

## **AI-Generated Graded Readers**

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### **About This Edition**

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was translated from Japanese into English and simplified using ChatGPT for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

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

### **Source Text**

Original work: Botchan (坊っちゃん)

Author: Natsume Sōseki (夏目漱石)

Source: Aozora Bunko (青空文庫)

<https://www.aozora.gr.jp/>

Original Japanese text available at:

<https://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000148/card752.html>

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Natsume Sōseki, *Botchan (Young Master)* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified from the Japanese by ChatGPT)

## Part 1

I got my wild nature from my parents, and because of it I lost many things from the time I was a boy. When I was in school, I once jumped down from the second floor of the school building and hurt my back so badly that I could not stand well for about a week. There was no deep reason for it. I was looking out from the new building when one of my classmates laughed and said, “You act big, but you cannot jump from there. You are a coward.” So I jumped. When a servant carried me home, my father opened his big eyes and said, “What fool jumps from the second floor and hurts himself like that?” I answered, “Next time I will jump without getting hurt.”

I did many foolish things like that. Once I got a small knife from a relative and showed it to my friends in the sun. One boy said, “It shines, but I do not think it can cut.” I said, “It can cut anything,” and he told me to cut my own finger if that was true. So I cut the back of my thumb, and even now the mark is still there. Another time I hid by the garden gate and caught Kantaro, the pawnshop boy next door, stealing chestnuts from our yard. He was older and stronger than I was, but he bit my arm, so I threw him over the low fence into his own yard.

I caused other trouble too. Once I fought with boys in a field and crushed young plants that a farmer had just grown. Another time I blocked a water pipe in a rice field because I did not know what it was, and the water stopped running. After that, the farmer came to our house in great anger, and I think my family had to pay him money. When I think about those days now, I can see that my father and mother had good reason to worry. In truth, I became almost the kind of man they thought I would become. I am still alive now only because I somehow did not end up in jail.

My father did not love me at all. My mother liked my older brother much more than she liked me. My brother had very white skin and liked to copy actors and

play women's parts for fun. Every time my father looked at me, he said, "This boy will never become anything good." My mother said, "He is too rough. I am afraid of what will happen to him." They were not wrong, and I knew that even then. When people in your own house talk about you like that, you stop hoping for much kindness from anyone.

A little before my mother died, I hit my side badly on the kitchen stove when I turned too fast. She became angry and cried, "I do not even want to see your face." So I went to stay with relatives. Then, before I understood how serious her illness was, she died. When I came home, I only thought that maybe I should have behaved better for a few days. My brother said, "You are a bad son. Mother died early because of you." I became so angry that I slapped him at once, and then of course I was scolded again.

After my mother died, the three of us lived together: my father, my brother, and I. My father did nothing but say, again and again, "You are no good." My brother studied English and planned to work in business, but we did not get along. We fought often, and sometimes it was over very small things. One day, while we were playing chess, he trapped me with a mean little trick and looked pleased when I got into trouble. I became angry and threw a chess piece at his forehead and made it bleed. My father shouted that he would throw me out of the family, and perhaps he would have done it if one person had not begged him to stop.

That person was Kiyō. She had served our family for many years and was already an old woman. I heard that she had once come from a good family, but after the old days ended, her family lost everything, and she had to work as a servant. For some strange reason, she loved me more than anyone else in the world did. My father was tired of me, my mother had lost patience with me, and the boys around me said I was rough and bad, but Kiyō treated me like a treasure. When nobody else was near, she would say, "You are honest. You have a good heart." I never understood why she thought so.

After my mother died, Kiyō cared for me even more. She bought me sweet cakes with her own money, brought hot food to me at night, and gave me socks, pencils, and notebooks. One day she even brought me three yen and said, "You

have no pocket money, so please use this.” I was secretly very happy, but then I dropped the purse into the toilet pit by mistake. When I told Kiyō, she did not get angry. She took a bamboo pole, pulled the purse out, washed it, dried the wet paper money by the fire, and later somehow brought me silver coins instead. I said I would pay her back one day, but I never did.

Kiyō always gave me such things only when my father and brother were not there. I did not like that. I hated taking things in secret, even from a person who loved me. So I once asked, “Why do you give things only to me and not to my brother?” Kiyō answered very calmly, “Your father buys things for your brother, so he does not need anything from me.” That was not really true, but Kiyō saw everything through her love for me. In her eyes, anything that helped me was right, and anything that did not help me was wrong.

Kiyō believed with all her heart that I would become a great man in the future. She thought my brother, who studied hard, would never be useful, while I, who always caused trouble, would surely rise in the world. Because she said that so often, I half believed it too. One day I asked her, “What kind of man will I become?” She thought for a while and said, “You will ride in a fine carriage and live in a house with a grand entrance.” That was all. Even then I knew it was foolish, but her foolish faith made me warm inside. In our house, where my father blamed me and my brother fought with me, Kiyō alone believed that I would become something fine.

## Part 2

Six years after my mother died, my father also died. It was early in the year, and after that our house quickly broke apart. In April I finished middle school, and in June my brother finished his business school. He found work at a company in Kyushu and said he had to leave Tokyo. He also said that we must sell the house, sell the old family things, and live apart from that time on.

I told him he could do as he liked. I did not want to live under his care, and I knew we would only fight if we stayed together. If I depended on him, I would

have to bow my head to him, and I hated that thought. I was ready to do any work at all if I had to eat. So my brother sold the old things in the house for very little money and then sold the house and land through an agent.

By that time I had already moved to a small cheap room in Kanda. I still did not know what I would do in life, but I knew one thing clearly: I would not go back to my brother. Kiyō was very sad to see the old house pass into other hands after she had lived there so long. She kept saying, “If only you were a little older, this house could have become yours.” She did not understand such matters very well. She believed that if I only waited long enough, good things would somehow come to me.

The hardest question was what would happen to Kiyō. My brother could not take her all the way to Kyūshū, and Kiyō herself did not want to go there. I had only one small room and could not even care for myself well, so I had no place for her. When I asked what she would do, she answered sadly, “Until you have your own house and wife, I will live with my nephew.” Her nephew worked at a court and had asked her before to come live with him, but she had always stayed with our family instead.

Two days before my brother left, he came to my room and gave me six hundred yen. He said, “Use this for business, or use it for study. Do as you like. But after this, I cannot help you anymore.” I had not expected such a clean end between us, but I thanked him and took the money. Then he gave me fifty yen more and said, “Please give this to Kiyō.” I agreed, and after we parted at Shimbashi Station, I never saw my brother again.

That night I lay in bed and thought about the six hundred yen for a long time. I knew business would not suit me. Even if I tried it, I did not have the face or the mind for buying and selling, and the money was not enough for any big plan. So I decided to use it for school. If I spent two hundred yen a year, I could study for three years, and that seemed simple enough.

I did not love study very much, and I hated language and books even more than other subjects. But one day I happened to pass the School of Physics and saw a notice asking for students. I went in, took the rulebook, and entered at once. That,

too, came from the same wild blood in me. I always moved first and thought later. Still, once I entered, I stayed there for three years.

I was not a very good student. In truth, it was often easier to count my place from the bottom than from the top. But a strange thing happened: after three years, I graduated. I thought it was funny myself, but there was no reason to complain, so I accepted my diploma and left. Eight days later, the principal called me and said that a middle school in Shikoku needed a math teacher. The pay would be forty yen a month, and he asked if I would go.

I had never planned to become a teacher, and I had no wish to leave Tokyo. Still, I had no other work ready for me, so I answered at once, "Yes, I will go." During the three years at school, I had lived quietly in my poor room and fought with nobody. Compared with the rest of my life, those years were easy. But now I had to leave even that and go far away. Until then, the only place outside Tokyo I had ever seen was Kamakura on a school trip.

Even after I gave up my room, I still went to see Kiyō at her nephew's house. Her nephew treated me kindly, but Kiyō always made me uneasy because she praised me too much in front of him. She talked as if I would soon buy a fine house in Kojimachi and take a great job in some big office. Sometimes she even told him stories of the foolish things I had done as a child, and I had to sit there with a red face while she spoke on and on. To her old mind, I was still her young master, and so I had to be an important man in the eyes of others as well.

Three days before I left, I went to see her again and found her resting in a little cold room because she had caught a chill. The moment she saw me, she sat up and asked, "Botchan, when will you have your own house?" She still believed that once I finished school, money would rise into my pocket by itself. I said plainly, "Not soon. I am going to the country." She looked deeply disappointed, and I felt sorry for her at once.

So I tried to cheer her and said, "I am going, but I will come back soon. I will surely come back next summer. What shall I bring you from there?" She thought for a while and then said, "Please bring me bamboo candy from Echigo." I had never heard of such candy, and in any case I was not going that way at all. When

I told her so, she asked very seriously, “Then where are you going? Is it beyond Hakone, or before Hakone?” She was enough to make a man tired, but because she was so serious, I could not laugh at her.

On the day I left, she came early and worried over every little thing. On the way she bought tooth powder, toothpicks, and a towel at a small shop and pushed them into my leather bag, though I said I did not need them. At the station, when I climbed into the train, she looked hard into my face and said in a low voice, “This may be our last farewell. Please take good care of yourself.” Her eyes were full of tears. I did not cry, but I was very close to it, and when the train began to move, I looked back and saw her still standing there, small and alone.

### Part 3

When the ship stopped, a small boat came out from the shore. The boatman wore very little, and at once I thought I had come to a wild place. The sun was strong, and the sea shone so brightly that my eyes hurt. I asked a man on the ship if this was the place where I should get off, and he said yes. From the sea, the town looked no bigger than a fishing village. I thought, “No one can live in a place like this,” but I had no choice except to go ashore.

As soon as I reached land, I stopped the nearest boy and asked where the middle school was. The boy only stared at me and said he did not know. In a place so small, I could not believe that answer. Just then a man in odd clothes came up and told me to follow him. He led me to an inn called Minatoya, and the women there all spoke together and asked me to come in. Their voices were so smooth and polite that I disliked the place at once.

I stood at the door and said I did not want to stay there. I only wanted to know how to get to the school. Then they told me that the school was still some distance away and that I had to take a train first. That made me angry, because I had thought I was already there. I pulled my two leather bags out of the man’s hands and went to the station by myself. The train was so small that it looked like a toy, and before I had time to think, it stopped again.

After that I hired a cart and went straight to the school. By then classes were over, and there was almost no one there except a servant. He said that the teacher on night duty had gone out. I thought that was a fine way to do night duty. I was tired from the long trip, so I did not wait there any longer. Instead, I went to another inn called Yamashiroya.

They first put me in a dark room under the stairs, and the heat was terrible. It felt more like an oven than a room for a man. I complained, but the woman only said that the better rooms were full. So I ate, lay down, and tried to rest. After a short time, there came a knock, and the principal walked in. He had come to meet the new teacher from Tokyo.

The principal was a dark man with a thin beard and large eyes. To me he looked like a badger trying to act important. He handed me my paper of appointment and said I must show it to each teacher one by one. I thought that was foolish. It would have been easier to hang it on the wall and let everyone read it there. But I said nothing and waited.

Before the other teachers came, he took out his watch, looked at it, and began to speak about the spirit of education. At first I listened in a lazy way, but before long I thought, "I have come to a very strange place." He said a teacher must be a model for the students, a guide for the whole school, and a man who teaches not only lessons but good character as well. I thought, "What kind of great man would come all this way for forty yen a month?" If the job was so hard and holy, they should have told me before I came. Because I hate lies, I almost gave the paper back and said I would return to Tokyo at once.

So I said, "I cannot do all that you ask. Please take this paper back." The principal opened his big eyes and looked at me in surprise. Then he smiled and said that what he had spoken of was only his hope. He added that he knew very well I could not live up to such a hope, so I need not worry. If he knew that from the start, I thought, there was no reason to frighten me first. Still, I kept quiet because I was tired and far from home.

Soon the teachers gathered, and I had to bow to each one and show my paper. The vice principal was there too. I heard that he was a university graduate in

literature, so perhaps he was an important man. But what surprised me most was that, in that great heat, he wore a red flannel shirt. Later I learned that he wore red shirts all year and said the color was good for the body. If he believed that so strongly, I thought, he should dress in red from head to foot. In my mind I gave him the name Red Shirt.

There was also an English teacher named Koga. He had a pale, soft face and looked weak and gentle. He reminded me of an old joke Kiyō once made, so in my mind I gave him the name Uranari. Then I met the math teacher Hotta. He had a hard round head and a rough face like a fighting monk. When I politely showed him my paper, he did not even look at it. He only laughed and said, "So you are the new man. Come and visit me sometime." I disliked him at once and gave him the name Porcupine.

There was also a drawing teacher who acted like a clown from the city. He said he too was from Tokyo and was glad to meet another man from there. But the way he spoke and moved was so smooth that I did not trust him. After all the greetings, the principal said I could rest that day and begin classes later. He also said I should speak with the head math teacher about my work, and of course that meant Porcupine. On my way out, I thought the school already looked full of strange people.

I walked around the town a little before going back to the inn. I saw the government office, the army buildings, and the main street, but nothing impressed me. The town seemed proud of itself, yet to me it felt small and narrow. When I went back to Yamashiroya, they suddenly treated me with much more respect and gave me a large fine room upstairs. I had never rested in such a good room before, so I lay flat on my back in the middle of it like a lord. Later Porcupine came, woke me, talked about my lessons, and told me I could not stay forever at such an expensive inn. Then he took me out at once to find a boarding house, and though I had disliked him at first, I began to think he might not be entirely bad.

Part 4

The next day I moved into the boarding house. It stood halfway up a hill at the edge of town. The master dealt in old things, and his wife had a sharp face that I did not like. Still, the house was quiet, and no one at the inn could keep taking my money forever. So I carried in my bags and told myself that I would live there somehow.

On the first day of my classes, I decided to begin in a strong way. I thought these country boys would be easy to control if I spoke fast and showed no fear. So I went into the room, opened the math book, and explained the lesson in my Tokyo way without slowing down. For a short time the boys sat still, and I thought I had already won. Then one strong-looking boy stood up and said, "Sir, you speak too fast. Please go more slowly."

That way of speaking annoyed me at once. I answered, "I am from Tokyo, so I cannot use your town's way of talking. If you do not understand, then listen harder." I thought that was a good answer, and the class moved on for a little while. But just before the bell, one boy brought me a hard problem and asked me to explain it. The truth was that I could not solve it right there, so I said, "I will teach that next time," and went out quickly.

At once the room filled with laughter. I heard boys saying, "He cannot do it. He cannot do it." The other classes were much the same. Some boys smiled in a bad way, some asked foolish questions, and some only wanted to test me. Then I learned that teaching is not easy at all when you are the one standing in front.

After class, I thought I could go home, but that was not allowed. All teachers had to stay until three o'clock, check the cleaning, and look at the attendance book. It seemed foolish to keep a man at school after his work was done, but the others all followed the rule. So I stayed too, though I did not like it. When I complained to Porcupine, he laughed first, then told me in a serious voice not to speak too freely in that school.

Life at the boarding house was no better. Every evening the master came to my room and asked, "Shall I make tea?" but he meant my tea, not his own, and then he drank it with me. After that he began bringing strange things to sell. One day it was a name seal, the next day it was a hanging picture, and after that it was a

huge inkstone. He praised each thing for a long time and said I could pay later, but I wanted none of them.

After about a week, I understood both the school and the house well enough to dislike them. The school was full of rules, noise, and hidden laughter. The house was full of tea, old goods, and trouble. Still, I was not afraid. If the place became too bad, I could always leave and do some other work somewhere else.

One evening, while walking through the main street, I saw a sign that said “Tokyo Soba.” I love soba, so I went in at once. The shop was dirty, far dirtier than any soba shop in Tokyo, but the smell was good. I sat down and called for tempura soba in a loud voice. Only then did I notice that three boys from my school were sitting in a corner.

They bowed, I bowed, and because I had not eaten good soba for a long time, I enjoyed it and ate four bowls. The next morning, when I entered class, huge words were written on the blackboard: “Tempura Teacher.” The whole room laughed. I asked, “What is funny about tempura?” and one boy answered, “Nothing, sir. Only four bowls is a lot.” Then I went to another class and found more jokes about tempura on that blackboard too.

A few days later, I went to a place with a hot spring and some tea shops. On the way home I stopped at a dumpling shop and ate two plates. This time I thought nobody had seen me. But the next day the board said, “Two plates of dumplings, seven sen.” The price was exactly right, and that made me feel worse than the joke itself.

The hot spring was the only place I truly liked. I always used the better bath, drank tea there, and when the large stone bath was empty, I swam in it for exercise. One day I came down from the upper floor ready for a swim and saw a new sign: “Do not swim in the bath.” I thought at once that it had been put there for me. So I gave up swimming that day and went home in a bad mood.

When I entered school the next morning, those same words were already written on the board. Then I knew the boys were watching my every move. If I ate soba, they knew it. If I ate dumplings, they knew it. If I swam in the bath, they knew that too. The town was small, the boys were everywhere, and each day I felt

more and more as if I were living inside a box with no clean air.

## Part 5

The school had a system of night duty. Each teacher had to take turns staying at school overnight. Only the principal and the vice principal did not have to do it. When I asked why, I was told it was because of their rank. I did not think that was fair at all. They got more money, did less work, and even escaped the duties that fell on the rest of us.

At last my own turn came. I have never liked sleeping anywhere except in my own bed, and even when I was a child I almost never stayed at another person's house. So of course I hated the thought of spending the night in the school. Still, if the duty was part of my forty yen a month, I had no choice but to do it. After all the students and teachers went home, I sat alone in the duty room and felt as if I had been shut inside a box.

The room stood at the far end of the school building, and the evening sun poured into it so strongly that I could hardly breathe. I ate the school meal there, but it was poor food, and I wondered how boys who ate such things still had enough strength to make so much trouble. After I finished eating, there was still a long time before I could sleep. I looked around the empty building and felt more and more restless. Then I remembered that on my first day the school servant had said the teacher on duty had gone out, and now I understood why.

So I told the servant, "I am going out for a little while." He asked whether I had some business to do, and I answered, "No. I am only going to the hot spring." Then I left at once. I had forgotten my big striped towel at the boarding house, which was a pity, but I thought I could borrow one there. I stayed out a while, enjoyed the bath, and came back around sunset by train.

On the way back, I first met the principal. He looked surprised and asked, "Are you not on night duty tonight?" I almost laughed. Only a little earlier he had thanked me for doing my first night duty. I answered, "Yes, I am on duty, and I am going back now." A little farther on I met Porcupine, and he also warned me

not to walk around town while I was supposed to be at school. I did not want another lecture, so I only said a few words and went on.

When I got back, night fell quickly. For a while I kept the servant with me and talked to pass the time, but even that soon became dull. At last I changed into my sleeping clothes, lifted the mosquito net, threw back the red blanket, and lay down heavily on the bed. The moment I stretched out my legs, something dry and hard jumped all over them. I leaped up at once and felt all through the bedding with my hands. Then I understood: the boys had filled my bed with grasshoppers.

I became furious. I shook the blanket, stamped on the floor, and drove the insects out as fast as I could. But before I could settle myself, a great shout came from one end of the dormitory. I ran there at once, but by the time I reached it, the noise had stopped. Then another shout came from the other end. The boys were playing with me, making me run from side to side like a fool.

I will tell the truth. I have courage, but I do not always have wisdom. In a moment like that, I did not know the clever thing to do. Still, I had no wish to lose. If I let a pack of schoolboys make a fool of me while I was on duty, I would never be able to look anyone in the face again. Because I am simple, I often do not know the best plan, but because I am simple, I also do not know how to give up.

So I sat down in the middle of the corridor and decided to wait for morning. I said to myself, "Think about it. Is there anything stronger than honesty? If honesty does not win tonight, it will win tomorrow. If it does not win tomorrow, it will win the next day. And if it still does not win, I will have food sent from my boarding house and sit here until it does." Mosquitoes came in clouds, but I did not care. My leg hurt from running in the dark, and when I touched it, I felt blood there, but I left it alone.

At last, after all the running and anger, I half fell asleep where I sat. Suddenly a sound woke me, and I jumped up at once. The door near me stood half open, and two boys were right there. The one closest to me had not even had time to pull his leg away, so I grabbed it hard and pulled, and down he fell on his back with a crash. The other was so surprised that I rushed at him, caught his shoulder, and struck him several times before he knew what had happened.

Then I dragged the second boy to my room and ordered him to explain himself. He would say nothing. No matter what I asked, he only answered, "I do not know." Soon another boy came, then another, and before long many boys from the dormitory were standing around me, all pretending to know nothing. I argued with them for a long time, but it got me nowhere.

At last the principal appeared, because the servant had gone to fetch him and said there was trouble at the school. He listened to my story, listened to some of the boys' talk, and then calmly said that the matter would be dealt with later. He told the boys to wash, eat breakfast, and go to class. I thought his treatment was far too soft. If it had been left to me, I would have driven the whole lot out then and there.

Then he turned to me and said, "You must be very tired. There is no need for you to teach today." I answered, "I am not troubled at all. Even if this happened every night for the rest of my life, I would still teach. If one sleepless night is enough to stop my classes, then I should give back part of my salary." He looked at my face for a while and said, half smiling, "You are very spirited, but your face is badly swollen." It was true. The mosquitoes had bitten me all over, and my skin burned terribly, but I still said, "My face may be swollen, but my mouth still works, so I can teach."

## Part 6

A little after that night, Red Shirt asked me to go fishing with him. Noda was going too. I did not want to go at all, because I did not like either of them very much, but I thought that if I refused, they would make some smooth excuse and laugh at me later. So I said yes. After school we met at the station and took a boat out to sea. The sea was calm, and the air was clean, and for a short time I felt better than I had felt in many days.

There was a small island with rocks and pine trees, and Red Shirt kept talking about how fine it looked. Noda agreed with every word and praised the view as if he himself had made it. Then Noda said that "Madonna" should be sitting under

one of those trees. Red Shirt laughed and told him not to say such things. They both looked pleased with themselves, and I knew they were enjoying some secret that they would not explain to me.

They fished with lines and weights, not with proper rods, which already seemed foolish to me. Still, I tried it once. Before long, I caught a small fish. It jumped so hard that sea water hit my face, and when I tried to take the hook out, the fish felt wet and ugly in my hand. I hated it so much that I threw it into the boat, washed my hands in the sea, and put away my line at once. Red Shirt and Noda went on catching fish, but I lay down in the boat and looked up at the sky instead.

While I lay there, the two of them began to talk in low voices. At first I did not listen, but then I heard words that made my ears stand up: “grasshoppers,” “tempura,” “dumplings,” and “Hotta.” They were talking about me, and they knew it well. They spoke in broken pieces, never clearly, as if they wanted me to hear just enough to become uneasy. Then Noda asked Red Shirt, “Will you meet Madonna tonight?” and Red Shirt laughed again in that quiet way of his. I stared so hard at Noda that he quickly looked away.

On the way back, Red Shirt began to speak more openly. He said the students were very excited because I had come, and that I must be careful because there were “many things” in the school that were not simple. Noda added that Red Shirt and he were trying to help me because we were all men from Tokyo. I said that if I did nothing bad, I had nothing to fear. Red Shirt laughed and said that was not enough in this world, because sometimes a man must also understand the badness in others. Then he hinted that the teacher before me had also been harmed in some hidden way.

When I got home, I thought over every word. Red Shirt never said anything in a straight way. He did not clearly say that Porcupine was bad, but he wanted me to think so. That was plain enough. Still, if Porcupine was truly such a bad man, why had he bought me iced water on my first day and found me a room? I do not like to owe even a small favor to a man I may have to fight. So I decided that the next morning I would return the price of the iced water to him. It was only one sen and five rin, but a debt is still a debt.

The next day I went to school early and waited for Porcupine with the coin in my hand. Because I had held it all the way from my room, the little coin was wet with sweat. Porcupine did not come. Instead, Red Shirt came up to me and, in his soft voice, asked whether I had spoken to anyone about what he had said in the boat. I answered that I had not, but that I meant to ask Hotta directly what he was doing behind my back. At once Red Shirt grew uneasy and said I must not do that, because he had said nothing clearly and such a fight would only cause trouble for him. At last I gave my word that I would say nothing for the moment.

Even after that, Porcupine still did not come, so when the bell rang, I left the money on his desk and went to class. When I came back later, he was there at last. The first thing he said was that he was late because of me. Then he told me that he had gone to my boarding house that morning and that the owner wanted me out. I asked why, and he said the people there found me too rough and claimed that I had even made the wife wipe my feet. That was a lie. I had done no such thing, and I became angry at once.

I said, "If there is a reason, tell me the reason. Do not stand there and tell me the other side must be right." Porcupine answered in the same hard way and said the house was tired of me and that I should leave. I told him that if he brought me to such a place, then he was to blame too. He said I was too rough. I said he was too ready to believe foolish talk. Soon we were both shouting, and all the teachers in the room stopped what they were doing and stared at us. Noda alone looked pleased, which made me want to hit him more than Porcupine.

The bell ended that fight, but the afternoon brought another matter. A meeting was held to decide what to do about the students who had filled my bed with insects and made all that trouble in the dormitory. The principal sat at the head of the table and spoke first. He said that any fault in the school was really his own fault and that he must apologize to all of us. I thought that was nonsense. If the boys did wrong, then the boys were wrong. A principal who says "their fault is my fault" is only making a fog where there should be a clear road.

After that, Red Shirt stood up and said the boys should be treated gently. He said young boys were full of spirit and often did foolish things without thinking,

and that perhaps the teachers themselves were partly to blame. Then Noda stood and agreed in a long speech full of big words and little meaning. I could not bear that, so I got up and said, "I am against that from start to finish. The students are wholly wrong. They should apologize, and if needed they should be sent away." Because my words were short and hot, some of the teachers laughed, which only made me angrier.

Then, to my surprise, Porcupine stood up and spoke in a great voice. He said Red Shirt was wrong, that I had only just come to the school, and that if new teachers could be mocked without real punishment, then the school would lose all order. He said the students should be punished and should apologize to me in public. I was pleased at once and almost forgot our quarrel. But then he turned and struck me too. He said that while the boys were wrong, I also had no right to leave the school and go to the hot spring while I was on night duty. This time he was right. So I stood up and said plainly, "Yes, I did that. It was wrong. I am sorry." The room laughed again, but I did not care. When a thing is wrong, it is wrong.

In the end, the boys were punished and later apologized to me, just as I had wanted. But the foolish talk did not end there. The principal said teachers should stay away from cheap places like soba shops and dumpling shops, because teachers must guide society. Red Shirt added that a teacher should enjoy higher things, like books and fine pleasures of the mind, and not common pleasures of the body. That was too much for me. So I said, "Is meeting Madonna also one of those fine pleasures?" This time nobody laughed. Red Shirt dropped his eyes, and the whole room became so quiet that even Noda could find nothing to say.

## Part 7

After that meeting, I decided I would not stay one more day in my boarding house. If a man is pushed out by a lie and still goes on sleeping in the same place, he is no better than a sack of rice. So I began to look for another room. But the town was small, and I did not know where to go. Then I remembered Uranari. He knew the town better than I did, and he was one of the few men there whom I

could trust.

I went to his house, and his mother came out with a paper lamp in her hand. She was old, quiet, and gentle, and she made me think of Kiyō at once. Uranari listened to my trouble in his soft way and said he knew an old couple named Hagino who might take me in. Then he kindly went there with me himself. By that night I had become a boarder in the Hagino house.

The house was small and plain, but it was clean, and no one tried to sell me strange old things after tea. I felt much easier there at once. But the next day I had one more surprise. As soon as I left my old boarding house, Noda moved into my room as if he had been waiting for it. That was too neat to be chance. I thought, "So that is how it is. They had planned this from the start."

For a few days after that, I thought often of Kiyō. If I had used my six hundred yen to open a small milk shop in Tokyo, then perhaps Kiyō could have stayed near me, and I would not now be so far away from her. When she was near me, I did not always understand how good she was. But in this town, where people smiled and lied at the same time, I began to see her true value. Hagino's wife was kind, but she was not Kiyō, and the space between Shikoku and Tokyo felt very long.

Hagino's wife often came to talk in my room. One day she asked me why I had not brought my wife with me. I told her I had no wife at all, but she would not believe me. She gave me many examples of younger men who were already married and had children. To make fun of her, I said, "Then please find me a wife at once, because I want one badly." But she answered in a serious voice, "Of course you do. All young men are like that." That answer made me feel foolish, so I stopped joking.

Then she lowered her voice and asked if there was not already some woman waiting for me in Tokyo. I asked how she could know such a thing. She said I always seemed to be waiting for letters. I told her she was wrong and asked what woman she was talking about. Then she said, "Do you know Miss Toyama?" I said no, and she looked surprised. "She is the greatest beauty in this town," she said. "All the teachers call her Madonna."

I said I had thought Madonna was the name of a geisha. She told me proudly

that it was a foreign word for a beautiful lady. Then, little by little, she told me the whole story. Madonna had long been promised to Uranari, she said. The marriage might already have happened if her father had not died and the family's money had not become uncertain. Uranari was too soft and too trusting, so things were put off, and while they were being put off, Red Shirt came into the picture.

According to Hagino's wife, Red Shirt had said he wanted Madonna for himself. He found ways to visit the Toyama house, and in the end the daughter began to listen to him. I said at once, "That red shirt is not just a shirt. I knew there was something wrong with it." The old woman said that Porcupine had once gone to speak to Red Shirt for Uranari's sake. But Red Shirt answered in a smooth way that he was not stealing another man's promised bride. He said that if the old promise was broken, then perhaps he might marry her, but for now he was only friendly with the family.

That answer made me angry. A man can hide a knife inside such soft words and still look clean from the outside. Still, I was not yet sure how everything stood, so I asked Hagino's wife, "Which is the better man, Red Shirt or Porcupine?" She first asked what sort of animal a porcupine was, and when I explained that I meant Hotta, she thought for a while. Then she said, "Hotta looks stronger, but Red Shirt is a graduate, so he has more learning. Red Shirt is gentler, but the students like Hotta better." I asked again, "So which one is really better?" She answered, "The one with the bigger salary must be the greater man." After that, I stopped asking.

Not long after, a long letter from Kiyō finally reached me. It had gone first to the inn, then to my old boarding house, and only after that to the Hagino home. The letter was so long and the writing so poor that reading it felt like climbing a hill with a heavy bag. But I read every word. Kiyō told me not to give silly names to people except in letters to her, told me country people often had bad hearts, told me to be careful not to catch cold, and said my own letters were too short. She also sent me ten yen, because she thought money was the best friend for a man living far from home. That old woman was worth more than all the clever men in my school put together.

A little later, I went again to the hot-spring town by train. At the station I saw

something that cut me deeply. Red Shirt quickly got into the upper-class car, and after him went Madonna and her mother. Uranari stood by the lower-class door with a weak and unhappy face. When he saw me, he stepped into the lower-class car. Though I had a better ticket, I followed him at once and sat beside him. It seemed to me that a man should sit with the one who had been hurt, not with the one who had caused the hurt.

At the hot spring, I tried to cheer Uranari by talking a lot, but he only answered “yes” and “no” in a tired voice. In the end I had to give up. After the bath, the moon was bright over the town, and the lanterns in the street moved a little in the night wind. I walked alone and thought about Uranari, Madonna, Porcupine, and Red Shirt. Truly, there is nothing in this world less certain than a human being. A beautiful woman may be cold, a gentle man may be good, a rough man may be honest, and a fine gentleman may be rotten inside.

While I was thinking such thoughts, I crossed a little bridge and walked along the bank of a narrow stream. There I saw two shadows ahead of me. One looked like a woman. I walked faster, passed them, and turned to look. The man gave a small cry and turned his face away. It was Red Shirt. He did not even call my name. He only told the woman to go back at once, and the two of them hurried away into the lighted street. After that, I had no more doubt.

## Part 8

A little after that moonlight night, I met Red Shirt and asked, as if it meant nothing, “I hear Koga is going to Hyuga.” He answered in his soft voice that Uranari himself had long wanted the move and that everyone at school felt sorry to lose such a fine teacher. The softer he spoke, the less I trusted him. Uranari did not look like a man who wanted anything. He looked like a man who had stopped wanting things because wanting them did no good.

So I went home and asked Hagino’s wife, “Is Koga really going because he wants to go?” She looked shocked and said, “Who told you that?” I answered, “Red Shirt told me so, and if that is not true, then he is a great liar.” The old woman

shook her head sadly and said that Uranari's mother had come to see her that very morning and had told her everything. Then she began slowly and gave me the whole story from the start.

She said that after Uranari's father died, the family had become poorer than people knew. Because Uranari had already worked at the school for four years, his mother went to the principal and asked very politely if her son's pay could be raised a little. The principal said he would think about it, so the family waited and hoped. But instead of getting more money where he was, Uranari was called in and told there was an open place in Nobeoka where he could earn five yen more each month. In other words, they used the mother's request as a reason to send him away.

I said, "That is not a talk. That is an order." Hagino's wife nodded and said that Uranari had begged to stay where he was, even if his pay did not rise, because his house was there and his mother was there. But the matter had already been decided, and another teacher had already been chosen for his place. So Uranari could do nothing. When I heard that, I became so angry that I wanted to run straight to Red Shirt and strike him.

Then I said, "So Uranari does not want to go to that far-off place at all." The old woman answered that of course he did not. That was why his face had looked so weak and strange for many days. Red Shirt had turned the whole matter upside down and was speaking as if Uranari were running after a better post because he wanted more money. When I thought of that, and of the moonlight walk with Madonna, my anger grew still stronger. A man who could do such things and still speak softly was worse than an open thief.

I then told Hagino's wife that Red Shirt had hinted he might raise my pay too, and that I meant to refuse it if he offered. She stared at me as if I had lost my mind. Then she said, "Even if a man is sly, if he raises your pay, you should quietly take it. When people are young, they lose much because of anger. When they are old, they look back and think, 'If only I had borne a little more, I would not have lost so much.'" She spoke as old people speak, from many years of seeing foolish young men throw away their chances. But I am not made to bow my head for a

little more money when the hand that offers it has just pushed another man into the mud.

The next day Red Shirt sent for me and asked me to sit in his room. He smiled in his gentle way and said the school wished to raise my monthly pay by ten yen. He also said that I must not misunderstand Uranari's transfer. He explained that Uranari would rise in rank in Nobeoka, that the new teacher would come for less pay by earlier agreement, and that the difference could therefore be given to me without hurting anyone. It was a neat speech, smooth and clean on the surface, like a pretty cloth spread over dirt.

Under other conditions, I might have been carried away by such clever talk. My head is not very strong, and when another man speaks in a quick and orderly way, I sometimes begin to think he must be right. But I had disliked Red Shirt from the first moment I saw that foolish red flannel shirt. After the matter of Uranari and the moonlight walk, my dislike had become fixed like a nail in wood. So while he spoke, I thought, "A man who wins an argument is not always a good man, and the man who loses is not always wrong."

Then I answered, "I do not want the raise." Red Shirt looked surprised and asked why. I said, "Because the whole thing is unpleasant." He tried again, speaking of my future, my career, and my own good, but I would not move. A man may use fine words, but they cannot make my heart walk in a road it does not like. Human beings move by liking and disliking far more often than by reason, and I am a human being before I am anything else.

After I left his room, I went straight to Porcupine and told him everything. He listened with his arms folded and then said in a hard voice that the whole thing was exactly what I thought. He said Red Shirt wanted Uranari far away so that he could take Madonna without trouble. "That fellow," he said, "does bad things with a calm face, and when anyone speaks, he already has his road of escape ready." Then he rolled up his sleeve and showed his thick arm, as if to say that words were not enough for a man like that. I liked him more than ever at that moment.

Half as a joke, I said, "Then why do we not beat Red Shirt and Noda after the farewell party?" Porcupine thought for a moment and answered, "Not yet. If we

hit them now, the fault will be ours. If we are ever to hit them, we must first catch them in the very act.” I had to admit that he had more sense than I did. I would gladly have struck first and asked questions after, but Porcupine wanted proof still warm in the hand. That made me trust him even more.

From that time on, my hatred of Red Shirt settled deep inside me. Outwardly he was still polite, soft, and reasonable. But to me he had become a villain who spoke one story with his mouth and wrote another story with his hands. Noda followed him as always, laughing, bowing, and saying yes to every word, which made him almost harder to bear than his master. The two of them together were enough to make any honest man sick.

I began to think that in this world most people seem to push men toward badness. If a man stays honest and simple, they laugh at him and call him a child or a fool. If that is so, then schools should stop teaching children not to lie. They should instead open classes in how to lie well, how not to trust anyone, and how to ride on another man’s back without falling off. I thought of writing that to Kiyo, but if I did, she would only worry and say again that beyond Hakone there were monsters everywhere.

## Part 9

Uranari’s farewell party was held at a restaurant in town, and from the first moment I disliked it. The principal, Red Shirt, and Noda all gave speeches, and the three speeches sounded like one lie said in three different voices. Each of them said Uranari was a fine teacher and a good man, and that the school would be very sorry to lose him. But each of them also said that Uranari himself strongly wanted the move, so nothing could be done. To hold a farewell party on a lie like that and then sit there smiling over food and drink was too much for me.

Red Shirt’s speech was the worst. He said he was losing not only a good teacher but also a dear friend. He made his soft voice even softer and spoke as if his heart were full of sorrow. Anyone who heard him for the first time would surely have believed every word. I thought, “This is the same mouth that must have caught

Madonna.” While he was still talking, Porcupine looked across the room at me, and his eyes flashed in a way that told me he thought the same thing.

When Red Shirt sat down, Porcupine stood up. I was so pleased that I clapped before anyone else, and then I felt a little foolish when the whole room turned to look at me. Porcupine did not care. He said that the principal and vice principal had spoken of deep sadness, but that he himself felt something different. He said it would be better for a good man like Uranari to leave this town as soon as possible, because a place with fewer dirty tricks and bad hearts would be better for him than this town, even if it gave him less comfort.

That hit the room like a stone. The principal moved in his seat, Red Shirt lowered his eyes, and Noda smiled in a weak and nervous way, as if he did not know whether to laugh or hide. Porcupine went on speaking in a clear and open voice, and though he did not say Red Shirt’s name, every person in the room knew whom he meant. Uranari himself looked troubled and almost ashamed, because a gentle man does not like open fighting around his own name. After that, the party lost all shape.

Some men drank too much, and others began to talk nonsense. One man sang, another shouted, and before long the farewell party felt more like a house of madmen than a proper gathering. I leaned close to Uranari and said, “I am going home. A farewell party should act like one.” He tried weakly to stop me, but I was already too angry to stay. So I rose and walked toward the door.

Just then Noda came forward with a broom in his hand and blocked my way. In his actor’s voice he said I could not leave yet, and that the evening was now a great “meeting” of some kind. I had already had enough of him, of the room, and of all the lies there. So I said, “If this is a meeting, then you are the clown in it,” and I struck him on the head with my fist. For a moment he stood there staring as if his soul had dropped through the floor.

Then he cried out in a loud voice and made a great show of his pain. Before he could do more, Porcupine rushed over from the other side of the room. He seized Noda by the back of the neck and twisted him so hard that the man bent over at once. After that, the whole room broke into noise. I do not clearly remember how

it ended, but I know I parted from Uranari on the road and went home after eleven, still hot with anger and drink.

The next day was the day of the war victory celebration, so the school was closed. Flags hung everywhere, and the town was full of noise, dust, and people. The teachers had to go out with the students because there was a ceremony at the drill ground. I went because I had to, though I would rather have stayed in bed. After the ceremony ended, the streets grew even wilder with drums, cheers, and boys running everywhere.

In the middle of that noise, Red Shirt's younger brother came up and told Porcupine and me to come see the real fun in another part of town. We went, and there we found boys from our middle school facing boys from the normal school. At first they only shouted, but before long they pushed one another, and then they began to fight. In one moment the whole street was full of moving arms, flying hats, and angry cries. Porcupine and I tried to stop them, but once we stepped in, each side pulled at us and dragged us into the middle of the trouble.

I do not know who hit first, and after that I did not care. By the time it was over, my clothes were dirty, my body hurt, and the whole thing seemed no better than a dog fight. I went home sore and angry and slept badly. The next morning, while I was still lying in bed, Hagino's wife brought me the local newspaper. I opened it without much thought, but the moment I read the second page, I sat up straight.

The paper said that the fight had been caused by "teacher Hotta" and "a certain proud fellow lately come from Tokyo." It said that we had not only used students to start the trouble, but had stood there directing them and had even attacked the normal school boys ourselves. Then came a fine piece of public talk saying that the good name of the school had been damaged by "two light and foolish young men," and that the school authorities should punish us so hard that we would never again enter the world of education. Every important word seemed to have been printed as heavily as possible, as if the paper were proud of its own anger.

I said, "Eat dirt," and jumped out of bed. The strange thing was that all the pain in my body seemed to grow lighter the moment I became properly angry. I rolled up the paper and threw it into the garden. But even that did not satisfy me, so I

went out, picked it up again, carried it to the toilet, and threw it away there instead. Newspapers are the greatest liars in the world. They put all their own lies into print and then act as if they are teaching everyone else what is right.

As I dressed, I kept thinking how little one can trust people. A beautiful woman may be cold. A soft man may be good. A rough man may be honest. A fine gentleman may be rotten inside. Porcupine had once seemed only rough, but he had turned out to be my best friend in that town, while Red Shirt, who spoke so sweetly, seemed dirtier each day I watched him. After thinking of all that, I made up my mind to go and find Porcupine at once.

## Part 10

The next morning my whole body hurt badly. It had been a long time since I had fought anyone, and pain seemed to sit in every joint from my neck to my knees. Still, I would not stay in bed, because I knew what people would say if I did. They would say the newspaper had frightened me and that I had hidden myself like a beaten dog. So I washed, ate, and went straight to school.

The teachers looked at my face and smiled one after another. I could not tell whether they felt kind or whether they were laughing at me, and in that town I trusted nobody's smile. Noda came near and asked in his smooth voice whether my wound was an "honorable wound." I told him to stop talking nonsense and go away. Then Porcupine came in, and his face looked even worse than mine, so together we made a fine pair for the room to stare at.

In class the boys clapped and shouted, "Long live the teacher!" I did not know whether they were praising me or making fun of me. Red Shirt alone acted as if nothing strange had happened. He came to us in his usual soft way and said he was very sorry about our trouble, that he had spoken with the principal, and that the newspaper would surely print the truth later. He even said that because his younger brother had called us to the festival, he himself felt partly responsible.

His words sounded smooth enough, but to me they felt like oil spread over dirty water. Porcupine and I told the principal and Red Shirt the true story as clearly as

we could. The principal said the newspaper must already have had some old anger against the school and had printed the story in bad faith. Red Shirt repeated that idea again and again in the teachers' room, as if he were working hard to protect us. But when I went home with Porcupine, he said in a hard voice, "You still do not see it. He and the newspaper are working together."

At first I had not thought that far. But once Porcupine said it, the whole thing began to make sense. He said Red Shirt had likely used his own brother to draw us into the crowd and then quickly given the newspaper a story that would hurt us and save himself. Soon afterward the paper printed only a tiny little note, not a real apology at all. Then I began to think the same as Porcupine.

A few days later, Porcupine came to me in great anger and said the principal had told him to hand in his resignation. I cried out at once that such a thing made no sense. We had both gone to the same celebration, stepped into the same fight, and been hit in the same dust. If one man had to leave, then the other should leave too. Porcupine answered that Red Shirt had long wanted to push him out, and now he had found the chance.

That made me so angry that I went straight to the principal myself. I asked why I had not also been told to resign. The principal looked surprised and said it was a matter of school need and convenience. I told him that such "convenience" was nonsense. If Porcupine had to go, I would go too, because I would not stay behind and look calm while a friend was thrown out for the same thing I had done.

The principal tried to calm me. He spoke of the school, the need for teachers, and my future, but I did not care much about such things. Loyalty seemed more important to me than any pretty line in a record book. In the end he begged me to think it over again and not decide too quickly. Because he looked truly troubled, I did not force the matter that very moment, but in my heart I had already decided.

When I told Porcupine what had happened, he said we should wait a little longer. If we moved too soon, Red Shirt would slip away again like an eel. Porcupine had already sent in his resignation, but in secret he had begun another plan. He rented an upstairs room in an inn called Masuya, which stood across from Kadoya in the hot-spring town. He even had a small hole made in the paper screen so he could

watch the front of Kadoya from the dark room.

The plan was simple. At Uranari's farewell party, a geisha had come who seemed to know Red Shirt very well. There were also rumors that Red Shirt met women secretly at Kadoya. If he truly went there with that geisha, then we would catch him not by argument but by fact. Porcupine said that if we were ever to strike him, we must first see the dirty thing with our own eyes. I had to admit he was right.

For several nights I went with him and watched through the hole in the screen. It was tiresome work. A man can bear a beating better than he can bear sitting in the dark for hours, doing nothing, waiting for another man's sin to walk through a doorway. On the first nights, no one came. Hagino's wife began to wonder why I kept going out after dark, but of course I could not tell her that I was carrying out a holy war for justice.

Porcupine, however, was built for waiting. He wrote down who came into Kadoya, who left, and at what time each person moved. By the eighth night, I was tired of the whole business. On my way there, I stopped and bought eight eggs, putting four into each sleeve so I could eat them later. When I entered the room, Porcupine turned toward me with a bright face and whispered that there was hope that night, because the geisha named Kosuzu had already gone into Kadoya.

We put out the lamp at once so our heads would not show on the paper screen. The moon had not yet risen, and the street below was dark except for the gaslight in front of Kadoya. We pressed our faces close to the hole and waited. The clock struck half past nine, then ten, and still no one came. I told Porcupine that if Red Shirt failed to appear again that night, I was done with the whole business.

Porcupine answered that he would wait as long as his money lasted. Just then we heard footsteps and low voices below. We could not lean far out, so at first we saw only shadows crossing under the gaslight. Then one voice said clearly, "Now it is all right. We have driven the troublemaker away." It was Noda's voice. The other voice, Red Shirt's, answered, "He only acts strong. He has no plan, so there was no difficulty."

Noda laughed and said, "That other man is like the Edo rough fellow. That

rough young master has a kind of charm.” Then Red Shirt said, “A man who refuses a raise and talks of resigning must surely have something wrong with his nerves.” I wanted to tear open the window, jump from the second floor, and beat them both at once, but I somehow held myself back. The two of them laughed together, passed under the gaslight, and went into Kadoya. Porcupine breathed out softly and said, “At last.” I answered, “Yes. Now we wait for them to come out.”

## Part 11

We waited until almost dawn. Little by little the sky grew pale, and the front of Kadoya came out of the dark. The street was still quiet, and only a few early people were moving about. Then at last the door opened. Two women came out first with their collars pulled close, and after them came Red Shirt and Noda.

The moment I saw them, all my anger came back at once. There was no room left for excuse, smooth words, or clever talk. Porcupine looked at me once, and I looked at him, and without saying anything we ran downstairs and out into the street. We crossed over so fast that Red Shirt and Noda had almost no time to understand what was happening. Before they could step back, we were already in front of them.

I went straight for Noda. Without thinking, I put my hand into my sleeve, pulled out two eggs, and threw them hard into his face. They broke with a wet sound, and yellow ran down from his nose and mouth. He gave a loud cry, fell backward, and shouted for help. I had bought those eggs to eat, not to throw, but once I saw how well the first two worked, I threw the rest at him too.

In a moment his whole face turned yellow. He tried to rise, but slipped and sat down again like a fool. While I shouted, “You wretch, you wretch,” I struck him again and again. He covered his face with both hands, but that only made him look sillier. Between my anger and the sight of him, I almost wanted to laugh.

At the same time, Porcupine had already caught Red Shirt. He said, “Now do you still mean to lie? We saw the geisha go in. We saw you come out.” Red Shirt, even then, tried to speak in his calm way. He said, “I stayed here with Yoshikawa.

Whether some woman came in or not has nothing to do with me.” He still tried to slip away through words, even when the truth stood in front of him.

Porcupine roared, “Be quiet,” and hit him hard with his fist. Red Shirt staggered and cried, “This is violence. This is lawless.” Porcupine answered, “Lawless is good enough,” and hit him again. “A villain like you understands only fists,” he said, and struck him again and again. Red Shirt tried to talk, but each new word only brought another blow.

I was busy with Noda and gave him as much as I could. He tried to crawl away, but I caught him by the collar and shook him back. Then I knocked him down again and beat him until he stopped trying to run. In the end, both men crouched by the roots of a cedar tree near the road, unable to stand or even speak well. Their clever tongues had finally become useless.

Porcupine asked, “Have you had enough? If not, I can hit more.” I asked Noda the same thing, and he cried that he had more than enough. Then Porcupine stood over them and said, “You two are villains. That is why heaven’s punishment has fallen on you today. However well you speak, justice will not forgive you.” Neither man answered. They only sat there, bent over and silent.

Once it was over, my anger suddenly went away, and I felt only tired. We went back to Masuya, washed our faces, and sat quietly for a while. The morning had now fully come, and the town had started its ordinary day as if nothing had happened. That annoyed me a little, because it seemed to me that something very important had been finished. After a while I said, “Well, that is done. What remains now?” Porcupine answered, “Nothing remains. I have already resigned, and you should do the same.”

I said that I had meant to resign from the start. After living in such a dirty place, I was ready to leave even if I had to carry stones in Tokyo to eat. So I settled my matters and prepared to go. I felt sorry to leave Hagino’s house, because the old woman had been kind to me, but I felt no sorrow at all about leaving the town itself. From the first day I had hated its narrow streets, its spying boys, its false smiles, and its dirty little tricks.

Porcupine and I traveled together for part of the way. When at last we had to

part, I felt truly sorry. In that whole region, he had been the one honest friend I had found. He looked rough, spoke roughly, and fought roughly, but inside he was clean. Men like Red Shirt look fine outside and are rotten within, but Porcupine was the other kind of man.

When I reached Tokyo, I did not first go looking for a room. I went straight to Kiyō with my leather bag still in my hand and cried, “Kiyō, I am back.” She gave a little cry and said, “Botchan, how good it is that you came back so soon,” and tears fell from her eyes. I was so happy that I almost cried too. I told her at once, “I will not go to the country again. I will stay in Tokyo and make a home with you.”

After that, through the help of a certain person, I got work as a technician for the city tram company. My pay was twenty-five yen a month, and the rent for our little house was six yen. It was not a great house with a fine gate like the one Kiyō had once imagined for me, but she seemed completely happy with it. As long as there was a small entrance, a kitchen, and a place for me to come home to, she acted as if she were living in a grand house. When I remembered the old days, I sometimes laughed, but I also felt warm inside.

We did not live together very long. In February of the next year, Kiyō fell ill with pneumonia and died. On the day before her death, she called me close and said, “Botchan, please, when Kiyō dies, bury me in your family temple. In the grave I will wait happily for the day you come.” For a while I could not answer at all. All the times she had loved me, helped me, believed in me, and forgiven me came back to my mind together.

So now Kiyō’s grave is at Yogenji in Koishikawa. When I think of her, I remember the old servant who gave me sweets, dried my wet money by the fire, wrote long letters in poor writing, and believed that one day I would ride in a fine carriage and live in a great house. I never became that sort of man. I stayed what I was from the beginning: quick to anger, poor at living cleverly, and no good at the smooth ways of the world. But if Kiyō were still alive, she would still call me “Botchan” in the same loving voice, and for me that would be enough.