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The Thread from the Spool *Shizu no odamaki* 賤のおだまき¹

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Chapter One *The Tale of Sangorō*²

In the past, when the Shimazu and the Ijūin armies were fighting for two straight years in Shōnai district, the entire male population of Satsuma province, not only the valiant youth in their prime but also the elderly who walked with a cane, achieved military feats in order to acquire glory, emulating the example of Zhong You.³ In the fierce conflicts, sons preceded their parents in death, disrupting the natural order; everybody wet their sleeves with tears. For some it was a master who was slain. For others a brother. A rage like a devastating fire burned in the chests of the survivors. Such separations felt certainly painful, and yet it was the fate of a boy named Hirata Sangorō Munetsugu that caused the most excruciating sorrow.

Sangorō exchanged a solemn vow of male love with Yoshida Ōkura Kiyōie.⁴ After they had departed from Satsuma, their homeland, Sangorō always stayed at Kiyōie's side. One day, when on their journey to the frontline, they lost their way among difficult mountain roads, so Sangorō spurred his horse to take the same path Kiyōie had followed; when they camped at night, Sangorō rested on the same bedroll as Kiyōie; when they admired the moonlight, Sangorō composed exquisite poems. In this manner, Sangorō accompanied Kiyōie as if he were his shadow.

Unfortunately, however, Kiyōie perished in combat. Therefore Sangorō, who had recently turned fifteen, fulfilled the pledge he had sworn



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with Kiyoe to die together by laying down his life, passing away as fleetingly as the autumn dew or the remnants of a flower.⁵ Kiyoe and he were buried beneath the moss of the same battleground. Usually, one dies alone, but they traveled to the netherworld together. They were connected by a very deep bond.

They threw their lives away out of obligation, regardless of their ranks, for they were born to wield the bow and arrow. Such was the custom among the warriors, nevertheless their sacrifice knows few parallels. United by love, they gave up their lives out of duty and the sensual attraction they felt toward each other. Their sentiments were truly beautiful and refined.

If we go back to the beginning of this story, his Lordship Hirata Sangorō Munetsugu was the son of Hirata Tarō Saemon Nojō Masumune, who retained the hereditary office of regent within the Shimazu clan. Since he began wearing armor, Sangorō showed great promise in both his talents and personality, his charm growing better with each day. His beauty having no equal, he looked even more elegant and radiant than the cherry trees that blossom on top of Mount Yoshino near Nara or the landscape when the harvest moon reveals her face among the clouds.

Sangorō lived during a time of great upheaval, when the provinces underwent a dangerous turbulence, so his allure captivated the hearts of men. Whoever saw him became infatuated with him and wished that, someday, their feelings would be reciprocated. Among the people who soaked their sleeves with the rain of tears, as if they had followed alongside him, risking their lives, on the mountain path of love and had advanced in a wood where branches drip dew, was the son of a chief retainer of the time, who burnt with passion for him like Mount Fuji in Suruga which constantly emits smoke. Because his father tenderly cared for him, he could not bring himself to court Sangorō, fearful of others' judgment as if hindered by a barrier.⁶ Determined to spend even a single night with Sangorō, he did not make a pact of eternal love with anybody else.

In the first year of the Keichō era, Sangorō was twelve years old.⁷ He looked as gorgeous as a young cherry tree that has blossomed twice in spring and whose color and aroma gush like a water spring and flow like a river; all the young warriors were enchanted by him.

Among them was a coarse and sturdy man named Kurata Gunpei. He fell madly in love with Sangorō, but he had no way to meet him, like a tiny boat which, having set sail, cannot see a beach to land upon. On dark and

on moonlit nights he wandered around the gate of Sangorō's manor and, as he was hit by the rain and the dew, he drenched his sleeves with his weeping without leaving the time for the tears to dry. He grieved because, in this world where hopes do not come true, he did not possess a status equal to Sangorō's.

Nights followed days, but Gunpei attained no result however much he reflected on what he could possibly do; he did not even have the chance to see Sangorō from a distance. Gunpei had no ties with Sangorō because he was a commoner, so he wondered what he might do and thought of Sangorō a thousand times, as if a firefly's flame kept burning even after the insect had thrown itself into the water. In this way, he let time go idly by.

Later, a favorable opportunity arose. A man named Onoe Gonroku, who in his adolescence had served as an attendant under the Kurata clan, had become a retainer of the Hirata clan with the rank of a soldier. Gunpei remembered him and had him summoned. He told Gonroku he was in love with his Eminence Sangorō and, giving Gonroku several gifts, asked him to act as a go-between. Desire leads the human heart astray; much to Gunpei's delight, Gonroku accomodatingly accepted.

However, Gunpei was crude and uncultivated. He ignored the art of composing letters, so he could not begin an amorous correspondence. He resorted to a number of devices and, in the end, he said to Gonroku: "I have carefully considered what to write and I have decided to send you my letter tomorrow morning." That evening, he asked a friend named Obama Sukegorō for help and had the emotions he felt for Sangorō written down. At dawn, he sent Gonroku the message.

Gonroku held a position of trust within the Hirata clan, although he had been in service to them only a short while; whenever he was available he was given tasks, such as tying Sangorō's hair.⁸ Unlike these other assignments, though, the job Gunpei had delegated to him was of the utmost importance. Nonetheless, Gonroku could not find the right occasion to carry it out and let time pass. Then, one morning when he was tying Sangorō's hair as usual, he inserted the envelope inside his master's writing box that lay next to them. Later, when Sangorō wanted to practice his calligraphy, he lifted the box's lid and saw the letter that said: "To Hirata Sangorō from Kurata Gunpei." After opening the seal, he read a vivid description of the man's genuine feelings and at the bottom the following poem:

<i>Kimi omou</i>	君思ふ	Thinking of you,
<i>makura no shita wa</i>	枕の下は	tears flow like a river
<i>namidagawa</i>	涙川	beneath my pillow.
<i>mi wa ukikusa no</i>	身は浮草の	Like grass I float on it,
<i>neiru ma mo nashi</i>	寝入る間も無し	restlessly.

Once he had finished reading the letter, Sangorō tore the sheets of paper with his teeth, and after ripping them to pieces threw the fragments away. Gonroku heard what was happening and, astonished, left the Hirata clan's manor. He came back to Gunpei and briefly explained what had occurred. A menacing expression appeared on Gunpei's face as his eyes widened and, in an outburst of rage, he said: "Listen carefully. Did you not say that things would go as I had planned? But now you tell me they did not, thus frustrating my efforts. How strange! Do you dare make a fool out of me? Then I am going to teach you a lesson! I will cut your head off and smash it into a thousand pieces." As he spoke, Gunpei rotated his long-bladed sword.

Gonroku trembled, his face wan, "I do not mean to deceive you, sir. His Excellency Sangorō, my master, is still a boy, but he has a temper as dauntless as a blazing fire unlike anyone else's. If I had talked to him at an inopportune moment, he would have certainly executed me with his own hands. He did read your message, but he did not write an answer. On the contrary, he tore up your letter and threw the fragments away. If I said the situation has not turned out to be as you wished it would, it is only because I have to interpret his dismissive reaction. Nevertheless, since you are upset, rightly, I will find an opportunity for you to meet with his Grace personally. Hopefully when this encounter takes place, you can dispel any doubts you have concerning my loyalty to you, sir."

In this manner, Gonroku explained his failure. Gunpei appeased his wrath: "Do not break your promise. If you make any more mistakes, your head will fly into the sky," he aggressively commanded. Gonroku, dismayed, left in silence. In the following days, Gunpei urged him to arrange the meeting, but Gonroku did not know what to do and let time go by vainly until the year came to an end.

Chapter Two *Kurata and Obama Attack Sangorō*

At the start of the second year of the Keichō era, Hirata Sangorō Munetsugu turned thirteen years old.⁹ On the seventh day of the first

month, he had his hair shaved on the temples at an angle, a hairstyle that made him look even more radiant and brought out his beauty and scent as if he were a flower.¹⁰

During spring, the mountains in the four directions wear a light mist as if they were garments, the mild solar rays glow, and the green of the trees grows brighter and brighter. On a day like this, Sangorō was taking care of a bird he had bred. Suddenly, he decided that on the thirteenth he would go hunting for birds in Yoshino, where his father Masumune owned a villa.

He left for Yoshino escorted by one of his servants and the soldier named Onoe Gonroku. When Kurata Gunpei learned about this excursion, he rejoiced at the propitious occasion the heavens gave him and summoned his comrade Obama Sukegorō. After they had chosen the right moment, they spurred their horses to gallop towards Yoshino.

Sangorō amused himself by chasing birds all day long and took the way back alongside his retinue when the sun was about to set. He was talking about birds and, when he finished his conversation, he and his attendants came across Kurata and Obama who were moving towards them side by side, laughing uproariously. Aware of who Kurata and Obama were, when he saw them and remembering the letter, he asked, anguished: “We meet in an unpleasant situation. What do you want?”

In the meantime, Kurata and Obama had come closer and, once they had seen Sangorō, quickly barred his path. “Quite the contrary, I say we meet in an excellent circumstance. I would like to have a word with you, please come with me,” asked Gunpei. Sangorō feigned indifference, his heart racing. “I do not know you. Please talk to me here.” To support Sangorō, Onoe Gonroku greeted Kurata and Obama with a bow and said: “Your Grace, as you are young and inexperienced....”

Glaring at him, Gunpei interrupted: “How dare you meddle with such impudent advice. Utter another word and I will cut you in half.” With a horribly angry look on his face, Gunpei threatened Gonroku, drawing a sword longer than three *shaku*.¹¹ Proving to be an immature servant, Gonroku was frightened and, cherishing his own life, he did not care what would become of his master. He implored Gunpei to forgive his insolence and ran away like a rabbit in the blink of an eye. The second retainer, shaking, followed him and fled as well.

Sangorō was left alone. He was cornered, but he had already made a decision: “I may be young, but still I was born into a warrior clan. I will

not cower, infringing the way of the bow and arrow.¹² Even more so because I turned thirteen this year. If I shamed myself I could not simply leave this place. If I am destined to die here, so be it.” His resolution taken, he said in the direction of Onoe and the servant who had run away: “You cowards, how dare you abandon your master in the face of danger.” He felt at the bottom of his heart an excruciating agony.

Gunpei spoke again: “Here is what I meant to tell you. I wished to ask you for an answer, since I have received none, to the letter that I sent you sometime ago through Onoe Gonroku. What is your reply?” Sangorō said: “I do not remember receiving any messages from you.” Gunpei looked around. They were in an unfrequented place and the temple bell was about to mark nightfall, so no one would come there.

Gunpei answered with a grin: “If that is the case, it stands to reason that I have not received your reply. My letter read: I have burned with love for you for a long time. These sentiments flock inside my chest as numerous as the stars and I have spent countless nights crying alone. I described the painful emotions I have felt over you in the message I sent you. However, I expressed myself poorly because I am unrefined. I am uncultivated and incompetent, but my sentiments for you will never change. So, would you please show me compassion? If you did, I would gladly offer you my fleeting life.” By saying so, Gunpei tried to persuade Sangorō to accept his courtship.

Nonetheless, Sangorō replied: “I do not understand what you are saying. I do not have any experience of romantic entanglements.” Kurata complained: “What a heartless rebuttal. I wish you would satisfy my desire, if only for once.” Obama shouted in agreement, but Sangorō talked back as flatly as earlier: “No matter how many times you ask me, I cannot comply with your request” and he started to leave.

From behind, Kurata and Obama threatened him in a high-pitched voice: “If you do not understand the lengths this warrior has gone to express his feelings, you are as lowly as a herdsman. We cannot convince you. You leave us no other choice but to take you by force.” Kurata Gunpei held him in his arms from behind. Sangorō tried to draw his dagger, but Obama Sukegorō retained him by his hands, immobilizing him. “I am sorry” Sangorō thought, but in his heart, resignation fought against his warrior spirit which would not die.

During the struggle, the strip of paper that tied Sangorō’s knot tore and his hair became an undone mess. The hem of his exquisitely plum-scented robe was lifted by a gush of spring wind, baring his skin so white that it

could be mistaken for snow. Kurata and Obama, unable to suppress their impatience, easily defeated him by exerting an unparalleled power, bending him as if he was a flower, and were about to forcibly reach their goal.

The sun set in the west and from the mountain temple the stroke of the night bell rang the passing of all things.¹³ If anybody arrived, Sangorō would be safe. Unfortunately, he was still a boy at the time, so, as much as he resisted, he could not stand up to two adults. He felt helpless, his eyes clouded with tears. “Farewell” he thought, and he was indeed worthy of commiseration.

By chance, a warrior passed through on horseback. When he saw the three men struggle, he quickly dismounted and commanded: “I am Yoshida Ōkura Kiyoi. I order you to stop.” His voice echoed and Kurata and Obama fled in the blink of an eye.

Kiyoi asked Sangorō about the assault. The young man wept copiously. “My name is Sangorō, son of Hirata Tarō Saemon Nojō.” He explained in detail how Kurata and Obama had ambushed him. As he was doing so, another person arrived on the spot. His name was Hirata Goji Uemon Nojō, a relative of Sangorō’s father. In shock at the disheveled sight of Sangorō, he asked: “What happened?” Kiyoi told Uemon about the attack on Sangorō.

Uemon, astonished at what he heard, thanked Kiyoi for rescuing Sangorō. Then Uemon suggested: “Let us go to Masumune’s residence,” but Kiyoi declined: “Unfortunately, I am in a hurry because of a pressing task. I would rather meet you on a different occasion.” Sangorō saddened because he wanted to stay with him, so he firmly clung to Kiyoi’s sleeve, his eyes clouded with tears. “I beg you, please come to my mansion.” “I am busy now, we will meet again at another time.” Kiyoi calmly bowed before Sangorō and said good-bye. Then he took the decisive action to leave. He nimbly mounted his horse and left without looking back.

Goji Uemon Nojō followed the same road Kiyoi had taken and brought Sangorō home. He admonished Sangorō not to tell anyone about the ambush. Then, the next day, Uemon went to Kiyoi’s house to thank him again for rescuing Sangorō and asked Kiyoi not to disclose what had occurred. Uemon zealously made sure that no information about the attack would spread because a custom of the time allowed families to sentence a warrior who had compromised his moral integrity to cut his abdomen open. In the case of Kurata and Obama, they resorted to violence and then fled, thus giving proof of a severe lack of righteousness. Consequently, if the

assault were to become public knowledge, the incident would be a delicate matter to handle. For this reason, Goji Uemon Nojō thought it through and warned Kurata and Obama against talking about it. Such benevolence deserves praising. Nevertheless, the affair eventually became a topic of conversation in society and, in the end, Kurata and Obama's kinsmen ordered them to cut their stomachs open. This episode makes us readers aware of how incredibly brutal the martial mentality was at this time.

Chapter Three

Yoshida Kiyoe and Hirata Sangorō Swear the Brotherhood Oath

In the third generation prior to the events narrated in this tale, the governor at the head of the three regions that comprised the provinces of Satsuma, Ōsumi, and Hyūga was his Excellency Takahisa, lord of Mutsu, descendant on the fifteenth generation of the forefather of the Shimazu clan, his Grace Tadahisa. The latter was a wise overlord, as he conformed with the justice practiced by Emperor Guangwu, founder of the Later Han dynasty, and restored prosperity in the three regions.¹⁴ Thanks to his many achievements, his Eminence Tadahisa was greatly renowned for his deep generosity, leniency, and compassion. Traitors of the homeland removed their helmets in surrender everywhere his flag was planted. In this era, the three regions were unified for the first time, creating a society that was strongly reminiscent of the mythical age when compassion infused traditions.

Afterward came the generation of his Excellency Yoshihisa and then the one of his Eminence Yoshihiro, lord of Hyōgo. Both were superb fighters who practiced justice with humanity. When they grew enraged, the entire Kyūshū island obeyed their commands. They distinguished themselves in the whole Japanese archipelago for the prestige they acquired. As it was said, the rulers of the three regions valued humanity, while their subordinates valued justice. The soldiers in the employment of the Shimazu clan were, from the top down, brave men who excelled in military skills, whereas the young warriors always observed justice and practiced courage.

Among them, Yoshida Ōkura Kiyoe was twenty-three years old. He was a fighter who knew no equal and was famous across the three regions. He masterfully wielded the sword and his Grace Yoshihiro constantly praised him with gratitude by saying: "Ōkura sets an example for every

warrior,” since he always conducted himself honestly and honored loyalty and justice. Because Kiyoi was so extraordinary, his comrades coined the expression “Yoshida style” to indicate his robust body type. As a consequence, all the boys hoped to become his friends. When Kurata and Obama ambushed Sangorō, they ran away at the mention of Kiyoi’s name because they feared him and knew, as did almost all the attendants in Kagoshima the majority of whom were inferior in rank to Kiyoi, that Kiyoi was a powerful warrior.

Yoshida Kiyoi honored loyalty, gathered his friends in his house, risked his own life whenever he trained at fighting techniques, and devoted himself to martial arts from dawn to dusk. As a result, there were among his companions several youth who possessed a radiant beauty, but their attractiveness was not enough to make Kiyoi fall in love with them.¹⁵ Nevertheless, Kiyoi constantly thought about Hirata Sangorō, his mind going to him day and night like the coming and going of waves. Ever since he had first seen the young man, his image had remained impressed in Kiyoi’s heart. Charmed and overcome by amorous feelings, Kiyoi looked ephemeral as if his life were over.

One late evening, five or six of Kiyoi’s friends met in his home to converse and he listened to them discuss a topic that was very important to him. “In the three regions there are now many boys who enjoy a solid reputation. If one were to establish the finest one at present, who would he be?” A man named Kubo answered: “Uchimura Hanpei from Hyūga is the one who currently enjoys a higher reputation than anyone else. He is followed by Matsushima Sangorō and then Nakahara Seihachi. In the Ōsumi and Satsuma provinces, you cannot find youth as handsome as Shibuya Fukusaki and Toyama.”¹⁶ One of those present in Kiyoi’s house was leaning on one of the veranda’s pillars while playing the *biwa*. As he put his pick away, he corrected Kubo: “You forgot about someone. Why did you not mention his Lordship Hirata Sangorō Munetsugu? All the boys you named are surely young men in their prime, including his Excellency the noble Fukuaki Tokuson about whom rumors already are flying, but still his Eminence Hirata Munetsugu is the one who, more than the others, looks as breathtaking as the cherry tree on Mount Miyama which has no master and thus creates an evocative atmosphere as if it bloomed in abundance of its own will. Furthermore, his Grace captivates his suitors not only with his beauty, but also with the refinement of his sentiments.

He is the best youth in our current time.”

Kiyoie spoke with a smile: “If, in this floating world, desires come true, anyone would make a love pact with such a splendid boy as his Excellency Sangorō and dedicate himself to martial arts alongside him. If that were possible, one would happily train every day. Who shall be the person so lucky as to be in a relationship with his Eminence Hirata? Alas, for ordinary people like us, he is as inaccessible as the flower blossoming on a high peak. What a miserable fate we have.” His friend who had played the *biwa* added: “Have you not heard? His Lordship Munetsugu was born to be a correct and resolute person. He devotes himself day and night to the study of letters under the guidance of a mentor and consistently delights himself in poetry, not to mention the martial arts. He masters a sophistication worthy of a warrior and practices benevolence as well. Moreover, he never deviates from the right path. For this reason, whoever sees him and listens to his voice becomes infatuated with him, but apparently he has not exchanged the pledge of eternal love with anyone yet.” Kiyoie hid his feelings in his chest and wanted to ask many more questions, but, since it was the fifth hour of the night, his guests ended the conversation and went home.¹⁷

Kiyoie had gathered new information about Sangorō. However, once he was left alone he grieved and, when he tried to sleep, he could not. Feeling as if he had gone crazy, he rushed into his garden and stood in front of a tree brandishing a wooden sword. “When he has made a decision, the warrior must pursue his objective and overcome any obstacles like an arrow which can pierce a rock.¹⁸ Ever since I first met his Eminence Sangorō, I have burned with passion for him. Gods and buddhas, be touched by my constancy: among the Three Treasures, Hirata is the one I love.”¹⁹ Absorbed in such thoughts, Kiyoie continued hitting the tree with the wooden sword until dawn. He could not tolerate the emotions upsetting him. He was indeed deserving of commiseration.

Ten days passed. Mysteriously, perhaps as a way to reward Kiyoie’s perseverance, starting from the same night, Hirata Sangorō had trouble falling asleep as well. Rather, he dreamed, both when he was asleep and when he lay awake until the temple bell marked midnight, that Yoshida Ōkura would come to the gate of his villa and Sangorō would invite him in. Then one night, having woken up five or six times, Sangorō grew too tired to try and reflect to understand the cause of his distress. The truth was that he had fallen in love with Kiyoie, but, at the same time, he felt pushed

by his rationality not to acknowledge the sentiments he was developing. Despite such resolve, however, Sangorō found himself thinking from dawn to dusk about the dream where Kiyōie came to visit him. By indulging in his feelings despite his rational decision to ignore them, Sangorō showed he possessed a refined sensibility.

Kiyōie thought about Sangorō both when he was awake and asleep. By night he hit the tree with his wooden sword until the sun dawned, by day he wrote on old scraps of paper as a calligraphy exercise: “I dedicate myself to his Excellency Munetsugu.” He tried to control himself, but to no avail. He carefully reflected: “What can I do? As I am an exceptional soldier, I should practice loyalty and justice, but instead I feel lost because of a fleeting beauty and I am confused about how I ought to conduct myself. How disgraceful. Nonetheless, although I burn with passion for him, I cannot hope that his Eminence would ever return my feelings. Were I to die like this, no one would mourn my passing because I threw my life away over unrequited love. I cannot stand my pitiful self. I should confess my sentiments to his Lordship Sangorō and, if he rejects me, I will commit suicide by cutting my stomach open.” One can deduce from his musings that Kiyōie was indeed a superlative man who honored loyalty. However, his being lost on the path of love demonstrates the vanity of human existence.

Later in the first month, Kiyōie decided to confess his feelings to Sangorō and headed to the Hirata clan’s residence, saying to himself: “If my love will not be crowned, I will never go back home.”²⁰ The delicious fragrance of the plum tree in Kiyōie’s garden moved to his sleeves as if the plant suffered separating from him. When Kiyōie smelled the aroma, his love for Sangorō grew even further.

Kiyōie arrived at Sangorō’s mansion. The latter had not turned fifteen yet, but he devoted himself to the twin Ways of the Letters and the Martial Arts following his father’s directives.²¹ In his free time, he enjoyed playing the *tenpuku*, which he loved deeply.²² Kiyōie reached Sangorō’s manor at sunset.

Once there, he heard the music of the *tenpuku* and listened in ecstasy. He wondered who might be playing. Looking through a gap in the fence, he saw that it was Sangorō, who was sitting alone, leaning on one of the veranda’s pillars near a door leading to a small *tatami* room. The garden’s plum tree was blooming and the sand spread so white that it could be mistaken for snow. Sangorō was so immersed in contemplating the spring

scenery that he did not notice the sun setting and seemingly wanted to go on playing music with an absolute concentration. He looked so attractive that not even a drawing could capture his beauty.

Kiyoie called his name: “His Grace Sangorō.” The latter stopped playing and was about to enter the tiny chamber. Kiyoie rapidly called him again: “His Grace Sangorō.” The boy said: “Who is there?” Kiyoie quickly entered the garden: “I am Yoshida Ōkura.” When he heard his name, Sangorō stepped down from the veranda: “What a pleasant surprise. Please, come inside.” They entered the room and briefly greeted each other. They wanted to hide their mutual sentiments and, trying to control their emotions, they attempted to have a casual conversation. Nonetheless, they could not mask the affection they felt toward each other, which their every word revealed. They grew embarrassed when they saw out of the corner of the eye the other’s beauty that made them lose their composure. They were enraptured as if they were admiring Mount Yoshino’s spring cherry blossoms blended with Tatsuta River’s autumn red maple leaves.

Kiyoie started the conversation: “The *tenpuku* I have just listened to is such a splendid instrument as to make me emotional. Would you please let me listen to another melody?” Sangorō was at a loss. “I cannot play it very well yet, so I find your compliment unexpected. Rather, would you let me listen to your music?” He took the flute from a small table and silently placed it in front of Kiyoie.

Kiyoie tried to decline but, since Sangorō wished so, he could not refuse. He cleared his throat, took the instrument, and started playing. He was a virtuoso renowned in the three regions, where he enjoyed a high reputation. Sangorō was bewitched as Kiyoie expressed his feelings through his music. Unintentionally, Sangorō came closer to him. He was as slim as a willow, wore a plum perfume and, turning his radiant gaze towards Kiyoie’s face, he looked keenly touched. His beauty was reminiscent of Dong Xian when he seduced the Han Emperor in his bed.²³ Kiyoie felt as if he were dreaming and this sensation overwhelmed him to the point he thought he was not the person experiencing it. He had no other chance but this, he realized, to confess to Sangorō.

After a while, Kiyoie stopped playing the *tenpuku* and took Sangorō’s hands, that were as white as snow. “There is something I have meant to tell you for a long time. Ever since I first saw you, I feel as eager as a *Harugoma* actor and I cannot break the link that has brought us together.²⁴ From dawn to dusk, I burn with love for you. Do you understand the gravity of what I am saying? If you do, I am ready to repay the debt of

gratitude I owe you by offering you my life in this existence as well as in any future reincarnations. Nevertheless, I am undeserving of you, and if you do not wish to satisfy my desire, please feel free to tell me nothing has ever existed between us. Should you decide that my day has come, I am determined to die by cutting my stomach open.” Sangorō was at a loss, his face as red as a maple leaf.

“If I exchanged a love vow based on duty with such a great, just, and courageous man, I would achieve the loftiest objective of a fighter. Together, we would discuss and give each other advice dedicating ourselves to the way of the warrior,” Sangorō reflected. Only now, although he had always been in love with Kiyōie for his bravery and sense of justice, did he realize his true sentiments. Judging from his own condition, was he not aware that he controlled himself? He seemed to be upset about his own state. Emotionally, he felt close to Kiyōie and, like the rice boats that ply the Mogami River poling upstream and back, the fact that he returned Kiyōie’s feelings was so clear that there is no basis for comparison.²⁵

It was a quiet moment when no one was around, it rained a spring drizzle and one could almost hear the sound of the water drops going down the drainpipe. Kiyōie could not control his passion any longer. Like the willow branch that gets lifted by a gust of wind, he embraced Sangorō from behind and blew out the lamp. Darkness enveloped them. A fragrance of plum blossoms exuded from Sangorō’s sleeves. In the dark of night, the chamber where only the sound of the rain had resonated became silent again. Their sentiments intertwined like yarn and now the unraveling of the knot bared their skin as white as snow, which they could finally touch. They swore the brotherhood oath. The bliss Kiyōie felt was beyond compare.

From that day on, the melancholic thoughts haunting Kiyōie vanished. On the contrary, when he realized the joys of his relationship with Sangorō, the sharpness of Kiyōie’s temper increased hundredfold. Since when they promised to be brothers, Kiyōie and Sangorō devoted themselves to the Ways of the Letters and the Martial Arts, gave each other advice, and debated the correctness of their actions. Among the people who saw and heard rumors about them, everyone was envious. For that reason, in this world where sincerity is not practiced, many persons tried to undermine their rapport, wrote slanderous insults about them on the pillars of *Shintō* sanctuaries and Buddhist temples, and mocked them with hatred. However,

Kiyoie and Sangorō resisted these provocations because they were brothers. Instead of growing enraged with those who vilified their relationship, Kiyoie and Sangorō strengthened their tie day after day and honored the obligation that united them.

Chapter Four *Sangorō and Kiyoie Swear a Written Oath*

As the saying goes: “If a link exists that brings two people together, they will meet even though they are one thousand *ri* apart. However, if such a link does not exist, their relationship will be as fleeting as the dream of a cricket and they will not be together in the same way as Wu opposes Yue.”²⁶

Hirata Sangorō Munetsugu, his attractiveness knowing no equal in the three regions, was ardently coveted by many. Among them were individuals with a wicked attitude like Kurata and Obama, who courted him with different tactics, but in the end he did not fall into their hands. Unlike them, Yoshida Ōkura Kiyoie was fated to make Sangorō fall in love with him, although he had described Sangorō as a flower blossoming on a high peak, because he possessed the virtues of courage and justice. Nonetheless, it was hard to ascertain whether a sure bond actually existed between them.

Mencius, called the second sage, once stated: “The propitious occasion given by Heaven does not bring a propitious occasion on earth. The propitious occasion on earth does not bring harmony in the heart of mankind.”²⁷ This claim constitutes a motto in the way of the warrior and, assumed that this stands to reason, it also applies to any other Way possessing similar characteristics.

Once they had become brothers, Kiyoie and Sangorō inspired one another, shared intimate moments reminiscent of when Emperor Ai of the Later Han cut the sleeve of his royal robe for Dong Xian, his favorite, they left and returned home together on mornings and evenings, and they gave everything they had in the martial arts training.²⁸ Since they fully committed themselves irrespective of whether it was day or night, everyone noticed their attachment and most people, amazed, said that such is the objective of the true warrior.

Nevertheless, some wicked warriors who had an evil temper and poor fighting abilities harbored resentment and devised ingenious schemes to divide Kiyoi and Sangorō. Among them was a man named Ishizuka Jūsuke. He had taken a fancy to Sangorō, but the latter had surprisingly accepted Kiyoi's courtship and now they behaved like brothers, since they had sworn that their tie would not break not even in their future lives. When Ishizuka learned about this, he fell prey to a furious jealousy and contrived various perverted plots to break their bond. Eventually, he figured out a plan.

It probably happened on the eighth day of the second month. Ishizuka had written a fake letter and dropped it in front of the gate to the Hirata clan's mansion. Sangorō left home, headed to Kiyoi's residence. He did not see the message and went on, but his retainer Gonroku noticed it thanks to his keen eye, picked it up, and showed it to Sangorō. The front of the envelope read: "To Yoshida Ōkura from Kanō Hachijirō." Sangorō smiled. "How lucky. I found this letter just when I am going to visit his Excellency Yoshida. I will give it to him." However, once he had arrived at the other's house, Sangorō was told that Kiyoi had just left. Heading back, Sangorō suddenly took the message, broke the seal, and opened the letter to read its content.

Last night I came to your home and you let me stay for a long time. I thank you for your thoughtful hospitality. In my opinion, informing his Lordship Hirata of our relationship would be premature. Since, in this world, people's eyes are vigilant and careful, being secretive is our primary duty. Tonight, when we will have met, we shall discuss in detail about whether to disclose our relationship to his Eminence Hirata. I offer you my best wishes.

Eighth day of the second month.

From a certain Kanō, younger brother to Yoshida Ōkura, esteemed older brother.

Postscript: I will later dispatch a servant to deliver the bow I pledged to give you; since it is a present, I beg you to kindly accept it.

Once he had finished reading, Sangorō gnashed his teeth. "Apparently, his Grace Yoshida has fallen in love with his Excellency Kanō and plans on abandoning me. The human heart changes overnight like the rapids on a river, or so it is said, but the warrior who has made a promise is not supposed to behave lightly. Should the soldier fail to fulfill a pact, he would be to blame no matter the reason. I did not know his Eminence

Kiyoie was disloyal. I regret thinking our tie important. Considering this turn of events, I cannot go on living. I see no option other than putting an end to my misery by dying together with his Lordship Kiyoie. However, since I have relied on him as I would on a brother, I should break our bond first and then assess the situation.” Resolved, Sangorō wrote the following letter:

I came to pay you a visit, but you were not home so I write you this message. May you please come to my villa? I need to discuss an important matter with you at all costs. Or would you rather I go back to your residence? Either way, I ask you to please send me a reply as soon as you have returned home. I will await your answer. I send you my cordial regards.

Eighth day of the second month, to Yoshida Ōkura from Hirata Sangorō.

After sending the letter to Yoshida’s house, Sangorō could not hold his bitterness, so he took the treasured *tenpuku* Kiyoie had given him and was about to play it. However, he was so angered he drew his dagger, broke the flute in half, and with the blade made three or four cuts on the corner of a table. He was now completely unable to control his rage, so he made some cuts on the room’s pillars and, screaming, struck many more blows. His wrath was so unavailing that his eyes clouded with tears. A bystander could easily suppose what kind of feelings had him so upset just by looking at him; indeed, he inspired a grave commotion.

Yoshida Kiyoie, none the wiser, came back home after sunset. He read the letter he had received and, finding its content suspicious, left as soon as possible for Hirata’s manor.

Once he arrived at Hirata’s residence, he sat in front of Sangorō: “I had a pressing engagement last night and I could not meet with you, so I thought I would pay you a visit tonight. However, I unexpectedly received your message, for which I am most obliged.” Kiyoie’s words sounded sincere, so Sangorō found him hateful. Then he answered, sitting stiffly: “Here is why I sent you the letter. Up until now I have relied on you as if you were my brother, but, for a certain reason, I want to break our bond. I kindly ask you to understand how I feel. In your heart, you know the cause behind my decision.” His eyes as beautiful as a hollyhock clouded with tears. Kiyoie, whom Sangorō coldly stared at grinding his teeth and tightening up his handsome face, found the statement unexpected. Nonetheless, he evaluated the situation and kept his composure.

“Do you suspect me of duplicity? Your Excellency, what you say does not make sense. Although the world might change, the sentiments I harbor in my heart, as hard as black iron, do not. I am a soldier, could I ever go back on my word? I suspect you are victim of an intrigue weaved by some spiteful persons bent on breaking our tie. Somebody made insinuations about me, is it not? If you have proof to demonstrate my guilt, please show me this evidence.”

Sangorō could not contain his grudge and showing Kiyoi the fake letter he thoroughly explained its content. Kiyoi stated: “If that is your evidence, then the situation is clear. Nevertheless, why do you believe I flatter you when I say that I have not betrayed you? You hurt me if you think you have made a promise with an unfair person. May I see the message and have a chance to defend myself?” Sangorō decided to attack Kiyoi in case he found his words to be false, so he sat beside the other, ready to stab him.

Kiyoi was unperturbed. “The fighter who had doubts because of such a letter and believed the fabrications it contains would surely be hot-tempered. I find it suspicious that you came in possession of such a vulgar message and you believe its trickery that makes you doubt me in such an inopportune moment, just today when you went to my residence while I was not there and we had not met since yesterday. Furthermore, his Grace Kanō has been sick for a few days, so what could I have promised him? Besides, it is false that he came to my house yesterday. I cannot believe that you do not suspect a scheme. Since I have nothing to hide, I do not need to defend myself.”

Sangorō felt Kiyoi made sense. He blushed in remorse because he realized he had acted on an impulse. He remained silent as Kiyoi continued defending himself: “I assume that, although you know me well, you believed this letter and were ready to break our relationship. If that is the case, I, too, have made a decision.”

Sangorō firmly clung to Kiyoi, his eyes clouded with tears. “I have made a pledge with you, do you think I am dissatisfied with you or I have rejected constancy to behave with duplicity? I acted impulsively. I regret doubting you.” Crying as beautifully as a flower, Sangorō declared his sincerity. Kiyoi, touched, said: “You set an example for those who honor justice with a clean heart,” and at last he was able to calm Sangorō.

Then together they wrote an oath by which they swore, the gods as their witnesses, the sincerity of their feelings that would not change, not even in their future reincarnations:

Introduction to the written oath.

- We shall practice the virtues of loyalty, trust, filial piety, and duty, the cardinal values of the way of the warrior;
- Since we have exchanged the brotherhood vow, from now on we shall live and die together;
- Whatever happens, even in extraordinary circumstances, we shall repay the debt of gratitude we owe towards one another, we shall not fall in love with anyone else and we shall behave with constancy;
- We shall always trust each other;
- Whatever occurs, no matter how unusual, we shall exchange opinions about our problems and we shall never grow apart.

We have agreed on the above clauses in the second month of the second year of the Keichō era, year of the Fire Rooster.²⁹ Should we violate these points, may we suffer the divine retribution and the punishment in the netherworld not only at the hand of Brahma, Indra, the Four Great Kings of the Sky, and the major and minor deities from every province of the Japanese archipelago, but especially at the hands of Satsuma's tutelary gods, the great and mighty Kashikuri God, the Hachiman bodhisattva of Kokubu, the six deities of Kirishima, the great and mighty god of Upper and Lower Suwa, and the tutelary god of the Shimazu clan.

We swear this written oath based on the aforementioned articles.

Eighth day of the second month of the second year of the Keichō era, year of the Fire Rooster.

Signed by Yoshida Ōkura Kiyōie.

His Grace Hirata Sangorō.”

Sangorō wrote a copy, signed it using his own blood, and gave it to Kiyōie. The latter said: “I, too, shall sign with my blood.” He drew his dagger and sat in front of Sangorō. “Luckily, the daily training make the infected blood accumulate in the arms. Please stab me here” he said while he rolled up his sleeve to bare his arm. Sangorō felt uneasy, but Kiyōie never went back on his word. Therefore, Sangorō took the dagger and, as soon as he had pierced the other's arm, the blood gushed like a waterfall. After Kiyōie had signed the pact, Sangorō took a towel, brought it to his mouth, and tore it. “Does it not hurt?” he asked Kiyōie while bandaging his arm. Kiyōie answered with a brief laugh: “How could such a small wound hurt? Last year, when I was stationed on the Korean peninsula, I was hit in my left arm with a poisoned arrow. Once I had recovered, I was in a dreadful condition because, without a doubt, infected blood had accumulated there.

Compared to that injury, this is a flesh wound, so I do not feel any pain.” Kiyoi exhibited great vigor and exceptional behavior that spurred others to emulate his example. He cautioned Sangorō against wickedness and gave him many other authoritative teachings. He then took his leave. Afterward, their bond grew even stronger.

Chapter Five

Kiyoi Goes to War in the Korean Kingdom of Goryeo. Sangorō and He Suffer from Their Separation

In this uncertain world, meeting leads to parting. For this reason, we are not surprised that Kiyoi and Munetsugu, despite their loving attachment, could not get out of a new predicament. Here is what happened.

In the first year of the Bunroku era, his Eminence former regent Toyotomi Hideyoshi decided to subdue the kingdoms in the Korean peninsula.³⁰ To reach the peninsula, the warriors coming from every province of the Japanese archipelago crossed the sea and, once on the Korean peninsula, they displayed their military power by taking the castle of the Goryeo king. The beat of the war drums resonated as far as the Great Ming Empire.

His Grace Shimazu Yoshihiro, lord of Hyōgo, led alongside his son, his Eminence Tadatsune, the joint troops of the three regions of Satsuma, Ōsumi, and Hyūga. His soldiers undertook the journey at the beginning of the Bunroku era and gave proof of their fearless grandness, standing out thanks to the martial exploits they performed. At last, the king of Goryeo surrendered and requested an armistice. He capitulated in the fourth year of the Bunroku era.³¹ To preserve peace, his Lordship Yoshihiro placed his Excellency Tadatsune in charge of the local stronghold. His Eminence Yoshihiro then returned from overseas on his own and quickly went to the Jurakudai manor where he was received by his Lordship Toyotomi. The latter rejoiced at his Eminence Yoshihiro’s success, commended him for his operations in the Korean peninsula, and bestowed on him generous rewards. Afterwards, his Grace Yoshihiro went back to the three regions to recover from the prostration due to the war.

Nevertheless, the king of Goryeo disrespected the treaties. As a consequence, his Eminence Hideyoshi sent his army back to the peninsula. His Excellency Yoshihiro was commanded to urge the contingents’

departure and ordered to rapidly set sail. He would go to Goryeo himself. He received the order to leave on the twenty-first day of the second month of the second year of the Keichō era.³²

Kiyoie was commanded to join the troops. Since he wished to enrol in the army, he promptly accepted the assignment. However, going to war meant that he had to leave Sangorō now that the latter's beauty was in full bloom. Had he not been enlisted, Kiyoie thought, he would never have separated from his beloved Sangorō since they pledged to live and die together. Leaving Sangorō was a difficult decision to make, but there was nothing Kiyoie could do. He felt an incomparable sorrow.

Hirata Sangorō also suffered parting from Kiyoie, his brother to whom he was as close as two trees that, lining up their branches, seem to form only one plant. They had sworn to be united like mandarin ducks although their bodies would sink in a deep river and to take off together despite their destination being in the middle of raging flames or between the waters.

Sangorō wished he could go to war too, but, since only men older than fifteen were enlisted, there was nothing he could possibly do. Unbeknownst to others, he searched for a way to join the army, but he could not find a solution. As a result, he felt restless. However much he grieved, though, he could only hope for the departure to be delayed indefinitely.

Nonetheless, the date was soon set for the twenty-first. Since the soldiers had received the order to go to Chōsa, on the previous day Sangorō sent Kiyoie the following letter:

The day of your departure has finally arrived. I suffer from our separation. If only this were a bad dream. Would you please spend the night at my mansion, as we promised? I will be waiting for you. If you have decided otherwise, please let me know. Since it is an urgent matter, I solicit your answer. I offer you my best wishes.

Twentieth day of the second month of the Rooster.
Hirata Sangorō.
To Yoshida Ōkura.

Kiyoie immediately sent the following reply:

I was very busy with preparations for the last two days, so I could not contact you. I am sorry. I have received your message. You are concerned

about me and I am grateful for it. I am coming to your mansion at sunset and we will play the *tenpuku* and the *biwa*. Since my *biwa* is a splendid instrument I carefully preserve, I wish you would pour out your deep love on it. We will have a chance to tell each other our thoughts once we have met again. I send you my cordial regards.

Twentieth day of the second month of the Rooster.
Yoshida Ōkura.
To Hirata Sangorō.”

Impatient for the night to come, Sangorō went to Kiyoe’s house on the afternoon and the two of them returned to Sangorō’s manor together. There, Sangorō presented Kiyoe with a renowned sword, two *shaku* and eight *sun* long, forged by Bizen Kanemitsu.³³ He told Kiyoe: “I lovingly treasured this sword and I would never give it away to save my life, but I offer it to you as my parting gift. Please use it to achieve glory. If you do, it will be as if I were at your side myself.”

Kiyoe took the sword, raised it above his head as a sign of gratitude, and answered: “I thank you for your gracious intentions, but such a parting gift would be excessive,” and refused it. Sangorō said with a smile: “Do you believe it will not be of any use to you? In that case, you are gravely mistaken: my noble father Masumune received the sword from his master and, by wielding it on the battleground, he has made brandishing it a good omen. He later passed it on to me. Why would you refuse it?” Kiyoe realized that turning such a gift down would be impolite.

Kiyoe wore the sword Sangorō had gifted him on his side and presented the young man with the sword he had used to kill Roku Kanemoto. This weapon, too, was two *shaku* and eight *sun* long. “This sword was handed down from generation to generation within my clan. It is a weapon of excellent craftsmanship. I used it when I was deployed to the Korean peninsula last year to admirably cut off a great number of heads. With it, I have always killed my target. I have treasured it until now, but I offer it to you as my parting gift. Should I die fighting in Goryeo, please consider it my memento.”

Kiyoe was a brave man, but he thought that this gift exchange was a farewell gesture and cried looking at Sangorō’s face. Kiyoe’s pitiful state tore apart Sangorō’s heart. After a while they had nothing left to say, but Kiyoe felt a growing agony inside him and told Sangorō: “Why would I utter such fearsome words? Those who go to the frontline are ready to die and they believe they will be back home if the progress of the war is positive, the army triumphing over the enemy. If you will think about me

from dawn to dusk, wish that I may never lose heart. Hope that, in the future, you shall be enlisted, too, and that we shall devote ourselves to the study of the letters and the martial arts, and that we shall undertake the way of the warrior. Pray that I might be dismissed after fighting for two or three years, like I was two years ago, and that I may celebrate your fifteenth birthday with you. I do not want to repeat myself but dedicate yourself only to acquiring prestige among the troops. Were I to die, reach me on the mountain path of the peak of death. If I were the only one of us to survive, what could I rely on to spend the rest of my days? Follow me immediately.”

In this manner, they talked about their strong feelings for each other knowing that soon their impending separation would cause them to suffer. In the dark of the night they lay on the same bed, they wrapped themselves in the blankets, and, while resting their heads on the hand of the other as if it were a pillow, they continued the conversation without alluding to their grief. After a short while, the temple bell marked the dawn. Kiyoe got out of bed at an early hour on the twentieth day, when the grass was still wet from the morning dew and returned home.

On the day of the army’s departure, the watchmen who stood guard headed for Chōsa. Since the authorities had issued a dispatch ordering the troops to assemble, Kiyoe took the road alongside Sangorō at the hour of the snake, went to the palace, and met with his Lordship governor Yoshihiro.³⁴ The latter was waiting for the soldiers to gather and in the meantime compared the information written down on two notebooks. Kiyoe and Sangorō withdrew to talk. As much as they conversed though, their suffering would not ease. Later on, the sun was about to set behind the mountains in the west and the fighters fully gathered up. They put on a spectacular show.

His Eminence Yoshihiro enthusiastically decreed the departure of the army by parading at the head of the contingents with the autumn rain banner.³⁵ Everybody, regardless of whether they were of noble extraction or of humble origin, old or young, men or women, burned with love for him, like the newborn grows attached to their mother and father, and suffered from the separation. His Grace Yoshihiro excelled not only for his learning, talent, and resolve. For his virtue he was close to Yao and Shun, for his generosity he was comparable to Zhou Gong.³⁶ Foreigners coming from distant countries became fond of him for his qualities and prisoners forgot about going back to their homeland because where else other than

on the Japanese archipelago was benevolence truly practiced?

The soldiers began their march. Now that the time had come, Kiyoiie suffered leaving Sangorō and, firmly staying by his side, he got separated from his comrades. One of his retainers, named Satō Hyōe Nojō Taketō, ran to him and said: “His Grace Yoshihiro has already left. Why do you hesitate? Delaying your inevitable separation with his Eminence Sangorō will not ease the pain of parting, so please join the contingents.”

So harshly reprimanded, Kiyoiie realized that what Taketō had said was correct, so he abruptly bid Sangorō farewell and started to leave. Sangorō briefly stopped him by holding him by the sleeve of his armor. “Fighting this war in a foreign country with honor and loyalty, achieve a high reputation and come back safely. I will await your return.” Then he composed the following poem:

<i>Mononofu no</i>	武士の	The warrior enjoys
<i>takaki na o ete</i>	高き名を得て	a high reputation,
<i>furusato ni</i>	故郷に	when he returns to his
<i>tsuite kuru hana no</i>	着いて来る花の	hometown
<i>nishiki o zo min</i>	錦をぞ見ん	he wears a flowery brocade, I long to admire him.

Kiyoiie answered in kind composing the following poem:

<i>Ukitabi mo</i>	浮旅も	As I will not forget
<i>wasureyasemaji</i>	忘れやせまじ	the pain of this journey,
<i>koto no ha no</i>	言の葉の	the flowery fragrance
<i>hana no nioi o</i>	花の匂を	of your words
<i>sode ni utsushite</i>	袖に移して	moves to my sleeve.

At last Kiyoiie said goodbye. Sangorō let his sleeve go and Kiyoiie joined the rear files of the troops. Sangorō was left behind alone. Watching Kiyoiie go, Sangorō could not control his fears that were Kiyoiie tragically murdered in the imminent campaign this would be their final parting in their present existence. There was nothing Sangorō could do. He could only helplessly watch Kiyoiie leave. Both of them were saddened and felt uneasy thinking nostalgically about their lives. If they were strangers listening to this story, they would soak their sleeves with tears, so it was all the more reason for them to suffer from the separation. Their sorrow cannot be described.

Governor Yoshihiro reached Kamō. That night, in a good omen for the

Shimazu clan, a heavy rain fell and for an instant a will-o'-the-wisp enlightened the darkness. “The great and mighty Inari God proclaims our victory in the coming war” said his Lordship and all his soldiers jumped with joy.³⁷ On the following day, the twenty-second, Yoshihiro reached Kumano castle where he resided for more than ten days. There Tanegashima Sakon no Shiyōgen and Kabayamagon no Saemon Nojō joined his army. Then his Grace moved to Gumizaki where he boarded a warship and set sail. After some days, he landed on Goryeo kingdom.

Chapter Six
Spurred by His Moral Integrity, Sangorō Goes on Pilgrimages to Suwa Sanctuary

After separating from Yoshida Ōkura Kiyōie, Hirata Sangorō Munetsugu grew lonely. Both when he was asleep and awake, he wondered where Kiyōie would head towards next and where he would sleep at night.

Spring passed and summer started. Couriers arriving via ship informed the inhabitants of the three regions that his Excellency Yoshihiro had crossed the sea and had safely landed on Goryeo. Sangorō felt slightly reassured. However, since he could not foresee the tide of the war, he soon lost his serenity and became even more dejected.

To ease his worries, Sangorō made regular pilgrimages to the sanctuary located at the slopes of Tōfuku castle dedicated to the great and mighty Suwa God. He prayed as intensely as if his own life were at stake that the deity may bestow upon Kiyōie a good fate in battle and that the god might protect him so that he would return safely. Sangorō’s manor was on the same side of Mount Giyokuryū and the holy place was only five or six *chō* afar, so he always went there on his own.³⁸

Days and months passed by quickly. At the beginning of the third year of the Keichō era, Munetsugu turned fourteen years old.³⁹ Like a flower in full bloom becomes proud, Sangorō let time fly by reminiscing vainly about the last spring when Kiyōie was still by his side, as if a cherry tree blossomed and showed its color and aroma in a deep mountain valley where nobody cared about it.

Ishizuka Jūsuke, the man who had written the fake letter to break Sangorō and Kiyōie’s relationship, had come to know that they were united by an unparalleled bond and could not tolerate it. The previous year, he had fallen sick when the troops had gone to war in the Korean peninsula,

so he had not been enlisted. Even now, when Kiyoi joined the army again, Ishizuka did not enroll. Seizing the opportunity offered by Kiyoi's absence, Ishizuka wrote a message and sent it to Sangorō. When the latter saw the envelope, he threw it on the floor leaving it unanswered. Ishizuka sent him a thousand more amorous letters, but Sangorō never opened them. To the contrary, he burned the sealed letters.

Frustrated, Ishizuka came up with various plans to make Sangorō break up with Kiyoi by force. To this end, Ishizuka brought together a large number of harsh and rugged acquaintances determined to get Sangorō for themselves. He assembled them in groups of five or six and in shifts they declared their purpose. Afterwards, at the dusk of a certain day when a drizzle fell, maybe on the last ten days of the third month, Hirata Sangorō took the road to the sanctuary, walking alone without seeking protection under an umbrella. When Ishizuka saw him, he urged his companions to follow him through a shortcut. Sangorō, none the wiser, briefly stayed in the main hall of the holy place. He put the formal robe he was wearing in order and sat down, engaged in his thoughts about the war raging on in the distant kingdom of Goryeo.

After a short while, the sun set behind the mountains in the west. Suddenly, the chime of the night temple bell echoed. When Sangorō stood up to leave, five or six brutes, their faces hidden behind a *haori*, gathered near the sanctuary gate. As they came closer to Sangorō, the savages split up, a man in front of Sangorō and another man behind the boy, a man at Sangorō's right and another man at Sangorō's left surrounding him, while a fifth man punched a solid stone wall screaming loudly and a sixth man rolled on the ground.

Sangorō felt an anger burn like a blazing fire. He was aware that such a ruckus was Ishizuka's doing. He readied to draw his sword and, prepared to stab whomever would dare lay a finger on him, he walked through the assailants staring coldly at them with a haughty glare. Ishizuka and his accomplices felt subjugated by Sangorō's strength and, frightened, did nothing but cry, someone in front and someone else behind the young man. In this way they followed Sangorō to his mansion, where he safely returned. Later on, the assailants, outraged, gnashed their teeth. Frustrated about their failure, they went back home bent on waiting for the next occasion.

That night, Sangorō carefully reflected. "Ishizuka and his savages will surely try to restrain me by force again. Why should I fear their attack,

even if I had to face ten opponents? Kiyoi, my noble brother, taught me that a respectful person, despite their humble conduct, should not bow down to those who abuse their prestige to subdue them. Starting from tomorrow, I shall make the pilgrimage every day at the same hour. Although people of their kind may ambush me, I am fourteen, why should I behave childishly? If they treat me rudely, I will cut them in half.” Such courage deserves praise.

The following day, Sangorō left at the hour he had decided, the same as the day before. For the next few days, he did not meet his adversaries. He continued to make his daily pilgrimage. Then a few times he did run into his adversaries, but he kept his composure. He walked past his assailants looking icily at them with a lofty stare. Ishizuka and his accomplices never posed a real threat. As the saying goes: “Barking dogs seldom bite,” the aggressors consulted each other and in the end they gave up, probably frightened by Sangorō’s bravery.⁴⁰ By conducting themselves with such cowardice, they demonstrated their immaturity.

Time went by as fast as an arrow until winter came. During the days from the eleventh to the twentieth day of the twelfth month, Sangorō resisted Ishizuka and the other assailants. Such behavior was splendid and commendable.

Chapter Seven

The Army Returns from Goryeo, Kiyoi and Sangorō Reunite. The Uprising in Satsuma, Ōsumi, and Hyūga

The Shimazu army was virtually invincible, for among its troops was his Eminence Yoshihiro, lord of Hyōgo, a renowned warrior who possessed the virtues of ingenuity, benevolence, and courage. His son, his Grace Tadatsune, and his nephew, his Excellency Tadatoyo, were extraordinary too. Each of their conscripts was as strong as a thousand warriors and each conducted himself loyally and dutifully. His Lordship Yoshihiro was unrivalled in the achievement of military feats.

In particular, on the first day of the tenth month during a single conflict, the Shimazu troops wiped out 200,000 combatants belonging to the contingents deployed by the Ming Empire at the new stronghold in Sacheon. In the battle, the Shimazu soldiers cut off 38,700 heads and so many other amputated body parts that their exact number remained unknown. Nobody had ever heard of such a vast number of heads being

cut off in a single campaign. Thanks to this exploit, the Shimazu army delivered an unequalled victory, altering the relations between China and the Japanese archipelago.

His Grace Yoshihiro possessed a superb martial virtue worthy of a god. Furthermore, he was famed for his skill in devising plans. He surpassed Zhang Liang and Chen Ping for his intellect and was equal to Guan Yu and Zhang Fei for his audacity. For his ability in commanding the troops, if Sun Zi and Wu Qi were still alive, they would follow his orders.⁴¹ Therefore, it stands to reason the Chinese population, having come to know about the military prestige of our country, cowered when they heard the name Shimazu. Probably the merit for gaining control over Goryeo's eight roads went not to a common soldier but to his Eminence. Who could ever disagree?

The army was stationed at Goryeo for seven years and occupied its main streets in no time. Consequently, during the winter of the eleventh month of the third year of the Keichō era, the warriors were dismissed and allowed to go back to their respective home provinces.⁴² His Excellency Yoshihiro returned on a ship and dismissed his contingents in Imazu city in Chikuzen province. He then reached Fushimi city in Yamashiro province together with his son, his Lordship Tadatsune.

Yoshida Ōkura Kiyoe accomplished several military feats during the course of the operations he took part in while deployed in Goryeo. He held his position whenever he saw the enemy vanguard and acquired more glory than anybody else in the massive battle in Sacheon, receiving the praise of his Grace Yoshihiro. Furthermore, while he was on his way back from abroad, the warship on which the Kabayama brothers Tadayuki and Hisataka, Kiire Tadamasu, and over 500 people traveled was taken by the current on the beach of an island in the South China Sea. Kiyoe was on board and, alongside a certain Takeuchi, reached Goryeo and contacted his Eminence the governor Yoshihiro to ask for help. In this way, Kiyoe saved the lives of more than 500 people. The merit went to Yoshida and Takeuchi, but Kiyoe's courage and resoluteness deserved a special praise. He gave proof of commendable behavior inspired by loyalty and justice on many more occasions, but the tale would grow to be too long, were I to narrate every single incident in detail. Thus, I have to omit a part of the available material. If the reader wishes to know more, I would advise them to consult supplementary sources.

During the days from the eleventh to the twentieth of the twelfth month, Yoshida Kiyoe returned to the Satsuma region. The weather was almost unbearably cold because of recent snowfalls. He headed for Hirata Sangorō's mansion on the very same night he returned.⁴³ We can easily imagine their happiness. The grief of their past separation turned now to be a topic that provoked laughter. Kiyoe told Sangorō he had consistently thought about him during the last two years. Sangorō told Kiyoe about his pilgrimages to the Suwa sanctuary and the Ishizuka incident. Marveling at the stories Sangorō told him, Kiyoe came to appreciate Sangorō's moral fiber.

Kiyoe spent the day at Sangorō's mansion and they talked about their feelings till dawn. Alas, the impermanence of this world. They had feared they would never meet again. If we keep this in mind, their bliss must have surpassed the joy Wang Zhi felt when he returned from the world of the immortals and met his grandchild from the seventh generation.⁴⁴

Truth constitutes the immutable form of Heaven and possessing the truth constitutes the pinnacle of human achievement. From the remote past until now, many praised the truth that the upright conduct of Kiyoe and Sangorō demonstrated. If we painted the figure of Kiyoe when he went to Sangorō's manor in a snowstorm, it would be the figure of a man who is the model of loyalty, trust, and probity. When Kiyoe fought through the snowstorm to reach Sangorō's villa, he displayed amazing steadfastness, his virtuous behavior teaching us a compelling lesson. This is noble indeed.

Compared to Kiyoe and Sangorō, we live in the future, but still the splendor of the past sets an example valuable for everyone. When a man, a certain Suwa, saw a portrait of Sangorō, he was overcome with nostalgia and expressed through a poem the emotions the boy had felt:

<i>Shinaba wakare</i>	死なば別れ	The truth you show me
<i>ikite wa nani o</i>	生きては何を	when, paying me a visit,
<i>mukuimashi</i>	報ひまし	you open a path in the snow.
<i>yuki wakete koshi</i>	雪分けて来し	If I die, we shall be apart,
<i>hito no makoto o</i>	人の誠を	if I live, how could I ever reward you?

Kiyoe and Sangorō's tie grew even stronger and they always stood by each other's side. They debated about martial arts by day, lay using the other's hand as a pillow by night, and pledged that their bond would be as unchangeable as stone.

Days and months flew by like an arrow and a new year started, the fourth year of the Keichō era.⁴⁵ The melancholy Kiyōie and Sangorō had felt in the previous years finally vanished. Nevertheless, after a short while another major event occurred. For a certain reason, his Eminence Tadatsune, the newly appointed governor, executed his chief retainer, Ijūin Uemon no Taifu Tadamune, in the tearoom of Fushimi palace. The latter's son, Ijūin Genjirō Tadazane, entrenched himself in Miyako castle, had twelve fortresses built, and according to some rumors he planned his revenge.⁴⁶ Since it was impossible to ascertain whether those talks were true, the three regions were thrown into an uproar and the whole population panicked, plunging into chaos. The young warriors urged their masters to take action by saying: "Tadazane, take shelter inside your castle. If you do, I will achieve the glorious feat of taking Uchimura Hanpei and all the other celebrated fighters prisoner," voicing their intention to go to war.

Ishizuka Jūsuke, who had become infatuated with Sangorō, had devised several plans to conquer him, but in the end he had not brought them to completion. Afterwards, Kiyōie had returned from overseas and his relationship with Sangorō had grown stronger. Ishizuka had passed the time vainly, because there was no way for him to have Sangorō. However, when he heard that Tadazane would move to Shōnai district, he galloped fast toward Miyako castle and, since he had ties with Tadazane, joined the Ijūin army.

Chapter Eight *The Shōnai Castle Riot. Kiyōie and Sangorō Go to War*

Ijūin Genjirō Tadazane entrenched himself in Miyako castle because he was angered by the murder of his old father, Tadamune. Resolute to take revenge on his Grace, governor Tadatsune, Tadazane had twelve fortresses quickly built and closed the roads between Hyūga and Ōsumi regions, revealing his intention to rebel. Therefore, Niiro Tadamoto, lord of Musashi, and Yamada Arinobu, lord of Echizen, led the army to Shōnai castle, obeying the orders of his Excellency Shimazu Yoshihira, Tadatsune's uncle. Nonetheless, they surprisingly turned out to be adventurers and headed toward Hyūga region.

Fushimi was immediately notified of their desertion and his Eminence general Nakatsukasa Daibu Toyohisa was rapidly deployed. During the first ten days of the sixth month, his Grace general Tadatsune took off from Kagoshima majestically dressed and defeated the two looters of Hyūga region. Among the men in his retinue were firstly Shimazu Nakatsukasa Daibu Toyohisa, Atachōju Moriatsu, Shimazu Hisamitsu lord of Shimotsuke, Shimazu Tadanobu lord of Kawachi, Shimazu Tadatomo lord of Bungo, Kiire Tadamasa lord of Setsutsu, and secondly the warriors Kamata Masachika, Sata Tarōjirō, Hishi Kunisada lord of Jimakii and Hirata Tarō Saemon Nojō Masumune. The dauntless elite troops amounted to several tens of thousands of soldiers. Unfortunately, I do not have enough time to register their names one by one. In short, an immense army was raised as fast as the clouds and the mist lift.

Yoshida Ōkura Kiyoe and Hirata Sangorō Munetsugu enlisted following the command issued by their master, Sangorō's father Masumune. Sangorō willingly remained in Satsuma for a short while and then departed alongside Kiyoe on the dawn of the tenth day of the sixth month. Once they had passed Chōsa in Ōsumi region, they made a pilgrimage to the Buddha Yakushi temple located at Mount Yoneyama, where they prayed for their fate in battle. There they saw an inscription, written with a faint ink, on one of the pillars at the left side of the main hall:

In the first year of the Bunroku era of the Water Dragon, in the second month, Chōsa Rokushichi, inhabitant of Chōsa city in Ōsumi region, crossed the sea headed for the Korean peninsula.⁴⁷

The following poem was written below:

<i>Inochi araba</i>	命あらば	If I will live,
<i>mata mo kite min</i>	又も来て見ん	I want to return
<i>Yoneyama ya</i>	米山や	and see this inscription again.
<i>Yakushi no dō no nokiba</i>	薬師の堂の軒端	May nobody damage
<i>arasuna</i>	荒すな	the hall of Yakushi temple in Yoneyama.

Kiyoe and Sangorō marveled. Kiyoe explained: “Rokushichi was a warrior whose boldness knew no equal. On that year, he took part in a tiger hunt in Changwon in Goryeo, but was killed from the bite of one of those

beasts. How touching. The strokes of his brush do not represent a memento that may live on for posterity.” Kiyōie and Sangorō cried with pity. “I do not think we will come back alive either” said Kiyōie and, after taking his portable writing box, he traced on the right pillar of the temple hall the following message:

In the fourth year of the Keichō era of the Earth Pig, in the tenth day of the sixth month, Hirata Sangorō Munetsugu and Yoshida Ōkura Kiyōie set out to go to war in Shōnai district.⁴⁸

Then they left. Afterwards, they perished in combat, but, although their corpses were buried beneath the moss of a rotting field, the prestige of their names survived death and reached future generations. Whoever saw their inscription on the pillar drenched their sleeves with tears to the point they could not wring them out. Their deeds prove what the poem says: “The earth in Longmen buries the bones, but not the glory.”⁴⁹

Chapter Nine *Kiyōie and Sangorō Die in Takarabe Battle*

The Ijūin brothers Jinkichi and Sawatari, the latter being lord of Hizen, entrenched themselves at Takarabe castle in Ōsumi region, one of the twelve fortresses built by Ijūin Tadazane, the instigator of the revolt, while Tadazane himself set his headquarters in Miyako castle, located in the west. The two buildings were only one *chō* far from each other. Moreover, behind them was An’ei castle where Shiraishi Eisen, Tadazane’s trusted retainer, and five Ijūin officials were stationed, so the contingents of the Shimazu army could not break the rebels’ defenses.

Nonetheless, a mountain road passed through there towards Hamanoichi in Ōsumi region. His Eminence Yoshihisa, Tadatsune’s uncle, was in Tominokuma castle and, realizing one of his brilliant strategies, he had a new barrier built in Watase down that road. In his opinion, the blockade would prevent the opponent’s attacks, so he assembled a squad and, taking the order issued by the Tōsuke brothers Takeshige and Takeaki, he had that division well protected. Additionally, the forces defending Ijiki received the command to safeguard Shiroge pass leading to Takarabe. The adversary’s army assaulted the two troops only to withdraw and from time to time the groups conducted skirmishes.

At the end of autumn, Yamada Arinobu lord of Echizen took the lead of the whole army, following the orders of his Excellency Shimazu Yoshihisa uncle of Tadatsune, and commanded the attack of Takarabe castle. During the conflict, started at the hour of the snake, the contingents attempted the assault by using secret techniques, but the stronghold's forces were formed by valiant men and, at the crucial moment, they mounted a strenuous defense.

Among these mighty soldiers was a man named Setoguchi Iwami, one of Tadazane's retainers, who was an excellent marksman, proficient in using the musket. Dressed in armor with violet and crimson ligatures, Setoguchi used a small pine tree that grew near a cliff as a shield and from there he hit the adversaries who came closer, so the Shimazu soldiers could not advance. Sagara Zensuke noticed that Setoguchi prevented the Shimazu's progress, so he shot him with a musket that was ten *monme* heavy.⁵⁰ The bullet followed its course and hit Setoguchi. Because of the kickback, Setoguchi was about to fall from the precipice. However, Chōsokabe Jinhyōe Nojō ran to him, lifted him, and was about to bring him back to their allies. A gun shot shattered the large war fan Chōsokabe wore on his side into a thousand pieces, but, unheeding of the danger, Chōsokabe brought Setoguchi to safety. He cut a magnificent figure.

This incident marked the start of the hostilities. Allies and opponents blended and hit each other, some inflicting on the bodies of their enemies wounds shaped like a comma, whereas others inflicted wounds shaped like a cross.⁵¹ The war cries shook the heavens, mountains collapsed, the sounds of the muskets trading shots and the sword guards parrying them ripped the sky. Among the Shimazu, Hirata Nizaemon Nojō, Miyauchi Harube, and others died fighting. Dead and wounded were countless on both fronts.

Yoshida Ōkura Kiyōie and Hirata Sangorō Munetsugu were always at each other's side, both when they progressed and retreated, as close as if a shadow had become concrete. They performed amazing exploits in every operation they took part in. On that fateful day, they stayed together from morning. However, alas, in the heat of the combat they were pushed and separated. In the end, Kiyōie died fighting. Satō Hyōe Nojō Taketō, his underling worth a thousand, carried Kiyōie's corpse on his shoulders and brought it toward the allied troops.

Behind him was Sangorō. He was on horseback, dressed in armor with the ligatures colored as *deutzia* flowers, and dared not wear his helmet.

The hair on the temples of his handsome and noble face were disheveled, the sleeves of his armor dangled in disarray. He looked like a willow tree whose leaves bend in the spring wind. He simply stood there, blankly.

When Taketō saw him, he asked: “Are you his Grace Sangorō?” The latter answered: “How is his Lordship Kiyōie?” “He is already dead.” Sangorō said: “How is this possible. What a disgrace.” He dismounted and, copiously weeping, embraced Kiyōie’s body. “Now there is nothing I can do. I regret being left behind in such a fierce battle. Taketō, this is where we part ways in this life. Farewell.”

He nimbly mounted his horse and galloped toward the enemy. His life died out fleetingly, as fast as the dew dissolves on the grass surrounding a tomb in a field near an old well. It was heartbreaking.

Sangorō had finally turned fifteen years old. The springs and autumns of a youth fly by as ephemerally as the dream of a butterfly. If we carefully reflect on it, nothing in this world is as vain as the warrior who practices justice and undertakes the way of the bow and arrow. Indeed, he is even more fleeting than the atmosphere created when the color of a flower that blooms on a spring morning fades drifting down the winds of war, or when, on an autumn night, the red maple leaf remains exposed to the dew changing its color and scattering in the wind. Sangorō had not reached maturity yet; why did he devote himself to the way of the bow and arrow and in the end lose his life?

Vermillion reddens and ink blackens when they are mixed with other pigments; so it is said.⁵² Sangorō had undertaken the twin Ways of the Letters and the Martial Arts and had grown fond of Kiyōie, with whom he had exchanged the brotherhood vow. Therefore, it stands to reason that he was influenced by Kiyōie, who was loyal, filial, fair, and firm.

Humankind distinguishes itself from animals because it observes justice at its source. If it did not, nobody would stand apart from beasts. Sangorō knew and respected justice despite his young age. As a result, the glory of his name survived to posterity and this vestige did not decay alongside the earth and Heaven, but remained as an example for the future generations of fighters.

Young warriors, not to mention modern boys, should master the martial arts, swear the brotherhood oath, honor loyalty and filial piety, observe justice, and always practice the virtue of courage. If they do, they could cultivate a spirit equal to that of Kiyōie and Sangorō. Nowadays, to the contrary, those who practice male love, although they pledge on their

life and death, seek only sensual pleasure, ignore loyalty and filial piety, and do not deserve to be trusted. In this manner, they behave like Miura Saneaki when it came to Imagawa Ujizane or like Takeda Katsuyori who favored Tsuchiya and risked bringing himself and the whole country down.⁵³ If the soldier, instead, draws a line between his ups and downs, he will know how to conduct himself fearlessly.

If we reread this volume whenever we have an opportunity or feel the need to, we will be able to communicate with virtuous men of the future. If we do this, our hearts shall be at ease. The incident of Kurata and Obama was fearsome, the plot of Ishizuka and his accomplices shameful. The oath sworn by Yoshida and Hirata based on duty, on the contrary, was commendable. When Kiyoi had his arm stabbed, he apparently carried out a blameful action because he wounded the body his parents gave him. His gesture proved, instead, that he fulfilled his obligations.⁵⁴ Therefore, morally speaking, he did not commit a transgression. It is not worth taking this discourse into consideration if we judge it from the perspective of the enjoyment of the senses, but, if we look at it from the point of view of duty, we can find in this book a venerable teaching.

<i>Kurikaeshi</i>	繰返し	The thread from the spool,
<i>kokoro o todomete</i>	心を留めて	if we roll it back
<i>miru ni nao</i>	見るに尚ほ	and look at it
<i>michi no oku shiru</i>	道の奥知る	paying attention
<i>shizu no odamaki</i>	賤のおだまき ⁵⁵	we shall learn the depth of the day.
<i>Kawaraji to</i>	変らじと	The words
<i>tagai ni kawasu</i>	互ひにかはす	we said to promise
<i>koto no ha no</i>	言の葉の	we shall never change,
<i>makoto o terasu</i>	誠を照らす	let us make a bright mirror
<i>kagami to yasen</i>	鏡とやせん	reflecting their truth.

NOTES

- ¹ The translation was conducted on the following edition of the original text: *Shizu no odamaki*, ed. Nomura Fukutarō (Tokyo: Nishobōin, 1885). Available at: <https://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/881186> [Last accessed April 2022]. The translation into modern Japanese realized by Suzuki Akira was also consulted for comparison: Suzuki Akira, “*Shizu no odamaki*,” in *Shizu no odamaki*, ed. by Suzuki Akira (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2017): 15–121. I would like to thank David Rands for revising and improving my English prose. Any mistranslation is, however, my sole responsibility.
- ² In the original text, the title for the first chapter reads as follows: “Kurata Gunpei asks Onoe Gonroku for help” *Kurata Gunpei Onoe Gonroku o tanomu koto* 倉田軍平尾上権六を頼む事; *Shizu no odamaki*, 1. Gunpei and Gonroku are two characters who appear in the second part of the first chapter and in the second chapter, where they conspire to win Sangorō’s attention with flattery and deceit. As a result, the text considers them bad examples of warriors. For this reason, I find it weird for the story to open with a mention of two negative characters. On the contrary, the first part of the first chapter presents Sangorō as a paragon of the perfect *bushi*. For this reason, I took the liberty to change the title of the chapter into “The Tale of Sangorō” to highlight the centrality of Sangorō to the narration. The titles of the other chapters faithfully translate the titles found in the original text.
- On a further note, the original text does not number the chapters. I took the liberty to number the chapters to help the modern reader navigate the translation more easily.
- ³ The Shōnai Rebellion spanned from 1599 to 1600. See also section *Genesis of the work* in the Introduction. Zhong You 子路 (Japanese: Shiro, 542–480 BCE) was one of the disciples of Confucius (Chinese: Kongzi 孔子, Japanese: Kōshi or Kuji, 551–479 BCE). Zhong You heroically died defending his lord, Kong Kui 孔悝 (Japanese: Kō Kai, dates unknown), who was involved in a coup orchestrated by Prince Kuaikai 蒯聩 (Japanese: Kaigai, ?–478 BCE) to ascend the throne of the State of Wei. In the original text (*Shizu no odamaki*, 1), the author of *Shizu no odamaki* mentions that Zhong You knotted again the lace of his hat. This is a reference to the *Shiji* 史記 (Japanese: *Shiki*, trans. Records of the grand historian, c. 94 BCE), according to which the Kuaikai’s soldiers who faced Zhong You cut the string attaching his hat. However, Zhong You fixed it in accordance with a gentleman’s decorum. By mentioning the example set by Zhong You, the writer of *Shizu no odamaki* implicitly exalts the virtues of the brave men who fought in the Shōnai conflict to defend the social order, like Zhong You did.

⁴ “Male love” translates *nanshoku*, for an analysis of the term see section *Content of the work* in the Introduction of this article; *Shizu no odamaki*, 1.

⁵ Literally, Sangorō means “fifteen-years-old boy.” However, at the time in Japan age count was based on a method, known as *kazoedoshi* 数え年, that added the nine months of pregnancy to one’s age as a full year. Therefore, Sangorō would be fourteen by Western count.

⁶ Parents occasionally prevented their sons from engaging in male love because this bond implied the obligation to die together with one’s partner and often led, as in Sangorō and Kiyōie’s case, to an untimely death. In *Nanshoku ōkagami* volume I episode III, a mother means to hide the romantic notes her son receives from other men to protect him from passing away prematurely; Schalow, *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, 64.

⁷ The Keichō 慶長 era spanned from 1596 to 1615.

⁸ In a later sentence, Sangorō is described as having his hair tied in a knot with a strip of paper; *Shizu no odamaki*, 14. His hairstyle is also visible in many illustrations contained in the original text, where his hair is tied at the back of his head. Judging from these clues, Sangorō seems to follow the tonsorial code observed in Edo Japan, when boys and adult men binded their hair at the back of the head into a forward-looping topknot; Gregory M. Pflugfelder, “The Nation-State, the Age/Gender System, and the Reconstitution of Erotic Desire in Nineteenth-Century Japan,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 71.4 (2012): 967.

⁹ The second year of the Keichō era corresponds to 1597.

¹⁰ In Tokugawa Japan, a complex tonsorial code demanded boys underwent a series of hairstyle changes that visually marked a youth’s progression from childhood into adulthood. In his translation to *Nanshoku ōkagami*, Paul Schalow summarizes this progression of hairstyles as follows: “At the age of eleven or twelve the crown of a male child’s head was shaved, symbolizing the first of three steps towards adulthood. The shaved crown drew attention to the forelocks (*mae-gami*), the boy’s distinguishing feature. At the age of fourteen or fifteen the boy’s natural hairline was reshaped by shaving the temples into right angles, but the forelocks remained as *sumi-maegami* (cornered forelocks). This process, called ‘putting in corners’ (*kado o ireru*), was the second step towards adulthood. [...] The final step, completed at age eighteen or nineteen, involved cutting off the forelocks completely; the pate of his head was shaved smooth, leaving only the sidelocks (*bin*)” Schalow, *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, 29.

In this passage, Sangorō has his hair shaved on the sides at an angle (in the original text, *kado ire* 角入; *Shizu no odamaki*, 8) as the second step in his progression towards adulthood.

¹¹ One *shaku* 尺 amounts to approximately one foot.

¹² The “way of the bow and arrow” (*yumiya no michi* 弓矢の道) is a synonym for the way of the warrior; *Shizu no odamaki*, 10.

¹³ In the original text of *Shizu no odamaki*, “from the mountain temple the stroke of the night bell rang the passing of all things” reads as follows: *iriai no mujō o noru yamadera no kane no hibiki* 入相の無常を告る山寺の鐘の響; *ibid.*, 14. This sentence is an adaptation of the first line of *Heike monogatari* 平家物語 (trans. The tale of the Heike, fourteenth century) that recites as follows: “The Jetavana Temple bells ring the passing of all things *Gion shōja no kane no koe, shogyō mujō no hibiki ari* 祇園精舎の鐘の声、諸行無常の響あり;” *The Tale of the Heike*, trans. Royall Tyler, (New York: Viking, 2012), 3; *Heike monogatari jo*, ed. by Kajihara Masaaki and Yamashita Hiroaki (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1991), 5.

¹⁴ Emperor Guangwu 光武 (Japanese: Kōbu, 5 BCE–57 CE), the founder of the Later Han dynasty (Chinese: *Houhan* 後漢, Japanese: *Gokan*, alternatively known as Eastern Han, Chinese: *Donghan* 東漢, Japanese: *Tōkan*, 25–220), began his political career as a lieutenant general serving in the civil war that broke out with the disintegration of the Xin dynasty (Chinese: *Xinchao* 新朝, Japanese: *Shinchō*, 9–23). Thanks to his military successes, the future sovereign gradually gained control over parts of China until he reunified the empire in 36. In ancient Chinese historiography, Guangwu was celebrated for his exploits as a ruler of exceptional moral stature and great military skill; see Hans Bielenstein, “Wang Mang, the restoration of the Han dynasty, and Later Han,” in *The Cambridge History of China. Volume I: The Ch’in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.–A.D. 220*, ed. by Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank (Cambridge, U. K.: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 247–256.

In *Shizu no odamaki*, the author shapes the figure of Shimazu Tadahisa 島津忠久 (c. 1179–1227) on the model of Emperor Guangwu. Tadahisa was appointed as “military governor” (*shugo* 守護) of Satsuma province in 1186 and in the following year he was assigned control over the Shimazu area of the same province. Tadahisa then founded the Shimazu clan by assuming the name of this area. According to the author of *Shizu no odamaki*, Tadahisa followed the example set by the Chinese Emperor Guangwu in that he founded the Shimazu clan and brought prosperity in the provinces of Satsuma, Ōsumi, and Hyūga, which were later unified by Tadahisa’s successors. Based on these analogies, the writer of *Shizu no odamaki* gives Tadahisa the same hagiographical treatment Emperor Guangwu received in ancient Chinese historiography by depicting him as a capable leader and a compassionate administrator.

¹⁵ In the original text, the author describes the beauty of the boys Kiyoe is acquainted with using the following idiomatic expression: “to have a face and a scent that dye the heart the bright color of light blank ink,” *usuzumi no kokoro wo someru iroka* 薄墨の心を染める色香; *Shizu no odamaki*, 18.

- ¹⁶ The character describes the beauty of the mentioned boys by saying that they have a “crimson face,” *kōgan* 紅顔, an idiomatic expression often used to depict a youth’s good looks; *ibid.*
- ¹⁷ The “fifth hour” (*gokō* 五更) of the night goes approximately from 4 to 6 a.m.; *ibid.*, 20.
- ¹⁸ A hyperbole that symbolizes the absolute resolution of a warrior.
- ¹⁹ The “Three Treasures” (*sanzon* 三尊) of Buddhism are the Buddha, the Buddhist Law, and the monastic community. *Ibid.*
- ²⁰ Because, if Sangorō does not accept his courtship, Kiyoe will commit suicide.
- ²¹ The expression “The twin ways of the letters and the martial arts” (*bunbu no futatsu* 文武の二つ in the original text, *ibid.*, 24; often found as *bunbu ryōdō* 文武両道) refers to the combined study of letters and the theory and practice of the martial arts, the two disciplines often considered as a pair that complemented one another.
- ²² The *tenpuku* 天吹 is a typical flute from Kagoshima. *Ibid.*
- ²³ On Dong Xian and Emperor Ai, see section *Content of the work* in the Introduction.
- ²⁴ *Harugoma* 春駒 is a New Year celebration that sees actors go from house to house to perform a brief recital with gaudy attire and exaggerated mannerisms to propitiate a bountiful year. *Ibid.* 26.
- ²⁵ In the original text of *Shizu no odamaki*, the sentence “like the rice boats ply the Mogami River poling upstream and back” reads as follows: *Mogamigawa noboreba kudarū inabune no ina* 最上川上れば下る稲船のいな. *Ibid.*, 27. The sentence is a reference to poem 1092 from *Kokinwakashū* 古今和歌集 (trans. *A Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern*, c. 905), that contains a pun on *ina*, “no,” and *inabune*, “rice boats,” which the anonymous poetess uses to say she will not refuse her suitor’s courtship; the poem recites as follows:

<i>Mogamigawa</i>	最上川	As the rice boats ply
<i>noboreba kudarū</i>	のぼればくだる	the Mogami River they
<i>inabune no</i>	稲船の	pole upstream and back -
<i>ina ni wa arazu</i>	いなにはあらず	you too should come again it’s
<i>kono tsuki bakari</i>	この月ばかり	only this month I say “no.”

See *Kokinshū: A Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern*, trans. Laurel Rasplica Rodd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 372; *Kokinwakashū*, ed. by Ozawa Masao (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1971), 523.

- ²⁶ The original saying goes as follows: *en aru toki wa senri kore ga tame ni aeri en nakereba kantan Kure Etsu no gotoshi* 縁有る時は千里是が為めに逢へり縁

なければ邯鄲呉越の如し; *Shizu no odamaki*, 28. Wu and Yue were Chinese neighbor states often at war with each other, so the saying alludes to them as a paragon of an intense rivalry.

One *ri* 里 amounts to approximately 2.440 miles.

²⁷ Mencius (Chinese: Mengzi 孟子, Japanese: Mōshi, 372–289 BCE) is often called the “second sage” (*asei* 亜聖) as the greatest Confucian thinker following only Confucius himself. In the original text of *Shizu no odamaki*, the quoted motto reads as follows: *ten no toki wa chi no ri ni shikazu chi no ri wa hito no wa ni shikazu* 天の時は地の利に如かず地の利は人の和に如かず. Ibid., 29.

²⁸ On Dong Xian, see section *Content of the work* in the Introduction.

²⁹ The second year of the Keichō era corresponds to 1597.

³⁰ The Bunroku 文禄 era spanned from 1592 to 1596.

³¹ The fourth year of the Bunroku era corresponds to 1595.

³² The second year of the Keichō era corresponds to 1597.

³³ Bizen Kanemitsu 備前兼光 (thirteenth century) was a famous swordsmith credited with the production of excellent weapons brandished by renowned warriors and generals. One *sun* 寸 amounts to approximately 1.193 inches.

³⁴ The “hour of the snake” (*mi no koku* 巳の刻) goes from 9 to 11 a.m. Ibid., 47.

³⁵ The “autumn rain” (*shigure* 時雨) was the symbol of the Shimazu clan. Ibid.

³⁶ Yao 堯 (Japanese: Gyō, according to traditional dating c. 2356–2255 BCE) was a legendary Chinese Emperor. During his reign, a great flood of the Yellow River occurred which allegedly went on for many years, causing disasters to the territory and the population. In his search for someone who could control the flood, Yao appointed Shun 舜 (Japanese: Shun, according to traditional dating c. 2294–c. 2184 BCE), who managed to deal with the immediate problems caused by the disruptions of the Yellow River. In recognition of his talents, Yao yielded the throne to Shun. For the abilities they displayed in handling the crisis, Yao and Shun are celebrated in ancient Chinese historiography as morally perfect sage-kings.

Zhou Gong 周公旦 (Japanese: Shū Kōtan, ?–1032 BCE) belonged to the royal family of the early Zhou 周 dynasty (Japanese: Shū, c. 1046–256 BCE). In 1042, he ascended to the regency of the kingdom and administered its territories. However, his political rivals accused him of usurping the throne. To defend himself from such an accusation, Zhou Gong defeated various rebellions and elaborated the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven to demonstrate that his clan possessed the right to rule over China. For his actions, Zhou Gong is considered in ancient Chinese historiography as a virtuous ruler on a par with Yao and

Shun. In *Shizu no odamaki*, the anonymous author compares Yoshihiro to Yao, Shun, and Zhou Gong for his virtuousness.

³⁷ The author considers rain a good omen because, as seen in note 86, rain was the symbol of the Shimazu clan. Similarly, Yoshihiro interprets the will-o'-the-wisp as a good omen sent by the Inari God because this deity is the “fox,” *kitsune* 狐, divinity and will-o'-the-wisp is in Japanese *kitsunebi* 狐火, literally “fox fire.” For this reason, Yoshihiro deems the will-o'-the-wisp as a presage of the Inari God meant to announce the victory of the Shimazu clan in the Korean campaign; *ibid.*, 49.

³⁸ One *chō* 町 amounts to approximately 357 feet.

³⁹ The third year of the Keichō era corresponds to 1598.

⁴⁰ In the original text, the saying translated as “Barking dogs seldom bite” goes as follows: *heta no funbetsu ato* 下手の分別跡, literally meaning that mediocre people do not have good ideas on the spot, but only later; see: *ibid.*, 54; Suzuki, “*Shizu no odamaki*,” 95 note 7.

⁴¹ Zhang Liang 張良 (Japanese: Chō Ryō, c. 251–186 BCE) was a military strategist who contributed to the establishment of the Former Han dynasty (Chinese: *Qianhan* 前漢, Japanese: *Zenkan*, alternatively known as Western Han dynasty, Chinese: *Xihan* 西漢, Japanese: *Seikan*, 206 BCE–9 CE). Chen Ping 陳平 (Japanese: Chin Pei, ?–178 BCE) served as a chancellor during the same dynasty. Guan Yu 關羽 (Japanese: Kan U, ?–220) and Zhang Fei 張飛 (Japanese: Chō Hi, ?–221) were contemporary military generals. Similarly, Sun Zi 孫武 (Japanese: Son Bu, according to traditional dating 544–496 BCE) was the credited author of *Sunzi bingfa* 孫武兵法 (Japanese: *Sonshi*, trans. *The art of war*), the famous book on military strategy. Wu Qi 吳起 (Japanese: Go Ki, 440–381 BCE) was also a military leader. By alluding to such a great number of Chinese generals celebrated for their martial exploits and outstanding abilities, the author of *Shizu no odamaki* enhances by comparison Yoshihiro’s military skills and feats.

⁴² The third year of the Keichō era corresponds to 1598.

⁴³ In the following paragraphs, the writer expands on the theme of snow by adding at each passage new elements that the previous sections do not explicitly mention. In the present paragraph, the author writes that, when Kiyoe returned to the Japanese archipelago, the weather was cold because of recent snowfalls and he visited Sangorō’s mansion. In the passage after the next, the writer adds that Kiyoe fought through a snowstorm to reach Sangorō’s villa. Furthermore, the author deems Kiyoe’s bravery in walking in the snowstorm as a model of probity which can be of inspiration to the reader. Then, the writer elaborates this idea in the following poem, where the image of Kiyoe as he opens a path

in the snow symbolizes what the author considers to be the “truth” (*makoto* 誠); *Shizu no odamaki*, 57.

- ⁴⁴ Reference to a Chinese legend where a man named Wang Zhi 王質 (Japanese: Ōshitsu) climbs a mountain and accidentally discovers the world of the immortals. There, Wang Zhi observes the activities of two immortals for what he thinks is only a short time. However, when he descends the mountain and goes back to the human world he finds out that actually many years have passed during his absence.
- ⁴⁵ The fourth year of the Keichō era corresponds to 1599.
- ⁴⁶ For more information on the cause of the war, see section *Genesis of the work* in the Introduction.
- ⁴⁷ The first year of the Bunroku era corresponds to 1592.
- ⁴⁸ The fourth year of the Keichō era corresponds to 1599.
- ⁴⁹ Quotation from a poem composed by Bai Juyi 白居易 (Japanese: Haku Kyoi, 772–846), which in the original text of *Shizu no odamaki* reads as follows: *Ryūmon genjō no tsuchi maikotsu fumaimyō* 龍門原上の土埋骨不埋名, 63.
- ⁵⁰ One *monme* 匁 amounts to approximately 3.75 grams.
- ⁵¹ The “comma” (*tomoe* 巴) and the “cross” (*jūmonji* 十文字) were the symbols of the Ijūin and the Shimazu armies respectively. *Ibid.*, 64–65.
- ⁵² In the original text, the saying goes as follows: *shu ni majiwareba akaku sumi ni majiwareba kuroku* 朱に交れば赤く墨に交れば黒く. *Ibid.*, 68. The saying means that a person will better themselves by imitation if they associate with someone who is morally superior to them.
- ⁵³ Miura Saneaki 三浦真明 (?–1568) and Takeda Katsuyori 武田勝頼 (1546–1582) were two warlords of the Sengoku period. In this paragraph, the writer of *Shizu no odamaki* writes that Miura and Takeda had male favorites and for this reason caused various unspecified problems to the country. It is not clear who their favorites were and why the author of *Shizu no odamaki* levels such harsh criticism against Miura and Takeda. Despite our ignorance about the specific cases the writer of *Shizu no odamaki* alludes to, it is well known that in premodern China and Japan rulers and ministers often kept male favorites on whom they lavished huge amounts of money and lofty offices, a custom that could lead to grave problems for the administration of the government. For example, Chinese Emperor Ai gave Dong Xian, his favorite, generous grants and appointed him to the highest offices attainable, to the point where Dong Xian accumulated so much power in his hands that he was accused of throwing the regulations of the state into utter chaos. Before his death, Emperor Ai even declared Dong Xian as the next sovereign. However, Dong Xian could lay only a tenuous claim to the throne, so his political enemies easily got rid of him and

forced him to commit suicide. By proposing Dong Xian as his successor, Emperor Ai unwillingly brought the Former Han dynasty to an end; Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China*, 44–46.

⁵⁴ *Gi atsusa*, see section *Content of the work* in the Introduction; *Shizu no odamaki*, 70.

⁵⁵ For an analysis of the second-to-last poem, see section *Content of the work* in the Introduction.