

AI-Generated Graded Readers

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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: Mabuta no Haha (瞼の母)

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Hasegawa Shin, *The Remembered Mother [Mabuta no Haha]* (Simplified Edition,
Adapted and Simplified from Japanese by ChatGPT)

Part 1

Dramatis Personae

Bamba no Chutaro
Hanjiro of Kanamachi
Omura, Hanjiro's mother
Onui, Hanjiro's sister
Kihachi
Shichigoro
Children

[Prologue]

Scene 1. The Tile Maker's House at Kanamachi (Spring)

[Near the Edo River, in Kanamachi. It is the house of Sobei, a tile maker. It is spring in the first year of Kaei. The time is from late afternoon into night.]

At the right stands the main house, with a dirt-floor entrance and a room facing a veranda with sliding paper doors. It is a strong house with a grass roof. In the middle and to the left is the place where tiles are made, with several ovens. Beyond that is a low fence. Outside the fence is the road, with a few trees.

Onui is near the yard. She pretends to drive chickens into a small pen, but she is also watching the road. Several children run about and play hide-and-seek.]

KIHACHI. [calling one child closer and asking something]

CHILD. [shakes head; the other children gather around and stare at Kihachi and Shichigoro]

SHICHIGORO. Knows nothing? That makes no sense.

KIHACHI. There you go again, Shichi. This is not your home ground. We crossed the river. We are in another place now.

SHICHIGORO. Even so, they are village brats. How can they not know?

CHILDREN. [grow afraid; one runs, then two, then all of them run away together]

KIHACHI. Look at that. You scared all the children away.

SHICHIGORO. Let them run. We came to ask at this house.

[Onui quietly starts toward the main house.]

SHICHIGORO. Hey, young woman.

ONUI. Yes. [she stops, though she does not want to]

KIHACHI. This is the tile maker's house at Kanamachi, yes? We want to see Sobei.

SHICHIGORO. Bring out the old man called Sobei.

ONUI. My brother went to Ise with the people of his religious group.

KIHACHI. So he is away. I see. Then who is at home?

SHICHIGORO. Is there any man here besides you?

ONUI. The workmen are off today, and the apprentice has gone to Gyotoku on an errand.

KIHACHI. I am not asking about people like that.

SHICHIGORO. We are asking if Hanjiro has come back. That is what we want to know.

ONUI. Hanjiro is not here.

SHICHIGORO. Do not lie.

KIHACHI. Easy, Shichi. Do not speak that way. She is a pretty young girl. Ask quietly.

SHICHIGORO. She is the one speaking boldly. She says he is not here.

KIHACHI. Never mind. Young woman, I wrote a letter. Give this to Hanjiro.

ONUI. But he truly is not here.

SHICHIGORO. She still says it.

KIHACHI. Maybe he is not here now. But he will come soon. When he comes, give it to him without fail.

[Onui will not take the letter, so Kihachi throws it over the fence.]

KIHACHI. Come on, Shichi. Let us go.

SHICHIGORO. It would be faster if we just went in.

KIHACHI. Fool. We are known men. If we do a thing, we should do it the proper way.

SHICHIGORO. Proper is fine, but it takes too long. I hate that.

KIHACHI. Come along. Why hurry? He is a rat in a bag.

[Kihachi and Shichigoro leave.]

ONUI. [watches them go, then nervously picks up the letter]

[Hanjiro appears carefully from inside the house. He is a young gambler. He hurt a man and has been hiding. He came home the night before.]

HANJIRO. Onui. Onui.

ONUI. Brother, do not come out.

HANJIRO. Who was that? They did not sound like men from around here. And that letter—was it for me?

ONUI. Two strange men came and threw it here.

HANJIRO. Was one of them a smart man in his thirties? Then it must be my sworn brother, Bamba no Chutarō. I spoke with him last night. Let me see it.

ONUI. No. It was not a man like that. They were two bad men.

[She gives him the letter.]

HANJIRO. [sees the way it is sealed and is shocked]

ONUI. What is it, brother?

HANJIRO. Nothing. It is nothing.

[He does not open the letter.]

ONUI. Ha, ha. You cannot read, can you? Is that why you made that face? Shall I read it for you?

HANJIRO. No. That is not needed. I know well enough what it says.

ONUI. Still, it was left by strange men. I want to know. Let me see it. You can hold it all day, but you will not know what is written there.

HANJIRO. Where is Mother?

ONUI. She went to Taishaku Temple. She should be back soon. Give me that letter.

HANJIRO. You should not look at it.

ONUI. Give it to me.

HANJIRO. What are you doing?

[Onui snatches the letter and opens it.]

HANJIRO. Fool. Why did you look?

ONUI. Brother—this letter—

HANJIRO. I cannot read every word, but I know enough. Men from Iioka have come for my head. This is a challenge.

ONUI. Brother, brother. Then it is true. What can we do?

HANJIRO. If I were an honest tile maker, I could run or hide. But once a man steps into the dirty world of gamblers, he must answer steel with steel. If not, people will say he is no man.

ONUI. It says you must go to the river bank and fight for your life. Are you truly going?

HANJIRO. Yes. I am going.

[He tries to go inside to get his long sword.]

ONUI. Wait, brother.

HANJIRO. Do not stop me. Let go. Let go, I said.

[He goes in.]

ONUI. Brother, brother.

[She follows him, then quickly runs back and holds the sliding door shut from outside.]

HANJIRO. [inside, trying to force the door open]

ONUI. [holding it with all her strength]

[Hanjiro comes out through the dirt-floor entrance instead.]

ONUI. [clinging to him] No. No. Brother, wait.

[Omura enters. She is Hanjiro and Onui's mother, returning from the temple.]

OMURA. Hanjiro, where are you going?

HANJIRO. Mother.

ONUI. Mother, something terrible has happened. Look at this.

[She shows her the letter.]

OMURA. [she is deeply shocked by the words, but controls herself] Hanjiro, have you still not done enough to hurt your mother?

HANJIRO. When you say that, I have no answer.

OMURA. It is late for scolding, but I will still say it. You were not there when your father died. You sent no word home for years. Then you come back for one night, and at once this trouble begins. Was it not enough for you to make bloody trouble in other lands? Must you come back to the place where you were born and bring blood here too?

HANJIRO. I am sorry. But, Mother, I did not ask for this fight. A man cannot refuse when it is pushed on him.

OMURA. Be quiet. What kind of man makes his mother and sister cry, then speaks of being a man? Look at your brother Sobei. He is kind to his mother and to his sister. He is kind to other people too. That is a man. You only boast. You rush into fights. You cut and stab. You do not work. You waste your days in play and gambling. What kind of man is that?

HANJIRO. Mother—

OMURA. This time you came home. Good. Then you will not leave again. When Sobei comes back, I will speak with him. We will make you live like a proper man. We will send you to your uncle in Hitachi. You will change.

ONUI. See, brother? That is why I stopped you.

HANJIRO. Since last night I have thought deeply. I did want to become an honest man. But after a call like this—

OMURA. You still say that? If you must go out to fight, then kill your mother first and go after that. Hanjiro, go inside the house.

HANJIRO. Yes. [but he does not move]

OMURA. I told you to go inside.

HANJIRO. [at last, with no choice, he goes into the house]

OMURA. [puts the letter into her robe, whispers to Onui to watch outside, then goes in after him]

ONUI. [drives the chickens into the pen]

Part 2

[The light slowly fades. It grows darker and darker. Somewhere far away, someone sings a song. Chutaro, a traveling gambler now past thirty, moves quickly from behind a tree and stands outside the fence, watching the house.]

ONUI. [after putting the chickens into the pen, she starts toward the house]

CHUTARO. Excuse me.

ONUI. [looks at him and is shocked again] Ah.

CHUTARO. I spoke too suddenly. Forgive me. You are Onui, are you not?

ONUI. Yes.

CHUTARO. [steps inside the fence and stands where the ovens hide him from the road] Did your brother not tell you about a man called Chutaro? I came with him to this very gate last night.

ONUI. No. Hanjiro has not come home. He was cast out long ago.

CHUTARO. Oh, I know that part well enough. Men who become gamblers are often cast out by their families. Onui, let me see your brother for only a moment. I need no more than a few words.

ONUI. No. Hanjiro is not here.

CHUTARO. How can that be? I myself urged him to come home, and I walked

with him to this place.

ONUI. [troubled, but stubborn] He is not here. Truly, he is not.

CHUTARO. It is natural for you to doubt a stranger. Still, it stings a little. I come as his sworn brother, and you hide him from me with all your heart. Hanjiro is lucky. He has a sister who cares for him so much.

[Omura comes out from the house.]

OMURA. You ask for my foolish son Hanjiro. Who are you, sir?

CHUTARO. Are you his mother? My name is Chutaro. I have deep ties with Hanjiro.

OMURA. So you too have come looking for him. Hanjiro was cast out. We struck his name from the family. He does not come to us. If you have business with him, please look elsewhere.

CHUTARO. If we keep saying the same thing, we will be here all night. Then let me put it another way.

OMURA. Do you ask me to pass on a message? How can I give a message to a man who is not here?

CHUTARO. I see. And yet, when I look at you and your daughter, both saying again and again that he is not here, I can feel the love in your words. For a man like me, who lost both parents, one by death and one by separation, and does not even know his mother's face, such love is hard to bear. It makes me envy other people's families.

OMURA. If you can say a thing like that, why do you come to drag Hanjiro out into danger? I feel almost ready to blame you. My son is bad, yes. I know that. But if better men had stood near him, perhaps he would not have fallen so far. It is foolish talk from a mother, but I cannot help resenting the friends who led him on.

ONUI. People say Hanjiro went to Iioka in Shimosasa and attacked a great boss there. They say many men were hurt, and that he has been running ever since. If that is true, then men like you are the reason.

OMURA. Every one of his friends must have had parents of his own. Do you men never once think of them?

CHUTARO. "Come play with me, little sparrow with no parent." [he lets out a slow breath]

ONUI. What?

CHUTARO. It is only a verse I once heard. Some man in Shinshu made it, they said. Ever since then I have remembered it. Foolish though I am, I always thought it was about me. I have parents, perhaps, but I know not my mother's face, nor even where she lives. I do not know what true family warmth feels like. Maybe that is why I think too much about it. I picture this and that in my mind, like dreams, like madness. Well then, I have caused enough trouble here. From this moment on, Bamba no Chutaro cuts all ties with Hanjiro. Farewell.

OMURA. Then you understand?

CHUTARO. A child with no parent feels these things more sharply than others. When he sees another man's mother and sister, he envies them. Sometimes he hates them too. Good-bye.

[Chutaro turns to go.]

HANJIRO. [throws open the sliding door and runs out] Brother. Brother.

CHUTARO. Hanjiro. Become an honest man. Do it. Do it.

[Chutaro goes.]

HANJIRO. Brother. He is gone after all.

ONUI. Brother, you will truly become an honest man from today on, will you not?

HANJIRO. [looking after Chutaro] I am sorry.

OMURA. [leaning against the fence and watching Chutaro leave] Hanjiro, is that man truly one with no parents?

HANJIRO. What? Brother Chutaro? He told me he was separated from his mother when he was five.

ONUI. And he has no father either?

HANJIRO. His father died when he was twelve.

ONUI. Then he is alone? No brothers, no sisters?

HANJIRO. None, he said.

OMURA. Is that so? Poor man. It must be a lonely life.

HANJIRO. I do not know if it is bitterness or sorrow, but he once told me that when he sees people with parents, he feels anger and sadness at the same time. It was Chutaro who told me to come home this time. He walked with me to this very gate last night.

ONUI. He said so himself.

OMURA. But his mother must be somewhere.

HANJIRO. He heard only a rumor that she is in Edo. He does not know where. Worse than that, he does not even clearly remember her name. Even if he searched, who knows whether he would ever find her.

OMURA. Then it is no wonder that he turned rough and wild.

ONUI. Brother, come inside. If those men come back, it will be dangerous.

OMURA. I did not know this trouble would rise tonight. But I spoke earlier with Seibei. He said there is a boat at dawn. It will go up the river, and from there you can enter the Mito road. Hanjiro, why not go to Seibei's boat before the night grows deeper?

ONUI. Yes, do that. Then even if those men return, you will be safe. Please, brother.

HANJIRO. [to Omura] I will do so. [to Onui] I have caused you worry. Forgive me.

ONUI. At our uncle's place in Naka Minato, become a firm and honest man. Please do.

HANJIRO. I will. I will never turn back to the gambler's road again.

OMURA. Then come in quickly. There is much to prepare, and I want to do at least a little for you before you leave.

HANJIRO. Mother, I am sorry for all the pain I gave you.

[Omura, Hanjiro, and Onui go into the house. A lamp is lit behind the paper door.

Kihachi and Shichigoro creep back and slip inside the fence. Chutaro follows after them, hiding himself again and again.]

KIHACHI. Shichi, whatever happens, keep quiet.

SHICHIGORO. I know.

KIHACHI. [listens at the door]

SHICHIGORO. [looks back toward the road from time to time; whenever he does, Chutaro hides]

KIHACHI. [coming back to him] He is in there for sure.

SHICHIGORO. Good. Let us rush in.

KIHACHI. No. I do not want people to say we hurt an old woman or a girl by mistake. Better to call the man outside and kill him cleanly.

SHICHIGORO. If the woman or the girl die with him, what of it?

KIHACHI. If it comes to that, it comes to that. I would cut down anyone if I had

to. But a man must think of his name. A good name brings a man closer to being a boss.

SHICHIGORO. You are still full of your grand plans.

KIHACHI. Of course. Strategy matters in every job.

SHICHIGORO. Fine then. I put the baggage together there.

KIHACHI. Good. That place will do. We kill him and leave at once. Shichi, let us begin.

SHICHIGORO. Right. [shouting toward the house] Hanjiro of Kanamachi, come out. Men from Iioka have come for you.

CHUTARO. [moves beside the ovens and crouches low]

[Inside, there is the sound of Hanjiro trying to rush out while Omura and Onui stop him. Kihachi and Shichigoro separate and take their positions.]

HANJIRO. [opens the door; Omura and Onui cling to him] Mother, sister, let me go. You hear them. Who is it out there?

KIHACHI. Kihachi, of the Iioka side.

SHICHIGORO. And Miyano Shichigoro too. Did you forget my voice? Come out.

OMURA. Please do not bring trouble to a son who has finally decided to become a decent man.

ONUI. Please. I beg you.

KIHACHI. Trouble? No. This is more proper than a common fight.

SHICHIGORO. Last year, on the night of the twenty-third moon, Shigezo of Sasagawa was killed. In revenge, our boss of Iioka attacked on the road back from Asahi town. The two who cut at him were you, Hanjiro, and that traveling dog Bamba no Chutarō.

KIHACHI. The boss got only a scratch, because you two were fast. But Tomozo and Kinshiro died, and the others were wounded. We have taken up the duty of revenge. Hanjiro, step out here.

SHICHIGORO. If you delay, we will rush in and cut down the old woman and the girl too.

HANJIRO. [to his mother and sister] You heard them. Those men will not put their blades away. I must go. It is life or death now. [calling out] If you are men, do not touch my mother or my sister.

KIHACHI. So long as you come quickly, I promise nothing will happen to them.

HANJIRO. Then I will go. I am a man too.

[He tears himself free and steps forward.]

OMURA. [with Onui, clinging to each other beneath the eaves, twisting in fear]

CHUTARŌ. Kihachi. Shichigoro. Turn this way.

SHICHIGORO. What? [turns] Ah. Chutarō.

HANJIRO. Brother.

OMURA. [with Onui, startled, but filled with sudden hope]

KIHACHI. This is rich. We may kill two birds with one stone. Two against two. Let us have a brave fight.

CHUTARO. I will not allow some neat little duel. Come together, both of you.

SHICHIGORO. Loud dog. I will put you to sleep first.

[Shichigoro cuts at Chutaro. Kihachi attacks Hanjiro.]

[Omura and Onui watch Hanjiro in terror. He is weaker than Kihachi.]

CHUTARO. Here you are.

[He strikes down Shichigoro in one sharp attack.]

CHUTARO. Hanjiro, leave that one to me.

KIHACHI. [seeing the fight turn against him, he leaps back, breaks through the fence, and escapes into the road] We will meet again. Remember that.

HANJIRO. [exhausted; his mother and sister rush to him from both sides]

CHUTARO. There will be no next time.

[He picks up Shichigoro's fallen long sword and throws it.]

KIHACHI. [outside the fence, ducking] Ah—

[The sword strikes him. He falls.]

HANJIRO. Brother, why did you come back?

CHUTARO. Those two fools thought no one was there. The way they talked made the whole thing plain at once.

HANJIRO. Then you had not yet set out for Edo?

CHUTARO. I felt something was wrong after I left. And night travel is a bother. There is a small shrine in the woods nearby. I thought I would sleep there and wait for dawn. Then these men came whispering together, so I followed them back.

OMURA. I treated you badly before. I was upset and spoke harshly. I said nothing but cruel things.

CHUTARO. When you speak so kindly now, I do not know what to say. Hanjiro cannot stay here any longer. Has he a place to run? If this were the old me, I would tell him to put on straw sandals again and flee with me down the gambler's road. But I will not say that now. Mother, do you have some plan?

OMURA. Yes. We will send him tonight to his uncle in Hitachi.

CHUTARO. Is everything arranged?

OMURA. Yes.

CHUTARO. Then I am at ease. Hanjiro, go carefully.

HANJIRO. Brother, I will go to my uncle. But what about you?

CHUTARO. Me? I go to Edo.

HANJIRO. To Edo? Have you found where your mother lives?

CHUTARO. Not for certain. Only a rumor. Still, if I think that my mother may be there, my heart grows light. Until I see her, I will protect my life. Even if I must do a cowardly thing on the road, I will cut down anyone who tries to stop me.

ONUI. The more I hear, the more sorry I feel for you.

OMURA. If your mother heard how much you long for her, she would surely be glad.

CHUTARO. Thank you, Mother. When you say that, I grow weak. A parentless child like me has a bad habit of becoming tearful.

OMURA. Forgive me for asking, but do you have enough money for the road?

CHUTARO. More than enough. If I must, I even have a hundred gold pieces sewn close to my skin.

HANJIRO. A hundred? Brother, I never knew.

CHUTARO. I saved it when the dice were kind. I thought that if I found my mother, and if she was poor, I might help her. Now I must go. Hanjiro, one day I will come and see you living as an honest man. But I cannot leave these bodies here with no word.

OMURA. We will manage somehow. You should go while you still can.

CHUTARO. Wait. This fellow has just the thing.

[He takes Shichigoro's writing case and opens a sheet of paper.]

CHUTARO. Hanjiro, you cannot write, same as me. Mother, if you know letters, take my hand and write what I say.

OMURA. Of course. What shall I write?

[She takes his hand as he holds the brush.]

CHUTARO. Write this. "The man who cut down these two is Chutaro, born in Bamba, Sakata district, in Omi."

[He repeats the words while she guides his hand. As he writes, tears begin to fall.]

ONUI. Mr. Chutaro, what is wrong?

HANJIRO. Brother, tears do not suit you. What is it?

ONUI. [stares at him]

CHUTARO. Mother, laugh at me if you wish. I was parted from my mother when I was five. When you take my hand like this, I feel as if I am leaning on my own mother for a moment. Sometimes, even now, even at my age, with a face rough enough for a beard, I long for that unknown woman like a lost child. I long for her. I long for her.

ONUI. [can no longer hold back her tears]

[Chutaro takes the paper. He pulls the dagger from Shichigoro's body and rises to

pin the note to a tree. Hanjiro looks from his mother to his sister, seeing the sorrow of parting in their faces.]

Part 3

Scene 2. A Summer Night Street

[It is still the first year of Kaei. A summer night in Edo, near a small shrine.

Everything is dark. Only one stone lamp burns with a small light. An old woman sits on the ground and plays a shamisen. A small lantern stands beside her. She begs for coins from people who pass.

A drunken workman squats nearby. He makes the old woman play and sings loudly. Chutaro, now in plain clothes after coming to Edo, stands a little apart and watches.]

OLD WOMAN. [plays the shamisen]

DRUNKEN MAN. [singing, then growing louder] Foolish, foolish. Now play the next one, old woman. A popular song this time. Yes, yes, play. [he sings another silly song, then laughs] Ha, ha. Good. Now a different one. [he sings again, then gets up] Ah, that feels better. Time to go.

OLD WOMAN. [puts out her hand for money, then slowly pulls it back in sadness]

CHUTARO. [steps forward, grabs the man by the front of his robe, and glares at him without a word]

DRUNKEN MAN. [frightened, gives a coin to the old woman, then slips away quickly]

OLD WOMAN. [bows again and again to Chutaro]

CHUTARO. You do not need to bow so much. How old are you?

OLD WOMAN. I am sixty.

CHUTARO. Have you no children?

OLD WOMAN. I had one once. But for certain reasons I gave him away, and now I do not know whether he lives or dies. My husband is dead. I am ashamed to be seen like this, but I live from day to day as best I can.

CHUTARO. [suddenly wondering if she may be the mother he seeks] The child you gave away—what was his name?

OLD WOMAN. [her face brightens with hope] Do you know my boy? Do you know Kotaro?

CHUTARO. Kotaro? Then it is not you after all.

OLD WOMAN. I see. Then I was wrong.

CHUTARO. [after a pause, trying one more question] Did you ever go to Omi when you were young?

OLD WOMAN. No. I have lived only in Edo. I have never gone beyond Kawasaki.

CHUTARO. I see. Do not lose heart, old woman. One day your son may still come

and call your name. Here, take this. I do not have much tonight, but take it.

OLD WOMAN. Thank you, sir. Oh—this is far too much.

CHUTARO. It is fine. Keep it.

[He walks a little way, then stops for a moment.]

OLD WOMAN. [bows many times and begins to play again]

CHUTARO. [starts walking once more, still searching for his mother with no clear path]

Scene 3. A Winter Night Street

[A street somewhere in Edo. It is a black winter night. Part of a guard hut can be seen.

A middle-class merchant's mother passes by slowly with a walking stick and a lantern. Her son comes hurrying after her. Chutaro, with a cloth over his head against the cold, happens to pass and stops to watch.]

MERCHANT. Mother. Mother. Wait for me.

MOTHER. Oh, Nao-chan, is that you? You are home already? You must be cold.

MERCHANT. I came back sooner than I thought. Well, Mother, how was it? Did you enjoy the magic show tonight?

MOTHER. Yes, I did. It was very good. Tomorrow night I will stay home, so you and your wife should go.

MERCHANT. Was it that good? I am glad. Shall I carry you on my back?

MOTHER. That is kind of you, but you are a young man. It would look foolish. I can walk slowly by myself.

MERCHANT. That does not matter. It is night. And even in daylight, who would laugh at a son carrying his own mother? Come now, Mother. When parents grow old, they should listen to their children. If you do not obey, I may have to scold you.

MOTHER. [laughing softly] Oh, dear. I cannot have my son scolding me. Very well, then. Carry me.

MERCHANT. That is better. Come, Mother. There. You are light as a child. It is nothing at all. If you feel cold, put your face against my shoulder.

CHUTARO. [watching them go, unable to hide his pain] What a happy mother. What a happy son. [very softly] How I envy them.

Part 4

[Act Two]

Scene 1. The Alley by Mizukuma

[It is now the autumn of the second year of Kaei, the year after the earlier scenes. This is the side alley of the eating house Mizukuma at Yanagibashi.

There is a tall black fence made of boards. To the right is the kitchen entrance of

Mizukuma. To the left stands a white storehouse. Somewhere near it is a willow tree, so the place looks very different from the open roads of the earlier scenes.

Otora, a woman past fifty, stands with her back turned at the kitchen door. She once knew the mistress of Mizukuma, but now she is poor and too old to earn much as a street woman. She carries a broken paper umbrella, and only the lower part of her body can be seen.]

MIYOSHI. [walking with Oyo, sharing one umbrella, humming a tune]

OYO. [nodding and repeating the tune]

MIYOSHI. Oh. The rain has stopped.

[She puts the umbrella together.]

OYO. Look. The sun is out again.

[She keeps singing softly.]

MIYOSHI. [taps the umbrella with her finger to keep time, hums again, and goes off with Oyo]

[Two fish sellers, Kumakichi and Kita, come along with poles on their shoulders and pass where the two women were.]

KITA. Huh. They did not even notice a fine man like me passing.

KUMA. A face like yours is not in fashion now.

[He is about to say more, but then sees Kingoro, a blind tough man, and gives a

stiff, unwilling bow.]

KITA. [also sees Kingoro, makes the same sour face, bows a little, and hurries away with Kuma]

[Kingoro is half drunk. He is a rough man. Zenzaburo, a cook from Mizukuma, follows him with a troubled face.]

KINGORO. Hey. You there with the pole. Stop.

ZENZABURO. Come on now. Do not trouble men who are only trying to do business.

KINGORO. They annoy me. Zenkō.

ZENZABURO. Yes.

KINGORO. Is the mistress really out?

ZENZABURO. She is out. Why should I lie? And listen, Kingoro. You must stop that talk. It puts me in a hard place.

KINGORO. Do not worry. When I become the husband of the mistress here, I will give you extra money as well as wages.

ZENZABURO. That is just the problem. How could I ever carry such words to her?

KINGORO. What is strange about it? She is a widow. I say I will marry her.

ZENZABURO. Use your head. You are still not even much past thirty. Our

mistress may look ten or fifteen years younger than she is, but she is past fifty.

KINGORO. Age means nothing. I love this house—well, and her too. Love has nothing to do with age.

ZENZABURO. We can leave that for another day. I am going now.

KINGORO. Fine. I will come later.

[The broken umbrella that had been still suddenly moves. Otoro is shoved, drops it, and falls hard.]

[At once Fujihachi, a man who washes dishes at Mizukuma, comes out in anger.]

FUJIHACHI. Hey, old woman. You were too stubborn, so I threw you out. Get away from here.

ZENZABURO. [asks Fujihachi what happened]

FUJIHACHI. [answers that she kept asking to see the mistress, so he said the mistress was out and threw her out]

OTORA. [pulling herself up] What do you think you are doing? If you want me gone, then make me gone properly.

FUJIHACHI. You still talk back? Did you not hear me say the mistress is out? And even if she were here, she has no reason to meet a beggar old woman like you. Go home.

ZENZABURO. Fujihachi, leave a creature like that alone and come back inside.

[He goes in.]

KINGORO. Hey, Fujikō. The mistress?

FUJIHACHI. She is out.

KINGORO. I see. So she is really out.

[He turns away in a foul mood.]

OTORA. Even if she has no business over there, I still have business over here.

KINGORO. What are you saying? I told you she is out.

[He shoves Otoro down again and goes.]

FUJIHACHI. There. If you had left when I told you, you would not have suffered for it.

[Chutarō now comes along. He has a new paper umbrella and new wooden clogs. He stops before the storehouse and watches. He sees what Kingoro has done and glares after him in anger.]

OTORA. Is he going to hit me too? He throws an old woman into the road, then raises his hand again, though he is no older than my own son would be.

FUJIHACHI. Fine. I will hit you if you want.

[Magosuke, a delivery boy, peeks out from the doorway with his carrying pole in hand.]

CHUTARO. [steps between them and shields Otoro]

FUJIHACHI. Oh? Are you this old woman's son?

MAGOSUKE. [comes out a little farther with the pole]

CHUTARO. Why do you bully an old person? A man should not do ugly things like that. Old mother, are you hurt anywhere?

OTORA. Every bone in my body aches.

MAGOSUKE. Fujisan, that old woman is a street woman from East Ryogoku. She is always the one left over at the end of the night.

FUJIHACHI. Oh? Still working at that age? Well, well.

CHUTARO. [hears the word and feels a sudden dislike]

OTORA. Yes, I am a street woman. Since you know that, perhaps you were once my customer.

MAGOSUKE. Do not joke. If I go anywhere, I go to Ofuku or Otake.

[He grows awkward and slips back inside.]

CHUTARO. [after a pause, looking at Otoro again] How old are you?

OTORA. My age? Why do you ask such a thing?

CHUTARO. Fifty-one? Fifty-two? Fifty-three?

OTORA. Somewhere around there, maybe. Will you ask my name next? That is usually how it goes.

CHUTARO. [gives Fujihachi a hard look]

FUJIHACHI. [feeling uneasy, goes back inside]

CHUTARO. Hold out your hand.

[He gives Otoro money.]

OTORA. Sir, you—

CHUTARO. Wait. Do not speak in that way. Just answer my questions. It is only a little money, but call it payment for your words.

OTORA. Oh, is that so? Then ask what you like. If it brings me no trouble, I will answer.

CHUTARO. Have you a grown child?

OTORA. A child?

[Her face falls, and she looks down.]

CHUTARO. [a dark fear rising in him] You do? You truly do?

OTORA. [starts to cry softly]

CHUTARO. I am sorry. I made you remember sorrow. Tell me then—what became of that child?

OTORA. If he lives, he would be thirty-one now. But he is dead.

CHUTARO. [lets out a breath of relief] I see. Then forgive me. I asked too much.

[He starts to go.]

OTORA. Sir, wait a moment. You are a kind man. Even the watchmen laugh at me and call me names, but you asked me such a question as if I were still human. It feels like many years since anyone treated me that way. Thank you. I will not forget it.

CHUTARO. Hearing such words is poison to me.

[He tries to go again.]

OTORA. There seems to be something heavy on your heart. Who are you looking for? If I knew, I would like to tell you.

CHUTARO. Every time I see an old woman, thin and worn by life, I think, "Perhaps she is the one." I have searched since last year. It will soon be a full year. But if there is no fate between us, we cannot meet.

OTORA. Who are you talking about?

CHUTARO. A woman around your age.

OTORA. Your mother, then.

CHUTARO. Perhaps.

[He turns away once more.]

OTORA. The mistress of this house too—back when I still knew her well—used to cry often and speak of the child she left behind.

CHUTARO. What?

[He turns and comes back close to her.]

OTORA. But that was not ten or fifteen years ago. It was longer ago than that.

CHUTARO. This is the eating house called Mizukuma, yes? And the mistress here left a child behind? Where was that? If you know, tell me.

OTORA. It is old, half-forgotten talk, but I think it was Omi. You look like a man of Edo, so perhaps that means nothing to you.

CHUTARO. I grew up in Edo from the age of thirteen, but I was born in the country. Did that woman truly think so much of her child?

OTORA. As I said, that was long ago. I do not know how she feels now. If you ask me, she has forgotten the child and never thinks of him now.

CHUTARO. No. A mother is not like that.

OTORA. Once we were close, almost like sisters. We helped one another. But in these past years, if she sees me in the street, she turns her face away. And if I come in need, she has me driven off, just as you saw now. Human hearts change when enough time has passed.

CHUTARO. Maybe that is true for other people. But a mother and child are not

like that. No matter how many years pass, a mother is still the one who gave birth, and a child is still the child. The same blood is in both. It cannot be otherwise.

OTORA. Then perhaps you should go and see for yourself.

CHUTARO. What? No. I cannot walk in there just because I heard the name of one province.

OTORA. That may be so. Ah, now you have made me think of my own boy again. I have stayed away too long. I will go visit him now.

CHUTARO. His grave? Wait. Take this for incense and flowers.

[He presses money into her hand.]

OTORA. This—this is a gold coin.

CHUTARO. Do not be afraid of it. I am no thief. You can see what I am—a gambler. It is not money earned with sweat. It is bubble money that rolled my way because the dice happened to fall well. If you can, old mother, leave that hard life and sell paste or some small thing instead. Your dead son will rest more easily.

OTORA. Yes, sir.

CHUTARO. Good-bye.

OTORA. Yes.

[She turns, bows, and goes.]

CHUTARO. [watches her leave, then turns back toward Mizukuma] Should I ask?

No, not yet. It is still too uncertain.

[Without knowing it, he walks a little away.]

FUJIHACHI. [opens the door a little with Magosuke and peeks out; neither of them likes Chutarō]

CHUTARŌ. [turns back again, thinking that this may truly be his mother's house, and happens to see them]

FUJIHACHI AND MAGOSUKE. [click their tongues and pull back inside]

CHUTARŌ. [takes this as a kind of challenge and starts back, ready at last to ask]

MIYOSHI. [returns from prayer with Oyo, talking as they come]

CHUTARŌ. [finds the two geisha looking back at him, loses his chance, and begins to move away]

Part 5

Scene 2. Ohama's Room

[This is the room of Ohama, the mistress of Mizukuma. On the right is a small inner garden. On the left is the corridor. The room is bright and showy.

Ohama, though she is fifty-two, still looks much younger. She leans beside a long brazier and smokes. Her daughter Otoyō, eighteen or nineteen, has finished her makeup and is changing her clothes. Fumi is with her, and the little maid Oseu moves about the room.]

FUMI. Ah, you look lovely. How fine it comes together. Mistress, do you not think so too?

OHAMA. [pleased] Heh, heh, heh.

OSEU. [forgets her work and stares at Otoyoy]

FUMI. Truly, if I were a man, I would never let a girl like this go.

OTOYO. Oh, stop. If it were you, I would feel too sorry for myself. Is that not right, Mother?

OHAMA. Yes, that is true enough. Heh, heh, heh.

OSEU. Would I not do either?

OTOYO. For you, Oseu, the best match would be the young vegetable seller's boy.

FUMI. Even that would be too good for her.

OSEU. [turns toward the mirror as if to look at herself, then suddenly lifts her head toward the corridor] Oh. There is a fight.

FUMI. What are you saying? Where is there a fight? Do not try to scare us.

OHAMA. It seems Oseu's ears were right. There is some noise.

OTOYO. Where?

FUMI. Ah, there really is. Is it not in our own house?

OSEU. Shall I go and see?

OHAMA. Leave it alone. In a house this large, little quarrels among the staff are nothing strange. I cannot stop for every foolish noise. Otoyō, hurry and go show your face. People say the finest treat at Mizukuma is first Otoyō, then the cooking. Go on now.

FUMI. There is still one more thing they say, Mistress.

OSEU. I know. They say our mistress looks ten or fifteen years younger than she is.

OHAMA. Heh, heh, heh.

OTOYO. Tonight it is the retainer from Lord Tanshū's house, yes? Very well, Mother.

OHAMA. Yes. Fumi, take good care of her.

[Otoyō and Fumi go toward the far end of the corridor. Oseu remains and begins putting things in order. The angry voices outside grow louder.]

OHAMA. That noise again. The one shouting is Fujikō, is it not?

OSEU. I think I hear the cook too.

[The sound of a plate breaking is heard.]

OHAMA. [losing patience] Oseu, go and tell them to stop at once. Tell every last

one of them to come here together if they want to quarrel.

OSEU. Yes.

[She hurries out. Zenzaburo, still in his cook's working clothes, appears at the corridor and kneels just outside the room.]

ZENZABURO. Excuse me.

OHAMA. Cook, are you at it again? You are noisy enough to wake the dead.

ZENZABURO. It is not that, Mistress. There is a strange man here. He says he must see you.

OHAMA. A strange man? What kind?

ZENZABURO. I cannot tell what he wants. He is a rough fellow, the sort one does not like to let inside. It would be better to send him away.

OHAMA. Is he drunk?

ZENZABURO. No. He is sober enough. That makes me trust him even less.

OHAMA. What does he say?

ZENZABURO. He says only that he has business with you and that he will not go until he speaks.

OHAMA. Then bring him here.

ZENZABURO. Mistress, that is a bad idea.

OHAMA. What nonsense. If I cannot deal with one man like that, how could I keep a house like this standing? Bring him here. I will put him in his place and send him off.

OSEU. [already on her way] Yes.

OHAMA. All of you stop fretting and go back to your work. I carry this whole house on my back. I will not lose to some man.

ZENZABURO. That may be true, but I still do not like it.

OHAMA. Watch me. You will see him roll up his tail and run.

[Zenzaburo turns back toward the kitchen. Fujihachi and the others begin to go away. Chutaro now enters, led by Oseu. He pays no mind to the hard looks from the men. He places his hands on the floor outside the threshold. The others leave.]

OHAMA. If you have business, then come in and say it. I will hear you out. But I hate long talk, so understand that first.

CHUTARO. Thank you kindly.

[He steps over the threshold and sits in a lower place in the room. Oseu slips out to the corridor and listens.]

OHAMA. Well? Are you not going to speak? You came here for some purpose.

CHUTARO. Yes. I will speak.

[But he hesitates, unable to find the first words.]

OHAMA. What is it, then?

CHUTARO. Mistress, I ask this knowing it is rude. I ask it ready to be turned away and broken for my boldness. But have you, by any chance, a memory of once having had a son about my age? I know the question is shameless. Still, I had to ask it.

OHAMA. [starts, but does not answer]

CHUTARO. Ah. Then you do remember something. I can see it in your face. The place is Sakata district in Omi, one mile south of Samegai, at a mountain posting town called Bamba near Surihari Pass. I am from there.

[He waits for her answer.]

OHAMA. [she remembers, but when she sees Chutaro's rough clothes and gambler's air, fear and caution quickly rise in her] I know Bamba well enough. What of it?

CHUTARO. What?

[He stares at her, uncertain.]

CHUTARO. Do you know the inn called Okinagaya, kept for six generations by Chubei?

OHAMA. Yes. I know it. When I was young, I was married there.

CHUTARO. Mother—

OHAMA. What is the meaning of this? Do not behave in that strange way.

CHUTARO. Forgive me. I spoke out of turn.

OHAMA. Who are you, then?

CHUTARO. My name is Chutaro.

OHAMA. [looks at him closely] What did you say? Chutaro? I did once have a son named Chutaro, from whom I was parted. But that child is dead now.

CHUTARO. No. No, he is not dead. We were parted when I was five. It has been more than twenty years now, almost thirty. In all that time we had no word from each other and did not even know if the other lived. Is that why you have let yourself believe there is no such child? Mother and child may be torn apart, but blood still joins them. That bond cannot truly be cut. I am Chutaro, son of Okinagaya in Bamba. I am that boy, Mother.

OHAMA. Wait. Wait. You know a great deal about Bamba. But no matter how much you speak to me in this way, it will not do.

CHUTARO. What do you mean?

OHAMA. It is true. Through my uncle in Kano in Mino, I was married into Okinagaya at Bamba, and I bore a son called Chutaro.

CHUTARO. Then that Chutaro is me—

OHAMA. Listen to me first. When that child was five, I left Okinagaya.

[Her eyes fill with tears.]

CHUTARO. My father died of illness when I was twelve, so I did not hear it from him directly. But when I grew older, I was told that when you left, the fault lay with him. They said his conduct was bad. They said the blame was his.

OHAMA. I did not truly wish to leave. I had a dear child there. But things became twisted beyond repair, and at last the tie was cut. After that, for many long years here in Edo, I would look toward Omi morning and night, toward clouds that hid Bamba from my eyes, and I would weep.

CHUTARO. I was five, so I should have remembered at least a little. Yet when I try to call back the face of the mother who bore me, nothing comes clear. I have cursed myself for that dull head of mine. For many years I have searched with no guide at all, like a man reaching into clouds. And now, Mother, I too am past thirty.

OHAMA. Be still. You are not the son I bore.

CHUTARO. What? Not your son? Then I am not Chutaro?

OHAMA. Your name may be Chutaro. You may even have been born at Bamba in Omi. But that proves nothing.

CHUTARO. Then still I am—

Part 6

OHAMA. Do not come closer, you shameless man. My Chutaro died of sickness when he was nine. Even last night, when I woke in the dark, I thought that if he had lived, he would be thirty-one or thirty-two now. I still count the years of a dead child. So if I, his own mother, look at you and feel you are not him, then that

is the truth. Go home. Leave at once, for your own good.

CHUTARO. I remember well that I nearly died when I was nine. What people heard was wrong. Chutaro did not die. He lived. He stands before you now.

OHAMA. Do not try to creep into this house with such a story.

CHUTARO. Creep in? Then you think I came here for money?

OHAMA. What else should I think?

[Oseu quietly slips away to call the cook and the people at the front.]

CHUTARO. No. No. That is not it. I may look poor, but I do not live in want.

[He takes out the money belt he has carried close to his body and sets a great sum before her.]

CHUTARO. I do not know my mother's face, but I thought that if fate let me meet her at last, and if she was living in hardship, I would place this in her hands like a gift. I won this money long ago, and whatever happened after that, I never touched it. I kept it warm against my body all this time. When I saw this house and all the people who serve in it, I felt easy in my heart. I thought, "So my mother lives in comfort." But because you have wealth around you, you have become careful and full of doubt, and now even when your own child stands before you, you cannot believe him. That is hard. That is a bitter thing.

OHAMA. Bitter? It is I who have reason to complain. I live quietly here, and every day I enjoy this house because I have my daughter beside me. Then suddenly a wild man appears and says, "The son you thought dead is alive. I am he." You have come to raise trouble in my home.

CHUTARO. Mother, that is cruel.

OHAMA. There you go again. “Mother,” you say. I know your heart well enough. You call yourself Chutaro, and your eye is on the wealth of Mizukuma, the wealth that will one day go to Otoyō. You mean to take half of it.

CHUTARO. What?

OHAMA. I have seen both the front and the back of this world. Do you think I would miss a scheme like that?

CHUTARO. [bursts into tears]

OHAMA. [stares hard at him]

CHUTARO. [wipes away his tears; his whole manner changes] Mistress, then I will ask once more, clearly. Do you truly say that you do not remember a man called Chutaro of Bamba in Omi? Do you truly say that your own son Chutaro is not me?

OHAMA. I say it.

[Chutaro takes up the money again, as if it has become a useless thing.]

[In the corridor, Yohei from the front room, the cook Zenzaburo, and Fujihachi creep closer, hiding weapons.]

OHAMA. If you understand that much, then stop forcing this talk of parent and child and go quickly.

CHUTARO. Is it human nature that we love those who are near and grow cold to those who have been far away too long?

OHAMA. No mother forgets her child. But each child is different. And if you come looking for your mother, why are you not living as an honest man?

CHUTARO. Mistress, I will not take that lesson from you. It is too hard to blame a boy who lost his mother and went bad. It is too late now for honest life. I stepped deep into the old swamp of a gambler's road, and no washing will clean me. Even if I tried to live as a decent man, who would be happy for me? I have no one. I am alone. So be it. My place is again under the wide sky, in whatever province my feet may carry me. I may as well put my traveler's sandals on at once.

[Someone in the corridor knocks against something.]

CHUTARO. Who is there?

[He throws open the sliding door.]

ZENZABURO. [with Yohei and Fujihachi, stepping back in fear]

CHUTARO. This is no talk for your ears. Get out. Move.

[He slams the door shut again.]

CHUTARO. Then good health to you, Mistress. Chutaro will not trouble this house again. I do not mean to complain, but someone once said that husband and wife are tied for two lives, while parent and child are tied for one. I feel that truth in my bones today.

OHAMA. Chutaro, wait.

CHUTARO. [not listening, stepping into the corridor] They say you have a daughter here. I would like to see her just once. No, perhaps that too is foolish talk. I alone built dreams as I pleased and longed for a mother and a sister. But what is over there and what is over here are not the same. When I think of it now, I was a fool. All these years, if I closed my eyes, I could still see the mother I lost as clearly as a painted picture. Yet I came all this way and wiped that picture away with my own hands. Good-bye, Mistress.

[He closes the sliding door.]

OHAMA. Ah—

[She half calls after him, then stops herself.]

[Otoyo comes down the corridor, knowing nothing. Fumi follows. Rain can be heard outside.]

CHUTARO. [stares at Otoyo] She looks so much like—

[He turns back once with deep feeling, then goes.]

OTOYO. Who was that man?

FUMI. [shakes her head]

OTOYO. Did he not look like Mother?

FUMI. Yes. He did.

OHAMA. [rises, unable to let him go in her heart, and starts toward the corridor]

OTOYO. Mother, who was that man just now?

OHAMA. You saw him?

OTOYO. Yes. Only a little, but I saw enough. Did he not look like you? Tell me, Mother. Was that not the man you used to speak of sometimes? Was that not Chutaro, the brother from Omi? But that cannot be, because you said Chutaro died when he was nine.

OHAMA. [breaks into sobs]

OTOYO. Then it was him. It was Brother Chutaro after all. Mother, if it was my brother, why did you send him away? Why did you let him go?

OHAMA. Forgive me. Forgive me. I was cold-hearted. You have been with me every hour since you were born, and because of that, all my love flowed toward you. Chutaro had been away from me for almost thirty years. For some reason, my feelings would not move toward him as they should. I am ashamed of myself. People call me a strong woman, and I too thought I was strong. But what kind of strength is this? I feel only mean and small.

OTOYO. No. No. He is still your child, just as I am.

OHAMA. I know it. That is why I ask your pardon. I have done a terrible thing.

[Zenzaburo rushes in.]

ZENZABURO. Mistress. I have learned something about that man.

OHAMA. Speak.

ZENZABURO. The greater danger is not really from him. The worse trouble comes from Kingoro. If our boss speaks for him, that matter could be settled with five or ten ryo. But Kingoro says that if that man keeps talking wild, he should have an arm or a leg broken so he never speaks that way again.

OHAMA. What? No. That must not happen.

ZENZABURO. There is more. Kingoro was with a vicious ronin. That ronin said he knew where the man could be found.

OHAMA. Then who knows what may happen?

ZENZABURO. That is what I fear. The ronin even said he would do the job for three ryo. I only hope they have not already killed Chutaro.

OHAMA. Get me a palanquin. Three carriers at once. I am going out now. You go too. At once.

ZENZABURO. Yes. Yes, I will go.

[He runs off.]

[Ohama quickly prepares to leave and ties all the money she has to her body.]

[The rain grows harder.]

OTOYO. [coming back weakly toward her] What is it? What has happened now?

OHAMA. Otoyoy. It is Chutaro.

[She whispers the name.]

OTOYO. [stares at her in shock]

OHAMA. Where is that palanquin? Cook! Where is the palanquin?

[She goes out into the corridor.]

OTOYO. [falls down and weeps]

Part 7

Scene 3. The Arakawa Embankment

[It is near dawn after the night of the last scene. The place is the bank of the Arakawa near the Toda ferry, after the rain.]

At the back is the embankment. Below it stand a few trees here and there. Tall pampas grass fills the place. Only two paths are clear of grass: one straight road in the back leading toward the ferry, and one slanting path from the left toward the back. At the left there is also a pool of water.

A ferryman crosses with a pole on his shoulder.]

[From somewhere not far away, a boatman's song is heard.]

BOATMEN'S SONG. We boatmen of Arakawa, and the road of my love. We take the oar in hand and leave the rest to the wind.

[A palanquin with a lantern hurries across the back road toward the ferry. Three

carriers bear it.]

OHAMA. [inside that palanquin, anxious and half beside herself]

[The ferryman watches it pass, then goes off toward the ferry.]

[Another palanquin follows in the same way.]

OTOYO. [inside, her heart already far ahead of her body]

ZENZABURO. [running beside Otoyoy's palanquin with a lantern]

[The boatman's song comes a little nearer.]

BOATMEN'S SONG. In spring the grass and trees come out into the world, but I am only a cricket in the dead field.

[Kingoro appears, dressed lightly for quick movement, though he hides it under a rain cloak. With him is the ronin Tobata Yosuke. They keep low and watch the roads.]

[Chutaro comes through the grass. He has left the house behind him and now moves alone in the gray hour before morning.]

CHUTARO. So this is how it ends. The sky grows light, and I am still one man under it.

[He stops. A faint sound in the grass makes him turn.]

CHUTARO. [getting no answer] Who is there? Still no answer? One sounds like a rough town man, and one like a ronin. Who are you? Why do you point naked

blades at a man's nose in the dark like thieves?

KINGORO. [says nothing, waiting for a safe chance]

TOBATA. [silent, pressing forward for a single killing cut]

CHUTARO. So you know who I am, do you?

KINGORO. I know well enough.

TOBATA. You are Bamba no Chutaro, a rotten man.

CHUTARO. And who are you? Men from Shimosa? Or from Edo?

[Neither answers.]

CHUTARO. No answer? Still none? Then come.

TOBATA. [with a cold laugh] Take this.

[He strikes. Chutaro cuts him down.]

KINGORO. [slips into the grass and hides, waiting for his chance]

CHUTARO. Come out.

[He searches. Then, thinking Kingoro has fled, he goes to the pool and begins to wash the blood from his sword.]

[Two empty palanquins return in silence, with Zenzaburo walking beside them. Tobata's body cannot be seen because the grass hides it.]

Ohama and Otoyoy now come on foot. They have learned that Chutaro's trail stopped at the river, and they return in deep sadness.]

OTOYO. [weeping openly]

OHAMA. [can only sigh; she has no words strong enough]

OTOYO. Mother.

OHAMA. Yes.

OTOYO. Is this what it means to have no tie with someone? Is this how it ends?

OHAMA. It is my fault. My own fault.

[Chutaro hears them from hiding. But the soft feeling in him does not rise first. His hurt and pride grow stronger.]

OTOYO. I cannot help it. In a lonely place like this, I feel as if Brother Chutaro is near. Shall I call him? Brother Chutaro. Brother Chutaro.

OHAMA. Chuta—

[She gathers strength to call, but no answer comes. At once all that strength leaves her.]

OTOYO. No one is here after all.

[She begins to walk on slowly.]

OHAMA. [empty and broken, walks with her]

CHUTARO. No. No. No. Why should I meet them now? Their sorrow bites, and yet some crooked part of me is glad to hear it. If I shut my eyes tight like this and think, the mother I never met still comes before me, clear as a painted face. That is enough. If I want to see her, I will only close my eyes.

[He turns away as if he will never again face mother or sister.]

[Kingoro, still hoping to kill Chutaro and throw the blame on Tobata, takes up Tobata's sword and creeps near from behind.]

CHUTARO. [suddenly aware] You dog.

[He moves to block Kingoro's way and stares at him.]

KINGORO. [with nothing left to lose, grows bold again]

CHUTARO. I remember that face now. I ought to kill you at once. But first—have you parents?

KINGORO. What? Parents? I have no such thing.

CHUTARO. A child, then?

KINGORO. No.

CHUTARO. Then that is that.

[He cuts Kingoro down quickly.]

[Chutaro wipes the blood from his blade and puts it back. He turns as if he might look toward the road where Ohama and Otoyō went, but he stops himself.]

[The red light of dawn spreads over the sky. Chutaro stands with that light behind him, then steps out once more onto the road of a traveler.

Far away, the boatman's song is heard again.]

BOATMEN'S SONG. Rain or shine, the wind blows as it will. East or west, I go as I must.