

Tachiubai (“Plundering a Sword”)

A Lord wanted to visit Kitano Shrine on the day it held its festival, and ordered Taro-kaja to follow him. On his way he saw a serving man with a sword in hand, hurrying to meet his Lord, and felt envious of the other Lord as he himself was not entitled to bear a long sword. Wasting no time, Taro-kaja rented a short-sword from his lord, and approached the serving man, commanding him to give up his sword. The serving man responded unexpectedly aggressively. In fear for his life, Taro-kaja let go of his lord's short-sword and came back in disgrace. But he secured his Lord's help in no time, and they together ran after the serving man: they soon caught him, and took back the sword. While his Lord pinioning him, Taro-kaja started making a rope out of rice straw to bind him with, but a conflict took place between his Lord and the captured. Hearing his Lord order him to catch the man's neck in a noose, and put an end to the commotion, Taro-kaja sprang forward lassoing a neck as ordered. But it was not Taro-Kaja's day. He soon realized to his horror that he had actually lassoed his Lord's neck, and that it was his Lord, not the serving man who had been restrained. To his chagrin as he held the rope restraining his Lord, he saw the serving man running away with two swords under his arm.

Mochizuki; or, Revenge Successfully Taken

Yasuda Tomoharu of Shinano Province (present-day Nagano prefecture) was slain by his cousin Mochizuki Akinaga after a heated argument. His family and his retainers were dispersed, and his loyal vassal, Ozawa Tomofusa, was in peril of assassination at any moment. So he concealed his identity by keeping an inn called Kabutoya at Moriyama, a noted post town along the Nakasendo Highway.

It happened that Yasuda Tomoharu's wife and son, who never stayed in one place for long, were spending the night at the Kabutoya. When the inn-keeper recognized who they were, he was overjoyed. But, as luck would have it, Mochizuki, their old enemy, happened to stay there on the same evening. He was on his way home after having been confined to Kyoto for his vicious crime for many long years. Acting quickly, the inn-keeper, formally the loyal retainer of Yasuda Tomoharu, framed a plot in which Tomoharu's wife and son would kill Mochizuki during his stay at the inn, and thus revenge the death of his old master.

Later that evening the inn-keeper proposed to Mochizuki an entertainment over drinks, in honour of his happy homecoming. The proposition was gratefully accepted, and preparing plenty of *sake*, the host first staged some spectacular lion-dances. These were followed by a dance performed by a 'blind' woman, impersonated by none other than Tomoharu's wife, and accompanied by her son, Hanawaka, playing the *kakko* (a small tabor drum). When Mochizuki became drowsy after enjoying many cups of sake, they killed him while his guard was down. Thus the three of them took their revenge upon the murderer of their Lord, husband and father.

(Takao Saijo)