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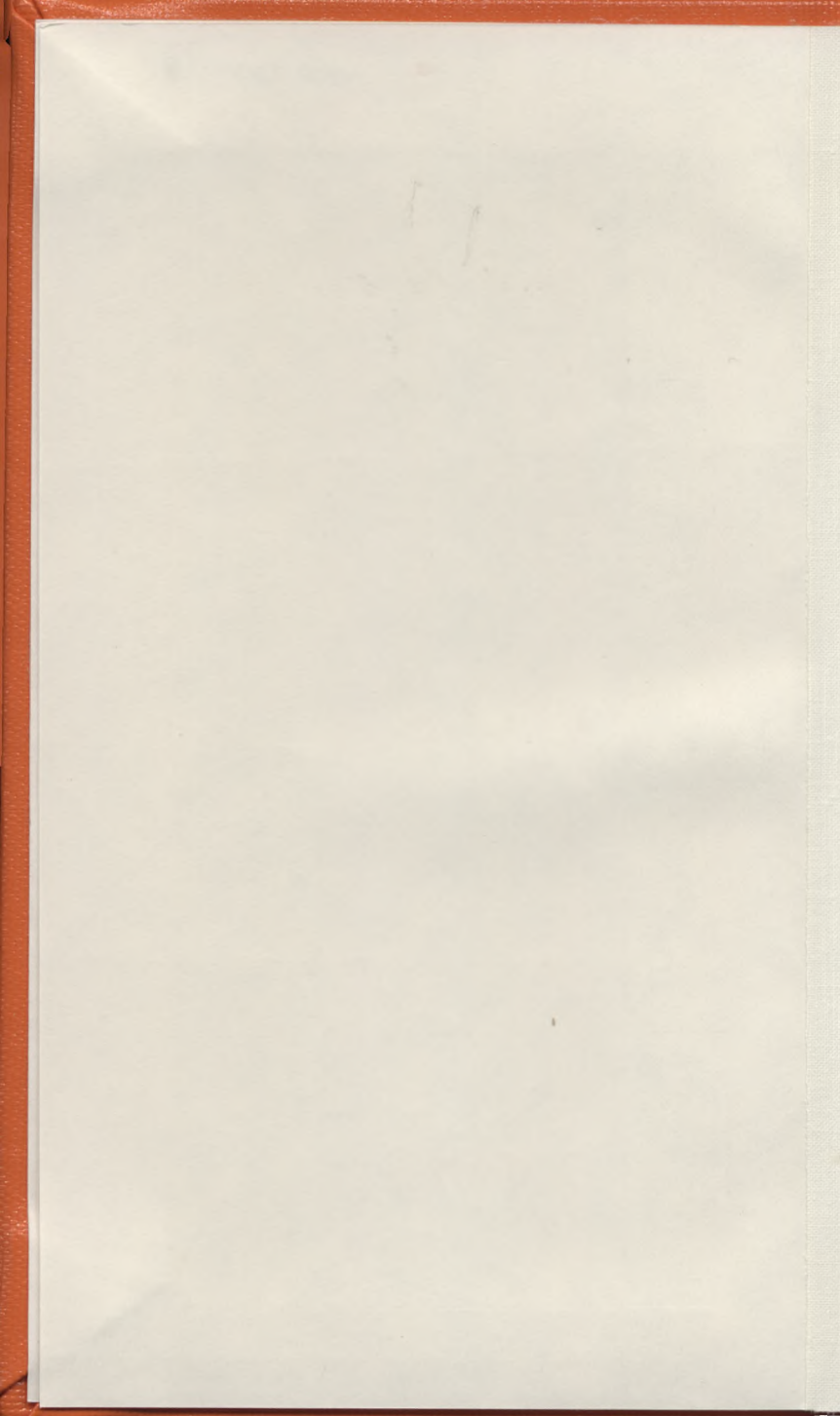
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With kindest regards
and best wishes

By the
Compiler
Eric S. Bell

— Tsujido —

— Feb 23rd 1933 —

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**EMINENT AUTHORS OF
CONTEMPORARY JAPAN**

One-act Plays and Short Stories

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Compiled by ✓
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Eric S. Bell and Eiji Ukai

VOLUME TWO

**KAITAKUSHA
TOKYO**

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EMINENT AUTHORS OF
CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

EDITED BY

FRANKLIN G. DIXON

VOLUME TWO

KAWAKATSU

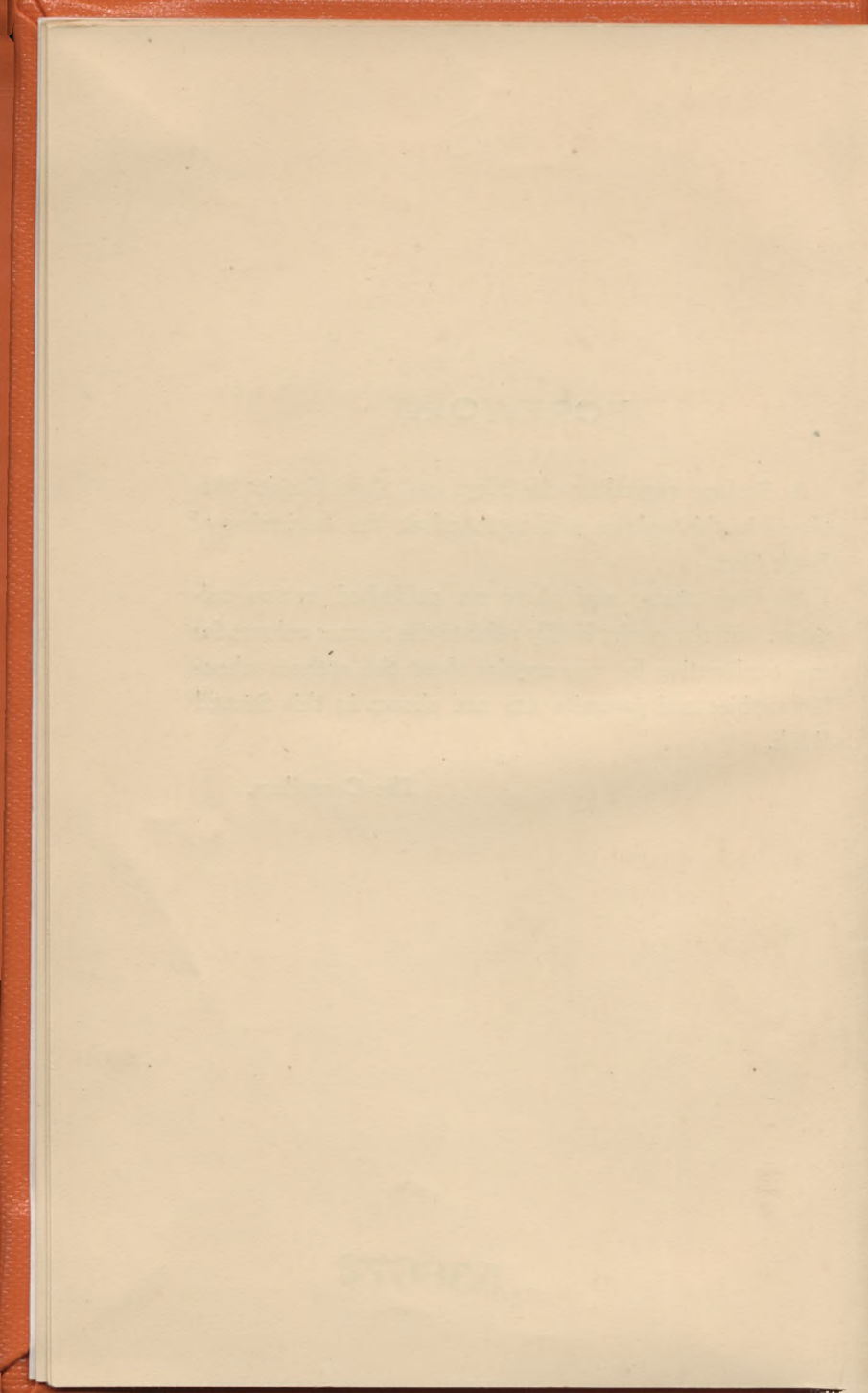
FOREWORD

A Preface regarding the Plays and Short Stories contained in this volume will be found at the beginning of Book One.

As these stories and plays are published in two volumes, will the reader kindly refer to the former volume for any explanation he may require about the authors whose biographies and portraits are not shown in this Second Book.

The Compilers.

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OKUNI AND GOHEI

By

Jun-ichiro Tanizaki

(A PLAY IN ONE ACT),

Translated by

Eric S. Bell & Yoshinobu Tada.

For a short biography and a portrait of Jun-ichiro
Tanizaki the reader will kindly refer to Book I.

“Okuni and Gohei”

Characters

OKUNI. The widow of a *samurai*.

GOHEI. A retainer of Okuni's husband.

IKEDA TOMONOJO. A *samurai* of the same clan as Okuni's husband.

Time

The Tokugawa-shogunate age.

Place

The wilderness of Nasuno, Shimodzuke Province.

A lonely Autumn evening on the wild wide plain and wilderness of Nasuno.

A pine-tree avenue from right to left across the stage.

Okuni and her retainer in traveling-dress, are resting at the foot of a pine-tree. The mistress, Okuni, is the widow of a samurai of one of the Western clans. The retainer, a follower called Gohei.

Gohei.—My lady, how do you feel? Can't you start again by and by?

Okuni.—Yes, but I still feel very tired.

Gohei.—It will soon be evening and it will be very hard for you if we are benighted in this wilderness, so I beg you to keep up your courage for a while until we reach the next village. I know

that it is very hard for you, and

Okuni.—Women are weak it must be a burden for you to have a weak woman with you now?

Gohei.—No, mistress, you must not say that. It is only two days since you set out after your long illness, so very naturally you will get easily exhausted. If I had had any consideration, I should have pressed you to stay two or three days longer at Utsunomiya.

Okuni.—No, that would not have been right, for though I am a little weak, we cannot afford to waste any more time for I have been ill these two months at Utsunomiya, and

Gohei.—You are right, but though you are very courageous at heart, you cannot help extreme weakness after such a long illness. Moreover we have walked some fifteen or sixteen miles to-day.

Okuni.—Yes, we have walked and walked, yet we never seem to come to any village, . . . you say this is the wilderness of Nasuno, . . . ah, what a lonely place it is!

Gohei.—I am told that beyond this wilderness there is a district called Oshu. If we go on for two or three days more across this wilderness, we shall come to the barrier of Shirakawa.

Okuni.—Oh, the barrier of Shirakawa! I often heard that name when I was very young when I was seven or eight years old. My grandmother used to talk about it.

Gohei.—Yes, we are going to that distant barrier, nay,

beyond that; even to the end of Oshu. It may be necessary for us to go such a distance.

Okuni.—My Grandmother was a skilful writer of 'waka' poems, and she told me many things about it, . . . the barrier of Shirakawa became a very famous place as a subject of that art, the distance is some hundreds of miles from Hiroshima, my native castle. Beyond Osaka, beyond Kyoto, beyond Yedo which is at the end of the great Tokaido road: hundreds of miles away even from that distant city of Yedo, . . . and beyond that barrier, my grandmother used to tell me, there is a wide, wide country, where once a very barbarous race of people lived.

Gohei.—Perhaps we shall be obliged even to roam through that wide, wide country, madam.

Okuni.—Three years have already passed since we left our native castle, and the third Autumn is wearing away, yet we cannot find even a trace of my bitter enemy. What a misfortune it is for us!

Gohei.—All your home folks must be impatient now. Your boy will be six years old this year, if I remember aright; how lovely he must have grown by now!

Okuni.—Ah, you must not mention my boy to me. When you speak of him I feel I must fly back immediately to my home. It makes my heart ache for those I have left behind.

Gohei.—Pray pardon me, madam; I am too often forgetful and thoughtless . . . I hope that we can

accomplish our wish very soon.

Okuni.—No labour or trouble is too great for me to accomplish my end, for it is for my dear husband's sake but . . . Gohei, I am deeply sorry for you.

Gohei.—Madam, when you speak such words, it wounds my feelings very deeply. Am I not your retainer?

Okuni.—Indeed, that is true, but you have not been our retainer from my father's time, for only two or three years you have been our follower While my husband was alive, he looked upon you as a retainer, and you considered yourself as such, but now I do not deem you my retainer.

Gohei.—Your words are generous, madam, and as I was your husband's retainer, I must do everything I can for you when you are in need of so much help. Though it was only for two or three years, I received too many gracious favours from you and your husband ever to forget. . . .

Okuni.—It is loyal of you to say that. There are indeed very few such loyal retainers in the world nowadays. My husband would be deeply thankful if he were alive now, and I am sure that your kind words will reach him now in the shadowy region of *meido*, where his spirit is living.

Gohei.—Until we meet our enemy, I will be your faithful follower, even if I have to serve you for five, ten, or even twenty years. I believe our enemy has fled to Oshu, but if he is not in Oshu, we

must go back again to Yedo, and perhaps to Kyoto and Osaka. Perhaps we must go to the out-of-the-way corners of Shikoku or Kyushu, nay, to the end of the world. I will go with you, even though it takes a lifetime.

Okuni.—But if this bad luck of ours continues, and we have to roam through the land for years,—over the mountains, and across the wilderness, as time passes, one day we shall find ourselves a gray-headed man and woman . . . what a strange karma it is that binds us so closely! That I, who have left my home in order to avenge my husband fall into such a long illness on the way, and should add trouble to our already heavy burden! It is indeed making a very miserable woman of me!

Gohei.—Madam, it is also my duty to avenge my master, and to take care of you. That your sickness should have recovered so soon must be through the divine help of the great and merciful Buddha. Our enemy Ikeda is a coward, and I fear that if we should meet him while your health is still weak, there is no knowing what he might do. I have been greatly troubled lately thinking about it, and I hope that no evil will befall us.

(From the distance, faint music of a shakuhachi-flute is heard, and Okuni listens to it intently.)

Okuni.—Listen, Gohei, do you hear someone playing a *shakuhachi*-flute in the distance?

Gohei.—Indeed, madam, I can hear it, but the music sounds very far away . . . surely that *komuso*-priest

is near.

Okuni.—Yes, I am sure it is he that is playing, for while I was so ill at Utsunomiya, I heard that music always stealing up to my window. Yes, there is no doubt about it. It must be he!

Gohei.—That *komuso*-priest seems to be roaming from one village to another, never hurrying, and it seems very strange indeed that he should always follow our tracks. He is a strange person!

Okuni.—We met this priest, I remember, at Kumagaya, on the Nakasendo road. Sometimes he passed us, and sometimes we overtook him, but we all arrived at Utsunomiya on the same day.

Gohei.—Yes, and at Utsunomiya, while you were lying so ill, he went each day and played his *shakuhachi* under your window. For two whole months he did this, and even on rainy days was there as usual.

Okuni.—Do you know that at times I almost fancied that he was our enemy Tomonojo

Gohei.—I also thought this, my lady, but I never said so before. You looked at his face, didn't you?

Okuni.—Yes, for when I threw him money, he often looked up at me from under his overhanging hat.

Gohei.—I also noticed his face at such times, but it never seemed to me to have any resemblance to Ikeda.

Okuni.—Perhaps what you say is true, but I hope that I may be able to look more closely at him when we meet him again, if we ever do.

Gohei.—He is a strange man! But he cannot be our enemy, madam, for a man who is being hunted as a bitter enemy, and who is believed by all the clansmen to be a coward, would never come so near to us without fear.

Okuni.—But the character of a man who tried to force his immoral affections upon me, and who killed my husband so shamefully under the cover of darkness, is capable of anything, and may still be following me.

Gohei.—Such a thing may be probable, if he is brave enough to give up his life to follow you. If you were alone, I could perhaps credit such a thing, but so long as I am escorting you, madam, such a weak coward would never dare to come so close. I cannot believe that the *komuso*-priest is he. Ikeda is an unskilled fencer. He is a man of graceful appearance, and as fair as a woman, but the priest was a man with a dark brown face, and with protruding cheek-bones.

Okuni.—Yes, I know it, Gohei, but Ikeda is a great coward, and we must be on our guard, for he may suddenly attack us; you never know where he may be hiding.

Gohei.—I am always watchful, so have no fear; moreover, our enemy is a weak *samurai*. As soon as we find him, we will at once kill him. But he seems to be able to keep out of our path always, and it is curious that he is able to keep in hiding from us.

Okuni.—It will be exactly four years next month,

- since my husband was killed. Tomonojo is a very wicked man! Oh, that I could have revenge soon!
- Gohei.**—The time will come I hope very soon, my lady, Be patient and try to bear up a little longer. Look . . . the twilight has come!
- Okuni.**—The evening breeze feels chilly, and because I have heard that we are so near Oshu, I feel the cold more intensely. Though I have grown accustomed to these long journeys, to-night I feel a strange loneliness creeping upon me, I know not why.
- Gohei.**—No one ever passes by this road, and it will become more lonely to you when it gets dark. . . . How do you feel, madam? Are your feet very tired?
- Okuni.**—I feel much refreshed. (*Rubbing her toes*) But the blister on my big toe has broken, and it hurts me very much indeed.
- Gohei.**—Please let me look at it, madam . . . I had no idea . . . (*He goes close to Okuni, unties the strap of her sandal. She takes off her tabi-sock. The music of the shakuhachi ceases for a brief time, then starts again, coming gradually nearer.*)
- Gohei.**—(*Still examining Okuni's foot*) Oh, this must hurt you; your toe is quite inflamed and swollen. What shall we do? Ah, let me wrap a sheet of thin paper round it carefully, so that the strap of your sandal will not touch it. (*He takes some Japanese paper from his dress, and tearing it into long strips, binds it carefully round her wounded foot.*)

Is that easier now, madam? I think that will help you a little.

Okuni.—Yes, it feels much easier now. You know, I have not put sandals on my feet for such a long time, and so my feet are tender, and my toes blister very easily.

Gohei.—In two or three days you will grow accustomed to them again. Please raise your foot a little.

(He helps her to put on her tabi, and then ties the strap of her sandals for her.)

Okuni.—Gohei, it seems to me that the *komuso*-priest is coming this way

Gohei.—*(Listening as he finishes tying her sandal)* Whoever he is, he is a suspicious character. Whatever can be his reason for walking at dusk through this lonely wilderness? His movements mystify me greatly, madam

Okuni.—He is sure to pass here, and if he does, please look carefully at his face.

Gohei.—Yes, madam. So I think it will be better to remain here, for as you say he will surely pass by very soon, and I will watch for a chance of examining him closely this time.

Okuni.—Please do so, but Gohei, please take care and be on your guard.

Gohei.—You must also be careful not to show your face. I will remain just where I am, keeping my sedge-hat well over my face, and will be smoking indifferently. *(Putting on his hat)* Look! He already approaches!

(The sound of the flute comes nearer. Okuni puts a Japanese towel on her head, and Gohei hangs his head, and continues to smoke. A komuso-priest enters from the left. He wears an overhanging sedge-hat, of peculiar shape, as worn only by a komuso-priest. He passes by, piping away on his shakuhachi-flute, and is passing off to the right.)

Gohei.—Pray, stop, your reverence! . . . Holy priest, stop!

(After hearing the second call from Gohei, the priest stops playing his flute, pauses, and without turning round he stops, with the flute still to his lips.)

Holy priest, . . . may I ask you . . . *(The priest removes the flute from his lips, and slowly turns toward the place where Okuni and Gohei are seated.)*

Are you not the one who came with us from Kumagaya in the Nakasendo road as far as Utsunomiya the other day? Sometimes you were in front of us, and sometimes we overtook you. Do you remember?

Komuso.—*(In a faint voice)* Yes, I remember, indeed it was I.

Gohei.—I was not mistaken then, . . . I have really nothing very important to ask you, but as chance has caused us to meet so often, and so strangely, I could not help but speak to you. May I ask where you are going?

Komuso.—I have no particular destination . . .

Gohei.—But, since you pass this way, you must surely

be going to some place in Oshu?

Komuso.—(After a pause) to the next village!

Gohei.—If that is so, let us all go together, for as the old proverb tells us, "It is pleasant to have friends in travelling," as far as the next village.

Komuso.—(Listens, but does not answer.)

Gohei.—O, holy man, what ails you? Why do you not answer a friendly question?

Komuso.—A moment ago, you said that you had nothing of importance to say, yet oh, do not hide what you have to say, for you wish to look at my face!

(Gohei and Okuni look up with great surprise at the priest, but do not speak.)

Komuso.—If you wish to see me, I will let you look (So saying, he calmly takes off his hat, and under it appears a very handsome young samurai with a clean-shaved face and exceedingly fair skin.)

Gohei.—Oh! Oh!

Okuni.—(Rising) You are Ikeda Tomonojo!

Komuso.—Yes, I am Ikeda Tomonojo It is indeed a very long time since I last spoke to you!

Okuni.—It must have been the will of my dear husband's spirit that we should meet in such a place Your time has come, Ikeda Tomonojo Be prepared!

Gohei.—I have been hunting for you for the past three years, escorting my lady from place to place, so that when we found you I might at last avenge my master. Ikeda Tomonojo, your star has fallen at

last! Arm yourself at once as a brave man should!

Komuso.—Oh, hold a moment. There is no need to be in such a hurry to kill me. I have always been a coward, and I am still one. I am poor in the art of fencing, and my strength is very weak; therefore, if you wish to kill me, you can do it at any time Iori had a very good and noble wife, such as you, Madam Okuni, and a good retainer, Gohei. Iori is a far happier man than I am, for I live a shameful life.

(He unconcernedly seats himself on the stump of a pinetree, and Okuni and Gohei stand on guard on each side of him.)

Gohei.—What! Dare you say that my master, whom you so shamefully killed and assaulted unawares, is a happier man than you? What nonsense are you talking?

Okuni.—Oh, Tomonojo, if you do not want to live a shameful life, why did you not give yourself up as a guilty man? You who were born the son of the principal retainer What a miserable figure you cut now!

Tomonojo.—I know well that I cut a miserable figure. But life is still so dear to me.

Gohei.—Though you have become so degraded, remember you were once a *samurai*. How dare you say that life is so dear to you?

Tomonojo.—Yes, yes, you may laugh and jibe at my cowardice. But it matters not to me how much people laugh, I do not wish to die!

Okuni.—Then, if you desire to live, why have you crossed our path? But now that it is impossible to escape from us, are you prepared to die?

Tomo.—No, no, I am not prepared I wished so much to see you once again, even to glance at your face for only a brief moment!

Okuni.—What! What did you say?

Tomo.—(*With a sad smile*) Oh, madam, do not be so hard and cruel to me. I must now tell you the truth For the past four years ever since you left Hiroshima, I have followed you like a shadow, day and night. A coward in love, you know, sometimes forgets the dangers of life!

Gohei.—Followed us for four years! You must be lying to us, for it was only a little while ago that we met you for the first time at Kumagaya!

Tomo.—It is no lie, I speak the truth. It was on the tenth of December the year before last—I cannot forget it—that you started from Hiroshima. From there you went to Osaka by the Chugoku road, you then visited Kyoto, and at the end of that year you came down to Yedo, following the Tokaido. Am I mistaken? Oh, Madam Okuni, it was only lately that I disguised myself as a *komuso*-priest, but it is now the fourth year since I commenced to follow you.

Okuni.—Why have you done such a thing? What are your intentions?

Tomo.—That I cannot tell you, for I do not know myself. You know well that I loved you, and

loved you madly, even killing my rival under the cover of darkness. Of course you will call me a coward!

Gohei.—What are you but a coward!

Tomo.—If you will listen to me, I will explain. Please bear with me a little. On the night that I assaulted and killed Iori I managed to escape from Hiroshima under cover of darkness. When I had found a safe place to rest, I sat down and thought over my deed, and I realised that my fate forever afterwards would be full of hopeless uncertainty, that I must wander about for years trying to escape detection. And then the wish came to my mind that I might surrender myself after I had had one more short glance at you, madam. I knew that you would avenge your husband, and that you would follow me. I even guessed that you would journey through the villages and ports of this empire until you would meet me face to face. This decision to see you once more made me cunning, so I resolved to follow you secretly until I had seen you again. The day after I had committed the murder of your husband, I disguised myself, and again entered the city of Hiroshima, and there I remained in hiding until you started on your journey.

Okuni.—You killed my husband, and now admit that you committed such a treacherous and cunning deed as to follow me, when you knew that I was hunting for you Oh, I hate you!

Tomo.—But will you not give me a little of your pity, for though you say that you hate me so strongly, I love you even still more. Why, the other day while you were lying so ill at Utsunomiya, it was I played the *shakuhachi* under the window of your sick room. I even went there on rainy and windy days. I wished that you might hear, through the throbbing of the notes that I played, all that was in my heart.

Okuni.—But, that *Komuso*-priest was not you, I think

....

Tomo.—Indeed it was I, madam. I smeared my face with "sumi" paint that it might appear black, so that you would not dream who I was. Okuni, do you remember that one day you put your head through the window, and threw me a gift of money. Oh, dear lady, it was then that I was able to see your face for the first time in four whole years. But even then, I felt that it was not sufficient, and that I must see you again.

Gohei.—You are an obstinate criminal! But now, since your wish is again fulfilled, perhaps, you have nothing more to hope for. Enough! I wish to hear no more. Rise and fight with me now as a manly *samurai* should!

Tomo.—No, no, I say! I do not want to cross swords with you. You have always been admired as a most skilled fencer, even from the time when you were only a lackey, and you yourself know your great skill. I have no skill to fight with such a

man as you, for I am but a cowardly and spiritless *samurai*. What use would there be in such a fight? I should be beaten without a doubt. So do not let us fight.

Gohei.—Is life so dear to you still, even at this juncture?

Okuni.—Do you wish to evade fighting by a quibble?

Tomo.—Yes, if it is possible. I want to escape death, even if it is for ever such a little time. Call me names. Laugh at me if you like; but I must speak as my heart directs me, madam. You will perhaps take what I am going to say as an idle compliment, but your late husband, and Gohei, also are happy, for they have the true *samurai* spirit, and are skilled swordsmen. I cannot but envy them

Okuni.—If you envy them, then why do you not try to become like them, and show that you are brave and courageous, and not a coward!

Tomo.—I have always wished that I might become a man, but I was born with an effeminate spirit, and though I fought hard to conquer myself and become manly, I have somehow failed. As I was born a son of a *samurai* family, I wished that I might be a great and good *samurai* like your husband. I wanted to be skilled with the sword, for then, Madam Okuni, you would perhaps have admired me instead of despising me. If I had conquered myself, perhaps now you might have been my dear and good wife, and my life would now be a happy one. All my unhappiness and my miseries come from my weakness of character. I am indeed a

very unfortunate man.

Okuni.--No, it was my husband that was the unfortunate one. When you were in our castle you gave yourself airs, influenced by your family. More than that, you tried to bring shame upon me even in my husband's home. Now you defend yourself by your weakness, and you pour forth all your sweet compliments to me, but I cannot, and will not, believe what you say. It is entirely your own fault that you are despised and disliked. It is your wicked deeds, that have made me hate you now!

Tomo.--Yes, madam, I admit that what you say is true. I was a wicked man, and unworthy of the name of a *samurai*. I have been an idler, liar, and I have the weak mind of a girl. I am a good-for-nothing fellow. By these things, I have been disliked, not only by you, but by everyone. But I do not think that I am responsible for all these bad qualities. I was born into the world weak and cowardly, just as you were born to be a beautiful woman. From the very beginning I was bad, and it was in my very nature. Do you not feel that what I say is true, and is it not unreasonable to accuse me so cruelly when you know my inborn weakness?

Okuni.--Tell me why you were so jealous of my husband's love for me.

Tomo.--How could I be otherwise? I was a young man like your husband then, and was I not your betrothed? But because of my weak nature you

were disappointed in me, and learnt to dislike me. I was even denied by your father, and more than that, people admired you, because you were clever enough to cast aside a good-for-nothing fellow, selecting Iori as your husband. No one pitied me. I was intolerably lonely, and realising my weakness and unhappiness, I could not bear him to share your happiness, so I killed him.

Gohei.—And did you think that by such a deed you should be any happier or that you would gain anything by such a foul act?

Tomo.—No, madam disliked me not because she gained the love of Iori, but because I was bad. I knew it very well. But I hated Iori, and I hated all the people of our castle who admired and loved Iori. He was a great and good *samurai* in every way, and I was an unfortunate man hated by all. It was not only because of my wrath at my rival, but I killed him out of indignation with the people who admired him and hated me. You say that I was treacherous to have killed him under cover of darkness, but what could such a weak fellow do? Such a coward as I had to stoop to such a mean and cowardly act!

Gohei.—It wastes our time to hear such foolish excuses. We wish to listen to you no longer—see, the day is wearing away. Ikeda, you must now prepare yourself, for you cannot escape this time. Fight as bravely as you can, so that we may tell our people that Tomonojo did his best, and died nobly,

contrary to our expectations. We will speak thus of you afterwards if you will do as we ask.

Okuni.—Tomonojo, let me tell you that I dislike you no longer, for though you have been a bad man, you have indeed loved me truly. After you are dead, I promise to have masses said for the repose of your soul, Therefore, for my sake, if you still love me, be prepared to die now like a brave man.

Tomonojo.—Oh, I am so happy, and yet so sad, to hear you speak to me with such tender words. I cannot but weep. It is seven years since I heard you speak so kindly. Now, I have nothing to live for any longer, therefore if you wish it, I will die for you. It is impossible to live in this wilderness with you for ever. Oh, how I envy Gohei! If I might only be spared so that I might travel with you for years through this great empire, I would follow you and be your slave for ever Gohei, surely you, who are a great and true *samurai*, must have a little sympathy for me?

Gohei.—I have great sympathy for you; therefore, I have asked you to prepare yourself for death!

Okuni.—And what joy can you receive by living? It was a long, long time ago that I was your betrothed, and all the love that I ever had for you is dead. Even should you kill Gohei, I should never become your wife. I would rather die with Gohei.

Tomonojo.—(*Laughing coldly*) Ha, ha, ha! Why should I kill him? If I wished to do so, you know, madam, that I could not. I have not the strength to match

against his.

Okuni.—Well, then, will you not die bravely for my sake, and to help me?

Gohei.—Ikeda, again I ask you, you must prepare yourself, for I can see that you hate us both. I may be a bad man to take your life now, but as I have said it, you must prepare to die!

Tomo.—What use is it to kill me? I shall never interfere with your love.

Okuni.—You know well, Ikeda, that should I fail in carrying out my revenge for my husband's death, I can never return home again. I wish to marry publicly, and could never do so if I spared your life.

Tomo.—If you have any pity, Okuni, you will think a little deeply. If you take my life, you know well that you will never forget the past, and the memory of your cruel revenge on a weak man will always haunt you. If you spare me, I shall be content to pass the rest of my life as a *komuso*-priest. I will wander from place to place making my *shakuhachi*-flute my means of livelihood. You need never return to your home. It is far better that you live a happy life without worrying about what is going on in the world around you. Why not settle down in some strange town and find a home there where you will be free and happy? I do not know the ways and duties of a *samurai*, but I am sure that is what all people should do.

Okuni.—No, no, I would never be happy then; I wish

to return to my own home, for I would make Gohei an honorable *samurai* Oh, you forget that my dear child is waiting at home for me.

Tomō.—Then for pity's sake spare my life now. I cannot die! I want to live! I entreat you, Okuni, have pity on me, for I am a miserable man!

Okuni.—(*Looks at Gohei, and then grips the handle of a small dagger.*)

Gohei.—Enough! Cease saying such things.

Tomō.—Are you not going to kill me? Well, what is the use in hiding anything from me now, for I shall never be able to speak after I am dead. I have followed my dear one for four long years, therefore do you think that I have been blind? I do not doubt that when you first started out you were both but mistress and retainer, but I know well that your loyalty has grown into deep love, and unknowingly you both feel it. Are you aware that I was a guest in the next room to yours when you passed a night in that hotel at Kumagaya?

Okuni.—What? Then, that night you.

Tomō.—Yes, that night I heard what you said in the next room. But Okuni, do not let it trouble you, for there will be no one in this world who knows your secret after you have killed me here. When you go back to your castle, after having had your long-sought-for revenge, you will be able to marry publicly. I shall be the only fool then!

Gohei.—I am very ashamed that you know our secret. Believe me when I tell you that my intentions were

most honourable from the first, but we have grown to love each other very dearly indeed. I hope that you will forget it.

Tomo.—It is not my business, but it only makes me angry with the world. I destroyed my life because I loved another man's wife, but you are really doing just the same thing, and the world calls you loyal. You have the means to love while you are doing this wrong, but I have none. You who know the duty of a good *samurai*, and who, to all appearances, are living the life of a good man, are really bad and weak-minded. This just proves how unjust the world is in its summing-up of mankind. I was bad and I took the life of another fellow creature, yet I have been tormented by the memory of my deed ever since. You are about to kill me, but it will be the means of raising you in the esteem of the world. Do you think the world is fair? Do you think that you are just and good?

Gohei.—Forgive me, Ikeda, I now see that I was wrong, I am also a wicked man.!

Tomo.—Then, will you let me have my life?

Gohei.—Oh . . . No, . . . ! . . .

Tomo.—Neither you nor Okuni have the right to kill me. You have wronged your master's wife too. If I were a strong man, I would make Okuni my wife even now, and would call you my enemy!

Okuni.—Oh, Tomonojo . . . I can see that perhaps you are right, . . . but if you still love me so madly, will you not give up your life for me?

Tomo.—No, no. I do not wish to die, for although I have to live the life of a miserable outcast, life is very dear to me still. If you decide to kill me, I must die like a dog at your hands, for I cannot defend myself, but I don't wish to die yet.

Tomo.—Remember, Gohei, that you were not so specially favoured by Iori. You only served him for two or three years, but after his death you proposed to escort your lady, and have travelled far with her in order that in the end you might avenge your master. No one will ever say that you have not been a loyal retainer, and your name will go down to posterity with admiration and honour. But if I were such a skilled fencer as you, I also would be as brave as you, and would even be willing to do much more for such a great and beautiful lady as your mistress Okuni. It must be a very happy thing for you to travel the world with such a splendid woman, and it is also true that you feel the thrill of adventure and courage to meet with your enemy, and to be able to kill him easily to gain the love and praise of your lady. Is it not true what I say, Gohei? Further, if you succeed in your wish, by avenging your good master, you will return home, and will be admired by the lord of your clan, and will even be knighted for your brave deed. Even more than that, you may be the heir to Iori, and may in the end marry your lady Okuni. Such is the advantage of being loyal. It

is quite natural that the clever and wise are loyal.
Gohei.—What are you saying? Do you dare to insinuate that I play such a part as a lady's escort with such an idea in my mind?

Tomo.—I do not mean that at first you had such an idea. I do not doubt for a moment that your offer to help and accompany Madam Okuni was done from your sense of duty towards your late master I mean only that it is not very hard to be loyal under such circumstances. To have such a sweet duty, to such a man as I, would indeed make me a happy man.

Gohei.—You have brought misery to many through your wicked act, so how can you understand our affections, or the miseries we have been through?

Tomo.—But, Gohei, though you have suffered many hardships, you have had much to compensate you. When your lady was ill at Utsunomiya, you played the part of a nurse, you were always at her side, and you tenderly waited on all her needs.

Gohei.—What are you saying now? What do you mean?

Tomo.—You both seemed to me a very friendly mistress and retainer, and secretly I was most envious of your position

Gohei.—Your words are insinuating! Why do you talk such nonsense? Do you wish to put me to shame?

Tomo.—Madam, it was very fortunate for you to fall ill during your long journey which you started to

avenge your husband. This is what I thought when I played my *shakuhachi* each day under your window for two months. I thought that ever you might be happy in spite of your misfortune. I even hoped that you might forget your revenge, though I knew that when you were well you would start to hunt me again. Life, after all, is only a short dream, and happiness does not remain long with us. Gohei, I do not mean to insinuate, but I can envy you!

(Okuni turns slightly pale, and looks significantly at Gohei.)

Gohei.—Ikeda, it is decided, and you must abide by my mistress's wish. Again I say, and finally . . . prepare yourself . . . and . . .

(Gohei rushes at him with his drawn sword. Tomonojo d fends himself with his shakuhachi flute, moving back step by step, and rails at them in a sad voice).

Tomo.—You are wicked and unmerciful people! You have no conscience You committed adultery You are a false lord and retainer! *(A blow of the sword wounds him in the shoulder and he falls. He continues to cry louder)* Oh, how dare you try to kill me! Wait, I tell you, wait! I have one thing to tell you before you finish me that lady there that Okuni

Gohei.—Quick, finish quickly, what have you to say?

Tomo.—*(weakly)* That Okuni to me, to this Tomonojo that you are trying to kill she . . .

she once gave herself to me and submitted herself to my passions!

(Gohei turns suddenly upon Okuni, with a glance of suspicion.)

(Okuni hangs her head, ashamed.)

Tomo.—Madam Okuni, this is my last entreaty to you Please strike the final blow, and finish me with your own hand!

Gohei.—No, that shall never be! I shall finish what I have started, for you are the rival of my love, and you were my master's enemy.

(Gohei strikes the final blow, and Okuni falls in grief by the roadside, and covering her face with her sleeves, she weeps.)

(There is a long pause, during which it is gradually becoming darker.)

Gohei.—*(bending over Okuni)* My Lady, . . . do not weep so bitterly. All is over, and what is done is done.

Okuni.—Oh, but my shame is more than I can bear. What must you think of me now that you have heard the truth from Ikeda.

Gohei.—Nothing matters now. You and I have realised the desire of our hearts. Now that Ikeda is dead, we have no one to fear in all the world. Let us forget the past, and start with the future only.

Okuni.—Then, Gohei, will you promise to love me for ever?

Gohei.—I cannot but love you, my lady; for although I do not deserve it you are my dear wife.

Okuni.—Now, I am anxious to return home very soon.

If your love is what you say it is for me, then let us go at once but let us take the head of Tomonojo with us.

Gohei.—How anxious they will all be at home. After these three long years, I wish to see the pleased face of your old father, and the smile of your little son when they see you.

Okuni.—Ah, yes, what great joy is now before me but, look it has been growing dark, and we have not noticed it. Now, let us sever the head from Ikeda's body.

Gohei.—(*Goes up to the corpse accompanied by Okuni both with drawn daggers.*) (*Speaking to the corpse*) Ikeda, our deed has been a cruel one, a disgraceful one; but we had no alternative. What we have done was done for the honour of our family, and for the sake of our clan, our love. Your body must resign itself to its sad fate!

Okuni.—(*bending over the body*) What we do may be selfish, and what we have done may be cruel Oh, Tomonojo, forgive us both!

Gohei.—*Namu Amida-Butsu!*

Okuni.—*Namu, Amida-Butsu!*

(*Okuni and Gohei repeat the words of the prayer faintly again, kneeling down near the body with folded hands.*)

IT WILL BE FINE TOMORROW

by

Kokushi Kishida

(A PLAY IN ONE ACT),

Translated by

Eiji Ukai and Eric S. Bell.

THE HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF BOSTON
FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT
TO THE PRESENT TIME
BY
NATHANIEL BENTLEY
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Kokushi Kishida

KOKUSHI KISHIDA

Kokushi Kishida, the author of the following drama, was born in Tokyo, in the 23rd year of Meiji (1880). His father was from Kishu Province and was the Commander of an artillery regiment.

Kishida's younger life was passed in Tokyo, and after graduating from the military schools at Nagoya and at Tokyo, he joined the colours at Kyushu. But for reasons of his own, the young officer gave up his army life, and again studied French literature at the Tokyo Imperial University. In 1919 he went over to France, where he experienced a wanderer's life for some four years, and with his father's death he returned home to be a writer and a lecturer at some colleges.

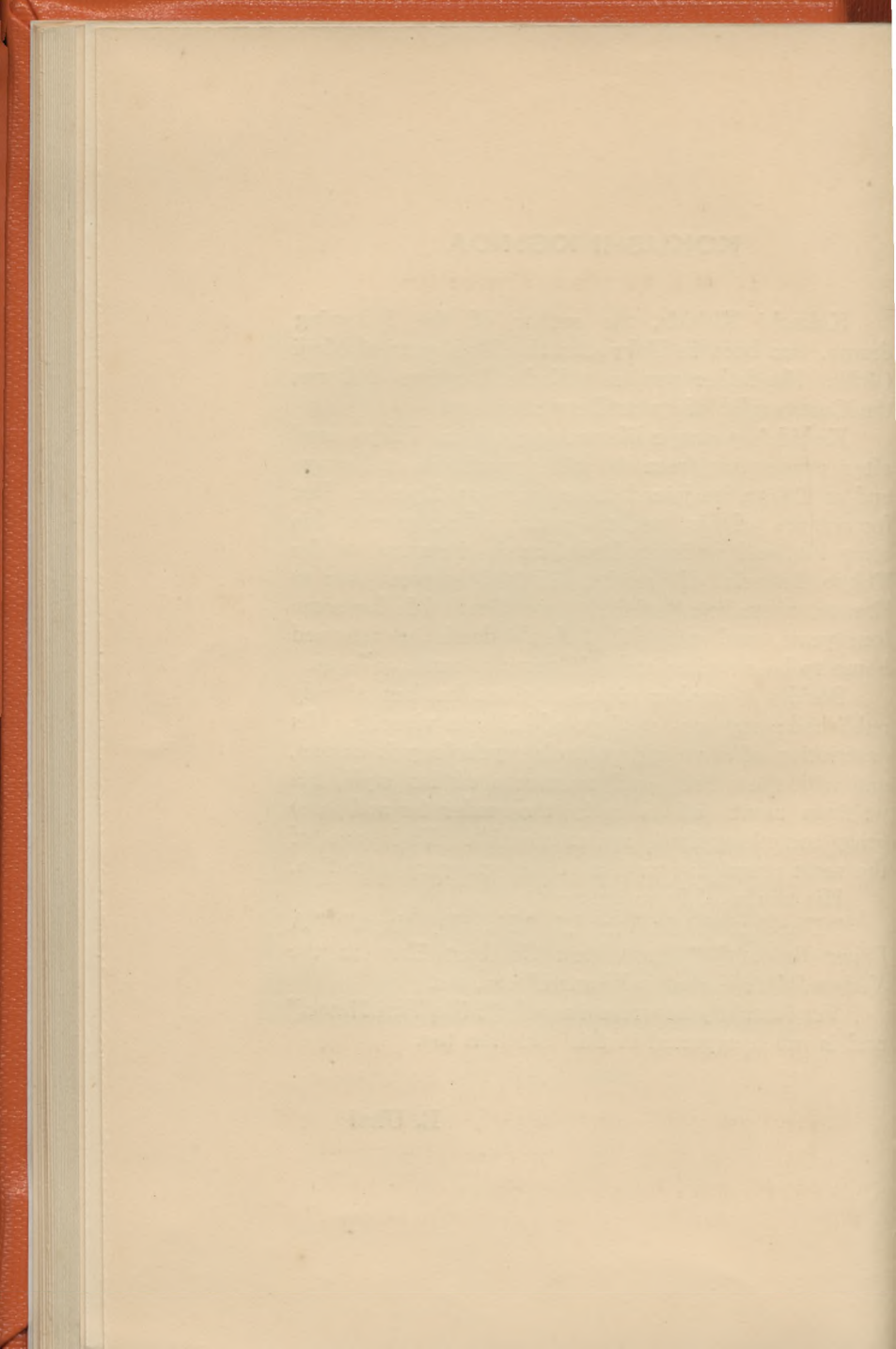
Besides a number of translations he has already published many one-act plays of his own vivacity. His description of a young woman's psychology is unique, and with the naivete and smartness of his style, his writings never fail to make the reader (or audience) grasp something fresh and memorable. He is one of the most promising writers of the younger generation.

His works of fame are:—

“The Autumn in Tyrol,” “Old Playthings,” “A Paper Balloon,” “The Oldest Chestnut Tree in the Village,” “A Virtuous Woman,” etc., etc.

Very recently he wrote a novel, “Miss Yuri Hatae,” and is much expected in this direction too.

E. Ukai



It Will be Fine Tomorrow

Characters

The husband.

The wife.

The maidservant of an inn.

A manservant.

Time

A rainy day in summer.

Place

A room in a seaside inn overlooking the sea.

PART ONE

When the curtain rises, the husband is seen lying face downwards on the floor matting of a room in a Japanese inn. He is imitating the gestures of a swimmer, and is practising various swimming-strokes. The wife is holding a bundle of picture post-cards in her hand, and is wondering whom she shall address them to.

A maidservant enters.

The husband suddenly stops his antics, and pretends to be reading a newspaper.

Maidservant.—This rainy weather is awful day after day! You must feel very miserable. I am extremely sorry for you, Madam.

Wife.—Yes, but if we really wanted to bathe, we could,

you know. Listening to the quiet pattering of the rain is not so uninteresting, and as it is summertime, we are quite glad to get such cool weather.

Maidservant.—Yes, Madam. The rainy weather is the best because it brings coolness, but if it were fine and bright you would feel less inclined to remain indoors.

Wife.—Yes, that is true. But in such cool weather you are not so troubled with guests, are you?

Maidservant.—No, Madam, even now a few of our guests are leaving here. I'm told it is quite cool in Tokyo too, lately

Wife.—I don't think so. It was very sultry there when we left. In fact it was so oppressive that we thought by coming here we should get away from the heat, and right away from our daily routine.

Maidservant.—Yes, Madam. But last night one of our clerks went up to Tokyo on business, and he telephoned this morning from there to say that, owing to the heavy rain which had been falling since the previous night, it is so cool that he felt quite cold in his summer-suit.

Husband.—All right, that is enough about Tokyo, if you don't mind. We came here to forget about it, to get away from things and to give our minds a complete rest.

Maidservant.—I beg your pardon, Sir Have you anything for me to do?

Husband.—If we want you we shall call, so you may go.

Wife.—You needn't be so sharp, my dear. But?

Maid.—Certainly, Sir. (*She goes out.*)

Wife.—For heaven's sake stop snapping at the poor maid just because you don't like the bad weather.

I know it is unpleasant, but if you want to swim so badly, why don't you go out and do so?

Husband.—Swim in the rain? If anyone saw me, they'd say I was crazy!

Wife.—It's far more idiotic to swim on the matting!

Husband.—Then shall we go back to Tokyo?

Wife.—No, let us stay for another day. Look! The sky over there seems much brighter. Perhaps it will be fine tomorrow.

Husband.—By all accounts it seems to be very cool in Tokyo. In the post-cards you are sending, you had better mention that it is hot here, and that so far we have not bathed yet, will you?

Wife.—This is what I have written to Miss Yuri; 'Is it very hot in Tokyo? It is so cool here that when we go out in the morning or evening we can't do without *haori*'

Husband.—When we go out in the morning or evening?

Wife.—Well, let me finish, my dear! 'and in the daytime we are not feeling the heat at all, as we have such lots of bathes!'

Husband.—Good gracious!

Wife.—(*continuing reading*) 'We have got so sunburnt during the last few days that we are almost ashamed for any one to see us'

Husband.—Oh, I say!

Wife.—Be quiet! 'We have just been talking of hiring a boat for a row'

Husband.—Oh, gracious! Have you written the same thing on each of your cards?

Wife.—Yes, I have said almost the same thing to everyone.

Husband.—Whom have you been writing to anyway?

Wife.—Well, this one is for Miss Yuri, and this I am sending to mother. This one is going to Miss Ko, and this for the wife of our next-door neighbour and also I have sent one to that poor woman who lives behind our house, and

Husband.—Well, I'm glad I am here, and happy that I shan't be one of the persons who gets your cards. I'm rather sorry for the man whose woman friend goes away in the summer! But, look! The sky is clearing, and it is getting quite bright.

Wife.—Yes, the rain seems to be over. How lucky!

Husband.—Do you happen to know what the name of this swimming-stroke is? (*He imitates some stroke.*)

Wife.—It's the frog-stroke, isn't it?

Husband.—Yes, that's right. And this?

Wife.—Is it any kind of swimming-stroke at all?

Husband.—Of course it is. It is called 'Suifu style,' and this is the over-arm stroke

Wife.—Which one are you going to teach me?

Husband.—Well, the frog-stroke is the easiest What about trying to do it now?

Wife.—Certainly not! Not here!

Husband.—It's a good chance to practice it here.

Wife.—I said no!

Husband.—How silly! You said you had never bathed in the sea, didn't you?

Wife.—Yes.

Husband.—Well, you shouldn't be afraid of trying everything so that you will get used to the water when you go in. But even if you can't swim, it is a delightful feeling to float on the waves. The sensation is almost indescribable If you want to compare it to anything at all, well, we might compare it to that feeling of dreamy ecstasy that lovers experience when exchanging their first vows of love!

Wife.—Oh, stop saying such stupid things!

Husband.—Why is it stupid? You always look at everything in that way, you are far too prosaic. After all, both our lives are rather insipid. I spend from morning till night bending over sheets of paper, counting and counting, and you only move backwards and forwards between the oven and your sewing! All the dreams we ever had have gone. There is no more talk of the cherished future we are already forgetting ourselves!

Wife.—(*does not answer.*)

Husband.—The small amount of money and leisure we have derived has enabled us to stand up and face a hope as great and limitless as that vast sea out there Just look at it! Are you listening to what I am saying?

Wife.—(*remains silent.*)

Husband.—Have you ever longed for the sun as much as you do now? You are a woman, and you do not realise that the fire that was almost extinguished has suddenly begun to burn again in my heart it has burst into flames can't you realise it?

Wife.—(*glances quickly at her husband.*)

Husband.—Why do you look at me like that? It is not the continuous rain of the past few days which has made me speak like this? (*The bell of the telephone on the desk rings.*)

Husband.—(*becoming calmer*) I have no use for that wretched telephone, I'm only thinking of your fresh and beautiful figure (*The bell rings again violently.*)

Husband.—Disgusting! (*He takes up the receiver.*)
Hello! Hello! Who is it? What? . . . Yes, it is . . . From Tokyo? . . . Who? . . . Oh, exchange, please don't cut me off please Hello! Hello! Yes, it is Oh is it you?

Wife.—Who is it?

Husband.—(*aside*) Kobayashi.

Wife.—Mr. Kobayashi?

Husband.—(*continuing his conversation into the telephone*)
No, no, nothing of the sort! What nonsense! . . .
. . . Yes, What? Yes, very good!
Oh, yes, the sea is lovely here What?
. . . . Yes, she is But I'm not quite at my ease with her.

Wife.—What are you talking about?

Husband.—(continuing into the phone) She is here now, yes. She is glaring at me.

Wife.—Stop talking such nonsense!

Husband.—She wants to know what we are talking about Ha, ha! Is it hot in Tokyo? Indeed! ever since yesterday? It is much cooler here, but we are not afraid of the sea, we are just going out there now.

Wife.—Give my kind regards to Mrs. Kobayashi.

Husband.—(still talking to his friend) Indeed! That is rather unexpected. It must rather worry you . . . I'm sorry My wife wishes to be remembered to Mrs. Kobayashi Yes, we're getting along very well. Is the Director there? Pshaw! That's awkward! Tell him I will return as soon as I feel like it Well, good-bye! Yes, yes, all right Good-bye!

Wife.—What does he want?

Husband.—Oh, nothing! . . . See, the rain has stopped. Let's go out now. (He takes off his clothes hurriedly, and is seen wearing a bathing-suit underneath.)

Wife.—(rises to her feet rather gaily.) Are you going out like that?

Husband.—Of course I am. The sea is quite near, just across the garden Did you expect that we should have to take a taxi to get to it?

Wife.—What shall I wear?

Husband.—The same as I'm wearing.

Wife.—But I haven't got my bathing-suit on yet.

Husband.—Then put it on quickly.

Wife.—Well, please go out of the room.

Husband.—No, carry your bathing-clothes to the dressing-shed on the beach and change there.

Wife.—Won't people stare?

Husband.—Oh, be quick! It may begin to rain again if you don't hurry.

(They both leave the room. Just about as long as it would take them to get downstairs, the rain begins to fall again. The sound of a phonograph is heard in some near-by room. As if stepping to the time of the music, they both enter the room again, and without speaking a word, they seat themselves and gaze vacantly out into the sky. Both heave a deep sigh, which is followed by a long silence.)

The husband then goes to his bag and takes a guide-book from it, and commences to turn over its leaves. The wife stretches for a pillow and prepares to take a nap.)

Husband.—Oh, for goodness sake don't go to sleep! If you do, what on earth am I going to do to kill time?

Wife.—You had better sleep too.

Husband.—Isn't it rather unreasonable to expect me to go to sleep now after sleeping continuously for fourteen hours from 7 last night until 9 this morning? As if we couldn't find anything to do but sleep! You seem to forget that we are at one of the famous summer-resorts in Shonan, and that we are paying as much as five *yen* a day at this hotel after taking a long and expensive train-journey

from Tokyo. Do you object to trying to find some other way of amusing ourselves?

Wife.—But if we can't bathe, whatever can we do?

Husband.—Instead of giving up everything just because we are unable to bathe, surely we can still find some other kind of amusement or diversion.

Wife.—If you want something to do, why don't you take your umbrella and go for a walk? I want to stay here and rest.

(The wife turns over on her side, and prepares to sleep.)

Husband.—Take an umbrella? Why, you know quite well that we haven't got one with us.

Wife.—Go and borrow one then.

Husband.—In the meantime do you intend to sleep?

Wife.—Yes.

Husband.—The husband borrows an umbrella to go for a walk by himself in the rain, while his wife leisurely takes a nap. It certainly is a joke!

Wife.—That is why I didn't want to come to such a place. I would rather have bought some new dresses Don't you remember how I begged you

Husband.—All right! Don't repeat it! I quite understand. Anyhow, now I would rather like to make a trip to some other place.

Wife.—Good gracious! Wherever to?

Husband.—Oh, anywhere, a trip round the country somewhere.

Wife.—*(makes no reply.)*

Husband.—I'll visit the Beppu Hot Springs.

Wife.—With only that guide-book to assist you?

Husband.—Of course! Why not? No trip could be less expensive. After all, a guide-book is rather wonderful! After scanning the time-table, and reading of the arrival hours of the different trains, you begin to feel just as if you had already begun to travel.

Wife.—(*Does not answer.*)

Husband.—It's rather interesting that, after finding the name of a station where a box-lunch can be purchased, one can almost smell the appetising odour of the food in it.

Wife.—I am afraid it isn't very interesting to me.

Husband.—Isn't it? You don't seem to find anything very interesting. You are even so careless about things as to allow a mosquito to sting you on the bottom of your foot. Does it still hurt?

Wife.—Oh, I don't know.

Husband.—The famous Onuma Park is mentioned also for its fine scenery or it wouldn't be a bad idea to visit Hokkaido Well, where would be the best place to go?

Wife.—My dear, if you are going anywhere else, for goodness sake do so without talking so much about it!

Husband.—Can I arrange a trip in silence? It will surely be a dumb sort of a business if I do!

(The music of the phonograph stops.)

Husband.—(*continuing*) Wouldn't you like something

nice to eat?

Wife.—(*does not answer.*)

Husband.—Are you going to sleep?

Wife.—(*still remains silent.*)

Husband.—Surely you can't be asleep, for you were stifling your yawns only a moment ago.

Wife.—(*makes no answer.*)

Husband.—Are you determined to pretend you are asleep?

Wife.—

Husband.—Then shall I tell you something that will surprise you? Don't you mind?

Wife.—

Husband.—All right! I shall! But promise not to shriek!

Wife.—

Husband.—A few days ago I met an old sweetheart of mine. I suppose you didn't know about it, eh? I didn't mention it till now because I didn't want to worry you about it, but I think it is time that you were told Oh, you needn't make such an effort to hold your breath!

Wife.—

Husband.—It seems that she is still unmarried

She has such innocent eyes, and she has remained as unchanged and pure as the expression of her eyes. She asked me if I ever thought about her now, and I answered well, do you know what I told her?

Wife.—

Husband.—Oh, look here! Does all I have been saying cause you no concern?

Wife.—(*moves a little, and scratches under her arm.*)

Husband.—It's not the time to scratch! Listen to what I'm saying! What do you suppose I told her? I said, 'I'm tremendously glad you have thought about me so much, but I am hardly worthy of your thoughts and affection, because I am not free,' and this is what she answered, 'I'm quite aware of it. Only yesterday I saw you and your wife together, looking very happy. I saw you as you passed along the corridor.' She looks gentle but very intelligent. I didn't know what to say to her, so I merely remarked that such women as you could be found everywhere.

Wife.—(*Gives a long sigh.*)

Husband.—Thinking afterwards that my answer had been rather vague, I continued, 'Such a dull kind of woman is rather rare.' And what I said was quite true, even though you may be angry with me for saying it.

Wife.—(*adjusts her pillow a little.*)

Husband.—Then she said rather gently, 'The happier it must be for a woman who lives with a man like you, I should think.' When I asked her why, she laughed but would not answer the question.

Wife.—(*begins to snore a little.*)

Husband.—Your suspicious snoring shows that what I have told you has sunk in! Now, answer whatever you like, I'd like to hear what you have to say!

Wife.—

Husband.—You won't answer! Oh, well then, I'll go on We became very intimate again, and after quite a long story, which I'll skip, she begged me to visit her house after I got back to Tokyo. She told me her life was very lonely, for she had only an old housekeeper for company I told her that instead of waiting until our return to the capital, I would very much like to talk with her . . . in her room as I was sick and tired of having nothing to do every day. I also told her that I was tired of my wife, and that it would be a relief for me to get away from her for an hour or so. She told me not to do that as it would be quite impossible for her to talk freely with me in a place where you were near us both. She said, 'I have no heart to talk to you here My house in Tokyo is in rather a lonely part of the city it would take a stranger quite a long time to find it' She suddenly broke off with what she was saying, and clutched wildly at the verandah railing. She was weirdly white, for she had just come from her bath! She seemed to be waiting for something her lips were deliciously red, and as she tried not to speak, they quivered intensely. Her eyes gazed far away as if they were recalling past memories and associations.

Wife.—(*turns over on her side, facing her husband. Her mouth is slightly opened as is natural sometimes to one in sleep. Her upturned nostrils enable you to*

peep into their inner recesses.)

Husband.—(*seeing her facing him, turns away.*) How brazen you are to turn over on your side like that! (*A sharp cry of "O-kin San" is heard from a maidservant in the corridor outside.*)

Wife.—(*suddenly wakes up, and after yawning, rises to her feet.*) Is the bath prepared yet?

Husband.—(*still very suspicious as to whether his wife has really been asleep or not, but nevertheless rather surprised by her natural manner of waking*) Have you been asleep?

Wife.—(*without answering, takes up a towel and a piece of soap, and after moving across the room for her toilet-case, she goes out.*)

Husband.—(*dumbfounded and amazed gazes at her as she leaves.*)

PART TWO

Time, rather late the following afternoon.

(The Husband, in his shirt-sleeves, is packing his trunk, making preparations to leave.

The Wife is drying her towel over a charcoal brazier.)

Maid.—You needn't hurry; there's plenty of time to catch your train.

Husband.—(*taking the bill from her*) We shall come here again before long, and

Maid.—Yes, Sir; we hope you will come here often . . . but couldn't you stay here for another day? It looks as if it were going to be fine tomorrow.

Husband.—Yes, I'd like to very much, but I have some business to attend to in Tokyo . . . we have had a thorough rest here, and after all, that was the main reason we came . . . Please take this. (*He hands her the money for payment of the hotel bill.*

The maid takes it, and after paying some polite compliment, she goes out.)

Wife.—How much did the account come to?

Husband.—Oh, it was rather cheap, my dear.

Wife.—As we expected?

Husband.—Well, yes . . . Shall we give rather a generous tip?

Wife.—Nonsense! I don't think that's at all necessary. It would be better to spend the money on an extra day here.

Husband.—You say it as if it were a very easy matter . . . But, look! It's getting quite fine again.

Wife.—But, couldn't you manage to take just one more day from your office?

Husband.—If I hadn't received that telephone message a little while ago, I might have been able to . . . I feel as if I were tied to the office by a rope. At any rate my absence has evidently convinced them that I am indispensable. When I get to the office tomorrow morning I'll let them see I am not too pleased to have been called back. I can see the manager coming to me with all kinds of flattering

remarks, trying to smooth things over, but I've determined to be rather blunt with him.

Wife.—I suppose that will give you a feeling of satisfaction. Can I tell our friends about this summer trip? But if they come across my bathing-suit which has never been in the water, I'll feel rather foolish!

Husband.—How silly! If you are afraid of such a thing, why not hold it over the steam of the kettle? You can soon make it look as if it had been used. Do you think it sounds like boasting to say that you have bathed?

Wife.—But, we have been very unlucky, haven't we?

Husband.—Yes, rather. But for goodness sake don't look at the dismal side of our holiday only. After all it hasn't been so terribly unpleasant loafing about indoors during the continuous rain, and even if we haven't been able to bathe, it is not such a very distressing story to tell anyone!

Wife.—But think of the good spirits you were in when we started!

Husband.—Naturally; but that is the case with others as well. No one would think much of us if we had started out for a holiday with glum faces as if we were expecting something unlucky to happen to us. You and your family take things too seriously altogether your mother, your elder sister and Miss Ko

(Hearing steps approaching down the corridor, they stop talking.)

A maidservant appears with some change from the bill.)

Maid.—I'm sorry to have kept you so long. Here is your change, Sir.

Husband.—(*picks out coins from the change and hands them to the maid*) Will you give this tip to your clerk, but I am sorry it is rather small.

Maid.—It is very kind of you, Sir. but it's our rule never to accept tips from our patrons.

Husband.—Oh, really! I'm sorry what shall I do about it then? Oh, well you had better keep it yourself.

Maid.—It is really very kind of you, Sir.

Husband.—By the way, what is the name of that other girl who waited upon us several times? I mean the one who walks rather heavily?

Wife.—Oh, how rude you are!

Husband.—It isn't rude. She does walk heavily, doesn't she? Anyhow, please call her and also that young man in charge of the bath and, by the way, is he dumb?

Maid.—No, Sir. he is only rather silent. He never talks to anyone unless it is absolutely necessary, Sir.

Husband.—Such a fellow will never find it necessary!

Maid.—Please tell me when your bags are ready, Sir. and I will help you with them. (*She goes out.*)

Wife.—How much did you give her?

Husband.—Don't worry about that, my dear. Anyone would think you were wife of the manager of some

big company since you have been away from Tokyo.

Wife.—Oh, I wish I could feel that such a thing was true when we got back there.

Husband.—Perhaps so. Anyway don't behave, when you get back, as if you were the wife of a poor clerk!

Wife.—But I can't help feeling that I am, all the same.

Husband.—What do you mean by 'all the same'? Are you trying to make me mad? If you talk like that I will start to lecture you again!

Wife.—No more lectures, please, dear! No, thank you. I've had quite enough of your lectures!

Husband.—Well then, listen to me; tell me plainly have you begun to understand my disposition yet? I want to feel that you understand me thoroughly, my dear After all you are an unusually good-natured woman Why do you make faces?

Wife.—(*remains silent.*)

Husband.—Oh, well, I'll not flatter you but really you are just the kind of woman for me.

Wife.—I'm glad!

Husband.—You have beauty! I consider myself a very fortunate man.

(*Just then the maid with the heavy foot-steps enters the room followed by the round-shouldered bath-attendant.*)

Husband.—Ah, you have both been very kind to us. Here is something for each of you.

Maid.—You are very kind, Sir. (*She takes the tip. The bath-attendant takes his tip, and bows silently.*)

Maid.—Can I do anything for you, Sir?

Husband.—Thanks, but there is nothing more I want.
(*The maid murmurs a few polite words and goes out. The bath-attendant also begins to leave.*)

Husband.—Oh, will you wait a moment, please? Were you born near here?

(*The bath-attendant stares vaguely at the husband.*)

Husband.—(*continuing*) Were you born in this village?
(*The bath-attendant bows slightly.*)

Husband.—Is there no news of interest around here?
(*The bath-attendant grins.*) They speak very highly of you here.

(*The bath-attendant looks at him suspiciously.*)

Well, can't you answer me? (*The bath-attendant remains silent.*)

What are you thinking about? (*The bath-attendant still remains silent.*)

Wife.—(*interrupting*) Isn't it time to start, my dear?
(*The husband gazes hard at the bath-attendant.*)

Wife.—Oh, you have said enough, let him go.
(*The bath attendant bows and goes out.*)

Wife.—(*indignantly*) He is as close as an oyster!
(*A long silence.*)

(*continuing*) But don't you think you were rather rude? (*The husband suddenly bursts into laughter. She looks at him.*)

Husband.—What impression did my remarks make upon him, do you think?

Wife.—He probably thinks you are rather an extraordinary sort of person!

Husband.—We often get what we don't expect.

Wife.—Take care, my dear; if you treat people as if you considered them fools, they will scorn you!

Husband.—That was not my intention at all at first. To tell the truth, I thought that perhaps such a silent man might give some rather bright answer to my questions. Even now I can't help thinking that he is hiding something by his silence. He may even have invented something great which no one knows about. He might have some deep insight into human nature, and may guess at some hidden secret of our married life . . . something which we ourselves may not be aware of.

Wife.—Again you are allowing your imagination to overstretch itself!

Husband.—Well, let us get ready to go now. Are you sure you have left nothing?

(At this moment the clerk of the inn appears.)

Clerk.—Are you leaving now? . . . We are extremely sorry the weather has been so bad while you have been here.

Husband.—But we are very glad that it has cleared up just when we are starting back.

Clerk.—Yes, I'm sure that it will soon be quite fine, Sir.

Husband.—I sincerely hope so . . . Will you be so kind as to carry this bag, this basket, and these small things downstairs for us?

Clerk.—Certainly, Sir. Have you got your railway tickets?

Husband.—(*taking out a bank-note*) No, not yet, but will you be so good as to get them for us?

Clerk.—Certainly, Sir. . . . two, second-class to Tokyo?

Husband.—No, two third!

Clerk.—(*bows, and goes out.*)

Wife.—Our return journey seems as if it were going to be rather miserable.

Husband.—Nonsense! If you think of all that are waiting for us in Tokyo you wouldn't talk in that way. Think of that fruit-shop, Sembikiya, . . . of the 'Overland,' . . . and think of that nice summer scarf!

Wife.—What scarf?

Husband.—And lots of other nice things.

Wife.—Yes, many things quite beyond our reach!

Husband.—Oh, rubbish! No harm if they are beyond our reach. Take sea-bathing, for instance. Until recently it was one of the things we considered beyond our reach, and yet it has been realised!

Wife.—Do you think it has?

Husband.—Yes . . . well . . . it would have been if it hadn't rained!

Wife.—It would be much better if we would stay here a little longer.

Husband.—Perhaps so. But you are never satisfied. It has been quite as profitable gazing out at the sea as bathing in it. It is quite easy to imagine that you have bathed every day since you have

been here, my dear.

Wife.—(*makes no reply.*)

Husband.—After all, the sea is nothing more than a huge salt-water bath, and by sitting in a bath-tub of cold water you can get just about the same sensation.

Wife.—But there must be a very different feeling when bathing in the sea . . . a feeling of expanse!

Husband.—Just exactly the same as in a tub. You can expand your limbs in a tub as well as in the sea. If you shut your eyes tight, and imagine the glorious blue sky above you, there is no difference!

Wife.—But how could I possibly feel the waves that roll in one after the other and break on the beach after they have passed?

Husband.—Oh, as far as that goes, you can get the swaying movement of the waves, if you rock your body to and fro. After all, it is rather adventurous to swim in the sea. Every year two or three cases of drowning are reported from each seaside resort, and also when you are learning to dive, it is very easy to lose your gold-rimmed glasses like Mr. Kawakami did And wasn't it Mrs. Kaneda who lost her pearl ring while bathing?

Wife.—I heard that it was only an imitation.

Husband.—It doesn't matter whether it was imitation or not! Anyhow, lots of people get their toes cut badly by shells or broken glass . . . and saltwater gets into your ears and damages the eardrums!

Wife.—Again, it is merely a case of sour grapes with

you. Before we came you couldn't say enough to me about the wonders of the seaside during summer, and now, listen to you! It is an extraordinary contradiction!

Husband.—I only say it to comfort you.

Wife.—I would feel better pleased if you were a little disappointed! Such pretence does neither of us much good. It would be far better if we both showed a little regret.

Husband.—All right! Now that you feel like that, the problem is solved. Let us therefore put the excursion behind us as a failure, and instead, let us live in hopes of making up for it in some other way before long! Do you agree to that, my dear?

Wife.—(*does not answer.*)

Husband.—Aren't you anxious to hear what I mean?

Wife.—I know it.

Husband.—Then, what is it?

Wife.—There is no need to say!

Husband.—You've misunderstood me, or do you mean this you remember the other day our neighbour asked us to take care of his phonograph for him while he was away from home? Now he has asked us to keep it in order for him so that it will not get rusty.

Wife.—Yes.

Husband.—Do you remember how we used to set it going night after night, playing each record one by one? And how we learnt the "Song of the Volga Boatman" from memory?

Wife.—And 'Souvenir'!

Husband.—Yes, and that takes me back to my hatred of getting up early.

Wife.—Yes, I know, for you got angry with me every morning and grumbled at me when I woke you.

Husband.—Well, it is most annoying to be wakened up in that way every morning! I have always wished to experience the happiness of being wakened unconsciously and naturally by the strains of some beautiful song near my bed-side the song of a girl. I knew that you would never help me, so I determined to use that phonograph for the purpose.

Wife.—Yes, I remember

Husband.—Don't interrupt! Let me finish what I was saying. I remember one night I asked you to wake me up the next morning by playing some melody on the phonograph close to my pillow, instead of thundering in my ear as you usually do, 'It's time to get up!' I promised you that as soon as the record finished I would jump out of bed. That night I tumbled quickly into bed, and prayed to God to send an early dawn with a clear sky. I remember going to sleep, still feeling the pleasant effects of a bottle of beer I had drunk for my supper.

Wife.—Yes, and the next morning I did just as you had asked me.

Husband.—Yes, for once you did keep your word, and put on 'Souvenir' to wake me up.

Wife.—And as soon as it was finished, you asked me to play it all over again.

Husband.—Yes, I admit it, but I assure you that it was not an excuse to lie in bed any longer. It was the fascinating melody of the violin breaking into my dreams so gently which filled me with intense happiness . . . even more than I had anticipated. But I am sorry to say that the impression only lasted for a few moments, for as I came to my senses, it gradually dawned on me that it was only my wife playing a phonograph near my bed. The idea of it was an utter disappointment, and I at once buried my head under the blankets.

Wife.—You were crying a little then, weren't you?

Husband.—You thought so, did you? . . . Well, as a matter of fact, while you played the melody again I began to think about our happiness, our dreams, and about life.

Wife.—You were very bright and happy during breakfast that morning.

Husband.—Was I? . . . And you promised to put a record on for me every morning if it showed such good results . . . but I told you not to do so.

Wife.—But it is funny that ever since that very morning you have learned to get up without having to be called twice . . . though quite recently you have got back into your old habit again.

Husband.—Although you may not believe it, while I was hiding my head under the blankets, I was thinking profoundly . . . I realised how disgusting

it was of me to lie there in bed like that! I almost made up my mind to kick the wretched phonograph off the chair, to spring up, and to run away with you to some lonely mountain, and to hide there away from everyone. A great tumult was going on in my mind, just as anyone feels deep self-reproach after committing some great sin. I experienced a feeling of deep repentance, and a kind of self-hatred. But I didn't want you to know how I felt at the time, and tried to calm myself by appearing undisturbed.

Wife.—I really don't know if you are talking seriously or not, my dear.

Husband.—Neither do I! (*A long silence*)

Wife.—I often used to feel very lonely, but somehow I got so used to it that I don't worry about it so much nowadays.

Husband.—What's the use of worrying? Later on you will learn what I am intending to do. I am thinking only of how to make you happy.

Wife.—You are talking nonsense again!

Husband.—Don't you believe what I say? Well, I shall tell you what I am expecting to do. You remember that when we went to Ogikubo some time ago, you saw a pretty house there surrounded with lawn. Do you remember saying how much you would love to live in such a home?

Wife.—What kind of a house was it?

Husband.—Have you forgotten it? Don't you remember . . . only last spring . . . how you

noticed a dog jumping up and being caressed by a young woman?

Wife.—Oh, yes, when we were searching for our present house?

Husband.—Yes, yes. I fancy that house we saw then had about four rooms. How much do you suppose one would have to pay for such a house?

Wife.—(*does not reply.*)

Husband.—We would need about ¥2,000 if we wanted to buy it. (*At this moment the first maidservant appears.*)

Maid.—Excuse me, but it is time for you to go.

Husband.—Oh, very well. (*He rises mechanically. The wife remains where she is sitting, and gazes absent-mindedly towards the sea upon which the dusk and haze of evening are creeping.*)

THE END

THE SPIDER'S WEB

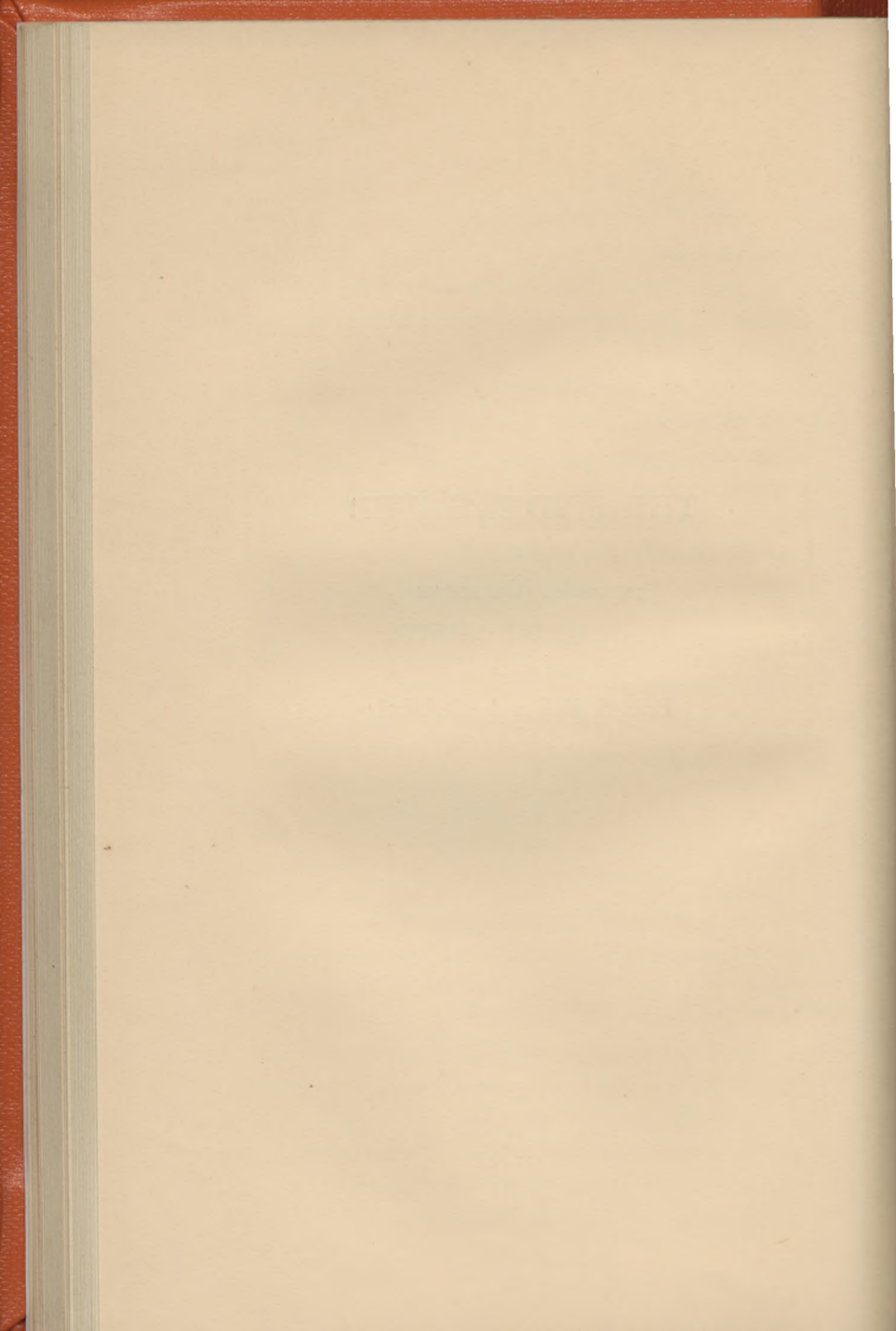
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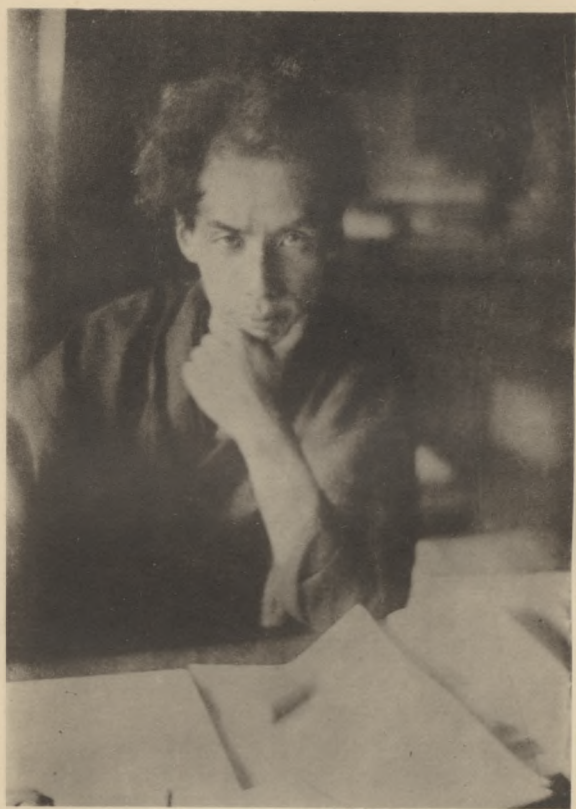
Ryunosuke Akutagawa

(A SHORT STORY).

Translated by

Eric. S. Bell and Eiji Ukai.





Ryunosuke Akutagawa

RYUNOSUKE AKUTAGAWA

Ryunosuke Akutagawa, the author of the following stories, was born in the twenty-fifth year of Meiji (1892), in the city of Tokyo. After finishing the course of the Tokyo First High School, he entered the College of Literature of the Tokyo Imperial University, and after a few years he graduated from that institution with high literary honours.

In his writings he showed a deep penetration into human nature, but at the same time he was gifted with a clear and reasonable outlook on life. This saved his writings from becoming decadent in character. He can be termed as a 'modernist' in the true sense of the word.

With the exception of a few mythical stories, such as 'Tu Zuchun,' most of his works have been chosen from historical facts. His method of writing is straightforward, yet veiled with a subtle and satirical humour. His style has been frequently likened to that of the Russian novelist, Anton Tchekhov. But while the latter embodies his stories with warmth, humour and tragedy, Akutagawa is cold, and lacks the warmth of the former writer.

His expression is as clear and transparent as a cool mountain stream which glitters under the autumn sunlight.

Although quite young, Akutagawa was one of Japan's most learned writers, and was a fine scholar of Japanese, Chinese and Western literatures.

Some of his most famous stories are as follows:—

'Rashomon' (The Raju Gate); Hana' (The nose);
'Yabu no Naka' (In the Bamboo); 'Kirishitohoro
Shonin Den' (A Legend from the Life of Cheist);
'Torokko' (The Truck); and 'Niwa' (The Garden).

It was a great regret to the Japanese nation that
this young writer took his own life on the 24th of July,
1927. His suicide came as a great loss to Japanese
literature.

The Spider's Web

Once upon a time Shakya Buddha was walking alone by the Lotus Pond in Paradise.

The lotus flowers were all of a pearly whiteness and in full bloom, and there floated from their golden pistils an indescribably delicious fragrance. It was morning in Paradise.

Suddenly Buddha paused, and walking to the edge of the Pond, he happened to peep into the water which sparkled between the green leaves which covered the surface.

Beneath the Lotus Pond of Paradise lay the depths of Hell, and through the crystal water he could plainly see the River Styx and the Hill of Needles.

At the bottom of Hell he saw a man writhing and struggling amidst numberless other sinners. His name was Kandatta.

Kandatta had been a notorious robber during his life, and had committed murder, incendiarism, and many other shameful crimes, but once during his life on earth he had performed one good act. Once, when he had been passing through a dense forest, he noticed a small spider crawling along the ground. Immediately a feeling of cruelty awoke in him, and he wanted to crush it to death with his foot. But something held him back, and after a moment's hesitation he decided to spare its small life. He murmured to himself:

"O, no. It is a living creature, even though it is so tiny. To deprive it suddenly of its life is a very heartless act indeed." He passed on, and the little creature's life was spared.

Buddha, looking down into the awfulness of Hell, recollected that once this Kandatta had spared a small spider's life, and he determined that if it were possible he would now rescue him from his terrible sufferings. He wanted to do this as a reward for his one good deed during life.

As Buddha looked about him, he saw a spider of Paradise resting on an emerald-green leaf of the Lotus Pond. The small creature was just in the act of spinning its silken, silver web. Buddha stretched out his hands, and gently took the web from the leaf, and carefully lowered it between the pearly lotus-flowers so that it sank deeper and deeper into the depths of Hell below.

Deep in the dreadful Pond of Blood of Hell, Kandatta was struggling in agony, and crowded about him were innumerable other sinners. Around him utter darkness prevailed, and if ever by chance he happened to spy some pale object floating in that utter darkness, it always proved to be nothing but the ghostly reflection of light from the bristling spikes which grew on the Hill of Needles, and in indescribable loneliness he would again abandon himself to even more hopeless despair than before.

On every side there was profound silence of Death, and the only sounds which at rare intervals reached his

ears were the faint sighs of the other tortured sinners. Those who had been condemned to Hell were all so completely exhausted with its nameless sufferings and tortures that they had long since lost all power of crying. So even this great robber, Kandatta, choked and struggled in this awful Pond of Blood, and all his struggles were quite hopeless.

But one morning he feebly raised his poor head, and looking upward towards the darkened sky which spread itself like a pall over the Bloody Pond, his eyes discerned the silvery line of a fine cobweb shining in the silent darkness. As he watched, it gradually got lower and lower, as if it were ashamed of being noticed by anyone, for it came from the far, far Paradise in the skies. He noticed that it ceased moving, and suspended itself just above his head.

Kandatta clapped his hands for joy. If he clung to it, and if he could climb to the top of it, he might perhaps be able to free himself from the agonies of Hell, he thought. If luck favoured him he might even be able to reach Paradise. Then he would never have to be driven again over the Hill of Needles, nor have to struggle in the depths of the Pond of Blood.

With these thoughts surging in his agonised brain, he quickly seized the web firmly with both his hands, and carefully began to climb upwards. This was not such a difficult feat for him because he had once been a great robber.

But the distance between Hell and Paradise was hundreds of thousands of miles, and however hard he

struggled on, it would not be so easy for him to reach the upper world. At last he became exhausted with climbing, and found no more strength to ascend any higher, so he decided to rest for a little while. Hanging firmly to where he had climbed, which was about half way up the web, he looked back far down into Hell. And lo! thanks to the headway he had made, he was aware that the Bloody Pond, in which he had been struggling only a few minutes before, was already hidden far below in deepest darkness. He noticed also that the terrible Hill of Needles, which had before shone palely, was now far beneath him. If he continued climbing in this way, it might not be so very difficult for him to escape from Hell altogether.

Kandatta found himself laughing, and after all the fearful years he had passed in Hell he found a new voice born in his throat, and he cried, "I have succeeded!"

At that moment, however, he became aware that numberless sinners had started climbing up the lower part of the web, and they appeared to him like a procession of ants following his way of escape. With surprise and terror he knew not what to do, and for a while he hung there, gazing below him, with his mouth wide open and blinking his stupefied eyes.

Was it possible that such a fine cobweb, which had threatened to break even with his own weight, would bear the stupendous weight of such a great number of people? If it should snap in the middle, his poor body would again be hurled headlong into the abyss of

Hell. The thought of such a thing happening was terrible to him after the awful anxiety of his laborious and painstaking climb. While he was thus meditating, he looked below him again, and he beheld thousands of other sinners climbing up behind him in a long line. They were crawling up the fine, silken thread, gradually getting nearer and nearer. He realised that unless he did something at once to get rid of them, the web would certainly snap, and he would fall.

So he cried out as loudly as he could:

"Listen, all of you! This cobweb is mine! Who gave you permission to climb it? Go down again, you scoundrels! Go down!"

Till then the cobweb had seemed quite strong, but suddenly, with a sharp sound, it snapped just at the place where he was desperately clutching to it, and lo! poor Kandatta was hurled head foremost into the abyss below, tumbling and tumbling with the lightning pace of a spinning top.

Behind him hung the remainder of the web leading to Paradise, delicately glittering midway in the dark, starless sky.

Buddha stood on the Lotus Pond, and gazed at the scene below. He had seen all that had happened. He saw Kandatta falling, and when at last he saw the poor man sink like a stone in the Bloody Pond, he raised his sorrowful face, and moved slowly away from the Lotus Pond and resumed his walk. What sorrow it must have brought to his kindly heart to have beheld the egotistical cruelty of Kandatta in his attempts to

save only himself, and to realise that his shameful malice had been rewarded only by his falling headlong back again into Hell!

But the beautiful lotuses in the Pond of Paradise did not seem to heed these things at all. The pearly-white flowers waved their calyces gracefully at Buddha's feet, and as they quivered, an indescribably exquisite fragrance rose perpetually from their golden pistils.

It was already noon in Paradise.

THE END

AUTUMN

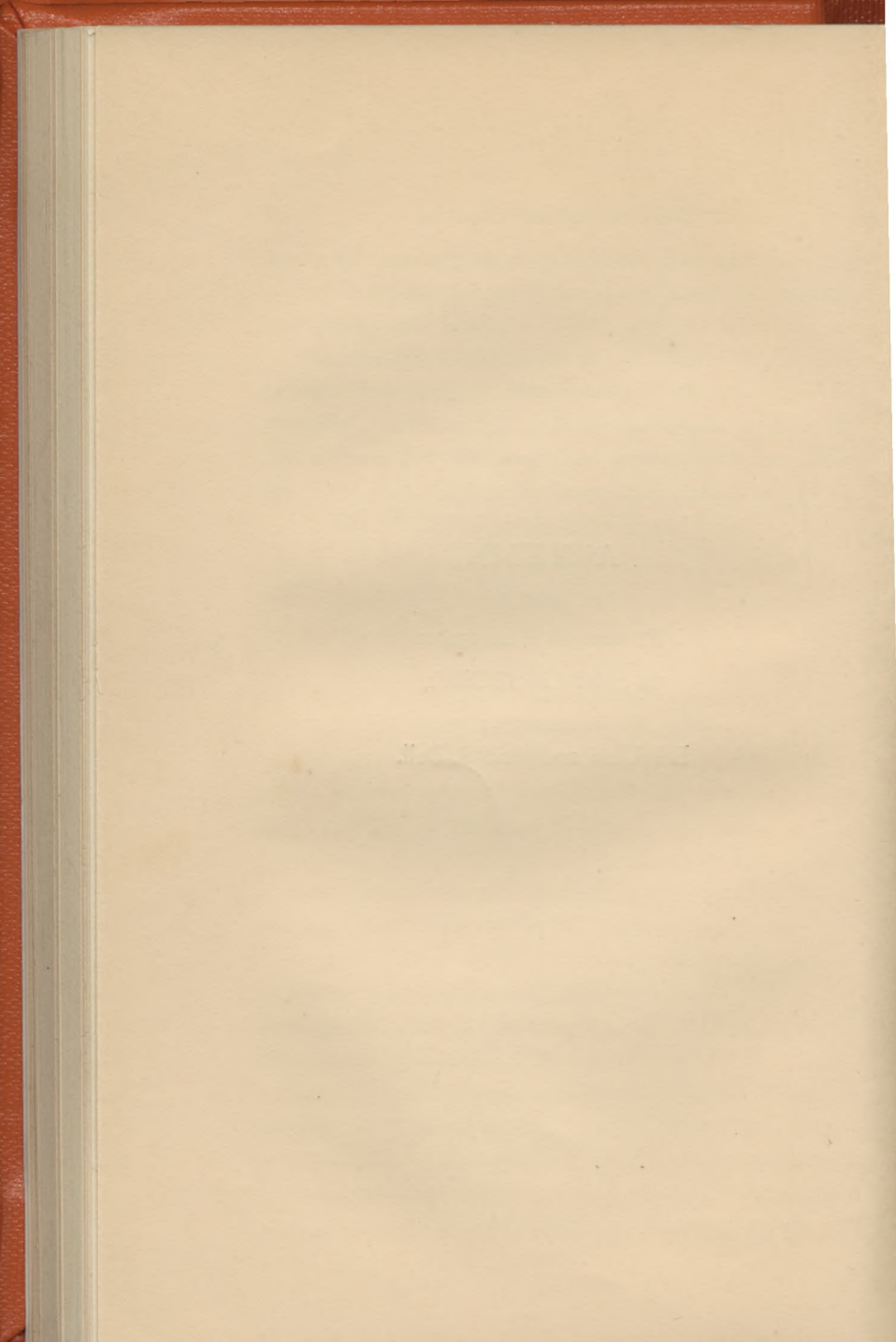
By

Ryunosuke Akutagawa

(A SHORT STORY),

Translated by

Eiji Ukai and Eric S. Bell.



Autumn

Nobu-ko was a very beautiful and talented young woman. She had received an excellent schooling, and at quite an early age had entered a woman's university. Even before her graduation she had completed over a two-hundred-page autobiographical novel, which was much talked about and praised by her friends and admirers. Everyone therefore predicted a very brilliant future for her as a successful authoress and novelist.

But when Nobu-ko graduated from her university, she found that her family affairs did not give her the freedom she would have liked to follow and develop her talents in this direction, for her poor mother who was a widow with small means, was the only supporter of her and her younger sister.

The younger girl, Teru-ko, was still attending a girl's high school. It was therefore necessary for Nobu-ko to decide upon the question of marriage before she began novel writing.

She had a cousin named Shunkichi, who was then a student of some literary college, and his future hopes also lay in becoming a writer. Being related, they had known each other since they were children, and as they happened both to be interested in the same subject, and were able to discuss literature together, naturally their intimacy had much increased after they had grown up. But their tastes differed. Nobu-ko rather admired the new school of literature, but the young man showed

little toleration for what he termed "the new literature" such as the problem plays of Ibsen and others which were quite in vogue then. He was rather inclined to talk satirically of this class of literature,—perhaps his criticisms were influenced by his study of French literature. This satirical attitude of Shunkichi's often irritated Nobu-ko, for she took everything rather seriously. But even though at times her irritation became almost unbearable when listening to him, she could not help finding something in his cynicisms and aphorisms which stirred her deeply.

During her school life she often went to concerts and exhibitions with Shunkichi, and nearly always she took her younger sister Teru-ko with her. Going or coming back from these entertainments the young people would talk and laugh together with the utmost freedom. But it was seldom that the younger girl was included in their conversation, and happily she showed quite a childish and innocent contentment in gazing at the various window-displays of bright parasols, shawls, and other pretty articles of wearing-apparel which she saw on the way. When, however, Nobu-ko became aware that she was excluding her sister too much from their conversation, she would quickly turn her talk into other channels, and would strive to draw the younger girl into their chattering again. But even though at times she endeavoured to be considerate in these matters, she was usually the very one who forgot all about her when she got interested in some particular topic.

Shunkichi, who was rather indifferent in his manner, would stride nonchalantly along the crowded streets, talking rather wittily, and would delight in flavouring his conversation with smart jokes and aphorisms.

The intimacy which existed between Nobu-ko and her cousin was of course apparent enough to their friends to cause everyone to anticipate their early marriage. Many of Nobu-ko's school chums even became envious and jealous of her coming happiness. This was especially the case with a few of her friends who did not even know anything of the true personality of the young man, and they seemed to delight in inventing unkind and disastrous predictions for Nobu-ko. As for her younger sister, she tried hard not to bring herself to listen to all this idle talking, yet at the same time she often hinted in her remarks to her sister that there was a possibility of some of their suppositions coming true. So Nobu-ko's school-mates had become quite reconciled to the fact that she and Shunkichi would soon be wedded, and they always had in their young minds rather a clear picture of the young bride and bridegroom.

But quite to the surprise of all her friends, no sooner had Nobu-ko finished her school course, than she suddenly married a young fellow who was a graduate of a higher commercial school, and who had just been appointed as clerk in a certain firm in Osaka.

A few days after their marriage the young couple started for their new home. According to those who

saw them off at Tokyo Station, Nobu-ko seemed very cheerful indeed. Her face beamed with smiles, and she was kindly trying to console her younger sister who would be left alone in Tokyo. The younger girl seemed to be feeling the parting very much, and her eyes brimmed with tears.

Nobu-ko's friends all wondered. A mixture of relief and spiteful jealousy took the place of their former feelings. A few of them still had faith in Nobu-ko, and attributed her sudden change of mind to the influence of her mother. There were some, however, who doubted her and talked in an unkind way about her fickleness. But they all realised that their opinions were nothing but mere supposition.

Why didn't she marry Shunkichi? This was the chief topic of conversation between all her friends for a long time afterwards. Whenever they met they discussed it over and over again as if it were quite a serious and important matter to them. After two or three months, however, they gradually began to forget all about it, and they even forgot to mention about the novel their friend had written.

In the meanwhile Nobu-ko settled in her new home which was in one of the suburbs of Osaka, and she rather anticipated a blissful married life. The house was built right in the centre of a grove of high pine-trees, and she enjoyed their fragrance as it was wafted into the open windows with the bright sunlight which flooded the rooms of her newly-built, two-storied house.

When she had nothing to do during the absence

of her husband, she enjoyed her new life immensely. But there were afternoons when she found it terribly lonely all by herself. Whenever this mood came upon her, she would take out her workbox, and from the bottom of it she would take out some pink sheets of letter-paper, and would pore over them for a long time. One of the letters she read contained the following passage:—

“ Realising that today is the last day that I can sit close to you, my dearest sister, I cannot stop the tears from falling down my cheeks as I write this letter. Oh, my dearest, I entreat you to forgive me. I entreat you with all my heart. Your poor little sister does not know what to say, or how to express her love for your most noble act of self-sacrifice.

“I know quite well that you decided this hurried marriage only for the sake of your poor sister. Even though you may deny it from your kindness of heart, I know that it is true. Do you remember asking me, while we were at the Imperial Theatre together a few nights ago, if I liked Mr. Shunkichi? And when I told you that I did, you kindly advised me to marry him, promising that you would do all in your power to help me in every way that was possible.

“That evening you must have already read the letter which I had ready to post to him. When I lost that letter, I bore you a terrible resentment. But now I understand, and I beg you to forgive me, my dearest, for now I realise how I wronged you.

“I must tell you now that even your gentlest and

kindest words sounded cruel and cynical to my ears that evening. I remember that I was unable to find words then to answer you as I wanted to.⁶⁶ But a few days afterwards when I heard of your decision to be married to another man, I was so ashamed that I wished to die. I wanted to die in the depths of hell, and to ask your forgiveness as I passed away.

"I know well that you love Mr. Shunkichi. I am sure of it, so do not conceal it, my dear. I am sure you would have married him if it had not been for your great love for me. But you told me that you did not love him, and now you have married someone whom you do not love.

"O my dearest sister, do you remember that when I went to see you off at the station I carried my pet hen in my arms, and I whispered to her to ask your forgiveness. I wanted to feel that even the fowl which I loved most of all would join me in entreating your forgiveness. Then our mother, who knew nothing of the matter, wept!

"Tomorrow you will have reached Osaka. But, my dearest sister, never desert your poor little Teru-ko. Every morning, as I go about my work, I will weep when I think of you"

The tears fell as Nobu-ko read her sister's letter, for it was brimming over with true and tender girlish feeling. She recalled to mind her pretty figure as she stood on the station platform, and she remembered how she had secretly handed her the mysterious letter. She had felt very sorry for the younger girl. Yet, had her

marriage been such a sacrifice? She did not like to doubt the sincerity of her younger sister's sympathy, and yet a rather gloomy feeling took hold of her. But she tried to shake it off, and to think of pleasanter things by looking up into the bright sunshine which was tinging the tops of the pine-trees with the golden hue of the coming twilight.

For about three months Nobu-ko and her husband were as happy as most newly-married people are. He had rather an effeminate character, yet at the same time his manner was somewhat taciturn.

He always made it a rule to spend a few hours after supper with his wife. Nobu-ko, with her knitting in her hands, would discuss the latest novels and dramas which were attracting notice at the time in the literary and dramatic world. Sometimes she discussed Christian philosophy, and sometimes she would drift on to the subject of the tastes of university girl-students. Her husband, whose cheeks were slightly flushed after his dinner wine, would listen with a kindly curiosity. He would sit, with his half-read evening paper on his knees, listening to all she said, but he never by any chance ventured his opinion about anything she discussed.

Almost every Sunday the young couple visited some of the pleasure resorts in the suburbs of Osaka, and would enjoy themselves thoroughly. Nobu-ko thought the people of Osaka and the vicinity a little vulgar. They took their meals at very odd times, and something about all these people and their manner of living dis-

pleased her. She felt that her own husband had far better manners than any of the other people she saw. He dressed very neatly, and always looked respectable, and everything about him seemed to give out a fresh and fragrant atmosphere of good health and breeding. When she was with him on these excursions she had the feeling of one who is basking in the sunshine of an early spring morning. His hat, the cut of his coat, his polished brown shoes, in fact everything about him, easily distinguished him from the vulgar people she met with.

One day during the summer holidays, when they were on a trip to Maiko Beach, she felt especially proud of her husband. Many of the other members of his office staff happened to be there, and she could not help contrasting him with them all. He was so different, so much more refined. But she was rather surprised to notice the intimacy with which he treated those unrefined people.

Before long, Nobu-ko again began to think about the literary career which she had intended to follow before her marriage. She made up her mind to start it anew by writing regularly for one or two hours each day, and only when her husband was at his office. But he soon got to know how she was occupying her time, and one day he said to her with gentle smile:

"You are going to become an authoress at last, aren't you?"

But somehow or other, whenever she sat down to write, her pen would not run freely at all, and often

she found herself with her chin resting on her hands, listening to the chirping of the cicadas in the pine-grove outside the window.

One morning, very early in Autumn, her husband, before leaving the house for his office, was looking for a clean collar to wear, but unfortunately he found that all his collars had been sent to the laundry, and he had only one soiled one to put on. Being rather particular about his appearance, he hated having to wear soiled linen, and he became rather annoyed. As he finished dressing he turned to his wife and said rather cynically, "You had better not be always writing novels!" Without answering, she bowed and continued brushing his coat.

One night a few days later, her husband, after having read something in the evening paper about the food shortage, asked her if she could not curtail their monthly expenses a little. "You are not a mere school-girl any longer now, you know!" This last remark was made rather unkindly. At the moment she was busy embroidering a new neck-tie for him, and she answered in rather an absent-minded way. He therefore continued with some persistence, "As for that neck-tie, wouldn't it be less expensive to buy a new one?" Again she hesitated to answer. After a while, getting no response, he ill-naturedly picked up a commercial magazine which lay near him, and began to read it.

His wife then switched off the light in their bedroom, which adjoined where they had been sitting. She remained in that room for a while, and then she spoke

very quietly and decidedly, but almost in a whisper, "I shall never again write novels!" As her husband made no reply, she again repeated the remark. Then tears came to her eyes, and she began to weep. Her husband reproved her a little for her childishness, but still her sobs came from the stillness of the further room. At last he went to her, and soon she found herself clinging to him.

The next day they were again the same happy and contented couple as before.

There were some evenings when her husband did not come home from his office until shortly after midnight. When he eventually did return, he was so drunk that he could not take off his overcoat without some assistance from his wife. Naturally she was annoyed with him, but she endeavoured to be as kind as possible, and would help him to remove his clothes. Often when he was fuddled with drink he would say very unkind things to her, such as, "If I had not come home at all this evening you would have made better progress with your novel!" He often made this remark, and there was something quite feminine in his tone of voice when he spoke. When she got into bed after these unhappy episodes, the tears would roll down her cheeks. She often thought how sorry her sister would have felt to witness such scenes, and she knew how she would sympathise with her at such times. She often felt the need of talking to her younger sister, and her heart would often utter these silent words, "Oh, Teru-ko! Teru-ko! You are the only woman in the

whole world whom I can depend upon!" When her husband came home in this condition, his breath smelt terribly of drink, and the poor young wife, turning over and over in her bed, would scarcely get any sleep at all.

But these little incidents were soon forgotten, and the following day the couple were quite reconciled again.

As the autumn advanced, these little troubles repeated themselves more often. It was seldom she sat down to write now, and she seldom took up her pen. Her husband showed very little interest in her literary talk, and they got into a habit of discussing only such trifling matters as running the house more economically. As they sat beside their oblong brazier, they would talk of nothing but these matters, and she gradually began to see that it was the only topic that interested her husband at all. After taking their supper, the young wife often watched her husband with a bitter disappointment in her heart. On the other hand, he never for one moment seemed to notice her anxiety. As he talked, he would chew the end of his rather long moustache.

Then he grew more jolly again after a while, and sometimes he would joke with her, saying, "In the event of our having a child"

About this time they often saw Shunkichi's name appearing in different literary magazines. Since her marriage Nobu-ko had ceased corresponding with him altogether, and seemed as if she had quite forgotten all about him. Lately she had been told quite a lot about his literary work, how he had graduated so

successfully from his college, how he had started his own magazine in co-operation with a few of his friends, and many other things about him. As time went on, she learnt more and more, for her sister would write and give her all the news about her husband. But somehow she had no wish to hear so much. Then one day she found a story written by Shunkichi in some magazine, and again her yearning for him welled up in her heart. As she turned over the pages of his story, she smiled again and again. In his writing she again detected the same jokes and sneers. They were as sharp and cutting as the attacks the ancient warrior Miyamoto-Musashi made with his wonderful sword. It even seemed to her that behind her cousin's satire there lurked something desperate which had never appeared in his writing before. But she realised that perhaps it was her own conscience which made her notice this rather changed attitude in his expression.

After this she began to consider her husband more and more. When he returned home late during winter, he would find her sitting up for him. She always welcomed him with a cheery smile. And she always had a warm brazier ready for him to warm himself. She took infinitely more pains with her toilet and made herself look younger and fresher than before. Even though the hour was very late, she would take out her sewing, and would chat pleasantly, reviving old recollections of their early married life.

The minute way in which she remembered even the smallest details was a surprise and a joy to him,

and he would remark jokingly, "I wonder that you can remember such little details!" As he teased her, she would only smile. But she often wondered why she remembered these little details so very plainly.

Not long after this her mother wrote to her, telling her that her younger sister's betrothal had been definitely settled. The letter also stated that Shunkichi had built a nice house in a suburb of Tokyo which was to accomodate both Teru-ko and herself. At once Nobuko hastened to write a letter of congratulation to them both. In it she remarked, ". . . . As I am very short-handed here, I much regret not being able to go to Tokyo for dear Teru-ko's wedding, but" As she wrote she found it rather hard to collect her thoughts properly. As she paused at intervals, she raised her head and looked out into the pine plantation. It seemed very dense and green in the early winter daylight.

That evening she talked to her husband about the coming marriage of her sister. As usual he listened smilingly to all she said, and was amused and delighted at the way in which she so cleverly imitated her sister's way of talking. But somehow or other Nobuko always seemed to be talking to herself, for her husband seldom ventured any remarks. After listening to her for two or three hours he would rise from the side of the brazier where they had been sitting, and stroking his moustache with the tips of his fingers, he would say, "Now, my dear, let us get to bed." Nobuko sat wondering what kind of a wedding-gift would be most suitable, and as she was thinking, she poked

the ashes in the brazier with the small tongs. Suddenly looking up she said, "How funny to think that I shall have a brother-in-law!"

"It isn't funny at all. It's quite natural as you have a sister," said her husband. She watched him rather curiously as he spoke.

At last the long-talked-of wedding took place in the middle of December. On that day, just before noon it began snowing quite hard in Osaka. After finishing her lunch all by herself as usual, she began to feel desperately lonely. The fish she had eaten seemed to have left an unpleasant taste in her mouth.

"I wonder if it is snowing in Tokyo, too?" thought she. She remained thinking for some considerable time, leaning her arms on the edge of the kitchen brazier.

Outside the snow began to fall more heavily, and she gazed at it absently. She still had the taste of fish in her mouth.

Time passed by. One day, during the following autumn Nobu-ko and her husband went up to Tokyo. She had not been there since her marriage. He had been sent there on some business connected with firm, and so the first few days after arriving in that city he was so busy with his work that, with the exception of one visit paid to his wife's mother, he had no chance of going out anywhere with his wife.

When Nobu-ko went out alone to visit her sister's new home in one of the suburbs she took a rickshaw which made its way along a rough road made through

newly reclaimed land and led to her sister's residence from the tram terminus. The new house stood next to a large vegetable field at the end of a small street, and in the vicinity were rows of new and rather pretty houses irregularly huddled together. Most of them had gates of simple design, and hedges of Chinese-hawthorn. On the drying poles of each house newly washed clothes were hanging out to dry in the warm sunshine. These seemed to be the general features of all the residences round about, and the rather common-place atmosphere of the neighbourhood somewhat disappointed her.

When she knocked at her sister's door, she was rather surprised to be welcomed by Shunkichi. As she had never been to see them since their marriage, he welcomed her with unusual hilarity with, "Hello! Nobu-ko San!"

Nobu-ko found that her new brother-in-law had quite changed in his appearance. His hair was very carefully trimmed and he wore it long instead of cropped short.

"How do you do, Mr. Shun?"

"Oh, I'm very well, and how are you? Come in, sister! I'm all alone just now."

"Where is Teru-ko? Is she out?"

"Yes, she's out shopping, and so is our maid."

Feeling strangely bashful, Nobu-ko took off her gaily-lined woolen coat in the corner of the entrance-hall. Then she followed Shunkichi into an eight-matted room, which served as both study and drawing-room.

Against the wall, numbers of books were piled up in disorder. Round about his red sandal-wood desk, which was placed near the sliding-door, and which was lighted by the rays of the afternoon sun, she saw newspapers, magazines, and sheets of copy-paper strewn everywhere in the same untidy confusion. Among all the things she saw, the only article which suggested the existence of his young wife was a *koto*-harp. It leaned against the wall in the alcove.

Nobu-ko's inquisitive eyes wandered round the room for a minute or so taking in all her surroundings.

"Though we knew from your letter that you were coming, I never expected the pleasure of welcoming you today, Nobu-ko San," he said, as he put a match to his cigarette. There was a look of deep affection in his eyes, and as he gazed at her, he added, "And how are you enjoying your new life in Osaka? Are you very happy in your new home?" As he chatted to her she began to feel conscious of her old love awakening in her again. During the previous two years she had managed to forget her old feelings of affection, and she had not corresponded with him all that time. As they now sat over the same brazier warming their hands, they talked of all kinds of things . . . the novel she had written, their mutual friends and other things which interested them both. They also drew comparisons between living in Tokyo and the life of Osaka. As they had not seen each other for such a very long time, they were at no loss for subjects to chat about. But by some natural and instinctive

bashfulness neither of them once touched upon private matters concerning their household affairs, and this naturally made her feel more at ease, enabling her to talk much more freely with her dear cousin.

After a little time, however, their conversation began to drag a little, and sometimes they would both become silent. Whenever this happened, she would drop her smiling eyes, and would gaze at the burning coals in the brazier. In the depths of her heart she had a feeling of expectation, but it was the merest suggestion of expectancy only. Whether it was done purposely or not, her cousin always managed to drive this feeling from her mind by suddenly finding some other new topic to discuss. This caused her a slight feeling of misgiving, and she would at once raise a questioning face to see if she could detect anything at all which betrayed his feelings towards her. But she noticed nothing at all. He seemed very calm in his manner and continued to puff leisurely at his cigarette. She would have rather liked to believe that he was feigning a little, yet his manner was quite collected and serene as he chatted to her.

Shortly after this Teru-ko came back, and finding her elder sister waiting for her, she was beyond herself with excitement and joy. Though Nobu-ko smiled, there were a few stray tear-drops in her eyes.

For a while the two sisters, forgetting all about the presence of Sunkichi, plied each other with eager questions concerning their respective lives during the past year or so. The younger woman's cheeks glowed

with the healthy colour of youth, and as she talked of one thing and another, she did not forget to mention such trifling things as her fowls.

Shunkichi, with a cigarette between his lips, sat gazing contentedly at the two young women, but there was something cynical in his smile.

When the maid-servant came back, she came into the room and handed him some post-cards. Taking them from her, he went over to his desk, and sitting down, he commenced to write letters. Teru-ko had an uneasy feeling regarding her maid having been absent when her sister arrived, and she quietly remarked:

"Was there no one here to welcome you when you arrived today, my dear?"

"Only Mr. Shun," was Nobu-ko's reply. She had a feeling that she was endeavouring to feign indifference. When Shunkichi heard this, he remarked with humour, "Thank your husband, my dear. It was he who made that tea!"

Later in the day the three young people sat down to supper. Teru-ko told her that the eggs which had been prepared for their meal had been laid by her own fowls.

"Human life consists only of plundering, doesn't it? From these eggs to . . ." said her husband in an argumentative tone of voice, as he offered a glass of wine to Nobu-ko. He seemed to have forgotten that eggs were his favourite kinds of food. Teru-ko was very amused at his witty remark, and laughed.

As Nobu-ko sat there she could not help thinking

about the lonely evenings she had spent in her own kitchen in Osaka, with the dark pine-grove outside, and she contrasted it with the jolly atmosphere of this supper-table.

They chatted on gaily until after the dessert and fruit was finished. Shunkichi, who had drunk a little too much wine, lounged on a cushion under the dim light of the lamp. He was happy, and fired off quite a number of his own witty epigrams, and his ever-ready flow of wit quite rejuvenated Nobu-ko as she listened to him. After a time she looked up very earnestly and said, "I want very much to write novels myself!" Shunkichi made no answer, but rambled on again with some quotation from Gourmont as follows, "The Muses being females, men alone were free to capture them." Both the young women disagreed with Gourmont. Teru-ko remarked rather seriously, "Then could no one expect a woman to be a musician? Wasn't Apollo a man-God?"

And thus they chatted on, and as they talked they never noticed how the time was passing, and when they eventually discovered that it was very late, they prevailed upon Nobu-ko to stay for the night.

Before going to bed, Shunkichi opened an '*amado*' sliding-door on the outside of the verandah, and stepped into the garden. After a little while he called—apparently to no one in particular, "Just come out here and look at the wonderful moon!" Nobu-ko slipped on a pair of garden-clogs which she found on the steps, and alone followed him into the garden. The cool night dew

felt extremely pleasant to her bare feet. The moon hung like a silver boat between the branches of a slender cypress-tree which grew in a corner of the garden. Under the tree stood Shunkichi, gazing up into the moon-lit sky.

"The grass is quite thick, isn't it?" said Nobu-ko as she approached him nervously across the weedy garden. But he did not turn his gaze from the sky, and merely muttered, "It seems to be almost full moon!"

There was a short silence, and then he looked at Nobu-ko and asked, "Will you come with me to look at our hen-house?" She nodded her consent.

The hen-house was in a corner of the garden just opposite the cypress-tree, and the young people strolled leisurely over to it. It was lined on two sides with straw-matting, and all they could see inside were shadows and slanting moon-beams. The place smelled rather strongly of fowls.

Peeping into the shed, Shunkichi whispered, "They are all asleep."

Nobu-ko thought of his remark during supper-time, and repeated quietly to herself, "Yes, man deprives the poor creatures of their eggs." Then they went back into the room again, and found Teru-ko gazing absently at the electric lamp on which a tiny green-hued rice-insect was creeping.

Next morning, soon after breakfast, Shunkichi, dressed in his best lounge-suit, and ready to start for his work, came into the front-hall. He said that he was

not going at once to his work, but would first visit the grave of one of his late friends as it was the first anniversary of his death.

"I shall come back before noon for certain. Be sure and wait till I return, won't you, Nobu-ko?" he remarked with some emphasis while he was putting on his overcoat. As Nobu-ko passed him his hat, she smiled.

After seeing her husband off at the porch, Teru-ko went back into the sitting-room with her sister. They sat down near the brazier, and Teru-ko offered the elder one some tea. She seemed to have quite a number of things to tell her sister, subjects which women like to discuss among themselves, such as the character of her neighbour's wife, who was woman-interviewer of some magazine, the foreign opera company whose performance she had seen with her husband, and many other topics they chatted pleasantly about. But somehow or other Nobu-ko felt depressed. She tried hard to shake the feeling off, but she found herself answering her sister's questions rather absent-mindedly. At last Teru-ko began to notice it. She peeped into her sister's face solicitously and asked, "Why are you so meditative, my dear?" But Nobu-ko herself did not know the reason.

When the clock struck ten, Nobu-ko languidly raised her eyes and said, "Your husband will not return soon, I suppose?"

Teru-ko looked at the clock and answered very briefly, "No, not so soon."

Nobu-ko thought that her sister's short answer showed the contentment of a young wife who placed the utmost confidence in her husband's true love. The thought of it caused her pensiveness to increase, and she said, "You seem very happy, my dear." She spoke good-humouredly, yet she could not keep back a certain veiled tone of jealousy as she talked to her sister. Her sister, however, seemed quite unconscious of it, and smiling vivaciously, she said, "Don't forget that your remark applies to yourself too, my dear." and she pretended to glare at her sister. Then she added rather caressingly, "But aren't you also happy?" These last words struck Nobu-ko's ears rather sharply.

"Do you think I am?" answered the elder sister, looking up. But as soon as she had made the remark, she regretted what she had said. Teru-ko looked at her sister curiously for a moment, and noticed her blush of repentance. The latter forced a smile and said, "Yes, I suppose I'm happy."

For a little time there was silence between them, and the only sound in the room came from the boiling kettle on the brazier, and the ticking of the clock.

"Isn't your husband very kind?" asked Teru-ko rather timidly after a while. There was a tone of gentle compassion in her voice. Nobu-ko noticed it, and as she did not wish to reply, she took up a newspaper, and placing it upon her knees, she began to read it. In the paper she found some articles dealing with the price of rice, and she commenced to read them. Suddenly her reading was interrupted by the

sound of weeping, which seemed to be coming from the next room. She at once put down her paper, and rising to her feet, she went to see what was the matter. She found her sister sitting beside a brazier, sobbing into the sleeves of her *kimono*.

"Oh, don't cry, my dear!" said Nobu-ko gently, but her words had little effect upon Teru-ko, and she continued to sob very bitterly. The elder woman then began to feel a kind of cruel triumphant joy as she watched the quivering shoulders of her younger sister. At last she spoke again in a gentler voice, "Forgive me, my dear sister, I was in the wrong. I'll be quite contented if I am sure that your life is perfectly happy. Please believe what I say. If Mr. Shunkichi loves you!"

Then she began to feel in rather a sentimental mood. Her sister lifted her face and looked at her. In her eyes there was no sign at all of deep sorrow or anger, but an expression of envy and jealousy lurked in her tearful eyes.

"Then why . . . why did you . . . last night . . .?" cried Teru-ko, but before she could complete her sentence, she buried her face again in her long sleeves and burst into another paroxysm of weeping.

In an hour or two Nobu-ko, enclosed in a covered rickshaw, was hurrying toward the terminus of the tramway. All she was able to see through the small square window of the covered vehicle were rows of suburban houses moving backwards one by one as the rickshaw raced on its way. Variegated leaves of

miscellaneous trees growing by the roadside drifted slowly past her. The only immovable thing to be seen through that small, murky, celluloid window was the clear, cool sky of early autumn, relieved here and there by streaks of downy cloud.

Nobu-ko's mind was now tranquil enough, but it came from a kind of cool resignation, not from actual peace of mind.

After Teru-ko's fit of crying had subsided, the two young woman soon smoothed things over, and were again the same loving sisters as they had always been before. But the fact that they had quarrelled still remained a reality in the mind of the elder woman. When she had hurriedly settled herself in her rickshaw, without waiting for Shunkichi's return, a cold, irritated feeling of determination came upon her that she would henceforth become a stranger to her sister. Her heart seemed frozen and cold.

While she was being carried along she happened to lift her eyes, and through the window of the vehicle she saw Shunkichi, stick in hand, coming along the dusty road towards her. Her heart beat violently as she watched him coming nearer. Should she stop her rickshaw, or should she pass on unnoticed? She tried hard to check the violent throbbing of her heart as she sat hidden under the cover of her rickshaw. The distance between them had now lessened considerably, and she watched him carefully picking his way along the road between the numerous puddles. Just as he reached the rickshaw she almost cried out, "Mr.

Shun!" But something made her hesitate, and she stifled the cry in her throat. While she hesitated he passed by, and the distance increased more and more. Then Nobu-ko looked behind her, but all she could see was a bright autumn sky, a few sparse houses dotted here and there, the yellowing branches of some tall trees, and the loneliness of the suburban street.

"It's autumn!" she thought, and she felt its meaning in the depths of her young heart, and as her rickshaw moved swiftly on, she shivered with cold and loneliness.

THE END

THE NOSE

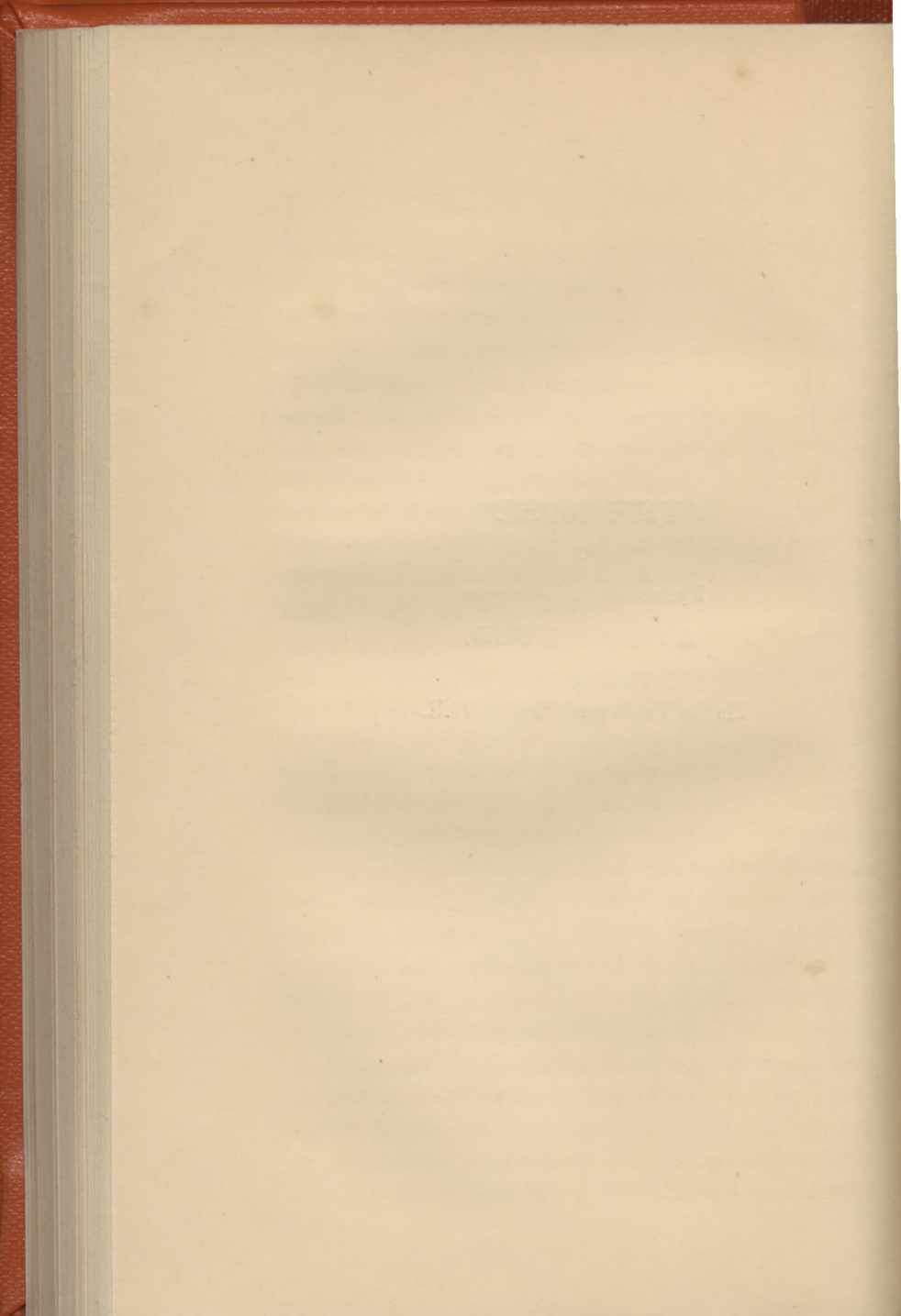
By

Ryunosuke Akutagawa

(A SHORT STORY),

Translated by

Haruo Endo and Eric S. Bell.



The Nose

There was no one at Ikeno-o who was not familiar with the nose of Zenchi, the 'Naigu' (a high priest of a Buddhist temple). Its length was about five or six inches, and it hung down from above his upper lip to beneath his jaw. It was equally thick from the bridge down to the tip; in fact, it had the appearance of a long sausage hanging untidily from the middle of his face.

The Naigu was more than fifty years of age, and in his innermost mind he had never ceased worrying about his nose through the days and years which had passed since he was a Shami (a young man entering priesthood), until now, when he had reached the happy position of 'Naidojo-gubu' (an abbot of a Buddhist lecture hall attached to the Imperial House). But externally one could not discern any trace of worry, for he rather gave himself airs, as if he cared little about his long nose. This came from the fact that he had convinced himself that it would be rather a bad thing for a Buddhist priest—who had an intense and fervent desire to enter the Buddhist Paradise when his time came—to show any anxiety about having a long nose. He also hated to feel that people knew he worried about it. More than anything else in the world he had a horror of hearing the word 'nose' mentioned in everyday conversation.

The Naigu's disgust with his nose arose from two sources: firstly, from a practical point of view it was exceedingly inconvenient to have such a long nose. At mealtimes he was unable to take his food by himself, for if he had attempted to do so, his nose would have touched the rice in his bowl. He therefore had to have the assistance of a disciple, who always sat at the opposite side of the small 'zen' table at which he ate, and all the while he was taking his food, the latter, with the assistance of a board, one inch wide and twenty-four inches long, would lift the Naigu's nose carefully, so that it did not fall into his food. To take meals in such a way was no easy task for the disciple, who had to keep continually raising his board; nor was it less unpleasant for the Naigu, whose nose had to be continually raised.

It is said that once a "chudoji" (a priest's page)—who had taken the place of this disciple during his absence—had to give way to a rather acute sneeze, and in doing so, his hands shook so violently that he allowed the Naigu's nose to drop into a bowl of porridge. This little incident was noised abroad at the time, and was even discussed in such a distant place as Kyoto.

But these things were not the chief cause of the worry he experienced over his nose. To speak truthfully, his nose was rather an insult to his personal pride.

The townsfolk of Ikeno-o often remarked that it was indeed fortunate that the Naigu had not been

bred amongst plebeians. They all felt that no woman would ever like to become the wife of a man with such a nose. Some of them even ventured to say that his nose was the cause of his becoming a priest. But the Naigu once having gone into the priesthood, did not feel that his worries were reduced in the least. His mind was too delicately subtle to weigh the consequences of marriage under such circumstances. He tried very hard to overcome his pride.

First of all he tried to think of some way of making his nose appear shorter than it really was. He enthusiastically attempted all manner of means. Looking carefully at himself in a mirror when he was alone, he viewed himself at many angles, but he became moody and dissatisfied when he found that there was no way to change his face. Sometimes he would sit before his mirror for a long time, supporting his cheeks with his hands, and pressing them together; and sometimes he would press his finger firmly under his chin, but none of these attempts seemed to alter or shorten his nose in the least. On the contrary, he often imagined that his nose became even longer than before. At such times the Naigu would put his mirror back into its case, and would sigh heavily as if some new trouble were arising. He would then return to the small altar at which he liked to sit to read the Buddhist sutras.

Besides the things I have mentioned, the Naigu always took great care to examine the noses of others. At the Temple of Ikeno-o memorial services,

were frequently performed for priests who had died. The dormitories were built in the precincts of the temple, and were very simple indeed, leaving little room to walk about. In the bath-room, the priests who belonged to the temple took their daily baths, and there were many classes of clergy and laity always coming and going between the dormitories and the bathroom, and the Naigu made it his duty to examine the faces of everyone of them, for he felt that it would greatly relieve his mind if he could find even one person who had a nose like his.

He never seemed to notice whether they were attired in deep-blue "suikan" (old-fashioned Japanese dress) or in summer garments of hemp. Furthermore, accustomed as he was to see the caps and gray hoods of the other priests, they never seemed visible to his eyes at all. He never looked at the man himself, but always at his nose. But even though he searched carefully among all these people that came and went, he never found another like himself. As his failure to discover another nose such as his went on continuously without any result, his moodiness increased more than ever. Despite his age, he blushed very easily, and when he was talking with others, he frequently found himself supporting his nose with his hand. Sheer nervousness caused him to act in this way.

Again, at one time the Naigu felt that if he were able to find any mention of a man with a nose like his in the "Naiten" (the Buddhist Scriptures) or the "Geten" (Scriptures of other religions outside the field

of Buddhism), it would have consoled him a little. In the Scriptures it was not written that the nose of Shaributsu was long. "Ryuju" and "Mamei" (Buddhist Saints) of course had ordinary noses like anyone else. In addition to that he searched in all the tales of "Shintan" (the Hindoo word for China, used in the Buddhist scriptures). The ears of Ryu Gen Toku (a Chinese hero) of Shokukan, were long, and he thought sadly that, if it had only been his nose that was long instead of his ears, he would have perhaps been greatly pleased to read of it.

I should not mention it perhaps, but though he worried himself in a negative way, he also felt it imperative at other times that he should find some way to have his nose shortened. At such times he tried to discover any possible way to have it done. He had tried drinking "Karasuuri" (a fruit used for medicinal purposes), and he had even rubbed his nose with an acid taken from the bodies of rats, but though he experimented in many kinds of ways and put forth every effort that was possible to reduce the size of his nose, it still hung its five or six unsightly inches from above his lips.

Unexpectedly, in the autumn of a certain year, a disciple priest of his, who had gone to Kyoto on some business, and also to attend to some private matters of the Naigu, happened to meet a certain doctor with whom he was acquainted. This doctor had once emigrated from China, and was now in the position of "Guso" (someone giving his services to a temple where

an important Idol is kept) at the Chorakuji Temple, and he explained to the disciple a method of shortening the nose of the Naigu.

When told of this, the Naigu, as usual pretended that he was not at all concerned about his nose, and he obstinately appeared to show little interest in what he was told, nor would he make any promise that he would even consider giving the idea a test. But at mealtimes he would remark pleasantly that he was sorry he needed the disciple's help. Deep in his heart he was really waiting for the time when his disciple would persuade him to undergo this experiment with his nose. As for the latter, it was quite obvious that he saw through this trick of the Naigu's. But it may be that he had a deep compassion in his heart for the Naigu who was tricking him so carefully, so he treated his obstinacy with patience and good-will.

However, in accordance with the Naigu's expectation, the disciple at last commenced to advise him earnestly to give this experiment a trial. The Naigu too, as was to be expected, began to take heed of the advice given him.

The experiment was a very simple one indeed. It had to be done with very hot water. In fact the nose had to be boiled, and after it had boiled long enough, it required pressing very firmly between someone's feet.

There was always quantities of hot water everyday in the bath-room of the temple, so one day the disciple poured some of it into a "hisage" (a wooden vessel for holding wine) and took it to the Naigu's room. The

water was so hot that it was painful even to dip one's finger into it. The disciple knew well that if the Naigu put his nose directly into such hot water, the heat of the steam might cause some severe burns to his face. They therefore decided to make a hole in the lid of this vessel, and through it the Naigu would put his nose gradually into the boiling water. So the experiment began, and strange to say, as the nose was only partly dipped at first into the water, he felt no pain at all.

After he had been holding it there for a short time the disciple asked:

"Surely your nose must be already boiled?"

The Naigu smiled bitterly, for he thought that if anyone should overhear such a remark, he would never comprehend its strange meaning. After his nose had been boiled for a time, it began to itch terribly, and felt as if insects were biting it all over.

As soon as the Naigu removed his nose from the water, the disciple began to press it with his feet. As he did so, a great deal of steam rose from it. The Naigu lay flat on the floor, his nose stretched out before him, and he patiently watched the disciple's feet as they moved up and down. Sometimes the latter, with a deep look of sympathy, glanced down at the Naigu's bald head, and remarked.

"Do you feel no aching?—The doctor told me to continue pressing until it was entirely reduced in size.

—But, doesn't it ache?"

But while his nose was being pounded in such a

manner, even though he tried, he was unable to move at all, and without answering he glanced up sideways at the disciple. After a while he found his tongue, and assuming rather a tone of irritation he said,

“It doesn't ache at all!”

Really the operation of pressing, especially when his nose became rather ticklish, almost had a soothing effect on the Naigu, and he felt very little signs of ache. After the pressing had been going on for some time, little pimples, like millet seeds began to appear on it. It began to look like the body of some small plucked bird after it had been well roasted. When the disciple noticed its odd appearance, he ceased working his feet, and softly murmured to himself,

“—I am told that these spots should be removed with ‘Kenuki’ (a kind of minute pincers).”

The Naigu, puffing out his cheeks, was not at ease, but he kept silent, for he realised that he had entrusted himself to his disciple. There was not unkind meaning in his look of discontent. It was not that he was ungrateful to his disciple, but it was merely because he didn't like the way the disciple treated his nose as if it were some dead article.

Then the Naigu, with an expression on his face like someone who had been undergoing an operation, continued to watch his disciple putting the finishing touches to his nose by removing all traces of grease.

When this was quite finished, and when the disciple seemed to have completed his task on the Naigu's nose, the former gave a deep sigh of satisfaction, and an

expression of intense relief showed itself in his face. But looking at the Naigu he remarked,

"Once it is boiled again, it will be perfectly satisfactory." The Naigu's expression was anything but pleasing, and he contracted his eyebrows into a frown. But he again did as his disciple had bidden him, and put his nose back into the boiling water.

Now, when it had been boiled well a second time, he removed it from the vessel, and certainly it was much shorter than it had been before, but its shape was not so very different from that of any ordinary nose. Stroking it gently, the Naigu looked shyly and hesitatingly into the mirror which his disciple passed to him. His nose, which once had hung down beneath his jaw as if it had been something unreal, now had the appearance of a mere "skeleton" of a nose growing from above his upper lip. As to its red appearance and the motley dots and spots which decorated it, he thought perhaps that they were only the traces left of the recent hard pressing it had undergone.

After all, having such a nose as this would never cause laughter from others. The Naigu thought this as he viewed his face again in the mirror, and he blinked his eyes contentedly.

That day, however, he experienced the anxiety that perhaps his nose might grow long again. As he read his sutras, or when taking his meals, he would very often touch the end of his nose with his hands. The nose, however, still sat neatly above his upper lip, and there was no indication so far that it would grow

downward again.

That night the Naigu slept well, and as soon as he woke next morning, he felt his nose. It was still short. So from that time onward the Naigu felt in a placid and calm state of mind. Such a feeling had been absent from his heart for a very long time indeed. He now had the feeling of one who had been putting all his efforts into copying "Hokekyo" (the Book of Hokke, in the Buddhist Scriptures) neatly into hand-writing, and had come to the end of his task satisfactorily.

After two or three days had elapsed, however, the Naigu had an unexpected experience. A certain *samurai* happened to pay a visit to the Temple of Ikeno-o, and while talking with him, he noticed that the former was pulling a funny face as he looked at him. Something seemed to be diverting the *samurai's* attention from their conversation. Something seemed to be amusing him very much, and instead of listening to what was being said, he only stared hard at the Naigu's nose.

Not only did this worry him, but outside the lecture-hall of the temple, when he met the same *chudoji* who had once so carelessly let the Naigu's nose fall into his porridge-bowl, he dropped his head as he passed, as if he was trying to suppress some amusement, and, being unable to control his feelings properly, burst loudly into laughter. Also the "gehoshi" (a lower priests), when they were in the presence of the Naigu, listened meekly to his orders, but would giggle

to themselves as soon as he turned his head away for one moment.

At first the Naigu put it down to the fact that his face had somewhat changed in appearance; yet even this did not thoroughly convince him, but,—of course this must be the reason for the laughter of the *chudoji* and the *gehoshi*. Though their laughter was the ordinary kind of laughter, he observed something different in their mirth, something which was never there before when his nose was long. We may even say that the shortened nose looked more of a caricature than the long nose to which they were accustomed. If he could feel satisfied with such an explanation of their mirth, it would have been all right, but there was still something in their laughter which he could not explain.

“They certainly never laughed at me in this way before!” The Naigu used to stop in the middle of reading the sutras, and inclining his bald head on one side, he would murmur this to himself. The loving-hearted Naigu, when he was thus meditating, absent-mindedly allowed his gaze to wander to the portrait of “Fugen” (a Buddhist Saint), and he thought about the length of his nose as it had been a few days before, and somehow he felt distressed at heart like one in humble circumstances who recollects his prosperous past. The Naigu was clever enough to find some answer to this worrying problem: From the human heart there springs two different kinds of feelings. Of course there are people who sympathise with the mis-

fortunes of others, but when others fight against great odds and merely escape misfortune by a hair's breadth, somehow we feel unsatisfied, as if their escape had in some slight degree caused us disappointment. If we exaggerate these feelings, it seems that there is some desire in all of us to push such people right back into the midst of misfortune again. At the same time, deep in our hearts, we feel some sympathy for their escape.

The Naigu, though he did not know the reason, felt somewhat troubled at the perception which enabled him vaguely to see "the egoism of the observers," which showed itself amongst the clergy and laity of Ikeno-o. As time went by, he became still more distressed. When anyone asked him a question a second time, he got angry and scolded them severely. Eventually he became so unkind and irritable that the disciple who had operated on his nose began to talk about him rather harshly behind his back. He even remarked that the Naigu would soon be committing "hokendon" (a self-inflicted punishment to one who has suffered an indignity).

The person who offended the Naigu most of all was that young and mischievous *chudoji*. One day, hearing the loud barking of a dog, the Naigu wandered out of the temple. There he found the boy rushing about and cutting the air rapidly with a two-foot wooden board. He was chasing a longhaired dog, and as he did so, he shouted at the top of his voice, "Look out for your precious nose, or I might beat it flat!" The Naigu was very angry, and snatching the piece of

board from the boy, he hit him rather violently across the face with it. He noticed that the piece of wood was the same one which his disciple had used before to lift his nose while he was taking his meal.

Somehow, now, the Naigu began to regret that his nose had been shortened.

One night, after the sun had set, a brisk wind rose, and while he lay on his bed there came to his ears the sound of the "futaku" (windbells) which hung outside the temple. They were tinkling very loudly. Moreover, the cold was growing intense, and in spite of his wish to sleep, this noise prevented him from even getting a wink of slumber. While he was lying wide awake, he became aware that his nose felt more ticklish than usual. Feeling it with his hands, he felt sure that it was slightly swollen like any nose that is suffering from a severe cold. The likelihood of such a thing happening seemed quite probable to him in such cold weather. He felt that he might even be suffering from a slight fever.

"As I shortened my nose unnaturally, perhaps I am suffering from some kind of sickness!" the Naigu whispered to himself, as he pressed his nose with his hands in a gesture as pious as if he were placing incense or flowers before the shrine of Buddha.

The next morning, rising early as usual, he found that a fig-tree and a horse-chestnut tree in the temple-grounds had shed all their leaves during the night, and the garden was strewn with them, giving it the appearance of having been sprinkled with gold. He also

noticed that at the top of the pagoda-tower, the "kurin" (a decoration of spiral rings attached to the top of the tower of a pagada) was glittering and shining under the still weak rays of the early morning sun. He thought perhaps it might be frost.

The Naigu stood on the balcony of the temple, the shutters of which had already been opened, and as his eyes rested on the beauty of the morning and all that he saw before him, he breathed deeply with contentment.

But somehow while he stood there, the old feeling of worry came to him again, and after some hesitation he put up one of his hand to feel the condition of his nose. What he felt was not the short nose of yesterday, but he became aware that his old nose, with its five to six inches of length, hung again from above his upper lip to beneath his jaw. The Naigu suddenly realised that his nose must have grown again to its former length during the previous night. At once a strange feeling of happiness came into his heart, the very same feeling he had experienced when he first found that his nose had been successfully shortened.

"Surely no one will ever laugh at me now that my nose has grown long again," murmured the Naigu to himself as his long nose hung in the gray of an autumn dawn.

THE END

THE PATRON SAINT OF
A SHOP-BOY

By

Naoya Shiga

(A SHORT STORY),

Translated by

Eiji Ukai and Eric S. Bell.



Naoya Shiga

NAOYA SHIGA

Naoya Shiga, the author of the following and other stories in this book, was born in the 16th year of Meiji (1883), in the town of Ishinomaki, in the province of Miyagi, Japan.

He was educated at the Peers' School in Tokyo, and after graduating from there, he entered the College of Literature of the Tokyo Imperial University, but did not quite finish his course in that institution.

He first became known by the publication of 'Shirakaba,' which was edited in conjunction with Mr. Mushakoji, and the late Mr. Takeo Arishima.

His writing is serene and straightforward, and he is moderate in his opinions. He shows an extremely tender heart, and loves justice.

He is a 'realist' in style, and is always careful in his selection of subjects. His remarkable simplicity of expression has stamped him as an artist.

His best-known stories are as follows:—

'Wakai' (Reconciliation), 'Haha no Shi to Atarashii Haha' (The Mother's Death and the New Mother), 'An-ya Koro' (Walking through Dark Streets), etc., etc.

He lives now in Nara, one of the famous old capitals of Japan, and is very very popular as a short story writer.

ERIC S. BELL.

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The Patron Saint of a Shop-boy

Senkichi was a little fellow apprenticed to a dealer in weights and measures.

It was a fine Autumn day. The mild sunshine was floating serenely into the front of the shop from beneath the *noren*-curtain, once indigo in colour, but now faded and old. There was no customer in the shop. Seated behind the counter was an elderly clerk, who was languidly smoking a cigarette. He was talking to another clerk, who was reading a newspaper beside a charcoal brazier.

"I say, Koh-san, the best season of the year for tunny-*sushi* has come. It's your favourite dish, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"How about this evening? Shall we go and have some after the shop is shut?"

"It would be awfully nice!"

"It only takes a quarter of an hour by car, round the outer moat."

"After once tasting the food cooked by that restaurant, one dislikes any of the cooking that one gets round about here."

"Yes, indeed."

Now Senkichi, the little apprentice-boy, who worked in the same shop, was sitting a little way behind the younger clerk. He had his hands folded under his apron, and listening to their conversation, he thought

to himself, "They are talking about the *sushi*-restaurant." Senkichi had often been sent on an errand to a certain dealer in weights and scales, whose name was S. His shop was situated in Kyobashi, and was very near this famous restaurant. The boy therefore knew quite well of its repute.

Senkichi, as he listened, was very envious of the clerks who were so free and in the position to visit such a place at will. As they continued to talk in this manner, making pretensions of their knowledge of delicacies, he found himself wishing he were their equal. Their conversation continued thus:

"I'm told that a son of Mr. Yohei has opened a tea-house somewhere near the Matsuya Department Store. Do you know anything about it, Koh-san?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't. Which Matsuya do you mean?"

"I'm not quite sure, but I suppose it is their store at Imagawa-bashi."

"Oh, I see. Do they say the cooking there is very nice?"

"Yes, they say so."

"Are you sure the restaurant is run by Mr. Yohei?"

"No, I'm not quite sure. Let me see . . . what is the name of the house? . . . Oh, I have forgotten it."

Senkichi was listening intently, and casually remarked that there were many such noted restaurants in the city. Then he thought to himself, "In what way is the cooking so nice?" As he thought about

these things, his mouth began to water, and he managed to swallow without making any sound.

A few days later, just before sunset, Senkichi was sent on a message to the shop kept by Mr. S. As he was leaving, the senior clerk gave him enough money for his return fare on the street car. Taking a car that followed round the outer moat, he got down at Kajibashi, and made his way to the front of the well-known *sushi*-restaurant. As he gazed longingly at the curtain hanging in front of the shop, he pictured to himself the clerks entering the plac later on, full of high spirits. He was very hungry, and as he thought of the inviting *sushi*, with strips of delicious tunny-fish upon it, he longed that he might taste it, even though it might be the smallest piece.

He had made it a rule for some time to save half of the fare that had been handed to him for the tram-rides. Whenever he was given money enough for a return fare, he usually walked one way, and so was able to save a few *sen* each time for himself. On this occasion the four *sen* which he had saved was jingling in his pocket.

"I could buy one piece of *sushi* for four *sen*," he thought, "but how embarrassing it would be to ask only for one piece!" So he gave up the idea, and walked past the restaurant.

He completed his errand at Mr. S's shop, and came away from there, carrying a small card-board box containing a number of little brass weights, and which weighed rather heavily.

Weighed down with his parcel he once more turned toward the *sushi*-restaurant, and on his way, just at the opposite corner of the cross road, he saw a *sushi*-stall, and in front of it hung a curtain bearing the same name as that of the big restaurant. He walked to it.

Mr. A., a young M.P., once heard his friend Mr. B. who was another M. P. talking boastfully of his epicurean tastes in this manner, "Unless you can come to appreciate *sushi* as served in a *sushi*-stall, fresh from the maker's hands, and which you eat with your fingers, you can never truly appreciate the flavour of Japanese cooking." Mr. A. therefore made up his mind someday to try *sushi*, eating it standing up at some *sushi*-stall. He was told about a noted stall where a very delicious kind of *sushi* was procurable.

One day, soon after sunset, Mr. A., walking leisurely from the direction of the Ginza, passed Kyobashi, and made his way towards this noted stall. When he arrived there, he found two or three other customers standing. At first he hesitated, but after a moment he made up his mind to enter. As he was rather shy of mixing himself up with the other vulgar customers, he remained standing for a little while behind them.

Just then he noticed a small boy of thirteen or fourteen years of age pushing his way sideways into the stall. The boy edged Mr. A. aside, walked into the little space before him, and looked at the slandering counter on which some delicious *sushi* was invitingly displayed.

"Haven't you any laver-*sushi*?" asked the boy.

"No, we haven't got today," answered the bulky keeper of the stall, and while shaping a rice ball with his hands, he stared at the boy, eyeing him from head to foot.

The boy at once made up his mind, and pretending that it was not the first time he had been in such a place, he stretched out his arm and picked up one of the three pieces of *sushi* which were decorated with tunny-fish. But although he seemed quite decided as to his wants, he timidly drew his arm back for an instant.

"It is six *sen* a piece, you know, my boy," said the keeper of the stall.

The boy put the *sushi* back on the stand, but nearly let it fall.

"We don't like you to touch it with your fingers, and then to put it back again." After saying this, the man placed a new piece of *sushi* on the stand, and took the piece that the boy had discarded and placed it on the counter near where he was standing.

The boy was silent. He made a disappointed grimace, but seemed unable to move away. But after a moment he plucked up courage and moved from the stall.

"At the present time the price of *sushi* a rather high, you know, and I'm sorry that they are rather too high for a shop-boy," said the keeper of the stall apologetically. After he had made another ball of *sushi*, he took up the piece which the boy had left, and

carried it deftly to his own mouth.

"The other day I visited that *sushi*-stall you told me about," said Mr. A. to Mr. B.

"And how did you enjoy the cooking there?"

"Oh, it was very delicious indeed! And by the way, I noticed that the people who were there were picking up the *sushi* in this manner with the tunny-side down, and carrying it to their mouths rather rapidly. It seems to be the conventional way of eating it."

"Well, yes, that seems to be the right way to eat tunny-*sushi*," answered his friend.

"Why do you eat it with the fish-side down?"

"Because if the meat should not be very fresh, it would at once give your tongue a warning as soon as you put it into your mouth."

"Ah! Your authority regarding *sushi* is very doubtful!" said Mr. A. laughingly.

Mr. A. then began to relate to his friend about the poor shop-boy that he saw there. I could not help being sorry for him," he said. "I should have been pleased if I could have helped the poor youngster."

"Surely you could have treated him to some. If you had given him as much as he could have eaten, how delighted he would have been!"

"Yes, the boy would have been pleased, but I should have been in a cold sweat with embarrassment!"

"Why a cold sweat? After all, you had but little courage!"

"I don't know about courage, . . . but at any rate I could not bring myself to such a thing. If I had taken the boy away from there to some other restaurant, I perhaps should have been able to treat him to what he desired."

"Yes, perhaps you were right," answered Mr. B.

Mr. A. had a little boy of his own, whom he was sending to a kindergarten, and wishing to follow day by day the physical development of his child, he decided to provide his bath-room with a small platform scales. One day it happened that he visited the very shop in Kinda where the little apprentice Senkichi was serving.

When Mr. A. entered the shop, the boy did not recognise him, but he at once remembered the boy.

In one inner part of the house stood numerous kinds of scales, big and small. They were standing there in order of their height. Mr. A. selected the smallest among them. It was of the same design as is usually found on the railway-station or is seen standing in the offices of any forwarding-agents. Though it was the smallest size that they had, he imagined how this neat little machine would please his wife and child at home.

A clerk of the shop, note-book in hand, came and asked him, "Excuse me, Sir, but will you kindly give me your address?"

"Well," said Mr. A. looking hesitatingly at the boy, "Is that boy of yours free now?"

"Yes, Sir, he is not specially busy . . ."

"Well, then, can he carry it to my house now, for I am rather in a hurry?"

"Certainly, sir, he can put it on a cart, and follow you to your home."

Mr. A. now thought that, as he was not able to treat the boy as he wanted the other day, he would now find an opportunity of treating him to a dinner somewhere on the way to his home.

"And will you please write down your address here?" insisted the clerk, offering him another register when Mr. A. proceeded to pay for his purchase.

Mr. A. hesitated a little. He was not aware that it was a regulation that when buying scales one should give one's address to the seller.

He felt a little ashamed of entertaining such a boy after allowing his name to be known. But he could see that he must do what was asked of him, so after a little more hesitation he wrote down a false address and handed it to the clerk.

Mr. A. walked loungingly away, and behind him, at some short distance walked the shop-doy, Senkichi, pulling his small cart with the scales upon it. When they arrived just in front of the house of a rickshaw-man, Mr. A. stopped and went into it, leaving the boy outside. He arranged with the rickshaw-man to transfer the scales on to his vehicle.

"Now, be sure," said Mr. A., "to take it to my house. Your fare will be paid on delivery. Present this card, and my family will understand." Saying this, he left the house, and said to Senkichi, "Thank you

very much for carrying my scales this far, but before you return, I should like to entertain you by giving you a small meal. So will you come with me to the restaurant over there?" He smiled at the lad, and Senkichi felt very grateful to him for his kindness, but he also felt a little apprehensive over accepting the kind offer. But he was nevertheless very happy, and bowed his head many times to show his gratefulness.

They passed by a *sushi*-house, a *sushi*-stall, and a beef-restaurant. "I wonder where we are going," thought she boy, beginning now to feel a trifle uneasy. They passed under the elevated railway at Kanda Station, and came to the Matsuya Department Store, and crossing over the tram-lines, they stopped in front of a small *sushi*-restaurant in a certain lane.

"Wait a little while, will you?" said Mr. A., and he entered the restaurant. The boy placed the shafts of his cart upon the ground and waited outside.

Soon Mr. A. came out of the restaurant, followed by the mistress of the establishment, who was rather young. She said to the boy, "Come in, young fellow!"

Mr. A. turned to the lad and said, "Now, my boy, go in, and eat as much as you want!" After saying this, he hurried towards that tramway and soon disappeared.

Senkichi did ample justice enough for three men. He ate his *sushi* ravenously, just as a hungry dog would have done after finding some unexpected food. There were no other customers in the restaurant, and as the windows had been closed by the woman, Senkichi had

no need of keeping up appearances. He felt that he could eat to his heart's content.

The mistress came to him, and pouring out a cup of tea for him, she said smilingly, "Won't you have another dish?" The boy blushed a little, and said, "No, thank you," and hanging his head, he prepared to leave.

"Will you please come again another time, and have some more? We have received too much money."

The boy was silent.

"Have you been long acquainted with that gentleman?"

"No."

"Well," said the mistress, and meeting the eyes of her husband who came into the shop at that moment, she added, "That gentleman is a gallant. Now, you must come again, young man, or we shall be at a loss what to do with the excess money we have received from him."

Parting from the boy, Mr. A. hurried to the train, feeling as if he were being chased, and stopping a taxi which happened to be passing, he told the driver to take him to the home of Mr. B.

Mr. A. felt strangely lonely. He had heartily sympathised with the lad, for he realised his pathetic circumstances very well indeed. By chance he had been able to accomplish to-day what he had wished to do for some time. The boy must have been very happy, and he himself should have been satisfied by what he had done. To give happiness to others is of course

not a bad act, and the person who does such an act should naturally feel pleased. Now what was the reason for this feeling of lonesomeness which stole over Mr. A? What on earth was the cause of it? He had the feeling of one who had secretly done something wrong.

Was it because he felt some vain pride at having done a good act, and that such pride was being criticised, betrayed and scorned by his natural conscience? He might have felt less concerned if he had looked upon his act with less exaggeration and with less nerves. Unconsciously he might have been over-biassed. At any rate he certainly had done nothing shameful. He therefore felt that he should at least have no cause to feel so uneasy.

According to a previous appointment, Mr. B. was waiting for him that afternoon, and in the evening getting into Mr. B's car, they drove to a concert which was being given by Mrs. Y. Late that night Mr. A. returned home. After having listened to the music, he had quite forgotten his feeling of lonesomeness.

"Oh, thank you so much for the pretty scales, my dear," said his wife, when he arrived home, and as he had supposed, she was very pleased with what he had bought for her. His child was already asleep, but his wife told him of the rapture of their child after it had seen the scales.

"By the way, you remember the shop-boy who I told you about some days ago? Well, I met him again to-day."

"O, dear! Where did you meet him?"

"I found that he was an apprentice in the shop where I bought the scales."

"How strange!"

Mr. A. then told his wife how he had entertained the lad, and of the strange feeling he had after he had done it.

"Why, what was the cause? It was strange to feel in that way!" his wife answered good-humouredly. She seemed to be musing, and then suddenly she remarked, "Yes, I can well understand your feelings, and once I had such an experience myself, my dear."

"Then you can understand how I felt?"

"Yes, I quite understand. What did Mr. B. say about it?"

"I did not tell him."

"Didn't you? But the poor lad must have been very pleased, I'm sure! Anyone would have been happy to receive such unexpected treatment from a stranger. I should be happy too. Couldn't we send for some of that *sushi* by telephone?"

Senkichi went back to his stop, pulling his empty cart. His stomach was more than full. Up to that time it was not a rare thing for him to have eaten much, but he could not remember ever being so content and satisfied with food as he had been on that day. Somehow his mind went back to his awkward situation a few days previous when he visited the *sushi*-stall, and it gradually dawned upon him that there was some relation between his entertainment of to-day and that embarrassing occurrence.

“Was the gentleman at that stall on that day? Certainly he must have been!” thought he. But how did he find my address? Very strange! The house, however, where I was treated to-day was the very same restaurant that the clerks at our shop talked about. How in the world did the gentleman hear the talk of our clerks?”

It seemed a miracle to Senkichi. He did not dream that Mr. A. and Mr. B. had been discussing that same *sushi*-restaurant too. An idea then took strong hold of him. Mr. A. must have somehow heard the discussion of the two clerks, and so had decided to tread him to the same restaurant. If that had not been the case, then why did Mr. A. pick on that special house that day?

At any rate Senkichi began to think about Mr. A. as a most miraculous customer, and one who knew how he had been disgraced at the *sushi*-stall. He must have been aware of the clerks' conversation, and must have been able to read their innermost thought into the bargain, and so had decided to treat him so splendidly, and in such a kind way. Such a person must surely be above any ordinary man. “He may be a patron saint,” thought the boy, “or he may perhaps be a hermit, or a Fox-god.”

His reason for thinking him a Fox-god was because he had an aunt who was a strong believer in such a God, and who once had almost been beside herself in this belief. When possessed by the Fox-god, her body would tremble like an aspen-leaf, and at such time she

would prophesy or guess what was happening at great distances. He had once seen her in such a state. "But for a Fox-god that gentleman was a little too stylish," he thought. "At any rate he must be some kind of supernatural being!"

After a day or so, that strange feeling of loneliness passed from Mr. A's mind. But his conscience smote him still rather queerly, and prevented him from passing again in front of the scales-shop in Kanda. Moreover he did not have any wish to revisit the *sushi*-restaurant.

"All the better, my dear," said his wife laughing. "If you will send for the food, we shall all be able to share the delicacy."

But Mr. A. did not laugh, and answered, "Being such a timid kind of man, I could not do such a thing without some reflection."

To Senkichi, 'that customer' became an unforgettable factor in his mind. Whether 'he' was a human being or a supernatural one was no more a question with the lad. He was, however, not inclined to revisit the *sushi*-restaurant, though he remembered being invited so kindly to go again by the master and mistress of the establishment. He was not so insolent as to take advantage of their kindness.

In sorrow and pain he was sure never to forget 'that customer.' The mere remembrance was quite enough to console him. He believed that some day 'that customer' would again appear before his eyes with some expected favours.

The author lays down his pen here.

To tell the truth, he wanted to continue the story, with a description of the boy's wish to ascertain who 'that customer' was, or of visiting him at the address which had been given to the senior clerk. The boy actually did visit the address that was given, but to his great astonishment he found that the number and address given was a small shrine dedicated to a Fox-god In this way the author wished to continue his story, but thinking that such an ending would be rather unkind to the boy, he decided to discontinue.

THE END

A MURDER CASE

By

Naoya Shiga

(A SHORT STORY),

Translated by

Eiji Ukai and Eric S. Bell.

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A Murder Case

A sudden tragedy had happened, in which Fan, a young Chinese, who was a member of some juggler's party, had slashed the carotid artery of his wife with a jack knife, during one of their juggling performances. The young wife died on the spot, and Fan was immediately arrested.

The manager of the party, an assistant Chinese, and more than three hundred spectators had been witnesses of the tragedy.

In one corner of the pit of the theatre a policeman was seated in a high chair watching the performance. But no one knew whether the killing had been intentional or not, though the tragedy had taken place before the eyes of a number of onlookers.

The performance had begun with a feat of knife-throwing, which had been performed in the following manner:—

The young wife was placed in a standing position in front of a thick board of wood of the size of a door. The husband, standing twelve feet away, threw big knives towards her, one after another, and as they hit their mark, they would stick fast in the board, thus making an outline of bristling knives round the woman just two inches from her body.

At the trial, the judge first of all questioned the manager.

"Was this feat at all difficult to perform?"

"No, your honour, it was not so very difficult for a skilful juggler, except that he needed to be in complete command of steady nerve."

"Then is it impossible to look upon it as a mere accident on the part of Fan?"

"Of course, your honour, such a performance had its risks, very possible risks."

"Then do you think that this accident may have been an intentional crime?"

"No, your honour, I don't think that at all, because, you see, it was a feat in which one must make the best of one's only skill, and also make use of a certain intuitive talent in throwing knives from a distance of twelve feet; and one can't be certain that it can be done as surely as by using some machine for the purpose. It is true, your honour, that before it really happened. It didn't enter our heads that such an accident might be possible. But now that it has happened, we don't care for people to think that we had entertained any such fear, and we don't care to be judged accordingly."

"What is your opinion of the real truth of the occurrence?"

"I don't know at all."

The judge seemed puzzled. All the facts of the case pointed to murder, yet there was no evidence all to decide whether it had been intentional or not. If it had been an intentional murder, he felt that no subtler crime could be committed.

The judge then called in the assistant Chinese who had been a member of the party even before Fan had joined it.

"Tell me something of Fan's everyday behaviour," said the judge.

"He is a man of very good behaviour, your honour," answered the assistant. "He never went in for gambling, he never indulged in women or drinking either. Moreover, ever since last year he has embraced the Christian faith. He also spoke English fairly well, and in his leisure time he often read sermons and such things."

"How did his wife behave?"

"She also behaved well, your honour. Strolling performers are not always people of good behaviour, you know. Some of them occasionally elope with other men's wives. But Fan's wife was never the kind of woman who could be seduced by anyone at all, even though she was a pretty woman and was sometimes made advances to."

"What is your opinion of the characters of these two young people?"

"They were both exceedingly gentle and kind towards others, and both of them were gifted with a lot of self-restraint when they became angry with anyone, but (Here the Chinese assistant stopped short, and after thinking for an instant, he continued) I fear it may be disadvantageous to him if I say this, your honour, but speaking candidly, these two people who were so gentle and kind and modest, were cruel

to each other."

"What was their reason?"

"I don't know, your honour."

"Have they behaved in this way ever since you first became acquainted with them?"

"Yes, your honour. Two years ago the wife gave birth to a premature child, who died three days later, and ever since then their lives gradually seemed to become discordant. Very trifling matters sometimes caused them to quarrel, and he would then suddenly become very pale. But in most cases he soon quietened down, and became silent, doing nothing violent to his wife. His Christian faith seemed to influence him from doing anything cruel to her, although quite often his face plainly showed that he was endeavouring to control some unbearable anger. So one day I said to him, 'If there is such discord, don't you think it would be better if you and your wife parted?' 'But,' he answered, 'if she has any reason to want a divorce, I have none at all.' He was very indulgent after all, your honour. Once I heard him say that it was quite natural that a wife who was not loved by her husband should in time lose all her love for him. His motive in reading his Bible and all those sermons seems to have been an idea of his that by doing so he might perhaps be able to calm the disturbance in his heart, and thus cure his rather cruel feeling for his wife, for apparently there was no real reason for his dislike. She was to be pitied, your honour. For the past three years, and ever since she married Fan she has been

continuously on the travel, going from one place to another, living the life of a strolling performer. The only one she had belonging to her was her only brother, a dissipated youth, who existed in his native village without a home. If she was to part from her husband and return to her native place, where would she find a house to live in, or who would believe in or marry a woman who had left there years before to join a party of strolling players?

"She could not help remaining with Fan, your honour, even though there was terrible discord in their married life."

"And what is your opinion of the tragedy?" asked the judge.

"Did he do it intentionally or by mistake, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"To speak plainly, I have thought and thought about it ever since it happened, but the more I think, the more puzzling it becomes to me, your honour."

"But why?"

"I don't know. At any rate, the whole affair seems very mysterious, there's no denying that, your honour. Everybody feels the same about it, you know. Our announcer also says he cannot understand it either."

"What did you think the instant the tragedy happened?"

"I thought . . . yes, I thought he had killed her intentionally."

"Well"

"But I'm told that our announcer thought that Fan had missed his aim."

"Did he? But wasn't it natural for your announcer to think such a thing when he was acquainted with the unhappy relationship that existed between the couples?"

"It may be so, but even though I thought at first that Fan's deed had been intentional, after carefully considering about it again, I now fancy that my judgment may have been prejudiced by knowing too much about the private life of the couple."

"What was Fan's attitude at that time?"

"As the knife hit, he sprang forward with a shriek. After that I saw blood bursting from the woman's neck. She stood still for a minute, and then bending her knees suddenly, was suspended a few moments by the knives sticking all round her. As they gradually began to fall off the board one by one, her body collapsed, face downwards. Nobody dared to move. Everyone of the audience stared as if turned stone. I can't speak definitely about Fan's attitude at the time, because for the moment I was too much taken aback, but I suppose that for a few moments he also must have been rather dazed. After that it dawned upon me that he had killed his wife. Then I noticed that he had turned deathly pale, and was standing stock still with his eyes closed. As the stage curtain came down, we rushed to the poor woman and raised her body, but found that she was dead. Fan at that time

seemed horror-stricken, and at last said, 'Whatever made me commit such a fault?' He then knelt down and prayed for some time."

"Didn't he seem to be in a panic?"

"Yes, your honour, a little."

"All right. If it is necessary I shall summon you again."

The judge dismissed the assistant juggler, and asked for Fan to be brought before him. The latter was rather a clever-looking man, with a strong and well-shaped mouth. As soon as the judge's eyes rested upon him, he saw that the man was suffering from nervous strain.

"We have questioned your manager and the assistant," said the judge, "and will now question you."

Fan nodded.

"Up to the present, have you never loved your wife?"

"I have loved my wife with all my heart from the day of our marriage until her death, sir."

"How was it then that you both disagreed?"

"It was, sir, because I knew that her baby was not mine."

"Do you know the man?"

"I can guess, sir. He is her cousin."

"Are you acquainted with him?"

"Yes, sir. He is one of my bosom friends. It was he who first suggested our marriage. He persuaded me into it, sir."

"Was your relationship with your wife begun

before your marriage?"

"Of course, sir. The baby was born eight months after our marriage."

"Your assistant says that the child's birth was premature. . . ."

"I told him so."

"I'm told that the child soon died."

"Yes sir, it died."

"What caused its death?"

"It was suffocated by her breasts."

"Did your wife do it intentionally?"

"She said it was an accident."

The judge said nothing but looked steadily at Fan's face. Fan's eyes dropped, and he waited for the judge to ask another question.

"Did your wife confess her unlawful relationship to you?"

"No, sir, she didn't. I didn't ask. Thinking the death of her child had been a kind of atonement for her unfaithfulness, I determined to be as kind and generous to her as possible."

"But after that time did you begin to find it hard to be generous and kind to her?"

"I had some feeling that even the death of the child could not drive from my mind, sir. When I was separated from her, to some extent I thought kindly of her, but when she was with me and happened to be doing anything, a feeling of unbearable displeasure took hold of me, especially when I looked upon her body."

"Didn't you think of getting a divorce from her?"

"I wanted very often to do so, sir, but I never said anything to her about it."

"Why?"

"Because, sir, I was weak, and she had once said to me that she would die if ever I divorced her."

"Did your wife love you?"

"No, sir."

"Then why did she say such a thing?"

"I think it was because she realised that she must live . . . her parent's home had been ruined by her brother, and she knew that no decent man would ever marry the former wife of a strolling juggler. Besides, she suffered from some extreme weakness of the legs, which made it impossible for her to do any hard work."

"Tell me something of the physical relations that existed between you and your wife."

"Perhaps they were not very different from that of any other ordinary man and woman, sir."

"Wasn't your wife at all sympathetic towards you?"

"No, I don't think she felt any sympathy towards me at all. I think that it must have caused her quite a lot of pain to have to live with me. But the way she endeavoured to bear it was beyond anyone's imagination. She watched my collapsing life with indifferent eyes, and with a cruel alertness she coldly watched me struggling to live my life as best as I could."

"Why couldn't you take some active attitude

against all this sort of thing?"

"Because, sir, I had various things to consider."

"What were they?"

"I wanted to feel that I was acting rightly, yet when I tried to think this way, I never found any solution at all."

"Had you never thought of killing your wife?"

Fan did not answer. The judge repeated the question again. Fan still hesitated before he answered, but at last he said,

"Before that I often wished that she were dead."

"Then perhaps if the law had permitted you, you might have killed her?"

"It was not that I was afraid of the law. It was only because I was weak, and my desire to live a decent life was very strong in me, sir."

"And did you think of killing her after that?"

"I made no decision to take her life, but I thought of it, sir."

"Was that before the accident?"

"It was on the previous day."

"Did you have any quarrel with her before the accident?"

"Yes, sir."

"About what?"

"About quite a trifling matter, sir."

"All the same, tell me about it."

". . . . I have a way of being rather irritable when I'm hungry, you know, and during a meal together I became angry with her because she had taken such a

long time preparing it."

"Were you more angry than usual?"

"No, sir, but my excitement lasted unusually long, because at the time I was so irritated to think that recently I had found it so hard to live in peace. I couldn't lie down to sleep at night without my brain being tortured with all kinds of worries. I realised that the very unsettled life I was leading all due to my disturbed relations with my wife—a life full of anxiety and nerve-strain. There were things which I wanted to do to rid myself of this anxiety, yet I did not dare. There seemed no brightness ahead of me at all, even though I had a burning desire to find it. Even though this slow-burning fire in me did not burst into flames, it seemed to choke me, for it went on smouldering, causing me suppressed and intense agony of mind. I felt that in the end it would surely kill me—that I would die some living death.

"Living in that way, I strove hard to bear my life. 'Oh, how I wish my enemy would die!' This thought kept on repeating itself over and over again in my mind. Then, why did I not kill her? I knew that if I did, I might be put into prison, but I would not feel sure that life in prison would be worse than the one I was enduring. Then again I thought of the future, and I felt that I must struggle on, even to death, however hard it might prove—trying to break down this terrible barrier of anxiety, but striving always. I desired to go on living in this way . . . With these thoughts I gradually forgot about my duty to my wife.

Eminent Authors of Japan

Then I got horribly tired, but it was not the fatigue that can be refreshed by sleep. I felt dazed, and then my strained nerves relaxed, and this feeling of murderous intention gradually faded. I felt very lonely, having the feelings of a man who had been awakened from a terrible nightmare. At the same time I regretted my lack of spirit, which I felt was weakening, even though my highly-strung nerves had almost driven me to a crime the day before.

"When I awoke that morning, I was sure that my poor wife had passed a sleepless night."

"When you got up that morning, how did you both feel?"

"We spoke no word to one another."

"Why didn't you think of running away from your wife?"

"Do you mean that if I had done this the result would have saved me?"

"Yes."

"But with me it was quite different, sir."

After saying this, Fan stopped short, and gazed steadily at the judge. The latter said nothing, but in his eyes was an expression of mild compassion, and he nodded his head. Then Fan continued,

"But there still lay a wide gulf between such an idea and the thought of murder, sir. All that day, ever since the morning, I was unconsciously excited. Sometimes you know, fatigue of the body causes a dull excitement of the nerves. Later I was strolling by myself, and a feeling of great loneliness came over me,

but it was mixed with an almost unbearable impatience. I had a desperate feeling that I must do something. But the idea of murder never entered my head as it had done the previous night, nor did I feel any anxiety at all over the coming performance of that evening. If I had been at all anxious, I should perhaps not have selected such kind of turn for that day's programme. We had many kinds of turns besides that one. Even until the very moment for us to perform our act that evening, I had no murderous intention in my mind.

"I cut up a sheet of paper with my knives first of all to show the spectators how very sharp they were. Soon my wife appeared. She was thickly rouged and powdered and was dressed in a gorgeous Chinese garment. Her attitude was as usual. Greeting the spectators with a pleasant smile, she placed her body in a standing position before the thick wooden board. Then taking my knives, I stood facing her, at some distance away. It was the first time that we had stood face to face since the previous night. It was then that I first felt the danger of having selected that particular performance for that evening. The thought suddenly came to me that it would be necessary for me to keep my nerves as steady as possible, for fear of making a mistake. I must keep control over my giddiness.

"But however much I tried to be calm, I was still conscious of a great fatigue of heart, body and soul. Then I began to lose confidence. I tried to shut my eyes and keep cool, but a giddy feeling stole over me.

Then the time came for me to start. First of all I threw a knife so that it would stick above her head. It flew and stuck to the board two inches higher than usual. After that I threw two knives one after the other, so that they would stick near her arm-pits, which were showing, for her arms were raised on a level with her shoulders. When the knives slipped from my hand, they felt sticky to the touch. It then came to my mind that I was not sure where they would fly. Each time after that, as knife after knife flew through the air and stuck to the board, I felt greatly relieved. I strove to be composed, but the strain caused me a lot of worry as I prepared my arm for throwing. Then I threw another knife to the left side of her neck. But just I was going to throw another to the right side, her facial expression suddenly changed. A pitiful expression of intense terror seemed to take hold of her. Perhaps she had some intuition that the next knife would strike her. I cannot say. I then began to feel strongly the influence of her fear and terror stealing into my mind. My giddiness increased, nevertheless I took aim, and threw my knife with all my might, aiming it at a darkness instead of at any target."

The judge was silent.

"At last I have killed her!" I said to myself.

"Well, do you mean you did it intentionally?"

"Yes, sir. At that moment I suddenly felt that I had done it intentionally."

"You knelt beside her and prayed, I'm told?"

"Yes, sir, that was merely a cunning idea which by

chance entered my mind. I was aware that everyone knew of my Christian faith, so I thought that a pretence of prayer would well fit the occasion."

"Did it occur to you at all that you had intentionally killed her?"

"Yes, sir, and so I thought that I must make some pretence that it had been involuntary homicide."

"But what made you think it was intentional murder?"

"My frightened state of mind, sir."

"And you thought you had succeeded in cheating your audience, didn't you?"

"When I thought about it afterwards I shuddered, sir. It is true that I had pretended to be amazed, but to some extent I lost my head because I was truly sorry for what I had done. But if there had been a single person of keen perception among the onlookers, he would of course have noticed that I was feigning a little. But afterwards I shuddered with shame.

"I made up my mind that night that I would use every power that was in me to declare myself innocent of the charge. The thought that there was no disputable evidence whatever regarding the murder, made me feel easier in mind. Of course every member of our troupe knew of the discord which existed between my wife and me, so it was natural to some extent that I should be suspected of having committed intentional homicide. But I felt sure that if I insisted with all my power that it had been a mere accident, that's all there would be to it.

"Our relations might make others suspicious, but it would never bring forth any evidence. At any rate I thought, sir, that I should be acquitted on account of insufficient evidence. Whereupon, chewing the matter over secretly, I prepared in my mind the statement I would make in court, for I wished to appear as innocent as possible of the affair.

"But soon I began to wonder why I had thought I had committed a wilful murder. I began to feel a that doubt about my feelings of the previous night, and could not quite regard my action as that of homicide.

"Gradually I became filled with doubt. I became very excited—so excited that I began to lose all patience. I felt strangely happy—so exhalted that I could no more remain still. I wanted to cry out loudly."

"Do you mean that you began to look upon your act as an accident pure and simple?"

"No, sir, Even now I cannot regard it in that light. It was because I thought that if I confessed everything openly I would not be acquitted. To be absolved of the blame meant everything to me, so I thought it would be far more effective to be honest, stating that I was not able to deside. I felt it was better to do this than to declare my innocence. I decided that I would never declare it had been an accident, nor should I assert that it had been intentional. Finally I felt that I could never make any confession either way, sir."

Fan ceased speaking. The judge was silent for a little while. Then he spoke very gently.

"Your confession as a whole seems to have been truthful. But have you no regret or sorrow for the death of your poor wife?"

"No, none at all, sir. I never imagined it possible that I should be able to speak of my wife's death with so light a heart as possesses me now, even though at times I have felt a kind of irritated love for her."

"All right. Now you may retire," said the judge. Fan without answering bowed his head slightly and left the courtroom.

The judge felt that some unspeakable excitement had taken possession of him. He hastily took up his brush and wrote down these words:

"Not guilty"

THE END

A MOORHEN

By

Naoya Shiga

(A SHORT STORY),

Translated by

Haruo Endo and Eric S. Bell.

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A Moorhen

It was an extremely peaceful afternoon, with a feeling of autumn in the keen air. Arranging his folding-chair on the outer edge of the verandah, Ryudo, the painter, gazed at the swampy ground in front of his house. Along a small track which edged a paddy-field he noticed a sportsman walking, headed by a pointer. In the far distance sounded two gun-shots. The dog stopped suddenly and pricked up his ears.

"I would like to keep a moorhen," remarked Ryudo, looking back at his younger sister Otane, who was busy sewing behind him on the verandah. "And, I would lead fresh water on to my land, and would plant green reeds there. I wouldn't mind having one or two of the moorhens, but I would let them roam about quite freely."

"When you've realized your great ambition?" said Otane rather cynically, without lifting her eyes.

"O no. I could do such a thing anytime!"

"But could you afford to build a house with this land of yours?"

Ryudo burst into laughter at his sister's dry remark.

"It is useless for you to have so many luxurious ideas, for you could never earn so much money!"

.....
That night, after they had taken their bath, and

when they were sipping their tea in their sitting-room, Ryudo repeated his wish again to Imanishi, his pupil.

"But, don't you think it would be far more picturesque to plant Korean variegated bamboo-grass there than reeds?"

"No, it wouldn't!"

"Why?"

"Because"

"But I like Korean hamboo much better."

"Anyway, its stems are far too thick for a moorhen to live among."

This longing to keep a moorhen was typical of Ryudo's nature. When he caught sight of one, with the bright ribbon of scarlet crest on its forehead, running here and there among the reeds, with slender legs like new-born stems, its shy and almost bashful nature reminded him of a maiden in her teens. But he would never tell such thoughts to Otane.

About 15 years before, he had lived in Kyoto, and at that time he had a disappointing affair with a girl of about the same age, of the merchant class. No one knew of it but his sister. At first he had regretted his conduct toward the girl, and for a long time his heart was troubled, and he suffered terribly, but with the passing of the years, time had softened his sorrow, and he could now think of her with a very good grace. Lately he had seen her in his dreams, and these sweet visions gave him extreme pleasure, and somehow the sight of a moorhen brought back memories of her.

At such times he did not care to think that by

now she had already reached the age of 30.

.....

A week passed by. One morning Ryudo, standing in one of his rooms, was designing a rather big picture, referring every now and then to his sketch-book in which he had lately been taking down some rough drawings. From the wicket-gate which led into the garden, came Otane, clothed in a morning dress, and holding in her hands a small parcel wrapped round with a 'furoshiki.'

"My dear brother, I have something nice for you here . . . but you must thank me first!" She smilingly approached the verandah and sat down.

"What have you got?" He said from his room.

"A real live moorhen! The old woman a few doors away gave it to me."

Ryudo was silent, but after a moment he carefully put down his brushes, and came to where she was seated.

"What do you think about it? Aren't you glad?"

"But why on earth did she give you such a thing?"

"The other day I was chatting to her about moorhens, and she told me that, if we set some floating hooks for eels about the garden, it would be very easy to catch one. She did so, and caught this one for us!"

Ryudo stretched out his hands, and gently attempted to undo the *furoshiki*. The bird, which had remained quiet until this moment, now began to flutter beneath its covering.

"Please do not touch it, for it might get away.

Soon Mr. Imanishi will come along with a chicken-pen which our neighbour has kindly offered to lend us."

The bird continued to flutter, but uttered no cry. After a while it settled quietly down again.

The moorhen would never become tamed. It not only refused to be tame, but it would eat nothing; and, when Ryudo was absent from home, it beat its wings against the wire of its cage and tried its hardest to get free. No sooner did he make his appearance than it would run into a corner of its cage, and would stand with its tail toward him, remaining absolutely motionless.

Ryudo became very anxious about the bird. He gave it goby and small silver carp, and he made Imanishi catch young dragon-flies for it to eat. Sometimes he would attach some food to a bamboo-stick and would push it through the wire-netting close to the bird, but this only made it flutter its wings, or move to the other corner of the cage, where it would immediately become immovable as before.

As he watched its antics, he could not help thinking that its fear and its motionless attitude as if of anger were something like the nature of the girl he had once loved. But every time he thought of this it made him sad.

"No bird will become tame, even though such a man as you gives it persistent attention. Let it be free and it will become tame naturally. If it felt hungry then it would surely look for food!"

"Yes, I believe you are right," he answered gently

and rather unusually for him.

The next morning, soon after getting up, he went to look at his moorhen. He found the bird lying on its side on the floor of the cage, with its long legs stretched out straight in front of it, quite dead. Over its cold body insects and dragon-flies crawled about.

As Ryudo gazed, he was filled with horror.

That evening, when they were sitting together, the student remarked: "Moorhens are very delicious to eat. When I told our neighbour that we had buried our dead moorhen, they were very regretful!"

"In spite of their regret I would never eat a bird I had tried to tame! Even if the day comes when I shall realize my great aspiration, I will never again try to keep a moorhen!" he added with a bitter smile.

THE END

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「鶴は非常にうまい鳥だそうですな。埋めた話をしたら、隣りで大變惜しがつてゐましたよ」と云つた。
「いくらうまくたつて、飼ふ氣で飼つたものは食へないよ。俺は一朝、志を得ても、もう鶴を飼ふ事はやめた」
左う云つて柳堂はにが笑ひをしてゐた。

鳥は少しも聲を立てず、風呂敷を被つたまゝ暴れてゐたが、間もなく又凝つとして了つた。鶴は少しも馴れなかつた。馴れないばかりでなく、餌を全く食はない。そして柳堂がゐないと逃げようとし、騒いでゐるが、彼の姿を見ると直ぐ、箱の隅へ行つて彼方向きに凝つとしてしまふ。

柳堂は氣をもんだ。最初隣から貰つた鮎はやや小鮎をやつてゐたが、食はないので、今西に鮎どびうを買はせたり、沼から蜻蛉の幼蟲を捕つて來さしたりした。が、鶴はそれをも食はうとはしなかつた。竹の棒で、凝つとしてゐる鶴の足元へそれらを寄せてやると、鶴は驚いて急にばたばた騒いだ。そして今度は、ちがう隅へ行つて又同じやうに彼方向きに凝つと立つて身動きせずにある。

柳堂はその驚く様子や、隅へ行つて拗たやうに凝つとしてゐる様子が、猶且つ十四五の小娘のそのやうに思はれて仕方なかつた。彼は憶ひ出したくない事を憶ひ出し、不愉快になつた。

「お兄さんのやうに附きつきりて、あゝ執拗しつこいくしてゐらむたら、却つて馴れませんよ。ほつといて自然に馴れるのを待たなきやあ。お腹がへれば仕方なしに餌につきますよ」

「左うかな」。柳堂は珍らしく素直に云つた。

翌朝、柳堂は起きるなり、鶴を見に行つた。鶴は箱の中で、横倒しに長い足を延ばして死んでゐた。そのまはりには、鱒や蜻蛉の幼蟲が這ひ廻つてゐた。柳堂はいやな顔をして、暫くそれを見てゐた。

その晩、茶の間で、今西が、

愉快にするやうなものではなかつた。そして何時とはなし、彼の頭では、其小娘と鶴とが結びついて居た。

同じ女が今は既に三十歳だといふやうな事は、彼には考へられなかつた。

一週間程経つた。柳堂は離れの晝室で、その朝寫生して來た寫生帖から、横物の晝を描いてゐた。その時、庭の木戸から、割藁着を着たお種が、風呂敷を被せた小さいものを両手に持ち入つて來た。

「お兄さん。いゝものをあげます。ありがたうと仰有い」

お種は、にこにこしながら縁へ来て腰かけた。

「何んだ」

「生きてる鶴よ。隣のお婆さんが呉れたんです」

柳堂は黙つて筆を置き、立つて來た。

「如何？ お嬉しいでせう？」

「どうして、こんなものを呉れたんだ」

「此間鶴の話をもたら、鶴の流しじりを田へ立て、置くくと捕れると云つて、それで捕つて呉れたの」

柳堂は手を延ばして、その被ふせた風呂敷を去らうとした。今まで凝つとしてゐた鳥は、急に中で暴れ出した。

「逃げられるといけないから、およしなさい。今、今西さんが隣から鶴の箱を借りて來ますから」

その晩、風呂が済み、茶の間で茶を飲んでゐる時、柳堂は弟子の今西に同じ事を云ひ出した。

「葎よりも朝鮮だん竹の方が、よくはないですか」

「そりやあ、いけない」

「何故ですか」

「何故でもない」

「私はだん竹が好きですがな」

「第一、鶴にはあの莖が太過ぎるぢやないか」

柳堂が鶴を愛するには、柳堂だけの氣持があつた。

前髪に赤い手緒てがらを結び、萌えだしの草の莖のやうな足で葎の間を馳け歩く姿を見ると、その羞むはにかやうな様子が彼には十四五の美しい小娘を見る氣がした。然し彼は此事をお種に云ふわけには行かなかつた。

今から十何年前、京都に住んで居た頃、町家のさう云ふ小娘に對し、彼は或るしくじりをした。そして此事はお種だけが知つて居る。

最初彼は自身のした事を甚く良心に咎め、弱つて居たが、年が経つに従ひ、それもそれ程には思はなくなつた。そして却つて、その小娘を美しい氣持で色々憶ひ浮べるやうになつた。よく夢にも見たが、それは決して彼を不

志 賀 直 哉

如何にも秋らしい静かな午前だつた。柳堂は縁前に折り疊みのチエブを開き、沼の景色を眺めてゐた。

獵犬を先に立てた鐵砲打が沼べりの畔みちを行くのが見えた。遠くの方で、二つ續けて鐵砲の音がすると、大は立止つて、耳を立てた。

「俺は鶺鴒が伺ひたいよ」柳堂は突然、妹のお種を顧み、こんな事を云ひ出した。お種は縁で針仕事をしてゐた。

「中庭に綺麗な水を流し込んで、霞を植え、其所へ一羽でも二羽でもいいが、鶺鴒を放し伺ひにするのだ」

「一朝志を得たら、でせう？」お種は顔もあげず、冷やかした。

「そんな事ぐらひ、志を得なくたつて何時でも出来る」

「中庭のあるやうな家が建てられて？」

柳堂は笑つた。

「色々贅澤な事ばかり考へてゐらしても、少しもお金を取らうとなさらないから駄目よ」

つて、それで無罪になれると思つたからです。只今の私にとつては、無罪にならうといふのが總てです。その目的の爲には、自分を欺いて過失と我を張るよりは、何方か解らないと云つても、自分に正直で居られる事の方が遙に強いと考へたからなのです。私はもう過失だとは決して斷言しません。そのかほり、故意の仕業だと申す事も決してありません。で私には、もうどんな場合にも自白といふ事はなくなつたと思へたからです」

范は黙つてしまつた。裁判官も少時黙つてゐた。而して獨言のやうに、

「大體に於てウツはなささうだ」といつた。「所でお前には妻の死を悲しむ心は少しもないか？」

「全くありません。私はこれまで、妻に對してどんな烈しい憎みを感じた場合にも、これ程快活な心持で妻の死を話し得る自分を想像した事はありません」

「もうよろしい。引き下がつてよし」と裁判官が云つた。范は黙つて少し頭を下げると此室を出て行つた。

裁判官は何かしれぬ興奮の自身にも湧上がるのを感じた。

彼は直ぐペンを取上げた。而して其場で「無罪」と書いた。

「而してお前は巧みに人々を欺き終せたと思つたのだな？」

「私は後で考へてソツとしました。私は出来るだけ自然に驚きもし、多少あわてもし、又悲しんでも見せたのですが、若し一人でも感じの鋭い人が其處にゐたら、勿論私のロザとらしい様子を氣づかずには置かなかつたと思ひます。私は後で其時の自分の様子を思ひ浮べて、冷汗を流しました。——私は其晩何うしても自分は無罪にならなければならぬと決心しました。第一に、此兇行には何一つ客観的な證據のないといふ事が、非常に心丈夫に感ぜられました。勿論皆は二人の平常ふだの不和は知つてゐる。だから私は故殺とは疑はれる事は仕方がない。然し自分が何處までも過失だと我を張つて了へば、それ迄だ。平常の不和は人々に推察はさすかも知れないが、それが證據となる事はあるまい。結局自分は證據不十分で無罪になると思つたのです。其處で私は靜かに出來事を心に繰返しながら、出來る丈自然にそれが過失と思へる様、申立ての下拵こしらへを腹でして見たのです。所が其内、何故、あれを自身故殺と思ふのだらう、といふ疑問が起つて來たのです。前晩殺すといふ事を考へた、それだけが果して、あれを故殺と自身ででも決める理由になるだらうか、と思つたのです。段々に自分ながら解らなくなつて來ました。私は急に興奮して來ました。もうソツとしてゐられない程興奮して來たのです。愉快で愉快でならなくなりました。何か大きな聲で叫びたいやうな氣がして來ました」

「お前は自分で過失と思へるやうになつたといふのか？」

「いえ、左うは未だ思へません。只自分にも何方か全く解らなくなつたからです。私はもう何も彼も正直に云

不思議な表情をしました。發作的の烈しい恐怖を感じたらしいのです。妻はそのナイフが其儘に飛んで来て、自身の頸へさゝる事を豫感したのでせうか？ それはどうか知りません。私は只その恐怖の烈しい表情の、自分の心にも同じ強さで反射したのを感じたのでした。私は眼まひがしたやうな気がしました。が、其まゝ力まかせに、殆ど暗闇を眼がけるやうに、^{かた}的もなく手のナイフを打ち込んで了つたのです……」

裁判官は黙つて居た。

「たうとう殺したと思ひました」

「それはどういふのだ。故意でしたといふ意味か？」

「さうです。故意でした事のやうな気が不意にしましたのです」

「お前はその後で、死骸の側に跪いて黙禱したさうだな？」

「それは其時不圖湧いたズルイ手段だつたのです。皆は私が眞面目にキリスト教を信じてゐると思つてゐる事を知つてゐましたから、祈る風をしながら、私は此場に處すべき自分の態度を決めようと考へたのです」

「お前は何處までも自分のした事で、故意であると思つてゐたのだナ？」

「さうです。而して直ぐ、これは過殺と見せかける事が出来ると思つたのです」

「然し全體何がお前にそれを故殺と思はしたのだらう？」

「私の度を失つた心です」

しその事を多少でも私が想ひ浮べたとしたら、多分あの藝は選ばなかつたと思ひます。私共のする藝は未だ他に幾らもあつたからです。其晚いよいよ私共の舞臺へ出る番が来た、其時すら私は未だそんな事は考へませんでした。私はいつものやうに、ナイフの切れる事を客へ見せる爲に紙をきつたり、舞臺へそれを突立てたりして見せました。間もなく厚化粧をした妻が、ハテナ支那服を着て出て來ました。其様子は常と全く變つてあません。愛嬌のある笑を見せて客に挨拶をすると、厚板の前へ行つて直立しました。私も一本のナイフを下げて或る距離から妻と眞向きに立ちました。前晚から初めて其時二人は眼を見合せたのです。其時漸く私は今日此演藝を選んだ事の危険を感じたのです。私は出来るだけ緊張した氣分で仕なければあふないと思ひました。今日の上つた興奮と弱々しく鋭くなつた神經とを、出来るだけ静めなければならぬと思つたのです。然し心まで食ひ込んである疲労は、いくら落つかうとしても、それを許しません。其時から私は何となく、自分の腕が信じられない氣がして來たのです。私は一寸眼をねむつて、心を静めようと試みました。すると、フラフラと體の揺るのを感じました。時は來ました。私は先ず最初に頭の上へ一本打ち込みました。ナイフは、いつもより一寸も上へ行つてさへりました。次に妻が兩手を肩の高さに舉げた其腋の下に一本づつ打ちました。ナイフが指の先を離れる時に、何かベタツクやうな拘泥こどひつたものが一寸入ります。私にはもう何處へナイフがさゝるか解らない氣がしました。一本毎に私は（よかつた）といふ氣がします。私は落ちつかう落ちつかうと思ひました。然しそれは反つて意識的になる事から來る不自由さを腕に感ずるばかりです。額の左側へ一本打ちました。次に右側へ打たうとすると、妻が急に

に従つて、人を殺すといふやうな考への影が段々にガクテ來たのです。私は悪夢におそはれた後のやうな淋しい心持になつて來ました。一方ではあれ程に思ひつめた氣が、一ト晩の間に、かうも細々しくなつて了ふ自身の弱い心を悲しみもしたのです。——而してたうたう夜が明けました。想ふに妻も眠つてゐなかつたらしいのです。」

「起きてからは、二人は平常と變らながつたか？」

「二人は互に全く口をきかずにゐました」

「お前は何故、妻から逃げて了はうとは思はなかつたらう？」

「貴方は私の望む結果からいへば、それで同じ事だらうと仰有るのですか？」

「左うだ」

「私にとつては大變な相違です」

范はかう云ふと、裁判官の顔を見て黙つて了つた。裁判官は和いだ顔つきをして只首肯して見せた。

「——然し、かういふ事を考へたと云ふ事と、實際殺してやらうと思ふ事との間には、未だ大きな堀が残つて居たのです。其日は朝から私は何となく興奮して居ました。からだの疲勞から來る、イヤに彈力のない神經の鋭さがあります。私はゲツとしてゐられない様な心持で、朝から外へ出て人のゐないやうな所をアラアラと歩いてゐました。私は兎も角どうかしなければならぬといふ事を、繰返し繰返し考へてゐました。然し前晩のやうに殺さうといふ考へは、もう浮びはしなかつたのです。又其日の演藝についても、私は何の心配もしてゐなかつたのです。若

「いつもより、それが悪しかつたのか？」

「いえ。然しいつになく後まで興奮してゐました。私は近頃自分に本統の生活がないと云ふ事を堪らなく焦々して居る時だつたからです。床へ入つても、どうしても眠れません。興奮した色々な考へが浮んで來ます。私は私が右顧左顧、始終キョトキョトと、欲する事も思ひ切つて欲し得ず、イヤでイヤでならないものを思ひ切つてハネ退けて了へない、中アライシな、ウヂウヂとした此生活が、總べて妻との關係から出て來るのだと云ふ氣がして來たのです。自分の未來には、もう何の光りも見えない。自分にはそれを求める欲望は燃えて居る。燃えてゐないまでも、燃え立たうとしてゐる。それを燃えさせないものは妻との關係なのだ。しかもその火は全く消えもしない。アスパスと醜く燃つてゐる。その不快と苦しみで自分は今中毒しようとしてゐるのだ。中毒しきつた時は自分ももう死んで了ふのだ。生きながら死人になるのだ。自分は左ういふ所に立つてゐるのに、尙それを忍ぼうといふ努力をしてゐるのだ。而して一方で死んでくれよばい、そんなきたない、イヤな考へを繰返してゐるのだ。其位なら何故殺して了はないのだ。殺した結果がどうならうと、それは今の問題ではない。牢屋へ入れられるかも知れない。しかも牢屋の生活は今の生活よりどの位いゝか知ればしない。其時は其時だ。其時に起る事は其時にどうにでも破つて了へばいゝのだ。破つても破つても破りきれないかも知れない。然し死ぬまで破らうとすれば、それが俺の本統の生活といふものになるのだ。——私は側に妻のある事を殆ど忘れてゐました。私は漸く疲れて來ました。度れても眠れる性質の疲勞ではなかつたのです。ボンヤリして來ました。張り切つた氣がゆるんで來る

「其前に死ねばいゝとよく思ひましたと」答へた。

「それなら、若し法律が許したら、お前は妻を殺したかも知れないな？」

「私は法律を恐れてそんな事を思つてゐたのではありません。私が只弱かつたからです。弱い癖に本統の生活に生きたいといふ欲望が強かつたからです」

「而して、其後にお前は妻を殺さうと考へたのか？」

「決心はしませんでした。然し考へました」

「それはあの出来事のどれ程前の事か？」

「前晩です。或はその明方です」

「其前に争ひでもしたか？」

「しました」

「何の事です？」

「話し仕なくてもいゝ程下らない事です」

「まあ、云つて見ないか？」

「――食ひ物の事です。腹が空いてゐると私は刺戟持ちになるのです。で、其時妻が食事の支度でケツケツしてゐたのに腹をたてたのです」

眞面目な男のない事も知つてゐたからです。又懶くにしては足が小さくて駄目だからです」

「二人の肉體の上の關係は？」

「多分普通の夫婦と、それ程は變らなかつたと思ひます」

「妻はお前に對して別に同情もしてゐなかつたのか？」

「同情してゐたとは考へられません。——妻にとつて同様してゐる事は非常な苦痛でなければならぬと思ふのです。然し其苦痛を堪へ忍ぶ我慢強さは、逆も男では考へられない程でした。妻は私の生活が段々と壞されて行くのを、殘酷な眼つきで只見てゐました。私が自分を救はう——自分の本統の生活に入らうとも、がき、苦んでゐるのを、押し合ふやうな少しも隙を見せない必持で、しかも冷然と側から眺めてゐるのです」

「お前は何故、それに積極的な思ひ切つた態度が取れなかつたのだ？」

「色々な事を考へるからです」

「色々な事とはどんな事だ？」

「自分が誤りのない行爲をしようといふ事を考へるのです。——然し其考へば、いつも結局何の解決もつけては呉れません」

「お前は妻を殺さうと考へた事はなかつたか？」

「私は答へなかつた。裁判官は同じ言葉を繰返した。それでも私は直ぐは答へなかつた。而して、

「妻はその關係に就いてお前に打明けたか？」

「打明けません。私も訊かうとしませんでした。而してその赤子の死が總べてのつぐのひの縁にも思はれたので、私は自身出来るだけ寛大にならなければならぬと思つてゐました」

「所が、結局寛大になれなかつたといふのか？」

「さうです。赤子の死だけでは、つぐのひきれない感情が残りました。離れて考へる時には、割りに寛大で居られるのです。所が、妻が眼の前に出て来る。何かする。そのからだを見てゐると、急に厭へきれない不快を感じるのです」

「お前は離婚しようと思はなかつたか？」

「したいとはよく思ひました。然し嘗てそれを口に出した事はありませんでした」

「何故だ？」

「私が弱かつたからです。妻は若し私から離婚されれば、生きてはゐないと申してゐましたからです」

「妻はお前を愛してゐたか？」

「愛してはゐません」

「何故それなら、そんな事をいつてゐたのだ？」

「一つは生きて行く必要からだつたと考へます。實家は兄がつぶして了ましたし、旅藝人の妻だつた女を貰ふ

「想像してゐます。それは妻の従兄です」

「お前の知つて居る男か？」

「親しかつた友達です。其男が二人の結婚を云ひ出したのです。其男から私は勧められたのです」

「お前の所へ来る前の關係だらうな？」

「勿論左うです。赤子は私の所へ来て八月目に生れたのです」

「早産だと助手の男は云つてゐたが……？」

「左う私が云つてきかしたからです」

「赤子は直ぐ死んだと云ふな？」

「死にました」

「何んで死んだのだ？」

「乳房で息を止められたのです」

「妻はそれを故意でしたのではなかつたのか？」

「過ちからだと自身は申して居りました」

裁判官は口をつぐんでグット范の顔を見た。范は顔を擧げたまゝ、伏目をして、次の問を待つてゐる。裁判官は口を開いた。

したな」といふ考へが浮んだのです。が、其時は范は眞蒼になつて眼を閉ぢて立つてゐました。幕を閉めて、女を起して見ると、もう死んでゐました。范は興奮から恐しい顔をして、(どうしてこんな過ちをしたらう)といつてゐました。而して其處に跪いて長い事黙禱をもしました。

「あわてた様子はなかつたか？」

「少しあわてた様子でした」

「よろしい。訊れる事があつたら又呼び出す」

裁判官は助手の支那人を下げると、最後に本人を其處へ連れて來させた。范は引きしまつた蒼い顔をした賢さうな男だつた。一眼で烈しい神經衰弱にかゝつてゐる事が裁判官に解つた。而して「今、座長と助手とを調べたから、それから先を訊くぞ」と范が席に着くと直ぐ云つた。

范は首肯うなづいた。

「お前は妻をこれまで少しも愛した事はないのか？」

「結婚した日から赤子を生む時までは、心から私は妻を愛して居りました」

「どうして、それが不和になつたのだ？」

「妻の生んだ赤子が私の兒でない事を知つたからです」

「お前はその相手の男を知つてゐるか？」

「何故が知りません。事實左うなるのです。恐らく誰でも左うなるだらうと思ひます。口上云ひの男に訊いて見た所が、此男ももう解らないと申しました。」

「では出来事であつた瞬間には何方かと思つたのか？」

「思ひました。(殺したな)と思ひました。」

「左うか？」

「所が口上云ひの男は(失策つた)と思つたさうです。」

「左うか——然しそれは、其男が二人の平常の關係を餘り知らない所から、單純に左う思つたのではないかね。」

「左うかも知れませんが、私が(殺したな)と思つたのも、同様に二人の平常の關係をよく知つてる所から、單純に左う思つたのかも知れないと、後では考へられるのです。」

「其時の范の様子はどうだつた？」

「范は(あつ)と聲を出しました。それで私も氣がついた位で、見ると女の首からは血がどつと溢れました。それでも一寸の間は立つてゐましたが、カクキと膝を折ると、さよつたナイフで一寸身體がづられ、其ナイフが抜けると一縷に、くづれるやうに女の前へめつて了ひました。その間誰もどうする事も出来ません。只堅くなつて見てゐるばかりでした。で、確かな事は申されません。何故なら私には其時范の様子を見る程餘裕がなかつたからです。が然し范も其數秒間は恐らく私達と同じだつたらうと思はれます。その後で私には(たうたう殺

て妻に對して手荒な行ひなどをする事はいけません。尤もあの男の信仰もそれを許さないからでせうが、顔を見ると、どうしても押へきれない怒りが凄い程に現れて居る事もいいます。で、私は或時、それ程不和なものな何時までも一緒にゐなくてもいいだらう、と云つた事がいいます。然し范は、妻には離婚を要求する理由があつても、此方にはそれを要求する理由はないと答へました。范は何處までも自分の我儘にしてゐました。どうしても妻を愛する事が出来ない。自分に愛されない妻が、段々に自分を愛さなくなる。それは當然な事だ。こんな事も言つてゐました。あの男がバイアルや説教集を読むやうになつた動機もそれで、どうかして自分の心を和げて、憎むべき理由もない妻を憎むといふ、寧ろ狂暴な自分の心を、ため直して了はうと考へてゐたやうでした。妻も又實際可哀さうな女なのです。范と一緒になつてから、三年近く旅藝人として彼方此方と廻り歩いてゐますが、故郷の兄といふのが放蕩者で、家はもうつぶれて無いのです。假に范と別れて歸つた所が、四年も旅を廻つて来た女を信用して結婚する男もないでせうし、不和でも范と一緒にゐるより外なかつたのだと思ひます」

「で、全體お前はあの出来事に就いてはどう思ふ？」

「邊りて仕た事か、故意で仕た事かと仰有るのですか？」

「左うだ」

「私も實はあの時以來色々考へて見ました。所が考へれば考へる程段々解らなくなつて了ひました」

「何故？」

「妻の素行は？」

「これも正しい方でふいました。御承知の通り旅藝人といふものは、決して風儀のいゝものばかりではありません。他人の妻を連れて逃げてしまふ。左う云ふ人間も時々はある位で、范の妻も小柄な美しい女で、さういふ誘惑も時には受けてゐたやうでしたが、それらの相手になるやうな事は決してありませんでした」

「二人の性質は？」

「二人共に他人には極く柔和で親切で、又二人共に他人に對しては、克己心も強く、決して怒るやうな事はありませんでした。が、（此處で支那人は言葉を斷つた。而して一寸考へて、又續けた）——此事を申上げるのは范の爲めに不利益になりさうで、心配でもありますが、正直に申上げれば、不思議な事に他人に對しては、それ程に柔和で親切で克己心の強い二人が、二人だけの關係になると、何故か驚く程お互に慘酷になる事でふいます」

「何故だらう？」

「解りません」

「お前の知てつる最初から左うだつたのか？」

「いえ、二年程前妻が産を致しました。赤子は早産だといふ事で、三日ばかりで死にましたが、其頃から二人は段々に仲が悪くなつて行くのが私共にも知れました。二人は時々極く下らない問題から烈しい口論を起します。左ういふ時、范は直ぐ蒼い顔になつて了ひます。然しあの男はどんな場合でも、結局は自分の方で黙つて、決し

「そんなら今度のやうな出来事は、過失としてもあり得ない出来事なのだな」

「勿論左ういふ假定——左ういふ極く確かな假定がなければ、許して置ける演藝ではございけません」

「では、お前は今度の出来事は故意の業と思つてゐるのだな？」

「いや、左うちやありません。何故なら、何しろ二間といふ距離を置いて、單に熟練と或直覺的な能力を利用してする藝ですもの。機械でする仕事のやうに必ず正確に行くとは斷言出来ません。あゝ云ふ過が起らないまでは、私共はそんな事はあり得ないと考へてゐたのは事實です。然し今此處に實際起つた場合、私共は兼ねてか考へてゐたといふ其考へを提出して、それを批判する事を許されてゐないと思ひます」

「全體お前は何方だと考へるのだ？」

「つまり私には解りませんのです」

裁判官は弱つた。此處に殺人といふ事實はある。然しそれが故殺或は謀殺（謀殺だとすればこれ程巧みな謀殺はないと裁判官は考へた）だといふ證據は全くない。裁判官は次に范が此一座に加はる前から附いてゐた助手の支那人を呼んで質問を始めた。

「ふだんの素行はどういふ風だつた？」

「素行は正しい男でゐます。バクチも女遊びも飲酒も致しませんでした。それにあの男は、昨年あたりからキリスト教を信じるやうになりまして、英語も達者で、暇があると、よく説教集などを讀んで居るやうでした」

范の犯罪

志賀直哉

范といふ若い支那人の奇術師が、演藝中に出刃庖丁程のナイフで其妻の頸動脈を切斷したといふ不意な出来事が起つた。若い妻は其場で死んで了つた。范は直ぐ捕へられた。

現場は座長も、助手の支那人も、口上云ひも、尙三百人餘りの観客も見て居た。観客席の端に一段高く椅子をかまへて一人の巡查も見えてゐたのである。所が此の事件は、これ程大勢の視線の中心に行はれた事でありながら、それが故意の業か過ちの出来事か、全く解らなくなつて了つた。

その演藝は戸板位の大きさの厚い板の前に女を立てて置いて、二間程離れた所から出刃程の大きなナイフを掛け聲と共に二寸と離れない距離に、からだに輪郭をとるやうに何本も打ち込んで行く、さういふ藝である。

裁判官は座長に質問した。

「あの演藝は全體六ヶしいものなのか？」

「いゝえ、熟練の出来たものには、あれは左程六ヶしい藝ではありません。只、あれを演ずるにはいつも、健全な而して緊張した氣分を持つて居なければならぬと云ふ事はあります」

て貰つて、其處を尋ねて行く事を書かうと思つた。小僧は其處へ行つて見た。所が、其番地には人の住みがなくて、小さい稻荷の祠があつた。小僧は吃驚した。——と、かう云ふ風に書かうと思つた。然しさう書く事は小僧に對し少し慘酷な氣がして來た。それ故作者は前の所で獨筆する事にした。

彼はそれを或る時見てゐたからである。然しお稻荷様にしては、ハイカラなのが少し變にも思へた。それにしろ超自然なものだと云ふ氣は段々強くなつて行つた。

九

Aの一種の淋しい變な感じは、日と共に跡方もなく消えて了つた。然し彼は神田の其店の前を通る事は、妙に氣がさして出来なくなつた。のみならず、其鮎屋にも自分から出掛ける氣はしなくなつた。

「丁度よう御座んすわ。自家へ取寄せれば、皆もお相伴出来て」と細君は笑つた。

するとAは笑ひもせず、

「俺のやうな氣の小さい人間は、全く輕々しくそんな事をするものぢやあ、ないよ」と云つた。

十

仙吉には「あの客」が益々忘れられないものになつて行つた。それが人間か超自然のものか、今は殆ど問題にならなかつた。只、無闇とありがたかつた。彼は鮎屋の主人夫婦に再三云はれたに拘らず、再び其處へ御馳走になりに行く氣はしなくなつた。さう附上る事は恐ろしかつた。

彼は悲しい時、苦しい時に、必ず「あの客」を想つた。それは想ふだけで或る慰めになつた。彼は何時かば又「あの客」が思はぬ恵みを持つて自分の前へ現はれて来る事を信じてゐた。

作者は此處で筆を擱く事にする。實は小僧が「あの客」の本體を確めたい要求から、番頭と名前を教へ

し、こんなに旨い物で一杯にした事は一寸憶ひ出せなかつた。

彼は不圖、先日京橋の屋臺詣で恥をかいた事を憶ひ出した。漸くそれを思ひ出した。すると初めて今日の御馳走がそれに或る關係を持つてゐる事に氣がついた。若しかしたら、あの場に居たんだ、と思つた。屹度さうだ。併し自分の居る所をどうして知つたらう？それは少し變だ、と彼は考へた。さう云へば今日連れて行かれた家は矢張り先日番頭達の噂をしてゐた、あの家だ。全體どうして番頭達の噂まであの客は知つたらう？

仙吉は不思議でたまらなくなつた。番頭達が其齋屋の噂をするやうに、AもBもそんな噂をする事は仙吉の頭では想像出来なかつた。彼は一途に自分が番頭達の噂話を聞いた、共同じ時の噂話をあの客も知つてゐて、今日自分を連れて行つて呉れたに違ひないと思ひ込んで了つた。さうでなければ、あの前にも二三軒齋屋の前を通りながら、通り過ぎて了つた事が解らないと考へた。

兎も角あの客は只者ではないと云ふ風に段々考へられて來た。自分が屋臺詣で恥をかいた事も、番頭達があの齋屋の噂をしてゐた事も、その上第一自分の心の中まで見透して、あんな充分な御馳走をして呉れた。到底それは人間業ではないと考へた。神様かも知れない。それでなければ仙人だ。若しかしたらお稻荷様かも知れないと考へた。

彼がお稻荷様と考へたのは、彼の伯母でお稻荷様信仰で一時氣違ひのやうになつた人があつたからである。お稻荷様が乗り移ると、身體をアルアル震はして、變な豫言をしたり、遠い所に起つた出來事を云ひ當てたりする。

「それは左うと、先日鮎屋で見た小僧ネ、又會つたよ」

「まあ、何處で？」

「ばかり屋の小僧だつた」

「奇遇ネ」

Aは小僧に鮎を御馳走してやつた事、それから、後、變に淋しい氣持になつた事などを話した。

「何故でせう。そんな淋しいお氣になるの、不思議ネ」。善良な細君は心配さうに眉をひそめた。細君は一寸考へる風だつた。すると、不意に、「えゝ、そのお氣持わかるわ」と云ひ出した。

「左う云ふ事ありますわ。何んでだか、そんな事あつたやうに思ふわ」

「左うかな」

「えゝ、本統に左う云ふ事あるは。Bさんは何んで仰有つて？」

「Bには小僧に會つた事は話さなかつた」

「左う。でも、小僧は吃度大喜びでしたわ。そんな思ひ掛ない御馳走になれば、誰でも喜びますわ。私でも頂きたいわ。其お鮎電話で取寄せられませんか？」

八

仙吉は空車を挽いて歸つて來た。彼の腹は十二分に張つてゐた。これまでも腹一杯に食つた事はよくある。然

Aは變に淋しい氣がした。自分は先の日小僧の氣の毒な様子を見て、心から同情した。而して、出来る事なら、かうしてやりたいと考へて居た事を、今日は偶然の機會から遂行出来たのである。小僧も満足し、自分も満足して、咎だ。人を喜ばす事は悪い事ではない。自分は當然或る喜びを感じていゝわけだ。所が、どうだらう。此變に淋しい、いやな氣持は、何故だらう。何から来るのだらう。丁度それは、人知れず悪い事をした後の氣持に似通つて居る。

若しかしたら、自分のした事が善事だと云ふ變な意識があつて、それを本統の心から批判され、裏切られ、嘲られて居るのが、かうした淋しい感じて感ぜられるのか知らず。もう少し仕た事を小さく氣樂に考へて居れば、何んでもないのかも知れない。自分は知らず知らずだはつて居るのだ。然し兎も角耻づべき事を行つたといふのではない。少くも不快な感じて殘らなくても、よささうなものだ、と彼は考へた。

其日行く約束があつたので、Bは待つて居た。而して二人は夜になつてから、Bの家の自動車でY夫人の音楽會へ出掛けて行つた。

晩くなつてAは歸つて來た。彼の變な淋しい氣持は、Bと會ひY夫人の力強い獨唱を聽いてゐる内に、殆ど直つて了つた。

「何とも恐れ入りました」。細君は案の定、其小形なのを喜んで居た。子供はもう寝て居たが、大變喜んだ事を細君は話した。

の間に平げて了つた。外に客がなく、かみさんが故と障子を縁切つて行つてくれたので、仙吉は見得も何もなかつた。食ひたいやうにして、鱈腹に食ふ事が出来たのである。

茶をさしに来たかみさんに笑ひながら、

「もつとあがれませんか」と云はれると、仙吉は少し赤くなつて、

「いえ、もう」と下を向いて了つた。而して忙しく歸り支度を始めた。

「それぢやあネ、又食べに来て下さいよ。お代はまだ澤山頂いてあるんですからネ」

仙吉は黙つて居た。

「お前さん、あの旦那とは前からお馴染なの？」

「いえ」

「へえ……」かう云つて、かみさんは其處へ出て来た主と顔を見合せた。

「粹いな人なんだ。それにしても、小僧さん又来て呉れないと、此方が困るんだからネ」

仙吉は下駄を穿きながら、只無闇とお辭儀した。

七

Aは小僧と別れると、追ひかけられるやうな氣持で電車通りに出ると、其處へ丁度通りかゝつた辻自動車を呼び止めて、直ぐBの家へ向かつた。

或る俣宿の前まで来ると、客は仙吉を待たして、中へ入つて行つた。間もなく秤は支度の出来た宿俣に積み移された。

「では、頼むよ。それから金は先で貰つて呉れ。其事も名刺に書いてあるから」と云つて客は出て来た。而して、今度は仙吉に向つて「お前も御苦勞。お前には何か御馳走してあげたいから、其邊まで一緒においで」と笑ひながら云つた。

仙吉は大變うまい話のやうな、少し薄氣味悪い話のやうな氣がした。然し何しろ嬉しかった。彼はヘコヘコと二三度續け様にお辭儀をした。

蕎麥屋の前も、鮎屋の前も、鳥屋の前も通り過ぎて了つた。「何處へ行く氣だらう」。仙吉は少し不安を感じ出した。神田驛の高架線の下を潜つて松屋の横へ出ると、電車通りを越して横町の或る小さい鮎屋の前へ来て、其客は立止つた。

「一寸待つて呉れ」。かう云つて客だけ中へ入つて、仙吉は手車の棍棒を下ろして立つてゐた。

間もなく客は出て来た。その後から、若い品のいゝかみさんが出て来て、

「小僧さん、お入りなさい」と云つた。

「私は先へ歸るから、充分食べておくれ」。かう云つて客は逃げるやうに急ぎ足で、電車通りの方へ行つて了つた。

仙吉は其處で三人前の鮎を平げた。餓ゑ切つた瘦せ犬が不時の食にありついたかのやうに、彼はがつがつと怒ち

は其一番小さいのを選んだ。停車場や運送屋にある大きな物と全く同じで、小さい其可愛い秤を妻や小供が嚙ぞ喜ぶ事だらうと考へた。

番頭が古風な帳面を手にして、

「お届け先きは何方様で御座いますか」と云つた。

「左う………」とAは仙吉を見ながら一寸考へて、「其小僧さんは今、手際かネ？」と云つた。

「へえ別に………」

「そんなら少し急ぐから、私と一緒に來て貰へないかネ」

「かしこまりました。では、車へつけて直ぐ御供をさせませう」

Aは先日御馳走出來なかつた代り、今日何處かで小僧に御馳走してやらうと考へた。

「それからお所とお名前を、これへ一つお願い致します」。金を拂ふと、番頭は別の帳面を出して來てかう云つた。

Aは一寸弱つた。秤を買ふ時、その秤の番號と一緒に、買手の住所姓名を書いて渡さればならぬ規則のある事

を彼は知らなかつた。姓名を知らしてから御馳走するのは、同様如何にも冷汗の氣がした。彼は考へ考へ出鱈目

の番地と出鱈目の名を書いて渡した。

六

客は加減をして、ぶらぶらと歩いてゐる。其二三間後から秤を乗せた小さい手車を掩いた仙吉がついて行く。

「それを聞くとBの通も少し怪しいもんだな」

Aは笑ひ出した。

Aは其時小僧の話をした。而して、

「何んだか可哀想だつた。どうかしてやりたいやうな気がしたよ」と云つた。

「御馳走してやればいゝのに。幾らでも、食へるだけ食はしてやると云つたら、囁喜んだらう」

「小僧は喜んだらうが、此方が冷汗ものだ」

「冷汗？ つまり勇氣がないんだ」

「勇氣かどうか知らないが、兎も角左う云ふ勇氣は一寸出せない。直ぐ一緒にでて、他方で御馳走するなら、まだやれるかも知れないが」

「まあ、それはそんなものだ」とBも賛成した。

五

Aは幼稚園へ通つて居る自分の小さい子供が、段々大きくなつて行くのを、數の上で知りたい氣持から、風呂場へ小さな體量秤を備へつける事を思ひついた。而して或日彼は偶然神田の仙吉の居る店へやつて來た。

仙吉はAを知らなかつた。然しAの方は仙吉を認めた。

店の横の奥へ通する三和土すわどになつた所に、七つ八つ大きいすいのから小さいのまで、荷物秤が背順に並んでゐる。A

「一度持ったのを置いてや、仕様がねえな」。左う云つて、主は握つた鰯を置くと引きかへに、それを自分の手元へかへした。

小僧は何も云はなかつた。小僧はいやな顔なしながら、其場が一寸動けなくなつた。然し直ぐ或る勇氣を振るひ起こして、暖簾の外へ出て行つた。

「當今は鰯も上がりましたからね。小僧さんには中々食べられませんよ。主は少し工合悪さうに、こんな事を云つた。而して一つを握り終ると、其空いた手で、今小僧の手をつけた鰯を器用に自分の口へ投げ込むやうにして、直ぐ食つて了つた。

四

「此間君に教はつた鰯屋へ行つて見たよ」

「どうだい」

「中々旨かつた。それは左うと、見て居ると、皆かう云ふ手つきをして、^{さかま}魚の方を下にして、一メンに口へ放り込むが、あれが通なのかい」

「まあ鰯は大概あゝして食ふやうだ」

「何故魚の方を下にするのだらう」

「つまり魚が悪かつた場合、舌へセリ、と來るのが、直ぐ知れるからなんだ」

若い貴族院議員のAは同じ議員仲間のBから、鮎の趣味は握るそばから手掴みで食ふ屋臺の鮎でなければ解らないと云ふやうな通を切りに説かれた。Aは何時か其立食をやつて見ようと考えた。而して屋臺の旨いと云ふ鮎屋を教はつて置いた。

或日、日暮間もない時であつた。Aは銀座の方から京橋を渡つて、かれて開いて居た屋臺の鮎屋へ行つて見た。其處には既に三人ばかり客が立つて居た。彼は一寸躊躇した。然し思ひ切つて兎に角暖簾を潜つたが、其立つて居る人と人の間に割り込む氣がしなかつたので、彼は少時暖簾を潜つた儘、人の後ろに立つて居た。

其時不意に横合ひから十三四の小僧が入つて來た。小僧はAを押し退けるやうにして、彼の前の僅かな空きへ立つと、五つ六つ鮎の乗つてゐる前下がりの厚い標板の上を忙しく見廻した。

「海苔巻はありませんか」

「あゝ、今日は出来ないよ」。肥つた鮎屋の主は鮎を握りながら、尙シロツロと小僧を見て居た。

小僧は少し思ひ切つた調子で、こんな事は初めてぢやないと云ふやうに、勢よく手を延ばし、三つ程並んでゐる鮎の鮎の一つを摘んだ。所が、何故か小僧は勢よく延ばした割りに、其手をひく時、妙に躊躇した。

「一つ六錢だよ」と主が云つた。

小僧は落すやうに黙つて其鮎を又臺の上へ置いた。

「然し旨いと云ふと、全體どう云ふ工合に旨いのだらう」。左う思ひながら、口の中に溜つて来る唾を音のしないやうに用心しいしい飲み込んだ。

一一

それから二三日した日暮だつた。京橋のSまで仙吉は使に出された。出掛けに彼は、番頭から電車の往復代だけを買つて出た。

外濠の電車を假治橋で降りると、彼は故と鮎屋の前を通つて行つた。彼は鮎屋の暖簾を見ながら、其暖簾を勢よく分けて入つて行く番頭達の様子を想つた。其時彼はかなり腹がへつて居た。脂で黄がかった鮎の鮎が想像の眼に映ると、彼は「一つでもいゝから食ひたいものだ」と考へた。彼は前から往復の電車賃を買ふと、片道を買つて歸りは歩いて来る事をよくした。今も残つた四銭が懐の裏隠してカチャカチャと鳴つて居る。

「四銭あれば一つは食へるが、一つ下さいとも云ばれないし」。彼は左う諦め乍ら前を通り過ぎた。Sの店での用は直ぐ済んだ。彼は眞鍮の小さい分銅の幾つか入つた妙に重味のある小さいボール圖を、一つ受取つて其店を出た。

彼は何かしら惹かれる氣持で、もと来た道の方へ引きかへして來た。そして何氣なく鮎屋の方へ折れようとすると、不圖其四つ角の反對側の横町に、屋臺で、同じ名の暖簾を掛けた鮎屋のある事を發見した。彼はノソノソと其方へ歩いて行つた。

「左うです」

「あの家のを食つちやあ、此邊のは食へないからネ」

「全くですよ」

若い番頭からは少し退つて、然るべき位置に、前掛の下に兩手を入れて、行儀よく坐つて居た小僧の仙吉は「あ、鮎屋の話だな」と思つて聽いて居た。京橋にSと云ふ同業の店がある。其店へ時々使ひに出されるので、其鮎屋の位置だけはよく知つて居た。仙吉は早く自分も番頭になつて、そんな通らしい口をきながら、勝手にさう云ふ家の暖簾をくゞる身分になりたいものだと思つた。

「何んでも、與兵衛の息子が松屋の近所に店を出したと云ふ事だが、幸さん、お前は知らないかい」

「へえ、存じませんな。松屋といふと何處のです」

「私もよくは聞かなかつたが、いづれ今川橋の松屋だらうよ」

「左うですか。で、其處は旨いんですか」

「左う云ふ評判だ」

「矢張り與兵衛ですか」

「いや、何んとか云つた。何屋とか云つたよ。聽いたが、忘れた」

仙吉は「色々左う云ふ名代の店があるものだな」と思つて聽いて居た。そして、

小僧の神様

志賀直哉

一
仙吉は神田の或る秤屋の店に奉公して居る。

それは秋らしい柔かな澄んだ日さしが、紺の天分はげ落ちた暖簾の下から、靜かに店先に差し込んで居る時だつた。店には一人の客もない。帳場格子の中に坐つて、退屈さうに巻煙草をふかして居た番頭が、火鉢の傍で新聞を讀んで居る若い番頭に、こんな風に話しかけた。

「おい、幸さん。そろそろお前の好きな鮪の脂身が食べられる頃だよ」

「ええ」

「今夜あたりどうだね。お店を仕舞つてから出かけるかネ」

「結構ですな」

「外濠に乗つて行けば十五分だ」

感じた。

——かうなれば、もう誰も晒ふものはないにちがひない。

内供は心の中でかう自分に囁いた。長い鼻をあげ方の秋風にぶらつかせながら。

ある。

内供はなまじひに鼻の短くなつたのが、反つて恨めしくなつた。

すると或夜の事である。日が暮れてから、急に風が出たと見えて、塔の風鐸の鳴る音が、うるさい程枕に通つて來た。その上、寒さもめつきり加はつたので、老年の内供は寢つかうとしても寢つかれない。そこで床の中で、なまじひしてゐると、ふと鼻が何時になく、むづ痒いのになががついた。手をあて、見ると、少し水氣が來たやうにむくんでゐる。どうやら、そこだけ熱さへもあるらしい。

——無理に短うしたで、病が起つたのかも知れぬ。

内供は、佛前に香花を供へるやうな恭しい手つきで、鼻を抑へながら、かう呟いた。

翌朝、内供が何時ものやうに早く眼をさましてみると、寺内の銀杏や縁が一晚の中に葉を落したので、庭は黄金を敷いたやうに明い。塔の屋根には霜が下りてゐるせいであらう。まだうすい朝日に、九輪がまばゆく光つてゐる。禪智内供は、じと部を上げた縁に立つて深く息をすひこんだ。

殆、忘れようとしてゐた或感覺が、再内供に歸つて來たのは、この時である。

内供は慌て、鼻へ手をやつた。手にさばるものは、昨夜の短い鼻ではない。上唇の上から頤の下まで五六寸あまりもぶら下つてゐる。昔の長い鼻である。内供は、鼻が一夜の中に又元の通り長くなつたのを知つた。そうしてそれと同時に、鼻が短くなつた時と同じやうな、はればれした心もちが、どこからともなく歸つて來るのを

内供は、さう云ふ時になると、必ずぼんやり、傍にかけた普賢ふけんの畫像を眺めながら、鼻の長かつた四五日前の事を憶ひ出して、「今はむげにいやしくなりさがれる人の、さかえたる昔をしのぶがごとく」ふさぎこんでしまふのである。——内供には、遺憾ながら、この間に答を與へる明が欠けてゐた。

——人間の心には互に矛盾した二つの感情がある。勿論、誰でも他人の不幸に同情しない者はない。所がその人がその不幸を、どうにかして切りぬけることが出来る時、今度はこつちで何となく物足りないやうな心もちがする。少し誇張して云へば、もう一度その人を、同じ不幸に陥れて見たいやうな氣にさへなる。さうして何時の間にか、消極的ではあるが、或敵意をその人に對して抱くやうになる。——内供が、理由を知らないながらも、何となく不快に思つたのは、池の尾の僧俗の態度に、この傍觀者の利己主義をそれとなく感づいたからに外ならない。

そこで内供は日毎に機嫌が悪くなつた。二言目には、誰でも意地悪く叱りつける。しまひには鼻の療治をしたあの弟子の僧でさへ、「内供は法慳貪の罪を受けられるぞ」と陰口をきく程になつた。殊に内供を忿らせたのは、例の悪戯な中童子である。或日、けたましく犬の吠える聲がするので、内供が何氣なく外へ出て見ると、中童子は、二尺ばかりの木の片をふりまはして、毛の長い瘦せたせういぬ犬を追ひまはしてゐる。それも唯、逐ひまはしてゐるのではない。鼻を打たれまい。それ、鼻を打たれまい」と囁しながら、逐ひまはしてゐるのである。内供は、中童子の手から、その木の片をひつたくつて、したまかその頬を打つた。木の片は以前の鼻持上げの木だつたので

食事をする時にも、暇さへあれば手を出して、そつと鼻の先にさわつて見た。が、鼻は行儀よく唇の上に納まつて居るだけで、格別それより下へぶら下つて来る景色もない。それから一晩寝てあくる日早く眼がさめると内供は先第一に、自分の鼻を撫でて見た。鼻は依然として短い。内供はそこで、幾年にもなく、法華經書寫の功を積んだ時のやうな、のびのびした気分になつた。

所が二三日たつ中に、内供は意外な事實を發見した。それは、折から用事があつて池の尾の寺を訪れた侍が、前よりも一層可笑しさうな顔をして、話も碌々せず、ぢろぢろ内供の鼻ばかり眺めてゐた事である。そのみならず、嘗、内供の鼻を粥の中へ落した事のある中童子なぞは、講堂の外で内供と行きちがつた時に、始めは下を向いて可笑しさをこらへてゐたが、とうとうこらへ兼ねたと見えて、一度にふつと吹き出してしまつた。用を云ひつかつた下法師たちが、面と向つて居る間だけは、憚んで聞いてゐても、内供が後さへ向けば、すぐにくすくす笑ひ出したのは、一度や二度の事ではない。

内供は始、之を自分の顔がはりがしたせゐだと解釋した。しかし、どうもこの解釋だけでは十分に説明がつかないやうである。――勿論、中童子や下法師が晒ふ原因は、そこにあるのにちがひない。けれども同じ晒ふにしても鼻の長かつた昔とは、晒ふのに、どことなく容子がちがふ。見慣れた長い鼻より、見慣れない短い鼻の方が滑稽に見えると云へば、それまでである。が、そこにはまだ何かあるらしい。

――前にはあのやうに、つけつけとは晒はなんだて。

らないわけではない。それは分つても、自分の鼻をまるで物品のやうに取扱ふのが、不愉快に思はれたからである。内供は、信用しない醫者の手術をうける患者のやうな顔をして、不承不承に、弟子の僧が鼻の毛穴から鱗子で脂をとるのを眺めてゐた。脂は鳥の羽の室のやうな形をして、四分ばかりの長さによけるのである。

やがて之が一通りすむと、弟子の僧は、ほつと一息ついたやうな顔をして、

——もう一度、之で茹でればようござる。

と云つた。

内供は矢張、八の字をよせたまゝ、不服らしい顔をして、弟子の僧の云ふなりになつてゐた。

さて二度目に茹でた鼻を出して見ると、成程、何時になく短くなつてゐる。これでは、あたりまへの鍵盤と大した變りはない。内供はその短くなつた鼻を撫でながら、弟子の僧の出してくれる鏡を、極りがわるさうに、おつおつ覗いて見た。

鼻は——あの顔の下まで下つてゐた鼻は、殆ど嘘のやうに萎縮して、今は僅に上唇の上で意氣地なく残喘を保つてゐる。所々まだらに赤くなつてゐるのは、恐らく踏まれた時の痕であらう。かうなれば、もう誰も咽ふものはないのにながひない。——鏡の中にある内供の顔は、顔の外にある内供の顔を見て、満足さうに眼をしばたいた。

しかし、その日はまだ一日、鼻が又長くなりはしないかと云ふ不安があつた。そこで内供は誦經する時にも、

——もう茹つた時分でござらう。

内供は苦笑した。これだけ聞いたのでは、誰も鼻の話とは気がつかないだらうと思つたからである。鼻は熱湯に蒸されて、蚤の食つたやうにむづ痒い。

弟子の僧は、内供が折敷の穴から鼻をぬくと、そのまだ湯氣の立つてゐる鼻を、兩足に力を入れながら、踏みはじめた。内供は横になつて、鼻を床板の上へのぼしながら、弟子の僧の足が上下に動くのを眼の前に見てゐるのである。弟子の僧は、時々氣の毒さうな顔をして、内供の禿げ頭を見下しながら、こんな事を云つた。

——痛うはござらぬかな。醫師は責めて踏めと申したで。ちやが、痛うはござらぬかな。

内供は首を振つて、痛くないと云ふ意味を示さうとした。所が鼻が踏まれてゐるので思ふやうに首が動かない。そこで、上眼を使つて、弟子の僧の足に禪あかざねのきれてゐるのを眺めながら、腹を立てたやうな聲で、

——痛うはないて。

と答へた。實際鼻はむづ痒い所を踏まれるので痛いよりも却て氣もちのいい位だったのである。

しばらく踏んでゐると、やがて、粟粒のやうなものが、鼻へ出来はじめた。云はゞ毛をむじつた小鳥をそつくり丸炙にしたやうな形である。弟子の僧は之を見ると、足を止めて獨り言のやうにかう云つた。

——之を餌けつゐ子でぬけと申す事でござつた。

内供は、不足らしく顔をふくらせて、黙つて弟子の僧のするなりに任せて置いた。勿論弟子の僧の親切がわか

下げてゐるではないか。

所が或年の秋、内供の用を兼ねて、京へ上つた弟子の僧が、知己しよどの醫者から長い鼻を短くする法を教はつて來た。その醫者と云ふのは、もと震旦から渡つて來た男で、當時は長樂寺の供僧になつてゐたのである。

内供は、いつものやうに、鼻などは氣にかけないと云ふ風をして、わざとその法もすぐにやつて見ようとは云はずにゐた。さうして一方では、氣輕な口調で、食事の度毎に、弟子の手数をかけるのが、心苦しいと云ふやうな事を云つた。内心では勿論弟子の僧が、自分を説伏せてこの法を試みさせるのを待つてゐたのである。弟子の僧にも、内供のこの策略がわからない筈はない。しかしそれに對する反感よりは、内供のさう云ふ策略をとる心もちの方が、より強くこの弟子の僧の同情を動かしたのであらう。弟子の僧は、内供の豫期通り、口を極めて、この法を試みる事を勤め出した。さうして内供自身も亦、その豫期通り、結局この熱心な勸告に聽従することになつた。

その法と云ふのは、唯、湯で鼻を茹で、その鼻を人に踏ませると云ふ、極めて簡單なものであつた。

湯は寺の湯屋で毎日沸かしてゐる。そこで弟子の僧は、指を入れられないやうなあつい湯を、すぐに提ひきに入れて、湯屋から汲んで來た。しかしぢかにこの提へ鼻を入れるとなると、湯氣に吹かれて顔を火傷する惧がある。

そこで折敷へ穴をあけて、それを提の蓋にして、その穴から鼻を湯の中へ入れる事にした。鼻だけはこの熱い湯の中へ浸しても、少しも熱くないのである。しばらくすると弟子の僧が云つた。

それから又内供は、絶えず人の鼻を氣にしてゐた。池の尻の寺は、僧供講説などの屢々行はれる寺である。寺の内には、僧坊が隠間なく建て續いて、湯屋では寺の僧が日毎に湯を沸かして居る。従つてこゝへ出入する僧俗の類も甚だ多い。内供はかう云ふ人々の顔を根氣よく物色した。一人でも自分のやうな鼻のある人間を見つけて、安心がしたかつたからである。だから内供の眼には、紺の水干も白の帷子カマエモノもはいらぬ。まして柑子色カンシイロの帽子や、帷鏡カマエキョウの法衣ホウイなぞは、見慣れてゐるだけに、有れども無きが如くである。内供は人を見ずに、唯鼻を見た。——しかし鑷鼻はあつても、内供のやうな鼻は一つも見當らない。その見當らない事が度重なるに従つて、内供の心は次第に又不快になつた。内供が人と話しながら、思はず、ぶらりと下つてゐる鼻の先をつまんで見て、年甲斐もなく顔を赤めたのは、全くこの不快に動かされての所爲である。

最後に、内供は、内典外典の中に、自分と同じやうな鼻のある人物を見出して、せめても幾分の心やりにしようとさへ思つた事がある。けれども、目蓮や舍利弗の鼻が長かつたとは、どの經文にも書いてない。勿論龍樹リウシュや馬鳴バメイも、人並の鼻を備へた菩薩である。内供は、震旦シユンタンの話の序に、蜀漢の劉玄德の耳が長かつたと云ふ事を聞いた時に、それが鼻だつたら、どの位自分は心細くなるだらうと思つた。

内供がかう云ふ消極的な苦心をしながらも、一方では又、積極的に鼻の短くなる方法を試みた事は、わざわざこゝに云ふ迄もない。内供はこの方面でも殆ど出来るだけの事をした。烏瓜を煎じて飲んで見た事もある。鼠の尿イヌを鼻へなすつて見た事もある。しかし何をどうしても、鼻は依然として、五六寸の長さをぶらりと唇の上になら

かしかうして飯を食ふと云ふ事は、持上げてゐる弟子にとつても、持上げられてゐる内供にとつても、決して容易な事ではない。一度この弟子の代りをした中童子が、噓うそをした拍子に手がふるへて、鼻を粥の中へ落した話は、當時京都まで喧傳された。——けれどもこれは内供にとつて、決して鼻か苦に病んだ重なる理由ではない。内供は實にこの鼻によつて傷けられる自尊心の爲に苦しんだのである。

池の尾の町の者は、かういふ鼻をしてゐる禪智内供の爲に、内供の俗でない事を仕合せだと云つた。あの鼻では誰も妻になる女があるまいと思つたからである。中には又、あの鼻だから出家したのだらうと批評する者さへあつた。しかし内供は、自分が僧である爲に、幾分でもこの鼻に煩はされる事が少くなつたと思つてゐない。内供の自尊心は、妻帯と云ふやうな結果的な事實に左右される爲には、餘りにデリケートに出来てゐたのである。そこで内供は、積極的にも消極的にも、この自尊心の毀損を恢復しようと試みた。

第一に内供の考へたのは、この長い鼻を實際以上に短く見せる方法である。これは人の居ない時に鏡へ向つていろいろな角度から顔を映しながら、熱心に工夫を凝らして見た。どうかすると、顔の位置を換へるだけでは、安心が出来なくなつて、頬杖をついたり、額の先へ指をあてがつたりして、根氣よく鏡を覗いて見る事もあつた。しかも自分でも満足する程、鼻が短く見えた事は、是までに唯の一度もない。時によると、苦心すればする程、却て長く見えるやうな氣さへした。内供は、かう云ふ時には、鏡を箱へしまひながら、今更のやうにため息をついて、不承不承にまた元の經風へ觀音經を讀みに歸るのである。

鼻

芥川龍之介

禪智内供の鼻と云へば、池の尾で知らないものはない。長さは五六寸あつて、上唇の上から顎の下まで下つてゐる。形は元も先も同じやうに太い。云はゞ細長い腸詰めのやうな物が、ぶらりと顔のまん中からぶら下つてゐるのである。

五十歳を越えた内供は、沙彌の昔から内道場供奉の職に陞つた今日まで、内心では始終この鼻を苦に病んで來た。勿論表面では、今でもさほど氣にならないやうな顔をしてすましてゐる。これは專念に當來の淨土を渴望すべき僧侶の身で、鼻の心配をするのが悪いと思つたからばかりではない。それより寧ろ自分で鼻を氣にして居ると云ふ事を、人に知られるのが嫌だつたからである。内供は日常の談話の中に、鼻と云ふ語の出て來るのを何よりも惧れてゐた。

内供が鼻を持てあました理由は二つある。——一つは實際的に、鼻の長いのが不便だつたからである。第一飯を食ふ時にも獨りでは食へない。獨りで食へば、鼻の先が碗かたまりの中の飯へとゞいてしまふ。そこで内供は弟子の一人を膳の向うへ坐らせて、飯を食ふ間中、廣さ一寸長さ二尺ばかりの板で、鼻を持上げてゐて貰ふ事にした。こ

はせた、冷やかな秋の空だけであつた。

彼女の心は静かであつた。が、その静かさを支配するものは、寂しい諦めに外ならなかつた。照子の發作が終つた後、和解は新しい涙と共に、容易く二人を元の通りに仲の好い姉妹に返してゐた。しかし事實は事實として、今でも信子の心を離れなかつた。彼女は従兄の歸りも待たず、この俵上に身を托した時、既に妹とは永久に他人になつたやうな心もちが、意地悪く彼女の胸の中に氷を張らせてゐたのであつた。――

信子はふと眼を舉げた。その時セルロイドの窓の中には、ごみごみした町を歩いて来る杖を抱へた従兄の姿が見えた。彼女の心は動揺した。俵を止めやうか。それともこの儘行き違はうか。彼女は動悸を抑へながら、暫くは唯幌の下に、空しい逡巡を重ねてゐた。が、俊吉と彼女との距離は、見る見る内に近くなつて來た。彼は薄日の光を浴びて、水溜りの多い往來にゆつくりと靴を運んでゐた。

「俊さん。」――さう云ふ聲が一瞬間、信子の唇から洩れようとした。實際俊吉はその時もう、彼女の俵のすぐ側に見慣れた姿を現はしてゐた。が、彼女は又ためらつた。その暇に何も知らない彼は、とうとうこの幌俵とすれ違つた。薄濁つた空、疎らな屋並、高い木木の黄ばんだ梢、――後には不相變人通りの少ない錫末の町があるばかりであつた。

「秋――」

信子はうすら寒い幌の下に、全身で寂しさを感じながら、しみじみかゝ思はずにはゐられなかつた。

「でも御兄様は御愛しくなくつて？」やがて照子は小さな聲で、恐る恐るかう尋ねた。その聲の中には明かに、氣の毒さうな響が籠つてゐた。が、この場合信子の心は、何よりも憐憫を反撥した。彼女は新聞を膝の上へのせ、それに眼を落したなり、わざと何とも答へなかつた。新聞には、大阪と同じやうに米價問題が掲げてあつた。その内に静な茶の間の中には、かすかに人の泣くけはひが聞え出した。信子は新聞から眼を離して、袂を顫に當てた妹を長火鉢の向ふに見出した。「泣かなくなつたつて好いのよ。」——照子は姉にさう慰められても、容易に泣き止まうとはしなかつた。信子は殘酷な喜びを感じながら、暫らくは妹の震へる肩へ無言の視線を注いでゐた。それから女中の耳を彈るやうに、照子の方へ顔をやりながら、「悪るかつたら、私があやまるわ。私は照さんさへ幸福なら、何より有難いと思つてゐるの。ほんとうよ。俊さんが照さんを愛してゐてくれれば——」と低い聲で云ひ續けた。云ひ續ける内に、彼女の聲も、彼女自身の言葉に動かされて、だんだん感傷的になり始めた。すると突然照子は袖を落して、涙に濡れてゐる顔を擧げた。彼女の眼の中には、意外な事に、悲しみも、怒りも見えなかつた。が、唯、抑へ切れない嫉妬の情が、燃えるやうに瞳を火照らせてゐた。「ぢや御姉様は——御姉様は何故昨夜も——」照子は皆まで云はない内に、又顔を袖に埋めて發作的に烈しく泣き始めた。……

二三時間の後、信子は電車の終點に急ぐべく、幌俵の上に揺られてゐた。彼女の眼にはひる外の世界は、前部の幌を切りぬいた四角なセルロイドの窓だけであつた。其處には場末らしい家家と色づいた雑木の梢とが、傘にしかも絶え間なく、後へ後へと流れて行つた。もしその中に一つでも動かないものがあれば、それは薄雲を漂

彼女の顔を覗きこんで、「どうして？」と尋ねてくれたりした。しかし信子にもどうしたのか、はつきりした事はわからなかつた。

柱時計が十時を打つた時、信子は懶さうな眼を擧げて、「後さんは中中歸りさうもないわれ。」と云つた。照子も姉の言葉につれて、ちよいと時計を仰いだが、これは存外冷淡に、「まだ——」とだけしか答へなかつた。信子にはその言葉の中に、夫の愛に飽き足りてゐる新妻の心があるやうな氣がした。さう思ふと愈彼女の氣もちは、愛壽に傾かすにはあられなかつた。

「照さんは幸福ね。」——信子は頷を半襟に埋めながら、冗談のやうにかう云つた。が、自然と其處へ忍びこんだ眞面目な羨望の調子だけは、どうする事も出来なかつた。照子はしかし無邪氣らしく、やはり活き活きと微笑しながら、「覺えていらつしやい。」と睨む眞似をした。それからすぐに又「御姉様だつて幸福の辯に。」と、甘えるやうにつけ加へた。その言葉がびしりと信子を打つた。

彼女は心もち眼を上げて、「さう思つて？」と問ひ返した。問ひ返して、すぐに後悔した。照子は一瞬間妙な顔をして、姉と眼を見合せた。その顔にも赤蔽ひ難い後悔の色が動いてゐた。信子は強ひて微笑した。——「さう思はれるだけでも幸福ね。」

二人の間には沈黙が來た。彼等は柱時計の時を刻む下に、長火鉢の鐵瓶がたぎる音を聞くともなく聞き澄ませた。

暫、沈黙が続いた後、俊吉は靜に眼を返して、「鶏小屋へ行つて見ようか。」と云つた。信子は黙つて頷いた。鶏小屋は丁度楕とは反對の庭の隅にあつた。二人は肩を並べながら、ゆつくり其處まで歩いて行つた。しかし藤園の内には、唯鶏の匂のする、朧げな光と影ばかりがあつた。俊吉はその小屋を覗いて見て、殆ど獨り言かと思ふやうに、「寢てゐる」と彼女に囁いた。玉子を人に取りられた鶏が。「——信子は草の中に佇んだ儘、さう考へずにはゐられなかつた。……」

二人が庭から返つて來ると、照子は夫の机の前に、ぼんやり電燈を眺めてゐた。青い横ばひがたつた一つ、笠に這つてゐる電燈を。

四

翌朝俊吉は一張羅の背廣を着て、食後匆匆玄關へ行つた。何でも亡友の一周忌の墓參をするのだとか云ふ事であつた。好いかい。待つてゐるんだぜ。午頃までにやきつと歸つて來るから。——彼は外套をひつかけながら、かう信子に念を押した。が彼女は華奢な手に彼の中折を持つた儘、黙つて微笑したばかりであつた。

照子は夫を送り出すと、姉を長火鉢の向ふに招じて、まめまめしく茶をすすめなどした。隣の奥さんの話、訪問記者の話、それから俊吉と見に行つた或外國の歌劇團の話、——その外愉快なるべき話題が、彼女にはまたいろいろあるらしかつた。が、信子の心は沈んでゐた。彼女はふと氣がつくと、何時も好い加減な返事はかりしてゐる彼女自身が其處にあつた。それがとうとうしまひには、照子の眼にさへ止るやうになつた。妹は心配さうに

た。信子はかう云ふ食卓の空気に、遠い松林の中にある、寂しい茶の間の暮方を思ひ出さずにはゐられなかつた。

話は食後の果物を荒した後も盡きなかつた。微酔を帯びた俊吉は夜長の電燈の下にあぐらをかいて、盛に彼一流の詭辯を弄した。その談論風發が、もう一度信子を若返らせた。彼女は熱のある眼つきをして、「私も小説を書き出さうかしら。」と云つた。すると従兄は返事をする代りに、グウルモンの警句を抛りつけた。それは「ミユウズたちは女だから、彼等を自由に虜にするものは、男だけだ。」と云ふ言葉であつた。信子と照子は同盟してグウルモンの權威を認めなかつた。「ぢや女でなければ、音楽家になれなくつて？ アポロは男ぢやありませんか。」——照子は眞面目にこんな事まで云つた。

その暇に夜が更けた。信子はとうとう泊るこゝになつた。

寝る前に俊吉は、縁側の兩戸を一枚開けて、寝間着の儘狭い庭へ下りた。それから誰を呼ぶともなく「ちよいと出て御覽。好い月だから。」と聲をかけた。信子は獨り彼の後から、沓脱ぎの庭下駄へ足を下した。足袋を脱いだ彼女の足には、冷たい露の感じがあつた。

月は庭の隅にある、瘦せがれた檜の梢にあつた。従兄はその檜の下に立つて、うす明るい夜空を眺めてゐた。

「大へん草が生えてゐるのね。」——信子は荒れた庭を氣味悪そうに、怯づ怯づ彼のゐる方へ歩み寄つた。が、彼はやはり空を見ながら、「十三夜かな」と呟いただけであつた。

けて、何時もその心もちを打ち破つた。彼女は次第に従兄の顔を窺はずにはゐられなくなつた。が、彼は平然と巻煙草の煙を呼吸しながら、格別不自然な表情を装つてゐる景色も見えなかつた。

その内に照子が歸つて來た。彼女は姉の顔を見ると、手を取り合はないばかりに嬉しがつた。信子も唇は笑ひながら、眼には何時かもう涙があつた。二人は暫らくは俊吉も忘れて、去年以來の生活を互ひに尋ねたり尋ねられたりしてゐた。殊に照子は、活き活きと血の色を頬に透かせながら、今でも何つてゐる鷄の事まで、話して聞かせる事を忘れなかつた。俊吉は巻煙草を啣へた儘、満足さうに二人を眺めて、不相變にやにや笑つてゐた。

其處へ女中も歸つて來た。俊吉はその女中の手から、何枚かの端書を受取ると、早速例の机へ向つて、せつせとペンを動かして始めた。照子は女中も留守だつた事が、意外らしい氣色を見せた。ちや御姉様がいらしつた時は誰も家にゐなかつたの。「ええ、俊さんだけ。」——信子はかう答へる事が、平氣を強ひるやうな心もちがした。すると俊吉が向うを向いたなり、「且那樣に感謝しろ。その茶も僕が入れたんだ。」と云つた。照子は姉と眼を見合せて、悪戯さうにくすり笑つた。が、夫にはわざとらしく、何とも返事をしなかつた。

間もなく信子は、妹夫婦と一しよに晩飯の食卓を圍むことになつた。照子の説明する所によると、膳に上つた玉子は皆、家の鶏が産んだものであつた。俊吉は信子に葡萄酒をすゝめながら、「人間の生活は豫算で持つてゐるんだね。小は、この玉子から——」などと社會主義じみた理窟を並べたりした。その辯此處にある三人の中で、一番玉子に覺著のあるのは俊吉自身に違ひなかつた。照子はそれが可笑しいと云つて、子供のやうな笑ひ聲を立て

留守？「使に行つた。女中も。」——信子は妙に恥じさを感じながら、派手な裏のついた上衣コッポをそつと玄關の隅に脱いだ。

俊吉は彼女を書齋兼客間の八疊へ坐らせた。座敷の中には何處を見ても、本ばかり亂雑に積んであつた。殊に午後の日の當つた障子際の、小さな紫檀の机のまはりには、新聞雑誌や原稿用紙が、手のつけやうもない程散らかつてゐた。その中に若い細君の存在を語つてゐるものは、唯床の間の壁に立てかけた新しい一面の琴だけであつた。信子はかう云ふ周圍から、暫らく物珍しい眼を離さなかつた。

「來ることは手紙で知つてゐたけれど、今日來ようとは思はなかつた。」——俊吉は巻煙草へ火をつけると、さすがに懐しさうな眼つきをした。「どうです、大阪の御生活は？」「俊さん、そ如何？ 幸福？」——信子も亦二言三言話す内に、やはり昔のやうな懐しさが、よみ返つて來るのを意識した。交通さへ疎になかつた彼是二年越しの氣まづい記憶は、思つたより彼女を煩はさなかつた。

彼等は一つ火鉢に手をかざしながら、いろいろな事を話し合つた。俊吉の小説だの、共通な知人の噂だの、東京と大阪との比較だの、話題はいくら話しても、盡きない位深山あつた。が二人とも云ひ合せてやうに、全然暮し向きの問題には觸れなかつた。それが信子には一層從兄と話してゐると云ふ感じを強くさせた。

時々はじかし沈黙が、二人の間に來る事もあつた。その度に彼女は微笑した儘、眼を火鉢の灰に落した。其處には待つとは云へない程、かすかに何かを待つ心もちがあつた。すると故意か偶然か、俊吉はすぐに話題を見つ

い眼つきをした儘、何とも返事をしなかつた。

照子と俊吉とは、師走の中旬に式を挙げた。當日は午少し前から、ちらちら白い物が落ち始めた。信子は獨り午の食事をすませた後、何時までもその時の魚の匂が、口について離れなかつた。「東京も雪が降つてゐるかしら。」——こんな事を考へながら、信子はじつとすすり暗い茶の間の長火鉢にもたれてゐた。雪は愈烈しくなつた。が、口中の生臭さは、やはり執念く消えなかつた。……

三

信子はその翌年の秋、社命を帯びた夫と一しよに、久しぶりて東京の土を踏んだ。が、短い期限内に、果すべく用向きの多かつた夫は、唯彼女の母親の所へ、來匆匆顔を出した時の外は、殆ど一日も彼女を連れて、外出する機会を見出さなかつた。彼女はそこで妹夫婦の郊外の新居を尋ねる時も、新開地じみた電車の終點から、たつた一人俤に搖られて行つた。

彼等の家は、町並が葱畑に移る近くにあつた。しかし隣近所には、いづれも借家らしい新築が、せせこましく軒を並べてゐた。のき打ちの門、要もちの垣、それから竿に干した洗濯物、——すべてがどの家も變りばなかつた。この平凡な住居の睿子は、多少信子を失望させた。が、彼女が案内を求めた時、聲に應じて出て來たのは、意外にも従兄の方であつた。俊吉は以前と同じやうに、この珍客の顔を見ると、「やあ」と快活な聲を上げた。彼女は彼は何時の間にか、いが栗頭でなくなつたのを見た。「暫らく。」「さあ、御上り。生憎僕一人だが。」「照子は？」

微笑してゐる彼女の顔を見出した。その顔は以前より若若しく、化粧をしてゐるのが常であつた。彼女は針仕事
の店を擴げながら、彼等が東京で式を擧げた當時の記憶なども話したりした。夫にはその記憶の細かいのが、意
外でもあり、感じさうでもあつた。「お前はよくそんな事まで覚えてゐるね。」夫にかう調戲はれると、信子は
必ず無言の儘、眼にだけ媚のある返事を見せた。が、何故それ程忘れずに居るのか、彼女自身も心の内では、不
思議に思ふ事が度々あつた。

それから程なく、母の手紙が、信子に妹の結納が済んだと云ふ事を報じて來た。その手紙の中には又、俊吉が
照子を迎へる爲めに、山の或郊外へ新居を設けた事もつけ加へてあつた。彼女は早速母と妹とへ、長い祝ひ
の手紙を書いた。何分當方は無人故、式には不本意ながら参りかね候へども……「そんな文句を書いてゐる中
に、彼女には何故かわからなかつたが」筆の滲る事も再三あつた。すると、彼女は眼を擧げて、必ず外の松林を
眺めた。松は初冬の空の下に、簇簇と蒼黒く茂つてゐた。

その晩信子と夫とは、照子の結婚を話題にした。夫は何時もの薄笑を浮かべながら、彼女が妹の口眞似をするの
を面白さうに聞いてゐた。が彼女には何となく彼女自身に照子の事を話してゐるやうな心もちがした。どれ、寝
るかな。「二三時間の後、夫は柔な髭を撫でながら、大儀さうに長火鉢の前を離れた。信子はまだ妹へ祝つて
やる品を決し兼ねて、火箸で灰文字を書いてゐたが、この時急に顔を擧げて、でも妙なもののれ、私には弟が一人
出來るのだと思ふと。」と云つた。「當り前ぢやないか、妹もゐるんだから。」——彼女は夫にかう云はれても、考深

が、それも亦翌日になると、自然と仲直りが出来上つてゐた。

そんな事が何度か繰返される内に、だんだん秋が深くなつて来た。信子は何時か机に向つて、ペンを執る事が稀になつた。その時にはもう夫の方も、前程彼女の文學談を珍しがらないやうになつてゐた。彼等は夜毎に長火鉢を隔て、瑣末な家庭の經濟の話に時間を殺す事を覺え出した。その上又かう云ふ話題は、少くとも晩酌後の夫にとつて最も興味があるらしかつた。それでも信子は氣の毒さうに、時々夫の顔色を窺つて見る事があつた。が、彼は何も知らず、近頃延ばした器を嘯みながら、何時もより餘程快活に、「これで子供でも出来て見ると——」などと、考へ考へ話してゐた。

すると、その頃から月々の雑誌に、従兄の名前が見えるやうになつた。信子は結婚後忘れたやうに、俊吉との文通を絶つてゐた。唯、彼の動靜は、——大學の文科を卒業したとか、同人雑誌を始めたとか云ふ事は、妹から手紙で知るだけであつた。又それ以上彼の事を知りたいと云ふ氣も起さなかつた。が、彼の小説が雑誌に載つてゐるのを見ると、懐しさは、昔と同じであつた。彼女は其の頁をばぐりながら、何度も獨り微笑を洩らした。俊吉はやはり小説の中でも、冷笑と諧謔との二つの武器を宮本武藏のやうに使つてゐた。彼女にはしかし氣のせゐか、その輕快な皮肉の後に、何か今までの従兄にはない、寂しさうな捨鉢の調子が潜んでゐるやうに思はれた。と同時にさう思ふ事が、後めたいやうな氣もしないではなかつた。

信子はそれ以來夫に對して、一層優しく振舞ふやうになつた。夫は夜寒の長火鉢の向うに、何時も晴れ晴れと

しながら、夫の襟飾ネクタイの紹刺しをしてゐた。すると夫は意外な位執拗に、「その襟飾にしてもさ、買ふ方が反つて安くつくぢやないか。」と、やはりれちれちした調子で云つた。彼女は尙更口が利けなくなつた。夫もしまひひに白けた顔をして、つまらなさうに商賣向きの雑誌か何かばかり讀んでゐた。が、寢室の電燈を消してから、信子は夫に背を向けた儘、「もう小説なんぞ書きません。」と、囁くやうな聲で云つた。夫はそれでも黙つてゐた。暫くして彼女は、同じ言葉を前よりもかすかに繰返した。それから間もなく泣く聲が洩れた。夫は二言三言彼女を叱つた。その後でも彼女の啜泣きは、まだ絶え絶えに聞こえてゐた。が、信子は何時の間にか、しつかりと夫にすがつてゐた。……

翌日彼等は又元の通り、仲の好い夫婦に返つてゐた。

と思ふと今度は十二時過ぎて、まだ夫が會社から歸つて來ない晩があつた。しかも漸く歸つて來ると、雨外傘も一人では脱げない程、酒臭い匂を呼吸してゐた。信子は眉をひそめながら、甲斐々々しく夫に着換へさせた。夫はそれにも關らず、まばらない舌で皮肉さへ云つた。「今夜は僕が歸らなかつたから、餘つ程小説が捗取つたらう。」——さう云ふ言葉が、何度となく女のやうな口から出た。彼女は其晩床にはひると、思はず涙がほろほろ落ちた。こんな處を照子が見たら、どんなに一しよに泣いてくれるであらう。照子。照子。私が便りに思ふのは、たつたお前一人ぎりだ。——信子は度々心の中でかう妹に呼びかけながら、夫の酒臭い寢息に苦しまされて、殆ど夜中まんじりともせず、寢返りばかり打つてゐた。

何處でも飯食する事を憚らない關西人が皆卑しく見えた。それだけおとなしい夫の態度が、格段に上品なのを嬉しく感じた。實際身綺麗な夫の姿は、さう云ふ人中に交つてみると、帽子からも、背廣からも、或は赤皮の編上げからも、化粧石鹼の匂に似た、一種清新な雰圍氣を放散させてゐるやうであつた。殊に夏の休暇中、舞子まで足を延した時には、同じ茶屋に來合せた夫の同僚たちに比べて見て、一層誇りがましいやうな心もちがせずにはゐられなかつた。が、夫はその下卑た同僚たちに存外親しみを持つてゐるらしかつた。

その内に、信子は長い間捨て、あつた創作を思ひ出した。そこで夫の留守の内だけ、一二時間づつ机に向ふ事にした。夫はその話を聞くと、「愈女流作家になるかれ」と云つて、やさしい口もとに薄笑ひを見せた。しかし机には向ふにしても、思ひの外ペンは進まなかつた。彼女がぼんやり頬杖をついて、炎天の松林の蟬の聲に我知らず耳を傾けてゐる彼女自身を見出し勝ちであつた。

所が残暑が初秋へ振り變らうとする時分、夫は或日會社の出がけに、汗じみた襟カッターを取變へようとした。が、生憎襟は一本残らず洗濯屋の手に渡つてゐた。夫は日頃身綺麗なだけに、不快らしく顔を曇らせた。さうしてズボン吊を掛けながら、「小説ばかり書いてゐちや困る。」と、何時になく厭味を云つた。信子は黙つて眼を伏せて、上衣の埃を拂つてゐた。

それから二三日過ぎた或夜、夫は夕刊に出てゐた食糧問題から、月々の經費を、もう少し軽減出来ないものかと云ひ出した。「お前だつて何時までも女學生ぢやあるまいし。」——そんな事も口へ出した。信子は氣のない返事を

「御姉様。もう明日は大阪へいらして御しまひなさるでせう。けれどもどうか何時までも、御姉様の照子を見捨てずに頂戴。照子は毎朝鶏に餌をやりながら、御姉様の事を思ひ出して、誰にも知れず泣いてゐます。……」

信子はこの少女らしい手紙を読む毎に、必ず涙が滲んで来た。殊に中央停車場から汽車に乗らうとする間際、そつとこの手紙を彼女に渡した照子の姿を思ひ出すと、何とも云はれず、いぢらしかつた。が、彼女の結婚は果して妹の想像通り、全然犠牲的なそれであらうか。さう疑を挟む事は、涙の後の彼女の心へ、重苦しい氣持を擴げ勝ちであつた。信子はこの重苦しさを避ける爲に、大抵はじつと快い感傷の中に浸つてゐた。そのうちに外の松林へ一面に當つた日の光が、だんだん黄ばんだ暮方の色に變つて行くのを眺めながら。

二

結婚後彼は三月ばかりは、あらゆる新婚の夫婦の如く、彼等も亦幸福な日を送つた。

夫は何處か女性的な、口數を利かない人物であつた。それが毎日會社から歸つて来ると、必ず晩飯後の何時間かは、信子と一しよに過す事にしてゐた。信子は絹物の針を動かしながら、近頃世間に騒がれてゐる小説や戯曲の話などもした。その話の中には時によると、基督教の句のする女子大學趣味の人生觀が織り込まれてゐる事もあつた。夫は晩酌の頬を赤らめた儘、讀みかけた夕刊を膝へのせて、珍しさうに耳を傾けてゐた。が、彼自身の意見らしいものは、一言も加へた事がなかつた。

彼等は又殆ど日曜毎に、大阪やその近郊の遊覽地へ氣散じな一日を暮しに行つた。信子は汽車電車へ乗る度に、

げて好いかもわからずに居ります。

「御姉様は私の爲めに、今度の御縁談を御きめになりました。さうではないと仰おっしゃつても、私にはよくわかつて居ります。何時ぞや御一しよに帝劇を見物した晩、御姉様は私に俊さんは好きかと御尋ねになりました。それから、又好きならば、御姉様がきつと骨を折るから、俊さんの所へ行けとも仰おっしゃいました。あの時も御姉様は、私が俊さんに差上げる管の手紙を讀んでいらしたのでせう。あの手紙がなくなつた時、ほんとうに私は御姉様を御恨めしく思ひました。(御免遊ばせ。この事だけでも私にはどの位申し譯がないかわかりません。)ですからその晩も私には、御姉様の親切な御言葉も、皮肉のやうな氣さへ致しました。私が怒つて御返事らしい御返事も碌に致さなかつた事は、もちろん御忘れになりもなさりませぬ。けれどもあれから二三日経つて、御姉様の御縁談が急にきまつてしまつた時、私はそれこそ死んでも御詫わびをしようかと思ひました。御姉様も俊さんが御好きなので御さいますもの。(御隠しになつてはいや。私はよく存じて居りましてよ。)私の事さへ御かまひにならなければ、きつと御自分が俊さんの所へいらしたのに違ちがひございません。それでも御姉様は私に、俊さんなどは思つて居ないと、何度も繰返して仰おっしゃいました。さうして、とうとう心にもない御結婚をなすつて御しまひになりました。私の大事な御姉様。私が今日鶏を抱いて来て、大阪へいらつじやる御姉様に、御挨拶をなさいと申した事をまだ覚えていらつて？ 私は何つてある鶏にも、私と一しよに御姉様へ御詫わびを申して貰もらひたかつたの。さうしたら、何にも御存知ない御母様まで御泣きになりましたのれ。

てしまつた。その時中央停車場へ見送りに行つたもの話によると、信子は何時もと變りなく、晴々とした微笑を浮かべながら、ともすれば涙を落し勝ちな妹の照子を、いろいろと慰めてゐたと云ふことであつた。

同窓たちは皆不思議があつた。その不思議がる心の中には、妙に嬉しい感情と、前とは全然違つた意味で嬉ましい感情とがあつてゐた。或者は彼女を信頼して、すべてを母親の意志に歸した。又或ものは彼女を疑つて、心がはりがしたとも云ひふらした。が、それらの解釋が結局想像に過ぎない事は、彼等自身さへ知らない譯ではなかつた。彼女はなぜ俊吉と結婚しなかつたか？彼等はその後暫らくの間、よるとさはると重大らしく、必ずこの疑問を話題にした。さうして彼是二月ばかり經つと——全く信子を忘れてしまつた。勿論彼女が書く管だつた長篇小説の噂なぞも。

信子はその間に大阪の郊外へ、幸福なるべき新家庭をつくつた。彼等の家はその界限でも、最も閑靜な松林にあつた。松脂の匂と日の光と、——それが何時でも夫の留守は、二階建の新らしい信家の中に、活き活きした沈黙を領してゐた。信子はさう云ふ寂しい午後、時々理由もなく氣が沈むと、きつと針箱の引出しを開けては、その底に疊んでしまつてある桃色の書簡箋をひろげて見た。書簡箋の上には、こんな事が細々とペンで書いてあつた。

「——もう今日かぎり御姉様と御一しよにゐる事が出来ないと思ふと、これを書いてゐる間でさへ、止め度なく涙が溢れて來ます。御姉様。どうか、どうか私を御救し下さい。照子は勿體ない御姉様の犠牲の前に、何と申上

肉や魯句の中に、何か輕蔑出来ないものを感じない譯には行かなかつた。

だから彼女は在學中も、彼と一しよに展覽會や音樂會へ行ぐ事が稀ではなかつた。尤も大抵そんな時には、妹の照子も同伴であつた。彼等三人は往きも返りも、氣兼ねなく笑つたり話したりした。が、妹の照子だけは、時話の圈外へ置きざりにされる事もあつた。それでも照子は子供らしく飾窓の中のバラソルや絹のショールを覗き歩いて、格別閑却された事を不平に思つてもゐないらしかつた。信子はしかしそれに氣がつくと必ず話頭を轉換して、すぐに又元の通り妹にも口をきかせようとした。その辭まづ照子を忘れるものは、何時も信子自身であつた。俊吉はすべてに無頓着なのか、不相變氣の利いた冗談ばかり投げつけながら、目まぐるしい往來の人通りの中を、大股にゆつくり歩いて行つた。……

信子と従兄との間からは、勿論誰の眼に見ても、來るべき彼等の結婚を豫想させるのに十分であつた。同窓たちは彼女の未來をてんでに羨んだり妬んだりした。殊に俊吉を知らないものは、(滑稽と云ふより外はないが)一層これが甚だしかつた。信子も亦一方では彼等の推測を打ち消しながら、他方ではその確な事をそれとなく故意に仄かせたりした。従つて同窓たちの頭の中には、彼等が學校を出るまでの間に、何時か彼女と俊吉との妾が、恰も新婦親郎の寫眞の如く、一しよにはつきり焼きつけられてゐた。

所が學校を卒業すると、信子は彼等の豫期に反して、大阪の或商會社へ近頃勤務する事になつた高商出身の青年と、突然結婚してしまつた。さうして式後二三日してから、新夫と一しよに、勤め先きの大阪へ向けて立つ

秋

芥川龍之介

一

信子は女子大學にゐた時から、才媛の名聲を擔つてゐた。彼女が早晚作家として文壇に打つて出る事は、殆ど誰も疑はなかつた。中には彼女が在學中、既に三百何枚かの自叙傳體小説を書き上げたなどと吹聴して歩くものもあつた。が、學校を卒業とて見ると、まだ女學校も出てゐない妹の照子と彼女とを抱へて、後家を立て通して來た母の手前も、さうは我儘を云はれない、複雑な事情もないではなかつた。そこで彼女は創作を始める前に、まづ世間の習慣通り縁談からきめてかかるべく餘儀なくされた。

彼女には俊吉と云ふ従兄があつた。彼は當時まだ大學の文科に籍を置いてゐたが、やはり將來は作家仲間に身を投ずる意志があるらしかつた。信子はこの従兄の大學生と、昔から親しく往來してゐた。それが互に文學と云ふ共通の話題が出来てからは、愈親しみが増したやうであつた。唯、彼は信子と違つて、當世流行のトルストイ、ムムなどには一向敬意を表さなかつた。さうして始終フランス仕込みの皮肉や警句ばかり並べてゐた。かく云ふ俊吉の冷笑的な態度は、時々萬事眞面目な信子を怒らせてしまふ事があつた。が、彼女は怒りながらも俊吉の皮

様には唯極樂の蜘蛛の絲が、きらきらと細く光りながら、月も星もない空の中途に、短く垂れてゐるばかりでございます。

三

御釋迦様は極樂の蓮池のふちに立つて、この一部始終をちつと見ていらつしやいましたが、やがて韃陀多が血の池の底へ石のやうに沈んでしまひますと、悲しさうな御顔をなさりながら、又ぶらぶら御歩きになり始めました。自分ばかり地獄からぬけ出さうとする、韃陀多の無慈悲な心が、さうしてその心相當な罰をうけて、元の地獄へ落ちてしまつたのが、御釋迦様の御目から見ると、淺間しく思召されたのでございませう。

しかし極樂の蓮池の蓮は、少しもそんな事には頓着致しません。その玉のやうな白い花は、御釋迦様の御足のまばりに、ゆらゆら^{うてな}を動かして、そのまん中にある金色の蓋からは、何とも云へない好い匂が、經間なくあたりへ溢れて居ります。極樂ももう午に近くなつたのでございませう。

分でのぼつて行けば、地獄からぬけ出すのも、存外わけがないかも知れません。韃陀多は兩手を蜘蛛の絲からめながら、ここへ来てから何年にも出した事のない聲で、「じめた。じめた。」と笑ひました。所がふと氣がつかますと、蜘蛛の絲の下の方には、數限もない罪人達が、自分ののぼつた後をつけて、まるで蟻の行列のやうに、やはり上へ上へと一心によぢのぼつて来るではございませんか。韃陀多はこれを見ると、驚いたのと恐ろしいのとで、暫くは唯、莫迦のやうに大きな口を開いた儘、眼ばかり動かして居りました。自分一人でさへ断れさうな、この細い蜘蛛の絲が、どうしてあれだけの人數の重みに堪へる事が出来ませう。もし萬一途中で断れたと致しましたら、折角ここへまでのぼつて来たこの肝腎な自分までも、元の地獄へ逆落しに落ちてしまはなければなりません。そんな事があつたら、大變でございます。が、さう云ふ中にも、罪人たちは何百となく何千となく、まつ暗な血の池の底から、うようよと這ひ上つて、細く光つてゐる蜘蛛の絲を、一列になりながら、せつせとのぼつて参ります。今の中にどうかしなければ、絲はまん中から二つに断れて、落ちてしまふのに違ひありません。

そこで韃陀多は大きな聲を出して、「こら、罪人ども。この蜘蛛の絲は己のものだぞ。お前たちは一體誰に尋いで、のぼつて来た。下りろ。下りろ。」と喚きました。

その途端でございます。今まで何ともなかつた蜘蛛の絲が、急に韃陀多のぶら下つてゐる所から、ぶつりと音を立てて断れました。ですから、韃陀多もたまりません。あつと云ふ間もなく、風を切つて獨樂のやうに、くるくるまはりながら、見る見る中に暗の底へ、まつさかさまに落ちてしまひました。

所が或時の事でございます。何氣なく韃陀多が頭を擧げて、血の池の空を跳めますと、そのひつそりとした暗の中を、遠い遠い天上から、銀色の蜘蛛の絲が、まるで人目にかかるのを恐れるやうに、一すぢ細く光りながらするすると自分の上へ垂れて参るのでございせんか。韃陀多はこれを見ると、思はず手を拍つて喜びました。この絲に縋りついて、どこまでものぼつて行けば、きつと地獄から抜け出せるのに相違ございせん。いやまく行くと、極樂へはいる事さへも出来ませう。さうすれば、もう針の山へ追ひ上げられる事もなくなれば、血の池に沈められる事もある筈はございせん。

かう思ひましたから、韃陀多は早速その蜘蛛の絲を兩手でしつかりとつかみながら、一生懸命に上へ上へと、たぐりのぼり始めました。元より大泥坊の事でございすから、かう云ふ事には、昔から慣れ切つてゐるのでございす。

しかし地獄と極樂との間は、何萬里となくございすから、いくら焦つて見た所で、容易に上へは出られません。稍しばらくのぼる中に、とうとう韃陀多もくたびれて、もう一たぐりも上へは、のぼれなくなつてしまひました。そこで仕方がございせんから、先一休み休むつもりで、絲の中途にぶら下りながら、遙かに目の下を見下しました。

すると、一生懸命にのぼつた甲斐があつて、さつきまで自分がゐた血の池は、今ではもう暗の底に何時の間にかかくれて居ります。それから、あのぼんやり光つてゐる恐ろしい針の山も、足の下になつてしまひました。この

「いや、いや、これも小さいながら、命のあるものに違ひない。その命を無暗にとると云ふ事は、いくら何でも可哀さうだ。」と、かう急に思ひ返して、とうとうその蜘蛛を殺さずに助けてやつたからでございます。

御釋迦様は地獄の容子を御覧になりながら、此の韃陀多には蜘蛛を助けた事があるのを御思ひ出しになりました。さうして、それだけの善い事をした報には、出来るなら、この男を地獄から救ひ出してやらうと御考へになりました。幸、側を見ますと、翡翠ひすいのやうな色をした蓮の葉の上に、極楽の蜘蛛が一匹、美しい銀色の絲をかけて居ります。御釋迦様はその蜘蛛の絲をそつと御手に御取りになつて、玉のやうな白蓮の間から、遙か下にある地獄の底へ、まつすぐにそれを御下しなさいました。

二

こちらは地獄の底の血の池で、外の罪人と一じよに、浮いたり沈んだりしてゐた韃陀多でございます。何しろどちらを見ても、まつ暗で、たまにそのくら暗からぼんやり浮き上つてゐるものがあると思ひますと、それは恐ろしい針の山の針が光るのでございますから、その心細さと云つたらございません。その上あたりは墓の中のやうに、しんと静まり返つて、たまに聞えるものと云つては、唯罪人がつく微な嘆息ばかりでございます。これはここへ落ちて来る程の人間は、もうさまざまな地獄の責苦に疲れはてて、泣聲を出す力さへ、なくなつてゐるのでございます。ですからさすが大泥坊の韃陀多も、やはり血の池の血に咽びながら、まるで死にかかつた蛙のやうに、もがいてばかり居りました。

或日の事でございます。御釋迦様は極樂の蓮池のふちを獨りてぶらぶら御歩きになつていらつじやいました。池の中に咲いてゐる蓮の花は、みんな玉のやうにまつ白で、そのまん中にある金色の蓋からは、何とも云へない好い匂が、絶間なくあたりへ溢れて居ります。極樂は丁度朝なのでございませう。

やがて御釋迦様はその池のふちに御佇みになつて、水の面を蔽つてゐる蓮の葉の間から、ふと下の容子を御覽になりました。この極樂の池の下は、丁度地獄の底に當つて居りますから、水晶のやうな水を透き徹して、三途の河や針の山の景色が、丁度覗き眼鏡を見るやうに、はつきりと見えるのでございます。

するとその地獄の底に、健陀多と云ふ男が一人、外の罪人と一しよに竊うすいてゐる姿が、御眼に止りました。この健陀多と云ふ男は、人を殺したり家に火をつけたり、いろいろ悪事を働いた大泥坊でございますが、それでもたつた一つ、善い事を致した覚えがございませう。と申しますのは、或時この男が深い林の中を通りますと、小さな蜘蛛が一匹、路はたを這つて行くのが見えまして。そこで健陀多は早速足を舉げて踏み殺さうと致しましたが、

「……」と、静かに答へた。その時、彼は、

「……」と、静かに答へた。その時、彼は、

「……」と、静かに答へた。その時、彼は、

「……」と、静かに答へた。その時、彼は、

「……」と、静かに答へた。その時、彼は、

「……」と、静かに答へた。その時、彼は、

「……」と、静かに答へた。その時、彼は、

夫 氣にかけることはいらんさ。今にわかるよ、おれが何をしようとしてゐるか。おれはたゞ、お前を幸福にすることしか考へてゐないんだ。

妻 またそんな……………。

夫 信じないと云ふのか。戯談だらう。そんなら、おれの新しい計畫を話して聞かさうか。お前は何時か疾速へ行つた時に、芝生で圍まれた家を見て、かういふ家に住んで見たいつて云つたことがあつたね。

妻 どんな家でしたっけ。

夫 忘れたのか。そら、若い細君が、犬にじやれつかれて困つてゐたぢやないか。此の春だよ。

妻 あゝ、家を捜しに行つた時……………。

夫 さうさ。あの家は、たしか四間ぐらゐだつたね。いくらで建つと思ふ？

妻 ……………。

夫 あれで二千圓だよ。

(此の時、最初の女中が現はれる。)

女中 あの、もうお時間で御座います……………。

夫 あ、さう。(かう云つて、機械的に立ち上る)

妻 (ぼんやり、暮れて行く海の方を見て居る)

— 幕 —

妻 あの日ば、ほんとに晴々した顔をして御飯を上りましたわね。

夫 さうか。こんなことなら、毎朝でもかけて上げますつて、お前も云つたね。おれは、しかし、それを斷はつた。

妻 でも、あの明くる朝から、一度呼べば、きつとお起きになるやうになりましたわ。尤も、近頃は、また駄目になつたけれど……。

夫 かういふことは、お前に云つてもわかるまいが、おれは蒲團をかぶりながら、つら／＼考へた。——こんなことをしてゐては大變だと……。おれは、もう少しで、蓄音機を蹴飛ばし、お前を連れて、何處か人のゐない、山奥かなんかへ隠れてしまはうと思つた。それは、大きな罪を犯した後の自責にも似た心の動搖だ。恐ろしい悔恨だ。惨めな自己嫌惡だ。しかし、この氣持は、お前に知らせたくなかつた。おれは、じつと心を鎮めた。

妻 あなたのおつしやることは、本當なのか、冗談なのかわからないのね。

夫 おれにもわからない。

(長い沈黙。)

妻 もうなれつこになつたから、近頃はあんまり氣にかけませんけれど、それでも、なんだか頼りないことがあ

りますわ。

分で自分の氣むづかしい神經を持ってあまして居る矢先だ。なんでもいゝ、早く夜が明けてくれ、空はなるたけ明るく、夢はなるたけ深く。かう心に祈りながら眼をつぶつた。一本のビールがやうやく廻はりかけてゐた。

妻 翌朝、ちやんと、おつしやる通りにしましたわ。

夫 あの時ばかりは、感心に、おれのいふことを一度で聞いたれ。忘れずに、お前は、おれの枕もとで、「スーヴニール」をかけた。

妻 一度終つたら、もう一度かけろつておつしやいましたわ。

夫 うむ。だが、あれは、もつと寝てみたい口實でもなんでもない。夢現に聞えて来るあのグイオリンのメロデイが、おれを、果して幸福の絶頂に押し上げた。と思つたのは瞬間で、だんだん耳がはつきりして来るにつれて、つまり、お前がおれの枕もとで、蓄音機をかけてゐるのだといふことがわかつて来ると、おれの心は、何か、かう痺れるやうな痛みを感じた。しまつたと思つた。おれは蒲團をかぶつてしまつた。

妻 泣いてらじつたんでせう。

夫 泣いてたと思はれても仕方がない。それほど、おれは激しいショックを受けた。蓄音機がもう一度「スーヴニール」を繰り返してゐる間、おれは、おれは、おれたちの幸福について考へた。おれたちの夢について考へた。おれたちの生活について考へた。

かつたことがあつたらう。旅行中、使はないと錯びるからつて……。

妻 え、。

夫 毎晩のやうに、有りつただけのレコードを、よく飽きずにかけてもんだ。「ヴォルガの船唄」を空で覺えたのもあのだ頃。

妻 それから「スーズニール」……。

夫 それさ。おれは、豫々、朝起きがつかいたちだ。

妻 起こしやうが悪いつて、毎朝お怒りになつたものですわ。

夫 毎朝、人間が、こんな風にして、折角の夢を破られるなんて、殺風景の骨頂だ。せめて、枕もとで、例へば女學生の歌ふやうな歌でもいい、。さういふ歌の聲で、何時とはなしに、自然に眼を覺まして見たら、さぞ幸福だらうと、おれは、かれがね思つてゐた。お前にそれをやれと云つても、どうせ、はいと云つてやる氣遣ひはない。丁度、蓄音機が手許にあるのを幸ひ、一度その空想を實現させてやらうと想ひ立つた。

妻 さうさう、そんなことがありましたね。

夫 先を云ふな。おれに終ひまで云はせる。それで、ある晩、おれは、お前に頼んで置いた。——あすの朝、おれを起す時に、「もう時間ですよ」なんてガミガミ呟鳴らずに、黙つて枕もとで蓄音機をかけてくれ。その一曲が終るか終らないうちに、むつくり起き上つて見せる。さう云つて、おれは床の中にもぐり込んだ。自

る。

妻 さういふことをおつしやるのは、負け惜みつていふのよ。あんなに海岸行きに効能を並べ立て、置きながら、今更そんなこと、よく耻かしくなくおつしやるわね。

夫 お前を慰めようと思つてさ。

妻 そんなら、あべこべに、もつとがっかりして、頂戴。さういふ見えすいた氣安めは、云ふ方でも、云はれる方でも、くすぐつたいばかりよ。残念なことは残念なことにして置かうちやありませんか。二人だけでね。

夫 おや、おや、お前がその氣なら、わけはないさ。それちや、今度は、残念なことにして置いて、何時かまた埋合せをしよう。それでい、だらう。よし、だが、おれは、飽くまでも、今度お前と一緒に泳ぎの眞似なんかしなくつて、仕合せだつたと思つてゐる。

妻 ……………?

夫 どうしてつて、お前はそのわけを聞きたがる必要はない。

妻 わかつてますわ。

夫 わかつてるなら云つて見ろ。

妻 云はなくつても、わかつてますわ。

夫 お前は勘違ひをしてゐる。それちや、かういふ事がお前にわかるか。——何時か、そら、隣から著音機を預

妻 それより、もう少し長くゐられ、ばですわ。

夫 さう取るのか。成る程、不平は絶えない筈だ。しかし、お前、かうして、あの海を眼の前に眺めて居れば、海へはひつたのも同じぢやないか。此の五日間毎日、海へはひり通したつたと、思へば思へないこともあるまい。

妻 ……。

夫 海の水は、たゞ鹽からいだけで、冷たい風呂へはいつたと思へば、大した違ひはない。

妻 でも廣さが違ひますわ。

夫 廣さは、手足を縮めておればおんなじだ。眼をつぶつて、頭の上に蒼空を頂いてゐるつもりになればい。

妻 あゝして、あとからあとから打ち寄せて来る波の感じがしなければ……。

夫 波の感じは、からだを前後にゆすぶれば、わけなく出る。兎に角、海へはひるといふことは、一つの冒險だから。毎年、何處の海水浴場でも、二人や三人の溺死者がないことはないぢやないか。それに、川上見たいに、下手なモグリ込みなんかやると、金縁の眼鏡を失くしたりするし、金田の奥さんだらう、眞珠の指環を波に渡はれたつて云ふのは……。

妻 安物だつたんですつて……。

夫 何れにしてもさ。それから、貝殻で足の指を切つたり、鹽水がばひつて中耳炎になる奴なんか、いくらもある

番頭 通符は……。

夫 (紙幣を出し) これで買つといてくれ給へ。

番頭 畏こまりました。東京驛二等……。

夫 三等だ。

番頭 へえ。(會釋して去る)

妻 歸りは惨めね。

夫 馬鹿云へ。今夜の豫定を聞かしたら、そんなことは云へない筈だ。東京には何があると思ふ。オーヴァーラ

ンドがあるぜ。千疋屋があるぜ。お前の夏のシヨウルがある。

妻 どのシヨウル……？

夫 それから、まだいろんなものがある。

妻 いろんなものがあるわ、手の届かないところにね。

夫 また始まつた。手が届かなくつたつて、いぢやないか。今度の海水浴だつてさうだ。此の間までは所謂手

の届かない計畫だつたんだ。それが、かうして實現できたぢやないか。

妻 實現できたと思つていらつしやるの。

夫 雨さへ降らなければね。

夫 何んでもないことが、思ふやうにいかんね。

妻 うつかり人を馬鹿扱にすると、あべこべに輕蔑されますわ。

夫 はじめは、そのつもりぢやなかつたんだ。あゝいふ風に黙つてる男が、何か云ひ出せば、きつと素晴らしいことを云ふだらうと、實は楽しみにしてゐたんだ。しかし、あの男は、きつと素晴らしいことを考へてゐるよ。おれなんか勿論眼中にあるまいが、例へば、おれたち夫婦の生活について、何か誰にも氣のつかないやうな秘密を嗅ぎつけてゐるかも知れない。——おれたち自身にさへ氣のつかないやうなね。どうも、そんな氣がする。

妻 またそんな勝手な想像をしてらつしやるのね。

夫 さ、ぼつぼつ片づけるよ。忘れものはないね。

(此の時、番頭が現はれる。)

番頭 もう御立ちで御座いますか。生憎どうも御天氣都合が……………。

夫 いや、立つ時に晴れたから、まあいゝさ。

番頭 もう、これで大丈夫だと思ひますが……………。

夫 さうありたいもんだ。ぢや、この靴と、そのバスケツト、それから、その細々したものを持つて降りて貰は

うか。

夫 おい、何んとか云ひ給へ。

風呂番 ………。

夫 君は、何か、決心をしてゐるんぢやないかい。

風呂番 ………。

妻 あなた、もう時間でせう。

夫 (風呂番の顔を見つめてゐる)

妻 ほんとに、もういゝのよ。

風呂番 (會釋して立ち去る)

夫 (いまいまじげに) 恐るべき沈黙派だ。

(長い間。)

妻 あなたは、まあ、なんていふ方でせう。

夫 (突然自嘲的に笑ふ)

妻 (夫の顔を見る)

夫 あれで、あの男、おれをどう思つたらうね。

妻 普通の人だとは思つてませんわ。

夫 あゝ、君たち、いろいろ御世話さん……………これは、ほんの少しだけれど……………。

女中 どうも……………。

風呂番 (黙つて頭を下げる)

女中 何か御用は御座いませんか。

夫 有りがたう、もう別に……………。

女中 (會釋して去る)

風呂番 (これも起ちかける)

夫 あ、君は一寸待つてくれ給へ。君は、此の土地の人かい。

風呂番 (ぼんやり相手の顔を見てゐる)

夫 此の土地で生れたの。

風呂番 (軽く頭を下げる)

夫 どうだい、何か變つたことはないかい？

風呂番 (にやにや笑つてゐる)

夫 君はなかなか評判がいよぜ。

風呂番 (訝しげに相手を見上げる)

女中　では、御荷物がおできになりましたら、どうぞ……………。(出て去る)

妻　女中にいくらおやりになつたの？

夫　一々心配することはない。お前は東京へ歸るまで、重役の夫人になつたつもりである。

妻　東京へ歸つてからも、そのつもりであたいわ。

夫　ゐるがいゝさ。お前は、根性まで安月給のお神さんだからいけない。

妻　だから丁度いゝのよ。

夫　丁度いゝとは……………？　おれを侮辱したつもりかい。そんなことを云ふなら、また御説教を始めよ。

妻　御説教はもう澤山……………。

夫　さうだらう。だが、なんだぜ。此の機会に、お前に相談するんだが、もうそろそろ、おれの氣持がわかつて

くれなくつちや困るよ。お前は世にも稀なる善良な女だ。どうして口をそんなに曲げるんだ。

妻　……………。

夫　お世辭でなく、お前は、おれの爲めに此の世に生れて來たやうな女だ。

妻　ありがたう。

夫　だから、さう云つてるぢやないか。その美。おれは果報者だと思つてゐる。

(此の時、どしどし足音を立てる女中と、猫背の風呂番とが前後して姿を現はす。)

かんよ。

(足音がするので話をやめる)

女中 (現はれる。つりをもつて来る) どうも有りがたう御座います。

夫 (そのうちから、幾らかを取つて) あ、これ、少しだが茶代……。

女中 いゝえ、こちらは、お茶代は頂かないことになつてをりますから……。

夫 さう。そいつはどうも、なんだな。それぢや、これは、色々御世話になつたから、君に……。

女中 恐れ入ります。

夫 えゝと、もう一人の女中さん、ちよいちよい、こゝへ来た、あのひとはなんて云つたつげな、どしどし音を

立てゝ歩くひと……。

妻 まあ、あんなことを……。

夫 いゝぢやないか、ねえ、静かな方ぢやないよ。あのひとを呼んでくれ給へ。それから風呂番の若い衆もね。

啞かい、あれや、君……。

女中 いゝえ、あゝいふ風なんで御座いますよ。餘つほどのことでもなければ、誰とも口を利かないんで御座い

ます。

夫 あゝいふ風ぢや、餘つほどのことなんかありつこないや。

御世辭を云ふからぬ。おれは、無愛想に鼻で返事をしてゐてやるよ。

妻 あなたは、それでお氣が済むでせうけれど、あたしは、歸へつてみんなに何んで云ふんですの、どうかしたはずみに、一度も濡らしたことのない海水着でも見つけられて御覽なさい。いゝ恥さらしよ。

夫 恥さらしなんていふ言葉を使つてくれるなよ。お前がさう思ふなら、その海水着を、一寸鐵瓶の湯で濡らして置けばいゝぢやないか。——第一、海にはひつたことが、さう自慢になると思ふかい。

妻 でも、いまいましいぢやないの。

夫 同感だ。しかし、物は考へやうでね。折角工面をして海岸へ出掛けたけれど、雨に降られ通して、たうとう五日間一度も海へはひれなかつたなんていふ話は、人が聞いたつて、そんなに不愉快な話ぢやない。それどころか、聞く人間によつては、涙を流してよろこぶかも知れない。

妻 誰が涙なんか……。

夫 まして、こつちが、少し情けてゐれば、なほさら滑稽でいゝぢやないか。

妻 だつて、出掛ける時の景氣つたら、なかつたんですもの。

夫 いゝぢやないか。實際景氣のいゝ話なんだから……。さういふことはよくあるもんだ。豫め、かういふことを慮つて、始めから悄然として家を出て見たところで、誰も感心しやしない。一體お前に限らないが、お前の家の人達は、お母さんにして、姉さんにして、お孝ちゃんにして、みんな、さういふところがあつてい

女中 どうぞ是非……。でも、折角明日はお天氣らう御座いますのに、もう一日御延ばしになることはできませんのですか。

夫 あい、どうも、忙しいもんでね。なに、充分保養にはなつたよ。東京を離れるといふことが、第一の目的なんだから……。天氣の悪いのは何處にゐたつて同じだ。ちや、これで……。〔勘定を渡す〕

女中 (會釋して去る)

妻 いくらになつてますの？

夫 案外かゝらなかつたよ。

妻 豫定通り……？

夫 まあ、そんなところだ。茶代でも奮發とかうか。

妻 およしなさいよ、そんな無駄なこと……。それくらゐなら、もう一日ゐた方が氣が利いてゐるわ。

夫 それができれば文句はないさ。あれ見ろ、あの空を……。今迄雨が降つてたなんて嘘見たいだ。

妻 會社の方は、もう一日、どうにかならないか知ら……。

夫 さつきの電話さへなければやれ。——丸で腰に繩をつけられてるやうなもんだ。しかし今度で、このおれが、如何に會社にとつて、重要な人物であるかといふことがわかつたわけだ。おれは明日の朝、少し遅れて行つてやるよ。さうして、少し不機嫌な顔附をしてゐてやる。係長の奴、きつと、そばへやつて来て、なんとか

夫（これを見て、思はず顔そむけ）圓々しく寝返りをうつたな。

（廊下で、突然「おきんさん」と呼ぶ女中の聲。）

妻（はたと眼を覺し、或は眼が覺めた風を裝ひ、むつくり起き上り、寝ほけ聲で、或は何食はぬ顔で）もう、お

風呂湯いてるでせうか？

夫（たちたぢとなり、それでも、疑ひ深く）眠つてたのか。

妻（これには答へず、起ち上がつて、手拭、石鹼、化粧道具など取り上げ、ふらふらと出て行く）

夫（さも氣拔けたやうに、その後を見送る）

— 幕 —

二

翌日の夕刻。

夫（ワイシャツ姿で鞆の支度をしてゐる）

妻（火鉢で手拭をかわかしてゐる）

女中（勤定書をもつて来る）まだ上り^のまでは大分時間が御座いますから、御ゆつくり……………。

夫（勤定書を引き寄せ）また近いうちにやつて来るから、よろしく……………。

妻 ……。

夫 なんにも云ふことはないね。それぢや、先を續ける。——二人は、それで、急に昔この親しみを取りかへした。その間に、いろいろ細い話もあつたが、それは略して、兎に角東京へ歸つたら、遊びに来てくれと云ひ出した。淋しく婆やと暮してゐるとまで附け足した。そこで、おれは、東京へ歸つたらなんて云はずに、今これから、あなたの部屋へ行つて、ゆつくりお話をしたいと切り出して見た。どうせなんにもすることはなく、退屈しきつてゐるところだと云つて見た。毎日見あきてゐる女房の側を、さうして一時でも離れてゐたいとまで云つて見た。すると、その女の云ふことが振つてゐるぢやないか。——いゝえ、それはいけません。あなたの奥様といふ方を、あんまり近くに感じてゐるところでは、寛ろいだおもてなしもできません。その氣持にもなれません。東京の住居は、それや靜かな、奥まつたところにありますのよ。知らない人は、尋ねてゐるだけに三時間もかゝりませう、といふことで話は一寸途切れた。湯上りの、透き通るやうな手を、膝側の手摺りに置いて、それとなく、何ものかを待つてゐる形だ。結ぶでもなく、開くでもなく、紅つ氣なしに赤い唇が、心もちふるへてゐたよ。眼は無論、渺茫たる水平線の彼方、思ひ出の花咲く國に注がれてゐるのさ。

妻 (寢返りをうつて、夫の方に向き直る。が、これこそ、口は自然に開くに委せ、鼻の孔は、耳鼻咽喉科の診察室に於ける如く、やゝ、あふ向き加減に奥の方まで見通せる姿勢である)

夫 おい、安心してゐる場合ぢやないぞ。

妻 (脇の下をゴシゴシ搔く)

夫 そんなところを搔いてゐる場合ぢやない。おれはなんと言つたと思ふ。おれはかう云つた。——あなたが、それほどこまでに、僕のことを想つてゐて下さるのは有りがたいが、僕はもう自由ではありません。すると、そんなことは存じてをりますわ、と云つた。昨日もお二人が睡じさうに、廊下を歩いておいでになるところを、お見かけしたんですもの。優しい上に、聰明な方らしいわれ、奥さまは……と云ふんだ。おれは返事に困つて、あんな女はさらにありますと云つてやつた。

妻 (大きな息をする)

夫 さらにあると云つただけでは、まだ云ひ足りないと思つたので、あれくらゐ鈍感な女は、一寸類がありませんよと云ひ直した。お前の前だが、それやほんとだからね。

妻 (枕を直す)

夫 すると、向ふはなかなか如才がない。——でも、あなたのやうなお方と一緒にゐるのは、その方が結局幸福ですわと云ふぢやないか。なぜですつて白ばくれた聞き方をする、笑つて、返事をしないんだ。

妻 (かすかに肩をかく)

夫 怪しげな肩は手應へのあつた證據だ。さ、なんとか云へ。

妻 ……………。

夫 あくまで狸を粧ふつもりか。

妻 ……………。

夫 お前がびつくりするやうなことを云つてやるが、それでもいゝか。

妻 ……………。

夫 ようし……………。云ふぞ。大きな聲を出すな。

妻 ……………。

夫 おれは、さつき十年前の戀人に遇つたよ。おれにそんな戀人のあつた事はお前も知るまい。今迄その話はせずにあた。お前の心を不必要に亂し度くなかつたからだ。しかし、たうとう、お前にそれを打ち明けなければならぬ日が來た。そんなに息を殺さなくつてもいゝ。

妻 ……………。

夫 向ふはまだ獨りでゐるらしい。純潔そのものゝやうな眼をもつた女だ。その眼が、昔と少しも變つてゐないやうに、おれに對する氣持も、そのまゝ昔と變りはないといふのだ。おれの方はどうだといふから、おれは云つてやつた。なんと云つてやつたか知つてるか。

妻 ……………。

妻 ……………。

夫 辨當と書いてあると、あの上等辨當の折の香までして来るから、面白いぢやないか。

妻 何が面白いもんですか。

夫 面白くないか。お前にはそれが面白くない。だから足の裏なんか蚊に噛まれるんだ。まだ掻いかい。

妻 知りませんよ。

夫 大沼公園といふのは、なかなか景色がよさうだね。北海道へも、一度ぐらゐ行つたつて悪くないな。ええと、時間はどうなつてゐるかな。

妻 旅行をなさるなら、黙つてなすつて頂戴ね。

夫 黙つて旅行をしろ……………？所謂啞の旅行といふ奴だね。

（蓄音器の音止む。）

夫 いろんなことを云ふやうだが、お前は近頃、何が食ひたい？

妻 ……………。

夫 もう眠つたのか。

妻 ……………。

夫 そんな筈はない。たつた今、欠伸を噛み殺してゐたぢやないか。

夫 傘をさしてか。傘は持つて来ないぜ。

妻 借りてらつじやいよ。

夫 お前は横になつてるのか。

妻 え、。

夫 夫は傘を借りて散歩をなし、妻は横になつて退屈を味はふか。洒落にもならないや。

妻 だから、あたしが、こんな處へ来るよりは、着物の一枚もこしらへた方がいゝつて、あれほど云つたのに……。

夫 もうわかつた。おればこれから、旅行をして来る。

妻 何處へいらつじやるの？

夫 氣の向いた處、日本國中だ。

妻 ………。

夫 一つ、別府邊りへ行つて見るかな。

妻 旅行案内だけをもつてれ。

夫 勿論………。これ程金のかゝらない旅はない。旅行案内といふものは妙なものだれ。汽車の時間を順々に見

て行くと、からだも一緒に動いて行くやうな氣がする。一種の錯覺かも知れんが、こいつを應用して、何か一つ、どえらい發見でもしでかすかな。

それが、やがて梯段を降りてしまつたと思はれる頃、また急に雨が降り出す。

何處かの室で蓄音器をかけてゐる。

その曲に足並を合はせる如く、悄然として夫婦が歸へつて来る。二人は黙つて部屋の中に入り、思ひ思ひに自分の座につく。何をすることもなく、ぼんやり空を眺めてゐる。かすかに溜息。

長い沈黙。

やがて、夫は、鞆から旅行案内を出して、頁を繰り初める。

妻は枕を持ち出して、晝寝の用意をする。

夫 おい、寝るのはよせ。此の上、お前に寝ちまはれちや、おれはどうしていいかわからん。

妻 あなたも、おやすみになつたら……。

夫 昨夕七時から、今朝九時まで、十四時間ぶつ通しに寝た者が、また寝ようたつて、そりや少し無理ぢやないか。いくら寝るより外にすることがないと云つたつて、おれたちは、遙々汽車に乗つて、大枚五圓の宿料を拂つて、名にし負ふ湘南の海水浴場に来てゐるのだ。少しは氣の晴れることもして見ようぢやないか。

妻 だつて、海水浴が駄目なら、仕方がないぢやないの。

夫 海水浴が駄目なら仕方がないと云つてしまはずに、そこを、なんとか胡魔化せないもんかなあ。

妻 あなたは傘をさして散歩でもしてらつしやい。あたしは、かうして横になつてますわ。(寝轉がる)

時だけ追ひ廻はすつていふ寸法だね。や、さよなら。え、ああ、わかつた。さよなら……。

妻 なんの御用……。

夫 用事なんかあるもんか。なんだ、雨が止んでるぢやないか。さ、今のうち、早く行かう。(慌て、浴衣を脱ぎ
 する。下には、ちやんともう滌水着を着込んで居る)

妻 (これもいそいそと座をたち)そんな風をしていらつしやるの。

夫 あたりまへさ。海は、お前、すぐそこだよ。庭續きだよ。自動車へ乗つて、とも行くつもりか。

妻 ぢや、あたしは……。

夫 お前だつて、それでいゝさ。

妻 だつて、あたし、まだ海水着を着てなくつてよ。

夫 ぢや、早く着ちまへよ。

妻 あなた、外へ出てらつしやい。

夫 それより、海岸に着物を着替へる小屋がある筈だ。そのまゝ持つて行けばいゝ。

妻 人が見てやしない？

夫 愚圖々々してると、また降り出すかも知れない。さ、早く……。

(二人はあたふたと外に出る)

……。東京の誰から……？早くつないでくれ給へ。あ、もし、あゝ、君が、……。なんだ、どうした。
え、うん、なあに……そんなでもないさ。

妻 どなた？

夫 小林さ。

妻 小林さん。

夫 いや、いや、そんなことあないがね。馬鹿云ふな。は……。うん、なかなかいいところだ。あゝ、海は奇麗だ
よ。え、あゝ、あるよ、あるとも……。嫌か、あを連れてちや、臺なしさ。

妻 なんですつて……。

夫 こゝにあるんだよ。こつちを睨んでやがるよ。

妻 なんのお話……。

夫 なんの話だつて聞いてゐるよ。は……。東京は暑いかい。さうか。昨おと夕よかられ……。こつちは、もつと
涼しいよ。なに、海は平氣だがね。あゝ、今も出掛けようとしてゐるとこだ。

妻 あたしから奥さんに宜しくつて、さう云つて頂戴れ。

夫 へえ、わからないもんだね。そいつあ、大變だらう。今ね、家内から君の細君によろしくだとさ。うん、適
當にやつてるよ。大將は出てゐるかい。ちえッ、うるせえな。歸る時にや歸るつて、さう云つてくれ。ゐない

なつてゐた。いや、夢どころぢやない。おれたちは、もう自分自身の妻さへ見失つてゐたのだ。

妻……………。

夫 たまたま得た儲かの金と、儲かの暇とが、おれたちを、今、あれを見ろ、あの海のやうに限りなく廣い希望の前に立たせてゐるのだ。おい、聽いてるか。

妻……………。

夫 おれたちは、今迄これほど太陽に憧れたことがあるか。近頃おれが、これほど物に執着をもつたことがあるか。お前も女だ。おれの心の中に、恐らく永遠に消えようとしてゐた情熱が、今再び燃え上りつゝあるのを感じないのか。え、感じないのか。

妻……………。(ちらと夫の方を見る)

夫 どうして、そんなに不思議さうな顔をしておれを見るのだ。おれは三日この方降り続く雨の爲めに、気が狂つたのではない。

(卓上電話の呼鈴が鳴る。)

夫 (平氣で)おれは、電話などに用はない。お前の、あの若々しい……………。

(呼鈴が、更に、けたましく鳴り續ける。)

夫 え、い。やかましい。(受話機を取り上げ)もし、もし、なんの用ですか。え、そうです。え、東京から…

夫 泳ぎさ。水府流だ。これが、拔手……………。

妻 あたしには、どれを教へて下さるの。

夫 まあ蛙だれ。これが一番樂で、易しい。一寸此處でやつて御覽……………。

妻 いやよ、こんなところぢや……………。

夫 稽古をするのにや、此處の方がいゝんだぜ。

妻 いや。

夫 可笑しな奴だな。お前は一度も海へはひつたことはないつて云つたれ。

妻 ええ。

夫 怖がつちや駄目だよ。水に親しむことが一番大事だ。泳ぐ泳がないは別として、波にからだを浮かす時の氣

持は、これや一寸、類がないぜ。強いて類を求めれば……………。さうさな、おれたちがはじめて戀を語つた日

の、あの夢心地……………。

妻 キザなことは云はないで下さい。

夫 どうしてキザなことだ。お前はなんでもそれだからいけないんだ。物事を散文的にしか考へない。なるほどわれわれは、平生、無味乾燥な生活をしてゐる。おれば朝から晩まで、紙とインキと算盤の中に頭を突つ込み、お前は朝から晩まで、錠びと七輪の間を往復してゐるのだ。おれたちの間に、もう夢といふものばなく

妻 二三日の間に、耻かしいほど黒くなりました。

夫 おい。

妻 黙つてゐらつしやい。——今日あたり、船で沖へ出て見ようかと相談をしてゐるところです。

夫 凄いな。そこにある端書、みんな、おんなじ文句か。

妻 大同小異よ。

夫 だれだれへ出すの。

妻 これは百合子さんでせう。それから、これが母さん。これが、お孝ちゃん。これが、お隣の奥さん。これが
裏のお神さん……………。

夫 おれは幸にしてお前と一緒にゐるから、さういふ端書は受け取らずに済むわけだれ。全く避暑に行く女を友
に持つ勿れだれ。おや、ほんとに明るくなつて來たぜ。

妻 小止みになつて來たわ。嬉しい。

夫 これ、なんていふ泳ぎか知つてるか。

妻 蛙泳ぎでせう。

夫 よし、さうだ。これは……………。

妻 それで、やつぱり泳りぎなの。

妻 なんですよ、あなたは……そんな無愛想なことをおつしやつて……。

女中 どうも、失禮いたしました。(出で去る)

妻 およしなさいよ、そんなに八ッ當りをなさるのは……。い、ぢやないの、雨が降つたつて……泳いでら

つしやいよ、そんなに泳ぎなげれば……。

夫 雨が降つても泳げ……？ 人が見たら氣違ひだつて云ふぜ。

妻 畳の上で泳いでる方がよつほど氣違ひだわ。

夫 いつそ、東京へ歸らうか。

妻 もう一日ゐて見ませうよ。なんだか、向ふの空が明るくなつて來たようだわ。若しかしたら、明日はお天氣

よ。

夫 東京は随分涼しさうね。こちらは毎日暑くつて、海へ一度もはひりませんつて、さう書け、端書に。

妻 あたし百合子さんに、かう書いたの。——東京はさぞお暑いことぞう。こちらは朝夕の散歩に羽織がいる

くらゐにて……。

夫 朝夕の散歩……？

妻 まあ聽いてゐらつしやい。——羽織がいるくらゐにて、日中は海にはいり通してすから暑さ知らず……。

夫 やれやれ……。

妻 ええ。でも、海へは何時でも這入れるんだから、かうして静かな處で雨の音を聽いてゐるのも、いゝわ。どうせ避暑に來たんだから、涼しいのが何よりよ。

女中 それやもう、お涼しいことは、なんて申しましても、お天氣の日よりはね。これで海岸と申しましても、

日が照りますと、なかなか、ちつとしてゐられないんで御座いますよ。

妻 さうでせうね。でも、かういふ風だと、お客さまも少いでせう。

女中 はあ、もう、これで、ぼつぼつお引上げになる方もありますんですよ。東京の方も、お涼しいさうで御座居ますね。昨今は……。

妻 そんなことはないでせう。あたしたちの來た日なんかは、少し曇つてたけれど、随分蒸し暑かつたわ。早くどつかへ行きたいつて、忙がしいところを逃げ出して來たんですもの。

女中 さうで御座いませうかね。昨晚こちらの番頭さんが東京へ参りましたんですよ。一寸、用が御座いましたもんですからね。その番頭さんから今朝電話で、東京も昨晚から大雨で、浴衣一枚では寒いくらゐだつて申して参りましたんですよ。

夫 おい、君、東京の話はよしてくれ。折角仕事の事を忘れて二三日ゆつくり頭を休めに來たんだから……。

女中 おや、とんだ失禮を……。何か御用は御座居ませんか。

夫 あつたら呼ぶから、まあ君は引下つてくれ。

明日は天氣

岸田國士

夫 妻

宿の女中

一

眞夏——雨の日

ある海岸の旅館——海を見晴せる部屋。

夫 (腹這ひになり、泳ぎの眞似をしてゐる)

妻 (繪葉書を出す先を考へて居る)

女中 (はいつて来る)

夫 (泳ぎの眞似をやめて、新聞を讀んでゐる風をする)

女中 ほんとうに毎日お天氣がわるくつて、御退屈でございませう。

СЛУЖБА НАСТАВНИКА (УСТАВ, ЗАКОНИ И ПОДЗКОНИ)

Устав, Закони и Подзкони о Служби Наставника

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は斯うするより外はなかつたのぢや。お前様の不運とあきらめて下されい。……………

お國 身勝手な奴ぢやと思ふであらうが、……………友之丞どの、赦して賜はれ。

五平 南無阿彌陀佛。

お國 南無阿彌陀佛、……………

(兩人口の中ですかすかに稱名を唱へながら、静かに跪いて合掌する。)

— 幕 —

五平 い、や、ならぬ。止めは拙者が刺してくりよう。お主の敵、戀の敵ぢや。……

(五平止めた刺す。その間お國は路はたに倒れて泣きながら、袂で顔を隠して居る。長き間。次第に暗くなる。)

五平 奥方さま、——そのやうにお泣きなさらぬがよい。出来たことは是非がござりませぬ。

お國 友之丞と私のことを、そなた根に持つて居やるのであらうが、……

五平 お前さまも私も、此れで本望を遂げたのでござります。池田様さへ死んでしまつたら、私どもは廣い世の中に誰に憚るものもない譯。もうお互ひに過ぎ去つた事は申しますまい。

お國 そんなら五平、私を末長う可愛がつてくれるかいの。

五平 可愛がらいで何といたませう。勿體ないがお前様は私の妻ぢや。

お國 さうきまつたら、一日も早う敵の首を土産にして、國へ歸りたうなつたわいの。

五平 さぞ皆様が待ちこがれておいでなさらませうが。——御隠居様やお坊つちやまの喜ぶお顔を、私も見たうござります。

お國 おお、いつの間によら、もうすつかり日が暮れた。——さ、さ、早う首しるしを擧げたがよいぞえ。

(五平七首を抜いてお國と共に屍骸に近づく。)

五平 池田様、いかにも我れ我れは卑怯でござつた。酷せこうござつた。とは云ふものの、お家の爲め、戀のために

ればかりか、國には可愛い子供もある、……

友之丞 そなたにさうまで云はれても、拙者はどうしても死にたうない。死ぬのはいやぢや。……此の友之丞がたつた一つの頼みぢやほどに、命だけは助けて賜れ。これ、お國どの、どうか拙者を不憫ぢやと思つて、

……

(お國、五平にそつと眼配せして、身を構へ、短刀の柄に手をかける。)

五平 氣の毒ながら是非に及ばぬ。……池田様、覺悟めされい!

(五平斬つてかゝる。友之丞、尺八で身を庇ひながら飛びのいて、悲しい聲でののしりつづける。)

友之丞 えゝ、お身たちは卑怯ぢや、卑怯ぢや、……不義者ぢや、不義の主従ぢや、……(肩先を斬られて倒れる。)

おお、おのれようも拙者を殺した、……これ五平、おのれに一言いうて置くが、そこに居るその

女は、お國どののはな、……

五平 何? 何と云ふ。

友之丞 お國どののは……この友之丞に——一度は身を任せたことがあるのぢや、……

五平 うん、さては、日頃の推量に違はず、——

(ヤロリとお國の顔色をうかがふ。お國面目なげにうなだれる。)

友之丞 お國どの、……いまはの願ひぢや。……そなたの手で止めを刺してくりやれ。

お國 したがそなた、そのやうにして生きて居たと何になると思つてぢや。私とそなたとが夫婦の約束をしたといふのは、あれは遠い昔のこと。今では私は、そなたに愛憎が盡きた。そなたが五平を殺したからと私の體は思ひのままになりはせぬぞえ。五平も死ぬなら私も一緒ぢや。

友之丞 (淋しき微笑) あは、は、は、拙者が何でお身たちを殺さう。殺したうても拙者にはその腕がないのぢや。なう、さうではないか、……

お國 そんならそなた、思ひ切りよう死んでくれぬか。どうぞ私を助けると思つて、……

五平 池田様、濟まぬ事ぢやが見して下され。お前様の身になつたら、われわれ二人がさぞ憎うござらうが。

友之丞 はて、何もお身たちは拙者を殺さずともよいではないか。戀路の邪魔をしようとは云はぬのに、……
お國 でも、敵を討たれば國へは歸れぬ。——私たちは暗れて夫婦になりたいのぢや。

友之丞 お國どの、拙者を少しでも不憫と思つたら、よう考へて見てはくれぬか。お互ひに討つたのとむづかしい事を云ふのは止めて、今迄の事はきれいに忘れてしまはうではないか。拙者は虚無僧になり果てて、一管の笛を便りに何處へなと流れて行かう。お身たちももう國へは歸らずに、一生旅をつづけるなり、知らぬ土地に落ち着いて家を持つなり、どうなりとして夫婦楽しく浮世をよそに暮すがよい。拙者は武士の道を知らぬが、さうしてこそお互に情を知ると云ふものぢや。

お國 いやぢや、私は國へ歸りたいのぢや。國へ歸つて五平を立派な侍にしてやりたいのぢや。……おお、そ

友之丞 はて、拙者は赦すも赦さぬもない。ただそれにつけても恨めしいのは世の中ぢや。——拙者は人妻に思ひな寄せて身を誤つたに、そちは同じ事をしてそれが忠義ぢやと人に云はれる。そちには不義をしながらも世を渡つて行く道があるが、拙者にはその道がない。そちのやうに侍の道を辨へて、日頃の心がけが正しい者は善人ぢや。拙者のやうに根性のひねくれた意氣地のない者は悪人ぢやと、世間の人は一概に云ふ。

考へて見れば悪人といふ者は、つくづく損な役廻りぢや。いかにも拙者は悪人ならばこそ人を殺した。ぢやがその報ひは受けて居るのに、そちは拙者を殺さうとするばかりか、それを立身の緒にする。

五平 池田様、赦して下さい。私が悪うござりました。私ぢやとてお前さまと同じ悪人ぢや。

友之丞 そんなら其方は、拙者の命は赦してくれるか。

五平 さあ、それは……

友之丞 そちもお國どのも、拙者に向ける刃はない筈ぢや。そちこそ主人の奥方と不義をした。めぐり合せがよかつたら、拙者がお國どのを我が物にして、そちを伊織殿の敵と呼んで見せるのぢやが、……

お國 なう友之丞……さうお云やるのも尤もぢやが、……そなた、それほど私を思つて居るなら、どうぞ私の爲ぢや程に死んでくりやれ。

友之丞 いいや嫌ぢや、——世に捨てられて有るにかひない日を送つては居るものの、淺ましい事には、それでも矢張り命は惜しい。無理に殺すなら殺されまじうが、拙者はどうしても死ぬのは嫌ぢや。

なうお身たち、それに違ひないではないか。……拙者は何もお身たちに耻を搔かせようと云ふのではない。
羨ましいと思ふばかりぢや。

(お國青ざめた顔色で五平と眼を見合はせる。)

五平 これ、何を證據にそのやうなことを。

友之丞 お身たちは今、拙者を殺さうと云ふのではないか。死んで行く者に隠し立てをしたらとて何になるのぢや。
四年の間戀しい人の跡をつけて居た拙者が、どうしてそれほど事を知らずに居よう。——成る程國を出た
時はあつげれな主従であつたらうが、お身たち二人がいつからともなく馴れ染めたのは、よう知つてゐる。
拙者はあの熊谷の越前屋でお身たちの隣の部屋に泊つて居たのぢや。

お國 えゝつ、ではあの晩そなたは、——

友之丞 おゝ、隣の部屋で話聲は残らず聞いた。——ぢやがお國どの、何も案ずるには及げぬ。拙者が此處で殺
されてしまへば、それを知つて居る者は廣い世の中にお身たち二人。敵を討つて國へ歸れば、きつと首尾よ
く晴れて夫婦になれるであらう。馬鹿を見るのは此の友之丞ただ一人ぢや。

五平 ……それを知つて居られては、今更お前様にも面目ない。何も始めからさう云ふ腹があつたといふ譯で
はない。ふとした事から不義とは知りつつ奥方さまと割りない仲になつてしまつた。……池田様、どうぞ
赦して下さい。……

めで——拙者はそれを疑うては居らぬ。ただその忠義は、はたで見る程辛いものではないと云ふのぢや。拙者のやうに、いとしい人からは敵と狙はれ、世の中から爪弾きをされ、何處と云ふあてもなくさまよふ者の眼から見れば、樂しさうに思はれると云ふのぢや。

五平 お前様は多くの人にうき目を見せながらも、ようそのやうな事が云はれる。お前様のやうな根性のひれくれたお人に、われわれの苦勞が分る筈はない。……

友之丞 したが五平、成る程苦勞もしたであらうが、そなたにはそれを慰める術すべもあつたではないか。……宇都宮ではお國どのが煩うた折、そちは心のありたけを盡してまめまめしう看護をした。痒い所へ手の届くやうに、かひがひしく世話を焼いた。——

五平 はて、それがどうしたと云はれるのぢや？

友之丞 あの時お身たちは、はたの見る眼も羨ましい仲の好い主従ぢやと拙者は蔭ながらさう思つた。……お國 これ友之丞、そなたは何を云やるのぢや。又しても私に耻を搔かせる氣か？

友之丞 夫の仇討に出たそなたが、道中でわづらふは重ね重ね不運ぢやが、あの二た月の間と云ふもの、窓の下で尺八を吹きながら、拙者はいつもさう思つた。——不運とは云ふが、今頃はさぞ心のうちで、お身たち二人はその不運を喜んで居よう。ひよつとしたら仇討の事も忘れて居よう。病が直ればいつまでさうして居られまいが、どうせ世の中は假の宿ぢや。暫しにもせよ楽しい時がありさへすれば仕合せであらうが。……

葉をかげられるのも、思へばもう此れで七年振りぢや。生きて居てもかひのない身ぢやほどに、殺すと云ふなら殺されもしようけれど、かうして互ひに膝を交へて、此の原の中にいつまでも暮らして行くことば出来ないものか。ああ、拙者は五平が羨ましい。五平のやうにそなたの供をして五年でも十年でも、遠い國々をさ迷ふことが出来るのであつたら。なう五平、そちも武士の情を知るなら、少しは察してくれたがよい。

五平 その情を知ればこそ、先程からお前様の覺悟を促してゐるのぢや。

友之丞 そちは格別、伊織殿から恩を受けたと云ふのではないに、ほんの二三年奉公した身でありながら、はるばる奥方に附添うて主人の仇を討ちに出た。——成る程開けばあつげれぬ忠義者、定めし後の世の鑑と云はれよう。ぢやが拙者として若しも武道に達して居たら、そちの眞似は喜んでして見せう。まして連れれの女は美しいお國どの、幾日旅をつづけたとて悪うはなし、たまたま敵に出遇つた所で、相手は自ら臆病者と名のつて居る腰拔侍、斬つて捨てるのは容易い事ぢや。なう五平、さうではないか。そして首尾よう仇を報いて國へ歸れば、そちはお上の御感に會うて侍分に取立てられる。あはよくば伊織殿の家名を繼いで、晴れてお國どのと夫婦めづまにもなれる。忠義と云ふはさうしたものぢや。智慧才覺のある者なら、誰しも忠義はする筈ぢや。

五平 聞き捨てにならぬその一言。——お前さまは私に、何かそのやうな腹があつて、奥方さまのお供に出たと云はつしやるのか。

友之丞 そのやうな腹があつたと申さぬ。そちが仇討の助太刀をせうと思ひ立つた時は、お主の恩に報いる爲

五平 ではお前様は、御主人様さへ居らせられんなら、思ひが届くとても考へておいでなされたのか？

友之丞 いいや、お國どのが拙者を捨てたは、伊織どのが居たからではない。拙者が悪い人間だからぢや。それは拙者とてもよう知つてゐる。したが拙者は、伊織どのが憎かつたのぢや。伊織どのを褒めそやす世間と云ふものが憎かつたのぢや。伊織どのは誰が見ても立派な侍、拙者は不運な生れの男。それぢやのに入は拙者を憫れまうと思はないで、みな伊織どこの味方をする。戀の恨みもあるにはあるが、拙者は世の中と云ふものに楯をつく氣で、伊織どのを殺してやつたのぢや。開討ちにしたのは卑怯ぢやと云ふが、女々しい男が立派な侍を殺すのに、外にどう云ふ手だてがあらう。拙者のやうな弱い人間は、卑怯になるより外はないのぢや。五平 そのやうな繰り言をいつまで聞いたとて埒は明かぬ。あまり時刻の移らぬうちに、——さ、さ、池田様、逃れぬ所とおあきらめなされて、お覺悟なさりませい。友之丞さまは、思ひの外にあつばれな勝負をなされて、見事な御最後を遂げられたと、國への語り草になるやうに、立派にお立合なさりませ。武士の情に云うて進ぜるのでござりますが、——

お國 なう友之丞、そなたがどのやうに悪い人でも、それほどまでに私を慕うてくれたものを、決して憎いとばかりは思はぬ。回向は私がして上げるほどに、どうぞ聞き分けて覺悟をして賜れ。これ友之丞どの、私の頼みぢや。

友之丞 そなたにそのやうに云はれると、拙者はうれしうて悲しうて……涙がこぼれる。そなたから優しい言

儘なるふるまひをしやつたばかりか、夫のある身に戀慕をしかけて、私に耻を搔かせたではないか。今になつてそのやうな事を云うたとて、誰がそれを眞に受けよう。そなたが人に嫌はれるのは、そなたの身から出た錆ぢや。

友之丞 いかにも拙者は人に嫌はれた。——侍の身にあるまじき不所存者、——怠け者で、うそつきで、女のやうで柔弱で物の役にも立たぬからと云うて、そなたばかりか多くの人に蔑まれた。ぢやが拙者から云はせれば、拙者の氣だての悪いのは自分の知つたことではない。拙者は始めから斯う云ふ人間に生れて來たのぢや。そなたの器量が美しいやうに、拙者の心は生れながら醜いのぢや。なう、さうではないか。それなのに拙者を攻めたとして無理ではないか。

お國 そなた、それほど自分の醜さを知つて居ながら、なぜ人を羨んだのぢや。

友之丞 おお、羨まないで何としようぞ。——伊織どのも人間なら拙者とても人間であらうに、その上そなたと拙者とは約束までした仲ではないか。それが行末の見込がないからとて、そなたにも疎まれ、そなたの父御にも斷わられた。いやそればかりか、世間の人もそなたたちはよう斷わつた。あのやくざ者の友之丞をよう見捨てた、伊織殿に見かへたと、手をたゝいて囃し合つた。唯一人として拙者を氣の毒と云うてくれる者はなかつた。それが拙者には……拙者のやうな女々しい者には、云ひやうのない淋しい思ひをさせたのぢや。

……拙者が伊織どのを斬つたのは、その淋しさに堪へかねたからぢや。

て居るものを、勝負したとて無益であらうが、……：

五平 お前様は此の期に及んでも、まだ命が惜しいのでござるかや？

お國 一寸逃れに逃れようとおしやるのか？

友之丞 逃げられるものならば、一寸でも二寸でも逃げたい。卑怯とも臆病とも笑へ。拙者は偽りのない事を申すのぢや。……今更こんな事を云うたとして愚痴かも知れぬが、そなたの夫の伊織殿と云ひ、又ここに居る

五平と云ひ、侍の道をよく辨へた剣道にすぐれた人は仕合せぢや。拙者はつくづく二人の者が羨しうてならぬわい。

お國 そなた人を羨むほどなら、なぜ自らも男らしうしないのぢや。

友之丞 男らしうしたいのぢやけれど、生れつき此のやうな、女々しい氣だてを持つて来たものを、自分の力でどうする事が出来ようぞい。拙者とても侍の家に生れたからは、そなたの夫に劣らぬやうな立派な武士になりたうござつた。剣道にも秀で、膽方も備はつた一人前のものふぢやと云はれたうござつた。さうすればお國どのからも、——あゝまで嫌はれはせなんだであらうに、……今頃はいとしいそなたを妻に持つて、一生楽しく目を送ることが出来たであらうに、……それも此れも、みんな拙者の生れつきが悪いからぢや。つまり拙者が不運だからぢや。

お國 不運と云ふのは亡き夫の伊織殿のことぢや。そなたは國においやる時分御家老の家柄を笠に着て、勝手氣

その時を待つて、こつそり跡へついて行つたら、望みがかなふ折もあらうかと、實はあの明るる日面體を變へて再び御城下へ忍び込み、そなたたちが旅立つ日まで隠れて居たのぢや。

お國 夫を殺してその上に又、そのやうな事をしようとは、——聞けば聞くほど面の憎い。

友之丞 ぢやが、それほど憎まれても、そなたの事を思ひ切れぬ友之丞を、不憫とは思つて下さらぬか。先だつて宇都宮で、そなたが長のわづらひをして寝て居た折に、雨の日にも風の日にも、そなたの部屋窓の下で尺八を吹いたは、誰あらう此の友之丞ぢや。そなたを思ふ心づくしを、蔭ながら聞いて貰ひたかつたのぢや。

五平 しかしあの虚無僧は、お前様ではなかつたやうぢやが、……

友之丞 拙者は顔に墨を塗つて、お身たちの眼を欺いたのぢや。なうお國どの、そなたも覺えて居るのであらう。ついで此の間、そなたは窓から首を出して拙者に錢をなげてくれた。あの時始めて、國を出てから四年ぶりて拙者はそなたの顔を見たのぢや。日頃の望みがあの時やうやうかなうたのぢや。

五平 聞けば聞くほどお前様は執念きお人ぢや。——したがその望みがかなうたからは、此の世に思ひ残すこともしざるまいが、……いかがでござりますか？ 池田様、さ、さ、男らしい勝負をなされい。

友之丞 いやいや、拙者は勝負をする氣はない。其方は國に居る時分から、仲間とは云へて武道にすぐれた男ぢやと云つて、人にも褒められ自らも許して居たやうぢやが、拙者にはそのやうな者と太刀打をする腕はないのぢや。拙者は先刻も云うた通り、意氣地のない「武士の風上にも置けぬ男」ぢや。見す見す負けると極まつ

ともあるのぢやほどに、……

五平 四年の間跡をつけたと？——そのやうな事がある譯はない。お前様とは先だつて熊谷の宿で落ち合つたのぢや。

友之丞 そち 友方がさう思ふのも尤もぢやが、拙者は決して偽りは申さぬ。お身達が廣島を發足したのは、——忘れない一昨年さきおとしの師走の十日、あれからおみたちは中國筋を大阪へ出て京に廻り、一昨年おとしの暮れに東海道を江戸へ下つたのでござらうがな。なうお國どの、——虚無僧の姿に變へたは、つい此の頃ぢや。が拙者はもう四年越し、そなたのお跡を追うて居たのぢや。

お國 さうしてそなた、私の跡を追うて来てどうおしやる心なのぢや。

友之丞 どうする心か、それは拙者にも分りませぬ。知つての通り拙者はそなたに懸慕をして、懸敵の伊織を闇討ちにした。それをお身たちに云はせたら、定めし卑怯ぢやと云ふであらうが、……

五平 卑怯でなくて何としようぞ！

友之丞 まま、その言ひ譯は後で申さう。——あの晩拙者は伊織殿を斬つて捨て、闇に紛れて一旦廣島を落ち延びはしたものの、考へて見れば此の先どうなるやら知れぬ身の上、いづこと云ふあても無く、さすらひの旅に出るにもせよ、せめては一と目お國どのの顔を見てからにしたいと思つて、……お國どの、きつと拙者を追ひかけて仇討に出るであらう。拙者を見つけ出すまでは、日本國中の津々浦々を経めぐるであらう。

五平 お立派な腕前を持ちながら、お前様の卑怯な手にかゝつて無念な最後をお遂げなされた御主人様が、仕合はせとは何事ぢや。云はせて置けば途方もない事を、……

お國 これ友之丞、生き恥を晒すのが辛いなら、なぜあの時に潔よう、下手人は己れぢやと名のつて出なかつたのぢや。かりにも御家老の家に生れた身が、まあ淺ましい其のやうな姿になつて、……

友之丞 淺ましいのは拙者とてもよう知つてゐる。ぢやが拙者は命が惜しかつたのぢや。

五平 池田様、お前様も今こそ落ちぶれておいでなさるが、昔は武士の端くれではないか。命が惜しいとはよう云はれた。……

友之丞 さ、さ、その臆病を笑つてくりやれ。いかほど人に笑はれても、拙者は命が惜しいのぢや。

お國 そのやうに命の惜しいそなたが、何で私どもの居る前へ出て來やつた？ それともそなた、とても逃れの所ぢやと覺悟をきめておゐるのか？

友之丞 いやいや、覺悟が出來た譯ではない。——拙者はただ一と目そなたの顔が見たうて參つたのぢや。

お國 何？ 何とお云やる？

友之丞 (淋しき微笑) あはゝゝゝ、お國どの、お國どの、何もそのやうにきつとならずともよいではないか。實

を申せば拙者はそなたと五平とが廣島を發足したその日から、今日まで足かけ四年の間、明け暮れ影のやうに附き添うて、そなたの跡を尋うて來たのぢや。いかに臆病な男ぢやと云うて、戀には命の危さを忘れるこ

でござらうが、……………

五平 ……………(お國と共に呆然として虚無僧を見上げる。)

虚無僧 見たくば見せて進ぜよう、……………

(云ひながら極めて落ち着いて編笠を脱ぐ。色の白い、さかやきの痕の青々とした美男子である。)

五平 やや。

お國 そなたは池田友之丞……………

虚無僧 いかにも池田友之丞ぢや。——お國どの、久し振りにござつたなう。

お國 こゝでそなたに出遇ふとは、亡き夫のお引き合はせ。逃れぬところぢや、観念しや。

五平 且那樣の敵を討ちたさに、奥方さまのお供をして、三年このかたお前様を尋ねて居たのぢや。池田様、も

う御運の靈きでござります。男らじうお立ち合ひなされい。

友之丞 まゝ、そのやうに騒がずともよい。拙者は昔から人に知られた意氣地なし。劍術は下手なり力は弱し、

お身たちが討たうと思へばいつでも討たれる。……………ぢやが、お國どのと云ひ、五平と云ひ、伊織殿は頼も

しい妻や家來を持たれたものぢや。拙者のやうになまじ長らへて生き恥を晒さうより、伊織殿はすつと仕合

はせぢや。)

(此の合辭せごひの間に、友之丞は松の根方に腰をおろす。お國と五平が左右よりそれを圍むやうにする。)

五平 虚無僧どの、——憚りながら、少々物をお聞き申したいのぢやが、……

(虚無僧靜かに尺八から口を離し、二人の方を振り返る。)

五平 おぬしはあの、先だつて中仙道の熊谷から、拙者どもの様になり先になり、宇都宮まで一緒に参られたお方ぢやと存するが、さやうではござりますまいかの？

虚無僧 (曖昧な小さな聲で) いかにも、御一緒にござつたなう。

五平 さてはやはりさうでござつたか。——いや、別段用事と云ふてはなけれど、かうして度び度び落ち合ふのが、不思議な御縁ぢやと存じたので、失禮ながらお呼び止め申したのぢや。しておぬしは、此れから何地へお越しになる？

虚無僧 いづこと云うて、あてはござらぬ、……

五平 ぢやが、この街道へ來られるからは、いづれ奥州へ参られるのでござらうがの？

虚無僧 ……

五平 もし左様なら、旅は道づれと申す事もござるゆゑ、次ぎの宿まで一緒に参らうではござらぬか？

虚無僧 ……

五平 虚無僧どの、どうなされた？ ……返辭のないのはどう云ふ譯ぢや？

虚無僧 おぬしは拙者に用事はないと云はれたが、さやうにお隠しなさらぬがよい。……拙者の顔が見たいの

お國 五平や、あの虚無僧はだんだん此處へやつて来るやうぢやが、……

五平 (草鞋を結び終つて耳を傾ける。)……町中を流して歩くなら兎も角も、人里を離れた原の中を、此の夕

ぐれに、あゝして笛を吹きながら歩いて居るとは、何にしても解せぬ男、……

お國 そなた、今にこゝへやつて来たたら、もう一度よく顔を見てはくれぬかいの？

五平 よろしくござります。幸ひ此處で待ち構へて、今一應念のために、面體を調べて見ることにいたしませう。

お國 ほんにさうしてくれたがよい。——そなた、さつきも云ふた事ぢやが、返す返すも氣を許してはならぬぞ

点。

五平 奥方さまも、成るべくお顔を見られぬやうになさりませ。私も此の笠を被つて、そしらぬ風で一服いたし

て居りませう。——(笠を被りながら上手を見る。)あれ、もう其處へ參つたやうでござります。——

(笛の音一層近くなる。お國は手拭を頭にかけて、五平は煙草に火をつけ、ちつとちつむいて控へてゐる。

……上手より虚無僧の姿が現れる。編笠を深く被り、尺八を吹きつゝ二人の前を通り過ぎて、下手へ

行かうとする。)

五平 もし、虚無僧どの、——虚無僧どの、——

(二度目に呼ばれた時、虚無僧は吹くのを止めて默然として歩みを止める。が、矢張り尺八を口へあてた

まゝ、振り向きもせず立つて居る。)

う心細い。

五平 此のあたりは人の子一人通るではなし、暗くなれば尙更さびしうござります。………いかがでござります？ おみ足の工合はまだお直りにはなりませんか？

お國 あらかたくたびれば扱けたやうぢやが、………(足の先を揉みながら) 此の、拇趾おとゆの豆がつぶれて、こゝがすきすきと痛んでならぬわいの。

五平 どれ、どこでござります。ちよつとお見せなさらませ、——

(お國の足もとへ寄り、草鞋の紐を解き、足袋を脱がせる。笛の音一旦途絶え、又次第に近づく。)

五平 おゝ、此れはまあ、さぞお痛みでござりませう。皮がむけて紅くなつて居ります。はて、何んぞよい工夫は、——ちよつとお待ちなされませ。草鞋の紐が觸らぬやうに、此れは紙をおあてなされたがようござります。

(懐紙を出して細く引き裂き、それを傷口へ巻いてやる。)

五平 さ、いかにでござります。これでいくらかお樂になるでござりませう。

お國 おゝ、大さう樂になつたわいの。——久しう草鞋を穿かなんだので、直き此のやうに豆が出来るのぢや。五平 もう二三日たちましたら、又すぐお馴れになります。——さ、ちよつとおみ足をお上げなされませ。

(云ひながら足袋を穿かせ、草鞋を結んでやつて居る。)

私のあとを附けて居ようも知れぬと思ふが、……

五平 命を捨て、かゝる積りなら、さやうな事もござりませうが、——それもあなた様お一人なら知らぬ事、私がお附き申して居りますのに、命の惜しいあの方に何んでそのやうな事が出来ますものか。あの虚無僧は決してさうではござりませぬ。池田様はあの通り剣術はお下手でも、人品だけはお立派な、女のやうに色の白い優しいお方、あの虚無僧は色の黒い頬骨の出た、武骨な人柄でござりました。

お國 ぢやが、友之丞はあゝ云ふ男、何處ぞにこつそりと隠れて居て、不意にどのやうな仇をせぬとは限らぬわいの。そなたも油断をせぬがよいぞえ。

五平 私の身は兎も角も、あなた様にお間違ひがあつてはならぬと、始終氣を附けて居ります故、決してお氣づかひには及びませぬ。相手はたかの知れた腕前、見つけ次第に必ず生かしては置きませぬが、いまだに運悪う出遇はぬと云ふのは、——池田様も命冥加なお人でござります。

お國 旦那様がお亡くなり遊ばしてから、もう來月は四年目の祥月命日がめぐつて來るのに、思へば思ふ程憎い奴は友之丞、——あゝ早う本懐を遂げたいものぢや。

五平 そのうちに時節が廻つて参りませうほどに、さういらいらと遊ばさぬがようござります。何にいたせ、もう大分暗くなつて参つたやうでござりますが、……

お國 奥州に近いと聞いたせいか、ゆうべの風が身にしみる。……旅には馴れて來たやうでも、けうは何とな

五平 あゝの虚無僧も私たちと同じやうに、急ぎの旅と云ふではなし、街から街を流して歩く身の上でござりませうが、あゝしていつも私たちの跡を追ふとは、ほんに不思議な男でござります。

お國 あの虚無僧と私たちとは、中仙道の熊谷から後になり先になりして、同じ日に宇都宮へ来たではないか。

五平 さやうでござります。さうして宇都宮でちやうど二た月、あなた様が御病氣の間、雨の日にも風の日にも、あの調の尺八の音が、窓の下に聞えぬことはござりませなんだ。

お國 若しひよつとして、あれが敵の友之丞ではあるまいかと、そんな氣がしたのぢやけれど、……………

五平 それは私とても同じでござりました。……………したが奥方さま、あなた様はあの虚無僧の顔を、御覽になつたでござりませうが、……………

お國 此の間、窓の下へお金を役けてやつたとき、深編笠の端をかして私の顔を見上げたわいの。

五平 私もあの時たしかに見ましたが、池田様とは似ても似つかぬ男のやうでござりました。

お國 それはさうぢやが、……………此の後又も行き違ふやうな折があつたら、もう一度よくあの顔を見たいものぢや。

五平 うろんな事ではござりますが、あれがよもや池田様ではござりませぬ。現在敵と附け狙はれるほどの者が、まして御家中でも評判の臆病なお人が、私たちの傍近くあゝ押し強う參れる譯はござりませぬ。

お國 さあ、そなたはさういひやるが、私に無體な懸慕をしかけ、卑怯にも旦那様を闘討ちにした男ゆゑ、……………

野を渡つたりして居たら、二人とも知らぬ間に年をとつて、髪に白毛が生えるであらう。そなたとわたしとは、——考へて見ればほんに不思議な縁ではないか。

五平 さやうでござります。——世が世ならば、あなた様は私のやうな仲間風情がお側へも寄せぬお身の上、それがかう云ふ事になりましたのも、……憚りながら何かの御縁でござります。

お國 敵を討ちに國を出て、身が道中で長のわづらひをして、それでなうてもそなたに世話を焼かせるのに、思ひがけない看病までして貰はうとは、ほんに何と云ふ勝がひのないことやら、……

五平 敵を討つのも看病をいたすのも、私にとつては同じ御奉公でござります。しかしまあ、あれほどの御病氣が、かうまで早う御本復になりましたのも、大方神佛のお加護でござりませう。もしひよつとしてお體のお悪いうちに、敵にでも遇ふやうなことがあつたら、……相手は卑怯な池田さま故、どんな事にならうとも知れぬと、私はたゞそればかりをお案じ申して居りました。

(その少し前から、遠くの方に微かな尺八の音が、きれぎれに聞えて来る。お國は一心に耳を澄ます。)

お國 これ、……五平や、そなた、あの尺八の音が聞えぬかいの？

五平 ……成る程、遠くの方でなしかに聞えて居ります。ではあの虚無僧が参つたさうな。……

お國 あの音色はあの虚無僧に紛れもない。……此の間ちう宇都宮で私がわづらうて居た折に、いつもあの窓の下で吹いて居たのは、あれぢや、あの調べぢや。

お國 なう五平、わたしはどのやうに苦勞をせうと、且那樣のお爲めゆえ厭ひはせぬが、そなたは嘸かし……
ほんにそなたには氣の毒でならぬぞ。

五平 奥方さま、どうぞそのお言葉はお置き下さりませ。何ぞと云ふと「氣の毒ぢや」と仰つしやりますが、
お恨みでござります。此の五平奴はあなた様の御家來でござりませうが……

お國 それはさうであらうけれど、親の代から召し使うたと云ふではなし、ほんの二三年奉公をしたばかりのそ
なた——且那樣のお出での時こそ、主とも思ひ思はれもすれ、今ではそなたを家來のやうには思ひませぬ。

五平 勿體ない事を仰つしやります。且那樣の御家來なら、かう云ふ時こそなほさら御奉公をいたさればなりま
せぬ。二三年の間とは云へ、なみなみならぬ御恩を受けたのでござりませぬ……

お國 恩を忘れる者ばかり多い世間に、僅かな義理を重んじて、ようまあ盡してくれる事ぢや。且那樣も草葉の
蔭から、そなたの忠義を喜んでおいであらう。

五平 敵にめぐり遇ふまでは、五年は愚か十年でも二十年でも、きつとお供をいたします。相手は必ず奥州へ
落ちのびた事と存じますが、若し奥州に居なければ又引き返して江戸へも上りませう。京大阪へも参りませ
う。四國へでも九州へでも、日本の國のあらん限りは、どのやうな邊土の果てまでも、いつ迄も御一諾にさ
迷ひます。

お國 ぢやがそのやうに運が悪うて、幾年も幾年も敵にめぐり遇はなんだら、……かうして毎日山を越えたり

話しては下されたが、……

五平 その白河の關へ着くのでござります。その關を越えて、すつと奥州の果てまでも、……次第に依つたら參らねばならぬかも知れませぬ。

お國 わしの祖母さまは和歌がお好きで、いつもいつも和歌の話をして下された。——歌に名高い白河の關と云うたら、廣島からは何百里の向ふにある——大阪を越えて、京を越えて、東海道の果てにある江戸を越えて、まだその先を百里ほども行かれねばならぬ。そしてその關の向ふにも、むかし夷の住んで居た奥州といふひろいひろい國があるのぢやと仰つじやつて……

五平 事に依つたら、そのひろいひろい國の中をのこらず歩かねばなりません。

お國 國を出てから、もう三年、今年の秋も暮れて行くのに、いまだに敵のありが知れぬとは、ほんに何んとしたした事であらう。

五平 今頃お國では、定めし皆様が待ちこがれておいでになりませう。お坊ちやまも今年は、たしかお六つにおなりになされた筈、まあどんなにお可愛いことござりませう……

お國 あゝ、これ、子供の事は聞かして賜^{たま}るな。それを云はれると、飛立つやうに國へ歸りたうなるわいの。

五平 はて、又してもうつかり致して居りました。お免と遊ばして下さりませ。——したがそれを思へば一日も早う本望を遂げたいものでござります。

五平 したが、もう日の暮れに間もない様子、——何にいたせ此の原中で夜になつては、路が難儀でございます故、次ぎの宿まで今一時御幸抱なさりませ、おつらいこととござりませうが。

お國 ほんに、女と云ふものは意氣地のない、——此のやうな足弱が道づれでは、そなたも定めし迷惑であらう。五平 何の。そのやうな事がござりますものか。長い間おわづらひなされてから、けふでやうやう二日目の旅でござりますもの、お疲れ遊ばすのは當り前、——かうと知つたら、もう二三日宇都宮へ逗留いたすのでござりました。

お國 いえ、いえ、わたしの體が弱いからとて、さうゆるゆると日を過しては居られぬわいの。……宇都宮で病みついてから、もう二た月にもなるぢやほどに、……

五平 それもお道理ではござりますが、いかほど勝氣なお方様でも、御病氣には勝てませぬ。それに今日は又、朝から彼れ此れ六七里もお歩きなされたでござりませう。

お國 歩いてても歩いても、一向人里らしいものも見えぬが、……此處は名にし負ふ那須野が原とやら、——まあ何と云ふ淋しい所であらうぞいの。

五平 此の原の先はやがて奥州ぢやと聞いて居ります。——此の原の道を何處までも、もう二三日お歩きなされたら、白河の關へ參るのでござります。

お國 あゝ、白河の關と云へば、子供の頃からよう話しには聞いて居たが、私が七つ八つの時分、よう祖母様ははさまが

お國と五平 (二幕)

谷崎潤一郎

人物

お國

五平

池田友之丞

時

徳川時代

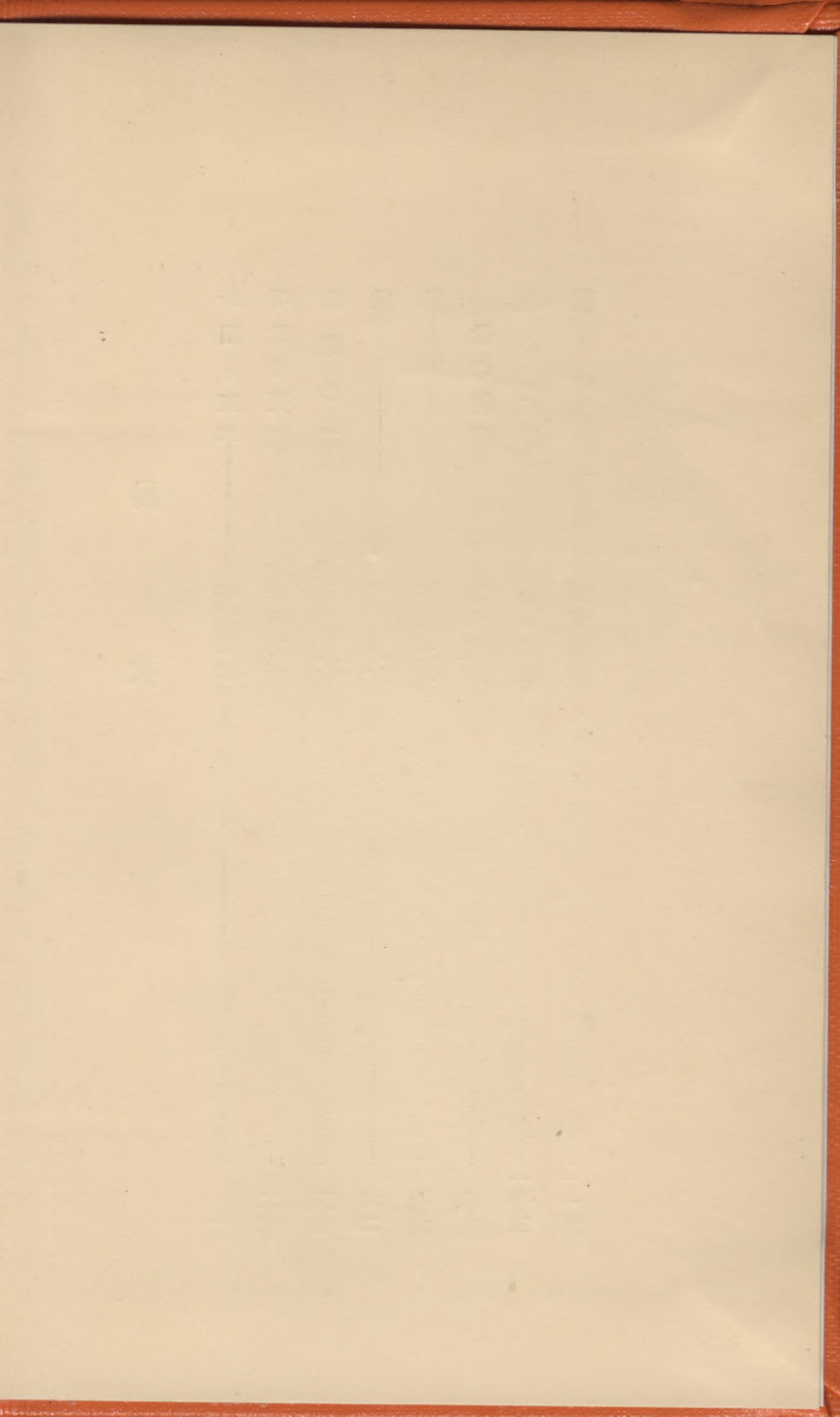
所

野州那須野が原

ひろびろとした、淋しい那須野が原の夕暮である。上手より下手へ松並木の街道がつづいてゐる。一本の松の根方に旅装束の主従二人が休んで居る。主人と云ふのは西國の侍の後家お國、従者は仲間の五平である。

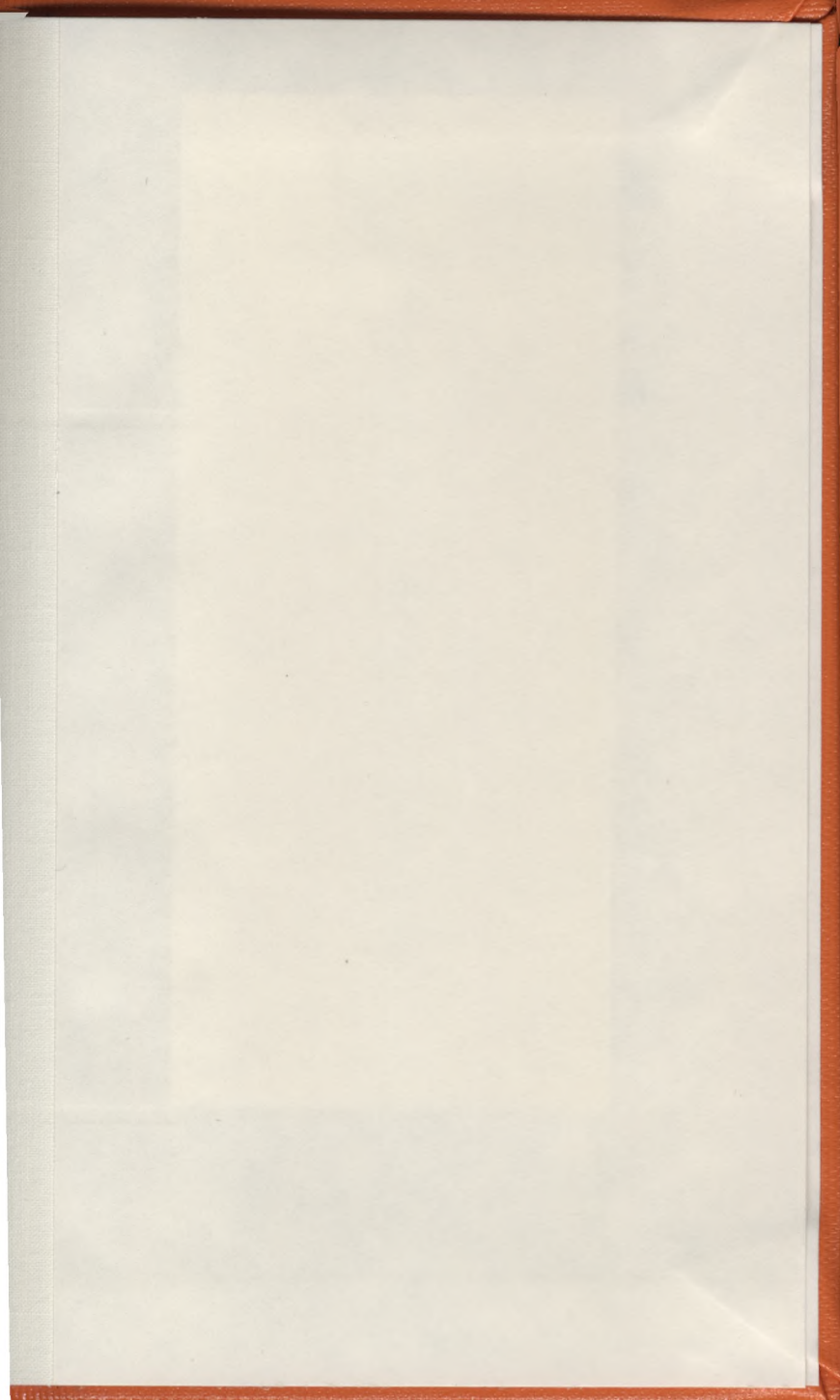
五平 奥方さま、いかがでございます。……もうそろそろ、おでかけになりましては？……

お國 あい、……まだくたびれが抜けぬわいの。



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