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Chapter Nine

9.11. The Double Charge

Meanwhile, Narida Gorô arrived.

Tai Sanéchita galloped forward at the head of his seven thousand horsemen, and the whole force attacked, yelling, with their colored standards raised.

The fifty thousand Gerji horsemen under Morinao had taken up positions on the main front, at Ikuta-no-mori. Among them, there were two men from Musashi Province named Kawara Taro Takanao and Kawara Jiro Morinao. Takanao called over his brother, Morinao. "A great lanceholder wins glory through his vassals' exploits, even though he may not do anything himself, but people like us have to earn our own reputations," he said. "It calls me to wait around like this, without even shooting an arrow, when we have an enemy in front of us. I'm going to sneak inside the stronghold and shoot. I haven't got a chance in a thousand of getting back here, so you'll have to stay; otherwise there won't be anybody to testify later."

Tears ran down Morinao's cheeks. "I can't listen when you talk that way. Do you think a younger brother would prosper if he stayed behind and let an older brother be killed? Let's not die in different places; let's face the end together," he said.

The two told their subordinates to carry word of their last moments to their wives and children. Then they went forward on foot, shod in straw sandals. With their bows as staffs, they clambered over the barricades of branches at Ikuta-no-mori and got inside the stronghold. In the dim starlight, even the color of their armor-lacing was invisible. Takanao announced their names in a mighty shout. "Kawara Taro Katschiro no Takanao and Kawara Jiro Morinao of Musashi; the first men from the frontal assault force of the Gerji to attack at Ikuta-no-mori!"

None of the Heike warriors felt like fighting. "Nothing is as fearsome as an eastern warrior," they said. "They're just two men in the middle of our huge force. What harm can they do? Let's humor them awhile."

The brothers were first-rate archers, and they let fly a fast and furious barrage of arrows.

"We can't put up with this! Kill them!" somebody shouted.

There were two brothers from the west who were famous archers, Ma-nabe no Shiro and Ma-nabe no Gorô from Bitchi Province. Shiro was at Ichin-outai; Gorô was at Ikuta-no-mori. Gorô quickly drew his bow to the full and sent an arrow whizzing off. The shaft drove straight through the breastplate of Takanao's armor to his back. Takanao stood paralyzed, clinging to his bow for support. Morinao rushed up, swung Takanao over his shoulder, and started to climb the barricade. Gorô's second arrow pierced a gap in the skirt of Morinao's armor, and the brothers fell together. One of Gorô's men went over and decapitated them.

When New Middle Counselor Tomonori saw the heads, he said, "They were brave fellows! Each of them deserved to be called a warrior worthy of a thousand. I wish they could have spared." At that point, the brothers' subordinates shouted, "The Kawara brothers have just become the first men to die in battle against the stronghold!"

"If the Shi League hadn't been negligent, those two wouldn't have been killed," said Kajiwara Kagetoki. "The time has come. Attack!" He and his men shouted a mighty battle cry, which was taken up at once by the rest of the fifty thousand horsemen. Foot soldiers were ordered to clear away the branches, and Kagetoki and his five hundred horsemen charged, shouting.

Kagetoki saw that his second son, Heiji Kagetaka, seemed inclined to go too far ahead. He sent a messenger to say, "The commander-in-chief has announced that there will be no reward for any man who gallops ahead with nobody behind him."

Kagetaka pulled up for a minute. "Tell my father this," he said.

Then he galloped on with a shout.

"Don't let Heiji be struck down! Follow, men! Don't let Kagetaka be struck down!" Kagetaka's father, Kagetoki, and his brothers, Genda Kagetsue and Saburo Kagetie, rode after him. The five hundred horsemen of the Kajiwara galloped into the giant enemy force, pressed it without mercy, and beat a swift retreat, their number reduced to a mere fifty. Kagetsue had somehow dropped out of sight. "What's become of Genda?" Kagetoki asked the retainers. "He must have penetrated too deep. It looks like he might have been killed," somebody said.

"My sons are the only things I have to live for. Why should I go on if Genda's been killed? I'm going back!" Kagetoki said. He turned around and announced his name in a mighty shout. "I am Kajiwara Heiji Kogetoki, warrior worth a thousand men! I claim descent from Kamakura no Gojô-gorô Kagemasa, the same who earned everlasting renown by setting an adversary with a return shot, after an arrow had gone through his left eye to the top layer of his neck-guard! If anyone here thinks he's as good as I am, let him kill me and show his commander my head!" He charged, shouting.

"Kajiwara is a warrior famous all over the east," Tomonori said. "Don't let him escape! Don't miss him! Kill him!" The Heike surrounded and attacked Kagetoki with their great numbers. With no regard for his own fate, Kagetoki galloped through and around
the innumerable enemies in search of Kagetsue, using sidewise, lengthwise, zigzag, and crosswise maneuvers. Meanwhile, Kagetsue had fought until his helmet sagged. Then, having lost his horse to an arrow, he had dismounted and backed against a twenty-foot cliff, where he and two retainers, one on either side, were fighting a desperate defensive battle, with their eyes straight ahead, hemmed in by five adversaries.

Kagetoki caught sight of him. “You haven’t been killed!” he shouted. “Here I am! Don’t show the enemy your back, Genda—not if it costs you your life!” Together, father and son killed three of the five enemies and wounded two.

“There’s a time for a warrior to advance and a time for him to withdraw,” Kagetoki said, “Come on, Genda!” He took Kagetsue on his horse and retreated.

That’s what people mean when they talk about “Kajiwara’s double charge.”

9.12. The Assault from the Cliff

Other eastern warriors advanced after those encounters—the Chichibu, the Ashikaga, the Miura, the Kamakura, and, among the leagues, the Inomata, the Kodama, the Naito, the Yokoyama, the Nishizumi, the Tazakaki, and the Shinotó. The massed armies of the Genji and the Heike mingled in combat, their riders charging in turn and competing to announce their names. Their shouts and yells made the mountains ring; the hoofbeats of their galloping horses reverberated like thunder; the arrows they exchanged fell like rain. Some men retired to the rear, carrying wounded comrades on their shoulders; some sustained light injuries and fought on; some suffered mortal blows and perished. There were those who rode alongside enemies, grappled with them, fell, and died in dagger fights; there were those who seized others, held them down, and cut off their heads; there were those who had their heads cut off. Neither side revealed a weakness for the other to exploit, and the main Genji force seemed unlikely to win without help, valiant though it was.

Now Yoshitsune had circled around to the rear, and had climbed to the Hiyodorigoe Road, behind Ichi-no-tani, toward dawn on the seventh. As he was getting ready for the descent, two targets and a dog ran down to the fortifications of the Heike, probably because they had been frightened by his men. Their appearance caused consternation in the stronghold. “Even the deer that live near here ought to be fleeing way back into the mountains to get away from us,” they said. “It’s very odd for these three to come down into the middle of a big army like this. The Genji must be going to drop down from those mountains up there.”

Takechi no Kiyomori of Iyo Province stepped forward. “Whether they’re up there or not, we can’t ignore anything that comes from a hostile direction,” he said. He shot the two targets and let the dog go.

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Etchu no Zenji, Moritoshi reprimanded him. “It was foolish to shoot those. You could have held off ten enemies with one of those arrows. Y-wasted precious arrows in order to commit a sin.”

Yoshitsune surveyed the distant stronghold. “Let’s try sending some horses down,” he said. They chased some saddled horses down. Some of the animals broke their legs and fell, but others arrived safely. Three reached the roof of Moritoshis quarters and stood trembling.

“The horses won’t get hurt if the riders pay attention,” Yoshitsune said. “All right, take them down! Do as I do!” He galloped forward at the head of thirty horsemen, and all the others followed, down a slope so steep that the edges of the rear riders’ stirrups touched the armor and helmets of the men in front. After slipping and sliding at great speed for seven hundred feet through a mixture of sand and pebbles, they pulled up on a ledge above a huge mossy Craig, a vertical drop of a hundred and forty or fifty feet. They sat against, ready to give up.

Sawara no Juro Yoshitsune came forward. “In Miura, we gallop over places like that all day long, even if we’re only chasing birds. This is a Miura race track!” he said. He dashed ahead, and all the others followed.

“Kii! Kii!” They encouraged the horses. They flailed them with their voices, their eyes close for the terrifying descent. What they were attempting seemed beyond mortal capacity, something demons might do.

Even before the last man reached the bottom, the party shouted a tremendous battle cry. There were only three thousand of them, but the echo made them sound like a hundred thousand.

Murakami no Yasukuni’s men put the torch to all the sleeping quarters and camps of the Heike. As luck would have it, a gale was blowing. Clouds of black smoke billowed up, and great numbers of Heike warriors panicked and galloped into the sea, desperate to save themselves.

There were many vessels ready to receive them at the water’s edge, but what good could come of it when four or five hundred men in armor—or even a thousand—tried to crowd into a single ship? Three big ships sank before the onlookers’ eyes when they were no more than three hundred and fifty yards from the shore. After that, orders were issued to let men of quality come on board, but to fend off those of lesser worth with swords and spears. Even though they knew what to expect, the ordinary soldiers clung to the vessels from which they were banned. Some lost their arms and other forearms, and they ended as rows of corpses, reddening the water’s edge at Ichi-no-tani.

Noto Governor Noritane was a man who had fought time and again without suffering a defeat, but now for some reason, he fled westward with his charger, Usagisro [Dusky Black]. He got on board a ship at Akashi Shore in Harima Province and made the crossing to Yoshima in Sanuki Province.

9.13. The Death of Etchū no Zenji

In reckless disregard of their lives, the warriors from Musashi and Sagami took the offensive on both the main front and the seaward side. The Kada-ma League sent a messenger from the mountainside to Tomomori, who was fighting with his face toward the east. "The men of the Kada-ma League tell you this because you once governed Musashi Province. Look behind you!" Tomomori looked, and he and the others saw a cloud of black smoke bearing down on them. Without even waiting to exclaim about the defeat on the west, they all took to their heels in desperate haste.

Etchū no Zenji Moritoshi, the samurai commander on the cliffward side, halted his mount and sat motionless, possibly because he thought it was too late to try to escape. Inomata no Kohoikezu Noritsuna marked him as a worthy adversary, galloped forward with flailing whip and flapping stirrups, and rode alongside him. Then he gripped him as hard as he could and crashed to the ground with him. Noritsuna was a man famous in the eight eastern provinces for his great strength, a warrior who was reputed to have torn apart a deer's double-branched antlers with ease. Moritoshi let other people think he was merely as strong as twenty or thirty ordinary fellows, but he could actually haul up or send down a ship that needed a crew of sixty or seventy. Thus Moritoshi succeeded in gripping Noritsuna and holding him fast. Lying underneath, Noritsuna tried to draw his dagger but could not grasp the hilt with his splayed fingers, tried to speak but was pinned too tight to get out a word. But although his head was about to be cut off, and despite his physical inferiority, he kept his valiant spirit. After collecting his breath for a few seconds, he spoke in an offhand manner.

"Did you hear me announce my name? When a man kills an enemy, it doesn't mean much unless he waits until he's identified himself and made the other fellow do the same. What are you going to gain by taking an anonymous head?" he said.

Moritoshi may have thought that he had a point. "I am Etchū no Zenji Moritoshi, born a Taira, but now become a samurai because of my inadequacies. Who are you? Announce your name; I'd like to hear it," he said.

"I am Inomata no Kohoikezu Noritsuna of Musashi Province," Noritsuna said. He continued, "If we look at the way things stand now, it seems that the Genji have the upper hand—that you on the Heike side are going to lose. Unless your masters prosper, you aren't going to get any rewards by taking heads to show them. How about stretching a point and letting me go? I'll use my exploits to save the lives of any number of Heike men— dozens, if you like."14

Moritoshi was outraged. "Unworthy or not, I'm still a Taira. I have no intention of looking to the Genji for help, and no intention whatsoever of helping one of them. Your proposal is dishonorable!" He got ready to cut off Noritsuna's head.

"You're disgracing yourself! How can you take the head of a man who already surrendered?" Noritsuna said.

"All right, then, I'll spare you," Moritoshi said. He pulled Noritsuna upright, and the two sat down to rest on a footpath that ran between a sunbaked field and a deep, muddy rice paddy.

Presently, a warrior in a suit of armor with black leather lacing came galloping toward them on a white horse. Moritoshi eyed him with suspicion.

"Don't worry," Noritsuna said. "That's Hitomi no Shirō, a friend of mine. He must have seen me." But he thought to himself, "If I begin wrestling with this fellow after Shirō gets close, Shirō will be bound to attack me too." He hid his bite.

Meanwhile, the rider advanced until he was only thirty-five feet away. First, Moritoshi tried to keep an eye on both men, but the one on horseback engaged his full attention as he gradually approached, and he lost track of Noritsuna. Noritsuna seizing his opportunity, sprang to his feet and yelled, dealt a powerful blow to Moritoshi's breastplate with both hands, and toppled him backwards into the paddy. As Moritoshi tried to get up, Noritsuna clamped him between his legs, snatched the dagger from Moritoshi's waist, and lifted his skirt. Then he plunged the weapon into his flesh three times, hilt, fist, and all, and took his head.

In the meantime, Hitomi no Shirō had come up. "It's cases like this that bring on disputes," Noritsuna thought. He struck the head on the tip of his sword, held it high, and announced his name in a mighty shout. "Inomata no Kohoikezu Noritsuna has slain Etchū no Zenji Moritoshi, the Heike samurai known in these days as a demon god!" His name led that day's list of exploits.

9.14. The Capture of Shigehira

Middle Captain Shigehira, the deputy commander at Ikuta-no-mori, had been deserted by all of his men but one. That day, he was wearing a dark blue tunic, embroidered with bright yellow plover, and a suit of armor with purple-shaded lacing, and he was riding a famous charger named Dōjō Kagō [Child Deerskin]. His foster-brother, Morinaga, was wearing a tie-dyed tunic with white spots and a suit of armor with flame-red lacing, and he was riding Shigehira's prized horse Yomenashi Takeda [Night-eyeless White].15

Recognizing Shigehira as a commander-in-chief, Kajiwara Genda Kagō [Grey Tiger] and Šō no Shirō Takaıe pursued him with flailing whips and flapping.
stirrups. Too hard-pressed to escape to one of the many rescue vessels at the water's edge, Shigehira crossed the Miounto and Kuroto rivers, galloped between Hasu Pond on the right and Koma Woods on the left, passed Inuyodo and Surna, and fled westward. His splendid mount forged faster and farther ahead, until there seemed little chance that the battle-weary Genji horses could overtake him. But Kagesune stood in his stirrups, drew his bow to the full, and sent off an arrow, hoping for a lucky hit. The arrow sank shaft-deep into Dôji Kage's rump. When the horse faltered, Morinaga raised his whip and fled, possibly because he feared that Shigehira would take his horse.

"What are you doing, Morinaga? This isn't the way you always swore to act? Where will you go after you desert me?" Shigehira asked. Morinaga pretended not to hear. He got rid of his red armor-badge and rode away as fast as he could.

The enemy was approaching and the horse was weakening. Shigehira rode into the sea, but the water was shallow, too shallow to drown in. He dismounted, slashed his belt, and unfastened his shoulder-cord. Then he took off his armor and helmet and got ready to cut open his belly.

Yakei came up ahead of Kagesune, galloping with flapping whip and flogging stirrups. He jumped down. "It would be a mistake to kill yourself," he said. "I'll attend you wherever you go." He mounted Shigehira on his own horse, tied him to the pommel, and escorted him back, riding a remount.

Thanks to his splendid, long-winded speech, Morinaga got away without any trouble. Later, he sought refuge with a Kuma monk, the Onaka Dharma Bridge. After the monk's death, he went to the capital with the widow, a woman who was prosecuting a lawsuit, and everybody recognized him as Shigehira's foster-brother. "He's a shameless rascal!" people said. "Shigehira thought the world of him, but he refused to face death at his master's side. Instead, the wretch turns up with a man, all things!" We are told that the criticism seems to have embarrassed even so disgraceful a man, and that Morinaga hid his face with a fan.

9.15. The Death of Atsunori

After the defeat of the Heike, Kunaga no Nazoane walked his horse toward the beach. "The Taira nobles will be facing to the shore to get on board the rescue vessels," he thought. "I wish I could wrestle with one of their high-ranking commanders-in-chief!" Just then, he saw a lone rider splash into the sea, bound for a vessel offshore. The enemy was wearing a silk tunic embroidered with cranes, a suit of armor with shaded green lacing, and a horned helmet. At his waist, there was a sword with gilt bronze firings; on his back, he carried a quiver containing arrows flecked with black-banded white eagle feathers. He held a rattan-wrapped bow and rode a white-capped reddish horse, with a saddle trimmed in gold. When the horse had swum out a hundred and fifty or two hundred feet, Nazoane beckoned with his fan.

"I see that you're a commander-in-chief! It's dishonorable to show your back to an enemy! Come back!" he shouted.

The warrior came back. As he left the water, Nazoane rode up beside him, gripped him as hard as he could, and crashed with him to the ground. Holding him motionless, he pushed aside his helmet, intending to cut off his head, and saw that he was only sixteen or seventeen years old, with a lightly powdered face and blackened teeth—a boy just the age of Nazoane's own son Nanie, and so handsome that he could find no place to strike.

"Who are you? Announce your name. I'll spare you," Nazoane said.

"Who are you?" the youth asked.

"Nobody of any special importance: Kunaga no Jirô Nazoane of Mutsu Province."

"Then I don't need to give you my name. I'm the kind of opponent you want. Ask about me after you take my head. Somebody will recognize me even if I don't tell you."

"He's bound to be a commander-in-chief," Nazoane thought. "Killing this one person won't change defeat into victory, and sparing him won't change victory into defeat. When I think of how I grieved when Nanie got just a little wound, it's easy to imagine how this young lord's father would feel if he heard that he'd been killed. I have a notion to let him go."

Casting a swift glance at the rear, he discovered Shigehira and Kagekazi coming along with fifty riders.

"I'd like to spare you," he said, restraining tears, "but there are Genji warriors everywhere. You can't possibly escape. It will be better if I'm the one to kill you, because I'll offer prayers for you."

"Just take my head; don't waste time," the boy said.

Overwhelmed by compassion, Nazoane could find no place to strike. His senses reeled, his brain seemed paralyzed, and he was scarcely conscious of his surroundings. But matters could not go on like that forever. In tears, he took the head.

"No life is as miserable as a warrior's. It's only because I was born into a military house that I've had this terrible experience. What a cruel thing I've done!" He pressed his sleeve to his face and wept.

But matters could not go on like that forever. He started to remove the youth's tunic, preparatory to wrapping the head in it, and found a flute in a brocade bag tucked in at the waist. "Poor fellow! He must have been one of the people I heard playing inside the stronghold just before dawn. There are tens of thousands of riders in our eastern armies, but I'd be willing to bet not one of them carried a flute to the battlefield. Those court nobles are men of refinement," he thought.

18. Court nobles began to blacken their teeth early in the 12th century.
Chapter Nine

Bowed down by grief, the defeated Heike embarked in boats and set out, taking the emperor with them. Some of their vessels headed toward Ki Province, driven by the tides and winds; some rowed to the investing Akiya, there to toss on the waves. Others voyaged aimlessly along the coast from Suma toward Akashi, while those on board used oars for pillows, bemoaned their lonely beds with tears, and gazed at the misty spring moon with grieving eyes. Others passed through the Awaji Straits and floated off Ekima Shore, their passengers compounding themselves to plowers crying fealy over the waves by night in search of lost comrades. Others hesitated in the offing beyond Ichi-no-tani, as though unable to decide on a destination.

Thus, driven by the tides and blown by the winds, the fugitives drifted toward many different shores and islands, each group ignorant of the fate of the others. They had held high hopes for the future when they were masters of fourteen provinces and a hundred thousand horsemen, with the capital itself only a day's journey away, but now Ichi-no-tani had fallen, and every heart despair.