

**A Translation:**  
***Vignettes of Red Beard the Doctor* (3)**  
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***Uguisu* Fool**

**1.**

The strip of the area generally called “The Back of the Lord Idzu Mansion” ran roughly from north to south, sandwiched between the large second residence of Lord Matsudaira Idzu and the cluster of minor temples in the precincts of the Kan’ei-Ji Temple. On the main street of the strip were sparsely dotted with shops and teahouses for temple visitors, for whom flowers and aqua pails were lined for sale to be taken to the graves in the temple. Other than those establishments, the street was mainly for the humble retreats of retired merchants and the quiet residences of mistresses and the day head-clerks of prosperous

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\* Translated from the last three vignettes: 「鶯ばか」 (“Uguisu Baka”), 「おくめ殺し」 (“Okume Goroshi”), and 「氷の下の芽」 (“Kōri no Shita no Me”) from 『赤ひげ診療譚』 (Akahige Shinryō Tan) in Shinchō-Bunko, Shinchō Publishing Co. Tokyo. 2007 (first ed. 1964). This was originally published in 1959 by Bungei Shunjū Publishing Co. Tokyo.

merchants. But going off the main street into any one of the five alleyways that cut across the area put you in the literal sandwich of tenement houses on either side. The eaves on both sides touched each other overhead. Were you not wont to the alleyways here, you had to be alert managing to wriggle your way through them, for they were, day or night, darksome, cramped, and teeming with romping children. The number of the tenements was forty-seven in total. Among them, as many as twelve were uninhabitable because they had completely fallen down and seven or eight had been left vacant. The actual number of tenancing families counted twenty-seven or -eight and the number of inhabitants was fluctuating between one hundred and fifty and one hundred and seventy or eighty.

Yasumoto Noboru visited the tenements in the alleyways for the first time when he attended Kyojo who went to see a man called “*Uguisu Fool*.” It was a windy day in mid-September. They had made five visits on the round and now the sun was setting. The alleyways were chock-full of smoke coming from cooking dinner. No doubt Kyojo was familiar with the inhabitants here. For reverent greetings and endearing calls came incessantly from left and right through the whirls of cooking smoke fanned up by the gusty winds. One, among others, called to him from the top of the roof. At this Uhe’e, the manager, who was escorting them ranted up at the man:

“Who’re you to call down from a place like that? Yasuke, isn’t it you, idiot?!” he shouted up, “Who do you think you are to call down to the doctor from the rooftop? Where are your manners? You’re a packhorse driver all right, but you should know how to behave. Come down.”

“The roof’ll be blown away. Don’t you maind it?”

“The roof’ll be what?”

“This wind, wow, *oogh-hey-eh*,” shouted back the man on the roof. “Don’tcha get mad, manager. This *oogh-hey-eh* ain’t yer name bein’ called. Sounds laike it but it’s somepin’ ya throw in whaile ya talk. It’s such a strong wind! Can you beat that? Then ya utter *oogh-hey-eh*.”

“Quit that tongue in cheek, you son-of-a-gun!”

“You come up shere an’ ya’ll know,” the man on the roof shouted

down, “This roof’s been rumblin’ fer a half toki. I’m a weight and a half on it, an’ it’s alraight. The instant ya take me away from shere, the wind’ll rip it off an’ blow it away.”

Kyojo laughed and said, “Yasuke, you mean to stay up there until the wind drops?”

“No way out, is there, doc?” the man on the rooftop said. “Rents been unpaid, dog’s chance to go outa shere fer me and may family. Well, quit worryin’ ’bout me please, doc.”

“Can you beat it? Idiot!” Uhe’e said. “Say what you will, if the roof gives way under your feet, you can go without impunity, mind you.”

The man on the roof retorted something but the winds swept it away except for *oogh-hey-eh*. Uhe’e clicked his tongue and showed Kyojo and his attendants to Jube’e’s tenement. On the way he chided the children still romping about the narrow alley and the wives broiling fish under the eaves.

Jube’e was forty-one, had a wife called o-Miki and a seven-year-old daughter o-Tomé. He had been a peddler of notions for years. In Bakuro-Cho there was a wholesaler called Moriguchi-Ya dealing in tabi socks, momohiki long johns, and notions. He had served the wholesaler until the expiry of his apprentice service. When he was twenty-one, the end of his free service he had been doing since he had finished apprenticeship being just about around the corner, he was taken in by a woman whose wiles beguiled him into appropriating quite a bit from the shop’s safe. This luckless deviancy resulted in him having to miss the chance of getting his business set up by his master. It had been supposed to be the reciprocation for the faithful service he had rendered through the years. Thus he had to let go of nearly ten years of his free service. He was ostracized from the trade, but his master’s compassion helped him from being a criminal. For the next several years he hopped from job to job. While doing deliveries for a buckwheat noodle shop, he met o-Miki and married her. The marriage made him determined. He talked to the old master in Bakuro-Cho about his circumstances. The proprietor of Moriguchi-Ya consented to his offer and decided to credit Jube’e with his merchandise for sixty days but not beyond.

For something like fifteen years since then, Jube'e had walked peddling, with his merchandise packed on his back, not only within Edo but without, too, come hell or high water. For a solid fifteen years, he had held his ground by clinging to sheer "perseverance" and made money. But the hell and high water of the misfortunes of losing two of his three children, first two, one dying at five and the other at four, and of o-Miki, his wife, faring badly after childbirth, confined him and his family in this poor tenement. —Things sometimes have a funny turn. Only a week ago when he took his daughter, o-Tomé, to the public bathhouse, did he suddenly go out of his mind there. He helped his daughter out of her clothes and went together into the bathroom ground, where she slipped down. There and then, he hit the man washing himself next to where she slipped. Then, he held her up and chided her:

—Didn't I tell you, dear? You fell down and made a stranger worried about you. Watch your step here.

They said, the scene in which Jube'e said so was so funny the victim was aghast and did nothing but keep on watching father and daughter. On returning home, Jube'e found out a square board about one foot long on all sides and brought a bamboo-mesh basket from the kitchen. He put the board where the beams crossed in the corner of the room and placed the basket upside down on it. Then, he sat down. O-Kimi had no idea at all what he was up to. When she asked what it was all about, he told her to hush up and whispered to her under his breath:

—Quiet. It's an *uguisu* warbler worth a thousand ryo.

—*Uguisu*, is it?

—At long last, I've caught hold of it. Listen, can you hear her warbling? That's the song worth a thousand ryo.

Jube'e looked up at the corner where the beams crossed. He looked hugely delighted, enraptured by "the song of the *uguisu*." He turned to whisper to o-Kimi:

—Now at long last, goodbye to Poverty, o-Kimi.

Ever since that day, Jube'e had stayed home to date without going to work to make money. Except when he ate and slept, he'd keep sitting quietly and gazing up at the basket. Sometimes, say, in the middle of the

night, he sat up in bed and listened worriedly for the warbler, and the next moment nodded to himself as if he'd found everything all right. He kept sitting as he was until the morning. When o-Miki asked him to go to work for wages, he looked inquisitive and only repeated that there was no such need any more and that the living would be easy for the rest of their lives, should this *uguisu* be sold.

Kyojo and Noboru heard it all from manager Uhe'e, but when they got there and Kyojo saw Jube'e, he found nothing that ought to be wrong with him. Urged by Kyojo, Noboru saw him, too. He got Takezo to produce a lantern taper. He lit it and by its light examined his pupils.

"You doctors take me for a madman, don't you?" Jube'e said in a way he took pity on them. "I'm sorry, you're mistaken. I've never been put under the care of a doctor since I was born. I assure you it's just a waste of time, doctors."

Just then, they heard children hooting, "Hey, thief!" A hoot of taunting that, apparently, three or four children were making came, "Choji, you thief!" and "Get the Cho rat, get him!" The yelling was followed by the clatter of the planks covering the sewer as they stomped them along.

"Tut, tut, tut, . . . bullying him again," said Uhe'e who was sitting on the stepping-board onto the floor. "Why must they bully Cho alone like that? Those helpless little devils!"

So saying, the manager went out into the alley.

Noboru was finished with Jube'e and gently shook his head toward Kyojo, who in turn looked up in the direction of the beams. It was dreary and darksome inside the tenement, for the night seemed to have fallen outside and inside the sooty andon was giving out poor light. The room was empty except for poor furniture, a Buddhist altar, and the pile of three large packages with pointed corners (maybe his merchandise). That was all. In the corner of this emptiness, the board across the beams and the basket placed upside down on it came somberly into view.

"Up there, Jube'e," Kyojo said, "what's in that basket?"

"Hush, doctor," Jube'e held him back, lowered his voice and said, "Don't trouble me by speaking in such a stupid loud voice. You say, what's in there? Can't you see it?"

“I can see nothing at all.”

“You have bad eyes, don’t look like it though,” said Jube’e, who cupped his hand, leaned toward Kyojo, and applied the cupped hand on Kyojo’s ear to whisper into it, “Listen. That. You may have bad eyes but you can hear, can’t you? Listen, listen to that. You can hear it all right, can you?”

Kyojo was silent.

“It’s the song worth a thousand ryo,” Jube’e murmured low to Kyojo. “It’s got to find a buyer soon.”

Shortly, Kyojo stood up, whispering to o-Kimi that he’d come and see Jube’e again, and stepped down to the dirt ground. Right there, Uhe’e returned and left together into the alleyway. Outside, everything was covered in the night’s cloak. Takezo lit the chochin folding lantern.

“I heard kids hooting, ‘Choji boy, you thief,’ ” Kyojo said when they came out on the street, “Is he a boy of Gorokichi I treated once?”

“That’s right, sir,” Uhe’e said. “Recently, as luck would have it, a misfortune it is, a wicked woman came to live here. She kicks up a fuss about stuff that should be better to be left unsaid. And old wives that go about gossiping and kids follow her lead, sir. They find it fun to bully weak ones, no one can stop it, sir.”

“How’s Gorokichi’s wife been doing since?”

“As ever as you see, doing, well, I reckon she can’t afford to keep to her bed, but, seems to be getting along, just barely, sir,” Uhe’e said. “By the way, —how is Jube’e, sir?”

“It’s hard to say,” Kyojo said, and turned his face to avoid the sandy dust that came blowing on the gusts of wind. “I’ll send Yasumoto once in a while, but I’ll have to wait a little more before I can say anything definite. At any rate, there’ll be no dread he’ll get any worse.”

Now Kyojo and his attendants took their way back.

## 2.

On the way back to the Infirmary, Kyojo asked Noboru why he had

examined Jube'e's eyes. Noboru answered that he had been taught it by a doctor of Dutch medicine while staying in Nagasaki. If patients had a swelling in the brain, he went on, they'd have similar symptoms. In this case, when a light was applied to their eyes, irregular tremors would be found in their pupils. For this reason, Noboru had inspected Jube'e's eyes but found nothing of the sort there.

"Then, what's your diagnosis?"

"Oh, it just beats me, sir," Noboru said. "There was nothing wrong with his body, no nothing, sir. Evidently, there're no chronic problems such as syphilis, either. Could it be, as it so happens, that he's pretending to be ill before he knows it?"

"I bid you to stop making a diagnosis out of your imagination."

"No, sir, not the figment of my imagination. I did it from his living condition."

Noboru's diagnosis went as follows: He's worked his fingers to the bone in spite of the hell and high water for a good fifteen years, but his life hasn't improved, let alone the distressing loss of two children. The time is beyond his ken when his family will be able to live in ease and comfort. There is no prognosticating a good life for them. He's forty-one. Those long-standing privations have made him wish invariably: "We'll get out of this living." This constant wish must have coalesced with the unpredictability and caused to derange his mental health, though he was not aware of it. The derangement was represented by the delusion of an *uguisu* worth a thousand ryo. Kyojo listened to him all along without interrupting. He remained silent after Noboru had finished. But shortly, he told him bluntly to go and see Jube'e if he had time to spare and did not give any comments on Noboru's reasoning.

Several days elapsed. When Noboru told Kyojo that he was going to visit the tenements, Kyojo handed him wrapped money, which was his usual way of doling out, and told him to give it to Uhe'e. He added to drop by Gorokichi's place to see them there, too, Gorokichi a day laborer living close by the common well of the same tenements, with all his family members having a delicate constitution. —Ever since that time till the beginning of October, Noboru had visited the tenements in the

Back of the Lord Idzu Mansion for five times to date. Meantime, Jube'e came to be called "*Uguisu Fool*" by fellow tenants. His daily routine was to be seated all the livelong day where he was wonted, viewing the basket over the beams.

In this while, Noboru became familiar with Gorokichi's family, in which everyone including Gorokichi, his wife, o-Fumi, and their three children except for Choji, second son, were apparently timid and shy and hardly dared to get closer to Noboru. Gorokichi was thirty-one, one year older than his wife. Torakichi, first son, was eight, o-Miyo, first daughter, six, and o-Ichi, second daughter, four. The first three of them had been born within one year of one another—including Choji who was seven. —This boy was friendly to Noboru from scratch. He came running to Noboru when he caught sight of him, jumped at him, and stuck around to him until he left. On the second visit, Choji had just been back from picking ginkgo nuts. A bamboo-mesh basket was full of the pick. He showed them to Noboru and promised him on the sly to give him some next time he came.

"You have quite a lot. Where did you pick them?"

"Lord Idzu Mansion. You know, doc," Choji said, "there's a big ginkgo tree inside the grounds. When a wind blows, nuts fall off outside the fence."

"There are loads of them."

"I'm the first winner, doc," Choji said as he dug a hole in the ground beside the back door and with his hands buried scoop by scoop the nuts that stunk as stuffily as an adolescent boy. "Everybody goes out there to pick nuts, but nobody's no match for me. I'll go picking tomorrow, too." And he emphasized, "They sell at a good price, doc."

Noboru looked puzzled and slowly diverted the subject.

"What do you bury them in the earth for?"

"Leave them in it for six, seven days, doc, and the stinking meat goes bad and comes off. Then I take out the nuts and rinse them in the water and dry them in the sun."

Then, a woman passed by. She blatantly made eyes at Noboru as she nodded. She was somewhere twenty-eight or -nine, stout, and broad-



shouldered. The broad shoulders precipitated to the broad waist as they were, finding no part narrow in the middle. Her flat face with prominent cheekbones was heavily painted to the extent that it was repulsive. Her sparse reddish-brown hair was done in a chignon and it was glossy dripping luridly with cheap oil.

“I hear you’re Dr. Yasumoto.” The woman spoke to him in a voice so thick and hoarse his heart could have missed a beat. “O-Kinu’s my name. I’m living in the tenement on that side of this one, at the end of it. Recently, I’ve got chronic headache. I don’t know what to do with it. When you come around, drop by and see me if you can.”

Noboru nodded silently and went into Gorokichi’s tenement. When he stopped by the manager’s on the way back, o-Tatsu, Uhe’e’s wife, fiercely shook her head to tell him to get that woman out of his way.

“That’s an outrageously wicked woman,” added Uhe’e from aside. “Sly old vixen, doctor. She served up the term at Kotsu (a prostitution district in Senju). Since I had no information about her, I took her on as a tenant. But since April, no day has passed without tiffs and miffs because of that vixen, she’s the hotbed of troubles. Cantankerous and scurvy woman.”

“I heard her name is o-Kinu, right?”

“Exactly,” said Uhe’e, “she looks like a boa constrictor. Such a ferocious woman that we’re worried if there won’t be bloodshed with a blade at any minute.”

Things about o-Kinu were entangled with imbroglios.

She’d made the protégée of three intimate patrons while serving at a Senju brothel. She’d promised to marry one of them. He hadn’t as yet been able to afford to marry when she’d finished her service term. She’d thought up a fraud. She’d played a sneaky trick on another patron called Tomekichi and got him to take her in as his mistress living in this tenement house. Tomekichi was a tatami maker by trade in Ikenohata-Shichiken-Cho. He was a good-natured man of fifty-two or -three years. Hardly could anyone beat him in his good-naturedness, though he was invariably on the losing side because she was his mistress cooped up in a wretched warren like this. Maybe the times were so hard that his busi-

ness was not brisk. Nevertheless, he could not repudiate the woman's selfish demands. He'd make a painstaking effort to provide her with money and things. She'd in turn dedicate her gains to the other man she had promised to marry. This was double-dealing. Tomokichi didn't smell a rat, not a sniff of it. The other man was a man-about-town by the look of him, younger than the woman by four or six years. He had a slick way such as when he deftly blew his nose with his fingers. O-Kinu boasted of his slick ways. She amorously called him "my man" when she fondly gabbed about him to her fellow tenants of the same tenement house, but she never brought on her lips where he lived, what he did, or even what his name was. This "my man," a cipher, came mostly during the day. The sight of him would make her mind wander off somewhere else. She'd busily run around to prepare food and drink. When that was done, she'd slide all the shutters tight shut even in a muggy midday with a ferocious sun overhead during the dog days of summer. It would be fine, however, if they'd stay quiet away from the rest of the world, but she'd act at it as openly and hilariously as if she were cutting loose. She'd kick the floor with such loud bumps and bangs that the sagging joists under the floor could have yielded to her kicking, and howl and scream. It was such an uproarious binge that the neighbors were struck all of a heap, even though they were accustomed to open and unreserved noises and whines and screams from what passed between man and woman at it. Those children who had no idea what they were engaged in would get scared and say, "The auntie's getting killed, mommy." When the rambunctious rite was consummated, it was much worse. Refreshed as she looked, she'd throw cold water on the wives of the next-door neighbors, saying: I drove "my man" mad and I got hell. Did you happen to hear me crying?

Was there a wickeder woman? She made a pass at men in the tenements, too. She seduced men irrelevant of young and old or likes and dislikes. She didn't miss a chance to ogle at men to take them into her bed. She didn't go out without bringing in a strange man. And maybe to cover up that weakness of promiscuity, she went around the tenements to find poor victims of her backbiting. It was lethal and full of venom,

such as “I saw that man’s wife was sleeping with such and such a man” and “A so-and-so has a criminal record.” The targets of her malicious backbiting were limited to those individuals whose family was afflicted by the penury that stood out from other tenants and who were exceedingly timorous. They were in most cases backbitten with the cliché: “Such and such a man, boy, woman, girl is a thief.”

“Recently, Gorokichi’s family seems to be made the exclusive target of her backbiting, sir.” Uhe’e sighed. “I’ve been on tenterhooks if there won’t be trouble because of her debauchery. She’s the tinderbox. I’m really at my wit’s end, sir?”

Noboru asked why not order her to leave if she was that wicked. At his question, Uhe’e’s wife got to her feet and left them and Uhe’e himself made an embarrassed gesture of helplessness.

“She’s not all that easy, that woman,” Uhe’e spat. “Had that been possible, for crying out loud, I’d have done it ages back, sir.”

Noboru felt shivers run down his back as he recalled a mortar of the build of a woman called o-Kinu, a woman who had a robust build, a small chignon on her red-brown hair glaring with oil, protuberant cheekbones, a flat face painted as white as a sheet, the ostentatious sheep’s eyes she would cast, and so on and so forth.

—There are women like that in this world.

So Noboru had to conclude to allay his trepidation. He had almost been disgusted to hear an astringent story. He appeased himself by thinking that in every tenement there was one or two who were touched by God like Jube’e, and that there were shameless, promiscuous women like o-Kinu who must bring trouble to neighbors.

—They aren’t to blame.

So Kyojo would say and more, like: How many years I don’t know, but during the years one serves as a prostitute, one will experience what’s way beyond others’ imagination. There are women who are, depending on their nature, no less wicked than o-Kinu even though they may be well off or freewheeling in the way they live. O-Kinu alone shouldn’t be blamed. Poverty, ignorance, and unnatural circumstances have come together to mold the sort of character that should be deni-

grated. A weak lopsided smile came on Noboru's face as he thought he was really hearing Kyojo saying so.

One day in late October, Noboru asked Kyojo for leave and went to see his parents in Third Street, Koji-Machi. There had been tidings about ten days before telling that his mother had been sick in the legs. His mother, Ya'e, was forty-six years old. She had had chronic gout in her right leg since she had been around thirty. At the turn of the season, pain would set on her and she would often be laid up in bed, some times for a half month, and other times for a full month. The year before, Noboru had joined the Infirmary upon return from Nagasaki. It had been almost a year, during which time he had flatly refused to go home. This dogged absence from home found him dispirited at the thought of seeing his parents at home in Third Street. He could no longer stay incorrigible now that his mother was sick and that he had to talk to Amano. He called up the pluck to go home.

Noboru got home around the noon. His father was out on his round of visits to his patients. A houseboy he was unfamiliar with was at the entrance to answer him. The houseboy told his mother was in bed. When he went straight to her bedroom, he found a young woman sitting at his mother's bedside reading something to her. He knew the young woman straightway to be Masawo, daughter of Amano. He was surprised, and so was Masawo, as it seemed. Her eyes got rounder in surprise to see him. She opened her mouth wide as if to utter, "Ack," in spite of herself. Scarcely had she put down the women's periodical reader she was reading to Noboru's mother, she blushed and ran away.

### 3.

Noboru only stayed home in Third Street for nearly one toki and went back without waiting for his father to come back.

In his diagnosis, his mother was stricken with chronic gout as before. It had been in her right knee only, but this time the pain which had spread from her thigh to her waist rendered it difficult for her to get

around. When Masawo learned about it, Noboru was told, she volunteered from the Amano family to look after his mother's needs.—Noboru only vaguely remembered her in her girlhood. He had chosen not to see her when she had come to see him in the Infirmary. He found that neither of the sisters, Chigusa and Masawo, bore any resemblance in physique or complexion. Masawo the younger was small and slim though obviously quite healthy, agile in movement like a young doe. Her face whose chin was somewhat upturned was amiable. Invariably, this face sported a variety of sensitive expressions, the kind which would emerge on and fade from the surface of the clear stream of a ravine.

—Amazing there could be such a yawning gap between sisters.

Masawo was much too different from her big sister Chigusa, whose gorgeous complexion was unsurpassed and deportment graceful and suave, and who thus made you associate a flower emanating a strong color and fragrance. Oddly enough, however, Noboru preferred Masawo to Chigusa now, or rather, to his bewilderment, he was strongly attracted to her. He himself was embarrassed by that feeling, for, when his mother hinted at them getting married, he curtly answered that he needed a little more time before he could give his answer, and went back to the talk about the Infirmary.

—Now my worries are gone, judging from the way you are, dear.

So his mother said as she bade goodbye to him. From the fervid fashion in which her son talked, she must have sensed that his anger had left him, the ingrained anger at being imprisoned in the Infirmary. His mother said in an 'It's-such-a-relief' tone, smiling weakly:

—There was such an entanglement while you were away. I was worried about how you'd feel, look how you are disposed. There was a timely offer from Dr. Niide at the time. We decided to ask him to take you on. We were sure you'd be infuriated, though, dear.

—Please, don't. Past worries. It's over.

Laughing, Noboru added that it had done him good that he had joined the Infirmary. He told her, besides the warming of her affected parts being surely effective to her gout, to carefully watch the regularity of her excretion, especially urination; and what foods to eat and how.

Only then did he leave. He greeted to Masawo who came to the entrance hall and sat squarely on her legs to see him off. He said, "Thank you very much for taking care of my mother." Masawo returned, "Please visit her again," and gazed up at him as she remained sitting.

Noboru stepped out. He felt wrapped up in happiness. When Masawo reached her hands out on the tatami floor to greet him off and looked up toward him, she spryly blinked her round eyes twice or thrice. Just then, he saw a flower bud of her whole face unfurl its petals to a full bloom, flinging off the dew, and emanate life as fresh as the month of May.

"Yes, those eyes," Noboru mumbled to himself as he walked. "Those eyes reveal her nature. On those eyes it reflects nimble attention as it is, marked by cleverness and sensitiveness."

What about Chigusa? he made a comparison. He shook his head in a forbiddingly decisive way. His image of Chigusa was thoroughly discolored in his mind. And it didn't make his heart crave her any. It even evoked dislike.

"Does this mean that I've grown?" he again mumbled to himself. "Yes, it does. The experiences I've had in the Infirmary have developed my mentality, no matter what degree. Yes, now I know all that's been has been better to me."

In each and every day of his life in the Infirmary, he had seen both sides of human lives that were at the grid of various streets and avenues. With his own eyes he had seen the vivid *au naturel* human nature that was reflected, above all, on unhappiness, poverty, and the pain of sickness. All this experience had endowed him with sufficient judgment to tell the differences between the two sisters, Chigusa and Masawo.

"Be that as it may, don't you be all that seething," he mimicked Kyojo's tone a while later, and murmured, "You accepted Masawo only just now, and you don't need to be that seething right off the bat. Shame on you, Noboru."

In his shame, he felt he would turn red in the face. In order to pull himself together, he decided to spend the rest of the day effectively. The day wasn't too old yet; it was a little before two in the afternoon. Instead of going back to the Infirmary, he turned on his heel and made

for “The Back of the Lord Idzu Mansion.”

Noboru had intended to see how Jube’e was doing in the first place, but as he was passing the manager’s, Uhe’e rushed out and called him to a stop.

“I was about to send a runner to the Infirmary just now,” Uhe’e said helter-skelter. “A terrible thing happened. Sir, please go see them right away. The whole family tried to commit suicide together. Doctor Ko’an gave first aid . . . No, no, no no, it isn’t. Not Jube’e’s. He’s quite all right and keeping tabs on the *uguisu* warbler as ever. Right, it’s at Gorokichi’s.”

“What did they use? Blade?”

“Poison, sir,” Uhe’e said, still flurried, as he scuttled into the alleyway. “According to Dr. Ko’an, they must’ve downed rat poison. In fact, their vomit stinks. The house’s reeking offensively. The reek will stifle you.”

#### 4.

The Gorokichi family took ratsbane, which was called such and such a rat killer produced in the Iwami silver mine. The prognosis had been that the parents would be narrowly able to survive. By the time Noboru arrived, Ichi the youngest had passed on and the rest of the three children were also in seriously critical conditions. The tenement was reeking of a mixture of sulfur and something rancid. The stench would have got him unawares and made him feel like throwing up.

“Sorry, doc,” Choji rasped in snatches as soon as he acknowledged Noboru. “Sorry, doc. Forgive me, will ya?”

“What are you sorry about?” said Noboru as he faked up a giggle at him. “Why, Cho, you did absolutely nothing wrong.”

Choji choked in the throat and faintly rasped out, “Ginkgo nuts.” His voice seemed arrested on the way. Noboru drew his ear close to the boy. Choji squeezed out words that went: He’d promised to give Noboru ginkgo nuts but failed to keep his promise. What followed after meant

something like this: He hadn't forgotten, had it all committed to memory, but sold them out and no choice because his mother had been short of the money to buy coarsely ground wheat with.

"Knock it off, Cho," Noboru shook his head, speaking as roughly as he could, "Gingko nuts ain't my cup 'a tea. An' besides I done almost completely forgotten yer promise. Quit worryin' 'bout crap like that an' be a sport."

"Next time I have pick, I promise I'll give you some," said Choji. "If not this year, then next year. Let's pinky swear."

"Okay, pinky swear. Let's."

The two entwined each other's little finger as a token of their sacred promise and shook the knot of them. Noboru felt Cho's finger was burning hot but devoid of strength. Promise, next year, Cho, Noboru's heart yelled to him, Cho, you must live to keep the promise, don't fail. Hang in there, Cho. Don't let this nonsense make you go! —Noboru put down all the names of the materials to prepare a medicine and sent a runner to the Infirmary with the list. He also left the message with the runner, to whom he explained why he did so, a note that said he might have to stay overnight with the dying family. Around four in the afternoon, o-Miyo, six years old, passed on, and after dark Torakichi the eldest son followed after her. Upon someone dying, the body was quietly removed to the manager's house lest the bed-fellows know it. Choji was the only one, among the children, who hung on this side of the Styx. Although the parents, Gorokichi and his wife o-Fumi, were obviously fully aware of it all, neither of them referred to anything of it. Noboru concocted the medicine with the materials the runner had brought and, decocting it, gave it to those surviving. Choji could no longer down a drop of it and the both parents wordlessly refused it.

"Don't you know everybody is this much worried about you all?" At last Noboru ranted at the couple in earnest, "You're giving them trouble. Still and all, are you trying to make all their efforts come to nothing?"

Only then, did Gorokichi and o-Fumi take the medicine.

Shortly after dark, a doctor named Nohara Ko'an came to see them. He was a stout man in his forties. He had the presumption to ignore



Noboru who was sitting next to him, examined the couple and their son Choji pro forma, and left with a grimace on his face. Presently, Uhe'e the manager came to fetch Noboru. "Dinner's ready, sir. Please come and eat." Noboru himself was feeling hungry. He left them to the care of the neighbors' wives who had come to be helping hands and took off with the manager to be fed at his home. For dinner he was served cooked wheat, boiled fish, soybean paste miso soup, and pickle. Uhe'e recounted the day's incident as he ate with Noboru.

Around seven in the morning, Gorokichi came to inform the manager that he'd go out with his family to "visit the Senso-Ji Temple in Asakusa." They locked the tenement and were off. There was nothing unusual about them. Could a family outing in Asakusa have taken place, it would have once in a blue moon. So, it might well have been for neighbors to let it pass unnoticed, even though there might have been anything unusual about them.

"He lied when he said he'd take his family out to Asakusa. They came back right away, to think back on it," said Uhe'e. "No one saw them come back and get into the house. The next-door neighbors on neither side weren't aware that they were back. Well, it may well have been so, because the neighbors were out, most of them. At that time the wives gathered around the common well, in the middle of jovial gossiping. Had the family planned well, it wasn't a big deal to get in without being noticed."

Shortly after midday, the next-door wife, o-Kei, heard noises coming from Gorokichi's, such as agonized groans and children's violent tosses and turns. She rushed there. And the neighbors found it a big to-do.

"Well, what I don't understand is," Noboru said, putting down his chopsticks, "what tempted them to do away with themselves, all at a time and all of a sudden?"

"Oh, it beats me," Uhe'e answered bluntly. "People living the way Gorokichi's family does are charged with a pile of reasons that tempt them to die. Isn't that awful. I'm sure there are many will go and kill themselves there and then only with a tiny push on the back, sir."

Noboru thanked for the dinner and was about to get on his way, when

suddenly he remembered and asked:

“Didn’t it happen that a doctor called Ko’an dropped by?”

“Yes, he did.” Uhe’e frowned. “He came by to make sure who’ll pay the bill. But he made no mention of his patients. He only mentioned they owe him so and so and asked who’d pay it and when. We’d had no choice but him, it was an emergency case and it couldn’t be helped, —He’s poor at treating but best at charging, so the rumor goes around in this neighborhood. He’s bad fame.”

“That isn’t true. He treated well and appropriately,” said Noboru. “There’s seldom a doctor who can do as much as he did and all on the double. It’s wrong to speak ill of him.”

Noboru went out into the open air. The sky was overcast and a chilly wind was blowing. The doors were closed at most tenements. Only sparsely were lights coming through the doors. The planks covering the ditches sent out a surprisingly high-pitched desolate clonk-clonk as he walked on them. When he came close to Gorokichi’s, he was arrested in his tracks by a blood-curdling sensation. —He heard unearthly, phantom, muffled, nebulous, and ‘eerie-as-eerie-could-be’ chanting that was coming from beyond. The chanting with a macabre ring came rising from under the ground as if invoking someone.

“What’s wrong with you?” a voice called him from behind.

In his surprise Noboru could have been blown out of the water. In spite of his awareness that the voice belonged to Uhe’e, his heart almost missed a beat and he was goose-fleshed all over.

“Oh, that chanting, is it?” Uhe’e noticed the voice coming from beyond and said with a laugh, “Maybe, you doctors have no idea about it. Shall we go over there? They’re the wives from tenements.”

Uhe’e started walking and Noboru followed after him. When they got as far as the common well, they saw several women with lanterns by the well. They made pairs and the pairs were taking turns calling down into the well:

“He-ey-yy, Cho-bo-oo Bo-oo-oy! Li-iss-sten, Cho-oo-ji Bo-oo-oy!”

They held out each and every syllable like He-ey-yy, Cho-bo-oo. The unusual thing about it was that they chanted in a plaintively appealing

tone of voice. The shaft of the well muffled the chant as it let it go down reverberating. The sound created a blood-curdling eerie howling effect to anyone that heard it wherever they did, even on the spot.

“They’re calling Choji back,” Uhe’e whispered to Noboru. “Wells reach down to the bottom of the ground, and the dying who are traveling in Hades will come back to this side of Lethe when they hear themselves called back like that, so people believe.”

Not a star was out in the sky. Winds were blowing through the alleyways. They were not strong but chilly. The chill seeped under the skin. It was a sure sign that the winter had come. Noboru stayed there a while longer as he quietly listened to the women chanting their lamentations imbued with their prayerful strong appeal resound in the well. — Kyojo didn’t come against the expectation he had suggested in the message he had left with the runner. He stayed at Gorokichi’s until some time around eleven, but, urged to take a nap, went to the manager’s home and turned in. He had difficulty going to sleep on a strange pillow, so he expected no sleep would come. While he was in bed drawing an image of Masawo and thinking about which opportunity he would seize to accept the marriage, happiness began to swaddle his entire self in the warmth. He passed into a slumber before he knew it.

At three in the morning, Noboru was called to wake up.

“I know it’s hard to leave a sweet slumber, sir, but will you slip out of bed a sec?” said Uhe’e. “That boy, Choji, insists he must see you.”

Noboru sat up and said, “Has he got worse or something?”

“I’m sorry I have no idea. I hear no such thing, but he stubbornly insists he needs must see you, sir.”

“What’s the time now?”

“Eight and a half,” Uhe’e said, adjusting the collar of his kimono nightwear. “Yahei’s wife’s here to show you, sir. Will you go with her?”

“Sure. I’ll change the clothes.” Noboru stood up.

The woman waiting for him was the wife of Yahei, a stall vendor on fair grounds. She was named o-Kei, aged forty-two or -three. She was a next-door neighbor of the Gorokichi family. It was she who first found the family suicide, and since then she’d been all along attending the

dying family. She was a strong-spirited, aggressive sort of woman, a virago. Her efficient way dominated a number of wives who had come away to be useful, from disposing of the children's bodies and attending to the needs of the surviving to treating the visitors with tea. She was a perfect manager there. Only, Noboru was annoyed that she used an abrasive language, such one as he had never heard spoken. She was an open-minded woman and didn't watch her language.

—Hey, woman, whatcher waist?

When they moved aside the bed with Gorokichi in it, o-Kei yelled like a man at one of the wives who took the other end of the mattress.

—Wi' that waist o' yours, ya can't have a pleasurable enough f—k, eh? Ya lift that ass more, yer ass, mindya!

Noboru felt his cheeks blush at that time. But now, as she was guiding him, lighting his step with her lantern, o-Kei was submissive and down in the mouth. She was a different person now.

“Will he be saved, doctor?” said o-Kei as she trod. “Can Cho live?”

“He'll live if he can hail the morning.”

“Will he?” She heaved a deep sigh. “She might at least have talked to me. She was unfriendly, o-Fumi was. Like we were strangers. What tempted them to do such a thing?”

## 5.

O-Kei suddenly stopped and pleaded to Noboru with resentment, pressing her face with her apron:

“O-Fumi and I have been getting along like sisters, you know, doctor. My family is living from hand to mouth like hers, so I'm in no position to boast of no help we can give to them, not in the least. But we've always opened our heart and talked everything over, even the most trifling. We've shared anything between us, such as a pinch of salt and a spoonful of soy sauce.” O-Kei stopped for a few moments to stifle her sobs. “We've got along with each other. Super-duper. More than sisters. Why couldn't she talk to me about the very important matter of life and

death? She might at least have when she had to cope with something she and her husband must die for, must accompany their children for, mightn't she?"

Noboru remained silent. He had seen the same kind of people as he was facing now. Poor people had their like alone to depend on for mutual help. The shogunate and wealthy people never offered to do anything for them. All the poor had to turn to were the poor, their neighbors, in the same tenement houses. Albeit, on the contrary, among themselves, there were inequalities between strong and weak like anywhere else, and there were envy and jealousy, vanity and arrogance. And to top it off, all those qualities lacked constraint and were let loose in sheer nakedness as they always lived by the day and for the day and not beyond. —Let's say, ordinarily they were so close as to borrow a spoonful of salt from each other, but for teensy-weensy trifling reasons, —say, because you spat toward him, because you didn't like the way she said good morning, because she was unusually haughty to you, so on and so forth, hatred would be brewed up in a trice as if they were mortal enemies. They would go to great lengths to help their like by altruistically sacrificing themselves. Their philanthropic affection was deeper than the sea. And this affection might no more be understood by those who had never been short of anything in their life than their vanity and arrogance and pride and hatred which were ingrained in their poverty and which they'd bare as outright as if naïvely.

—They were as thick as thieves, more than sisters. They'd borrow a spoonful of salt from each other. But she couldn't talk to her about what she must die for.

Noboru chew the cud: Either the reserve toward her neighbor which exceeded the necessary dose because she was also poverty-stricken, or the bigoted pride, too proud to be rational, may have found its way to the reason for Gorokichi and his wife to keep quiet to anybody outside the family. O-Kei failed to hit the nail on the head when she blamed her dear friend and she herself must have felt so in her bones.

"Listen, doctor," said o-Kei as she resumed walking. "Pray at least save Cho-bo, doctor. Nothing can be done about the three that have

gone. But at least don't let Cho-bo go, save him, please. This is the least I ask of you, doctor."

"I'll try," Noboru replied. "I'll do all I can to save him, I promise."

In Gorokichi's tenement, two more women from the neighborhood were keeping a vigil. Choji's eyes were wide open and his mouth gaping. His breathing was short and rapid. He lay on his back, shook his head once in a while from side to side, and let out a feeble groan.

"Choji—" On sitting at the bedside, Noboru asked an andon lamp brought closer to them and looked into the boy. "It's me. What's up?"

"I, I stole, doc," said Choji in a hair-raising raucous voice. "That, I wanted to tell you, doc."

"You can tell crap like that later."

"No. I must. I gotta tell you right this minute, this minute, not later, doc. That's why I got you to come." He talked the way an adult did. "The fence boards in back of Shima-Ya, you know. Are you with me?"

"Yes, I'm with you, Choji."

"I took the boards off the fence in back of Shima-Ya, and brought them home, doc," said Choji. "It was my fault, not nobody else's. I stole other things, too. That's why Mom and Dad got mad. They said, 'We're all finished. We've raised a thief. All's over once we got it on our neighbors' lips that our boy's a thief.' Ya know, doc, that's why the whole bunch of us decided to die. Gimme a drink of water, doc."

Noboru turned to look at the wives. O-Kei was going to take a teacup, but he said, "Give me clean bleached cotton cloth." The thought flitted across his mind that the boy didn't have enough strength to gulp down water because his throat got inflamed with the poison as he regurgitated it. O-Kei washed the hand towel clean, soaked the edge with water, and brought it to Noboru.

He then rolled up the tip into a tiny ball and put it into Choji's mouth.

"Have a suck," said Noboru. "Suck it gently with your tongue. Gently, yes, gently."

But Choji choked violently. He retched something stinking with the water he'd just sucked down and, curling up his debilitated body, turned and twisted.

"I'm to blame, that's clear, doc," Choji said again after he had calmed down a little. "Mom and Dad, forgive 'em. Be sure of it, doc. Forgive 'em. You got it?"

"Got it, son," Noboru clenched Choji's hand. "I got it all all right, so have a little sleep. Talk and it only hurts you more, son."

"I want water," said Choji, "but not now but later. Right, doc?"

"Yep, in a few hours. You'll be able to drink water soon."

Choji closed his eyes. But his eyelids didn't quite come together. The white of his eyes was peeping out. Purple spots appeared on either side of his nose. The breathing got faster and shorter in rapid succession.

"Doctor," o-Kei whispered with a start. "This breathing is when Death is here, isn't it? I know of this breathing. Isn't it, doctor? It's when someone dies. Please do something, doctor. Can't it be helped?"

"Let him go as he is," o-Fumi's voice came away from behind.

Everybody there could have started in surprise and turned back. Neither Gorokichi nor o-Fumi had spoken a word till now. They had been immobile as they were laid up and hadn't stirred an inch. And now, out of the blue, she called to them in a voice so hoarse and raucous it didn't sound like a human voice. They looked over their shoulder and found her lying on her back still and her eyes closed.

"I knew that boy had stolen," o-Fumi said slowly as if languishing. "I'd known it inside out before o-Kinu snitched on it. But it couldn't be stopped. It's not Cho that's to blame. But in dire need I couldn't dare to stop him."

"What, o-Kinu?" O-Kei sidled up to her and demanded, "That woman say anything?"

"Let him go," said o-Fumi. "Let him go quietly as he does, please. That's the best thing for him, understand, o-Kei."

"O-Fumi," o-Kei said, staring into her face, and asked vigorously, "you tell me the whole truth. Did a slut of that bitch say anything about Cho-bo? Hey, did that cow say anything? Tell me, o-Fumi."

O-Fumi grimaced. "My husband was called by Shima-Ya. He went and found o-Kinu there in the shop. She said she'd watched everything of what Cho was doing and that she'd be a witness."

“That sex fiend?”

“Let her. It’s we’re to blame. No blame’s on her.”

“Bitch,” said o-Kei and sat up. She glowered into the mid-air. “That cussed slut as mad as a March hare did crap that slick, eh?”

“For goodness’ sake,” o-Fumi said imploringly, “I’m sorry I troubled you, but please don’t bother yourself about us any more, leave us alone. Let Cho go as he is, will you, o-Kei?”

Cho went at the crack of dawn.

Both Gorokichi and o-Fumi seemed to be sleeping when he died. The wives conversed with their eyes. O-Kei held Choji’s body in her arms and moved him to the manager’s house. All four brothers and sisters were washed and purified, and laid out in the shroud for their last journey. The bodies were transferred to the empty tenement next to Uhe’e’s residence. Noboru knew all that procedure later, but anyhow when Choji was carried away, he inwardly spoke to him softly.

—Now Choji, you’ve joined all your brother and sisters. You four of you, take your hands and go like good brothers and sisters.

The sooty shoji sliding doors by which to step up into the room, grew light in dark gray. The temperature had gone down and made Noboru’s knees and the tips of his toes feel gelidly cold as he was sitting. He blew out the andon lamp and added charcoal in the brazier.

“Doctor,” said o-Fumi. “Did he suffer as he went?”

“No.” Noboru took off his hands from the brazier. “No, he didn’t suffer. He ended peacefully.”

“No suffering, doctor?”

“It’s said when one dies, one doesn’t suffer any more,” said Noboru. “The lethal poison gets one’s brain. In another’s eye, one looks suffering, but one doesn’t feel anything. I say, Choji was brave and didn’t show a sign of suffering.”

O-Fumi looked over to her husband. She kept looking at him for a while and turned to lie on her back. In a reserved tone, she begged for water. Noboru took up the earthen kettle which contained the decoction. But on second thought, he poured a little boiled water left cold in the iron kettle into an empty small one and took it to o-Fumi.



“Be careful. Sip bit by bit,” he cautioned. “You’ll do better to apply the spout to your mouth. Be careful or your throat will hurt.”

O-Fumi contorted her face as she downed it, but she didn’t choke. They heard Gorokichi begin making a breathing sound in sleep. The breathing didn’t sound as if he were spent out; rather it sounded as if he were completely lost to the world in ease and peace. His soul and body had been liberated. O-Fumi turned to look at him and watched her husband’s sleeping face for a long time.

“This is the first time he ever slept like this,” o-Fumi rasped. “It’s been something like ten years since we got married, but this is the first time I’ve ever seen him sleeping in comfort like this, doctor.”

## 6.

“How come they didn’t let all of us go?”

After a while, o-Fumi began by asking.

“How come, doctor?” said o-Fumi, her eye fixed on the ceiling. “We weighed and turned and mulled over the idea and came to a conclusion. There was no other way out. The only way out was for all of us, parents and children together, to do away with ourselves. And we attempted it. There was absolutely no other way out, but why didn’t they leave us alone and let us all go?”

“This way,” Noboru put in a little pause, “You tried to go this way. That’s not fair. Listen, it’s a sin to throw away uncompleted, in your own right, the time given when you were born, especially to take your little kids with you, —why, it’s only natural they can’t leave you to go when you do.”

O-Fumi shut her mouth. She didn’t stir a bit and stayed quiet for what seemed a very long time, but in time, coughed lightly to clear her throat and began. She talked and paused and talked in a thin voice as if talking to herself.

Gorokichi had been born in Fukagawa and o-Fumi in Itabashi. Both had been born into such a poor family that he, at seven, and she, as

young as at five, were put out to babysitting. The circumstances in which each father had grown up paralleled those of the other. Gorokichi's father had been a fish hawker by trade. He walked streets, balancing his merchandise hanging from either end of the pole on his shoulder. O-Fumi's father had changed jobs, such as a junkman, a day-laborer, an assistant, and so forth. Gorokichi himself left home to serve an apothecary wholesaler as an apprentice at the age of twelve. At seventeen, while he was hauling down packing cases from a pile of them in the storehouse, the pile collapsed on him and the cases hit him hard on the head. He was quite all right for the time being, but in the course of a half year or so, something like a fit seized him when unexpected. Without warning, the screen would come down on his consciousness and take his judgment away. One time when he went to put away a drug case and stood in front of the shelves, he blanked out, couldn't remember what he was there to do and what he was there for. Another time when he went out pulling a cart to receive the goods, he was beset by a fit on the way and lost in town. He kept pulling the cart around for a solid two days without eating or sleeping.

O-Fumi met Gorokichi while serving at an eating house in Namiki-Machi, Asakusa. Gorokichi had been dismissed by the apothecary and was working as a stevedore in Kuramae. He was twenty-one, and o-Fumi twenty. —Shortly after they had met, they left Edo to go to Mito. O-Fumi had been to be sold to oka-basho, an unlicensed red-light district. When she told him the whys and wherefores, he said, "Let's run off together." She said it was as good as she'd inveigled him.

"We stayed in Mito three years. Meantime, Torakichi and Choji came on. But," continued o-Fumi, "my husband was weak-minded with a chronic disease and we were strangers there. We got hard put to get by. We had no choice but to come back to Edo again."

Oh-ho, o-Fumi giggled. A memory must have popped up into her head. She said, "Before we left Mito, the four of us went on a picnic to the O'arai Shrine. We, four of us, spent a half day taking it easy on the beach by the Shrine. We had box-lunch and watched the ocean, dad and mom and kids all together. Neither before nor after, have we had as

peaceful and easy-going a time as that. That was the first and only time in my born days, even to this day, that I'd ever been as happy as a lark.

After they had been back to Edo, there was nothing good, either. For the last three years or so, Gorokichi had had no fits of his mind blanking out, but had been losing concentration. He hadn't been born quick-witted, nor was he skilled in anything. He couldn't stay long on any one job that came his way. Meanwhile, the family had grown bigger with two more girls, o-Miyo and o-Ichi. It meant they had more to feed. O-Fumi tried to fill in for all she was worth with what she made by doing piecework at home but it only fell short of feeding and clothing the family satisfactorily. Torakichi was slow and of no use, and the girls were too small for anything. Among others, Choji was an exception. He was smart. By all means, he'd tried to be a shield to his mother with what brains he could use since he was at the tender age of three or four.

"Since he was at the artless, tender age of only three or four years, You'd never know by any means, doctor," said o-Fumi. "Times, there was not enough to eat for dinner. Well, I used to make a point of eating myself after my family were finished. Whenever there was apparently not enough, Choji would refuse to eat, too. He'd say he wasn't hungry or that he had tummy-ache. He'd fake up reasons. I watched him carefully and found that he was trying to leave as much as he could so I could eat later what he'd tried to lay aside for me."

"I say, doctor, he was only a three- or four-year-old," she reiterated, "Poor boy, he was such a good boy," she murmured rapturously.

Each passing day, they only scraped a hand-to-mouth living. Three days in a row in which Gorokichi couldn't make any immediately spelled absolutely nothing to eat, not even thin gruel. In winter, they were more often hard up, such as when in dire need of money to buy slack by the weight with and fuel for cooking. Choji was in the know. He picked up and brought back bits and pieces which would do for fuel, such as chips of wood, pieces of lumber, dead twigs, and scrap like straw rice sacks and straw mats, too. Among them were often pieces of lumber he must have stolen from construction sites or branches he broke off the trees in another's garden. Aware as she was, she couldn't

so much as preach him not to steal, let alone scold him, when they were hard up for the day's fuel, in actuality.

Coming on top of all those precedents, the Shima-Ya incident took place. Shima-Ya was a general store on the main street. Gorokichi would be sometimes asked to do a menial job and get paid some. He would be employed on very limited occasions in a year, such as spring-cleaning and scouring the wainscots with lye. As it was, those were included in the occasions the family would look forward to when the father could earn a pittance. In the depths of the store grounds was the retired proprietor's retreat. It had a garden, small though, which was fenced off by the boards. In the lower part of the fence where the cross-pieces were laid horizontally across, the crossing boards were worn down and gone loose with rotten nails which had come off. Choji removed the boards from the fence and took them home. They'd make a faggot to burn at home. The boards were two inches and a half wide and seven to nine inches long (he broke them short). —Thereupon, the next day, a runner came to fetch Gorokichi, who expected he'd have another job. It turned out an expectation to the contrary. In the store he found o-Kinu awaiting him. She mouthed off, barraging gibes such as 'Choji peeled off the fence boards and took them away,' 'I witnessed, and I can take the stand,' 'He's always been light-fingered,' 'He's got a streak of thievery.' ” The proprietor of Shima-Ya was not giggling. Without giving a going-over, he only admonished Gorokichi to watch over his son from then on. On returning from Shima-Ya, Gorokichi did not go to work but sat down absentmindedly. Then he rolled down on the floor, his head resting on his elbow.

“That was five days ago, no, no, it's been six days already,” o-Fumi counted the days with her eyes. “On the same night, after the kids had gone to sleep, my husband talked to me about it for the first time.”

Gorokichi cried as he talked. O-Fumi despaired. Before the incident, children in the neighborhood would often hoot at Choji in chorus, “Thief!” But this time everything was different. One o-Kinu had been there to see it, a “witness.” She'd watched Choji “peel off” the boards to steal from another's fence and take them home. With this grim fact,

in the eyes of others, the father had his son pointedly called names: he'd always been light-fingered; he was a born thief; and so forth.

"We both talked it over that night and all day the next day and came to a decision. We explained it to our kids. They said we'd do better to do what we'd decided. It was thoughtful of them," o-Fumi said in a void, almost blasé tone. "—But please don't misunderstand. We didn't decide to do away with ourselves because we had hard feelings against what o-Kinu had had to say. We knew it wouldn't get us nowhere, that the living would go on being hard for us the longer we live."

O-Fumi went on: Since our parents' generation both of us've lived in poverty to this day. We've worked our fingers to the bone, we've had no time at all to catch our breath. Our eyes were open but unseeing. We failed to raise our kids like the next one. Fine, we haven't raised, we've taught Choji theft, as it were. The living was hard for our parents, so has it been for us, and so will it be for our kids if it goes on like this. They'll only shoulder the same trouble and pain as we have. That's enough. Draw the curtain on it. Thank God, she shook her head weakly.

"God's grace is, my kids went for good. Now that we're left alone, my husband and I can die any time, any place, not bothered by anybody. We've had our kids die, I'm out-and-out relieved." When she came this far, o-Fumi said dubiously, "—It'd be ungracious of me to say stuff like this, but why didn't everybody leave us? Had they done, parents and children could all have gone hand in hand. How come they ever tried to save us? How come, doctor?"

Noboru barely replied, "Everybody, if human, couldn't but do so."

She tittered or so he heard. He must have heard it wrong. Her breath made a noise of friction at the throat. But in his feeling, she did titter.

"They can leave us to live in trouble and pain but they don't leave us to die in peace, right, doctor?" She shook her unsteady head to and fro on the pillow. "—Supposing we two survived, what'd become of us? Would any of the trouble and pain we've had be lifted? Did they see any glimmer of hope for that?"

Noboru didn't reply. He dropped his head.

Who in the world can ever answer her question? Noboru excogitated.

This is not her personal question alone. There are the likes of her in the world. They're bogged down in the quagmire of privation they can't pull themselves out of, stuck in an eternal impasse. They're all spent out, chased on by this impasse of poverty, and their soul asks the question their lungs out. Who can answer it straight without prevarication? Can there possibly be a way to let them enjoy living a bit like an ordinary human? Noboru's fists were clenched so strongly his nails almost bit into his palms.

"Doctor, —" o-Fumi said after a silence, "They're stirring up something, it seems."

Noboru lifted his head. He heard women making a boisterous banging noise and raising a great hue and cry, a racket, whose cacophony filled the quiet alleyway about to hail a new day.

"Them, those women, doctor," said o-Fumi. "Probably, they're attacking o-Kinu or something. Please go and stop them."

Noboru refused to rise to his feet.

"Please. Please doctor, go stop them," o-Fumi begged in earnest. "It wasn't her fault. It was ours. So, pray, be up and off you go, doctor."

## 7.

Day broke completely and it was light, but a dense fog shrouded everything and made it impossible to see through several yards away. Many of the tenants were out cooking on the fire on either side of the alleyway, where only men and old women were to be seen by the fires. The men called to Noboru by the cooking fire which smeared the fog in a blurred red. Jeering, they motioned their shoulders to attract Noboru's attention toward the ongoing racket from over the alleyway.

"Look over to 'em, doc, that's our old waives' pastime, heh," one of them said. "Everyone's always waited fer this opportunity to turn up. A woman laike that is a destined enemy fer 'em. Leave 'em, doc, or ya'll get scratched if ya try to stop 'em halfway."

"Seems so," said Noboru and stopped where he was.

The fog blanketed the scene, but from about o-Kinu's tenement, the noise came of property being hauled, dishes and plates breaking, and women scuffling and yelling. What came most clearly were the voices of o-Kei and o-Kinu the target of their vengeance.

"Ya s-hit me, cow!" The voice belonged to o-Kinu. "Struck someone else's head, you, hags, chee!"

"Is this whatcha call a s-human head? This?" Now the voice was o-Kei's. "You bitch, ya only got a s-hip, don'tcha? Wi' that ship, ya hooked men, and wi' that mouth, ya committed a murder. Slut of a murderer bitch, ya'll have this!"

"What! Murder-rr-er? Eech," yells back o-Kinu as they slap each other, but her voice sounds daring, clear and firm. "I said he was a thief 'cos he was a thief. Whay, then, a murderer?"

"If Cho stole, then ya steal men, rob other women of their men. Go get hanged, ya cow, this, this, this, this!" o-Kei yells as she slaps, "Get that stinkin' carcass outa shere. It's a shame to all the tenants. To have a slut laike ya stayin' in shere. Get lost! Go get lost!"

"You slut, get outa shere," another woman yells. "Ya cast yer heep's eyes at may old man. Ya bitch, I'll beat ya to a frazzle."

"Chee! Ya give it to me."

"I'll scratch ya to a frazzle, you damned sex fiend! Drop dead!"

Noboru turned on his heels and made for the manager's residence.

A half month later, Gorokichi and his wife left the tenement house. They left with their kids' ashes. Without telling the fellow tenants where they would be off to, but only getting around the tenements to thank for their kindnesses, they left nestling each other. So ended the Gorokichi incident. Fortunately, they were allowed by the constable to go with impunity, thanks to the written report sealed with the Infirmary's stamp and the records of the manager's and their fellow tenants' oral statements, but those who were left behind had to pay the piper for it. —That is to say:

One day, while Noboru was passing "The Back of the Lord Idzu Mansion," it flitted across his mind to drop by and see Jube'e. He stopped by the manager's residence and his wife said, "My husband is

out at Jube'e's about the piecework to do at home." He went into the alley and a woman coming from the opposite direction spoke to him. He looked and saw it was o-Kinu, to his surprise. As usual, she was wearing a heavy makeup and reeked of cheap oil applied to the small knot of her maroon hair. She smiled at him, all her face flirtation itself.

"Look who you are. Long time no see," o-Kinu said seductively. "You're such a hard worker, doctor. These days, I've been annoyed with the same old headache. Would you please come to my place—"

Noboru ignored her and took off, leaving her. But all the same, he was beset by the kind of disgust and hatred which gave him the pricking sensation all over his body as if he had touched a poisonous woolly bear. When he got to Jube'e's, he found the manager was there. Noboru told him that he had just run into o-Kinu and asked, "Was she still here?"

"I had a losing battle with that woman," Uhe'e said as if he'd been sick of it. "She says, if she's evicted from her tenement, she'll make an appeal to the constable and tell the whole truth about the family-suicide attempt that included the loss of four kids' lives, —she could do it, a woman of sorts that she is, sir. Should she do, all the tenants would be in trouble. I convinced them of the cause and effect and we came to a conclusion that we'd let it go at that and forget it. Thank God, what a woman under heaven!"

Noboru was becoming disgusted. He said he'd see how Jube'e was, so that he could get away from the disgust.

O-Miki rose to her feet and began to make tea. Jube'e stayed put, seated in his usual place, his gaze fixed up at the beams. Apparently, he had gained weight. His shoulders had grown rounder and so had his cheeks. Noboru went up to him and sat down. He was about to start with 'How are you feeling?' but was stayed by Jube'e immediately. "Hush!" Jube'e gently turned his ear toward the spot. And then, quietly pointing to the spot, he nodded at Noboru:

"Doctor, listen to it. It's trilling beautiful song," Jube'e said happily. "I can't sell this *uguisu* at the exorbitant price of one thousand ryo. It's such a beautiful trill, don't you think? That trill, —let's say, rids us of



what's on mind and makes us feel serene, peace of our mind, doesn't it?"

## The Murder of o-Kumé

### 1.

Shortly after eight on the evening of a day in early December (lunar calendar), —Niide Kyojo was talking to Yasumono Noboru as they trod up the gentle slope at the Denzu-In Temple toward the Infirmary. Takezo was ahead of Kyojo, whose steps he was lighting with the lantern. Noboru was carrying the medicine basket. Kyojo made a point of making the employees engaged with one job at a time, never more than one. This bylaw didn't apply to the medical staff, but other staffs such as menservants, maidservants, and gardeners were to rigidly abide by it. Noboru often carried the medicine basket, nor was Kyojo exempted from the practice of the rule.

—No doubt he's tired out.

Inwardly Noboru gave a soft shrug as he listened to Kyojo. Kyojo was prone to a peeve when tired. On this day, he had seen an extraordinary number of patients and made as many as fifteen visits on his round. For this reason, he was one toki later than usual in getting back, which made him all the more choleric. He was tired and hungry. He vitriolically accused the authorities of their inhumanity materialized in the order of "The Ban of Treating Outpatients."

It was in summer that the order of the cutback in expenditures and the ban of treating outpatients were issued. At that time, Kyojo made strong protestations but only wound up in a standstill. His protests ended in having the authorities acquiesce in treating outpatients on condition that Kyojo himself bear the expenses for it. To cope with it, he had had to comply with more requests of domain lords, wealthy people, and rich merchants. With the earnings from treating them, he had since covered the reduced portion of the expenditures and the

medication of outpatients. In spite of his painstaking efforts, a few days ago, he was summoned and bade by the yoriki stationed at the Infirmary to “stop once and for all treating outpatients” and to “charge food expenses on those inpatients” whose family members, if any, made money no matter what.

“There’s this Buddhist saying: “More than a rich person’s contribution of tens of thousands of lanterns is a poor person’s contribution of one single lantern,” Kyojo continued as he walked. “I’m told the meaning. It’s a poor person’s piety in a small contribution or the widow’s mite that better suits Buddha’s will. But I declare it *is* nothing but a blatant *whopper*.”

Kyojo continued: Rich people who contribute tens of thousands of lanterns are limited in number and they don’t always contribute as many. There’re a great number of poor people who can contribute one single lantern, and they’ll be ready to give one lantern if asked. It’s preached that “offering services to the Buddha” is a path leading to the hereafter and again a path to blissful Heaven. Those people who are afflicted by poverty and can’t get ahead in their whole life in this world hope at least to be received into blissful Heaven and to become a Buddha in the hereafter. Taking the advantage of this fond hope or the weakness of poor people along with the whopper the wiles of which to take one lantern from them, directly bears on the current government’s politics.

“It goes without saying, the shogunal economy is comprised of the revenues gained from taxes,” Noboru heard Kyojo saying, “but it’s always ensured by the taxes collected individually from numerous lesser merchants, farmers, and craftsmen. There is no need of taking examples, you know, and there’s no straight generalizing the pros and cons of it. However, the government imposes taxes on day laborers’ paltry wages and charges poor sick people for food who are treated in an institute like a dispensary. Aren’t the authorities inhumane! I just can’t stand it.”

Kyojo stomped along with his might and main, *stomp, stomp*.

“Not to mention, no matter how I bluster here, I can’t wield my

influence on shogunal officials,” Kyojo said. “Even though I can use my influence on a couple of officials, it can’t reach the government’s policy-making. Therefore, that I’m bawling like this is a ridiculous form of quibbling. In antiquity, whether it was the Genji clan or the Heike clan, once either of them came to power, they enforced laws on their people to rule them so that they could preserve the powers that be. This is the way humans have practiced politics over time and in any period of times. —You’ve heard me quibble like this times over, Yasumoto. You must be fed up. You may think, There he goes again!” As if Noboru had brought up something to retort to him, Kyojo raised the tone of his voice and said harshly, “No, no, say nothing. I don’t care no matter what you think, nor do I no matter who says no matter what. Even though this may be preposterous gripes, I W-I-L-L bawl out as long as I live! I, —”

Kyojo was about to utter, I, when he halted abruptly. They had come to the end of the earth wall of the Denzu-In Temple where Takezo had raised a weird squeal and displaced his lantern toward the ditch running alongside the wall.

“What’s that?” Kyojo asked.

Takezo said, “Someone’s lying there,” and peeped into the ditch.

“Oi,” he called, “what happened? Hey, is there anything wrong with you?” He peered into the person and let out a cry of surprise, “Yak, it’s blood. He looks terribly injured, doctor.”

“Don’t touch him,” said Kyojo.

Coming closer, they saw a young man fallen down. The ditch was laid with stone, short of three feet both in width and depth, and dry of water. As it was, the man had fallen and was lying on his side, apparently deprived of movement. Kyojo drew the lantern nearer to the man and studied him. He looked twenty-seven, -eight, in an indigo long hanten livery coat which was fastened with a blind-stitched narrow sash. The robe was disheveled, exposing his chest and legs as good as naked. The paper cord that had tied his hair was snapped. His hair was loose and tousled on his head, from which he was smeared with blood through half of the face down to the chest. He was breathing heavily

and grunting low. When Kyojo spoke to him, the whole body gave a jerk, and the next moment the man swirled on his back and posed his right hand on the chest against an attack. The hand was holding a foot-long dagger, which glinted like a section of ice, reflecting the lantern light.

“Stay cool,” Kyojo said. “I’m a doctor of the Koishikawa Infirmary. You’re seriously injured. How come? Fight?”

The man lifted his head and said, “Isn’t there anyone around here, I mean, around here?”

“Seems none.”

“Blundered, dammit!” the man groaned. “Aw shucks, I missed it by a hair.”

“Fight, isn’t it?”

“I’d intended to dispatch a bastard, but,” the man responded, “he had bodyguards and they got me. Sorry, could you help me on my feet?”

Kyojo called, “Takezo,” and took the lantern from him. Takezo went down into the ditch and gingerly braced him up by thrusting his arms under the young man’s armpits. The man labored on his feet, but the right leg failed. He let out a screech and collapsed down on his haunches. Kyojo gave the lantern to Noboru, got down to the man, so he could get Takezo to bind the man’s leg.

“It’s your shin bone,” said Kyojo. “It’s not as bad as broken. Probably it’s cracked. Takezo, give him a piggyback ride.”

“What would you do with me?” the man asked anxiously.

“What would I do with you?” Kyojo said as if he were angry. “Didn’t I say I was a doctor?”

“But I, umph.”

“Takezo,” said Kyojo. “Give him a piggyback ride.”

When Takezo put him on his shoulders, Kyojo began to stride along.

## 2.

Kakuzo was the man’s name. He was twenty-five. He was living in

the quarter called Yabushita, in Fifth Street, Otowa, Koishikawa. Transported to the Infirmary where he was examined, it was found that he had two wounds in the head and five, six more from the shoulders down through the back to the legs. The wounds in the head were made with a blade, and the others were the marks left by a bludgeon or something. The shin bone had a crack.

Kyojo was familiar with the tenement houses in Yabushita and would drop by once in a while. But he hadn't met the man named Kakuzo.

"I'd been out apprenticed since twelve," said Kakuzo. "My old man was called Kakichi. He died two years ago."

"Kakichi, let's see," Kyojo jogged his memory with narrowed eyes. "—Aha, there were three rows of eight-tenement houses there. I presume he made tatami for a living at the end tenement, didn't he?"

"Bull's eye. He had difficulty moving around. He had gout in the right leg. He was an awfully unyielding old man, as unyielding as any." Kakuzo grimaced as he turned over in bed, gritted his teeth to fight off the pain. "Do you—," as if there were nothing he asked, so that he could divert his attention from the pain. "Do you happen to know an old man called Tasuke, doctor?"

"He's an old man who had a buckwheat noodle night stand, right?"

"Exactly. May I ask a favor of you? Will you get someone to run to this old man?" said Kakuzo. "I'd like a young woman called o-Tané to be here. I'd like the runner to tell her to come right away 'cause I got an important thing to tell her."

"Not tonight but in the morning, I'll get you someone to do the errand for you. Tonight, go to sleep as you are."

"Not tonight, doctor?"

"You attempted to kill somebody, didn't you?" Kyojo said. "What if it was detected when she was challenged by the gatekeeper at one of the town gates? I'll send a runner first thing in the morning, so do be quiet and go to sleep, or it'll do harm to your wounds."

Kakuzo closed his eyes and said, "I got you, doctor. Please follow up my request first thing in the morning."

Kyojo glanced at Noboru as he rose to his feet. Noboru was thinking

about remaining there to attend the injured man but sensed there was no need for it from the way Kyojo glanced at him. He stood up, too, and left the sickroom. Kyojo was about to head for his room, when he saw Noboru come out. He said, "Sorry, will you tell the kitchen to bring me rice balls?" At his request Noboru became aware that he had been starved, too. He hurried his way along the corridor, through the exit, and out into the kitchen.

The dining room closed at eight. After that, the choice was only to go directly to the kitchen, all of whose lights but one were extinguished. Entering, Noboru saw in the spacious empty dim dirt ground of the kitchen a man alone making something like a box. Next to him stood o-Yuki watching him work. As he asked o-Yuki to make rice balls for two, he noticed the man was Wino.

"Look who's there, isn't it Wino," Noboru called to him. "Aren't you overdoing it? What're you up to?"

"Good evenin', doc. Well, er, just a little thing," he quibbled. "You doctors are overdoing it, too. It's grown late. It's cold outside, isn't it?"

"Don't change the subject. What are you making?"

"Well, it's, it's a chair for a bedpan," said Wino, blushing.

"A chair for a bedpan?"

"Y'know, doc, a lady who's odd in the head, called o-Yumi," said Wino. "She's grown very weak and wobbles even when she uses a bedpan. There was a suggestion. A chair's made so that she can sit steadily on it and it may ease her discomfort one way or another. So I'm making one for a trial. We'll see."

"'s that so?" said Noboru. "You've been asked by o-Sugi?"

"Oh, that's my duty." Wino spoke up with a vengeance, at the top of his lungs. "I'm allowed to stay here, so I'll fulfill the responsibility to do a job like this. I ain't doin' it 'cos I was asked by somebody special. Pray, don't you quit jokin', doc?"

"You're offended," Noboru laughed. "If so, I'm sorry. Forgive me."

"C'mmon, doc. Why should you?" Wino blushed again. Embarrassed, he scratched his head. "Shame if I get you to apologize? I'll lose face. I'm sorry I just talked like a big man now. Please you forgive me, doc."

“We’ve behaved well toward each other, then,” Noboru said and laughed again. “Give my best to o-Sugi.”

For one reason or another, Wino made a loud noise with his hammer. Noboru went out of the kitchen with a basket of rice balls he received from o-Yuki, hearing her say into his back she’d bring tea later.

At the crack of dawn, a messenger ran to Yabushita and fetched a young woman called o-Tané. She looked older than her real nineteen years. She was prudent and unperturbed in any way even when she saw Kakuzo’s head bandaged with bleached cotton cloth. She listened quietly to Kyojo.

“He can get out of bed in a matter of ten days.” Kyojo explained the wounds. “And his leg, well, we’ll have to wait and see. Probably, he’ll get well in a month or so. Until then, he’d better not get around on his own.”

“Can’t I take him home?”

“He’d better stay here for several days,” said Kyojo. “It’s convenient to give him treatment, and he seems to have been involved in a rabble or something. Isn’t it rather inconvenient for him to go home now?”

“Doctor, I mean, it’s about the rabble thing.”

“O-Tané,” Kakuzo said, “was there anything? Anyone come from Takada-Ya and claim anything?”

“Yes,” o-Tané said. “Late at night, Izo came accompanying three bodyguards. He said someone had attempted to murder Takada-Ya Jr. in the grounds of the Lord Mito residence. He claimed that ‘someone,’ for the ‘someone’ must be our fellow tenant.”

“That’s what I expected.”

“They said they’d get around from door to door. And I, well,” o-Tané faltered a little but said discreetly in reserve for Kakuzo, “I led them away by saying you’d gone to visit a relative in Toshima. There was a sudden death in the family of your relative way into Toshima. And you ought to stay there overnight, but I couldn’t be confident.”

“Good job! Well said! But they aren’t the sort who’d believe you. They didn’t believe you, did they?”

“I hope they did. So, should you not return, it’d be much worse.”



“Did they threaten you?”

“They said, if you don’t return, it’s the proof that you did it, and that we all tenants were conspirators.” O-Tané gulped down the water in her mouth. “They said menacingly they’d sue all the tenants.”

“I got it. I’ll go back.”

“Spare me a few seconds and wait,” said Kyojo. “It depends, but I may be of some help to you. What’s this all about?”

“Please don’t ask nothing more, doctor,” said Kakuzo. “I can’t trouble you no more.”

“Trouble or no trouble, I’ll decide myself. At any rate, let us hear about it.”

“Oi, Kakuzo” o-Tané said.

Kakuzo rolled over on his side and grunted, “Oogh.” A wry expression spread all over his face. He bit his lower lip to put up with the pain. And there Handayu turned up and announced it had come time to see the inpatients.

“All right,” Kyojo nodded and said to Noboru as he got to his feet, “Yasumoto, hear him out in place of me.”

### 3.

The row houses called Yabushita in Fifth Street, Otowa, comprised twenty-four tenements in three row houses, of which twenty-one families tenanted. The landlord was Matsujiro of Takada-Ya in Kagura-Zaka, Ushigome. His father, the predecessor, had been called Yoshichi, who had once owned a small pawnshop in Fifth Street, Otowa years before. You used call the kind of pawnshop a “Cabinet Pawnshop.” It was so small he had no storehouses, but the business came off with luck. He bought land and buildings with the money he made. He may have been blessed with good fortune and better suited to amassing real estate than expanding his original business. Wealth accrued to his inventory. Some fifteen years ago, he quit being a pawnbroker, removed to Kagura-Zaka to change his trade to a regular realtor and landlord.

The three Yabushita houses had been rent-free for nineteen years, to be precise, since Yoshichi had been a pawnbroker in Fifth Street. He had not only collected no rents but paid for repairs without charging the tenants anything at all.

“And all that,” said Kakuzo, “was promised to remain in effect for two generations, his and his son Matsujiro’s. I hear Motosuke the manager was the attestor.”

“Was there any reason for it?”

“Maybe,” said Kakuzo, “there couldn’t be any such promise for no reason.”

“You don’t have any idea what the reason was?” Noboru said.

“No, doctor,” said Kakuzo. “As generations changed, so did managers. The only remaining person who ought to know about those times is this here o-Tané’s gramp. But he’s got in years and grown feeble-minded.”

Everyone knew of the promise at that. The current manager was called Sukesaburo. He managed the land and the houses Takada-Ya had to let in this neighborhood. He had heard about the promise letter-perfect from his deceased father. He knew it not only because his father had told him but because he had the remaining ledgers of the rents endorsed by Yoshichi himself. The nature of tenanting was that there was frequent change of tenants. In five or six years’ time, tenants would usually change completely. But the Yabushita in particular, because of the unusual term of ‘rent-free,’ and probably because many of the tenants had a stable job at the Gokoku-Ji Temple, what little change there had been was that there were only three vacancies and that only seven families that had come and gone. —Since it had been nearly twenty years, Tasuke was the only one remaining alive, but was now a feeble-minded old-timer. Nevertheless, everybody knew of the promise with Takada-Ya.

“But what do you know, doctor? They suddenly changed the policy.”

Yoshichi died in May and the only son Matsujiro succeeded to his trade. He was twenty-three, had got married in the fall of the year before, and had a son.

“Last month, no, toward the end of October, this man Matsujiro came and demanded us to vacate the tenements,” Kakuzo went on. “He accompanied three men, goons by the look of them. He said it was decided that the houses be demolished and that all twenty-one families must leave them.”

“Didn’t he know of the promise?”

“He said he did,” said Kakuzo, “but he says there’s no deed whatsoever. His old man let us live here free of rent for nineteen years. But his promise is another story. Now that the generations have changed, how can he ensure the promise? So, he flatly refused.”

Noboru turned glum. “That’s a hassle. It won’t be easily settled, to my feeling.”

“To be sure, he may well have his say and with reason. But the reason he’s trying to drive us out isn’t because he’s hard up or something. He has a plot,” said Kakuzo, “—that is to say, to pull down all the buildings in and around Yabushita and develop a new quarter. There’s going to be a complex of inns and brothels. The priests in top management at the Gokoku-Ji Temple seem to have clandestinely consented to the plot.”

Could be, Noboru thought. Oddly enough, there was affinity between religion and prostitution. There were red-light districts next to the Senso-Ji Temple, the Temple of Gongen the Avatar in Nezu, the Hikawa Shrine in Akasaka, the Shrine of Amaterasu the Sun Goddess in Shiba, to name but a few. The Gokoku-Ji Temple had been built during the Genroku era (1688-1704) and endowed by the shogunate with a glebe that brought on the revenue of thirteen hundred koku of rice. The legend had it that, one time, such and such a widow of the shogun family became a devout worshipper of this temple. However, probably because its neighborhood was desolate and the temple itself was not quite historical, it was not all that popular. Naturally, some of the priests had an idea that it would work if a new quarter were to be developed to offer merriment. Noboru mused, Sure thing, that could be possible.

“Should the temple also handle it, yes, it’d be all the harder,” Noboru conjectured. “Sure, I’ll talk to Dr. Niide about it, but I think it’s time

you moved out. You've enjoyed being free of rent for nineteen years."

"Well yes, it'd be so."

"You'd do better to move to a new place and start it over, once and for all, instead of being involved in a complication like that."

"That'll be true, I think," Kakuzo said in a halfhearted voice. "But thing is, that son-of-a-gun takes an unbearably rapacious means."

"Oi," o-Tané said, "if you mean to go home, then you ought to be on the way. I'm away from home and they may smell out this meeting of you and me as prearranged."

"Wait a mo," said Noboru, who stood up. "At any rate, I'll go and talk to Dr. Niide and ask what he thinks. Wait here and give me a few moments."

Noboru took off, leaving the two alone.

He had to wait awhile for Kyojo to finish his consultations for the day. Meantime he went to the dining room, where he had a sip of tea, and returned to Kyojo's office. While changing the upper garments, Kyojo listened silently to Noboru's recounts. He sat down at his desk and began to file the day's dispensing. He had notebooks for every inpatient to record their conditions and the medication they got. He put in the dispensing records every time he changed to a new medicine, depending on their conditions.

"You may continue your recount," Kyojo said writing. "What's next?"

Noboru went on. Kyojo was still writing without replying when Noboru was finished. He finished the last notebook shortly. He heaved a deep long sigh as though growling.

"I understand what they're up to at Takada-Ya," Kyojo said and looked at Noboru, "but what's there about Kakuzo and his fellow tenants?"

Noboru said, "Well," and with it he clammed up.

"It's odd he went as far as attempting to assassinate the other. He wouldn't do it without reason, would he?"

"I'm afraid I didn't hear about it."

"Isn't that the name of the game?" Kyojo said sullenly. "—All right,

let's forget it at the moment. It won't be too late to hear later at their tenements."

#### 4.

Kyojo agreed to send Kakuzo back home to his tenement. Takada-Ya was otherwise likely to sue all the tenants for plotting a murder along with Kakuzo. It was doubtful if the constable would take up an appeal like that. Or rather, Takada-Ya was likely to bribe the officer. Either way, the situation would be more complicated. Apart from all this, Kyojo fabricated a story that Kakuzo had visited a relative in Toshima County; that on his way back he'd fallen off a drop, where Kyojo happened to pass by and found him injured, whereupon he had been brought to the Infirmary and given first aid. Kyojo efficiently planned procedures and deliberately ensured that this should be consistent to all concerned. He had o-Tané go first. He got a shutter stretcher ready and laid Kakuzo on it. The stretcher followed a little later. Kyojo, Noboru, and Takezo with the medicine basket on the back, three of them, left together. They traversed the back of the Denzu-In Temple to Otsuka, from which, going through the part of the town where there were a number of temples and small samurai residences, they headed for Otowa. —On the way, Kakuzo said under the cover, "I got something left behind." Kyojo responded forthwith, "Forget the stuff like that, once and for all." Noboru failed to guess it out but nodded soon after: Ah-ha, the dagger he had last night. Kakuzo himself clammed up thereafter.

When they came to the backstreet in Fifth Street, Otowa, about to turn into an alleyway, Kakuzo said, "In that corner to the left." The tenement in the corner retained the look of having recently been remodeled. The entrance and latticework windows were facing the backstreet with the new sliding shutters and their case. A glimpse at the structure gave you the image of an eatery, but the shutters of the entrance were nailed with the six-inch wide boards which crossed

diagonally.

“Where shall we get in?”

“There’s the back door on the other side,” said Kakuzo. “Let me in by it, please.”

They got around to the back door.

When the shutter stretcher was carried to the door, a crowd of people gathered in a moment. Kyojo urged Noboru to open it. While they were moving Kakuzo inside, two men jostled their way out in front through the crowd of tenants. —One looked, about thirty, like a fireman-cum-scaffolding man. The other looked younger, twenty-two or -three. He was wearing next to himself a lined indigo kimono with a tozan vertical-thin-light-blue stripe pattern. He fastened the kimono low down around his waist with a three-foot long sash. His bare feet were in zori sandals with plaited-hemp backs. His face was light complexioned, thickly eye-browed, and his body slender and clear-cut. But a kind of air—an eerie air was felt to be emanating from his entire figure. A clever dog could have barked at the sight of him.

“Is that Kakuzo, sir?” said the older one. “He seems to be injured. Let me have a look.”

“What will you do when you get a look?” Kyojo asked.

“There was a snag last night,” the man responded. “A man sought to kill the landlord of the tenement houses here. And we’re looking for the culprit, sir.”

“What are you? Are you a constable’s man?”

“No, sir, I’m business-related to Takada-Ya. Izo is the name.”

“Isn’t it the constable’s duty to look for a culprit?” Kyojo said. “Or else, is Takada-Ya entrusted with the jitte truncheon or something?”

Izo became silent.

Just then, the younger man began to say something, arrogantly right hand thrust in kimono chest. But Kyojo was quicker. He said he was a doctor of the Infirmary, called Niide Kyojo. In Noboru’s perception, Kyojo had expected the man to be overpowered and recoil at the mention of his standing. At least he must have expected bewilderment to appear on the man’s expression, but no such change came on it. Dis-

appointment emerged in the look of Kyojo's eyes for a fraction of a second. There, a titter came on Noboru but he had only to suppress it. Needless to say, Kyojo had been back to his normal self in a trice.

"Listen carefully," said Kyojo. "I have no idea where there was a snag and what nature it was. However, yesterday evening I found this man lying on the roadside in Nezumiya, Nakamaru Village, Toshima County. He'd intended to make a shortcut and fell off a drop. I found him covered with gore. I took him to the Infirmary and gave him medical care. But, —the snag you mention, tell me when and where on earth it happened?"

"At the sixth toki yesterday evenin', on the side street of the Lord Mito residence," the young 'un said. He was as tender as a woman but then his voice hid an eerie ring in it. "Hey you, ya done knowed it all alon'?" he sneered. "Ya done knowed it, so ya done made the first move, by smatterin' the names of places in the wron' direction, such as Toshima and Nezumiya, didn'tcha, eh, old geezer?"

"Izo—wasn't it your name," Kyojo turned and said, "Tell me, Izo, the master of Takada-Ya as you call him, was he killed, or was he just injured?"

"Well, er, I mean, sir, fortunately, we had three men attending our master. They're concerned with his business."

"He didn't so much as get injured?"

"The three of them came to fend off the attack right off the bat."

"What did the rogue do?"

"Sir, he had a dagger. It was dangerous, so they beat him down."

"You mean, they got the rogue?" said Kyojo as if to make doubly sure. "The master was perfectly in one piece and the rogue himself got injured contrary to his initial intention. It turned out the wrong way around for him. That's why you're suspecting him as a plotter, is that what you mean?"

The younger 'un said, "Hey, old geezer."

"Shut up!" Kyojo shouted. His voice was not high-pitched but penetrating, and his eyes glared as he glowered at him.

"You shut up." Kyojo softened the tone of his voice the next moment,

and said to Izo, "Listen carefully to what I'll say, Izo. This is important. —The Infirmary comes under the Town Magistrate. We have a yoriki, police sergeant, stationed all the time. This man Kakuzo I found at Nezumiyama and brought to the Infirmary. I've reported this to the yoriki. Let us suppose it wasn't a fact. Takada-Ya was in one piece, alive and kicking, whereas the rogue was beaten up by three men until he was injured. Providing this is to be known to the public, how will it be judged? Think on it well, Izo."

"But that bastard was going to kill our master."

"Do you have the evidence?"

"He'd said so, so our master . . ."

"Knock it off," Kyojo interrupted. "Who said what? Who heard it how? Nothing but a tiff, not a big deal. And nothing goes beyond it. Do you think the court of justice will take up a case like it? You were four and the other one, and this one's seriously injured. Your master Takada-Ya, not this injured man here, will be guilty if he produces no clear evidence that will prove the rogue had intended to kill him."

Then Kyojo gave a glance at the young 'un and continued:

"And what's worse, Izo, look at him, you've hired a scalawag goon. It'll make the matter impossible even if you have a good reason. Go back and talk it over. I'll attest any time."

The young 'un looked at Izo. His right hand remaining in his kimono chest, he suggested with his eyes that he would do his share of duty, but Izo shook his head. Kyojo signaled to Noboru with his eyes. When he took Kakuzo under the arm pits and lifted him from the shutter stretcher, he carried him with Noboru into the house by the back door. O-Tané had preceded them. She had thrust her way out of the crowd, gone into the house, and laid out the bedding for him.

"I have a question for you, sir," Izo said, standing at the back door. "You won't transfer him elsewhere, will you?"

"He got his leg broken when he fell off," Kyojo replied from inside the house. "Stop worrying. He can't get around three, four weeks."



## 5.

When Izo and the young 'un were gone, fellow tenants came to see him. A wife brought live charcoal to kindle a fire with and with it o-Tané began to brew tea. Kyojo asked where the manager's residence was and stood up to go. He left Noboru there.

"Kakuzo needs rest," Kyojo said to the gathering as he left. "When you see him, will you give him as much time to rest as you can?"

At his words the visitors left presently.

"He's a doctor full of pep," Kakuzo said and smiled on the pillow. "He's far from doctors we know of. I was wondering if his talk wouldn't change any minute to a peppy crude talk we plebeians talk in downtown Edo."

"No wonder it could," Noboru said with a lopsided smile. "When the chips are down, three or five racketeers he can . . ." he stopped there. The legend of the fracas in Mikumi-Cho, Hongo, came of itself at the tip of his tongue, and he stayed it right where it shouldn't go beyond.

"Hon," o-Tané put in, "brush maker Gen's just been driven out."

"Gen's done what?"

"Same as in the case of Kichisaburo," said o-Tané. "Three strange navyish men came and claimed they'd just rented Gen's tenement. They dumped the Gen family with their effects. The rouges have settled and are drinking there now."

"What did Gen do?"

"What could he have done? Any match for them? They're men of sorts. He and his family are staying with Yohei."

"What's this all about?" Noboru asked.

Kakuzo grunted and said. "Fine job Takada-Ya did, doctor. Maybe, they didn't think negotiations would get them nowhere. There was a similar case. Five days ago, they sent two navyish rogues. They drove out Kichisaburo and his wife with force. They're an old couple."

Noboru listened to Kakuzo as he felt a pressure bear down on him. "Isn't there the headman of town or your five-household-neighborhood unit?"

“Could they be relied on? If they could, I wouldn’t have done such a desperate thing,” said Kakuzo. “We’d tried this and that and all the other until I made up my mind to kill him.”

After all had been said and done, it had turned out that everything would be disadvantageous to the tenants. Should the top priests of Gokoku-Ji be local backers of the plan, naturally this alone would make it impossible for the rational to beat the irrational. And into the bargain, Takada-Ya had money to bribe with, and people such as the headmen of town and the members of five-household-neighborhood units would prove to be wolves that would gobble at the prey if a “new pleasure quarter” was to come on. Kakuzo went with four proxies from the tenements and asked them for support, but they were adamant, Kakuzo and his company’s nemesis, saying:

—You all have been living rent-free nearly twenty years, and are you still saturated in such unstoppable greed?

Not that they would stay on the rent-free benefit. They had talked and decided: “We’ll pay an adequate rent from now on.” But they would not lend their ears, only persisted in suggesting the sooner they removed, the better. While listening to Kakuzo, Noboru became confused which party was in the right.

—Why not move out?

In any way, if you have the intention to pay the rent, it’s easier that you’ll get rid of this imbroglio and remove somewhere else. Isn’t it? How come you die hard like this? Is it because of your pride or your fond regard lingering in you for the tenement you’ve lived in through the years? In his mind Noboru asked Kakuzo of all whys and wherefores.

Kyojo came back in a half toki or so. Instead of getting up into the house, he urged Noboru and Takezo to get ready to go back. “There’ll be no more worries,” Kyojo said to o-Tané. “I talked the manager into understanding the situation you are in, so Izo won’t do anything rough. I’ll send someone over tomorrow too, but be sure not to get short-tempered, —will you repeat this to Kakuzo and the rest of the tenants?”

Kyojo and his attendants were on the regular round of visits from

Otowa. Kyojo recounted in detail what was up along the way as he walked. Since he could only do the talking on the way between visits, he took long to come to the end. Albeit, Noboru comprehended all the better for it. —Noboru learned that Kakuzo and o-Tané ought to have a wedding in the middle of next month and that they had taken a solid four hard years to get there.

Kakuzo had turned twenty-five. His father had been called Kakichi, a tatami-making craftsman, who had finally missed a shop of his own.

At age twelve, Kakuzo was apprenticed at the kitchen of restaurant “Nadamon” in Shitaya. He acquired culinary skills. He chose cooking for his vocation because he liked it. But he didn’t have so-called gift; he realized it on his own before he attained twenty: “I’m not cut out for a first-class restaurant chef.” Clean determined he would be a cook of an eatery, he had ever since turned down all social amusements and saved money for that goal. —Chefs were men-about-town in most cases, and naturally wine and women came to them, maybe due to the circumstances and the nature of the trade. Since he was aware that his skills were limited, Kakuzo was determined “to be a cook of an eatery,” saved money, cutting down on his spending in the face of his cronies’ ridicule.

Meantime, Kakuzo got to know o-Tané. In time the relationship had grown to the promise of a marriage. Her parents had died when she was a young child. She’d been brought up by her grandfather Tasuke, who was a buckwheat noodle vendor at his night stand or a *whippoorwill* buckwheat noodle vendor. O-Tané had helped him prepare his menu and gone out to work together since twelve or thirteen. But the year before last, her grandfather had a light stroke, and since then he’d rapidly lost the free movement of his legs and lower back and his mind had become befuddled. He could not go out to work to make money. O-Tané had found a job that enabled her to commute from home, a maidservant at an inn she’d been for the last two years.

Kakuzo’s father died before Tasuke had a stroke. His mother had been dead five years. He was left alone. Once left alone, he left the live-in employment and began to commute to “Nadamon” from home in Yabushita. Thus, the two of them met at least once a day. They talked

about having an “eatery.” O-Tané would also be useful in the eatery by making use of her experience of having long helped her grandfather.

—Let’s work hard by any means and make a success of it.

So o-Tané said repeatedly. She’d also tried to save what little she could squeeze from the paucity of her family budget. Then in August this year, the current tenement was vacated. Upon consultation with the manager, they moved into it. In spite of being in the backstreet, they thought, the location was most desired. It was close to the approach to Gokoku-Ji and to many a samurai residence in its environs. Servants of samurai families could make good clientele. Located in a backstreet, their business should thrive. In the same tenement house were a builder named Yohei and a plasterer Kosuke. They were both drinkers. They were so little skilled in their trade they made only paltry wages on a daily basis. Kakuzo and o-Tané talked with them and, getting them to make rough estimates, had them come by necessary materials and with them had the tenement remodeled.

The job of that kind seemed better suited to day-labor workers on an irregular basis. Naturally, the remodeling did not progress fast enough, for they had to find time for it. It was completed as late as the end of September. Meanwhile, Kakuzo and o-Tané purchased commodities such as cooking knives, pots and pans, and tableware. Kakuzo left “Nadamon” as of the end of September. —They had more to prepare, but anyhow opened the house to start their business on the fifteenth of October. They vowed to each other that they’d have a wedding after the busy New Year weeks and that till then they’d stolidly keep their distance from each other to avoid fellow tenants’ eye.

“And in a half month’s time, Takada-Ya came to tell them to remove from their tenement,” Kyojo recounted. “It was just when their business was beginning to run on the rails and gain regular customers.”

And, Kakuzo had put into his new business all he had taken the long ten and odd years to save (that included o-Tané’s share) and he’d been indebted to liquor and other dealers.

## 6.

If evicted from the tenement, Kakuzo would be in debt and have nothing left, not even a shirt on his back. O-Tané would also have to go back into service someplace, say, at an inn. Thus, all tenants had had consultations and negotiated with Takada-Ya.

“But Takada-Ya wouldn’t concede further rental. Fact is, apart from whether or not Gokoku-Ji was backing, the representatives of neighborhood associations sided with Takada-Ya at the bait of the promised prosperity of their neighborhood,” Kyojo said. “—The most crucial adversity for the tenants there is the grace they, twenty and odd families, have enjoyed for nearly twenty years. It’s as plain as day that the world will approve of this fact and sympathize with Takada-Ya before they take legal action.”

“But, why in the world, sir,” Noboru retorted, “has such a rent-free agreement been in effect for such a long time?”

“It wasn’t agreed on, it was voluntarily promised by Yoshichi, former proprietor of Takada-Ya. I saw the ledger of the rents at the manager’s. In it, it was clearly underwritten by the name of Yoshichi that the tenants were to be charged no rents till the end of the Matsujiro generation. The statement was signed by Yoshichi himself and five representatives from the tenements and sealed with their thumbprints.”

“Were there so many who knew their letters, sir?”

Walking, Kyojo looked over his shoulder at Noboru. “Supposing one with a liver problem doesn’t know one has a problem in one’s liver, this one still suffers the liver problem, right?”

“Y-yes, sir,” Noboru answered ambiguously.

“It’s not a big deal if the five of the representatives knew their letters. That they’ve paid no rents is the positive proof, isn’t it? —you talk nonsense.” The last remark was Kyojo’s monolog, but he came back to the subject at stake. “What I want to know is, Why did Yoshichi make such a promise? For what reason did he have to make such a promise? The tenants will have no chance of winning unless it is made clear.”

They had walked a while before Noboru said, “Doesn’t anyone know

the reason, sir?”

“It’s exactly what Kakuzo told us,” Kyojo said throatily in aggravation. “Two of the five representatives moved out. Two are dead, one of them’s Kakuzo’s father, the only remaining one’s Tasuke.”

“Suffering from senile dementia—”

“I talked to him just now. He was apparently forgetful because of the stroke. I asked him various questions. The old man himself tried hard to jog his memory, but all that remains is the murder of o-Kumé.”

Noboru looked him in the face.

“Murder of o-Kumé, that’s all, —you’ll learn nothing, no matter how you may study my face.” Kyojo swung his arm out of habit. “No one knows what it refers to. Tenants went to all the lengths to ask him. But just the murder of o-Kumé stays with him. He himself has no idea what it stands for.”

“Then it could be totally another story,” Noboru started. And, flurried, he changed the subject. “Now I’m almost in the know.”

“What are you in the know about?”

“The plight that drove Kakuzo to the determination to assassinate Takada-Ya,” Noboru answered. Answering, he thought to himself that he was being ridiculously imbecile today. “—his devotion through the long ten and odd years has come to nothing and the wedding near at hand has vanished into thin air. And what’s worse, all this happened because the other party aims at making money. It may well be that Kakuzo went berserk.”

“Who are you to marvel at a motive like that. Whatever the reason, it’s unforgivable to take another’s life. And it’s stupid of him,” Kyojo said angrily. “The poverty-stricken will often leap for joy and ruin themselves in despair, insensibly at things under their nose. We have this common saying: An empty sack cannot stand upright. If you’re living for the day, you’ll go from one extreme to the other when things don’t go as you expect. As a result you’ll end up helping the strong grow yet stronger.”

“Only when light is shed on why the promise was made, will there be a solution.” Kyojo said again, “Rather than letting priests and avari-

cious fellows develop a shady quarter, protecting one humble, honest eatery is humane, isn't it? But for that goal, we must make clear how come Yoshichi gave such a word to his tenants."

They traipsed on. Then Kyojo looked up at the sky and murmured in a fervent tone of voice as if speaking to something unreal: "Whatever compensation did Yoshichi make such a promise for? —"

Noboru inwardly returned to Kyojo: It's something like a doctor who's anxiously seeking for God's help because he's failed to find what the problem is after examining a person with a liver problem."

The next day, Noboru went to see Kakuzo as he was told by Kyojo. He was giving him treatment with the help from o-Tané, cleansing the wounds, changing the plasters, and rewinding the cotton cloth around him, when an old man on a cane faltered through the back door. O-Tané let out a cry of surprise:

"There you are, Gran'pa! What's the matter?" O-Tané stood up and went to him. "It's not safe to come out on your own, Gran'pa."

Probably, that was Tasuke. Noboru unconcernedly looked across to him as he drew the metal basin up to him to wash his hands in. Helped by his granddaughter, Tasuke was as ungainly as a broken puppet as he shuffled over to the movable floorboard of the kitchen and sat down on it. (Just then his cane fell down and made a high hard noise when it hit the ground.) The old man was scrawny, skin as livid as wax, face as impassive as a mask, and lips hanging down limply.

"Sorry Gran'pa, but I can't make out." O-Tané was asking him to repeat. "What did what?"

Kakuzo looked at Noboru, wanting to ask something. Noboru shook his head wordlessly.

"What's the matter?" Kakuzo asked loudly. "What's the matter with your gran'pa?"

"Wait a moment and don't interrupt, please." o-Tané answered.

Noboru told Kakuzo that he'd come to see him the day after the next and got to his feet. He said as he went out: The fever has subsided, there's no worry about the wounds festering. Change the plasters on your legs once tomorrow. In passing o-Tané and Tasuke, he recognized

Tasuke striving to get his weltering tongue to form words to utter. He was trying hard. Tears were running down and saliva dribbling. Pressing his throat with one hand, he wrung out words which failed to form into words. The figure toiling and moiling to little avail was almost much too pathetic to look straight at. Rather, it made a chilling, bleak impression.

“That’s fine. Shall we go home,” o-Tané said, which Noboru heard behind his back. “Kaku is all right. Gran’pa, don’t say any such sinister thing as a family altar. Stay home, that’s all you got to do. You’ve got nothing to worry about, Gran’pa.”

Noboru got out from the alleyway into the side street.

## 7.

Noboru got around to Koishikawa Bridge from there on. He was supposed to meet Kyojo at the Lord Matsudaira Wakasa residence. Maybe because Noboru was finished earlier in Otowa, he had to wait a half toki before Kyojo arrived. —After getting together, they visited eight patients to see them. It was five in the evening when they came back to the Infirmary. They called it a day earlier than usual. Noboru took a bath. He dipped himself in the clear water for the first time in a long time before many used the same water before him. Then he had a long leisurely dinner with Handayu, seated at their tray next to each other. When finished, Handayu spoke in his casual tone over the tea they were served: Tsugawa was coming back. Noboru couldn’t tell what he had meant.

“The man you replaced, Yasumoto,” Handayu said. “That’s Tsugawa Genzo, you don’t remember him?”

Noboru remembered.

“He was a nasty fellow,” he said, looking at Handayu quizzically. “—You say he’s coming back . . . you mean here?”

“Here.”

“Didn’t he become a doctor on probation for Shogun?”



“No, he didn’t, it seems,” said Handayu. “He did become one all right. But he made a blunder, so he was displaced from the position and that’s that.”

“That’s why he’ll come back here?”

“That is it.” Handayu sipped the tea. “I hear they need more staff here.”

“They need more staff here?”

“That’s that.” Handayu changed the subject. “I hear Wino and o-Sugi got engaged. Do you know it?”

Noboru shook his head. Handayu led away to the subject about the engaged couple. Noboru listened, for curiosity arose in him. It never entered his head that “They need more staff here” had meaning. According to Handayu, madwoman o-Yumi had very little life left in her, that was how she was these days. She would not pull through till New Year. If o-Yumi died, o-Sugi was slated to go home. She was in a situation which “discouraged her from going home.” Wino and o-Sugi talked it over and made up their mind to be married and start a life together, when it came time.

“This is the first time I’ve ever heard happy news in this Infirmary,” said Handayu. “Most probably, it’ll be the first in its whole history. When I came to this realization, my heart felt heavy, —living as we do in this world, we rarely see with our own eyes people become happy.”

Noboru inwardly nodded: Yes, we rarely see people getting along happily. The future of Wino and o-Sugi is a sealed book. The joy of being married lasts only a short time in comparison with the days and years they’ll have yet to live. He shook his head and laughed.

“Somehow, when confined in a place like this,” Noboru said, “we’re apt to form a habit of thinking the way senior people do before we know it. No, I’m referring to myself, I’ll tell you.”

The next day, Noboru was stopped by a stranger at the gate on the way out with Kyojo. Apparently shown by the janitor just now, he came up to Noboru as he called to him, “Excuse me, sir, are you Doctor Yasumoto?” He was in a livery with his workplace’s name on it, long johns, and in sandals. He was twenty-six or -seven by the look of him,

short but sturdy, with an unshaved face which was covered with a growth of dense stubble from the lips up to the cheeks.

"I've come from Otowa," the man rasped. "Them just call me Yohei, a buster, a builder. I live in the same tenement house as Kakuzo."

Noboru remembered him, who had taken on the brush-maker Genji family.

"Kakuzo turned worse or something?"

"Nope, sir. It ain't so," Yohei said scratching his head embarrassedly as if caught doing something bad. "I'll tell ya the truth, sir. A little thin' popped up, and so we'd laike ya to come alon' 'round the seventh toki (four o'clock in the afternoon) for once. I'm shere to tell ya this, sir."

"Was there something wrong? Rabble?" Kyojo came in from aside. "Takada-Ya, again?"

"Nope, it ain't, sir. Or is it?" Yohei scratched his head again and racked his brain. "It ain't a rabble, nor ain't it really 'bout Takada-Ya. There'll be a rabble, maybe, but ya'll see when ya come, sir. Will ya come?"

"Seventh?" said Kyojo. "Gotcha. Tell 'em we'll be 'long by then."

Yohei turned to look at Noboru, who, in turn, said, "I'll be along," and nodded.

When they finished five visits on the round, Kyojo told Noboru to be off to Otowa. Off he went. It was a cloudy afternoon. It was still before four, but it was gloomy all around, and the light north wind was so boreal that the cold would seep into the skin. Noboru called at the back door of Kakuzo's tenement. O-Tané answered. She said Kakuzo had his fellow tenants there. She seemed to have perceived that Noboru was looking quizzically at the footwear lying at sixes and sevens in the entrance. —Noboru stepped into the room and saw four men sitting at Kakuzo's bed. They greeted to Noboru and made a space for him to sit down. One of them was Yohei, who introduced the rest of the three to Noboru: plasterer Kosuke, fishmonger Choji, and carter Shokichi. Kosuke looked as old as Yohei, and Choji and Shokichi about thirty.

"I'm sorry we're troubling you when you're busy, sir," said Kakuzo, laid out in bed. "Now straight to the point. It's about Takada-Ya. It's

come to light what happened nineteen years back.”

“It’s come to light?” Noboru narrowed his eyes.

“Old man Tasuke came, oh yes, it was when you happened to be with us,” Kakuzo said. “He had to have his clumsy tongue welter and, on top of it, was excited. What he was struggling to say sounded like a mumbo jumbo. We failed to make it out. After you’d gone, he calmed down a bit. When he did, we listened very carefully and successfully picked up what he was trying to convey. It was that there ought to be a deed, a record concerning the incident nineteen years ago.”

The old man only repeated “the family altar” at first, but then began to tell them there had been a memorandum that told of the understanding between Takada-Ya and his tenants, that the document had been sealed with his and the other four representatives’ thumbprints, and that that had been kept by Kakichi who was dead now.

—That, I never heard of before.

Kakuzo hadn’t heard anything about it from his father. Could be, Tasuke had said and continued: You were apprenticed out and couldn’t make it for your father’s death. Before you rushed to your father’s death bed, your father told me about it:

—I hope there oughtn’t be no such thing, but if a dispute should take place about the rent, search behind the memorial tablet in the family altar. There you’ll find the memorandum of mutual understanding drafted at that time.

Tasuke had been told so by Kakichi but he had since forgotten it. And now, there was this discord, which awakened the “murder of o-Kumé” in Tasuke’s mind. While thinking back on what it was about, only the day before had it come back to his memory. So Kakuzo concluded his recount.

## 8.

“That, have you found?” Noboru asked.

“Yes, I have, doctor.” Kakuzo replied and took out a flattened rolled

document from under his pillow. “As the old man said, this was hidden behind the memorial tablet.”

“The reason is described in it, right?”

“It’s written in detail and sealed with the thumbprints of the five representatives. No, will you wait, doctor?” said Kakuzo, who handed the document to Choji. “I’ll explain what’s in there to you later. Were I to do it now, something would go amiss. For I’m afraid you’ll probably stop us from doing what we’ll be doing from now, doctor.”

Noboru stared at him. “Then, what did you have me over here for.”

“We’d like you to be a witness?”

“Witness for what?”

“Ya’ll know later, sir,” Yohei said. “Only when the other party comes, will we begin raight away, and he oughta be comin’ soon.”

“Who’s coming?”

“Takada-Ya, ya know, sir,” said Yohei, who then looked at Kakuzo, “Oh, one too many?”

“We’ve called Matsujiro here, doctor,” Kakuzo took the ball from Yohei and got it rolling. “We told him that the evidence had been found of the promise to rent the tenements for free. We asked him to come as we’d show it to him. He complied with our request, doctor.”

“How come you need a witness for that?”

“This doctor asks too much,” plasterer Kosuke remarked.

“Maid yer own business,” Kakuzo interrupted. “All ya gotta do’s maidn yours. Cho, are you sure of yours?”

“Will ya take a lantern wi’ ya?” Choji turned back to look at Yohei. “It’s laikely to get dark earlier today. I think we need a lantern to read bay.”

“I’ll brin’ one later,” said carter Shokichi. “Call me an’ I’ll rush wi’ it raight off the bat. Is it faine?”

Noboru fell silent. He had no idea whatsoever what they were up to or what he’d be a witness for. But they seemed to have no mind to tell him anything, and presently the thing would be happening. That was why, Noboru thought, he would just have to watch it happen as it would happen. And no choice. —O-Tané served tea to Noboru. Shokichi got to

his feet. He said as he left: He'll go home and have a lantern ready. When he sees 'em all off, he'll brin' up the rear an' be alon' below the open field and wait in haidin'.

Takada-Ya Matsujiro arrived a little after four, attended by Izo, the man who had shown up the other day, and two other young 'uns. Only Matsujiro and Izo came in. While Kakuzo was talking to them, Noboru studied Matsujiro from aside. He'd been told this proprietor was twenty-three, but he looked older by three, four years. He was a medium height and build with no particular features, but his spoilt upbringing betrayed blatantly the haughtiness and fearlessness in, say, the look of his eyes and the way he talked.

"Do you swear it's true?" Matsujiro asked back. "Are you sure it's not forged?"

"You'll know when you have a look," Kakuzo replied. "Could a simpleton like us cheat a man as quick-minded as you, Mr. Takada-Ya? And you ain't so happy-go-lucky as to be cheated, either. Here we have Dr. Yasumoto from the Koishikawa Infirmary. He's going to be a witness for us. So, we'd like you to examine the evidence at any rate."

Matsujiro turned to look at Noboru.

"I'm Yasumoto Noboru," Noboru said.

"I'm Matsujiro of Takada-Ya." Matsujiro stared at the way Noboru was clothed. "I'm familiar with those clothes. In my memory, they're the livery for the doctors in the Infirmary, right?"

The word livery had a particular tone in his utterance of the word, obviously contemptuous, but Noboru only smiled.

"Choji and Kosuke will escort you," Kakuzo said. "Dr. Yasumoto has agreed to go with you. With him go take a good look at the evidence, please."

"Where's it?"

"An open space below the drop-off," Kakuzo replied. "Only, leave yer attendants behind and go alone, please."

"Why not my attendants?"

"As I hear, you'll be humiliated," Kakuzo said calmly. "The deceased master was worried about your humiliation and kept it unknown to

everybody else. This is why we've been left in the dark to this day. So, please go on yer own."

Matsujiro hesitated a moment. Izo whispered, "You're alright, Young Master?" This remark evidently stimulated Matsujiro's pride. He shook his head toward Izo, Don't.

"That's fine," Matsujiro nodded nonchalantly. "I'll study it closely whether it'll be humiliating or not. As I understand, Dr. Yasuda will come with me, won't he?"

Noboru was silent. Kakuzo corrected, "Dr. Yasumoto."

"Oh excuse me, sir." Matsujiro gave an affected nod of apology to Noboru and said to Izo, "You call in Tatsu and Ginn and wait here. Don't worry, I'm fine by myself. Mind you, I am Matsujiro of Takada-Ya."

Noboru stood up and went ahead to go out by the back door.

"Well, *Mind you, I am Matsujiro of Takada-Ya.* 's that so?" Noboru muttered once out in the alleyway. "Heaven knows you're Matsujiro of Takada-Ya, so you are, indeed."

Soon Yohei came out, followed by Matsujiro, Choji, and Kosuke. Choji said, "This way," and proceeded toward the deeper end of the alleyway. Noboru and the rest of the three followed after him. Outside, it was already dark, though before the nightfall. They saw cooking fires here and there in the tenements. Smoke whirled up from the fires. In the smoke children were romping around and ditch planks were clonking as they trod them.

The alleyway led them out in an open space which was raised one step from the level of the tenement houses. A precipice towered on that side of the space. On the top of it were samurai residences, which were hidden from sight. The open space with an area of approximately five-hundred tsubo was covered with withered grass that stood as high as the human chest. Out of the grass there stood tristfully in dejection toward one end of the space two pine trees with knotted and twisted old branches. Choji went up to them and, looking around, said to Matsujiro, "About shere."

"About here?" asked Matsujiro, "What is about here?"

“Where the evidence is,” Choji said. “Could ya come over there a sec?”

Matsujiro looked at Noboru, who swayed one hand to signal to him: “After you.” It was obvious that he was dithered. Because of the dithers he put on a bold front. He went up to Choji.

“Let’s see, a bit more back,” Choji said to himself, comparing the pine trees and the precipice with his eyes. “Excuse me, sir, will you step back a bit more?”

Matsujiro backed.

“Still a bit more, please,” Choji said and crouched on the ground. “Raight, but a teensy-weensy bit more, sir.”

Matsujiro moved two steps backward. Then, suddenly, his feet missed the footing or something, and the next moment he was swimming in the air with both arms and slipped out pat into the seared grass.

## 9.

What the incident meant that had happened in the lingering light of the deepening twilight, Noboru did not apprehend in a moment. It happened all too suddenly. As he disappeared into the seared grass, his hands stroking frantically in the air, Matsujiro let out a loud cry, and the sound of it drew a downward wake of its sound track after him, which Noboru heard, dumbfounded.

“What you saw just now, it’s what the old man calls the murder of o-Kumé,” Yohei said. “The truth is there ain’t no such name. It’s only an old drawin’ well, thirty feet deep, dry without water. We investigated it yesterday, doctor. It was found that there ain’t no poison gas down there. Long, long, long taim ago, it did happen but not sure of when, a girl called o-Kumé fell off into the well and daied. Old people know it, so they used to call it o-Kumé’s well. They put a lid on it and built a fence, so even children would never get close to it. But . . .”

“Put Yohei to sailence,” Choji said. “Oi Sho-boy, are you there?”

Shokichi brought a lantern over and said: Did it go well? Yep, smack

into the bull's eye, said Choji. Take a gander, he's screamin' down there. —Really! That bastard must of got scared outa shis wits. —Gimme the laight, said Choji. Noboru watched quietly what they did.

"You're the witness," Choji said to Noboru, "Come over shere and listen to what I say to that buster, sir."

Noboru nodded. It was still light in the sky, but it had grown dark down here at the foot of the precipice. Dry grass was swaying, swept by the wind which had got stronger now. The lantern light lit up one side of the five men's figures. Choji gingerly made forward in the direction of the well. It was nothing but a hole covered by the dry grass. The trace left by the fall of Matsujiro showed the mark of broken earth, but nothing was left to show it had been a well.

"Listen, Takada-Ya," Choji shouted down. "Are you hurt anywhere?"

A shout came up from the bottom, but it only resounded to create a strident noise along the well shaft, and it was hard to make out what was being said.

"You can shout at the top of your lungs, so maybe you didn't get hurt. Listen careful," Choji said and took out the document from the chest pocket. "I'll tell you the whole story. Hey Takada-Ya, shear me out."

"Clear your ears and prick 'em up" said Yohei.

"Wow, ya talk a bran-new tongue," Kosuke jeered.

"Sailence!" Choji held them back. He shouted into the well so he could begin, "Ready? Listen careful, Takada-Ya. —This is the draied-up well of a samurai residence that was shere a long taimo ago."

There Choji explained in more detail what Yohei had told Noboru. The girl had been six. The lid put over the well had been wooden.

"On the fifteenth day of the month of October naineteen years back when you were four, you fell down into this well, you get it?" Choji went on, "You were the only son, the apple of your parents. They treasured you so much nothing could replace you. The ac-hident got to be a tumult among the neighbors living as thick as thieves. Your parents haired men to search for you. They may have come to search this well, too. There wasn't a shred of you nowhere at all. Were you spirited away or kidnapped? They had a fortune teller divaine your whereabouts and



had incantations performed. Still your whereabouts were unknown. Your mother was distressed and grew weak laike she was sick. Your father completely gave up on you, decaiding you'd been kidnapped and taken to a faraway land or else daied. In the middle of their desperation, on the fourth day, a tenant shere found you. He made doubly sure, hoping he was mistaken. By bairding shimself with a rope, he went down to the bottom of the well and got hold of you there, —where you are now you were laying. He rescued you and got a doctor to see you, but the doctor said there maight be no hope of you coming back to laife.”

There was an absolute silence inside the well. Nothing else was heard. The reverberation of Choji's voice reinforced the silence of the environs.

“But your laife was saved,” Choji was going on. “You can imagine how pleased your parents were, can't you? The debt of gratitude should be remembered for generations to come. As a token of this, the agreement came into effect that all twenty-four tenants in the three tenement rows be exempted from the rent until the end of your generation, on condition that they keep the ac-hident hecret, for you were four and in taime you'd forget it; that this horrible ac-hident be not told to you. Not that the agreement was to trade for paying the bill, but it was earnestly hoped for the tenants to keep the hecret. —That's your parents' benevolence, don't you think, Takada-Ya? —The tenants have kept the hecret. So, they've had no aidea to date whay they've been free of the rent.”

There Choji recounted to him how the document signed by the five representatives had been found in the family altar at Kakuzo's tenement.

“Now that's all. You understand, don't you?” Choji said. “You buster intend to go back on the former Takada-Ya's pledge and wouldn't yield when we offered to pay the rent from now on. As you have your own plan, so we do our own. Naineteen years ago you were daying down there, in the same spot you are at now. That's the place we said we'd show you as the evidence. You get it?”

A voice was heard that came rising from the bottom of the well. No

word was to be made out because the reverberation was intense and young Takata-Ya's voice sounded vacuous from fright.

"Hey, don't shout so," said Choji, "should you shout and ramp and rage, you'd run out of your energy all the more, buster. And this is a forgotten place. Even us didn't know there was a well there before the document was discovered. No matter how you shout or scream, you don't need to expect no one to shear you. Instead of ramping and raging to no avail, you calm down and think hard that you were daying at the same place when you were four, buster. —See ya."

When Choji waved his hand, Yohei and the other two, the three of them drew up the stone lid and with an effort shut off the well with it.

"Sir, you see whay we didn't tell you nothing," Choji said to Noboru. "Had you heard of our plan, you'd sure have disapproved of the way we've just carried it out."

"I wonder," Noboru gave a smile.

"We are nitwits, but we wanted to pay out an old score this much. And that bastard will be struck home one way or another," Choji said. "Well, Kakuzo will be impatiently waiting. Let's go back and get shim to read this document?"

"But you'll never leave," Noboru asked, "Takada-Ya as he is, will you?"

"Well, sort of," Choji said ambiguously.

The five of them came back to the tenement. At the entrance they said to Izo, "Your master went straight home in Ushigome." And going in, they told Kakuzo what had gone on from A to Z. Noboru read the document and confirmed that what Choji had said was elaborated on in it.

"I won't shove my oar in," Noboru said, "but anyway I've been the witness to you, so if anything should happen to Takada-Ya . . ."

"We all know that," Kakuzo interrupted, "so, we won't do anything that'll trouble you, sir. When it's settled, we'll come and report to you. Please don't worry."

Noboru took leave of them shortly.

After that, Noboru visited Kakuzo every other day to treat his

wounds, but Kakuzo told nothing about it. On the fifth day, he told Noboru that “all had gone well and ended well.”

“Yesterday evening, they took him out of the well,” o-Tané said. “He said we can stay on here as before.”

“There’s no fear of retribution?”

“That was a real big strain on him, it seems,” said Kakuzo, “because, of his own will, he sealed the document with his thumbprint. Really, it seemed it’d affected him to the core of his heart.”

“Could be, he was left alone in the bottom of that well.”

“We’ll pay the rent from now on. Oops, ouch,” he grunted frowning at the sudden pain that was caused by the peeling off of the plaster. “—Oops, be gentle, sir.”

## Sprouts under the Ice

### 1.

On December 20, apothecary Okaku-Do delivered medicines, and from the morning of the following day, the Infirmary became occupied with sorting them. On the day Kyojo canceled his round of visits and helmed the work. Yasumoto Noboru had an appointment with his parents at home in Koji-Machi. Kyojo reminded him of it three times or so, but, instead of rising on his feet to go, Noboru only answered him half-heartedly and remained at work, sorting the supplies. Should he go, he would leave only Kyojo and Handayu to do the work.

At the two-o'clock teatime, Noboru went to the dining room with Handayu and had tea and cakes together. As he ate, Handayu told him about madwoman o-Yumi who was in critical conditions and “won’t last more than ten days.” She had been sane longer than not at one time, but recently she was the other way around. She stayed sane much less often now. Sometimes her appetite plummeted and other times it grew extraordinarily voracious. Insomnia persisted. When besieged by the fit of insanity, she went berserk. She ramped and raved. Thus, she always had fresh bruises all over her body. She’d once attempted to hang herself to death. She’d since visibly grown debilitated. And now she didn’t eat. Her consciousness was getting more muddled, too. That was just about how she was.

“Her father, so the man was called, came yesterday,” Handayu said. “He looked like an affable, skinny gentleman in his fifties. He didn’t mention where he lived, after all was said, —didn’t Dr. Niide tell you?”

Noboru shook his head.

“Well then, Dr. Niide alone knows it,” said Handayu, “The impression I got when I met him, was that he was a merchant of considerable

means and that he was like a retired merchant. When it came to the subject of his daughter, he was shedding tears all along from start to end.”

O-Yumi had lost her sanity because of the mischief done by an assistant of her father’s shop. She may have had the predisposition, but the assistant, who was in his thirties, had molested o-Yumi who was as young as nine years of age and intimidated her by saying, “I’ll kill you should you repeat it to anyone.” The father, who had had no idea that he’d been the cause of his daughter’s trouble, had dismissed the assistant due to another trouble he had caused. Time had coursed its way. O-Yumi had been to be married but the engagement had been broken off. It had been not until o-Yumi had begun to show the symptom of insanity that the fact had been brought to light.

“Even now he wanted to kill the assistant, the father said,” said Handayu, shaking his head, as he poured tea. “Although she was predisposed, she wouldn’t be that mad, hadn’t the assistant made her such grotesque advances or threatened her like that. Should he find that man, he’d kill him first, and then kill himself, too, the father said and shed tears again.”

That was not correct, Noboru thought back on the case. He had heard her accounts directly from o-Yumi the victim herself and validated most of them as true. The assistant had apparently had personal disorder. As a matter of course, not that he had not been responsible for what he had done. But both men and women at large had, more or less, had the similar experiences when they were young children. Above all in o-Yumi’s case, other factors came on top such as her mother’s unnatural death and the cancellation of her marriage. Nevertheless, men and women in general would keep going in one piece and pull through all those layers of adverse conditions, but o-Yumi couldn’t. After all, o-Yumi was predisposed to be extraordinarily susceptible to nymphomania, which, suppressed, would ruin the entire harmony she maintained in herself. Her insanity was rooted in it, not elsewhere. It ought to be the father’s monomania that made him “hate” the assistant “to the extent that he would kill him,” Noboru concluded as he mulled it over.

When both interns came back to sorting the supplies, they found

Kyojo out. Setting about the work with Handayu, Noboru asked:

“Didn’t the father make any mention of that building?”

“He’ll donate it as he promised,” Handayu said. “He said, He’ll do so after he gets it extended if we will. What was most interesting was, no, I’m confounded to say so,” Handayu gave a giggle, “—but, maybe Wino heard it from o-Sugi, he showed up on the scene to negotiate with the father.”

“Negotiate?”

“As I suspect, he was worried that, when the daughter died, o-Sugi would be taken away back to service at the shop. He barged in on the bull session that was going between the father and me. He said he had a business he had to meet with him about and that it was a life’s sink-or-swim matter for him.”

“Well, I never!”

“Oh yes, he well did threaten,” said Handayu, with the giggle still on his face. “The hang of it was this. He wanted o-Sugi for his wife. There was in Sakuma-Cho, Kanda, a builder called Tokichi knew him well. He’d tell anything about Wino if he was asked. Wino said, Wait and see, and the surest thing he’d do was to make o-Sugi happy for the rest of her life. And then, he invoked some deity of sorts and swore to it.”

“What did the merchant say in return?”

“He was thrown off balance. He said, O-Sugi’s parents lived in Ebara County and he’d talk it over with them, but he had no objection in principle.”

Handayu stopped and turned back. They had heard wild steps and a woman cry out in tears in the corridor. “No, I won’t,” she was screaming as she came, “Don’t touch me. Lemme go. No, no, no, no.”

Noboru stood up and went out onto the corridor. The instant he was out, a young woman ran into him and clung to him, getting around behind him to hide herself. Thereupon, Kyojo came after her, saying, “Keep her held down.” Jostling Kyojo away, came running immediately after a woman about forty.

“Help,” cried the young woman who still clung to Noboru, “help me, please. I don’t want it, no, no way.”

The woman who came up to her and cried out, “O-Ei!” Kyojo stood in her way. He said to Noboru, “Take her into my office.”

“Calm down. It’s all right,” Noboru said to the young woman. “Here you have many staff hands. They won’t let anybody do any harm. There, there, come this way.”

“You, come to yourself, o-Ei,” the woman said. “We’ll be doing it for your own sake, eh? We’re not going to make you unhappy, you know it, don’t you?”

“That’ll be later, not now,” said Kyojo, “so you’ll stay in the waiting room.”

“Aren’t I allowed to be with her?”

“I’ll try to talk her into it, so you stay away in the waiting room.”

While Kyojo was struggling to hold back the older woman, Noboru took the young woman into Kyojo’s office. There, the medicine cabinets were open, all the drawers of the cabinets half drawn out, and the sacks of medicines were piled all over the wooden floor. The office was so cluttered Noboru was almost at a loss where to offer her a cushion. —She looked seventeen or nineteen years old. She was robed in a short striped wadded kimono of coarse cotton, the underneath of which she fastened herself with a brown sash. Her hair was poorly adorned only with a comb. Her hands and feet were painfully chapped from water-using chores. Her face was red from the cold and didn’t have a trace of powder. The cheeks were already chilblained at that time of the season. Her looks were on the good side but lacking in expression as if masked. On sitting, she wore a faint smile on her face. She had left behind all those cries and screams she’d just been letting out.

—Mentally retarded, it seems.

So Noboru determined, feeling like tut-tutting.

## 2.

Kyojo entered. He sat and began to have a session with the young

woman. O-Ei was the name, nineteen years old. The older woman was her mother, called o-Kané. O-Ei's father had been missing for three years. She had a big sister, a big brother, a little brother, and a little sister. Since ten, she had served "Kinroku," a wholesaler dealing in tapers, in Ikenohata-Naka-Machi, Shitaya, but was axed because she got pregnant. She was now living with her parent in Funagawara-Machi, Ichigaya, so o-Ei said. —It took her much trouble to say that much, for she frequently slumped into long silence from the ineptness of her tongue which slurred her speech and had to repeat three times what she was trying to convey. She seemed to have great pain again in responding to what was asked: she wiped her brow and rubbed her mouth with the back of her hand (as if she was driving).

—Mentally retarded, no doubt about it, Noboru thought again.

O-Ei became big with baby while serving as a maid at "Kinroku," but the baby's father was unknown. Her family, to whom she came back jobless, was scraping a hand-to-mouth life. Her mother did not want her mentally retarded daughter to have a baby. For these reasons, she brought her daughter to the Infirmary to ask for an abortion. Kyojo had so far chosen to perform abortions depending on the circumstances.

—Babies getting killed immediately after being born are "culled out." This is practiced everywhere. Some northern provinces have ever issued a cull-out edict.

Kyojo would make a point of justifying abortion. Depending on their local food-supply situations those poverty-stricken with a big family were incapable of raising all the children that came on one on the heels of another. In that case, "culling out" was overlooked with impunity. It was by all means ruthless and unnatural to do away with a human life that saw the light of day. Should it be found needed, the life ought to be annihilated while it was a fetus, that is, before it grew into "a human being." So went his theory. Accordingly, he was going to perform an abortion on o-Ei. On being told about the treatment, o-Ei had changed color and repudiated it: "No way!" She had slipped away from Kyojo and other medical staff and run out into the corridor.

"I'll have the baby," she insisted, welteringly. "The baby inside this



belly is mine. Come what may, I'll have it and bring it up. Woo, woo-oo, if I won't trouble nobody, there'll be no problem, right?"

"No problem indeed providing you can be a mother," Kyojo said, "but it'll be too much for you. You aren't as normal up there as anyone else. It'll be very hard to get by satisfactorily, even on your own, for the long years to come, don't you think?"

O-Ei gave an ear-to-ear giggle and whispered to Kyojo in the way she'd have a tête-à-tête with him, "Doc, —to be honest with you, I'm acting an idiot."

"Okay. I heard it three times already."

"It's true, doc. I'm telling you the truth and the whole truth," she persisted. "It happened when I was a maidservant. I was twelve. While I was helping with the merchandise being put away into the storehouse, I slipped down the ladder and hit my head and back. That was when I decided to pretend to be an idiot, honest. In reality I'm not. I can bring up a baby like the next one, doc."

"Yasumoto, —" Kyojo turned on him and said, "her mother's waiting in the anteroom. Tell her we'll keep her here a couple of days. Tell her to be back in three days and that I'll talk her into it by then."

When Noboru appeared at the anteroom, o-Kané came rushing over to him and, without waiting for him to finish, she complained in an impatient tone of voice:

"How come it takes so much trouble?" O-Kané pouted her thick-lipped mouth. "She was born dopey and stubborn. It's useless to try and talk her into it."

"It can't be helped unless she consents to it," Noboru said. "Dimwitted or daft or whatever, no woman lies when she wants to have a baby."

"Then, you're going to let that dopey girl have a dolt, aren't you?"

"Dr. Niide says to come back in three days."

"I'll take her home today," she said, flaring up. "I've brought her here because I was told the doctors are understanding and do away with babies of needy people, and that treatment and medication is free. But it's a hassle here. Pay some money and get it done. No this and that. Just that. Will you please go and get my daughter here, doctor?"

Let her do as she liked, Noboru thought, but Kyojo was a die-hard and refused flatly to comply with her. O-Kané gave in and left at long last. She cussedly set the deadline and repeatedly reminded: “Three days.” In contrast to her initial demure imploration, she’d grown literally high-handed and obligating now. Her meaty face with prominent cheekbones looked like a cistern filled with deprecation.

“What does she mean to do?” said Noboru, who could hardly resist the temptation to fume at her. “She said she’d get the baby aborted right away even if she’d have to pay. Doesn’t she have any reason for it, sir?”

“Why not be off? It’s time,” Kyojo urged. “We, Mori and I, will take care of the rest. Get ready and off you go. It’s gone past three.”

Noboru got to his feet.

At home in Koji-Machi, the Amanos and their daughter Masawo had arrived and were waiting for Noboru. The sky was overcast heavily with low, dark gray clouds. The inside of the house was already lit up though it was still before four in the afternoon. —First, Noboru was called by his father into his study, where his mother took her seat and attended them, and was told that nuptials would be performed in the presence of the family members alone. Noboru declined it. The bitter memory of Chigusa’s breach entered his head at the mention of nuptials. His mother seemed to have instantly perceived it and slid forward as she sat on her legs to say something. But his father Ryo’an’s headshake shut her mouth with her words stillborn on the tip of her tongue.

“This has been requested by Mr. Amano and I’ve complied with it,” his father said in his usual good-natured tone. “It’s scheduled that we’ll hold a full wedding reception in March with the presence of guests, so there’s no problem if we have the ceremony of exchanging nuptial cups for a family celebration tonight.”

“Come March will and we’ll have a full ceremony, so nothing’ll be taking place tonight.”

“But this is a custom, you know.”

In silence, Noboru looked across at the alcove. He saw the pine and winterberry twigs arranged in the bronze vase. Maybe because it was placed well away from the andon light, the arrangement looked lacka-

daisical and dismal to him. Tedium beset him, making him feel as if the arrangement had been there for a hundred years.

—Pine and winterberry. It's always this combination.

Noboru thought to himself. Mother arranges them just from habit and to this insensitivity to the monotonous repetition Father is insusceptible. It might as well have nothing arranged as have this display of boredom. His father took the silence Noboru fell into for his consent. In the tone of utmost relief, he said to his wife, "Now, get ready, will you?"

"That settles," Noboru's father said after his mother had left his study. "I've been worried about you. You underwent the bitterness. But I'm relieved. After the nuptials, according to our plan, Mr. Amano will pass along to you good news."

Noboru looked at his father. Ryo'an was wearing an affable smile on his face.

### 3.

Then they were attired for the ceremony and in the drawing room performed the ceremony of exchanging the nuptial cups between the couple to consummate the marriage, attended by the family members. The couple was seated against the unfolded old golden screen behind them and on the scarlet carpet spread under them, two candlesticks glowing to light them up. Noboru was attired in the samurai warrior's formal gear: a noshime ceremonial kimono robe and a flaxen kamishimo two-piece on top of it; and Masawo was arrayed all in pure white: a bridal kimono robe and sash and, on top too, an uchikake trailing wedding gown. The bride's hair was done in *bunkin-takashimada* for the wedding. The thick makeup made her look like a different, strikingly matured woman. —Their parents were of course formally dressed for the ceremony. A woman Noboru was unfamiliar with brought the nuptial cups and the choshi sake-container on the tray.

—There is no go-between present, or is there?

So Noboru vaguely thought. When the ceremony was over after it

had conformed to the wedding protocol, the woman who had brought the tray and the sake-container put her hands down on the tatami floor by the fusuma screen doors at that end of the room across the floor from the newly-weds. She greeted to them: "Let me felicitate you on your marriage." Her voice was quivering as she gave her greetings. Then it turned into sobs as her hands remained rested on the tatami and her head bent hanging. Noboru was watching the sobbing figure of the woman. Suddenly he turned taut in the face.

—Chigusa, that's Chigusa.

Noboru felt as it were if the scales had fallen off his eyes. With the fresh vision he gazed at the way she held herself. He recognized that she had awfully aged. Aging shed her completely of the dazzling lusciousness and the blindingly stunning beauty that she had had when he used to see her before he left for Nagasaki. It left no trace of them. She had her eyebrows shaved off and her teeth stained black, the insignia of a wife married to a samurai warrior. The life with the man she had infatuated with, living as she did, buried in obscurity, and the bearing of a child must have changed her so. She was now quite an ordinary, good wife like one you knew of here and there, so Noboru's eyes registered her. As he observed her deportment, he felt relieved as if he had discharged a heavy load and said inwardly to himself, though he did not know why, "All's ended well that's been hell."

"Aren't you Chigusa?" Noboru addressed her in a placid tone. "I hear you had a baby. Is it faring well?"

"Yes," Chigusa answered softly through the throat, "it got over the measles the other day."

"That's good to know," said Noboru. "We won't be seeing but give my regards to your husband."

"Well done, Chigusa," Amano Gempaku said to his daughter. "Now you can leave us."

Chigusa greeted and took leave.

"I'm much obliged for forgiving my daughter, Noboru my honor," Gempaku said, nodding. "You may think I'm a foolish father, but I've always wanted your forgiveness, by all means, and I've got it. Now that

I got it, I can resolve the disownment and hold my grandchild in my arms. Much obliged to you.”

Noboru gave a nod at him and turned to look at Masawo. Smiling, she stared at him with gratitude in her eyes.

—Thank you very much from the bottom of my heart.

So Masawo’s eyes were conveying. It came to Noboru that she had clever eyes that expressed subtle feelings. I’m lucky, he ruminated. Masawo’s not a stunning beauty, but her beauty will emerge with time, it seems to me. Chigusa is gorgeous and like flowers in full glorious blossom on a tree. The stem and branches play the sole role of helping the flowers to bloom. When the flowers pass their best and fade, the stem and branches get conspicuously shriveled. Masawo is a humble blossom. But her stem and branches grow taller each passing day and as they grow the gem in the rough is polished out. One is to be compared to a flowering tree and the other an evergreen like a conifer. The latter is a woman best suited to a marriage that is to last a whole life.

When the cup went around the old Yasumotos and the old Amanos, Gempaku sat afresh and looked at Noboru.

“Well, Noboru my honor,” Gempaku said, “you’ve been in the Infirmary one year. I’ve talked with Dr. Niide and we’ve come to a decision. As of March at the change of the fiscal years, you’ll be promoted to a doctor on probation at the shogunate.”

Noboru looked quizzical.

“I had promised that I’d arrange for you a position in the shogunate soon after you returned from Nagasaki,” continued Gempaku. “When I talked to Dr. Niide about the fettle you were in, it was decided that he’d take you on at the Infirmary for the time being.”

It must have been such a blow, Gempaku went on, for young Noboru to be betrayed by Chigusa, his fiancée that she had been, while he had been away studying in Nagasaki. Had he been let loose in society as he had been then, he might have become desperate. Rather than that, he’d be better off, involved in the busy routine of days of a place like a dispensary. There, each passing day was variegated, one from another. New medicine was needed there, too. For these reasons, without asking

Noboru if he would be interested, Gempaku had put Noboru into the Infirmary upon his return from Nagasaki.

“I met with Dr. Niide every now and then and heard about how you were getting along,” Gempaku said. “At first, it took him pain to break you in, a hard nut to crack, so Dr. Niide said with a smile. But you recovered your confidence and you, of your own will, take on those patients other doctors would avoid. Dr. Niide is very gratified. We aren’t more pleased to learn that our unreasonable plot has turned out a good result in the end. You have persevered, you’ve done it for us all. Let me thank you again.”

Wordlessly, Noboru returned his thanks.

They changed the rooms for a banquet. Noboru listened, with an open mind, to what Gempaku had to say and took it straight to heart. It was thanks to Kyojo that he bounced back. The wild oats he had sown in the imbroglio with o-Yumi, when it was looked back on, would make him shrink from stark embarrassment even now. That absurd indiscretion had come from his desperation and beckoned o-Yumi to the brink of killing him. He had been so desperate that he got soused to the gills with saké which he did not like very much and he would take out that desperation on everybody around him. Kyojo had never told him off and furthermore left him to do as he liked. He had rescued him from o-Yumi’s snare. He had consigned this humiliating scandal into oblivion so no one (except Handayu) would learn about it.

—That was the very chance of recovering myself, Noboru thought.

That humiliation made me bounce back, and until I did Kyojo had been magnanimous enough to keep quiet about it. His tolerance was a prop for me, Noboru recollected. Kyojo once told him that he had ever stolen, sold a friend, and betrayed his teacher. Noboru had no notion of how much meaning it had in reality. As it was, Kyojo was making amends for the wrongdoings he had done, so much so it appeared to Noboru, in view of the perseverance Kyojo had had for Noboru to get back on his feet and the bountiful affection he had almost without a limit toward poor people.

—Only those who have never sinned judge.

Noboru heard a voice say so in his heart.

—Those who have ever sinned never judge.

Noboru concluded: Although he had no idea whatsoever what had befallen him in his life, my master knew the darkness and heaviness of the sin. After the banquet, Noboru called Masawo to his study to have a word with her alone. She came after she had changed her clothes. She was now wearing an Edo-fine-pattern kosode with conspicuous patterns only at the bottom, which was fastened with a sash with red-maple-leaf patterns finely woven into it. The thick makeup had been cleanly cleansed, which made her look much younger than when laid out in the pure white wedding attire. On her cheeks which looked healthy and firm, the fuzz absorbed the andon light. This made her cheeks look just like the skin of a ripening peach encircled by a hazy halo. Noboru pushed aside the wooden brazier.

#### 4.

“I have one thing to ask you,” Noboru said. “As you know, your father has just told me that he’d promote me to a doctor on probation for the shogun in March.”

“Yes, he has,” Masawo gave a nod.

“That was what I used to desire. In Nagasaki, I did it my way studying medicine and contrived a new treating method,” Noboru went on slowly. “By doing so, I’d intended to win a good reputation in the world of medicine while attending to the responsibilities of a doctor on probation at the shogunate, and in the course of time to be promoted to a full doctor then onto the head of the shogunate doctors. But now I have no such ambition.”

Masawo blinked a couple of times and gazed at him with her crystal clear eyes.

“To make a long story short, I intend to remain in the Infirmary,” Noboru went on, “and I’m not sure just yet if this determination will stay the same in the years to come. Now’s the time I’d do better to stay

in the Infirmary, rather than to seek for honors and a fortune. I have to talk it over with Dr. Niide, but supposing I stay on, we'll be considerably hard up and removed farther from reputation and money. I must ask you to put up with the poverty resulting from it as a matter of course. Think on it if you can brave the kind of life we'll necessarily be in for."

She did not need to answer there and then, Noboru said. Think on it hard, then tell him what she really thought. Masawo's large eyes that would reflect subtle feelings, looking squarely into his, blinked. Then they turned crystal clear as if washed clean with water. This clarity was, as it were, replying to him with her answer unmistakably meaning that she had no objection.

"Think hard first, then give your answer," Noboru said making doubly sure. "You'll never be able to imagine what living in poverty is like. For all I must put up with, I have a faith that the current pursuit is something I find worth living for. When you make up your mind, please put in a line for a reply."

"I will," Masawo said steadfastly. "I'll follow your words."

Suddenly Noboru felt strong affection fill in his heart. Her mind was already made up. It needed no thinking. She was determined to put up with anything. It wasn't blind obedience, it was grounded by an active affirmation to whatever plight she would hold out. So it seemed to him. He smiled as he looked on Masawo with all his heart. She smiled back, the rims of her eyes turning red, and gently, so gently dropped her eyes.

"She can do it. From the way she is, she can."

So Noboru said aloud to himself once he was out after he had taken leave ahead of the Amano family. The night temperature of a cloudy day was low and the air was cold. The cold was comfortable to him. He was hot from the excitement. He strutted along in a vigorous, long stride, head held up high.

On returning to the Infirmary, Noboru dropped by Handayu's room. The first thing Handayu did was offer felicitations on his marriage with Masawo. She'd make him a good wife, Handayu said. She was the kind of woman a man must ask to be his wife. But about remaining at the Infirmary, it'd be hard, he said as he tilted his head in doubt.



“Dr. Niide has already given you up, apparently,” added Handayu, “and Tsugawa will be arriving soon, I guess.”

“You say Tsugawa, —” Noboru looked at Handayu. “It follows then that you meant it when you said the other day more staff would be needed here.”

“Well, yes. Tsugawa Genzo is hopeless, but he’ll be better than nothing if you go.”

“I shall stay here,” Noboru said in a low voice. “I shall not budge an inch no matter how Dr. Niide orders me to go.”

Handayu smiled in the corner of his mouth. Noboru’s changed, he marveled. When he first came here, he was thinking all the time about getting out of here. That’s not weird. An ordinary person may well think so. It’s only those people who are fallen on the road that come here to get treatment. They’re all clothed in rags, smeared with sweat and grime, stinking and dirty, or else, poor people almost in the same condition. We’ve got more than enough we’ve got to cope with. Other than that, we must attend Dr. Niide on his round of visits. And we’re paid exceedingly paltry wages. Noboru loathed it at first and he may well have done so, Handayu reminisced. And now he chooses to stay on, and this rather goes against the grain.

“What’s that?” Noboru said. “Why do you look at me like that?”

“Oh, it’s nothing,” Handayu said. “You might as well not hurry through it. Find a good chance and break it to him and you’ll do better.”

“Will you give me a tip when it’s due?”

“I’ll try,” said Handayu.

The next morning, when it was still dark, Noboru was woken by the noise of voices. From beyond the corridor came into his half-sleeping ears, a woman’s shrill cry demanding to let her go and another voice trying to hold her back. Noboru got out of bed straightway, changed his clothes, went out of his room, and rushed his way toward the commotion. —The hanging lights were still lighting the corridor and the floor icy cold to his bare feet. The commotion was at the entrance of a sick-room. When he went up to it, four women, who were staying with the invalids to attend them, were all out holding down the raving o-Ei.

“Calm down,” Noboru said. “We have seriously sick persons here.”

O-Ei stopped raving.

“She tried to run away,” said a middle-aged woman. “When I came back from disposing of the bedpan thing, I ran into this woman. She slid that door open and was getting out through it.”

She pointed to the cedar-panel door left ajar that opened out down to the middle yard. He shut it as the east sky was dimly lit by the first glimmer of the day.

“I’ll take care of this girl,” Noboru said to the women. “Will you go back to your room? Thanks much for taking trouble.”

The women made for their room and Noboru urged o-Ei to come with him to his room. When he was putting away the bedding, Mori Handayu came in. Noboru told him what had been up and asked him to remain with her. He himself went to Kyojo to ask what to do with her. Kyojo was already seated at his desk writing something. He listened as he wrote. Hearing it out, he put down his writing brush, and got to thinking for a while. Shortly, he sighed low, “Umph.”

“Did you meet with Amano in Koji-Machi?” Kyojo asked. It was another story.

“I had the private ceremony of exchanging the nuptial cups,” Noboru finished and brought back the initial subject: “What would you do with that young woman, sir? She must have a grave reason for which she attempted to take flight.”

“She isn’t an idiot. Like she said, she’s acting it out,” Kyojo mumbled in a way he was talking to himself, and abruptly he turned around on Noboru: “Will you listen to all she has to tell, to the minute?”

Noboru took a few seconds before he suggested, “How about Mori?”

“You do it,” said Kyojo. “You’re getting married soon. You can hope to hear something helpful to a married life. You don’t need to attend me on my round of visits this afternoon. Try and make her come out with something, in your way.”

## 5.

It took no less than two toki (four hours) before o-Ei began to talk.

Noboru had her breakfast and tea brought to his room so she could eat there, but she left both untouched. She was seated next to the wooden floor, fixed her eyes on the wall. She was demonstrating her cussed refusal with her whole body. It was past ten. Noboru was inclined to give up for the day. Just then, without warning o-Ei cleared her throat and began to talk all but sardonically in a dry voice:

“Anyways, it’s all a cart that falls to pieces.”

Noboru held his breath. O-Ei fell silent again but jerked up her shoulders and spoke with her back to Noboru:

“I shall have a baby. No matter who says no matter what, I shall raise my baby on my own like a good mother. Be assured, doc.”

Noboru remained silent. He thought she would go on in spite of the silence he would keep up. But o-Ei clammed up and sat still quite a while. It had to be his turn to talk. He began as if he couldn’t have cared less:

“If you want to have a baby, then you can have it here. How come you tried to run away?”

“Because Mom’ll come,” o-Ei said. “Next time she comes, I’m sure the doctor’ll abort this baby of mine. That’s why I tried to get away from here and I’ll have my baby elsewhere.”

Noboru took a long enough pause before he asked: “But wouldn’t it be all that easy to bring up a child without a father?”

“Humph,” o-Ei snorted. “Father, hun, —you’ll be much better off without one.”

“Why?” asked Noboru.

O-Ei, her face toward the wall still, began apathetically:

Her father was called Sataro, whose whereabouts were unknown now. He’d been an entertainer. He had no specialty. He could at best play the shamisen three-string instrument and had a good voice to go with it. He was the kind of entertainer who was called to perform from occasion to occasion with small troupes and at guest houses some times, and other

times out performing as a strolling musician. He earned nothing to speak of. It was seldom he made money for a living. —He met her mother o-Kané at a tavern or something. O-Kané was crazy about him, and they had fights all the time not because they were hard up but because the wife was jealous if he had a mistress elsewhere.

—I don't kick up a fuss about money, o-Kané would always say. You're an entertainer. I know entertainers and money are strangers to each other. What I mean is women. Don't pretend, you got a woman somewhere again. Ain't I right?

And then it would end in a scuffle of blowing and kicking. When she came as far as this, abruptly o-Ei whirled around on Noboru. Eyes glaring she said:

“You're cheating me, aren't you, doc?”

“What about?”

“You've made me tell you stories like this, and then you'll cheat me into aborting this baby. Will you not, doc?”

“Be sensible!” Noboru said. “This is a place authenticated by the shogunate. It's under the control of the town magistrate. A yoriki police officer is always stationed. Do you think that, in a place like this, it's allowed to perform an abortion when the mother doesn't want it?”

“All men are the same,” o-Ei muttered beneath her breath, “If only women didn't have their men, they would, so would their children, have no trouble they'd otherwise have.”

Noboru said nothing. Then o-Ei resumed her accounts:

O-Kané was really so gone on Sataro she had been and gone and bit off more than she could chew to let him have all he wanted. They had six children between them. Ritsu, the eldest daughter, was to be twenty-three this year; Su'e, the youngest daughter, nine. In between were two boys called Jiro and Kaneji. All the children were made to work for a living when they turned six or seven. They were put to service as a babysitter or errand boy. Both parents took turns appearing at their workplace and asked the employer for an advance on the pittance their children made. O-Ritsu was put out to live-in service at a geisha house in Fukagawa. The amassed debts of her wages were such that she was

made to take a john to repay them in the spring of her twelfth year. When she ran back home in her fright, Sataro her father went to negotiate with the employer. How he concluded the negotiation nobody knew, but she was sold to a brothel as a maidservant in the oka-basho, an unlicensed prostitution district, at Honjo-Ataké.

—Be reassured, this time it’s a good and honest service as a maid.

So Sataro said. At first she had only to do chores in the kitchen and run errands. But in about fifty days, she was made to take a john. In her attempt at flight from the john, she was caught and flogged brutally to death. In no less than fifty days, both her parents had asked for advances that came up to nearly ten ryo.

“I was eight at that time and was babysitting as a live-in servant at a sembei cracknel shop in front of the Hachiman War-God Shrine in Fukagawa,” said o-Ei. “Then, one day while babysitting, I went to see my sister at her live-in workplace. There I was told by her what my parents had gone and done.”

Her big brother Jiro was nine and apprenticed at an inn in Bakuro-Cho. It was the third place he had served because of the amassed advances his parents had made. He was complaining about having to let go of all he earned, not a penny to his name. On the way back after she had talked with her sister, she thought about being in the same boat she and her big sister and brother were in and falling the prey to their parents’ predation. Her younger brother Kaneji aged four now and younger sister Hana who had just been born would also be prey to the vultures in time soon or later. Young girl as she was, she was chilled to the heart.

O-Ei changed her serving place to a wholesale chandlery in Shitaya when she was ten. In about a half year, her big sister stopped by her workplace and said, “I’ll run away because the work is too painful.” O-Ritsu, her big sister, was fourteen then, but she’d been reduced to a wretched physique due to the two-year tough and rough labor. She was as small and skinny as her kid sister o-Ei.

—I’m this defiled and finished useless, but you consider yourself and stay away from all that foolishness and protect yourself. You get it?

So her big sister said as she parted.

How to avoid falling prey to her parents' predation o-Ei had ever since kept thinking and thinking only about that. Her father and mother came as ever for the advance of her wages. The excuse her mother made was that they were "hard put to it" because another daughter o-Su'e had come on the heel of o-Hana. As it was, it wouldn't be long before o-Ei would be sold to a brothel like her big sister. What could she do? She thought and hit upon an idea.

"There was a loony called Matsu in the neighborhood of the shop I worked for in Ikenohata-Naka-Machi," o-Ei continued. "He was sixteen or eighteen, but he couldn't talk satisfactorily. His nose was running and mouth drooling. He was wandering in the neighborhood all the time. No one cared about him except children. This young man entered my head."

She wouldn't be sold if she became an idiot. At the age of ten, o-Ei made up her mind to become demented. Then one day, while helping them stack the stock in the storehouse, she fell down the ladder and hit her head and back. She didn't do it on purpose. She accidentally missed her footing on the ladder. And she had lost consciousness for a while.

## 6.

"I came to, and while I was being given water I decided it was time," o-Ei said. "I had a splitting headache and the back pained too much to bend a couple of days. With these consequences I started pretending to have gone loony."

She'd known of loony Matsu and had only to mimic him. The doctor was the first to be taken in. His diagnosis was that her derangement came from hitting her head, but that she'd be back to normal in a little while. O-Ei pretended to be getting better at one time and at another behaved as if she'd grown much more demented. The proprietor of "Kinroku" was neither good nor mean in particular. He felt responsible for o-Ei's misfortune, but then again he began to decline advances asked for by Sataro and his wife because the girl was useless now.

—I'll take care of o-Ei because she was involved in the work for my shop and became like this, but I can't pay her wages any more.

And if they didn't think it enough, the proprietor added, he'd have their debts written off. Take her home. Sataro came and tried to take her home thrice or so, but every time he came, o-Ei clung to the pillar and screamed and shouted her head off as if all the neighbors could hear: "I don't wanna go home!" and bit her father's hand, ramped and raved.

While hearing her accounts, Noboru was covertly watching o-Ei. Her accounts were consistent and her bearing was nothing but normal. But her speech was slurred by the tongue-tie. Incessantly she rubbed the underside of her nose and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. As if she minded her nose running, her mouth drooling, and wiping them. This movement made her look like a perfect idiot. Mimicking an idiot had become her way and was now second nature to her. So Noboru guessed and he was amazed at the inveteracy of one's wholehearted efforts.

"If I had ordinary parents, I wouldn't do such an absurd thing," o-Ei went on. "Both of my parents are extraordinary, out of the way. They sponge off their own children one and all. They don't do a stroke of work, not work to speak of. They binge on drinks and good foods and idle time away, lotus-eaters, that's all they do."

Look at the world, said o-Ei. Poor families look the same in one way or another. Parents who love their kids, even, can't do anything if they are poor. More or less, they can't help but give them a hard time. She went on, Above all, men are feckless. I've watched men through the years. They go wrong a little after thirty. They begin to seek for pleasures, as if of necessity, in either drinking or whoring or gambling, and forget their family. I don't know how it is in rich families. Nor do I say all of poor men do so, but eight or nine out of ten are, without fail, infatuated with seeking for pleasures.

"Men are like a cart that'll break down in time," o-Ei said. "I might as well bear the load myself from scratch as do when the cart breaks."

O-Ei continued: Therefore I refuse to have a husband. Mother and child alone can get by. I can bring up a child as I work as a housemaid.

A mother alone will give her child no trouble it doesn't need to have. I'll give birth to this child and give it good upbringing.

"Then," Noboru asked, "is your mother still going to sponge off you? Is that why she insists on having your baby aborted?"

"Exactly," o-Ei nodded and wiped her mouth. "Dad disappeared three years ago, and Mom took to drinking in her desperation of losing Dad. She sold my kid sister Hana to a geisha house, and now she's going to go and sell little Su'e, nine years old."

"Does it mean your mother has detected the idiot you're acting?"

"That's another story," o-Ei shook her head with a vengeance. "I mean, some johns value a loony girl more as a rarity insomuch as she's sound in wind and limb."

Noboru didn't say anything for a little while. "They're perverts," he said, "it's simply perverse that there are such johns. It's them that are broken carts."

"Am I allowed to have a baby?"

"You bet," he said and looked at her in the way he'd put her to test. "But what does your man think?"

"What does my man think, what do you mean, doc?"

"You don't have a husband, but your baby does have a father, right?"

O-Ei stole a giggle. "Oh, don't let it worry you. When I said I'd have a baby, he disappeared into thin air for keeps."

"Wasn't he one of the assistants?"

"Who knows?" o-Ei said cryptically. She shook her head cunningly, saying, "I only wanted a child. If I'm a loony and mother, Mom'll give up and there'll be no man will make advances on me. —Were I alone, I wouldn't be confident in getting by in the long years ahead. If only I have a child, hardships and pains in life are worth going through, doc. For this reason I've simply wanted a child. The man I loved has gone into limbo. I don't even remember what he looked like."

Her big sister o-Ritsu had once tried at flight but been caught soon, o-Ei went on. She was now twenty-three. Till then she'd hopped from place to place and had a job in a brothel in Senju now. Her big brother Jiro was twenty. He'd blown into a navvys' doss-house of sorts, and



made a social deviant of himself. She was worried about her kid brother Kaneji, fifteen years old, and her two kid sisters. But the focus was more on her determination to keep being devoted to protecting herself and her child to come on. That was all she was capable of. And she concluded her account.

“I fully understand,” Noboru said. “The Infirmary will look after you until you have a baby, so go back to your room and be like a good girl. Let me tell you: Try to get away and you’ll only land in a pickle.”

“Yes, doc,” o-Ei nodded, “I’ll never do a thing like that again.”

On the same evening, Noboru waited for Kyojo to come back from his round of visits and recounted o-Ei’s story. Kyojo listened wordlessly. Since Kyojo remained silent even when he finished his recount, Noboru asked if he could take care of her until she had a baby.

“Until she has a baby, —” Kyojo looked at Noboru dubiously. Then he nodded hurriedly, “Sure, we’ll look after her. What else can we do?”

Noboru faltered as he said, “Rather, the problem remains with her mother, sir.”

“I’ll talk to her. Has the daughter calmed down?”

“She has, sir.”

“Tomorrow if you will, will you go and meet with the proprietor of ‘Kinroku’?” said Kyojo. “Tell him the circumstances. We’ll keep her until she gets to be mother and child. And after that, when they do well, will he employ her as a maid or something? This, will you ask him?”

Noboru said affirmative.

## 7.

The next day, Noboru visited “Kinroku” in Ikenohata-Naka-Cho and met with Omi-Ya Rokube’e the proprietor of the firm. He would not easily believe that o-Ei was a fake idiot but consented to employing her as a maidservant.

“I’ll get a storeroom remodeled and let her live in it,” Rokube’e said. “Idiot or not, o-Ei is a hard worker and makes herself useful. Needless

to say, we will never let her mother come near her.”

“That’s what I’d like to ask you especially among other things, sir,” Noboru emphasized.

A seriously injured person had just been carried in when Noboru returned to the Infirmary. He had no time to take a break for two toki or so working together with Handayu. The treatment got over with and the patient’s condition eased, the two went to the dining hall to have tea. Thereupon, someone came to tell that a woman called o-Kané was waiting. Startled, Noboru looked at him hard. It was not the usher but Tsugawa Genzo who came to fetch him.

“Hey, there you are, Tsugawa,” Noboru said.

“It’s good to be remembered,” Genzo said with an ironic smile on his face. “You and I always take each other’s place, and this time I’ve come back to take my good old place you’ve held to date.”

Noboru looked at Handayu, who turned his face off with a grimace on it.

“What are you going to do with that woman?” Tsugawa asked.

“Dr. Niide is supposed to see her,” Noboru said. “Will you tell her to wait until he gets back?”

“She’s drunken,” Tsugawa said. “She’s making a scene in the ante-room. Can you leave her alone?”

Noboru gave it a little thought and said, “Well then, I’ll see her. Will you bring her to my office?”

“Your office, is that it, my liege?” Tsugawa made a bow, his palms put together before his chest, and said, “Very well, young doctor.”

Handayu clenched a fist. Seeing Genzo off, Noboru said to him, “Never mind.”

“Never mind? —” Handayu said as he wheezed around on him, “you’ll never mind because you’ll go, Yasumoto, but when I’m left alone with him, I’ll have to . . .”

“Oh, I see,” Noboru waved off as he stood up, “Don’t get so steamed up. He won’t be here. That, I told you the other day.”

Handayu unclenched his fist and then again firmly clenched it.

“But,” he retorted, “isn’t that something you *alone* have decided?”

Noboru replied nothing and hung down his head. He’d very much have had it out: It’s this. O-Ei had made up her mind to protect herself as youthful an age as ten. Protecting herself, she’d have a baby soon. She was determined to give it a good upbringing in a pandemonium of this cold world. Kyojo had lived the same way. He’d said he hoped that one’s hope would bear fruit where one would make a point of putting an effort, unflinchingly one upon another, into something that would end in nothing rather than into something that would turn out crops in evidence, or in sum, into where the effort made would come to nothing. He had proclaimed that he’d commit himself more to an endeavor that would need effort but which would seem to end in nothing.

—Any buds sprout and keep growing in hotbeds. In ice-bound earth, too, won’t you truly have anything to live for if only you have the passion to help them grow?

So Noboru had meant to say, but he didn’t.

“I’ll stay here,” Noboru replied instead. “It’s Dr. Red Beard who put me in here. I’ll get him to pay for it.”

So saying, he left the dining hall.

Back to his office, Noboru found Tsugawa Genzo chatting with o-Kané. Rather than chatting, he was teasing her. O-Kané’s body was rocking to and fro from drunkenness. She was having ribald talks at the top of her voice, to which Tsugawa was assenting in sheer vulgarism.

“Oh, that’s you,” o-Kané said upon recognition of Noboru. “I remember that face. Huh, yucky! This doctor is much more lovable, isn’t he? Hey, don’t you put on airs.”

Without responding to it, Noboru sat at his desk.

“Well now, my liege,” Tsugawa said and rose to his feet, “it seems my duty is over. Let me be excused. Will I be, young doctor?”

Noboru didn’t even turn to Tsugawa Genzo and kept silent as he saw Genzo go out. O-Kané looked so fuddled that when she tried to sit formally on her knees, the front part of her robe broke open at her knees and her pale-blue underwear peeped.

“How did you doctors decide about that doltish girl?” o-Kané said.

“It’s not the matter of rhyme or reason. Abortion, that’s what you’ll give to her. Will you?”

“Your daughter wants to have a baby.”

“Ridiculous!” O-Kané swept her hands as if to get rid of a cobweb in her face. “How could she? Of all great people, doctors of the Infirmary should have taken a loony’s words for it. How could you? Please don’t dawdle, be finished with it all asap, doctor. I’m not a Croesus as you see them around. I just can’t afford to be easygoing like them.”

“You’d better give it up,” Noboru said, suppressing the rising anger. “Your daughter says she’s going to have it and we’re going to let her do so. You’d better quit exploiting your daughter.”

The next moment, Noboru regretted to say what he’d gone and said, Aw, shucks! All at once o-Kané got stiffened. Her facial muscles, which had been loosened from inebriation, suddenly came together and grew taut just as though her face had been tightly wound up with strings. It stiffened and contorted in an ever uglier way. Her expression suggested with a menace that she’d pounce on him any minute.

“Do you say I exploit my girl?” said o-Kané, “When did I exploit her? What right do you have to say what you said just now? Listen, man, I, such as I am, ever have had no one point their finger at me and backbite me, not once. Now that I’ve had ya say what ya’ve said, I can’t dare to go out in public. Now, produce the evidence that’ll show I sponged off my girl and let me see it, eh, man!”

“O-Ritsu, one of your daughters, what’s she doing?” Noboru asked back in a whisper. “What are Jiro, Kaneji, and o-Hana doing? What are you going to do with the youngest daughter o-Su’e?”

“Hun!” O-Kané turned aside. “Ya mind yer own business, man. Ya ain’t in the position to know what they’re doin’. I gave birth to all of ’em and brought ’em all up, tell ya, man. Who in the heck am I to be preached by another like ya, no matter what I do with my own kids?”

“Then, don’t say to show you the evidence.”

O-Kané gasped and turned to glare at Noboru over her shoulder.

“I’m their mother, ya know,” she lashed out at Noboru. “It’s natural children should do what they can fer their parents, huh? I myself have

taken pains all my life for my parents since I was a kid. This is how it is between parents and children, eh?” Coming this far, o-Kané suddenly grew imperious as if impromptu, and said, “The authorities award ya if you’re a good son. Filial piety is the source of all virtues, goes the common sayin’. It’s children’s piety for their parents that rounds off all things in the world. Don’tcha think, eh, man?”

## 8.

Noboru began to tremble all over. Trembling, he thought of something to say for a word of brutal irony in spite of the keen awareness that he was no match for her in a verbal contest, for she was a woman of forty with disparate backgrounds such as the upbringing and the experience in life. It was the matter of only brief moments. Before he started in on it, the shoji suddenly slid open, and Kyojo entered.

Kyojo’s entrance gave o-Kané a start. She readjusted her posture. He took his seat right in front of her and just kept gazing her into the face for several moments without a word. The shoji was left open. When Noboru was about to get up to shut it, Kyojo said, shaking his head:

“Leave it. It stinks.”

Noboru sat down.

“Stinks?” o-Kané said. “Doctor, are you trying to get back at me?”

“No, I’m not,” said Kyojo. “This room is infested with your rotten nature and stinking so much, it makes me feel like throwing up. Sniff that body of yours good and well.”

“What my nature?”

“Not only your nature, but your whole self, from head to toes, is rotten to the bones,” Kyojo said. “There are parents in the world who are too hard up to feed their children and have to get them to work for a living. But there are none who are robust and laze around with nothing better to do. No parents sell their children so they can indulge in drinking. They’re not parents, nor are they human beings. Listen, beasts, dogs for one, don’t spare their life to protect their puppies. They seek to

feed their puppies even when there's nothing for themselves to eat. Beasts as they may be, they love their little ones inasmuch as they are parents. But you're worse."

O-Kané tried to say something in retort, and Kyojo shouted her to silence, "Shut up."

"The Infirmary will take on your girl," Kyojo went on. "I'll report you to the town magistrate. Were you to keep on sponging off your children, I'd ask the authorities to do something with you. Hammer it into your head."

"No, I won't give a shit to such a threat!"

"Vamoose," Kyojo said. "Mind you, you'll be in the custody of the police if you do anything further to your children."

"No way. Who the hell cares?" o-Kané said as she stood up. "Huh, town magistrate?" The fuddled face grew pale. She tottered. "Livin' in Edo of all towns as I do, don't you think I can get by in this world? Scared shitless of the town magistrate? Knock off yer phony bravados at the sour grapes. That splits my sides."

This woman o-Kané wouldn't flinch, I'm no such woman, should the town magistrate come for me all in a legion. So saying, o-Kané tottered out, wobbled her way, and disappeared beyond the corridor.

"That's done it again," Kyojo mumbled. "There's something wrong with me these days. Seldom did I use to shout at or debase anybody that much before. The trouble with that woman is only that she's ignorant and foolish. She oughtn't to be blamed for that. It's because of the poverty and circumstances she's lived in."

"I don't think so, sir," Noboru said.

Kyojo lifted his eyes and looked at him. "*You* don't think so?"

"In my opinion, a person's nature has nothing to do with poverty or circumstances which could be either good or evil," said Noboru. "I've attended you, sir, on your round of visits nearly one year. I've met people from different walks of life. Some had the background which afforded them comfortable circumstances, in which they'd been brought up and given good education, but they were worse than lowlife people. Others, who had been brought up in the unbearably evil circum-

stances and didn't even know their hiragana letters, were admirably respectable persons. I met not just a few of them, I did quite a few, sir."

"That is to say, a poisonous plant never loses its poison no matter how much care it is given, hun!" said Kyojo, "But Yasumoto, man has made good medicines from poisonous plants. That woman o-Kané is a wicked mother. And the more yelled at and despised she gets, the more wicked she will get. As mankind has made medicines out of poisonous plants, so we should make an effort to bring out good from evil persons. Humans are humans."

"I may be taking up the thread of the story, sir," Noboru quietly responded. "You have called back Tsugawa. Is it in the same vein, sir?"

"Why do you bring out Tsugawa here?"

"I'd like to ask what you think, sir."

"Do you go and mean me to shout at you, too?"

"Probably, I shall make you shout at me, sir," Noboru said calmly. "There's absolutely no need of calling Tsugawa back, because I shall stay here."

Kyojo narrowed his eyes. "—Who allowed you to?"

"You did, sir."

"Did I, did I allow you to stay?"

"Yes, you did, sir."

"No, I never did," Kyojo shook his head. "You, Yasumoto Noboru, are slated to serve the shogunate as a shogunal doctor on probation. It's already decided."

"No other place but this Infirmary needs doctors who deserve to be called doctors in the true sense of the word, —you told this to me at the very start of my career, sir." Noboru persisted doggedly, "I've also learned from the life here that medicine is a caring profession, humanitarian art—"

"Whatever preposterous idea got into your head?" suddenly, Kyojo ranted at Noboru and interrupted, "How do you dare to say medicine is a humanitarian art?" He got defiant. But apparently aware that he was ranting and raving, he drew in a deep breath and turned down to a calm voice. "—There's a lot of baloney. Hypocritical doctors speciously say

medicine is a humanitarian profession. They're all sham doctors who profess to make money. They adorn their entrance to look respected so they can ask exorbitant charges for treatment and medication. It's stuff and nonsense which enable them, pseudo-doctors, to hide the fact that they're making irrational money."

Noboru fell silent.

"Other than a humanitarian art, medicine can't as yet satisfactorily cure common cold. Nor can doctors identify the causes of the disease correctly. They only depend on the patients' vital strength and are just probing and fumbling blindfolded in an ungainly manner. They really don't know what they're doing. And, in most cases, they're all the more sham doctors because they won't try to move a muscle even to probe."

"For all that, sir," Noboru said, "do you say you'll displace me and take back Tsugawa?"

"This is quite another story."

"It's the same story, you know it every well, sir," Noboru said. "Let me announce as clearly as clearly can be: Even though you may wield force, I S-H-A-L-L S-T-A-Y H-E-R-E. I know of your physical strength, sir, but I know I won't give up all that easy. Please use your force and throw me out if you will, sir."

"You're a fool."

"It's because of you, sir."

"You're a fool." Kyojo stood to his feet. "You're sowing wild oats and saying so, but the time will come when you must pay for it."

"Now I have your permission, don't I, sir?"

"I'm sure you'll eat humble pie for it."

"I'll give it a big shot, sir," Noboru bent his head down and said, "Thank you very much, sir."

Kyojo went out slowly.



## Afterword:

### Theorization Comes First? Or does Praxis? Or...?

#### Throwing the protagonists into relief

Maybe I'm a slow translator since it has taken a solid three years to complete a translation of *Akahige Shinryō Tan*, or *Vignettes of Red Beard the Doctor* consisting of eight episodes. Throughout them an old doctor and philanthropist Niide Kyojo and a young contender, rather misanthropist at the very first, Yasumoto Noboru debate the way medicine ought to be in the face of the ignorance and privation with which people, citizens of the society which is stratified due to the widening of income gaps, are afflicted as they live in downtown Edo in the period of the Edo era, supposedly in the middle of the eighteenth century. Before he knows it, Noboru is using his master's humanitarian eyes. In time this young hopeful learns to see the world which unfolds right before him myriad possibilities of human life, as something to be affirmed.

Not only that, but Noboru, as does Kyojo, learns to favorably look at what humans of all but no means go and do as something loveable. This is what ought to be depicted exactly in the same vein and verve as the original. Or ought the gap society to be? No, it must stay back to make the pair of young and old doctors clearly outlined. Failing to draw in the high-definition clarity philanthropist Kyojo and contender Noboru lose their resplendence and renders the story lackluster, making it a dull read. Although my mind hankers after a much longer time, three years ought to be long enough to explore the merits of the protagonists and time enough to throw them into relief so the back-bone of gap society will help them stand out.

#### Any Such Thing Definite or Indefinite?

Translating a book from cover to cover did take me three years. The years I ran through to get bodily to the target text, was spent for the purpose of crying out: "Here I am! Now I can report the

victory on behalf of my friend,” like a Marathon runner in the Grecian age. The span of the time does not leave any leeway for anything else, such as the rectification of anomalies that cost the unity which penetrates the whole entity, the use of rhetoric to season the style, which is about to incubate for the current translator, and the scintillations that reflect the confetti of cherry blossoms in the soft spring light render the translation a better read.

The current translator may have been timid and shy and scared in the lexical choice in order that the gem would be polished out of the rough. In consequence, I have oscillated in making decisions. Here’s the proof in which subtle effect can be observed. What differences are to be perceived between *The Episodes...* and *The Vignettes...* , and between *The Vignettes...* and *Vignettes...* ? One “see”s “a world in a grain of sand / And a heaven in a wild flower,” and one “hold”s “infinity in the palm of” one’s “hand / And eternity in an hour”. (William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*) One sees what Blake has to say in the title of the translation which changed each and every time it came out, batch by batch, as the first vignette progressed toward the last. It appeared as:

in 2009 *The Episodes of Red Beard the Doctor (1)*

in 2010 *The Vignettes of Red Beard the Doctor (2)*, and

in 2011 *Vignettes of Red Beard the Doctor (3)*.

Who knows how it will end up in another three years’ time?

Translation studies must admit that it must go many more miles, yes, many more miles indeed, before it can sweetly sleep in the soft bed of the triangular stability of translating: theorization, praxis, and assessment. It is still in a cot or as yet in the mother’s uterus as an embryo or fetus. Every pursuit is sweet. Because it is sweet, too, translating is challenging, too. One who is interested in this area of concentration is willing to forget passage of time, agonize over the choice of word, and be hooked on wallowing through the mire of choosing a unique structure of a sentence – one, not more than one, choice is allowed since it is a paradigmatic operation of language, ie, stylistic choice. Therefore, the pursuer is addicted to delirium and relies so much on ‘qualitative’ elements, such as intuition, fortuitous encounter, and serendipity, which make the scientific establishment of translation studies even more recondite. Therefore,

there is all the more reason for translation retaining the defeatist expression of having been an also-ran. Look, it's still an infant, a tot! Can never stand on its own feet.

### **Stand on its Own, Not Subordinated by Other Disciplines**

Can translation studies (theorization, praxis, and assessment) stand side by side with other linguistic or literary disciplines without being used as a tool by its big brothers and sisters?

This discipline ought also to employ at least one quantitative perspective so it will be acknowledged as a scientific proposition. What factor will suit the need? Translating from cover to cover (“praxis”) has come up with a number of problems to consider and solve (“theorization” enabling “assessment”), and hopefully the problems may help find it.

### **1) “Traddutore, Traditore” (“A Translator, a Traitor”, or**

**Untranslatability):** Between no matter what languages, when translation is done, it is natural there are big gaps between the source text and the target text. Nothing in the reproduction (TT) can be exactly the same as the original (ST). So much is lost in the process, it could be said that there has been gained a spinoff in a creative way, not in a pejorative or tampering way. In translation how can exactly the same thing be reproduced when, from scratch, the phonetic systems, for one, are completely different from each other, at least between Japanese and English? Thus, the question of untranslatability is inveterately unsolvable insofar as one sticks to the perfectionism or conceptualism of translation.

**2) No Substitutes Found:** Cultural differences or different lifestyles and different times can find no words that substitute for the words used in either language. This includes things physical and metaphysical. Dialect is one example. What is the use if the dialect used in Edo (now Tokyo) in the Edo era (17th century to 20th), temporally and spatially remote (or metaphorically, interstellarly) and going extinct, should be substituted for phonetic features in that which one hears in Brooklyn in NYC. What equivalence is brought about and for what help? For the creation of a pseudo atmosphere? Could be. And so what?

**3) Logical Representation (Grammar and Usage):** Different ways of thinking reflect on the way language is and are represented in grammar – word order, collocability, number, determiners, pronouns, tense, etc. However, it is often that nothing is admitted into usage if grammatical. If not grammatical, it could make sense. And that's that. Whereas grammar is the logical representation of language, usage does not easily let logical veins be brought to light. For translators, both grammar and usage ought to be part of them, ready to be of service to them before the combination of both is reasoned out.

### **How to translate?**

What is to be translated? This is always the humongous proposition when it comes to the topic of translatability. Perfectionists talk of translation as if nothing is readily and really translated. No, it isn't. But why do people go on talking about translation and translating and come up with the product of the enterprise? Focus is to be directed on this.

Let us come straight to the point. Translation is, the core part of communication in that communication is the collage of, to borrow Roman Jakobson's terminology (*On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*, 1959), intralingual translation or rewording/paraphrasing, interlingual translation, and intersemiotic translation. What is to be communicated, in principle, ought to be translatable. If anything communicable is translatable, it matters how it is translated. Problems burgeon under the rubrics as mentioned above in the foregoing section:

- 1) "Traddutore, Traditore";
- 2) No substitutes found; and
- 3) Logical representation.

Problems again have risen from the praxis of translating *Vignettes of Red Beard the Doctor*. Each and every one of them help debates go on about how things communicable are to be translated.

Take a few problems for example:

- 1) "Traddutore, Traditore": things that are extinct can only be extant in imagination, as long as they are committed to memory. How about lifestyles three centuries ago? The protagonists of

my translation should be at least some three hundred years old.

- 2) No Substitutes Found: the Edo dialect is a good example, for almost nothing suggests which dialect it can be compared with, If any, does it bring back the verisimilitude of the idiosyncrasies of the dialect? Traditional things exclusively particular to Japan have no substitutes in English – samurai, daimyo, shogun? Well, well, well. Is there a need to present analogies? Leave as they are in Japanese and let English readers encounter the same thing over and over again and make them accustomed to the original? Or put footnotes every time it occurs and harass the readers, winding up in dissipating the readers' attention? Or what?
- 3) Logical representation (grammar and usage): The established time frame enables English readers to gain the axis of time. The English language is no more rigorous in establishing the time frame than the Japanese language is, by use of the represented speech, a Pandora's box of the tense of speech. However, the latter language is more lenient by far in handling it. Setting a time frame is incomparably stricter with English than with Japanese. There is such a difference as one sees between a probationary sentence and a capital sentence. Apply to English the leniency of the Japanese tense system and let the tenses run wild. English readers will be led away into the maize of time and fly into a vertigo, passing out from the loss of the temporal ground they stand on.

### **Translation as a Tool of Communication**

In the previous section, just a few problems have been listed out of the many which are cluttered throughout the entire body of the present work. Giving elaborate consideration to them will give clues to successful communication. If there is anything that needs to be communicated, the first thing to do is make a good translation of what is going to be conveyed – intra-/interlingually and intersemiotically.

In the next three years, the translation I refer to here may appear under a totally different title after all is readjusted, leaving almost no incompatibilities, much more merits having accrued to its readability,

making it a good read, if there is any such thing in the current translation.

But where does the accrument of merits come from? If one piece among others is of a quantitative perspective, the other pieces will be supported by that very piece and be more visible in terms of quantitatively increasing betterment. In other words, the base on which translation pieces are laid up together will be steadfast. In order to keep up the steadfastness, each of the problems must take enough time and be elaborately (re)solved. Then, there is a hope that communication and translation will take each other's hand by way of the quantitative intermediary. The current translator will remain quiet for the next three years in working on the pieces until they build up to be a reputable edifice entitled *Vignettes...* , or ... .

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