

THE TWO GATES

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis contains one short story and one novella. Both are set in a historical setting and contain themes of loyalty, duty, morality, and spirituality. What connects them is a common setting and similar conflicts, both internal and external, as well as the protagonist of the novella's involvement with the conclusion of the short story. In my introduction, I show how three authors use setting to help portray three novels and one short story that are set in historical time periods and cultures. I then explain how I've adopted certain techniques to aid me with the creation of historical and cultural settings in my own works.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
CHAPTER	
I. Introduction.....	1
Temporal Shift: Writing in a Historical Setting.....	1
II. Enemy of the Buddha.....	12
III. The Two Gates.....	35
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	96
VITA.....	99

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### Temporal Shift: Writing in a Historical Setting

I believe fiction is designed to take the reader on a journey to another time and place, to a world that no matter how similar to our own is distinctly different in some way. This alternate reality is a story's setting, an integral aspect of fiction that grounds the reader into the world of a story and directly influences how characters act within it. Establishing setting is usually done at or near the beginning and naturally draws readers in because as author Stephen Minot says, "the first thing they want to identify is the means of perception. The second is where they are" (213). That setting involves both time and place is important to note, for "[w]e naturally think of setting in terms of place, but it also involves time—the hour of the day or night, the season, and occasionally the historical period" (Minot 213). All of these aspects of setting are important in my thesis, but perhaps the most significant are the place, Japan, and the historical period, the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, because conveying stories in this setting provides additional challenges. As the author, I must be aware of differences in culture and language, and also possess adequate knowledge of the period while ensuring I do not pass these challenges on to the reader. In this introduction I will cite examples of techniques used by historical fiction writers that illustrate ways to deal with these challenges. The works to be discussed are the novels *Taiko* and *Musashi* by 20<sup>th</sup> century Japanese historical fiction writer Yoshikawa Eiji, the short story "Passage to Fudaraku" by Yoshikawa's contemporary Inoue Yasushi, and the novel *Shōgun* by American

author James Clavell. In each case these authors choose an appropriate point of view, provide readers with necessary historical or cultural information without distracting them, and show how these atypical settings can be used to enhance stories, not simply be present within them. I will then show how I intend to use these techniques effectively in my own works.

Point of view is every bit as important as setting is to a story; it is “the means of perception” Minot calls the very first thing a reader looks for (213). One experiences setting through the narrator because who’s eyes we’re looking through dictates how we experience the fictional world. Traditionally, limited omniscience (either first-person or third limited) is used in short stories, while third-person omniscience is often reserved for novels (Minot 180). The primary reason for this is that short stories usually have a single plotline and protagonist, whereas novels have room to include multiple plots and secondary characters, which often necessitate point of view shifts when moving from one character or plotline to another.

Yoshikawa Eiji uses an omniscient narrator in both *Taiko* and *Musashi*: the former details the life of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, while the latter tells the story of Miyamoto Musashi, both of whom are very important and well documented historical figures. But while these novels center on Hideyoshi and Musashi, respectively, dozens of secondary characters appear and play major roles within each narrative. What holds these novels together is that these ancillary characters have some connection (with varying significance) to the protagonist, and the various plotlines ultimately converge.

While Yoshikawa’s characters are natives to the settings of his stories, James Clavell’s *Shōgun* tells the story of a foreigner—English privateer John Blackthorne—who accidentally finds himself shipwrecked on the shores of medieval Japan. While Blackthorne belongs to the time period, he is culturally displaced, and Clavell uses a third-person limited point of view to

emphasize this point. On the very first page, Blackthorne attempts to ask a Japanese woman where he is, and she responds in Japanese: “*Goshujinsama, gobikun wa ikaga desu ka?*” (25). Blackthorne does not understand, and this sentence is never translated into English because Clavell is telling the story from Blackthorne’s perspective. Using this limited third-person point of view creates conflict that would not exist if an omniscient narrator translated for us. This choice also allows the reader to experience the setting of the story through Blackthorne’s eyes, and we learn about the setting at the same pace he does. It should be noted that Clavell doesn’t restrict the point of view to Blackthorne throughout the entire novel: there are scenes where he briefly shifts to another character—most notably Toranaga and Mariko—but during these shifts, the point of view is still limited, and the purpose is still to emphasize differences between themselves and the foreign Blackthorne.

Inoue Yasushi’s “Passage to Fudaraku” is written in close third-person and never deviates. The story is about the Abbot of the Fudarakuji, Konko, who at the age of 61 is expected to embark on a one-way trip to the legendary island of Fudaraku. This island is considered the “Pure Land,” home of the Buddhist deity Kannon, and the Fudaraku monastery is dedicated to its worship (206). The three previous abbots had taken the journey when they were 61 because they were assumed to be sufficiently enlightened and prepared for the journey. Konko is filled with doubt, however, and while the action of the story centers around his preparation, particularly on the day of the voyage, most of the narrative takes place in Konko’s mind: he recalls his memories of each of the abbots he’d known, their attitudes toward the tradition, how strong each man’s faith was, and how each approached the fateful day that he set out to sea. Since the reader is informed about these men through Konko’s memories, our information about them is as limited as Konko’s, and is thus naturally skewed by his personal perception. The only complete,

unbiased knowledge we are given is that of Konko himself. Konko recalls that the Abbot Yushin claimed that he could actually see the island of Fudaraku on a clear day, going so far as to describe its shoreline features—he had no doubts about either the island’s existence or that he would reach it (212). Conversely, the Abbot Shokei (in response to Konko’s question about whether Shokei would die or not), laughingly replies, “Of course I shall die. I shall die at sea and sink to the bottom, which, by the way, is every bit as expansive as the surface, and I shall make friends with all the fishes” (214). Ultimately, the fates of these men are as unknown to the reader as they are to Konko; Konko’s voyage is the only one we witness.

As a result of this limited point of view, the reader is placed as closely into Konko’s shoes as possible. Since Konko is a Buddhist monk who has lived at this remote, seaside monastery nearly his entire life, his knowledge of the outside world is limited, but his knowledge of the temple’s history and tradition is expansive. We learn about his sect and its daily practices through Konko’s routine, and we experience his fateful journey firsthand, sharing all of his memories, doubts, and anxieties. This level of immersion would be very difficult to replicate with an omniscient narrator. The impact of the setting is enhanced by experiencing it solely through Konko.

“Passage to Fudaraku” is also an excellent example of a story that imparts a great deal of historical and cultural knowledge without burdening the reader with large amounts of distractive expository writing. At the same time, we are not given superfluous information about the setting; what Konko tells us through his memories and experiences are all relevant to the story. One of Konko’s recollections describes how the monk Yushin was commonly known as “the blessed Ashida” because “he habitually wore *ashida*, the common wooden clogs, instead of the sandals appropriate to his vocation” (209). This description shows that Yushin was an eccentric monk,

which apparently played a role in his faith, but it also shows that *ashida* are the common footwear for people, and that the monks normally wear a different style of shoe. In a scene where Konko is reading from the sutras, his attendant remarks that Konko resembles a *yorori*—a type of fish found in the area that’s considered sacred and never eaten (211). A brief description of *yorori* follows, and the primary implication of the comparison is a literal one: *yorori* eyes appear blank and lifeless, and Konko’s eyes appear this way when he’s reading. The sacredness of the fish implies that Konko resembles them spiritually as well, even though the real reason why Konko’s eyes turn blank is that he’s distracted and apprehensive about taking the “passage,” making the comparison ironic. As significant as this point is to the story, the author has also given us another piece of tactile information about the setting. We know what *yorori* are, have an idea of what they look like, and some understanding of what the people think of them. Knowing what *ashida* and *yorori* are isn’t necessary for the reader to comprehend the story, but it does seamlessly enrich the setting.

Inoue provides the reader with relevant historical information in a similar fashion. The first sentence gives us the year of the story’s setting—1565—so the time is established immediately (206). Next, we learn why this year is important: firstly, it’s when Konko turns 61, the significance of which is quickly revealed. Secondly, we’re briefly told that the Kumano area (in which the Fudarukuji is located) suffered an earthquake in 1538, a typhoon in 1540, and a major flood in 1541 (214). There is also a “civil war raging about the capital” that has made the countryside lawless and dangerous. None of these events have directly affected Konko, and his attention is fixed on the journey he’s about to undertake. Yet there is no religious mandate compelling him to go, only a tradition inadvertently begun and continued by the previous abbots. Because of this and the fact that Konko feels unready to make the voyage, he wants to put it off,

but when he contemplates what will happen if he does so, he realizes that he has no choice. The mounting natural disasters and political instability have affected the people who worship Kannon and Fudaraku, and they look up to him as abbot to lead them through these harsh times. As much as Konko would like to postpone the ritual, he knows that the mere mention of it would fall “on unsympathetic ears” and likely provoke “great disquiet and even violence” (208). This would not only injure his own reputation (and possibly body), but that of the temple, which would be an unforgivable offense. Therefore, the setting of the story is what ultimately forces Konko to sail for Fudaraku. These historical events are mentioned but scarcely detailed to the reader. We are only told enough about them to understand why the people would not accept Konko’s refusal.

James Clavell takes a similar approach to providing historical information. *Shōgun* is set in the year 1600, an important time in both Japan and Europe. Blackthorne is English, presumably one of the first Englishmen to ever reach Japan, and most of his crew (as well as his ship, the *Erasmus*) are Dutch (28-31). England and Holland are allies and at war with Portugal and Spain. The Portuguese have been present in Japan since 1543, and have established trade routes and missions throughout the country. Therefore, in order to question Blackthorne and his crew, the Japanese, who have taken them captive, bring a Jesuit priest to translate. Blackthorne speaks Portuguese and is able to communicate with the priest, but their hostility towards each other flares up immediately (32-35). Through their dialogue and Blackthorne’s internal knowledge, the reader is informed of the political situation, which may determine Blackthorne’s fate; he is unable to trust this Jesuit to translate accurately and legitimately worries that the priest may try to have him killed. This necessitates a need to change translators, which brings Mariko into the story—a Japanese woman who’s converted to Christianity and speaks both Portuguese

and Latin. Mariko becomes intimately involved with Blackthorne as the novel progresses, and is also the principle figure who helps Blackthorne learn the Japanese language and culture.

Japan itself is in a state of political upheaval. Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the *Taiko* and Japan's de facto ruler, died in 1598, leaving a power vacuum that his underage son cannot fill. Hideyoshi appointed regents to govern until his heir came of age, two of whom are Tokugawa Ieyasu (named Toranaga by Clavell) and Ishida Mitsunari (whom Clavell calls Ishido). By 1600 Toranaga and Ishido are on the verge of open war, with the former controlling most of northeastern Japan and the latter dominating the southwest. Blackthorne's shipwreck occurs in Toranaga's territory, and Toranaga takes a liking to him because of his strangeness (Blackthorne is unlike the other foreigners in Japan, whom Toranaga generally disapproves of) and his knowledge of naval warfare, which may be very useful in the near future. Therefore, Blackthorne gradually becomes close to Toranaga, eventually becoming one of his *hatamoto* (personal guards) and privy to some of his plans, through which the reader learns many details about the political situation: the relative military strength of each side, when the war is expected to erupt, and how the result will impact the status of foreigners like himself. He's also sent on a trip to Osaka where he meets Ishido and the other regents, further expanding his knowledge (936). As much as Blackthorne does learn, however, he's not informed about everything, only what he's told or can discern for himself. The reader's knowledge is limited accordingly.

The end result of this conflict between Tokugawa Ieyasu and Ishida Mitsunari was the Battle of Sekigahara, which occurred in October of 1600. The events of *Shōgun* end before the battle, with a brief summary of it given in epilogue form (1152), but the immediate aftermath of the battle serves as the opening of Yoshikawa Eiji's *Musashi*. Musashi (at this time known as Takezō) and his childhood friend, Matahachi, both participated on Mitsunari's side, which lost.

They regain consciousness on the battlefield amid countless dead bodies, surprised to be alive and not seriously injured (3). Some background information about the battle is given, which is limited to what the two boys know (they're only seventeen). Neither had any particular loyalty to Mitsunari, having chosen his side because their home province of Mimasaka lay under his control, but they wanted to make names for themselves. They failed, however, and are lucky to be alive, though they're still in danger because the Tokugawa forces are hunting down fugitives in the area (4-5). Musashi and Matahachi both escape, but not without newfound knowledge of what war is really like. The outcome of this battle affected everyone in Japan. If Tokugawa Ieyasu had lost, there would have been no Tokugawa shogunate, which endured from 1603 to 1867. Yoshikawa's omniscient narrator could have told us how important it was. But he does not because as significant as the outcome of this battle was, its immediate impact on the story is limited to these two boys. Therefore, we are only told what we need to know.

This method of revealing information as needed is consistent throughout Yoshikawa's works. While *Musashi* is more of a personal journey, the early life of a lone samurai who becomes a famous swordsman, *Taiko* takes place roughly half a century earlier and encompasses numerous major historical events and battles, as well as the notable people involved. But the information we're given about these events and the amount of detail involved depend on their significance to the protagonist, Hideyoshi. The Battle of Okehazama has an entire chapter dedicated to it titled, "The Lord with the Blackened Teeth" (193-214). The historical significance of this battle is profound, much like Sekigahara. Its significance to this novel is that it is Hideyoshi's first battle, even though his role is small and has no direct impact on the outcome. Information is given about the loser, Imagawa Yoshimoto (the lord with blackened teeth), and the reader is informed of the battle's general details, including Yoshimoto's death (211). But the

purpose is not to tell us about Yoshimoto, only why he lost to Oda Nobunaga (Hideyoshi's master), and by extension, Hideyoshi himself. Yoshikawa emphasizes this point at the chapter's end when he describes the victory celebration and recognition of meritorious services:

[Hideyoshi] received no praise whatsoever. And, of course, he expected none. Nevertheless, he had received something far more precious than his stipend of a thousand *kan*: for the first time in his life, he had straddled the line between life and death, he had lived through a battle, and he had seen firsthand Nobunaga's grasp of human nature and his great capacity for leadership. (214)

The fact that he survives and that Nobunaga wins is what matters to the narrative.

The stories that comprise my thesis—"Enemy of the Buddha" and "The Two Gates"—are both set in sixteenth century Japan. Because there is symmetry between the two, I've chosen to employ the same techniques in each. The first technique is a close third-person limited point of view. This is my preferred choice when writing fiction because I believe that it helps create a sense of realism. Individuals have limited knowledge and perspectives, and by limiting the narrator accordingly, writers can place the reader into the protagonist's shoes as closely as possible. First-person can also achieve this effect, but as Minot notes:

The greatest advantage of the third person is flexibility. The writer can use the protagonist as the primary means of perception, using *he* or *she*, while occasionally drawing on a more objective view for incidental or background information. (187)

Providing such information is necessary at times in these stories because of the historical setting. Inoue Yasushi's "Passage to Fudaraku" is an excellent example, and is the model I've emulated most in my own work. Another reason why I've chosen third-person rather than first is to distance myself from the narrator, not because I am too close to the material, but because when I write in first-person, I invariably (albeit incidentally) infuse too much of my own personality into the narrator. Writing in third-person helps me create a protagonist unlike myself, which is the case with both Keiji and Katsuhisa.

The second technique is the revelation of relevant historical information only as needed and in non-distractive fashion; revealing too much, especially in large blocks, can easily pull the reader out of a story, as well as disrupt the flow of a narrative. By limiting the point of view, I am limiting the knowledge of my narrators, and so they cannot impart information that they do not possess. Furthermore, what information they do impart is dictated by their respective situations: if characters don't have a reason to think of a past event or muse about political matters, religion, culture, etc., then they do not do so. Similarly, they do not speak to other characters about such matters unless two conditions are met: the subject is directly relevant, and one or more characters involved lack some necessary knowledge but need to learn it. It is always important in fiction to not have one character give another information that the latter would already know. Doing so is a trick on the writer's part to directly pass information on to the reader without having any true bearing on the story. This is a form of authorial intrusion, which I am not allowed to do if I am to maintain my limited omniscient point of view and the authorial contract I've established with my audience (Burroway, Writing Fiction 299). I have been careful to avoid this trap as a means of divulging information, historical or otherwise.

Lastly, I have chosen to employ a few cosmetic techniques to help immerse the reader into the historical and cultural setting of my stories. Some Japanese words appear in both which I have purposely not translated, typically in cases where accurate translations are either too inexact or bulky. In these instances, the words may be understood by context, while at the same time adding some cultural or period distinction to the narrative. Another technique which I've borrowed from Yoshikawa's *Taiko* is the use of the traditional Japanese lunar calendar and clock for denoting times and dates. My reasoning for this is that these would be the methods by which most characters, including my protagonists, would keep and tell time in this setting; the

Gregorian calendar and twenty-four hour clock might be used by Westerners and some Christian converts, but not by the general populace. In places where these appear, I have provided simple endnotes for the reader, which I believe are not too intrusive because of their scarcity. And finally, I have been careful in my choice of language, particularly regarding words and phrases that are either too modern or Western. To use such language would be a distraction and might pull the reader out of the setting. At the same time, I've tried not to make the language overly formal or foreign so as not to alienate my audience.

None of these superficial touches are strictly necessary for either story, but when used in appropriate measure, have the effect of enriching the foreign, historical setting. The goal is not to trick the reader into not noticing the setting, but rather to make it as realistic as possible without making it inaccessible. When done effectively and combined with the necessary techniques outlined above, the result is a world that's unique and foreign, but one in which the reader can become immersed and understand without difficulty. I have applied these techniques to achieve an accurate yet accessible historical setting in my works.

CHAPTER II  
ENEMY OF THE BUDDHA

*“There are three things that are beyond my control: the rapids of the Kamo River, the dice at gambling, and the monks of the mountain.”*

- Emperor Go Shirakawa-In, circa 1170

Keiji sat in silent meditation before one of the outer shrines when he heard a quiet but high-pitched voice mutter, “Sir, would you play *kemari* with me?”

He opened his eyes and looked over his shoulder. There stood a young boy, perhaps eight years old, holding a round ball of coarse leather between his hands. Keiji rose from his kneeling position, smiled, and said, “I would, but I’m afraid I wouldn’t know how.”

The child didn’t respond, keeping his head down as if he were afraid to look Keiji in the eyes. The *kemari* ball vibrated in his small hands, and it was then that Keiji noticed that the boy was trembling. He walked over to the child slowly, gently put a hand on his shoulder and said, “It’s late in the afternoon and your mother is probably looking for you. Go see her before she worries, and perhaps you can play with your friends before it gets dark.”

The boy nodded slightly before bolting out of the shrine, nearly tripping on one of the prayer mats along the way. Keiji sighed while looking back at the dimly lit altar of Amida Buddha. With his concentration broken, there was no reason for him to stay, either. He chanted a

short prayer from the Lotus sutra, put out the candles, and walked outside, pulling his white cowl over his clean shaven head.

Enryakuji atop Mount Hiei was a huge, sprawling temple complex. Aside from the main temple, there were seven shrines, separate monasteries and pagodas on the eastern and western slopes, and numerous halls and homes in between. The total number of buildings exceeded 3,000. The mountain itself was sacred, for it was not only the seat of Keiji's Tendai sect of Buddhism, but also the home of the Shinto deity, Sanno, "King of the Mountain." Situated just northeast of Kyoto, Mount Hiei protected the capital's "demon gate," and hence Enryakuji was officially designated the "temple for the pacification and protection of the state." *But that was 800 years ago*, thought Keiji. Now, in the second year of Genki<sup>1</sup>, though all of the titles and privileges that came with them remained intact, he wondered if the sacredness of Enryakuji and Mount Hiei could be called into question.

It was cold for the ninth month, and Keiji shivered as he walked up the stony path that led back to the main temple grounds. He was in no hurry to return, so he walked slowly, watching the clusters of multicolored leaves swirl and scatter with each gust of wind, then listening to them rustle and crunch beneath his wooden clogs. Cicadas and other insects were quiet on account of the weather, but he could still hear the occasional chirping of a sparrow flying high above. With the exception of the temple compound and the narrow, winding paths that led up to it, Mount Hiei was almost completely covered with trees, and Keiji enjoyed walking through them in all seasons. Today's stroll, however, had more to do with finding solitude than observing nature.

As he neared the main temple, the sound of human voices drowned out all other noises, and the commotion had greatly increased since he'd left to meditate earlier that afternoon. It

wasn't uncommon for the courtyard of Enryakuji to be filled with the clamor of people or even the laughter of children: the mountain was home to tens of thousands. Today was different, though; a mass of armed men occupied the grounds, drinking *sake*, singing songs, brandishing weapons, and even playing games of *go* using black and white stones they'd found lying on the ground. The men were monks, at least those who were natives of the mountain, but few ascetic or scholarly types could be found among them. They were *sohei*—warrior-monks—and though the sight of such men had become quite common these days, Keiji had never seen so many gathered at once. He recognized some as members of his own order; the Tendai had maintained an armed force for centuries, and all of the monks of Enryakuji were required to train with various weapons once per week. But many of the others were newcomers to the mountain and spoke with strange accents. While the Enryakuji *sohei* were largely uniform in appearance and equipment, the strangers varied greatly. Some were little more than farmers with spears; others could have passed for samurai. *They must be ikko-ikki*, thought Keiji, members of the Shinshu sect's fanatical peasant movement.

Keiji always felt uncomfortable around them, perhaps more so with the *ikko* than with the true *sohei*, but then he found the very concept of *sohei* to be troubling enough. They had another name, *akuso*—“evil monks”—and the popularity of this term had risen in recent years. The great abbot Ryogen had established Enryakuji's first armed force as a means of protecting the mountain and its shrines some 600 years ago, but those men were mercenaries, not monks. Ryogen had in fact forbidden all Tendai from carrying arms. The tradition of *sohei* stemmed from this precedent, however, and the number of times they'd been involved in wars, demonstrations in the capital, and even inter-temple feuds was incalculable. Moreover, carrying weapons was only one of many vows regularly broken by such men. Few abstained from meat or

drink, and fewer still observed chastity, as the number of women and children on the mountain clearly indicated. Keiji himself had been born at Enryakuji, as had the child who'd interrupted his meditation, no doubt. It was no wonder the boy feared him when so many other men dressed in monk's robes had armor sticking out of their sleeves and long-bladed *naginata*s in their hands. They frightened Keiji, too, and represented a fundamental paradox. It was one thing for a samurai to wear a head cowl or ceremonial scarf, but quite another for a monk to wear armor and carry weapons.

Keiji quickened his pace as he passed them by, circumventing the crowd as best he could. One noticeably intoxicated *ikko* tried to talk to him, offering a cup of *sake* and asking why he was unarmed, but Keiji said nothing, stopping only long enough for a quick glance. The man and several of his companions got angry at this, yelling taunts and insults at Keiji until a pair of Enryakuji monks intervened. The Tendai and *ikko-ikki* were not natural allies, only uniting in times of need, and Keiji guessed that this wasn't the first time tensions had flared that afternoon, so he hurried on. Still, he wasn't even sure why the *ikko* were here. They hadn't been earlier that day. He wanted to know what was happening. He decided to go to the western pagoda, both for its vast view of the surrounding area and in hope of finding someone to talk to in a more peaceful setting.

The paths to the western slopes were less noisy than the courtyard, but they could hardly be described as peaceful. Keiji only encountered a handful of armed men hurrying this way or that, but a large number of women and children huddled by the roadside or stumbled through the thick brush to his left or right. The women said nothing, and if their children cried out, they were instantly silenced. Keiji guessed these people had been displaced from the main temple grounds, and he couldn't blame them for shunning him. He even avoided eye contact so that they

wouldn't have to do the same. Instead, Keiji stopped to talk with the few monks he passed, but they either knew as little as he did or claimed to have no time for conversation.

“You don't know what's going on? Go to the western summit and see for yourself,” said one who only paused long enough to catch his breath. He quickly got under way again, carrying a large bundle of firewood in his arms. In fact most of the men Keiji saw were carrying supplies of some kind. It looked as if they were preparing for a siege.

This possibility then occurred to Keiji: the mountain might very well be under siege. It had only happened once before, but not in the distant past, it was the previous winter. Keiji didn't know all of the details but he knew the general situation: the Asai and Asakura clans were at war with the Oda and had retreated to Mount Hiei after a defeat. The warrior-monks of Enryakuji, out of mutual animosity toward the Oda clan, had sheltered them, prompting the Oda *daimyo* Nobunaga to surround the mountain with his army and lay siege to it for a month. It was a bitter time for everyone on Mount Hiei. The Asai and Asakura swelled the mountain's population far beyond its capacity, the lack of shelter forced many to sleep outside in freezing weather, and small bands of Oda soldiers periodically snuck up the mountain and set fire to various buildings, keeping the defenders so busy that they hardly had time to sleep. There was virtually no fighting, however, and the whole situation ended as peacefully as could be expected. The monks sent emissaries to Nobunaga, and though Abbot Sonrin, the head of Enryakuji's *sohei*, was put to death for sheltering enemies of the Oda, terms were quickly negotiated and the three clans all returned to their home provinces. To Keiji's knowledge that was the end of the affair, and though he knew that Sonrin's death would likely do little to blunt the spirits of Mount Hiei's warrior-monks, they at least hadn't involved themselves in any fighting since. That being the case, why would anyone be threatening the mountain now? Keiji turned this question over

and over in his mind as he walked up the steep path to the western peak, but he could find no answer.

The western pagoda was a magnificent structure, and at four stories, was one of the tallest in the country. That it stood near a precipice on one of the steepest parts of the mountain made it that much more imposing, especially when viewed from below. As Keiji headed towards it, he saw that the area was virtually deserted. The only people here were monks, none of whom were armed. This put Keiji more at ease, and he scanned their faces until he saw one that he recognized, an elderly monk standing on the veranda and staring into the distance. The sunlight gleamed off of his bald head and white robes. Had he not been fingering the beads of his prayer necklace, one might have mistaken him for a statue.

“Master Tessai,” called out Keiji as he ran up to the old monk. Tessai was not technically a master of anyone, but Keiji looked up to him as a mentor. Keiji called the old man’s name several times, but Tessai didn’t respond until Keiji was at his side.

“Calm yourself, Keiji. Why are you in such a hurry?” Tessai spoke these words as if he were talking to himself, never turning his eyes from whatever they were fixed on.

“Forgive me,” said Keiji. He was winded and starting to perspire. After wiping his brow and taking a moment to catch his breath, he continued, “I was glad to see you. I haven’t seen many friendly faces today.”

“There’s no need to apologize,” said Tessai. “Come and enjoy the view with me.”

Keiji wasn’t sure exactly what the old man was so focused on, but he looked down and saw a great many things. On such a clear day, Kyoto was not obscured and could be seen in fine detail. He made out the line of the Kamo River twisting its way through the capital, and the gilded outlines of the Nijo Palace, Honnoji, Myokakuji, and other prominent buildings glistened

brightly. To the east of the city lay Lake Biwa, stretching to the horizon and beyond, its calm waters reflecting an orange hue in the late afternoon sun. It was truly a remarkable view, until Keiji lowered his gaze to the mountain's base. Black smoke rose steadily from the town of Sakamoto, and yellow and gold banners occupied the space between the lake and the mountain's foothills. A number of tents could be seen in their midst, and one particularly large one was emblazoned with purple encircled bellflowers. Keiji's pulse quickened again.

"Do you see it?" asked Tessai.

"What do you mean?" said Keiji, turning toward the old man in exasperation.

"Chikubu Island," answered Tessai. "It's always covered with red leaves at this time of year. Today, I came up here to meditate, but the island caught my attention instead." His voice seemed as distant as the island he spoke of. After a long pause, he added, "Perhaps I'll write some poetry later. You should join me."

Keiji looked back at the lake, but he couldn't see Chikubu. Even on a day such as this, few if any could see the island from here. Keiji felt that Tessai must be deluded. "No, I don't see Chikubu," replied Keiji, "I see Sakamoto burning and thousands of Oda banners between the lake and the mountain. If you can see Chikubu Island, then you must surely see those things, too."

A slow smile formed on the old man's face. "We see what we want to see. Of course I can see them, but my attention is on the island. Perhaps when you are older, you will be able to focus your attention better as well." Tessai finally broke his gaze. Glancing up at the sky, he said, "Well, we should head back to the temple, it will be dusk soon. Come with me, I can also see that you have many questions, so let us talk on the way."

As Tessai descended the stairs from the balcony, Keiji looked at the old man in amazement. He expected Tessai to be calm and detached, but not to this extent; an army was burning towns in the foothills, and given what had happened less than a year ago, the Oda and Enryakuji were not exactly on friendly terms. Was Tessai so removed from worldly events that he cared nothing about such things? Did he think that the Oda were simply passing through, that whatever their intentions were, they had no relevance to the temple and its monks? Tessai was certainly right about one thing, Keiji did have questions. The old man moved quickly for his age, and so Keiji had to run after him in order not to be left behind.

Despite inviting Keiji to join him, Tessai didn't prove very cooperative with providing answers. Instead, he talked mostly about foliage: the cherry blossoms that grew near the Ane River, the great Chinese black pines that dotted the hills of Omi Province, the dwarf bamboo that was prominent around Nara—things that might have interested Keiji if his mind wasn't preoccupied with the Oda. But whenever Keiji started to ask Tessai about them, the attitudes of the temple's *sohei*, or what members of the *ikko-ikki* were doing on the mountain, the old man simply replied that such matters shouldn't concern a monk, then returned the subject to nature. Keiji remained respectful and didn't persist, but he paid little attention to Tessai's ramblings the rest of the way.

At near the middle of the Hour of the Rooster<sup>2</sup>, they returned to the main temple grounds, reaching them right at sunset. The area was considerably less crowded than when Keiji was last there, but the men who remained were well armed. Some of the *ikko* were sprawled out on the stones asleep, likely from too much *sake*. The warrior-monks of Enryakuji were alert, though, standing like sentries throughout the courtyard. As Tessai and Keiji passed one of them, they were questioned about where they'd been and where they were going. Keiji looked at the man,

and aside from his robes and prayer beads, he bore no resemblance to a monk. He was in full armor, had two swords tucked into his belt, a bow and quiver over his right shoulder, and wore a bell-shaped helmet with large deer antlers protruding from the top, out of which his long black hair fell past his shoulders. Keiji then looked at Tessai. The old man's face appeared as though he'd just bitten into a piece of rotten fruit.

“Our comings and goings are no business of yours,” said Tessai. His tone was that of a father lecturing a misbehaving child. “Is it any wonder that so many people call you ‘*akuso*’ rather than ‘*sohei*’ when you dress like this and show no respect for your elders?”

The man didn't argue, he simply responded in a calm but stern voice, “Just remember, venerable sir, that if the mountain is attacked, we are all equally bound to defend it.”

“And you remember that you are a disciple of the Buddha,” replied Tessai, tapping the man on the shin with the foot of his staff. He then continued toward the temple, and Keiji followed close behind, wishing he'd responded to the *ikko* man who'd confronted him earlier in a similar fashion. Then again, Keiji was a young acolyte and couldn't demand the same respect as a man like Tessai, nor did he ever speak with such conviction. It was probably best that Keiji had said nothing. Still, he hoped that in time, he could emulate his mentor.

When they came to the Takimido Hall, Tessai parted with Keiji, saying he'd forgo the evening meal and spend time in his quarters instead. “I feel like writing,” he said. “Come see me after you've eaten. Perhaps I can find some like-minded friends and we'll compose linked verses tonight.”

Keiji said he would come, for though he considered himself to be a pitiful poet, he would still enjoy the company. But for now, his mind was on food—his stomach had been rumbling since he'd left the western pagoda—so he said farewell to Tessai and entered the hall. It was very

crowded inside. Monks of all kinds, even some of the *ikko*, were eating and drinking noisily. *No wonder the courtyard is quiet, the mob has simply moved inside*, thought Keiji. It also occurred to him that Tessai likely expected as much and that this had contributed to his decision not to eat here. The hall wasn't designed to hold so many people at once, so all of the tables were full and many monks were forced to eat on the floor, forming circles in corners, alcoves, and anywhere else they could find room. Keiji gathered a simple meal of a few rice balls, two cucumbers, a large peach and a cup of green tea, then looked for a place to sit, preferably far away from the *sohei* and *ikko*. He found a small group of unarmed monks in one corner of the hall and joined them, and though some were eating venison and drinking *sake*, they were likely the friendliest group Keiji could hope to find this evening.

The monks were deep in conversation, and though Keiji preferred to eat quietly and say no more than necessary, he listened intently to their discussion. As he expected, the main topic was the Oda. "They're probably just passing through," said one. "It's not uncommon for armies to burn and pillage towns. My guess is that they're on their way to Echizen to finish off the Asakura."

"Maybe they are, but they could do that without stopping here," said another. "Most of them arrived by ship from across the lake. If they were going to Echizen, they would have passed us and landed in northern Omi. They must have come here for a reason, and don't think that Nobunaga has forgotten what happened last year."

"They could be stopping at the capital, they could be heading west to fight the Mori, who knows?" replied the first man. "They have many enemies."

"And you think that they don't consider us one of them?"

“Oh, that’s preposterous. What threat could we possibly pose to them? Besides, even that upstart from Owari wouldn’t have the audacity to attack this sacred mountain.”

“You say that, and yet he’s already done so once.”

“That was different,” said the first man, pausing to take a drink of *sake*. “That was very different. First of all, he didn’t attack, he simply surrounded us. And secondly, we were sheltering thousands of his enemies. That gave him a reason. He has no reason now.”

The second man shook his head and sighed, saying, “I wish I shared your confidence.”

“I’m glad I don’t share your fears,” replied the first, causing several of the monks to laugh. Keiji wasn’t among them. He’d been eating as quietly as possible, chewing his rice balls into paste and nibbling at his cucumbers to minimize the crunching sound, and now that he’d finished them, he took his peach and quietly slipped away unnoticed. As far as the argument went, his sympathies were largely in tune with those of the second man, but Keiji didn’t want to get involved, especially since his opinion seemed to be in the minority. For now, he just wanted to clear his head, so he left the hall and decided to look at the stars while he finished his meal.

The Hour of the Rooster was nearly over and the sun had set when Keiji stepped back outside. The wind had picked up considerably and icy gusts penetrated his robes. Keiji wrapped his cowl tightly round his head, pulling the lower part up to his nose in order to protect his face. He walked back to the courtyard to get a better view of the sky, but clouds were moving in and the stars were only visible at intervals. Keiji felt disappointed, but then he thought it would be just as well to get out of the cold. Tessai was waiting for him, too, and though the old man had infinite patience, Keiji didn’t want to keep him waiting without reason.

Just as he started to head toward the monks’ quarters, however, he heard a strange noise: the blast of conch shells—three, actually—with about ten second intervals in between. The

sound was very loud, coming from somewhere further down the mountain but carried by the wind all the way to the summit. Keiji wanted to peer down the slope, but the courtyard was mostly level and didn't provide much of a view. Besides, other than the temple structures and a handful of other places where lamps were set, it would be almost impossible to see anything in the dark. But the *sohei* standing guard throughout the main temple grounds scurried all around, climbing rocks and anything else they could use to see better, and they were joined by many more who came running out of various buildings. After a few moments, some of them said that they could see small lights flickering here and there, far down the slope, and the others ran over to see for themselves. But it wasn't long before a large fire erupted down in the foothills that even Keiji could see.

"Miidera is burning!" yelled one of the monks, and the others looked on with their eyes opened wide and mouths agape. Keiji was shocked, too; Miidera was Enryakuji's sister temple in Mount Hiei's foothills, almost as ancient and no less sacred. Could the Oda have really committed such an atrocity? The other monks didn't seem to have any doubts, for they grabbed their weapons and prepared to fight. Within moments, Enryakuji's main bell began ringing furiously, and the sound reverberated in Keiji's chest.

He wasn't sure what to do, or even think. It could be that the monks were mistaken about Miidera; that the fires in the foothills were caused by the Oda was very likely, but at this distance no one could be certain of what exactly was burning. Keiji watched as some of the *ikko* who carried arquebuses, those strange fire-shooting weapons brought to this country by the southern barbarians, began taking aim at the points of light below and firing, filling the air with plumes of smoke and the putrid smell of gunpowder. The other *sohei* quickly put a stop to this, saying that the *ikko* were only wasting ammunition and shooting trees. Instead, they were told to form ranks

and take up defensive positions behind wooden barricades that had been constructed on the paths leading up to the mountain. The *sohei* seemed to think that the enemy would be forced to use these paths and planned to stop them there. Keiji thought that this seemed reasonable enough, assuming it was true and that they had enough men to hold off the Oda. But Keiji could rarely bring himself to put trust in assumptions.

It also occurred to him that the longer he stayed and watched, the more likely someone would see him and force him to join. But then again, where could he go for safety? While he contemplated this, a monk put a hand on Keiji's shoulder, startling him so badly he dropped his peach. He turned and saw that it was the same monk who'd been carrying firewood on the path to the western pagoda that afternoon, though he could only tell by the man's face: he was now fully armed and armored.

"Well, I don't suppose I have to tell you what's happening now," he said, apparently recognizing Keiji as well. "Hurry and get dressed, we need to fortify the paths on the southeastern slopes."

Keiji couldn't simply ignore this man or evade his questions, but he lacked the courage to respond the way Tessai would have. "I don't have any weapons or armor," he finally said. It may not have been what he really wanted to say, but at least it was true.

The other monk let out a sigh of frustration, saying, "You ascetics are pitiful. How can you be so ignorant of the outside world? If it weren't for the *sohei*, this temple would have been destroyed long ago." He then pulled the short sword out of his belt and handed it to Keiji, saying, "Just take this and follow me. I hope you at least know how to use it."

The monk started to walk away, but Keiji stopped him and said, “Wait, I have to ask you something.” Though Keiji did know how to use a sword, having learned along with every other Enryakuji monk, he couldn’t imagine surviving a battle.

“Make it brief.”

“You seem to know a great deal about what’s going on,” said Keiji, who was in no mood to speak briefly, “while I obviously do not. So tell me, why would the Oda would commit this outrage? Why are they here, destroying sacred temples and waging war against monks, against the Buddha?”

“You really are an ignorant fellow, aren’t you?” he replied, almost laughing. “Is it not obvious? The Oda are enemies of the Buddha. But do not worry,” he said, placing a hand on Keiji’s shoulder as a token of reassurance. “We’ve been communicating with the Takeda clan for several months now, and just two days ago, we received word that Takeda Shingen has mobilized a large army and is heading for the capital. Moreover, the Asai and Asakura have made a formal alliance with us and will join in the attack, too. All we have to do is hold the Oda here and wait for our allies to arrive, and then we’ll attack from all sides. Just wait,” he added with a smile, “Nobunaga’s head will be on display in Kyoto in a matter of days.”

Keiji couldn’t believe his ears. For a moment he even felt lightheaded and thought he might faint. How could these *sohei* call him ignorant when they’d done something so incredibly foolish? Had they learned nothing from what had happened the year before? Confused as he was, Keiji at least knew better than to meddle in the affairs of warring clans. Maybe the Asai, Asakura, and Takeda would all come, but not before the mountain was reduced to ashes. And were these warrior-monks so deluded as to think that the Oda would be oblivious to their plans? *They’ve condemned us all, thought Keiji, and they can’t even see it.*

“Fool!” he shouted, pushing the man away and taking a few steps backwards. He’d barely finished speaking before he heard a loud explosion behind him. He turned and saw that the Daijo Hall was burning, or rather what remained of it; it was used as a storehouse and had been filled with supplies of all kinds, evidently including gunpowder. Keiji looked around and saw that several buildings had caught fire. The Oda must be coming up the mountain from several sides, and it seemed that the thick woods weren’t much of a hindrance, especially now that they’d begun to burn, too. This wasn’t like last year. When buildings were burned then, it was done methodically, meant to cause more confusion than destruction. Now, buildings were burning all over the temple compound, and neither homes nor the sacred shrines were being spared.

The monk Keiji had been arguing with called out for water and started running toward the Daijo, a number of men following close behind him. Keiji, however, walked away slowly, weighing his options and trying to decide what to do. He could run down the mountain paths and join the *sohei*, where he would no doubt die but might at least help delay the onrush of Oda soldiers. But that would be futile, and he doubted he could bring himself to break his vows and take a human life. And if the Oda did break through, he could fight and die then should he change his mind. He could join the others who were attempting to put out the flames, but he felt that that, too, would accomplish nothing. There were already more fires burning than the defenders could possibly handle, and more were springing up every minute.

Finally, he thought about flight. It was the only option that didn’t guarantee death, and even though a Buddhist monk—even an acolyte—shouldn’t fear death, Keiji had to admit that he did. Perhaps in another twenty or thirty years, he would be sufficiently enlightened to accept it gracefully, but not now. He recalled reading about the final words of a monk of Kofukuji in Nara who had died during the Gempei War. Kofukuji, as well as many of Nara’s ancient temples, was

razed to the ground during that conflict. Just before throwing himself into the flames, he reputedly told his fellow monks:

“Scalding water and charcoal fire are no worse than the cooling breeze. Let us concentrate our attention on the Moon of Perfect Enlightenment, and chastise our hearts in the water that flows from the hillside of Shimei.”

That was the attitude of an enlightened monk. It was no doubt the attitude of a man like Tessai, and Keiji then thought of the old man throwing himself into a raging fire just like the monk of Kofukuji. He wondered if Tessai had in fact already done so; the fires had likely spread to the monks’ living quarters by now, and he couldn’t imagine Tessai hesitating. But as for himself, when Keiji looked at the flames all around him, he knew that he wasn’t ready.

The main temple now burned, too. Tiles fell off of the roof and shattered on the stones, the decorations and sayings from the sutras carved into the wooden beams and coated with lacquer became blackened and distorted. Such a large building would take a long time to burn down, but Keiji imagined that even the great Buddha statue inside would be half melted and disfigured beyond recognition by morning. He then looked up at the sky, and the conflagration of Enryakuji reflected on the clouds so brightly that it almost looked as if dawn had come, except that the light flickered, making the darkness around it seem to move and dance as well. The moving darkness looked like demons, and combined with the heat of the flames all around him, Keiji felt as though he were in one of the deepest of Buddhist hells.

The cries of people—men, women, and children—snapped Keiji out of this revelry. *There must be thousands dead and many more dying, a great many of whom have to be innocent.* Keiji couldn’t bring himself to die here, but if he was going to escape, he decided that he would at least take others with him. It was the least penance he could do. Looking back toward the

paths that led down the mountain, he was surprised not to see any Oda samurai yet, but he knew it was only a matter of time. He did see some people run into the courtyard, though, and they were not *sohei*. Maybe they were survivors from Miidera or Sakamoto, and they had fled in the only direction they could: up the mountain. Keiji ran over to them and learned that many were indeed from the foothills.

“The Oda are burning everything,” one layman from Miidera said, gasping for breath. “They even destroyed the Hiyoshi Shrine and slaughtered the Shinto priests. Now they’re moving up the slopes behind the flames, and they’re killing everyone regardless of age or sex. We had hoped that Enryakuji would be safe, that the warrior-monks could hold them off, but. . .”

One look at the courtyard was enough to see that it was anything but safe. Keiji surveyed the group and counted about twenty people, several of whom were wounded. “It’s not safe here,” he said, “but there may be a way to escape. Our best chance is probably to the north, I expect they’ll be guarding the south most heavily to keep people from reaching Kyoto. Hurry ahead, I’ll follow at the rear and help the wounded.”

They didn’t need any encouragement. Keiji followed behind, thinking that if they were pursued, he would do whatever he could to hold them off. He still had the short sword he’d been given earlier, and though he thought it would be a sin to use it, it would be a greater one to let these people die. In a way he hoped to encounter more survivors as they moved through the temple complex on their way to the northern slopes, but he also knew that the smaller the group was, the better their chances would be. It was a bitter thought, but it couldn’t be helped.

As they moved through the temple complex, the smoke became so thick that Keiji could hardly see, and the entire group had to do their best to suppress any coughing. Keiji was fortunate to be able to cover his mouth and nose with his cowl, but few of the others had that

luxury. There was also a great deal of debris and other obstacles that made progress difficult; the only advantage of traveling through this wreckage was that it would make them harder to find. Keiji could hear voices coming from many directions, and though he couldn't hear them clearly enough to make out more than a few words, he guessed that at least some of them had to be enemies.

It wasn't long, though, before he could hear a number of voices ahead, and their strange dialects meant they were likely Oda. The company moved slower now, but after coming to a clearing, one of the men in front of the column panicked and took off running. Keiji heard one of the strange voices shout that he'd seen someone and ordered pursuit. Keiji tried to make the others stop, but most didn't listen and took off in different directions. Those who tried to run would likely be hunted down, but if the group as a whole was spotted, the only thing they could do would be to scatter anyway. Keiji was distressed, but he stayed where he was, and a woman and two children remained with him. The woman had a deep cut on her leg and couldn't move very fast, while the children had to be restrained: Keiji held one and the woman gripped the other. Keiji closed his eyes while trying to discern the best course of action, but nothing seemed promising. Had they all been in good health, taking advantage of the confusion and running would probably have been best, but that wasn't an option. Instead, he decided to hide in a nearby hut, one of the many poor homes in this part of the temple compound. It would give the woman a chance to rest and the children a chance to calm down while they waited for the Oda soldiers to move away.

Once inside, Keiji crouched by the sliding door and listened while the others rested on straw mats. The children, a boy of about ten and a girl of six or seven, were noticeably scared but quiet for now. The boy reminded him of the one he'd seen with the *kemari* ball earlier; these

children seemed just as afraid of Keiji as that boy had been, cowering in a corner while avoiding his gaze. He couldn't blame them. For all he knew, they regarded Keiji as a *sohei*, and why shouldn't they? He was armed, he ordered them about, and he was prepared to fight the enemy, or at least as prepared as he ever would be. And perhaps they somehow knew that the *sohei* were also enemies, that all of this would have never happened if not for their pride and foolishness. *Does it even matter that I'm not one of them?* he asked himself. But as much as he pitied them, Keiji's immediate concern was for the woman. She seemed exhausted and on the verge of passing out, and if he had to carry her out of here, there would be little hope of escape. He chose this particular hut not only because it was close by, but also because it was one of the few buildings in the area still relatively intact. It was a risk, regardless: he didn't have to worry about the building collapsing, but an undamaged house would attract more attention than a burnt one. At this point, though, there was nothing else to do. Keiji felt that their lives were simply in the hands of fate.

He listened intently for any sound, especially footsteps. He hoped that by now, the Oda would think the temple compound was deserted and that any survivors would be somewhere on the hillsides. If that was the case, then he and his companions might even be able to sleep a little and try their luck in the early morning hours, when the Oda would surely be looking for survivors elsewhere. It wasn't easy, but he tried to be optimistic about this possibility, and then his mind drifted to other things. Now that his life wasn't in immediate danger, he focused on trying to comprehend what had happened this day. Nobunaga's actions here would certainly be known throughout the country in a matter of weeks, perhaps days, and not only for the destruction of the sacred shrines of Mount Hiei, but also for the brutality with which it was carried out. His name would be vilified and his enemies would rejoice. On the other hand,

though, Keiji couldn't help but think that the monks of Enryakuji deserved their share of the blame. This would never have happened if they had lived like true monks. The destruction of the Hiyoshi Shrine in particular seemed to make this point: it was the shrine of Sanno, and if the shrine of the Mountain King could be destroyed, then perhaps the mountain was no longer under his protection. There is balance in all things, even in carnage like this; only half was Nobunaga's cruelty, the other half was divine retribution.

While contemplating these matters, he was jolted by the sound of footsteps. It sounded like only one man, but as far as Keiji could tell, the sound was coming closer. He then heard a crash, and as he listened, the thought occurred to Keiji that the houses were being searched—the sound must have been that of someone kicking in a wall or through a door, and judging by how loud the crash was, it couldn't have been more than one or two houses down at most. All hope died in Keiji at that moment. In a matter of minutes, Oda samurai would come crashing into this house, and he and his three companions would be killed. It was too late to escape, and even trying would only alert the Oda to their presence. A cold sweat broke out on Keiji's forehead, but he did his best to remain calm. He gripped his short sword in his right hand and slipped back from the doorway, crouching behind a small pile of firewood. He decided that if the samurai charged in and attacked, he would use his weapon. The only alternative would be to let himself and the others die. With his left hand he began fingering his prayer beads, praying to every Buddha he could think of.

Suddenly, the door was kicked in, and a samurai with a long *yari* spear burst into the hut. Keiji wasn't ready. He thought the man was still searching the next house over, and this startled him so much that he let go of his sword. He must have misjudged the distance. *There is nothing left to do now but die*, he thought, though his regret was more for his companions than for

himself. But as he braced himself for the samurai's thrust, Keiji saw the man stop, and he simply stood there for a moment, staring at Keiji and his companions. Then he set his spear up against the wall and pulled down the demon-like face guard of his helmet, and Keiji saw that he was a young man, likely not much older than himself. He looked pale, almost sickly, and when he looked at Keiji and the others, he could only maintain eye contact for a second or two before looking away.

Finally, the samurai said, "Are you alone? Are there more in your group?" He was addressing Keiji, though the man's eyes shifted back and forth between Keiji and the others.

"Yes," said Keiji. He tried to make his voice stern and strong, but the words came out meekly. "There were others, but we became separated from them some time ago."

The samurai nodded, though he didn't respond verbally right away. "Yes," he said quietly, "I think I saw them, they were running north."

There was another pause. Keiji knew what he wanted to ask, but there was no easy way of saying it. "Are they dead?" he finally said, his words sounding more like a statement of fact than a genuine question.

"Yes," answered the samurai again. "Most of them, anyway. I killed two, a man and a woman, and I saw several others die. A few may have escaped, but I doubt they made it far."

"I see," said Keiji. He expected as much and took the news accordingly. What he didn't understand, though, was why he and this samurai were speaking of it. *What is he waiting for?* After another uncomfortable pause, Keiji said, "Well? Aren't you going to kill us, too? Why are you waiting?"

The samurai didn't respond at once. He looked down at the dirt floor and let out a deep sigh. "I am a retainer of Akechi Mitsuhide," he said, still looking down. "My master and many of

the other generals were against this fire attack and pleaded with Lord Nobunaga not to carry it out. They even risked having to commit *seppuku*.” He paused for a moment after this, as if he were reluctant to continue. “It was no use, though. Lord Nobunaga was obstinate. And his orders were clear: every single building was to be destroyed, and everyone on the mountain—man or woman, monk or layman, adult or child—was to be killed. No mercy and no exceptions.”

Keiji wasn't sure why this man was explaining himself. It was very unlike a samurai to hesitate this way. And he wasn't finished, either.

“As a retainer of the Oda, I am bound to carry out my master's orders,” he continued. “I have done so for half a night, and I thought I was through killing. But here you are.”

He looked at the wounded woman and the children for a long time, hardly even blinking, and Keiji looked at him just as intently. If he were to suddenly strike at them, Keiji would rise to their defense. He'd placed his hand over the short sword, ready to pick it up at an instant's notice. *I must try to protect them, even if I fail. I cannot simply watch them die.*

Finally, the samurai said, “Go. Head to the East. The Akechi and Sakuma corps are stationed there, and they may be sympathetic toward a wounded woman and her two children.”

He was looking at the woman as he said this, and when she heard these words, she got to her feet as quickly as possible, grabbed the children by their arms, and stumbled out the door.

Keiji was amazed. He started to get up as well, but the samurai glared at him so fiercely that Keiji slunk back to the ground. Once the others were gone, Keiji prepared to prostrate himself in gratitude, but the samurai stopped him.

“Do not be too grateful yet,” he said. “I let them go because I have killed enough women and children for a lifetime tonight, and this small deed will do nothing to erase that. But I can't

let you go. Though you don't appear to be a *sohei* or an *ikko*, it doesn't matter. You are a man and you are a monk, and I still have my duty."

Keiji's pulse and respiration quickened as he heard this, but he couldn't say that he was surprised. It was simply that for a moment, hope that he might live had returned, and it was no easier to let go of now than it had been before.

"I understand," he finally said. "I won't resist."

"Lean your head forward," said the samurai as he drew his long sword from its sheath. "I'll make it quick."

Keiji did his best to clear his head; he tried to think of a suitable saying from the sutras, but nothing came to him. Finally, he said a silent prayer to Kannon, the Buddha of mercy, and then closed his eyes.

"Are you ready? I will allow you a moment to make peace with yourself."

Keiji took a deep breath. "I am ready."

He bowed his head slightly, pulling his cowl down to reveal his neck, and soon felt the cool blade touch him at the nape. Keiji had forced his hands to remain steady while doing this, but they twitched now as they rested on his lap, so much so that he clutched his knees instead. His final thoughts were that his final words had been a lie, and what a shameful thing that was. If there was going to be any atonement, though, it would have to come at another time—in another life.

Keiji felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up as the sword was raised from its resting place, followed by a quick rush of wind, and then nothing.

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<sup>1</sup> 1571

<sup>2</sup> 5:00-7:00 PM

CHAPTER III  
THE TWO GATES

*“There are not two gates: loyalty and treason.”*

- Akechi Mitsuhide, 1582

Akada Katsuhisa whipped his horse furiously as he traveled the road to Kitano, determined to get every last ounce of energy from the beast. The horse could only take so much, but Katsuhisa knew he would get a fresh steed soon. Many stations had been set up along the main roads throughout the Oda domain to supply messengers with fresh horses, and Katsuhisa had already changed mounts once. Speed was all that mattered, and he was determined to cover the distance between Azuchi and Kameyama before morning, making what would normally be a two-day journey in a single night. Or at least that had been his intention when he'd set out the previous evening. Now that he was two-thirds of the way there, the long ride across muddy roads in the summer heat was beginning to take as much of a toll on him as it was on his horse. Upon reaching the Shirakawa River, he decided to stop for a short respite.

He dismounted and led his horse to the riverbank, where it drank copiously. Katsuhisa himself went further, wading into the water until it reached his knees. The rainy season had left the river swollen, but still fordable, for which he was grateful. He removed his helmet, and after rinsing away the sweat, used it as a bowl to drink from. Once he'd had his fill, he washed his face in the foam and then looked up at the night sky, trying to guess what time it was. It had been

raining earlier, all through Omi Province and around Lake Biwa, but here, the clouds had cleared away and the stars shone brightly, so he could see the outlines of the river's rapids cresting and falling all around him. But the sky itself remained entirely black, so even though he had no idea what hour it might be, at least dawn wasn't approaching. He took comfort in this, and standing there in the water, listening to the rapids mingle with the croaking of frogs and chirping of crickets, thought how nice it would be to go for a swim, cooling himself and relaxing his tired muscles.

Such thoughts had to be quickly dismissed, though, for he never forgot about the letter he carried, tucked securely beneath his breastplate. Reaching for it now, he felt how damp it was from perspiration. He hoped that the ink hadn't smeared. But then again, it wouldn't really matter so much if it did, for Katsuhisa believed he was well aware of the letter's contents, as were all of the Akechi retainers who'd been present at Azuchi the previous day. Katsuhisa's master, Akechi Mitsuhide, had been ordered immediately to muster his clan and prepare to join the campaign against the Mori, the Oda's chief adversary in the west.

As Katsuhisa waded out of the river and climbed back onto his horse, he began to think about the matter, and how very strange the whole situation had been. When he'd left Azuchi, he'd been in too much of a hurry to question anything, and he'd spent the bulk of his journey drenched in rain while navigating muddy and treacherous roads in the dark. Now that the weather had cleared and he'd taken a few moments to relax, he could focus on other things. As he forded the river and whipped his horse into full gallop once again, he reviewed the details of the previous day.

Oda Nobunaga, *daimyo* of the Oda clan, was holding a three-day banquet in honor of his staunch ally, Tokugawa Ieyasu. It was a triumphal celebration for their shared conquest of the

Takeda clan's territory in the spring, and Mitsuhide had been placed in charge of the feast. But yesterday, the very day of Ieyasu's arrival, Nobunaga made a surprise inspection of the kitchens, and claiming the place was filthy and the food rotten, ordered Mitsuhide to dump it all into the castle's moat. Nobunaga then not only relieved Mitsuhide of his duty, but within the hour, issued the orders that Katsuhisa now carried.

The orders were unreasonable and Mitsuhide's summary dismissal humiliating. Katsuhisa had witnessed his master prostrating himself before Nobunaga, trying to explain that the delicacies he'd gathered were certainly not rotten. This pitiful image was one that would be etched into Katsuhisa's mind forever. Still, Mitsuhide had obeyed his lord, and Katsuhisa had been chosen to relay the orders to Kameyama, the main Akechi stronghold, so that things could be prepared for Mitsuhide's arrival. It was for this reason that Katsuhisa had traveled all night, halting only to change horses prior to his brief stop at the Shirakawa, and why Katsuhisa was now making all speed once again. He soon reached the small village of Kitano, and after changing horses a final time, immediately continued his journey. Saitō Toshimitsu, one of Mitsuhide's senior retainers, governed Kameyama in Mitsuhide's absence, and so it was to him that Katsuhisa would deliver his letter.

Dawn was breaking when Katsuhisa crossed into Tamba Province, and the castle town of Kameyama soon appeared in the distance. Katsuhisa was exhausted, but he mustered his energy for the final stretch, whipping his horse until it bled. He managed quickly to cross the last few miles, and upon reaching the city's eastern gate, nearly tumbled to the ground while dismounting. This startled the guards, but Katsuhisa regained his balance before falling and brushed away their hands as they tried to steady him. Composing himself as best he could, he

told them that he required an immediate audience with Saitō Toshimitsu, presenting his letter affixed with the blue bellflower seal of the Akechi as proof.

Seeing this, one of the guards said, “Certainly, sir. I will give him the letter as soon as he awakens.”

“No,” Katsuhisa said, adopting a sterner tone. “I was instructed to give it to Lord Toshimitsu personally. It concerns an urgent matter from Lord Mitsuhide himself. I am also no mere page or sandal bearer, but a samurai of the Akechi clan and a friend of Lord Toshimitsu’s. Tell him that Akada Katsuhisa is here.” He then removed his helmet so they might recognize his face better. The guards were trained to be suspicious, and for good reason: spies and assassins were so common that one couldn’t be too careful.

“I see,” replied the guard. “In that case I will inform him that you are here. In the meantime please allow us to escort you to a guesthouse while you wait.”

“Very well,” said Katsuhisa. While the first man walked off toward the castle, two others led Katsuhisa to a guesthouse just inside the city walls. Inside was a small and sparsely furnished room, unfit for a man of Katsuhisa’s status, but he was too weary to be concerned with such things. He knelt down on a straw mat and leaned against a crude wooden armrest while he waited, and his two escorts stood dutifully at the entrance.

Katsuhisa had nearly fallen asleep when he heard voices outside. He raised his head and looked toward the door, and almost immediately afterwards, an elderly man with white hair and a sparse beard slid open the *shoji* and walked into the room. He bowed low, saying, “Lord Katsuhisa, I hope I’m not disturbing you. Are you well?”

“Lord Toshimitsu!” Katsuhisa exclaimed as he stumbled to his feet. Toshimitsu’s humble words and deference almost made Katsuhisa feel ashamed, especially considering the state of his

appearance. “Forgive me. I am exhausted from the journey. Otherwise, I am in good health. Please,” he said, motioning to the mat across from his own, “come join me. I have important news to tell you.”

“I know,” replied Toshimitsu, “but there are better places for us to talk. Had I known you were coming, I would have arranged fitting accommodations. But for now, let’s go the teahouse. It’s not far, but is more comfortable, and private.” He glanced at the guards standing just outside as he spoke this last word.

Katsuhisa nodded, saying, “Very good, my lord. Lead the way.”

“Come,” said Toshimitsu as he turned and walked outside. Katsuhisa followed, and so did the two guards as they walked down the street. It wasn’t far to the teahouse; Toshimitsu soon turned off of the main street and towards a small, secluded building with a luxurious garden. The flowers were in full bloom, as was the great cherry blossom near its center. Toshimitsu instructed the guards to stay nearby but to keep out of hearing distance of the teahouse, and to make sure all others did the same. He then beckoned Katsuhisa to follow him inside, where the two knelt across from each other on comfortable silk cushions.

“May I offer you some tea?” asked Toshimitsu. “It will take a little time to boil the water, but we have some fine, fresh leaves.” He reached for the kettle as he said this, seemingly expecting Katsuhisa to accept.

“No, thank you,” replied Katsuhisa, raising a hand. “I’m afraid I’m not well versed in the tea ceremony. And besides,” he said, letting out a sigh of weariness, “after last night, I could use something a bit stronger than tea.”

Toshimitsu smiled, saying, “Don’t worry about the ceremony, but as for something stronger, I’m afraid we don’t have any *sake* handy, though I could send for some if you’d like.”

Katsuhisa shook his head and said that wouldn't be necessary, but before he could say anything more, Toshimitsu said, "Actually, we do have something, though I don't know whether you'll like it." He stood up and walked over to a wooden crate, pulling out a large bottle with strange writing on it. "If you don't mind, I'd be curious to hear your opinion," he continued, taking what appeared to be an oddly shaped glass vessel and filling it with the bottle's contents. When he'd finished, he knelt back down and presented the glass to Katsuhisa, but Katsuhisa hesitated to accept it; he simply stared at it for a moment, unsure of what to say or think about this strange liquid.

"It looks like blood," he finally said, trying to suppress a look of complete disgust.

Toshimitsu laughed, saying, "It does, indeed. And I can assure you," he said as he placed the glass on the floor, "it tastes little better. In fact, I think I would prefer blood. And why they serve such a drink in a glass cup is beyond my understanding."

"What is it?" asked Katsuhisa.

"It is a gift from Lord Nobunaga," replied Toshimitsu, "and I assume he received it as a gift in turn from the southern barbarians. They call it 'wine,' and Lord Nobunaga has reputedly developed a taste for it, as he has with most of their 'gifts.'" Toshimitsu was no longer smiling as he said this.

"Yes, he does seem to be quite taken with them and their customs," said Katsuhisa. "He has always been an...eccentric man."

"Eccentric?" said Toshimitsu. "That is one way to describe him. But come," he said, "Forget the drink. I believe your important news has to do with Lord Nobunaga. You came from Azuchi, did you not?"

“Yes, I did,” replied Katsuhisa, reaching inside his breastplate for the letter. He had relaxed somewhat at first, but seeing that Toshimitsu was no longer smiling or laughing, Katsuhisa quickly resumed a serious and servile attitude. “Here,” he said, bowing slightly as he handed the parchment to Toshimitsu. “I hope that rain and sweat have not ruined it.”

Toshimitsu took the letter, broke the seal, and read it silently. Katsuhisa kept his head bowed, but not so low that he couldn't see Toshimitsu's face; in fact he couldn't help but observe the old man as he read. Toshimitsu's stoic expression turned to a slight scowl at first, but this slowly faded and his eyes widened slightly just before he finished. When he was done, he looked up, and Katsuhisa looked down accordingly. He expected the old man to ask him a series of questions about the banquet incident and had been prepared to reply at length concerning the details, but Toshimitsu said nothing. When this uncomfortable silence had gone on for some time, Katsuhisa lifted his head and saw Toshimitsu staring outside with a glazed look over his eyes. He didn't make a sound. Katsuhisa could hear the chirping of birds and buzzing of cicadas in the garden.

“Do you wish for me to go over the details, my lord?” Katsuhisa finally asked.

Toshimitsu stared a little longer. Then, without looking at Katsuhisa, he quietly asked, “How is Lord Mitsuhide's health?”

Katsuhisa was surprised by this question, not because it was inappropriate, but because he thought the answer was obvious. “He seemed fine when I left Azuchi,” he said. “Well, he's certainly tired, but Lord Nobunaga has kept him very busy. I believe he will be all right with a little rest, though.”

“What was his attitude when he was relieved of his duties at the banquet?”

“He was confused, as we all were,” replied Katsuhisa. “But once the initial shock subsided, I think he accepted it gracefully enough.”

“Was he planning to set out last night, and if so, is he coming directly here?”

“I believe he was planning to leave late last night, yes, though he may not be coming straight here. He said that he might stop at Sakamoto first to see his cousin, Lord Mitsuharu.”

“Mitsuharu? Good, that is good,” said Toshimitsu, his voice trailing off.

Katsuhisa was confused by this response. “Is it good for him to stop along the way, regardless of where? Lord Mitsuhide was ordered to mobilize his forces immediately, and Lord Nobunaga is already angry with him. I don’t think he should delay.”

Toshimitsu grimaced, saying, “You yourself said that Lord Mitsuhide is exhausted. He needs to rest. As for Nobunaga, his mood changes with the wind. He is pleased or displeased by chance.”

Katsuhisa knew this was true enough. He’d seen plenty of Nobunaga’s mood swings over the years, often spurred by trivial things. “He certainly is a difficult master to please,” he eventually said.

“Only difficult?” said Toshimitsu, raising his eyebrows slightly. He paused as if awaiting an answer, then continued, “Yes, he certainly has been. Well, we will see.” Toshimitsu broke his gaze and now looked directly at Katsuhisa again. “Regardless, both Lord Mitsuhide and I thank you. I will send a messenger to Sakamoto to confirm that Lord Mitsuhide’s is there, and in the meantime, I’ll begin making preparations here. Once you’ve rested and seen your family, come see me in the citadel, there is much work to be done.” Toshimitsu stood and began to walk outside, but then turned back and added, “Do not discuss Lord Mitsuhide’s current location or any details of his plans with anyone until we know more.”

“Of course, my lord.”

Toshimitsu smiled again, saying, “Go now and rest, or stay here for a while if you prefer.”

In truth Katsuhisa was struggling to stay focused, and with the burden of his errand gone, fatigue overtook him. He wasn't sure if he'd be able to make it home or not. “If you don't mind, my lord, allow me to rest a little while here, and then I will return home. I will be ready when you need me.”

Toshimitsu replied, “Sleep then, and I will call upon you later. Also, do not worry about Lord Mitsuhide. I believe he will be fine when the current situation is over, and we will not have to worry about Nobunaga's wrath.”

Katsuhisa replied that he would and bowed as the old man left the teahouse, closing the *shoji* behind him. But in spite of how tired he was, it was some time before he fell asleep. Something about Toshimitsu's words seemed odd, as were his mannerisms, especially after reading the letter. Katsuhisa couldn't help but wonder what the old man was really thinking. He pondered these thoughts for some time, and they followed him into his dreams.

Katsuhisa awoke with a start, having unconsciously slapped himself in the face while swatting at a mosquito. Normally, one slept inside of gossamer netting this time of year, even while on campaign when possible, but such considerations had been far from his mind when he'd passed out on the teahouse floor that morning. He hadn't thought to unbuckle his armor or find a comfortable position to sleep in, either, and so he sat up with a sore back and a painful crick in his neck. He wiped the sweat from his brow and rubbed his eyes, trying to clear his head before standing up. The sun shone brightly through the paper windows and *shoji* of the teahouse, and

feeling the typical midday heat and humidity of the fifth month, Katsuhisa guessed it must be at least the Hour of the Horse<sup>3</sup>, if not later. He stood and stretched, drank a handful of water from the unused tea kettle, and walked outside, hoping to feel a breeze as he passed through the garden.

Kameyama paled in comparison to the grandeur of Nobunaga's castle town of Azuchi and lacked the gilded palaces and magnificent temples of Kyoto, but it was far from being a small, poor village. Akechi Mitsuhide had conquered the province of Tamba for the Oda nearly five years ago, and Nobunaga had awarded him the governorship and this castle town to serve as his headquarters. The city prospered under Mitsuhide's administration, and had the good fortune of being little harmed by the civil war and destruction that had now enveloped the country for more than a century.

As Katsuhisa walked the crowded streets, the mood of the common people seemed to be as bright and cheerful as the weather; merchants went about their business, travelers from all over filled the inns and public drinking houses, and children played in the streets. *What a pity that this tranquil scene must be disrupted yet again*, thought Katsuhisa as he passed an unsupervised young girl buying fish from a large, crowded stand. Most of the men in this town had just recently returned home from the spring offensive in the north, and had barely spent any time with their families since the New Year; Katsuhisa himself hadn't seen his wife or children for over six months. Samurai were accustomed to spending most of their time on active duty and were always at the beck and call of their masters, but during Katsuhisa's fifteen years of service—thirteen of them as a married man—the number of months he'd slept in his own house could be counted on one hand. With this in mind he hurriedly made his way home.

Despite his rising reputation, Katsuhisa still lived in one of the poorer parts of town, a district of small tenement houses built for and largely occupied by lower ranking samurai families. His stipend of 1,000 *kan* allowed him to live comfortably, if not extravagantly, but this was of little concern to him, especially since he was rarely home. His wife, Okei, took care of the money as well as the household, and she was quite frugal, having come from a poor family; her current home was already luxurious compared to that of her childhood. As Katsuhisa approached his house, he saw her standing just outside the doorway at the edge of the little garden she tended, wearing a touch of powdered makeup and a floral silk kimono that blended nicely with the peonies and morning glories around her feet. Toshimitsu had apparently sent word that Katsuhisa was coming, for Okei was ready to receive him in her finest clothing.

She smiled as he walked up to her, though this changed to a look of concern as he came near. Katsuhisa was about to take her hand into his own, but she reached up to feel his forehead instead, saying, “Husband, your face is bright red. Are you ill?”

Katsuhisa didn’t doubt that his face was flushed or that it might be warm to the touch, but he thought this was due more to the weather and mosquito bites than anything else. Then again, he had ridden through torrential rain for much of the night before. A fever was certainly possible. “I think it’s simply the heat,” he said, grinning to ease her mind.

“You have welts on top of your head all the way back to your hairline,” she said, gingerly touching them with her fingertips. Katsuhisa’s hair was tied back in a traditional samurai queue, the front of his head closely shaven.

“Blame that on Lord Toshimitsu,” he said with a slight laugh. “He shouldn’t invite tired messengers to sleep in the teahouse without leaving a mosquito net.”

“Perhaps you shouldn’t sleep in a teahouse when your wife and home are just a short walk away,” Okei replied, teasing him. But then she slid open the door and led him inside, saying, “Let me give you a bath and lay out some fresh clothes for you. If you don’t cool off, you will get sick.”

Katsuhisa happily agreed to this and followed her in. Their house was essentially one large room, though it was partitioned with curtains into three. Okei went behind one to change out of her formal kimono into a rough, hempen one more suitable for doing housework, and then poured some warm water she’d boiled earlier into a large washing basin. Katsuhisa meanwhile stripped off his armor and his sweaty, dirty undergarments, placing them in a corner to be cleaned later. While Okei readied his bath, Katsuhisa peered into the enclosure reserved for their two children, and he saw his three year-old son sleeping quietly on a padded mat, wrapped in a soft cotton blanket. Katsuhisa was astonished at how much the boy had grown since he’d last seen him, and he could only hope he’d be able to spend more time with his son during the youth’s developmental years, teaching him skills such as horseback riding, archery, swordsmanship, and above all, the importance of moral integrity that comes with being born a samurai. Okei was a good wife and a fine mother, but Katsuhisa knew he had to do his own part as well.

He left his son to sleep and returned to the main room, where Okei waited to give him his bath. Katsuhisa stepped into the wooden basin and sat down; the water rose to his waist as Okei slowly poured a small lacquered bucket of hot water over his head and back. Katsuhisa washed his face and chest, and then leaned back, stretching a bit at first and then relaxing, content to simply soak for a while, just as he wished he’d had the luxury to do in the midst of the Shirakawa River the night before.

“Lean forward for a moment so that I may scrub your back,” said Okei. “It will only take a moment, but it needs to be done.”

“Be gentle,” replied Katsuhisa, arching forward a little. “My muscles are very sore from last night.”

“Then scrubbing them gently won’t do them much good,” she said, “but I need to at least remove the dirt and sweat.”

Katsuhisa allowed her to do as she’d asked, though not without wincing now and then when she would touch a sore spot. After a few moments of silence, he asked, “Where is Akemi?” referring to their eleven year-old daughter.

“I sent her to buy *sake* and some other things when I heard you were coming home,” Okei replied, rinsing the areas she’d scrubbed with another bucket. “She should be home soon.”

“That wasn’t necessary,” said Katsuhisa. “I don’t know how long I’ll be able to stay, and it’s not necessary to prepare an extravagant meal every time I come home.”

“It’s as good a reason as any, and besides, you never eat enough while you’re away.” She finished washing his back and walked around to face him. “How long has it been since you’ve eaten, anyway?”

In truth Katsuhisa hadn’t even thought of food since yesterday; so much had happened since then that eating simply hadn’t occurred to him. “Well,” he paused for a few seconds, actually having to think of the honest answer, “I suppose it was yesterday afternoon, around the second half of the Hour of the Monkey<sup>4</sup>.”

Okei shook her head, saying, “To think that most soldiers’ wives have to worry about their husbands getting killed. I have to worry about mine not eating.” She began to walk away, saying over her shoulder, “I’m going to steam some rice and boil some tea. You’re going to eat

something now and later, both.” She lit a fire in the hearth, then went to get a pot and a sack of grain from the corner where they stored dried food. “You’re past thirty now,” she added, “You have to start taking better care of yourself.”

Katsuhisa couldn’t argue, and really had no desire to, either. He stood up from his bath, and after drying somewhat, wrapped himself in the blue silk kimono Okei had laid out for him and slipped on a pair of straw sandals. He then knelt on a soft cushion next to the low, black lacquered table near the fire, picking up a small bamboo fan to cool his face. Katsuhisa watched as Okei went about preparing this simple meal for his sake and felt grateful to have such a wife. He knew he would also soon see his daughter Akemi again, as well as his young son when the boy woke from his nap, and they would have a family meal together, discussing family matters—the subject of finding a potential match for Akemi would undoubtedly be brought up since she would come of age and be eligible for marriage in less than a year. But Katsuhisa could only focus so much attention on his family, knowing that Toshimitsu might call upon him at any time. The plight of his master, Akechi Mitsuhide, always remained in the back of Katsuhisa’s mind. He didn’t have the heart to tell Okei that he would likely be leaving on another campaign so soon, perhaps in no more than a week’s time, and even if he could tell her that much, he couldn’t tell her why. Okei was no gossip, but Katsuhisa understood the importance of keeping the matter secret, even without Toshimitsu’s reminder. *I’ll go to the castle this evening*, he thought, whether he received a formal summons or not. In the meantime he would do his best to simply enjoy himself and not be overly concerned with what was to come. *Live in the present, and worry about tomorrow when the tomorrow comes*, he repeated in his head. There was nothing else to be done.

“To think that a man  
Has but fifty years under Heaven.  
Surely this world  
Is nothing but a vain dream.  
Living but one life,  
Is there anything that will not decay?”

Obata Iori sang these verses from the *Atsumori* deeply and solemnly, keeping in perfect rhythm with the slow beats of the *koto*, but his accompanying dance was so awkward that he nearly fell as he chanted the word “decay.” The young woman playing the drum placed it on the floor and raised a hand to cover her grinning face, while Akada Katsuhisa laughed loudly at his friend’s clumsiness.

“Are you already drunk?” asked Katsuhisa, pouring another bowl of *sake*. Iori had just arrived at Kameyama that afternoon bearing news from Sakamoto, and after a brief interview with Governor Saitō Toshimitsu, returned to the city’s eastern gate. Katsuhisa, the newly appointed commander of that post, had seen his friend arrive and asked him to come back when his business was finished. Iori had done so, but was in such a foul mood that Katsuhisa had invited him to drink with his companions at the guardhouse this evening. However, no amount of *sake* seemed to lift Iori’s spirits, and Katsuhisa was growing concerned. “Are you drunk, or are you merely too shy to dance in front of a pretty young girl?”

“No, it is not that,” replied Iori. A slight smirk appeared on his face, but was gone almost before Katsuhisa could notice. Iori then took the bowl from his friend’s hands and drained it just as quickly. “You asked me to drink, and I’ve done so. You asked me to sing and dance as well, and I did that, too, though grudgingly. But now that I’ve indulged you, I wish only to drink.”

Katsuhisa nodded and asked everyone else to leave, thanking the young singing girl and the other samurai for an excellent drinking party, even though all who were present surely knew

it had been anything but that. Once they were alone, Katsuhisa knelt on a soft cushion and motioned for Iori to sit on the opposite side of a low, red lacquered table. Katsuhisa then poured two more bowls of *sake*, and after offering one to his companion, said, “If you want to drink, then I’ll make certain you’ve had your fill, even to the point that you have to be carried home if you wish. But in return, I would ask that you indulge me once more by telling me what’s troubling you.” These men had been friends since childhood and Katsuhisa believed there were no secrets between them, so he felt comfortable asking such a question. But knowing that Iori had just come from Sakamoto and had therefore been in the presence and direct service of their master, Akechi Mitsuhide, Katsuhisa wondered how much Iori would allow himself to say.

Iori took the bowl of *sake* in his hands, and though he drank more slowly this time, still finished it in a single sip. He then set the bowl down and leaned on the wooden armrest to his left, breathing deeply and audibly while staring at the floor. Though he was a fit man and had had time to change and rest after his journey, one considerably shorter and less arduous than the one Katsuhisa endured the week before, Iori appeared disheveled and exhausted: his topknot was poorly tied, the sash of his white kimono was half loose, and the dark rings around his eyes were offset only by his reddened cheeks and forehead. He remained silent, looking as if he hadn’t heard a word Katsuhisa had said, and Katsuhisa felt uneasy repeating himself. He waited patiently for several moments, hearing the heavy breathing of his friend seem to slowly eclipse the loud chirping of crickets outside.

Finally, Katsuhisa said, “Well, if you don’t wish to tell me, then I won’t press you.” He had been kneeling upright, but now relaxed somewhat, leaning a little to his right side. He then looked at the nearly empty bottle of *sake* and asked, “Are you ready to retire for the night, or would you like one more drink?”

Iori glanced upward and glared intensely at Katsuhisa, looking both surprised and angry. “Is that it?” he asked, raising his voice. “Do I want to sing or dance? To drink or sleep? Do I want to celebrate anything at a time like this? Do you really have to ask what’s bothering me— what should be bothering every Akechi samurai?”

Katsuhisa now felt surprised in turn. Of course he hadn’t forgotten the humiliation Lord Mitsuhide had suffered at Azuchi, or the cold treatment in general his master had received from Lord Nobunaga in recent years. But if Lord Mitsuhide could endure these things, then surely Katsuhisa could bear them on his lord’s behalf. To endure such pains and still perform one’s duty was part of being a samurai. Katsuhisa then wondered if he’d appeared to be too callous to Iori, or to other people in general. He also wondered what else Iori may have witnessed at Sakamoto. Why had he been sent to Kameyama ahead of Lord Mitsuhide himself?

“If you think that I’m not troubled by what has happened to Lord Mitsuhide, then you don’t know me as well as you should, Iori.” Katsuhisa now sat upright once more and spoke with a clear, stern voice. “I witnessed Lord Mitsuhide’s humiliation at Azuchi personally. I was the one sent to relay this information to Lord Toshimitsu, as well as the orders for our entire clan to mobilize. I was upset, Lord Toshimitsu was upset, no one here is happy with this turn of events. But as you have no doubt seen, preparations for war are under way. We plan to be ready to march by the time Lord Mitsuhide arrives. And besides,” Katsuhisa said, softening his tone a little, “if the Akechi clan performs well on this campaign, will we not regain the favor of Lord Nobu—”

“Do not even speak that dog’s name!” Iori slammed his fist on the table so hard that one of its legs cracked, causing Katsuhisa to spring to his feet and recoil. Iori then stood up as well and began pacing the room, gripping his right fist with his left hand. Katsuhisa was shocked,

both at Iori's actions and at his reference to Lord Nobunaga as a "dog," but though Katsuhisa's first impulse was to berate his friend for displaying such disrespect, he hesitated on account of Iori's wrath, fearing that violence might ensue. After a moment of pacing, Iori, perhaps realizing the gravity of what he'd said, calmed down and returned to his seat at the now broken table. "Forgive me," he said, pausing to take a deep breath, "I've had too much to drink." He pushed his empty *sake* bowl away with his uninjured hand.

Katsuhisa then slowly returned to his own cushion, thinking it fortunate that the hour was late and that they were alone. "I understand," he said, though he wasn't sure what else to say. But before he could think of anything more to add, Iori spoke up again.

"You don't understand, Katsuhisa, and you should." Tears now began to roll down Iori's face. "You speak of duty and loyalty, how subordinates should follow the example of dutiful masters. A dutiful master will have dutiful followers, as can be clearly seen in our own case. Lord Mitsuhide is as good a master as any man born a samurai could hope for, and I doubt that even the lowliest *ashigaru* of the Akechi clan could find fault with him. But what you leave out is that when a master is shamed, so too are all of his followers, from the highest to the lowest. And when that shame is undeserved, then it is almost impossible to bear. If a man is truly shamed, then he can at least redeem himself through death. But what remedy is there for those unjustly put to shame? Should the entire Akechi clan commit *seppuku* to regain the honor we never lost?"

Katsuhisa listened intently to his friend and felt that Iori's words had merit, but did not think that the Akechi's outlook was as hopeless as Iori thought. "All that you say is true, except that you have overlooked the solution. You say that Lord Mitsuhide has been wronged, and so have we and all others who receive their stipend from the Akechi clan. You're right. But as you

said, the reason that we are put to shame is not because we've lost our honor, but rather that we've lost the favor of Lord Nobunaga. Therefore, all we have to do is regain his favor, and what better opportunity to do this will we have than to expand Oda territory?"

Iori then looked at Katsuhisa with his eyes wide and head arched back, as if he thought Katsuhisa had lost his mind. "Regain Nobunaga's favor? Expand his territory to please him? Is this not what every Oda retainer has been doing for the past twenty years? No, no, you fool." Iori shook his head and began lecturing Katsuhisa like he would a child or ignorant peasant.

"Remember Sakuma Nobumori? All of his years of service, all of his victories, they meant nothing to Nobunaga in the end. Nobumori was given rank and status, and then for no reason, was stripped of all of his possessions and left to die in exile. And Hayashi Sado, a man who served the Oda from the time of Nobunaga's father—his faithful service ended with accusations of treason and an order to commit *seppuku*. And now Lord Mitsuhide, who has done nothing but expand Oda territory and influence, who has achieved every task he's ever been given, is being treated the same way."

"You cannot know that," replied Katsuhisa, thinking that Iori was taking his criticism of Lord Nobunaga too far. "What you say about Nobumori and Sado is true, but the combined achievements of those two cannot match Lord Mitsuhide's accomplishments. Besides, Lord Mitsuhide is not being sent into exile or asked to kill himself, he's being sent to take part in a vital campaign. If anything, Lord Nobunaga's decision to send our master into battle against the Mori reflects poorly on the Hashiba, especially Hideyoshi." Hashiba Hideyoshi had been leading the western campaign for nearly five years, and though he'd had a number of early victories, his progress had all but come to a halt.

“Hideyoshi?” Iori laughed at the mere mention of the low born general who was better known by his nickname, ‘Monkey.’ Iori paused for a few seconds, then said, “You don’t know, do you?”

“Do I know what?”

“That’s right, those orders were sent after you’d already left Azuchi,” said Iori. “Still, I assumed you would have known by now, but from your reaction, I suppose you don’t. Well,” Iori said, speaking with a mixture of mockery and scorn, “after you left Azuchi on the night of the banquet, Lord Mitsuhide decided to pay his respects at the castle before taking his leave. But even as his horse was being saddled, a messenger from Nobunaga arrived and spoke with our master. Lord Mitsuhide was told not to come to the castle but to leave immediately, time being crucial, and that when Lord Mitsuhide arrived in Mori territory, he was to place himself and his clan under the command of Lord Hideyoshi.”

“Are you certain of this?” asked Katsuhisa. This seemed almost unbelievable: the Akechi were generally considered to be on the same level as the Shibata and Niwa clans, and superior to the Hashiba. Therefore, placing the Akechi under the command of the Hashiba would be a substantial insult to all members of the former. If this had indeed happened, then Katsuhisa felt he might have to take Iori’s warnings more seriously.

“Of course I’m certain. I was there when the messenger spoke to Lord Mitsuhide.”

“And what was his reaction?”

“Our master accepted it, of course,” said Iori, “but with a grave look on his face. I was at his side all the way to Sakamoto. Lord Mitsuhide hardly said a word to me or anyone else. Even his cousin, Lord Mitsuharu, barely got a response when he greeted us upon our arrival. So,” Iori

said after a short pause, “do you think our master will gain any merit or find his way back into Nobunaga’s favor by placing his banner beneath that of Master Monkey’s?”

Katsuhisa didn’t respond. This information surely wasn’t common knowledge in Kameyama, nor should it be. In any case he wasn’t going to be the one to spread it. *If this is true...*, he thought over and over to himself. *Nobumori, Sado: could Mitsuhide be heading for the same ignominious fate?* Katsuhisa could find no answer.

Just then, a loud thud came from outside. It sounded as if someone had tripped on the wooden veranda of the guardhouse. Iori sprang to his feet and rushed out of the room, Katsuhisa following close behind. Once there, he saw a young girl—one of the serving women from the drinking party—lying on the ground and clutching her ankle. Iori stood over her, and after quickly looking her over, grabbed her free arm and yanked her to her feet. “What were you doing?” he asked forcefully. “Were you listening to us?”

“What are you doing?” Katsuhisa whispered to Iori.

“What does it look like? I’m questioning this whore!”

“Then at least keep your voice down and bring her inside. If anyone is spying on us, they’ll certainly hear you now.” He understood Iori’s concern in principle, though he doubted that this girl could be a spy. Katsuhisa knew her: she was named Ryoko and came from a respectable family in Kameyama. And to Katsuhisa’s knowledge, she was certainly no whore.

Iori grunted his assent and began dragging her to the door. Katsuhisa quickly placed his arm under Ryoko’s other shoulder to brace her. She groaned at first, but became quiet when Iori glared at her. Katsuhisa looked at her left ankle and saw a bruise forming just above the foot. The shoe was missing, though Iori wouldn’t stop for Katsuhisa to retrieve it. They brought her inside,

where Iori let go and went to slide the door shut behind them. Katsuhisa kept Ryoko from falling and sat her down on one of the cushions.

“Now then,” Iori said, still speaking more loudly than Katsuhisa would have liked, “tell us what you were doing. And don’t say you were simply leaving. Everyone else left some time ago.” Katsuhisa had sat down again, but Iori remained standing, towering over the girl.

“But I was leaving,” she said meekly. “I tripped and hurt my ankle. That is all.”

Iori instantly slapped her across the face. Ryoko cried out and fell to her side, her face to the floor and her arms over her head. “I’ve done nothing wrong!” she exclaimed. She then began weeping.

Iori raised his hand to strike her again, but this time, Katsuhisa intervened. He’d been too slow to react the first time, not expecting such a violent outburst. While questioning Ryoko had some merit, there was no need for this. Katsuhisa quickly stood and grabbed Iori’s arm, saying, “Enough! You must be drunk to act this way, like an ill-mannered peasant. Remember that you’re a samurai.”

Jerking his arm away, Iori said, “I may be drunk, but I would treat any spy this way, or worse. And if hitting her won’t make her talk, I’ll get my sword.”

Katsuhisa tightened his grip on Iori, saying, “You will not, and if you can’t be civil, you won’t even speak to her. I will do it, and if you don’t sit down and calm yourself, I’ll get my own sword.” Both blades were nearby, sitting on the floor next to the cushions they’d been using earlier.

“Fine,” said Iori, turning his glare on Katsuhisa. “You can question the whore. But don’t be taken in by her charms. These are exactly the kind of spies Nobunaga and that monkey Hideyoshi use.”

Katsuhisa cautiously eased his grip, guiding Iori to a seat away from both his sword and the girl before letting go, after which Iori sat down with a defiant shrug. Folding his arms, he stared at Ryoko as if she were an enemy on the battlefield that he was preparing to cut down. Katsuhisa walked back to the girl and sat next to her, only turning his attention away from Iori when he was safely seated once more. He then said, “Ryoko, first tell him who you are.” Ryoko raised her head slowly and started to thank him, but Katsuhisa stopped her, saying, “There’s no need for that, just do as I say.”

Wiping her tears on her sleeve, she nodded and propped herself up with her right arm, leaving her injured leg stretched out. She turned to face Iori, though she kept her head down and wouldn’t look into his eyes. “My name is Ryoko,” she said quietly. “My father runs the Yomogi Inn, and I work there as a serving girl.”

“And why were you here tonight?”

“Because you ordered *sake* from the inn, and my father sent me to serve it to you and the other guests.”

“And you know me, don’t you?”

“Of course, you’re Master Akada Katsuhisa. I’ve known you since I was a little girl.” Katsuhisa wasn’t sure about her exact age, but he’d known Ryoko and her family for at least a decade, and Ryoko couldn’t have been more than nine or ten when he first saw her.

Katsuhisa looked back at Iori. He’d hoped his friend would calm down once Katsuhisa established that he and Ryoko knew each other, but Iori maintained his rigid stare.

Sighing, Katsuhisa turned back to Ryoko and said, “Though I know and trust you, Ryoko, my friend here does not. But he does have one legitimate concern, which is what you were doing

outside the guardhouse so long after the party had ended. Why didn't you immediately return to the inn?"

Ryoko was still crying, and the thin layer of white powder makeup on her cheeks was smeared down to her chin. A bright red mark had also appeared on her right cheek just below the eye from Iori's blow. Drying her eyes again, she said, "I...I should have. It's just that I was worried." She paused, trying to control her sniffing. "Master Iori seemed so upset, and I wanted to help him, to cheer him up somehow."

"While my problems are no concern of yours, I can say that the services of a whore won't solve them," said Iori.

"I am not a whore!" she yelled, staring back at him defiantly before raising her sleeve to her eyes once more.

*If anyone is spying on us, they surely heard that,* thought Katsuhisa. "Ryoko, speak quietly, and Iori, do not speak at all until she's finished. Now, continue. What did you mean by helping him?"

"I don't know," she said. "The others were glad to leave. I wasn't. So I stayed. I heard you two speaking, and then I heard a crash. I couldn't tell what was being said, I just knew that something was wrong. I was worried and I wanted to help. I don't even know how. And then I thought I heard someone coming, so I tried to hide, thinking I would look suspicious. My *kimono* got caught in the railing and I fell." She showed a piece of torn cloth in her robe. "You found me before I could get up. That is all."

Katsuhisa pitied her. Inns and teahouses were not brothels, but their servants were expected to satisfy customers as much as possible with food, drink, and entertainment. This was especially true in a town like Kameyama, for there was no licensed quarter as in Kyoto. Being

the daughter of the Yomogi's proprietor, Ryoko was likely pressured to do so more than most, especially for notable guests like Iori and himself. Katsuhisa felt that her desire to "help" came from this sense of duty and nothing more, even if she didn't know how to help. It was enough to satisfy Katsuhisa, but would it be enough for the brash, sullen, and inebriated Iori?

"I understand, Ryoko," he said. "I'll escort you back to the inn, and you can ride my horse."

She thanked him and gingerly stood up with Katsuhisa's assistance, but Iori stood as well. "Is that how you interrogate spies? It's a wonder you're still alive. What a mistake Lord Toshimitsu made by giving you this post!"

"For the last time, Iori, be quiet." Katsuhisa was losing his patience. "If anyone was spying on you, they wouldn't need to listen through a door. They'd hear you from across the street. Now, I am taking this girl home. You have a choice: if you can manage it, go home yourself. If you cannot, wait for me to return, and I'll take you."

Iori scoffed. "You have no authority over me, Katsuhisa. I'll do as I please."

"I have authority here, and if you defy me, I'll escort you to the stockade instead. For the sake of our friendship, don't force me to do so, Iori." Katsuhisa returned his friend's stare. There was rage in Iori's bloodshot eyes, and no fear. Nonetheless, Katsuhisa was determined to win this battle of wills.

Iori blinked first. He'd stared into Katsuhisa's eyes for a long time, then looked him over from head to toe. He briefly did the same to Ryoko, but then finally looked away. "So be it," he said, speaking sternly but less loudly than before.

Greatly relieved, Katsuhisa asked, "Will you wait here or go home?"

"I'll wait."

“Very well.” Katsuhisa retrieved his sword and tucked it into his belt, but as a sign of good faith, left Iori’s blade where it was. Iori made no noticeable acknowledgement of this, but sat down again and closed his eyes. “I’ll return soon,” Katsuhisa said as he slid open the door for Ryoko. Iori merely grunted, folding his arms across his chest.

Katsuhisa hurried Ryoko to the inn, which was also her home. She thanked him many times, but Katsuhisa said little in return. His thoughts were on Iori. Katsuhisa had never seen his friend become so angry over something so trivial. *Maybe he’s just drunk*, Katsuhisa thought, *and he took out his rage at Lord Nobunaga on poor Ryoko*. While offering little comfort, this explanation was at least better than Iori being so deluded as to think that this girl was a spy.

When they reached the Yomogi Inn, Katsuhisa helped Ryoko dismount and led her inside. Her father was dressed to go out looking for the girl, and thanked Katsuhisa profusely for finding her. Not wanting to alarm or anger the old man, Katsuhisa explained that the party had simply gone on much longer than anticipated, and Ryoko’s injuries were all the result of her fall, which is why Katsuhisa had escorted her home personally. He knew that Ryoko had enough wits not to tell what had really happened, and she said nothing to contradict Katsuhisa’s story. Though her father offered Katsuhisa money, he refused it, asking only for some hot tea to help sober up some of the guests—a request that had the virtue of being true. Ryoko’s father happily agreed, taking a lacquered kettle that had been boiling over the hearth and putting some of his highest quality leaves in it. He bowed deeply after handing the kettle to Katsuhisa, who bowed in return before taking his leave.

Riding as quickly as he could without spilling the tea, Katsuhisa returned to the guardhouse, but when he went inside, Iori was gone. He’d left his sword where it was, but nothing else to explain where he’d gone or why he’d refused to wait. Katsuhisa walked slowly

over to the broken table he and Iori had used earlier, and resuming his former seat, poured some tea into his empty *sake* bowl and set the tea kettle on the floor. Sipping it slowly, he gazed at Iori's sword. *He would never simply forget this, no matter how drunk he was*, Katsuhisa thought. It must have some meaning. Thinking it over as he finished his tea, he concluded that by leaving his sword, Iori was telling Katsuhisa that he intended no harm. It also implied that Katsuhisa would be responsible for returning the blade to its owner, a gesture that would reaffirm their friendship. Katsuhisa smiled, thinking this message was clearer than any written explanation Iori could've provided. Setting his bowl down, he picked up the sword as he stood. Katsuhisa put out the lamps and left to go home himself, travelling slowly under the clear, moonlit sky.

Katsuhisa sat in the main room of the eastern gate's guardhouse, fanning his face and drinking cold water; even shaded from the early afternoon sun, the summer heat was hard to endure. The boredom was worse, however. While most Akechi retainers in Kameyama were drilling or preparing supplies for the western campaign, Katsuhisa and the men under his command were tasked with questioning travelers entering the city or passing the nearby roads. He wondered why Toshimitsu had given him this relatively menial position; the post was important of course, but Katsuhisa felt that his talents would be better used elsewhere. The sitting and waiting also gave him more time to ponder Obata Iori's words and attitude from the night before last. Katsuhisa hadn't seen his friend since. Perhaps having so much idle time to think and worry was what he hated most.

“Yanase, what time is it?”

The young man went outside for a moment, then returned. “Near the end of the Hour of the Horse.”

“So early,” Katsuhisa muttered to himself. He drank the last of the water in his cup, then addressed Yanase again. “Go and see if the guards have found anyone of interest.” There had been few travelers today, mostly merchants of no importance. The locals tended to avoid towns preparing for war, as did the wayfarers they forewarned.

Yanase obeyed and Katsuhisa began fanning himself again, closing his eyes and doing his best to clear his head. Yanase and the two pages who served as Katsuhisa’s attendants weren’t very good for conversation, all being a decade younger and seemingly intimidated by their master. Still, Katsuhisa attempted to engage them from time to time; even idle conversation was better than nothing. He was reminiscing about his youth in Echigo and how much milder the summers were there when he realized that Yanase had been gone longer than usual. Katsuhisa stood and was about to go check on him when one of the gate guards rushed into the room and knelt before Katsuhisa.

“My lord, we found a foreigner walking on the main road. We called out for him to stop, but he turned his head away from us and quickened his pace. We’ve detained him, but he won’t answer any questions and speaks only strange words. I assume it’s the barbarian tongue, but none of us can understand him. I’ve come to ask for your instructions.”

“A barbarian, here?” Katsuhisa asked. He’d never seen one in Kameyama, or anywhere in Tamba; while the Sanin Road did lead to the western provinces and ports to Kyushu, foreigners normally travelled by sea or at least stayed near the coast. They were seldom found so far inland. “What does he look like, how is he dressed?”

“He’s pale. His eyes are large and his hair and beard are brown. The top of his head is shaved, but a ring of hair circles the edges—similar to ours, except that it connects in the front and there’s no topknot. He wears a brown robe and leather coverings on his feet, but little else: a

beaded necklace, a black rope around his waist, and a small pouch with a few coins in it. Some have strange markings on them, and he carries two stacks of paper bound by leather and filled with similar writing. Yanase called them ‘barbarian books.’” The guard spoke as if he were describing a strange new animal; it was clear that he’d never seen a man like this before. “He’s filthy and smells of more than just sweat,” he added.

Katsuhisa nodded. He’d seen men dressed like this in Azuchi, where Nobunaga had allowed them to build one of their temples. “There are two types of barbarians in our land: traders and holy men. The man you describe sounds like one of their priests or monks.”

Katsuhisa thought for a moment, then asked, “He’s travelling alone?”

“Yes.”

“And he speaks no Japanese?”

“Only a few words. He repeats them many times, mainly ‘house’ and ‘road,’ but they make no sense. The rest of what he says is gibberish.”

“As strange as it is for a barbarian priest to be here, its stranger still for him to be alone and not speak our language. Are you sure that he cannot speak Japanese, or simply will not?”

“I do not know, lord,” the guard said. “We hit him several times trying to force him to speak, but it made no difference. Some of the men wanted to keep beating him, but Yanase told us to wait for your orders.”

“Well, I’m glad he had the sense to do that,” Katsuhisa said, proud of his young servant.

“Only fools beat men before speaking to them. You were right to detain this foreigner, but I would speak with him before doing anything more. And even if he doesn’t speak Japanese, he speaks something.” Turning to one of the pages, he said, “Find someone who speaks the barbarian tongue. Start by asking those who’ve converted to their faith.” There were no barbarian

temples in Kameyama, but there were surely some ‘Christians’ as they were called, especially among the samurai, many of whom had spent much time in Azuchi, Kyoto, Sakai—places where barbarians were common. After the boy left, Katsuhisa went to the gate to see the strange man, bringing the guard and remaining page with him.

The early afternoon sky was clear, but though it had not rained for several days, the air was thick and heavy with humidity. The short time it took Katsuhisa and his companions to walk from the guardhouse to the gate was enough to make them sweat; Katsuhisa continuously fanned himself and was thankful not to be wearing armor. As he approached, he saw Yanase and three other men standing next to their captive, who was sitting cross-legged on the ground, his arms pinned behind his back with thick hempen rope. He appeared much like the guard had described him, only filthier than Katsuhisa had imagined: the man’s robe was so stained that it was hard to tell whether its original color was brown or not.

Yanase and the others knelt and bowed before their master, and Yanase said, “My lord, we keep trying to make him talk, but he won’t. He’s been quiet for some time now. I ordered him not to be beaten until you arrived, but I don’t know what else to do with him.”

“You did well,” Katsuhisa replied while looking over the captive. The man’s stench suddenly hit Katsuhisa, and he had trouble stifling a cough. He knew that barbarians seldom bathed, but wondered if this one had ever done so. He looked at his page and said, “Bring some water and a parasol.” As the boy was about to leave, he added, “Fetch me a stool as well. This may take some time.”

When the page had left, Katsuhisa told Yanase and the others to stand, and though two of the guards did so but kept their spears aimed at their captive, Katsuhisa waved them off, saying, “There’s nowhere for him to go. I want to try to put him at ease.” He’d noticed that though the

barbarian made no verbal protest, his legs quivered slightly when weapons were pointed towards him. Addressing Yanase, Katsuhisa asked, "So now he will say nothing, not even in barbarian? I was told that he spoke before and knew at least a few Japanese words."

"He did," Yanase replied, "or at least it sounded that way. His accent is hard to understand. But now, all he does is mutter quietly or say nothing at all."

"You couldn't get a name or where he's from, even if he said it in barbarian?"

"Not that I could tell, lord. If he said either, none of us understood it."

"Well then, we'll have to wait for a translator. Where are his possessions? I want to see them, especially the papers he carried."

A guard quickly retrieved these items from a wooden box used for storage near the gate and brought them to Katsuhisa. They consisted of the two 'books' that had been reported, the barbarian's necklace, coin pouch, and a wooden staff. Katsuhisa only looked at the necklace, pouch, and staff for a few seconds before handing them back. The books were what interested him, and though he was unable to understand the symbols, he was struck by the elegant style of writing and bright colors used to highlight certain characters. He also noticed that the barbarian stared at them while Katsuhisa turned the pages, his large eyes wider than before and his lips quivering. These books were clearly the foreigner's most treasured possessions, though Katsuhisa wondered if it was because they themselves were valuable, or if there was something in them.

The page sent to retrieve Katsuhisa's stool, parasol, and water returned. Katsuhisa sat and the page held the parasol over his head, providing some much desired shade. Yanase poured a bowl of water from the bucket and offered it to his master, who drank it quickly and then told the others to drink as well. They gladly did so, and Katsuhisa saw the barbarian shift his gaze toward

them, opening his mouth as if to say something but then closing it again. “The barbarian must be thirsty as well,” Katsuhisa said. “Give him a ladle full, Yanase.”

One of the guards said, “A bucket should have been brought to pour over his head. His stench could draw more flies than a rotting deer carcass.”

Katsuhisa laughed. “It would take more than a bucket to fix that. Don’t waste water trying to clean him. I think these barbarians prefer to stink; cats are more fond of bathing than they are.”

“If they have that little sense, why even give him water to drink?” the guard replied. “At least cats kill vermin. These foreigners behave like vermin.” He spat at the barbarian’s feet and grabbed Yanase’s arm to prevent him from giving the captive a drink, causing some of the ladle’s water to spill.

Katsuhisa didn’t laugh at this. He was relatively new to commanding men and often encouraged them to speak freely and forgo formalities, but not to the point of open defiance. “Enough!” he said, rising from his stool. “Give the barbarian water, Yanase.” Pointing at the guard, he said, “You are the one who will go without. Leave!”

The guard immediately dropped to his knees, begged forgiveness, and quickly ran into the nearby gatehouse. He likely feared for his life—men had been killed for less—though Katsuhisa had no intention of killing him, only instilling discipline. Katsuhisa also wanted the area clear of hostility to keep his prisoner at ease, hoping he’d be more cooperative that way. He had no love for barbarians, nor did he enjoy the stench of the man sitting tied up before him any more than the others, especially on a hot summer day. But watching this man eagerly gulp down the little water Yanase gave him, Katsuhisa felt pity. This barbarian might be an enemy spy or he might just be as he appeared: a simple holy man travelling in a strange land—unwelcome, but

innocent. Memories of Mt. Hiei entered Katsuhisa's mind; memories that made him cringe. After drinking, the barbarian said something in his strange language while bowing his head toward Yanase and then Katsuhisa. Katsuhisa nodded back, acknowledging what he assumed to be gratitude.

Just then, the page who had been sent to find a translator arrived with an older man dressed as a merchant. The two knelt before Katsuhisa and the page said, "I could not find any Christians in the city, but I was told that a trader from Kyushu was in town who had many dealings with the barbarians. I sought him out, and though he says he has not mastered the barbarian tongue, he can speak enough to communicate with them."

The trader said, "Yes, my lord, I am a merchant from Satsuma and have traded with these foreigners for many years. My name is Sagara Hanzo, and I offer you my service."

Katsuhisa rose and thanked him formally, saying, "I am grateful to you, Sagara Hanzo. As you can see," he said, raising a hand to point to the captive, "we have one of the southern barbarians in our custody, but he cannot speak Japanese. I need to question him about why he is here and what is in these writings he carries. You will be rewarded for your aid."

Hanzo stood and said, "I will help as best I can, my lord, and I ask for no reward. However, you must understand that not all of the barbarians speak the same language, and I can only speak one of their dialects. If he speaks a different one, then I will understand him no better than you."

"I see," replied Katsuhisa. He knew this, or felt that he should have known, but hadn't taken it into consideration. All of the southern barbarians sounded the same to his ears. "In that case try to speak with him and find out. Ask him his name and where he is from." Katsuhisa sat

back down on his stool and watched as Hanzo spoke somewhat haltingly to the captive, and the latter replied.

“I understand him, my lord,” said Hanzo. “He says his name is Francesco and that he comes from a country called Portugal. I am familiar with traders from there, though I don’t believe this man is a merchant. He’s dressed as one of their priests.”

“I suspected that much,” said Katsuhisa, though he was unfamiliar with either name. He tried to repeat them to himself but found them unpronounceable. “Are these holy books, then?” he asked, raising them up in his hand to show Hanzo.

Hanzo asked about the books and the barbarian gave a quick reply. Hanzo then said to Katsuhisa, “Yes, they are. They are called ‘Bibles.’”

“Bibles,” Katsuhisa said to himself a few times, trying to pronounce it correctly. “Are they the same? Why does he have two copies of the same book?”

“He says that one of them belongs to him personally, while the other belongs to someone named Father Gneccchi.”

Katsuhisa didn’t even try to pronounce this name. “Very well, I’ll accept that these are just holy books and will return them to him when he’s released. Tell him this.”

Hanzo did so and the barbarian responded with a deep bow to both Hanzo and Katsuhisa.

“Now, ask him why he’s here and where he’s going.”

Hanzo asked, and this time the barbarian replied at length. Hanzo stopped him several times, and it sounded to Katsuhisa as if the foreigner repeated the same words whenever this happened. Finally, Hanzo turned back to Katsuhisa and said, “He says is travelling to Mori. I asked him what he meant by this, but he simply says it over and over again. He was in Azuchi and he’s travelling to Mori.”

This caught Katsuhisa's attention. Mori was not a place name, but the name of the clan that controlled the western provinces and was at war with the Oda. Was this man travelling to Mori lands? To see Mori Terumoto, the *daimyo* himself? And from Azuchi, Nobunaga's castle? Surely, this man couldn't be a messenger. And what message would Nobunaga send to Terumoto, anyway? Katsuhisa leaned forward and looked over his prisoner more carefully, saying to Hanzo, "Ask him if he means Mori Terumoto."

When asked, the barbarian seemed perplexed at this name. Hanzo replied, "He claims not to know Terumoto. He still just says Mori."

"Then explain to him that if he keeps travelling west, he will enter the domain of the Mori. Ask him if this is where he intends to go, and if so, what business does he have there."

Hanzo seemed to have difficulty communicating this, and given the potential importance of the answer, Katsuhisa wished he had a better interpreter. The barbarian spoke at length, but Hanzo interrupted him many times. Katsuhisa was growing impatient when Hanzo turned to him and said, "Forgive me, lord, he speaks quickly and I cannot always keep up. He did say that he's travelling west to Mori and seemed delighted to know that he was heading in the right direction, but he still won't clarify what he means by Mori and I can't discover the purpose of his journey. He either won't say or I fail to understand what he means."

Katsuhisa sighed. "It is not your fault, but I still need the answer; I cannot let him travel into enemy territory without knowing his intentions, whoever he may be." Katsuhisa called for Yanase, who was standing some distance away, and said, "This barbarian came from Azuchi and is on his way to Mori lands, but we don't know why. Inform Lord Toshimitsu and return as soon as you can."

As Yanase went off to carry out this order, Katsuhisa leaned back on his stool and asked for water, telling the pages to offer more to the barbarian and to Hanzo as well. He drank and then fanned himself while staring at this strange man, wondering how to solve this puzzle. He told Hanzo to keep trying, though he had little hope to learn more that way. Katsuhisa picked up the books again and thumbed through them but could make no sense of the barbarian script. But as he began to set them down, he felt a piece of loose stitching on one of them that he hadn't noticed before; it was on the back cover of the book that the barbarian claimed was not his own. Considering how well made and in good repair the book was, Katsuhisa found this odd. He pulled on it gently and the thread easily came loose, revealing an interior space in the leather binding. Looking inside, Katsuhisa found a small sheet of paper folded in two and tucked neatly between the layers. He quickly pulled it out, opened it, and read the following:

Hideyoshi,

Reinforcements are coming to aid you in the western campaign. Around the beginning of the sixth month Niwa will bring a force by sea, and I will follow soon afterwards. First to come will be the Akechi, and they will be under your command. Use them well, but keep a close eye on Mitsuhide. Send him to the front and allow him to die in battle if possible. If he survives, I leave it to you to find a discreet way of disposing of him. He is to be dead by the time I arrive.

Katsuhisa nearly dropped the letter when he read these last lines. This was written by Nobunaga himself and proved beyond all doubt what he intended to do with Lord Mitsuhide. It even implied that Mitsuhide wouldn't be allowed the honor of committing *seppuku*. Katsuhisa stood and shoved the letter in the face of the barbarian. "Hanzo, make him explain this!"

Hanzo did as he was asked, though Katsuhisa was careful not to show the contents to Hanzo or anyone else; this was privileged information and should not be seen by just anyone. The barbarian spoke frantically with Hanzo, frequently looking at Katsuhisa and the now-

damaged book. After a lengthy conversation, Hanzo said to Katsuhisa, “He denies knowledge of any letter, my lord. I could not understand everything he said, but most of it was protest about how you ruined his holy book.”

Katsuhisa picked up the book, spat on it, and threw it in the dirt. “Tell him I will burn it and the other as well unless he explains why he had a Japanese letter hidden inside one of them.” As Hanzo started questioning the barbarian again Katsuhisa picked up the other ‘Bible’ and began examining it for similar hidden messages. While he was doing so Yanase returned, accompanied by four samurai from the castle.

“Lord Toshimitsu says that he has no translators available, but that the prisoner should be interrogated thoroughly.”

Katsuhisa understood what this meant. Turning to Hanzo, he asked, “Has he said anything else, anything useful?”

“He continues to protest, my lord. He says nothing else as far as I can tell.”

“Very well. Thank you for your assistance, but your services are no longer required. Please accept this and return to your shop.” Katsuhisa handed a few coins to Hanzo and sent him away. Katsuhisa then motioned the four men who’d come with Yanase to take the barbarian into the gatehouse and begin their interrogation. The foreigner yelled out in his strange tongue, but Katsuhisa ignored him as he was dragged away. When they were gone, Katsuhisa called Yanase to him, sending everyone else within hearing distance away. Pressing the tightly folded letter into Yanase’s hands, he said, “Deliver this to Lord Toshimitsu. Do not read it and do not show it to anyone else. Simply tell the lord that this was found concealed in the barbarians belongings.”

Katsuhisa was placing a great deal of trust in this young man, but felt that he’d earned it. Yanase agreed and hurried away. Katsuhisa ordered his pages to remove his stool and parasol

and return them to the guardhouse, where they themselves were to remain as well. Katsuhisa wished to be alone, and thought it wise to have as few people around as possible.

Katsuhisa stood alone outside the gatehouse, having ordered all the nearby guards to resume their duties inspecting travelers on the road or entering the city. Looking up, he guessed it must be near the middle of the Hour of the Monkey. Stains had formed around the neck and armpits of his light yellow kimono and it clung to his skin. Katsuhisa paid little attention to this, though, having even folded up his fan and tucked it into his belt. He focused on standing guard and keeping people away, not trusting others to do so, while the barbarian was being interrogated inside. The interrogators did a good job of stifling the barbarian's screams, though Katsuhisa himself was close enough to hear them. His thoughts, however, were on the letter and its implications; if Lord Mitsuhide was being sent to his death, then so were his retainers, either in battle or out of shame for allowing their master to die. No samurai worthy of the name would consent to serve a new one—certainly not that monkey, Hideyoshi. This, therefore, implied that Katsuhisa himself was to die in the upcoming battle, or at least soon after. He was prepared to die whenever he fought, of course, but it was different to know he would die, to be virtually certain of when and how. *When the time comes, how will I face it? Will I be brave at the end?* He remembered the face of that young monk on Mount Hiei—how he was unable to tell if the man had been frightened or at peace when Katsuhisa beheaded him. Katsuhisa had looked at that face for some time, long after its head had left its shoulders, but he never was able to answer this question. His thoughts then drifted to Okei and their children, and what would become of them.

The afternoon was waning when Yanase returned. He came close to Katsuhisa and spoke quietly so no one else would hear. “Lord Toshimitsu has ordered you to learn all that you can from the barbarian, and then kill him.”

Katsuhisa expected this, though he would take no pleasure in carrying it out. As angry as he had been when he discovered the letter, the letter itself proved nothing about the barbarian's guilt or innocence; Katsuhisa thought it unlikely that Nobunaga would entrust such information to a barbarian regardless of how friendly he was with them. "What about the body?" he asked, knowing it would have to be disposed of discreetly.

"The lord wants there to be no trace. He suggested taking the corpse to the Atago Shrine and having the Shinto priests burn it."

Katsuhisa nodded and told Yanase to stay outside but to keep others away, then went in to see the prisoner. He found him lying on the ground, his hands and face bruised and bloodied. The stuffy room stank of sweat and soiled clothing. Addressing one of the interrogators, he asked, "Has he said anything? Does he speak any Japanese?"

"If he does, torture failed to make him talk," the man replied. "These foreign beasts aren't known for courage. I think he's too stupid to understand us."

"Leave, then. Tell Lord Toshimitsu that the barbarian said nothing. I will take care of the rest."

The guards bowed and left, one of them kicking the barbarian once more and spitting on him as he went. When they were gone, Katsuhisa approached the broken man and untied the rope that had bound him since he'd first been captured. Lifting him off the ground, Katsuhisa placed him in a kneeling position. The barbarian slouched forward and braced himself with his arms, breathing heavily while muttering something to himself. He likely knew he was about to die. Again, Katsuhisa was reminded of Mount Hiei and that monk's final moments. At least then, he'd been able to tell his victim what was about to happen and why. Katsuhisa wondered how to do so now—wanting to do so if at all possible. He looked around the room and saw the

barbarian's necklace lying on a table. He took it and placed it in the man's hands, saying, "Pray if you need to pray. I will give you a moment."

The barbarian looked up at Katsuhisa, his left eye swollen shut and several teeth missing. As he had done earlier that day, he moved his mouth as if wanting to speak, but merely bowed toward Katsuhisa instead. He took up his necklace and began muttering again, moving his fingers from one bead to the next, reciting what must have been some prayer since he repeated it each time.

Katsuhisa drew his short sword silently and stood at the barbarian's back. He waited until the man had counted off five beads before striking; placing his left hand over the man's mouth, Katsuhisa stabbed him through the back with his right, piercing the barbarian's heart. Holding him so that he wouldn't fall, Katsuhisa kept his left hand firmly placed over his victim's mouth, waiting for his breath to cease. When it did, Katsuhisa pulled his sword out of the man's back, wiped the blood on the barbarian's soiled robe, and put the blade back in its sheath. Letting out a deep sigh, Katsuhisa said a silent prayer to Amida Buddha, both for himself and the barbarian. *I have killed another holy man, and even if he was a foreign devil, he was still probably innocent. One day soon, I will have to account for these deeds.*

Yanase was waiting by the door when Katsuhisa came out. He asked Yanase to get a large silk blanket, preferably red to hide the blood, and return quickly. Yanase did so; Katsuhisa went back inside, wrapped the body from head to toe, and carried it out. The sun was setting now and few people lingered anywhere near the gate. "Report to Lord Toshimitsu that it has been done. Nothing more needs to be said."

"Yes," said Yanase, making a quick but deep bow before hurrying back to the castle.

The Atago Shrine—the “Shrine of the Fire God”—was just south of the city. Katsuhisa placed the wrapped body in a wagon and had a porter drive it there, Katsuhisa riding beside him on horseback. When they reached the shrine, Katsuhisa took the body around to the back, not wishing to bother the priests. There was no need to involve them. Katsuhisa placed the body reverently on a pyre, doused it with fish oil, and lit it with a torch. It burned quickly and brightly, enough to light the surrounding area with a reddish hue, which blended well with the sunset. It wasn’t long before a few of the Shinto priests came to see the conflagration. The stench was overwhelming, but Katsuhisa forced himself to endure it.

“I am making an offering to the Fire God,” Katsuhisa told them. “Say whatever prayers you deem appropriate for the occasion.” The priests lit incense and began chanting. Katsuhisa stayed for a short time, then taking some sandalwood incense with him, returned to the city. He entered the gatehouse, placed the incense in a copper burner located in the center of the room, and lit it. *I can do no more to cleanse this place. Others will clean the blood; I will live with it.* Katsuhisa left without a word, walking home in the silent darkness.

A cool breeze blew through the tall cryptomeria tree standing on a patch of lawn near Kameyama’s castle gate. Katsuhisa stood beneath it and watched the branches sway. He was waiting for someone. Obata Iori had sent a message for him to come to the castle this evening, no later than the second half of the Hour of the Boar<sup>5</sup>. Katsuhisa had arrived on time, but it was now close to midnight, and he’d neither seen nor heard from his friend. In fact prior to this afternoon, he hadn’t had any contact with Iori for two weeks—a day and a half before the incident with the barbarian. Katsuhisa had heard nothing more from Lord Toshimitsu, either, which was strange. Did Toshimitsu approve of how Katsuhisa had dealt with the barbarian or not? There had been

no change in his duties—he still commanded the city’s eastern gate—though there had been no further incidents of note. Only Lord Akechi Mitsuhide’s arrival on the twenty-fifth, followed by that of his cousins and their retainers from Sakamoto a few days later, had caused any stir. Within the city, preparations for war continued, and nearly everything was ready. Katsuhisa expected the army to march by the first of the sixth month, only two days away.

The men guarding the citadel’s entrance said little, so Katsuhisa didn’t bother pressing them for information. He listened to the crickets chirping for a time, then fixed his gaze on the cryptomeria, wondering how old it might be. It was even taller than it initially appeared, being slightly crooked and leaning to the left, away from the stone wall. It must’ve been fifty or sixty years old, perhaps older. Katsuhisa liked knowing the history of such things and often studied arboriculture when he had the time, comparing it to architecture. He was wondering which was older, the tree or the stonework, when he heard a horse trot up the well swept avenue leading to the castle. Katsuhisa turned and saw that the rider wore a wide brimmed straw hat and held a lit paper lantern in his left hand. As the man reached the gate and dismounted, Katsuhisa discerned the face of his friend.

“Iori, you’re late, and so is the hour. What kept you?”

Iori handed the reins of his horse to one of the guards and asked that a stable boy be called for. He was breathing heavily. Looking at Katsuhisa, he removed his hat and apologized, saying, “I know, and I’m sorry, but there was no helping it. Come with me now, though, we have something important to discuss.”

In addition to the hat Iori was dressed in full travelling attire; his kimono was mud stained and his sandals frayed. Removing the latter and handing the guards all of his accessories except the lantern, his swords, and a slim scroll satchel strapped to his back, he beckoned

Katsuhisa to follow him inside. Katsuhisa started to ask questions but Iori shook his head, saying only to follow. Katsuhisa obeyed. Once inside, Iori removed the paper cover of his lantern and walked slowly through the narrow corridors, Katsuhisa following closely behind, guided by the slender flame of the lamp. All else was dark, and though Katsuhisa had been inside Kameyama's keep before, he didn't know the layout well enough to keep track of where they were going: down one long corridor, up a flight of stairs, briefly outside along a wooden terrace, and then through another corridor. But Iori never wavered, and so neither did Katsuhisa.

Eventually, they reached a small room at the end of a hallway where Iori stopped, quietly slid open the *shoji*, and walked inside. He stepped back out in a matter of seconds, and then standing to the side, motioned for Katsuhisa to enter. He did so, and Iori slid the door shut behind him and put out his lamp, vanishing into darkness. The room in which Katsuhisa now stood was lit, however, and not empty: Saitō Toshimitsu was kneeling on the mat furthest from the door and facing Katsuhisa. Trimming the wick of the lamp next to him, he said in a low voice, "Katsuhisa, sit."

Katsuhisa stepped forward slowly, knelt on the mat across from Toshimitsu and made a swift bow before assuming a formal position. "Lord Toshimitsu, I received a message to meet Obata Iori at the citadel entrance this evening, but when I did, he led me directly here. I do not understand why."

Toshimitsu didn't respond at once. Iori's now empty satchel lay at his side, its contents were in Toshimitsu's hands, and the old man read the scroll silently. Whatever it said, it seemed to have no effect on Toshimitsu, who merely grunted as he finished and rolled it back up, setting it next to the satchel. Turning his attention to his guest, he said, "I would explain in more detail if

there were time, but there isn't. I will say why you are here, and then I will have one question to ask you. That is all."

Katsuhisa had only heard Toshimitsu speak this bluntly on the battlefield, and seldom had he looked so serious. Katsuhisa couldn't help feeling a bit perturbed. Nonetheless, he quickly replied, "Yes, my lord."

The old man nodded. "Good." Taking a deep breath, he continued, "First, I apologize for not speaking with you sooner. Though we are of different age and rank, we have been good friends for many years—better than most. However, that alone was not enough for me to permit myself to tell you everything. Only now that Lord Mitsuhide is here and our plans have been finalized may I open my heart to you. Even so, I do not do so lightly."

"I understand."

Toshimitsu smiled slightly. "I know that you do. What is about to happen is in no small part due to matters you have witnessed. You were at Suwa, you were at Azuchi. You were even at Mt. Hiei, forced to take part in that outrageous massacre, though our master pleaded against it. And then finally, you caught that heathen barbarian and his treacherous letter. You may well have saved our clan that day, Katsuhisa."

"I did my duty, nothing more."

"And you are modest." Toshimitsu smiled again. "That is a good trait to have. But you are also thorough. Anyone would have stopped the barbarian, but not all would have found the letter. If you hadn't, then we might be preparing to march to our deaths, at the behest of a madman and for the glory of that monkey peasant, Hideyoshi."

Katsuhisa understood this much, the letter he'd intercepted was clear. But if the Akechi were not planning to join the western campaign, why bother preparing the army? Or did

Mitsuhide intend to take the glory for himself, to achieve what Hideyoshi had failed to do for more than five years? “Our lord is in no way inferior to Hideyoshi. We will prove our mettle to Lord Nobunaga.”

Toshimitsu laughed quietly. “He will learn, indeed. One final lesson. Well,” he said, leaning closer, “it seems you are on our side, as I suspected. But there is no room for doubt, just as there is no room for error in our plans. We march tomorrow night, and there can be no turning back. So I will ask you plainly: are you with us?” Toshimitsu stared directly into Katsuhisa’s eyes, not blinking until he heard an answer.

Katsuhisa felt confused. Toshimitsu was clearly outraged at Nobunaga’s treatment of the Akechi, and rightfully so; Katsuhisa understood the shame, for he felt it, too. But there was no need for all of this secrecy for a campaign against the Mori. Unless...Nobunaga’s one final lesson? A rush of cold blood washed over his heart and raced to his extremities. “My lord,” he answered slowly, careful to choose the right words, “you have asked me plainly if I am with you, with Lord Mitsuhide. I am with our master to the end. But I would ask that you answer me plainly. When we march tomorrow night, where will we go? Who is our enemy?”

The old man leaned back, a look of bewilderment replacing the piercing gaze of his previous stare. Composing himself, Toshimitsu said in a low, yet stern voice, “As for where, the place is Kyoto. I understand you not knowing that much and was going to tell you once I had your answer. But who is our enemy? How can you not know? Our enemy is Nobunaga!” This last word was said through clenched teeth.

Another chill swept through Katsuhisa, and he felt his pulse quicken. It wasn’t as though the thought had never occurred to him; if the public shame had been hard to endure, the letter was almost unbearable. Though he’d never been as openly critical of Nobunaga as Iori and some

of the other Akechi retainers had, Katsuhisa did vent his rage after the letter incident. He'd had to: there was no way for him to stifle his feelings entirely. But Katsuhisa did so in private, only in the company of his sandal bearer, Yanase, whom he'd grown to trust. He'd even hidden it from Okei. Moreover, Katsuhisa expelled his rage in a single outburst, one fueled by many bowls of *sake*. Once sober again the next morning, his hatred had turned to ashes. Katsuhisa didn't carry grudges, and to hold one against a man like Nobunaga would be pointless and dangerous. Ultimately, the letter was merely one more insult to endure.

In this respect he likened himself to his master, Mitsuhide, a man whose face seldom betrayed emotion, yet produced a calming effect on Katsuhisa. He'd witnessed Nobunaga's berating of Mitsuhide twice now, and however angry Nobunaga became, Mitsuhide endured it in silence, or when forced to speak, did so calmly and clearly. Katsuhisa considered this trait admirable, worthy of emulation. Yet it was this very trait that alarmed him now, for the decision to betray Nobunaga had to have come from Mitsuhide. None of the retainers would have been bold enough to even suggest it, much less carry it out. But how did Katsuhisa miss it? How did Mitsuhide hide it so well? How long ago had he, a man—a samurai—of such high principles, determined to kill his own lord? In all his years of service, Katsuhisa never felt that he understood his master less than he did now.

Toshimitsu was staring intently and had leaned close once more. His bushy white eyebrows were furled, and his mouth no longer showed any trace of a smile. He sat so still that Katsuhisa couldn't tell if the old man still drew breath. Katsuhisa knew he had to say something, though, and that if he didn't agree to the plan, he'd never leave the castle alive. If he now understood anything at all, it was why he'd been brought here. He exhaled deeply, then quietly,

yet clearly stated, “I see. Our enemy is Nobunaga.” Meeting Toshimitsu’s gaze, he asked, “What is the plan, my lord?”

“Then you do agree?”

“Of course, my lord.”

Toshimitsu slowly leaned back again. He looked at Katsuhisa as if he were contemplating a move on a *go* board. “Your hesitation concerns me, Katsuhisa. You remember what I said: there is no turning back. If you’re certain, why did you take so long to speak?”

“It’s not that I was uncertain. I was merely wondering why Lord Mitsuhide has waited so long.” This was a lie, one Katsuhisa made up as he said it. His heart was racing now. It was critical that he remain outwardly calm, though; his life depended on it.

Toshimitsu was silent for a moment. Katsuhisa slowed his breathing while maintaining eye contact. He resolved not to break it until Toshimitsu did, though the old man’s eyes were like a weight on Katsuhisa’s chest. If one man could ever truly see into another’s heart, Katsuhisa feared that Toshimitsu could see into his right now, revealing every doubt and fear as clearly as if they were written in large characters.

Finally, Toshimitsu blinked. He nodded with a grunt, then relaxed his shoulders, allowing Katsuhisa to gradually relax his own. “I’ve always known you to be an upright man, Katsuhisa. For all of Nobunaga’s faults, he is still our *daimyo*. It cannot be easy for a samurai of principle like you to betray his lord under any circumstances.”

Truthfully, Katsuhisa’s loyalty was divided. Mitsuhide and Nobunaga were both his master, and Nobunaga was of higher rank. Katsuhisa was an Akechi samurai, but Mitsuhide was the head of the clan, and he was an Oda samurai. Did this not make Katsuhisa an Oda retainer, too? Or did Mitsuhide’s betrayal nullify Katsuhisa’s responsibility to the Oda? Thinking of the

many instances he knew of when a retainer rebelled against his master, right and wrong were never clearly established before the rebellion—it was after, and depending on who prevailed, that made it just or not in the eyes of the people. Moreover, whatever choice he made, he could not remain loyal to both. Either choice would bring both honor and shame.

Time would not allow for more thought on the matter. Toshimitsu's position was clear, and he now wanted to know Katsuhisa's. He let out a deep breath. "It is not easy in principle," he said, "but in practice, it is. Lord Mitsuhide is my master. If he attacks Nobunaga, then so will I. He makes the decisions. I follow them." Katsuhisa hoped his words sounded more sincere than they really were.

Toshimitsu nodded again, saying, "Well put, my friend. When you break it down to the essentials, the matter becomes simple." Unfolding a sheet of white silk cloth that lay on the small table to his left, Toshimitsu lightly ground an ink stone, and then turned the table around to his front, where it was within both men's reach. Setting a dry bamboo brush next to the stone, he said, "Your word is enough for me, but our master wants it in writing. Please sign this document to set his mind at ease."

Katsuhisa took up the brush and wet the tip. The cloth contained a list of 20 or so names, including all of Mitsuhide's senior retainers. Saito Toshimitsu's name was elegantly written at the top, even before the names of Mitsuhide's cousins. Katsuhisa signed his name at the bottom, right beneath that of Obata Iori's. Though not explicitly stated, this document bound not only the men who signed it, but their entire families as well. Mitsuhide was making sure that there was no turning back, indeed. Katsuhisa felt sick to his stomach. When he'd finished, Toshimitsu moved the table back to its former position and neatly refolded the cloth.

“Now,” he said as he finished these tasks, “Nobunaga has left Azuchi and is currently staying at the Honnoji in Kyoto. His son, Nobutata, is also there, lodging with the governor at Nijo Palace. Both will soon leave to join the western campaign, but Nobunaga has sent Niwa Nagahide ahead to Sakai with most of the men he brought from Azuchi. Currently, Nobunaga is protected only by the city’s paltry garrison and an escort of 50 to 100 people, mostly pages and courtesans.” Toshimitsu smiled again. “This is a Heaven sent opportunity to dispose of both the brute and his heir; we must take advantage, for we may never have such a chance again.”

Nobunaga was an arrogant man, but could he really be so careless? “Are we certain that this information is correct, my lord?”

“It seems absurd, I know, but it is true. We’ve sent many people to confirm it. Your friend has just returned from one such mission,” he said, patting the scroll Iori had delivered earlier. “Lord Mitsuhide is taking every precaution. And what’s more, no help can reach Kyoto in time: Hideyoshi is at a stalemate with the Mori in Bitchu, while Shibata Katsuie is occupied with the Uesugi in Echizen. Even if they were free to move their armies against us, they would be too late. The only army within a day’s march of the capital is ours.” Toshimitsu clapped his hands.

There was no denying that the plan was sound. Mitsuhide would crush Nobunaga, and most of the nobles in Kyoto would likely thank him for it, not to mention the exiled Shōgun, Yoshiaki. The “Demon King” would be no more. But for Katsuhisa, another battle would be fought within, and who would win was far from certain. He showed an approving smile to Toshimitsu, however, asking, “With things being so, we cannot but win.” Bowing his head, he continued, “What are Lord Mitsuhide’s orders?”

“All preparations are complete. We march tomorrow night as I said, and we should arrive at the capital before dawn, which is when we will strike. You have no orders until then except to rest well tonight and be ready tomorrow. We will not need many supplies, though we will bring them so as not to arouse any suspicion. The men are not to know where we are going until the last moment, and they will not know who our enemy is until we reach Kyoto. But as for yourself, travel light, and tell no one of the plan. That is all.”

“I understand, my lord.” Katsuhisa raised his head.

“Retire now, Katsuhisa. Iori will escort you out.” He then laughed slightly, saying, “It is getting very late, I didn’t mean to keep you so long. But you were the last to be informed, and I had to be certain. I do apologize for the rude treatment. I trust you understand that it was necessary and nothing personal.”

“Of course,” Katsuhisa said, rising from his mat. It must be late now; his legs were stiff from kneeling. Toshimitsu waved him off, and Katsuhisa slid open the *shoji* and stepped back into the hallway, closing the door behind him. He turned to look for Iori and wondered how he would find him in the dark, but a lamp was suddenly lit to his right, and he saw Iori’s form standing next to him. Katsuhisa was startled. “You were waiting this whole time? Were you listening as well?”

“I was,” replied Iori, trimming the wick while adjusting his eyes to the light. “I was ordered to.”

Katsuhisa then understood. If he hadn’t agreed to the plan, he not only would’ve died where he sat, but his friend would’ve been his executioner. As Iori walked down the hallway, Katsuhisa followed, saying, “So if I had said ‘no,’ you would have killed me right in front of Lord Toshimitsu?”

“Yes.”

“Why choose you to do it?”

“I volunteered.”

“Why?”

“You’d prefer that someone else took your head?”

“No, I suppose not,” Katsuhisa said, musing that if anyone were to take off his head, he would want it to be a friend who’d be quick and clean about it, and who wouldn’t deliver it to some enemy lord as a trophy.

“I was also worried,” Iori said, looking over his shoulder. “The last time we spoke, you were eager to please Nobunaga, not kill him. I didn’t know how you’d react. I wanted to be certain that you’d be willing to carry out Lord Mitsuhide’s plan.”

“Well, are you satisfied now?”

“I am.”

“Good.” Katsuhisa was glad he’d managed to convince two of his closest friends that he was committed. But now he had to convince himself. The two men parted ways at the gate. Katsuhisa walked home slowly, wondering how he could set his mind at ease. All he felt certain of was that he’d sleep little tonight, and that no one—not even Okei—could know why.

The morning mist rising from the Katsura River was blinding. From his vantage point on the western bank, Katsuhisa could barely make out the forms of soldiers crossing the river, and those already across were completely obscured. Even the ones still on his side weren’t clear; any man or beast beyond 20 paces appeared as a shadow in a dream world. He guessed it was near the start of the Hour of the Rabbit<sup>6</sup>; the short summer nights meant it would be dawn soon. Three

other horsemen were with him: Obata Iori, Yanase, and Iori's sandal bearer, a man whom Katsuhisa didn't know. Presently, Iori shouted, "Gunners, keep your cords dry! Cut them short and wrap them around your necks if you have to. And all of you, hurry! Dawn is approaching!"

Could he really see them, or was he just urging them on? Katsuhisa couldn't tell. He and Iori commanded this small force of 100 men. They were the first to cross the river, and Iori was pushing them hard to make sure they remained well ahead of the main army, which had set out an hour later. The task of this advance force was a grim one: clear the area of anyone who might alert the defenders of Kyoto to the attack. Clearing meant killing, and anyone meant not just Oda spies and sentries, but farmers, woodcutters, fishermen, itinerant monks—anyone who happened to working in or passing through the western outskirts of the city. It was a perfectly reasonable precaution, but one Katsuhisa loathed taking part in.

The decision had been made at a small war council the previous evening, held at the Itokuinji just southeast of Kameyama. Only those who had signed the document were present. Katsuhisa attended, for though exhausted in mind and body, he could not excuse himself. Lord Mitsuhide did most of the talking. He first listed his reasons, all of which Katsuhisa was already aware save the last—that Mitsuhide intended to restore the Ashikaga Shōgunate. Katsuhisa didn't know whether to believe Mitsuhide about this point or not; he'd assumed that Mitsuhide would simply take Nobunaga's place as de facto Shōgun. Everyone knew that Yoshiaki was a fool, and there were no other Ashikaga heirs to take his place. Mitsuhide was far more capable. Was this merely a show of modesty, or how he justified his rebellion? That seemed more likely. Katsuhisa had watched his master intently as he spoke, paying closer attention to his face than his words. He looked older than the last time Katsuhisa saw him: his hair grayer and further receded, his face more pale and wrinkled. It was as if Mitsuhide had aged ten years in less than a

month. Katsuhisa wondered if this was because Mitsuhide had struggled so much with his decision. He then wondered if he was showing signs of aging, himself.

When the time came to give orders, Toshimitsu took over. He spoke to the point, assigning the corps commanders, telling them what formations to use, what tactics to employ. Katsuhisa thought it unnecessary to plan so carefully—the Akechi army was over 10,000 strong. All that mattered was that Nobunaga and Nobutada didn't escape, and that the capital wasn't unnecessarily damaged. But to make sure that their targets didn't get away, one of the generals had advised sending a small company ahead to ensure that no alarm was raised. Mitsuhide agreed and Toshimitsu asked for a volunteer, prompting Iori to offer himself. Toshimitsu consented and appointed Katsuhisa co-commander. Once more, Katsuhisa agreed with his mouth but not his heart.

“Let's go,” Iori said. The last of the soldiers were crossing the river. Despite the summer heat, Katsuhisa felt cold, even as sweat beads appeared on his hands and face. Iori commented on how good the water felt as they forded the Katsura, yet it froze Katsuhisa to the core. He felt ill when they reached the other side.

“You've been so quiet,” Iori said as they took position behind the soldiers once more. “What's troubling you?”

“We're supposed to be quiet. Especially now.” On a clear day, Kyoto would be within sight at this point, for the ground was flat and no more obstacles lay in their path. The plain ahead is what they'd come to secure.

“No, I mean that you've been quiet before now, too, more than you needed to be. You've hardly said a word all night.”

“We may be co-commanders, but you’re leading the men. I’m content to be your second. You have everything under control.” Katsuhisa’s words sounded distant to his own ears.

Iori let out a frustrated sigh. “That’s not what I meant,” he said, lowering his voice, though making it sound clearer. “I’m worried, you don’t seem like your usual self. I need to know that I can depend on you. Especially now.”

Katsuhisa looked at him and saw the intense look in Iori’s eyes; they were the only parts of the man that appeared clearly, cutting through the fog. “I’m not my usual self, I’m about to enter battle. But don’t worry. I will do what I must, nothing less.”

Iori shook his head slightly, but grunted as if he understood.

“Now that we’re here,” said Katsuhisa, “I would advise you to move to the front and guide the men from there. I will bring up the rear.”

“Yes,” Iori replied, “I think that is best. Well then, I will see you after the battle.”

Katsuhisa nodded, and then Iori whipped his horse and moved ahead into the mist. Iori’s sandal bearer followed, leaving Katsuhisa alone with Yanase. Katsuhisa was glad to be rid of his friend’s company; it was one less burden to endure. What Katsuhisa hadn’t said was that he honestly had no idea what he was going to do, and the time for a decision was approaching fast. He ordered the men at the rear of the column to spread out and start searching for the enemy, though using that word made him cringe a little. *Here I am, about to kill more innocents, or order others to do it for me. Is that better or worse? Does it even matter?* Katsuhisa wore Buddhist prayer beads around his neck when he went into battle. His hands had occasionally gone to them during the journey, but now, his right hand gripped them as firmly as his left gripped his horse’s bridle. He prayed to Amida Buddha for guidance, then to Kannon, and finally even to Bishamonten, the god of war.

It was oddly silent as Katsuhisa slowly moved forward. Between the darkness and the mist, there was little to show what lay ahead aside from the ground immediately in front of him. The grass appeared full, though inky, for what little light shown on it came from the slender crescent moon. But its light was now fading as well, for dawn was coming, and as they continued eastward, a thin red hue gradually colored the horizon. Katsuhisa focused his gaze on this until he heard Yanase ask, "What is that?" Before Katsuhisa could answer, Yanase dismounted and scampered forward like a rat. He stopped and knelt to the ground about ten paces in front of Katsuhisa. Katsuhisa rode up and halted next to him. Looking down, he saw the body of a young girl, maybe twelve or thirteen years old, lying face down on the grass. One deep cut diagonally crossed her back. The blood was still warm, and so was she.

As Katsuhisa stared at her corpse, a rush of heat coursed through him, the first such wave he'd felt in weeks. It was rage and despair, both. He thought of his daughter, Akemi, who was about the same age. He then thought of Mount Hiei. How many dead children had he seen there? How many more would he see, along with their dead siblings and parents, as he trotted to Kyoto, wracked with guilt for their deaths, yet doing nothing about it except wallowing in self-loathing? An empty wooden bucket lay next to her. She was likely fetching water, or perhaps gathering food. What would she have told Nobunaga? *This is not war—these are not warriors.* He closed his eyes and said a prayer for her spirit.

Yanase remounted and took his place again at his master's side. He looked pale; Katsuhisa guessed that he'd never seen the corpse of a child before, or least one who'd been murdered. Yanase was nineteen, only a year younger than Katsuhisa had been at Mount Hiei. Katsuhisa understood exactly how Yanase must be feeling now. It was a feeling that he wished Yanase would have never known.

“We have to stop this,” Katsuhisa said. “Mitsuhide may have his reasons for betraying Nobunaga, even if he’s wrong in the end. But there is no reason for this,” he said, pointing at the corpse. “A samurai fights and dies for his master, but he does not commit murder. Do you understand?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Then you agree to help me put a stop it? Do not say yes unless you truly mean it, Yanase. If you say no, I will simply release you from my service and let you go where you will.”

“I understand, my lord, and I agree.” He sounded sincere.

“Good. Then we’ve wasted enough time, follow quickly.” As he finished these words, he set off at a gallop, and Yanase kept pace behind him.

Katsuhisa saw the horizon grow brighter as he rode forward. Or perhaps it only seemed brighter. He felt as though he’d shed a great weight from his chest: it felt easier to breathe. He called out for any Akechi soldiers who could hear him to halt. He met a few who’d either come running to him or who happened to be in his path. They recognized and knelt before him, asking for instructions. They were *ashigaru*—conscripts—so Katsuhisa couldn’t admonish them for dishonorable behavior as he would samurai. He simply told them to wait where they were or return to the Katsura River; either way, they were not to kill anyone else unless they came upon Oda retainers, but only to rejoin the main army when it arrived. The men agreed, most sitting down where they’d stood. Some had blood on their weapons, and Katsuhisa found other bodies. A few had been hacked to pieces, while others were missing heads, as though their killers had taken them as battle trophies like they would with slain enemy troops. As much as this disgusted Katsuhisa, he had no time to linger. He moved faster instead.

Presently, he heard a woman cry out in the distance. Judging the direction it came from as best he could, Katsuhisa rode toward it with all the speed his horse could muster, whipping it furiously. He called out to her, but it wasn't long before he couldn't hear her anymore. He continued calling, however, yelling for anyone who could hear him to stop, until a man's voice greeted him: "What are you yelling for? Be quiet or I'll have your head!" Though the sun was rising and the mist beginning to clear, it was still difficult for Katsuhisa to see very far. He did soon see the outline of a horse coming towards him, the rider bearing a lance in his right hand. Katsuhisa gripped his own spear and slowed his steed, preparing to defend himself. Just as the rider came into view, he swung his lance in a wide arc at Katsuhisa's head. Katsuhisa ducked and thrust his spear at the rider's torso. It pierced him through the stomach, and he fell to the ground with a loud thud, Katsuhisa's spear shaft pointing at the sky. Katsuhisa quickly dismounted and ran to the fallen man, sword in hand. The wounded warrior grunted loudly, and reaching for his facemask, ripped it off and threw it away. Katsuhisa then saw the man's face: it was Obata Iori.

Katsuhisa tossed his blade aside and removed Iori's helmet, placing it under his head to elevate it. Iori coughed and spat up blood; Katsuhisa looked at the wound and knew it was mortal—a pool of blood had already accumulated around Iori's waist, and the force of the fall exposed some of his entrails. Looking at Katsuhisa, Iori said, "Curse you, Katsuhisa! I knew I should never have trusted you."

Shaking his head, Katsuhisa replied, "I never intended to harm you."

Coughing again, Iori said, "You would lie to me even now? Why should I believe you when you've just run me through?"

"I defended myself. Your lance was aimed at my head."

“At first I thought you were one of those unruly peasants. If I’d noticed in time, I would’ve adjusted my aim.”

“Well,” Katsuhisa said, “it seems we both made a mistake. I’m sorry that you’re the one who has to pay for both.”

Iori gritted his teeth. “My mistake was trusting you. I wish I’d killed you last night when I had the chance.” He coughed again, and fresh blood trickled down his chin. “I don’t care what you have to say now. Cut off my head and take it to Nobunaga while you can. May Lord Mitsuhide give you what you deserve!”

Katsuhisa sighed. “I wish you could understand, Iori.” Rising, he continued, “I won’t cut off your head, I’ll leave you whole for the sake of your ancestors. But I will end your suffering if you wish.”

“Then do it, stop wasting your breath!” Iori groaned. The pain must have been overwhelming. He was surely hiding it from his perceived enemy as best he could.

“Very well.” Katsuhisa retrieved his sword, and standing over Iori, aimed the tip at his heart. He’d have to pierce right through the *Akechi mon*—the blue bellflower—emblazoned on Iori’s breastplate, for it couldn’t be removed without removing the spear. The irony of this was not lost on him, but there was no better way to end his friend’s suffering, or his own. Before striking, Katsuhisa said, “I will take care of your family, so do not worry about them. I’ll also let them know that you died well.”

Iori didn’t respond. He simply glared at Mitsuhide with clenched teeth and hatred in his eyes. Katsuhisa pitied him; he was on the verge of tears. Closing his eyes and invoking Kannon’s name, Katsuhisa thrust his sword into Iori’s chest. The blade went through the armor and into the heart. Iori gasped, then slowly exhaled, his life leaving his body with that one final breath.

Katsuhisa withdrew his sword with a firm tug, wiped the blood on the grass, and put it back in its scabbard. Kneeling again, he closed Iori's eyes and mouth, giving him a look of relative peace.

Yanase stood nearby as Katsuhisa did this. He'd said nothing, but Katsuhisa knew he was there. Turning to Yanase now, he said, "He was a great warrior and a good friend. I regret his death immensely, but considering what he had done, there was no helping it. Remember this, and take care never to put yourself in his position." *Or mine*, he thought to himself. Katsuhisa looked ahead and saw the body of a woman lying on the ground. It must have been her that Katsuhisa heard crying for help, and it was Iori who'd silenced her.

Yanase said he'd remember. The sky grew lighter by the moment, and when the mist cleared, it would likely be a bright, sunny day. Katsuhisa gazed at the sky while pondering his next move. Yanase asked, "What shall we do now, my lord? We cannot simply stay here and wait for the army to arrive."

"No, we cannot." Katsuhisa's thoughts drifted back to his family in Kameyama, and also to Iori's wife and son. "Yanase, I need you to do something for me," he said after thinking for a moment.

"What is it, lord?"

"I need you to return to Kameyama and take my wife and children to safety. Bring Iori's, too, if they will come."

"Where shall I take them?"

Honestly, Katsuhisa didn't know. But anywhere that neither Mitsuhide nor Nobunaga could find them would suffice for now. "As for where exactly, I do not know. A remote temple, a mountain village—somewhere difficult to find. I leave the choice to you. There is a store of money at my house. Okei will show you. It should cover travelling expenses for a time."

Yanase said, "I will, but if you don't know where they are, how will you find them?"

"When they are safe, come find me, and I will go to them." One problem remained: where would he go so that Yanase could find him? Thinking it over, he said, "I'm heading south. Nara, perhaps. Look for me there."

Yanase said that he would and started to mount his horse when Katsuhisa said, "Wait! Leave your armor here, or at least any part that bears the Akechi *mon*. I will do the same. We're fugitives, now," he said while untying the cords of his helmet's chinstrap. "Keep your weapons, but nothing that identifies you as an Akechi samurai. Also," he added as he removed his helmet and placed it on the ground, "Do not travel directly back. Go north and circle back around to reach Kameyama. You cannot risk running into Mitsuhide's army or being caught by his scouts. Be quick, but be discreet at all times."

Yanase removed his helmet and armor and placed it next to Katsuhisa's. "I understand," he said, mounting his horse. "I will take my leave now, and I will do as you've said. I hope I can return to you soon."

Katsuhisa smiled. Mounting his own steed, he said, "Go now. The Akechi will be here soon. Farewell!" With that, both men rode off at full speed in opposite directions: Yanase north and Katsuhisa south.

On the evening of the third day of the sixth month, Katsuhisa arrived at a temple. A storm had passed through and he'd become lost on the road to Nara, having never travelled that way before. As he approached the gate, he saw two well-armed monks standing guard. Katsuhisa greeted them and asked the name of the temple, but they drew their weapons and ordered him to dismount. One of them searched Katsuhisa while the other commented, "Another *ronin*. They're

like locusts.” The man searching Katsuhisa confiscated his swords, but nothing else. Then the other spoke again, asking gruffly, “What is your name and business here?”

“I’m a simple country samurai,” Katsuhisa replied, being careful around these men, though not intimidated. “My name is unimportant. As for my business, I merely wish to know the name of this temple.”

“I will decide if your name is important or not,” said the monk. “This is the Negoroji. We do not allow just anyone to enter.”

Katsuhisa was about to reply when an elderly monk came to the gate, asking what the commotion was about. The younger monk told him, and then the older man reprimanded him for treating a visitor with so much suspicion, rapping his staff on the young monk’s shin. To Katsuhisa, the old man said, “Forgive these brutes. They know how to wield a blade, but little else, including the duties of a proper monk. But come, it’s almost time for the evening meal. Please join me.” He started to turn away, but then looked back, eyeing Katsuhisa’s face curiously. He added, “You look like a man who has a lot on his mind and needs to rest. Perhaps the Buddha has led you here for that very purpose.” With that he walked briskly back inside the temple. Katsuhisa followed, wondering what this old monk saw in him, yet eager to find out.

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<sup>3</sup> 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

<sup>4</sup> 3:00 – 5:00 PM

<sup>5</sup> 11:00 PM

<sup>6</sup> 5:00 – 7:00 AM

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## VITA

Evan Mitchell Frees was born and raised in Chattanooga, TN. He wrote his first story around the age of 10, but wouldn't take up creative writing again until his late teens, more interested in drawing, and then reading instead. He graduated Notre Dame High School in 1996 and enrolled in Chattanooga State Technical Community College that fall, studying computer programming while working full time for his father's furniture supply business. Over the next few years, his only creative writing efforts were poetry largely inspired by depression and grunge music. Initially pursuing a technical certificate, health problems caused him to miss a few semesters and prompted him to get a bachelor's degree instead. He transferred to the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in 2000, but while he did well in programming classes, he struggled mightily with the massive math requirements for his new degree. Losing interest in programming, he began reading extensively again, and in the spring of '02, officially changed his major to English. He took his first creative writing class that fall, beginning with poetry and some short fiction. In 2003 he delved into non-fiction, and in '04, began writing fiction. He wrote his first historical piece that year, fueled by a keen interest in history, eastern cultures, and philosophy. He earned his BA in '05, but re-enrolled in '06 as a graduate student with a creative writing concentration, hoping to further his education and improve his craft. Family problems and financial difficulties have delayed his progress, but he plans to finally earn his master's degree in 2011. His future is uncertain, but will likely involve teaching, pursuing a doctorate, or both.