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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

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Matsuo Bashō, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North [Oku no Hosomichi]* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified from Japanese by ChatGPT)

[Opening]

The months and days are travelers from age to age. The years that come and go are travelers too. Men who spend their whole lives on boats, and men who grow old while leading horses on the road, make travel their home. Many people of the past died while they were traveling. I too, for many years now, have been pulled by a cloud in the wind. I have not been able to stop thinking about wandering, and I have drifted along the seashore with that feeling in my heart.

Last autumn I came back to my poor hut by the river and brushed away the old spider webs. Little by little the year ended. Then spring came, and a light mist lay in the sky. I longed to cross the Barrier of Shirakawa. A god of restless wandering seemed to seize my heart, and the road god seemed to call me forward. Because of that, I could not keep my mind on anything else.

I mended my torn trousers for the journey and changed the cord on my hat. I burned moxa on my legs to make them strong for the road. Yet even before I set out, my mind had already gone ahead to the moon of Matsushima. I gave my old house to another person and moved to the country home of Sampū.

Even this grass hut—
in another person's time
it becomes a doll's house.

I hung the first eight linked verses at the pillar of the hut and left them there.

[Departure]

It was the twenty-seventh day of the last part of the Third Month. At dawn the sky was dim and soft. The moon was still there, but it was pale in the morning

light. Mount Fuji could be seen only faintly. The blossoms on the trees at Ueno and Yanaka looked sad to me, and I thought, “When will I see them again?” That thought made my heart feel weak.

All the close friends who cared for me gathered the evening before, and then they came with us by boat to see us off. When we got off the boat at Senju, I felt as if the road of three thousand miles was pressing against my chest. We were standing at the crossing between the world we knew and the world of shadows and distance. Tears of parting fell from my eyes before I had truly begun the journey.

Spring is going—
birds cry, and in the eyes of fish
there are tears.

I wrote that poem as the first line in my travel notebook, but even after writing it I could not move on at once. The people who had come to send us off stood in a row along the road. They kept watching us until only our shadows could be seen. That picture stayed in my mind for a long time.

[Soka]

This was the second year of Genroku, and I had lightly thought of making a long journey through the far north. Yet when I truly began it, I felt the weight of the road. My white hair seemed like one more sorrow under a distant sky. Ahead of me were places I had only heard about and had never seen with my own eyes. I did not know whether I would come back alive. I could only trust myself to an uncertain future and go forward.

At last, on that first day, I reached the post town called Soka. What troubled me most was the load on my thin shoulders. I had meant to leave home with almost nothing, taking only my own body onto the road. But friends had given me many farewell gifts. There was a paper robe to keep out the cold at night, a light robe,

rain gear, ink, brush, and other things that were hard to throw away because they had been given with love.

Even so, those things became a burden on the road. I could not easily leave them behind, yet carrying them made my steps heavy. So from the very first stage of the journey, I learned again what travel is: joy and trouble together, longing and pain tied in one bundle.

[Muro no Yashima]

We went to the shrine called Muro no Yashima. My companion Sora said, “This deity is Princess Konohana Sakuya, the blossom princess, and so she is one with Mount Fuji. Long ago she entered a room with no door and gave birth there in fire. Because that birth took place in such a room, this place came to be called Muro no Yashima.” He told the story in a calm voice, as if he were opening an old book before me.

Sora also said, “That is why people here have long made poems about smoke in this place.” As I listened to him, the old story, the shrine, and the land around us seemed to join together. A place is never only earth and trees. It also keeps the tales that people have trusted for many years. Because of that, even a quiet place can feel full of unseen life.

There was also a tradition, he said, that the fish called konoshiro must not be eaten here. That too had been passed down in the local stories about the shrine. We heard such things and thought about the deep roots of old belief. Thus, before we had even gone far into the north, the journey had already become more than a journey across distance. It had become a journey through memory, story, and the old heart of the land.

[Buddha Gozaemon]

On the thirtieth day, we stayed at the foot of Mount Nikkō. The master of the house said, “My name is Buddha Gozaemon. I try to live by honesty in all things,

so people call me by that name. Please rest here for one night and sleep without care." He spoke in a plain and open way, and there was nothing false in his face or voice. His words made us feel at ease at once.

I wondered what kind of Buddha had appeared in this dusty world and taken this form in order to help poor travelers like us. We were only men on the road, like wandering monks or beggars, yet he received us warmly. When I watched the things he did, I saw that he was not a clever man in the usual sense. He was simple, direct, and almost stubborn in his honesty. Yet that very nature made him worthy of deep respect.

He had no twisted thought and no double mind. He was one of those people whose plain heart comes close to true goodness. Such a pure nature is rare in this world, and for that reason it shines all the more. We spent that night under his roof with quiet gratitude. Even before we reached the sacred mountain, the journey had already given us one thing of great value: the sight of an honest human soul.

[Nikkō]

On the first day of the Fourth Month, we climbed the holy mountain and paid our visit there. Long ago, this mountain had been written with the characters Futara-san. Later, when the Great Teacher Kūkai opened the place, people say that he changed the name to Nikkō, "Sunlight." Perhaps he saw with wisdom what would happen a thousand years later. Now that light seemed to shine across the whole sky, and its blessing seemed to spread to the ends of the land.

Under such light, the homes of the people appeared calm and safe. Men of every class seemed able to live in peace beneath that grace. Yet the place was so holy that I felt it was not right to write too much. My brush stopped in my hand. There are times when words become smaller than what the eyes and heart receive. This was one of those times.

How noble it is—
the sunlight among green leaves,

young leaves, fresh leaves.

Mount Kurokami stood in a light mist, and its snow was still white. Beside that sight, Sora offered a verse of his own. It matched the mountain air and the feeling of the season very well. His poem carried both the cold of the fading snow and the change of clothes that belongs to early summer. In a few short words, it made the whole scene feel close and real.

Shaving his black hair,
at Mount Kurokami he changes
into summer robes.
−Sora

Sora was of the Kawai family, and his personal name had once been Sōgorō. He lived near me under the leaves of my banana plant and often helped me with daily tasks, bringing wood and water, helping with small needs, and sharing many quiet hours. He was glad that on this journey he could see Matsushima and Kisakata with me. He also wished to ease the hardships of travel as much as he could. So on the morning of departure he shaved his head, put on black robes, and changed his name from Sōgo to Sōgo, written in a new way.

Because of that, he had made the poem about Mount Kurokami and the changing of clothes. The words “summer robes” sounded especially strong and fitting in that place. Then we climbed more than twenty chō up the mountain, and there we found a waterfall. It came flying down from the top of a rocky cave and fell into a deep blue pool among a thousand stones. The sound filled the valley, and cold spray rose around us.

I hid my body in a cave of rock and looked at the waterfall from behind. Seen from there, it seemed even stranger and more wonderful than from the front. People had long called it the “Back-View Falls,” and when I saw it with my own eyes, I understood why. The water dropped before me like a white curtain, while the dark cave held me in shadow. For a little while I felt as if I had stepped outside

the common world.

For a little while
I shut myself in by the falls—
the start of summer retreat.

[Nasu]

At a place called Kurobane in Nasu there was a man I knew, so we planned to leave the main road and go across the fields by a shorter path. We saw a small village far away and walked toward it, but rain began to fall, and before long the day grew dark. So we borrowed a place to stay for the night in a farmer's house. When morning came, we set out again and walked on through the open fields. The land was wide, and there was little to guide the eye.

There we saw a horse grazing in the field. I called to the man who was cutting grass and asked him for help. Though he was only a country man, he was not without kindness. He said, "What can I do for you? Still, this field is cut across in every direction, and travelers who do not know it easily lose their way. Please take this horse, and when it stops, send it back from there." His words were rough, but his heart was warm.

Two small children ran after the horse as it went ahead of us. One of them was a little girl, and her name was Kasane. I had never heard such a name before, and it sounded gentle and lovely to my ears. Sora, moved by that name, made a verse on the spot. The child herself, the wide field, and the soft sound of her name came together in it. Such moments are small, yet they stay in the memory.

"Kasane"—
surely that must also be
the name of a double pink.
−Sora

Before long we reached a place where people lived. There we tied the payment to the saddle and sent the horse back. The kindness of that farmer, and the sight of the children running behind the horse, remained in our hearts after the road had changed again. In famous places, men often look for old poems and old stories. Yet in such an open field, with rain, mud, a borrowed horse, and a little girl's name, there was also something worthy of poetry. The road to the deep north was teaching us that too.

[Kurobane]

In Kurobane I sent word to a certain man at Jōbōji who served as the keeper of the lord's residence there. He was much happier to receive me than I had expected. We talked day and night without tiring of each other. His younger brother, a man called Tōsui, came morning and evening with great care, visited us often, took us to his own house, and even brought us to the houses of relatives. In this way, with one welcome after another, the days passed almost without our noticing it.

One day we went out walking in the country and saw the old ground where dog-hunting on horseback had once been held. We also went through the fields of Nasu no Shinohara and visited the old grave of Lady Tamamo. In that wide and quiet land, stories of the past seemed still to breathe under the grass. The names of the places were full of old fame, and each place opened another door in memory. The more I saw, the more I felt that this road through the north was also a road through ancient time.

After that we visited Hachiman Shrine. When Nasu no Yoichi shot the fan upon the pole, he had prayed especially to Hachiman, the great god and the guardian of his land. I heard that the very shrine before us was that one. Because of that, I felt a strong and sudden movement in my heart, as if the old prayer and the old arrow were still alive in the air there. By evening we returned to Tōsui's house, carrying that feeling back with us.

There was also a place called Kōmyōji, a temple of mountain ascetics. I was

invited there and looked at the hall for the practitioners. Their wooden clogs, worn for mountain travel and hard training, stood there as signs of departure and devotion. Looking at them, I thought of the deep strength of those who leave the common road and go into the hills. The sight brought a verse to me at once.

In summer mountains,
I bow before the wooden clogs—
gear for a first journey.

[Unganji]

Deep in the grounds of Unganji there was said to be the mountain retreat of the priest Bucchō Oshō. I had once heard that he had written a poem there in charcoal upon a rock. The poem spoke of a tiny grass hut, less than five feet each way, and said that if there had been no rain, he would have been ashamed even to build such a poor shelter. That old poem had stayed in my mind for a long time. So now I wished to see the place with my own eyes.

A grass hut so small,
not even five feet each way—
I would be ashamed
to build it at all, but rain
gives me reason to stay here.
−Bucchō Oshō

When I set out for Unganji, many people came gladly forward to guide me. There were many young men among them, and they made cheerful noise all along the road. Without my quite knowing how far we had gone, we reached the foot of the mountain. The place lay deep among hills. Along the valley path, pine and cedar stood dark, and the moss lay thick everywhere. Though it was already the Fourth Month, the air still felt cold there.

We crossed a bridge and entered through the temple gate. Then I asked where the old retreat might be, and we climbed farther up behind the mountain. At last we found it: a small hut set among rocks, almost like a cave. It looked like the closed retreat of an old Zen master, or like the stone chamber of a holy monk from long ago. It was a place made for silence, and its silence entered the body at once.

The hut stood in such deep summer growth that even a woodpecker seemed not to have broken it. The leaves were rich above it, the shadows were quiet around it, and all loud thought began to fall away. I felt the long distance between the world below and this little place among rocks and trees. There I left a verse on one of the pillars. It was a simple verse, but it belonged to that stillness.

Even the woodpecker
has not damaged this small hut
in the summer trees.

[Sesshōseki and the Wandering Willow]

From there we went on to Sesshōseki, the Killing Stone. The keeper of the lord's residence sent us by horse. The man leading the horse asked me for a poem strip. I thought it charming that he should wish for such a gentle thing, even on a rough country road. So I made a verse for him as we rode across the fields. The call of a cuckoo seemed to pull the horse and the heart sideways over the open land.

Across the open fields,
turn the horse to one side for me—
a cuckoo calls there.

The Killing Stone stood in the shadow of the mountain where the hot springs rose. The poison of the stone had still not disappeared. Bees and butterflies lay there dead in such numbers that the true color of the sand beneath could hardly be

seen. The place had an evil and lonely air, and even the wind seemed harsh around it. Looking at it, I felt how near beauty and dread may stand to each other in the world.

Yet after that fearful place, we came to the willow by the clear stream. It stood in the village of Ashino, left beside the ridge of a rice field. A certain local lord had often told me that he wished to show me that willow. Until then, I had wondered where it might be. And now, on this very day, I found myself standing in its shade. The moment felt quiet, natural, and deeply satisfying, as if a long wish had come true without noise.

Water ran clear beside it, and the willow gave a soft shadow over the earth. Near it, a single rice field was being planted. A person finished planting that one field and then went away, leaving the willow behind in silence. The small work of the day and the old fame of the place met one another there. It seemed to me that the whole scene could be held in one brief poem.

After planting one field,
they rise and leave it behind—
the willow remains.

[Shirakawa Barrier]

As the days of uncertain travel kept adding one to another, we came at last to the Barrier of Shirakawa, and there my heart as a traveler truly settled into its work. It was only right, I thought, that no message could easily be sent back to the capital from such a place. This barrier was one of the three great barriers of the East, and it had long held the hearts of men of poetry. Even before I stepped fully into it, old poems and old feelings had begun to gather around me.

The autumn wind seemed still to remain in the ear there, and red leaves rose before the mind’s eye, though now it was the season of green leaves. Even so, those fresh leaves had their own sadness. White deutzia blossoms were blooming, and wild roses opened beside them. Looking at them, I felt almost as if I were

crossing snow. The place had that kind of pure, cold beauty.

Men of old, it is said, would straighten their caps and change their clothes before crossing here, and such stories had even been written down in old books. When one passes a place so full of memory, an ordinary spirit will not do. Sora too felt this deeply and made a verse. His poem joined the white flowers before us with the idea of careful dress, as if the barrier itself asked travelers to appear with respect.

With deutzia blossoms
for a little decoration—
barrier traveling clothes.
−Sora

[Sukagawa]

In this way we went on and crossed the Abukuma River. High Aizu Peak stood to the left, while to the right the lands of Iwaki, Sōma, and Miharu stretched away, with mountains rising between them and the provinces of Hitachi and Shimotsuke. We passed a place called Kage-numa, but that day the sky was cloudy, and nothing was reflected in the water. The land was broad and quiet under that gray light, and we kept moving through it.

At the post town of Sukagawa I visited a man named Tōkyū, and he asked me to stay four or five days. He first asked how I had crossed Shirakawa Barrier. But the pains of the long road had tired both body and mind. My spirit had been taken by the beauty of the view, and my heart had been torn by thoughts of the past, so I could not give a clear answer. I could only offer a poem instead.

The first taste of art—
in the deep north, the rice-planting
songs rise through the fields.

When I said that it did not seem right merely to cross the barrier and say nothing more, we added a second and a third verse and made linked poems together. Near this lodging there was a monk who had turned away from the world and lived under the shade of a great chestnut tree. The place felt very still, and it seemed to me like the deep mountain life of old poems. So I wrote down a few words there. I wrote that the character for chestnut is made from the signs for "west" and "tree," and so it seems to have some tie with the Western Paradise; people even say that the holy priest Gyōki used chestnut wood for his staff and for the pillars of his house.

After writing those words, I made a verse of my own. The monk's dwelling was plain, almost hidden, and no famous flower stood there. Yet the chestnut by the eaves seemed enough. It was not a blossom that people came from far away to praise, but for that very reason it held a quiet beauty.

A flower the world
has never cared to notice—
the chestnut by the eaves.

[Asaka Marsh]

Leaving Tōkyū's house, we went about five leagues and, after passing the post town of Hiwada, came near Mount Asaka. The road lay close to it, and there were many marshes in that area. Since the season for cutting katsumi was drawing near, I asked people again and again which plant was the true "flower-katsumi" of old poems. Yet no one knew. I searched the marshes, asked travelers and local people, and wandered about repeating "katsumi, katsumi," but the day passed and the sun lowered toward the mountain edge.

From Nihonmatsu we turned off to the right and also looked at the cave of Kurozuka. Then we went on and stayed for the night at Fukushima. The search for an old poetic plant had led nowhere, yet that too seemed to suit the journey. In these northern lands, many names from poetry still lived, but the things

themselves were often hidden, changed, or lost. The road taught us to accept that without anger.

[Shinobu Village]

The next day, when morning came, we went to Shinobu Village to look for the stone used for the old “shinobu-zuri” pattern. In a small village far under the mountain, there it was: the stone half buried in the earth. A child from the village came and told us, “Long ago this stone stood on the mountain above. But travelers came and rubbed wheat leaves on it to test it, so the farmers hated that and pushed it down into this valley. That is why the face of the stone now lies turned downward.” Hearing that, I thought the story very likely true.

The old poems, the curious village tale, the half-buried stone, and the young rice seedlings of the present day all came together before my eyes. The past was there, but not in a grand or shining form. It remained in a broken and altered way, mixed into the common life of the fields. That very change moved me, and I made a verse.

Hands planting seedlings—
at their very fingertips lives
the old Shinobu print.

[The Ruins of Satō Shōji]

Crossing the ford at Tsuki-no-wa, we came out at a post town called Senoe. The ruins of Satō Shōji, people told us, were about a league and a half away by the mountain on the left. Hearing that the place was in the village of Iizuka, in a district called Sabano, we went asking our way until we reached a place called Maruyama. This, they said, had been the old residence of Shōji. At the foot of the hill they pointed out what had once been the great gate, and tears came to my eyes.

In an old temple beside the site there remained stone markers for the whole

family. Most moving of all were the memorial signs for the two wives. Though they were women, their brave names had been heard by the world, and that thought made my sleeves wet with tears. The famous “stone of falling tears” was also not far away. When I entered the temple and asked for tea, they showed me there the sword of Yoshitsune and the chest of Benkei, kept as treasured objects.

Yoshitsune’s chest,
Benkei’s great sword too displayed—
paper streamers of May.

It was the first day of the Fifth Month. The season of boys’ banners and festive display gave a strange life to those old war objects. They were no longer things for battle, yet they had not become mere dead remains either. Under the bright signs of the season, they seemed to hold both grief and honor at once. Such meetings of the living present and the sorrowful past often came to us on this road.

[Iizuka]

That night we stayed at Iizuka. Because there was a hot spring there, we bathed and then looked for lodging, but the place we found was a poor house with straw mats spread directly on the dirt floor. There was no lamp, so we made a bed by the light of the hearth fire and lay down. In the night thunder roared, rain fell hard, and water leaked down over us where we lay. Fleas and mosquitoes bit us so much that I could not sleep at all.

Even my old illness returned, and I felt almost as if I would fade away. At last the short summer night slowly became morning, and we started out again. My heart was still weak from the troubles of the night, but I borrowed a horse and came out to the station of Koori. Thinking of the long road still ahead and feeling my sickness so uncertain, I told myself that if I died on the road, that too would be heaven’s will. With that thought I gathered my strength a little and went on, crossing the great gate of Date.

[Kasashima]

After passing Abuzuri and the castle of Shiroishi, we entered the district of Kasashima. I asked someone where the grave of Fujiwara no Sanekata might be. They told me that the village visible far off by the mountain was called Minowa and Kasashima, and that even now the shrine of the road god and the “memento silver grass” remained there. But the roads were very bad with the rains of the Fifth Month, and my body was tired, so I only looked toward it from afar and went on past.

Even from a distance, the place drew the mind. Minowa and Kasashima too had been touched in old poems by the rains of this season. Because of that, the mud under my feet seemed to belong not only to the road of the present, but also to the poetry of long ago. Looking toward that famous place and yet unable to go there, I made a verse.

Where is Kasashima?
On this muddy Fifth-Month road
I only ask that.

[Takekuma Pine]

At the pine of Takekuma I felt as if I were waking from a long dream. The tree divided into two trunks close to the ground, so one could see that it had not lost the old shape for which it had long been praised. First I thought of the monk Nōin. Long ago, when a man came down as governor of Mutsu, this tree was said to have been cut and made into bridge posts for the River Natori. Perhaps that is why Nōin wrote that, when he came, the pine was no longer there. Yet in age after age, they say, it had been cut and planted again, and now once more it stood before us in a beautiful ancient form.

A man called Kyohaku had given me a farewell poem before I left. His words

came back to me there at once. Because I was now truly standing before the famous pine, the old gift felt fresh again, and the distance between Edo and the north seemed to close for a moment. A farewell poem can travel farther than the body that hears it.

“Please show me
the pine of Takekuma too—
late cherry blossoms.”
−Kyohaku

Looking at the two trunks, I thought not so much of cherry blossoms as of time itself. Three months had passed since I left home, and what had once been only a hoped-for sight now stood plainly before me. The pine had endured by being cut, replaced, and renewed, yet its name and form remained. So I answered the place with my own verse.

More than the cherries,
these twin trunks of the pine have crossed
three months into spring.

[Miyagino]

We crossed the Natori River and entered Sendai. It was the season when people put iris leaves on the roof for the festival day. We found a place to stay and remained there for four or five days. In that town there was a painter named Kaemon. I heard that he was a man of some taste, and so we came to know him. He said that for many years he had been studying the exact places of the old famous sites whose positions were no longer clear.

One day he kindly offered to guide us there. In Miyagino the bush clover was thick, and just from looking at it I could imagine the feeling of autumn. At Tamada, Yokono, and Tsutsujigaoka, the asebi flowers were blooming. Then we entered a

pine grove so dense that sunlight could hardly pass through it, and he told us that this place was called Kinoshita. The dew there was indeed deep enough to make one understand why old poets had sung of hats and dripping sleeves.

We also visited Yakushidō and the shrine of Tenjin. By the time we had gone around all those places, the day was already ending. Kaemon then drew for us a picture of the places in Matsushima and Shiogama and gave it to us for the road. He also gave us two pairs of straw sandals with cords dyed dark blue. Only a true man of taste would think of such a gift at such a time, and here at the very end he showed his real worth.

Iris leaves—
I will tie them to the cords
of my straw sandals.

[Tsubo Monument]

Guided by that picture, we made our way on. At the foot of the hills along the narrow road of the north there grew sedge used for woven mats, and they said that even now, year after year, people prepared fine matting from that sedge and offered it to the governor of the province. Soon we reached the stone monument called Tsubo no Ishibumi, in the village of Ichikawa at Tagajō. The long-sought place stood before us at last.

The monument seemed more than six feet high and perhaps three feet wide. Moss had eaten into it, and the letters were faint, yet they could still be read. The writing marked the distances to the four borders of the province. It said that this fortress had first been set here by Ōno no Azumabito, military governor and inspector, in the first year of Jinki, and that it was repaired later by Emi no Asakari in the sixth year of Tenpyō Hōji. Thus I understood that it belonged to the age of Emperor Shōmu.

Many famous places from old poems had been passed down only by words, and one often found that mountains had broken down, rivers had changed their

course, roads had moved, stones had been buried in the earth, and old trees had died and been replaced by young ones. Age changed everything, and so one could not always know what was true. Yet here, before my eyes, was a certain memorial of a thousand years. For the first time I felt I could truly look into the minds of the men of old.

At that moment I forgot the hardships of travel, the pains of the road, and even the small fear that belongs to wandering. I felt only the joy of being alive and of having come so far. My tears almost fell. There are places that are beautiful, and there are places that are true. This stone was both, and so it struck the heart more deeply than any common sight.

[Sue no Matsuyama]

From there we went on to Noda no Tamagawa and looked for the stone called Oki no Ishi. Then we came to Sue no Matsuyama. A temple had been built there, and the place was now called Masshōzan. Between the pines there was a burial ground everywhere. Looking at those graves among the trees, I felt the sadness grow stronger in me. Even the bond of birds that fly wing to wing, and branches that join together, must in the end come to such an end as this.

At last we heard the evening bell from the bay of Shiogama. The rainy sky of the Fifth Month cleared a little, and in the faint evening moon the island called Magakijima lay not far away. Small fishing boats came rowing in, and we heard the voices of the fishermen as they divided their catch. Then I understood more deeply the feeling of the old song that spoke of the sadness of the towing ropes in Shiogama Bay. The whole place entered the heart with quiet sorrow.

That night a blind priest played the biwa and sang a local jōruri tale. It was neither the tale of the Heike nor a courtly dance song. The tune was rustic and raised its voice close beside our pillows, so that at times it seemed almost too noisy to bear. Yet even so, it moved me. In that rough border land, the old customs had not yet been forgotten, and for that reason the performance seemed all the more worthy.

In such a place, where famous names from old poems still lived in the land and on the sea, even the common sounds of the evening had a strange force. The bell, the boats, the singing, and the faint moonlight all seemed tied together. I felt again that the north held not only distance and hardship, but also a deep store of old feeling that still lived among ordinary people.

[Shiogama]

Early the next morning we visited the shrine of Shiogama Myōjin. The governor had rebuilt it, and so the sacred pillars were thick, the painted beams were bright, and the stone steps rose in many high tiers. The morning sun shone on the jeweled fence, and the whole place glittered with fresh beauty. To find such living holiness even at the far end of the road, in a place touched by dust and distance, seemed to me a precious sign of the nature of our country.

Before the shrine there stood an old iron lantern. On its metal door were the words saying that it had been offered by Izumi Saburō in the third year of Bunji. The image of five hundred years rose before my eyes as if it were present now. I found it strange and moving that such a thing had remained until this day. I thought of the man who had offered it, a warrior of courage, loyalty, and filial duty, whose name was still remembered.

There are men whose fame is loud while they live and is lost at once when they die. But there are others who follow the Way and hold fast to what is right, and their names endure with their deeds. Looking at that lantern, I felt that truth with unusual force. The road had brought me here to see not only nature and old poetry, but also the shape of duty made visible in iron and time.

I stayed there for a while in silence. The shrine was splendid, but the deeper feeling came from the long reaching hand of memory. It seemed to gather together gods, warriors, governors, priests, and travelers from many ages into one place. Such moments on the journey could not be forced. One simply arrived, looked, and felt oneself become smaller.

[Matsushima]

By then the day was already close to noon, so we hired a boat and crossed over to Matsushima. The distance was a little more than two leagues, and we landed first at the rocky shore of Ojima. It is an old saying, yet true, that Matsushima is the finest view in all our land. It need not be ashamed before Dongting Lake or the West Lake of China. The sea enters from the southeast and makes a broad inner bay, and within it lie islands beyond counting.

Some islands rise sharply and point toward the sky. Others lie low upon the waves. Some stand in double and triple layers. Some separate left and right. Some seem to carry others upon their back, while some appear to hold them close like children or grandchildren. The pines on them are richly green, and their branches bend in the salt wind as if shaped by careful human hands. The whole scene looks like the face of a beautiful woman newly dressed. Was it the work of the mountain god in some ancient age? Who could take up a brush and truly use up all the words for such a sight?

Ojima itself runs out from the shore into the sea. There were remains there of the retreat of the Zen master Ungo, and also a stone where he had sat in meditation. Under the pines we saw here and there men who had turned away from the world and lived in humble huts, burning fallen pine cones and straw. We did not know who they were, yet the place drew us close. Soon the moon shone in the sea, and the view of the day changed into another kind of beauty. We returned to the lodging by the water, where the windows stood open and an upper room had been built so that we seemed to sleep among wind and cloud.

Matsushima—
even a crane would wear itself thin;
a cuckoo cries.
−Sora

I closed my mouth and meant to sleep, but I could not sleep. When I left my

old hut, Sodō had given me a Chinese poem on Matsushima. Hara Antekki had given me a waka on the island shore of pine. I opened the bag and took them out as companions for that night. Sampū and Jokushi too had given me opening verses for the journey. Though they were not with me in body, their hearts were there, and so the room did not feel empty.

[Zuiganji]

On the eleventh day we visited Zuiganji. Long ago, in the age of the temple's thirty-second head, Makabe no Heishirō left the world, went to China, returned, and then opened this temple. Later, through the power and teaching of the Zen master Ungo, its seven great buildings were renewed. Golden walls and splendid ornaments shone with light, and the whole place had become like a great Buddhist land made visible in this world.

Seeing it, I thought of the holy man called Kenbutsu Hijiri, who had once lived in Matsushima and had drawn even Saigyō to seek him out there. Where now was that older temple of the seeing saint? The present temple stood noble and rich before the eye, yet it also called up the shadow of earlier devotion. Thus the place held two times at once: the visible beauty of the buildings and the invisible beauty of what had been sought there before.

I walked through the grounds with quiet respect. After the sea wind, the boat, the moon, and the sleepless night at Matsushima, the temple gave a different kind of depth to the journey. The north was not only fields, barriers, ruins, and famous shores. It was also a land where religious feeling had taken root and lifted itself into lasting form. That thought stayed with me as we prepared to move on again.

So ended our time in Matsushima and its nearby places. Beauty of nature, beauty of memory, and beauty of faith had all come together there. I had longed for Matsushima from before leaving home, and now that I had seen it, I understood why the longing had been so strong. Still, the road ahead remained, and travel does not allow the heart to stay long in one place.

[Hiraizumi]

On the twelfth day we set our hearts on Hiraizumi. Along the way we heard of such famous places as the Pine of Aneha and the Bridge of Odae, but the road was lonely, and the paths of men, pheasants, rabbits, and woodcutters were all mixed together so that we could hardly tell one from another. At last we lost the way and came out at a harbor called Ishinomaki. Looking out to sea, we saw Kinkasan, the island praised long ago in a poem about golden flowers, and in the bay there gathered many trading boats.

Houses stood close together there, fighting for space, and smoke rose without end from many kitchen fires. I had never thought I would come even to such a place as this. Yet when we tried to find lodging, no one would let us stay. At last we passed the night in a poor little house. When morning came, we set out again on another strange road and went on through places whose names we only saw from afar. We followed a long embankment beside the lonely marsh of Naganuma and, after one more night on the road, reached Hiraizumi at last.

The glory of three generations had vanished in one dream. The site of the great gate stood about a league away, and the place of Hidehira's hall had become fields and wild land, with only Mount Kinkeizan still keeping its old form. First I climbed Takadachi. Below it the Kitakami River flowed from the south. The Koromo River wound around Izumi's old fort and joined the great stream beneath the hill. Across the river had stood the old places of Yasuhira and the others, guarding the southern approach against the Ezo.

Here loyal men had once gathered and shut themselves inside the fort, and now their great names were only grass and brush. I spread out my rain hat and sat down upon it, and the words of an old Chinese poem came to me. I remained there until time seemed to stop, with tears falling as I looked over the scene. Such is the way of this world: the land remains, and men pass away.

A nation is broken—
mountains and rivers remain;

in spring, grass fills the old fort.

Summer grasses—
all that remains
of warriors' dreams.

In white deutzia blooms
I seem to see Kanefusa's
old white hair.
−Sora

We also saw the two famous halls, which had been opened for viewing. The sutra hall still kept three old images, and the Hall of Light held the coffins of the three lords and the images of the three holy ones. Its jewels had scattered, its jeweled doors had been broken by the wind, and its golden pillars had been worn by frost and snow. It should long ago have fallen into ruin and become empty grassland. Yet a new outer building had been put around it, and a roof now sheltered it from wind and rain. So, for a little while longer, it remained as a memorial across a thousand years.

The summer rains—
they left this Hall of Light
still shining there.

[Shitomae Barrier]

Looking far along the road toward Nanbu, we stayed a night in a place called Iwade. Then we passed Ogurosaki and Mizu-no-Kojima, and from the hot springs at Narugo we came to the Barrier of Shitomae, hoping to cross into the province of Dewa. This road was one that few travelers used, and so the barrier guard looked at us with suspicion before at last letting us pass. We climbed a great

mountain, and by the time evening came we saw a house belonging to the guard and asked for lodging there.

Wind and rain kept us there in that useless mountain place for three whole days. The room was poor, the air was foul, and beside our pillows there was no peace. Even in such hardship, however, the road had its own rude life. All things near us seemed mixed together: insects, beasts, men, and the rough sounds of the stable close by.

Fleas and lice—
and near my pillow
a horse lets water.

The master of the house said, “From here on, Dewa lies beyond the great mountains, and the road is not clear. You should hire a guide if you mean to cross it.” So we did. The man who came was a strong young fellow, with a curved short sword at his side and an oak staff in his hand. He walked ahead of us, and I thought, “Today must surely be the day when something dangerous happens.” With that bitter thought, we followed after him into the mountains.

Just as the host had warned us, the way was terrible. The hills were high, the woods were thick, and not even the cry of one bird could be heard. Under the trees it was so dark that it felt like walking at night. Dust seemed to fall on us from the clouds above. We pushed through bamboo grass, crossed streams, struck our feet against rocks, and sweat coldly over our skin. At last we came out into the district of Mogami. Then the guide said, “On this road trouble often comes. I am glad I have brought you here safely.” Only later, when I thought of it again, did my heart truly shake.

[Obanazawa]

In Obanazawa we visited a man named Seifū. He was a wealthy man, but his spirit was not low. He often went to the capital, and because of that he understood

something of the feeling of travel. He kept us there for several days and cared for us in many ways, doing all he could to ease the pain of our long road. After so much hardship, his welcome felt gentle and deep.

During our stay, several verses were made. The coolness of the house, the frogs crying under the silkworm shed, the safflower, and the old way of life among the people there—all these became poetry. Such poems rose naturally from the place itself. The life there was not grand, yet it was full of color and feeling.

Such coolness—
I make my lodging here
and settle in.

Come crawling out—
under the silkworm shed
the frogs are calling.

Safflower—
its red brings back to me
the woman with painted brows.

Those who raise silkworms—
they still seem to keep
the look of old times.
−Sora

In those few days, the world of the road changed again. After mountain fear and dirty lodgings, we had entered a place of rest, hospitality, and quiet human warmth. The poems made there were light in sound, yet they came after real weariness. That is why they carry true ease inside them. We took that ease with us when we left.

[Risshakuji]

In the lands of Yamagata there was a mountain temple called Risshakuji. People strongly advised me to see it, so from Obanazawa we turned back and made the journey there, about seven leagues in all. We arrived while there was still daylight. After arranging to stay at a temple lodging at the foot of the mountain, we climbed up to the halls above. Rock stood piled upon rock to make the mountain, and old pines and cedars had grown there for ages.

Earth and stone had grown ancient and smooth with moss. The temple buildings upon the rocks kept their doors shut, and no sound at all could be heard. We went around cliffs, climbed over rocks, and bowed before the Buddhist halls. The fine view and the deep stillness made my heart grow clear. That place did not ask for words. It entered the body first, and only then the mind.

The silence there was not empty. It was a full silence, thick with rock, trees, heat, and age. Even the cry of the cicadas did not break it. Rather, their voices seemed to sink into the stone itself and become part of that stillness. For a long time I felt only that my heart was being washed clean.

Such stillness—
the cicadas' cry
sinks into the rocks.

[Mogami River]

Wishing to go down the Mogami River, we stayed at a place called Ōishida and waited for good weather. In that town, old seeds of haikai had been scattered long before, and I was moved by memories that had not faded. Voices from the older way still seemed to sound there, and my heart grew softer as I thought of them. I felt my feet searching between the old road and the new, yet there was no one to guide me clearly, and so I left behind one linked-verse sequence there. The spirit of this journey, I thought, had reached even that place.

The Mogami River comes down from the far north, and Yamagata lies at its upper course. There are dangerous places there with fearful names, such as Goten and Hayabusa. North of Mount Itajiki the river flows on, and at last it enters the sea at Sakata. Mountains rose on both sides, and our boat went down through thick growth along the banks. Because people load rice upon boats there, they call such craft rice boats.

The White Thread Falls dropped through openings in the green leaves, and Sennindō stood out on the shore. The water was full and strong, and our boat seemed to move in real danger. Yet that danger gave power to the whole scene. The river was not only beautiful. It was swift, deep, and wild, and it carried us through its force whether we wished it or not.

Gathering the rains
of the Fifth Month, how swiftly
the Mogami flows.

[Haguro]

At the foot of Mount Haguro, a man called Rōmaru led us into the mountain. We stayed at a branch lodging in the South Valley, and the kindness shown to us there was fine and gentle in every way. The mountain air itself felt cool and pure. Even in summer, the memory of snow seemed still to remain in that valley. On the fourth day a haikai gathering was held at the main temple, and the place seemed full of quiet devotion as well as poetry.

How grateful I am—
the scent of snow still lingers
in South Valley air.

On the fifth day we went to worship the Gongen. I did not know in what age the holy founder Nōjo Daishi had lived. In the old records, the shrine is said to

stand in the mountain land of Dewa, and men say many things about how the names of Dewa and Haguro came to be. Whatever the true origin may be, it is certain that Mount Gassan and Mount Yudono, together with Haguro, make the Three Mountains. Their sacred fame had spread far and endured for a very long time.

Looking at the place, I felt that it was indeed a blessed mountain, one whose prosperity and holiness had continued through the ages. The mountain was not merely old. It was alive with prayer, practice, and memory. Here the world of ordinary travel seemed to fall away, and the road took on the shape of pilgrimage. Even our talk became quieter there, as if the air itself required it.

The valley, the lodging, the gathering of poets, and the solemn worship all joined together in one feeling. The coolness there did not come only from shade or wind. It came from the mountain’s long life as a place of faith. For that reason, even simple acts such as walking, resting, or writing a verse seemed changed. We stayed there under that feeling until the day came to climb still higher.

[Gassan and Yudono]

On the eighth day we climbed Mount Gassan. We wrapped sacred white cloth around our bodies, covered our heads, and were led by a strong guide. Through clouds, mist, and mountain air we trod over snow and ice for eight long leagues. It seemed almost as if we had entered some high gate in the clouds where the sun and moon themselves carried out their course. By the time we reached the summit, my breath was failing, my body was numb with cold, the sun had set, and the moon had come out.

We spread bamboo grass beneath us and used thin branches for pillows as we lay there waiting for dawn. When the sun rose and the clouds were gone, we went down toward Yudono. Beside the valley there was a forge hut. The smiths of that province, choosing holy water and purifying themselves there, forge swords which they then mark with the name Gassan, and those blades are prized in the world. It reminded me of the ancient tale of tempering a blade in the Dragon

Spring. From such things one can know how deep the spirit of devotion runs upon those mountains.

I sat down for a little while upon a rock and rested. There I saw a cherry tree only about three feet high, with its buds half open. It had lain buried under piled snow and yet had not forgotten the spring. The sight of that late cherry touched me deeply. In that fierce summer heat, it seemed almost like plum blossoms carrying a cool scent, and I remembered with even greater feeling the old poem of the priest Gyōson.

As for the more secret details of those mountains, the rules of the ascetics do not allow one to speak of them lightly, and so I stopped my brush there. When we returned to the lodging, the abbot asked me for verses on the pilgrimage to the Three Mountains, and I wrote them on poetry slips. Those verses tried to answer the different feelings of the three sacred places: coolness at Haguro, the broken cloud-peaks of Gassan, and the tears of Yudono, which cannot easily be put into words.

How cool it is—
for all three months of summer,
Mount Haguro stays green.

Cloud-peaks collapsing,
one after another—there
stands Mount Gassan.

Words cannot tell it—
at Yudono my sleeves are wet
with tears alone.

On Yudono’s slope,
stepping on the coin-marked path,
my tears keep falling.

−Sora

[Sakata]

Leaving Haguro, we were welcomed at the castle town of Tsuruoka and stayed in the house of a warrior named Nagayama Shigeyuki. There a full linked-verse sequence was made. Sakichi too came along to see us off. Then we boarded a river boat and went down to the port of Sakata. There we lodged with a physician called En'an Fugyoku. Thus, after mountain pilgrimage, we came again into the world of men, houses, boats, and the sea wind.

The road and waterway had carried us from sacred heights down into a busy harbor. Yet even there the journey did not lose its poetic feeling. The western sea opened out before us, and the evening cool came on. Looking toward Mount Atsumi and farther toward Fukura, I felt the line of coast and mountain gather into one broad evening view. The body, worn by heat, was eased a little by that wind.

Mount Atsumi—
toward Fukura I look out
in the evening cool.

The great river too seemed to end there in one final gesture. All day long it had carried the heat of the land, but now, as it reached the sea, it seemed to pour even the burning of the day into that wide water. The image was so strong that it became a poem at once. River, heat, and sea all entered one line together.

The burning day—
the Mogami has carried it
and poured it in the sea.

Sakata gave us rest, but not stillness. Boats came and went, people moved about, and the life of the port continued around us. Even so, after the solemn

silence of the Three Mountains, this human noise had its own welcome. Travel is made not only of holy places and famous views, but also of such changes in air, sound, and company. From Sakata, the road ahead still reached farther north and west, and our hearts were already turning toward it.

[Kisakata]

The beauty of mountains and water, of land and sea, had already shown me many things on this journey, and now all my thought was fixed on Kisakata. From the port of Sakata we went northeast, crossing hills, following the rocky shore, and stepping over sand for ten leagues. By the time the sun was sinking westward, the salt wind was blowing up the sand, and rain came dim and misty so that Mount Chōkai was hidden from view. I thought that even this dark and rainy sight had its own wonder, and so we bent our knees inside a fisherman's hut and waited for the sky to clear.

The next morning the heavens opened beautifully, and the morning sun came out bright and fresh. We floated a boat on Kisakata. First we drew near Nōin Island and visited the place where the poet Nōin was said to have lived in solitude for three years. Then we went ashore on the opposite side, where there still stood an old cherry tree, the very tree remembered in the old verse about rowing beneath blossoms on the water. It remained there as a keepsake of Saigyō.

There was also an imperial tomb there, said to be the grave of Empress Jingū. The temple at that place was called Kanmanju-ji. I had never heard of an imperial visit to such a place, and I wondered by what cause such a thing was remembered there. Sitting in the temple room and rolling up the blinds, I saw the whole view gathered into a single glance. To the south, Mount Chōkai seemed to hold up the sky, and its shadow lay upon the water.

To the west, the road reached toward the border place called Muyamuya Barrier. To the east, a long embankment ran off toward Akita. The sea spread to the north, and where the waves came in upon the shore they called it Shiogoshi. Kisakata stretched about a league in width and length. In some ways it recalled

Matsushima, and yet it was wholly different. Matsushima seemed to smile, while Kisakata seemed to grieve. It was as if loneliness had taken on deeper sorrow and entered the very shape of the land.

Kisakata—
in the rain, Seishi
sleeping among silk-tree flowers.

At Shiogoshi,
cranes get their legs wet too—
the sea is cool.

[Festival at Kisakata]

We came there during the festival days. The place was full of movement, offerings, and the common life of people gathered together before the gods. In such a place even an ordinary question could become a poem. Sora looked at the festive food and asked, in a half-playful spirit, what the gods of Kisakata would choose to eat on such a day. His verse gave a human warmth to the solemn scene.

Kisakata—
what food will they serve today
to the gods at the feast?
−Sora

There was also a merchant from Mino Province named Teiji. He had joined our company for part of the road, and at evening he made a verse of his own. The houses of the fishermen were simple, and boards had been laid out for the people to sit on and enjoy the coolness of the evening. The sea breeze touched those rough dwellings with a quiet grace. Teiji’s poem caught that plain beauty very well.

Fishermen’s houses—
they lay out door-planks and sit
to enjoy the cool.
−Teiji

We also looked at the nest of a fishing hawk upon a rock. Sora, seeing it there above the waves, made yet another verse. He thought of an old promise that the waves would never cross over a certain place, and that thought joined itself to the bird’s nest. In that way, even the rock, the bird, and the old songs of the place came together.

A nest of the hawk—
was there a vow that the waves
would never cross here?
−Sora

[Echigo Road]

The aftertaste of Sakata stayed with us for several days, yet our eyes had already turned toward the clouds over the Hokuriku Road. The thought of so long a way pressed painfully upon the chest. I heard that there were one hundred and thirty leagues still to go before Kaga. When we crossed the Barrier of Nezu, we entered Echigo and changed our steps to the road of that province. At last we came to the barrier at Ichiburi, on the border toward Etchū.

Nine days had passed in that stretch. The heat and damp had so troubled my spirit that illness came on me, and I could write nothing down. The road was long, wet, and weary. Many things must have passed before my eyes, yet little remained clear enough to set into words. When the body is worn down, the heart too grows dim, and the pen falls silent.

Even so, two verses rose out of that hard passage. The first was about the

Seventh Month, when even the sixth night did not feel like an ordinary night. The second came from the sight of the sea and the sky together. Beyond the rough waters lay Sado, and across the heavens stretched the Milky Way, so that sea and stars seemed to answer one another in one wide lonely view.

The Seventh Month—
even its sixth night is not
like an ordinary night.

Rough sea—
stretching toward Sado Island,
the River of Heaven.

[Ichiburi]

That day we had crossed the most fearful stretch in all the north country: places called Oyashirazu, Koshirazu, Inumodori, and Komagaeshi. We were so tired that, as soon as I pulled the pillow near and lay down, sleep almost took me. Then, from the room next to ours toward the front, I heard the voices of two young women. Mixed in with them was the voice of an old man. Listening closely, I learned that the women were courtesans from Niigata in Echigo.

They were on their way to Ise Shrine, and the old man had brought them as far as this barrier and would return home the next day. They were writing letters home and passing on small, fragile messages. Their lives were like bodies thrown upon a shore where white waves come in. They had fallen into this sad world, tied by uncertain bonds, and hearing them speak of it, I could not help feeling pity. While I listened, I fell asleep.

In the morning, when we were about to leave, they came before us and said, “The sorrow of traveling on a road whose end we do not know is too great, and we feel only fear and sadness. Even if we can only appear and disappear far behind you, we would like to follow after your steps. Out of your religious mercy, please

let the great compassion of the Buddha fall upon us and give us the blessing of a bond.” As they spoke, tears ran down their faces.

We answered, “It is indeed a sad thing. But we ourselves stop in many places along the way. It is best simply to go where others go and trust yourself to the road. Surely the gods will protect you and keep you safe.” Saying only that, we left them there and went on. Yet the sorrow of it did not leave me for some time. Their lives, the moon, the journey, and the lonely lodging of that night all stayed together in my mind.

In one house
even courtesans slept—
bush clover and the moon.

When I later told Sora of this, he wrote it down. Perhaps that is why the feeling remained so clearly. On a road full of famous places and old poems, there are also such meetings with living sorrow. They too belong to the truth of travel. And sometimes they stay in the heart longer than mountains, temples, or famous shores.

[Kaga Province]

Crossing countless streams among what people call the forty-eight shallows of Kurobe, we came out at the shore called Nago. I asked about the famous wisteria of Tago, though this was no longer spring but the first sadness of early autumn. People answered, “From here it is five leagues along the shore. Then you go under the shadow of the mountain. The fishermen’s huts are so poor and dim that you will hardly find even a rough place to spend one night.” In that way they tried to frighten us with talk of hardship, but we went on and entered Kaga Province.

The scent of early rice—

I make my way through it,
with the Ariso Sea on my right.

[Kanazawa]

Crossing Unohana Hill and the valley of Kurikara, we reached Kanazawa on the fifth day of the middle part of the Seventh Month. There we met a merchant from Osaka who often came and went on that road, and we shared the same lodging. In Kanazawa there had been a poet named Isshō. I had heard his name little by little for many years, and there were people there who had known him well. But they told me that he had died early in the previous winter.

His older brother had arranged a memorial gathering for him. I was moved by the thought of a gifted man cut off so soon, and at the gathering I made a verse. The grave itself seemed as if it might stir in the autumn wind and answer the sound of my weeping. Grief has a way of making even earth seem alive.

Move, if you can,
O grave mound—my crying voice
is the autumn wind.

I was also invited to a small grass hut. There people set melons and eggplants before us, cool and fresh, each one offered by hand. The season had begun to turn, and the air itself felt gentler there. Looking at those simple things, I felt that autumn coolness was present not only in wind and sky, but also in the hands of the people around me.

Autumn coolness—
let every hand present
melons and eggplants.

There was also a poem made earlier on the road, before reaching Kanazawa.

The sun had been bright, even harsh, and yet the wind already carried the feeling of autumn. Day and season did not agree with each other, and that very difference struck the heart. The verse came out of that uneasy brightness.

So red and bright—
the sun looks cold and distant;
autumn wind has come.

At a place called Komatsu, I also made a verse. The name of the town itself seemed graceful and fitting to the season. Bush clover and pampas grass were stirring there, and the place answered its own name with a gentle beauty. Sometimes a place-name already holds a poem inside it, waiting only for the wind to touch it.

How lovely the name—
Komatsu, where bush clover
and pampas grass blow.

[Ōta Shrine]

At that place we visited the shrine of Tada. There were preserved there Sanemori’s helmet and pieces of rich brocade. People said that, long ago, when Sanemori had served the Genji, Lord Yoshitomo had given them to him. Looking at them, I felt at once that they were no common warrior’s things. From the projecting visor to the turned-back rim, there were carvings of chrysanthemums and vines, touched with gold, and even the crest rose like a dragon’s head.

After Sanemori was killed in battle, Kiso Yoshinaka is said to have sent these things, together with a written vow, to be placed in this shrine. The old record there even tells how Higuchi Jirō carried out that act. Standing before those remains, I did not feel the pride of war. I felt only its sadness. Splendor, old loyalty, noble death—all of it had already passed into silence, and only the insects of

autumn now cried beneath the helmet.

How pitiful—
under the warrior's helmet
the crickets cry.

[Natadera]

On the way toward the hot springs of Yamanaka, we walked as if Mount Shirane were always before us. Along the foot of the mountain to the left stood a hall of Kannon. They say that after the retired Emperor Kazan completed his pilgrimage to the thirty-three sacred places, he enshrined there an image of great mercy and gave the place the name Natadera. The name, they say, was made by joining one character from Nachi and one from Tanigumi. The story suited the place well.

Strange rocks stood there in many forms, and old pine trees had been planted among them. A small hall with a thatched roof had been built out upon the rock itself. It was an unusual and holy place, one in which stone, tree, and building seemed to belong together. The whiteness of the rock and the freshness of the season met in my eyes and became a poem.

Whiter than
the stones of the stone mountain—
the autumn wind.

[Yamanaka]

We bathed in the hot spring at Yamanaka. People say its healing power comes next after Arima, and after so long a journey, the water did indeed seem to enter the body kindly. The air there carried a rich smell from the spring, yet there was also something clean and fine in it. Even the thought of chrysanthemums seemed

not to be harmed by that scent. So the place gave rise to a verse at once.

Yamanaka—
the smell of the hot spring
does not break the chrysanthemums.

The boy who served as our host was called Kume no Suke, and he was still only a child. His father had loved haikai. Long ago, when Teishitsu was still young and came to this place, that father had shamed him in matters of poetry. Teishitsu then returned to the capital, became a disciple of Teitoku, and later became known throughout the world. After he had won fame, people say, he would not accept even a fee for judging verses from this one village. Now all that had become only an old tale.

But a sadder change came next. Sora fell ill in his stomach, and because he had family ties in a place called Nagashima in Ise, he decided to go on ahead of me. Before leaving, he wrote a verse and left it behind. In it he said that even if, going on and on, he should finally fall down upon the moor of bush clover, still he must go. The poem struck me painfully.

Going on and on,
even if I fall at last
in a field of bush clover.
−Sora

The sadness of the one who leaves and the bitterness of the one left behind were like two wild ducks separated and lost among clouds. I too made a verse in answer. From that day on, I thought, perhaps the writing in my notebook would begin to vanish like dew from my hat. So much of this journey had been shared with Sora that the road now seemed changed merely because he was no longer beside me.

From this day on
may the notes I keep fade out—
dew on my travel hat.

[Zenshōji]

Outside the castle town of Daishōji, we stayed at a temple called Zenshōji. It was still part of Kaga. Sora too had stayed at that temple on the night before, and he had left a verse there. He wrote of hearing the autumn wind all through the night over the mountain behind the temple. Though only a single night lay between us, that distance felt as wide as a thousand leagues.

All through the night
the autumn wind is heard
on the mountain behind.
−Sora

I too lay down in the monks' sleeping room and listened to the autumn wind. At dawn, as the chanting voices grew clearer in the near sky, the bell and wooden board sounded, and the monks went into the dining hall. My own heart, however, was already hurrying ahead toward Echizen, and so I came down from the hall with an unsettled mind. Then young monks, carrying paper and inkstone, came after me as far as the foot of the steps.

Just then the willow leaves in the garden were falling. The sight of them, together with the eager young monks and the temple morning, gave me one more verse before departure. Still wearing my straw sandals, with no time to polish the words, I wrote it down quickly and left it there. In that way, temple quiet, parting, and travel were joined once more in a single moment.

I would sweep the garden
before I go—but in the temple

the willow leaves are falling.

[Shiogoshi Pine, Tenryūji, and Eiheiji]

At the border of Echizen, we took a boat across the inlet at Yoshizaki and went to look for the pine of Shiogoshi. There was little I felt able to add there, because one old poem had already said everything that needed to be said. When a place has been fully held inside a single poem, later words only become extra fingers on the hand. So I stood before the scene and let that old verse lead my heart instead of trying to surpass it.

All night long
the storm has carried waves beneath
the pine at Shiogoshi,
where the moon seems to hang down
from the branches over the sea.
−Saigyō

After that, I visited the head priest of Tenryūji in Maruoka, because we had an old connection. Hokushi from Kanazawa had also followed me this far, though at first he had only come to see me off for a little way. Since he did not let the sights of the road pass by without feeling them deeply, he often spoke with moving care about the scenes around us. Now, as the time for parting had truly come, I made a poem for him.

Writing a few lines,
then tearing my fan apart—
the pain of farewell.

Then I went fifty chō into the mountains to visit Eiheiji. This was the temple of Zen Master Dōgen. He had turned away from the busy center of the country

and left his traces in such a mountain shadow, and surely that too showed the depth of his spirit. The way there itself seemed to teach withdrawal from noise and fame. Walking into that mountain silence, I felt again how great men choose places that common minds would pass by.

The temple stood deep in the hills, far from worldly roads. I did not stay there long, yet the place carried great weight. The farther I traveled, the more often I found that true greatness did not shout. It hid itself in mountain valleys, old halls, and quiet lives. Leaving Eiheiji, I carried that feeling with me toward Fukui.

[Fukui]

Fukui was only about three leagues away, so after arranging an evening meal I set out. But the road in the falling dusk was hard to follow. In that town there was an old recluse named Tōsai. Long ago, in some forgotten year, he had come to Edo and visited me. More than ten years had passed since then. I asked people whether he had grown old and fallen into misery, or perhaps already died. They told me that he was still alive and living somewhere nearby.

Guided by what they said, I slipped quietly into a part of town and came to a poor little house. Bottle gourds and moonflowers climbed over it, and cockscomb flowers and broom plants half hid the narrow door. “Then it must be here,” I thought, and knocked at the gate. A worn-looking woman came out and said, “Are you perhaps a traveling monk? The master of this house has gone to visit someone nearby. If you have business with him, please go and look for him there.” From her manner, I knew she must be his wife.

It felt exactly like a scene from an old tale. I found him soon after, and then stayed with him for two nights in that house. The memory of Edo, the passing of years, and the worn quiet of his life all lay before me at once. He had not become grand, yet the very plainness of his life gave the meeting its depth. Sometimes seeing a man again after many years is more moving than seeing a famous place.

Then, saying that I wished to view the full moon at the harbor of Tsuruga, I set out once more. Tōsai too came with me to see me off, lifting his robe in a lively

way and happily serving as a guide along the road. His company gave warmth to the journey, and the sadness of parting was softened for a while by that cheerful help. So we went on together toward the coast.

[Tsuruga]

At last Mount Shirane disappeared behind us, and Mount Hina came into view. We crossed the bridge at Asamuzu, and the reeds at Tamae had already put out their plumes. We passed Uguisu Barrier, crossed the pass at Yuno-o, saw the old site of Hiuchi Castle, and heard the first wild geese near Kaeruyama. By the evening of the fourteenth day we reached the harbor town of Tsuruga and found a place to stay.

The moon that night was especially clear. I asked whether it might be just as fine on the following night too. The innkeeper said, “In the lands along this northern road, one can never know the weather of the next night.” He urged me to drink, and then I went out for a night visit to Kehi Shrine. It was the imperial burial place of Emperor Chūai. The shrine stood in ancient stillness, and moonlight fell between the pine trees upon the white sand before it, so that the ground looked as if frost had been spread there.

Long ago, the second Yugyō holy man had made a great vow there. He himself cut grass, carried earth and stones, and dried the wet ground so that people could come and go for worship without trouble. The custom from that time still continued. Even now, people carried sand before the shrine as an offering, and the innkeeper told me, “This is what we call the Yugyō sand-carrying.” Hearing that, and seeing the bright moon over the sand, I made a verse.

Clear moonlight—
on the sand carried here
by the wandering saint.

On the fifteenth day, just as the innkeeper had said, rain fell. Under that

uncertain northern sky, even the full moon could not be trusted to remain. I felt both disappointment and acceptance, for that too belonged to travel in the north. The weather itself seemed to teach impermanence.

The harvest moon—
in the north country weather
nothing stays certain.

[Iro Beach]

On the sixteenth day the sky cleared, and I took a boat to Iro Beach to gather the little shell called masuho no kogai. The way across the sea was seven leagues. A man called Ten'ya had carefully prepared broken food boxes and bamboo tubes for us, and many servants got into the boat with us. A fair wind rose, and before long we arrived. The shore was little more than a few poor fishermen's huts, and there was also a lonely temple called Hokkeji.

There we drank tea and warmed sake, and the sadness of evening became more than the heart could bear. Everything seemed poor and thin, yet that poverty itself gave the shore its beauty. The beach, the shell gathering, the temple, the fading light, and the wind from the sea all entered one feeling together. I made two poems there, one from the loneliness of the evening and one from the shells and autumn flowers mixed by the waves.

Loneliness—
on this beach of autumn
even Suma is defeated.

Between the waves,
mixed with little shells,
scattered bits of bush clover.

I had Tōsai write down the rough story of that day and leave it at the temple. In this way, the place was joined not only to old poems and old memory, but also to our own passing presence. A traveler leaves almost nothing behind, yet sometimes a few words, set down in the right place, are enough. When evening had fully fallen, the beach seemed to sink into a sadness that words could barely hold.

[Ōgaki]

Rotsū came out as far as this harbor to meet me and travel with me into Mino Province. Helped by a horse, I entered Ōgaki. There Sora too came from Ise and joined me again. Etsujin also came riding fast on horseback, and they all gathered at Jokō's house. Zensen, Keikō and his son, and many other close friends visited me day and night. It felt almost like meeting the living again after coming back from death, and they rejoiced over me while also showing deep concern.

Yet even after reaching Ōgaki, the weariness and dull sadness of travel had not fully left my body. The road was over, and yet not over. For a journey changes a man even after his feet stop moving. Still, the kindness of those friends brought me back into the world of ordinary human warmth. Their visits, their voices, and the fact that Sora was once more beside me filled the place with life.

Then, when the sixth day of the Ninth Month came, I wished to go and worship at the shrine in Ise. So I took a boat once more. The journey that had begun with parting now ended in another parting. The image that came to me was simple and exact: a clam whose two shells, once joined, are forced apart. So I made my final verse.

Like the two shells
of a clam parting at Futami—
autumn goes with us.