said, as if moved by some fresh impulse, to the infant:—

"Grow up to be a happy man, dear."

"Of course he shall be, why not?"

"Well, children need no parent to help them grow, they say."

"He has father and mother, why do you talk like that?"

Hama looked displeased. Ryunosuke, all of a sudden addressing Hama, said, "I think I will move up to Kioto shortly."

"To Kioto?" Hama was surprised.

"Yes. Samurai of different clans, who have resigned from clan service on purpose, are all congregating there and they are rebellious. So picked swordsmen are sent by the Shogunate to arrest their activities. I have been asked by one of them to go with them."

"Yes, and when?"

"Shortly. I might start all at once, you never know."

"Then what do you do with the child and me?"

"You two remain here."

"No, that won't do," Hama strongly objected, being

quite alarmed at the idea of Ryunosuke's going.

"If you object to that, I must think of some other arrangement," said Ryunosuke to give Hama peace of mind and he withdrew to the next room.

The child was really not much hurt, but it ailed all the same. So Hama remained closely attending to it. Ryunosuke remained in his room, not even once coming out, not even a cough was heard from within.

"Why he is so strong in will?" Hama said to herself resenting the fact that her man was not at all anxious about the illness of his child, and that he remained aloof in his room. Then he came out. Hama looked at her man. He had his sword with him, so:—

"Where are you off to, sir?"

"I want to call on Serizawa."

"Don't, if it is not on an urgent matter; our darling is seriously hurt."

"Urgent; shan't be long."

"Please, don't be long, I shall be lonely and helpless."

Hama saw her man to the door:—

"I wonder if my man has a heart?"

Hama began to be retrospective again. She called to mind the past, especially since she began to live with Ryunosuke. She thought she was now undergoing punishment for not being satisfied to live with the peaceful

Bunnojo. Yet she could not say to herself that she erred, she alone was to be blamed.

Hama spent the whole day cursing at times herself at times other people, and nursing Ikutaro. Ryunosuke, who had said that he would return soon, did not come back till evening. Hama resented the delay in her man's home-coming deeply.

"Oh, I can't stand this, he is too cold," she said to herself, "Why, he has no heart even for his own child!"

Ryunosuke and Hama lived so far together because they loved each other after all though their relation started very ignobly. But it had been the instant complaint of Hama, the woman, that her man did not love her enough. She wanted him to love her more and had expected it. But he was rather cold, and at times Hama felt as if a piece of iron plate intervened between the two hearts. Not only was she sad for the want of Ryunosuke's love of her, but resented his want of affection towards his child.

"Ikutaro is not my child," said Ryunosuke to Hama once when he was in a temper. The words now returned to her once more in a stronger strain.

"I fear that he may really be thinking that Ikutaro is not his child," Hama thought.

Ryunosuke now came in at the door.

"Home, dear," he said dryly. His face was paler than usual. He passed Hama and the child to the next room with only a glance. Hama felt anger rise from within and said:—

"Sir, whose child is this?"

Her voice shook with emotion. Ryunosuke gave another glance at Hama from the corner of his slender eyes:—

"What do you mean?"

"Whose child is Ikutaro I'm asking you, sir."

"What is the purpose now?"

"He is not *your* child, you know."

"Stop your prattle."

"He's dying, don't you know that?"

"What!?"

Ryunosuke thought that Hama opened the usual fire again out of her waywardness. He was cooler than usual and said:—

"Die!?" Well, if the child is so fated."

"Indeed....."

Hama stared Ryunosuke in the face with eyes dreadfully strained. Ryunosuke returned the stare in quiet but determined eyes. Here it used to burst into further altercations and in which Hama would mention her resolution to kill herself and so forth, but to-day, strange to relate, both held their peace.

Ryunosuke left Hama and entered his room. He sat before the desk absent-mindedly for a while. Then he lighted the lamp himself, and appeared to have begun writing something having opened the ink case and taken out paper. Presently Hama came in:—

"Sir, Mr. Ryunosuke."

"What is it?"

"I have something I must ask you."

"Say it."

Ryunosuke did not even turn his head nor stayed his hand. He kept on writing and answered coolly. Hama's eyes showed a cool determination, too; she did not waste words.

"Divorce me, sir."

"Divorce!?" Here Ryunosuke turned his head stopping his pen.

"Divorce, do you say? Not a bad idea."

"No, not a bad idea. We have gone through many a

scene, so....."

"So 'curtain' eh?"

"Yes, give me divorce in writing."

"I don't think that is needed, for our status is only private."

"Then I take your leave now."

"You may" said Ryunosuke all the more coolly, and

adding:—

"But, where are you going?"

"That's my business, sir."

"No, I don't mean to interfere with your liberty, I only ask you to look after Ikutaro."

"You needn't ask that, he is my son."

Hama went out to the next room.

Hama opened the chest of drawers. She began to

ransack pulling out many a suit. From the bottom of a drawer she pulled out an early summer silk suit with arrows in purple and white. This lined garment was the one she was wearing when she was divorced by Bunnojo. It was in this garment that she secretly climbed Mt. Mitake to meet Ryunosuke at Fog Hill. Naturally she was wearing this dress when she travelled on the Yedo-Kofu Road with Ryunosuke to come to Yedo, after walking the mountain paths down to Hikawa stopping in charcoal-burner's huts at night, and raising a loan from her relation at Uenohara by deceit to obtain money for the journey.

Since Ryunosuke and Hama set up cohabitation here, the dress strangely escaped the hand of a ragsman and remained to remind Hama of the past. The dress was a wedding present from her sister-in-law whom she set at naught many a time for being officious enough to interfere in the management of her household. In spite of that she and brother were very kind to her, and did everything they could in arranging Hama's marriage with Utsuki. The dress was what the sister-in-law made herself for Hama. She felt now deeply sorry for having had been so self-willed and wayward towards her sister-in-law.

"Well, I think I'll go back to my native Province Kai and to her," she thought, but then "How can I! I can not do that; then where shall I go?"

Hama had no place to go should she leave Ryunosuke—yes, she had just one place left to go, that was where her first husband Bunnojo Utsuki was now. No other place

there could have been. Thinking where she should go Hama felt as if her blood rose from bosom to head.

As she had thrown down the dress, something peeped out of it. It was a dagger in a sack.

Her eye now caught the sight of it. 'Death,' the most dreadful thought of man, flashed in her mind, Better die than live in shame—was her thought.

Hama had never entertained the thought of death till then. She thought she would leave Ryunosuke taking Iku-taro with her seeking refuge somewhere in this wide world—such a reckless idea filled her thought.

Clinging to life her thought had troubled her, now it did not, and a way opened to her, though it was to no other place than Hades.

She picked up the dagger quickly and put it into her bosom as a thief would hide his spoils. Hama heard her own heart throb loudly and rapidly, but on her face appeared a cool spiteful smile. She now sat and stared into the light of the paper-shaded rape-seed oil lamp absent-mindedly.

"Hama, Hama, you still there?"

Ryunosuke was heard calling.

"Hama, are you not there?"

This time Hama heard him. Ryunosuke called out for the third time:—

"Hama, Hama."

Hama now hated that voice, she could stand it no longer. Ryunosuke now seemed to be coming into Hama's room.

"Oh, are you getting ready to go, is it?" Ryunosuke said opening the slide. He now stood there and looked at Hama. Hama gave a glance at him looking up, but then she looked aside and refused to be drawn into conversation.

"Hama, where are you intending to go?"

"I can't tell you, sir."

"All right. You proposed divorce a while ago, so we must be strangers now, very well. As a parting present I have some news for you, listen closely," Ryunosuke went on standing:—

"Shortly I'll kill Hyoma Utsuki."

"Kill Hyoma!?"

Hama turned.

"Yes, kill him or he kills me."

"Why?"

"I don't think I shall be put to sword by the young and slender Hyoma. 'Go the whole hog' people say, so I'll kill Hyoma too, as I did Bunnojo, his brother."

A grim smile appeared on the pale long face of Ryunosuke.

Hama looked up in his face squarely. She did not feel fear at all this time. She said coolly:—

"Yes, kill!"

Chapter 10.

Ryunosuke retired early after drinking some wine filling the cup himself.

Hama sat, still absent-mindedly. Iktaro, the child, was fortunately in peaceful slumber.

"Kill Hyoma!" the word of Ryunosuke pierced the heart of Hama.

Ryunosuke seemed to be asleep now. The usual groan and the gnashing of teeth were heard. Hama rose suddenly and entered his room.

On the desk were a few letters which Ryunosuke seemed to have written a while ago. Hama picked up one of them. It was the letter of challenge from Hyoma. She read..... "according to our samurai custom. I expect you by four to-morrow morning at Akabanebashi Cross."..... The signature of Hyoma Utsuki followed. Now Hama understood all.

Fine young samurai Hyoma! to challenge a man thus. Hyoma whom Hama knew was a lovely boy of twelve or thirteen, now a man! Yet he must be only sixteen at the most. No doubt he must have practised the sword very much, yet Ryunosuke's attainment of the skill in using the sword was something wonderful, there could have been no getting away for Hyoma but to be put to Ryunosuke's cruel sword, should they meet for a duel. Hama's heart was now full of sympathy for Hyoma.

"U-u-u-m" groaned Ryunosuke. To Hama it sounded as if he had cut down Hyoma and was steadying himself from the thrill and excitement of the killing.

"I'm so sorry for Mr. Hyoma."

Hama's hand touched again the dagger that was in her bosom.

Hama thought she would kill Ryunosuke before she killed herself. Let the two ugly sinners die, and the young fair Hyoma live; and she was now fast nerving herself for action.

To be able to sleep with an impending duel in the morning, was praiseworthy of Ryunosuke.

He might, to some extent, have become out of practice, but in his eye there was no fencer worth the name; he laid himself down to snatch sleep to recuperate himself. But in mind Ryunosuke was now thoroughly exhausted.

The nightmares, the gnashing of teeth, the perspiration while in sleep and the like, all followed since Ryunosuke saw how well Toranosuke Shimada used the sword the other night at Shin-Sakashita when Shimada was waylaid by the Levy-men. In wake as well as in sleep the vision of Shimada's looks, his carriage and his deportment did not leave Ryunosuke.

For the reason of that Ryunosuke's mind seemed to have become disturbed by degrees. He was sleeping now, but he was dreaming that he approached stealthily, with his sword drawn, from behind Shimada, who sat in the calm and serene dignity of a perfect samurai in full silk dress with

a streak of sweet incense rising upright before him. Ryunosuke dreamt now he lifted his sword to deliver a cut. Shimada turned as he sat to face Ryunosuke. Ryunosuke now turned to the side for a thrust, the sitting samurai again faced him squarely. Losing patience Ryunosuke attempted to pounce upon the man, then the smoke of the incense rose higher, and coiling, it blew upon his face. Brushing away the smoke, he walked round and round Shimada with the sword pointed at the sitting figure. Exhausted he began to feel giddy, bleeding at the nose, and the smoke choking him. Then something cold touched him at the throat.

"Who goes there?" his dream was broken. He sprang up in his bed and he felt that his hand was staying a soft human hand, that held an icy blade. It was now not a dream, a reality.

"Why, aren't you Hama?"

Yes, it was his wife who applied a dagger to his throat riding upon him.

"What do you mean, gone crazy?"

He wrestled the dagger from the hand of the woman, and rising to his feet he kicked her. She fell on her back upon the lamp and it broke; the fire caught its paper-shades.

Recovering from the fall, Hama got up and darted out from the door which she seemed to have opened on purpose, and disappeared in the dark.

"Dirty wretch!" Ryunosuke uttered.

The fire of the lamp that Hama upset by falling upon now caught the paper sliding doors. Ryunosuke stamped it out hurriedly and rushed out after the woman with a sword in hand. The house was now dark within. Ikutaro, the child, was heard crying as if his little throat would burst.

Which way did Hama run?

Dark the night was it was now near daybreak. The sky was now lighted in the east. Upon the thoroughfare from Shimmei to Hamamatsucho, Hama was running showing her back. The chaser closed upon her as she came before the pine grove by the gate of the Zôjôji Temple.

"Wait!"

She was caught by the collar and was pulled down.

"Let go."

"No. You're in league with Hyoma."

"Kill me, quick!"

No valour nor any martial feat in killing a woman. Ryunosuke who even at the moment of intense excitement could recover coolness of mind, now gazed upon the dishevelled and confused figure of Hama.

"Mr. Ryunosuke, kill me first and please get killed after," Hama said.

Man and woman were now face to face. It was sufficiently light then to see each other. Hama was calm and collected, she no longer begged for mercy, and she spoke reason.

"I'll let you kill me willingly, so please be killed by Mr. Hyoma willingly, too. Then the whole affair will be set right, and we expiate our sin, too. So please do so, Mr. Ryunosuke."

Footfalls were now heard approaching the temple gate, the morning bell boomed out.

"Help, murder!"

Ryunosuke killed Hama.



Chapter II.

"Oh, what's that?"

The cry of Hama caught the ear of Hyoma and his party who had just left their palanquins outside the temple gate.

"'Help, murder' didn't it say?" Banjiro Katayanagi, Hyoma's second, said cocking his ear.

"It was from that pine grove for certain," Hyoma said looking in the direction of the dark trees.

"Shall I go and see?" proceeded Yohachi with lantern in hand into the grove. He bumped against a pine-tree.

"Ouch," he put his hand over the brow; reeks of blood smote his nose.

"Funny," said he and put the lantern down. There by a pine-tree was a figure of some one prostrate.

"Hey, some one's...." Yohachi steadied his eyes. He

found that it was a woman who had her breast covered with blood—running to the ground.

“I say, a woman!”

Hyoma did not like to be detained, for he was now going to the place of supreme importance. Yet he thought if a human life could be saved, he must save it.

“Oh, bloody feat!”

“The blood will soil your skirt, sir.”

“Where did she catch it?”

“One thrust on the breast.”

“Bring the light closer.”

“Poor woman, right under the breast.”

Yohachi who held the lantern close to the body and was in a state of much agitation, said:—

“I think I have seen this lady” and brought his face close to that of the corpse.

“I think.....this lady is.....Madame Hama,” said he looking up in the face of Hyoma with signs of uneasiness in his face.

“Mr. Hyoma, please see her face closely, it may be my fancy, but I think she looks like Mrs. Bunnojo.”

“What, looks like my sister!?” Hyoma stepped forward pushing aside his seconds Katayanagi and Mizushima.

“Yes, it resembles her, though I find a great deal changed. To ascertain, please examine her belongings.”

“Here I find a dagger.....a letter.....another letter,” Yohachi handed them to Hyoma. The first letter was, to his great surprise, his own letter of challenge to Ryunosuke.

The next one he scanned in the light. “‘What!?’ To Mr. Hyoma Utsuki, from Hama.” It was written in Hama’s hand and was addressed to Hyoma Utsuki.

Ryunosuke Tsukue did not make his appearance at the place of duel.

To run after receiving a challenge was the greatest shame for a samurai. Besides, Ryunosuke was the sort of man who wanted to kill more if he killed one. So it was something unaccountable that he absconded.

He did not make his appearance at Akabanebashi Cross by the appointed hour. His house at Shinsenza was in sixes and sevens, and a child was crying hoarse inside. Ryunosuke was sought in several directions but in vain, therefore the duel could not take place. Hyoma Utsuki felt as if the bottom were cut away under his feet, but there was just one consolation to him, that was that he discovered Ryunosuke’s letter to Kamo Serizawa, captain of the Levy-men. It said in part:—

After putting Hyoma to sword I will proceed to Kioto as arranged previously.....

According to this letter, Ryunosuke was not only determined to accept the challenge but was certain of winning, and then he intended to leave Yedo for Kioto. Then why he ran at the last moment when his mind about the matter was so settled. Nobody could think of why, but the possible murderer of Hama, all thought, must be Ryunosuke.

Chapter 12.

"I have long neglected to call on you, Madame."

It was Shichbei, who lived near Ome, calling on Madame Kinu at Tsumagoi Zaka, Hongō, Yedo. He seldom called.

"Is it Mr. Shichbei, well I never. I was wondering what has become of you?"

"A farmer has much to do, you know. Besides, I went on pilgrimage to the Grand Shrine at Ise for a holiday, so naturally I couldn't come sooner than this. Please accept this little present as a token for souvenir."

"That is very kind of you. You farmers are lucky people. Certainly you work hard, but then you can go on pilgrimages and sight-seeing every now and then for a change."

"You don't say so."

"Ordinary farm folks can't do that often, can they?" Shichbei could not help smiling, rather a grim smile, on hearing Kinu talk like that.

"You know, I have a bit of side line."

"A side line! Piece goods?"

"Yes, something of the kind."

"Yes! Well, I'd like you show me some Kaki silk next time."

"Very well, I'll bring some. By the way, Madame," Shichbei altered his tone:—

"How is Matsu getting along?"

"Ah well, about her—I was on the point of sending a letter to you to make inquiries."

"Has anything happened?"

"Yes, she eloped."

"Eloped!?"

"Yes, If it were that she ran with the son of her Lord, or some samurai, I don't mind so much, but....."

"Who was the man, then?"

"Who do you say? Well, she eloped with a half-wit from the country, isn't it disgusting?"

"A half-wit!?"

"Yes. It must be explained. About two months ago, I put Matsu in the service of a Shogun's retainer Lord Kario, who lives at Yotsuya. In the household of Kario was a servant called Yotaro, or Yohachi or something, a half-wit. Matsu was seduced by that country bumpkin."

"Do you mean that Lord Shuzen Kario, whose mansion stands on Demmacho Street, by Lord Kario of Yotsuya?"

"That's him. Lord Kario is a retainer whose fief yields fifteen thousand bushels of rice. So if Matsu were clever enough to please the lord, she might rise as high as a woman could go. Yet of all the household she picked the bath-man, Yohachi the half-wit, to elope with. I'm through with Matsu now. No woman so stupid as she had passed my hand."

"I never thought she would act so stupidly. Have you any knowledge as to the whereabouts of Matsu?"

"None absolutely. I exhausted every means of search, but all in vain. I thought of despatching a courier to you, but then the lord stopped it saying there's no use in running after such an immoral girl. So the matter rested there. But I feel ashamed of myself to meet the lord because of her now, and, oh my vexation!"

"Well, I think I'll look for her. I believe she is not such a stupid woman, so there may be reason for her strange conduct, if only I find her and ask."



Chapter 13.

A raggman, who had been shadowing Shichibei before he called on Madame Kinu, and was loitering in the lane now followed Shichibei. Shichibei travelled from Kinu's house at Tsumagoi-Zaka to Yamaokaya, the draper, at Motomachi, Hongō. The shutters were down, and a sheet of paper posted obliquely bore 'House for Sale.' Shichibei stood before the house for some time.

"I say, Mister."

One who accosted Shichibei from behind was the raggman.

"Do you mean me?"

"Yes."

"What can I do for you?"

"Well, I have nothing to trouble you about, sir; but you are looking at this house for some time....." The man

looked up at Shichibei from under the brow that he covered with a folded headkerchief.

"If you want to know anything about Yamaokaya, I can tell you all, sir."

A curiously meddlesome man! But he did not seem likely to carry a provost's baton in his bosom. So Shichibei thinking there must be some cause:—

"That's fortunate, I want to know where Mr. Yamaokaya has removed."

"There's a long story about Yamaokaya to relate. Which way are you going, sir? I may relate while walking."

"I am intending to go in the direction of Shinjuku."

"I am for Yotsuya, so I'll, accompanying, tell you all about the downfall of Yamaokaya."

Shichibei did not like the man, he was still suspicious of him. Yet he thought there was no harm in listening to what he had got to say, so he walked along with that rag-picker.

"Well, it was mid-summer some four years ago. One night a thief broke into Yamaokaya."

"Yes!"

"The master was not in. The mistress of the house was then *tete-a-tete* with a young man of shaven eyebrows (actor). It was right into there that the thief entered."

"Ha-hu-m."

"That thief was not only after money. He seemed to

have come to settle some old score with her. So he went away after handling the woman and the young one pretty roughly."

"Hu-hu-m."

"I can't tell you all in detail, but to make a long story short the thief stripped the lady and the young one, and

"Hu-u-m."

"And oh the uproar and confusion when the morning came! You couldn't describe nor draw the scene."

"Was it so?"

"Then whole town began to talk it that Mrs. Yamaokaya was stripped naked by a burglar. The disgrace was too much for her."

"I see."

"Then the master who had been travelling came back."

"Yes."

"He was angry, there was now no peace between husband and wife. But the wife belonged to the house; the master had entered the house of Yamaokaya to perpetuate the family line. So she couldn't be very well divorced, and he said he would rather leave the house."

"Did he leave?"

"No. Right in the midst of the turmoil, the master died suddenly after a brief illness."

"Yes, did he?"

"Then the wife began, out of desperation, to live a

riotous life. The house and business were ruined in no time, and the store changed hands.

"I see."

"And again the man who bought the house and the drapery business never thrived. People say that the fire-proof store of that drapery is haunted. The establishment changed hands three times, and again it is for sale."

"Sorry to hear, but what has become of Mrs. Yamaokaya?"

"Well, that can constitute another story of interest. But, what are you, sir, to Yamaokaya? I fear I'm talking too much to a stranger."

"What are you, then, to Yamaokaya?"

The ragman and Shichibei looked at each other.

"Sir," the tone of the man altered.

"You may not remember my face, but I do remember yours."

"What?! Do you know me?"

"Yes. Well, I shan't withhold my identity any longer, to use a high sounding phrase. You know, I was one of the shop hands of Yamaokaya."

"Oh, I see now, you were the clerk—my eyes were not seen enough."

"I well remembered your face when you brought to Yamaokaya that girl named Matsun."

"Yes."

"'Yes' is too brief, sir. I took advantage of that incident and absconded with some sum of money. Then a

bit of activities here and there on the crook, and am now fallen into the plight you find me. The reason that I accosted you, sir, was....."

"Well, what was it?"

"If one inquired into the cause, one may say that it was you, sir, who caused the ruination of Yamaokaya. So some help I ask of you to me."

"Well, you have become a crook all right," said Shichibei giving the ragman a hard glance. The man returned the look with a sinical smile, and said:--

"But then I'll tell you all about that girl Matsu whom you brought to Yamaokaya."

"All right. I'll give you this, so tell me all you know of Matsu, will you?" Shichibei encouraged the man handing him a purse entire as he took it out of the breast pocket.

"Thank you very much. Then I'll take you to where the girl is now living."

The two persons presently came as far as Kagurazaka Slope. The ragman complained that his feet were now sore. Shichibei felt that the man was trying to give him the slip. So on purpose he acted in such a manner that it made the man believe that Shichibei was off his guard. Being deceived by that, the man gave Shichibei the slip in a lane. Shichibei went round, and overtaking him:--

"Hey, my man," said he poking the rag-basket from the side.

"Oh."

"What do you mean by the 'oh'?"

"You are a fast walker, Mister."

"You also are a good walker."

"You're joking, sir."

"How are your feet, better?"

"They give me pain again."

"Run again as you did now."

"I've had enough of it, sir."

"Where are you going to take me, I must know."

"To Mrs. Yamaokaya."

"Where does she live now?"

"At Shinjuku."

"If so, we are in a wrong direction."

"All right, let's now start in the right direction."

"All right, Mr. Ragman, you lead this time."

They resumed their journey. Then in the direction where they were now going there appeared a red glow in the sky.

"Look, what's that, so red?"

"Fire has broken out."

"It's in the direction of Shinjuku."

"It's dead calm, so it won't do much damage."

The glow grew as they talked on thus.

"Yes, it's in the direction of Shinjuku. Let's hurry up."

"My feet are sore."

Shichibei took the man by the hand and pulled him as he hurried on. This made the man feel pain. He said:--

"Sir, don't pull me so; you are too quick a walker."

"Never mind what I am, come along."

"Hold on, Mister, I tell you all now. The girl Matsu whom you seek was sold to be an inmate of gay quarters."

"Of where?"

"Well.....you know....."

"Spit it out quick," Shichibei said and he twisted one of the man's arms.

"She was sold far."

"Where?"

"Kioto.....Ouch!"

According to the rag-picker, Taki, the aunt, that night having had Yohachi given the slip, deceived Matsu and brought the girl to this man's house. There she sold Matsu to a slaver for a term of service at Shimabara, Kioto. The reason of sending her away so far was that at Yedo Matsu might be identified easily by her friends and that might lead to Taki's conviction; and fortunately for Taki there were slavers about from Kioto looking for girls. So the bargain was concluded speedily.

Shichibei did not know how much of this man's narrative to believe, but his story was consistent enough. So:—

"Take me to your house now."

"Sir, let me go, please."

"That woman Taki must be living in your house."

"Oh no, sir."

"You and Taki, two, kidnaped Matsu and sold her, I'm positive."

"Oh no, not at all."

"Never mind that now, hurry on."

Just then the eye of the ragman caught sight of a vigilantes' hut at a corner of the street. So he called out aloud:—

"Stop thief."

"You dare?" said Shichibei and wrung the man at the neck.

"Gentlemen, this is a thief; Stop thief! Stop thief!"

Those who were in the hut as well as many of the people who were going to the scene of fire now came running towards Shichibei. So letting the rag-picker go with a hard push, he ran and was soon lost among the crowd.

If Matsu was really sold to the gay-quarters of Kioto, Shichibei must hither fly. If he wished that, his feet would be treading Kioto at night leaving Yedo in the morning.

Apart from the above incident, if Ryunosuke Tsukue had chosen Kioto as a place of sojourn in his life of wandering, Hyoma Utsuki must be going that way, too, pursuing Tsukue.

Besides, Serizawa, Kondo, Hijikata and all the rest of the New Levies were now going to Kioto to police the city against the anti-Shogunate samurai. So the story must now move from Yedo to Kioto.

Chapter 14.

A figure that plodded on the Ome Highway was Yohachi.

On the back he carried Ikutaro ; in a hand a parcel wrapped in cloth tied up with a cord. On the feet, he wore straw sandals. He shed tears as he walked.

To Yohachi to walk here with a child on his back was a strange change to take place in a night, from his expectation of travelling the same road with Matsur.

"Oh, isn't that Mr. Yohachi?"

"Oh, Mr. Tarosaku."

It was a peasant who was hoing.

"Back from Yedo, eh?"

"Yes."

"Made money?"

"No."

"Whose child that? Not yours!?"

"No, not mine."

"A waife, eh!"

"Oh you're carrying some presents, leave some here,

Mr. Yohachi."

Yohachi's sad looks fell upon the parcel:—

"No, this is not presents."

The parcel contained the hair of Hama as her remains.

"Mr. Tarosaku, is my mill-wheel all right?"

"Oh, it is all right."

"Didn't the water carry it off?"

"Oh, no."

"Good-bye!"

Yohachi left him and renewed his steps.

The ranges of Miake, Sawai and Great Buddhisattva stood before Yohachi. The sight brought fresh tears to him. He turned to see how the child was getting on; it was deeply in slumber. Absent-mindedly Yohachi stopped. His eyes fell again upon the parcel that contained the 'remains hair' of Hama. Hair cut off the head of a deceased person and preserved in his memory—a custom prevalent in Japan. The object made Yohachi cry again. Yohachi meant well, but his offences brought about evil consequences every time. He assumed that that was because he lacked in intellect, and wanted to spend the rest of his life in prayers for as many dead persons as he could in order to expiate his sin of blundering. Also he would bring up this child to help the expiation.

Yohachi never blamed others, but always himself—such was his ways.

"This is the spot where I was found by the grand old master."

He halted for a rest at the place where he had been told that he was found.

Seek ye pilgrim,

The parental love here

At Kakawa fane,

As Buddha did deign.

Chapter 15.

The mile-post:—

Tokaido High-way. Seki Town. To Nihonbashi Bridge, Yedo, 265 miles. To Sanjō Ohashi Bridge, Kioto, 49 miles.

Five miles hither from the foot of Suzuka Pass, in the Province of Ise, stands the famous Jizo of Seki Town holding up his staff of Six Great Powers. A little over a quarter of a mile past the image, and a little retired from the highway, near the short cut for the Grand Shrine at Uji-yamada, Ise, stood a rustic tea-stall. In the stall an old man, about seventy, kept shop employing his spare time in making match-ropes.

"Pardon," entered a samurai. It was that hour of day that ordinary travellers coming from the direction of Kioto should have fixed lodging for the night at Sakashita, and those from the direction of Yedo at Seki Town.

"Welcome, sir."

The old man put down his handiwork and rose. The samurai put down his parcels, fastened at each end of a strap over the shoulder to balance, upon the form. He dusted the laps of his widely hemmed travelling skirts.

"Say, old man."

"Yes, sir."

"I ask of you for a draught of freshly drawn clear water."

"Yes, sir, some water freshly drawn from the well! Very well, sir; our well is well-known round here for the purity of its water."

The old man went round to the back of the stall to draw; the samurai was already seated on the form, but he did not remove his bamboo-bark hat. He put down by his side his great sword, the sheath of which was reinforced with narrow copper rings, and sat downcast. One would have found a colourless face under the hat if he dared a peep.

The samurai was Ryunosuke Tsukue who had come safely as far as here intending to go to Kioto.

With a bamboo ladle he took a draught of cold water, which the old man brought forth in a pail. He threw the water remaining in the ladle out over the sill on the road. Putting the ladle back into the pail, he drew a long breath.

"Won't you have a cup of tea, sir?" the old man said politely. Ryunosuke shook his head. The stall keeper offered a brazier to him to smoke, but he did not seem to care for it at all. So the keeper finding not much doing, was about to return to his match-rope.

"A pair of sandals."

"Very well, sir," the old man pulled a pair out of some home-made straw-sandals that were hung.

"Three times up and down the Pass, yet go strong," are my home-made sandals, you know," the old man said.

It seemed that he loved to talk very highly about his possessions. He did it so of his well at first, now about the sandals.

"You are changing your sandals, Mr. Samurai! Aren't you going to stop yet?" the old keeper asked wondering to see Ryunosuke change his sandals for a new pair. Even if the traveller was to lodge at Sakashita it was strange of him to renew his sandals which seemed to be still serviceable.

The old man looked stupid, for Ryunosuke did not give any reply, so looking up in the sky from under the eaves of the hut said to himself:—

"Hope it won't rain."

Well, it had been dull all day. Was it that the soul of that ill-fated and famous courtesan Koman still hovered over there to influence the weather?

'I think of Yosaku,

The bright sun dims'

When the echoe from this ditty is dull, it is sure to rain.

"Don't you think it is wise for you to lodge in the town for the night?" the old man said, in such a manner that it did not sound exactly a piece of advice nor yet a soliloquy, and went back to his match-ropes.

Ryunosuke, who had laced up his new sandals, looked up in the sky from under his big hat. Just then a palanquin man observed:—

"This is the tea-stall by the short cut, Madam," and a palanquin, that had come at a brisk pace, was put down. Lifting the blind a woman appeared.

"Hama!" Ryunosuke was about to utter. If the name of this woman were not Hama, what else could it be? Or to Ryunosuke did every woman look like Hama?

"Thank you, Mr. Runner," she said.

Ryunosuke closed his eyes so as not to see the woman. He wanted to stop the ears not to hear her voice, for it resembled that of Hama so much.

The woman came out of the palanquin:—

"Thank you, Mr. Runner," and she put her hand in the fold of the broad and stiff sash to take out her purse. Not finding it there she turned pale and began to search for it in a flurry putting her hand into her bosom, and into the sleeve pockets of her kimono.

"What shall I do? Let me see the inside of the palanquin," she said.

She examined the inside of the palanquin closely. She was now all the more at a loss.

"I say, Mr. Runner, I'm sorry, but....."

The two runners had been rudely watching the woman standing each on her side.

"What is it, Mum?"

"Won't you kindly wait a little while till my friend, who is expected to be here soon, arrives?"

"Why wait?"

"Because the purse which I surely had with me is missing, so....."

"What, a purse is missing!?" one of the runners said, and he sat upon a mat that was found lying near the palanquin. He did not frequent this part of the road, but was a notorious rogue named Kurosaka who frequented on the road from Kuwana to the Grand Shrine. Finding who he was, the stall-keeper began to feel very anxious about the woman.

"That won't do. It would affect my fair name Kurosaka if I were to leave the matter at that. I must do my best to find it for you, Mum; it may cast a slur upon us all runners, isn't it so, mate?"

"Yes, it is."

"Well, Mum, get in the palanquin once more; we will take you back to where you hired us taking the same road and our eyes upon the ground. And if we can't find it, we must all go to the town office. Hard luck, mate, but we must shoulder the thing again."

"Right Oh!"

"Oh no, no! The thing is not worth for such trouble, not much money was in it.....well, but I don't know what to do."

"Well, we can well see that you are perplexed, but our business reputation is at stake. So come on, Mum, get in the palanquin, please."

They now took the woman by the hand and tried to force her to ride again. So out of despair she said:—

"Then I'll do this, Mr. Runner," and thrusting her comely hand into her beautiful hair pulled out a flat silver hair-pin of about five inches in length. It seemed that it was her final recourse.

"Please take this for the fare."

"No, we don't want that sort of thing," said Kurosaka and snatched it from the hand of the woman.

"Hey, come on, get in the palanquin once more, if you please."

"I say, Mr. Runner," the old man rose slapping his knee:—

"Not so fast, not so fast."

He wanted to mediate, but failing to find suitable words:—

"Don't overdo it, friend, don't overdo!"

"What do you mean by saying 'don't overdo' eh?"

"Don't tease women folks so."

"Tease! ? Who's teasing? You had better keep out."

"Oh.....what shall I do?"

"Get in the palanquin once more," said Kurosaka and he pushed the woman at the waist to the palanquin taking hold of her by an arm at the same time.

"Oh please, don't!"

When the scene came to this pass, though heartless Ryunosuke now was, it was up to him to say something:—

"Hey, runner!"

Kurosaka turned, there he saw a samurai, whom he had never noticed, sitting and watching this way from under his big hat.

"Do you want me?"

"I'll pay you the fare in the place of that lady, so come here."

"Yes, sir."

Kurosaka wondered if this samurai was the friend she said she was expecting, and came near Ryunosuke:—

"See, this lady talked queer not paying the fare, so....." the man now sat on the sill, and taking out a short and thick pipe from the tobacco pouch, put it in his mouth, and gave a light slap to the pouch to see if it contained the weed.

"What's the fare?"

"It is three miles and three-quarters from Kaneyama."

"All right."

Ryunosuke, taking out his purse and grabbing small coins as much as a hundred *mon*, threw them upon the mat to let the runner take as much as he wanted. Kurosaka, looking askance at the money:—

"Hee, hee, thank you, sir," and not touching the money he now cast a glance at the woman:—

"Madame, please ask the master to add some extra, or what we call 'drink money,' won't you?"

To the woman the samurai was also a discovery: she never noticed him until now. She was very grateful to the samurai, and said to the runner rather timidly:—

"You mustn't be so unreasonable."

"What, unreasonable? That's what I must say of you. What part of Kaneyama did you come from? You were in a desperate hurry to catch the palanquin, why? So we have decided that we may very well ask you to be liberal to us with 'drink money. Are we wrong, Mum?"

"Oh what shall I do?" burst out the woman in tears.

Ryunosuke rose, and 'swish' slapped Kurosaka on the cheek.

"Ouch!"

What was it for, Kurosaka fell on his back, and instead of sitting up anew for further blackmailing (which was quite usual with a man of his type) he ran helter skelter.

Did Kurosaka take Ryunosuke for an officer of law on his round, or concluding that he was no match to Ryunosuke ran to collect his mates to come at Ryunosuke for a return?

"I don't know how to thank you, Sir," said the woman arraying herself and thanking the samurai from the bottom of her heart.

"I hope you are not hurt."

"No, but I would have been and worse, if you had not been here."

"Dirty rogues!"

Ryunosuke sat again on the form. His eyes saw the woman anew—the face and expression as she thanked him, the glossy profuse hair done into a *shimada* knot, maiden's style; the attractive eyes, the slim and spruce nape of the neck and her shoulders—the woman was Hama's double.

"Oh Miss Toyo, have you been here long? I have been very late."

So saying a pretty young man, although he was in travelling clothes, came in almost all rushing.

"Mr. Shin, I was treated most dreadfully," said the woman crying at the sight of the man.

"You're crying dear, what's the matter?" the man said approaching and stroking her back lovingly and even smoothing up her hair—his kindness was pleasing to behold even for Ryunosuke.

"You know, this gentleman saved me from the hand of the knavish palanquin men whom I had the misfortune of hiring."

"Knavish palanquin men! ? Well, you know, they were what I was afraid of. Sir, I am profoundly indebted to you," the young man said to Ryunosuke turning towards him and bowing politely in spite of his being in a state of hurry a minute before.

According to him, he belonged to Kioto, and the woman to Kameyama; they were relations; and they agreed to meet in this town here, to go on pilgrimage to the Grand Shrine of Uji-yamada.

Ryunosuke did not waste much words in returning the profuse thanks offered by the man and the woman, but said:—

"You had better depart from here immediately, for if the rogues return, the matter may take a worse turn."

"Well then, good-bye, sir," they said thanking him again,

and the man urging the woman to start. They went their way walking side by side beaming with happiness. Ryunosuke gazed upon their backs rather absent-mindedly for some time, and returning to himself:—

"Ah well, I think I wasted my precious time. Old man, 'tea money'!"



Chapter 16.

When Ryunosuke arrived at Sakashita, or Slopefoot, as it is in the ditty 'If the slope is cloudy, so is Suzuka Pass,' it began to drop as if the sky was weeping.

This rain would be snow at the Pass. Might it not turn into snow, but the eve was sure to turn into night. Suzuka Pass, where folks say demons lurk, was not a place for any man to pass at night. At Sakashita there is a big inn called Otake-Kotake, thirty-six yard frontage with a depth to match; it ought not to find Ryunosuke too cumbersome a guest to lodge. Yet he sped on and past Sakashita Town. It was now two leagues and a half through the pass; no inn, no rest house was to be expected. He renewed his sandals for naught, he intended to pass the night travelling.

"Ho, it's raining," said Ryunosuke as he stood looking up in the sky. Suzuka and Oyama mountains were now wrapt in night and blurred by rain. Ahead a thick cedar grove stood like a giant, and the rays of a votive lamp

broke through the trees. Ryunosuke now stood, before he was aware of it, near the portal of the Suzuka Shrine.

"It's raining," he muttered again.

The rain had started to fall as Ryunosuke entered the township of Sakashita. His hat and cloak were now dripping; that however he never noticed. To remark of the rain after having travelled in it so long was a little out of tune.

"Where is that traveller bound for?" stared the touts of the Otake-and-Kotake Inn in wonder—Ryunosuke passed without noticing them.

"To go on in rain and cross a mountain!" he said and gazed into the grove of the shrine. On the right of the portal stretched the pass, and the shrine for Lady Suzuka, and the Outer and Inner shrines stood in a row. The light shone from the gigantic *kasuga* style lamp-stand looked wet in the rain. On the left stood a towering giant cedar-tree, at the foot of it a shrine for Atago, or god of fire, and the houses for the priests. Ryunosuke did not take shelter in any one of them, but crossed the portal and climbed the stone-steps. It was but a short way to return to Slopefoot. Why did not lodge he in an inn and enjoy the comfort of sleeping in a soft and warm bed?

A man who finds his body on fire may leap into a well. Was it that Ryunosuke sought lonely and awesome places in order to quench the fire that burnt in his mind? Groping in the dark Ryunosuke entered stealthily a hall in the shrine precinct, and put down his parcels. Next, out of a

leather bag he took out a flint, candles and pocket kindlers groping for them, and a candle was lighted and stuck on the floor. He then took off his wet hat and dripping cloak, and taking out a little collapsible paper lantern, and putting the candle on the floor in it, inspected the place. Being satisfied, he laid his head upon the parcel to sleep.

The woman who resembled Hama hovered before him in vision. He saw a young couple walking on the Futami-ga-Ura Beach, or Twin Rock Cove. It seemed to him that it was Hama and him. Oh Ikutaro, too!

In spite of all her shortcomings, Hama was a woman deep in love nature. She was given to fault-finding often enough, but it was then usual with a woman high in spirit. In spite of her nature, she meekly put up with Ryunosuke's slender and scanty means, contriving to manage it for him. She seemed to be very obstinate, but in reality was a very warm and affectionate woman. Was it Hama who caused Ryunosuke to err, or was it he who caused her to err? Pensive inclined and touched by pathos of things, Ryunosuke longed for friends. Sleep had deserted him that night.

Outside the sound of wind and rain was heard. The sound of Inari Falls came like the drums that beat charge. He listened. Out of the sound he heard a man snore.

"Oh, I hear a man snoring," he said and looked into the four corners of the hall by the lantern light. But there was nobody. On the lintel he observed the famous ode by Priest Saigyō (early thirteenth century) written in a flowing and dignified hand posted in a frame. It read:—

Suzuka's peak,

Thou standest aloof!

I have left the world;

What will become of me,

I do not know.



Chapter 17.

"I don't know what to propose on hearing you talk so," said he sadly, after much thinking. The man sat leaning on a post, his love faced him and she said consolingly:—

"But Shin-san, we had better each return home to-morrow staying here for the night."

"Could I return home I wouldn't have come at all."

"Then what do you want to do?"

"It depends upon you."

"I have told you my mind."

"You want me to go back to Kioto?"

"I think that is the best plan."

"But I can't go back now."

"Be a good boy and go home."

"You don't know how I stand now, you are ignorant of it all."

"What do you mean? Aren't you Mr. Kameokaya Junior, heir to a rich merchant?"

"No, Kameokaya is no longer the same Kameokaya as you knew. My house was broken in on the night of the sixteenth of last month, and....."

"Broken in?"

"Yes, broken in; and taken not only all the gold and silver, but all important goods that had been entrusted for safe-keeping by the government. The robbers declared it was a contribution for the 'war fund.'"

"That's news to me, Shin-san."

"Besides, my long squandering and doings have come to light, and I have now no place to go."

"I never knew that."

"Messrs. Kameokaya & Co. is ruined, I'm extremely sorry for my father and mother. And when I come to think of my young sister....."

"Miss Yuki, you mean?"

"Yes, Yuki has sold herself to a house at Shimabara," the man said in tears.

"What, Miss Yuki has sold herself to a Shimabara house?" the woman said in surprise.

"Tell me all about what has happened once more. Has Miss Yuki already got to receive guests or not yet? Which of the Shimabara houses is it? Did her mother consent to her going?"

"Don't ask me any further, you well know now that I can't go back to Kioto," said the man sobbing, his arms folded on his breast.

These people did not go on pilgrimage after parting

with Ryunosuke at the tea-stall, the keeper of which made match-ropes. They halted at an inn near the *Jizo* Shrine, and were thus talking in tears in an out-room of the establishment. The rain that annoyed Ryunosuke in the mountain wetted softly the shrubs of the inn yard. The rain that falls in token of Koman's sorrow sadden every one!

"What's to be done?!" said the woman who had been trying to strengthen the man. She became now thoroughly downcast on hearing the news.

"I wish I could rescue my young sister," came in the voice of the man a little while later. The rain fell sadly, and the sunset bell tolled from the Hozoji Temple. The light that a servitor of the inn had just left for them flickered. The woman, with a slight start, looked out at the rain that poured gently on the plants in the yard.

"It's sunset now, I must return," said she, and began to be restless.

"Go?!" the man looked up determinedly.

"You go back deserting me?"

"Don't take it ill. I am no longer so free as....."

"Then you are going to marry, as I hear from people

....."

"Oh no, but please let me return to-night. I have a little idea of my own. Surely I'll come back to you to-morrow morning."

"The sun has already set, the distance is well over a

league, what do you do if you meet again such knavish palanquin-men as you met this morning?"

"But as a matter of honour, I cannot stay overnight. The inn will provide me with honest runners, so let me go."

"Well, I mustn't stop you any more, all right, go, if you must."

"Yes, please let me do so. I'll come in the morning again," she said, but the man did not give any answer. She rose sadly and fearing he might doubt her sincerity. The man saw her off to the passage hiding his tears, and returning to the room, he sat as if collapsed:—

"Ah-a! even Miss Toyo....." and tears ran down his cheeks.

Toyo, who had left the place saying she would return to Kameyama, came back after a while for some reason. She walked along the passage stealthily and seemed to be looking into the man's room from outside the paper-paneled sliding doors as she reached there.

"Oh, Shin-san, why?" she rushed in and stayed the hand of the man who held a short sword to stab his own throat.

"I feared your mind might take untoward turns. I had presentiments, so I returned; let go the thing."

"Toyo-san, I must die."

"Don't be a coward! You have written last letters, too."

She wrested the sword from the man, and said:—

"Should you die what would become of your parents and sister? I can't go back seeing this. I will not go back, I'll stay with you to-night, please let me stay with you. Let's talk the matter over minutely, Shin-san?"

Toyô and Shinzaburo talked the night out. The next morning, what was the outcome of their overnight consultation, they left the inn in two palanquins. They did not return to Karneyama, but crossed Suzuka Pass by the time Ryunosuke arrived at Kusatsu Town.

At Toyô's house everybody, including her fiancé, looked with eyes blood-shot from anxiety when they discovered that Toyô was missing. They sent runners into several directions. When they came to Seki and Sakashita, the man and woman were not there nor at Tsuchiyama, nor at Ishibe.

—[Book II. End]—



BOOK III.