

LEVELED BOOK • G

Chinzaemon the Silent



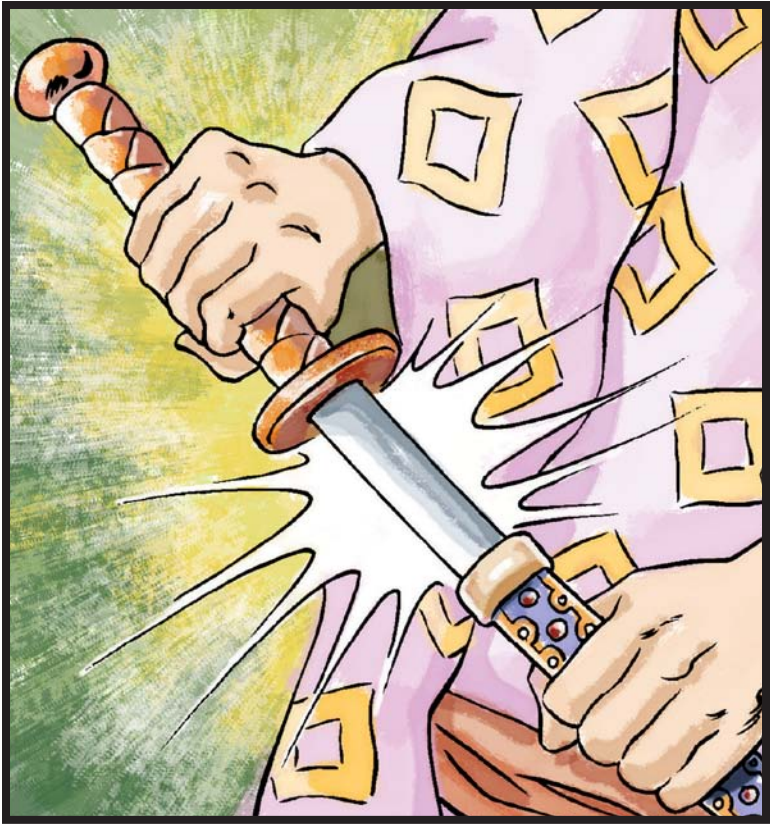
A Japanese Folktale Retold by William Harryman
Illustrated by David Cockcroft

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A very long time ago, there lived an armorer named Chinzaemon. His swords were very beautiful and perfectly balanced. He was famous throughout the land for the quality of his work. Even more famous than his swords, however, were his scabbards. Swords slipped into them so easily and silently that other armorers began to call him Chinzaemon the Silent.



A very powerful prince heard about Chinzaemon. The prince summoned the armorer to his court. The prince admired the work of the famous silent armorer. He wanted Chinzaemon to make weapons for his soldiers and guards.

Chinzaemon was not only a skillful armorer. He was also very funny and clever. He enjoyed playing practical jokes on people. He had been a very funny child in school. Even while serving his time as an apprentice armorer, he continued to tell jokes and play pranks on people.

Few people knew that Chinzaemon was such a funny man. He only shared his jokes with people he trusted. So when he made the prince laugh and laugh, for the whole three hours of his visit, Chinzaemon was hired as the prince's new armorer. And no one was more surprised than Chinzaemon. "The prince must be a noble man," he thought to himself. "I will trust him and be very loyal."





One night Chinzaemon decided he would play a joke on the guards. He knew that some of them fell asleep while they were on duty. He thought it would be humorous to catch them sleeping on the job. They would be very embarrassed. So Chinzaemon waited until it was very late in the night and then quietly left his room. He moved silently through the hallways until he was out on the palace grounds.

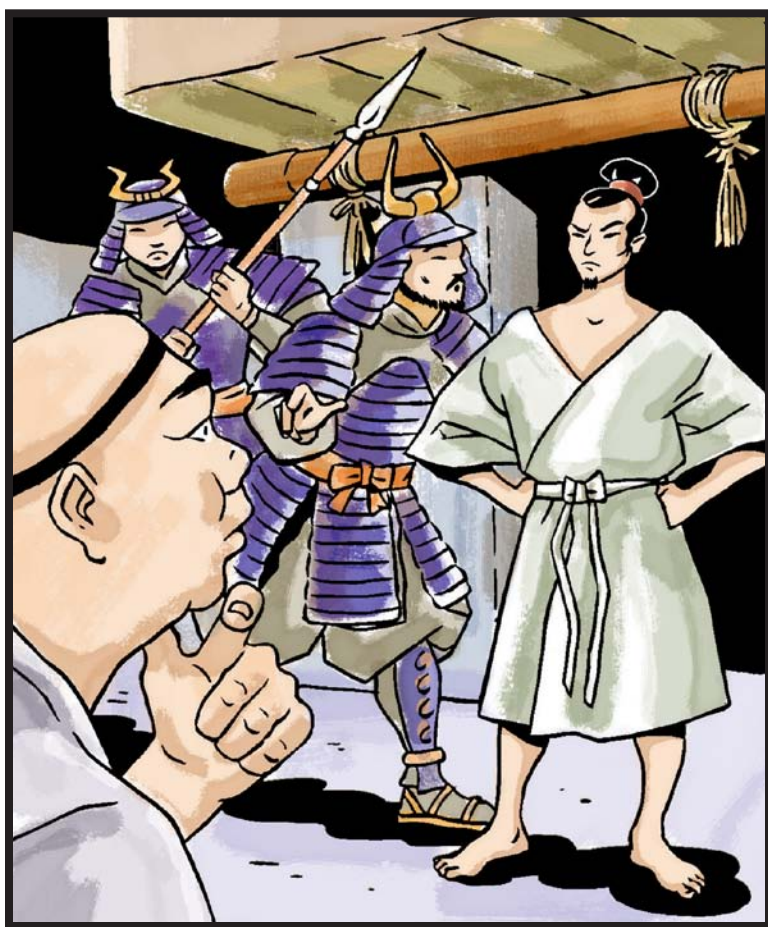
Chinzaemon sneaked out to the gate where two guards were sleeping. Using very strong glue made from tree sap, he glued their sandals to the ground. He was very quiet so that he did not disturb them. He then did the same thing to four other guards who had fallen asleep.





When Chinzaemon was done gluing the guards' sandals to the ground, he told some other guards about his prank. He then told the head guard and persuaded him to sound the alarm. A very loud bell was rung that signaled an attack. All the guards came running except the six who were stuck to the ground. They were glued into place. They couldn't unlace their sandals quickly enough to avoid getting caught.

When the prince came out of his palace to see what had happened, he was still in his nightclothes. The head guard informed him of Chinzaemon's prank. Chinzaemon was afraid that the prince might be angry. He hadn't meant for his little joke to make the prince get out of bed.

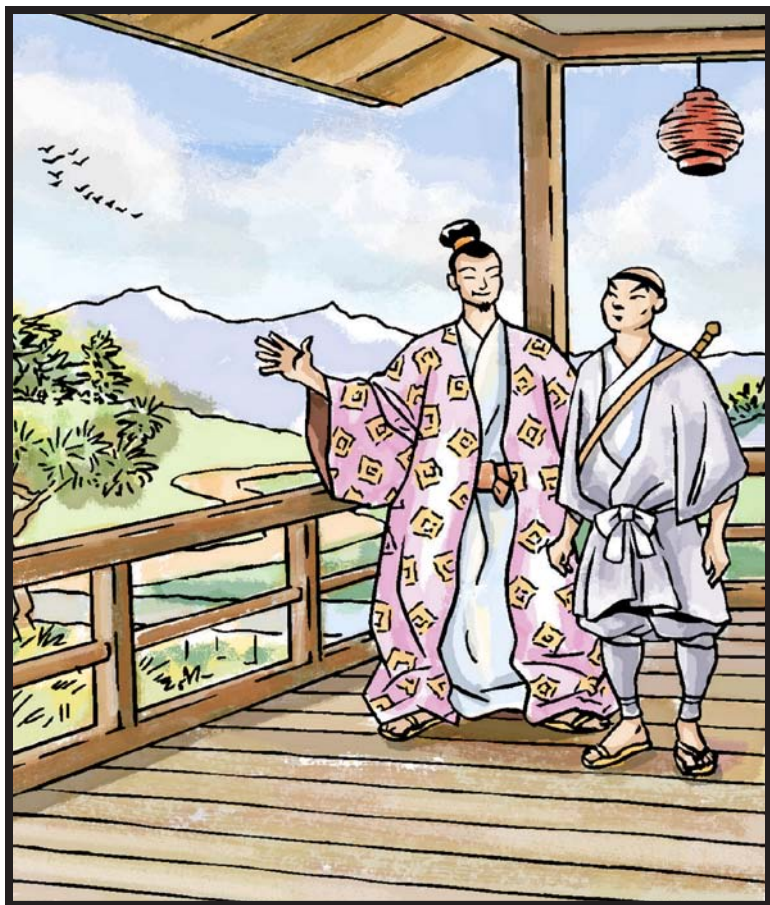


But the prince was not angry. For a minute he stood silent, and then he began to laugh. He laughed so hard that he had to bend over to catch his breath. The other guards laughed as well. They were glad they weren't the ones who had been caught. When the prince finished laughing, he told the guards who had been sleeping that they were fired. He also told them they were lucky he did not have them beheaded.





Later that day, the prince summoned Chinzaemon to his chambers. “So,” the prince began, “you have caused me to fire six worthless guards. Thank you, oh Silent One.” The prince smiled so that Chinzaemon would know he wasn’t angry.



“You are welcome,” Chinzaemon replied.
“But I was only meaning to play a joke.”
He was a little nervous. But he sensed that the prince was truly grateful for what he had done.

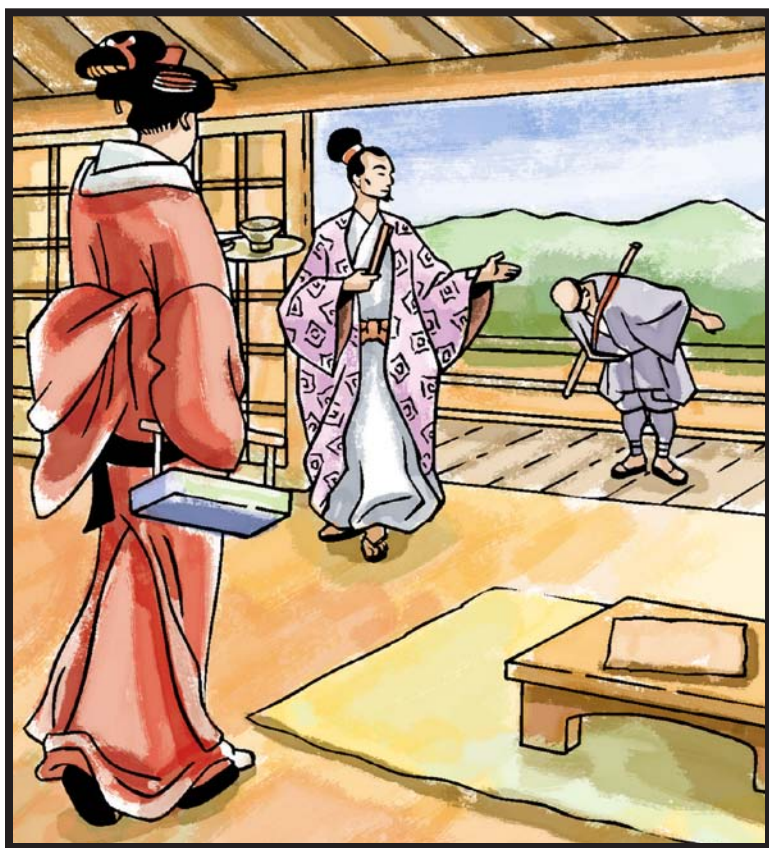
“Well, I feel safer now,” the prince said.
“You may have saved my life. In return, I will grant you anything you wish.”

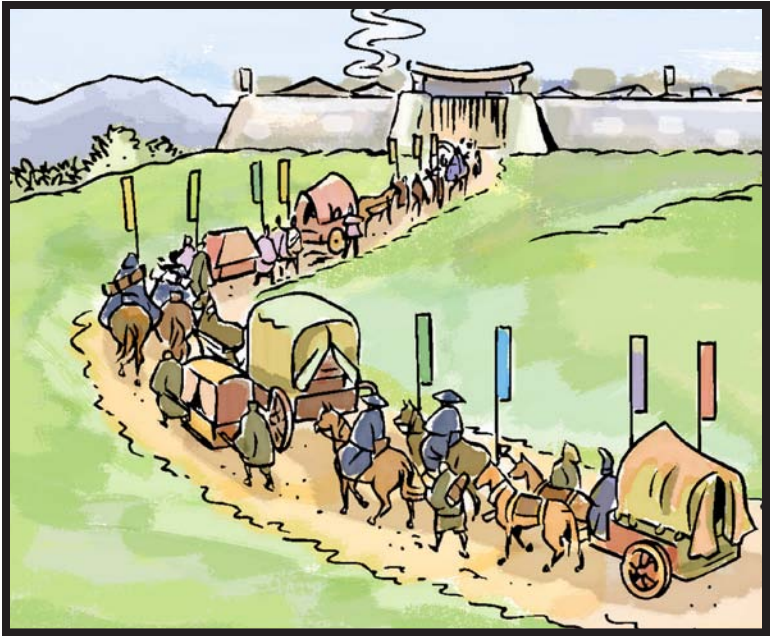
Chinzaemon thought about it for a minute. He already had a good life. But then he realized he could use this offer to play a big prank on the courtiers of the prince's court. "Well, noble prince, I have one request." He was a bit embarrassed to ask for what he wanted, but he did so anyway. "Allow me, whenever I want, to sniff into your ear."



The prince was shocked. “Strange!” he shouted, laughing again. “You could have chosen anything—gold, silver, land. I don’t understand your request. But if that is all you request, it is yours.”

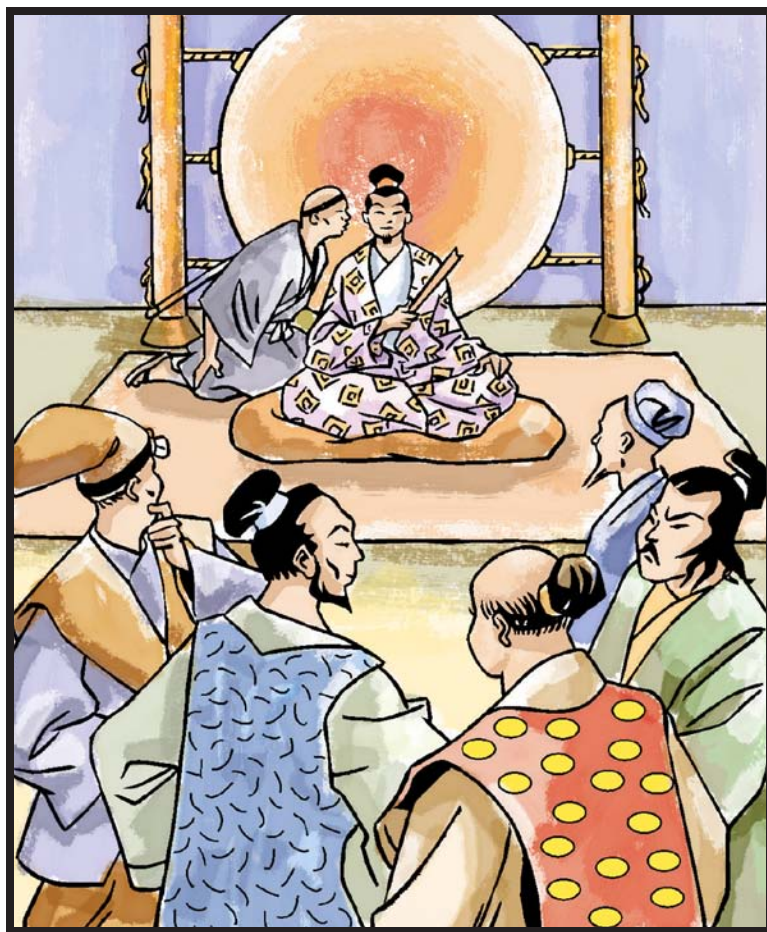
“You couldn’t have given me anything better, noble prince,” said Chinzaemon, smiling.





The next week there was a large gathering at the palace. All the prince's ministers came, as did the courtiers. And everyone brought their wives and dressed in their finest clothes. Every month the prince accepted visitors, usually on the full moon.

Everyone who came had some request that they wanted the prince to grant. This was the tradition in every palace, in every land, all over the Earth. The prince would consider the requests and do his best to satisfy those he felt were worthy.



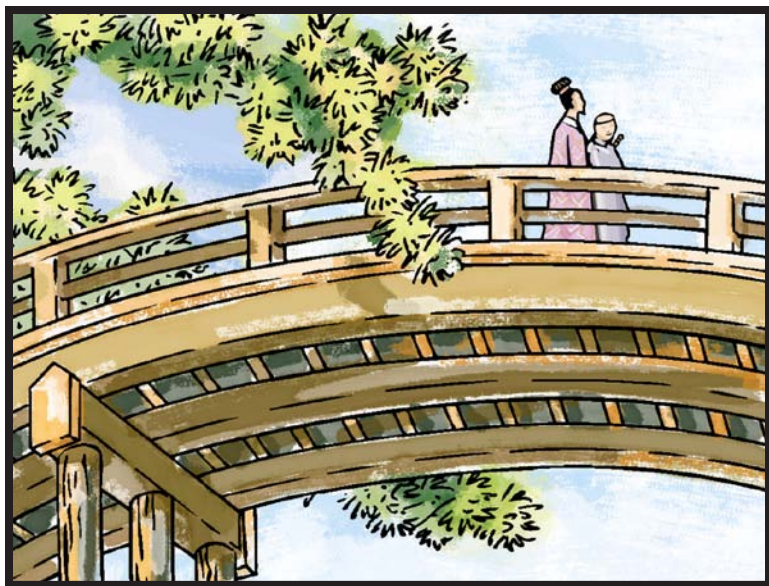
Chinzaemon ran over and sniffed in the prince's ear. When they saw him, the ministers and courtiers all thought he was whispering something about them into the prince's ear. They all were afraid he might whisper something bad about them that would stop the prince from giving them what they wanted.

So, one after another, the ministers and courtiers all began to give Chinzaemon gifts. They thought that if they gave him gifts, Chinzaemon might recommend them to the prince. They didn't know he was just sniffing into the prince's ear. Even their wives would give him gifts before talking to the prince. Chinzaemon just smiled and accepted their offerings. He made them no promises that he would say good things about them to the prince.



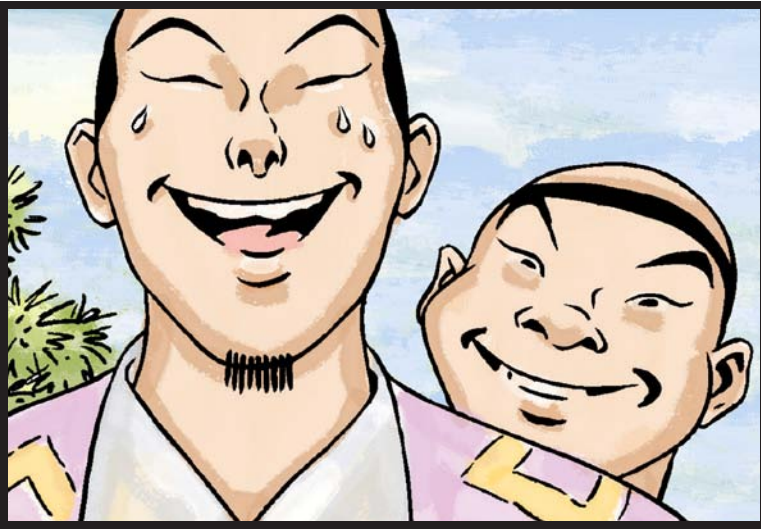
And so it happened. Before anyone dared speak to the prince, he or she would see Chinzaemon first and give him an amazing gift. Soon, the simple armorer was a very rich man. He had piles of money, beautiful gold jewelry, jade statues, and other fine treasures. He had so many things that he didn't know what to do with all of them. In truth, he was now as rich as the prince, but he still lived as he always had.





Then, one day, the prince turned to Chinzaemon and said, “Well, Silent One, aren’t you sorry you didn’t ask for anything better from me as a reward?” He saw that Chinzaemon’s lifestyle had changed very little over the last months. He wished his loyal armorer had asked for money or land.

“My word, noble prince!” Chinzaemon began, “Something better? Why, your favor has brought me so much more wealth than I could ever have imagined. It is more than I could ever need.” Then he told the prince what was happening.

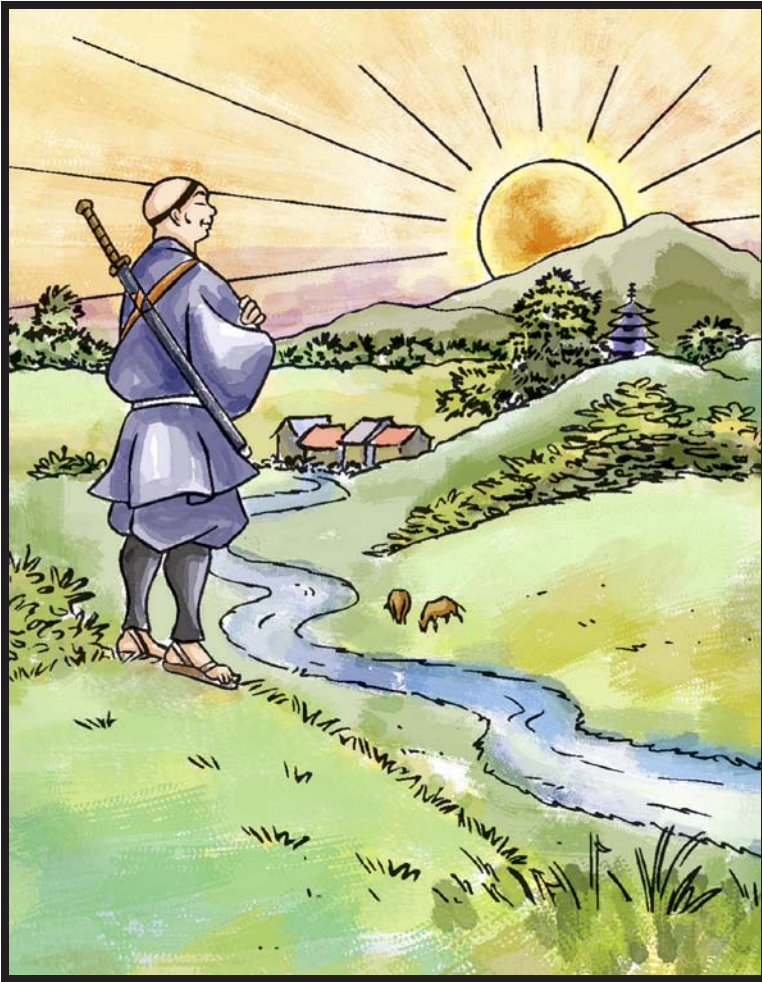


When the prince heard how Chinzaemon was making such fools out of his ministers and courtiers (and their wives), he laughed and laughed. He laughed so hard that tears ran down his cheeks.

“So much for my loyal advisers,” the prince said. “They aren’t much use to me. They are all worthless as advisers. I will dismiss every last greedy, foolish one of them.” He was actually very angry. He had trusted these people, and they all thought they could buy his favor. He thought about beheading them all. He decided he would just fire them all and send them away.

The prince summoned his advisers one by one. As they entered his chambers, they bowed and fidgeted nervously. To each one he revealed what had happened. They all apologized and begged forgiveness. But the prince told them to leave the palace and to not return.





When the prince had finished dismissing his advisers, he made Chinzaemon his only adviser. The only condition was that Chinzaemon must tell the prince if he ever acted like a fool. Chinzaemon agreed and was given a large piece of land for his loyalty.

This story is an expansion and adaptation
of a Japanese folktale.

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A Japanese Folktale
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