

TALES OF TIMES

NOW PAST

Sixty-Two Stories
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Chapter Twenty-Eight

5. HOW TAMEMORI, THE GOVERNOR OF ECHIZEN, SUBDUED THE JUNIOR OFFICERS OF THE SIX COMPANIES OF THE GUARDS

AT A TIME NOW PAST, there was a man named Fujiwara no Tamemori Ason.¹ It happened that while he was governor of Echizen he failed to pay in his share of the salary rice due the Companies of the Palace Guards. Every last man of the Six Companies of the Guards² was angered, junior officers and men in the ranks alike. Carrying their flat-roofed tents,³ they went to Tamemori's house and pitched them in front of his gate; they set camp stools underneath and sat down side by side in a solid row so that the inhabitants could neither enter nor leave, and there they remained, demanding their pay.

It was the sixth month, when the days are long and very hot. The Guards had been sitting there since before daybreak, and by early afternoon⁴ they were dizzy from the sun and the heat. They were resolved, nevertheless, not to leave without getting what they had come for. At length, the gate of the house opened a crack and an aged retainer stuck his head out.

"His honor the Governor has asked me to speak to you on his behalf," he said. "I would like to meet with you in person at the earliest opportunity," he says, "but my wife and children are terrified and in tears owing to this extraordinary harassment, and so I am quite unable to discuss the matter with you face to face. Now, it seems to me that you have been waiting all day in this heat; surely your throats must be dry. Moreover, it's occurred to me that we might contrive to talk things over through a partition. I've been thinking, suppose I were to call you in quietly—shall we say, for refreshments? Would that suit you? If you've no objection, I'll ask the officers and men of the Left and Right Companies of the Inner Guards please to enter first. After they've left, I'll speak with you gentlemen of the other companies in turn. I ought to see you all at once, I know, but this place is so dingy and cramped, there's not room enough for a crowd. Please be patient



Tamemori looks out from behind the blinds as Kanetoki and Atsuyuki feast, members of the other companies of the guards continue their vigil, at the lower right.

just a little longer. Now if the Inner Guards will enter first — That's his message," said the retainer.

The men were utterly parched from the heat of the sun, and they were overjoyed at the thought that now they would have the chance to present their complaint. "How very kind of him!" they replied. "Let's go in at once and explain what has brought us here."

"Very well," said the retainer, whereupon the gate was opened and the officials and men of the Left and Right Companies of the Inner Guards all went in.

Long mats had been laid out along three sections of the north gallery adjoining the inner gate, and on them two rows of some twenty or thirty tables had been set up facing each other. These, the men saw, were laden with all sorts of salty tidbits: minced salt-dried bream, salt-pickled salmon that looked very salty indeed, salt-cured mackerel, and bream in fermented bean sauce. For fruit there were purple plums, dead ripe, that filled ten great Kasuga bowls⁵ to overflowing. When all the food had been set out, the retainer said, "This way please, the Inner Guards first, please," whereupon the most venerable elderly Guards came crowding in, with Owari no Kanetoki and Shimotsuke no Atsuyuki⁶ at their head. "That's enough now," said the retainer. "The rest of you will have to wait," and he closed the gate and locked it and took the key.

The Guards were lined up at the inner gate, and bidden to hasten, they went up onto the veranda and took their seats across from one another in two long rows. "Quick, bring the wine cups," the retainer called, but for a long time no wine came, and meanwhile the Guards, who were famished, set to with their chopsticks, tasting and chewing all the things cured in salt and pickled in bean sauce, the salmon, the bream, and everything else. "How slow the wine is!" said the retainer, but even so none appeared. A message was brought: "The Governor feels he should greet you, but just at the moment he's incapacitated with a catarrh, and he can't come just yet. Have some refreshments while you're waiting, and he'll be out." Still no wine came.

And here at last was the wine. Two young attendants came; each bearing a pair of big-bellied wine cups, which they set on trays and put between Kanetoki and Atsuyuki, who sat facing each other. Next they brought great pitchers brimming with

wine. Kanetoki and Atsuyuki took up their cups and let them be filled to overflowing. The wine was a little muddy and sour, they noticed, but their throats were so parched from the sun that they drank on without pause. They drained their cups three times before setting them down. The other Guards were equally thirsty and gulped down two or three, four or five cups apiece just to moisten their throats. They ate the plums as they drank, and then more wine was urged on them, so they drank a fourth or fifth, a fifth or sixth time. It was only then that the Governor crept out to a seat behind the blinds.

"Gentlemen, my profoundest regrets! I never thought I would be subjected to your reproaches. Last year there was drought in my province, and I took in nothing, nothing at all. Oh, perhaps there was a grain or two of tax rice, but their eminences above squeezed that out of me. There's nothing left. There's not even food for my household. The serving girls go hungry. I can only think that fate has ordained that I should suffer this shame. Please understand that I am unable to offer you so much as a potful of rice. Thanks to the sins of my previous lives, for years I failed to be appointed to office, and when I did by chance obtain a post it was as governor to an impoverished province. For my hardships I blame no one but myself, it's all the fault of my evil karma." And he wept loudly and copiously.

Kanetoki and Atsuyuki were sitting closest to the Governor, so that the insistent rumbling that came from their stomachs was very audible to him. Rumbling and squealing: for a while they drummed their ceremonial batons against the tables to cover the sound. . . .⁸ As the Governor looked on from his side of the blinds, all the stomachs rumbled in concert, and every man, down to the last table, writhed with cramps.

"Excuse me a moment," said Kanetoki, and he took off at a run. At this signal, the other Guards rose from their seats and scrambled pell-mell in his wake, jumping down from the veranda or leaping from the beams,⁹ farting and crapping. Some ran to the carriage shed and began to shit before they had time to loosen their clothes. Others hiked up their garments and let it squirt.¹⁰ Others, unable to conceal themselves, just crapped in a daze. For all that, they were laughing.

"Just as we thought, those old fellows don't fool around. We figured he'd pull something. No, we've no grudge against his

lordship. We did it to ourselves with our thirst.” And they all laughed as they crapped in agony.

Then the gate was opened. “Well, gentlemen, you may leave now. And would the officers of the other companies please enter.”

“Splendid. Come right in and get made to crap like us.”

All the men’s trousers were befouled; seeing them scramble out wiping the shit off, the Guards of the other four companies ran away laughing.

In fact, it was just as Tamemori had planned. “I’ll let them roast under the sun for six or eight hours, and then I’ll call them in. They’ll be good and thirsty. I’ll give them plums and salt fish to whet their appetites, and when they’ve stuffed their empty stomachs with those I’ll have them drink muddy sour wine and lace it with ground convolvulus seeds.¹¹ Won’t that crowd of rascals be shitting green!”

That Tamemori was a clever one, an ingenious old dandy who loved surprises and was always making people laugh, and this was typical of him. People of the time laughed and said it was the Guards’ hard luck that they went to the home of a joker.

The Guards must have learned their lesson, for they never again went in protest to the house of a provincial governor who had failed to contribute to their pay. It was the height of cleverness, not to have tried to drive them away by force but to have contrived such a prank. So the tale’s been told, and so it’s been handed down.

Notes to Story 5

1. Tamemori became governor of Echizen in 1028 and died in 1029. Echizen was in the far north of Japan, but the incident takes place while he is in his residence in Kyoto.

2. Six Companies of the Guards: rokuefu, the guards who protected the imperial palace (not to be confused with, e.g., the *takiguchi*, guards attached to the Sovereign’s Private Office, who appear in 27:41). These companies were the Inner Palace Guards, Right and Left Divisions; the Middle Palace Guards, Right and Left Divisions; and the Outer Palace Guards, Right and Left Divisions. junior officers renders *kannin*, officials of the rank of *shōgen* (“Lieutenant”) and below.

3. Flat-roofed tents: *hirabari*, a kind of portable awning used for protection from light rain or the direct rays of the sun and suitable for little more.

4. Literally, the Hour of the Sheep, see 26:9, note 3.

5. Bowls lacquered red on the outside and black on the inside, ornamented with mother-of-pearl and the like, a product of Nara.

6. There are numerous other mentions of Kanctoki and Atsuyuki in *Konjaku*; a translation of 23:26, which tells of a contest in horsemanship in which the vanquished man acquitted himself with even more distinction than the victor, appears in Frank, pp. 156–157. Kanctoki was appointed Lieutenant of the Inner Palace Guards, Left Division, in 998.

7. Not out of humility but because this was a normal method of locomotion when only a short distance needed to be traversed indoors.

8. Ellipsis points represent a brief passage that is unintelligible and may be corrupt; one possible interpretation is “their fists dug grooves in the mats.”

9. Beams, *nageshi*, long, narrow beams laid on the floor, which divided the outer from the inner veranda.

10. Literally, “like water from a *hanzō*.” A *hanzō* was a jug outfitted with a mechanism to spray water. The *Konjaku* compiler was fond of this simile and used it also in 19:18, which relates among the eccentricities of the monk Zōga his yielding to an attack of diarrhea all too shortly after ordaining an empress dowager.

11. It may be superfluous to remark that seeds of the convolvulus were a common laxative. See F. Porter Stuart, *Chinese Materia Medica* (Shanghai, 1911), pp. 489–490, under *Ipomoea hederacea*.

11. HOW KAISHU, THE INTENDANT OF GION, WAS GIVEN AS A FEE FOR CHANTING THE SUTRAS

AT A TIME NOW PAST, there was an intendant of Gion named Kaishu,¹ a senior monk of the imperial temple, who made illicit visits to the house of a certain prominent deputy governor. The deputy governor had a notion that something was going on but pretended to know nothing. One day when Kaishu had taken advantage of his absence to come there and was lording it about and looking very smug, the Governor returned. The mistress of the house and her maids seemed strangely flustered, and the Governor thought to himself, “Aha! just as I suspected!” He went into the interior of the house and saw that a clothes chest²