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Miyazawa Kenji, *“Gauche the Cellist” and Other Tales* (Simplified Edition,  
Adapted and Simplified from Japanese by ChatGPT)

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## Gauche the Cellist [Serohiki no Gōshu]

### Part 1

Gauche was the man who played the cello in the town movie theater orchestra. People said he was not very good, but that was too kind. The truth was that he was the weakest player in the whole group, and the conductor was always hard on him. One afternoon the players sat in a circle in the dressing room and practiced Beethoven's Sixth Symphony for the concert that would come in ten days. The trumpet sang with all its strength, the violin ran like wind, the clarinet growled below them, and Gauche stared at his music with wide eyes and played with all his heart.

Suddenly the conductor clapped his hands. The room became silent at once, and everyone looked up. The conductor glared at Gauche and shouted, "The cello was late. From there again. Ready." They started once more from a little before that place, and Gauche, his face burning red, pushed through it with sweat on his forehead. He had just begun to feel safe when the conductor stopped them again and cried, "Cello. Your strings are out of tune. I do not have time to teach you do-re-mi."

The other players looked down at their own music or touched their own instruments as if they had seen nothing. Gauche quickly fixed the strings, and he knew part of the trouble was his fault, though the old cello itself was not a good one. The conductor said coldly, "Again, from the bar before that." Gauche bent his mouth and played with all his strength, and this time they went farther. He thought, "Maybe I can get through it now," but again the conductor struck his hands together and the music broke apart.

This time another player had made a mistake, and Gauche pretended to study his music the way the others had done when he was the one being blamed. But only a moment later the conductor stamped his foot and shouted at him again. "No, no, this will not do. This place is the heart of the whole piece. You play it like dry

boards hitting each other. We have only ten days left, and if trained musicians like us lose to a group of blacksmiths and shop boys, what will become of our honor?" Then he fixed his eyes on Gauche and went on, "You do not show feeling. No anger, no joy, nothing. And you never fit exactly with the others. You sound like a man dragging a loose shoe string behind the group. Enough for today. Rest now, and be in your box at six."

The players bowed, lit cigarettes, and went out talking among themselves. Gauche turned toward the wall with his rough little cello in his arms, bit his lip, and tears fell down his face. But he wiped them away, straightened himself, and began to play the hard place again all alone, softly this time, from the beginning. He played not to show anyone anything, but because he could not bear to leave it as it was. The room was almost empty now, and every sound of his poor cello came back to him as if the bare walls themselves were laughing. Still he went on.

Late that night Gauche came home carrying a large black bundle on his back. His home was a broken watermill hut by the river at the edge of town, and he lived there alone. In the mornings he worked in the little field around it, cutting tomato branches or taking worms from the cabbages, and in the afternoons he went to the theater. He lit the lamp, unwrapped the bundle, and laid the cello carefully on the floor. Then he seized a cup, drank water from the bucket in great gulps, shook his head once, sat down on the chair, and began to play with the force of a tiger.

He played the afternoon's music again and again. He turned the pages, played, stopped, thought, began once more, and pushed on to the end, only to return to the first page and start over. The sound filled the little room until it seemed too small to hold it. Midnight passed, but Gauche did not know it. His face became redder and redder, his eyes were bloodshot, and he looked as if he might fall to the floor at any moment, yet his bow still moved and the rough sound still went on.

Sometimes he tried to remember the conductor's words exactly. "The heart of the piece," he muttered. "Feeling. Fit with the others." Then he would play a line once with anger, once with sorrow, once with the joy he imagined the others wanted, but nothing seemed right to him. "Why can I not do it?" he said aloud.

“Why do my hands know the notes, and still the music does not come out?” Outside, the river kept moving in the dark, and the wind touched the broken boards of the hut, but Gauche heard almost nothing except the cello and the hard beating of his own heart.

At last his arms began to feel strange, as if someone else were moving them. He could hardly tell whether he was playing the cello or whether the cello was playing him. The lamp flame shook, the floor seemed to tilt, and the sound grew wild and heavy in the room. Gauche bit his lip and forced himself through the difficult place once more, then once again, as if sheer effort could break open the music. Just then, from behind him, there came a quiet knocking on the door. Gauche stopped, stared into the dark, and said in a tired, angry voice, “Who is it at this hour?”

## Part 2

The door opened little by little, and a large calico cat slipped into the room as if it belonged there. In its mouth it carried a half-ripe tomato from Gauche’s own field, and it set the tomato down in front of him with great care. Then it stretched its back, gave a tired sigh, and said, “Ah, that was hard work. Carrying things is no easy job.” Gauche stared at it with burning eyes and said, “What did you say?” The cat blinked and answered in a calm voice, “It is a gift. Please eat it.”

All the anger that had filled Gauche since the afternoon suddenly burst out. He pointed at the tomato and shouted, “Who asked you to bring me a tomato? And why should I eat anything you bring me? That tomato is from my own field. It is not even red yet. You pulled it too early. And you were the one who bit the tomato vines and broke them before, were you not? Get out, you cat.” The cat made its shoulders round, narrowed its eyes, and smiled a little around the mouth as if Gauche were the foolish one.

“Sir,” the cat said, “if you grow so angry, it will be bad for your health. Instead, why not play Schumann’s ‘Träumerei’? I will listen.” Gauche felt his face

grow even hotter. "Do not talk like that," he said. "A cat has no business asking for Schumann." But the cat only sat there and licked one paw with slow care. "Please do not be shy," it said. "I cannot sleep unless I hear your music."

"Too proud. Too proud. Too proud," Gauche cried, stamping just as the conductor had stamped that afternoon. Then, all at once, an idea came to him, and his anger changed shape. He looked at the cat with a narrow smile and said, "Fine. I will play for you." At once he locked the door, shut every window tightly, took up his cello, and put out the lamp. Pale moonlight from the late month came into half the room, and the cat sat in that white light with its whiskers shining.

Gauche asked in a low voice, "What was it you wanted?" The cat wiped its mouth and answered with great pride, "Träumerei. A romantic piece by Schumann." Gauche tore his handkerchief into strips, stuffed them deep into his ears, and said, "I see. So that is what you want." Then, instead of the soft and dreaming music the cat had asked for, he drew his bow across the strings with the force of a storm and began to play "The Indian Tiger Hunt." The sound leaped through the little room like fire and iron, and the cat, after listening only a moment, suddenly flashed its eyes and jumped backward.

It rushed to the door and struck it with its body, but the door did not open. Then sparks began to fly from its eyes and forehead, and soon from its whiskers and nose as well. The cat twitched, sneezed, ran about the room, and threw itself against the wall, while Gauche, now almost laughing, played harder and harder. "Sir, that is enough," cried the cat. "Enough, please. I beg you to stop. I will never wave time for you again." Gauche shouted back, "Be quiet. I have only just reached the place where the tiger is caught."

The cat sprang high, spun round and round, and pressed itself against the wall so hard that the place where it touched shone pale blue for a moment. At last it raced about Gauche like a wheel in the wind, and even Gauche himself began to feel dizzy from the speed and noise. Then he stopped at last and said, "There. I forgive you now." The cat, to his surprise, became calm at once and said, "Sir, there is something very strange about your playing tonight." Gauche took a cigarette, put it in his mouth as if nothing had happened, struck a match, and said,

“Does your tongue feel sore? Show it to me.”

The cat, still trying to look proud, stuck out its long pointed tongue. Gauche said, “Ah, yes. It looks a little rough,” and at once struck the match on the cat’s tongue and lit his cigarette. The cat was so shocked that it waved its tongue round and round like a little red windmill. Then it rushed to the door again, knocked into it with its head, staggered back, rushed again, and kept doing the same thing as if it were trying to make a road out through the wood itself. Gauche watched for a while, greatly pleased, and at last said, “I will let you out. But do not come again, you fool.”

He opened the door, and the cat shot out through the grass like an arrow in the dark. Gauche stood there a little longer, laughed once under his breath, and felt lighter than he had felt all day. The room was still full of the wild noise of the cello, but now the silence underneath it seemed deeper and kinder. He put the instrument down with more care than before, lay down without even undressing properly, and fell asleep at once. The next night he carried the black bundle home again, drank water in great gulps, sat in the same chair, and began once more to play with all his strength.

### Part 3

Gauche went on playing until it was past midnight, then past one, then past two, and still he did not stop. The music roared and swelled until he no longer knew the hour, and at last he no longer knew whether he was truly awake or not. Then, through the noise, he heard a light tapping above him, as if someone were knocking on the ceiling of the little hut. Without turning, he shouted, “Cat, are you still not tired of this?” At once something dropped through a hole in the ceiling with a soft sound, and when Gauche looked down, he saw a gray bird standing on the floor. It was a cuckoo.

Gauche frowned and said, “Now a bird has come too. What do you want?” The cuckoo answered in a neat, serious voice, “I want to learn music.” Gauche gave a short laugh and said, “Music? Your song is only ‘cuckoo, cuckoo.’ That is

all you ever do.” The cuckoo bowed its head a little and replied, “Yes, that is exactly the trouble. It is difficult, you see.” Gauche snorted and said, “Difficult? Nonsense. The only hard thing about your singing is that you do too much of it.” But the cuckoo answered more earnestly than before, “No, it is difficult. One ‘cuckoo’ and another ‘cuckoo’ are not the same at all if you truly listen.”

Gauche said, “They sound the same to me.” The cuckoo lifted itself proudly and answered, “Then you do not understand. If one of us sings ‘cuckoo’ ten thousand times, every one of those calls is different.” Gauche waved his hand and said, “Then do as you please. If you understand your own song so well, why come to me?” The cuckoo said, “Because I want to sing do-re-mi-fa correctly.” Gauche burst out, “Do-re-mi-fa? What has that to do with you?” The cuckoo answered, “Before I go abroad, I must learn it once, properly.”

Gauche was now both annoyed and amused. “Abroad?” he said. “That is rich. Fine, then. I will play it for you three times, and when I am done, you go at once.” He took up the cello, matched the strings with a rough rolling sound, and played a simple scale: “Do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-do.” The cuckoo beat its wings in alarm and cried, “No, no. Not like that. That is wrong.” Gauche stopped at once and said, “Wrong? Then you do it.” The cuckoo bent its body forward, held still for a moment, and then gave one careful cry: “Cuckoo.”

Gauche stared and said, “What is that? Is that your do-re-mi-fa? To creatures like you, I suppose do-re-mi-fa and Beethoven are the same thing.” The cuckoo replied, “No, they are not the same. The hard thing is when that cry goes on and on and on.” Gauche said, “Oh, you mean like this, then,” and he drew the bow again, making the cello repeat the note in the shape of the bird’s call: “cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo.” The cuckoo became delighted at once, and before long it joined in, crying, “Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo,” with its whole body bending forward each time. It did not stop. Gauche’s hand began to ache, but the bird went on with complete seriousness, as if its very life depended on it.

At last Gauche cried, “Enough. Will you stop now?” The cuckoo, its eyes lifted and its body still tense, gave a few last broken cries and then said, “Please, once more. Yours is good, but it is still a little different.” Gauche stared at it in

anger. "What is that supposed to mean? I am not here to take lessons from you. Out with you." But the cuckoo lowered its head again and again and pleaded, "Please. Only once more. I beg you." Gauche muttered, "This is unbearable," but he raised the bow once more, and the cuckoo drew one sharp breath and said, "Then please make it as long as you can."

Gauche began again, and once more the cuckoo followed with complete devotion. Its cry was no longer comic to him. The longer he played, the more he began to feel that the bird, not he, was closer to the true note it wanted. The sound was simple, but it was so fixed, so exact, so stubbornly alive that Gauche felt something strange inside himself. "This is absurd," he thought. "If I go on much longer, I will turn into a bird." With that he stopped the cello suddenly. The cuckoo staggered as if struck on the head, gave a few weak last calls, and then looked at Gauche almost with pain.

"Why did you stop?" it said. "Even the weakest one among us would go on until blood came from the throat." Gauche pointed toward the window and cried, "Impudent creature. How long do you think I can keep up this foolishness? Get out. Look there. Dawn is coming." In the east the sky had turned pale silver, and black clouds ran northward across it in long strips. But the cuckoo bowed again and said, "Then until the sun rises, please. Just once more. Only a little." Gauche stamped hard on the floor and shouted, "Silence. One more word, and I will pluck you and eat you for breakfast, you stupid bird."

The cuckoo sprang up in terror and flew straight toward the window. It struck the glass with a hard crash and fell to the floor. Gauche ran toward it and said, "Fool, that is glass," and tried to pull the stiff window open, but the old frame would not move. While he struggled with it, the cuckoo rose and hurled itself against the glass again. This time a little blood came from the base of its beak. "Wait, I am opening it," Gauche cried, and at last he forced the window up a little. But even then the bird, wild with fear and longing for the pale eastern sky, flew once more at the unopened part and fell back senseless.

Gauche reached out to catch it and carry it to the door, but the cuckoo opened its eyes, leaped away from his hand, and prepared to throw itself at the window

yet again. At that, Gauche lifted his leg and kicked the whole frame with all his strength. Several panes shattered with a terrible sound, and the window fell outward in its frame. Through the great empty space the cuckoo shot like an arrow into the whitening sky, and it flew straight on and on until at last it vanished completely. Gauche stood for some time staring after it, unable to move, and then, as if his strength had been cut through, he fell over in the corner of the room and slept.

#### Part 4

The next night Gauche played until after midnight again, and when he had grown tired and stopped to drink a cup of water, someone knocked softly at the door. He thought, "Tonight, whoever comes, I will frighten him away at once, before he begins any foolish lesson," and he stood waiting with the cup still in his hand. The door opened a little, and a young raccoon dog came in. Gauche at once pulled the door wider open, stamped the floor hard, and shouted, "You there, raccoon dog, do you know what raccoon-dog soup is?" The little animal sat neatly on the floor, bent its head to one side, thought for some time, and then answered in a slow voice, "No. I do not know."

Gauche almost burst out laughing, but he kept a fierce face and said, "Then I will teach you. Raccoon-dog soup is made by putting a creature like you into a pot with cabbage and salt and boiling it until I can eat it." The little raccoon dog looked more puzzled than frightened. "But my father said you were a very good man," it answered. "He said, 'Go to Gauche. He is not frightening, and he will teach you properly.'" At that Gauche could not help himself any longer and laughed aloud.

"Teach you what?" he said. "I am busy. And I am sleepy besides." At once the little raccoon dog came one step nearer, as if courage had suddenly entered its body. "I am in charge of the small drum," it said. "I was told to come and practice with your cello." Gauche looked about the room and said, "There is no drum here." The little animal quickly pulled out two short sticks from behind its back and said,

“Here they are.” Gauche stared. “And what will you do with those?” he asked.

The raccoon dog answered, “Please play ‘The Merry Coachman.’” Then it pulled out a piece of music from behind its back as well and offered it proudly. Gauche took it, looked at it, and laughed again. “This is a strange piece,” he said. “Very well, I will play it. Let me see what sort of drummer you are.” He began to play, watching the little visitor from the corner of his eye, and at once the raccoon dog began to beat time with the two sticks on the lower part of the cello near the bridge: “pon, pon, pon.” It did it so neatly, with such steady time and such cheerful seriousness, that before the piece ended Gauche found himself thinking, “This is rather fun.”

When they finished, the raccoon dog bent its head and thought for a long while. At last it lifted its face and said carefully, “When you pull the second string, you are a little late. It makes me feel as if I stumble.” Gauche gave a start. Since the night before, he had indeed felt that one string did not answer at once, even when his hand moved quickly. He said sadly, “Yes, perhaps that is true. This cello is bad.” The little raccoon dog looked full of sympathy, then bent close and listened to the instrument as if it were a living thing.

“I wonder what is wrong with it,” it murmured. “Would you play it again?” Gauche said, “Of course I will,” and began once more. The raccoon dog tapped exactly as before, but now from time to time it put its ear near the cello itself, listening not only to the tune but to the body of the instrument, the way a careful workman listens to wood. Gauche had never thought of the cello in that way. He played more carefully now, and without noticing it he began to keep better time, not only for the raccoon dog but for the instrument itself. By the time they finished again, the east had begun to grow pale.

“Ah, dawn is coming,” said the little raccoon dog in alarm. “Thank you very much.” It hurriedly strapped the music and the drumsticks to its back with a bit of rubber, bowed two or three times, and ran out. Gauche remained sitting still for a while, breathing the cool air that came in through the broken window. Then he muttered, “So it was the second string after all,” and crawled into bed, hoping to sleep a little before he had to go into town. He had hardly closed his eyes when

the next night seemed to come.

Once again he played through the night. Near dawn, with the music still in his hands, he fell half asleep in the chair, and then he heard a very faint tapping at the door, so faint that he might not have noticed it on any other night. But now he was used to strange visitors, so he said at once, "Come in." Through the crack of the door came a field mouse, and beside her walked a tiny child so small it was like a little bit of gray rubber. Gauche could not help laughing when he saw the size of it, and the mother mouse, wondering what had been laughed at, looked nervously about before placing a blue chestnut in front of him and bowing very low.

"Sir," she said, "this child is very ill and near death. Please be kind and cure him." Gauche frowned and answered, "How should I cure him? I am no doctor." The mouse lowered her head and was silent for a moment, then said with sudden force, "Sir, that is not true. Every day you cure so many people with your wonderful playing." Gauche blinked. "What are you talking about?" he said. The mouse answered, "Why, Rabbit grandmother got well because of you, and Raccoon Dog father got well because of you, and even that cruel owl got well because of you. Is it possible that only my child will be left without help?"

Gauche stared at her and then laughed in astonishment. "You have the wrong man," he said. "I have never cured an owl in my life. The little raccoon dog did come last night and pretend to be in a band, but that is all." At that the mother mouse began to cry. "Ah, if only this child had fallen sick earlier," she wailed. "Until a moment ago your great sound was shaking the whole place, but the instant my child became ill, the sound stopped. And now, no matter how I beg, you will not play. What a miserable child this is." Gauche jumped up and cried, "What? When I play the cello, do sick animals get well? What do you mean?"

The mother mouse rubbed her eyes and said, "Yes, sir. When creatures here become sick, they all go under your floor to be cured." Gauche said, "And do they recover there?" She answered, "Yes. The blood begins to move through the whole body, and it feels wonderfully warm. Some get well at once. Some go home and get well after that." Gauche stood still for a moment, then said slowly, "So the

sound of my cello shakes the ground, and for you it is like a massage. I see. Very well then. I will do it.” He quickly tightened the strings, picked up the child mouse in his fingers, and dropped him through one of the cello’s sound holes.

“I will go too,” cried the mother in panic, leaping toward the cello. “In every hospital the mother goes with the child.” Gauche tried to push her through the hole as well, but only half her face would go in. The mother flapped wildly and called down, “Are you all right in there? Did you fall properly? Put your feet together the way I taught you.” From deep inside the cello came a voice thin as a mosquito. “Yes. I fell all right.” Gauche set the mother down and said, “Then be quiet and do not cry out,” and he began to play a rhapsody with a great roaring sound.

The mother mouse listened in terrible worry, her whole body shaking with every wave of sound. At last she could bear no more and cried, “That is enough. Please take him out.” Gauche stopped and said, “Already?” He bent the cello and held his hand under the hole, and after a moment the little mouse child came out. Gauche placed him silently on the floor. The child kept its eyes shut and trembled for a little while, then suddenly leaped up and ran. “He is well, he is well,” cried the mother, running after him, and then she came back again and again, bowing and saying, “Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.”

Gauche felt something inside him become soft and painful all at once. “Tell me,” he said awkwardly, “do you mice eat bread?” The mother was startled and looked around as if she feared a trap. “I have heard,” she said, “that bread is made from wheat flour, and that it is soft and swollen and very good. But we have never gone to a cupboard, and after such kindness from you, how could we dare to carry such a thing away?” Gauche said, “That is not what I mean. I only asked whether you can eat it. Wait there.” He laid the cello down, tore off a small piece of bread from the shelf, and placed it before her. The mother mouse at once seemed almost mad with joy, crying and laughing and bowing all together. Then she took the bread with great care, set her child ahead of her, and went out into the dawn. Gauche dropped heavily onto his bed and said to himself, “Even talking with mice is enough to tire a man,” and in a moment he was asleep.

## Part 5

Six days passed after that. On the sixth night the players of the Venus Orchestra came back all together into the waiting room behind the public hall stage, their faces hot, their instruments in their hands, talking in excited voices as they came. They had finished Beethoven's Sixth Symphony without disaster, and from the hall the applause still came like a storm. The conductor walked up and down among them with his hands in his pockets as if applause did not matter to him at all, but the truth was that he was full of joy. The players lit cigarettes, put instruments into their cases, laughed a little, and listened.

But the clapping in the hall did not die away. Instead it grew louder and sharper until it sounded almost frightening, as if the whole building had become one great pair of hands. Then the master of ceremonies came in, wearing a broad white ribbon on his chest, and said, "They are calling for an encore. Could you give them something short?" The conductor stiffened at once and answered, "No. After a large work like that, nothing else will come out the way it should." The man said, "Then at least, would you come out and bow?"

"No," said the conductor again. Then he turned suddenly, looked through the room, and said, "Gauche, you go." Gauche stared at him and cried, "Me?" At once the first violin raised his head and said, "Yes, you. You go." The conductor added, "Go on, then. Quickly." Before Gauche could resist, the others pushed the cello into his hands, opened the door, and sent him straight onto the stage.

Gauche came out carrying that old cello with the hole in it, and the audience, seeing him, clapped harder still. Some people even shouted. Gauche felt all at once that they must be mocking him, and the blood rushed up into his face. "So they want to make a fool of me," he thought. "Good. Then I will play 'The Indian Tiger Hunt.' Let them hear that." And just as he had played for the cat, he walked to the middle of the stage, planted his feet, and began.

He played with the force of an angry elephant. The bow drove forward, the cello roared, and the strange wild piece leaped out over the hall. Gauche did not

once look at the audience. He played the place where the cat had thrown sparks from its eyes, and then the place where it had rushed at the door again and again, and then the rough crashing part that had once filled his hut and spun the room around him. He went on and on with complete seriousness, and before long the whole hall had fallen silent.

No one laughed. No one whispered. The people listened with all their strength, just as if the music had pulled them into some fierce forest they had never seen before. Gauche felt it, though he did not fully understand it, and because of that he played with even more power and even more truth. There was no conductor now, no players around him, no shame, no fear, only the sound moving forward from inside him. When at last the piece ended, he did not bow at all, but turned at once and ran off the stage with the cello in his arms just as quickly as the cat had once fled from his hut.

When he reached the waiting room, he stopped in surprise. The conductor and all the players were sitting there in complete silence with fixed faces, like people who had just come safely through a fire. Gauche thought, "Now it has happened. I have done something terrible," and because he had gone too far already, he walked straight through them without a word. Then he dropped onto the long bench at the far side of the room, crossed one leg over the other, and sat there with a hard face, ready for whatever would come.

Then all at once every one of them turned and looked at him. Still no one smiled. Still no one laughed. Gauche felt more and more uneasy and thought, "What a strange night this is." At last the conductor stood up and said, "Gauche, that was good. It was a strange piece, of course, but the people here listened to it seriously. You have improved a great deal in a week or ten days. Compared with ten days ago, you are like a soldier next to a baby. If you had wanted to do it, you could always have done it, could you not?"

One by one the others came nearer and said, "Well done, Gauche," and "That was fine," and "You surprised us." Gauche could only stare at them. From the other side of the room he heard the conductor saying, half to himself, "His body is strong, that is why he can do it. An ordinary man would have died trying."

Gauche did not know whether that was praise or scolding, but for the first time he did not much care. The words of the others, awkward though they were, warmed him more than he wanted to show.

Very late that night Gauche returned alone to his hut by the river. As always, he took a cup and drank water in great gulps, and then he stood quietly for a while without lighting the lamp again. At last he went to the broken window, opened it wider, and looked out toward the far sky where he remembered the cuckoo had flown away into the dawn. The night air was cool, and the dark field lay still under it. Gauche looked a long time, and then he said softly, "Ah, Cuckoo. I was wrong then. I was not truly angry with you."

## The Cat Office [Neko no Jimusho]

### Part 1

Near the small railway station there stood the Sixth Cat Office. It was a place where cats came to ask about geography and history. The clerks there wore short black satin coats, and all the other cats respected them very much. Whenever one clerk left his place, young cats all around the town became excited and tried to win that seat. But there were always only four clerks in the office, so only one among many hopeful cats could be chosen. The one who wrote best and could read poems best was usually the one who won.

The head of the office was a large black cat. He was already a little old and dull in some ways, but his eyes were still bright and strong, and they seemed to have wires of copper deep inside them. Under him worked four clerks. The first clerk was a white cat, the second a tiger cat, the third a tortoiseshell cat, and the fourth a soot-colored kitchen cat. This last one was not born that way. He had the habit of sleeping inside kitchen stoves at night, so soot always covered his body, and his nose and ears were black as coal.

For that reason the kitchen cat was disliked by other cats. They thought he looked dirty, and some even said he looked more like a raccoon dog than a cat. Still, because the head of the office was himself a black cat, he had chosen this kitchen cat from forty others. The kitchen cat was quick, careful, and very good at study, and that was why he had been allowed into the office at all. In any ordinary place, no matter how well he studied, he would never have been given such work. So he was proud of his place, and he tried very hard never to make a mistake.

In the middle of the large office stood the head clerk's great table covered with red cloth. On his right sat the white cat and the tortoiseshell cat. On his left sat the tiger cat and, at the far end, the kitchen cat. Each had a small table, a chair, and a large record book. They sat straight and neat, and from outside the room they looked like very wise officials. You may ask, "What use are geography and

history to cats?" Well, the work was like this.

One day there came a knock at the door. "Come in," shouted the black head clerk, leaning back with both hands in his pockets. The four clerks lowered their faces and pretended to be very busy with their books. A rich cat entered the room, bowed a little, and said, "I wish to travel to the Bering region and eat glacier mice. Which place is best?" The head clerk nodded and said, "First clerk, state the best places where glacier mice are found." The white cat opened a large blue book at once and answered, "Usteragomena, Novaskia, and the basin of the Fusa River."

The head clerk turned grandly to the visitor and said, "Yes, yes, Ustera... Nova... what was the second one?" The rich cat and the first clerk said together, "Novaskia." The head clerk cleared his throat and said, "Of course. Novaskia. And then... what else?" Again they answered together, "The Fusa River." The head clerk looked a little ashamed, but at once recovered himself and said, "Yes, yes, the Fusa River. Those places should be good." Then the rich cat asked, "And what should I be careful about on such a trip?" The head clerk said, "Second clerk, explain the cautions for travel in the Bering region."

The tiger cat turned the pages of his book and read in an official voice, "Summer cats are not fit for the journey at all. Winter cats also need very great care. Near Hakodate there is danger of being lured by horse meat. Black cats especially must make it clear that they are truly cats. If they do not, they may be mistaken for black foxes and chased in earnest." At those words all three clerks gave a quick sideways look toward the kitchen cat. The head clerk said to the visitor, "There, you see. Since you are not a black cat like me, you need not worry too much. Just be careful of horse meat near Hakodate." The rich cat nodded and said, "I understand. Then who are the strong and important cats in that region?"

"Third clerk," said the head, "give the names of the important persons in the Bering region." The tortoiseshell cat answered, "Tobaski and Genzoski. There are two." The rich cat asked, "And what sort of cats are they?" At once the head clerk said, "Fourth clerk, give a short account of Tobaski and Genzoski." The kitchen cat had already placed one paw in one part of the great book and another paw in the next, waiting for the question before it even came. The visitor noticed this,

and even the head clerk seemed impressed. But the other three clerks looked at him from the side and smiled a cold, mocking smile.

The kitchen cat read with all his strength, “Chief Tobaski has great respect among his people. His eyes are sharp, though he speaks rather slowly. Genzoski is rich. He also speaks rather slowly, though his eyes too are sharp.” “Very good,” said the rich cat. “That tells me enough. Thank you.” He bowed and went out. So the office was truly useful to cats. Questions came, answers were given, names and places were searched, and the four clerks worked from morning to evening. Yet, even in the middle of this useful work, a poison had already begun to spread through the room.

The three upper clerks had slowly come to hate the kitchen cat. The tortoiseshell cat hated him most of all, because he wanted very badly to do the fourth clerk’s work himself. The kitchen cat felt this, though he did not fully understand why. He tried many small things to win their good opinion. He sat neatly, answered quickly, bowed carefully, and even smiled when they looked at him in their dry, unpleasant way. But nothing helped. The more he tried to be kind and careful, the more foolish he seemed to them.

One day, near noon, the tiger cat opened his lunch box on his desk. Just as he was about to begin eating, a great yawn came over him. He stretched both his short forelegs as high as he could and opened his mouth wide. Among cats this was not rude at all, but as he pushed his feet against the floor, his table tilted a little. The lunch box slid across the desk, slipped off the edge, and fell with a clatter onto the floor right in front of the head clerk. The box was made of aluminum, so it did not break, but it rolled and moved from side to side. The tiger cat leaned over and stretched his paws toward it, but because his arms were too short he could not reach it.

The black head clerk, chewing bread, laughed and said, “You cannot get it, can you?” At that very moment the kitchen cat had just lifted the lid of his own lunch box. Seeing the trouble, he jumped up quickly, picked up the fallen box, and held it out with both paws. But the tiger cat suddenly became very angry. He pulled his hands behind his back, shook his body wildly, and shouted, “What do

you mean by that? Do you mean to tell me to eat a lunch box that has fallen on the floor?" The kitchen cat blinked and answered in a weak voice, "No. I only thought you were trying to pick it up, so I picked it up for you."

"When did I say I wanted to pick it up?" cried the tiger cat. "I was only trying to push it under my desk. It had fallen in front of the head clerk. That was rude, so I meant to hide it." The kitchen cat bowed and said, "I see. I only thought it was moving so much that..." "What?" shouted the tiger cat. "How dare you? A duel..." But just then the head clerk cried out loudly, making a great rattling sound to stop the word before it was fully spoken. "No fighting," he said. "There is no need for that. The kitchen cat did not pick it up in order to force you to eat it. And by the way, Tiger Cat, I forgot to tell you this morning, but your pay has gone up by ten sen."

At once the tiger cat's face changed. He bowed to the head clerk and said, "I am very sorry for the trouble." Then he sat down again, but before turning to his work he gave the kitchen cat one long, cold look. The kitchen cat also sat down, yet his own lunch no longer seemed pleasant to him. He felt heat in his face and a tight pain in his chest. He told himself, "I only meant to help. I must be more careful next time." But even while he thought that, he had the sad feeling that any next time would go no better.

## Part 2

After that, five or six more days passed, and then a very similar thing happened again. Such accidents happened often among cats for two reasons. One was that cats are lazy by nature, and the other was that their forelegs, which must serve as hands, are too short. This time it was the tortoiseshell cat on the other side of the room. Before work began in the morning, her brush rolled little by little across the desk and fell to the floor.

The tortoiseshell cat could easily have stood up and picked it up. But she hated to trouble herself, so she leaned over the desk and stretched out both hands just the way the tiger cat had done before. Of course she could not reach it. She

leaned farther and farther, and because she was especially short, her body went out too far, and at last her feet slipped from the chair. The kitchen cat watched with wide, blinking eyes. He remembered the terrible trouble of the lunch box, and for some moments he could not decide whether to help or not.

At last he could bear it no longer and rose from his chair. But at that exact moment the tortoiseshell cat leaned out too far, lost her balance completely, and fell with a crash from her chair to the floor, hitting her head hard against the edge of the desk. The sound was so violent that even the black head clerk started up in alarm and reached at once to the shelf behind him for a bottle of ammonia. Yet almost as soon as she had fallen, the tortoiseshell cat sprang up again in blind anger and shouted, "Kitchen cat, you pushed me over. You did that on purpose."

The kitchen cat trembled and could not speak at all. This time, however, the head clerk spoke quickly and calmed the tortoiseshell cat down. "No, no, Third Clerk, that is your mistake," he said. "Kitchen Cat only stood up in kindness. He did not touch you. Such tiny matters are not worth this shouting. Let us go on. Now then, the notice about Santontan's change of residence... yes, where was it?" So the work began again. The tortoiseshell cat, still angry, had no choice but to return to her desk, though from time to time she sent the kitchen cat a long cruel look.

That was the way things were for him. It was a hard life, and no day passed easily. The kitchen cat even tried many times to become an ordinary cat. He tried sleeping outside by the window at night instead of in a stove, but the cold always entered his bones, and before dawn he would begin to sneeze and shake so badly that in the end he always crawled back into the warm ashes again. "Why am I like this?" he thought. "Why is my skin so thin?" Then he answered himself, "It is because I was born in the hottest season. It cannot be helped. It is my fault."

So he blamed himself for everything. Still, when he thought of the honor of working in the Sixth Office, and when he remembered how many cats would have been proud to sit in his place, he clenched his little paws and said, "I must not leave. I must bear it. The head clerk has shown kindness to me. No matter how hard it is, I will stay." He said this, but tears filled his round eyes even while he

said it. And after a time even the black head clerk, on whom he had placed so much hope, became unreliable.

One unlucky day the kitchen cat caught a cold. The place where his hind leg joined his body swelled up like a bowl, and he could not walk at all. For the first time he had to stay away from the office. He rolled on the floor of the shed where he lived, weeping with pain and shame. All day long he rubbed his eyes and cried while yellow light came in through the little window. "They will think I am lazy," he said. "They will think I do not care for my work. Oh, if only I could stand, if only I could crawl there."

But in the office, things went differently. In the middle of the morning the head clerk said, "That is odd. Kitchen Cat is late today." The white cat answered, "Oh, perhaps he has gone to the coast for pleasure." The tiger cat said, "No, no. He has probably been invited to some banquet." At that the head clerk turned and asked in surprise, "A banquet? Is there a banquet today?" For he believed there could hardly be any cat banquet to which he himself had not been invited. The tiger cat replied, "I heard there is some opening ceremony in the north."

"Is that so?" said the black cat, and he fell silent. Then the tortoiseshell cat spoke very softly, as though she had almost not meant to say it. "Kitchen Cat is being invited to many places these days. I hear he has even said that he may become head clerk himself before long. So all the fools are hurrying to flatter him while they still can." At once the old black cat's face changed. "Is that true?" he cried. "Perfectly true," said the tortoiseshell cat, pointing her sharp mouth forward. "You can inquire for yourself if you doubt it."

The head clerk's pride had now been touched. "Shocking," he muttered. "I have shown him special favor. I have raised him from the crowd. And this is how he repays me? Very well. I also know how to think." After that the office became very quiet. The next day the kitchen cat, overjoyed because the swelling had finally gone down a little, came early through a roaring wind to the office. But the moment he entered, his heart began to beat violently, for the great record book that always lay on his desk was gone. It had been divided up and placed on the three other desks.

“Ah,” he whispered in a hoarse voice, “they must have been terribly busy yesterday.” He tried to say it as if it were natural, but his chest shook. Then the door opened, and the tortoiseshell cat came in. The kitchen cat stood up at once and said, “Good morning.” The tortoiseshell cat said nothing, sat down, and began turning pages in a show of business. Then the tiger cat came. Again the kitchen cat stood and bowed. Again there was no answer to him. The tiger cat only said, “Good morning. What dreadful wind,” to the tortoiseshell cat.

Then the white cat entered. The tiger cat and tortoiseshell cat greeted him warmly together, and he answered them at once. The kitchen cat rose again and bowed low, but the white cat behaved as if he had seen nothing. Last of all the head clerk came in, saying, “What terrible weather.” The three others sprang up and bowed. The kitchen cat also stood and bowed with his head down, but the black cat did not look at him even once. He spoke over him as if he were already absent from the room.

Work began at once. “Today,” said the head clerk, “we must finish yesterday’s question about the Ammoniatuck brothers. Second Clerk, which of them went to the South Pole?” The kitchen cat sat with his face lowered. He had no book now. It was his task, he knew it, yet there was nothing before him, and when he tried to speak, no sound would come. The tiger cat answered in his place. Then the head clerk turned to the white cat and said, “Good. Give the details.” The white cat opened the very book that had been taken from the kitchen cat’s desk and read aloud from it without the smallest shame.

“Ah, that is my work,” the kitchen cat thought, and the corners of his face began to ache with sorrow. The room soon grew busy, almost like a pot of water coming to a boil, and the work moved on faster and faster. From time to time one of the others glanced toward him, but not one word was spoken to him. At noon he did not open the lunch he had brought. He only sat with both hands on his knees and kept his eyes on the floor. At last, after one o’clock, he began to cry quietly. Then he cried harder. Then he stopped and began again.

For three hours he wept on and off while the others went on with cheerful faces as if nothing in the room had changed. They turned pages, read answers,

asked questions, and even smiled a little. The kitchen cat's tears fell one by one to the floor. He felt as though the whole office had become far away from him and that he no longer sat among living companions at all. And just at that time, though none of the cats noticed it, beyond the window behind the head clerk there appeared the great golden head of a lion, looking in with grave surprise.

### Part 3

The golden lion's head remained for a moment beyond the window behind the head clerk, grave and terrible, with its eyes fixed on the room. The cats inside had not yet noticed it. The white cat was still reading from the kitchen cat's own record book, the tiger cat was turning pages in a busy way, the tortoiseshell cat was pretending to write, and the black head clerk sat heavily at the red table as if the room still belonged to him. Only the kitchen cat, weeping with his face bent low, felt that something in the air had changed.

The lion watched them in silence for a little while longer. Then, all at once, there came a hard knocking at the door, so strong that the whole office shook. Before any cat could answer, the door opened and the lion came in. The confusion among the cats was beyond words. They ran first one way and then another, their chairs scraping, their books half falling, their eyes wide with fear. Only the kitchen cat stopped crying, rose from his chair, and stood upright.

The lion looked around the room once, slowly and sternly. Then he spoke in a deep, clear voice that filled the whole office from wall to wall. "What are you doing here?" he said. "Is this an office for history and geography, or is it a nest of spiteful fools?" No one answered. The black head clerk opened his mouth a little, but no words came out. The white cat lowered his face. The tiger cat swallowed hard. The tortoiseshell cat seemed to shrink into her own chair.

The lion took one step farther in and said, "You there, black head clerk. Is this how you rule your office? You sit in honor while your clerks mock and torment one another. You let work be stolen from the weakest one. You let tears fall in front of you for three hours, and still you do not speak. And you three there,

what are you so proud of? Geography and history are nothing in the mouths of creatures like you.” The black cat trembled and tried at last to smile in a humble way. “Your Excellency,” he said, “there has been some small misunderstanding.”

“Misunderstanding?” roared the lion, and the very books seemed to tremble at the sound. “Do not say such a cheap word. I saw enough from the window. I saw the one who wept. I saw the others turn away. I saw the work taken from him. And I saw you, who should have protected him, pretending not to see.” The black cat pressed both paws together and bowed. “I had intended,” he murmured, “to correct matters gradually.” But the lion answered at once, “A wrong that is seen and left standing is not corrected gradually. It is approved.”

The kitchen cat stood still, hardly breathing. He did not know whether he should feel shame, relief, or fear. The lion turned toward him for a moment, and his eyes grew gentler, though his face remained severe. “Did you wish to continue this work?” he asked. The kitchen cat tried to answer, but at first his voice did not come. Then at last he said, very softly, “Yes. I wished to do my work well. I wished to stay.” The lion nodded once, then turned back to the others.

“And yet,” said the lion, “there can be no proper work in a place like this. Learning without fairness is empty. Rank without kindness is filth. You all wear black coats and sit at desks, and because of that other cats respect you. But what should they respect? Your vanity? Your cowardice? Your little tricks?” The three upper clerks shook violently, but still none of them spoke. The lion’s tail moved once across the floor. Then he said, with terrible firmness, “Enough. This office is finished.”

The black head clerk gave a little cry and leaned forward over the red cloth. “Finished?” he said. “Your Excellency, please. If the Sixth Office is closed, what will become of our duties?” The lion answered, “Duties? You have already forgotten them. You are not keeping an office now. You are only keeping chairs.” The white cat suddenly fell from his seat and bowed again and again. “Please forgive us,” he said. “We were only joking a little.” The lion looked down at him coldly and said, “A joke that drives one creature to tears all day is not a joke.”

Then the tiger cat, perhaps thinking of his raised salary and his fine place,

cried out in a high voice, “But that kitchen cat is strange. He sleeps in a stove. He looks dirty. We only—” The lion stopped him before he could finish. “Be silent,” he said. “If you despise a creature for soot on his face, then you have learned less than dust.” The tiger cat at once threw himself flat on the floor. The tortoiseshell cat also began to speak, but her words broke apart into frightened sounds, and she too could do nothing except bow and shiver.

The lion lifted his great head and gave the order. “I command that this office be dissolved. There will be no more Sixth Cat Office.” The words fell through the room like stones. The black head clerk sat as if all strength had gone out of him. The white cat and the tiger cat stared at one another in terror. The tortoiseshell cat covered her face with both paws. Only the kitchen cat, though his legs shook, felt a strange stillness enter his heart. He was sad, because the place he had worked so hard to keep was gone. Yet at the same time he knew that what had happened was just.

The lion turned once more toward the kitchen cat and said, “You should leave this place with your head up.” The kitchen cat bowed deeply, and tears came again, but not the same tears as before. “Thank you,” he said. “I was clumsy, and I could not make them like me. But I truly wished to work.” The lion answered, “I know.” After that he turned without another word and went out through the door. No cat tried to stop him. No cat even lifted a paw.

So the Sixth Cat Office was abolished. Perhaps some cats were sorry because an honored place had been lost. Perhaps others were sorry only because their fine black coats would no longer be admired in the same way. As for the kitchen cat, I think he was hurt, and lonely, and confused, but I also think he was saved. And for my own part, I must say that I am half on the lion’s side.

## The Pig at the Flandon Agricultural School [Furandon Nōgakkō no Buta]

### Part 1

At the Flandon Agricultural School there was a pig that had learned to accept almost anything. In a book it was written that pigs could take in nearly every kind of material that was not stone or metal and turn it into fat or flesh, so the helpers and servants at the school threw all kinds of things into its pen. The pig did not think much about this, because it had grown used to such treatment from birth. On some evenings it even felt proud of its strange life and looked up toward heaven with something like thanks. One evening a first-year student of chemistry came and stared at the pig with wide, curious eyes, and at last he said, “A pig is a very strange creature. It eats water, slippers, and straw, and turns them into the finest meat and fat. A pig is like a living catalyst. In the world of dead things there is platinum, and in the world of living things there is a pig.”

The pig heard this very clearly. It also knew that platinum was worth a great deal of money, so it quickly made a calculation in its own mind. “If platinum is worth that much,” it thought, “and if my body weighs this much, then I too must be worth a fortune.” It bent its front legs, half closed its small angry-looking eyes, and worked out the sum. When it decided that its own body must be worth an enormous amount, it felt like a first-class gentleman, and it twisted its big mouth with a foolish, happy smile. But this happy feeling did not last long.

Two or three days later a heap of food fell into the pen as usual, and inside it the pig found something long and white with short hairs at one end. It was, to speak plainly, a toothbrush. The moment it saw those hairs, every hair on the pig’s own body seemed to shake and whisper like dry grass in the wind. It stared at the thing for a long time with a strange face, then suddenly buried its head in the straw and rolled over as if it could not bear the sight. By evening it rose again, but only a gray and cold feeling remained in it. “What are they thinking when they look at me?” it wondered. “They feed me, yes, but when they stare at my body, their eyes are hard and cold like a winter sky. Oh, that is frightening.”

The teacher of animal science came every day and measured the pig's living weight with sharp eyes. One day he said to his young assistant in the pale blue coat, "Shut the windows properly and keep the room dark. Otherwise the fat will not come well. And it may be time now to begin real fattening. Give him a little flaxseed oil every day." The pig heard every word. It could hardly swallow the flaxseed after that, and it thought with growing fear, "They are planning something. They are making me into something. They are not looking at me as a creature at all." Then another thing made its fear still worse. A royal law had been announced in that country saying that anyone who wished to kill a farm animal must first receive a written agreement from that animal, and the animal had to place its own mark on the paper.

So in those days, before a horse or cow was killed, the owner forced it to press its mark onto the death paper. Even old horses, after their shoes were taken off, cried great tears and struck their heavy hoof marks onto the page. The pig at Flandon heard about this, and one day it saw such a document for itself. The headmaster came to the pen with a large yellow paper under his arm. The pig had learned human language rather well, and in a polite voice it said, "Headmaster, the weather is very fine today." The headmaster gave a bitter little smile and answered, "Yes, yes. The weather is fine." Then he looked closely at the pig's body in the same hard way as the teacher, and the pig felt the words catch in its throat.

At last the pig lowered its ears and said, "These days I feel very heavy in spirit." The headmaster smiled in that same unclear way and said, "Do you? Has the world become unpleasant to you? Is that it?" But when he saw how dark the pig's face had become, he changed his tone. For some time they stood looking at one another in silence. Then the headmaster, perhaps losing courage, put the yellow paper more deeply under his arm and said, "Well then, rest well. Do not move about too much," and went away. After that the pig kept repeating those words to itself again and again. "'Rest well. Do not move about too much.' What does that mean? What is going to happen?" That night a strong snowstorm blew, and dry flakes came through the cracks of the shed and covered even the remains

of its food in white.

The next day the teacher returned with the red-faced assistant. After staring at the pig from head to tail as if his eyes could cut into it, he said, "Have you been giving him flaxseed?" The assistant answered, "Yes." The teacher said, "Good. It could be tomorrow or the day after tomorrow now. We only need the consent form. The headmaster came here yesterday with the paper, did he not?" The assistant said, "Yes, he came in." The teacher frowned and replied, "Then why has he not sent it yet? Make the room darker. And on the day before we do it, give him no feed." When the two men left, the pig's torment became almost unbearable. "What is this consent?" it thought. "The day before they do it? Do what? Will they sell me somewhere far away? Oh, this is terrible."

The next morning, just after sunrise, three boarding students came laughing to the shed. One said, "When will it be? I want to see it soon." Another said, "I do not want to see it." The first one laughed and said, "The sooner the better. The onions we put aside will freeze if we wait too long." A third said, "And the potatoes are stored too." "Yes, three whole measures of them," another answered. "We could never eat them all by ourselves." One boy blew into his hands and said, "It is cold this morning." Another looked at the pig and laughed. "That pig looks warm enough. It wears a coat of fat one inch thick." The three of them burst out laughing, and the pig felt weak and dizzy. "What do onions have to do with me?" it thought. "How can they look through my body like that? Oh, I am afraid."

In the middle of this misery the headmaster came once more, shaking snow from his clothes at the door and smiling that same soft, dangerous smile. "How do you feel today?" he asked. "Quite well, thank you," said the pig, though its voice was already failing. "Good, good," the headmaster said. "And is your food pleasing?" "Yes, very pleasing," the pig answered. Then the headmaster leaned closer and said, "I have come for a private talk. Tell me, is your head clear today?" The pig said only, "Yes," and even that came out like a dry sound. The headmaster went on, "Everything in this world must die. Noblemen die, rich men die, middle people like me die, beggars die, horses die, cows die, chickens die, even tiny living things die. So you and I must also die one day." The pig tried to answer each time

with a weak “Yes,” but its voice would hardly come.

Then the headmaster said, “Our school has raised you until now. We have treated you very well, better than many others would have done. So if you feel even a little thankful, would you agree to one very small request?” Again the pig could only whisper, “Yes?” The headmaster quickly took out the yellow paper and said, “It is nothing. It only says that, in return for long kindness, you agree to die whenever it becomes necessary. Here, you only need to put one mark from your front hoof.” The pig bent its brows and looked hard at the paper. Then, in a voice almost like crying, it asked, “Does ‘whenever’ mean today?” The headmaster gave a start, then said quickly, “No, no, not today. Nothing so sudden.” “Then does it mean tomorrow?” asked the pig. “Oh, no, not exactly tomorrow. It is just a vague way of speaking,” said the headmaster. The pig gave a sharp cry. “And when I die, do I die alone?” The headmaster hesitated and said, “Well, not entirely alone.” At that the pig burst into tears and shouted, “No. No. I will not. I hate it. I will never agree.”

The headmaster’s face turned red with anger. “So that is your answer,” he said. “You are more ungrateful than a dog or cat.” He pushed the paper back into his pocket and strode out of the shed. The pig cried after him, “I know I am worse than a dog or cat. I always was,” and then all its sorrow and bitterness rose together at once. It cried as hard as it could, and after half a day of crying, with the weariness of two sleepless nights upon it, it finally fell asleep in the middle of its tears. Even in its sleep it shook again and again with fear, and its legs trembled as if it were still trying to run from something it could not see.

## Part 2

The next day the teacher of animal science came again with the young assistant, and the moment he saw the pig he became angry. He looked at the body from head to tail with that same hard, unbearable gaze and said, “What has happened here? The meat has fallen away badly. This is useless. A farmer in the country could do as much as this. The cheeks are thin, the shoulders are thin, and

we could never show such a body at a fair.” The assistant put a finger to his lips and thought for a while, then said in a vague voice, “Well, yesterday afternoon the headmaster came here. That is the only unusual thing I can think of.”

At once the teacher jumped. “The headmaster? That is it,” he cried. “He must have tried to get the consent paper and frightened the animal badly. That is why it went round and round all night and did not sleep. What a mess. And I am sure he still failed to get the paper.” He ground his teeth for a while in anger, crossed his arms, and thought. Then he said, “Very well. Open the windows wide. Take him outside and let him have some exercise. Do not beat him hard and do not make him run. Walk him slowly in the shade, near the stable, over the grass where the snow is gone, for about fifteen minutes. Give him less feed so he grows a little hungry, and when the mood improves, offer him only the good green part of the cabbage.”

The pig, hearing all this, felt even more empty than before. “So now I am something to be repaired,” it thought. “They speak of me the way people speak of a broken tool.” Soon the assistant came in holding a thin whip and smiling pleasantly, and that smile was almost worse than the whip. He opened the little gate of the pen and said in a soft polite voice, “Would you care for a short walk? The weather is very fine today, and the wind is calm. I shall gladly go with you.” Then the whip snapped across the pig’s back, and the pig, full of sorrow, had no choice but to go.

It walked slowly from the shed, each step painful, while the assistant came behind it, lazily blowing a tune through his lips and swinging the whip. From time to time he said things like, “Perhaps a little more to the left would be better,” and each time another sharp blow followed. “What kind of world is this?” the pig thought. “I am so full of misery, and this man whistles as if he were going to a picnic.” Then the assistant said, “There, that is enough. You may rest now,” and gave it one more crack with the whip. The pig could only think, “If this is called a healthy walk, then the whole world is mad.”

Back in the shed it lay down on the straw with a heavy fall. The assistant brought only a little of the best green cabbage, and the pig did not want to touch

it, but the assistant stood there waiting with those cold eyes fixed from above, so at last the pig only pretended to chew. Then the assistant gave a short laugh through his nose, seemed satisfied, and went away again whistling. Because all the windows had been opened, the room was terribly cold, and the pig shivered until its teeth clicked. In this way it passed three whole days, sunk in grief, as if living inside a dream.

On the fourth day the teacher and the assistant returned. The teacher looked once at the pig, waved his hand in disgust, and said, “No, no, this will never do. Why did you not do as I told you?” The assistant answered quickly, “I opened the windows, I gave the good cabbage, and I walked him carefully for fifteen minutes every day.” The teacher frowned and said, “Then it is worse than I thought. He is only going to grow thinner. This is nervous wasting. We cannot help him from the outside. Before he becomes nothing but skin and bone, we must decide matters.” After a moment he added, “Shut the windows now. We will use the fattening machine. Mix two sho of bran, two go of flaxseed, and five go of cornmeal with water and make dumplings. Force them in two or three times a day.”

Then he muttered, “But before we tie him, we must get that consent form. The headmaster was clumsy, very clumsy.” He ran quickly toward the school building, and soon after that the headmaster himself came hurrying in. The pig, seeing him, felt it no longer knew where to put its own body and began to dig the straw with its nose. “Come now,” said the headmaster sharply. “We cannot delay. About that consent paper from before, you must put your hoof mark on it today. It is nothing very serious. Do it.” The pig burst into tears at once and cried, “No, no, I do not want to. I hate it.”

The headmaster’s face changed, and now he no longer tried to smile. “Do not be selfish,” he said. “That body of yours was made entirely by the school. And from now on you will be given bran, flaxseed, and cornmeal every day. So put your mark on the paper and do it at once.” The pig was so frightened that its whole body trembled. “I will do it,” it whispered at last in a broken voice. The headmaster quickly spread the yellow paper before its eyes. “Where shall I stamp it?” asked the pig through tears. “Here,” said the headmaster, staring at it over his

glasses. "Under your name."

The pig twisted its mouth, lifted its short right foreleg, and pressed it down on the paper. "Good. That will do," said the headmaster, pulling the paper away and examining the mark with satisfaction. At that very moment the animal science teacher came in and asked, "Did it go well?" "More or less," said the headmaster. "Here is the paper. How many days of fattening do you think will be needed?" The teacher answered, "We must watch and see. With chickens and ducks forced feeding works very well, but with a nervous pig like this, it may not answer so easily." "Very well," said the headmaster. "In any case, do it properly." Then he went away.

Soon the assistant returned carrying a strange canvas tube with a screw, and also a bucket of prepared feed. The teacher pinched a little of the mixture, tested it, and said, "Good. Tie him now." The assistant jumped into the pen with a Manila rope. The pig struggled wildly, but at last both right legs were tied to two iron rings in the corner. "That is enough," said the teacher. "Now put this end down the throat." The assistant tried to make the pig open its mouth, but the pig clenched its teeth with all its strength. Then the teacher handed over a short steel tube and said, "Use this."

The assistant forced the steel tube between the pig's teeth. The pig cried, roared, and wept with all the strength it had, yet in the end the tube was fixed in place, and the canvas tube went down into its throat. "There. Now begin," said the teacher. He poured the wet feed into the funnel at the outer end and used the screw to send it down into the pig's stomach. No matter how much the pig tried not to swallow, the throat itself betrayed it, and the heavy food entered and entered until the belly felt painfully full. This was the beginning of forced fattening. The pig felt so sick and so wrong inside that it cried almost all that day.

When the teacher came the next day and saw the body again, he said with satisfaction, "Good. It has worked. He is fatter already. From now on, you and the janitor will do this twice every day." And so it continued. For seven whole days the pig hardly knew whether the sun was shining outside or whether the wind was blowing. Its stomach remained heavy all the time, its cheeks and shoulders began

to swell out again, and at last even breathing became difficult. Students came in turns and said many things while staring at it. Sometimes a group of ten or so stood before the pen and argued about how many kan it weighed, how many measures of water it would equal, and whether it would sink or float. Hearing people talk of its body as if it were a cask to be measured, the pig wept bitterly. Then, exactly on the seventh day, the teacher and the assistant stood before it once more, looked it over from a little distance, and the teacher said, "This is enough. Tomorrow will be the right day."

### Part 3

The pig did not sleep that night. Its belly was swollen and hard from the forced feeding, and every time it closed its eyes it seemed to feel the yellow paper again under its hoof. It thought, "Tomorrow will be the right day. That is what he said." From time to time it tried to tell itself that perhaps "the right day" meant some other small misery, some other new machine, some other walk in the cold, but the thought never held for long. By morning the bell rang from the school building, and the sound came to it as if from very far away.

Before long there was noise outside, and many students came laughing and talking together. The assistant also came, and after him the animal science teacher appeared at the doorway wearing a brown gown different from his usual clothes. The teacher stood there for a while, looking in with tired but fixed eyes, and then said, "Shall we do it outside? Outside is better, I think. Bring him out. And mind this. Do not let him squeal too much. It spoils the taste." The pig heard those words clearly, yet for a moment they did not mean anything at all. Then suddenly they meant everything.

The assistant came in with a serious face, as polite as ever, and said, "How are you today? The weather is very good. Would you care for a little walk?" At the same time he gave the whip a short, sharp crack across the pig's side. The pig did not resist. It only blew out its cheeks and began to move with a loose, broken motion, half walking and half stumbling. Before it and beside it there moved the

black legs of the students, two by two, like a strange dream.

Then all at once the light grew bright. Outside, the snow shone under the sun, and the pig narrowed its eyes against the whiteness and still went on in that same dull, broken way. "Where are they taking me?" it thought. "Is there perhaps another shed? Another machine? Another paper?" Ahead there stood a single cedar tree dark against the snow. The pig lifted its head just a little, and at that instant it saw before its eyes a fierce white flash burst open like fireworks.

From the center of that white flash ran out hundreds and thousands of red fires, rushing sideways like water. Somewhere above there rang a thin sharp sound like metal crying. Somewhere to one side there was a great roaring, as if water were boiling up from the earth itself. After that, I truly do not know what the pig understood any longer. I only know that beside it there stood the animal science teacher, breathing hard, holding a great iron hammer, his face a little pale.

The pig lay at his feet. It gave two small sounds through its nose, only "khun, khun," and then it became still. The students around it seemed at once to step back and crowd forward at the same time, and for a few moments all was disorder and brightness and breath in the cold air. Then the assistant, who had been standing ready, came near with a large knife in his hand. Everything after that became too pitiful to watch calmly.

The assistant thrust the knife deep into the pig's throat. Really, this story is too cruel. It is better not to describe every motion and every sound in detail. Let it be enough to say that soon after that the pig's body was cut apart into eight pieces and piled up behind the stable. There it was left buried in the snow for the night.

And so, gentlemen of the university, the sky that evening was very clear. Taurus shone out, and the silver horn of the moon of the twenty-fourth day hung cold above the world like a thin blade. Its pale, merciless light poured over the clouds and over the frozen ground and over that white yard where the snow held the night's sharp cold. In that cold white snow, like bodies laid in a battlefield grave, the eight clean-washed pieces of the pig lay buried.

The moon passed on in silence. The night grew colder and clearer still. No

one there spoke of platinum then, or of catalysts, or of the value of living flesh. There was only the snow, the blue-white moonlight, and the stillness over the place where the pig had been put away at last.

## Otsubel and the Elephant [Otsuberu to Zō]

### Part 1

Otsubel was a great man, or so people said. He had six rice-threshing machines set up in a row, and they all made their rough, uneven sound together, “nonnon, nonnon, nonnon,” without ever really agreeing with one another. Sixteen farm workers, their faces bright red, pushed the pedals with their feet and fed the piled rice into the machines without stopping. The straw flew backward and rose into new heaps. The air was full of fine dust from husks and straw, and the whole place looked yellow and dim, like a desert covered in smoke.

In that half-dark shed Otsubel walked up and down with both hands behind his back. He held a great amber pipe in his mouth and narrowed his eyes so the ashes would not fall into the straw. The shed itself was large and strong, almost as big as a school building, but with all six new machines shaking and roaring together, the whole place seemed to tremble. If you stood inside for long, the sound alone could make you hungry. Otsubel knew that well, and he let the noise help him work up his appetite so that at noon he could eat a beefsteak six inches wide and an omelet as large as a rag, hot and soft and full of steam.

That was how things were going that day, the machines shaking, the men sweating, Otsubel walking as if he owned the earth. Then, for no clear reason at all, a white elephant came there. I mean a truly white elephant, not one painted over with white paint. Why did it come? Well, because it was an elephant, I suppose. It must have wandered out of the forest and come that way for no reason it could explain even to itself.

When the white elephant slowly put its face in at the entrance of the shed, the farm workers were startled. Why were they startled? You ask too many questions. How could they know what such a great beast might do? Since they were busy and wanted no trouble, they kept their heads down and went on threshing rice with all their strength. But Otsubel, from behind the line of machines, slipped both hands into his pockets and gave the elephant one sharp

glance. Then he quickly looked down again and went on walking as if nothing had happened.

The elephant lifted one foreleg and placed it on the floor of the shed. The workers were startled again, though they still did not dare stop their work. Otsubel, deep in the dim rear of the place, took his hands from his pockets and looked once more. Then he made a large lazy yawn, folded his hands behind his head, and walked up and down as if he were bored. But the elephant now pushed both forelegs forward and began to climb properly into the shed. The workers gave a little shiver, and even Otsubel was shaken enough to blow one quick breath of smoke from his pipe, though he still pretended not to care.

At last the elephant came all the way in and walked slowly in front of the machines. Since the wheels were turning fast, rice grains struck it like a sudden storm. They hit its white head, its neck, and even its teeth with a sharp pattering sound. The elephant narrowed its little eyes because of the annoyance, but if you looked closely, you could see that it was also smiling just a little. Otsubel knew he had to act now, so he stepped out from before the machine, fixed his courage in place, and prepared to speak.

But before he could say much, the elephant spoke first in a voice so beautiful it sounded almost like a nightingale. "Ah, this will not do," it said. "It is too busy here, and the sand keeps striking my teeth." The grains still flew and hit its mouth and face. Otsubel tightened his grip on the pipe, shifted it into his right hand, and said with all the bravery he could gather, "Well then, do you find this place interesting?" The elephant leaned its body a little to one side, narrowed its eyes in a cheerful way, and answered, "Yes, it is interesting."

Otsubel felt his heart beat wildly, but he pressed on. "How would it be," he said, "if you stayed here for good?" The workers went still. Even while asking the question, Otsubel himself began to tremble, for he knew what he was trying to do. But the elephant answered at once, as lightly as if the matter were nothing at all. "I do not mind," it said. "I could stay." Then Otsubel's whole face crumpled with delight. It became red, soft, and ugly with joy as he cried, "Good. Then let us settle it that way. Yes, that is exactly what we shall do."

And so, from that moment, the elephant became Otsubel's property. At least that is how Otsubel saw it. He thought, "Now I will make this creature work, or else I will sell it to a circus. Either way I will earn a fortune." He saw money already shining before his eyes like yellow fire. As for the elephant, it had no such thoughts. It had simply answered kindly, because that was its nature.

By the next Sunday Otsubel was in even finer spirits than before. He had built the elephant a rough shed of logs, and he looked at the animal with hungry satisfaction. The elephant was white all over, its tusks were beautiful ivory, its hide was thick and strong, and its strength must have been equal to twenty horses. Of course the beast worked well, but Otsubel would have told you that the real wonder was not the elephant at all. He would have said, "It is only because the master is clever." That was the kind of man he was.

One day he came to the elephant shed with the amber pipe in his mouth and his face drawn into a businesslike frown. "Say," he asked, "do you need a watch?" The elephant laughed and answered, "No, I do not need a watch." Otsubel said, "Still, try one. It is a fine thing to have." And with that he hung a great tin watch from the elephant's neck. The elephant moved a little and said pleasantly, "Yes, that is rather nice."

"A chain is needed too," said Otsubel. So he fixed a chain weighing a hundred kilos to one of the elephant's forelegs. "Yes," said the elephant after taking three steps, "the chain is rather nice too." Otsubel then asked, "What about shoes?" The elephant answered, "I do not wear shoes." But Otsubel only said, "Try them first. You will see." Then he put great red paper shoes on the elephant's back feet, and the elephant, always ready to be pleased, said once again, "Yes, that is rather nice."

"And shoes need ornaments," Otsubel declared. In a great hurry he fastened heavy weights over them, four hundred kilos in all. The elephant took two slow steps and said in the same innocent voice, "Yes, those are nice too." On the next day the great tin watch and the miserable paper shoes were already broken. Only the chain and the weights remained, and the elephant still went about happily. Otsubel came with both hands behind his back and said, "I am sorry, but taxes are

high. Today would you bring some water from the river?" The elephant narrowed its eyes with joy and answered, "Yes, I will bring it. I will bring as much as you like." And that afternoon it carried fifty loads of water and poured them over Otsubel's vegetable field.

## Part 2

From that day on, the white elephant worked from morning until night. Otsubel always came with his fine pipe, his face bent into a worried shape, and some new excuse on his tongue. "I am sorry," he would say, "but taxes have gone up again." Or he would say, "I am sorry, but times are hard." And then he would ask for one more task, and then another, and then still another. The elephant always narrowed its eyes with pleasure and answered, "Yes, I will do it," as if work itself were a kind of game.

One day Otsubel said, "I am sorry, but taxes are higher again. Could you bring firewood from the forest?" The elephant answered at once, "Yes, I will bring it. It is fine weather, and I truly love going to the forest." Otsubel was so startled by that cheerful answer that he nearly dropped his pipe, but when he saw the elephant walking away in good spirits, he gave a little cough, put the pipe back into his mouth, and pretended all was well. By the afternoon the elephant had carried nine hundred bundles of firewood. That evening, while eating straw in the shed and looking at the young moon in the west, it said softly, "Ah, that felt good. Santa Maria."

On the next day Otsubel came again. "I am sorry," he said, "but taxes are now five times higher. Could you go to the forge and blow the charcoal fire?" The elephant laughed and replied, "Yes, I will do it. If I truly try, I can blow so hard that I could send stones flying." Again Otsubel gave a little start, but again he smiled and acted as if he were pleased. The elephant went slowly to the forge, folded its legs under its body, and all afternoon used its breath in place of the bellows. That night, with even less straw before it, it looked up at the fifth night moon and said, "Ah, I am tired. Ah, I am happy. Santa Maria."

But from the next morning the work grew harder still, and the straw grew less. Yesterday there had been only five bundles to eat, yet somehow the elephant still found strength enough for everything that was asked. It was truly a wonder, though Otsubel would have told you it was no wonder at all. He would have said, "It is simply because I am clever." So he gave more orders, reduced the food further, loaded more chains and more weights, and made the white elephant labor as if no limit existed either in its body or in its patience.

At first the elephant still smiled often. It worked, breathed hard, lifted, dragged, and pushed, and when evening came it would say, "It feels clean to work," or "How good it is to earn one's keep." But little by little that smile grew rare. The chains bit into its legs, the weights pulled at its feet, and the little food in the shed no longer filled its great body at all. Sometimes it lifted its head and looked down at Otsubel with red, burning eyes like a dragon's. Even then it did not speak in anger, but Otsubel saw those eyes and became crueler still.

One night the elephant, having eaten only three bundles of straw, looked up at the moon of the tenth night and said, "It is painful. Santa Maria." Otsubel heard of this, and after that he made everything still worse. He gave less food, demanded more labor, and hurried about in his fine clothes with greater harshness than before. The workers watched, but none of them dared speak. Otsubel's house, his sheds, his fields, his walls, and even his pipe all seemed to say that he was the master and the elephant was only a thing.

Then came another night. The elephant staggered inside its shed, fell heavily to the ground, and sat there shaking. It did not even touch the straw. It only looked up at the moon of the eleventh night and said, in a thin clear voice, "Now, farewell, Santa Maria." At once the moon itself seemed to answer, "What is this? Farewell? You are all size and no courage at all. Why do you not write to your friends?" The elephant answered sadly, "I have no brush and no paper." Then it began to cry, very quietly, in its beautiful narrow voice.

"Why, here they are," said a little voice close by. The elephant lifted its head and saw before it a child in red clothes holding out paper and an inkstone. "Quickly, then," said the child. The elephant at once wrote a letter. "I am in great

trouble. Come and help me, all of you.” The red-clothed child took the letter and walked away toward the forest. The elephant watched for a long time after him, and then the shed grew still again.

The child in red reached the mountain just about noon on the next day. Under the dark shade of the sala trees the mountain elephants had been amusing themselves at games, but when they saw the child and read the letter, they all pressed their foreheads together over it. “I am in great trouble. Come and help me, all of you,” it said. At once all the elephants sprang up, black with anger. “Let us strike down Otsubel,” cried the leader. “Yes, let us go. Gralaa gaa, gralaa gaa,” they all answered together.

Then they rushed through the forest like a storm. Every one of them was like a creature gone mad with rage and sorrow. Small trees were torn up by the roots, thickets were smashed flat, and the whole wood shook with their running. “Gralaa gaa, gralaa gaa,” they cried as they burst out over the plain like an exploding shower of fire. Then they ran and ran until, far ahead in the blue distance, they saw the yellow roof of Otsubel’s house at the edge of the fields.

It was just half past one, and Otsubel was sleeping on his leather bed, dreaming some foolish dream about crows. The noise came first like thunder, then like trains, then like the earth itself breaking open. Farm workers ran in through the gate, white with fear, and shouted, “Master, elephants. They are coming. Master, elephants.” But Otsubel, being the sort of man he was, opened his eyes wide and understood everything at once. He sprang up and cried, “Is that elephant still in the shed? Is it? Good. Shut the shed. Shut it quickly. Bring logs. Tie the door. He has had his strength reduced on purpose. He can do nothing. And now the gate, the gate. Bar it. Brace it. Do not panic. Stand firm.” The workers, however, were not calm at all. They wrapped white cloths and towels round their arms to show surrender, for none of them wished to be crushed for Otsubel’s sake.

### Part 3

Otsubel became more and more desperate and ran about the yard like a

madman. His dog also lost its senses and rushed here and there, barking as if it had caught fire. Before long the ground began to shake under their feet, and everything around the house grew dark and wild as if a storm cloud had fallen to earth. The elephants had surrounded the whole place. From inside that dreadful roaring there came another sound as well, a kind gentle voice calling, "We are here now. Do not worry. We will save you."

At once the white elephant answered from inside the locked shed, "Thank you. I am truly glad you have come." Hearing that, the elephants outside grew even wilder than before. They roared, "Gralaa gaa, gralaa gaa," and seemed to run round and round the walls, while now and then great angry trunks rose over the fence and swung down again. But the wall was made of cement, with iron hidden inside it, so even elephants could not easily break it. Inside the wall Otsubel went on shouting by himself, while the farm workers wandered about half blind with fear and did nothing useful at all.

Then the elephants outside began to help one another. Using one another's bodies as steps, they climbed higher and higher against the wall until their great gray faces slowly appeared over the top. Their faces were huge, wrinkled, and terrible to see at such close range. When Otsubel's dog looked up and saw them, it gave up completely and fainted on the spot. Otsubel, however, snatched out a six-shot pistol and began firing as fast as he could.

"Bang," went the pistol. "Gralaa gaa," answered the elephants. "Bang. Gralaa gaa. Bang. Gralaa gaa." But the bullets did not go through. When they struck an ivory tusk, they only bounced away. One of the elephants even said in an annoyed voice, "This fellow is rather troublesome. Those little things keep pattering against my face." Otsubel, hearing that, had a sudden strange feeling that he had heard the same complaint somewhere before.

He hurriedly changed the cartridge case with shaking hands, but by then it was too late. First one elephant's leg came over the wall and hung down inside. Then another followed. Then five elephants dropped over the wall together all at once. Before Otsubel could even cry out properly, they had landed like a falling hill, and in a moment he was crushed into a shapeless mess with the pistol still in

his hand. The gate too was already broken open, and more elephants came flooding in with their terrible cries.

“Where is the prison?” the elephants shouted. They rushed toward the shed where the white elephant had been shut up. The great logs tied across the door snapped like matches under their strength. Then the door burst wide, and the white elephant came slowly out. It had grown terribly thin. Its beautiful body, once full and strong, now looked wasted and sorrowful, and even its face had changed.

“Ah, you poor thing. You have become so thin,” the others said quietly, crowding near it with deep kindness. One by one they removed the chain from its foreleg and the heavy weights from its feet. The white elephant smiled a lonely little smile and said, “Thank you. Truly, I have been saved.” It did not speak with anger or pride. It only spoke with relief so deep that it almost sounded like sadness.

The farm workers stood far away and watched, still wearing the white cloths around their arms. None of them dared come near. The dog lay senseless. Otsubel was gone. The yard that had once seemed so strong, so rich, and so full of his will had become only a broken place full of dust, fear, and silence after noise. The elephants no longer needed to roar.

The rescued elephant took a few slow steps, as if it were not yet sure that the earth beneath it was real. The others stayed close around it, not pressing, not hurrying, only guarding it in a quiet circle. No one spoke for a while. Then one of them said, “Let us go.” Another answered gently, “Yes, but slowly.” They all understood that the white elephant could not yet walk as it once had.

So they led it away from Otsubel’s broken yard. They passed out through the ruined gate and toward the open fields, where the wind could touch them and no chains waited. The white elephant still smiled that sad smile from time to time, and sometimes it looked up as if it were searching for the moon or for Santa Maria even in the daytime. The others walked beside it in silence.

And then, just when you might think the story had become very grand and solemn, the old voice of the storyteller suddenly seemed to come close again and speak almost to a child standing nearby. “Hey now,” it said, “you mustn’t go into the river.” That is where the story stops, as if the world after all this noise and

sorrow still went on in its ordinary way.

## The Earth God and the Fox [Tsuchigami to Kitsune]

### Part 1

At the north edge of a wide field there was a little rise in the ground. It was covered with tall grass, and in the middle of it stood a beautiful birch tree like a young woman. It was not a very large tree, but its trunk shone dark and smooth, its branches spread in a graceful way, and in spring it covered itself with white flowers like a cloud. In autumn it dropped leaves of gold and red and many other colors. Because of this, cuckoos, shrikes, wrens, and white-eyes all came to rest on it, though when a young hawk was nearby, the smaller birds stayed away.

The birch tree had two friends. One was the Earth God, who lived in a wet marsh about five hundred steps away. The other was a brown fox who always came from the southern side of the field. If the truth must be told, the birch liked the fox better. The Earth God had the name of a god, but he was rough and frightening, with red eyes, long black nails, wild hair like torn cotton thread, and clothes that looked like strips of seaweed, while the fox was neat, gentle in manner, and usually careful not to offend anyone. Still, if one looked very closely, one might say that the Earth God was honest, while the fox had a little falsehood in him.

One evening at the beginning of summer, the sky was already full of stars, and the Milky Way shone faintly above the field. The birch was rich with new soft leaves, and their sweet smell filled the air. Under that sky the fox came walking with a book of poems in one paw. He wore a new dark blue coat, and his red leather shoes made a little sharp sound on the ground. When he reached the tree, he looked up and said, "What a quiet evening this is."

The birch answered softly, "Yes, it is very quiet." The fox looked up at the sky and said, "Do you see that great red star crawling over there? Long ago, in China, they called it fire." The birch asked, "Is it different from Mars?" The fox smiled with calm confidence and said, "Quite different. Mars is a planet. That one is a fixed star." Then the birch asked, "And what is the difference between a planet

and a fixed star?" and the fox, pleased to explain, said, "A planet does not shine by itself. It only looks bright because it receives light from another body. A fixed star shines with its own fire. Even the sun is one of those, though if we were very far away, it too would look like a tiny star."

The birch listened with delight and said, "Then the sky is full of suns. That is so strange and wonderful." The fox laughed in an easy, generous way and went on, "Yes, it is. And the stars are not all the same color, as you see. Some are red, some yellow, some green, some blue." The birch said, "I have often wondered why that is," and the fox raised his arm grandly, the book swinging from his paw, and answered, "In the beginning all stars were only cloudy masses. Even now there are many in the sky. There are nebulae in Andromeda, in Orion, and in the Hunting Dogs. Some are like rings. Some are like whirlpools. There is even one shaped like a fish's mouth."

"How wonderful," whispered the birch. "I wish I could see such a thing." The fox answered, "You shall. I saw them at the observatory in Mizusawa." The birch said at once, "Oh, then I wish even more to see them." Before he could stop himself, the fox replied, "I have ordered a telescope from Zeiss in Germany. It should arrive by next spring, and when it comes, I will show you everything." The words had come out of him too quickly, and the very moment he said them, pain touched his heart. "I have lied again," he thought. "I only wanted to please my one dear friend, but I have lied again."

The birch did not know this. She moved her leaves with joy and said, "How kind you are. You are always kind." The fox looked a little troubled and answered, "If it is for your sake, I would do many things." Then he held up the book and said, "Would you like to borrow this? It is a book of poems by Heine. It is only a translation, but it is still very fine." The birch said, "May I truly borrow it?" and the fox replied, "Of course. Take your time with it. I should go now. I feel there was one more thing I meant to say." The birch said, "You had begun to explain the colors of the stars," and the fox answered, "Yes, yes, that was it, but let us leave that for next time. I should not stay too long. I will come again. Good night."

He went away quickly, and a south wind came just then and made the birch

leaves whisper all together in the dark. The birch lifted the book the fox had left and turned its pages in the weak light that came from the Milky Way and the stars. Inside were many beautiful poems, including “Lorelei,” and the birch read on and on through the whole night. Only once, sometime after three in the morning when Taurus was rising in the east, did she grow a little drowsy. Soon the sun came up, dew shone on the grass, and every flower opened itself with all its strength.

Then, from the northeast, the Earth God came walking slowly across the field, his whole body bright with the strong morning sun, as if he had been covered in melted copper. He came with his arms folded and his face full of heavy thought. The birch, though already a little uneasy, turned her shining leaves toward him and said, “Good morning.” The Earth God stopped before her and answered, “Good morning, Birch Tree. There are many things I cannot understand in this world.” The birch asked, “What kind of things?” and the Earth God said, “Grass comes out of black soil, and yet it is green. Flowers come out of the same earth, and some are yellow, some white. I do not understand it at all.”

The birch answered carefully, “Perhaps it is because the seeds already hold those colors within them.” The Earth God grunted and said, “That may be so, and still I do not understand it. Mushrooms rise from the ground without seeds, and they too have many colors. It is all very strange.” The birch, still half dreaming of the fox and the stars, said without thinking, “Perhaps Fox would know.” The moment those words were spoken, the Earth God’s whole face changed. He clenched his fist and cried, “What? Fox? What has that fox been saying here?” The birch trembled and answered in a frightened voice, “Nothing at all, truly. I only thought he might perhaps know.”

The Earth God began to walk back and forth. His shadow fell black over the grass, and even the grass seemed to shake under it. Grinding his teeth, he shouted, “That fox is a curse upon the world. There is not one grain of truth in him. He is cowardly, sly, and full of jealousy. For a beast to speak to a god in this way—” The birch tried to calm him and said, “Your festival day is coming soon, is it not?” For a moment his face softened, and he answered, “Yes. Today is the third day of the fifth month. Only six days remain.” But then anger rose in him again. “And

yet those humans are shameless. They do not even bring an offering anymore. The next one who steps into my land, I shall drag down into the mud.”

The birch did not know what else to say. She moved her leaves lightly in the wind and said nothing. The Earth God, burning in the sunlight, went on grinding his teeth and pacing about, and the more he thought, the more bitter he became. At last he gave a loud cry like an animal and strode back to his marsh. There, in the middle of a cold wet place with moss, creeping plants, low reeds, twisted willows, and patches of red iron scum on the surface of the water, stood his little shrine on a small island of firmer ground. He lay down beside it, scratched his thin black legs, and stared toward the birch again.

A bird passed overhead, and he suddenly sat up and hissed, “Go.” The bird nearly fell from the sky and flew away low and crooked with terror. The Earth God gave a short laugh, but when he looked toward the birch again, his face darkened at once. Then he saw a woodcutter walking along the edge of the marsh on his way toward the mountain. The man knew enough about the place to glance now and then toward the Earth God’s shrine, but he could not see the god himself. The Earth God’s face brightened strangely. He held out one hand toward the woodcutter, caught his own wrist with the other, and slowly drew the unseen force inward. The woodcutter, thinking he still walked on the path, began without knowing it to step farther and farther into the marsh.

## Part 2

As soon as the Earth God stretched out his right hand and slowly drew his fist inward with the other, a strange thing began to happen. The woodcutter thought he was still walking safely on the path, yet step by step he moved deeper into the marsh. Then he seemed to notice that something was wrong. His face went pale, his mouth opened, and he began to breathe hard as if fear had suddenly caught him by the throat.

The Earth God slowly turned his fist in a circle. At once the woodcutter also began to walk in a circle. Round and round he went, faster each time, more and

more frightened, while the wet ground pulled at his feet and the reeds brushed against his legs. He clearly wanted to escape from the marsh at once, yet however much he hurried, he only came back again to the same place. At last he began to cry in confusion, threw both hands into the air, and ran wildly as if madness had taken hold of him.

The Earth God lay watching with a wicked smile spread across his face. He looked as pleased as a boy tormenting a trapped insect. Soon the woodcutter, completely dizzy and exhausted, fell flat into the water with a splash. Then the Earth God rose slowly, walked in great uneven steps through the mud, seized the fallen man, and tossed him like a bundle onto the grass beyond the marsh. The woodcutter landed heavily, groaned once, and moved a little, but he still had not recovered his senses.

Then the Earth God laughed. It was a huge laughter, and it climbed into the sky in a strange wave. Before long it seemed to come back from above and fall with a harsh sound near the birch tree. The birch at once changed color, turned pale and blue in the sunlight, and trembled in quick little motions from top to bottom. Seeing that, the Earth God thought again, "It is because of the fox. It is because of the birch and the fox together. Yet I am not angry with the birch. It is because I do not hate her that all this pain burns in me."

He tossed and fretted and argued with himself. "I am a god, however low I may be. Why should I care about a fox? If the birch meant nothing to me, then the fox would mean even less. And yet I cannot forget her. This morning she turned pale and trembled. Ah, how beautiful she was then. Out of this pain I tormented that poor man, but what could I do? When a creature is in torment, who knows what evil it may do?" As he thought this, a hawk flew high across the sky, but this time he did not hiss or shout. He only watched it pass in silence.

Very far away there came the little sharp sound of military practice, like salt bursting in a pan. Blue light seemed to pour down from the sky over the field. At last the woodcutter, who had been lying where the Earth God had thrown him, slowly sat up and stared around him in terror. Then all at once he sprang to his feet and ran toward Mitsumori Mountain as fast as he could. The Earth God

laughed again, and that laughter too seemed to rise into the sky and then fall back near the birch, who once more shivered so finely that she could hardly be seen. After walking round and round his shrine for a long time, the Earth God at last calmed himself a little and melted silently into the little shrine as if his body had become smoke.

One evening in August, when the fog was deep and the world seemed shut away, the Earth God came out again. He was lonely beyond words, and full of the same heavy, restless bitterness that had never truly left him. Without meaning to, his feet turned toward the birch. Now his feelings had changed in one way: he had become gentler. When he thought of the birch, his chest gave a sudden painful beat, and he felt only sorrow. He told himself every day, "Am I not a god? What value can one birch tree have for me?" Yet the sadness would not leave him, and if he remembered the fox even for a moment, it was as if his whole body were set on fire.

Thinking deeply, he came nearer and nearer until at last he realized clearly that he was truly on his way to the birch. The moment he understood this, his heart began to leap. "It has been a long time," he thought. "Perhaps she has been waiting for me. Yes, perhaps she has. If so, how pitiful that would be." These thoughts grew stronger and stronger until he strode forward through the grass in great excited steps. But then his strong pace weakened. A blue sadness seemed to pour down over his head, and he suddenly had to stop, for through the heavy moonlit fog he heard the voice of the fox.

"Yes, of course that is exactly it," said the fox. "If something only obeys the mechanical law of symmetry, that does not make it beautiful. That is dead beauty." The birch answered softly, "Yes, that is quite true." The fox went on in a smooth learned voice, "Real beauty is not a fixed model, not a dead fossil. Even when we say it satisfies the law of symmetry, what we truly want is that it should possess the spirit of symmetry." Again the birch said, "I think that is very true." The Earth God felt as though his whole body were being burned by a pale pink fire.

He panted and tried to control himself. "What is this?" he thought. "Are you shaken by nothing more than a few words spoken in the field? And you call

yourself a god?" But the fox continued, "Any book on aesthetics discusses at least this much." The birch asked, "Do you have many books on aesthetics?" and the fox replied proudly, "Not too many, perhaps, but I have most of the important ones in Japanese, English, and German. The Italian ones are new, and they still have not arrived." The birch answered with admiration, "Your study must be wonderful." The fox gave a sound that was half modesty and half boast and said, "Oh, it is quite untidy. It is my study and laboratory together. A microscope in one corner, the London Times in another, marble scissors lying about everywhere. It is a complete disorder."

"How splendid," said the birch. "It truly sounds splendid." At that the Earth God could bear no more. Listening to the fox, he felt for the first time that the fox was greater than he was. Until now he had comforted himself by saying, "At least I am a god." But now even that thought failed him. "Ah, this is unbearable," he thought. "Shall I leap out and tear the fox in two? No, a thing like that is beneath me. And yet what am I, if in the end I am less than a fox?" He writhed like a creature tearing at its own breast.

Then the birch asked, "Has that telescope still not come?" The fox answered smoothly, "Ah, the telescope. No, it has not yet come. Ships from Europe are much disturbed these days. But as soon as it arrives, I will bring it to you at once. The rings of Saturn are astonishingly beautiful." At those words the Earth God suddenly pressed both hands over his ears and ran straight toward the north. He was afraid that if he stayed another moment he would not know what he might do. He ran like a creature hunted by fire, until at last he fell exhausted near the foot of Mitsumori Mountain.

There he rolled over and over in the grass, tearing at his hair with both hands. Then he cried aloud. His crying went through the sky like thunder out of season and was heard across the whole field. He cried and cried until he was worn out, and toward dawn he returned in a daze to his little shrine.

Part 3

Then autumn came at last. The birch was still green, but all around it the grasses had already put out golden heads that shone in the wind, and here and there the berries of the lily-of-the-valley had ripened red. On one clear golden morning the Earth God was in an unusually good mood. All the pain he had suffered through the summer seemed to have changed into a high pale mist above his head, like a shining ring. The strange sharp cruelty in him had gone quiet for the moment, and he thought, "If the birch wishes to speak with the fox, let her speak. If both are happy, that itself is good. Today I will tell her so."

The birch saw him from far off and trembled as before, though this time not from the same fear as in summer. The Earth God came up lightly, greeted her almost cheerfully, and said, "Birch Tree, good morning. It is truly fine weather." The birch answered, "Good morning. Yes, it is fine." The Earth God looked up at the sky and said, "The sun is a wonderful thing. In spring it is red, in summer white, in autumn yellow. And when autumn turns yellow, the grapes become purple. It is all very wonderful." The birch answered, "Yes, truly."

The Earth God went on, "Today I feel strangely light. Since summer I have suffered much, but this morning all at once my heart has become easy." The birch wanted to reply, yet for some reason every answer seemed heavy inside her, and she could only stand there silently. The Earth God looked far off into the blue sky and said, "As I am now, I could give my life for anyone. If an earthworm had to die, I could die in its place." His eyes were dark and fine as he spoke, and for a moment the birch almost forgot all fear.

Just then the fox came. The moment he saw the Earth God already standing there, his face changed sharply. But he could not turn back now, so he came forward, trembling a little, in his brown raincoat, his red leather shoes, and even his summer hat still on his head. He said, "Good morning, Birch Tree. And I see the Earth God is here." The Earth God answered in a bright voice, "Yes, I am here. Fine weather, is it not?" The fox went pale with jealousy and said quickly to the birch, "Forgive me for coming when you have a guest. Here is the book I promised. And as for the telescope, on some clear night I will show it to you. Good-bye."

"Thank you very much," said the birch. But before she had finished, the fox

had already turned and was walking away without even greeting the Earth God properly. The birch went pale and trembled in small quick motions. The Earth God stood and watched the fox for some time in a blank way. Then all at once he saw the red leather shoe flash in the grass, and he seemed to wake from a dream. The fox was walking farther and farther off, his shoulders held stiff with pride, and at that sight anger rose in the Earth God like sudden fire.

His face became terribly dark. "Books on beauty, telescopes, lies," he thought. "Beast, let us see now." And without warning he leaped after the fox. The birch shook all her branches at once in terror. The fox heard something in that sound, glanced back, and saw the Earth God, black as a storm, rushing at him. In an instant his own face changed completely, and he fled like the wind. The Earth God felt as if all the grass around him had burst into white flame, and even the blue shining sky seemed to open into a huge black hole with red fire burning at the bottom.

The two of them ran with a great roaring sound like a train. The fox thought wildly, "It is over. It is over. Telescope. Telescope. Telescope," as if that one lie had become the whole of his life. Ahead of him there was a little bare red hill, and under it a round hole. He turned once and lowered his head to spring into it. But just as he lifted one hind leg and was about to dive inside, the Earth God flew upon him from behind.

In a moment the fox's body was twisted in the Earth God's hands. His mouth grew pointed, and he seemed almost to smile a little as the strength went out of him all at once. Then he hung loose and still in the Earth God's grasp. The Earth God stared down at him in horror. "Ah," he thought, "what have I done?" All the rage was gone. There was nothing left in him now but emptiness, fear, and a heavy cold sadness. He lifted the fox more carefully, as if he had suddenly remembered that this was a living creature who had once spoken gently under the stars.

Carrying the dead fox in both arms, he slowly went back toward the birch. He no longer strode. He no longer burned. He walked like a creature crushed under a burden too heavy to bear. When the birch saw him returning and saw what he held, she turned pale to the roots of her leaves and trembled so hard that the whole

tree seemed about to break apart. The Earth God came close and stopped before her, but for some moments he could not speak. At last he said in a broken voice, “Birch Tree, the fox is dead.”

The birch gave no answer at all. She only trembled. The Earth God looked at her once, then looked down again at the fox. “I did not mean...” he began, but the words would not go on. He sank slowly down beside the birch and laid the fox on the ground with both hands as gently as a mother lays down a sleeping child. Then he covered his face and began to cry. He cried with great rough sobs that shook his whole body, and yet those sobs were not fierce now. They were only full of pain.

The birch could not move toward him and could not move away. She stood there trembling, her leaves making a faint dry sound in the autumn air. The golden grasses shone all around them. The sky remained clear and high above. Nothing in the field answered. The Earth God went on crying and crying beside the dead fox, and there was no one there who could comfort him.

## Snow Crossing [Yukiwatari]

### Part 1

The snow had frozen so hard that it seemed firmer than marble, and the sky above looked like a cold smooth blue stone. The sun burned white and poured down its light until the whole field flashed and glittered. Every tree shone with frost as if sugar had been thrown over it, and even the air itself felt sharp and bright. Shiro and little Kanko put on their small snow boots and ran out into the field with quick light steps. As they went, they sang, “Hard snow, kanko. Frozen snow, shinko.”

It was one of those rare winter days when children could go anywhere they liked. They could walk across millet fields where no one could usually step, and over wide grassland that was soft and deep in other seasons. Now the ground was flat like a giant board, and every part of it shone like thousands of tiny mirrors. Shiro looked far ahead and cried, “Kanko, let’s go all the way to the woods.” Kanko laughed and answered, “Yes, let’s go. Hard snow, kanko. Frozen snow, shinko.”

Near the forest stood a great oak tree, bent under long clear icicles so thick and heavy that its branches looked tired. The children stopped there and turned toward the wood. Then together they shouted as loudly as they could, “Hard snow, kanko. Frozen snow, shinko. Little fox, do you want a bride?” The call flew over the white ground and into the dark line of trees. For a moment nothing answered, and the children listened with bright eager faces.

Then from inside the wood there came a strange light voice singing back, “Hard snow, kanko. Frozen snow, shinko.” The branches moved a little, and out stepped a fox child. He wore a blue scarf round his neck, and his fur was yellow-brown and very neat. His name, he said, was Konzaburo. He stood politely on the hard snow, looked at the two children with clear black eyes, and asked, “Were you really calling for me?”

Shiro answered at once, “Yes, we were calling. We did not think anyone

would come.” Kanko clapped her hands and said, “You really are a fox child. How pretty your scarf is.” Konzaburo seemed pleased, and his whiskers moved a little as he smiled. “Thank you,” he said. “My mother tied it for me. But why did you ask whether I wanted a bride?” Shiro laughed and said, “We only shouted it because it sounded funny in the snow.”

Konzaburo did not seem angry at all. Instead he looked around at the shining field and said, “It is a wonderful day. On a day like this, even foxes feel happy.” Then he came a little closer and added, “Would you like to come to our house? We have dumplings.” Shiro and Kanko looked at one another. They were not truly frightened, but they remembered many stories about foxes, and Shiro asked carefully, “Are they real dumplings?” Konzaburo lifted his short paws and cried, “Of course they are real. I grew the grain myself, cut it, beat it, ground it, kneaded it, steamed it, and even put sugar over it.”

Kanko smiled, but Shiro shook his head. “We just ate rice cakes at home,” he said. “We are not hungry now.” Konzaburo seemed sorry for a moment, but then his whole face brightened again. “Then come another time,” he said quickly. “On the next moonlit night when the snow freezes hard again, we will have a lantern show. It will begin at eight o’clock, and I will give you tickets.” Shiro said, “Then give us five.” Konzaburo blinked and asked, “Five? There are only two of you. Who are the other three for?”

“My older brothers,” said Shiro. “They will want to come too.” Konzaburo became serious and asked, “Are your brothers eleven years old or younger?” Shiro counted for a moment and answered, “No. My small older brother is in the fourth grade, so he is twelve.” Konzaburo pulled his whiskers in a wise way and said, “Then I am sorry, but they cannot come. Only you two may come. I will prepare special seats.” Kanko asked, “Why only children?” and Konzaburo replied, “Because it is a children’s lantern show. It is much more fun that way.”

Shiro’s eyes grew bright. “What will the lantern show be about?” he asked. Konzaburo stood straighter and said proudly, “The first picture is ‘Do Not Drink Sake.’ It shows two men from your village who drank too much and then tried to eat strange buns and noodles in the field. I am in that picture too. The second is

‘Watch Out for Traps.’ The third is ‘Do Not Steal Fish.’ There are songs with every picture, and everyone claps.” Kanko laughed and said, “That sounds wonderful.” Then Shiro asked, “Will there be many fox children there?” and Konzaburo answered, “Yes, a great many.”

After that they began to talk as children do when they have quickly become friends. Konzaburo told them which places in the wood were good in summer and where the snow stayed longest in winter. Shiro boasted that he could walk faster than anyone over frozen snow, and Kanko said she could sing louder than both of them. Then Konzaburo asked, “Shall we call the fawn too? He is very good at the flute.” Shiro and Kanko were delighted, so the three of them shouted together, “Hard snow, kanko. Frozen snow, shinko. Little deer, do you want a bride?”

A thin fine voice answered from far away, “North wind, pii pii, Wind Saburo. West wind, do do, Matasaburo.” Konzaburo made a sharp little face and said, “That is the fawn. He is timid. He will probably not come.” Still, they shouted once more, and again there came only that distant singing voice, half like wind and half like a flute. Then Konzaburo said, “You had better go home now. If the snow softens, it will be dangerous. But when the next bright moonlit frozen night comes, you must come. I promise we will have the lantern show.”

Shiro nodded and said, “We will come.” Kanko also said, “Yes, we will come. Do not forget us.” Konzaburo answered, “I will not forget. I will save the best seats for you.” So the children turned and started back across the silver field, singing once more, “Hard snow, kanko. Frozen snow, shinko.” When they looked back, Konzaburo was still standing near the edge of the wood with his blue scarf bright against the dark trees, and then at last he slipped quietly into the forest and was gone.

## Part 2

On the night of the full moon, the great pale moon rose quietly over the icy mountain. The snow shone blue and white under it, and once again it had frozen as hard as stone. Shiro remembered his promise with Konzaburo and whispered

to Kanko, "Tonight is the foxes' lantern show. Shall we go?" Kanko jumped up at once and cried, "Yes, let us go. Fox child, fox child, dear little Konzaburo." At that, their second brother Jiro heard them and said, "So you are going to the foxes. I want to come too."

Shiro looked troubled and said, "No, Brother, you cannot. It says on the ticket that only children of eleven or younger may enter." Jiro held out his hand and said, "Let me see that." Then he laughed and read it aloud in a grand voice. "Any guest who is not a parent of a school child and who is twelve or older will not be admitted. These foxes do things properly, do they not?" Then he added more kindly, "Since I cannot go, take them a gift. Here, this round rice cake will do nicely."

So Shiro and Kanko put on their little snow boots again, carried the rice cake, and stepped out into the moonlight. Their three brothers stood in a row at the door and called after them, "Go carefully. If you meet a grown fox, shut your eyes at once. Shall we cheer for you? Hard snow, kanko. Frozen snow, shinko. Fox child, do you want a bride?" The moon rose higher, and the woods ahead looked wrapped in pale blue smoke. Before long the two children reached the edge of the forest.

There they saw a small white fox child standing very straight with an acorn badge on its chest. It blinked with great dignity and said, "Good evening. Do you have your admission tickets?" Shiro answered, "Yes, we do," and showed them. The fox child bowed, pointed one paw into the woods, and said, "Please go that way." So the children followed the path of moonlight between the trees until they came into a small open place deep in the forest.

The clearing was full of fox schoolchildren. Some were throwing chestnut shells at one another, some were wrestling, and the strangest of all was a tiny fox no bigger than a mouse riding on the shoulders of an older fox and trying to catch stars with both paws. In front of them all hung a white sheet from a branch. Then suddenly a voice behind them said, "Good evening. Thank you for coming. I was rude the other day." They turned quickly, and there was Konzaburo.

He looked quite different now. He wore something like a fine tailcoat, with

a daffodil on his chest, and he kept wiping his sharp little mouth with a white handkerchief. Shiro bowed a little and said, "Thank you for inviting us. Please let everyone share this rice cake." All the fox pupils turned and stared. Konzaburo drew himself up proudly, received the rice cake, and said, "Thank you very much for your gift. Please relax and enjoy yourselves. The lantern show will begin very soon. Excuse me for a moment." Then he carried the cake away with a very important face.

At once all the fox schoolchildren shouted together, "Hard snow, kanko. Frozen snow, shinko. Hard rice cake is kattarako. White rice cake is bettarako." A large sign appeared beside the hanging sheet. It said, "Gift: Many Rice Cakes. From Human Shiro and Human Kanko." The fox pupils clapped their paws with delight. Just then a whistle sounded, sharp and clear in the moonlit clearing.

Konzaburo came out beside the screen, gave a careful little cough, bowed deeply, and began. "Tonight is a beautiful night. The moon is like a pearl plate, and the stars are like drops of dew frozen bright over the field. We will now begin our lantern show. Please keep your eyes wide open and do not blink or sneeze." Then he added, lowering his voice, "We also have two honored guests tonight, so everyone must be quiet. No one must throw chestnut shells in their direction. That is the opening speech." The fox pupils clapped again, and Shiro whispered to Kanko, "Konzaburo is very good at this."

The whistle sounded again, and large words appeared on the screen. "Do Not Drink Sake." Those words vanished, and in their place came a picture of a drunken old man from the village holding some strange round thing in his hands. At once all the fox pupils began stamping their feet and singing, "Frozen snow, shinko. Hard snow, kanko. Field buns puff puff puff. Drunken old Taeemon ate thirty-eight last year." When the picture disappeared, Shiro bent toward Kanko and whispered, "That song is Konzaburo's."

Another picture appeared. This one showed a younger drunken man with his face pushed into a bowl made of magnolia leaves, while nearby stood Konzaburo in white trousers watching. Again the fox children stamped and sang, "Frozen snow, shinko. Hard snow, kanko. Field noodles puff puff puff. Drunken Seisaku

ate thirteen bowls last year.” Then that picture too vanished, and there was a short pause. During it, a pretty fox girl brought two plates of millet dumplings and held them out to the children.

Shiro lost heart completely for a moment. He had just watched those village men eating strange things they should not have eaten, and now every fox pupil in the place had turned to look at him and Kanko, whispering, “Will they eat them? Do you think they will eat them?” Kanko turned red and sat frozen with the plate in her hands. Then Shiro made up his mind. “Come on,” he said softly. “Eat them. I do not believe Konzaburo would trick us.”

So the two of them ate the dumplings. They were so delicious that it seemed their cheeks might fall off with pleasure. The fox pupils were beside themselves with joy. They jumped up and began to dance and sing all together, “In the day the hard bright sun, in the night the sharp bright moon. Even if the body is torn apart, a fox schoolchild must not lie.” Then they stamped and sang again, “Even if one freezes and falls down, a fox schoolchild must not steal.” And once more, “Even if the body is broken to pieces, a fox schoolchild must not envy others.”

Hearing that song, Shiro and Kanko were so happy that tears came into their eyes. It did not feel like a trick or a joke now. It felt as if the whole clearing, the moon, the snow, and all those little foxes had gathered there to say something true and brave. Kanko whispered, “Brother, they are good children, are they not?” Shiro nodded and answered very softly, “Yes. They are.” And just then, from beside the screen, the whistle sounded once more to begin the next part of the show.

### Part 3

Then the whistle sounded again. Great words appeared on the screen: “Do Not Think Lightly of Traps.” Those words vanished, and a picture came in their place. It showed a fox called Konbei with his left leg caught in a trap out in the field. At once all the fox pupils stamped their feet and sang, “Fox, fox, little fox. Last year Fox Konbei put his left foot in a trap, and flapped and cried, kon-kon-

kon.” Shiro bent toward Kanko and whispered with quiet pride, “That is my song, is it not?” Kanko nodded, her eyes shining, and whispered back, “Yes, Brother. It is yours.”

Then that picture too disappeared, and new words came out bright and large. “Do Not Think Lightly of Fire.” These also vanished, and now another picture appeared. It showed Fox Konsuke trying to steal a roasted fish and burning his tail in the fire. The fox pupils shouted together, “Fox, fox, little fox. Last year Fox Konsuke tried to take a roasted fish, and fire caught his tail, and he cried, kyan-kyan-kyan.” The children could not help laughing, yet it was a warm kind laugh now, full of friendship rather than fear.

After that the whistle gave one last sharp note, the screen turned bright again, and Konzaburo came out once more beside it. He bowed deeply, wiped his mouth with his white handkerchief, and spoke in a very careful voice. “Everyone, tonight’s lantern show is now over. There is one thing that all of you must keep firmly in your hearts. Tonight two wise human children, who were not drunk and were not foolish, ate food made by foxes. Because of that, I believe all of you, when you become grown foxes, will stop lying, stop envying others, and remove the bad name foxes have carried until now. That is the closing speech.”

The fox schoolchildren were deeply moved. Many stood up all at once, many lifted both paws into the air, and tears shone in their eyes. Shiro and Kanko also felt their eyes fill again. The whole clearing seemed bright with moonlight, frost, and honest feeling. It was as if all the songs and pictures had been preparing for this one quiet truth. For a little while no one moved roughly or laughed too loudly. Even the smallest foxes stood still.

Then Konzaburo came straight to the two children, bowed with great care, and said, “Well then, good night. I will never forget your kindness tonight.” Shiro bowed too and answered, “We will not forget it either.” Kanko said, “Thank you, Konzaburo. Everything was beautiful.” Konzaburo smiled, and for a moment he looked no longer proud and careful, but simply happy. Then the two children turned toward home.

At once the fox pupils came running after them. One slipped acorns into their

pockets. Another pushed chestnuts into their sleeves. Another dropped little blue shining stones into the folds of their clothes. "Here, take this." "Please have this too." "Do not forget us," they cried, and then each one fled away like the wind before the children could thank them properly. Konzaburo stood a little apart and watched, laughing quietly to himself as if he were pleased with every one of them.

Shiro and Kanko came out of the forest and crossed the wide pale field. The snow shone blue-white under the moon, and their two shadows went beside them, thin and dark on the hard frozen ground. They were tired now, but it was the happy tiredness that comes after a wonderful night. From time to time Kanko touched her pocket and felt the hard round acorns and chestnuts there. "Brother," she said softly, "foxes are not bad at all." Shiro answered, "No. They are not. They were kinder and truer than many people."

Then, in the middle of the great shining field, they saw three black shadows coming toward them from the other side. The shadows grew larger and larger until they became clear. They were their three older brothers, who had come out to meet them. Shiro and Kanko ran forward across the silver snow, and the brothers called, "Was it good? Was the lantern show good?" The two children cried back together, "Yes. It was wonderful." And under the cold bright moon they all turned homeward across the frozen field.

## Baraumi Elementary School [Baraumi Shōgakkō]

### Part 1

I went out to the Baraumi field for two reasons. One was to collect a good volcanic bomb for a specimen, and the other was to see whether the wild beach rose people talked about truly grew there. As you know, beach roses belong by the sea. So many people thought it very strange that such a plant should grow in a lonely field far inland beyond the mountains. One man even wrote in the newspaper that Baraumi must have been sea until quite recently, and he gave three reasons for this: the name Baraumi itself, the rumor of beach roses, and the slight salty taste one seemed to find if one licked the soil.

For my part, I did not think any of those things proved anything at all. In fact, I never found a single beach rose there. Of course that did not prove there were none. If I had found even one, that would have been proof that they existed there, but because I found none, the question remained just as it had been. As for the volcanic bomb, I did at last find one, though one edge of it was a little crushed, and so I was fairly satisfied. Yet even that specimen, which had cost me half a day's search, was later taken from me and turned into a donation.

“A donation? To whom?” you may ask. To the principal, of course. “The principal of what school?” Well then, to speak plainly, the principal of the Baraumi Fox Elementary School. Please do not make such a face. I am quite serious when I say that on that very afternoon I visited the whole school. I was not tricked by foxes into seeing women or priests where foxes stood. I saw foxes as foxes. If seeing foxes as foxes means being deceived by foxes, then perhaps seeing human beings as human beings also means being deceived by them.

The only odd thing, perhaps, is whether foxes can have an elementary school at all. But even that is not impossible. Listen a little further, and you will see that such a school may indeed exist. I must add, however, that when I say the fox school existed, I do not mean it was only a lie inside my head. It was not false. The proof is that I am now telling you about it. And if you listen and imagine it in

the same way, then that fox school will exist for you as well. I sometimes take such private journeys alone across such private fields, but when I do so I become very tired afterward, and for some time I become especially poor at arithmetic. So there is no real harm in hearing about such travels, but it is best not to wander into them too often yourself.

To tell the truth, it would have been far better to visit the fox school from the beginning than to search among the grasses for beach roses. If I had watched from the first morning class, I am sure I would have learned much more. What I saw was only the afternoon session, from one o'clock to two, the fifth hour of the day. Yet even at that hour the fox pupils were far from tired. Not one of them looked bored, and that alone was a lesson. Now let me tell you in order how I came there, for perhaps the account may be of use to you too.

Since I found no beach roses, I sat down in the grass with my little volcanic bomb in hand. The sky was full of white scale-like clouds that glittered brightly. The wild rose bushes were hung with green fruit, and the silver grass was just beginning to put up its heads. The sun stood high, so I knew it was noon, and my own stomach knew it too. I took out the bag of bread I had brought, but just then I found I wanted water more than bread. There had been no stream or spring anywhere I had walked so far, yet I thought that if I went only a little farther, surely I must come upon a small trickle of water somewhere. So I put the volcanic bomb into my knapsack, slung it over my back without even fastening it properly, and walked on with only the bread bag in my hand.

I went on and on, passing through places where wild roses stood like hedges and other places where the grass looked almost planted by hand, but still there was no water at all. At last I stopped and thought I might as well eat where I was. Just then I heard, from far away, the sound of a bell. It was exactly like the bell any school rings, and it seemed to reach all the way up to the white clouds in the sky. There could be no school in that field, so I told myself perhaps the sudden stop had made my own head ring. But I could not truly believe that. Then I heard children's voices too. The wind made them sometimes faint and sometimes quite clear, but they were certainly the voices of children, calling, answering, laughing,

and shouting as children do, with now and then the deep strong voice of an adult among them.

The sound seemed so lively and inviting that I could no longer bear to stay where I was. I began to run toward it as fast as I could, catching my clothes on thorn vines and stepping into hollows with heavy blows, but still pushing ahead. As I ran, the roses became fewer and the field grew thick with a tall grass that sends up soft smoky heads. I rushed straight through it. Then, without warning, it felt as if a stick had struck my legs from under me, and I fell flat into the grass. When I jumped up, I saw that my feet had caught in the twisted heads of the grass. Smiling bitterly at myself, I rose and ran again. Once more I fell.

This time I looked carefully and saw that the grass heads were not merely tangled by nature. They had been tied from both sides into shapes like gates. In other words, they were traps. There were many of them all around. So now I moved more carefully, trying not to drag my feet sideways through the grass but to lift them neatly. Even so, before I had gone twenty steps, I was thrown down again. At that very moment a loud burst of laughter rose ahead of me, followed by a chorus of cheering cries. There before me were many fox children, white and brown, some wearing only little vests, some only short trousers, all watching me and shouting. Some bent their necks sideways and laughed, some kept their mouths pointed and silent, some threw back their heads and laughed at the sky, and some jumped up and down with delight. Then I understood at last that I had indeed come to the Baraumi Fox Elementary School, of which I had once heard somewhere before.

I had just stood up, rubbing myself and burning with shame, when the fox pupils suddenly fell silent. Across the field there came walking a teacher in a black frock coat, his pointed brown mouth neither fully open nor shut, his eyes fixed hard ahead. He was, of course, a fox teacher, and even now I still remember clearly the sharp points of his ears. He stopped suddenly and said to the pupils in a stern voice, "So you have made traps again. What if our honorable guest had been hurt? This concerns the name of the school. Today every one of you must be punished." At once the pupils drooped, flattening their ears or lifting their hands to their heads.

Then the teacher came to me and asked with perfect politeness, “Have you come to observe our school?”

Since I had come this far, I thought I might as well say yes. It was Sunday, of course, but the bell had rung, and because these were foxes I assumed they might have some different rule and not keep Sunday as a holiday at all. So I answered, “Yes, I should very much like to.” The teacher asked, “Do you have a letter of introduction?” I remembered then a certain painter named Takeshi, who had once sketched a fox school in a children’s magazine, and I said, “I come from the painter Takeshi.” The fox teacher asked, “Have you brought his letter?” and I answered, “No, but he is a very important man now. He belongs to the Academy of Fine Arts.”

The teacher waved one paw as if that would not do at all, then said, “In any case, you do not have a letter.” I answered, “No, I do not.” To my surprise he said at once, “Very well. Please come this way. It is now the noon break, but I will show you the afternoon lessons.” So I followed him. The pupils made themselves small and watched me go by. There must have been fifty of them altogether. When we had passed, the teacher turned back and commanded, “Untie all the traps. Such things damage the honor of the school. The one who planned this will be punished later.” At once the pupils sprang about busily, undoing the grass traps.

Ahead of us I had seen what I took to be a beautiful hedge of wild roses, about seven feet high and perhaps twelve yards long, with an opening in the middle and a slightly raised place inside. I thought it was only a hedge. But when the teacher said, “Now please come in,” and I stepped through the opening, I was completely astonished. It was not merely a hedge at all. It was the entrance hall of the school.

Inside, the ground was trimmed into short fine grass, and the spaces were divided neatly by rose walls. There was a place to remove shoes, a row of leather slippers, and even a whisk made from gathered horse tails hanging by the way in. Just above the entrance there was a room marked in white letters as the Principal’s Office, and beyond that there was a corridor, along with other rooms for teachers and classes, all neatly divided like our own elementary school. The only

differences were that there were no windows and no roof, but since there was no roof, windows were hardly necessary, and white clouds passed slowly over the tops of the rooms. I had scarcely finished staring when the teacher smiled a little and said, "Please put on the slippers. I will inform the principal at once."

## Part 2

I put on the slippers, took off my long boots, and stood with my knapsack in my hand while the teacher went into the principal's office. Before long he came out again with the principal himself. The principal was a thin white fox wearing a cool-looking linen collar, and since fox clothes must of course allow for a tail, I noticed at once that his trousers had a neat pouch at the back for that purpose. He wore large spectacles, and behind them his eyes shone like gold. He looked at me closely and then hurried forward, saying, "Welcome, welcome. Please do come in. I hear the pupils were very rude to you in the yard. Please come in at once."

I followed him inside, and the room was truly splendid. On the desk stood a globe. In the glass case behind him there were chicken skeletons, samples of traps, a stuffed wolf, clay models of many kinds of guns, hunting caps, bird-shooting hats, and all sorts of other things which, it seemed, were thought necessary for the elementary education of foxes. I could do nothing but look from one thing to another in surprise. Then the principal poured tea for me. It was black tea, and I thought there was milk in it as well. I was so astonished that for a moment I almost forgot to sit down.

"Please, do sit," said the principal. So I sat. He asked, "Forgive me, but are you also engaged in education?" I answered, "Yes, I teach at an agricultural school." He nodded gravely and asked, "And today is a holiday for you?" I said, "Yes. It is Sunday." The principal lifted one paw and said, "Naturally. Since you use the solar calendar, Sunday is your day of rest."

That struck me as a little odd, so I asked, "Then how is it on your side?" The fox principal slowly twisted one whisker while looking up at a blue place in the sky and replied, "A very proper question. Since we use the lunar calendar, Monday

is our day of rest.” At that I was deeply impressed. I thought, “In that case this school must be of very high level indeed. Perhaps among foxes there are only two kinds of schools, the elementary school and the university, and this Baraumi school may teach all the way to what we would call the fifth year of middle school.” So I hurriedly asked, “Do many of your pupils go on to the university?”

The principal looked proudly into the empty air far above me and answered, “This year, curiously enough, many of the graduates wished to enter practical life. Of the thirteen who finished school, twelve returned to their home districts and began useful work. Only one took the entrance examination for Ooyachi University, and he passed it beautifully.” This was exactly what I had expected. Just then a dry-looking brown fox in only a black vest came in from the teachers’ room, bowed to me, and said to the principal, “How shall we punish Takeda Kin-ichiro?”

The principal slowly turned toward him, then glanced at me. “This is the teacher of the third year,” he said. “And this gentleman is a teacher from Aso Agricultural School.” I bowed a little. The principal then said, “So it is Takeda Kin-ichiro, is it? Even though we have a guest, bring him in.” The third-year teacher bowed respectfully and went out. Soon he returned with a fox pupil wearing a short blue checked jacket. The child came in meekly and stood before us.

The principal removed his spectacles in a calm grand way, stared at the boy for some moments, and then said, “You were the one who told the others to set those grass traps in the yard, were you not?” The boy answered smartly, “Yes, sir.” The principal asked, “Did you not think that was wrong?” The boy said, “I think it is wrong now. But when I did it, I did not think so.” “Why not?” asked the principal. “Because I did not mean to knock a guest down,” the boy answered. “Then why did you do it?” said the principal. “We wanted to hold an obstacle race,” said the boy.

The principal asked, “Did you forget that the school forbids such traps?” The boy answered, “No, sir. I remembered.” “Then why did you do it?” the principal said. “Guests come here from time to time. If one of them had been badly hurt at

the entrance to the school, what then? You knew the rule and still broke it. Why?" The boy stood straight and answered, "I do not know." The principal nodded slowly and said, "No, you do not know. The truth is, one often does not know. Very well. And when this gentleman stumbled and fell, you all laughed. Why?" Again the boy answered, "I do not know." "Exactly," said the principal. "If you truly knew, you would not do such a thing. For today I shall apologize to our guest on your behalf, but from now on you must be more careful. Do you understand? Never again do what the school has forbidden."

"Yes, sir," the fox boy answered. "Then you may go and play," said the principal. Turning to me, while the teacher still stood stiffly beside the child, he said, "As you have heard, the pupils are only innocent. It seems there was no bad intention in their laughter. I ask that you kindly forgive them." Of course I replied at once, "There is nothing to forgive. I was the one who rushed straight into your yard without warning. If the pupils laughed at me, I should almost say I am glad of it." The principal cleaned his spectacles and put them back on. "Thank you very much," he said. Then he called, "Teacher Takemura, please offer our thanks as well." The third-year teacher bowed slightly to me, bowed again to the principal, and went back to the teachers' room.

The principal lowered his head, made a little thoughtful sound, and poured fresh tea into my cup. At that moment the bell rang. It must have been ten minutes before the afternoon classes began. Looking toward a black-painted timetable, the principal said, "This afternoon the first year has Ethics and Self-Protection, the second year Hunting Technique, and the third year Food Chemistry. Would you like to observe them all?" I answered, "Yes, certainly. They all sound extremely interesting. I truly regret that I could not come in the morning." The principal smiled and said, "Another time, perhaps."

I asked, "Is Self-Protection taught together with Ethics?" He answered, "Yes. Until last year they were separate subjects, but the results were not so good." I said, "I see. And hunting too. That is quite an advanced subject. On our side such things are only taught in higher schools or forestry departments." The principal smiled in a knowing way and replied, "Yes, yes. But your hunting and our hunting

differ completely in content. What you call hunting belongs under our Self-Protection, while our hunting—well, perhaps the preliminary stage of it might fit somewhere under what you call animal husbandry. In any case, I will explain each matter in turn.” Just then the bell rang again.

There came the sound of many voices, and then commands such as “Attention,” “Count off,” “Right face,” and “Forward march,” from which I understood that the fox pupils were entering the classrooms one class at a time. Soon afterward every room became quiet, and I heard the heavy voices of the teachers beginning the lessons. The principal stood up from his chair with a clever-looking smile and said, “Now then, let me guide you.” I followed him from the room. “We will begin with the first year.”

We entered a room marked, “First Classroom, First Year, Homeroom Teacher, Takei Koukichi.” The teacher there was not one I had met before. He was dressed in a very stylish way, with his silver hair cut high in a German fashion and a white morning coat over his body. Behind the platform was a blackboard fixed against a wall of wild rose branches. In front of him stood a table, and about fifteen fox pupils sat properly at white desks, listening to the lecture. When I had fully come inside, the teacher stepped down, bowed to us, climbed back onto the platform, and said, “This is a teacher from Aso Agricultural School. Everyone, rise.”

All the fox pupils stood at once. “We will greet him by singing the Aso Agricultural School song. One, two, three,” said the teacher, waving his paw. Then the pupils began to sing my school song in high clear voices. I nearly collapsed. Who could come suddenly into the Baraumi Fox Elementary School and hear fox children singing his own school song without wanting to cry? I bit my lips and twisted my face in every possible way to keep the tears back. It was less joy than something almost painful. When the song ended, the teacher gave a short greeting, motioned the pupils to sit, took up his pointer, and turned toward the blackboard.

On the board was written, “The Highest Lie Is Honesty.” The teacher began to explain it. “A lie,” he said, “is a bad thing. However cleverly one lies, it does not succeed for long. A wise person can tell at once. The balance of the words gives it away, the sound gives it away, the speaker’s face and shape give it away.

Therefore a lie may seem to work for a very short time, but before long it surely fails.” The pupils sat with their paws on their knees and their ears sharpened, listening in complete seriousness. My own head, however, had already begun to swim. Still, I told myself that since Ethics and Self-Protection had been combined this year, there must be some deep and practical reason for it, and I sat there, trying with all my strength to look impressed.

### Part 3

The first-year teacher waited until all the pupils had finished writing. Then he began again and said, “So this saying, ‘The highest lie is honesty,’ does not only mean that we ourselves should avoid foolish lies. It also has an opposite use. When human beings lie to us, their lie too may become a kind of honesty, and that honesty is often the most useful thing of all.” The fox children sat very straight with their paws on their knees, and not one of them looked away. I myself felt that my head had already begun to sway a little, yet because the principal had told me that Ethics and Self-Protection had been joined into one subject, I nodded as if the whole thing were a very deep improvement.

The teacher went on, “Take traps, for example. There are many kinds, but the most dangerous trap is the one that openly looks like a trap. It is badly hidden. It almost says, ‘I am here to catch foxes.’ And precisely because it says so honestly, it catches foxes well.” He then asked a pretty little fox in a red vest to fetch the trap models from the principal’s office, and while the child was gone, the whole room remained silent. Outside, the sky had filled with white clouds, and the sun ran behind them like a silver round mirror, while the green walls of wild rose trembled softly in the wind. Then the child came back, panting, with all five models at once.

The teacher lifted them one by one and explained them with great seriousness. He showed an American fox-catcher with nickel plating, another old-fashioned type with heavy iron teeth, and others of different size and shape, pointing out with his whip how a good trap deceives by appearing not to deceive. The pupils

listened with their ears sharply forward. Some narrowed their eyes, some leaned a little over their desks, and all of them seemed to take careful note in their minds. I myself could only think, "This is certainly practical instruction, though whether it belongs with moral training is another question." Still, I kept a grave face and made a show of admiring the lesson.

At last the principal touched my sleeve and whispered, "We should go on. There is little time." So we slipped out quietly and went to the next classroom, where the lesson was Food Chemistry. The fox teacher there was speaking with a perfectly calm academic voice about the value of different foods. "In general," he was saying, "not only chicken meat but the flesh of birds contains much phosphorus, and phosphorus is very important for feeding the nerves of the brain." I thought at once, "That sounds exactly like something written in a household science book for girls," and because of that I became still more impressed by the broad range of fox education.

The teacher continued, "Eggs are also very good. Compared with chicken meat, they contain a little less protein and a little more fat, and so they are also used for the sick. Then there is fried tofu. In former times the supply of that was abundant, but now that is no longer so, and therefore it is in truth a declining food. Its protein is twenty-two percent, its fat eighteen point seven percent, and its carbohydrates zero point nine percent, though at present it is not especially important." The pupils sat quietly through all this, and even the principal stood with his head lowered, listening with a face that suggested both dignity and appetite. Then the teacher added, "In place of fried tofu, corn has lately become common, though it is not very easy to digest."

The principal again bent toward me and said in a low voice, "There is not much time left, so let us go to the last room." We went back down the rose corridor, passed the entrance, crossed by the principal's office and the teachers' room, and came at last to the third classroom, where the black board read, "Third Year, Teacher Takehara Kyusuke." It was the dry brown fox teacher from before, the one who had brought in the boy called Takeda Kin-ichiro, and the class was Hunting. The very moment I heard that title, my curiosity returned in full force,

for the principal had already warned me that fox hunting and human hunting were entirely different matters.

The teacher was lecturing in a proud clear voice. "Hunting," he said, "has three parts. The first is to encourage poultry keeping. The main part is to catch what has been raised. The last part is to eat it." I stared so hard that my eyes hurt, but the pupils only nodded as if this were the most natural division in the world. The teacher then said, "As a model of the first part, let me give one example. Not long ago, while I was walking in the pine grove at Barakubo, I met a human schoolboy in a black student uniform. I jumped out and said, 'Do you know what I am?' He answered, 'You are a fox.' I liked that answer very much."

The whole class leaned forward, and the teacher continued, "'Then shall I guess what you are thinking about?' I asked. 'No, there is no need,' the boy said. I liked that answer too. Then I told him, 'You are worried about what to say at the school entertainment two days from now. In that case, speak about the need for raising chickens. There are always grains fallen in the dirt, leaves no one needs, and caterpillars in the cabbage. Feed all these to the chickens. The chickens will be delighted, they will lay eggs, and it will be very profitable.' The boy thanked me warmly and went away. He surely gave that speech. Then everyone naturally began to keep chickens, and once there are many chickens and chicks, we can begin the main business." At this the fox pupils did not laugh. They only listened with bright hard eyes and wrote down what seemed important.

But I nearly burst with laughter, for I knew that human boy. He was one of my own second-year students. There really had been a school entertainment, and he really had spoken there of a fox he met in the pine grove. Only in his version, when the fox advised him to encourage poultry keeping, he answered, "So you want me to raise chickens and then let you steal them?" and the fox ran away in confusion. I naturally did not say a word of this in class. Just then the bell for the end of the period rang, and the hunting teacher said, "We will stop here today."

The pupils stood and bowed, and I bowed in return, though by then my head seemed full of wind, clouds, school songs, traps, eggs, chickens, foxes, and every sort of mixed-up principle. The principal led me gently back to his office and

poured more black tea with milk into my cup. Then he smiled and asked, “Well then, what is your opinion?” I answered honestly, “To tell the truth, my head feels rather mixed and tangled.” At that the principal threw back his white face and laughed. “Ah, yes,” he said. “Everyone says that.”

Then he suddenly asked, “By the way, did you happen to find anything good in the field today?” I replied, “Yes, I found a volcanic bomb, though it is not a very complete specimen.” The principal at once leaned forward and said, “May I see it for a moment?” I took it unwillingly from my knapsack and handed it over. He turned it in his paws and examined it for some time through his large glasses. Then he said, in a tone so polite that refusal became impossible, “This is truly an excellent specimen. Would you be so kind as to donate it to the school?”

What could I do? I answered, “Yes, certainly.” The principal silently put it away in the glass cabinet. By then my head had become so dizzy that I could no longer bear another minute in that place. Just then the principal said quite suddenly, “Well then, good-bye.” I stood up at once and answered, “Then I shall take my leave.” I hurried from the office, down the corridor, through the entrance, and out into the field.

At once I began to run. Behind me I could hear the fox pupils shouting loudly, and over them the deep voices of the teachers trying to quiet them. I ran and ran until I came back to the part of the Baraumi field that I knew well. Only then did I calm down enough to walk slowly home. And after all that, I must confess the truth. Even now I do not understand in the least what educational policy ruled that fox elementary school. To be perfectly honest, I simply do not know.

## The Shell Fire [Kai no Hi]

### Part 1

Now all the rabbits wore their short brown summer coats. The grass in the field shone brightly, and white flowers opened on the birch trees here and there. The whole field was full of a sweet smell. Little Homoi, a young rabbit, jumped and danced with joy and said, “Ah, what a good smell. It is so good. Even the lily-of-the-valley tastes crisp and fresh.” Then a wind came over the field, and the flowers and leaves of the lilies touched each other and rang softly like little bells.

Homoi was so happy that he could hardly breathe. He ran over the grass in quick little jumps and at last stopped, crossed his arms, and smiled to himself. “I feel just like a performer dancing on top of river waves,” he said. And in fact, before he knew it, he had come to the bank of a small stream. The water there made a round bright sound as it moved, and the sand at the bottom flashed like glass.

Homoi bent his head and looked across the water. “I think I could jump over this stream,” he said aloud. “It would be easy enough. But the grass on the other side does not look very good.” Just then a loud frightened cry came from upstream. Something dark and messy was floating down the water, beating weakly against the current. Homoi ran quickly to the bank and stood ready. “What is that? A bird? A leaf? No, it is alive,” he said.

The thing in the water came nearer, and now he saw that it was a young skylark. The poor little bird was thin and wet and half drowning. Homoi cried, “Do not be afraid. I will catch you,” and jumped straight into the water. He seized the bird with both front paws and carried it onto the bank. The little skylark opened its yellow beak wide in terror and gave a broken sound. Homoi said, “Be quiet. I am not hurting you. You are safe now.”

The bird still trembled, and just then its mother came flying down with wild cries. She circled above Homoi and screamed, “Give him back. Give him back. That is my child.” Homoi looked up in surprise and said, “I saved him from the

water.” But the mother bird was too frightened to understand. She fluttered down and struck at him with her wings while crying, “You rabbit, you rabbit, leave my child alone.” Homoi stepped back at once and said sadly, “I was only trying to help.”

The young skylark, still shaking, hid against his mother. The mother bird spread both wings over him and stared at Homoi with hard frightened eyes. Then, after a moment, she began to see what had happened. The wet child was alive. The river was behind them. Homoi was standing back and looking hurt rather than cruel. At last she said in a weak voice, “Did you truly pull him out?” Homoi answered, “Yes. He was floating away, and I thought he would die.”

The mother skylark lowered her head and said, “Then forgive me. I was afraid and did not know.” Homoi answered quickly, “That is all right. A mother must be afraid.” The little skylark now looked up and gave a small cry as if he too wanted to thank him. Homoi smiled and said, “You should take him home quickly. He must get warm.” The mother bowed many times and said, “We will never forget this kindness,” and then she flew away with her child.

Homoi stood there for a while, pleased and a little proud, though he tried not to show it. “Well,” he said to himself, “it was nothing much. Still, I am glad I was there.” But the water had been very cold, and soon he began to feel strange. His ears grew hot while the rest of his body turned chilly. He tried to walk back through the sweet-smelling field, but the ground no longer felt firm under his feet. “That is odd,” he said. “Why does everything shake like this?”

When he reached home, his mother looked up at once and cried, “Homoi, what has happened to you? Your face is burning.” His father came quickly from the other room and touched his head. “He has a fever,” he said. Homoi tried to laugh and answered, “It is nothing. I only went into the stream for a moment.” But even while he spoke, the walls seemed to tilt around him. “Mother,” he whispered, “the room looks strange,” and with that he fell heavily to the floor.

His parents called the rabbit doctor at once. The doctor came hurrying with his bag and said, “This is a hard fever, but do not be too frightened. Keep him warm, and do not let him move.” His mother sat beside him and wiped his face.

His father prepared medicine and hot cloths. Sometimes Homoi opened his eyes and murmured, “The stream... the little bird... did he live?” and his mother answered, “Yes, yes. Be quiet now. You did a good thing, and the bird lived.”

The days passed slowly. Outside, the lilies of the valley made blue berries, and the field changed little by little under the summer sun. Inside the house Homoi lay weak and thin, sometimes sleeping, sometimes waking and asking for water in a faint voice. His father and mother cared for him with great patience, and the rabbit doctor came again and again until at last the danger passed. Still, Homoi remained weak for a long time, and all through those quiet days no one in the house guessed that this small act of kindness beside the stream would soon bring a strange and shining gift.

## Part 2

By the time the blue berries had formed on the lily-of-the-valley, Homoi had finally become well again. One quiet clear evening he stepped outside for the first time since his sickness. A red star went slanting across the southern sky, and he stood watching it with complete wonder. Just then there came a sudden flutter in the air overhead, and two small birds came down from the sky. The larger one carefully set a round shining red thing on the grass and bowed low before him.

“Lord Homoi,” said the older bird, “you are the great savior of my child and of me as well.” Homoi looked closely in the red light and said, “Are you the skylarks from that day by the stream?” The mother skylark bowed again and answered, “Yes, we are. On that day you saved my son’s life, and because of us you yourself became ill. We have flown here every day waiting for you to come outside again. We bring you a gift from our king.” Then she began unwrapping the shining thing from a thin cloth like mist.

Inside the cloth was a round jewel almost as large as a horse chestnut. It was called the Shell Fire. Red and yellow flames seemed to move inside it, though when Homoi touched it, it was cool and clear and smooth. The mother skylark said, “Our king sends this to you. He says that, depending on how you care for it,

it may become more and more splendid. Please accept it.” Homoi smiled and shook his head. “No, no,” he said. “I do not need such a beautiful thing. It is enough just to look at it. Please take it back with you.”

But the skylark bowed again and answered, “No. You must accept it. It is the king’s own gift. If you refuse it, then my child and I must go home and kill ourselves for failing in our duty.” Homoi cried, “Please do not say such terrible things,” but before he could think what to add, the skylarks bowed two or three more times and flew up into the night, leaving the jewel before him on the grass. Homoi picked it up very carefully. When he held it to the sky, the flames disappeared, and he could see the Milky Way through it as clearly as through pure water. But when he lowered it again, the little fires began moving inside once more.

He carried it into the house at once and showed it to his father. His father took off his glasses, examined the jewel very carefully, and said, “This is truly the famous Shell Fire. It is an extraordinary treasure. There are stories that only three beings have ever kept such a jewel bright through their whole lives, two birds and one fish. Be very careful, Homoi. Do not let its light be lost.” Homoi answered quickly, “That is easy. I will never lose it. I will breathe on it a hundred times every day and polish it a hundred times with red sparrow feathers.” His mother also looked at it for a long time and said, “It is very easily damaged, they say, and yet there is another story too.”

“What story?” Homoi asked. His mother answered, “Once an eagle minister carried such a jewel. During a great eruption he rushed everywhere helping the birds escape. The jewel was struck by falling stones and even swept along in red-hot lava, yet it was not clouded or broken at all. It grew even more beautiful than before.” Homoi’s father nodded and said, “That is a famous story. If you become noble like that eagle minister, the jewel may also stay bright with you. But if you grow cruel or selfish, that is another matter. So be careful not to become unkind.”

Homoi was already sleepy from his long illness and all this excitement. He lay down in bed and said, “Do not worry. I will do splendidly. Give me the jewel. I will sleep with it.” His mother handed it to him, and he pressed it against his

chest and was asleep almost at once. That night he had beautiful dreams. Yellow and green fire burned in the air, the whole field turned into gold grass, countless tiny windmills flew through the sky with a humming sound, and a noble eagle minister in a silver mantle passed proudly over the plain. Even in his dream Homoi cried many times, “Ah, it is working. It is working beautifully.”

The next morning he woke around seven and looked first of all at the jewel. It seemed even more beautiful than it had the night before. He peered into it and whispered, “I can see it. That must be the crater. There, it is bursting again. The sparks are splitting in two. It is beautiful, just like fireworks.” His mother came smiling with fine white roots and blue wild-rose berries for breakfast and said, “Wash your face well today and take a little exercise. May I hold it while you wash?” Homoi answered cheerfully, “Of course. It belongs to the whole family.”

After breakfast he breathed on the Shell Fire one hundred times and polished it one hundred times with red sparrow feathers. Then he wrapped it in soft breast feathers, placed it in the agate box where the family had once kept a telescope, and gave it to his mother for safekeeping. After that he went out into the field. The wind shook the dew from the grass, the bellflowers rang their morning bell, and Homoi went skipping toward the birch trees in the bright air. Before long an old wild horse came walking toward him.

Homoi grew a little afraid and was about to turn back, but the old horse bowed deeply and said, “Are you Lord Homoi? I have heard that the Shell Fire has come to you at last. It has been twelve hundred years, they say, since it last came among the beasts. When I heard the news this morning, I wept with joy.” And indeed the horse began crying in great tears. Homoi had first been only surprised, but seeing the horse cry so hard, he too felt his nose sting. The horse wiped his tears with a handkerchief the size of a towel and said, “You are our benefactor. Please take very good care of your health,” and then bowed again and walked away.

Homoi felt oddly pleased and wandered on beneath the elder trees, thinking happy thoughts. There he found two young squirrels sitting side by side and eating white rice cakes together. When they saw him, they jumped up in alarm, fixed

their collars, rolled their eyes, and tried to swallow their cakes at once. Homoi said in his usual friendly way, "Good morning, squirrels." But the two of them were so stiff with respect that they could not answer him at all. Homoi said, "Would you like to go somewhere and play with me today?" and the squirrels only stared at one another with round frightened eyes and ran off as fast as they could.

Homoi went home at once and said, "Mother, something is wrong. The squirrels have left me out already." But his mother laughed and answered, "That is only because you are now a very important person. The squirrels are shy in front of you. So you must be careful not to behave in a way that makes others laugh later." Homoi cried, "Then am I a great chief now?" and his mother, pleased herself, said, "Well, something like that." At once Homoi jumped high and shouted, "Wonderful. Then everyone is my follower now. Even foxes will not frighten me anymore. I will make the squirrels my little generals, and the horse can be a colonel."

His mother laughed again and said, "That is all very well, but do not become too proud." Homoi answered, "That is all right. I know what I am doing," and bounded out into the field once more. At that very moment a cruel fox flashed by like the wind. Homoi trembled, but he gathered all his courage and shouted, "Stop there, Fox. I am a great chief now." The fox spun round at once, changed color, and said, "Yes, sir, I know it already. What command do you have for me?"

Homoi felt his heart leap with joy. "You have treated me badly before," he said as grandly as he could. "From now on, you are my servant." The fox looked almost ready to faint and cried, "I am terribly sorry. Please forgive me." Homoi enjoyed this so much that he nearly forgot himself. "Very well," he said. "I will forgive you specially. I appoint you second lieutenant. Work hard for me." The fox whirled round four times with delight and said, "Thank you, sir. I will do anything. Shall I go steal some corn for you?" Homoi answered at once, "No. That is bad. You must never do such things."

"Yes, yes," said the fox, scratching his head. "From now on I will never do such a thing. I will wait for your orders." Homoi said, "Good. Go over there, then, and stay ready in case I call you." The fox bowed again and again and hurried off.

Homoi was so pleased that he could hardly stand still. He walked up and down through the field, talking to himself, laughing softly, and thinking of one delightful plan after another. By the time the sun fell beyond the birches like a broken golden mirror, he at last returned home, where his father was already waiting and a fine supper had been prepared. That night too Homoi had beautiful dreams.

### Part 3

The next morning was gray and wet. A heavy mist lay over the field, and everything seemed to hold its breath. The trees did not move. The grass did not move. Even the beech leaves stayed still. Homoi, who had gone out once more with the pride of a new great lord in his chest, stood in that silent world and felt both important and lonely. He thought, "This is a day fit for a general. No one speaks because they all know I am here."

Soon the fox came again, quick and smooth as ever. He bowed low and said, "Good morning, Lord Homoi. I have heard that the Shell Fire has come to you. That is a great thing, a very great thing." Homoi lifted his head and answered in as deep a voice as he could manage, "Yes. It has come to me. From now on you must serve me properly." The fox bowed still lower and said, "Of course. I am your man now. I would be honored to bring you something fine every day." Homoi narrowed his eyes and asked, "What sort of thing?" The fox answered at once, "Three good pieces of square bread every day. I can bring them without fail."

Homoi was delighted. "Three every day?" he said. "Then do it." The fox blinked and added carefully, "There is only one condition. If I happen to take a chicken here and there while doing my work, you must not stop me." Homoi thought of the rich sweet taste of square bread and of carrying it proudly home. He answered too quickly, "Very well. I will not stop you." The fox bowed and cried, "Excellent. Then here are today's first gifts," and ran off like the wind.

Before long he came back with two more pieces in his mouth and set them before Homoi. "There, my lord," he said. "That makes three." Homoi looked at them with shining eyes and said, "Good. You may go now." The fox bowed again

and vanished into the mist. Homoi picked up the bread and thought, "Father has surely never tasted anything this fine. Mother too will be surprised. I am truly a good son. I am a great lord, and I am dutiful as well."

When he brought the bread home, his father and mother were drying lily-of-the-valley berries in front of the house. Homoi cried happily, "Father, Mother, look what I have brought. Please eat it. It is very good." His father took one piece, removed his glasses, and examined it closely. Then his face grew hard. "You got this from a fox," he said. "It was stolen. I will not eat stolen food." Before Homoi could answer, his father snatched away the piece meant for Mother as well, threw both to the ground, and trampled them into the dirt until they were broken and ruined.

Homoi stood frozen. Then his face twisted, and he began to cry. "Why did you do that?" he shouted. "I brought them for you." His father said sternly, "A gift stolen by a fox is filth. If you accept such things, your heart will also become dirty." Homoi ran into the house, crying bitterly, and would not come out for some time. At last he fell asleep in tears, but even in sleep he was restless and unhappy, and before dawn he dreamed again. This time he stood on the top of a sharp narrow mountain on one leg, unable to move, while a terrible emptiness opened below him.

On the next day his mother sent him out with a basket to gather lily-of-the-valley berries. Homoi walked through the field muttering, "A great commander picking berries is ridiculous. If anyone sees me, they will laugh. If only the fox would come." Just then the ground under his feet stirred a little, and he saw a mole moving underground. Homoi stamped and cried, "Mole, Mole, do you know that I have become great?" From the earth below came a frightened voice. "Yes, Lord Homoi. I know it very well."

Homoi swelled with pride. "Good," he said. "Then I make you a sergeant. Now work for me. Gather these berries." The mole answered in great fear, "Please forgive me. I am very clumsy in bright places. If I stay long in the sun, I will die." Homoi stamped harder and shouted, "Then you are useless. I do not need you. Later you will see what happens." The mole begged again and again, but Homoi

would not listen. At that moment five squirrels came running out from the shadow of the elder trees, bowed their heads, and said, “Lord Homoi, please let us gather the berries for you.”

Homoi was pleased at once. “Yes, do it,” he said. “All of you are my little generals.” The squirrels squealed with joy and began to work at once. Then six young horses came trotting over the grass and stopped before him, and the biggest one said, “Lord Homoi, please give us an order too.” Homoi laughed with pure delight. “Good,” he said. “You are all colonels. When I call, you must come running.” The colts kicked up their heels and danced away, happy to have received such rank.

From below the ground the mole spoke once more, almost crying. “Lord Homoi, please give me some task I can truly do. I will do it well. I promise.” But Homoi was still angry from before. He stamped again and shouted, “You are no use to me. When the fox comes, I will have all your kind treated cruelly. Just wait and see.” After that there was no sound at all from under the earth. The squirrels worked until evening, gathered a great number of berries, and carried them with loud excitement to Homoi’s house. When his mother came out in surprise, Homoi cried proudly, “Mother, just look at my power. I can do anything now.”

His mother did not answer. She only stood looking at him in silence. Just then his father returned, saw the whole scene, and said in a heavy voice, “Homoi, have you lost your senses? I hear you frightened the mole family terribly. They are weeping like mad creatures in their home. And who, in all the world, could eat this mountain of berries?” Homoi burst into tears at once. The squirrels stood sadly for a moment, looking at him, and then slipped away one by one.

Homoi’s father said again, “You are going the wrong way. Look at the Shell Fire. It must surely have grown cloudy now.” Even Homoi’s mother began to cry and brought out the agate box with trembling hands. Homoi’s father opened it and looked inside. Then, to everyone’s surprise, his whole face changed. The Shell Fire was more beautiful than ever before. Red, green, and blue flames seemed to fight and dance inside it like war, like lightning, like signals in the sky, and then all at once soft flower colors moved through it like poppies and yellow tulips in

the wind. Homoi forgot his tears at once and stared at it in wonder, and his father handed it back to him without a word.

At dinner his father said quietly, "Still, you must be careful of foxes." But Homoi, full of pride again, answered, "There is nothing to fear. I have the Shell Fire. How could it ever break or grow cloudy? It belongs to me. Even if I did anything at all, it would never leave me." His mother said, "It is truly a fine jewel," and Homoi replied more proudly still, "Of course. I was born to stay with it forever." His father looked at him for a long moment and said only, "It would be best if that were true." That night Homoi dreamed once more of the high sharp mountain, and he woke crying in the dark.

#### Part 4

The fox came through the wet mist carrying three square pieces of bread and wearing short trousers in a foolish, jaunty way. Homoi said, "Good morning, Fox," and the fox answered with an ugly smile, "Well, yesterday was a surprise. Your father is a stubborn one, is he not? But never mind. He must be calmer now. Today let us do something far more amusing. Tell me, do you dislike zoos?" Homoi, still proud and eager for anything that sounded important, answered, "No, I do not dislike them." The fox bent nearer and said, "Good. Then I will show you a very rare one."

The two of them went through the wet grass while the bellflowers rang out their morning bell high in the cloudy air. Everything was quiet, and the whole field seemed to be listening. The fox walked quickly, now and then glancing back over his shoulder with bright narrow eyes. Homoi followed, feeling both curious and uneasy, yet unwilling to seem childish before the fox. At last the fox stopped before a mole hole covered by a flat stone and said in a low voice, "Now watch carefully. You are a great lord, and such sights are proper for you."

He pushed the stone aside with one quick movement. Inside the hole was the mole family, driven close together in fear and half dragged up into the light. They cried, "Please forgive us. Please forgive us," and tried to escape, but they could

not see, and their feet no longer worked properly. The smallest child had already rolled over on its back as if it had fainted. The fox ground his teeth and made ready to leap on them. Homoi's heart gave a sudden hard beat, and though he had come there proudly, the sight before him was so miserable that he stamped one foot and cried, "Go on. Off with you. Leave them."

At that very moment a great voice rang out, "You there, what are you doing?" The fox spun round and round four times in pure fright and then fled like a leaf in the wind. Homoi turned and saw his father coming over the field with terrible speed. At once his father knelt, lifted the little moles one by one, placed them gently back into their hole, and set the stone above them just as it had been before. Then he seized Homoi by the back of the neck and pulled him toward home. Homoi's mother came out crying and caught at the father's arm, but the father said heavily, "Homoi, you are finished. This time the Shell Fire must surely be broken. Bring it out and let me see."

The mother, still wiping tears from her face, brought the agate box, and the father opened it with a dark expression. But the instant he looked inside, he gave a start of real astonishment. "What is this?" he said. "It has never been so beautiful." And indeed the Shell Fire was blazing more splendidly than ever before. It shone like war, like lightning, like the opening of flowers in colored flame, and when the father handed it back, Homoi forgot his tears almost at once and stared with delight. By noon they were all eating square bread at the table, and the father said quietly, "Homoi, you must be careful of foxes," yet Homoi only answered with pride, "There is no danger. I have the Shell Fire. Nothing can happen while it is mine."

That night Homoi again dreamed of standing on the top of a sharp mountain on one leg, unable to move. When he woke, he found the dream still sitting like a small cold stone inside his chest. Yet the next morning he went out again. The sky hung low, and the field smelled damp and sad. Soon the fox came once more carrying three square pieces of bread. He laughed in that thin false way of his and said, "You see? Everything is smooth again. Yesterday was only a little misunderstanding. Today, however, I truly ask a favor. I have a fine box hidden in

the grass. Please lift the lid for me. I cannot do it myself just now.”

Homoi followed him through the field, trying to forget the moles of the day before. At last the fox showed him a box hidden among the grasses. A voice inside said in a trembling way, “Please, please, have mercy, Homoi.” Homoi started and bent toward it, ready to open the lid at once. But then the fox’s face changed in a frightful instant. Wrinkles gathered black on his forehead, his eyes rose sharp and cruel, and he roared, “Homoi, be careful. Put your hand on that box and I will eat you, thief.” His mouth seemed about to split across his whole face. Homoi became so frightened that he turned and ran home with all his strength.

The house was empty when he reached it, for his mother was still out in the field. His chest beat so hard that he could scarcely breathe. At once he took out the agate box and opened it. The Shell Fire was still burning like fire itself, yet now, in one small place, there was something white, tiny as the mark of a needle. Homoi whispered, “No. No, that was not there before,” and breathed on it in the usual way, polishing it softly with red sparrow breast feathers. But the white mark did not go away.

Just then his father came home and saw at once that something was wrong. “Homoi,” he said, “has the Shell Fire gone cloudy? Your face looks terrible. Let me see.” He held it to the light and tried to smile. “It will come off,” he said. “The yellow flame is almost brighter than before. Bring me more of the red feathers.” He polished it with great care, but the white cloud only seemed to grow. Then the mother came back, took the jewel in silence, sighed, and tried in her turn. All three of them breathed on it and polished it and stared and sighed, changing places again and again until evening had fallen without any of them noticing it.

At last the father stood up suddenly and said, “We had better eat. Let it stay in oil all night. I have heard that is best.” The mother cried out, “I forgot supper completely. There is nothing ready. Shall we eat only the lily-of-the-valley berries from the day before yesterday and this morning’s square bread?” “Yes,” said the father. “That will do.” So they ate in silence. The next day birds began to come, one after another, until the house and yard were full of them. Homoi’s father bowed and said, “I must confess something shameful. We have finally clouded

the jewel your king gave my son.” All the birds cried together, “How could that be? Please let us see it.”

So the father led them into the house. The birds filled the floor, the shelves, the table, and every empty place, while the owl stood there giving dry pompous coughs and rolling his eyes in a terrible way. Homoi, crying already, followed sadly behind them. Then the father picked up the Shell Fire, which had now become only a white stone, and said bitterly, “Here it is. Laugh at us as much as you like.” The very moment he spoke, the Shell Fire gave a hard sharp sound and split in two. Then came a fierce crackling, and in an instant it shattered into powder like smoke.

Homoi cried out and fell down at the doorway, for the powder had gone into his eyes. The birds rushed toward him, but then all around them there began a new sound, fine and quick, “pichi, pichi, pichi,” and the smoke-like powder drew together again. Before their eyes it formed shining fragments, then two main pieces, and then, with one last little sound, the whole Shell Fire stood complete once more, exactly as before. It flamed like an eruption, glowed like sunset, and with a rushing cry flew out through the window and away into the outer world. The birds, their excitement gone, began to leave. One went, then two, and at last only the owl remained. Looking all around the room, he laughed and said, “Only six days. Hoh-hoh. It lasted only six days,” and then he swung his shoulders and went out in long strides.

Homoi’s eyes by then had turned white and cloudy like the jewel itself, and he could no longer see anything at all. His mother had wept from the beginning to the end and could do nothing else. His father stood with folded arms for a long time, thinking deeply. At last he came to Homoi, laid one paw gently on his back, and said, “Do not cry. Things like this happen everywhere. Since you have learned that truth well, you are in one way the happiest of all.” Homoi could not answer. Outside, in the damp field beyond the house, the bellflowers were still ringing the morning bell.

## The Twin Stars [Futago no Hoshi]

### Part 1

On the western side of the Milky Way there could be seen two tiny stars, small as the dust of horsetail spores. They were the homes of two twin star children named Chunse and Pouse. Each of them lived in a little crystal palace, and the two palaces stood facing one another exactly across a narrow shining space. Every night, without fail, the twins returned to those small clear homes, sat properly in their places, and played silver flutes through the long dark hours in time with the song of the circling stars. That was their duty, and they did it faithfully.

One morning the sun rose in the east with a grave bright sound, shaking his shining body as if he were knocking gently on the sky. Chunse put down his silver flute and called across to his brother, "Pouse, that is enough now. The sun has risen, and the clouds are already white with light. Shall we go to the spring in the western field today?" But Pouse was still half asleep with his eyes nearly closed, still playing softly into the morning. So Chunse climbed down from his own little palace, put on his white shell shoes, went up the steps to his brother's palace, and said again, "Pouse, wake up. Let us go. The eastern sky is burning white, and even the small birds below us seem awake. We can make mist with pinwheels and send little rainbows flying."

Pouse started, laid down his flute, and answered, "Ah, Chunse, forgive me. I did not see how bright it had become. I will put on my shoes at once." So the two brothers walked away together over the silver grass of the sky, singing as they went in sweet clear voices. They sang of the path of the sun, of white clouds and blue clouds, and of making all his road clean and bright. In that happy way they came to the spring before they even noticed how far they had gone.

On clear nights that spring could be seen from the world below. It lay some distance from the western bank of the Milky Way, circled by little blue stars. Its bottom was paved with blue shining stones, and from between them fresh water

came bubbling out and ran away in a small stream back toward the river of heaven. When the earth below suffered from drought, birds like night hawks and cuckoos sometimes looked up at it with sad longing and moved their throats as if swallowing dry air, but no ordinary bird could ever reach it. Only stars such as the Great Crow, the Scorpion, or the Rabbit could easily come there.

Chunse stepped into the little stream barefoot and said, "Pouse, shall we build a waterfall here first?" Pouse, already gathering smooth stones from the bank, answered, "Yes, let us do that. I will carry the stones." The whole sky was full of a sweet apple smell, for the pale moon in the west had left it behind like breath. Then, from somewhere across the heavenly field, there came a loud singing voice. The twins stopped at once and cried together, "It is the Great Crow."

Soon the Great Crow came striding through the silver grass in a black velvet cloak and black velvet leggings, moving his shoulders heavily as he walked. He bowed very politely and said, "Good morning, Chunse and Pouse. It is very fine weather, but when the sky is so clear, my throat becomes terribly dry. I also sang a little too loudly last night. If you will excuse me, I will drink." Pouse answered kindly, "Please drink as much as you wish." The Great Crow bent his head down into the spring and drank for a very long time, then lifted it at last, blinking and shaking drops of water from his feathers.

Just then another song came from the far side of the field, but this one was rough and sharp and full of insult. It sang of the red-eyed scorpion in the south and mocked anyone who did not know his poison and great claws. The Great Crow's face changed at once, and his whole body shook with anger. "That is the Scorpion," he cried. "That wretched creature is mocking me again. If he comes here, I will tear out those red eyes." Chunse hurriedly said, "Great Crow, you must not do such a thing. The King knows all this." But before he could say more, the Scorpion was already coming.

The Scorpion moved slowly toward the spring, his two great claws swinging and his long tail scraping on the shining ground with a harsh sound. The twins waved their hands, trying to calm the Great Crow, who now trembled like a storm cloud. But the Scorpion ignored him completely and came right up to the water.

“Ah,” he said, “my throat is dry. Good morning, twins. Forgive me. I think I will drink a little. Strange, this water smells of dirt. Some foolish black idiot must have put his head into it, but never mind. I will endure it.” He then drank for ten whole minutes, and all the while he kept flicking the poison hook at the end of his tail toward the Great Crow in a way that was openly insulting.

At last the Great Crow could bear it no longer. He spread his wings and shouted, “Scorpion, you have been insulting me since before you arrived. Apologize at once.” The Scorpion slowly lifted his head from the water, his red eyes burning like fire. “Oh?” he said. “Who is making noise? Is it some red gentleman or a gray gentleman? Perhaps I should show him the point of my hook.” At that the Great Crow sprang up in fury. “Insolent thing,” he cried. “I will throw you headfirst over the edge of the sky.” The Scorpion twisted his large body quickly, raised the poisonous hook into the air, and prepared to strike.

The twins had no time to stop them. The Great Crow came down straight like a spear, and the Scorpion lashed upward. In one terrible instant the Scorpion’s head was deeply wounded, the Great Crow was struck in the chest by poison, and both fell together unconscious. Dark red blood from the Scorpion spread through the air and became an ugly cloud. Chunse put on his shoes at once and cried, “This is terrible. The Great Crow has poison in him. Pouse, hold him firmly while I suck it out.” Pouse ran behind the bird, braced himself, and answered, “Do not swallow the poison, Chunse. Spit it out at once.”

Chunse bent to the wound and drew out the blood again and again, six times in all, spitting it away each time. At last the Great Crow opened his eyes a little and muttered, “Ah, thank you. What happened? I was sure I had finished that fellow.” Chunse said firmly, “Wash the wound in the stream first. Can you walk?” The Great Crow staggered up, glared at the Scorpion, and said, “That vile poison insect should be thankful he died in the sky.” But the twins hurried him to the water, washed his wound carefully, and blew their sweet fragrant breath on it until the poison weakened. Then Pouse said, “Now go home slowly while it is still light. You must never do this again. The King knows everything.” The Great Crow hung his wings, bowed many times, and said, “Thank you. I will be careful from now

on,” before limping away across the silver grass.

Then the twins turned back to the Scorpion. His wound was deep, but the blood had already begun to slow. They washed it with water from the spring and took turns blowing softly on it until, about noon, he opened his eyes a little. Pouse wiped the sweat from his face and asked, “How do you feel now?” The Scorpion whispered, “Is the Great Crow dead?” Chunse answered with some anger, “Are you still saying such things? You were the one who nearly died. You must gather your strength and go home while it is still light.” But the Scorpion, after looking at them strangely, said, “Twins, would you please take me home? Since you have already helped me this much, help me a little more.”

Pouse said, “Then we will take you.” Chunse added, “Hold on to me as well. We must hurry, because if we are not back in time, we cannot play the flute tonight.” So the Scorpion leaned on them and began to walk. But his body was enormous, perhaps ten times as heavy as either of them, and almost at once the twins’ shoulders felt as if the bones were bending. Still they went on, red in the face, taking one step after another in silence. The Scorpion dragged his tail over the stones with a hateful scraping sound, breathed heavily, and moved so slowly that even after a long time, they had scarcely gone any distance at all.

## Part 2

The twins went on in silence, each step hurting more than the one before it. The Scorpion dragged his tail over the stones with a hateful scraping sound, breathed in a weak harsh way, and moved so slowly that an hour passed without much progress at all. His claws cut into the boys’ shoulders, and before long both Chunse and Pouse felt as though their own chests and backs no longer belonged to them. Still they did not let go. The heavenly field shone white around them, and they crossed seven small streams and ten silver grass plains, yet the Scorpion’s home still lay far ahead.

At last more than six hours had passed. The sun was now sinking toward the western mountains, and the sky had begun to turn red around the edges. Pouse

said in a trembling voice, “Scorpion, can you not hurry just a little? We must be home within another hour and a half, or we cannot play the flutes tonight. Are you in great pain?” The Scorpion answered, almost crying, “Please, just a little farther. Have mercy.” Chunse, whose shoulders felt ready to break, said gently, “Yes, just a little more. Does the wound hurt very much?” Even then they tried to speak kindly to him.

Then the sun gave three solemn shining movements and slipped behind the western mountains. Pouse cried out, “Now we truly must go. Is there no one anywhere nearby?” But the heavenly plain stood silent, and no answer came. The western clouds burned bright red, and the Scorpion’s eyes also glowed red and sad in that light. One child below on earth pointed upward and called, “I found one star. Let me become rich.” Another child shouted, “One star alone will not do. A thousand and ten thousand must come out together.” Hearing those voices from the world below only made the twins feel more painfully that night had already begun.

Chunse bent forward under the weight and said, “Scorpion, if we are late tonight, the King will surely scold us. We may even be cast away. But if you do not reach your home, that would be worse still.” Pouse answered in a broken voice, “I am so tired I may die. Scorpion, please gather your strength and go faster.” But he could say no more. In the next moment he fell flat on the ground. The Scorpion at once began weeping and cried, “Forgive me. I am a fool. I am not worth one hair from your heads. I will mend my heart. I will certainly repay this.”

At that very moment a bolt of lightning, clothed in a fierce pale-blue cloak of fire, flashed toward them from far away and stopped before them. He bowed with both hands on the ground and said, “By command of the King I have come to receive you. Please hold fast to my mantle, and I will take you to your palaces at once. The King, for some reason, is greatly pleased. And as for you, Scorpion, until now you have been hated by many. Here is medicine the King himself has sent you. Drink it.” The twins cried at once, “Then good-bye, Scorpion. Drink it quickly. And do not forget the promise you made. You must truly change.” The Scorpion put many hands to the ground, drank the medicine, bowed again and

again, and could not stop his tears.

Then the twins grasped the mantle of Lightning, and in one flashing instant they were back beside the very spring where the trouble had begun. Lightning said, "Wash yourselves well. The King has sent new clothes and shoes. There are still fifteen minutes left." The two children stepped gladly into the cold crystal water, bathed their tired bodies, and put on the thin sweet-smelling blue shining robes and the new white shining shoes that had been prepared for them. At once all their pain and weariness disappeared as if it had been carried away in the water. They felt fresh and light again.

"Now let us go," said Lightning. The twins grasped his mantle once more, a purple light flashed, and in the next instant they stood before their own little palaces. Lightning was already gone. "Chunse, let us prepare," said Pouse. "Pouse, let us prepare," Chunse answered. So they climbed to their places, sat facing one another in the clear little halls, lifted their silver flutes, and began to play just as the song of the circling stars started up across the sky. In that way they passed safely through the night and fulfilled their duty after all.

On another night, however, the lower part of the sky was filled with black clouds, and under those clouds the rain came down in loud hard sheets. Still the twins sat as always in their two little crystal palaces and played their silver flutes to the song of the stars. Then suddenly a great violent comet came rushing toward them and blew a blue-white mist over the two palaces. "Hey, blue twins," he cried. "Would you like to go on a little trip? A night like this is nothing. Shipwrecked sailors cannot see you through the clouds, the star watchers at the observatory are yawning at home, and that cheeky schoolboy who is always staring upward is shut inside drawing pictures because of the rain. If you do not play tonight, the stars will still turn. Come on. I will bring you back by tomorrow evening."

Chunse stopped his flute and said, "It is true that the King has permitted us to stop on cloudy nights. But we only kept playing because we enjoyed it." Pouse also lowered his flute and said, "Even so, we are not allowed to travel away. We do not know when the clouds may break." The comet laughed and answered, "Do not worry. The King himself told me once, 'On some cloudy night, take those

twins out for a little journey.’ Come now. I am called the Whale of the Sky. I swallow little weak stars like sardines and dark meteor stones like tiny fish. Best of all is when I turn so hard in my path that my whole body seems ready to fly apart. Come along.”

Pouse said, “Chunse, perhaps we should go. He says the King allowed it.” Chunse answered, “But is that truly so?” The comet cried, “If I lie, may my head split apart. May my head, body, and tail fall separately into the sea and become sea cucumbers. I do not lie.” Pouse asked, “Then can you swear it before the King?” The comet, for no reason at all, straightened himself and shouted into the dark, “Certainly I can. King, please witness this. Today, by your command, the blue twin stars are going on a journey. There now. Are you satisfied?” The two boys looked at one another and at last said together, “Very well. Then let us go.”

The comet said in a suddenly serious voice, “Then take hold of my tail at once, and hold tight. Ready?” The twins grasped the shining tail firmly. The comet breathed out a blue-white light and shouted, “Off we go. Gii-gii-gii-fuu. Gii-gii-fuu.” Truly he was like a whale of the sky. Weak little stars fled from his path in every direction, and before long the twins’ own palaces were so far away that they looked like tiny blue-white points.

After they had flown a long while, Chunse said, “We must have come very far. Is the fall of the Milky Way still ahead?” At once the comet’s whole manner changed. “Hah,” he said. “Why look for the fall of the Milky Way when you can look for your own fall instead? One, two, three.” He lashed his tail violently two or three times, turned his head, blew a fierce blue-white mist over them, and threw both twins off into the dark. As they fell, the comet rushed away laughing, “Ha, ha, ha. Every oath is canceled. Gii-gii-gii-fuu.”

The two children held each other tightly by the elbows as they dropped straight through the blue-black emptiness. They had decided, without words, to fall together no matter where the fall might end. Once their bodies struck the air, they roared like thunder, red sparks flew all around them, and even the sight of it would have made another creature dizzy. Then they passed through black storm clouds and fell like arrows into the dark sea, where the waves below had been

roaring unseen. Down they sank, deeper and deeper, and yet, strangely, they found they could still breathe.

At last they reached the bottom of the sea. The mud there was soft, great black creatures lay sleeping, and masses of long seaweed moved in the dim water. Chunse said in a frightened voice, "Pouse, this must be the bottom of the sea. We can never rise again to the sky. What will happen to us now?" Pouse answered bitterly, "That comet deceived us. He even lied before the King. What a hateful creature he was." Just then, at their feet, a little red starfish shaped like a small glowing star asked, "What sea are you from? You wear the mark of blue starfish."

Pouse said, "We are not starfish. We are stars." At once the little starfish grew angry and cried, "What? Stars? All starfish were once stars. You must have only just arrived here. Then you are new starfish, fresh little criminals. To boast that you are stars after coming here for evil deeds is not the custom at the bottom of the sea." Pouse looked upward sadly. The rain had stopped by then, the clouds were gone, and through the still water they could see the whole sky clearly, even their own little palaces as tiny faint lights. "Chunse," he said, "I can see our homes. And yet we have truly become starfish."

Chunse answered quietly, "Then there is no help for it. Let us say farewell from here to the sky and ask pardon of the King." So the two of them called upward, "Farewell, King. From today we become starfish. We were foolish and were deceived by the comet. From now on we will crawl through the mud at the bottom of the dark sea. Farewell to all in heaven. May you all continue to shine in glory." Many red starfish gathered round them at once, shouting, "Give us your clothes. Hand over your swords. Pay taxes. Make yourselves smaller. Polish my shoes." The sea bottom had suddenly become loud and rough around them.

Then over their heads there roared a huge black shape, and all the starfish hurriedly bowed. The great creature stopped, looked closely at the twins, and said, "Ah, new recruits. You have not even learned how to bow. Do you not know this whale? I am called the Comet of the Sea." Hearing that, both twins looked at each other in silence, for even here the boasting sounded horribly familiar. The whale then demanded, "Well then, where is your paper of exile from heaven? Bring it

out at once.” The twins could only stand there, wet and trembling, and Chunse said quietly, “We have no such paper.”

### Part 3

The great whale of the sea glared at them and said, “So you have no paper? Then you are criminals indeed. I will take you to the Sea King at once.” He blew out a heavy stream of water from his mouth, and all the red starfish turned pale and bent low, but Chunse and Pouse stood as straight as they could. Their bodies were trembling, yet they would not bow to a lie. The whale moved nearer and nearer, and the dark water around him shook as if a whole hill were pushing through it. The twins held each other’s hands and waited.

Just then a deep voice came through the sea, quiet but stronger than the whale. “Wait,” it said. The water began to turn in a great circle, and a huge waterspout came down through the sea like a living pillar. It stood before the twins and said, “By command of the Sea King, I have come to receive these two. They are not to be touched.” The whale drew back at once, angry but afraid, and the waterspout turned to the twins and said, “Please come with me. The Sea King knows everything already.”

The twins bowed and answered, “Thank you very much.” Then they looked toward the starfish around them. The little red starfish who had first spoken to them cried out, “Please, when you go back to heaven, ask the King to show mercy to us too. We were once stars, and we have done many foolish things.” Other starfish shouted as well, “Yes, ask for us too. Ask for mercy.” Even the quiet sea cucumbers seemed to lean a little in their dark places, as if they too wished to be remembered. Chunse said, “We will ask,” and Pouse added, “Yes, we promise.”

The waterspout bent low, and the twins climbed onto it as if onto a moving tower of clear water. At once they rose from the sea bottom. Up they went past the sleeping black creatures, past the waving weeds, past the slow sea cucumbers and the red starfish, who all looked up after them. The water grew lighter and lighter, and soon the twins could see the whole sky above them shining through

the still sea like a great open gate. Pouse said softly, “Chunse, we may truly be saved,” and Chunse answered, “Yes, but we must never again trust such words so quickly.”

When they came out of the sea, the night had already become very pale. They seemed to pass through a blue-white fire that did not burn. The stars around them grew clearer and clearer, and the air itself rang faintly as if the sky were beginning to sing again. The waterspout carried them gently upward and said, “The Sea King sends his respect to the King of Heaven. He was sorry to see you in such trouble. He also asks that the evil of the comet not be forgotten.” The twins bowed again and said, “We will tell everything exactly.”

At last the sound of the circling stars’ song came to them once more. It was already beginning. The twins’ little crystal palaces shone ahead, very small and very dear, standing face to face just as before. The waterspout set them down softly and said, “Good-bye, and may all be well with you.” Then he turned and went back toward the sea like a long clear wind. The twins called after him, “Please give our thanks to the Sea King,” and then they hurried up into their palaces.

Each of them climbed into his own little crystal home and sat down properly. Before lifting their flutes, they bowed toward the unseen King and said together, “Because of our carelessness, we failed in our duty for a time, and we are deeply sorry. Even so, tonight, by great mercy, we were saved in a wonderful way. The Sea King sends his deep respect to Your Majesty. And the starfish at the bottom of the sea ask for pity. We too beg that mercy may be shown to them, and if it is possible, also to the sea cucumbers.” After that they took up their silver flutes.

The eastern sky had already turned golden, and dawn was not far away. Still the song of the stars went on, and the twins played their flutes clearly and faithfully into the brightening air. Their little palaces shone once more on the western bank of the Milky Way, facing each other in peace. And if you look very carefully on a clear night, you may still see those two tiny blue stars there, quietly doing their work.

## The Spider, the Slug, and the Raccoon Dog [Kumo to Namekuji to Tanuki]

### Part 1

A spider, a silver slug, and a raccoon dog who never washed his face were all famous athletes. At least that is what people said. But I do not really know what kind of athletes they were. Wildcat told me that the three of them competed with all their strength and took the contest very seriously. Yet I never saw them line up and run, and I never heard that they had taken first, second, and third place in any school examination.

So what kind of contest was it? The spider had long red legs and a mark on his chest written in spider letters. The silver slug always wore shining rubber shoes. The raccoon dog wore a sports cap, though it was a little broken. Whatever their sport was, there is one thing I know for certain. All three of them died in the end. The spider died in the fifth month of the Year 3800 in the Spider Calendar, the silver slug died the year after that, and the raccoon dog died the year after that, so let us examine their lives a little more closely.

Only the last year of the red long-legged spider's life is known clearly. One night he was blown by the wind and caught in an oak tree at the entrance to the forest. He was terribly hungry, but he endured it and at once began spinning a web in the moonlight. He was so hungry that it felt as if there was hardly any thread left inside his body, yet he kept saying, "Pull, pull, pull," and dragged out thread with all his strength. At last he made a tiny web no bigger than a small copper coin.

Near dawn a mosquito came humming from far away and struck the web. But because the web had been made when the spider was almost starving, the thread had no stickiness at all, and the mosquito quickly began to cut through it and fly away. The spider leaped out from behind a leaf like a mad creature and bit the mosquito hard. The mosquito cried in a sad voice, "Forgive me. Forgive me. Forgive me." But the spider said nothing and ate him completely, head, wings, legs, and all. Then he let out a long breath, rubbed his stomach, looked up at the

sky for a moment, and spun a little more thread.

Soon the web was bigger, and the spider hid again behind his leaf with all six eyes shining. A blind mayfly came walking with a stick and asked, "Sir, what place is this?" The spider blinked his six eyes one by one and answered, "This is an inn." The mayfly gave a tired little sound, sat down in the web, and said, "Then I will rest a moment." At once the spider rushed out and bit into the middle of his body, saying, "Now then, please have some tea."

The mayfly lifted his hands helplessly into the air and struggled, then began to sing in a thin sad voice, "Poor daughter, if you hear your father died on a journey..." The spider cried, "Be quiet. Stop struggling." The mayfly pressed his hands together and begged, "Please have pity. Let me say my last words first." The spider felt just a little sorry for him and said, "Very well, but be quick," while holding one of the mayfly's legs. Then the mayfly started again from the beginning and sang a longer sad song, ending with a warning not to touch or go near the cruel spider's web-house.

The spider became angry and cried, "How impudent." Then he killed and ate the mayfly in one breath. After that he rubbed his stomach, looked at the sky again, blinked, and sang in a joking voice, "Do not say impudent things." Then he spun more thread. The web became three times larger, and now it was truly a proper spider's web. Feeling quite safe, he hid once more behind the leaf.

Then he heard singing below. "Red long-legged spider, crawling near the sky, spinning shining thread, making a bright bright web." Looking down, he saw a beautiful female spider. He lowered one thread and said, "Come up here." She climbed at once, and the two of them became husband and wife. Every day many insects were caught in the web, and the spider wife ate a great number of them and turned them all into children. Soon there were many children, though they were so small they looked almost transparent.

The children played on the web all day long. They slid, wrestled, and swung like acrobats, and the place was always full of noise. One day a dragonfly came and brought the news that the insect council had decided to make the spider an adviser. That made him very proud. But one day, while the husband and wife were

drinking tea behind the leaf, a creature below them sang in a flat laughing voice, “Red long-legged spider, father of two hundred sons, each no bigger than eye dirt, scabs, mosquito tears, or at best a grain of millet.” It was a large silver slug.

The spider’s wife became so angry that she cried as if fire had been set to her. But the spider only laughed and said, “That fellow envies me these days. Hey, Slug, I am going to become an adviser to the insect council. Can you do that? Never. Grow fat all you like. You still cannot do what I can.” The slug was so furious that he became sick with fever and groaned, “Spider, spider, how dare you insult me.” But the spider cared nothing for that. When wind tore the web or rough beetles damaged it, he quickly repaired it with new thread, and the web grew more and more splendid.

Of the two hundred children, all but two died. Ants carried some away, some disappeared, and some died of sickness, but the parents soon forgot them, because they all looked so much alike. Now the web was a truly grand thing, and insects were caught in it all the time. One day, while the spider and his wife were again drinking tea behind a leaf, a traveling mosquito came flying toward the web, saw it, and quickly turned back in alarm. Then from below they heard a loud laugh and a deep singing voice: “Red long-legged spider, your web is so poor that even a traveler from eight thousand two hundred miles away sees it and turns around.”

This time it was the raccoon dog who never washed his face. The spider ground his teeth and said, “You raccoon dog. Before I die, I will make you bow to me.” From that day on he worked harder than ever. He made ten webs here and there, and he even stood guard at night. But that brought trouble. More and more food gathered, rotted, and spread decay. The rot passed into the spider, his wife, and the last of the children. Their legs began to rot from the tips, their bodies became soft and sticky, and one day at last the rain washed all four of them away.

That was in the fifth month of the Year 3800 in the Spider Calendar. So the first great athlete was gone. But the contest did not end there, because the silver slug was still alive, and the raccoon dog was still alive too. And now it is time to look at the life of the silver slug.

## Part 2

At about the same time that the spider was spinning his tiny coin-sized web in the oak at the forest edge, a snail came to the fine house of the silver slug. In those days the slug had the name of being the kindest creature in the forest. The snail bowed and said, "Slug, I am in terrible trouble. I have no food, no water, nothing at all. Could you spare me a little of the dew you have saved on those butterbur leaves?" The slug answered at once in his smooth laughing way, "Of course, of course. Please, drink as much as you wish."

The snail thanked him and drank the dew in great gulps. The slug kept smiling and said, "More, please have more. You and I are almost brothers, are we not? Ha, ha, ha. Come, drink a little more." The snail, now deeply grateful, drank again. Then the slug said, "Now that you feel better, shall we have a little wrestling match? Ha, ha, ha. It has been a long time since I had one." The snail looked troubled and answered, "I am too hungry. I have no strength."

"Then have some food too," said the slug. So he brought out thistle shoots and other little things for the snail to eat. The snail thanked him and ate them carefully. Then the slug rose and cried, "Now then, let us wrestle. Ha, ha, ha." The snail had no real wish to do so, but he could not easily refuse after receiving such kindness. He stood and said, "I am weak, so please do not throw me hard."

"Very well then. Ready? There. Ha, ha, ha," cried the slug. But he threw the poor snail down with great force. "Let us do it once more. Ha, ha, ha." The snail answered, "I am tired already." But the slug insisted again and again, each time pretending friendship, each time laughing, each time throwing him down more cruelly than before. At last the snail could barely rise at all and said in a faint voice, "I am dying. Good-bye."

Yet even then the slug only said, "Come now, just once more. Ha, ha, ha. I will help you up. There. Ha, ha, ha." And with that final throw the snail died. The silver slug then ate him up in one easy swallow. So that was the kindness for which he had been praised in the forest. His laughter was soft and his voice was smooth, but underneath both there was only greed. Still, for a while the forest went on

praising him, because it had not yet seen him clearly.

About a month later a lizard came to the slug's handsome house, dragging one leg painfully behind him. "Slug," he said, "please could you give me a little medicine? A snake bit me." The slug laughed in that same cheerful way and answered, "That is easy enough. I will lick the wound for you. It will be well at once. Ha, ha, ha." The lizard bowed and said, "Please do. I beg you." The slug replied, "Certainly. You and I are like brothers. Ha, ha, ha."

So the slug put his mouth to the wound. The lizard at first said gratefully, "Thank you, Slug." But the slug went on licking and licking. "If I do not do it thoroughly," he said with his mouth full, "it may go badly later, and I will not help you a second time. Ha, ha, ha." Before long the lizard cried out, "Slug, it feels as if my leg is melting." The slug only answered, "Ha, ha, ha. It is nothing much. Nothing much at all."

Soon the lizard said, "My stomach feels strangely hot." Again the slug answered, "Ha, ha, ha. It is nothing much." Then the lizard began to cry and said, "Slug, half my body feels melted. Please stop now." But the slug replied, "Ha, ha, ha. Not at all. Only a little more. Just one and a half minutes more." Hearing that, the lizard became calm at last. And exactly then his heart melted. The slug swallowed him too.

After eating the lizard, the slug grew enormously large. He became so pleased with his own size that he went off and mocked the spider, which led to the spider's mocking answer and to the fever of shame and anger that followed. Worse than that, the forest's opinion of the slug began to change. Creatures now said, "He is always laughing and speaking in a loose easy voice, but his heart is bad. In some ways he is worse than the spider." The raccoon dog especially, whenever the slug was mentioned, would laugh through his dirty face and say, "A slug is a poor thing. Awkward, ugly, and not worth looking at."

The slug heard this and grew furious and sick all over again. Then, when the spider finally rotted away and was washed off in the rain, the slug felt easier in his heart. "Good," he thought. "That one is gone. Now I can stand first." But the contest was not over. In the following year, on a dry day, a tree frog came to the

slug's fine house and said, "Good afternoon, Slug. May I have a little water?" At once the slug decided that this frog too would make an excellent meal.

So he spoke in the sweetest voice he could find. "Frog, welcome. There is water enough for you, as much as you please. These days it is dry, but what does that matter? You and I are like brothers. Ha, ha, ha." He led the frog to the water jar. The frog drank noisily and then sat looking foolish and harmless for a while. At last he said, "Slug, shall we have a little wrestling match?" The slug was delighted. This was exactly what he had intended to suggest himself. "Yes, let us wrestle," he said. "Ha, ha, ha."

He threw the frog down once, then twice. The frog flew through the air each time and landed hard. Then, with a look of sudden concern, the frog pulled a bag from his pocket and cried, "We must put salt on the ring first. Otherwise it is no proper match." He scattered the salt over the ground. The slug, not understanding the danger, only laughed more loudly than ever. "Frog," he said, "now you will certainly beat me, since you are so strong. Ha, ha, ha. Ready? There." He threw the frog again, and this time the frog lay on his back like a dead thing, with his pale belly turned up to the sky.

The silver slug moved toward him eagerly, ready to swallow him at once. But then something strange happened. His body would not move properly. Looking down, he saw that half his foot had already melted away. "Ah, I am caught. Salt. Curse it," he cried. At once the frog sat up, crossed his legs, and laughed with his wide mouth open like a bag. Then he bowed to the slug and said, "Well then, good-bye, Slug. Things have gone badly for you, have they not?" The slug, nearly weeping now, tried to answer, "Frog, good-b—" But before he could even finish the word, his tongue had melted. The frog laughed harder still and said, "You wanted to say good-bye, did you not? Then good-bye indeed. If you pass by the dark narrow road to the other side, please give my respects to my stomach." And with that he swallowed the silver slug whole.

So the second great athlete was finished. He too had tried to rise by swallowing the weak, laughing all the while in his smooth foolish way, and in the end he had gone down just as the spider had done, though by another road. And

now only the raccoon dog who never washed his face was left. His turn, too, would come.

### Part 3

The raccoon dog never washed his face. It was not that he forgot. He left it dirty on purpose. At the time when the spider was first spinning his little coin-sized web on the oak at the edge of the forest, the raccoon dog too was hungry and leaning against a pine tree with his eyes half closed. Then a rabbit came and bowed low before him. "Lord Raccoon Dog," the rabbit said, "I am starving. I can do nothing. I will soon die."

The raccoon dog pulled his collar together and answered in a solemn voice, "So it is. All is in the will of Lord Wildcat. Nama-neko, nama-neko." The rabbit, not understanding at all, began to say it too. "Nama-neko, nama-neko, nama-neko," he repeated. Then the raccoon dog took the rabbit's paw, pulled him nearer, and while still chanting, "All is in Lord Wildcat's will. Nama-neko, nama-neko," he bit one of the rabbit's ears. The rabbit cried out in pain and said, "That hurts. Lord Raccoon Dog, that is cruel."

But the raccoon dog only went on muttering piously and ate both the rabbit's ears. The rabbit, hearing so much holy talk, became strangely moved and began to cry great tears. "Ah, Lord Wildcat, how kind you are," he said. "If a bad creature like me can still be saved, then two ears are nothing. Nama-neko." The raccoon dog at once began crying false tears as well and said, "If a low creature like me may help in this holy work, I would gladly give even hands and feet. Ah, merciful Lord Wildcat. Nama-neko." And while saying this he ate the rabbit's paws.

The rabbit only wept more gratefully. "If I can be saved, even two hands are nothing," he said. "Nama-neko, nama-neko." The raccoon dog cried and prayed more loudly still and kept eating. Before long the rabbit was gone completely. From inside the raccoon dog's stomach, however, the rabbit's voice said bitterly, "I was cheated. Inside your belly it is black. Ah, how hateful." The raccoon dog became angry and snapped back, "Be quiet in there, and digest quickly." Then he

beat his stomach like a drum and felt very pleased with himself.

About two months later a wolf brought three measures of rice to the raccoon dog's house and asked humbly for a sermon. The raccoon dog put on the same grave holy manner as before and said, "All is in Lord Wildcat's will. The rabbit has gone to serve at his side as a minister. But you have taken many lives, surely hundreds. If you do not repent, terrible punishments will come upon you. Nama-neko, nama-neko." The wolf shook with fear and asked, "Then how can I be saved?" The raccoon dog answered, "I am Wildcat's representative here. Do exactly as I say."

"What must I do?" the wolf cried. The raccoon dog said, "Sit still. I will pull out your fangs. I will close your eyes. I will bite your ears a little. Bear it well. Patience is everything. Nama-neko." Then, while speaking in that false holy voice, he bit and bit and bit. He ate the wolf's ears, his head, his legs, and even his back, all the while pretending this was sacred punishment and rescue. From inside the raccoon dog's stomach, the wolf's voice finally said, "It is dark in here. Ah, here are the bones of a rabbit. Whoever killed him will surely be bitten later by Lord Raccoon Dog." At that the raccoon dog forced out a harsh little laugh.

So the spider melted and was washed away, and the slug was swallowed up, and now the raccoon dog alone remained. But by then he had also fallen into sickness. Mud and water gathered inside his body, and he swelled more and more. At last his insides were said to contain whole fields and hills, and his body grew round like a globe. His face turned black, fever burned through him, and he rolled about crying in terror.

"Oh, it is dreadful, dreadful," he groaned. "I have been running a marathon to hell. Oh, it is too painful." He swelled and burned and suffered until at last he died, scorched by his own fever. And when all three stories are put together, the matter becomes clear at last. The spider, the silver slug, and the dirty-faced raccoon dog had truly been competing with all their strength.

It was a marathon race to hell.

## The Kairo Commander [Kairo Danchō]

### Part 1

Once there were thirty tree frogs who worked together in great good humor. Their work was mostly done for the insect people. They gathered seeds of perilla and poppy to make flower beds, and they collected pretty stones and moss to build lovely little gardens. We often see such beautiful tiny gardens in many places. They may be under a bean plant in a field, at the foot of an oak in the woods, or under the shadow of a stone where rain falls. They are made with wonderful care and are truly charming.

The thirty frogs enjoyed their work every day. In the morning they began when the golden sunlight threw the shadows of the corn far, far across the ground, and in the evening they went on until the green of trees and grass turned sweet and bright like candy in the low sun. They sang, laughed, and shouted while they worked. On the day after a storm they were especially busy. "Please come quickly and lift the board that has fallen over our garden," one creature would call. "Our cedar-moss tree has fallen, so please send five or six workers at once," another would say. The busier they were, the happier they became, because hard work made them feel like important people.

"Pull hard there." "Good, just so." "Hey, Buchiko, the rope is loose." "All right, I see it." "Now then, pull." "Bikiko, let go of that side." "Tie the rope for me." "Heave-ho." "One more push." That was the sort of thing one heard from them all day long. So matters went on very pleasantly. Then one day, after the thirty frogs had completely finished the ants' park and were happily returning toward headquarters, they passed under a peach tree and saw that a new shop had appeared there.

A sign hung out in front of it. It said, "Imported Whisky. One cup, two and a half rin." The frogs had never seen anything like it, so they all went inside together in a curious crowd. There sat a dark lordly frog, heavy and slow, looking terribly bored and playing with his tongue all by himself. But the moment he saw the

visitors, he cried in a grand beautiful voice, "Welcome, gentlemen. Please come in and rest yourselves." One of the tree frogs said, "What is this imported wekku, or whatever it is called? Could you let us try one cup?"

"Imported whisky, is it?" said the lordly frog. "Two and a half rin a cup. Is that acceptable?" The frogs answered, "Yes, that will do very well." So the lordly frog filled tiny cups hollowed out of millet grains and handed them round. One frog drank and cried, "Wui. This is terrible stuff. It burns the stomach. Wui. Friends, this is a strange thing indeed. The moment it goes down the throat, it grows hot. Ah, I feel wonderful. Please give me another cup." "Yes, yes," said the lordly frog smoothly. "As soon as this gentleman is served."

"Give me one quickly too." "Yes, yes, in order, in order. Here, this one is yours." "Ah, thank you. Wui. Uf, uu. This is excellent." "Quick, over here too." "Yes, this is yours." "Uui." "Another for me." "Here too, quickly." "One more, one more." "Certainly, certainly," said the lordly frog. "Please do not hurry me. The measured cup will spill if you rush me. Here now, this one is yours." "Thank you. Wui. Cough, cough. Wui, yes, very good indeed."

In this way the tree frogs kept asking for more and more, and the more they drank, the more they wanted to drink. The whisky itself was kept in a large oil can, and since the cups were only millet-grain cups, even if the lordly frog measured out ten thousand of them, the can would scarcely be less full than before. "Another cup." "One more, hurry." "Come on, quickly now." "Yes, yes. This will be your three hundred and second cup. Is that acceptable?" "Of course it is. Give it here." "Very well, if you insist. Here now." "Wui. Delicious."

Before long the drink had gone to their heads. Here and there the frogs began to snore, crying "Kii, kii," and fell asleep in every corner of the room. Then the lordly frog smiled to himself, quickly shut up the shop, put a lid firmly on the whisky can, and took chain armor from a cupboard. He dressed himself from head to foot in it. Then he brought out a table and chair, sat down with perfect calm, and placed a small stool just opposite his own chair. After that he took an iron rod from the shelf, sat heavily, and struck the green head of the first sleeping tree frog with a hard little knock.

“Hey, wake up. Time to pay the bill.” The frog stirred and cried, “Kii, kii, kwaa. Ah, that hurts. Who is hitting a fellow on the head?” “Pay the bill,” said the lordly frog. “Ah yes, yes. The bill. How much is it?” “Yours is for three hundred and forty-two cups. Eighty-five sen and five rin. Can you pay?” The tree frog pulled out his purse and looked inside. There were only three sen and two rin. “What is this?” cried the lordly frog. “Only three sen and two rin? What a fool you are. What will you do then? I shall report you to the police.”

“Please forgive me. Please forgive me,” cried the frog. “No, that will not do. Pay.” “I do not have it. Please forgive me. Instead, I will become your servant.” “Oh? Very well then. From this moment you are my servant.” “Yes. I have no choice.” “Good. Go into that room.” The lordly frog opened the next door, pushed the miserable tree frog inside, shut it tight, smiled to himself again, and sat heavily down once more. Then he took up the rod again and struck the blue-green head of the second tree frog.

“Wake up there. Time for the bill.” “Kii, kii, kwaa. Uui. Another cup, please.” “What nonsense are you muttering? Wake up properly. Open your eyes. It is time to pay.” “Uui. Ah. Uui. Why are you hitting me?” “Stop babbling in your sleep and pay your bill.” “Ah yes, yes. That is right. How much is it?” “Yours is six hundred cups. One yen and fifty sen. Have you got that much?” The frog turned so pale he was almost transparent and emptied out his purse. He had only one sen and two rin. “Please take this much and forgive the rest,” he begged.

“Take this much? There is not even one yen and twenty sen here. What are you talking about? This is only one sen and two rin. Do not make a fool of me. You are asking me to forgive ninety-nine percent of the bill. In a foreign language that would be called one percent payment. Do not be absurd. Pay at once.” “But I do not have it.” “Then become my servant.” “I have no choice. Please let it be so.” “Good. Come with me.” And the lordly frog drove that one also into the next room and shut the door firmly behind him.

Part 2

Then the lordly frog was about to sit down again, but suddenly some new idea came into his head. He rose at once, went among the sleeping tree frogs one by one, and pulled out every purse he could find. He opened each with quick greedy fingers, but none of them held more than three sen. One purse was swollen and seemed promising, but when he opened it, he found not a single coin inside, only a neatly folded camellia leaf. At that he smiled more widely than ever, took up his iron rod again, and went back to the sleeping frogs.

He struck them one after another on their green heads, “pon, pon, pon,” until the whole room came alive with cries. “Ouch. Ouch. Who is that?” they shouted as they sat up and stared round with wild confused eyes. But the moment they saw that it was the whiskey seller, the dark lordly frog himself, they rushed at him from every side together, crying, “You old cheat. How dare you hit people like that?” Yet the lordly frog had the strength of thirty frogs, wore chain armor from head to toe, and faced only drunken tree frogs whose legs were shaking under them. He threw them aside one by one with hardly any effort at all.

At last he seized eleven of them together in a great tangled bundle and flung them down with a flat ugly sound. The tree frogs lost all courage after that. They turned pale green and blue, trembled from head to foot, and lay flat all over the floor. Then the lordly frog stood in the middle of the room and spoke in a heavy solemn voice. “You drank my whiskey. Not one of your bills comes to less than eighty sen, and yet not one among you has more than five sen in his purse. Is that not so? Does anyone have enough? No? I thought not.”

The frogs could do nothing but gasp and look at one another with frightened eyes. The lordly frog grew still prouder and went on, “Now then, two of your friends have already agreed to become my servants instead of paying. What will the rest of you do?” At that exact moment the two frogs who had been locked in the next room pushed their eyes into the crack of the door and gave a low unhappy cry, and that made everything worse. The others looked from face to face, and at last one said weakly, “There is no help for it.” Another said, “Let us beg to be taken in the same way.” Then all together they cried, “Please let it be so. Please make us your servants.”

You see what simple creatures tree frogs are. It was that easy. The lordly frog opened the door, dragged out the first two servants again, and declared in a grand voice, “Good. Then from now on this body will be called the Kairo Corps. I am the Commander of the Kairo Corps. From tomorrow onward you will obey every one of my orders. Do you understand?” The frogs answered in miserable voices, “We have no choice,” and the Commander rose, marched all the way around the house once with great importance, and by the time he had finished, the whiskey shop had somehow become the official headquarters of the Kairo Commander.

The next morning the sun rose golden, throwing the shadow of the peach tree far across the ground, and the sky shone bright blue. Yet no one came to ask the Kairo Corps for work. The Commander gathered them all and said, “This is bad. If no one brings work, there is no point in feeding you. But when work is scarce, that is exactly when we must prepare the materials needed for busy days. The first thing needed is wood. So today each of you will go out and bring back good timber. Ten logs each. No, a hundred. No, a thousand. If you fail, I will hand you to the police, and your thick necks will be cut off at once.”

The tree frogs shook so hard that their green hands and feet twitched. Then they went out in a frightened scattered group and searched everywhere for fine wood, hoping each to find a little more than his share. But they had long ago gathered almost all the good wood in those parts, and by evening, after running here and there until they could hardly breathe, they had found only nine pieces in all. They stood in the amber light of sunset with tears on their faces, not knowing what to do. Just then an ant came by and asked in surprise, “Tree frogs, what is the matter? You all look ready to die.”

“We must bring the Commander a thousand logs today,” they answered, “and we have only found nine.” The ant burst out laughing. “Then bring him a thousand,” he said. “What is the trouble? Look there at that smoke-like mold wood. One handful would count for five hundred pieces if one were in the mood to count that way.” The frogs saw at once that this was true enough for a man like the Commander. They thanked the ant warmly, gathered up the mold-wood in proper shares, and hurried back to headquarters. The Commander was delighted. “Good.

Very good,” he said. “Now each of you may drink one cup of imported whiskey and rest.”

So they each drank one little millet-grain cup of whiskey, and at once they became dizzy and fell asleep again, crying in their sleep, “Kii, kii.” On the next morning the Commander called them together again and said, “Still no one comes with work. Very well. Today you will gather flower seeds from the flower beds. One hundred seeds each. No, one thousand. No, ten thousand. If you fail, I will hand you over to the constable, and he will cut off your heads.” The tree frogs turned almost transparent with fear in the sunlight and hurried away toward the flower fields.

Fortunately seeds were falling there like rain, and bees were humming busily over the flowers, so the frogs crouched down and gathered with all their might. As they worked, they muttered among themselves, “Bichuko, can you gather ten thousand?” “Not at this rate. I have only three hundred so far.” “At first the Commander said one hundred. That would have been easy.” “Then he said one thousand. That would also have been enough.” “Why did we drink that whiskey at all?” “I have been thinking about that too. It was as if one cup was tied to the next by some invisible string, all the way to three hundred and fifty.” “Do not talk. Hurry.”

By evening they had somehow managed to gather ten thousand seeds each and carried them all back to the Commander. He was pleased once more and said exactly what he had said the day before. “Good. Very good. Now each of you may drink one cup of imported whiskey and sleep.” The frogs, though they should have known better by then, were so happy at hearing praise that they all drank again from the little millet-grain cups and fell asleep with thin crying snores. And on the following morning, when they woke, they saw that another lordly frog had come to visit, and the two of them were already deep in conversation.

“You must carry things out on a grand scale,” the visitor was saying. “Otherwise people will only laugh.” “Exactly,” said the Commander. “Do you think ninety yen per head would do?” “Yes, that should sound about right,” said the visitor. Then the Commander looked at his men and cried, “Good, you are

awake. Today you will haul stones. Each of you will bring ninety monme. No, that sounds too small. Better say nine hundred kan. Yes, that sounds much better. If you fail, I will turn you over at once, and there is even a judge in town who could order your heads cut off.”

The tree frogs turned so pale that the blue morning light seemed to pass straight through them. How could it be otherwise? A tree frog weighs only eight or nine monme. Even for a human being, carrying nine hundred kan would be absurd, and the very thought of such work made the poor frogs collapse here and there with faint cries. The Commander at once took up his iron rod and knocked on their heads until they staggered up again. Then, with the sun itself seeming to whirl like a yellow triangle in the far corner of the sky, the frogs went out toward the stone place to begin the impossible work.

### Part 3

“Now then, this is the King’s order. Pull,” cried the tree frogs. The lordly frog, who had been so fierce a moment before, now lost his color little by little until he looked almost transparent in the golden light, and then he began to shake. The frogs crowded round him and led him to the place where the stones lay. There they tied a rope around a stone weighing about one kan and hung the other end over his shoulder. “If you carry this by evening,” they said, “that will be enough for the first half.”

The Commander seemed at last to understand that the matter could not be laughed away. He threw down the iron rod, fixed his eyes in a serious way, and looked hard at the direction in which the stone must be dragged. Even then, however, he still did not quite mean to pull. So the frogs began to chant together to encourage him. “Yoito, yoito, yoito, yoitoshō,” they cried. Drawn in by the rhythm, the Commander planted his feet and pulled five times or so, but the stone did not move in the least.

Sweat began to come out over his whole body in sharp little drops. He opened his mouth as wide as he could and breathed in great rough gasps. Everything

around him seemed to turn brown and dizzy before his eyes. Still the frogs cried, “Yoito, yoito, yoito, yoitoshō,” and the Commander made another effort. He stamped four times or so, but on the last try his legs bent with a little cracking sound, and he almost collapsed.

At that the frogs burst out laughing all at once. Yet for some reason, just as suddenly, the laughter stopped. A deep silence fell over the place, and it was so lonely and painful that I can hardly describe it. You know, perhaps, the sadness that comes when many voices laugh together to mock someone and then in the next instant all become silent. That is the sadness which filled the air then. The Commander stood shaking, his legs bent, his breath wild, and no one said anything at all.

At that exact moment the clear far-reaching voice of the snail’s megaphone rang out over the blue sky once again. “A new order from the King. A new order from the King,” it cried. “All living things are kind and pitiable. No one must hate them. This is the order.” Then the voice moved farther and farther away, still calling, “A new order from the King,” over the shining field. The frogs listened with lifted faces, and everything changed at once.

They ran to the Commander together. Some brought him water, some straightened his bent legs, some patted his back, and some fanned him gently with leaves. The Commander began to shed tears of real regret. “Friends,” he said, “I was the one who was wrong. I am not truly your commander at all. I am only an ordinary frog, and from tomorrow I will give up all this and become a tailor.”

The tree frogs clapped their hands and jumped up with joy. They had suffered greatly, yet now they no longer hated him. The new order from the King had entered their hearts too quickly and too deeply for that. The Commander sat quietly for some time, still weeping a little, while the evening light turned softer and more golden over the ground. Then, when the sun went down, they all returned together in peace.

From the next day onward the tree frogs began again just as before, happily and busily at their own proper work. So, when the rain has just stopped, or the wind has passed, or even on any bright fair day, have you never heard small dry

voices in a field or under the shadow of a flower bed? “Hey, Bekko, make that part a little smoother.” “All right.” “No, not sparrow grass, sparrow bamboo.” “Ha, ha, I mixed them up.” “Bichuko, fill that hole there.” “Good. Throw it here. Ah, missed it. Pull now. Yoisho.” If you have heard such voices, then perhaps you have heard the old happy workers again.

## The Frog's Rubber Boots [Kaeru no Gomugutsu]

### Part 1

Under the pine trees and oak trees there ran a deep irrigation ditch. On its banks thick grasses and weeds grew in a wild mass, and near a cluster of ten dewflowers there stood the home of Kan Frog. A little farther off, under an oak in the wood, was the home of Bun Frog. Beyond the wood, in the shadow of the pampas grass, stood the home of Ben Frog. The three were of the same age and almost the same size, and all three were equally proud, mischievous, and full of foolish confidence.

One summer evening the three of them sat in the clover patch before Kan Frog's house and watched the clouds. Frogs love cloud-watching, especially in summer. Those great white cloud peaks, soft and round like little heaps of jewels or carved bunches of grapes, seemed magnificent to any eye, but to frogs they were still more special, because the peaks reminded them somehow of frogs' heads and even of frog eggs in spring. So while human beings may go flower-viewing or moon-viewing, frogs hold cloud-viewing instead. "That one is really splendid," said Bun Frog. "It is becoming flatter and flatter." "Yes," said Ben Frog. "It has a pale golden color. It makes one think of eternal life." "It is truly our ideal," said Kan Frog.

The clouds slowly broke apart, and the blue evening darkened into a deep violet color. Then Ben Frog and Bun Frog said, "Good night, then," and left Kan Frog there by himself. They swam strongly through the ditch under the trees and went home, while Kan Frog remained in the clover patch, folding his little arms and thinking hard. After a long time he gave two small cries, "Gik, gik," and then set off across the field toward the edge of the cultivated ground. There he made his voice as thin and gentle as possible and called, "Field Mouse, Field Mouse, excuse me, excuse me."

At once a field mouse popped out of the dark and stood before him. The evening was now so black that even the mouse's small dusty face could hardly be

seen. Kan Frog said, "Good evening. I have a favor to ask. Could you perhaps hear me out?" The mouse answered kindly, "Of course I will hear you. Last autumn, when I ate buckwheat dumplings and became terribly ill, you cared for me as if I were your own brother. How could I forget such a kindness?" Kan Frog grew bold at once and said, "Then could you somehow get me a pair of rubber boots? The shape does not matter much. I can alter them myself afterward."

"Rubber boots?" said the mouse. "That is difficult, but not impossible. I will bring them by tomorrow evening without fail." "Really?" cried Kan Frog. "Then thank you very much. I depend on you." The field mouse answered, "Good night, then," and vanished at once. Kan Frog was delighted. He hurried home, curled himself up, and fell asleep full of happy dreams, already imagining himself walking over chestnut burrs and rough ground without the least pain.

The next evening he went again to the field and called gently, "Field Mouse, Field Mouse, excuse me." The mouse came out looking terribly tired, with his eyes half closed and an angry look on his face. Without any greeting he flung a tiny pair of rubber boots down before Kan Frog and cried, "There. Take them. I had a terrible time. It cost me endless trouble. I nearly died worrying over it. I have paid my debt now, and perhaps I have paid more than enough." Then, before Kan Frog could even thank him properly, he turned away in a fury and disappeared into the dark.

For a little while Kan Frog stood there in complete surprise, but when he thought it over, he understood why the mouse had been so upset. A field mouse cannot make rubber boots. He must have asked an ordinary mouse, who then asked a cat, who asked a dog, who asked a horse, and somehow the horse must have cheated and got another pair when receiving his own iron shoes. Then the boots must have passed back from horse to dog, dog to cat, cat to mouse, and mouse to field mouse, with every step full of ugly demands, danger, and fear. Yet once Kan Frog looked down at the fine boots, he forgot all that. He was so pleased that his mouth twitched. He pulled, pushed, and beat the boots until they fit his own feet exactly, put them on, and spent the whole night walking up and down, smiling to himself.

By dawn he was so tired that he dragged himself home and fell asleep. Then, the next morning, Bun Frog and Ben Frog came and shook him awake. "Kan, Kan, it is time for cloud-viewing," they cried. Kan Frog opened his eyes and saw a pale golden cloud tower rising beautifully in the east. Bun Frog looked down at his feet and cried, "Why, you are already wearing rubber boots. Where did you get them?" Kan Frog answered with great pride, "I got them after terrible difficulty, endless trouble, and almost deadly worry. You fellows could never manage such a thing. Watch me walk. There now. Fine, is it not? When I walk like this, I look like an actor in a play."

"Yes," said Bun Frog, staring at the boots rather than at the clouds. "They are excellent." "We would like a pair too," said Ben Frog. "But I suppose it is hopeless." "Quite hopeless," said Kan Frog grandly. At that very moment a beautiful young frog maiden came hopping from the far side of the dewflowers and shyly showed her face. "Miss Rura, good evening," said Ben Frog quickly. "What brings you here?" She answered, "My father told me to find a husband." Ben Frog cried, "Then perhaps I would do." Bun Frog said at once, "Or perhaps I might do just as well."

But Kan Frog did not say a word. He only kept walking back and forth in his new boots with as much style as he could manage. The young frog maiden watched him for a little while, hiding half her face, and then said, "I have already chosen." "Chosen whom?" cried the other two, blinking fast. Kan Frog at last turned toward them with a blank face, as if he had noticed nothing until then. "What is it?" he asked. Bun Frog and Ben Frog said together, "The young lady has chosen you." Kan Frog hurried over at once and said in a polite important voice, "Good evening. Do you have some business with me? Ah, I see. Very good. I understand. Then what day shall we fix for the wedding?"

"The second day of the eighth month would be good," said Rura Frog. "That will do perfectly," replied Kan Frog, lifting his face toward the sky as if he were discussing state affairs. The cloud peaks were again floating there in their favorite flat shape. "Then I shall go home and tell my family," said Rura. "Yes, please do," said Kan Frog. "Good night," she said. "Good night," he answered. Bun Frog and

Ben Frog, filled with anger, turned their backs at once and swam away through the ditch in great offended splashes. Kan Frog, however, was beside himself with joy. He walked and walked in every direction until the twentieth-day moon rose in the east, and only then did he return home and sleep.

After that, matters went forward. On Rura Frog's side, preparations were made, and on Kan Frog's side, there were negotiations and arrangements. Then, in the early morning of the day two days before the wedding, Kan Frog said in a dream, "Today I must go and invite everyone properly to the ceremony." But from before dawn the rain had begun to fall in earnest. The woods roared with wind and water, and the clover before his house looked pale and blurred under the muddy flood. Even so, Kan Frog bravely left home. The ditch was swollen and brown, the dewflowers and knotweed were almost under water, and it was honestly rather frightening to jump in.

Still he leaped from a knotweed stalk with a splash and swam hard through the current, though he was carried along far downstream. Somehow he managed to climb up the opposite bank, and then he went on and on over the moss, across insect paths, through the rain, with his rubber boots making a loud wet sound, until he reached Bun Frog's house under the oak. "Good day, good day," he called. "Who is it? Ah, it is you. Come in," said Bun Frog. Kan Frog answered, "What dreadful rain. Even the great Passen Highway is empty today. But as you know, my wedding is the day after tomorrow. Please come." Bun Frog said, "Yes, yes, I heard some little red insect say something like that. I will come."

Then Kan Frog went on with his boots going "picha, picha" through the wood and on to Ben Frog's house beyond the pampas grass. "Good day, good day," he called again. "Who is it? Ah, it is you. Come in," said Ben Frog. Kan Frog repeated, "As you know, my wedding is the day after tomorrow. Please come." Ben Frog answered, "Yes, I heard something of the kind somewhere. I will come." So Kan Frog returned home at last, crossing the ditch again, thoroughly pleased with himself. He did not know that Bun Frog and Ben Frog were already planning how to ruin those wonderful boots that had won him both his pride and his bride.

## Part 2

After the three frogs reached Kan Frog's house, some time passed, and then from far away there came the wedding procession carrying butterbur leaves like umbrellas and cattail heads like banners. They came on in a long bright line through the damp air, and as they drew nearer, the father of the bride, old Ganro Frog, turned back and asked in a loud worried voice, "My girl, which of those three is the bridegroom?" At that Rura Frog blinked her small eyes several times in real trouble. The truth was that, when she had first seen Kan Frog, she had noticed nothing at all except the rubber boots. Now the three of them stood there together, all barefoot, all dark-faced, all large-mouthed, and all much too similar.

So Rura said in some confusion, "I cannot quite tell yet. I think I must go a little closer." The frog who served as go-between said from behind, "Yes, yes, of course. One must be very careful in a matter like this. It would be terrible to choose wrongly." So the procession moved forward. Yet the nearer they came, the less certain things became. All three frogs had the same bulging eyes, the same wide mouths, and nearly the same ugly brown color, and now even Rura herself began to feel cold with worry.

Just then Kan Frog, who had been standing at the far right, suddenly opened his mouth with a large little snap, stepped one pace forward, and bowed. At once Rura felt relieved. "That one," she said quietly. And so the ceremony began. It would be hard to describe in full how splendid the feast was, how much drinking there was, and how proud everyone tried to look, but in any case it lasted long enough for the cloud peaks in the sky to reach their brightest and finest shape.

At last the formal part ended, and the bride's side all began to take their leave. Then Ben Frog cried out merrily, "Now for the wedding journey." Bun Frog added, "We will go along a little way and see you off." Kan Frog did not really want them there, but he could not refuse without seeming rude, so he set out with Rura Frog beside him. The two other frogs followed with bright eager faces, and before long they came to the place where the old stake hole lay hidden under leaves, just as Bun Frog and Ben Frog had planned from the beginning.

“Ah, this is a bad bit of road,” said Bun Frog in a very kind voice. “Bridegroom, let me take your hand.” “And I will help too,” said Ben Frog. Before Kan Frog even had time to draw himself up properly or object, the two of them had taken him by both hands. They themselves walked safely on either side of the hole while pulling him straight over the covered place. At once the leaves laid across it gave a rough dry sound. Kan Frog lurched forward and sank a little.

Bun Frog and Ben Frog quickly turned outward, meaning to let go and escape. But Kan Frog in his terror clutched both of them at once, and because of that, the hind legs with which they had been holding themselves firm trembled and gave way together. In the next moment there came the dull sound of something dropping and the sharp sound of muddy water leaping up. All three frogs fell straight down into the bottom of the stake hole. They splashed deep into the cold dirty water and disappeared almost to the throat.

When Rura looked down, she saw nothing but a small round piece of sky above the hole and, far below, the three frogs struggling in black mud. The bright cloud peaks were still shining far overhead, but for the frogs below there was nothing to hold, nothing to climb, nothing to catch. The sides of the hole were straight and wet. Bun Frog cried, “Pull me out. Pull me out first.” Ben Frog cried, “No, me first.” Kan Frog shouted only, “Rura. Rura. Save me somehow.” The mud sucked at them whenever they tried to kick.

Rura turned pale with fright, but she did not lose her head. She remembered the six-hundred-meter running practice she had done long ago, and in the next instant she was already racing back the way they had come to fetch help. She ran straight to where her father and the others from the wedding party still were. But when she reached them, she found them all dead asleep from drink. They lay in a heap under leaves and near the empty cups, breathing heavily and making ugly little snoring sounds.

“Father, wake up. Father, wake up,” cried Rura. “Three frogs have fallen into the hole. They may die.” But no one woke. She shook one, then another, then all of them, but not one opened his eyes. Ganro Frog only made a thick sleepy noise and turned over. Rura looked at them in despair, then ran back again to the hole.

The three frogs were still there, splashing weakly, and Kan Frog cried as soon as he saw her, “Did they come? Did they come?” Rura could only answer, “No. No one woke up.”

Then the light slowly faded, and evening came. Rura went round and round the hole crying, not knowing what else to do. Once again she ran to her father’s place. Once again she shook them all. Once again no one woke. She came back, looked down, and heard the frogs below making smaller and smaller sounds in the muddy dark. By then it was night. The sky could not be seen except as a little circle above, and the place around the hole was full of damp darkness and the sound of dripping water.

Time passed. Again and again Rura ran back to her father and the others. Each time she shook them, called to them, begged them, and even pushed at them with both hands. Each time the answer was the same. They were still sunk in drunken sleep, snoring and groaning and impossible to wake. So she returned each time to the hole and wept there, going round and round it in misery until her legs shook under her. From below there came now only faint little sounds, hardly more than “picha” now and then from the muddy water.

Morning came at last. Then day passed and evening came again. The bright cloud peaks formed in the sky once more and broke apart once more, while still the frogs below remained trapped in the hole and still Rura ran back and forth between the sleepers and the place of the accident. Her face grew pale, her body weak, and her eyes dull from fear and exhaustion, but she did not stop. She could not stop. Even when she could hardly stand, she kept trying.

At last another morning broke, and at just that time old Ganro Frog finally woke and set out, wondering what had become of his daughter. He walked through the field still heavy from drink and saw, near the stake hole, Rura Frog sitting there with her arms folded over her chest, fast asleep from sheer exhaustion. Her face had turned almost blue. Ganro bent over her and called, “Hey, what has happened here? Hey.” Rura opened her eyes slowly and said in a cracked voice, “Father, the three of them fell into this hole. They may be dead by now.” Ganro at once went carefully to the edge, laid one ear near the mouth of the hole, and

listened. From deep below there came a very faint splashing sound.

“Good,” he cried. “They are still alive.” Then he turned and sprang away as fast as he could to bring back the other frogs.

### Part 3

Ganro Frog hurried back with a whole crowd of frogs. They all ran in confusion at first, but Ganro shouted, “Do not lose your heads. Bring strong vines. Bring the shady creeper from the wood.” So several frogs rushed into the forest, pulled down long cool vines, and carried them back over their shoulders. Others lay flat at the edge of the hole and called downward, “Hold on. We are coming now. Do not let go.” Far below there came only weak little splashing sounds in answer.

Then they lowered the vines carefully into the hole. “Which one should come first?” cried Ganro. At first there was no answer. Then, after a long moment, Kan Frog’s voice came up in a cracked whisper. “Anyone. Pull anyone out. We are all dying.” So two frogs held one vine, two held another, and at last one of the trapped frogs caught hold. “Pull,” shouted Ganro. They all pulled together, and slowly, with mud falling and water dripping, the first frog came up out of the darkness.

It was Ben Frog. He was almost half dead. His white belly was turned upward, his eyes were shut, and his mouth was tightly closed as if he had forgotten how to breathe. “Lay him there,” said Ganro. “Quickly, now. Do not stop. Lower the vine again.” The frogs obeyed at once. Again they called into the hole, again there was a weak little splash, and after much pulling, Bun Frog too was brought out, just as white-bellied, just as cold, and just as close to death as the first.

“One more,” cried Rura, whose face was still blue with fear and tiredness. “Father, quickly, one more.” Ganro nodded and said, “Yes, now the bridegroom.” So they lowered the vine again for the third time. This time longer passed than before, and all the frogs around the hole began to shake. Then, at last, there came the faintest tug on the vine. “Pull,” shouted Ganro, and every frog there pulled with all his strength. Bit by bit Kan Frog rose out of the hole, dripping with black

water and mud, his eyes shut, his mouth closed, and his body limp as grass after frost.

All three were laid out side by side on the ground. For a moment it seemed as if none of them would ever move again. Then Ganro said, “Do not stand there staring. Bring soft hairs. Bring gomanzai fibers. Rub them hard.” At once frogs ran here and there, tearing off soft plant hairs and bringing whatever might help. They rubbed the three bodies, pressed their sides, warmed them, and did all they could think of, while Rura knelt by Kan Frog and whispered again and again, “Please wake up. Please wake up.”

At last Ben Frog gave a little cough. Then Bun Frog’s legs twitched. And then, after a long while, Kan Frog opened one eye, shut it again, and at last slowly opened both. Rura cried out with joy, and all the frogs gave a great shout together. “They are alive. They are alive,” they said. The cloud peaks were shining beautifully overhead, and the whole field seemed brighter than before. Even the wet leaves and the ditch water looked glad.

After that Kan Frog and Rura were truly joined together at last. Bun Frog and Ben Frog had been taught such a hard lesson that they did not dare make trouble again. In truth, all the frogs around them changed after that day. They remembered too clearly the dark hole, the muddy water, the helpless splashing below, and the long desperate running of Rura Frog through the field. So they corrected their hearts, worked more honestly than before, and gave up many of their foolish jealous tricks.

As for the rubber boots, they were gone forever. Not one piece of them was ever put together again. Yet in the end that did not matter very much. Kan Frog had won his bride, had nearly lost his life, and had come back wiser than before. And so the story ends with the frogs all living more carefully and working better after that day.

## Signal and Signaless [Shigunaru to Shigunaresu]

### Part 1

“Gatanko, gatanko, shuu-fuffu-fu. When the red eye of the Scorpion was still in the sky, I was already running here this morning from four o’clock. The basin of Tono was dark, and there was only the sound of cold water. Gatanko, gatanko, shuu-fuffu-fu. I breathed steam over the frozen gravel and threw sparks into the dark until at last the east began to burn. Gatanko, gatanko, shuu-fuffu-fu. Birds began to sing, trees began to shine, the river ran blue and clear, and the hills and valleys all wore bright frost. Gatanko, gatanko, shuu-fuffu-fu. When I run, I grow warm, and sweat comes out. I could still run seven or eight more ri, though today again will be a frosty day. Gatan, gatan, gii, shuu-shuu.”

Singing like that, the first little train from the east on the light railway came hurrying in and stopped. A little weak steam slipped out from under the engine, and only a very small thread of blue smoke rose from its long funny chimney. At once the telegraph poles that stood with the light railway gave little buzzing sighs of relief, and the signal post lifted its white arm with a quiet sound. This straight slender signal post was Signaless. She looked up into the sky, gave a small soft sigh, and saw pale striped clouds filling the heavens and sending cold white light down over the frozen ground while they drifted eastward.

Signaless kept looking toward that distant side for a long time. Then, stretching her gentle arm as far as she could in that direction, she whispered to herself, “This morning my aunts must be looking this way too.” She went on standing like that, still half lost in thought, when suddenly there came a hard little sound behind her. “Katan.” She turned quickly. Beyond the long piles of black railroad ties, the fine signal post of the main line had just lowered his stiff arm to welcome a shining train that was coming from far to the south under a plume of bright white smoke.

“Good morning. It is warm this morning,” said the main-line signal in a voice so serious that it sounded almost military. Signaless lowered her eyes and

answered very softly, "Good morning." But at once the thick telegraph pole that sent electricity to the main-line signal during the night spoke in a grand scolding tone. "Young master, this will not do. You must not speak so freely to things like that." The main-line signal became embarrassed and fell silent. Poor timid Signaless felt as if she wished either to vanish into the air or fly far away, but she could do neither, and so she only kept standing there.

The striped clouds became like thin wet amber boards, and a little weak sunlight began to fall. The fat telegraph pole of the main line was so pleased by that that he began to sing in a low crooked voice while looking at a small farm cart moving across the distant field. "Gogon, goo-goo. Thin clouds pour down sake. From the sake, frost comes running. Gogon, goo-goo. When the frost melts, the ground turns black. Horses step in dung, people go splash-splash. Gogon, goo-goo." After that he went on singing even more foolish things, one after another, without sense or shame.

While that silly song went on, the main-line signal quietly asked the west wind to carry a message. "Please do not mind him," he said. "He is quite uncivilized. He knows nothing of manners. Truly, he is always a trouble to me." Signaless lowered her head still more and answered in a low voice, "Oh no, not at all," but she was downwind, and his ears never caught her words. The main-line signal mistook her silence for kindness and said eagerly, "Then you forgive me? Truly, if you were angry with me, life itself would not be worth living." Signaless drew in her shoulders shyly and said, "Oh, such a thing," and though she tried to hide it, a little white brightness came over her face with happiness.

"Please listen seriously, Signaless," said the main-line signal, growing more excited now that the wind had dropped. "For your sake I would even keep my arm from lowering when the ten o'clock train comes. I would stand firm all through it if I had to." "Oh, you must not say such things," said Signaless in alarm. "Of course I must not truly do it," he answered quickly. "It would help neither you nor me. But I say it only to show you this: there is nothing in the whole world as precious to me as you. Please love me." Signaless said nothing. She only looked downward and stood very still, while the rude telegraph pole beside him kept on

muttering his nonsense songs.

The main-line signal was impatient by nature, and the longer Signaless stayed silent, the more he lost his peace. "Will you not answer me?" he cried. "My whole world is dark. It is like a black deep pool before my eyes. Let lightning strike me and break me in one blow. Let an eruption open beneath my feet and throw me into the far sky. Let everything end." The telegraph pole stopped singing and said with great importance, "Young master, if lightning should come, I myself will receive the noble disaster for you." "Be quiet," cried the signal. "You understand nothing at all." Then even he fell silent.

Evening came. The young moon showed its face once more from a black cloud over the western mountains and cast a dull leaden light over everything before sinking again. Winter trees slept. The black piles of ties slept. Even the poles seemed to sleep. Only some far-off sound of wind or water went on. In that stillness the main-line signal thought, "There is no use in living. Every time a train comes, I lower my arm and put on my blue glasses. For what? Nothing is interesting anymore. I should die. Lightning, eruption, something." Yet it was not only he who could not sleep that night. Beyond the ties stood poor pale Signaless with her red lamp, and she too was just as troubled.

"Signal has been too cruel," she whispered to the stars. "Because I could not speak and could not answer, he was angry at once. Everything is over now. Dear God, if you strike him with lightning, please strike me too." Her voice was very faint, but somehow the main-line signal heard it. He straightened himself sharply, trembled, and then called in a shaken voice, "Signaless, what are you praying for?" "I do not know," she answered softly. "That is too cruel," he said. "I am ready this very moment to be crushed by thunder, torn up by eruption, broken by wind, or drowned under Noah's flood, and yet you will not pity me?"

"Ah, that eruption and flood," said Signaless suddenly, gathering all her courage. "Those are what I was praying for." The main-line signal shook with joy so strongly that even his red spectacles trembled. "Then why should you have to die?" he cried. "Tell me. Tell me. I will chase away whatever troubles you." Signaless said, "Because you became so angry." "That?" he answered. "There is

nothing to fear in that. I am not angry at all. For your sake I would have my glasses taken away, my arms pulled off, or be beaten down into the bottom of a marsh, and I would still never blame you. So please, love me. Say that you do.”

The moon stood halfway between the mountain and the cloud. The main-line signal had grown so pale that he looked like a gray ghost. “Again you are silent,” he said. “So you do hate me after all.” “No, no,” said Signaless. “Then what is it? Tell me.” At last she said, “For a very long time, even from long ago, I have thought only of you.” “Is it true?” he cried. “True? True?” “Yes,” she answered. Then he said, “Then promise me you will marry me. In spring we will ask the swallows to carry the news and hold the ceremony.” Signaless hesitated and said, “But you are made of metal. You are the new kind. You have two sets of red and blue glasses, and even at night you have electric light. I am wood. At night I have only a lamp, and only one pair of glasses.” “I know,” he answered. “That is why I love you.”

Signaless gave a small trembling cry of joy. “Then I promise,” she said. “Thank you,” said the signal. “Then you are truly my future wife.” “Yes,” she answered. “I will never change.” “Look there,” he said. “Those four little blue stars. Do you see the ring beneath the lowest one? That ring of light is my engagement ring for you. Please take it.” “Thank you,” said Signaless. “I receive it.” And at that very moment, from the dark warehouse across the way, there came a huge shouting laugh. “Ha, ha, ha. Wonderful. You are doing very well indeed.” Both of them fell silent at once. Then the warehouse roof said in a broad kindly voice, “Do not worry. I will not tell anyone. I have swallowed the whole thing safely.”

## Part 2

The warehouse roof spoke again from the dark. “Do not worry,” he said in a broad, steady voice. “I truly wished to help this morning, but I made matters worse. That was my fault. Still, I have another idea, so do not be so sad. Tonight the fog is thick, and you cannot even see each other’s faces, can you?” Signal and

Signaless answered together, "No." The roof then said, "Very well. Then I will make it possible. Listen carefully, and both of you repeat exactly after me."

"Yes," they said. "Good," answered the roof. "Now then. Alpha." "Alpha," said Signal and Signaless together. "Beta." "Beta." "Gamma." "Gamma." "Delta." "Delta," they repeated, and the sound of their voices seemed to spread through the fog like pale rings in water.

Then something very strange happened. Before they knew it, the two of them were standing side by side in the middle of a black velvet night. "How odd," said Signal. "What has happened? Everything is dark, but not like an ordinary dark night." Signaless whispered, "Yes. It is all black, and yet it is beautiful." Signal lifted his eyes and said, "No, not black only. The sky above us is full of stars. What a great strong star that one is. And what are those thirteen blue stars in a row? I have never seen such a sky before in all my life."

"And the sky is turning so fast," said Signaless. "Yes," said Signal, his voice trembling with wonder. "And look there. That large orange star is rising from the horizon. No, perhaps not a horizon. It may be the edge of the sea. Yes, that must be it. We are standing on the shore of a night sea." Signaless cried softly, "How beautiful the blue light on the waves is." Signal answered, "Yes. Those must be the tops of the shore waves. Let us go and look more closely."

They stepped forward together and came to the water. "How lovely," said Signaless. "The water looks exactly like moonlight." Signal bent and looked down into the clear dark shallows. "See," he said. "There are red starfish on the bottom, and silver sea cucumbers crawling very slowly. And there, do you see those things with the blue trembling spines? Those are sea urchins. Ah, the waves are coming in. Let us step back a little." So they moved together over the shining wet sand, and every step seemed to make the night still deeper and lovelier around them.

Time passed, though neither of them knew how much. "How many times has the sky turned since we came here?" Signal said at last. "It has become terribly cold." Signaless nodded and answered, "The sea too seems frozen somehow. The waves are no longer breaking." Then she tilted her head and said, "Do you hear that sound?" Signal listened carefully. "What sound?" "It is like the creaking of a

waterwheel in a dream,” said Signaless. Signal answered at once, “Yes. I hear it now. That must be the harmony of the moving heavens.”

Signaless then looked around and whispered, “Everything has begun to grow pale blue.” Signal stared into the strange brightening air and said, “Is dawn coming? No, I do not think it is dawn. Wait. How splendid. Your whole body has begun to shine in the same blue-white light.” Signaless gave a little cry and answered, “And you too. Your chest and your glasses are shining in it.” They stood there looking at one another, and because they were no longer signal posts but seemed for that short time almost like living beings, the wonder of it entered even more deeply into their hearts.

Then the sea before them grew stiller still, and far out over the black-blue water there appeared a very faint silver path, as though some hidden star had laid a road upon the waves. “If we walked there,” said Signal softly, “perhaps we could go very far away, farther than trains, farther than telegraph lines, farther than all the busy people and all the angry poles.” Signaless answered, “Yes. If I could go with you, I would go anywhere.” Signal said, “There are no tracks there, but then I would make a field and work in it. We must do something wherever we live.” Signaless said only, “Yes,” but in that one word there was such trust that Signal felt his whole being fill with light.

Then he lifted his face toward the high blue fire he had spoken of before and said, “O distant stars, those tiny blue stars above even our engagement ring, please take us to you. Merciful Santa Maria, and kind George Stephenson, hear the prayer of two sorrowful souls.” Signaless answered, “Yes.” “Let us pray together,” said Signal. “Yes,” she whispered again. So they prayed side by side in that strange sea night, while the stars turned overhead and the cold silver path over the water trembled only a little, as if it too were listening.

After that, the silence deepened again. Signal and Signaless stayed close together, and neither wished to speak too much, because everything around them had become too beautiful for many words. At last Signal said in a low voice, “If only we could remain like this forever.” Signaless answered, “Yes.” Then the pale blue brightness around them slowly grew stronger, and the dreamlike creaking of

the great heavenly wheel became clearer and clearer, until it seemed that the whole night itself was beginning to move them somewhere.

“Something is changing again,” said Signal. “Yes,” said Signaless. “The light is growing, and yet it is not morning.” “Perhaps we are being sent back,” Signal said. “If so, I am glad that for this little while we stood together and saw the same sky and the same sea.” Signaless turned toward him and said, “I will not forget it, no matter what happens tomorrow.” Then the blue-white brightness gathered around them more thickly still, and both of them stood very quiet, waiting to see what would come next.

### Part 3

Then, just as the blue-white brightness gathered most thickly around them, everything trembled once, as if some great unseen wheel had turned. The sea, the stars, the silver road over the water, all of it shook and became thin. Signal reached for Signaless, and Signaless reached for him, but before either could say anything more, the whole beautiful night broke apart like mist in the wind. In the next moment they were once more in their own places, fixed where they had always stood, with the dark warehouse nearby and the deep fog all around them. Only their hearts still beat as if they had truly walked together somewhere very far away.

Morning came, and with it came a hard strong wind. The sky turned a fierce blue, and clouds ran through it like lame white animals driven by force. All the telegraph poles on the main line and the light railway hummed and shook until they seemed nearly mad with strain. Even the fat telegraph pole beside the main-line signal had no desire to sing nonsense that day. He only drew himself in as much as he could and made a low buzzing sound to hide his fear. In the middle of that great wind, Signal stood like a young policeman and spoke secretly to Signaless, taking advantage of the noise.

“It is dreadful weather,” he said. “Your head must ache. Mine feels a little dizzy too. So let us do this. I will speak, and you need only nod. If something I say displeases you, turn your head a little to the side. This is how refined people

in Europe speak when they wish not to be understood by the foolish creatures around them. I read about it in a foreign journal. That warehouse fellow is absurd, is he not? He understood well enough that I spoke to you, but because of the wind he cannot possibly hear the words. Still, you hear me, do you not? Yes, I see. Then we are safe. We must marry quickly in spring. We should tell no one at all and suddenly... ah, the wind hurts my throat. I must stop for a little.”

Signaless waited quietly for him, her whole body turned just slightly in his direction. The wind roared like bears and the telegraph poles roared like a mountain full of broken hives. After a while Signal began speaking again, and now his voice came only in pieces through the storm. “I would do anything for you... anything at all. If a train came, I would keep my arm from lowering. You are the most beautiful of all our kind in the whole world. The others around us are all fools and slowards. My fat fellow there is blinking and trying to guess what I say. Look, now he twists his mouth. He is uglier than a piece of chalk...” He went on in that way, brave because the storm seemed to hide him.

But then the fat telegraph pole suddenly shouted above the storm, “Young master, what have you been whispering all this time? And to that Signaless, of all things? What smiling nonsense is this?” Both Signal and Signaless went pale at once and straightened themselves. Signal tried to recover his courage and, since the wind hid most sounds anyway, said carelessly, “Nothing important. Nothing at all.” But Signaless, who stood a little farther downwind, heard the whole exchange clearly, and in spite of her fear she could not help giving a tiny laugh. It was only a small laugh, but it was enough.

The fat telegraph pole shook violently with rage. At once he sent messages far and wide, first one way and then another, asking what had been said, what Signal had been whispering, and why Signaless had laughed. Unluckily for Signal, there stood not far away a very long sharp-eared telegraph pole on the light railway side who had been pretending to look at the sky while listening to every word. So the whole matter was quickly carried off through the wires, and before long the fat telegraph pole had heard everything. Then he turned wild with anger. “Scoundrels. Dogs,” he cried. “If you think you can marry, just try it. All the

telegraph poles are against you already. The signal posts too must obey the railway chief, and the railway chief is my uncle. Try your marriage now if you dare.”

He sent message after message in every direction, changing color as he listened for the answers. It seemed he received promises of opposition from everyone he contacted. Perhaps he even sent word to some railway superintendent farther away, for he soon became still more swollen with importance. Then suddenly he began to cry in a loud false sorrowful voice. “Ah, eight years I watched over you day and night, and this is my reward. The world has gone crooked. Ah, everything is finished. Has great Edison himself abandoned this shameful age?” He went on like that until even the wind seemed tired of him.

As he wailed, the storm grew stronger still. The western sky turned a strange dim white, and before long snow began to come in small sharp flakes. Signal lost all strength and stood there pale and miserable, glancing only once toward gentle Signaless. She was weeping quietly while lowering her arm to receive the two o’clock train, and her dear sloping shoulders trembled almost invisibly. Above them the wind cried through the air, and all around them the pitiless telegraph poles went on humming as if nothing in the world had happened.

Then night came again. The clouds shone blue-white under the moon, and there in that cold silence the mountains lay on their sides like the bodies of young white-bear nobles. The black ties slept, dreaming their red and yellow triangle dreams. Far away, a remnant of the day’s wind passed once with a thin lonely sound, and then all was still. Signal let out a small sad sigh. At the same moment Signaless, half frozen where she stood, let out one too. “Signaless,” he said softly, unable to bear it any longer, “we are truly unhappy.”

“Yes,” answered Signaless in a low pale voice. “It was all my fault.” At that Signal’s chest seemed to burn. “Ah, Signaless,” he said, “I wish the two of us could go far away, far beyond all this, to some place where none of these others existed.” “Yes,” she answered. “If only I could go, I would go anywhere.” Signal looked upward and said, “There, far above even our engagement ring, do you see those tiny blue lights? They are so far away.” “Yes,” said Signaless, lifting her small mouth as if she wished to kiss them. “I wonder whether blue mist-fire is

burning there.”

“I think so,” said Signal. “Blue fire, and perhaps a quiet sea, and perhaps no trains at all, no harsh orders, no fat poles, no cries, no mockery.” Signaless answered, “If we could stand there side by side, even if it were cold, I would not mind.” Then Signal said, “Let us ask. If there is any mercy in the stars, let them take us there.” Signaless whispered, “Yes,” and the two of them grew quiet again, their sorrow rising like prayer into the high blue night.

Whether the stars heard them or not, no one can say. But perhaps if you go out late on a winter night, when the moon is pale and the mountains lie white and still, and if by chance you pass a lonely line of railway where signal posts stand unmoving in the frost, you may feel that somewhere among them there remains a deep sad kindness, as if two young hearts had once spoken there and never wholly ceased.

## The Bears of Nametoko Mountain [Nametokoyama no Kuma]

### Part 1

The bears of Nametoko Mountain are interesting creatures. Nametoko is a great mountain, and the Fuchizawa River comes down from it. Most days of the year the mountain seems to breathe in cold mist and breathe out cloud. All around it stand other dark blue-black mountains, ugly and grand like sea monsters. Halfway up there is a huge cave, and from that cave the river suddenly falls three hundred feet in a great waterfall through thick groves of cypress and maple.

The old Nakasendo road is almost never used now. Butterbur and knotweed grow all over it, and fences stand here and there to keep cattle from wandering up. But if you push through it for three ri or so, you begin to hear a strange sound ahead, like wind passing over a high peak. When you look carefully in that direction, you see something white and long moving down the mountain and throwing up mist. That is the great waterfall of Nametoko. I myself have not seen all these things with my own eyes. Much of what I know comes from what I have heard and thought, so perhaps I am wrong in places, but I believe the story all the same.

In those parts the gall of the mountain bears was famous. People said it cured stomach pain and even healed wounds. At the entrance to the lead mine baths there was an old sign that said so plainly. So I feel sure that the bears truly lived there in numbers, crossing streams with their red tongues hanging out and letting their cubs wrestle and slap one another after the match was done. And the man who caught them one after another was the hunter Fuchizawa Kojuro.

Kojuro was a hard red-brown old man with a body thick as a small millstone. His palms were huge and heavy, and his face looked rough enough to have been cut from wood. In summer he wore bark clothing, straw sandals, and carried a broad mountain knife and an old heavy gun that looked as if it had come to Japan from Portugal long ago. Beside him always went a strong yellow dog. Together they moved across Nametoko Mountain and the other ridges and valleys around

it, through Shidoke Marsh, Mitsumata, Sakkai Ridge, Mami Cave Forest, and Shirazawa, as if the whole wild region belonged to them.

When Kojuro went up a valley, the trees were so thick that the way often seemed like a blue-black tunnel. Then, without warning, a patch would open where everything shone green and gold, or a place where the sunlight fell down through leaves as if flowers of light had bloomed in the air. Kojuro walked through all this slowly and calmly, as though he were crossing his own room at home. The dog went ahead, running sideways along cliffs, jumping into the water, swimming with all his strength through deep ugly pools, and then climbing onto a rock to shake his coat hard and wait for his master. Kojuro followed behind with white water rising around his knees like folding screens and his long legs moving wide and steady as if he were a compass walking.

I may as well say this at once, though perhaps it sounds strange. The bears of Nametoko more or less liked Kojuro. When he crossed a stream or passed under a narrow high bank covered with thistles, they often watched him quietly from above. Some held branches and hung from trees. Some sat on cliffs with their knees pulled up. Some looked on as though they found both Kojuro and his dog quite interesting. The dog too seemed somehow accepted by them, though of course none of this kindness lasted when man and bear met face to face in the open and the yellow dog leaped like a burning ball while Kojuro raised his gun with those strange shining eyes of his.

In such moments most bears waved one paw as if refusing the whole ugly business. But bears are not all the same. A fierce one would rise up roaring, spread its forelegs, and come straight at Kojuro as though it meant to crush the dog in one blow and then seize the man. Kojuro would stand perfectly still with a tree between himself and the beast and fire at the white mark on its chest. Then the whole forest seemed to shout. The bear would crash to the ground, blood would pour from it, its nose would twitch and twitch, and it would die there on the mountain.

When that happened, Kojuro did not laugh or boast. He leaned the gun against a tree, came near very carefully, and spoke to the dead or dying bear in a

low rough voice. "Bear," he would say, "I did not shoot you because I hate you. It is only my trade. I would rather do some honest work where no one suffers, but I have no fields, and the trees belong to the government, and when I go down to the village no one has work for me. So I became a hunter because I had no choice. If it is bad luck for you to be born a bear, it is bad luck for me to do this kind of work. Next time, do not be born a bear." And each time, as though he understood, the yellow dog sat down with his eyes half closed and looked ashamed.

There was a reason the dog always looked that way. When Kojuro was forty, dysentery came to his house, and one by one his family fell ill. In the end his own son and the son's wife died, while this dog alone stayed healthy and alive. After a kill, Kojuro would take out a sharp knife and begin the sad work that followed. I hate even to speak of it in detail. Still, one thing is certain. At the end Kojuro placed the red gall in a little wooden case on his back, washed the bloody hide in the stream, rolled it tightly, lifted it over his shoulders, and went down the valley looking tired and empty.

In time Kojuro came to feel that he almost understood the language of bears. One early spring, before even one tree had turned green, he went up Shirazawa with the dog and climbed toward a ridge where he meant to spend the night in a small hut of bamboo grass he had built the summer before. But for some reason, though he knew the mountain better than most men know their own house, he lost the path. He went down and up the slope several times, the dog panting hard and Kojuro breathing from the side of his mouth, until at last he found the broken little hut. Then he remembered there was a spring just below it and started down the slope.

What he saw there stopped him like a nail driven through his feet. In the pale moonlight of the sixth night a mother bear and a cub, not yet even a full year old, were standing on the slope just like people shading their eyes and looking far off into another valley. Kojuro stared at them, and for a moment it seemed to him that light shone around their bodies like a holy glow. He did not move. Then the little bear spoke in a sweet pleading voice. "It must be snow, Mother. It is white only on that side of the valley. It must be snow."

The mother kept looking and answered at last, "No, it cannot be snow. Snow would not fall only there." The cub said, "Then it stayed there without melting." The mother replied, "No. I passed that place yesterday to look for thistle shoots." Kojuro also looked hard at the opposite slope. The moonlight lay on it in a pale cold shine, and one patch there gleamed like silver armor. After a little while the cub said again, "If it is not snow, then it is frost. It must be frost." Kojuro thought to himself, "There will be frost tonight indeed. Even the stars near the moon are shaking blue, and the moon itself is hard and cold as ice."

Then the mother bear said gently, "Now I know. Those are the flowers of the mountain cherry." The cub cried at once, "Oh, mountain cherry flowers. I know them." "No," said the mother, "you have never yet seen them." "Yes, I have. I brought some home before." "No," said the mother. "What you brought home were catalpa flowers." "Was it so?" said the cub in a puzzled voice. For some reason Kojuro felt his chest become full. He looked once more at the white shining flowers far across the valley, and at the mother and child standing there in the moonlight with all their minds on that distant beauty. Then, taking care not to make the smallest sound, he slowly stepped backward up the slope while the smell of spicebush moved through the moonlight around him.

## Part 2

Yet for all his greatness in the mountains, Kojuro became pitiable when he went down to town to sell bear skins and gall. In the middle of the town there was a large general goods shop with baskets, sugar, whetstones, tobacco, and even glass fly-traps on display. When Kojuro stepped over the sill with a mountain of rolled skins on his back, the people in the shop gave little thin smiles that seemed to say, "So he has come again." In the next room the owner sat heavily beside a great bronze brazier. Kojuro, who in the mountains moved like a lord, would set down the load, place both hands carefully on the floorboards, and say, "Master, thank you kindly for the other day."

The owner would answer in a lazy voice, "Yes, yes. And what do you want

today?” Kojuro would say, “I have brought a few more bear skins.” Then the owner would tap his pipe quietly against his palm and say, “Bear skins again? The ones from before are still lying there. I really do not need any today.” At once Kojuro’s face would tighten with worry, and he would plead, “Master, please do not say that. Please buy them. I do not care if the price is low.” He had old people and children at home, seven mouths in all, and though there were chestnuts in the mountains and a little millet in the small field behind his house, there was no rice and no miso there, and even a little rice was necessary.

People lower in the valley could grow hemp for cloth, but Kojuro’s family could make almost nothing except baskets and containers of wisteria vine. So after a while he would say again, his voice turning rough and thin, “Master, please. Buy them for whatever you wish.” And after making him bow in that way, the owner would hide a smile and say, “Very well. Leave them there. Heisuke, give Kojuro two yen.” The shop servant would bring four large silver coins and place them before him. Kojuro would receive them with both hands as if he were receiving a blessing.

Then the owner’s mood would improve. “Well then, bring Kojuro a drink,” he would say. Kojuro, already trembling with relief, would sit in a respectful way and talk about the mountain and the weather while he was pulled into the kitchen side of the house. Soon a little black tray would come with sliced salted salmon, cut squid, and a bottle of yellow sake. Kojuro would sit there almost stiff with politeness, lay a piece of squid on the back of his hand before licking it, and pour the sake carefully into a tiny cup as if he were handling sacred medicine. Anyone would have thought two yen for two bear skins was a cruelly low price, and Kojuro knew that too, but still he came again and again to the same man.

Why did he not take the skins elsewhere and sell them for more? Most people would not understand that. But in Japan there is something like a fox game in the way power moves. The fox loses to the hunter, and the hunter loses to the master. Here the bears were beaten by Kojuro, and Kojuro was beaten by the shop owner. The owner was safe because he stood inside the town among many others and could not easily be eaten by bears. When I think of it, I cannot help feeling angry

that such a fine man as Kojuro had to lower himself before such sly people.

Because things were like this, Kojuro killed bears, yet never truly hated them. Then one summer something happened that was very strange. Kojuro was splashing up a valley and had just climbed onto a rock when he saw a large bear climbing a tree right in front of him with its back rounded like a cat's. He raised his gun at once, and the yellow dog rushed around the foot of the tree in wild joy. The bear stayed there for a little while, seeming to consider whether it should leap down and attack or simply stay and be shot.

Then, all at once, the bear dropped heavily to the ground of its own will. Kojuro came nearer with the gun ready, but before he could do anything, the bear lifted both paws and shouted, "What is it you want from me that you must kill me?" Kojuro answered honestly, "I want nothing from you but your skin and your gall. And even those do not bring me some grand fortune in town. Truly, I am sorry, but I have no other way." Then the bear said, "Wait for me two more years. I do not care much about dying now, but I still have a little work left undone. Wait two years, and I will come and die in front of your house. You may take my skin and my insides then."

Kojuro stood still in deep confusion. While he stood thinking, the bear slowly set all four feet on the ground and began to walk away. It did not even look back. It moved as though it knew perfectly well that Kojuro would not shoot it from behind. The broad red-black back flashed once in a shaft of sunlight between the branches, and then it was gone. Kojuro gave a low troubled groan and went back down through the valley.

Exactly two years later, on a certain morning, Kojuro went out from his house and saw a red-black shape lying below the cypress fence. He had in fact half feared and half expected such a thing, and when he came closer, he saw that it was the very same bear. Blood had poured from its mouth, and it lay dead before his home, just as it had promised. Kojuro pressed his hands together as if before a shrine. He did not speak. He only stood there for a long time, full of something too deep for words.

Then came a day in January. As Kojuro set out that morning, he said

something he had never said before. "Mother, I am old now. For the first time in my life, I feel as if I do not want to go into the water this morning." His mother, who was ninety and sat spinning thread in the sun on the veranda, lifted her dim eyes and made a face that was almost a laugh and almost a cry. Kojuro tied his straw sandals, stood with a great effort, looked once at the smooth blue winter sky, and said to the children who were peeping from the stable, "I am off, then." The grandchildren laughed and called, "Grandfather, go on now," and Kojuro set out toward Shirazawa over the hard white snow.

The yellow dog ran ahead, panting hard, red tongue hanging out, running and stopping, running and stopping. Before long Kojuro's shadow sank behind a hill and vanished from sight. The children began to play with millet straw, and the house returned to its quiet winter morning. Kojuro went on along the bank of Shirazawa. The water was deep blue where it formed pools, frozen flat as glass in places, and hung with strings of icicles like rosary beads. Red and yellow berries shone from both banks, and the blue shadows of Kojuro, the dog, and the birch trunks moved sharply over the snow as he climbed higher and higher into the mountain.

### Part 3

Then the yellow dog stopped all at once. He braced himself on a rock, stared into the upper valley, and gave a fierce low growl. Kojuro also stopped and looked hard in the same direction. Above them, on the opposite side, on a blue icy ledge in the shadow of a great overhanging rock, there stood a huge bear, broad-shouldered and dark. The bear was watching them without moving. The dog gave one sharp cry and leaped into the stream, while Kojuro lifted the old heavy gun with both hands.

The bear did not run. It did not rise roaring and wave its paws as fierce bears sometimes did. It only stood and looked down quietly, as if it had come there to be seen. The yellow dog splashed across the water and climbed toward it in a wild rush. Kojuro, breathing hard now, came after him through the snow and water,

climbed the slope, stopped, and took aim. The forest stood still around them. The cold blue shadow of the rock seemed to press on everything.

Then Kojuro fired. The sound broke through the valley like a board split in two. The bear gave a great heavy shiver, yet it did not fall at once. Instead it stepped forward once, then again, as though it still meant to keep its footing, and only then crashed down from the icy ledge. It rolled, struck a jut of rock, and came to rest in the snow below. The dog reached it and barked madly around it, but Kojuro did not move for a few moments. He stood with the smoke from the gun drifting around him and looked as if all the strength had gone out of his body.

At last he came down to the dead bear and stood over it. Then, as he had done so many times before, he leaned the gun against a tree and spoke in his rough quiet voice. "Bear," he said, "I did not kill you because I hated you. It is only my trade. If I could earn rice another way, I would not be here with a gun. If it was bad luck for you to be born a bear, it was bad luck for me to be born a hunter. Next time, do not be born a bear." The yellow dog sat down with half-shut eyes, as if he too had heard the words many times and understood them all.

Kojuro then bent over the bear and began his sad work. The cold air bit into his hands, and from time to time he had to stop and straighten his back. "I am old now," he muttered once under his breath. "I am truly old." At last he finished. He placed the gall carefully into its wooden case, washed what had to be washed in the stream, and rolled what had to be rolled. Then he stood up, but for a moment he swayed. The dog came close and looked up at him, whining softly.

"What is it?" Kojuro said. "Do not cry. We must go home." Yet even as he said it, he put one hand to his side. The white world around him had grown strangely bright. He took one step, then another, carrying the heavy load over his shoulders, and started down through the valley. But before long his feet seemed no longer to know the path. The dog ran ahead, then came back, then ran ahead again, growing more and more anxious. Kojuro stopped beside a tree and leaned against it.

For some time he stood there without moving. The blue winter sky was clear above the branches. From very far away came a dry little sound, perhaps a tree

cracking in the cold, perhaps only a bird. At last Kojuro slid slowly down and sat in the snow at the foot of the tree. The rolled hide and his tools slipped from his shoulders beside him. "So this is how it is," he said in a low voice. "Well then." The dog whined and licked his hands again and again.

Kojuro tried once to rise, but could not. He looked toward the way home, toward the lower valleys where the children and the old mother would now be waiting for the smoke of his return. Then he looked once more at the winter sky between the black branches. "I am sorry," he said, though no one there could answer him except the dog. After that he no longer spoke. The dog ran round and round him in terror, barked into the empty valley, came back, pushed against him, and licked his face, but Kojuro only sat there in the snow and became still.

Evening fell. The mountains darkened one by one, and blue shadow rose from the streams and valleys. Then, from the higher slopes and from the woods beyond, the bears began to come. One came first and stopped some way off. Then another came. Then more and more, until there were many of them standing among the trees or sitting on the snow-covered ground, all facing the place where Kojuro sat. None of them roared. None of them moved roughly. They only gathered there silently in the cold dusk.

The yellow dog, exhausted with grief, no longer barked. He sat close beside Kojuro and looked from bear to bear, but the bears did not come nearer in anger. Some held their paws before them. Some bent their heads. Some seemed to be staring not at the dead hunter alone, but at the whole long hard life that had ended there. Snow light remained faintly on Kojuro's face, which had already become still and frozen. The mountains breathed their cold mist in and out, and the valley held its silence.

Through that winter night the bears of Nametoko Mountain stayed gathered around Kojuro. They did not touch him. They did not leave him. They only remained there in the snow, as if keeping watch over someone they had known for a very long time and could not bring themselves to abandon at the last.

## Matasaburo of the Wind [Kaze no Matasaburō]

### Part 1

“Dododo, dododo, dododo, dodo. Blow away the blue walnuts. Blow away the sour quince.” So the old song seemed to run through the air over the valley, for the wind itself was loud that morning. On the bank of a stream there stood a small school. It had only one classroom, and there were no third-year pupils, but all the other years, from first to sixth, were there. Behind the school was a grassy hill with chestnut trees, and at one corner of the yard there was a little spring that bubbled up cold water from a hole in the rock.

It was the fresh morning of September first. The sky was bright blue, the wind roared over the valley, and sunshine filled the whole schoolyard. Two first-year boys in black winter trousers came around the bank and entered the yard. Seeing that no one else had come yet, they shouted happily, “Hoh, we are first. We are first.” But when they looked into the classroom, both stopped as if their feet had frozen to the ground. They stared, looked at each other with trembling faces, and then one of them burst into tears, because there in the still, silent room sat a strange red-haired child in the very front seat, and that seat was his own.

The other little boy was also close to tears, but he forced his eyes wide and tried to glare at the stranger. Just then, from upstream, there came a high voice crying, “Choo-ha, kaguri. Choo-ha, kaguri.” Then Kasuke came running into the yard laughing, his schoolbag over his shoulder, and right behind him came Sataro, Kosuke, and others in a noisy group. Kasuke caught the shoulder of the boy who had not cried and asked, “Why are you crying, then?” The poor child only began to cry too, and when the others looked around to see why, they all noticed the same thing: that odd red-haired boy sitting calmly in the classroom as if he had always belonged there.

At once everyone fell silent. More and more girls arrived, but no one knew what to say. The strange boy did not seem afraid in the least. He just sat straight, looking at the blackboard with his hands on his knees. Then Ichiro, the sixth-year

boy, arrived. He walked with long slow steps like a grown man, looked at the others, and said, "What happened?" The children all began speaking together at once and pointed toward the classroom. Ichiro watched for a while, then went firmly to the window with his bag under his arm. The others, feeling brave again because he was there, rushed after him.

Climbing up to the window, Ichiro pushed his face inside and said, "Who are you, coming into the classroom before time?" Kosuke called from below, "If you stay in the classroom on a fine day like this, teacher will scold you hard." Kasuke added, "And even if he scolds you, we do not know you." Ichiro then said, "Come out now. Come out." But the red-haired child only looked around the room and at the children outside with his round black eyes and kept sitting there properly as before. His very shape was strange. He wore a loose gray coat like a mouse-colored sack, white short trousers, and red leather shoes.

His face looked like a ripe apple, and because his eyes were so round and black, it seemed impossible to know what he was thinking. He also seemed not to understand a word they said, and even Ichiro was now at a loss. "He is a foreigner," someone whispered. "He has come to enter the school," another said. Then suddenly Kasuke cried, "Ah, I know. He has come for the third year." The younger children thought that might be true, but Ichiro only bent his neck and stayed silent. At that moment a gust of wind came roaring across the yard. The classroom windows rattled hard, the grass on the hill behind the school turned pale and waved, and the strange child in the classroom smiled a little and moved as if he had almost laughed. Kasuke shouted at once, "I know who he is. He is Matasaburo of the Wind."

The others had just begun to believe it too when suddenly, behind them, Goro cried, "Ow, that hurts." Everyone turned around. Goro had had his toe stepped on by Kosuke and was now hitting him angrily with tears all over his face. Kosuke shouted back, "Why are you hitting me when it was not my fault?" and tried to strike him in return. Goro grabbed at him, and in a moment the two were fighting. Ichiro stepped between them, and Kasuke held Kosuke back. "Do not fight," Ichiro said. "Teacher is surely coming from the staff room already." Then he

looked back toward the classroom and stopped in complete surprise.

The red-haired boy had vanished. A moment before he had been sitting there in plain sight, and now there was not the smallest sign of him. All the children felt strangely empty, as if a colt they had just begun to like had been led away, or as if a little bird they had caught had flown from their hands. Another gust of wind came and rattled the windows. The grass on the hill bent in pale waves toward the upper valley. Kasuke said angrily, "Because you two fought, Matasaburo has gone away." The others thought so too. Goro forgot all about his sore foot and stood there miserably, feeling as though he had done something truly terrible.

"He really was Matasaburo of the Wind," one child said. "He came on the two-hundred-and-tenth day," said another. "But he had shoes on," someone objected. "And clothes too," another said. "His hair was red. He was a very strange fellow." Just then a second-year boy cried, "Look, he left a stone on my desk." Everyone looked. There was indeed a dirty little stone lying there. "And that broken bit of glass too," another said. "No, that was Kasuke, before the holiday," someone else answered. At that very moment the teacher came out through the entrance, a shining whistle in his right hand, ready to call the children together. And right behind him, walking with an oddly calm face, wearing a white cap and looking almost like the attendant of some wild mountain god, came the same red-haired child.

Everyone fell silent at once. At last Ichiro said, "Good morning, Teacher," and the others followed in a weak confused chorus. "Good morning, everyone," said the teacher. "You are all well, I see. Line up now." He blew the whistle sharply, and the sound flew across the valley, struck the mountain opposite, and came back lower and softer. Thinking that everything was now exactly as it had been before the summer holiday, the children lined up by year. The strange child stayed behind the teacher, looking all around with bright curious eyes and a little smile at the corner of his mouth.

"Takada, come this way," said the teacher. He led the child to the line of fifth-year pupils, compared his height with Kasuke's, and made him stand between Kasuke and Kiyo. The children turned to stare. "Forward," called the teacher.

Everyone stretched out both arms. The new boy did the same with perfect calm, his fingertips just touching Kasuke's back, and Kasuke twisted his shoulders as if the touch made him itch. "At ease," said the teacher. Then one year after another entered the building, put away their footwear, and sat down in the classroom. The strange boy followed Kasuke and sat properly in the seat behind him.

At once there was a great noise. "There is a stone in my desk." "My desk has been moved." "Lend me your pen." "Who took my notebook?" But when the teacher entered, the children rose, Ichiro called, "Bow," and for a moment they became quiet. Then the teacher spoke. He told them that the long summer holiday was over, that autumn was the best season for both body and mind, and that from now on they must all study hard again together. Then he said, "During the holiday one new friend has joined us. This is Takada. His father has come for company work near the upper plain. Until now he attended a school in Hokkaido, but from today he is your friend. So whether you are in class, gathering chestnuts, or catching fish, you must ask Takada to come with you. Do you understand?"

Everyone raised a hand at once. So did Takada himself, lifting his hand strongly as if he too had been asked the question. The teacher smiled a little, then said, "Good. Then that is settled." Just then Kasuke raised his hand again and asked, "Teacher, what is his name?" "Takada Saburo," said the teacher. At once Kasuke almost clapped his hands and cried, "There now. See? He really is Matasaburo." The older children laughed, but the younger ones looked at Saburo in a frightened way. After that, the lesson ended, Saburo left together with the man in loose white clothes who must have been his father, and the children watched them cross the schoolyard and go off down the valley. The wind came again and rattled the windows, and even after they had gone, no one in the room could stop thinking that the strange new boy had come with the wind itself.

## Part 2

The next morning the sky was clear, the stream went on singing over its stones, and Ichiro felt from the moment he woke that he wanted to know whether

the strange red-haired boy would truly come again and sit in the classroom like an ordinary child. He went out early and found that Kasuke had thought of the same thing even sooner. Kasuke had already eaten, wrapped his books in cloth, and come out to wait in front of his house. As the two boys walked to school together, they spoke of nothing else. "Do you think he really lives up there?" Ichiro asked. "He must," said Kasuke. "But if he comes on the wind, he can come from anywhere."

When they reached the schoolyard, seven or eight of the younger children were already there playing stick-hide, but the red-haired boy was nowhere to be seen. Ichiro looked into the classroom, half expecting to find him once again sitting there before everyone else, but the room was empty and still. White drying marks from yesterday's cleaning lay across the blackboard like pale stripes. "He is not here yet," Ichiro said. "No," said Kasuke, looking all around. Ichiro climbed onto the horizontal bar, pulled himself over in his rough proud way, and sat there staring down toward the road by which Saburo had left the day before. The river shone in that direction, and farther off the grasses on the slope sometimes turned white in the wind.

They did not have to wait long. Suddenly Saburo appeared from the lower path, carrying a gray schoolbag in his right hand and moving almost as if he were running, though not quite. Before Ichiro could even call down to Kasuke, Saburo had already come round the bank, entered through the main gate, and said in a clear voice, "Good morning." All the children turned to look at him, but not one answered properly. It was not that they meant to be rude. They had simply never said "Good morning" to one another in that plain way, only to the teacher, and so the words stuck in their throats.

Saburo, however, did not seem troubled at all. He took two or three more steps and stopped. Then he slowly looked all around the schoolyard with his black round eyes, as though he were searching for someone who might come and play with him. But everyone, though staring at him from one side or another, kept pretending to be busy. So he stood there awkwardly for a little while, looked round once more, and then began walking from the main gate toward the entrance,

counting his steps in long serious strides as if he meant to measure the whole schoolyard. Ichiro jumped down from the bar and stood beside Kasuke, both of them watching in complete silence.

When Saburo reached the front of the entrance, he turned toward the yard and stood still with his head a little bent, like someone doing a hard sum in his mind. The other children stared without even pretending to hide it now. Then Saburo clasped both hands behind him, looked a little troubled, and began walking toward the bank beyond the teachers' room. Just then a gust of wind came roaring across the yard. The grasses on the bank moved in waves, dust rose in the middle of the yard, and by the time it reached the entrance it had twisted itself into a little whirlwind, yellow and narrow, like a bottle turned upside down, and shot higher than the roof. Kasuke cried out at once, "There. I told you. He really is Matasaburo. Every time he does something, the wind comes."

Ichiro still was not sure, but he said nothing. Saburo kept walking with that same quiet strange dignity, and then the teacher came out with the whistle as usual. The children lined up, went into the classroom, and the morning lessons began. There was a great deal of ordinary school noise as books were taken out and children borrowed pencils and forgot things. Saburo sat behind Kasuke, and beside him sat Sataro, whose little sister Kayo was in the lower grade. Suddenly Sataro reached out and snatched Kayo's pencil. "It is mine," he said, hiding it in his coat. Kayo came over, begged for it, and at last looked ready to cry.

Saburo had already put his reading book on the desk and was watching in a troubled way. The moment Kayo's tears finally spilled, he silently set down the half-used pencil he himself had been holding and placed it on the desk in front of Sataro. Sataro sat up at once and said, "Will you give me that?" Saburo hesitated only a little, then answered, "Yes." At once Sataro burst out laughing, handed his sister's pencil back to her little red hand, and kept Saburo's. The teacher had not seen it, and Kasuke, sitting in front, had not seen it either, but Ichiro at the back saw everything. He did not know what to think. His teeth began to press together with a strange tight feeling. Saburo had yielded too easily, and yet there had been kindness in it too.

The lessons went on. The younger children copied sums from the board, the older ones read in silence, and the teacher moved from one group to another in the single crowded room. Saburo held the reading book with both hands and read with fierce attention, as if he were not simply reading a lesson but trying to force the whole page into himself. He did not write down any difficult characters in his notebook, and no one could tell whether that was because he knew them all or because he no longer had a pencil. Later, in arithmetic, Ichiro finished a problem and glanced toward him. Saburo had found a small burnt piece of charcoal from somewhere and was making large rough calculations on his notebook with it, scratching hard, his face set and serious.

On the following morning Ichiro, Kasuke, Sataro, and Etsuji decided to go up toward Saburo's house before school. They crossed the stream below the school, broke willow twigs from the bank, peeled the green skin, and made whips from them, swinging them through the air as they climbed the road toward the upper plain. They were already short of breath. "Do you think Matasaburo is really waiting at the spring?" Kasuke asked. "He said he would," answered Ichiro. "Besides, he does not seem like a liar." "It is hot," said one of them. "I wish the wind would blow." "It is blowing somewhere," another said. "Maybe Matasaburo is making it blow." White clouds began to appear, and far below them the roofs of the valley houses flashed in the sun.

The path entered the wood and grew damp and dim. Soon they heard Saburo's high voice calling from ahead, "Hey. Have you all come?" They hurried up the last slope and found him waiting there by the bend with his little lips pressed tight together. The boys were so out of breath that they could hardly speak. Kasuke threw his head up and shouted into the air just to empty his lungs more quickly, and Saburo burst into loud laughter. "You took your time," he said. "And someone said it might rain later today." "Then let us hurry," said Kasuke. "First I will drink." The boys crouched by the white rock where cold water gushed out and drank again and again. Saburo said, "My house is just above here, really very near. On the way back you must all come."

They went on together through the scrub at the edge of the wood, across

places where little bits of rock slid away under their feet, until they came near the entrance of the upper plain. There they stopped and looked back westward. Beyond many overlapping hills, shining and shadowed in different bands, the true open plain stretched away in a blue haze beside the river. "There. That must be the river," one said. Saburo answered, "It looks like the sash of Kasuga Myojin." "What do you mean?" Ichiro asked. "The sash of Kasuga Myojin," Saburo repeated. "Have you really seen such a thing?" Ichiro asked. "Yes. In Hokkaido," Saburo answered. The others fell silent, not understanding at all, but not wishing to show it.

There at the entrance stood a great chestnut tree in the short cut grass. Its trunk was blackened and hollow near the root, and old ropes and broken straw sandals hung from its branches. "A little farther on, they are all cutting grass," said Ichiro. "And there are horses too." Saburo walked just behind him and said, "There are no bears here, so they can leave the horses loose." Soon they came to a great oak by the path. Rope bags lay there, and bundles of cut grass were scattered all around. Two horses with grass loads on their backs snorted when they saw Ichiro. He called for his brother, and after a while his brother came laughing out of a hollow among the grass. He told them they could play inside the embankment but must not go outside it, because if they wandered too far they might lose their way.

The sky by now was thinly clouded, and the sun had become white like a mirror running in the opposite direction from the clouds. Wind rose over the uncut grass and made waves through it. The boys followed a little path to the embankment, where two logs lay across the gap. They pulled one aside and jumped inside. Beyond them, on a little rise, seven chestnut-colored horses stood together, their coats shining and their tails moving lazily. "Every one of these is worth more than a thousand yen," Ichiro said. "They will all race next year." The horses came toward them at once as if they had been lonely. They stretched out their noses and seemed to ask for salt. The boys held out their hands to let them lick, but Saburo, who was not used to horses, pulled one hand quickly into his pocket.

“There now,” cried Etsuji. “Matasaburo is afraid of horses.” “I am not,” said Saburo, his face turning red. He reached out bravely, but when the horse stretched its neck and let its tongue slip out, Saburo’s face changed and he snatched his hand back at once. The others shouted in laughter, and after standing there flushed and awkward for a while, Saburo suddenly said, “Then let us have a horse race.” They all stared at him. “How?” “I have seen races many times,” said Saburo. “There are no saddles, so we cannot ride. We will each drive one horse, and the first to reach that big tree over there will be the winner.”

“That sounds wonderful,” said Kasuke. “The herdsmen will scold us,” someone objected. “No, no,” Saburo said. “Racehorses must practice.” So each chose a horse, and they tapped the animals lightly with willow switches and pampas stalks. But the horses did not move at all. They only lowered their heads to the grass or stretched their necks to look farther off. Then Ichiro clapped both hands hard and shouted, “Da.” At once all seven horses sprang forward together as if they had been waiting for that signal. “The horses are going,” cried Kasuke, leaping after them, and all the boys ran with all their strength, shouting and laughing though the race was no real race at all, because the horses kept side by side and did not run very fast.

Still the boys chased them in delight. After a while the horses slowed, and the children, breathing hard, thought they might stop, but once more they drove them on. Then the whole group came circling back toward the broken place in the embankment where they had entered. Suddenly Ichiro went white and shouted, “The horses are getting out. Stop them. Stop them.” He ran with everything he had left, crying, “Whoa, whoa,” and by the time he stumbled there with both arms spread, two of the horses had already gone out beyond the logs.

### Part 3

The two horses that had already slipped outside the opening were not running wildly yet. They stood just beyond the embankment, pulling at the grass with their mouths in long rough jerks as if nothing much had happened. “Careful now. Hold

them carefully,” Ichiro said, trying to sound calm though his voice was shaking. He seized the tag on one horse’s halter and held it hard. Kasuke and Saburo went toward the other one, but the moment they came near, that horse gave a start as if it had suddenly remembered freedom, turned along the embankment, and ran south in a straight line.

Behind them Ichiro shouted with all his strength, “Brother, the horse is running. The horse is running.” Kasuke and Saburo ran after it as hard as they could. But now the horse truly meant to escape. It went up and down over the high ground, through grass as tall as a person, parting it with its chest and vanishing again and again like a reddish wave. Kasuke ran until his legs felt numb. Before long the ground, the grass, and the sky all seemed to turn blue and spin round, and at last he fell flat into the deep grass.

For a moment he lay there on his back, staring upward. The whole sky shone white and went round and round, while thin gray clouds ran across it at great speed. Far ahead he saw, only for an instant, the red mane of the horse and the white cap of Saburo following after it. Then both were gone. Kasuke sat up at last, breathing in quick painful gasps, and tried to laugh. “That horse will stop somewhere and stand there stupidly enough,” he told himself. “Saburo will catch it. Of course he will.” So he got to his feet and began walking in the direction they had gone.

There was a faint track in the grass, or so it seemed, as though the horse and Saburo had passed there just now. Kasuke followed it eagerly. But before he had gone even a hundred steps, the marks broke apart among tall thistles and strange weeds and divided into two or three useless traces. Kasuke stood still and shouted, “Hey.” Somewhere, very far off, Saburo’s voice seemed to answer, “Hey.” Kasuke chose the middle trace and pushed on, though even while doing so he knew it was no real path at all, for sometimes it vanished, and sometimes it crossed steep ground where a horse would never have gone.

The sky grew dark and heavy in a very ugly way. The air around him turned pale and thick, and strips of cloud or mist began to race past close before his eyes. A cold wind came sliding over the grass. Kasuke felt his heart begin to knock hard in his chest. “This is getting bad,” he thought. “When bad things start, all the other

bad things come running after them.” And that was exactly what happened. The trace of horse and boy vanished completely. Nothing was left now but the huge wet grass, the broken clouds, and the wind.

Kasuke shouted till his throat hurt. “Ichiro. Ichiro. Come this way.” There was no answer. White cold drops of mist danced all around him, fine as chalk dust shaken from a blackboard, and then, without warning, everything became terribly still. The silence was worse than the wind had been. Grass drops began to fall one by one with soft little sounds. Kasuke turned and hurried back the way he thought he had come, but almost at once he knew that this too was wrong. There were too many thistles. Rocks lay under the grass where he was certain none had been before. He had lost the right direction completely.

Then a great valley opened in front of him so suddenly that he nearly fell into it. The pampas grass on its edge whispered and shook, and beyond that trembling edge the far side vanished into fog like the lip of the world. When the wind came, the plumes seemed to lift long pale hands and signal wildly to east and west and south and north. The sight was so terrible that Kasuke shut his eyes and turned away at once. Then, just as suddenly, a narrow black path appeared in the grass. It had been made by many horses’ hooves and seemed solid enough to save him. Kasuke laughed aloud with relief and followed it eagerly.

But that path too was unreliable. At one place it narrowed to only a few inches, and at another it spread out wide. It seemed to curve around in circles. At last it brought him to a great chestnut tree with a burned black top, and there, in a foggy round place like a horse gathering-ground, it broke into many traces again and was gone. Kasuke’s courage nearly failed him then. He turned and went back the way he thought he had come, while unknown grasses swayed softly and stronger gusts made the whole field bow as if some hidden signal had been passed along it. Above him the sky rang with a sharp metallic sound.

Then, straight ahead in the fog, there appeared something large and dark shaped exactly like a house. Kasuke stopped dead and stared. “A house,” he thought. “It must be a house.” But when he went nearer in fear and hope together, it proved to be only a huge black rock. The sky shook white once, the grass flung

off its raindrops all together, and Kasuke whispered half aloud, "If I go down on the wrong side of the field, Saburo and I are finished." He shouted again, "Ichiro. Ichiro. Are you there?" The light came and went strangely. Somewhere in his mind he heard old frightening stories about boys tied up by mountain men. Then the black hoof-path disappeared again, and a fierce wind struck him all at once.

The sky flapped white like a great flag. Fire seemed to crackle in the air. Kasuke could bear no more. He fell over into the grass and lost himself in something between sleep and fainting. Then all these things seemed very far away. Saburo was sitting right in front of him, legs stretched out, silently looking up into the sky. Over his usual mouse-gray coat he wore a shining glass mantle, and on his feet were bright glass shoes. The blue shadow of a chestnut tree lay across his shoulder, and his own shadow lay blue on the grass. Wind blew and blew without stopping. Saburo did not laugh or speak. He only kept his small lips tight shut and stared upward, and then, all at once, he rose lightly into the air, and the glass mantle flashed.

Kasuke opened his eyes. Gray mist was flying fast overhead. A horse stood right in front of him, huge and slow, looking away from him sideways as if ashamed. Kasuke jumped up and seized the tag on its halter. Then Saburo came out of the mist behind it, his lips colorless now and tightly closed. Kasuke began to tremble so hard he could hardly stand. Just then a voice came out of the fog, "Hey." It was Ichiro's older brother. Thunder was rolling somewhere above. Another voice cried, "Kasuke, are you there?" It was Ichiro. Kasuke sprang up with joy and shouted, "Here. Here. Ichiro."

In the next moment Ichiro and his brother stood before them out of the gray air. Kasuke suddenly burst into tears. "We looked everywhere," said the older brother. "That was dangerous. You are soaked through. Come on now." With practiced hands he took hold of the horse's neck, slipped the bridle he had brought neatly into its mouth, and said, "Let us go." Ichiro looked at Saburo and said, "Matasaburo, you were frightened too, were you not?" Saburo only nodded, his lips still pressed tight.

They followed Ichiro's brother over two slow rises and hollows, then onto a

broad dark track that seemed almost safe after all the rest. Once or twice lightning flashed weakly. There was a smell as if grass had been burned, and smoke drifted through the mist. Then Ichiro's brother called out, "Grandfather. Here we are. We found them all." Out of the mist an old man appeared and cried, "Ah, I was worried. I was worried. Thank goodness. Kasuke, you must be freezing. Come here. Come into the shelter." Under a half-burned great chestnut tree there was a little hut of grass, and inside it a red fire burned softly.

Ichiro's brother tied the horse to an oak. The animal whinnied once. "Poor thing," said the old man. "Come now, all of you, eat these dumplings. Eat. This one too. Come now. Where did you get to?" "At the entrance to Sasanagane," Ichiro's brother answered. "That was dangerous," said the old man. "If you had gone down the other side, that would have been the end of horse and children both." Rain began dripping through somewhere in the roof, but soon Ichiro's brother said, "Grandfather, it is getting lighter. The rain has passed." The old man looked up, laughed, and said, "Then warm yourselves well. I must go back to cutting grass."

The mist suddenly split. Sunlight rushed in. The sun had already gone a little west, and the broken pieces of fog shone like wax as they fled. Water drops fell from the grass in bright lines. Every leaf, stem, and flower seemed to drink in the light of what felt like the last clear hour of the year. The far western plain shone blue and wide as if it had just finished crying and now laughed instead. The distant chestnut trees held blue halos. The boys, exhausted at last, came down from the field with Ichiro leading. At the spring Saburo, still silent, parted from them and went alone toward the hut where he and his father were staying, his mouth still set hard and straight. As they walked away, Kasuke said, "He is the child of the wind-god after all. The wind-god and his son live there together." "No," Ichiro said sharply, but even he did not sound fully certain.

#### Part 4

The next day rain fell through the morning, but by the second lesson the sky

had begun to brighten, and by the ten-minute break after the third lesson the rain had stopped completely. Here and there pieces of blue sky opened as if someone had shaved them out of the gray, white scale-like clouds ran fast toward the east, and from the mountain grass and the chestnut trees behind the school the last bits of cloud rose like steam. Kōsuke bent toward Kasuke and whispered, “When school is over, shall we go and get wild grapes?” Kasuke answered at once, “Yes, yes. Let us go. Saburo, will you come too?” Kōsuke at once protested, “No, no. Why should we show that place to Saburo?” But Saburo, not hearing the warning, said cheerfully, “I will come. In Hokkaido I picked them too. My mother filled two whole barrels.”

Then little Shokichi of the second year begged to be taken as well. “Take me too. Please take me too,” he said. Kōsuke answered roughly, “No. Why should we teach it to you? I found the place last year myself.” Still, they all spent the rest of the lessons longing only for the end of school. When the fifth lesson was over, Ichiro, Kasuke, Sataro, Kōsuke, Etsuji, and Saburo all went upstream together from the school. Before long they came to a small house with a thatched roof, and in front of it there was a tiny tobacco field. The lower leaves had already been picked, so the blue-green stalks stood neatly in rows and looked very pleasing in the afternoon light.

Suddenly Saburo reached out, tore off one tobacco leaf, and said, “What is this leaf?” Ichiro turned white at once. “Hey, Matasaburo, do not pick tobacco leaves. The government office will scold terribly for that. What did you do that for?” The others too began speaking all together. “Oh, no. They count every one of those leaves and write them in books.” “I do not know anything about it.” “I do not know anything either.” Their voices rose one over another until even Saburo looked startled.

He stood for a little while with the leaf in his hand, his face bright red, swinging it lightly and trying to think of what to say. At last he burst out, almost angrily, “I picked it because I did not know.” The others all glanced toward the house, afraid someone might have seen, but the house stood perfectly still behind the steam rising from the field, and no one seemed to be there. Kasuke then said

in a gentler voice, "That is little Kosuke's house." But Kōsuke, who had never liked bringing Saburo to his secret place in the first place, made things worse again. "Even if you do not know, that does not matter. It is still bad. Hah, Matasaburo will get into trouble just like he deserves."

Saburo fell silent again. Then, after thinking for a while, he said, "Then I will leave it here and that will be all right," and he laid the leaf quietly at the foot of a tree. Ichiro, wanting to end the matter at once, said, "Come on now. Let us go." So they all walked on, though Kōsuke lingered behind muttering loudly, "There now, look. That is the leaf Matasaburo picked. I do not know anything about it." But when the others had gone far enough, he too had to follow them.

Soon they climbed a little way up through a narrow path among the reeds. On the south side of a hollow there stood several chestnut trees, and below them thick wild grape vines had formed a dark deep tangle. "I found this place, so do not all take too much," said Kōsuke. At once Saburo answered, "I am taking chestnuts," and threw a stone up into one of the branches. A green burr fell. He split it open with a stick and took out the still-white nuts. The others had already begun picking grapes with all their strength.

After a little while Kōsuke went toward another patch under one of the chestnut trees, and suddenly a shower of cold drops came down on his head and shoulders all at once. He looked up in surprise and saw Saburo already sitting high in the tree, laughing a little and wiping his own face with his sleeve. "Hey, Matasaburo, what are you doing?" Kōsuke cried bitterly. Saburo answered from above, "The wind blew." Kōsuke moved away and began picking grapes again. He had already piled up so many that he could hardly carry them, and his mouth had turned dark purple.

"Shall we not take this much and go back?" Ichiro asked. "No, I am taking more," Kōsuke said. Then, just at that moment, another shower of cold drops fell on his head. He looked up again, but this time Saburo was not in the tree. Only one of his gray sleeves could be seen on the far side, and the sound of his low laugh came through the leaves. That was enough. Kōsuke became truly angry. "Hey, Matasaburo, you did that again," he shouted. "The wind blew," Saburo

answered.

Everyone burst out laughing. “Hey, Matasaburo, you are the one shaking the tree over there,” they called. Again they all laughed. Kōsuke glared at Saburo for a while in deep hurt and anger, and then at last shouted, “Hey, Matasaburo, the world would be better with no wind in it at all.” Saburo gave a sly little smile. “Ah, Kōsuke, forgive me,” he said. But Kōsuke, still burning, cried again, “Yes, yes. Wind should not exist anywhere in the whole world. Never. Never.”

Then Saburo, instead of getting angry, suddenly looked amused and said, “What do you mean by that? Tell me the reasons one by one. Go on.” He even held up one finger like a teacher asking questions. Kōsuke felt at once that things had turned against him. It was as though he had been dragged into a lesson without warning. Still, being too angry to stop, he thought a little and said, “Wind does bad things. It breaks umbrellas.” Saburo nodded gravely and said, “And after that? After that?” Kōsuke answered, “It breaks trees and turns things over.” “And after that?” Saburo asked. “And after that?” Kōsuke said, “It breaks houses too.” “And after that?” Saburo asked again. “It puts out lamps,” Kōsuke said. “And after that?” Saburo went on. “It blows off hats,” said Kōsuke. “And after that?” “It blows away umbrellas too.” “And after that?” “It knocks down telegraph poles.” “And after that?” “It blows off roofs.”

“Ah-ha-ha,” Saburo laughed. “A roof is part of a house. What then? Anything else?” Kōsuke was trapped now. He had already said nearly everything he could think of. He stood there red-faced, unable to find another answer, while Saburo kept one finger raised and asked, “And after that? And after that?” At last Kōsuke forced out, “It breaks windmills too.” Then Saburo really did jump and laugh. The others all laughed too, loudly and helplessly. Saburo at last managed to say, “Now look there. You have said windmills. A windmill does not hate the wind. Sometimes the wind breaks it, yes, but much more often it turns it and makes it work. A windmill does not hate the wind at all.”

He laughed again and said, “And besides, your way of counting was all mixed up. You kept saying one thing twice, and then at the end you had to bring in a windmill. Ah, that is funny.” Kōsuke, who had been so angry before, began

slowly to forget the anger itself because he had been trapped too neatly. Before long he too started laughing, though unwillingly at first. Then Saburo stopped laughing, blinked his eyes quickly, and said in a kinder voice, "Kōsuke, I was wrong to play tricks on you. I am sorry." Ichiro at once said, "Well then, let us go," and handed Saburo five bunches of grapes. Saburo divided his white chestnuts among them all, and together they came back down to the lower road. From there each went home to his own house, and the quarrel ended almost as quickly as it had begun.

## Part 5

The next few days passed in a strange mixed way. Saburo was now with them almost all the time, and yet he was never simply one of them. Sometimes he laughed sooner than anyone else and ran faster than anyone else, and then suddenly he would fall silent and look far off toward the upper plain as if listening to something none of the others could hear. Kasuke still called him Matasaburo whenever he felt like it. Ichiro sometimes objected, but not very strongly now, because he himself no longer knew what to think.

In class Saburo did almost everything properly. He sang loudly in music, he read as if he wanted to tear the meaning out of the page with his eyes, and in arithmetic he scratched huge black workings across his notebook with charcoal whenever he had no pencil. But he did not behave quite like the others. If he wanted to ask something, he asked it directly. If he did not understand a game, he said so. If he was pleased, his black eyes shone. If he was angry, he bit his pale lips hard and went even paler than before.

The younger children had mostly stopped being afraid of him, though they still watched him more than they watched anybody else. The older boys had also begun to forget their first fear and now tried instead to test him at one thing after another. Could he swim? Could he climb trees? Could he stand cold water? Could he run over stony ground? Saburo never boasted in advance. He only did things, and often he did them too well, which made the others both admire and dislike

him at the same time.

One afternoon they all went down to the deep pool by the river. The water there was dark green under the overhanging trees, and the bank shone with wet sand and little stones. The boys threw down their clothes on the gravel, shouted, splashed, and ran in. At first Saburo stood under the honey-locust tree on the far side and only watched. Kasuke, already up to the waist in water, shouted across, "What is it, Matasaburo? Are you afraid of the river too?" Saburo only gave that thin sideways smile of his and said, "No. I am just looking."

Then they began a kind of water game like demon-tag in the pool. One after another they tried to catch one another in the water, shouting and diving and flinging spray in every direction. Ichiro was caught. Then Kōsuke. Then several of the younger ones fled shrieking to the gravel and would not come back. Kasuke alone swam hard up toward the deeper end, but Saburo, who had by then slipped into the water without anyone noticing exactly when, came after him like a fish. He caught Kasuke at once, pulled him round and round four or five times by the arm, and Kasuke swallowed water and coughed till he cried, "Enough. Enough. I give up. I will never play demon with such an ogre again."

Saburo then stood alone under the honey-locust tree in the water, his face bright and his hair darkened by wetness. But while they had been shouting and splashing, the sky had changed. Thick black clouds had filled it completely. The willow leaves had turned strangely pale. The grasses on the hills had grown dark and still in a way that made the whole world look fearful. "The sky has become bad," said Ichiro quietly, but before anyone could say more, thunder began to roll from the upper plain.

Then, all at once, it came. There was a roar like a whole mountain of water falling, and the evening storm rushed down upon them. Rain slammed into the river and the stones in one instant, and wind whistled through the trees. Great bubbles rose everywhere over the surface of the pool, so that the water itself seemed no longer like water. The children snatched up their clothes and ran for the shelter of the silk tree on the bank, where they crouched together in a wet frightened heap.

Saburo too seemed frightened for the first time. From under the honey-locust tree he plunged into the pool with a loud splash and swam straight toward them. Then, from somewhere among the children, perhaps from fear and excitement together, there rose a shout: "Rain goes zakk-zakk, Ame-Saburo. Wind goes dokko-dokko, Matasaburo." At once the others took it up in one great voice, "Rain goes zakk-zakk, Ame-Saburo. Wind goes dokko-dokko, Matasaburo." Saburo sprang out of the water as if something had caught his feet and came running toward them, trembling all over.

"Was it you who shouted that?" he asked, his lips colorless and shaking. "No, no, it was not us," they all cried at once. Then little Pekichi stepped out too and said in his small voice, "Not us." Saburo stood looking toward the river in a very uneasy way. At last he bit his faded lips in the old tight manner and said only, "What was that, then?" Yet his body still shook. So they all waited together under the tree until the rain began to break apart and thin light came back through it. Then each child took his bundle of clothes and went home.

That night, near dawn, Ichiro heard once again in a dream the very song Saburo had taught them only a little before: "Dododo, dododo, dododo, dodo. Blow away the blue walnuts. Blow away the sour quince." He started awake at once. Outside, the wind was truly blowing terribly. The woods sounded as if they were howling, and the dim dark-blue light before daybreak filled the shoji, the lantern box on the shelf, and the whole room. For some time he lay there listening, not quite sure whether he had woken from the song or whether the wind itself had entered his dream and sung.

When morning came, the wind had not stopped. It drove clouds low across the sky, rattled the windows of the school, and bent the grasses white along the upper slopes. The children looked at one another more than usual that day, because all of them remembered Saburo's song and the shout by the river. Kasuke whispered, "He called the wind, and now it has come." Ichiro tried to laugh at that, but his laugh did not go very far. He kept thinking of Saburo's face under the storm, and of the strange fear that had come into it for the first time.

## Part 6

That night Ichiro heard again in his dream the very song Saburo had only recently taught them. “Dododo, dododo, dododo, dodo. Blow away the blue walnuts. Blow away the sour quince.” He woke with a start and sat up at once. Outside, a truly terrible wind was blowing. The grove roared like a living thing, and the dim blue-black light before dawn had already filled the shoji screens, the lantern box on the shelf, and every part of the house. For a little while Ichiro sat still and listened, half frightened and half excited, as if the whole valley had risen and begun to run somewhere at top speed.

Then he tied his sash quickly, put on his clogs, stepped down into the dirt-floored passage, went past the stable, and opened the little outer gate. The wind rushed in at once with cold drops of rain, striking his face and chest so hard that he almost stepped back again. Somewhere behind the stable a door banged flat against something, and the horse gave a sharp heavy snort. Ichiro drew one long breath. The wind seemed to go right through his clothes and sink deep into him, right down to the bottom of his chest. Instead of making him weaker, it made him feel fuller and wilder.

Outside it was already fairly bright, though the light had a strange hard color. The ground was wet. The row of chestnut trees in front of the house looked bluish white and were being beaten and twisted so fiercely by the storm that they seemed to be washed in the wind itself. Blue leaves had been torn free and carried away. Green chestnut burrs lay everywhere on the black earth. High above, the clouds shone with a severe gray light and were driven faster and faster northward. Far off, the woods sounded like a rough sea, now booming, now rushing, now making a deep broken noise as if whole slopes were moving.

Ichiro stood in that storm with cold rain striking his face and his clothes nearly being pulled from him, and he looked up without blinking. At first his chest felt thin and dry like paper, then suddenly it seemed to swell in waves. It was as if the clear still wind that had been resting over the hills and fields until yesterday had now risen all at once before dawn and gone driving toward some vast place

far away beyond the world. Thinking of that, Ichiro's face grew hot, his breathing became hard, and he felt that he too was somehow running through the sky together with it. Then he rushed back inside, filled his chest with air, and blew it out hard.

"Ah, what a terrible wind. The tobacco and the chestnuts will be ruined today," said his grandfather, standing at the threshold and staring grimly at the sky. Ichiro ran to the well, drew a full bucket, and scrubbed the kitchen floor with great energy. Then he took out the metal basin, washed his face quickly with the cold water, pulled cold rice and miso from the cupboard, and ate in great rough mouthfuls as if still half dreaming. "Ichiro, the soup will be ready in a moment. Why are you going to school so early in a storm like this?" his mother asked from the hearth where she was putting wood under a pot.

"Saburo may have flown away," Ichiro answered. "Saburo? What Saburo? Some kind of bird?" she asked. "No. Saburo. Matasaburo," said Ichiro impatiently. Then he swallowed the last of the rice, clattered the bowl clean in water, hung it on the kitchen nail, put on the oilcloth raincoat hanging there, and, instead of wearing his clogs, took them in his hand and ran barefoot to fetch Kasuke. Kasuke had only just risen and said, "Wait. I will eat first and come." So Ichiro stood for a while in front of the stable, watching the rain slash across the yard, until Kasuke came out wearing a little straw raincoat.

The two of them made their way to school through the savage rain and wind and arrived soaked through. When they entered from the shoe place, the classroom was still silent, but rain was driving in through gaps around the windows and the boards below them were almost under water. Ichiro looked around once and said, "Kasuke, let us sweep out the water ourselves." They found two palm brooms and began sweeping the rainwater toward the drain hole by the wall. They had only been doing that for a short while when the teacher came unexpectedly out from the back. The strange thing was that he was wearing an ordinary summer robe and carrying a red fan, as if he were ready for heat rather than storm.

"You two are very early," the teacher said. "Are you cleaning the room by yourselves?" "Good morning, Teacher," said Ichiro. "Good morning, Teacher,"

said Kasuke too, and then at once he asked, "Teacher, is Matasaburo coming today?" The teacher paused for a moment and seemed to think. "Matasaburo? Do you mean Takada?" he asked. "Yes," said Kasuke. "Well," the teacher answered, "Takada went away yesterday with his father. It was Sunday, so there was no time to say good-bye to all of you."

Kasuke stared. "Teacher, did he fly away?" he asked. "No," said the teacher. "His father was called by telegram from the company. He may come back here once more for a short time, but Takada himself is to enter school there instead. His mother is there too." Ichiro then asked, "Why was his father called back by the company?" The teacher answered, "It seems the molybdenum vein here will not be worked for the time being. That is the reason." Kasuke cried out at once in a loud voice, "There now. I knew it. He really was Matasaburo of the Wind."

Something made a heavy rattling sound over in the night-duty room. The teacher hurried away with the red fan in his hand, and the two boys were left standing there with the brooms. For a little while neither said anything. They only looked at each other, each trying to see what the other truly thought. Outside, the wind still had not stopped. The rainclouded windowpanes shook and rattled again and again. The whole valley seemed to be listening.

At last Kasuke said more quietly, "He really was, was he not?" Ichiro did not answer at once. He looked at the wet floorboards, the streaming windows, the empty desks, and the place where Saburo had so often sat with his little lips bitten pale and his black eyes fixed on things no one else seemed to notice. He remembered the strange first morning, the gusts of wind, the race over the plain, the horses, the grapes, the storm by the river, the song, and Saburo standing there in fear as if he himself had been called by some invisible voice. Yet he also remembered the gray schoolbag, the charcoal on the notebook, the pencil given to the crying little girl, the wet sleeve in the chestnut tree, the chestnuts divided among them, and all the little ordinary things that no wind-god ought to have needed.

"I do not know," Ichiro said at last. "Maybe he was only Takada Saburo after all. Maybe he was the wind. Maybe he was both." Kasuke did not understand that

answer, but because the storm outside was still running like a herd of great unseen things, he did not argue. He only stood there with his broom in his hand and stared through the cloudy window. Ichiro too stood still. Beyond the glass, the rain streaks, the blown leaves, and the flying gray clouds all went racing northward without rest, and it seemed to both of them that somewhere inside that great rushing, red-haired Saburo was still moving too.

## The Nighthawk's Star [Yodaka no Hoshi]

### Part 1

The nighthawk was truly an ugly bird. His face was blotched as if someone had smeared miso here and there over it, his beak was flat and split almost to his ears, and his legs were so weak and poor that he could hardly walk even a short distance. Other birds felt unhappy the moment they saw him. The skylark, though not especially beautiful himself, thought he was far above the nighthawk and would close his eyes in a sour way and turn his head aside whenever they met in the evening. Smaller chattering birds were worse and said cruel things openly whenever the nighthawk passed.

“There he is again. Just look at that face.” “His mouth is so big. He must be some relation of a frog.” “He makes the whole bird family look bad.” They spoke like that without shame. If the nighthawk had been a true hawk and not only a bird with a similar name, such creatures would have hidden in the leaves at the mere sound of him. But the nighthawk was not such a bird. He was gentle, lonely, and unable to answer insult with force, though in truth he too flew through the sky and lived by catching other small lives.

Even that brought him pain. At night he opened his great mouth and swept through the air, swallowing moths, beetles, and all sorts of little insects. Their lives entered him one after another, and yet each time he felt a bitter ache. “I, who am hated by all, must still go on taking other lives,” he thought. “How strange and sad the world is.” He did not boast over his hunting as a hawk might have done. He only felt shame and sorrow and tried to fly where no one would notice him.

To make matters worse, there was another bird called the hawk, and because of the shared name the hawk could not bear him. “How disgusting,” the hawk thought. “That ugly creature has even stolen part of my noble name.” So one evening he flew down before the nighthawk with his sharp eyes shining and said, “Listen carefully. From now on you may not call yourself nighthawk. It dirties my name. You are to go around to every bird and every beast and say, ‘I am called

Ichizo.' If you do not, I will kill you."

The nighthawk lowered his head and answered quietly, "Hawk, that is too hard. Even if my face is ugly, the name nighthawk has belonged to my family from the beginning. If there were some other way, I would obey you. Please do not force this one thing on me." The hawk flared up at once. "No," he cried. "There is no other way. Tomorrow morning before the sun is high, you will visit every creature and change your name, or I will tear you apart." Then he beat his wings and shot away into the darkening sky.

The nighthawk remained there trembling. The evening wind touched the leaves around him, and the first stars came out one by one, but he could think of nothing except the hawk's command. "I am ugly," he thought. "That much is true. But must I throw away even my own name? And if I go before everyone, will they not only laugh more than before?" He looked up helplessly into the night, where the sky was already growing deep and cold.

At last he could bear sitting there no longer. He flew first to the home of the kingfisher, for the kingfisher was, in a distant way, his younger brother. The kingfisher's house was bright and clean, and the bird himself shone beautifully with blue and orange feathers. The nighthawk called softly, "Kingfisher, Kingfisher, are you at home?" The kingfisher came out, saw who it was, and at once made a face. "What is it?" he asked in a sharp voice. "If you have come near my house, people may think we are close relations. Please go away quickly."

The nighthawk said sadly, "I know you do not like me, and perhaps you are right to feel so. But tonight I have come to say good-bye. Hawk has ordered me to throw away the name nighthawk and call myself Ichizo before all creatures. If I do not, he says he will kill me. I cannot bear such a thing, so I think I will leave this world instead. Since you are my younger brother, I wished to see you once before I go." The kingfisher blinked and said, "Then why not simply change the name? Ichizo is not so bad. At least it would end the trouble."

"No," the nighthawk answered. "I would rather die than do that." The kingfisher gave an impatient click with his beak. "You are always troublesome," he said. "Do as you please, then. But do not stay here long. Someone may see

you.” Hearing that, the nighthawk bowed his head very low and said, “Good-bye.” Then he rose into the air once more, feeling that even this last meeting had given him no comfort.

After that he flew to the house of the rambling little birds, then to the wagtail, then to others he had known in passing. But nowhere did he find real kindness. Some only stared. Some said, “If Hawk ordered it, you should obey.” Some said, “An ugly bird ought to be thankful he is allowed to live at all.” A few were frightened by his face and shut their doors before he had finished speaking. The nighthawk went on from place to place through the dark, and with every visit his heart grew colder and more alone.

At last, when the moon had not yet risen but the stars were already thick over the fields, he came to the house of the little bird called the kestrel and said, “Please forgive me for calling so late.” The kestrel, who was half asleep, answered from inside, “Who is there?” “It is I, the nighthawk,” he said. The kestrel opened one eye and replied, “Then be quick. I am tired.” The nighthawk told once more the whole sad story of the hawk’s command and his wish to leave the world. The kestrel listened and then said, “I have no advice. If you can die, die. If you cannot, live. That is all.” Then he closed his eyes again.

So the nighthawk understood that there was no place for him anywhere among the birds of the earth. He flew away from the houses and perches and nests and went out into the open dark over the fields. The night wind moved around him with a lonely sound. Far below, little lights burned in human houses, and farther still, rivers shone faintly like long threads. The nighthawk looked up once more at the huge cold sky and thought, “If no one on earth will accept me, perhaps I should go there instead.”

Then he spread his wings wide and began to fly upward toward the stars.

## Part 2

The nighthawk flew upward with all his strength. The wind cut at him, the earth fell farther and farther away, and the fields below became dark patches with

only here and there a little light. His weak legs trailed behind him, his broad mouth trembled, and his chest hurt, but he did not stop. "I will go higher," he said. "If I can no longer live among birds and beasts, then I will leave the earth itself." So he beat his wings again and again and climbed toward the pale edge of the night.

At last the eastern sky began to whiten. The stars grew dim, and before him, rising with terrible brightness, came the sun. The nighthawk stopped in the thin cold air and cried out with all the voice he had. "Sun, Sun, please take me. No one on earth wants me. I am ugly, and even my name has been taken from me. Please let me go with you and burn in your light." The sun rose higher and higher, dazzling and severe, and after a time answered in a deep golden voice, "That cannot be done."

The nighthawk trembled and cried again, "Why not? I do not ask for comfort. I do not ask to live happily. I only ask to leave the earth." The sun said, "You are a creature of the night. My fire is too strong for you. Even now you are already suffering just from facing me. Go back. When evening comes, perhaps you may ask the stars." The nighthawk tried once more to bear the light, but his eyes filled with pain, and he felt as if his whole face would crack. At last he lowered his head and fell away from the eastern sky like a burnt leaf.

All that day he hid among the dark branches of a tree and neither slept nor moved. He only kept saying to himself, "When evening comes, I will ask the stars. If the sun will not take me, then perhaps one of them will." The other birds were awake and busy in the world below, but no one came near him. The skylark rose singing far above the fields. The kingfisher flashed like blue fire over the river. The hawk circled high in the clear air. The nighthawk shut his eyes and waited for night.

When evening came at last and the west glowed red behind the mountains, he rose once more. The first bright star stood there, clear and lovely over the edge of the darkening sky. The nighthawk flew toward it and called, "Evening Star, Evening Star, please take me. I can no longer live on earth." The Evening Star shone beautifully and answered in a voice like white cold light, "I am too far away. Even if you flew for a hundred years, you would not reach me. And my fire too

would be too strong for you.” The nighthawk asked desperately, “Then where can I go?” The Evening Star said only, “Ask another. Ask another,” and continued shining in silence.

So he flew toward the Great Bear. “Please take me,” he cried. “I do not care what happens to me after that.” But the Great Bear answered, “No. We are too far away, and you are too small and weak.” He flew then toward Orion. “Please let me come.” But Orion answered, “No. You would never reach us. Go back while you still can.” He called to the Pleiades, to the Milky Way, to every bright group of stars that rose in the sky one after another, but all answered in the same way. “No. We are too far.” Or else, “No. Our fire is too strong.” Or else, “Go back. Go back.”

The nighthawk flew on in despair. His chest was now full of pain, his throat burned, and the cold upper air cut him like knives. Yet he would not turn back. “If I go back, I must still live there,” he thought. “I must still hear them laugh and still swallow little lives with this hateful mouth of mine. No. I will keep flying until I die.” His wings grew heavier and heavier. The stars above seemed no nearer at all, and the earth below had become a dark wide thing with rivers like threads of dull metal.

Then, far away in the south, he saw the Scorpion burning red. It was low and fierce and seemed closer than the others. The nighthawk gathered all the strength left in his body and flew toward it. “Scorpion,” he cried, “please take me. I am ugly and hated. I have nowhere to go.” The red star answered in a rough stern voice, “If you truly wish to come here, then come. But this is not easy. You must burn yourself. You must not fear pain. You must burn and burn and keep coming.” The nighthawk’s heart gave a great leap. “Then I will do it,” he cried. “I will come.”

At once he beat his wings harder than ever before. He flew straight upward toward the Scorpion with his broad beak open and his weak legs trailing behind. The air rushed around him. His chest gave sharp painful cries inside him. It seemed as if blue sparks were already beginning to burst from the base of his wings. “I do not care,” he said. “I do not care if I burn. Better that than going back.” So he flew and flew, each stroke of his wings like a blow against the whole

dark sky.

Soon his breathing grew strange. Little red blood began to come from his mouth. His body, so despised on earth, now felt lighter than before, as if the pain were burning away even his weight. "Scorpion, I am coming," he cried. "Please do not leave me." The Scorpion answered from the south, "Come then. Come if you can." The nighthawk no longer felt the cold. Instead there was a strange heat in him. It was not from outside. It was rising from his own chest.

Then, all at once, his whole body gave out a bright blue light. It was small at first, like a bead of flame, but in the next moment it spread along his wings and body. The nighthawk himself did not notice it at once. He only felt that everything around him had become clear and sharp and that the darkness no longer pressed so heavily against him. "I am going," he said. "I am still going." Below him the earth had become very far away. Above him the stars shone in a deep still heaven, and among them the Scorpion burned red like a promise.

The blue fire around the nighthawk grew stronger and stronger. It was no longer a weak bird forcing itself through the sky. It was now something burning, something that seemed almost to sing while it flew. The other stars looked on in silence. The nighthawk cried out one last time, not in sorrow now, but in fierce lonely joy. "I am coming. I am coming." And still he rose through the night, carrying his own blue fire with him.

### Part 3

Then the blue fire around the nighthawk grew brighter still. It spread over his whole body until he was no longer a poor dark bird beating upward through the air, but a living blue flame. His wings, his beak, even his weak trailing legs all burned in that strange clear light. Yet it was not a fire that hurt him any longer. The pain in his chest and throat, which had been growing sharper and sharper, was now lost inside that brightness.

The nighthawk went on rising. Below him the earth had become a black round thing with only a few pale rivers and tiny lights. Above him the stars were

vast and cold and quiet. He no longer asked them to take him in with words. He only flew, and because he flew with his whole heart, it seemed as if his own burning body were itself becoming a star little by little. "I am going," he thought. "I am going farther still."

At last he could no longer feel his wings moving at all. He could no longer tell whether he was flying or simply burning and rising by the force of that fire alone. Then, all at once, the nighthawk understood that he had become a star himself. He was no longer a bird hated on the earth below. He was now a beautiful blue star, burning clearly in the night sky. And because of that, his heart, which had always been full of sorrow, became strangely calm.

From then on the nighthawk no longer had to be ashamed of his face, or his mouth, or the way the other birds had spoken to him. No one in the sky laughed at him. No one told him to throw away his name. He burned there quietly with a blue light, high and far above the earth. The other stars looked on in silence, and the dark fields and rivers below received his light without knowing whose sad life had turned into it.

So now, when the evening comes and the sky grows clear, the nighthawk is still there, burning beautifully as a small blue star. He is burning even now.

## The Leather Trunk [Kawa Toranku]

### Part 1

One spring, Saito Heita went to the town of Naraoka and took the entrance examinations for the middle school, the agricultural school, and the technical school. He believed he would fail all three, but by some strange accident he passed only the technical school. He somehow got through the first and second years without disaster, and then, because his teacher was poor at arithmetic and miscounted the grades on his report, Heita actually graduated. Such a thing is very rare indeed. But it happened.

As soon as he graduated, he was sent home. His family lived by farming, and his father was the village mayor. With his father's agreement, Heita put up a sign at the gate of the house that said, "Architectural Design and Building Contractor." At once, and again by very unusual good fortune, two jobs came to him. One was a two-story building that would serve both as the village fire shed and as a public consultation room. The other was the branch school. Heita drew both plans in four days.

After that he called carpenters from the neighboring villages and began the work in earnest. Heita wore brown riding trousers and a red necktie and went busily from one place to another, supervising both projects as if he were already a great engineer. In the middle of the work shed the plans hung proudly. Whenever the carpenters looked at them, they grew more and more uncertain. None of them had ever worked from such plans before. "What does this mark mean?" one asked. "And what about this line?" asked another. But Heita, who barely understood all of it himself, would answer in an important voice, "Do not trouble yourselves. Just follow the plan exactly."

At first this seemed splendid. But before long the carpenters began to notice that the measurements did not match, that windows met beams in impossible ways, and that stairs arrived where walls should have stood. They muttered among themselves, and yet because the village mayor was Heita's father, no one wished

to make a full public complaint. So the work went on, awkwardly, noisily, and more and more strangely. Heita still hurried about in his riding trousers and red necktie, giving orders with all the dignity he could gather, but inside he was beginning to feel a little uneasy.

Then, exactly when the branch school was half built, the village mayor stopped the whole thing. "Enough," he said. "This must be taken down. It will never do." So the half-finished building was pulled apart and rebuilt from the beginning in a simpler and more ordinary way. As for the fire shed and consultation room, Heita's father somehow forced it through to completion. In the end it stood there looking somewhat crooked and anxious, but since it did not immediately fall down, people agreed to leave it alone. Heita himself, however, had now become a subject of quiet laughter in the village.

After that no further work came. The sign still hung at the gate, but no one asked for plans, and no one asked for a building. At last Heita went to Tokyo. He had heard that in the city there was room even for people who had failed in their home districts. For a while he had great difficulty. He did not know the city well, had little money, and had no true skill beyond the little he had half learned. Yet because he was stubborn and because strange luck still followed him from time to time, he somehow stayed there.

Two years passed. During that time he slowly became used to Tokyo. At last he entered again the old line of work he had studied at school and found employment as a site supervisor with the Hirasawa construction company. The carpenters hated him and played cruel tricks on him. When he made inspection rounds, they threw bits of wood down from high places. Sometimes, when he had climbed up into a ceiling space, they pretended not to know he was there and nailed boards shut beneath him. Even so, Heita rather enjoyed this city life. Compared with the silence and embarrassment of home, even such trouble felt lively and important.

So Heita sent a postcard home. It said, "Recently I have risen in the world. I have enough banknotes to paper shoji with them. Everyone treats me with respect. I still require a little more study, so please endure present inconveniences for a

short while.” His father, the village mayor, sent no answer at all. But then Heita’s mother fell a little ill. Every day she spoke of Heita. At last, though unwillingly, the mayor sent a telegram: “MOTHER ILL. COME HOME AT ONCE.”

Heita had only just received his wages then and had about thirty yen left. After much thought, he spent twenty of them on a very large leather trunk. It was a magnificent thing, but of course he had almost nothing to put in it except the one linen suit he was wearing. So he asked his foreman for about thirty sheets of old plans that were no longer needed and packed them tightly into the trunk until it was full. That too, needless to say, is a very rare thing.

Heita then returned to his home station. From there he rode through the town by rickshaw with the great trunk beside him. But when they reached the line of pine trees on the main road, where the path to his village turned off and immediately became rough and broken, the rickshaw man refused to go any farther. He took his fare, bowed, and left. So there was nothing for it. Heita lifted the enormous leather trunk onto his own back and began to walk toward home.

## Part 2

Heita walked on with the enormous trunk on his back. The road from the station toward the river was rough and full of ruts, and every little while he had to stop and shift the weight because the leather box seemed to grow larger each time he moved it. He had almost nothing inside it except his old linen suit and a mass of useless plans, yet on his back it felt as if he were carrying a whole building. “This is ridiculous,” he thought. “A man who has come home from Tokyo in success should not have to stagger along like this.” Still he did not dare set the trunk down in the dirt.

Before long children from the town began following him at a distance. Then they came nearer. Then they all gathered behind him and beside him and began talking in excited voices about the trunk itself, for the trunk was so enormous that it seemed more important than Heita. “Look at that. It is all leather.” “It is cow leather.” “That bent place there must be from the cow’s knee.” The children grew

more and more delighted with their own discoveries. Sure enough, near one of the brass fastenings there was a curved little piece where the leather had kept the shape of a knee.

Hearing them say such things, Heita felt a strange sadness come over him. It was not exactly shame and not exactly anger. It was a lonely, worn-out feeling, as if all the grandness he had hoped to show by bringing home the huge leather trunk had been peeled away at once by those childish voices. He almost began to cry, but he tightened his mouth and walked on. The road sloped toward the river, the evening light whitened behind him in the clouds of sunset, and the ferryboat was slowly coming over.

The boatman shaded his eyes with one hand against the white western light and stared fixedly at Heita from far off. As the boat drew nearer and he understood that the gentleman in white clothes carrying the great trunk was indeed Heita, he cried in a high surprised voice, "Oh, Master Heita. We have been waiting." Heita nearly burst into tears then too, but instead he only lowered the trunk, placed it on the boat, and climbed in after it without a word. The children on the bank were still talking only about the trunk. Even the boatman kept stealing glances at it while he pushed off and let the boat slide across.

The little waves made a soft "pita-pita" sound against the boat, and the wire rope above sang thinly in the evening air. Then, as the sun dropped fully behind the western clouds, the water suddenly turned dark. On the opposite bank two figures were waiting. The boat touched shore, and one of the men ran forward at once. "We have been waiting for you, sir. Your luggage?" he cried. It was the servant from Heita's house.

Heita said nothing. He only blinked rapidly and handed over the great trunk. The servant, though plainly irritated and keyed up, hoisted the huge leather case onto his back. Then the two of them began walking through the mulberry fields toward home while mosquitoes hummed all around them in the dim evening. The road smelled of wet grass and dust. Heita followed in silence behind the servant, feeling now not proud at all, only tired beyond words.

When they came out onto the large road and had gone a little farther, the

village mayor, Heita's father, happened to be returning from the village office just then from behind them. He came up, looked once at the enormous leather trunk on the servant's back, and gave a bitter little smile.

The Biography of Pennennennennen Nenem  
[Pennennennennen Nenemu no Denki]

Part 1

Several pages from the beginning of this story have been lost, so we must start in the middle of a hard time. The eastern sky used to fill with the color of amber beer before Lord O-Kire rose, but that year things went wrong. The monster wheat did not ripen. Great flowers opened, but no grain came. Even the chestnut trees only made green burrs, and so famine came over the whole monster world.

When that year ended and spring returned, the famine only became worse. Nenem's father, a blue monster of the forest, sat with his head in his hands for a very long time. At last he jumped up and said, "I am going into the forest to find something." Then he went out, weak and unsteady, and never came back. Nenem's mother also kept watching with bright tired eyes and sighing all day. Then one day she said, "I am going to the field to look for something," and she too went away and never returned.

So Nenem and his little sister Mamimi were left alone. They shook with cold and hunger in the empty house. Then one day a tall man with sharp eyes came to the door carrying a big basket. "Good day," he said. "I have come to save this district from famine. Come now, eat whatever you like." In the basket there were waffles, grape bread, and many other rich sweet things, and the two starving children ate them wildly until at last they could say, "Thank you, Mister. Thank you very much."

The man watched them with hard shining eyes while they ate, and only after a while did he speak again. "You are good children," he said. "But being good is not enough by itself. Come with me, and I will take you somewhere better. The boy is strong, and his knees and heels already seem too hard, so that cannot be helped. But you, little girl, would you like to come with me? I will let you eat grape bread all day long." Nenem and Mamimi gave no answer, but the man suddenly lifted Mamimi into the basket of sweets. Then, crying, "Ho-hoi, ho-hoi,"

he rushed out of the house like the wind.

Mamimi did not understand at first, but once she was outside she suddenly began to cry loudly. Nenem screamed, “Thief. Thief,” and ran after them with tears pouring from his eyes. But by then the man had already crossed the forest and was only a moving shape far away on the yellow field beyond. Mamimi’s crying seemed to become a small white triangle of light that sank into Nenem’s chest. He ran and shouted through the woods until he could do no more, and at last he fell flat to the ground from weariness.

He did not know how many days passed after that. Then one day he opened his eyes and saw above him a monstrous chestnut tree letting out little puffs of steam. Two ladders had been set against the trunk, and two men were climbing and throwing something that looked like nets into the air, though Nenem could see no thread at all. Lord O-Kire was back to his ordinary shining self, and the dead grass around him had begun to warm while monster bracken grew up here and there. Nenem jumped to his feet and ate the young shoots at once, but then a flat unpleasant voice said above him, “So you are awake at last. Do you still think it is famine? Summer will come soon. Why not help me a little?”

Nenem looked up and saw a very fine gentleman indeed. He wore a coat made of shells and held a water pipe in one hand. “Sir, is the famine really over?” Nenem asked. “And what is this work?” The gentleman answered, “We gather kelp here.” Nenem stared in surprise. “Kelp? In a place like this?” The gentleman frowned and said, “What a disagreeable child. Why would anyone build a factory where kelp could not be gathered? Of course kelp is taken here. I and many others live by it.”

Nenem felt something ugly and false in the man’s words, yet he had nowhere else to go. The gentleman said, “This forest is mine, so even that bracken you were eating is forbidden. Work for me, and I will pay you one dollar a day. Otherwise you will not eat at all.” Nenem almost began to cry, but he held it back and said, “Then I will help. But how do I gather kelp?” The gentleman took from his pocket something small like the bones of a folded umbrella and drew it out longer and longer until it became a very thin ladder of shining silk-like thread.

“You hang it on that chestnut tree,” he said, “and then you climb.”

Nenem obeyed because he could see no other path. The ladder cut into his hands and feet like wire, and when he reached the top of the chestnut tree he found it terribly cold. Then he saw, stretching from his own hands into the blue sky, a strange trembling net made of something fine as spider silk. The gentleman shouted from below, “There, now you see it. Throw it upward. The shaking in your hands is only the sharks and great fish of the wind striking it. Do not be a coward. Throw it.” Nenem hated it, but he pulled back the invisible net with all his strength and flung it up into the sky as hard as he could.

At once his eyes spun round, Lord O-Kire looked like a black ball of earth, and he fell from the very top. He thought he had died, and then he thought his ears had come off, but when he opened his eyes he was standing on the ground while the gentleman twisted his ear cruelly. “You soft useless thing,” the man cried. “If I had not caught your ear just now, your head would have burst open. So I am your great benefactor. Do not forget your manners. Now climb again. When evening comes, I will send food. At night I may even send a cotton vest. But you do not come down until you have gathered enough kelp.” Nenem asked weakly, “Then I may come down in the evening?” “No,” said the gentleman. “Of course not. You come down only when the work is done.”

So Nenem climbed again and threw the net again and again into the sky. At first he caught almost nothing. Then evening came, and the sky of the monster world turned green. A strange loaf of monster bread floated up from below and stopped in front of him, while the two men in the other tree bent over sadly eating their own bread. Even their ladders had disappeared. Nenem ate because he had no choice. Then the gentleman shouted from below, “Eat quickly and throw again. If you do not gather one kin of kelp, you will get no warm vest.” Nenem cried back, “Mister, I cannot do it. Please let me down.” But the gentleman only answered, “What? You eat my bread and then ask to come down? Do not speak such selfish nonsense.”

Nenem was too tired to move and sat at the top of the tree in despair. The chestnut tree let out warm steam, and for a little while he felt a little better. So he

tried again. This time the net felt truly heavy, and when he pulled it in, there was indeed a large sheet of kelp shining in it. “Mister, I got some. I got some,” he cried with joy, throwing it down. “Good,” shouted the gentleman. “Then I will send up your cotton vest.” The vest floated up, and Nenem put it on quickly. “Mister,” he called, “then will you give me one dollar?” The gentleman answered from the pale yellow mist below, “Yes, I will pay one dollar. But your bread costs one dollar a day. If you gather more than ten kin, I will buy the extra at ten cents a kin. If you gather less, the missing amount becomes your debt.”

Nenem was crushed by that answer, but he had no way down and no one to help him. The two men in the other tree vanished after a time, as if the hard work itself had erased them. So Nenem made a decision. With only the steaming tree, the floating bread, the unseen net, the harsh gentleman, and the kelp for company, he stayed there and worked. At first he fell deeper and deeper into debt, and only much later did he begin to repay it. But that belongs to the next part of his life.

## Part 2

Nenem came out of the forest rubbing the knees that had been hurt by ten years of standing straight in the chestnut tree. Near the forest mouth there was a little general shop, and there he bought one black coat and one pair of black trousers. While putting them on in a hurry, he thought, “I must study something and become a clerk. Even thinking of throwing and pulling nets makes my life grow shorter. Yes, I will become a clerk.” When he paid and turned to leave, he happened to catch sight of himself in a mirror.

His clothes were black as night, his red curly hair hung richly from head to shoulders, and his blue eyes shone so brightly that he doubted for a moment whether the figure in the glass was truly his own. He became so happy that he began to whistle and then burst into a run of thirty knots or so without even noticing how fast he was going. At last he slowed and asked a yellow ghost-like monster drifting toward him, “How far is it still to the city of Hanmunmunmunmun Mumune?” The yellow spirit answered, “Come here a

moment,” and drew Nenem by the square end of his sleeve to the foot of a monster apple tree.

There the ghost set one foot neatly against a root and said, “Now place one of your feet here beside mine.” Nenem did so at once. The ghost bent down, closed one eye, carefully checked that the toes were aligned exactly with the root, and then said, “Good. From this spot to the entrance of Mumune City is exactly six knots and six chains. Now go carefully.” Then he turned and drifted away without another word. Nenem bowed deeply after him and said, “Thank you very much. If I walk one knot and one chain an hour, I can reach it in six hours. If I walk three knots and three chains an hour, I can reach it in two. I am very grateful. I understand everything now.”

Yet the yellow spirit had already vanished into the fields of heat haze ahead. So Nenem walked on again. Before long another strange figure came toward him, a glittering mouse-colored man in red rubber boots. The man stared hard, suddenly ran up, seized Nenem’s right wrist, and demanded, “You have given up kelp-taking in the forest and come out here. What is your purpose now?” Nenem thought at once, “This must be a detective,” so he stiffened himself and answered in the most formal voice he could manage, “My aim is to become a clerk.”

The man twisted his short beard with his left hand and thought a little. Then he said, “A clerk, is it? In that case, you must have eaten a great deal of monster bread in the forest.” Nenem was so exactly struck in the center of the truth that he scratched his head in confusion and answered, “Yes, sir. I fear perhaps I did eat rather too much.” The stranger nodded. “Just so. I thought as much. Very well. I understand your status and your plans. Go on. I am a detective of Mumune City.” At that Nenem felt relieved for the first time in many hours, bowed very politely, and continued toward the city.

After one hour and six minutes at a pace of three knots and three chains, he met a farmer’s wife, a monster woman orange in color. She had been looking at him strangely from afar, and then suddenly she burst into tears and ran toward him, crying, “Why, Kuek, you have come home. Have you forgotten your own mother? Ah, how miserable.” Nenem was startled, but quickly understood she had

mistaken him for someone else. “No, madam,” he said gently, “I am not a person called Kuek. I am Pennennennennen Nenem.”

At once the woman realized her error and wiped her face. “Please forgive me,” she said. “You looked so exactly like my son.” Nenem answered, “It is nothing. This is my first time going to Mumune City.” But the woman began crying again and said, “My son too was just your age. The way your curly hair falls, the way your ears shine, everything is the same. And such soft feet, like a slug-monster’s, wearing hard steel sandals. Ah, where is my own boy now, walking in such shoes? Poo, poo, poo, poo.” Nenem did not know what to do, so he said the kindest thing he could think of. “Surely your son has become a clerk somewhere by now. Surely he will send for you soon. Please do not cry so hard. I must hurry now, so forgive me.”

Leaving behind the sound of her clarinet-like sobbing, he went on. Fifteen minutes later he was only three chains from Mumune City itself. There he stopped, arranged his hair carefully, washed his face in a flow of quicksilver by the roadside, and prepared himself to enter the city with dignity. As he drew nearer, the greatness of the capital of the monster world was already clear to him. A huge humming sound, “nonnonnonnon,” seemed to rise from the very ground, though at exactly this point several pages of the manuscript have been burned away, and so we lose part of Nenem’s first arrival.

What can still be read begins with an angry shout from somewhere in a school building. “Class is in session. Noisy creature. If you have business, come in.” Nenem, taking courage from that invitation, climbed the stairs as quietly as he could and entered the classroom. It was vast as a field. Students of every imaginable form crowded it, red, white, pepper-shaped, mortar-shaped, scissors-shaped, packed together under a blackboard big as a cliff. On the platform stood a famous monster teacher more than a hundred feet tall, delivering a lecture.

“If chlorine were red,” the teacher cried, “that would be the clearest possible absurdity. It must be yellow. Therefore yellow is a most important matter. The character for yellow is written thus.” Then he turned to the board and wrote the character for yellow three hundred times at once, using hands, nose, mouth,

elbows, collar, hair, and everything else together. The students all hurried to copy it in their notebooks, though none could write it as well as he had. Nenem slipped quietly into the last seat and whispered to the red-and-white mottled student beside him, "What is the name of this teacher?" The student looked at him with shining scorn and answered, "You did not know? It is Doctor Fufifibo, in chemistry."

Nenem was full of admiration. He took out his own notebook and pencil and began writing as hard as he could. Then the lights came on all at once, for evening had already fallen. The doctor shouted from the front, "Why then is green most clearly seen at evening? It is due to the phenomenon of Puurukiinii. Puurukiinii is written thus." He wrote three hundred worm-like foreign letters on the board in one rush. Nenem copied those too. Then the doctor suddenly spread his arms wide, leaped onto the table, folded his hands, fixed his mouth, and cried, "The star-clouds above and the vague monster-law below, behold, these rule the universe." The students all shouted, "Bravo, Doctor Fufifibo," and snapped their notebooks shut.

Nenem too was carried away by the excitement and shouted, "Bravo," while biting his lips tight with determination. Then the doctor smiled very slightly and said in a lower voice, "Now then, we will immediately hold the graduation examination. Each of you will pass before me one by one." The students came in turn, opened their notebooks, answered one or two questions, and then had on their backs written in chalk such judgments as "Pass," "Fail," "Pass with Sympathy," or "Expelled." They hunched their shoulders and went outside to ask their friends what had been written, then either rejoiced or wept.

At last only Nenem remained. When he held out his notebook, Doctor Fufifibo gave an enormous yawn, and somehow the notebook slipped straight into his mouth. The doctor swallowed it without the least concern and said, "Very good. Your notebook was excellent. Now answer this. How many kinds of smoke come from a chimney?" Nenem replied, "There are four kinds. If I may name them, they are black, white, blue, and colorless." "Excellent," said the doctor. "The fact that you noticed colorless smoke is especially admirable. And what of its forms?"

Nenem answered, “When there is no wind, it is like a vertical rod. In strong wind, a horizontal rod. Otherwise it may take the form of worms and the like. When there is very little smoke, it may even resemble a corkscrew.”

The doctor nodded. “Excellent. In today’s examination you are first. If you have any wish, say it now.” Nenem answered, “I wish to become a clerk.” The doctor said, “Very well. I will write the address on my card. Go there tonight at once.” Nenem waited for the card, but instead the doctor took up a piece of chalk and wrote on Nenem’s chest, “Sem Number Twenty-Two.” Nenem bowed politely in joy and stepped back. In a low voice the doctor muttered, “The straw omelet must be ready by now,” swept scraps of chalk and lecture pages into a leather bag, tucked it under his arm, and leaped out of the window toward a dark house far beyond the city. Nenem watched with his own eyes until the doctor landed safely on a drying platform and went inside.

Then Nenem came down the stairs. There in the corridor many students were crying. Indeed, if one had failed every day for ten years, even through leap years, Sundays, and summer holidays, one could hardly do otherwise. But Nenem was entirely different. He walked out of the university gate in high spirits, pointed to the address on his chest, and asked a jellyfish-like monster how to reach it. That creature bowed with extreme politeness and said, “Why, that is the residence of the Chief Judge of the World. Go two chains farther, and you will see a great house hardened from clay. You will know it at once. Please remember me kindly.”

So Nenem went on at a rate of one knot and one chain an hour and soon saw, on the right side of the road, a large clay house with a sign saying, “Official Residence of the Chief Judge of the World.” He scratched his red hair and called, “Excuse me. Excuse me.” At once many, many monsters came pattering out from inside, all dressed in long black garments, all bowing respectfully. Nenem said, “I have come by introduction from Doctor Fufifibo of the university. May I perhaps see the Chief Judge for a moment?” And then they all answered together, “It is you. You are the Chief Judge.”

Part 3

“You are that Chief Judge,” they all said together. Nenem blinked several times and asked, “Then what are all of you?” They bowed again and answered, “We are your staff, the judges, prosecutors, and the rest.” Nenem said, “Then I am the master here, am I?” “Yes, exactly,” they replied. So in this strange way Pennennennennen Nenem became, all at once, the Chief Judge of the whole monster world, and they led him into the judge’s room and made him sit heavily in a chair made of sponge.

One of the judges then bowed and said, “There are two cases arranged for hearing tonight. Are you too tired, or will you open court?” Nenem answered at once, “No, I will do it. But first tell me one thing. What is the policy of the court?” The judge replied, “Our main policy is to keep the people of our world from showing themselves too easily on the other side.” Nenem nodded and said, “I understand. Then let us begin at once.” So they put a white curly wig on him, dressed him in a long black robe, and led him into the courtroom.

There about thirty judges and prosecutors were already sitting in their seats. Nenem took the highest chair in front. Then from a little door in the corner a gray creature with sharp eyes was dragged in by guards. He held a broom in one hand. A prosecutor read the charge in a high loud voice, saying that this was a zashiki-warashi, twenty-two years old, who had appeared without permission in an eight-mat room in a house in Iwate and frightened an eight-year-old boy into fainting.

Nenem asked, “Is your name and age correct?” “Yes, exactly,” the gray creature answered. “Did you truly appear there without permission?” “Yes, that is true,” he said. “And what did you do after appearing?” Nenem asked. “I swept the room with my broom,” the creature said. “Why?” asked Nenem. “To let the wind in,” the gray creature replied. Nenem thought for a moment and then said, “That part is useful and worthy of sympathy. But since you appeared in an empty room without permission, made a sweeping sound, and caused a child to faint, you are still guilty of unlawful appearance. Therefore you are ordered to sweep the streets of Mumune City for seven days, and from now on you must not appear on the other side without leave from the head of the monster world.”

The zashiki-warashi bowed deeply and said, "I understand. Thank you very much." At once the judges began whispering, "A fine judgment. A truly fine judgment." Then another accused creature was brought in. This one had a face painted with brown and white clay, a mouth split almost to the ears, and a thick straw-like thing tied around the waist. The charge was that he had appeared in a clearing in the forests of the Congo and frightened a group of dancers into running away in panic.

Nenem asked him the same questions one by one. At last he said, "Why did you appear there?" The creature answered in a rough voice, "Because it looked so amusing. That is the truth. I am very sorry. It looked so funny that I could not help it. Kero, kero, kero." "Silence," said Nenem. Then, after listening a little more, he said, "You are clearly guilty of unlawful appearance. Therefore from tomorrow you will patrol Mussen Highway for twenty-two days. And from now on you too must not appear on the other side without leave." The creature bowed low and said, "Yes. Thank you very much."

The judges and prosecutors whispered again that it was a splendid judgment. Just then the window opened with a noise, and the great gray face of Doctor Fufifibo looked in. "Well then, what do you think?" he called. "Is he not an excellent Chief Judge?" At once all the judges and prosecutors shouted, "Bravo, Doctor Fufifibo. Bravo," and by the time they finished, the doctor's face had already vanished and the window had shut again. So Nenem went back to his room, took off the white wig, and slept, while all his thoughts ran ahead toward the next day.

The next morning he rose at six and called one of the prosecutors. "At what time does court sit today?" he asked. "Again, there are only two cases this evening at seven," the man replied. "Good," said Nenem. "Then at eight we will go to greet the Head of the World. After that we will make a full inspection of the city. Tell everyone to prepare." So Nenem ate a light breakfast of one bundle of oats and two liters of bean soup, and then, with thirty subordinates behind him, went to the great official hall.

The Head of the World was already seated in the front of a vast room. He

was a middle-aged agate tree, one hundred and ninety shaku tall. Nenem walked forward, bent one knee to the floor, and bowed his head deeply. “Are you Pennennennennen Nenem, the Chief Judge?” the great being asked. “Yes, sir,” Nenem answered. “I pledge eternal loyal service.” “Good,” said the great tree. “Work hard. I have already heard of last night’s court, and I hear you are making an inspection this morning too.” Nenem bowed again and answered, “Yes. I am honored.” “Very well,” said the Head of the World. “Do your work properly.” Nenem backed away with great respect, and all thirty of his men were delighted by how well the audience had gone.

Then Nenem, in very high spirits himself, began the inspection of Mumune City. The city of the monster world was as busy and splendid as ever. Creatures by the millions passed and crossed, appeared and vanished, joined and melted together, formed again and moved on. Nenem looked at it all and felt a deep admiration. Just then, from in front, there came the sound, “Totten, totten, tottenten,” made by a little instrument called a charinel, and toward him rolled a tiny cart carrying a red flag. Around it stood a crowd of watchers like a moving red hill.

As Nenem came closer, he saw that on the flag the name “Fukujiro” was written in white. Beside it stood a creature only three shaku tall, with a face wrinkled like an old man’s. Behind him, in a long line, came thirty more just like him, each wearing very smart clothes and walking one after another in endless order. Nenem stopped at once and asked, “What is all this?” One of the little old-faced creatures answered, “We collect old debts. We walk after our man all day and take the interest from him bit by bit, for one hundred years, two hundred years, as long as necessary.”

Nenem frowned and called them before him. “Is that really so?” he asked. “Yes, exactly so,” the first two said together. Nenem listened to a little more and then gave his judgment on the spot. “I understand well enough now,” he said. “This is a chain of wrong piling up one after another. To lend money a hundred or two hundred years ago and then send thirty fashionable creatures walking behind one poor little fellow every day to collect interest is shameful. To spend each day

half asleep, yawning and eating at restaurants while doing this is shameful too. And to say, 'It is not I who profit,' while doing more and more evil is no excuse at all."

The little men trembled and looked at one another. Nenem went on, "So all of you are in the wrong. I ought to punish you all. But that would be too pitiful. Instead, stop this work all at once. As for Fukujiro, I will arrange for him to work alone in a small room in some toy factory, where from time to time he may even eat sweets. The others look strong enough. Let them find their own work. If they truly cannot, they may come and consult me." At once they all bowed and cried, "We understand. Thank you very much." Then the whole red crowd broke apart and scattered in every direction, leaving only Fukujiro behind.

Nenem at once assigned one prosecutor to take Fukujiro to a workshop where papier-mâché tigers were made. The watchers around them shouted with delight, "A great Chief Judge. A truly great Chief Judge." And so, praised from every side, Pennennennenen Nenem began his inspection once more, going on through the city toward whatever strange things the next street might bring.

#### Part 4

Nenem began his inspection again in very high spirits. The city of the monster world went on roaring and glittering around him without the least pause, and now it seemed to him that every sound in it had become friendlier than before. Not long after the Fukujiro case, he saw on the right side of the street a large house hardened from mud with a sign that said it was the official residence of the Chief of World Police. Nenem stopped, looked at it, and said, "Let us go in for a moment." At once the whole house became noisy inside, doors opened, feet slapped, and the police chief himself came hurrying out in front to guide him in with the deepest respect.

Nenem was shown through all the arrangements of the house, and then he and the police chief sat facing one another at a table. The police chief took out a business card as large as a newspaper, spread it open with great care, and handed

it over with both hands. On it was written, “Kenkenkenkenken Kuek, Chief of Police.” Nenem stared at the name and then said, “Kuek. That is strange. I feel I have heard that name before. Tell me suddenly, are you perhaps from a farming family somewhere near here?” The police chief started and answered, “Your Honor’s guess is exactly right.”

Nenem then said at once, “In that case, you left home without permission, did you not? Your mother has been weeping greatly.” The police chief became embarrassed, moved his hands uneasily, and answered, “No, not exactly. The truth is a little different. The day before yesterday in the morning I came from home on a small errand to the janitor’s room of the university. By bad or good luck I was drawn into Dr. Fufifibo’s lecture. Then I stayed there three whole days, listening, failing, thinking, and listening again. Last night I finally passed, and I was assigned here at once. Even so, I did send a telegram home.” Nenem laughed warmly and said, “Ah, so that is how it was. Then it is very fine indeed.”

He was honestly impressed by this story, because it reminded him too much of his own strange rise in the world. He rose, bowed a little, and said, “Then please continue your work faithfully.” The police chief bowed even lower and answered, “I will do so with all my strength.” After that Nenem went out again and continued making his rounds through the city. He inspected streets, crossed busy squares, and spoke now and then with people who bowed until their foreheads nearly touched the ground. By around noon he returned at last to the official residence of the chief judge, and his lunch there was a straw omelet.

From that time on, Pennennennennen Nenem’s reputation became enormous. Everyone said that since the world of monsters had first begun long ago from a single tiny water creature and had slowly grown feet and branches and all its present forms, there had never been such a remarkable judge. Even the great moneylender Shaaron said, “Ah, truly, Lord Nenem is a famous judge, the return of Danee, no, more than that, the development of Danee.” From the Head of the World there came titles and decorations almost every day. So many came that it took two full hours merely to read all the titles aloud, and the medals covered the walls of Nenem’s room from one side to the other.

When he walked through the city now, the great crowds parted before him. Judges and prosecutors ran when he only lifted a finger. Servants bowed so low that their faces nearly disappeared into the floor. Nenem tried at first to behave modestly, but all this honor entered his chest little by little like warm strong drink. He had once stood shivering in a chestnut tree with a hidden net cutting into his hands and feet, looking down at a cruel gentleman through yellow mist. Now he slept in a grand room, ate straw omelets without hurry, and had so many decorations that they flashed around him even when no sun was present.

Yet it was not only comfort that filled his days. He also had work, and he did it seriously. Each evening he sat in court under the white curled wig, heard charges, and gave judgments in his clear new voice. Some punishments were light, some severe, but nearly all who heard him said afterward that he had seen directly into the middle of each matter. Sometimes a creature came in hard with pride and went out weeping with gratitude. Sometimes a shameless rogue entered laughing and came out bent and silent. The more Nenem judged, the more deeply people trusted him.

Soon it was said everywhere that if Nenem looked at a thing only once, he could see where the wrong began and how it had gathered bit by bit in a chain. This pleased him greatly, for he felt it was true. Indeed, once when a troublesome business about matches and old debts came before him, he untied the whole knot at once and sent the guilty in different directions according to their share in the fault. After such cases, crowds in the street cried, "A great chief judge. A great chief judge." Nenem heard them, kept his face still, and walked on, but inside he felt taller every day.

Then came a season of even stranger peace. There were days when no truly hard matter reached him at all. Messages of thanks arrived. Gifts arrived. New decorations arrived. Writers composed speeches in his praise. One day he heard one such speech declaimed at length, full of words saying that even the earth's crust obeyed his judgments and that mountains themselves would split at his command. Nenem, hearing this, at first smiled only a little. But before long he found that he wanted to hear such words again.

So he began, once in a while, to sing to himself when no one else was present. He sang of having once been a forest kelp laborer, of how the wind-sharks and wind-sharks had struck the net and shaken his hands, of how Dr. Fufifibo had swallowed his notebook with an enormous yawn, and of how his sister had been stolen long ago by the magician Tejimaa and had there become a star. Then he sang of his present greatness, of his hundred dozens of medals, of how even the crust of the earth bowed to his decisions. These songs were foolish, but they pleased him, because in them his whole long strange road from hunger to power flashed before him like lightning.

His subordinates were easily carried away by such things. If Nenem laughed, they laughed louder. If he sang, they rose and shouted, "Bravo, Pennennennennen Nenem. Bravo, Penpenpenpen Penem." Once, in a place full of bright kurare flowers under a burning noon sky, they were all so seized by excitement that they began to dance and cry, "Figaro, figaroto, figarotto," until their robes flew and their shadows broke apart like soldiers in battle. Far off, the blue-glittering mountain called Sanmutori threw up black smoke and golden fire, and to those around him it almost seemed that Nenem's joy itself had made the volcano answer.

Nenem, now beyond ordinary calm, ran, danced, shouted, and laughed among them. The flowers flashed, the wind came, and his men cried out his name again and again. For a while he was at the very height of his happiness. But precisely then, in the middle of that wild bright triumph, his foot slipped only a little to the wrong side. It was only a small mistake, hardly more than half a step, and yet that wrong side was not merely another part of the field. It was the side of the human world.

Someone seemed to scream, "Ah, the chief judge has slipped," but Nenem scarcely heard it. His head rang. The bright flower field vanished. In the next moment he found himself standing on hard black jagged rock. In front of him ran an impossibly thin path through gray moss, and above him the sky was terribly high and white. Behind him rose a steep slope which disappeared almost at once into a mass of cloud. Of the shining field of the monster world there was not the smallest sign.

## Part 5

At that moment, in the middle of the dance and the smoke and the bright kurare flowers, Nenem's foot slipped only a little to the wrong side. But that wrong side was not just another patch of field. It was the side of the human world. Someone seemed to cry, "Ah, the Chief Judge has slipped," but Nenem's head was already ringing like metal. In the next instant he stood on hard black jagged rock, with a dreamlike narrow path running through gray moss before him.

The sky above was terribly high and white. Behind him a steep slope rose and soon disappeared into a mass of pure white cloud. There was not the smallest sign of the kurare field where he had just been singing and dancing. In fact, he had come out on the top of a mountain pass leading from Nepal into Tibet. Three poles stood there with many long strips of rag tied to them, flapping and rattling in the wind.

Nenem saw them and felt a sudden cold fear. He knew at once that they were the prayer flags and charm-banners of Tibet. He turned and fled without even thinking. He ran and ran over the black cruel ridges, trying only to get away, but then he saw two pilgrims coming toward him along the narrow path, singing in thin high voices. Nenem flung himself about desperately, trying somehow to get back into the monster world before they reached him.

But the pilgrims had already seen him. They were so astonished that they threw themselves flat on the ground and began chanting some strange prayer or spell. Nenem felt his whole body go numb. His strength left him, his head rang once more, and then everything went black. After some time he heard a voice close to his ear saying again and again, "Chief Judge. Chief Judge. Be steady, Chief Judge."

Nenem opened his eyes in surprise. He was lying once more in the field of kurare flowers, and the thirty judges and prosecutors were gathered round him in deep concern. "What has happened to me?" Nenem asked. The chief judge beside him answered, "Your Honor fell out of the sky just now. How do you feel now?"

Nenem sat up slowly and pressed his hand to his head. Then, in a low broken voice, he said, "Thank you. I am all right now. But I have truly committed unlawful appearance myself."

He bowed his head and went on, "Today I must judge myself. Ah, I should resign. From tomorrow onward I should clean the university for a hundred days. Everything is over." Then, to the surprise of all his subordinates, Nenem began to cry. At once the thirty judges and prosecutors also cried aloud together. Their great crying rolled over the ground in waves, and when those waves reached far-off Sanmutori, the mountain answered with a fifth eruption.

Fire rose red against the sky. "Gaan, dorodoro, dorodoro," the mountain roared, and a hard wind came rushing over the field. The broken kurare flowers trembled. But even then Nenem did not rise. He sat there weeping among his men, no longer a glorious judge in that moment, but once again the lonely child who had lost his sister in the famine year and who now knew, even at the height of power, how easily a single wrong step could throw everything into ruin.

[The surviving manuscript breaks off here.]

## The Biography of Gusuko Budori [Gusukō Budori no Denki]

### Part 1

Gusuko Budori was born in the great forest of Ihatov. His father was a famous woodcutter named Gusukonadori, a man who could fell even the largest tree as gently as if he were putting a baby to sleep. Budori had a younger sister named Neri, and the two of them played every day in the forest. They went so far that they could only just hear the sound of their father sawing wood, “goshi, goshi,” from very far behind them. There they picked wild raspberries, cooled them in spring water, and took turns imitating the call of mountain doves, until real birds answered sleepily from one side of the wood and then the other.

When their mother sowed barley in the little field before the house, Budori and Neri spread a mat on the road and sat there boiling orchid flowers in a tin can. All sorts of birds flew over their dry tousled heads, crying out as if greeting them on purpose. Later, when Budori grew old enough to go to school, the forest became lonely during the day, but in the afternoons he and Neri again wandered through it together. They wrote the names of trees on trunks with red clay and charcoal, and they sang loudly as they went. On a white birch where hop vines hung from both sides like a gate, Budori once wrote, “Cuckoo Bird, Do Not Pass.”

So Budori turned ten and Neri turned seven. But in that year something went wrong with the world. From spring onward the sun looked unnaturally white. The magnolia trees that should have burst into white blossom after the snow melted did not bloom at all. Even in May sleet came down again and again in dirty clumps, and by the end of July no real heat had arrived. The barley sown the year before produced only white empty heads, and most fruits opened flowers and then dropped them without setting any flesh.

At last autumn came, but the chestnut trees made only green burrs without nuts inside, and the grain called oryza, the most important food in that land, failed completely. Panic spread through the fields. Budori’s father and mother went often toward the open country with loads of firewood, and in winter they hauled large

logs to town by sled many times, yet they always came home with only a little flour or came back empty-handed and pale with worry. Somehow that winter passed. In spring they sowed the precious seed they had saved, but that year too turned out exactly like the one before.

When autumn came again, real famine at last had begun. Children no longer came properly to school. Budori's father and mother stopped their ordinary work and spent whole days in anxious talk. Sometimes one of them went to town and brought back a handful of millet, and sometimes they returned with nothing at all and faces so hopeless that Budori and Neri scarcely dared look at them. All through that winter the family lived on acorns, kudzu roots, bracken roots, soft bark from trees, and whatever else could be chewed and swallowed. By spring both father and mother seemed almost like people with some terrible illness.

One day Budori's father sat with his head in his hands for a very long time. Then suddenly he stood and said, "I am going into the forest to look around," and he went out staggering as if he were drunk. When darkness came, he had not returned. Budori and Neri asked their mother what had become of him, but she only looked at them and said nothing. On the next evening, when the forest already looked black, she suddenly rose, piled many logs on the fire, and made the whole house bright. Then she said, "I am going to look for your father. You two stay here and eat a little of the flour in that cupboard."

The children burst into tears and ran after her. She turned and scolded them, saying, "What disobedient children you are," and then she hurried into the forest, stumbling but somehow moving quickly all the same. Budori and Neri wandered back and forth crying. At last they could bear it no longer and went into the dark wood themselves. They walked all night around the old hop-vine gate and the spring where they had once played, calling for their mother again and again. Stars flickered between the branches as if trying to speak, and birds flew suddenly through the dark from time to time, but nowhere was there any human answer.

At last the two children stumbled home and fell into a sleep like death. Budori woke only in the afternoon of the next day. Then he remembered what his mother had said about the cupboard. When he opened it, he found bags of

buckwheat flour and acorns still left inside. He shook Neri awake, and the two of them licked the flour and made a fire in the hearth as they had seen their parents do. In that way about twenty days passed in a dazed half-life of eating a little, waiting, and not understanding what had truly happened.

Then one day a man's voice came from the doorway. "Hello. Is anyone here?" Budori jumped up, thinking for one burning instant that his father had come back, but when he looked, he saw only a sharp-eyed man carrying a basket on his back. The man took out a round rice cake from the basket, tossed it lightly, and said, "I have come to help this district in the famine. Come now. Eat whatever you like." The two children stood there stunned until he repeated, "Go on. Eat." Then they began to nibble fearfully.

The man watched them with bright hard eyes. At last he said, "You are good children. But merely being good is worth nothing. Come with me, and I will take you somewhere better. The boy is too strong now, and I cannot take two. But you, little girl, if you come to town with me, I will let you eat bread every day." Neither child answered. Then, all at once, the man snatched up Neri, thrust her into the basket on his back, and ran out of the house shouting, "O-hoi-hoi. O-hoi-hoi."

Only when they were already outside did Neri begin screaming. Budori cried, "Thief. Thief," and ran after them in tears. But the man was already past the edge of the forest and racing out across the grassland beyond. Neri's crying came back only as a thin trembling sound in the distance. Budori ran as far as the forest edge, shouting and sobbing, but at last he grew so weak that he fell flat to the ground. There, with his chest empty and the world gone dark around him, the first part of his childhood ended.

## Part 2

When Budori opened his eyes again, a flat unpleasant voice sounded right above his head. "So you are awake at last. Do you still think the famine is going on? Get up and help me." Looking up, Budori saw a man in a brown mushroom-shaped hat, with a coat hanging over a shirt and some strange wire thing in his

hand. “Has the famine really passed?” Budori asked. “And what kind of work do you want?” The man answered, “Netting.”

“Netting? Here in the forest?” Budori said. “What is it for?” “For raising silkworms,” the man replied. Budori looked ahead and saw two other men already climbing chestnut trees on ladders and throwing or pulling something in the air, though he could see no net or thread at all. “Can silkworms really be raised like that?” he asked. The man frowned and answered, “Of course they can. What an annoying child you are. Do you think I would build a factory where they could not be raised? Many people live by this work. And this whole forest now belongs to me, so either you help here or you go somewhere else and starve.”

Budori almost burst into tears, but he held them back and said, “Then I will help. But please teach me.” The man stretched the wire thing in his hands and showed him that it became a kind of ladder. Then he hooked it onto a chestnut branch and said, “Now climb. Take this little ball with you. When you are high enough, throw it over the top of the tree and into the sky.” Budori obeyed. The ladder was so narrow and sharp that it cut into his hands and feet like wire, and when he reached high up in the tree, the air itself seemed to shake.

“Higher. Higher,” the man shouted from below. “Now throw it. Throw it into the sky. Why are you trembling? Coward. Throw.” Budori gathered all his strength and threw the little ball upward with both hands. In the next instant the sun seemed to turn black, the world flipped over, and he fell upside down. Somehow the man below caught him. But instead of praising him, he became furious. “You soft useless thing,” he cried. “If I had not caught you, your head would have burst open. Remember that I am your savior.”

Budori, still dizzy and weak, could do nothing but climb again with another little ball. The man kept sending him from tree to tree. “Good. You are getting better,” he said at last. “Now do not be lazy. Any chestnut tree will do.” Budori threw two or three more, but soon his whole body grew heavy and his breath came in painful gasps. He thought of going home. Yet when he turned toward the place where his house should have been, he stood in astonishment. The house now had a red pipe chimney, and over the door hung a sign saying, “Ihatov Tegusu Factory.”

Then the same man came out smoking and said, "Here, child, I brought you food. Eat this and earn a little more before dark." "I do not want to," Budori said. "I am going home." The man gave a dry laugh. "Home? That is no longer your home. It is my factory. The house and this whole stretch of forest are mine now." Budori felt as if everything inside him had gone numb. He ate the steamed bread in silence and then threw ten more little balls into the sky because there was nothing else to do.

That night he slept curled up in a corner of what had once been his own house. The man and several strangers sat late by the fire drinking and talking. From the next morning onward Budori worked in the forest just as he had done the day before. After a month all the chestnut trees had been netted. Then the man hung small boards covered with millet-like grains on the branches. When spring deepened and the whole forest turned bright blue-green, countless tiny pale worms climbed up from those boards into the trees by threads so fine they could hardly be seen.

After that Budori and the others were made to gather firewood every day. The wood rose in heaps around the house. By the time the chestnut trees were covered with long pale flower tassels, the worms too had become the same color and shape as those flowers, and they ate the leaves of the whole forest until the trees looked as if they had been stripped by fire. Soon afterward the worms began to spin large yellow cocoons, one in each square of the unseen nets. Then the tegusu master became almost mad with greed. He drove Budori and the others hard, made them gather the cocoons into baskets, and boiled them one after another in great pots while turning the reels by hand to draw out the thread.

Day and night the three spinning wheels went on, "gara-gara, gara-gara," and yellow thread filled the hut higher and higher. Outside, from cocoons left behind, large white moths began to emerge in numbers. The man's face became like that of a demon. He brought four more workers from the fields and made everyone labor even harder, yet the moths increased every day until at last the whole forest seemed full of flying snow. Then one day six or seven freight wagons came, loaded all the thread, and went off toward town. One by one the workers followed

them, until only Budori was left.

At the very end the man said to him with a strange grinning face, "I will leave enough food in the house for you to last until spring. Until then, you keep watch over the forest and the factory." Then he too went off after the last wagon. Budori stood there in complete emptiness. The house was filthy and torn as if after a storm, and the forest itself looked like land after a mountain fire. On the next day, while cleaning inside and outside the building, Budori found an old cardboard box near the place where the master usually sat. Inside were about ten books.

Some of them were full of pictures of silkworms and machines and were too difficult for him to read. Others showed drawings and names of trees and plants. Budori spent that whole winter copying the letters and figures from those books with all the strength of his mind. He wrote again and again, trying to teach himself. Then spring came, and the same man returned in grand clothes with six or seven new workers. The old work began all over again. Nets were hung, yellow boards were fastened, the worms climbed, and Budori and the others began once more to gather wood.

Then one morning, while they were working, the ground suddenly shook. Far away there was a great booming sound. After a little while the daylight turned strangely dark, and fine ash began to fall, "basa-basa," until the whole forest turned white. The workers crouched in confusion under the trees. Then the tegusu master came running in great panic. "It is no use. It is an eruption," he cried. "The tegusu are all dead under the ash. Everyone leave at once. Budori, you may stay if you like, but I will leave no food for you this time, and this place is dangerous. Go out into the fields and earn something there instead."

Then he ran off without another word. When Budori went back to the factory, no one was there. So he too walked out toward the open country, stepping sadly over the white ash and the footprints of those who had gone before him. He walked for half a day through the forest. Whenever the wind blew, the ash fell from the branches like smoke or snow, but as he came nearer the fields it grew thinner, until the trees showed green again. At last he came out and stared in amazement.

From right before his feet all the way to the distant white clouds, the land

looked like great cards laid side by side in beautiful pink, green, and gray. When he went closer, he saw that the pink parts were covered with low flowers and busy bees, the green parts with thick short grass pushing up little heads, and the gray parts with shallow muddy swamps. Each patch was divided by narrow earthen banks, and men worked there with horses, digging and stirring the mud. As Budori walked among them, he came upon two men standing in the middle of the path arguing in loud voices. One was a red-bearded man, and the other an old man in a white hat. Budori bowed and said at once, "If you need help, would you let me work for you?"

### Part 3

The red-bearded man looked at Budori and then burst into laughter. "Good, good," he said. "I will have you handle the horse stick. Come along with me at once. We shall see by autumn whether I win or lose. At a time like this I would even hire a bean vine if it could help." The old man in the white hat only muttered, "If he does not listen to old advice, he will cry later," and stood watching them go. So Budori followed the red-bearded farmer and began work at once.

Every day Budori went into the swamp fields and drove the horse while the mud was stirred and turned. Little by little the pink cards and the green cards of the field were all crushed into gray-brown pools. Again and again the horse splashed muddy water hard into Budori's face. As soon as one swamp plot was finished, they entered the next. The days grew so long that he sometimes no longer knew whether he was truly walking or only dreaming that he walked. The mud began to feel like syrup, the water like soup, and the drifting clouds above, sour-sweet in shape and color, looked so free and enviable that he could hardly bear to watch them.

After about twenty days the swamp plots had at last all become thick smooth mud. Then, starting the next morning, the master grew excited and sharp-tempered. With many helpers gathered from all around, he planted the whole muddy field with rows of green rice shoots like little spears. That work took ten

days. Afterward Budori went with the others to repay the labor they had borrowed by working at many neighboring places in turn. When that was finally done, they came back again to their own swamp field and began pulling weeds every day. The master's rice darkened into such a deep green that at a distance it looked almost black, while the next man's field remained a pale weak green, so that the boundary between the two could be seen even from far away.

Seven days later the weeding was done, and again they went off to help elsewhere. Then one morning, while crossing their own field, the master suddenly cried out, "Ah," and stood stiff as a post. Even the color of his lips turned watery blue while he stared straight ahead. "The sickness has come," he said at last. Budori, thinking the man meant himself, asked, "Does your head hurt?" "Not me," the master said. "The oryza. Look there." Budori bent down and saw that every leaf was covered with tiny red specks unlike anything he had seen before.

The master walked all around the field in silence and then went home looking completely beaten. Budori followed in worry. The master wrung out a cloth in water, laid it over his head, and lay down on the wooden floor without speaking. A little later his wife came running in from outside and cried, "Is it true the rice has fallen sick?" "Yes," the master answered. "It is no use now." "Can nothing be done?" she asked. "Nothing, I think. It is exactly as it was five years ago." Then she began to weep and scold at once. "That is why I told you not to gamble on such farming. And the old man warned you too."

Suddenly the master sat up again with new force. "All right," he cried. "Do you think one of the great farmers of the Ihatov plain will be defeated by something like this? No. Next year I will do it. Budori, since you came here, you have never once slept as long as you wished. Good. Then sleep for five days or ten if you like. While you sleep, I will perform an interesting trick in that swamp field. But this winter, understand, everyone in the house will live on buckwheat. You like buckwheat, do you not?" Then he jammed on his hat and strode out at once before anyone could answer.

Budori meant to do as he was told and go sleep in the shed, yet the field troubled him too much, and before long he drifted slowly back there. The master

was already standing alone on the embankment with his arms folded. The whole field was full of water now. The rice plants only just showed their leaves above the surface, and over all the water there floated a shining layer of oil. The master said, "I am trying to steam the disease to death." Budori asked, "Will the disease die in oil?" The master drew in his neck and answered, "If a man were plunged in oil up to the head, would he not die?"

Just then the owner of the lower field came charging over with his shoulders stiff and his breath coming hard. "Why are you putting oil into the water?" he shouted. "It is all flowing into my side." The master answered with terrible calm, "I am putting oil into the water because disease has come into the rice." "Then why are you sending it onto my land?" the man cried. "Because water flows, and the oil flows with it," the master answered. "Then why did you not close the water mouth?" shouted the neighbor. "Because that one is not my water mouth," said the master. The neighbor became so angry that he could no longer speak. He plunged into the water and began piling mud against his own water gate with both hands.

At that the master smiled for the first time all day. "That man is difficult," he said softly to Budori. "If I had blocked it on my side, he would have become angry for that instead. So I let him do it himself. Once that place is closed, the water will stand over the tops of the rice all night. Come now. Let us go home." So they did. But on the next morning, when they came again, the master pulled a leaf from the water and studied it with a gloomy face. The next day was the same. The next day was the same. The next was the same. Then, on the following morning, he suddenly seemed to make up his mind.

"Budori," he said, "we are going to sow buckwheat here. Go over there and break the neighbor's water mouth." Budori obeyed at once. The oil-covered water rushed into the next field with frightful force. "He will surely come in anger now," Budori thought. And sure enough, around noon the same neighbor arrived carrying a large sickle. "Why are you sending oil into my field?" he shouted. The master answered from deep in his belly, "If oil flows, what of it?" "All my oryza will die," the neighbor cried. "Will all your oryza die, or will it not?" said the

master. "Look first at my own field. I covered it with oil for four whole days, and here it stands. The red marks were from sickness, and the strong growth was from the oil."

"Does oil become fertilizer, then?" the neighbor asked, already less fierce than before. "Whether it becomes fertilizer or not, I do not know," the master replied, "but at least oil is oil, is it not?" "That is true enough," the neighbor admitted, and now he was completely calmed. The water kept draining away, and the rice roots soon stood fully exposed. All of them were scorched and mottled red. The master said, "Now, in my field, we begin harvesting the rice." Then he and Budori pulled up the ruined plants and threw them aside.

After that they sowed buckwheat in the emptied swamp field. The master stood over it like a gambler staking his whole life on one throw, and Budori, watching him, understood that this man could not stop taking such chances even if the world broke in two. Autumn came. The buckwheat flowered white. Then the cold season drew near, and for a while it seemed that perhaps the master had truly won. Yet Budori also saw more clearly every day how unstable such fortune was, and in the back of his mind there remained the memory of the books from the tegusu factory and the strange longing to know more than soil, oil, and wagered crops could teach him.

So he worked on through that season in the swamp fields, turning mud, carrying tools, and doing whatever he was told, while somewhere deep inside himself another road was slowly beginning to open.

#### Part 4

In the years that followed, Budori went on working, learning, and moving from place to place until at last he came, by means of a card from Dr. Kubo, to the great brown building of the Ihatov Volcano Bureau. Behind it stood high white pillars like hanging clusters against the night sky. When he rang at the entrance, a man came at once, took the card, looked at it once, and led him straight into a vast room. There sat a fine kind-looking man with some white in his hair, writing while

holding a receiver to his ear. All along one wall there stood a great raised map of Ihatov, with its towns, rivers, fields, and mountains shown in colors, while red, orange, and yellow lights shone and changed over the volcanoes.

Below the map, black machines stood in rows, more than Budori could count, clicking, humming, and writing. The man put down the receiver, handed Budori his own card, and said, "So you are Gusuko Budori. I am Pennen, chief engineer here." Budori bowed deeply and could hardly speak for wonder. Pennen then showed him how the bureau watched the mountains, the gas, the tides, and the weather over the whole land. From that day Budori entered the service of the bureau and began a new life, one in which books, numbers, machines, mountains, clouds, and the lives of countless people were all tied together.

He worked with complete devotion. He learned how to read the movements of gas, how to judge the signs of dangerous mountains, and how to carry out difficult work before eruption or collapse could bring ruin. In time Budori became an engineer-in-training, and most of the year he moved from volcano to volcano across Ihatov, checking instruments, repairing towers, or helping with dangerous operations. The labor was hard and often lonely, yet Budori loved it, because for the first time he felt that all his strength was being used for something larger than the hunger of one house or the greed of one master. He often remembered the swamp fields and the tegusu forest, and that memory only made his new work dearer to him.

Four years passed like this. As Dr. Kubo had planned, tidal power stations were set all along the coast of Ihatov, and white iron towers rose one after another beside the little observation huts on the volcanoes. One spring the bureau put up posters in towns and villages saying that nitrogen fertilizer would be made to fall from the sky. Budori himself took part in that work. High above a sea of cloud, he watched an airship fly from mountain to mountain, laying out a great white net of smoke over the upper air. Then, when Pennen Engineer's voice came through the receiver saying the lower preparations were complete, Budori pressed the button.

At once the shining net over the cloud sea flashed pink, blue, and violet, then faded again into the dark. Pennen's voice soon returned, saying that ammonium

nitrate had begun to come out into the rain below and that if they continued for four more hours, the whole district would have enough for the month. Budori was so happy he felt he might leap into the air. He thought of the old red-bearded master in the swamp fields and the neighbor who had once asked whether oil could become fertilizer. He thought of them listening with joy to the rain and of their rice plants turning rich green by morning. In that moment he knew beyond all doubt that his life had reached the place where it truly belonged.

Yet even greater work still lay ahead. One day it was learned that if the volcano called Sanmutori could be made to erupt at once, its gas would rise into the upper great current, spread around the whole world, and prevent too much heat from escaping from the lower air and the earth. The climate, it was thought, would grow warmer by about five degrees on average. That could save the crops. But there was a terrible condition. The one who carried out the final operation could not escape. Dr. Kubo said so plainly, and Pennen Engineer agreed. When Budori heard this, he said at once, "Please let me do it."

The older men refused. Dr. Kubo told him he was still young and that men who could do his work were not easy to replace. Pennen Engineer said instead that he himself would go, because he was already sixty-three and would count it full happiness to die there. But Budori answered, "There will be many better men after me, men who can work more beautifully and laugh more beautifully than I have done. And if you go now, then all the thinking that still remains after this will have no guide." At last the older engineer lowered his head and could not answer. Three days later the bureau's ship hurried to Carbonado Island, towers were raised, wires connected, and all the work was prepared.

When everything was ready, Budori sent all the others back by ship and remained alone on the island. On the next day the people of Ihatov saw the blue sky turn muddy green and the sun and moon become the color of copper. Then three or four days passed, and little by little the climate grew warmer. The change did not stop. It went on steadily and kindly, and that autumn the harvest across the land was nearly a normal one. All through Ihatov, fathers and mothers who might otherwise have become like Budori's own lost parents were able to live through

the winter in warmth, with food enough and bright firewood in the house.

So, in the very way this story had once begun in sorrow, it ended now in quiet rescue. Many fathers and mothers lived with many Budoris and many Neris through that winter in warm rooms with good food and cheerful fires. Somewhere among all those households, no doubt, there were children once more boiling flowers in cans, imitating birds, and running through the woods. And Budori, who had lost so much and traveled so far through hunger, labor, knowledge, and service, had given his life so that such winters might continue.

The Robe Seen by the Scholar Aramuharad  
[Gakusha Aramuharado no Mita Kimono]

Part 1

In a certain year the scholar Aramuharad taught eleven children. They were all children from rich and important houses. One was the son of a judge who stood just below the king. One was the son of a minister of farming and trade. Another was the oldest son of a wealthy man who produced ten koku of perfumed oil from his land each year. Yet among all of them, Aramuharad felt a special quiet liking for a small child named Serarabaad.

Whenever Serarabaad answered a question, Aramuharad felt as if, far away somewhere, there were a cold and lonely dark-blue sky. Still, he was such a great scholar that he never showed open favor to any one pupil. His school stood in a willow grove at the edge of the city. Every day the children sat on a mouse-colored stone floor. There they recited old sacred songs, counted numbers larger than trillions, added and multiplied, and at the end of the lessons learned about birds, trees, stones, and many other things.

Aramuharad wore a long white robe and a scholar's hat with a hanging cloth that marked his office. He sat on a low chair, holding a long whip in his right hand and a book in his left, and taught in a slow calm voice. On days when the air was pleasantly moist, or on the day after a very difficult lesson of recitation, he often took the children out into the hills. But the story I am telling is, in the end, about a strange robe that Aramuharad saw for only a moment, first one day in his school and then another day in mountain rain.

One day Aramuharad said to the children, "When fire burns, it makes a flame. If you watch a flame carefully, it is a strange thing. It is always moving, and yet it still keeps a shape. Its color changes in many ways. The flame of an ordinary fire is orange, but depending on the wood and the place, it may become very red or strongly yellow. If sulfur burns, it makes a purple flame that almost makes your eyes turn. When copper is heated, it makes a bright blue fire like a green-blue

stone.

“Now, though these colors are different, all flames share the same nature. First, they are always moving upward. Fire is light, and it is always trying to rise. Next, it gives light. Even a weak flame that is hard to see in the sun will clearly brighten a dark place. Fire is always trying to shine and to light things. And one more thing: fire is hot. All fire is hot, and it is always trying to dry what is near it. So fire has these kinds of nature. Why is that so? It is because that is the nature of fire itself. A thing that is hot, bright, drying, and rising is what we call flame.”

Then he said, “Now you all know water too. Water also has its own clear nature, just as fire does. Water cools things. If a cloth is soaked and wrapped around a copper jar in summer, the jar grows cool. If the cloth is changed again and again, it may become almost like ice. So water cools things. Water also makes things wet. And water always tries to go downward. When water is poured into a bowl, it soon becomes still and flat. Mountain lakes often become calm and smooth like mirrors. Why? Because all the water is trying to go down, and so it settles. If a wave rises, it always tries to fall again. So the coolness of water, its wetness, and its downward movement are the nature of water.”

Then Aramuharad looked at the children and said, “And now think of small birds. Think of warblers, wrens, finches, and jays. Their bodies are small and light, and they fly very well. When they move from branch to branch, their wings are so quick that you can hardly see them. When they cross the blue sky, they become only a small shaking point. And they sing very much. A warbler sings clearly in spring. A wren sings almost every time it moves. If you go into a wood where many such birds are singing, it can sound almost like rain.

“Why do birds sing so much? Why do they fly so much? You know the answer. Birds fly because they cannot help flying. They sing because they cannot help singing. It is born in them. So now we have this. Fire is hot and rising. Water is cool and falling. Birds fly and sing. You could think in the same way about fish or beasts. But then what about human beings? In the way that birds cannot help singing and fish cannot help swimming, what is the thing that human beings cannot help doing? Think carefully.”

When Aramuharad said this, he closed his mouth firmly and looked around at the eleven children. They all began to think with all their strength. Some bent a finger to their lips like grown people. Some stared straight down at the floor. Among them, the minister's son Talra became a little red in the face and gave a small twisted smile. Aramuharad saw it at once and said, "Talra, answer." Talra bowed and then looked a little sideways as he answered, "Human beings walk and speak."

Aramuharad smiled. "Good. You answered well. Truly, people cannot help walking. A sick person who has long lain in bed may think, 'If only I could once more stand on my own two feet and walk to the spring in that pleasant place and drink the cold water with my hands, then I could die in peace.' And as you said, human beings also cannot help speaking. It is very painful to keep all one's thoughts inside. Some people even grow ill from it. People want friends because they want to speak openly and listen openly. So yes, people cannot help walking, and they cannot help speaking.

"But is there not something even more important than these? Is there not something for which a person would trade even his feet or his tongue? This is difficult, but think." While Aramuharad spoke, Talra's face first became bright red and then a little pale. Aramuharad said at once, "Talra, answer once more. Is there anything for which you would give up your feet? Or is there nothing at all?" Talra answered like a small lion, "If famine came and everyone were dying, and if losing my feet would stop the famine, I would not regret cutting them off."

Aramuharad was almost moved to tears. "Yes," he said. "You have found something stronger than walking or speaking, something you cannot help doing. Then you are truly my pupil. Your father once climbed onto the altar and prayed for nine days during the bad harvest seven years ago. He did not count his life dear if it might help others. Now then, what do the others say? Branda, speak." A child called Branda straightened himself quickly and answered, "What people cannot help doing more than walking or speaking must be something good." Aramuharad said, "Yes. That is what I wished to say. All people love goodness and justice. Many would even give their lives for them. You have heard many

such stories, and you must never forget them.”

Then he said, “To love justice is just like a bird not being able to stop singing. Serarabaad, you look as if you wish to say something. Speak.” Little Serarabaad seemed surprised for a moment, but then he answered calmly, “I think human beings cannot help thinking about what the truly good thing is.” Aramuharad closed his eyes for a moment. In the darkness behind them he seemed to see blue light everywhere, like little phosphorus flames, and then far away a great bright blue place where splendid trees with golden leaves stood in rows and their tops made a light ringing sound.

He opened his eyes again. The children were all watching him closely. “Yes,” he said. “That too is true. Human beings seek truth. They seek the real road. To seek the true way is as natural to people as flying is to birds. You must remember this well. Human beings cannot help loving the good and seeking the true path. That is human nature. Never forget it. All of you must one day walk through a very hard road in life, a road full of ice, hot sand, fierce rivers, and danger. When you walk it, do not forget these two things. They will protect you. They will teach you.”

Then he said, “Now it is midday. You may stand, rest, and eat.” The children bowed. Aramuharad too rose quietly and went toward his own room. On the way he suddenly closed his eyes once more. Again he saw that beautiful blue scene clearly. And now, in that bright place, he saw four people standing upright, wearing light golden robes, thin and shining like feathers. Aramuharad quickly opened his eyes, bent his head a little as if listening inwardly to something, and went into his room.

## Part 2

Aramuharad walked quietly into the forest with the children gathered around him. When the cold damp air came pressing close over all their bodies at once, the children gave cries of delight. The trees were so high and thick, and the vines were so tangled round them, that the path itself had become quite dark. Only here

and there, very high above, one or two pieces of a dreadful blue sky could be seen through the leaves, and because the forest was so deep, the children loved it all the more.

Talra, the minister's son, ran in front. Whenever he saw a bird, he threw up both hands and chased it. Whenever he found a squirrel, he shouted and tried to frighten it. He ran, stopped, ran again, and seemed almost mad with excitement. The others took turns asking Aramuharad all sorts of questions, and sometimes he had to answer one before he had even finished replying to another. Little Serarabaad, with a small leather water bottle hanging from his shoulder, walked near the back with his head bent down, listening to the other children's questions and Aramuharad's answers, smiling a little as he followed.

The forest grew deeper and deeper, full of oak trees and camphor trees, until even the sky was almost hidden. Then a small boy named Samashaad suddenly found a tall jujube tree and cried out, "A jujube tree. A jujube tree. Can we not get the fruit?" At once all the children and Aramuharad looked up together into the high branches. Aramuharad said, "That tree is too high. We cannot reach its fruit. But you all know the famous story of King Vessantara, do you not?"

The children gathered closer, and Aramuharad went on. "King Vessantara practiced the perfection of giving. Whatever anyone asked of him, he gave. Jewels, robes, food, houses, servants, anything at all, he gave as it was requested. At the last he even gave away the kingdom's white elephant, which was its treasure. The people and his attendants bore it as long as they could, but in the end they feared the country itself would be ruined, and so they drove the king away into the mountains. Then the king went with only his queen, his son, and his daughter into the forest."

He looked up again toward the jujube branches and said, "When the royal children entered the great wood, they saw the fruit hanging high above them and said that they wanted it. But the virtue of Vessantara was so great that even the trees of the forest were moved by it. Their branches bent down of themselves like living things and offered their beautiful fruit to the children. It is said that all who saw it shivered, and even the earth itself trembled three times. Now, we cannot

take these fruits. But if a man truly had the virtue of King Vessantara, and if he were terribly hungry, then surely the branches would again bend down to him. More than that, if such a man merely looked up at the fruit with joy, it would almost be the same as if he had already eaten.”

When he said this, Aramuharad lifted his eyes once more toward the tops of the black trees. A little piece of sky could still be seen there, but suddenly he rubbed his eyes. Only moments before it had been a deep bright blue. Now it had become thick and gray, almost like the color of a mouse, and terribly dark. The trees had begun to sway. The air felt oppressively warm. Rain seemed likely to come at once. “Ah,” he said, “it is going to rain. No matter how quickly we hurry now, we may not escape getting wet. Is any child feeling unwell? No? This rain will be very good for fields and trees, but I did not think it would come so suddenly. We must go back.”

Still, Aramuharad believed there was a little time left before the rain truly fell. Yet before he had even quite finished speaking, the forest had already begun making a sharp “pachi-pachi” sound all around them. Even when one spread both hands, lifted one’s face, and tried to see whether rain itself was already falling, the drops could not yet be clearly seen. Only the broad leaves overhead were striking one another and beginning to sound.

The children all looked upward. Some drew near Aramuharad. Some laughed a little from excitement, though none now ran ahead as Talra had done before. The dark in the forest grew deeper in a strange way, though it was still day. Serarabaad stood there holding his little water bottle in his right hand.

The broad leaves overhead kept striking and sounding.

[The surviving manuscript breaks off here.]

The Morning of My Last Farewell [Eiketsu no Asa]  
(from *Spring and Asura [Haru to Shura]*)

Today,  
my little sister, you will go far away from us.  
Sleet is falling, and outside is strangely bright.  
(Please bring me some snow.)

From the pale red, even darker, sad clouds,  
the sleet falls down, wet and heavy.  
(Please bring me some snow.)

In these two cracked pottery bowls  
with a blue water-plant pattern on them,  
to get the snow that you will eat,  
I rushed out into this dark sleet  
like a bent rifle bullet.  
(Please bring me some snow.)

From the dark clouds, the color of blue-gray lead,  
the sleet falls down, wet and heavy.  
Ah, Toshiko,  
now, at the very time when you are dying,  
to make my whole life bright,  
you asked me  
for one clean bowl of snow like this.  
Thank you, my brave little sister.  
I, too, will go straight forward.  
(Please bring me some snow.)

Between your fierce, fierce fever

and your hard breathing,  
you asked this of me.  
...the last bowl of snow  
that fell from the sky  
of the world called the Milky Way, the sun, and the atmosphere...

On two pieces of granite,  
the sleet gathers sadly.  
I stand on them, dangerously,  
holding the pure white mix  
of snow and water,  
and from this shining pine branch,  
filled with clear, cold drops,  
I will take the last food  
for my gentle little sister.

While we were growing up together,  
I came to know well  
even this blue pattern on the rice bowls,  
and now, today,  
you are leaving them behind.

(Ora Orade Shitori egumo. [I will go alone.] )

Truly, today, you are leaving us.  
Ah, in that closed hospital room,  
inside the dark screen and the mosquito net,  
you are burning softly and pale blue,  
my brave little sister.

Wherever I may choose to take this snow from,

every place is too white.  
From that terrible, broken sky,  
this beautiful snow has come.

(If I am born again,  
next time I will be born  
so that I will not suffer  
so much over only myself.)

For these two bowls of snow  
that you will eat,  
I now pray with all my heart.  
Please let this become ice cream in heaven,  
and bring holy food  
to you and to everyone there.  
I pray for this  
with all the happiness in my life.

Not Giving In to the Rain [Ame ni mo Makezu]

Not giving in to the rain,  
not giving in to the wind,  
not giving in to snow,  
or to the heat of summer,  
having a strong body,  
free from desire,  
never getting angry,  
always smiling quietly,

eating four cups of brown rice a day,  
with miso  
and a little vegetables,

in everything,  
not putting myself first,  
but looking well, listening well, understanding well,  
and not forgetting,

living in a small thatched hut  
in the shade of a pine grove  
out on the fields,

if there is a sick child in the east,  
going there and nursing the child,

if there is a tired mother in the west,  
going there and carrying her bundles of rice,

if there is someone near death in the south,

going there and saying there is no need to be afraid,

if there is fighting or a lawsuit in the north,  
saying, "It is pointless, so stop it,"

shedding tears in time of drought,  
walking around in confusion in a cold summer,

being called a blockhead by everyone,  
not praised,  
not cared about,

that is  
the kind of person  
I want to become.

## Wild Pear [Yamanashi]

These are two blue magic-lantern pictures of the bottom of a small valley stream.

### I. May

Two little crab children were talking on the pale blue bottom of the water.

“Clambon laughed.”

“Clambon laughed with a bubbling sound.”

“Clambon jumped and laughed.”

“Clambon laughed with a bubbling sound.”

Up above them, and to the sides, everything looked blue, dark, and hard, like steel. Across that smooth ceiling, many small dark bubbles were flowing.

“Clambon was laughing.”

“Clambon laughed with a bubbling sound.”

“Then why did Clambon laugh?”

“I don’t know.”

The small bubbles flowed on. The little crabs also let out five or six bubbles in a row, pop, pop, pop. Shaking as they went, the bubbles shone like mercury and rose up at a slant.

Then, with a quick flash of its silver-colored belly, a fish passed over their heads.

“Clambon died.”

“Clambon was killed.”

“Clambon is dead now...”

“It was killed.”

“Then why was it killed?” said the older crab, putting two of the four legs on his right side on his younger brother’s flat head.

“I don’t know.”

The fish quickly came back again and went downstream.

“Clambon laughed.”

“It laughed.”

Suddenly it became bright. Golden sunlight came down into the water like a dream.

A net of light from the waves stretched and shrank beautifully over the white rocks on the bottom. From the bubbles and tiny bits of dust, straight shadow-sticks stood in lines through the water at a slant.

Now the fish broke up all that golden light into pieces, and its own body changed into a strange iron color that shone from below. Then it went up the stream again.

“Why does that fish go back and forth like that?” asked the younger crab, moving his eyes as if the light was too bright.

“It is doing something bad. It is taking something.”

“Taking something?”

“Yes.”

Then the fish came back again from upstream. This time it came slowly and calmly. Without moving its fins or tail, it let the water carry it, and it came with its mouth round like a ring. Its shadow slid black and quiet over the net of light on the bottom.

“The fish is...”

Just then it happened. Suddenly white bubbles rose at the ceiling, and something blue and shining, like a bright bullet, came flying in all at once.

The older crab clearly saw that the front of that blue thing was black and sharp like the point of a compass. The next moment, the fish’s white belly flashed once and turned over. It seemed to rise upward, but after that, neither the blue thing nor the shape of the fish could be seen. The golden net of light kept wavering, and the bubbles kept flowing on.

The two little crabs were so frightened that they could not even make a sound.

Then their father crab came out.

“What is the matter? You are shaking.”

“Father, something strange came just now.”

“What kind of thing?”

“It was blue and shining. The end was black and sharp like this. And when it came, the fish went up.”

“Were its eyes red?”

“I don’t know.”

“Hm. But that was a bird. It is called a kingfisher. It is all right. Don’t worry. It won’t bother us.”

“Father, where did the fish go?”

“The fish? The fish went to a terrible place.”

“That is scary, Father.”

“There, there, it is all right. Don’t worry. Look, birch flowers are floating down. See? They are pretty.”

Together with the bubbles, many white birch petals came sliding across the ceiling.

“I’m scared, Father,” said the younger crab too.

The net of light wavered, stretching and shrinking, and the shadows of the petals slid quietly over the sand.

## II. December

By now the crab children had grown quite big, and the view on the bottom had changed completely between summer and autumn.

Soft white round stones had rolled there. Small grains of crystal shaped like tiny drills, and pieces of gold-colored mica, had also flowed down and come to rest there.

Down to the bottom of that cold water, the moonlight passed through completely, clear like the glass of a lemonade bottle. On the ceiling, the waves looked as if they were making a pale blue fire burn and go out again and again. All around was silent, and only the sound of the waves came echoing, as if from very far away.

The crab children did not sleep, because the moon was so bright and the

water was so clear. They came out and for a while said nothing. They let out bubbles and looked up toward the sky above.

“My bubbles are bigger after all.”

“Brother, you are making them big on purpose. If I wanted to, I could make mine even bigger.”

“Then do it. Oh, is that all? Now watch me do it. See? Big, right?”

“They are not big. They are the same.”

“Yours looks bigger because it is closer to you. Then let’s do it together. Ready? There.”

“Mine are bigger after all.”

“Really? Then I’ll do one more.”

“That doesn’t count. You stretched yourself up too much.”

Then Father Crab came out again.

“Go to sleep now. It is late. Tomorrow I won’t take you to Isado.”

“Father, whose bubbles are bigger, ours?”

“Your older brother’s, I think.”

“No, that’s wrong. Mine are bigger,” said the younger crab, almost ready to cry.

Just then, plop.

A big round black thing fell from the ceiling, sank far down, and then rose again. Gold spots flashed on it.

“A kingfisher!” said the crab children, pulling in their necks.

Father Crab stretched out both his eyes as far as he could, like little telescopes. He looked very carefully and then said,

“No, it isn’t. That is a wild pear. It is floating away. Let’s follow it and see. Ah, what a good smell.”

Sure enough, the moonlit water all around them was full of the sweet smell of wild pear.

The three crabs followed after the wild pear as it floated along, bobbing softly.

As they walked sideways, their three black shadows on the bottom became six dancing shapes, chasing the round shadow of the wild pear.

Before long, the water began to make a soft rustling sound. The waves on the ceiling raised bluer and bluer flames. The wild pear turned sideways, caught on a tree branch, and stopped there. Over it, a rainbow of moonlight gathered thickly.

“You see? It really is a wild pear. It is nicely ripe. It smells good, doesn’t it?”

“It looks delicious, Father.”

“Wait, wait. If we wait about two more days, it will sink down to the bottom. Then, all by itself, delicious wine will be made. Now then, let us go back and sleep. Come along.”

The crab father and his two children went back to their hole.

The waves raised their pale blue flames more and more, wavering gently. It looked as if they were blowing out diamond dust.

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And now my magic-lantern show is finished.