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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.
The text was translated from Japanese into English and simplified using ChatGPT for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

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

Source Text

Original work: Omoide no Ki (思い出の記)
Author: Koizumi Setsuko (小泉節子)

Source: Aozora Bunko (青空文庫)
https://www.aozora.gr.jp/

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Koizumi Setsuko (Mrs. Hearn), *Reminiscences of Lafcadio Hearn [Omoide no Ki]* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified from the Japanese by ChatGPT)

Part 1

Hearn came to Japan in the spring of 1890. Soon after he arrived, he lost his connection with the company that had brought him there. He was now alone in a far country, with little help and few people to depend on. It must have been a hard time for him. But when he heard that he could take a teaching post in Izumo, he accepted it without fear. He thought that Izumo was one of the oldest parts of Japan, and that there he might still find traces of the age of the gods. The place was far away and not easy to reach, but that did not trouble him. He did not need a high salary, and he cared more for the spirit of a place than for comfort.

On the way to Matsue, he stopped for a night at Shimoichi in Hōki. There he saw a Bon dance, and he later said that he found it deeply interesting. After that he came by boat from Yonago, crossing the Nakaumi lagoon, and at last reached the riverbank near the Great Bridge of Matsue. It was the end of August. In those days the railway went only as far as the Okayama side, and beyond that the road was long and rough. There were mountains after mountains, poor inns, and lonely villages. Then, after all that hard travel, Matsue suddenly appeared as a clean and graceful town, and travelers were often surprised by the change.

When he stood on the Great Bridge and looked around, he must have felt at once that he had come to a place he could love. To the east rose Mount Daisen, far away, noble in shape, like Fuji seen through dream and distance. The Ohashi River moved slowly toward that mountain. To the west, the lake and the sky seemed to touch each other so gently that one could hardly see where one ended and the other began. White sails moved over the quiet water. There was also a small island with a little shrine to Benten, and five or six pine trees stood upon it. The whole view was calm, soft, and full of quiet beauty. It was exactly the kind of beauty that could enter Hearn's heart at once.

Matsue then had a population of about forty thousand. It was not a great city,

but it had refinement. People said that this was because Lord Fumai, one of its old rulers, had shaped the taste of the place. Though Matsue stood in a remote part of the country, its people loved elegant things. There was culture there, not noise. There was memory there, not hurry. Hearn could feel such things quickly. He was the kind of man who noticed not only what people built, but also what they valued.

The school where he worked combined a middle school and a teacher-training school. There he received much help from the vice-principal of the middle school, a man named Nishida. The two men soon became very close. Hearn trusted him deeply and praised him with warm feeling. He would say, in his own strange but touching Japanese, “He is clever, kind, and knows things well. He has not one coward’s heart. He tells me even my bad points. He has the heart of a true man. He does not flatter. He is a lovable man.” Nishida, however, was often ill, and suffered greatly. Hearn felt pain whenever he saw it, and said with anger that it was cruel for such a good man to have such sickness. He could not understand why evil did not fall upon cruel people instead.

Even after he went to Tokyo, Hearn continued to worry about Nishida’s health. When Nishida died on March 15, 1897, Hearn never forgot him. Sometimes, even after that death, he thought he saw Nishida in the street. Once he said that he had noticed a man from behind who looked exactly like him, and had hurried his carriage forward, only to find that it was another person. He said the likeness alone had moved him. Later, when he went to Waseda University, he was pleased because a man named Takata reminded him a little of Nishida. That shows how deep the memory remained in him. When Hearn gave his heart to someone, the bond did not break easily.

At that time the governor of the prefecture was Mr. Koteda. He was said to care strongly for the preservation of native Japanese ways. He had the air of an old lord, calm and dignified, and he was skilled in fencing. Under him, old martial practices were brought back for a time. There were contests in swordsmanship and spear fighting, and even old-style horse races. Elderly former samurai were glad to see such things again, because they felt that the past had not entirely disappeared. Hearn was treated very kindly by this governor, and was invited to

such events before many others. That too helped him feel that he had entered not only a province, but a living world with memory.

For Hearn, everything he saw and heard in Izumo was new. Because it was new, he did not pass over it lightly. He listened, watched, asked questions, and wrote things down. This was one of his great joys. He was liked at both schools, by students and by other teachers. The local newspapers printed stories about him and praised him. People in the town were glad to have such a teacher among them. Some even said, “Mr. Hearn is not the kind of man who ought to come to such a remote place.” But that was exactly what they did not understand. A remote place was the very kind of place he wanted.

He loved remote places more than famous ones. Matsue pleased him more than Tokyo ever did. Oki pleased him more than Nikkō. In fact, after he came to Matsue, he never went to Nikkō at all. He said he did not want to see it. Perhaps, if he had gone, he would have loved the great cedar trees and deep woods there. But he did not seek out places because others praised them. He looked for something older, quieter, and more hidden. He wanted places where the old heart of Japan still beat softly under daily life. In Matsue, from the first days of his arrival, he felt that heart near him, and that is why he was happy there.

Part 2

When I first came to him in Matsue, he had very little. There was only one table, one chair, a few books, one suit of Western clothes, and one set of Japanese clothes. As soon as he came home from school, he changed at once into Japanese dress. Then he sat on a cushion, smoked quietly, and took his meal in the Japanese way. He used chopsticks as other people in the house did. He liked everything that was Japanese, and day by day he moved closer to that way of life.

He often spoke strongly against Western ways. When he saw people copying the West without thought, he seemed almost hurt by it. He would say, “Japan has such a beautiful heart. Why must people copy the West?” If he found something beautiful or moving, he gave himself to it fully. In Matsue he sometimes went to

dinners, and at his own house he invited three or four teachers from the school. They ate together, listened to old tales and popular songs, and passed a pleasant time. He even enjoyed wearing haori and hakama for New Year visits, and he was pleased when he could bow in an old formal way at the governor's house.

At first he stayed at an inn in Zaimoku-chō, but before long he had to leave it. There may have been more than one reason, but one cause was very clear. A small girl in the inn had trouble with her eyes, and he pitied her deeply. He begged the parents to send her to a hospital at once, but they kept saying yes and did nothing. At last he grew angry and said, "This is a cruel way. They have no true heart as parents." So he left that inn and moved to a detached room in Suetsugu Honmachi.

Yet he did not forget the child after leaving. He kept saying, "The girl has no fault. She is only to be pitied." He himself took care to send her to a doctor, and she became well. Because his own eyes were weak, he always treated sight as something precious. Even when our first son was about to be born, he worried and said, "Please come into this world with good eyes." He felt deep sympathy for anyone whose eyes were bad. If a student in the house bent too low over a book or newspaper, he quickly said, "Please hold it in your hands when you read."

While we were living in that detached house, another strange thing happened because of his sharp and stubborn nature. A man who had moved into the next house came to greet us and ask to borrow a corkscrew. After the greetings, Hearn suddenly asked, "You stayed at the inn in Zaimoku-chō, did you not?" The man said yes. Then Hearn asked, "Then are you a friend of the master of that inn?" When the man answered yes again, Hearn said at once, "I do not like the friend of such a cruel man. Good-bye, good-bye," and went inside. The visitor stood there in complete surprise, and I had to step between them and smooth the matter as best I could.

That house at Suetsugu looked out over the lake, and the view over the water was very beautiful. But after I came to live with him, it no longer seemed convenient for a family. So in the early summer of 1891, we moved again, this time to a former samurai house in Kitabori. We went there with a servant and a small kitten. That kitten had come to us in the cold of early spring. One evening I

saw four or five rough boys at the shore putting a tiny kitten into the water, lifting it out, and pushing it in again for fun.

I took the poor little creature from them and carried it home. It was wet through and shaking with cold. When I told him what had happened, he cried, “Oh, the poor little kitten. What cruel children.” Then, without waiting for anything, he put the trembling animal inside his own clothes and warmed it against his body. I admired him greatly at that moment. His heart could not bear needless cruelty. He did not speak of kindness as an idea. He acted at once.

The house in Kitabori did not have the fine lake view, but it stood away from the noise of the town. A river ran before the gate, and through the trees on the other side we could see part of the castle tower. Because it had once been a samurai residence, the arrangement of the rooms was graceful and well made. There was a garden behind the house, with the hill at its back, and he loved that garden very much. In a light summer robe and wooden garden sandals, he walked there happily, listening to the mountain doves and watching the big toads that came out slowly at evening. When the doves called, he would call me and say, “Do you hear that sound? How interesting it is,” and then try to copy their cry himself.

There was also a lotus pond in that garden, and snakes often came there. He said, “If we do not wish them harm, they will not do harm to us.” Sometimes he even shared a little food from his tray and said, “Let them eat this, so they will not take the frogs.” He told me that in the West Indies, while he was studying, snakes sometimes passed from one shoulder to the other, and he had remained still because they meant no evil. He was, in truth, a perfectly honest man, with not the smallest bad thought in him. He had a kindness even gentler than that of many women, but because hard people had hurt him from childhood, his feelings were very sharp, and when something touched his heart, the pain or joy in him was stronger than in most men.

Part 3

Once, when we traveled in Hōki Province, we planned to stay about a week at a hot-spring place called Tōgō Pond. But the moment we entered the inn, he changed his mind. Many people were drinking, laughing, shouting, and making a great noise. He pulled at my sleeve at once and said, “No, this is impossible. It is hell. I cannot stay here even for one second.” The servants came forward politely and tried to lead us in, but he only said, “I do not like it,” and turned away. The innkeepers and the men with the carriage were all amazed, but when he hated something, he would not bear it even for a little while.

The inn was vulgar and noisy, and I too disliked it, though I had said nothing. He, however, spoke of it as if it were a place of torment. He had no patience at all with what felt rough, loud, or without beauty. At that time I was still young and not yet used to the world, so his strong nature often troubled me. Yet later I came to think that this was also one of his best points. There was nothing false in him. If he loved, he loved with all his heart, and if he hated, he turned away at once.

Around the same time, we went to Kaga no Ura in Izumo to see the sea cave called Kuredo. It lay far out over the water, more than a ri from the shore, among dark rocks. He loved swimming very much, and on the way he swam beside the boat in many different ways, sometimes behind it and sometimes before it, showing me what he could do. When the boat entered the cave, the sound of the waves struck the stone walls in a strange and fearful way. Water fell in drops from the rocks, and the boatman tapped the side of the boat with a stone so that the spirits or demons would know that a boat had come. Then something splashed in the water, and the boatman told stories that were sad, terrible, and full of old fear.

While we listened, he began to take off his clothes again. The boatman cried, “Sir, that will not do. It is dangerous.” I too begged him not to go into that dark place, because it was tied to such frightening old tales. But he said, “Still, this water is so beautiful, and it looks so deep, as if no one could ever know the bottom. It is very interesting.” He wanted badly to swim there, but in the end he gave it up. Even then he was very unhappy, and his disappointment lasted until the next day. Later he once told me that on another day he had swum in a place that everyone said was dangerous, and nothing had happened at first, but then the sea

had seemed to burn his body, fever had followed, and once he had seen a great shark's tail suddenly rise near him while another swimmer vanished from sight.

In those Matsue years he was still young and full of strength. He often remembered the West Indies and would say to me, "I wish I could show you the West Indies." During the summer holidays of 1891, he and Mr. Nishida went to Kizuki to visit the Great Shrine. The next day he sent me a letter and asked me to come at once. When I reached the inn, the two men had gone to the sea, and his money had been left carelessly in his tabi, with silver coins and paper notes spilling out. He had never cared much for money and was never good at accounts. Only later, when children were born and he felt more clearly that his own health was weak, did he begin to worry about those who would remain after him.

The chief priest of the shrine was a friend of Mr. Nishida, and because he had heard how deeply Hearn loved Japan, he received him with great kindness. When Hearn said he wanted to see a Bon dance, the season was still a little early, but the priest had hundreds of people gathered and asked them to dance. The dancers were pleased, and he too was delighted. Still, he said that this dance felt too cheerful to be a true Bon dance, and that it was more like a harvest dance. During that journey he learned "Kimigayo," and the three of us often sang it together. There was something very innocent in him then, almost like a child's joy.

About two weeks later, when the season of Bon dancing had almost come, he and I traveled together to Shimoichi in Hōki to see it. Mr. Nishida had gone on a journey to Kyoto, and this was the first long trip that the two of us made alone. We visited the same inn where he had stayed the year before when he first traveled to his post, but there we heard bad news. The police had forbidden the dance that year and ordered the people to stop it. He was bitterly disappointed and said, "These foolish police destroy Japan's old and interesting customs. It is all for the Christians. They break Japanese things and only copy the West." He was angry not only because he had missed the dance, but because he felt that something old and living was being damaged.

During that journey we went from place to place searching for Bon dances. At last we found one, but then, because a foreigner had come, some foolish people

stopped looking at the dance and began to throw sand for mischief. Later there was an apology, but it was still a strange and unpleasant thing. We returned to Izumo at the end of August and spoke happily with Mr. Nishida, who had come back from Kyoto, about all that we had seen. We also made many shorter one-day journeys in those years. Izumo pleased him greatly, but after the heat of the West Indies, the winter cold there was hard for him. In those days there were still no stoves in Matsue schools, and only a large brazier stood in the classroom, so he taught in his overcoat and thought little about how he looked.

Part 4

Izumo delighted him, but the winter there was hard for him to bear. He had grown used to the heat of the West Indies, and the cold seemed to enter his body very deeply. In those days there were still no stoves in the schools at Matsue. Only one large brazier stood in the classroom, and that gave little comfort in the bitter season. He told Mr. Nishida that he suffered greatly while teaching, and Nishida answered, “Then please keep your overcoat on during the lesson.” So he taught in that way, wearing the one heavy coat he had, a rough coat that he said was like a boatman’s garment.

He did not care much about appearance in such matters. He had his likes and dislikes, but when it came to dress, he was often careless in a simple and natural way. Warmth mattered more than looking proper. He wanted ease, quiet, and freedom from useless trouble. If something helped him live or work better, he accepted it. If it was only for show, he had little interest in it.

Later, when we were living in Kumamoto, I had a strange walk with him that I still remember clearly. One evening he came home from his walk and said, “I have found a very interesting place. Let us go there tomorrow night.” The next evening had no moon. We left the house together and walked along lonely roads until we reached the foot of a hill, and then he said, “It is up there.” We climbed a narrow path through long grass and small bamboo, and at last we found ourselves in a graveyard under the faint light of the stars.

Many graves stood there, far apart in the darkness, and the place felt very lonely. I had only just begun to think how sad and silent it was when he said, “Please listen to the frogs.” That was what he had brought me there to hear. He did not seek noise or company. He wanted the strange voice of the night, the hidden sound in a lonely place, the feeling that the world had become thin and deep. What frightened many people often interested him most.

There was another night in Kumamoto that stayed in his mind. He came back from a walk and said, “Tonight I was walking on a lonely country road. Then, out of the dark, I heard your voice, very small and gentle, calling me.” He paused and looked at me with a serious face. Then he said, “I moved forward at once, but there was only darkness. No one was there.” He often felt such things strongly. The dark, the wind, a voice, a memory, a place with no one in it, all these could move him like a half-remembered dream.

During the summer holiday in the Kumamoto years, we traveled from Hōki to Oki. We went together through many harbors and villages in the islands, including Saigō, Beppu, Uragō, and Hishiura. In Hishiura alone we stayed for more than a week. Because the people there had never seen a Westerner before, crowds gathered wherever we went. In Uragō the people pressed forward in such numbers that some even climbed onto the eaves of a house opposite the inn to get a better look, and the eaves broke under them. By good fortune no one was badly hurt, though a police officer had to come and there was great confusion.

At Saigō the head of the hospital invited us as honored guests because we were so unusual there. He was troubled by all the staring, but he tried to act cheerful for my sake and said, “There is nothing to mind. It is almost amusing.” Yet I believe it tired him. We also visited the imperial tomb and the place connected with Emperor Go-Daigo at Kurokiyama. In one village called Beppu there were no sweets to buy, so at a teahouse they served us beans instead, and that small memory remained with me.

On the way back, at Sakaiminato in Hōki, we happened by chance to see a Bon dance. Because the town was full of strong fishermen, the whole dance had power in it. When they stamped their feet and struck their hands together, the force of it

seemed to shake the air. He always said that this was the bravest Bon dance he had seen. He would compare the dances and say, “The one at Kizuki was cheerful like a harvest dance, the one at Shimoichi was for the spirits of the dead, and the one at Sakaiminato was full of strength.”

Another journey remained in his memory because of the very poor inn where we stayed after crossing the mountains from Hōki toward Bingo. The roads were broken in many places, and night came before we reached the town where the men had promised to stop. We traveled on through the mountains in darkness, with insects crying on every side until the whole mountain seemed to be made of their voices. At last the men told us that a few houses stood ahead and that one of them would take us in. When we reached it, it was around ten o’clock, and the inn was a small country house with dim light, an old man and old woman, and three rough-looking men speaking below near the entrance.

We were shown upstairs, and the old woman left only a tiny lamp. After the great flood of that year, the sound of the rushing water outside was terrible, and huge fireflies crossed the room with sudden bright flashes. Strange insects struck my face and hands as if they had been thrown at me from the dark, and now and then the stairs creaked so sharply that I feared some bad man was coming up. Yet he loved the place and said, “How interesting. I wish we could stay one more night.” Later, when we were to go from Kobe to Tokyo, he told me more than once, “I do not think I can bear Tokyo for more than three years. It is like hell.” He said that I imagined Tokyo to be like the old Edo pictures of Hiroshige, and that I was mistaken, but because I had long wished to see it, he agreed to go, saying, “When you have seen enough, we shall return to the country.”

Part 5

We came from Kobe to Tokyo on August 27 in the twenty-ninth year of Meiji. People said that there might be an official house connected with the university, but he did not want to live near the school in a busy place. He said that, if possible, we should live far away, on the edge of the city, where there might still be some

quiet. So people looked for a house for us. Yet at first no place seemed right. Tokyo already felt too crowded and restless for his heart.

At that time we once went together to see a house in the Ushigome area. It was said to be very large. The house had no second floor, and it was built in an old Japanese way. Looking back now, I think it must once have belonged to a hatamoto family. It was almost like a temple, with a broad garden and a large lotus pond, but the moment one passed through the gate, the whole place felt strange and faintly fearful. He liked it at once and said, “This is an interesting house,” but I felt from the first that something about it was not good, so we decided not to take it.

Later we heard that people called it a haunted house. The rent had been lowered again and again, and in the end the building was torn down. When I told him this afterward, he said with regret, “Ah, that is why. Why did we not live there? I thought that house was a very interesting house.” He was often drawn to what was lonely, old, and touched by fear. A place that made other people uneasy might attract him more strongly for that very reason. He wanted not comfort alone, but atmosphere, memory, and mystery.

After that we moved to Tomihisa-chō. The garden there was small, but the house stood on higher ground and had a good open view. What pleased him most was that it stood beside a hill temple called Kobidera. Long ago, people said, it had been famous for bush clover. By our time it had already fallen into neglect, yet many tall cedar trees still stood there, and the whole place was lonely and wonderfully quiet. Every morning and evening he went there for a walk, and because he went so often, he grew friendly with the old monk and took great pleasure in talking with him about Buddhism. I too sometimes went with him.

He would go out cheerfully in Japanese dress. When guests came whom he liked, he sometimes said, “Let us go to the interesting temple,” and led them there. The children became so used to this habit that, if their father could not be found, they simply said, “Kobidera,” as if that answer were enough. He loved the silence of the place, the old trees, the worn ground, and the feeling that time had moved slowly there. Such places seemed to calm him. They gave him the kind of peace

he could never find in modern streets.

As we walked there, he would sometimes say to me, “Mama-san, can I sit in this temple? Is it difficult?” He meant that he wished to live there, if only some way could be found. I answered, “You are not a monk, so it is difficult.” Then he said, “If I become a monk, how happy I am.” I laughed and answered, “You would be a strange monk, with large eyes and a high nose, but a good monk.” Then he said, “At the same time, you become a nun. Kazuo is a little novice. How pretty it is. Every day we read sutras and care for the graves and live happily.” When I told him, “Then in another world, please be born as a monk,” he said quietly, “Ah, yes, that is my wish.”

One day we went there as usual, and suddenly he cried, “Oh, oh,” in such a voice that I was startled. Three great cedar trees had been cut down. He stood looking at them as if he had seen some living thing struck dead before his eyes. “Why did they cut these trees?” he asked. I said that the temple was poor and perhaps needed money. He answered with deep pain, “Why did they not tell me? I could give a little money. It is not difficult. Better than cutting trees. How many years these trees lived on this hill, from little small shoots.” Then he said sadly, “Now I like that monk a little less. He has no money, yes, and that is sad, but these trees also, how pitiful.” He came home in heavy disappointment, sat down in his study, and said, “My heart hurts today. Please ask them not to cut more.” After that he went to the temple much less. Soon the old monk left, a younger priest came, more trees were cut, graves were moved, rental houses were built, and the whole face of the place changed. The quiet world he loved there began to break from the day those three cedars fell.

Because of this, he spoke more and more of wanting a lonely country house, a small house with a wide garden and many trees. I had people search in many places. At last we heard of a property for sale in Nishi-Okubo. It was entirely Japanese in style, and there were not even Western houses nearby. I said that it would be better to build one small house for ourselves than to go on living in rented houses forever, and when I told him I had the money, he answered playfully, “Interesting. Let us build in Oki.” If I objected, he said, “Then let us build in

Izumo." We even looked at land for that. But in the end I did not wish to settle in Izumo so strongly, and so we decided to buy the Nishi-Okubo place and enlarge it.

He had long said that he wanted to live in the middle of pure Japan, without mixture, so he went himself to see the place and the neighborhood. He liked very much that it stood at the edge of the town and had a bamboo grove behind it. About the new work he asked only a few things. He said that there should be one room where a stove could be used in winter, that in the study his desk should face west, and that everything else should be in a Japanese style. Beyond that he left everything to me and said, "You do as you like. I only know a little about writing. I know nothing of other things." He disliked spending time on such matters. He even said that one day I should tell him, "Today, after university, please come to Okubo," and then he would go straight from one life into the other. That is exactly what happened. We moved to Nishi-Okubo on March 19 in the thirty-fifth year of Meiji. The house was made in a Japanese way in all things except that the paper screens in the stove room were glass. He was delighted that day. While he put books into the shelves and I helped beside him, the place felt much broader and quieter than Tomihisa-chō, and the warblers sang again and again in the bamboo grove behind the house. He said with joy, "How interesting and happy it is." But then he added, "Still, my heart hurts." When I asked why, he said, "Because I am too happy. When I am too happy, I also worry. I am glad to live long in this house. But what do you think?"

Part 6

After we moved to Nishi-Okubo, he still kept the same strong rule about his time. He hated troublesome social duties and tried to avoid them all. Even if an important person came to visit, he told us to say, "He has no time, so please excuse him." He said that was enough, and that no longer answer was needed. But when a guest stood at the entrance, the students and servants were always troubled, because they had to turn people away without giving offense.

He often said that he had no time either to visit others or to receive them. Yet this was not only dislike of society. It was something deeper than that. He wished to keep himself free from anything that might break, spoil, or weaken his thought. In such matters he was almost severe, as if he were guarding something holy. He wanted his mind to remain whole, quiet, and untouched while he worked.

I, on the other hand, liked everything in the house and garden to be very clean. I was the kind of person who wanted to sweep and dust at least twice a day. But he hated the sound of beating dust from things, and whenever he heard that busy noise he said, “That cleaning is your illness.” If I begged to be allowed to clean, he agreed only on the condition that it should last no more than five or six minutes. During that time he walked in the garden or moved up and down the corridor until the noise stopped.

He seemed strange to some people because he lived apart in this way, but the reason was simple. He loved beauty and wonder too much. When something seemed beautiful or interesting to him, he valued it more than ordinary life. For that reason he sometimes wept alone, or grew angry alone, or was carried away with joy, until he almost looked like a man not living in the same world as others. Yet for him the greatest happiness was to live in such a world of imagination and to write there.

Once I said to him, “You stay in your room and do nothing but read and write. Please go out sometimes and enjoy some pastime that you like.” He answered, “You know well what pastime I like. To think and to write, that is it. If I have work to write, I do not grow tired, and I am glad. When I write, I forget all worries. So please tell me things.” I said, “I have already told you everything. I have no more stories.” Then he said, “Then go outside, see good things, hear things, and when you come home, tell me a little. It is not good only to stay in the house and read books.”

When he was writing, his effort was so intense that the smallest disturbance gave him real pain. Because of that, I always tried to keep every sound away from him. I worried about doors opening and shutting, footsteps in the corridor, and the noise of the children. When I had to go into his room, I chose a time when he was

smoking and tapping his pipe, or when he was singing softly and walking about the room. At other times he might fail to hear even if one called him, yet in another mood he could feel even the tiniest sound with painful sharpness.

After we moved to Nishi-Okubo, the house became larger, and his study was farther from the entrance and from the children's rooms. Because of that, I kept the area around him like a world with no sound at all. He himself often used the word "world." He would speak of "this world" or "that world," as if his mind passed from one place of feeling to another. In truth he did seem to live in worlds within himself. If the outer world remained quiet, those inner worlds became stronger.

In ordinary talk his voice was soft, almost as soft as a woman's. Even his laughter could be gentle and warm. But he was also a man of sudden force, and in the middle of mild speech he could suddenly put such strength into a few words that one was startled. He had two kinds of laughter. One was quiet and tender, but the other made him forget everything and laugh with full delight, and that laughter was so joyful that the whole household laughed with him, even the maids.

In the days after he left the university, Mr. MacDonald, who was living in Japan then, used to come from Yokohama every Sunday. At such times laughter often came from the study, and we in the house could not help smiling when we heard it. On the table in that room there was also a large conch shell. I had bought it at Enoshima when I went there with the children, and brought it home as a gift. When he blew it, a deep and beautiful sound came out, and he said happily, "It is because my lungs are strong that the sound is like this."

He thought the shell wonderfully amusing. Puffing out his cheeks, he blew it again and again, pleased by the heavy voice that rolled out of it. After that we made a little rule in the house: when his tobacco fire went out, he would blow the shell. Then a long "po-o, wo-o" rose through the silent house and could be heard even in the kitchen. We all tried to keep the house perfectly still for his work, and then suddenly that great sound came through the quiet, especially strange and amusing at night. I tried not to let the tobacco fire die, but he himself liked blowing the shell so much that, if the fire became weak even a little, he at once blew it

with delight. When the sound came, even the maids laughed and said, “There, the shell is singing again.”

Part 7

At meals we talked about many things. Papa told us stories from Western newspapers, and I told him things from Japanese newspapers. For many years we read the *Yomiuri* and the *Asahi*. Little Kiyoshi peeped in through the paper doors. The cat came near us, and the dog waited below the window. He always shared a little of his food with each of them. So our meals passed in a cheerful way, and when they were over, we often all sang songs together.

He also had a curious way of feeling things when he was alone. Sometimes he was full of joy and walked up and down the corridor with a kind of light step, almost as if he were dancing a little. At other times he laughed to himself in the next room. When I heard him and asked, “Papa-san, what is so funny?” he would at first try to hold it back, and then suddenly burst into loud laughter. Sometimes tears came to his eyes while he laughed and called, “Mama-san, Mama-san.” Very often the cause was some amusing thing he had read in the newspaper, or something I had told him earlier.

People may think that a man who loved ghost stories and deep thought would never make jokes, but that was not true. From time to time he said things that were quiet, refined, and very funny. There were people who said, “Whenever I meet him, he never fails to say at least one playful thing.” His humor was not rough. It came suddenly, lightly, and with good taste. Even in that, one could feel his quick mind.

When something pleased him, the whole world seemed pleasant to him. When sorrow entered his heart, the whole world seemed sad. This was true in ghost stories, and it was true in every other matter as well. Once he entered the world of a story, he seemed to become one of the people in it. When he was listening with deep feeling, even his face and the color of his eyes changed. He often used the word “world” himself. It was as if each feeling opened a new world around him

and drew him inside.

Whenever he saw a thing well made, he praised it warmly. We often went together to picture shows in Ueno. He cared almost nothing for the name of the artist. If the picture itself pleased him, he thought the price cheap no matter how high it was. He would ask me, “What do you think of that picture?” and if I answered, “The price is rather high,” because I was afraid he might buy it too quickly, he said at once, “No, no. I am not talking about money. I am talking about the picture. Do you think it is good?” If I said, “Yes, it is beautiful,” he answered, “Then let us buy it. It is still cheap. We should pay even a little more,” and he hurried to have the sold mark put on it.

When we traveled in Kyoto and visited places like Chion-in, Ginkaku-ji, and Kinkaku-ji, he acted in much the same way. At such places there was usually a small entrance fee, only a few sen. But if he liked a place, he wanted to give fifty sen or even one yen. I told him that such a thing was not necessary and would only seem strange, but he said, “No, no. I feel ashamed,” and could not understand why he should not give more. He never even gave his name, though the priests sometimes looked at him with surprise. If beauty moved him, he wanted to answer it with open gratitude.

In Matsue, during one walk to a temple, he saw a small stone Jizō and was greatly taken by it. He asked who had made it, and learned that it was the work of a man named Arakawa. People said that this man was eccentric, poor, unlearned, and without desire for gain. Even when someone ordered a piece from him, he might take two or three years and still not finish it. Hearn found such a man deeply interesting. He sent him large casks of sake more than once, invited him to our house and fed him, and even visited the poor, dirty house where the old man lived. Later he bought a carved image from him, not because it was perfect, but because he respected what he called a “poor genius.”

One summer we went together to a draper’s shop to buy two or three lengths of cotton for summer robes. The clerk spread out many kinds before us, and Hearn was delighted at once. “Let us buy this one. Let us buy that one too,” he kept saying, pulling more and more toward him. I told him that we did not need so

many, but he answered, “But look, each is only one yen fifty, or two yen. Please wear many kinds. Even to look at them is pleasant.” In the end he bought nearly thirty lengths and astonished the boy from the shop. When he liked something, he could become strangely eager and almost childlike.

He said that even looking at the cloth itself gave pleasure. At first his taste was a little bright, but later he came to prefer quieter things. Among patterns he especially liked waves and spider webs. When I wore one he liked, he said happily, “Ah, that yukata.” He did not like Japanese people in Western dress, and he said that Western dress on women, and also the sound of English spoken in the wrong place, gave him pain. Once in Ueno he asked in Japanese the price of an object, and the shop woman answered him in English. At once he pulled my sleeve with an unhappy face, and we went away without buying it. But when he visited Mr. Takata’s house and Mrs. Takata welcomed him in graceful Japanese instead of English, he came home so pleased that he told me the story before he had even taken off his shoes.

There was also a newspaper story about an old nobleman who hated everything Western and made his whole household live in an old-fashioned way. The maids tied their obi in the old style, their hair was dressed in an old court fashion, and even the lamps were old-style lamps instead of modern ones. Soap was disliked, newspapers were disliked, and anything that smelled of the West was kept out of the house. Servants were said to avoid that place and say, “I want no part of that house.” When I told this to Hearn, he was delighted and said, “How interesting. I like such a man very much. He would be my friend. I would like to see that house.” Then, half joking and half serious, he added, “I am not Western-smelling.” When I laughed and said, “Perhaps not, but what about your nose?” he answered, “Please think well. I, Koizumi Yakumo, love true Japan more than many Japanese do.”

Part 8

He cared even about small things in the children’s dress. He liked them to wear white tabi, not dark blue ones. He said that, when a Japanese child moved, and

the white tabi showed a little under the kimono, the sight was very pretty. He also said that children should wear geta rather than shoes. Sometimes he showed me his own feet and said that he did not want the children's feet to become like those of Western people. Even in such small matters, his feeling was always the same. He wanted beauty, natural form, and the old Japanese way.

He hated anything that seemed too modern or too fashionable. A "high-collar" way of life displeased him very much. He did not like clothes that looked too stiff and correct, whether Japanese or Western. Formal Western dress was especially hateful to him. White shirts, silk hats, evening dress, frock coats, all such things seemed to him almost barbarous. When we moved from Kobe to Tokyo, I begged him to have a frock coat made, because I said that a university teacher must have one. He answered, "No. I told Mr. Toyama that I hate dress clothes. If I must go to a place where such clothes are needed, then I do not wish to go." In the end he allowed one to be made, but he wore it only four or five times, and each time he complained bitterly that he was wearing it only because of me.

Once I joked and said, "You have written so well about Japan that perhaps His Majesty will call you to the palace to praise you. Then you must go in a silk hat and a frock coat." He answered at once, "Then I humbly refuse." He had learned that phrase from the newspaper story of the old nobleman who hated Western ways, and he enjoyed the sound of it very much. Even when he went out in Western clothes, he chose only an ordinary suit. At heart he always preferred Japanese dress, and above all he loved the light summer robe. He never carried an umbrella or a walking stick. If rain came during a walk, he simply got wet unless it became too heavy, and then he took a carriage. His boots were rough military boots. Fashion meant nothing to him. He once said that the feet of Japanese workers were more beautiful than those of Westerners. I think he loved Japan more than the West, and the world of dream more than the world of daily life.

At night, before sleep, we often said to each other, "Pleasant dream." He enjoyed hearing my dreams, and listened to them as if they were little stories from another world. He himself did not wear collars in the ordinary Western way, and even when he was forced to wear that hated frock coat, the collar was very low.

In truth he had strong tastes in almost everything, yet in his own dress he liked carelessness and ease. What he hated was not only ugliness, but also anything merely showy. He disliked pretty surfaces without depth. He disliked new fashions, false kindness, painted appearances, and empty display. He also hated false religion. He distrusted many missionaries, whom he thought dishonest, though he kept three copies of the Bible and often told our eldest son that it was a book he must read well.

Among Japanese stories, the one he loved most was *Urashima Tarō*. Even to hear the name "Urashima" made him happy. He would go out near the end of the corridor and sing, with a gentle tune, "In the hazy sky of a spring day, by the sea of Sumi…" He knew the song by heart, and repeated it so often that I too came to know it by heart. One day, at an exhibition of pictures in Ueno, he saw a painting of Urashima. He did not even stop to ask the price properly before deciding to buy it. He also loved the idea of Hōrai, the land of wonder, and said many times that he wanted a picture of it. We looked at many paintings, and some were even made for him, but none satisfied him. The image he carried in his heart was stronger than any painted one.

Because he loved heat, summer was his favorite season. Of all directions, he loved the west most, and that is why he wanted his study to face west. When the evening sky turned red, he was full of joy. The moment he saw such a sky, he called me and the children in haste. We always hurried, but even so he sometimes said sadly, "One minute late. The red sky is already a little spoiled." Then, with the children, he sang little songs of the evening. At Yaizu, on the beach, he even played hand games with the children and with Otokichi, innocent and happy like a child himself. They sang, "Open, open, what flower has opened?" and played in a ring. At other times he joined the children in singing the song about Major Hirose, raising his voice with great spirit. Sometimes he sang in the room. Sometimes he listened from his study with pleasure. Sometimes he came out quietly and joined them before they noticed him.

He also loved hokku. He remembered many, and recited them with a little tune, almost as if he were singing while he walked along the corridor. Sometimes he

made little verses of his own and jokingly called himself Bashō. Someone sent us each issue of *Hototogisu*, and he was very glad of it. He had amusing habits with words as well. Because he once ate delicious pickles at Yura during a journey, he afterward called all Narazuke pickles "Yura." Such things pleased him. A word, a taste, a song, a line of verse, once tied to a memory, stayed with him and came back again and again.

He had curious and vivid memories of many other things. Once, when we were traveling by train, another train stopped opposite ours for a few minutes. He saw the eyes of a man looking from the other window, and those eyes seemed to him terribly strange and frightening. After our train moved on, he asked me at once, "Did you see those eyes?" He spoke of "the eyes of the man in the train" long afterward. He liked sumo, which he first saw in Matsue, and thought it more interesting than Western wrestling. He also loved the theater, but not in the easy way one might expect. In America, when he had worked as a newspaper man, he had gone to the theater almost every day and known many famous actors. He said that he had studied the theater there. In Japan, however, he saw plays only twice, once in Matsue and once in Kyoto, because long hours in a crowd caused him pain. Still, he said that truly good actors and good drama should be seen, and he urged me to go and take the children when a fine performance was given. He especially wanted us to see Danjūrō, and when I returned, I always described everything in detail, from the actors to the stage, and he listened with eager delight.

In his later years he said that he wanted to study Japanese theater more seriously. He also asked me at one time to look into matters connected with Sanjūsangendō. He said that he would write his own life little by little, and a small fragment of that work was indeed begun. But the book on the theater was never written, and the life story too remained unfinished. That was often the way with him in his last years. His mind still opened toward many roads, but time was already drawing in around him, and many hopes remained only as plans, bright and unfinished, in the air.

Part 9

At festivals and temple events, he often said that people should give more than they planned. Once, in Matsue, we were renting a house, and he heard that the man who cleaned the place had been given firewood instead of rice as part of his pay. He was shocked and said, “I am ashamed. From now on, please give one yen each time.” He could not bear the thought that a person might work hard and still be treated meanly. He did not speak in a grand way about justice, but small acts of unfairness pained him at once. If he thought someone poor had been treated badly, his heart moved before anything else.

He often warned me, “Please be careful. Do not trust people too easily.” Yet he himself was so honest that he was often deceived. He knew this about himself, and perhaps that is why he gave such warnings. When he had trouble with publishers in distant countries, especially about pictures, titles, or other matters decided without asking him, he sometimes grew very angry and wrote a sharp reply at once. He would say that the letter must be mailed immediately. I understood his moods, so sometimes I said yes and quietly kept the letter back for two or three days. When the anger had cooled, he regretted the harshness of it, and if I then showed him the unsent letter, he was delighted and thanked me, and rewrote it in gentler words.

He also had very clear ideas about beauty in women. He preferred gentle, quiet women to lively and forceful ones. He liked eyes that looked a little downward, not bright, bold eyes raised high in the Western way. He said that the eyes of Kannon and Jizō were beautiful, calm, and kind. Even when we had our photograph taken, he wanted us to hold our faces a little downward, and many of his own pictures are like that. He always looked for softness, stillness, and inward grace. He did not care for mere cleverness if it came without tenderness.

Even before our first son was born, he said that children were lovely, and once he even had a child brought to the house for a while because he liked to have one near him. When our eldest son was about to be born, he was full of both worry and joy. He kept saying that he was sorry I had to suffer, and begged again and again that the child should be born safely. At such a time he said that the best thing

was to go on working quietly, and he sat writing in the detached room. But when he first heard the baby's cry, he said later that he felt something unlike anything he had ever felt in his whole life. When he first saw the baby, he stood silent and said nothing at all, and afterward he explained that his breath had almost stopped from the strangeness of the feeling.

After that he loved the child deeply. The next year he went alone to Yokohama, one of the very few times he ever traveled by himself, and came home full of joy with many toys. Some of them were expensive, and everyone in the house was surprised that he had bought so much at once. He rose early all year round, even on New Year's Day, and every morning he taught our eldest son for one full hour. When he was teaching at the university, he still kept this habit, only changing the hour on the day his classes began too early. His days were carefully shaped. In the afternoon he walked, read, prepared lectures, or wrote letters, and at night he usually wrote until midnight.

When our daughter Suzuko was born, his feeling was mixed with sadness. He said that he was growing older and might not live long enough to watch her future. "How much my heart hurts," he said more than once. When I had to go out, I tried to choose the day on which he had the most hours of teaching, because he did not like my absence. The day before, he would remind me kindly to bring back a good story as a gift, perhaps from the theater or from some outing in town. Yet he would also say, half sadly and half playfully, that while I was away the house no longer felt like his house, and that he must endure the loneliness by waiting for the story I would tell on my return.

In his later years, when his health had grown weaker, he depended on me more than before and waited for my return almost like a child waiting for its mother. If he heard my footsteps, he called out at once and was very glad. If I was even a little late, he worried that the carriage might have overturned or that some accident had happened on the road. He judged people too by how they treated women. When a man asked for work as a carriage puller or servant, Hearn would ask first, "Does that man treat his wife kindly?" If I answered yes, he said, "Then he is all right." If he heard of a man who frightened his wife, abandoned her, or treated

women and children cruelly, he was deeply angered and often lost respect for him forever.

He also worried constantly for us, more than I can fully say. He endured many things for the sake of his wife and children, even matters that gave him real pain, such as official work he disliked or questions about becoming Japanese in law. At the same time, he hated many things from the modern world. He hated streetcars and would not ride them even once. He refused to have a telephone in the house and said that we could add more servants if needed, but no telephone. At that time Okubo still had neither electric light nor gas, and I believe that even if they had come earlier, he would not have wanted them. He also disliked trains and said that if one could simply walk and then ride only when tired, how much happier travel would be, though he loved ships and was glad whenever a journey by sea was possible.

Once he told me that on his way to Japan there had been such a storm that everything on the deck was washed away, and even the sailors grew sick, while he alone calmly asked for his meal as usual. He often said that he would like to be a lighthouse keeper and write books there. Another time he came home laughing and told how a student near Sendagaya had stopped him and asked in poor English, “Where are you from?” He answered, “Okubo,” then “Japan,” and the puzzled student followed him all the way to the gate and only then understood from the nameplate that he was Koizumi Yakumo. He also told me of a stranger in America who borrowed a book from him, asked neither his name nor gave his own, and returned it more than a year later, and Hearn still never learned who the man was. Once he burned his hand badly because a matchbox caught fire, and instead of dropping it on a fine carpet, he crushed it in his hand to save the floor. When I think of all these small things together, I remember the whole shape of him: he loved the west, the red sky of evening, summer, the sea, swimming, Bashō, cedar trees, lonely graveyards, insects, ghost stories, Urashima, and Hōrai. He hated lies, cruelty to the weak, dress coats, stiff shirts, New York, and many other things of that kind. And one of his quietest pleasures was simply to sit in his study in a light cotton robe and listen to the cicadas singing outside.

Part 10

On the afternoon of September 19, 1904, I went to his study at about three o'clock and saw that he was walking quietly with his hand over his chest. When I asked whether he was ill, he said, "I have a new sickness." I asked what kind of sickness it was, and he answered, "A sickness of the heart." I tried to calm him at once and sent a carriage for Dr. Kizawa, who had attended him before. He did not want me or the children to see too much of his pain, and told me not to worry and to go elsewhere. But I stayed near him, and then he went to his desk and began to write. When he finished, he said that the letter was for Ume, and he told me that if greater pain came, he might die, that I must not cry, that I should buy a very small bottle for his bones, bury him in some lonely country temple, and afterward play cards with the children, because that would please him more than grief.

When I begged him not to say such sorrowful things, he answered with force that he was not joking and that he was speaking from his true heart. Then, after only a few minutes, the pain passed away. He said that he wanted to try a cold bath, and he went to the bathroom and poured cold water over himself. Soon he said, with surprise, that he felt very well again and asked for a little whisky. I was uneasy, but he told me not to fear, so I mixed it with water and gave it to him. After drinking, he smiled and said, "I shall not die now," and this made me feel much easier. He also told me then that a pain like this had first come a few days earlier. When the doctor arrived, Hearn laughed and said, "Forgive me, the sickness has gone away," and the doctor, after examining him, said that he could find no clear trouble. Hearn had always hated doctors and medicine in a childlike way, and if I forgot even for a little while to send for one, he would almost rejoice.

Yet there were signs before the end, and when I remember them now, they seem full of meaning. Two or three days before he died, one branch of the cherry tree in the study garden bloomed again out of season. Our maid Osaki found it and told me, and in our house even the smallest thing became a great event. We would call out over a tiny bamboo shoot, a yellow butterfly, an ant hill, a frog climbing

up to the door, or the changing colors of the evening sky, and all these things were gladly reported to him. Frogs, butterflies, ants, spiders, cicadas, bamboo shoots, and sunset were among his dearest companions. In Japan people say that an out-of-season blossom is unlucky, so I felt a little fear. But when I told him, he thanked me as he always did, went to the veranda, said “Hello” to the flower, and looked at it with pleasure. Then he said that the weather had been warm and the cherry had thought it was spring, that the branch had entered his world and so had bloomed, but that it was to be pitied, because the cold would soon return and the flower would fade in surprise. It bloomed for only one day, and by evening the petals were already falling sadly, and now I cannot help feeling that it had come to say farewell to him.

He was an early riser, but because he said that one must not break the dreams of wife and children, he usually sat quietly by the brazier, smoking, until I came into the study. He loved long pipes and had perhaps a hundred of them, each with its own carving, and in the morning he would choose one, look first at the mouthpiece and the bowl, and then smoke with a calm and pleasant air. On the morning of the twenty-sixth, when I entered the study at about half past six, he was already awake and smoking. After I greeted him, he seemed thoughtful, and then he told me that he had seen a very strange dream in the night. He said that he had gone on a very long, very distant journey, and that now he sat here smoking, and he wondered which was the true world, the journey or the present room. He said it had been neither the West nor Japan, but some strange place, and he spoke of it with quiet interest. That same morning, before our son Kazuo went to school, the boy came and said, “Good morning,” and Hearn answered, by mistake, “Pleasant dream,” as if the world of sleep were still close around him.

At eleven o’clock he walked along the corridor and stopped before a hanging picture in the alcove of the study. The picture was called “Morning Sun,” and it showed a coast at dawn, with many birds rising and flying over the sea. He looked at it and said that it was a beautiful scene, and that he would like to live in such a place. He often bought hanging scrolls, but he never ordered me to hang one or another. When I changed them, he looked at them with the pleasure of a guest.

That autumn we were also keeping a singing cricket, and near the end of September its voice had become thin and broken, and sounded more sorrowful than before. When I asked how he heard that sound, he said that the little insect had sung well for them, that he had been glad of it, but that the weather was growing colder and the creature must soon die, and he pitied it greatly. Later I felt that the cherry blossom, the long dream, and the fading cricket had all been messengers of his death.

That afternoon he looked through his books, wondering what he might send to Mr. Fujisaki in Manchuria, and in the end he wrote him a letter. At supper he was in better spirits than usual. He joked, laughed loudly, and exchanged the familiar playful words with the children that had so often brightened our table. Then he said good night to them and went, as usual, to walk a little in the passage by the study. After about an hour he came to me with a lonely face and in a small voice said, “Mama-san, the other sickness has come back.” I went with him at once. He walked for a little while with his hand on his chest, and then I gently urged him to lie down and rest. He obeyed quietly, and before long he was no longer a person of this world. There seemed to be no pain at all. A slight smile remained near his mouth, and even now I cannot help feeling that his death came too quickly and too suddenly, without enough time for loving care, long watching, and the slow, bitter understanding that the end had truly come.

He had often spoken beforehand in ways that now returned to my mind with painful force. When we crossed Ochiai Bridge and walked toward the New Yakushi temple, he would look at the chimney of the crematory and say that one day he too would go out from that chimney as smoke. He had long loved lonely temples, small ones with broken fences and grass growing thick around the hall, and he used to say that his grave should be small and hidden from outside view. Yet such a temple could not be found at once. In the end, the funeral was held at Kobidera, though that temple had ceased to please him as before. Because of old ties, and because there was also a connection with a priest who later became head of Denpōin in Asakusa, that man served as the chief priest for the rites. Hearn had seemed to like Zen. Still, we did not choose burial in a temple ground, because

graves there might later be moved, and I could not bear the thought of such uncertainty. Aoyama cemetery felt too busy for him, and so we chose the public cemetery at Zōshigaya, which was quiet and had a lonely beauty that suited his nature.

Zōshigaya had long been a place he liked. More than once he had taken me there, and sometimes the children too, because he said he wanted to show us a good place. He walked near Kishibojin, listened to the birds, and asked what I thought of their voices. He said that the stretch from Sekiguchi toward Zōshigaya was very fine, and that if only he had been twenty years younger, he would have liked to build a house on one of those heights and live there. About two weeks before his death, when we were planning to rebuild the front gate of our house, we went out together and walked around the Zōshigaya area, looking at many gates for reference. That was the last time the two of us went out together. Work on the new gate began about two days before he died, and after his death it was hurried on so that it would be ready in time for the funeral. When I remember that last walk, and how quietly he looked at those gates, the whole road returns to me with unbearable clearness. It was the final path we shared before he passed into the silence he had so long loved.