

# Green Willow

Long ago in Japan, there lived a young Samurai named Tomotada.

Tomotada was a skilled warrior - an expert using his bow, his spear and his sword. Yet he also loved to sing, to dance and to take pleasure in the world around him.

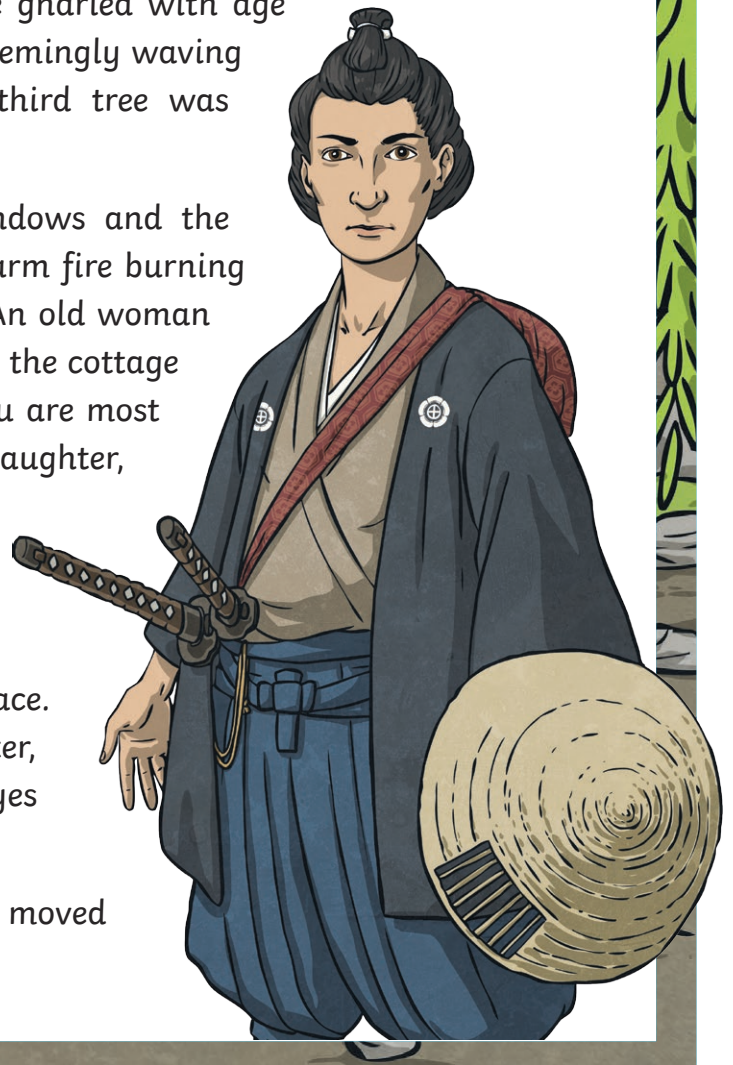
Tomotada was faithful to his master, Lord of Noto, and was chosen to carry a special message, a mission of trust. "Ride fast, fear no beast nor storm, let no maiden tempt your gaze. Ride only to deliver this scroll," instructed Lord of Noto. Obediently, Tomotada set off on his quest.

He travelled through steep mountain passes, endured torrential rain and howling winds, riding straight through a wicked storm. Day became as black as night and Tomotada, weary with lack of sleep, lost his way in the wilderness. Just as he was about to give up hope, the moon peeped from behind a cloud and cast its light like a beacon onto a small cottage standing atop a small hill.

Leading his horse slowly up the hill, he saw that three willow trees closely guarded the hut. Two were gnarled with age but stood proudly, their long branches seemingly waving in greeting as Tomotada passed. The third tree was graceful and slender in its youth.

A welcoming light shone from the windows and the smoke curling from the roof told of a warm fire burning within. Tomotada knocked on the door. An old woman answered and, full of pity, drew him into the cottage saying, "Come in, come in young sir! You are most welcome! Come to the fire and let my daughter, Green Willow, take care of your horse." As Tomotada turned, his eyes beheld a maiden fairer than any he had ever seen. Jet black hair hung loose to her waist, framing her sweet, soft face. Forgetting the warning from his master, Tomotada gazed directly into the girl's eyes and knew instantly they would marry.

That night, the wind seemed to sing as it moved



the branches of the willow trees, making gentle music that spoke to Tomotada, "Green Willow, Green Willow!" He awoke at dawn with a heavy heart. He knew he must fulfil his duty to his master, yet that burden lay heavy on his heart. Tomotada left Green Willow with tears in her eyes, making a promise to return once his mission was complete.

In its wake, the storm had left a beautiful, clear day but Tomotada's thoughts were clouded with sadness. At night, he found an old Shinto shrine to shelter in. As he entered the ruins, Tomotada heard footsteps and unsheathed his sword shouting, "Who goes there?" From the shadows stepped Green Willow! From that moment, Tomotada abandoned his quest, knowing he could never leave her.



Together, they wandered until they came to a town where the Lord of Noto was not known. Together, they settled in a small white house and filled their garden with the perfume of flowers and trees. Birds flitted across the garden and the gentle sound of running water came from a stream. Here they dwelt for three happy years, each like a garland of sweet flowers for Tomotada and Green Willow.

One evening as they gazed at the full moon, Green Willow let out a cry, "My tree! My tree! They have cut down my tree! Farewell my dear husband! Remember Green Willow!" And with that, she fell from Tomotada's arms, leaving him holding nothing but the warm air where she had been standing.

In his grief, Tomotada wandered the land, sleeping in open fields beneath the stars. Once, at nightfall, he found himself on a lonely moor and beheld a sad ruin of a thatched cottage. Before the ruin stood the stumps of three willow trees that had long since been cut down. Tomotada knew then that his wandering days were over.

He decided to settle in the ruins, building a new garden in memory of Green Willow. As time passed, more trees grew. With each passing year they grew taller, their branches growing long and slender. When the wind blew, Tomotada could hear music in the gentle rustling of the leaves, a whisper calling, "Green Willow! Green Willow!"