

The Honour of the Name

There was once a great and powerful samurai lord, he was known as the Lord of the Eastern Legions. He married and his wife gave birth to three children, an older son, a younger son and a daughter.

Shortly after the birth of his daughter, his wife passed from this life and into the next. The Lord of the East was saddened by the loss of his wife, but when he held his infant daughter in his arms he had not the heart to blame her for it.

The three children grew and matured, carefully schooled in the ways of the sword, the ways of *bushido* and the ways of war. His two son's performance was adequate, but in his daughter the Lord of the East knew his blood ran true. Talented with the sword, dedicated to her studies and exceptional in strategy and tactics. His second son acknowledged his sister's skills, but his oldest son was jealous of his sister and thought his father unfairly favoured her.

The lord fully intended for his daughter to be his heir, passing of his two sons for her to lead the Eastern Legions. Yet before he could make his will, he fell gravely ill. He was confined to his bed. His daughter never left his side but he was too weak to speak.

Then the lord died and the Eastern Legions mourned his loss.

The older son succeeded his father as Lord of the Eastern Legions, receiving oaths of fealty from all his samurai. He decreed that his younger brother would be his hatamoto, steward of the castle and adviser in all things.

"And what is to become of me?" asked his sister.

"You will be shortly married," said her oldest brother. "I declare that you will give up the sword and the ways of war. Your duty will now be to keep house for your husband and bear children that will bring honour and glory to our father's line."

"And I declare I will do no such thing," said his sister. "I will not give up my sword, if you wish to have it from me you must take it." She drew it, baring the blade before all. No one moved to take it, for none could best her.

"Then I declare that your sword will no longer serve the Eastern Legions," said her oldest brother. "You will be a nameless *ronin*, subject to the waves and the rain. You shall leave these lands forthwith and never return."

"Hear this, my brother," said his sister, pointing her sword towards where he sat. "I swear to you on our father's line that I will return. And that you shall be at my sword point and beg for mercy."

Then she strode from the hall and left the lands of her birth.

She travelled for many days and nights until the lands of her birth were far behind her and she entered the lands of the Shogun himself, who ruled all lands and all armies from the mountains to the sea.

She came to a small castle and was tested by the hatamoto there. He praised her skill with the sword, her knowledge of *bushido* and her mastery of tactics and offered her a posting at the castle which she accepted.

"And what is your name?" the Hatamoto asked.

"I am called Nanashi," she answered, which means "no name".

The hatamoto accepted this, he had accepted wave men before and as long as he was satisfied with what he saw he questioned them no further.

By the end of summer, Nanashi had earned the admiration of her fellow samurai. She was first in the fight, always in the thick of it but also never hesitated to risk her life to help them in difficulty or danger. Yet none could best her in a duel, not even the Hatamoto.

When the year was out, the Hatamoto promoted her to lead her squad which was welcomed by all of them.

The next summer, the Shogun was to have a great tournament at his castle. The hatamoto declared that Nanashi was to be one of the samurai that represented them.

Many samurai from all over the land gathered for the tournament, their superiors gathering in the stands by the Shogun's side to watch them. One of these Nanashi noticed was her oldest brother, sitting by the Shogun's right hand. Not wishing to be recognised, she kept her helmet on and her face hidden.

The tournament began, Nanashi faced many samurai in duels and soon emerged as the firm favourite. She even duelled her second brother, he bowed at his defeat but he did not recognise her.

Finally, it came to the final round and Nanashi faced her opponent, bowing to the Shogun before beginning.

The Shogun sat on a dais beside the duelling ring. He had watched her closely throughout the tournament, wondering who this mysterious samurai was that never showed their face. The Shogun was a young man, new to his role after the death of his father. He was also unmarried, with his handsomeness and charm making him the target of many matchmakers bringing young ladies before him. The Shogun refused them all.

Nanashi won the final duel, making her bow to the Shogun.

"Your duel was well fought," said the Shogun, acknowledging her bow. "But I have a request to make of you. Will you face me in a duel and test my blade against yours?"

"It shall be as you wish, Shogun," she said.

They duelled, round and round the ring. It became clear to all that Nanashi had met her match, each attack she made was deflected by the Shogun, each weakness or hesitation taken advantage of. After the longest time, the Shogun prevailed, having Nanashi at his mercy. Nanashi conceded, bowing low.

"You have won the day, Shogun," she said. "I was never bested before, until now."

"Might I make another request of you," said the Shogun. "Remove your helmet, show me your face and tell me your true name."

Nanashi knew she could not refuse, removing her helmet and showing her face.

In the stands, her oldest brother stood up and shouted. "That is my sister! She left my house as a nameless *ronin* when she refused my orders."

The Shogun turned to Nanashi. "Is this true?"

"I am as he says," Nanashi answered.

Disappointed, the Shogun almost turned from her. Then he spoke again. "What did he order of you?"

"He ordered me to give up my sword and the ways of war," Nanashi answered.

The Shogun laughed. "What samurai would fight for one who would squander their talents?"

He raised his voice for all to hear. "I declare this, from this day on you shall serve me directly. For I am not one to spurn a strong sword pledged in honour."

Nanashi dropped to her knees and offered her sword. "My blade is yours to command, Shogun."

There was a great celebration last night, many samurai sought to know Nanashi. Though they now knew her true name, they still called her Nanashi.

She did not see her brother among the revellers, he had left shortly after the tournament.

Nanashi served the Shogun faithfully, putting her talents at his disposal, seeking not glory for herself but only in his name. The Shogun admired her, it gave him joy to see her return victorious at the head of his armies.

And it was then he realised that he loved her. And the thought he could not leave his mind. Weeks passed, he was unable to speak to anyone of it and found it difficult to eat or sleep. Every day he woke, he promised it would say something of it to her, and the sun would set without him doing so. Nanashi showed no sign of any feelings towards him, kept doing her duty diligently from one day to the next.

One morning, as the Shogun and Nanashi practised in the castle dojo as they often did, a messenger arrived.

"Shogun, the Lord of the Eastern Legions has struck his banners against you," said the messenger. "He marches this way with other lords in rebellion."

"Is it my brother?" Nanashi asked.

The messenger nodded. The Shogun motioned for him to leave.

Nanashi knelt before the Shogun, bowing her head and placing a hand on her sword. "Send me!" she pleaded. "Let me be your strong right arm! Let me be your sword to slay your enemies! Let me redeem the name of my father in the home that my brother has taken from me!"

The Shogun's heart swelled with his love of her. He would send her, she would prevail but he knew he must now speak of what was in his heart.

"It shall be so," decreed the Shogun. "You will lead my armies, your sword will be my will. But first...there is something I must say to you."

He motioned for her to rise and stand.

"Shogun?" Nanashi's voice was low and soft.

"I must confess my true feelings for you," said the Shogun. "I love you, and I wish for you to be my wife and lead my armies at my side."

Nanashi looked at him for the longest moment. "It took you this long to speak?"

The Shogun gasped. "You...you knew?"

Nanashi nodded. "I have loved you ever since that first day I entered your service, when you bested me in the duel," she said. "But I did not think it right to speak of it. I buried my feelings as best I could. But since you have spoken, I could not stay silent."

The Shogun took her in his arms and kissed her. "My heart wants to sing with happiness," he said. "Let us be married at once!"

"Please, let it be on my return," said Nanashi. "Let me claim the land of my father. Let this battle be my dowry."

The Shogun granted, for he could deny her nothing.

Nanashi led the Shogun's armies back to the land of her birth. She knew the land better than anyone, and this helped her to prevail against the other rebellious armies. Then she got to the castle itself, where she had lived. She ordered her troops to accept the surrender of any samurai that gave it.

"These men fought for my father," she said. "They are men of honour who are not to blame for my brother's treachery."

Nanashi was soon in the great hall where she had last spoken to her brother on that fateful day she had left the castle. The banner of the Shogun now flew free above the castle.

Her brother was brought before her, two samurai holding him and throwing him down.

Nanashi pointed her sword at her brother. "Brother, I said once that we would be here, did I not?"

"You did," said her brother. "And by our father's name, I beg you to show mercy to myself and my family."

Nanashi looked down at her brother for a long time, then sheathed her sword. "I will give you the same mercy that you gave me," she said. "I grant you your life, but know that it is my gift. I grant your family their lives, but know their memory shall be of your disgrace. But you will go from this place, without your name, and shall not return. Now go!"

Her oldest brother left. She called her second brother forward, he pledged his sword and his life to her and to the Shogun. She made him her *hatamoto* and steward of the castle until she should return.

She then returned to the castle with the Shogun's armies, the Shogun himself meeting her at the gates. The two were soon married, with much revelry and rejoicing by all who attended. They had many sons and daughters, all grew up to give honour and glory to the family name.