

A Sanma from Meguro

In the Edo period, the shogunate, the feudal government, was in Edo, and every lord in this country had to live in their fief for one year, and live in Edo the next year alternately. One clear autumn day, a young lord went out on a horse for a bit of relaxation with a dozen of his men. As is often the case, he knew little of the real world. When they came to Meguro, one of the suburbs of Edo, the lord got off the horse and said to his men,



"I'm tired of riding a horse. I want to run a race with you. Whoever defeats me shall have much reward."

"Ready, steady, go!"

Since it was the lord's request, they couldn't help obeying it. The lord and his subjects started running. The young lord ran through a field for dear life, while the old subjects ran after him, losing their breath.

"How woeful it is! Look! Our lord has already been seated on a stump looking at us," they said.

"What slow runners you are!" The lord looked proud of himself in triumph.

"By the way, where are we now?" he asked.

"This is the place called Meguro," one of them answered. Then a good smell of grilled fish drifted out of a shabby house near there.

"Oh, smells good. I feel so hungry after running hard," the lord said.

"It seems like someone is grilling fish near here," one of them said.

"You're right. Someone must be grilling a sanma, or a Pacific saury," they whispered with each other.

"What is sanma?" overhearing the conversation, the lord asked, "I've never heard such a name in my life."

"It's the name of the fish," one of them answered, "In autumn, sanma put on fat and become much more delicious. It's a popular fish for people, but not a fish for you."

"I'd like to have a sanma. Serve one for me right now," the lord insisted.

Soon they found an old man grilling a fish on a *shichirin* (a small round charcoal stove made of clay or earthenware), fanning charcoals desperately.

"Excuse me, but the lord sitting over there has smelled your sanma, and wants to have it. Would you mind sharing it with him?"

"Why not, with pleasure."

The lord had sanma for the first time in his life. The good smell and soy-sauce flavor pleased the hungry lord so much.

It's delicious! I've never eaten such delicious fish. Give him much reward!"

After the outing, not a day had passed when he didn't think of the taste and the smell of the sanma. At that time, the only fish the lord had eaten were expensive ones like a tai or a sea bream, which was known as 'king of fish' with big eyes on a red, oval body. Now he knew another fish called sanma, he fell in love with the fish; small eyes on a grilled slim body.

"I want to eat a sanma, I want to eat a sanma, again," he was murmuring all the time.

His attendants noticed his wish and got the best sanma from the fish market at Nihonbashi.

They steamed it fully to get rid of much fat and pulled all the fish bones with tweezers not to stick them in his throat.

"Here you are. This is your sanma. Please enjoy tasting it."

Looking at the fish, the lord said,

"What? You call this a sanma? My sanma should be grilled. You must have gotten the wrong fish."

The lord smelled the fish. He smelled the faint scent of a sanma.

"Humm...It is true that this smell really belongs to a 'sanma'."

The lord tried to put a piece of it into his mouth with a pair of chopsticks. But the taste he had was different from the one he was expected.

"Is this really a 'sanma'?" He tilted his head in doubt.

"Yes, it surely is."

"Hmm, where did you get it?"

"It's from the fish market at Nihonbashi."

"Oh, I see. That's the reason it's not good. The best 'Sanma' must be from Meguro."

They held the 14th annual [Meguro Sanma Festival](#) on September 9, 2009 near JR Meguro Station in Tokyo. It was based on a traditional rakugo, 'Meguro-no-Sanma'. About 6,000 charcoal grilled sanma were served, and people enjoyed eating them for free at the festival.

○お殿様はどうしてお城で食べた「さんま」に満足しなかったのでしょうか。

目黒のさんま

江戸時代、幕府は江戸にありました。諸大名は江戸と領地を一年ごとに行き来して暮らさなければなりませんでした。

秋のよく晴れた日、ある若いお殿様が家来数人を連れて気晴らしに遠乗りに出かけました。ご多分にもれず世間知らずのお殿様でした。江戸郊外の目黒に来ると、お殿様は馬から下り、家来にこう言いました。

「もう馬は飽きた。その方たちと走り比べがしたい。予に勝った者には褒美を取らせる。」

「位置について。用意はよいか。それ！」

主君のご命令ゆえ、さからうことはできません。お殿様と家来達は走り出しました。お殿様はわき目もふらずどンドン野原を走って行き、その後を家来達が、ハアハア息を切らしながら、追いかけてきました。

「誠に情けない！見てみろ！わが殿はもう切り株に座ってこちらを見ておられる。」

「遅いではないか！」お殿様は誇らしげです。

「ところで、ここは何と申す所じゃ。」

「ここは目黒という所でございます。」

すると近くの民家から魚を焼くかぐわしい匂いが漂ってきました。

「うむ、うまそうな匂いだ。走った後の空腹は格別だ。」と、お殿様。

「このあたりで誰か魚を焼いているのだな。」

「そうだな。誰かさんまを焼いているに違いない。」家来達は小声でひそひそ話しました。

「さんまとな。予は生まれてこの方そのような名は聞いたことがない。」と話を小耳にはさんだお殿様が尋ねました。

「魚の名でございます。秋のさんまは脂（あぶら）が乗っていてたいそう風味があります。下魚（げざかな）でございますゆえ、お殿様が召し上がるものではございません。」

「余はさんまを食（しょく）してみたい。はよう持って参れ。」

家来達は、七輪の炭を団扇（うちわ）でやけにあおいでさんまを焼いている年寄りを見つけました。

「済まぬことだが、あちらに座（ざ）しておられる我が殿が、その方のさんまをいたくお気に召されてな。食してみたい、と仰せられる。一匹分けてもらいたいのだが。」

「お安い御用で。どうぞ、どうぞ。」

お殿様は生まれて初めてさんまを食べました。さんまの香ばしい匂いと醤油の味にご満悦です。

「うまい！このような美味なる魚は初めてじゃ。そのものに過分に褒美を取らせよ！」

あの遠出以来、お殿様は、一日たりともさんまの味と匂いを頭に思い浮かべない日はありません。当時、お殿様が食べる魚といえば鯛（たい）のような高級魚だけでした。「魚の王様」として知られ、赤く、丸みを帯びた魚体に大きな目がついていました。さんまという魚を知ってしまったお殿様は、さんまに恋こがれていました。細身の黒い体の小さな目に。

「さんまが食べたい。もう一度、さんまが食べたい。」お殿様の口癖でした。

家来達はお殿様の願いを悟り、日本橋の魚河岸から最上級のさんまを取り寄せました。

さんまは余分な脂（あぶら）を抜くため十分蒸され、お殿様の喉に刺さってはいけないと、毛抜きを使って小骨も一本残らず抜かれました。



「殿、ご注文のさんまでございます。ご賞味下さい。」

さかなを見て、お殿様は、

「何？これがさんまと申すか？さんまは黒く焦げておった。これは違う魚であろう。」

お殿様は匂いをかぎました。ほのかにさんまの匂いがしました。

「ふう・・・む。まさしくさんまの匂いじゃ。」

お殿様は箸でちょっとつまむと一口召し上がりました。美味しくありません。

「これは本当にさんまか？」お殿様は首を傾（かし）げました。

「まさしくさんまに相違ございません。」

「ふーん、して、このさんま、いずれより取り寄せたのじゃ。」

「日本橋の魚河岸でございます。」

「は、そうか。それはいかん。さんまは目黒にかぎる。」（古典落語）