

8. *Sanemori*

The Heike were all gone now, but a single rider, Saitō Bettō Sanemori, from Nagai in Mutsu, turned back from the rout to carry on the fight.

For a special reason, he wore a red brocade *hitatare* robe, green-laced armor, helmet with spreading horns, and a gold-fitted sword.

On his back he bore arrows fletched with black-banded eagle feathers; his hand gripped a lacquered, rattan-wrapped bow; and he rode a dappled roan with a gold-trimmed saddle.

Tezuka no Tarō Mitsumori, one of Yoshinaka's men, noted a worthy opponent.

"Bravo!" he cried. "And who are *you*, then, when your whole side has fled, to ride alone against us? I would gladly know you. Tell me your name!"

And you—who are *you*? Sanemori replied.

"Tezuka no Tarō Mitsumori,

a warrior from Shinano province."

"Why, then," Sanemori answered,

"you and I are worthy opponents.

Believe me, I mean no disrespect,

but for certain particular reasons

I cannot now reveal my name.

Come, Tezuka, let us close and fight!"

He was moving up next to the foe

when one of Tezuka's trusted men

galloped up from behind the two,

to ensure that his lord was not killed,

got between them, and seized Sanemori.

"So you have a mind, do you, to fight

the greatest warrior in Japan?"

Sanemori shouted, got his own grip,

crushed the man onto his pommel,

cut off his head, and tossed it away.

At the sight Tezuka circled left,

lifted the skirt of his enemy's armor,

stabbed him twice, and as he weakened,

seized him and fell with him to the ground.

Sanemori had courage aplenty,

but the fighting had worn him out,

and besides, he was an old man.

He ended up under Tezuka.

Tezuka entrusted the head to a man of his who had just galloped up and went in haste to report to Yoshinaka.

"I have just fought and killed a most unusual opponent," he said.

"He might have been a rank-and-file warrior, except that he was wearing red brocade. But if he was a commander, his followers were nowhere in sight. I demanded his name repeatedly, but he never gave it to me. He spoke like a man from the east."

"Ah," Yoshinaka replied, "I expect that was Sanemori. If so, then, I saw him once when I was a boy, on a visit to Kōzuke province. His hair was graying even then, though, and it must be snow white by now. I do not see how his hair and beard could be black. Higuchi no Jirō spent a lot of time with him and will certainly recognize him. Call Higuchi over here."

So Higuchi was summoned.

Higuchi took one look and exclaimed, "How awful! Yes, this is Sanemori."

"But if it is," said Yoshinaka, "at over seventy his hair should be white.

How can his hair and beard be black?"

Weeping copiously, Higuchi replied,

"I can explain this, and I will,

but the sight is too great a shock,

and weak tears have robbed me of speech.

It is fitting that a warrior,

on the slightest of occasions,

should speak words worth remembering.

I often heard Sanemori say,

"If I go again to war

after passing my sixtieth year,

I will dye my beard and hair black,

so as to look like a young man.

You see, it would be undignified

for an old man to seek to best

the young in battle, and besides,

it would hurt an old warrior so

to be ridiculed and despised."

So that is what he must have done.

Have his head washed, then, and see."

It seemed likely that Higuchi was right.

Yoshinaka had the head washed,

and indeed the hair turned white.

This is how it happened that Sanemori wore red brocade.

He said when he came before Lord Munemori to bid him farewell,

"I know that I am far from alone in this, my lord, but at any rate I feel acutely in my old age the shame of having set out for the east a few years ago, only to flee back to the capital from Kanbara in Suruga without shooting a single arrow, at the mere whirring of waterbirds' wings. Now duty calls me to the north, where I mean to die in battle. Although originally from the province of Echizen, more recently I settled, in your service, on your Nagai estate in Musashi. Now, a saying urges a man to return home wearing brocade.³⁹⁰ Please grant me leave to wear a brocade *hitatare*." Well said!" Lord Munemori replied. He gave the permission requested.

Once upon a time, Zhu Maichen waved brocade sleeves at Huji-shan. Now, Saitō Bettō Sanemori had clearly won glory in the north, but only his empty name lived on; for his remains merged, alas, with the earth of the northern marches. It had been the fourth month past, the seventeenth day, when a great force numbering more than a hundred thousand and surely invincible set forth, but now, as the fifth month drew to a close, only twenty thousand or so returned. "Yes," people said, "you catch many fish when you completely fish out a stream, but the next year there are no fish at all. Burning the forest yields plenty of game, but there is no game the following year. They should have given thought to the future and kept a few more men in reserve."

4. *The Death of Kiso*

Lord Kiso had brought with him from Shinano two beauties: Tomoe and Yamabuki. Yamabuki was unwell and stayed in the capital. With her lovely white skin and long hair, Tomoe had enchanting looks. An archer of rare strength, a powerful warrior, and on foot or on horseback a swordsman to face any demon or god, she was a fighter to stand alone against a thousand. She could ride the wildest horse down the steepest slope. In battle, Kiso clad her in the finest armor, equipped her with a great sword and a mighty bow, and charged her with the attack on the opposing commander. She won such repeated glory that none could stand beside her. And that is why, when so many had already been cut down in their flight, Tomoe remained among the last seven. Word spread that, via Nagasaka, Kiso was now heading for Tanba.

or that he was crossing Ryûge Pass, aiming at last to reach the north. Actually, desperate to know

what had become of Kanehira, he was in full flight toward Seta.

Meanwhile Imai Kanehira, who with a force of eight hundred had done his best to hold that crossing, now was reduced to fifty men.

Banner furled, he was heading back toward the city, anxious to know what fate had overtaken his lord, when the two men found each other in Otsu, along the Uchide shore.

Each knew the other a hundred yards off. They urged their mounts forward and met.

Kiso took Kanehira's hands.

"It seemed all over for me," he said,

"on the riverbank at Rokujô,

but I so longed to know about you

that I broke through swarms of enemies

and managed to reach you after all."

Imai replied, "You do me too much honor.

I had meant to die in battle at Seta, but concern for you led me here."

And Lord Kiso: "Then the bond between us still holds.

The enemy has scattered my men and driven them into the woods.

They must be somewhere nearby.

Raise that furled banner of yours!" Imai did so.

Had these men fled the city or Seta? There was no knowing, but the sight of Imai's banner brought three hundred racing to join him.

Lord Kiso was very pleased. "With this many," he said, "we can at least fight our last battle. Whose men are those, swarming over there?"

"I gather that their commander is Ichijô no jirô, from Kai."

"And how many with him?"

"Six thousand horse."

"A fine opponent, then. If I must die anyway, I might as well get myself cut down by someone worthy, among a superior force." With these words he moved straight ahead.

Lord Kiso wore that day Chinese damask-laced armor over a red brocade *hitatare*,

a helmet with *kuwagata* horns, and a dauntingly long sword.

At his back the few arrows left to him after the day's battles projected above his head,

fletched with eagle feathers. He carried a black, rattan-wrapped bow, and his exceptionally powerful steed,

famous under the name Demon Roan, bore a gilt-edged saddle.

He rose in his stirrups and announced in a great voice,

"You will have long heard tell of me:

the man from Kiso. Now with your eyes

behold the chief left equestrian

and also the governor of Iyo,

famed as the Asahi Shogun,

Minamoto no Yoshinaka!

They say you are Ichijô no jirô, from Kai.

Then hear me! We are worthy opponents, you and I!

Take my head and show it off to Yoritomo!"

With that he charged.

Ichijô cried, "The man who just now

shouted his name is their great commander!

See that he does not slip away! Get him,

young men of mine, strike him down!"

Surrounding Kiso with a mass of men,

Ichijô went for his life and his head.

Kiso's three hundred, amid six thousand,

slashed left, right, up, down, everywhere,

meanwhile retreating till they broke out,

just fifty now, cutting through all comers

until they met a force of two thousand

under Doi no jirô Sanehira.

They broke through that, too, and, farther on,

through four or five hundred, through two or three,

through a hundred and forty or fifty,

then a hundred, each time at a cost,

until Kiso had only four left.

This last remnant band of five

still included Tomoe.

Lord Kiso said to her, "Go, woman, go quickly, anywhere, far away. For myself, I shall die in battle or, if wounded, take my own life, and it must not be said that at the end I had a woman with me."

She still did not go, but he kept pressing her until at last she replied,

"All I want is a worthy opponent, so that you can watch me fight my last fight."

And while she waited,

Onda no Hachirō Moroshige, a man from Musashi famed for his strength, rode up with thirty men. Tomoe charged, caught him in an iron grip, forced his head down to her pommel, kept it pinned there, twisted it around, cut it off, and tossed it away.

Then she abandoned her arms and armor and fled toward the east.

Tezuka no Taro was killed.

Tezuka no Bettō fled.

Imai and Kiso were alone.

Kiso said, "This armor of mine—

I never gave it much thought before,

but it feels heavy today!"

Imai Kanehira replied, "There is still life in you, and your horse is not yet winded.

Why should mere armor weigh heavily on you?

Perhaps because losing all your men has made you a coward.

There is only one of me, I know, but think of me as a thousand.

I have seven or eight arrows left. I will cover you for a while.

Look: Over there is the pinewood of Awazu.

Go in among the pines and take your life."

They were urging their horses that way when a new band of fifty appeared.

"Go in among the pines, my lord," said Imai. "I will keep them off."

"I should have faced my fate in the capital itself," Kiso replied, "but I fled all the way here to die with you. I want us to die together, not apart." He brought his horse up beside Imai's and prepared to charge.

Imai dismounted in haste and took his lord's bridle.

"A man who wields the bow," he said,

"may have won great and lasting fame,

but a misjudgment at the end

may tarnish that fame forever.

Yes, you are exhausted, I know.

You have lost every one of your men.

It would be a very great shame

if the enemy were to cut you off

and some nobody's follower

drag you down and manage to kill you.

"Ah, Lord Kiso, people would say—

"everyone in Japan knew of him,

but then some nobody did him in."

Please, just go into those pines over there."

"Very well," Lord Kiso replied, and at a gallop he set off

for the pinewood of Awazu.

Imai Kanehira, all on his own, charged in among the fifty men, rose in his stirrups, and in a great voice announced his name:

"You will have heard of me long ago.

Now, see me. I am before you:

Imai no Shirō Kanehira,

foster brother of Lord Kiso,

in my thirty-third year.

Yoritomo, too, must know of me.

Kill Kanehira and show him my head!"

The eight arrows remaining to him

he shot in merciless succession,

and eight men fell, dead or alive.

Then he drew his sword and attacked,

slashing until not one dared face him.

Oh, he took his full share of trophies!

Crying, "Shoot him! Finish him off!"

they rained arrows from all around him,

but his armor was good—it stopped them,

and since none hit any chink or joint,

not one of them wounded him.

Lord Kiso galloped off, alone,

toward the pines of Awazu.

It was the first month, the twenty-first day.

The light was failing, and thin ice

spread across the surrounding paddies.

Never knowing the depth of the mud,

he rode his mount straight into one.

The horse sank in over its head.

No stirrup, no whip could move it.

Lord Kiso glanced back, worried about Imai,

so that his tilted helmet offered an opening.

Ishida no Jirō Tamehisa, close behind him, drew to the full, and his arrow sped

through.

The wound was mortal. Kiso slumped forward onto his horse's neck.

Two of Ishida's men fell on him and took his head.

Ishida impaled it on his sword, held it aloft, and shouted,

"Lord Kiso, so famous lately throughout Japan, has fallen to Ishida no Jirō

Tamehisa!"



The death of Kanehira (right). Small in background: Yoshihira (left) and Ishida no Jirō Tamehisa (right), with drawn bow.

Imai Kanehira, still fighting, heard.
 "Well then, I have no one left to protect!
 Watch me now, gentlemen from the east!
 Learn from the greatest brave in Japan
 how a warrior ends his life!"
 He took the point of his sword in his mouth,
 hurled himself headlong from his horse,
 and died transfixed. So it came to pass
 that no battle took place at Awazu.

12. The Charge Down Hiyoudori Ravine

Thereafter the warriors of Chichibu, Ashikaga, Miura, and Kamakura, the men of the Inomata, Kodama, Noiyo, Yokoyama, Nishi, Tsuzuki, and Shi leagues

threw themselves into a free and furious battle, Genji against Heike—endless sallies and sorties, endless fierce challenges as men roared out their names until the mountains quaked and charging hoofbeats rang out like thunder. Arrows rained down in volleys and countervolleys.

Some carried the wounded off on their shoulders; some, only lightly wounded, fought on; some, mortally struck, lay dead or dying.

Pairs grappled side by side, fell, stabbed each other to death.

Here a man pinned another's head down and cut it off; there a man's head rolled from his shoulders.

Neither side betrayed any sign of weakness, and the Genji main force by itself seemed far from sure to prevail.

At this juncture Yoshitsune swept his flanking force around to the rear.

At daybreak on the seventh, he climbed up behind Ichi-no-tani, to the top of Hiyoudori Ravine. He was about to start the descent when the stags and a doe, presumably startled by his men, fled all the way down to the Heike fortress.

Their arrival caused consternation below.

"Perhaps those deer are used to being around humans," the men said, "but even so they should have run from us farther into the mountains.

It makes no sense for them to be fleeing right into an army.

The Genji must have frightened them down from up there!"

Takechi Kiyonori, from the province of Iyo, stepped forward.

"Perhaps," he said, "but nothing from off toward the enemy must get by." He shot both stags and let the doe pass.

Moritoshi protested,

"Shooting those stags made no sense!

With just one of those arrows,

you could have kept off ten enemies!

Now you have committed a sin²²⁰

and wasted your arrows, too."

Yoshitsune stood looking out over the fortress below.

"Let's send some horses down there," he said, "and see how they do."

They drove down a number of saddled horses.

Some broke their legs and fell, others got down safe and sound.

Three saddled steeds landed on top of Moritoshi's quarters and stood there, trembling.

Yoshitsune was convinced. "As long as the riders are careful," he declared, "the horses can get down there perfectly well."

So down we go! Do as I do!"

And down he went, with thirty men.

The whole force poured after him.

The slope was so steep that those behind found the front of their stirrups bumping the helmets of the riders ahead.

Swiftly, over mixed sand and pebbles, they slid for some two hundred yards, until, on a flat spot, they halted.

From there they looked down.

Huge, mossy boulders dropped plumb before them a good hundred and fifty feet.

"This is it, then," they muttered, frozen.

But Sato no Jūrō Yoshitsura stepped forward.

"In Miura, where I come from," he said, "we gallop over places like this anytime, just chasing a bird."

This is a Miura riding ground!"

And down he went. Everyone followed, stifling whoops and shouts to the horses.

The drop was so steep they shut their eyes.

The feat seemed all but superhuman—something for gods or demons, not men.

Short of the bottom, they roared their war cry:

three thousand voices, answered by echoes swelling them to ten thousand strong.

Murakami Yasukuni loosed fire among the Heike camp buildings and burned every one to the ground. The strong wind then rolled billows

of black smoke over the Heike men. They panicked, and most raced to save themselves by plunging into the sea. Many ships lay ready there, but with hundreds and hundreds of armed warriors clamoring all at once to board them, disaster was sure to follow. Three sank in full view before they got more than a few hundred yards offshore.

It was next decided to let men of rank board but not the lower orders, who were to be fended off with swords and halberds.

Knowing full well what awaited them, these held on for dear life nonetheless to ships they were forbidden to board.

Some of them had their arms cut off, some their forearms, and there they lay at the water's edge, red with blood.

Never once throughout many battles had Lord Noritsune's courage faltered.

but now, for reasons best known to himself, he mounted his horse, Usuguro, and fled west as fast as he could.

At Akashi, over in Harima,

he boarded a ship and set sail at once for Sanuki province and Yashima.

13. *The Death of Moritoshi*

In both the main force and the one now on the beach at Ichi-no-tani, the Musashi and Sagami men fought without a thought for their lives.

Lord Tomomori battled on, facing the east,

when a man of the Kodama League approached him from toward the mountains. "Sir," he said, "you were once the governor of Musashi,

and the men of the Kodama League therefore wish me to tell you: Look behind you!" Tomomori did so, and his men with him.

Black smoke billowed overhead.

"Oh, no! The west flank has fallen!" They dropped everything to flee.

Now, Moritoshi was the field commander of the Heike force below the mountains. No doubt he felt it too late for flight, for he turned back to await the enemy.

Inomata Noritsuna saw in him a worthy opponent.

Whip and stirrup, he raced to Moritoshi's side and grappled fiercely with him. Both crashed to the ground.

Inomata was a warrior famed

through the eight provinces of the east.

There was that time, so the rumor went,

²²⁰ A sin because the Buddhist commandments forbid taking the life of any sentient being.

when he had torn a deer's antlers apart like nothing at all. Moritoshi,

for his own part, preferred to confess to the strength of twenty or thirty men but secretly could haul up or launch, all by himself, a ship that required sixty or seventy men to move it.

So it was he who seized Inomata, crushed him to the ground, and held him.

Pressed down that way, his fingers splayed,

Inomata could not draw his dagger or even get a grip on the hilt.

He tried to speak, but no voice came.

At any moment his head would be off.

Although not the stronger of the two, Inomata was brave.

Unfazed, he caught his breath and asked calmly,

Did you hear me announce my name?

When a man slays an opponent, he may glory in the deed

only if, before taking the head, he speaks his name and has his foe do the same.

What will you gain from taking my head when you do not know who I am?"

Moritoshi must have seen he was right, for he replied,

Although born a Heike lord, I was good only for war:

My name is Moritoshi, once governor of Etchu. Who are you?"

Inomata no Koberoku Noritsuna, from Musashi,"

Inomata answered. "As far as I can see,

the Genji are now too strong and the Heike face defeat.

If your great lord still lived, then yes, taking an enemy's head

might win you glory and rich reward, but he is gone.

Spare me this once and you will have your reward:

I will save for you the lives of dozens of your men."

Moritoshi was furious.

"I am not good for much," he said,

"but I am a Heike after all.

I have no intention of seeking help from any Genji, nor do I imagine any Genji wanting mine. You should have held your tongue!"

He was about to strike when Inomata spoke again. "For shame!" he said, "to take the head of a man who has already surrendered!"

"Very well," Moritoshi answered, "your life is yours." He drew Inomata to his feet. Before them the ground was dry and hard, like an upland field; behind them stretched a paddy filled with deep mud. They sat down on the path that bordered it and rested.

Soon a single warrior came galloping toward them, clad in black-laced armor and riding a pale roan. Moritoshi peered suspiciously at him.

"That is Hitomi no Shirō, a good friend of mine," Inomata said. "He is probably heading this way because he has seen me. There is no need to worry."

All the time, though, he was thinking, "If I grapple with Moritoshi when Shirō gets close, he is bound to join in."

By now the man was hardly more than a few yards away. Moritoshi at first kept an eye on both, but with Shirō so near now, he reserved his watchful gaze for this new foe. His eyes were off Inomata when, with a shout, Inomata jumped to his feet, shoved Moritoshi's breastplate with both hands, and knocked him backward into the paddy.

While Moritoshi struggled to rise,

Inomata leaped on top of him,

drew the dagger from his foe's waist,

pulled open the skirts of his armor,

plunged in the dagger thrice, hilt and fist,

and took the head. Then Shirō arrived.

To forestall any possible dispute,

he roared, "Inomata Noritsuna

has slain Taira no Moritoshi,

famed so long as a demon or god!"

His exploit earned him pride of place

on the roster of valorous deeds that day.

Kumagai could not bring himself to begin. He spoke instead: "Who are you, if I may ask? Tell me your name. I will spare you."

"And who are *you*?" the other answered.

"Nobody you can have heard of:

Kumagai no jirō Naozane

from the province of Mutsushi,"

Kumagai replied.

"Well then, nothing about you requires me to give you my name.

I am a worthy opponent. Take my head anyway and ask around.

Others will know me."

"Ah!" Kumagai said to himself.

"Then he *is* of very high rank!

And what if I do behead him?

His losing army cannot win.

If, on the other hand, I do not,

our winning army still cannot lose.

Kojiro's wound, though slight, was still a terrible shock.

How this young lord's father, then, will suffer when he learns that his son has been killed!

No, I simply must spare his life."

But then he glanced behind him.

He saw Doi and Kajiwara galloping his way with fifty men.

Struggling to hold back his tears, he said,

"What I want, you know, is to spare you,

but the great host of men on my side

will never allow you to get away.

Rather than leave your fate to others,

I prefer to see to it myself

and to pray for you in the afterlife."

So he spoke; and the lordly youth:

"Just take my head now. Only be quick."

Kumagai, overcome by pity,

hardly knew how even to begin.

His sight darkened, his courage faltered,

he barely knew what he was doing,

but there was simply no escape:

In tears, he took the head after all.

"Alas," he murmured in bitter grief,

"the warrior's calling is harder than any.

Had I not been born to a warlike house,

never would I have known such sorrow!

16. *The Death of Atsumori*

The enemy army was finished, and Kumagai Naozane remarked,

"The Heike lords will be falling back down to the water,

so as to get away on their ships.

I would gladly do battle with a worthy commander."

He rode toward the shore and found a warrior there,

wearing a silk *hiatare* embroidered with cranes under delicately tinted green

armor,

a helmet with spreading horns, a sword with gold fittings,

and, on his back, arrows fletched with mottled feathers.

He carried a lacquered, rattan-wrapped bow

and rode a dappled gray with a gold-trimmed saddle.

Eyes fixed on a ship out at sea,

he plunged into the water and swam toward it some fifty yards.

Kumagai shouted a challenge to him:

"My eyes tell me that you are a man of high rank. For shame, to turn your face from an enemy! Come back! Come back!"

He beckoned urgently with his fan, and the other came. Kumagai halted beside him even as he rode up onto the shore and gripped him hard. The pair fell. Kumagai pinned the head to the ground and, to take it, tore off the helmet. He beheld a youth in his sixteenth or seventeenth year, his face lightly powdered, his teeth blackened, and about the same age as Kumagai's son, Kojiro. He was very pretty, too.

What cruelty has been forced on me!"

He pressed his sleeves to his eyes and wept.

A moment went by. There was more to do.

He took off the young man's *hitatare*,

meaning to use it to wrap the head,

and found at his waist a brocade bag

containing a flute. "Oh, how awful!"

At dawn today, within the fortress,

you could hear men making music,

and obviously he was one of them!

We boast in our army from the east

warriors by the tens of thousands,

but I am certain not one of them

brought a flute with him into battle!

These noble gentlemen are so refined!" Kumagai went to present himself before Yoshitsune, and the sight of the head drew tears from every man present. Only later on did Kumagai learn that the youth

had been Atsumori, the son of Taira no Tsunemori, the director of palace upkeep. He had been in his seventeenth year. It was then that Kumagai felt rise compellingly within him the aspiration to enlightenment.

Now, as to Atsumori's flute, his grandfather, Tadamori, a most accomplished musician, had once received it as a gift from Retired Emperor Toba.

He then passed it down in his line, and it had come, or so they say, for his talent, to Atsumori.

The name of the flute was Saeda.

It is a touching thought indeed that the giddy charms of music served to turn a warrior's mind to praise the way traced by the Buddha.