

The Rust-Covered Sword of the Sealed Room

[Sengoku Period]

A young Yamabushi (mountain ascetic) arrived at a village in the Nasu region. "I am here to train in the mountains of Nasu. Might I trouble you for a night's lodging?" He was kindly welcomed into a home where a young woman resided. She diligently attended to his needs and saw him off to the Nasu mountains the next morning. Several days passed, but the young woman couldn't forget the image of the young Yamabushi. One day, disguised as a man, she decided to meet the young Yamabushi and finally snuck into the vicinity of Kitayu.

At that time, Kitayu was a training ground for Shugendo (mountain asceticism) and a hot spring resort where women were forbidden. Shugendo was a sect of esoteric Buddhism founded by En no Gyoja, adhering to strict precepts. "Who goes there? Why, a woman!" She was discovered by another Yamabushi and beheaded. The young Yamabushi, upon finding the woman's body, wept profusely. After some time, he buried her body, built a mound, and mourned her. Furthermore, he enshrined the sword that had killed her in a shrine and offered fervent prayers.

[Tokugawa Period]

Kitayu was under the rule of the Ozeki clan of the Kurobane Domain. The Ozeki clan was one of the so-called "Nasu-shu," a powerful family dating back to the Middle Ages. They participated in the Siege of Odawara, were granted a territory of 13,000 koku by Hideyoshi, and by their achievements at Sekigahara, came to rule 20,000 koku, establishing the Kurobane Domain. They were one of the few daimyo families who maintained their medieval territories until the end of the shogunate. Due to the Kurobane Domain's policies, the Yamabushi had disappeared from Kitayu. Over time, the story of the woman became merely a tale carried by the wind, and the shrine crumbled, with the enshrined sword's whereabouts becoming unknown.

Incidentally, the Ozeki clan built a new bathhouse for their princess's hot spring cures, which was called "Hime no Yu" (Princess's Hot Spring). This name later changed to "Onna no Yu" (Woman's Hot Spring), then "Me no Yu" (Eye Hot Spring), and finally became the current "Me no Yu" (Sprout Hot Spring).

[Early Meiji Period]

This was during the time of Kumagai Genzo I at Kitayu. As he was leveling the ground to build a new hot spring lodge, a rusted sword emerged from the earth. Genzo was surprised and afraid. The hot spring lodge was built, but Genzo thought that if left as it was, something bad might eventually happen. So, he enshrined the rusted sword in the room directly above where it was found and sealed that room as the "Aka Zunoma" (Sealed Room). Thanks to this, no misfortunes occurred, and the hot spring lodge prospered.

[1907 (Meiji 40)]

There was a time when the wall of the Sealed Room collapsed due to a rockfall. The then-innkeeper immediately repaired it and had a Yamabushi perform prayers. As a result, the prosperity of the hot spring lodge continued.

[1938 (Showa 13)]

A severe storm struck the Nasu region. A great flood caused buildings to collapse, and the rust-covered sword in the Sealed Room was swept away. Restoration efforts were extremely difficult, and they had no choice but to give up on finding the sword.

[1985 (Showa 60)]

Decades passed since the sword was lost. The current innkeeper's father was a hardworking and robust man. One day, he fell ill, and his symptoms were more severe than expected, leaving him bedridden for a long time.

One night, the woman and the rusted sword appeared in his dream. The woman tearfully recounted the circumstances of her death and the fate of her soul and the sword. "Please, perform a memorial service once more." It was such a tragic story. The innkeeper's father drew a picture of the woman from his dream and called a prayer master to perform a memorial service. He floated the painting and offerings down the Yosasa River, giving her a heartfelt memorial. Afterward, the innkeeper's father's illness rapidly healed, and Kitayu continues to prosper. This is the sad tale of the rust-covered sword of the sealed room, spanning 400 years.

