

# Toshidama Gallery

## Gonpachi

Play: Gonpachi Komurasaki

Gonpachi's is the story of two faithful lovers ultimately destroyed by a harsh and uncaring world. His life is dramatised in many popular plays, notably *Gonpachi Komurasaki*. In the second half of the seventeenth century, Shirai Gonpachi, a skilled swordsman, killed a clansmen in a quarrel and fled to Edo. En route he met a girl, Komurasaki, who was being held captive by robbers. Gonpachi attacked the robbers, and rescued the girl whom he took to her parents in Mikawa. He then returned to the Edo road, met with another party of robbers, and was himself rescued by a man named Chobei.

Years later in the pleasure district of Edo, Gonpachi was reunited with Komurasaki (now working as a prostitute), whose family had met with misfortune, and who had sold herself to pay their debts. Gonpachi began a life of crime, killing and robbing people to get the money to buy her freedom. He was eventually cornered by the authorities and committed suicide on the Rokugo river. Chobei buried his body at Ekko-in, and Komurasaki came a few days later to kill herself on his grave. Their souls are embodied in the legendary bird *Hiyokudori*.

*Illustrated, Actors at the 53 Stations: Gonpachi, by Kunisada. 1860*



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