

Genji & Heike

Selections from *The Tale of Genji*
and *The Tale of the Heike*

Translated, with Introductions, by
Helen Craig McCullough

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reins over its neck, and drove it ahead of him into the depths of the unfamiliar mountains.

As was to have been expected so early in the second month, there were places where lingering patches of snow dappled the peaks like blossoms, and others where the warriors heard warblers in the valley and made their way through thick haze. When they climbed, they were among cloud-capped peaks; when they descended, they encountered rugged, forested slopes and towering cliffs. The snow had not melted from the pines; the narrow, mossy track was all but invisible. Snowflakes scattered like plum blossoms in the blustering wind. Darkness settled down over the mountain trail while they whipped their steeds this way and that, and they all dismounted to make camp.

Musashibō Benkei brought an old man to Yoshitsune.

"Who's this?" Yoshitsune asked.

"He goes hunting in these mountains."

"Then you must know the area very well. Tell us the truth."

"Yes, of course I know it."

"I want to get down from here to the Heike stronghold at Ichi-no-tani. Can that be done?"

"Absolutely not! There's no way for a man to get down the gorge; it's three hundred feet long. Or the rock face, either; it's a hundred and fifty feet. It would be out of the question on horseback."

"Do deer go through?" Yoshitsune asked.

"Yes. When the weather turns warm, deer from Harima Province cross into Tanba Province to lie in the deep grass, and when it turns cold, deer go from Tanba Province to Inamino in Harima Province to feed where the snow is shallow."

"Why, it sounds like a regular racetrack! A horse can certainly go where a deer goes. All right, you'll be our guide."

The hunter protested that he was too old.

"You must have a son?" Yoshitsune asked.

"I have." He presented an eighteen-year-old youth called Kumaō. They proceeded to put up the boy's hair, named him Washinoo no Saburō Yoshihisa (his father's name being Washinoo no Shōji Takehisa), and sent him to the vanguard to guide them. When Yoshitsune met his end in Ōshū, estranged from Yoritomo after the defeat of the Heike, it was that same Yoshihisa who died at his side.

9.10. *First and Second Attackers*

Kumagae Naozane and Hirayama Sueshige stayed with Yoshitsune's rear assault force until around midnight on the sixth. Then Naozane summoned his son, Kojirō Naoie. "Nobody will be able to get out in front when this force rides down the mountain. Let's head for Toi's route, the Harima Road, so we can be the first to attack Ichi-no-tani," he said.

"That's a great idea," Naoie said. "I've been wanting to suggest the same thing. Let's start right away."

"Come to think of it, Hirayama Sueshige is marching with this force. He's a man who doesn't care to fight in a crowd," Naozane said. He told one of his men to check on Sueshige's activities and report back.

Just as he had suspected, Sueshige was already getting ready to leave. "Others can do as they please," he was muttering. "I'm not going to fall one step behind." A subordinate who was feeding his master's horse cuffed the animal. "How much longer are you going to keep eating, you big slob?" he said. "Don't treat him like that," Sueshige said. "You're seeing him for the last time tonight." He rode off.

Naozane's man ran back and blurted out the news. "All right!" Naozane said. He too left at once.

Naozane was wearing a dark blue tunic, a suit of armor with red leather lacing, and a red cape, and he was riding his famous steed Gondakurige [Chestnut Gonda]. Naoie was wearing a tunic decorated with a faint design of water-plantains, and a suit of armor laced with blue-and-white rope-patterned leather, and he was riding a whitish horse named Seirō [White Tower]. Their standard-bearer was wearing an olive-gray tunic and a suit of armor laced with re-dyed cherry-patterned leather, and he was riding a blond chestnut horse. The three proceeded at a walk toward the right, observing on their left the gorge where the others were planning to make their descent, and came out onto the beach at Ichi-no-tani by way of an old path called Tai-no-hata, which had not been used for years.

Because it was still only around midnight, Toi Sanehira had halted with his seven thousand horsemen at Shioya, near Ichi-no-tani. Naozane slipped past him in the dark, following the beach, and rode to the western gate of the Ichi-no-tani stronghold. Not a sound was to be heard in the peaceful enemy camp at that hour, nor was a single Genji warrior following Naozane's party.

Naozane called Naoie over. "There must be plenty of fellows who want the honor of leading the attack," he told him. "We can't leap to the conclusion that we're the only ones. Some others are probably waiting around near here for morning to come. We'd better announce our names." He walked his horse to the barricade of shields and announced their names in a mighty shout. "The first men to attack Ichi-no-tani are Kumagae no Jirō Naozane of Musashi Province and his son Kojirō Naoie!"

The Heike refused to answer. "Just keep quiet," they told one another. "Let them wear out their horses and use up their arrows."

Meanwhile, a warrior came up behind Naozane. "Who's there?" Naozane asked.

"Sueshige. Who wants to know?"

"Naozane."

"Kumagae, is it? How long have you been here?"

"I got here during the night."

"I ought to have been right on your heels, but I was delayed because Narida Gorō tricked me. Narida said he wanted to die wherever I did, so I took him along, but he tried to slow me down after we started. 'Don't be in a hurry to attack first, Hirayama,' he said. 'Nobody will know how well you fought unless you have friends watching behind you. What would be the use of dashing into the middle of a lot of enemies and getting killed?' I thought he had a point, so I went ahead of him to the top of a little rise, turned my horse's head downhill, and waited for some of our men to show up. When Narida came along behind me, I expected him to bring his horse up beside mine and talk about the battle, but he galloped on past with an unfriendly look. 'Damn it!' I thought, 'that fellow's tricked me so he can take the lead.' He was about two hundred feet ahead. I saw that his horse seemed weaker than mine, so I whipped after him. I overtook him and yelled, 'You have a lot of nerve to think you can fool somebody like me!' Then I came on alone to attack the enemy. He must have fallen way back; I'm sure he couldn't keep me in sight."

Naozane, Sueshige, and the others waited, a party of five. When the first light appeared at last, Naozane again walked his horse to the barricade of shields and called out in a mighty shout. (He had already announced his name, but he may have wanted Sueshige to hear.) "Kumagae no Jirō Naozane of Musashi Province and his son Kojirō Naoie, the men who announced their names earlier, are the first to attack Ichi-no-tani! If any Heike samurai thinks he's as good as I am, come on out and face me!"

"Come on! Let's drag those two off their horses! They've been yelling their names all night long." Who were the Heike samurai who came forward with those words? They were Etchū no Jirōbyōe Moritsugi, Kazusa no Gorōbyōe Tadamitsu, Akushichibyōe Kagekiyo, Gotōnai Sadatsune, and other prominent warriors. They opened the gate and galloped out, more than twenty strong.

Sueshige was wearing a tie-dyed tunic with white spots, a suit of armor with flame-red lacing, and a cape with a design of two bars, and he was riding his famous steed Mekasuge [Gray-ringed Eyes]. His standard-bearer was wearing a suit of armor with black leather lacing and a helmet with the neck-guard well down, and he was riding a rust-brown horse.

Sueshige announced his name. "I am Hirayama no Mushadokoro Sueshige, the man from Musashi who led the attacks in the Hōgen and Heiji eras!" He galloped forward, shouting, side by side with the standard-bearer.

Where Naozane galloped, Sueshige followed; where Sueshige galloped, Naozane followed. Neither was willing to be outdone, and they took turns at dashing in, whipping their mounts and attacking until the sparks flew. The hard-pressed Heike samurai must have decided that they were overmatched, for they hurried back inside the stronghold to fight from its shelter.

An arrow hit Naozane's horse in the belly. The horse reared, and Naozane dismounted by swinging his leg over its back. Naoie jumped down and stood beside him, wounded in the bow arm, after he had announced his age as sixteen and had fought until his horse's nose touched the shields of the barricade.

"Are you wounded, Kojirō?" Naozane asked.

"Yes," Naoie said.

"Keep pushing your armor up. Don't let an arrow get through. Keep your neck-guard low. Don't get hit in the face."

Naozane pulled out the arrows stuck in his own armor, tossed them aside, and scowled at the stronghold. "I am Naozane, the man who left Kamakura last winter determined to give his life for Lord Yoritomo and bleach his bones at Ichi-no-tani! Where's Etchū no Jirōbyōe, who brags about what he did at Muroyama and Mizushima? What's happened to Kazusa no Gorōbyōe and Akushichibyōe? Isn't Lord Noritsune there? Fame depends on who you fight; it doesn't come from meeting just anybody who happens along. Come out and face me!" he yelled.

Etchū no Jirōbyōe Moritsugi was wearing his favorite garb, a blue-and-white tunic and a suit of armor laced with red leather. He advanced slowly on a whitish roan horse, staring at Naozane. Naozane and his son did not give an inch. Instead, they raised their swords to their foreheads and advanced at a steady pace, staying side by side to avoid separation. Moritsugi may have thought he was overmatched, for he turned back.

"Isn't that Etchū no Jirōbyōe?" asked Naozane. "What's wrong with me as an adversary? Come on! Let's wrestle!"

"No, thanks," said Moritsugi. He withdrew.

"Coward!" Kagekiyo said. He started to gallop out to grapple with Naozane, but Moritsugi seized his shoulder-guard. "This isn't the only battle Lord Noritsune has to think about. Don't throw away your life here," he said.

Afterward, Naozane got a fresh mount and galloped forward, yelling, followed by Sueshige, who had been letting his horse rest while Naozane and Naoie fought. Not many of the Heike warriors were mounted. The men on the archery platforms aligned their bows and released showers of arrows, but the numbers of the Genji were far fewer, and Naozane and the others escaped harm, lost in the melee. "Ride alongside and grapple with them! Grapple!" came the orders from the platforms. But the horses of the Heike were exhausted from having been overridden, underfed, and made to stand in boats for long periods of time. One collision with Naozane's big, well-nourished beast, or Sueshige's, would have been enough to knock any of them flat, and nobody tried to wrestle with either warrior.

An arrow pierced Sueshige's standard-bearer, a man he valued as he did his life. Sueshige burst through the enemy ranks, took the slayer's head swiftly, and came out again. Naozane also amassed many trophies.

Naozane, the first to arrive on the scene, had been kept outside because the gate was closed; Sueshige, the second, had been able to gallop inside because the gate was open. So each claimed to have led the attack.

9.11. *The Double Charge*

Meanwhile, Narida Gorō arrived.

Toi Sanehira galloped forward at the head of his seven thousand horsemen, and the whole force attacked, yelling, with their colored standards raised.

The fifty thousand Genji horsemen under Noriyori had taken up positions on the main front, at Ikuta-no-mori. Among them, there were two men from Musashi Province named Kawara Tarō Takanao and Kawara Jirō Morinao. Takanao called over his brother, Morinao. "A great landholder wins glory through his vassals' exploits, even though he may not do anything himself, but people like us have to earn their own reputations," he said. "It galls me to wait around like this, without even shooting an arrow, when we have an enemy in front of us. I'm going to sneak inside the stronghold and shoot. I haven't got a chance in a thousand of getting back here, so you'll have to stay; otherwise there won't be anybody to testify later."

Tears ran down Morinao's cheeks. "I can't listen when you talk that way. Do you think a younger brother would prosper if he stayed behind and let an older brother be killed? Let's not die in different places; let's face the end together," he said.

The two told their subordinates to carry word of their last moments to their wives and children. Then they went forward on foot, shod in straw sandals. With their bows as staffs, they clambered over the barricade of branches at Ikuta-no-mori and got inside the stronghold. In the dim starlight, even the color of their armor-lacing was invisible. Takanao announced their names in a mighty shout. "Kawara Tarō Kisaichi no Takanao and Kawara Jirō Morinao of Musashi: the first men from the frontal assault force of the Genji to attack at Ikuta-no-mori!"

None of the Heike warriors felt like fighting. "Nothing is as fearsome as an eastern warrior," they said. "They're just two men in the middle of our huge force. What harm can they do? Let's humor them awhile."

The brothers were first-rate archers, and they let fly a fast and furious barrage of arrows.

"We can't put up with this! Kill them!" somebody shouted.

There were two brothers from the west who were famous archers, Manabe no Shirō and Manabe no Gorō from Bitchū Province. Shirō was at Ichi-no-tani; Gorō was at Ikuta-no-mori. Gorō quickly drew his bow to the full and sent an arrow whizzing off. The shaft drove straight through the breastplate of Takanao's armor to his back. Takanao stood paralyzed, clinging to his bow for support. Morinao rushed up, slung Takanao over his shoulder, and started to climb the barricade. Gorō's second arrow pene-