

The Tale of Yoichi of Nasu  
(Nasu no Yoichi no Katari)

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Long, long ago, Shikoku forces rose up against the Heike Clan. Soldiers came out to join the allies, some from this peak, others from that cave, in groups of ten or twenty mounted soldiers each, quickly swelling the army of Yoshitsune to three hundred strong. But as it was already dusk, it was decided to make the attack the next morning.

Advancing, retreating, a small boat, luxuriously decked out, was seen rowing from far out in the sea, proceeding directly toward the shore. It stopped around one hundred yards offshore, turning itself sideways to the beach. Just when everyone was peering out to see what the boat might be up to, a courtesan of seventeen or eighteen years, wearing a willow-patterned, five-layered robe, and crimson trousers, rose up in the boat and stuck a scarlet-edged fan upright in the thwart. Then she beckoned enticingly and called out to the men on the shore.

Yoshitsune summoned Goto Hyoe Sanemoto and ordered him to explain what was going on. Sanemoto responded, "Well, Sir, the fan that you see there may have been set up for shooting down by a skillful archer hidden in the boat's hull. But it also may be that they are inviting us to shoot it down." "And is there one among our allies who can shoot it down unfailingly?" "Well, Sir, among our allies there are many who are indeed capable archers, but of them all, there is one who hails from the

Land of Shimotsuke, the son of Taro Suketaka of Nasu named Yoichi Munetaka. While he is yet young, he possesses particularly great skill. To explain just how accurate he is, I tell you that he never fails to shoot down two of any three birds at which he might aim for a wager." "Then summon this Yoichi to me. Ei!"

Yoichi was at that time a youth of twenty years. He wore a brown silk robe beneath black braided-leather armor, with his fur helmet of the same hue hanging on the straps of his armor. Thus did he present himself before his general. Yoshitsune looked at him and said, "Here, Yoichi! Go show all our allies and enemies how you can shoot down the fan set up out there by that courtesan. Will you do this for me, Yoichi?" "I do hear and respect your order, Sir, but I am not yet worthy of such an honor. I beg you to choose someone more worthy." Upon hearing this, Yoshitsune was greatly angered, saying, "Any man who has come all the way to the Western Lands from Kamakura with me, but still refuses my orders, will be sent packing right back to Kamakura. Once more I order you to go do as I say!" Yoichi shook his head with vigor to show that he had not meant to offend his lord and responded, "I will indeed do as you say, Sir." And with that he left the presence of his general.

Quickly Yoichi went to his fine horse known as Koguro of Nasu, strapped on a finely-carved and gilded saddle. Leaping lightly into the saddle, he drew back the reins sharply, grasped his bow of tightly twined wisteria vines in its very middle, and paced his horse slowly toward the shore. The allies stared at Yoichi's back as he moved away, saying among themselves, "Ha, haaa! This fine

young soldier will surely shoot it down without fail!"  
And Yoshitsune, as well, looked on with expectation.

Next Yoichi drove his horse into the water, until it lapped against its belly. The date was the eighteenth of March, the time was six in the evening. Suddenly, a strong north wind came blasting down upon the water. The waves were high, the boat was small. Rising, falling, rising, falling, the little boat rocked to and fro, making it hard to get a clear sight on the fan.

At this point, Yoichi thrust his hands into the salty tide, then clapped them over both eyes and prayed, "In the name of the Hachiman Bodhisattva, and the gracious deity Yuzen, the guardian god of Nasu, I pray, please keep this arrow to its mark, for if I miss, I swear to break my bow in two and throw it into the sea, and never more will I be able to face my fellow men."

Then he opened wide his eyes to find that the wind had calmed somewhat and the fan was visible enough to take his aim with care. This young warrior Yoichi then smartly drew a long three-pronged arrow, notched it in his bow, drew it to the full, and let it fly. The arrow hit its mark, piercing the fan just one inch above its pivot with a resounding smack. Even after the arrow plunged into the water, it went on whirring for a time. The fan tossed once, and once again, in the spring winds, and then dropped straight down, slashing the water's surface. The scarlet-edged fan lay floating on the white-capped waves, looking like a fallen red autumn leaf.

Both Genji and Heike warriors clapped their hands against the hulls of their boats and against their quivers, shouting in praise, "You hit it, Yoichi! You hit

it, Munetaka!" Yoshitsune, also overcome with joy, shouted out, "Oh, you have done well, Yoichi. You and your horse deserve a rest. Take yourself into the most inner chamber and eat and drink to your heart's content."

This is the way I heard the story.