

## **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 generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

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Lafcadio Hearn, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

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## Preface

### Part 1

In the introduction to the book *Tales of Old Japan*, a writer named Mr. Mitford wrote these words in the year 1871. He said that many books had been written about Japan. Some of those books were made from official records. Others were written by travelers who only stayed a short time and wrote quick impressions. Because of this, the world still knew very little about the true inner life of the Japanese people. Their religion, their strange beliefs, their ways of thinking, and the hidden ideas that guide their actions were still almost unknown to foreigners.

The life that Mr. Mitford spoke about is what I call the “unfamiliar Japan.” It is the hidden Japan that cannot easily be seen by visitors. During my stay in the country I was able to see only a few small parts of that hidden world. Perhaps the reader will feel disappointed that these glimpses are rare and incomplete. I must admit honestly that four years of living among the people is not enough time for a foreigner to truly feel at home in such a different land. Even when a person tries to learn the customs and live like the people around him, much still remains strange and difficult to understand.

I know better than anyone how small my work is. These pages show only a little of what exists. Much more remains to be learned and written in the future. Japan is a country that reveals its deeper life slowly. The longer one stays, the more one begins to notice quiet details that were invisible before.

Many of the ideas described in these sketches come from popular religion. These beliefs are mostly connected with Buddhism and with many curious traditions that ordinary people follow in daily life. However, the educated people of modern Japan do not always share these beliefs. The younger generation, trained in modern schools and universities, often thinks very differently from the common people.

In many ways the modern educated Japanese thinks much like an educated person in Europe or America. He studies modern science and philosophy. He reads

foreign books. His ideas about the world are often very close to those of a cultivated man living in Paris or Boston. Yet this modern education has also produced another result. Many educated people now feel ashamed of the old beliefs of their country.

Because of this, they often treat stories about spirits, gods, and strange powers with open contempt. To them, such beliefs are simply superstition. They do not wish to study how these ideas affect the feelings and imagination of the people. They think these things belong only to an ignorant past.

This attitude is not very surprising. When people first abandon an old religion, they often reject everything connected with it. Many people in the West once felt the same way when they began to doubt the severe religious teachings of earlier times. The change in Japan has happened very quickly. In only a few decades many educated people have become skeptical about religion.

Because the change was so sudden, the reaction against old beliefs has also been strong. For the moment it sometimes seems almost like intolerance. If educated people react so strongly against religion itself, their feelings toward superstition are even stronger.

Yet the most charming parts of Japanese life are not found among the Europeanized classes of society. Those circles often look very similar to the society of Western countries. If one wishes to see what is truly special about Japan, one must look elsewhere.

The real beauty of Japanese life is found among the ordinary people. These people keep the old customs of the country. They still wear the traditional clothes. They still keep small Buddhist images in their houses. They still pray before the household shrine where the spirits of ancestors are honored.

Among them the foreign observer can discover a world that never becomes boring. Day after day new details appear. The longer one lives among such people, the more surprising and touching their life seems.

Sometimes the observer may even begin to wonder whether Western civilization always moves in the direction of true moral improvement. Japanese life certainly has its darker side. There are foolish customs, human weaknesses,

and even cruelty in some places. No society is perfect. Yet even the darker parts of this life often seem gentle when compared with certain harsh aspects of Western existence.

What strikes the visitor most strongly is the kindness of the people. There is an extraordinary patience in their behavior. There is a courtesy that rarely fails. There is also a natural simplicity of heart that expresses itself in small daily actions.

Many of the common beliefs that educated people call superstition also have their own beauty. These beliefs contain fragments of unwritten stories about the hopes and fears of the people. They show how human beings try to understand the mystery of the unseen world.

Some of these beliefs even teach kindness toward animals and sympathy toward unfortunate people. Because of this, they often produce gentle results in everyday life. The traveler notices many small scenes that come from these ideas.

For example, birds often show little fear of human beings. White sea birds follow ships that enter the harbor, hoping to receive crumbs from passengers. Doves fly down from the roofs of temples to eat rice offered by pilgrims. In old public gardens one may see storks walking freely among visitors.

At sacred places deer approach people without fear, waiting to receive cakes or gentle touches. Fish rise to the surface of temple ponds when a visitor stands by the water. These beautiful scenes exist partly because people believe that life in all forms is connected.

Of course, not every belief is pleasant. Some traditions speak of dangerous spirits or mysterious fox demons. Modern education is slowly causing such ideas to disappear. Yet many other beliefs possess a poetic beauty that reminds one of the ancient myths of Greece.

Poets in the West still find inspiration in Greek mythology. In the same way, Japanese traditions can inspire imagination and kindness. Even when certain beliefs appear strange or humorous, they deserve thoughtful attention rather than simple rejection.

A historian once wrote wise words about superstition. He explained that not all superstitions are based only on fear. Many also appeal to hope. They satisfy deep

emotional needs that reason alone cannot answer. They offer clear images where philosophy can give only uncertain possibilities.

Because of this, such beliefs sometimes become important parts of human happiness. They provide comfort in moments of danger or sorrow. A simple object believed to possess sacred power may give greater emotional support to a suffering person than the most complex philosophical theory.

Therefore it is a mistake to think that when people become more critical and rational, only harmful beliefs will disappear while pleasant ones remain. Often the opposite happens. When doubt grows strong, many beautiful illusions vanish together with the harmful ones.

In modern Japan something similar may be happening. The critical spirit of the new generation may unintentionally help foreign religious groups replace the gentle beliefs of the people with harsher doctrines imported from the West. Some Western missionaries teach ideas of eternal punishment and a severe divine judgment that many people in Japan had never imagined before.

More than one hundred and sixty years ago the traveler Kaempfer wrote about the Japanese people. He said that in moral behavior, purity of life, and outward devotion they often surpassed Christians. In many places his observation still seems true today.

Except in certain open ports where foreign influence has weakened traditional morals, the character of the people remains admirable. Many thoughtful observers believe that Japan has little to gain from converting to Christianity. Instead, the country might lose many valuable elements of its own culture.

Among the twenty-seven essays that form this book, four were first printed in newspapers and have now been changed and expanded. Six others appeared earlier in a magazine called *The Atlantic Monthly* between the years 1891 and 1893. The remaining essays, which form the larger part of the book, are entirely new.

L. H.

Kumamoto, Kyushu, Japan

May, 1894

## Chapter 1: My First Day in the Orient

### Part 1

“Do not forget to write down your first impressions as quickly as you can,” said a kind English professor whom I met soon after I arrived in Japan. “Those first feelings disappear very quickly. When they are gone, they never return. And yet the strange sensations of your first day here are among the most delightful things you will ever experience.” I am now trying to remember those first impressions from the notes I made at the time. But I find that they were even more difficult to keep than I expected. Something seems to have disappeared from my memory of them. A certain feeling is missing, something impossible to bring back again.

I must admit that I did not follow the professor’s advice very well. During those first weeks I could not stay indoors and write. There was simply too much to see. The streets were full of strange sights, new sounds, and curious people. Every moment outside seemed more interesting than sitting quietly at a desk.

Even if I could remember everything perfectly, I am not sure that I could describe those first sensations clearly in words. The charm of Japan during the first days is delicate and difficult to explain. It is like a perfume in the air—something that you feel strongly but cannot easily describe.

My first real feeling of being in the East began during my first ride in a jinricksha. I traveled from the European quarter of Yokohama into the Japanese part of the city. What I remember from that ride I will try to describe now.

Imagine sitting in a small carriage pulled by a running man, passing through unfamiliar streets. You cannot speak the language of the driver, and he cannot understand your words. All you can do is gesture with your hands and ask him to go anywhere—forward, left, right—because everything you see is new and delightful.

During that ride I suddenly felt the full reality of being in the Orient, in that distant East that I had read about and imagined for many years. Now my eyes told me that the dream was real.

The day itself seemed wonderfully beautiful. The morning air felt fresh and cool with the coolness of Japanese spring. Somewhere far away the winds carried a faint breath of cold from the snowy mountain of Fuji.

The air itself seemed strangely clear. It had a softness and brightness unlike anything I had known before. There was only the faintest hint of blue in the sky. Because of this clear light, even very distant objects appeared sharp and well defined.

The sun was warm but not hot. The jinricksha itself was comfortable and pleasant. And the long view of the streets ahead—seen above the dancing white hat of the runner—had a fascination that seemed endless.

Everything looked strangely small. The houses were small. The shops were small. Even the people seemed small. Because of this, everything appeared mysterious and slightly magical.

The houses stood close together under their blue roofs. The fronts of the shops were open to the street. Pieces of dark blue cloth hung above the entrances. And everywhere there were smiling little people wearing blue clothing.

Occasionally a tall foreigner passed by. Sometimes a shop displayed a sign with English words written in strange spelling. These things reminded me that this place was real and not a dream. Yet they did not destroy the charm of the scene.

At first the streets looked like a delightful confusion. Flags moved in the air. Dark blue cloth hung from the shops and waved gently. Many of these cloth signs were decorated with beautiful Japanese or Chinese characters. Nothing seemed to follow a clear plan. Every building appeared different. Each shop had its own curious beauty. Everything looked new and surprising.

But after some time my eyes began to understand a pattern. The houses were low and built of wood. Most were not painted. Their lower floors opened directly onto the street. Above each shop was a narrow strip of roof like a small awning. The upper floors had tiny balconies with paper screens instead of glass windows.

I also noticed that the shops followed a similar design. Their floors were covered with straw mats and raised slightly above the street level. The signs were usually written vertically instead of horizontally.

The same dark blue color appeared everywhere—in the clothes of workers and in the cloth signs hanging from the shops. Sometimes there were other colors too: red, white, and brighter blue. But I rarely saw green or yellow.

I soon noticed something curious about the clothing of the workers. Many jackets had large characters written on the back in white. These characters showed the name of the company or group to which the worker belonged.

These signs looked surprisingly beautiful. They were not like the decorative patterns used in Western clothing. The characters themselves created the beauty. Even a poor worker's jacket seemed elegant because of the large white writing on the deep blue cloth.

Slowly I realized something important. Much of the beauty of the street came from the writing itself. Japanese and Chinese characters appeared everywhere. They decorated cloth signs, shop boards, doorposts, and even paper screens. These characters seemed almost magical.

For a moment I imagined how the streets would look if all those characters were replaced by English letters. The thought shocked me. The beauty would disappear immediately. That thought alone made me dislike the idea of writing Japanese with Roman letters, which some people wished to introduce.

To the Western mind, letters are simply symbols for sounds. They are lifeless shapes on paper. But to the Japanese mind, each character is more like a small picture. A character seems to live. It seems to move and express emotion.

When you walk through a Japanese street, you see thousands of these characters around you. They seem like living figures that speak to your eyes.

The printed characters in books cannot show the full beauty of this writing. In decorative signs the characters become much more artistic. The calligrapher shapes every line with care. Each brush stroke has its own grace and balance. Even the smallest curve has meaning. When the strokes join together they create a form that feels alive.

Generations of artists have worked to perfect this art. Through centuries of effort the ancient symbols have become things of great beauty. Because of this, there are even legends about calligraphy. Some stories say that characters written

by holy masters once came alive and spoke to people.

Meanwhile my jinricksha driver continues running in front of me. His name is Cha. He wears a huge white hat shaped like a mushroom. His short jacket is blue with wide sleeves. His trousers fit tightly and reach his ankles. On his feet are straw sandals tied with cords.

Cha represents the patience and endurance of the jinricksha runners. Already he has persuaded me to give him more money than the official price. I had been warned about this, but the warning did not help. When a man runs for hours pulling a carriage with a passenger inside, it is difficult not to feel sympathy.

And Cha smiles constantly with a gentle expression that makes it impossible to feel angry with him. When you give him even a small kindness, he responds with what looks like deep gratitude.

His clothing is wet with sweat. From time to time he wipes his face with a small blue towel decorated with white pictures of bamboo and sparrows.

But what interests me even more than Cha is the expression on the faces of the people we pass. As we move through the narrow streets, many people turn to look at the foreign visitor. Yet their looks are never unpleasant. There is no hostility in their eyes.

Most of them smile.

Because of these smiles, the visitor begins to feel as if he has entered a kind of fairy world. This comparison has been used many times before by travelers describing Japan. Yet there is a reason why so many people say the same thing.

Suddenly finding oneself in a place where everything is smaller, softer, and gentler than in the West produces a strange feeling. The people seem delicate and friendly. Their movements are quiet. Their voices are soft. The land itself feels different from any other place.

For someone who grew up with stories of fairies and elves, such a place feels like the realization of those old dreams.

It feels like entering a world of little magical beings.

Part 2

A traveler who arrives in a country during a time of great change often feels two different emotions at the same time. On one side he may feel sadness when he sees old customs slowly disappearing. On the other side he may feel surprise when he sees new things from the modern world entering places that once seemed untouched. I do not yet know how much of this change I will later notice in Japan. But on this first day everything seems to fit together strangely well. The old and the new appear side by side without destroying the harmony of the scene.

For example, I see a line of thin white telegraph poles standing beside the road. They carry news from distant parts of the world to newspapers printed with Japanese and Chinese characters. In one tea-house I notice a small electric bell placed near the door. Beside the bell someone has pasted a piece of paper covered with mysterious writing. In another street there is a shop that sells American sewing machines. Right next to it stands a shop where a craftsman makes images of Buddhist gods. Nearby is a photography studio. Beside it there is a shop where a man produces straw sandals by hand.

These combinations do not seem strange here. Every new object from the West appears inside a Japanese frame. Because of that frame, even foreign inventions seem to belong naturally in the scene.

But on this first day the traveler's attention is captured mostly by the older things. Everything that belongs to traditional Japan appears wonderful. Even the smallest objects seem beautiful.

A pair of ordinary wooden chopsticks, wrapped carefully in a paper cover with a small drawing, seems charming. A package of tiny toothpicks made from cherry wood, tied with a paper band printed in three colors, appears like a small treasure. Even the towel used by the jinricksha runner becomes an object of curiosity. The simple designs printed on it are graceful and pleasant.

The bank notes and coins used in daily life also attract attention. Even the thin colored string used by a shopkeeper to tie a package looks decorative. Everywhere the traveler looks he finds curious objects.

But looking too carefully becomes dangerous. Whenever you pause to examine

something in a shop, you soon feel a strong desire to buy it. If the shopkeeper begins to show you many variations of the same object, the temptation becomes almost impossible to resist.

The shopkeeper never pressures you to purchase anything. Instead he politely displays his goods with a friendly smile. But the objects themselves seem enchanted. If you begin buying small things, you quickly realize that you want to buy everything.

The prices are low. Yet that cheapness becomes a trap. Because everything costs so little, it becomes easy to spend far more money than you intended. A large ship crossing the Pacific Ocean could not carry all the things that you suddenly feel the desire to buy.

In truth, what you want is not simply the objects in the shops. You want the shops themselves. You want the shopkeepers, the hanging cloth signs, and the narrow streets filled with life. You want the entire city with its harbor and mountains. You want the white beauty of Mount Fuji rising above everything in the sky.

You want Japan itself—with its magical trees, its clear air, its temples, its towns, and its millions of gentle people.

At this moment I remember something once said by a practical American man when he heard that a large fire had destroyed many houses in Japan. “Those people can afford fires,” he said. “Their houses are cheaply built.”

In one sense this statement is true. The wooden houses of ordinary people can be rebuilt quickly and without great cost. But the objects that fill those houses cannot easily be replaced. When a fire destroys a home in Japan, it often destroys many beautiful handmade things. Every such loss is a tragedy for art.

Japan is a country where each object is made by human hands. Machines have not yet replaced the craftsman in most forms of production. Because of this, every object is slightly different from every other object—even when made by the same artisan. When something is destroyed, the exact form of that creation disappears forever.

Yet the artistic spirit of the country survives. Even in a land where fires often

occur, the tradition of craftsmanship continues from generation to generation. The ideas behind the art remain alive. An object destroyed today may appear again in another form many years later. The new creation may be slightly different, but it will still carry the spirit of the earlier one.

Each artist in Japan works not only with his own imagination but also with the experience of many earlier generations. The knowledge of past craftsmen lives within his hands. When he paints a bird, draws a mountain cloud, or designs the shape of a flower, he is guided by traditions that reach far into the past. The skill that once required great effort has become almost instinctive. What once demanded years of struggle now flows naturally through the artist's brush.

Because of this, a small colored print by a master such as Hokusai or Hiroshige—once sold for less than a single cent—may contain more true art than many expensive paintings in the West.

As we continue through the streets I suddenly notice something curious. Many of the people walking around me look exactly like the figures drawn in the prints of Hokusai. Farmers wear straw raincoats and enormous straw hats shaped like mushrooms. Their legs are bare and dark from the sun. Mothers carry babies on their backs. The babies smile and watch the world quietly from their high position.

Merchants sit in their shops smoking tiny pipes while surrounded by goods.

I also notice the feet of the people. They are small and beautifully shaped. Some feet are bare and brown from walking outside. Some belong to children wearing very small wooden clogs called geta. Young women often wear white socks called tabi that separate the big toe from the others. These socks give the foot an elegant and unusual shape.

The Japanese foot has a natural beauty. It has not been damaged by the tight shoes commonly worn in Western countries.

When people walk on wooden clogs they produce a curious rhythm of sound. One clog strikes the ground slightly differently from the other. The result is a repeated pattern of sound: kring... krang... kring... krang. On hard pavement this rhythm becomes surprisingly loud. Sometimes a group of people walking together fall into the same rhythm, producing a strange musical effect.

Suddenly Cha stops the jinricksha and turns toward me.

“Tera e yuke!” someone has just said to him.

I have returned briefly to the European hotel. Not because I am hungry—I almost regret taking time to eat—but because I cannot make Cha understand that I want to visit a Buddhist temple. Now the hotel owner has spoken the magic words for me.

“Tera e yuke!”—“Go to a temple!”

Cha nods with understanding.

Soon we are running again through the streets.

First we pass through a wider road lined with gardens and large European-style buildings. Then we cross a bridge over a canal filled with narrow boats. After that we plunge again into the small Japanese streets.

The houses seem even smaller here. The shops are open and bright. Blue cloth signs hang everywhere with beautiful writing on them.

But we do not stop.

Cha runs quickly up a rising street until we reach the base of a hill.

Suddenly he stops before a long flight of wide stone steps.

He lowers the shafts of the jinricksha so that I may climb down.

Pointing toward the steps, he smiles and says proudly:

“Tera!”

A temple.

### Part 3

I step down from the jinricksha and begin to climb the long stone steps. When I reach the top, I find myself standing on a wide terrace. Before me rises a large gate of remarkable design. The roof above the gate curves upward at the corners in the Chinese style. The structure itself is richly carved. Dragons twist together across the surface above the entrance. The wooden panels of the gate are also covered with carvings. Strange stone faces project from the roof edges like guardians watching the entrance. These grotesque shapes resemble lions or

demons.

The color of the gate is grey, almost like stone. Yet the carvings seem strangely alive. The dragons appear to twist and move as if flowing like water.

For a moment I turn and look back. The view behind me is wonderful. The sea and the sky blend together in a pale, shining blue. Below me spreads a great field of rooftops. The roofs appear like waves of dark blue flowing across the town. On the right the roofs reach the quiet bay. On the other sides they climb toward green wooded hills. Beyond those hills stands a distant mountain range. The peaks appear dark blue against the bright sky.

And above those peaks rises something even more beautiful. Far above everything stands a single white mountain. Its snowy cone floats so lightly against the sky that it almost looks like a cloud. The lower part of the mountain cannot be seen clearly. It blends with the pale blue air. Only the upper part, covered with snow, shines clearly. This is the sacred mountain—Fujiyama.

As I stand before the gate, a strange feeling suddenly comes over me. Everything around me—the stone steps, the carved dragons, the blue sky, the shining mountain, even my own shadow on the ground—seems slightly unreal. For a moment I feel that all of it may suddenly disappear.

Why should I feel this? Perhaps it is because these shapes look strangely familiar. The curved roofs, the dragons, the decorations—these things seem less like new discoveries and more like memories from old picture books.

The feeling lasts only a moment. Soon the sense of reality returns. The beauty of the scene appears even stronger than before. The distant mountains glow softly. The sky stretches endlessly above. The sunlight falls gently across the town.

I pass through the great gate and climb another flight of steps. Soon I reach a second gate, similar to the first, with dragons carved across its surface. Beyond it lies a quiet courtyard. Stone lanterns stand around the courtyard like small monuments. On both sides of the entrance sit two great stone lions. These are the Lions of Buddha—one male and one female.

Beyond them stands the temple building itself. The temple is long and low. Its roof curves upward at the ends and is covered with blue tiles. Three wooden steps

lead to the entrance. The walls of the building are made from wooden frames covered with white paper screens.

I remove my shoes before stepping onto the wooden floor.

A young man slides one of the paper screens aside and bows deeply in welcome. I enter and feel the soft surface of thick straw mats beneath my feet.

The room inside is very large. The air is filled with a faint sweet smell—the smell of burning incense. After the bright sunlight outside, the interior seems almost dark. At first I can see very little except a few faint flashes of gold.

Slowly my eyes begin to adjust to the dim light. I notice large shapes standing near the walls. At first they appear to be flowers. When I move closer I discover that they are large lotus flowers made from paper. Their leaves are painted green and gold.

At the far end of the room stands the altar. It is tall and richly decorated. Bronze objects and golden ornaments stand on both sides of a small shrine shaped like a miniature temple.

But I cannot see any statue.

There is only a mysterious collection of shining metal shapes in the dim light. Behind the altar there is darkness so deep that I cannot tell whether it hides another room.

The young man who welcomed me now approaches. To my surprise he speaks in good English.

Pointing to the golden structure on the altar, he says, “That is the shrine of Buddha.”

“I would like to make a small offering,” I reply.

“It is not necessary,” he answers politely.

But I insist.

Finally he accepts a small coin from me and places it before the shrine.

After this he invites me to visit his own room in another part of the building.

We walk into a bright room covered with straw mats. There is no furniture. We sit on the floor and begin to talk.

The young man explains that he is a student at the temple. He studied English

in Tokyo. His pronunciation is unusual, but his vocabulary is excellent.

After a few minutes he asks me a question.

“Are you a Christian?”

“No,” I answer honestly.

“Are you a Buddhist?”

“Not exactly.”

He looks curious.

“Then why do you make an offering to Buddha if you do not believe in him?”

I think for a moment before answering.

“Because I respect the beauty of his teachings,” I say, “and the faith of the people who follow them.”

He nods thoughtfully.

“Are there Buddhists in England and America?” he asks.

“Yes,” I reply. “There are many people who study Buddhist philosophy.”

He walks to a small alcove in the room and returns with a book. It is an English copy of *The Buddhist Catechism*.

I ask him another question.

“Why is there no image of Buddha in the temple?”

He smiles.

“There is a small image inside the shrine,” he explains. “But the shrine is closed. It is opened only on special festival days.”

He tells me that the temple owns several large statues as well. But these too are displayed only on certain occasions.

From where I sit I can see people climbing the temple steps outside. Men and women kneel at the entrance to pray. Their movements are graceful and natural. Compared with them, the kneeling of Western worshippers often seems awkward.

Some people simply press their hands together and bow. Others clap their hands three times before praying. Their prayers are very short. After a moment they rise and leave.

From time to time I hear the sound of coins dropping into the wooden offering box at the entrance.

I turn again to the student.

“Why do they clap their hands three times?” I ask.

He answers, “It is for the Three Powers: Heaven, Earth, and Man.”

I ask another question.

“Do they clap to call the gods, the way people clap to call servants?”

He shakes his head gently.

“No,” he says. “The clapping means awakening from the dream of the long night.”

“What dream?” I ask.

He pauses before answering.

“The Buddha taught that all beings are dreaming in this unhappy world.”

“So the clapping means that the soul awakens from that dream?”

“Yes.”

“You understand what I mean by the word ‘soul’?”

“Yes,” he replies calmly. “Buddhists believe the soul has always existed and will always exist.”

“Even in Nirvana?”

“Yes.”

At that moment the chief priest enters the room. He is a very old man. Two younger priests follow behind him.

I am introduced to them.

All three bow deeply, showing their shaved heads shining like polished ivory.

Unlike the other Japanese I have met today, they do not smile. Their faces remain calm and serious while the student translates their questions.

Tea is brought for us in a tiny cup placed on a small bronze saucer shaped like a lotus leaf. Small sweets are also served.

When I rise to leave, everyone rises with me.

At the door the student asks my name and address.

“I will not remain in the temple much longer,” he says. “But I hope to visit you later.”

“What is your name?” I ask.

“Call me Akira,” he replies.

I bow in farewell.

They bow even lower in return.

As I leave, only Akira smiles.

#### Part 4

“Tera?” asks Cha when I return to the jinricksha at the bottom of the steps. His question clearly means: “Do you wish to visit another temple?” I certainly do. I still have not seen the face of Buddha. “Yes, tera,” I answer. Cha immediately lifts the shafts and begins to run again.

For several minutes we travel along wide roads bordered by gardens and large Western-style buildings. Soon we cross another canal filled with narrow wooden boats. After that we return again into the narrow and lively streets of the Japanese town. Cha runs faster now. Once again we pass rows of small houses shaped like narrow wooden boxes, wider at the bottom and narrower above. Many of the shops stand open toward the street. Above the entrances hang cloth curtains—some dark blue, some red, some white. Each one carries beautiful characters painted across the fabric. But everything passes too quickly for careful study. The view rushes by like a dream.

Soon we cross another canal and turn into a narrow street that climbs up a hill. At the top of the street Cha suddenly stops. Before us rises another long staircase made of stone. He places the jinricksha shafts on the ground so that I may step out. Then he points upward and proudly says once more: “Tera!”

I begin climbing again. At the top I reach a wide terrace. Before me stands another impressive gate, even more elaborate than the previous one. The roof above it rises sharply with many corners, decorated in the Chinese style. The entire structure is covered with carvings. Dragons twist across the beams. Strange animal faces look down from the edges of the roof. The shapes seem almost alive, as if moving slowly within the wood.

I pause once again to look behind me. The light is glorious. The sea and sky

blend together into a soft blue haze. The city stretches below like a rolling field of rooftops. Beyond the town the hills form a wide circle of green. And far above them floats the shining white cone of Fuji. For a moment I feel again that strange sensation that everything might suddenly disappear. The carved dragons and curved roofs seem familiar, as if I had seen them long ago in childhood stories. Then the feeling passes.

I pass through the gate and climb a second set of steps. Soon I reach another courtyard. Stone lanterns stand quietly on both sides. At the far end of the courtyard stands a long temple building with a curved roof of blue tiles.

Before entering I remove my shoes again. A young attendant slides open the paper screens and bows politely. Inside the temple the light is dim and cool. The smell of incense fills the air. At first I can see very little. Gradually shapes appear as my eyes grow accustomed to the darkness. Near the walls stand large paper lotus flowers. Their petals are colored delicately, and their leaves shine with green and gold.

At the far end stands the altar of Buddha. It is decorated with bronze lamps, gilded ornaments, and many ritual objects whose purpose I cannot guess. But again I cannot see the statue of Buddha itself. Only the golden shrine stands at the center.

The young attendant approaches me again and speaks in English. "That is the shrine of Buddha," he says politely. "I would like to make an offering," I reply. "It is not necessary," he answers gently. But I insist. Finally he places the small coin upon the altar for me.

After this he invites me to visit a room nearby. We sit together on the floor and begin to talk. He tells me that he studies at the temple and learned English in Tokyo.

After a short conversation he suddenly asks: "Are you a Christian?" "No," I answer. "Are you a Buddhist?" "Not exactly." He looks puzzled. "Then why do you give an offering to Buddha?" I explain that I respect the beauty of Buddhist teaching and the sincerity of those who follow it. He listens thoughtfully.

Then he asks if there are Buddhists in Western countries. I tell him that many

people study Buddhist philosophy in Europe and America. He brings me a small book written in English. It is a copy of a Buddhist catechism.

I ask him another question. “Why is there no image of Buddha in the temple?” “There is a small one,” he explains, “but it is inside the shrine. It is shown only on festival days.”

From the open screens I can see visitors coming and going outside. They kneel at the entrance of the temple. Some press their hands together quietly. Others clap their hands three times before praying. Their prayers last only a few seconds. The sound of coins dropping into the offering box rings softly in the air.

I ask the student why people clap their hands. He explains that the three claps represent Heaven, Earth, and Man. “But do they clap to call the gods?” I ask. “No,” he replies. “The clapping represents awakening from the dream of the long night.”

“What dream?” I ask.

He hesitates before answering. “Buddha said that all beings are dreaming in this world of suffering.”

“So prayer is like waking from that dream?”

“Yes.”

Soon after this conversation the chief priest of the temple enters. He is very old. Two younger priests accompany him. They bow deeply when introduced to me. Their expressions are calm and serious. Unlike the people in the streets, they do not smile.

Tea is brought for us in tiny cups. Small sweets decorated with ancient symbols are also offered.

When I prepare to leave, everyone rises and bows again. At the doorway the student asks for my name and address. “You will not see me here again,” he says. “I will soon leave the temple. But I will visit you later.”

“What is your name?” I ask.

“Call me Akira,” he replies.

As I leave the temple they all bow deeply. Only Akira smiles.

When I return to the jinricksha, Cha lifts his hat respectfully and asks again: “Tera?”

Of course.

There are many temples yet to see.

## Part 5

“Tera?” asks Cha again when I return to the jinricksha. The word means: “Another temple?” “Yes, tera,” I reply. Cha lifts the shafts once more and begins running again. Soon we are moving through the narrow streets of the town. The houses seem even smaller now. Many of them look almost like wooden boxes stacked beside one another. Shops open directly onto the street. From each entrance hangs a curtain of cloth marked with large white characters. The streets twist and turn in many directions. Sometimes we cross small bridges over narrow canals. Sometimes we pass houses that look so light and thin that they seem almost like cages made from bamboo. I no longer try to remember the path. I simply watch the endless parade of strange sights.

After some time Cha stops again at the foot of another hill. Once more I see a long flight of stone steps rising upward. But this time something different stands before the steps. It is a structure unlike the carved gates of the Buddhist temples. It has no carvings, no decorations, and no painted letters. Yet it possesses a mysterious dignity. Cha points to it and says: “Miya.” This means that it is not a Buddhist temple. It is a shrine belonging to the older religion of Japan—Shinto.

I am looking at a torii for the first time. It is difficult to describe such a structure to someone who has never seen one. Two tall pillars stand upright like gateposts. Across their tops rest two horizontal beams. The lower beam connects the pillars just below their tops. The upper beam rests across the very top and extends outward beyond the pillars on both sides. This simple form creates the torii. Yet the simplicity of the design gives it an impressive power. When seen against the sky it resembles an enormous written character drawn with a giant brush. The lines are graceful and balanced, like the strokes of calligraphy.

Passing beneath the torii I begin climbing the steps. After about one hundred steps I reach another torii at the top. Hanging from its crossbeam is a sacred rope

called shimenawa. This rope is thick and twisted like a snake. Small tassels hang down from it at regular intervals. According to ancient tradition this rope represents a sacred object used in one of the oldest myths of Japan. Long ago, the story says, the Sun Goddess hid herself in a cave. The world fell into darkness. The gods finally succeeded in bringing her out again. After she emerged, they stretched a rope behind her so that she could not return to the cave. The shimenawa recalls that rope.

After passing through this second torii I find myself in a small park at the top of the hill. To my right stands a small shrine building, but its doors are closed. I am not disappointed. Something even more beautiful lies ahead. A grove of cherry trees fills the area before me. The branches are covered with blossoms. They appear like soft white clouds floating among the dark branches. The petals cluster so thickly that almost no leaves can be seen. Beneath the trees the ground is covered with fallen petals. The path itself seems dusted with snow. The air carries a gentle fragrance.

Beyond the grove stand small flower gardens and miniature shrines. There are even tiny artificial landscapes built among the rocks. Small trees, tiny streams, little bridges, and miniature waterfalls create a whole world in small form. Swings hang nearby for children. At the edge of the hill stand small viewing platforms. From these places one can see the entire city below. The harbor lies quiet and blue. Small fishing boats float on the water like tiny white dots. Far away the coastline stretches into the sea. The entire scene seems covered with a soft blue haze.

I wonder why the flowering trees appear so extraordinarily beautiful here. In Western countries we also have cherry and plum trees. But their blossoms never produce such an overwhelming impression. Here the branches disappear beneath a cloud of petals. It feels almost magical. Perhaps these trees have been loved and cared for by people for so many centuries that they have learned to express gratitude. They seem almost like living beings trying to please those who admire them. In Japan people truly love these trees. Their beauty captures the heart.

Yet I notice a curious sign placed near the grove. Written in English are the words: "IT IS FORBIDDEN TO INJURE THE TREES." Clearly some foreign

visitors have behaved badly enough to require this warning.

At last I return to the waiting jinricksha. Cha looks at me again and repeats his question. "Tera?" "Yes, Cha. Tera."

Once more we travel through the narrow streets. But soon the houses become fewer. The city begins to fade behind us. We move along a curved road overlooking the sea. On one side green hills rise steeply beside the road. On the other side the land slopes downward toward the shore. The tide is low. Far below I see wide stretches of wet sand and shallow pools. Thousands of people walk across the sand searching for shellfish. At such distance their figures look no larger than insects. Some of them walk along the road carrying baskets filled with their catch. Among them are young girls whose cheeks appear almost as rosy as those of English girls.

Cha continues running steadily. The hills grow higher. Finally he stops again at the base of another long staircase. This one is the steepest yet. I begin climbing once more. Step after step I ascend. The climb is exhausting. My legs ache with the effort. At last I reach the top, breathing heavily.

Two stone lions guard the entrance. One lion shows its teeth. The other keeps its mouth closed. Before me stands the temple. It looks old and weathered. Behind it a rocky cliff rises sharply. From the rocks a small waterfall flows into a pool beside the temple. The sound of falling water fills the quiet air. A cold wind blows from the sea. The place feels lonely and solemn.

I knock gently at the temple door. After a moment I hear a slow step inside and the sound of someone coughing. The paper screen slides open. An old priest appears. He wears a simple white robe. His face is kind, and he greets me with a gentle smile. But he coughs repeatedly, as if suffering from illness.

He invites me inside. I remove my shoes and step onto the soft matting of the temple floor. The interior is dark. Slowly he slides back one screen after another, allowing more light to enter. A tall bronze lamp stands near the altar. Small bells hang from its upper edge. As I pass, my shoulder accidentally touches the bells, and they begin to ring softly.

At last I reach the altar. I look carefully for the statue of the god worshiped here.

But instead of a statue I see something unexpected. In the center stands only a mirror. A round metal mirror reflects the light. In it I see my own face. Behind my reflection appears the distant blue sea outside the temple.

Only a mirror.

I begin to wonder what it means. Perhaps it represents illusion. Perhaps it teaches that the truth we seek exists within ourselves. Perhaps it means that the universe is only the reflection of our own mind. Someday I may understand.

As I sit on the temple steps putting on my shoes, the old priest returns. He brings a bowl and bows politely. Thinking it is a bowl for offerings, I quickly place some coins inside. But I soon realize my mistake. The bowl contains hot water meant for drinking. The old priest does not laugh. With perfect courtesy he takes the bowl away and returns with another. This time he fills it with hot water and gestures kindly for me to drink. Tea is usually offered to visitors at temples. But this shrine is very poor.

As I leave, I see the old priest still watching me from the doorway. I hear his hollow cough once again. While walking down the steps I remember the mirror inside the temple. I begin to wonder whether I will ever find what I seek anywhere outside myself. Perhaps the answer exists only in imagination.

## Part 6

“Tera?” Cha asks again as I return to the jinricksha. “No, not another temple,” I reply. “It is becoming late. Hotel, Cha.” But Cha has his own ideas. As we turn into another narrow street on the way back, he suddenly stops before a very small shrine. The building is scarcely larger than an ordinary shop. Yet what stands before it surprises me more than any of the great temples I have already seen.

On both sides of the entrance stand two enormous figures. They are naked, painted deep red, and terribly muscular. Their bodies appear almost frightening in strength. Their feet resemble the claws of lions. In their hands they hold golden thunderbolts. Their faces show expressions of fierce anger. Their eyes seem full of wild fury. These are the guardians of the temple gate—the Ni-O, the “Two

Kings.”

Between these terrible figures stands a young girl. She watches us quietly. Her robe is a soft silver-gray color, tied with a violet sash. Against the dark interior of the shrine her figure appears especially graceful. Her face is delicate and calm. Standing there between those red monsters, she creates a strange and beautiful contrast.

For a moment I wonder if perhaps my first feeling of fear toward the statues was mistaken. The young girl clearly does not fear them at all. She gazes at the foreign visitor with simple curiosity, completely unaware that the figures beside her might appear terrifying to a stranger.

When I look again at the statues they seem slightly less ugly than before. I later learn that these figures are connected with ancient Indian gods. In Buddhist tradition they once represented Brahma and Indra. But Buddhism transformed them. The great god Indra, who once ruled the heavens, now stands as a guardian of the temple gates. He defends the faith that replaced the religion of his earlier worshippers. Even the mighty gods have become servants of Buddhist compassion.

This small shrine is dedicated not to Buddha himself but to Kwannon, the Goddess of Mercy.

“Hotel, Cha, hotel!” I repeat. The road back to the city is long. The sun is already sinking in the sky. A warm golden light spreads across the world. The sky glows with a soft color like polished topaz.

I realize that during the entire day I have not yet seen the face of Buddha. Perhaps tomorrow I will find his image somewhere in this maze of wooden streets or upon the summit of another hill.

The sun finally disappears below the horizon. The golden light fades.

Cha stops for a moment to light the small paper lantern attached to his jinricksha. Soon we begin moving again. As we pass through the streets I see long rows of paper lanterns hanging in front of the shops. Their glowing light forms two endless lines along the road. From a distance they look like strings of shining pearls.

Suddenly a deep sound rolls through the evening air. It is solemn and powerful. The sound comes from the great temple bell of Nogiyama. The bell's voice spreads across the city, echoing above the rooftops.

The day now feels very short. My eyes have been dazzled by the bright sunlight of morning and by the endless images of the streets. Everywhere I looked I saw strange characters written on signs and cloth and walls. They seemed like mysterious symbols from some great book of magic. Now even the gentle glow of the lanterns begins to make my eyes tired.

A pleasant drowsiness slowly comes over me. It is the kind of tiredness that follows a day filled with wonder.

Later that night I hear a voice in the street below my window. The voice belongs to a woman. She sings as she walks. Her song repeats the same words again and again in a tone that sounds almost like music from a flute. "Amma-kamishimo-go-hyakmon!" Between each call she blows a small whistle. First one long note. Then two shorter ones.

My Japanese servant explains the meaning of the words. The singer is an amma—a blind woman who earns her living by massaging tired or sick people. Because she cannot see, she uses the whistle to warn people walking in the street. Her call means that for the price of five hundred mon she will massage a person's body from head to foot and remove fatigue or pain.

Five hundred mon equals five sen—five small coins. There are ten rin in one sen and ten mon in one rin.

The sweetness of her voice is strangely touching. It almost makes me wish that I had some pain, simply so that I could call her and pay the small price for her service.

"Amma-kamishimo-go-hyakmon!"

The call continues through the quiet night.

Finally I lie down to sleep.

Soon I begin to dream.

In my dream the mysterious characters of Japanese writing rush past me like living creatures. They appear on signboards, on paper screens, and on the backs

of men walking through the streets. The characters seem alive. They move like insects across the air.

I am riding again in a jinricksha that makes no sound. The narrow streets glow with strange light.

And always, always, I see the great white mushroom-shaped hat of Cha moving up and down in front of me as he runs.

## Chapter 2: The Writing of Kobodaishi

### Part 1

In Japan there exists a very curious tradition connected with writing. Many people believe that certain remarkable examples of calligraphy were written by a famous Buddhist priest named Kobodaishi. Kobodaishi lived more than a thousand years ago. He was a great religious teacher and the founder of an important Buddhist school called Shingon. His real name was Kukai. Yet the title Kobodaishi, which means “Great Teacher Who Spread the Law,” became the name by which most people remember him. He is honored not only as a religious leader but also as a scholar, a poet, and a master of calligraphy.

Because of his fame, a curious custom developed. Whenever people discover writing that seems unusually beautiful or mysterious, they sometimes say that Kobodaishi must have written it. This belief appears especially strong in rural districts. Travelers moving through villages often hear stories about strange characters carved upon rocks or written upon temple walls. The villagers may say with great confidence that the writing was created by Kobodaishi himself.

Yet in many cases the writing appears to have been made long after his lifetime. Still the people continue to associate such works with his name. One reason for this tradition lies in the extraordinary respect that Japanese culture gives to calligraphy. Writing is not considered merely a way to record words. It is also a form of art. The beauty of the brush strokes reveals the spirit and character of the writer. For this reason the work of a great calligrapher is admired with deep appreciation.

Kobodaishi gained a reputation as one of the greatest masters of this art. His brush strokes were said to possess remarkable strength and grace. Even today examples of ancient writing attributed to him are carefully preserved. Yet the number of such works appears far greater than could reasonably have been created by one man. This fact shows how strongly the legend has grown over time.

In many villages one may see characters carved into stone beside a road or near

a shrine. When asked about them, local people may explain that Kobodaishi passed through the area long ago. During his journey he supposedly paused and wrote the characters as a blessing for the place. Sometimes the story describes him writing the words with extraordinary speed. At other times it says that he used a walking stick or even his finger to form the characters upon rock.

Such stories add a sense of wonder to the landscape. Travelers enjoy hearing them while exploring the countryside. Whether the writing truly belongs to Kobodaishi becomes less important than the charm of the legend itself.

In certain temples one may also see large calligraphic inscriptions hanging upon the walls. These inscriptions contain Buddhist teachings or sacred phrases. If the writing appears especially powerful, people may again say that Kobodaishi created it. The belief reflects the deep admiration felt for the great priest.

Over the centuries his name became connected with wisdom, artistic skill, and spiritual insight. Many legends also describe his travels throughout Japan. According to these stories, Kobodaishi wandered across mountains and valleys teaching Buddhism to the people. Wherever he traveled he left signs of his presence. Some legends say that he struck the ground with his staff and caused springs of water to appear. Others say that he wrote sacred characters to protect villages from misfortune.

In this way his memory became closely linked with many different places. Even today travelers may encounter stones, temples, or small shrines connected with his name. The writing attributed to him therefore represents more than simple calligraphy. It symbolizes the influence that this remarkable teacher has had upon Japanese culture. Through stories and legends, the spirit of Kobodaishi continues to live in the imagination of the people.

## Part 2

The respect given to Kobodaishi can be seen in many parts of Japan. Travelers sometimes discover curious inscriptions carved into cliffs or stones beside country roads. The characters may appear large and bold. Sometimes they form Buddhist

phrases. Sometimes they represent only a few mysterious symbols. When local people are asked about such writing, they often reply with the same explanation: “Kobodaishi wrote that long ago.” The answer is given with great certainty. It does not matter that the style of the characters may seem different from the writing known to belong to the famous priest. The villagers feel that such beautiful or powerful characters could only have been written by a master like him.

This belief shows how deeply the name of Kobodaishi has entered popular imagination. For many people he represents the highest example of wisdom and artistic skill. Because of this reputation, the stories about him have grown larger over the centuries. In some legends he appears almost as a magical figure. One story says that he could write several lines of characters with a single movement of the brush. Another says that he once wrote sacred words upon the surface of a rock using only water. According to the story, the writing remained visible even after the water dried.

These tales are not meant to be historical facts. They express admiration for the extraordinary ability that people believed Kobodaishi possessed. The legends also show how strongly the Japanese people value the art of writing.

Calligraphy holds an important place in Japanese culture. The movement of the brush requires both skill and calm concentration. Each line must be formed with confidence. A single mistake cannot easily be corrected. Because of this, the act of writing becomes almost like a form of meditation. The writer must control both the body and the mind. The beauty of the finished characters reflects that inner balance.

Kobodaishi was believed to have mastered this art completely. For that reason many works of writing gradually became connected with his name. Even if historians cannot prove that he created them, the association continues. The stories themselves have become part of the cultural landscape.

Travelers walking through rural districts often find such legends charming. A guide may point toward a stone beside the road and explain that Kobodaishi once stopped there during his travels. The guide might describe how the priest paused to write a sacred phrase before continuing his journey. Listening to these stories

adds a special feeling to the visit. The ordinary scenery of fields, hills, and roads becomes linked with ancient traditions.

Whether the writing truly belongs to Kobodaishi matters less than the sense of connection with the past. The legends remind people that great teachers once traveled across the country spreading knowledge and faith.

In this way the memory of Kobodaishi remains alive in many places. His influence continues through the temples that preserve his teachings and through the countless stories told about his journeys. The writing attributed to him therefore represents both art and legend. It stands as a symbol of the deep respect that Japanese culture gives to learning, spiritual devotion, and the beauty of written words.

## Chapter 3: Jizo

### Part 1

I have spent another day walking among temples—both those of the Shinto faith and those of Buddhism. During this wandering I have seen many curious and beautiful things. Yet I still have not seen clearly the face of the Buddha. Again and again I have climbed long flights of stone steps that lead to temple gates guarded by strange carved creatures—lions and other fantastic beasts. Each time I removed my shoes and stepped quietly into the dim interior of the temple. Inside there was always the same soft scent of incense. In the half-darkness I could see shapes that glittered faintly in gold. But when I looked carefully for the statue of the Buddha, I saw only a mysterious confusion of objects. There were golden lamps twisted into complicated shapes. There were bronze vessels whose purpose I could not guess. There were sacred writings painted in gold. All these objects surrounded a shrine with closed doors. But the image itself remained hidden.

What impressed me most during these visits was the cheerful spirit of the people who came to pray. I expected temples to feel solemn or even severe. Instead I found them full of life. Children ran and played happily in the courtyards. They laughed loudly and chased one another across the stone steps. Mothers came to pray, but they did not force their children to remain quiet. The little ones crawled across the soft temple mats and made cheerful noises.

The worship of the people seemed simple and natural. They approached the offering box, dropped a small coin into it, clapped their hands, and spoke a brief prayer. Then they stood up and returned to the sunlight outside. Some people did not even enter the building. They stood at the doorway, prayed for only a few seconds, and then left. After praying they often remained outside talking with friends, laughing, or quietly smoking their small pipes. Their religion seemed light and joyful. Blessed indeed are those people who do not fear too greatly the gods they worship.

While I am thinking about these things, I suddenly see Akira standing at the

door of my room. He bows politely and smiles. Removing his sandals, he steps inside wearing his white socks with the divided toe. He bows again and sits quietly on the chair I offer him.

Akira is an interesting young man. His face is smooth and without a beard. His skin has a warm bronze color. His hair is dark and thick, falling over his forehead. In his long robe and white socks he almost looks like a young Japanese girl.

I call for tea. The tea served at the hotel is what Akira calls “Chinese tea.” I offer him a cigar, but he politely refuses. Instead he asks if he may smoke his own pipe. With my permission he removes a small pipe-case from his belt. Attached to it is a tiny pouch containing tobacco.

From the case he takes a small brass pipe. The bowl of the pipe is extremely small—no larger than a pea. From the pouch he takes a pinch of tobacco so finely cut that it looks almost like hair. He places the tobacco into the tiny bowl and lights it. He draws the smoke deeply and then lets it escape slowly through his nose. Three small puffs. That is enough. He cleans the pipe and places it back in its case.

Meanwhile I tell him about my unsuccessful search for the image of Buddha. Akira listens carefully. “You may see him today,” he says. “If you walk with me to the temple called Zotokuin.”

“Why today?” I ask.

“Because today is Busshoe—the festival of the birth of Buddha.”

I am immediately interested.

“But the image is very small,” Akira adds. “Only a few inches high. If you want to see a very large Buddha, you must travel to Kamakura.”

He tells me that in Kamakura there is a giant statue of Buddha seated upon a lotus.

“It is about fifty feet high,” he says.

Soon we leave together for the temple. Akira promises that he will also show me “some curious things.”

When we arrive at the temple we hear the cheerful sound of many voices. Mothers and children crowd the steps. When we enter the courtyard I see a small

table placed in front of the temple entrance. Around it stand many women holding babies.

On the table stands a wooden vessel filled with sweet tea. In the center of the tea stands a tiny statue of Buddha. One of the statue's hands points upward. The other points downward.

The women first place a small coin in the offering box. Then they take a wooden ladle and scoop up some of the sweet tea. They pour the tea gently over the small statue. Afterward they take another ladle of tea and drink a little themselves. Then they give a small sip to their babies.

Akira explains the meaning of the ceremony. It represents bathing the newborn Buddha.

Near the table stands a large bell shaped like a bowl. A priest approaches and prepares to strike the bell with a padded mallet. But when he lifts the mallet he suddenly stops. Looking inside the bell, he bends down and lifts something out.

It is a laughing baby.

The baby had climbed inside the bell while the priest was not watching.

The mother rushes forward laughing and takes the child. The priest laughs as well. Everyone nearby smiles at the scene.

Akira now goes to speak with one of the temple attendants. Soon he returns carrying a long lacquered box. The box is about one foot long and perhaps four inches wide. It has a small opening at one end.

"If you give two sen," Akira says, "we can learn our future."

I give him the two coins.

He shakes the box.

From the small opening slides a thin stick of bamboo. On the stick are written several Chinese characters.

Akira reads them.

"Kitsu," he says happily. "Good luck. Number fifty-one."

He shakes the box again.

Another stick appears.

"Dai-kitsu," he says. "Very great luck. Number ninety-nine."

He shakes the box a third time.

Another bamboo stick falls out.

This time Akira laughs.

“Kyo,” he says. “Bad luck. Number sixty-four.”

The bamboo sticks are called mikuji.

Akira returns the box and receives three small papers with the same numbers. These papers explain the fortune of each number.

Akira reads the first one aloud for me.

“If the person who draws this fortune follows the law of heaven and worships Kwannon,” he translates, “his sickness will pass away. If he has lost something, he will find it. If he is involved in a lawsuit, he will win. If he loves a woman, he will marry her—though he may need to wait. Many good things will happen to him.”

The second fortune promises even greater happiness.

The third fortune warns of illness, loss, and disappointment.

“But we are lucky,” Akira says cheerfully. “Two good fortunes out of three.”

Then he smiles.

“Now we will go to see another statue of Buddha.”

## Part 2

We leave the temple courtyard and walk together through many narrow streets. The houses stand close to one another, and the air carries many small sounds of daily life—voices, footsteps, and the soft tapping of wooden clogs. After some time Akira leads me toward the southern edge of the city. Before us rises a hill. A broad flight of stone steps climbs upward through trees of cedar and maple. We begin to ascend slowly.

At the top of the steps two stone lions sit as guardians. Passing between them, we enter a large temple courtyard. At the far end of the court stands the temple building itself. Its roof is covered with blue copper tiles. The edges of the roof curve upward in the familiar shape I have already seen many times. The paper

screens of the temple are open.

From inside comes a strange rhythmic sound. The priests are chanting. Their voices rise and fall together in a slow and solemn rhythm. The words they chant are ancient Sanskrit texts written in Chinese characters. Akira explains that they are reciting a sacred Buddhist scripture called the Sutra of the Lotus of the Good Law.

One of the priests sits slightly apart from the others. In front of him stands a curious wooden instrument shaped somewhat like the head of a fish. He strikes it gently again and again with a padded stick. Each blow produces a hollow sound that echoes softly through the temple. This instrument is called a mokugyo.

To the right side of the temple stands a smaller shrine. From within it rises the thin blue smoke of burning incense. The fragrance spreads through the air. I lean forward to look inside. Through the curling smoke I see a small wooden image of Buddha. The figure is dark in color and somewhat roughly carved. On the head rests a small crown. The statue bows slightly forward with hands joined together as if in prayer. The expression of the face is calm and gentle. Although the statue is simple and small, it possesses a quiet beauty.

After a moment I cross the courtyard to the other side of the temple. There I see another flight of steps climbing up a wooded slope behind the building. Curious to see what lies above, I begin climbing again.

When I reach the top I stop in surprise.

Before me stretches a strange and silent place. Tall trees grow closely together, casting deep shadows over the ground. Their branches are ancient and heavy. The soil beneath them is very dark. But what truly astonishes me is what stands among the trees. Everywhere I look I see small statues. Hundreds of them. Perhaps thousands. They stand in rows, filling the forest floor.

All of them are statues of Jizo.

Jizo is a beloved figure in Japanese Buddhism. He is the protector of travelers and the guardian of children—especially the spirits of children who died very young.

The statues are small, often no more than two or three feet high. Some are made

of stone, others of clay. Time and weather have softened their shapes. Moss grows over many of them. Each statue has a gentle, childlike face.

Some wear small red bibs tied around their necks. Others have little caps placed upon their heads. These garments are offerings from mothers who have lost children. They believe that Jizo watches over the souls of the little ones.

In front of many statues stand small toys, flowers, or cups of water left by visitors. The entire grove feels peaceful and deeply touching. The sunlight passes softly through the leaves above, creating moving patterns of light and shadow across the quiet figures.

For a long moment I stand without speaking.

Akira finally breaks the silence.

“These are the Jizo,” he explains gently. “Many mothers come here to pray.”

He tells me that in Japanese belief the souls of children who die too young must cross a river in the afterlife. But they cannot cross alone. Jizo helps them. He protects them and guides them safely.

Because of this belief, parents who have lost children often come to these statues. They bring small gifts. Sometimes they place stones beside the statues as symbols of prayers. Sometimes they dress the statues as they would dress their own children.

Looking at the rows of gentle faces, I begin to understand why the people love Jizo so deeply. The statues express kindness and compassion rather than power or fear. There is something very human about them.

Akira tells me that some of these statues have stood here for many generations. Others are newer, placed by grieving families. Together they form a silent community beneath the trees.

The place feels strangely sacred.

No loud voices are heard here. Even the wind moving through the leaves seems soft.

I walk slowly among the statues. Many faces smile quietly through their covering of moss. Some appear almost worn away by time. Yet each one seems to hold a gentle presence.

It is impossible to count them all.

I begin to feel that this quiet forest of Jizo statues reveals something very deep about the heart of Japan. The people here do not worship with fear. They express their feelings through small acts of tenderness—placing a cloth on a statue, offering a flower, leaving a toy. Their faith feels closely connected to love for family and memory.

After some time Akira and I begin to descend the hill again. The chanting of the priests continues faintly in the temple below. The soft sound of the mokugyo still echoes through the air.

But the image that remains strongest in my mind is the silent grove of Jizo.

Under the ancient trees they stand patiently, watching over the spirits of children.

Quiet guardians of sorrow and hope.

### Part 3

I continue walking slowly among the countless statues. The deeper we move into the grove, the more Jizo figures appear. Some stand alone beneath the trees, while others gather closely together in groups. Many of them have been standing here for a very long time. Rain and wind have softened their outlines. Moss grows across their shoulders and faces. Yet even when time has worn away their features, their expressions still seem gentle.

Some statues wear bright red cloths around their necks. These cloths look like small children's bibs. Others have little caps placed carefully upon their heads. These things are not decorations made by priests. They are gifts from mothers. When a child dies very young, the parents often come to this place. They place clothing upon the statue as if dressing their own lost child. In this way they show their love and ask Jizo to protect the spirit of the child.

Near some statues I see small toys. Wooden animals, tiny dolls, and little spinning tops lie quietly on the ground. Someone has also placed flowers in small cups of water beside several figures. Each offering represents a memory. Akira

explains that parents sometimes return here many times during the year. They clean the statue, replace the cloth, and bring new flowers. The grove becomes a place where grief changes slowly into peace.

Walking among these statues produces a strange feeling. At first the number of them seems almost overwhelming. Everywhere I look another small figure appears beneath the trees. But after some time the repetition of their quiet faces begins to calm the mind. They seem like patient watchers standing silently through the centuries.

The sunlight falls gently through the leaves above. Moving shadows slide slowly across the stone faces. Sometimes a small bird flies down and rests upon the shoulder of a statue. The entire grove remains silent except for the distant chanting from the temple below.

Finally we return to the main courtyard. The chanting of the priests is ending. Their voices fade gradually into silence. Visitors walk slowly across the courtyard. Some enter the temple. Others stand quietly outside. The peaceful atmosphere continues to impress me.

I realize again how different this religious feeling is from what I expected before coming to Japan. I had imagined temples filled with stern priests and solemn rituals. Instead I find laughter, children, flowers, and gentle expressions. The religion here seems closely connected with daily life. People pray quickly and naturally. They do not appear frightened by their gods. When they finish praying, they speak with friends or watch their children playing nearby.

Akira notices my thoughtful expression. "You are thinking about Jizo," he says.

I nod.

"It is very touching," I answer.

Akira smiles softly. "Japanese people love Jizo very much," he says. "He is kind. He protects travelers. And he protects children."

We leave the temple together and walk slowly back through the streets. The afternoon light has grown softer. Merchants call to customers from their shops. Children run through the narrow streets laughing. Ordinary life continues everywhere around us.

Yet in my mind the image of the Jizo grove remains. I remember the silent statues beneath the trees. I remember the small red bibs and the toys placed at their feet. Those quiet figures seem to express something that cannot easily be explained in words. They show a form of compassion that is simple and human.

Perhaps this is why Jizo is loved so deeply by the people. He represents kindness rather than power. He stands patiently beside human sorrow.

And in that silent forest of statues, beneath the old trees, he continues to watch over the souls of children.

## Chapter 4: A Pilgrimage to Enoshima

### Part 1

A pilgrimage to Enoshima begins most pleasantly from the town of Kamakura. The distance is not very great, and the road runs along the edge of the sea for much of the way. On a clear morning the journey becomes especially delightful. The sky shines with a pale brightness. The sea stretches outward in long lines of soft blue. Fishing boats move slowly across the water, their sails white against the horizon. Sometimes the road runs close beside the shore. At other times it climbs gently over low hills covered with grass and small trees.

Travelers may go on foot, or ride in a jinricksha, or even hire a small horse. But walking allows one to see the beauty of the place most clearly.

Enoshima itself appears first as a small island rising suddenly from the sea. From a distance it looks almost like a green rock crowned with trees. The island stands connected to the mainland by a narrow stretch of sand. At low tide people can easily walk across the sand to reach it. At high tide the water sometimes rises and covers parts of the path.

The island is famous throughout Japan as a sacred place. Many pilgrims travel there every year. Some come to pray. Others come simply to admire the beautiful views of the sea and sky.

The road leading toward the island passes through small villages where fishermen live. Their houses stand close together near the shore. Nets hang outside the doors to dry in the sun. Boats lie pulled up upon the sand. Children run along the beach chasing one another. Women carry baskets filled with fish freshly caught from the sea.

As the traveler approaches Enoshima the sound of waves becomes louder. The wind carries the smell of salt water. Soon the narrow sand path leading to the island appears clearly ahead.

Pilgrims move slowly along it in both directions. Some carry small bundles. Others carry staffs used during long journeys. Many wear white garments that

show they are traveling to sacred places.

At the end of the path the island rises steeply. Stone steps climb upward through trees and small buildings. Shops stand along the lower part of the path selling food, charms, and souvenirs for visitors.

The air is lively with voices and laughter. Pilgrims pause to rest or drink tea before beginning the climb.

As I start upward I notice many small shrines placed beside the steps. Some contain images of gods or Buddhist figures. Others hold only small offerings of flowers or incense left by travelers.

The climb becomes steeper as the path rises higher. From time to time I stop to look back. The view across the sea grows wider and more beautiful with every step. Fishing boats appear smaller and smaller upon the shining water.

Far away along the coast the hills of Kamakura stretch like dark shapes against the sky.

At last I reach a terrace where a large torii gate stands before another flight of steps. Passing beneath it, I continue upward toward the sacred places hidden among the trees of Enoshima.

## Part 2

The path continues upward through a long series of stone steps. Tall trees grow closely on both sides, and their branches form a cool shade over the pilgrims who climb slowly toward the shrine. Small shops appear along the way. In these shops old women sell tea, cakes, and small charms for travelers. Pilgrims often stop to rest for a moment before continuing the climb.

As one rises higher upon the island, the sound of the sea becomes distant. Instead there are the voices of visitors, the tapping of wooden sandals upon the stones, and sometimes the ringing of a bell from the shrine above.

At last the path opens into a small courtyard where the principal shrine of the island stands. The building is painted in soft colors and decorated with many carvings. Before the entrance stands a great bell and a large box for offerings.

Pilgrims approach quietly, bow before the shrine, and throw a few coins into the box. Then they clap their hands together and offer a short prayer.

After praying they often remain standing for a moment in silence.

Many visitors believe that the goddess worshiped here possesses special power. She is thought to protect travelers and sailors and to bring good fortune to those who pray sincerely.

From the terrace near the shrine one can see a magnificent view of the ocean. The water stretches outward without end, shining brightly under the sky. The wind blows strongly across the island, carrying the fresh smell of salt and seaweed.

Sometimes the distant outline of Mount Fuji can be seen rising far across the plain. When the air is very clear, its snow-covered peak appears white against the blue sky.

Travelers gather along the edge of the terrace to admire this view. Some sit quietly looking out across the water. Others speak with friends or point toward distant boats moving slowly along the horizon.

After spending some time near the shrine, many pilgrims continue their walk around the island. Narrow paths lead along the cliffs where waves strike the rocks below. In some places the sea has hollowed out small caves beneath the cliffs.

These caves are also considered sacred.

Visitors often enter them carrying small candles. Inside, the air feels cool and damp, and the sound of the waves echoes faintly from the darkness beyond.

Within one of the caves stands a statue of the goddess worshiped on the island. Pilgrims place candles before the image and bow quietly.

The flickering light of the candles casts moving shadows across the rough stone walls. The atmosphere becomes mysterious and solemn.

When one leaves the cave and returns again to the bright sunlight outside, the sea and sky seem even more beautiful than before.

After exploring the island, pilgrims finally descend the long steps again toward the sandy path that leads back to the mainland.

Many pause once more to look behind them.

The island stands green and peaceful above the shining water, and the sound of

waves continues to rise softly from the rocks below.

For those who visit Enoshima, the journey becomes not only a pleasant excursion but also a quiet moment of reflection beside the sea.

### Part 3

As evening approaches, the atmosphere of the island slowly changes. During the day the paths are lively with pilgrims, merchants, and curious visitors. Voices rise everywhere, and the sound of sandals upon the stone steps never ceases. But when the sun begins to sink toward the sea, the crowds gradually grow smaller.

Many travelers return to Kamakura before nightfall. The small shops begin to close. The merchants pack away their goods, and the narrow paths become quiet again.

Those who remain on the island walk slowly along the cliffs to watch the sunset.

The sky over the sea turns soft shades of gold and red. The waves reflect the changing colors, and the horizon grows dim beneath the evening light. Fishing boats move silently across the water, their dark shapes drifting slowly toward the distant shore.

Standing upon the rocks, one feels a great calmness.

The wind grows cooler as night approaches. The trees on the island whisper softly in the darkness. Sometimes the distant cry of seabirds echoes above the waves.

At such moments the sacred character of the place becomes easier to understand. The island seems removed from the ordinary world. Surrounded by the endless movement of the sea, it possesses a feeling of quiet mystery.

Long ago people believed that divine beings lived in places like this. When one watches the changing colors of the sky above the ocean, that belief no longer seems strange.

Even a modern traveler can feel something of the same emotion.

After the sun disappears completely below the horizon, a deep blue twilight spreads across the sea. Lights appear slowly in the distant villages along the shore.

The sound of the waves grows stronger in the darkness.

Pilgrims who remain overnight often stay in small inns upon the island. From their windows they can hear the sea throughout the night.

The steady rhythm of the waves striking the rocks below creates a sound that continues without end.

Listening to that sound, one understands why Enoshima has long been a place of pilgrimage.

The beauty of the island does not lie only in its shrines or sacred buildings. It lies also in the quiet harmony between sea, sky, and stone.

Those who visit the island carry away with them not only memories of a journey but also a deeper sense of the peaceful power of nature.

And when they return again to the busy towns of the mainland, the sound of the waves of Enoshima remains in their memory for a long time.

## Chapter 5: At the Market of the Dead

### Part 1

In Japan there are certain festivals which seem strange and almost mysterious to foreigners. Among these is the festival held in honor of the spirits of the dead. During this time it is believed that the souls of ancestors return for a short visit to the world they once knew.

Families prepare carefully for this occasion. The houses are cleaned, small altars are decorated with flowers, and offerings of food are placed before the images of the departed. Lamps are lit so that the returning spirits may find their way easily.

In some places the festival also includes a curious kind of market.

This market appears only for a short time each year. It is held in the evening, and the stalls are filled with small objects connected with the memory of the dead.

When I first heard about this strange market, I wished very much to see it for myself. One evening I therefore went with several friends to visit the place where it was held.

The market stood in an open area near a temple. As we approached, we saw many small lanterns shining through the darkness. The light from these lanterns gave the entire scene a soft and somewhat dreamlike appearance.

Rows of stalls had been arranged closely together. At each stall a merchant sat quietly waiting for visitors. The goods displayed on the tables were unlike those in ordinary markets.

Instead of clothing or food, the stalls offered small objects used in religious ceremonies. There were tiny images of Buddha, little wooden tablets for writing the names of the dead, and many delicate paper lanterns.

Some stalls sold flowers and incense.

Others offered small toys made for children who had died young.

People moved slowly among the stalls, examining the objects with serious expressions. Their voices were quiet, and the atmosphere remained calm and

respectful.

The market did not feel like a place of business alone.

It seemed also to be a place of remembrance.

Many visitors bought small offerings to place upon the family altar at home. Others selected objects that would later be used during ceremonies for their ancestors.

In this way the market served both a practical and a symbolic purpose.

The goods sold there were not merely merchandise.

They were reminders of the connection between the living and the dead.

For a foreign visitor the experience was both unusual and deeply touching.

The quiet respect shown by the people revealed how strongly they continued to feel the presence of those who had passed away.

## Part 2

As we walked slowly through the rows of stalls, I noticed that each object seemed to carry its own quiet meaning. The merchants spoke gently with their customers, explaining the use of different items. Small lanterns of colored paper were among the most common things displayed. These lanterns would later be lit during the festival nights to guide the spirits of the dead back to their homes. Their soft light was believed to help wandering souls find the houses where their families waited.

There were also many small wooden tablets upon which names could be written. Families would write the names of departed relatives upon these tablets and place them before the household altar. In this way the presence of the ancestors would be remembered during the days of the festival.

Some stalls displayed delicate flowers made from paper or silk. Others offered real flowers carefully arranged in simple bundles. These were intended to decorate the small altars prepared inside the houses.

Incense was also sold in great quantities. The thin sticks were placed in small boxes, and their fragrance filled the air of the market. The rising smoke of incense

was believed to carry prayers upward toward the spirit world.

Among the most touching objects were the toys prepared for the spirits of children. Tiny drums, dolls, and little paper animals lay upon the tables. These gifts were meant for the souls of children who had died young, so that they might not feel lonely when they returned briefly to visit their families.

As we continued walking, I realized that the market did not possess the noisy excitement of ordinary commercial places. People did not bargain loudly or hurry from stall to stall. Instead they moved slowly, speaking in quiet voices. The entire gathering had the feeling of a gentle ceremony rather than a business transaction.

Many visitors paused at the stalls for a long time before choosing an object. Sometimes they seemed lost in thought, as if remembering someone who had once been dear to them.

The soft glow of the lanterns, the fragrance of incense, and the quiet movements of the crowd created a scene unlike any other market I had ever seen.

It seemed less like a place where goods were bought and sold and more like a meeting point between the living and the memory of the dead.

### Part 3

While we were standing near one of the stalls, a small group of women approached carrying baskets. They moved slowly through the market, examining the objects placed upon the tables. Their faces were calm, yet their expressions suggested quiet reflection. One of them stopped before a stall where small paper lanterns were displayed in long rows. She lifted one of the lanterns gently and studied its shape. The merchant spoke softly to her, explaining the design and the meaning of the object.

After listening for a moment, the woman nodded and placed the lantern carefully into her basket.

In another part of the market a man stood looking at a group of wooden tablets prepared for writing names. He remained there for several minutes without speaking. At last he selected one tablet and handed a coin to the merchant.

The merchant wrapped the object slowly and respectfully before giving it to him.

Watching these small exchanges, I began to understand more clearly the spirit of the market. Each purchase seemed connected with a memory. The people were not buying objects for decoration or amusement. They were choosing symbols through which they could express remembrance and affection.

As the evening grew darker, the lanterns around the market shone more brightly. Their soft light reflected from the faces of the visitors and from the objects displayed upon the stalls.

Children sometimes walked beside their parents, watching the scene with curious eyes. Although they might not fully understand the meaning of the festival, they were learning the traditions that connected their families to the past.

From time to time the distant sound of temple bells reached us through the night air.

The tone of those bells seemed to deepen the feeling of quiet reflection that surrounded the market.

Eventually the crowd began to grow smaller.

Some visitors left carrying baskets filled with flowers, incense, and lanterns. Others walked slowly away with only a single object chosen after careful thought.

When we finally left the market and returned toward the town, the lanterns still shone behind us in the darkness.

The image remained in my memory for a long time.

It was not the strangeness of the market that impressed me most, but the gentle dignity with which the people honored the memory of those who had gone before them.

In that quiet gathering of lanterns, incense, and simple offerings, the past seemed to remain alive in the hearts of the living.

## Chapter 6: Bon-Odori

### Part 1

During the season of the Festival of the Dead another custom appears which is both beautiful and joyful. This custom is the dance known as Bon-Odori. It is performed in many towns and villages throughout Japan during the evenings of the festival. The dance is not intended as entertainment alone. It is believed that the spirits of the ancestors return during these days, and the dance is offered partly as a welcome to them.

When the night of the dance arrives, lanterns are hung everywhere in the open space where the gathering will take place. The lanterns are usually made of paper and painted with delicate designs. Their soft light fills the evening air with warm color.

At the center of the space a raised platform is built for the musicians.

Drums are placed upon this platform, and sometimes flutes or other instruments are used as well.

When the music begins, the dancers gather slowly around the platform. Men, women, and children all take part. The dance does not require special training. Its movements are simple and graceful, so that anyone may join.

The dancers move in large circles around the musicians. Their steps follow the rhythm of the drums. Arms rise and fall gently in time with the music.

Each region of Japan has its own variations of the dance. The gestures may differ slightly, and the melodies of the songs may change from place to place. Yet the spirit of the dance remains the same everywhere.

It expresses both remembrance and happiness.

Watching such a dance for the first time produces a strong impression. The movement of the dancers appears calm and natural. There is no excitement or wild motion.

Instead the entire gathering moves together with quiet harmony.

The lanterns glow softly above the dancers. Their light reflects from the faces

of the people as they move slowly around the circle.

Sometimes the voices of the singers rise above the sound of the drums.

These songs are often very old. They tell stories of villages, of travelers, and of simple moments from everyday life.

Children often watch the dancers from the edges of the circle before joining timidly in the movement themselves.

In this way the dance becomes not only a ceremony but also a joyful meeting of the whole community.

For a visitor the scene is unforgettable.

The gentle rhythm of the drums, the slow turning of the dancers beneath the lanterns, and the quiet summer night combine to create an atmosphere of peaceful celebration.

## Part 2

As the evening deepens, the dance gradually becomes more animated, although it never loses its quiet grace. More people join the circle as the music continues. Those who had been watching from a distance step forward and take their places beside the other dancers. In a short time the circle grows wider, and sometimes a second or even a third ring of dancers forms around the musicians.

The drums sound steadily from the platform at the center. Their rhythm guides the steps of everyone in the gathering. Occasionally the drummer calls out a short cry, and the dancers answer with voices of encouragement.

Yet even in these lively moments the mood remains gentle.

The purpose of the dance is not excitement but shared remembrance.

Many of the dancers move with expressions of quiet happiness. Some smile softly as they follow the rhythm of the music. Others seem thoughtful, as if remembering those who are believed to be visiting the world during these festival nights.

For this reason the dance contains a mixture of joy and reflection.

The presence of the lanterns adds greatly to the beauty of the scene. Hundreds

of small lights hang above the dancers or stand along the edges of the open space. Their glow reflects from the bright summer clothing worn by the participants.

When the wind moves gently through the lanterns, their light sways slowly back and forth, giving the entire gathering a dreamlike appearance.

Sometimes an elderly person joins the dance with calm dignity, moving slowly but confidently through the familiar gestures. At other times young children imitate the movements of their parents, laughing quietly as they try to follow the rhythm.

In this way the tradition passes naturally from one generation to the next.

The dance may continue for many hours.

As the night grows late, some dancers leave the circle and rest for a while at the side of the gathering. Others continue moving steadily around the platform, following the music without interruption.

From a distance the scene appears almost like the movement of a great living wheel turning slowly beneath the lanterns.

When at last the music begins to fade and the drums fall silent, the dancers gradually stop and bow their heads for a moment of quiet respect.

The gathering then breaks apart slowly.

People walk home through the warm night air, speaking softly with friends or family members.

The lanterns are extinguished one by one, and the open space returns to silence.

Yet the memory of the dance remains vivid in the minds of those who have taken part.

For them the evening has been more than a festival.

It has been a moment in which the living and the memory of the dead seemed to share the same peaceful circle beneath the summer sky.

## Chapter 7: The Chief City of the Province of the Gods

### Part 1

The province of Izumo has long been regarded as one of the most sacred regions of Japan. Ancient legends tell that the gods once gathered there to decide the fate of the world. Because of these traditions the land is often called the Province of the Gods.

The chief city of this province stands near the sea, surrounded by fields and distant hills. It is not a large city in the modern sense, yet its history reaches far into the past. Many travelers come here not for commerce or business but to visit the famous shrine which lies a short distance away.

The streets of the town are quiet and orderly. Small houses line the roads, and shops display simple goods for visitors and pilgrims. The atmosphere of the place feels peaceful, as if the life of the city moves at a slower rhythm than in the larger towns of Japan.

From time to time groups of pilgrims appear along the streets. Some travel on foot carrying staffs and small bundles. Others arrive by carriage or boat from distant provinces. Their clothing often shows that they have come from far away.

Many of them speak in dialects that sound unfamiliar even to the local people.

Despite these differences they share a common purpose.

All have come to visit the great shrine of Izumo.

The road leading from the town to the shrine passes through open fields and quiet groves of trees. As one approaches the sacred grounds, the atmosphere changes gradually. The sounds of ordinary life grow faint. Instead the traveler hears the wind moving softly through the tall trees that surround the shrine.

Large torii gates stand at intervals along the approach.

Passing beneath each gate gives the feeling of moving deeper into a place set apart from the ordinary world.

Pilgrims walk slowly along the path, sometimes pausing to bow their heads in respect.

Some carry offerings which they will place before the shrine. Others bring written prayers asking for guidance, protection, or happiness in the future.

The closer one comes to the sacred buildings, the more impressive the surroundings become.

Ancient trees rise high above the path, their trunks dark and massive with age. Moss covers the ground in soft green carpets.

The air itself seems cooler and quieter beneath the shadow of these trees.

For those who visit this place, the experience feels less like entering a building and more like stepping into a living fragment of the ancient world.

## Part 2

The great shrine itself stands within a wide sacred enclosure surrounded by ancient trees. The buildings are constructed in a style far older than the temples of later centuries. Their roofs slope steeply upward, and the wood of the structures has darkened with age. Yet the appearance of the shrine does not suggest decay. Instead it gives the impression of great antiquity carefully preserved.

Pilgrims enter the grounds quietly and walk toward the main hall where prayers are offered. Before approaching the shrine, visitors purify themselves according to the custom of the country. They wash their hands and rinse their mouths at a basin filled with clear water.

Only after this act of purification do they step forward to present their offerings.

Some pilgrims bring coins or small gifts. Others bring only their prayers.

Standing before the shrine, they bow respectfully, clap their hands together, and speak a few silent words to the unseen powers they believe dwell within the sacred place.

Afterward they remain still for a moment, as if listening for an answer.

The atmosphere of the shrine is very different from the solemn darkness of many Buddhist temples. Here the open air, the tall trees, and the bright light of the sky give the place a feeling of natural purity.

The religion associated with the shrine belongs to the ancient traditions of the

country.

It reflects a time when people believed that divine spirits lived in mountains, rivers, forests, and stones.

For this reason the shrine seems closely connected with the surrounding landscape.

The buildings do not dominate the forest around them.

Instead they appear to exist in harmony with it.

Walking through the sacred grounds, one often notices small details that reveal the long history of the place.

Ancient wooden fences show marks left by many generations of visitors.

Stone paths have been worn smooth by countless footsteps.

Even the trees themselves seem to share in the memory of centuries.

Pilgrims from distant regions often remain for a long time in the quiet spaces between the buildings.

Some sit beneath the trees in silent reflection.

Others walk slowly through the grounds, examining the architecture of the shrine and the objects displayed there.

Although the shrine attracts many visitors each year, it still preserves an atmosphere of calm dignity.

The voices of the pilgrims rarely rise above a respectful murmur.

The wind moving through the tall branches produces a soft sound that seems to belong naturally to the sacred place.

Standing there among the trees, one begins to understand why the province of Izumo has been known for centuries as the Province of the Gods.

### Part 3

Beyond the principal buildings of the shrine the sacred grounds extend into quiet wooded areas where fewer visitors wander. Paths lead through the trees toward smaller shrines dedicated to various deities connected with the ancient legends of the province. These smaller structures are simple in appearance, yet

they possess a dignity that comes from great age and long reverence.

Many pilgrims visit these places after offering their prayers at the main shrine.

They walk slowly along the shaded paths, pausing occasionally to read the inscriptions carved upon wooden tablets or stone markers placed near the shrines.

Some of these inscriptions tell stories about the gods who were believed to gather in Izumo in ancient times.

According to tradition, during one month of the year all the gods of Japan assemble in this province to hold a great council.

At that time the rest of the country is said to be temporarily without divine guardians, while Izumo becomes the center of the spiritual world.

Whether one believes these legends or not, the atmosphere of the place encourages reflection.

The quiet forest, the ancient buildings, and the respectful behavior of the pilgrims all contribute to a feeling that the present moment is connected with a distant past.

As I walked through these sacred grounds, I found myself thinking about how long such traditions have endured.

Generations of people have come here bringing their hopes, fears, and prayers.

Empires have risen and fallen, cities have grown and changed, yet the shrine remains, surrounded by the same trees and visited by pilgrims whose concerns are not very different from those of their ancestors.

In the late afternoon the light of the sun begins to filter gently through the branches above the shrine grounds.

The shadows grow longer, and the sound of the wind in the trees becomes more noticeable as the number of visitors slowly decreases.

Some pilgrims prepare to leave, bowing once more before the shrine before walking back along the path toward the town.

Others remain for a while longer, sitting quietly beneath the trees or gazing toward the distant hills beyond the forest.

Eventually I too turned back toward the road leading to the city.

As I passed again beneath the great torii gate, I felt that I had not merely visited

a historical monument but had briefly entered a living tradition that continues to shape the spirit of the country.

The memory of the quiet shrine, the ancient trees, and the pilgrims moving slowly along the shaded paths remained with me long after I had left the Province of the Gods.

## Chapter 8: Kitzuki: The Most Ancient Shrine in Japan

### Part 1

The great shrine of Kitzuki, known today as Izumo Taisha, is believed to be the most ancient shrine in Japan. Its origin reaches back into a time so distant that history and legend become almost indistinguishable. For many centuries it has been regarded as one of the most sacred places in the country.

The shrine stands in a wide clearing surrounded by forests of ancient trees. Approaching the sacred grounds, the visitor first passes beneath large torii gates that mark the boundary between the ordinary world and the domain of the gods.

Beyond these gates the path leads slowly toward the main buildings of the shrine.

Pilgrims walk quietly along this path, often carrying small offerings or written prayers.

The atmosphere is calm and solemn, yet not oppressive.

Instead it suggests a quiet dignity that comes from long tradition and deep reverence.

The architecture of the shrine differs greatly from that of Buddhist temples.

The buildings are constructed entirely of wood and raised slightly above the ground upon large pillars.

Their roofs rise steeply and are decorated with distinctive crossed beams at the ends.

These features reflect a style of construction that existed long before the influence of Chinese architecture reached Japan.

Because of this, the shrine provides a rare glimpse into the earliest forms of Japanese religious architecture.

One of the most striking features of the shrine is the enormous rope made of rice straw that hangs before the main hall.

Pilgrims often stand beneath it while offering their prayers.

Some throw small coins toward the rope before bowing respectfully.

The rope itself symbolizes purity and serves as a visible sign that the space beyond it is sacred.

Within the main hall the sacred object of worship is kept hidden from ordinary view.

Visitors do not enter the inner sanctuary but pray from the open space before it.

This practice emphasizes the idea that the divine presence cannot be fully seen or understood.

Instead it is approached with humility and respect.

Walking slowly through the grounds of Kitzuki Shrine, one becomes aware not only of its great age but also of the continuity of tradition that it represents.

Generations of pilgrims have walked the same paths and offered their prayers before the same buildings.

The shrine stands today much as it has for centuries, quietly preserving the memory of Japan's earliest religious life.

## Part 2

The traditions connected with Kitzuki Shrine are closely related to some of the oldest myths of Japan. According to ancient belief, this place was associated with the great deity Ōkuninushi, a god who was said to have ruled the land before the heavenly gods sent their descendants to govern the world of men. Because of these legends the shrine has long been regarded as a place where the divine history of the country is remembered.

Pilgrims who visit the shrine often think about these ancient stories as they walk through the sacred grounds.

The myths describe how the gods once gathered in this province to decide the destiny of the nation.

In this way the shrine became not only a place of prayer but also a symbol of the spiritual origins of Japan.

The ceremonies performed at Kitzuki preserve many elements of very old religious customs.

Priests dressed in traditional garments conduct rituals that have been passed down through countless generations.

Their movements are slow and deliberate, reflecting a deep respect for the sacred traditions they serve.

During certain festivals the shrine grounds become filled with visitors from many parts of the country.

Pilgrims gather to witness the ceremonies, offer prayers, and take part in the celebrations connected with the ancient deities of the shrine.

Even during these busy times the atmosphere rarely loses its dignity.

The wide spaces between the buildings and the presence of the surrounding forest maintain a sense of calm and order.

The natural setting of the shrine contributes greatly to its character.

The tall trees that surround the sacred buildings appear almost as ancient as the shrine itself.

Their trunks rise high above the paths, and their branches form a quiet canopy through which sunlight falls softly upon the ground.

Walking beneath these trees gives the impression of entering a place where time moves differently.

The modern world seems distant.

The voices of visitors are softened by the surrounding forest.

Even the wind that moves through the branches appears to carry a sense of quiet continuity.

For those who visit Kitzuki Shrine, the experience becomes more than a simple tour of a historical monument.

It becomes an encounter with a living tradition that links the present with the earliest spiritual beliefs of the Japanese people.

### Part 3

As one continues to explore the grounds of the shrine, the sense of antiquity becomes even stronger. The wide open spaces between the buildings allow

visitors to move slowly and observe the details of the architecture. The wood of the structures has darkened with age, yet the buildings are carefully preserved and repaired whenever necessary so that their original form may remain unchanged.

This practice of rebuilding sacred structures is itself an ancient custom.

Instead of allowing a shrine to decay, the buildings are sometimes reconstructed according to the exact design of earlier generations.

In this way the form of the shrine remains faithful to the traditions of the past, even though the materials may be renewed.

Such customs reflect a way of thinking very different from the preservation of ruins in other parts of the world.

Here the continuity of form and ritual is considered more important than the survival of the original wood itself.

Walking slowly along the paths of the shrine, I noticed many pilgrims pausing beneath the trees.

Some were writing prayers upon small wooden tablets which they later hung upon racks near the buildings.

Others stood quietly with folded hands, gazing toward the main hall where the deity of the shrine is believed to reside.

Although the gestures of prayer were simple, the expressions of the people showed sincere feeling.

For many of them this journey represented an important moment in their lives.

They had come from distant provinces carrying hopes, fears, and wishes for the future.

The shrine offered them a place where those emotions could be expressed with dignity and calm.

In the late afternoon the light of the sun began to soften as it passed through the tall trees surrounding the sacred grounds.

Long shadows stretched across the gravel paths.

The number of visitors slowly decreased as some pilgrims began their journey back toward the nearby town.

Standing for a moment near the entrance of the shrine, I looked once more

across the quiet grounds.

The buildings rose calmly among the ancient trees, unchanged in their essential form despite the passing of many centuries.

It seemed clear that the significance of Kitzuki Shrine did not lie only in its age or its architecture.

Its true importance lay in the continuity of belief and tradition that had preserved it through so many generations.

Leaving the shrine behind, I felt that I had seen not merely one of the oldest religious monuments in Japan but also a living reminder of the country's earliest spiritual imagination.

## Chapter 9: In the Cave of the Children's Ghosts

### Part 1

Near the sacred places of Izumo there exists a small cave which is connected with one of the most touching legends of the region. The people of the province speak of it with quiet seriousness, for it is believed to be associated with the spirits of children who died before reaching maturity.

According to local belief, the souls of such children do not immediately enter the peaceful world of the ancestors.

Instead they must first pass through a place where they perform a strange and sorrowful task.

The children are said to gather stones beside the river of the dead.

With these stones they attempt to build small towers.

Each tower represents their hope of reaching the world of rest and peace.

Yet whenever they build their fragile structures, evil spirits come and scatter the stones again.

Because of this the work must begin repeatedly.

The children struggle again and again to rebuild their little towers.

Their efforts symbolize the sorrow of lives ended too soon.

But in this legend the children are not left entirely without protection.

The compassionate figure of Jizo appears to guard them.

Jizo gathers the children around him and hides them within the folds of his robe.

There they are sheltered from the cruel spirits who would destroy their work.

This story has deeply influenced the religious imagination of the people.

In many places small statues of Jizo stand beside roads or near temples.

Parents who have lost children often place small offerings before these statues.

The cave connected with the legend lies not far from the shrine.

Visitors who approach the place must follow a narrow path leading through a quiet wooded area.

The entrance of the cave is small and partly hidden among rocks and trees.

At first glance it appears unremarkable.

Yet those who know the story approach it with a sense of reverence.

Within the darkness of the cave the legend of the children's spirits seems to take on a deeper emotional meaning.

## Part 2

Entering the cave, one immediately notices the cool and damp air that fills the interior. The light from outside fades quickly, and the deeper parts of the cave remain in shadow. Small lamps or candles are sometimes placed near the entrance by visitors, and their weak light reveals the rough surface of the stone walls.

Inside the cave many small stones have been arranged in little piles.

Some of these piles resemble the towers described in the old legend.

Visitors often place additional stones upon them, continuing the symbolic work of the children whose spirits are believed to gather here.

The sight of these small stone towers produces a quiet and touching impression.

Each stone may represent the memory of a lost child or the compassion of someone who has heard the story.

The silence of the cave deepens this feeling.

Only the faint sound of water dripping from the rocks can sometimes be heard.

Standing there, a visitor cannot easily forget the meaning attached to the place.

The legend of the children building their fragile towers beside the river of the dead becomes strangely vivid in the imagination.

For this reason many parents who have suffered the loss of a child come to this cave.

They bring small offerings such as flowers, toys, or simple stones.

These gifts are placed gently among the little towers already standing on the ground.

The gesture expresses both grief and hope.

The grief arises from the loss that cannot be changed.

The hope comes from the belief that compassionate spirits, especially Jizo, will

protect the souls of the children.

In this way the cave becomes a place not only of sorrow but also of quiet comfort.

Those who leave offerings there often remain for a few moments in silence before returning to the daylight outside.

When one steps again into the open air, the brightness of the sky and the movement of the wind through the trees feel strangely vivid.

The memory of the dark cave and the small towers of stone remains deeply in the mind.

It reminds the visitor of the tenderness with which human beings attempt to care for the spirits of those who have departed too soon.

### Part 3

After leaving the cave, the visitor walks again through the quiet grove of trees that surrounds the place. The contrast between the darkness of the cave and the light of the open air creates a strong impression. The world outside appears brighter and more vivid than before.

The wind moves gently through the branches overhead, and the sound of the leaves creates a soft whispering that seems almost like distant voices.

For those who know the legend, the surrounding landscape becomes connected with the story of the children and their fragile towers of stone.

Every small rock and every shadow beneath the trees seems to belong to the same quiet tradition.

The path leading away from the cave returns slowly toward the shrine and the more open areas of the sacred grounds.

Along the way small statues of Jizo stand beside the road.

Many of them wear red cloth bibs or small caps placed upon their heads by visitors.

Flowers and tiny offerings often lie at their feet.

These simple objects show how deeply the legend of the children has entered

the hearts of the people.

Parents who pass along the path sometimes stop before the statues.

They bow quietly or place a small stone among the offerings.

In such gestures one can see the tenderness of human sympathy expressed through religious tradition.

Although the story of the children building their towers beside the river of the dead contains elements of sorrow, it also reflects a powerful sense of compassion.

The figure of Jizo represents protection, kindness, and patience.

Because of this belief, the legend does not leave the listener in despair.

Instead it offers a sense of comfort.

The children are not abandoned in their struggle.

They are watched over by a guardian who gathers them safely within his care.

Walking slowly away from the cave, I felt that the legend had revealed something important about the spiritual imagination of the people.

It showed how stories and symbols can transform grief into a form of quiet hope.

Through such traditions sorrow becomes part of a larger vision of compassion and protection.

The memory of the cave and its small towers of stone remained with me long afterward as one of the most moving experiences of my journey through the Province of the Gods.

## Chapter 10: At Mionoseki

### Part 1

The small town of Mionoseki stands at the edge of the sea not far from the sacred province of Izumo. It is a quiet fishing village whose life is closely connected with the ocean that surrounds it. Boats move slowly in and out of the harbor, and the sound of waves breaking against the rocks can be heard throughout the day.

Although the town is small, it possesses a certain charm that attracts travelers who visit the region.

The houses are built close together along narrow streets that descend toward the shore.

Fishermen mend their nets beside the water, while small children run along the beach playing among the boats.

The air carries the scent of salt and seaweed, reminding visitors that the life of the town depends almost entirely upon the sea.

The harbor itself forms a gentle curve protected by rocky points of land on either side.

Within this sheltered space the fishing boats rest quietly when they return from their journeys.

Some of the boats are small and simple, while others are larger vessels prepared for longer voyages.

Their masts and ropes create delicate patterns against the sky.

From the shore one can watch the fishermen preparing their equipment before setting out once again upon the water.

The rhythm of life in Mionoseki appears calm and unhurried.

Unlike the busy ports of larger cities, the village seems to exist in harmony with the natural movement of the sea and the seasons.

Visitors who arrive here often feel that they have entered a place where time passes more slowly.

In the early morning the harbor is filled with quiet activity as fishermen prepare their boats.

By midday the streets grow peaceful again, and only the sound of the waves and the cries of seabirds break the silence.

Toward evening the boats return one by one across the shining surface of the sea.

The fishermen carry baskets of fresh fish toward the market while their families gather near the shore to greet them.

The scene has a simplicity that leaves a strong impression upon the traveler.

Standing beside the harbor, one senses how closely human life in this village remains connected with the natural world.

The sea provides both livelihood and beauty, shaping the daily existence of everyone who lives there.

## Part 2

In addition to its quiet harbor, Mionoseki is known for a shrine that stands near the edge of the sea. The shrine is dedicated to deities who protect sailors and travelers upon the water. For this reason fishermen and seafarers visit it regularly before beginning their journeys.

The building itself stands on slightly raised ground overlooking the harbor.

From its steps one can see the open sea stretching toward the horizon.

Pilgrims who come to pray there often bring small offerings or write their wishes upon wooden tablets that hang near the entrance.

Many of these prayers ask for safe voyages or protection from storms.

The connection between the shrine and the sea feels natural in such a place.

The people of Mionoseki depend upon the ocean for their livelihood, yet they also understand its dangers.

The sea can provide abundance, but it can also become violent without warning.

Because of this uncertainty the shrine plays an important role in the life of the community.

Before leaving the harbor, some fishermen pause at the shrine to bow their heads in prayer.

Their gestures are simple, but they reveal the respect with which they approach the forces of nature that shape their lives.

Walking through the village one also notices the friendliness of the people who live there.

Visitors are greeted with quiet courtesy, and conversations begin easily with those who work near the harbor or along the narrow streets.

The atmosphere of the town encourages such simple exchanges.

Unlike larger cities where strangers hurry past one another, the slower rhythm of village life allows time for brief moments of conversation.

As evening approaches, the appearance of Mionoseki changes once more.

The sunlight fades across the surface of the water, and the harbor becomes filled with soft colors reflected from the sky.

Fishing boats return gradually to their places along the shore.

The voices of the fishermen rise as they unload their catch and prepare their equipment for the following day.

At the same time lanterns begin to appear in the windows of the houses.

Their gentle light spreads across the narrow streets and the quiet harbor.

The scene possesses a peaceful beauty that remains long in the memory of those who witness it.

For the traveler, a visit to Mionoseki offers more than the sight of a picturesque fishing village.

It reveals a way of life shaped by the sea, sustained by tradition, and enriched by a quiet sense of community.

### Part 3

As night falls over Mionoseki, the quiet harbor takes on a new character. The movement of the day gradually fades, and the village settles into a calm rhythm shaped by the sound of the sea. Lanterns glow softly along the streets, and their

reflections tremble upon the dark surface of the water.

The boats lie motionless in the harbor, their shapes outlined faintly against the dim horizon.

Occasionally a fisherman moves quietly along the shore checking his equipment or securing the ropes that hold the boats in place.

The sound of the waves becomes more noticeable during these quiet hours.

Each wave breaks gently against the rocks and then withdraws again into the darkness.

The steady rhythm continues through the night, forming a kind of natural music that accompanies the sleeping village.

Walking along the edge of the harbor, one feels the peacefulness of the place in a very direct way.

The sea, the sky, and the small houses of the village seem to exist in simple harmony.

Nothing appears hurried or disturbed.

Instead everything moves according to the slow and enduring rhythm of nature.

For travelers who have spent time in large cities, the quiet of Mionoseki offers a welcome contrast.

The absence of noise and confusion allows the mind to rest.

Even the simplest sights—a lantern shining in a window, the outline of a boat against the water, the distant call of a seabird—take on a quiet beauty.

Standing there beside the harbor, one begins to understand why places like this remain memorable long after the journey has ended.

The charm of Mionoseki lies not in grand monuments or impressive buildings.

Its beauty arises from the simple relationship between the people of the village and the sea that sustains them.

When at last I left the harbor and returned toward the house where I was staying, the sound of the waves followed me through the dark streets.

That quiet sound seemed to express the spirit of the village itself—calm, enduring, and deeply connected with the natural world.

## Chapter 11: Notes on Kitzuki

### Part 1

Kitzuki, known in later times as Izumo Taisha, holds a unique position among the sacred places of Japan. Unlike many religious sites that developed gradually through centuries of change, Kitzuki preserves a form that appears closely connected with the earliest traditions of the country.

The architecture of the shrine reflects this antiquity.

The buildings are constructed entirely of wood and raised above the ground on heavy pillars.

Their roofs rise sharply upward, and the distinctive crossed beams that extend from the roof ridges give the structures an appearance unlike that of Buddhist temples.

These features represent a style that existed long before foreign architectural influences reached Japan.

Because of this, the shrine provides valuable insight into the earliest religious practices of the Japanese people.

Another remarkable feature of Kitzuki is the enormous rope of twisted straw that hangs before the main hall.

This rope serves as a symbol of purity and marks the sacred boundary of the shrine.

Pilgrims approaching the building often pause beneath it before offering their prayers.

Many throw small coins toward the rope as part of their act of devotion.

The interior of the shrine remains hidden from public view.

Visitors do not enter the innermost sanctuary where the sacred object of worship is believed to reside.

Instead they pray from the open space before the building.

This practice emphasizes the mysterious and invisible nature of the divine presence honored at the shrine.

The rituals associated with Kitzuki also preserve many ancient elements.

Priests dressed in traditional garments conduct ceremonies according to forms that have been transmitted through generations.

Their gestures are slow and precise, reflecting the careful preservation of ritual that characterizes the shrine.

Visitors who observe these ceremonies often feel that they are witnessing traditions that have remained largely unchanged for centuries.

In this way Kitzuki stands not only as a place of worship but also as a living record of the spiritual imagination of early Japan.

## Part 2

In addition to its architectural importance, Kitzuki Shrine occupies a central place in the mythology of Japan. The traditions connected with the shrine describe it as the dwelling place of Ōkuninushi, a powerful deity associated with the creation and governance of the land.

According to ancient legend, Ōkuninushi once ruled the earthly realm before it was entrusted to the descendants of the heavenly gods.

Because of this story the shrine came to symbolize an early stage in the divine history of the nation.

Pilgrims who visit Kitzuki often remember these myths as they walk through the sacred grounds.

For them the shrine represents not only a place of prayer but also a connection with the distant past of their country.

The surrounding forest strengthens this impression.

The tall trees that rise around the shrine appear ancient and enduring, as if they too have witnessed the passing of many generations.

Their branches form a quiet canopy above the paths where pilgrims walk slowly toward the main hall.

The relationship between the shrine and the natural environment is one of the most striking aspects of the place.

Unlike many monumental religious buildings in other parts of the world, Kitzuki does not dominate the landscape through size or grandeur.

Instead it seems to exist in harmony with the forest that surrounds it.

The wooden structures blend naturally with the colors of the trees and earth.

This harmony reflects an important element of the traditional Japanese view of the sacred.

Divine presence is often understood not as something separate from nature but as something that exists within it.

For this reason the shrine feels less like an isolated monument and more like a natural part of the landscape.

Visitors who spend time walking through the grounds gradually become aware of the quiet dignity that characterizes the place.

Even when many pilgrims are present, the atmosphere remains calm.

People move slowly, speak in low voices, and show respect for the traditions that have shaped the shrine over many centuries.

Standing beneath the tall trees of Kitzuki, one feels that the site represents a meeting point between myth, history, and living faith.

The shrine continues to exist not only as a relic of the past but also as an active center of devotion for those who believe in the enduring presence of the ancient gods.

### Part 3

Another feature of Kitzuki that attracts attention is the great open space surrounding the shrine buildings. Unlike the crowded temple complexes of large cities, the grounds here allow visitors to move freely through wide areas of gravel and forest.

This openness contributes greatly to the atmosphere of the shrine.

Pilgrims are able to approach the sacred buildings slowly and thoughtfully.

The absence of noise and congestion allows the mind to focus on the act of prayer itself.

As one walks across the grounds, small details become noticeable.

Wooden racks hold hundreds of tablets upon which visitors have written their wishes.

These tablets sway gently in the wind, creating a soft rustling sound among the trees.

Some prayers ask for happiness in marriage, others for success in business, and many for protection or good health.

Although the requests differ, they all express the same human desire for guidance and blessing.

Watching the pilgrims place these tablets among the others reveals the continuity of belief that sustains the shrine.

Each new prayer joins the countless prayers that have been offered there throughout the centuries.

In this way the shrine becomes not merely a place of architecture or legend but a living center of spiritual expression.

As the afternoon light begins to fade, the appearance of the shrine grounds changes subtly.

The tall trees cast longer shadows across the gravel paths.

The number of visitors gradually decreases as some pilgrims begin their journey back toward the nearby town.

Yet even when the grounds grow quiet, the sense of presence remains strong.

Standing near the entrance and looking back toward the main hall, one can easily imagine the generations of travelers who have stood in the same place before.

The shrine appears unchanged in its essential form, continuing to welcome those who seek connection with the ancient traditions of the land.

Leaving the grounds of Kitzuki, I felt that I had encountered not only a historical monument but also a living symbol of the earliest spiritual ideas of Japan.

The quiet dignity of the place remained deeply impressed upon my memory.

## Chapter 12: At Hinomisaki

### Part 1

Not far from the sacred province of Izumo lies the dramatic headland of Hinomisaki, a place where the land meets the wide expanse of the sea in a scene of striking natural beauty. Travelers who visit this region often journey to Hinomisaki in order to see its rocky cliffs and the famous shrine that stands near the shore.

The road leading to the headland passes through quiet countryside where fields and small villages lie scattered among the hills.

As the traveler approaches the coast, the sound of the sea becomes gradually stronger.

The wind carries the fresh scent of salt water, and the sky opens widely above the horizon.

At last the road descends toward the rugged shore where waves break against the rocks with great force.

The landscape of Hinomisaki differs greatly from the calm harbors and gentle shores of the fishing villages nearby.

Here the cliffs rise sharply from the sea, and the water moves with powerful energy.

The sight of the waves striking the rocks again and again creates a sense of awe in those who stand watching from the heights above.

Near the edge of the headland stands the shrine dedicated to the deity associated with the sun and the sea.

The building appears small when compared with the vastness of the surrounding landscape, yet its presence adds a human and spiritual dimension to the scene.

Pilgrims and travelers approach the shrine quietly, pausing to admire the view of the ocean stretching far into the distance.

From the grounds of the shrine one can look across the wide waters toward the

horizon where sea and sky seem to meet.

On clear days the view extends for many miles.

The wind blowing across the headland carries the sound of the waves upward toward the shrine, creating a constant natural music that accompanies the prayers of the visitors.

Standing there between the ancient shrine and the restless sea, one senses the powerful relationship between nature and the spiritual imagination that has shaped the traditions of the region.

## Part 2

From the shrine the path continues toward the extreme point of the headland where the cliffs descend sharply into the sea below. Walking along this path, the traveler becomes increasingly aware of the power of the ocean. The wind grows stronger, and the sound of the waves striking the rocks echoes upward with great force.

The rocks along the coast have been shaped by centuries of wind and water.

Their surfaces are rough and irregular, forming dramatic shapes that rise above the sea.

At times the waves crash against them with such energy that spray rises high into the air.

Watching this constant movement of the sea gives a strong impression of nature's power.

Yet the scene is not frightening.

Instead it inspires a feeling of deep respect for the forces that shape the world.

The view from the headland extends across a wide area of ocean.

Fishing boats appear small against the immense background of water and sky.

Sometimes seabirds circle above the cliffs, carried effortlessly by the strong currents of air.

Their cries echo across the rocky shore, adding another voice to the sound of the sea.

Near the highest point of the headland stands a lighthouse which serves as an important guide for ships traveling along the coast.

Its tall white tower rises clearly against the sky, visible from great distances across the water.

At night the light from the tower sweeps slowly across the sea, warning vessels of the dangerous rocks that lie beneath the waves.

The presence of the lighthouse reminds visitors that this beautiful place also holds hidden dangers for those who travel upon the ocean.

For centuries sailors have relied upon such lights to guide them safely through uncertain waters.

Standing beside the lighthouse and looking out across the vast horizon, one feels a powerful connection between human life and the natural world.

The people who live along this coast have long depended upon the sea for their livelihood, yet they have also learned to respect its unpredictable strength.

In this way the landscape of Hinomisaki becomes more than a scenic destination.

It represents a meeting point between nature, tradition, and the enduring efforts of human beings to live in harmony with the forces that surround them.

### Part 3

As the afternoon light begins to soften, the headland of Hinomisaki reveals another aspect of its beauty. The bright glare of the midday sun fades, and the colors of the sea and sky become deeper and more varied. Shadows lengthen across the rocks, and the wind carries a cooler breath from the open ocean.

Visitors often remain on the cliffs to watch the changing light.

The waves continue their endless movement below, but the sound of the sea seems gentler as evening approaches.

Fishing boats begin to return toward distant harbors, their dark shapes moving slowly across the glowing surface of the water.

From the shrine and the lighthouse the view across the ocean remains wide and

unobstructed.

The horizon stretches in a long, calm line where the sky meets the sea.

Watching this meeting of water and light creates a feeling of quiet reflection.

The vastness of the scene encourages the mind to wander beyond the immediate moment.

Many travelers who stand there experience a sense of peace that is difficult to describe.

The powerful landscape of Hinomisaki does not overwhelm the visitor with grandeur alone.

It also invites contemplation.

The steady rhythm of the waves and the endless movement of the wind suggest the continuity of nature beyond the brief span of human life.

As the sun finally begins to descend toward the horizon, the sky fills with soft colors of gold and crimson.

The sea reflects these colors in long shifting bands of light.

For a few moments the entire headland appears suspended between day and night.

Then gradually the sun disappears, leaving a deepening twilight across the water.

The lighthouse soon begins its work, sending its slow turning beam across the darkening sea.

That moving light becomes the final image of Hinomisaki that remains in memory.

Leaving the headland in the evening, one carries away the impression of a place where the forces of nature, the traditions of faith, and the quiet reflections of the traveler come together beside the restless sea.

## Chapter 13: Shinju

### Part 1

Among the many customs and beliefs of Japan, few subjects have attracted more attention from foreign observers than the tragic practice known as shinju, or double suicide. The word refers to the act in which two people, usually lovers who feel unable to live together in the ordinary world, choose to die at the same moment.

To those unfamiliar with Japanese history and literature, the idea may seem difficult to understand.

Yet within the cultural traditions of the country the theme has appeared repeatedly in stories, plays, and poems.

Many of the most famous examples occur in the dramatic works performed in the puppet theater and the kabuki stage.

These plays often tell the story of lovers who find themselves separated by social obligations or family expectations.

Unable to overcome the barriers that divide them, they decide that death together will allow them to preserve the sincerity of their love.

In such stories the final act is not portrayed merely as despair.

Instead it is often presented as a tragic expression of loyalty and devotion.

This interpretation reflects an important element of the emotional life depicted in classical Japanese literature.

The lovers in these narratives frequently believe that their bond will continue beyond death.

By leaving the world together they hope to escape the circumstances that have made their happiness impossible.

For audiences watching such dramas, the story evokes both sorrow and admiration.

The sadness arises from the loss of life and the suffering of the characters.

At the same time the intensity of their devotion may inspire a sense of tragic

beauty.

The theme of shinju therefore occupies a complicated place within Japanese cultural imagination.

It represents not only personal tragedy but also the conflict between individual feeling and social duty.

Understanding this idea requires recognizing the importance that traditional society often placed upon honor, obligation, and emotional sincerity.

When these values came into conflict, the resulting tension could become overwhelming for the individuals involved.

Within that emotional landscape the story of lovers choosing death together came to symbolize the ultimate expression of loyalty to the heart.

## Part 2

The theme of shinju appears most vividly in the dramatic literature of Japan, particularly in the works written for the puppet theater during the early modern period. Among the playwrights who explored this subject, none is more famous than Chikamatsu Monzaemon. His plays often portray the painful conflict between personal love and the social obligations imposed by family and society.

In many of these dramas the central characters are ordinary people rather than members of the aristocracy.

Merchants, clerks, and young women living within the strict expectations of their communities become the heroes and heroines of the stories.

Their lives are governed by rules that leave little room for emotional freedom.

When love develops under such circumstances, it frequently leads to a situation in which the lovers see no honorable path forward.

The tragedies depicted in these plays therefore arise from a clash between duty and desire.

One of the most well-known examples is the story of lovers who cannot marry because the man is already bound by financial obligations or family arrangements.

The woman, often placed in a vulnerable social position, faces a future of

suffering if the relationship becomes known.

Together they reach the conclusion that death will preserve their dignity and sincerity.

The final scenes of such plays are usually quiet and solemn.

The lovers prepare themselves carefully for the act that will end their lives.

They speak tenderly to one another, expressing both sorrow and unwavering devotion.

These moments are presented not with sensational drama but with restrained emotional intensity.

For audiences, the power of the story lies in the recognition of the characters' sincerity.

The tragedy does not arise from sudden violence but from the slow realization that no other path seems possible.

Because these narratives focus on human feeling rather than heroic action, they possess a deeply emotional quality.

The spectators understand the suffering of the characters even while recognizing the sadness of their decision.

Through such stories the theme of shinju became one of the most memorable motifs in Japanese theater.

It continues to influence the understanding of love, duty, and sacrifice within the cultural imagination of the country.

### Part 3

Although the theme of shinju appears frequently in literature and drama, it would be a mistake to assume that the practice was common in everyday life. In reality such tragedies were rare, and when they occurred they were often regarded with deep sorrow by the communities involved.

Nevertheless the stories surrounding these events captured the imagination of writers and audiences.

The reason for this fascination lies partly in the emotional intensity of the

situations portrayed.

The lovers in these narratives are not portrayed as reckless individuals seeking escape from ordinary difficulties.

Instead they are often depicted as thoughtful people who feel trapped between powerful social forces and the sincerity of their own emotions.

This tension gives the stories their tragic beauty.

The audience witnesses the characters struggling to remain faithful both to their feelings and to the expectations of society.

When no solution appears possible, the final act becomes a symbolic resolution of that conflict.

At the same time, the stories also reveal the strict nature of the social structures within which the characters live.

Family duty, financial obligation, and public reputation all play important roles in shaping their choices.

The lovers are not free to act entirely according to their own desires.

Their personal happiness becomes entangled in a network of responsibilities that they cannot easily escape.

Because of this, the theme of shinju reflects more than individual tragedy.

It also expresses the emotional pressures created by the social order of the time.

Through these narratives audiences were able to explore questions about love, loyalty, duty, and sacrifice.

Even when the conclusion of the story is sorrowful, the emotional sincerity of the characters often leaves a powerful impression.

The tragic lovers are remembered not only for the sadness of their fate but also for the depth of their devotion.

In this way the theme of shinju continues to occupy a distinctive place within the literary and dramatic traditions of Japan.

## Chapter 14: Yaegaki-Jinja

### Part 1

Among the many shrines of the Izumo region, Yaegaki-Jinja holds a special reputation connected with love and marriage. Pilgrims who visit this shrine often come with hopes concerning their future relationships. Because of this tradition the place is sometimes associated with prayers for romantic happiness and harmonious unions.

The shrine stands in a quiet area surrounded by trees and small paths that lead through the forest.

Compared with the great shrine of Kitzuki, the buildings of Yaegaki-Jinja appear modest.

Yet the atmosphere of the place possesses a gentle charm that attracts many visitors.

According to ancient legend, the shrine is connected with a story from the earliest mythology of Japan.

The tale describes how the god Susanoo rescued a young woman named Kushinada-hime from a terrible serpent.

After defeating the creature, the god hid the maiden within a safe place surrounded by many layers of fences, or “yaegaki,” in order to protect her.

From this story the shrine received its name.

The legend symbolizes both protection and the beginning of a sacred union.

For this reason many people believe that the shrine possesses special power related to love and marriage.

Visitors who arrive at the shrine often walk quietly through the grounds before offering their prayers.

The forest surrounding the buildings creates a calm and secluded atmosphere.

Small paths wind gently among the trees, and the sound of wind moving through the branches adds to the peaceful character of the place.

Pilgrims approach the shrine carrying small offerings or written prayers.

Some hope for a future marriage, while others ask for happiness within relationships that already exist.

The atmosphere of devotion remains simple and sincere.

Unlike grand ceremonies performed at larger shrines, the prayers offered here often feel personal and intimate.

For many visitors the shrine represents a place where hopes for the future can be expressed with quiet sincerity.

## Part 2

One of the most well-known features of Yaegaki-Jinja is a small pond located within the forest behind the shrine. This pond is often called the “Mirror Pond,” and it is connected with a popular form of fortune-telling associated with love and marriage.

Visitors who wish to learn about their romantic future take a small piece of paper upon which a short poem or message has been written. A coin is placed upon the paper, and the paper is then carefully set upon the surface of the water.

If the paper sinks quickly, it is believed that marriage will come soon.

If it remains floating for a longer time before sinking, the expected union may take longer to appear.

Some people also observe the direction in which the paper moves across the water.

If it drifts toward the edge of the pond, the future partner may come from a nearby place.

If it moves toward the center, the partner may come from far away.

Although this practice is simple, it attracts many visitors who approach the pond with curiosity and quiet excitement.

Young women in particular often gather near the water, watching attentively as the small pieces of paper float upon the surface.

The atmosphere around the pond is gentle and hopeful.

People speak softly while observing the movements of the paper.

Sometimes laughter rises when the paper sinks unexpectedly quickly.

At other times visitors wait patiently for several minutes before the paper finally disappears beneath the water.

The surrounding forest enhances the charm of the place.

Tall trees stand closely around the pond, and their reflections appear upon the still surface of the water.

The quiet setting makes the small ceremony feel almost magical.

Whether or not visitors truly believe in the fortune it predicts, the experience offers a moment of shared anticipation and amusement.

Through this simple ritual the shrine continues to express its long association with the themes of love, destiny, and the mysterious unfolding of human relationships.

### Part 3

After leaving the Mirror Pond, visitors often walk slowly through the forest paths that surround the shrine. The quiet of the woods adds greatly to the charm of the place. Sunlight filters gently through the leaves above, and the air carries the soft scent of trees and earth.

The peaceful environment encourages reflection.

Many pilgrims remain for a time beneath the trees before returning to the main shrine building.

Some write their wishes upon wooden tablets and hang them among the many others placed there by previous visitors.

Reading these tablets reveals the simple hopes that bring people to the shrine.

Some ask for marriage.

Others pray for harmony in existing relationships or for the happiness of their families.

Although the requests differ, they share a common desire for affection and understanding in human life.

The shrine thus becomes a place where private hopes are quietly expressed.

Unlike large festivals or public ceremonies, the experience of visiting Yaegaki-Jinja often feels personal.

Each visitor approaches the shrine with individual wishes and reflections.

The surrounding forest provides a natural setting that protects this sense of intimacy.

Walking back toward the entrance of the shrine grounds, one often hears the gentle sound of wind moving through the branches overhead.

This quiet music of the forest seems to accompany the prayers offered there.

For many travelers the visit leaves a pleasant impression.

The modest buildings of the shrine, the peaceful woodland paths, and the gentle ritual of the Mirror Pond combine to create a place that feels both sacred and welcoming.

Leaving Yaegaki-Jinja, one carries away the memory of a shrine devoted not to grand displays of power but to the quiet hopes that shape the personal lives of those who come seeking its blessings.

## Chapter 15: Kitsune

### Part 1

Among the many supernatural beliefs found in Japanese folklore, few are as widely known as those concerning the kitsune, or fox. Stories about these mysterious creatures have been told for centuries, and they appear frequently in legends, literature, and popular imagination.

In traditional belief the fox is not simply an ordinary animal.

It is thought to possess magical abilities and a high degree of intelligence.

Some foxes are believed to have the power to change their form, appearing as human beings in order to interact with people.

Because of this ability, many stories describe foxes taking the appearance of beautiful women or wandering travelers.

These transformations are not always intended to cause harm.

In some tales the fox becomes a loyal companion or even a devoted wife.

In others the creature uses its powers to deceive or confuse those who cross its path.

The fox therefore occupies an ambiguous place within the folklore of Japan.

It may act as a trickster, a spirit messenger, or even a guardian figure depending on the story being told.

Foxes are also closely connected with the deity Inari, one of the most widely worshiped gods in Japan.

Shrines dedicated to Inari can be found in cities, villages, and rural areas throughout the country.

At these shrines small statues of foxes often stand beside the gates or along the paths leading to the sacred buildings.

These figures represent the fox as a messenger or servant of the deity.

Visitors frequently place offerings before the statues, hoping to receive blessings related to prosperity, agriculture, or success in business.

Because of this religious association, the fox has become both a sacred symbol

and a creature of legend.

Stories about foxes often reflect the deep connection between the natural world and the spiritual imagination of the people.

The animal moves quietly through forests and fields, appearing suddenly and disappearing just as mysteriously.

Such behavior naturally encouraged the belief that foxes possessed hidden powers beyond ordinary understanding.

## Part 2

Many of the legends concerning foxes describe encounters between human beings and these mysterious creatures in disguise. Travelers walking along lonely roads at night sometimes report meeting strangers whose behavior appears unusual or strangely captivating. Only later do they discover that the person they met was believed to be a fox in human form.

In some stories the fox becomes the wife of a man who remains unaware of her true nature for many years.

The woman lives quietly with her husband and cares for their household with devotion.

Yet eventually some small incident reveals the secret of her identity.

When the husband finally realizes that his beloved companion is not entirely human, the fox must leave him and return to the world from which she came.

These tales often contain a mixture of sadness and wonder.

The fox may love sincerely, yet the difference between the human world and the supernatural world prevents the relationship from lasting forever.

Other stories portray the fox as a playful trickster who delights in confusing travelers or creating strange illusions.

A person walking along a familiar road may suddenly lose all sense of direction.

Lights may appear where no houses exist.

Voices may be heard in empty fields.

Such experiences were sometimes attributed to the magical influence of foxes.

Although these stories may sound frightening, they are often told with a sense of amusement rather than terror.

The fox becomes a figure representing the mysterious and unpredictable aspects of nature.

For people living close to forests and fields, encounters with animals often seemed to contain elements of the supernatural.

Foxes, with their intelligence and quiet movements, naturally became the subject of many imaginative tales.

Through these stories the fox entered deeply into the folklore of Japan, becoming one of the most recognizable figures in its world of legend.

### Part 3

Beyond the individual stories and legends, the figure of the fox reveals something important about the traditional imagination of Japan. The animal occupies a space between the ordinary world of nature and the mysterious realm of spirits and transformation.

Because of this position, the fox becomes a symbol of the hidden possibilities that may exist within the natural world.

For people who lived close to forests, mountains, and fields, animals often appeared to possess qualities that were difficult to explain.

The sudden appearance of a fox on a quiet road, the way it vanished silently into the darkness, or the bright intelligence in its eyes could easily inspire stories of supernatural power.

Over time these impressions grew into a rich body of folklore.

The fox was no longer merely an animal but a creature capable of thought, emotion, and magical transformation.

At the same time the association between foxes and the deity Inari gave the animal an important religious significance.

Statues of foxes standing beside the paths of Inari shrines can be found throughout the country.

Some hold keys in their mouths, symbolizing the keys to storehouses of rice. Others hold scrolls or sacred jewels.

These images remind visitors that the fox serves as a messenger between the human world and the divine.

Thus the fox occupies a unique place in Japanese culture.

It appears both in sacred spaces and in playful stories told for amusement.

It may represent wisdom, mischief, devotion, or mystery depending on the context in which it appears.

The enduring popularity of fox legends suggests that the creature continues to capture the imagination of the people.

Even in modern times, when many traditional beliefs have faded, the stories of foxes remain familiar and beloved.

They remind listeners of a world in which the boundaries between nature and spirit were once felt to be far less certain than they appear today.

In this way the figure of the fox continues to stand as one of the most vivid symbols within the folklore of Japan.

## Second Series

### Chapter 1: In a Japanese Garden

#### Part 1

My small house stood beside the Ohashi River. It had two floors, and it was neat and pretty, like a bird cage. When I first came to live there, I liked it very much. The water of the lake could be seen from the rooms, and the light of the sky moved softly over the surface of the river. In the evening the wind came over the water and made the air cool. At that time I believed that I had found a pleasant home.

But when the hot season began, the house became hard to live in. The rooms were very low. They were no higher than the cabins of a ship. They were also narrow, so narrow that I could not hang a mosquito net in them. The heat of summer grew stronger each day, and the air inside the rooms became heavy and still. Soon I understood that I could not remain there through the hot months.

I felt sad to leave the lake view. The sight of the water had given me much quiet pleasure. Yet comfort was more important than the view. So I decided to move to another part of the city.

My new home stood in the northern part of the town. It was in a very quiet street behind the old castle. The house had once belonged to a samurai of high rank. In former times such homes were called *katchiu-yashiki*.

A long wall shut the house away from the street. The wall was high and strong, and tiles covered the top. A person walking along the road could not see inside the grounds. To reach the gate one had to climb a short flight of wide stone steps. The gate itself was large, almost as large as the gate of a temple.

On the right side of the gate there was a small window that looked like a wooden cage. Strong bars covered it. Long ago guards had stood behind those bars. From that place they watched every person who passed on the road. The bars were set so close together that anyone outside could not see the face of the watcher within.

After passing through the gate, a visitor walked along a narrow path between two walls. These walls hid the garden and the grounds from sight. A guest who did not have special permission could see only the entrance of the house ahead. That entrance was always closed with white sliding doors of paper.

The house itself had only one floor, as most samurai houses did. Yet it was large. Inside there were fourteen rooms. The rooms were wide, high, and beautiful. The floor was covered with soft mats, and the air inside felt cool and calm.

This new house did not have the lovely lake view of my former home. From the front wall I could see only a small part of a hill called O-Shiroyama. At the top of that hill stood the old castle. Pine trees grew thick around it and hid most of the stone walls from sight.

Behind the house, only a short distance away, rose wooded hills. The trees there were tall and dense. They shut away much of the sky. From inside the grounds one could not see the far horizon.

Yet the house had something that made up for the loss of the lake view. Around the building there was a very beautiful garden. In truth it was not only one garden but several garden spaces. These lay on three sides of the house.

Wide wooden verandas ran along the outer edge of the rooms. From these verandas one could look down into the gardens. At one corner of the veranda I could see two of the garden spaces at the same time.

Bamboo screens stood between the different parts of the garden. These screens were made of thin bamboo and woven reeds. In the middle of each screen there was an opening without a gate. These screens were not meant to keep people out. They were made only for beauty. They showed where one style of garden ended and another style began.

Before speaking more about my own garden, I must say something about Japanese gardens in general.

A Japanese garden is very different from the gardens of Europe. When a person begins to understand Japanese taste in flowers and plants, the gardens of the West may appear strange and even rough.

In Europe people often cut many flowers and place them together in a large

bunch. The flowers are pushed into a vase without much thought. The colors mix together in a bright mass.

But in Japan the arrangement of flowers follows a very different idea. A single branch of flowers may be enough. The person who arranges it studies the branch carefully. He may spend an hour cutting small parts away and placing the branch at exactly the right angle.

When this work is finished, the result may look simple. Yet the beauty is deep and quiet. After learning to see such beauty, it becomes difficult to enjoy the large crowded flower bunches of the West.

The same difference can be seen in gardens.

A Japanese garden is not made mainly for flowers. In fact many Japanese gardens have no flower beds at all. Some have only a few plants. Some rare gardens have no green plants at all. They may be made only of stones and sand.

Usually a Japanese garden is meant to show a landscape. It is like a small picture of nature.

The size of such a garden does not matter. Some cover a large area of land. Others are very small. A garden may even be made small enough to place inside a room.

In certain homes a tiny garden is placed inside the alcove of a room. This miniature garden may be built in a bowl or a shallow box. In that small space the maker creates tiny hills and tiny houses. There may be a very small pond and a narrow stream with a tiny bridge over it.

Small plants stand for trees. Little stones stand for rocks. A small stone lantern may stand beside the path. The whole scene becomes a living model of a landscape.

Another important thing must be understood if one wishes to enjoy a Japanese garden.

One must learn to see the beauty of stones.

These stones are not stones cut into shapes by human tools. They are stones shaped only by nature. Their surfaces are rough and irregular. Their lines may be strange or uneven.

To many foreigners such stones appear plain or even ugly. But with time a person begins to feel their beauty. Each stone has its own character. Each has its own color and form.

In Japan the love of natural stone is very old. It can be seen everywhere.

Along the roads near temples there are large flat stones standing upright. Words are cut into their surfaces. These stones serve as memorials or religious tablets.

Many of them came from river beds where water had shaped them for many years. Because of this natural shaping, people consider them more beautiful than stones cut by tools.

In temple grounds and in gardens one may also see large stones used as water basins. A round hollow is cut into the top so that water may gather there.

Such stones are often taken from mountain streams. Their shapes are irregular, but their natural form gives them quiet beauty.

When a person lives long in Japan, he slowly begins to notice these things more and more. He begins to see stones not as lifeless objects but as forms with their own mood and presence.

In time stones may even seem to have faces or expressions. Some may appear calm. Others may appear strong or silent.

Japan, with its mountains and old volcanic land, is rich in stones of strange shape. It is not surprising that people long ago imagined that such stones might hold spirits or mysterious powers.

In many provinces there are famous stones to which people give special honor. Pilgrims travel long distances to see them. Some stones are believed to bring good fortune. Others are believed to be sacred.

Because of this belief, the stones used in gardens are chosen with great care. Large stones form the framework of the garden design. They are placed in exact positions to guide the shape of the whole landscape.

Each stone may even receive its own name according to its role in the garden.

I cannot explain all the traditions connected with these stones. Their meanings are many and old. But even a small knowledge of them helps one understand the quiet art of the Japanese garden.

With this understanding, we may now return to the garden of my own house.

## Part 2

A Japanese garden does not try to show a world that does not exist. It does not try to build a dream land or a perfect land that no one has ever seen. Its purpose is much simpler and also much deeper. It tries to copy the beauty of a real place in nature.

A garden may show the feeling of a quiet river bank. It may show the feeling of a lonely mountain path. It may suggest the peace of a small lake among trees. In this way the garden becomes like a picture made with living things. But it is not only a picture. It is also something like a poem.

When we look at nature, different places give us different feelings. Some places feel bright and joyful. Some places feel calm and quiet. Others feel lonely, or strong, or deep and serious. The makers of the old Japanese gardens understood this very well. Many of them were Buddhist monks who studied nature for many years. They believed that a garden should not only show beauty but should also awaken a feeling in the heart.

Some gardens were made to show peace and calm thought. Some were made to show strength and courage. Others were made to express ideas such as faith, loyalty, or simple happiness. For this reason gardens were often designed according to the character of the owner. A warrior might have a garden that suggested power and firmness. A poet might have a garden that suggested quiet thought and beauty. A priest might have a garden that suggested peace and meditation.

Sadly, this old art is slowly disappearing. Western taste has entered Japan, and many people now prefer large lawns or bright flower beds like those seen in Europe. But the ancient gardens still show the deep thought and quiet beauty of the older time.

I do not know what special feeling the main part of my garden was meant to express. The people who built it lived many generations ago. They have long since

passed away. Yet the garden still speaks in its own silent way.

The largest part of the garden lies in front of the house and faces the south. It also stretches toward the west. A strange bamboo screen partly separates it from another garden area beyond.

In this space there are many large stones. Thick moss covers their surfaces. Their green color shows that they have stood there for a very long time. There are also several stone basins where water may gather. Near them stand old stone lanterns. Their shapes are dark and rough with age.

One of the most curious objects in the garden is a large stone figure shaped like a fish. It is called a shachihoko. The head is pressed into the ground, while the tail rises high into the air. Similar shapes can be seen on the corners of old castle roofs.

There are also small hills covered with grass and old trees. The slopes of these hills fall gently downward like the banks of a river. Some small round mounds of earth rise here and there like little islands.

All these green shapes stand out against wide spaces of pale yellow sand. The sand is spread smoothly across the ground. Its surface is as soft and even as silk. These sandy spaces represent the winding path of a river.

No one walks upon them. The sand is too beautiful to disturb. Even a small mark would break the quiet harmony of the design. A skilled gardener cares for this sand. He is an old man whom I like very much. With a careful hand he smooths the surface again and again so that it always remains perfect.

Across the sand run narrow paths made of flat stones. These stones are placed at uneven distances, just like stepping stones across a shallow stream. When one walks along them slowly, it feels almost as if one is crossing a quiet river.

Because of all these things together—the sand, the stones, the hills, and the moss-covered rocks—the garden gives the feeling of a lonely river bank somewhere far from the noise of towns. Nothing breaks the illusion. The garden is very secluded.

High walls and fences hide the nearby streets. Trees and bushes grow thick near the edges of the grounds. They hide even the roofs of neighboring houses.

When sunlight falls upon the sand, the leaves above cast soft moving shadows.

The wind carries the gentle smell of flowers across the garden. Bees move slowly through the warm air. The whole place feels quiet and full of peace.

According to Buddhist teaching, all things in the world belong to one of two groups. The first group is called *hijo*. These are things without desire. Stones and trees belong to this group. The second group is called *ujo*. These are things with desire. Animals and human beings belong to this group.

This idea does not appear clearly in the books about garden design. But it is still useful when speaking about the life of the garden. The stories of my garden concern both kinds of things. It may be best to speak first about the *hijo*—the things without desire.

Near the entrance of the house, not far from the gate, there grows a small tree with large leaves. In this region it is called *tegashiwa*.

I do not know its scientific name, and even the meaning of the Japanese name is not completely clear to me. Yet the shape of the leaf is interesting. It looks somewhat like a human hand.

Long ago, when a samurai had to leave his home to travel to the city of Edo with his lord, a small ceremony took place before his departure. Just before leaving, he was given a special meal. A baked fish called *tai* was placed upon a leaf of the *tegashiwa* tree.

After the meal was finished, the leaf was hung above the door of the house. It served as a charm to bring the warrior safely home again.

There was another reason for this custom. When the wind moves through the leaves of the *tegashiwa* tree, they seem to make a gentle waving motion. The motion looks like a hand calling someone to come closer. In this way the leaves seem to call the absent warrior back to his home.

Another plant that grows in many Japanese gardens is called *nanten*. A very curious belief is connected with this plant. If a person has an evil dream, one that seems to bring bad luck, he should go to the *nanten* plant early in the morning. There he should whisper the dream softly to the plant. After that the dream will never come true.

Two kinds of *nanten* grow in my garden. One bears red berries. The other bears

white berries and is more rare.

The red-berry plant grows close to the veranda, perhaps so that people can easily whisper their dreams to it in the morning.

The white-berry plant grows in a small flower bed near the center of the garden. In the same place stands a small citron tree. This citron tree has a strange and wonderful fruit. The fruit grows in many long shapes that look like fingers. Because of this, people call the tree “Buddha’s fingers.”

Not far from the citron tree grows another tree with long shining leaves. Its leaves are smooth and dark like polished bronze. This tree is called yuzuriha. It is often planted in the gardens of old samurai homes.

The yuzuriha is believed to bring good fortune. The reason lies in the way its leaves grow. An old leaf never falls until a new leaf has already grown behind it. Because of this, the tree symbolizes the hope that a father will not die before his son becomes strong enough to take his place.

For this reason leaves of the yuzuriha are used in New Year decorations. They are tied together with fern leaves and hung at the entrance of homes.

These plants, though small and quiet, carry many memories and beliefs from the past. In this way even the simplest parts of a Japanese garden may hold stories that connect the present with the old days.

### Part 3

The trees of the garden, like the small plants, also have their own stories and meanings. In Japanese gardens every tree is placed with care. The position of a tree is never chosen by chance. Each tree has a role in the whole design of the landscape. Just as stones form the bones of the garden, trees form its living body.

Among all trees, the pine is the most important. Pine trees give strength and shape to the garden. Their dark green branches spread out in strong lines that the eye can easily follow.

In my garden there are five pine trees. They are not twisted into strange shapes by force, as sometimes happens in small decorative gardens. Instead, the gardener

has worked with great patience over many years to guide their natural growth. By cutting certain branches and leaving others, he has helped the trees grow into forms that look powerful and old. The branches stretch outward in uneven lines. The dark needles gather in thick masses.

The pine tree has deep meaning in Japan. Because it stays green throughout the year, it is a symbol of long life and strong spirit. People also believe that the sharp pine needles can drive away evil spirits.

Besides the pines, there are two cherry trees in the garden. The Japanese call them sakura. The blossoms of the sakura are considered among the most beautiful sights in Japan. The flowers are not bright or heavy in color. Instead they are soft and pale, like white touched with the lightest pink.

When spring arrives, these trees suddenly burst into bloom. The change is astonishing. Before the flowers appear there are no leaves at all. Then, almost in a single moment, every branch becomes covered with blossoms. The whole tree seems wrapped in a soft cloud of pale pink.

The sight is so delicate that it almost feels unreal. It is as if a piece of sunset cloud had floated down from the sky and rested gently upon the branches. Beneath the tree the ground becomes covered with fallen petals. They gather like drifts of pink snow. Anyone who has never seen the cherry trees of Japan in bloom cannot fully imagine the beauty of the scene.

Yet these trees are not planted only for their beauty. In earlier times the samurai also saw a deeper meaning in the cherry blossom. The flower is pure and delicate. It falls quickly when its short life ends. Because of this, the cherry blossom came to symbolize the ideal life of a warrior. Just as the flower is the finest among flowers, the warrior was expected to be the finest among men. The spotless petals represented a life lived with honor and without shame.

There is also another kind of cherry tree called yamazakura, or mountain cherry. This tree grows wild in the hills. Unlike the garden cherry, the mountain cherry grows its leaves first and then its flowers. Still, it too holds great meaning in Japanese poetry.

Long ago a famous poet wrote a verse about the spirit of Japan. He said that if

someone wished to understand the heart of the Japanese people, he should look at the blossoms of the mountain cherry shining in the morning sun.

The garden contains another beautiful tree that stands near the western side. Its branches stretch out over the edge of the veranda. This is an old plum tree, called ume. It was probably planted here many years ago so that the people of the house could enjoy its blossoms.

The plum tree blooms very early in the year, long before the cherry trees. When winter is almost over and the air is still cold, the plum blossoms appear. Their fragrance spreads softly through the garden. The sight of the blossoms gives hope that spring is coming.

In Japan the flowering of the plum tree is celebrated almost as much as the flowering of the cherry tree. People travel to see the blossoms and enjoy the beauty of the season. Yet the two flowers carry different meanings.

The cherry blossom is used as a symbol of youthful beauty. It represents physical grace and charm. The plum blossom, however, represents inner beauty. It stands for kindness, gentleness, and a pure heart.

Japanese poets often compare women to trees and flowers. A graceful girl may be compared to a willow tree that bends softly in the wind. A bright young woman may be compared to a cherry tree in bloom. But a woman who has a gentle and faithful heart is compared to the plum blossom.

In old poems many such comparisons appear. The poets even describe different movements of a woman by comparing them to flowers. One old verse says that when a woman stands she is like the graceful flower called shakuyaku. When she sits she is like a peony. When she walks she is like the slender lily.

Even the names of many country girls come from plants and flowers. It is common to add the polite letter "O" before such names. For example there may be girls called O-Matsu, which means Pine; O-Take, which means Bamboo; or O-Ume, which means Plum. Other names include O-Hana, meaning Blossom, or O-Ine, meaning a young ear of rice.

Some people say these names come not only from beauty but also from the good meanings connected with the plants. Certain trees are symbols of long life

or good fortune. Whatever the reason, it is clear that trees and flowers play a large role in the imagination of the Japanese people.

After seeing the blossoms of the cherry and plum trees, it does not seem strange that people might believe trees have souls. In fact many people in this region believe that certain trees truly possess spirits. This belief does not fully agree with Buddhist teaching, yet it feels natural when one watches the life of the trees through the changing seasons.

There are even strange stories about special trees. Two trees are especially feared: the enoki and the willow. These trees are believed to be haunted. People say that the tree itself does not move or change. Instead a spirit leaves the tree at night and wanders about. This spirit is called a ki-no-obake, which means the ghost of a tree.

Most often the spirit appears in the form of a beautiful woman. It rarely speaks and never travels very far from the tree. If someone approaches, the ghost quickly returns to the trunk or the branches and disappears.

Another belief says that if an old willow tree or enoki tree is cut down, blood will flow from the cut. Young trees are not dangerous. But as they grow older, their spirits become stronger.

There is also a famous story about a willow tree that once grew in the garden of a samurai in Kyoto. Because people believed the tree was haunted, the owner of the house wanted to cut it down. But another samurai said to him, "Do not destroy it. Sell it to me instead. That tree has a soul, and it would be cruel to kill it."

The tree was moved to the new owner's garden, where it grew well and strong. After some time something very strange happened. The spirit of the tree took the form of a beautiful woman. Out of gratitude to the man who had saved it, she became his wife.

For several years they lived happily together. A son was born to them. But one day the local lord ordered that the willow tree must be cut down.

When the woman heard this news, she began to weep. At last she told her husband the truth. "I am the spirit of that willow tree," she said. "If the tree dies,

I must also die. But our child will live, and you will always love him. That thought gives me comfort.”

Soon afterward she disappeared into the tree once more. The husband begged the lord not to cut it down, but the order could not be changed. The wood was needed to repair a great temple.

When the tree was finally cut and fell to the ground, something strange happened again. The trunk suddenly became so heavy that three hundred men could not move it.

Then the small child of the samurai came forward. He took hold of a branch and said gently, “Come.” At once the great tree began to move. It followed the child slowly along the ground all the way to the temple.

Stories such as these show how deeply the people of Japan feel that trees and nature are alive in spirit. In a garden, every tree may carry such quiet memories of the past.

#### Part 4

The second garden lies on the north side of the house. Among all the garden spaces, this one is my favorite. It is smaller and quieter than the first garden. There are no large trees here. The ground is covered with smooth blue pebbles that shine softly in the light.

In the center there is a small pond. It is really no larger than a tiny lake, but the way it has been designed makes it seem much larger than it truly is. Around the water grow many rare plants. In the middle of the pond there is a little island. The island holds tiny hills, and upon these hills stand dwarf trees.

Some of the trees are dwarf peach trees. Others are dwarf pines and azalea bushes. Though they look small and delicate, many of them are very old. Some may be more than a hundred years in age, even though they are hardly taller than a child’s foot.

When seen from the proper place, this garden does not appear small at all. If one sits in the guest room and looks outward at the right angle, the pond and island

seem like part of a real landscape. The eye believes that the water stretches away toward a distant shore. The island appears like land rising from a true lake.

The gardener who made this design lived long ago. He has now been dead for a hundred years or more. Yet his skill still lives in the quiet illusion he created.

Only one small object reveals that the scene is actually small. On the island there stands a stone lantern. Because the lantern is large compared with the tiny hills and trees, the eye finally understands that the island is not truly far away. Without that lantern, the illusion might be perfect.

Around the edge of the pond there are several large flat stones. They lie almost level with the water. A person may stand upon these stones or sit upon them while looking into the pond. When sitting there quietly, one can watch the small creatures of the water or care for the plants growing along the shore.

The pond contains many beautiful plants. There are water lilies whose bright round leaves float upon the surface of the water. Their leaves are smooth and shining. There are also lotus plants, which are the most wonderful of all.

Two kinds of lotus grow in the pond. One kind produces soft pink flowers. The other produces flowers that are pure white. Along the edges of the pond grow iris plants. Their flowers shine in deep violet colors. Ferns, grasses, and soft moss also grow around the water.

Yet the lotus plants give the pond its greatest charm. Watching their growth through the summer is a special pleasure. First the leaves appear. They rise slowly from the water on long stems. The leaves open little by little until they form wide green cups that stand above the pond.

Later the flower buds rise among the leaves. At last the blossoms open. The lotus flower is large and noble in shape. Its petals spread wide, and its color is soft and deep.

Many people in Japan believe the lotus is one of the most sacred flowers. It is closely connected with Buddhist thought.

On rainy days the lotus plants become even more interesting to watch. Rain falls into the wide leaves and gathers there. Each leaf holds the water like a bowl. But when too much water gathers, the stem bends slowly. Suddenly the leaf tips

and the water pours back into the pond with a loud splash. Then the stem rises again and the leaf becomes straight once more. The sight is very curious and beautiful.

Because of this movement, Japanese artists often choose the lotus leaf as a subject for metal work. When drops of water move across the surface of the leaf, they shine like small balls of silver. Only metal seems able to show this shining motion perfectly.

Beyond this second garden lies the third garden, which is much larger. It stretches away toward the wooded hills behind the house. These hills form the northern and northeastern borders of the old samurai district.

Long ago this wide space was filled with a bamboo forest. Tall bamboo grew there in thick clusters. But now most of that bamboo has disappeared. The ground has become a field of wild grasses and flowers.

In the northeastern corner there is a deep well. The water in this well is very cold and clear. From the well a small stream of water flows through bamboo pipes and enters the house. The pipes are arranged with clever skill so that the water moves smoothly and quietly.

In the northwestern corner of the garden stands a tiny stone shrine. The shrine belongs to the god Inari. Before it sit two small stone foxes. They face outward as if guarding the shrine.

The stone is chipped and broken with age. Moss grows thickly over the surfaces of both shrine and foxes. Although the shrine is old and worn, it still feels peaceful and mysterious.

On the eastern side of the house there is one small square piece of land that is still carefully cultivated. This space is used only for growing chrysanthemums. These flowers are very important in Japan. They are admired for their beauty and their many shapes.

To protect them from heavy rain and strong sun, wooden frames are built over the plants. Thin bamboo poles hold the frames in place. White paper covers the frames in a way similar to the paper doors of the house.

Many books have been written about chrysanthemums and their cultivation in

Japan. Their beauty and variety are truly remarkable.

But there is also a curious story connected with chrysanthemums that I once heard.

In one place in Japan people believe it is unlucky to grow these flowers. That place is the town of Himeji.

Long ago there stood in Himeji a great castle with many towers. A powerful lord lived there, a daimyo whose wealth was measured in vast amounts of rice.

Among the servants of one of his chief officers was a young woman named O-Kiku. The name "Kiku" means chrysanthemum flower.

O-Kiku was trusted with the care of many valuable objects. Among them were ten beautiful dishes made of gold.

One day one of these dishes disappeared. No one could find it.

Because O-Kiku had been responsible for the dishes, she was blamed for the loss. She knew she was innocent but could not prove it.

In despair she threw herself into a well and died.

But after her death strange things began to happen. Each night people heard a voice near the well. It was the voice of O-Kiku's ghost.

Slowly and sadly the voice counted the dishes.

"One... two... three... four... five... six... seven... eight... nine..."

But when the counting reached nine, the voice stopped.

Then there came a terrible cry of grief.

Again the counting began from the beginning.

"One... two... three..."

Night after night the same sad sound was heard.

In time people said that her spirit had entered the body of a strange insect. The insect had a small head that looked like a ghost with long hair. People called it the insect of O-Kiku.

It is said that this insect can be found only in Himeji.

Because her name meant chrysanthemum, people began to believe that growing chrysanthemums in that area would bring misfortune.

For that reason many people there still avoid planting those flowers.

Thus even the plants of a garden may carry strange memories and legends from the past.

## Part 5

After speaking about the plants and trees of the garden, we may now speak about the living creatures that move within it. According to the Buddhist way of thinking, these are called ujo, the beings that have desire. Many small creatures live in my garden. The most common are frogs. There are four kinds of frogs here. Three kinds live in the pond, and one kind lives in the trees.

The tree frog is a very pretty little animal. Its body is bright green, almost the same color as the leaves. Because of this, it can easily hide among the branches. Its voice is sharp and clear. The sound is very thin, almost like the cry of an insect. The people call this frog amagaeru, which means “rain frog.” They believe that when the frog begins to cry, rain will soon fall.

The frogs that live in the pond are larger. One kind is called babagaeru. This frog is very big and not beautiful at all. Its color is dull and unpleasant. Another kind is called shinagaeru, which means “striped frog.” This frog has lines across its body. But the most beautiful frog in the pond is called Tono-san-gaeru. The name comes from the word tono, which once meant a noble lord or daimyo. Perhaps the frog received this name because of its handsome appearance. Its skin shines with a fine reddish color like bronze.

Besides these frogs there is another creature in the garden that visits the house from time to time. It is a very large toad. The people of the house call it hikigaeru. The creature has large eyes and a heavy body. Its movements are slow and awkward. Yet the servants treat it kindly. They believe the toad brings good luck to the house. The toad sometimes enters the rooms during the evening. It comes without fear and waits quietly on the floor. The people feed it and allow it to remain for a while. Some even believe that the toad can draw mosquitoes out of the air. They say that by breathing in strongly, it pulls the insects into its mouth.

There is also an old story about a giant toad that lived long ago. That creature

could draw not only insects but even people into its mouth by the power of its breath.

The pond contains many other small forms of life. There are small fish that move quietly among the plants. There are also newts with bright red bellies. These newts swim slowly in the clear water. On the surface of the pond many small water beetles move in circles. They are called maimaimushi. They move so quickly that their shape is difficult to see. They spin again and again across the water. Because of this, a person who runs about in confusion is sometimes compared to a maimaimushi.

There are also snails with shells marked by yellow stripes. Japanese children like these snails very much. When they see one, they often sing a small song. The song asks the snail to put out its horns. The words say that rain will come soon, and the snail should show its horns before the rain begins.

For children in Japan the garden has always been a place of learning and play. The children of rich families play in their home gardens. The children of poor families play in the temple grounds. In the garden young children first learn about the life of plants and insects. They watch how flowers open and how small creatures move. Mothers often teach their children gentle songs about birds, flowers, and animals. They also teach the children to be kind to living creatures. Because of this early teaching, Japanese children often grow up with a strong feeling of kindness toward animals.

Of course, children everywhere sometimes show cruelty without thinking. Japanese children are not entirely different in this respect. But an interesting difference can often be seen between boys and girls. Little girls are usually gentle with insects and animals. They watch them quietly and often set them free again after playing. Little boys are sometimes rougher. Yet if a child is seen hurting a small creature, the adults quickly correct him. They say, "If you do cruel things, your next life will be unhappy." Such words come from Buddhist belief.

Somewhere among the stones of the pond there lives a small tortoise. I believe it was left here by people who lived in the house before me. The tortoise is shy and difficult to see. Sometimes many days pass without any sign of it.

In Japanese stories the tortoise is connected with a god named Kompira. When a fisherman finds a tortoise, he may write words upon its shell. These words say that the animal is a servant of the god Kompira. After writing the words, the fisherman gives the tortoise a little sake to drink and then sets it free. People believe that tortoises enjoy sake.

Some people say that only the land tortoise serves Kompira. The sea tortoise, they say, serves the Dragon King who lives beneath the ocean. In old stories the sea tortoise has magical powers. It can create clouds and fog. It can even build a shining palace beneath the sea. The tortoise appears in the famous story of Urashima, a fisherman who once traveled to the kingdom under the ocean.

Because tortoises are believed to live for a thousand years, they often appear in Japanese art as symbols of long life. Artists sometimes draw a special kind of tortoise called minogame. This tortoise has a strange tail made of many thin strands that look like the straw rain coat called mino. The idea for this image came from real tortoises that lived for many years in temple ponds. Plants grew on their shells, and long green threads hung behind them as they moved through the water. People saw this and imagined that the tortoise itself had grown a long tail.

Such are some of the living creatures that share the quiet life of the garden. Though small and often unnoticed, they give movement and life to the peaceful landscape.

## Part 6

In the early part of summer the frogs in the garden become very numerous. When night falls their voices fill the air. Their sounds rise from the pond again and again. The noise is so loud that it sometimes seems as if the whole garden is singing. But little by little the voices grow fewer. Each week the sound becomes weaker. This happens because many enemies hunt the frogs.

One of these enemies is the snake. Several snakes live near the garden. Some are almost a meter long. They move quietly through the grass and water. Sometimes they swim across the pond like dark lines moving through the surface.

When a snake catches a frog, the frog cries loudly. The sound is sad and sharp. If someone in the house hears the cry, they often try to save the frog. One of the servant girls is especially quick to help. When she sees a snake holding a frog, she touches the snake lightly with a long bamboo stick. The snake usually releases the frog and glides away into the grass.

The snakes are excellent swimmers. They move easily through the pond and the small streams of the garden. Yet none of the people in the house wish to kill them. In this region people believe that killing a snake brings bad luck. One farmer once told me a strange belief. He said, "If you kill a snake without a good reason, later you will open the rice box in your house and find the head of that snake inside." Perhaps this story was told long ago to teach people not to harm harmless creatures.

Still, snakes are not the greatest danger for the frogs. Much more dangerous are the birds. Kites and crows fly over the garden every day. They watch the pond carefully. When they see a frog near the water's edge, they quickly swoop down to catch it. There is also a small weasel that lives beneath the storehouse of the house. It is a beautiful animal with bright eyes and quick movements. The weasel steals fish and frogs from the pond without fear. Even when I am sitting on the veranda watching the garden, the animal sometimes runs out and takes its prey.

Another hunter is a cat. This cat does not belong to the house. It comes from outside and wanders through the garden like a thief. I have tried to make the cat friendly, but it remains wild and suspicious. Because of its behavior, the servants believe it may be a nekomata. A nekomata is a goblin cat. In this region people say that cats have the power to become magical creatures when they grow old. One sign of such a change is a long tail. For this reason kittens often have their tails cut short when they are very young. People believe that without a long tail the cat cannot transform into a goblin.

Many strange stories are told about cats. Some say that cats have magical power and can even make the bodies of the dead move. Others say that cats are not grateful animals. A Japanese saying explains this idea. It says, "Feed a dog for three days and it will remember your kindness for three years. Feed a cat for three

years and it will forget your kindness in three days.” Cats also cause trouble in the house. They tear the floor mats and scratch the wooden pillars. They make holes in the paper doors.

There is another story about cats in Buddhist belief. When the Buddha died, all living creatures wept. Only two did not cry. These were the cat and the poisonous snake. Because of this, some people say that cats will never enter the peaceful paradise after death. For these reasons cats are not loved very much in this region. Most of them must live outside the house.

In the warm months many butterflies visit the garden. During the last few days I have counted eleven different kinds. The most common butterfly is pure white. It is often seen near the small yellow flowers of the rape plant. When little girls see this butterfly they sing a simple song. The song asks the butterfly to rest on the leaf of the flower. If the butterfly does not wish to rest there, the children ask it to rest on their hands instead.

Yet the most interesting insects of the garden are the cicadas. These insects live in the trees and sing loudly during the warm season. Their music is very different from the sound of cicadas in other countries. In Japan several different kinds appear one after another through the summer. Each kind has its own voice.

The first kind that I usually hear is called natsuzemi, which means “summer cicada.” Its voice begins with a weak sound. Then the sound grows stronger and louder until it becomes almost like the noise of steam escaping from a machine. At last the sound slowly fades away again. When two or three of these insects sing near the window, the sound becomes so strong that I must drive them away.

Soon another kind appears called minminzemi. This cicada has a much more pleasant voice. Its sound is clear and musical. Some people say it sounds like a Buddhist priest chanting a sacred book. When I first heard it, I could hardly believe that such a sound came from an insect.

Later in the season a third kind arrives. This one is green and beautiful. It is called higurashi. Its voice is gentle and clear, like the ringing of a small bell. The sound repeats again and again in the quiet air.

But the most surprising cicada of all appears toward the end of the warm season.

This insect is called tsukutsukuboshi. Its song sounds almost like the voice of a bird. The sound rises and falls in a strange rhythm. The people write its song with sounds that imitate its voice. These sounds repeat again and again in a lively pattern.

Listening to the cicadas in the garden is like hearing an orchestra of many instruments. Their voices fill the trees and the warm summer air. Together with the frogs and the wind among the leaves, they create the living music of the garden.

## Part 7

Besides the cicadas there are many other insects whose voices fill the summer nights. Some of them are small crickets that live among the grasses. Others hide beneath stones or under the wooden floors of the house. When evening comes and the air grows cooler, their sounds begin softly and then grow stronger as the darkness deepens.

The Japanese people love these sounds very much. To them the voices of insects are not unpleasant noise but a kind of music. In fact, there is even a special word used to describe the enjoyment of listening to insects. People call it mushi-no-ne, which means “the voices of insects.” In the warm evenings families sometimes sit quietly outside the house and listen to this natural music.

Several kinds of singing insects appear during the late summer and autumn. One of the most famous is the insect called suzumushi, or “bell cricket.” Its sound is very clear and delicate. The tone resembles the ringing of a small temple bell. Because of this beautiful sound, people often catch these crickets and keep them in small cages. The cages are usually made of bamboo and placed inside the house. The gentle ringing of the insect continues through the night.

Another well-known insect is the kirigirisu. This insect is larger than the bell cricket and has a stronger voice. Its sound is rougher but still pleasant. The kirigirisu is also connected with many old poems and songs.

In earlier times people sometimes traveled to certain fields and hills simply to listen to the voices of insects. These excursions were called mushi-kiki, which

means “listening to insects.” Friends would gather together in the evening and walk through the countryside. They would sit among the grasses and listen quietly while the insects sang around them.

The love of insect music appears often in Japanese poetry. Many ancient poems describe the sadness of autumn through the voices of insects. When the weather begins to cool and the days grow shorter, the sound of the insects becomes a reminder that summer is ending.

In the garden the insects begin their music soon after sunset. First a few small voices appear among the grasses. Then more and more join the chorus. Before long the whole garden seems filled with a delicate trembling sound.

Sometimes the singing becomes so strong that it feels almost like a living presence in the darkness. The sound surrounds the listener on every side. Yet it is never harsh. Instead it seems soft and mysterious.

In Western countries many people do not notice such sounds very much. But in Japan the voices of insects have long been admired as part of the beauty of nature. Just as people admire the blossoms of spring and the red leaves of autumn, they also admire the quiet music of insects.

The garden at night becomes a different world from the garden of the day. The shapes of trees and stones grow dark and uncertain. The surface of the pond reflects the moon and the stars. Fireflies sometimes drift slowly above the water like tiny moving lights.

At such moments the garden feels very peaceful. The sounds of insects, the movement of the water, and the whisper of the wind among the leaves all join together in gentle harmony.

Even when one sits alone in the darkness, the garden does not feel empty. The many small lives within it continue their quiet activities. Frogs move among the reeds, insects sing among the grasses, and the slow water flows through the stones.

In this way the garden shows a truth that Japanese people have understood for many centuries. Nature is never silent or lifeless. Even the smallest creatures share in the great movement of life.

For this reason a garden in Japan is not only a place of beauty but also a place

of meditation. By watching the plants and listening to the voices of animals and insects, a person may learn to feel the deep rhythm of the natural world.

And when night passes and the first light of morning appears, the garden slowly changes once more. The insects grow silent, the birds begin to sing, and the quiet life of another day begins.

## Part 8

Morning in the garden begins very quietly. At first there is only a faint light in the eastern sky. The air feels cool and fresh. During these early moments the garden seems almost motionless.

Soon the birds awaken. Their voices begin softly among the trees. One bird answers another from a distant branch. Little by little the music of the morning grows stronger.

At the same time the insects of the night fall silent. The frogs return to their hiding places among the stones and plants of the pond. The mist that rose from the water during the night slowly disappears as the sun climbs higher in the sky.

When the sunlight finally reaches the garden, every leaf and stone becomes bright. Drops of water shine upon the plants like small jewels. The pond reflects the blue of the sky and the moving shapes of clouds.

The plants seem to awaken as well. The lotus leaves spread wide across the surface of the water. Small fish begin to move beneath them. The flowers open slowly toward the warmth of the sun.

The gardener often appears early in the morning. His work is quiet and careful. With small tools he trims the plants, removes fallen leaves, and sweeps the paths between the stones. The work may seem simple, yet it requires great patience and skill.

In Japan the care of a garden is considered an art. The gardener must understand the nature of every plant and stone. He must know how sunlight moves through the garden during the day and how shadows fall in the evening.

Nothing is left to chance. Even the smallest detail receives attention. A single

stone may be moved slightly so that the whole scene appears more balanced. A branch may be trimmed so that the shape of the tree becomes more graceful.

The purpose of such careful work is not merely to create beauty. The garden is meant to express harmony between human life and the natural world. By shaping the landscape with respect and patience, the gardener allows nature to reveal its quiet order.

For this reason a Japanese garden often appears simple at first glance. There may be only a few stones, a small pond, and several trees. Yet each element has been chosen with thought and placed with care.

When a person sits quietly in such a place, the mind becomes calm. The movement of water, the shapes of stones, and the living forms of plants create a feeling of balance and peace.

In this way the garden becomes more than a collection of plants and objects. It becomes a place where one may reflect upon life.

Through the changing seasons the garden shows many different faces. In spring the cherry blossoms fill the air with soft color. In summer the lotus flowers rise from the pond and the cicadas sing in the trees. In autumn the red leaves glow beneath the clear sky. In winter the branches of the trees stand dark against the snow.

Each season brings its own beauty, and each reminds us that all things change.

The garden therefore teaches a quiet lesson. Nothing remains the same forever. Flowers bloom and fall, leaves grow and disappear, and even the stones slowly change with time.

Yet within this constant change there is also continuity. Life continues in new forms. The seeds of plants grow again. New insects and birds appear each year.

For those who watch carefully, the garden becomes a book written by nature itself.

And so the small garden beside the house is not only a pleasant place to rest. It is also a teacher. By observing its quiet life day after day, one may learn patience, humility, and a deeper understanding of the world.

## Chapter 2: The Household Shrine

### Part 1

In every Japanese home there is usually a small place that is set aside for the spirits of the family. This place is called the household shrine. It is not large. In many houses it is only a small wooden shelf fixed high upon the wall. Yet the meaning of this place is very important. The shrine shows the deep respect that Japanese people feel toward their ancestors.

Long ago people believed that the spirits of the dead continued to live near the homes of their families. These spirits were thought to watch over the living. Because of this belief, families made a special place where they could honor the spirits of their ancestors.

In Buddhist homes this place is called the butsudān. The word means “Buddha shelf.” The shrine is usually made of dark polished wood. Small doors close over the front of the shrine. When the doors are opened, one can see the sacred objects inside.

These objects may include small images of the Buddha, memorial tablets that carry the names of ancestors, and sometimes other religious symbols. The tablets are especially important. Each tablet represents a member of the family who has died. The name of the person and the date of death are written upon it.

Before the shrine a small space is kept clean and respectful. Offerings are placed there regularly. These offerings may include flowers, rice, tea, or fruit. Incense is often burned as well. The gentle smoke rises slowly in front of the shrine, carrying prayers toward the spirits of the dead.

Every day members of the household may bow quietly before the shrine. They place their hands together and offer a short prayer. In this way they show gratitude to the ancestors who came before them.

The household shrine therefore forms a quiet center within the home. It reminds the living that they are connected with the past. The family does not stand alone in the present moment. Behind every generation stand many earlier lives.

Because of this feeling, respect for ancestors has long been one of the strongest elements of Japanese family life.

## Part 2

The household shrine is treated with great respect. It is always placed in a high position within the house, usually above eye level. This position shows honor to the spirits that are believed to dwell there. The place beneath the shrine must remain clean and quiet. People avoid careless behavior near it.

In many homes the shrine is opened in the morning and closed again in the evening. When the doors are opened, the family may offer fresh water, tea, or rice to the spirits of the ancestors. These offerings are simple but meaningful. They show that the living still remember the dead.

The act of offering food does not mean that people believe the spirits truly eat the food. Instead, the offering expresses gratitude and remembrance. It shows that the family continues to respect those who lived before them.

On special days the ceremonies at the household shrine become more elaborate. During festivals or memorial days, the family may prepare better offerings. Fresh flowers are placed before the shrine. Incense is burned in greater quantity. Sometimes a Buddhist priest may visit the house to recite sacred prayers.

One of the most important times for honoring ancestors is the festival called Obon. This festival usually takes place during the summer. At that time people believe that the spirits of the dead return briefly to visit their homes.

During Obon families clean their household shrines carefully. Lanterns are sometimes placed nearby to guide the spirits. Special foods are prepared as offerings. In many towns people also perform traditional dances in the evenings.

At the end of the festival small lanterns may be set afloat upon rivers or the sea. These lights represent the spirits returning to the world beyond.

Even outside such festivals, the quiet presence of the household shrine continues to influence daily life. Children grow up seeing their parents bow before the shrine. Through this simple action they learn the importance of respect,

gratitude, and family memory.

In this way the household shrine is more than a religious object. It becomes a symbol of continuity between past and present.

### Part 3

Besides the Buddhist household shrine, many Japanese homes also contain another kind of sacred place. This second shrine belongs to the ancient religion of Japan called Shinto. The Shinto household shrine is known as the kamidana, which means “the shelf of the gods.”

The kamidana is usually placed high upon the wall, often above the Buddhist shrine or in another honorable position within the room. It is commonly made of light wood and often shaped like a very small shrine building. Inside the shrine are sacred objects that represent the presence of the gods.

The most important object placed within the kamidana is a small paper charm from a Shinto temple. This charm is called an ofuda. It bears the name of a particular deity and represents the protection of that god within the household.

Every morning the family may place offerings before the kamidana. These offerings usually include rice, salt, water, and sometimes sake. Just as with the Buddhist shrine, these offerings are simple but meaningful. They show gratitude toward the divine powers believed to protect the home.

Although the Buddhist shrine and the Shinto shrine come from different religious traditions, it is common in Japan for both to exist peacefully within the same house. This situation may seem unusual to people from other countries where religions often remain separate. In Japan, however, the two traditions have lived side by side for many centuries.

The Buddhist shrine is mainly connected with the memory of the dead and the care of ancestors. The Shinto shrine, on the other hand, is connected with the living world and the natural spirits that protect it.

Together these two small shrines quietly express two important aspects of Japanese spiritual life: respect for the past and harmony with the powers of nature.

Even in modern homes where space is limited, people often find a way to include at least a small sacred place for remembrance and prayer. The presence of these shrines continues to remind families of their connections with both their ancestors and the spiritual traditions of their country.

#### Part 4

The presence of both the Buddhist butsudan and the Shinto kamidana in the same home reveals something important about Japanese religious life. In many Western countries people usually belong to a single religion. In Japan, however, religious traditions have long blended together in everyday life.

A person may take part in Shinto ceremonies at one time and Buddhist ceremonies at another without feeling any contradiction. Shinto rituals are often connected with events of life such as birth and marriage. Buddhist ceremonies are more closely connected with death and remembrance.

Because of this, the two traditions support different parts of human experience. One looks toward life and the living world. The other reflects upon death and the memory of those who have passed away.

Within the quiet space of the home these two ideas meet peacefully. The kamidana honors the divine forces that protect the household each day. The butsudan honors the ancestors whose lives made the present family possible.

Together they form a small spiritual center within the house.

Visitors to Japan sometimes feel surprised by the simplicity of these shrines. They are not large temples filled with elaborate decoration. Instead they are modest and quiet. Yet the respect shown toward them reveals their importance.

Each morning the family may bow before them. A small offering of rice or tea may be placed there. A stick of incense may be lit before the ancestral tablets.

These actions require only a few moments. Yet they connect daily life with a much larger sense of continuity. The living remember the past, and they acknowledge the unseen forces that surround them.

Through such simple rituals the home becomes not only a place of shelter but

also a place of reflection.

In this way the household shrine expresses an idea that lies deep within Japanese culture: the belief that everyday life should remain connected with gratitude and respect.

## Part 5

There are many small customs connected with the household shrine. These customs differ somewhat from region to region, but the spirit behind them is generally the same. The shrine must always remain clean. Dust should never gather upon it. The objects placed before it must be handled with care.

When new offerings are placed before the shrine, the older offerings are removed respectfully. Even these simple acts are performed with quiet attention. Through such actions people show that reverence belongs not only to great ceremonies but also to the ordinary moments of life.

Children learn these customs at an early age. At first they may only watch their parents bow before the shrine. Later they begin to participate themselves. They may carry a small cup of water or help arrange flowers before the ancestral tablets.

In this way respect for the ancestors becomes part of daily behavior rather than a distant religious idea.

Sometimes people also speak to the shrine in private moments. A person who feels troubled may bow quietly and ask for guidance. Another may offer thanks for good fortune that has come to the family. Such prayers are usually simple and personal.

The household shrine therefore serves not only as a symbol of tradition but also as a place where individual feelings may be expressed.

In many old houses the shrine stands in the most honorable room of the building. This room is often used for important family gatherings. When guests visit, they may notice the shrine and bow respectfully toward it.

Through such gestures the guest also acknowledges the presence of the ancestors and the dignity of the household.

Over the centuries these quiet customs have helped maintain a strong sense of family continuity in Japan. Even when the members of a household change from generation to generation, the shrine remains.

The names written upon the tablets remind the living that they are part of a long chain of lives. Each generation receives the gifts of the past and passes them onward to the future.

Thus the small wooden shrine within the house becomes a powerful symbol of memory, gratitude, and family connection.

## Part 6

Although the household shrine may appear simple, its meaning reaches deeply into the history of Japan. The respect shown toward ancestors is not merely a private family custom. It reflects an older way of thinking about life and society.

In earlier centuries the family was considered the central unit of social life. The honor of the family name was extremely important. Each generation was expected to respect the generations that had come before it and to protect the reputation of those who would come after.

The household shrine helped to strengthen this feeling of responsibility. When people bowed before the memorial tablets of their ancestors, they were reminded that their own actions would someday become part of the family's history.

In this way the shrine encouraged both gratitude and moral reflection.

Many Japanese writers have commented on this quiet influence. They have noted that the shrine teaches humility. It reminds people that their lives are only one small part of a much longer story.

Even those who do not consider themselves deeply religious may still feel respect for the household shrine. The feeling is often cultural rather than strictly theological. It grows from a sense of continuity with the past.

In modern cities the structure of family life has changed in many ways. Houses are smaller, and people often move far from the homes where they were born. Because of these changes, some homes no longer contain traditional shrines.

Yet the idea behind the shrine has not disappeared. Many families continue to keep photographs of their ancestors in special places. They may place flowers or light incense beside these pictures on certain days.

Through such practices the memory of earlier generations remains alive.

Thus the household shrine, whether traditional or modern in form, continues to express one of the most enduring values of Japanese culture: the belief that the past and the present are closely connected.

The quiet presence of the shrine reminds the living that they are never entirely alone. Behind them stand the lives and experiences of many generations.

And in remembering those lives, people often discover a deeper understanding of their own.

## Part 7

In earlier times the household shrine held an even more central place in daily life than it does today. In large traditional houses the shrine room was often considered the most honorable space within the building. Family ceremonies, important conversations, and moments of reflection frequently took place in its presence.

The shrine therefore served not only a religious function but also a social one. It reminded everyone in the household that the family existed within a long tradition. The authority of parents and elders was connected with this sense of continuity.

Children who grew up in such homes learned to feel that their lives were linked with those who had lived before them. The ancestors were not distant historical figures. Their names were spoken regularly, and their presence was symbolically maintained through the shrine.

In this way the household shrine helped preserve family history. Stories about earlier generations were often told near it. Grandparents might explain the lives of the ancestors whose names were written on the memorial tablets. Through such stories the younger members of the family came to understand their place within

the larger chain of generations.

The influence of these traditions can still be felt today. Even when modern life becomes busy and complicated, many people continue to value moments of quiet remembrance.

A simple gesture such as lighting incense before a memorial tablet may seem small, yet it carries deep emotional meaning. It expresses gratitude toward those who came before and acknowledges the invisible bonds that connect past and present.

Thus the household shrine stands as a quiet symbol of continuity. It reminds the living that their own lives are part of an ongoing story.

Each generation receives the legacy of the past, adds its own experiences, and then passes that legacy forward.

In this sense the shrine represents more than memory alone. It represents the enduring connection between generations.

And through this connection the meaning of family continues to live from one age to the next.

## Chapter 3: Of Women's Hair

### Part 1

In Japan the hair of women has long held deep meaning. For many centuries the hair styles of Japanese women were very complex. Japanese women traditionally allowed their hair to grow very long. In earlier times women did not cut their hair short. The long black hair was considered one of the most beautiful features a woman could possess.

Different styles of hair existed for different groups of women. Married women wore their hair in one fashion, while unmarried girls used another. Women of the court had still other styles that showed their social rank. Women who worked as entertainers, such as geisha, used still other styles. Because of this, a person who understood these customs could often recognize a woman's position in society simply by looking at her hair.

The arrangement of the hair required much time and skill. Special combs, pins, and ornaments were used. The hair was carefully divided into sections and then shaped into elaborate forms. Sometimes the work required the help of professional hairdressers who spent many hours completing a single style.

Because the work was so difficult, women did not arrange their hair every day. After the hair was dressed, they tried to preserve the style for as long as possible. This required great care. Even sleeping became a delicate matter. Women rested their heads upon small wooden supports rather than soft pillows so that the hair would not be disturbed during the night.

The care of women's hair required not only skill but also many special tools. These tools were often expensive. Only wealthy women could afford them easily. In large cities entire shops existed that sold combs, hairpins, and ornaments made from fine materials such as lacquer, shell, ivory, or metal.

Because hair styles reflected beauty, rank, and tradition, artists often showed women with these elaborate arrangements in paintings and prints. Looking at such images, one can understand why women's hair held such fascination in Japanese

culture. The long black lines of the hair and the graceful shapes created by careful arrangement became an important element of artistic beauty.

For this reason the study of women's hair in Japan reveals more than simple fashion. It also shows something about the history, aesthetics, and social customs of the country.

## Part 2

In very ancient times the hair of Japanese women was worn in a simple manner. It flowed freely down the back without complicated arrangement. This style can be seen in old paintings and descriptions from the earliest periods of Japanese history.

Such long flowing hair was considered extremely beautiful. The dark smooth strands formed a strong contrast with the pale colors of traditional clothing. When a woman walked slowly, the movement of her long hair created a graceful image that poets often admired.

In the classical literature of Japan many descriptions of beauty include references to long black hair. Writers praised hair that was thick, shining, and straight. The length of the hair sometimes reached the ground when the woman was seated.

Later, however, fashions began to change. During the medieval and early modern periods new styles appeared. These styles involved lifting and shaping the hair into large forms above the head.

The development of these elaborate arrangements required the invention of new tools and techniques. Combs and hairpins became more important than before. The hair was sometimes strengthened with wax or oil so that it would remain in place.

Because these styles required such careful construction, professional hairdressers became necessary. In large cities women visited hairdressers regularly to have their hair arranged in the newest fashion.

The complexity of these styles reflected the highly refined culture of the cities

during that period. Fashion and appearance played important roles in social life.

Yet the admiration for long black hair never completely disappeared. Even when the hair was arranged in elaborate forms, its color and texture remained essential elements of beauty.

Japanese poets and artists continued to celebrate the elegance of women's hair. Through literature, painting, and theater, the image of graceful hair became deeply rooted in the cultural imagination.

In this way the history of women's hair in Japan shows the gradual transformation of beauty ideals while preserving certain enduring elements that remained admired across centuries.

### Part 3

During the period when the great cities of Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka flourished, the art of arranging women's hair reached an extraordinary level of complexity. New styles appeared frequently, and each style carried its own name and meaning.

Hairdressers developed many techniques to shape the hair into graceful curves and balanced forms. Large sections of hair were lifted upward and supported by hidden combs and pins. Other sections were drawn outward to create soft wings on either side of the head.

These styles were not created at random. Each arrangement followed rules that had been refined through long tradition. The hairdresser needed not only technical skill but also an artistic sense of proportion.

Different occupations required different styles. Young unmarried girls wore simpler arrangements that emphasized youth and freshness. Married women wore styles that were more controlled and dignified.

Women who worked in the pleasure districts developed especially elaborate hair fashions. Geisha and other entertainers used striking arrangements decorated with many ornaments. Their hair might be adorned with combs of lacquer, pins of metal, and delicate flowers made of silk.

These ornaments were not merely decorative. They often indicated the season

or the status of the wearer. For example, certain flowers were appropriate only during particular months of the year.

Because of these customs, the appearance of a woman's hair could communicate many subtle messages to those who understood the tradition.

The work of maintaining these elaborate styles required patience. Once the hair had been arranged, women tried to preserve it for several days. Sleeping without disturbing the hair demanded great care.

Special wooden headrests were used instead of ordinary pillows. These supports held the neck while leaving the hair untouched.

Although such practices might seem uncomfortable, they were accepted as part of the discipline of beauty. Elegance required effort and self-control.

Through these customs the arrangement of women's hair became not only a matter of fashion but also an expression of cultural values such as refinement, patience, and attention to detail.

#### Part 4

The ornaments used in women's hair were often works of art in themselves. Craftsmen produced beautiful combs and hairpins from many materials. Some were made from lacquered wood polished until it shone like dark glass. Others were carved from ivory or shaped from delicate metals.

Certain ornaments were decorated with tiny flowers, birds, or leaves. These designs reflected the strong connection between Japanese aesthetics and the natural world. The ornaments therefore did more than decorate the hair. They also expressed the changing beauty of the seasons.

In spring women often wore ornaments shaped like cherry blossoms or plum flowers. During summer lighter decorations might appear, sometimes representing flowing water or cool plants. In autumn the ornaments might take the form of red leaves. In winter the decorations became simpler and more restrained.

The arrangement of ornaments within the hair required careful balance. Too many ornaments would appear excessive, while too few might seem incomplete.

The skill of choosing the correct combination became part of the art of appearance.

Because these ornaments were valuable, they were often preserved carefully within families. A mother might pass her combs and pins to her daughter. In this way the objects themselves sometimes became part of family history.

Artists of the Edo period frequently represented these ornaments in paintings and woodblock prints. In such works the graceful lines of hair and the delicate shapes of combs created a striking visual harmony.

Many famous prints show women adjusting their hair before a mirror. The quiet gesture of arranging the hair became a symbol of elegance and contemplation.

At the same time, the great variety of hair ornaments reflects the prosperity and artistic creativity of urban life during that historical period.

Thus the study of women's hair ornaments reveals not only the taste of individuals but also the cultural atmosphere of an entire society.

## Part 5

Although the elaborate hair styles of earlier centuries were admired for their beauty, they also required much effort to maintain. As time passed and society began to change, many women gradually abandoned the most complicated forms.

During the later nineteenth century Japan experienced rapid contact with Western cultures. These changes influenced many aspects of daily life, including clothing and personal appearance.

Some women began to cut their hair shorter or arrange it in simpler ways that required less time and fewer ornaments. New fashions appeared that reflected the changing position of women in modern society.

Schools for girls, new professions, and increased public activity all made the older styles less practical. Women who studied or worked outside the home needed hair arrangements that were easier to manage.

Because of these social changes, the traditional art of elaborate hair dressing slowly declined. Many of the old styles disappeared from everyday life.

Yet they did not vanish entirely. In certain traditional occupations, such as the

profession of geisha, the older styles continued to survive. In festivals and theatrical performances the historical forms of hair arrangement are still carefully preserved.

Artists and historians have also studied these styles with great interest. Old paintings, prints, and photographs provide valuable records of the many designs that once existed.

Through these images we can see how closely the arrangement of hair was connected with the cultural ideals of earlier generations.

Even though modern women may no longer wear such elaborate styles, the admiration for beautiful hair has not disappeared. Long, smooth, dark hair still carries a sense of elegance within Japanese culture.

In this way the history of women's hair reflects a balance between change and continuity. Fashion may transform over time, yet certain aesthetic values remain quietly present beneath the surface of social change.

## Part 6

Although many traditional styles have disappeared from ordinary life, the memory of them continues to live within Japanese culture. Historical paintings, woodblock prints, and literary descriptions preserve the image of the elegant arrangements once worn by women of earlier generations.

These records show how closely the idea of beauty was connected with patience, balance, and refinement. The shaping of hair required time and discipline. Each line and curve had to be carefully considered.

For this reason the art of hair dressing was often regarded as a form of craftsmanship. The hairdresser did not merely arrange the hair but created a harmonious design.

Such designs were influenced by the same aesthetic principles that guided other Japanese arts. The ideas of balance, simplicity, and harmony with natural forms appeared in hair styles just as they appeared in gardens, architecture, and painting.

Even today these principles remain visible in modern Japanese design.

The historical study of women's hair therefore reveals something larger than fashion alone. It helps us understand how beauty was imagined and expressed within a particular cultural tradition.

The long dark hair admired in old literature, the elaborate forms created by skilled hairdressers, and the delicate ornaments chosen with care all reflect a shared appreciation for subtle elegance.

Although modern life has simplified many customs, the sense of grace associated with beautiful hair still survives.

Thus the story of women's hair in Japan is not merely a history of changing styles. It is also a record of artistic ideals and social values that shaped the appearance and imagination of generations.

## Chapter 4: From the Diary of an English Teacher

### Part 1

When I first came to Japan to teach English, I expected that my work would be simple. I believed that teaching a foreign language required mainly patience and clear explanation. Yet I soon discovered that the situation was far more complex.

My students were intelligent and eager to learn, but the differences between the English and Japanese languages created many unexpected difficulties. Words that seemed perfectly clear to me often produced confusion among my pupils.

One of the greatest problems came from the different ways in which the two languages express ideas. English sentences usually require a clear subject. Japanese sentences, however, often omit the subject when it can be understood from the situation.

Because of this difference, students sometimes produced English sentences that lacked an obvious subject. To them the sentence seemed natural, yet to an English speaker it sounded incomplete.

Another difficulty arose from pronunciation. Certain English sounds do not exist in the Japanese language. Students therefore had trouble producing them accurately.

The sounds of “l” and “r,” for example, often caused confusion. Many students found it difficult to hear the difference between these two sounds. As a result, they sometimes pronounced words in ways that changed their meaning entirely.

Despite these challenges, the students showed admirable determination. They repeated exercises many times and carefully copied sentences from the blackboard. Their notebooks often contained long lists of vocabulary written with great care.

Through these efforts they gradually improved their understanding of English. Yet the process remained slow and sometimes amusing.

As a teacher I soon realized that learning a foreign language involves not only grammar and vocabulary but also the habits of thought that lie behind the language

itself.

For this reason the classroom became a place where two different ways of thinking met each day. And within that meeting many curious situations arose.

## Part 2

One day I asked my class to translate a simple English sentence into Japanese. The sentence was: “The horse is a noble animal.” I expected the students to produce a straightforward answer. Instead they began to discuss the sentence with great seriousness.

After some time one of the students stood up and explained the difficulty. In Japanese, he said, the word “horse” does not always carry the same emotional meaning that it has in English. To call a person a horse in Japanese might suggest something very different from nobility.

Because of this difference, the students wished to know whether the sentence should be understood literally or metaphorically.

Such discussions revealed how language is closely connected with culture. A word in one language may carry associations that do not exist in another. When students translated a sentence, they often needed to consider not only the dictionary meaning of each word but also the deeper sense behind it.

Another curious example occurred during a lesson about English idioms. I explained the expression “to kill two birds with one stone.” The students listened carefully and wrote the phrase in their notebooks.

After a moment one student raised his hand and asked a thoughtful question. He wished to know whether English people truly killed birds in this manner, or whether the phrase was simply symbolic.

I explained that the expression was metaphorical and meant achieving two results with a single action.

The student nodded politely, yet he still seemed uncertain. In Japan, he explained, harming birds might be considered unkind. The image therefore felt somewhat disturbing.

Through such moments I realized that teaching language also involves explaining the cultural images hidden within ordinary expressions.

The classroom therefore became a place of mutual discovery. While the students learned English, I also learned much about the perspectives and sensitivities of Japanese thought.

These experiences gradually taught me that successful teaching requires patience not only with grammar but also with cultural understanding.

### Part 3

Another difficulty appeared when students attempted to translate polite expressions. The Japanese language contains many forms of politeness that depend on social relationships. The words used when speaking to a superior differ from those used when speaking to a friend.

English does not express such distinctions in the same elaborate manner. Because of this, students sometimes asked which English phrases should be considered the most respectful.

For example, when writing a letter, they wished to know how deeply the writer should humble himself before the reader. In Japanese letters, expressions of modesty often appear at the beginning. Writers may apologize for disturbing the reader or for writing imperfect words.

Students therefore expected that English letters would contain similar expressions. When I showed them simple English letters that began directly with the main subject, they seemed surprised by the brevity.

To them such directness felt almost abrupt. Yet in English writing it is usually considered efficient and clear.

These differences sometimes produced amusing results in translation exercises. When students translated Japanese letters into English, the sentences often became extremely long. Each polite phrase was carefully included.

The final result sometimes sounded excessively formal in English, though it reflected the natural courtesy of Japanese communication.

Through such experiences the students slowly learned that language reflects the habits of the society that uses it. Words and grammar cannot be separated from the cultural patterns in which they exist.

Little by little the class began to understand that learning English required more than memorizing vocabulary. It required adjusting one's sense of expression to fit a different way of communicating.

For the teacher, these moments provided valuable lessons as well. Observing the careful courtesy of the students revealed the depth of politeness embedded in Japanese life.

Thus the classroom became not only a place of linguistic study but also a meeting point between two cultural traditions.

#### Part 4

Pronunciation lessons often created some of the most memorable moments in the classroom. Certain English sounds proved especially difficult for the students to distinguish.

One well-known example involved the sounds represented by the letters "l" and "r." In English these sounds are clearly different, but in Japanese they are not separated in the same way. As a result, many students found it difficult both to hear and to produce the distinction.

When reading aloud, they sometimes exchanged the two sounds. Words such as "light" and "right" could therefore become confused.

During one lesson I wrote several pairs of such words on the board. I asked the students to repeat them carefully after me. The class responded with great seriousness, concentrating on the subtle difference in sound.

Despite their efforts, however, the results were not always successful. At times the pronunciation of the entire class produced unexpected combinations that caused quiet laughter among the students themselves.

Yet their determination remained admirable. They repeated the words again and again until the difference slowly became clearer.

Another pronunciation difficulty appeared with the sound of “th.” Because this sound does not exist in Japanese, students often replaced it with other familiar sounds.

Words like “this,” “think,” or “three” therefore became especially challenging. Some students attempted to place the tongue between the teeth exactly as I demonstrated, but the result sometimes produced expressions of surprise or amusement.

Even so, the students practiced diligently. Over time their pronunciation gradually improved.

These lessons reminded me that learning a new language requires training not only the mind but also the muscles used in speech. Sounds that feel natural to native speakers may require careful effort for others.

Through patience and repetition the students slowly gained confidence. And as their pronunciation improved, their enjoyment of speaking English increased as well.

Thus the small daily struggles of pronunciation practice became part of the larger journey of learning a new language.

## Part 5

Vocabulary sometimes produced difficulties of a different kind. Students often learned many English words from dictionaries, yet the exact usage of those words remained uncertain.

A single English word may carry several meanings depending on the context in which it appears. Students who relied only on dictionary definitions sometimes used such words in unusual ways.

For example, one student once attempted to describe a peaceful scene in nature. He wrote that “the wind was enjoying the trees.” The sentence was grammatically understandable, yet the image felt strange in English.

When I asked him about the meaning he wished to express, he explained that he wanted to describe the wind moving gently through the branches. In Japanese

poetry the wind is sometimes described as enjoying or playing among the trees.

Such expressions reveal how poetic imagination can differ between languages.

Another student attempted to describe a diligent classmate by writing that he was “a man of great suffering.” The student intended to praise the classmate’s patience and effort in study.

In English, however, the phrase suggested that the person lived in deep misery.

Moments like these reminded me that vocabulary cannot always be transferred directly from one language to another. Words carry emotional tones and cultural associations that shape their meaning.

Through careful explanation and repeated practice, the students gradually learned to recognize these differences.

At the same time, I found myself increasingly fascinated by the subtle beauty of Japanese expressions. The poetic images used by the students often revealed a sensitivity to nature and emotion that enriched our discussions.

Thus the process of teaching vocabulary became a two-way exchange of ideas and imagery between languages.

## Part 6

Another interesting difficulty appeared in the use of English articles. The words “a,” “an,” and “the” are small, yet they play an important role in English grammar. For students whose native language does not use such articles, understanding their function required considerable effort.

Japanese sentences usually do not contain words that correspond directly to English articles. Because of this, students sometimes omitted them entirely when writing English.

At other times they inserted them in places where they were not needed. The result could produce sentences that sounded unusual to a native speaker.

During one lesson I tried to explain the difference between saying “a book” and “the book.” The distinction seemed clear to me, yet the students asked many thoughtful questions.

They wished to know how a listener could always determine whether the speaker meant a particular object or any object of that kind.

Such questions revealed the complexity hidden within ordinary language habits. Native speakers use articles automatically without conscious thought, but explaining the rules in detail proved surprisingly difficult.

To make the idea clearer, I began using simple objects in the classroom. I placed a book on the desk and asked the students to describe it.

When a student said “the book,” I explained that he was referring to the specific book that everyone could see. When another student said “a book,” I explained that the phrase could refer to any book in general.

Through these small demonstrations the class slowly began to grasp the difference.

The process reminded me that language learning often requires concrete examples rather than abstract explanations.

Little by little the students gained confidence in using articles correctly. Although occasional mistakes continued to appear, their understanding steadily improved.

In this way even the smallest words became important steps in the larger journey of learning English.

## Part 7

As time passed, my experience in the classroom gradually changed my understanding of teaching. At first I had believed that the teacher’s task was simply to present knowledge clearly. Yet daily contact with the students revealed that learning is a far more subtle process.

Language does not exist only in books and dictionaries. It lives within habits of thought, patterns of feeling, and the shared experiences of a culture. When students learn a new language, they must also learn something of the world in which that language developed.

In the same way, the teacher who enters a foreign country begins to learn about

the culture of the students. Through small questions and unexpected translations, the teacher discovers new ways of seeing familiar ideas.

Many moments in the classroom therefore became occasions for reflection. A simple grammatical exercise might lead to a discussion about poetry, politeness, or the customs of daily life.

Through these conversations the distance between teacher and students gradually decreased. The classroom no longer felt like a place where knowledge moved only in one direction.

Instead it became a meeting place of two traditions. The English language entered the minds of the students, while the teacher slowly gained insight into the spirit of Japanese culture.

Looking back on those early lessons, I now understand that the most valuable result was not the perfect mastery of grammar.

Rather, it was the mutual curiosity that developed between teacher and students.

Through patience, humor, and shared effort, we learned to understand one another a little better.

And in that quiet exchange, the true purpose of education began to appear.

## Chapter 5: Two Strange Festivals

### Part 1

Among the many festivals celebrated in Japan, there are some that appear very unusual to foreign visitors. These festivals often combine ancient religious ideas with lively public celebrations. To understand them fully, one must remember that Japanese customs frequently unite solemn belief with cheerful activity.

One such festival takes place in the early spring. It is connected with the belief that certain unlucky influences must be driven away at the beginning of the new season. The ceremony is known as Setsubun.

On the evening of this day families gather in their homes and perform a curious ritual. Roasted beans are thrown about the house while people call out loudly, "Demons out! Good fortune in!"

The words are spoken again and again as the beans are scattered into corners, doorways, and even outside the house.

Children especially enjoy this custom. Sometimes one member of the family puts on a mask representing a demon. The other members then throw the beans toward the masked figure, chasing the demon from the house.

Although the scene often becomes playful and full of laughter, the ceremony reflects a serious belief that harmful influences may be removed in this symbolic way.

After the beans have been thrown, another small custom follows. Each person eats a certain number of the roasted beans. The number usually corresponds to the person's age.

It is believed that eating the beans will bring health and good fortune for the coming year.

Such practices reveal how Japanese festivals often mix symbolic meaning with everyday enjoyment. Even when the ceremony appears lighthearted, it preserves traditions that reach far back into the past.

For visitors who observe these events for the first time, the combination of

seriousness and play may seem unusual. Yet within Japanese culture these two elements exist together quite naturally.

Thus the festival of Setsubun offers a glimpse into the way ancient beliefs continue to live within modern daily life.

## Part 2

Another curious festival takes place during the summer months. This celebration is connected with an ancient belief concerning the spirits of the dead. It is widely known as the festival of Bon, or Obon.

According to traditional belief, during this season the spirits of ancestors return briefly to visit the homes of their families. Because of this belief, many preparations are made to welcome the returning spirits.

Before the festival begins, families carefully clean their homes. Special attention is given to the household shrine where the ancestral tablets are kept. Fresh flowers are placed there, and offerings of food are prepared.

Small lanterns are often hung near the entrance of the house. These lights are believed to guide the spirits safely back to their former homes.

In many towns and villages public celebrations also take place during the evenings of the festival. One of the most characteristic events is the Bon Odori, or Bon dance.

People gather in open spaces such as temple grounds or village squares. Music begins to play, often performed on drums and traditional instruments. Then groups of dancers move slowly in circles, performing simple and graceful steps.

The dance is not intended as a performance for spectators alone. Instead it invites participation from everyone present. Young and old alike join the movement, creating a shared rhythm that continues late into the night.

Although the dance may appear cheerful, its meaning remains connected with remembrance of the dead. The movements of the dancers symbolize the welcoming of the ancestral spirits.

At the end of the festival another touching ceremony sometimes takes place.

Lanterns are set afloat upon rivers, lakes, or the sea. Each lantern carries a small light.

As the lanterns drift away into the darkness, they represent the spirits returning to the world beyond.

For observers, the sight of many glowing lights floating slowly across the water can be both beautiful and deeply moving.

Through such ceremonies the Obon festival expresses a powerful idea: that the bond between the living and the dead continues across time.

Thus the festival unites joy, memory, and reverence within a single celebration.

### Part 3

Although the festivals of Setsubun and Obon differ greatly in appearance, they share an important similarity. Both reflect the belief that unseen forces influence human life.

In the case of Setsubun, the ceremony attempts to drive away harmful influences. The throwing of beans symbolizes the removal of misfortune and the welcoming of good fortune.

In the case of Obon, the festival welcomes the spirits of ancestors and expresses respect for the dead. The ceremonies show that the memory of earlier generations remains an important part of family life.

These customs reveal a view of the world in which the visible and invisible are closely connected.

Such ideas may appear unusual to people from cultures where daily life is more clearly separated from religious belief. In Japan, however, many traditions developed from a long history in which spiritual ideas blended naturally with everyday activities.

The result is that festivals often combine religious meaning with joyful public celebration.

Children laugh while throwing beans at imaginary demons. Families gather to remember their ancestors. Villagers dance together beneath the summer sky.

Through these activities the festivals strengthen social bonds within the community. They provide moments when people share common memories and beliefs.

At the same time, they offer opportunities for relaxation and enjoyment.

Even in modern cities where life has become busy and complex, many of these festivals continue to be celebrated.

Their persistence suggests that traditions possess a quiet strength. Although society changes over time, certain customs remain meaningful because they connect people with both their past and their community.

Thus the strange festivals that may surprise foreign visitors also reveal deeper aspects of Japanese culture.

They show how symbolic actions, collective memory, and simple enjoyment can exist together within a single tradition.

#### Part 4

For a foreign observer, these festivals may at first appear curious or even mysterious. The sight of people throwing beans to chase invisible demons or floating lanterns to guide returning spirits may seem unfamiliar.

Yet when one looks more closely, the meaning behind these customs becomes easier to understand.

Human societies everywhere create ceremonies that express hopes, fears, and memories. The forms may differ from culture to culture, but the underlying feelings are often similar.

In Japan the festivals of Setsubun and Obon give visible form to these universal emotions.

Setsubun reflects the desire to begin a new season with purity and good fortune. By symbolically driving away harmful forces, people express hope for a safe and prosperous future.

Obon, on the other hand, expresses gratitude toward those who lived before. The returning spirits of ancestors remind the living that their own lives are part of

a continuing chain of generations.

Through dance, music, and gentle rituals of remembrance, the festival transforms this idea into a shared community experience.

The combination of solemn belief and cheerful celebration may seem unusual at first. Yet it reflects a cultural tradition in which the sacred and the everyday are closely intertwined.

In this way the festivals serve several purposes at once. They preserve ancient beliefs, strengthen family and community ties, and provide moments of joy within the cycle of the year.

For those who observe them with patience and sympathy, these celebrations offer a valuable glimpse into the spirit of Japanese life.

Thus the “strange festivals” that surprise foreign visitors become, upon closer understanding, meaningful expressions of human experience that resonate far beyond the boundaries of a single culture.

## Chapter 6: By the Japanese Sea

### Part 1

One summer I made a journey to the western coast of Japan. My destination was a quiet village that faced the great waters of the Japanese Sea. The journey required several days of travel through mountains and countryside.

When I finally arrived, the scene before me was very different from the busy cities where I had been living.

The village stood between the sea and steep green hills. Small houses with dark roofs were scattered along a narrow strip of land near the shore. Fishing boats rested on the beach, and the air carried the smell of salt and seaweed.

The sound of the waves formed a constant background to village life. From morning until night the sea moved rhythmically against the shore.

The people of the village lived mainly by fishing. Each day before sunrise the fishermen prepared their boats. They pushed them into the water and set out toward the open sea.

Watching them depart in the early light created a powerful impression. The small boats moved slowly across the shining surface of the water while the sky gradually brightened in the east.

When evening came the boats returned again. The fishermen carried their catch to the shore, where women and children waited to help.

The entire rhythm of the village seemed to follow the movements of the sea.

Life there appeared simple and direct. Yet it possessed a quiet dignity shaped by the close relationship between the people and the natural world around them.

For someone accustomed to city life, the atmosphere of the village offered a refreshing change.

The wide horizon of the sea and the steady movement of the waves created a feeling of calm that was rarely found in crowded urban streets.

During my stay I began to observe not only the scenery but also the customs and stories that belonged to this coastal region.

These observations gradually revealed another side of Japanese life, one shaped by the sea and the traditions of fishing communities.

## Part 2

The sea along that coast possessed a character very different from the waters near the eastern side of Japan. The waves of the Japanese Sea often appeared darker and more powerful. At times the water stretched before the eyes like an immense sheet of moving steel.

The fishermen of the village understood these waters with remarkable skill. From childhood they had learned to read the signs of wind, clouds, and currents. A slight change in the color of the sea or the movement of the sky could tell them much about the coming weather.

One morning I walked along the shore while the fishermen prepared their boats. Nets lay spread across the sand while men carefully examined ropes and wooden floats. Their work was quiet and deliberate.

A fisherman noticed my interest and spoke to me kindly. He explained that the success of the day's work depended not only on effort but also on the behavior of the sea.

"Sometimes the sea gives generously," he said. "At other times it keeps its treasures hidden."

Such words reflected a deep respect for the natural forces that shaped their lives.

The boats used by the fishermen were small but sturdy. They were designed to move easily through the waves. When the time came to depart, several men pushed each boat into the water while others jumped aboard with practiced movements.

Soon the boats were moving across the open water.

From the shore they appeared very small against the vast surface of the sea. Yet the fishermen handled them with confidence.

During the day the village became quiet. Most of the men were away on the water, leaving behind women, children, and older people who cared for the homes.

In the afternoon the women gathered along the beach to repair nets or sort the catch that had already been brought in by earlier boats.

The atmosphere remained peaceful and unhurried.

As the sun began to descend toward the horizon, the returning boats appeared one by one in the distance.

Their dark shapes slowly grew larger as they approached the shore.

When they reached the beach, the fishermen lifted baskets filled with fish and carried them to the waiting villagers.

These moments created a sense of shared accomplishment. The success of the day's work belonged not to individuals alone but to the entire community.

Watching this daily rhythm allowed me to understand how closely the life of the village was connected with the sea.

The ocean was not merely a beautiful landscape. It was the central force that shaped the work, hopes, and traditions of the people who lived beside it.

### Part 3

During my stay in the village I also learned about several local beliefs connected with the sea. Like many coastal communities, the people possessed traditions that reflected both respect and caution toward the powerful waters before them.

One such belief concerned the spirits thought to dwell within the ocean. The fishermen often spoke of these unseen beings with quiet seriousness. They did not describe them in frightening terms, yet they believed that the sea possessed its own mysterious life.

Before beginning an important fishing season, small offerings were sometimes made at a nearby shrine. The fishermen prayed for calm waters and safe return from their journeys.

The shrine stood on a low hill overlooking the coast. From that place one could see the wide horizon where the sky met the sea.

The building itself was simple. A small wooden structure sheltered a sacred

object representing the local sea deity.

When the fishermen visited the shrine, they brought offerings of rice, sake, or fish. They bowed respectfully and clapped their hands softly as part of the traditional prayer.

Such ceremonies expressed gratitude as well as hope for protection.

The people of the village understood that their lives depended greatly upon the unpredictable nature of the sea.

Storms sometimes arrived suddenly along that coast. When dark clouds gathered over the water and strong winds began to blow, the entire village prepared quickly.

Boats were pulled far up onto the shore. Nets and tools were secured carefully. Families remained indoors while the wind and waves grew stronger.

During such storms the sea produced a powerful sound that filled the air day and night.

Yet after the storm passed, calm often returned just as suddenly. The waves became gentle again, and the fishermen resumed their work as before.

Through generations of experience the villagers had learned to live with both the generosity and the danger of the sea.

Their customs and beliefs reflected this careful balance between trust and respect for the natural world.

For an outsider, observing these traditions offered a deeper understanding of how environment shapes culture.

The sea was not only the source of food and livelihood for the village. It also influenced the imagination, beliefs, and daily practices of the people who lived beside it.

#### Part 4

One evening during my stay, I walked alone along the shore after sunset. The sky still held a faint red glow where the sun had disappeared below the horizon.

The sea stretched outward in deep shadow, while the first stars began to appear

above the water.

The village behind me was quiet. Only the distant sound of voices and the occasional bark of a dog broke the stillness of the evening.

As I walked, I noticed small lights moving slowly across the dark surface of the sea.

At first I wondered what they might be. Soon I realized that they came from fishing boats working at night.

Each boat carried a lantern whose light shone softly upon the water.

From the shore these lights appeared like small stars drifting across the surface of the ocean.

The sight was both beautiful and mysterious.

Standing there in the quiet darkness, I felt a strong sense of the vastness of the sea.

The boats, the village, and even the land itself seemed small in comparison with the endless horizon.

Yet the fishermen moved confidently within that immense space.

Their lives had been shaped by long familiarity with the sea and its rhythms.

Watching the distant lanterns, I thought about the countless generations of people who had lived along that coast.

For centuries they had launched their boats into the same waters and returned again to the same narrow shore.

Their daily work formed part of a continuing tradition that connected past and present.

The lights of the boats slowly moved farther away until they became almost invisible against the darkness.

After some time I turned back toward the village.

The quiet houses stood close together along the beach, and the faint glow of lamps appeared in their windows.

The simple scene conveyed a feeling of peace that remained with me long after my journey had ended.

## Part 5

My stay in the coastal village lasted only a short time, yet the impressions it left were lasting. The quiet rhythm of life by the sea differed greatly from the hurried atmosphere of the cities.

Each day followed a pattern shaped by natural forces rather than by clocks or schedules. The fishermen rose with the early light and returned with the setting sun. The movement of the tides and the behavior of the weather influenced every activity.

Such a way of life required patience and careful observation. The villagers had learned to respect the sea rather than to challenge it.

Through this attitude they developed a calm acceptance of both success and hardship.

On days when the catch was abundant, the village shared in the prosperity. Baskets filled with shining fish were carried through the narrow streets, and the atmosphere became lively with conversation and laughter.

On other days the nets returned nearly empty. Yet the fishermen accepted this result without bitterness. They understood that the sea could not always be generous.

This quiet resilience formed an important part of the character of the community.

During my walks through the village I often noticed how closely the houses, boats, and daily activities were arranged around the shoreline.

The sea remained constantly present—visible from windows, audible in the background of conversation, and reflected in the habits of work and rest.

Living beside such a powerful natural element encouraged humility as well as appreciation.

Before leaving the village, I visited the small shrine on the hill once more. From that height I looked out across the wide expanse of water.

Fishing boats moved slowly near the horizon, and the waves broke softly against the rocks below.

The scene seemed timeless.

In that moment I understood more clearly how deeply the sea shaped the lives of the people who lived beside it.

Their customs, beliefs, and daily labor all grew from their long relationship with the ocean.

Although my journey eventually carried me back to the busy streets of the city, the memory of that quiet village remained vivid.

The sound of the waves, the lanterns of the fishing boats at night, and the calm patience of the villagers continued to live in my thoughts as reminders of a different rhythm of life.

## Chapter 7: Of a Dancing-Girl

### Part 1

Among the many memories of my early years in Japan, one small incident remains especially vivid in my mind. It concerns a young dancing-girl whom I happened to meet in a quiet provincial town.

The town lay far from the great cities and possessed a calm atmosphere. Narrow streets wound between rows of wooden houses, and small shops stood open along the roadside.

One evening, while walking through the town, I heard the distant sound of music. The melody came from a nearby house where a small gathering appeared to be taking place.

Curious about the sound, I paused for a moment outside the building.

Soon the door opened, and a young girl stepped onto the veranda. She wore a simple but graceful kimono, and her hair had been carefully arranged.

In her hands she held a small fan used in traditional dance.

Although she seemed very young, her movements possessed a quiet confidence. She looked around briefly and then began to practice a series of dance steps.

The music from inside the house continued softly, guiding her motions.

Her movements were slow and precise. Each gesture of the fan and each turn of the body appeared carefully controlled.

Watching her, I felt a sense of admiration for the discipline required to perform such dances.

Traditional Japanese dance does not rely upon rapid movement or dramatic gestures. Instead it emphasizes subtlety and grace.

A slight movement of the hand or a gentle turn of the head can express emotion more powerfully than large actions.

The young dancing-girl practiced for several minutes without noticing my presence.

Then she suddenly looked up and saw me standing nearby.

For a moment she appeared surprised, but her expression quickly changed to one of polite composure.

She bowed slightly, as courtesy required.

In that brief encounter I sensed the quiet dignity with which even very young performers were trained to carry themselves.

The meeting lasted only a short time, yet it left a lasting impression upon my memory.

## Part 2

After her brief bow, the young girl seemed uncertain whether she should continue her practice. I spoke to her gently in Japanese and apologized for interrupting.

She listened quietly and then smiled with a mixture of shyness and politeness.

When she realized that I had been watching only with admiration, she appeared less embarrassed.

The house from which the music came was evidently a place where young performers were trained. In many towns such houses existed to teach girls the arts of traditional entertainment.

These arts included singing, playing musical instruments, and performing classical dances.

The training required patience and many hours of practice.

Although the young girl looked no more than fourteen or fifteen years of age, it was clear that she had already spent considerable time studying her art.

Her movements possessed a careful precision that could only come from long repetition.

As we spoke briefly, she explained that she practiced every evening after her other lessons were finished.

Sometimes her teacher watched closely and corrected every small detail of her performance.

At other times, like that evening, she practiced alone while the music played

inside the house.

The dedication required for such training impressed me deeply.

In many cultures children learn artistic skills, but the discipline demanded in traditional Japanese arts often begins at an early age.

The young dancing-girl seemed to accept this discipline naturally.

When I asked whether she enjoyed dancing, she answered simply that it was her duty to practice well.

Yet the quiet brightness in her eyes suggested that she also felt pride in her progress.

Our conversation lasted only a few minutes.

Soon she excused herself politely and returned to her practice.

Once again the fan moved slowly through the air as the music continued inside the house.

Watching her graceful movements in the soft evening light, I felt that the small scene revealed something important about the cultural traditions that shaped such performers.

### Part 3

As I continued to watch from a respectful distance, the young dancer repeated the same sequence of movements many times. Each repetition seemed almost identical to the one before it.

Yet small differences appeared as she adjusted the position of her hands, the angle of the fan, or the rhythm of her steps.

The discipline required for such practice was remarkable.

In traditional Japanese dance, perfection is sought not through dramatic innovation but through careful refinement of established forms.

The dancer learns patterns that have been preserved across generations.

Within those patterns, the smallest variation in timing or gesture can create a powerful emotional effect.

For this reason the training emphasizes patience and concentration.

The young girl seemed fully absorbed in her task.

Occasionally she paused to listen more carefully to the music coming from inside the house.

Then she resumed her movements with renewed attention.

The scene took place in the quiet twilight of the town.

The narrow street remained almost empty, and the fading light of evening softened the outlines of the surrounding buildings.

In that peaceful setting the slow movements of the dance appeared especially graceful.

After some time the music inside the house came to an end.

The girl lowered her fan and stood still for a moment.

Then she bowed toward the doorway of the house, perhaps acknowledging the teacher or musicians inside.

When she turned again, she noticed that I was still standing nearby.

Once more she bowed politely, showing the courtesy that formed an essential part of her training.

I returned the gesture and prepared to continue my walk through the town.

Although our meeting had been brief, the quiet dedication I had witnessed remained vivid in my memory.

Through the simple scene of a young girl practicing her dance, I had glimpsed the discipline and continuity that sustain traditional arts in Japan.

#### Part 4

As I resumed my walk through the quiet streets, I continued to think about the young dancer and the dedication she had shown.

The small town around me seemed calm and ordinary, yet within its houses traditions of remarkable refinement were quietly preserved.

The training of performers such as the girl I had seen formed part of a cultural heritage that had developed over many centuries.

Traditional dance in Japan is closely connected with classical theater and music.

Many of the movements performed by dancers today originate in artistic forms that appeared long ago.

Through careful instruction these movements have been passed from teacher to student across generations.

Each new performer therefore becomes part of a long artistic lineage.

The young girl practicing in the evening light represented one small link within this continuing chain.

Her discipline and patience reflected the values required to preserve such traditions.

In modern times rapid changes have affected many aspects of Japanese life.

Western influences have introduced new forms of entertainment and artistic expression.

Yet the classical arts have not disappeared.

Instead they continue to exist alongside modern culture.

Young performers still devote years to mastering the precise techniques of dance, music, and theater.

Their training reminds observers that cultural traditions survive not only through written records but also through the dedication of individuals who practice them faithfully.

The image of the young dancer therefore remained with me as a symbol of this quiet continuity.

Even in a small provincial town, far from the great cultural centers, the spirit of traditional art continued to live.

## Part 5

The memory of that brief encounter remained with me long after I left the town. In itself the event had been very simple. A traveler paused on a quiet street and watched a young girl practicing her dance.

Yet the scene seemed to express something characteristic of Japanese culture.

The art of the dance required not only physical skill but also an understanding

of restraint and balance.

Every movement had to be controlled. Every gesture had to appear natural and unforced.

Such qualities reflect aesthetic ideals that appear throughout many traditional Japanese arts.

In poetry, painting, and even the arrangement of gardens, beauty is often found in simplicity and careful moderation.

The dancer must therefore learn not only how to move but also how to avoid unnecessary movement.

The young girl I had observed seemed already to understand this principle.

Her gestures were quiet and deliberate.

She did not hurry through the sequence of steps but allowed each movement to unfold slowly.

Watching her practice revealed the patience required to master such an art.

It also revealed the importance of dedication in preserving cultural traditions.

Many artistic forms survive only because individuals devote years of effort to learning and transmitting them.

The young dancer stood at the beginning of such a path.

Whether she would continue far along that path I could not know.

Yet her quiet concentration suggested that she already possessed the discipline required for the journey.

Thus the small moment I witnessed in the fading light of that provincial town remained in my memory as a symbol of the living continuity of traditional art.

Through the practice of one young performer, the heritage of many generations continued to move gently forward into the future.

## Chapter 8: From Hoki to Oki

### Part 1

During my travels in Japan I once made a journey from the province called Hoki to a group of islands known as Oki. The journey led me across the sea along the western coast of the country. The distance was not very great. Yet the experience left a strong impression upon my mind.

The coast from which I departed was quiet and simple. Small villages stood near the shore. Fishing boats rested upon the sand. The sea stretched wide and gray under the sky. The air carried the smell of salt and seaweed.

Early in the morning I walked down to the harbor. The boat that would carry passengers to the islands was already waiting. It was not a large vessel. The boat was built mainly for the work of fishermen. Yet it also carried travelers who wished to cross the water.

Several people had already gathered near the boat. Some carried baskets or bundles. Others stood quietly watching the sea. The sailors moved about preparing the vessel. They checked ropes and arranged supplies. Their actions were calm and practiced.

At last the signal was given to board the boat. The passengers climbed aboard carefully. Soon the boat began to move away from the shore. The sound of water against the wooden sides echoed softly.

As the coast slowly disappeared behind us, the open sea spread in every direction. The waves were gentle that day. The sky above was pale and clear.

For a long time the boat moved steadily across the water. The passengers spoke quietly among themselves. Some watched the horizon. Others rested silently.

I looked often toward the distant line where the sky met the sea. It seemed almost empty at first. Yet after many hours faint shapes appeared. These shapes slowly grew clearer.

They were the islands of Oki rising from the water. The islands looked dark against the bright sky. Steep cliffs faced the sea. Above the cliffs stood hills

covered with trees.

## Part 2

As the boat approached the islands, their rugged outlines became clearer. The cliffs rose sharply from the sea, and the dark green of the trees contrasted strongly with the pale surface of the water.

The islands appeared lonely and remote. Few signs of human settlement could be seen at first. Only after we came nearer did small villages become visible along the narrow strips of land near the shore.

These villages consisted of simple houses built close together. Fishing boats rested in small harbors protected by the natural shape of the coastline.

The life of the island people seemed closely connected with the sea, much like the coastal villages I had visited on the mainland.

Yet the atmosphere of the islands felt even more isolated.

For many centuries the islands of Oki had been known as places of exile. Important political figures who had fallen from favor were sometimes sent there by the authorities.

Because of this history, the islands possessed a certain solemn reputation in Japanese tradition.

Some famous individuals had spent years of their lives in exile upon these remote shores.

When our boat entered the small harbor, several villagers gathered to watch the arrival of passengers. Their expressions were calm and curious.

The sailors secured the boat with ropes, and the travelers slowly stepped onto the wooden landing.

The air on the island carried the fresh scent of the sea mixed with the smell of vegetation growing on the nearby hills.

From the harbor a narrow path led upward toward the village.

As I began to walk along that path, I felt a quiet sense of entering a place that had long stood apart from the busy movements of the mainland.

The peaceful isolation of the islands created a unique atmosphere that invited careful observation.

I soon realized that the journey from Hoki to Oki had brought me not only to a new landscape but also to a place filled with historical memories and distinctive local traditions.

### Part 3

After arriving in the village, I spent some time walking slowly through its narrow streets. The houses were simple wooden buildings with tiled roofs. Small gardens appeared beside many of the homes. In these gardens grew vegetables, flowers, and occasionally a few carefully tended trees.

The villagers seemed accustomed to the arrival of occasional travelers. They greeted strangers politely but without excessive curiosity. Their manner was quiet and reserved.

Life on the island appeared to follow a steady rhythm connected with the sea and the changing seasons.

Fishing provided an important part of the local livelihood. Early in the morning many boats left the harbor and returned later in the day with their catch.

The harbor itself formed the center of daily activity. Fishermen repaired their nets, children played near the shore, and women carried baskets of fish toward the houses or small market areas.

The surrounding landscape added to the sense of isolation. Hills rose steeply behind the village, covered with thick forests that extended toward the interior of the island.

From certain high points along the paths one could see the sea stretching endlessly toward the horizon.

Standing in such places, I felt the full distance that separated these islands from the mainland.

Yet the isolation also created a particular beauty.

The quiet sound of waves against the rocks, the movement of wind through the

trees, and the distant cries of seabirds combined to form a peaceful atmosphere.

The people who lived there seemed closely connected to this natural environment.

Their lives reflected patience and endurance, qualities necessary for communities living in remote coastal regions.

As evening approached, the light of the setting sun spread across the sea. The water turned a deep red and gold beneath the fading sky.

The small harbor gradually became quiet as the fishing boats returned and the villagers withdrew to their homes.

Watching this peaceful scene, I felt that the islands of Oki possessed a character both solemn and beautiful, shaped by their long history and their distance from the mainland world.

#### Part 4

During my stay on the island, I learned more about the history that had given Oki its reputation. The islands had long served as a place of exile for important figures who had fallen from political power. Because of this role, the quiet villages and lonely shores possessed a certain historical gravity.

Among those who had been sent into exile there were individuals of high rank and strong character. Their presence had left memories that continued to live in local traditions and stories.

The villagers spoke of these events with quiet respect. Although many generations had passed, the names of certain exiles were still remembered.

In some places small shrines or monuments had been built to honor those who had once lived on the islands under such difficult circumstances.

Walking through the landscape while hearing these stories created a strange impression. The beauty of the natural scenery seemed to stand in contrast with the sorrowful events that had taken place there long ago.

The cliffs, forests, and quiet villages appeared peaceful, yet they had once witnessed the lives of individuals separated from the centers of power and society.

This mixture of beauty and melancholy gave the islands a distinctive character. Travelers who visit such places cannot help reflecting upon the fragile nature of fortune in human life.

Those who once possessed great influence at court could suddenly find themselves transported to a distant island, far from the world they had known.

The calm sea surrounding Oki therefore seemed to carry echoes of many forgotten stories.

Standing upon the shore and looking across the water, one could easily imagine the ships that had once brought exiled nobles to these remote islands.

For the people who arrived unwillingly, the view of the mainland disappearing beyond the horizon must have been filled with deep sadness.

Yet over time even those exiles had become part of the island's history.

Their memory remained woven into the quiet life of the villages and the natural beauty of the surrounding landscape.

## Part 5

As my visit to the islands came to an end, I once again walked along the quiet shore near the harbor. The sea stretched calmly before me, reflecting the pale light of the sky.

Fishing boats moved slowly across the water, and the distant hills of the islands rose quietly behind the village.

The peaceful scene seemed very different from the troubled histories associated with the islands.

Yet perhaps this contrast formed part of their lasting impression.

Places that once witnessed sorrow and exile often become quiet landscapes where memory and nature exist together.

Travelers who arrive later can only imagine the emotions of those who lived through the events of the past.

While standing there, I thought again about the individuals who had been sent to these remote shores many centuries earlier.

Separated from their homes and from the centers of power, they had faced long years of isolation.

Yet even in such circumstances, life on the islands continued.

Villages grew, families lived their ordinary lives, and the natural beauty of the landscape remained unchanged.

The waves continued to rise and fall along the coast, just as they had done long before the arrival of any exiled noble.

This continuity of nature often reminds us how temporary human fortunes can be.

Political power, reputation, and influence may rise and fall within a short time.

But the mountains, the forests, and the sea remain.

As the boat prepared to leave the harbor and return toward the mainland, I looked once more at the quiet islands of Oki.

Their cliffs and forests stood silently above the water.

Although my visit had been brief, the journey from Hoki to Oki left a lasting impression upon my memory.

The islands seemed to represent a meeting place between history and nature, where the stories of the past continued to echo quietly within the landscape.

## Chapter 9: Of Souls

### Part 1

Among the many beliefs that have shaped Japanese thought and daily life, ideas about the soul occupy a particularly important place. These beliefs appear not only in formal religious teachings but also in the ordinary customs and emotions of the people.

In Japan the idea of the soul is closely connected with the belief that the spirit of a person may continue to influence the world even after death. The presence of such spirits is often felt in subtle ways within everyday life.

For this reason the memory of the dead is treated with deep respect.

Families maintain household altars where the names of ancestors are remembered and honored. Offerings of food, flowers, and incense are placed before these altars as signs of continued affection.

Through these acts the living express the belief that relationships between family members do not end completely with death.

The idea of the soul also appears in various traditional festivals.

During certain times of the year it is believed that the spirits of the dead return briefly to visit the world of the living.

One well-known example is the festival commonly called Bon.

During this period lanterns are lit, dances are performed, and families gather to welcome the returning spirits of their ancestors.

The atmosphere of the festival combines joy with quiet reverence.

Although the spirits cannot be seen, people feel that they are present among the living.

Such beliefs influence many aspects of daily life.

Expressions of respect toward ancestors, care for graves, and the preservation of family traditions all reflect the idea that the souls of the dead remain connected to the living world.

At the same time, Japanese literature and folklore contain many stories about

spirits that appear in more dramatic ways.

Some of these stories describe gentle ancestral spirits who protect their descendants.

Others tell of restless souls who return because of strong emotions that were never resolved during life.

Through these various traditions, the concept of the soul continues to occupy an important place in Japanese culture.

## Part 2

The belief that the soul may leave the body under certain conditions appears frequently in Japanese tradition. It is sometimes said that strong emotions such as grief, anger, or intense longing can cause the spirit of a living person to wander from the body.

In such cases the wandering spirit may appear to others in dreams or visions.

Stories of this kind are found in classical literature as well as in popular folklore.

These stories often describe individuals who encounter a mysterious visitor, only later discovering that the visitor was the spirit of a person still living elsewhere.

Such narratives reflect the belief that the soul possesses a certain independence from the physical body.

Even without physical death, the soul may travel or reveal itself in unexpected ways.

This concept may seem strange from the perspective of modern scientific thinking.

Yet for many people it expresses an emotional truth about the power of human feelings.

Strong attachment between individuals can create the impression that their presence is felt even when they are physically absent.

Traditional Japanese culture often expresses such emotional experiences through the language of spirits and souls.

The idea that the soul can travel beyond the limits of the body therefore serves as a poetic explanation for deep psychological connections.

Literary works sometimes describe this phenomenon with great subtlety.

A character may feel suddenly aware of another person's presence, even though that person is far away.

Later events reveal that the moment coincided with a time of intense emotion in the distant individual.

Through such stories the imagination gives form to experiences that are difficult to explain in ordinary terms.

These beliefs also influence artistic representations in theater and storytelling.

In certain dramatic traditions, characters appear as spirits representing unresolved feelings from the past.

Their presence allows audiences to explore themes of memory, regret, and enduring emotional bonds.

In this way the concept of the soul becomes not only a religious belief but also a powerful cultural symbol.

### Part 3

In Japanese literature the idea of the wandering soul appears with particular clarity in certain classical stories. These works often describe moments when a powerful emotion causes a person's spirit to separate from the body and influence events elsewhere.

One of the most famous examples can be found in early Japanese narrative literature, where a character experiences such intense jealousy or longing that her spirit unconsciously travels to the place where the object of her feelings resides.

The result is sometimes tragic.

The wandering spirit may harm another person without the conscious intention of the individual whose soul has departed.

Such stories reveal the deep psychological insight contained within traditional narratives.

They suggest that emotions which remain hidden within the human heart can nevertheless exert powerful influence upon others.

The image of the wandering soul provides a symbolic way of expressing this invisible emotional force.

The belief also reflects the importance placed upon emotional harmony in Japanese society.

Because feelings are often expressed indirectly, strong emotions may be imagined as taking on an independent existence outside the self.

In this way the soul becomes a representation of inner experience.

The concept also appears in traditional performing arts such as Noh drama.

In many Noh plays a spirit appears before a traveling monk or priest and recounts the story of its past life.

The spirit may represent someone who died long ago but whose emotional attachments still remain.

Through prayer and remembrance the spirit is finally released from suffering.

Such dramatic stories illustrate the belief that unresolved emotions can bind the soul to the world even after death.

At the same time they suggest that compassion and understanding may bring peace to troubled spirits.

The artistic beauty of these performances lies partly in their ability to present profound emotional ideas through simple and symbolic forms.

A quiet stage, a slow movement of the actor, and the sound of a flute may express feelings that words alone cannot convey.

In this sense the idea of the soul becomes both a philosophical and artistic theme within Japanese culture.

#### Part 4

In addition to literary and dramatic traditions, beliefs about the soul also appear in many everyday customs. These customs reflect the idea that the spirits of the dead remain connected to the world of the living.

For example, when a person dies, various rituals are performed to guide the soul peacefully toward its new state of existence.

Family members and religious officials conduct ceremonies that express respect and remembrance.

These rituals are not only acts of mourning but also expressions of continuing relationship.

The living seek to ensure that the spirit of the departed finds peace and does not remain troubled.

The maintenance of family graves represents another important expression of these beliefs.

Throughout the year families visit burial places to clean the graves, offer flowers, and light incense.

Such acts demonstrate the belief that the dead remain aware of the actions and thoughts of their descendants.

Respect for ancestors therefore becomes part of daily moral life.

Children learn from an early age that the spirits of previous generations continue to watch over the family.

This belief encourages a sense of continuity between past and present.

Even in modern Japan, where scientific knowledge has greatly changed the way many people think about the world, these customs continue to exist.

They may no longer always be interpreted literally as the presence of spirits.

Yet the symbolic meaning of honoring the dead remains deeply significant.

Through such practices people express gratitude toward those who came before them.

In this way the concept of the soul functions both as a religious idea and as a cultural expression of memory and respect.

The presence of ancestral spirits within the household shrine or family grave connects individuals to a broader sense of history and identity.

Thus the idea of the soul continues to shape emotional and cultural life in subtle ways.

## Part 5

When one considers the many traditions, stories, and customs related to the soul in Japan, it becomes clear that these beliefs express more than simple superstition.

They reveal a particular way of understanding the relationship between the living and the dead, between visible actions and invisible emotions.

The idea that the soul may continue to exist beyond the body allows people to imagine that human connections are not entirely destroyed by death.

Memories, affection, regret, and gratitude can therefore remain meaningful even after physical separation.

In literature and art, this idea provides powerful themes through which writers and performers explore the deepest emotions of human experience.

The image of the wandering spirit, the returning ancestor, or the troubled ghost allows audiences to reflect upon questions of attachment and release.

At the same time, everyday customs surrounding death and remembrance give practical expression to these ideas.

The lighting of incense, the offering of food, the quiet bow before an ancestral tablet—all these acts symbolize the continuing presence of those who have passed away.

Such gestures remind the living that their own lives are part of a larger human continuity.

The concept of the soul therefore serves as a bridge between personal memory and cultural tradition.

It connects the individual to family history, and family history to the wider narrative of society.

Even when modern knowledge encourages more rational explanations of the world, the emotional meaning of these traditions remains strong.

People continue to honor the memory of the dead not only because of religious belief but also because remembrance itself gives meaning to human relationships.

Thus the idea of the soul, whether interpreted literally or symbolically, continues to occupy an important place in Japanese thought.

Through stories, rituals, and artistic expression, the presence of the soul remains a quiet but enduring element within the cultural life of the nation.

## Chapter 10: Of Ghosts and Goblins

### Part 1

Among the many traditional beliefs that exist in Japan, stories about ghosts and supernatural beings occupy a particularly vivid place in the imagination of the people. These stories have been told for centuries and continue to appear in literature, theater, and popular storytelling.

In Japanese tradition the supernatural world contains many different kinds of spirits. Some are believed to be the souls of the dead who have not yet found peace. Others belong to an older world of mysterious creatures that inhabit mountains, forests, rivers, and abandoned places.

Because of this rich tradition, the Japanese language contains many words referring to different kinds of supernatural beings.

Some are frightening, while others are playful or even helpful.

The stories told about them vary greatly depending on region and historical period.

In earlier times such tales were often shared during the evenings, when families gathered together after the day's work was finished.

The quiet atmosphere of night provided an ideal setting for stories about invisible presences and mysterious encounters.

Listeners would sit close together while the storyteller described strange events that had happened long ago.

Some stories spoke of travelers who encountered spirits on lonely roads.

Others described haunted houses where unexplained sounds were heard during the night.

In many cases the purpose of these tales was not simply to frighten the listener.

They also expressed moral lessons about human behavior.

A person who acted selfishly or cruelly might encounter supernatural punishment.

Meanwhile someone who showed kindness or respect might receive

unexpected help from an invisible spirit.

Through such stories the supernatural world became a way of expressing deeper cultural values.

The ghost or goblin represented forces that reminded people of the importance of moral balance and respect for others.

Even in modern times these stories remain popular.

Although many people no longer believe literally in such beings, the imaginative power of the tales continues to fascinate readers and audiences.

## Part 2

In many traditional stories, ghosts appear as the spirits of individuals whose strong emotions remain unresolved after death. These spirits are often connected with memories of love, sorrow, jealousy, or injustice.

Because such emotions are believed to persist beyond the moment of death, the spirit may return to the world of the living in search of peace.

These ghostly appearances do not always take a frightening form.

Sometimes the spirit appears quietly in a dream or vision, revealing a message or expressing a final wish.

In other cases, however, the presence of the ghost is associated with more disturbing events.

Unexplained sounds, mysterious illnesses, or strange accidents may be attributed to the influence of a restless spirit.

Stories of this kind appear frequently in Japanese literature and theatrical traditions.

In particular, classical dramatic forms such as Noh theater often portray spirits who return to tell the story of their suffering.

A traveling monk or pilgrim encounters the spirit and listens to its confession.

Through prayer and compassion the troubled soul is eventually released from its attachment to the world.

These dramatic narratives emphasize the emotional depth of the ghost's

experience.

Rather than presenting the spirit merely as a frightening being, they explore the human feelings that continue to exist after death.

The ghost becomes a symbol of unresolved emotion.

Such stories remind audiences that actions performed during life may leave lasting consequences.

In this way the supernatural world becomes a reflection of moral and emotional truths.

### Part 3

Besides ghosts of the dead, Japanese folklore also describes many other supernatural creatures that inhabit the natural world. These beings are often called by the general name *yōkai*, a word referring to mysterious or strange presences.

Some of these creatures are believed to live in mountains or forests.

Others are associated with rivers, lakes, or the sea.

Their forms vary widely from story to story.

Certain goblins are described as mischievous rather than dangerous.

They may enjoy confusing travelers or playing small tricks upon careless people.

In other stories the creatures appear as protectors of particular places.

A spirit dwelling in a forest or near a waterfall might guard the area and punish those who treat the natural environment with disrespect.

Through such tales the supernatural becomes closely connected with the landscape.

Mountains, forests, and rivers are not seen merely as physical surroundings but as places inhabited by invisible life.

The presence of such beings encourages an attitude of caution and respect toward nature.

Travelers are advised to behave politely when passing through lonely places.

Even simple acts, such as speaking respectfully or avoiding unnecessary

disturbance, may be considered ways of maintaining harmony with unseen spirits.

These beliefs reveal a cultural imagination in which the natural world and the supernatural world exist side by side.

The mountains and forests of Japan have long been regarded as places where the boundary between these worlds becomes uncertain.

For this reason many traditional stories take place in remote landscapes far from the centers of human activity.

The quiet atmosphere of such locations allows the imagination to perceive presences that might otherwise remain unnoticed.

#### Part 4

In addition to literary and dramatic traditions, beliefs about ghosts and goblins have also influenced many aspects of everyday life in Japan. Even when people do not fully believe in the literal existence of such beings, the stories surrounding them continue to shape attitudes and customs.

For example, certain places are traditionally regarded as haunted or spiritually sensitive. Old houses, lonely bridges, deep forests, and abandoned temples often become the settings for ghost stories.

These locations possess a quiet atmosphere that encourages the imagination.

When people pass through such places at night, they may remember stories that they heard during childhood.

The darkness, the sound of wind in the trees, or the movement of shadows can easily awaken a sense of mystery.

Such experiences do not necessarily mean that people truly believe a ghost is present.

Rather, the cultural memory of supernatural stories allows ordinary surroundings to take on a deeper emotional meaning.

In this way the landscape itself becomes connected with narrative tradition.

Many festivals and seasonal customs also reflect this imaginative relationship with the spirit world.

Certain nights are believed to be times when spirits move more freely between the world of the living and the world beyond.

Lanterns may be lit to guide spirits, and special rituals may be performed to ensure that wandering ghosts do not cause harm.

These customs show how supernatural belief has been woven into the rhythms of communal life.

Even when interpreted symbolically, the traditions remain powerful reminders of the cultural past.

They preserve the stories and emotional experiences of earlier generations.

Through these practices, the world of ghosts and goblins continues to exist as part of the cultural imagination.

## Part 5

When we consider the long history of ghost stories and supernatural traditions in Japan, it becomes clear that these tales serve more than the simple purpose of frightening listeners.

They provide imaginative ways of expressing human fears, hopes, and moral concerns.

Through stories of ghosts and goblins, communities have explored questions about justice, responsibility, and the consequences of human actions.

A restless spirit may represent a wrong that has not yet been corrected.

A mysterious creature of the forest may symbolize the hidden forces of nature that demand respect.

In this sense the supernatural world becomes a symbolic language through which deeper truths about human life can be communicated.

The popularity of such stories across many centuries shows how powerful this language has remained.

Even in modern times, when scientific explanations have replaced many traditional beliefs, the fascination with ghosts and supernatural beings continues.

Literature, theater, and cinema frequently return to these themes.

Audiences remain drawn to narratives that explore the boundary between the visible world and the unseen realm of spirits.

Part of this fascination may arise from the mystery surrounding death and memory.

Human beings naturally wonder what becomes of the emotions, desires, and relationships that define their lives.

Ghost stories provide imaginative answers to these questions.

They suggest that feelings do not simply disappear but may continue to influence the world in subtle ways.

Thus the world of ghosts and goblins remains an enduring part of cultural storytelling.

Whether interpreted as literal belief or symbolic imagination, these figures continue to remind us that human experience contains dimensions that cannot always be explained through ordinary observation.

Through such stories the invisible aspects of emotion, memory, and moral reflection are given vivid and memorable form.

## Chapter 11: The Japanese Smile

### Part 1

Among the many characteristics that visitors to Japan often notice, one of the most frequently mentioned is the Japanese smile. To an observer from another culture, the meaning of this smile may at first seem difficult to understand.

In many Western societies a smile usually expresses simple happiness or amusement. It is a direct sign of pleasure or friendliness.

In Japan, however, the smile can serve a wider range of emotional and social purposes.

A person may smile not only when feeling joy but also when experiencing embarrassment, uncertainty, or even sadness.

Because of this difference, foreigners sometimes misunderstand the meaning of a Japanese smile.

They may believe that a smiling person feels happy, even when the smile actually conceals another emotion.

In Japanese social life, however, the smile often functions as a form of politeness.

It allows a person to maintain harmony in a conversation without openly expressing discomfort or disagreement.

The importance of harmony within social relationships has long been emphasized in Japanese culture.

Direct expressions of negative emotion may disturb the balance of a situation.

A gentle smile can soften such moments and prevent unnecessary conflict.

For this reason people sometimes smile when they feel unsure how to respond.

The smile becomes a way of protecting both oneself and the feelings of others.

It allows communication to continue smoothly even when the true emotion remains unspoken.

This cultural habit does not mean that Japanese people are insincere.

Rather, it reflects a social tradition that values restraint and consideration for

others.

Understanding this difference can help foreign visitors interpret the behavior they observe more accurately.

The Japanese smile therefore represents not only an expression of emotion but also a subtle form of social communication.

## Part 2

Foreign observers sometimes notice that a Japanese person may smile even when hearing news that seems sad or troubling. At first this reaction can appear confusing.

However, the smile in such situations often serves as a way of controlling emotion.

Rather than showing grief openly, the individual maintains calmness and dignity through a restrained expression.

The smile does not necessarily indicate happiness.

Instead it may express patience, endurance, or an effort to remain composed.

In traditional Japanese culture, the ability to control visible emotion has often been regarded as a sign of maturity and inner strength.

Open displays of strong feeling might be considered disruptive to social harmony.

Therefore people learn from an early age to manage their emotional expressions carefully.

The smile becomes one of the most common tools for this purpose.

By smiling gently, a person may acknowledge a difficult situation while still preserving a peaceful atmosphere.

This form of expression can be particularly noticeable in formal social interactions.

During conversations with strangers or with individuals of higher social status, the smile helps create a respectful tone.

Even when the speaker feels uncertain, the smile allows the conversation to

proceed smoothly.

For foreign visitors unfamiliar with these customs, the situation may sometimes produce misunderstanding.

A smile may appear to signal agreement or enjoyment when it actually expresses politeness or restraint.

Learning to recognize this cultural difference requires careful observation and patience.

Once understood, however, the Japanese smile reveals itself as a subtle and thoughtful form of communication.

### Part 3

The meaning of the Japanese smile becomes clearer when we consider the broader cultural importance of social harmony. In many situations the goal of communication is not simply to express personal feelings but to maintain a balanced relationship between individuals.

Because of this emphasis, direct confrontation or open disagreement is often avoided.

A smile can soften a potentially uncomfortable moment.

For example, if a person receives a request that cannot easily be accepted, the response may be accompanied by a polite smile rather than an immediate refusal.

The smile does not necessarily mean agreement.

Instead it signals that the speaker wishes to respond thoughtfully without creating embarrassment for the other person.

In this way the smile functions as a protective social gesture.

It helps preserve dignity on both sides of the conversation.

The same principle may appear in many everyday interactions.

Shopkeepers, teachers, and public officials often maintain a gentle smile while speaking with others.

This expression communicates attentiveness and courtesy.

Even when the individual feels tired or troubled, the smile helps maintain the

atmosphere of respect expected in social situations.

To an outside observer, such behavior may sometimes appear overly restrained.

Yet within the cultural context it represents a form of mutual consideration.

The smile becomes a sign that the individual values the comfort and feelings of those around them.

Understanding this aspect of Japanese social behavior allows foreign visitors to interpret these expressions more accurately.

The smile is not simply an emotional reaction but an important element of interpersonal communication.

#### Part 4

The Japanese smile may also appear in situations where a person feels embarrassed. When someone makes a small mistake or finds themselves in an awkward moment, a gentle smile can help ease the tension.

Rather than showing visible discomfort, the individual smiles quietly, acknowledging the situation without drawing too much attention to it.

In this way the smile acts as a form of social balance.

It allows people to move beyond minor difficulties without creating unnecessary embarrassment.

Such behavior can be seen frequently in daily life.

A student who forgets an answer in class may smile slightly while apologizing.

A traveler who makes an error while speaking the language may also respond with a polite smile.

In both cases the smile communicates humility and goodwill.

Another situation in which the Japanese smile appears is during moments of uncertainty.

When someone hears surprising news or receives an unexpected request, they may smile while considering how to respond.

The expression helps maintain politeness while the person thinks carefully about their answer.

This use of the smile demonstrates the value placed upon thoughtful communication.

Rather than reacting quickly with strong emotion, individuals often pause and respond with calm restraint.

Through these various uses the smile becomes a flexible and meaningful social signal.

It can soften embarrassment, manage uncertainty, and maintain harmony between individuals.

Although the expression may appear simple, its meaning often depends upon the context in which it occurs.

## Part 5

When we observe the many situations in which the Japanese smile appears, it becomes clear that the expression cannot be interpreted in only one way.

Its meaning changes according to the circumstances and the relationships between the people involved.

For this reason the smile represents more than a simple sign of happiness.

It forms part of a broader system of social communication.

Through the smile individuals manage emotions, protect the feelings of others, and maintain harmony within the group.

In societies where direct emotional expression is valued, communication may rely more heavily upon clear verbal statements.

In Japan, however, subtle facial expressions and gestures often carry important meaning.

The smile therefore functions as a quiet language understood through experience and cultural familiarity.

Foreign visitors who spend time observing everyday interactions gradually learn to recognize these subtle differences.

They begin to notice that a smile may indicate politeness, embarrassment, uncertainty, or even quiet endurance.

Such understanding helps prevent misunderstandings that might otherwise arise.

Rather than assuming that every smile represents joy, the careful observer learns to interpret the expression within its social context.

In this way the Japanese smile reveals something significant about the culture in which it developed.

It reflects the importance placed upon restraint, courtesy, and the preservation of harmonious relationships.

Although the expression itself may appear small, it carries a rich and complex meaning.

By learning to understand this simple gesture, one gains deeper insight into the subtle patterns of communication that shape Japanese social life.

## Chapter 12: Sayonara!

### Part 1

The Japanese word sayonara is commonly translated into English as “goodbye.” Yet the meaning of the word carries a nuance that differs somewhat from the ordinary farewell used in everyday conversation.

In many situations the word suggests not merely a temporary parting but a separation that may last for a long time.

Because of this implication, the word often conveys a gentle feeling of sadness or quiet resignation.

In daily life, however, people frequently use other expressions when taking leave of one another.

Shorter phrases may be spoken casually among friends or colleagues who expect to meet again soon.

The word sayonara therefore appears most naturally in moments when the farewell carries deeper emotional weight.

When the word is spoken slowly and sincerely, it can express gratitude for the time shared together as well as acceptance of the coming separation.

The emotional tone of the word becomes clearer when we observe the situations in which it is used.

Students graduating from school, friends parting after a long journey, or travelers leaving a place that has become dear to them may speak the word with particular feeling.

In such moments the farewell represents more than the simple ending of a meeting.

It becomes a recognition that the present moment will not return in exactly the same form again.

For those who hear the word spoken in this way, the sound of sayonara often carries a quiet sense of reflection.

The past is acknowledged with appreciation, while the future remains uncertain.

In this respect the word reflects a broader sensitivity within Japanese culture toward the passing nature of time.

Moments of happiness are valued precisely because they cannot remain unchanged.

Thus the farewell becomes both a closing and a remembrance.

## Part 2

The emotional quality of the word sayonara becomes especially clear in moments of departure between people who may not see one another again for a long time.

In such situations the word carries a sense of finality that distinguishes it from more casual expressions of farewell.

The speaker acknowledges that the path of life may lead each person in a different direction.

Because of this awareness, the word often appears in literature, poetry, and dramatic works.

Writers use it to express the delicate mixture of gratitude, sadness, and acceptance that accompanies meaningful partings.

The sound of the word itself seems gentle and reflective.

When spoken slowly, it allows a moment of silence to follow, giving both speakers time to recognize the significance of the farewell.

This quiet pause often becomes as meaningful as the word itself.

In many cultures farewells may be expressed quickly and without deep reflection.

In Japan, however, the act of parting sometimes becomes an opportunity for thoughtful appreciation of shared experiences.

The farewell does not merely mark the end of a meeting.

It also honors the time that has been spent together.

In this way the word sayonara becomes associated with a broader emotional awareness.

It reminds those who speak it that human relationships are shaped by time and circumstance.

Even when people hope to meet again, they recognize that life continues to move forward.

The moment of farewell therefore becomes a moment of reflection as well as separation.

### Part 3

The deeper meaning of sayonara can also be understood in relation to the Japanese awareness of impermanence. Many aspects of Japanese art and thought emphasize the idea that all things change and eventually pass away.

Flowers bloom and fade. The seasons arrive and depart. Human lives follow the same pattern.

Because of this understanding, moments of parting are often treated with quiet seriousness.

When people say farewell, they recognize that the moment itself is part of the natural flow of time.

The word sayonara therefore expresses acceptance of this reality.

Rather than resisting the separation, the speaker acknowledges it with dignity and calm feeling.

This attitude appears frequently in Japanese literature and poetry.

Authors describe scenes in which travelers leave familiar places, friends say goodbye at the end of a journey, or lovers part under uncertain circumstances.

In such scenes the farewell often becomes a moment of emotional clarity.

The characters become aware of the value of what they have shared.

Even when sadness is present, it is accompanied by gratitude.

The word sayonara thus represents not only the act of parting but also the recognition of the beauty contained within temporary moments.

Through such expressions Japanese cultural tradition often transforms ordinary experiences into occasions for reflection.

A simple farewell becomes a reminder that life itself is composed of passing moments.

Each meeting and each separation forms part of a larger human story.

#### Part 4

In everyday life the word sayonara is not used in every farewell. Because it carries a deeper emotional tone, people often reserve it for moments that feel especially significant.

Friends who expect to meet again soon may choose lighter expressions when parting. Short phrases spoken casually can signal that the separation will only last a brief time.

In contrast, sayonara is more likely to appear when people feel that the meeting itself has special meaning.

For example, a teacher saying farewell to students at the end of the school year may use the word with quiet emotion.

Travelers leaving a place where they have spent many months may also speak it with reflection.

The word thus marks the recognition that a particular chapter of life has come to an end.

Even when the individuals hope to meet again in the future, they understand that the circumstances surrounding their meeting will never be exactly the same.

In this way the farewell becomes an expression of gratitude.

It acknowledges the experiences shared during the time spent together.

The tone of the word may remain gentle and calm rather than dramatic.

Japanese culture often favors restraint in emotional expression.

Yet within that restraint a deep sincerity can still be felt.

When spoken quietly, the word sayonara communicates appreciation, remembrance, and acceptance all at once.

For this reason the word often remains memorable for those who hear it.

## Part 5

When we listen carefully to the word sayonara, we can hear within it a quiet acknowledgment of the passing nature of human experience.

The word does not attempt to resist the movement of time.

Instead it accepts the reality that meetings and partings are both natural parts of life.

Because of this acceptance, the farewell becomes a moment of reflection rather than simply an ending.

Those who speak the word recognize that the experiences they have shared cannot be repeated in exactly the same way.

Yet the memory of those moments remains.

In this sense the word carries both sadness and gratitude.

The sadness comes from the awareness that something valued is coming to an end.

The gratitude arises from the knowledge that the meeting itself has already enriched life.

This combination of emotions gives the word its distinctive tone.

In literature and everyday life alike, sayonara therefore represents more than a casual goodbye.

It expresses a thoughtful recognition of time, memory, and human connection.

Through such simple words cultures reveal their deeper ways of understanding life.

The Japanese farewell reminds us that every meeting is temporary and that each shared moment deserves appreciation.

Thus the quiet sound of sayonara closes not only a conversation but also a chapter in the unfolding story of human relationships.