

Tangerines
(Koji)

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Taro Kaja
Master

MASTER I am a resident of this neighborhood. Last night I went to a banquet and received a fine branch of tangerines for dessert. When I picked up the branch, I found it had three tangerines on it. One very seldom finds two tangerines on one branch, so three is most unusual. I decided to bring it home as a souvenir and gave it to Taro Kaja for safe keeping. I will call him and question him about this matter. Taro Kaja, are you there?

TARO KAJA Here.

MASTER There you are.

TARO KAJA At your service, Sir.

MASTER You came quite quickly. The matter I have called you here about is of no great import. Was not the party last night a much grander one than usual?

TARO KAJA As you have so astutely observed, Sir, everyone present appeared to be in the best of spirits.

MASTER And fine tangerines were served for dessert. When I picked up the branch, I found it had three tangerines on it. One very seldom finds two tangerines

on one branch, so three is most unusual. I decided to bring it home as a souvenir and gave it to you for safe keeping. Give it to me quickly.

TARO KAJA Last night, even we of the lower ranks were served wine in plenitude, so I have no memory at all of what took place there.

MASTER What is this? No matter how much wine you may have drunk, how could you have drunk so much that you have no memory of what took place? I am most certain that I gave it to you for safe keeping. Give it to me quickly.

TARO KAJA Now that you put it that way, I do indeed remember what happened.

MASTER Did you think you could get by with not remembering?!

TARO KAJA As one very seldom finds two tangerines on one branch, three is, indeed, most unusual. So in order to give it the best possible care, I bound it securely to my lance at the base of the blade, and as I carried it along the way, one of the tangerines suddenly dropped from the branch and rolled along the ground. So I immediately spoke to it.

MASTER And what did you say?

TARO KAJA There is the practice of dispatching tangerine messages. So I called out, "Stop, stop." Though it is said that plants have no minds, it appears that tangerines do, for it rolled against a fallen leaf and came to a complete stop, standing upright. While considering

it most thoughtful for it to stop as it did, I was quite put out with it for having dropped off the branch so heartlessly, so I picked it up, peeled off its skin, removed its white fibers, and ate it on the spot.

MASTER What is this? What do you mean by eating it? But, if it is true that you ate it, there is nothing to be done now about that one. Give me the two remaining tangerines quickly.

TARO KAJA After that, in order to take better care of them, I slipped the branch into the breast of my kimono.

MASTER You did well, indeed.

TARO KAJA Due to the celebratory nature of last night's party, I decided to wear my sword with the square handguard. There was such a crowd decked out in their finest broad-sleeved outfits, and such pushing and shoving, that suddenly I felt something cold trickle down my chest. Thinking this most strange, I put my hand into the breast of my kimono, and discovered something truly momentous.

MASTER What was it?

TARO KAJA My square sword handguard had pressed against it and squashed it.

MASTER What is this?

TARO KAJA Thinking that such a squashed tangerine would be of no further use, without bothering to even peel off the rind, I sucked it out and swallowed it.

MASTER It is just because of such a danger that I expressly advised you against wearing sword with a square sword handguard, but you wore it anyway. So with one excuse and another, you managed to consume two of my tangerines. There is nothing that can be done now about them. So give me the remaining tangerine quickly.

TARO KAJA Concerning that one remaining tangerine, I have a pathetic tale to tell you. Please listen to it.

MASTER No, no. I do not want to hear any tales. Just give me the tangerine quickly.

TARO KAJA Out of pity for that tangerine, please listen to my tale.

MASTER If that is the case, I will listen, so tell it to me quickly.

TARO KAJA As you say, Sir. (Speaking in an exaggerated narrative style.) Long, long ago, when the land was ruled by Taira Kiyomori, there were three men who were banished, named Major-General Naritsune of Tanba, Priest Yasunari of the Taira Clan, and High Priest Shunkan, to the Isle of Demons. While his two companions were pardoned, Shunkan was left alone to languish on the Isle of Demons. In the same manner, of the three original tangerines, one dropped off the branch and another was squashed, and both were put to rest in Taro Kaja's stomach. While men and tangerines are different in many ways, their hearts are the same, and the fate of both brings to the eyes bitter tears.

MASTER Well, I must say, what a pathetic tale you have told. Thinking of the loneliness in the heart of Shunkan of ancient days, one cannot help but feel deep pity.

TARO KAJA It is as you say, indeed.

MASTER But your tale of Shunkan is an ancient one. Now, give me that one remaining tangerine quickly.

TARO KAJA Something has happened to that one remaining tangerine.

MASTER What is it?

TARO KAJA This is it.

MASTER What is it?

TARO KAJA It has also been put to rest in Taro Kaja's stomach.

MASTER You useless rascal! Get out of my sight!

TARO KAJA (Bowling.) Ha.

MASTER Ei.

TARO KAJA Ha.