

***Heart Matters\* : Short Stories\*\****  
**by Yamamoto, Shugoro (3)**  
**A Translation**

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**Our Youngest One**

**1 The Clan's Assessment of Him**

Koide, Hoary Bozo (Don'ō), his grandfather (deceased), said:

“About Heigo? Well yes, maybe not too bad. Because his grandmother pampered him too much, he seems to be a little bit mollycoddled, but not too bad. Well, he's quick-witted one way or another and if he happens upon a marriage into a good family, chances are he'll break the ground. However, he won't luck out and find such a windfall, but the boy's not bad the way he is, I guess.”

Ichi-Jo, his grandmother (deceased), said:

“He's a clever boy. He has a character diametrically opposed to that of

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\* The title was newly given by the translator; the author himself did not bring out a collection of any of his short stories under any such title pregnant of a number of interpretations. The translator leaves it to the reader how it is to be interpreted.

\*\* Translated from : 「末っ子」 (“Suekko” ), and 「桑の木物語」 (“Kuwa no Ki Monogatari” ), in *Shinchō Bunko*, Shinchō Publishing Co. Tokyo. 2007 and 2011 (first ed. 1965 and 1975), respectively. These stories first appeared in *Ōru Yomimono*. October 1957, and *King*. November 1949, respectively.

Kei-san or Moku-san. He is more reliable than his two elders. Although his grandfather coddles him, and, since he's our youngest one, that's, well you know, he has a character which is strong and clever in the core of him. Oh yes, I like Heigo best of all my grandchildren. Look at him in a long-term perspective, and I'll assure you you'll see him get way on in life."

Koide Gemba, his father, says:

"I should say, well, he's not of a desirable character. I don't want to say stuff like this as his father, but I feel in my bones he'll risk our fortune by marring our family name some day. For one thing, he doesn't respect me as his father. He hasn't since an infant. Take an example: when he was still a baby, yes, as young as thirty days old, he stuck out his tongue on seeing me. He was such a little baby and couldn't possibly have had any intention. I thought at first it was mere haphazard but it didn't seem so. He didn't stick out his tongue toward others. He did it exclusively toward me. He stuck out his tongue anytime he looked at me. That made me feel bad. This isn't something I can talk about to anyone, not to my wife, even. I can't still forget the feeling I got those days that I was despised. I've since kept tabs on what he has done. Everything he has done is flippant and unlike a son of samurai. He lacks the consciousness of being a son of the shogun's direct retainer with annual revenue of 36,900 bushels of rice. No one else may know of, say, bean-jammed buns or *manju*, old socks and old underwear, and antique shops. I know all he has done about them. Frankly, all this is deplorably beyond description. Furthermore, it is despicable when I think about the lineage of our family. We are a family with long history which stretches as far back as the Mikawa times when our ancestors shared the trouble and pain in fighting for the foundation of the Tokugawa Shogunate."

Keijiro, the eldest brother, says:

"He's the youngest and baby of the house. As people put it, the youngest is three pennies cheap. He is, thus, originally cheap but cheaper than that because he was pampered by his grandfather and grandmother. We are too ashamed of the way he is to marry him into a family even if that family is keen on him. He's the pain in the ass."

Itsu-Jo, his mother, says:

“I haven’t the faintest idea how he feels. He’s a stranger to me. Since he’s the lastborn and because of it I ought not to pamper him. As I brought him up I took as much trouble as I could, not to. No, not that he’s either rough or sloppy. Rather, he’s the cleverest of my children. He’s never answered me back. He’s always complied with what I say, a good boy. However, it’s just superficial, and I can’t help but wonder if he sticks out his tongue at others in his heart of hearts. He attended the school in Hijiri Slope regarding learning, and regarding military arts he attended the school of Mr. Yagyū because the school was close by. He goes to attend the day’s lectures once in a while in Hijiri Slope. Anyway he did well on both, learning and military arts, it seems, and possibly this makes him puffed up with pride. He doesn’t get along with his father or his eldest brother Kei-san, so I often get stumped caught between them. There have been a couple of offers of his adoption into a family by marriage, but Kei-san hasn’t let him get married at any time. He says: supposing we marry him the way he is, he’ll bring shame on us Koide family. And not to mention, he himself doesn’t seem to be interested in getting married. He is already as old as twenty-four. What is he going to do? I have no idea. The youngest is the youngest, he’s enjoying being a mollycoddle. Yes, most probably so, and I really don’t know what it’s all about. Really, he is a total stranger to me.”

Haru-Jo, wife of his eldest brother, says:

“About Heigo? Well, it beats me. I don’t really know about him, to be sure. I don’t think he’s as bad as my husband says. Everyone, I think, is a little too strict with him. Oh, I’m not quite sure. Right, to be honest with you, I don’t really know about him.”

Mokunosuke, the second elder brother (married into the Kinoshita family), says:

“He’s the lastborn and the spoilt of the family. Although a wimp, he’s aggressive, and he’s sly one way or another. He’s detestable. He’s a clown but you must be on the alert. Whenever I see his face, I get itchy in the nape of my neck. Now this is my prediction: he will be nothing but a good-for-nothing.”

Yoné, the eldest sister (married to Hijikata), says:

“Heigo is weird. Mollycoddled though precocious. He’s hard to love in any way. I’ve had no feelings for him as his sister. A relative of the Hijikatas offered him a marriage, but he turned it down. My husband Hijikata got angry at that time and I was vexed. But when I come to think of it now, in my feeling, it was better he turned down. It makes all my hair stand on its end now to think about him becoming a member of the Hijikata clan. I’m really sorry for my father and mother when I think they are still put out by him.”

Kuni, the second elder sister (married to Mera), says:

“You mean that boy? Well, he’s our youngest one, and my grandmother cosseted him for all she was worth, so he’s a little bit of a cosset, it seems. However, he’s independent to the contrary of everyone’s assessment and I see him very considerate to others. For example, nobody may know this: through the grapevine, he’s making casual contributions to uncle Shinjo. My husband Mera is very fond of him. He says Heigo is the best of the Koide family in terms of personality. I’m this carefree and only one year older than him, so we get along best of my brothers and sister. We had a lot of fights and for all those fights he visits us here often even now. Maybe he comes here to see my husband rather than me, but I think he also relies on me because he entrusts me with the money he’s saved. Yes, I have one marriage offer on hand. The family in question is an out-of-office direct retainer to the shogun. Be that as it may, the family is unofficially well off with annual revenue of 2,600 bushels of rice. The daughter of the family is mild and good-looking. Why he doesn’t take the offer, I have no idea. The family is really keen on him and my husband eggs him on to marry her. I wonder if he has any ideas. At any event, he won’t say yes.”

Tonomo, uncle (Gemba’s younger brother, married into the Shinjo family), says:

“I have nothing to assess concerning Heigo. Look at my elder brother—he’s just that, oh yes, he’s a completely established person whereas, as you see, I’m poorly off. I often give him, er, you know what, but I can’t say anything about him. My brother must know very well, I guess.

Since my brother is a man of character, I must tell you, no, there's nothing I can say."

## 2

That year had started out as being an unpleasant one for Heigo. He thought it would be going to be an unlucky year. The first bad thing was the squabble with his elder brother at New Year's family reunion. On the sixth of New Year month (that is, January by lunar calendar), relatives came together to the Koide family. This get-together was held to save the trouble of each individual visiting the other individual relative to bid New Year's greetings. They would always take turn every year to fulfill the responsibility of organizing the get-together, but since Hoary Bozo had passed on eight years before, they had wound up meeting together only at the Koide family.

—It's due to my old man's insensible vanity.

So Heigo derided his father in his heart. In his eyes, his father was on top of the world when he was ensconced in the central position of the relatives, that is, when he was called "the head family in Kobiki-Cho"; and when he bragged about his antique collection. Originally, the relatives supposed to be present were a party of twelve, but for the last three years the number had decreased to nine. They must have been fed up with brags his father made about his antiques, Heigo thought. This year the meeting ended up in the smallest number of only five. Those who presented themselves were Mori Naizen in Hirakawa-Cho, Kinoshita Mokunosuke in Kamiya-Cho, Hijikata Ichinojo in Yakushi Lane, Shinjo Tonomo in Tamura Lane, and Mera Heiza'emon in Enoki Slope.

When the drinking was nearly half over, Mokunosuke tapped on Heigo and said:

"Oh oh, you're still here at home, Heigo?"

He was twenty-eight, four years senior to Heigo. He had been married into the Kinoshita family six years before. They had disliked each other since Mokunosuke, being single, had still been at home.

Heigo didn't reply. He was angry about the order of sitting. No one said anything about the uncle of Shinjo wrongly seated below the salt. This uncle called Tonomo was the only younger brother of his father. He got married into the Shinjo family when he turned thirty-two or -three. Because he had depended on his parents till he had got that old, probably because the Shinjo family he had been married into was heavily in need, and finally because he had been born to be rather introverted and retiring in his ways, he'd always sit below the salt and made himself small by condescending of no necessity when all relatives got together. Heigo couldn't let this go unnoticed. He told Tonomo to move up to a seat above the salt. Tonomo would do so only when others urged him to. But on that day there was no one to press him up to the seat according to his higher standing. Heigo's biggest brother Keijiro went and turned on Heigo and said, "Don't make a noise."

—What the heck is the noise? He's your uncle, hammer it into your head.

So Heigo shouted inwardly.

—Were the Shinjo family richer, you might be foolishly apple-polishing, mightn't you? So, serves you right.

Then he got angry with uncle Tonomo, too. You're sloven. You're the way you are and that's why you get despised by everybody, he sulked inwardly and glowered as he was munching what was on the tray.

"Hey, Heigo," Mokunosuke called to him. "Something wrong with your ears?"

"There's nothing wrong."

"Then, did you hear what I said?"

"I did, brother."

"You did hear and why do you not respond?"

"There's no need, is there?" Heigo answered. "As you see, I'm here at home all right. So, everybody can see that I am here."

"I don't mean stuff and nonsense like that. There was a marriage offer but you declined. I thought you did because you had some plans. But you're dawdling as ever. That's why I asked," Mokunosuke said. "You've turned twenty-five, haven't you?"

“Twenty-four.”

“You’ll be twenty-five next year. What do you plan to do?” Mokunosuke said. “If you have your likes and dislikes about marriage, you’ll be a hanger-on for the rest of your life, I’ll tell you.”

Mind your own business! he got piqued.

“Thanks, but not for me,” Heigo retorted. “I’d rather be a hanger-on if there’s shortage of the stuff you can freely spend. And besides, you can’t drink when you like it and all you do is curl up. I’d rather be left forgotten at home.”

The color of Mokunosuke’s face changed.

What? Who the hell are you meaning by “you”? Mokunosuke said. —I don’t mean any specific person, Heigo answered. I just took an example. —Don’t hoodwink me. You’re making innuendos about me, said Mokunosuke, peeved. There began a piffling squabble between the brothers. Then, the eldest called to them from over there to stop.

“Shut up, Heigo—,” Keijiro said. “Your big brother is your big brother anywhere. You good-for-nothing. Apologize.”

Heigo clammed up.

“Apologize,” Keijiro said. “You won’t apologize, eh, Heigo?”

Just then, Mera Heiza’emon came to mediate with them. He was thirty-two, as old as Keijiro, but he was more matured in looks and temper. He was the only one among the relatives who sided with Heigo. By the by this Heiza’emon forgot to mediate, but instead came out with that which struck Heigo out of the blue:

“That’s enough Kei-san. Don’t scold him so,” Mera said. “In your eyes Hei-san is the lastborn and pampered of the family, but he’s twenty-four. I hear he has somebody special. He has a crush.”

Heigo was left aghast and then bewildered. He interrupted, “Mera-san.” But it was too late. Mori Naizen said, That’s nice, and began laughing and everybody else was caught up in the laughter. Even his father Gemba laughed and was heard to vent, Such a fool! Heigo stood up to his feet and fled from the gathering.

A couple of days later, Heigo visited Mera in Enoki Slope and nagged Mera about what he had said the other day. Mera said, grinning, he had

thought that nothing other than that could make Kei-san put off.

“If it offended you, please forgive me,” Mera apologized. “But all the same, you were saying you have a girlfriend, weren’t you?”

“I didn’t say I had a crush. I only ran into her at a certain shop a few times.”

“Oh, did you?” Kuni, Heigo’s big sister, said beside her husband. “From the way you talked about her, I heard you were mad about her.”

“How can I? You heard it wrong. You two go and, aw shucks!”

“That’s weird. You fume more than needed,” Mera said and grinned again. He changed the subject. He said, “—Do you know it’s decided that we’ll meet in Kobiki-Cho once a month from now on?”

“At my house? No, I don’t.”

“On the evening of the tenth of every month. It was decided after you Hei-san had retreated.”

Now it was the turn for Heigo to grin. “I’m sorry for you. Will you be hearing up to the neck my father brag about his antique collection?”

“It seems so. Everyone is supposed to bring one item to the meeting. That is to say, the purpose is to bring up each other’s appreciating eye.”

Heigo burst into laughter. “That’s quite pitiable. I’m sorry for you. The meeting will be exclusively for you to listen to my father’s long-winded lecture. Did everybody consent?”

“Tamura Lane was the first to show total consent.”

“What? —That uncle? Holy moly.”

“He was the very first to say it was a clever idea. Everyone was astonished, though,” Mera said, a smile on his face. “—At any rate, there ought to be the first meeting on the tenth next month.”

### 3

Heigo did not attend the meetings. Neither was he told to nor did he take interest. However, he sometimes heard about what went in the meetings. Sometimes his father and his brothers told him about it. Other times Mori Sukesaburo at Hijiri Slope did. —Sukesaburo was a son



of Mori Naizen, a cousin to Heigo. He was twenty-two. He was said to peerlessly excel in learning, but in Heigo's eyes, it was not that he purely excelled in learning but that his pursuit of learning was for the sake of earning good records. It was just for vanity, which was told by the way he talked and the way he discussed. It was also well in evidence about his attitude in which he preferred to scorn off those who didn't look very strong in their learning.

Heigo went to attend the day's lectures at Hijiri Slope School three or five times a month. He would sometimes run into Sukesaburo at the school. Unless stopped by him, he would not speak to him. It was after the second Day 10 meeting in March that he was stopped and told by Sukesaburo that the uncle of Shinjo had been put to shame in the meeting. It went like this: the uncle had brought out a funny incense burner as a family heirloom, which did not need looking at for a second time. It was no elaborate burner but a simple crude object for a family Buddhist altar. This the uncle explicated, saying, "This is said to have been handed down for five generations in the Shinjo family." At this, everybody there guffawed.

"Isn't he chic?" Sukesaburo scoffed in his throat. "To my chagrin, nobody else there could understand. Mr. Shinjo is chic. He's such a master of tea ceremony. Don't you think?"

On his way back, Heigo made a detour and stopped by Enoki Slope. Mera Heiza'emon said that he'd agree with Sukesaburo.

"Whether he was playing the fool or he was serious, I have no idea, but I think he was playing the fool."

"That uncle doesn't ever know how to perform the fool," Heigo said and gave a sigh. He shook his head and said, "He's hopeless."

"That's it. To change the subject, I have a question for you," Mera lifted his face and said, "I heard it from Kuni, the amount of money you've deposited with her came over twenty ryo."

"Yes, it ought to have come up to eighty-three bu."

"What's eighty-three bu?"

"The unit of *ryo* sounds harsh when it is uttered. So, I count money in the unit of *bu* in all cases. But what's wrong with the money?"

“Is that so?” Mera said instead of replying the question. “Does *ryo* sound harsh?”

“In any case, my status is a dependent of my father.”

“What of it? Apart from small sums of three *ryo* and five *ryo*, inasmuch as Hei-san, a dependent, has laid up twen, nay, eighty-three *bu*, the responsibility of us who are entrusted with the money increases. The thing is, we’d like to know for once what nature the money is.”

“Didn’t I tell you?” he said inquiringly. “Didn’t I tell you, big sis?”

“No, you didn’t,” Kuni said.

“Do you, Mera-san,” Heigo asked abruptly, “know why I turn down marriage offers?”

Heiza’emon shook his head slowly.

“That is,” said Heigo, “I don’t want to get married into another family.”

“Oh, you can say that again.”

Kuni burst out laughing.

“No, it’s not that. Well, there’s a reason for my not feeling like doing so.” Heigo rephrased what he meant: “There are examples, the uncle of Shinjo, Moku-san who was married into the Kinoshita family, and there are others including two friends of mine. They are wretchedly pitiable, one and all.”

Heigo enumerated about what to be pitied as husbands. He made a juxtaposition of the pathos, to the minutes, of being married into another family. It was so finely detailed that the Meras got a bit surprised.

“I see,” Mera said. “At the New Year family reunion you were talking down Moku-san. I see. I see it’s a pressing problem for you.”

“The Yoda family doesn’t apply,” Kuni opposed. “I know nothing about the Shinjo family, the Kinoshita family, or others, but at least as far as the Yoda family is concerned, no such things apply.”

The Yoda family was the subject of the marriage talk the Meras brought up for Heigo, who had met the family once. The father had also been adopted into the family. Heigo met only the mother and the daughter. The daughter was seventeen, with a small build like her mother, but good-looking and demure, always with a smile in her eyes. These were

the impressions he got. The marriage talk was brought up after he had met the mother and the daughter. They were badly enthusiastic about him, so he heard, but he flatly refused.

“You say so, big sis, but Moku-san’s wife was a good woman before she was married,” Heigo said. “But look, once she had the first baby, she changed completely. The two friends of mine have undergone nearly the same experience. Before marriage they were demure and graceful, but after marriage they change the whole gamut. There’s a common saying: A single man with a little fortune, is no exaggeration, I’ll tell you.”

“When your mind is set for staying single, that’s fine. But what will you do? Are you going to be a dependent of your father for the rest of your life?”

“That’s why I am saving money,” he said and looked at Mera. “With fifty ryo I can buy the stocks of the immediate retainer to the shogun.”

Heiza’emon was silent for a few moments and quietly said, “You work out a far-sighted scheme.”

“Looking into this and that has found it possible for the stock to be purchased with fifty ryo. The value of the samurai status has gone down, but it’s another story with people from the working class. If you are samurai, you can begin negotiations with that sum.”

Mera said okay, then he said that, all things considered, he was surprised that Heigo had saved that much money, as if he had been reminded of something dubious.

“Although the sum may be the amount of my efforts, it falls short of half the price. But my efforts accompany moving stories that will induce you to tears,” Heigo said. “I can’t tell them to anyone else, but will you listen to me?”

“Oh how dare you say of your own accord that the stories are about moving efforts,” Kuni said.

“I’ll listen for future use,” Mera said.

“Let shames come first. The first one was when I was seven,” Heigo began. “At the time, uncle Shinjo was thirty and was dependent at home in Kobiki-Cho. And people around him made a fuss about him, saying he would be a hanger-on for the rest of his life if he stayed on single

until he was as old as he was. He had also given up on marriage himself. By looking at the situation that developed, a seven-year-old that I was thought about it seriously. I remember thinking that I had to do something to find a way out.”

Then, Heigo was determined to devote himself to saving money. Saving money, he had no purpose of doing something definite. It was a vague feeling if only he had money. He saved money with a vengeance.

“Here it is, of which I feel ashamed. It was that not only did I save my allowances but I tried to find a way to make money when I was all that young,” said Heigo, rubbing his cheek with his hand. “Can you guess what I did?”

Mera shook his head wordlessly.

#### 4

“The first thing was manju,” Heigo continued. “I was given afternoon snacks. Given that a manju of the Dewed-Moon Hall Confectionary was five mon (pennies), I sold one that I got for my snack to servants and retainers with kids in the samurai tenements for something like three mon.”

“You make me amazed,” said Kuni, her eyes wide open. “Oh, I’m surprised. You were such a little child but then again you were such a cunning boy. I can’t believe it’s true.”

“Next came used underwear,” Heigo said, not bothering about his big sister. “I dealt in old underwear and old tabi socks. They were all hand-me-downs from my big brothers, so even my mother didn’t care about such old rags. She’d gather them in one place and sell them to a ragman. Before she sold I’d pick out pieces that were still good to wear, and sell them. Inhabitants of the samurai tenements and servants would be rather willing to buy them.”

Kuni was of a carefree character. But she seemed to be dealt a heavy blow by her younger brother’s confession. She gave an incessant sigh of grief as she listened: “Deplorable”; “Discreditable”; and “Could that

ever happen?"

"But," Mera said as he smiled, "how could it have gone unnoticed by your parents?"

"It was natural that it should have gone unnoticed by my parents, because what punishment they, household retainers and servants, would have been given had it been known that they had bought rags like old underwear from me? At any rate, I was an innocent boy."

"Oh, you must have been such an innocent boy!"

"It won't do if you get angry here," Mera told his wife. "Will you get some saké ready for me?"

When Kuni took off, Mera urged him to continue, saying, "So what?" and glanced at Heigo.

"Until I turned twelve or so, I had kept on at it, and then I took note of my father whose interest was collecting antiques," Heigo went on to say. "I was thirteen or fourteen when antiquaries were in and out. They began to come after my grandfather had died. Before that, my father used to visit antiquaries such as Matsuju and Daisho and often be home with knickknacks that he was beguiled into buying."

Antique Shop Matsuju was in Yaza'emon-Cho, Kyobashi and Antique Shop Daisho in Fukushima-Cho, Nihonbashi. It was said they were second-rate antiquaries. Gemba had a firm belief that it was at a second-rate antiquary's where he could find rare antiques. The buyer was a direct vassal of the shogun with the annual revenue of 36,900 bushels of rice and the sellers would never seem to conduct deceitful and rapacious transactions. However, the customer would target rare items, believing that he was equipped with appreciative eye, he had to burden on his own shoulders ludicrous scrap once in every three times. The antiquary was innocuous of a malicious intention when he sold scrap. When the collector would in time know that his appreciation had failed, in order to cover up the fiasco he made, he would stash away that very "ludicrous scrap" into the cupboard. The scrap would be forgotten as it was most of the time. When it came time that it would be sold out to a junkman, it was lumped together and sold for a mere song.

"I picked out and sold some ludicrous scrap that had been left on the

shelves,” Heigo said apologetically. I hit upon this when I was picking out items from among the pieces to be sent away. When they were dealt in by a junkman, the items would have been put together with other scrap and sold in one lump for a song. But for an antiquary, I thought they would be worth something. Be that as it may, it was my father who explored to find them though they turned out to be the failures of appreciation.”

“Your father himself must have known.”

“My father? No, by no means,” Heigo shook his head. “His vanity would never let him acknowledge his own failure of appreciation. On stashing away into the cupboard, he forgot, full stop. I guess he didn’t ever even remember again.”

When I selected items from among the things that were supposed to go to a junkman, Heigo continued, I did ask for permission. Then I took them to antiquaries. Where they were dealing in proper items, they would just stay away from them, no chance for them at all. They would only say, I’m sorry we don’t deal in an article like this; Will you go to talk to other antiquaries?; or Excuse me, but you mustn’t tease me, sir. There, I searched for the kind of antique shop which was as good as a junk shop. I found out one in Inaba-Cho close to Etchu Moat, where I became a habitu . —The shop was in a narrow side street, with the entrance nine feet wide and in the depths only one private room with four and a half tatami mats laid out. Outside of the shop, on the awning was hoisted a framed sign lettered as Seikan-Do (literally, Clearly Appreciating Hall). But it was presumptuous to call the shop “do (hall).” Looking at the items displayed in the shop would make me shrink back from shame.

“I hit it off with the owner of the shop,” Heigo said. “I took him to my house in Kobiki-Cho once. When I told him where those items came from, Seibe’e now got committed to them in his own way and intended to make money out of them. He seemed to expect that he might come across rare items. . . . Why are you laughing?”

“Not that I laughed,” said Mera, caressing his mouth. “Well, I’ll listen to the rest.”

“Saké is coming.”

Kuni brought dinner trays with the help from the servant. Heigo didn't drink. Only Mera took up a saké cup and began to drink slowly, served by his wife. Heigo continued, he had been working in tandem with Seikan-Do nearly ten years. In the meantime, Seibe'e came in big money a number of times. From among the objects which had been bought because of Gemba's failures in appreciation, sometimes at the market, and other times among co-traders, some pieces were sold at surprisingly high trade prices. Interestingly, those were not proper prices that deserved the items, but most probably, they were appropriate to customers of a certain stratum (Gemba for one) because they were intended for them. Actually, traders had orders from those customers.

Mera interrupted Heigo: “You don't say Gemba in Kobiki-Cho bought the same articles again. You don't say he did, do you?”

“I'm talking seriously,” Heigo said and drank the tea that had become lukewarm. “While I was transacting this way, I further found a new way. It was partly because my old man's provision didn't last any more. I bought items that I thought would make profits from among the junk displayed in Seikan-Do and sold to other antique shops. Of course at first my efforts didn't pay, but while keeping at it, my intuition must have been switched on. Above all, sword stuff would sometimes bring fairly big profits.” There he swiftly told his big sister, “I know what'll come from you. Deplorable, isn't it?”

“About how old were you when you set about a new way?”

“About sixteen or seventeen, I guess.”

“It's lucky nobody found it out.”

“It was found out. No, the money I made was,” Heigo shrugged. “It was found when I laid up just twenty-one bu. I had wrapped it in paper and hidden it on one of the beams. My mom found it and took it away from me.”

“You had it taken away?”

“How could I possibly have said I made it? I asserted I had laid up what I got as allowances and gifts. But she said that wasn't suitable for a child of samurai and that she would give from the family purse when I

needed some. It was thwarting. Really frustrating. Tears didn't stop, I'll tell you."

"That's true when it comes to twenty-one bu," said Mera. "Twenty-one bu is, umph, yep, five ryo and one bu. Am I right?"

"Since then, you began depositing with me," Kuni said.

"It hadn't been long after you had got married," said Heigo. "Anyway, there's no other place but here I can place trust."

"When it's known, I'll get scolded. That's all."

"As long as you don't let them know, it's safe."

"It follows then," Mera said, "that you've made over twenty ryo in the last seven years."

"At the latest in another five years, by the time I get to be thirty, I'll achieve the goal. I myself think it will be in another three years."

When Mera said, "That's an earnest wish," a young houseboy came and told he had a guest: "Mr. Keijiro in Kobiki-Cho."

Heigo drew up his knees, a reflex action, and said, "That's too bad. I'll retreat."

"You will?" Smiling, Mera told the houseboy, "Usher him into the drawing room."

"I'll send around your footgear," Kuni said and rose to her feet.

## **5 Seikan-do's Assessment of Him**

The owner of Seikan-do said:

"The young master of the Koide family has favored us for the past seven, eight years. Yes, yes, he's prodigious. It's regrettable that he remains to be samurai. The lord of Koide is all but a professional in antiques. No, I'm not flattering. Daisho in Nihonbashi and Matsuju in Yaza'emon-Cho are the antiquaries who are regularly in and out, aren't they? I often hear about him in the market too. That is to say, there's the streak of blood in appreciating antiques in the young master, most probably. As you see, my shop is stacked with odds and ends. But out of this bric-à-brac, the stuff about which the young master feels that this must



be it invites a good price without fail. I can't count how many times the same thing has happened. That's why I tell him to give up being a samurai. I'm told he's the third son and the youngest. So, I often advise him to forget the long and short swords on his waist once and for all, to get married with the girl of Hori'e living in the back of my shop, and to open up an antique shop. Let him be an antiquary, and he can take it easy. And, what's more, he will be sure to make a fortune. Yes, oh, about the Hori'e family? It's a family of ronin masterless samurai in the tenement in the alleyway one block from here. The lord, Mr. Hori'e, passed on three years ago. Now the family are two people alone, his lady and his daughter called Mino. I've been familiar with this family because his daughter has been in and out to sell articles since Mr. Hori'e was alive. At any rate she was born and brought up as a daughter of proud samurai, so she falls short of earning the day's living only by doing piecework. She visits us often recently, too. In the early stage, I received good things. Yes, I made money on some of the stuff they sold. But lately, never at all. I received swords when I didn't need them. Now look. They're just left over there. There in the corner, they are left covered with dust. I can't bring myself to put them on the market. That's right, the young master of the Koide family is acquainted with the daughter. They've run into each other for a number of times. They don't express it but they seem to be attracted to each other. She is, as far as I know, eighteen, six years apart from the young master. The difference of the ages is pat fit. But no. The young master intends to be independent as samurai and doesn't care a hair to belong to the working class. It's regretted to have to lose him. It's too good to lose him who has that appreciative eye. He hasn't been in for something like ten days. I have the hunch that he'll come along today."

## 6

Heigo immediately felt remorse for opening up what he had hidden to the Meras. Mera was trustworthy, but his big sister wasn't. This second

biggest sister was the closest to him of all his siblings and would always sided with him. But then again now that she was a member of the Mera family, her husband was the most important of all to her. She had been married for seven years but hadn't yet been blessed with a child, which was apparently her constant weak point. For this reason she came to see her mother frequently. He dreaded what would cause her tongue to slip and that she'd come out with all she had heard from him.

“What impulse led me to come out with stuff like that?” He tutted. “There's been something wrong since New Year this year. I must be more cautious, for all I'm worth, lest anything serious happen to me.”

Heigo thought he'd have to tell her to be careful not to carelessly repeat again next time he'd visit her.

April, May, June went without anything serious happening. In Kobiki-Cho, the third baby was born to Keijiro. In the Kinoshita family in Kamiya-Cho twin baby girls came on. In the Mori family in Hirakawa-Cho, Heigo's grandmother on his mother's side demised in late June. His mother Itsu-Jo, who had been from Kobiki-Cho to attend her sick mother at her bedside, took to her bed. Probably it was because her mother's death had a grave impact on her. She stayed in bed until the end of July, staying with the Moris, her home. For those thirty and odd days, Heigo kept going to see his mother every day in Hirakawa-Cho. He made a daily trip in order not merely to see his mother but also to take with him, as he was asked to, cakes, fruits, and the foods his big brother's wife cooked. Late dog days which were just about to be taken over by the heat of the late summer and the trips between Kobiki-Cho and Hirakawa-Cho were hard on him. However, every three days, he stopped to poke around Seikan-do on the way. Seibe'e, the owner, was in the shop most afternoons, but even when he was out, Heigo hunted antiques and palavered with his wife. Seibe'e and his wife took it for it that he had a reason for that. That is, the reason Heigo stopped by, looking around the display, and killed time there, was that he might be waiting for Hosoe's daughter to come by. That must be it, they were convinced.

“Of course I don't dislike her,” Heigo would respond candidly. “How-

ever, it's no use struggling when I can't marry her, is it?"

"Why not be engaged at least? You know well that she likes you?"

"Don't say stuff and nonsense," Heigo would say and turn a little flushed. "It will be long before I become independent and have a home of my own. It will be three years or five years, I have no idea. When things are the way they are, I can't get engaged, I'll tell you. I don't mind but when it comes time she'll be too old."

"That's why we advise you to take the plunge and be an antiquary instead of remaining in the samurai class."

"Quit it," Heigo would refuse. "In a samurai's blood runs. Supposing I wanted to be an antiquary, that samurai blood coming down from my ascendants wouldn't allow me to. That I'm well aware of."

"Is that so spelled? That sounds horrendous."

"Will you please stop talking about that girl?"

When it turned to August, Heigo's mother came back home to Kobi-ki-Cho.

At the end of the regular Day 10 meeting of that month, it was decided that everyone bring their family heirloom sword to the next meeting. When Heigo heard it, the uncle of Shinjo came into his head first of all. He visited him at his home in Tamura Lane. The uncle was forty-seven years old with seven children. He got married well after he was thirty and the eldest son was only fifteen years old, and the youngest daughter was not two yet. On top of seven children, he had his wife with the house where she had been born and her mother. The small house was always as noisy as a chicken house.

Heigo talked in his uncle's room, which was three-tatami-mat (54 ft<sup>2</sup>) room with a garden which was so small he was under the delusion that his nose would touch the plank-fence that separated the nextdoor neighbor's premises. In the garden was a lean Japanese laurel with languishing leaves. The entire scene was stuffy and hot and dreary. The subject was not complicated; the talk finished in a jiffy and Heigo left there in a half hour or so, during which time children came in and went out, fought among them, and ran around. All this took place in his uncle's small room. He was not able to be quiet a moment.

As he saw Heigo off, Tonomo made a usual facial sign which read that he was asking for something. He was in such need that he would apparently feel like asking for something (when there was no need of doing so, too), when he saw his nephew. When he came by in the evening, Heigo would treat his uncle to dinner. But today it was still daytime, Heigo pretended not to notice and said goodbye.

“Swords are what I’m strongest in,” Heigo whispered to himself as he walked.

“This is where I can come in to help him save his face. My father doesn’t know anything about antique swords and those who come to the meeting are as good as blind. Now everyone wait and see and I’ll make you stare your eyes out.”

He dropped by Seikan-Do in Etchu Moat.

Taking a turn into the side street and coming to the shop, he saw that girl inside the shop. The girl was Hoso’e Mino. She was in an unlined garment whose textile had been washed out. It was fastened with an old sash. She wore patched tabi socks. She was sitting sideways on the timber frame to step up to where the owner was seated. Her lissome waist was drawing a thin line from which her womanhood emanated. It was surprisingly sexy. She had taut, dark skin and little eyes and a little mouth. Heigo was irresistibly attracted by her little eyes and mouth. Since he had met her in the shop, the little eyes and mouth had captured him.

Heigo failed to go into the shop for some reason or other and was going past when Seibe’e called to him from inside the shop.

“What’re you up to, Mr. Koide? You are not coming in?”

Heigo stopped and indecisively came into the shop. The girl sprung to her feet and, her eyes cast down, bowed and stepped aside.

“Go ahead,” Heigo returned a bow, “Get your business done with. I just dropped by on my way.”

“Thank you, sir,” the girl answered, in a voice thin and low but clear. “I am finished just now, so please go ahead.”

She gestured for him to sit where she had been sitting. Seibe’e opened his moneybox and was taking out some money onto the paper.

“It’s terrible, this heat of the late summer,” Heigo said.

The girl said, “Yes,” and in a while Heigo said again:

“We want a sprinkle of rain, don’t we?”

“Yes,” the girl responded.

“Oh,” Heigo uttered suddenly, “Excuse me. I am Koide Heigo.”

The girl just lowered her head.

“I am sorry to have kept you waiting,” Seibe’e said as he handed the girl the money on the paper. “Please count yourself.”

The girl received the money, carefully counted it, wrapped it with the paper on which the money came, and put it into the pocket of her garment’s sleeve. Then she bowed to Seibe’e and Heigo and took off. Heigo sat on the timber frame. Seibe’e chuckled as he ordered tea from the inner living part.

“What’s wrong with you?” Seibe’e said chuckling. “You did already introduce yourself three years ago, didn’t you? Did you forget?”

## 7

“Did I?” Heigo feigned ignorance. “I don’t care. I’m here today to ask a favor of you.”

He did feign ignorance but in actuality his memory had failed. The fact was that he had introduced himself long before and that the girl had given him her name. But he was at a loss what to say today and felt like he hadn’t introduced himself yet.

Seibe’e complied with Heigo’s request there and then. He said he would inquire into something appropriate he could think of. Then, he seemed to hit upon something. He showed the short sword in a white sheath left beside him.

“How about this? This is something I just got from Hoso’e.”

“You only paid two bu and two shu.”

“That’s even intolerably ripping off,” Seibe’e said. “The girl’s mother had a sprain of the joint in her waist. They seemed so hard up that I bought it and no choice. The set of the long and short swords I bought

are lumped together over there. But look, this short sword just fits the terms of your order, sir.”

“What’s it like?”

“Your terms are a counterfeit antique sword, sir. The girl said this is a Masamuné.”

“It won’t work out,” Heigo shook his head. “Masamuné is too good. Even though you’re a friend, it’s too good for the price you paid.”

“That so, sir?” Seibe’e said and gave a sigh. “All right, sir. I’ll try to find one, so will you come back in a couple of days?”

Since then Heigo had waited toward the end of the month. He attended Seikan-Do five, six times, and was shown two, three items, but they did not measure up to his terms. The purpose was to surprise the members of the meeting and by doing so help save the uncle’s face. Trite items were wide of the mark. What he wanted had to be a counterfeit of an antique sword well reputed for its swordsmith’s name and at the same time the one which was difficult for the eye of the man on the street to judge whether it was a real one or a false one. But as it progressed into the end of the month, Seibe’e gave it up.

“I’m at the end of my rope, sir,” Seibe’e said. “In the first place, I was a square peg in a round hole about swords and it was impossible from scratch.” Then again, he took up the short sword he had bought from Hoso’e and showed it to Heigo. “How would you like this? Why not take a look at it?”

Heigo took it, unsheathed it, and looked at it for a few moments, but put it down right away, shaking his head. “That, —” Heigo said, “Show me the ones you said you’d bought from Mr. Hoso’e.”

Seibe’e stood up and went to the bric-à-brac that was piled and filled up the whole place, from among which he fished out the set of long and short swords. He dusted them with a cloth and handed them to Heigo. He looked at the short sword first then the long one. Neither of them would work out. They seem to be made in Bizen but they lacked grace in their appearance for a Bizen.

“Should anything be valuable, then the parts to be mounted on the sword would be and none other,” Seibe’e said. “The sheath is still us-

able, and the pin and ornamental pieces are worth some. Sooner or later, I'll pull them apart to pieces and put them on sale."

"Wait a mo," Heigo said without warning, put down the long sword, and took up again the short sword he had been shown first. This time he unsheathed the sword and elaborately studied the curve of the blade. Then he pulled out the rivet from the hilt and looked into the tang of the sword.

"What's up?" Seibe'e asked.

Without responding, Heigo looked at the blade and the tang.

"This is burned," Heigo whispered. "Sure, it was burned. It must be rehashed, but both the struck metal and the blade are firm. It's not known before it gets honed, but from the patterns on the blade the way they are, it looks like an antique sword made in Soshu."

"Shouldn't it happen to be a real one?"

"I doubt it," Heigo gave a wry smile. "But it sure looks like an antique sword struck in Soshu. Yes, I wonder if this will work out, as the case may be."

"Then it follows that it's a Masamuné."

"Oh, that's a tall question. It will be Sadamuné or Yoshihiro," Heigo said. "We can make do to settle down to the work done while the maker was a trainee, so the sword doesn't bear the swordsmith's name. The misty luster of the blade and the placid openhandedness of the blade patterns well resemble the artistic character of an antique style. All right, suffice it to say that this is said to be made by Sadamuné."

"You're going to take it, sir?"

"I'll buy it for three bu."

"Oh, you're heartless. You were at the transaction when I bought it for two bu and two shu. If this can help you, will you let me enjoy a little profit?"

Heigo shook his head. He was not going to buy this because of the price. The purpose was to take the blind people by surprise who would come to the meeting. Otherwise the sword was useless. So, if Seibe'e didn't like the price of three bu, he would withdraw, said Heigo. Seibe'e persisted. What he got from Hoso'e would lie unsold, which was the

source of his wife's naggings. However, Seibe'e felt sorry for them, mother and daughter, he couldn't help but buy from them. Since Heigo was not altogether a stranger, he might extend some help by taking the advantage of the circumstances now, Seibe'e persuaded.

"What funny reasoning," Heigo said with a smile. "Then I'll give you another two shu. That makes three bu and two shu. That's the deal. If you don't like it, then it's the end of the deal."

"You're too tight-pursed, sir," Seibe'e scratched his head which was getting bald. "You're really too good for a samurai. You're all but a professional."

The next day, Heigo took the short sword to his uncle in Tamura Lane. He thought about putting it to honing, but on second thought decided against it, for it would be better off as it was. He elaborated on the sword to his uncle:

"Look at the luster of the metal and the rough-and-readiness of the blade patterns which are mixed with little disturbances. They are particularly seen as the special taste of antique swords made in Soshu," Heigo said as he pointed out the minutes of the blade patterns. The blade is thin for the width of the blade probably because it was reduced from honing. Apparently, it had been burned once and so it was rehashed. That was why the tang was corrupted. Although corrupted, the tang had dignity in view of being rough-and-ready. New swords lack this dignity. So, tell the group of the meeting to appreciate it."

"I don't know well," Tonomo said, looking restive, "but can I say it's a Sadamuné?"

"You can say that it's said to be a Sadamuné. If you organize the points I've elaborated on well, they're all blind and will not know whether or not it's a real one. I'm sure they'll be surprised."

"What if they know it's a false item?"

"Even so, you're not to blame. It's an object which has been handed down from generation to generation in the Shinjo family. There are a number of false items in the domain lord's treasure house, too. There's no worry."

"Then, will I dare?" Tonomo said, "Yes, I'll give it a shot."



Heigo didn't worry a bit.

—They will all fall for my trick.

So he believed. He'd been in and out of antique shops some seven years and had often made money on pottery. This is thanks to his father whose hobby was collecting antiques. However, as far as swords were concerned, it was Heigo's own intuition that told. Of course he fell far short of making an appraisal. He just enjoyed appreciating for fun. But compared with his father and relatives, he was confident he had much more appreciative eye.

—It would go well unless his uncle would bungle. Heigo thought although under different conditions this time than those of that incense burner, he was chicken-hearted and in his rashness would expose his ignorance. Only without it, would it prove to be successful.

On the tenth of September, Heigo went out to Hijiri Slope. He thought he'd observe how the meeting would turn out, but he felt guilty of his wily scheme. It was not the day of lectures at school. Getting there, he looked into the lecture rooms, then went to the dormitory and was talking to friends, when Sukesaburo of the Mori family came along and spoke to him. "Why don't you stay at home?" Sukesaburo said merrily. "Today, Hon'ami went to the meeting with my father."

## 8

Heigo looked hard at Sukesaburo who spoke to him. He failed to scoop what Sukesaburo had meant right away. Sukesaburo, coming up to him, told Heigo that he should have attended today's meeting if he was interested in swords at all. He asked why Heigo was at a place like this.

"Hon'ami did what?" Heigo asked back.

"By Hon'ami I mean Taga in Kyoto," Sukesaburo answered. "He's Kan'emon of Taga. He's been staying with us for several days. He said he was interested in attending the meeting when he was told the members would be bringing swords today."

“Did he go?” Heigo asked as if grabbing at Sukesaburo. “Did that man go to Kobiki-Cho?”

“He did. He’d have done better to stay back. There’ll be no meritorious swords at the meeting. Really he’d have done better not to, but my father took him all eagerly.”

Heigo groaned.

“Hey, what’s up?” Sukesaburo said. “What in the world is up?”

“Assistance unasked for,” Heigo said as he stood up. “Shit on it!”

“What?” Sukesaburo caught hold of Heigo’s word.

“Oh, it’s my business.”

“Hey,” Sukesaburo stood in Heigo’s way. “Take it back.”

“Didn’t I say it was my business?”

“You won’t take it back?”

Sukesaburo clenched his fist.

“I meant myself when I said ‘Assistance unasked for.’ Do I have to take it back when it was directed to me?”

“No. You said ‘Shit on it!’ and I’m telling you to take it back.”

Heigo looked at Sukesaburo and said, “Oh, that? Then, don’t shit on stuff like that.”

Sukesaburo began to say something, but Heigo bid goodbye to his friends and hurried out of the dormitory.

“This is terrible. This is really terrible,” Heigo whispered. “It’s all a fiasco that they have a professional called Taga. It’s just swindling. What will I do?”

Through the wood gate fitted in the daub wall of the school, he went along the riding ground and out on Hijiri Slope.

Should Hirakawa-Cho introduce him as “Taga,” at the beginning of the meeting, then the uncle of Shinjo wouldn’t present the sword to the meeting. No, Taga was not enough. He didn’t know the relation between Hon’ami and Taga. So, because of the introduction only of Taga and nothing more, the uncle would probably produce the sword for his presentation.

—This is an heirloom of the Shinjo family and is said to be made by Sadamuné.

Heigo could see his uncle presenting his article. The thought that his uncle would expound on as much as the blade patterns and the tang made Heigo feel his whole body shrink up. He groaned again and again as he walked.

“My father and the others can be deceived but a professional can’t,” Heigo muttered. “My uncle will be ashamed. I have meddled into his affair when I was not asked for assistance. Far from helping save his face, I’ll help him to be put to shame in front of the group. That’s terrible. My plot is resulting in a terrible blunder.”

He cursed himself. He cursed for his flippancy. For his petty shrewdness. For his vanity and pride. His head lowered, he admitted defeat in his heart.

It was in the evening that he visited his uncle in Tamura Lane. The uncle of Shinjo had not been home yet. His wife told him to take off his footgear and step up inside and wait, but he said he had a business to do elsewhere. He hung around about an hour and returned. Tonomo had just been back. He was told Tonomo was taking a bath now and waited in the usual three-mat room. The children made a big noise. Boys of seven and five came in and teased Heigo. They wanted him to be their playmate, but he was in absolutely no mood for it. Not feeling up to giving amiable words to them, either, he remained silent.

When Tonomo appeared wiping off beads of sweat from bathing, Heigo abruptly lowered his head and apologized:

“I didn’t in the least expect Hon’ami, nay, Taga would come. When I heard he would, I thought I had made a mess of our scheme,” Heigo said and looked at his uncle as if sneaking a glance at him. “I am sorry to trouble you. Did you show the sword, in any event?”

“Yes, I did,” Tonomo said. “I didn’t know the man called Taga was a connoisseur. Hirakawa-Cho said nothing about him. Had I known he was a connoisseur, I wouldn’t have shown it.”

“I didn’t in the least expect things would turn as they did. Please forgive me.”

“No, don’t put a foot wrong,” Tonomo waved his hand to deny. “No, no such things. You don’t need to apologize. He said the sword was a

real one.”

Heigo stuttered, “W-wh-what?”

“It went like this.”

Tonomo told the story as he wiped the sweat off. Taga Kan’emon looked at the sword twice. First, he just gave a quick glance, but after he had looked two or three others, he asked the group to let him take another look at it. On the second time, he surveyed it in a formal manner, turning it over scrupulously, studying the tang, too, and muttered repeatedly, “That’s weird.” Then he said he couldn’t affirm until it was honed, but that that was not a Sadamuné but a Shintogo or a Masamuné as the case may be.

“That it bore no name would prove it to be a Masamuné, the connoisseur said,” Tonomo wiped off the sweat again. The sweat was not from bathing but from the excitement that arose from remembering the situation. “So-and-so blade patterns looked exactly like that of Shintogo, but looking openhandedly placid and rough-and-ready in the figure, and, what’s more, having invigorating high spirits, affirm that the sword was a Masamuné. He repeated thus. In any case, since he’d like to hone it with his own hands, he’d take it with him, he said. At his words, the group turned silent and I truly won honor because of you.”

Heigo gulped the water in his mouth and answered back: “Is it true? You are not teasing me, are you, sir?”

“You’ll see when you go home,” Tonomo said. “Would a professional connoisseur make a mistake? You dug out a horrendous find.”

“Who knows? That couldn’t be. Although I haven’t seen a Masamuné yet, it doesn’t seem true to me. No way,” Heigo said, unable to hold down his excitement. “Were it true, we’d have to either return the sword to the original possessor or pay what it’s worth. Supposing it were true.”

“But you bought it, didn’t you, Heigo?”

“The original possessor is known in the first place,” said Heigo as he stood up. Anyway, I’ll see Taga and make sure with him. Is he still staying in Hirakawa-Cho?”

“I guess so. He said he would give a rough blade honing and that he’d give his answer in a matter of a couple of days.”

“Anyway, I am off to Hirakawa-Cho.”

Heigo dashed out of his uncle’s house. He spurred more than when he hurried out of the dormitory in Hijiri Slope and with a sign of rising temper. Usually, he would not have splurged, but now he hailed a street palanquin and paid a very good fare so he could make haste. —In Hirakawa-Cho was staying Taga Kan’emon. When he arrived, Heigo did not seek to see the Mori family folks but had the steward come to the entrance and told him that he’d like to directly meet with Taga. The steward once got back into the depths and came back right away and ushered him to the tea-ceremony hut through the garden.

## 9

Kan’emon was a stout man of forty-two or-three. He was robust in both looks and appearance. He had piercing eyes but had the Kyoto accent which sounded feminine. This made awfully odd impressions on Heigo. The meeting was simple and Heigo left after he had got back the short sword from him.

Kan’emon had not honed the sword yet. He affirmed it must be a Masamuné and explained the reasons. Heigo told Kan’emon the circumstances honestly, too, asking if it was Masamuné’s own making, then how much it would be. Kan’emon replied that if it bore his hallmark, it would be worth eighty-five gold coins, and that, had it not been rehashed, it wouldn’t be less than a hundred and fifty gold coins, but that it was rehashed, the price would be that much. There and then Heigo asked what it would be if he would give a rebate to the original possessor. Kan’emon chuckled and said there was no need for it, but that if he felt bad, twenty gold coins would be fair enough. He added, “However, as far as I can remember, this sword was supposed to be bought by Koide in Kobiki-Cho.”

On his way back from Hirakawa-Cho, one thought after another came on Heigo and his mind anguished.

Heigo took the sword home because his father was waiting to pounce

upon it so as to make it his. Although Taga expressed his earnest wish to hone it up, letting Taga do so would let his father take his game and get Heigo nowhere. Asked by his father to turn it over, his uncle, timorous, couldn't possibly decline. It was like while the dogs growl, the wolf devours the sheep.

"It's exactly that while the dogs growl, the wolf devours the sheep," he whispered as he walked. "I can't tolerate it if it goes so well with my father. Drat! Thanks for no joke."

Heigo thought he'd explain to Hosoe, for he had been told that, when the daughter came to Seikan-Do to sell, she told it was a Masamuné. It might be a Masamuné all right, but the mother and the daughter (and the deceased owner Hosoe himself) had not believed so even though it had been said it was a Masamuné. Otherwise they would never have sold it for two bu and two shu, a mere song. Therefore, once the sword proved *bona fide* to be a real one, it was natural that he should let them know the truth.

"Albeit, the problem is after they get let to know." What would he do if they would buy back as their house heirloom? Could he ask for eighty-five gold coins? No, how could he? He could ask for the price he had paid to Seikan-do when he bought it. They were in dire need of as little as two bu, which meant they would have difficulty raising as much as three bu and two shu. And it was regrettable in his own right that he had to part with what he had bought at three bu and two shu when it was known to be worth eighty-five gold coins.

"Oh, it's much, much more than regrets, it's cruelty," Heigo muttered. "Sell this and I can buy the shogun's retainer's stocks right away. I can leave home and be independent. And what's more, if no one but me had found, this little thing would have remained under the layers of dust in the corner of Seikan-Do. That is to say, in a nutshell. . ."

He straightened himself, raised his brow and shook his head sternly. An unrighteous idea popped into his head. He expostulated with himself inwardly on the idea he had which a samurai should not embrace. Nor should a normal human being. It was a shame to do so. But all the same, the idea which once popped into his head would not lend its ears. Were

he to keep quiet, it would be known to no one. It was his appreciative eye that found it. And what was more, it would enable the long-standing wish to come true. Letting Hosoe know would rather make the matter complicated. Keep quiet, keep quiet. The persistent whisper hung around his ears.

“Heave!” he stopped to shout encouragement. “Hey, you, pull yourself together.”

The passerby who came in the opposite direction suddenly stepped aside. He must have been surprised to hear Heigo’s shout of encouragement. Heigo, too, was surprised and resumed walking hurriedly.

Heigo was bemused, thinking hard, for three days. For the three days, he went out, but could not anyhow bring himself to head for Etchu Moat. If he visited Hosoe, he would be clean of his words. He would speak innocuously for sure, and if need be, return the short sword for nothing. Probably, at least, he would succumb to this temptation. He had strong self-esteem, eh? At long last, on the evening of the third day, the solution struck him. It was to take the daughter for his wife along with the sword. One of the children to be born would carry the family name of Hosoe. The Koide family was fertile, so he would have at least two or three children. Not to mention, he would take on her mother when he married her. He thought this would work out.

“Preposterous,” Heigo muttered with an expression on his face which turned cheerful the next moment. “I’ve fallen for her that much, but why haven’t I noticed it? —greed, for crying out loud,” he grimaced. “The greed of not wanting to part with the sword came foremost. Shame on you, Heigo!”

He decided he’d visit Hosoe the next day. With this decision, he returned home. Upon returning, he was called by his father. His mother came to tell him. She said his father was very angry and so he had to apologize to him on seeing him. He asked what he was angry at. She only repeated he had to apologize for whatever it was that made him see red.

His father was writing in his apartment. When Heigo took a seat, he turned to Heigo, who, at a glimpse, knew that his father was really an-

gry.

“What have you done with the sword?” Gemba shouted the moment he saw Heigo.

Heigo was perplexed. “What do you mean?” he tried to feign ignorance.

“It’s no use concocting a quibble. You have a short sword made by Masamuné. I order you to bring it here.”

“Why, nay, what would you do, sir?”

“It’s not the kind of item that you possess. I’ll keep it and that’s why I’m telling you to bring to me.”

Heigo mumbled: “It’s a little inconvenient, sir. That’s uncle Shinjo’s, and. . .”

“Shut up,” Gemba ranted. “I know inside out what you’ve done. Tonomo came and told the whole thing. You, you dunce. You’re a dumbfounding dunce. At any rate, bring the sword first.”

Heigo remained silent.

“It’s as plain as day that you have the sword,” Gemba continued. “I went to Hirakawa-Cho because I wanted to know the result of the honing. Then I was told the sword had been returned to Shinjo. I called for Tonomo right off the bat. He told me everything from A to Z, and he told me it would have been you that took it back. Is that correct?”

Heigo grew red-hot from anger.

—What a wretched person!

Had it been another person, it’d be forgivable. But the uncle of Shinjo should have had it out! No way! That was the least he should have kept it to himself. What a wretched coward! A sissy would have done it. Heigo gritted his teeth.

“Are you with me?” he found his father shouting. “I mean you to bring it when I say bring it, or else I have something in mind.”

Heigo looked at his father. “What is it that you have in mind, sir?”

“Are you trying to answer back?”

“You have something in mind, what do you mean, sir?”

“I’m saying to bring the sword.”

“No, sir, I won’t,” he interrupted and said, “You must know if my



uncle told you everything, sir. It's I that found the sword and it's I that bought it. Even at my father's orders, I absolutely can't part with that sword, sir. I reject your orders."

"You said it, eh! You said 'absolutely.'"

"You don't have to make sure, sir. I did," Heigo said challengingly. "Please let me hear it, sir, what do you have in mind?"

"Disowned," said Gemba. "As of now, you are disowned."

"Would you give me the reason, sir?"

Here came his mother calling, "Heigo-san." At this Gemba grew all the angrier, as if the fire had been fanned into a flare-up. He began to rant at the top of his lungs: Don't you ever put in your oar.

"If you need to know the reason, I shall let you know. You're the very dunce to drag the name of the Koide family through the mud and to disgrace the clan. I know it all. I know each and every one of the things you've done. I am neither blind nor deaf."

"What do you say I've done?"

"Heigo-san," his mother told him.

"You shut up," Gemba fiercely ordered her to silence. He turned to Heigo and said, stuttering, "When you were this little, you traded in manju and other candies and cakes and made money on them. Next came old underwear and tabi socks. You, born into the house of a direct retainer to the shogun with the annual revenue of 36,900 bushels of rice, and you, just a little imp falling short of ten years of age. Aren't I right?"

"Dear me, my lord!" Heigo's mother panted. "For goodness' sake, could that ever . . . ?"

"You're to blame, too," Gemba told his wife. "You pampered him as you brought him up, thinking him the youngest of the family, and look what he's been cast into. You say, could that ever? That can ever happen in deed. Look. What have followed suit was playing at an antiquary. I won't say more than this, which parlance soils my tongue. This son of ours has been taking a cut from such as a ragman and behaving like an antique dealer. The five and odd ryo of silver you once found and took it away from him is what he'd laid up by doing what a samurai should

never do as a dirty game.”

“My eye, Heigo-san!” Heigo’s mother cried.

“By the same token, he’s dealing in the short sword this time,” Gemba trembled as he continued. “According to Tonomo, you had intended to ridicule all of us with a phony sword you bought worth nothing, —I’ve reached the limit of my patience. A rogue like you isn’t my son any more. Keeping a son like a rogue at home, that’s you, will disgrace our Koide’s family name, will drag our entire clan’s name through mud. Get out now! You are disowned.”

“I understand, sir,” said Heigo, whose face had blanched but whose language and bearing were clear and calm. “If you mean it when you say I am disowned, then I’ll leave home. No, please be quiet, mother. Before I leave, I have a word for you, sir.”

“What? What you, rogue, have to say, I would. . .”

“Just one word, sir. Please listen to me unless you are scared of hearing it,” Heigo said. “I did what you’ve just said, sir, dealing in from manju to antiques. Everything is all but correct. But have you ever once given a thought for me to the reason why I have done such stuff?”

“Because you didn’t have samurai pride, nor samurai spirit.”

“Is that all?”

“Because there’s merchant in you instead of samurai. Trading in antiques and others has come naturally to you,” Gemba said. “Now that things have proved as they are, anything can be the reason. However, listen carefully, if you, you dunce, had done a proper thing, you would never have had to make any excuse.”

Heigo turned to look as if taken aback. As if given a slap in the face, he looked flabbergasted with his mouth open, then gulped down the water in his mouth.

“I got you, sir,” Heigo nodded. “I got you. Well then, let me say another thing. You blamed my mother just now, for pampering me because I’m the youngest one of the family. —This is something everybody in my family has kept telling me ever since I can remember. Let big brother Keijiro say, that I’m the lastborn of the family makes me three pennies cheap, and, what’s worse, because I was pampered I’m additionally

cheaper. There's no kidding. No way! As long as I can remember, I've never been pampered in all my born days. To begin with, you, mother, never have," said Heigo, who turned to his mother, "Probably you must have forgotten, but when I tried to ask for something, the answer 'No, you can't' would come before I say a word. Upon 'Mother, I' coming on my lips, the answer 'No, you can't' came from you when actually you didn't hear anything yet. Mother, you must have forgotten, but I do remember all. My brothers and sisters did the asking freely, and asking, they would be allowed. But all that came to me alone was 'No.' All the time 'No,' and that was that, mother."

"I thought," Heigo's mother felt a lump in her throat as she pressed her eyes with the sleeve of her robe, "I would spoil you if I should pamper because you are the youngest."

"My grandfather and grandmother were in the same rut," said Heigo, who continued, "My grandfather used to say my grandmother pampered me, and on the other she used to say he did. In this way, everybody in the family said I was pampered and in reality no one ever pampered me, never. Have you ever once let me be pampered, mother? Do you ever remember pampering me once?"

"I only thought," Heigo's mother said again, "I would bring you up so you'd be independent."

"I know, I know," Heigo nodded again. "I'm not blaming you, mother. I'll be just fine if you understand this. I am the youngest of the family and I may be three pennies cheap, but I have no experience of ever being pampered, full stop. Please excuse me."

## 10

Heigo returned to his room. He put on both long and short swords on his waist, took only the short sword at stake, and got out by the side entrance door. His mother clung to him the while and wept and implored him to beg forgiveness of his father.

She said: What'd he do after he left home? There was nothing he

could do or did he have anything in mind?

“I’m all right, mother. Please don’t worry about me,” Heigo said. “Maybe, an antique dealer will come naturally to me as my father says. This evening for the first time in my life I’m determined. I will be an antique dealer.”

“Oh, come on, Heigo-san. What do you mean?”

“When I settle down, I’ll be in touch, mother. So let me be excused this evening, —.”

Not minding his mother calling from behind, Heigo fled out. He hurried along the streets in the evening, shaking his head, smacking his tongue, and talking to himself. He was vexed about things he had intended to say but didn’t, and proud that he had the perseverance to suppress what he had to say.

“Oh my old man, he said a good thing,” he whispered as he walked. “It didn’t ever enter my mind that he could say such a smart thing. That one word of his really got me.”

That’s right, there is no need of making excuses. What of it if I take a strong stand and assert my circumstances and talk my old man down? That’s that. It can do to prove with facts what I’ve done is proper for me.

“Wait and see and I’ll be a first-rate antique dealer,” he whispered to himself bravely. “Hell with samurai spirit! Becoming first-rate in the trade I pursue with my own hands will be more human by far than living dependent for a permanent stipend. Heh, wait and see and I’ll show you the proof. Don’t get surprised.”

The first thing he did was visit Seikan-Do.

Seibe’e was apparently drinking with his dinner. When he heard the whole story, he said, his red face shining, “Oh, you did it?” and slapped his knee. In an ‘oh-I’m-pleased-with-your-determination’ tone, he said he’d take care of it all in his own humble way. He told Heigo to come in and join him in a drink for celebration before anything. Heigo turned down the offer, saying he’d come back later, and asked where the Hoso’es lived. Seibe’e slapped his knee again and said that was exactly what he expected would come next. He showed the way. It was in the alleyway

beyond, there was a wicket by which entering he had to proceed to the fifth tenement on his left.

“But how about not going tonight? It’s not the kind of talk that you should do at this hour of the day, is it?”

“Yes, and I have other things to do, too,” Heigo said, getting up to go. “Just a few minutes and I’ll be back. After I come back, I’ll talk to you.”

Heigo was able to find Hosoe’s tenement easily.

It was narrow and dark in the alleyway, which was filled with the smell of cooking on the fire here and there in the tenements and the stench of the gutters and garbage dumps that came adrift to him and stung his nose. He felt at once hungry and sick. At Hosoe’s, the shutters were closed already and the door would not open readily at Heigo’s calls.

“I’m Koide Heigo,” he repeated. “I have to talk about the short sword you sold the other day. It’s the sword you sold to Seikan-Do.”

The daughter Mino seemed to be asking her mother if she could open the door, and presently, she slid open the shutter which was stuck and did not easily slide. She said, “Please come in.” When the shutter was open, he found there was no lattice door next to it. There were a foot-long dirt floor next to the doorstep and immediately two-tatami-mat room through which you went into the living room. She sat down there formally with an andon lamp light pulled beside her and greeted him as was dictated by the manners.

“I’m sorry to disturb you at this late hour,” Heigo apologized as he kept standing. “I am here to inform you that the short sword you sold the other day has proved a real one struck by Goro Masamuné.”

Mino lifted her eyes dubiously. Heigo told her the outline of the story. He spoke up so that her mother who must be lying beyond could hear it at the same time. A voice came calling to Mino from beyond the screen doors that separated the front part from the inner part of the tenement. She replied to the voice and moved toward where the voice came from. Heigo heard the voice say to ask him to step up into the front room. Mino looked at Heigo embarrassedly. Probably she hesitated to ask him up onto the two-mat room whose tatami mats, for instance, were frayed.

Heigo got up and took off his swords from his waist and put them down as he said, "Excuse me." He moved closer to the screen doors and sat down.

"I am Shinobu Hosō'e," Mino's mother said beyond the screen doors. "Since I am sick, may I be excused for being as I am?"

Heigo introduced himself on this side of the doors.

"I heard about the sword right here," Shinobu said in formal language. "It is a great pleasure that the sword said to be a Masamuné over the generations has proved a real one. However, once we parted with it, it does not have anything to do with us. Please do not let it worry you and make it yours."

She was using stiff language and, what was more, it had a ring of a rational attitude in the way she said it.

—She seems to be a formidable enemy.

So thinking, Heigo began to say he wanted Mino for his wife. He told the whole story of how he was disowned by his father. That the sword in question gave the impetus for the disownment. That he was hoping to be an antique dealer, a would-be best merchant. That he would be dedicated to his trade after forsaking his samurai status, giving up both of his long and short swords. And that when he married Mino, he would take on her mother at the same time so they could look after her needs. He was so nervous that the thread of his talk was entangled and he stumbled and stuttered on what he had to say. Albeit, he had all he had to say. Shinobu was listening to him silently the while, but no sooner had he finished than she replied, "I can't accept it.

"I can't unfold the name of the old master, but Hosō'e is a family of good lineage with annual revenue of 3,840 bushels of rice. Even though we may have come down in the world, being masterless ronin and in penury like this, we cannot marry our daughter to someone who will be an antique dealer or something. I will turn down your offer."

"But," Heigo blurted out, in spite of himself, and retorted, "in conjunction with the family lineage, the Koide family is a direct retainer of the shogun. The ancestors shared the trouble and pain in founding the Tokugawa Shogunate."

“Your family is so. You were born to a family of that renown but you have been disowned. In short, you cannot talk about the reputation of your good family lineage any more, or can you?”

How about the Hoso'e family? was on the tip of Heigo's tongue, by which he meant that, in the first place, they could expect no chance to restore the Hoso'e family, a ronin family in predicament, and without a boy to be heir of the family; then that there was no mentioning a family pedigree whatsoever; and that it was the same story after all. Just then, sobs began to be heard from beside him. When he turned, he saw Mino's face covered with her sleeve.

“Please excuse me,” Heigo did all he could to hold himself down and said, “Maybe, my way of asking for permission of marriage must have been tactless. I'll broach the subject some other time.”

“No, my answer is no,” Shinobu said. “If it is about marriage, I do not need to hear about it any more. Therefore, please do not visit us.”

“Excuse me,” Heigo said to Mino.

He took his swords and went out. When he walked through the alleyway and was out, he went to the side of the moat and stopped there.

“That was—,” he muttered, panting and gasping, “That was, as my father refers to, the spirit of samurai, that must be it. It's just terrible. I couldn't live up to it. It's, to be sure, an unlucky year, this year.”

Suddenly he looked back. He felt someone in the back of him. He turned back and saw Mino coming this way. She must have followed after him right after he had left. When she came up to him, she stopped and let out a sob, covering her face with her sleeve. Follow after him as she did, she had nothing more to do. She appeared to be unable to speak to him, either. But that was enough for Heigo. Quickly he looked from left to right, (as there was not a human shadow in the dark moat-side road) he got closer to Mino and put his hands on her shoulders.

“I'm confident in being patient,” Heigo said. “My father's been more obstinate than your mother, but up until I got to be twenty-four today, I've put up with his obstinacy. Do you understand?”

Mino nodded between her sobs.

“I hope it won't be inconvenient for you that I'll be an antiquary,”

Heigo said.

Mino shook her head. He was driven by the impulse of holding her tight. Under his hands her shoulders were so weak, so small, and so soft. He softly pushed her shoulders away.

“Seikan-Do will help you. Now you must go,” Heigo said. “Do take good care of your mother.”

## 11 Mera’s Assessment of Him

Mera Heiza’emon said:

“Heigo seems to be better off as he is, rather than he would have married into the Yoda family. Oh, it had been three years before Hosoe’s wife died. He took almost four years to get married. In the meanwhile, he had got on the right track of the trade and was able to have a shop of his own. After all, he’s been successful. He’s worked his way through the troubles that have been in his way. In other words, it is the line of trade he’s been fond of. Imagine it. It started out with manju. Well, they say, among co-traders the shop’s name ‘Heigo’ is well-reputed. Koide-san, Heigo’s father, was, as you know, a good collector of antiques, but when the name ‘Heigo’ began to be heard, he stopped indulging himself in antiques once and for all. Probably because he feels like Heigo would stick out his tongue at him. From the way Koide-san talked, things were, it seemed, as he suggested them to be. The son, Heigo, it seems, is the winner over the father, nay, it’d be better phrased to put it as ‘he, the youngest, is the winner, of all the Koide family.’ Oh, that young ’un, Heigo, he’s done it well, at any rate.”



## The Story of the Mulberry Trees

### 1

“The Notes of the Apricot Bloom Arbor” handed down in the domain roughly describes Doi Yujiro as follows:

“Doi Uemon, or commonly known by Yujiro. Born the second son of Chuza’emon, Shigeharu, he was for reasons brought up in a working-class family until age seven. In the spring of his eighth year, he began to serve the young prince as a playmate and stayed in service as a retainer attending closest to the lord at all times, a fair-haired boy, that is to say, for a good many years, until he retired from the service at the age of twenty-one.

“He was unrestrained and wild by nature, always characterized by constant off-the-wall behavior, and *The Sogan Chronicle* frequently makes mention of the undesirable services he rendered. After having retired, he buried himself in the hubbub of town’s routine and refused to associate with relatives and old acquaintances, and he did nothing for the rest of his life until the end of his days.

“And it is told that the mulberry stand in the depths of the city residence of the domain, all mulberry trees having grown so tall, was planted on his counsel by Honorable Taishun-In as a boy. This advice would be an exemplary expression of the wildness of Yujiro’s disposition. —By the by, *The Sogan Chronicle* is the tome of Honorable Taishun-In’s lifetime records, which contains full-length accounts on the restoration of the domain he of all lords embarked on, and on the life and achievements of his majesty who was regarded as an unrivaled governor. The author is Niizumi Sojuro, who later became the domain’s head senior

councilor with a pen name Sogan.”

This is the drift of the article, which sounds vitriolic on Yujiro, penned as “unrestrained and wild by nature” and “the undesirable services he rendered.” The Notes savages him. Certainly it is unusual to plant mulberry trees in the depths of the garden of the domain lord’s residence—so is it in a working-class residence, but does one go all lengths to claim an off-the-wall character for this matter? One can scarcely alledge it is so.

In addition, for the sake of the reader’s convenience, let me extract an outline alone of the article on his grandfather from the same “Notes of Apricot Bloom Arbor”:

“Doi Kan’emon, whose pen name is Kyoboku. In the time of Honorable Josho-In, he was promoted to be lord chamberlain from his lord’s liaison (a hereditary position) in Edo (now Tokyo), doubling a senior retainer. He was most heartily trusted by the then Honorable Lord. After the demise of Honorable Josho-In, he devoted himself to fostering the lord’s heir. Honorable Taishun-In’s disposition, it is told, of clear-sightedness and resolution may have been much indebted to Kan’emon. — And there are others that assess him, that is, openhearted bold man though he was, he indulged in drinking and was in and out of red light districts until old age. He was good at popular songs and haikai, three-line poetry with syllable pattern 5-7-5 containing a seasonal word within it. What he daily did included not a few things that were unrestrained.”

To these notes are added “other comments,” a kind of criticism against him. That Kan’emon was heavily loaded with responsibilities and in charge of fostering the domain lord’s young prince which spells such a high character, but then that he favored wine and women. That his daily behavior was unrestrained. These are something that could not be lauded to the sky. —And in this respect, his disposition may have something to do, that is, a cause and effect relationship, with Yujiro’s being “unrestrained and wild,” or may it not?

Yujiro was a twin brother. His big brother, the other twin, was called Samon, Shotaro. The samurai warriors had the tradition to shy away twins, and, on seeing the light of day, Yujiro was farmed out. Although “Apricot Bloom Arbor” records simply “a working-class family,” he

was farmed out, to be in more detail, to a boating-and-boarding which provided rowboats, functioning as at once a transporter and inn-keeper, called “Shusen” in Rokken-Cho, Asakusa.

His father, Chuzá’emon, was a kind of person who had a scrupulous disposition. Although he was the lord’s liaison which required sociability, he drank little. His one and only interest was to keep goldfish. And, other than goldfish, he was again a stranger to playing *go* and *shogi* (Japanese chess). On the contrary, Yujiro’s grandfather, Kan’emon, was apparently much of a man-about-town. Like “Apricot Bloom Arbor” records, he was into pleasure rendered in the red light districts such as Yoshiwara and Fukagawa until he got well into his years. He was a strong drinker, too. He was well versed in popular songs made by Ogi’e Itchu and others. He was also much into haikai by the pen name of Kyoboku. —Probably in this regard, he favored “Shusen.” It seemed to be his most favorite hideaway, so much so that Senkichi, the proprietor, more often than not came by Kan’emon’s house in the premises of the city residence. And o-Tsuné, the proprietor’s wife, too, was a familiar face in the kitchen of the house, where she would often pop up to bring fish of the season.

It was his grandfather Kan’emon who decided to farm out Yujiro to Shusen. His father opposed, saying that it was not the environment in which to farm out a son of the samurai class, whatever the reason. His mother, Kana-Jo, was also opposed to the idea and grimaced at it. Albeit, old Kyoboku said in an “Oh-I-know-it-all” tone:

—Look at his features, and you’ll see that he’ll grow to be a man-about-town like me. Therefore, we’ll be fighting one evil with another by farming him out to a place like a boating-and-boarding.

He said what he said. One day later on, it was said, he said this to his grandson’s mother. It was infallibly Kana-Jo, the wife of Yujiro’s father that he told:

—He’s the second son, who’s got no chance to succeed his father in this family. Therefore, it will be much better to be a boatman than to be adopted into a samurai family of sorts by marriage. Being a boatman is a trade that is easygoing for his entire life and can be a trade which is

pretty rakish, I tell you.

Probably, he said this when he was mellow from drinking. But it was most unruly about one's future. He must have been considerably liberalist for the times he lived in. —At any rate, Yujiro was thus farmed out to Shusen.

—Don't treat him like a delicate thing. Generally speaking, don't scold when he gets into mischief. Try as much as you can to let him run as free as a wind.

Old Kyoboku gave strict orders to Senkichi and o-Tsuné to treat him so, and they brought up Yujiro exactly as they had been told. The wet nurse came from a farmer in Kasai, a rural area of Edo. —He had been quick in getting to do things since an infant. As early as he was in his seventh month, he did not give a damn about milk any more and ate hard-boiled rice without batting an eyelid before he got to be one year old. He began crawling, standing, and walking earlier by thirty percent than average.

“I ain't of seen a baby like this.”

This was what they would always hear the wet nurse say.

“Look at him, he as quick and nimble as any. I can't take my eyes off of him. I takes leave of him fer brief moments, thinkin' he done fallen asleep, and I finds him nibblin'a geta, yeah a wooden-soled shoe, after he got down to the dirt floor before I knows it, ya know. Really, this here baby make me sit on thorns.”

True, you must keep tabs on most of infants when they begin crawling, then walking. But Yujiro was extraordinary. Like the wet nurse said, he was nimbleness itself and with the nimbleness he would do such outlandish things that grown-ups around him had to keep busy all the time. One of the bizzare incidents he caused was the “pickled-plum stones” incident. It happened when he had only begun crawling. O-Tsuné, who was babysitting him, carelessly got her guard down, and during her absence the baby Yujiro had gone and shoved into both nostrils the stones of pickled plums, one stone into each nostril, with his own hands. The stones in his nose blocked air passage and he fell down on his back and vainly thrashed his arms and legs in the air, frothing at the mouth.

O-Tsuné said later on: “Really, that moment shortened my life span. That incident curdles my blood as I recall it.”

Much later she would often repeat the incident and give a shudder. —Apparently, o-Tsuné was bewildered. Helter-skelter, she did this and that and finally found something lodging in his nostrils. She brought tweezers. She got the wet nurse to pin him down as he was kicking up, and tried to dislodge the something. She tried it in vain because the something was slimy and slippery and bigger by far than his nostrils. Try as she did, she failed. In time, Yujiro flaked out, turning pale. O-Tsuné grabbed hold of him under her arm at right angles, shot out of the house without footgear and ran on and on to doctor Gen’an in Hanakawado.

—Dr. Gen’an, my Yu-bo’s in trouble.

Running into the doctor’s office, she screamed so. Just then some thing or another God knows what, made the baby sneeze and began shrieking forcefully. —The sneeze blew out the stone from one of his nostrils. The remaining one was, not to mention, taken out by Dr. Gen’an, who, he himself said, was so appalled, words failed him.

Yujiro himself did not have a shred of memory of this episode. Putting aside quite a little mischief he did, he was embarrassed at this incident in spite of being a rascal that he was.

“Don’t pretend to be what you are not. Of all things, you shoved pickled-plum stones into your nostrils.”

At that he felt morally indebted to them, absolutely never able to protest.

His grandfather old Kyoboku kept showing up at Shusen after the incident, too. He came just about every ten days. On those occasions, he would go upstairs and, settling there, called for entertainers and had a pleasurable time singing and dancing lively with them. Or he set out on a rowboat to red light districts such as Yoshiwara and Fukagawa. — Thus, meantime, when o-Tsuné gave birth to a baby girl, the old man was asked to be her godfather. Yujiro was four then. He found the baby a great curiosity and he made much of the baby girl named o-Mitsu. He tried to hold her in his arms, pinched her nose, and thrust his fingers into

her mouth and ears, so they could not get their guard down a moment.

It was said that his grandfather often came by the inn for one reason that he intended to see how his grandson was getting along. But the young boy had no interest whatsoever in such a weird “dotard,” so he had never spared a moment to talk to him seriously. —Other than that, he was busy playing, so busy he grudged wasting time on a meal. He was naturally so busy because the household trade was operating a boating-and-boarding and because he did not lack any place to play: there were the Sumida River and the Senso-Ji Temple in his neighborhood. Come rain, come wind, his home was minus him most of the time except when he ate and slept.

Yujiro was already the leader of bullies in the neighborhood at the age of five. He was physically lean and small, but no one was any match for him in quick-mindedness and nimbleness. He never lost even when he fought with older boys. —His robe was ripped with holes all the time, his hands and feet were muddy, and almost always he had either scratches or bumps somewhere on him. In this way, at his dinner tray with a swollen black eye or something on his face, briskly raking in the morsels of dinner, he would say:

“Sonnovabitch! That loggerhead Katsunbé, wait an’ see. When I catch ya tomorrow. . .”

He was thoroughly known by the name of “Yu-chan of Shusen” from Hanakawado to Yamanoyado, Imado, or around Hashiba on this side of the River and on the that side from Koume to Mukojima. His name was famous far and wide not just to children but to their parents as well. And those parents came complaining to Senkichi and his wife, whose associations in turn got to expand again far and wide.

“I was regarded as haughty amon’ co-traders, but these days thanks to Yu-bo I done turned humble and humiliated through an’ through, tell ya.”

“You’re apologizin’ day in and day out. Customers are surprised that the boss’s got awfully affable. —That is to say, you got disciplined by Yu-bo, didn’t you?”

“Oh, knock it off. No kiddin’. Must I be made a fool of by you, too?”

Thanks much but not fer me.”

Senkichi and o-Tsuné would often talk like this and make themselves heartened to laughs and disheartened by complaints. —And then, in the fall when he turned seven years old, Yujiro was suddenly taken back home, to the Doi family.

## 2

Later on, someone revealed that it had also been his grandfather that had proposed to take him back. And he had said so at such short notice Chuza’emon, Yujiro’s father, and his wife had had no time to say either yes or no. Above all, Chuza’emon had secretly gone a couple of times to see what his son had been up to.

—That boy has failed completely. There’s no choice but to give him up to Shusen.

So he said and shook his head to his wife. He said that Yujiro had no chance one way or another to be admitted into the samurai class and told her to give him up.

The outfit in which he was taken back home was pretty eye-catching. It certainly caught your eyes because he was not what he had been. He had been free as a wind: he had been swimming in the river, chasing after dragonflies and fighting in the mud until only the day before. And now he wasn’t in play clothes any more. He was decked out in the formal garments: a kimono, a pair of hakama, skirt-like trousers, for the first time in his life, was made to wear swords on his waist again for the first time in his life, and, in addition, a pair of tabi socks. Of course, his hair was formally done in the way boys from the samurai class had it done. Everything on him was tight all over his body and stifled him. He felt so giddy he would pass out and fall down at any minute.

He was sunburned, so only his eyes stood out as he rolled them. Chuza’emon had scarcely had a glance at him before he grimaced and turned his face away. But Kana-Jo was different. She was his mother. She was struck by the contemptibility in which her son appeared, geared

in formality, and, taking him in her arms, let compassionate tears roll down her cheeks. —His elder brother, Shotaro was astonished, his mouth agape, and drew back a little as he was sitting. This flinch Yujiro swiftly grasped and said:

—He ain't a big deal.

So thinking, he gave a derisive snort.

His grandfather introduced Yujiro to the old steward Watanabe, seven retainers of the house, and man servants and maid servants. Yujiro detected that they were all easy to get by. His father was hard to deal with. Among the retainers, one called Kuroita Gombe'e, with a beard and big round eyes, would be a bit hard to deal with, too. —But 'em all others ain't no big deal. There ain't no one who had a sting. He felt there was no element of thrill and gave a number of snorts.

His new life began. In the new life what made him raddled were manners and learning. He had to be formally geared all day long in kimono and hakama, and swords on his waist even though he was only a boy, and in either walking or sitting, he had to keep bolt upright. —He had to walk quietly with his eyes set straight in the direction he walked. When he sat, he had to place both hands on the knees, chest thrown out. He had to talk distinctly and plainly and only in the gist of what he had to say, no idle talk whatsoever. When he ate, he had to be quiet, making no noise of the plates or dishes or chopsticks. Making a noise as he chewed was out of the question. If he forgot those manners, words of his father's scolding flew at him at the drop of a hat: "Yujiro—."

"Yujiro, sit squarely. Put the neckband of your robe together on your chest."

"Yujiro, clamp your lips. Men are supposed to hardly laugh."

"Walk quietly, Yujiro. The corridor isn't a riding ground."

Yujiro, Yujiro, Yujiro. Don't. Mustn't. Shut up. Sit. These words rang around his ears incessantly. He was unable to stand it and appealed to his grandfather once. Kyoboku sniggered and retorted, "What do you think of your big brother Shotaro?" Yujiro replied in less than no time, "That washout of a melon, I can twist him around my little finger."

"But your big brother is doing all right what you've surrendered to."



His grandfather said like he was playing a fool, looking like one:

“Then it follows that the washout of a melon is you, not him, right?”

Yujiro had not been more insulted. Had he not been his grandfather, he would have beaten him to a pulp and chucked it into the furnace of the Imado ceramics. In his aggravation, he shed big tears and, rubbing them off with his fists, protested:

“I ain’t none of a washout nor a melon, tell ya. I ain’t got nothin’ to give up to.”

“Really? Is that true?” his grandfather sniggered again and said, “—I wonder.”

Yujiro was excited. As far as obstinacy was concerned, no one was any match for him. *Sonnovabitch!* He gave his all to everything he was slated to do, his teeth clamped. —The whole thing was not really a penance. He had only to be accustomed to it all. And, if only he was careful, he could seek out openings in which he could have his way. After his father went to work and where he was not within his mother’s eyesight, he could take as frequent a breather as he liked. And in this regard, he was best gifted, a natural. It took no time or trouble at all for him to find open space and time and make best use of them.

In regards learning, a samurai from the same domain called Kayano Michinosuke came every day to teach how to read aloud (, in which you were not required to comprehend what you were reading,) for the first thirty days or so.

—It had been shortly after he’d been back to the Doi family. He hadn’t been able to sit properly yet. Such as he had been, he had had to sit at the desk, open the book, and mimic reading aloud letter-perfect as the instructor had done. . . . Characters in the book were totally at sixes and sevens and nothing at all came to him as he mimicked aloud, completely beyond comprehension. His legs were pins and needles. Sleepiness beset him. What was singularly interesting was that yawns came one after another without knowing an end.

“You must properly behave.”

Professor Kayano glared, rolling his eyes.

“Set your knees straight. There is no yawning. Even though you have

learned something, yawns let out all that you've learned."

Yujiro snorted: Who would care? If what he'd learned was bent on going out by yawning, let it go. There was absolutely no need to keep it confined when it wanted to go.

"I've yawned something like twenty times. Well, this means all of what I've learned have gone out, professor?"

Professor Kayano turned to the color of red ocher, glared at Yujiro fiercely, cleared his throat, and went on reading. —Three days passed, followed suit by the fourth, fifth days. He grew more fed up and got bored each passing day. It was a wonder, on the other hand, that Professor Kayano stayed dedicated to instructing Yujiro.

"Do you find it amusing to read stuff like this, professor?"

Yujiro wondered if it wasn't so, so he asked if it was. He intended no malice at all by inquiring, but the professor saw red, shut the book determinedly and roared ferociously that what they were doing did not quite spell fun.

"This is learning. We're learning the teachings of a sage who is called Confucius the Sage. It's learning that is gracious, truly serious, and highly edifying."

Then he began to pour out something Yujiro couldn't make out. Yujiro thought this was gratifying. What the professor was preaching was simply tarradiddles, but tarradiddles were easier for him when he was just listening to them. More than anything, the professor's face the color of red ocher, he must be thinking this is awfully formidable, those glaring rolling eyes of his, that vivacious mouth that spit as it moved, and all that jazz, were something that couldn't be missed as long as he was just watching it.

—Katsunbé in Koume, when he got mad, turned to the same color in the face. . . . Those round eyes, whose eyes do they look like? Kuma's, the roof tile maker's son's?

A variety of people and things popped up in association.

—Wow, the mouth is very agile. Open and shut, open and shut, non-stop, eh? . . . Oh, yeah, that's right. I ain't seen the goldfish Dad have yet.

This was much better than just reading aloud, a strange thing, like, and that was the ticket, he thought. So, when he became bored, he used the ticket.

“Which times was Confucius from, professor?”

“Put the honorific title. Don’t call him simply Confucius. He’s so great he’s called a sage. —Confucius the Sage came from about two thousand three hundred years ago.”

Yujiro was surprised. He thought the professor was fudging up the number. But this time he was truly surprised that it was not an exaggerated number of years.

“What a surprise! I didn’t know he was that ancient. Well, I never! But do such ancient teachings still work in our times if we learn them now?”

Professor Kayano’s face grew a much deeper red ocher than usual. At this Yujiro expected he’d be entertained longer than ever. His expectations did live up. He took it easy, enjoying much longer than usual. —Professor Kayano came every day for thirty days but after that he resigned from teaching him and stopped coming. He was so mean as to let on to Yujiro’s father, who gave him hell and made him sit on his seat for a half day on the wooden floor of the corridor.

“From tomorrow on you will go to the domain school. If you’re frivolous at the school, you will have to pay more for it, really.”

In this way, he was sent to the domain school located in the premises of the city residence. He was to go to school with his elder brother Shotaro.

At school things didn’t go as had gone with professor Kayano. Students varied from seven years old to twelve years old and the school was open to only the sons of shogunal vassals. They were all of them thirty-four or thirty-five. The sons of the vassals of lower-ranking, not shogunal vassals, were privately educated at the private house of individual professors of the school. There were five professors besides the principal, whose name was Sagara Saisho. He was at a managerial position below the senior councilors, white-haired and admirably mild of the character. The professors were irascible and peculiarly formal. This was

offensive to the eyes. But otherwise, Yujiro thought, they were not much to deal with. Shit! There was one among them seriously formidable.

He was called Hanada Kin'ya (Flower-Patch the-Pleasurable), a name vividly suggestive of that which was viciously gentle. He was fair complexioned with thick eyebrows. He was considerably good-looking. And he turned out to be a real sham. On the third day of school, he got Yujiro to sit squarely on the corridor and struck him in the forehead with a fist.

On the fifth day, Yujiro was made to sit on his seat on the open veranda, which was made of rawboned logs. When he sat on the veranda, it got his shins painfully and it looked like his bones would be busted at any minute. In his pain his head began to swim in the end, stars twinkling in his eyes. —Sonnovabitch, he clenched his teeth and endured the pain until he was told, “You can get to your feet.” He bore such deep resentment against the professor that inwardly he swore to make him pay for this some day without fail. . . . Punishment continued thereafter. He was made to stand still barefoot in the yard, stay on after school. He was given one punishment or another every day. And every other day, he was told to sit on that open veranda.

One day when it was some thirty days after he had been enrolled, he was going back after school, when Professor Hanada ordered him to “stay on.” Bullshit! would he be made to stay on after school again? he thought. Sickened, he was sitting at his desk solitarily. —Then, in time, Professor Hanada showed up and sat down, producing to him a bowl of cakes or *manju*.

“Here you are, *manju* with chestnut in from the Rogetsu-Do or Dewed-Moon Hall Confectionery. Eat them.”

There, Professor Hanada himself took one. A reflex gulp in Yujiro's throat, and his mouth was watered for the *manju*. But he remained silent, his eyes turned away.

“I won't be giving classes from tomorrow on. In a matter of a couple of days, I'll be leaving for the home province. —I want to part friends, so eat one. When you finish, I'll have a word with you.”

3

“I don’t want to eat. I don’t like manju at all.”

Yujiro declined the offer, his face kept turned away. Professor Hanada returned the manju in his hand into the bowl and went on looking at him for a while and then he nodded “Okay” and redid his legs to sit on his seat.

“The truth is, I wish to take care of you a little longer. I must tell you I regret that I have to leave you behind. Most probably, ordinary eyes can’t see good things about you. You’ll be reflected on those eyes as a mere incorrigible imp. The you as described will stay with me as something I regret that I have to miss.”

So saying, the professor lowered his voice a little.

“This is strictly confidential, but you’ll be chosen a mate of the young prince in the near future. Seven will be chosen, and among them you and Niiizumi Kotaro are the two that I expect to be the most hopeful. You and Niiizumi must be useful to the young prince in your individual faculty. Be aware that you both have different responsibilities from the others, your own responsibilities. Do your best.”

Yujiro began to feel ill at ease. Even here at school, everything was too formal for him to breathe freely. What would he do when chosen to be a mate to the young prince? No way! He thought he had to turn it down definitely. However, Professor Hanada bore a grudge against him and it wouldn’t work out if he asked the professor to tell them not to choose him. And he remained quiet.

“Now I’m finished. I might have been a little bit too strict with you, but for being so, —look at this.”

So saying, Professor Hanada pulled up the bottom of his hakama and bared both shins. His shins were not hairy, thinly haired as Yujiro expected. Either of them bore marks of four, five layers of red swollen strips, one about two and a half inches apart from another. —What they stood for, Yujiro did not know. He thought it might be because of blood

beriberi. Then he was given the manju in the bowl and presently went home with them.

He learned later that Professor Hanada had been appointed to be head master of the domain school in the home province. A professor called Nakano Kennosuke arrived and filled the opening. Young as he was, he wore glasses. His face was ashen and a little swollen. Like an old man, he was coughing all the time. —Even when Yujiro stirred up the class by poking boys around him, pulling other boys' hair, smearing others' cheeks with his brush and black ink without warning, the professor, eyeing suspiciously, flabby-skinned face wearing glasses turned toward Yujiro, and only said, "Who did it, boys? Who did it?"

On the part of Yujiro, he gradually learned more knacks of avoiding punishment. Around that time, he scarcely got punished. But instead, a new drag came in. It was rivalry against Niiizumi Kotaro. —In the first place he had had no idea whatsoever a boy like that was in the class. He had regarded the rest of the class as scatterbrained hammerheads, but since he had heard from Professor Hanada the name together with his, he had been paying attention to see what sort of boy Kotaro was.

. . . The boy was chubby, with red cheeks, and extraordinarily clearly drawn eyebrows and lips. He looked very handsome. He would listen to the class intently, always lips tightly compressed and eyes serene, and read aloud the textbook exceptionally well in a calm good voice.

"Good, very good."

The professor in charge said so to the class to praise him. Every professor seemed to be in favor of Kotaro:

"This is Niiizumi's calligraphy. You must write your letters like he does. Pass it around and see well what it is like."

Praising Niiizumi in one way or another took place almost every day. His father, Niiizumi Sojuro, they said, was the second senior councilor. That was why, it was felt, the professors favored him particularly. Although Yujiro tried to take him the way he was, what Professor Hanada had said was on his mind and could not distract his attention from Niiizumi.

—You'll be chosen a study mate to the young prince in the near fu-

ture. Among those who will be chosen, I expect you two most to stand out as hopefuls.

He did not let it on to anybody yet because he had been told it was strictly confidential and because he was not by any means interested in bearing such formal responsibilities. He was trying as much as he could to be not selected—that is to say, so that he would not be mistaken for a good boy. But, on the other hand, rivalry would peep out, no matter how. The rivalry proceeded from the belief that even he himself was regarded as a hopeful by Professor Hanada. He had a strong itch to come out with it.

In spite of that, what got on his nerves was how Niiizumi behaved toward him. Niiizumi Kotaro ignored Yujiro. He would pretend to be prudish and never took interest in Yujiro or gave a glimpse at him. He seemed to be a boy of few words by nature. Yujiro went and talked to him, but all that came back from him was “Yes” and “No.” He simply gave the cold shoulder to Yujiro, who tried to pick a fight but in vain because Kotaro never got his guard down. —At any rate, he was so exacerbated, going to school every day weighed on his mind.

Oddly enough, Yujiro had no business at all with his big brother Shotaro, with whom he lived under the same roof and went to school. He could not remember talking to each other. Although it was said the twins resembled each other in their characters, it didn’t apply at all. His big brother was mild or somewhat like he was on the daft side. When he was told to go to school, he responded, “Yes”; practice swordsmanship, “Yes”; study, “Yes”; dinner, hit the sack, get up, —everything he did was what he was told to do all day. He repeated yes. Whereas, it did not work with Yujiro. He himself sometimes tried to be quiet, but sitting for a long time made him sleepy or nervous as if a cicada was chirping in his ears. His limbs began to fidget. He felt itchy here and there on his body. And before he knew it, he would bolt out of the house.

“Since Yujiro came back, it’s been topsy-turvy everywhere in this household.”

His father would often say so and grimaced. They said, he was quite right in what he said, but which of them, father or son, was to blame

was a problem. Anyhow, it was very different here than in Asakusa to Yujiro. There was nothing at all here. There were not the Big River, boats, shows, grassy spots, or gravel piles. Here, there was a garden all right, in which were absurd stones, lawn, planted trees, a pond, and moss-covered stone lanterns. They were all disposed peculiarly at arm's length from each other but orderly as if measured by the scale. When he broke a branch off any of the trees, he would be shouted at: "Hey! The branch was grown to give taste to the shadow over there. You broke it and we can't enjoy the shadow patterns any more, you idiot!"

The odd rock disposed on the brink of the pond had a bump on the shoulders. That looked ugly, so Yujiro chipped it off with a hammer. And he caught it in the similar words. And then, the stepping stones, — there were placed desultorily flat stones from the wicket beside the main entrance to the veranda. You were supposed to step on one stone after another. The disposition of the stones was awfully desultory, the stones being placed in a singularly bending line, one stone to the left and the next one to the right. Maybe it was the job of a mean person or a cock-eyed person. —Yujiro thought, okay, he would do a good thing once in a while. He rearranged the stones in a straight line. They were not so big or thick but they weighed exceptionally hefty. He was drenched with sweat and his feet lurched when he was done.

It's a bliss to cast bread upon the waters. Yujiro forgot he was tired and was thrilled with joy as he imagined that he would be hearing his father raise his voice in surprise and admiration. —Well, the result was exactly the other way around. It would be clever to leave it unsaid how it turned out the other way around. . . . The drift of it was that he had to work by the sweat of his brow to undo the stones in the eyes of his father.

When Yujiro was digging up the garden, he found an arrowhead. He thought there were very strange things in the hills sections of Edo, so he kept digging. He dug up one after another until finally he dug up thirty-five or thirty-seven. They were daffodil bulbs and he got hell. And here's another vignette of him. In early spring, there sprouted weird buds in one corner of the garden. Plants of an eerie color wiggled



out one after another. He thought they might be poisonous grasses and plucked them all out. What happened? They turned out to be the sprouts of Chinese peonies, which pulled a fast one on him, too.

When it came to the goldfish, Yujiro got hell, much more severely.

Beyond the veranda next to his father's apartment was a huge bowl with water lilies floating. The bowl was two to three feet tall and twelve to thirteen feet in circumference. His father had his goldfish in it. They said there were some ten goldfish dappled with red and white spots in the thin green cloudy foul water. In the shades of the leaves of the water lilies and through the cloudy water they were seen to be swimming all the time in an oddly slow manner as if tired.

"Your father goes all lengths to take care of them. Don't meddle into them. No mischief whatsoever, understand?"

So said his mother importunately as if worried. —It was fine to just get a look, so Yujiro got close to the bowl and looked. They were big and fat. Some looked bigger than six inches. Some had a head of bumps with the trunks as fat as a ball, totally looking very ugly. They were called ranchu or lion mask and they were hard to breed. They said, his father put his all to breed them so nobody could possibly do as much as he did. . . . He was going to make a present of them to the lord. That was why he took all the more care of them. That might be so, but Yujiro found his father had missed a thing. What was it then? He cared for them too much to notice that the goldfish's fins and tails had overgrown. They could not swim like ordinary goldfish because their overgrown fins and tails came in their way. —Like a baby was donned in a long-sleeved kimono, they wriggled their body and swam, strenuous and heavy work for them, in the way that made them look languidly tired, barely swimming as if loaded heavily.

Yujiro felt sorry for them. He brought a pair of scissors and, catching one by one, cut the overgrown fins and tails down to size. —When he was doing the seventh, he was found by the round-eyed Kuroita Gombe'e. He yelled like he was about to be killed, at which Yujiro's mother rushed to the scene, followed by the old steward Watanabe, Shotarō, his big brother, and everybody else. Yujiro was surprised that all

the folks in the household gathered.

“We humans cut our hair and nails when they grow too long. Don’t you feel sorry for the goldfish?”

Yujiro explained so, but his father was madness itself. He ordered that Yujiro be confined in the murky closet for three days straight.

#### 4

It was in March the next year that Yujiro met the young prince Masa’atsu for the first time. —He had meant to have done his best lest the meeting take place, but his effort had gone for nothing and he had been chosen to be a “study mate” of the young prince.

The preceding lord Joso-In had passed on six years before at the age of twenty-three. The young prince had not officially ascended to the throne yet but he was the *de facto* lord of the domain with annual revenue of 323,000 bushels of rice. His mother was called Seiko-In who was from the Matsudairas, noble siblings to the shogun. Her elder brother Matsudaira Geki was the guardian of the young prince. —The domain was governed under the council system, all senior councilors from both Edo and the domain taking part. Among them, Doi Kan’emon did not only govern the domain but bore the responsibility of fostering the young prince as well.

The young prince was called Nobutaro at the time. Yujiro and the other mates were warned to call him “young lord.” —The young lord was living in the Nichigetsu (Sun-and-Moon) House situated on the heights in the depths of the garden, apart from the large front houses. It was encircled by the forest of pine trees and cedar trees. There were flower gardens and large areas of lawn. When you climbed to the top of the heights, you could get a commanding view of the landscape ranging from the Reservoir through the Akasaka Heights to the forests of Sanno in the west, and in the east you looked, between the roofs of the front houses, over downtowns in the direction of Kyobashi in the distance. . . . And again when you climbed down the layered heights in the west and

beyond the plank-roofed (Kasagi-style) fence, there were orchards and vegetable gardens on each layer of the heights. The bottom layer formed the bottom of a ravine with a rivulet, where there was the boundary of the city residence. The boundary was drawn by the tall-roofed mud (Tsuiji-style) walls, beyond which were blackish lush forests.

—The young lord was eight, as old as Yujiro. He was pale and skinny. His face was featureless with the eyebrows and the eyes set far apart from each other. His motions were slow. He talked with a lisp. Watching him made Yujiro only irritated.

—A young one of this kind will be a foolish lord when grown up.

So thought Yujiro, who was disinclined to serve him seriously. He was on his own most of the time, romping about. As Professor Hanada had said, there were seven chosen and Niiizumi was one of the seven. —They were on duty at eight in the morning and off at three in the afternoon. In the morning, they were scheduled to listen to a lecture, to read aloud (without seeking the meaning) and to practice calligraphy, and in the afternoon, to practice the forms of swordsmanship. In other time, they played in the garden. And they had a holiday every seven days.

Yujiro liked neither reading aloud nor calligraphy, but he did like lectures and swordsmanship. Lectures took up narratives on ancient and contemporary great commanders and brave warriors and battles. They were like storytelling on the street and given in the precincts of the Senso-Ji Temple. Thus, he wondered if the lecturer was not acquainted with the storyteller in the temple and tried questioning him, “Professor, do you happen to know the storyteller Tonchinken Donsai (a funny name, literally, Monseigneur Off-the-Track Dull-Witted)?” In response he asked who and what he was. When Yujiro answered he was a storyteller in Asakusa, the lecturer grew angry and stopped his lecture partway.

On his third holiday since he had begun to serve the young lord, his grandfather said, “We’ll visit the Shrine of Confucius,” and they left their house early in the morning. That was the first outing since he had been taken back home. Therefore, he was terribly pleased and gratified to just go out, but they did not go to the Shrine. His grandfather took him to Asakusa. That was a great big surprise for Yujiro.

“Be quiet about this. It’s secret.”

His grandfather made sure with him.

At Shusen, o-Tsuné shed tears to see Yujiro. O-Mitsu, who had grown five years old, must have forgotten him. She looked at him with her round eyes and never came close to him. Yujiro hurriedly tore off his gear and said, “Mom! Get me my robes.” As he said so, he untied his hair, too.

“And do my hair the way you did to me.”

“Young master, you ask me so, but by any chance, are you. . . ?”

“Do as he likes,” old man Kyoboku said and laughed. “—For a good half year he’s been patient. This is a breather for you, Yujiro. Run and romp as wildly as you like.”

Now he was in a romper’s lined kimono with tight-sleeves which came down only to the elbows and the kimono was tied with a waistband. His hair was lumped together and knotted only once. He came out simple and neat.

“Cool! This is real cool! ”

He yelled, jumping for joy.

“My waist’s real light an’ so I could float in the air. I could jump up to the roof. This is cool! —Mom, is Kichibe’e in?”

“A boat is not safe, young master.”

No sooner had o-Tsuné warned so than he shot down to the dirt floor and out. —He called out for Kichibe’e, a young boatman, had him row a boat for the other side of the River and, getting there, stayed until lunchtime. And when finally he came back, he had a black eye and three scratches in the cheeks.

“I owed loggerhead Katsunbé a fight.”

He guzzled his lunch as he said so.

“I also owed still another in Koume, but the other got scared shitless an’ didn’t show up. Now I’m seein’ Kuma of the roof-tile maker. Naw, it ain’t a fight. We’ll play at the Temple of the Kwannon (Goddess of Mercy).”

There was no time for o-Tsuné to apply ointment to his wounds. On finishing lunch, he threw his chopsticks away and went out. —Old

Kyoboku had his way, too, he must have been off somewhere around Fukagawa. He came back mellow in good spirits after three. But Yujiro came back much later. They found him muddy all over and dangling a torn sleeve.

“What’s that face? No kidding,” old Kyoboku groaned, understanding as he was, “We’re supposed to be visiting the Shrine of Confucius, but there you. . . come on, no kidding. However, anyway, get ready quickly. We’re really late going back.”

When Yujiro was about to leave Shusen, o-Mitsu peeped out halfway at the entrance and grinned from ear to ear and said:

“Yu-chan Big Bro, come back again.”

Yujiro did not respond. Hastily he began to walk away.

At that time, old Kyoboku cunningly evaded questions that Yujiro’s parents would have barraged him with. As they left the Shrine, Yujiro fell down on the steps and earned the black eye. He got the scratches in the face as he walked past the hardy orange hedges. Whether they were trusted or not was unknown because Yujiro’s father was quiet and his mother just applied ointment without asking anything about it.

After that Yujiro visited Shusen once a month, and not on regular days he was taken out to attend those events he would have missed, such as the Sanja (Three Avatars) Festival of the Asakusa Shrine, the Fire Works in Ryogoku, Forty-Six Thousand Days, and the Flower Markets.

It was about the early fall of the same year that he got on the speaking terms with the young lord. Until then, the young lord had only stuck to Niiizumi and taken no notice of him. Yujiro had preferred to be left alone because whenever he found time he had explored the premises of the city residence as he liked. By that time he knew every corner of the huge tract of land of the city residence. —Since the beginning of July (lunar calendar), Kotaro had been absent from his duties. He was sick. The young lord missed him greatly. Noticing this, Yujiro spoke to the young lord for the first time. He intended to make him forget his loneliness, so he put his mouth to the young lord’s ear and whispered into it:

“Shall we go scooping fish, young lord?”

The young lord looked at him suspiciously.

“We can scoop up carp and river shrimps. That’s very fun, tell ya.”

They would keep it secret from the others. They concerted a plan of operations and climbed down together to the ravine at the aforementioned boundary. The young lord was on the verge of tears when they scrambled up the Kasagi-style fence. He scraped his knees when they jumped down the layers of the heights. His motion was so slow and clumsy Yujiro felt like clicking his impatient tongue.

“You must be quicker on your feet, young lord. Forget the scrapes you made. This’ll become serious if we are found by the janitor.”

When they jumped down off the stone fence, Yujiro took a bamboo basket with large meshes out of the crevice where the stone fence was broken.

—The young lord was uneasily looking around. The landscape of dingy and damp floor of a ravine bottom where he came down dismayed him. He was restive because he felt uneasy. Yujiro showed him to the rivulet, saying, This way, young lord, and brushing their way through the reeds. The stream was about three feet wide, shallow, and muddy. It led down to the Reservoir, from where small fish and river shrimps swam up the stream. Yujiro tucked the sides of his hakama. He seemed accustomed to it. He took off his footgear, and waded into the stream. In less than no time he scooped up a fish.

“Look, young lord. Here’s a fish. It’s called *kinko*, shinin’ gold, eh. Or called gold carp. Guys in Koume call it *kinko*.”

Yujiro’s catch was five small carp and three river shrimps. This was the very first experience to the young lord, who was only astonished. Eyes rounder, he looked like he had become a fool.

The next day, the young lord called Yujiro when it was playtime and said, “There are fish in my residence, too.” Thereupon, Yujiro went with him and found goldfish swimming in a little pond. —They were called ranchu or lion mask, those ugly-looking goldfish. He knew at once they were the present his father had made. He, suddenly becoming disgusted, felt such a threat of war that he spat sideways and said with a grimace on his face, Shit on ’em!

“They’re all crippled. Them goldfish are somethin’ girls watch an’ en-

joy. Ain't fer boys to watch. Or do they watch 'em here? Ain't nothin' to deal with."

The young lord was dejected, looking at his wits' end.

About two days after, Yujiro went scooping fish with the young lord. On the third time, the young lord himself suggested to go fishing. Now fishing was amusing to him. It had grown easier for him to get over the Kasagi-style fence, jump down the heights, and hide from the janitor when he came around. And now he himself planted his feet in the stream and scooped.

"This ain't a real thin', young lord. When ya go to the river in Hashiba, ya can hook up minnows an' carp, this big, an' in a pile of 'em. —Ump-teen times I hooked up carp in the Ayase River."

"—Can I be there myself?"

"No, ya can't, young lord. If ya could, it'd be gonna be lotta fun. There're plays to watch. Jugglers come an' play at the Temple of the Kwannon, tell ya. Do ya happen to watch a *rokurokubi*? A *rokurokubi* is a long-necked woman. Her neck grow long an' then grow short. Weird."

"—I, I once, . . . once watched a Noh play."

The young lord consistently talked like that then, though most of the time he talked inconsistently. Yujiro would look as if he couldn't help but to despise him any time he spoke, but then Yujiro'd feel sorry for him. Instead he narrated his happy experiences in detail.

When Niiizumi came back, the young lord had him around all the time again, but then he did not slight Yujiro. Only, he must have perceived that the two boys of disparate characters could not get along, and he never talked about Niiizumi to Yujiro and *vice versa*.

Around that time Yujiro got to imagine letting the young lord slip from his residence and showing intriguing things and places in the neighborhood of Asakusa. He only imagined that and no more or no less. He did not think about carrying it out, nor did he think he'd be able to do it. But opportunities came about and he could realize what he had imagined.

## 5

In the year the young lord turned twelve, it was decided that he was to spend the time June through August in the villa in Honjo, a rural area in Edo. It was because the young lord was in delicate health that his doctor and Kan'emon strongly asserted that he be temporarily relocated and made the decision. There were no women to attend. Only a few retainers did. All the young lord had to do was play with the seven children with no study or practice of anything. —In this villa, Yujiro cleverly found the opportunities to let the young lord slip out.

In the villa, everything went with very few rules. Kan'emon was the only person in charge there in order to take care of the young lord and the seven kids. The structure of the residence and the fences were so uncomplicated there was chance enough to slip out. Yujiro got the young lord to say, "I'm feeling poorly," most of the time and got out by pretending to go into his bedroom. The pretention was made by Hara Sei'ichiro, one of the seven mates, being made to be in bed in place of the young lord. Sei'ichiro was a peerless gourmand, so Yujiro and the young lord could bribe him for a bag of candies and cakes. —On slipping out, Yujiro made a beeline to Shusen, where he had the young lord change his clothes as well as himself, and took him out here and there and everywhere. He introduced the young lord as a friend called Nobutaro to the folks of Shusen. In their face, he called the young lord "Oy, Nobu-chan." He tried to get the young lord to call him "Yu Boy," by doing which he intended to suggest the difference of their status. But the young lord did not accustom himself to it and only called him with "Hey," and "Excuse me" to the end.

Yujiro got the young lord to witness a fist fight in which he struck Katsunbé in Koume. He showed him how to fish, how to drain the water out of the pond, and how to swim in the Big River. The young lord became quicker on his feet. So, in case they were chased after because of the mischief they did, he remarkably learned to get away more swiftly



and nimbly. —When they went to the neighborhood of the Chomei-Ji Temple, it so happened that Yujiro suddenly remembered something by the look of the house. It looked like a villa. He said, “Wait a mo. I think I’m right in guessin’ that it was in here, yep, I’ll go an’ get ya somethin’ good to eat.”

So saying, he wriggled through the hedge into the garden, where he had picked mulberries before. The berries were a little out of the season but he guessed it was the right place for sure and proceeded. And there he was. There were tall mulberry trees. Surely, berries had passed their best, but there remained plenty of black berries on the trees. —Yujiro picked berries with both hands and put them inside the chest pocket of his robe. He was repeating the procedure of picking berries and putting them into his pocket, when suddenly a male servant or something dashed out of the house with a rod and shouted:

“Bastard, you pillaging our garden again!”

Yujiro swiftly got through the hedge where it was slightly open. “Hurry, hurry!” he said and ran as if hurtling the young lord. —They ran and ran breathlessly as far as the residence of the Mito Domain. They sat beneath the embankment of the residence. Yujiro took the mulberries out of his chest pocket and ate them with the young lord.

“This is good. I’ve never eaten a good thing like this. What berry is this?”

“Mulberries. When ya eat ’em, the inside of yer mouth get purple all over. Now look. Ya see?”

“Really. Is mine purple all over, too?”

The two showed their mouth and tongue to each other. They laughed at each other that their teeth were blackened like a married woman’s.”

In September when they returned to the city residence, the young lord ordered the gardener to plant two mulberry trees. The gardener protested it was not the kind of tree that was planted in the residence’s garden and would not agree. But the young lord would not listen to him. The gardener, who surrendered, said to keep it secret and planted two mulberries in the back of the Sun-and-Moon House.

“I’ll make this mine, and then that is yours.”

So whispered the young lord to Yujiro.

“From now on, I’ll have two mulberry trees planted every year. When they come up to many, I’ll get all the retainers and servants to eat berries. The berries are so good they’ll be surprised.”

The next year too, the two slipped out of the villa very often.

It was decided that they spend in the villa for one month in December, too, from the year after the next on. They had different experiences from summer. —Two mulberry trees were added every year, and the first two began bearing berries in the third year.

In the spring when the young lord turned sixteen, the guardian left him. The young lord was inaugurated Lord of Settsu and renamed Ma-sa’atsu. He got married with the daughter of Lord Matsudaira Gemba. Yoriko, the wife, was seventeen years old.

“Grandfather, can there be such an outrageous thing?”

Yujiro was really indignant and so demanded of his grandfather.

“The previous lord and the lord before died young. Isn’t it because they were all married young? Dr. Junsai also says an early marriage does harm to the health of the married. Children born of young couples tend to be weak and delicate in health. Don’t you grandfather know such a cinch?”

“Oh, I do, my boy. —They all know, probably.”

“Then why do you keep quiet? Why don’t you try and stop it? It may be all fine by the woman who is seventeen and at marriageable age. The young lord is sixteen all right, but then isn’t he a late developer?”

“But this I can’t help.”

Then, old Kyoboku began. Since five lords before, oddly enough the lords had died young. The lord called Kogaku-In through the previous lord Josho-In, they had mostly died of a sickness at the age of twenty-one or twenty-three. In those times it had been usual practice for domain lords to get married young. There had been not a few who had got married young at the age of thirteen or fifteen only nominally though. —For that reason and according to the medical diagnosis, those who had married young had had genetic defects by nature. Dr. Muroi Junsai who had been the doctor of Josho-In pointed out that constitutionally the young

lord Nobutaro had a number of things which were common to his father's.

"You can't tell one's life span. Neither can a doctor no matter what a good doctor he may be. However, they have died young for five consecutive generations and their constitutions resembled, if so, —then it's too awesome to say this but we must regard the current young lord as having a short life."

There, what would arise is the problem of the successor. For the sake of the estate with the annual revenue of 323,000 bushels of rice, the family name and the pedigree, and then all the retainers of the domain, he needs must have an heir. An heir was, of necessity, needed even though he was a little imbecile or weak.

"Isn't it just absurd! No matter how they need an heir, it's—then it's just like making the young lord's life shorter, short it will be in nature, isn't it, sir?"

"It can't be decided only by the number of the years one has lived whether one is long-lived or short-lived."

Seeing Yujiro seething, old Kyoboku said as if to appease him:

"Compare living a hundred years exclusively in a storehouse (that is, within four thick earthen walls) and living thirty years in the middle of town's hurly-burly in view of the experience one has accumulated. Which one has lived longer? —Yujiro, you'll understand."

"No I don't, sir. Does that do with the young lord?"

Old Kyoboku made a wry smile. He whispered he was slow to catch on and told him to consider if he didn't understand.

Masa'atsu moved to the front houses. The study mates were removed from their position and Yujiro, Niiizumi, and gourmand Hara were newly appointed to be attendants who would look after the lord's needs. —At that time Yujiro obliquely preached to Masa'atsu that an early marriage would not work. He was unable to be direct about it, so took examples to insinuate it. Masa'atsu seemed to catch on and said, "Don't worry about me if you mean me," and smiled.

The wedding took place in mid-March. But Masa'atsu slept in the front house and only when the events he could not help took place, did he go into the inner part of the house where his wife was. —It was said

that there had been difficult circumstances about Masa'atsu sleeping in the front house. Yoriko was blood kin to Seiko-In, Masa'atsu's mother, who was so fond of Yoriko the marriage had been consummated according to her will. —The other thing was that his mother must have wanted to have an heir as soon as possible. There was a fairly strong urge for him to relocate where he slept. Between the front and the inner, Kan'emon and Muroi Junsai did this and that to moderate the urge. They procrastinated the matter quite naturally for the main reason, which they fabricated, that Masa'atsu was not in good shape.

In the same year, immediately it turned June, they shifted to the villa and resumed to get out of the residence. All the Shusen folks waited for them impatiently. O-Mitsu, above all, was not more pleased. "I made matching yukata for you two to wear," she said and brought them the yukata and waistbands herself. She took care of them close by.

"Yu-chan, your waistband must to be tied much lower. Nobu-san, wear yours a little lower, too, —that's right. Yes, cool. The patterns become you, too. Not bad."

This was the way she spoke toward them, like a grown-up woman. Probably because the family trade was dealing with people in nature and she was brought up in, of all, busy downtown Asakusa, she was precocious. She had grown taller than last year and her looks changed conspicuously for the lovelier. She was one or two years older than a thirteen-year-old that she was.

"None of yer cheek! Ya never sewed yerself. Away! Get outa here. Shut up!"

"No, I didn't sew them. But I chose the patterns."

"Ah-ha! That's why it got bumpkin patterns. Tell ya, ya ain't that old yet. Lick yer pacifier an' play house an' be a big sis. This way it'll suit ya."

"Never mind and if you don't like it, take it off."

"Oh, ya have my sympathy. I'll wear it fer ya, or I'll feel sorry. Mom! I'll borrow a boat."

He urged Masa'atsu and got out on the riverbank and o-Mitsu followed after them and began to attend them again, looking after their

needs.

“That boat won’t do. No. Take this one.”

“Shut up. Don’t bother me. I ain’t the man on the street.”

“Oh, you talk big. OK, try that one. That’ll be a feast to my eyes.”

Masa’atsu was already used to quarrels between them. Senkichi and his wife were looking at them down there, laughing. —What’ya talkin’ ’bout? The feast’ll be mine. So saying, he untied the painter, and rowed the boat off the shore with the pole. He thought it was enough and tried to expose the fulcrum peg, but it had broken off and there was nothing in the oarlock. He groaned.

“What’s wrong? You won’t row, Yu-chan?”

So yelled o-Mitsu on the bank.

That year they played much at Shusen, where Yujiro and Nobu-san had over dancers of *Daikagura*, Shinto’s sacred dance, storytellers, jugglers, punch-line story tellers, and popular song singers. The sliding doors upstairs were removed. The open space that the doors separated into the rooms was provided for invited neighbors, who lively enjoyed their performances together with them. —They had already watched most of them at Okuyama of the Senso-Ji Temple, but it had a different taste to have performers come over and perform privately. Masa’atsu looked to be overjoyed with it all.

## 6

The day was approaching when they had to go back to the city residence. O-Mitsu said with a searching gaze when she was alone with Yujiro:

“There’s something weird about you this year. You preposterously give greater attention to Nobu-san than you always did. Even when you two go out, you aren’t as wild, are you?”

“That’s none of yer business.”

“Nobu-san himself sounded annoyed. The other day he said: There’s something peculiar about Yu-chan. He annoys me. It’s quite unlike

him.”

Yujiro’s heart missed a beat. He averted o-Mitsu’s searching eyes. Very well then, when he says stuff like that, that loggerhead—Yujiro said. He felt his heart weigh down, he got away from o-Mitsu.

In October that year, permit was given for Masa’atsu to go back to his home province, which no one had expected. It was the leave of the service to the shogun in Edo and it was the first time for Masa’atsu to be in his own domain, his provenance. (He had been born and raised in Edo.) It was expected there’d be no permit granted for a couple of years, and there were only a few days before they were to set out. For a while everybody hustled and bustled in the city residence. —Masa’atsu told Yujiro to stay behind in Edo because it would be a pity for him to be detached from Edo and because o-Mitsu would miss him. But Yujiro had no ears to lend and set out attending Masa’atsu.

They stayed a whole one year in the home province, where tall mountains ranged in the east and the north, and a river with rapids was flowing at the edge of the castle town. The castle was on a hill. It was encircled by tree stands like a forest but the hill rose out of the trees and the castle had a commanding view which stretched far and wide.

Yujiro was dazed at the view from the castle. The peaks of snow-capped mountains rose sharply pointed, the lay of the land which came distinctly into your eyes; the houses in town were grayish and dreary, beaten by wind and rain; beyond the houses flowed the river, whose rapids made vivid white foams; and the wildernesses and rice paddies which extended farther beyond were covered with sheets of ice that did not melt for days, —whichever direction he looked in, he saw the same view of the landscape. Every time he saw it, he missed Edo and he was depressed. To this feeling he gave in.

Upon arrival, Yujiro met with Professor Hanada, who was good-looking as ever but grew a little fat and his demeanor was much milder. —He had been told to come by with Niiizumi and, when they visited him, they were treated to lunch. Professor Hanada told them he had got married upon return. He had an affectionate-looking wife and a little boy.

“Good. Yes, good enough. You are just as I expected.”

Hanada Kin'ya said so with a smile, looking at the two being the way they were. Niiizumi pretended not to know, but Yujiro was embarrassed. He rubbed his neck and gave fake coughs. —Professor Hanada had once said he had expected him and Niiizumi to be the best hopefuls. This must link to what he said just now. If so, then it was simply outrageous. He would sooner say, No, no, sir, on the contrary, and take flight.

During the one-year stay, a change came about in Masa'atsu's character.

It came home to Yujiro later on that no sooner had Masa'atsu returned home than he visited his family grave in the Dairyu-Ji Temple, his family temple, and had visited it more often than not. A little before or after that, his temper had grown uneven. One day he would laugh merrily and then he would be heavily depressed and clam up for days on end. Then suddenly he would be full of spirit and propose to ride out to Mt. Takanosu. —In depression, he even looked gloomy, his face ashen and his brow puckered. He looked distressed as if he had been abiding pain or something patiently.

“What's ailing you, my lord? Aren't you feeling poorly or is there anything wrong with your health?”

Once Yujiro asked him so. Masa'atsu turned on him with a startled look in his eyes as if he had been frightened out of a clear blue sky. Then, lips awry, he laughed and said, shaking his head:

“No, it's nothing. —I'm all right. What ails me, if anything, it's nostalgia. I miss Edo now and then.”

“You do, lord? But is that all?”

“You don't want to go back?” Masa'atsu said, turning his eyes sideways. “—Shall we go back to Edo and stop by Shusen again? All the Shusen folks will be waiting for us. What is o-Mitsu doing now?”

It struck a chord of sympathy. Yujiro was relieved but then he was reminded of what he was trying to leave in limbo. He felt bad.

This also happened around the same time: It was decided that Hanada Kin'ya would lecture on *Seiken-Igen* (the subject being on loyalty to the emperor). He had intended to give a series of about fifty lectures, but the first lecture had proceeded one hour or so before Masa'atsu let out

a weird moan “Aa-ah.” —On the spur of the moment, Yujiro raised his eyes from the book and saw that Masa’atsu had turned pale as if he had seen a ghost. His brow ever more puckered than usual, he was looking haggard, esoteric expression on face. Masa’atsu was startled at himself. Embarrassed, he said, “Oh, it’s nothing. Please go on with your lecture.” His mind seemed to be elsewhere, even after that, and the series of lectures was ended for good. —Later on, at times, there was also something peculiar about him. He suddenly grew incoherent in his response while talking to Yujiro. He clammed up without warning; and out of the blue, proposed to go out and made the attendants flurried. But since this caprice was a rare happening and Masa’atsu did not particularly look out of the way, Yujiro did not take it very seriously.

It was the March of the year after the next that they came back to Edo. Upon the ceremony of return to Edo in which Masa’atsu attended the shogun in person—the feudal lord was to meet with the shogun and present his provincial products—being over, Masa’atsu was sick in bed with a slight cold. Fatigue told on his constitution probably, so it was expected that he would take four, five days at the longest, but he could not leave his sick chamber for some fifty days in a row.

For fifty days Yujiro stayed in service without a hiatus and attended on his lord. Certainly, there were other officials who were on night duty and attended on the lord, but the three of them, he and Niiizumi and Hara, stayed with the sick lord around the clock. And above all Yujiro stayed with the lord and didn’t go home all the while his lord was sick. —Niiizumi and Hara went home every five days and, while attending, retired when Masa’atsu told them to. But only Yujiro, on the same occasion, never retired farther than the night watcher. . . . Masa’atsu himself was not insistent with Yujiro in saying, “Retire.” Left alone with Yujiro, the lord could talk to him mainly about Shusen, which was sedative to him. He even laughed out frequently.

“That made me surprised. I couldn’t ever believe it was true.”

One time Masa’atsu said so like he suddenly remembered it. He turned to Yujiro and chuckled. He seemed to be gazing him in one point of the face and chuckled, Yujiro got embarrassed as always, and asked



what he meant. He pointed at his own nose with his finger.

“Why your nostrils got so big, o-Tsuné told me everything about it.”

“Whoa? Ah-ah, will you excuse me from it, of all things?”

“Excuse me from it, of all things? But it’s a true story, isn’t it?”

“I have no memory,” Yujiro flushed and defended himself in earnest, “—at all. I don’t remember a bit of it. It was promised me that this was a forbidden story, not to tell anybody, . . .oh, she a criminal.”

Masa’atsu laughed and coughed severely.

But a conversation of this kind took place less and less often and in the meantime Masa’atsu looked more and more depressed with each passing day. Even though he listened to Yujiro talk and laughed, Yujiro knew the laugh did not come from Masa’atsu’s heart. His face was a puddle of gloom. More often, he was liable to clam up and dream away, his mind was not there. —It was worried that he had got worse but the doctor said, on the contrary, he was recuperating. In time it happened that he recalled the many times that Masa’atsu had shown the same symptoms while he had been staying in his home province. Yujiro tried to infer that there had been some reason back there, from where it had extended its thread to his current conditions.

Rain had set in earlier in the evening. On that evening they happened to be alone again talking about this and that and the talking had stopped before they knew it. Both of them were deep in listening to the quiet rain beating on the eaves. They had listened for a while when Masa’atsu, on his back, with his head on the pillow, said in a voice like it was swaddled in his throat:

“Yujiro, when will you go to Asakusa?”

The question had been repeated many a time. Yujiro answered as usual in a casual manner.

“It isn’t long before you’ll get well and I’ll be accompanied, my lord. It’s not amusing if I go on my own.”

“That’s not true, right? You also want to go to Asakusa but you can’t leave me alone, can you?” His tone of voice grew acrimonious. “—You know all about it. So, you dread I will die at any minute.”

“What are you talking about, my lord?”

Yujiro was started. Flurried, he tried to stop him, but Masa'atsu continued scornfully:

“You don't need to hide. I know it, too. When I went to the Dairyu-Ji Temple, I learned it all from the temple's chronicle. My male ancestors have died young since five generations back. My father, my grandfather, my grand-grandfather, they all died between twenty and twenty-two or three. —The reason I was coerced into getting married so that I would beget an heir is that my honorable mother and senior councilors know that I'll be short-lived. Isn't it, Yujiro?”

Yujiro was speechless. He caught grab of his hakama with both hands, head down, and was for the life of him holding down his tears.

“To everybody it's more important for me to beget an heir than to live. —Even though I may shorten my life for it, if I beget an heir, it's more beneficial for everybody. . . . Isn't that so, Yujiro?”

## 7

At that Yujiro put down his hands on the tatami-mat floor on which he was seated. And he began as calmly as possible:

“I do not think you will die young, my lord. You will not necessarily be short-lived because your honorable ancestors died young. I have a firm belief that you will have a long life, my lord.”

“Will my life be prolonged if only you believe so?”

“When was it? I was told by my grandfather,” he continued without reservation. “—One's life span cannot be decided by the number of years one has lived, a long life or a short life. Compare living a hundred years exclusively within the four walls of a storehouse and living thirty years out in the hurly-burly of town in regards the experience one has accumulated while in life, and in reality, can't you say that a life in town with much experience but for only thirty years is a long life?”

Masa'atsu closed his eyes and bated his breath. Yujiro still continued with more emphasis:

“I did not understand at the time my grandfather said it. But in no

time did it come home to me. Being as you are, my lord, you have so far had considerable experience. —In the same outfit as working-class people wear, you watched shows and displays, rowed out in the middle of the Big River and swam freely and fished, my lord. You played and had fights with imps from Mukojima to Koume, . . . You know things those who grow up exclusively within the small world of their residence cannot possibly experience, my lord, do you not, my lord?”

Yujiro fidgeted at the impatience which came from the sense of such insufficiency that he was unable to appropriately put into words what he thought. He shook his shoulders and rubbed his knees. He stammered incessantly:

“It is said that one’s life span is equipped to one when one was born, my lord. Only and only if you live to be twenty-three, if you will experience as extensively as you can and try and live a tense and full life, then you will really have lived longer by far than living a hundred years with nothing to do, will you not, my lord?”

Masa’atsu had opened his eyes, when had he? Yujiro didn’t notice it, and he was staring still at one corner of the darkened ceiling. In the quiet of the night, they heard the rain hitting on the eaves, coldly and furtively. —Yujiro had no time to choose words any more, so he let them come, with abandon, to his lips which proceeded from his thoughts.

“If you were to die, my lord, then you would not be unattended by me. I will never let you, my lord, go alone. —Men are mortal. Early or late, men must die. . . . My lord, do not think about dying. What matters is literally the time of your life. Shall we think of a way to live a life as full as it can, a life that is tense with depth and width? Until we die, shall we think about living a life that is full while we can, about living for the purposes we were born with to attain while in life, my lord?”

“—I got you. I fully understand.”

Masa’atsu said after a little long silence:

“—I will live as long as I am allowed to. As you say, what matters is to live, Yujiro. —Please don’t leave me no matter what comes my way.”

“Not no matter what comes your way, my lord,” Yujiro said as if he took a vow.

“—Not only in this world but also in the hereafter, will I not leave you alone, my lord.”

Masa’atsu extended his hand. Yujiro received it with both his hands. The rain was continuously falling, dripping quietly on the eaves.

As the doctor had prognosticated, Masa’atsu got better. In mid-May, he left his bed. And immediately he moved to the villa according to the doctor’s advice and Masa’atsu’s wish. —After the midnight’s bullssion, Masa’atsu did not look depressed. Rather, he was alive in his behavior, cheery and bold in his look. It had been four, five days since he had moved to the villa that he whispered:

“Yujiro, we shall go out after dark.”

And on the same evening, they slipped out of the villa for the first time. Because he had grown to be eighteen years old and had been inaugurated lord of the domain, he did not need to heed the attendants any longer as he had. But he did not seem to take advantage of it. He got out every two or three days and was punctual, coming back not too late in the night.

O-Mitsu was as old as fifteen years and looked like one that had grown to be at her prime but her inherent precociousness exceeded much the way she looked. She treated them like her younger brothers.

“Where do you think, young gentlemen, you’re dawdling? Sometimes Naka (Yoshiwara, a red light district) is a place you should prefer to be.”

She would say a thing like that. She was like a cheeky girl that she was.

“Don’t make a pretense of what you aren’t. You shoved the stones of plum pickles into your nostrils, Yu-chan. —If it’s a defeatist talk, then why don’t you make a sweetheart of an entertaining woman?”

“Who’re you to say stuff like that? This here Nobu-san lives in Honjo, don’t ya know?”

So saying, Yujiro pouted, worked up.

“He lives in Honjo, so what?”

“Absurd! It’s just a step from Hojo to Fukagawa. Look, Nobu-san, this here girl doesn’t know nothin’ ’bout nothin’, I tell ya. This a chit of a girl.”

“Well then, why not bring her to our place? If you’ve got a crush on her, bring here.”

“That’s absurd again! We ain’t such rustics as to show ’round our own gals from red light quarters. If ya think it’s a lie, ya go ask yerself. Go to Fire Watch Tower in Fukagawa (where prostitution dens were) an’ ask ’em like this: May I be excused to ask, nowadays, of the entertainers, the ones who are in love head over heels with the gentlemen called Nobu-san and Yu-san? —Ask this way an’ even a kitten’ll tell ya. Hey, serves you right.”

“Well then, why not transfer yourselves there? It isn’t fun at all to come by a place like this, is it? Go. I’ll get a boat ready for the young gigolos here soon.”

O-Mitsu was harried and bit her lip.

“That’s what we wanted. Tell Matsukichi, we’ve gotta get back before curfew, and tell him to make haste.”

“I will. It’s child’s play. I’ll tell him so and you’ll be satisfied, won’t you?”

“Go tell him an’ it’ll do. In a rush, will ya?”

“I got you. I can do without. You look clean, but where no one can see, you’re doing such a dirty thing. At home, Mom and I waited for you impatiently. We planned to have you relax here this evening. For that purpose, we rammed ourselves into the hurly-burly of preparing the evening for you. Dad joined us when we discussed what entertainers we’d have over here. We’ve waited for you impatiently, don’t you know? But then. . .”

“Whoa, yer cryin’? Surprise, surprise, surprise.”

O-Mitsu began to weep and Masa’atsu was sniggering. Yujiro was at a loss. It was too late to appease her but then he couldn’t leave here as she was. He tried to hoodwink. He got embarrassed and hung around, and with nothing better to do, he sought help from o-Tsuné.

“How come, how come you end up weepin’? As soon as you see him, you pick up a fight. —It’s your fault. What could I say: Nonsense! You had it comin’. You started it out with stuff an’ nonsense. And that’s why you got teased by Yu-san. Romance?—that’s a lie! Don’t you see you’re

gettin' teased? You're such a fool! ”

“I don't care. All the tidbits will be cat food. All of them we've taken trouble to prepare.”

“Cats're sayin' no way.”

“Quit it. More than enough already. O-Mitsu, come downstairs. You must help me. Keep tabs on what I'm cookin' on the fire.”

They were always quarreling like that, but the quarrels were patched up in no time, leaving no grudge. When they went back, she would come out of the house and say, “Just a moment. Your robe's neckband is bent over.” She would have to do something about Yujiro's kimono, pulling it up and pulling it down in some parts to make it right.

“Nobu-san wears his kimono right, but why are you so sloppy with yours, Yu-chan? Stand still. Stay put.”

“Don't bother me. I don't mind a bent-over neckband.”

“Yes, you must mind. Wait here. Here, oops, oh come on. You must do it over from the underwear.”

“What the heck yer sayin'? See ya again.”

He was helpless, o-Mitsu would pucker her brow at Yujiro. She would trot after them and formally bend down and say some nice things to Masa'atsu:

“I hope you'll come soon again. We'll be expecting you soon.”

When they stayed upstairs at Shusen to have some fun, they did not change their clothes. But when they went out they would mostly be dressed as craftsmen were. They would get around much of downtown from Koume to Mukojima. They walked by the hedge through which Yujiro had stolen mulberries and been found by the janitor and ran off for the life of them.

“What has become of the mulberry trees in your garden, my lord? Something like six of them have been planted, probably—or eight?”

“It's been seven years since. I decided to plant two mulberries every year, you forget it?”

“Then, regularly two every year, since then?”

“One for me and the other for you, Yujiro. . . . When we go back to the city residence, you ought to go and see.”

That year, they ran into Katsunbé in Koume for the first time in a long time. In the crowds of the Sanja Festival, Yujiro called to him, then Katsunbé turned. He was embarrassed, his face flushed, and said he'd been working for the plasterer in Také-Machi, Shitaya since two years before.

"You remember Kuma, the roof-tile maker's son, in Imado. He says he will be a cook. He is now washing dishes at Hyaku Shaku (One Hundred Feet) in Nakasu (namely, Shoal)," Katsunbé said and things like that, and, blinking his eyes, went on, "—I'm told that both Yu-chan and Nobu-san are sons of samurai."

That year, in the Ayase River, Masa'atsu hooked up a carp that weighed some 500 mé or some 4 lb. And guided by o-Mitsu, he went to Suijin (Water God) by boat, where he ate a course of fresh-water fish food at a dingy restaurant like a farmer's house.

September came and they went back to the city residence. Upon return, Yujiro went to the back of the Sun-and-Moon House. Exactly as Masa'atsu had told him, he counted fourteen mulberry trees including the two that had been freshly added in the spring. The first two had grown nine shaku or feet tall. They extended branches in all directions as much as they liked, for Masa'atsu banned the gardener from pruning them.

"Look at them, sir. They've grown as wild as wild can be. Nothing can be done about them. Every time I see them, well, they are," the old gardener was intently complaining, "—They are not the kind of plant that is suited to be planted in a garden. Sooner or later, sir, I will get a scolding, without fail."

Masa'atsu was silently smiling to hear it.

While they were still staying in the villa, Yujiro repeatedly made sure: I am sure you will be severely goaded in the ladies' chambers. But do not make a concession, never, my lord. I will talk my grandfather and Dr. Junsai into coalescing with us. You should, my lord, refuse flatly. It is said the harm an early marriage will do cannot be undone, my lord. Do not go into the inner sleeping chamber until you get to be twenty, my lord. —Masa'atsu had promised. And then on the night of the day they

got back to the city residence, Masa'atsu himself repeated the promise he had made.

“I won't make a concession, never. You have my word.”

## 8

First of all, I'll take care to live on. And if my life span allows me to, I want to leave healthy blood to my heir, Masa'atsu said and continued:

“Thanks to you, I have been able to know multifarious worlds. I have seen a great deal of the lives of working-class people: merchants, day laborers, craftsmen, and people from various walks of life. —For this reason, I think I can tell vaguely that if the government at the time is good, it impacts working-class's living in a good way; so, if it is bad, it impacts in a bad way. . . . I'll go and see them this winter, too, and so will I next year and the year after the next. As long as I have time, I'll go out and see them. I have, this year for the first time, —become aware that I am the lord of a domain of 323,000 bushels of rice in annual revenue.”

Yujiro was, on his part, taken aback. And he thought this was definitely true: Like father, like son. He became shy of himself, who had only enjoyed getting around to seek pleasure town offered. He became blushed by himself.

“When the time comes, I will commit myself to governing my domain on my own. But it's not the time yet. When it comes, —Yujiro, you and Niiizumi will be my both hands.”

There were a number of strong protests from the inner residence. One time, Masa'atsu's mother Seiko-In came by herself to the front sleeping chamber to take his son to the inner sleeping chamber. At the time, Yujiro was not on night duty. When her trip to the front house proved vain, Seiko-In cried, they said, and her crying voice reached as far as the firewood-burning chamber. —Kan'emon had long been dismissed from the responsibility of fostering the young lord but still held the position of a senior councilor. He was as free as if retired, so he didn't get out



much but drank at home, taking it easy. However, when Yujiro asked, he took trouble to go to the inner residence for him. . . . Dr. Muroi Junsai was caught between the devil and the deep black sea, namely, between the outer and the inner residents and between other senior councilors. He was wedged into a torturous position. He tried to align himself with Kan'emon and persisted in having his say. He asserted Masa'atsu's delicate health conditions against the antagonists. After all, Yujiro's grandfather and Junsai carried through and it was decided to prolong.

In the December of the same year, too, Masa'atsu was relocated to the villa. And so was he in the next summer and December. Only, the way he played changed gradually. He outgrew having entertainers come over, going to eat, and watching plays and displays. —The permission to go back home to his domain was delayed. It was in February the next year that Masa'atsu left for home. Until then, he exclusively chose those grimy downtowns in hustle-bustle with row after row of tenement house complexes which were found in Shitaya through Asakusa, Fukagawa, and Honjo. In those places he had meals sitting side by side with navvies and bent his elbow with them.

“Supposing I am not allowed to live long, I want to give my domain at least a little better governing while I am alive.”

So Masa'atsu said often and heaved a sigh.

“They are that hard up. They work as hard as all that, but they are not leading a satisfactory life, are they?”

And he said like this:

“First and foremost, I will reshuffle responsible positions. Let a new wind blow in and implement drastic innovations.”

In February, they left for the home province. Yujiro was left behind in Edo. He had asked for permit to attend the lord and it was granted by Masa'atsu. But at the last minute he was ordered by the authority in charge to stay in Edo, willy-nilly.

“Well, no problem. I'll play well enough for the first time in a long time.”

Kan'emon was laughing foolishly.

“If you felt like going, go to Shusen and play a good son to o-Tsuné

once in a while. Are you still calling her Mom?”

“Will you please cut it out, sir? I can’t ever bring myself to do that.”

“It’s no use raging. If you don’t feel like it, you have the goldfish’s tails to cut short again. It’s time they had them grown longer.”

In his vexation, Yujiro gritted his teeth.

He was embittered to be left behind. Not to mention Niiizumi, Hara Seiichiro the gourmand also went attending the lord. Why was he left out? He knew it was not Masa’atsu’s will. Probably, somebody had interfered with his going. It must be the machinations of someone who was trying to cut him off from Masa’atsu.

—Who had done such a thing?

Had Niiizumi? He thought so over and over again. But, although they had different tempers, he knew Niiizumi was not the type of person to do a thing like that. Hara the gourmand? What the heck! Who else? he could not think of. There, the name of Niiizumi popped up in his mind again and helter-skelter he denied it. In the end, he was fed up. Okay, on my part I’ll have time out, he decided after all was said and done.

He went to Shusen, too. But it was not fun at all.

“Is there anything wrong with Nobu-san?”

“Ya really don’t understand. I said why last time I came here, didn’t I? He’s now absent from Edo. He went attending the lord an’ is gone home. How many times do I have to repeat?”

“You don’t need to be mad like that. I just asked. That’s all. So, don’t speak like a machine gun.”

“Shut up. Get lost.”

No fun. He rolled down and lay.

“What will you do? Aren’t you going out?”

“I’m sayin’, Shut up. Can’t ya hear me?”

He had gone to Shusen three times. Mostly, he had stayed only a couple of hours and got bored and, finding nothing better to do, come back home. Sometimes, he had sat in the living room with Senkichi and o-Tsuné and talked with them. Senkichi would often go to see Kan’emon, who was the frequent topic of their chitchats.

“Last time, I partook of a drink with him. An’ I found Monseigneur

Old Man has grown much less of a drinker.”

“Oh has he? I ain’t seen him in ’bout a half month an’ I ain’t got no idea.”

“At that time again, this popped out about you: when you returned home as a son of samurai, you had a lot of difficulties.”

“Sure, ya know, it was only natural. I’d been brought up as free as a wind until that time. I’d been rompin’ ’bout as I liked, naked all the year ’round to cap it all. An’ suddenly, I was all formally rigged out. I got robed properly in kimono an’ hakama. I wore swords on my waist. And manners and manners, . . . an’ on top of it, I was a boy of seven when I was most mischievous like the next one. The new life almost killed me!”

“You’re quite right, young master. On that day, when you got ready for home, I saw you sobbing and I couldn’t stop tears running down. In the dead of night, I woke up and I couldn’t go back to sleep, wondering what you were doing, if you weren’t crying because everything was so very formal you wanted to be back in Asakusa, sir. —Time and time again clearly I heard myself called in my dream, Mom! and I woke up.”

“Oh, the young master’s back. No mistake about that. She’ll go get a look out of the house, o-Tsuné says. No he ain’t here. You dreamed, I say. But she was stubborn an’ went out to look for you when it was freezin’ cold outdoors.”

“It was pitch-dark and still outside, everybody fast asleep. You came back all right, but I guessed you were hiding somewhere because you’d be scolded. —The dark road was frost-bitten and looking all white. Calling you, Yu-chan, Yu-chan, I went around to the back of the house. Oh, those were the days.”

“Thank you, but not for me no more.”

Yujiro felt embarrassed and sat up.

“Shall I give you a shoulder massage, Mom? I ain’t given you in a lon’ time.”

And then o-Mitsu broke into a giggle.

“You’re such a blunderer. It’s very unnatural. You’re quick to sense things, but you’re quite blunt when it comes to a thing like this.”

“Shut up. Don’t preach me. I’m told by my grandfather to be a good boy to Mom. Mom, sit here, hurry.”

“That’s too good. Please forget it, young master. It’s so good my shoulders will get crooked in punishment.”

“I’ll do instead. You don’t mind me, do you, Mom?”

“Then, the male parent tribe has to take the lion’s share of being left alone. Ya fight for yer Mom between ya two an’ whatever is me?”

Yujiro couldn’t stand such a peaceful time without Masa’atsu. It was not fun at all to eat something good or drink. Even when he went out, the playmates from old times, every one of them, were at work: Katsunbé a plasterer and Kuma, the roof-tile maker’s son, a cook of a restaurant. Whichever direction he looked in, he felt himself left alone by everybody, and came to stay back at home more and more often.

Masa’atsu came back to Edo in April to serve the shogun. Yujiro had waited so impatiently he showed up in front of the lord to greet him as if to see his sweetheart. However, Masa’atsu simply listened to what Yujiro said in celebration and took an awfully cold attitude toward him. He did not tell him to stay on and talk. . . . When Yujiro looked at the attendants who were waiting close by, both Niiizumi and Hara showed no expression whatsoever. They were completely sun-tanned and had grown more robust. They were in the posture that made them look properly like one who guarded the lord. Yujiro took leave of the lord, feeling lonesome as if forsaken.

As soon as Masa’atsu came back to Edo, the notice came to Yujiro that he was dismissed from his bounden duty, that he was dismissed from the responsibility of being an attendant on Masa’atsu’s will, and that he was to take care of himself until further notice. —That was that and he received a gift of twenty pieces of gold directly from the lord’s pocket.

—Now approaching is the reshuffle of responsible positions. It must be so. I’ll be promoted to a suitable position. Until the reshuffle, this means the order that I have to wait.

So Yujiro thought and was convinced of it himself alone.

In May, there was reshuffle of responsible positions as Yujiro had

expected. He heard Kan'emon was mentor to Masa'atsu. The reshuffle ranged fairly wide and the entire domain was in confusion for the time being. —Yujiro didn't know it in detail. His grandfather stayed in office for a number of nights. Express emissaries came and went between Edo and the domain. The reshuffle took about a month, and only then did they take five. It was when the May rain season came to an end.

But, there came no notice to Yujiro.

Niiizumi succeeded his father after him with his father's name Sojuro and was promoted to be a chamberlain. Hara Seiichiro assumed the responsibility of being a magistrate in charge of the store room, which came as a surprise to Yujiro. And another two from among the study mates from old times. And still another three. Yujiro knew them, who were nothing and about whom people only gossiped, "That man, bla, bla, bla." All of them took to the seats of responsible positions.

And then when everything was over, Kan'emon fell down.

Old Kyoboku was now seventy-six years old. He had been debilitated for three years during which time he, in spite of his love of wine and women, had rarely gone out. When he drank at home, he would drink less and less. —Such as he was, he was involved the topsy-turvydom of the reshuffle of responsible positions, which made him spend sleepless hectic hours. When it all ended and he became relieved, Kan'emon collapsed probably from overwork, as if he was snapped broken in the middle.

He had cerebral apoplexy. Upon downfall he lost consciousness and it had been two hours before he died. —When, hearing of Kan'emon's downfall, Masa'atsu came rushing in spite of it being late at night, Kan'emon had breathed his last already.

## 9

Masa'atsu went straight into the dead man's room. His attendants were ordered to leave him. He sat face to face to the corpse for an hour. Everybody had been told to let him alone. The family, also leaving him

by himself, were waiting in the next room, but heard over the screen doors Masa'atsu begging painfully for something in earnest and wailing, voice killed, between the beggings. —When he finished his condolence, he went back straight, speaking nothing in particular to the bereaved family. Yujiro was completely left out of his mind.

—What's wrong with the lord? He forgot me completely? Or, did I do anything wrong to make him offended? Or else, is this again anybody's plot?

The thought racked Yujiro's nerves so much, he was restive at all times. He visited Niiizumi three times or so and asked him cordially to let him once meet with the lord because he had something to ask of him. But it was to no avail.

“The lord says to wait a while. He will give notice, so he tells you to wait until then.”

He could not believe Niiizumi's words any longer and asked the same thing of Hara and all the other attendants he knew. But in the end they were told: “Don't bring me a matter like that any more,” and thereafter nobody would listen to his entreaty.

—My grandfather is as dead as the lord is deaf.

If only his grandfather were alive, he could complain to him and would be assuaged by him. Now, he had nobody to count on. His father was a senior councilor cum the commissioner of finance. His big brother was renamed Samon and had the responsibilities of a judicial and criminal investigator to the store room. His mother, not to mention, loved him, but not in the way o-Tsuné loved him directly. There was an aperture somewhere to let in a draft. —He clearly felt he was alone. And he felt he couldn't stand it any more. He would go out because his solitude got on his nerves if he stayed home. But there was nothing that distracted his enervated mind. Naturally he would be heading for Shusen.

However, he still had a hope at the time. Masa'atsu said to wait. He would give him further notice. In due time he might really be called. He would harbor a hope like that. —It settled once and for all, in October. He was called by the senior councilor who was in charge of appointment and dismissal. He went to the senior councilor's office, all keyed up that

he would be needed again. But the senior councilor said:

“The lord has his plans and you will have no responsibilities as of today. Your devotion since the lord’s young age has been admired and you will be presented with fifty pieces of gold from his private account, a set of garments, and lifetime revenue in rice for thirty retainers per month.”

So saying he placed each of the gifts there.

On returning home, Yujiro went straight to Shusen, where he stayed for three days straight. He drank and lay down. He had no sooner called for entertainers than he got them to go back. He woke up in the dead of night, mumbled to himself and drank cold saké without warming it.

“I’ll be kept on the payroll with the lifetime revenue in rice for thirty retainers per month. Shit on it.”

“What’s the matter, Yu-chan? How come you are so uptight? What happened?”

“Shut up, it ain’t none of yer business.”

“But you make me worried. You’ve been only drinking. You’ve been jittery all the time. You don’t go home. Mom and Dad are also worried. Hey, —tell me, is there anything that makes you uptight, Yu-chan?”

“Didn’t I say, shut up? Will ya shut up an’ leave me alone?”

On the fourth day, old Watanabe, the steward, came and said that his father and mother were worried and that they had something to talk about. At any rate Yujiro went home with the old man.

“You imprudent,” his father said on seeing him and scolded him. “—Who do you think you are, to leave home and hide at a place like a boating-and-boarding. Isn’t it degrading the family name? You harebrain.”

“Now beg your father’s pardon, Yujiro. Say you will never do that again.”

His mother interceded beside him. But Yujiro remained silent, head down, and wouldn’t budge an inch.

“Your grandfather mollycoddled you as you grew and you do such an insensible thing. You are twenty-one year old this year. Now that you are a dependent with no responsibilities, you must be all the more sensible and conduct yourself properly. Do not get out of your room for ten days. I declare that you are confined.”

He did not utter a word after all. He kept to his room for ten days. In the meantime, it was always on his mind how Masa'atsu was feeling. Sometimes when his eyes met his big brother's, almost subconsciously he would come out with:

“How is his majesty going? Has he always been fine? He is not sick?”

The instant he asked so, he realized he had meddled into the business that was none of his own. He was exasperated at himself.

“His majesty has been alive and well. These days he looks to have gained a little.”

At this report, he turned away because, either way, he couldn't care less. Sullen, he would go away from his big brother.

The ten-day confinement over, he collected necessary commodities and left home, intending never to return again, and went to Shusen.

“Let me stay for a while.”

So saying, he settled in his usual four-and-a-half-tatami room at the end of the upstairs floor. He was indulged in drinking for a couple of days, —sober, needless to say, or drunk, in spite of himself, he was thinking of Masa'atsu. When Masa'atsu was called Nobutaro, Yujiro had talked to him for the first time and taken him to scoop fish at the boundary of the residence. When he had to get over the Kasagi-style fence, Masa'atsu had been about to burst into tears; when Yujiro talked about Asakusa and its neighborhood, he had grown so envious and asked:

—Can I be there myself?

In asking so, how he looked Yujiro was able to recall vividly now.

Those days when Masa'atsu began to seasonally move to the villa, he had successfully slipped out of the villa and played out. In those occasions everything he saw seemed new and pleasant to him, so he frisked about and laughed sprightly. All these memories renewed as they came back to Yujiro as if they had happened only yesterday.

“But they're all past things. All this is what just came while I was dreaming. I'm now deadly drunk upstairs at Shusen. I'm not the Yujiro that I was, a Yujiro wretchedly forgotten and forsaken.”

Time and time again Yujiro remembered the night in the sick chamber. It was the night when Masa'atsu who had learned that his life would be



short came out with it to Yujiro for the first time.

—I read the chronicle. In my family since five generations back, all males have died young. Probably, I will live to be twenty-two or -three and not beyond.

The tone in which Masa'atsu had said it had been cold, vicious, and despaired. Yujiro had been assailed by the heartbreak and, holding back the tears that had welled up in his eyes, had said that Masa'atsu should forget dying young as such a preposterous thing but think about living, and that were he to die, Yujiro would not let him go alone, that he would attend him to the hereafter, and therefore that they would live a life that was full and worth living until the time came. So he had encouraged, not a word had been wasted. —Masa'atsu had understood. He had been moved. Yujiro could not think it had been false that Masa'atsu was moved. Hadn't Masa'atsu said like this at the time? :

—I understand very well. As you say, what matters is to live. I'll live as long as I can. But don't leave me no matter what comes my way.

And the fall of the same year, he had said this:

—When the time comes, I shall govern my domain. When it comes, Yujiro, be my both hands, you and Niiizumi together.

Were they all a fabrication? Was it just to suit the occasion, with no grounds at all? Yujiro moaned. He swigged down a gulp of saké to get more drunk. But nothing soothed what was raging in his heart.

“Oh, ridiculous! Isn't it really sissy! Until when will I cling to what's passed? Unable to wash it out of my hair.”

He sneered as if to disparage him.

“All daimyo lords are supposed to look dignified. However, Masa'atsu has been familiar to me inside out since a little kid. Supposin' he has to have me beside him, there ain't no dignity stuff at all. He should have known through and through that I'd stand in his way from scratch. You don't realize it as yet, Yujiro? Blockhead!”

But as he muttered so, there were tears in his eyes.

From home old Watanabe came thrice. But Yujiro refused to see him. Then, when it was some days into December, his father came accompanied by old Watanabe and told him that he had been disowned formally.

“You’re disowned from the Doi family. Your name is deleted from the vassal book. You’re not my son, nor a vassal of the domain. You’ll do as you like.”

Yujiro didn’t say anything, only bending his head silently. His father may have told Senkichi and his wife, for o-Mitsu rushed upstairs, sat down by Yujiro and began to cry.

“What’s wrong with you? What’s the matter, Yu-chan? What will you do now that you’re disowned? I entreat you, go right now and beg his pardon? Yu-chan, I am entreating you.”

“No need of cryin’. I was prepared fer it.”

“Say what you do, you are expelled. What will you do from now on? I am asking you, please go and beg his pardon.”

“Leave me alone. I’ll take care of myself.”

“No, it doesn’t do and that’s why I’m asking you to. If you do as you say, then you’ll only have a hard time.”

Pressing her face with her robe’s sleeve, o-Mitsu cried.

“—Do you think I can stay quiet when I see you having a hard time of it? . . . How worried I am about you, you don’t have the least idea, don’t you understand me?”

Lying where he was, Yujiro was, without saying anything, listening to o-Mitsu crying for a long time. Then, his eyes closed, he said in a whispering low voice:

“I was brought up here. As soon as I was born, I came here. I was raised calling your Mom Mom. They been all mine since my childhood, the water of the Big River, the precincts of the Kwannon, neighborhood from Mukojima to the end of Koume. I got a lotta close friends I’d had fights with. This is my home. —This house is my home. Your Mom’s my real Mom.”

O-Mitsu cried bitterly for a while. Calling, “Yu-chan,” her face wrapped in her robe’s sleeve, she threw herself crying. Yujiro wobbled his head and continued in a low voice, too:

“I will be a boatman of this house. I was told that my grandfather had said one day—if he doesn’t mind, being a boatman is one choice for him. It’s easygoing in its own way and a rakish trade. . . . I can row a

roofless small boat at least, ya know.”

## 10

“The Notes of Apricot Flower Arbor” says, after having retired, Yujiro hid himself in the hubbub of town’s routine and refused to associate with relatives and old acquaintances. He did nothing for the rest of his life and ended his life. The quote may refer to Yujiro’s becoming a boatman. Yujiro persuaded Senkichi and harried o-Tsuné so he’d be a boatman. Senkichi disclosed the secret for the first time that he had been confided with a big sum of money by Yujiro’s grandfather on behalf of Yujiro.

“That loggerhead was brought up wildly, he couldn’t be put pat into the rigid brackets of the samurai class. If he really fails to fit into samurai society and comes back here for good, buy him boating-and-boarding trade stocks with this. So I was told and entrusted with this much.”

So said Senkichi and placed the money there.

When the old year brought in a new year, the new year was supposed to be an unlucky year for o-Mitsu. Yujiro coerced her parents into letting him marry her. Nobody disagreed to their getting married. When the year was almost closing, they wedded. —The reception was thrown in at “Hyaku Shaku” in Nakasu. Let alone co-traders of boating-and-boarding, Yujiro invited, Katsunbé and Kuma to begin with, all friends whose whereabouts he was able to find, and drank, letting his hair down, until the end of the reception.

He was told that his mother of Doi had visited twice some time around the marriage. She had seen only o-Tsuné because her husband had forbidden to see her son, and asked o-Tsuné please to look after Yujiro’s future. She had left underwear, robes, sashes of her own sewing for her son. That marked the real end of the coming and going of Doi.

“What’s Nobu-san up to? He doesn’t show up at all.”

O-Mitsu suddenly remembered him and said so when her married hair-do with an oval chignon on the top did not quite become her.

“Oh, that’s the way samurai is. That’s all. He rose to such greatness I can’t reach him. He doesn’t have a business with me no more. You might as well forget him.”

“But you’ve been such good friends. . . .”

There had been a number of conversations like this between them, but after a while he shouted in a really mad voice:

“Piss it off. Next time his name comes on yer lips in the face of me, Ya’ll earn a slap.”

O-Mitsu was so astonished she stared at him in the face. She suspected there was a reason for it, so, thereafter, she never mouthed even the syllable “no” of Nobu-san.

O-Mitsu gave birth to a baby in the second summer of their marriage. It was a baby girl. Senkichi suggested, “Let her name rhyme with her mother’s,” and named the baby o-Natsu. Senkichi and his wife said it was a timely occasion for retiring from their trade. And they did, giving up the whole estate to Yujiro and o-Mitsu. —Shusen had the property of seven roofless flat boats, five fishing boats, and three roofed pleasure boats, which meant they were as prosperous as any along the River.

A boy was born when o-Natsu was five. O-Mitsu proposed his name be Yukichi and so he was named.

“I want this boy to grow to have your temper. It makes me pleased to be able to call him Yu-chan the way I did you. Isn’t it a good name, honey?”

O-Mitsu had charming eyes, with which she gazed upon her husband. Yujiro got shy and, batting his eyes, turned away.

“But no thanks for your impetuousness and mischief. Muddy all over all through the year, bumps and wounds all over, and when you play out, you have a fight. No thanks!”

“Yer thinkin’ the boy’s yer toy. It’s helpless.”

Now, Yujiro sometimes heard about Masa’atsu. He ever heard samurai customers talk about him, and in the world there were those who were fond of gossips. If there was a tiny piece of news they talked around like it was about themselves. So, naturally he could learn about various things as he remained sitting. —It was reputed that Masa’atsu was

a good lord. He made plenty of achievements in governing his domain. He was not merely loved by working-class people but he was well-renowned in the shogunate. He was robust. There were already three entries of his children in the book of heraldry.

—Good lord. The Nobu-san that was those days is a good lord.

Yujiro was faintly seized by old memories. But they were already distant memories and he was not to do with him any longer. Yujiro was captured with a vain feeling like he was listening to the sound of the wind that coursed its way high up in the sky, and quietly gave a sigh, looking out of the window.

When Yukichi was three, another baby girl came on.

“O-Mitsu is much greater than her Mom.”

Senkichi was pleased and insisted the name rhyme again. He named her o-Hatsu. He died a godfather from the acute disease of his intestines in the early summer of the same year.

—Senkichi had diarrhea with unbearable pain. In the end, he bled in diarrhea. Only ten days or so did he lie in bed and die all too soon.

It was the day after Senkichi’s first seven-day memorial service had been given. It was around nine in the morning. Yujiro was surprised Hara Seiichiro came to visit him.

“Gourmand. Do you remember me?”

So smiling, Hara said he was an express messenger. Before Yujiro could say anything in reply, he produced a knotted letter. He asked him to open it right off and Yujiro opened it to find it was a letter from Masa’atsu.

—I have something to talk to you about upon seeing you. Don’t be affected, come with the same old feelings you had those days. I have a firm belief that you will come. I’ll wait for you.

So meaning, it was a scribbling. The letter was only signed, “Nobu-san,” and the addressee was written, “Yu-dono.” The characters “Nobu-san” suddenly seized his heart forcefully. Come with the same old feelings you had those days, yes the “the-same-old-feelings” lived again in his entire body, and feeling as if he’d fly up in the air, he told o-Mitsu to hurry to get ready for him to go.

He went to the city residence in a palanquin side by side with Hara and was directly ushered into the inner garden. —Masa'atsu was in a single-layer hemp kimono without hakama on top of it, wearing a short sword, and sitting on the edge of the veranda of the Sun-and-Moon House. He had grown fat, a muscular stout body, on his lips and in his eyes lodged an expression of power and a strong will.

“Let us skip greetings. Long time no see.”

“You are alive and well, my lord, . . .”

Yujiro began to say but lost words in mid-sentence.

“You're not needed any more, Hara. Leave us.”

So said Masa'atsu and said nothing further for a while. When Hara left, there was nobody but two of them. —Masa'atsu seemed to have prepared previously, he took up a liquor bottle placed at hand and poured blackish thick liquid into two legged glasses. “This is the liqueur I made. I'll drink, too, so shall we talk over this liqueur?”

He gave one glass to Yujiro and took his up.

“You must have been angry with me. You must have borne a grudge against me as a ruthless master. —At the last minute, I broke the staunch promise I had made and I treated you as if you had not been there. It is natural you should bear a grudge. Had I been you, I would for sure have got angry, too.”

“I'll be honest with you, my lord. It was exactly as you say.”

Yujiro answered thus and, as if protesting a little, he gulped down what was in the glass. It had a fragrance with a vaguely bittersweet, wild taste.

“I had intended to ask you to be my right hand. That was my true will.”

Masa'atsu said, head down:

“But I thought a second thought. You were too close to me. We didn't know it, but our slipping out of the villa was known to Niiizumi and many others. Although they knew, they pretended not to know because Kan'emon banned them from repeating.”

Yujiro gently nodded. It surprised him a little but it was true when told. They would bribe Hara Seiichiro and slip out all that frequently. So

it had been rather unnatural that it was left unknown.

“The two of us were too close. We had been thick as thieves since we were very young. We had gone much too far into everything about us. When I govern the domain, I must do things in a drastic and rough way. It would be inevitable that some of them would raise their voice of complaints and criticism. I thought when it happened. . . retainers’ criticism wouldn’t direct itself straight to the lord. It ricochets to the close attendant without fail. Were you in the center of my control, you would be the object of retainers’ grudges as one closest to me, my favorite retainer, that is. —I did not wish it to happen to you. Truly, I didn’t want to put you in a position like that.”

Yujiro was letting his head droop with an empty glass in his hand. His heart grew full of emotion and his eyes filled with tears.

“It was pain to exclude you. I knew you would be infuriated and bear grudge against me. But I thought it would be fine by me. —Although I may be hated by you, I would do better than to make you the object of criticism. . . . But, Yujiro, a day has not passed without me thinking about you for ten years since then. I’ve always thought you are here right beside me. —I have something to show you. Come follow me.”

So saying, Masa’atsu stood to his feet and walked around to the back yard. When Yujiro followed him and Masa’atsu stopped at the mulberry trees Yujiro was familiar with and turned to him.

“Count, Yujiro. Our mulberry trees.”

Yujiro did not grasp what Masa’atsu meant. But as he counted one by one, an avalanche of old memories gushed on him and he was about to let out a voice. —Counting, he touched each and every mulberry tree. When he came to thirty-eight, he couldn’t abide it any more. He stood there stock-still and covered his face.

“I’ve planted mine and yours. I’ve planted two every year. I didn’t skip or miss a year.”

“\_\_\_\_\_”

“In summer the trees have borne fruit, and I’ve come here on my own, and, calling to you, I’ve picked berries and eaten them. —I’ve brewed liqueur from the berries and gained the habit of drinking it quietly by

myself late at night, again calling to you. You've always been by my side. Do you understand, Yujiro?"

Yujiro sobbed his heart out, with which he had been putting up. Then Masa'atsu got close to him, took Yujiro's hands and broke into sobs.

—I longed to see you so much!

—My lord, I longed to see you so much, too!

Their heart got through to each other's from hand to hand in an exquisitely vivid fashion. In time, Masa'atsu said, "That's done. That's enough." He took paper out of his kimono front and wiped his face. This time he smiled brightly and said as he pointed to the branches of the mulberry trees:

"Look, they bear such a lot of berries. Shall we pick and eat together for the first time in years. Stop crying."

"I'm not crying any more."

"I pick berries on this tree, and you on that tree."

"Was that mulberry liqueur, my lord?"

"When you go, take some with you. I have a bottle ready for you."

The two of them reached for the branches, and picked black ripe berries, and brought them to their mouth."

"Did you hear about my family?"

"An heir and two princesses. You have three children. And on top of it, I heard the reputation that you are a good lord."

"How many children do you have, Yujiro?"

"One boy and two girls, my lord."

"Do you fight with o-Mitsu as ever?"

Yujiro had his mouth full of berries, so he mumbled something in reply that couldn't be made out. Masa'atsu picked one berry after another without stopping, talked as he ate.

"It's not too bad to be the proprietor of a boating-and-boarding?"

"I am afraid it seems so, my lord."

"To be candid with you, that was my scheme, too," Masa'atsu smiled with his lips dyed purple. "—What I said just now is true, but another thing was, I didn't want you to be samurai. It becomes you better to mix with working-class people than to stay in the samurai class. I wanted



you to be married with o-Mitsu and live taking it easy for the rest of your life. I wanted to return you to the water.”

“—Look at me, my lord.”

So said Yujiro, pretending unable to hear Masa’atsu, and opened his mouth toward him, who in turn asked how his was and opened it. The two of them recalled the happening in Mukojima in the distant days. While looking into each other’s mouth with the memory of it, they both burst out laughing. —This is a preposterous deed. Two men, as old as thirty, why were they doing such a childish thing? Did they need to? Yes, it is funny for sure. It sure is a preposterous scene. However, they had no choice but to talk to each other this way, to exchange words between them. The mulberries tied them together with the old memories, and branches and leaves hid too vivid emotions they were sharing. Without them, they would have to play much more embarrassing, unbearable scenes.

“The time has come at last when I can have free time.”

Masa’atsu spoke as he moved to the next mulberry tree.

“Come by sometimes from now on.”

“Will the time come when I have the honor to have you over to Shusen?”

Yujiro moved on to the next tree, too. It seemed neither of them wanted their face to be seen. From the darkness where the leaves are lush, Masa’atsu answered brightly:

“Yes, I will come. Some day in the further future when I am free. —I will live long, Yujiro.”

“I said you would, my lord. Remember?”

“I will live much longer than you say that I will. I’ll live longer than Kan’emon. —Can you hear me? I will live to be eighty. Are you with me, Yujiro?”

The leaves of the mulberry trees swayed. Masa’atsu heard Yujiro saying something inarticulately. He put into his mouth the handful of berries he had picked and swiftly wiped his eyes with his fingers.