EMINENT AUTHORS OF CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

ONE ACT PLAYS AND SHORT STORIES

VOLUME ONE

EDITED BY

EIJI UKAI & ERIC S. BELL

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VOLUME ONE

KAITAKUSHA

TOKYO

PREFACE

The plays and short stories which appear in these two volumes are all translations from the well-known playwrights and authors of contemporary Japan. I commenced this work several years ago, and it comprises all I have translated since January 1925 till now. Many of these stories and all the plays have already been published in either "The Japan Times" of Tokyo, or "The Osaka Mainichi." It is with their kind courtesy and permission that I am able to reprint them in book form.

My most grateful thanks are especially due to the anthors who so graciously gave me their consent to translate their plays and stories into English.

My aim in doing these translations has been to enable English readers in Japan to have the opportunity of reading the works of some of Japan's best-known writers, for up till the present time I think none of these have been translated into the English language.

It is almost impossible that any translation can equal, much less excel the original; so to derive any true benefit or thorough enjoyment from any work of this kind is by getting into direct touch with the original text written in the original form and language. I have therefore decided to include the Japanese texts which may add to the interest of the Japanese reader.

The task of a translator becomes doubly hazardous when he is translating the Japanese language into English, because the very inspiration of the two languages is so widely different. The habits, traditions, and even the thoughts of the Japanese people are extremely different from those of Europeans, and there is very little kinship in the grammatical constructions of the English and Japanese languages. This makes the work of the translator all the more difficult.

In the case of the present translations I have done my best to present them in a form that can easily be understood from an English reader's standpoint. There is little pretence on my part of presenting them as efforts of any literary merit as far as English is concerned, but I have tried to translate simply, yet without losing the charm of the original Japanese text.

I am deeply indebted to the following translators who did the original translations from Japanese into English with my collaboration:

The late Mr. Yoshinobu Tada,
Professor of English at the Matsue High School, in western Japan.

Mr. Haruo Endo,
A boy student of the 4th year grade of the Seijo Middle School, Tokyo, Japan.

Mr. Eiji Ukai,
Professor of English at the Seijo Middle School, Tokyo, Japan.

Mr. Eitaro Sayama,
Professor of English at the Seijo Gakuin, Kinuta Mura, near Tokyo.

Any faults that may be found by the reader in the interpretation of the contents of this book lies entirely with the translators, but should the readers find in it some deserving or praiseworthy merits, the credit is entirely due to the original Japanese text.

February 1930.

Eric S. Bell
SUZUNO ISAMU,
Higashi Kaigan, Chigasaki,
Kanagawa-ken, Japan.

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THE WHITE FOX

("Byakko-no-yu")

(A PLAY IN ONE ACT)

By

Jun-ichiro Tanizaki,

Translated by

Haruo Endo & Eric S. Bell.

Jun-ichiro Tanizaki

JUN-ICHIRO TANIZAKI

Jun-ichiro Tanizaki, the author of the following drama, was born at Nihonbashi, Tokyo, Japan, in the 19th year of Meiji (1886). Upon graduating from the College of Literature at the Tokyo Imperial University, he at once began his career as a writer and a man of letters, and has always kept a most prominent position ever since in the literary sphere of Japan.

This author shows a unique genius by his clever treatment of cases of abnormal sexuality, which was first proved when he published the following books: "Osai & Minosuke," "The Devil," and "On the way."

Besides the above-mentioned works, "The conversation between A and B," and his very clever "Man and God," are his most representative books. The latter work is especially interesting, being a kind of autobiography.

Mr. Tanizaki has always something novel to reveal to his reader by his clever method of expression, and in his selection of materials. His works are always very attractive, and have been received throughout Japan with much enthusiasm.

Although "Byakko-no-yu" is not so well known as many of his other plays, it is undoubtedly a fine stage-drama. One of his more famous dramas, "Okuni and Gohei", appears in the second volume of this book.

Eric S. Bell.

The White Fox ("Byakko-no-yu")

Persons in the Play

KAKUTARO (Kaku-chan). A young man enchanted by a fox.
OSAYO. His lover.
OSAYO'S MOTHER. An old woman.
THE FOX.
THE FOX'S CHILDREN.
A FOREIGN WOMAN.
AN OLD WOMAN SERVANT. Attendant to foreign woman.
A FOREIGN MAN.
A POLICEMAN.

Scene

(Into the middle of the stage from above runs a deep and narrow stream. Many large rocks and boulders in the bed of the stream prevent the audience from seeing the water, but the rushing torrent can be heard splashing and washing on the rocks below the banks. On each side are high cliffs, and a narrow pathway runs up to a small bridge which crosses the stream above. The path from the stream descends to L.C. to the edge of the river near the front of the stage, and there stands an old cottage. This building is the bath-house of a small hot-spring which is slightly visible through the open door.

The water of the bath is only indicated by a line of white.

The cottage has a little window on its left side, but, as the entrance faces the river, some large rocks in front prevent us from seeing much of the interior which seems to be in complete darkness.

It is night-time in the early autumn. On the edges of the cliffs many Shiro-hagi shrubs are in full bloom. Sitting alone on a rock near the entrance of the cottage is Osayo. She is gazing up the river. Presently, an old woman—her mother—comes wandering down the steep descent of the cliff's edge toward the bridge. She carries a bundle of fire-wood on her shoulders. When she reaches the middle of the bridge she looks down and notices Osayo. She stops.)

Mother.—Who is that down there? Is it you, Osayo?

Osayo.—(*Remains silent*).

Mother.—Good gracious! Whatever are you doing here at this time?

Osayo.—(*Does not answer, but her face shows embarrassment, which her mother notices.*)

Mother.—Why are you sitting there at midnight? In spite of what I have often told you, never to come down here! How long have you been here? At what time did you come?

Osayo.—(*Seems about to answer her, but stops.*)

Mother.—What? what is that you say?

Osayo.—I didn't say anything.

Mother.—Oh, didn't you? Even though you won't

speak, I know your reason quite well—I tell you to come home quickly! Come home with me!

Osayo.—(*Makes no answer.*)

Mother.—Do you hear what I say? I told you to come home! Anyway, what business have you to leave our house without anyone to watch it? I told you distinctly this very morning that I must go to the neighboring village, and that my return would be late at night. Oh, what a stupid girl you are! (*She pauses.*) Won't you come home with me me now?

Osayo.—Oh, dear Mamma, I will come soon.

Mother.—Oh, you worry me! (*Looking up into the sky*) Look! the moon is already hiding among the branches of the pine-trees on Mt. Hanno-ki. I don't think you can see it, can you?

Osayo.—Of course I can see it! I am waiting for the coming of the moon!

Mother.—Waiting for the coming of the moon?

Osayo.—Yes, I am waiting the coming of a man with the moon!

Mother.—Pooh! If you are waiting for him, you will wait a long time, for you will never see him again. Kakutaro is already dead!

Osayo.—But I've heard that if he had really died, his body would have been found. At the time of the death of his brother and sister I was told that their dead bodies were seen from the bridge, floating face upwards on the surface of the stream.

Mother.—Yes, at that time they were said to be seen,

but there is some doubt about it. Kakutaro has been drowned in the stream or has died on the mountains, so I am sure his body will never be found.

Osayo.—But it is said by the old people of this village, that if men are enchanted by foxes they will all fall into the river and will meet their deaths, and after a time their bodies will change to the bodies of human beings, and will afterwards be seen floating on the surface of this deep river.

Mother.—In spite of what they say, I am sure it will be a long time before his body will be seen in the stream. Why, it is only five or six days since he disappeared!

Osayo.—Therefore, if it is only such a short time since his disappearance he must still be living.

Mother.—I wonder if he could live on the mountains without food if he were enchanted by a fox?

Osayo.—But the mistress of our school told us that if we could get water enough to drink, we could manage to live for some twenty days, so I believe Kaku-chan is still alive.

Mother.—If he lives, we must never allow a man who is enchanted by a fox to enter our home any more! (*She frowns at her daughter, who nods her head sadly. The old woman crosses the bridge, and coming down the path, she seats herself good-naturedly near her daughter.*) Oh, my dear Osayo, why do you think about him so much? You are still very young, and when you reach a

marriageable age, you can easily find a good and ideal husband.

Osayo.—Why, Mamma, I never think about such things!

Mother.—Then, why worry so much over Kaku-chan? You had better come home with me now. If such a thing had happened to you I would never know how to answer to our good Buddha; I've given up thinking about Kaku-chan long ago!

Osayo.—But, Kaku-chan is your nephew.

Mother.—No, I don't like to think that a man who is enchanted by a fox can possibly be a nephew of mine. All his family, and even his ancestors were enchanted in this way. Why, it was that fox's trick which caused the deaths of his brother and sister!

Osayo.—But our school-mistress declares that nowadays fox enchantments do not exist at all.

Mother.—If your teacher argues such a thing, why can't we find some logical cause for his disappearance? In Kaku's childhood this strange enchantment showed itself; but afterwards, when he had secured a good position, he returned home again with the brains and manner of a madman. After that I was obliged to look after him in my home. He never did a stroke of work, and would only wander about the mountains all day long. When his mother became mad, she did just the same thing.

Osayo.—Oh, dear! I did not know this about my

aunt; but, as for Kaku-chan, I am certain it was not the enchantment of a fox that caused him to be so strange, for he was only slightly mad. If we thought of him kindly, he might perhaps find his resurrection.

Mother.—No, I don't believe, Osayo, that he was any ordinary madman. People say that at midnight he was often seen walking with a fox that had pure white fur, near this hot-spring of Byakko.

Osayo.—Mamma, I tell you that you are too easily led to believe all you hear, and it amuses people to tell you these strange and imaginative stories. You know, they are not necessarily true.

Mother.—But I can't find any reason for their telling me things which are untrue. Do you know, I was even told that the night before last, a gentleman from the Chitoseya saw him, and again the night before that he was seen by Oroku-san, and also by the servants of this very bath-house.

Osayo.—Oh, they are all nervous!

Mother.—Even if they are, there must be some truth in what they say, because they all have seen the man. I tell you, the man I spoke of saw him, and the night before that he was seen by others too.

Osayo.—Then, if someone saw him, Kaku-chan is still alive!—But why didn't these people stop him, and bring him home?

Mother.—Even though you would like them to do so, Osayo, no person would ever venture down to the bottom of this gully at midnight. After the sun

sets they are afraid of this place, and no one will approach this cottage then.

Osayo.—Then, where did they see Kaku-chan?

Mother.—Look! All of them saw him (*pointing toward the upper part of the cliff*) when they passed that chestnut-tree on the high-road. They can get a clear view from there of this cottage. Besides, the fox only makes his appearance when it is a moonlight night.

Osayo.—I wonder if such a thing really does happen?

Mother.—Oh, of course it happens! You have already been told many times that as soon as the autumn begins, and when the hagi-flowers are in full bloom, the fox is sure to come down to this cottage to take his bath. Look there! At the hour when the moon makes its appearance over the side of Mt. Hanno-ki, and when it becomes as bright as daylight in the valley, and when the moonbeams crawl into the interior of the cottage, the fox always takes a dip in the waters of the bath.

Osayo.—Who invented such a story?

Mother.—Who? Why, for many long years people have seen him there. As the bath-water is very clear, the moonbeams creep into it through the door. In the middle of the water, the fox can be seen shaking his pure white fur, and throwing the water over his neck and under his arm-pits with such rapidity that it makes the scene appear as

ghastly as the vision of the snow-maiden. Should anyone attempt to peep into the inside of the cottage to see his beautiful body more closely, they will afterwards become enchanted by the fox, and will end their days as madmen. Kaku-chan's mother, brother and sister all met their ends in this way.

Osayo.—Then does Kaku-chan always come to watch the fox at night-time?

Mother.—"Yes, I assure you that every night he comes here and peeps into the cottage, according to the story of a man who saw him from that chestnut-tree up yonder. He said that from there he could not see very much, but he saw the pure white fur of the fox glittering in the moonlight, and afterwards watched him gliding silently out of the cottage and across the bridge. At such a time Kaku-chan follows close behind him.

Osayo.—After he crosses the bridge, where does he go?

Mother.—Perhaps they go to the upper part of the river. They say there is a fox's den in that place. (*Osayo looks up at the moon, and then turns her gaze to the upper part of the river. A pause.*)

Mother.—Oh, Osayo, my dear, how long do you intend to remain here? Let us give up talking about it now.

Osayo.—I will stay here a little longer.

Mother.—Why do you talk in such a foolish way? Oh, look! The moon has already come over this

side of the mountain!

Osayo.—Yes, I see it. I intend to stay here and wait for the moon, and will then bring Kaku-chan home. Please go home now, and leave me here, Mamma dear. (*The moon gradually shines full into the valley.*)

Mother.—You must take your mother's advice sometimes. You know that, if you stay here, you may be also enchanted by the fox!

Osayo.—I don't care what you say, so don't worry about me any longer.

Mother.—Good gracious! What an obstinate girl you are! All right, if you refuse to come with me, I shall call the policeman to make you come.

Osayo.—Very well, mother, do as you please.

Mother.—Come, Osayo! (*She rises, and pulls at Osayo's hands, endeavouring to make her stand.*) Stand up, stand up, I say!

Osayo.—But have you no pity for Kaku-chan? If you are so heartless and uncharitable, I know that some harm will come to your daughter!

Mother.—Don't talk such nonsence! Why don't you stand up?

Osayo.—Oh, why can't you leave me alone? (*The mother again pulls roughly at her daughter's hands, and getting her to her feet, drags her toward the bridge.*)

Osayo.—Oh, Mother, please let me go! Please!

Mother.—I won't, I tell you! However much you may struggle, I will take you home with me!

Osayo.—But, I hate to leave here! Oh, Mother, please! (*Her mother tugs at the girl's dress, and drags her on again until they disappear round the path on the right side of the cliff. For a time Osayo's cries can be heard.*) Let me go! Oh, Mother, let me go, I say! (*And then her voice dies away in the distance.*)

(*There is a long pause. The moonlight streams full into the valley, and shines into the interior of the cottage. Many insects can be heard purling, and the ripplings of the crickets fill the air with sound. The only other sound is the running of the stream over the rocks.*

Suddenly, Kakutaro makes his appearance among the rocks high up in the bed of the river. He seems to have climbed down the rocks from above. He wears a very worn kimono, with sleeves badly torn. Japanese zori, or sandals, worn threadbare are on his feet. He jumps from rock to rock, endeavouring to reach the bridge. Suddenly he slips on a big rock, and tottering, he falls on his face. He remains very still, as if he were badly hurt.

There is a long pause. Insects sing noisily in the bushes and trees and the rushing of the water are the only sounds heard.

Suddenly, Osayo is seen approaching rapidly round the cliff-road where she disappeared some time before. As she hurries on, she keeps turning her head to make sure she is not being pursued by her mother. After crossing the log-bridge, she reaches the cottage,

and seems about to peep into the interior, but fear causes her to resist from doing so. She notices the moonlight shining into the door, and so she decides to come round to the cottage window. At first she catches hold of the window ledges, and tries to raise herself to look in, but fear again seizes her, and in a sudden fit of great terror she steps back to the bridge again, and looks around her anxiously. As she gazes toward the upper part of the river, she notices Kakutaro lying on the rocks above. She jumps down quickly, and runs to him.)

Osayo.—Kaku-chan, my dear Kaku-chan! Whatever is the matter? Why are you lying there? What are you doing?—Oh, Kaku-chan! What is it? (*Saying this, she tries to lift him on to a rock, and sets him down. His clothes are soaking wet.*) All your clothes are wet! (*She then takes his kimono in her hands and wrings the water out of it. Kakutaro seems absent-minded and looks around him as if he were dazed.*)

Osayo.—Kaku-chan, where have you been for the past few days? I have been so worried about you! (*She gazes at him in fear.*) Oh, Kaku-chan! My Kaku-chan! Try and listen to what I am saying. You must be very hungry!—Can't you walk? If you can't, I will carry you on my back.—Will you go home with me?—Oh, let us go, Kaku-chan!

Kakutaro.—(*Pushes her hands away.*) No, I dare not! I will never go home any more! (*As he speaks he looks about him all the time as if he were expecting*

to see somebody.)

Osayo.—But why won't you go? Tell me why!

Kakutaro.—I hate your mother, and she treats me unkindly!

Osayo.—I assure you, dear Kaku-chan, my mother has no such ideas about you. She has worried very greatly about you, and her heart has been very troubled. Do you know that not so long ago, this very night, she came down here, and said to me, that if you were enchanted by the fox as your relations were. . . . . (*The moon becomes brighter, and Kakutaro, as if not hearing her words, becomes alert, his eyes sparkling brightly, and begins to walk toward the cottage.)*

Osayo.—(*Frozen to the marrow by sudden fear*) Kaku-chan! What are you. . . . . what are you gazing at?

Kakutaro.—Oh, Oh! Look how the moon shines! Can't you see how it has crept into the cottage? (*Saying this he begins to go nearer to the cottage, as if being drawn by some unseen power.)*

Osayo.—(*Begins to run, overtaking him. She tries to take his hands to hold him back.* Oh, don't go there! Don't look! Kaku-chan!

Kakutaro.—I tell you I will go. She is in the bath! already!

Osayo.—Oh, Kaku-chan, can't you believe me? I tell you that at this hour no one will come to such a place!

Kakutaro.—No, she is there! She is there! Look

(*Peeping toward the cottage door*) There is a white thing moving about in there. Look! She is there! (*He moves closer to the cottage.*)

Osayo.—(*Looks in the direction in which he points, terribly frightened.*) No, there's nothing, Kaku-chan. There is nothing in there. I have been near this cottage for several hours, but I have never seen anything or anyone approach this place.

Kakutaro.—But I have been seeing her every night. Yes, every night, when the moonbeams creep into the cottage door and into the bath, that is usually the time she comes here. Last night, and the night before, at this very hour, I saw her.

Osayo.—You lie to me, Kaku-chan. Such a thing is not possible! Nobody can be there at this time of night.

Kakutaro.—I am telling you the truth. If you think that I am lying to you, come with me and look. (*Again he peeps into the door-way.*) Oh, look! She is already there; look, I say! She has already taken off her clothes, and I can see her naked body. . . . . I can see her in the bath, and the moon is shining upon her pure white naked body, and . . . . oh, oh, Osayo, do look at her!

Osayo.—(*Is afraid, and will not look.*) I beg you, I pray you not to look in there, for it must be the fox!

Kakutaro.—What nonsense are you talking! . . . . . I assure you it is no fox. . . . . It is a woman! I know her well, for when I was in Kobe I saw her there.

Osayo.—It must be the fox!

Kakutaro.—Who has been telling you such foolish things?

Osayo.—My mother told me, and not only she, but also everyone of the villagers says the same thing; and when the light shines in there, the fox is always within, and anyone who peeps there will surely be enchanted by him. We must never look upon him while he is there, they say.

Kakutaro.—(*Laughs*) Ha, ha, ha! The villagers know nothing about it. She is no fox! Osayo-chan, I will tell you a secret about this woman. Don't you know that a foreign woman is now staying at that villa on the cliffs avobe the abyss of Chigo-ga-fuchi?

Osayo.—(*Looking sadly at him*) But, Kaku-chan, you lie to me, because no foreign woman would come here at this time. I think you must be out of your senses to believe it!

Kakutaro.—I tell you that all European women hate entering the bath in the presence of others, so that is the reason she comes here at this time, so that she can be alone.

Osayo.—But where she is staying they have a bath-room where quantities of hot water enter by a pipe from this same spring.

Kakutaro.—But, she is afflicted with some awful disease, and it cannot be cured except by the spring water, so she comes here secretly. I am sure that none of the villagers know about it.

Osayo.—(*Half believing him*) But, how do you know of this?

Kakutaro.—When she was in Kobe she dwelt in a very old and large foreign-style house very near the office of the company I worked for. Ah, I know her very well! . . . . In that house there were several foreign women living with her. As soon as it was evening, they would always put on pretty red or white clothes, and would paint their faces in a very charming way. . . . . But, after a little time, this woman became indisposed, then some disease developed.

Osayo.—Even though you may believe that, none of the villagars believe she has any disease. In the evening, she always is seen walking up the valleys or near the stream, and she seems very happy, and is a very pleasant woman, they say. All the villagers admire her greatly, and for a woman they think she is an excellent walker.

Kakutaro.—Yes, because she is gradually recovering from her sickness, owing to these baths that she takes each night. You can be sure that, if she were in good health, she would never stay here for such a long time. You know very well that it is getting much colder every day, and that no one stays in the village at this time of the year.

(*While Osayo is thinking over what he says, he gets a chance to escape from her. He suddenly jumps off the bridge, and goes down toward the cottage again.*)

Osayo.—(*Follows him, running across the bridge, and when she reaches the cottage she tries to pull him away from the door.*) Kaku-chan! Oh, Kaku-chan!

Kakutaro.—I have some business with her I tell you! If you don't wish to stay here, please go away. Oh, please, Osayo-chan, go away and leave me here! (*He peeps again into the cottage, through the window, by catching hold of the window-ledges.*) Why will you interrupt me?

Osayo.—But what would you do if it were a fox?

Kakutaro.—(*Looks again into the cottage.*) Miss Rosa, Miss Rosa! Dont' you know me? I am the messenger from that tailor's shop in Kobe!

Osayo.—Oh, Kaku-chan, please don't call out like that! (*Saying this, she takes hold of him, and with all her strength tries to pull him away toward the right-hand side of the stage.*)

Kakutaro.—There she is! There she is!. . . . Miss Rosa!

Osayo.—Don't, Kaku-chan! (*This time she goes to the window to look, but shrinks back in terror.*) No one answers your call, Kaku-chan. . . . I assure you that there is no one there at all!

Kakutaro.—(*Paying no attention to Osayo*) Miss Rosa! Miss Rosa!

Osayo.—Oh, let us go home quickly, Kaku-chan! You must be crazy!

Kakutaro.—Look, I tell you. She is there! I can see her washing her body in the water . . . look! (*He*

holds on to the window-ledges with all his might.) I can see the moon shining into the bath so clearly now, that the water looks as transparent as crystal . . . . Miss Rosa's body is all shining with something like white snow. . . . It's not snow, no, it shines like new silver . . . . oh, now she is combing her hair and . . . . oh, just look now! Miss Rosa's hair is like gold. Through the steam I can see it floating on the surface of the clear water. Her hair is very beautiful, and I tell you it is the hair of a woman!

Osayo.—*(Goes near the window again as if to look, but stops.)* You are mad! It seems like that to you, but there is no sense in what you say!

Kakutaro.—Oh, she has already undone her hair, and it is hanging down over her shoulders. Now she is washing her arm. Oh, look how Miss Rosa touches the sore on her arm. Rosa, Rosa, when you put your arm in such hot water, doesn't it hurt you? . . . . what a beautiful colour that sore is! It is reflected in the water like a glittering ruby on a surface of white velvet. But, see! She has other ones too, ... one on her leg, and there is another on her shoulder! Perhaps after all they are not sores, perhaps they are rubies. They glitter like . . . . Oh, Osayo-chan, look and see how wonderfully white her neck is! I tell you it is the skin of a human being! *(Osayo, after a little heitation, at last takes hold of the window-ledge. She seems very frightened, but Kakutaro keeps tempting her to*

look. She peers through the window, then suddenly draws back terrified at the apparition she has seen. She utters a scream as she steps away.) Oh!

Osayo.—*(Pale and trembling, goes quickly past the cottage, as if to run away. As she does so, she half turns and cries to Kakutaro.)* Oh! The . . . . that . . . . that is the Fox! It is the fox, Kaku-chan . . . . I saw the fox!

Kahutaro.—Oh, she has finished washing and bathing now, and is drying her body with a towel. Rosa, Rosa, are you coming out in a minute? If you are, I shall meet you in front of the cottage.

Osayo.—Kakutaro, I tell you it is no human-being . . . it is a white fox! All that Mamma told me is true, absolutely true! I am going at once for the policeman. *(After finishing these words, she rushes off in great fear, and, upon crossing the bridge, she disappears along the mountain-road on the right side.)*

Kakutaro.—Now she has quite dried her body, and is beginning to dress. Her gown is made from white towelling. Both her body and her dress are white . . . . she almost deceives me into thinking she is a snow-maiden . . . . Again she is crouching near the edge of the tank! . . . . Oh, I can see her shadow reflected in the hot-spring water. It is not a clear reflection, but it is like some figure on the moon appearing through a pearly mist. Ah, I know it—did you forget to bring your mirror with you, Rosa? That is why you are bending over the water, so that you can see your beautiful body

as in a looking-glass! Now she is dressing her hair, and drops of water are falling from it . . . . the golden drops are falling in showers as she binds it up . . . . She has finished at last! She is squeezing her towel, and commences to dry her feet . . . and now she is putting on her white linen shoes! . . . . Are you ready now, Rosa? . . . . Are you coming out? . . . . I am here. (*He hurriedly goes to the entrance of the cottage.*) At last she is coming, and . . . . Rosa?

(*As he says the last word, a fox disguised in the dress and body of a woman appears in the doorway. The figure looks like that of some Occidental woman. A robe made of white towelling covers her body, and on her bare feet are white linen shoes. She carries a basket in which can be discerned a soap-case, sponge and towel. As she moves from the door, the pale opalescent moon-beams that were previously streaming into the door when she was bathing, now follow her as she leaves. The cottage becomes dark again, and the beam of light enshrouds her body and bathes her in a milky light. Upon seeing her closely, Kakutaro steps back a little, as if attracted by her great beauty. The fox glances once at him, then glides with a quiet step past him, and is about to cross the bridge.*)

Kakutaro.—(*With some hesitation*) Excume me, Rosa-san, Rosa-san! Please tell me if you are Rosa-San?

The Fox.—(*Stops half way across the bridge and looks*

down at him. She speaks in rather broken Japanese, imitating the accent of a foreigner.) Yes, I am Rosa . . . . I am Rosa. Who are you?

Kakutaro.—I? . . . . Of course I am the messenger-boy who was once employed by Nakamura, the tailor, in Kobe.

The Fox.—Oh, yes. You worked once in Nakamura's shop?

Kakutaro.—Yes, I once served there . . . . for about three years. I remember very well often coming up to your place with messages and parcels. You had a great variety of dressing-gowns, hadn't you? Do you remember when I used to go up to your room which was at the corner of the second storey? It was there that I saw your chest of drawers with a great looking-glass on it . . . . it was next to your bed, and I remember it was full of dresses, wasn't it? . . . . Oh, Rosa-san, I remember everything, quite well.

The Fox.—Oh, do you? . . . . And your name, what is it?

Kakutaro.—I'm named Kakutaro.

The Fox.—Oh, yes, Kakutaro . . . . I know you now. I remember you as the messenger-boy at that time. *(Saying this, she comes back again across the bridge, and standing close to him, looks into his face.)*

Kakutaro.—You were very kind to me then. Whenever you saw me you used to stroke my head, and call me Kakutaro-san, Kakutaro-san. Then you used to give me lovely chocolates wrapped in silver-

paper.

The Fox.—Yes, I remember well. I gave you chocolates, I always thought you were a very smart messenger-boy. I never forgot you, you see. (*The fox sits down on a rock.*) Why do you stand there? Come and sit here near me!

Kakutaro.—Oh, thank you, it is very kind of you. (*He takes a seat near her, with great delight.*)

The Fox.—Kakutaro-san, why are you here?

Kakutaro.—Oh, I will tell you about myself. I once was employed there, but unfortunately it was reputed that I was mad. It was untrue . . . . but I had to leave, and retruned again to this part of the country, which is my native place.

The Fox.—Do your father and mother live here?

Kakutaro.—No. Both of them are dead, so I was compelled to live with my aunt.

The Fox.—I see. So you stay here with your aunt, do you?

Kakutaro.—No, not now. I've already fled from her house, for *I* hate her very much . . . . she treats me very badly, and is always scolding me.

The Fox.—Then, where are you staying now?

Kakutaro.—I have no home at all. By day, I always hide myself in the woods and on the mountains, and at night I aways come down here to this valley . . . . Rosa-san, I know that you visit this bath every night, and so every evening I come here and peep at you from this spot.

The Fox.—What! Have you been here every night?

Were you here last night, and other nights before that?

Kakutaro.—Yes. Last night, and the night before, and each night before that, and I have watched you taking your bath. I have spoken to you each time, saying: 'Rosa-san, Rosa-san!' but although I have called your name many times, you have never once replied to me.

The Fox.—Is what you tell me true? I've never known you were here, and I am very sorry for you, Kakutaro-san. Will you forgive me?

Kakutaro.—I have been very troubled because you would never answer me. But never mind about it now. I am very happy to-night, because I am able to talk to you alone. It makes me think again of the days I spent in Kobe. Don't you remember, Rosa-san, the many times I came to your room with messages?

The Fox.—I remember very well indeed. And now I remember giving you those chocolates.

Kakutaro.—There were many decorations and pictures in your room, weren't there? Pictures, photos, and clothes, and other things. . . . I remember that you had a cage hanging by the window, in which you kept a canary.

The Fox.—Yes, you have a very good memory.

Kakutaro.—How I envied that little bird!

The Fox.—Why? . . . . Why did you envy it?

Kakutaro.—Because that canary was able to live near you night and day . . . . all the time, and it could

take it's food from your soft hand.

The Fox.—Did you love me so much, Kakutaro?

Kakutaro.—Yes, I did love you very much! The happiest thing in my life was to be able to visit your room. You often played the piano and sang, didn't you? And I remember once when I called, and walked into your rooms suddenly, you were sitting close to a fat foreigner, who was dressed in a sailor's uniform. You scolded me severely, and said: 'Don't walk into this room without knocking!' And you frowned at me so much that I was very unhappy!

The Fox.—Did I? I never meant to be angry with you!

Kakutaro.—Yes, ... the same thing happened twice after that. The second time the man was not a sailor, but was the manager of Kelly & Co., and you were both drinking whiskey. You scolded me very severely that time, and said sharply: 'Don't come here, I've a visitor! Come again when I ask you to!' I shall never forget it. I felt very humiliated, and my heart became very sad indeed.

The Fox.—Forgive me, Kakutaro-san, please forgive me. I am very sorry for you; but, if you knew how I was living, you would understand. I was just like the canary in that cage, and, though I liked you very much, I was compelled to be friendly with that sailor, and the manager from Kelly's. If I refused their advances, that wicked old woman would have scolded me severely. I was not my

own mistress then, can't you understand?

Kakutaro.—Oh, do you mean that you loved me then?

The Fox.—Yes, I was devoted to you only. I hated both those men, but I was obliged to drink to please them, and had to amuse them, or I would have got into trouble.

Kakutaro.—Rosa-san, I still have the handkerchief that you gave me. (*He takes a rose-colored handkerchief made of silk from his dress.*) Look at this, the very handkerchief that you gave me, and as you handed it to me you said: 'I will give you this, Kakutaro-san!

The Fox.—Yes, that is the same one. Just fancy your keeping it till now!

Kakutaro.—On the corner of it is written two letters: 'K' and 'R.'

The Fox.—Yes. (*The fox takes it and examines it.*) Do you understand what those letters mean? 'R' is for Rosa, and 'K' stands for Kakutaro.

Kakutaro.—But do you know that when I showed it to the boys who were working with me at the tailor's, they said that the 'K' stood for Kelly.

Osayo.—Oh, no, it's you. I stitched it on specially for you because I loved you."

Kakutaro.—Yes, I know. I told them that, but they laughed at me, saying I had made a mistake, and it made me madder and madder, and the whole time I worked there after that they made all kinds of fun of me, and played jokes upon me.

The Fox.—Oh, did they laugh at you?

Kakutaro.—Yes, they did. They still say that I am enchanted by a fox, and as the villagers don't know that you come down here to take your bath, they cannot believe that it is a real person who comes at night, and think it is a fox.

The Fox.—Ha! Ha! Ha! (*She laughs very loudly.*) And do they say I am a fox?

Kahutaro.—Yes, they do. Your skin is so white that they believe that such a person as you could not possibly dwell upon this earth, and so they declare you are a fox.

The Fox.—Ho! Ho! Ho! It is funny, very funny!. . . . . I'm no fox, I am Rosa, and you know that I am and believe me, don't you?

Kakutaro.—Of course I do, but since you are staying at the villa, I have been thinking that perhaps you have some disease, and so come here to take the hot-spring baths. Oh, Rosa-san, are you not already cured?

The Fox.—Yes, I am quite well now. The hot-spring water here is wonderful and would cure any disease. Look! (*She rolls up her sleeves and shows him her wrists.*) My body is all as beautiful as this. It is very white as you can see.

Kakutaro.—But, on that. . . . . that elbow you have some sore. It is quite a pretty one, just like a ruby!

The Fox.—Oh, do you mean this? (*She rolls up her sleeve still further, and shows him something.*) This is not a sore at all. I assure you it is a pure ruby. People are apt to think it a sore, but I am deceiving

them, and it is really a bright ruby that you can see. . . . come, touch it gently with your fingers, and you will see.

Kakutaro.—(*touches it, and finds that it is a pure ruby set very skifully into her skin. He also notices downy hair like velvet growing on her pearty white arm.*) Oh, it is a ruby! . . . . It is truly a ruby! It is just as I thought, and no sore at all!

The Fox.—Ha! Ha! Ha! (*She laughs again loudly.*)

Kakutaro.—How it glitters, Rosa-san! If you had a real sore on your skin, would it glitter like that ruby?

The Fox.—Ho! Ho! I have had another one set here. Please look! (*Saying this, she shows him her leg, on which soft hair is also growing like white velvet. A dark ruby glitters there also.*)

Kakutaro.—(*kneels before her, places her foot on his knee, and touches the ruby on her leg.*) Oh, it is true. This is a ruby too. . . . . But what lovely shoes you have on!

The Fox.—Ha! Ha! Ha! (*She stands up.*) Now I must go home, Kakutaro-san. Will you come with me? I will take you to me home if you have no place to go. I will show you the lovely avenues and streets in my native city.

Kakutaro.—Oh, I suppose the streets where you were born must be very beautiful. Oh, please forgive me for bothering you, but tell me when you expect to leave here, Rosa-san?

The Fox.—To-night . . . . I will go there, to-night.

Kakutaro.—To-night? . . . . But isn't your native place in France?

The Fox.—Yes, my country is France. . . . I was born in Paris.

Kakutaro.—In Paris? . . . . To get there, it would take me many, many days, and I should have to travel by boats and trains, shouldn't I?

The Fox.—No. It is not necessary to go there by boat or train. I will show you an easy way to get to Paris, for I know it quite well. Paris is over yonder. (*The fox points toward the upper part of the river.*) We must walk up the river for many miles, and soon we shall reach Paris. Won't you come with me, Kakutaro-san? (*She places her hand on his shoulder.*) Come, I will take you with me. I will treat you kindly, so won't you come?

Kakutaro.—(*nods his head, and rises to his feet.*) Yes, Rosa-san, I will go anywhere with you, and will you always love me deeply?

The Fox.—Of course I will, dear boy. You are truly a very 'nice' boy, and I promise you that, as soon as we reach my home in Paris, you shall have a new suit of clothes, and I will give you every kind of delicious food. Come, we must hurry! (*As they prepare to leave, a rustling is heard among the hagi-flower bushes on the right bank of the river, and the fox's two children, in the guise of girls, make their appearance. They have been crouching there for some time listening to the conversation between the fox and Kakutaro. Both of them are wearing shin-*

king white dresses. They jump on to the bridge, and bow many times.)

1st Child.—Rosa-san, Rosa-san.

2nd Child.—Kakutaro-san, Kakutaro-san.

Both Children.—We have come to meet you.

The Fox.—Oh! *(Looking back at Kakutaro,)* These girls are my maids, and they have come to meet us and to welcome you.

1st Child.—Kakutaro-san, Kakutaro-san, I will carry you on my back, for as you have had nothing to eat, you will be very weak, and will not be able to walk.

Second Child.—Kakutaro-san you know that the bed of the stream is full of rough boulders, and it is very hard and dangerous to walk there, so we shall both be very proud and happy to carry you. *(Both children walk up to Kakutaro, who is very exhausted, and gently lift him in their arms. One of them holds him by the shoulders, and the other holds his legs, and Kakutaro remains lying there very still. They run with him toward the middle part of the bridge, and as they reach it Kakutaro collapses in a dead faint.)*

The Fox.—At last we have succeeded! *(making the sound of a fox.)* Kon, Kon, Kon!

Both Children.—*(Swaying his body up and down, they answer their mother.)* Kon, Kon, Kon! *(Then the three of them, bearing Kakutaro, jump quickly down to the bed of the stream. The Fox keeps in front, and the others follow belind, and they move off*

toward the upper part of the stream, crossing many rocks and boulders on their way, and gradually disappearing from view on the right side.

There is rather a long pause, then a policeman, carrying a Japanese paper lantern, Osayo, and her mother appear round the corner of the road. They are looking in every direction as they walk, and seem to be searching. They come to the middle of the bridge and pause.)

Osayo.—(*Looking down from the bridge toward the cottage,*) Kaku-chan, Kaku-chan, please answer me, dear!

Mother.—You see, he has already disappeared. I am sure the fox has taken him!

Policeman.—(*Peeps into the cottage, and then looks round the outside of the building.*) I wonder where he is. I am sure he is not down here.

Osayo.—(*Looking toward the upper part of the stream, calls.*) Kaku-chan, Kaku-chan! Where are you? Where have you gone?

Policeman.—(*To Osayo.*) My girl, are you sure tha you saw the Fox here?

Osayo.—Oh, yes, I am certain. While Kaku-chan and I were peeping into the cottage from the window, we both saw a large white fox in the bath.

Policeman.—It is very curious! (*He stops aud thinks deeply for a moment.*)

Mother.—Now, my girl, you know that what I told you was true. How many times did I advise you! You can see plainly that he is not here!

Osayo.—(*Calling again toward the upper part of the river,*) Kaku-chan! Kaku-chan! My dear Kaku-chan!

Mother.—Though you may call his name over and over again, you will never see him any more, I am sure. Come, Osayo, my child, let us return home. (*To the policeman*) Sir, I beg your pardon for troubling you. I am very grateful to you for being so kind as to come down here with us at this time of night.

Policeman.—What do you think about searching for him in the upper part of the stream?

Mother.—No, Sir, I am sorry, but I don't think it is worth while, Sir. Please don't worry about him any more. Sir, I have quite given up hope of ever seeing him again. (*From the left side of the mountain there appers a foreign woman, robed in a light walking-dress. She is holding the arm of a foreign man. Following behind them is an old woman servant. Noting Osayo and the others wandering abont there, they are about to pass the other way. After a little hesitation, the policeman calls to the old woman:*)

Policeman.—Excure me, Madam! (*The three of them stop on the bridge.*) Excuse my rudeness, but tell me where you have been at such a late hour?

The Old Woman Servant.—(*looks very annoyed.*) My mistress and this gentleman went out for a stroll this evening, and as it got very late and they did not return, I came to meet them. (*The two foreign-*

ers look very disgusted at being so closely questioned.)

Policeman.—Well, Madam, please tell me where they have been.

The Old Woman Servant.—The lady told me that, as the moon was so beautiful, they have been wandering around the lake on the mountain.

Osayo.—(*notices the handkerschief still lying upon the rock, where Kakutaro left it. She picks it up, and shows it to the policeman.*) Sir, I found his handkerchief here. He told me that while he was in Kobe, Miss Rosa gave this to him, and he always kept it near his heart.

The Foreign Woman.—(*Hears the name of 'Rosa,' and comes toward the policeman, and glances at the handkerchief.*) What! This handkerchief is my property. It was stolen from me in Kobe! (*angrily*) Who had this handkerchief?

The Old Woman Servant.—Why, Rosa-san, surely it is yours, look! There are the marks 'R' and 'K' worked upon it! (*She turns to the foreign man.*) Mr. Kelley, it is your souvenir handkerchief.

The Foreign Man.—Oh, yes, so it is! I am very glad that it has been found, for it was a valuable keepsake to me. It is surely the same one! How was it found in this place?

The Old Woman Servant.—(*As if suddenly recollecting something,*) Oh, that lout of a boy in Kobe must have stolen it . . . . how disgusting! What a horrid fellow he is! (*to the Policeman*) Do you know that idle-looking boy who has been wandering about

here lately, and who was working for some time in Kobe?

Policeman.—Yes, I know him quite well. You know, he is enchanted by a fox, and wanders about here at night.

The Old Woman Servant.—Yes, it must be he. He knows that my mistress always comes here to take her bath, and every night he wanders about here. Last night she told me that she saw him, and when she returned home, he followed her. When she came in she looked very frightened and pale.

Policeman.—Then you mean that this lady took a bath here to-night also?

The Old Woman Servant.—Oh, no. She got such a fright last night that she would not come here this evening. Besides, her sickness is almost cured, and tomorrow she intends to return to Kobe. This gentleman came here to take her back, and to see the fine scenery of the place at the same time.

Policeman.—Oh, I see. I can understand fully now, and will give this handkerchief back to the lady.

The Foreign Woman.—(*takes the handkerchief rather proudly, and turns to the man.*) Let us go! (*to the policeman*) Good-bye!

Policeman.—Good-evening, Madam! I am very sorry to have detained you. (*The two foreigners leave arm in arm, and the old woman servant follows behind them. Soon they disappear round the cliff-road on the right. The three on the stage watch them as they go. There is a short pause. Shortly afterwards the*

light of a lantern can be seen far up in the bed of the steam. It is very indistinct, as it is a long way off. At the same time a voice can be heard in the distance, calling:)

The Voice.—Hallo, down there! Come here, everybody! Kakutaro's body has been found!

Osayo.—What! Kaku-chan is dead? (*She jumps quickly down into the bed of the stream, and is seen climbing hurriedly toward the upper part of the river. Then the policeman and Osayo's mother follows. The light of the lantern gradually gets nearer, and the voice can be heard clearer than ever.*)

The Voice.—Hallo! Come quickly! Kaku-chan's body has been found floating on the stream in the abyss of Chigo-ga-fuchi! (*The three figures gradually pass out of sight as they climb to the upper part of the stream.*)

(THE END)

A CASE OF CHILD MURDER

("Eiji-goroshi")

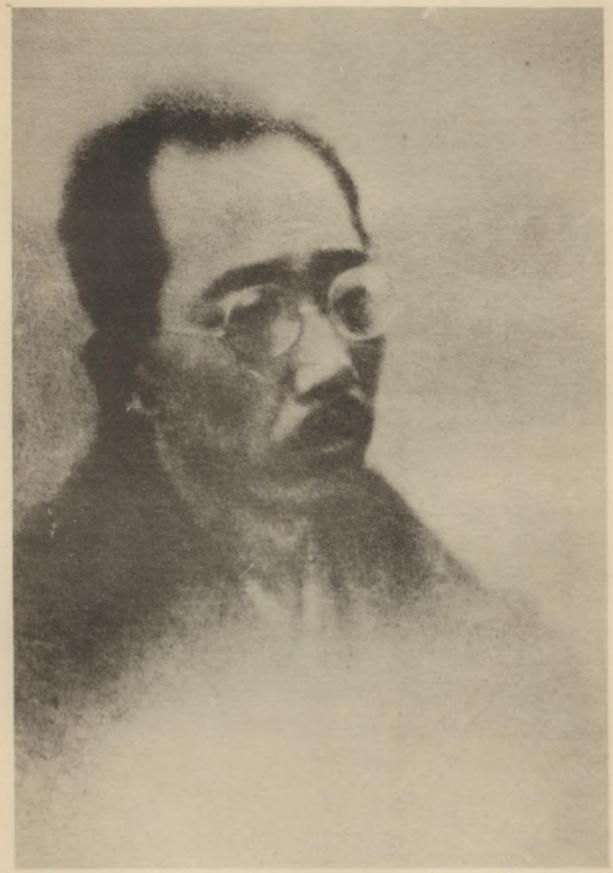
(A Play in One Act)

By

Yuzo Yamamoto,

Translated by

Eric S. Bell & Yoshinobu Tada.



Yuzo Yamamoto

YUZO YAMAMOTO

Yuzo Yamamoto, the author of the following drama, "A Case of Child Murder," was born in the little town of Tochigi- machi, in the prefecture of Tochigi, Japan, in the 20th year of Meiji (1887).

He studied at the Tokyo Imperial University, particularly specializing in German literature. After graduating from the College of Literature there, he translated a number of things from German literature, but his success lies solely in play-writing. He is undoubtedly one of the best known play-writers in Japan today.

Mr. Yamamoto's best known works published in book form are: "The Crown of Life," "Sakazaki Dewanokami," and "Kindred Spirits."

His Plays, when presented on the stage, always prove most successful, because he understands the technique and management of stage productions; and his clever dramas never fail to make an appeal to his audiences, because of the author's great gift of psychological analysis, which enables him to write deeply and also very naturally.

"A Case of Child Murder" has been presented in Japan many times, and has always proved most successful, drawing large audiences.

Eric S. Bell.

A Case of Child Murder ("Eijigoroshi")

Characters

KEISUKE KOYAMA. A Policeman, about 43 years old.
TSUGI. His Daughter, about 18 years old.
ASA SUGIHARA. A woman coolie, about 30 years old.
A Ragman.
The Errand Boy of a Wine Merchant.
The Wife of a Neighbour.

Time

The Season of Spring. Present Day.

Place

A Suburb near the City of Tokyo.

Scene

A Police-station; used at the same time as the dwelling-place of the Resident Policeman. A sitting-room and kitchen directly adjoins the office. The kitchen has an entrance from the back in the form of a Japanese sliding door, the upper half being papered. Through the open shoji window at the side of the kitchen, branches, thickly clustered with pink cherry blossoms, are seen. It is evening.

Miss Tsugi, the daughter of the house, sits absent-

mindedly on the tatami of the sitting-room. The office door, which leads into this room, opens quietly, and Koyama, the Resident Policeman, comes in from his finished duty.

Koyama.—(*Slipping off his shoes as he enters,*) A shower of rain would improve the road, for it is very dusty outside.

Tsugi.—Yes, Father, you must be tired. You better change your clothes at once. (*She brings her father's kimono.*)

Koyama.—I will do so now. (*He removes his uniform, and puts on his kimono*). There are such crowds of people outside this evening. Everyone seems to be out flower-viewing.

Tsugi.—Yes, Papa. Many of them are very merry too, and crowds have been passing here all day.

Koyama.—Well, wouldn't you like to go for a picnic tomorrow? I will be off duty, and will very gladly mind the house for you if you care to go.

Tsugi.—To-morrow?

Koyama.—Yes, child. You look very tired and fatigued from too much nursing, and it will do you a world of good to go off for the day on a cherry-viewing trip.

Tsugi.—I'm sorry, Papa, but I really feel that I would rather not go. I feel as if all my energy had left me. Nothing seems to interest me these days, not even the cherry blossoms.

A Ragman.—(*Passing the house*) Rags! Rags! Any rags for sale?

Koyama.—Yes, you may feel tired, but such a trip would cheer you up. Please go, my child.

Tsugi.—It is strange, papa, but when I see all these happy people passing the house, I feel as if I hated them!

Ragman.—(*Outside*) Any rags for sale? Have you no old rags to sell me?

Koyama.—There is a ragman outside. You better call him in.

Tsugi.—Very well, papa. (*Calling through the window to the man*) Kuzuya-san! We want you.

Ragman.—(*Sliding open the back door*) Did someone call me from this house?

Tsugi.—Yes, please come in.

Ragman.—Thank you for your kindness to me, Sir. We are having very pleasant weather these days. (*He comes into the house.*)

Koyama.—(*Opens a closet, and takes out some six or seven suits of clothes from an old basket. He sets them before the ragman.*)

Koyama.—You buy old clothes, don't you?

Ragman.—Clothes? Of course, Sir. I like to get them better than anything else, and I always give good money for them too.

Koyama.—But I am afraid that all of these are rather old.

Ragman.—That's all right, Sir. You know there are many classes of men in my trade; some won't touch such things, but I prefer old clothes to anything else you could offer me, and so, I am

sure that I can offer you a far better price than most others can do. (*Examining the clothes*) They are all women's clothes!

Koyama.—Yes, all of them are. I have lost my wife.

Ragman.—I'm sorry, Sir. I sympathize with you in your grief. You must miss her very much. (*Still looking closely at the clothes*) Oh, I see some boy's clothes here too!

Koyama.—Oh, yes; I forgot to mention them. My son has also died, so they are no further use to me now.

Ragman.—Eldest son, perhaps?—What a tragedy, Sir. You must indeed be greatly grieved. As you have told me of your sad loss, I will give you my best possible price for all these things, Sir.

Koyama.—How much will you give me?

Ragman.—Let me see—(*thinking for a moment*) I will give you seven and a half yen for the lot. That is the very highest price that you would get from anyone.

Tsugi.—(*Picking up one of the garments, and looking at it sadly*) Papa, is it not a pity to sell them in thi way?

Ragman.—(*Taking the garment from her gently*) But this, Miss, is too plain for you to wear.

Tsugi.—Oh, it is not that at all. It is not that I wish to wear it—

Ragman.—Of course, Miss, if this garment did not have such a narrow neck-band, I would give you far more for it, but unfortunately the cut of it is

too narrow, and it will be hard to sell again at any profit at all.

Koyama.—But can't you give me a little more for these things?

Ragman.—Very well, Sir,—I will give you thirty sen more. I would like to offer you eight yen, but it is impossible, for I would make nothing myself. They are all rather old, you know.

Koyama.—That will do, then.

Ragman.—Thank you, Sir. (*He takes the money out of his purse.*) (*Counting*) Seven yen, fifty, sixty, seventy eighty sen. Please see that it is right, Sir.

Koyama.—(*Taking the money and putting it away*). How is business these days with you? Is it good?

Ragman.—To tell the truth, Sir, we are having rather a hard time lately. It seems hard to get enough to earn one's daily food. Sometimes I walk all day, and get little for my pains.

Koyama.—Yes, indeed; things are not good at present. All of us experience the same thing.

Ragman.—Times are hard indeed. Has any one told you that there is a woman coolie going about disguised as a man, so that she may earn more money?

Koyama.—Yes, I have read it in the papers. Perhaps the poor woman could no longer live on a woman's wage, which is small.

Ragman.—Yes, Sir; it sometimes seems to me that we cannot get along at all, if we always do what is right and honest and just. Man sometimes is driven to anything in order that he may live, but

—pardon me, Sir; I have been too talkative. I must be going. And again, thank you, Sir, for your kindness. (*He goes out, and his voice is again heard outside, as he walks away.*) Rags! Rags! Any rags for sale?

Tsugi.—(*Sadly*) Now all of them have gone, I feel as if I miss them.

Koyama.—But, my child, if we kept them here, they would be constantly bringing back old memories and trouble, and so that is why I determined to part with them. Moreover, you know that we must pay for medicine.

Tsugi.—Oh, I see! Of course we have not yet paid for it.

Koyama.—I only wish that I could have earned more money to pay for medicine and ice.

Tsugi.—Yes, Papa; we have always been short of money, and we have had to be careful in the past as to how we spent it. We were unable to do more than we did, you know.

Koyama.—You are right, but it seems to me sometimes when I think about it, that, if we had been able to spend more, we should have been able to let them live.

Tsugi.—Yes, Papa; but we did all we could, and our regrets cannot bring them back to us now.

Koyama.—Yes, the more I think about it, the more I feel that it was I who cruelly killed them both.

Tsugi.—No, no, Papa, you must not talk in such a way. You have nothing to blame yourself for.

Koyama.—But it was my fault that I was not able to afford to help them more beneficially.

Tsugi.—There are many people in this world who lose their dear ones, even though they try ever so hard to bestow care upon them, so, Papa, you must not blame yourself so unjustly, for you did your best.

Koyama.—In spite of what you say, I still hold myself responsible. I will always feel that I let them die, when I could have done far more.

Tsugi.—Please say no more; but all the same, I wish that we were a little richer.

Koyama.—But, we are not; so it is useless to complain further! Let us have our supper at once, for I am very hungry.

Tsugi.—Very well; but, I am sorry that to-night I have nothing very tempting for you. Shall I go out and buy some tofu?

Koyama.—No, no, I want nothing more. I think you have some boiled beans, haven't you?

Tsugi.—Yes,—

Koyama.—That will do then.

Tsugi.—(*Brings a small table into the room, and prepares for supper, while Koyama turns on the electric light, and sets some incense sticks before the household shrine. It becomes darker outside. Many people pass by the door. At last Tsugi and Koyama seat themselves at the table.*)

Koyama.—I feel so lonely when we sit down to a meal.

Tsugi.—Yes, I wish it were possible to have Kenchan with us now—

Koyama.—If he were alive, and with us now, how happy we should be!—but, what use is it to talk about such things? We must try to be happy.

(The two begin to eat in silence. Suddenly, the glass-door of the office is opened from outside, and a peasant rushes into the room.)

Peasant.—Good evening, Sir!

Tsugi.—Who is it? And what do you want?

Peasant. A horrible thing has happened! We want you to come at once, Sir!

Koyama.—What is the matter?

Peasant. The matter, indeed!

Koyama.—Yes. Is there another railway suicide?

Peasant. No, no, far more serious than that.

Koyama.—What is it, then?

Peasant. A baby has been found in the bamboo grove

Koyama.—A baby?

Peasant. Yes; I wanted to take to take some bamboo shoots to the market tomorrow, so I entered the bamboo wood behind my house, and began to dig, when suddenly a baby, a dead baby, revealed itself in the hole that I was digging. As it seemed to me a very serious thing, I came at once to tell you, Sir.

Koyama.—I see. Yes, I will go with you at once.

Peasant. I am very sorry to disturb your supper, Sir, but I felt that I must tell you without delay.

Tsugi.—Must you really go, Papa?

Koyama.—Of course, my child. Please get out my uniform again.

Tsugi.—All right, Papa. (*She goes to the closet, and unfolds his uniform.*)

Koyama.—(*Quickly dressing,*) (*Speaking to the peasant*) Have you told them of this at the town office?

Peasant.—Yes, Sir; I sent a man there a little time ago. But you must come now, for it seems rather an extraordinary case to me, and we cannot do anything without your kind assistance.

Koyama.—Of course. It does seem strange.

Tsugi.—What about your supper, Papa?

Koyama.—I will have it when I come back. But you better have yours now, and not wait for me, for I may be late.

Tsugi.—Very well.

Koyama.—(*Preparing to put on his shoes*) I am ready. I will go with you at once.

(*Tsugi is left alone. A moment after the wife of a neighbour comes in from the back door.*)

Wife.—Good evening!

Tsugi.—O, good evening, Madam! (*She motions to her guest to be seated, and leaves the table.*)

Wife.—You are taking your supper; pray, don't stop for me. I will wait till you have finished.

Tsugi.—Thank you. (*Continuing quickly to eat.*)

Wife.—Will you not go to the bath-house after supper with me?

Tsugi.—I wish that I could go, but—

Wife.—Where is your father? Is he absent?

Tsugi.—He was suddenly called away, a few moments ago. He had just returned from his duty, and had

not started his supper, but had to go out again at once.

Wife.—Poor man! He must be very busy. What has happened this time?

Tsugi.—They say that a dead baby has been found in the bamboo wood.

Wife.—Oh, horrible! I suppose some immoral young woman must have got rid of her unlawful baby there.

Tsugi.—Yes, I suppose that is it.

Wife.—What a shameful creature such a girl must be! And your poor father is always the one to be troubled with such distressing things. He must sicken of such cases.

Tsugi.—Yes, Madam; but he cannot help it; it is his duty, you know.

Wife.—I know it is his duty, but there is no one who would be so conscientious as your father. Why is it that such honest folks should have so much trouble? To lose one's wife and child; it is terrible!

Tsugi.—It is our sad karma. So we just resign ourselves to it.

Wife.—You say it is our sad karma, but it is exceedingly hard for us to have such misfortunes.

Tsugi.—But fate is fate, so we must resign ourselves to it.

(She finishes her supper, and moves away from the table.)

Wife.—I am angry with this world. It seems a wicked

and unjust world sometimes.

Tsugi—(*Going into the kitchen, washes up her dishes.*) Why, Madam?

Wife.—While I was making match-boxes to-day at the factory, I was thinking about the world in general, and I wished that I could be a match-box rather than a woman.

Tsugi—Why? What an extraordinary thing to wish?

Wife.—Nevertheless it is true, Miss Tsugi! It may be my karma, but so long as this world remains unjust, I would rather by far be a match-box!

Tsugi—(*Laughing softly*) Ha, ha, ha!

Wife.—Don't laugh at me, Miss Tsugi. Match-boxes do not feel any hunger. Therefore they need not work, and are not scolded by the overseer. Theirs must be a very easy life indeed!

Tsugi.—But, Madam, ...

Wife.—But what I say is true. Match-boxes are treated very carefully. If you visit my factory some time, you will find that we treat match-boxes as they treat the sons of noblemen. They are never put on the bare floor, and they must not be too dry, or too wet. We, who make these boxes, are very miserable. They are always finding fault with us, and we are always being scolded in the presence of others; "You are always dozing!" or "You are too talkative!" or "Your efficiency is very low." I just hate the life! Why, in our factory, a mere match-box is thought far more of than a human being!

Tsugi.—Is that really true?

Wife.—If we could get enough to keep the life in us, none of us would ever go into such a place. We hunger and we thirst, and we cannot overcome it, so we must be fed, and so to get our daily food we must turn to, and be treated shamefully.

Tsugi.—Yes, the hardest thing in life is to live.

(A boy from a wine merchant's shop comes in from the back door.)

Boy.—Please excuse me, I am behind time.

Tsugi.—Have you brought *miso*?

Boy.—Yes, Miss; also some kindling wood and salt.

(The boy seems to be peering intently under the floor at the door.)

Tsugi.—What are you looking for? Have you lost something?

Boy.—I am seeking for a dog.

Tsugi.—Dog! Why, there is no dog here. There may be a few rats under the floor, but there is certainly no dog there!

Boy.—It might come here, Miss.

Tsugi.—If you play with dogs instead of hurrying with your rounds I will have to tell your master.

Boy.—I don't mind if you do, Miss.

Tsugi.—O, what a naughty boy you are!

Boy.—All the same, if I find it, it might bring me 500 yen.

Wife.—What are you talking about? What is likely to bring you such a sum?

Boy.—You know that big new brick house that belongs

to a new rich? Well, a dog has run away from there, and the one who finds it is to receive 500 yen.

Wife.—Shame on the owner I say! To spend 500 yen on a dog that has strayed is scandalous, when there are so many people these days suffering for want of food. If he can spend so much money on a dog, why doesn't he spend it on the needy?

Boy.—Yes, and they say that every day his dog is fed with the best beef that money can buy.

Wife.—And his poor servants are fed on the cheapest Chinese rice, I daresay!

Tsugi.—I think it is very wasteful to spend all that money on a dog.

Wife.—But, my child, there is often much money where it is not needed. Those who do not want often have too much.

Tsugi.—And some of us need it so badly, and we cannot get it. Oh, if only we had had enough money, I should never have lost my dear mother and brother.

Wife.—I think that perhaps you are wrong there, Miss Tsugi. Very often the rich die young, because they are rich.

Tsugi.—What is the reason?

Boy.—Perhaps it is because they eat too much. Ha, ha, ha! (*He puts his box on his shoulder quickly.*) Good-bye, and many thanks. (*He passes out of the door, shutting it behind him.*)

Wife.—Oh, I have been talking too long. I must go

to the bath before you. If your father returns soon, please come, and I will see you again there.

Tsugi.—Very well, I shall come presently.

Wife.—Good-bye, then. (*She goes out, looking up to the sky.*) Oh, what a gloomy sky it is!

Tsugi.—Is it raining again?

Wife.—No, it is not raining, but it is very cloudy and dark. The weather is very uncertain during the cherry-blossom season. Goodbye, Miss Tsugi.

Tsugi.—Good-bye. (*After a short silence Koyama, the policeman, comes in from his office.*)

Tsugi.—Oh, Papa, you are back again. Will you change your clothes first, or will you have your supper? (*She goes to get his kimono, which is hung from a hook on the wall.*)

Koyama.—I will have my supper first, for I feel very hungry.

Tsugi.—Yes, your supper was interrupted by the sudden coming of that man, and I knew that you would be very hungry when you returned, so I kept it for you.

(*Tsugi pushes out the table again before Koyama, and fills his bowl with rice. Koyama begins his supper, with his back to the audience.*)

Tsugi.—Papa, has the woman who buried her baby been arrested?

Koyama.—Not yet. It was only a little while ago that the corpse was found,—but I think that the criminal will soon be caught. Such a heartless wretch could not be allowed by God to escape.

Tsugi.—Yes, Papa, you are right. To think that a life should be destroyed, when we so badly miss our little Ken-chan!

Koyama.—The poor little baby was strangled to death with a towel perhaps. Its little throat was all bruised and blue.

Tsugi.—Oh, what a cruel and wicked deed! Its murderer must have been heartless and vile.

Koyama.—One who has never lost a dear one cannot understand what a joy and blessing it is to live. The man who kills his own child, even though it may be a new-born baby, must be a devil. The thought of arresting such a criminal makes my old body and nerves active again. Please give me a cup of tea.

Tsugi.—Have you finished your supper?

Koyama.—This pickled radish is a bit over-salted.

Tsugi.—Yes, I know it is. Papa, you seem so tired. You had better go and take your bath now, and then go to bed.

Koyama.—I don't want to take one to-day. You had better go instead, for it is several days since you have been to the bath-house.

Tsugi.—All right, I will go now.

Koyama.—You had better go at once, for this neighbourhood is rather unsafe late in the evening, and I feel uneasy when you go out alone after dark.

Tsugi.—Then I will go at once.

Koyama.—Take care of yourself. (*He takes a note-book from his pocket and begins to write in it.*)

Tsugi.—I will shut the back door, for it is safer, I think.

Koyama.—(*Still writing*) Yes, please do.

Tsugi.—(*Stepping from the floored part of the kitchen, opens the shoji of the back door, and tries to shut the outer sliding door. Suddenly she cries out:*) Oh!

Koyama.—(*Looking up in surprise*) What ever is the matter?

Tsugi.—There is someone here,—something—something black!

Koyama.—Something black? (*He rises quickly and goes to the back door.*)

Tsugi.—It seems to be moving to and fro, I fear—

Koyama.—(*Looking out of the door*) There is nothing at all!

Tsugi.—Yes, there is. Look there! (*pointing*).

Koyama.—Yes, I see now. Someone is standing there. (*He calls to the object in the dark outside.*) Who is it? What do you want? (*He seems not to have caught what is said from outside.*) What? Do you say that you want to ask the way somewhere?

The one outside.—No, I have something to ask you.

Koyama.—To ask me?

One outside.—Yes.

Koyama.—Why were you standing so silently at the back door then?

One outside.—Please excuse me, but I was rather uneasy about knocking at your door.

Koyama.—You need not feel uneasy if you have nothing to fear. Please come round to the front

door, if you have something to see me about.

Koyama.—(*To his daughter*) I will shut the back door. You go to the bath at once.

Tsugi.—Very well, Papa.

Koyama.—Please be careful, and look after yourself; I feel rather anxious about your going alone. You had better take your umbrella, for it seems that it is going to rain.

Tsugi.—Yes, Papa. (*She opens the front door. There stands Asa Sugihara, a woman coolie. She looks timidly into the room.*)

Asa.—Excuse me, Miss, I have frightened you, I think?

Tsugi.—Oh, never mind. I was a little startled at first when I saw your figure in the dark. Please come in.

Asa.—(*Enters the office very timidly. By her dress, it can be seen that she has just come from her work.*)

Tsugi.—Goodbye, Papa; I will soon be back. (*Exit.*)

Koyama.—Was it you that was wanting to see me?

Asa.—Yes.

Koyama.—What is it you want, then?

Asa.—(*Presenting a box of cakes to Koyama*) Will you kindly accept my poor present?

Koyama.—I'm sorry, but I can't accept it.

Asa.—Oh,—then please give the cakes to your boy.

Koyama.—I have no boy.

Asa.—(*Confused*)—Well—then,—then—

Koyama.—I really wish you would tell me your business quickly. What is it that you wish to ask me?

Asa.—But I wish you would accept my present, for I

have something particular to ask you.

Koyama.—I will listen to what you have to say, but, as I told you before, I cannot on any account accept anything from you.

Asa.—Perhaps your refusal is right,—

Koyama.—You don't seem to understand that an official cannot receive presents from any stranger. I am sorry, but please try to understand. Also please remember that I am not the man to be influenced by gifts. My duty is my duty and there it ends; so kindly state your business now.

Asa.—(*Very timidly*) Well, then—

Koyama.—Oh, please put that box down—what is it you want?

Asa.—(*After hanging her head for a while*) Must we register with you when we have a child?

Koyama.—Of course you must.

Asa.—But supposing that child died soon after its birth, —is it still necessary to register in such a case, Sir?

Koyama.—Even though the child is dead, you must of course report it.

Asa.—But is it not the same as if the child were not born, if it died immediately after birth?

Koyama.—Your supposition is entirely wrong.

Asa.—Then you mean to tell me that we must register the child as born?

Koyama.—Have you got your child?

Asa.—(*After a pause.*) Yes, Sir.

Koyama.—Why did you not report it until now?

Asa.—Because we had no one to send.

Koyama.—You could have asked your husband?

Asa.—But I have no husband.

Koyama.—Is he dead, then?

Asa.—Yes.

Koyama.—I'm sorry. Under the circumstances I will register the child's birth for you, though it is behind time.

Asa.—Must I really do it?

Koyama.—Yes, of course you must do it. If you don't, you will be punished by law.

Asa.—(*Hanging her head*) I don't know what to do. (*She timidly picks up the box that she had laid down, and presents it to Koyama.*) I ask you, I entreat you, Sir; can't you make an exception this time, and pass over this matter for me?

Koyama.—No, I cannot.

Asa.—Sir, I don't want to register, and I want to escape any punishment. For mercy's sake, please try to settle the matter privately for me as I ask?

Koyama.—(*Suddenly seizing the arm of the woman*) You have killed your child!

Asa.—Oh, no! God forbid! I never, never could do such a——

Koyama.—You lie! Why are you so afraid of registering your child if you are telling me the truth?

Asa.—No, no, to kill my child—Oh, I tell you I am innocent!

Koyama.—Then how did it die?

Asa.—It died,—only died.

Koyama.—It died? How? What happened that it should die?

Asa.—It was ill,—it was very ill,——

Koyama.—Illness? When was it taken ill?

Asa.—The day before yesterday.

Koyama.—The day before yesterday? (*Sternly to the woman*) And what did you do with the corpse?

Asa.—(*Tries to shake herself free from his grasp, and to get out of the door.*)

Koyama.—You devil! (*He runs after her and catches her, but as she seems strong, he throws her to the ground in his doorway, and binds her hands behind her with cord.*)

Asa.—What are you going to do with me? (*She tries to fight against being bound, but he overcomes her.*)

Koyama.—What! So you are trying to fight me, are you? I must bind you. (*He again continues to tie her arms and she struggles.*)

Asa.—If I am arrested—If you arrest me now— (*She again struggles with Koyama.*) Please—! (*Pathetically*) Please!

Koyama.—Silence! Keep still, I say, and cease your fighting!

Asa.—(*Reeling, as if faint, and overcome.*) Oh, if I am arrested now—(*She sinks to the floor weeping piteously.*)

Koyama.—(*Tightening the cords behind her, so that she cannot escape*) You impudent woman! You are a rascal! You tried to bribe me with the box of cakes, I say, you tried to—Hold up your head and listen

to what I say!

Asa.—(*She remains silent, and rolls over on her face, crying.*)

Koyama.—Hold up your face, I say! (*Seizing her by the collar, he forces her to lift her face.*)

Asa.—(*Still silent, she lifts her face. Her eyes shine with a bitter light.*)

Koyama. Woman, why did you kill your child?

Asa.—(*Silent*)

Koyama.—You must tell me all about it. What made you commit such a cruel deed?

Asa.—(*She remains silent.*)

Koyama.—(*He shakes her roughly.*) Tell me, I say! Confess the truth!

Asa.—(*Rather shaken by his rough handling, falls in a heap, but still remains silent.*)

Koyama.—What an obstinate woman you are! Why don't you answer me? You must answer my question?

Asa.—(*Still remains motionless, and silent.*)

Koyama.—You know that you are a criminal. You have committed adultery, for you said that you had no husband. Your child must be unlawful.

Asa.—(*Shakes her head sadly, but is still silent.*)

Koyama.—You lie again! You have committed this crime because you were at your wit's end what to do. Answer me, who is the man? I command you to speak!

Asa.—(*Mumbles something unintelligible in a low voice.*)

Koyama. (*Seeming to understand what she says*) What!

Not an unlawful child, you say? Your husband's child!—But you told me a few minutes ago that you had lost your husband? What do you mean by lying?

Asa.—(*In a very low voice*) It is quite true that he died, but it was only three months ago.

Koyama.—Died three months ago? Then are you sure it was your husband's child that you have killed?

Asa.—(*In a voice full of grief*) Yes, Sir.

Koayma.—Then you are more cruel than any beast. You are not a human being. To kill your own child! It is horrible! Have you no human love in you?

Asa.—(*She weeps silently and piteously.*)

Koyama.—Only the other day I lost my own child. He died of sickness. I grieve bitterly over my loss, so how could any woman with motherly instincts kill her own child?

Asa.—The young are very precious indeed, Sir; I sympathize with you if you have lost your child, too.

Koyama.—Don't speak to me of sympathy, for it sounds unnatural from you.—You can't possibly understand what it is to love one's own child; your heart is too cruel to understand anything!

Asa.—Sir, poor as I am, I have as much maternal love in me as any other woman.

Koyama.—Then why did you kill your child, I say? You are only trying now to arouse my sympathy. You are trying to move me with false words.

Answer me now truthfully. Why did you commit this crime upon your own flesh and blood?

Asa.—(*Weeping again*) I killed it—out of pity, Sir! That is why I killed it!

Koyama.—What! Out of pity, you say! Nonsense! If you had the maternal love you speak of, you would have cherished it and would have died yourself to save its precious life. What makes you say "Out of pity," when you took its wee life?

Asa.—Yes, what you say is right, Sir.

Koyama.—Then, why did you do it? Tell me.

Asa.—It is every parent's duty to cherish and to care for her child. Every parent in the world does it, but—I cannot—I cannot do it, Sir.

Koyama.—Why?

Asa.—Why, Sir——

Koyama.—Now, come; tell me all about it.

Asa.—It would be no use telling you, Sir. It would be too much to tell——

Koyama.—Well, then, I will question you more slowly. You told me that your husband died three months ago. How did he die?

Asa.—He died of illness, Sir.

Koyama.—Died of illness?

Asa.—Yes; he had a dreadful cough. One day he coughed up more than one *sho* of blood, and died. They say that he had some lung disease, but I don't know——

Koyama.—I see. Then, after that you became a woman coolie?

Asa.—No, Sir; I have been working as a coolie for over a year.

Koyama.—Then your husband has been ill all that time, and you had to work to help him?

Asa.—He had been ill for a long time before that, Sir, but a year ago, he had to cease work, for he was too ill. . . .

Koyama.—And then you took his place?

Asa.—Yes.

Koyama.—You must have been in rather straightened circumstances then, eh?

Asa.—Often we had nothing at all to eat for two or three days at a time. Worse than that, Sir; during that time, we lost two children.

Koyama.—From the same disease?

Asa.—Yes, they were always coughing up blood, and it was awful to see them suffer, for the blood in their throats nearly choked them. I often had to put my finger down to pull out great clots of blood so that they would not die.

Koyama.—And so, during that one year and a half, you lost your husband and two children?

Asa.—Yes.

Koyama.—If what you tell me is true, then you should have been more careful in bestowing greater love on your last born.

Asa.—Oh, yes, yes, I know you are right, Sir!

Koyama.—Then, why did you kill it?

Asa.—*(Bursts loudly into tears again.)*

Koyama.—What is the matter now, woman?

Asa.—(*She again falls in a heap on the floor weeping.*) Because you do not understand, Sir.

Koyama.—Why?

Asa.—It was far better to let it die than live. It was far more merciful to lose it, than for it to live and be tormented in this merciless world.

Koyama.—Are you not crazy to talk in such a way?

Asa.—No, Sir; I am sane. It is a terrible thing to let the sick linger and live on without being able to help them and to give them relief.

Koyama.—But it is very sinful and cruel to kill a healthy child.

Asa.—Yes, but I was sure that that child would grow up sick like the rest of them. Even now, the one that came before him lies in his bed deadly sick.

Koyama.—But still, I cannot see any reason for taking its life.

Asa.—Oh, I thought and thought many times before it was born. I even tried to bring on a miscarriage, but the attempt made me frightened, lest I should hurt my own body in the attempt. After it was born, I tried to kill it, but couldn't at first. Before the child was born I thought how dear life was to me, for my present child was lying sick, and needed me. It must have attention, and so I allowed the child to be born naturally.

Koyama.—You have someone looking after the child now?

Asa.—Yes, an old man.

Koyama.—Is that man too old to work?

Asa.—Yes, Sir; therefore I had to go out to earn my rice. I had to work very hard, even to the day before my child was born. Poor as I am, that baby was very dear to me. Though I could not give it enough milk, it would smile and look up into my eyes, and it made me so happy that I often pressed it to my breast and kissed it.

Koyama.—Yes, I understand.

Asa.—But I knew that, if I spent my time in caring for two children, we must all starve. I could not bear it, for the old man and the sick child must be cared for too.

Koyama.—I see. So you killed the child, so that you could work.

Asa.—Yes, the baby was a drag, and it prevented me from working.

Koyama.—Now, I begin to understand . . . . Ah . . . . (*He sighs.*)

Asa.—Oh, please forgive me, Sir.

Koyama.—But you did not realise that once you had killed your child you would be punished?

Asa.—Yes, I did think, but I was distracted . . . .

Koyama.—Why did you destroy it in such a cruel way?

Asa.—I could not help it.

Koyama.—You could have given the child to someone else to to look after; many women would have been glad to take it from you.

Asa.—Give it to someone else? How could I do such a thing without money? You know that there is no one that will take a child unless he gets money.

Oh, how terrible it is to be so poor, and what misery it brings us, Sir! Although I killed my baby, I did not do it wickedly; I did it from the mercy that was in my heart. It nearly killed me to do it, I tell you. Oh, Sir, be merciful this time, and overlook my crime!

Koyama.—Now you have told me the exact truth, I feel deeply for you, but I cannot overlook your crime,—it is my duty to arrest you, and bring you before justice.

Asa.—Oh, I know it well; but for pity's sake, spare me that, I beg you, Sir!

Koyama.—It is impossible, especially now that the child's corpse is found.

Asa.—What? The baby found?

Koyama.—Yes. You buried your baby in the bamboo thicket.

Asa.—I am lost! (*She falls down in grief and weeps.*)

Koyama.—All I can advise you now is to confess everything, and to tell the truth; that is the only way to lessen your penalty. What is your name? (*He takes out a note-book and prepares to write.*)

Asa.—(*Answers nothing, but only weeps silently.*)

Koyama.—You must answer, for it will be the worse for you if you don't; what is your name?

Asa.—(*Still weeping*) Asa is my name, Sir.

Koyama.—(*Writing in his book, goes on questioning calmly.*) Your husband's name?

Asa.—Sugihara; Sadajiro Sugihara.

Koyama.—He died three months ago, did you say?

What was his calling?

Asa.—A coolie, like myself.

Koyama.—Residence,—the place where you live?

Asa.—Shimo-Meguro.

Koyama.—Shimo-Meguro in the village of Meguro, the county of Ebara, in a suburb of Tokyo. Yes—What is the number of your house?

Asa.—Number 2-3-5-7.

Koyama.—Number 2-3-5-7. Have you this house to yourself, or have you other people living with you?

Asa.—We live alone.

Koyama.—And when was the baby born?

Asa.—On the tenth day of the month before last.

Koyama.—That was the tenth of February. Was it a boy?

Asa.—Yes.

Koyama.—And the day on which you killed it?

Asa.—(*With a woeful expression*) It was on the night of the day before yesterday.

Koyama.—How did you kill it?

Asa.—It happened that I was on the way home from my work, just as I am today. I was walking near Gyoninzaka, and the baby began to cry. It cried and cried, as if it were being burnt. I wanted to give it milk but I couldn't. I did not know what to do.

Koyama.—Why couldn't you give it any milk?

Asa.—Because I hadn't any to give. Perhaps the food I had been having was too poor. I had been unable to nurse my child for some days before that.

Koyama.—And?

Asa.—I only had to let the child suckle my dry breast, for I could do nothing more.

Koyama.—And then?

Asa.—The baby went on crying;—I was desperate. Then at last it fell asleep through exhaustion from crying.

Koyama.—It was then perhaps that you killed it?

Asa.—(*Remains silent.*)

Koyama.—And how did you do it? With a towel?

Asa.—(*Silent*)

Koyama.—What did you use when you killed it?

Asa.—(*Suddenly is taken violently ill with a fit of cerebral anaemia, and falls backwards. Koyama in great confusion bends to her assistance. Just then the door opens and Tsugi comes in.*)

Koyama.—Oh, you have just come back in time. Please help me at once!

Tsugi.—Oh, Papa, whatever is the matter—yes, what can I do?

Koyama.—This woman is ill. Let us carry her into our room. (*He and Tsugi carry her gently into the sitting-room, laying her on the floor.*) There is no need for a pillow; we must keep her head low. Put something under her legs and feet. (*She puts a stool under the coolie's feet, and takes off her straw sandals. Koyama brings a cup of water, and sprinkles her face and breast with it.*)

Tsugi.—Papa, you must unbind those cords. The poor thing is in a wretched condition.

Koyama.—(*Trying to untie the cords*) Yes, she looks in a sorry plight.

Tsugi.—(*Rubbing her legs*) It seems to me a rather distressing case, Papa.

Koyama.—Why, my dear, have you listened to what she has been telling me?

Tsugi.—Yes; but I stood outside, because I did not care to enter while the poor woman was telling you all that wretchedness.

Koyama.—There are indeed many unfortunate people in this world.

Tsugi.—Look, she seems to be coming to herself.

Koyama.—Let her rest awhile. In spite of her weakness, she will soon be all right, and will be able to walk again. All the sorrow and suffering that she has gone through has caused her to take this fit.

Tsugi.—Papa, will you really arrest this woman?

Koyama.—Yes, I really must, my child, although I have committed precisely the same crime myself, for I let my wife and——

Tsugi.—Don't say that, Papa. It is not true.

Koyama.—This woman killed her child; I also killed my wife and child. The only difference is this: she did it directly, and I did it indirectly.

Asa.—(*Suddenly sitting upright, and then standing*) Yes, I see now; I was wrong. I killed it. I am to blame!

Koyama.—Oh, you feel better? You have come to yourself?

Asa.—Yes Sir, I am better now,—I don't know what was the matter with me; but I have heard what you have said, and now I know that I was wrong, unpardonably wrong. In the future, I will do my utmost to do what is right, so for mercy's sake pardon me, I say. (*Noticing Tsugi*) Oh, Miss; when I first came here tonight I frightened you a little—I am so sorry. I have committed a very wicked deed, and so I was too timid and frightened to enter your house. When you first saw me, I was striving hard to assume a nonchalant air, but it was impossible. And when I entered your father's house, I became so frightened. My baby's face haunts me night and day, and, wherever I go, I seem to see it. When I am at my work, helping to drive in a post for the foundation of some building, I feel that I am striking cruel blows on my darling's head. I cannot stand it, and it makes me desperate. If I am arrested now, all will be lost; therefore I came to see your father, and to get his kind help and advice. (*She look at her hands, and seeing the cords have been removed from her wrists*) Sir, you are kind indeed to take those ropes from my wrists. Oh, Sir, how shall I ever be able to thank you enough? (*She bows her head several times in gratefulness.*)

Koyama.—(*Remains silent.*)

Asa.—(*Turning to Tsugi*) Miss, I am saved, saved! I am now saved from the worst that could happen to me. (*Tsugi hangs her head because she cannot*

answer.) I only get one yen thirty sen a day, and it is little enough, but, as long as I can work, we can get along. (*Turning to Koyama*) Sir, again I thank you from the depths of my heart. You are a good and merciful man to have made me free.

Tsugi.—Papa, she is so happy now, and surely you can do something?

Koyama.—(*Hangs his heard, looks serious, but does not answer.*)

Asa.—Oh, Sir, speak! Speak to me, and tell me what is to happen! . . . . Then, I am to. . . . Oh! (*She falls to the floor weeping.*) (*There is a heavy silence for a few moments.*)

Asa.—(*Still crying*) Sir, please bind my arms again. . . . .

Tsugi.—But, if my father arrests you now, you will be in great trouble?

Asa.—I must resign myself to my sad fate . . . . I am lost!

Tsugi.—But . . . .

Asa.—All through my life I shall be bound. Unhappiness, poverty, and misfortune will bind me closer than these ropes; so it is all the same to me,—bind me again, I say . . . .

Tsugi.—But what will become of your sick child and the old man whom you look after and care for?

Asa.—Oh, the thought of them drives me to despair, and . . . . (*She begins to weep again.*)

Koyama.—Will you not go to your house now and see your child? I can at least manage that for you.

Asa.—Don't ask me to do that, Sir; I cannot! If I see them now, I shall never be able to part from them again.

Koyama.—Yes, it will be a very painful thing for you to see them, I realise fully.

Asa.—(*Rising a little, and looking at him*) Sir!

Koyama.—Yes?

Asa.—I have one thing to ask you.

Koyama.—What is it?

Asa.—I have with me here what remains out of my wages. Please will you take this money to my house?

Koyama.—Of course I will do what you ask.

Asa.—Oh, thank you, Sir. Please take it for me and give it to the old man. (*She hands her purse to the policeman*).

Koyama.—Please trust me. I will look after the money and will hand it to your family without fail.

Asa.—Thank you kindly, Sir. (*Silence for a few moments.*)

Asa.—Sir!

Koyama.—Yes?

Asa.—How many years shall I have to stay in prison?

Koyama.—I am afraid that I cannot tell you exactly, —perhaps for four or five years. Perhaps in your particular case, if you tell the truth to the court, and tell them all you have told me, they may be merciful to you, and you may be allowed to return to your home, but that is not for me to say.

Asa.—Oh, thank you for saying that, Sir. (*Short silence*

again).

Asa.—Sir.

Koyama.—What is it?

Asa.—May I ask you just one thing more?

Koyama.—Yes, certainly.

Asa.—You told me that they had found my baby. Where is it now?

Koyama.—I sent the body to the district office.

Asa.—Cannot I look at it again?

Koyama.—No, it is better for you not to see it, I think.

Asa.—Yes,—perhaps you are right.

Koyama.—If you look at it, it will be harder for you to bear your trouble.

Asa.—Yes. . . . but, when I buried it and laid its little body in the hole, it seemed to look at me, and its eyes seemed to pierce me with a look of terror. Oh, when I think of it! . . . . (*A short silence.*)

Asa.—Sir, I implore you to bind my hands again at once.

Koyama.—No, no; there is no need for it now.

Asa.—(*Bows slightly with a look of sad gratefulness to the policeman.*)

Koyama.—Now, Tsugi, I must go with this poor woman to the Police Court at once.

Asa.—Yes, please take me as quickly as you can! (*Koyoma goes away with Asa. Tsugi looks after them sadly and thoughfully. Outside the rain is heard, and a melancholy wind moans round the house.*)

(THE END)

THE AWAKENING

("Nobijitaku")

(A SHORT STORY)

By

Toson Shimazaki

Translated by

Eitaro Sayama & Eric S. Bell.

Toson Shimazaki

TOSON SHIMAZAKI

Haruki Shimazaki (Toson is his pen-name), the author of the following story, 'The Awakening,' was born in the 5th year of Meiji, in a far away place in the mountains of Kiso, in the province of Nagano, Japan.

When he was a boy he came to Tokyo and studied English Literature at the Meiji Gakuin. After graduating from that school, he became a school-teacher in a school at Komuro, in his native province. After that he taught in a school in Sendai.

When he first began to write he was known as a poet, and his writing was always romantic and idyllic. He showed a vivid sense of sentimentalism in all his poems.

Later, he became influenced by naturalism, due to his love and keen study of European literature.

His first great novel, 'Hakai' (Apostasy), which was published in the 39th year of Meiji, marks one of the epoch-making works of naturalism in Japan. Then followed 'Sakura no Mi no Jukusuru Koro' (When the Cherries Ripened), 'Shinsei' (New Birth), and other excellent stories.

In writing, Mr. Shimazaki never fails to get at the truth that lies at the depths of life. His mode of expression is soft and tender. I must not forget to mention that his 'Arashi' (Storm) is one of his most loved works.

Eric S. Bell.

The Awakening ("Nobi Jitaku")

As is the case with most girls of fourteen or fifteen years old, Sode-ko, at that age, had become rather indifferent to her dolls.

Sode-ko had been a mere child in the way she fussed about the dresses and underwear for her dolls. How many little gowns and hoods she had made for them, and what enjoyment it had brought to her childhood! She had possessed various kinds of dolls; some of the cheaper ones had been bought at a toy-shop in the neighbourhood, and a few of these had lost their heads, and some had been thrown away, because of their smeared faces and broken noses. But in her collection was one particular doll which her father had bought her once when she visited Maruzen's with him before the great earthquake disaster, and this one had the longest life of them all. This beautiful doll was a new arrival from Germany, and was dressed in real European style. It had cost little, but was strongly made. It was a boy doll, with brown clustering curls, and when it was laid on its back it closed its pretty round eyes, and when it was raised into a sitting position it opened them wide again.

This doll was kept upstairs in an honoured place amongst her very best toys. Sode-ko spoke to it and treated it as if it were a real boy. She adored it with such love that she often embraced and caressed it with

fervour. She carried it in her arms, and every day she dressed and undressed it, and even made it a little bed and a tiny pillow to rest upon. Whenever she happened to be absent from school with a cold, it was always this particular doll which was chosen to sit cross-legged near her bed, and with its smiling face it seemed to listen intently to the fairy tales which she told it.

A little girl who lived near by would often call upon Sode-ko, and would say;

"Sode-ko-san, let us play."

Her name was Mitsu-ko, and her hair was cut across her brow in the style of little girls who attend kindergarten. Sometimes Sode-ko would go to see her when she had a little time to spare, and they would play happily together, making all kinds of pretty things from folded paper, or amusing themselves in other ways. At such times, the boy doll was always with them.

But Sode-ko's love and devotion for her dolls gradually waned, and she did not go to play with Mitsu-ko so often as before. However, before she had finished the first course of the higher elementary school, being fond of the company of other children, she could not be without someone or something to play with, so she began to bring a little boy, of two years of age, the son of a neighbour, to her house. But he was a very quiet baby compared with the headstrong Mitsu-ko, her former playmate.

His name, Kinnosuke, suited him well. He had a lovely face, with plump cheeks which dimpled merrily

when he smiled. He was very obedient to Sode-ko, and so they got on well together. How much easier it was to amuse him than to amuse Mitsu-ko, who was restless, and often proved too much for Sode-ko! She was able to go anywhere she liked carrying this baby boy like a doll in her arms, or if she desired, she could keep him always at her side.

Kinnosuke was born in the month of January, two years before, but he could hardly speak at all. The only sounds that came from his rose-bud lips were "uma, uma," or some sounds to that effect. The only other word that he knew was "Char-chan," and this he used when he wanted to address his mother, or any other person who was dear to him.

When he was with Sode-ko, he was often brought .nto close contact with her father and her two brothers, but he never once addressed them as "Char-chan," for this word was kept specially for the ones who were specially dear to him. It was Ohatsu, the maid-servant, who had first brought Kinnosuke to play with Sode-ko, for she too was extremely fond of little children.

"Char-chan!" was the cry from the child as he toddled toward the sitting-room to seek for Sode-ko. "Char-chan!" And when he went into the kitchen to seek for Ohatsu, this also was the name that he called. He would cling, intensely happy, to the shoulders of Sode-ko or Ohatsu, or would follow them about, hanging onto their skirts.

In March snow fell, and covered the town like cotton-wool, and again completely melted away in the

night. But there was no little voice calling Mitsu-ko then. It was always "Kinnosuke-san, Kinnosuke-san!" instead.

"Sode-ko-san, why don't you play with me now? Hsve you forgotten me?"

Mitsu-ko's voice was heard calling from the window of a neighbouring upstairs window. Her precocious girlish voice sounded clear in the early spring air.

Sode-ko had been busy preparing for an entrance examination of a certain girls' school, and had returned home late from class. As she approached the house, she heard the shrill voice of Mitsu-ko, but passed on without paying any heed to her call. She entered her home and found Ohatsu sewing and playing with Kinnosuke near the paper shutters of the sitting-room.

That afternoon, Sode-ko provoked Kinnosuke, and for the rest of the day he never left Ohatsu's side.

"Char-chan!"

"Yes, Kinnosuke-san."

Thus these two exchanged words of love with one another in the presence of Sode-ko, and each time that the baby called to her, she smiled lovingly upon it.

"Char-chan!"

"Yes, Kinnosuke-san."

"Char-chan!"

"Yes, Kinnosuke-san."

Ohatsu's voice became so loud that Sode-ko's father appeared at the door with a smiling face.

"What a noise you are both making! From my room it sounds as if you were both singing a duet!"

"Sir," she said, smiling in turn from Sode-ko to Kinnosuke, "I love little Kinnosuke very much, and he and Sode-ko have had a quarrel today." This remark made the father laugh. Sode-ko began to feel embarrassed as she looked at the baby who refused to leave Ohatsu's side. The little fellow was so fair in complexion that one almost wished he had been a girl. His silken eyebrows, his little parted lips, his short downy hair, and his childish brow were very pretty to see. His somewhat sulky yet innocent expression, as he looked at Sode-ko, made him even prettier to look upon. There was no such sweetness in the lifeless doll that Sode-ko used to adore with such passion.

"After all, Kinnosuke-san is Sode-ko's doll," said the father good-naturedly.

Sode-ko's father was a widower, but somehow he had managed to bring up his children alone, as men who lost their wives in early manhood are often able to do. But he must not laugh at his daughter for treating Kinnosuke like a doll, for after all, wasn't Sode-ko her father's doll too? Father had always chosen his daughter's dolls himself, and had carefully chosen the best one from Maruzen's stock of German dolls. Just as Sode-ko had made many dresses for her dolls, so had her father chosen the most tasteful *kimono* for his little girl.

"Sode-ko-san looks wretched in such plain frocks. When are you going to allow her to wear brighter and more becoming clothes?"

This remark would sometimes be made by lady

visitors, but her father took no heed of such remarks. His daughter's clothes must be as neat as possible, and always according to his own taste. He always had chosen her clothes for her, for he wanted to keep her a child as long as he could, and liked to look upon her as his own pet doll.

One morning, Ohatsu was working in the kitchen, and turning round suddenly, she saw Sode-ko standing near her. She was extremely pale, and hung her head in silence.

"Sode-ko-san, what is the matter?"

At first, Ohatsu was puzzled, for the child did not answer, but only stood silently with hung head. Suddenly, an older woman's intuition told her the truth. She was a strong woman, and seeing that the child looked weak and ill, she took her gently in her arms and bore her to the sitting-room. She laid her down in the corner of the room, and said as kindly as possible:

"You need not be anxious, Sode-ko-san. I know what is the matter, and I will attend to you . . . it is every young woman's experience . . . you had better remain away from school today, and keep to your bed."

Sode-ko had no mother and no grandmamma to tell her what would happen to her when she reached the first stages of womanhood, and such a thing was so unexpected to Sode-ko. It had come just as she was very busy with her lessons preparing for her entrance examinations, and she seldom stayed away from

school.

When the warm spring sun of March was shining through the shutters of the sitting-room, her father came to see her, and enquired anxiously from Ohatsu about his daughter's condition.

"She is a little . . ."

She replied vaguely to the question put to her. Sode-ko was silent, for staying in bed made her unhappy, and she was also rather restless. Her father was very anxious about her, and visited her room many times that day. Ohatsu, seeing his anxiety, was unable to conceal the child's real condition any longer.

"Sir, Sode-ko-san's illness is nothing to be anxious about."

On hearing this, the father left the room in doubt. He had always been in the habit of acting as mother to his child, looking after her clothes, and attending to her with the utmost care, but somehow today he felt that he no longer possessed the confidence of his young daughter. He felt that he was only the poor male parent, who could not ask anything further from Ohatsu.

"What is the time now, by the way?" he remarked as he was passing out of the door, and glancing at the clock, he saw that it was ten o'clock.

"Her brothers will be back at noon," he went on, "Ohatsu, if the children enquire what is the matter with Sode-ko, tell them that as she had a headache I bade her remain home from school."

The father pondered over the questions that her

brothers would ask when they came home from school, and in his mind he was puzzling what to answer them.

A little before noon, the two brothers returned one after the other, in very good spirits. The first, finding Sode-ko in bed, said in surprise:

"What are you doing there? Whatever is the matter?" Sode-ko shrank back a little in her bed when she saw his jeering face. It was hard for her to keep back her tears. He knew nothing about her indisposition, and seemed to understand nothing, but continued roughly.

"How can you stay away from school only because you have a headache? You molly-coddle!"

"Don't be so hard on her," Ohatsu answered, trying to make him be quiet. "I advised her to remain at home. Do not blame her, but me."

A strange silence followed, and even the father was unable to explain things in any better way. He paced to and fro along the corridor of Sode-ko's room, and it seemed to him that the last day of his daughter's childhood had come. The day when she was no longer his cherished doll had arrived.

"Ohatsu, I beg you to take charge of Sode-ko." After saying this, he went back to his room.

Sode-ko spent a distressing and hateful day in bed. In the evening, she heard Mitsuko's high voice, mingled with the voices of other little girls and boys playing outside. The evening was mild and sweet, and Sode-ko knew that young green grass would be spring-

ing up freshly in the night, but sad thoughts weighed heavily upon her mind.

The next day, she was able to dress herslf and was going to school as usual, for she felt she must study very hard, or she would have to stay one more year in her present school. Just as she was leaving, Ohatsu told her of her own experience when she first became a woman.

" With me, it was very late. It happened when I was seventeen. I wish I had told you about it earlier. I have often thought of speaking to you, but I feared it might be too early, so I kept silence until now. I think that you better absent yourself from the gymnastic lesson today, Sode-ko-san."

Uneasy and anxious, blushing and confused at the mere thought of this thing, Sode-ko went off to school. She wanted hard to understand this change, which, once gone through, seems quite a natural thing, and she puzzled hard over the possible reasons for its occurrence. She had been told everything by Ohatsu, but she ardently wished that her dear mother were yet alive and could have folded her in her arms and comforted her at such a time. When she arrived at school she had a feeling that she was not quite the same as usual. She seemed to have lost her freedom, and felt constrained and depressed. She seemed to have been suddenly separated from her playmates of yesterday, and looked sadly at the other children playing merrily with their teacher at ball and skipping-rope in the corner of the playground.

A week later her health was quite restored. All that flows is pure. As the young grass gathers strength to grow from the snow of spring, so did Sode-ko rapidly become stronger and more full of life. She looked about her and said to herself:

"At last, I feel well and at ease again in my heart." But something struck her as she looked round her. It was a deep feeling of sadness at the thought of parting with her childhood. She could no longer look at the children with the same eyes as before, and when she beheld Mitsu-ko running merrily around the house, with laughing, artless face, and her little head of dark fleecy hair, she longed to be back again in her own innocent childhood.

The difference between man and woman was plain to her now. Quite unlike her free and easy-going brothers, she felt that she must stand on her guard. If she had not yet thoroughly learned about the world of grown-up people, she had at least peeped into it, and she was filled with wonder at its inexpressible mysteries.

Ohatsu, who loved children dearly, would often bring Kinnosuke to her home and play with him. The innocent boy clung to Sode-ko's shoulders, or followed her about as usual.

"Char-chan!"

There was no change in the sweet voice of Kinnosuke. But Sode-ko felt that he could not hold him in her arms as she used to do in the days that had passed.

Sode-ko's mother had died from profuse bleeding after childbirth. As she was dying, a red tide of blood ebbed from her poor tired body, and so she died.

The tide that had so rapidly ebbed from the mother's body flowed again—after fifteen years—in the doll-like frame of the daughter, in exchange for her death. A tide that moves in and out to the waxing and waning of the moon in the sky, a miracle, yet not a miracle—this was far too great a problem for Sode-ko to comprehend. That it ebbed and flowed regularly, as everybody said, she could not believe. An unfounded anxiety constantly troubled her and destroyed her happiness, and Sode-ko, in this uneasiness of her heart, often trembled and panted on the wayside which leads from the world of children to the kinddom of grown-ups.

THE END

THE STORY OF A FALLEN HEAD

By

Ryunosuke Akutagawa

(A SHORT STORY),

Translated by

Eiji Ukai & Eric S. Bell.

For a short biography and a portrait of Ryunosuke Akutagawa the reader will kindly refer to Book II.

The Story of a Fallen Head

PART I

Khashoji, a Chinese cavalryman, throwing aside his sabre, clung to the head of his horse in panic. He was sure that his neck had been badly slashed. He remembered having been struck with something, and at the same time he had frantically clung to his horse's neck. The animal may also have been wounded, for the very moment when Khashoji bent his body upon his saddle, the animal gave a loud neigh, tossed its muzzle in the air, and immediately charged into the centre of the enemy's cavalry, and began to gallop furiously across the wide Manchurian high-growing millet-fields. A few gun-shots came from behind, but Khashoji seemed to hear them as in a dream.

The millet-stalks, which were taller than a man, were trampled down by the madly-galloping horse, and as he rushed through them, they rose and fell like the waves of an angry sea. From right and left they swept Khashoji's pig-tail from side to side. They struck his uniform, and smeared him with the dark-red blood which ran from his neck. But his brain was too confused to notice these things clearly. Only the simple fact that he had been wounded was branded upon his consciousness with a terrible certainty. "I'm wounded! I'm wounded!" he repeated mechanically over and over

again to himself, and he wildly kicked at his horse which was already covered from head to foot with sweat.

Only ten minutes before, Khashoji, starting from a Chinese encampment, had been reconnoitering with some of his fellow-soldiers in the vicinity of a hamlet beyond a river, and as they were crossing a field of already-yellowing giant millet, they came upon a troop of Japanese horsemen. The encounter was so sudden that both sides had scarcely time to raise their guns or sabres. The Chinese perceiving a number of caps and uniforms decorated with red-ribbed lines—which distinguish the Japanese soldiers—drew their sabres immediately, and instantly their horses were charging into the enemy's line. Naturally, under such sudden circumstances, the thought of being killed never entered their heads. "The enemy!" or "Kill them!" was their only idea. Turning their horses suddenly roundabout, and grinding their teeth like angry wolves, they furiously charged the Japanese cavalry. The enemy must have felt the same impulse, for in an instant the Chinese found themselves surrounded with a host of terrible-looking faces. With them were intermingled numberless swords, flashing and hissing in every direction.

From that moment Khashoji lost all sense of time. He remembered strangely and clearly that the tall millet-stalks had swayed beneath his charging horse as if in a storm, and that red-hued sun was glaring down above their waving ears. But how long the noise of

the battle had continued, or what losses had occurred, he could not remember at all.

He also recollected that in the confusion of the moment he had shouted madly and had frantically brandished his sabre. Once it had glittered with the colour of fire, but he could not remember whether it had struck anything. The hilt of his sword had become grimy and greasy with sweat. At the same time he felt a terrible thirst in his throat. Then all of a sudden there appeared right in front of him, a threatening-looking Japanese horseman, with his mouth wide open, and with eyes so dilated that his eyeballs seemed to be jumping out of their sockets. From a big rip in his red-lined cap peeped the top of a head shaped like a chestnut.

Instinctively Khashoji raised his sabre and drove it down upon the ugly head and cap with all his strength. But what resisted his stroke was not the cap or the head beneath it, but the hard steel of the sword with which his assailant suddenly parried the blow with the splendid skill of a Japanese swordsman. The clashing sound of the two swords rang out with awful clarity amidst the deafening noise of the conflict, and a penetrating odour of polished steel sharply entered his nostrils. At the same time the broad sword of his opponent flashed in the sunshine, and flew widely round his head, and he felt something unspeakably cold entering the joints of his neck with a cruel hissing sound.

The horse continued to rush headlong through the almost endless millet-fields, with Khashoji on its back.

The din of fighting men and horses, and the clash of swords were now hushed. The autumn sunshine in Liaotung was serene and peaceful. It was like an autumn afternoon in Japan.

Poor Khashoji was groaning with the pain of his wound, which was emphasised by the rocking movement of his horse. But there was a deeper meaning in the moans which broke through his grinding teeth. He was not only struggling against bodily pain, but he was being tormented with an agony that was spiritual—he was crying out against the sudden terror of death which he felt was upon him. To say farewell to life filled him with an unspeakable sorrow. A deep resentment against all men and their worldly affairs for causing him to be mortally wounded surged in his heated brain. He was angered at having to leave the world. Thoughts of this kind flashed one by one through his brain, inflicting endless sorrow upon him, and as these feelings came and went, he cried out in a heart-rending groan, "I'm dying! I'm dying!"

He cursed the Japanese cavalry, and then in gentler tones he muttered the loved names of his parents. But already he was so exhausted that as soon as these cries rose to his lips, they changed into senseless, hoarse moans.

"Oh, how unhappy I am! What a misery it is to have been brought here in the very prime of my life, to fight and be killed like a dog! What a hateful beast is that Japanese who tried to kill me! What fools those officers were to have sent me on that re-

connaissance! And how detestable are the two fighting powers, China and Japan!

"But even more abominable than these are all the human beings who have in any way been responsible for making me a soldier. They are all my enemies! Through the stupidity of these people I am obliged to give up my life and leave the world in which I still have so many things to do. Alas! what an idiot I have been to have allowed myself to be the tool of circumstance and to have let these people do just as they liked with me!"

These thoughts surged through his brain one after another as poor Khashoji continued on his mad stampede through the high millet-fields.

Being surprised by the rush of the horse, flocks of quail here and there started up in confusion. The horse paid little heed to anything. It only felt its master clinging to its back, sometimes nearly falling from the saddle, but on and on it galloped, with froth dripping from its mouth.

Khashoji might have continued his perilous journey on the back of his horse for that whole day, and he might have kept going until the copper-hued sun had sunk in the western sky, complaining to heaven in his misery and groaning incessantly. But where the fields gradually began to slope down towards a narrow and dirty river which ran through the tall millet-fields, a few willow-trees, with their lower boughs still covered with withered leaves, stood solemnly in his way on the brink of the stream. Just as his horse made a dash

through them, he was roughly torn from his saddle by the branches, and was deposited headlong on the muddy bank that bordered the stream.

At that instant some old association of the past flashed into his mind, and he fancied he saw before him a brilliant yellow flame burning in the sky. It was the same bright, yellow flame he had so often watched when he had been a child, the fire that burnt under the big kitchen oven of his home. "My God! Look at the fire burning!" he muttered, and the next instant he had lost consciousness.

PART II

But did Khashoji really faint when he was thrown from his horse? It is true that he had been unconscious of any pain from his wounded neck, and he distinctly remembered lying helpless on the muddy bank of a lonely river, smeared from head to foot with mud and blood. As he lay there he gazed up into a clear blue sky, and across his vision a few branches of willows waved to and fro.

How densely blue the sky seemed to him compared with any he had ever looked at hitherto! It appeared as if he were peering from below into a gigantic, inverted jar of indigo. At the bottom of the jar, clouds like gathering foam were drifting, and as fast as they came they disappeared again behind the quivering leaves of the willows.

So was it possible that Khashoji had been unconscious? Between his eyes and the blue sky, how-

ever, floated many curious things like shadows, things that did not exist at all, but merely visions of his fevered brain. First there appeared the old skirt which his mother used to wear. When he had been a child, how often he had clung to it in joy or sorrow! Poor Khashoji stretched out his hands to grasp it, but it at once eluded him. It flapped like transparent silk-gauze, allowing the drifting banks of clouds to be seen through its folds like glittering mica, and then it disappeared altogether.

Then behind that gauzy film appeared the same vast fields of sesame which had grown at the rear of his house—the sesame fields, which in mid-summer were dotted with delicate, pale flowers. He tried hard to see if he and his brothers were playing there, but there was no sign of a human being. He could only see the ghastly, pale flowers and leaves of the sesame basking in a dim sunshine, and soon they also vanished into the blue of the sky.

Then a strange thing appeared, wriggling in the sky. It proved to be a big 'Dragon-lantern,' the kind which is carried in the streets during religious festivals. It was some twenty feet long, and its body was a framework of bamboo, covered with paper. On it was painted in red and blue a gorgeous dragon. Though it was bright day-light, the candles in the lantern were alight, and as it floated in the air the lantern looked to him like a real, living creature. He noted how its long whiskers waved to and fro as it moved along. And lo! it too gradually melted from his sight, then sud-

denly disappeared altogether.

Succeeding this strange dragon, the pretty, delicate foot of a woman began to take shape in the blue dome of the sky. The foot was bound after the manner of Chinese women. It was very thin and slender, and no more than five inches long. At the end of each gracefully-bent toe, the soft, white flesh showed itself through a delicately pale nail. The memory of this slender foot brought a deep sorrow to the heart of Khashoji. Oh, if he could but touch that delicate foot again! But he knew that such an accomplishment was quite impossible, for a distance of hundreds of miles lay between Khashoji and the place where the foot was seen. Then suddenly the foot became transparent and evaporated into the shadows of the clouds, as all the other visions had done.

It was then that Khashoji felt a strange, lonely feeling in the depths of his heart, a feeling such as he had never experienced before. Above his head the endless blue sky glared dumbly down upon him. Under that self-same sky all the miseries of human existence must continue, and men must accept their destinies whether they liked it or not. They would continue being blown about like helpless leaves which are swept here and there by the winds of heaven. Oh! what great loneliness he felt! And a deep heart-rending sigh escaped his dry lips.

Suddenly between his eyes and the sky there appeared a host of Japanese cavalry. They were charging down upon him at a furious pace. But just as

they were about to trample upon him they vanished from his sight again as quickly as they had appeared. If it had not been a vision, he would have raised his voice in a mad cheer so as to forget his intense loneliness for one short minute. As he was thinking this, the troop of cavalry completely disappeared.

Then tears began to roll down his cheeks. He began to think over the shameful way in which he had lived, and as he raised his wet eyes to the sky, he felt a desire to fall at the feet of everyone whom he had harmed, and to ask for their forgiveness.

"If I am ever rescued, I will compensate for my ugly past by living a better life!" As these words were wrung from his heart, he again sobbed bitterly. The endless blue sky only stared cruelly down upon him, and foot by foot, and inch by inch it seemed to be dropping upon him and pressing heavily upon his breast. No more visions passed before him now. He sighed again, his lips suddenly quivered, and gradually his eyes closed.

PART III

It was an early Spring morning in the following year after the Sino-Japanese war. In a room of the Japanese Embassy in Peking a Japanese military attache, Major Kimura by name, was chatting over coffee and cigars with a certain Mr. Yamakawa, a Bachelor of Science, and a civil engineer of the Japanese Agricultural Department, who had just been sent to China on some official business. These two men were talking in a

very leisurely way, and had forgotten all the business which they had in hand. Though it was still early spring, a hot stove in the room made the atmosphere comfortably warm. On the table a potted plum-tree, already in bloom, gave off a faint fragrance.

For a while their conversation turned on the Chinese Empress Dowager, and then it drifted to stories and incidents of the Sino-Japanese war. Suddenly Major Kimura stood up, and fetching a file of Peking daily papers from a near-by table, selected one of the numerous sheets from the pile and spread it before Mr. Yamakawa. Pointing to a certain paragraph, he asked his friend to read it. His suggestion was so abrupt that Mr. Yamakawa was a little surprised, but knowing the Major's peculiar manner rather well, he took the paper and read what was pointed out to him, naturally expecting to find there some extraordinary anecdote of the war. His supposition was right, for in the paper he found a paragraph printed in rather square and elaborate Chinese characters, which read as follows:

"Khashoji, the master of a certain barber's shop, and a hero of the Sino-Japanese war, who rendered great services to his country, has, since his return home, become a man of very loose morals, indulging rather freely in wine and women.

"A few days ago he had a quarrel with another man while at a bar, and fighting with him, received a severe wound in his neck, and died on the spot.

"The cause of his death was due not so much to the wound inflicted during this quarrel, as to the opening

of an old cut which he had received during the war. According to a witness, Khashoji's head suddenly fell from his body with a thud, just as he was grappling over a small table with his assailant. But for a short strip of skin which connected the head from the body, the former seemed completely severed. As it fell, a great deal of blood gushed from the gaping neck. The police are very puzzled over the curious cirumstances of his death, and are now said to be searching for his assailant. Referring to an ancient book entitled Ryosai-Shii, there is an account of a man's head having fallen from his body in a similar manner. Therefore the circumstances connected with the falling-off of Khashoji's head cannot be treated as a mere romance, etc., etc."

After reading the newspaper account of the incident, Mr. Yamakawa who was much struck by the strangeness of the affair, thought for a moment, and then said rather abruptly, "What utter nonsense!"

Major Kimura smiled at the exclamation, and after sucking at his cigar for a moment or two he remarked dryly, "But, all the same it is very interesting, isn't it? It is only in China where we should hear of such a thing!"

"Yes, I'm hanged if we should ever hear about such a thing happening anywhere else!" Mr. Yamakawa remarked dryly as he knocked off the ashes of his cigar into the ash-tray.

"But, listen! It may be more interesting for you to know. . . ." Here the Major stopped short and

paused for a moment. Then with a rather cynical expression on his serious face, he added, "I happened to have known this man Khashoji personally."

"Oh, did you? I'm surprised to hear it. You don't mean to say that you, a military attaché, have conspired with the newspapers in concocting such a cock-and-bull story, do you?"

"Don't be stupid, Mr. Yamakawa! After I was wounded in the battle of Teikaton, during the war, this man Khashoji was brought to our field-hospital, and while I was there I often talked to him, merely to get practice in my Chinese conversation. I am almost sure it was the same chap, because he had been badly slashed in the neck. He explained to me that while he was out on some reconnaisance, he encountered a party of our cavalry, and while fighting with them had been wounded in the neck with the stroke of a Japanese sword."

"Yes, it was rather strange that you knew him. But this paper says that he was rather a rascal—wasn't it so? If it is true, it might have been better for all concerned if he had died there and then!"

"But," said the Major, "when he was there he seemed to be a very honest and decent fellow, and was one of the most obedient of our prisoners. Every one of our surgeons liked him, and it is said they favoured him with special treatment. He told us many interesting stories about his life. I can also remember quite clearly the description he gave us of his extraordinary psychological feelings when he fell off his horse after

having been wounded. He told us that, as he gazed through the willow-branches from the muddy bank of the river where he was lying, he saw most vividly in the sky, visions of his mother's skirt, a woman's foot, and a field of blooming sesame."

Major Kimura threw away his cigar, and after helping himself to a cup of coffee, his eyes turned to the pink plum-blossoms on the table. He seemed to be meditating. Then he went on.

"He told me that when he saw those visions, he felt heartily ashamed of the life he had been leading hitherto."

"Yet no sooner did the war end than he became a thorough scoundrel again! It shows that we can put little reliance upon men!" said Mr. Yamakawa, flinging himself back in his chair and stretching his legs. In cynical silence he puffed at his cigar.

"By what you say, do you mean that he acted like a hypocrite?"

"Yes."

"I'm afraid I can't agree with you. I feel sure that what he said at the time was sincerely meant. Also, if I may be permitted to quote the newspaper, when 'his head suddenly fell,' perhaps for a moment he saw similar visions again. I should explain his death in this way: As he was drunk he was quite easily knocked down. The suddenness of his fall had opened his old wound, and with the long pig-tail hanging from it, his head came off and fell with a thud upon the floor. Perhaps he again beheld his mother's skirt, a

woman's foot, etc., in a vision. Perhaps for a moment before death he had been gazing beyond the ceiling of the room into a deep blue sky. He might even have been tortured with the pangs of remorse—but this time it was too late.

"When he was first wounded, our military nurses, after having found him unconscious, tended him most kindly and with the greatest care, but during this quarrel later on, his antagonist, knowing his weaknesses, struck and kicked him. During his scuffle the poor man may have repented again, but in falling, his life ended."

Mr. Yamakawa shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"You are certainly very imaginative! But tell me, why did he become such a scoundrel after having shown so much sincerity?"

"Of course, because man is an unreliable creature, but in a different sense from what you mean," Major Kimura answered, lighting another cigar. Then he continued smilingly and with rather an air of pride.

"We should all try to be aware of our own unreliability—but I'm afraid the only people who are at all reliable are those who realise that fact about themselves, otherwise the people who don't, like Khashoji, who lost his head, can never be certain of not suddenly losing their own heads. I think that we must endeavour in the same way to try and find an inner meaning in what we read in the Chinese newspapers."

THE END

TU TZUCHUN

(A SHORT STORY)

By

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Tu Tzuchun

PART I

It was the close of a spring day, and the sun was setting. A young man was standing in front of the western city-gate of Loyang, the capital, during the Tang dynasty in China. He was looking up absent-mindedly into the sky. His name was Tu Tzuchun, and he was the son of a very rich man; but now he was living poorly and miserably, for all his fortune had been wasted away.

At that time Loyang was considered the most prosperous city in the world. Therefore it was crowded with all kinds of traffic, and its streets were always full of people. Under the oily glow of the setting sun, which was reflected fully from the city-gate, the silk-gauze hats of ancient lords, the gold earrings of Turkish ladies, and the many-coloured decorative reins on the heads of white horses made a very beautiful picture as they streamed by incessantly.

Tu Tzuchun, however, stood leaning against the gate walls, and gazed absently at the setting sun. Above, the silvery circle of a new moon could be already seen shining white and ghostly through the evening haze.

"It grows dark, and I am hungry. No one will give me a bed . . . . Perhaps it will be better to drown myself in some river and end the life I am leading," thought Tu Tzuchun, and, just as he was turning this

idea over in his mind, there suddenly appeared from somewhere an old man with one squint eye, who stopped in front of him. The setting sun, falling aslant on the body of the latter, cast a long shadow upon the gate. For a moment he looked intently at Tu Tzuchun, and then said abruptly:

"What are you thinking about?"

"I?" said Tu Tzung, looking up, "I am thinking of what I shall do, for I cannot find a place to lay my head or pass the night."

Being questioned so suddenly, Tu Tzuchun could not but give an honest answer, and he at once hung his head.

"I understand. I am very sorry for you," replied the old man, and for a while he seemed deep in thought. After a few moments he raised his finger and pointed to where the sun's rays were slanting.

"I will tell you what. When you are standing here in the sunshine, mark carefully where your head casts its shadow. Come to that place at midnight, dig, and you will find a cart-load of gold."

"Is what you tell me true?" the young man answered in astonishment, but when he looked, to his great surprise, the old man had disappeared, nor could he find a trace of him anywhere. He only saw the moon shining whiter and more silvery than before, and, as the crowd surged past him, several restless bats flapped their grey wings across his vision.

PART II

In one day Tu Tzuchun became the richest man in the capital. He had done what the old man had told him, and had dug in the place where the sun had cast the shadow of his head the evening before. There he had found such a quantity of goldt hat no waggon could be found large enough to carry it.

Tu Tzuchun, now a rich man, at once bought a magnificent mansion, and began to lead an even more luxurious life than the fabled king Genso. He drank the rich wine of Lanling, ate the longan of Kueichou, decorated his rooms with the peony that changes its colour four times a day, and rode in a carriage made from incense-wood, upon a seat of the purest ivory, and . . . . if we were to describe his luxuries one by one, our story would never come to an end.

Hearing all this, his friends, who had never even nodded their heads when they had met him in the street, began to frequent his house day and night, and the number of his acquaintances increased day by day. At the end of six months there was no beautiful woman or accomplished gentleman in all the capital who did not visit him frequently as his guest. Tu Tzuchun gave great banquets every day, and how indescribably gay these banquets were! I will describe to you what happened at such feasts. Tu Tzuchun would drink from a golden goblet filled with costly European wine, while he watched the clever tricks of some Hindo juggler who swallowed a naked sword

while around him sat twenty beautiful maidens, ten of them wearing in their hair exquisite lotus flowers made from jade, a precious stone found in China, while the other ten wore peony flowers made from pure agate. These beautiful young women made harmonious music on flutes and harps, charming his senses as he watched the juggler.

But, rich as he was, his money could not last for ever, and so in the course of two years he again became a poor man. All his friends, whom he had entertained so lavishly while he was wealthy, gradually ceased to call, and at last not one of them troubled to inquire after him as they passed his door.

At last, when the third spring had passed, he was without a home, and, though he still had many acquaintances in the great city of Loyang, not one of these would offer him a bed to sleep on or a morsel to eat. Not only shelter for the night was refused him, but he was even refused a cup of pure water to quench his thirst.

One evening, being at his wit's end, he happened to be standing again at the western gate, gazing into the sky watching the setting sun, when suddenly there appeared again before him the same old man with the squint eye, and looking into his face he asked, as before:

"What are you thinking about?"

When Tu Tzuchun saw who it was, he hung his head with shame, and for a while was not able to make any answer. But again the old man repeated his

question more kindly, so Tu Tzuchun answered timidly:

"I am thinking of what I shall do, for I cannot find a place to lay my head or pass the night."

The old man said to him:

"I understand. I am very sorry for you; but, I will tell you what to do. As you stand here in the setting sun, and when your shadow is cast upon the ground, mark that part of it which corresponds to your breast. Come to that place at midnight, dig deep, and you will find a cartload of gold.

On saying these words the old man again disappeared suddenly among the crowds of passers-by.

Again Tu Tzuchun became the richest man in the world, and he at once plunged into the same luxurious manner of living as before. The same peony flowers that change their colour four times a day grew in his garden, and graceful white peacocks dreamed among the flowers, and the Hindoo juggler was engaged to entertain his guests. . . . all was as before. And the immense heap of gold, that overflowed the cart which he took to gather it up, was all gone in less than three years.

PART III

"What are you thinking about?"

The old man with the squint eye stood before him again, asking the same question for the third time; and as before Tu Tzuchun stood gazing absent-mindedly at the new moon glimmering faintly through the haze.

"I am thinking what I shall do, for I have no place to lay my head or pass the night."

"I understand. I am very sorry for you, but . . . . I will tell you what to do. Stand here in the rays of the setting sun, and when your shadow is cast upon the ground, carefully mark the spot of the shadow which corresponds to your abdomen. Come here at midnight, and dig in that place, and I am sure you will find a cart-load of . . . ."

But this time Tu Tzuchun interrupted the old man before he could finish his words, and holding up his hands he said:

"I want no money!"

"'You want no money? I see! Then you are at last tired of luxurious living?"

The old man incredulously watched Tu Tzuchun's eyes.

"No, I am not tired of my way of living, but I am disgusted with all men," replid Tu Tzuchun harshly.

"That is amusing. And what has made you so disgusted with men?"

"They are heartless, every one of them! While I am rich, they say pretty things, but, as soon as I become poor, they will not even smile at me. It seems useless to become rich again when I reflect on what has happened before."

On hearing Tu Tzuchun's words, the old man began to grin broadly.

"I see. Even though you are young, you have some good sense left. Well, then, even though you

might be a poor man hereafter, do you intend to live a quiet and simple life?

Tu Tzuchun hesitated a little, then quickly lifting up his face, which bore a resolute expression, he looked steadily at the old man and began imploringly:

"Just now I do not wish to live in that way, but I would like to become one of your pupils and study magic. . . . . O, do not hide your learning from me. I am sure that you are a hermit of high virtue, otherwise how would you have been able to make me the richest man in the world in a single night? I implore you, become my teacher, and explain to me your wonderful art of magic."

The old man thought for some time in silence, and a frown crossed his brows. Then with a pleasant smile he again began to speak:

"Yes, I am a hermit as you supposed. My name is Tiehkuantzu, and I live among the mountains of Emeishan. When I first saw you, I thought that you possessed some wisdom, so twice I tried to make you rich . . . . If you wish to be one of my pupils, and if you are truly earnest in what you say, you shall have your wish."

The old man gladly consented to take him as his pupil, and Tu Tzuchun was beside himself with joy. Before waiting for the old man to finish his words, he prostrated himself and bowed to the ground at his feet. But the old man bade him rise, saying:

"No, no, do not thank me so much yet. Even though I have consented to take you as a pupil, it

depends wholly upon yourself whether you will become a great magician or not. . . . At any rate, will you come with me into the heart of the mountains of Emeishan? Look, pick up that bamboo-stick which is lying in the dust. Let us fly immediately into the air."

The old man took the green bamboo stick which the youth had handed to him. They seated themselves upon it as one might ride a horse, he mumbled a few magic words, and lo! the stick began to soar up into the sky as vigorously as if it had been a dragon. They speedily flew toward the mountains of Emeishan through the clear evening sky of a perfect spring day.

Frightened beyond words, Tu Tzuchun looked timidly beneath him, but he could only discern the blue mountains rising out of the twilight. The western city gate of Loyang was hidden, perhaps in the evening mist, and, though he strained his eyes, there was no sign of it to be seen. Then Tiehkuantzu, with his white beard flowing behind him in the breeze, began to sing loudly:

"In the morning I visit the Polar Seas,
In the evening the mountains of Tsangwu.
With a dagger at my belt, and with a brave heart,
Three times I entered Loyang, but no one knew me,
And singing, I flew over the lake of Tungtinghu."

PART IV

Very soon the bamboo stick on which the two of them rode, descended upon the mountains of Emeishan. Where they came down Tu Tzuchun saw a

large flat rock protruding from a deep ravine; but he knew that it must have still been very high, because in the sky the polar star still could be seen sparkling brightly, as large as a cup. Being a deserted part of the country, all was very still, and they could only hear the whispering of the wind in a twisted pinetree that grew on the edge of a cliff near by.

When they alighted on the rock, Tiehkuantzu told Tu Tzuchun to rest there under the shelter of the cliff, saying:

"I am going to heaven to see Hsiwangmu, so you must wait until I come back. Probably during my absence many devils will appear before you, but whatever you do make no noise at all. If you give vent to a single word, you must know that you will not be fit to become a magician. Mark what I say! You must keep absolute silence even if the earth should split asunder!"

"You can count upon it. I will never make a noise. I will keep silent, even though I may lose my life," answered Tu Tzuchun.

"Then I am content," said Tiehkuantzu, "and, now I am going."

With a word of parting the old man rose again on his bamboo stick, flew straight up into the sky, and disappeared above the steep mountains which stood vertically against the night sky, looking as if they had been hewn and shaped by the axe of some giant.

Tu Tzuchun sat alone on the flat rock, and in silence he watched the stars in the evening sky. After

an hour or so, as the cold night wind from the high mountains began to penetrate his clothes, a ringing voice came from the sky. It shouted suddenly down upon him, and its tone was rough:

"Who is it that sits there?"

Tu Tzuchun remained silent as the old man had told him to do. Then again the same menacing voice called sternly:

"If you will not answer, prepare to die instantly!"

But Tu Tzuchun still remained silent.

All of a sudden a tiger with very bright eyes appeared from somewhere, and leaping upon the rock on which Tu Tzuchun sat, began glaring and roaring at him very fiercely. At the same time the pine-tree on the cliff just behind him shook violently, and a huge white snake with a big head, as big as a barrel, came wriggling down the precipice toward him, and stopped before him waving its fiery tongue.

Tu Tzuchun, however, remained still and silent, and did not move so much as an eyebrow.

The tiger and the snake glared at each other, as if gloating over their chances of getting their victim first. Presently, and almost at the same instant, both of them sprang upon Tu Tzuchun. He was prepared to feel the sharp teeth of the tiger embedded in his throat, or to be swallowed by the snake, but just as they both almost touched his body, they disappeared suddenly, dissolving like mist, or losing their substance like the night wind. Only the pine-tree on the cliff moaned as before.

Tu Tzuchun wdre a long breath, and waited for the next terrible thing that might happen to him.

Presently a great gust of wind began to blow, and the clouds, black as ink, shut everything from his view. Dazzling, purple-colored lightning cut the sky asunder, followed by a terrible thunder-storm, but Tu Tzuchun sat still and showed no sign of fear. The wind howled, the rain fell in torrents, the lightning became incessant, and the mountains themselves seemed to shake to their very foundations. All at once a dreadful thunder-bolt, blazing hot, fell from the skies of inkyblack clouds, and struck Tu Tzuchun upon the head.

In spite of himself, he fell flat upon the rock, pressing both his hands to his ears. When he opened his eyes again, the sky was as clear as before, and the great polar star, as big as a cup, was shining above the high mountains across the ravine.

Then, this thunder-storm, too, must have been the evil trick of devils, just as the tiger and the white snake had been. Tu Tzuchun's heart became calmer, and wiping the cold perspiration from his brow, he again seated himself upon the rock. He sighed, and looked about him.

But while his sigh was still dying on the wind, there appeared in front of him the solemn figure of a great god. He was some 30 feet high, and wore a suit of armour made of pure gold. He held a three-forked spear in his hand, and pointing it at Tu Tzuchun's breast, he roared in a terrific voice like thunder:

"Hey, there! What are you doing in this part of

the world? These mountains of Emeishan have always been my abode since the very beginning of the world. How dare you sit here alone without paying any attention to my presence. You cannot be any ordinary mortal. If you value your life, I command you to make answer!"

But Tu Tzuchun still kept silence, for he remembered what the old man had told him.

"You will not answer me?. . . . Well, then, do as you please. I will command my army to cut you to pieces!"

The war god held up his spear, and beckoned to the sky above the opposite mountains. In one instant the dark clouds opened, and a host of countless warriors, some armed with spears and some with swords, came surging down upon him.

This sight nearly made Tu Tzuchun give vent to a cry of terror, but remembering the old man's intructions, he did his best to keep silence. Seeing that Tu Tzuchung did not move or utter a sound, the war god was beside himself with rage.

"You obstinate brute! Since you will not answer me, you shall die!"

So saying, the war god raised his three-forked spear and plunged it into Tu Tzuchun's breast, and killed him. And laughing so loudly that the mountains of Emeishan shook violently, the war god disappeared, and his countless warriors also disappeared with him like figures in some horrible dream.

The polar star began to shine once more upon the

flat rock. The pine-tree on the cliff moaned as the wind swept sadly through its branches. But Tu Tzuchun lay flat on the rock, for his life had left his body long before.

PART V

Tu Tzuchun's body lay on the rock, but his soul, floating from his corpse, drifted silently down to the bottom of Jigoku, the Inferno.

Between this world and the Inferno there is a dark, dark passage, and an icy-cold wind brows furiously in the sky all the year round. Carried on by this icy wind, Tu Tzuchun floated in the sky for a very long while, just as a dead leaf might float through the air, until he came in front of a magnificent palace. On a tablet outside this beautiful place was written: 'Senlotien."

Crowds of terrible and evil-looking devils were in front of this palace, and, as soon as they saw Tu Tzuchun, they gathered thickly around him, and, carrying him, they took him to the foot of a throne where a king in a black robe, and wearing a golden crown was seated. As he sat there he glared angrily around him. It was evident that this was Yama, or Yemma, the king of Hades, of whom Tu Tzuchun had often been told. Tu Tzuchun knelt down before the king, fearing what would become of him.

"Why were you on the top of the mountain of Emeishan?

Yama's voice thundered from the throne, and Tu

Tzuchun was about to make answer, when he remembered the caution of Tiehkuantzu: "Never speak one word!"

He therefore hung his head, and remained dumb. Yama became very angry, and rising on his feet, and raising his sceptre, he again roared like thunder:

"Do you know where you are? Answer this instant, or you shall feel the torture of the Inferno!"

But Tu Tzuchun never moved a muscle. Yama seeing this, turned to the devils and harshly gave them some order. The devils prostrated themselves, and then, rising again, they seized him, and flew with him up into the sky.

Now, everyone knows that, besides the Mountains of Swords and the Pond of Blood, there is also the Valley of Flames and the Sea of Ice, which lie side by side under the dark sky of Jigoku. In turn the devils hurled Tu Tzuchun into each of these, so that his heart was pierced by the cruel swords, his face scourged by the flames, his tongue was wrenched from his throat, his body was skinned and beaten with an iron-pounder, and he was then hurled into a pan of boiling oil. His brain was sucked by venomous serpents, and his eyes were picked out savagely by crested eagles, ... but, if we are to describe all the horrible things which befell him, we should never come to the end of our story. But he went through every kind of infernal torture that is too terrible to relate.

Tu Tzuchun, nevertheless, was patient, and with teeth set he bore all these horrible tortures without

giving vent to a single sound. The devils themselves were amazed at his obstinacy, and so eventually they flew back again with Tu Tzuchun to the palace of Senlotien. Prostrating themselves as before at the foot of his throne they related all that had happened.

"This sinner never utters a single sound, yet we have put him through every kind of torture."

Yama thought for a while, and frowned, but presently he hit upon an idea.

"This fellow's parents, I remember, are living among the animals of Jigoku. Bring them here at once."

One of the devils who had heard the king's command instantly flew up into the sky, and came back as a meteor shining through the darkness, and with him he brought the two animals. Upon seeing these animals Tu Tzuchun was very amazed, for they were none other than his own parents. Though their bodies were those of starved-looking horses, they had the faces of his deceased parents.

"Why were you sitting on the top of the mountains of Emeishan? If you do not answer at once, I will put your parents to the torture instead of you."

Tu Tzuchun did not make any answer to this threat.

"You undutiful wretch! You think, then, that al is well so long as you are happy and unharmed. You do not mind if your parents suffer?"

Then Yama, with a voice so loud and fierce that it shook the very foundations of the palace, cried:

"Beat these two animals, you devils. Beat them until all their flesh and bones are crushed to pulp!"

At his command the devils sprang up and seizing whips made of the hardest iron, began to beat the horses most unmercifully. Their whips whistled as they passed through the air, and the lashes descended upon the poor animals one after another. The animals —his parents who had taken the form of horses— writhed in agony, and shedding tears of blood, they screamed so hideously that it was horrible to hear.

"How now? Won't you speak?"

Yama ordered the devils to cease their beating for a minute, and again pressed Tu Tzuchun to answer. The two horses lay gasping for breath, and their flesh, cut to the bone, was dripping with blood. Their bones were so broken and crushed that they both lay in a pool of gore at the foot of the throne.

Tu Tzuchun desperately kept his eyes closed firmly remembering the old man's warning. He remained like this for a few moments, until a very faint voice, as soft as breathing, came to his ears.

"Never worry about us. Our suffering does not matter at all. Nothing could make us more contented than to know that you are happy. If you wish, keep silence, however hard the king may press you."

The voice that spoke was without doubt the loving voice of his dear mother. Tu Tzuchun involuntarily opened his eyes, and saw that one of the wretched horses lying at his feet had its eyes intensely fixed upon him. The expression on her face showed no sign of

anger, even though she had been lashed so cruelly, for, in her great love for him, she had forgotten all her bodily pain. What a heavenly heart! What bravery! How different from the selfishness of the world, and of the people who said pretty things to him when he was rich, and who cut him so cruelly when he was poor. Then Tu Tzuchun, regardless of the old man's orders, ran to the side of his mother, and took the neck of the dying horse in his arms, and as the tears streamed down his face, he could hold out no longer and he cried:

"Mother! . . . ."

All of a sudden everything seemed to change, and he found himself standing at the western gate of the city of Loyang, gazing absent-mindedly at the setting sun. The sky was hazy, and a white new moon shone in the sky above him. Surging past was an incessant stream of men and vehicles . . . . he saw just the same scene as before.

"Young man, do you know that you can never be a magician, even though you become one of my pupils?"

Looking up he beheld the old man with the squint eye. He was smiling.

"No, I cannot, but I am rather glad of it."

Tu Tzuchun, with tears in his eyes, took the old man's hands in his and held them. His voice shook with passion:

"It was impossible to keep silent when I saw my dear parents being tortured in the palace of Senlotien, even though I may never become a great magician."

"If you had kept your silence. . . . ."

Tiehkuantzu looked intently into Tu Tzuchun's face, and his expression suddenly became very severe.

"If you had kept your silence," he continued, "I would have killed you at once. You don't wish to be a magician, and to be rich again is distasteful to you. Then, what would you like to be?

"No matter what I become," he answered, "I intend to lead only an honest and humane life hereafter." And a happiness hitherto unknown came into his voice as he said these words.

"I shall never forget what you have said! And, now, I will bid you goodbye. Perhaps I shall never see you again."

So saying, Tiehkuantzu turned to go, but stopping suddenly he turned again toward Tu Tzuchun and said, smiling pleasantly:

"O, before I go, I have just remembered that own a house, which is at the southern foot of Mt Taishan. I will give it to you, with the surrounding fields, and everything that is in it. You had better take up your abode there at once. At this time of the year the peach-trees that surround it will be in full bloom."

And Tiehkuantzu disappeared.

THE END

THE RAZOR

(A SHORT STORY)

By

Naoya Shiga,

Translated by

Eiji Ukai & Eric S. Bell.

For a short biography and a portrait of Naoya Shiga, refer to Book II.

The Razor

PART I

Yoshisaburo, the master of a barber's shop at Roppongi, in Azabu, a suburb of Tokyo, had taken a bad cold, and, for a wonder, had taken to his bed for a few days. It was now just before the Festival of the Autumnal Equinox, and his shop was extremely busy with cutting and dressing the hair of many of the soldiers from the near-by barracks.

While he was lying in bed, the barber thought again about the two apprentices, Gen-ko and Jita-ko, who had once been in his employ, and who had been dismissed only a month before. As his mind dwelt on them he murmured to himself, "If only they were here now!"

Yoshisaburo was Gen-ko's and Jita-ko's senior by a year or so, and had once lived with them, serving his apprenticeship in the same shop. Their former master had taken a great deal of interest in Yoshisaburo, for he realised that he gave great promise of becoming a very skilled barber. Later on, his master had given him his only daughter in marriage and a few years after that the former had retired from business altogether, and the shop had been turned over to his son-in-law.

Gen-ko, who had been secretly in love with his

master's daughter, quickly resigned his apprenticeship after the marriage, but Jita-ko, who was gentle in character, continued to work for Yoshisaburo, and at once commenced addressing him as "master."

Yoshisaburo's father-in-law died half a year later, and his wife also passed away some months after him.

Yoshisaburo was a master-hand in the art of using a razor. He was so painstaking and thorough in his profession, that, when the smallest spot on a freshly-shaven face felt rough to his fingers, he was not satisfied, nor could he cease his shaving until he had made it smooth and clean. Yet he had never been known to hurt the skin of any of his clients. His customers all declared that their faces remained smooth one day longer by Yoshi's shaving than by the work of any other barber. He was very proud of the reputation he had of never having hurt a single customer in all his past ten years as a barber.

Gen-ko, who had left the shop at the time of Yoshisaburo's marriage, returned again unexpectedly some years later, and Yoshi, remembering their former friendship, could not help offering again to take the repentant Gen-ko as his apprentice. But during the two years which had elapsed Gen-ko had somewhat degenerated in character, and now began to neglect his duty. He also enticed Jita-ko to go with him to some disreputable house in Kasumi-cho, which was the resort of military men. Gen-ko at last became so dissipated that he even instigated the gentle Jita-ko to

steal money from his master's shop.

Yoshisaburo, who noticed this, felt very sorry for Jita-ko, and instead of reproaching him, he gave him kindly advice every now and again. But still these petty thefts continued. At last, after putting up with his two apprentices' misdeeds for a month longer, Yoshi was obliged to dismiss them from his shop.

After that, Yoshisaburo engaged two new apprentices. Kane-ko, the elder of the two, was a pale-faced and rather dull youth of twenty. The other was a boy of about twelve years of age named Kin-ko. The latter youth had a remarkably strange-shaped head which projected at the back.

During the busiest season, just before festival-time, the work in the shop progressed at a snail's pace owing to the slowness of these two assistants, and it was quite natural that poor Yoshi was in an agony of anxiety. He eventually fell sick, and becoming rather feverish, had to confine himself to his bed.

One day, towards noon, the customers increased in number. The noisy opening and shutting of the sliding glass-door of the shop, and the creaking of the partly broken wooden clogs, which the slovenly Kin-ko walked about in, reduced to exasperation the already strained nerves of the sick barber.

Again the glass door clattered, and this time a maid-servant of some gentleman who lived near-by, entered the shop, and he heard her say to his assistants: "I'm from Mr. Yamada's at Rindo-cho. My master is starting on a journey tomorrow morning, so will you

kindly sharpen his razor by this evening? I shall call later on to get it."

"Well, madam, how about tomorrow morning? We are awfully busy today," said Kane-ko. The girl seemed rather put out by the assistant's reply, but after a moment of hesitation she answered, "Then be sure to have it ready by then." As she left she shut the glass door behind her, but opening it again suddenly she added, "Excuse me for bothering you again, but will you be so kind as to ask your master to do it himself. My master prefers to have it sharpened by him?"

"I'm sorry, but my master is sick," replied Kane-ko. Yoshisaburo heard this from his room, and quickly called out, "I will do it, Kane-ko!" His words were sharp and hoarse. Without answering his master, Kane-ko said quietly to the girl, "All right, madam, we will see that it is done." The girl closed the door again and went away.

"Confound it!" said Yoshisaburo to himself, and stretching out his feverish arm from the bed, he gazed at it vacantly for a while. His arm was very hot, and felt as heavy as if it had been earthenware. Then he gazed absent-mindedly at the papier-maché dog which sat upon the shelf, and on which a number of flies were resting.

Unconsciously he heard the talking that was going on in his shop. A few soldiers who were there were passing comments on some of the small restaurants in that neighborhood, and were abusing the bad food given them in the barracks, declaring

that as the cool weather increased their appetites, however, the food seemed a little tastable now. Listening to these discussions Yoshi began to forget his illness, and felt slightly better. He turned over wearily in his bed.

His wife, O-Ume by name, wrapped in a *hanten*-overdress, and with her baby on her back, was busily preparing the supper. The evening sunbeams were streaming into the kitchen through the door beyond the three-mat room. As Yoshi watched his wife, his spirits returned and he began to feel less troubled.

"I had better sharpen that razor now," he thought, and he tried to raise his tired body into a sitting position. But when he sat up he felt dizzy, and again laid his head back upon his pillow.

"Shall I bring you some water to wash with, my dear?" asked his wife gently, and she came near to his bed, with her wet hands hanging at her sides. Yoshisaburo tried to say, "No," but his voice was so weak that his wife did not catch his reply. When she tried to take the bed-clothes off him, and to carry his spittoon and other things from his bedside, he tried to cry out to her, "No, leave them alone!" but again his wife did not hear him. Once more his reviving spirits became irritated.

"Shall I support your body from behind?" asked his wife, and she came and stood behind her husband.

"Bring me the razor-strop and Mr. Yamada's razor!" said Yoshisaburo. His wife looked at him for a moment and was silent, then she said quietly, "Are you able to do it now?" "Bring them to me at any

rate!" was his sharp reply.

"If you want to sit up, my dear, you must put on your overcoat. . . ."

But he interrupted her by saying, "Bring them quickly, I say!" Though he did not speak very loudly, his voice sounded irritated. His wife kept quite calm, and after taking her husband's overcoat from the cupboard, she put it carefully over his shoulders from behind as he sat upright on his bed. Yoshisaburo snatched at the collar of his overcoat, pulled it off his shoulders again, and threw it roughly off the bed.

His wife remained silent, and then opening a small sliding-door, she disappeared. She soon returned from the shop with the strop and the razor. Finding no proper place to hang the strop, she drove a small nail into the wooden pillar by his bed.

PART II

Barber Yoshisaburo, even when in good health, was never quite satisfied with his work after sharpening a razor, and now that he was irritated, and with his hands trembling with fever, he was less successful.

Seeing her poor husband's bad humour, the gentle wife said, "Hadn't you better make Kane-ko do that for you, dear?" As he did not answer her, she repeated the question several times, but still she got no reply. He, however, began to feel very weak, and after working quietly with the razor for some fifteen minutes, he sank down on his bed quite exhausted. After that he soon fell asleep.

Mr. Yamada's maid-servant called at the shop that evening on her way back from an errand, and took away the razor.

O-Ume-san had prepared some groats for her husband, and she wanted him to take them before they got cold, but seeing him asleep, and noticing how exhausted he was, she refrained from waking him, lest he should again fly into a temper with her.

But it was now 8 o'clock, and she was afraid that if she delayed matters too long, she might also miss the chance of giving him his medicine. So she at last made up her mind to awaken her husband. Upon waking, Yoshisaburo was in a slightly better mood, and sitting up, he took his supper. As soon as he had finished it, he lay down again on his bed, and soon fell into another sleep.

A little before 10 o'clock, Yoshi was awakened once again to take his medicine. He had been half asleep, wrapped up almost to his head in his heavy bed-clothes, and his face was quite damp with fever. The shop was quiet. He looked around feebly. On a pillar near his bed hung the black leather strop. The dim light of the lamp, which burned with a weirdly yellow flame, shone upon the back of his wife, who was giving the baby her breast in the corner of the room. Everything in the room seemed to him stiflingly hot.

"Master! . . . master!" came the hesitating voice of Kin-ko from the door of the shop.

"Yes, what is it?" answered Yoshisaburo from

under his bed-clothes. The boy did not seem to catch the muffled reply of his master, and so he called again, "Master!"

"What's the matter?" This time his voice was quite clear and sharp.

"The razor has been sent back from Mr. Yamada, Sir."

"What, another one?"

"No, master, the same one that you sharpened this evening. The messenger said that Mr. Yamada tried it once, but he thinks there is rather a poor edge on it. He wants you to try it yourself, and then to send it back to him if you think it is all right."

"Is his messenger still waiting?"

"No, master, she went away some time ago."

"Hand it to me," said Yoshisaburo, and pulling his arm out from beneath the blankets of his bed, he took the razor, which was enclosed in a morocco-leather case, from Kin-ko, who bent over his master's bed to hand it to him.

"Hadn't you better ask Barber Yasukawa to do it for you, my dear, for your hands are rather shaky with fever?" said O-Ume-san, and, drawing her *kimono* across her breast, she came to her husband's side. Yoshisaburo was silent, and stretching towards the lamp, he turned it up. He took the razor out of its case, and examined the blade very intently, turning it over and over with one hand. His wife sat down by his bedside, and gently reaching out her hand, she felt his forehead. But Yoshisaburo pushed her hand away, and seemed

to be embarrassed. He cried out, "Kink-o!"

"Yes, master," answered the lad from near the end of the bed where he had been standing.

"Bring me the hone!"

The hone was brought. Yoshisaburo roused himself again, and raising one knee, in the manner of all good razor-sharpeners, he began to slowly grind the razor. The clock slowly struck 10 o'clock.

O-Ume-san began to realize that any more advice on her part was in vain, so she sat looking anxiously at her husband. He went on sharpening the razor for a little while, and then worked it smoothly on the leather strop. It seemed to him that the stillness of the room began to quiver with the chafing sound of his razor. In whetting it, his shaky hands were stretched out before him, and the strop was swinging to and fro as if it would snap. It flew outwards, and twined round and round the razor.

"My God! Look out!" cried his frightened wife, and she gazed in alarm at her husband's face. His brows quivered nervously.

Yoshisaburo unwound the strop, and threw it down. He then stood up, razor in hand, and tried to make his way towards the shop in his night attire.

"Good gracious! You should not do that. . . ." O-Ume-san cried, as she tried to stop her husband. She was weeping softly, but her efforts to prevent him were in vain. Yoshisaburo reached the shop without uttering a single word, and his wife followed him.

In the shop there was no customer. Kin-ko was

there alone, sitting absent-mindedly in a chair before one of the huge mirrors

"Where's Kane-ko?" asked O-Ume-san.

"He has gone to visit his sweetheart, Miss Toki," answered Kin-ko nonchalantly.

"My God! To think that he has gone there openly declaring where he was going in that way!" said the angry barber, but O-Ume-san began to laugh, for it struck her as being rather humorous. Yoshisaburo looked very annoyed.

Now, this Miss Toki was rather an untidy and slovenly looking girl, who worked at a certain shop not far from the barber's. Over this shop hung a sign-board with "Grocery for Soldiers" painted on it. It was said that she was a graduate from a girl's high school. Very often one or two soldiers, some students, or other young men were seen sitting talking to her.

"Go and tell him to return quickly, as we shall soon be shutting up the shop," said O-Ume-san to Kin-ko.

"It's not yet so late!" Yoshisaburo remarked sharply. His wife then went back into the house.

The barber began to whet the razor, and he felt decidedly more at home in his shop than doing the task while lying in his bed. His wife entered again and brought his warmly-lined *hanten*-coat, and managed, after a little coaxing, to get him to put his arms into the sleeves. She seemed quite satisfied after she had done this, and sitting down near the entrance of the

shop, she watched her husband absorbed in the work of sharpening the razor. Kin-ko was sitting on one of the barber's shairs, with one leg aslant, and was shaving the other leg up and down with his own razor.

Suddenly the glass door opened, and there appeared a young man of low stature, about twenty-one or two years of age. He wore a new Japanese lined garment of half silk, and had his *Heko*-sash knotted in front of his body. A pair of new-fashioned *komageta*-clogs were on his feet.

"I want to be shaved as quickly as possible, and I don't care if you do it roughly." He then came and stood directly in front of one of the mirrors, and biting his lower lip, put out his chin, and stroked it repeatedly with his fingers. He spoke smartly, but his tone was decidedly rustic. His knotted fingers and his rough brown face showed that he was employed in some hard labor by day.

"Send for Kane-ko at once!" cried the barber's wife.

"No, that is not at all necessary, I can shave him myself," said the barber.

"But today your hands are shaky, my dear."

"All the same, I shall do it," insisted Yoshisaburo flatly interrupting his wife.

"You are beside yourself!" she cried angrily.

"Bring me my working clothes!"

"Your everyday clothes will do, won't they? They are quite good enough to give anyone a shave in," said O-Ume-san, who did not like her sick husband to take

off his *hanten*-coat.

The young man was looking from the wife to the husband, and after a short pause he said, "You aren't sick, I hope?" And he winked his small narrow eyes propitiatingly.

"Yes, sir, I've taken a slight cold."

"Well, you must take great care of yourself, because a rather bad kind of influenza is prevalent at the present time."

"Thanks," murmured Yoshisaburo in his throat.

PART III

When a piece of white linen had been placed over the youth's neck and chest by the barber, the youth said again, "Just pass the razor over my face, for I'm in rather a hurry." And he smiled faintly at the barber. Yoshisaburo was silent and did not seem to notice his remark. He was softening the blade of the razor which he had just been whetting, against the inner side of his left elbow."

"Between half past ten and eleven I shall be able to get there," murmured the young man to himself. He was evidently expecting to receive an answer of some kind from the barber.

Yoshisaburo at once began to recollect a rather strange girl who was employed in a certain house of ill-fame not far away. She had a curious voice, a mixture of male and female in tone. He was thinking that this vulgar little man might be going to visit her, and in his weak and nervous brain, he pictured one

scene after another that might be enacted after this young fellow had left his shop, and the thought of it made him feel sick. Lathering the soap with the coldest water, he rubbed the young man's chin and cheeks desperately. While he was doing this the youth was trying to peep into the mirror. Yoshisaburo was so disgusted with this vulgar young man that he was almost tempted to vent some abusive language upon him.

Sharpening the razor once more upon the strop, the barber began shaving the youth's chin and throat. But his razor had no edge on it, his hand shook, and while he was bending his head over his customer, he could not stop sniffing. In bed his nose had not run in this way, and it annoyed him. He was often obliged to stop his work to wipe his nose, but as soon as he started again, the intense itching of his nostrils caused him to sniff and snivel again worse than ever.

Then the baby began to cry in the inner room, and O-Ume-san left the husband to go to her lonely child. The young man, though being shaved roughly with a blunt razor, remained cool and unconcerned, and his strange insensibility to the roughness of the shave now irritated the barber's nerves to quite an unbearable extent.

Yoshisaburo had another sharp razor, which he was accustomed to use, but somehow he did not feel inclined to take it out. Whether his razor was sharp or not he did not care very much. But unconsciously he soon became sensitive, and when he found any small rough

spot on the young man's face, he began to feel impatient. The more impatient he became, the more his irritation increased. His body was feeling fatigued, his spirits were falling again, and he seemed to be getting very feverish.

The young man, who at first had been rather talkative, now became silent, for he noticed Yoshisaburo's sullenness. By the time the barber was shaving the youth's brows, his customer had fallen into a doze, perhaps caused by his hard day's work. The apprentice Kin-ko was also dozing near the window. In the inner room O-Ume-san's lullaby was no longer heard, and the night seemed to be very silent. The only sound now was the swishing of the razor.

The irritation of the barber now changed into a sentimental mood, and his body and soul seemed tired out. His feverish eyes became as hot as molten iron.

He continued to shave on from throat to chin, from chin to cheek, and from cheek to brow, but he could not make the soft part of the youth's throat as smooth as he wanted. After going over it again he lost patience, and had a wish to tear off that part of the skin altogether. As he looked at the rough face of the youth, with the pores of the skin full of grease, this mad feeling increased more and more in his heart. The young man was now asleep, his head hanging languidly behind, and his loose mouth was open showing his yellow, uneven teeth.

The exhausted Yoshisaburo could no longer bear to continue his shaving. He felt as if every joint of

his body had been poisoned, and a sensation of weakness came over him as if he would fall there and then.

Several times he thought to himself, "Now I shall stop." But somehow a feeling of inertia prevented him from stopping his work. The blade of the razor was caught a little by the roughness of the youth's skin. The young man's throat quivered in his sleep. Yoshisaburo felt some strange and unknown sensation run swiftly through his body from head to toe. This feeling seemed suddenly to take away all his former fatigue and weariness.

The cut which he had made on the rough skin of the youth's chin was barely half an inch in length. He stood staring at it. The spot left by the thinly stripped skin was at first a milky white, but gradually it began to change into pink, and then to crimson, and soon the blood was oozing from the small cut. Yoshisaburo still gazed. The blood now came out rather freely in dark-red drops, swelling like rubies, and then bursting and falling down his chin in streaks.

Then a feeling of cruelty came over him. To barber Yoshisaburo, who had never till that moment hurt any customer's face, this feeling came with surprising force. His breathing became quicker and quicker. His whole body and soul seemed to be intent on the cut he had made, and he could no longer overcome the strong feeling of satisfaction which had taken hold of his brain.

Grasping the razor with the point downwards, he

suddenly dug it into the youth's throat. He did it with such strength that the blade sank completely into the flesh. The youth did not even move, for he did not feel any pain. Then the blood began to splash, and the face of the youth suddenly began to change.

Yoshisaburo almost fainted, and fell back into a chair which was standing near him. This nervous strain suddenly came over him again, and at the same time a terrible feeling of fatigue oppressed him. With closed eyes and collapsed body he looked like one dead. The moments seemed to stand still. All life seemed to be asleep. Only the huge mirrors on the walls were calmly watching the scene from three directions.

THE END

ARAGINU

(A SHORT STORY)

By

Naoya Shiga,

Translated by

Eiji Ukai & Eric S. Bell

Araginu

Long, long ago, on a mountain there lived a Goddess who was very beautiful. She was the Goddess of Beauty, of Love, and of Jealousy.

All the youths and maidens who lived in the vicinity of this mountain, which could be seen clearly in fair weather, prayed to the Goddess, when they had found a mate, for success in their love. As their love grew and gradually increased, they offered grateful thanks to the Goddess, but when their love affairs did not run smoothly they forgot everything but their own troubles. They even forgot the favours which the Goddess had bestowed upon them. When this happened, she at once changed herself into the Goddess of Jealousy and unexpected evils came suddenly upon them, and their love ended in tragedy.

Old people who had so many times witnessed these unhappy endings, shrugged their shoulders with pity, and sighed, for when a young couple was swept away in the ecstasy of a romance, the aged and more experienced could foresee a tragedy looming ahead. But the old people no longer had the power or influence to prevent the young ones from falling violently in love, and they had to stand by and watch a great many youths and maidens rushing into danger and could only shake their old heads sadly when they saw them falling headlong down the cliff of their doom.

At the foot of this mountain there lived a handsome shepherd boy named Adani. Every morning he went up the mountain driving several of his father's cows. While they were grazing, he busied himself by cutting the green grass, and when the animals lay down in the shade to rest, he would lie beside them and fall asleep. Towards sunset the cows would low to one another, and the shepherd, awakened by their voices, would rise quickly from his slumbers, load each of the animals with grass, and make his way down the mountainside so as to reach home before dark.

On the mountain, in the sweet green grass, grew quantities of fragrant flowers, and trees and shrubs abounding in many-coloured blossoms. Adani would pluck great bunches of them, and after fashioning a beautiful bouquet, he would place it upon the altar of the Goddess as an offering to her beauty. The remainder of the flowers he would carry with him down the mountain to present to the girls of the village.

A few years passed. Adani grew more handsome. The Goddess of the mountain saw this, and secretly a great love sprang up in her heart for the shepherd lad. By this time the beautiful youth had already fallen in love with a girl of the village. Her name was Araginu, and she was noted for her great skill at weaving. She was a year or two older than her lover, and her beauty was so exquisite that it almost put the loveliness of the Goddess to shame.

Ever since the shepherd had fallen in love with Araginu, he would cut his grass in the morning only.

and after gathering his bunch of flowers, could be seen hurrying down the mountain driving his cows as fast as he could make them go. Up till this time he had always made it a rule to offer his prettiest bouquet to the Goddess, but now he always set the most beautiful one aside, and placed the next best upon the altar of the Goddess.

The Goddess was naturally displeased. One day, a woodman, named Ganzu, told her all about Adani's love for Araginu. This man was rather elderly, and was a bad character. He spent much of his time searching round the villages at the foot of the mountain for stray sheep and odd fowls, and he often stole wine and fish from the villagers too. He had been told that from the beginning Araginu's love had been strictly hidden from the Goddess. He heard this story from the girl's uncle, who was an old hermit. He also was told that Araginu was busy weaving a most beautiful tapestry. She was spending most of her time very earnestly upon this work in order that she might one day enwrap her lover in its folds, so that he should never be enticed away by any other beautiful woman he might see. When the Goddess heard of this, an intense jealousy burned within her heart against the girl.

Her only desire was to see this wonderful tapestry which Araginu had woven. So one night, when the moon had wrapped the world in its gentle, opalescent light, she secretly descended the mountain, with the woodcutter as her guide.

It was late at night, and in the woods the owls were hooting. The people in their huts in the villages had put out their lights and were sound asleep. She found only one house with a light still burning, and it was the home of Araginu.

Leaving her guide behind, the Goddess proceeded very quietly alone. On approaching the house, she heard the sounds of a beautiful song, and the rhythmic hum of the weaving shuttle made a most charming accompaniment to the song. Araginu was singing some enchanting melody, and all the pain of the deep love in her heart was in her music. The Goddess was so enchanted with the song, that she stopped still and listened for a while, but soon her soul blazed within her with a still fiercer flame of jealousy.

She approached the window, and standing on tiptoe peeped stealthily in the room through a chink in the window shutters. The first thing that met her eyes was a wondrous fabric of great width. It flowed out from the loom, spreading upon the floor, and the other end of it hung from the wall on the opposite side of the room. All the girl's deepest feelings of love were expressed in the patterns woven into the fabric. Exquisite shades of colour stood out here and there in the forms of birds and rare flowers.

The Goddess watched the graceful figure of the girl, and noted how her eyes beamed with a dreamy ecstasy as she wove. Her rounded cheeks, her heaving breast, her white tapering fingers, which nimbly held the fabric, and her overflowing healthy youth seemed

to rival even the great beauty of the Goddess herself.

Then the Goddess noticed that the floor of the room was strewn with mountain flowers of every hue. Doubly and trebly burnt the Goddess's jealousy. She had never before beheld such a lovely maiden, and had never seen such a perfect fabric. What a wonderful love there must be between these two young people! If this beautiful tapestry should be completed, the Goddess feared there would be no possibility of separating the maiden from her shephed. So she at once made up her mind that at all costs she must prevent the tapestry from ever being finished.

But the beautiful Araginu, never dreaming for one moment of the Goddess's jealousy, sat at her loom by night and by day, whenever the yearning for her lover was strong upon her, which was almost every moment of her waking life. Two thirds of her precious fabric had been completed, and only one-third remained to be done. When that was finished, her uncle, the hermit, was to marry her to her lover, and whenever she thought of it, untold joy filled her soul and set her heart throbbing.

Every day, when the shepherd returned from the mountain, he threw his loveliest bouquet in at her window. By the strict order of her uncle, the young couple were forbidden to speak even a word to each other until the tapestry had been completed. Adani had even been forbidden to peep into her room.

One night, when all the villagers were sound asleep, and when Araginu was alone weaving her cloth, a sad

and terrible feeling of depression came over her. She stopped short, and closed her eyes. She thought she heard the sound of a man's hoarse voice singing in the distance. It was so faint to her ears that she could not quite make out what it was, but there was something very repulsive in the voice.

From that time on, she heard the voice every night. It came nearer and nearer. Sometimes, when the wind or breeze was blowing in the direction of her house, she could even hear some of the words of the song, and then she knew that it was some unlucky curse that was enfolding her. She knew that, if she stopped weaving the tapestry, some evil would befall her.

The song of imprecation seemed to approach nearer and nearer every night. At last she could distinguish these words: "Know yourself, and cease weaving your tapestry, or you will become a spider!"

The maiden grew more and more afraid. She understood that the Goddess of Jealousy had put a curse upon her, but she did not like to speak of it to her uncle or to her lover. If she should reveal her secret to her uncle, he would certainly prohibit her from weaving. It would be no better if she told it to Adani, for she knew that he would request her to cease her weaving, and would insist on her marrying him immediately. But she entertained a strong fear that, if she married him without finishing the tapestry, the Goddess might deprive her altogether of her lover. So she made up her mind not to reveal her secret to anyone whomsoever, and to do her utmost to complete her

work whatever might happen.

And so she stuffed her ears tightly with pieces of waste thread, to prevent herself from hearing anything. But still the terrible sound of the curse penetrated to her eardrums. Sometimes she found herself muttering the very words of the accursed song.

Gradually the maiden's body began to grow weaker, and her soul began to pine away. Yet not for one single day did she cease weaving. And often now a great, fitful and impatient longing for the love of Adani came over her. But she bore it by summoning up all her strength of will, and even as her distress increased, she worked with greater haste. She was now weaving purple-coloured flowers into the fabric as a symbol of her great and burning passion for her lover.

But the cruel song of imprecation became louder and louder as the nights went by. The purple of the woven flowers gradually changed to a still darker shade, and the poor girl's mind gradually became distraught. At last she wove nothing but black flowers every day. Even the little birds, that had formerly been woven in such bright and brilliant colours, were now worked in sombre black, and as she continued, the cloth began to take on a shabby appearance, as if the beautiful fabric had been dragged in the mud.

Her impatience became pitiable, and at last her great energy in weaving began to fail her. In the evening she was often seen standing beneath the eaves of her house, shuttle in hand, gazing absent-mindedly up into the sky. But Adani never beheld her in these

moods of dejection. He still continued to visit her window after he had come from the mountain, and would throw his prettiest flowers into her room. He did this every day, but his bouquets piled themselves one upon another unheeded.

Two months passed by, and Adani began to wonder why Araginu was so slow in finishing her tapestry. He visited her uncle, the hermit, and asked him to make enquiries. The old man also wondered why she had not finished her work after weaving for more than half a year, and so he determined to go and see for himself what had happened.

But the astonishment of the hermit was still greater when he entered the maiden's room. He found no Araginu. She was nowhere to be seen. Cobwebs hung across the ceiling, and the once beautiful tapestry lay across the floor. The colours were changed from purple to black, and where she had last been weaving, it looked as if it had been saturated with mud.

Through a chink in the window a fine thread led into the open air. The hermit, guided by it, went out of the cottage, and found that it was endless, and led towards the mountain. He followed it, and climbed the mountain. Arriving at the shrine of the Goddess, he found little torn pieces of the maiden's dress lying here and there upon the ground.

The thin thread extended onwards to the back of the hill, which faced to the north. As the sunshine never shone there, the scene was a dreary one, for there were no flowers to be seen and no songs of birds to

be heard.

The hermit, catching hold of rocks and roots of trees, carefully let himself down the face of the cliff. At the bottom he found a big cave, into the mouth of which the thread stretched. Peering into the darkest corner of the cave, he beheld, staring at him with terrible eyes, his poor niece, the once beautiful Araginu.

In front of her, huge cobwebs spread their nets about the cave. Poor Araginu! With an empty shuttle in one hand, she was extending both her arms, as if still trying to weave something. Alas! With those big eyes, wild and glaring, those thin and weirdly elongated limbs, and the dark, drab colour of her skin, she already had the appearance of a spider.

THE END

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れたやうな荒絹の着物の切れ端が落ちて居るのを見た。

絲は更に山の裏側へ延びて行つた。山の裏側は北向きの日もあたらねば、花も咲かず、小鳥も啼かぬ荒凉たる景色をした處だつた。隱者は岩角や木の根につかまりながら中腹まで下りて來た。而して其處に一つの大きな洞穴を發見した。而して絲の續きはその洞穴へ入つて居た。

隱者は其洞穴の薄暗い奥に荒絹が恐ろしい眼をして此方を見て居るのを見た。荒絹の前には穴一杯の大きさに大きい蜘蛛の巣が張つてあつた。荒絹はまだ何かを織らうとするかのやうに、もう絲のなくなつたをさを持つて其手を兩方に廣げて居た。ギロリと大きく見開いた眼、疲れ衰へて妙に細長く見える手足、薄よごれた皮膚の色、荒絹はもう蜘蛛のやうに見えて居た。

に織り込むやうになつた。

呪の唄は夜毎に烈しくなつて行つた。紫色の花は段々黒味がかつて來た。此頃から荒絹の樓子が少しづつ狂はしくなつて行つた。而して今は毎日々々黒い花ばかりを織り込んで居た。小鳥の色も黒かつた。華やかだつたとばりは見るかげもない物に變つて行つた。それは丁度美くしい布れが半分溝泥につかつたやうに見えた。

荒絹にはあせる心はあつても機を織る氣力がなくなつた。夕方になると、よくをさを兩手に持つて、ぼんやりと軒下に立つて空を見上げて居るやうな事が多くなつた。然し阿陀仁は一度も荒絹の左う云ふ姿を見なかつた。而して毎日山を下ると直ぐ、美しい花束の一つを窓から投げ込んでは歸つて行く。美しい花束は徒らに溜るばかりであつた。

やがて二々月程經つた。餘りにとばりの出來上る事の遲いのを阿陀仁は不思議に思つた。阿陀仁は隱者を訪れて、見に行く事を頼んだ。隱者も半年餘りして未だ出來ないのは少し長過ぎると考へた。

隱者は中へ入つて見て驚いた。其處には荒絹の姿は見えなかつた。而して部屋の中は蜘蛛の巣で一杯になつて居た。しかも美しいとばりは途中から段々にきたない色に變つて行つて、仕舞は全く泥につかつたやうなひどい色に織出されてあつた。

窓の隙間から細い絲が戸外へつながつてゐた。隱者はそれを頼りに出て見ると、何處までも何處までもそれは續いて、段々に山の方へ延びて行つた。隱者はついて山へ登つた。而して女神の社まで來ると、其處にむしり取ら

吉な文句だつた。其とばりを織る事を今止めなければ必ず不吉な事が其身に起るぞ、と云ふ樣な意味だつた。

呪ひの唄は夜毎に近づくやうに思はれた。身の程もわきまへず、その樣なとばりを尙織り續けるなら、お前はいまに蜘蛛になる。そんな意味を唄つて居る。

荒絹は段々に苦しくなつて來た。

荒絹はそれが女神の妬みからである事を悟つた。然し荒絹はそれを伯父にも阿陀仁にも打明けようとは思はなかつた。若し伯父に打明ければ伯父は機を織る事をとめるだらう。

阿陀仁に打明けてもそれは同じであらう。而して阿陀仁は機を止めて直ぐ結婚しようと云ふに違ひないと思つた。然し荒絹には此とばりなしの結婚では、何時阿陀仁を山の女神に奪ひ取られるか知れないと云ふ不安があつた。荒絹はどうしても誰にも打明けずに此とばりを完成させれば置かぬと決心した。

荒絹は兩方の耳の穴に絲くづを堅く堅く詰め込んだ。荒絹は殆ど聾者と變りなくなつた。然し一度其耳の底に浸み込んだ不愉快な呪ひの節は、耳の中で勝手に尙其唄を續けた。或時は意識せずに荒絹自身口の中で其いやにいやに思つて居る唄を唄つて居る事さへあつた。

荒絹の身體も精神も段々に衰へて來た。然し荒絹は一日も機を織る事を止めなかつた。荒絹には阿陀仁に對する堪へ性のない戀しい心が發作的に起る事が多くなつた。

然し荒絹はそれをヂツと堪へた。而して其苦しい心の儘にとばりの完成を急いだ。荒絹は苦しい戀を紫色の花

長い指、其若々しさには女神の美も到底及ばないやうに思はれた。

女神は最後にその邊、床一ぱいに撒き散らされた山の美しい花々を見た。

女神の心は二重三重の嫉妬に燃えた。女神はこんな美しい少女を初めて見た。こんな美しい織物を初めて見た。

而して阿陀仁との戀。女神は若し此美しいとばりが完成すれば、もうどんな事をしてもあの牧童を再び此少女から引き離す事は出來ないと考へた。而して女神はどうにかして此とばりを完成させぬやうにせればならぬと決心した。

何事も知らない荒絹は夜となく日となく、心に戀の燃え立つ時直ぐ機に坐つた。とばりはもう三分の二以上出來て居た。あと三分の一。それが出來上がつた日に、伯父の隱者は阿陀仁と自分をめあはせて呉れる。それを思ふと荒絹の心は何時も燃え立たずには居なかつた。

阿陀仁は毎日山からの最も美しい一束の花を窓から投込んで往つて呉れる。然し隱者の言葉で、とばりが完成するまでは一ト言でも二人は話しする事を禁じられて居た。阿陀仁にはとばりを隙見するさへ禁じられて居た。

或夜、もう村中寢靜まつた頃、荒絹は一人靜かに機を織つて居ると、不意にいやな寂しさに心を襲はれた。荒絹は機の手を止めて眼を閉ぢた。すると遙か遙か遠い所で何か唄つて居る男のしやがれ聲が聞えて來た。それはかすかで何を云つて居るかは解らなかつた。然し解らぬ儘に何んだかいやな氣持をさす節だつた。

それから毎夜其聲は聽えた。其聲は段々に近く聽えて來た。風の向きで時々其文句も聽えた。それは呪ひの不

今荒絹は一念を凝らして美しい美しい一帳のとばりを織つてゐるといふこと、そのとばりの中に阿陀仁と二人入る爲め、その美しいとばりに包まれた二人は世の如何なる美しい物にも再び眼をまどはされる事のない爲めに、今荒絹は一心にそれを織つて居るといふ事を聞いた。女神には强い妬みの心が起つた。

女神は荒絹の織つてゐる其美しいとばりと云ふのを見たいと思つた。或晩、それは月のいゝ晩であつた。女神は岩頭の案内で、初めて山を降りて往つた。

夜は更けて居た。森々ではふくろが啼いて居た。村の家々では皆灯を消して、もう寂靜まつて居た。只一軒、彼方に窓一ぱいにあかあかと灯の映つてゐる家があつた。

それが荒絹の家である。

女神は岩頭を其處に殘して一人靜かに進んで行つた。止まるにつれ、女神は美しい唄の聲を聞いた。機のトントンと云ふ響がそれに伴奏してゐた。魅するやうな調子で戀の切ない心を唄つて居る。女神は暫らくそれに聞惚れた。然し女神の心は一層强い嫉妬に燃えて來た。

女神は跫音を忍ばせて窓の下に近よつた。左うしてそつと隙間から中を覗いて見た。女神は先づ機から流れ出て、床を敷き、更に向うの壁へ其端をかけられた、幅の廣い美しい美しい織物を見た。それにはあらゆる美しい花と美しい小鳥とで、少女の戀する心が織り込まれてあつた。

女神は次に夢見るやうな、うつとりとした眼の美しい少女の姿を見た。豐かな頰、張切つた胸、丸味を持つた

が草を喰ふ間、阿陀仁も一緒に草を刈つた。牛が寢て靜かに反芻をする時に、阿陀仁は快く其處に畫寢をした。日が山の頂きに隱れる頃、牛は互に呼び交す。其聲に阿陀仁は眼を醒まして、刈つた草を或る牛の背に積み上げる。而して日の暮れきらぬ内に麓へ歸つて行く。

山には美しい花が多かつた。木の花も、草の花も。阿陀仁は左ういふ花を澤山につみ取つた。而してそれで美しい花束を幾つも作り、中で最も美しい一束を女神の祭壇に生けて、あとを麓の若い娘達に持つて行くのを例として居た。三四年經つた。阿陀仁は段々に美しくなつた。山の女神はいつか此若者を戀するやうになつた。然し其時は既に若者にも一人の戀人が出來て居た。それは荒絹と云ふ機の名人で、年は阿陀仁より一つ二つ上で、山の女神にも劣らぬ程美しい娘であつた。

阿陀仁が荒絹を戀するやうになつてからは、朝の内だけは草を刈り、花を摘みなどしてゐても、晝過ぎると、いそいそと牛を追ひ追ひ麓へ下つて行くやうになつた。それまでは摘んだ花の一番美しい一束を毎時女神に捧げて行つたのが、今は一番美しい一束を別にして、次の一束を捧げて行くやうになつた。

女神の心は樂しまなかつた。さうして女神は或日、使つて居る岩頭と云ふ山男——此山男はかなりの年をしながら惡戯者で、夜になるとよく麓の村々をあさり歩き、羊や雞や、或時は魚の肉などを盜み、又或時は酒をも盜んで來るのを仕事のやうにしてゐる奴であつた。——女神は此山男から阿陀仁と荒絹との戀を聞いた。左うして荒絹の伯父にあたる年老いた隱者の入智惠で、此戀は最初から絶對に女神には祕めて居ると云ふ事を聞いた。其上

荒絹

志賀直哉

昔々或る山に美しい一人の女神が住んで居た。女神は美の神で、戀の神で、さうして妬みの神であつた。晴れた日に此の山の頂きを望み得る程の地方に住む若者は、戀人の出來た日に皆其戀の成就を此女神に願はぬ者はなかつた。戀は成就する。二人は女神に感謝する。然し間もなく二人は有頂天になる。二人は今は二人だけになる。二人はもう女神の恩惠を忘れて居る。此時は戀の女神は妬みの神に變る。思はぬ禍が不意に二人の上に落ちて來る。其戀は遂に悲劇に終る。

かう云ふ例を幾度か見てゐる老人等は悲しげに頭を振つて溜息をつく。彼等は有頂天になつて行く二人を見る時に既に其悲しい終りを見て居た。然し有頂天になつて行く若い二人をさゝへる力はもう老人等にはなかつた。

老人等は斷崖へ急ぐ二人を見す見す只腕を拱いて見てゐるより仕方なかつた。左うして斷崖から逆落としに落ちて行く二人を見ながらも、只悲しげに頭を振るより仕方がなかつた。

玆に此山の麓に阿陀仁と云ふ美しい一人の牧童が居た。毎朝阿陀仁は七八頭の牛を連れて山へ登つて來る。牛

は剃刀を逆手に持ちかへると、いきなりぐいと咽をやつた、刃がすつかり隠れる程に。若者は身悶えも仕なかつた。

一寸間を置いて血が迸しる。若者の顔は見る見る土色に變つた。

芳三郎は殆ど失神して、倒れるやうに傍の椅子に腰を落とした。總べての緊張は一時に緩み、同時に極度の疲勞が還つて來た。眼をねむつてぐつたりとして居る彼は死人の樣に見えた。夜も死人の樣に靜まりかへつた。總べての運動は停止した。總べての物は深い眠りに陷つた。只獨り鏡だけが三方から冷かに此光景を眺めて居る。

咽から頰、頤、額などを剃つた後、咽の柔かい部分がどうしてもうまく行かぬ。こだはり盡した彼は其部分を皮ごと削ぎ取りたいやうな氣がした。肌理の荒い、一つ一つ毛穴に油が溜つて居るやうな顏を見て居ると、彼は眞からそんな氣がしたのである。若者はいつか眠入つて了つた。がくりと後ろへ首をもたせて、他愛もなく口を開けて居る。不揃な、よごれた齒が見える。

疲れ切つた芳三郎は、居ても起つても居られなかつた。總べての關節に毒でも注されたやうな心持がしてゐる。何も彼も投出して其のまゝ其處へ轉げたいやうな氣分になつた。もうよさう！かう彼は何遍思つたか知れない。

然し惰性的に依然こだはつて居た。

……刃がチョツとひつかゝる。若者の咽がピクツと動いた。彼は頭の先から足の爪先まで何か早いものに通り拔けられたやうに感じた。で其早いものは、彼から總べての倦怠と疲勞とを取つて行つて了つた。

傷は五分程もない。彼は只それを見詰めて立つた。薄く削がれた跡は最初乳白色をして居たが、ヂツと淡い紅がにじむと、見る見る血が盛り上がつて來た。彼は見詰めてゐた。血は黑ずんで珠形に盛り上がつて來た。それが頂點に達した時に、珠は崩れてスイと一ト筋に流れた。

此時彼には一種の荒々しい感情が起つた。

嘗て客の顏を傷つけた事のなかつた芳三郎には、此感情が非常な强さで迫つて來た。呼吸は段々忙しくなる。彼の全身全心は全く傷に吸ひ込まれたやうに見えた。今はどうにもそれに打克つ事が出來なくなつた。……彼

らする自分の顏を見ようとする。芳三郎は思ひ切つて毒舌でもあびせかけてやりたかつた。

芳三郎は剃刀をも一度キユンキユンやつて、先づ咽から剃り初めたが、どうも思ふやうに切れぬ。手も震へる。それに寢て居てはそれ程でもなかつたが、起きてかう俯向くと直ぐ水洟が垂れて來る。時々剃る手を止めて拭くけれども、直ぐ又鼻の先がムヅ〳〵して來ては滴りさうに溜る。

奥で赤子の啼く聲がしたので、お梅は入つて行つた。

切れない剃刀で剃られながらも、若者は平氣な顏をして居る。痛くも痒くもないと云ふ風である。其無神經さが芳三郎には無闇と癪に觸つた。使ひつけの切れる剃刀がないではなかつたが、彼はそれと更へようともしなかつた。どうせ何んでもかまふものかといふ氣である。それでも彼は不知又丁寧になつた。少しでもざらつけば、どうしても其處にこだはらずにはゐられない。こだはればこだはる程癪が起つて來る。からだも段々疲れて來た氣も疲れて來た。熱も大分出て來たやうである。

最初何の彼のと話しかけた若者は、芳三郎の不機嫌に恐れて默つて了つた。而して顏を剃る時分には、晝の烈しい勞働から來る疲勞で、うつらうつら仕始めた。錦公も窓に倚つて居眠つて居る。奥も赤子をだます聲が止んで、ひつそりとなつた。夜は内も外も全く靜まり返つた。剃刀の音だけが聞える。

焦々して怒りたかつた氣分は泣きたいやうな氣分に變つて、今は身も氣も全く疲れて來た。眼の中は熱で溶けさうにうるんでゐる。

「やるよ」と芳三郎は銘くさへぎつた。
「どうかしてるよ」とお梅は小聲で云つた。
「仕事着だ！」
「どうせ、あたるだけなら毛にもならないから其儘でおしなさい。」お梅は半纏を脱がしたくなかつた。
妙な顏をして二人を見較べて居た若者は、
「親方、病氣ですか」と云つて小さい凹んだ眼を媚びるやうにショボショボさした。
「えゝ、少し風邪をひいちやつて……」
悪い風邪が流行るつて云ひますから、用心しないといけませんぜ。」
「ありがたう。」芳三郎は口だけの禮を云つた。
芳三郎が白い布を首へ掛けた時、若者は又「ザットでいゝんですよ」といつた。而して「少し急ぎますからネ」と附加へて薄笑ひをした。芳三郎は默つて臍の腹で今砥いだ刃を和げて居た。
「十時半と、十一時半には行けるな。」又こんな事をいふ。何とか云つて貰ひたい。
芳三郎には、男か女か分らないやうな聲を出して居る小女郎屋のきたない女が直ぐ眼に浮んだ。で、此下司張つた小男が是から其處へ行くのだと思ふと、胸のむかつくやうなシーンが後から後から彼の衰弱した頭に浮んで來る。彼は冷切つた湯でシヤボンをつけ、やけにゴシゴシ頤から頬のあたりを擦つた。其間も若者は鏡にちらち

云ふ。其店には始終、兵隊か書生か近所の若者かゞ、一人や二人腰かけて居ない事はない。

「もうお店を仕ふんだからお歸りつて。」とお梅は錦公に命じた。

「まだ早いよ。」芳三郎は無意味に反對した。お梅は默つて了つた。

芳三郎は砥ぎ始めた。坐つて居た時からは餘程工合がいゝ。

お梅は綿入れの半纏羽織を取つて來て、子供でもだますやうに云つて、漸く手を通させて、やつと安心したといふやうに上り口に腰をかけて、一生懸命に砥いでゐる芳三郎の顏を見て居た。錦公は窓の傍の客の腰掛で膝を抱くやうにして、毛もない脛を剃上げたり剃下げたりして居た。

此時景氣よく硝子戸を開けて、せいの低い二十二三の若者が入つて來た。新らしい二ヲ子の袷に三尺を前で結び、前鼻緒のヤケにつまつた駒下駄を突掛けてゐる。

「ずつとでよござんすが、一つ大急ぎであたつておくんなさい。」かう云ひながら、いきなり鏡の前に立つと、下唇を嚙んで頤を突出し、揃へた指先で切りに其邊を撫でた。若者はイキがつた口のきゝやうだが、調子は田舍者であつた。節くれ立つた指や黑い凸凹の多い顏から、畫は荒い勞働についてゐる者だといふ事が知られた。

「兼さんに早く」とお梅は眼も一緒に働かして命じた。

「おいらがやるよ。」

「お前さんは今日は手が震へるから……」

「エイ。」

砥石の支度の出來た所で、芳三郎は起き上がつて、片膝立てゝ砥ぎ始めた。十時がゆるく鳴る。

お梅は何を云つてもどうせ無駄と思つだから、靜かに坐つて見てゐた。

暫らく砥石で砥いだ後、今度は皮砥へかけだ。室内のよどんだ空氣が、そのキユンキユンいふ音で幾らか動き出したやうな氣がした。芳三郎は震へる手を堪へ、調子をつけ砥いでゐるが、どうしても氣持よくゆかぬ。其内先刻お梅の假に打つた打釘が不意に拔けた。皮砥が飛んでクルクルと剃刀に卷きついた。

「あぶない！」と叫んで、お梅は恐る恐る芳三郎の顏を見た。芳三郎の眉がぴりゝと震へた。

芳三郎は皮砥をほぐして其處へ投げ出すと、剃刀を持つて立上がり、寢衣一つで土間へ行かうとした。

「お前さんそりやいけない……」

お梅は泣聲を出して止めたが、諾かない。芳三郎は默つて土間へ下りて了つた。お梅もついて下りた。

客は一人もなかつた。錦公が一人ボンヤリ鏡の前の椅子に腰かけて居た。

「兼さんは？」とお梅が訊いた。

「時子を張りに行きました。」錦公は眞面目な顏をしてかう答へた。

「まあそんな事を云つて出て行つたの？」とお梅は笑ひ出した。然し芳三郎は依然嶮しい顏をして居る。

時子と云ふのは、此處から五六軒先の軍隊用品雜貨といふ看板を出した家の妙な女である。女學生上りだとか

「山田さんから剃刀が又來ました。」
「別のかい？」
「先刻ンです。直ぐ使つて見たが、餘まり切れないが、明日の晝迄でいゝから親方が一度使つて見て寄越して下さいつて。」
「お使ひが居なさるのかい？」
「先刻です。」
「どう」と芳三郎は夜着の上に手を延ばして、錦公が四這ひになつて出す剃刀をモロツコのケイスのまゝ受取つた。
「熱で手が震へるんだから、いつそ霞町の良川さんに頼む方がよかないの？」
かう云つてお梅はハダカツタ胸を合せながら起きて來た。芳三郎は默つて手を延ばして、ランプの心を上げ、ケイスから拔き出して刃を打ちかへし打ちかへし見た。お梅は枕元に坐つて、そつと芳三郎の額に手を當てゝ見た。
芳三郎は五月蠅さうに空いた手でそれを拂ひ退けた。
「錦公！」
「エイ。」直ぐ夜着の裾の所で返事をした。
「砥石を此處へ持つて來い。」

思ふ樣に砥げなかつた。其焦々してゐる樣子を見兼れて、お梅は、

「兼さんにさせればいゝのに」と何遍も勸めて見たが、返事もしない。けれども遂ひに我慢が出來なくなつた。十五分程して氣も根も盡きはてたといふ樣子で再び床へ横はると、直ぐうとうとして、いつか眠入つて了つた。

剃刀は火とぼし頃、使の歸途、寄つて見たといふ山田の女中が持つて往つた。

お梅は粥を煮て置いた。それの冷えぬ内に喰べさせたいと思つたが、疲れ切つて眠つてゐるものを起して又不機嫌にするのもと考へ、控へてゐた。八時頃になつた。餘り遲れると藥までが順遲れになるからと、無理にゆすり起した。芳三郎もそれ程不機嫌でなく起直つて食事をした。左うして横になると直ぐ又眠入つて了つた。

十時少し前、芳三郎は藥で又おこされた。今は何を考へるともなくウトウトとしてゐる。熱氣を持つた鼻息が、眼の下まで被つてゐる夜着の襟に當つて、氣持惡く顏にかゝる。店の方も靜まりかへつてゐる。彼は力のない眼差であたりを見廻はした。柱には眞黑な皮砥が靜かに下がつて居る。薄暗いランプの光はイヤに赤黃色く濁つて、部屋の隅で赤子に添乳をして居るお梅の背中を輝して居た。彼は部屋中が熱で苦しんで居るやうに感じた。

「親方――親方――」土間からの上り口で錦公のガヅガヅした聲がする。

「えゝ。」芳三郎は夜着の襟に口を埋めたまゝ答へた。其籠つたやうな嗄聲が聞えぬかして、

「親方――」と又云つた。

「何だよ。」今度ははつきりと鋭かつた。

芳三郎は否と云つたつもりだつたが、聲がまるで聲かなかつた。
お梅は夜着をはいだり、枕元の痰吐や藥壜を片寄せたりするので、芳三郎は又、
「左うぢやない」と云つた。が、聲がかすれてお梅には聞きとれなかつた。折角直りかけた氣分が又焦々して來た。
「後から抱いて上げようか。」お梅はいたはるやうにして背後に廻つた。
「皮砥と山田さんからの剃刀を持つて來な。」芳三郎はぶつけるやうに云ひ放つた。お梅は一寸默つてゐたが、
「お前さん砥げるの？」
「いゝから持つて來な。」
「……起きてるならかいまきでも掛けて居なくつちや仕樣がないれえ。」
「いゝから持つて來いと云ふものを早く持つて來れえか。」割りに低い聲では云つてるが、癇でピリピリして居る。お梅は知らん顏をして、かいまきを出し、床の上に胡坐をかいてゐるのに後から羽織つてやつた。芳三郎は片手を擔ぐやうにしてかいまきの襟を掴むとグイと剝いで了つた。
お梅は默つて半間の障子を開けると、土間へ下りて皮砥と剃刀を取つて來た。而して皮砥をかける所がなかつたので、枕元の柱に折釘をうつてやつた。
芳三郎はふだんでさへ氣分の惡い時は旨く砥げないと云つて居るのに、熱で手が震へて居たから、どうしても

「御面倒でも親方に御願ひしますよ」といふ聲がした。

「あの、親方は……」兼次郎が云ふ。それを遮つて、

「兼、やるぜ」と芳三郎は寢床から怒鳴つた。鋭かつたが嗄れて居た。それには答へず、

「よろしう御座います」と兼次郎の云ふのが聞える。女は硝子戸を閉めて去つた樣子だ。

「畜生」と芳三郎は小聲に獨言して、夜着裏の紺で青く薄よごれた腕を出して、暫らく凝つと見詰めて居た。然し熱に疲かれた身體は据ゑられた置物のやうに重かつた。彼はうつとりとした眼で天井のすゝけた大張子を眺めて居た。大張子に蟹が澤山とまつて居た。

彼は聞くともなく店の話に耳を傾けた。兵隊が二三人、近所の小料理屋の品評から軍隊の飯の如何に不味いかなどを話し合つて、然しかう涼しくなると、それも幾らかは食べられて來たなど云つて居るのが聞える。こんな話を聞いて居る内に、いくらかいゝ氣分になつて來た。暫らくして彼は大儀さうに寢返りをした。

三疊の向ふの勝手口から差込む白つぽい曇つた夕方の光の中に、女房のお梅が赤ん坊を半纏おんぶにして夕餉の支度をして居る。彼は輕くなつた氣分を味ひながらそれを見てゐた。

「今の内やつて置かう。」彼はかう思つて重いからだで蒲團の上へ起き直つたが、眩暈がして暫らくは枕の上へ伏して居た。

「はゞかり？」と優しく云つて、お梅は濡手をダラリと前へ下げたまゝ入つて來た。

る源公を又使はないわけに行かなかつた。然し源公は其二年間にかなり惡くなつて居た。仕事は兎角怠ける。そして治太公までを誘ひ出して、霞町あたりの兵隊相手の怪し氣な女に狂ひ廻はる。仕舞には人のいゝ治太公を唆して、店の金まで掠めさす樣な事をした。芳三郎は治太公を可哀想に思つて度々意見もして見た。然し店の金を持出す樣になつては、どうする事も出來なかつた。で、彼は一ト月程前、遂に二人を追出して了つたのである。

今あるのは兼次郎といふ、二十歳になる至つて氣力のない靑白い顏の男と、錦公といふ十二三の、これは又頭が後ろ前にヤケに長い子供である。祭日前の稼ぎ時に此の二人では、さつぱり埒があかぬ。彼は熱で苦しい身を横へながら床の中で一人焦々して居た。

晝に近づくにつれて客がたて込んで來た。けたゝましい硝子戸の開け閉てや、錦公の引きづる齒のゆるんだ足駄の乾いたやうな響きが、鋭くなつた神經にはビリビリ觸る。

又硝子戸が開いた。

「龍土の山田ですが、旦那樣が明日の晩から御旅行遊ばすんですから、夕方までにこれを砥いで置いて下さい。——私が取りに來ます。」女の聲だ。

「今日はチツトたて込んで居るんですが、明日の朝のうちぢやいけませんか?」と兼次郎の聲がする。

女は一寸澁つた樣子だつたが、

「ぢやあ間違なくね。」かういつて硝子戸を閉めたが、又直ぐ開けて、

剃刀

志賀直哉

麻布六本木の辰床の芳三郎は風邪の爲め珍らしく床へ就いた。それが丁度秋季皇靈祭の前にかゝつてゐたから、兵隊の仕事に忙がしい盛りだつた。彼は寢ながら、一ト月前に追出した源公と治太公が居たらと考へた。

芳三郎は其以前、年こそ一つ二つ上だつたが、源公や治太公と共に此處の小僧であつたのを、前の主が其剃刀の腕前に惚込んで一人娘に配し、自分は直ぐ隱居して店を引渡したのである。

內々娘に氣のあつた源公は間もなく暇を取つたが、氣のいゝ治太公は今までの「芳さん」を「親方」と呼び改めて、前通りよく働いて居た。隱居した親父はそれから半年程して、母親は又半年程して死んで了つた。

剃刀を使ふことにかけては芳三郎は實に名人だつた。加之、癇の强い男で、撫でゝ見て少しでもざらつけば毛を一本一本押出すやうにして剃らねば氣が濟まなかつた。それで膚を荒すやうな事は決してない。客は芳三郎にあたつて貰ふと一日延びが、ちがふと云つた。そして彼は十年間、間違にも客の顏に傷をつけた事がないといふのが自慢であつた。

出て行つた源公は、其後二年許りしてぶらりと還つて來た。芳三郎は以前朋輩だつた好誼からも、詫を云つて居

「何になつても、人間らしい正直な暮しをするつもりです。」

杜子春の聲には今までにない晴れ晴れした調子が罩つてゐました。

「その言葉を忘れるなよ。ではおれは今日限り二度とお前には遇はないから。」

鐵冠子はかう言ふ内に、もう歩き出してゐましたが、急に又足を止めて、杜子春の方を振り返ると、

「おお、幸ひ今思ひ出したが、おれは泰山の南の麓に一軒の家を持つてゐる。その家を畑ごとお前にやるから、早速行つて住まふが好い。今頃は丁度家のまはりに、桃の花が一面に咲いてゐるだらう。」と、さも愉快さうにつけ加へました。

と涙を落しながら、「お母さん」と一聲叫びました。……

六

その聲に氣がついて見ると、杜子春はやはり夕日を浴びて、洛陽の西の門の下に、ぼんやり佇んでゐるのでした。霞んだ空、白い三日月、絶え間ない人や車の波、――すべてがまだ峨眉山へ行かない前と同じことです。

「どうだな。おれの弟子になつた所が、とても仙人にはなれはすまい。」

片目眇の老人は微笑を含みながら言ひました。

「なれません。なれませんが、しかし私はなれなかつたことも、反つて嬉しい氣がするのです。」

杜子春はまだ眼に涙を浮べた儘、思はず老人の手を握りました。

「いくら仙人になれた所が、私はあの地獄の森羅殿の前に、鞭を受けてゐる父母を見ては、默つてゐる譯には行きません。」

「もしお前が默つてゐたら――」と鐵冠子は急に嚴かな顏になつて、ぢつと杜子春を見つめました。

「もしお前が默つてゐたら、おれは即座にお前の命を絶つてしまはうと思つてゐたのだ。お前はもう仙人になりたいと云ふ望も持つてゐまい。大金持になることは、元より愛想がつきた筈だ。ではお前はこれから後何になつたら好いと思ふな。」

鬼どもは一齊に「はつ」と答へながら、鐵の鞭をとつて立ち上ると、四方八方から二匹の馬を、未練未釋なく打ちのめしました。鞭はりうりうと風を切つて、所嫌はず雨のやうに、馬の皮肉を打ち破るのです。馬は、――畜生になつた父母は、苦しさうに身を悶えて、眼には血の涙を浮べた儘、見てもゐられない程嘶き立てました。

「どうだ。まだその方は白狀しないか。」

閻魔大王は鬼どもに、暫く鞭の手をやめさせて、もう一度杜子春の答を促しました。もうその時には二匹の馬も、肉は裂け骨は碎けて、息も絶え絶えに、階の前へ倒れ伏してゐたのです。

杜子春は必死になつて、鐵冠子の言葉を思ひ出しながら、緊く眼をつぶつてゐました。するとその時彼の耳には殆、聲とはいへない位かすかな聲が傳はつて來ました。

「心配をおしでない。私たちはどうなつても、お前さへ仕合せになれるのなら、それより結構なことはないのだからね。大王が何と仰有つても、言ひたくないことは默つて御出で。」

それは確に懷しい母親の聲に違ひありません。杜子春は思はず、眼をあきました。さうして馬の一匹が、力なく地上に倒れた儘、悲しさうに彼の顏へ、ぢつと眼をやつてゐるのを見ました。母親はこんな苦しみの中にも、息子の心を思ひやつて、鬼どもの鞭に打たれたことを怨む氣色さへも見せないのです。大金持になれば御世辭を言ひ、貧乏人になれば口も利かない世間の人たちに比べると、何といふ有難い志でせう。何といふ健氣な決心でせう。杜子春は老人の戒めも忘れて、轉ぶやうにその側へ走りよると、兩手に半死の馬の頸を抱いて、はらはら

つて來ると、さつきの通り杜子春を階の下に引き据ゑながら、御殿の上の閻魔大王に、

「この罪人はどうしても、ものを言ふ氣色がございません。」と、口を揃へて言上しました。

閻魔大王は眉をひそめて、暫く思案に暮れてゐましたが、やがて何か思ひついたと見えて、

「この男の父母は、畜生道に落ちてゐる筈だから、早速ここへ引き立てて來い。」と、一匹の鬼に言ひつけました。

鬼は忽、風に乘つて、地獄の空へ舞ひ上りました。と思ふと、又星が流れるやうに、二匹の獸を驅り立てながら、さつと森羅殿の前へ下りて來ました。その獸を見た杜子春は、驚いたの驚かないのではありません。なぜかといへばそれは二匹とも、形は見すぼらしい痩せ馬でしたが、顏は夢にも忘れない、死んだ父母の通りでしたから。

「こら、その方は何のために峨眉山の上に坐つてゐたか。まつすぐに白狀しなければ、今度は其方の父母に痛い思ひをさせてやるぞ。」

杜子春はかう嚇されても、やはり返事をしずにゐました。

「この不孝者めが。その方は父母が苦しんでも、その方さへ都合がよければ、好いと思つてゐるのだな。」

閻魔大王は森羅殿も崩れる程、凄じい聲で喚きました。

「打て、鬼ども。その二匹の畜生を、肉も骨も打ち碎いてしまへ。」

「こら、その方は何の爲に、峨眉山の上へ坐つてゐた？」

閻魔大王の聲は雷のやうに、階の上から響きました。杜子春は早速その間に答へようとしましたが、ふと又思ひ出したのは、「決して口を利くな。」といふ鐵冠子の戒めの言葉です。そこで唯頭を垂れた儘、啞のやうに默つてゐました。すると閻魔大王は、持つてゐた鐵の笏を擧げて、顏中の鬚を逆立てながら、

「その方はここをどこだと思ふ？　速に返答をすれば好し、さもなければ、時を移さず地獄の呵責に遇はせてくれるぞ。」と、威丈高に罵りました。

が、杜子春は相變らず唇一つ動かしません。それを見た閻魔大王は、すぐに鬼どもの方を向いて、荒荒しく何か言ひつけると、鬼どもは一度に畏つて、忽杜子春を引き立てながら、森羅殿の空へ舞ひ上りました。

地獄には誰でも知つてゐる通り、劍の山や血の池の外にも、焦熱地獄といふ熔の谷や、極寒地獄といふ氷の海が、眞暗な空の下に竝んでゐます。鬼どもはさういふ地獄の中へ、代る代る杜子春を抛りこみました。ですから杜子春は無殘にも、劍に胸を貫かれるやら、熔に顏を燒かれるやら、舌を拔かれるやら、皮を剝がれるやら、鐵の杵に搗かれるやら、油の鍋に煮られるやら、毒蛇に腦味噌を吸はれるやら、熊鷹に眼を食はれるやら、――その苦しみを數へ立ててゐては、到底際限がない位、あらゆる責苦に遇はされたのです。それでも杜子春は我慢强くぢつと齒を食ひしばつた儘、一言も口を利きませんでした。

これにはさすがの鬼どもも、呆れ返つてしまつたのでせう。もう一度夜のやうな空を飛んで、森羅殿の前へ歸

程、からからと高く笑ひながら、どこともなく消えてしまひました。勿論この時はもう無數の神兵も、吹き渡る夜風の音と一しょに、夢のやうに消え失せた後だつたのです。

北斗の星は又寒さうに、一枚岩の上を照らし始めました。絶壁の松も前に變らず、ころころと枝を鳴らせてゐます。が、杜子春はもう息が絶えて、仰向けにそこへ倒れてゐました。

五

杜子春の體は、岩の上へ仰向けに倒れてゐましたが、杜子春の魂は、靜に體から拔け出して、地獄の底へ下りて行きました。

この世と地獄との間には、闇穴道といふ道があつて、そこは年中暗い空に、氷のやうな冷たい風がびゆうびゆう吹き荒んでゐるのです。杜子春はその風に吹かれながら、暫くは唯木の葉のやうに、空を漂つて行きましたが、やがて森羅殿といふ額の懸つた立派な御殿の前へ出ました。

御殿の前にゐた大勢の鬼は、杜子春の姿を見るや否や、すぐにそのまはりを取り捲いて、階の前へ引き据ゑました。階の上には一人の王樣が、まつ黑な袍に金の冠をかぶつて、いかめしくあたりを睨んでゐます。これは兼ねて噂に聞いた閻魔大王に違ひありません。杜子春はどうなることかと思ひながら、恐る恐るそこへ跪いてゐました。

ふ厳かな神將が現れました。神將は手に三叉の戟を持つてゐましたが、いきなりその戟の切先を杜子春の胸もとへ向けながら、眼を瞋らせて叱りつけるのを聞けば、

「こら、その方は一體何物だ。この峨眉山といふ山は、天地開闢の昔から、おれが住居をしてゐる所だぞ。それも憚らず、たつた一人、ここへ足を踏み入れるとは、よもや唯の人間ではあるまい。さあ命が惜しかつたら、一刻も早く返答しろ。」と言ふのです。

しかし杜子春は老人の言葉通り默然と口を噤んでゐました。

「返事をしないか。――しないな、好し。しなければしないで勝手にしろ。その代りおれの眷屬たちが、その方をずたずたに斬つてしまふぞ。」

神將は戟を高く擧げて、向うの山の空を招きました。その途端に闇がさつと裂けると、驚いたことには、無數の神兵が雲の如く空に充ち滿ちて、それが皆槍や刀をきらめかせながら、今にもここへ一なだれに攻め寄せようとしてゐるのです。

この景色を見た杜子春は、思はずあつと叫びさうにしましたが、すぐに又鐵冠子の言葉を思ひ出して、一生懸命に默つてゐました。神將は彼が恐れないのを見ると、怒つたの怒らないのではありません。

「この剛情者め。どうしても返事をしなければ、約束通り命はとつてやるぞ。」

神將はかう喚くが早いか、三叉の戟を閃かせて、一突きに杜子春を突き殺しました。さうして峨眉山もどよむ

なく、一時に杜子春に飛びかかりました。が虎の牙に嚙まれるか、蛇の舌に呑まれるか、杜子春の命は瞬く内に、なくなつてしまふと思つた時、虎と蛇とは霧の如く、夜風と共に消え失せて、後には唯絶壁の松が、さつきの通りころころと枝を鳴らしてゐるばかりなのです。杜子春はほつと一息しながら、今度はどんなことが起るかと、心待ちに待つてゐました。

すると一陣の風が吹き起つて、墨のやうな黒雲が一面にあたりをとざすや否や、うす紫の稲妻が、やにはに闇を二つに裂いて、凄じく雷が鳴り出しました。いや、雷ばかりではありません。それと一しよに瀑のやうな雨も、いきなりどうどうと降り出したのです。杜子春はこの天變の中に、恐れ氣もなく坐つてゐました。風の音、雨のしぶき、それから絶え間ない稲妻の光、――暫くはさすがの峨眉山も、覆るかと思ふ位でしたが、その内に耳をもつんざく程大きな雷鳴が轟いたと思ふと、空に渦巻いた黒雲の中から、まつ赤な一本の火柱が、杜子春の頭へ落ちかかりました。

杜子春は思はず耳を抑へて、一枚岩の上へひれ伏しました。が、すぐに眼を開いて見ると、空は以前の通り晴れ渡つて、向ふに聳えた山山の上には、茶碗程の北斗の星が、やはりきらきらと輝いてゐます。して見れば今の大あらしも、あの虎や白蛇と同じやうに、鐵冠子の留守をつけ込んだ魔性の惡戯に違ひありません。杜子春は漸く安心して、額の冷汗を拭ひながら、又岩の上に坐り直しました。

が、そのため息がまだ消えない内に、今度は彼の坐つてゐる前へ、金の鎧を着下した身の丈三丈もあらうとい

「さうか。それを聞いて、おれも安心した。ではおれは行つて來るから。」

老人は杜子春に別れを告げると、又あの竹杖に跨つて、夜目にも削つたやうな山山の空へ、一文字に消えてしまひました。

杜子春はたつた一人、岩の上に坐つた儘、靜に星を眺めてゐました。すると彼是半時ばかり經つて、深山の夜氣が肌寒く薄い着物に透り出した頃、突然空中に聲があつて、

「そこにゐるのは何物だ。」と、叱りつけるではありませんか。

しかし杜子春は仙人の敎へ通り、何とも返事をしずにゐました。

所が又暫くすると、やはり同じ聲が響いて、

「返事をしないと、立ち所に命はないものと覺悟をしろ。」と、いかめしく嚇しつけるのです。

杜子春は勿論默つてゐました。

と、どこから登つて來たか、爛爛と眼を光らせた虎が一匹、忽然と岩の上に躍り上つて、杜子春の姿を睨みながら、一聲高く哮りました。のみならず、それと同時に、頭の上の松の枝が、烈しくざわざわ搖れたと思ふと、後の絶壁の頂からは、四斗樽程の白蛇が一匹、炎のやうな舌を吐いて、見る見る近くへ下りて來るのです。

杜子春はしかし平然と、眉毛も動かさずに坐つてゐました。

虎と蛇とは、一つ餌食を狙つて、互に隙でも窺ふのか、暫くは睨み合ひの體でしたが、やがてどちらが先とも

袖裏の青蛇、膽氣粗なり。
三たび嶽陽に入れども、人識らず。
朗吟して、飛過す洞庭湖。

四

二人を乘せた青竹は、間もなく峨眉山へ舞ひ下りました。

そこは深い谷に臨んだ幅の廣い一枚岩の上でしたが、よくよく高い所だと見えて、中空に垂れた北斗の星が、茶碗程の大きさに光つてゐました。元より人跡の絶えた山ですから、あたりはしんと靜まり返つて、やつと耳にはひるものは、後の絶壁に生えてゐる曲りくねつた一株の松が、ころころと夜風に鳴る音だけです。

二人がこの岩の上へ來ると、鐵冠子は杜子春を絶壁の下に坐らせて、

「おれはこれから天上へ行つて、西王母に御眼にかかつて來るから、お前はその間ここに坐つて、おれの歸るを待つてゐるが好い。多分おれがゐなくなると、いろいろな魔性が現れて、お前をたぶらかさうとするだらうが、たとひどんな事が起らうとも、決して聲を出すのではないぞ。もし一言でも口を利いたら。お前は到底仙人にはなれないものだと覺悟をしろ。好いか。天地が裂けても、默つてゐるのだぞ。」と言ひました。

「大丈夫です。決して聲なぞは出しません。命がなくなつても、默つてゐます。」

「いかにもおれは峨眉山に棲んでゐる鐵冠子といふ仙人だ。始めお前の顔を見た時、どこか物わかりが好ささうだつたから、二度まで大金持にしてやつたのだが、それ程仙人になりたければ、おれの弟子にとり立ててやらう。」と、快く願を容れてくれました。

杜子春は喜んだの、喜ばないのではありません。老人の言葉がまだ終らない内に、彼は大地に額をつけて、何度も鐵冠子に御辭儀をしました。

「いや、さう御禮などは言つて貰ふまい。いくらおれの弟子にした所が、立派な仙人になれるかなれないかは、お前次第できまることだからな。――が、兎も角もまづ、おれと一しよに峨眉山の奥へ來て見るが好い。おお、幸ここに竹杖が一本落ちてゐる。では早速これへ乘つて、一飛びに空を渡るとしよう。」

鐵冠子はそこにあつた青竹を一本拾ひ上げると、口の中に咒文を唱へながら、杜子春と一しよにその竹へ、馬にでも乘るやうに跨りました。すると不思議ではありませんか。竹杖は忽ち龍のやうに、勢よく大空へ舞ひ上つて、晴れ渡つた春の夕空を峨眉山の方角へ飛んで行きました。

杜子春は膽をつぶしながら、恐る恐る下を見下しました。が、下には唯青い山山が夕明りの底に見えるばかりで、あの洛陽の都の西の門は、（とうに霞に紛れたのでせう）どこを探しても見當りません。その内に鐵冠子は、白い鬚の毛を風に吹かせて、高らかに歌を唱ひ出しました。

朝に北海に遊び、暮には蒼梧。

「金はもう入らない？　ははあ、では贅澤をするには、とうとう飽きてしまつたと見えるな。」
老人は訝しさうな眼つきをしながら、ぢつと杜子春の顏を見つめました。
「何、贅澤に飽きたのぢやありません。人間といふものに愛想がつきたのです。」
杜子春は不平さうな顏をしながら、突慳貪にかう言ひました。
「それは面白いな。どうして又人間に愛想が盡きたのだ？」
「人間は皆薄情です。私が大金持になつた時には、世辭も追從もしますけれど、一旦貧乏になつて御覽なさい。柔しい顏さへもして見せはしません。そんなことを考へると、たとひもう一度大金持になつた所が、何にもならないやうな氣がするのです。」
「さうか。いや、お前は若い者に似合はず、感心に物のわかる男だ。ではこれからは貧乏をしても、安らかに暮して行くつもりか。」
杜子春はちよいとためらひました。が、すぐに思ひ切つた眼を擧げると、訴へるやうに老人の顏を見ながら、
「それも今の私には出來ません。ですから私はあなたの弟子になつて、仙術の修業をしたいと思ふのです。いいえ、隱してはいけません。あなたは道德の高い仙人でせう。仙人でなければ、一夜の內に私を天下第一の大金持にすることは出來ない筈です。どうか私の先生になつて不思議な仙術を敎へて下さい。」
老人は眉をひそめた儘、暫くは默つて、何事か考へてゐるやうでしたが、やがて又につこり笑ひながら、

老人はかう言つたと思ふと、今度も亦人ごみの中へ掻き消すやうに隱れてしまひました。

杜子春はその翌日から、忽天下第一の大金持に返りました。と同時に相變らず、仕放題な贅澤をし始めました。庭に咲いてゐる牡丹の花、その中に眠つてゐる白孔雀、それから刀を呑んで見せる天竺から來た魔法使——すべてが昔の通りなのです。

ですから車に一ぱいあつた、あの夥しい黃金も、又三年ばかり經つ內には、すつかりなくなつてしまひました。

三

「お前は何を考へてゐるのだ。」

片目眇の老人は、三度杜子春の前へ來て、同じことを問ひかけました。勿論彼はその時も、洛陽の西の門の下に、ぼそぼそと霞を破つてゐる三日目の光を眺めながら、ぼんやり佇んでゐたのです。

「私ですか。私は今夜寢る所もないので、どうしようかと思つてゐるのです。」

「さうか。それは可哀さうだな。ではおれが好いことを敎へてやらう。今この夕日の中へ立つて、お前の影が地に映つたら、その腹に當る所を夜中に掘つて見るが好い。きつと車に一ぱいの——」

老人がここまで言ひかけると、杜子春は急に手を擧げて、その言葉を遮りました。

「いや、お金はもう入らないのです。」

笛や琴を節面白く奏してゐるといふ景色なのです。

しかしいくら大金持でも、御金には際限がありますから、さすがに贅澤家の杜子春も、一年二年と經つ内には、だんだん貧乏になり出しました。さうすると人間は薄情なもので、昨日までは毎日來た友だちも、今日は門の前を通つてさへ、挨拶一つして行きません。ましてとうとう三年目の春、又杜子春が以前の通り、一文無しになつてみると、廣い洛陽の都の中にも、彼に宿を貸さうといふ家は、一軒もなくなつてしまひました。いや、宿を貸す所か、今では椀に一杯の水も惠んでくれるものはないのです。

そこで彼は或日の夕方、もう一度あの洛陽の西の門の下へ行つて、ぼんやり空を眺めながら、途方に暮れて立つてゐました。するとやはり昔のやうに、片目眇の老人が、どこからか姿を現して、

「お前は何を考へてゐるのだ。」と、聲をかけるではありませんか。

杜子春は老人の顏を見ると、耻しさうに下を向いた儘、暫くは返事もしませんでした。が、老人はその日も親切さうに、同じ言葉を繰返しますから、こちらも前と同じやうに、

「私は今夜寢る所もないので、どうしたものかと考へてゐるのです。」と、恐る恐る返事をしました。

「さうか。それは可哀さうだな。ではおれが好いことを一つ敎へてやらう。今この夕日の中へ立つて、お前の影が地に映つたら、その胸に當る所を夜中に掘つて見るが好い。きつと車に一ぱいの黃金が埋まつてゐる筈だから。」

りの上には、もう氣の早い蝙蝠が二三匹ひらひら舞つてゐました。

二

杜子春は一日の内に、洛陽の都でも唯一人といふ大金持になりました。あの老人の言葉通り、夕日に影を映して見て、その頭に當る所を夜中にそつと掘つて見たら、大きな車にも餘る位、黄金が一山出て來たのです。

大金持になつた杜子春は、すぐに立派な家を買つて、玄宗皇帝にも負けない位、贅澤な暮しをし始めました。蘭陵の酒を買はせるやら、桂州の龍眼肉をとりよせるやら、日に四度色の變る牡丹を庭に植ゑさせるやら、白孔雀を何羽も放し飼ひにするやら、玉を集めるやら、錦を縫はせるやら、香木の車を造らせるやら、象牙の椅子を誂へるやら、その贅澤を一一書いてゐては、いつになつてもこの話がおしまひにならない位です。

すると、かういふ噂を聞いて、今までは路で行き合つても、挨拶さへしなかつた友だちなどが、朝夕遊びにやつて來ました。それも一日毎に數が增して、半年ばかり經つ内には、洛陽の都に名を知られた才子や美人が多い中で、杜子春の家へ來ないものは、一人もない位になつてしまつたのです。杜子春は此の御客たちを相手に、毎日酒盛を開きました。その酒盛の又盛なことは、中中口には盡されません。極くかいつまんだだけをお話しても、杜子春が金の杯に西洋から來た葡萄酒を汲んで、天竺生れの魔法使が刀を呑んで見せる藝に見とれてゐると、そのまはりには二十人の女たちが、十人は翡翠の蓮の花を、十人は瑪瑙の牡丹の花を、いづれも髮に飾りながら、

「日は暮れるし、腹は減るし、その上もうどこへ行つても、泊めてくれる所はなさうだし――こんな思ひをして生きてゐる位なら、一そ川へでも身を投げて、死んでしまつた方がましかも知れない。」

杜子春はひとりさつきから、こんな取りとめもないことを思ひめぐらしてゐたのです。

するとどこからやつて來たか、突然彼の前へ足を止めた片目眇(すがめ)の老人があります。それが夕日の光を浴びて、大きな影を門へ落すと、ぢつと杜子春の顏を見ながら、

「お前は何を考へてゐるのだ。」と、横柄に言葉をかけました。

「私ですか。私は今晩寢る所もないので、どうしたものかと考へてゐるのです。」

老人の尋ね方が急でしたから、杜子春はさすがに眼を伏せて、思はず正直な答をしました。

「さうか。それは可哀さうだな。」

老人は暫く何事か考へてゐるやうでしたが、やがて往來にさしてゐる夕日の光を指さしながら、

「ではおれが好いことを一つ敎へてやらう。今この夕日の中に立つて、お前の影が地に映つたら、その頭に當る所を夜中に掘つて見るが好い。きつと車に一ぱいの黃金が埋つてゐる筈だから。」

「ほんたうですか。」

杜子春は驚いて、伏せてゐた眼を擧げました。所が更に不思議な事には、あの老人はどこへ行つたか、もうあたりにはそれらしい影も形も見當りません。その代り空の月の色は前よりも猶白くなつて、休みない往來の人通

杜子春

芥川龍之介

一

或春の日暮です。

唐の都洛陽の西の門の下に、ぼんやりと空を仰いでゐる一人の若者がありました。

若者は名を杜子春といつて、元は金持の息子でしたが、今は財産を費ひ盡して、その日の暮しに困る位、憐れな身分になつてゐるのです。

何しろその頃洛陽といへば、天下に竝ぶものない繁昌を極めた都ですから、往來にはまだしつきりなく人や車が通つてゐました。門一ぱいに當つてゐる油のやうな夕日の光の中に、老人のかぶつた紗の帽子や、土耳古の女の金の耳環や、白馬に飾つた色糸の手綱が、絶えず流れて行く容子は、まるで畫のやうな美しさです。

しかし杜子春は相變らず門の壁に身を凭せて、ぼんやり空ばかり眺めてゐました。空には、もう細い月が、うらうらと靡いた霞の中に、まるで爪の痕かと思ふ程、かすかに白く浮んでゐるのです。

幾分でもあてになるのだ。さうしないと、何小二の首が落ちたやうに、我我の人格も、何時どんな時首が落ちるかわからない。――すべて支那の新聞と云ふものは、こんな風に讀まなくてはいけないのだ。

「いや、僕はさうは思はない。少くともあの時は、あいつも眞面目にさう感じてゐたのだらうと思ふ。恐らくは今度も亦、首が落ちると同時に（新聞の語をその儘使へば）やはりさう感じたらう。僕はそれをこんな風に想像する。あいつは喧嘩をしてゐる中に、酔つてゐたから、譯なく卓子と一しょに拋り出された。さうしてその拍子に、創口が開いて、長い辮髪ぶらさげた首が、ごろりと床の上へころげ落ちた。あいつが前に見た母親の裙子とか、女の素足とか、或は又花のさいてゐる胡麻畑とか云ふものは、やはりそれと同時にあいつの眼の前を、彷彿として往來した事だらう。或は屋根があるのにも關はらず、あいつは深い蒼空を遙か向うに望んだかも知れない。あいつはその時、しみじみ又今までの自分の生活が淺ましくなつた。が、今度はもう間に合はない。前には正氣を失つてゐる所を、日本の看護卒が見つけて、介抱してやつた。今は喧嘩の相手が、そこをつけ込んで打つたり蹴つたりする。そこであいつは後悔した上にも後悔しながら、息をひきとつてしまつたのだ。」

山川技師は肩をゆすつて笑つた。

「君は立派な空想家だ。だが、それならどうしてあいつは、一度さう云ふ目に遇ひながら、無頼漢なんぞになつたのだらう。」

「それは君の云ふのとちがつた意味で、人間はあてにならないからだ。」

木村少佐は新しい葉巻きに火をつけてから、殆得意に近い程晴晴した調子で、微笑しながらかう云つた。

「我我は我我自身のあてにならないことを、痛切に知つておく必要がある。實際それを知つてゐるもののみが、

本刀をお見舞申されたと云つてゐた。」

「へえ、妙な縁だね。だがそいつはこの新聞で見ると、無頼漢だと書いてあるではないか。そんなやつは一層その時に死んでしまつた方が、どの位世間でも助かつたか知れないのだらう。」

「それがあの頃は、極正直な人の好い人間で、捕虜の中にも、あんな従順なやつは珍らしい位だつたのだ。だから軍醫官でも何でも、妙にあいつが可愛いかつたと見えて、特別によく療治をしてやつたらしい。あいつは又身の上話をしても、中中面白い事を云つてゐた。殊にあいつが頸に重傷を負つて、馬から落ちた時の心もちを僕に話して聞かせたのは、今でもちやんと覚えてゐる。或川のふちの泥の中にころがりながら、川楊の木の空を見てゐると、母親の裙子だの、女の素足だの、花の咲いた胡麻畑だのが、はつきり空へ見えたと云ふのだが。」

木村少佐は葉巻を捨てて、珈琲茶碗を唇へあてながら、テエブルの上の紅梅へ眼をやつて、獨り語のやうに語を次いだ。

「あいつはそれを見た時に、しみじみ今までの自分の生活が淺ましくなつて來たと云つてゐたつけ。」

「それが戦争がすむとすぐに無頼漢になつたのか。だから人間はあてにならない。」

山川技師は椅子の背へ頭をつけながら、足をのばして、皮肉に葉巻の煙を天井へ吐いた。

「あてにならないと云ふのは、あいつが猫をかぶつてゐたと云ふ意味か。」

「さうさ。」

び落ちたりと云ふ。但當局はその眞相を疑ひ、目下犯人嚴探中の由なれども、諸城の某甲が首の落ちたる事は、戴せて聊齊志異にもあれば、該何小二の如きも、その事なしとは云ふ可らざるか。云云。

山川技師は讀み了ると共に、呆れた顏をして、「何だい、これは」と云つた。すると木村少佐は、ゆつくり葉卷の煙を吐きながら、鷹揚に微笑して、

「面白いだらう。こんな事は支那でなくつては、ありはしない。」

「さうどこにもあつて、たまるものか。」

山川技師もにやにやしながら、長くなつた葉卷の灰を灰皿の中へはたき落した。

「しかも更に面白い事は——」

少佐は妙に眞面目な顏をして、ちよいと語を切つた。

「僕はその何小二と云ふ奴を知つてゐるのだ。」

「知つてゐる？　これは驚いた。まさかアツタツシエの濟に、新聞記者と一しよになつて、いい加減な讃を揑造するのであるまいね。」

「誰がそんなくだらない事をするものか。僕はあの頃——屯の戰で負傷した時に、その何小二といふ奴も、やはり我軍の野戰病院へ收容されてゐたので、支那語の稽古かたがた二三度話した事があるのだ。頸に創があると云ふのだから、十中八九あの男に違ひない。何でも偵察か何かに出た所が、我軍の騎兵と衝突して、頸へ一つ日

ブルを圍みながら、一碗の珈琲と一本の葉巻とに忙しさを忘れて、のどかな雑談に耽つてゐた。早春とは云ひながら、大きなカミンに火が焚いてあるので、室の中はどうかすると汗がにじむ程暖い。そこへテエブルの上へのせた鉢植ゑの紅梅が時時支那めいた匂を送つて來る。

二人の間の話題は、暫らく西太后で持ち切つてゐたが、やがてそれが一轉して日清戰爭當時の追憶になると、木村少佐は何を思つたか急に立ち上つて、室の隅に置いてあつた神州日報の綴ぢこみを、こつちのテエブルへ持つて來た。さうして、その中の一枚を山川技師の眼の前へひろげると、指で或箇所をさしながら、讀み給へと云ふ眼つきをした。それがあまり唐突だつたので、技師はちよいと驚いたが、相手の少佐が軍人に似合はない洒脫な人間だと云ふ事は、日頃からよく心得てゐる。そこで咄嗟に、戰爭に關係した奇拔な逸話を豫想しながら、その紙面へ眼をやると、果してそこには、日本の新聞口調に直すと、こんな記事が、四角な字ばかりで物物しく揭げてあつた。

——術の剃頭店主人、何小二なる者は、日清戰爭に出征して、屢勳功を顯したる勇士なれど、凱旋後兎角素行修らず、酒と女とに身を持崩してゐたるが、去る——日、某酒樓にて飲み仲間の誰彼と口論し、遂に摑み合ひの喧嘩となりたる末、頸部に重傷を負ひ即刻絕命したり。ことに不思議なるは同人の頸部なる創にして、こはその際兒器にて傷けられたるものにあらず、全く日清戰爭中戰場にて負ひたる創口が、再破れたるものにして、實見者の談によれば、搭鬪中同人が卓子と共に顚倒するや否や、首は俄然喉の皮一枚を殘して、鮮血と共に床上に轉

力で、慌しく進んで來た。さうして又同じやうな速力で慌しくどこへか消えてしまつた。ああ、あの騎兵たちも、寂しさはやはり自分と變らないのであらう。もし彼等が幻でなかつたなら、自分は彼等と互に慰め合つて、せめて一時でもこの寂しさを忘れたい。しかしそれはもう今になつては遲かつた。

何小二の眼には、とめどもなく涙があふれて來た。その涙に濡れた眼でふり返つた時、彼の今までの生活が、如何に醜いものに滿ちてゐたか。それは今更云ふ必要はない。彼は誰にでも謝りたかつた。さうして又、誰をでも赦したかつた。

「もし私がここで助かつたら、私はどんな事をしても、この過去を償ふのだが。」

彼は泣きながら、心の底でかう呟いた。が、限りなく深い限りなく蒼い空は、まるでそれが耳へはひらないやうに、一尺づつ或は一寸づつ、徐徐として彼の胸の上へ下つて來る。その蒼い瀕氣の中に、點點としてかすかにきらめくものは、太方晝見える星であらう。もう今はあの影のやうなものも、二度と眸底は横ぎらない。何小二はもう一度歎息して、それから急に唇をふるはせて、最後にだんだん眼をつぶつて行つた。

下

日清兩國の間に和が講ぜられてから、一年ばかり經つた或早春の午前である。北京にある日本公使館内の一室では、公使館附の木村陸軍少佐と、折から官命で内地から視察に來た農商務省技師の山川理學士とが、一つテエ

彩色が施してある。形は畫で見る龍と少しも變りがない。それが晝間だのに、中へ蠟燭らしい火をともして、彷彿と蒼空へ現れた。その上不思議な事には、其の龍燈がどうも生きてゐるやうな心もちがする。現に長い鬚などは、ひとりでに左右へ動くらしい。——と思ふ中に、それもだんだん視野の外へ泳いで行つて、そこから急に消えてしまつた。

それが見えなくなると、今度は華奢な女の足が突然空へ現れた。纏足をした足だから、細さは漸く三寸あまりしかない。しなやかに曲つた指の先には、うす白い爪が柔く肉の色を隔ててゐる。何小二の心には、その足を見た時の記憶が夢の中で食はれた蚤のやうに、ぼんやり遠い悲しさを運んで來た。もう一度あの足にさはる事が出來たなら、——しかしそれは勿論もう出來ないのに相違ない。ここととあの足を見た所との間は、何百里と云ふ道程がある。さう思つてゐる中に、足は見る見る透明になつて、自然と雲の影に吸はれてしまつた。

その足が消えた時である。何小二は心の底から、今までに一度も感じた事のない不思議な寂しさに襲はれた。彼の頭の上には、大きな蒼空が音もなく蔽ひかかつてゐる。人間はいやでもこの空の下で、そこから落ちて來る風に吹かれながら、みじめな生存を續けて行かなければならない。これは何と云ふ寂しさであらう。さうしてその寂しさを今まで自分が知らなかつたと云ふ事は、何と云ふ又不思議な事であらう。何小二は思はず長いため息をついた。

この時、彼の眼と空との間には、赤い筋のある軍帽をかぶつた日本騎兵の一隊が、今までのどれよりも早い速

た。が、彼は土と血とにまみれて、人氣のない川のふちに横はりながら、川楊の葉が撫でてゐる高い蒼空を見上げた覺えがある。その空は、彼が今まで見たどの空よりも、奥深く蒼く見えた。丁度大きな藍の瓶をさかさまにしてそれを下から覗いたやうな心もちである。しかもその瓶の底には、泡の集つたやうな雲がどこからか生れて來て、又どこかへ悠然と消えてしまふ。それが丁度絶えず動いてゐる川楊の葉にかき消されて行くやうにも思はれる。

では、何小二は全然正氣を失はずにゐたのであるか。しかし彼の眼と蒼空との間には、實際そこになかつた色色な物が、影のやうに幾つとなく出來した。第一に現はれたのは、彼の母親のうすよごれた裙子である。子供の時の彼は、嬉しい時でも、悲しい時でも、何度この裙子にすがつたかわからない。が、これは思はず彼が手を伸ばして、捉へようとする間もなく、眼界から消えてしまつた。消える時に見ると、裙子は紗のやうに薄くなつて、その向ふにある雲の塊を、雲母のやうに透かせてゐる。その後からは、彼の生れた家の後にあるだだつ廣い胡麻畑が、辷るやうに流れて來た。さびしい花が日の暮を待つやうに咲いてゐる。眞夏の胡麻畑である。何小二はその胡麻の中に立つてゐる自分や兄弟たちの姿を探して見た。が、そこに人らしいものの影は一つもない。唯色の薄い花と葉とが、ひつそりと一つになつて、薄い日の光に浴してゐる。これは空間を斜に横ぎつて、吊り上げられたやうにすつと消えた。

するとその次には妙なものが空をのたくつて來た。よく見ると、燈夜に街をかついで歩くあの大きな龍燈である。長さは凡そ四五間もあらうか。竹で造つた骨組みの上へ紙を張つて、それに青と赤との繪の具で、華やかな

何小二はその唸り聲の中にこんな意味を含めながら、馬の平首にかじりついて、何處までも高粱の中を走つて行つた。その勢に驚いて、時時鵝の群が慌しくそこゝから飛び立つたが、馬は元よりそんな事には頓着しない。背中に乘せてゐる主人が、時時ずり落ちさうになるのにもかまはずに、泡を吐き吐き駈けつづけてゐる。

だから若し運命が許したら、何小二はこの不斷の呻吟の中に、自分の不幸を上天に訴へながら、あの銅のやうな太陽が西の空に傾くまで、日一日馬の上でゆられ通したのに相違ない。が、この平地が次第に緩い斜面を作つて、高粱と高粱との間を流れてゐる幅の狹い濁り川が、行手に明く開けた時、運命は二三本の川楊の木になつて、もう落ちかかつた葉を低い梢に集めながら、嚴しく川のふちに立つてゐた。さうして、何小二の馬がその間を通りぬけるが早いか、いきなりその茂つた枝の中に、彼の體を抱き上げて、水際の柔な泥の上へまつさかさまに拋り出した。

その途端に何小二は、どうか云ふ聯想の關係で、空に燃えてゐる鮮な黃いろい炎が眼に見えた。子供の時に彼の家の厨房で、大きな竈の下に燃えてゐるのを見た鮮な黃いろい炎である。「ああ火が燃えてゐる」と思ふ——その次の瞬間には、彼はもう何時か正氣を失つてゐた。……

中

馬の上から轟げ落ちた何小二は、全然正氣を失つたのであらうか。成る程創の疼みは、何時か殆しなくなつ

れる聲には、唯唸り聲と云ふ以上に、もう少し複雜な意味がある。と云ふのは、彼は獨り肉體的の苦痛の爲にのみ呻吟してゐたのではない。精神的な苦痛の爲に――死の恐怖を中心として、目まぐるしい感情の變化の爲に、泣き喚いてゐたのである。

彼は永久にこの世界と別れるのが、たまらなく悲しかつた。それから彼をこの世界と別れさせるやうにしたあらゆる人間や事件が恨めしかつた。それからどうしてもこの世界と別れなければならない彼自身が腹立しかつた。それから――こんな種種雜多の感情は、それからそれへと緣を引いて際限なく彼を虐(さいな)みに來る。だから彼はこれらの感情が往來するのに從つて、「死ぬ。死ぬ。」と叫んで見たり、父や母の名を呼んで見たり、或は又日本騎兵の惡口を云つて見たりした。が、不幸にしてそれが一度彼の口を出ると、何の意味も持つてゐない嗄れた唸り聲に變つてしまふ。それほどもう彼は弱つてでもゐたのであらう。

「私ほどの不幸な人間はない。この若さにこんな所まで戰ひに來て、しかも犬のやうに譯もなく殺されてしまふ。それには第一に、私を斬つた日本人が憎い。その次には私たちを偵察に出した私の隊の上官が憎い。最後にこんな戰爭を始めた日本國と淸國とが憎い。いや憎いものはまだ外にもある。私を兵卒にした事情に幾分でも關係のある人間が、皆私には敵と變りがない。私はさう云ふいろいろの人間のおかげで、したい事の澤山あるこの世の中と今の今別れてしまふ。ああ、さう云ふ人間や事情のするなりにさせて置いた私は、何と云ふ莫迦だらう。」

喚きながら、無暗に軍刀をふりまはしてゐた。一度その軍刀が赤くなつたこともあるやうに思ふが、どうも手答へはしなかつたらしい。その中に、ふりまはしてゐる軍刀の欄が、だんだん脂汗でぬめつて來る。さうしてそれにつれて、妙に口の中が渴いて來る。そこへ殆、眼球がとび出しさうに眼を見開いた血相の變つてゐる日本騎兵の顏が、大きな口を開きながら、突然彼の馬の前に跳り出した。赤い筋のある軍帽が、半ば裂けた間からは、いが栗坊主の頭が覗いてゐる。何小二はそれを見ると、いきなり軍刀をふり上げて、力一ぱいその帽子の上へ斬り下した。が、こつちの軍刀に觸れたのは、相手の軍帽でもなければ、その下にある頭でもない。それを下から刎ね上げた向ふの軍刀の鋼(はがね)である。その音が煮えくり返るやうな周圍の騷ぎの中に、恐しくかんと冴え渡つて、磨いた鐵の冷かな臭を、一度に鋭く鼻の孔の中へ送りこんだ。さうしてそれと共に、眩く日を反射した幅の廣い向うの軍刀が、頭の眞上へ來て、くるりと大きな輪を描いた。——と思つた時、何小二の頸のつけ根へは、何とも云へない、つめたい物が、すんと音を立てゝ、はひつたのである。

馬は、創の痛みで唸つてゐる何小二を乘せた儘、高粱畑の中を無二無三に馳けて行つた。どこまで馳けても、高粱は盡きる樣子はなく茂つてゐる。人馬の聲や軍刀の斬り合ふ音は、もう何時の間にか消えてしまつた。日の光も秋は遼東と日本と變りがない。

繰返して云ふが、何小二は馬の背に搖られながら、創の痛みで唸つてゐた。が、彼の食ひしばつた齒の間を洩

機械的に、汗みづくになつた馬の腹を何度も靴の踵で蹴つた。

十分程前、何小二は仲間の騎兵と一しよに、味方の陣地から川一つ隔てた小さな村へ偵察に行く途中、黄いろくなりかけた高粱の畑の中で、突然一隊の日本騎兵と遭遇した。それが餘り突然すぎたので、敵も味方も小銃を發射する暇がない。少くとも味方は、赤い筋のはいつた軍隊と、やはり赤い肋骨のある軍服とが見えると同時に、誰からともなく一度に軍刀をひき拔いて、嗤嗟に馬の頭をその方へ立て直した。勿論その時は、萬一自分が殺されるかも知れないなどと云ふことは、誰の頭にもはひつて來ない。そこにあるのは、唯敵である。或は敵を殺す事である。だから彼等は馬の頭を立て直すと、いづれも犬のやうに齒むき出しながら、猛然として日本騎兵のゐる方へ殺到した。すると敵も彼等と同じ衝動に支配されてゐたのであらう。一瞬の後には、やはり齒をむき出した。彼等の顏を鏡に映したやうな顏が、幾つも彼等の左右に出沒し始めた。さうしてその顏と共に、何本かの軍刀が、忙しく彼等の周圍に、風を切る音を起し始めた。

それから後の事は、どうも時間の觀念が明瞭でない。丈の高い高粱が、まるで暴風雨にでも遇つたやうにゆすぶれたり、そのゆすぶれてゐる穗の先に、銅のやうな太陽が懸つてゐたりした事は、不思議な位はつきり覺えてゐる。が、その曆ぎがどの位つづいたか、その間にどんな事件がどんな順序で起つたか、かう云ふ點になると、殆何一つはつきりしない。兎に角その間中何小二は自分にもまるで意味を成さない事を、氣違ひのやうな大聲で

首が落ちた話

芥川龍之介

上

何小二は軍刀を抛り出すと、夢中で馬の頸にしがみついた。確かに頸を斬られたと思ふ――いや、これはしがみついた後で、さう思つたのかも知れない。唯、何か頸へぢんと音を立てて、はひつたと思ふ――それと同時に、しがみついたのである。すると馬も創を受けたのであらう、何小二が鞍の前輪へつつぶすが早いか、一聲高く嘶いて、鼻づらを急に空へ向けると、忽ち敵味方のごつたになつた中をつきぬけて、滿目の高粱畑をまつしぐらに走り出した。二三發、銃聲が後から響いたやうに思はれるが、それも彼の耳には、夢のやうにしか聞えない。

人の身の丈よりも高い高粱は、無二無三に馳けて行く馬に踏みしだかれて、波のやうに起伏する。それが右からも左からも、或は彼の辮髪を掃つたり、或は彼の軍服を叩いたり、或は又彼の頸から流れてゐるどす黑い血を拭つたりした。が、彼の頭には、それを一一意識するだけの餘裕がない。唯、斬られたと云ふ簡單な事實だけが、苦しい程はつきり、腦味噌に焦げついてゐる。斬られた。斬られた。――かう心の中に繰返しながら、彼は全く

見た。その心から、袖子は言ひあらはしがたい驚きを誘はれた。

袖子の母さんは、彼女が生れると間もなく激しい産後の出血で亡くなつた人だ。その母さんが亡くなる時には、人のからだに差したり引いたりする潮が三枚も四枚もの母さんの單衣を雫のやうにした。それほど恐ろしい勢で母さんから引いて行つた潮が——十五年の後になつて——あの母さんと生命の取りかへつこをしたやうな人形娘に差して來た。空にある月が滿ちたり缺けたりする度に、それと呼吸を合せるやうな、奇蹟でない奇蹟は、まだ袖子にはよく呑みこめなかつた。それが人の言ふやうに規則的に溢れて來ようとは、信じられもしなかつた。故もない不安はまだ續いて居て、絶えず彼女を脅した。袖子は、その心配から、子供と大人の二つの世界の途中の道端に息づき震へてゐた。

子供の好きなお初は相變らず近所の家から金之助さんを抱いて來た。頑是ない子供は以前にもまさる可愛いげな表情を見せて、袖子の肩にすがつたり、その後を追つたりした。

「ちやあちやん。」

親しげに呼ぶ金之助さんの聲に變りはなかつた。しかし袖子はもう以前と同じやうにはこの男の兒を抱けなかつた。

何の故であるのか、何の爲であるのか、それを袖子は知りたかつた。事實上の細い注意を殘りなくお初から敎へられたにしても、こんな時に母さんでも生きて居て、その膝に抱かれたら、としきりに戀しく思つた、いつものやうに學校へ行つてみると、袖子はもう以前の自分ではなかつた。事毎に自由を失つたやうで、あたりが狹かつた。昨日までの遊びの友達からは遽かに遠のいて、多勢の友達が先生達と繩飛びに鞠投げに嬉戯するさまを運動場の隅にさびしく眺めつくした。

それから一週間ばかり後になつて、漸く袖子はあたりまへのからだに歸へることが出來た。溢れて來るものは、すべて淸い。あだかも春の雪に濡れて反つて伸びる力を增す若草のやうに、生長ざかりの袖子は一層いきいきとした健康を恢復した。

「まあよかつた。」

と言つて、あたりを見廻はした時の袖子は何がなしに悲しい思ひに打たれた。その悲しみは幼い日に別れを告げて行く悲しみであつた。彼女は最早今迄のやうな眼でもつて、近所の子供達を見ることも出來なかつた。あの光子さんなぞが黑いふさふさした髮の毛を振つて、さも無邪氣に、家のまはりを馳け廻はつて居るのを見ると、袖子は自分でも、もう一度何も知らずに眠つて見たいと思つた。

男と女の相違が、今は明らかに袖子に見えて來た。さものんきさうな兄さん達とちがつて、彼女は自分を護らればならなかつた。大人の世界のことはすつかり分つてしまつたとは言へないまでも、すくなくもそれを覗いて

つまでも父さんの人形娘では居ないやうな、ある待ち受けた日が、到頭父さんの眼の前へやつて來たかのやうに。

「お初、袖ちやんのことはお前によく頼んだぜ。」

父さんはそれだけのことを言ひにくさうに言つて、また自分の部屋の方へ戻つて行つた。こんな惱ましい、言ふに言はれぬ一日を袖子は床の上に送つた。夕方には多勢のちひなさな子供の聲にまじつて例の光子さんの甲高い聲も家の外に響いたが、袖子はそれを寢ながら聞いて居た。庭の若草の芽も一晩のうちに伸びるやうな暖い春の宵ながらに悲しい思ひは、丁度そのまゝのやうに袖子の小さな胸をなやましくした。

翌日から袖子はお初に教へられた通りにして、例のやうに學校へ出掛けようとした。その年の三月に受け損なつたらまた一年待たねばならないやうな、大事な受驗の準備が彼女を待つて居た。その時、お初は自分が女になつた時の事を言出して、

「私は十七の時でしたよ。そんなに自分が遲かつたものですかられ。もつと早くあなたに話してあげると好かつた。そのくせ私は話さうと思ひながら、まだ袖子さんには早からうと思つて、今まで言はずにあつたんですよ……つい、自分が遲かつたものですかられ……學校の體操やなんかは、その間、休んだ方がいゝんですよ。」

こんな話を袖子に聞かせた。

不安やら、心配やら、思出したばかりでもきまりのわるく、顏の紅くなるやうな思ひで、袖子は學校への路を辿つた。この急激な變化――それを知つてしまへば、心配もなにもなく、ありふれたことだといふこの變化を、

と言つて父さんが茶の間に掛つてゐる柱時計を見に來た頃は、その時計の針が十時を指して居た。

「お晝には兄さん達も歸つて來るな。」と父さんは茶の間のなかを見廻して言つた。「お初、お前に頼んで置くがね、みんな學校から歸つて來て聞いたら、さう言つてお呉れ——けふは父さんが袖ちやんを休ませたからツて——もしかしたら、すこし頭が痛いからつて。」

父さんは袖子の兄さん達が學校から歸つて來る場合を豫想して、娘のためにいろいろ口實を考へた。晝すこし前にはもう二人の兄さんが前後して威勢よく歸つて來た。一人の兄さんの方は袖子の寢て居るのを見ると默つて居なかつた。

「オイ、どうしたんだい。」

その權幕に恐れて、袖子は泣き出したいばかりになつた。そこへお初が飛んで來て、いろいろ言譯をしたが、何も知らない兄さんは譯の分らないといふ顏付で、しきりに袖子を責めた。

「頭が痛いぐらゐで學校を休むなんて、そんな奴があるかい。弱虫め。」

「まあ、そんなひどいことを言つて。」とお初は兄さんをなだめるやうにした。「袖子さんは私が休ませたんですよ——けふは私が休ませたんですよ。」

不思議な沈默が續いた。父さんでさへそれを說き明すことが出來なかつた。たゞたゞ父さんは默つて、袖子の寢て居る部屋の外の廊下を往つたり來たりした。あだかも袖子の子供の日が最早終りを告げたかのやうに——い

今日は學校をお休みなさいね。」

とお初は袖子の枕もとで言つた。

祖母さんもなく、母さんもなく、誰も言つて聞かせるものゝないやうな家庭で、生れて初めて袖子の經驗するやうなことが、思ひがけない時にやつて來た。めつたに學校を休んだことのない娘が、しかも受驗前でいそがしがつて居る時であつた。三月らしい春の朝日が茶の間の障子に射して來る頃には、父さんは袖子を見に來た。その樣子をお初に問ひたづれた。

「えゝ、すこし……。」

とお初は曖昧な返事ばかりした。

袖子は物も言はずに疲苦しがつて居た。そこへ父さんが心配して覗きに來る度に、しまひにはお初の方でも隱しきれなかつた。

「旦那さん、袖子さんは病氣ではありません。」

それを聞くと、父さんは半信半疑のまゝで、娘の側を離れた。日頃母さんの役まで兼ねて着物の世話から何から一切を引受けて居る父さんでも、その日ばかりは全く父さんの島にないことであつた。男親の悲しさには、父さんはそれ以上のことをお初に尋ねることも出來なかつた。

「もう何時だらう。」

の二階にあつた獨逸出來の人形の中でも自分の氣に入つたやうなものを求めて、それを袖子にあてがつた。丁度袖子があの人形のためにいくつかの小さな着物を造つて着せたやうに、父さんはまた袖子のために自分の好みによつたものを選んで着せて居た。

「袖子さんは可哀さうです。今のうちに紅い派手なものでも着せなかつたら、いつ着せる時があるんです。」

こんな事を言つて袖子を庇護ふやうにする婦人の客なぞがないでもなかつたが、しかし父さんは聞き入れなかつた。娘の風俗は成るべく淸楚に。その自分の好みから父さんは割り出して、袖子の着る物でも、持ち物でも、すべて自分で見立てゝやつた。そして、いつまでも自分の人形娘にして置きたかつた。いつまでも子供で、自分の言ふなりに、自由になるものゝやうに……

ある朝、お初は臺所の流しもとに働いて居た。そこへ袖子が來て立つた。袖子は敷布をかゝへたまゝ物も言はないで、着ざめた顏をして居た。

「袖子さん、どうしたの。」

最初のうちこそお初も不思議そうにして居たが、袖子から敷布を受取つて見て、すぐにその意味を讀んだ。お初は體格も大きく、力もある女であつたから、袖子の震へるからだへうしろから手をかけて、半分抱きかゝへるやうに茶の間の方へ連れて行つた。その部屋の片隅に袖子を寢かした。

「そんなに心配しないでもいゝんですよ。私が好いやうにしてあげるから——誰でもあることなんだから——

「はあい——金之助さん。」
あまりお初の聲が高かつたので、そこへ袖子の父さんが笑顔を見せた。
「えらい騷ぎだなあ。俺は自分の部屋で聞いて居たが、まるで、お前達のは掛け合ひぢやないか。」
「旦那さん。」とお初は自分でもをかしいやうに笑つて、やがて袖子と金之助さんの顔を見くらべながら、「こんなに金之助さんは私にばかりついてしまつて……袖子さんと金之助さんとは今日は喧嘩です。」
この「喧嘩」が父さんを笑はせた。
袖子は手持無沙汰で、お初の側を離れないで居る子供の顔を見まもつた。女にもして見たいほど色の白い兒で、優しい眉、すこし開いた唇、短いうぶ毛のまゝの髮、子供らしいおでこ——すべて愛らしかつた。何んとなく袖子にむかつてすれて居るやうな無邪氣さは、一層その子供らしい樣子を愛らしく見せた。こんないぢらしさは、あの生命のない人形にはなかつたものだ。
「何と言つても、金之助さんは袖ちやんのお人形さんだね。」
と言つて父さんは笑つた。
さういふ袖子の父さんは鰥で、中年で連合に死に別れた人にあるやうに、男の手一つでどうにか斯うにか袖子たちを大きくして來た。この父さんは、金之助さんを人形扱ひにする袖子の事を笑へなかつた。なぜかなら、さういふ袖子が實は父さんの人形娘であつたからで。父さんは、袖子のために人形までも自分で見立て、同じ丸善

が起らなかつた。それが「金之助さん、金之助さん」に變つた。

「袖子さん、どうしてお遊びにならないんですか。わたしをお忘れになつたんですか。」

近所の家の二階の窓から、光子さんの聲が聞えて居た、そのませた小娘らしい聲は春先の町の空氣に高く響けて聞えて居た。丁度袖子はある高等女學校への受驗の準備にいそがしい頃で、遲くなつて今迄の學校から歸つて來た時に、その光子さんの聲を聞いた。彼女は別に惡い顏もせず、たゞそれを聞き流したまゝで家へ戻つて見ると、茶の間の障子のわきにはお初が針仕事をしながら金之助さんを遊ばせて居た。

どうしたはずみからか、その日、袖子は金之助さんを怒らしてしまつた。子供は袖子の方へ來ないで、お初の方へばかり行つた。

「ちやあちやん。」

「はあい——金之助さん。」

お初と子供は、袖子の前で、こんな言葉をかはして居た。子供から呼びかけられるたびに、お初は「まあ、可愛い」といふ樣子をして、同じ事を何度も何度も繰返した。

「ちやあちやん。」

「はあい——金之助さん。」

「ちやあちやん。」

せるとは大違ひだ。袖子は人形を抱くやうに金之助さんを抱いて、どこへでも好きなところへ連れて行くことが出來た。自分の側に置いて遊ばせたければ、それも出來た。

この金之助さんは正月生れの二つでも、まだいくらも人の言葉を知らない。雷のやうなその唇からは「うまうま」ぐらゐしか洩れて來ない。母親以外の親しいものを呼ぶにも「ちやあちやん」としかまだ言ひ得なかつた。こんな幼い子供が袖子の家へ連れられて來て見ると、袖子の父さんが居る。二人の兄さん達も居る。しかし金之助さんは、さういふ人達までも「ちやあちやん」と言つて呼ぶわけではなかつた。矢張りこの幼い子供の呼びかける言葉は親しいものに限られて居た。もともと金之助さんを袖子の家へ初めて抱いて來て見せたのは下女のお初で、お初の子煩惱と來たら、袖子に劣らなかつた。

「ちやあちやん。」

それが茶の間へ袖子を探しに行く時の子供の聲だ。

「ちやあちやん。」

それがまた臺所で働いて居るお初を探す時の子供の聲でもあるのだ。金之助さんは、まだよちよちしたおぼつかない足許で、茶の間と臺所の間を行つたり來たりして、袖子やお初の肩につかまつたり、二人の裾にまとひついたりして戯れた。

三月の雪が綿のやうに町へ來て、一晩のうちに見事に溶けて行く頃には、袖子の家ではもう光子さんを呼ぶ聲

も造つた。袖子が風邪でも引いて學校を休むやうな日には、彼女の枕もとに足を投げ出し、いつでも笑つたやうな顏をしながらお伽話の相手になつて居たのも、あの人形だつた。

「袖子さん、お遊びなさいな。」

と言つて、一頃はよく彼女のところへ遊びに通つて來た近所の小娘もある。光子さんと言つて、幼稚園へでもあがらうといふ年頃の小娘のやうに、額のところへ髪を切りさげて居る兒だ。袖子の方でもよくその光子さんを見に行つて、暇さへあれば一緒に折紙を疊んだり、お手玉をついたりして遊んだものだ。さういふ時の二人の相手は、いつでもあの人形だつた。そんなに抱愛の的であつたものが、次第に袖子から忘れられたやうになつて行つた。そればかりでなく、袖子が人形のことなぞを以前のやうに大騒ぎしなくなつた頃には、光子さんともそう遊ばなくなつた。

しかし、袖子はまだ漸く高等小學の一學年を終るか終らないぐらゐの年頃であつた。彼女とても何かなしには居られなかつた。子供の好きな袖子は、いつの間にか近所の家から別の子供を抱いて來て、自分の部屋で遊ばせるやうになつた。數へ年の二つにしかならない男の兒であるが、あのきかない氣の光子さんに比べたら、これはまた何といふおとなしいものだらう。金之助さんと云ふ名前からして男の子らしく、下ぶくれのしたその顏に笑みの浮ぶ時は、小さな靨があらはれて、愛らしかつた。それに、この子の好いことには、袖子の云ふなりになつた。どうしてあの少しもぢつとして居ないで、どうかすると袖子の手におへないことが多かつた光子さんを遊ば

伸び支度

島崎藤村

十四五になる大概の家の娘がさうであるやうに、袖子もその年頃になつて見たら、人形のことなどは次第に忘れたやうになつた。

人形に着せる着物だ襦袢だと言つて大騒ぎした頃の袖子は、いくつそのために小さな着物を造り、いくつ小さな頭巾なぞを造つて、それを幼い日の樂しみとして來たか知れない。町の玩具屋から安物を買つて來てすぐに首のとれたもの、顏が汚れ鼻が缺けするうちにオバケのやうに氣味惡くなつて捨てゝしまつたもの——袖子の古い人形にもいろいろあつた。その中でも、父さんに連れられて震災前の丸善へ行つた時に買つて貰つて來た人形は、一番長くあつた。あれは獨逸の方から新荷が着いたばかりだといふ種々な玩具と一緒に、あの丸善の二階に並べてあつたもので、異國の子供の風俗ながらに愛らしく、格安で、しかも丈夫に出來て居た。茶色な髮をかぶつたやうな男の兒の人形で、それを寢かせば眼をつぶり、起せばぱつちりと可愛い眼を見開いた。袖子があの人形に話しかけるのは、生きてゐる子供に話しかけるのと殆ど變りがないくらゐであつた。それほどに好きで、抱き、擁へ、撫で、持ち歩き、毎日のやうに着物を着せ直しなどして、あの人形のためには小さな蒲團や小さな枕まで

（小山はあさを引立てゝ去る。つぎはぢつとそれを見送る。ざあと寂しい音を立てゝ雨が降り出す）

——幕——

小山　何でも訊くがよい。

あさ　赤ん坊が掘り出されたつてますが、今どこに居りませう。

小山　あれは村役場に引渡した。

あさ　もう一度會へねえでせうか。

小山　いや、それは會はない方がいゝ。

あさ　さうでごぜえませうか。

小山　會ふとおもひが殘つて却つていけない。

あさ　さうでごぜえますれ。だが埋める時、かうぢいつと怨めしさうな眼付をして、穴の中から私を睨んでゐましたが、あゝ、あれを思ふと！

（間）

あさ　旦那、お繩を。

小山　いやそのまゝでいゝ。

あさ　（心のうちで厚く小山に感謝する）

小山　ぢや、ちよつと本署まで行つて來るから。

つぎ　はい。

小山　どんなことだ。

あさ　こゝに日當の殘りがごぜえやすが、うちへ屆けて貰ふ譯にはいかねえでせうか。

小山　造作もないことだ。屆けてやらう。

あさ　有難うごぜえます。ではお願ひいたします。（と財布を巡査に渡す）

小山　よし、わしが預つた。確に屆けてやるぞ。

あさ　はい、有難うごぜえます。

（間）

あさ　旦那。

小山　うむ。

あさ　何年位牢にはいるでせう。

小山　さうだな。はつきりしたことは分らないが、二三年はくふかも知れない。併し事情が事情だから、場合によつては、執行猶豫でそのまゝさがれるかもしれない。何でもありのまゝを正直にいふがいゝ。

あさ　有難うごぜえます。（間）旦那。

小山　うむ。

あさ　もう一つ訊いても宜うごぜえますか。

（暫く重い沈默）

あさ　（やがて泣き伏したまゝ泣聲で）旦那、どうか縛つて戴きます。

つぎ　今縛られては、おまへさん困りやしないの。

あさ　諦めました。もう諦めました。

つぎ　それでもね。

あさ　私のやうなものは一生縛られてるやうなものでござえます。どつちにしたつて同じことでござえます。

つぎ　だつて病氣の子供や年寄が困りやしないの。

あさ　それを思ふと。（しくしく泣き出す）

小山　おい、うちへ寄つて、ちよつと子供に會つて行つてやれ。その位の手心なら、わしにもしてやることが出來る。

あさ　（き泣乍ら）會ひますまい。會ふと却つて心殘りがいたしますから。

小山　それもさうだな。

あさ　旦那。

小山　何だ。

あさ　お願ひがあるんですが。

ます。どうかご勘辨なすつて下さい。（つぎを認めて）あ、お孃樣。さつきはとんだ亂相をしました。嘸びつくりなすつたでせう。申譯がございません。私は惡いことをしたものでございます。それでついおづおづしてゐたんです。本當に人は惡いことは出來ねえもので、知らない振りをして通さうと思つたんですが、どうしてもそれは出來ません。赤ん坊の顏が夜も晝も私の頭にこびりついてゐて、離れねえんでございます。繩をとつて地形をしてゐると、埋めた赤ん坊の頭をこづいてゐるやうな氣がして、ゐても立つてもゐられねえやうになるんです。さうかといつて、今捕つてしまつては大變ですから、旦那のところにお願ひに上つたのでございます。（ふと自分の手を見て、繩の解かれてあるのに氣がつき、小山に）旦那、繩を解いて下すつたんですか。有難うございます。有難うございます。（と、さも嬉しさうに小山にお辭儀をする）

小山　（無言）

あさ　（つぎの方に向ひ）お孃さま、助かります。助かります。助かります。（と心から禮を述べる。つぎは困つて無言のまゝ首を垂れる）私は日に一圓五十錢しきや貰つてゐませんが、それでも私が働いてゐさへすりや、どうにかその日が送つて行けます。旦那、助かります。何にも申しません。有難うございます。

つぎ　お父さん、あんなに言つてゐるんですから、何とかしてやる譯にはいかないんですか。

小山　（堅く口を閉ぢたまゝ首を垂れてゐる）

あさ　えッ。ちや私はやつぱり。あゝ、（と泣き伏す）

つぎ　（女の足をさすつてやり乍ら）この人、可哀さうなんですわれ。
小山　おまへ、聽いてゐたのか。
つぎ　え、うちに入りにくかつたもんですから、外に立つてゐましたの。
小山　さうか。世の中には氣の毒な人が澤山あるな。
つぎ　あツ、息を吹き返したやうですわ。
小山　まだそつとしておいてやれ。產後間もないのに、烈しい勞働をやつたり、心配をしたりしたので、腦貧血を起したのだ。
つぎ　お父さん、矢張りこの人を連れて行くんですか。
小山　さうだ。さうしない譯にはいかない。しかし實際はわしも同じ罪を犯してゐるのだ。
つぎ　そんなこと、お父さん——
小山　いや、この女は兒を殺したが、わしも子供や妻を殺してゐる。たゞ違ふところは直接手を下したかどうかといふだけだ。
あさ　（急に起き返る）はい。私が惡いのです。私が殺したんです。申譯がございません。
小山　おゝ氣がついたか。
あさ　はい。私は惡いことをしました。全く惡いことを致しました。しかし旦那、これからは、きつと心を改め

あさ　（無言、がくりと首を前へ垂れて突伏す）

小山　で、何で殺したのだ。手拭か。

あさ　（無言）

小山　おい。何でやつたのだ。

（突然あさは腦貧血を起して仰向けに倒れてしまふ。小山は驚いて介抱しようとすると、表の硝子戸が明いてつぎが入つて來る。

小山　あ、丁度いゝ所へ歸つて來た。ちよつと手を貸してくれ。

つぎ　はい。

小山　おい、座敷へ上げるんだ。（つぎと二人がかりであさを座敷へ寢かす）枕なんかいらない。頭を低くして、足の方を高くしてやるんだ。

（あさの足に踏臺をかつてやる。

それからつぎはあさの土足の草鞋を解く。

小山は水をコップについで來て、女の額や胸に吹きかけてやる）

つぎ　お父さん、繩を解いてやらなくつちや可哀さうですわ。

小山　さうだ、繩を解いてやらなくつちや。（といひ乍ら、急いで繩を解いてやる）

あさ　先々月の十日。

小山　二月十日と。男の子だね。

あさ　はい。

小山　殺したのは。

あさ　（苦しさうに）一昨日の晩でございます。

小山　どういふ風に殺してしたのだ。

あさ　今日と同じやうに仕事の歸りでございました。赤ん坊を背負つて行人坂の近くまで來ると、赤んが坊が燒きつくやうに泣くんです。乳をやりたいにも乳はなし、困つてしまひました。

小山　どうして乳がないのだ。

あさ　食物が惡いせいか、この五六日ぱつたり乳が出なくなつてしまつたんです。

小山　それで。

あさ　それで爲方がねえから、乳は出なくつても、乳房を口へふくませてやりました。

小山　それから。

あさ　それから暫く泣いてゐましたが、いつかお乳を離して眠つてしまひました。

小山　その時おまへはやつたのか。

いふのだ。（手帳を出して書き取らうとする）

あさ　（泣いてゐて答へない）

小山　おい、返事をしないと爲めにならんよ。何といふ名だ。

あさ　（泣きながら）はい。おあさと申します。

小山　（手帳に記入し乍ら、冷靜に訊問を續ける）夫は。

あさ　杉原定二郎。

小山　三ヶ月前に死んだのだね。それで職業は。

あさ　矢張り土方でございます。

小山　住所。住居は。

あさ　下目黒。

小山　府下荏原郡目黒村下目黒と。何番地かね。

あさ　二千三百五十七番地。

小山　二千三百五十七番地。同居ぢやないんだね。

あさ　はい。

小山　それから赤兒の生れたのは。

あさ　はい。

小山　それなら何故こんなことをするのだ。

あさ　他にしようがなかつたのでございます。

小山　誰かに子供をくれたらいゝぢやないか。

あさ　くれるつたつて旦那、たゞはくれられません。金のつかねえ赤ん坊なんか誰が貰ふもんですか。貧乏人はどこまでみじめなんか分りません。旦那、全く悪い氣でしたのではございませんから、どうかお赦しなすつて戴きます。

小山　事情を聽くと氣の毒だが、わしの職務としては、これを聽いて内分に濟ますといふ譯にはいかない。

あさ　そこをどうか旦那、お願ひでございます。

小山　どうもさういふ譯にはいかん。殊に死體でもあがつてならなければ格別、赤子の遺骸が發掘されてゐる以上、今更どうすることも出來ない。

あさ　え、赤ん坊が？

小山　さうだ。おまへは赤ん坊を竹藪の中へ埋めたらうが。

あさ　あゝ、もう駄目だ。（と突伏して泣く）

小山　で、今となつては、ありのまゝを包まず云ふがいゝ。それが罪の輕くなる唯一の道だ。おまへの名は何と

小山　するとうちには、子供の外に年寄があるんだな。

あさ　へえ。

小山　年寄は老年で働けないのか。

あさ　へえ。ですから、どうしてもわしが働かなくつちやならねえんです。わしは働きました。子供の生れる前の日まで一生懸命に働きました。旦那の前ですが、赤ん坊が生れて見ると、いくら貧乏してゐたつて、子供はやつぱり可哀うございます。碌すつぽ乳もやらねえのに、わしの顏を見ては、につこり笑つたりなんかすると、食ひつきたい程可哀うございます。

小山　それはさうだ。

あさ　けれど世間樣のやうに子供にかまつてゐた日には、わし達は口が乾上つてしまひます。それも自分丈ならようございますが、年寄や病氣の子供が、そんなことでは過しては行かれません。

小山　ふむ、それでは赤ん坊がゐると、働く邪魔になるので殺したといふのか。

あさ　はい。邪魔といふ譯ぢやありませんが、あれがゐた日には、とても手足纏ひで稼ぐことは出來ません。

小山　ふむ、さうか。（と太息をする）

あさ　旦那、どうも誠に申譯がございません。

小山　併し考へがなさ過ぎたな。殺せば罪になるつてことは、おまへ知らないのぢやあるまい。

小山　どうして。

あさ　わし等の子供は、生かしておくよりも、死なした方が却つて功德なのでごぜえます。なまじ苦しい浮世を見せるよりは、何にも知らずに死なす方が、思ひやりが深いのでごぜえます。

小山　おまへ、氣がどうかしてやせんか。

あさ　いゝえ、そんなことはありません。だつて且那樣、さうぢやごぜえませんか。看護一つ出來ねえで病人を寢かしておくのは、可哀さうでごぜえます。全く可哀さうでごぜえます。

小山　しかし丈夫な赤ん坊を殺してしまふのは、もつと罪ぢやないか。

あさ　そりやさうでごぜえますが、あの子だつて、どうせさうなつちまふんです。今もまた赤ん坊の直ぐ上の奴がうちに寢てゐる位なんですから。

小山　しかし何も殺すには當らんぢやないか。

あさ　へえ。わしも何度それを考へたかしれません。それで考へては止め、考へては止め、つい今迄經つてしまつたんです。實は腹にあるうち、おろさうかと思つたんですが、そんなことをしちや、自分の身體がたまらねえと思つて——いゝえ、決して生命が惜しいのぢやごぜえません。わしは死んだ方がどんなに樂かしれませんが、わしはどうしても死なれねえんです。わしが死なうものなら、病氣の子供と年取つた親爺とを餓死させなくつちやなりません。

あさ　はい。

小山　ぢや、隨分うちは苦しかつたらうな。

あさ　三日も四日もおまんまを食はなかつたことが何度もあります。その位ならまだようございますが、その間に子供に二人も死なれまして。

小山　矢張り同じ病氣か。

あさ　はい。無闇に血を吐くんです。それが咽喉につかへちや苦しがるもんですから、何度も咽喉の中に手を入れてやつて、血のこゞりを引つ張り出してやりました。

小山　するとおまへはこの一年半の間に、亭主と子供二人に死なれたのだな。

あさ　へえ。

小山　そんなら今度出來た子供こそは、丈夫に育てなくつちやならないぢやないか。

あさ　さうでございます。

小山　それだのに何故殺してしまつたのだ。

あさ　（大聲をあげてわつと泣き出す）

小山　これ、どうしたのだ。

あさ　（泣き伏し乍ら）且那方にはとてもお分りにはなりません。

あさ　はい。（涙をふき乍ら）子を大事にするのが親の勤めでございます。全くさうするのが世間の親の習はしでございます。ですがわし等のところでは、とても世間樣のやうにはまゐりません。

小山　どうしていかないのだ。

あさ　どうしてつたつて、旦那樣。

小山　それをすつかり話せ。

あさ　話したつて、とても駄目でございます。話せるやうな話ぢやありません。

小山　宜しい。ぢやわしが問はう。おやへの亭主は三月前に死んだといつたが、何で死んだのだ。

あさ　病氣で死にました。

小山　何病で死んだのだ。

あさ　肺病つていふのか、血を一升も吐いて死んぢまひました。

小山　ふん、で、おまへが土工になつたのはそれからか。

あさ　いゝえ、一年半ばかり前でございます。

小山　では亭主はその頃から病氣だつたのか。

あさ　惡いのはもつと前からですが、働けなくなつたのは、その時分からです。

小山　それでおまへが亭主の代りに働くやうになつたのだな。

小山　やい、それなら貴樣は鬼婆よりもひどい奴だぞ。現在の子を殺すといふのは何といふ人非人だ。貴樣は子が可哀くはないのか。

あさ　（無言のまゝ泣いてゐる）

小山　わしはつい此間子供をとられた許りだ。病氣で亡くしたのぢやあるが、わしにはどうしても諦めきれない。それだのに貴樣には、よくもそんなむごいことが出來るな。

あさ　全く子供は可哀うございます。旦那樣お察し申します。

小山　人並なことをいふな。貴樣に子の可哀いことが分るか。そんな恐しい心で。

あさ　旦那、いくら貧乏してゐても、子を思ふ親心に違ひはございません。

小山　そんなら何故殺したんだ。憐れつぽい事をいつて同情を惹かうたつて、そんな手には乘りはしないぞ。何故殺したのだ。譯をいへ。譯を。

あさ　（泣きながら）子、子供が可哀さうだから殺しました。

小山　なに。子供が可哀さうだから殺した。これ、馬鹿なことをいへ。子が可哀いけりや大事に育てるのが當りまへぢやないか。それだのに子を殺しておいて、子が可哀いといふ理窟がどこにある。

あさ　そ、その通りでございます。

小山　それなら何故そんなことをしたんだ

小山　どうしてそんな酷いことをしたんだ。それをいへ。

あさ　（無言）

小山　それを白狀しないかつていふに。（と女をゆすぶつて突きのめす）

あさ　（力なく、芋蟲のやうにごろりと前へのめる。しかし矢張返事をしない。

小山　貴樣しぶとい奴だな。何故默つとるんだ。返事をしないか。

あさ　（やはり無言）

小山　何だ。貴樣はいたづらをしたんだらう。貴樣はさつき亭主がないといつたな。それで父無し子を生んだんだらう。

あさ　（無言のまゝ首を振る）

小山　嘘をつけ。始末に困つて、そんな大それたことをしたに相違ない。相手は誰だ。相手の男をいへ。

あさ　（聽きとれぬ程小聲に何かいふ）

小山　なに。父無し子ぢやない。夫の子に相違ないつて。しかし貴樣、亭主は死んだといつたぢやないか。

あさ　（極めて小聲に）死んだといつても、つい三月前に死んだんです。

小山　三月前に死んだ。それぢや確に亭主の子に相違ないのだな。

あさ　（涙聲で）はい。

（女は無言のまゝ急に巡査の手を振拂つて逃げ出さうとする）

小山　貴樣太い奴だ。

（巡査は直ぐに追ひかけて、女をねぢ伏せ、繩をかけようとする。）

あさ　旦那、なにするんです。（抵抗する）

小山　抵抗すると承知せんぞ。

あさ　今縛られちや、わしが今縛られちや。（と悲痛な聲を揚げて抵抗する）

小山　八釜しい。ぢつとしてをらんか。

あさ　（ぐつたりとして）今縛られちや……。（泣き伏す）

小山　（あさを縛り上げ）圖太い奴だ。菓子折なんか持つて來て、わしを籠絡しようとかゝりをる。やい、顏をあげろ。

あさ　（突つ伏したまゝでゐる）

小山　顏をあげろといふんだ。（とあさの襟髮をつかんで顏を引上げる）

あさ　（無言のまゝ顏を上げる。その眼は痛烈な光を放つてゐる）

小山　これ、どうして貴樣は赤ん坊を殺したんだ。

あさ　（無言）

あさ　（うなだれて）困つたな。旦那、（おづおづとまた先刻の菓子折を小山の前にすゝめ乍ら）どうかお願ひでこざえます。旦那お一人のご料簡にして戴く譯にはいかねえでせうか。お願ひでこざえます。

小山　そんな譯にはいかんよ。

あさ　旦那、どうか罪にならねえやうにして下さい。どうかご内分にお願ひ申します。旦那、お慈悲です。

小山　（急に女の腕を捉へる）これ。貴樣、兒を殺したな。

あさ　と、とんでもねえ。わし、決して、そ、そんな……

小山　嘘をつけ、そんなら何故眉けることをそんなに恐がるんだ。

あさ　いゝえ、全く殺したなんて、お、おぼえのなえ……

小山　ぢや、赤ん坊はどうして死んだのだ。

あさ　死んだんです。たゞ死んぢまつたんです。

小山　ただ死んぢまう筈があるか。

あさ　病、病、病氣で……

小山　病氣で。いつ死んだのだ。

あさ　を、をとゝひ。

小山　一昨日。（嚴かに）さうしてその死體はどうした。

小山　いや假令死んだにしても、一應は屆けなくてはいかんね。

あさ　だが、生れたとはいつても、直ぐ死んぢまつたんだから、生れなかつたも同じことですが。

小山　いや、さうはいかん。

あさ　矢つ張り屆けなくちやいけねえでせうか。

小山　おまへ赤ん坊が出來たのか。

あさ　（暫く默つてゐたが）へえ。

小山　それをどうして今迄屆けなかつたのだ。

あさ　人手がなかつたもんで。

小山　亭主に屆けて貰つたらいゝぢやないか。

あさ　それが居ねえもんですから。

小山　死んだのか。

あさ　へえ。

小山　それならわしが屆けてやらう。遲れたけれども爲方がない。

あさ　どうしても屆けなくつちやいけねえんでせうか。

小山　そりやいけないさ。屆出でをしないと罪になるからね。

あさ　どうか坊ちやまにでも。

小山　いや、うちには子供はゐない。此間死なれたもんだから。

あさ　（出はなを突かれて、おどおどしながら）は、はい。では……

小山　そんなことは關係のないことだ。で、用件といふのは。

あさ　どうか旦那、お取んなすつて戴きます。折入つてお願ひがござえますんで。

小山　頼みがあるなら何でも聽かう。しかしさういふものは絶對受取れない。

あさ　さうでもござえませうが。

小山　おまへは女だから何にも知らないと見えるが、官吏といふものは一切他人から物は貰へないことになつてゐるのだ。だからそんな心配はしない方がいゝ。わしはものを貰つたから、貰はぬからといつて差別をつけるやうなことは決してありはしない。それよりか用件を早く話した方がいゝ。

あさ　（おどおどしながら）へえ。

小山　さ、その菓子折なんか仕舞つて。――それで用件といふのは。

あさ　（暫らくうなだれてゐたが）旦那様、子供が生れたら屆けなくちやいけねえでせうか。

小山　そりや無論屆けなくちやいかんね。

あさ　ところがその赤ん坊が直ぐ死んちまつたんですが、死んだものなら屆けなくてもよかねえでせうか。

外の人　濟みません。つい這入りにくかつたもんですから。

小山　用があるんなら表へお廻んなさい。（娘に）裏はわしが閉めるから、おまへは早く湯に行つておいでなさい。

つぎ　はい。

小山　氣をつけておいでよ。それに雨が降つて來さうだから傘を持つておいで。

つぎ　はい。

（つぎは表から出て行かうとして、硝子戸を開けると、外には土工の杉原あさがおづおづと立つてゐる）

あさ　只今は濟みませんでした。

つぎ　いゝえ。こちらへおはりなさいまし。

あさ　へえ。（恐る恐る駐在所に這入る。爲事の歸りらしい服裝）

つぎ　（小山に）行つて參ります。（去る）

小山　おまへさんかね、用があるといふのは。

あさ　へえ。

小山　で、用事といふのは。

あさ　（菓子折を小山の前に差出し）つまらないものでごぜえますけれど。

小山　そんなことをしちや困るよ。

つぎ　不用心ですから裏の方は閉めて行きませう。

小山　（なほ書込みをしながら）あゝ、さうしておいてくれるといゝね。

つぎ　（土間に下り、裏口の障子を開け、雨戸を閉めようとしたが）あれつ。（と恐しい聲を立てる）

小山　（驚いて）どうしたんだ。

つぎ　何かゐるのよ、そこに。黒いものが。

小山　黒いもの。（と急いで臺所に飛んで來る）

つぎ　あつちへ行つたり、こつちへ行つたりしてゐるの。あたし恐いわ。

小山　（外を見て）何もゐないぢやないか。

つぎ　いゝえ、ゐるわ。そら、そこに。

小山　うム。誰か立つてゐるやうだな。（外の人に）どなたです。（答へが聞きとれないので）え。何ですつて。道が分らないんですか。

外の人　いゝえ、少々お願ひがござえまして。

小山　わたしにですか。

外の人　え。

小山　それなら何だつてこんな裏口になんか突立つてゐるんです。

い位ですわ。

小山　全くだな。痩せちやゐたが可愛いゝ赤ん坊だつたよ。多分手拭か何かで絞め殺したんだらう。咽喉のところがすつかり紫色になつてゐるんだ。

つぎ　まあ何ていふことをするんでせう。ひどい人があつたもんですわね。

小山　死なれたことのない奴は生命の有難味が分らないのだ。本當に平氣で子を殺すなんて、鬼みたやうな奴だ。だが、その太々しい犯人を引つ捕へてやらうと思ふと、わしにも元氣が出て來たよ。おい、お茶をくれ。

つぎ　もうおしまひですか。

小山　この澤庵は鹽が鹹いね。

つぎ　え、何ですか今度のは大變鹽がきいて居るやうですわ。お父さん、お疲れになつたでせう。お湯にいらつしやいませんか。

小山　いやわしはいゝ。それよりおまへ行かなくちやいけない。もう四五日も行かなかつたらう。

つぎ　えゝ。

小山　遲くなるとこの邊は物騷だから、早く行つた方がいゝ。

つぎ　ぢや、ちよつと行つてまゐりますわ。

小山　さうするがいゝ。（ポケツトから手帖を出して何か頻りに書き込む）

つぎ　また降り出したんですか。

隣の女房　落ちては來ませんけれど、すつかり曇つてしまひましたの。本當に花時のお天氣は困りますこと。左樣なら。（去る）

つぎ　左樣なら。ごゆつくり。

（暫らくしてから表から小山巡査が歸つて來る）

つぎ　お歸んなさい。

（つぎは柱に掛けてある着かへの着物をはづさうとする）

小山　いや、このまゝでいゝ。腹が減つてゐるから先にご飯を濟ましてしまふ。

つぎ　さうですか。惡いところに人が來ましたからね。屹度さうだと思つて、お膳はそのまゝにしてありますわ。

（と云ひ乍らチヤブ臺を小山の前に寄せ、ご飯をつける）

（小山は食事をする）

つぎ　お父さん、子を捨てた奴はもう捕つたんですか。

小山　まだそこ迄はいかないさ。やつと死體が見附つたばかりなんだから。しかし犯人は直ぐ上るよ。そんな不人情な奴は天が必ず赦しはしない。

つぎ　本當にさうですわね。ですが子を殺すやうないらない生命があるなら、あたし譲ちややんに貰つてやりた

小僧　あすこぢや毎日犬に牛肉を食はせておくんですつて。

隣の女房　そして雇人には大かた外米を食はしておくんだらう。

つぎ　犬の捜索費に五百圓も出すなんて、勿體なうございますね。

隣の女房　あるとこには、いらないお金が澤山あるもんですよ。

つぎ　それだのに要るところには少しもそれがありませんのね。あゝそんなお金があつたら、死ぬ人も死なずに濟んだでせうに。

隣の女房　さういひますがね、おつぎさん、金があるとまた早死をするものよ。

つぎ　どうしてでせう。

小僧　多分食ひ過ぎるからだらう。はゝゝゝゝ（と笑ひ乍ら威勢よく桶をかついで出掛る）左樣なら、毎度有難うございい。

（小僧歸つて行く）

隣の女房　あら、とんだお喋りをしてしまつたわ。ぢやお先きへ行つてますから、お父さんが歸つて來たら、いらつしやいな。

つぎ　え、後から參りますわ。

隣の女房　ぢや左樣なら。（外へ出て空を見る）まあ、いやなお天氣だこと。

つぎ　お味噌を持つて來てくれたの。

小僧　へえ。それからお鹽に焚きつけ。（と云ひ乍ら頻りに縁の下を見てゐる）

つぎ　小僧さん、何だつてそんなに縁の下を見て居るの。何か落し物？

小僧　いゝえ、犬を見附けてゐるんです。

隣の女房　犬、犬なんかゐやしないよ。縁の下にゐるのはもぐらもちか、先代萩の鼠ときまつてゐるぢやないか。

小僧　だつてひよつと來てるかもしれないから。

つぎ　小僧さん、犬になんかからかつてゐると、旦那に言ひ附けて上げるよ。

小僧　言ひ附けたつてかまやしない。

隣の女房　口のへらない小僧さんだね。

小僧　だつて五百圓になるんですもの。

隣の女房　何が五百圓さ。

小僧　そら、この先に煉瓦塀の大きな家があるでせう、成金の。あすこで犬が逃げたんですつて、それで見附けたものには五百圓くれるつていふんです。

隣の女房　馬鹿々々しい。犬が一匹逃げ出したからつて、そんな大金を懸けるなんて。ふん、こつちには食へなくてまご〳〵してゐる人間が澤山あるんだ。犬に出す位なら本當に少し人間に出せばいゝんだ。

つぎ　ホ、、、。

隣の女房　笑ひごとぢやないんですよ全く。第一マッチは腹がへらないでせう。だか働らかなくつてもようございんすし、監督に叱られる氣遣ひもなし、本當に氣樂な身分ぢやありませんか。

つぎ　だつて、あなた。

隣の女房　いゝえ、全くですよ。マッチだと、どんなに大事にされるか。まああたしの工場へ一寸來て御覽なさいよ。それ下へおいてはいけないの、濡らしてはいけないの、乾かし過ぎてはならないのつて、それはそれは華族樣の獨り息子のやうに、その丁寧な扱ひ振りつたらありませんわ。ところがあたしたち女工は、そりやみぢめなものよ。やれおまへは居眠りをするの、お喋りだの、能率が低いのと年中怒られたり、威されたり、全く厭になつてしまひますわ。實際あすこへ這入つたら。人間はマッチの棒ほどにも思はれないんですかれ。

つぎ　まあ、そんなゝんでせうか。

隣の女房　あたし食べられさへすれば、あんなところには行きませんわ。ところがあなた惡るいことには人間はお腹が減るんでせう。これにはお前さん、全く困つてしまひますわ。

つぎ　本當に食べる程つらい事はありませんわれ。

（酒屋の小僧が裏口から這入つて來る。）

小僧　どうも遲くなりました。（品物を臺所におく）

隣の女房　本當に世話をやかせる奴僧らしいぢやありませんか。そのたんびにお出掛けにならなくちやならないのは、大抵ぢやありませんわれ。

つぎ　でも職務ですから爲方がございませんれ。

隣の女房　いくら職務でも他人にはなかなか勤まりませんよ。ですがお宅のやうな、こんな實直なおうちに、どうして不幸が續くんでせう。奥さんや息子さんが、いちどきに亡くなるなんて。

つぎ　まはり合せですわ。さう諦めてをりますのよ。

隣の女房　まはり合せつていひますがれ、おつぎさん、なかなか諦められませんよ。

つぎ　だつてさう思ふより爲方がないんですもの。（食事を濟ます）

隣の女房　世の中つて本當に意地が悪いもんですれ。あたし癪にさわつて堪りませんよ。

つぎ　（勝手に廻はつて茶碗などを洗ひ乍ら）あら、どうして。

隣の女房　今日も工場でマッチの箱を貼りながら、つくづく考へたんですがれ。今のやうぢや、あたし人間のやうな氣が少しもしませんわ。

つぎ　そんなことありませんわ。

隣の女房　いゝえ、本當ですよ。いくら廻り合せだからつて、こんな風ぢや、あたしマッチになつた方が餘程いゝ位だと思ひますわ。

つぎ　はい。

小山　ぢや、ちよつと行つて來る。（百姓と共に去る）

（つぎは一人だけで食事をしてゐると、そこへ裏口から隣の女房が這入つて來る）

隣の女房　今晩は。

つぎ　あら、お隣のおかみさん、（食事を止めようとする）

隣の女房　今ご飯なの。濟ましておしまひなさいよ。

つぎ　ぢやご免なさい。

隣の女房　おつぎさん、ご飯が濟んだらお湯に行かないこと。

つぎ　あたしご一緒に行きたいんですけれど。

隣の女房　お父さんお留守なの。

つぎ　え、急にご用が出來て、今歸へつて來たんですけれど、また出てしまひましたの。

隣の女房　お忙がしいんですことれ。何か出來たんですか。

つぎ　何でも赤ん坊の死體が竹藪から出て來たんですつて。

隣の女房　まあ厭だこと。何ですよ。屹後いたづら者が子供のやり場に困つてそんなところへ捨てたんですよ。

つぎ　え、きつとそうですわ。

百姓　竹藪ん中から赤ん坊が出て來たんで。

小山　何だつて、

百姓　明朝早く市場へ持つてかうと思つて、うちの裏の竹山へ這入つて竹の子を掘つてゐると、死んだ赤ん坊が鍬の先に引かゝつて出て來たんでさ。打つちやつておけれえことだから直ぐに旦那のとこへ馳けて來ました。

小山　さうか。よし、直ぐに行かう。

百姓　どうもご苦勞さまでござえます。

つぎ　またお出掛け、お父さん。

小山　うん、服を出してくれ。

つぎ　はい。（正服を出す）

小山　（服を着ながら）役場にはもう知らせたのか。

百姓　さつき人を出しました。何しろ他の物と違ふから、旦那方に一刻も早く來て貰はなくつちや、どうにも手がつけられねえんで。

小山　そりやさうだ。

つぎ　お父さん、ご飯は。

小山　歸つてから食べる。しかしお前は先へお上り。

小山　それでいゝ、〳〵。

つぎはチヤヲ臺を出して夕食の支度をする。その間小山は電燈をつけたり、佛壇に線香をあげたりなどする。外は日が落ちて暗くなる。やがて二人は食卓に坐る。

小山　膳に向つても何だかもの足りないな。

つぎ　せめて謙ちやんだけでもゐると……

小山　ウム、あの子がゐたら賑かでいゝんだが——いや、もう思ふまい〳〵。

二人默って飯を食べ始める。と、突然表の硝子戸が開いて、駐在所に百姓が飛込んで來る。

百姓　旦那さんゐたかれ。

つぎ　どなた。

百姓　えれいことが出來たんで、ちよつと旦那に來て藏きてえと思つて。

小山　何か事件でも起つたのか。

百姓　へえ。

小山　また轢死かい。

百姓　いゝえ、そんなことぢやねえ、もつとえれいことなんで。

小山　どうしたんだ。

つぎ　だつて、それでなくてさへ容易でないのに、此上もつと拂つたら大變ぢやありませんか。
小山　だが、さうしたら、ひよつと助かつたかもしれんからさ。
つぎ　本當にもつと思ふやうに手が屆くとよかつたんですけれど。
小山　さう愚ふと二人ともわしがむざむざ殺してしまつたやうな氣がしてたまらないのだ。
つぎ　あら、そんなことはありませんわ。お父さんに惡いことはないんですもの。
小山　いや、わしに力がなかつたから惡いのだ。
つぎ　だつてお金が足りないために、病人に十分のことが出來ない人は世間に澤山ありますわ。何もお父さん一人ぢやないんですもの。そんなにお責めになることはありませんわ。
小山　それだから猫ほいけないのさ。世間にさういふことが一つもなくなつたら、どんなにいゝことか知れないぢやないか。
つぎ　それはさうですけれど。あゝ、本當にも少しお金があつたらね。
小山　愚痴だ。——おい飯にしよう。わしはすつかり腹が減つてしまつた。
つぎ　はい。ですけれど何もおかずがありませんわ。お豆腐でも買つて來ませうか。
小山　何にもいらない。たしか豆があつた筈ぢやないか。
つぎ　え。

屑屋　旦那の前でございますが、全く暮しにくい世の中になりましたな。毎日毎日のおまんまを食べて行くだけが容易ぢやないんですから。

小山　さうだね。

屑屋　實際世の中がせち辛くなりました。何だつてぢやありませんか、この間女が男の服裝(なり)をして働いてゐたつてぢやありませんか。

小山　そんなことが新聞に出てゐたれ。女の貨銀ぢや食つて行けないんだらう。

屑屋　全く當前のことをしてゐたんぢや食つて行けませんからな。人間つてものは恐しいもんで、食つて行くためには、どんなことでもしなくつちやなりませんよ。これはとんだお喋りをいたしました。どうも毎度有難う存じます。

（去る。そして外へ出るや否や、「屑い、お拂ひはございませんか。」と呼び歩いて行く。）

つぎ　何だか賣つてしまふと惜いやうな氣がしますわね。

小山　それはさうだが、あると却つて無出していけないから、思ひ切つて賣つてしまつたのだ。それに藥代を拂はなくちやならんからな。

つぎ　あ、まだお拂ひがしてありませんのね。

小山　しかしわしは藥代や米代がもつと拂へたらと本當に思ふよ。

小山　どの位に買へるね。

屑屋　さうでございますな。（胸算用をして）引くるめまして七圓五十錢に頂戴いたしませう。全く飛切の値段でございます。へえ。

つぎ　お父さん、あれ勿體ないぢやないこと。

屑屋　（紡績の羽織をとりあげ）これでございますか、お嬢樣。併しこれはお嬢樣にはおちみでございますよ。

つぎ　いゝえ、あたしが着る譯ぢやないけれど。

屑屋　これが襟が半巾でないと宜敷いんですが、生憎半巾に裁つてあるものですからな。さうでないともう少し頂戴が出來るんですが。

小山　どうだらう。もう少し買へないかね。

屑屋　さうですね。ぢやもう三貫戴いときませう。丁度と申上げたいんですが、それでは手前の方がとても引合ひませんので。

小山　ぢやそれできめておかう。

屑屋　さうでございますか。有難う存じます。（金を財布から出して）では七圓の、こちらが八十錢。どうかお調べ下さい。

小山　（金をしまひ）どうだね、儲かるかね。

屑屋　（裏口を開けて）お呼びはこちらでございい？

小山　屑屋さん、這入つてくれないか。

屑屋　へえ、毎度有難う存じます。どうもよい時候になりましたな。（家に這入る）

（小山は押入をあけて、古葛籠から衣類を六七枚取出して屑屋に見せる。）

小山　屑屋さん、おまへさんは、かういふものはやらないかね。

屑屋　へえ、お召物で。何より結構でございます。お高く頂戴いたします。

小山　みんな古い物許りだけれど。

屑屋　どういたしまして。これでれ旦那、屑屋と申しましても、いろいろあるんで、同じ古物のうちでも手前は

その古着の方が得手なんでございまして、他の同業者よりは十分高値に頂戴いたします。

（衣類を調べながら）みんな女物でございますな。

小山　妻に死なれたもんだから。

屑屋　それはどうも御愁傷なことで、何かと御不自由でございませう。（なほ衣類を調べながら）お子供衆のも

のも交つてをりますな。

小山　引つゞいて長男に死なれてね。それでみんな不用になつてしまつたのさ。

屑屋　ご總領に。それはお力落しでございますな。さういふご事情でしては、分けて奮發して頂戴いたします。

小山　たゞ今。どうもひどい埃だ。（靴をぬいで上にあがる）

つぎ　直ぐにお着かへになるとようございますわ。

（つぎは立つて着換の着物を父に差出す）

小山　ウム、さうしよう。（制服を脱いで和服に着かへ乍ら）外は花見で大變な人出だな。

つぎ　え、隨分賑やかのやうですわれ。こゝも澤山お花見の人が通りますわ。

小山　どうだ。明日は非番だから、わしが留守居をしてやる。お前花見にでも出かけちや。

つぎ　あたし？

小山　おまへは看護疲れで大分窶れてゐる。少し花でも見て心をうきうきさせるがいゝ。

つぎ　あたし花なんか見たくないわ。何だか力が拔けてしまつて、何をしても少しも面白くないんですもの。

「屑い屑い。」と表を屑屋が通る。

小山　それはさうだな。

つぎ　あたし、花なんか見て浮かれてゐる人を見ると憎らしくなりますわ。

「屑い。屑のお溜はございませんか」とまた屑屋の聲がする。

小山　屑屋のやうだ。ちよつと呼んでくれないか。

つぎ　はい。（勝手の窓から小聲で屑屋を呼ぶ）屑屋さん屑屋さん。

嬰兒殺し（一幕）

山本有三

人物

巡査　小山圭介（四十三四歳）
娘　つぎ（十八歳位）
屠屋
百姓
隣の女房
酒屋の小僧
女土方　杉原あさ（三十歳位）

時代――現代、春
場所――市に接した郡部

住居を兼ねた巡査駐在所。駐在所に直ぐひっつけて居間と臺所がある。臺所には腰障子が閉まつてゐて、裏の出入口になつてゐる。勝手の櫺子窓（れんじまど）の向ふに櫻の花がのぞいてゐる。

娘のつぎは座敷にぼんやり坐つてゐる。そこへ駐在所の硝子戸をあけて小山巡査が歸つて來る。

つぎ　お歸んなさい。

人聲　（灯かげと共にやや近く行くなり、ハッキリ聞える。）

おういい！　早く來いよう！　角ちやんが死んで居るだよう！　稚兒ケ淵に死骸が浮かんでゐるだよう！

（三人の姿が川上の方へ次第に消えて行く）

――幕――

老婆　ああ、彼奴ですよ。毎晩々々、うちのお嬢さんが此處のお湯へ這入りに來るのを知つて居てね。ゆうべも此の近所をうろうろして、跡を追ひかけて來たとかつて、もうお嬢さんは氣味惡がつてゐたんですよ。

巡査　それでは今夜も此のお湯へお這入りになつたんですか？

老婆　いいえ、ゆうべで懲り懲りしちまつたつて、今夜は這入りませんでしたよ。それにもう、病氣の方も大分よくなつて來ましたので、明日は神戸へ歸ると云ふのでね、此の旦那が迎ひかたがた遊びに入らつしつたんですよ。

巡査　ああ、さうですか。それでよく分りました。では此のハンケチはそちらへ御返し申します。

白人の女　（横柄に默つて受け取り。紳士を見ながら）レット、アス、ゴー。（巡査に）左樣なら。

巡査　左樣なら。失禮しました。

（白人の女、再び紳士と腕を組みつつ、老婆をつれて上手の山路へ去る。三人ぼんやりして後を見送つてゐる。短き間。）

（やがて、遠くの川上の方に一點の灯かげが見え、微かに呼ぶ人聲が聞える。）

人聲　おうい、みんな此方へ來いよう！　角ちやんが死んでゐるだよう！

お小夜　え！　角ちやんが死んでゐる？

（云ひながら夢中で川の中へ飛び降り、川上の方へ走つて行く。巡査と母親つづく。）

だつてそんな事を聞くんですよ。

お小夜　（岩の上に落ちてゐた絹のハンケチに心づき、それを取り上げて巡査の方へ持つて來ながら）ああ、こに角ちやんのハンケチが落ちてゐただあよ。角ちやんはな、神戸にゐる時分に此のハスケチをローザさんに貰つたんだつてさう云つてな、肌身放さずに持つてゐただあよ。

白人の女　（ローザと云ふ名をきくと同時にふと氣がついて、ツカツカと傍へ寄つて來て、巡査の手にあるハンケチを見る）おお、これ、これ、これ私のものです。わたし神戸で此のハンカチーフ盗まれました。（强き語調で）誰が此れを持つてました？

老婆　まあ、ローザさん、ほんたうに此のハンケチだよ。これ御覽なさい。ここにRとKと云ふ字がちやんと書いてあるぢやないか。ケリーさん、記念のハンケチが出て來ましたよ。

白人の紳士　おおさう、わたくし大へん喜びます。（同じく傍へ寄つて）おお、これに違ひありません。これ、どうして此處にありましたか？　わたくし不思議に思ひます。

老婆　（思ひ中つたと云ふ顏つき）ああ、きつとあの小僧が盗んだんだよ。彼奴の仕業だ。……まあ、ほんたうに薄つ氣味の惡い厭な小僧だつたらありやしない。（巡査に向つて）あなた方はあの、此の頃此の近所をうろついてゐる薄馬鹿のやうな小僧がゐるのを知りませんかれ？　もと神戸の洋服屋に奉公をしてゐた、——

巡査　ええ知つてゐます。あれは狐つきでれ。毎晩この小屋の近所をうろついてゐたんです。

お小夜　（再び川上に向ひ）角ちやん、――角ちやんてばよう。――

母親　そんなに呼んだつて、もうあの野郎は歸つちやあ來ねえだあ。さあ、お小夜ぼう、もう歸らうよ。（巡査に）旦那、ほんたうにまあこんな夜更けに、濟まねえことでごぜえました。

巡査　どうだれ、もう少し川上の方を捜して見ようかれ。

母親　いいえ、もうそれには及ばねえだあ。あの野郎は私はとつくにあきらめて居ますだあ。

（下手より白人の女、輕快な散歩姿で紳士と腕を組みながら山路を降つて來る。召使ひの老婆がそのあとについて來る。お小夜等のうろうろしてゐる樣子を見ながら行き過ぎやうとする。）

巡査　（ちよつと躊躇した後、老婆に靡をかげる）もし、もし。

（白人等の一行、橋の上で立ち止まる）

巡査　あの、失禮ですが、あなた方はこんなに晩くどちらへおいでになりましたれ？

老婆　（面をふくらせながら）わたしはれ、うちのお嬢さんが此の旦那と（紳士をさす）夕方散歩に出たつきり、大變歸りがおそいもんだから、迎ひに行つて來たんですよ。

（二人の白人、うるさい事を尋ねる奴だと云ふ顏つきで聞いてゐる。）

巡査　はあ、成る程、――そしてどの方面を散歩して居られたのかれ？

老婆　あんまり月がいいもんだから、此の山の上の湖水の周りを歩いてゐたつて、さう云つてゐますがれ。全體何

仔狐の一、二、（角太郎を上下に揺す振りながら）こん、こん、こん。

（ついで一同渓川へ跳び下り、親狐を先に立てて、角太郎を引つ擔いだまま、岩の間を乘り越え乘り越え、川上の方へ見えなくなる。）

（やや長き間。上手より提灯を持つた巡査、お小夜、母親の三人が下りて來る。用心深くあたりを見廻しながら溫泉小屋の方へやつて來る。）

お小夜　（橋の上ら小屋の方を見て）角ちやん、角ちやんたらよう、返辭いしてくんろよう！

母親　なあに、もう居やあしねえだあよ。きつと狐にさらはれてしまつただあ。

巡査　（小屋を覗き、周りを一とまはり廻つて見ながら）何處へ行つたか。もう此の近所には居らんやうだね。

お小夜　（川上を向いて）角ちやん、角ちやんたらよう！　何處へ行つちまつたんだあよう！

巡査　（お小夜に）お前、たしかに此處で狐を見たと云ふんだね？

お小夜　ああ、已あたしかに見ただあよ。それ、その小屋の窓のところで、角ちやんと已が中を覗いて見るてえとな、眞つ白な大きな狐がお湯に漬かつてゐただあよ。

巡査　ふむ。（考へる）

母親　だからおツかあの云はねえ事ぢやねえんだによう。こんなところに居てほなんねえつて、あれほどにおツかあが云つたあのによう。

ません。

（上手の岸に生ひ茂つてゐる萩の花がざわざわと鳴つて、花の下にべつたりと身をひれ伏して隠れてゐた二匹の仔狐が現はれる。白繻子のやうにピカピカ光る美しい縫ぐるみを着てゐる。そして、ひよいと丸木橋の上へ跳んで出て、親狐の方を見てぴよこぴよこお辭儀をする。）

仔狐の一　ローザさん、ローザさん。

仔狐の二　角太郎さん、角太郎さん。

仔狐の一、二、　あなたがたをお迎ひに參りました。

狐　おお、（角太郎を顧みて）あの人たち、わたしのうち、の女中です。わたしたちを迎ひに來ました。

（さう云つて、ちよつと仔狐に眼くばせする。）

仔狐の一　角太郎さん、角太郎さん、お腹が減つて歩けないなら、わたしが負ぶつて上げませう。

仔狐の二　川にはごろごろ石があつて、ころぶと危うございます。二人で抱いて行つて上げませう。

（仔狐どもするすると角太郎の傍へ寄り、一匹は首を持ち、一匹は脚を持つて、高く高く胴上げをしながら、親狐と共に橋の中央を駈けて來る。角太郎はいつの間にか失神したやうになつてゐる。）

狐　うまく行つたね。（狐のやうな恰好をして）

こん、こん、こん。

角太郎　ああ、ローザさんの生れた街はきつと美しいでせうね。どうか僕をつれて行つて下さい。ローザさんはいつその街へお歸りになるんですか？

狐　今夜、――今夜歸ります。

角太郎　今夜？――でもローザさんは佛蘭西の方ぢやないんですか？

狐　ええ、さう、わたしの國ふらんす。わたし巴里で生れました。

角太郎　巴里で？　だけど巴里へ行くのには汽車に乘つたり、船に乘つたり、幾日も幾日も旅をするのぢやありませんか？

狐　いいえ、汽車にも乘りません。わたし歩いて巴里へ行きます。わたしよく道を知つてゐます。巴里は彼方（あちら）、（川上の方を指さす）――彼方にあります。此の川の中を何處までも上つて行きます。そしたら直きに巴里へ着きます。角太郎さん、あなた私と一緒に行きます？　（肩へ手をかけて云ふ）さ、わたしあなたをつれて行きます。そして大事にして上げますよ。ね、一緒に來ませんか？

角太郎　（うなづきながら立上る）ローザさん、僕はあなたに何處までででも附いて行きますよ。ほんたうに僕を可愛がつて下さいな。

狐　おお、好い兒、好い兒。あなたほんたうにナイス、ボーイ。巴里のわたしの家へ行つたら、わたしあなたにいい着物きせて上げます。うまい御馳走毎日たくさん喰べさせて上げます。さ、あなた、早く行かねばなり

ルビーです。おでき、のやうに見えますけれど、わたし此處へルビーを入れて、みんなを欺してやりました。

——これ、よく觸つて見て下さい。これ、分ります？

角太郎（觸つて見る）びろうどのやうに細い毛の生えた、白い肌がきらきら光つて、そこにほんたうのルビーが腫物の膿のやうな工合に嵌つてゐる）ああ、ルビーだ、ルビーだ。ほんたうのルビーだ。やつぱりおできぢやなかつたんだ。

狐　おほほほ。

角太郎　まあ、何てきらきらよく光るんだらう！　ローザさん、あなたの肌へ若しほんたうのおできが出來ても、きつと此のルビーのやうにきれいでせうね？

狐　おほほほ、わたし、ここにもルビーを嵌めてゐます。これ、見て下さい。（云ひながら今度は脛を出す。そこにも白びろうどのやうな毛が生えて、ルビーが光つてゐる）

角太郎　（彼女の前に跪き、白繻子の沓を穿いた足を自分の膝の上にのせ、又そのルビーに觸つて見る）ああ、ほんたうだ。此れもルビーだ。まあ、何と云ふ可愛いきれいな沓なんだらう。

狐　おほほほ、おほほほ、（立ち上る）さあ、角太郎さん、わたしもう歸ります。あなた、わたしと一緒に來ませんか？　あなた、泊る家がはいならば、わたしあなたを連れて行きます。わたしの生れた美しい國の美しい街へ連れて行きます。

角太郎　ええ、さうですよ。今でも僕を狐つきだつてみんなさう云つてゐるんですよ。……村の奴等はね、ローザさんが此のお湯へ來ることを、だあれも知らないもんだから、夜おそくなつてからこんな所へ來る者はない、そりやあきつと人間ぢやあない、狐だ狐だつて云ふんですよ。

狐　おほほほ、（甲高く笑ふ）私のことを狐だと云ひますか？

角太郎　ええ、さうなんです。ローザさんがあんまり色が白いもんだから、あんなきれいな人間がゐる譯はない、あれは狐だつて云ふんです。

狐　おほほほ、ほをかしいですね。わたし狐ではありません。わたしローザ、ね、あなたよく知つてゐますね。

角太郎　ええ、知つてゐますとも。——僕はあなたがあの別莊へ入らつしつた時から、きつと體が悪いので此の温泉へ這入りにおいでになつたんだと、さう思つてゐたんですもの。——ねえ、ローザさん、あなた、もうすつかりお直りになつたんですか？

狐　わたし、もうすつかり直りました。此の温泉はほんたうにいい温泉です。悪い病氣みんな直ります。ほら、（手頸のあたりをまくつてみせる）わたしの腕、こんなに綺麗。ね、此の通りこんなにきれい。

角太郎　でもあの、その肘のところにおできが出來てゐましたつけね。ほんたうにきれいな、ルビーのやうな美しいおできが、……

狐　おほほほ、これ、これですか　（肘の方までまくつて見せる）これおでき、ではありません、これほんたうの

角太郎　ああ、それぢやローザさんは、ほんたうは僕が好きだつたんですか？

狐　ええ、わたし一番あなたが好きでした。わたし、ほんたうは、あの水兵もミスタ・ケリーも嫌ひてした。けれど仕方ありませんから、一緒に唄をうたつたり、お酒を飲んだりしてゐました。

角太郎　ローザさん、僕はあなたのハンケチを持つてゐますよ。（懐から絹の薔薇色のハンケチを出す）ほら、これを御覧なさい。いつかあなたが此れをお前に上げると云つて下すつた、あのハンケチなんですよ

狐　ああさう、さうです。わたしあなたにそのハンカチ一つ上げました。あなた今でも持つてゐますれ。

角太郎　此のハンケチの隅のところに、Kと云ふ字と、Rと云ふ字が書いてありますれ。

狐　ああさう、（ハンケチを手に取つて見る）――あなた此れが分ります？　此のRと云ふ字、ローザの事です。そして此のKと云ふ字、角太郎さんのことですよ。

角太郎　でも店の者にこれを見せたら、Kと云ふ字はケリーさんのことだつて云ひましたけれど……

狐　いいえ、ちがひます、あなたのことです。わたしあなたに、此の字を縫つて上げました。わたしあなたが好きでしたから。……

角太郎　きつとさうかも知れないつて、僕はさう云つたんだけれど、そんなことがあるもんか、だからお前は氣違ひだつて、みんなが僕を馬鹿にしました。僕はみんなに笑はれたり、からかはれたりしたんです。

狐　おお、みんながあなたをからかひました？

さんの優しい美しい手から餌を喰べさして貰へるんですもの……

狐　あなた、それほど私が好きでした？

角太郎　ええ、僕はローザさんが大好きでした。あなたのお部屋へ使ひに行くのが何よりも樂しみでした。ローザさんはよくピアノを彈いて、唄をうたつておいででしたれ。一度僕がお部屋へ行つたら、太つた髯の生えた、水兵のやうな服を着た西洋人が傍にゐて、一緒に唄をうたつてましたれ。ローザさんはあの時僕を叱りましたれ、――「獸つて此處へ這入つて來ちやあいけないよ」ッて。恐い眼をして僕を睨めて、――

狐　私が恐い眼をしました？　そんな事がありました？

角太郎　ええ、――それから後も二度ばかりありましたよ。その時は水兵のやうな人ぢやなくて、ケリー商會の旦那と二人で、ローザさんはお酒を飲んでおいででしたれ。あの時も僕はあなたに叱られました。「今お客さまがあるんだよ。用があるなら後におしよ」つて、さう云つて。――僕はローザさんに叱られたのが悲しかつたもんだから、今でも忘れずにゐるんですよ。

狐　ああ、角太郎さん、堪忍して下さい、堪忍して下さい。わたしあなたにお氣の毒しました。――けれどもわたし籠の中のカナリヤと同じことでした。わたしあなたが好きでしたけれども、あの水兵やミスタケリーと仲好くせねばなりませんでした。さうしなければ、わたしも矢張り意地の惡いお婆さんにら叱られました。わたし自分で、自分の體が自由になりませんでした。ね、あなた分つ　ぬたでせう？

なるのを見てゐました。僕は小さな聲で、ローザさん、ローザさんて、あなたをあんなに呼んだんだけれど、けふまで一度も返辭をしては下さらなかつたんですね。

狐　おお、さう、わたし知りませんでした。ほんとうに濟みません。角太郎さん、あなた、勘忍してくれます？

角太郎　僕はどうしてローザさんが返辭をしてくれないのかと思つて、悲しくつてなりませんでした。でももうそんな事は何でもないんです。僕は今夜はうれしいんです。かうしてローザさんと二人ツきりで話をすることが出來るんですもの。――かうしてゐると、僕は神戸にゐた時のことを想ひ出しますよ。ねえ、ローザさん、あなた覺えておいでですか？　あなたのお部屋へ僕がたびたび使ひに行つた時分のことを？

狐　ええ、覺えてゐますよ。わたしあなたにチョコレートを上げましたよ。

角太郎　あなたのお部屋には、きれいな物が澤山飾つてありましたつけれ、繪だの寫眞だのいろいろな切れだのが。……さうしてあの、綠色の幕のかかつた窓のところに鳥籠が下つてゐましたつけれ。籠の中にカナリヤがゐましたつけれ。

狐　ああ、……あなた、ほんたうによく覺えてゐますれ。

角太郎　僕はあのカナリヤが羨ましかつたんですよ。……

狐　なぜ？　なぜなぜですか？

角太郎　だつて、あのカナリヤは、朝でも晩でも、始終ローザさんの傍にゐられるんですもの。さうしてローザ

狐　角太郎さん――そしてあなた、どうして此處へ來てゐますか？

角太郎　僕ですか、僕はあの、神戸に奉公してたんだけれど、氣ちがひでもないのに氣が違つたんだつて云はれて、こんな田舍へ追ひ歸されてしまつたんです。

狐　あなたのパパやママの家、此の田舍にあるんですか？

角太郎　いいえ、僕のお父さんやお母さんは、もう死んぢまつたんですよ。だから仕方がないもんだから、伯母さんの家へ歸つて來たんです。

狐　おおさう、あなた伯母さんの家にゐます？

角太郎　いいえ、もうその家も出ちまつたんです。僕はあの婆が大嫌ひなんだもの。――意地が惡くつて、毎日毎日僕を叱つてばかりゐて。――

狐　それならあなた、今何處にゐます？

角太郎　僕の家は何處にもありません。晝間は森の中だの山の中だのに隱れてゐて、夜になると此の谷へ出て來るんです。……ローザさん、僕はね、あなたが毎晩ここのお湯へ入らつしやるのをちやんと知つてゐたんですよ。さうしていつまでもあなたのお姿をそうツと蔭で見てゐたんですよ。

狐　おお、あなた毎晩此處に來ました？。きのふの晩もをととひの晩も？

角太郎　ええ、きのふの晩もをととひの晩も、その前の晩も、その前も僕はいつでも、あなたがお湯へお這入りに

角太郎　ええ、ゐました。僕はあすこに三年ばかり奉公をしてゐました。さうして始終ローザさんのところへ洋服を持つて行つたんですよ。ローザさんはいろんな服を澤山持つておいでしたれ。ほら、二階のつきあたりのローザさんの部屋へ行くと、白い色をした鏡のついた簞笥があつて、――寢臺の横にそれが二つ列べてあつて、――中に一杯服がしまつてありましたつけれ。れえローザさん、僕はちやんと覺えてゐますよ。

狐　ああ、……そしてあなたの名前、何と云ひますか？

角太郎　僕は角太郎つて云ふんですよ。

狐　おお角太郎、――わたし知つてゐます。あなた、あの時のボーイですれ。

（云ひながら掘を戻つて來て角太郎の顏を見る。）

角太郎　ローザさんは僕を大そう可愛がつて、くれましたつけれ。角太郎さん角太郎さんて、行くたび毎に僕の頭を撫でてくれて、よく銀紙に包んであるチョコレートをくれましたつけれ。

狐　さうです、さうです、わたしあなたにチョコレート上げました。あなた、大へん悧巧なボーイでした。わたし決して忘れません。（岩角に腰をかけながら）あなた、なぜそこに立つてゐますか。一緒に此處へおかけなさい。

角太郎　ええ、ありがと、ありがたうございます。

（うれしさうに並んで腰かける）

てゐる。……ああ分つた、ローザさんは鏡を忘れて來たんですね？　それで水鏡をしてるんですね？　ああ、髪を結つてゐる。濡れた髪の毛からぽたぽたと雫が落ちる。……やつぱり金色の雫が落ちる。……おや、もう髪を結つちまつた。タオルをしぼつて、足を拭いて、白繻子の靴を穿いてゐるな。……ローザさん、もう支度が出來たんですか。出て來るんですか。僕はお迎ひに來たんですよ。……（云ひながら小屋の戸口の方へ廻る）ああ出て來た、出て來た。ローザさん！

（小屋の中から、白人の女に化けた狐が出て來る。白いタオルの浴衣を着て、素足に白繻子の靴を穿き、石鹸の箱とスポンヂとタオルを入れた籠を提げてゐる。狐が小屋を出ると共に、小屋の中に充ちて居た青白い月明りのやうなものが、始終狐の跡を追つてその身の周りを照らして行く。）

（白人の女の姿を見ると、角太郎は思はずその美に打たれたやうな風になつて、默つて二三歩後へさがる。狐、ちらりと角太郎を見、すうつとその前を通り過ぎつつ橋を渡りかける。）

角太郎　（遠慮しながら）もし、ローザさん、ローザさん、あなたはローザさんぢやないんですか？

狐　（橋の中途で振り返り、西洋人らしい日本語で）ええ、さう、……わたしローザです、あなた誰？——誰ですか？

角太郎　僕ですよ。——あの、神戸の洋服屋の中村にゐた小僧ですよ。

狐　おおさう、あなた、テイラーの中村に居ました？

きらきらと光つてゐるやうだ。……ああ、あれ、腕ばかりぢやない、脚にも一つ、肩にも一つ、……あれおでき、ぢやないのかも知れない。きつとほんたうのルビーなんだ。だからあんなに光つてゐるんだ。……

お小夜ちやん、あれを御覽よ、あの眞つ白な襟頸を御覽よ。あれでも人間の肌なんだよ。……

（お小夜、再び幾度かためらつた後、遂に角太郎に誘惑されて恐る恐る窓に取りつき、中を覗いて見る。同時に「あッ」と云つて身の毛のよだつやうな樣子で、直ぐに首を引つ込める。）

お小夜　（眞青になつてふるへながら、逃げるやうに小屋の傍を離れる）あ、あ、あれは、き、き、きつねだ。狐だあよ角ちやん！……お、おらあ、狐を見ちやつただあ。

角太郎　ああ、もうすつかり洗つちやつた。タオルで體を拭いてゐる。ローザさん、ローザさん、もう上るんですか？　上るんなら僕がお迎ひに行きますよ。……

お小夜　角ちやん、そりあ人間ぢやあれえ。……眞つしろな狐だあよ。やつぱりおッかあが云つた通りだあ。……己あお巡りさんを呼んで來るよ。

（云ひ捨てて飛ぶやうに丸木橋を渡り、上手の山路へ走り去る。）

角太郎　……もう體を拭いちまつた。あれ、あれ、今着物を着てゐる。タオルで拵へた眞つしろな着物を着てゐる。體も着物もみんな眞つしろで、何だか雪の精のやうだ。……ああ、又湯壺の緣へ行つて、しやがんぢまつた。あれ、あれ、ローザさんの姿がお湯の上へ映つてゐる。お月さまよりも青白く、ぼうッと明るく映つ

お小夜　これ、角ちやんたら！　（つい一緒にのぞかうとして、やはり恐いのでのぞけない）ほうれ、だあれも返辭をしやしねえだあ。……人なんかゐやしねえだあよ。

角太郎　ローザさん、……ローザさん、……

お小夜　さあ、早く歸らうよ角ちやん、お前氣が違つたんだあよ。

角太郎　あれ、あすこにちやんと居るぢやないか。……あれ、あれを御覽。……ローザさんがせつせと體を洗つてゐる。……ああ、お湯の中に月があんなにさしてゐるよ。湯壺がまるで水晶のやうに透き徹つて、……ローザさんの體ぢうが雪のやうに照つてゐるよ。雪ぢやあない、銀だ。銀のやうに眩しくきらきら光つてゐるんだ。……ああ、金髮の毛をさらさらとしごいてゐる。……あれ、あれを御覽、……ローザさんの髮の毛が、金色の髮の毛が、お湯の中で月に映つてゐるぢやないか。あんな綺麗なものが、……あれでも人間の髮の毛なんだよ、……

お小夜　（見ようとして躊躇しながら）そりやあみんな角ちやんの氣の迷ひだあよ。そんなものが見える譯はねえよ、……

角太郎　あれ、もう髮の毛を解いちやつたよ。……今度は腕を洗つてゐるよ。ああ、ローザさんは腕のおできを洗つてゐる。ローザさん、ローザちん、そんなにそこをお湯へ入れても泌みはしないの？　……まあ何と云ふきれいなおできだ。紅い血うみがお湯の中でつやつやとして、まるで白びろうどの上にルビーの玉が

角太郎　そりやあ毎晩此のお湯へ這入りに來るから、だんだん直つて來たんだよ。此の夏からずうつと此處にゐるんだもの。――體がよけりや、あんなに寒くなつて來たのに、いつまで此處に居やあしないよ。もう何處の別莊にだつてだあれも居やあしないぢやないか。……

（お小夜がぢつと考へてゐる隙に、角太郎はふいと橋を飛び越へて行く）

お小夜　（あわててその跡を追ひ、小屋の前へ來て又手を捕へる）角ちやん、角ちやんでば！

角太郎　己ああの人に用があるんだよ。お前いやなら彼方へ行つといで！　よう、お小夜ちん、彼方へ行つといで！　よう、お小夜ちやん、彼方へ行つといで！　（云ひながら小屋の中を覗かうとする。お小夜引き止める）　なぜお前は邪魔をするんだ。

お小夜　だつて、……もし狐だつたらどうするだあ。……

角太郎　（一と目小屋の中を覗く）ローザさん、ローザさん、……僕ですよ、洋服屋の小僧の角太郎ですよ。……

お小夜　あれッ、角ちやん、止してくんろよう！

（云ひながら無理やりに下手の方へ引つ張つて行く。）

角太郎　（引つ張られながら小屋の窓にしがみつき、伸び上つて中をのぞく）あれ、居る、居る。ローザさん。……

ちやんの氣の迷ひだあよ。

角太郎　西洋人と云ふ者はれ、人にお湯へ這入るところを見られるのが嫌ひなんだよ。だから今時分、だあれも居なくなつてから此のお湯へやつて來るんだ。……

お小夜　だつて、あの別莊にはお湯が引いてあるんだもん。こんな所へわざわざ這入りに來ねえだつて。

角太郎　でもあの人は惡い病氣にかかつてゐるんだよ。その病氣が此處のお湯へ這入らなけりや直らないもんだから、そうツと人に知れないやうにやつて來るんだよ。村の奴等あだあれも氣が付かないんだけれど、己あちやんと知つてるんだ。

お小夜　（半信半疑になる）それを角ちやんはどうして知つてゐるだあよ？

角太郎　あの人はな、己の奉公してゐた店のな、直き近所の古い大きな西洋館に住んでゐたんだよ。……ああ、己はよく知つてゐる。……そこの家にはまだ二三人異人の女が住んで居てな、夜になると紅い着物や白い着物を着て、みんな綺麗にお化粧をしてゐたんだよ。……だけどあの人は、それから病氣になつちやつたんだ。そして長い間わづらつてゐたんだ。

お小夜　だつて、あの異人さんは、ちつとも體なんか惡かあねえよ。夕方になると、谷を越えたり、川あ渡つたり、いつもてくてくと獨りで山路を歩いてゐるだあ。女のくせによくまああんなに活潑に歩けるツてよう、みんな感心してるだあもの。

角太郎　うそぢやあない。――うそだと思ふなら己と一緒に來て見て御覽。……（又透かして見る）ほら、もう居る、居る。ほら、あの人が着物を脱いで、裸體になつたよ。……ほら、今お湯へ漬かつたよ。眞つ白な體に月がうつつて、……よう、お小夜ちやん、あれを御覽よ。

お小夜　（強いて見まいとしながら）角ちやん、後生だから見るんぢやねえよ。そりやあきつと狐だあもの。

角太郎　馬鹿なお云ひ。ありやあ人間だよ。己はあの人をよく知つてゐる。己は神戸にゐる時分にあの人を見た事があるんだ。

お小夜　そりや狐だあよ。――狐に違へねえだあよ。

角太郎　誰がそんなことを云ふんだ？

お小夜　おツかあがさう云つただあ。――おツかあばかりか、みんな村の人がさう云つてるだあ。月がさす時分にあのお湯を覗くと狐が居る。さうしてな、その狐を見た者はみんな狐つきになるだから、決して見ちやあなんねえツて。

角太郎　あはははは、村の奴等はみんななんにも知らないんだ。ありや狐ぢあないんだよ。――お小夜ちやん、お前にだけは己あ内證で教へてやるがな、あれはほれ、稚兒ケ淵の崖の上のな、あの別莊に泊まつてゐる西洋人の女なんだよ。

お小夜　（悲しげに角太郎を見る）　うそだあよ角ちやん、あの異人さんが今時分こんな所へ來る筈はねえ。角

お小夜　（慄然としながら）　角ちやん、お前何を——何を見て居るだあれ？

角太郎　ああ、あれ、あんなに月がさしてるぢやないか。

あれを御覽、あの小屋に月がさしてゐるのを。——（云ひながら物に惹き寄せられるやうに、ふらふらと歩き出し、橋へ上つて小屋の方近へづく。）

お小夜　（同じく橋の上を追つて行き、やるまいとして手を捕へる。）あれを見るんぢやねえ。見ちやあいけねえよ角ちやん。——

角太郎　いいや、己あ彼處へ行くんだ。あのお湯の中にもうあの人が來てゐるんだ。

お小夜　あれ、角ちやん、お止しッたらよう！　今時分あんなところに誰も人なんか居やしねえだあ。

角太郎　いいや、居る、居る。——ほら、（橋の上から透かして見る）あすこに白いものが、ちらちらしてゐる。

——ほら、あすこに人が居るぢやないか。（更に小屋の方へ近づく）

お小夜　（さう云はれて其の方をちらりと見、ぞつとしながら）うそだあよ、角ちやん、ゐやしねえよ。——己あさつきから此の小屋の近所にゐただあけれど、だあれも來やあしなかつただもん。……

角太郎　だつて己には（おいら）ちやんと見えてゐるんだ。——毎晩毎晩、月があの小屋のお湯の中へさす時分に、きつとあの人が來てゐるんだ。ゆうべの晩も、をととひの晩も、ちやうど今時分に己あ見たんだ。

お小夜　うそだあよ、そんな事がある筈はねえ。

お小夜　まあ、着物も何もこんなに濡れてゐるだあよ。……（お小夜、角太郎を岩角に腰かけさせ、着物の裾をしぼつてやる。角太郎はぼんやりして、我を忘れてゐるもののやうに、うつろな眼つきであたりを見廻して居る。）

お小夜　角ちやん、お前まあ、此の間から三日も四日も何處へ行つて居ただあよ？　己あどんなに心配したか知れねえのに。……（ちつと、氣味惡さうに顏を見入る。）よう、角ちやんてば！　しツかりしてくんろよう！……お前、お腹が減つて歩けねえんぢやねえの？　歩けねえなら己が負ぶつて行つてやるから、さあ、一緒に内へ歸らう。……歸らうよ角ちやん。

角太郎　（お小夜の手を拂ひのけながら）いやだよ己あ、己あ内へは歸らないんだ。（云ひながら猫もキヨロキヨロする）

お小夜　なぜ？　なぜだあよ？

角太郎　己あお前のおツかあは意地が惡いから大嫌ひだあ。

お小夜　そんな事はありやしねえよ。――おツかあだつてお腹の中ぢや角ちやんの事を案じてゐるだあ。角ちやんが又狐にでもつままれたんぢやねえかツて云つてな、先程も此處へ尋ねて來ただあ。……

（温泉小屋の内部がぼうッと一層青白く明るくなる。角太郎はいつの間にかその小屋の方へ眼を据ゑて、お小夜の言葉が全く耳に入らないかのやう。……瞳の色が次第に怪しく鋭くなる。）

（長き間。月が谷あひを一杯に照らして、青白い光が温泉小屋の中にさし込む。蟲がぢいぢいと頻りに繁く啼き始める。しんとした靜かさの中に、溪川の早瀨の音が際立つて居る）。

（川上の岩の間から角太郎の姿が現はれる。裾のちぎれた筒袖を着て、擦り切れた草履を穿いてゐる。岩の上を飛び飛びに傳はつて溪川を渉りながら、だんだん丸木橋の方へやつて來る。と、とある岩角に足を滑らして、ばつたりと俯伏しに倒れる。そして倒れたまゝ、體を平べつたく地面につけて、ぢつと死んだやうに動かない。）

（やや長い間。蟲の音。早瀨の音。……）

（上手の崖を、お小夜がこつそりと後を見返りながら下りて來る。丸木橋を渡つて、恐る恐る温泉小屋の傍まで行き、中を覗いて見ようとする。が、月の光が物凄くさし込んで居るので怯氣がついたらしく、小屋の周りを一まはり廻はつて見てから、今度は下手の窓に取り縋つて覗かうとして、又暫らく躊躇する。そうして結局覗く氣になれないで、橋の上へ戻つて來て、きよろきよろとあたりを見廻し、戀しさうに川上の方を眺める。と、角太郎の姿に氣が付いてぎよつとして、橋を飛び降り、その方へ近寄つて行く。）

お小夜　まあ角ちやん。お前はまあ、そんな所に寢ころんで、何してゐるだあ。よう？　角ちやん、……角ちやんてばよう！（角太郎の傍に寄り添ひ、抱き起しながら）

お小夜　なつたつて、いいつてばよう。放つて置いてくんろよう！

母親　まあ！　さう云つてもおめえは剛情な兒だなう。いいともいいとも、云ふことを聞かれえならお巡りさんを呼んでくるから。

お小夜　どうとでも勝手にしたらいいだあ。

母親　さあ！　お小夜、（彼女の手を取つて立ち上る）立ちなよう！　……立ちなつたら！

お小夜　だつて、おツかあにやあ角ちやんが可哀さうでねえのかよう？　そんな無慈悲な了見で居りやあ　きつと自分の娘にも祟りが來るだあ。

母親　これ、馬鹿な事を云ふもんでねえつ！　さあ！　立たれえかツて云ふによう！

お小夜　あれ何するだあ！

（母親、無理やりにお小夜を引つ張つて丸木橋を渡つて行く。）

お小夜　ようおツかあ、後生だから放してくんろよう！

母親　いんやなんねえ、どうしてもおらあ連れて行くだあ。

お小夜　いやだつてばよう！　ようおツかあ……

（兩人爭ひながら上手の崖の路へ消える。「ようおツかあ、いやだつてばよう！」と云ふお小夜の泣き聲が暫く聞える）

栗の樹の高えとこから見おろすんだから、此れつぽつちにしきや見えねえけれど、そりやあ眞つ白なきれえな狐が、體ぢゆう月に照らされて、銀のやうに光つてな、すうツと此の小屋を出て、その橋を渡つて行くだあとよう。さうすると又角の奴が、きまつてその後にくツ着いてゐるツて云ふだあよう。

お小夜　橋を渡つて、それからどけへ行くだかよう？

母親　大方此の溪の川上の方へ行くだあよ。川上の方に狐の洞穴があるだあよ。

（お小夜、仰いで空の月かげを見、それから川上の方をぢつと見つめる。）

（間）

母親　さあ、お小夜ぼう、いつまで此處にかうしてゐるだあ。もう好い加減にしねえかよう。

お小夜　おいらあもう少し此處にゐるだあ。——

母親　おめえ、なぜそんな馬鹿を云ふだあよ。ほれ、もう月が此方（こつち）かたへ廻つて來ただあ。

お小夜　おいらあ、その月を待つてゐるだあ。さうして角ちやんを連れて歸るだあ。おツかあは先へけへつてくんろよう。

（次第に谷あひに月がさして來る）

母親　おめえ、たまにやあ親の云ふこともきくもんだあよ。あんな野郎にかまつてゐると、今におめえも狐つきになつちまうだあ。

母親　みんな、ほれ（上手の崖の上を指す）あの往還の栗の樹の下を通る時にな、――彼處から此の小屋の近所が見えるだあよ。それになう、いつも狐が出る時は月夜にきまつてゐるだのう。

お小夜　……ほんたうにそんな事があるかしらなう、……

母親　おおあるともよ。おめえだつて、たびたび聞いてゐる筈だあによう。……秋になつて、毎年此の萩の花が咲く時分になるてえとな、きつと狐が此處の湯へ這入りに來るだあ。ほれ、あの月が榛木山の此方側へ出て、谷間が晝間のやうに明るくなつて、此の小屋の奥へあかりがさし込む刻限になるとな、いつもきまつて狐が湯の中に漬かつてゐるだあ。

お小夜　誰がそんな事を云ひ出しただあ？

母親　誰がつて、昔ッから見た者は多勢居るだあ。湯がきれいだもんだから、それへ月の光が透き徹つてよう、そん中に狐が眞つ白な毛なみを立てて、首つたまや腋の下をせつせッと洗つてゐるのが、まるで雪女のやうに物凄いつて云ふだあよ。それがあんまりきれいだからつて、つい釣り込まれて小屋ん中を覗きでもしたもなあ、それつきり氣が違つて狐つきになつちまうだあ。角のおふくろだつて兄あだつて、姉えだつて、みんなそれでああなつただ。

お小夜　ぢやあ角ちやんも、夜になると、その狐を見に來るだかなう？

母親　ああさうだあよ。毎晩々々、きつと此の小屋を覗きに來るだあよ。――何でも見た人の話ぢやあな、あの

し氣が變になつただけだあよ。だから親切にしてやれば、今に直るかも知れねえのによう。

母親　いいや、あれはただの氣ちげへぢやあねえ。現におめえ、――此の白狐の湯の近所でな、夜がふけてから彼(あれ)が眞白な狐と一緒に歩いてゐるのを見たつて云ふ人が毎晩のやうにあるんだもんなあ。

お小夜　おツかあが眞に受けろもんだから、みんなが面白がつて好い加減な事を云ふだあよ。そりや嘘にきまつてゐるだあ。

母親　いいや、嘘の譯はねえだあ。さきをとひの晩は、千歳屋の旦那が見たつて云ふし、その前の晩は、お六さんとこの若え衆が見たつて云ふしよう、――

お小夜　そりやあみんな神經だあ。

母親　神經なら、そんなに幾人もおんなじものを見る譯がねえだあよ。ゆうべもおとひも見た人があるんだもん。

お小夜　ほうれ、ゆうべ見た人があるつて云ふなら、角ちやんはまだ生きてゐるだあ。……だけれどよう、見たならなぜ摑めえて、つれて來てくれなかつたかよう。

母親　さう云つたつて、おめえ、夜中にこんな溪の底まで降りて來る者はありやあしねえだあ。暗くなりやあ誰一人だつて、此の小屋の傍へなんか、おツかながつて寄りつきやあしねえからなう。

お小夜　そんなら、みんな何處で角ちやんを見ただあよ？

母親　（橋を渡り、お小夜の傍に來て、岩角に腰を掛け、やさしい言葉づかひになる）よう、お小夜ぼう、おめえは、まあどうしてそんなに角の事ばかり案じるだあよ。おめえはまだ歳が若えんだしなう、今に嫁に行く時分になりやあ、いくらだつて好い婿が貰へるだあよ。

お小夜　あれ、おツかあ、おいらあ何もそんな氣ぢやあれえんだによう。……

母親　そんならなぜ角のことばかり案じるだあよ。――さ、お小夜ぼう、好い兒だから一緒にけえんな。角の野郎は仕方がねえけれど、おめえの身にでも間ちげへがあつちや、おらあほんとに佛樣に申譯がねえ。

お小夜　角ちやんだつて、おツかあにや、たつた一人の甥だのによう。

母親　いいや、おらあ、あんな狐のついた人間を甥だたあ思はねえよ。あれの一家は代々狐にたたられてゐるだあ。あれのおふくろが死んだのも、兄あや姉えが死んだのも、みんな狐の業なんだもん。

お小夜　狐がつくなんて、今の世の中にそんなことがあるもんでねえつて、先生がさう云つただあよ。

母親　いらく先生がさう云つたつて、角のする事が正氣の沙汰と思へるかよう。小さい時はそんな風でもなかつたけれどな、奉公に出せばあの通り馬鹿になつて歸つて來るしよう。仕方がねえから引き取つてやりあ、始終山ん中ばかりほツつき歩いて、何一つ用を足した事もありやしねえ。あれのおふくろが氣がふれた時も、ちやうどあんな風だつただあ。

お小夜　そりや伯母さんの事は知らねえけれどな、角ちやんのは狐がついた云ふ譯ぢやあねえだあよ。ただ少う

お小夜　死んぢやつたら死骸が出なけりやなんれえつて、みんなさう云つてるだあよ。角ちやんの兄(あん)さの時だつて、姉(あんね)えの時だつて、――ほれ、あの釣橋の下の方のよう、眞つさをな淵の中に仰向けになつて、ちやんと死骸が浮いて出たつて云ふんだもん。

母親　そりや、あの時はさうだつたけれど、角の奴あ溪で死んだか山で死んだか分りやしれえもん。死骸だつて出るときまつちやあ居れえだあよ。

お小夜　だつて、昔ッから此の村ぢやあ、狐に憑かれた者があると、みんな溪へ落ちて死ぬんだつて云ふんだもん。さうして、しまひにやあ死骸になつて、あの淵へ浮かぶんだつて云ふんだもん。……

母親　さう云つたつて、おめえ、死骸が浮いて出るまでにやあ間があるだあよ。角の野郎が居なくなつてから、まだ五六んちにしかなられえもん。

お小夜　だからよう、まだ五六んちにしかなんれえだから、生きてゐるかも知れれえのによう。

母親　五日も六日も、飯い食はずに、山ん中に生きてゐられるかよう。いぐら狐につままれたつて……

お小夜　でも人間は、水さへ飲んでりやあ、十日や二十日飯い食はれえでも、大丈夫だつて、學校の先生がさう云つただあよ。だから角ちやんはまだ生きてゐるだあ。

母親　生きてゐたつて、そんな狐につままれた人間なんか、二度と我が家へ入れることはなんれえからのう。（さう云つてお小夜を睨める。お小夜悲しげにうなだれる。）

白狐の湯（一幕）

谷崎潤一郎

人物

角太郎
お小夜
お小夜の母
狐
仔狐
或る白人の女
その召使の老婆
或る白人の紳士
巡査

所

ある山奥の渓流のほとり

まんなかに渓流がながれてゐる。河床に幾つもの大きな岩がごろごろして居るので見えないが、せせらぎの音

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