

AI-Generated Graded Readers

Masaru Uchida, Gifu University

Publication webpage:

https://www1.gifu-u.ac.jp/~masaru/a1/ai-generated_graded_readers.html

Publication date: March 22, 2026

About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was translated from Japanese into English and simplified using ChatGPT for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

The adaptation aims to improve readability while preserving the narrative content and spirit of the original work.

Source Text

Original work: Panorama-Tō Kitan (パノラマ島綺譚)

Author: Edogawa Rampo (江戸川乱歩)

Source: Aozora Bunko (青空文庫)

<https://www.aozora.gr.jp/>

Original Japanese text available at:

<https://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/001779/card56651.html>

The original work is in the public domain in Japan.

Copyright and Use

This simplified English edition is an educational adaptation intended for non-commercial use only.

The source text is provided by Aozora Bunko, a digital library that makes Japanese public domain literature freely available.

For information about Aozora Bunko and its usage policies, see:

<https://www.aozora.gr.jp/guide/kihon.html>

This edition is an AI-assisted translation and simplification prepared for educational purposes.

Disclaimer

This edition is an independent educational adaptation and is not affiliated with or endorsed by Aozora Bunko.

Edogawa Rampo, *Strange Tale of Panorama Island [Panorama-Tō Kitan]*
(Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified from the Japanese by ChatGPT)

Part 1

Many people in M Prefecture probably do not notice it. Near the south end of S District, where I Bay opens to the Pacific, a small island lies alone in rough water. From far away, it looks like a green round bun placed upside down on the sea. Few people go there now, and it is almost an empty island. Fishermen land there only once in a while, and even they do so only on calm days. The sea around it is dangerous, and there seems to be no reason to risk a boat for such a place.

Yet that lonely island once belonged to the rich Komoda family of T City. In earlier years, some fishermen from that family used it for huts, nets, and storage. Then, some years ago, everything on it was suddenly cleared away. After that, a strange kind of work began. Every day, boats brought laborers, gardeners, stones, trees, steel, wood, and barrels of cement. No one could tell whether they were building a fort, a garden, or something from a dream.

The villages nearby were poor and far from the centers of modern life, so the news did not travel far. Still, the local people talked about it in low voices. They also talked about the head of the Komoda family, who had once been said to die from illness and then, to everyone's shock, return to life. After that return, they said, he behaved like a different man. So when the work on the island grew larger, people whispered that madness was guiding it. Walls rose, hills and pools appeared, and a huge building slowly stood up in the middle. But before the whole plan was fully finished, disaster came, the master and his wife died, and the island was left to rot under the wind and rain.

Even now, if someone goes there, that person can still feel that the place was made for some huge purpose. It looks like a broken garden, but it also feels like the remains of a strange art. There is beauty there, but there is also fear. The air itself seems heavy with anger, sorrow, and a secret that has not gone away. And because there truly is such a secret, I must now begin the story. It begins not on

that island, but in Tokyo.

In a dull boarding house called Yuai-kan, in a student area on the high ground of Tokyo, there lived a man named Hitomi Hirosuke. He was no longer young, yet he still lived like a student. He had finished a private university five or six years earlier, but he had never found a real place in the world. He had no steady job, no steady income, and no clear plan for the future. One by one he had worn out the patience of landlords and friends, and at last he had drifted into that cheap room. There he stayed until about a year before the strange work began on the island.

Hirosuke said that he had belonged to the philosophy department, but his learning had gone in every direction and settled nowhere. At one time he ran after literature, at another time architecture, then economics, then painting. He bought books with passion, entered classes that were not meant for him, and started new studies with bright eyes. But he grew tired just as quickly, and nothing truly became his own. If he had learned anything, it was not the straight road of scholarship, but odd fragments from the side paths. That was one reason why he had reached his thirties without success.

But the deeper reason was inside him. Before he had really lived in the world, he had already grown tired of it. Part of this came from weak health, and part from a nervous mind that never rested and never moved forward. He did not want action; even the thought of action was enough to exhaust him. So he lay in his narrow room for hours, sometimes for whole days, and let his mind build worlds that no practical man had ever seen. Hirosuke was, above all things, a dreamer.

The one dream that held him was not a dream of power, law, or money. It was a dream of a perfect land of beauty. Since his school days, he had read many books about ideal countries and imagined places beyond ordinary life. But the parts that moved him were not the rules of society or plans for a better state. What drew him was the thought of a paradise on earth, a land of beauty, pleasure, and wonder. He would picture it in detail until the dirty walls of his room seemed to disappear. In those hours, the poor boarding house no longer existed for him.

Hirosuke's dream was larger than the dreams of writers and painters. He wanted

to use nature itself as his material. Mountains, rivers, trees, flowers, birds, beasts, insects, stones, water, and light were, in his mind, like colors in a paint box or notes in a song. Other artists used words, canvas, or sound, but Hirosuke wanted to shape the living world with his own will. He wanted to change the face of nature, make it more beautiful, and leave his own spirit upon it. In his heart, he wished to become like a god and build a new world with his own hands.

That was why ordinary art did not fully satisfy him. He would think, “Why should a man be content with paint, paper, or music alone?” “Why not take the earth itself and make a greater work?” Gardens and buildings had already changed nature in small ways, so why should someone not do the same thing on a grand and fearless scale? When he thought this way, the old kings and rulers of history excited him more than poets did. Great walls, palaces, temples, and vast cities seemed to him like signs that human desire had once dared to fight against the world as it was.

Again and again he said to himself, “If only I had more money than I could ever spend.” Then he would imagine buying a wide stretch of land and ordering hundreds, even thousands, of people to help him build his dream country. He would plan valleys, woods, towers, bridges, lakes, and secret paths until the whole vision stood clear in his mind. But when the dream ended, he was still only a poor man in a four-and-a-half-mat room, with barely enough for bread. No matter how hard he worked, he could not hope to gather the wealth that such a project would need. So his dream remained a bright palace in the air, while his real life stayed small, thin, and joyless.

Even art, which might have saved another unhappy man, did not save him in a normal way. He had little interest in painting pictures or writing books for their own sake. Unless they could lead him toward that one vast dream, all other pleasures seemed weak and small. Music, entertainment, work, and even love looked poor beside the shining land in his mind. Because he had wandered so far inside that dream, ordinary life seemed flat to him afterward. In that sad and dangerous way, he had already begun to leave the common world behind.

To survive, Hirosuke wrote cheap translations, children’s tales, and sometimes

stories for adults. Editors bought just enough of this work to keep him alive, but they did not care for the stories closest to his heart. Those stories were filled with his imagined dream land, described in loving detail, and other people found them dull. So he kept writing for money with one hand, while with the other he drew maps of his ideal country and plans for the buildings that would rise there. He wrote them, tore them up, and wrote them again. As he did so, he envied the rulers of the past who had possessed the gold and power to shape the world. He did not know it yet, but the door to that impossible dream was already beginning to open.

Part 2

The true story began when a strange piece of good fortune came into Hirosuke's life. It happened about a year before the great work on the island began. But this "good fortune" was so dark and so terrible that the word does not really fit it. It was like a gift from a fairy tale that had passed through hell before it reached him. When the news first came, he felt a sudden joy that almost lifted him out of himself. Then, in the very next moment, he felt such fear at his own thought that his teeth shook in his mouth.

The person who brought the news was an old classmate from the university, a newspaper reporter. One day the man came to Yuai-kan after a long absence, sat down in Hirosuke's poor room, and began to talk in an easy way about this and that. Then, in the middle of the talk, he said, "You probably do not know yet, but your older brother died two or three days ago." Hirosuke stared at him and said, "What are you talking about?" The reporter laughed and answered, "Have you forgotten already? I mean your famous other half. Komoda Genzaburō."

Hirosuke gave a short dry laugh, though the sound did not come easily. "Ah, Komoda," he said. "That rich Komoda. Is that true? What killed him?" The reporter leaned forward and said that a local writer had sent in the story. "It seems his old illness took him. He had an attack, and he never came back from it. He was not yet forty. It was a sad thing." Then he added another detail, one that struck Hirosuke far more deeply than the death itself. "You know, I saw a recent

photograph with the article, and I was amazed again. You and that man look even more alike now than you did when we were students. Cover the mustache in the picture and add your glasses, and it is almost exactly your face.”

That was no empty joke. During their university days, the poor drifter Hirosuke and the rich heir Komoda had been known among other students as twins. They were not brothers at all, and yet their faces, height, build, and even the tone of their voices were so close that people laughed and gave them that name. Since Komoda was a little older, students called him the elder twin and Hirosuke the younger one. They were teased often, and at first both men disliked it. But even they could not deny the strange truth of the likeness. It was one of those rare accidents that seem small at first and later open the door to disaster.

There had not been many comic mistakes between them in those days, because several things helped to keep them apart. Neither man cared much for regular class life, so they did not meet every day. Hirosuke also wore glasses because his sight was weak, and that made it easier to tell them apart from a distance. Even so, there had been moments that caused laughter among their classmates. The memory of those moments stayed in Hirosuke’s mind, though he did not like to think of them. In truth, he had long felt a kind of dislike toward Komoda, as if the rich man were his own shadow made proud and successful.

So when he heard of Komoda’s death, Hirosuke did not feel grief in any simple way. What he felt was stronger than surprise and stranger than sorrow. The news settled over him like a cold mist and would not leave. While the reporter stayed, Hirosuke kept talking and nodding, but part of his mind had already gone elsewhere. After the visitor finally left, the room seemed larger and darker than before. Then, while he sat alone and turned the news over and over in his thoughts, a monstrous idea rose inside him with the speed of a storm cloud spreading across the summer sky.

He sat still for a long time, pale and shaking. At first he did not want to give the thing a clear shape, but it forced itself forward. He tried to push it back, and each time he did so, it returned more sharply, with more detail, like a picture coming into focus. Soon he could see not only the idea itself, but also one step, then

another, then another after that. It frightened him so much that his whole body seemed to grow cold from the inside. Yet the fear did not drive the thought away. It held him where he sat and made him look at it.

One reason the thought had such force was simple. In Komoda's home district, people of rank were not burned after death but buried in the ground. Hirosuke knew this well, because he had heard it from Komoda himself when they were students. The second reason lay in the manner of Komoda's death. The report had said that he died after an epileptic attack, and that fact touched an old store of knowledge in Hirosuke's mind. Years earlier he had read strange books about death, false death, and people buried before life had truly left them.

He remembered very clearly that epilepsy was one of the illnesses most often named in such books. A man might seem dead, the body might fall still, and yet life might remain hidden so deeply that the eye could not see it. Hirosuke had read case after case, and those stories had once filled him with a horror beyond ordinary fear. Some had stayed in his mind for years. They had not stayed there by chance, though he did not fully understand that at the time. Somewhere in the dark part of his imagination, the knowledge had attached itself to the image of Komoda, the rich man who shared his face and who also suffered from that very illness.

It is possible that the seed of the plan had been sleeping in him for years and only now began to open. Whether that was true or not, the result was the same. That night Hirosuke did not lie down. He sat upright in his room while the hours passed, feeling cold sweat move out across his skin, and little by little the wild dream lost its dreamlike shape. It began to look practical. It began to look possible. At last, it even began to look simple.

Again and again he argued with himself. "This is madness," he thought. "Men in cheap detective stories may pretend to be other men, but this is real life. No one has ever truly done such a thing." He tried to laugh at the idea and throw it away. But then another voice answered, "And yet the chance is here. You want money beyond measure. You want land, power, material, workers, and freedom. You have wanted only one thing for years. If this works, you can build the paradise you have dreamed of all your life."

Then he began to defend the plan to himself as if he were speaking before a judge. He was not planning murder. He was not poisoning the world. He would only erase Hitomi Hirosuke and let Komoda Genzaburō live again. Would Komoda's family not be glad to see a dead man return? Would it not seem like a miracle rather than a crime? And what would the money be used for? Not for low pleasure, but for the making of a great work, a land of beauty beyond anything common men had seen. Once he arranged the matter in that order, the plan seemed almost clean to him.

The family situation also encouraged him. Komoda's parents were dead. There was only a young wife in the house, along with a few servants. There was a married sister in Tokyo and no doubt many relatives in the province, but none of them knew that a man existed who looked almost exactly like Komoda. Even if they had heard of such a person, they could never guess that he might step into the dead man's place. The greatest danger was the wife, who must know her husband's habits in the smallest detail. But Hirosuke told himself that if he was careful, if he avoided deep private talk and let illness explain changes in manner, even she might be deceived.

So his thinking moved farther and farther into detail. The great question now was not whether the exchange could bring wealth, but how the exchange itself could be done. He had to destroy Hitomi Hirosuke in the eyes of the world. He had to make Komoda seem to rise from death in a believable way. He had to deal with the real corpse. One by one, he attacked these problems with the same twisted patience he had once given to his dream maps and plans. By the time dawn neared, his mind had already begun to turn horror into method, and method into resolve.

Part 3

By the end of that long day and night, Hirosuke made his decision. Later he would remember that time as if he had been walking in his sleep. Even after he began to act, the whole thing did not feel fully real. It felt like a strange trip taken inside a dream, while the true world waited somewhere far beyond it. Yet the

dream did not break, and so he stepped deeper into it.

His plan had two main parts. First, Hitomi Hirosuke had to vanish from the world. Before he could do that, however, he needed to go once to T City, where Komoda's house stood, and learn several things with his own eyes. He had to make sure that Komoda had truly been buried in the ground, not burned. He also had to see whether the grave could be reached in secret, what sort of woman Komoda's young wife was, and what sort of people served in the house. If any one of those points seemed too dangerous, he could still stop. Up to this point, nothing had been done that could not be undone.

But he could not appear in T City in his ordinary face. If people there saw him as Hitomi Hirosuke, that would be dangerous. If they mistook him for Komoda Genzaburō too soon, that would be even worse. So he prepared a disguise for this first journey. It was not a grand or theatrical disguise, but a plain and careful one, built from small changes that would alter the whole face.

He threw away the glasses he usually wore and replaced them with large dark ones that did not draw too much notice. Over one eye he fixed folded gauze that ran from the brow down across the cheek, so that he looked like a man with an eye illness. He placed cotton in his mouth to change the line of his cheeks and jaw, added a modest false mustache, and had his hair cut very short. That was all, but the effect was strong. On the way out, even a friend who passed near him on the train did not recognize him.

Hirosuke had his own theory about disguise. The eyes, he believed, were the part of the face that most clearly showed the person within. If the eyes were hidden, much of the man vanished at once. But dark glasses alone made a person look suspicious, so he used the gauze to explain them and to hide part of his brow and cheek at the same time. Then he changed his hair, his clothes, and even the way he carried himself. He had always thought that wigs and painted faces were clumsy and unnatural, but that simple changes, used well, could hide even a Japanese face quite successfully.

The next day he told the people at the boarding house that he had some private reason to leave for a time. He said he would go wandering without any fixed goal,

perhaps first toward the south of the Izu Peninsula. Carrying one small trunk, he left the house, bought what he needed on the way, and finished his disguise on a quiet road where no one would see him. Then he went straight to Tokyo Station, left the trunk at the baggage room for a time, and bought a ticket to a station two or three stops beyond T City. After that he entered a crowded third-class carriage and began the journey.

In T City he spent nearly a full day moving about with great care. By his own quick and private methods, he saw what he needed to see and heard what he needed to hear. He learned enough about the grave, the household, and the wife to know that the thing was possible. The details of that investigation would take too long to tell here, but the result was clear. His plan, wild as it seemed, did not break when it touched real ground.

When he returned to Tokyo Station, it was near eight in the evening of the third day after he had first heard the news. Six days had passed since Komoda's funeral. In Hirosuke's mind, the false resurrection had to take place no later than ten days after death, so only four days remained. He recovered his small trunk, went into the station lavatory, removed the disguise, and became Hirosuke again. Then he hurried at once to the steamship pier at Reiganjima, because the next step required him to head toward Izu just as he had told the boarding house.

The ship for Shimoda left at nine, and when he reached the waiting room, the bell for boarding was already ringing loudly. He bought a second-class ticket, ran down the dark pier with his trunk, crossed the heavy wooden gangway, and climbed aboard just as the whistle sounded. This was good luck for his purpose, because the second-class room at the stern had only two other passengers in it. Both seemed to be country men in plain clothes, sunburned and heavy-faced, the kind who sleep deeply after a long day. Hirosuke greeted no one, lay down in a corner far from them, and pretended to go to sleep under one of the ship's blankets.

Of course he did not sleep. He lay on his side, his back turned, listening to the two men speak in low voices while the engine beat its dull rhythm through the floor. The sea was calm, the ship hardly moved, and the steady sound of machine and water might have sent another man to sleep. But as Hirosuke lay there, the

excitement of the past two days slowly sank, and a different feeling rose up in its place. "Even now it is not too late," one part of his mind told him. "Give it up before it is too late. What kind of mind truly means to carry out such a thing?"

Yet another voice answered at once. "What flaw is there? What danger have you left open? You have thought through every step. You cannot throw it away now." So the two parts of him argued in silence while time passed and the engine kept beating. At last he noticed that the men's voices had stopped, and in their place came two different kinds of snoring from across the room. He turned slightly, opened his eyes a little, and saw them lying flat and fast asleep.

Then the chance seemed to stand up before him. Without hesitation, as though someone had ordered him to move, he opened his trunk and took out a torn piece of old cotton cloth. It was only a scrap, but it matched the cheap kimono he wore next to his skin. Closing the trunk again, he slipped out onto the deck. It was already past eleven. No servant or sailor was in sight nearby, though a helmsman was surely awake somewhere above. Around him there was only the dark sea, the low sound of waves against the ship, the pale light of stars, and the black mass of land drawing slowly nearer.

He had chosen the time and place in advance. This route passed near the coast before turning, and he knew the spot from earlier travel. First he found a place on the rail where a nail stuck out and tied the torn cloth there so that it would not blow away. Then, hidden in shadow, he removed the old kimono from his body, wrapped inside it his wallet and the tools he had used for disguise, and tied the bundle hard against his back with his belt. "Now it is enough," he thought. "I need only endure the cold." Crawling low across the deck, he climbed the rail without noise and held on to a rope outside it, waiting for the ship to slow as it changed direction.

In that fearful moment, he was strangely calm. The act itself was not a crime. A strong swimmer could jump from a slow-moving ship and reach the shore if the distance was short. Still, because it was part of his great scheme, one would expect terror to fill him. Instead he felt only a hard, clear stillness. Soon he heard the chain of the steering gear rattle, felt the ship begin to turn, and knew the speed

had dropped. “Now,” he told himself, and let go.

There was a heavy sound as he struck the water, then a cold so sharp that it seemed to stab him from every side. The sea pulled at him, pressed over his head, and for a moment he could not rise. Yet even in that danger he remembered the screw behind the ship and forced himself to swim away from it with all his strength. How he escaped the spinning water and crossed that dark stretch of sea, he could never later explain. But he did escape. At last he dragged his exhausted body onto a black strip of shore near some sleeping fishing village, waited there for dawn, put on his half-dry clothes, changed his face once more, and before the villagers woke, began to walk toward what he believed was Yokosuka.

Part 4

The man who had been Hitomi Hirosuke until the night before spent the next day in a cheap inn at Ōfuno, near a station where trains changed. He did almost nothing there. He waited, because one thing had to be known before he moved again. He had to see whether the story of his false death had entered the newspapers in the way he had hoped. Only after that could he dare to go on to T City and take the last terrible step.

By the afternoon of the next day, he had his answer. Small articles appeared in the papers under a heading like “A Novelist’s Suicide.” The title itself gave him a bitter little smile, because while alive he had hardly been called a novelist by anyone. The reports said that a notebook had been found in his luggage, with the name Hitomi Hirosuke written in it, and with words that seemed like a farewell to the world. They also said that a torn piece of his clothes had been found caught on a nail by the ship’s rail, as if he had jumped into the sea from that very place.

So the trick had worked. In the eyes of society, Hitomi Hirosuke was dead. There was no body, but there was enough evidence to satisfy the public, and public belief was all he needed. He had a brother and some relatives in his home district, and perhaps they would feel sorrow when they heard of his death. But he had already accepted that cost, and he did not allow himself to think long about it.

What filled him more strongly was a strange feeling that he had never known before. He had lost not only his room and his poor name, but his place in the whole order of the world. He was no longer a man whose name stood on any official page. He was a stranger with no true address, no true past, and, for the moment, no true future. When he looked from the train window at the houses, roads, trees, and fields, all of them seemed to belong to another world, one from which he had quietly stepped away.

That feeling was partly fresh and light, almost like being born again. But it also carried a deep loneliness. He was now a single man floating outside ordinary life, and that one man had chosen to carry out a vast crime and a vast dream with no companion at all. The thought made his chest tighten. More than once, as the train rolled toward T City in the evening darkness, he felt something like tears rising in his eyes.

Still, the train did not care about his feelings. It ran from station to station, and at last it brought him to T City after night had fallen. As soon as he stepped down, he did not go toward an inn or a tea house or any place where a traveler might rest. He went straight toward the temple where the Komoda family buried its dead. The temple stood outside the town among fields, and by then the roads were already quiet.

When he slipped through a gap in a thin hedge beside a narrow path, he found himself inside the graveyard he had studied on his earlier visit. The stars were bright, and he had already fixed the place in his memory, so it took him little time to find the new grave of Komoda Genzaburō. He moved first toward the main temple building and looked through a crack in the closed shutters. Everything inside was dark and still. The priests and temple workers, who rose early, seemed already asleep.

Satisfied, he returned to the path, searched among nearby farm houses, and stole a hoe from a shed. By the time he brought it back, creeping like a cat and hiding himself in shadow at every step, it was close to eleven. The hour suited his purpose. Then, in that dreadful darkness, he began to dig into the fresh grave.

The earth was soft because the burial was recent, and the work went faster than

he had expected. Even so, every strike of the hoe shook him. He tried not to think of what waited below, but thought forced itself upon him all the same. After only a short while the lid of the coffin appeared beneath the loose soil, pale even in the weak starlight, and he knew there was no turning back.

He cleared the earth from the lid, forced the edge of the tool between the boards, and gave one hard push. The lid opened with a sound that seemed to pass through his bones. At once a terrible smell rose from the coffin and struck his face. He had not yet truly seen the body, but that smell alone almost drove him back in horror.

Until that moment, he had worked almost calmly. But when he had to face the dead man inside, the fear became something different, something deeper than the ordinary fear of ghosts. It felt as though he were alone in a dark hall, looking at his own face in a mirror by candlelight, only many times worse. The dead man below was not merely another man. He was, in a dreadful sense, Hirosuke himself.

Under the silent stars, with the stone markers standing like dim watchers all around, the open grave seemed like the mouth of a black pit. Hirosuke lay on his stomach at its edge and reached down with both hands. He touched the head first and felt short rough hair. He touched the skin and found it soft and swollen, as though it might tear at the slightest pressure. Then his hand reached the mouth, and what he felt there filled him with a new terror.

The mouth stood open far wider than any living mouth should open. The lips seemed drawn back, the teeth showed deeply, and the face had been fixed in the awful shape of a last struggle for breath. Hirosuke understood at once what that meant, and the image struck his mind with cruel force. He imagined the dead man fighting in darkness, long after all others had believed him gone. For a moment he almost lost all strength.

But then a different condition came over him, the same hard numbness that sometimes comes to criminals when fear grows too great. His nerves seemed to go dead, and in their place only a cold, exact mind remained. He no longer hesitated. Like a machine, he reached down, lifted, pulled, and at last dragged Komoda's half-rotten body out of the coffin and onto the ground.

The work was sickening beyond words. The flesh seemed ready to break apart

in his hands, and a thin layer of skin clung to his palms as if it would never come off. Yet he did not stop. He had thought more than once about what to do with the corpse, and now he carried out the answer he had chosen. The safest hiding place, he had decided, was the nearest one of all.

Beside Komoda's grave stood another, older family grave. Hirosuke dug there too, though the harder earth made the work slower. At last he reached old bones, white and dry and almost clean, no longer like a human body at all but more like pale stone. Then he paused, looked carefully around in the dark, and made himself think through every small danger again. Not the smallest sign could be left behind.

After that, with no feeling on his face, he stripped the burial robe from Komoda's corpse and pulled three rings from its fingers. He wrapped the rings in cloth and pushed them into his pocket. Then he pushed the naked body down into the older grave, into the place where the family bones had long rested. When he had done that, he felt across the ground with both hands, checking that nothing had fallen or been forgotten. Then he filled the grave, set the stone right, and spread back the grass and moss as neatly as he could.

At last he stood up and looked at the sky. For one wild moment he felt almost proud. Komoda Genzaburō, he told himself, had now vanished forever, and Hitomi Hirosuke had vanished too. The only man left standing there was the new Komoda Genzaburō. And because people would discover the empty coffin and the broken grave first, their minds would at once run toward miracle, not trick.

Before dawn fully came, he returned to the first grave and arranged it so that it would seem the dead man had broken out from within and crawled away after coming back to life. Then he slipped out through the hedge again, disposed of the hoe, and hurried toward the town. There he bought a razor, found a hiding place in the woods, shaved his head to match the dead man's burial state, put on the burial robe, placed the rings on his fingers, and burned the clothes and other things he no longer needed.

By then the sun was already high, and people had begun to pass along the road. He could no longer go boldly to the temple door as he had first planned. So he hid in a thick place near the roadside, lay down in the dirt, and pretended to be a man

who had risen from the grave, tried weakly to return home, and collapsed on the way. There he waited in silence, filled now not with courage but with doubt. “What if this is all too easy?” he thought. “What if I have become nothing but a fool in a cruel play?”

Soon village children found him. They crept near, whispering that he might be mad, or dead, or something worse. Their dirty curious faces bent over him as though he were some strange show. Hirosuke burned with shame and anger, but he did not move. Then one child ran to call the adults, and in a short time farmers came in a noisy group and gathered around him.

At first they only stared. Then one man cried out, “It is Master Komoda!” Others agreed at once. Some had already heard that something strange had happened at the Komoda grave, and the rumor rushed from mouth to mouth like fire in dry grass. “Master Komoda has come back from the grave,” they said. To those country people, the thing had already become a miracle.

Messengers ran to the Komoda house, to the temple, and for a doctor. More and more people gathered. At last Hirosuke judged that the moment had come, and in the middle of that crowd he slowly opened his eyes as if waking from a dark sleep. He looked from face to face in dull confusion and said nothing. That silence was part of his plan. Until he could understand everything around him, he would not risk a single word.

He was carried away with great care, surrounded by servants, police, temple men, relatives, and townspeople. The noise grew larger and larger as they took him to the great Komoda house, which was now, in the world’s eyes, his own. There, in rich bedding unlike anything he had ever known, he lay still and kept his mouth shut like a man half dead and half alive. The false resurrection had succeeded. Now the harder test would begin.

Part 5

For about a week after he was carried into the Komoda house, Hirosuke kept up the same silent discipline. Outwardly he was only a half-conscious patient who

had come back from the edge of death. He lay still in bed, moved little, and let others believe that his mind was still covered by mist. But inside that still body, his thoughts worked with astonishing speed. While nurses, servants, and relatives bent over him in pity, he listened, watched, compared, and stored away every detail of the household.

He learned the customs of the family, the order of the rooms, the tone in which one servant spoke to another, and the way each person addressed the master of the house. He paid attention to footsteps in the hall, to names spoken carelessly beside his bed, and to the little habits of those who visited him. It was as if he were learning a new language, but the language was made of glances, pauses, and hidden relations. He had to become Komoda not only in face, but also in atmosphere. So he studied the house from his bed as a hunter studies the woods from behind a screen of leaves.

The doctor's explanation turned out almost exactly as Hirosuke had hoped. The man was said to be one of the finest doctors in T City, and he spoke with the full confidence of learning. Yet when he faced this unbelievable return from death, he took refuge in difficult terms. He spoke again and again of catalepsy, of false death, of fits that resembled death so closely that even skilled men might be deceived. In this way he tried to protect his own honor more than to discover the truth.

Standing at the bedside in his spectacles, the doctor gave long explanations to the gathered relatives. He described epilepsy, false death, and nervous collapse in language that none of them fully understood. Still, because the dead man had plainly returned alive, no one wished to question him too closely. They only nodded, looked frightened, and accepted the explanation because they wanted to accept it. In such a situation, even a poor explanation was enough if it restored peace to the room.

The doctor also examined Hirosuke's body with the greatest care, but even that danger passed. His mind was so busy defending his earlier mistake that he could not look freshly at what lay before him. If he noticed some difference in the patient's body, he likely explained it away as an effect of the strange illness and stranger recovery. After all, once a man had risen from what seemed to be death,

smaller changes no longer seemed impossible. So the very greatness of the miracle protected the smaller fraud hidden inside it.

Since the supposed cause of death had been an attack and not a wasting sickness, there was no great weakness for Hirosuke to imitate. He had only to keep silent, act mentally confused, and accept light food and careful treatment. This made the role far easier than he had feared. The house took care of him in every possible way. The doctor came twice a day, two nurses stayed near him, a maid watched beside the bed, and an old chief manager named Tsunoda came often with anxious eyes and careful steps.

All of this almost made him laugh. These people, whom he had once imagined as powerful figures in the solid world of wealth, now seemed small to him. They moved about his bed whispering, bowing, worrying, and trying to please him, and the whole performance looked childish. He felt, with a kind of cruel disappointment, that the world had less weight than he had once thought. "So this is what it is," he told himself. In those days he began to understand how great criminals and proud conquerors might come to look down on other men.

Yet among all the people in that house, there was one whom he could not dismiss so easily. That person was Chiyoko, the young widow of the dead Komoda Genzaburō, and so, in the world's eyes now, his own wife. She was only twenty-two, still very young, yet she alone filled him with a fear different from all other fears. He had known before coming that she was said to be beautiful. But beauty seen from a distance had become something more dangerous when it stood every day beside his bed.

The more he watched her, the stronger her charm became. She belonged to that kind of woman whose loveliness grows clearer when one sees her often. She cared for him with the deepest attention, and from the skill and tenderness of that care he could judge how close she had once been to her husband. Nothing escaped her hand. She could adjust a pillow, offer water, or move a blanket with such intimate ease that Hirosuke felt at once how dangerous she was. "I must not let down my guard before this woman," he warned himself. "If there is a true enemy to my great plan, it is she."

He never forgot the first moment when, as the resurrected man, he arrived at the Komoda house. The car carrying him stopped at the gate, and Chiyoko, who had been held back inside the grounds, came forward in confusion and terror. When she saw him, she first showed a quick expression of shock so sharp that it chilled his blood. Then her face crumpled like a child's, and she ran beside the car in a helpless, broken way until it reached the entrance. There, before all the relatives, she threw herself upon him and clung to his body, weeping so long that others had to pull her away.

He had to lie there and look at her from terribly close range while pretending dull weakness. He could see every eyelash, each wet line of tears, the fine pale hair on her cheeks, and the trembling of her soft lips. Her bare arms touched his shoulder, the warmth of her body reached him, and even her faint personal scent entered his breath. The moment was both sweet and monstrous. It was not merely another man's wife who embraced him. It was the wife of the dead man whose very place he had stolen.

As the days passed, his fear of Chiyoko only grew stronger. Several times he came near disaster. One night, for example, he woke suddenly from an uneasy sleep and found her in his room. She had risen from the next room without his hearing it, and now her loose night hair lay across his chest while she wept softly over him. In that moment, he nearly spoke as a husband would speak. He nearly said, "Chiyoko, do not cry so much. I am here just as before. Show me your usual smiling face." Only by biting down hard on the words did he keep from uttering them.

He had never imagined such torment. But at last, following the plan he had made, he began little by little to speak. Around the fourth or fifth day, he started a skillful performance in which his mind seemed to be slowly waking after deep confusion. He would remember only the things he had heard during his silence, or the things he could safely guess, and when talk moved beyond that range, he would wince and say that the memory would not come. Because he had first spent days in perfect silence, people believed this gradual return of speech to be natural.

In this way he learned with amazing speed. Each mistake taught him something

new. Each question revealed another part of the Komoda world. Soon he knew enough of the family, the businesses, the lands, and the servants to move with greater confidence. Half a month after entering the house, the doctor gave his full approval, and a large celebration was held for Hirosuke's recovery. At that feast, surrounded by relatives, business heads, trusted employees, and Tsunoda the manager, he gained still more knowledge from their open and relaxed talk.

On the morning after that celebration, he decided that the time had come to take the first outward step toward his true goal. He called Tsunoda and said, in a calm and practical voice, that since his body had nearly returned to normal, he now wished to inspect his lands, fisheries, and other undertakings. He explained that he wanted to clear his still-clouded memory and then make more organized plans for the family fortune. Tsunoda was astonished, because the former Komoda had not been such an active man. He tried to object on grounds of health, but Hirosuke silenced him with a firmness that left no room for refusal.

That same day he set out with Tsunoda and a few attendants to travel through the wide spread of the Komoda properties. For Hirosuke, this was much more than a business journey. It was the first time he would look directly at the true size of the wealth he had seized. It was also the first test of whether he could move through the world not as a frightened actor in one house, but as Komoda Genzaburō himself. As the party left the gate, the house behind him seemed full of danger, and yet the road ahead promised something far more dangerous still.

Part 6

The inspection journey lasted nearly a full month, even though Hirosuke moved through it as quickly as he could. During that month, he visited broad fields that seemed to run without end, deep forests where almost no one passed, wide fishing grounds, timber works, dried-bonito factories, canning plants, and many other businesses in which the Komoda family had full or partial control. Again and again he was forced to admit, with fresh amazement, that the fortune he had seized was even greater and more solid than he had imagined from account books alone.

Numbers on paper had once looked like mere symbols. Now those symbols stood before him as land, labor, buildings, machines, and obedient men.

Wherever he went, he received the kind of welcome given to a feudal lord. Managers bowed low, local connections hurried to please him, and innkeepers behaved as though a prince had entered their doors. No one studied his face with rude suspicion. No one looked twice. Sometimes an old acquaintance of the dead Komoda, even a geisha from former days, would laugh warmly and say, "It has been so long," and such moments only drove Hirosuke's boldness deeper into him. The more natural he seemed, the more natural he became.

Yet he did not spend that month only in pride. While smiling at dinners and accepting cups of sake, he kept calculating. He considered which properties could be sold quietly, which factories would be hard to control, which managers were dangerous, and in what order different holdings might be turned into ready money without attracting public attention. At the same time, he worked patiently on old Tsunoda, opening his heart by degrees, winning trust little by little, until the old manager came near to becoming his adviser in the disposal of the family fortune. Hirosuke had entered the journey as an actor. He returned from it feeling that he had almost ceased to act.

Still, even among such triumphs, another image kept rising before him. In the middle of fine meals, in crowded inns, or in the silence after a day of travel, he would suddenly see Chiyoko's tear-wet face in his mind. He would remember the soft pale down on her cheek, the trembling of her lips, the warmth of her arms, and the faint touch he had felt only once and yet could not forget. Those memories came to him with both fear and longing. Night after night they followed him into sleep.

Since Chiyoko was, in the world's eyes, his wife, one might say that loving her was now the most natural thing possible. And no doubt she too wished for the return of her husband's love. But that very ease made the temptation more dangerous. Many times Hirosuke thought, "Why should I not throw myself at her feet, confess everything, give up my lifelong dream, and die if death must come after that?" The thought was wild, but it returned again and again. The nearer the

desire came, the more painful it became.

Yet from the first moment of his plan, he had decided that Chiyoko must remain only a wife in name. He had never imagined that her charm would wound him so deeply, but even before that, reason had told him to keep away from her. A face, a voice, a figure, these might deceive the world. But the private body of a man, seen without clothing by the true wife of the dead husband, was another matter entirely. Somewhere on that body there might be some small difference, some mark, some shape, some habit unknown to others and unforgettable to her.

So he fought himself with harsh words. "Can you throw away the great dream of your life for one woman, no matter how lovely she is?" he asked. "If your dream is fulfilled, will there not be a stronger and stranger joy waiting for you than anything human love can give? Think of even one small part of the paradise you have imagined. Compared with that, is not the love between one man and one woman a small thing?" In this way he stood between dream and reality, unable to give up the dream, unable to silence the real desire before him, and so he suffered in a double torment.

In the end, the old dream and the fear of exposure proved stronger than desire. To drown his grief, and to drive Chiyoko's lonely face from his mind, he threw himself into the great enterprise with still greater violence. After returning from the journey, he quietly sold off the least noticeable securities first and used that money to begin preparations. Painters, sculptors, architects, civil engineers, and gardeners began coming daily to the Komoda house. Under his orders, plans unlike anything ordinary men had seen were drawn, corrected, thrown away, and drawn again.

At the same time, orders went out for trees, flowers, stone, glass, cement, steel, and all manner of materials. Messengers were sent to distant places, even to the South Seas, and workers of every kind were called in from many regions. There were carpenters, ditch diggers, and tree planters, but also a smaller and stranger group: electricians, divers, boat builders, and other men whose purpose no one outside the project could understand. Another odd thing also became noticeable. Young women, not quite maids and not quite attendants, were hired one after

another until there seemed scarcely room for them all.

After many changes of plan, the chosen site became the lonely island at the south end of S District. The design office was moved into a temporary barrack built there, and the engineers, the workers, and even those mysterious young women were sent over the sea to the island. As the ordered materials began to arrive, the true labor started. Walls rose, land was altered, and the whole place began to change under Hirosuke's will. It was the first visible body of the dream that had once lived only in his head.

Naturally the Komoda relatives and the heads of the family businesses did not remain silent. As the work advanced, they crowded into his reception room day after day, speaking in loud voices, demanding explanations, calling the whole thing reckless madness, and begging him to stop the project before the family fortune was ruined. But Hirosuke had expected all this from the very beginning. He had already resolved, if necessary, to throw away half of the Komoda wealth. Most of the relatives stood beneath the main house in position and fortune, and when argument failed, gifts of money could quiet many mouths.

Thus a full year of struggle passed. During that year Hirosuke suffered more than any outsider knew. More than once he nearly abandoned the whole undertaking. More than once the relation between him and Chiyoko came near a point beyond repair. Yet the endless force of money kept saving him. Money softened relatives, solved practical troubles, brought in new men, bought silence, and pushed the work onward. Before such wealth, impossibility itself seemed to step aside.

But money could do nothing against Chiyoko's sorrow. Even if her family could be calmed, she herself could not be comforted. Since the day of the false resurrection, she had watched her husband's nature change in a way she could neither understand nor deny. She cared less about the danger to the family fortune than about one thing alone: the loss of the husband's love. "Why does he look at me with such strange eyes?" she must have asked herself. "There is no hatred there, and yet he keeps away from me as though I frighten him."

Hirosuke understood her pain too well. He often stayed on the island overnight,

sleeping in the office there. Even when he returned to the house, he kept a careful distance, spoke without warmth, and arranged matters so that they slept in separate rooms. Then, many nights, from the next room he would hear the faint sound of Chiyoko's hidden sobbing. He had no words with which to comfort her. At times he felt that he himself might begin to weep.

This unnatural state lasted for nearly a year, which was already the limit of what either of them could bear. Then, by a small opening of fate, the long strain broke. One evening, because the main earthworks and garden works on the island had almost reached completion, the principal people involved in the project gathered at the Komoda house for a modest celebration. Hirosuke, wild with happiness because his long desire was so near fulfillment, moved about in high excitement, and the younger technicians matched his mood. There was sake, noise, geisha from town, and laughter that went on until long after midnight.

By the end, the guests drifted away in different directions. Some stayed at the house, some vanished into the town, and the reception room looked like a shore after the tide had gone out, with cups and dishes left in confusion. In the middle of that disorder, Hirosuke lay drunk and half senseless. The one who remained to care for him was Chiyoko. What happened during that night is only partly clear, but the next morning told enough.

Hirosuke woke unusually early, at about seven, with a sweet memory in his mind and at the same time a terrible regret beating in his chest. After much hesitation, he crept softly to Chiyoko's sitting room. There he found her sitting pale and motionless, biting her lip and staring into empty space like a different person. "Chiyo, what is wrong?" he asked, trying to sound calm though despair was already rising in him. She did not answer.

"Chiyo..." he began again, but the words died in his throat. Her eyes met his, sharp as arrows, and in that instant he understood everything. Somewhere on his body there had indeed been some difference from the dead Genzaburō, and during the drunken weakness of the night, Chiyoko had discovered it. He dimly remembered her suddenly drawing back from him, growing stiff, then falling still as though dead. Now her suspicion had taken clear form, and the danger he had

feared from the very beginning stood at last before him.

He told himself bitterly, “What have you done? However drunk you were, how could you make such a mistake?” For a long time they faced each other in silence. Then at last Chiyoko, as if no longer able to bear the terror, spoke in a faint voice. “Please forgive me, but I feel very ill. Please leave me alone for a while.” With that, she suddenly dropped forward where she sat, and the silence between them turned from fear into something even darker.

Part 7

After Chiyoko fell forward and asked to be left alone, the house entered a strange silence. Hirosuke did not rush to her at once. He stood still for a moment, watching her as if her body itself might reveal the next danger. Then servants were called in a calm voice, excuses were made, and the day passed under a false appearance of illness and rest. But beneath that surface, both husband and wife had already crossed into a place from which there was no easy return.

During the next four days, Chiyoko’s mind moved in painful circles. At one moment she told herself that she must have made some shameful mistake. Even if she had seen a difference on that drunken night, how could that mean the man was not Genzaburō? Could there truly be another man in all Japan who looked so exactly like him? And if such a man did exist, could he possibly perform a miracle like rising from Genzaburō’s grave and returning to the house in burial clothes?

Yet another current of thought pulled her the other way. Since the resurrection, her husband’s nature had changed too sharply. He had become cold to her, secretive, obsessed with the island, and strangely distant from the life they once shared. The great work on Okinoshima, the unexplained separation between them, and the physical proof she believed she had seen all stood together in her mind like dark witnesses. More than once she thought she should tell someone everything and ask for help before it was too late.

Hirosuke, meanwhile, remained shut up in the house under the excuse of illness. He stopped going to the island works for a few days and instead watched Chiyoko

with careful fear. He studied the way she walked, whether she spoke with maids, whether she sent messages, whether her old nurse was treated with unusual confidence. At times he almost calmed himself, thinking that perhaps her doubt would fade on its own. But each time he saw her keep away from him, refuse to attend him, or answer in only the smallest words, his fear returned more strongly than before.

He told himself that even if the secret had not yet gone outside the house, it might already be spreading in whispers among the servants. A careless look, a half-heard word, or a sudden change of manner could destroy everything. And if Chiyoko truly believed him an impostor, then no amount of money would keep him safe forever. So after four days of hesitation, he made a hard decision. He would take her to the island, show her the world he had created there, and end the danger in the midst of that dreamlike place.

That afternoon he called her into his room and spoke with studied calm. "You seem stronger now," he said. "I must go back to the island, and this time I may not return until the whole work is finished. I want you to come with me and stay there for a while. It will be a change for you, and I also want to show you the strange work I have nearly completed." He spoke as if the wish were kind and natural, but inside him he was measuring every movement of her face.

Chiyoko did not agree at once. Her suspicion had not left her, and she tried one excuse after another. She said the trip would tire her, that the sea air might not suit her, that perhaps another time would be better. Hirosuke answered each objection with patient pressure, sometimes gentle, sometimes firm, and he went on so long that she had little strength left to resist. At last, half persuaded and half forced by his will, she bowed her head and agreed.

There was one more discussion about whether her old nurse should come too. Chiyoko seemed to want another woman near her, perhaps for comfort, perhaps for safety. But Hirosuke would not permit it. He spoke of the many women already on the island, of the shortness of the trip, and of the inconvenience of extra company. In the end the matter was settled as he wanted. That same afternoon the two of them set out alone.

The railway ran along the coast for about an hour and ended at T Station. From there a motorboat, already prepared for them, took them out over rough water for another hour toward Okinoshima. Chiyoko sat beside him through the trip with a heart divided in two. She still feared him, and yet she also felt a strange happiness at traveling alone with him again after such a long cold separation. More than once she prayed in silence that the terrible thing she thought she had discovered might prove to be nothing but her own mistake.

What made the journey more painful and more sweet was Hirosuke's behavior. He was unusually kind. On the train and on the boat he talked more than usual, pointed out the passing scenery, and attended to her with a quiet care she had not felt from him in many months. He seemed almost like the husband of earlier days, and the journey itself began to remind her of a honeymoon. Because of that, her fear slowly loosened, and for a little while she wished only that the hours might stretch on without end.

As the boat neared Okinoshima, she saw something strange floating in the water about twenty yards from the shore. It was like an enormous buoy with a broad iron-covered top, and in the middle of it there was a small opening like a hatch. The boat was tied beside it, and a gangway was set across. When they stepped down onto the iron surface, Chiyoko turned and looked again toward the island. What she had thought was only dark rock now seemed less natural than before.

Hirosuke pointed upward with quiet pride. "Look carefully from here," he said. "Those masses rising like cliffs are walls of concrete. From outside they seem only part of the island, but inside them I have hidden marvelous things. And do you see that high scaffolding above the rocks? That part is not finished yet. There I will make a hanging garden, a flower world in the sky." His voice had begun to change as he spoke, growing warmer and more alive, as if the island itself were waking him.

Then he smiled and said, "Now let us enter my dream country. There is nothing to fear. We go down through this opening, pass under the sea, and come up on the island itself." He took her hand as he spoke, and to his own surprise the touch moved him deeply. Even while remembering that he might soon have to kill her,

he felt her warm skin with a painful tenderness, and for one dangerous moment he wished the journey could remain only what it seemed to be: a secret shared by two people alone.

They went down through the hatch and descended a dark shaft for some distance. At the bottom, a passage opened sideways like a corridor in some great building. Chiyoko had scarcely taken a step into it before she cried out in shock. The tunnel was made of glass, and on every side, above and below, right and left, the sea itself was visible.

Thick glass plates were fixed in frames of concrete, and powerful electric lights shone outward into the water. All around them lay the bottom of the sea, close enough to seem almost within reach. Black wet rocks, huge streaming weeds, swarms of fish of every size and color, great octopuses stuck against the glass, and crawling sea creatures moved in that pale shining world. Beyond the circle of light, the water darkened into a blue-black depth where countless unknown things seemed to crowd and wait. Chiyoko turned pale at the sight, and Hirosuke, pleased by her terror, said softly, "You are surprised, are you not? But this is only the entrance. Farther on, there are stranger things still."

Part 8

So began the strangest journey of their lives, a kind of false honeymoon through the dream country that Hirosuke had made with stolen wealth and mad desire. The two travelers moved side by side, and yet each carried a secret against the other. Hirosuke still planned to remove Chiyoko forever, while Chiyoko still kept, somewhere in her heart, the terrible doubt that this man might not be her husband at all. But the strange beauty around them softened those hard thoughts for a while. Instead of hatred, a sweet and painful closeness seemed to rise between them.

More than once Hirosuke felt his fixed resolve shake inside him. As he walked beside her, holding her hand under the glass roof of the sea, he wondered whether he should throw everything away. He could confess the truth, give up Panorama Island, and let himself be destroyed if that was the price. Such thoughts came like

sudden light in a storm, but they never lasted long. The dream that had ruled him for years was too strong, and the danger Chiyoko posed was too real.

He said quietly, “Chiyo, are you lonely?” Then, after a short pause, he added, “We are walking alone together under the sea. Are you afraid?” Chiyoko moved closer to him and answered in a low warm voice, “No, not while you are beside me. The things outside the glass are strange and frightening, but if you stay near me, I am not afraid at all.” Little by little, she seemed to forget the fear she had brought from the house, and she gave herself over to the wonder of the path before her.

The glass tunnel bent and curved on and on like a great snake. Even with the strong electric lamps, the sea kept its dark, pressed-down air, and the distant sound of waves came from far above like a dull beating through the world. Outside the glass, creatures moved through blue-black water that seemed to belong to some other life entirely. At first Chiyoko had felt only blind terror. Then the terror changed into wonder, and wonder slowly turned into a dreamlike joy that she had never known before.

Fish passed through the dark distance like small lamps, their eyes shining like moving lights over a summer river at night. As they drew closer to the lamps outside the tunnel, their shapes slowly came out of the black water one by one. Some came straight toward the glass without moving tail or fin, as if they were hidden machines cutting through the sea. Others slipped out of darkness so suddenly that Chiyoko almost cried out each time. It seemed to her that the sea was not full of fish, but full of visions that were waiting to show themselves.

Sometimes the tunnel rose until the sea above the glass ceiling looked thin and near, and at other times it sank so deep that even the strong lamps showed only a narrow ring of pale light. Beyond that light there was nothing but endless darkness. Along the rocks and across the sea floor, great forests of seaweed moved in slow curves. Thick brown plants bent and lifted like trees in a storm, long thin ones twisted like snakes, and red growths clung to the rocks like fresh blood or torn flesh. Chiyoko, who had seen dried sea plants on shore since childhood, now felt horror and wonder at seeing them alive, breathing, touching, and seeming almost

to speak to one another.

Among those moving plants, the sea's hunters appeared. Small sharks crossed the light with pale bellies and hungry eyes, fast as thieves. Thick-mouthed fish struck at the glass as if they wanted to bite through it, and when their wet mouths spread wide against the shining wall, Chiyoko shivered and pressed close to Hirosuke. Yet beauty also came from the same dark water. Striped fish, bright fish, flat fish, and fish with shining fins passed near the tunnel in colors so sharp and unreal that they looked like painted designs made alive.

One fish in particular filled her with both joy and fear. It came out slowly from the dark, larger than the rest, its body bright and pale, with bold dark lines across it and a strange long fin rising from its back like a banner. As it moved close to the glass and then swam alongside them, Chiyoko could not help giving a cry of wonder. "It is beautiful," she whispered, clutching at Hirosuke's sleeve. He smiled with satisfaction and said, "You see now why I wanted you to come. But there is much more ahead, and I want your judgment more than anyone else's."

Then he showed her another device set into the lower part of the glass wall. It looked like a small swelling in the glass, but when he told her to bend down and look through it, the whole sea changed. At first she saw only a cloudy blur. Then, as she moved her eye, something huge and terrifying came into view. There on the sea floor, among great bag-like plants floating upright in the water, a monstrous beast seemed to crawl toward her with a huge mouth and rough spotted skin, like some ancient dragon of the deep.

Chiyoko pulled back with a cry and turned toward Hirosuke, but he laughed softly and told her not to fear. "It is only a strong lens," he said. "Look through the ordinary glass, and you will see the truth." When she did so, the giant monster became only a small ugly fish creeping along the bottom, and the great floating bags became nothing more than sea plants. Even after he explained it, she could not resist looking again and again through the trick lens, half frightened and half delighted by the false giant world it created. The island, she now understood, was not only a place of beauty, but also a place where the eye itself could be deceived.

Yet the thing that shocked her most was still to come. After they had walked

farther, she felt a faint trembling above the water, almost like a warning in the air. Then a large pale shape shot through the dark and disappeared among the weeds. Chiyoko caught Hirosuke's arm, and he whispered, "Watch that place. Keep looking there." Bubbles began to rise, and from the sea floor a smooth pale form slowly lifted itself, as if it had grown out of the black water itself.

First she saw white skin, then a forehead, then smiling eyes, and then red lips drawn back in a strange bright smile. A woman was there under the sea, swimming on her stomach and coming straight toward the glass. Chiyoko nearly collapsed, and Hirosuke had to hold her up. "Do not be afraid," he said. "She is one of my women. She is a skilled diver, and she has come to welcome us." Chiyoko gasped like a child, "A person... here, at the bottom of the sea," and could say no more.

The naked diver rose before the glass and then stood almost upright in the water, her dark hair waving over her head, her body covered with shining bubbles. Supporting herself with one hand against the glass wall, she moved beside them as they walked. In some places the glass bent in hidden ways, and each time she passed one of those places her body was strangely changed. Now she was cut in two, now her head seemed to float apart from her body, now her face grew huge and terrible, and now she became long and thin like something from a fever dream. Chiyoko could not decide whether she was seeing a woman, a spirit, or some creature that belonged only to Hirosuke's island.

Before long the diver could remain below no longer. She let out a flood of trapped air, and a wild cloud of bubbles rushed upward through the dark water. Then, leaving one last smile behind her, she beat the water with hands and feet and began to rise. Her body grew dim, then only her pale feet showed far above them, moving weakly in the dark like petals blown upward into the night. At last even those vanished, and Chiyoko stood still in the tunnel, breathing hard, feeling that she had now passed beyond the world she had known before.

Part 9

After that strange sea passage, Chiyoko's mind moved farther and farther away

from ordinary human life. T City, the Komoda house, her parents' home, and even the old ties of husband, wife, master, and servant all seemed to fade like mist. In their place there remained only two strong feelings. One was the deep charm of the world around her, which no common life could match. The other was the painful love she felt for the man walking beside her, whether he was truly her husband or not.

Hirosuke said gently, "Now we must pass through a darker way. It may be dangerous, so let me hold your hand." Chiyoko answered softly and gave him her hand at once. The glass path ended, and the two of them turned into what felt like a narrow cave cut through rock. She could not tell whether they were on land now or still under the sea, and in truth she hardly cared. His warm hand held hers so tightly that the darkness itself seemed less important than that one human touch.

They went on through the dark, feeling the walls and moving step by step, and to Chiyoko it seemed as if they had walked for a very long distance. In fact the passage was short. Then, without warning, the dark broke open, and a vast scene spread before them. A huge valley, or rather a long narrow waterway, lay across their path. Black cliffs rose on both sides like walls, and between them deep dark water stood still without the smallest wave.

At first it looked like a natural valley, but the more she looked, the more she felt that some mind had shaped it. The cliffs were too clean, the water too perfect, and there was not one rough thing to break the design. Even the sky above was strange, a narrow gray strip between the dark heights, as if evening had entered a place where day should still have lived. At the far end, where the cliffs seemed to meet, a white stair rose straight upward. It shone between the black walls like a line of milk or a frozen waterfall, so simple and so bright that it was almost painful to see.

While Chiyoko still stood in wonder, two large white swans appeared on the water and came slowly toward the shore where they stood. Their necks were high, their chests made soft lines in the black surface, and they seemed too large and too beautiful to be ordinary birds. Chiyoko said, "How big they are," and at almost the same moment a woman's voice came from the throat of one swan. "Please get

on,” the voice said. Before she could draw back, Hirosuke lifted her lightly and placed her on one swan’s back, then climbed on the other himself.

“Do not be frightened,” he said. “These too are my servants. They will carry us to the white stair.” The swans obeyed as if they understood every word. As they moved across the water, Chiyoko began to feel something strange under her body. The thing below the feathers was not the shape of a bird alone. Beneath the covering she felt warm human flesh, moving shoulders, and the strong hidden body of a young woman swimming under the white bird form.

But she had no time to think further, because new wonders rose from the water itself. One naked young woman came up smiling beside her, and Chiyoko knew at once that it was the diver who had appeared below the sea. Then another came, and then another, until a whole group of shining bodies moved around the swans. Some swam beside them, some dove under the black water, some rose and waved from far away, and others seemed to dance against the dark cliffs like figures from an old Greek painting. Then, high above on the cliff edge, more women appeared and threw themselves down into the water in many graceful forms, falling like flower petals through the air before vanishing into the dark pool below.

So the swans carried them at last to the foot of the white stair. Seen from near, it rose so sharply that it seemed to press against the sky itself. Chiyoko stepped down and at once said, “I cannot climb this.” Hirosuke smiled and took her hand. Before she could resist, he had already led her twenty steps upward, and, strangely, the terrible height she had feared began to lessen.

When they reached the top, the mystery grew stranger still. The stair that had looked as if it climbed into the clouds turned out to be far lower than she had believed. It was tall, but not impossibly tall, and she could not understand how her eyes had so greatly deceived her. Before them lay a sloping strip of grass leading into a dark forest, while behind them the black valley now looked like a boat-shaped crack in the earth. On the water below, the two swans floated like scraps of white paper, and the small grassy place between valley and forest shone red-gold in the late spring light, with white butterflies flying low above the warm ground.

The forest ahead was no common forest. It looked endless, and yet it also seemed arranged by an evil but careful hand. The trees stood close and high, their tops joining above like the roof of a church, and the deeper shadows were as dark as the sea they had just left. The whole mass of the forest gave Chiyoko a strange feeling, as though some giant hidden face or monster shape lay buried in it. Hirosuke saw her pause and said, "Why do you stand there? There is nothing to fear. Look, our obedient servants are waiting."

Near the entrance stood two donkeys with fine smooth coats, tied quietly under a tree. Hirosuke told her they would carry them through the woods, and so the two of them climbed onto the small animals and went forward. Inside the forest, the ground was thick with fallen needles and leaves, so the donkeys made almost no sound at all. Great tree trunks rose like the round pillars of a vast hall, and high above them leaves joined in arch after arch. It did not feel like a wild wood. It felt like a temple built by nature and corrected by a human dream.

The farther they went, the more clearly Chiyoko felt that the place had been arranged. There were no useless shrubs, no ugly breaks, and even the curves of the narrow path seemed chosen to shape the mind of the traveler. No bird sang. No animal cried. Now and then a low sound moved through the darkness above, like wind in branches or the deep notes of an organ in a church, and that strange music only made the silence feel greater. They rode on without speaking, as if words themselves might damage the sacred fear of the place.

After some time, a silver light began to enter the forest. Half the tree trunks shone pale, while the other half remained black, and the long rows of them looked like shining and dark columns standing side by side into the distance. Chiyoko asked in a dry voice, "Are we near the end of the forest now?" Hirosuke said, "No, but there is a pond ahead." Soon they reached it. The water was heavy and still like melted metal, and across it stood a few old camellia trees, dark and thick, each one carrying bright red flowers like drops of blood.

Beneath those trees, in a dim patch of ground, lay a beautiful young naked woman, stretched on the moss and looking down into the water. Chiyoko almost cried out, but Hirosuke raised a hand for silence, and they stood still together. The

girl did not move. She seemed to have forgotten the world, and the whole picture—the silent pond, the red flowers, the dark forest, and the pale body lying at rest—was so simple and so complete that it struck Chiyoko more deeply than any rich ornament could have done. As they finally turned away, one large camellia flower dropped from above, slid softly across the girl's shoulder, and came to rest on the still water without making even the smallest ripple.

They rode on again through the forest, and as they went deeper, the way seemed more and more impossible to understand. It felt as if they were moving forward and backward at once, climbing and descending in the same step, and passing from one world into another without any clear boundary between them. At last the trees grew so close that they made a wall, and Hirosuke said, "Now leave the donkeys and follow me." He led her by the hand through branches and darkness, forcing a path where there seemed to be none. Then, suddenly, they burst out into full sunlight.

Before them spread a wide green plain under an open gray-blue sky. No forest could be seen anywhere. Chiyoko pressed her hand to her head and whispered, "What is happening to me?" Hirosuke answered with a strange bright excitement. He began to explain that this whole island was built like a giant panorama, a place where dark passages opened suddenly into complete new worlds. He told her that distance, light, slopes, and curves had all been arranged so that narrow places looked endless and small things looked vast, and that several such worlds had been made to stand side by side on this one little island. Chiyoko listened, but even after hearing the trick, she could not stop believing in the plain before her. It still seemed to run to the horizon, and tears slowly filled her eyes as she looked into that lonely, beautiful distance.

Part 10

What came next felt less like walking from one place to another than like falling out of one dream and into a second one. The change was so quick, and the short dark path between the two scenes was so uncertain, that Chiyoko could not tell

where one world ended and the next began. It was like those moments in sleep when the mind leaves one dream and enters another without waking. Everything changed at once: the color of the sky, the smell of the air, the very shape of the ground. She had the strange feeling that she had not crossed a path on one island, but had stepped from one kind of reality into another.

The new world was the flower land that Hirosuke had spoken of. But it was not a flower garden in any ordinary sense. Under a thick white sky, the land rose and fell in long swelling hills, and every hill was covered from top to bottom with spring flowers in full bloom. The sight should have been sweet and bright, yet it was not. The size of it, the unnatural order hidden inside its disorder, and the strange softness of the white sky made the whole place feel almost wicked.

Chiyoko swayed and nearly fell, and Hirosuke had to catch her. “Are you ill?” he asked. She pressed one hand to her head and said, “My head hurts. I do not know why.” A strong scent filled the air, but it was not like the scent of a fresh morning garden. It was heavy, warm, and thick, almost like the smell rising from living flesh after heat and effort, and though it was not exactly unpleasant, it made her dizzy at once.

The hills themselves troubled her almost more than the scent. Their lines were not like the lines of normal land. The curves crossed and leaned against one another in a way that made the eye uncertain and the body uneasy, as though the hills might begin to move in the next moment and roll over the watcher like waves. “I am afraid,” she whispered. Hirosuke smiled very slightly and said, “Afraid of what?” She answered, “I do not know. I feel as if I have come to a place where I should never have come, and I am looking at something I should never have seen.”

At that moment a group of women appeared from behind one of the flower hills. They came slowly, almost like a festival line, and their bodies were painted so that their white skin had a faint blue tone, with soft purple shadows that made every curve stand out more strongly. Their lips were bright red, their dark hair lay loose upon their shoulders, and they moved with a smooth rhythm that was neither walking nor dancing. One after another they formed a silent ring around Hirosuke and Chiyoko, saying nothing, smiling only with their eyes.

“These will carry us,” Hirosuke said. Before Chiyoko could fully understand him, he lifted her and set her down upon a seat made from the joined bodies of the women, and then he placed himself beside her. The human seat moved forward at once, soft and steady, over the flower-covered ground. At first Chiyoko should have felt shame, or at least sharp surprise, but the place itself had already pulled her too far away from common life. The warm moving flesh beneath her knees and hands felt less shocking than natural, as if this world had always obeyed different rules.

The path wound between the hills in curves so smooth that the body felt them before the mind understood them. Sometimes the seat rose gently, sometimes it sank, and sometimes it bent to one side in such a graceful line that Chiyoko felt a kind of pleasure merely from being carried along it. The flowers underfoot were so deep that they formed a soft living carpet, and the women’s steps made almost no sound. Somewhere in the air music had begun, or perhaps it had already been there for some time. It did not seem to come from instruments, but from the whole place itself, like a low song passing through flowers, air, and skin.

The true beauty of that world did not lie only in its scent, or in the white sky, or even in the flowers. It lay in the endless crossing of those strange curves. No ordinary mountain line, no human body, no statue made by a sculptor could match them. They were beautiful and ugly at the same time, full of desire, disorder, and pressure, like the shapes seen in fever dreams or in moments of wild half-sleep. At times Chiyoko felt that the whole flower country was pressing against her not with hands, but with invisible lines.

Now and then the winding path opened into wider spaces. Then she saw, far away across a slope bright with flowers, groups of naked men and women running, chasing, laughing, and singing under the gray-white sky. Some looked no larger than little pale dolls in the distance. In one place a young woman ran down a hillside and fell close to the path, and a man came after her, lifted her in both arms, and walked away singing with her held against his chest. In another place giant trees stretched branches over the path, and from those branches hung women like strange fruit, their hair and limbs moving in the wind while they sang with the

same gentle terrible music.

The journey seemed to go on for a great distance, though in truth Chiyoko could no longer judge time or space in any clear way. The scent grew stronger. The music grew fuller. The hills seemed to bend inward, and the road, though beautiful, seemed slowly to draw all things toward one hidden center. At last they came to a huge hollow shaped like a bowl. From the high edges of that bowl, pale bodies rolled down the flower slopes one after another and dropped into a great warm bath at the bottom, laughing, splashing, and singing as they fell.

By then Chiyoko no longer knew when her clothes had been taken away. It had happened somewhere in the midst of the dream, and because everyone around her was naked, her own body no longer felt separate or shameful. She and Hirosuke found themselves in the warm water among the others, supported by the bodies of the women who had carried them there. Then the scene turned wild. More and more bodies came down the slopes, flowers were crushed underfoot and flew up like colored snow, steam rose thick into the air, and the singers in the water pressed together in such a moving mass that the whole bath seemed to become a living tide of flesh, scent, voice, and heat.

It was impossible to say how long that lasted. Chiyoko lost all measure of time. The music, the flowers, the water, the warm bodies, and the thick scented air passed over her until she felt almost emptied of thought. Then, little by little, the noise went away. When she next understood anything clearly, night had already come. The white sky had turned dark like a storm cloud, the flower hills had become great black shapes, the music had stopped, the singers were gone, and the women who had supported them had vanished without leaving the slightest sign behind.

Only Hirosuke and Chiyoko remained in the hot bath, with steam lifting around them into the dark. Chiyoko felt human again all at once, and with that return came fear. "Please, let us go home now," she said, shivering in the warm water. At first Hirosuke did not answer. His head floated on the black surface like a dark buoy, still and almost lifeless, and when she moved toward him and caught him by the neck, he finally said in a slow distant voice, "We will go, but first there is

one last thing I want you to see.”

“I cannot bear any more,” she cried. “This island is too terrible. The tricks here are terrible, and the mind that made them is terrible too.” Hirosuke answered quietly, “Am I so terrible?” She spoke with painful honesty then, because the darkness and the long excitement had broken her ordinary caution. She told him that she loved him more than anything in the world, and yet had begun to fear him, to fear that he no longer loved her, and to fear even more what he might say in such a place if he spoke his true mind. Hirosuke replied, “I know very well that you doubt me,” and the moment he said it, a sharp fear passed through her, as though she had heard those exact words once before in some older, darker life.

“Please do not say any more,” she begged. “Do not speak. Only take me away.” But at that very instant the darkness above them split open with a violent sound. Fire burst across the sky in strange colors, spreading and hanging there far longer than ordinary fireworks, like bright painted shapes fixed in the air. Chiyoko clung to Hirosuke in terror, and he said with a low excitement that frightened her even more, “Do not be afraid. These are my fireworks, made for my dream land. That is the last thing I wished to show you.”

Part 11

The fire did not bloom and vanish like common fireworks. It stayed in the sky with a hard shining life of its own, as if some picture had been hung upon the dark itself. At first the shape was only a bright broken pattern, but then it gathered into the clear form of a huge golden spider. Its long legs opened across the sky, and each joint moved in a slow ugly way, so that the thing seemed not painted but alive. It hung over the flower land and the black bath below, and little by little it appeared to sink closer toward them.

Chiyoko could hardly breathe. Of all things, a spider was the one shape she hated most, and this one seemed to cover the whole heaven. Even when she tried to turn away, her eyes went back to it again, partly from fear and partly from the same strange charm that had filled the island from the beginning. What shook her

still more was the feeling that she had seen all this before. The darkness, the hot water, Hirosuke's head floating near hers, the same dreadful words, the same shower of sparks over the sky—everything seemed to return like a half-remembered nightmare now becoming real.

“I do not want to see any more fireworks,” she said, her teeth shaking as she spoke. “Please stop frightening me. Please take me home now. Let us go back at once.” But the great spider had already begun to fade into the dark, and Hirosuke only answered in a low, almost gentle voice. “So even fireworks frighten you. That is troublesome. The next one will not be ugly like that. It will be a beautiful flower, so endure a little longer. Do you remember the black tubes standing on the far side of this pool? Those are the firework tubes, and the men below are sending them up for us.”

As he spoke, his hands moved onto her shoulders. They did not rest there lightly. They closed with such force that she felt as if iron rings had been fastened around her body. In the warm water she could not easily pull away, and his face, lit now by one color and now by another, looked less and less like the face of any man she had known in ordinary life. She understood then that she was trapped. The whole island, with its wonders and its sweetness, had led only to this dark center.

“Listen, Chiyo,” he said, and now his voice dropped the last shadow of tenderness. “I know very well that you have doubted me. I knew it in the house. I knew it in your silence. I knew it even while you still clung to me and loved me.” Chiyoko shook her head wildly and cried, “No, no, please do not say another word. I am afraid to hear you speak here. Say nothing, and only take me away.”

But he would not stop. “Until yesterday, until even a little while ago, you still loved me, even while you asked in your heart whether I was really Genzaburō. But now what is it? If I speak honestly, if I lay everything open before you, do I become a monster to you? Do you hate me now as an enemy?” His hands pressed harder as he spoke, and Chiyoko could feel the wild trembling beneath his anger. It was not only rage in him. It was hurt pride, desperate love, and the madness of a man who had gone too far to return.

“Let me go,” she cried. “Please, let me go home.” Hirosuke answered at once,

“So that is it. You do think of me as your husband’s enemy. You think of me as the enemy of the Komoda house. Then listen carefully.” His face came so close to hers that she could see the strange light in his eyes. “I love you more than anything on earth. I love you so much that I could almost wish to die with you. But I still have one thing I cannot give up.”

He spoke then with the full nakedness of a man who has torn open his own heart. He told her that he had killed Hitomi Hirosuke and brought Komoda Genzaburō back from the grave. He told her how much labor, danger, and sacrifice had gone into the making of that false life and this dream kingdom around them. “In another month,” he said, “the island will be complete. After all I have done, I cannot cast it away and die now. I cannot. Because of that, Chiyoko, there is only one path left to me. I must kill you.”

At those words, all strength seemed to leave her body. Then, in the next moment, terror gave her strength again, and she clutched at him with shaking hands. “Do not kill me,” she begged in a dry broken voice. “I will do anything you say. I will serve you as Genzaburō, just as before. I will tell no one. I will never speak of this, not now and not later. Please, please do not kill me.” Hirosuke stared at her under a new wash of blue fire from the sky and said, “Do you truly mean that?”

For an instant she thought she saw a path of escape. She nodded again and again, weeping openly now, promising silence, obedience, anything at all. But even as she pleaded, she understood that he was not a man who could trust such a promise. He had built the whole island out of distrust, secrecy, and desire. No spoken vow from her lips could loosen the fear in his mind. And perhaps, in the deepest place of his heart, he had already chosen the end before he spoke to her at all.

Then everything happened at once. The colored fire in the sky changed again, and under that strange light Hirosuke threw himself upon her with the violence of a wild animal. She slipped in the hot water, cried out, and tried to break from his grasp, but he followed at once and dragged her down against the side of the bath. What began as an attack almost looked like an embrace. Their naked bodies struck together, slid apart, and locked together again in the steam and colored light.

Chiyoko fought with all the strength that fear could give her. She twisted, struck,

pushed against his chest, and tried to pull air into her throat for a cry, but his hands found her neck and closed there. Even then the struggle did not look simple or clean. It looked like some terrible play of life and death, a dance of two beings who had once loved each other and could not untangle love from ruin. At moments their faces pressed close, their tears mixed, and their hearts beat against each other so wildly that one might have mistaken the scene for a desperate act of passion instead of murder.

But the pressure on her throat did not ease. Hirosuke, half mad with grief and desire, held on while she writhed beneath him like a fish caught in a net. Her movements grew weaker, then strangely graceful, as if death itself were drawing curves through her hands and arms. At last her pale fingers opened toward the sky several times and caught only emptiness. A thin line of blood slipped from one nostril across her white face, and just then an enormous golden flower of fire opened above them and hung clear in the black sky, pouring its false splendor over the flower land, the hot pool, and the two tangled bodies below.

Part 12

From the day Chiyoko died, Hirosuke never again returned to the Komoda house in T City. He remained on Panorama Island as if he had crossed some final border and could no longer step back into ordinary human life. The island was now not only his artwork, his hiding place, or his kingdom of pleasure. It was the whole world he meant to inhabit. There, as master of that mad country, he settled into a new life that was built upon death, beauty, and a lie too great to undo.

Of course Chiyoko's absence could not go unexplained. She had vanished from the world of parents, servants, old habits, and family duties, and many eyes waited for some answer. But Hirosuke had already become skilled in handling danger. He knew how to speak to each person according to that person's weakness, hope, or fear. So he turned even this new crisis into one more part of the great performance he had been acting since the night at the grave.

"Chiyoko is the queen of Panorama Island," he said. "She will never again wish

to return to the human world.” When he spoke in that way, he did not speak like a husband making excuses. He spoke like a ruler announcing the law of a country that existed apart from all common judgment. He described her as a being who had passed from one form into another inside the island. At times, he said, she moved among the crowded groups of living statues. At other times she was a mermaid below the sea, a snake woman in the land of poisons, a spirit hidden among flowers, or a queen resting deep in the inner palace behind rich curtains and golden rooms.

To hear him speak so beautifully was itself a kind of danger. His words had music in them, and when joined to the strange setting of the island, they weakened the simple working of ordinary reason. That was what happened when Chiyoko’s old nurse came all the way to the island to ask after her mistress. The old woman had been with Chiyoko since childhood, and she came not as an enemy, but with real worry in her heart. Hirosuke received her not in a plain office or a family room, but in the underground palace built beneath the island, seated on a throne with the cold grandeur of an emperor receiving a subject.

The old nurse was overwhelmed before he had even spoken much. The underground halls, the strange light, the deep still air, and the silence of the hidden palace seemed to press on her from every side. In such a place, Hirosuke’s beautiful lies grew stronger than truth. He spoke gently and richly, telling her that Chiyoko had become drunk on the beauty of the island, just as Urashima Tarō in the old tale had forgotten home and time in the Dragon Palace. He told her there was no cause for fear, because her beloved mistress now lived in the highest joy imaginable, far beyond the sadness and dust of human life.

Whether the old woman was convinced, or only frightened into silence, hardly mattered. She left without seeing Chiyoko, and she had no power to force the matter further. That was how almost everything was handled. Chiyoko’s father received one large gift after another. Other relatives were quieted in different ways: some by money, some by favors, some by pressure, and some by the knowledge that it was safer not to ask too much. Official persons too were remembered in proper fashion, and through the careful hands of old Tsunoda,

every dangerous mouth was softened, sealed, or turned away.

On the island itself, no one was allowed to see the queen clearly. Hirosuke ordered that she remained hidden night and day in the deepest part of the underground palace, behind the heavy curtains that lay beyond his own rooms. No servant, performer, or worker was to enter there. But this secrecy did not create suspicion so much as excited a kind of smiling curiosity. The people of the island already knew their master's strange tastes, and so they only whispered that behind those curtains there must lie some secret world of pleasure reserved for the king and queen alone.

In truth, very few of them knew Chiyoko's face well enough to question anything. Most had seen her rarely, if at all, and those who might once have recognized her had already grown used to a life in which the eye could not trust what it saw. On Panorama Island, human bodies became birds, statues seemed to breathe, and the sea itself hid women in its depths. In such a place, what was one more concealed queen? No one wished to challenge the dream when the dream paid so well.

That was one of the deepest truths of the island. Hirosuke could do almost anything because wealth held the whole mad structure together. Poor relatives became suddenly comfortable. Broken-down circus girls, silent film actresses, and female performers of all sorts were treated there like great stars. Young writers, painters, sculptors, and architects received pay that men of their age could never have expected elsewhere. Even if they felt some shadow of fear, what courage had they to abandon the island that fed them, praised them, and let them take part in a living fantasy unlike anything in Japan?

So at last the paradise on earth truly began. The whole island gave itself over to a carnival beyond reason. Everywhere there were naked women blooming among flowers, mermaids troubling the hot pools, fireworks that seemed not to die, statues that moved, steel monsters dancing in black mechanical frenzy, drunk beasts laughing like men, and snake dancers winding through poisoned lands. Through the midst of it all moved litters of beauty, human platforms, music, steam, scent, light, and painted bodies, joined into one endless celebration. And above or

among them, wrapped in rich shining robes, Hirosuke appeared again and again with the wild smile of a king who had gone beyond sanity and no longer knew that he had done so.

At times he was carried through the island on a human platform like some god from an eastern fable. At other times he climbed the great concrete pillar that rose in the middle of the island. Blue ivy spread across its surface, and around it ran a spiral stair like an iron vine twisting upward to the top. When he went up that stair, step by step, the lower scenes changed their form beneath him. The gardens, ponds, forests, and pathways lost their separate shapes and seemed to fold themselves into a single design.

From the strange mushroom-shaped top of that pillar, one could see the whole island at once. But what one saw there was not the series of worlds known to the travelers below. Seen from above, the red walls and huge masses of the island spread outward in overlapping shapes like the petals of one colossal flower floating on the sea. It was as though the entire island had turned into a single red blossom drifting on the ocean under the open sky. That view, with its vastness and its almost terrible simplicity, had a beauty so strange that some visitors may have felt they were looking into a forgotten age before history, when gods and monsters still walked openly upon the earth.

How can one describe the days and nights that followed? The island became a place where madness, pleasure, cruelty, theater, lust, and dream all mixed until no clear line remained between them. Men and women lost themselves there in dances, games, drunken joys, violent amusements, and spectacles of life and death that seemed too wild even for nightmares. If one tried to gather all the ugliest and most splendid visions of sleep and join them to the richest colors of a painted world, perhaps one might come a little near the truth. Yet even then, the real Panorama Island would still have remained stranger.

Part 13

One day, after many days of endless pleasure, a strange uneasiness came over

Hirosuke. He could not name it clearly. Perhaps it was the sadness that sometimes comes even to a winner. Perhaps it was simple weariness after too much pleasure. Or perhaps the fear of old crimes, long buried under beauty and noise, had risen at last from the bottom of his heart. But there was another cause as well, one more exact and more dangerous than any dim feeling. A certain man had come quietly to the island, and with him he seemed to bring an evil sign that spread through the air around Hirotsuke.

Hirosuke first noticed the man standing near the hot pool in the flower garden. The figure was plain and quiet, almost too quiet, as if he wished to be forgotten. Hirotsuke turned to one of the poets who served on the island and said, "Who is that man standing there? I do not remember seeing him before." The poet answered, "Have you forgotten, sir? He is one of the literary men you hired in the second group. He went home for a time, so perhaps you have not seen him lately. His name is Kitami Kogorō."

The name itself did not strike Hirotsuke strongly at first, but after that day the man seemed to appear everywhere. In the flowers, across the steam of the bath, behind the iron machines, between the statues, among the trunks of the forest, Hirotsuke always felt Kitami's eyes on him. It was not that the man behaved rudely or openly followed him. Rather, he seemed always to be standing in the right place at the right time, watching without seeming to watch. That quiet persistence began to work on Hirotsuke's nerves more than any loud accusation could have done.

At last, one day near the great central concrete pillar, Hirotsuke could bear it no longer. He found Kitami standing there in a dull, absent way, leaning against the huge round wall like a gloomy schoolboy lost in thought. "You are Kitami Kogorō, are you not?" Hirotsuke said. "It seems a little odd that wherever I go, you are there too." Kitami lowered his eyes respectfully and answered, "No doubt that is only chance, sir." Hirotsuke said, "Chance? Perhaps so. But what were you thinking about just now, standing here alone?"

Kitami answered, "I was thinking about a story I once read, a story that made a deep impression on me." Hirotsuke asked, "A story? By whom?" Kitami said, "You probably do not know it. It was never printed, and the writer was not famous.

It was a short story called ‘The Tale of R.A.’ by a man named Hitomi Hirosuke.” At the sound of his old name, Hirosuke did not start or show fear. He had trained himself too well for that. In fact, along with caution, he felt a strange pleasure at hearing that some forgotten writing of his had once moved another person.

So he answered calmly, “Yes, I know that name. He was a friend of mine from my student days, though not a close friend. He wrote rather fairy-tale-like stories. But I never read this one. How did you come to see the manuscript?” Kitami replied that he had once worked at a Tokyo magazine office and had known Hirosuke there. He explained that the story had been admired by him but suppressed by the editor because its rich and dangerous description seemed too much for a young unknown writer. Then he added with quiet weight, “You really did not know that story, sir? And you never heard its outline from Hitomi Hirosuke himself?”

Hirosuke answered with care that he had hardly spoken deeply with Hirosuke in the old days. They were only classmates who exchanged greetings. Kitami accepted this in form, but not in spirit. He kept pressing gently, little by little, like a man testing a weak place in a wall. He told Hirosuke that the dead writer had killed himself by drowning and that a note had been found, and then, with a half-smile, he remarked again on the strange likeness between Hirosuke and the dead man. Hirosuke laughed and said, “We were often teased about that. God plays curious tricks.”

The day itself seemed to support the dark turn of the talk. The sky was covered with low gray clouds, and though no wind moved, the sea around the island made a wild animal sound below the blackening air. The huge round pillar rose beside them like a stair for devils climbing into the storm. There, alone for once, without his usual human litter or attendants, Hirosuke kept listening while Kitami spoke more and more boldly. “There is another strange thing,” Kitami said. “That old story of Hitomi Hirosuke’s. The scenes in it and the scenes on this island are the same, almost from beginning to end. The agreement is too close to be chance.”

At those words Hirosuke finally felt real cold move under his skin. He tried to hold himself firm and asked, “And what of it?” Kitami said, “If you had read the

story or heard it from the author, you might explain that you copied it knowingly. But you have just closed that road yourself. You say you never knew it. Then how can this island be such a perfect living image of that manuscript? It can only be because the maker of the island and the writer of the story are one and the same man. In plain words, you are not Komoda Genzaburō. You are Hitomi Hirosuke.”

For one moment Hirosuke cursed himself inwardly. Before beginning the great fraud, he had looked over his old writings to see whether anything dangerous remained. But he had forgotten the rejected manuscript, “The Tale of R.A.” He had even forgotten that he had written such a thing. Yet now, as Kitami spoke, memory returned clearly. Yes, he had written it. Since his dream of artificial landscapes had filled him for years, it was only natural that it had appeared once as fiction and later as fact. The weakness in his careful plan had been that forgotten story lying in another man’s hands.

Even so, he was not defeated at once. He gathered himself and answered with forced ease, “That is a foolish theory. Suppose I were Hitomi Hirosuke. What then? I am still Komoda Genzaburō, whatever you say.” But Kitami had gone too far to retreat. He told Hirosuke that the manuscript was only the beginning, not the true proof. He said he had been asked by the wife of Komoda’s sister, the East Kōji family, to watch matters from afar. More importantly, he said he had observed the disappearance of Chiyoko and had understood that if Hirosuke were truly an impostor, Chiyoko must have been his greatest obstacle. From that thought, he had begun to search for her body.

Then Kitami showed the final proof. In the surface of the great concrete pillar, half hidden among creeping vines, one long hair had become fixed. He drew it out for Hirosuke to see. “You know what this means,” he said. Hirosuke’s hand moved toward his pocket, but Kitami raised a pistol and warned him not to try. Then, taking out a large knife, he drove it again and again into the concrete below the trapped hair. The white surface cracked, and at once bright red liquid began to flow down from the wound, spreading across the pillar like a red flower. “There is a human body inside,” Kitami said calmly. “The body of Madam Komoda.”

Hirosuke turned pale as death, and Kitami went on with cruel kindness. He

explained how he had reasoned that Chiyoko must have been killed, how the story “R.A.” had suggested burial in concrete, and how the date of her disappearance matched the time when cement had first been poured into that very pillar. He even spoke of the older crime at the temple graveyard. He had reasoned that the missing corpse of Komoda need not have revived at all, but could have been moved into the neighboring grave, where the grandfather’s bones already lay. “Your kindness was admirable,” Kitami said bitterly. “Grandfather and grandson now rest together, bone embracing bone.”

By then Hirosuke had collapsed against the pillar, close to the very place where Chiyoko’s hidden blood had shown itself. Yet suddenly he sprang up and began to laugh in a dreadful hollow way. “Yes,” he said. “You have found it all. There is not one mistake in what you say. But the truth is, I was already near ruin even before you came. At first I thought of fighting you, but what would that gain me? A month more, perhaps half a month more, of this life of pleasure. That is nothing. I have made all that I wished to make. I have done all that I wished to do. I have no regret left.”

Then, in a tone almost calm, he admitted that the Komoda fortune could support the island only about one month longer. Kitami answered that he had no wish to turn so great an artist over to the ordinary law if it could be avoided. He said he hoped Hirosuke would choose his own end cleanly. Hirosuke thanked him for that and asked only one thing. “Let me remain free for thirty minutes,” he said. “Then wait for me by the hot pool in the flower garden.” Kitami agreed. Hirosuke gave no further word. He only turned and disappeared beyond the far side of the great pillar, leaving the air around it heavy with storm, blood, and the end that was now coming near.

Part 14

About ten minutes after Hirosuke disappeared behind the great pillar, Kitami Kogorō went to the hot pool in the flower land, just as they had agreed. He did not go there like a man hurrying to stop a criminal. He went almost quietly, as

though he were keeping an appointment with an artist at the close of a performance. Around the pool, many naked women still moved or rested as part of the island's endless show, and so Kitami entered among them and lowered half his body into the pleasantly warm water. He waited there with an outward calm that would have seemed impossible to another man.

The sky was still covered from end to end with black cloud. No wind moved through the flower hills, and not the smallest wave crossed the surface of the pool. The broad slopes of blossoms, which had once looked full of scent, music, and wicked joy, now lay under a dull silver-gray light like something asleep or dead. Even the many women bathing there kept an unnatural silence, so that the whole place seemed less like a garden than like a huge picture cut from colored paper and pasted flat against the world.

Then time began to lengthen in a strange way. Ten minutes felt like twenty, and twenty felt much longer still. Nothing changed anywhere: not the fixed sky, not the motionless flower hills, not the breathless pool, not the silent bodies half hidden in steam. Kitami, who had been so sharp and active while speaking beside the pillar, now found himself caught in the same dreamlike stillness that had always ruled Panorama Island. It was as if the island, before allowing its master to die, wished to hold all living things in one last unmoving pose.

Even in that stillness, Kitami's thoughts did not rest. He knew Hirosuke had accepted defeat, but defeat did not mean simplicity in a man like that. Such a man would never walk quietly into an ordinary end if some grander image remained possible. Kitami thought of Hirosuke's love of spectacle, of scale, of terror mixed with beauty, and of the fireworks that had more than once filled the island sky with monstrous shapes. So he waited not only for a man, but for some final invention.

At last the silence broke. From one corner of the pool, where dark pipes and hidden devices stood among the flowers, there came the sudden crack of a firework launched at the wrong hour. All heads turned upward at once, and in the next moment the watchers saw something so beautiful that even fear gave way first to wonder. A vast flower of light opened high against the black cloud, so

enormous that it seemed to cover almost the whole sky above the island.

It was not like an ordinary firework that bursts, shines briefly, and dies. This thing grew and continued growing. Its colored petals spread outward in layers, and as they opened, they changed their shapes and shades with the rich turning order seen inside a kaleidoscope. Red, blue, gold, green, and purple moved into one another without losing their brightness, and the whole giant flower widened and widened as though all flowers in the world had been gathered and forced to bloom in a single burning form.

Because the sky was dark and the flower hills below were lit only with that dead silver-gray, the colors looked stranger than they would have looked at night. They did not shine sharply like stars. They glowed with a thick softened brilliance against the low black clouds, and the effect was more terrible than cheerful. As the huge flower slowly descended, spreading wider while it came, it looked less like a firework than like a colored ceiling lowering itself over the whole island, ready to press beauty and death down upon everything beneath it.

The women in the pool cried out in admiration, and even Kitami forgot caution for a few moments and stared. Then he noticed something odd in the shifting five-colored light. On the cheek of one woman, and on the bare shoulder of another, he saw little red drops. At first he thought it was only the firework color reflected on wet skin or on beads of steam and water. But almost at once the drops became more numerous, and they did not vanish when the color in the sky changed.

A warm wet touch fell upon Kitami's own forehead and then upon his face. He raised a hand, wiped the drops away, and looked at his palm. What lay there was not colored water, but real blood, bright and unmistakable. While he still stared at it, more drops fell, then thin streams, and soon the red rain came down more heavily from above, sprinkling faces, breasts, shoulders, flowers, and the steaming pool itself with human blood.

Then something pale and heavy drifted upon the water in front of him. It floated softly, turning once in the steam, and when Kitami looked closely, he saw that it was a human wrist torn violently from the arm, the fresh red cut opening like a horrible flower at the end. For one instant the whole meaning of the sky, the

firework, and the thirty minutes Hirosuke had asked for became clear without need of explanation. Somehow, in a last act worthy of his madness, Hirosuke had joined his own body to his own spectacle and had blown himself apart in the heavens over the kingdom he had made.

Yet the strangest thing was not the blood or even the severed flesh. It was the stillness with which the island received them. The naked women did not scream and flee in ordinary terror. They seemed only dimly puzzled, as if even this shower of blood and meat belonged to the dream logic of Panorama Island. Kitami too remained nearly motionless, his head leaning against the edge of the pool, his eyes fixed upon the torn hand floating near his breast, because ordinary action itself felt foolish before a death so theatrical and so complete.

In that way the end came. Hitomi Hirosuke's body was shattered into fragments together with the giant firework, and his blood and pieces of flesh fell like a red rain over every corner of the Panorama Kingdom he had stolen wealth, love, and life to create. His last performance did not merely kill him. It spread him across his own dream country, over the flower hills, the steaming bath, the hidden scenes, and the many false wonders that had risen from his imagination. Thus the creator of Panorama Island vanished at last into his own creation, not as a king leaving his kingdom, but as a broken offering scattered over it from the sky.