

川 翻 訳 川

## The Swallows\*

Translated by  
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1

Yoshinaga's story was so abrupt, so much out of the blue that Kihira Takao was unable to accept it right away as real.

“I hesitated a little bit about whether or not to tell this to you, but anyway, it's different from usual matters. It's special, mind you.”

Yoshinaga Setsutarō tried to sound as flat as possible as he continued:

“I hear it started sometime around the time the plums began to bloom. The rendezvous took place almost regularly every seven days. Didn't you ever have a sense of something ... anything going on?”

“No, no nothing at all.”

“But you should have—the outing took place as often as every seven days.”

“I was told that she was going to the temple to pray for something or other. Let's see ... as far as I can remember, she said she was going to pray to Kwanon the Goddess of Mercy in the Taishō-Ji Temple.”

“Didn't it look unnatural?”

So Yoshinaga pressed for an answer. Then abruptly he shook his head and muttered to himself under his breath:

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“It’s really like you, Kihira.”

This mutter was a sigh he eventually gave toward Takao, which he often did. This sigh was also an expression he made to show his feelings toward Takao’s being faint-hearted and again his being good-willed. He made the same expression when he was impressed with something about his friend and when he reproached him. Takao asked reservedly, eyes cast down:

“And, you saw her date with your eyes?”

“I did. The third son of Mori So’emon. You know him, don’t you? It’s Mori Sannosuke.”

“—Who is the Mori Sannosuke that has gone to Edo. Hasn’t he?”

“He didn’t go to Edo, to be sure. Because I did see him with my own eyes, and nothing is truer.”

There, Yoshinaga took a brief pause. From the beginning he knew how what he was going to unfold would hurt Takao, and what pain he would inflict on him. But as far as this particular incident was concerned, he knew he ought not to appease Takao or compromise with him so easily. No matter how cruel, he had to incise it where it was corrupted and scrape out all that needed to be scraped until it got clean of the pus. For this he had to be unfeeling, and by being so, he would show his friendship toward Takao. So thinking, Yoshinaga went on to say matter-of-factly:

“The staff of Restaurant Itami, their tryst, have no idea yet about what’s going on. There won’t be others, yet, who have perceived it. Before it spreads, you may as well bring it to an end. We live in a small local town, and if you don’t take any measure against it, somebody else will see it without fail. Before that happens, put an end ... if I can be of any help, I’ll do anything for you.”

He had walked a while after he’d left Yoshinaga’s residence before he felt something unpleasant in his body. He felt like his temperature was running up. His head was confused. He felt his body that was lower than his knees to be

extraordinarily heavy.

—Yoshinaga saw it with his eyes.

A voice repeated this continuously in his muddled head. In a remote manner, like someone other than himself was whispering into his ears, Takao heard the same voice time and time again.

—Yoshinaga found it, not anyone else.

—One way or another, I must bring the matter to a conclusion.

—But what can I do?

As if paralyzed, his consciousness refused to do a stroke of work. As if he had become an idiot, he couldn't concentrate on what he was thinking. Thoughts that entered his head fell to pieces as they came, and only incoherent pieces remained, churning round and round in his head without a pause and all to no avail.

How should he look at his wife's face when he got home? Would he be able to stay calm?

He was worried. But when he was home, he found himself calm against his earlier expectations. He had dinner with Daisuke as usual. There was nothing unusual about his wife, either. Rather, she looked brighter and more cheerful than usual ... A half-month or so before Daisuke had begun eating without assistance, but he was poor at using his spoon and spotted all his face with grains of rice. He spilled more than he ate. If others ineptly meddled with him as he ate, the little boy got angry. They had to cajole him into letting them help him eat. The way Takao's wife picked up what was left on her boy's face and spilled on the floor as she helped him, made her look full of a young mother's satisfaction and pleasure.

—Not now. I'll talk to her before I go to bed.

So thinking, Takao expected he'd be able to begin straightway, but when it came time, he failed. He spread out on his desk the work he had brought from

his office and took up his writing brush. But, sitting at his desk the way he was, he leaned on it and spent time mooning over nothing.

He didn't notice it himself, but pain had already started in him. Imperceptibly, like the poison that slowly took effect went through the veins and pervade into the tissue, bit by steady bit, inch by firm inch, along with the elapse of time, the pain permeated and ate and hurt him in the depths ... In something like three days, he grew haggard, his face lost color. He ate less. He had fuzzy eyes like he was seriously short of sleep.

“Aren't you feeling poorly, my lord?” o-Ichi asked worriedly.

“—You mean me? ...”

Takao turned to his wife. It was the fifth morning since he had learned about her affair. He had just gotten ready to go to his office in the castle. When he turned to see his wife, a piercing pain occurred somewhere in his heart.

O-Ichi was looking up at him with her clear bluish eyes. She was only five feet tall with a small build. But her parts were exquisitely well in proportion and she stood well shaped, looking slender and tall. Her silky, fine skin had such healthy color that her lips were smooth like they were wet and the color of thin red plum blossoms, which made her sexy with the cherubic softness and sweet scent of a girl at her prime.

—These eyes without a blemish ... and this soft skin that has no muddiness.

Set on by an inexplicably strong emotion, he stopped his retort in mid-sentence, *You mean me?* and averted his face from her. The emotion which thrust up at the time was something he had never experienced before. Nor painful, nor sad, nor lonesome, no word could explain. He couldn't separate one from the others, but then again it was an emotion as fierce ... When he made his way to the vestibule, o-Ichi came out to see him off with Daisuke. Hadn't she sensed how Takao was feeling? She placed both hands on the step of the vestibule and looked up at him and asked:

“I’d like to visit the Taisho-Ji Temple today. May I go, my lord?”

“No, you may not, today,” Takao said. He didn’t turn back to reply to her. “I’ll come home early today. I’ll have a word with you, so I want you to stay put at home.”

O-Ichi’s voice, which said, ‘yes’, was so weak as to be inaudible. Takao got out of the entrance without looking at his wife over his shoulder. His shoulders were stiffened. Into his back came Daisuke’s lisping voice:

“Darry, ho ev’fi weh weh.”

## 2

It seemed that the mention of Taisho-Ji, by reflex, prompted him to a decision. As soon as he got to his office in the castle, he asked the manager for permit and left office before lunch ... Determined as he was, he was still bogged down in the dumps and the stabbing pain in his heart wasn’t a bit alleviated as yet. On his way home, he stopped in his tracks a number of times and, looking at the road ahead, which was white and dry with dust, shook his head before he knew it and heaved a sigh as if he hesitated.

O-Ichi was home.

“I don’t need lunch. When you finish yours with Daisuke, come to my apartment.”

So Takao said as he changed his clothes. He couldn’t look his wife in the face. He seemed unable to abide her responding him.

Entering his apartment, he sat at his desk and looked out of the window that was left open. He thought he had to be composed ... There out of the window was the side garden giving on the northeast and planted with several Russian rock birches by his deceased father. Other plants that were there were briars

whose tendrils entwined the low fence and clusters of bamboo arrow shoots. They did not get pruned and so they were left to grow as they liked. The Russian rock birches, their provenance in cold countries, would not take root in a place like his garden, so said other people. But now they had grown to be twice as tall as when they had first been planted, and tender fresh buds had all unfurled now, reflecting the spring afternoon sun.

“—O-Ichi ... o-Ichi.”

Takao whispered the name under his breath and closed his eyes, his elbows planted on the desktop.

She was the only daughter of a poor foot soldier of the gun squad, whose name was Kosuke. He was, it was said, such a good-natured person. His wife had long been in bed with a stomach disease, which had reduced them to total poverty. In the middle of their penury, Kosuke also collapsed with a stroke. Because her mother had long been ill in bed, o-Ichi had cooked and done laundry since she had been eight or nine years old, and besides she had made money to help with the family budget by running errands and babysitting for neighbors. It was the autumn of her thirteenth year that her father broke down, but by then she had been sewing dexterously, plying her needle and thread. She would often be asked and go out to help unthread kimono and dry the cloth out in the sun. She did all this as she looked after the needs of her sick parents. One could imagine how painful it was for her but she did not show others the painful side of her life, not a mite of it. She looked cheerful and sounded clear and crisp when she spoke. She was a total stranger to grudges and complaints. A few more inches could be wished for in her height, but her good looks and tactfulness made her loved by everybody.

A while after Kosuke had been taken ill, people around them began to broach marriage offers. Although o-Ichi was still as young as thirteen, it was common practice that even nominally the only daughter of the family would have a hus-

band who was adopted into her family by marriage and then notify the authority of succession. It was only too natural that offers were brought up, but if there was anything to which o-Ichi gave a flat refusal, it was to a nominal marriage.

—I'll attend my sick parents for the rest of my life.

Even though it would be nominal, she didn't want to let it change her way of life, the life exclusively with the three of them, parents and daughter. Her father seemed to be of the same opinion and gave no good response to fairly good offers.

—Hisao is the family name, but it's a foot soldier's and that's that. And it's a pity that adopting someone of sorts should make o-Ichi unhappy because of the trouble and pain he may bring about.

So saying, Kosuke, who had difficulty talking due to the stroke, turned down all offers ... At that time, the world in general was enjoying the acme of matured culture and society. Discrepancies between the rich and the poor were deplorably wide. People had gone wild in their humanity and morals. A great number of poverty-stricken people were famished, whereas rich people indulged in luxury in the face of those poor people and were never ashamed. Sons and daughters from the samurai class got married with those rich sons and daughters from the working class who brought a dowry. And marriage across the classes was not rare any more ... Morals between men and women tended to be corrupt, too. Nasty gossips were rank. The reason Kosuke did not show any interest in adoption was, it seemed, that he couldn't bring himself to rely on the man to be adopted, judging from the decadence the current world was in.

Kosuke died in the spring when o-Ichi was fifteen. And only within a few months of her father's death did her mother die, too, as if to follow after her husband. A little before their demise, o-Ichi would often come to the house of Kihira to sew and unsew kimono. Takao was not familiar with her, but Ise, his mother, was very fond of her. Ise's fondness had been extraordinary, something

which he learned of later. With the consent of her husband, Takanojyo, needless to say, Ise farmed o-Ichi out to her home, the Aono family, as soon as o-Ichi had become an orphan. There she was given an education until she became eighteen years old. And then, Ise designated the Aonos as the girl's temporary parents, from whom the Kihira family received o-Ichi for the son's wife.

In the first two years or so of her marriage into the Kihira family, o-Ichi looked sad and worried. They wondered if the marriage had put her off. Takao's mother worried in many ways, but Takao himself was indifferent most of the time.

In a year and a half, Takao's father, Takanojyo, passed away, and so did his mother in the summer the next year from intense dysentery. O-Ichi bemoaned her demise and her distress was unusual. She mourned so much it came to Takao as a surprise that she had been attached to his mother as much as all that ... When he thought about it later, it came home to him that o-Ichi had been pregnant then. The pregnancy must have affected her that way. And she must have taken the opportunity and got closer to Takao for the first time in their marriage. With her character growing more cheerful, she started to do house chores more efficiently.

After she had given birth to Daisuke, o-Ichi grew more beautiful. You could compare it to a hard-shell nut, whose shell broke and exposed the fresh meat inside. The skin, having put on fat and become all the smoother, gained tender resilience with gracefulness. Her eyes, to the center of which came to sit confidence and peacefulness, rolled at times in a surprisingly sexy way. Takao's wife appeared fresh, overflowing with life and youthfulness, in which Takao found her beauty of womanhood for the first time in his life.

“—This you ... o-Ichi, this you ... hiding it from me ... ”

So Takao whispered furtively, eyes closed, and gasped for air as if he couldn't stand the bitterness.



He heard his wife coming along the corridor.

The sound of her footsteps was something he did not know. It was an unwanted sound, which was weak and hesitant. It was like tiptoeing, even. Takao kept silent until his wife got seated. When she did, he opened his eyes and looked up at the branches of the Russian rock birches, and further up at the pale blue sky, which might have been thinly misted.

“—I have something to ask of you.”

He began, his back remaining to her.

“—I find it hard to ask and you’ll find it hard to answer, but I want you to answer candidly what I ask you.”

O-Ichi said yes. She said it in a rasping low voice but it had a ring that she was determined. In order to encourage himself, Takao, whose plan was almost being thwarted, whirled around to his wife. But just then Daisuke came stomping along the corridor.

“Darry an Mommy, swilla, swilla may der hom, swilla hom.”

Crying out loud with the tongue that lisped, he came running. He clutched his mother’s shoulders and looked at his father with a face flushed from excitement and said, panting and gasping:

“Reanny, Darry, com lon an loo. Swilla may der hom. Hurry, Mommy.”

“All right, all right, I got you, son.” Takao smiled at his boy and nodded. “—I have something to do now, go along with your mother. I’ll come a bit later, but soon.”

O-Ichi sprung to her feet. Like a captive was freed, she held Daisuke in her arms and trotted out.

Takao turned back to the window. He threw out one hand on his desk and sighed. Oddly enough, he himself felt relieved. It may have been indecision as well as regretful irresolution. All he did was procrastinate, but he was relieved and decided to wait a little more. —He thought this way: Human beings were

all bound up with their past, it was impossible to blame them for the present consequences alone, relationships between men and women were, above all, esoteric and so he could take a bit more time.

O-Ichi came back shortly. With Daisuke in her arms, she said nervously from the corridor:

“Swallows have made a nest on the side entrance. Does it need removing, my lord?”

“We can leave it as it is,” said Takao, turning back to his boy. “—It was nest he was meaning by hom. Now I’m in the know. It’s hard to understand what Dai-san is meaning.”

“Dose swilla Dai-tan’s, Darry?”

“Yes, they are yours. And they come every year from now on.”

“Bicos der Dai-tan’s.”

“Yes, bicos they’re Dai-san’s.”

When o-Ichi heard her husband frolicking with his son’s lisp, she burst out laughing. She violently rubbed her cheek against Daisuke’s. And, choked with the laughter, she left the room.

### 3

Needless to say, that didn’t bring the matter to a conclusion. The wound left in his heart hurt constantly, and he was continually assailed by piercing pain. His night’s sleep was shallow, sighs escaped him before he knew it, and moans were emitted. When he came to, he found he had been indulging in the visions of persecuting his wife savagely. He would sometimes think he’d throw everything away and find himself a shelter deep in the mountains.

He had never experienced any of that before and therefore the intensity and

depth of the torment he was suffering was beyond comparison.

—However, I guess I'd be able to accustom myself to this pain.

So he thought. He mused that most of the time human beings could accommodate to even the worst condition. He knew he had confidence in his perseverance. Should nobody but him be anguished, and therefore, should nobody be hurt, he knew he could make himself pull through. This he was definitely positive about.

—What remained was how o-Ichi felt.

Her date was, he was told, Mori Sannosuke. After all was said and done, he had at least to make clear how they had met, how far they had gone, and what o-Ichi thought about the man, not the other way around ... But did he have to? Wouldn't it work out for him to do nothing and just give them no further chance to meet and wait for time to settle the matter?

Since the swallows had made a nest on the side entrance, Takao's mind oscillated between the conflicting courses of action, and for him each passing day had been painful and troubling. And on the fourth day it happened all of a sudden:

On the evening of the day he was invited to dinner after work by the manager of his office in the castle. The manager was called Masamitsu Bunnoshin, who begot a baby boy as late as at the age of forty-three in the fourteenth year of his marriage.

“It's like I had the good fortune to pick up a general's head in the battlefield.”

So he said to everyone he met. Takao was invited to the celebration of the birth of the baby boy. A couple of senior officers were also present and the party ran longer than expected. Takao took leave after the seniors had left. It was nearly ten o'clock ... Masamitsu lived in Sanjo-Maru, from which to get back to his home in Shimokita-Maru, there were two ways. One way was to follow Ote Road and the other to go through the ex-archery range. Skirting along the

ex-archery range was a byway, which was a shortcut to his home. He had had his servant go back earlier and, holding a lantern in his hand, took his way home along the byway.

The ex-archery range was some sixteen acres in area. It was now used for stone-pile yards and timber yards. It was fringed with old trees such as beeches, evergreen oaks, and Japanese oaks, whose trunks stood side by side with their branches crossing one another, making it look like a fence, and beyond which stretched out wild grass fields ... The byway marked the western bounds of the samurai residence area. The road was over ten yards wide and went half way around the ex-archery range.

It was an evening when the moon was lucid. The trees lining one side were casting their shadows on the center of the road. The moon was so bright Takao stopped in his tracks, thinking about extinguishing his lantern light. Just then, he felt a strange presence behind him. On turning back reflexively, he uttered 'ack' and leapt sideways as he threw away the lantern in his hand.

The man seemed to have come after Takao without footgear, so the body of the masked man and the flash of the sword that reflected the moonshine bearing down upon him from above his head zoomed in and covered up the vision of Takao who was turning to look behind.

"What are you doing? Wait."

He leaped to one side of the road and turned his face toward the moon and shouted:

"You got the wrong man. I'm Kihira Takao."

He saw the man in the shade of the trees and, about ten feet to the left of him, the thrown lantern burning. Takao couldn't guess out who it was. The mask and the whiteness of the man's tabi socks, which were bare of footgear, might have been evincing the ferocity of murder.

"You didn't take the wrong man?"

“\_\_\_\_\_”

“Declare who you are. Give your name.”

Takao sensed danger and unsheathed his sword, when, like a pellet, the man dashed forward with his sword slashing at him. No voice raised. Breath bated. The man was frantic and desperately charged at Takao, charged, and charged, and charged.

—Ah-ha! That’s it.

Jumping into the lush trees, Takao inwardly cried so. Yes, there was no one but him who would be for Takao. This was him—it had to be. When he guessed it, he was seized by a sudden flare-up of anger.

“I got it. You’re Mori Sannosuke, aren’t you?”

No sooner had Takao cried out so than the man looked like he shuddered. The loudness of Takao’s voice incited fight in Takao and he flung out into the brightness of the road.

“Coward! If you want o-Ichi so much, get me. You can’t get me so easily, I’ll tell you.”

The man groaned. Apparently, he thought he was driven at bay. Voicelessly again, he charged at Takao as if frenzied.

—I’ll get him.

So Takao thought. But the next moment, the man stumbled forward fiercely and fell down. Takao heard the man’s bone hit against something and the sword flew out of the hand of the man, who struggled to spring up to his feet. But something went wrong and from where he was he sank down prostrated on the ground. He gasped painfully with his legs drawn in.

When Takao saw the figure in misery, his anger receded as if he got cold water splashed over him.

—Get away! Now is the time I can get away.

Takao began to run, unsheathed sword in hand.

## 4

Kihira Takao was well-known for his faint-heartedness. Everyone knew it. No one had been closer to Takao than Yoshinaga Setsutarō since they had been very young. They trusted each other deeply. However, Yoshinaga Setsutarō himself would often fly into a passion because of Takao's lack of decisive attitude. Only recently did he seem to have reconciled to Takao's disposition. Despite the subject being on the attempted murder, he calmly said, It was really like him, as ever, Kihira, and only gave a wry smile. But had it been before, he would have grown short-tempered and come down on Takao like a ton of bricks.

When he got home from the ex-archery range, Takao had regained his calmness. Rather, in truth, he was in a pathetically hollow state of mind after the aberrant frenzy. But then the anger returned. While changing his clothes, he heard a low 'ack' leak from the mouth of o-Ichi, who sat folding the clothes he took off. He heard it and casually turned back to see his hakama, skirt-like trousers, in her hands. This very sight suddenly excited him to exasperation.

His eyes fell on a cut made in the upper back of his hakama. The cut drew a horizontal line about one foot long. A little roughly though, he took up the kimono he had worn under the hakama and spread it. The same part of it had been cut.

—What a ruffian!

He was choked with fury. On the part of o-Ichi, she was trembling. She must have guessed out what had happened. Head hung down, she was trembling, hands planted on the hakama which was spread in front of her.

“I almost fell a victim of assassination. Who plotted it, you must know,

o-Ichi,” he said and sat down where he was standing. “—You have known tonight’s plot all along, too, haven’t you?”

Head bent down, she shook her head.

“Be honest. Weren’t you told by Mori that he was intending to murder me on my way back from Masamitsu?”

Takao’s voice was harsh. As if flailed down by his voice, o-Ichi groaned and fell forward as she sat on the floor. Falling forward, she limply threw out one arm and was motionless like a rock.

“—O-Ichi, o-Ichi,” he called her, drawing himself close to her.

Her face had lost color and got stiff. Her teeth were gritted.

She fainted in agony ... Takao scooped a rice-bowl full of water. He took her up in his arm and poured the water through the slits of her clenched teeth.

O-Ichi came to and managed to sit up. Apparently unable to sit on her seat, she propped herself up with both arms planted on the tatami-mat floor. However, she was still unstable, the upper half of her body swaying to and fro.

“Tonight, I must ask you. How did you meet him? What are the relations now between you and him. Speak up honestly.”

O-Ichi was gasping raucously. But the agony that had caused her to pass out must have made her mind made up. She began stammering in a voice that sounded hollow and soft and rasped.

“—I gave him toffee from Matsuba-Ya. And manju from Yoné-Ya, too, ...”

*Where the heck had she begun?* he wondered. But these were the first words of her confession.

“—He’s a third son (which meant he had no right at all to succession) and on top of it, his mother is different from his big brothers’ ... he had been raised separately from his brothers. He ate and slept by himself in the same tenement complex as the male servants ... he was looking out of the window all the time ... alone, lonely, sorrowfully.”

Mori Sannosuke was an illegitimate son, which o-Ichi learned from a maid of the Mori family. By that time she had turned thirteen years old. She was in the aforementioned destitution, and so she frequently visited the Mori family to do what she was asked. In the meanwhile, she learned about Sannosuke's unfortunate circumstances ... Her heart went out to his wretched misfortune. He was not provided with allowances at all except a one-room tenement, in which he filled up his days copying texts and mooning his time away, looking out of the window.

"I understood very well how lonesome and sad he was feeling. I was living a life which was poor and full of trouble and pain ... What an unhappy life he was living I could tell, as if it were my own."

Only those who had gone through unhappiness could tell what it tasted like. O-Ichi saw her misery in his circumstances. She had to console him. And one day she bought Matsuba-Ya toffee with what little money she had and gave it to him.

"On the first time, he said he didn't want it and, once and for all, looked aside as if he were angry ... he said later he had thought he had been teased ... he was nineteen and I was thirteen."

He declined it three times. On the third time, o-Ichi went back with the toffee weeping. And on the fourth he received her gift for the first time.

—Oh, that's the other way around. But thank you. Thank you so much.

So he said. His face smiled but as if it were weeping. He must have understood how she felt. From then on he received what she brought to him with all gladness. Her privation was such that she was unable to make a gift all that often. However, o-Ichi tried to cut down to her last morsel and racked her little brain to solace him as often as possible. For a number of times she made him gladdened to have Yoné-Ya's manju or steamed buns, well-reputed manju in town.



—They were very nice. I had heard people say it was a very good manju and this was the first time I tasted it. Yes, it deserves its good reputation. Thank you so much.

O-Ichi remembered long the glad expression that had come to Sannosuke's face when he ate the manju ... Since Takao's mother had arranged the adoption of o-Ichi into the Aono family, o-Ichi had been unable to visit Sannosuke any more. She had to accommodate to the new life, which took up most of her time. As time went by, Sannosuke had naturally faded from her mind. And then o-Ichi became a member of the Kihira family by marriage.

Toward the end of January this year, o-Ichi visited the Taisho-Ji Temple to pray so as to relieve Daisuke of sudden bursts of temper. On the way back, she was stopped by Sannosuke. Coerced, she went with him to the place called Restaurant Itami on the Ashiya River.

He was skin and bones and his face ashen. He incessantly coughed. From the start he looked too excited to be calm, but he had sat silently for a while before he began most unusually, his face wearing a serious expression:

—I'm a fugitive now.

This was the very first thing that came from his lips. Toward the end of the previous year, his adoption by marriage had been arranged. The family he would be adopted into was a member of their Daimyo's city residence in Edo. It was a foot soldier's family with annual revenue of money worth twenty-five bushels of rice and rice for three retainers per month. That was a laugh. And this marriage had been consummated in such a negligent way, not at all a dutiful way, that even those as low as house servants called the consummation as "good riddance" behind Sannosuke's back. When it turned to the New Year, he was given a little money and told to go, almost as he was, to so-and-so in the city residence in Edo. It was all but a command.

Sannosuke did not go to Edo. He pretended to have gone and lurked in town.

At the time, he got angry for the first time in his twenty-seven years of endurance. But his anger transformed itself into a yearning for o-Ichi. He wanted to see her and complain about his predicament. She would understand and, with her warm heart, comfort him. She would listen to him and give him counsel about his future ... So he thought and secretly waited for an opportunity, which at last came to him on the day she visited the temple ... She listened to him with tears in her eyes, but then she encouraged him to go to Edo.

—I can't go to Edo with this feeling for you. Will you meet me again?

Sannosuke importuned her. O-Ichi couldn't turn it down. They agreed on the day to meet next and they met, and then she was made to promise to meet him again.

—You're the only person who has ever been affectionate to me. I've known all along what nature the money was with which you bought me candies and cakes. Do you know how happy I was? I was gladder at the thoughtfulness out of which you bought the candies and cakes than the candies and cakes themselves you bought for me.

—In this wide world I have no father or mother, nor brothers or friends. All I have is you. You are the only person that I have in this world.

His words got bolder and fuller of passion every time he met her.

—I can't live without you, nor do I want to. Please come to me. Mr. Kihira is a man of high standing and well off. He has that lovely boy. You are not everything to him, but for me you are. I would as soon die as part from you. Please do come to me. You must understand how I am feeling. Please don't make me any more miserable.

O-Ichi couldn't leave him the way he was. For him she felt guilty of the satisfactory life she was leading.

“How wretched he is I understand very well. I have ever had trouble and pain since I was very young. I was brought up ... where the world was cold, where

the people were unfeeling ... where the days were bitter and painful, where unspeakable poverty prevailed ... No one but me can comfort him and strengthen him. There's no one but me."

Thus o-Ichi narrated her story and, biting into the sleeve of her kimono, uttering no voice, she wept. Takao closed his eyes. The anger went away, but more than anger, an unbearable sadness, a sadness that was as helpless as hopeless, surged, pervading his entire body, and made it hard for him to breathe.

"—I understand. You really made yourself understood."

It had been a while before Takao began. Things he wanted to say stung his throat. He wanted to shout at the top of his lungs and let out all that was in his heart by hollering and bellowing. But he could not do so. He did his best to contain himself and continued as quietly as he could in a sedate voice:

"—I have a number of things to say for my part. But you know them even if I don't ... therefore, I'll only say the most important thing."

He grimaced and stammered a little, but continued as quietly:

"—Like I was mortified, you and Mori, both of you, must have been mortified, too ... I don't think I alone was. The three of us, in our own way, have been. O-Ichi ... let us think about finding a way to make this jam useful. I think this is what we must do first and foremost ... We must not waste this awful experience. How can we overcome it, without hurting each other, if we can, in order that we'll be happy for it? Shall we think about it? Don't you think so, o-Ichi?"

"Please do as you like, my lord."

Between sobs she said in snatches:

"I have no strength left to think about anything. I'll do as you tell me to, my lord. You will do as you will, won't you?"

5

Several days later, o-Ichi left for the hot spa in Sarugatani. The notification was turned in to the effect of restoring her debilitated health conditions. Takao arranged for the old male servant Matsusuke to attend her at the spa.

Since the reason for the need of his attendance had to be made clear, Takao outlined the circumstances to Matsusuke, who at first wouldn't accept the order. He had been serving the Kihira family over thirty years since Takao's father's time. He was dogged of his service and obstinate of his character. He was an unsociable sullen-looking but honest old retainer.

"Let me, once and for all, decline the order in which I shall be an accomplice in such unfaithfulness. It's way out of my league."

The strong expression "to be an accomplice in unfaithfulness" was exactly characteristic of him. Takao supplicated him for his help. Because the whole story was complicated and lest those who were close to his wife become inquisitive, there was no one else but him for an attendant. He had served the Kihira family longest and was trusted by Takao's relatives and acquaintances. Should this inside affair leak out, what would become of the Kihira family? Takao told Matsusuke all this in order to get him to accept his order.

"They say when you live long you have many a shame. Never have I dreamed of fulfilling a duty in a way like this."

Matsusuke shed regretful tears.

Sarugatani was a hot spa resort ten and some odd miles to the northwest. It was located in the mountains of the neighboring domain. It was well-known for five kinds of hot water coming out and people came from afar to recuperate from a disease. But because it was a place of resort in another domain, samurai

of Takao's domain rarely visited there. Takao chose the spot for the reasons that there was large traffic of various visitors and that there was very little risk of his wife running into people from his domain.

Three days or so after o-Ichi had left for the hot spring, Takao went to Yoshinaga to report it.

“You sent her out to a hot spa for recuperation. I heard about it.”

Setsutaro was in high spirits as he said so. Probably he intended to solace him. He ordered saké to be prepared right away. While drinking together, he listened to what Takao had to say ... In the beginning he was cheerful but as the story proceeded he looked displeased and in the end he glowered at Takao as if he were angry.

“Does that follow then that Mori also went to Sarugatani?”

“—At the moment he needs o-Ichi.”

“Which means you do not need her?”

“—No one's to blame as far as this affair goes,” Takao said in a low voice, eyes cast down. “—It's been just a misfortune. It's nobody's fault and nobody should be unhappy for it. This is all I thought.”

Yoshinaga looked away. He appeared to be really dissatisfied. Head turned away, he asked how Takao was going to settle the matter.”

“I'm going to get them to sojourn at Sarugatani for a year,” answered Takao. “In the meantime, they'll come up with a way of life. In case they fail to, well, either way, in one year's time, I'll notify the authority of o-Ichi's death of the disease ... the two of them, o-Ichi and Mori, will start a new life together, and I myself, if possible, will start a new life, too.”

“That's an unbearable story.”

Yoshinaga sounded like he rejected what Takao had said, as he continued:

“If you go such lengths, it's not the matter any more of your lack of decision or your good-natured character, I must tell you. Rather, it's immoral and

insulting to human beings. If Mori is a man, he won't be able to abide such a consideration sooner or later."

"If you were me, Yoshinaga, would you have any other means?"

"I would either have a duel with Mori or expel him. I would either absolutely pardon my wife or divorce her. Either way, it is to show mutual respect."

"—I can do only what I can."

So saying, Takao went on as if to himself:

"—I'd rather be tormented myself than see anyone else tormented. If this would lead to insult others, I'd gladly be blamed for it."

Days progressed. Matsusuke returned from Sarugatani once every month. Outwardly, he came back to report how much she was recuperating. Otherwise, if there had been any change in their relation, Takao would hear him report it, and he, in turn, gave him sundry expenses for the stay ... Apparently, there was nothing that had developed between the two. Matsusuke said nothing nor did Takao ask anything. When he returned home, Matsusuke would stay overnight and go back to his bounden duty, looking glum.

Daisuke did not mouth a syllable of mother from the day o-Ichi left. At Aono, Takao's deceased mother's home, the folks, it need not be said, were not informed of the truth of o-Ichi's departure. But they thought Takao must be having a hard time without her, and sent a distant relative as a helping hand ... She was called Katsué, twenty-six years old. She had been married once but divorced and was back at her home. In spite of her misfortune, she was not gloomy at all. She was open-minded and couldn't be more cheerful. Not a day passed without her laughing somewhere in the house.

"Dai-san, mount on auntie's back. Let's ride a horse. Ready? I'll trot."

On all fours, she had Daisuke on her back and romped about. From the very first day she was like that and in no time at all, Daisuke took to her.

## 6

Time went, but the wound in Takao's heart did not heal a bit.

He felt, more strongly and more deeply each passing day, how important o-Ichi had been to him. Some jealousy must have been involved. To be sure, imagining Mori and o-Ichi being together was a torture, which stopped Takao's breath and crushed his heart. Rather than mental, it was a torment much more direct and physical ... However, more than anything, he realized how important o-Ichi had been, being there with him. But that he learned only after she had left him. And although she had been so important to him, he had neglected her. These thoughts, clinging to him all the time, tortured him as if he were guilty of doing things which were impossible to be undone.

"I ought to have loved her more. I ought to have been more loving and caring."

So he mumbled to himself now and then.

"And, even if she had met him then, her heart wouldn't have gone out to him that much ... had I filled her heart up with my love and care ... oh, I am to blame. I was blind and fool."

He often woke up in the dead of night and walked around the dark garden or, leaning on his stool, sat motionless for a long time thinking about nothing.

The dry hot summer went.

One day in the afternoon, when he looked into Daisuke's room, Daisuke was taking a nap with Katsué. The upper half of her body tilted toward Daisuke and the lower half was on her haunches, which vividly exposed her thighs. The bottom of her kimono was tucked up. Entangled in her pale blue *futano*, women's

loincloth, her thighs were so matured as to look sturdy, taut and muscular, and abundant. But the color of her skin was surprisingly swarthy.

Takao averted his eyes from them right away and left there. What he had just seen did not in the least arouse him sexually. But the impact gave him new pain. Katsué's somewhat uncouth thighs called back the memories of o-Ichi's body which was totally different from Katsué's.

—O-Ichi's skin was more elegant.

Her skin was white, smooth, and soft with moisture, and on top of it all, supple with a sucking touch. He had not seen it with his eyes. Its touch remained in his memory ... o-Ichi was his wife. She had always been there right by his side. He had been able to hear her voice any time he liked and her figure had been within reach of his hands.

—Yes, o-Ichi was so close to me. These arms embraced her and this skin touched hers.

But did he really embrace her and did he really touch her skin to skin? He didn't. He didn't truly look at her, or embrace her, or touch her. When winds went through a forest, they touched the surface of the forest, brushing tree trunks and the leaves of branches. Like this, he only went past touching the surface of her body.

“Right, I don't know what o-Ichi is. Although we have been man and wife for four years, I don't know a bit of her.”

That day Takao didn't have supper.

One day when Daisuke was absent, Katsué said:

“It's peculiar, sir. Dai-san doesn't mention his mother at all. When I ask where his mother is, he makes a wry face. He never comes near the topic of his mother but goes away from it and begins something else. It is said a child that parts from its parent early does not long for its parent. I wonder if his mother



didn't get worse.”

Naturally, the remark bore no malice, because she was the type of person who did not care about anything at all. She cared little about her marriage that had ended in failure. So, she said what she thought. It was a stabbing painful remark to Takao. He managed to hold down the impulse of crying out. Standing up, he implored:

“Please do not mention his mother. Try and make him forget her if you can ... death may separate mother and son for good, just in case. So, please.”

Takao tried as much as possible not to look at Daisuke. From the very day o-Ichi left them, Daisuke never mentioned his mother, which Takao knew. He thought Daisuke was still naïve and that he forgot his mother because of the turmoil of the many people attending to their individual duty around him. Since it was easier to have his wife out of his son's mind than to have his son pine for her, Takao was not especially concerned about his wife's absence from his son's mention. He was, however, all the more shocked by Katsué's remark. According to Katsué, when Daisuke was asked about his mother, he would change the subject and make a wry face. This meant he was aware of the reason for his mother's departure. Didn't he know instinctively that she had not left for the purpose of recuperating but that she would not come back again?

—A child that parts from its parent early does not long for its parent.

He had heard it before, but he did not ever think of applying it to his son. But Katsué perceived it. Whether consciously or instinctively his boy must have been aware, he had no idea. But he was aware all right for his age that he would be unable to see his mother again, and that was why he tried to avoid mentioning his mother. The thought rendered Takao unable to look his son in the face. When he happened to see him playing by himself, he might have been hearing a gimlet boring a hole in his heart. He turned away in spite of himself. He would tell Katsué at all times:

“Watch over Daisuke, please. You don’t have to attend to anything else. You have only to take care of Daisuke, so please stay with him as much as you can.”

It may have been too much, but he repeatedly implored her. In reality he did not need to say that much, for Katsué was all the time attending Daisuke. When he slept, Takao heard, she slept with him and let him nestle up to her, which o-Ichi had not done. She let him ride on her back like a horse. She let him play with the sand in the garden. They played tag and hide-and-seek. She went ahead and played with Daisuke. She enjoyed herself like a little child. She would take him to the Ashiya River and Mt. Kameoka now and then.

“Dai-tan grow big, Darry. I can swim.”

He came to Takao out of nowhere to report so. He came out to the vestibule when Takao went to his office in the castle:

“Darry, I ho evrifi go wel,” Daisuke said and saw his father off.

In the spring, it was “Ho ev’fi weh weh weh weh.” I hope everything will go well. This was the formula used in the domain to see someone off. Now the lisp was going away. When he heard Daisuke talk to Katsué at the entranceway:

“Tha swillo, auntie swillo.”

He was able to pronounce more clearly.

“Tha Dai-tan’s. Dai-tan’s swillo. It fal dow, Darry, it fal dow.”

“Wow, a swallow falls down, Dai-san?”

“Yes, it fal dow. Really. It fal dow an head hurt, head hurt. It bumt its head.”

One day, Takao happened to hear them talk between them:

“Dai-san, that’s the mother swallow.”

She was careless when she said it. Daisuke’s voice dropped dead for a moment. And then, he said angrily:

“Swillo, have, no mommy.”

Autumn was just around the corner. Takao would often murmur a saying of Iyeyasu’s, Tokugawa Iyeyasu, the first shogun of the Tokugawa Shogunate:

—One’s life is compared to a long road along which one plods heavily loaded; hasten not.

As a boy, he had learned it by heart just by parroting it. Now he put it on his lips and could feel a deep consolation. Mori Sannosuke, too, o-Ichi, too, were heavily loaded. Little Daisuke, too, was already heavily loaded in the heart.

“—Hasten not ... ”

Takao would mumble, eyes closed, as he listened to the sound of rain late at night.

“—Everyone is carrying a heavy load on their back. Although circumstances and characters are different from each other, human beings are each of them carrying some heavy load ... To go on living is something like that. And the road goes far ...”

People ought to help and support one another, Takao thought. People ought to care about and support one another to make their heavy load as light as possible. Thus, they shared pain and sorrow among them and so lived on. To decrease the weight of their own load would be to add up that much weight to others’ load. The road was long and living was painful. He must not get bogged down in his own pain and sorrow. The way he thought had undergone change and this change seemed to, very slowly though, rid him of the abysmal pain of losing o-Ichi.

Shortly after it turned to September, Takao was invited to dinner by Yoshinaga Setsutaro.

It was an evening in which winds that had suddenly grown autumnal were blowing. In Yoshinaga’s garden, the white lespedeza he prided himself on had already passed its best and the pampas grass had shot out ears all at once. There was another guest who was called Miyata Shingo. A strange young woman was helping Yoshinaga’s wife serve the dinner. Miyata was, Takao was introduced, a colleague of Yoshinaga at his office and the strange woman was Miyata’s

younger sister, Yukino by name and twenty years old.

—Ah-ha, I'm invited to dinner to meet this young woman.

So Takao guessed right off. Yukino was a girl, five feet two inches tall with a full build, deliberate in her demeanor, and arcadian in speaking. When Yoshinaga's wife offered saké, she took it with no demur. When Yoshinaga and her brother spoke to her, quite naturally without blushing, she responded in a placid manner.

“Right, now, let us hear her perform, shall we?”

Yoshinaga suggested when they got mellow with saké. His wife had a servant bring in a koto, thirteen-string zither.

“Yukino-san has an instructor's skill in the koto,” Yoshinaga told Takao.

Then, Yukino who wore a smiling mellow expression on her face said:

“There are various instructors, aren't there?” she said toward Yoshinaga's wife. “—My instructor's skill is a must-not in playing the koto ... my father and my brother say they get sober when they hear me playing while drinking.”

“That's exactly what my sister says. Listen and find the truth,” Miyata Shingo told Takao. “At home, her performance bears the hallmark of making mellow drinkers sober up.”

Takao did not reply but gave a wry smile.

He was not a bit interested in accepting a marriage offer. In order not to hurt the girl's feelings, he tried as much as possible to distract his attention from the atmosphere of the group who came together to dinner. Yukino played “Oimatsu” or “The Old Pine Tree”, an ancient piece. She strummed out music that was out of this world.

## 7

No sooner had the koto performance come to an end than there was a messenger from Takao's home. It sounded urgent. He apologized for having to take leave in the middle of dinner. When he was back home, he found a doctor there. Daisuke had abruptly been taken ill.

Takao was told that Daisuke had run a high temperature earlier in the evening and that he had had convulsions and uninterrupted nausea and diarrhea.

"He has very little chance, he's ninety percent out of luck. Be prepared for it."

The doctor said so and attended the patient till morning. The next day, Daisuke was still in a coma, set on repeatedly by a watery diarrhea and a spasm of nausea in spite of having nothing left in his stomach to throw up. There seemed no hope for Daisuke in the eyes of Takao, either.

He had not slept a wink, but since he had work to do in his office, he went to the castle early in the morning. Finishing the work during the morning, he went home, where he found Matsusuke back from Sarugatani. He came back a little earlier than the regular date of the month because he said he had something to do at home. Probably, he had learned there was no hope for Daisuke. He looked pale and his eyes were red from crying. When Takao finished his lunch, Matsusuke said under his breath:

"Please call back your honorable wife so she could attend the poor young lord."

Takao was surprised and stared at him. The old man's blood-shot eyes were holding his dearest earnestness, which came from his worried heart. Takao shook his head:

“—No, she must not. Don’t say that again.”

So saying, he left for the sick room.

Daisuke had expressly grown drawn, his skin pallid like a dead person. His eyes opened a slit, he was as ever listlessly shaking his head to and fro between weak gasps. Katsué had not had a wink of sleep since the previous night. Takao told her to retire, he would take her place, and he sat at his son’s bedside by himself.

“Look, swillo. Darry ... swillo hom.”

Daisuke had been in delirium and repeating the same thing since the evening before.

“Hurt, hurt. Dai-tan’s swillo, ya see, fal dow an hurt, hurt. Really ... Say, Darry, swillo, never go anywhere, right? ... Swillo, don’t go. Don’t go, Dai-tan’s swillo. Don’t go ... don’t go.”

Takao clenched his teeth.

—Loaded heavily, along a long road ...

He closed his eyes and cried in his heart, Daisuke, don’t go. Live, live, please live for us, fight, live. Strive to the last ounce of your courage and live. I know it’s painful but hang in there ... thus, he was calling to his son as if pleading, when he heard behind his back a sob burst out, which had been unable to be held down any more.

“Please, I entreat you, my lord. Please grant this tattered old man’s wish, for heaven’s sake.”

It was Matsusuke’s voice. Takao kept his back to him and whispered:

“You may understand if you heard him talking ... Daisuke never brings his mother onto his lips even in delirium. Since she left he has never once brought up the topic of his mother. His young little heart has fought its own battle to forget his mother ... It’s better off as we are ... Calling her back precipitates the four of us, including Daisuke, into the abyss of pain again.”

“I know it through and through, but I can’t help asking you. For heaven’s sake,” said Matsusuke as he kowtowed.

“—And this, I mean, calling your honorable wife back is something I, this tattered old man, must ask you for some day.”

Takao turned back quietly. He was not able to follow what Matsusuke was trying to convey.

“—Call her back?”

“When I was first ordered to attend your lady, I hope you haven’t forgotten what I told you, my lord ... servant as I was, I said I couldn’t be an accomplice in unfaithfulness. Out of the earnestness of a fool who did not know anything about anything, I said what I said straight from the shoulder.”

“—What do you mean by not knowing anything.”

“I was completely in the wrong. Your honorable wife is far from being unfaithful. I have attended her for two hundred and odd days and kept watching her and I say there was not a single element of unfaithfulness in your honorable wife.”

“—Matsusuke, what are you getting at?”

“Will you please listen to me, my lord? Listen to what I have to say.”

Haltering, Matsusuke began, one hand clutching his knee and the other wiping tears as he spoke ... Takao was not eager to hear. He even went and tried to reproach him. But when he heard the old man say from the very beginning that Mori Sannosuke was seriously ill and that he did not have long to live, he was all ears before he knew it.

Mori had been sick with tuberculosis for several years. He hadn’t been aware that he was sick. He had only been in the know on that night he attempted to murder Takao. There he fell down and without warning coughed up blood. He remained prostrate, unable to move a half hour after Takao had left and only then crawled back to his lodging. He arrived at Sarugatani seven days later.

Upon arrival, he spit blood again and since then had taken to his bed to date.

O-Ichi slept in a different room that was remote from Sannosuke's. When she was with Sannosuke in his room, she kept the sliding doors open. Not to mention, they entered the false names into the guest book of the inn. They were brother and sister, which relationship the inn staff had never once suspected. The old man thought that it was only too natural for them to do so before she was divorced from Kihira. Should she be untrue before divorce, he had intended to catch them there and then and relentlessly revile them in the face. But nothing had developed between them. Matsusuke began to see them quite innocent. They two struck up a conversation very rarely. When they were in the same room, o-Ichi did her sewing and decocted Sannosuke's medicine. Sannosuke was silent, quietly laid up. When they conversed, which they did once in a while, they would always talk about the memories of their childhood.

“And only the other night, did honorable Mori call me in after your honorable wife had retired to her room. In tears he told me this story.”

Matsusuke talked as if to moan. Sannosuke came out with the relations between him and o-Ichi, which proved the same as o-Ichi had told Takao. He also disclosed that he was an illegitimate son ... It had been decided that he go to Edo to be adopted. Before he left, he had wanted to see her, just a bit of her. He had met her and wanted to see her once again, and they had met for the second then third times, until finally he had been unable to leave her.

—When, by Takao's arrangement, he came to Sarugatani and got together with o-Ichi, Sannosuke soon found out that it had not been love that he had desired of her. He had longed for a mother and a big sister in o-Ichi, who was the only woman who had shown affection to him. He had not known what affection was. For the first time in his life he had known the sweetness of tender care and the pleasure of generous heart. He had thought he would take her by force, whatever the cost. But when left alone with o-Ichi as he had wished, he



could not even touch her hands.

Matsunosuke said Sannosuke had said like this:

“O-Ichi is a mother and a big sister to him. Her feeling isn’t love for him. But it is affection she has for him like a mother cares about and protects her son and a sister her little brother. For the past two hundred and couple of dozen days, he has received warm care from o-Ichi and he has spent peaceful and heart-warming and human days for the first time in his life. For the first time indeed, he felt he had something to live for ... So honorable Mori said and wept. According to the doctor, too, his life will be good till the end of this year at the most. O-Ichi is innocent. She has from the beginning sympathized with his wretchedness. She has been so deeply and tenderly sympathetic she has been unable to turn down his lawless importunity. She hasn’t had a shred of unfaithfulness. He can swear by God that she is innocent ... He says: Please take care of her. When I die, will you take care to make arrangements so she can go back to the Kihira family? Don’t make her unhappy. I entreat you, Honorable Mori, in tears, face on pillow, bent down to me, this old man, and asked me to look after her.”

Takao listened to him, genuinely impressed. Sannosuke’s tenaciousness had been such that he had attempted murder. And it proved not love when loving was granted. Because his conduct had been almost unnatural, his confession that it was not love but that it was attachment to a mother or a sister moved Takao all the more in an unprejudiced way. Takao thought he could accept this confession straight, without ever suspecting it.

“I am poor at putting things into words. I can’t put things into words as I think. However, what type of person your honorable wife is, you must know very well, my lord ... I’ve seen her innocence with my own eyes, my lord.” Matsusuke looked up at Takao with his face smeared over with tears. “—Should anything serious happen to my young lord, there is no mending it. Please call back your honorable wife and let her attend him one day or even one night. This

is all I ask, for goodness' sake.”

Takao did not reply for a while. And in a low voice he said decisively:

“We were excruciated. All of us, o-Ichi, Mori, and me ... were excruciated according to our own way. This experience of pain must not be wasted, and so I took a measure like that ... it hasn't ended yet. I believe they are innocent but I can't allow her to come back until it comes to a definite end.”

And in a still lower voice, he whispered:

“When the time comes, I will go to meet her. If Daisuke lives, I'll take him with me ... when you get back to Sarugatani, don't tell her about this boy's sickness. This is my order.”

In four, five days, Yoshinaga came by. As was expected, he came to talk about Takao getting married with Yukino. Takao gave an absolute turndown. By that time Daisuke had managed to get past the crisis and the doctor had said he would conquer death. Takao had only just been relieved.

“It's natural your boy should get sick, he has no mother. What he needs is a mother not a babysitter,” said Yoshinaga, who was keen to advance the marriage. “—For the sake of your boy, you should get married. Miyata says a word of promise will do at the moment.”

“—O-Ichi may come back,” said Takao. “—The hot spa seems to have done her good. I'll tell you about it in more detail some other time ... most probably she will come back. That's why.”

Yoshinaga clammed up sullenly. He glared at Takao and, without talking about it any more, he left.

One morning several days later, Daisuke was persistently fretting over something. Takao hurriedly got ready to go to work in the castle and went to Daisuke's room. Katsué was doing the best she could to appease him, but he was sniveling and begging for something, kicking up his legs under the quilt.

“He insists on watching the swallows. He shouldn’t get out of his bed yet.”

“No problem. That will work out.”

Encouraged by his boy’s lively demonstration, he removed the quilt and reached for him.

“It’s fine with a little trip as far as the vestibule. Come into my arms. Oh-ho, you’ve grown heavy. You’ve grown heavy again, Dai-san.”

“Dai-tan, heavy. Ha, ha, ha, ha, heavy, heavy!”

Katsué wrapped him in his nightie.

“Heavy, heavy. You got over your kiiki and you’re heavy, heavy. Now let’s go out and say good morning to the swallows. And they’ll say, Good morning, Dai-san. Good morning!”

“The swallows aren’t here any more, sir,” Katsué said from behind. “—They have not been here for a couple of days. They’ve migrated to the south.”

Her words started him. The swallows were gone, Daisuke’s swallows he spoke about even in delirium.

“What marra, Darry? What marra wi swillo?”

“—Yes, they ... ”

Embarrassed, he went with him to the vestibule. There was a nest on the beam of the pent roof, but it was as quiet as any. A glance could tell it had lost its inhabitants. Daisuke sniveled. He cried over the absence of the swallows and writhed in his father’s arms.

“Be a good boy and listen. The swallows go back home to a warm country when it gets cold here. Back to a far country in that way,” Takao said putting his cheek to the boy’s.

“—And in spring, when it’s warm here, they’ll come back to Dai-san’s home. When you turn four, the swallows will come back, without fail.”

“Swillo, com back again, swillo?”

“Yes, they will come back, without fail.”

Something like hot water overbrimmed Takao's heart. His eyes almost teary, he whispered to Daisuke:

“When it's warm here, the swallows come back, and Dai-san's mother, too ... wait a little more, when winter goes and spring comes ... Because you've been a big boy.”