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Parting in the Snow at Nanbuzaka

TŌCHŪKEN KUMOEMON

Translated by HENRY D. SMITH II

*In a long wool rain cape, navy blue,
on high clogs with a toe cover,
holding a two-stop oilpaper bull's-eye umbrella,¹
Ōishi is followed by
his trusted sidekick, Teranishi Yadayū.²
They arrive at the celebrated Nanbuzaka.*

They stand before the gate of the mansion of Asano Shikibu Shōyū 浅野式部少輔.³

KURANOSUKE. “Gatekeeper! Ōishi Kuranosuke Yoshio has come for an audience
with Lady Yōsen’in.”

GATEKEEPER. “Pass through!”

Inside the gate, to the left, was still another gate.

THE following is a translation of *Nanbuzaka yuki no wakare* 南部坂雪の別れ by Okamoto Minekichi 岡本峰吉, “otherwise known as Tōchūken Kumoemon Nyūdō 桃中軒雲右衛門入道” (Tōkyō Meirinsha, 1912). It is available on the Kindai Digital Library 近代デジタルライブラリー site of the National Diet Library (<http://kindai.ndl.go.jp/>). In an effort to convey a sense of the conventions of the original format, the sung portions (*fushi* 節) appear in italics, while the spoken lines (*kotoba* 詞) are in roman type and indented. A phonograph-record version of Kumoemon’s performance, issued by Sankōdō 三光堂 in May 1912 on the Lyrophone “Grafton” label, is available with a Japanese transcription on the MN website, <http://monumenta.cc.sophia.ac.jp>. The twelve-minute recording (on two double-sided records of three minutes per side) goes up through the line “turn to tears of joy” on p. 512 of this translation. In June 2006 Columbia Records issued a two-disc CD set of what appears to be all of Tōchūken’s extant recordings: *Columbia shihō shirizu, SP-ban hen: Tōchūken Kumoemon* コロムビア至宝シリーズ, SP 盤編・桃中軒雲右衛門 (D3459).

¹ The second and third lines are reversed in the phonograph recording.

² Teranishi Yadayū has no apparent historical counterpart, although the historical Kuranosuke did have retainers in Edo during the days leading up to the attack (Seo Magozaemon 瀬尾孫左衛門 and Yano Isuke 矢野伊助, who were probably low-ranking samurai), as well as two servants (Saroku 佐六 and Kōshichi 幸七), but all of these had deserted or been dismissed by the evening of the attack. The name “Teranishi” suggests that he may have been derived from the historical Terasaka Kichiemon 寺坂吉右衛門 (who in certain legends was depicted as a retainer of Ōishi, rather than of Yoshida Chūzaemon 吉田忠左衛門); in this story, however, Terasaka later appears in his own right (see pp. 514–19 below).

³ After the seppuku of Asano Naganori 浅野長矩 in 1701.3, his widow, Akuri 阿久里 (1674–1714), had retired to the Edo outer mansion (*shimo-yashiki* 下屋敷) of her own family, the Asano daimyo of Miyoshi 三次 (a parallel line to the Asano of Akō, both having branched off from the main Asano line in Hiroshima in the mid-seventeenth century). She had been born as a late child

The sign reads, “From this point on, men are forbidden.”

KURANOSUKE. “I request permission to pass through the gate.”

MAID. “Who might it be?”

KURANOSUKE. “Ōishi Kuranosuke Yoshio has come for an audience with Her Ladyship, the widow of his late lord.”

MAID. “Please wait a little.”

After he has waited a little, the gate opens for him; to his right on entering is a waiting room. He hands his umbrella and cape to Teranishi, and on reaching the entry hall, he is greeted by Toda no Tsubone 戸田の局, lady-in-waiting and younger sister of Onodera Jūnai 小野寺十内.⁴

LADY TODA. “My, my, how good to see the Senior Councilor!”⁵

KURANOSUKE. “I am sorry, Toda, for not visiting in such a long time, and hope that all is well with Her Ladyship.”

LADY TODA. “She keeps wondering when you will visit, perhaps today, perhaps tomorrow . . .”

KURANOSUKE. “I am deeply grateful that she has been waiting for me. Please escort me in.”

LADY TODA. “It is my pleasure.”

*Led by Toda deep into the women’s quarters,
he passes through and sees before him,
sitting on a cushion of pale blue satin,
dressed in white satin
with a purple-crested jacket,
fingering a crystal rosary,
having cut her hair and her ties to the world,
Yōsen’in, now nineteen years of age.⁶*

Upon seeing her, Kuranosuke prostrates himself.

YŌSEN’IN. “Ah, it is you, Yoshio, thank you for coming. I have waited so long for your visit.”

of the first lord of Miyoshi, Asano Nagaharu 浅野長治 (1614–1675). Since her father died not long after her birth, Akuri was adopted by his heir, Nagateru 長照 (1652–1705), the “Asano Shikibu Shōyū” mentioned here. In historical fact, Nagateru had already retired as lord of Miyoshi in 1691, but at the time of the incident, his own heir, Asano Tosa no kami Nagazumi 浅野土佐守長澄 (1661–1718) was out of Edo, so it was his retired father who made the arrangements for Akuri to settle into the family’s outer mansion, in which he also lived, located in the Akasaka district, up Nanbuzaka hill, in the area north of Roppongi-dōri, across from what is now the Ark Hills shopping complex. It was there that Akuri took the tonsure and adopted the nun’s name of Yōsen’in 瑤泉院 (also read Yōzeiin).

⁴ Onodera Jūnai (1643–1703) was a senior member of the league of revenge. He is not known to have had a younger sister, and Toda no Tsubone appears to be entirely fictional.

⁵ Lady Toda addresses Ōishi here as “Jōdai-sama” 城代様, referring to his position as *jōdai-garō* 城代家老, the councilor responsible for the castle in the absence of the daimyo.

⁶ The historical Yōsen’in was in fact twenty-nine (by traditional count) at the time of the attack on Kira.

KURANOSUKE. "I am most pleased to see you in good health, as always."

YŌSEN'IN. "Toda, Kuranosuke has come to visit, after such a long time, and

*By good chance today is my husband's death memorial,⁷
a time of abstinence, but let me join you myself
in a cup of sake."*

KURANOSUKE. "I would be happy to do as you say."

*At Toda's signal a group of maids
comes quickly with sake and side dishes.
This is my cup of farewell to my lord,
he thinks, although unable to say so.
In fact he has come intending to reveal
the plans for the great event that night,
but just earlier he had noticed a maid,
one whom he had never seen before,
her eyes now fixed only on Kuranosuke.
This is a person to beware of;
the plan cannot be revealed.
I must not break the news.*

Yoshio drinks several cups, feigning drunkenness.

KURANOSUKE. "Ah, it's not like me to drink so much. Actually, I came today for a special reason. I have come to bid farewell."

YŌSEN'IN. "Farewell, Kuranosuke? Where do you plan to go?"

KURANOSUKE. "Well, as you know, once the memorial services for my lord are finished, I have no need to stay in Edo. At any rate, I will return to Kyoto, and after one night there I plan to move to Osaka, where I will abandon the way of arms and open up a sundries shop. My son left the other day, after the inventory had all been prepared, and I myself plan to leave Edo tomorrow. If I were going to a place just twenty or forty miles away, I could come visit you every month, but in Osaka, two hundred fifty miles distant, even once a year might be rather difficult . . .

*So please take care of yourself."
Hearing these astonishing words,
Yōsen'in asks in great surprise,
"Wha, wha, what do you mean, Kuranosuke?
Are you really serious?"*

KURANOSUKE. "I have no reason to deceive you."

YŌSEN'IN. "Is it really true, Kuranosuke . . . ?

*As they say, one cannot rely on human feeling.
When our house was prosperous and*

⁷ Asano Naganori's death was commemorated on the fourteenth day of each month; the night attack would be carried out on the same day.

*I resided in the Edo mansion,
 scarcely a day went by without some talk
 of Kura doing this, or Yoshio that.
 As I would boast to all who came,
 Ōishi was worth more than all
 the fifty-three thousand koku of Akō's domain.
 At the time of his seppuku at the Tamura 田村 mansion,
 my husband told Kataoka 片岡 of his regret.
 Unable to leave any testament,
 even to me or to his younger brother,
 he asked to pass on to you as mementos his death poem
 and the dirk that took his life.⁸
 How can you forget your debt to him?
 You are an unspeakable monster,
 with whom it fouls my tongue to speak.
 Get up, get up now, and leave!"*

*She is absolutely right,
 should I go ahead and tell her now
 of the great plan for tonight . . . ?
 No, no, no, that will not do.
 Her tears of anger now
 will on the morrow
 turn to tears of joy.⁹*

KURANOSUKE. "I am humbled by your anger, but I must now bid farewell."

*Pretending to stagger, he rises,
 his heart aching to stay, and yet drawing new resolve
 as he walks the long corridor back,
 and Lady Toda sends him off.*

LADY TODA. "Senior Councilor!"

KURANOSUKE. "What is it, Toda?"

LADY TODA. "I understand that you intend to abandon the way of arms and to become a townsman."

KURANOSUKE. "Yes, there seems to be no other choice in these times."

LADY TODA. "It is a trivial matter, but might you know where my brother Jūnai and his son Kōemon 幸右衛門 are now?"

KURANOSUKE. "Both father and son should surely have returned to Kyoto by now."

LADY TODA. "And what might they be doing in the capital?"

⁸ Kataoka Gengoemon 片岡源五右衛門 was one of Asano Naganori's most intimate retainers, and, in an episode often told in *kōdan* and *naniwabushi*, he is said to have approached Naganori at the Tamura mansion shortly before the seppuku there. Naganori's younger brother Nagahiro 長広 (often called by the name Daigaku 大学) was also his heir.

⁹ The 1912 phonograph recording goes up to this point.

KURANOSUKE. “They have opened a candy store.”

LADY TODA. “They are selling candy . . . ?”

KURANOSUKE. “Yes, Jūnai is skilled at the shamisen and has a good voice, and Kōemon has practiced dance, so they go around selling candy with Jūnai on the shamisen and Kōemon dancing. They are all the vogue in the pleasure quarters of Shimabara and Gion and manage to sell a lot of candy.”

LADY TODA. “Do they have no shame, in Kyoto of all places, to go about selling candy? If by any chance you meet them, tell them that Jūnai’s sister asks why they do not rather cut their bellies and die.”

KURANOSUKE. “Hmm, you ask why not cut their bellies and die . . . I will definitely ask them. Meanwhile, Toda, I was distracted by Lady Yōsen’in’s anger, and failed to hand over this parcel wrapped in purple cloth. It includes a few songs that I recited in poetry groups in Kyoto, together with some maps of the sights of the capital.¹⁰ Were I to give it to her now, she probably would not touch it. Please wait until tomorrow when her spirits have revived to show it to her, and do not open it yourself until Her Ladyship the widow sees it.”

LADY TODA. “I have duly received the parcel.”

KURANOSUKE. “Toda, since I will be far away, I have no one but you to ask to take care of Lady Yōsen’in.”

LADY TODA. “I will do everything that I can.”

KURANOSUKE. “We will not likely meet again. Toda, take care of yourself.”

LADY TODA. “And you as well.”

*He puts on the sandals lined up at the exit.
Teranishi follows without a word,
helping don the rain cape,
opening the bull’s-eye umbrella.
Leaving the gate,
they walk down Nanbuzaka hill,
with not another soul on the snowy street.
Lord and retainer look back,
stifling bitter tears of blood.*

*After this, the widow collapses in tears,
as Lady Toda and the maids console her.
In the end, she goes to bed that night,
but it is somehow hard to sleep,
her body drenched in oily sweat.
Past midnight and the hour of the rat,
she is suddenly awakened.
The altar candle, once extinguished,*

¹⁰ Most listeners would know that in fact (at least according to the legend), Kuranosuke’s parcel contained an account book that kept track of all the money received from Yōsen’in and spent in support of the league of revenge. As mentioned in the preceding article (note 97), such a document evidently did exist and was delivered to Yōsen’in, although not by Kuranosuke but by Yōsen’in’s chamberlain Ochiai Yozaemon 落合与左衛門

*must have been lit again.
The yet unopened buds of narcissus on the altar,
freshly arranged, seem to smile with pleasure at the light.*

*Lady Toda cannot sleep either,
anxious about her mistress and her brother,
as well as her own position,
she lies there restlessly.*

“Squeak, squeak . . .”

Hearing footsteps in the corridor, something seems wrong to Toda, and she listens more closely. Softly opening the shoji, a figure in black dress and robber’s mask, carrying a man’s sash, moves quickly towards the chest of drawers, treading on the unrolled sash to muffle all sound. Grabbing the parcel from Kuranosuke that had been left on the chest of drawers, the figure tries to leave. But Onodera’s sister, woman though she is, leaps up and grabs the culprit from behind, shouting “Hold it there! You scoundrel!” The thief tries to escape, but Toda will not allow it, crying “Here, everyone, come help! There’s a thief! A thief!” Heeding the call, a throng of maids appears, running about, lighting lanterns.

*The thief is subdued,
and bound firmly hand and foot.
The mask is removed, revealing
it is not a man at all,
but the newly hired maid, daughter
of a greengrocer from Akasaka Tamachi 赤坂田町.
This is the very person who earlier
had fixed her gaze on Ōishi,
stirring his suspicions.*

LADY TODA. “Oh, so it’s you!”

MAID. “Yes, but it was just a sudden impulse.”

LADY TODA. “No, this may have been an impulse if you had tried to steal something else, but it is most strange that you fixed your eyes on only the parcel left by Lord Kuranosuke. You must be brought before Lady Yōsen in herself.”

*Just as she is brought in,
the night begins to turn to dawn.
Suddenly a maid appears, agitated.*

MAID. “I beg to report!”

LADY TODA. “What can it be?”

MAID. “Just now a foot soldier named Terasaka Kichiemon 寺坂吉右衛門 has come, bearing the report that last night, Ōishi Yoshio and forty-odd others made a night attack on the mansion of Lord Kira in Honjo Matsuzaka-chō 本所松坂町, successfully accomplished the revenge of their lord, and retreated to the temple of Sengakuji 泉岳寺 in Takanawa 高輪. How should we deal with his report?”

*Astonished at the news, Yōsen'in
exchanges glances with Lady Toda,
both wondering, is this a dream?*

*When Kuranosuke came the day before,
it must then have been a hidden farewell.
How angry he must have been
at the shallow understanding
of ignorant women.
Saying that Terasaka's rank
of foot soldier is of no concern,
Lady Yōsen'in commands that
he be allowed into her presence.*

*Shortly, Terasaka
is led into the inner court,
still dressed for the attack the night before,
his face covered with snow.
The widow takes her seat by the veranda,
followed by Lady Toda,
who enters, wondering and eager to inquire
about Lord Kura's report that
Onodera father and son were in Kyoto.
Could this be true, or were they among
the league of revenge last night?*

LADY TODA. "So you are Terasaka Kichiemon. You may now see Lady Yōsen'in and tell her the story of the revenge last night."

TERASAKA. "At your command."

*Terasaka now raises his head,
and straightens his dress.
"My rank is low,
and to come before my lord's widow
does not befit the dignity of one so humble.
Let me now tell the tale of last night's revenge.*

*"At the time of the final council at Akō,¹¹
fifty-three members joined the league,*

¹¹ After the news of the seppuku of Asano Naganori reached Akō five days later, Ōishi Kuranosuke summoned the retainers to a series of meetings to discuss their options. Although some called for resisting the bakufu takeover of Akō castle and other argued for mass seppuku, it was decided at the final council to surrender the castle peacefully to bakufu authority and also to form a league of revenge against Kira.

*but meanwhile some died of old age,
 and others went missing.
 The final council at Sengakuji in Takanawa was yesterday,¹²
 and last night on the second floor of the shop Kusuya 楠屋
 in Onoe-chō 尾上町 in the Honjo area,
 those chosen to dress for battle numbered forty-seven,
 with only Yokogawa Kanpei 横川勘平 still missing.
 Awaiting the appointed hour,
 bravely dressed all in the same attire,
 they sounded the drum in the Yamaga 山鹿 style,
 striking once, twice, then three short beats,
 ten-and-two yin-yang five drum raps,
 while shouting ‘Fire! Fire!’
 In this way we arrived at the gate of Kira’s mansion.
 As ordered in advance, we divided into
 an east team and a west team.
 The east team took the front gate,
 with Kuranosuke as commander-in-chief,
 and the west team took the back,
 under the command of Chikara Yoshikane 主税良兼
 and his guardians Yoshida Chūzaemon 吉田忠左衛門 and Onodera Jūnai.”¹³
 Hearing this name, Lady Toda rejoices,
 for her brother was with them after all!*

*“Kataoka Gengoemon 片岡源五右衛門 directed the course of battle,
 and Senba Saburōbyōe 千葉三郎兵衛 secured the enemy barracks.
 A rope ladder was thrown to the roof of the front gate,
 and when the competition began for who was to go first,
 Yokogawa Kanpei, arriving late,
 to make up for his lateness
 climbed first to the ridge,
 hands and feet on the rope ladder,
 followed by Takebayashi 竹林¹⁴
 With one leap they were inside the gate,
 and smashed the bolt in two.
 On signal as the gate opened,
 they burst in with a roar,
 the members of the league.*

¹² The historical avengers did not in fact assemble at Sengakuji temple (the site of the grave of their master) before the revenge, but reports to this effect began to circulate soon after the attack.

¹³ Ōishi Chikara Yoshikane (for the historical figure, actually written 良金) was the fifteen-year-old son of Kuranosuke, and, at least in this version, his youth made it necessary for him to be accompanied by guardians.

¹⁴ Takebayashi Tadashichi 武林唯七.

*Standing before the entrance,
 Ōtaka Gengo Tadao 大高源五忠雄 shouted,
 in a loud voice echoing to the heavens,
 ‘Yaa, we are rōnin of Asano, from Akō in Banshū 播州.¹⁵
 We have broken in to fulfill the revenge of our late lord,
 Come out, Lord Kira, come out!’
 Raising the great hammer of which he was a master,
 with all his strength he smashed
 the black-lacquer rafters of the entry porch
 and the cedar-paneled shutters.
 ‘As for Kira’s retainers,
 whose dreams have been so rudely interrupted,
 if they flee don’t chase them,
 but if they confront you, cut them down.
 Don’t harm the women or children,
 and remember the passwords, yama 山 and kawa 川.’*

*“The comrades all searched frantically,
 looking in every corner, and yet
 Kira’s hiding place could not be found.
 Finally from behind, at the whistle’s signal of success,
 the comrades gathered and danced with joy.
 Inside a storage shed along the neighbor’s wall,
 Kira Kōzuke 吉良上野 lay hiding.
 Hazama Jūjirō 間十次郎 took the first strike,
 breaking down the latticed door of the shed.
 Takebayashi pulled Kira out with both hands,
 and brought him to the middle of the main hall.
 Kira faced forward,
 and we all gathered around him.
 Kuranosuke withdrew to a respectful distance from Kira
 and placed his hands politely to the floor.
 ‘Begging your pardon,’ he said,
 ‘I am Ōishi Kuranosuke Yoshio, now a rōnin,
 a retainer of the late Asano Takumi no kami Naganori,
 of Akō in Banshū. With these forty-odd others,
 we have presumptuously come into your mansion tonight,
 resolved to fulfill the revenge of our late lord.
 Understanding the hearts of the rōnin gathered here,
 if you will now take your own life,
 I, Kuranosuke, will be honored to serve as your second.’
 Hearing this, the comrades exchanged glances,*

¹⁵ Banshū is the province of Harima 播磨.

*all impressed now to witness what it was
that made Ōishi a true warrior.*

*“I am not Kira, I am Ōtomo 大友,” he claimed,
but they knew better, bringing in Satohashi Rihei 里橋利平,
who was familiar with his face.¹⁶
The cowardly Kōzuke, clinging to life,
looked for an opening and thrashed about in flight.
What cowardice to flee at a time like this,
when it is useless to resist.
The Naminohira 波ノ平 sword of Kuranosuke
came from its sheath,
and cut deep from the shoulder down.
Kira fell with a thud, trying to rise but unable to stand.
Kuranosuke pinned him down firmly on the chest,
and drew out from his breast
the very dirk that took his lord’s life,
which had been passed on as a memento to Kataoka
on the fourteenth of the fourth month last year,
following the seppuku.
Kuranosuke unsheathed the dirk and,
declaring, ‘Know that this is my lord’s vengeance,’
stabbed with happiness and joy.*

*“The head was taken by Kimura Okaemon 木村岡右衛門,
and transported by boat to Sengakuji.
As for myself, I have come to give this report.”
Such was the breathless tale of Terasaka.*

*The woman spy, who has listened to this tale,
cries out and begins to weep.
“I knew I wouldn’t be able to get away with this!
I am indeed the daughter of a greengrocer in Akasaka Tamachi,
but I was asked by Chisaka Hyōbu 千坂兵部,¹⁷
to whom my father is indebted,*

¹⁶ The primary descriptions of the attack on Kira record that he was identified (since none of the rōnin themselves had ever seen his face) by one of the guards at the mansion. The source and identity of Satohashi Rihei is unclear; most likely, it is a fictitious name from a *kōdan* version.

¹⁷ Chisaka Hyōbu (1637–1700) was a councilor (*karō*) of the Uesugi 上杉 domain of Yonezawa 米沢, of which Kira Kōzuke no suke’s son Yoshinori 吉徳 (1663–1704) was daimyo at the time of the Akō incident. Even though Chisaka died almost two years before the incident began, a legend emerged that he had counseled Yoshinori not to attack the Akō avengers in the immediate wake of the attack on Kira. Chisaka became a standard figure in *kōdan* tales and later in films and historical novels about the Akō revenge. He is generally depicted in a sympathetic way, which in this story works to mitigate the treachery of the greengrocer’s daughter.

*to become a spy for your enemy.
Now that the revenge is over,
please spare my life!”*

*The human heart is a fickle thing,
so it is best to despise the crime and not the person.
The woman is forgiven, and
Lady Toda goes by palanquin to Sengakuji,
to pay respects on behalf of the widow Yōsen'in.
There she meets Kuranosuke,
and conveys Lady Yōsen'in's apologies for her rashness the day before.
Terasaka makes preparations for travel,
and carries his report to Toyooka 豊岡, in Tajima,
to Kuranosuke's mother, wife, and children,
residing at the house of Ishizuka Gengobei 石塚源吾兵衛
councilor to Lord Kyōgoku Kai no kami 京極甲斐守.¹⁸
This episode, known as “The Second Report about the Loyal Retainers,”
brings to an end “Parting in the Snow at Nanbuzaka.”¹⁹*

¹⁸ Ishizuka Gengobei was the father of Ōishi Kuranosuke's wife, Riku りく, and a councilor of the domain of Toyooka, of which Kyōgoku Kai no kami Takazumi 京極甲斐守高住 was daimyo at the time. Ōishi had sent Riku and his children back to her parents' home in the spring of 1702. There is no historical evidence that Terasaka did in fact travel to Toyooka to carry the news of the revenge back to Riku and her father.

¹⁹ The episode known as “The Second Report about the Loyal Retainers” (*Chūshin nidome no kiyogaki* 忠臣二度目の清書) was a separate Gishi tale about Terasaka's retelling to Ōishi's family the story of the night attack and concluding with Terasaka's own seppuku. It was told both in jōruri and *kōdan*, and Kumoemon included it in his own repertoire as well.