

Kyotou Yasuri

An Audiobook Prequel to Katanagatari Series



Kyotou Yasuri – Chapter 1

Let us speak of Yasuri Mutsue, the sixth head of Kyotouryuu. The unorthodox killing art of Kyotouryuu, whose practitioners were swordsmen who wielded not swords but their bodies in place of them, was itself shrouded in darkness, but the darkness surrounding its sixth sword was yet deeper. After he became renowned as the hero of the rebellion, Yasuri Mutsue was spoken of in so many rumors that any discussion of him would only be treading over old ground.

However, all such rumors were false. There were some who called him a flippant dandy¹. Some called him a ruthless murderer. Some called him a humorless soldier. Some called him a foolhardy beast. There were even some who claimed that Yasuri Mutsue was a woman or child—there was so little common ground on his true form, it was as if he was some kind of unidentified creature. Nearly all information on his appearance, personality, and even style of combat was disparate and divergent. Some said that he was strong, and others that he was weak. Some said that he was frightening, and others said that he was kind. It was almost as if everyone saw him in a different way; his true self was impossible to determine. Indeed, for every opinion on Yasuri Mutsue, without fail, the exact opposite opinion also circulated. Like matter and antimatter, for any person who claimed to know something about Yasuri Mutsue, it was an absolute certainty that there would be some other person with a contrary view.

Following the founder and first head of Kyotouryuu who had rampaged through the Sengoku Era, Yasuri Kazune, each successive head of Kyotouryuu was enigmatic due to a lack of information—all except for the sixth, Yasuri Mutsue, who was enigmatic due to an excess of information. There was simply too much available information. He was told of and talked of so much that, paradoxically, the end result was identical to not being told of or talked of at all. No, it was even worse. He was told of so

haphazardly and talked of so unreliably that it was no different from a forgery and fabrication of his identity. If Yasuri Itsumiki, the fifth head of Kyotouryuu, who had perished young and while still in training, had been alive, he may have been puzzled by these state of affairs, but it was only a manifestation of an abnormality characteristic to Kyotouryuu. Even the Tetsubi family, the rear guard of the Six Noble Families serving the Owari Shogunate's Yanari family, who retained Yasuri Mutsue, had in reality very little understanding of him.

In the words of Migiri, Yasuri Mutsue's wife and the daughter of the Tetsubi family, who at least nominally and by appearances, was his wielder, "That Mutsue guy is just too sharp of a sword. Know what I mean? He's been polished so much that he shines like a ornamental mirror instead of a blade. Anyone who confronts Mutsue, swordsman or not, doesn't see him, but their own image reflected in the mirrored sword that Yasuri Mutsue is. That's why Yasuri Mutsue looks and appears different to different people. For every thousand people, there exist a thousand Yasuri Mutsue. It sure gives me the creeps."

While her explanation did have some persuasive power, it was still far from the truth. It was only a deception or a mere excuse. It was her wholehearted bluff about Yasuri Mutsue, who was her husband and the father of her two children, yet could not be contained into a single form. She had likely heard the legend of Higaki Rinne the sage, and twisted the story to fit him. Still, the reasons for her bluff were not unreasonable. At the very least, she could not be condemned for it. In fact, it was only natural to make empty bluffs about the empty sword of Kyotouryuu. For there were none who could perceive Yasuri Mutsue in a true sense. The issue lay with Yasuri Mutsue, who did not permit such an absence of preconceptions. He himself was an unfathomable enigma. Not even the two children born to Yasuri Mutsue and Migiri, Yasuri Shichika and Yasuri Nanami, understood their father in the slightest.

He was not the strongest swordsman of Kyotouryuu. He was not the most famous swordsman of Kyotouryuu, nor was he the swordsman who had fought the most, triumphed the most, or killed the most. It would be impossible to claim so. However, it was a definite fact that Yasuri Mutsue was the most enigmatic swordsman of Kyotouryuu.

That is why we shall speak of him. We shall speak of the sixth head of Kyotouryuu, Yasuri Mutsue. To explore the truth of this sword, or at least something approaching it. As truthfully as possible, drawing a clear distinction between fact and fiction. We shall speak of him through his battle with the only person in his life he had acknowledged as an enemy, Hida Takahito, lord of Oushuu. At the very least, we shall unveil, to the light of day, his intangibility and indeterminacy, not as the subjective thing described by Migiri, but as reality.

And so for the first time in quite some time, or even at all:

To a time before the flowery narrative of battle and swords; the drama of blades, action, and history that is Katanagatari.

“A sword’s at its strongest when it’s sittin’ in its sheath—if y’ask me, anyways.”

The underground armory of Owari Castle overflowed with countless weapons. These various weapons had been collected by the Yanari shogun family from every corner of Japan and were meticulously ordered and displayed, almost like a museum. They were the results of Shogun Kyuu’s sword hunt. Naturally, these weapons included nearly a thousand of the Deviant Blades created by the legendary swordsmith Shikizaki Kiki, which emanated an unnerving and imposing aura.

A man strolled through the armory with no concern, purposefully clacking his steps. He was a skinny twig of a man. He bore a close resemblance to a walking stick. Despite his long limbs and height, he seemed to weigh nothing. He looked so weak that he might snap apart in a strong gust. Yet despite his frail body, he was undaunted by the countless weapons. It was as if he meant to say that he was keener than any of the weapons stored there. It may have been true. After all, he was the master of the armory.

“I’m not gettin’ philosophical here, I mean on a practical and basic level. Y’know, before ya draw a sword outta its sheath, it’s got infinite possibilities. Same as how ya can’t tell if a cat in a box’s dead or alive. Reality ain’t but an illusion. So once ya draw a sword, the trick’s outta the bag. They all say Kyotouryuu’s cloaked in darkness and the strongest sword style. I say it’s only the strongest cuz it’s cloaked in darkness. If ya take it out into the light, it’d barely count as a sword style. The strongest ain’t meant to fight,” concluded the spindly man.

He was delivering a monologue to himself. As the Master of the Armory was an honorary position as well as a sinecure, allowing for plentiful free time, he had only intended it to be a monologue. But while it was the monologue it ought to have been...

“Hey, don’t ya think so?” called out the spindly man to his rear.

“No, I don’t,” came a reply from behind.

“A sword is only a sword because it cuts, isn’t it? You can’t call something a sword if you can’t even see its edge. A sword doesn’t even need a sheath. That just gets in the way. Swords are meant to be drawn.”

It was a rotund man who had spoken. His body was as round as a circle, and he was no longer even obese. His silhouette from the front, back, and above was the same identical circle. He followed the spindly man at the same pace, with movements that were indistinguishable between walking or rolling.

The rotund man said to the spindly man, “A sword that isn’t used just rusts, you know. Just like the Sabi family². I don’t care about the style or the family name, but I’d hate for that to happen to me.”

“And I’m saying there ain’t nothin’ wrong with that. I wouldn’t hate it, I’d love it. So what if a sword’s rusty or corroded or broken—ya can’t tell once it’s sheathed.”

“And is that really alright?”

“Sure is. If ya can’t tell if ya got somethin’ or not, then it don’t matter either way. If ya don’t got it, just make like ya do and it’s the same thing. So what if reality’s a big sham? Same as how Kyotouryuu calls itself a sword style when it don’t use swords.”

“Give me a break. You’re such a contrarian. This is exactly what makes you dull.

Well, that means it hurts even more when you do cut someone, but you should just cut down people all the time and get stronger like me. Swords get sharper the more people they kill. Hey, what do you think?” said the rotund man, casting his gaze upwards.

He had directed the question to the man sprawled asleep atop the pointed tips of a rack of weapons. Clearly, it would be inconceivable for a man who could sleep while being pierced by blades to be so easily awoken. Yet, upon closer inspection, it was evident that the blades did not pierce or even penetrate his flesh. They were fended off by his skin, which was as hard as iron. His muscles were polished to the extreme and as thick as armor. Otherwise, it would be impossible to accomplish something so absurd as sleeping on a bed of blades. Even so, his conduct was unfitting for a master of the armory. The rotund man seemed to be upset by his lack of response, and kicked over the weapons he was lying on. The muscular man immediately woke.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

“You can’t be sleeping during work,” he said, citing a noble cause, but it was flimsy justification given that he had knocked over the very weapons he was meant to guard.

“What about this is work? The only work for a sword is to kill,” said the muscular man in a dull tone. It was as if he saw nothing of value in the world, and was confident that it could all be dismissed as trivial.

“There’s no point in thinking or giving your actions meaning, the way you two do. Swords don’t have wills of their own, and they aren’t meant to. You’re only wasting your time thinking about that nonsense.”

In response, the rotund man shrugged his round mass and muttered, “You’re as hard as ever.” He seemed to be unbothered by the denouncement, and was even amused.

“Maybe that’s why you’re a sword that doesn’t get cut by swords. I know I say it all the time, but that’s a really ninjalike technique. Y’know, like the Maniwa Ninja. You get what I’m saying?”

“I don’t, and have no need to.” The muscular man shook his head in response to the rotund man’s taunts. As he lay on the ground, he said, “I don’t care about understanding.”

“You’re saying you don’t care about it?” interjected a voice with no prelude, out of nowhere.

The three men turned to find a tall woman and a small boy. It was the woman who had spoken. “Putting aside whether they want to or not, is there even a single person who can do something as outrageous as understand. Hm?” she continued.

Although she was unmistakably beautiful, the large stretches of skin exposed by her clothes lacked flush and were pale and translucent. In fact, she was nearly blue. It was as if blue ink coursed through her veins in place of blood. Yet she had a strange air to her and somehow did not seem sickly in the least.

“Let’s take the leader of this Owari Shogunate sitting way up above this armory. The eighth of his line, was it? I don’t remember exactly. Do you think he understands his lofty position? I’m sure he doesn’t. Just like everyone else, he did one thing at a time and before he knew it, he ended up where he is now. He has no idea why he’s there. I’m the same. We’re the same as sheltered kids,” the pale woman said sardonically and then glanced to her side.

“You think so too, don’t you?” she said, asking the child by her side for his opinion. There was no mistaking the child’s young age, but he replied with an oddly mature tone, “Certainly, I more or less agree with you.”

His strangely weathered voice was no affectation. He seemed almost like a child who had lived a thousand years, and had an unusually menace to him. Despite appearing to be less than half her age, he was speaking down to the pale woman.

“But you’re too talkative. I can’t fathom why you have this need to beat a dead horse. He might be a contrarian, at least he has some self-awareness. If you keep mocking reality, all you’ll meet is despair,” he rebuked.

“Alright,” agreed the woman perfunctorily.

“Understanding, eh? I ain’t thought about it much, but if ya call havin’ no complaints being satisfied, then I’m pretty satisfied. Master of the Armory ain’t so bad a job. When I’m holed up here I don’t gotta deal with people. A hermit’s the life for me.”

“That’s no different from being sheathed. You’re about the only one here who could stand that. Go ahead and keep that life to yourself. Don’t you all have some desire to test your tempered bodies, even if it isn’t as much as me? Don’t you, you, and you?”

“I have no desires.”

“That sounds quite undesirable. Either way, I’m not human, so I’ve never had a bit of desire, understanding, satisfaction, purpose, or soul.”

“Exactly. Being talkative has its advantages: at least you say what needs to be said. But even so, you ought to at least have the desire to test your strength, to test your steel.”

“In times as peaceful as these, I don’t think I’ll ever get a chance.”

“You’re wrong.” Amidst the aimless and inane conversation, or rather, monologue between the spindly man, the rotund man, the muscular man, pale woman, and the millenarian boy, meant only to kill time, a voice smoothly slipped in. It signaled the end of the monologue.

“Everyone, rejoice. The time has come to test our steel.”

It was a spotted dog lurking in the shadows of the racks who had spoken. It was almost too huge, too enormous to be called a dog. The fangs peeking out of its open mouth seemed sharp enough to crush a human skull with a single bite. Each fang resembled a sword.

“Huh? Whadd’ya mean? Ya sure popped outta nowhere, when didya get here? Scared me good. Aincha supposed to be on break today?”

“Break time is over. It’s over for me, you, you, you, and you. That’s why I said to rejoice. Our long monologue has ended. Kyotouryuu will see the light of day for the second time since its birth in the Sengoku Era. Orders from Migiri.” The spotted dog understood and spoke human language as if it was only natural. The other five listened to the beast intently, without interrupting. They listened intently, as if they had long awaited his words.

“The great lord in the north, Hida Takahito, has turned against the Shogunate. It was some time ago, actually. Now the country is going to pieces like it hasn’t for centuries. The entire country is breaking out into war. It’s almost another Sengoku Era.”

“Oh? So we might as well be Urashima Tarou³. I can’t believe Migiri kept that from us for so long. And? What are her orders?”

Upon hearing what the spotted dog said, the millenarian boy smiled wryly and posed a question. The dog returned a wolfish smile and answered “She says that as the Tetsubi family’s treasured sword, we shall unleash the legendary Kyotouryuu upon the world, return with the head of the villain Hida Takahito, and subdue the rebellion. She’s so demanding, even for a princess.”

“Hm?”

“Hm...”

“Hm.”

“Hmm...?”

“Hrm...”

The five each reacted in their own way, and then fell into rank and walked forth. They had already abandoned the post of Master of the Armory. Even the spindly man, who seemed to have been satisfied with it, did so without complaint. The spotted dog joined their ranks. Their stride and bearing all differed, but oddly enough they all walked at the exact same pace.

“Hida Takahito, huh? Ain’t he grown big for his britches, pickin’ a fight with the country. Well, I always reckoned he’d start somethin’.”

“If Tetsubi, the Owari Shogunate’s final bastion and last line of defense is on the move, the shogun must be really cornered.”

“There’s no point in thinking about it. You don’t need your emotions to cut him down. It doesn’t even matter if he’s a former ally.”

“No, wait, we should think about it. Takahito is a real schemer. Even if you or me fought him in a straight fight, we’d get the tables turned on us.”

“That’s true. I heard he has this powerful Elite Four bunch, too⁴. And he’s got a spymaster for a strategist. I haven’t heard any news about them, but if he’s gone into action then there’s no way they haven’t.”

They monologued in conversation as they made their way past the weapons. They— he, he, he, she, he, and it: the five and the animal, or rather the six. Their appearances and personalities all differed, but they all shared the same roots. They were one as six, six as one, equals with none superior or inferior, neither leader nor follower, not a group but a whole. That was their, or his, peculiar identity. These six branches grew

from the trunk of Kyotouryuu, a sword school born in the Sengoku Era and shrouded in darkness, practiced by swordsmen who wielded not swords but their bodies in place of them, as well as the strongest of all.

“Alright, let’s go save the country,” said one of them. But it was as if they had all said it. The six left the armory with the door unlocked and announced their name to the outside world.

“The sixth head of Kyotouryuuu, Yasuri Mutsue, goes forth.”

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The sixth head of Kyotouryuu, Yasuri Mutsue, who later became known as the hero of the rebellion, was also the only one in the history of the inherited sword school of Kyotouryuu to wield six swords.

Translation Notes

¹To be specific, a kabukimono, a kind of gangster from feudal Japan. Kabukimono wore gaudy clothing and had a strange style of speech. They formed gangs and had a reputation for being rude and violent.

²Sabi(錆) means rust.

³Urashima Tarou is like the Japanese version of Rip van Winkle. In the folk tale, Urashima Tarou is a fisherman who visits an underwater palace for what seems like a few days, but after he leaves he finds out that hundreds of years have passed.

⁴Elite Four (also translated as Four Heavenly Kings) is a common name for four important people in a particular field. You might have seen it as a name for a group of miniboss characters from series like Pokemon and Kill La Kill. The original meaning is the Buddhist gods of the cardinal directions.

In Japanese, the 6 Yasuri Mutsue each use different first-person pronouns, which are:

The spindly man: boku

The rotund man: ore

The muscular man: watashi

The pale woman: atashi

The millenarian boy: sessha

The spotted dog: washi

There are multiple first-person pronouns in the Japanese language, each with their own connotations. People use different pronouns depending on how they want to present themselves. Only a few are commonly used in normal conversation, but many more are used in fiction. For more information see Wikipedia.

Name Meanings

Yasuri Family

Yasuri(鑢)- file, rasp

Kyotouryuu(虚刀流)- null sword style

Kazune(一根)- one root

Itsumiki(五幹)- five trunks

Mutsue(六枝)- six branches

Shichika(七花)- seven flowers

Nanami(七実)- seven fruits

Kyotou Yasuri – Chapter 2

“I say this well aware that it’d have me mistaken for a boastful and ill-tempered man, but being talented is a tremendous pain.”

There stood a castle painted a pitch black so dark that it seemed to consume every last bit of light in the world. As such, it was impossible to perceive it in its entirety. Its stalwart defenses rivaled those of Gekoku Castle in Inaba Desert. The castle, Ankoku Castle in Higo Province, was counted among the Three Great Castles of the era. The castle was so enormous it was nearly a fortress; it was the keystone of the island of Kyuushuu and presently the site of a battle. As stalwart as its defenses were, Ankoku Castle was now utterly overwhelmed by sheer numbers and on the verge of falling. At this point, any clever tricks employed in the construction of its walls were meaningless. Not a single person spared an upward glance for the castle’s splendid craftsmanship.

“To be frank, I, Hida Takahito, am a genius. I can guarantee that no one in history was as brilliant as me, and that no one with more wits than me will ever be born. I’m one of a kind. I’m so talented that even I’m baffled.”

It followed that there was no one to notice a scar-covered man sitting on the roof of Ankoku Castle’s keep, muttering and grinning to himself. Both those attacking and defending the castle were completely occupied with their immediate surroundings.

“Compared to me, everyone else is an idiot. It’d be an understatement to say that I’m exceptional. Even if you added up the intelligence of everyone in the world, it still wouldn’t be a tenth of mine. And if Shikizaki Kiki, that legendary swordsmith who

they say ruled over the Sengoku Era, had been born in the same era as me, he definitely wouldn't have become a legend.”

The scar-covered man, Hida Takahito, fixed his disinterested gaze on the conflict below him. Both scars and fresh wounds ran across Takahito's body. They were not just scattered here and there, but were worn into him. Old scars covering every inch of his body were overlaid with fresh wounds covering every inch of his body. Of course, blood was gushing from his fresh wounds, but Takahito paid them no heed. It was as if he had no sense of pain, or his wounds had merely been painted on. He only watched the battle taking place below him and smirked.

Takahito had used his extraordinary intelligence to bring about this battle. But he was allied with neither faction, and had merely created—or more precisely, fabricated—a pretext for the battle. The combatants knew neither Hida Takahito's face nor even his name. But regardless of whether or not they knew him, there was no mistaking that Takahito's schemes had drove those who only a few months ago had been defending Higo together on good terms to brutally slaughter each other.

“Since it's true, I don't mind repeating that I'm a genius. But being a genius is a pain. It's anguishing having to manage my precious talents. My talent is mine alone. It's not something I inherited from my parents, and it's not something I'll pass on to my children. There's no one else like me. I'm too unique, too special. Man, it's such a burden.”

Takahito slumped down his shoulders as he called his talent a heavy load. He truly felt that his talent was a pain. He sat on a roof that might collapse within a half hour, watching the battle that was proceeding exactly as he expected, precisely as he planned, with neither the smallest anomaly nor the slightest deviation. He watched, lamenting the enormity of his intellect.

“And now even more people will die because of my talents. I wonder how many will die in this battle? And how many will die in the conflicts across Japan in total?”

Even before he had finished posing the question to himself, he had already calculated the answer. His answer was no estimate, it was accurate down to the very last individual.

“I really screwed up. I completely failed. If only I'd known that there were no limits to my intelligence, I wouldn't have let myself get this far. Seriously, what were they all thinking? They should have just offed me when I was still a kid and didn't know what to do with my talents. *This* is what they get for not killing me.”

By ‘this’, he was referring to his rebellion, which had interrupted over a hundred years of peace under the Yanari Shogunate. Hida Takahito had once been the lord of Oushuu. But now he was nothing more than an lawless rebel.

“My sympathies go out to the good folk of Japan for being swept up by my brilliance and not having a clue who or what they’re slaughtering each other for. I’m sure those men and women won’t have any idea of the truth when they die. I envy them. Nothing would be more wonderful than to die in ignorance. Well, I’d say that my sympathy and envy just about cancel out. Yeah.”

“It’s such a pain. What else could I have done?” Although everything had gone as he had planned, exactly as he had calculated, he muttered to himself as if he had failed. He muttered, nearly raving, as if he were regretting the irreversible. He repeated to himself, *“What a pain, what a pain.”*

“Really though, what should I have done?”

“You should have done as you saw fit, my lord. You have always done what is right.” spoke a man from behind Takahito. He had been standing there the entire time, just behind Takahito, but had concealed himself so effectively that Takahito was completely unaware of his presence until he spoke.

With no sign of surprise, Takahito said, “You were here? I guess you would be, Head.”

The man called Head replied, “Yes, I would be. I have a duty to guard you. A duty to protect what you refer to as your genius intellect from the world.”

The man had a strange figure. Or rather, it was more bizarre than strange, and more monstrous than bizarre. He was a well-built ninja dressed in a sleeveless kimono. Chains were draped across his body. To those in the know, he wore the mark of the Maniwa Ninja Corps, but the man had long discarded that affiliation, as well as the name Maniwa Dokuhebi. Now he was only known as Head, and served as Hida Takahito’s strategist. However, he was a strategist only in name, and in reality watched over and guarded Takahito, who had a tendency to blindly plunge himself into battle.

Head’s simple name came from the fact that he possessed no head, but instead had a large sword sprouting out of his neck. He had neither eyes, nose, ears, nor mouth, but only a broad, 4-foot-long sword. Not even Takahito’s wits could tell him how Head could see or hear the outside world. Once he understood that he could not understand, he ceased thinking about it. He only knew how Head could speak without a mouth. It was because his sword vibrated at high frequencies, generating sound.

“My lord, yet again you have not asked me what I am doing here. As a ninja who is fond of making my appearance from behind, it saddens me.”

“I mean, I’ve just accepted that you’re that kind of person. That’s right, you must be miserable too, being stuck serving a genius like me.”

“It was of my own will that I left the Maniwa Ninja Corps to serve you, and I do not regret my decision. Nevertheless, my lord, I must ask you instead: what are you doing here?”

“Hm?”

“Why are you here? You should be in Oushuu, in the besieged Hida Castle. The princess has been searching for you.”

“Besieged, huh? I wonder how you guys can call that patchy mess a siege with a straight face. I can’t believe the shogunate hasn’t broken through by now. Maybe they’re bigger idiots than I even imagined. It’d really be something if there was a level of idiocy even my genius couldn’t comprehend. Well, anyways.”

Takahito turned towards Head. He grinned, just as he had while watching the battle.

“Ankoku Castle was just about to fall, so I came to watch, like usual. I won’t be able to see all the battles, but I can at least see the important ones. I’m responsible for them, after all.”

“Responsible, you say?”

Head gave an exaggerated shrug. As he possessed a sword in place of a head, he had no face. But if he did possess one, it would have surely had an expression of irritated exasperation.

“If you are aware of your status, then I would ask that you abstain from such reckless actions. Please refrain from acting alone.”

“Even if I weren’t a genius, I’d know that I’ll never be alone as long as you guys are around.”

“Even were I not a ninja, I would know that it would be a trifle for you to slip away from us. No, I will trouble you no more on this matter. You should be free as you are, for that is why we follow you. But even so...” said Head, turning to watch the battle surrounding the castle, as Takahito had. His eyes held no emotion as he gazed at a stunning amount of people dying. For that matter, he had no eyes.

“I beg of you not to take part in battle directly. Intelligent as you may be, you have no ability for combat.”

“That’s not a nice thing to say. You wound me.”

Takahito grimaced in response to his subordinate’s blunt remarks.

“Wound you? When you’re already covered in physical wounds? You should know that if your cuts are not treated immediately, you will die from blood loss.”

“I’ll die? That’d be great,” said Takahito as he raised his arms.

This was a gesture of neither surrender nor celebration, but a silent request for Head to dress his wounds. Head in turn silently responded by dressing Takahito’s wounds. He reached into his bag and took out the medical supplies he had prepared beforehand with practiced motions, as if this was a common occurrence.

“Which side were you on this time?”

“I wasn’t really on a particular side. I just walked around and slashed at anyone who was attacking me. Actually though, I didn’t end up slashing anyone and just got slashed up.”

“I shall ask you once more, what is the purpose of your actions? Is this a part of one of your strategies?”

“I’ll answer you once more, there is no purpose to it. Well, if I had to say...oh that’s it,” Takahito said diffidently as he was being bandaged. “It’s because I don’t want to forget that I’m fighting.”

“Forget?”

“Yeah. I’m way above everyone else, but I don’t want to get full of myself because of that. I don’t want to lose sight of what I’m really doing. Since I’m a genius, I want be on the same footing as everyone else.”

There was no trace of seriousness or sincerity in his casual tone. He may as well have been telling a joke. Yet those were the honest thoughts of Takahito the rebel. Unbelievably, he had never told a single lie in his entire life. He never spoken a falsehood, not even as a part of politics or schemes. That was how Hida Takahito lived his life. In times of need he would use his wisdom to scheme, but never would he deceive. It could be said that his anomalous way of life was only possible because he was a genius. For who else could tell no lies?

“When you get cut it hurts. Your skin splits apart and blood comes gushing out. You might die. You can’t wage a war if you forget that. No wait, maybe you can. Normally, you’d have to forget that to wage war. But it’s different for me since I’m a genius. I remember everything; there’s nothing that I’ve forgotten. I know what it is I’m doing, why I’m doing it, that many people have already died because of my rebellion, and that even more will die as it continues. By the time I complete my objective, Japan’s population will have more than halved. And then the survivors will shoulder serious mental wounds. They’ll have their lives, but their parents might die, or their siblings might die, or their friends might die, or their lovers might die. They’ll have to bear their scars for the rest of their lives, and some will never recover. There’ll be orphans too. This rebellion won’t make anyone happy.”

“What about you?”

“Me? As far as I can tell, this rebellion will make me the most unhappy,” answered Takahito. “After all, there’s nothing worse than making people unhappy.”

“That all sounds rather cynical, but I find it difficult to understand your views.”

“Of course it’s hard for you, you’re not as smart as me. Well, you’re just barely clever enough to act as my strategist, but you’re still confined by common sense.”

“When you overthrow the current shogunate, the people will surely rejoice. You will rule the country just as well as you have Oushuu—no, your plans will be even more magnificent and bring happiness to all. Granted, your rebellion will take many lives, but those are necessary sacrifices.”

“Necessary sacrifices, huh? That’s a nice little phrase,” Takahito laughed. “A nice and convenient phrase.”

“Sacrificing the present for the future is a natural choice for the wise.”

“Actually, I’m sacrificing the future for the present.”

“What?”

“Well, either way. I just can’t stand it. I could have done without all this wisdom. Having to make sacrifices is just so terribly terribly terrible. I’d rather be an idiot if I could just be happy. I’d spend my days in oblivious bliss. I’d let everyone else take care of the important stuff, and just get ordered around by others, completely at their beck and call. In the mean time, I’d start up this heartwarming family drama with some adorable children. But instead I have to deal with this bloody mess. I was even born into a time of peace and everything.”

With a grin on his face, Takahito truly lamented. The reason Takahito, who had quickly risen into prominence as lord of Oushuu, had thrown the country into war

after more than a hundred years of peace was shrouded in mystery, even to later generations. Not even his lieutenant or daughter knew why Takahito, a man more renowned than any in the Six Noble Families surrounding the Yanari shogun family, would start a rebellion. Yet his reason was simple and clear. It was neither ambition nor righteousness. There was simply ‘no one else to do it’.

“It’s just bad timing. In this primitive era with no information technology, the only way to spread a message across the country is through war. My only option was to start a rebellion. I can only destroy the country to save it. If only I had been born three hundred years later, I could have gotten across to the entire world just by tweeting away¹.”

“Do you mean to say that you were born in the wrong era?”

As Head attempted to show basic comprehension of his master’s nonsensical declarations, Takahito replied, “What’re you talking about? You sure are stupid.”

“I wasn’t born in the wrong era. There’s no way a genius like me would do that wrong. Seriously though, there’s something broken about my talents; they keep shooting up whenever I take my eyes off them for a second. *That’s why. That’s why even if I can’t see the whole rebellion that I started, I’m traveling across Japan to make sure I don’t miss the critical parts,*” said Takahito as he casually stood up and pressed a nearby roof tile with his foot.

“I won’t leave the important stuff to my subordinates—I’ll do all of it by myself.”

Just then, explosions occurred all over Ankoku Castle. They were not simultaneous. Gunpowder bombs had detonated one after another, interspersed by intervals too brief to be called instants. They went off one after another. Indeed. They went off in order, destroying first the weakest and then the strongest parts, using mechanical principles to bring down the so-called impenetrable Ankoku castle down with less a dozen bombs. It went without saying that it was Takahito who had had planted these bombs. In the distant future, this would become a commonplace technique for demolishing large buildings, but it was yet an era where no one else in the world had thought of the idea. He had thought of everything before anyone, anyone at all. His abilities were equal to, even surpassing, those of a fortuneteller or prophet. For he was a genius.

The wreckage of the castle fell on the combatants before they had a chance to flee, burying and then annihilating both sides. Not a single beam was left standing. With a single footstep, one of Japan’s Three Great Castles had been completely and utterly erased from the world. It was thoroughly destroyed, without a thought given to minimizing damages.

“Hm, not bad.”

“Did everything go according to your plans, just as usual?”

“Well, yeah.”

Takahito, having survived the precipitous descent by being carried by Head, who as a ninja could land as easily as hopscotch, shook his head sheepishly.

“But still, battles are scary. Even though everything went off without a hitch, killing so many people feels pretty bad. I knew you would catch me, but I still had a risk of falling to my death. There was the danger of getting blown up by my own bombs, too.”

“Do you mean to say that your intelligence makes you more aware of your chances of failure?”

As Head ran on top of debris and crushed flesh, he gave his understanding of the matter.

“You’re way off the mark,” replied Takahito.

“I’m saying that if you can’t feel what you’re doing, it turns into a game. It’s my philosophy that people who don’t stand on the front lines and fight don’t deserve to call themselves leaders. You should keep that in mind. Ninjas always seem to have trouble with that sort of thing. It’s probably on purpose, but they don’t seem to understand what it is they’re doing. You’d better tell that to your men too: Right Arm, Left Arm, Right Leg, and Left Leg.”

“They are not my men. They are your men.”

“Ha! I hear they’ve been going around calling themselves the Takahito Elite Four. Man, they’re so lame. I really worry about those poor saps. I’m not afraid of my enemies, but I’m scared to have allies like that.”

“It looks like you now have an enemy to be afraid of.”

Takahito and Head’s conversation was suddenly interrupted by a pure and innocent voice—one that was utterly out of place in a battlefield, especially one where a castle had only just collapsed and killed a great number of people. They turned towards the source of the voice. It was a young girl with blonde hair and blue eyes holding a temari ball. Despite her clearly foreign features, the girl’s Japanese clothing suited her well. Her very presence raised the questions of “What are you doing here?” and “Just where were you in this bloodbath?”, but Takahito merely asked “An enemy to be afraid of?”

Evidently, he had anticipated her arrival just as he had with Head, or perhaps even to a greater extent.

“Do I really have an enemy like that? Are you talking about yourself or something? I’ll admit that an inscrutable and denying girl like you whose thoughts I don’t even want to think about *is* pretty scary.”

“I don’t mean myself. I don’t fight people. I don’t even care what happens with your rebellion. So I’m not your enemy.”

Despite her age, the blonde-haired and blue-eyed girl spoke in an oddly adult manner. She shrugged and continued.

“Hida Takahito, your enemy is that Kyotouryuu man retained by the Tetsubi family.”

“Huh. Kyotouryuu? You’re saying Mutsue is my enemy? Now? After all this time?” said Takahito. “That sounds like a huge pain.”

Although Takahito was still grinning, his grin had become harsh.

Hida Takahito. The man was an unparalleled genius, and in what later generations would call the supreme folly of the greatest schemer of all time, he had never told a lie. He never lied, not even to his subordinates or his lieutenant. Though he claimed to excel, he never claimed to be correct. Perhaps his excess of genius had given him foresight of his inevitable failure and loss. For he had promised the success of his rebellion to no one, not even to his wife or daughter.

Translation Notes

¹Tweeting is a reference to Twitter.

Name Meanings

Ankoku Castle— darkness castle

Gekoku Castle

This has the same pronunciation as 下克上, a phrase that means subordinates overthrowing their superiors.

Ge(下)- low

Koku(酷)- severe, harsh

Hida Takahito

Hida(飛騨)- the name of an old Japanese province

Taka(鷹)- falcon

hi(比)- compare

to(等)- rank, equal

Togame(とがめ)- blame, criticism, cross in eye

Kyotou Yasuri – Chapter 3

The despicable revolt instigated by Hida Takahito, lord of Oushuu, interrupted a time of peace and rained down devastation upon all in Japan. Regardless of status and age, nobody was left unscathed—all of Japan had become a battlefield where people killed each other. Even the autonomous region of Izumo, the seat of the gods, was no exception. On the contrary, as it was independent from the shogunate and received no aid or support from the gods, the holy land was afflicted with the greatest casualties. In the end, Izumo would obtain the dishonorable distinction of the region with the most war orphans. The result being as it was, the process was even worse. It was beyond description. During the war, the entirety of Izumo could only be compared to Hell.

“Huff... huff... huff... huff. Hack, huff... hack, huff. Huff... huff... huff... huff. Huff... huff... huff, hack.”

A single girl walked unsteadily through that hellish landscape. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that she staggered, rather than walked. Judging from her ragged breathing, she was likely exhausted—but even if she were in good condition, it would be impossible for her to walk evenly over the corpses sprawled out endlessly beneath her.

“Huff, hack... huff, huff... Huff, huff... huff, huff. Huff... huff, huff... huff. Huff... huff... huff, huff.”

Even so, the girl did her best not to tread on the corpses as she made her way forward unsteadily, wobbling forward in pursuit of a futile endeavor. From the outside, it was impossible to judge how much of her movements were conscious.

“Hagh...”

The girl paused and raised her head. She raised her head and looked over her surroundings. There were only corpses as far as she could see. Scorched corpses stretched to the distant horizon. The scene could best be expressed as a carpet of burnt

flesh blanketing the earth. No, that was no expression, but unmistakable reality. She knew without having to check that not one of the soldiers was alive.

She stumbled over a corpse. To be precise, the corpses were all jumbled together into a single mass. She stumbled and then collapsed. Her fall was cushioned by a corpse to her front, and the girl appeared to be uninjured. But her spirit, which had just barely held itself together, shattered into pieces and the girl ceased movement.

“Huk... huck... huck. Hahuk, hyuk... Augh!”

As she lay still, her tears came flooding out. She was crying not out of pain or grief, but out of frustration. She cried, loudly and without interruption.

“Waaauughh!!!”

“Whassa matter kiddo? Whatcha cryin’ for?” asked someone just above the girl, out of the blue. “Here you are at a heart-thumpin’ battlefield, somethin’ the matter? Gettin’ me worried here.”

“Ack!”

The girl looked up reflexively. She saw a skinny stick of a man. Despite his long limbs and height, he seemed almost weightless. In fact, he looked so weak he could snap in a strong gust. The man, who looked out of place in a battlefield without any armor or weapons, hovered over the girl. The girl quickly got up, and scrambled down the carpet of bodies, away from the spindly man.

“—ah, wah! Aah! Agh!”

“Hm? No worries, ain’t nothin’ to be ‘fraid of. I’m a friend to little girls,” he said brashly as he approached the girl with no concern for her fear or terror.

The girl continued crawling away, but she was immediately outpaced by the spindly man’s long stride.

“Kahahaha! Aincha a cute lil’ thing. I just wanna take ya home and adopt ya. Maybe ya’d get along with Nanami and Shichika.”

He reached out and picked her up from under her arms like a doll, then raised her up high.

“Eyah?!”

The girl looked at the spindly man as if she was seeing a monster, and stiffened, unable to put up a struggle. She had no idea what the spindly man was talking about. In her terror, her tears had stopped and she had difficulty even breathing.

“Oh yeah, missy. While I’m at it, mind if I ask ya something? Y’see, I’m lookin’ for someone. He oughtta be ’round these parts.”

The spindly man still paid no heed to the girl’s change in demeanor, and carried on speaking at his own convenience.

As she was being held up, the girl asked, “Looking for...someone?” straining to catch his meaning. Although he had done nothing to threaten her, she was convinced that if she could not answer his question satisfactorily, she would be killed or meet an even worse fate. The spindly man was unarmed and carrying the girl gently, but she felt as if she was pierced by a frozen blade.

“Hida Takahito,” said the spindly man. “Hida Takahito, this seriously bad guy who’s crazy smart, oughtta been through these parts. Ya see a scrawny guy covered in scars?”

“Ah, aghh!”

As soon as she heard his name, she suddenly began flailing—blindly, haphazardly and strongly enough to dislodge the spindly man’s grip.

“H-h-h-help. Help. Help! Help, help, help! Help, help! Help! Help! Help!”

“Whoa there.”

In response, the spindly man quickly and calmly let go of her. His actions suggested that it was only because she started moving. Naturally, upon being released, the girl fell to the ground. She landed, squashing the corpses underneath her. She continued flailing, as if she was throwing a fit.

“Help. Help, help. Help, help, help!”

She repeated, ranting, and then seemed to run out of energy.

“Help, dad,” she said.

“Your dad?” said the spindly man, tilting his head.

“My dad was the colonel of the second regiment of the Three Holy Regiments.”

Several hours later, after the girl had been provided with food and water, her body cleaned of blood and flesh, and her clothes changed, she finally began speaking.

“This autonomous region, the dominion of Izumo, is protected by soldiers who fight for the gods. My dad was one of them.”

“Oh, he was? So you’re a proper little lady,” replied the spindly man.

Or rather, it was no longer the spindly man who stood before her. The spindly man had changed places with a beautiful woman with unusually pale skin. Although the girl had never let him out of her sight, she was unsure if they had truly switched. But she felt a strange certainty that the spindly man and the pale woman were the same person.

“The second regiment of the Three Holy Regiments—that’s the one with Sentouryuu, right? Like us, they don’t carry swords, so I’ve at least heard of them. They’re strong, really strong. Really really strong.” smirked the pale woman, and scornfully scanned over the carpet of corpses.

“So you’re telling me that these dead guys are the oh-so-powerful second regiment of the Three Holy Regiments?”

After hearing the pale woman’s inconsiderate remarks, the girl began to tremble. She was quivering. But the pale woman was not bothered by her reaction.

“So they got annihilated,” she continued. “And not just the second regiment. From the looks of it, I’d say the first and third regiments got annihilated too.

“What happened?” she asked. “Well, I can pretty much guess. Hida Takahito passed by, didn’t he? After storming Ankoku Castle in Kyushuu, he’d have to pass through here to get to Hida Castle. The only way he could he could sneak past the shogunate was to go through this autonomous territory. That’s how the battle started. Am I right?”

“No.”

Despite the pale woman’s confidence, the girl slowly shook her head.

“There was no battle.”

“Huh?”

The pale woman’s stared back in surprise, and the girl said, “It’s just like you said. He only passed by.”

“All he did was pass by. He only walked through here. My dad’s regiment couldn’t even put up a fight.”

“What? Aw, c’mon.”

“You couldn’t call that a battle. It was just a…”

“Massacre,” she said. “That’s why I’m frustrated. What we thought was strength wasn’t strong at all. We— my dad’s regiment wasn’t even weak. They couldn’t even lose a battle. Do you call stepping on an ant a battle? No, you don’t. He—they only passed by here. There were only two of them.”

“Two?”

That word piqued the attention of the pale woman. Or rather, it was a huge spotted dog whose attention had been piqued. The fangs peeking out of its open mouth seemed sharp enough to crush a human skull with a single bite. Each fang was almost like a blade.

A spindly man, a pale woman, and now a spotted dog. It was one after another.

“Two, huh. One of them’s Hida Takahito, but what did the other one look like?”

“I don’t know.”

The girl was bewildered for a moment by the sight of a talking dog, but possibly judging that there was no use in mentioning the matter, she only mechanically answered the question.

“I didn’t see them myself. I only came out from hiding after they left. I’m supposed to be the successor to Sentouryuu, but I just hid underground in the dojo like a coward.”

“Hmph. You’d have to be a coward to be a swordsman,” said the spotted dog flatly. “You’re more of a swordsman than anyone in the second regiment, when all they did was fight a hopeless fight and die. Well, that’s just my opinion, not that it’s true.”

“From what I heard...” she said, furrowing her brow at the spotted dog’s incomprehensible remarks.

“From what I heard he’s a monster with no head on his shoulders, just a sword,” she said, relaying a baseless rumor.

However, it said “Hm, so it was Maniwa Dokuhebi. No wait, he’s calling himself Head these days,” taking that baseless rumor at face value and digesting it.

Then the spotted dog said, “Hey, girl,” looking up at last. Their eyes met, and the girl flinched.

“In exchange for telling me about Hida Takahito, I’ll give you two pieces of advice.” “Advice?”

“First off, your father is definitely dead. I guarantee it. You’re wasting your time wandering around here. If you don’t want to die like a dog, then go home straight away.”

The girl was unmoved by its sharp words. She said, as if she had long ago known that, “My home burned down. I...don’t have anywhere go.”

“That so? Then you’ll just have to live on by yourself,” it said, in a tone that verged between encouraging and dismissive.

“In that case,” the spotted dog moved on to its second piece of advice, “Sentouryuu heir, it’s not safe to be standing there, so you’d better get away.”

In the next instant, there was an explosion beneath the girl’s feet.

“Hm, it didn’t work? That didn’t get him? Since he noticed right before, I’ll bet he dodged.”

The carpet of corpses lifted up, and a man emerged from underneath. He was bare-chested and covered in scars. Who could it be? It was, of all people, the subject of the previous conversation, the former lord of Oushuu who had defeated the Three Holy Regiments and ought to have already passed through Izumo, and who should not have been acting on his own, Hida Takahito.

“How’d it go? I can’t tell with all the corpses spraying up in the air, but it didn’t get him, did it? If only Mutsue got blown into smithereens.”

“Unfortunately not,” said a ninja who wore chains draped over a sleeveless kimono that had appeared next to him, from out of nowhere. He had a sword in place of a head, and it was impossible to discern how he could speak.

“It would appear that he dodged at the last moment. While carrying the girl, at that.”

“That so? What a shame.”

Takahito snapped his fingers, but he seemed to have expected the outcome, and drew his sword as he turned towards the cloud of dust.

“And here I went through all that effort to lay down a carpet of corpses. I even left out a cute little girl that would remind Mutsue of his kids to wander around as bait. And it still didn’t work, geez.”

The smoke finally cleared, and a small but aged child that seemed a hundred or even a thousand years old emerged, carrying the girl under his arm, her new clothes stained red by the blast. The millenarian boy threw a piercing glare at Takahito.

“Hahaha! So this is the kind of person you are today, Mutsue? It’s like you’re a different person every time I meet you.”

“Your ambushes are as skillful as ever. It seems that you already knew that we were sent to target you, Takahito.”

“I happen to have a very denying and knowledgeable friend. She was kind enough to tell me. Don’t worry, I won’t pass by *you*. I’ll be sure to have a good and proper battle with you.”

“So you say, after setting landmines in a battlefield.”

“Hahaha! What are you talking about? That’s no big deal between us. I didn’t actually think I’d kill you with that. It was just a wild gamble to pass the time.”

“And just how many did you kill for that wild gamble?”

“Eleven thousand eight hundred forty-seven people. About half as many sacrifices as I’d hoped for.”

“I see. When you put it like that, it really isn’t very many,” said the millenarian boy as he laid down the girl. He then entered a stance.

“Kyotouryuu, first stance: Lily.”

“I am the sixth head of Kyotouryuu, Yasuri Mutsue. Here I come.”

“I am the lord of Hida Castle, Hida Takahito. Ready to fight.”

As acting on a prearranged cue, the two simultaneously gave their names and simultaneously went into motion. The rebellion’s long confrontation between Yasuri Mutsue and Hida Takahito thus began, with only a single war orphan as an audience.

Name Meanings

Sentouryuu(千刀流)- Thousand sword Style

Kyotou Yasuri – Chapter 4

“Ahahahaha!”

If you were to describe Hida Takahito’s style of combat in one phrase, that is, if his bizarre actions could even be considered combat, that phrase would be suicide bombing. He carried so many explosives on his person that with a single misstep, or on a moment’s impulse, he could blow his entire surroundings to smithereens. He attacked his opponents with no regard for the consequences. These were not at all the actions of the lord of a state. But in reality, he only seemed to lack regard as seen

by bystanders, or in other words, from the perspective of the masses. Takahito himself had made calculations of the utmost precision. He was confident that this was the style of combat, the tactics, and the strategy best suited for himself. And so he laughed. He laughed as he fought and laughed as he killed.

“Hahahahahahaha!”

It was Izumo, an autonomous region, the seat of the gods, now burnt to the ground and carpeted in soldiers, where the lord of Hida Castle and the mastermind of the rebellion unfolding across Japan, Hida Takahito, and the sixth head of Kyotouryuu, Yasuri Mutsue, were fighting to the death. They fought at extremely close quarters. From an unbelievably close range, Takahito set his bombs alight and attempted to blow up Mutsue. If they exploded at such a close range, he himself would not escape unscathed. But he was not at all concerned.

“Keh.”

If you were to ask whether Takahito had predicted Mutsue would grunt like so while defending himself by launching the bombs into the distance, the answer would be an assured yes. That was how highly Takahito had appraised the strength of Mutsue, the swordless swordsman. In truth, this was not the first time that these two, Hida Takahito and Yasuri Mutsue had fought, that they had tested their strengths against each other. They had been fighting to the death, again and again, a countless number of times. By this point, they could almost feel a sense of solidarity. That was why Takahito repeatedly launched what could only be described as suicide attacks.

However, according to Maniwa Dokuhebi, or Head, who maintained his distance from their fight so as not to be caught in Takahito’s indiscriminate explosions and avoid hindering his master, “Even if Yasuri Mutsue were but a common, run-of-the-mill swordsman, my lord would still fight him in the same manner. In reality, when he brought down Ankoku Castle and laid out a carpet in Izumo, he has done the same thing. Indeed, my lord has simply resolved himself. He stakes his own life to kill anyone, no matter how insignificant,” was all there was to it; and that too was true. Even for his rebellion, had it been possible, Takahito would have chosen not to use any armies or schemes, and instead personally kill every member of the shogunate, one at a time.

“Well, wouldn’t that be nice. Ahaha. Man, you’ve gotten way better, Mutsue. You’re just brushing off my finishing moves.”

“Hmph. Likewise.”

Unlike Takahito who laughed while fighting, Mutsue’s face remained stoic. The current Yasuri Mutsue, a muscled man, was a sword who did not easily show his emotions, but even so his expression demonstrated the intensity of their battle.

“You’re the same as ever. No, you’ve become more hideous than ever before. You are despicable.”

“Despicable? C’mon now, you’ve got me all wrong. I’m just doing whatever it takes to achieve my objective, but besides that I’m a nice and harmless guy.”

“So you say.”

“Don’t go badmouthing me! Ahahaha!”

Takahito burst into laughter, while Mutsue had not the faintest smile.

“I just got this great idea, Mutsue! How about you go betray the shogunate and team up with me? C’mon, let’s be friends. We could take down Japan in a snap. No wait, we could even take over the world. Alright, now we’re talking.”

“Unfortunately, I am unlike you and have no ambition. I am a blade. I am a sword. I am only a piece of metal that acts as my master wishes.”

“Then just let me be your owner! You don’t have to let that foul Tetsubi woman swing you around however she wants. I’ll definitely be able to make better use of you.”

“I refuse.”

Without a moment of hesitation, Mutsue bluntly declined Takahito’s unmistakably insincere offer.

“Swords may not choose who they cut, but they do choose their wielders. I’d rather let that foul Tetsubi woman do as she pleases with me than be wielded by the likes of you.”

“Ahahaha. So we both agree that Migiri’s foul. And here I only said that to rile you up.”

“On that subject, what has your pretty wife been doing?”

“Not much. She’s probably playing with my daughter in the castle. When I’m at home, I’m just a henpecked husband. And that’s another reason I’m here on the front lines. I can’t stand it at home.”

“So you say, you doting husband. Your words are filled with lies.”

“How rude. I’ve never told a lie in my whole life, y’know.”

Even as they conversed and exchanged small talk, their battle never eased up. Takahito tried to kill Mutsue and Mutsue tried to kill Takahito. They probed for nonexistent openings with constant, unrelenting vigilance.

“Keh.”

The battle was even, or so it seemed at first glance, but upon closer observation it was clear that Takahito was at a slight advantage. But that was not because Takahito was more capable than Mutsue. First and foremost, Takahito was unsuited for battle. Under normal circumstances, he was weaker than the average infant. He had in fact lost to his young daughter in play fights. However, he compensated for his weakness with firepower. But even then, he would stand no chance against Kyotouryuu, which was famed as the strongest sword style. He would lose a hundred battles out of a hundred, and stood no chance even in a hundred years. And yet, in spite of that, there was a reason their clash had lasted more than a quarter-hour.

“...ah!”

It was the girl that Mutsue had been carrying under his arm, who had finally cried out. She had been stifling her voice so as not to distract Mutsue, but could no longer hold it in.

“Really though, I’m not lying or anything, I’m seriously impressed. I bet you’re the only one who could block my attacks while protecting a girl. You’re such a nice guy, Mutsue.”

“To repeat myself,” With the girl occupying one of Mutsue’s arms and throwing off his balance, he fended off Takahito’s bombs with his remaining limbs. He said in a voice filled with disgust, “Your vile personality that would exploit corpses, girls, or anything available, has become more hideous than ever before.”

“But this is nothing special. Besides, I’m not forcing you to do anything. If that girl’s in your way, then just toss her already. It’s just that I promise I’ll go and blow her up the instant you do.”

“People like you...” said Mutsue with the same stern expression, his voice overflowing with emotion that should not have belonged to a sword and particularly not his current self, “...are scum, Hida Takahito.”

“You offer me the highest praises.”

If you were to describe Hida Takahito’s fighting style in one phrase, it would be suicide bombing. If you were to use two phrases, the other would be merciless. Because he put his own life at stake, he held no qualms against sacrificing others. He had given away all of his mercy to his daughter.

From afar, a pair of eyes was watching over the fight that could not be called a fight. They did not belong to Head, Takahito’s strategist. In the first place, as he had a sword in place of a head, Head had no eyes. Secondly, those eyes were far more distant than Head’s position. It was a staggeringly distant distance. Despite standing at a range at which nothing should be distinguishable to the human eye, a woman was intently watching Takahito and Mutsue’s fight. She did not conceal herself, but stood in the open. It was only natural. Takahito, Mutsue, and even the ninja Head should not have been able to see her where she stood.

“Hm, hm, I see, meow. It’s just amazing, meow. I got here late so I thought they might’ve already finished, but at that rate they could keep fighting for another two thousand years, meow. This isn’t just a fight to the death or a showdown, those two are fighting out the whole war by themselves, meow. Putting aside Takahito for a bit, I just can’t help but be jealous of Yasuri Mutsue as a fellow swordsman, meow. She was more of a girl than a woman, and a rather young girl at that—or at least, judging by her appearance. Considering her youthful features, the pattern on her single-layered kimono that dragged on the ground, and her innocent expression, she seemed no more than five years of age. However, appearances can be deceiving. She was in fact not a girl, young or not, but a woman. She was over thirty years old, and had even given birth. Her name was Sabi Kokken. She served under the Owari

shogunate, and currently the Yanari family itself as a swordsman and an assassin. She was considered the equal of the shogunate's eleven personal guards combined, and was even called a master of the sword. She was also known as the strongest swordsman in history, or simply as a god of death.

"The Yasuri, the Yasuri, Kyotou Yasuri... Even if he's the latest work of old man Shikizaki Kiki, he was still supposed to be incomplete, meow. So how has he gotten so far, meow? Hm... Maybe that rebel's been pulling him up, meow."

She rambled to herself without lowering her voice. She spoke loud and clear, as if to show that she had no concern for being overheard.

"That unbelievably outrageous guy, Hida-cat, and his goal to restore the falsification of history is the opposite of that denying girl's, but depending on the circumstances we might be able to use him to our advantage, meow. Her group's plan won't necessarily go the way they want, and it still needs a lot of fine tuning, meow. Hm... Maybe I should just let Hida-cat murder the shogun, meow."

It would be unthinkable for a retainer of the Shogunate to make such a remark, and she could have been beheaded for that alone. But Kokken said it brazenly as she watched the course of the battle.

"Except Hida-cat probably won't go that far. I can't tell if he's set his sights low or he's just a realist who only does what he needs to, but either way, being too smart is something else, meow. Normally, this is something that the Yasuri family or Sabi family should be doing, meow. *Now then.*"

As she continued her surveillance, Sabi Kokken crouched down. She had not grown tired of standing. If she so desired, she could have stood there for one or two years, without moving a muscle. So then why did she crouch down? It was to pick up a perfectly ordinary tree branch by her feet.

"Since I'm only here to watch, I really shouldn't be sticking my nose in, meow. For that denier, it doesn't matter whether Hida-cat or Yasuri-cat wins, meow. But she doesn't know that I've got my own feelings about Yasuri-cat as a sword, meow. I'd hate it if our fated duel as Shikizaki swords passed on to the next generation, meow. I won't get much of a better chance, meow. I can come up with an excuse later, so I might as well just side with Hida-cat and send Yasuri-cat to the next world, meow."

As she spoke the unspeakable without a thought for where her loyalties lay, whose plans she acted by, who she betrayed, or who she was allied with, Kokken raised the stick into an overhead stance with a fluid motion.

Although Sabi Kokken was famed as a master of the sword, she did not wear a sword outside of tournaments and other formal occasions. She had no need to carry one otherwise. Any long and thin object, be it a stick or a roll of paper, became a sword in her hands.

“Hida-cat should manage to survive, meow. Well, if he dies, that’s that, and then the country will be at peace again, which is fine by me, meow. After all, I want my dear son to have a nice and peaceful life, meow.”

Then, without pausing in her monologue, without concentrating, and without hesitating she casually brought down the stick, her sword.

It was no special move or secret technique. It was nothing more than a simple swing. It was the same basic swing that was taught in every swordsmanship dojo. But Kokken’s destructive power and range were dramatic and enormous.

A gale almost like a typhoon swept through the battle between Hida Takahito and Yasuri Mutsue, even reaching Head. It was a large-scale disaster. The earth cleaved and the heavens parted. The carpet of soldiers was torn off the ground. Not a single blade of grass was left standing in the wake of the massive destruction that Sabi Kokken’s single swing had wrought. It was beyond comparison to Hida Takahito’s firepower. It was purely destructive power. This provided an explanation to Sabi Kokken’s cavalier attitude. She could freely inflict such destruction with no regard for range or weapon—it followed that affiliation, reputation, and of course allies meant nothing to her.

And so Izumo, the seat of gods, having been razed to the ground by the mastermind of the rebellion, was now thoroughly devastated by a god of death who feared no gods. Due to a mere whim and near happenstance, the first battle of the rebellion between Hida Takahito and Yasuri Mutsue was forced into a complete draw. On a more fundamental level, if they had been hit by that extraordinarily powerful strike, their very survival was in question.

“That was close. What even happened? Was that Kokken from the Sabi family? She really is reckless. That self-proclaimed failure is just ridiculous.”

A pale woman sluggishly rose from what was no longer a battlefield, but only a bare crater the size of a lake. The pale woman, Yasuri Mutsue, began surveying her surroundings, but soon realized the futility of the act and paused in dumbfounded shock.

“What was that? Did you save me, then?” said Yasuri Mutsue as she lowered her gaze to the girl under her arm.

The girl had fainted from Sabi Kokken’s swing, but like Yasuri Mutsue, she was completely unharmed. Her hand was clutching a stick.

“That’s right, she did say something about Sentouryuu. That allows you to take the swords of others and use them as your own; it’s the greatest disarming technique.

Whether it's a stick, a rolled up piece of paper, or even the sword of the master swordsman Sabi Kokken—a sword is a sword, huh? I thought I was the one saving her, but she ended up saving me. All this time I thought she was just a burden, talk about irony,” Mutsue quietly contemplated as she laid the girl down.

“She probably fainted from the shock wave, and then did that unconsciously. If she survives this war, I'm sure she'll become a force to be reckoned with. With that in mind, I should kill her for Shichika and Nanami's sake, but I couldn't call myself human if I did that. Even if we're swords, and not human.”

Yasuri Mutsue muttered, and then pursued Hida Takahito, who had presumably survived and escaped with the help of Head. She left the girl there, her business concluded. They moved on to the next stage.

“Wow, Mutsue really is strong. It was like I was fighting him one on six. At that rate, I would've lost.”

“My lord, had you predicted Sabi Kokken's interruption?”

“No way. If I could plan out that far, then it'd all be a piece of cake. There are always things I can't predict. I had to play along with Kokken's whims. Still, it was all worth it for being able to observe Mutsue up close. I still don't get him at all, but at least I know that he's still bound by Migiri.”

“Meaning?”

“Next time, I won't use some random girl; I'm going to take that sword's owner, Yasuri Migiri, as my hostage.”

Name Meanings

Sabi Family

Sabi(錆)- rust

Kokken(黒鍵)- black keys

Hakuhei(白兵)- unsheathed sword. The individual characters mean white and soldier/military, respectively.

Zentouryuu(全刀流)- all sword style

Kyotou Yasuri – Chapter 5

The daughter of the Tetsubi family, the central of the Six Noble Families that had served the Yanari family from the Sengoku Era, was so well known that there was

none in Owari who did not know her name. Her reputation had even spread to neighboring countries, and in some places she was arguably more famous than the shogun himself—yet unfortunately, she was not just famous but infamous. It was for her foul personality that she was well known. Her personality was so vile that others could not help but wonder what events could have shaped her into such a person. She was, in a manner of speaking, fundamentally bankrupt as a human being. In terms of scenery, she could only be compared to an endless desert. While she may have been spoiled as a child, or had perhaps been shaped by pressures of nobility, at some point her personality grew beyond any simple explanation.

“She used to be such a cute kid, how could she turn out like that? If only *that* never happened, and instead I did *this*,” was something that those acquainted with the Tetsubi, those who knew her as a child, and even her parents would never have said. Naturally, she had at one point been an guileless child, but her present personality was so notorious that no one could recall such a time.

One exemplary example of her repugnant personality would be that she had a hobby of watching people commit seppuku. Her greatest pleasure in life was hearing that someone would commit seppuku, rushing over immediately, shamelessly badgering her way into a front row seat, and looking on in delight. At one point, her passion was so great that she aspired to be an assistant for seppuku in order to have the closest possible view ¹. The nickname she had acquired, ‘that seppuku girl who’ll cut you quicker than a sword’, was not simply baseless slander.

“I mean, they slice open their own bellies! It’s so funny. Why would they even do that? Everybody knows there’s no point, but they still do it! They just go hack and slash! I don’t get it all, ahahaha. It’s absolutely hilarious.”

Naturally, those close to her tried to reach out, but she was so thoroughly twisted that they eventually left her to her own devices. She had her regrets, but by that point the responsibility rested solely with herself.

Although her repulsive personality and cruel hobbies so widely known that there was little attention left for her stunning looks, they were still known to a select few. It would be no exaggeration to say she was the most beautiful in the continent, and while her beauty was not enough to overshadow the fact that she had the most awful personality in the world, there were eccentric men who preferred women with disagreeable personalities, and she was not without suitors.

But she would say to those men, “Sure. If you love me, then cut open your belly. I’d like to see your guts.”

Naturally, they had all immediately fled. No one could continue their advances after being faced with that line. And so even after Migiri grew past an age considered fit for marriage as a noblewoman, she remained unmarried, and indulged herself in seppuku viewings and other interests that were incomprehensible to ordinary people.

Her parents were troubled. They were members of a storied noble lineage, and even supposing the line itself could be continued by adopting a son, they could not bear to

lose face by indefinitely retaining a spinster daughter. While their concern was somewhat absurd, considering that their daughter had already acquired a formidable reputation for her repugnant personality, it was somewhat understandable when viewed as an aspect of simple parental love. In the end, her parents, or rather, the consensus of the Tetsubi family, married her off through sheer trickery.

“Say, would you like to wield a sword?”

It went without saying that she agreed to the request. After all, she had once aspired to be an assistant for seppuku. And so the sixth head of Kyotouryuu and retainer of the Tetsubi House, Yasuri Mutsue, and Tetsubi Migiri became husband and wife. Incidentally, this highly political marriage was not due to Mutsue’s courtship. As usual, when Migiri first met him, she declared, “I’d like to see your guts. Bye now.” Without a moment of hesitation, Mutsue cut his belly open with his own hands. It was not a surprising act for a sword as opposed to a person, but Tetsubi Migiri, who would later become Yasuri Migiri, was dazzled. It would bear to add that it was not strictly true that their two children were born to a false and loveless marriage of convenience. On another note, the fact she gave birth to both of her children with Mutsue through Cesearean section was the pinnacle of irony for a woman who had once been called seppuku girl.

“Who’re you?” asked Yasuri Migiri, annoyed, as she laid in bed in the middle of night, addressing the man who had infiltrated into her room.

The man had a strange figure. Or rather, he looked almost like a bizarre monster. Besides the fact that he was a ninja draped in chains, he had no right arm and instead a sword jutted straight out of his right shoulder. The joint between the two was exceedingly natural, as if the the sword was not attached to his shoulder but sprouted from it. He looked especially menacing in the dark room, but Migiri was only annoyed, sleepy, and apathetic. She had apparently only asked the question out of obligation.

“Hmph,” snorted the man. He was unsure of whether to be impressed or irritated by Migiri’s impudent attitude towards an intruder. “I am Right Arm, a retainer of Hida Takahito the lord of Oushuu, and a member of the Takahito Elite Four.”

“Oh.”

Her utter lack of reaction suggested that she had predicted he would sneak in at the dead of night, but that would be inconceivable. However, neither was Migiri completely unsurprised. It was only that her surprise was overcome by her drowsiness.

“Good grief.”

In the end, Right Arm was impressed that she was as impudent as the rumors claimed. It was the first time that Right Arm, a former member of the eccentric Maniwa Corps, had been treated so rudely. Despite Migiri's nearly contemptuous attitude, he saw no use in becoming enraged. Only an amateur would become enraged.

To better serve my lord, I must put those feelings aside. I must discard these feelings. Due to his temperamental nature, Right Arm restrained himself to a degree that most would find unbearable.

"I think I've heard of this Takahito guy before... who's he? Oh right, I remember, it's the guy behind the rebellion, who Mucchan went off to fight. Oh yeah, I know Takahito, we're buddies."

"I...don't think he's your buddy," he said. "You don't sound worried that you're at the center of a war sweeping across Japan."

He laughed. He had meant to mock Migiri's thoughtlessness, but instead Migiri looked at him as if he were the fool.

"Like I even care!" she said childishly.

"My job isn't to protect the country, it's to protect my household. So from the looks of it, Takahito hasn't offered Mucchan yet and Mu-chan actually has the upper hand. Which is why you're here to kidnap me, right? Hmph," she grumbled.

What was it that she found disagreeable? Displeasure at the prospect of being kidnapped was to be expected, but that did not seem to be the case. The remaining option would be that she was displeased that her husband was at an advantage. Even considering her warped personality, was it even possible for a living person be this abhorrent? As these thoughts ran through Right Arm's head, he recalled his lord's words.

"Alright, Right Arm, you'd better not think of Migiri as a human."

When Takahito gave Right Arm his mission, he stressed this point above all.

"She'll cut you quicker than any sword. She's more inhuman than that Kyotouryuu guy, Mutsue. Supposing Mutsue's the embodiment of a sword, then Migiri's the embodiment of malice."

Although Takahito had been as hyperbolic as ever, Right Arm had not made light of his words. But even then, when he looked at Migiri lying in bed, he only saw an ordinary woman.

"Do you know why I've made such an important mission a solo mission? It's because if I sent two or more people, Migiri's malevolence would guarantee a falling out."

She only looked like a woman to him, but he trusted Takahito's judgment over his own, and did not let his guard down in the least. He had no doubts. He treated Migiri as the embodiment of malice.

"That's right. I'm here to take you hostage," he said menacingly. "There's no point in resisting. Think about what my presence here means."

"What it means?" Migiri said sleepily as she rubbed her eyes. His bluster had no effect.

"Ah, even with Mu-chan gone, there's still a bunch of people guarding the house. Are you bragging about being skilled enough to sneak in by yourself?"

"Sneak in? I wouldn't go through the trouble," Right Arm responded to her conjecture. "I went straight through your defenses. I didn't sneak in, I broke in. You should know the hallway to this room is filled with dead bodies.

"Hm..."

But it had no effect. She was not at all upset upon being told that her retainers had been slaughtered. But neither was she completely unfazed. Her reaction was along the lines of 'I guess that's life'. She was no more surprised than she would have been being caught out in the rain.

Then, she said "Oh," as if she had just realized something. "You said the hallway's filled with dead bodies, so does that mean you killed me and Mu-chan's kids, Nanami and Shichika?"

"Hm?" Right Arm let out a sigh of relief; even Migiri considered herself a parent and worried about her children. However, Migiri seemed to have noticed his relief.

"Aw, that's too bad. So you didn't kill them. What a shame, especially for Nanami."

It was indeed true that Right Arm had only killed those who were obstructing his path down the hallway, and he had not laid his hands on any children sleeping in their rooms, but how could she possibly be disappointed about that?

"Well, it's not like you'd stand a chance against Nanami anyways. Now then... oh yeah, I'm not going to resist or anything. I'll gladly let you kidnap me. I mean, it's not every day I get such a big chance to trip up Mu-chan. It feels nice knowing that that big dumb sword will be having a tough time. This is great." said Migiri. "But I'm sleepy, so can we leave tomorrow? You can just wait here."

Her request went beyond impudent, and was simply insolent. It went without saying that Right Arm could not acquiesce.

"Don't be ridiculous. If you don't want to be treated roughly, then get ready to leave."

“Okaaay.” Migiri relented surprisingly quickly, and got out of bed. She was in the nude. Despite possessing what should have been a refined upbringing, her actions were not at all dignified, and resembled those of a young girl.

“You’ll let me put my clothes on, won’t you?”

“Yeah. Go ahead.”

“I can’t put my clothes on by myself, help me out.”

“I told you, don’t be ridiculous. I’ll give you three seconds, so make it quick.”

“You’re no fun,” said Migiri as she began changing into her clothes. Or rather, as she was originally naked, she was not changing, but getting dressed. As Right Arm thought to himself that while Migiri was an incomprehensibly abhorrent woman, his mission to kidnap Yasuri Mutsue’s wife was proceeding smoothly—

“Ngh!”

—at that very instant he made that snap judgement, Migiri, still in the nude, took advantage of his moment of relaxation and chomped the base of his neck. She bit him viciously, like an animal. Though her teeth were not the sharp fangs of a wild beast, they sunk in deep enough to kill an ordinary human. Being that Right Arm, a former ninja, was no ordinary human, he managed to shake her off.

What’s with this woman? Right Arm was bewildered.

“Feh,” Migiri spat out Right Arm’s flesh, and said “Aw.”

“Aw, you didn’t die.”

“So you are trying to resist?”

“Nah, that’s it for me. I was only getting payback for having to get up. I feel all better now.”

Apparently, Migiri had not acted on any plans or calculations, and had only attacked Right Arm, an overwhelmingly superior force, out of annoyance. She was inconceivably reckless. Or rather, she was inconceivably malevolent. The question that came to his mind was not what upbringing had led to such a woman, but...

“Hmph. I can’t believe no one’s killed you yet with that kind of personality.” As he pressed down on his bleeding neck wound, Right Arm dumbfoundedly gave his honest opinion.

Migiri boasted, “Well, yeah. I’ve got the strongest sword in the world.”

And so Yasuri Migiri was abducted quite easily. But the sixth head of Kyotouryuu, Yasuri Mutsue had yet to learn of that fact. At the time, he was being beset by the formidable combined attacks of the remaining members of the Takahito Elite Four: Left Arm, Left Leg, and Right Leg.

Translation Notes

¹The kaishakunin stands behind people who commit seppuku and beheads them for a quicker and less painful death.

Name Meanings

Tetsubi(徹尾)- 徹 means thorough or complete, and 尾 means tail.

Migiri(みぎり)- occasion, time

Yanari(家鳴)- the creaking of a house

Kyotou Yasuri – Chapter 6

Hida Takahito was served by the Takahito Elite Four (a title they had given themselves), who along with his strategist Head, originated from the Maniwa Ninja Corps, a ninja group specializing in assassination. During the Sengoku Era, the Maniwa Ninja Corps had performed and demonstrated such amazing feats despite being ninja their name was known to all; after Shogun Yanari seized power and brought peace to the country, while they had quietly concealed themselves as if returning their original nature, greatly diminished in scale since their height, their unusual ninja skills and techniques had still not been completely lost. That the extraordinary schemer boasting of the greatest intelligence in the world, Takahito, surrounded himself nearly exclusively with former members of the Maniwa Ninja Corps, bore ample evidence for this fact.

The former Maniwa Dokutsuru, Right Arm. The former Maniwa Dokuari, Left Arm. The former Maniwa Dokufugu, Right Leg. The former Maniwa Dokugumo, Left Leg. Together with the former Maniwa Dokuhebi, Head, any of these five were more than capable of serving as a head of the corps. They had been drawn from the preexisting Maniwa Beast Squad, Maniwa Bird Squad, Maniwa Fish Squad, and Maniwa Insect Squad and together formed the Maniwa Poison Squad. Even among such a ninja group specializing in assassination, they were an incredibly deadly squad, each member with their own unique talents.

On the other hand, the fact that Hida Takahito had recruited all five of them provided an example of his unfathomable capabilities. And on yet another hand, the reason why the Maniwa Ninja Corps had nearly no involvement in the sole rebellion under the Owari shogunate ruled by the Yanari family was partially because the village was in the process of restructuring after having been deprived of those five vital members. If Takahito had aimed for this result when headhunting them, it would have been quite shrewd of him. Regardless, it would be impossible to deny that the Maniwa Ninja Corps had diminished even further as a result. Following the rebellion, they would decline yet further, but that is a story for another time.

The former Maniwa Poison Squad: Head, Right Arm, Left Arm, Right Leg, Left Leg. Currently, Head was accompanying Hida Takahito as he returned to Oushuu from Kyuushuu. Right Arm was in the process of kidnapping Migiri, the daughter of Tetsubi, which was one of the six lords serving the Yanari shogun family. As for the remaining three: Left Arm, Right Leg, and Left Leg...

They were stalling Yasuri Migiri's husband and Hida Takahito's old friend, the sixth head of Kyotouryuu, Yasuri Mutsue. No, those venomous three had no word so soft as stalling in their dictionaries, and came with the full intention of ending his life.

“Whew, that was tough.”

At present, those three had been cut down by Mutsue and were lying on the ground. They lay in what was the only desert of the era, Inaba Desert. Left Arm had been beheaded, Left Leg had been impaled, and Right Leg had been dismembered. They had each suffered fatal wounds, and moved not an inch.

“Hida Takahito's Takahito Elite Four, was it? I couldn't have let my guard down. I almost died in that fight. Really though, each of those three had such fearsome ninja techniques.”

Although he was a child, he had an aged air to him. The millenarian boy threw a meaningful gaze at the three corpses.

“And three on one is fighting dirty. Takahito really has no mercy. He really abandoned it. There's no single person in the world could fight three Maniwa ninja on that level and win. Maybe Nanami would stand a chance, but that's it.”

“Ain't that right,” said Yasuri Mutsue as he stepped out from behind Yasuri Mutsue. He was a skinny, spindly man.

“I thought I was gonna be a goner. I thought I'd kick the bucket and get snuffed out. Scary stuff. Three enemies I can't even beat one-on-one, all at once. Gimme a break.”

“Indeed.”

Yet another Yasuri Mutsue agreed. It was not a person, but a spotted dog who had spoke.

“Good thing it was six on three.”

“Yeah, good thing it was six on three.”

“Yeah, good thing it was six on three.”

“Yeah, good thing it was six on three.”

Three Yasuri Mutsue: a pale woman, a rotund man, and a muscled man, concurred alike. In the history of the swordless sword school of Kyotouryuu, the sixth head of Kyotouryuu, Yasuri Mutsue, was the only swordsman to wield six swords. The men, the woman, the child, and the beast had combined their strengths and used their swordless sword skills to defeat three members of the former Maniwa Ninja Corps' Poison Squad and the present Takahito Elite Four.

“It really helps that our enemy doesn't know about our six-sword style. Good to know that even a military genius can't plan for what he doesn't know.”

“Three to go! Takahito, Right Arm, and Head. Sure that was a tough fight, but things are lookin' up now. We put a real damper on his plans.”

“Hmph, I wonder about that.”

The muscled man shook his head in reaction to the spindly man's levity.

“We may have hindered the enemy significantly, but he treats his subordinate's lives the same as his own—he only thinks of them as pawns. We should assume that the deaths of those three was a part of his plan.”

“Huh? Ya sayin' Takahito already knows we use six swords?”

“No, I don't believe so. But he knows we have something up our sleeves. I can't help but suspect that he never expected those three to win against us.”

“I dunno about that. Takahito might be able to see all of the possibilities, but he can't control everything. If he could, he wouldn't hafta go outta his way to start up a rebellion or revolt. Sure he's got somethin' up his sleeve, and he knows the risk of havin' his assassins wiped out. But a total war's a total war. We might even wipe him out. There's no way he'd be happy about that.”

“Of course,” agreed the pale woman. “Accumulating advantages like this is the only strategy that works against a genius commander. Wait, strategy's his specialty, so let's call it a plan instead.”

“That's quite right. But the issue is...” said the spotted dog, frowning. He looked over the three corpses lying on the ground, those of Left Arm, Right Leg, and Right Arm. His expression had no trace of grief or compassion towards the dead, but was only as cold as a sword.

“The issue is, what were these three sacrificed for?”

“Hrm.”

“Nng.”

“Hm.”

Neither the spindly man, muscled man, nor the pale woman had an answer. It was a question that all six had considered, yet could not bear to think about: What could Hida Takahito have plotted that he would sacrifice three of his closest retainers for?

“It’d be somethin’ else if we were right in the middle of Oushuu, but we’re in Inaba, all the way out in the Chuukoku region. Even for a total war, it’s too early. If he thought ’bout the chance we’d run, it’d just end with him showin’ his hand.”

“True. They fought desperately, with all the strength of Maniwa ninja, but still their mission was only to stall us, so we can conclude that his objective was to pin us in Inaba Desert. “

“So we need to ask, why Inaba Desert? Or maybe there isn’t anything special about Inaba Desert. “

“But it might be that he didn’t want his path back to Oushuu blocked.”

“So he stalled us as part of a diversion for some other plan.”

“But...”

“Then...”

“So...”

As the six Yasuri Mutsue tried to guess at Takahito’s impenetrable plans, and voiced their suspicions, suddenly and without warning...

“If you’ve got time to ramble on about that, then you’d better hurry up and do something,” a young voice confidently interrupted their conversation.

“By now, Takahito’s kidnapped your precious master and wielder, Yasuri Migiri.”

There stood an extremely denying young girl.

Her appearance was quite unconventional. Possibly due to the sweltering desert heat, the girl only wore hakama pants and stood on the sand bare-chested and with bare feet, looking rather feral. Her striking blonde hair was pulled back in a ponytail, and the fierce gaze of her blue eyes further heightened her unbridled wildness. But regardless of how stifling hot the Inaba Desert was, or rather, for that precise reason, exposing so much skin to the intense sun was, bluntly speaking, nothing but suicidal.

Sensing that, Mutsue said, “Ya can’t be doin’ that. If ya wear that flirty getup out in the sun, maybe ya’d just get locked up in Edo, but here ya gonna scorch up. Your skin’s so pale ya’d burn up straight away.”

Despite saying this, he of course aware that that was beyond the point. They were in the the center of the Inaba Desert. The dead center. It would take several days of travel through the desert to reach this point. That her skin remained pale was an abnormality that deserved serious consideration. It could not have been that until that moment she had been appropriately dressed, but upon seeing an opportunity to speak to Mutsue, she then undressed herself and removed her sandals.

Indeed, there was nowhere to hide from sight, and no sign of discarded clothes. The girl’s footprints, which stretched into the distance, had not been made by neither sandals nor clogs, but by bare feet with each toe clearly imprinted—they were footprints in the literal sense. This would be something impossible for Mutsue. It was impossible for all but ninja. And with the corpses of Left Arm, Right Leg, Left Leg bearing on his mind...

“What’s goin’ on here?” he said to the girl. His mind was already a drawn blade. “What’re ya, a ninja?”

“Huh? A ninja? Who, me? Me of all people?” The girl soundly mocked him. “You’re funny, but dumb. Is that some principle of Kyotouryuu? Just how do I look like a ninja? You think I’m in the Maniwa Ninja Corps? Or maybe that Aioi Ninja Corps that they say got wiped out way back? Hahaha! No way’s there’d be such a cute and sexy assassin out there, just think about it!”

“True,” said Mutsue, and slowly nodded. He was the spindly man.

The other five blades had already vanished into hiding. No, they were not hiding. As previously stated, there was nowhere to hide in the Inaba Desert. In truth, the remaining five had hidden in Mutsue’s shadow. It followed that the girl should have only seen him as a single person. As the same single-bladed and swordless swordsman that Takahito, Head, Left Arm, Right Leg, and Left Leg saw him as. But was that really so? Why then was her gaze so penetrating? She seemed to see right through him and into his soul. Her eyes were such a vivid blue.

“Who’re you, then?”

“Right now, it basically doesn’t matter who I am. There isn’t much that I can do at this point in time. Whatever you call me, I won’t bother denying it.”

“...”

Mutsue sensed something hidden within in the girl and wavered. Even now, as she boldly stated that despite her denying nature she would not bother denying anything, he wavered between cutting her down immediately and continuing their conversation. No, that was not it, that was not where he wavered. In all honesty, without any pretense, he was torn between whether or not to flee from the bare-footed, half-naked girl only wearing pants who was standing before him. He had not yielded an inch to the former Maniwa Poison Squad’s three-fronted assault, but he was now on the verge of fleeing, of all things.

Once he wavered before an unknown enemy, his sharpness as a sword had more than halved. It followed that fleeing was unmistakably the correct option, but even so, should the head of Kyotouryuu really flee from a girl who was nearly the same age as his own daughter?

“Hey, are you even listening? Ya-su-ri Mu-tsu-e? Here I am telling you these future developments out of the goodness of my heart, so what are you gawking at my body for? This isn’t the time to worry about my sunburns. I’m telling you that right at this moment, your wife is getting kidnapped.”

“I don’t believe you. Sorry to say, but my master ain’t gonna get kidnapped so easily.”

The only possible way it could happen was with her cooperation, and that possibility was rather likely, but Mutsue would not risk betraying that fact. His instincts as a sword shouted out that he absolutely must not expose any weakness before this denying girl.

“You don’t have to believe me if you don’t want to. Either way, you’ll have to return to Owari, right? You can just check that nobody’s at home. Except...”

Boom. At that moment, Yasuri Mutsue’s right arm flew off. It exploded into blood, flesh, and bone.

“I’m quite denying on the subject of whether or not you can survive me and that swordmaster’s strikes. “

“Like I thought, at this range stabbing is much harder than slashing, meow. I was aiming for his head, but I got his shoulder instead, meow. And if my sniping isn’t precise enough, I’ll hit that denying girl too, meow. Alright, three more tries and I’ll get my aim down, meow!”

There stood Sabi Kokken in the outer Inaba Desert, holding only a stick.

Name Meanings

Dokutsuru— poison crane

Dokuari— poison ant

Dokufugu— poison pufferfish

Dokugumo— poison spider

Dokuhebi— poison snake

Kyotou Yasuri – Chapter 7

Even the greatest product of the distinguished Sabi lineage, Sabi Kokken, a master swordsman among master swordsmen who was famed as the strongest person in the world and even the strongest in history, was not without flaws. Perfection is nothing but a word and an abstract concept. As such, while the legendary swordsmith Shikizaki Kiki strove for completion and finality beyond that, he made no attempts to achieve perfection. He knew better than anyone else that it would only led to an abyss.

“You have cut yourself off and give up somewhere. It’s like reading a book. Reading a book that never ends would just be hell. I don’t want to create that kind of neverending duty or unending obligation. So really, my swords aren’t for cutting, but for being cut off.”

These were the words of Shikizaki Kiki. He asserted that while something could be finished, it could not be perfected. Sabi Kokken in particular had a clearly fatal flaw of being unable to hold herself back. She was utterly incapable of suppressing or repressing her strength. She had no stoppers. Of course, she did attempt to restrain

herself. She expended her utmost efforts attempting to rein in her power, and her intentions were honest. But even then, she was utterly incapable of restraining her power. It was just as impossible as stepping on an ant without killing it.

She was so talented that she was considered a lethal weapon. In the same way that no single human could halt the rotation of the earth, Sabi Kokken could not hold back her own strength. It was a preposterous tale. But still, it was a compelling tale. She had such overwhelming power that even the Owari Shogunate struggled to rein her in and she was fully capable of destroying the country—but during peacetime she was not even too valuable to be useful, but only too dangerous to be useful. If not for Hida Takahito's rebellion, she would have never made an appearance in history. So as not to dull the spirits of those children aspiring to take up the sword, all mention of her would be struck out from the history books.

The reason Kokken's name still remained, that her existence remained, was not because she had just blew off Yasuri Mutsue's arm from an extremely long range, from the edge of the Inaba desert to its center. This was work concealed in darkness as deep as an abyss. It was a clandestine assassination job in the style of the Maniwa Corps. Her legitimate activities during the rebellion were yet to follow in Oushuu, the heart of the rebellion. But for her, the present was the most fulfilling part of the rebellion, as well as the moment she had lived for. This was because she would soon be facing an opponent that she would have no need to hold back against. It would unfold as so...

“Mrow?!”

She was startled. *Sabi Kokken* had been startled. She had adjusted her aim to make sure that with her second blow she would hit Yasuri Mutsue's head, then swung down her stick as a sword. The shock wave produced by the half-foot long stick should have raced down the desert and annihilated Yasuri Mutsue before he had a chance to block it. This was not at all difficult for Kokken. Her only concern was that with her lack of control, she might catch the denying girl next to him in the blast, but she only thought nonchalantly, *Well, if I do, then that's that, meow. There's no point in worrying about it, meow.*

She was unconcerned until the moment she launched her attack. She was the same even soon after. But then, Sabi Kokken was surprised. She was surprised that her attack was struck down before her very eyes, and by a single girl. And not just a girl, but a rather young girl. She was unlike Kokken, who despite her young appearance was over thirty. The girl genuinely appeared to be seven years of age. She was even younger than the denying girl.

“Hah... now what?” she said, lethargically, or rather, simply listlessly. With movements too slow to be called relaxed, she turned towards Sabi Kokken.

“I didn’t mean to do anything. My hands just moved on their own. I only wanted to see Dad become a hero from up close. I strained my weak constitution running away from home, and had an awful time following him around. I got lost and when I ran into you, ah... my hands moved on their own. Or should I say sword instead of hands? It doesn’t really matter.”

“Who’re you, meow?”

Kokken spoke, without thinking, to the girl who was muttering to herself. It was exceedingly rare for her to speak without thinking, and a sign had yet to recover from her surprise. Perhaps it would be more accurate to call it shock. The reason being...

“You’re the first person who’s blocked my sword, meow. Even the rest of the Sabi family are as helpless as windchimes against my attacks, meow. So how...”

“Sword?”

The girl tilted her head.

“What a strange thing to say. Isn’t that a stick you’re holding?”

“In my hands, a stick is no different from the sword of a legendary hero. That’s the Sabi family’s ability.”

“Ability?”

“That’s right!” she agreed, and brandished her stick. A sword with the ability to turn any object into a sword: that was Zentou Sabi.

“Hm? Oh.”

The girl nodded blankly; it was unclear whether or not she understood. Or perhaps she held no interest in Kokken in the first place. Judging by her demeanor, her disinterest extended to everything in the world. But if that were the case, that raised the question of why she would she block a blow meant to kill Yasuri Mutsue.

“My name is Yasuri Nanami.”

She suddenly introduced herself.

“I’m the eldest daughter of the Yasuri family, Yasuri Nanami. Which makes me the daughter of Yasuri Mutsue, the man you attacked. Probably, that is.”

“Probably? That’s a vague way to put it, meow,” said Kokken, puzzled.

“Never mind,” said the girl. “I wasn’t thinking anything like ‘if only I wasn’t actually born into the Yasuri family and was just picked up from somewhere and wasn’t related to Dad I could love who I want.’ Not at all.”

“I see. I think I get the picture, meow,” said Kokken, attempting to change the topic. Despite appearing five years old and younger than Nanami, she was an adult.

“You see, I have a brother who’s three years younger than me, and he’s absolutely adorable. So I definitely don’t have any complicated worries like ‘I’m so glad he’s my little brother, but maybe it would be better if he wasn’t my brother, no wait, I do want him to be my brother.’”

In contrast, at seven years of age, Nanami had yet to learn how to rein in her emotions, and her thoughts, or rather her feelings, came spilling out.

“Alright, moving on,” said Kokken, completely ignoring what Nanami said. She was quite the adult. “Hm, the Yasuri family, meow. This is quite the surprise, meow. But now it makes sense, meow. You see, our families, Sabi and Yasuri, are basically polar opposites, meow.”

“Opposites?”

“That’s right—opposite, and opposed, meow,” said Kokken.

“The Sabi family can turn anything into a sword, and the Yasuri family doesn’t need swords, meow. They say that Shikizaki Kiki couldn’t decide until the end which of the two to make into an Ultimate Deviant Blade, meow. That’s why the Yasuri and the Sabi are destined to face each other. *Meow*,” said Kokken as she readied her sword. She raised it in an overhead stance.

“Now that I think about it, I’ve mostly been fighting at an extremely long range since it’s more efficient, so it’s been quite a long time since I fought someone this close up, meow. Heh. Nanami-cat, I’m looking forward to this, meow.”

“Huh? Oh, pardon me, I wasn’t listening,” Nanami said, snapping out of a daze. “I was having a daydream.”

“I have a feeling you’re going to grow up to be a terrible adult, meow.”

Kokken’s expression grew stern. This was the sincerity she possessed as a swordsman. She let her resolve to cut down her opponent, whether she be a child or unarmed, show on her face.

“As an adult, I ought to discipline you. Meow!”

“Discipline? Mom does that every day, which is another reason I followed Dad on his trip. Oh, dearie me,” she said, for no apparent reason.

Something about her personality seems too slack. That was Kokken’s evaluation of Nanami.

“You’re so unsteady, I can’t tell if you’re here or not or even if you’re alive or dead, meow. It’s like someone cobbled together a bunch of random parts and happened to get you, meow.”

“Flattery will get you nowhere.”

“The way you think what I said was flattery is exactly what I mean by a slack personality! ...meow,” she said right after swinging her stick. Or rather, it was a sword that she had swung. In an instant, her swing closed the distance between them, and descended onto Nanami’s shoulder. The scientifically dubious existence of a shock wave did not even bear consideration. The stick itself split Nanami into two—or at least, it should have.

“Kyotouryuu: Dandelion.”

Nanami neither dodged nor blocked the attack, but instead completely ignored it as she struck Kokken’s abdomen with her finger. Kokken was humiliated. It was as if Nanami had not acknowledged her slash as a threat or even as an act of combat, and considered it worthy of no more than a single finger in afterthought.

She may as well have said, “That’s just a stick.”

No, she actually did say it. She smiled sinisterly, more heinously than a human, much less a child, should be capable of smiling. Then she, she dealt a blow to Kokken’s chest using the greatest sword style Kyotouryuu, whose swordless practitioners

wielded their bodies as swords. This was the first time anyone had hit Kokken, and as a result...

“Guheow!”

“O-ow. I must have jammed my finger,” said Nanami as she took a step back. She appeared to have landed the blow, but due to the headwind it was difficult to tell. But Kokken was surprised enough to drop her stick. This was also the first time she had been surprised twice in the same day.

“W-what was that, meow?”

She said, again without thinking. She felt compelled to ask.

“You... what the hell was that?”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I was saying Kyotouryuu and Dandelion, but I haven’t actually learned it. Dad hasn’t taught me any Kyotouryuu, so this is just me copying him. *I didn’t mean to do that*,” she said, nonchalantly and lazily.

“I only poked you with my finger.”

“A poke...”

“It’s only a copy for now, but someday I’d like to make it my own. Though I think I’d have to go through some kind of hardship like being stranded on a desert island before I can. There’s no need to worry, er, what was your name? Sabake?”

“No, meow.”

“Kekkon, was it?”

“Kokken, meow!”

“Alright, I’ll remember that. Oh, I forgot.”

“You don’t have to remember my name, just answer my question, meow! Nanami-cat, are you telling me that you haven’t been taught Kyotouryuu, learned any sword style, studied, or trained at all...”

Kokken took a deep breath to muster her resolve, and asked, “and you blocked my strike, ignored my blow, and landed a hit on me, meow?”

“Is that supposed to be difficult somehow?”

Nanami answered her question with a question. She had no conviction in her voice.

“I think it would be harder to just stand there.”

“Hehe.”

Kokken laughed. She laughed heartily. As her laughter died down, she picked up her stick and held it in a lowered stance.

“I’ll stop talking weird. Let’s have a serious fight. This will probably be the first and last time I can give it my all,” said Sabi Kokken.

“Oh.”

In response, Nanami said as slackly as ever, so listlessly that she might as well have been dead.

“Well, then, let’s have a good fight. Um, would it sound cool if I said ‘I’ll turn you into rust on my blade’?”

“Yes, let’s have a good fight. Though I don’t think this will be a very fruitful battle.”
Sabi Kokken bowed her head, and Yasuri Nanami bowed her head in return.

“Zentouryuu: Kanzen Touitsu!

“Kyotouryuu: Kyouka Suigetsu... or something.”¹

Sabi Kokken’s flaw of being unable to hold back was simultaneously a flaw of being unable to use her full strength. In her encounter with Yasuri Nanami, this flaw of hers was completely nullified. She had no need to hold herself back, and could not spare any effort for fear of her life. The two strongest prodigies thus began their battle, but unfortunately there were no records of the event itself. It would have been too damaging to the education of children. That their battle lasted for roughly half a year and was more intense than the rebellion itself was not a lesson meant to be passed on to future generations. The only certainty was that both the shogunate’s ace was sealed and that Yasuri Mutsue’s strongest defender was sealed. They had canceled each other out. And as for how much of this development and conclusion was a part of Hida Takahito’s plans...

“...so that’s how I think it’ll end up, Head. I’m sure that denying girl would do something like that. Of course, that’s only supposing Left Arm, Right Leg, and Left Leg lose to Mutsue.”

“I doubt that those three would be so easily defeated. But I suppose we can assume they have succeeded in stalling for time.”

“Yeah. Alright, let’s go see Migiri. Right Arm, what’s she up to?”

“She is speaking with the princess. They seem to be getting along quite well.”

Translation Notes

¹Kanzen Touitsu (完全刀一) means Perfect Swordification and Kyouka Suigetsu (鏡花水月) means Flower in the Mirror, Moon in the Water, or more figuratively, transcendental beauty.

Kyotou Yasuri – Chapter 8

Although Hida Castle in Oushuu was widely renowned across Japan, there were few who called the enormous castle by its proper name, even in the local area. The vast majority, including the castle’s lord, Hida Takahito, called it Meikyuu Castle. As the

name implied, the castle was filled with passages and stairways winding about in such a labyrinthine manner that was impossible for anyone unfamiliar with the castle to find the exit. Even those who were familiar with the castle could not help but lose their way when attempting to reach any specific room. In that becoming lost inside it was the norm, it was closer to an optical illusion than a castle.

Hida Castle's labyrinthine nature was the reason it was counted along with the nonexistent Gekoku Castle and the invisible Ankoku Castle as the third of the Japan's Three Great Castles, famous for their stalwart defenses. In short, it was because the castle was impossible to enter. However, the defenses of Hida Castle were not strong in the sense of being easily defensible. The soldiers guarding the castle had little understanding of what exactly they were defending in the complex castle. They had not the faintest idea.

The only person who could live in Hida Castle without losing his way was Hida Takahito, who possessed the greatest wits in the world. But if you were to take his statement of, "Nah, it's not like I don't get lost. It's just that I always have a few broad objectives. Whatever path I take and whatever room I get to, there's an objective I can work on. This castle's unpredictability makes it a good fit for my sloppy personality," at face value, then you would be forced to say that no one on earth could comprehend the layout of Hida Castle, of Meikyuu Castle.

As a side note, the present day Miyagi prefecture derived its name from the same Meikyuu Castle¹. However, that is a story of the ever uncertain future, and at the time of the rebellion, Meikyuu Castle was nothing more than Hida Takahito's place of residence and the Shogunate's target of attack. At present, Yasuri Migiri of the Tetsubi family, who had been kidnapped from Owari, was being held in an underground cell in the very same Hida Castle.

"Y'know, in my opinion, by which I mean the absolute and unconditional truth, people fail quite a bit. They give it their all, exhaust their efforts, but try as they might they don't get what they want, or anything close. It's just like this Meikyuu Castle: you can never get to where you want to go," said a woman.

It was Yasuri Migiri. She did not seem bothered in the least about being confined in a dusty and shabby underground cell, and instead sat against the wall quite comfortably, admiring her fetters as she spoke dispassionately.

"They lay down their plans and schemes, but plan as they plan and think as they think, it all comes to vain—it's like the world is fundamentally built for failure. Or maybe it's that people are fundamentally made to fail. Now that I think about it, has anyone since the beginning of time succeeded? Is there even one single person who could hold their head up high and proudly shout out 'I'm successful!'? Nope, nobody can. There's no way. Oh sure, there's probably people who could say those words. But even those people have seriously failed a countless number of times. In the first place, you could say that they've already failed just by shouting out 'I'm successful!'

without an ounce of shame. In other words, people fail over and over in every possible way, until they finally succeed in dying. Y'know?"

"Don't you think so?" Migiri asked the girl in front of her, outside the cell. The girl had been standing outside the cell. She had black hair and wore an austere kimono. "I said, 'don't you think so?' Answer me, will you!"

"I don't think so," The girl replied in a whisper. Her voice was just barely audible. *"My father is successful. Everybody knows that."*
"Oh, is that so?"

Migiri smirked at the girl. Judging by the tone of her voice, she had no regard for the fact that she was speaking to a girl of tender years. Or rather, it was precisely because she was speaking to such a young girl that Migiri's tone held such unrestrained ruthlessness. Her voice dripped with venom. It was hatred directed not at the girl, but at the world.

"From what I can tell, your father, that genius Hida Takahito, is definitely failing. Actually, you could say that he's planning for failure."

"Planning...for failure?"

"That's right. He knows it better than anyone else. That genius understands it better than anyone else. He knows deep down that things never go your way, that nothing will ever happen how you want it to. I guess that's what happens when you're too smart. He can't just blindly believe in things, which is why it's easier for him to imagine a future where he fails than a future where he succeeds. That's why he makes schemes that rest on failure. He schemes and schemes. He tries to get closer to success through repeated failure. It might seem like he's given up on trying, but what he's doing is the second best way to succeed. In other words, Hida Takahito is trying to succeed by abandoning the idea of becoming successful. He thinks of success as something separate from himself. Well, that's pretty hard for amateurs. Ordinary people care more about being successful than succeeding. They don't like being called failures, even when they keep failing all the time. That's how people are in general. But Hida Takahito is different. He doesn't care about being seen as a hero or put on a pedestal. He just goes after his objective."

"I...don't get it," said the girl, confused by Migiri's rant. Migiri only retorted, "That's your problem, now isn't it? Don't go shoving it off on me!"
She had absolutely no intention of playing nice.

“This is your own father we’re talking about, so you should be thinking about these things as a matter of course. You’re the daughter of a genius; it can’t be that hard.”

“About my father?”

“You could see this as a fairy tale about your father’s unusual attitude, but at the same time it’s a sad little story of how not even your father can be successful if he wants to achieve his goals. Is that supposed to be consolation for the amateurs?” said Migiri. She spoke cruelly and viciously, with a malevolent smile.

“In this world, there’s an incredible genius who’s inhumanly amazing and unbelievably smart, but not one even person who’s successful. Not a single person. What am I supposed to say to that? I’d laugh, but I’m probably the only one who could do that. It’s like the world itself rejects success.”

“What about you?” asked the girl. It was the first time she went on the offensive against Migiri, so to speak, but her voice was still so faint that it was less than a whisper.

“What was that? I can’t hear you. Speak up!”

“I said, ‘What about you?’ You’re not successful?”

“Course I’m not successful. I went and got kidnapped, and now here I am locked up and chained. You can’t spin that into anything but failure. Now that I think about it, I’ve been failing my entire life. I’ve never succeeded at a single thing. I married the wrong man, and I failed just by getting born in the first place.”

“Then how…”

‘How’. Perhaps the girl wanted to ask ‘How can you smile so happily?’ She may have even voiced her question, but if so she spoke too softly for Migiri, or even herself, to hear.

“You see, the reason I’m smiling is,” said Migiri without being prompted, “because failing is so fun. Losing and getting defeated is just too fun. Failure is what makes me happy. I’m so happy I got locked up.”

“Failure makes you happy?”

The girl was plainly baffled about Migiri’s perplexing worldview. In response, Migiri’s smile grew deeper and deeper.

“In that sense, you could say I’m successful. I’m failing in the right way. But in the end that’s still failure, and I only have some flimsy sophistry to back up an opinion

that no one else would agree with. It's only some self-depreciation, but that's about the third best way to succeed."

"Third best?"

"In other words, it's the worst."

"Worst..."

After pondering over those words for a moment, the girl asked, "Then...then what's the best?"

"Huh?"

"What's the best way to succeed?"

"Oh, that?"

Apparently, Migiri had not anticipated the girl's completely natural question, and was somewhat surprised. She hemmed and hawed with her arms crossed and head tilted, as if she had never considered the question before.

"It's hard to put it into words—I mean, a little kid like you probably wouldn't get it in the first place. But you are that genius's daughter after all, so you'll get at least some of it. So, you want to know the best, the absolute best way to succeed, do you? Heh, to be honest that genius's second best way and my third best way are only variations of the best way. There aren't really any second best or third best ways to succeed, there's just one single way."

"Don't drag it out, just tell me."

"I'm not dragging it out! No wait, maybe I am dragging it out. I do think it's a drag for me to just tell you the answer. People have been searching for a way to succeed for ages, you know. Alright, alright, stop giving me that look already, I'll tell you. See, I'm kind. Everyone back home says I'm a kind mother, you know? My kids adore me.

"Hm."

"What, you don't believe me? I'm not telling you anymore," snapped Migiri, but in the next moment she regained her malevolent smile.

“The only way to succeed is to think of success and happiness as separate,” she said. She proclaimed it as if it were a natural truth.

“Separate success and happiness?”

“That’s right. You cut them apart. The only way to succeed is to cleave them all the way apart, like you’re taking a sword to it,” she asserted decisively.

Her malevolent smile grew ever more malevolent.

“Though that’s also the best way to never be happy. Which is why people have to give up on succeeding if they want to be happy. *That’s the only way to become happy. It’s the same thing as succeeding through repeated failure or defining unhappiness as success,*” said Migiri.

“Just think about it. Do you know how many people spend their lives worrying over how to be happy? Just how much suffering the desire to be happy has brought humanity? Think about it. They should all realize the fact that anyone can save themselves by giving up on happiness. Who decided that pleasure is better than suffering? Who went and decided that joy is better than rage, that mirth is better than grief? Sure, maybe they *are* better. But just because something’s better, it doesn’t mean you absolutely have to pursue it, does it? They should all think long and hard about how unhappy it is to have an obligation to be happy. Anyone can succeed just by giving up on happiness.”

“Are you saying,” the girl asked after knitting her brows in thought, “that succeeding and being happy are different things?”

“That’s right.”

“They’re completely different. They have nothing in common,” she again asserted, forcefully and decisively.

“Everybody lumps them together, which is why they can’t succeed *or* be happy.”

“They can’t succeed *or* be happy...”

“You have to pick one or the other. You can succeed or be happy, but not both. You know what they say: you can’t have your cake and eat it too. *If you want to be happy, then give up on succeeding. If you want to succeed, then forget about being happy,*” she said.

“Biyori-gou, that clockwork doll in Lake Fuyou in Edo, isn’t trying to be happy, now is it? It’s only trying to guard Lake Fuyou, and it’s succeeding at that.”

“I don’t know what Biyori-gou is.”

“That so? Well, now you do. In the end, success isn’t something you can achieve on purpose. So little lady, if at some point in the future, in the distant future, you have an objective to accomplish, you’d better abandon happiness if you want to succeed. Don’t even think about finding happiness with others. Happiness is something you can find with other people, but success is something you can only find on your own.”

“Could you not brainwash my daughter?”

A figure appeared, interrupting the conversation between the two. It was the lord of Hida Castle and Oushuu, the mastermind of the rebellion, Hida Takahito.

“Hey, go play somewhere else. What are you doing here, anyways? That woman is infamous for having the worst personality in the world. Just talking to her is bad for you. Even I’d rather not have taken her as a hostage.”

After hearing what he said, after hearing what her father told her, the girl said, “Okay!” and pattered away.

Although she was in Meikyuu Castle, and might lose her way after a single misstep and perhaps even starve to death, she had spent her entire life there and would not become completely lost. Perhaps that was why Takahito was not concerned. Instead of watching her depart, he turned to Migiri.

“Lovely daughter you’ve got. It’s the first time I’ve met her. I wish my daughter Nanami could learn from her. No wait, Nanami’s already got this incredibly nasty personality. Wonder where she gets it.”

“Who else could it be but you?”

“It’s got to be her father.”

“Mutsue is...”

Takahito paused in the middle of speaking. It was exceptionally rare of him to do so. It was a sign of how uneasy he was around Migiri. When he said that he would rather not have taken her as a hostage, he was simply speaking the truth.

“What’s up with you? Nobody likes me. Not that I mind. Actually, if anything I’d rather be disliked than liked.”

“I have trouble understanding your tastes.”

“Even when you say you have trouble with something, you’ve still got it figured out, you genius. We’re the same kind of people.”

“I hope not.”

“Don’t worry about her. For kids her age, everything goes in one ear and out the other. I mean, I didn’t even tell her my name. She probably won’t care about some random prisoner’s gibberish.”

“She’s my daughter, so even if she doesn’t remember, it might stay in the corner of her mind and come back to haunt her on her deathbed. My genius is mine alone, but she can’t escape my influence.”

“Then it’s a question of whether your influence or my influence will win out. And?” asked Migiri, who despite being confined in a cell, showed no sign of hesitation towards the man who had imprisoned her. “How’s that idiot Mutsue doing? Is he here to rescue me yet?”

“Personally, I hope he gets here soon. I wish he’d take you back as quickly as possible, but unfortunately he has a big obstacle up ahead. Though according to the latest reports, he’s gotten past Sabi Kokken,” said Takahito, now smiling malevolently himself. “I wonder if he can overcome Shin’ou Issouryuu in Tendou, Dewa.”

“Shin’ou Issouryuu?” Migiri was surprised. “That’s weird. That school isn’t on your side, is it? In the first place, I don’t think they would take part in a war when they’re a life-saving sword style.”

“Sure, Nokogiri isn’t on my side. But that doesn’t mean they’re on the shogunate’s side. It’s no big deal, there’s plenty of ways to get a pacifist to fight.”

A battle between a life-saving sword and a death-dealing sword, between Shin’ou Issouryuu and Kyotouryuu, between Outou Nokogiri and Kyotou Yasuri, one that was brought about by Hida Takahito and one preceding the battle between the twelfth Kiguchi Zanki and Yasuri Shichika by twenty years, was soon to begin.

Translation Notes

¹Miyagi prefecture (宮城県) and Meikyuu Castle (迷宮城) share two characters.

Name Meanings

Meikyuu Castle(迷宮城)- Maze Castle

Biyori-gou(日和)- Biyori means good weather and gou means model/make

Fuyou Lake(不要湖)- unneeded lake

Kyotou Yasuri – Chapter 9

The reputation of Shin'ou Issouryuu, a life-saving sword style based in the shogi town of Tendou had long past faded by this stage of the rebellion. Without outside influence, Shin'ou Issouryuu, whose philosophy on swords and swordsmanship were the antithesis to Kyotouryuu's, would have never encountered Kyotouryuu, even if both schools had continued on for generations. It was a matter of historical fact that Shin'ou Issouryuu had not participated in the rebellion, that the pacifistic school had not struck a single blow in the bloody conflict, that it had remained a neutral party. In a manner opposite to, or rather identical to, how Kyotouryuu became the hero of the rebellion, Shin'ou Issouryuu became known as the neutral bystander of the rebellion. The reality was nearly the same as the historical fact. However, there was one occasion, one single occasion lasting only a moment, when Kyotouryuu and Shin'ou Issouryuu briefly encountered, met, and confronted each other. It happened once, and was brought about by outside influence.

“Hello there, Kiguchi. There's something I'd like to ask of you. Would you mind listening? Aha, oh, you needn't be so cold, it's nothing bad. After all, I've never told a lie in my life.

“To get straight to the point, in a little while I plan to start this ridiculous rebellion that will send the entire country into turmoil. Lots and lots of people will die. The entire country will be laid to waste and all sorts of bonds be torn apart; it'll be a war among wars. It won't quite be a repeat of the Sengoku Period, but ideally I'd like to get close to that. How should I put it—it won't be worth it unless I go all the way. To use a simple analogy, it's like clearing land. You won't get good soil unless you take a hoe to the ground and churn it up, will you? You won't be able to grow good vegetables, now will you?

“Now then, I'm sure this is nothing but bad news to you, Kiguchi. Kiguchi, Kiguchi, Kiguchi. The eleventh head of Shin'ou Issouryuu, Kiguchi Zanki. Kiguchi Zanki the pacifist and peace dove. I'm fully aware of your views; there's no need for you to tell me. I have no intention of forcing you into the war. None at all. See, not even *this* little. There's no way I would want that. There would be no point in forcing you to join the war, especially considering who you are. I greatly respect your school's skill with the sword, but I'm just as well aware that forcing your life-saving sword style into the war would only backfire. So I won't waste my time preaching my ideals at you. The ideals of a young man like myself are worth nothing to you. Oh, this isn't humility or modesty, I know very well what you think of me. You're surprised by my mere existence. So I'll skip over the details and offer you a suggestion, one single suggestion. It's exactly what you're thinking of.

“In the rebellion I plan to start, I'll be absolutely massacring people. But if just once you join the war of your own volition, of your own free will and not because I want you to, this massive number of deaths will more than halve and the length of the war will be dramatically reduced. This is a definite fact.

“Proof? I haven’t got anything of the sort. In this age, it would be more suspicious if I did have proof. In the first place, there’s no proof that I’m about to start a war, and from your point of view I might as well be delusional. As such, you needn’t promise me anything, and I don’t mind if you forget our talk right away. But I do believe that one day you’ll remember my proposal. I believe that one day you’ll remember my baseless suggestion, and decide what it is you can do as a single pacifist, a practitioner of a life-saving sword, and a first-rate swordsman. How can you bring peace to the world as peacefully, quietly, and quickly as you can? Now then, this question is so easy you don’t even have to think about it.

“It’s like taking an exam with the answer key in front of you. All you have to do is imagine the world you want your dear granddaughter to live in.”

And so the stage was set. The stage was set for an encounter between Shin’ou Issouryuu and Kyotouryuu. The stage was set for a death match between the 11th head of Shin’ou Issouryuu, Kiguchi Zanki, and the 6th head of Kyotouryuu, Yasuri Mutsue. It was all according to his script.

“I’d really appreciate it if you didn’t stand in my way,” was the first thing that Yasuri Mutsue said to the wizened old man blocking her path.

“Even I feel guilty about hurting the elderly, you know? And it would be even worse if I killed you—it might ruin the reputation of the celebrity of the day, Kyotouryuu.”

“How odd,” said the old man in response, “that Kyotouryuu, whose central tenet is to kill indiscriminate of age or gender, would concern itself with the elderly. I can only see this as some kind of joke.”

“I could say the same,” Mutsue responded with a crooked and cynical smile, then pointed at the old man.

“I’m not just surprised, I’m straight-up shocked that the pacifist and antiwar Shin’ou Issouryuu, and its head at that, would take part in this ridiculous bloodbath, in Hida Takahito’s rebellion that’s been upending the peace of this country.”

The withered old man, the eleventh head of Shin’ou Issouryuu, Kiguchi Zanki only smiled craftily in response.

As soon as she saw his smile, Mutsue thought, *Ah. This is bad. This isn’t the right role for me. It’s probably too heavy for me.*

Mutsue was intimidated by a man well over seventy. He was only standing in her way. She should have been entirely capable of walking around him or turning back, but she felt immobile, as if she were rooted to the ground. No, instead of being rooted, it was as if swords were pinning her to the ground. It was absurd. It was absurd that she honestly would have preferred to fight Sabi Kokken. Kiguchi was still a considerable distance away, and the sword at his waist was not even metal, its wooden grain was clearly distinguishable.

A wooden sword, huh. Though I don’t even wield a sword, wooden or not, so I can’t mock him for that. Even a wooden sword can incapacitate someone in one blow, so

it's not that different from a real sword. For someone who wields it as a life-saving sword, at least.

“What’s the matter, child? Won’t you be going past me?” said Kiguchi, in provocation. No, he was not provoking Mutsue, but attempting to render her further immobile. They were weighted words.

“Kyotouryuu is renowned as a mighty force equal to an army, is it not? They’re all calling you a hero. You may have been right when you called yourself a celebrity. I doubt a hero such as yourself would want to tell your grandchildren about being held up by an old man. You shouldn’t have any trouble defeating a single pacifist. I am merely standing here.”

Yasuri Mutsue knew how difficult it was to merely stand there. That was why she could not move.

“Hero, huh? That word sounds pretty hollow with you around, even for Kyotouryuu. I might be an ignorant fool who knows of nothing but swords, but even I’ve heard of how skilled the eighth head of Shin’ou Issouryuu with a sword.”

“I am the eleventh. The reputation of the eighth is simply the former glory of Shin’ou Issouryuu. As of now, it is a school without even a proper successor, one on the verge of extinction.”

“I could say the same,” said Yasuri Mutsue, and sighed in exaggerated resignation as she entered a stance.

Mutsue, Yasuri Mutsue, charged forth. Not just Yasuri Mutsue, but multiple Yasuri Mutsue—six Yasuri Mutsue charged forth.

“Kyotouryuu: Dandelion!”

“Kyotouryuu: Lily!”

“Kyotouryuu: Poppy!”

“Kyotouryuu: Gingko!”

“Kyotouryuu: Camellia!”

“Kyotouryuu: Vetch!”

They charged in from six different directions and six different sides—the pale woman, the spotted dog, the millenarian child, the rotund man, the muscled man, the spindly man each charged forth and unleashed their Kyotouryuu in the manner of quick-draw.

“So this is the famous Kyotouryuu.”

Kiguchi Zanki, the eleventh Kiguchi Zanki laughed at the sight. He laughed and laughed.

“How tepid.”

In the next instant, the six Yasuri Mutsues’ fields of sight swam. The heavens and earth, the sky and ground whirled. The fact that all six of their Kyotouryuu techniques had been deflected by a single swing of his wooden sword, and that they been thrown into the air, was only something they understood well after being tossed up up, blown away, and thrown onto the ground.

“ ... ”

At a loss for words, she immediately regained her footing, but Kiguchi made no attempt to pursue her, and only stood in place without moving. As a matter of fact, even when he blocked her attack, he had not moved his feet. He had blocked Mutsue's six techniques, her six branches, while only moving his upper body.

“What strange martial arts. Or is that swordsmanship? For a moment, I thought there were seven of you.”

“It was six,” said Mutsue as she fell into a different stance. It was Kyotouryuu's seventh stance, Iris. She supposed that Kiguchi refused to move his legs, and decided to use her full range of movement. It was not spite nor pride, but possibly confidence or her principles that brought her to the decision. If her opponent chose not to use all of his strength, then she would simply take full advantage of that.

“Hmph. So you do have some will to fight, Kyotouryuu.”

“I've had it since the start.”

“Have no fear. I shan't kill you. Shin'ou Issouryuu is a life-saving sword, after all. I am simply standing here.”

“This is just like some kind of Badger Formation.”¹

Mutsue tried to use her opponent's home of Tendou, the shogi village, to make a remark about shogi—but she had not been trained in the game, and could not be sure if her simile was appropriate.

Migiri would probably know, she thought. While she had a terrible personality, Migiri had received a well-rounded education, and should at least know the basics of shogi. She might even be playing a game with Hida Takahito in Meikyuu Castle. It was a plausible conjecture, but even so it was an unbearable conjecture. She glared harshly at Kiguchi, venting her anger out at him.

“What is it? Your eyes look like those of a wild bear.”

“You said something about a life-saving sword, didn't you?”

“I did. And I said that I shan't kill you. “

“Then why are you siding with Hida Takahito? He's a mass murderer. Even you must have heard of how many people he's killed in this war. The cause and source of all of all the dead, of the killed, of all this bloodshed and carnage, these lost lives, is none other than Hida Takahito. Won't allying with him tarnish your school?”

“Unfortunately,” Kiguchi calmly responded without pause to Mutsue's attempt at provocation. “We do not share that school of thought. We see no purpose in finding the cause or source of massacres. The only time to find a cause or source is in one-sided killings. You say that Hida Takahito is a mass murderer, yet why are your hands stained in blood?”

“If I told you it was self defense,” said Mutsue with a bitter laugh, “you wouldn't believe me, would you?”

“I do think you have some nerve to say that.”

“It's kill or be killed. Wouldn't you say that killing someone before they can kill you is a kind of self defense?”

“Save your excuses for a sage. We are swordsmen. We can only converse through our swords,” said Kiguchi as he gripped the wooden sword at his waist. It was a passive

stance. Perhaps if Mutsue did not lay her hands, her sword, on him and only held his stance, Kiguchi too would not move. In fact, that was quite likely. In other words, his goal was...

“Are you here to stall me?”

Just like the Maniwa Poison Squad, those three ninja who called now themselves part of the Takahito Elite Four; or even like the mysterious denying girl that appeared in the desert—even as she held the seventh stance, Iris, the sensation of swords pinning her to the ground was no illusion. Was the old man only standing there to stall for time? If so, just how many hours, how many days, years, and decades, had they been fixed to the spot?

“No,” said Kiguchi, slowly shaking his head. “All that I want is a world where my granddaughter might have a peaceful life playing shogi.”

As Yasuri Mutsue confronted Kiguchi Zanki in Dewa and was being stopped in his six sets of tracks, Hida Takahito had left Meikyuu Castle for a second time. He had slipped past Head and went on his own to meet a certain person. It did not bear mentioning that this person was Higaki Rinne the sage, wielder of Seitou Hakari.

At last, Takahito’s plan to falsify the history of Japan approached its climax.

Translation Notes

¹In other words, an anaguma castle, a specific defensive formation in shogi where you move your king to the corner and protect it with two layers of your pieces. It’s commonly used in professional games.

Name Meanings

Kiguchi Zanki

Ki(汽)- steam

guchi(口)- mouth, a common character in surnames

Zanki(慚愧)- shame

Shin’ou Issouryuu(心王一鞘流)- Heart king one sheath style. (I’m not sure what it means)

Kyotou Yasuri – Chapter 10

“Oh? What’s this? That’s weird. I’m here to see Higaki Rinne the sage¹, so who’s this creepy, gangly guy covered in scars?”

“Ukeke. That’s no way to talk about someone, Hida Takahito, mastermind of the rebellion. Takahito, you’re being rude to me and rude to yourself. After all, I’m you right now.”

“You’re me? Oh, yeah, that’s how it goes. That’s right. That’s what’s going on. You’re Higaki Rinne the sage, and you look different to different people. You’re a wishy-washy flip-flopper who’s impossible to make sense of—or something like that.”

“That’s pretty rude, too, but you should keep in mind that what you’re saying applies just as well to yourself. Actually, this is a first for me, too. It’s quite confusing. You see, I’m basically a mirror that reflects whoever a person is uncomfortable with. So when people talk to me, they’re confronting their own weaknesses. But here you are looking at yourself. Don’t you think it’s strange? Now I’m just a regular mirror! It’s just bizarre.”

“Really? I don’t think it’s anything out of the ordinary.”

“Oh? I never imagined you of all people would be talking about what’s ordinary.”

“I mean, there’s nobody I’m uncomfortable with. There’s nothing and nobody in the whole world that I’m afraid of. If I had to pick something, I’d say I’m afraid of steamed buns.”

“Oh? Is that so?”

“And if I really had to say, I’m afraid of myself for that. I’m afraid of myself since I can’t see myself. How about that, Higaki Rinne the sage? Aren’t you afraid of yourself, too?”

“Ukeke! That’s really something. Are you trying to guess who I’m uncomfortable with? That’s not such a good idea. See, I’ve obtained enlightenment and become a sage. I’m not afraid of anything in the world.”

“Hm... but I have to wonder if you even belong to this world.”

“Eh?”

“Something that feels off about reality. It isn’t really realistic, or rather, it seems fictional. I just can’t come to terms with it. You can’t come to terms with it either, can you? It’s just not humanly possible for me to be accept it. It can’t be humanly possible for you to accept it either, can it?”

“How intriguing. I’m not actually human, but do go on.”

“Oh, there’s no point in explaining the whole thing to a sage. It’s just that it’s all too suspicious. Like you, for example. It feels fake to be able to meet something as nonsensical as a sage in person. It feels contrived, and the more you think about it the less it makes sense. And then there’s Mutsue’s Kyotouryuu. The idea of a swordless sword school surpassing all other sword schools is just absurdly inconsistent. And by consistency here, I mean the kind of consistency a story has. It’s like it’s all out of a book.”

“Since when was this?”

“Huh?”

“Since when have you been thinking that? It must have been hard to come up with such an egotistical idea.”

“Well now, ever since I could remember, something felt off. There were little things about everybody including myself that kept bugging me. It made me want to find fault with the entire world. I couldn’t help but wonder how everyone else got by without thinking about it.”

“Ukekeke! Well, you know, not everyone’s a genius like you.”

“That’s true, I am a genius.”

“C’mon, how about a little humility?”

“Humility is just a waste of time. Society is kinder to people like me when we’re arrogant.”

“Society, you say?”

“That’s right. This artificial society. A society dancing on strings in a world that runs to a script. And it’s the fate of geniuses like me to stick out in this kind of society.”

“I wouldn’t exactly call that fate.”

“Hm?”

“Never mind. I’m a sage who’s reached enlightenment, but all that really means is that I’ve been alive for a long time. So there’s nothing I can teach a genius like you. Sorry to tell you that after you took the time to visit me. Still, there is something I can tell you because I’ve been alive for a long time. I have a hunch about who wrote the script.”

“A hunch?”

“You do too, don’t you? Isn’t that why you went out of your way to bring up Kyotouryuu as an example? A certain family that the legendary swordsmith Shikizaki Kiki belongs to are what you’d call the authors of this world. Without them, neither you nor I would have been born into this world.”

“Been born? Hold on a minute. I won’t deny that I’ve noticed that history has been influenced by a certain family, or rather, by a legendary swordsmith who’s forged a thousand swords; but even if that’s why you were born, that shouldn’t be why I was born.”

“That’s not quite true. Even if you would have still been born, you wouldn’t have your peculiarities without Seitou Hakari.”

“Seitou?”

“That’s the truest sword in the world. It’s more or less mine, but it’s hidden in Hida Castle, where you were born and raised, so it should have had an effect on you.”

“I’m not sure I follow—are you saying that I’m doing what I’m doing because of the influence of this sword Seitou?”

“Ukeke. Yeah, that’s about right. I can’t guarantee it though. This is only how I’d imagine it. And I can’t even guess at why Shikizaki Kiki would entrust a Completed Deviant Blade to me. He didn’t even live that long, but it’s like he was enlightened from the start. That’s what it seemed like, anyways.”

“Anyone would be short-lived compared to you.”

“Uke, uke, ukeke. But you know, I think Shikizaki Kiki might have predicted this would happen. Maybe he gave me Seitou so that you would be born.”

“So that I would be born?”

“Born to be the person you are, maybe. Ukeke! In other words, you’re a mechanism of history. The rebellion you’re fighting for the sake of history might just be another part of Shikizaki Kiki’s plans. Doesn’t that make everything feel pointless? Supposing your rebellion against a scripted world was all a part of the script.”

“So then, what’s the point?”

“Hm?”

“Why did these authors of history have me start a rebellion? Don’t tell me it’s to add depth to the story. That can’t be the reason.”

“Well, now. I’m afraid that’s beyond the scope of a one-off character like me.”

“So much for being a sage.”

“I mean, I might be a sage, but that’s only a title someone else gave me. It wasn’t Shikizaki Kiki, but his ancestor from way back. But Shikizaki Kiki was definitely the one who gave me Seitou Hakari.”

“I get this feeling that you know more than you’re letting on. You’re only telling me what you want me to know.”

“You’re right. But just because you know that, it doesn’t mean I’ll tell you the whole truth. After all, I’m *you* right now.”

“You’re me. I’m you.”

“Exactly. I have the same awful personality that you fear and hate. I said so at the start, didn’t I?”

“That you did. Well, I already knew that. Everyone says I have an awful personality. I’m not the kind of guy that people want to be friends with.”

“So what, you’ve got plenty of people following you anyways. You’re charismatic enough to make up for your awful personality and character flaws. Good for you.”

“That doesn’t sound like much of a compliment.”

“That’s because it’s not one.”

“How about we get back on topic? Why did Shikizaki Kiki and his family give me this nonsensical role as a rebel and the greatest laughingstock in history?”

“That’s not necessarily true. I’m just saying it’s a possibility.”

“When people like me bring up possibilities, they’re nearly always talking about the truth. There are almost no exceptions.”

“Ukeke. But that’s only another possibility! But that aside, you sound pretty pessimistic, Hida Takahito. The war is still raging on, and you’re already talking about being the greatest laughingstock in history—it’s like you’re planning for failure.”

“I *am* going to fail.”

“Hm?”

“Though that possibility isn’t easy for me to talk about. To be frank, I can clearly see that this rebellion will fail. In other words, I have absolutely no possibility of success. There’s no path leading anywhere. My actions and our struggle are cut off from all possible futures.”

“Futures, huh?”

“What about it?”

“I was just thinking that Shikizaki Kiki used to talk about that stuff a lot. He talked about stuff like the future and history all the time. You do too, don’t you?”

“Yeah, I do. Everyone does. There’s nothing unusual about that. The future, history, hopes, dreams, and all that. Not that I’ve got the faintest bit of either hopes or dreams.”

“Like I said, don’t be so pessimistic. You might actually win! The experts are all saying that Shogun Yanari’s Owari shogunate isn’t in good shape.”

“My enemy isn’t the Owari shogunate. And it isn’t Shogun Yanari.”

“Oh? Then who *is* your enemy?”

“Shikizaki... no, it’d have to be Mutsue.”

“Yasuri Mutsue, that’d be Kyotouryuu’s fruitless flower.”

“You see, I had all these plans to win Mutsue over to my side, but none of them worked out. It’s got to be Migiri’s fault. His wielder, Migiri, is just too dangerous. She’s definitely this generation’s fruitless flower.”

“The Tetsubi family, too. Though they don’t seem to have much to do with Shikizaki Kiki’s family. No, actually, there’s no one alive who isn’t a part of their script.”

“That’s right. That’s why I started a rebellion: to make the world more free. To bring change to a predetermined world. But since I *am* a genius, I’m more or less aware that doing so has absolutely no meaning.”

“Hm, what do you mean by that? You’re not talking about how the rebellion will fail?”

“I’m not. But my rebellion will definitely fail. I just don’t know how it’ll fail yet, which makes things exciting. I mean that even if I succeed, my success will be meaningless.”

“‘Meaningless.’ Just what do you mean by that?”

“I mean just like how the future and history are illusions, and hopes and dreams are illusions, the concept of freedom is only an illusion. This isn’t even a possibility, it’s the plain truth. After all, there’s no one in this world who lives freely and spends their days freely.”

“I don’t know about that. Aren’t there plenty of fools doing as they please?”

“They’ve only been told what they want. They’re only pretending to be free, and they have no desires of their own. Even if Shikizaki Kiki’s family hadn’t written their script, everyone in the world would still become the people they are by listening to what other people say. So you could say that all my work will be for nothing. It’s only the difference between one ruling over all and all ruling over all.”

“Well, I think that’s a pretty big difference. Anyways, maybe the way you keep bothering yourself with things you don’t even need to think about is why you were made to act as a restoration mechanism of history.”

“What was that? A restoration mechanism of history?”

“Whoops! That’s just my personal opinion, so don’t take it too seriously. Ukeke! It’s only the opinion of a sage, you don’t need to pay any attention to it.”

“That’s fine. Just tell me what you mean by a restoration mechanism of history.”

“I mean it literally, as a reason why the authors of history might have had you start a rebellion. I think you were set up to redirect the course of history after it flowed off in a unexpected direction, which would make you an artificial watershed.”

“Watershed?”

“From what I can tell there was a divergence, or rather a discrepancy that popped up around the time of Shogun Kyuu. And so even the rebellion you decided to start was a part of Shikizaki Kiki’s plans all along. This is all still just a possibility, though. How about that? Doesn’t it make everything you did feel—”

“No, it doesn’t.”

“Oh?”

“Even before you told me that, I was only doing what I was because I had no other choice. And I’ll probably fail, but even if I fail, that won’t be the end of it.”

“Oh? Is that so?”

“Yeah, it is. That goes without saying.”

“Anyways, Hida Takahito, why did you come to see me in the first place? This whole time I was thinking that you wanted to know if your actions, and your rebellion, were scripted. I thought you came here to confirm that.”

“No, that’s not why. I have a request for after I’ve failed.”

“A request? From you? To me?”

“From me to you. In other words, from me to myself. My request is about my daughter.”

And so Hida Takahito made preparations for the future that would follow in twenty years and for the history of twenty years later. He did not make these preparations as a strategist. In a manner of speaking, he was a character acting on his own accord. It was an action that nobody who knew him had predicted and one that would greatly change history. And for Hida Takahito, it was his final revolt against history, after which the rebellion dramatically lost its momentum. At last, the end had arrived.

Translation Notes

¹Specifically, a xian, an immortal being in Taoism. Xian are people who have reached enlightenment. They live outside of society and have various supernatural abilities like flight.

Name Meanings

Higaki Rinne

Higa(彼我)- self and others.

ki(木)- tree, a common character in surnames.

Rinne(輪廻)- samsara (the cycle of reincarnation).

Shikizaki Kiki

Shiki(四季)- four seasons.

zaki(崎)- peninsula, a common character in surnames.

Kiki(記紀)- An abbreviation for the Kojiki and Nihon Shoki, the two oldest existing written accounts of Japanese history.

Ki(記)- record.

ki(紀)- period, era.

Kyotou Yasuri – Chapter 11

To say that the day arrived suddenly would be a misstatement. In the future, Yasuri Mutsue's assault on Meikyuu Castle and his following assassination of Hida Takahito would commonly be described as an event that came like a bolt in the blue, but as previously stated, it was in actuality a cumulation of meticulous plans made by multiple parties, refined through various exchanges—as such, even to the end nothing about it was abrupt or sudden.

It then followed that Hida Takahito, who on that day was not at the front lines as usual but in the keep of Meikyuu Castle, enjoying a bottle of sake, knew what would happen to himself on that day. He did not predict it, but knew it. That may have been why he had the bottle.

“It's not like I thought I could get through this without dying, but it feels different now that it's about to happen. I guess I just can't get by without a drink,” muttered the lord of Oushuu, Hida Takahito.

However, at the time there had been no disturbance to the castle. At the very least, he had received no reports of the sort. But he understood. Because he possessed the finest wits in the world, he understood. He had enough forewarning.

“Oh man. I knew it was coming, but still, why'd this have to happen? I really don't want to die. And I especially don't want to get killed.”

“Then why not flee?” said a voice, interrupting his grumbling. It was a woman who had spoken. Despite her gorgeous looks, she wore an oddly austere kimono. The garment was so coarse it seemed more like a piece of cloth than a kimono.

“Oh, if it isn't you, Yuru.”

“Yes, it is I, Yuru.”

“My dear wife, Yuru.”

You don't have to tell me who I am, I wouldn't forget my place.”

“Oh? I barely ever see you, so I thought you might have went off somewhere.”

“You make it sound like you wish I did. You're hurting my feelings,” she said as she walked over and sat by Takahito's side. She gracefully plucked the sake bottle from his grasp and held it to her lips.

“I never knew you were so bold.”

“I love sake.”

“Oh, really? That's news to me.”

“So there's something even a famous genius like you doesn't know.”

“Being a genius isn't the same thing as being knowledgeable.”

“But shouldn't you at least know about your wife?”

“I can't argue with that.”

“And your daughter.”

“I can't argue with that.”

Haha,” laughed Takahito weakly. He seemed not to mind the chiding.

“So what’s my daughter doing?”

“She’s playing without a care in the world. In the basement with Migiri, that is.”

“So Migiri’s become Princess Yousha’s playmate.”

“After all’s said and done, she *is* a mother.”

“Oh yeah. She does have a daughter and a son, doesn’t she? With the way she looks, even a genius like me would forget.”

“It isn’t as if you look like a parent either.”

“Well, yeah. I don’t act like one at all. My daughter might even think I’m just some mysterious old guy lurking in the castle.”

“That’s true.”

“C’mon, you should have denied that one.”

“Just like you, I’ve never told a lie. Either way, denial is that girl’s specialty.”

Takahito slumped his shoulders, then attempted and failed to take back his bottle.

Yuru beamed, and Takahito slumped even deeper.

“So?”

“Hm? What is it?”

“Why don’t you flee?”

“Where would I go?”

“You could go anywhere you wanted. If you only cared about saving yourself, that is.”

“C’mon, do I look that cold-blooded? Do I look scheming enough to abandon everybody who’s been fighting for me and only save my own skin?”

“You do indeed.”

“Oh, yeah, I guess you’re right. I’m not that nice of a person. And everyone says that I have the most awful personality.”

“It’s a shame you can’t pass that off as a misunderstanding.”

“Not really. I definitely am a schemer.”

“So then why are you not fleeing?”

“Hm... I’m not sure how to put it. I don’t even know if you would get it...”

“That’s a rude thing to say to your dear wife.”

“But it’s true. You might not get it. But since you asked, I’ll tell you. You’re my dear wife after all.”

“What empty words.”

“It’s because when I die and my rebellion fails, this story will finally end. Or maybe it’ll start,” said Takahito.

His expression was in a way serene. He had in fact run out of options and could do nothing but wait, so he had no choice but to accept the outcome. And yet he himself did not recognize that reality.

“There was so much that I wanted to do. I had all these opportunities,” he said, in a tone that was not serene but regretful.

“Opportunities?”

“Or at least it feels like it. I don’t mean much by it. Either way, my actions were restricted from the start by a script that’s already been written.”

“Script? What a strange idea. Even a man like you has already had his actions decided for him? All this time I had been assuming that you would be the sort of person writing the scripts,” said Yuru. Despite her teasing tone, she appeared to be serious. Her expression was the very image of sincerity.

“Yeah, I guess,” replied Takahito. His expression was not particularly serious. “I’ve had all my actions decided for me.”

“But you know, I’m a lousy actor. Even if I try and follow the script to the letter, I still can’t do exactly what the writer wants. I hope my bad acting will leave a mark on the world.”

“You want your bad acting to be passed down?”

“Yeah, though that might not be such a good idea. But still, traditions are the sort of thing that get passed down whether you like it or not. It’s like how Princess Yousha is a lot like you.”

“She takes after you more.”

“Oh?”

“She doesn’t think of you as a mysterious old man in the least. She respects you as her father.”

“Really?”

“She might not be very clever, but she still thinks of herself as your daughter. She’s the daughter of the Hida Takahito, lord of Oushuu.”

“Don’t you mean mean the daughter of Hida Takahito, insurgent against the legitimate government? Right, I’ll turn your question back on you, Yuru.”

“What question?”

“Why don’t you flee?” said Takahito. His expression was once again, not serious.

“When I said I thought you might not be in the castle anymore, I wasn’t joking. You could run away with Princess Yousha, and maybe Migiri too. I can see the end coming, so you can too, right? There’s no point in going down with a sinking ship. Why are you here drinking when you could be running away? You might still make it,” he said. He sounded as if he was only wondering. But given who he was, he likely had a good idea of what she would say. Perhaps he chose to ask the question because he wanted to hear her answer from her lips.

“I thought I told you that I wouldn’t forget my place. Even on the verge of death,” replied Yuru, as she took a drink of sake.

“I am your wife. I won’t leave you behind,” she answered. “Even if I’ll die because of you, I forgive you.”

“I see. That’d be love, then.”

“Yes. That’s love.”

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome. And Princess Yousha is your daughter. Though I’m sure she hasn’t the faintest idea of what’s happening.”

“Ah, yeah. I should probably go talk to her.”

Just as he was getting up, there was a loud sound from outside the castle. Or rather, the sound had already encroached into the castle.

“So you’re here, Mutsue. You’re as unrefined as ever,” said Takahito, gleefully. Yuru, who rarely saw him so happy, looked on in delight.

Having been hindered by Kiguchi Zanki for a considerable amount of time, Yasuri Mutsue judged that it would be impossible to break through or even slip past Zanki, and withdrew for a moment. Even after withdrawing, he had not forgotten the objective that Yasuri Migiri required of him as a sword. As his objective was not to defeat Zanki, withdrawing was the natural choice. He was simply a sword and had no will of his own. Zanki did not give chase. He would not go beyond what was necessary. By no means had he allied himself with Takahito. He freely chose not to pursue Mutsue.

On his way to Meikyuu Castle, Mutsue ultimately routed around the town of Tendou and the entire province of Dewa to avoid Zanki. It was an astonishingly roundabout detour. That was how much of a threat Kiguchi Zanki posed to him. Or perhaps it was that Zanki commanded such irreproachable respect as a fellow swordsman, even to Mutsue, who possessed no will of his own. It was irreproachable respect.

After being delayed by several months and having managed to make his way past various obstacles, the sixth head of Kyotouryuu, Yasuri Mutsue, arrived at Hida Castle in Oushuu. He had finally reached the starting line. He began an assault on the castle with forces numbering only six, or rather one.

“So you’ve come, Kyotouryuu,” said a strange figure, who had been waiting outside the castle gate, as if he had foreseen Mutsue’s presence at that very hour and exact place.

It was impossible to describe him as anything but strange. He lacked a head, and instead a sword sprouted from his shoulders.

“You’re Head, aren’t you? Hida Takahito’s lieutenant, Head? Oh boy. So you’re my final opponent?” said Mutsue.

“Saving the best for last, are we?”

“No. Your final opponent is none other than my lord, Takahito. I am only a checkpoint.”

“Checkpoint, huh. You’re a bit much for that, aren’t you? You’d be a match for Sabi Kokken or Kiguchi Zanki. I don’t even want to meet a ninja on the level of a Maniwa head, much less fight one.”

“So you disdain me. You could say that it’s part of my job to be disdained.”

“Won’t you let me through?”

“Who are you asking?”

“I’m asking you. Even if I don’t kill him, Hida Takahito will probably end up dead, no matter what happens with his rebellion. He fights like he doesn’t care about the consequences. The only reason he can do that is because he’s desperate and hopeless. I’m worried about the aftermath more than anything.”

“That goes without saying. My lord lives only for the present. He has no concern for the future’s history.”

“Most people are just plain terrified of those kind of destructive trailblazers.”

“That may be so.”

Although Head joined in the badmouthing even without a mouth, he showed unwavering resolve as he readied himself.

“By the way...are you the only one here?”

“Yes. I work for Takahito in the shadows. I act independently from the army.”

“Shadows, huh? So was it you who kidnapped Migiri?”

“No, that Was Right Arm ‘s doing. Takahito ‘s right arm, that is. He now guards the same Yasuri Migiri. Though he will be no checkpoint too you.”

“Hey, isn’t that a terrible thing to say about your comrade?”

“Don’t misunderstand me. Right Arm’s skills are comparable to my own. His skills are several levels above those of Left Arm, Left Leg, and Right Leg, who you have killed. However—”

“However?”

“I believe that you intend to kill Lord Takahito before rescuing Yasuri Migiri. You are, after all, a sword. As such, Right Arm will be no checkpoint to you. You will kill me, and you will go to Takahito. But you go no further. Once you meet Takahito, you will have no future,” said Head before charging forth with the sword he had for a head.

Despite what he had said, he showed no hesitation or willingness to be killed as he brought down a broad slash. Mutsue moved to defend herself.

“Ha! I don’t even have a present,” she said, and with a boom that resounded all the way to the castle keep, she unveiled a Kyotouryuu technique. She unveiled her florid technique. The technique, one unfit for an assassination, became the beginning of a flowery castle assault that would earn her the title of hero of the rebellion.

Next: the final chapter.

Name Meanings

Yuru– forgiveness, lily, slack, gentle

Kyotou Yasuri – Chapter 12

Burning. Burning. Burning.

Burning. Burning. Burning. Burning.

Burning bright red. Burning up in flames. Everything was burning. Everything was burning away. Burning up. Burning out.

The stronghold of the lord of Oushuu and mastermind of the rebellion Hida Takahito—Hida Castle, Meikyuu Castle was engulfed in bright red flames stretching to the heavens. It marked the end. It marked the end to everything. Anyone would be able to understand from seeing those flames. They may have not understood the process, the exact events or happenings, but they would be forcefully made to understand. That the war was at an end. That the war had ended. At the moment, there were a countless number of battles raging across Japan, but hereafter they would abruptly dwindle. Almost as if the rebellion had never happened, it had all ended. Ultimately, the peaceful reign of the Owari Shogunate would simply resume. The rebellion had failed, and peace would return to the world. It had ended. It had all ended.

But in the midst of this, there was one single thing that had not ended. It went without saying that it was the conversation between the mastermind of the rebellion, now nothing but a war criminal, the genius who had become the greatest laughingstock in history, Hida Takahito, and the man who had plunged him into such a state, the assassin and swordless swordsman, the sixth head of Kyotouryuu, Yasuri Mutsue. Their conversation, their final conversation, had not yet ended.

“Hey. I thought you’d be the one here to kill me, Mutsue,” Takahito said calmly as he sat the burning castle keep.

“Ya thought? What kinda nonsense is that? What, are ya lookin’ forward to being killed?” replied Mutsue, as he shrugged his shoulders. “Quit bein’ so stubborn, will ya?”

“Being stubborn? There’s no point in doing that. No wait, it only has a point. Either way, I wasn’t looking forward to it. You completely misunderstand me, Mutsue.”

“I don’t misunderstand you. And I don’t understand you. As a sword, I’m going to cut you down, to kill you. That’s all there is to it, so I don’t care who you are or what you think.”

“Is that so? By the way, since you’re here this probably goes without saying, but what happened to Head, who was guarding the castle gate?”

“I killed him. You may have only used him as a strategist, but he fought well. But still, a strategist? You would have the least need for that post.”

“That’s not true. Head was very useful. Since he’s a normal strategist, he can interpret my ridiculous ideas so that everyone else can follow them.”

“Ha! Like always, you only think of people as pawns. The strategist who’s served you for years has just met a cruel, even miserable death, and you don’t even twitch.”

“What, you wanted me to twitch? I mean, I already knew that this would happen. And he worked for me knowing what kind of guy I am. People that lead others are just inhuman like that. Mutsue, even your wielder Migiri is inhuman, isn’t she?”

“Being a leader makes you inhuman, you say? That sounds rather profound, but I can’t say that I agree. Aren’t you just pretending to be self-deprecating, when you actually think of yourself as a god, Takahito?”

“Hahaha. I’m sure Migiri thinks *she* is, at least.”

“She’s a demon, the opposite of you. Though I may be the only one that can tell the difference.”

“Haha.”

Takahito laughed. He laughed heartily, with no concern for Mutsue’s appearance, which shifted without end. In the midst of the blaze, several pillars had fallen over, and it seemed impossible to have a conversation or even breathe under the circumstances, but even so Takahito continued on in high spirits.

“Either way, Head played his role well. If it weren’t for him, Mutsue, you wouldn’t have gotten the idea to set fire to the castle because of how convoluted it is, would you?”

“Maybe.”

Mutsue nodded. He too was indifferent to the flames.

“But so what? Are ya tellin’ me ya wanted your precious castle to get burnt down?”

“I am. This is a signal fire.”

“A signal fire? What, a signal fire of rebellion?”

“No, it’s a signal fire of surrender. A white flag would have worked the same, but that just wouldn’t enough of an impact. If I’m going to lose either way, I’ll do my best to go out with a bang.”

“Do your best’, you say? How pathetic.”

“Pathetic? It might seem pathetic to you, when you can manifest six of yourself.

Heh,” said Takahito, with another laugh. His smile was now one of self-depreciation, or perhaps envy towards Mutsue.

“It really is frightening how you can manifest all of your possibilities. That your six-sword style lets you manifest every possible version of yourself. It lets you slip through the cracks of a probabilistic world. If I’ve got god delusions, then you’re just demonic. A demon of probability.”

“Oh? So you’ve seen through the secret of my swordsmanship, of Yasuri Mutsue’s swordsmanship?”

“Not at all. There’s nothing a genius like me doesn’t understand, but I haven’t seen through it. Let’s just say that I understand that some things in this world are beyond the reach of human understanding and leave it at that.”

“How noncommittal.”

“I am noncommittal. I’m noncommittal and ambivalent and just do as I please. And because of who I am, I picked a fight with the shogunate without any pretext, and now I’m about to meet a miserable and pathetic end. If I’m picking the best method of fighting out of a thousand, then you’re picking a thousand methods of fighting out of a thousand, Mutsue.”

Takahito said, and stood up. Even after standing up, he had no intention to make a stand against Mutsue. Hida Takahito, the uncommon genius, knew better than anyone else that to do so would be useless and meaningless.

“Hahaha hahahaha!”

So he simply laughed. He had returned to his usual mood, and simply laughed. He laughed so as not to bring shame to those he had sacrificed, those he would sacrifice, and his family.

“Oh man, it’s just so funny, Mutsue, this situation we’re in. You have no choice but to kill me, and I have no choice but to be killed by you. I have nothing to counter your swordsmanship, and I bet you’ve got a thousand different ways to kill me. Is this kind of gap even possible between two fellow humans?”

“What a strange thing to say. You’re not human, you’re inhuman. Leaving aside whether or not you’re a god. Whatever you say, you’ll only sound like a sore loser.”

“That’s not it. Don’t misunderstand me. I don’t have any complaints or regrets about it. It’s just funny. The fact that I can barely feel any sense of danger after being driven in a corner is unbearably funny. And the fact that history has been so thoroughly wrong is just too funny.”

“Ya always used to go on about history and all that, now that ya mention it. Well, that ain’t got nothin’ to do with me.”

“You’re wrong. You’re the one whose the most confined by history, Mutsue. No matter how many possibilities you can manifest.”

“Hm?”

“Or should I say that it’s your sword school, Kyotouryuu, that’s confined by history. Even if you manifest six or even a thousand of your possibilities, you’ll still be confined. And you don’t notice it, or even try to, which make you a fool.”

“Nngh.”

“It’s up to you if you want to be a fool, but you’d better not pass on that absurd folly to later history. For example, you’d better not give your daughter or your son a cross to bear.”

“Cross? I haven’t the faintest idea what you mean. I may have known you for a long time, but even in the very end, the very very very very end, it looks like I don’t understand Hida Takahito the genius.”

“Oh, you don’t? Well, that’s fine. I’m not trying to come to an understanding with you. Either way, I don’t dislike people like you. But I do dislike swords like you. It’s a tremendous shame that you’re my enemy. If you had become my ally, I’m sure history would have been corrected. Well, this is fine, too. At this point, nothing can be done.”

““Nothing can be done”? You always resign yourself like that. Being too smart really is a problem, isn’t it? If they call people like you geniuses, then I don’t mind being a fool.”

“Hah! Well, I think that’s another kind of resignation.”

“You needn’t worry, I won’t have my daughter or son bear a cross.”

“They, Nanami and Shichika,” said Mutsue, speaking with six voices in unison, “I will raise to be human.”

“In the calm and peaceful world that will result after I kill you.”

His six voices had become one.

“And I know that that’s impossible. Right now, you might actually be fighting for that reason, but you’ll change your mind soon enough.”

As Mutsue remained silent, Takahito returned to his seat. It was plainly clear that he did not intend to stand up again. Even for Mutsue, the so-called fool.

“I’m the same. I want my daughter to have a peaceful life in a peaceful world from the bottom of my heart, but I know she probably won’t. And there’s nothing I can do to stop that. Hey Mutsue, don’t you think parents are powerless?”

“It’s you who’s powerless, I am...”

“It’s you who’s powerless, I am...”

“It’s you who’s powerless, I am...”

“It’s you who’s powerless, I am...”

“It’s you who’s powerless, I am...”

“It’s you who’s powerless, I am...”

“...swordless,” he said.

Yasuri Mutsue stepped forth. Their conversation had ended. The only thing that had not ended after all else had ended, their conversation and relationship, had ended. Never again would the two speak to each other.

“Kyotouryuu: Kyouka Suigetsu!”

“Kyotouryuu: Kachou Fugetsu!”

“Kyotouryuu: Hyakka Ryouran!”

“Kyotouryuu: Ryuuroku Kakou!”

“Kyotouryuu: Hika Rakuyou!”

“Kyotouryuu: Kinjou Tenka!”

“Kyotouryuu: Rakka Rouzeki!”¹

There was clearly no need for such measures. But perhaps he had his pride as an unyielding and implacable sword that Shikizaki Kiki had dedicated his life to producing. He executed each of the seven secret techniques of Kyotouryuu simultaneously on Takahito, who made no attempt to resist.

“Princess Yousha!” shouted Hida Takahito, without sparing a glance to those seven techniques.

He shouted with all his might. He knew that he could still change fate with a single lie, but he had never told a lie in his life, and could not tell one now. No, even if he had been a consummate liar, this was a lie he could not have told.

“This will be it for me. But there’s something I need to tell you. Even if you don’t understand anything I say, or remember anything about me, just don’t forget this!”
The swords closed in. Six swords closed in on Takahito. He did not attempt to dodge. He did not think he could dodge. He could not gamble on such an improbable

possibility. *Ah, I'm so jealous of Mutsue, who can choose everything, true or not. I can only choose my words.*

"I love you very much."

Those words of love to his daughter became the final words of Hida Takahito the rebel, but there was no one to tell of that. And so the country returned to peace.

"—and that was what happened twenty years ago. Though I fudged the end a fair bit," said the blonde-haired and blue-eyed woman formerly known as Princess Hitei, chuckling, to the tall scar-covered man formerly known as Yasuri Shichika, who sat next to her gobbling up dango.

"Ahaha. That's everything I know about the hero of the rebellion. Emonzaemon was quite skilled at gathering information," said blonde-haired and blue-eyed woman as she stroked the mask she wore as a hair ornament.

"I didn't know you met my dad. Or Togame's dad," said the scar-covered man as he ate dango.

"Hm? Ah, no, you've got it wrong. That wasn't me. It was someone else in my family. She was the one who took part in that war twenty years ago."

"Shikizaki Kiki had other descendants?"

"Not anymore. But back then there were still a few."

"That sounds fishy. Are you trying to blame other people for what you did?"

"So you don't believe me."

"How am I supposed to believe you? Your story was way too weird. Since when was my dad six people?"

"If you're asking me that, then he must have chosen to be a single person around you. Even if he raised you to be a sword, I'm sure he still wanted to be a parent to you."

"You make it sound like you did know him."

"I deny that. It's only second-hand information."

"Second-hand information, huh? But doesn't that make your whole story second-hand information?"

"Even if there's only one truth, six different people will describe it as six different truths. Hida Takahito never lied, but even without lies all sorts of falsehoods can emerge. He was too fixated on the truth," said the blond-haired and blue-eyed woman with a trace of sorrow. She wore an expression that reminisced and grieved over a bitter enemy or old friend.

Possibly because he had rarely, if ever, seen her with that expression, the scar-covered man asked, *"And then what happened?"*

"Not much. After killing Hida Takahito, Yasuri Mutsue rescued his kidnapped wife, and escaped the burning castle. And they say that Right Arm, the only surviving member of the Takahito Elite Four, returned to the Maniwa Corps, so he might have been one of those ninja you fought."

"The ninja I fought? It was mostly Emonzaemon who beat them."

“Was it? In the end, Yasuri Mutsue became a hero. Then they all lived happily ever after,” she concluded, and drank her tea. She gulped down the hot tea as if it were history, or the truth.

“It must have been destiny that after that Takahito’s daughter, that unpleasant woman, chose you to be her sword. But in the end, you getting covered in scars seems almost like fate.”

“Huh?”

“I can’t say that I don’t understand why she had a love-hate relationship with you. Personally though, I can only have that kind of relationship with my ancestors. Oh, and with Emonzaemon.”

“Anyways, Dad was really strong.”

Evidently, the blonde-haired blue-eyed woman’s tale had vastly exceeded the comprehension of the scar-covered man, and he could only offer his simple impressions. But the blonde-haired blue-eyed woman denied even those simple impressions with a “no.”

“He’s the weakest sword I know.”

She was not at all in the mood for a retort of ‘So you did know him.’

The scar-covered man hurriedly changed the subject, and the blonde-haired blue-eyed woman made no effort to revisit their original topic. Their idle conversation stretched on, and never again did the two speak of the rebellion twenty years ago.

Although Yasuri Mutsue had been celebrated as a hero, after killing his wife Yasuri Migiri, who he had risked his life to save, he was exiled to an uninhabited island. The hero’s reputation then plummeted. And so his battle had ended. Until the white-haired strategist arrived at the island in search of him, Kyotouryuu had vanished from the center stage of history. The man was even more forgotten than he was before becoming a hero. Even if it were to be revealed that this was Hida Takahito’s true objective for instigating a rebellion, who would believe it?

The dark past flowed away and led to a bright future.

Translation Notes

1Literal and figurative translations:

Mirrored flower, reflected moon [intangible beauty] (鏡花水月)

Flowers and fowl, wind and moon [the beauty of nature] (花鳥風月)

Profuse blossoms [a gathering of beauties/talents] (百花繚乱)

Green willows, red blossoms [the beauty of spring] (柳緑花紅)

Scattered petals, fallen leaves [impermanence] (飛花落葉)

Gilded blossom [crowning touch] (錦上添花)

Fallen petals, violence [running amok] (落花狼藉)

Original: <https://swordtranslations.wordpress.com/>