

Tsunemasa

SEAMI

Table of Contents

<u>Tsunemasa</u>	1
<u>SEAMI</u>	2

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PERSONS

The Priest of Gy kei.
The Ghost of Taira No Tsunemasa.
Chorus.

Gy kei:

I am Gy kei, priest of the imperial temple Ninnaji. You must know that there was a certain prince of the House of Taira named Tsunemasa, Lord of Tajima, who since his boyhood has enjoyed beyond all precedent the favour of our master the Emperor. But now he has been killed at the Battle of the Western Seas.

It was to this Tsunemasa in his lifetime that the Emperor had given the lute called Green Hill. And now my master bids me take it and dedicate it to Buddha, performing a liturgy of flutes and strings for the salvation of Tsunemasa's soul. And that was my purpose in gathering these musicians together.

Truly it is said that strangers who shelter under the same tree or draw water from the same pool will be friends in another life. How much the more must intercourse of many years, kindness and favour so deep. . .

Surely they will be heard,
The prayers that all night long
With due performance of rites
I have reverently repeated in this Palace
For the salvation of Tsunemasa
And for the awakening of his soul.

Chorus:

And, more than all, we dedicate
The lute Green Hill for this dead man;
While pipe and flute are joined to sounds of prayer.
For night and day the Gate of Law
Stands open and the Universal Road
Rejects no wayfarer.

Tsunemasa: speaking off the stage.

"The wind blowing through withered trees: rain from a cloudless sky.

The moon shining on level sands: frost on a summer's night."

Frost lying. . . but I, because I could not lie at rest,

Am come back to the World for a while,

Like a shadow that steals over the grass.

I am like dews that in the morning

Still cling to the grasses. Oh pitiful the longing

That has beset me!

Gy kei:

How strange! Within the flame of our candle that is burning low because the night is far spent, suddenly I seemed to see a man's shadow dimly appearing. Who can be here?

Tsunemasa: his shadow disappearing.

Tsunemasa

I am the ghost of Tsunemasa. The sound of your prayers has brought me in visible shape before you.

Gy kei:

"I am the ghost of Tsunemasa," he said, but when I looked to where the voice had sounded nothing was there, neither substance nor shadow!

Tsunemasa:

Only a voice,

Gy kei:

A dim voice whispers where the shadow of a man

Visibly lay, but when I looked

Tsunemasa:

It had vanished——

Gy kei:

This flickering form. . .

Tsunemasa:

Like haze over the fields.

Chorus:

Only as a tricking magic,

A bodiless vision,

Can he hover in the world of his lifetime,

Swift-changing Tsunemasa.

By this name we call him, yet of the body

That men named so, what is left but longing?

What but the longing to look again, through the wall of death,

On one he loved?

"Sooner shall the waters in its garden cease to flow

Than I grow weary of living in the Palace of my Lord."

Like a dream he has come,

Like a morning dream.

Gy kei:

How strange! When the form of Tsunemasa had vanished, his voice lingered and spoke to me! Am I dreaming or waking? I cannot tell. But this I know,——that by the power of my incantations I have had converse with the dead. Oh! marvellous potency of the Law!

Tsunemasa:

It was long ago that I came to the Palace. I was but a boy then, but all the world knew me; for I was marked with the love of our Lord, with the favour of an Emperor. And, among many gifts, he gave to me once while I was in the World this lute which you have dedicated. My fingers were ever on its strings.

Chorus:

Plucking them even as now

This music plucks at your heart;

The sound of the plectrum, then as now

Divine music fulfilling

The vows of Sarasvati.

But this Tsunemasa,

Was he not from the days of his childhood pre-eminent

In faith, wisdom, benevolence,

Honour and courtesy; yet for his pleasure

Ever of birds and flowers,

Of wind and moonlight making

Ballads and songs to join their harmony

To pipes and lutes?

So springs and autumns passed he.

Tsunemasa

But in a World that is as dew,
As dew on the grasses, as foam upon the waters,
What flower lasteth?

Gy kei:

For the dead man's sake we play upon this lute Green Hill that he loved when he was in the World. We follow the lute–music with a concord of many instruments.

Music.

Tsunemasa:

And while they played the dead man stole up behind them. Though he could not be seen by the light of the candle, they felt him pluck the lute–strings. . . .

Gy kei:

It is midnight. He is playing Yabanraku, the dance of midnight–revel. And now that we have shaken sleep from our eyes. . .

Tsunemasa:

The sky is clear, yet there is a sound as of sudden rain. . . .

Gy kei:

Rain beating carelessly on trees and grasses. What season's music ought we to play?

Tsunemasa:

No. It is not rain. Look! At the cloud's fringe

Chorus:

The moon undimmed
Hangs over the pine–woods of Narabi Hills.
It was the wind you heard;
The wind blowing through the pine–leaves
Pattered, like the falling of winter rain.
O wonderful hour!
"The big strings crashed and sobbed
Like the falling of winter rain.
And the little strings whispered secretly together.
The first and second string
Were like a wind sweeping through pine–woods,
Murmuring disjointedly.
The third and fourth string
Were like the voice of a caged stork
Crying for its little ones at night
In low, dejected notes."
The night must not cease.
The cock shall not crow
And put an end to his wandering.

Tsunemasa:

"One note of the phoenix–flute

Chorus:

Shakes the autumn clouds from the mountain–side."
The phoenix and his mate swoop down
Charmed by its music, beat their wings
And dance in rapture, perched upon the swaying boughs
Of kiri and bamboo.
Dance.

Tsunemasa:

Oh terrible anguish!

For a little while I was back in the World and my heart set on its music, on revels of midnight. But now the

Tsunemasa

hate is rising in me. . . .

Gy kei:

The shadow that we saw before is still visible.

Can it be Tsunemasa?

Tsunemasa:

Oh! I am ashamed; I must not let them see me.

Put out your candle.

Chorus:

"Let us turn away from the candle and watch together

The midnight moon."

Lo, he who holds the moon,

The god Indra, in battle appeareth

Warring upon demons.

Fire leaps from their swords,

The sparks of their own anger fall upon them like rain.

To wound another he draws his sword,

But it is from his own flesh

That the red waves flow;

Like flames they cover him.

"Oh, I am ashamed of the woes that consume me.

No man must see me. I will put out the candle!" he said;

For a foolish man is like a summer moth that flies into the flame.

The wind that blew out the candle

Carried him away. In the darkness his ghost has vanished.

The shadow of his ghost has vanished.