

THE TEA SERVANT

by e. shockley

www.youthplays.com
info@youthplays.com

Cast of Characters

*ZANSHIN, quiet tea servant and retainer to the princess
PRINCESS, sheltered young love-struck girl.*

RONIN, a farmer masquerading as a samurai

*NARRATOR, storyteller, could also be played by multiple
members of the Chorus*

SENSEI, learned man of peace

STUDENT #1, arrogant senior student

STUDENT #2, playful senior student

*CHORUS, flexible in size, to play the spirits during duel,
students in the class--flexible in size*

*The lines of Students 1 and 2 could be divided between a larger
group of students, depending on the needs of your production.*

SCENE ONE

The center space is bare. Three boxes are defined by jo- sticks and bokkens (wooden swords) placed stage left, right and up center. Actors enter in ceremonial fashion, bless the performance space with incense then kneel with their backs to the audience in the boxes. Zanshin enters then begins performing the tea ceremony. The Princess flits around sighing with love then both freeze. The Narrator turns and enters the performance space.

NARRATOR

Then and now,
next and last,
deed and dream,
mix in time.
This great tale,
as old as salt,
may well have grown
fed by the years
but none the less,
her perfect core
will stand the test
past one telling more.

(Narrator claps and the bodies build a house covering the tea ceremony using jo-sticks.)

NARRATOR

Perfection is rare in things large and small. Our tale begins with a simple tea being served without flaw by a faithful retainer and confidant.

PRINCESS

Read it again, Zanshin....Did you hear? I want his sweet words dancing upon the autumn air once more.

ZANSHIN

To do one thing well we must do one thing only.

PRINCESS

You sound like my father but I am too happy to care. Here, give me the letter and I will read it myself.

(Zanshin slowly pauses the tea service then produces the letter, unfolding it with deliberation. The impatient Princess takes it from her and Zanshin returns to the ceremony.)

PRINCESS

My Dearest Darling:
Without you here the days are decades. My soul cries out like a featherless bird beneath a burning summer sun. If I could hold you for one hour I would trade every twilight from now until dawn shall cease to follow night. Write to me immediately and come sooner.
Your tortured love,
Natsume
Has such elegance ever before been employed in the service of love?...Zanshin?

ZANSHIN

The tea is too hot, Princess, we are wise to wait.

PRINCESS

What? Never you mind. Order my wardrobe crated. We are going to Meiji.

ZANSHIN

We cannot.

PRINCESS

Why not?

ZANSHIN

We have no escort and bandits plague the road.

(The bandit comes alive and performs a martial dance.)

PRINCESS

Love will give us wings to fly past them to her sacred goal.

ZANSHIN

Ducks have wings and yet fall prey to gamesmen.

NARRATOR

Every argument is countered without recourse to logic for love is a disease that affects the mind and so preparations are made and in less than an evening the belligerent princess and her apprehensive retainer meet to embark on a perilous journey.

(Zanshin enters dressed as a samurai.
Princess bursts into laughter.)

ZANSHIN

It is desperate tactic to fulfill your wish.

PRINCESS

I have no desire to see you parade around in a samurai hakima.

ZANSHIN

If I can effect the swagger of a sword master then the deception may preserve us past the perils of this journey.

PRINCESS

You can no more pass for a samurai than I could masquerade as a tea servant.

ZANSHIN

For sake of our virtue and your verbose suitor, we will pray for dim sighted vagabonds.

NARRATOR

And this time it is Zanshin who will not be swayed from her course and so after hours of practice perfecting the gait, the ladies set out to bluff their way across the kingdom.

(Comic dance captures Zanshin learning to walk like a man and the journey until they arrive at a deserted knoll.)

RONIN

Have you permission to travel my highway?

PRINCESS

The emperor is lord of every road and walkway and so unless you are in his employ we owe you nothing.

ZANSHIN

Except courtesy and the wish of a pleasant journey.

RONIN

It is I who say what is owed and who will pay.

PRINCESS

Stand down, oaf, or I will report you to my father.

ZANSHIN

Please...

RONIN

And who might your father be when he is at home?

ZANSHIN

It is of no consequence, for we are simply...

PRINCESS

My father is Michiyo Kazuma and he will have your entrails spread out before you for daring to bar my way.

ZANSHIN

We needn't allow affairs to progress so far...

RONIN

A rich and powerful man this Kazuma, eh?

ZANSHIN

A man of appearances, living beyond his means.

PRINCESS

How can you say that? He owns and controls every cubit of land from Yoshikuni to Saruwatari Riku.

RONIN

Therefore you will pay for passage and you shall beg for your life.

ZANSHIN

House your blade.

RONIN

In your heart.

PRINCESS

What is your price? I would rather pay than lose a friend.

ZANSHIN

The turn in the road is passed now.

PRINCESS

Nonsense. You wanted alms and here you have it; now let us pass.

(Princess throws a purse to the Ronin)

ZANSHIN

It is become a matter of honor.

PRINCESS

He is a thief accosting women on highways. Where is this precious honor?

ZANSHIN

He has drawn his sword and now it may not be sheathed until it has crossed with another. This is the samurai code, is it not?

RONIN

Uh, quite true.

PRINCESS

You will not fight him.

ZANSHIN

It must be.

PRINCESS

He will kill you.

RONIN

As I have many.

ZANSHIN

Such is fate.

RONIN

Then let us bury you in a shallow grave so that I may be on to my lunch.

ZANSHIN

I request one concession...Allow me to deliver the princess to her destination and then I will return and conclude our duel.

RONIN

How do I know you will return?

ZANSHIN

You have my word.

PRINCESS

And you have my purse as ransom.

RONIN

Go. Deliver your princess and if you seek me again, I will be found.

ZANSHIN

Thank you, noble samurai. I suspect that my travels will require a night and day again, there and back.

(The Ronin grunts and the women continue their journey.)

PRINCESS

Well done, Zanshin. You outwitted the simpleton though it grieved me to surrender my purse to that clod. When we reach Meiji I will report this to my precious Natsume and he will find this buffoon and cut off his ears.

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